

Belgian euthanasia cases hit record high

27 January 2016

Belgium carried out more than 2,000 mercy killings last year, the most since euthanasia was controversially legalised in 2002, the government said Wednesday.

In Switzerland, doctors can assist a patient seeking to die but [euthanasia](#) itself is illegal.

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"There were 2,021 cases in 2015," said a spokeswoman for the government's euthanasia commission which oversees the legislation to ensure it is correctly applied.

In 2014, there were 1,924 cases, according to official figures, with the numbers rising steadily since 2002, topping 1,000 for the first time in 2011 with 1,133.

Commission head Professor Wim Distelmans said the increase appeared to reflect more doctors registering euthanasia cases than before but there were perhaps more which were undeclared.

"Remember, there could be some euthanasia [cases](#) carried out but which are not declared so we cannot say for certain what the position is," Distelmans was quoted as saying by the Belga news agency.

Belgium extended the scope of its law in 2014 to allow euthanasia for minors of any age suffering from incurable diseases if they were capable of making a [rational decision](#) about their fate.

Even more controversial than euthanasia's introduction in 2002, the move sparked fierce debate over whether a child had the ability to make such a decision.

The neighbouring Netherlands is the only other country in the world to allow euthanasia for minors but it has a minimum age of 12.

Distelmans said that the commission had not received any request for euthanasia for a minor.

After the Netherlands and Belgium in Europe, Luxembourg approved euthanasia but for adults only in 2009.

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