

## Using suicide data

**Understanding suicide statistics can be tricky. Figures are not always as straightforward as they might appear. Below are some important things to consider when using suicide statistics:**

- **It's all about rates per 100,000.** The number of suicides in a group (eg, in a country or a specific age group) can give a misleading picture of the incidence of suicide when considered alone. Rates per 100,000 people are calculated to adjust for the underlying population size. An area or group with a larger population may have a higher number of suicides than an area or group with a smaller population, but the rate per 100,000 may be lower.
- **Age-standardised vs. crude rates.** "Age-standardised" rates take account of differences in the age structure of populations between different countries or regions, so that comparisons can be made with greater confidence. The 2013 European Standard Population is used when rates are age-standardised. "Crude rates" have not been standardised in this way and are a basic calculation of the number of deaths divided by the population (x100,000). The two types of rate are not necessarily comparable.
- **Be careful of small groups/populations.** The size of populations should be considered when looking at suicide rates. Smaller populations often produce rates that are less reliable as the rates per 100,000 are based on small numbers. Therefore, differences in the number of suicides may have a bigger impact on the rate than in a larger population. An example of this might be suicide in older people (eg, over 80 years), as the population size is lower than in younger age groups.
- **Rates for a whole country can mask local and regional variations.** It is important to note that within countries there are significant regional and local differences in suicide rates.
- **Year-on-year fluctuations can be misleading.** It is important to look at suicide trends over a relatively long period of time. Increases and decreases year-on-year should not necessarily be viewed as 'true' changes to the trend that are attributable to any specific psycho-social factors (eg, an increase in unemployment).