



European Congress of Psychiatry: press release

Major European study confirms drop in suicides in last decade: may be linked to active measures to prevent suicide

Average 20% drop in European suicide rates from 2011 to 2019

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Type of work: Not peer-reviewed/national statistics review/people¹

A major new study confirms the trend to fewer suicides in Europe. The findings show that suicide rates are down in 15 countries (including Germany and Italy), and stable elsewhere (including France, Spain and UK). Only Türkiye shows a significant increase. This work is presented for the first time at the European Congress of Psychiatry in Paris.

Suicide is one of the major causes of premature death, globally around 700,000 suicides are reported each year. European suicide rates have been generally dropping since the beginning of the century. Each suicide indicates a decision to end one's life, and so in principle may be preventable.

EU statistics show that around 1.1% of all deaths are due to suicide², meaning that in the EU an average year around 56,000 deaths as the result of suicide – more if the whole of Europe is considered.

The new study considered suicide rates, as listed in European public databases, in 38 European countries between 2011 and 2019. 15 of these countries showed a significant drop in suicides (adjusted for population), with no significant change in the other 22 countries. Türkiye was the only country to report a significant increase, although the reasons for this are unclear.

Researcher, Dr. Anna Gimenez (University of Barcelona) said:

“This work confirms that suicide rates continued to drop – or at worse held stable- across Europe in the 2011 to 2019 period. Psychiatric disorders are related to an overwhelming proportion of these cases. In the last years, several specific interventions and action plans for suicide prevention have been implemented in a number of European countries, and we believe that these might have had an impact on suicide trends. This contrasts with, for example, the United States³, where suicide rates increased by 36% in the 2000-2018 period, before beginning to drop. The differences in trends from country to country of course reflect local society, but may also reflect the adoption of measures to prevent suicide in each country. We're not yet sure about this, but it seems the most likely cause. Previous research has shown that introducing these measures can be effective, so our next step is to confirm that the improvement is linked to this direct action.

The total suicides rate in Europe (38 countries) went down from 20 deaths for every 100,000 people in 2011 to 16 per 100,000 in 2019, a drop in suicide deaths of almost 20% in this period.

Lithuania, which previously had by far the highest suicide rate in Europe, showed the greatest drop in suicides.

All European countries have agreed to work with the World Health Organisation to implement suicide reduction measures, including⁴:

