

Juristat Bulletin—Quick Fact

Trafficking in persons in Canada, 2022

by Loanna Heidinger

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Trafficking in persons in Canada, 2022

by Loanna Heidinger

Trafficking in persons, or human trafficking, is a serious human rights violation that can occur domestically or transnationally with the crossing of international borders. Human trafficking involves the recruitment, transportation or harbouring of a person and includes controlling or influencing their movements with the goal of exploiting, or facilitating the exploitation of, a person (Public Safety Canada, 2022a, Public Safety Canada, 2022b).¹

Human trafficking is considered a criminal offence in Canada, as outlined in the *Criminal Code* and the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act* (IRPA) (see Text box 1). The National Strategy to Combat Human Trafficking, announced in 2019, further outlines the Government of Canada's commitment to prevent and address human trafficking, including providing support to victims and survivors (Public Safety Canada, 2022b).

Despite legislation prohibiting all forms of human trafficking both within and outside Canadian borders, it is difficult to detect and measure due to its hidden nature. Victims of human trafficking are generally isolated and concealed from the public, and many may experience barriers or be unwilling to report to authorities for various reasons, including a general distrust of authorities, feelings of shame, fear of consequences, language barriers, or a lack of human rights knowledge (Public Safety Canada, 2022a; Public Safety Canada, 2022b; UNODC, 2021). Moreover, the detection of human trafficking cases by police services may be dependent on the availability of resources, specialized units and training received.

While human trafficking takes various forms,² trafficking for sexual exploitation is the most detected and encountered form of human trafficking by law enforcement in Canada (Public Safety Canada, 2022c). It is highly gendered, disproportionately impacting women and girls, although men and boys are also victims (Parliament of Canada 2018; Public Safety Canada, 2022a; Public Safety Canada, 2022b; UNODC, 2021). Furthermore, certain groups experience a heightened risk of human trafficking for sexual exploitation, including vulnerable youth and people who experience social or economic marginalization (Public Safety Canada, 2022a; Public Safety Canada, 2022b).

Trafficking for forced labour is another form of human trafficking. Unlike human trafficking for sexual exploitation, victims of trafficking for forced labour vary largely by age and gender depending on geography and economic sector (UNODC, 2021). As with other types of trafficking, data on labour trafficking is limited and estimates of the number of victims may be largely underestimated (CCTEHT, 2023a).

Using data from the Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Survey, this *Juristat Bulletin—Quick Fact* examines trends in police-reported incidents of human trafficking in Canada and highlights characteristics of victims and accused persons. Court outcomes of cases related to human trafficking are also examined using data from the Integrated Criminal Court Survey (ICCS).

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Text box 1

Human trafficking in the *Criminal Code* and the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act*

In 2005, the following human trafficking offences were added to the *Criminal Code*:

- Section 279.01: trafficking in persons
- Section 279.02: receiving financial or other material benefit for the purpose of committing or facilitating trafficking in persons
- Section 279.03: withholding or destroying identity documents (e.g., a passport, whether authentic or forged) for the purpose of committing or facilitating trafficking of that person
- Section 279.04: defines exploitation for the purpose of human trafficking offences.

In 2008/2009, the first case involving a human trafficking charge under this new legislation was completed in adult criminal court.

In 2010, section 279.011 was added to the *Criminal Code* which imposed mandatory minimum penalties for individuals accused of the trafficking of persons under the age of 18 years.

In 2012, the *Criminal Code* was amended to allow for the prosecution of Canadians and permanent residents for human trafficking offences committed internationally and to provide judges with an interpretive tool to assist in determining whether exploitation occurred (subsection 279.04(2)).

In 2014, mandatory minimum penalties were imposed on the main trafficking offence (section 279.01), as well as for receiving a material benefit from the trafficking of children (subsection 279.02(2)) and withholding or destroying documents to facilitate the trafficking of children (279.03(2)).

In 2019, amendments were brought into force that allow prosecutors to present evidence that the accused lived with or was habitually in the presence of an exploited person as proof of one of the elements of the trafficking offence, and that place the onus for forfeiture of proceeds of crime on those convicted of human trafficking offences (Department of Justice Canada, 2022b).

Section 118 of the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act* (IRPA), introduced in 2002, criminalizes the cross-border trafficking of one or more persons by means of abduction, fraud, deception, threatened or actual use of force or coercion (Public Safety Canada, 2022b). While human trafficking differs from human smuggling, the IRPA also prohibits the smuggling of persons into Canada.

Section 1: Police-reported human trafficking

This section presents trends in police-reported human trafficking in Canada using data from the Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) survey. Data from 2012 to 2022 are used to provide high-level national and regional trends of human trafficking. This is followed by an analysis of the characteristics of human trafficking incidents, victims and accused persons.

Number of police-reported human trafficking incidents decreased slightly in 2022

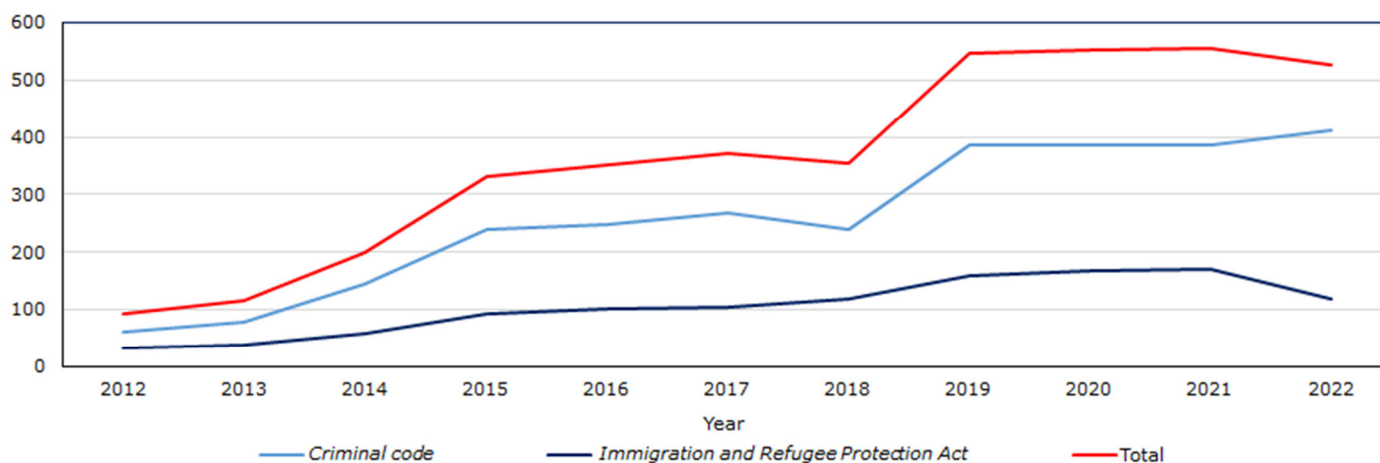
There were 3,996 police-reported incidents of human trafficking between 2012 and 2022.³ Incidents of human trafficking accounted for 0.02% of all police-reported crime during this time and represented an average annual rate of 1.0 incidents per 100,000 population.

In 2022, there were 528 police-reported incidents of human trafficking, a slight decrease compared to 2021, where 555 incidents were reported by police (Chart 1). The rate of human trafficking in 2022 decreased from the previous year (1.5 incidents per 100,000 population in 2021 and 1.4 incidents in 2022).

