



TOPIC 2:
The issue of organ trafficking

Committee: **HRC**

Modern organ transplantation, often seen as one of the greatest medical revolutions, has changed and saved countless lives since its first successful attempt in the late 19th century. However, if there is light, there has to be a shadow - this one in the form of organ trafficking and trafficking of persons for the purpose of organ removal. In the latter part of the 2000s, it was estimated that **1 in 10 transplants worldwide** were involved in illegal organ trafficking practice.

Human trafficking is a lucrative form of transnational organized crime, constituting modern-day slavery. Victims are usually targeted for their vulnerabilities and trafficked between countries using force, extortion, or other forms of deception. These activities can often be linked to forced labour, or forced criminal activities. Unfortunately, organ trafficking holds a critical place with transnational organized crime groups due to high demand and relatively low rates of law enforcement. Once obtained, trafficked organs can be transplanted to recipients in major cities throughout the world, where desperate patients in need of an organ may fall prey to a trafficker who could be posing as a perfectly trustworthy representative of an organ matching organization.

The main drive for organ trafficking comes from greed and desperation. Both the vendor and the recipient are desperate - first one for money, in order to escape poverty, the other one for a chance to survive. Although both are in a breach of the law, neither fits the image of a typical criminal. It is the brokers and scouts, however, who truly embody the inhumane role in striving to profit from the suffering of others. And the profits are definitely quite substantial, despite a smaller number of transplants that include an illicitly acquired human organ. It is estimated that the illegal organ trade generates **approximately \$840 million to \$1.7 billion annually**. For context, circa 120 000 organ transplants were carried out in 2014, which suggests that **roughly 12 000 of them involved an illegal element** (as per Global Observatory on Donation and Transplantation), be it the procedure itself, or the way the organs were acquired.

As demonstrated by *Map 1* below, most of the transplants take place in the **regions of Latin and South America, the Middle East, Central and North-East Africa and South-East Asia**. The reason why many of these regions became hotspots for organ trafficking, especially Africa and the Middle East, is the **upsurge in migration** from these regions. This activity puts a lot of the people involved at risk and makes them vulnerable and easily exploitable. There are reports of organ trafficking merging with human smuggling in Africa. Migrants heading to Israel via Egypt or through North Africa to Europe are **targeted by smugglers for organ trafficking**. Smugglers taking migrants across the Mediterranean have coerced migrants into selling a kidney in order to cover their travel costs. Other examples show that brokers have wasted no time in targeting the Syrian refugees in the Middle East during their efforts to escape their country. The refugees are reportedly being compelled to sell a kidney, to earn money to build a new life within the region or to pay for their and/or their family's passage to Europe.

To counter these practices, two of the largest international medical bodies in the area of transplantations summoned a **Summit Meeting in Istanbul in April 2008**, where over 150 representatives of medical and government bodies were present. This event reached a consensus in the form of **the Declaration of Istanbul**, which was afterwards ratified by further 135 national

and international bodies. The Declaration aims to create programs, where organs for transplantations are fairly allocated, while upholding medical and interpersonal ethical standards.

In 2018, the **Declaration of Istanbul was updated** by the Declaration of Istanbul Custodian Group in order to tackle new clinical and legal developments that happened in the last decade. The updated version of the Declaration of Istanbul was presented and adopted in Madrid in July 2018.

Useful sources

1. [North and West Africa: INTERPOL report highlights human trafficking for organ removal](#)
2. [Organ Trafficking: The Unseen Form of Human Trafficking - ACAMS Today](#)
3. [The Declaration \(declarationofistanbul.org\)](#)

Global distribution of living donor transplantation activity - 2017



Courtesy Jeremy Chapman
Data source: Global Observatory on Donation and Transplantation (www.transplant-observatory.org) slide courtesy of S. White

Map 1 - Global distribution of living donor transplantation activity (Global Observatory on Donation and Transplantation, 2017)