

27 February 2023: EUTHANASIA - Figures for 2023

These figures relate to the registration documents for euthanasia cases carried out between 1 January 2023 and 31 December 2023 and reviewed by the Commission.

A more detailed analysis of euthanasia cases reported in 2023 will be provided in the Commission's next biennial report (containing data from 2022 and 2023).

The number of registration documents received in 2023 was 3,423. The number of euthanasia cases registered rose by 15 % compared with 2022. The proportion of deaths by euthanasia reported in 2023 was 3,1% (compared with 2,5% in 2022) of all deaths in our country (source Statbel 25.01.2024).

Language of registration documents

70,8 % of registration documents were in Dutch, 29,2 % in French.

There has been a more or less similar increase in the number of declarations in both languages (an increase of declarations 16% in Dutch and 14% in French).

Patient age

70,7 % of patients were aged over 70 and 42.1 % were over 80. Euthanasia in patients under the age of 40 remained very rare (1.1 %). Patients in their 60s, 70s and 80s were most likely to request euthanasia (74.7 %). The largest group of patients was in the 70 -79 age bracket (28.6 %).

In 2023, one declaration of euthanasia of a minor was registered.

Place of the act

The percentage of euthanasia cases taking place in the home fell slightly in 2023 (48.6 % versus 50.5% in 2022) , while the number of euthanasia cases taking place in nursing homes and rest homes continued to rise (17.6 % versus 16.4% in 2022).

In contrast, the percentage of euthanasia cases performed in hospitals and palliative care units remained stable (32 % versus 31.8% in 2022)

Advance declarations

0.6% of euthanasia cases involved unconscious patients who had made an advance declaration.

Time of death

In the vast majority of cases (79.2 %), the doctor felt that the patient's death was foreseeable in the short term. Patients whose death was clearly not expected in the short term were mainly suffering from polypathologies, whereas the death of cancer patients is rarely considered as such.

Conditions

The conditions that prompted euthanasia cases were tumours (cancers) (55.5 %), a combination of several chronic refractory conditions (polypathologies) (23.2 %), diseases of the nervous system such as ALS or Charcot's disease (9.6 %), diseases of the circulatory system such as stroke (3,2 %), diseases of the respiratory system such as pulmonary fibrosis (3 %), psychiatric conditions such as personality disorders (1,4 %), cognitive disorders such as Alzheimer's disease (1.2 %), , diseases of the osteoarticular system such as arthropathies or myopathies (0.7%) and traumatic lesions such as a complication following surgery (0,6%). The other categories together accounted for 1.2% of conditions.

- The oncology patient group remains the largest group requesting euthanasia. These were mainly malignant tumours of the digestive organs (e.g. stomach, colon), respiratory organs (e.g. lung), breast and lymphoid, hematopoietic and related tissues (e.g. leukemia).
- After oncological conditions, the major reason for euthanasia requests is still polypathologies (a combination of several conditions such as terminal heart failure (NYHA 3-4), haemiplegia due to a stroke and metastatic lung cancer). In 2023, the number of euthanasia cases carried out on patients with polypathologies was 793 or 23.2 % of the total number of euthanasia cases versus 528 patients in 2022 (19,6 %).
- Requests for euthanasia based on psychiatric conditions such as personality disorders are increasing but remained marginal (1.4%). Requests for euthanasia based on cognitive disorders remain stable (1.2 %). As with all the euthanasia cases reviewed, the legal conditions were met (considered and repeated request from a capable patient; medical situation without a medical solution; constant, unrelievable and unbearable suffering caused by a serious and incurable condition).

Suffering

For most patients, several types of suffering, both physical and psychological (not to be confused with psychiatric conditions), were observed simultaneously (76.2 %). Psychological suffering should not be confused with psychiatric illness. In fact, psychological suffering alone is the result of both psychiatric and somatic conditions. For example, a cancer patient whose physical suffering is alleviated by pain relief may experience only psychological suffering, such as loss of dignity or loss of autonomy. example: a cancer patient whose physical suffering is soothed by pain relief may feel only psychological suffering such as a loss of dignity or a loss of autonomy. This suffering was always the consequence of one or more serious and incurable conditions.

