

EONS Cancer Nursing Index 2022-2025©

National profile: Belgium

The EONS Cancer Nursing Index (ECNI) was developed by the EONS Advocacy Working Group to illustrate the development and status of this profession in Europe. The index (with scores from 0-100) covers the following dimensions: Education and Career Development, Patient and Occupational Safety, Recognition, Working Conditions and Impact and Workforce statistics.

The first ECNI survey, conducted in 2020, gathered responses from more than 650 cancer nurses across 42 European countries. ECNI 2020 offered a unique overview of the status of cancer nursing across Europe, highlighting both common challenges and country-specific variations. The data have since been presented at multiple international meetings and used to support advocacy for improved education, safety, and recognition of cancer nurses. In 2022, the ECNI 2022 update gathered responses from 630 nurses in 29 countries. This iteration placed greater focus on local workplace settings and included additional questions addressing the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and staffing levels. The ECNI 2025 builds on the 2022 findings with a special focus on working conditions and safety in cancer nursing, both key concerns raised in previous editions.

The Index is based on:

1. EONS Survey on Patient and Occupational Safety (anonymous survey among cancer nurses, 2025 respectively)
2. Work force statistics (obtained from ec.europe.eu/Eurostat and OECD in 2023).

A scoring system was developed to reflect the level of development for the different Index dimensions/items. For items with a variety of responses from the same country, the most frequently reported response was used. The purpose of the Index is primarily not to rank some countries as better than others, moreover, to illustrate cancer nursing profiles, differences and areas in need of development. The Index could be used to aid the development of cancer nursing in each country as well as for general European progress. The ECNI offers a snapshot of the status in cancer nursing across Europe, reported by the profession. The results largely depend on number of and profiles of responses from each country.

More information on ECNI including national profiles for each county can be found on

<https://www.cancernurse.eu/ecni>

Dimension/item	Maximum score	Score 2022	Score 2025	Comments
OVERALL SCORES	100	61	71	
EDUCATION AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT (5 items presented below)	23	7	10	
Specialist education at university level	5	2	5	

Master programs in cancer nursing	4	0	0	
Professors in cancer nursing	4	0	0	
Advanced cancer nursing roles established	4	2	2	
EONS Cancer Nursing Framework recognized and supported	5	3	3	
PATIENT AND OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY (8 items presented below)	36	26	34	
Safety guidelines (hazardous drugs) available	5	5	5	All responding nurses reported that guidelines are in place at all workplaces.
Guidelines during pregnancy (hazardous drugs)	5	5	5	All responding nurses reported that guidelines are in place at all workplaces.
Pregnant and /or breastfeeding women assigned other tasks that don't involve direct contact with cytotoxic/radioactive drugs	5	2	5	All responding nurses reported that pregnant/breast feeding women are forbidden to perform task with risks for exposure to cytotoxic/radioactive drugs at all workplaces.
Systematic testing for occupational exposure (surface swipes)	3	1	1	
Access to cytotoxic spillage kit and PPE	5	5	5	All responding nurses reported that cytotoxic spillage kit and PPE are available at all workplaces.
Introductory training before administer hazardous drugs	5	2	5	
Nurses preparing cytotoxic drugs	5	4	5	'It never happens'
Speak-up or whistle blower policy implemented for all members of staff	3	2	3	
RECOGNITION (4 items presented below)	18	11	7	
Does the country have a national cancer plan that includes nursing care?	3	3	3	
Does your workplace/center have Board positions dedicated for cancer nursing?	5	1	1	
To what extent is nurse-led cancer care implemented in your workplace/center?	5	2	0	
Does the country have a cancer nursing society?	5	5	3	
WORKING CONDITIONS AND THE IMPACT ON CANCER CARE (4 items presented below)	20	14	20	Congratulations - maximum score achieved
Level of adherence to European Working Time Directive (EWTD)	5	4	5	All responding nurses reported EWTD to be followed in their working place
Risk of negative consequences if asking for alternative duties pregnancy/breast feeding	5	2	5	All responding nurses reported that that pregnant/breast feeding women do not face negative consequences if asking for alternative duties

To what extent hospital beds are closed due to cancer nursing shortages	5	4	5	'It never happens'
To what extent cancer treatments were delayed due to cancer nursing	5	4	5	'It never happens'
WORK FORCE STATISTICS (1 item)	3	3	3	
Number of practicing nurses/1000 citizens (www.europe.eu/Eurostat and OECD)	3	3	3	

Strengths and recommendations for improvements

Overall, Belgium achieved a total ECNI score of 71 in 2025, demonstrating substantial progress compared with 2022. Other countries with similar scores included Greece (total score 71), Ireland (total score 73), and United Kingdom (total score 67). The results indicate a well-developed cancer nursing environment, with particularly strong performance in Patient and Occupational Safety, Working Conditions and the Impact on Cancer Care, and Workforce Statistics.

Scores for Education and Career Development improved between 2022 and 2025. A notable development was the reporting of specialist education in cancer nursing at university level, reflecting increased opportunities for formal specialist preparation. Advanced cancer nursing roles and recognition of the EONS Cancer Nursing Framework continued to be reported. However, master's programmes and professors in cancer nursing were not reported, suggesting opportunities to further strengthen postgraduate education, academic leadership, and research capacity within the specialty.

Patient and Occupational Safety remained one of Belgium's strongest dimensions and showed further improvement in 2025. Respondents reported widespread availability of hazardous drug safety guidelines, pregnancy-specific recommendations, reassignment of pregnant and breastfeeding nurses away from hazardous drug exposure, access to cytotoxic spillage kits and personal protective equipment, mandatory introductory training before handling hazardous drugs, and implementation of speak-up or whistleblower policies. Nurses were also reported to continue preparing cytotoxic drugs. Systematic occupational exposure monitoring through surface wipe testing was reported only to a limited extent and remains an area for further development.

Scores for Working Conditions and the Impact on Cancer Care improved considerably, with Belgium achieving the maximum score in this dimension. Respondents reported strong adherence to the European Working Time Directive, supportive workplace policies for nurses requesting alternative duties during pregnancy or breastfeeding, and no reported hospital bed closures or cancer treatment delays due to cancer nursing shortages. These findings suggest a highly supportive working environment for cancer nurses.

Recognition of cancer nursing presented a more mixed picture. Positive findings included the continued presence of a national cancer plan that includes nursing care and the existence of dedicated cancer nursing leadership positions in some healthcare settings. However, nurse-led cancer care was not reported, and the

score related to the national cancer nursing society was lower than in 2022. These findings suggest opportunities to strengthen the visibility, leadership, and influence of cancer nurses within healthcare organisations and national cancer policy.

The Workforce Statistics dimension remained unchanged at the highest possible score, reflecting the relatively high number of practising nurses per 1,000 inhabitants compared with many other European countries. This remains an important strength supporting the delivery and sustainability of cancer care services.

Overall, the ECNI 2025 findings demonstrate that Belgium continues to provide a strong environment for cancer nursing practice, particularly in relation to patient safety, workforce capacity, and working conditions. Future efforts should focus on strengthening academic leadership and postgraduate education, promoting nurse-led models of care, enhancing professional recognition, and expanding occupational exposure monitoring practices.

EONS Advocacy Working Group, 2026

