

Laura, lung recipient

Organ donation and transplantation

Swisstransplant – Swiss National
Foundation for Organ Donation and Transplantation

Bern | 2026

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A photograph of Giuseppe, a liver recipient, sitting on a concrete block. He is a middle-aged man with grey hair and a beard, wearing a white t-shirt and white trousers. He is wearing a watch on his left wrist and a bracelet on his right wrist. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with a building and trees.

Giuseppe,
liver recipient

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The Swisstransplant Foundation

Lisa, liver recipient

Swisstransplant

1985

**Establishment of the
Foundation in Geneva**

- 2006: relocation of the Foundation's headquarters to Bern

2007

**Mandated by the
Federal Office of
Public Health (FOPH)**

- National Allocation Office
- Management of the waiting list

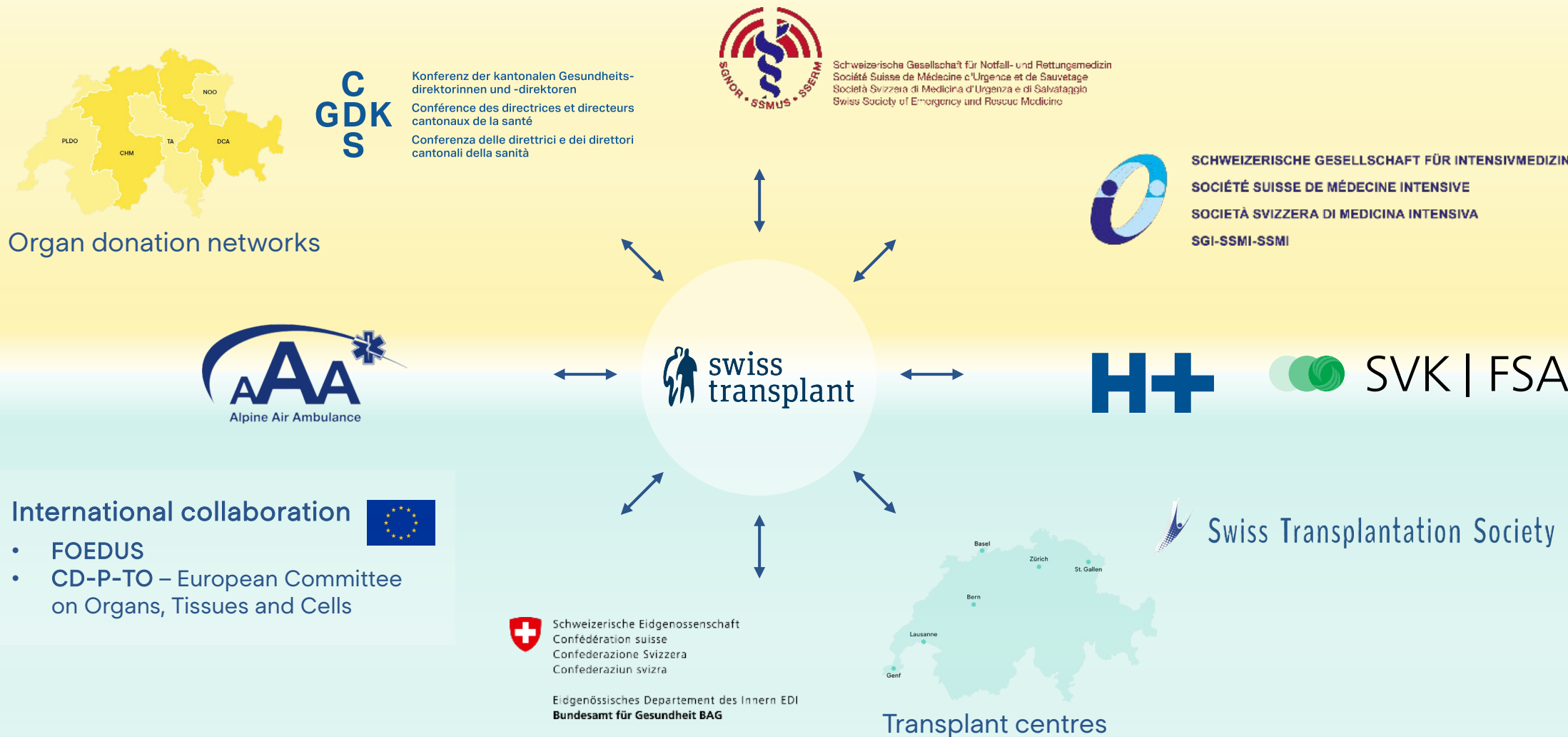
2009

**Mandated by the Swiss
Conference of the
Cantonal Ministers of
Public Health (GDK/CDS)**

- Coordination of organ and tissue donation
- Development and expansion of the organ donation networks

