



# SOCHUM

## The Question of Organ Trafficking





**Committee:** SOCHUM

**Topic:** The Question of Organ Trafficking

**Chairs:** Tia Job, Monique Goate

---

## Summary

Organ trafficking is a form of human trafficking where organs or parts of organs (usually non-vital ones) are removed from a healthy person and sold to someone requiring a transplant. The main perpetrators are complex gangs, and most victims are vulnerable in some way.

### Origins

The first successful organ transplant was performed in 1954, when a human received a kidney and survived for the first time. It remained rare until the 1980s, due to risk of rejection, but after the development of more treatments to prevent this, it became more widespread. Around the same time, concerns began to emerge that a practice called 'transplant tourism' was emerging – people travelling to obtain organs, often with the rich receiving poor people's organs. In 1990, the first scientific study of the topic was conducted, concluding that organ trafficking was a growing problem, but not a new one.

### The Victims

Victims of organ trafficking are exploited, though most seem to have consented. However, they are usually deceived, pressured or abused in some way. They are frequently uneducated and often in poverty, with many from vulnerable backgrounds: refugees, migrants, asylum seekers, and the unemployed are the most frequent targets. Over 60% of donors are men. They are convinced that selling their organs is the only way to help their situations, though are given little to no money in return and often no medical care after the operation. Most are paid as little as 1000 USD for an organ that the smugglers are paid \$5000 for, without taking into account the \$100000-200000 paid for organising the transplant. This trafficking leads to complex health issues, making it difficult to hold a job, and stigmas in their communities lead many to become depressed, with most donors remaining in poverty for the rest of their lives. Meanwhile, the organ trade industry (largely trafficking) makes 840 million to 1.7 billion USD annually.

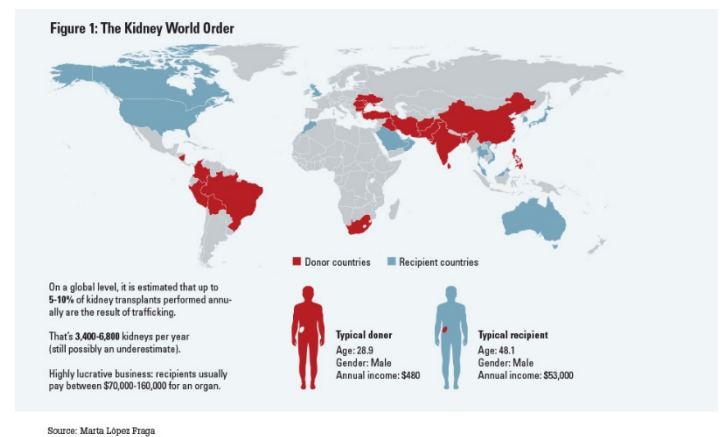
### The Perpetrators

The gangs that run organ trafficking organisations are complicated international organisations that are facilitated by healthcare workers, hospitals, customs officers and local recruiters – often trusted figures of the victims intending to persuade them to sell their organs. Other recruitment efforts are social media and local advertising, as well as former victims. Other important roles within these gangs are logistic co-ordinator; recruiters for the medical professionals involved, and creators of fraudulent documentation for the organs, donors and smugglers.

### Prevalence of the Crime

The WHO estimate that 5-10% of transplants involve trafficked organs. However, this is an old statistic and likely an underestimation. In the UK, 7,000 people are waiting for organs, and in the USA it is 100,000. 17 people die each day in the USA waiting for organs – this provides those in need of an organ with the desperation required to pay as much as necessary to get an illegal organ and survive. 82% of

people waiting in the USA require kidneys, increasing the prevalence of transplants from the living, as you can technically survive with just one healthy kidney. Therefore, most victims of trafficking have a kidney removed, or part of their liver. These statistics only account for a tiny fraction of the global population. Worldwide, 150,000 transplants occur each year, but this accounts for less than 10% of demand. Detection of the crime is also difficult, as it is illegal in most countries to sell your organs as well as buy, leaving victims unlikely to come forward. Most victims are also trained to pretend that they are relatives of the receiver to avoid suspicion.



### What is being done?

It is illegal to trade in organs anywhere in the world except Iran, and there it only applies to citizens. However, medical privacy laws and corruption make convictions difficult. UNDOC provides assistance to criminal prosecutors through information, and 'is developing research and capacity-building programmes, along with guidance, to enhance national capabilities in addressing human trafficking for organ removal and organ trafficking and is ready to provide capacity-strengthening to interested States'. Many countries also have presumed consent laws, increasing the amount of available legal organs. For example, the USA, UK, Brazil, France and most of Europe. This has shown a 25-30% increase in available organs.

### Importance of the Problem

Organ trafficking is a shockingly widespread practice that leaves the victims with a plethora of physical and mental health issues, and unable to escape from the poverty that gangs told them it would. This blatant exploitation must be stopped.

## Definition of Key Terms

Non-vital organs – organs a person can survive without.

WHO – The World Health Organisation

UNODC – United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

Presumed consent laws - also known as opt-out laws, countries with these in place assume that citizens consent to their organs being donated.

## Major Countries and Organisations Involved

The United States of America

The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

Brazil

India

The People's Republic of China

The Republic of the Philippines

Israel

Egypt

WHO

UNODC