

Improving women's access to new cancer treatment

ESGO's Legacy Event addressed the challenges associated with new cancer treatments often not receiving approval in Denmark.

In February 2026, the European Society of Gynaecological Oncology (ESGO) hosted its 27th Annual Meeting in Copenhagen under the theme **"The Wind of Innovation in Women's Cancer"**. More than 3,700 clinicians, researchers, and experts from around the world gathered to share the latest advances in gynaecological cancer research.

In 2022, more than 274,000 women across Europe were diagnosed with gynaecological cancers, including endometrial, ovarian, cervical, vulvar, and vaginal cancers (ESGO, 2026). Despite progress in diagnosis and treatment, significant disparities remain in both quality of care and access to innovative medicines across European countries.

Connecting Danish and European expertise

To address these inequalities, ESGO partnered with Copenhagen Legacy Lab to host a high-level forum on the opening day under the theme **"Bridging Best Practices in Women's Cancer"**. The forum brought together 65 selected Danish and European researchers and policymakers to exchange best practices in gynaecological cancer between ESGO and the Danish healthcare system through two sessions:

- **"From Denmark to ESGO"**: Sharing the Danish experience with centralisation of cancer care
- **"From ESGO to Denmark"**: Improving timely access to novel therapies in Denmark

Centralisation of cancer care

Denmark is widely recognised for its effective organisation of cancer care (ESGO, 2026). Over the past two decades, diagnosis and treatment have been centralised in a small number of highly specialised hospitals, strengthening clinical expertise, improving access to advanced technology, and ensuring consistent, high-quality care.

"The most frustrating part is, when you do a clinical trial and it shows amazing results and it gets approved both by FDA and by the European Medicines Agency, but you are not able to prescribe this drug to your own patients."

Dr Mansoor Raza Mirza
Chief Gynaecological Oncologist, Denmark

As a result, Denmark has achieved significant improvements in treatment outcomes and survival rates. Despite these well-documented results, many European countries have not yet reached this level of centralisation.

The first session highlighted the positive outcomes of Denmark's model to inspire other European countries to strengthen cancer care. It also aimed to establish a blueprint and a joint call to action for EU countries, supported by ESGO.

Timely access to novel therapies

While Denmark performs well in organising cancer care, access to new medicines is inadequate compared to our European neighbours. In 2025, 12 of 14 new medicine applications were rejected by the Danish Medicines Council (LIF, 2026). According to LIF, this reflects a cautious approach to investing in new medicines, and the Danish approval process is often described as slower and more restrictive compared to other European countries.





At the same time, major advances in gynaecological cancer treatment have been made in recent years (Mirza, 2026). Many of these treatments have been approved by the European Medicines Agency and have significantly improved patient outcomes. However, Danish gynaecological oncologists report that restrictive approval processes limit their ability to prescribe these treatments to their patients.

In some cases, patients in Denmark are advised to seek treatment in countries such as Germany or Sweden, where the medicines are approved - at their own expense. This creates unequal access to treatment, where optimal care depends not only on national approval systems but also on the patient's financial situation.

To address this challenge, the second session explored how novel treatments are approved in other European countries and whether Denmark could learn from these approaches to ensure more equal and timely access to new medicines. The German model was highlighted, particularly the trial-based framework, which enables earlier patient access while clinical data is still being collected. During this session, a Danish patient with ovarian cancer shared her treatment journey and her hopes for better treatment options in Denmark. In addition, representatives from the Danish Medicines Council and the Danish Association of the Pharmaceutical Industry (LIF) provided insights into Denmark's approval and reimbursement processes.

Both sessions concluded with panel discussions involving the audience, thus facilitating knowledge exchange between Danish and European experts.

From dialogue to action

Throughout the two sessions, it became clear that collaboration between European countries is essential to advance women's cancer care, and a lot can be gained from streamlining processes across European countries and sharing best practices.

Building on this momentum, ESGO will continue to collaborate with Danish and European stakeholders to strengthen awareness of how countries can learn from each other and ensure equal access to high-quality care and innovative therapies for women across Europe.



“This was the first legacy event associated with the ESGO congress, and we are very enthusiastic about the fruitful discussions that took place. We believe it will have a lasting impact, not only in Denmark but also at the European level, and we are determined to continue this work at the next ESGO congress in London.”

Dr Maja Pakiz
Vice President of ESGO and gynaecological oncologist
(Slovenia)

Legacy Process

Strategic goals and societal needs

Denmark is recognised for its advanced centralisation of cancer care compared to many other European countries, resulting in documented improvements in treatment outcomes and higher survival rates. At the same time, access to innovative cancer medicines in Denmark remains more restrictive than in several other European countries, limiting patient access to new treatments.

Ensuring equal treatment opportunities for all women with gynaecological cancer is a strategic priority for both Denmark and ESGO. This requires coordinated political action at both national and European level.

Objective

- To share the Danish success story with centralisation of cancer care as an inspiration to other countries.
- To improve access to novel gynaecological cancer treatments for patients, especially in Denmark.

Stakeholder involvement

The European Society of Gynaecological Oncology (ESGO) organised the high-level legacy forum.

Copenhagen Legacy Lab facilitated the legacy process while providing strategic guidance on planning and evaluation, as well as coordinating invitations to Danish media and policymakers.

Activities

A 2-hour high-level legacy event was held on the opening day of the congress, covering two parts:

- Sharing the Danish experience with centralisation of cancer care
- Improving timely access to novel therapies in Denmark

Outputs (immediately after the activity)

Around 65 selected stakeholders attended the legacy forum in person, including clinical experts, patient advocates, policymakers, journalists, and representatives from the industry.

The forum was recorded and **published** by ESGO to ensure broader dissemination of key insights.

Outcomes (+6-12 months – changed behaviour)

Since the legacy forum, the agenda of equitable access to treatment has gained sustained traction both in Denmark and across Europe.

In Denmark, the Danish Association of the Pharmaceutical Industry (LIF) continues to drive this agenda forward by working to improve access to cancer medicines for Danish patients and by actively contributing to public and policy debates (**e.g., through LinkedIn**).

At the European level, European Society of Gynaecological Oncology will continue advancing the legacy agenda through future congresses. The organisation remains actively engaged in shaping policy and is currently preparing a white paper focused on improving medicine approval procedures and ensuring timely access to innovative therapies. Furthermore, the debate on access to innovative medicines has since continued beyond the event and been featured in a column published by Slovenia's second-largest newspaper.

Impact (+1 year – societal value)

To be evaluated.

Potential legacy (+1-3 years and beyond)

To be evaluated.