National collaboration

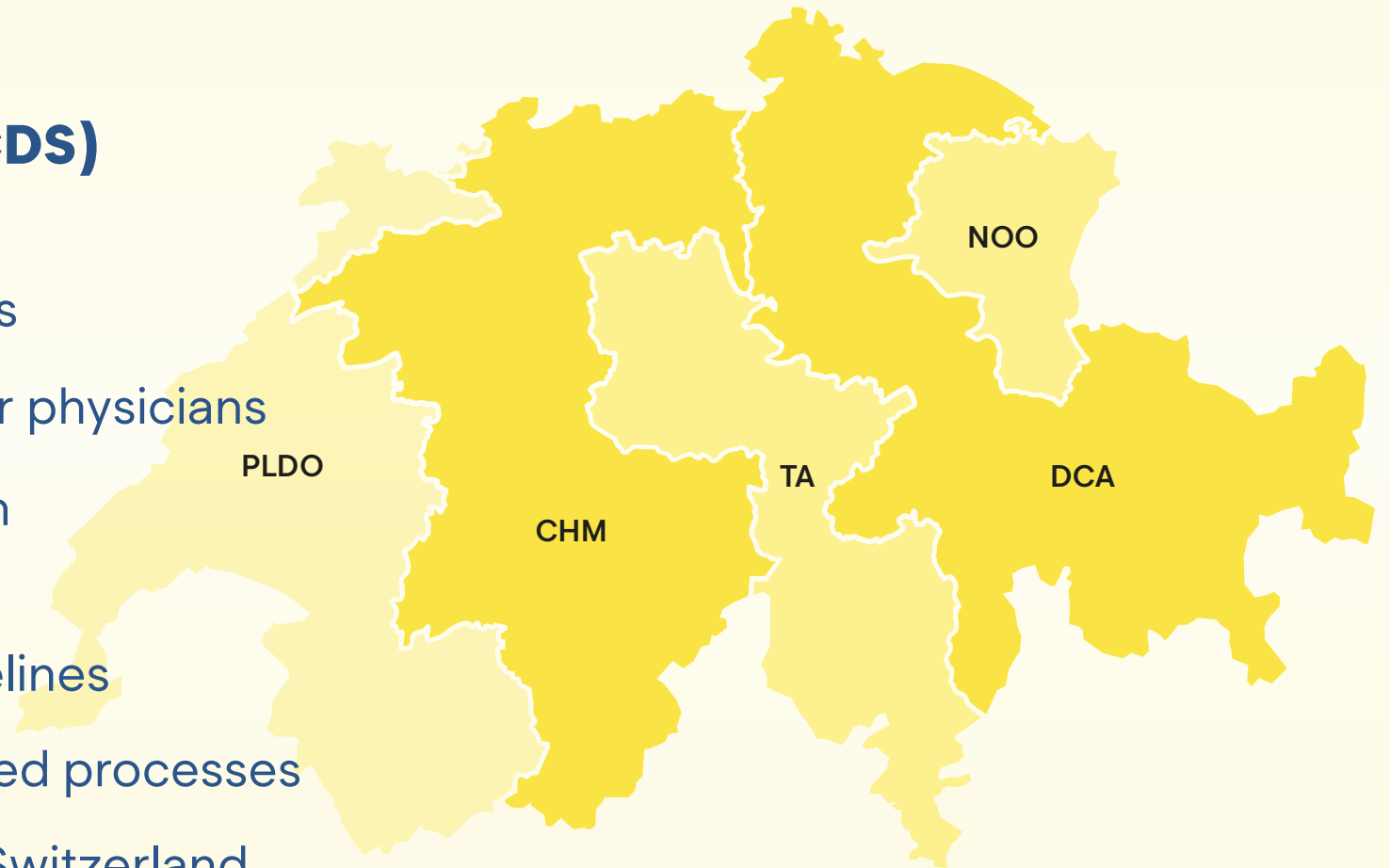
Organ donation
Transplantation



5 organ donation networks

Regional responsibilities
as **mandated by the (GDK/CDS)**

- Regional grouping of hospitals
- Under the leadership of senior physicians
- Training and further education of medical professionals
- Implementation of legal guidelines
- Implementation of standardised processes
- Use of synergies throughout Switzerland



6 transplant centres

- Authorisations from the **Federal Office of Public Health (FOPH)**
- Approval of each organ and transplantation programme under Highly Specialized Medicine (HSM)



6 transplant centres

Key:



