



# Press release

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14 Health

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Assisted suicide in Switzerland 1998–2009

## Almost 300 cases of assisted suicide in 2009

**Neuchâtel, 27.03.2012 (FSO) – The Federal Statistical Office (FSO) is presenting statistical results on assisted suicide for the first time. These cover the period from 1998 to 2009. During this period the number of Swiss residents who died as a result of assisted suicide rose steadily. In 2009, the number was nearly 300, which corresponds to 4.8 per 1000 deaths. There are no corresponding data for the period prior to 1998.**

### Sex and age

In 90% of recorded cases, the persons who resorted to assisted suicide were aged 55 or over. Only 1% were younger than 35. The age distribution is similar for men and women. From age 55, a markedly higher proportion of women choose to seek assisted suicide

### Underlying diseases

Assisted suicide is resorted to when life no longer appears worth living for the person concerned, in particular due to a serious physical illness. In 44% of cases, cancer was reported as the underlying disease. In 14% of cases a neurodegenerative disease was the decisive factor, in 9% a cardiovascular disease and in 6% a musculoskeletal disorder. Depression was reported in 3% of cases and dementia in 0.3%.

### Canton of residence

In the 12 years since 1998, at least one person in each canton has resorted to assisted suicide. The canton of Zurich accounted for the largest share, both in absolute and relative numbers: 700 persons, or 5.6 per 1000 deaths, between 1998 and 2009. In the canton of Geneva 100, or 4.4 per 1000 deaths, were reported. The cantons of Appenzell Ausserrhoden, Vaud, Basel-Stadt und Schaffhausen are also above the Swiss average of 2.8 per 1000 deaths.

### **International comparison**

There are few opportunities for international comparison, as national legislation on assisted suicide differs widely, ranging from prohibition to liberal solutions, and there are no international standards on the collection of assisted suicide data.

Well documented data are only available from Belgium and the Netherlands. In Belgium the number of reported cases of active euthanasia and assisted suicide has risen steadily since the introduction of the Belgian Euthanasia Act in 2002 and stood at 7.9 per 1000 deaths in 2009.

On the other hand, in the Netherlands, where active euthanasia and assisted suicide also have to be reported, only 2.3 per 1000 deaths were reported in 2010.

SWISS FEDERAL STATISTICAL OFFICE  
Press Office

### **Background, definitions and sources**

At the end of June 2011 the Federal Council decided to dispense with an explicit legal provision on organised assisted suicide. The Federal Council gives priority to suicide prevention. For this reason the Federal Council wants to continue to promote suicide prevention and palliative care – the care and treatment of people with incurable, life-threatening or chronic degenerative diseases. The FSO provides the statistical basis for this.

Assisted suicide reports have hitherto been classified as suicide by poisoning. However, the WHO rules stipulate that the disease to be entered as the cause of death should be the originating cause of the sequence that led to death. In this sense, assisted suicide is usually the last resort taken at the end of a serious disease. The FSO identifies the cases and publishes the numbers as a supplement to the Cause of Death Statistics.

The Swiss Cause of Death Statistics are based on medical cause of death certificates. The diagnoses are coded according to the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-10). All collected data are treated anonymously and strictly confidentially and are subject to the provisions of the Federal Data Protection Act of 19 June 1992 (SR 235.1). Publications on the Cause of Death Statistics refer to persons who are resident in Switzerland, i.e. on the permanent resident population regardless of nationality and place of death.

Further data and information can be found in FSO News (in English, German, French and Italian) published at the time of this press release.

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### **Information:**

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### ***New publication:***

FSO News: Assisted Suicide in Switzerland 1998–2009. Order number: 1260-0900, free of charge.

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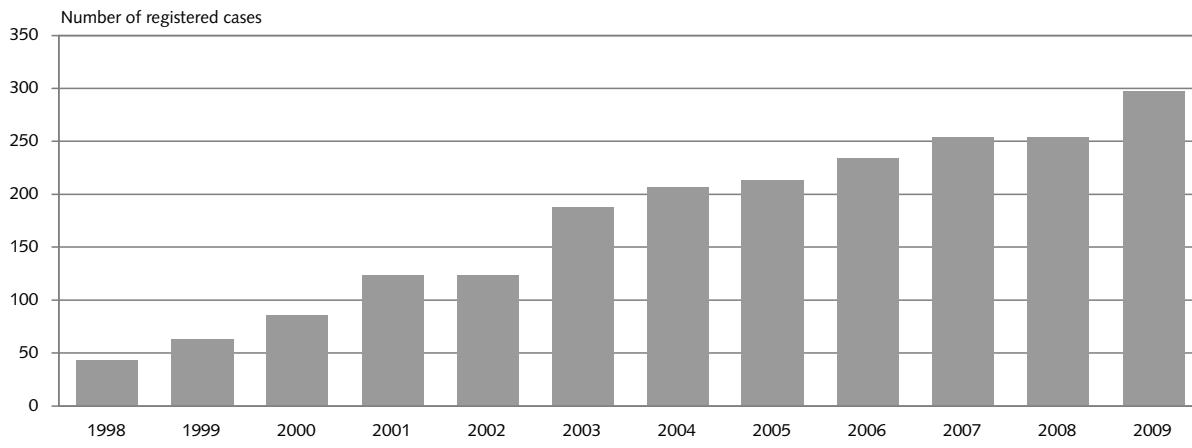
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**Assisted suicide 1998–2009**