Patients living abroad

According to Section II of the declarations, in 2023, 110 patients residing abroad came to Belgium in order to be euthanised under the conditions of Belgian law. As the place of residence is not compulsory in this section, this is the minimum number.

This concerned patients suffering from diseases of the nervous system, tumours or polyopathologies

60 % of the deaths were expected in the short term. Most of the patients were aged between 50 and 89. These patients mainly resided in France (101). The other countries of origin mentioned were: Germany, Netherlands, Spain, UK, Italy and South Korea.

Decisions

The Commission found that all the declarations received met the essential requirements of the law, and none were forwarded to the Public Prosecutor.

Statistical data (2023)

Number of euthanasia cases carried out and language breakdown

	2023	% TOTAL
TOTAL	3423	100 %
NL	2422	70,8
FR	1001	29,2

Breakdown of patients by gender

	2023	% TOTAL
TOTAL	3423	100 %
Male	1662	48,6
Female	1761	51,4

Breakdown of patients by age

	2023	% TOTAL
TOTAL	3423	100 %
Under 18 years	1	0
18-29	8	0,2
30-39	30	0,9
40-49	83	2,4
50-59	256	7,5
60-69	625	18,3
70-79	980	28,6
80-89	952	27,8
90-99	467	13,6
100 years and over	21	0,6

Location of euthanasia

	2023	% TOTAL
TOTAL	3423	100 %
At home	1664	48,6
Hospital (including palliative care unit)	1096 (209)	32 (6,1)
Rest Home - Rest and Care Homes	601	17,6
Other	62	1,8

Basis of the written request

	2023	% TOTAL
TOTAL	3423	100 %
Current request	3404	99,4
Advance declaration of euthanasia	19	0,6

	2023	% TOTAL
TOTAL	3423	100 %
Expected in the short term (short)	2710	79,2
Not expected in the short term (not short)	713	20,8

Conditions prompting the request for euthanasia

	2023	% TOTAL
Breakdown in % according to the category of conditions, all expected time of death durations included		
TOTAL	3423	100 %
Tumours (cancers)	1899	55,5
Polypathologies (a combination of several chronic refractory conditions)	793	23,2
Diseases of the nervous system	330	9,6
Diseases of the circulatory system	110	3,2
Diseases of the respiratory system	103	3,0
Psychiatric conditions	48	1,4
Cognitive disorders (dementia)	41	1,2
Diseases of the osteoarticular system, muscles and connective tissue	23	0,7
Traumatic lesions, poisoning and certain other consequences with external causes	22	0,6
Diseases of the digestive system	12	0,4
Diseases of the genitourinary system	11	0,3
Symptoms, signs and abnormal clinical and laboratory findings not listed elsewhere	10	0,3
Diseases of the eye and its appendages	8	0,23
Certain infectious and parasitic diseases	4	0,12
Endocrine, nutritional and metabolic diseases	4	0,12
Congenital disorders and chromosomal abnormalities	4	0,12
Diseases of the blood and blood-forming organs and certain immune system disorders	1	0,03

	2023	% TOTAL
Breakdown in % according to the category of conditions, death not expected in the short term		
TOTAL	713	100 %
Polypathologies (a combination of several chronic refractory conditions)	372	52,2
Diseases of the nervous system	141	19,8
Psychiatric conditions	48	6,7
Diseases of the circulatory system	35	4,9
Cognitive disorders (dementia)	35	4,9
Tumours (cancers)	18	2,5
Diseases of the osteoarticular system, muscles and connective tissue	18	2,5
Diseases of the respiratory system	15	2,1
Traumatic lesions, poisoning and certain other consequences with external causes	9	1,3
Diseases of the eye and its appendages	8	1,1
Symptoms, signs and abnormal clinical and laboratory findings not listed elsewhere	6	0,8
Congenital disorders and chromosomal abnormalities	3	0,4
Diseases of the digestive system	2	0,3
Endocrine, nutritional and metabolic diseases	2	0,3
Certain infectious and parasitic diseases	1	0,1
Diseases of the genitourinary system	0	0
Diseases of the blood and blood-forming organs and certain immune system disorders	0	0

