

Trafficking in persons in Canada, 2018

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In 2018, the number of human trafficking cases reported to police in Canada declined for the first time since 2010, from 348 incidents in 2017 to 315 in 2018. In the past decade, there have been more than 1,700 incidents of human trafficking reported by Canadian police services, and almost all of the victims were women or girls.

Trafficking in persons, or human trafficking, occurs around the world. It violates human rights and is a criminal offence in Canada. Human trafficking involves recruiting, transporting, transferring, holding, concealing, or exercising control over a person, for the purposes of exploitation. It is done without the consent of the individuals, and often involves forced labour or sexual exploitation. Human trafficking is different from human smuggling, which involves the illegal migration of individuals, for profit and with the individuals' consent, across international borders.

Official statistics on human trafficking provide important information about the nature of this problem in Canada. However, human trafficking can be subject to underreporting in official data because it is difficult to detect and can be influenced by police practices, resources, and priorities. Criminal court data can underrepresent the volume of human trafficking-related cases heard in Canada, due to the fact that prosecuting human trafficking charges can be challenging and prosecutors sometimes use other charges when addressing human trafficking in the criminal justice system.

The *Juristat* article, "[Trafficking in persons in Canada, 2018](#)," released today, provides an overview of data on human trafficking reported by police services and courts in Canada. In addition, the infographic "[Police-reported human trafficking in Canada, 2009-2018](#)" presents some recent trends in police-reported data on human trafficking.

The COVID-19 pandemic is likely to have a considerable impact on the nature of human trafficking. Readers should note that these data are from prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, and future analysis will be able to assess the impact of the pandemic on this type of crime in Canada.

Police-reported human trafficking declines in 2018

Police reported 315 incidents of human trafficking in Canada in 2018, down from 348 in 2017 when there were 348 incidents, representing the first annual decline since 2010. Despite this decline, the overall number of police-reported incidents of human trafficking has been increasing over the past decade.

Since 2009, police services have reported just over 1,700 incidents of human trafficking in Canada. This represents an average annual rate of 0.5 incidents for every 100,000 Canadians. Among the provinces and territories, the highest rates over this period were recorded in Nova Scotia (1.0 per 100,000 population) and Ontario (0.9 per 100,000 population).

The vast majority (90%) of incidents of human trafficking were reported by police services in census metropolitan areas. However, this is not necessarily an indication of where victims originate, as their traffickers may transport them to urban centres directly from other countries or from elsewhere in Canada.

Most victims of human trafficking are young women

Nearly all (97%) victims of police-reported human trafficking were women and girls. Close to three-quarters (74%) of all victims were under the age of 25.

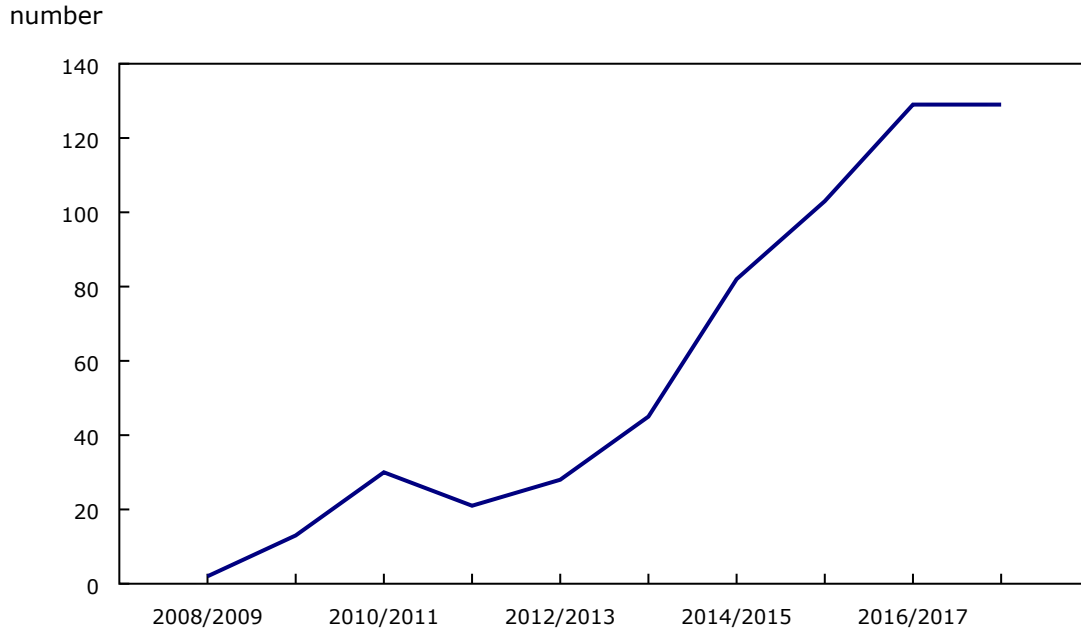
The majority (92%) of victims of human trafficking knew the person accused of trafficking them. Most commonly, victims were trafficked by a friend or acquaintance (31%) or a current or former spouse, common-law partner, or other intimate partner (29%).



