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Lagging behind: 70% of Romanians are reluctant to donate their organs after death, according to the results of a Eurobarometer survey

## **Why we don't want to donate organs**

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by Ramona Samoila – Romania Libera

Lack of reliable information, religion and mistrust of doctors are contributing to longer transplant waiting lists.

Four out of ten Romanians say they would not agree to donate an organ after death, and 29% say they are undecided. Furthermore, 35% of respondents would not agree to a deceased member of their family donating an organ and almost as many say they do not know what they would do in such a situation. This compares with 83% of Swedes who would agree to donate organs after death, and 72% of Finns and Belgians.

Almost half of Romanians who refuse to donate organs cannot explain the reason for their decision, while 15% say that they do not trust the medical system. 17% give religious reasons for refusing to donate organs. These are the results of a Eurobarometer survey carried out last year at the European Commission's request on a sample of 1 000 Romanians, which was presented last week in Brussels. Close to 27 000 people in the 27 EU Member States took part in the research. Around 76% of Romanians surveyed say that they have never talked about organ donation or transplants with their family, and 73% are not familiar with the law on these procedures. The Dutch talk the most with family about organ transplant, with 74% discussing the matter with relatives, followed by 62% of Swedes.

### **Spain performs the most transplants**

Of the EU countries, Spain has the highest number of donors, and also carries out the most transplants. The Spanish government's successful strategy, which it implemented 10 years ago and which has increased the donor rate by over 130%, involved setting up a system to monitor potential donors. The Spanish National Transplant Organisation's purpose is to compile waiting lists of patients who need transplants and to produce statistics, educate doctors, and provide a 24-hour information hotline to answer questions. There were 34 registered donors per million people in Spain in 2009, while in Romania there were only two per million. "Romania needs to do more to improve the situation. Two useful steps would be to increase the number of transplant coordinators and to identify donors in hospitals. Public confidence in the medical system is another important factor," said Axel Rahmel, medical director of Eutransplant International Foundation in the Netherlands.

### **Survey questioned by Romanian specialists**

However, some Romanian specialists contradict the findings of the study. "I wanted to take legal action against the Romanian company that carried out the study in 2006, because of the way it collected data. It's a shame that a company which has no idea what a transplant is provided data for a Eurobarometer survey. People on the street and the transplantation market were not involved in such a study. For Romanians, the reality is different: they support organ donation. This year we identified nearly 70 donors, the largest number of donors to date. Of the families who spoke with the six transplant coordinators, fewer than 20% refused," said Victor Zota, transplant coordinator and former president of the National Transplant Agency, who also said that Romania has 3.5 donors per million inhabitants. There are six transplant coordinators in Romania, compared to about 1 000 in Spain. "In order to increase the number of coordinators, we need to offer better salaries. What's more, people must not be forced into donating organs, otherwise family members may believe that the deceased relative was not cared for properly or that they have not contributed enough financially," explained Ionel Sinescu, head of the Urological Surgery and Renal Transplant Clinic at the Fundeni Hospital in Bucharest.