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Euthanasia became legal in Belgium on 3 September 2002.

#### Increase in number of deaths

In Belgium deaths by legal euthanasia increased more than twelvefold (1262%) from 235 in 2003 – the first full year of legalisation – to 2,966 in [2022](#). From 2020 to 2021 alone the increase was 10.4%, with a further increase of 9.85% from 2021 to 2022. Officially reported euthanasia now accounts for one in 40 (2.5%) of all deaths in Belgium in 2022.<sup>1</sup>

In Flanders in 2013 a total of 6.35% of deaths were physician assisted deaths: 4.6% by euthanasia on request; 0.05% by assisted suicide; and 1.7% by “hastening of death without an explicit request from the patient”.<sup>2</sup>

In 2013 euthanasia by request accounted for 6.3% of all deaths in Flanders of persons aged 65-79.<sup>3</sup>

#### Increased willingness of doctors to grant requests for euthanasia

A study of the granting of requests for euthanasia by doctors in Flanders comparing 2007 and 2013 data shows that by 2013 doctors were 1.4 more likely to grant requests for euthanasia overall (55.4 % in 2007; 76.7% in 2013); 1.7 times more likely to grant requests from women (45.7% to 76.4%); twice as likely to grant requests from persons over 80 (38.1% to 75.4%); twice as likely to grant requests from persons with no or only primary school education (35.1% to 69.5%); two and a half times more likely to grant request from patients with cardiovascular diseases (29.6% to 73.2%); 1.5 times more likely to grant requests from patients with respiratory diseases (47.1% to 72.7%); 1.4 times more likely to grant requests from patients with diseases of the nervous system (69.5% to 100%); 3.8 times more likely to grant requests for diseases other than cancer; cardiovascular, respiratory or nervous system disorders (18.8% to 70.7%) and three times more likely to grant requests from persons in nursing homes (22.9% to 68.2%).<sup>4</sup>

This data indicates that initial reservations about euthanasia requests from persons with particular characteristics or conditions are rapidly swept away with a clear trend towards euthanasia on demand.

#### Requirements routinely flouted

In 2013 in Flanders some 26.77% of all physician assisted deaths involved the explicitly intended hastening of death by administering drugs without an explicit request from the patient despite the legal requirement for an explicit request. *“This can include cases where a patient request was not*

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<sup>1</sup> <https://organesdeconcertation.sante.belgique.be/sites/default/files/documents/cfcee-communiquepresse20230217-chiffreseuthanasie-2022.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> K. Chambaere et al. “Recent trends in euthanasia and other end-of-life practices in Belgium”, *New England Journal of Medicine*, 17 March 2015, <http://www.nejm.org/doi/pdf/10.1056/NEJMc1414527>

<sup>3</sup> Sigrid Dierickx et al., “Comparison of the Expression and Granting of Requests for Euthanasia in Belgium in 2007 vs 2013”, *JAMA Internal Medicine*, Published online 10 Aug 2015, <http://archinte.jamanetwork.com/article.aspx?articleid=2426426>

<sup>4</sup> Sigrid Dierickx et al., “Comparison of the Expression and Granting of Requests for Euthanasia in Belgium in 2007 vs 2013”, *JAMA Internal Medicine*, Published online 10 Aug 2015, Table 1: Euthanasia requests and granted requests in Flanders, Belgium, 2007 vs 2013, <http://archinte.jamanetwork.com/article.aspx?articleid=2426426>

*judged as explicit by the physician, where the request came from the family or where the physician acted out of compassion.”<sup>5</sup>*

Another study found that, contrary to the law which authorises only doctors to perform euthanasia, nurses administered the lethal drugs in 12% of cases involving an explicit request and in 45% of cases without an explicit request.<sup>6</sup>

In its report for 2018 and 2019 the Commission fédérale de Contrôle et d’Évaluation de l’Euthanasie notes that it *“does not have the possibility to assess the proportion of the number of declared euthanasias compared to the number of euthanasia actually performed.”*

It is clear that in Belgium the legal requirements for euthanasia are routinely flouted.

### Organ donation following euthanasia

Belgium allows organ donation after euthanasia.

The first four cases of organ donation (2005-2007) following euthanasia involved persons who were not in the terminal phase of a terminal illness but who had a *“debilitating neurologic disease, either after severe cerebrovascular accident or primary progressive multiple sclerosis”*.<sup>7</sup>

In 2011 a report was published on a partially overlapping set of four cases lung transplants taken from persons who were euthanased between 2007 and 2009. The cases each involved *“an unbearable non-malignant disorder”*, including two cases of multiple sclerosis. One case involved a 52 year old woman with a mental disorder manifested with the symptom of automutilation – cutting to cause self-harm. Her consent to euthanasia and organ donation was accepted despite this particular mental illness.<sup>8</sup>

