



**UNODC**

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

**GloACT**

# Toolkit on the Investigation and Prosecution of Trafficking in Persons for Organ Removal



*This project is funded by the European Union*

© United Nations 2022. All rights reserved worldwide.

The designations employed and the presentation of material in this publication do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the Secretariat of the United Nations concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area, or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.

This publication was produced with the financial support of the European Union, within the framework of a joint initiative by the European Union and UNODC being implemented in partnership with IOM, the Global Action against Trafficking in Persons and Smuggling of Migrants (GLO.ACT). The views expressed herein can in no way be taken to reflect the official opinion of the European Union or the United Nations including UNODC or IOM.

This publication has not been formally edited.

## **TOOL 2:** **TYPOLGY OF TIP FOR OR**

# **TYPOLGY OF CRIMINAL BEHAVIOR ASSOCIATED WITH TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS FOR ORGAN REMOVAL**

In this tool, a typology of criminal behavior associated with TIP for OR is advanced – i.e., the most common factual scenarios in which the crime presents itself. The typology has been developed based on reported case studies and official documents.

### **I. Removing an organ without the victims' knowledge or consent: use of force, threat, or intoxicating victims with substances.**

#### **Key characteristics:**

- Victims are subjected to physical force that is often direct and crude.
- Victims might be restrained and forced to undergo medical testing against their will.
- Victims might be abducted from their location and transported domestically or across the border.
- Victims might be subdued with various medical substances for compliance.
- This method requires coordinated operations, and the direct involvement of medical clinics, and complicit medical professionals.
- Force might be used at the later stage (e.g. when the victim changes his/her mind). Victims might be physically restrained or medicated to undergo surgery.
- Asylum seekers, refugees, undocumented migrants, displaced or stateless persons are the most vulnerable categories of persons to this form of trafficking.

### **II. Removing an organ under the pretence of providing medical treatment with no knowledge or consent of the victim: use of deceit and deception.**

#### **Key characteristics: This method is often described as 'organ stealing' from unaware organ donors.**

- Victims might go to a hospital with a genuine

health issue and only days or months later find out that an organ has been removed.

- Victims might be lured into medical facilities under false pretences, including a need for medical examination for a promised job, or they might be offered a free medical checkup.
- This form of TIP for OR might include brokers or other intermediates, but they might not be required if the medical professionals involved have direct access to waiting organ recipients and legitimate access to medical resources.
- Physician(s) who removed an organ might claim that it was removed because it was damaged during a medical procedure, or due to illness.

### **III. Offering payments or other benefits to vulnerable organ donors in exchange for their organs: abuse of a position of vulnerability, and other means.**

#### **Key characteristics:**

- Poor, economically vulnerable and financially desperate persons are often the key targets.
- Recruiters, due to belonging to the same cast, ethnic minority or belonging to the same community, know of persons who struggle financially.
- Offers to sell or donate an organ for money are advertised on social media platforms, in newspapers, or through word of mouth.
- Victims are lured with promises of substantial amounts of "easy" money.
- Organ removal is presented as a small and low-risk procedure.
- Victims are often provided with fake identity documentations (ID or passports).
- A lot of preparations take place before the transplant is performed to match organ donors with suitable recipients.

- Illicit organ removals are often disguised as legitimate transplants.
- A case might present documentary evidence from medical facilities.
- Physical force is rarely used to give the victim a sense of freedom and choice.
- Often a trafficking network is involved in organizing illicit organ removals, transportation of victims (and recipients) and illicit transplants.

**IV. Victims are forced to give up an organ in exchange for freedom of movement or to pay off (accumulated) debt: use of coercion, blackmail, and abuse of a position of vulnerability, abuse of power.**

**Key characteristics:**

- Victims are coerced to give up an organ as a form of repaying a debt (e.g. to a ‘recruiter’ for finding them a job, or a smuggler who moved the victim illegally across borders).
- Victims might be in unequal power relation with a trafficker (e.g. an employer who demands an organ, a husband/wife who ‘sell’ a spouse for organ removal in exchange for money);
- A number of prohibited means might be used, including use of force.
- Depending on the country where the medical procedure is conducted, the organ removal and subsequent transplantation might be disguised as a legitimate transplant.
- Victims who have irregular status are especially vulnerable to this form of TIP for OR as they are often fearful of reporting what happened due to concerns of being deported or prosecuted.
- Organized smuggling and trafficking networks might work together, or one network might be facilitating both criminal acts: smuggling and TIP for OR.