Heart



Pancreas



Lungs



Islet cells



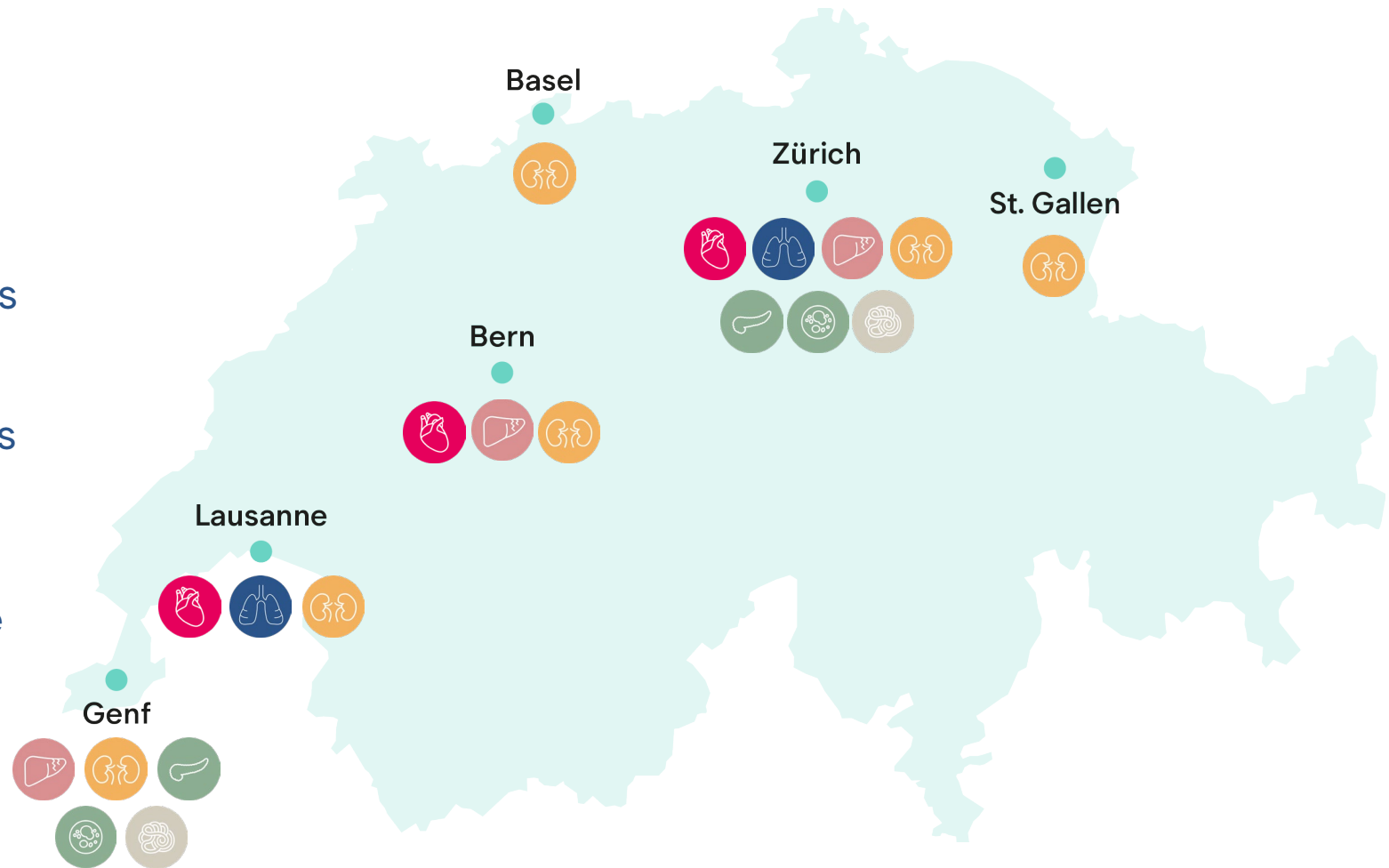
Liver



Small intestine



Kidneys



Renata, heart recipient

Transplantation Act



Swiss Transplantation Act

- Replaces cantonal legislation from 2007, regulates aspects relating to donors and recipients
- Creation of a "National Allocation Office"

Key points under the current act

- Extended consent solution
- Organ donation must be free of charge, trafficking is prohibited
- Organ allocation in accordance with the law
- In 2022, the Swiss electorate approved the introduction of the extended opt-out system (60.2% in favour)



Image: Keystone, Gaëtan Bally

Change of system

National Organ Donor Register (expected no earlier than 2027)

- Everyone has the right to agree or object to donating their organs
- The National Organ Donor Register will ensure clarity and certainty

Extended opt-out system (expected no earlier than 2028)

- Organ donation will remain voluntary
- Eases the pressure on relatives in a difficult moment



Image: Keystone, Gaëtan Bally

The extended opt-out system

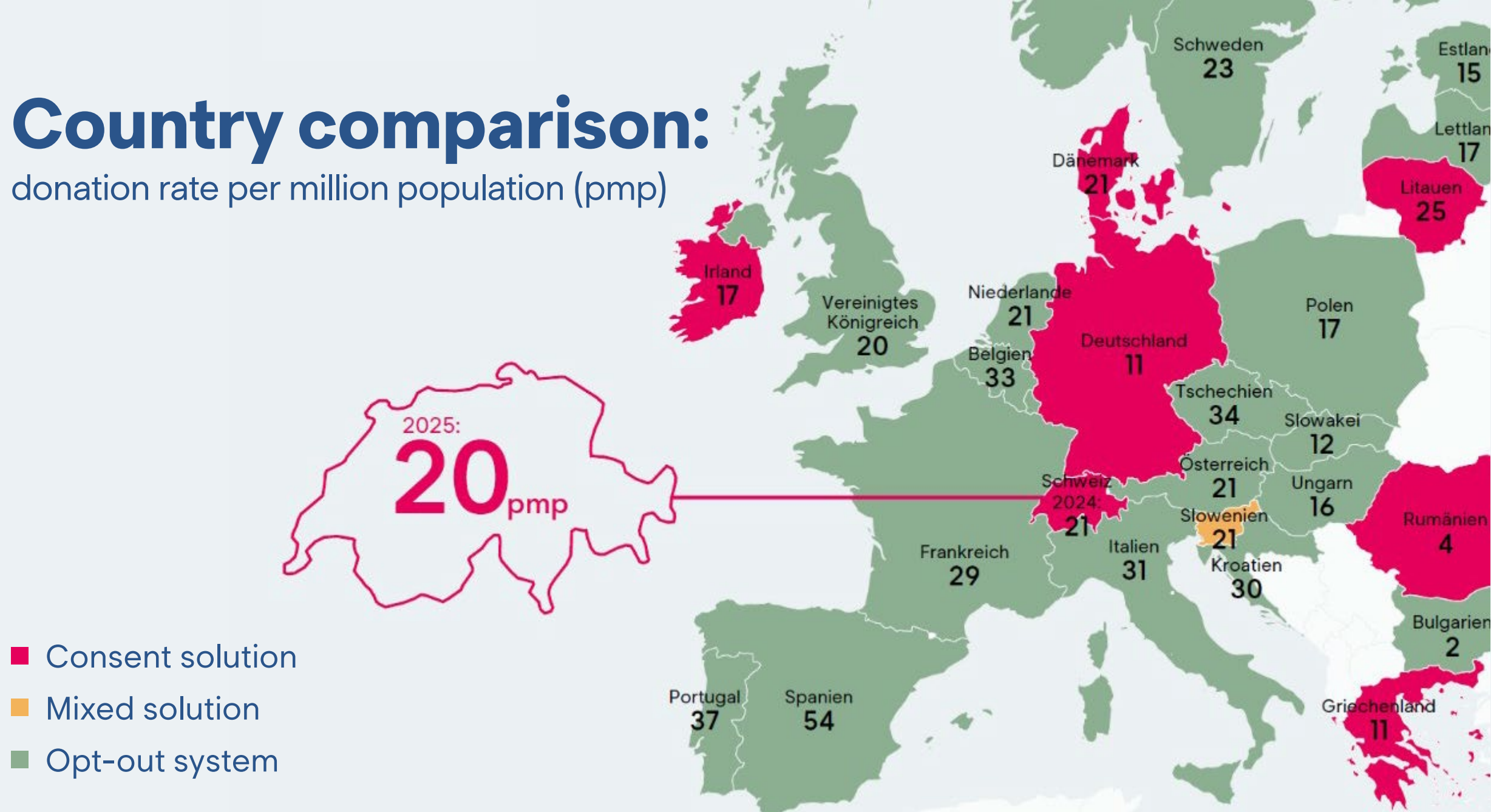
- Anyone who does not want to donate their organs should record their decision while they are still alive
- If no documented decision is available, consent will be presumed
- Relatives can object to organ procurement if they know or suspect that this does not reflect the wishes of the deceased



