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Newsletter Transplant 2022 shows a global increase in donation and transplantation figures, lessons learnt from COVID-19 pandemic

The latest edition of the *Newsletter Transplant* – the international reference in monitoring practice in donation and transplantation of substances of human origin – has just been published. It provides comprehensive information and data on donation and transplantation activities in 2021 from 79 countries worldwide.

This invaluable report is produced thanks to the Spanish Organización Nacional de Trasplantes (ONT), which co-ordinates the collection, compilation and analysis of international data annually through a vast network of health authorities and officially designated individuals involved in donation and transplantation activities. This is done under the aegis of the European Committee on Organ Transplantation (CD-P-TO) of the European Directorate for the Quality of Medicines & Healthcare (EDQM)/Council of Europe. The publication is part of the CD-P-TO's efforts to benchmark donation and transplantation programmes, which will contribute to increasing organ availability and improving the effectiveness of transplantation systems, and thus to securing the fundamental human right of access to good quality healthcare.

Although donation and transplantation activities continued to be affected by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021, the return to pre-pandemic figures is well underway. Over time, an increased understanding of the SARS-CoV-2 virus in the transplant setting – of the testing and selection of donors and recipients or the impact of the disease on patients, for example – has prompted changes not only in the way we protect and treat patients, but also in how transplant programmes are managed. Close international co-operation has played a major role in these successes, enabling transplant programmes and professionals worldwide to adjust to adverse – and persistent – pandemic conditions. The figures below¹ clearly indicate this trend.

- **36 585 transplants** were performed in 2021, a **9% increase** compared to 2020.
- The greatest increase was in **kidney transplants (+13%)**, followed by liver transplants (+7%).
- **Living donation increased by 25% and deceased donation by 7%**, with 8 530 and 10 603 donors, respectively.
- There were **1 997 donors after circulatory determination of death (+20%)**, representing 19% of all deceased donors.
- Demand for organs remained high, however, bringing the total number of **new patients added to waiting lists to 41 152**.
- The rate of transplantation was far from meeting the needs of patients and their families: in this difficult context, an average of **20 patients died every day waiting for a transplant**.

The ONT General Director, Beatriz Domínguez-Gil, stressed the importance of collecting and publishing these data: "These figures reveal how the hard work of healthcare professionals and international co-operation during these turbulent times of COVID-19 have been pivotal to

1. Figures provided concern the 43 Council of Europe member states that provided data pertaining to 2021 and 2020 to the *Newsletter Transplant*.

return to a growth path in donation and transplantation activities. They also show that the confidence and resilience of patients in need of a transplant and the generosity of the European population have continued despite these years of pain and uncertainty.”

Petra Doerr, Director of the EDQM, welcomed this gradual return to the pre-pandemic reference figures (2019) and commended the efforts by healthcare professionals without whom this would not have been possible. She added, “Although the 2021 figures represent an improvement, we must not lose sight of the fact that the need for transplantable organs, tissues and cells continues to grow. Tens of thousands of patients remain on waiting lists, hoping for a treatment that can radically improve their lives or may even mean the difference between life and death”.

Further analysis of the 2021 data should enable relevant policy makers, health professionals and national competent authorities to benchmark efforts in their countries and draw conclusions regarding best practices of national health systems in their approach to this unprecedented crisis, in the interest of increasing the resilience of health systems across the continent and improving donation and transplantation rates.

The *Newsletter Transplant* can be [downloaded for free](#) and paper copies can be ordered through the [EDQM WebStore](#).

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Note for the Editor: Further information is available on the internet site www.edqm.eu.

The EDQM is a leading organisation that protects public health by enabling the development, supporting the implementation and monitoring the application of quality standards for safe medicines and their safe use. Its standards are recognised as a scientific benchmark worldwide. The European Pharmacopoeia is legally binding in member states.¹ The EDQM also develops guidance and standards in the areas of blood transfusion, organ transplantation and consumer health issues.

1. The [European Pharmacopoeia Commission](#) comprises 40 members: Albania, Austria, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Republic of Moldova, Montenegro, Netherlands, North Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Türkiye, Ukraine, United Kingdom and the European Union.

A political organisation set up in 1949, the Council of Europe works to promote democracy and human rights continent-wide. It also develops common responses to social, cultural and legal challenges in its 46 member states.