

Trafficking in persons in Canada, 2021

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From 2011 to 2021, police reported over 3,500 incidents of human trafficking in Canada and human trafficking accounted for 0.01% of all police-reported crimes. The vast majority (96%) of victims were women and girls, while 8 in 10 accused persons were men and boys.

Trafficking in persons, also referred to as human trafficking, is a complex crime that is often difficult to detect. It involves the recruiting, transporting, transferring, receiving, holding, concealing or harbouring of a person—or the exercise of control, direction or influence over the movements of a person—in order to exploit them. Whether it is sexual exploitation, forced labour or another type of exploitation, victims of this type of crime often come from vulnerable groups in society.

The *Juristat Bulletin—Quick Fact*, "[Trafficking in persons in Canada, 2021](#)," is released today. The article is based on data from the Uniform Crime Reporting Survey and the Integrated Criminal Court Survey and provides an overview of trends in police-reported human trafficking and outcomes of cases that go through the court system. It should be noted that police-reported data are an underestimation of the true scope of this issue in Canada; however, monitoring this type of crime is an important starting point.

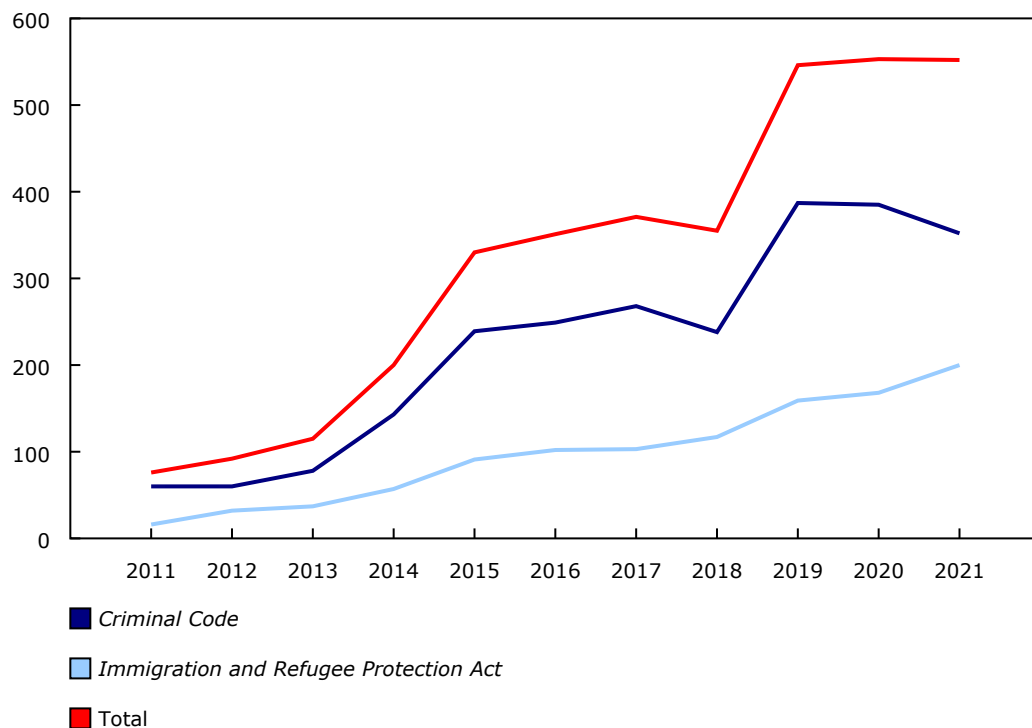
Number of police-reported incidents of human trafficking remains unchanged in 2021

While there was a slight decrease in the rate of police-reported human trafficking in 2021 (1.4 incidents per 100,000 population) compared with the previous year (1.5), the number of human trafficking incidents remained unchanged in 2021, with 552 incidents reported to police compared with 553 the previous year. More broadly, the number of incidents of human trafficking increased steadily year over year from 2011 to 2017, followed by a notable increase from 2018 to 2019, and then it remained relatively unchanged from 2019 to 2021.



Chart 1
Police-reported incidents of human trafficking, by statute, Canada, 2011 to 2021

number of incidents



Note(s): 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(s): Uniform Crime Reporting Survey (3302).

The relative stability in the overall number of police-reported incidents of human trafficking in 2020 and 2021 may be the result of circumstances surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic. With people isolating and spending more time at home, away from public view, the police's ability to detect this type of crime could have been impacted.