	Short 2023	Non short 2023	% Short	% Non short
Breakdown in % according to the category of conditions and according to the expected time of death				
TOTAL	2710	713	%/conditions short	%/conditions NON short
Tumours (cancers)	1881	18	99,1	0,9
Polypathologies (a combination of several chronic refractory conditions)	421	372	53,1	46,9
Diseases of the nervous system	189	141	57,3	42,7
Diseases of the circulatory system	75	35	68,2	31,8
Diseases of the respiratory system	88	15	85,4	14,6
Psychiatric conditions	0	48	0,0	100,0
Cognitive disorders (dementia)	6	35	15,0	85,0
Diseases of the osteoarticular system, muscles and connective tissue	5	18	21,7	78,3
Traumatic lesions, poisoning and certain other consequences with external causes	13	9	59,1	40,9
Diseases of the digestive system	10	2	83,3	16,7
Diseases of the genitourinary system	11	0	100,0	0,0
Symptoms, signs and abnormal clinical and laboratory findings not listed elsewhere	4	6	40,0	60,0
Diseases of the eye and its appendages	0	8	0,0	100,0
Certain infectious and parasitic diseases	3	1	75,0	25,0
Endocrine, nutritional and metabolic diseases	2	2	50,0	50,0
Congenital disorders and chromosomal abnormalities	1	3	25,0	75,0
Diseases of the blood and blood-forming organs and certain immune system disorders	1	0	100,0	0,0

Suffering mentioned

	2023	% TOTAL
TOTAL	3423	100 %
Physical and psychological suffering reported simultaneously	2608	76,2
Physical suffering only	749	21,9
Psychological suffering only* (resulting from both psychiatric and physical conditions)	66	1,9

*For example: a cancer patient whose physical suffering is soothed by pain relief may feel only psychological suffering such as a loss of dignity or a loss of autonomy.

Qualification of doctors compulsorily consulted

	2023	% TOTAL
Qualification du 1^{er} médecin consulté obligatoirement		
TOTAL	3423	100 %
General Practitioner	2142	62,6
Specialist	1194	34,9
Psychiatrist	87	2,5

Qualification of the second doctor compulsorily consulted (death not expected in the short term)

	2023	% TOTAL
TOTAL	713	100 %
Psychiatrist	365	51,2
Specialist	348	48,8

Technique and products used

	2023	% TOTAL
TOTAL	3423	100 %
Propofol + neuromuscular paralyzing agent by intravenous administration	1550	45,3
Thiopental + neuromuscular paralyzing agent by intravenous administration	1246	36,4
Thiopental only by intravenous administration	594	17,4
Morphine and/or anxiolytic + neuromuscular paralyzing agent by intravenous administration	20	0,6

Press Release from the Federal Commission for the Control and Evaluation of Euthanasia - FCCEE

Barbiturates by oral administration	6	0,2
Other (for example Thiopental + Propofol)	7	0,2

Commission Decisions

	2023	% TOTAL
TOTAL	3423	100 %
Straightforward acceptance	2534	74,0
Opening of section I for administrative reasons	453	13,2
Opening of section I for comment(s) only	260	7,6
Opening of section I for specifications about the procedure followed or compliance with the conditions	176	5,1

Forwarded to the Public Prosecutor: no case in 2023.

Press contacts

FR

- **Jacqueline Herremans**, lawyer
+32 (0)2 738 02 80
+32 (0)475 74 40 92
jacqueline.herremans@ljlj.be
- **Dr. Didier Giet**, prof. General Medicine
University of Liège - General Practitioner
+32 (0)4 382 15 18
d.giet@uliege.be

NL

- **Wim Distelmans**, prof. Palliative Medicine VUB
+32 (0)475 67 14 51
Willem.Distelmans@uzbrussel.be
- **Luc Proot**, surgeon+32 (0)50 84 17 77
+32 (0)474 31 75 56
proot.luc@telenet.be