In a paper delivered to the 21<sup>st</sup> European Conference on General Thoracic Surgery held in Birmingham in May 2013, Dirk Van Raemdonck and his colleagues reported on a total of six lung transplants following death by cardiac arrest brought on by the administration of euthanasia carried out in Belgium between January 2007 and December 2012. Of the six cases, three of them had neuromuscular disorders and three had neuropsychiatric disorders. The authors conclude *“More euthanasia donors are to be expected with more public awareness.”*<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> K. Chambaere et al. “Recent trends in euthanasia and other end-of-life practices in Belgium: Supplementary Appendix”, *New England Journal of Medicine*, 17 March 2015

[http://www.nejm.org/doi/suppl/10.1056/NEJMc1414527/suppl\\_file/nejmc1414527\\_appendix.pdf](http://www.nejm.org/doi/suppl/10.1056/NEJMc1414527/suppl_file/nejmc1414527_appendix.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Els, Ingehlbrecht et al., “The role of nurses in physician-assisted deaths in Belgium, *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, 2010, 182:905-910, <http://www.cmaj.ca/content/182/9/905.full.pdf> ,

<sup>7</sup> D Ysebaert et al. “Organ Procurement After Euthanasia: Belgian Experience”, *Transplantation Proceedings*, 2009, 41: 585–586, [http://www.coma.ulg.ac.be/papers/death/organ\\_euthanasia09.pdf](http://www.coma.ulg.ac.be/papers/death/organ_euthanasia09.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> D Van Raemdonck et al., “Initial experience with transplantation of lungs recovered from donors after euthanasia”, *Applied Cardiopulmonary Pathophysiology* , 2011, 15: 38-48, [http://www.applied-cardiopulmonary-pathophysiology.com/fileadmin/downloads/acp-2011-1\\_20110329/05\\_vanraemdonck.pdf](http://www.applied-cardiopulmonary-pathophysiology.com/fileadmin/downloads/acp-2011-1_20110329/05_vanraemdonck.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> D Van Raemdonck et al., “Lung transplantation with grafts recovered from euthanasia donors”, Abstracts, 21<sup>st</sup> European Conference on General Thoracic Surgery, Birmingham, 26-29 May, 2013, Abstract O-099, p, 137, <http://www.estsmeetings.org/2013/images/documents/ests-abstracts-2013.pdf>

There seems to be no awareness of the exploitation involved in accepting consent to euthanasia followed by organ donation from patients with mental illness.

The 2018-2019 report notes that 18 people who were euthanased donated their organs. These people suffered either from a disease of the nervous system or **from a mental and behavioral disorder**. The majority of them were Dutch speakers, in the age group 50 to 69, female and **death was not expected soon**.

There were 3 cases reported for 2020 and 2021 – all males, aged 33, 73 and 76.

There was a total of 64 cases of organ donation with euthanasia in Belgium between 2005 and 2021.

Dr Marc Cosyns has expressed support for beating heart donation following a decision to perform euthanasia.<sup>10</sup> In this case death would be caused by exsanguination following surgical incisions to remove a still beating heart for the purpose of organ transplantation.

### No notification of family

In April 2012 Tom Mortier's mother was euthanased on the grounds of chronic depression. Tom writes:

*I was not involved in the decision-making process and the doctor who gave her the injection never contacted me.*

*Since then, my life has changed considerably. Up until now, I am still trying to understand how it is possible for euthanasia to be performed on physically healthy people without even contacting their children. The spokesman of the university hospital told me that everything happened according to my mother's "free choice". After my mother's death, I talked to the doctor who gave her the injection and he told me that he was "absolutely certain" my mother didn't want to live anymore.*

*The death of my mother has triggered a lot of questions. How is it possible that people can be euthanased in Belgium without close family or friends being contacted? Why does my country give medical doctors the exclusive power to decide over life and death? How do we judge what "unbearable suffering" is? What are the criteria to decide what "unbearable suffering" is? Can we rely on such a judgment for a mentally ill person?*

*After all, can a mentally ill person make a "free choice"? Why didn't the doctors try to arrange a meeting between our mother and her children? How can a medical doctor be "absolutely certain" that his/her patient doesn't want to live anymore? <sup>11</sup>*

### Euthanasia for non-terminal conditions

The Euthanasia Evaluation and Control Commission describes "polypathology" as including situations where mobility difficulties, increasing deafness or loss of vision have led to loneliness, social isolation

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Tom Mortier, "How my mother died", *MercatorNet*, 4 February 2013, [http://www.mercatornet.com/articles/view/how\\_my\\_mother\\_died](http://www.mercatornet.com/articles/view/how_my_mother_died)

or a decreased ability to engage in various activities as sufficient justification for euthanasia. Urinary or fecal incontinence, described as a loss of dignity, is also mentioned in this context.<sup>12</sup>

Despite claiming that *“In the absence of a serious and incurable disease, a feeling of life completed, fatigue of life or old age are not valid reasons for requesting euthanasia”* the Commission describes issues with vision loss, whether or not accompanied by hearing loss, as

*at the origin of a total dependence, a marked loss of autonomy which caused the loss of patients in control of their lives and made them dependent on the decisions of others, and social isolation due to the inability to communicate with others. All this gave rise to a feeling of loneliness, the feeling of being a burden to others, and the feeling that continuing to exist no longer makes sense. It is frequently a question of an absent or deficient quality of life, accompanied by a weariness of living or **feeling like you're done with your life**.*<sup>13</sup>

The Commission considers that general practitioners are “specialists” in polypathology so that where a specialist opinion is required from a second doctor for people not expected to die in the “months to come” another general practitioner can provide this opinion.