Looking at longer term trends, between 2012 and 2021, there were year-over-year increases in the number of police-reported incidents of human trafficking, except for a slight decrease in 2018.

Chart 1
Police-reported incidents of human trafficking, by statute, Canada, 2012 to 2022

number of incidents



Note: This chart is based on aggregate data, and counts are based on the most serious violation in a criminal incident. The Uniform Crime Reporting Survey was amended partway through 2011 to allow police services to report the specific offence of human trafficking under the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act*. Once the specific violation code was introduced, a small number of incidents which took place prior to this date were reported.
Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice and Community Safety Statistics, Uniform Crime Reporting Survey.

Police-reported incidents of human trafficking include *Criminal Code* and *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA)* offences. Although there was a decrease in the number of police-reported human trafficking incidents overall in 2022 compared with 2021, there were opposing trends for *Criminal Code* and IRPA incidents. Compared with 2021, there were 25 more offences under the *Criminal Code* (representing a 6% increase) and 52 fewer offences under IRPA (representing a 31% decrease) in 2022.

In 2022, approximately eight in ten (78%) incidents of police-reported human trafficking were related to *Criminal Code* offences and about one in five (22%) were IRPA offences. These findings differ slightly from larger trends between 2012 and 2022 where, *Criminal Code* offences represented about seven in ten (71%) police-reported human trafficking incidents while almost three in ten (29%) incidents were related to IRPA.

Police-reported human trafficking incidents under the *Criminal Code* have generally increased from 2012 to 2021, with the exception of a decline in the number of incidents documented in 2018. This upward trend continued into 2022, with the number of *Criminal Code* incidents increasing from 2021 (386 incidents in 2021 and 411 incidents in 2022). These year over year increases in the number of incidents may indicate a rise in offences or improved overall detection of human trafficking. IRPA incidents of human trafficking generally increased from 2012 to 2021; however, in 2022 there was a decrease in the number of incidents compared to the previous year (169 incidents in 2021 and 117 incidents in 2022).

Text box 2

Labour trafficking or forced labour

Labour trafficking, or forced labour, involves the control or exploitation of persons for their work or service. Labour trafficking can happen in many different industries; however, it is more common in low-wage and agricultural sectors (FCJ Refugee Centre and Canadian Centre to End Human Trafficking, 2023). There is limited research on labour trafficking and data on the number of victims may be largely underestimated. In Canada, men, women and children have been victims of labour trafficking.

Migrant workers play an important role in the Canadian economy and help to address critical labour shortages in Canada (FCJ Refugee Centre and Canadian Centre to End Human Trafficking, 2023). However, the precarious immigration status of migrant workers may increase their vulnerability to exploitation. Labour trafficking recruiters may lure victims with the promise of high paying jobs, legal documentation, and an overall better life in Canada (Canadian Council for Refugees, 2019).

Between 2019 and 2022, Mexican migrant workers accounted for the largest proportion (44%, on average) of temporary foreign workers in the agricultural sector in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2023). During this time, there was an annual average of 26,580 Mexican migrant workers in this sector in Canada.

Two recent large scale police investigations in Ontario uncovered two cases of labour trafficking targeting Mexican migrants. In 2019, more than 60 Mexican migrant workers were exploited by a network of labour traffickers in the Wasaga-Barrie region of Ontario (Canadian Council for Refugees, 2019). More recently, in 2023, 64 migrant workers were rescued from a labour trafficking situation in the Greater Toronto Area (York Regional Police Press Conference, 2023). Migrants recruited by labour traffickers were forced to work long hours in unsafe conditions and made little to no money. Their movements were restricted, and they were under the constant threat of detection by police and immigration authorities.

For more information on Labour Trafficking in Canada see Canadian Council for Refugees, 2019.

Rates of human trafficking in Nova Scotia and Ontario are higher than the national average

Among the provinces, two exceeded the national rate (1.0 incidents per 100,000 population) of police-reported human trafficking between 2012 and 2022 (Table 1). Nova Scotia had the highest rate of human trafficking (3.1 incidents per 100,000 population), followed by Ontario (1.6 incidents). This pattern was consistent in 2022 with Nova Scotia reporting 4.5 incidents per 100,000 population and Ontario reporting 2.3 incidents, both higher than the national rate (1.4 incidents). Furthermore, in 2022, Nova Scotia accounted for 8.7% of human trafficking incidents and Ontario accounted for 67% of incidents despite respectively representing 2.6% and 39% of the Canadian population that same year (Statistics Canada, 2022).⁴

A high concentration of urban areas in Ontario may contribute to the higher rates of human trafficking in the province. Ontario is made up of various population centres that may be used by human traffickers to avoid detection while increasing profits (CCTEHT, 2021). The accessibility of international border crossings may further appeal to traffickers. Since 2012, over

one-third (35%) of human trafficking incidents in Ontario were IRPA related. In Nova Scotia, the relatively high rates of human trafficking have been linked to the province's geographical location. Nova Scotia has been identified as a hub for human trafficking due to its coastal location, whereby victims are often moved from Atlantic Canada to the rest of the country (Barrett, 2013). Since 2012, one in three (30%) human trafficking incidents in Nova Scotia were IRPA-related.

Majority of incidents of police-reported human trafficking are in urban centres

In 2022, the majority (82%) of human trafficking incidents were reported to police in census metropolitan areas (CMAs).⁵ This finding has been consistent since 2012, with more than eight in ten (83%) incidents of human trafficking reported to police in CMAs between 2012 and 2022 (Table 2). In comparison, about six in ten (57%) violent incidents were reported to police in CMAs during this time.

Almost half (48%) of all police-reported incidents of human trafficking in Canada between 2012 and 2022 were reported in five CMAs: Toronto (911 incidents, 23% of all incidents in Canada), Ottawa⁶ (364, 9% of all incidents), Montréal (249, 6% of all incidents), Halifax (243, 6% of all incidents), and Hamilton (160, 4% of all incidents). Four other CMAs reported a high number of human trafficking incidents: St Catharines-Niagara (136 incidents), London (130), Vancouver (117), and Edmonton (109).

Between 2012 and 2022, police services in Thunder Bay⁷ and Halifax reported the highest average annual rate of human trafficking incidents (5.9 and 5.0 incidents per 100,000 population, respectively). Several CMAs reported an average annual rate of human trafficking that was higher than the average national rate (1.0 incidents per 100,000 population), including Peterborough (3.9), Ottawa (3.2), Barrie (2.8), St Catharines-Niagara (2.6) and Windsor (2.6).

In 2022, more specifically, Halifax and Moncton reported the highest annual rate of police-reported human trafficking (5.6 and 5.0 incidents per 100,000 population, respectively). Several other CMAs had an annual rate higher than the national average (1.4 incidents per 100,000 population), including Barrie (4.8), Guelph (4.0), Thunder Bay (4.0), Peterborough (3.8), Kitchener-Cambridge-Waterloo (3.6), and London (3.6). In comparison, the overall rate of human trafficking incidents for the CMAs in Canada in 2022 was 1.5 incidents per 100,000 population.

