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Newsletter Transplant 2021 – Data shows dramatic impact of COVID-19 pandemic

The 2021 edition of the *Newsletter Transplant* has just been published. It summarises comprehensive information and data for 2020 from 82 countries worldwide on donation and transplantation activities, management of waiting lists, organ donation refusals and authorised centres for transplantation activities.

The year 2020 was extremely challenging for healthcare systems in general. The COVID-19 pandemic had a heavy impact on patients' access to care and treatment in Europe and worldwide. The surge of COVID patients put enormous strain on hospital services and healthcare professionals, forcing them to shift their resources toward fighting and treating the SARS-CoV-2 virus and controlling the pandemic, thus delaying other procedures. This also affected procedures like organ and tissue donation and transplantation in Europe, as the following figures¹ indicate:

- **35 529 transplants** were performed in 2020, a **20% drop** compared to 2019;
- **heart transplants (–12%)** were unsurprisingly **maintained more often** than other organ transplants – such as kidney (–23%) or lung transplants (–19%) – which were postponed when possible;
- **deceased (–22%) and living donation (–23%)** followed the same negative trend, with 10 174 and 7 155 donors, respectively;
- demand for organs remained high, however, bringing the total number of **new patients added to waiting lists to 43 183**;
- the rate of transplantation was far from meeting the needs of patients and their families: in this difficult context, an average of **21 patients died every day waiting for a transplant**, representing a dramatic increase compared to 2019.

Susanne Keitel, Director of the European Directorate for the Quality of Medicines & HealthCare (EDQM), said that while the overall decline is not surprising in this context, the data nevertheless serves as a testament to the dedication of donation and transplantation staff across the continent. "We must thank not only healthcare professionals, who managed to adapt to the rapidly changing situation, for their part in maintaining critical front-line services, but also the donors and their families," she added.

The 2020 data will be analysed in depth to determine how national health systems have fared in this unprecedented crisis and how resilient they have been. It is hoped that organ donation and transplantation rates will return to pre-pandemic levels as the virus is brought under control.

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

This annual publication is produced by the European Committee on Organ Transplantation (CD-P-TO) of the EDQM/Council of Europe, in co-operation with the Spanish National Transplant Organisation (Organización Nacional de Trasplantes, ONT), in order to monitor practices in donation and transplantation of substances of human origin worldwide and provide essential information for the sake of transparency and international benchmarking. It has become an international reference in the field, supporting policy makers, health professionals and national competent authorities in their decisions.

1. Figures provided concern the Council of Europe member states.

It demonstrates the active contribution of the CD-P-TO to increasing organ availability, improving the effectiveness of transplantation systems and enhancing the quality and safety of organs, tissues and cells for clinical use, and thus to securing the fundamental human right of access to good quality healthcare.

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Note for the Editor: Further information is available on the internet site <https://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.* The EDQM also develops guidance and standards in the areas of blood transfusion, organ transplantation and consumer health issues.

* There are 40 members of the [European Pharmacopoeia Commission](#): *Austria, Albania, 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, Turkey, Ukraine, United Kingdom and the European Union.*

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