

A DUTY TO DIE?

**How assisted
suicide has
increased
exponentially in
the Netherlands
and Belgium**

INTRODUCTION

The Committee on Justice and Equality has been looking at the issue of the 'right to die'. This is prompted by a Private Member's Bill by John Halligan TD that aims to create such a right in supposedly limited circumstances. As we demonstrate in this briefing note, this was the promise in Belgium and the Netherlands when a 'right to die' was first created. Numbers dying by assisted suicide and euthanasia quickly escalated and the grounds quickly widened.



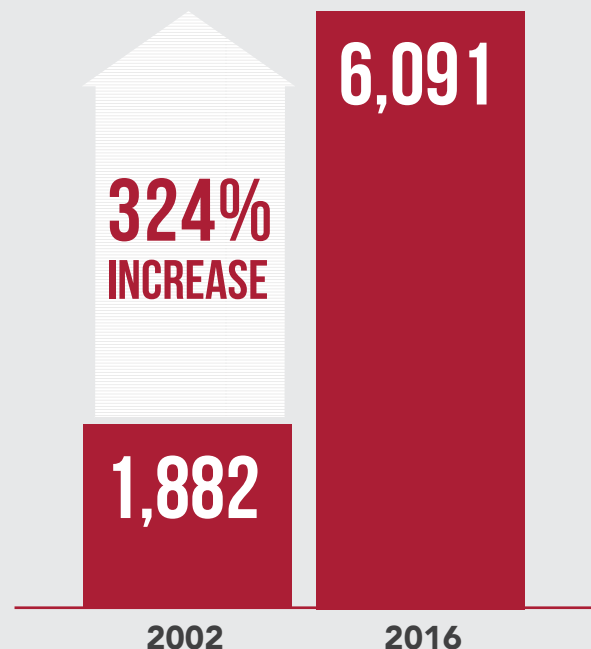
NETHERLANDS

In the Netherlands euthanasia was legalised in 2001. The number of euthanasia and assisted suicide deaths went from **1,882** in 2002 to **6,091** in 2016.

This represents a **324% rise** in assisted suicide in just 14 years despite warnings that it would be rare. In recent years the rate of increase has accelerated.



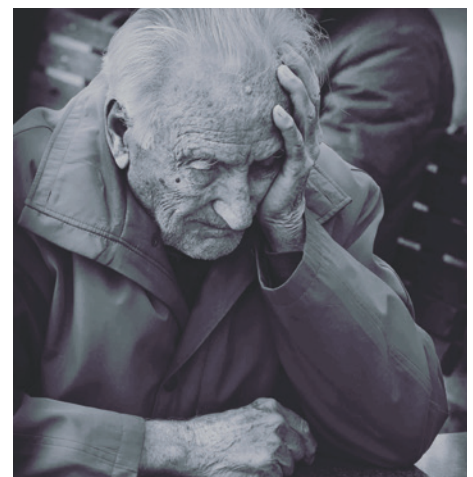
NETHERLANDS NUMBER OF ASSISTED SUICIDES



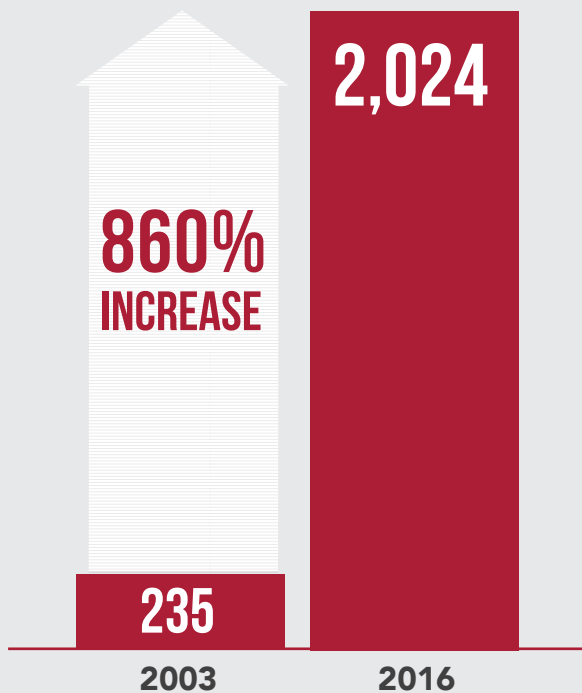
The grounds for assisted suicide and euthanasia have also widened so they can take in non-terminal conditions. In 2016, 141 people were killed because of dementia (**564% increase** since 2010), 60 for psychiatric reasons (**428% increase** since 2012) and 244 for "advanced age".

These official figures are incomplete. A study published in the Lancet (July 2012) indicated that 23% of all assisted deaths were unreported, which gives us an estimation of 1,400 unreported cases in 2016.

Non-voluntary euthanasia, without an explicit request from the patient, is also permitted and this has been criticised twice by the United Nation Human Rights Committee.



BELGIUM NUMBER OF ASSISTED SUICIDES



BELGIUM

In Belgium euthanasia was legalised in 2002. In 2003 there was **235** cases of assisted suicide/euthanasia and by 2016 this had rocketed to **2,024**, an almost nine-fold increase. Since 2014, euthanasia in Belgium has been made available to children.

The rate of euthanasia increased significantly in the years and now it counts as to **4.6% of overall deaths**. Both the number and the proportion of the requests granted have increased.

In Belgium and Switzerland **mental illness** can itself be a basis for euthanasia or assisted suicide. A study published in 2015 in the British Medical Journal shows that of 100 patients who requested euthanasia for psychiatric reasons **not even one was terminally ill**. They suffered from mood disorders, post-traumatic stress disorders, eating disorders, autism, etc. The most frequent diagnosis was depression.

In both the Netherlands and Belgium assisted suicide was initially made available for terminal illnesses only but soon the law was changed to include non-terminal conditions including psychiatric illnesses.



SOURCES <https://www.euthanasiecommissie.nl/uitspraken/jaarverslagen/2016/april/12/jaarverslag-2016>
<http://www.nejm.org/doi/pdf/10.1056/NEJMc1414527>
<http://bmjopen.bmj.com/content/5/7/e007454>

All sources referenced in this document have been published in peer review journals or official reports. Where the full text is not freely available online it can be requested at abottone@ionainstitute.ie

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