From 2011 to 2021, the large majority (83%) of human trafficking incidents were reported to police in census metropolitan areas (CMAs). The concentration of such incidents in urban areas is likely impacted by regional differences, such as awareness campaigns, specialized training and local expertise in human trafficking. In addition, certain CMAs are located along the route of human trafficking corridors and may act as hubs for such criminal activity.

From 2011 to 2021, the average annual rate of police-reported human trafficking varied across the provinces. Nova Scotia (2.7 incidents per 100,000 population) and Ontario (1.4) had the highest rates, while Newfoundland and Labrador (0.1) had the lowest, and Prince Edward Island reported no such incidents during the same period. The relatively high number of incidents in Ontario may be attributed to the concentration of urban areas in the province. Such population centres may form a part of human trafficking corridors, used by traffickers to increase profits, avoid detection and isolate victims through psychological control. As for Nova Scotia, its coastal location is likely an important factor in the relatively high proportion of human trafficking incidents in the province. In 2021, three provinces had rates of human trafficking that were higher than the national rate (1.4 incidents per 100,000 population): Nova Scotia (5.3), Ontario (2.3) and Saskatchewan (1.8).

Women and girls account for nearly all detected victims of human trafficking

Of the 2,688 detected victims of police-reported human trafficking in Canada from 2011 to 2021, the vast majority (96%) were women and girls and nearly one-quarter (24%) were under the age of 18. While men and boys accounted for a small proportion (4%) of detected victims, they represented a large majority (81%) of persons accused of human trafficking.

Overall, just over 9 in 10 victims of police-reported human trafficking (91%) knew their accused trafficker. In total, one-third (33%) of victims were trafficked by an intimate partner. It has been documented that traffickers often pose as potential romantic partners to recruit or lure individuals, with the end goal of trafficking them.

It is challenging to accurately measure this type of crime to obtain a clear understanding of its prevalence. When research and efforts target a specific type of human trafficking, it is typically related to sexual exploitation rather than forced labour. As such, the victimization of women and girls—who are most often the target of sexual exploitation—is discussed more often than that of men and boys.

Less than half of detected incidents of human trafficking result in the laying or recommendation of charges

From 2011 to 2021, 4 in 10 incidents of police reported human trafficking (42%) were cleared by the laying or recommendation of charges, a proportion similar to that of violent incidents overall (43%). Meanwhile, over half (54%) of human trafficking incidents were not cleared, meaning police had not identified an accused person, compared with just over one-third (35%) of violent incidents generally. The remaining incidents were cleared another way (for example, the victim requested no further action be taken).

Charges were laid or recommended against 9 in 10 persons accused of human trafficking (91%) that were identified, and this was similar for female (92%) and male (91%) accused.

The number of completed human trafficking charges and cases declines from previous year

From 2010/2011 to 2020/2021, there were 948 cases involving 2,992 human trafficking charges completed in adult criminal court in Canada and, during this time, the number of human trafficking charges and cases increased in general. However, in 2020/2021, there was a decline in the number of completed human trafficking charges (-9%, from 439 to 401) and cases (-13%, from 136 to 119). The number of completed cases and charges—human trafficking or not—is likely impacted by the ongoing challenges of the pandemic, which affected court proceedings and created case backlogs in Canada.

From 2010/2011 to 2020/2021, the median amount of time to complete a human trafficking case was 382 days. This was more than twice as long as sex trade cases (147 days) and other violent offence cases (181 days).

Human trafficking cases take longer to complete in adult criminal court, small proportion result in a guilty decision for a human trafficking charge

Around one in eight human trafficking cases (12%) completed in adult criminal court from 2010/2011 to 2020/2021 resulted in a guilty decision for a human trafficking charge. In comparison, a guilty decision for a sex trade or other violent offence charge was more common for cases with a sex trade charge (31%) and cases with a violent offence charge (47%).

When cases of human trafficking resulted in a guilty outcome for a human trafficking charge, the most common sentencing outcome was custody (78%), more common than in cases involving a sex trade charge (43%) or a violent offence charge (41%).

Note to readers

Police-reported data come from the Uniform Crime Reporting Survey, and the category of human trafficking offences includes six provisions under the Criminal Code and one 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.*
- *Immigrant and Refugee Protection Act: trafficking in persons into Canada.*

Data on human trafficking in courts come from the Integrated Criminal Court Survey, which collects statistical information on adult criminal and youth court cases involving Criminal Code and other federal statute offences. 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. The "guilty findings" category includes 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.

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

The article "[Trafficking in persons in Canada, 2021](#)" is now available as part of the publication *Juristat Bulletin—Quick Fact* ([85-005-X](#)).

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; infostats@statcan.gc.ca) or Media Relations (statcan.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.statcan@statcan.gc.ca).