In 2022 there were 582 cases (19.6% of all cases) of euthanasia for polypathology, including 239 cases (8% of all cases) where death was not expected in the foreseeable future.<sup>14</sup>

Other cases of euthanasia where death was not expected in the foreseeable future included 41 for cognitive disorders; 24 for psychiatric disorders a range of physical non-terminal conditions, including arthritis (15), eye and ear disorders (2), chromosomal and congenital abnormalities (3) and injuries from external causes (7).

In total, there were 513 cases (17.3%) of euthanasia where the person was not expected to die in the foreseeable future.

In 2016/2017 there were 27 cases where death was not expected but the mandatory one month waiting period between the written request for euthanasia and its execution was not complied with by the euthanasing doctor. The Euthanasia Evaluation and Control Commission took no action on these cases other than sending the offending doctor *“a didactic letter to remind the doctor of the procedure to be followed in case of unexpected death in the short term”*.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 28

<sup>13</sup> Commission fédérale de Contrôle et d'Évaluation de l'Euthanasie Neuvième rapport aux Chambres législatives 2018 – 2019,  
[https://organesdeconcertation.sante.belgique.be/sites/default/files/documents/9\\_rapport-euthanasie\\_2018-2019-fr\\_0.pdf](https://organesdeconcertation.sante.belgique.be/sites/default/files/documents/9_rapport-euthanasie_2018-2019-fr_0.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> <https://organesdeconcertation.sante.belgique.be/sites/default/files/documents/cfcee-communiquepresse20230217-chiffreseuthanasie-2022.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> Commission fédérale de Contrôle et d'Évaluation de l'Euthanasie Huitième rapport aux Chambres législatives années 2016 – 2017, p. 18  
[https://organesdeconcertation.sante.belgique.be/sites/default/files/documents/8\\_rapport-euthanasie\\_2016-2017-fr.pdf](https://organesdeconcertation.sante.belgique.be/sites/default/files/documents/8_rapport-euthanasie_2016-2017-fr.pdf)

### No physical suffering

In [2022](#) some 56 (2.2%) cases involved no physical suffering at all. This includes, for example cancer patients “whose physical suffering is relieved by painkillers” but who “suffer psychologically by loss of dignity or a loss of autonomy”.<sup>16</sup>

### Euthanasia for disability such as blindness

In December 2012 identical twin brothers were euthanased on the grounds of their psychological distress at learning they were both going blind. The brothers were reportedly distressed that they would not be able to see each other.<sup>17</sup>

Commenting on this case, Dr. Marc Maurer, President of the [US] National Federation of the Blind, said: *“This disturbing news from Belgium is a stark example of the common, and in this case tragic, misunderstanding of disability and its consequences. Adjustment to any disability is difficult, and deaf-blind people face their own particular challenges, but from at least the time of Helen Keller it has been known that these challenges can be met, and the technology and services available today have vastly improved prospects for the deaf-blind and others with disabilities. That these men wanted to die is tragic; that the state sanctioned and aided their suicide is frightening.”*<sup>18</sup>

In [2022](#) there were 2 cases of euthanasia for eye or ear diseases (non-terminal), 7 for injuries (non-terminal), and 3 cases (nonterminal) for a congenital malformation or chromosomal abnormality. Each of these may be a case of euthanasia for disability.<sup>19</sup>

In relation to euthanasia for polypathology, the Commission has stated that for 234 cases [in 2020 and 2021](#) *“Visual disturbances progressing to bilateral blindness due to macular degeneration, in association or not with a pronounced hearing impairment, were at the origin of a total dependence and a marked loss of autonomy, which made the patients lose control of their lives and made them dependent on the decision of others. This situation was partly at the origin of social isolation due to the inability to communicate with others. All this gave rise to a feeling of loneliness, the feeling of being a burden on others, and the feeling that continuing to exist no longer makes sense. It was often a question of an absent quality of life, accompanied by a weariness of to live or a feeling of having finished with his life.”*

Belgium is euthanasing the disabled as a “cure” for loneliness.

### Euthanasia for victims of sexual abuse

In late 2012 a 44 year old woman known as Ann G was euthanased by her psychiatrist on the grounds of unbearable psychological suffering. She had been treated for anorexia since her teenage years by

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<sup>16</sup> <https://organesdeconcertation.sante.belgique.be/sites/default/files/documents/cfcee-communiquepresse20230217-chiffreseuthanasie-2022.pdf>

<sup>17</sup> Bruno Waterfield, “Belgian identical twins in unique mercy killing”, *The Telegraph*, 13 January 2013, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/belgium/9798778/Belgian-identical-twins-in-unique-mercy-killing.html>

<sup>18</sup> <https://nfb.org/national-federation-blind-comments-belgian-euthanasia-deaf-men-losing-sight>

<sup>19</sup> <https://organesdeconcertation.sante.belgique.be/sites/default/files/documents/cfcee-communiquepresse20230217-chiffreseuthanasie-2022.pdf>

psychiatrist Walter Vandereycken. In 2008 she publicly accused Vandereycken of sexual abusing her under the guise of therapy. In October 2012 he admitted to years of sexual abuse of several of his patients. Following this admission Ann G spoke of some temporary relief from “*the cancer in her head*” but subsequently persisted in her request for euthanasia.<sup>20</sup>

Ann G will not be available to testify against her abuser if charges are laid.

