

# Children Are Now Being Euthanized in Belgium

Three minors have been [euthanised](#) in Belgium since euthanasia for children was legalised in 2014. According to the [latest report from the government agency](#) (PDF in French) which tracks euthanasia deaths, the children were 9, 11 and 17 years old. Two died in 2016 and 1 last year.

Under the existing law, their request for death has to be voluntary and well-considered and the patient must be suffering unbearably, with no prospect of improvement.

“There is no age for suffering,” said Professor Wim Distelmans, chairman of the [Federal Commission for Euthanasia Control and Evaluation](#). “Fortunately, euthanasia among young people remains very exceptional. Even if it were only one, the law would have been very useful. “

The number of euthanasia cases seems to be rising rapidly in Belgium, particularly in Flanders, the Dutch-speaking region. In 2007, 495 Belgians chose euthanasia; in 2016 the number was 2,028 and in 2017 2,309. Four out of five are Dutch-speaking.

From the UK, Lord Alex Carlile, co-chairman of Living and Dying Well, a parliamentary group opposed to euthanasia, [declared that](#) he was “profoundly shocked” by the report.

*The euthanasia of those children is plainly contradictory of the European Convention on Human Rights. No parent and no public authority has the power to take away the life of anyone who is a child, whoever they are. The Belgium government is far too relaxed about this. It is not ensuring that appropriate checks are carried out and standards maintained. Belgium is perhaps the state that is causing the greatest concern in Europe about the way it administers*

*euthanasia.*

Another controversial issue which surfaces in this year's report is "poly pathology" – a combination of illnesses which together makes life unendurable. Although cancer remains the principal reason for requesting euthanasia, the number of poly pathology patients requesting euthanasia has almost doubled in the last four years, from 232 to 444.

According to a discussion of child euthanasia in Belgium in the July issue of the [Medical Law Review](#) journal, "euthanasia accounts for 1.7% to 1.8% of all deaths in Belgium, although anonymous physician surveys suggest that the actual figure, at least in Flanders, the Dutch-speaking Northern half of Belgium, is closer to 4.6%."

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