# European Attitudes and Developments in Assisted Dying Legislation



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Moves to legalize assisted dying are advancing across various European nations, where public opinion increasingly favors allowing individuals with terminal illnesses to control the manner and timing of their deaths.

**Netherlands**: A precedent-setting case in 1973 involving Dr. Truus Postma led the Netherlands to become the first country to legalize euthanasia in 2002. Dutch law permits euthanasia for individuals experiencing "unbearable suffering with no prospect of improvement." It covers physical conditions like cancer, as well as psychiatric conditions and diseases like dementia. Approval requires the consent of two independent doctors, ensuring strict adherence to legal criteria. In 2022, 8,720 people in the Netherlands opted for euthanasia, accounting for 5.1% of all deaths.

**Spain**: Spain legalized euthanasia in 2021, influenced by the case of Ramón Sampedro, who had campaigned for the right to die after a debilitating accident. Spanish law recognizes assisted dying as a constitutional right, encompassing a broad range of illnesses without distinguishing between physical and mental conditions. In the first 18 months after legalization, 383 people in Spain utilized this right.

**Ireland**: In March 2024, an Irish parliamentary committee recommended legislation permitting assisted dying for individuals with terminal illnesses. This was inspired by the case of Marie Fleming, a university lecturer who campaigned for the right before her death in 2013. The proposed law targets those expected to die within six to twelve months, depending on the condition.

**UK**: The debate in the UK saw renewed vigor after television personality Dame Esther Rantzen expressed her support for assisted dying due to her terminal cancer diagnosis. The UK law currently prohibits assisted suicide, punishable by up to 14 years in prison, though legislation is under review.

**Scotland**: In the upcoming autumn, Scotland is set to debate the Assisted Dying for Terminally Ill Patients Bill. If passed, it would allow terminally ill individuals, including those as young as 16, to seek a lethal dose of medication from their GP. The bill includes an opt-out clause for healthcare professionals with conscientious objections.

**Case of Zoraya ter Beek**: A Dutch woman, 29-year-old Zoraya ter Beek, with depression and borderline personality disorder, received approval for euthanasia. She plans to die at home, citing her decision after extensive mental health treatment without improvement. The Netherlands' stringent euthanasia laws require multiple independent consents and thorough post-procedure reviews to ensure compliance.

These developments mirror growing acceptance of euthanasia across Europe, balanced by strict regulatory frameworks to address ethical concerns.