

European Institute of Bioethics - Brussels

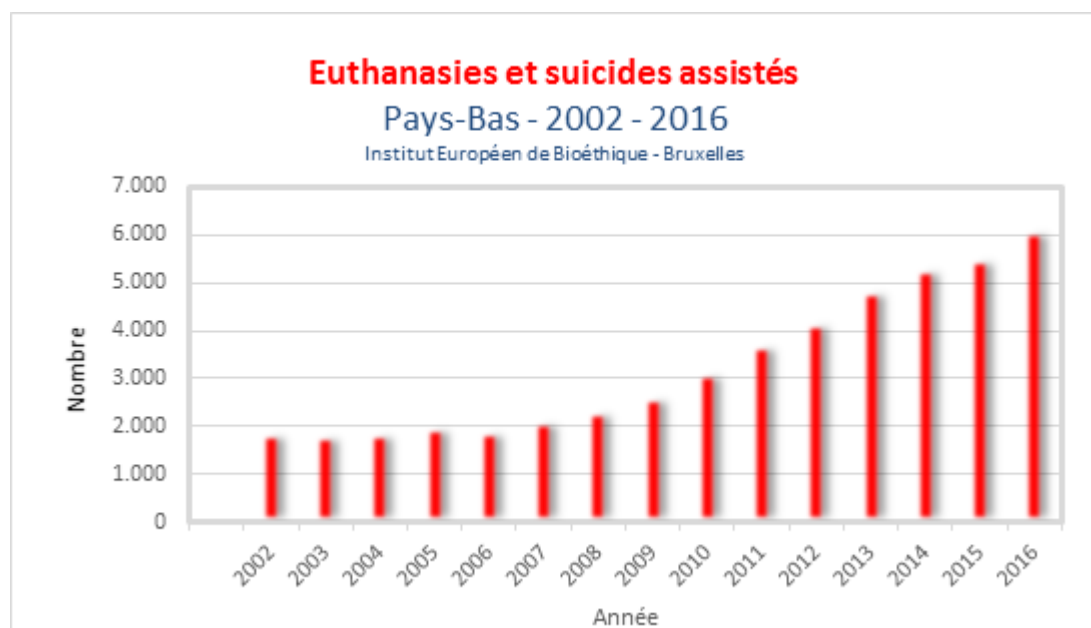
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Netherlands: 10% increase in euthanasia cases in 2016

Numbers

6091 euthanasia and assisted suicide were registered in 2016 in the Netherlands. This means that 4% of the deceased (148.973) requested that a doctor cause or assist them (216 assisted suicides).

How can this important increase be explained? In the annual report of the regional euthanasia committees (Regionale Toetsingcommissies Euthanasie, RTE), which has just been published, the members of these committees are simply asking questions. Do physicians more easily declare euthanasia practiced? Are they less reluctant to meet the demand of their patients? Could it be that patients are more determined and firm in their choice to seek death? No response is provided.



Pathologies

If we look at the figures according to the pathologies, it appears among other things that 68% of those who asked to be euthanized suffered from cancer. While in 2012, 41 people with dementia were euthanized, this figure is threefold in 2016, as it has involved 141 people. As for euthanasia patients suffering from psychiatric disorders, they affected 60 people in 2016. Finally, 244 elderly people suffering from an accumulation of ailments due to old age were euthanized.

For patients with dementia, it is usually in the early stages of the process of degeneration due to dementia that the doctor practices the euthanasia of his patient, who still has some awareness of

this gesture. The official report, however, states that "in some cases, patients with more advanced dementia" were still euthanized.

Nature of the condition	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012
Cancer	4,137	4000	3,888	3,588	3,251
Neurological symptoms	411	311	317	294	257
Cardiovascular	315	233	247	223	156
Pulmonary disease (not cancer)	214	207	184	174	152
Pathologies due to advanced age	244	183	257	251	172
Dementia	141	109	81	97	42
Psychiatric disorders	60	56	41	42	14
General Condition	104	417	291	160	144
Polypathologies	465				

Age and related pathologies

54% of the euthanized persons were over 70 years of age. It should be noted that a minor (aged between 12 and 17 years) was euthanized in 2016 in the Netherlands.

The report also indicates the relationship between age and pathologies justifying the demand for euthanasia: the largest proportion of requests justified by the "accumulation of age-related illnesses" concerns the age range over 90 years, those justified by dementia in the 80-90 age group and those justified by a psychiatric condition in the 50-60 age bracket.

> 90 years (522 euthanasia)	Accumulation of age-related illnesses
80-90 years old (1487 euthanasia)	Dementia
50-60 years (631 euthanasia)	Almost 50 cases of psychiatry
18-40 years (59 euthanasia)	7 cases of psychiatry

Place of euthanasia and practicing doctor

80% of the euthanized persons were sent to their homes and, in 85% of cases, by the family doctor. The report also confirms the growing involvement of doctors in the "End-of-Life Clinic" (around 400 cases compared to 107 in 2013), who accept tangent and "complex" cases that other doctors do not consider to be accurate or timely. Moreover, many practitioners refuse to cause the death of their patient if it is not at the end of life. They sometimes refer these cases to the end-of-life clinic.

Activity of the End-of-Life Clinic in 2016:

Cause of the request for euthanasia	Number	By the end-of-life clinic
Pathology psychiatric	60	37 (62%)
Dementia	141	46 (33%)
Pathologies due to age	244	66 (27%)

Conclusion of the TEN Committees

The Regional Euthanasia Committees are quite satisfied with the way in which euthanasia is practiced in the Netherlands. Out of a total of 6091 cases, 77 required additional information. For 40 cases, the committees invited the doctors involved to provide explanations. It was found that in 10 cases the doctors had not complied with the legal requirements.

Stressing the complexity of the cases to be studied and the difficult group discussions, the RTE committees are considering, with an external consulting firm, how best to pursue their work in view of the increasing number of requests for euthanasia.

Every five years, the Government of the Netherlands conducts an overall assessment of the euthanasia law: the third five-yearly report is expected mid-2017.