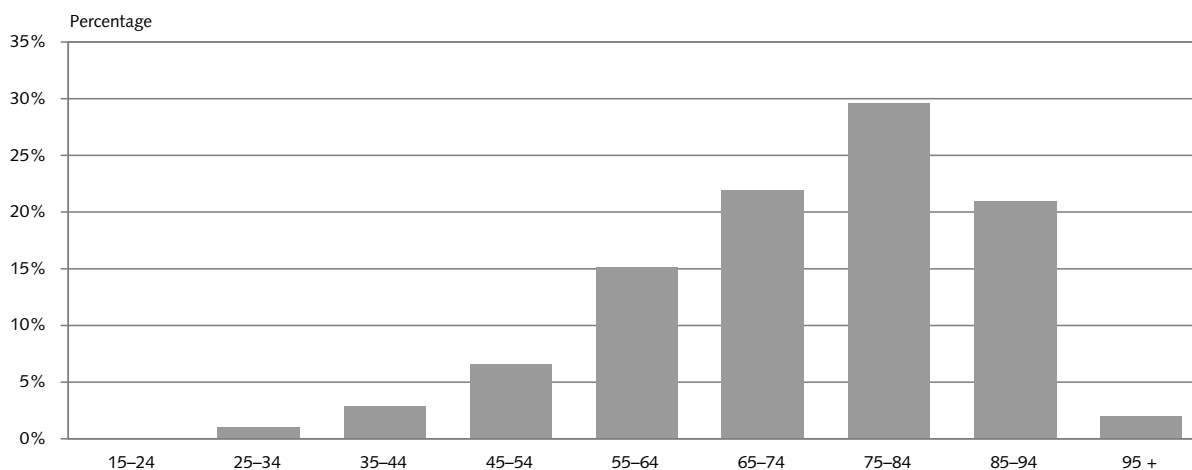
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**Assisted suicide cases, by age 1998/2009**

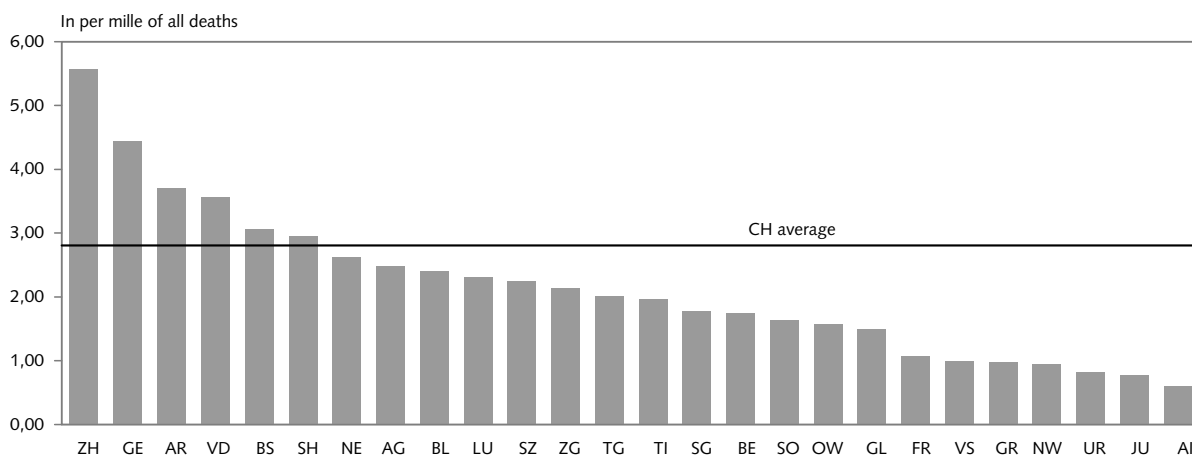
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**Assisted suicide cases, by canton of residence 1998/2009**

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