One in four human trafficking incidents involved at least one other type of violation, most often related to sex trade

A human trafficking offence was listed as the most serious offence, either under the *Criminal Code* or IRPA, in the vast majority (95%) of police-reported human trafficking incidents between 2012 and 2022.⁸ Of all human trafficking incidents during this time, six in ten (60%) involved human trafficking as the only violation, while four in ten (40%) involved at least one other type of violation.⁹ Among these incidents, the associated offence was most often related to the sex trade, accounting for over half (56%) of all incidents with multiple violations.¹⁰ About one-third (35%) of incidents with an associated offence had a physical assault violation, about a quarter (27%) had a sexual offence, and one in eight (12%) had a deprivation of freedom offence.¹¹

Vast majority of police-reported human trafficking victims are women and girls

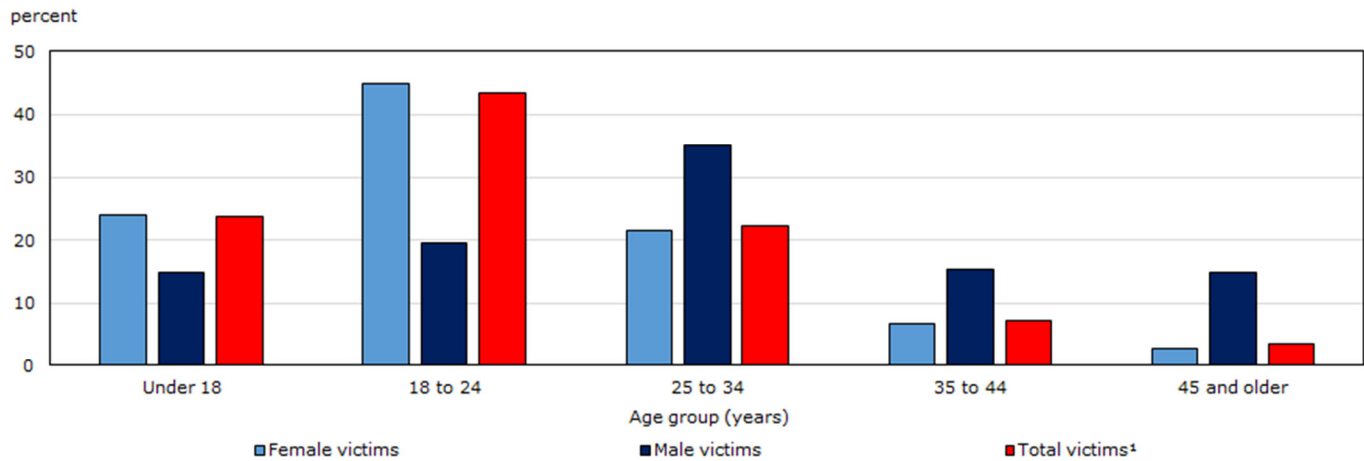
Between 2012 and 2022 there were 3,103 detected victims of police-reported human trafficking in Canada.¹² Human trafficking is a gendered crime with women and girls accounting for the vast majority (94%) of victims, while men and boys comprise a small proportion (5.6%) of victims.¹³ The number of victims of human trafficking remained fairly stable in 2020 (410 victims) and 2021 (418 victims); however, in 2022 (439 victims) there was a 5% increase in the number of victims of human trafficking compared to the previous year and a 7% increase compared to 2020. In comparison, the number of victims of violent crime in 2022 was 5% higher than 2021 and 11% higher than 2020.

One in four victims of human trafficking are children and youth

Just over four in ten (43%) victims of human trafficking in Canada from 2012 to 2022 were aged 18 to 24 (Chart 2).¹⁴ Meanwhile, about one in four (24%) victims were under the age of 18 and one in five (22%) were between the ages of 25 and 34. Smaller proportions of victims were aged 35 to 44 (7.2%) and 45 and older (3.6%). Female victims of human trafficking were concentrated in the youngest age groups with approximately seven in ten (69%) of the 2,861 female victims under age 25. More specifically, about a quarter (24%) of female victims were under age 18 and nearly half (45%) were aged 18 to 24.

The age breakdown of victims of human trafficking differed for male victims compared to female victims. Of the 168 male victims of human trafficking, the largest proportion were aged 25 to 34 (35%), followed by those aged 18 to 24 (20%).

Chart 2
Victims in police-reported incidents of human trafficking, by gender and age group, Canada, 2012 to 2022



1. Includes victims whose gender was unknown.
Note: Excludes those with unknown age and those whose ages were reported as 80 years and older, but were identified as possible instances of miscoding. Given that small counts of victims identified as “non-binary” may exist, the Uniform Crime Reporting Survey data available to the public has been recoded to assign these counts to either “female” or “male” in order to ensure the protection of confidentiality and privacy.
Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice and Community Safety Statistics, Incident-based Uniform Crime Reporting Survey, Trend Database.

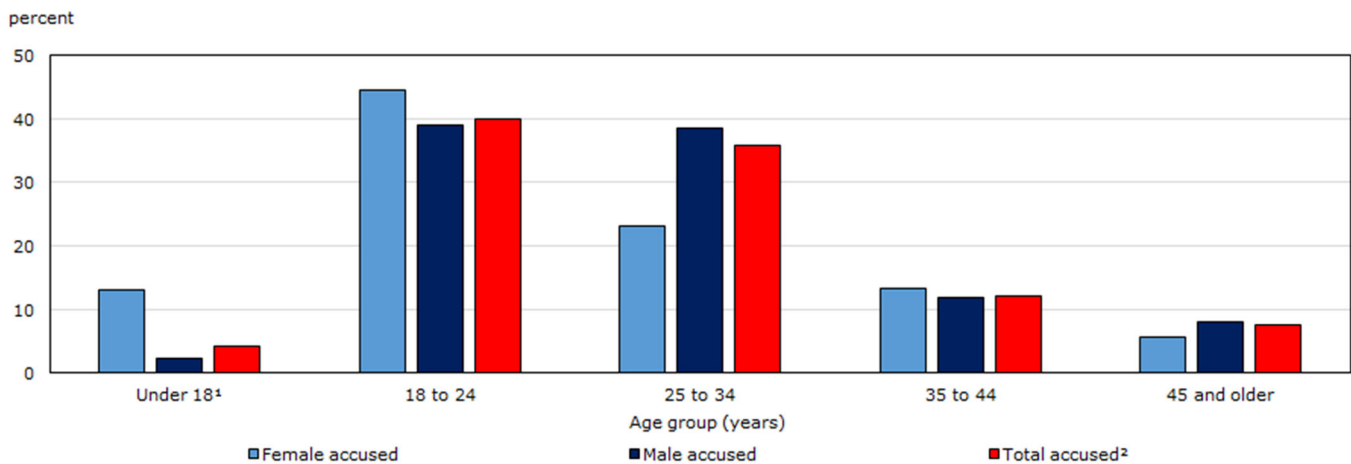
Human trafficking may involve violence and coercion and typically involves psychological harm. Prior research has consistently linked human trafficking to elevated rates of anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder and suicidal ideation among victims (Casassa et al., 2021; Dell et al., 2019; Hemmings et al., 2016). Although the UCR survey does not collect data on the psychological or emotional harm of human trafficking on victims, it does collect information on physical harm sustained during human trafficking. It is important to note that victims may experience a prolonged period of exploitation and as such, all physical injuries are not captured.