Image: Keystone, Gaëtan Bally

Country comparison:

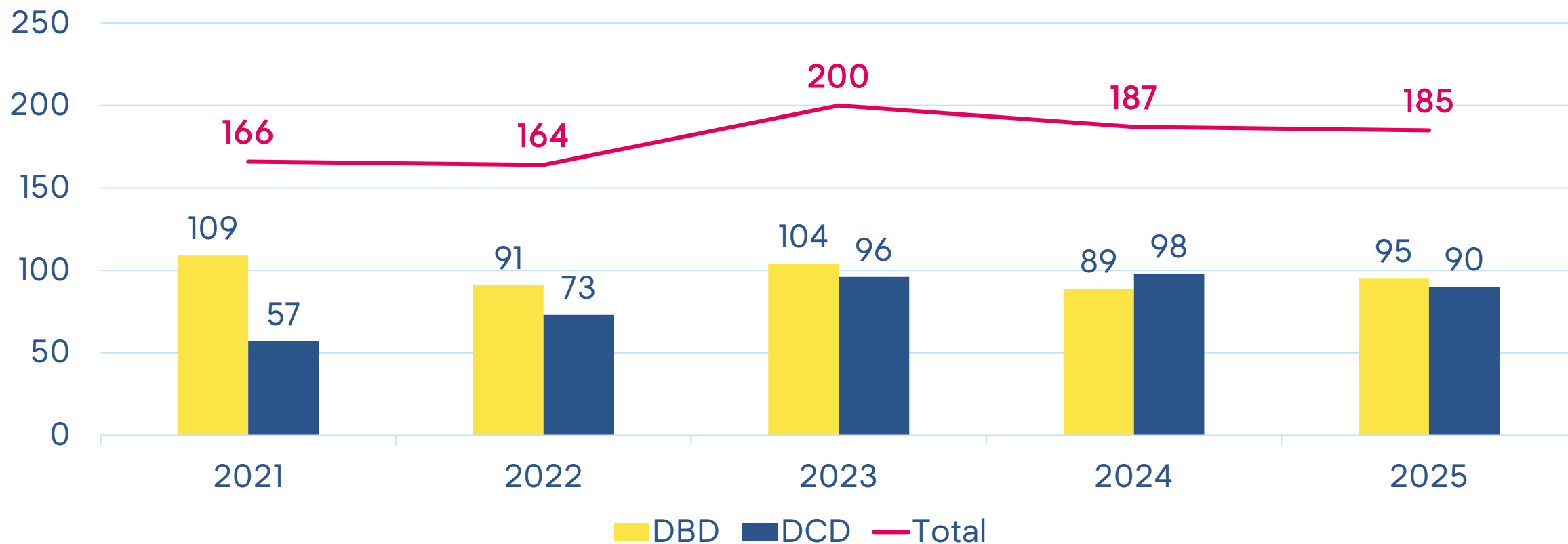
donation rate per million population (pmp)



Facts and figures

Elilan, kidney recipient

Annual figures – deceased organ donors



Post-mortem donations

DBD: donation after brain death

- Organ donors after brain death
- Circulation mechanically stabilised
- Donation of all organs possible