#### Euthanasia for gender dysphoria

On 30 September 2013 Nathan Verhelst was euthanased on the grounds of unhappiness following a sex change operation. Nathan (previously known as Nancy) had been rejected by a family who hated girls. Commenting on the euthanasia Nathan’s mother said:

*“When I saw ‘Nancy’ for the first time, my dream was shattered. She was so ugly. I had a phantom birth. Her death does not bother me.”*<sup>21</sup>

The doctors who approved and carried out euthanasia on Nathan Verhelst effectively affirmed the rejection Nathan had experienced since childhood.

#### Euthanasia for same sex attraction

In June 2016 the BBC interviewed a 39 year old Belgian man, known as “Sebastien”, who was in the process of being assessed for euthanasia on the grounds of his sexual attraction to men which he said he had never accepted and found unbearable. The outcome of his assessment has not been reported. However, Gilles Genicot, a member of Belgium’s Federal Euthanasia Evaluation and Control Commission, commented “*It’s more likely he has psychological problems relating to his sexuality. I cannot find a trace of actual psychic illness here. But what you cannot do is purely rule out the option of euthanasia for such patients. They can fall within the scope of the law once every reasonable treatment has been tried unsuccessfully and three doctors come to the conclusion that no other option remains.*”<sup>22</sup>

#### Euthanasia for children

On 12 December 2013 the Belgian Senate voted 50-17 in favour of a bill to amend the euthanasia law to allow “emancipated minors” to request euthanasia on the same terms as adults; and to allow “unemancipated minors” with the capacity for discernment to request euthanasia for a hopeless medical situation resulting in death shortly and who have reported a constant and unbearable physical suffering that cannot be appeased and that results from a serious and incurable disease or an accident.<sup>23</sup> For unemancipated minors at least one parent must consent to the act of euthanasia.

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<sup>20</sup> “Patiënte van psychiater Vandereycken krijgt euthanasia” *De standaard*, 28 January 2013, [http://www.standaard.be/artikel/detail.aspx?artikelid=DMF20130127\\_00448215](http://www.standaard.be/artikel/detail.aspx?artikelid=DMF20130127_00448215)

<sup>21</sup> Bruno Waterfield, “Mother of sex change Belgian: ‘I don’t care about his euthanasia death’”, *The Telegraph*, 2 October 2013, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/belgium/10349159/Mother-of-sex-change-Belgian-I-dont-care-about-his-euthanasia-death.html>

<sup>22</sup> Jonathan Blake, “Man seeks euthanasia to end his sexuality struggle”, *BBC News*, 9 June 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-36489090>

<sup>23</sup> [http://www.senate.be/www/?MIval=/index\\_senate&MENUID=21320&LANG=fr](http://www.senate.be/www/?MIval=/index_senate&MENUID=21320&LANG=fr)

The proposed law was transmitted to the Chamber of Representatives on 13 December 2013<sup>24</sup> where it passed by 88 votes to 46 on 13 February 2014<sup>25</sup>. It was signed into law by the King on 3 March 2014 and is now in effect.

Four children have so far been killed under the Belgian law: three in 2016 and 2017 and one in 2019. These were a 17-year-old child who was suffering from muscular dystrophy; a nine-year-old child, who had a brain tumour, and an 11-year-old child, who was suffering from cystic fibrosis, and a child of unstated age and condition in 2019. No children were euthanased in 2020, 2021 or 2022.

Luc Proot a member of the Belgium's Federal Euthanasia Evaluation and Control Commission, commented to Charles Lane of the *Washington Post* that he "saw mental and physical suffering so overwhelming that I thought we did a good thing"<sup>26</sup> As Lane points out he is referring to the Committee approving the cases after the fact based on reports from the doctors who carried out the killing. It is curious that Proot refers to "mental and physical suffering" when the Belgian law specifically refers only to "unbearable physical suffering" in relation to children in contrast to a reference to "unbearable physical or psychological suffering" for adults. This comment raises a doubt in relation to each of these three cases of child euthanasia as to whether there was "unbearable physical suffering" that could not be alleviated.