According to police-reported data, just over a quarter (27%) of victims of human trafficking sustained an injury.¹⁵ Among victims with an injury, a large majority (88%) sustained minor injuries and about one in eight (12%) sustained major injuries.¹⁶

Men greatly outnumber women among adult accused, higher proportion of girls among youth accused

Between 2012 and 2022 there were 2,540 persons accused of police-reported human trafficking in Canada. About three-quarters (76%) of these accused were adults aged 18 to 34. More specifically two in five (40%) were aged 18 to 24 and over one-third (36%) were aged 25 to 34. A small proportion of accused persons were youth (4.3%) between the ages of 12 to 17.

Chart 3
Accused persons in police-reported incidents of human trafficking, by gender and age group, Canada, 2012 to 2022



1. Includes accused persons aged 12 to 17.
 2. Includes accused persons whose gender was unknown.
Note: Excludes those with unknown age and those whose ages were reported as 80 years and older, but were identified as possible instances of miscoding. Given that small counts of accused persons identified as “non-binary” may exist, the Uniform Crime Reporting Survey data available to the public has been recoded to assign these counts to either “female” or “male” in order to ensure the protection of confidentiality and privacy.
Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice and Community Safety Statistics, Incident-based Uniform Crime Reporting Survey, Trend Database.

Overall, the large majority (82%) of persons accused of human trafficking were male. Men aged 18 to 34 accounted for almost two-thirds (64%) of all persons accused of human trafficking. Across adult age groups, the proportion of men accused of human trafficking outnumbered that of women, with about four in five (80%) accused identified as men in each adult age group. However, this pattern was not consistent among youth accused of human trafficking. Among the 109 youth (aged 12 to 17) accused of human trafficking, a larger proportion were girls (55%) than boys (44%).¹⁷

Limited research on female human traffickers finds that there may be a blurred line between trafficking victims and perpetrators. Societal perceptions of women and girls, in particular youth, may position them as more trustworthy to potential victims (Kienast et al., 2014). Therefore, some traffickers may use female human trafficking victims to lure or recruit other females through manipulation and control, resulting in a situation where women and girls accused of human trafficking may themselves be current or former victims (Kienast et al., 2014).

Just over one-third of victims were trafficked by a current or former intimate partner

Between 2012 and 2022, the large majority (91%) of detected victims of human trafficking knew their accused trafficker, while a small proportion (8.8%) of victims were trafficked by a stranger. Notably, about one-third (34%) of victims of human trafficking were trafficked by an intimate partner.¹⁸ Prior research has found that traffickers often pose as a romantic partner to lure or recruit potential victims, with the intention of trafficking them (Fedina et al., 2019; UNODC, 2021). Almost one-quarter (22%) of police-reported victims were trafficked by a casual acquaintance and a similar proportion of victims were trafficked by someone with whom they had a criminal (13%)¹⁹ or a business relationship (11%). Trafficking by a friend (5.7%) or a non-spousal family member (2.9%)²⁰ was relatively less common.

Text box 3

Financial Transactions and Reports Analysis Centre of Canada

The Financial Transactions and Reports Analysis Centre of Canada (FINTRAC) is Canada's financial intelligence unit. Using financial transaction reports, FINTRAC contributes to the detection, prevention, and the deterrence of money laundering. In 2016, FINTRAC, together with banks and law enforcement agencies, launched Project Protect, a partnership initiative targeting the money laundering aspect of human trafficking for sexual exploitation.

FINTRAC provides financial intelligence disclosures to law enforcement and security agencies in Canada to better understand and improve the detection of proceeds laundered from human trafficking for sexual exploitation. Since conception, Project Protect, has identified over 50 indicators, or markers, that may signal a pattern of suspicious activity related to the laundering of illicit proceeds (FINTRAC, 2021).

Recently, FINTRAC conducted an analysis of about 100,000 transactions related to human trafficking for sexual exploitation disclosed between 2018 and 2022. Findings indicate that most victims from these sexual exploitation-related FINTRAC disclosures provided sexual services at short-stay locations, such as hotels. However, illicit storefront businesses offering sexual services and private residences were also identified as locations where sexual exploitation occurred (FINTRAC, 2021).

Similar to findings from police-reported data, almost all victims from the sample of human trafficking for sexual exploitation-related FINTRAC disclosures were female, and a large proportion (60%) were under the age of 25. Most traffickers were males aged 24 to 36. A small proportion of traffickers were female, and most were victims themselves connected to male traffickers. The primary transactions identified in human trafficking for sexual exploitation-related disclosures were money transfers and cash deposits.

Multiple money laundering techniques were observed in the disclosures, including the use of prepaid credit cards, gift cards, investment accounts, and front companies owned by traffickers or associates. The involvement, or suspected involvement, of traffickers in other criminal activity was common, with many traffickers using victims to conduct crimes. Therefore, it was not clear if money laundered were proceeds from human trafficking specifically or from other illicit crimes (FINTRAC, 2021).

For more information on the indicators of laundering of proceeds from human trafficking for sexual exploitation, visit FINTRAC, 2021.

Charges laid or recommended against the large majority accused of human trafficking, when accused person identified

Four in ten (40%) incidents of police-reported human trafficking were cleared by the laying or recommendation of charges. This was similar to the proportion of violent incidents that were cleared in the same manner (43%). Over half (56%) of human trafficking incidents were not cleared, which could be due to several factors, including the incident still being under investigation, insufficient evidence available to proceed, or no accused identified. In comparison, a smaller proportion (37%) of violent incidents were not cleared.

A large majority (91%) of those accused of human trafficking had charges laid or recommended against them. This was the case for 92% of females accused of human trafficking and 91% of males accused. About nine in ten (91%) adults accused of human trafficking had charges laid or recommended against them. This was the case for 88% of youth accused of human trafficking.

Human trafficking incidents involving *Criminal Code* violations more often result in charges being laid compared with *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act*

Overall, a larger proportion of police-reported human trafficking incidents involving *Criminal Code* violations resulted in a charge compared to those incidents involving IRPA offences. Just over half (52%) of *Criminal Code* violations were cleared by charge compared with less than one in five (18%) incidents involving IRPA.²¹ Less than half (45%) of *Criminal Code* violations were not cleared. In comparison, around three-quarters (76%) of incidents involving IRPA were not cleared. Similar proportions of *Criminal Code* violations and IRPA violations were cleared otherwise (4% and 5%, respectively). In cases where an accused was identified, a large majority (93%) of *Criminal Code* violations resulted in charges compared to about four in five (81%) IRPA violations.²²

Text box 4

The Canadian Human Trafficking Hotline

In 2019, the Canadian Centre to End Human Trafficking (CCTEHT) launched the Canadian Human Trafficking Hotline (the Hotline), a confidential, multilingual service. Using a person-centred and trauma-informed approach, the Hotline connects those impacted by human trafficking, including victims, survivors and other signalers,²³ to services and supports. Data is collected from all incoming interactions, including inbound phone calls, emails, or web chat. It is important to note that the Hotline only captures a subset of human trafficking cases across Canada; therefore, the data is not fully representative of all trafficking that occurs across the country.

In its first year (2019), the Hotline identified 415 cases²⁴ of human trafficking involving 593 victims and in 2022, the Hotline identified 368 human trafficking cases and 518 victims (CCTEHT, 2023a; CCTEHT, 2023b). Since 2019,²⁵ the Hotline has identified 1,500 human trafficking cases, ranging from 251 to 460 per year. The most common forms of human trafficking identified through the Hotline were sex trafficking (1,029 cases) and labour trafficking (88 cases).