DCD: donation after cardio-circulatory death

- Organ donors after death from cardiac arrest
- Donation of all organs possible

Living donation

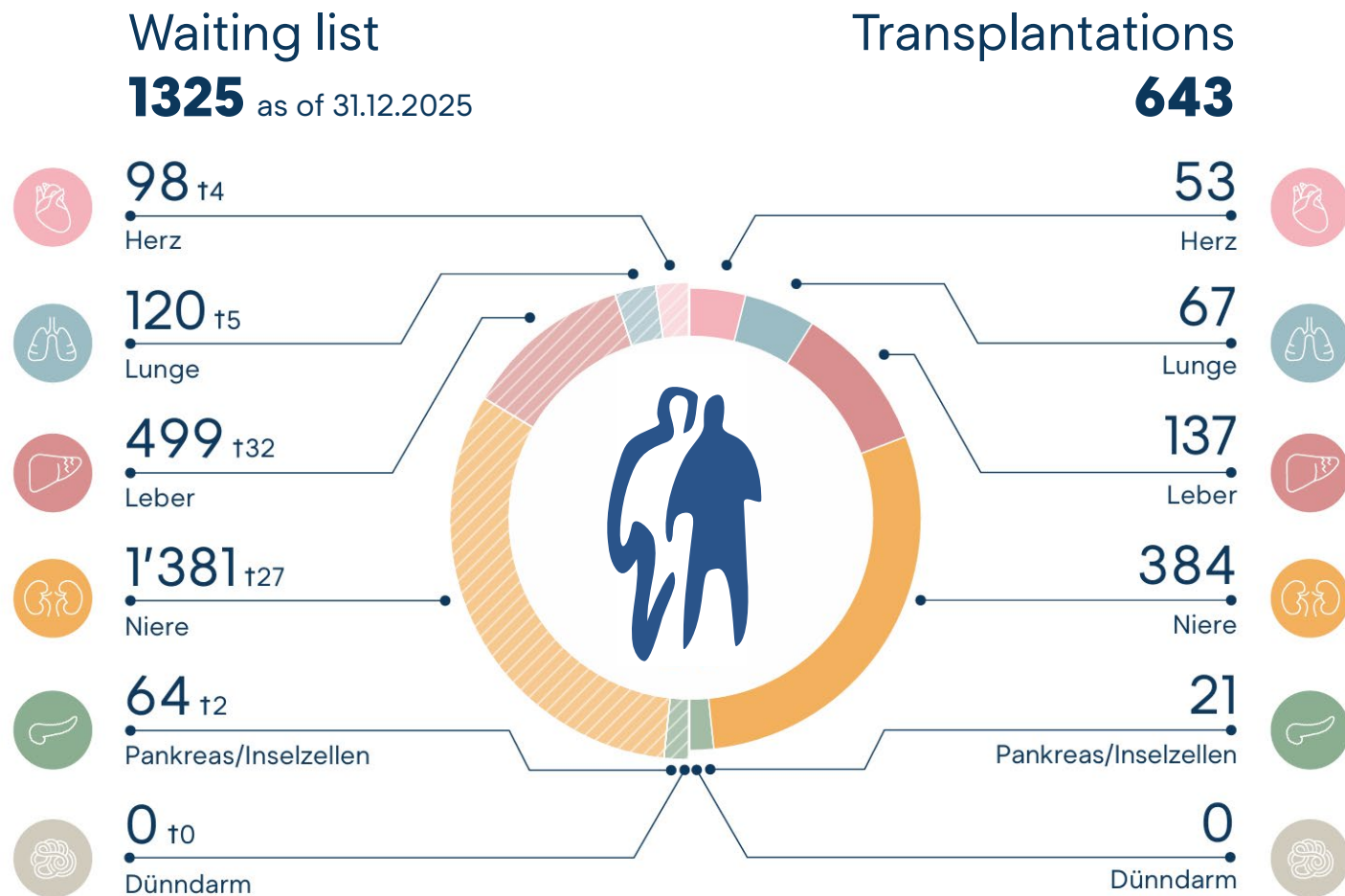
A kidney or part of the liver
(rarely: part of the lungs, part of the small intestine)

- Directed donation
- Altruistic donation
- Kidney paired donation

Image: Keystone, Gaëtan Bally

Waiting lists and transplantations

(January–December 2025)



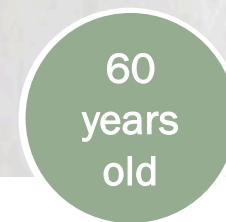
Source: Swisstransplant 2025 annual report

