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IARC launches website of EU-CanIneq, a project to measure and address socioeconomic inequalities in cancer across Europe

Lyon, France, 4 February 2025 – To mark World Cancer Day, the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) is launching a new website¹ for the EU-CanIneq project, a European Union (EU) initiative dedicated to reducing socioeconomic inequalities in cancer across Europe. Funded by the European Commission in collaboration with Erasmus MC (in the Netherlands), EU-CanIneq supports the European Cancer Inequalities Registry by coordinating a research and data framework to develop and expand indicators of socioeconomic inequalities in cancer mortality. The project also aims to analyse and map socioeconomic inequalities in cancer mortality across European countries and geographical areas. The project will feature country-specific reports and other resources, offering tailored guidance to national cancer control programmes to improve resource allocation and address key challenges.

“Socioeconomic factors are the most significant determinant explaining the distribution of the cancer burden between and within countries,” says Dr Salvatore Vaccarella, a scientist in the Cancer Surveillance Branch at IARC and the coordinator of the project. “The findings of this initiative should play a key role in guiding countries to reduce inequalities in cancer through evidence-based policies.”

Socioeconomic disparities in cancer mortality remain significant and widespread across Europe, everywhere and for most cancer types. However, these inequalities vary greatly between countries, driven largely by very high cancer mortality rates among individuals with lower socioeconomic position.

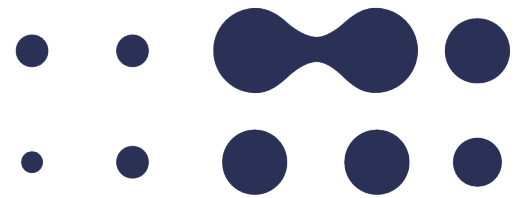
In contrast, mortality rates among individuals with higher socioeconomic position are generally more uniform and are consistently lower across countries. These patterns highlight the critical role of socioeconomic factors in shaping cancer outcomes. Addressing these disparities is crucial to reduce overall cancer mortality, particularly among the most disadvantaged groups.

Key findings

Initial findings for 15 EU countries² reveal significant socioeconomic inequalities in cancer mortality across Europe, with the highest disparities observed in the Baltic and Eastern European countries. These inequalities are particularly pronounced for highly preventable cancers, such as lung cancer and cervical cancer, for which

¹ <https://eu-canineq.iarc.who.int>

² <https://cancer-inequalities.jrc.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/ECIR-inequalities-factsheet-socioecon-cancer-mortality-Jun2024.pdf>



individuals with lower socioeconomic position have higher mortality rates, due to factors such as tobacco use and limited access to cervical cancer screening.

Women are substantially affected: significant disparities in cancer mortality between women with low and high education levels are observed even in the Nordic countries, such as Denmark and Norway. This is especially alarming considering that the Nordic region is renowned for strong welfare systems and policies aimed at promoting equality.

These findings underscore the critical role of socioeconomic position and regional context in shaping cancer outcomes and the need for targeted interventions to reduce disparities, especially for the most vulnerable populations.

Note to Editors:

The EU-CanIneq team is currently working on producing estimates and corresponding country-specific fact sheets for each of the 27 EU Member States plus Iceland and Norway. These will provide further detailed insights into socioeconomic inequalities in cancer mortality across Europe.

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The International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) is part of the World Health Organization. Its mission is to coordinate and conduct research on the causes of human cancer, the mechanisms of carcinogenesis, and to develop scientific strategies for cancer control. The Agency is involved in both epidemiological and laboratory research and disseminates scientific information through publications, meetings, courses, and fellowships. If you wish your name to be removed from our press release emailing list, please write to com@iarc.who.int.