Since 2019, approximately two in five (37%) callers who contacted the Hotline were victims of human trafficking. About two-thirds (67%) of human trafficking incidents were disclosed in Ontario. This was followed by incidents disclosed in Alberta (10%), British Columbia (9%) and Quebec (7%). Similar to what was observed in police-reported data, a large majority (87%) of human trafficking incidents disclosed to the Hotline occurred in large urban centres²⁶ (CCTEHT, 2023b).

Between 2019 and 2022, Hotline staff provided 1,416 program and service referrals for cases related to human trafficking. Program and service referrals provided by Hotline staff were most often associated with shelter and housing (30%),²⁷ case management (19%), and supportive counselling (19%). Referrals for legal services (9%), financial support (6%), and health, mental health and addiction treatment (3%) were less common (CCTEHT, 2023a; CCTEHT, 2023b).

The Canadian Human Trafficking Hotline is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and in over 200 different languages, including 27 Indigenous languages. It can be accessed toll-free by phone at 1-833-900-1010 or online at Canadian Human Trafficking Hotline.

Section 2: Human trafficking in adult criminal court

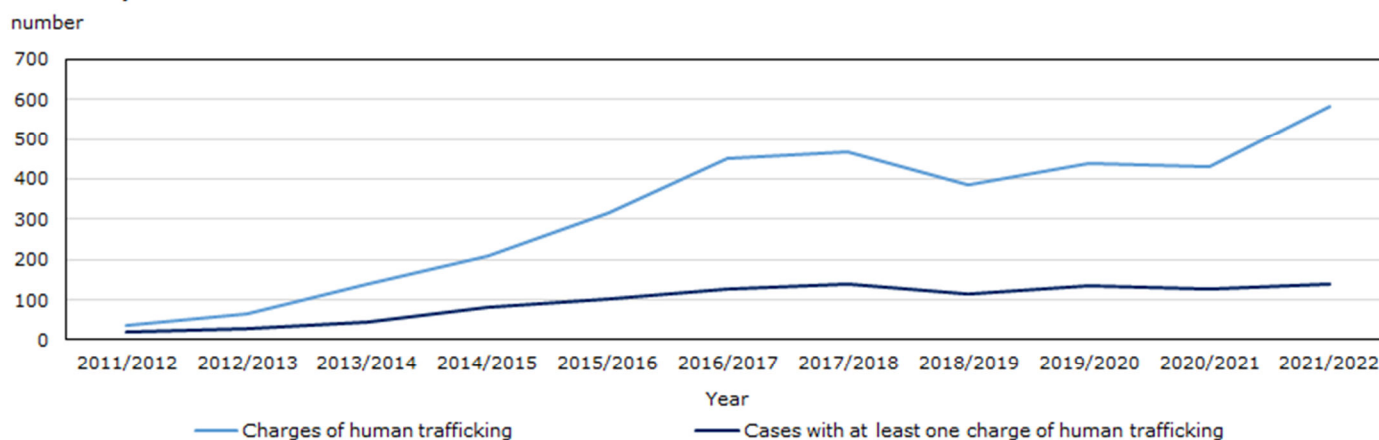
The Integrated Criminal Court Survey (ICCS) provides administrative data on human trafficking cases that are processed in Canadian adult criminal and youth courts. The ICCS provides information on court processing times, charge and case decisions, and sentencing outcomes. This section uses ICCS data to present information on human trafficking cases completed between 2011/2012 and 2021/2022 in adult criminal court (for information about youth court, see Text box 5). It is important to note that police-reported data and criminal court data on human trafficking may not fully align since some police-reported incidents may result in charges other than human trafficking pursued in court. Furthermore, since court cases enter the database only when cases are complete²⁸ or deemed complete, timelines for court data may not align with police-reported data.

Over past decade, charges and cases of human trafficking increased

There were 1,066 cases involving 3,523 human trafficking charges completed in adult criminal court between 2011/2012 and 2021/2022 in Canada.²⁹ In general, the number of human trafficking cases has increased over this time. In 2011/2012, there were 21 completed cases that involved at least one human trafficking charge, with a total of 36 charges of human trafficking among these cases. In comparison, there were 139 human trafficking cases with 582 human trafficking charges completed in 2021/2022. In total, there were more than six times as many human trafficking cases and sixteen times as many completed charges in 2021/2022 compared with 2011/2012.

Chart 4

Completed human trafficking charges and cases in adult criminal court, by year, Canada, 2011/2012 to 2021/2022



Note: Data are based on the adult criminal court portion of the survey where accused were aged 18 and older at the time of offence. Includes *Criminal Code* charges and cases only, excluding *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act* offences. A case involves one or more charges against an accused person or company that were processed by the courts at the same time and received a final decision. Data exclude information from superior courts in Ontario, Manitoba and Saskatchewan, as well as municipal courts in Quebec, due to data availability. Superior court data for Prince Edward Island was included as of 2018/2019.

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice and Community Safety Statistics, Integrated Criminal Court Survey.

In 2021/2022, there was an overall increase in the number of completed human trafficking charges and cases compared to the previous year. More specifically, there was a 9% increase (128 versus 139) in the number of cases and a 35% increase (431 versus 582) in the number of charges in 2021/2022 compared with 2020/2021. This increase in the number of cases and charges may be associated with the challenges on the court system brought on by the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, which resulted in backlogs and delays in court proceedings in Canada (Department of Justice Canada, 2023; Department of Justice Canada, 2022a).

Human trafficking cases average more charges and take longer to complete than other violent cases

Between 2011/2012 and 2021/2022, human trafficking cases took a median of 398 days to complete, more than twice as long as sex trade cases (170 days) or other violent offence³⁰ cases (187 days).

During this time, there were an average of 18 charges per completed adult criminal court case that included at least one charge of human trafficking. In comparison, there were fewer charges for other types of violent court cases, such as cases involving at least one charge related to the sex trade (average of 6 charges) or cases with at least one other violent offence charge (average of 4 charges).

More than three-quarters (77%) of the 1,047 multi-charge human trafficking cases also included a sex trade offence, and nearly three in ten included a charge of kidnapping or forcible confinement (28%), or a sexual offence charge (29%).³¹ Compared to single-charge cases, multi-charge cases may be more complex and generally require more time to complete in court.

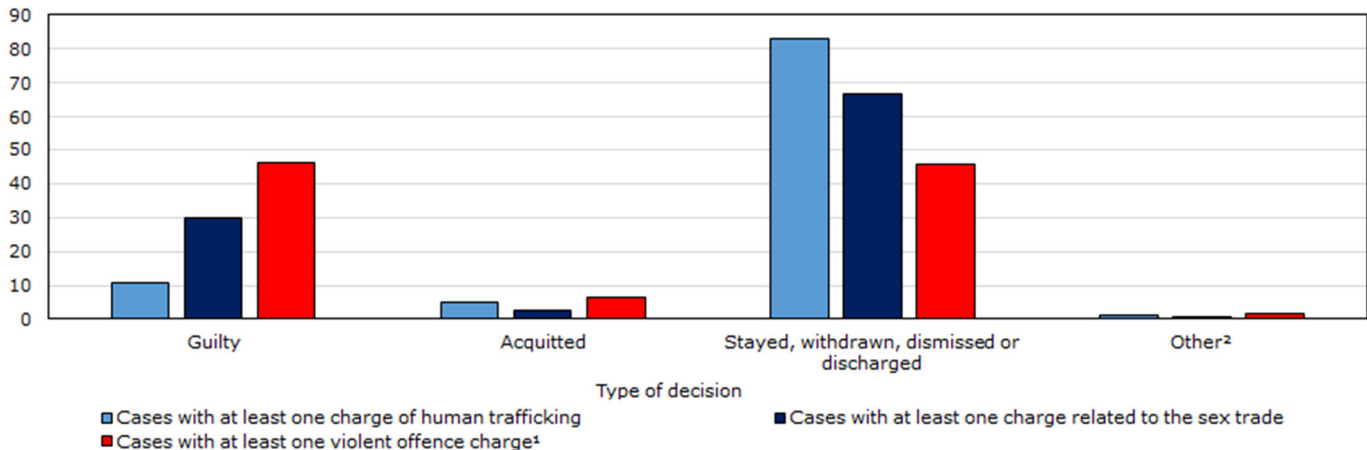
One in ten completed human trafficking cases result in a finding of guilt

