



The Department of Internal Medicine, Section Nephrology and Transplantation of Erasmus MC, in collaboration with the Department of Law, Society and Crime of Erasmus University Rotterdam, is looking for a PhD candidate on the project:

“Walls of Secrecy and Silence in the Human Organ Trade: Facilitating, Concealing and Laundering Illegal Transplants”

Job description

The organ trade is a relatively new but neglected crime that is proliferating globally. The trade is prohibited universally, yet, the growing gap between organ supply and demand has led to an illegal organ market that converges with altruistic organ procurement systems. Research suggests that this trade is embedded within medical/legal institutions. There is however a critical lack of research and knowledge on how the medical sector, such as hospitals and clinics, and other legal businesses facilitate, conceal and launder illegal transplants. **This proposed research aims to understand how, where and why medical/legal businesses facilitate, conceal and launder illegal transplants and assesses the implications for anti-organ trade responses.**

This is a multidisciplinary, ethnographic research project that runs from April 2025 until March 2030. It is funded by a European Research Council Starting Grant. Methods include a study of the online organ market, qualitative fieldwork in 5 ‘hot spot’ countries and analysis of criminal cases.

PhD project

The objective of the PhD project is to study ‘How do medical, and other legal businesses and persons participate in concealing, laundering and sustaining illegal organ transplant activity?’

The research questions are:

1. Where, why and how are illegal organ transplants concealed and laundered?
2. Which ‘legal’ and ‘illegal’ institutions and persons conceal and launder illegal transplants?
3. Which types of laundering and concealment are identified?
4. What medical, social, cultural or other factors contribute to the trade’s sustainment?
5. How can concealment and organ laundering be identified, prevented or disrupted?

This PhD project will triangulate online data, fieldwork data, and criminal case data and analyze the data through a **‘walls of secrecy and silence’ framework** looking at acts of commission and omission in **concealment** and **laundering** of illegal transplants.



You will work together closely with another PhD student (see our other vacancy on this project), as well as with the PI. This three-person team will travel - and collect the data together in the various countries.

Work environment

- Erasmus MC houses one of the largest kidney transplantation centers in Europe, which performs 200 kidney transplantations annually. The section Nephrology and Transplantation of the Dept. of Internal Medicine is involved in kidney transplant patient care, research and education, and is part of the recently established Erasmus MC Transplant Institute.
- You will become part of the Organ Trafficking Research Group at the section Nephrology and Transplantation of the Dept. of Internal Medicine at Erasmus MC. This enthusiastic team of researchers conducts studies on various aspects of the organ trade globally.
- More broadly, we offer a dynamic and multidisciplinary team of transplant professionals including postdocs and PhD students working on medical, ethical, legal and psychosocial aspects of organ transplantation.
- Throughout the project we collaborate with **the Department of Law, Society and Crime of Erasmus University Rotterdam (EUR)**. This department is one of the four departments of the Erasmus School of Law (ESL) and forms the institutional home for academics from Criminology, Criminal Law, Health Law and Sociology of Law. Its researchers focus amongst others on understanding and explaining crime, deviance and insecurity as well as the different ways society deals with and acts on crime and insecurity in a global context.
- You will be dividing your working hours between both departments / faculties (dpt. of Nephrology and Kidney Transplantation at Erasmus MC and the dpt. of Law, Society and Crime at ESL).

Qualifications and skills

- We are looking for a highly-motivated researcher with a curious mindset to complete our team. You are eager to learn and you are comfortable working in an academic research environment within a research group as well as working autonomously.
- You have completed a master's in a discipline that is relevant to this project such as criminology, anthropology or sociology. You must have demonstrable experience in ethnographic fieldwork, preferably on sensitive topics. You also have well-developed qualitative data analysis skills including the use of qualitative data analysis software (ATLAS.ti, NVivo).



- Next to doing fieldwork, publishing (international) academic articles, presenting research results at conferences and writing periodic newsletters (through the project website) constitute important parts of your work.
- You have excellent networking and communication skills and you are happiest when working in a team. You are able to handle ethically sensitive topics such as organ trade.
- You are willing to travel to other countries for longer periods of time (up to 4 weeks). You are ready to relocate to The Netherlands as your main residence for the time of your contract.

Terms of employment

- We offer you a full-time PhD Fellowship of definite duration, consisting of an initial period of 12 months, which—upon positive evaluation—will be extended to a maximum of 48 months. The gross monthly salary is € 3.108,- in the 1st year and increases to € 3.939,- in the 4th year (scale OIO), based on a full-time working week of 36 hours. The terms of employment are according to the Collective Labour Agreement for Dutch University Medical Centers (CAO UMC).
- Your contract will start on 1 October 2025. We offer benefits including a 13th month paid out in November and an individual travel expense package and pension insurance with ABP; we take care of approximately 2/3 of the monthly contribution. Other benefits include an in-company physiotherapist, a gym and a bicycle repairer.
- This PhD project is embedded within and supervised by both Erasmus MC's Internal Medicine Department and EUR's Department of Law, Society and Crime. You will be given an honorary agreement at EUR's Department of Law, Society and Crime which gives you full access to this department's facilities (i.e. a personal account, e-mail, working space) and allows you to become active part of this department's multidisciplinary team, opportunity to work with peers, etc.

Information and application

- If you are excited by the thought of this position and would like to apply, please do so by sending your CV and a motivation letter (max. 1 page) to the PI of this project, Dr. Frederike Ambagtsheer. **The application deadline is June 4th 2025**
- You can also apply through the vacancy posting on the website of Erasmus MC at <https://www.werkenbijerasmusmc.nl/en/vacancies>
- For more information about this position, please contact Dr. Frederike Ambagtsheer
- For queries regarding this application/working at Erasmus MC, please contact Mr. Ronald Breen, Human Resources Advisor. Phone number +31 (0) 650008203 or e-mail: r.breen@erasmusmc.nl



Contact information Section Nephrology and Kidney Transplantation, Erasmus MC

Prof. Dr. Marc Hemmelder, head of section Nephrology and Kidney Transplantation

Dr. Frederike Ambagtsheer, assistant professor / project PI

Dr. Molewaterplein 40 (Room Rg-520k)

315 GD Rotterdam, The Netherlands

E-mail: j.ambagtsheer@erasmusmc.nl

Phone +31 (0) 6 86553125

Website: www.organtraffickingresearch.org

Contact information Dpt. of Law, Society and Crime, Erasmus University Rotterdam

Dr. Robby Roks

Erasmus School of Law, Dpt. of Law, Society and Crime

L5-06, Campus Woudestein

E-mail: roks@law.eur.nl