



# Organ Trafficking on the Rise

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The demand for donated human organs in wealthy nations is rising much faster than the supply of organs donated through traditional means can meet, leading to a small but growing number of people living in poverty who sell their vital organs to the highest bidder.

Countries throughout Latin America, Asia and the Middle East are among the nations where organ trafficking has become a major business as demand for these body parts rises in some Asian, African and European nations but also in the United States, where in 2009 [an FBI sting reeled in an alleged "matchmaker"](#) who bought organs in Israel for \$10,000 and sold them in the U.S. for as much as \$160,000.

Unlike drug and sex trafficking, there is little reliable information on the trade but it is believed to be on the increase, with brokers allegedly charging between \$100,000 and \$ 200,000 to organize a transplant for wealthy patients, according to the World Health Organization (WHO).

"The international trade in human organs is on the increase fueled by growing demand as well as unscrupulous traffickers," [WHO said in a statement](#). "The rising trend has prompted a serious reappraisal of current legislation, while WHO has called for more protection for the most vulnerable people who might be tempted to sell a kidney for as little as US\$ 1000."

There has been a growing concern by some doctors that diseased tissues could infect patients with hepatitis, HIV and other diseases, yet little has been done in the medical field to monitor where the organs come from.

The organ trade not only adversely affects the patients who receive the transplants, but also the people selling their body parts. [According to a study conducted in the early 2000s by the European Society for Organ Transplantation \(ESOT\)](#) the main vendors of their organs tend to be the poor or unemployed, undocumented immigrants, former soldiers or young people.

The main brokers of organs tend to be local organized crime groups and corrupt officials on the local level and doctors, independent transplant coordinators and transnational organized crime syndicates on the international stage.

"Despite the popular urban myth that victims often find themselves post-operation in a bath of ice, having had an organ removed by criminals, this is a common misconception," [wrote Edward Fox of Insight Crime](#). "The role of organized crime is typically only that of facilitator, not surgeon."

With the ESOT claiming that the nations of Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Mexico and Peru are all key nations in the sale of illegal organs, some countries in Latin America are taking steps to combat the trade. In June, representatives from Central America and the Dominican Republic established a minimum penalty for the crime of organ trafficking, where a person convicted of the crime will receive no less than five years in prison.

However, other countries are slower to enact harsher penalties. In 2004, U.S. President George W. Bush signed the Organ Donation and Recovery Improvement Act, which authorized the federal government to reimburse living donors for expenses and offer project grants aimed at increasing donations and improving organ preservation and compatibility, but did little to combat the illegal trade, the group says.

The task of investigating and combating organ and tissue trafficking instead has fallen on organizations like the World Health Organization (WHO), which plans to create a coding system to track human tissue traded for transplants.

"The coding system would enable authorities to track trade in products derived from human tissue," [the Japanese daily Asahi Shimbun reported in July](#). "If an infectious disease is caused by a particular product, products using the same donor's tissue can be recovered soon."

Despite these advances and the efforts of some nations to combat the trade, the rising demand in many developed nations will drive the organ trafficking business, experts say.

“Organ transplantation is a necessary treatment for many individuals whose organs have failed and has been in practice in the United States since the 1950s,” [said Dr. David E. Samadi](#), Vice Chairman of the Department of Urology and Chief of Robotics and Minimally Invasive Surgery at the Mount Sinai School of Medicine in New York City and a Fox News contributor.

“An illegal market has capitalized on these individuals’ desperation, and the prospects of large profits are creating unfortunate incentives, with patients willing to pay up to \$200,000 for a kidney.”

*Correction: This story revises a previous version which incorrectly attributed a report by the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists on the legal trade of human tissue and bone. The tissue and bone trade is legal in the U.S., while underground organ trafficking is not.*

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