Good palliative care can relieve the various forms of physical suffering associated with end-stage brain tumours.<sup>27</sup>

Relevant to these cases is a discrepancy between the French and Dutch language versions of Article 3 Section1 of the Belgian euthanasia law in relation to children. The French language version reads "*qui entraîne le décès à brève échéance*"<sup>28</sup> which means "which will cause death in the short-term". The

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<sup>24</sup> <http://www.lachambre.be/FLWB/pdf/53/3245/53K3245001.pdf>

<sup>25</sup> <http://www.dekamer.be/doc/PCRI/html/53/ip186x.html>

<sup>26</sup> Charles Lane "Children are being euthanised in Belgium", *Washington Post*, 6 August 2018, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/children-are-being-euthanized-in-belgium/2018/08/06/9473bac2-9988-11e8-b60b-1c897f17e185\\_story.html?noredirect=on&utm\\_term=.388d76a167e4](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/children-are-being-euthanized-in-belgium/2018/08/06/9473bac2-9988-11e8-b60b-1c897f17e185_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.388d76a167e4)

<sup>27</sup> See for example: M. Cohn et al., *Transitions in Care for Patients with Brain Tumors: Palliative and Hospice Care*, 2014 [https://www.ucsfhealth.org/pdf/transition\\_of\\_care\\_handbook.pdf](https://www.ucsfhealth.org/pdf/transition_of_care_handbook.pdf) ;

Canadian Virtual hospice, *What can be expected as brain cancer progresses?*, [http://www.virtualhospice.ca/en\\_US/Main+Site+Navigation/Home/Support/Support/Asked+and+Answered/What+to+Expect+with+Various+Illnesses/Cancer/What+can+be+expected+as+brain+cancer+progresses\\_.aspx](http://www.virtualhospice.ca/en_US/Main+Site+Navigation/Home/Support/Support/Asked+and+Answered/What+to+Expect+with+Various+Illnesses/Cancer/What+can+be+expected+as+brain+cancer+progresses_.aspx)

<sup>28</sup> [http://www.ejustice.just.fgov.be/cgi\\_loi/change\\_lg.pl?language=fr&la=F&cn=2002052837&table\\_name=loi](http://www.ejustice.just.fgov.be/cgi_loi/change_lg.pl?language=fr&la=F&cn=2002052837&table_name=loi)



Dutch language version reads “*binnen afzienbare termijn het overlijden tot gevolg heft*”<sup>29</sup> which means “will result in death in the foreseeable future”.

There is a clear difference between death being caused in the “short-term” or in the “foreseeable future”.

Life expectancy for people with cystic fibrosis is increasing significantly in response to developments in treatment regimes. In the United States the median predicted age of survival for people with CF has now increased to 47 years.<sup>30</sup> It is by no means clear that the 11 year old child euthanased in Belgium in 2016 or 2017 was facing imminent death. He or she may have had years to live. Depression is also a particular issue with CF.<sup>31</sup> The “mental suffering” mentioned by Luc Proot may have been relievable through appropriate treatment.

The 17 year old child had Duchenne muscular dystrophy (DMD). “Until relatively recently, boys with DMD usually did not survive much beyond their teen years. Thanks to advances in cardiac and respiratory care, life expectancy is increasing and many young adults with DMD attend college, have careers, get married and have children. Survival into the early 30s is becoming more common, and there are cases of men living into their 40s and 50s.”<sup>32</sup> On the available information it is not clear whether in this case the child was both imminently dying and experiencing unbearable physical suffering that could not be alleviated.

#### Euthanasia for prisoners and mental health detainees

On 15 September 2014 the Brussels Court of Appeal decided that Frank Van Den Bleeken, who has been detained since the 1980s as a mentally impaired man accused of rape and murder, could legally request euthanasia as an alternative to life in prison.<sup>33</sup>

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[http://www.ejustice.just.fgov.be/cgi\\_loi/change\\_lg.pl?language=nl&la=N&cn=2002052837&table\\_name=wet](http://www.ejustice.just.fgov.be/cgi_loi/change_lg.pl?language=nl&la=N&cn=2002052837&table_name=wet)

<sup>30</sup> Cystic Fibrosis Foundation, <https://www.cff.org/CF-Community-Blog/Posts/2017/Survival-Trending-Upward-but-What-Does-This-Really-Mean/>

<sup>31</sup> Cystic Fibrosis Foundation, <https://www.cff.org/Life-With-CF/Daily-Life/Emotional-Wellness/Depression-and-CF/>

<sup>32</sup> Muscular Dystrophy Association, *Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy (DMD)*, <https://www.mda.org/disease/duchenne-muscular-dystrophy>

<sup>33</sup> “Belgian murderer Van Den Bleeken wins ‘right to die’”, BBC News Europe, 15 September 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-29209459>

His euthanasia was scheduled for 11 January 2015 but was halted after the doctors treating him decided not to go ahead with it.<sup>34</sup>

Geneviève Lhermitte was an infamous murderer. She killed her son and four daughters, aged between three and 14, in Nivelles, Belgium on 28 February 2007. On 28 February 2023, she was euthanised, after she successfully invoked her 'right to die'.<sup>35</sup>

#### Euthanasia for suicidal ideation

Euthanasia has been approved for a 24 year old woman, known as Laura, on the sole grounds of her mental suffering based on suicidal ideation.<sup>36</sup> Belgium now treats suicidal ideation by facilitating suicide.

