



## UK rate of avoidable deaths is higher than EU average

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Around a third of the 1.7 million deaths of people under the age of 75 in the European Union in 2013 were avoidable, with heart attacks (184 800 deaths) and strokes (94 000) accounting for nearly half (48%) of all premature deaths, show data from Eurostat, the statistical office of the European Union.<sup>1</sup>

The United Kingdom ranked 16th of 28 member states in terms of premature mortality, with 34.2% of deaths among people under 75 deemed by Eurostat as avoidable. This was just above the European average of 33.7%.

Eurostat defines avoidable deaths as those that could have been prevented had timely and effective medical treatment been available. It said that the data were not meant to be a definitive measure of the quality of healthcare in member states but that they did offer an indication of the quality and performance of healthcare and public health policies.

France had the lowest proportion of avoidable deaths (23.8%), followed by Denmark (27.1%), and Belgium (27.5%). Other countries that had lower than average numbers of preventable deaths included Spain (31.3%), Poland (31.4%), Slovenia (33.1%), and Cyprus (33.2%).

Romania had the highest proportion of avoidable deaths (49.4%), followed by Latvia (48.5%) and Lithuania (45.4%).

After heart disease, the main causes of avoidable deaths were colorectal cancer (67 000 deaths (12%)), breast cancer (50 800 (9%)), hypertensive diseases (28 700 (5%)), and pneumonia (24 100 (4%)).

Commenting on the figures, Katherine Murphy, chief executive of the UK Patients Association, said, "These figures give further evidence of the crisis in the NHS. These statistics are indicative of a failing and underfunded service. Every day we hear the stories of patients calling our helpline expressing their frustration at the problems occurring in the NHS. Patients and their relatives are fed up with facing endless delays due to capacity issues.

"We urge the Department of Health to ensure that the NHS is properly resourced and managed so that it can provide the care that patients need and deserve."

<sup>1</sup> Eurostat. Avoidable deaths in 2013: one death out of three in the EU could have been avoided in the light of current medical knowledge and technology. May 2016. <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/2995521/7335847/3-24052016-AP-EN.pdf/4dd0a8ad-5950-4425-9364-197a492d3648>.