

Human Trafficking for Organ Removal

Human Trafficking for Organ Removal (commonly called organ trafficking) is when a person is exploited for the removal of an organ. Even if a victim appears to agree, their "consent" is invalid if it results from deception, fraud, or abuse of a vulnerable position. In such cases, they are considered victims of human trafficking.

Legal Framework

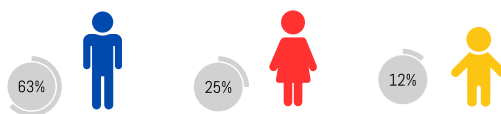
The legislative approach to organ trafficking as a form of human trafficking differs at regional and national levels. The UN Palermo Protocol includes trafficking for organ removal as a form of human trafficking.

Scale and Key Facts

Key Statistics

- It is estimated that 5 to 10% of all transplants worldwide were performed using an organ from the black market (WHO, 2020).
- Approximately 300 victims of trafficking for organ removal were identified globally between 2017 and 2022 (UNODC, 2024).
- The scale of this crime is unknown due to its secrecy, limited studies, and victims' reluctance to come forward, as organ selling is illegal in most countries.
- The illegal organ trade would generate profits between \$800 million and \$1.7 billion per year, over many countries (Global Financial Integrity).

Victims Identified



Organs Most Sought



Recent years have also seen the emergence of trafficking in other human body parts, including human eggs, skin, human embryos, and blood plasma. (Note: The UN Trafficking Protocol's definition currently does not cover trafficking of tissues and cells.)

Patterns in Trafficking for Organ Removal

- **Exploitation of the Vulnerable:** Traffickers prey on individuals from vulnerable or impoverished communities, particularly in regions with poorly regulated transplantation systems and widespread corruption.
- **Organ Stealing:** Organs are sometimes removed under false pretenses, with victims believing they're receiving legitimate medical care while their organ is secretly extracted without their knowledge or consent.
- **Ransom or Debt Bondage:** Victims may be forced to donate an organ to repay fabricated debts (e.g., smuggling fees) or in exchange for their freedom.

Where?

Victims of organ trafficking have been reported in at least 25 countries across various regions:

- North Africa and the Middle East, Western, South, and Southeast Asia
- Central America
- Western, Central, and Eastern Europe.

Learn more at:
www.antitraffickingresponse.org

Who Are the Organ Buyers?

- Buyers of trafficked organs are typically wealthy, desperate individuals from developed countries seeking to bypass long transplant waiting lists.
- A kidney can cost \$50,000–\$120,000, with buyers often from countries with advanced healthcare but limited legal organ supply, like from the US, Canada, Europe, and the Middle East.
- Buyers travel to lower-income countries for surgery or have donors brought in from a third country, a practice increasingly seen with patients from Africa and Asia as dialysis programs expand.

Who else is Involved?

- **Criminal networks** – local or transnational groups organizing the trade.
- **Brokers** – coordinate logistics, payments, recruitment, and travel.
- **Medical staff** – conduct organ removal, testing, and post-surgery care.
- **Facilitators** – officials, recruiters, drivers, translators, and enforcers supporting operations.

Emerging Trends

- **Migration and Displacement** – Vulnerable groups such as refugees and asylum seekers are increasingly being targeted.
- **Online Networks** – traffickers use social media, platforms, and the dark web, leaving digital traces.
- **Changing Methods** – There is a rise in small networks and independent "micro-brokers," who are harder to detect but often traceable online.

Organ Trade/Transplant Tourism

Unlike organ trade or transplant tourism, which involve illegal but voluntary transactions, TIP for OR is based on coercion, deception, or abuse of vulnerability.