Organ donors

A typical example

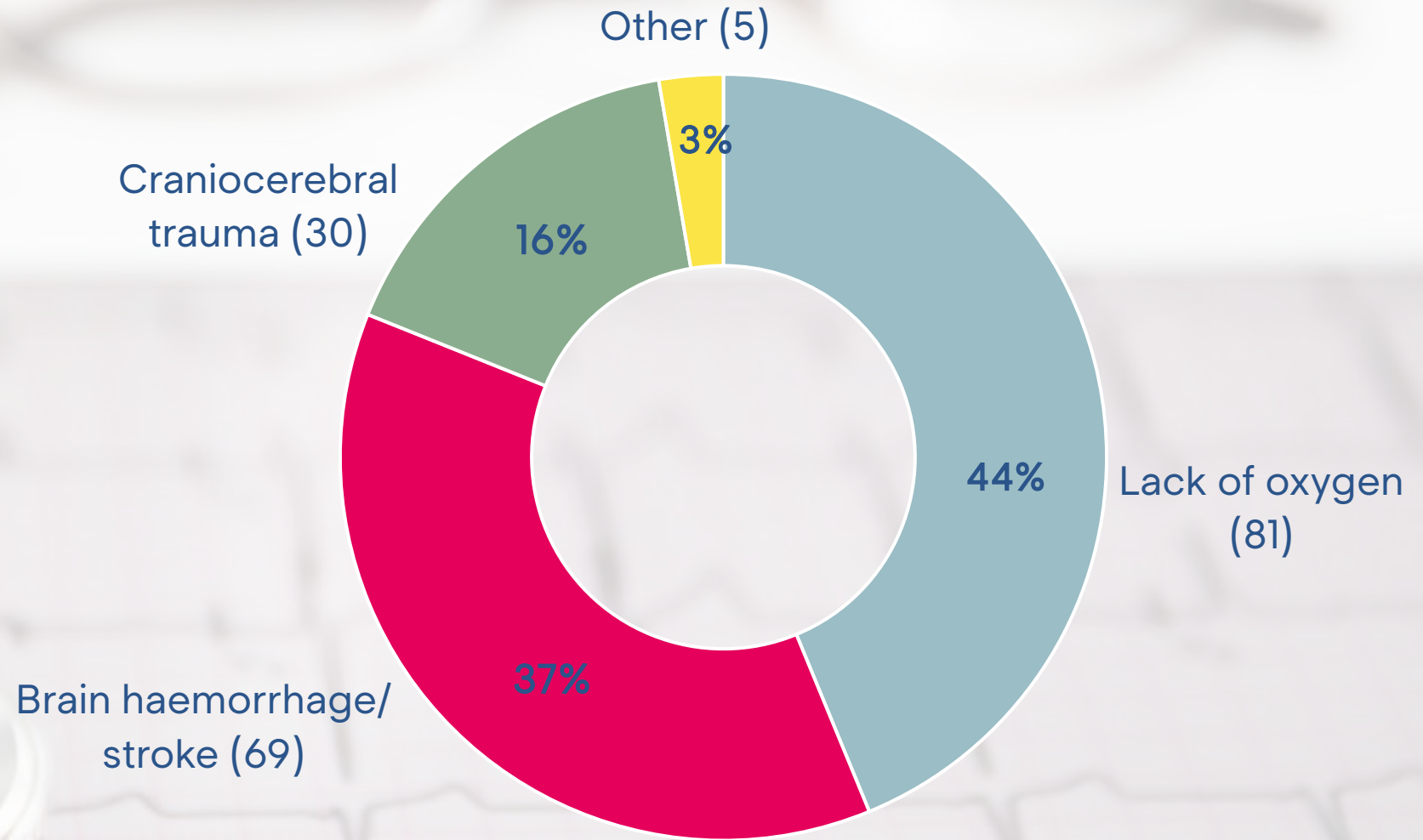
Michael, potential organ donor

Image:Freepik.com



Causes of death

of organ donors in 2025

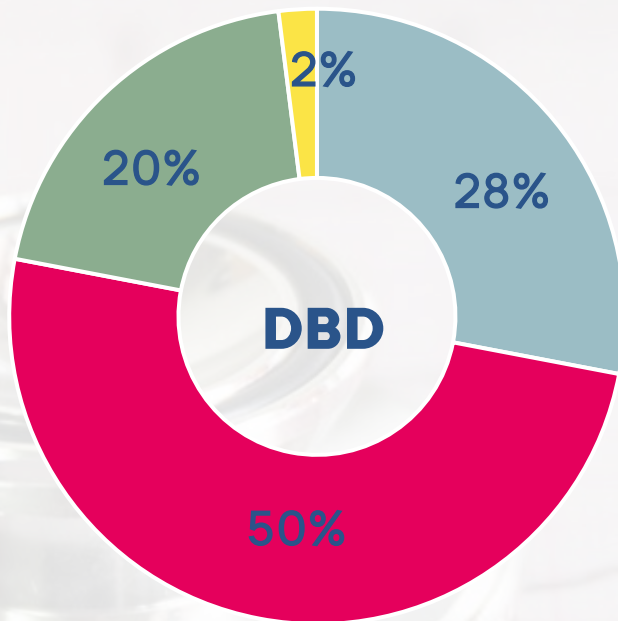


n total = 185 organ donors

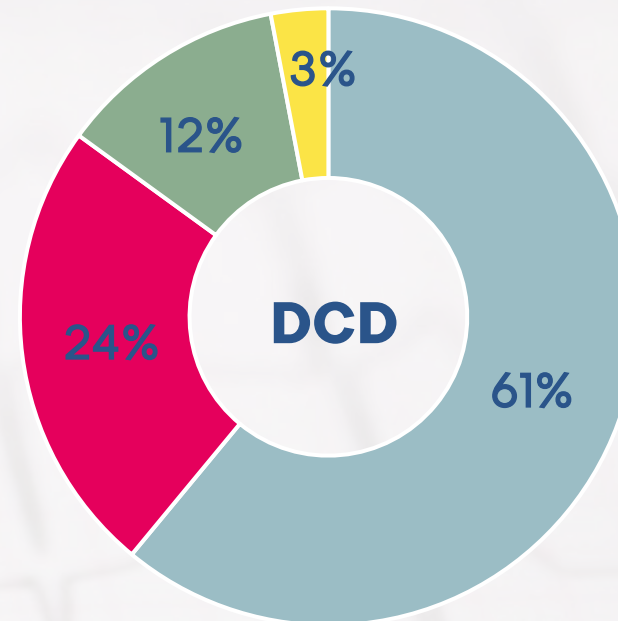
Causes of death of organ donors

Distribution in % in 2025

n total = 95 organ donors



n total = 90 organ donors



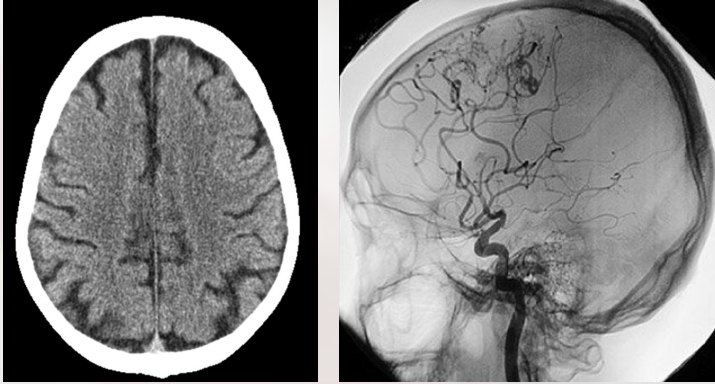
■ Craniocerebral trauma ■ Brain haemorrhage/stroke ■ Lack of oxygen ■ Other