Between 2014 and 2017 two patients who were in an irreversible coma after a suicide attempt were euthanased based on an advance directive 5 months and 35 months respectively before the suicide attempt.<sup>37</sup>

Dr Marc van Hoey, who estimates he has personally euthanased about 140 people, is being investigated for his actions in 2015 when he performed euthanasia on an elderly woman who was threatening to commit suicide after the sudden death of her daughter.<sup>38</sup>

#### Euthanasia for bipolar disorder

Dr Wim Distelmans, the chairman of the Belgian Euthanasia Control and Evaluation Commission, in March 2015, enthused about euthanasia as the solution for people with bipolar disorder:

*"Manic-depressive patients, in their manic moments, do the most improbable things: plunder their bank account, stay weeks in a five star hotel, buy numerous cars in one day. At that stage they are not mentally competent, that is obvious. But in moments of depression and exhaustion to the baseline, then they are indeed competent. Then they can say, for example: "I have lived for thirty years crazy highs and lows, I've tried everything to break that infernal cycle, including psychiatric hospitalization,*

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<sup>34</sup> "Belgian rapist Van Den Bleeken refused 'right to die', BBC News Europe, 6 January 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-30699780>

<sup>35</sup> <https://www.spiked-online.com/2023/03/08/how-assisted-suicide-has-revived-the-death-penalty/>

<sup>36</sup> "Healthy Woman Will Die By Doctor-Assisted Euthanasia Over Suicidal Thoughts", *Inquisitr*, 24 June 2015, <http://www.inquisitr.com/2196375/healthy-woman-die-doctor-assisted-euthanasia-suicidal-thoughts/>

<sup>37</sup> Commission fédérale de Contrôle et d'Évaluation de l'Euthanasie Huitième rapport aux Chambres législatives années 2016 – 2017, p. 14, [https://organesdeconcertation.sante.belgique.be/sites/default/files/documents/8\\_rapport-euthanasie\\_2016-2017-fr.pdf](https://organesdeconcertation.sante.belgique.be/sites/default/files/documents/8_rapport-euthanasie_2016-2017-fr.pdf)

<sup>38</sup> <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-6450405/Belgiums-Dr-Death-proudly-admits-killed-140-patients-including-two-friends.html>

*but now I'm back on the baseline, and I know I have a few weeks left before I am back for a dip in the depth or a jump in height." These are people who are eligible for euthanasia.*"<sup>39</sup>

#### Euthanasia for cognitive and psychiatric disorders, including Asperger's

In [2022](#) there were 42 cases of euthanasia for cognitive disorders (including Alzheimer's and other dementias) as well as 21 cases of euthanasia for psychiatric conditions<sup>40</sup>.

Between 2018 and 2021 there were 97 cases of euthanasia for cognitive disorders (including Alzheimer's and other dementias) as well as 102 cases of euthanasia for psychiatric conditions and including depression/bipolar disorder (36), personality disorders (35), anxiety/stress disorders (10), schizophrenia (10), autism (6), and anorexia (2).

Extraordinarily, one person was euthanased in 2018 for *"Commonly occurring behavioral and emotional disturbances during childhood and adolescence (such as attachment disorder)"* and one person in 2020 for *"Mental and behavioral disorders related to the use of psychoactive substances"*.

The Commission reports that *"In young patients, the unbearable and persistent nature of the suffering was frequently associated with experiences from the past. In this regard, it was a question of sexual abuse, neglect as a child, rejection by parents, self-destructive behavior and suicide attempts. In addition, failed suicide attempts have made those affected aware that there is also another, more dignified way to end their life."*

A total of 201 people with psychiatric disorders were killed by euthanasia in **Belgium between 2014 and 2017** including for mood disorders such as depression, bipolar disorder (73 cases); organic mental disorders, including dementia and Alzheimer's (60 cases); personality and behavioural disorders (23 cases); neurotic disorders, and disorders related to stressors including posttraumatic stress disorder (16 cases); schizophrenia and psychotic disorders (11 cases); organic mental disorders, including autism (10 cases) and complex cases involving a combination of several categories (8 cases).<sup>41</sup>

Of these 201 cases there were 25 cases of people under 40 being killed by euthanasia. In relation to these troubled young people the Commission observes *"In the group of patients under 40, it is mainly personality and behavioral disorders. All these patients have been treated for many years, both outpatient and residential. There has always been talk of intractable suffering. For this type of disorder,*

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<sup>39</sup>“ Jaarlijks vijftig keer euthanasie om psychiatrische redenen”, *HLN*, 20 March 2015, <https://www.hln.be/nieuws/binnenland/-jaarlijks-vijftig-keer-euthanasie-om-psychiatrische-redenen~a832222b/>, Translated with the aid of Google Translate

<sup>40</sup> <https://organesdeconcertation.sante.belgique.be/sites/default/files/documents/cfcee-communiquepresse20230217-chiffreseuthanasie-2022.pdf>

<sup>41</sup> Commission fédérale de Contrôle et d'Évaluation de l'Euthanasie Huitième rapport aux Chambres législatives années 2016 – 2017, p. 46, [https://organesdeconcertation.sante.belgique.be/sites/default/files/documents/8\\_rapport-euthanasie\\_2016-2017-fr.pdf](https://organesdeconcertation.sante.belgique.be/sites/default/files/documents/8_rapport-euthanasie_2016-2017-fr.pdf)