Human trafficking charges and cases in adult criminal court are generally increasing

In adult criminal courts, 582 cases involving at least one charge of human trafficking were completed from 2008/2009 to 2017/2018. Just as the volume of human trafficking incidents coming to the attention of police has increased over the past decade, adult criminal court cases involving human trafficking have also been generally increasing.

Chart 1
Completed cases related to human trafficking in adult criminal courts in Canada, 2008/2009 to 2017/2018



Note(s): New human trafficking legislation was introduced in Canada in 2005/2006. However, the first court case involving a human trafficking offence under this new legislation was completed in Canada in 2008/2009. Includes *Criminal Code* charges and cases only. Does not include human trafficking offences under the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act*. A case is 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 Prince Edward Island, Ontario, Manitoba and Saskatchewan as well as municipal courts in Quebec due to the unavailability of data.

Source(s): Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice and Community Safety Statistics, Integrated Criminal Court Survey (3312).

Many incidents identified as human trafficking by police are not processed as such in courts

Other Canadian research suggests that charges of human trafficking may not be pursued as such once they come before the courts. Criminal court cases involving human trafficking, on average, involved more charges, took longer to complete, and were less likely to result in a guilty decision when compared with criminal court cases for other violent offences. The added complexity and lower likelihood of successful prosecution of human trafficking cases may influence the decision to pursue charges from the outset of a court case.

Data integration between police-reported human trafficking incidents from 2009 to 2017 and data from adult criminal and youth courts from 2008/2009 to 2017/2018 in Canada showed that this was the case for nearly half (45%) of incidents reported by police as human trafficking. These cases were commonly pursued as charges of non-violent offences under the *Criminal Code* or other federal statutes (52%).

Among the criminal cases pursued as charges of non-violent offences, 7 in 10 were offences against the administration of justice or offences that were primarily related to the possession or trafficking of drugs, weapons, or other stolen goods.

Note to readers

Police-reported data comes from the Uniform Crime Reporting Survey, and the category of human trafficking offences includes six Criminal Code offences and an offence under the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act that targets international cross-border trafficking. Police services can report up to four violations for each criminal incident.

- Criminal Code offences: trafficking in persons; trafficking in persons under 18 years; material benefit from trafficking in persons; material benefit from trafficking of persons under 18 years; withholding or destroying documents; and withholding or destroying documents to facilitate trafficking of persons under 18 years.
- Immigration and Refugee Protection Act: trafficking in persons.

Data on human trafficking in adult criminal and youth courts comes from the Integrated Criminal Court Survey and includes only charges under the Criminal Code. 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.

Definitions, data sources and methods: survey numbers [3302](#) and [3312](#).

The article "[Trafficking in persons in Canada, 2018](#)" is now available as part of the publication *Juristat* ([85-002-X](#)). The infographic "[Police-reported human trafficking in Canada, 2009-2018](#)," which is part of the series *Statistics Canada — Infographics* ([11-627-M](#)) is now available.

For more information, or to enquire about the concepts, methods or data quality of this release, contact us (toll-free 1-800-263-1136; 514-283-8300; STATCAN.infostats-infostats.STATCAN@canada.ca) or Media Relations (613-951-4636; STATCAN.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.STATCAN@canada.ca).