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## **A Good Half of Europeans Ready To Donate Organs**

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Finns are among the most willing organ donors in Europe. And in Spain, a campaign changed attitudes.

Finns view organ donation more positively than Europeans on average. According to a Eurobarometer survey, 72% of Finns would consent to having their organs removed immediately after death. The average for all EU Member States was 55%.

As many as 83% of Swedes would be ready to donate their organs. The most negative attitudes in the EU were found in Latvia, Romania and Austria.

Professor in Surgery Krister Höckerstedt, who is the head of the Transplantation and Liver Surgery Clinic at Helsinki University Hospital, does not find any single reason for Finns' favourable attitude.

“There is a general desire to help others and confidence in Finland's hospital system,” says Höckerstedt.

### **Campaigns affect attitudes**

Campaigns have succeeded in changing people's attitudes in different parts of Europe.

The willingness of Spaniards to donate organs grew dramatically at the end of the 1990s thanks to a nation-wide campaign. Today 61% of Spaniards see organ donation in a positive light.

“It's essential to increase the social acceptability of organ donation and improve the way people view it. The system must also be fully transparent and absolutely reliable,” points out Dr Rafael Matesanz, founder and director of the Spanish National Transplant Organisation.

After a week-long campaign arranged throughout Sweden, thousands of people joined the national organ donor register. Authorities considered the campaign a success.

Based on the experiences in Spain, Matesanz takes a more critical stance. He feels resources shouldn't be wasted by targeting the public at large through big ads in newspapers.

“It's more useful to influence people's attitudes by telling them about successful transplants and how a transplant improves the quality of life,” Matesanz explains.

### **Finnish legislation based on presumed consent**

There is a serious shortage of organ donors in Finland and worldwide. In the EU, more than 56 000 people are on organ transplant waiting lists and every day 12 people die while waiting for a suitable organ.

The new EU Directive on organ donation aims to improve the quality and safety of organ transplants, though it will be up to Member States to decide on more detailed rules and principles.

The Finnish Act on organ donation was amended last summer by introducing the concept of presumed consent. The Act is based on the assumption that every Finn wishes to be a donor unless he or she has specifically opted out.

Finnish legislation is now in line with a welcome trend elsewhere in Europe, according to Ms Raija Asola, Ministerial Counsellor for Health Affairs at the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health. Presumed consent is the norm in about ten other Member States.

“Amending the Act was justified, as people are generally in favour of organ donation,” says Asola.

**If you want to opt out, tell a family member or friend**

What should you do if you don't want to donate your organs? There is no official form for lodging an objection to organ donation.

“For this reason you need to make your family clearly aware of your refusal,” explains Raija Asola.

If a deceased person's views are not known it is presumed that he or she has agreed to organ donation.

Experts say that despite the adoption of presumed consent, organ donation cards still have a role to play. The card makes it easier to take the necessary decisions in difficult situations.