There were an estimated 3.9 million new cancer cases and 1.9 million cancer deaths in Europe in 2018. Cancers of the female breast (535,000 new cases, 15% of all cancer cases), colorectum (503,000, 15%), lung (470,000, 13%), and prostate (460,000, 13%) were the most common cancers on the continent, and combined they represented almost half of the overall cancer burden. Figure 1

For men, prostate cancer was the most commonly diagnosed cancer in almost all northern and western European countries, and lung cancer was the most commonly diagnosed in most Eastern European countries. For women, breast cancer is the most commonly diagnosed cancer in all European countries. Figures 1 and 2 These cancers were also the leading causes of cancer death in Europe: lung (518,000 deaths, 20%), colorectum (245,000, 16%), female breast (158,000, 7%), and pancreas (128,000, 5%).

Substantial variation in incidence and mortality rates are observed at the national level, where cancer incidence rates in males vary from 490 per 100,000 in Ireland to 133 in Montenegro. The lifetime risk of a cancer diagnosis ranges from 53% in Iceland—indicating that in 3 in 5 persons in Iceland will be diagnosed with cancer over the course of their lifetime—to 32% for 1 in 4 persons, in Montenegro. Similarly, a twofold difference in rates is seen for mortality, with the highest and lowest mortality rates observed in Hungary and Sweden, respectively. The risk of dying from cancer in men varied from 24% in the Republic of Moldova to 12% in Iceland, and in women from 15% in Hungary to 7% in Spain.

Incidence trends for all cancer sites combined have continued to rise in many countries, although at a slower pace in recent years. This slower increase partly results from a stabilization or decline in breast and prostate cancers, countered by an increase in colorectal cancer. On the other hand, overall cancer death rates are steadily decreasing in Europe, mainly due to decreasing death rates from breast and prostate cancers as well as lung (male only, particularly in Northern and Western Europe). In Central and Eastern European men, lung cancer incidence and mortality rates are beginning to stabilize or decline. But in women across Europe, who for the most part acquired the smoking habit several decades after men, lung cancer rates are still rising, though there are early signs of stabilization in recent years in some countries, notably in the highest risk countries of Northern Europe.