**V. Trafficking in persons networks operating domestically or transnationally organizing illicit transplants using vulnerable organ donors.**

**Key characteristics:**

- High level of organization, planning and execution of criminal activities.
- Involves more than one form of illicit activity.
- Possible inclusion of financial crimes, e.g., money laundering.
- Possible involvement of public authorities.
- Involves a broad range of actors: domestic recruiters, international brokers, domestic and international medical staff, domestic and/or international donors and recipients.

- Involvement of private and public medical facilities: transplant facilities, diagnostic laboratories, insurance companies.
- Use of legal businesses (medical clinics, travel, or medical tourism agencies) as fronts for illegal activities.
- Can include one or multiple criminal network(s) working together across many jurisdictions.
- Most TIP for OR cases are disguised as legitimate organ transplants.
- The use of corruption to protect a traffickers’ interests and avoid arrest and prosecution.

**VI. Forced, abusive and exploitative marriages as a means to obtain an organ.**

Organ removal in the context of trafficking in persons might also occur through another form of exploitation, i.e., forced abusive and exploitative marriages<sup>1</sup>. Most, if not all, states allow organ donation between spouses, usually after ascertaining a certain number of years of being legally married. Depending on the country transplant system, the health situation of the organ recipient, and possibilities to obtain an organ abroad, it might be easier to pay for an arranged marriage and then force a spouse to donate an organ. The ‘marriages’ can be arranged by family members, wedding agencies or brokers, often for financial or material gain. In some cases, brides are directly kidnapped. Traffickers use violence, abuse, restrictions on movement and isolation from as common factors of these forced unions<sup>2</sup>.

It is also possible that the exploitation of a victim may be compounded with other forms of trafficking – i.e. sexual exploitation or forced labour.

**VII. Organ removal for ritualistic purposes or use in medicine**

Very little is currently known about this form of trafficking although there have been a number of recent prominent cases<sup>3</sup>. However, one of the main differences between this form of TIP and the one described below is that victims are often killed, and the removed organs and body parts are not used for transplantations but for religious rituals, magic

1. For more information, please see UNODC Issue Paper, ‘Interlinkages between Trafficking in Persons and Marriage’ available online at: [UNODC Interlinkages Trafficking in Persons and Marriage.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/interlinkages/Interlinkages_Trafficking_in_Persons_and_Marriage.pdf).

2. Issue Paper on Interlinkages between Trafficking in Persons and Marriage (United Nations Publication, 2020)

3. See for instance Al Jazeera, ‘Nigerian Senator Accused of Organ Harvesting Attempt’, available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/6/23/nigerian-senator-accused-of-organ-harvesting-attempt-in-the-uk> and Institute for Security Studies, ‘Tanzanians hard hit by trafficking in people with albinism’, available at: <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/tanzanians-hard-hit-by-trafficking-in-people-with-albinism>.

(witchcraft) and medicinal purposes. The latter one is also referred to as 'muti murder' (a literal translation from Zulu means 'medicine' murder) is defined as a murder in which body parts are removed from a living victim for the sole purpose of using the victim's body parts medicinally<sup>4</sup>. The aim is to obtain body parts for [medicinal] ingredients. Some forms of muti murder may be ritualized in that it is done in a certain way, it is not however a sacrificial act of offering a life. "Muti made from human body parts is considered to be exceptionally powerful [and] traditionally the victim must be alive when the body parts are removed as this increases the 'power' of the muti<sup>5</sup>."

A special category of victims targeted for TIP for OR are persons with albinism. Albinism occurs globally, in all genders, racial and ethnic groups. While the estimations of affected people as part of the local population vary from region to region, the highest rate is reported in Sub-Saharan Africa (e.g. Tanzania, Malawi, Burundi, Mozambique, South Africa). Body parts such as teeth, bones, genitals, and thumbs have been used in rituals by traditional healers, or witchdoctors, to bring success, are consumed as "medicine", carried as a good fortune talisman, or processed and packaged for illegal trade.

Since violence and brute force is used against the victims, and victims are physically transported to a place where their organs are removed, it might be possible to prosecute this crime as TIP for OR. This, however, will depend on the domestic trafficking law, and how the term 'organ' is defined.

---

4. Gerard Labuschagne, "Features and Investigative Implications of Muti Murder in South Africa", *Journal of Investigative Psychology and Offender Profiling*, vol.1 (2004), p. 191

5. *Ibid.* p. 193



## Contacts

Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling Section  
Vienna International Centre, PO Box 500, 1400 Vienna, Austria

Website: [https://www.unodc.org/unodc/glo\\_act2/](https://www.unodc.org/unodc/glo_act2/)

Email: [unodc-glo.act@un.org](mailto:unodc-glo.act@un.org)

Twitter: [@glo\\_act](https://twitter.com/glo_act) | [@htmss\\_unodc](https://twitter.com/htmss_unodc)