Between 2011/2012 and 2021/2022, the most serious decision³² for the large majority (83%) of completed adult criminal court cases involving at least one human trafficking charge was a stay, a withdrawal, a dismissal, or a discharge (Chart 5).³³ In comparison, two-thirds (67%) of sex trade cases resulted in these decisions. A small proportion of human trafficking cases resulted in a guilty decision³⁴ (11%), an acquittal (5%), or another type of decision (1%).³⁵ In contrast, a larger proportion of cases with a sex trade charge (30%) and cases with a violent offence charge (46%) resulted in a guilty decision.

Chart 5

Type of decision in completed adult criminal court cases, by selected offence, Canada, 2011/2012 to 2021/2022

percent



1. Excludes cases with at least one charge of human trafficking and cases with at least one charge related to the sex trade.

2. Other decisions include being found unfit to stand trial, not criminally responsible and case waived out of province or territory. Includes any order where a guilty decision was not recorded, the court accepted a special plea or arguments related to the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* were raised.

Note: Data are based on the adult criminal court portion of the survey where accused were aged 18 and older at the time of offence. Includes *Criminal Code* charges and cases only, excluding *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act* offences. A decision is a judgment made by the court. A case involves one or more charges against an accused person or company that were processed by the courts at the same time and received a final decision. Data exclude information from superior courts in Ontario, Manitoba and Saskatchewan, as well as municipal courts in Quebec, due to data availability. Superior court data for Prince Edward Island was included as of 2018/2019.

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice and Community Safety Statistics, Integrated Criminal Court Survey.

Since 2011/2012, more than three-quarters (78%) of human trafficking cases with a guilty outcome for a human trafficking charge also resulted in a custodial sentence. In comparison, cases involving a sex trade charge or a violent offence charge with a guilty decision less commonly resulted in a custodial sentence (44% and 41%, respectively). The same proportion of human trafficking cases with a guilty outcome for a human trafficking charge resulted in probation (10%) or another type of sentence (10%). Probation was more common for cases involving a sex trade charge or a violent offence charge with a guilty outcome (26% and 42%, respectively).

Text box 5

Completed human trafficking cases in youth courts in Canada

Since 2011/2012, 5% of completed human trafficking cases involved a youth accused aged 12 to 17. During this period, there were 58 cases involving a human trafficking charge completed in youth court, totaling 125 charges.

All but one of the human trafficking cases completed in youth court were multi-charge cases. Of these 57 cases, 68% included a sex trade charge, 37% included a sexual offence charge and 33% included a charge of kidnapping or forcible confinement.³⁶

In human trafficking cases where the most serious sentence was associated with a finding of guilt for the human trafficking charge, 50% resulted in a sentence of custody and supervision, 19% deferred custody and supervision,³⁷ 25% probation and 6% involved another type of sentence.

Summary

Since 2012, there were 3,996 incidents of human trafficking, including *Criminal Code* and *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act* offences, reported by police services in Canada. During this time, incidents of human trafficking accounted for 0.02% of all police-reported crime and represented an average annual rate of 1.0 incidents per 100,000 population. The rate of human trafficking decreased from 1.5 incidents per 100,000 population in 2021 to 1.4 in 2022 and there was also a slight decrease in the number of police-reported incidents in 2022 compared to 2021.

Of the 3,103 detected victims of police-reported human trafficking in Canada between 2012 and 2022, the vast majority (94%) were women and girls and were overwhelmingly young, with approximately seven in ten (69%) under the age of 25. The age distribution of male victims of human trafficking was more varied. The large majority (91%) of detected victims of human trafficking knew their accused trafficker and about one-third (34%) of victims were trafficked by an intimate partner.

In 2022, four in ten (40%) incidents of police-reported human trafficking resulted in the laying or recommendation of charges. Over half (56%) of human trafficking incidents were not solved, or cleared, by police. This could be due to several factors, including the incident still being under investigation, insufficient evidence to proceed, or no accused person identified.

The number of human trafficking cases increased between 2011/2012 and 2021/2022. During this time, the most serious decision for the large majority (83%) of completed adult criminal court cases involving at least one human trafficking charge was a stay, a withdrawal, a dismissal, or a discharge.

Survey description

Uniform Crime Reporting Survey

The Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Survey collects detailed information on criminal incidents that have come to the attention of police services in Canada. Information includes characteristics of victims, accused persons and incidents. In 2022, data from police services covered 99% of the population of Canada. The count for a particular year represents incidents reported during that year, regardless of when the incident actually occurred.

One incident can involve multiple offences. In order to ensure comparability, aggregate counts are presented based on the most serious offence in the incident as determined by a standard classification rule used by all police services. For human trafficking, *Criminal Code* offences reflect the most serious violation against the victim and *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act* offences reflect the most serious violation in the incident. Where further detail is provided—such as characteristics of incidents, victims and accused persons—microdata from the Incident-based UCR are used, for which police services can report up to four violations for each incident. As such, the human trafficking-related offence may or may not be the most serious violation reported by police for the incident.

Given that small counts of victims and accused persons identified as “non-binary” may exist, the UCR data available to the public has been recoded to assign these counts to either “female” or “male” in order to ensure the protection of confidentiality and privacy. Victims and accused persons identified as non-binary have been assigned to either woman or man based on the regional distribution of victims’ and accused persons’ gender.

Integrated Criminal Court Survey

The Integrated Criminal Court Survey collects statistical information on adult and youth court cases involving *Criminal Code* and other federal statute offences.

All adult courts have reported to the adult component of the survey since the 2005/2006 fiscal year, with the exception of superior courts in Ontario, Manitoba and Saskatchewan, as well as municipal courts in Quebec. These data were not available for extraction from the provinces' electronic reporting systems and therefore, were not reported to the survey. Superior court data for Prince Edward Island was included as of 2018/2019.

The primary unit of analysis is a case. A case is defined as one or more charges against an accused person or company that were processed by the courts at the same time and received a final decision. A case combines all charges against the same person having one or more key overlapping dates (date of offence, date of initiation, date of first appearance, date of decision or date of sentencing) into a single case.