*serious psychological trauma at a very young age have been mentioned several times, such as domestic violence, psychological neglect or sexual abuse.”<sup>42</sup>*

**Belgium is treating the victims of child abuse by domestic violence, neglect and sexual abuse by killing them.**

The breakdown for **2014-2015** is more detailed for the 124 people killed by euthanasia in Belgium in for mental and behavioural disorders, including depression (41); dementia (36); borderline personality disorder (14); bipolar disorder (9); obsessive-compulsive disorder (5); personality disorder (3); post-traumatic stress disorder (1); psychosis (1); schizoaffective disorder (1) and anorexia (1).<sup>43</sup>

A report on 100 cases where patients an outpatient psychiatric clinic in Dutch speaking Belgium who requested euthanasia between 2007 and 2011 found that of the 35 cases in which euthanasia had been carried out by December 2012 there were 9 men and 26 women, indicating women are more vulnerable to being killed for their poor mental health.

Of the 100 cases, 11 patients were under 30 years (average age was 47 years).

The conditions for which requests were considered included: depression, bipolar, schizophrenia, Asperger’s syndrome (19 cases); post-traumatic stress disorder; complicated grief; eating disorders; obsessive-compulsive disorders; anxiety; and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.

“In total, 48 of the 100 patients’ euthanasia requests were accepted (48%), because LT [Lieve Thienpont] (psychiatrist), in discussion with the patients’ other practitioners and families, considered the requests to be based on reasons that were sufficiently tangible and reasonable, and because all legal requirements had been fulfilled.”<sup>44</sup>

This psychiatrist (Dr Lieve Thienpont) and two other doctors were prosecuted for the poisoning in April 2010 – under the guise of euthanasia - of a 38 year old woman, Tine Nys.

Dr Thienpont signed off on Tine’s request for euthanasia on the basis of a diagnosis of Aspergers Syndrome given just two months before she was killed by a lethal injection.

Tine’s family filed a criminal complaint in 2017 alleging that Tine did not have Aspergers Syndrome but was seeking to end her life after a failed relationship; that the doctors made no effort to treat her for any suffering allegedly arising from the supposed condition and that during the actual process of euthanasia the doctor asked Tine’s parents to hold the needle while he injected the lethal drugs, and even asked the family to check Tine’s heart with a stethoscope to confirm her death.

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 48

<sup>43</sup> Federale Controle- en Evaluatiecommissie Euthanasie, Zevende verslag aan de Wetgevende Kamers (2014 - 2015), 7 Oct 2016, p. 8; p. 38, <https://www.lachambre.be/flwb/pdf/54/2078/54K2078001.pdf>

<sup>44</sup> Thienpont L, et al. “Euthanasia requests, procedures and outcomes for 100 Belgian patients suffering from psychiatric disorders: a retrospective, descriptive study. *BMJ Open*, July 2015, <http://bmjopen.bmj.com/content/5/7/e007454.full.pdf+html>

After the criminal complaint was initiated Dr Thienpont wrote to colleagues calling on them to “try to stop these people [the Nys family]. It is a seriously dysfunctional, wounded, traumatized family with very little empathy and respect for others.”

The three doctors were each acquitted in a jury trial in Ghent on 31 January 2020. The doctors’ lawyer Mr. Van Steenbrugge said the acquittal had sent a strong, reassuring message to doctors. “It was not manslaughter, it wasn’t a crime,” he said. “It was euthanasia.”<sup>45</sup> This reassuring message to doctors regarding the poisoning of persons with suicidal ideation and mental and behavioural disorders is far from reassuring for the wellbeing of these troubled people.

### Euthanasia by advanced directive

27 people were killed by euthanasia in 2019 while “irreversibly unconscious” pursuant to an advanced directive.<sup>46</sup> 19 people were killed by euthanasia in [2022](#) pursuant to an advanced directive.<sup>47</sup>

### A nurse’s view

Claire-Marie Le Huu-Etchecopar is a French nurse who has worked in Belgium since 2008. She has written about her experience with euthanasia in Belgium. These are two of the disturbing cases she has recounted:

#### ***Monsieur R. never asked for euthanasia: he was released from life out of ‘compassion’***

*This was the view of an oncologist just after the euthanasia of Mr R. Some days before, the doctor informed his wife that her husband was in the terminal phase of lung cancer. The doctor added that the patient ‘will suffer enormously, even though he was showing no signs of pain or distress at the moment’. His wife asked the specialist not to say a word to her husband ‘so he doesn’t suffer further’ and at the same moment seeks euthanasia to spare him the ‘horror of the end of life’. Mr R died by euthanasia without ever knowing of his illness and without deciding or even once expressing the wish to have recourse to euthanasia.*