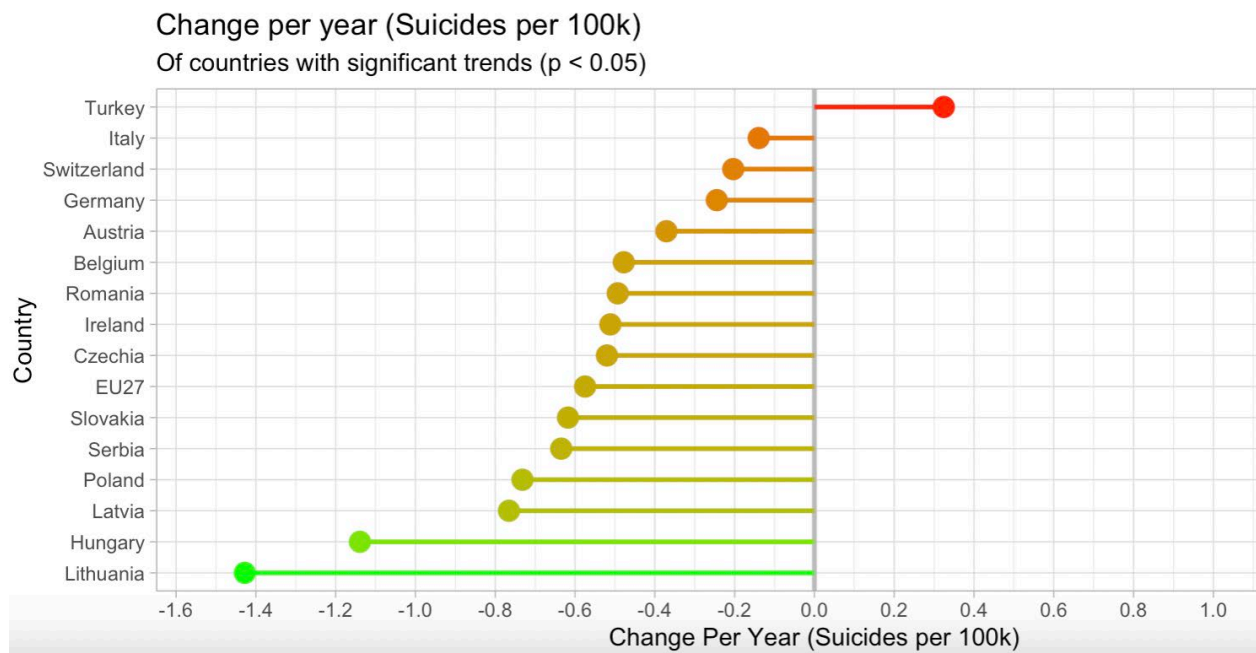


- limiting access to the means of suicide (e.g., pesticides, firearms, certain medications);
- interacting with the media for responsible reporting of suicide;
- fostering socio-emotional life skills in adolescents;
- early identification, assessment, and ongoing management of anyone who is affected by suicidal behaviours.

Co-researcher, Dr Giovanna Fico (University of Barcelona) said *“Of course our study took us to 2019; COVID, and the ongoing war in Ukraine may affect suicide trends, but overall the trend in Europe is towards fewer successful suicides”*.

Commenting, Professor Philip Gorwood (Ex-President of the European Psychiatric Association, University of Paris) said:

“As countries cope differently to reduce the burden of mental disorders, it is interesting to know which measures are efficient, and actually translate into something as crucial as a decrease of the suicidal mortality rate. Therefore this European study is very interesting, showing that there are large heterogeneities between countries, and that for a relatively important number of countries, it is indeed possible to reduce the number of deaths by suicide per year”



The following 22 countries have shown no significant change in suicide rates from 2011 to 2019:

Bulgaria, Denmark, Estonia, Greece, Spain, France, Croatia, Cyprus, Luxembourg, Malta, The Netherlands, Portugal, Slovenia, Finland, Sweden, Iceland, Norway, United Kingdom, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Albania, Ukraine.

The European Congress of Psychiatry takes place from 25-28 March 2023, in Paris. It is Europe’s largest congress dedicated to psychiatry, with around 4500 attendees <https://epa-congress.org/>



Notes

¹ This indication is part of a project from the Academy of Medical Sciences to improve press release communication. See <https://tinyurl.com/37pp49xu>

² EU statistics <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/DDN-20180716-1>

³ US statistics <https://www.cdc.gov/suicide/suicide-data-statistics.html>

⁴ More info at: <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/suicide>

Notes for Editors

Congress Abstract

Changing trends of suicide mortality from 2011 to 2019: an analysis of 38 European Countries

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Introduction: Suicide is a serious public health problem since it accounts for nearly 900,000 deaths each year worldwide. Globally in 2019, 10.7 persons out of 100,000 died by suicide. Psychiatric disorders are related to an overwhelming proportion of these cases. In the last years, several specific interventions and action plans for suicide prevention have been implemented in a number of European countries.

Objectives: Our aim was to analyze recent epidemiologic trends of suicide mortality rates in Europe.

Methods: Annual national statistics of suicide mortality rates derived from Eurostat public databases from 2011 to 2019 were analyzed for 38 European countries. The suicide mortality rate was estimated per year/100,000 population. Linear regression models were used to study temporal trends of suicidal mortality. Analyses were performed using RStudio.

Results: Available data show a statistically significant reduction in suicide mortality rates from 2011 to 2019 in 15 European countries, and a significant increase for Türkiye (ES=0.32, SD=0.06, p=0.037) (Fig 1). The greatest significant decrease was reported in Lithuania (ES=-1.42, SD=0.02, p=0.02), followed by Hungary (ES=-1.13, SD=0.11, p=0.0007), Latvia (ES=-0.76, SD=0.11, p=0.007), and Poland (ES=-0.73, SD=0.10, p=0.001). Italy reported the lowest significant reduction in suicide mortality rates (ES=-0.13, SD=0.018, p=0.003). The remaining 16 countries showed no significant changes in suicide mortality trends.

Conclusions: In the last years, Europe registered an overall reduction in reported suicide rates. However, more recent data (i.e., suicide rates after COVID-19 pandemic, age and sex-related effect on suicide rates) should be analyzed and used to implement future recommendations. Current and future suicide prevention strategies aim to contribute to a greater reduction of suicide rates in the different European countries.

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