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Notes

1. Human trafficking is different than human smuggling, which involves an individual illegally—but voluntarily—crossing an international border in agreement with another person or a group of people. Human smuggling ends once the individual has reached the destination country (Public Safety Canada, 2022b). Some people who are smuggled may become victims of human trafficking once in the destination country.
2. Human trafficking for sexual exploitation and labour trafficking are the most discussed forms of human trafficking. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, other forms of human trafficking include forced criminal activity, exploitative begging, organ removal, forced marriage, baby selling and illegal adoption (UNODC, 2021).
3. One incident can involve multiple offences. In order to ensure comparability, aggregate counts are presented based on the most serious offence in the incident as determined by a standard classification rule used by all police services. For human trafficking, *Criminal Code* offences reflect the most serious violation against the victim and *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act* offences reflect the most serious violation in the incident. The data reflect the report date of an incident (i.e., when it came to the attention of police); therefore, some human trafficking incidents may have occurred prior to 2012 but were reported during the 2012 to 2022 reference period. Trafficking in persons incidents reported to the Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Survey may be undercounted due to differences in police reporting practices for this violation.
4. For reference, in 2022, Saskatchewan accounted for 3% of the Canadian population and 3% of police-reported human trafficking incidents.
5. A census metropolitan area (CMA) consists of one or more neighbouring municipalities situated around a major urban core. A CMA must have a total population of at least 100,000, of which 50,000 or more live in the urban core. To be included in the CMA, adjacent municipalities must have a high degree of integration with the central urban area, as measured by commuting flows derived from census data. A CMA typically comprises more than one police service. It is important to note that while official police-reported data on crime from the Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Survey use Statistics Canada's standard Census Metropolitan Area (CMA) names, the boundaries for the policing-based CMAs do not always fully align with the standard CMA geographic units used for disseminating information about the Census of Population.
6. Ottawa refers to the Ontario part of the Ottawa–Gatineau census metropolitan area.
7. The rate of police-reported human trafficking in Thunder Bay has continually increased over the past several years. There were no such incidents reported between 2011 and 2016. In 2017, the rate was 1.6 incidents per 100,000 population, after which it continued to climb: 5.6 in 2018, 9.6 in 2019, 15.9 in 2020 and 28.1 in 2021. In 2021, all incidents of human trafficking were related to the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act*.
8. Data are based on the Uniform Crime Reporting Survey, Trend Database.
9. Police services can report up to four violations for each incident. As such, the human trafficking-related offence may or may not be the most serious violation reported by police for the incident. Reporting of additional violations is not mandatory and, therefore, information on additional violations may be underrepresented. Since police services can report up to four violations for an incident, percentages do not add up to 100.
10. As of December 2014, new laws were enacted in Canada which introduced some new violations and, among other changes, classified certain offences relating to the sex trade as violent crimes. These legislative changes were reflected in police-reported data as new violent crime categories were added to the Uniform Crime Reporting Survey. For the purposes of analysis, all offences related to the sex trade reported by police are included in this group as a reflection of the volume and type of related offences. These offences include obtaining sexual services for consideration, obtaining sexual services for consideration from a person younger than age 18, material benefit from sexual services, material benefit from sexual services provided by a person younger than age 18, procuring, procuring a person younger than age 18, advertising sexual services, public communication to sell sexual services and offences related to impeding traffic to buy or sell sexual services.
11. Offences related to the deprivation of freedom include, for example, kidnapping and forcible confinement.
12. In the Uniform Crime Reporting Survey, victim information is reported by police for *Criminal Code* incidents of human trafficking, but not for *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act* violations. As a result, there are fewer victims of police-reported human trafficking than there are incidents, and analysis of victim characteristics is based on *Criminal Code* human trafficking incidents only.
13. Given that small counts of victims identified as “non-binary” may exist, the Uniform Crime Reporting Survey data available to the public has been recoded to assign these counts to either “female” or “male” in order to ensure the protection of confidentiality and privacy. Percent calculation excludes victims whose gender was unknown.

14. Percent calculation excludes victims whose age was unknown and those whose ages were reported as 80 years and older, but were identified as possible instances of miscoding.
15. Percent calculation excludes victims where level of injury was unknown.
16. Minor physical injury refers to injuries that required no professional medical treatment or only some first aid (e.g., bandage, ice), while major physical injury refers to injuries that required professional medical attention at the scene or transportation to a medical facility, or injuries that resulted in death.
17. Excludes those with unknown age and those where age was greater than 110 due to possible instances of miscoding of unknown age within this age category. Given that small counts of accused persons identified as “non-binary” may exist, the Uniform Crime Reporting Survey data available to the public has been recoded to assign these counts to either “female” or “male” in order to ensure the protection of confidentiality and privacy.
18. Includes victims aged 15 and older who were victimized by current and former legally married spouses and common-law partners. Also includes victims aged 12 and older who were victimized by current and former boyfriends and girlfriends, and other intimate relationships (i.e., persons with whom the victim had a sexual relationship but none of the other relationship categories apply).
19. Includes relationships based on illegal activities.
20. Includes, for example, parents, siblings and extended family members.
21. Incidents that involved both *Criminal Code* offences and *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act* offences are counted twice.
22. Persons accused of both *Criminal Code* offences and *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act* offences are counted twice.
23. Other signalers include friends, family, other community members, and service providers.
24. A case refers to a unique situation, event or series of events that prompted an individual to contact the Hotline.
25. The collection period is from May 29, 2019 (Hotline launch date) to December 31, 2022.
26. Data is based on geographic data that callers voluntarily disclose to the Hotline. Not all callers provide this information.
27. Shelter/housing includes emergency and short term, transitional, and long-term housing options.
28. A charge is deemed complete when processed and resolved by the courts.
29. As of 2005/2006, all adult provincial and territorial courts in the ten provinces and three territories reported to the survey. Information from superior courts in Ontario, Manitoba and Saskatchewan as well as municipal courts in Quebec could not be extracted from their electronic reporting systems and was therefore unavailable. Superior court data for Prince Edward Island were made available in 2018/2019. The absence of data from superior courts in Ontario, Manitoba and Saskatchewan may have resulted in a slight underestimation of the severity of sentences since some of the most serious cases, which are likely to result in the most severe sanctions, are processed in superior courts.
30. In this section, other violent offence cases exclude cases with at least one human trafficking charge and cases with at least one sex trade charge.
31. Percentages do not add up to 100 as some cases have more than two concomitant charges.
32. Court decisions for each charge in a case are ranked from most to least serious as follows: guilty; guilty of a lesser offence; acquitted; stay of proceeding; withdrawn, dismissed or discharged; not criminally responsible; other; and transfer of court jurisdiction.
33. Represents the most serious decision for a given offence of interest. For example, when looking at human trafficking cases specifically, the type of decision for a case represents the most serious decision which was rendered on a human trafficking charge. This approach differs from the most serious offence method that is typically used when analyzing courts data.

34. Guilty findings include guilty of the charged offence, of an included offence, of an attempt of the charged offence, or of an attempt of an included offence. This category also includes guilty pleas, and cases where an absolute or conditional discharge has been imposed.

