

2008 crisis spurred rise in suicides in Europe

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The financial crisis that began to hit Europe in mid-2008 reversed a steady, years-long fall in suicides among people of working age, according to a letter published on Friday by The Lancet.

Researchers looked at [mortality data](#) provided by 10 European Union countries.

They comprised six countries -- Austria, Britain, Finland, Greece, Ireland and the Netherlands -- that had been EU members before 2004, and four -- the Czech Republic, Hungary, Lithuania and Romania -- that joined afterwards.

In 2008, [suicides](#) among people aged younger than 65 in the pre-enlargement states rose by almost seven percent over 2007, the letter said.

The rise was especially marked in Greece (+17 percent) and Ireland (+13 percent), two of the worst-hit economies.

"This is... consistent with historical studies that show immediate rises in suicides associated with 'early indicators' of crisis, such as turmoil in the banking sector, which precipitates later unemployment," the epidemiologists said.

In the four post-enlargement states, the number of suicides rose by one percent in 2008, but accelerated from 2009 when job losses started to bite.

In that year, the relative increase was higher than among the pre-enlargement states, which have a wider social [safety net](#).

The [unemployment rate](#) across the 27-nation EU rose by 2.6 points, a relative increase of 35 percent, between 2007 and 2009.

Only Austria bucked the suicide trend, with five percent less self-inflicted mortality in 2009 compared with 2007.

Unexpectedly, however, Finland -- which like Austria has widespread support for the unemployed -- saw an increase in suicides of just over five percent in the same period.

Overall, mortality from all causes in the 10 countries remained stable.

This was because deaths from [road accidents](#) fell substantially, especially in the eastern countries, as car use retreated due to the [economic crisis](#) and unemployment.

A macabre footnote to that decline is a slump in the availability of organs for transplant.

The letter is authored by five specialists in public health, led by David Stuckler of the University of Cambridge. The data is preliminary, and further research will cast a wider net across Europe.

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