

Belgium moves closer to euthanasia for minors

20 June 2013

Belgian lawmakers on Thursday moved closer to legalising the euthanasia of minors, so long as they are judged capable of deciding for themselves.

Four senators from parties in the governing coalition formally put forward changes to a 2002 law that made Belgium the second country in the world after The Netherlands to legalise mercy killing in certain cases.

Their parties said they would back the changes and [parliament](#) is likely to approve them in coming months.

Euthanasia is currently legal only for those aged 18 but experts have told parliament that in practice euthanasia on children was already taking place, without any set guidelines.

Changes to the law were submitted for debate in parliament in December and legislators have been discussing them there since February.

Discussions have centred on the minimum age should the law be changed, and senators on Thursday settled on a [young person's](#) "capacity to discern", which would be assessed by a [psychiatrist](#).

The proposals have the support of the four [senators'](#) parties although they will be opposed by two of the other parties in the senate majority—the Christian Democrat, Flemish speaking CD&V and the centrist but Christian-inspired Francophone CDH.

They are then expected to win a parliamentary majority in the following months with several parties saying they would back them.

A separate issue of whether to extend the law to those suffering from a mental deficiency remains unresolved.

Belgium recorded a record 1,432 cases of euthanasia in 2012, up 25 percent from the previous year. They represented two percent of all deaths.

There are strict conditions governing the act including that patients must be capable, conscious and have to give a "voluntary, considered and repeated" request to die.

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