Medical contraindications

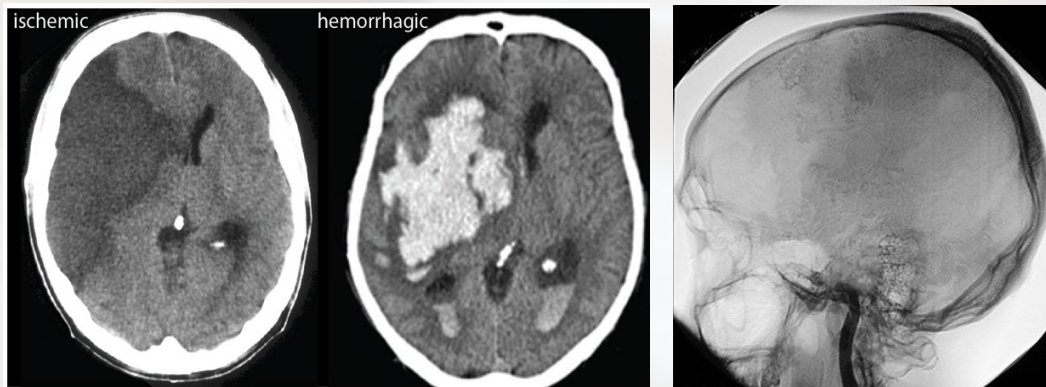
Grounds for exclusion from organ donation:

- Severe systemic infection
- Disease of the central nervous system (rabies, prion diseases such as Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease)
- Important: there is no upper age limit

Brain death – imaging diagnostics



Normal brain perfusion



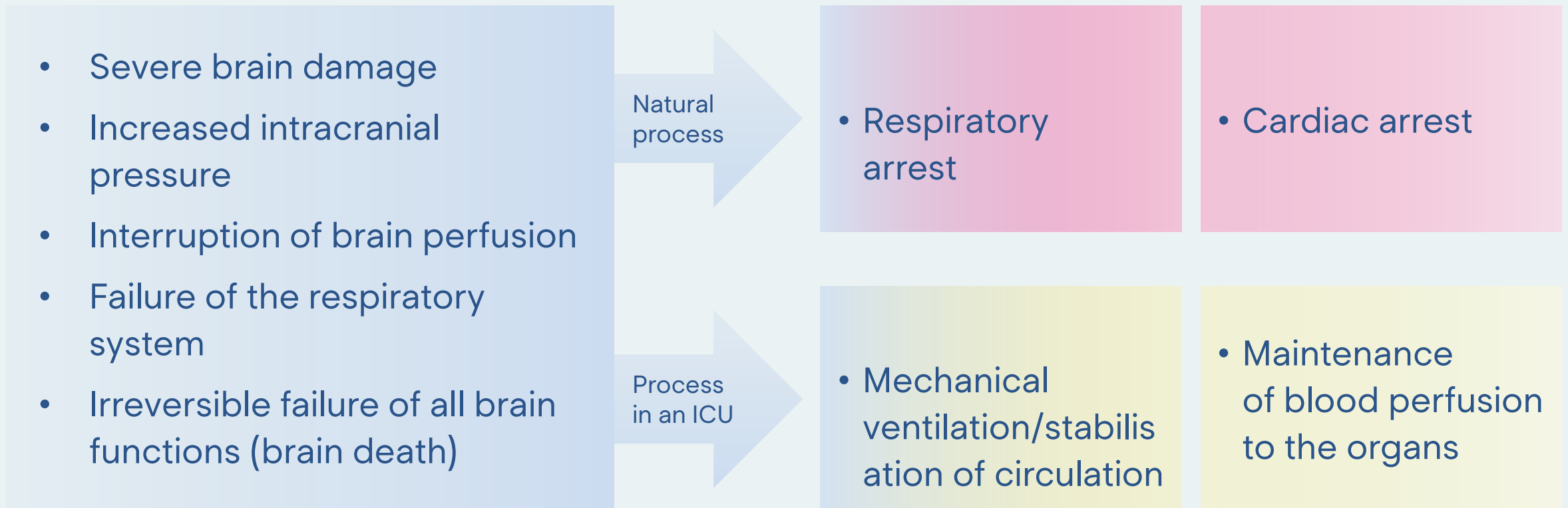
**Severe brain haemorrhage
with brain death**

- Irreversible failure of the brain and brain stem
- Brain death is not the same as a coma
A coma describes potentially **reversible** partial damage to the brain; patients respond to certain stimuli and show brain activity

Sources: M. van Straten (2007); *American Journal of Neuroradiology*, 28(3), 421–427, <https://donatelifecalifornia.org/> and Kummer (2019); <https://ysjournal.com/>

