

Opt-Out Organ Donation Policies: A Double-Edged Sword

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Johnson and Goldstein first proposed that switching from an opt-in to an opt-out system for deceased organ donation—where all eligible individuals are presumed donors unless they opt out—could save many lives. Countries using opt-out policies were reported to have up to six times higher registration rates for deceased donation¹.

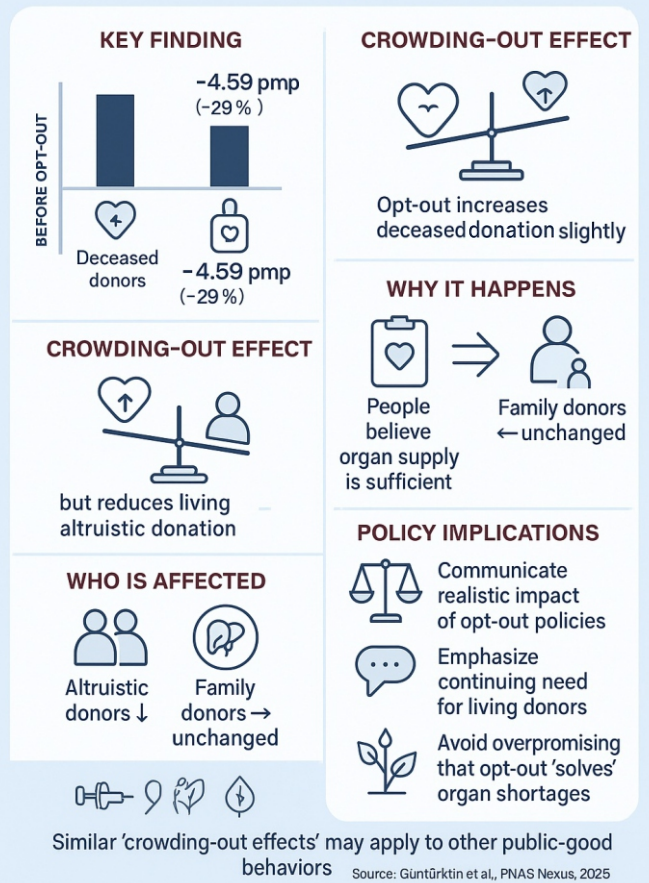
Encouraged by these findings, several nations have adopted opt-out systems, including England and the Netherlands². However, earlier evidence from Belgium suggested that presumed consent may negatively impact living kidney donation³. A recent cross-country analysis has confirmed this concern. Güntürkün *et al.* reported that while opt-out policies led to a small, statistically insignificant rise in deceased donors (+7%, +1.21 per million population), it caused a significant decline in living donors (−29%, −4.59 per million population)⁴. The study concludes that opt-out defaults may produce crowding-out effects, as people perceive organ shortages to be solved, reducing motivation for living altruistic donation.

The infographic summarises these findings, emphasising that while opt-out systems may appear beneficial, they can inadvertently reduce overall organ availability by discouraging living donors.

References

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