

Financial crisis drives up Greek suicide rate

10 September 2013, by Derek Gatopoulos



Art teachers protest against the government austerity measure that threaten their jobs, outside the Greek parliament in central Athens, on Friday, Sept. 6, 2013. The conservative-led government plans to sack 15,000 state employees by the end of 2014, and place another 25,000 in a program of mandatory suspensions and job transfers. (AP Photo/Petros Giannakouris)

Suicides increased by 45 percent during the first four years of Greece's financial crisis, a mental health aid group said Tuesday, warning there are indications of a further "very large rise" over the past two years.

The Athens-based group Klimaka said officially reported suicides rose steadily, accounting for an annual jump in deaths from 328 in 2007 to 477 in 2011, according to data from the Greek Statistical Authority.

The group said, based on its own research, the number of suicides has continued to rise through 2012 and 2013.

Greece still has one of the lowest [suicide rates](#) in Europe, but a dramatic rise in poverty and unemployment since the debt-strapped nation began imposing harsh austerity measures has been blamed for the increase in deaths.

Aris Violatzis, head psychiatrist at Klimaka, said the organization gathered suicide data from families of victims, local churches, funeral homes and other sources, as well as official statistics.

"The official stats are generally lagging. Our data suggests a very large rise. We are talking about specific individuals whose names and circumstances have been recorded," Violatzis said.

Klimaka, which runs a suicide prevention hotline, said men took their own lives more than four times as frequently as women, with males most commonly in their mid-50s and females in their late 30s. Some 43 percent of suicide deaths in 2011 involved unemployed people, while 25.7 percent of hotline callers with [suicidal thoughts](#) last year said they were experiencing serious financial difficulties.

More than half of suicide deaths are by hanging, followed by shooting, jumping from heights and poisoning.

The Greek [aid group](#) urged the government to adopt plans to create a national strategy against the rise in suicides, with improved data gathering and training for police and [health care workers](#).

"For every [suicide](#) death, there are some 30 attempts by others," Violatzis said. "So we are creating a growing bank of people who are potentially suicidal. That is a long term problem."

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