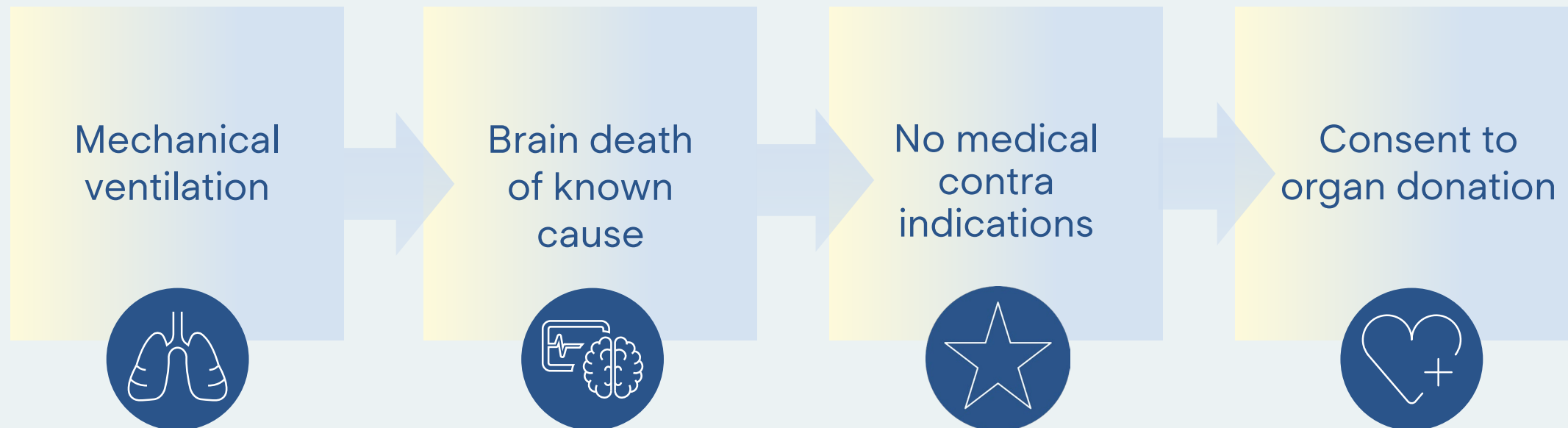
Brain death

Natural process vs. process in an intensive care unit



Post-mortem donation

Who can be an organ donor?



Organ donation procedure



Sandra, kidney recipient

Organ donation procedure



Saving the patient is always the priority

The goal is always
to stabilise and treat
the patient.

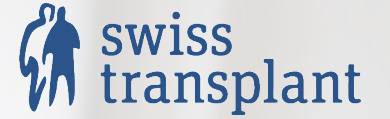


1. Hospitalisation

2. Treatment in an intensive care unit

- Mechanical ventilation/medication to maintain circulatory function
- Brain and brain stem irreversibly damaged
- Further treatment hopeless

Organ donation procedure



3. Diagnosis of brain death

- Dual-control principle: two independent doctors
- Seven clinical signs: all brain stem reflexes are checked
- Normal reactions and pathological reactions are checked (corneal reflex, vestibulo-ocular reflex, mydriatic test, apnoea test)



Organ donation procedure

No urgency when it comes to making a decision

Whenever possible, the conversation should not take place at the patient's bedside.



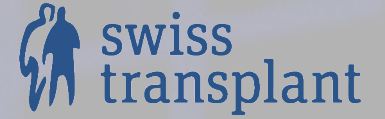
4. Consent/discussion with relatives

- Information communicated regarding hopeless prognosis/brain death
- Wishes of the deceased regarding organ donation

5. Time frame

- Once the decision to change treatment has been made, a maximum of 48 hours may elapse before brain death is confirmed (otherwise DCD donation)
- Once brain death has been confirmed, organ procurement must commence within 72 hours

Organ donation procedure



6. Swisstransplant

- Consent given
- The deceased's details are recorded: Case history, results, laboratory tests, imaging

7. Waiting list/ranking

- Data recorded in the Swiss Organ Allocation System (SOAS)
- Swisstransplant ranks potential recipients in terms of priority with the help of the SOAS



Organ donation procedure

Limiting factors in terms of timing:

- Availability of an operating room
- Hospital routine
- Availability of the anaesthesia and procurement team
- Flight logistics and weather



8. Allocation

- Allocation rules:

1. Medical urgency

2. Medical benefit

3. Priorities
(children, blood group)

4. Waiting time

- An algorithm is used to calculate the order of allocation according to statutory allocation rules.
- Swisstransplant offers the organs to the transplant centres.
- Good cooperation with European allocation authorities:
2025: 69 imported organs and 25 exported organs
(643 transplantations in Switzerland)

Organ donation procedure



Ischaemia time

Heart: 3–4 h
(12–15 h with OCS)

Lungs/liver/pancreas:
6–8 h (typically 10–12 h)

Kidneys: 12–24 h

9. Organ procurement

- Organ procurement carried out by the transplant team in the donor hospital
- Packaging of the organs

10. Organ transport

- Transport of the organs by taxi, ambulance, helicopter or jet, either accompanied or unaccompanied, to the recipient hospital



Organ donation procedure

11. Transplantation

- Preliminary examination carried out on the recipient
- Transplantation carried out in the transplant centre



A portrait of Sandra, a woman with dark hair tied back, wearing a light green and white striped short-sleeved shirt. She is standing outdoors with green foliage in the background.

Sandra,
liver recipient

Organ recipients

- Improved quality of life
- Lifelong medication (immunosuppression)
- Extension of life
- Possibility to write an anonymous thank-you letter to the donor family

Tissue donation

- All in-hospital deaths
- 24–48 hours after death
- Consent
- Most common types of tissue donation:
 - Cornea
 - Heart valves
 - Vessels



Corneal transplantation

After an eye injury, corneal infections (keratitis)

Saying goodbye

- Opportunity for relatives to say goodbye to the deceased
- Funeral organised according to the wishes of the deceased and their relatives
- Relatives taken care of by local coordinators
- **Most important principle:** dignified treatment before, during and after organ procurement



**Yes or no to organ donation?
Record your decision now.**



Gaëtan, liver recipient

Questions

info@swisstransplant.org
www.swisstransplant.org



Suggested videos

- Swisstransplant vision and mission:
[Swisstransplant vision and mission \(with subtitles\) \(youtube.com\)](#)
- Explanatory video: How does organ donation work in Switzerland?:
[Explanatory video: How does organ donation work in Switzerland? \(youtube.com\)](#)
- When is a person dead?
[When is a person dead? \(youtube.com\)](#)
- Noah's organ donation – grief and hope:
[Noah's organ donation – grief and hope \(youtube.com\)](#)
- Elio – back to life:
[Elio – back to life \(youtube.com\)](#)
- Marie-Claude Kempf: coordinator in Geneva for 27 years
[Marie-Claude Kempf talks about her work as a transplant coordinator at Geneva University Hospitals \(HUG\)](#)