#### ***A sixty year old woman with dementia: The worrying influence of her entourage.***

*The entourage, consisting of friends and some family due to conflict, seemed totally unprepared. They kept harassing caregivers demanding euthanasia for this lady. The Care team felt uncomfortable because they understood that despite the request of the patient there is another reality: that of feeling abandoned because of a lack of solidarity. Her companions were undoubtedly sincere, seeking [her] well-being. But their kindness was devoid of empathy, the perspective necessary for real solidarity. The whole time she was in hospital, she asked for a*

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<sup>45</sup> Eliau Peltier, “Belgium Acquits Three Doctors in Landmark Euthanasia Case”, *New York Times*, 31 January 2020,

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/31/world/europe/doctors-belgium-euthanasia.html>

<sup>46</sup> Federale Controle- en Evaluatiecommissie Euthanasie, EUTHANASIE – Cijfers voor het jaar 2019, 3 March 2020, [https://overlegorganen.gezondheid.belgie.be/sites/default/files/documents/fcee\\_cijfers-2019\\_persbericht.pdf](https://overlegorganen.gezondheid.belgie.be/sites/default/files/documents/fcee_cijfers-2019_persbericht.pdf)

<sup>47</sup> <https://organesdeconcertation.sante.belgique.be/sites/default/files/documents/cfcee-communiquepresse20230217-chiffreseuthanasie-2022.pdf>

*toothbrush. Instead of a toothbrush, they bring her what they believe to be good according to them: wine, cakes, but never meeting the lady's request.*

*Also, the majority of the care team feel frustrated because lots of measures have been put in place to improve her comfort and her desire to be more surrounded. Initially, she agreed to appropriate structures for her needs, and then under the influence of her environment, she rejected them. Those close to her are locked in the emotion of seeing their friend disabled. They cannot bear to see her different. Any other solution than euthanasia seems unimaginable to them. In a small notebook where they leave her messages while she's sleeping, the question of euthanasia is on every page. You can read words such as:*

*Do not forget your euthanasia, it is your right, you have to ask the doctors or they'll never do it for you...*<sup>48</sup>

#### A case of euthanasia without request

One case reported in 2016/2017 concerned an interruptive act of life without request from the patient.

In this complex case where the patient had not made an explicit request, some members of the Commission felt that the law on euthanasia had been violated and that the file should be sent to the public prosecutor. Indeed, demand is one of the essential legal conditions. However, other members considered that a referral to the prosecution was not appropriate. Two arguments have supported this position. On the one hand, the fact that the means used in such a situation of agony did not indicate not necessarily the practice of euthanasia. On the other hand, several members of the Commission pointed out that in this case the doctor was faced emergency characterized by an extremely painful agony suffered by the patient for 24 hours, while her life expectancy was at most 2-3 days. This patient was in danger of choking. In addition, the patient's behavior and non-verbal communication were interpreted by the physician, the nursing staff and the family members of the patient as a request for euthanasia. The two-thirds majority, legally required for referral to the King's Attorney (see Article 8 of the law) was not reached (9 for referral to the King's public prosecutor, 7 against).<sup>49</sup>

This high threshold of two-thirds majority of the Commission for referral to the public prosecutor helps explain why only one case has ever been referred (in 2015).

#### Euthanasia tourism

The place of residence is only required to be reported in the first part of a euthanasia report filed by the doctor performing euthanasia. This part only gets open when questions arise. However, in 2020 and 2021 doctors did refer in the second part of the report to people who were foreigners who came to Belgium to seek euthanasia. There were 79 such cases reported in this way (up from 45 reported in

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<sup>48</sup> Claire-Marie Le Huu-Etchecopar, *Lifting the veil on euthanasia: what really happens in Belgium's healthcare system - a nurse's story*, 28 May 2014, <http://alexschadenberg.blogspot.com.au/2014/05/lifting-veil-on-euthanasia-what-really.html> ; Originally published in French under the title "Euthanasie: le model Belgique a la derive", <http://plusdignelavie.com/?p=2773>

<sup>49</sup> Commission fédérale de Contrôle et d'Évaluation de l'Euthanasie Huitième rapport aux Chambres législatives années 2016 – 2017, p. 30, [https://organesdeconcertation.sante.belgique.be/sites/default/files/documents/8\\_rapport-euthanasie\\_2016-2017-fr.pdf](https://organesdeconcertation.sante.belgique.be/sites/default/files/documents/8_rapport-euthanasie_2016-2017-fr.pdf) /

2016 and 2017) but there may be many more. Of the 79 reported cases “More than half of the deaths were expected in the near future” meaning several were cases where death was not expected in the short term.<sup>50</sup>

There were 61 cases of euthanasia tourism in [2022](#), including one person from Australia. Of these 13 were cases where death was not expected in the foreseeable future.

### Conclusion

The 21-year experiment with euthanasia in Belgium is fatally flawed. It has resulted in the abandonment of the disabled, the mentally ill, the suicidal and the victims of child abuse to hopelessness and State sanctioned death by lethal injection.

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<sup>50</sup> [https://organesdeconcertation.sante.belgique.be/sites/default/files/documents/10\\_rapport-euthanasie\\_2020-2021-fr.pdf](https://organesdeconcertation.sante.belgique.be/sites/default/files/documents/10_rapport-euthanasie_2020-2021-fr.pdf)