35. Other decisions.

36. Percentages do not add up to 100 as some cases have more than two concomitant charges.

37. This judicial outcome is specific to youth sentenced under the *Youth Criminal Justice Act*.

Detailed data tables

Table 1
Police-reported incidents of human trafficking, by statute and province or territory, 2012 to 2022

Province or territory	Human trafficking incidents reported in 2022				Human trafficking incidents reported in 2012 to 2022			
	<i>Criminal Code</i>	<i>Immigration and Refugee Protection Act</i>	Total	rate	<i>Criminal Code</i>	<i>Immigration and Refugee Protection Act</i>	Total	average annual rate ¹
	number				number			
Newfoundland and Labrador	3	1	4	0.8	8	4	12	0.2
Prince Edward Island	0	0	0	0.0	0	0	0	0.0
Nova Scotia	45	1	46	4.5	235	100	335	3.1
New Brunswick	10	2	12	1.5	31	5	36	0.4
Quebec	36	1	37	0.4	360	33	393	0.4
Ontario	254	99	353	2.3	1,678	907	2,585	1.6
Manitoba	1	0	1	0.1	39	3	42	0.3
Saskatchewan	9	5	14	1.2	83	22	105	0.8
Alberta	22	6	28	0.6	194	66	260	0.5
British Columbia	29	1	30	0.6	205	11	216	0.4
Yukon	1	0	1	2.3	8	0	8	1.7
Northwest Territories	0	0	0	0.0	1	0	1	0.2
Nunavut	1	0	1	2.5	2	0	2	0.5
Canada²	411	117	528	1.4	2,844	1,152	3,996	1.0

1. This rate is the average of the annual rates from 2012 to 2022.

2. Under the authority of the Canadian Forces Provost Marshal, the Canadian Forces Military Police Group started reporting incidents to the Uniform Crime Reporting Survey in 2020. For this reason, provincial and territorial counts may not equal counts for Canada.

Note: This table is based on aggregate data, and counts are based on the most serious violation in a criminal incident. Rates are calculated on the basis of 100,000 population.

Populations are based upon July 1 estimates from Statistics Canada, Centre for Demography. The Uniform Crime Reporting Survey was amended in 2011 to allow police services to report the specific offence of human trafficking under the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act*. Once the specific violation code was introduced, a small number of incidents which took place prior to this date were reported.

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice and Community Safety Statistics, Uniform Crime Reporting Survey.

Table 2
Police-reported incidents of human trafficking, by statute and census metropolitan area, 2012 to 2022

Census metropolitan area (CMA) ¹	Human trafficking incidents reported in 2022				Human trafficking incidents reported in 2012 to 2022			
	Criminal Code	Immigration and Refugee Protection Act	Total	rate	Criminal Code	Immigration and Refugee Protection Act	Total	average annual rate ²
St. John's	1	1	2	0.9	2	4	6	0.3
Halifax	27	0	27	5.6	145	98	243	5.0
Moncton ³	8	1	9	5.0	...	...	...	...
Saint John ³	0	0	0	0.0	...	...	...	...
Saguenay	1	0	1	0.6	1	0	1	0.1
Québec	6	1	7	0.8	54	3	57	0.6
Sherbrooke	2	0	2	0.9	3	0	3	0.1
Trois-Rivières	0	0	0	0.0	0	0	0	0.0
Montréal	15	0	15	0.3	237	12	249	0.5
Gatineau ⁴	7	0	7	2.0	39	0	39	1.1
Ottawa ⁵	23	0	23	2.0	354	10	364	3.2
Kingston	3	1	4	2.3	7	21	28	1.5
Belleville ⁶	0	1	1	0.9	...	...	...	...
Peterborough	5	0	5	3.8	41	14	55	3.9
Toronto	125	29	154	2.3	611	300	911	1.3
Hamilton	7	16	23	2.9	83	77	160	1.9
St. Catharines–Niagara	7	10	17	3.4	36	100	136	2.6
Kitchener–Cambridge–Waterloo	22	1	23	3.6	85	13	98	1.5
Brantford	2	1	3	1.9	13	6	19	1.1
Guelph	1	5	6	4.0	12	10	22	1.4
London	19	2	21	3.6	102	28	130	2.2
Windsor	4	4	8	2.2	28	70	98	2.6
Barrie	11	2	13	4.8	50	27	77	2.8
Greater Sudbury	2	0	2	1.2	32	1	33	1.8
Thunder Bay	1	4	5	4.0	36	45	81	5.9
Winnipeg	0	0	0	0.0	25	2	27	0.3
Regina	0	3	3	1.1	4	12	16	0.6
Saskatoon	6	2	8	2.3	60	9	69	1.9
Lethbridge ⁶	2	0	2	1.5	...	...	...	...
Calgary	4	1	5	0.3	63	14	77	0.5
Edmonton	10	5	15	1.0	62	47	109	0.7

See notes at the end of the table.

Table 2
Police-reported incidents of human trafficking, by statute and census metropolitan area, 2012 to 2022

	Human trafficking incidents reported in 2022				Human trafficking incidents reported in 2012 to 2022			
	<i>Criminal Code</i>	<i>Immigration and Refugee Protection Act</i>	Total	rate	<i>Criminal Code</i>	<i>Immigration and Refugee Protection Act</i>	Total	average annual rate ²
Census metropolitan area (CMA)¹		number		rate		number		
Kelowna	2	0	2	0.9	20	0	20	0.9
Abbotsford–Mission	0	0	0	0.0	8	0	8	0.4
Vancouver	15	1	16	0.6	109	8	117	0.4
Victoria	2	0	2	0.5	15	0	15	0.3
CMA total	340	91	431	1.5	2,362	945	3,307	1.1
Non-CMA total	71	26	97	0.9	482	207	689	0.6
Canada⁷	411	117	528	1.4	2,844	1,152	3,996	1.0

... not applicable

1. A census metropolitan area (CMA) consists of one or more neighbouring municipalities situated around a major urban core. A CMA must have a total population of at least 100,000, of which 50,000 or more live in the urban core. To be included in the CMA, adjacent municipalities must have a high degree of integration with the central urban area, as measured by commuting flows derived from census data. A CMA typically comprises more than one police service. CMA populations have been adjusted to follow policing boundaries. The Oshawa CMA is excluded from this table due to the incongruity between the police service jurisdictional boundaries and the CMA boundaries. It is important to note that while official police-reported data on crime from the Uniform Crime Reporting Survey use Statistics Canada's standard CMA names, the boundaries for the policing-based CMAs do not always fully align with the standard CMA geographic units used for disseminating information about the Census of Population.

2. This rate is the average of the annual rates from 2012 to 2022.

3. Part way through 2013, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police revised policing boundaries for rural detachments in New Brunswick. This resulted in a change in the census metropolitan area (CMA) boundaries that are determined for the purpose of reporting crime statistics. As such, 2013 data for the New Brunswick CMAs of Saint John and Moncton are not comparable to previous or future years. Further, data from 2014 onward are not comparable to years prior to 2014.

4. Gatineau refers to the Quebec part of the Ottawa–Gatineau census metropolitan area.

5. Ottawa refers to the Ontario part of the Ottawa–Gatineau census metropolitan area.

6. Following the 2016 Census of Population, Belleville and Lethbridge were reclassified as census metropolitan areas. As such, data for the 2012-2022 period are not available.

7. Under the authority of the Canadian Forces Provost Marshal, the Canadian Forces Military Police Group started reporting incidents to the Uniform Crime Reporting Survey in 2020. For this reason, CMA and non-CMA counts may not equal counts for Canada.

Note: This table is based on aggregate data, and counts are based on the most serious violation in a criminal incident. Rates are calculated on the basis of 100,000 population.

Populations are based upon July 1 estimates from Statistics Canada, Centre for Demography. The Uniform Crime Reporting Survey was amended in 2011 to allow police services to report the specific offence of human trafficking under the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act*. Once the specific violation code was introduced, a small number of incidents which took place prior to this date were reported.

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice and Community Safety Statistics, Uniform Crime Reporting Survey.