

Juristat Bulletin—Quick Fact

Trafficking in persons in Canada, 2021

by Shana Conroy

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Trafficking in persons in Canada, 2021

by Shana Conroy

Trafficking in persons—often 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 or facilitate the exploitation of that person (Public Safety Canada, 2022a; Public Safety Canada, 2022b; UNODC, 2021).¹ Whether it is sexual exploitation, forced labour or another type of exploitation,² victims of this type of crime often come from vulnerable groups in society (Casassa et al., 2021; CCTEHT, 2021b; Public Safety Canada, 2022a; Public Safety Canada, 2022b).

Accurately measuring this type of crime to obtain a clear understanding of its prevalence is challenging; instead, research is often qualitative in nature, focusing on a victim-centred and trauma-informed approach (see, for example, Dell et al., 2019, Hemmings et al., 2016 and Knight et al., 2022). Further, when research and efforts target a specific type of human trafficking, it is typically related to sexual exploitation rather than forced labour (Matte Guilmain & Hanley, 2020; Tien, 2013; Zimmerman & Schenker, 2014). 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 (Cole, 2018; Dennis, 2008; Jones, 2010).

Human trafficking, whether domestic or international in nature, is prohibited by law in Canada and criminal offences are outlined in the *Criminal Code*, as are related offences under the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act* (IRPA) (see Text box 1). The Government of Canada is committed to preventing and addressing human trafficking, as outlined in the *National Strategy to Combat Human Trafficking* (Public Safety Canada, 2022b). Using a whole-of-government approach, the *National Strategy* consolidates the efforts of relevant federal departments to deal with this crime and support victims from multiple angles.

Following the *Juristat* release, “Trafficking in persons in Canada, 2020” (Conroy & Sutton, 2022), this *Juristat Bulletin—Quick Fact* provides updated data for 2021. Data are based on the Uniform Crime Reporting Survey and the Integrated Criminal Court Survey. It should be noted that police-reported data are an underestimation of the true scope of this issue in Canada. Regardless, administrative data sources like those from the police are an important starting point to monitor this type of crime.

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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 provisions 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 2010, section 279.011 was added to the *Criminal Code* which imposed mandatory minimum penalties for individuals convicted 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 human 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

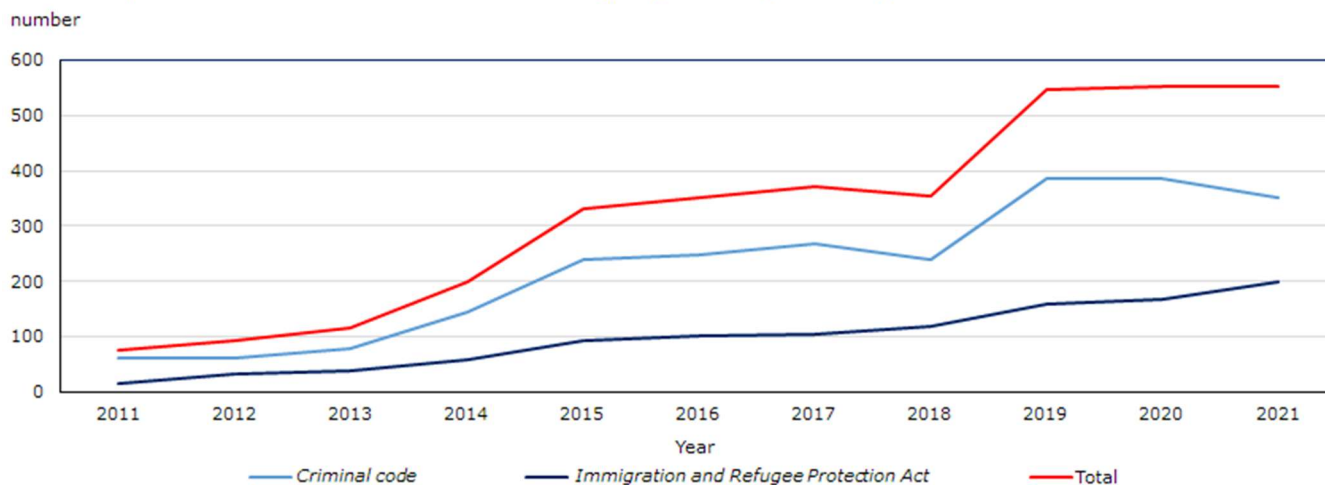
This section presents police-reported data from the Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Survey. Data from 2011 to 2021 are discussed in terms of high-level trends by geographic location, and characteristics of incidents, victims and accused persons are examined.

Number of police-reported incidents of human trafficking remained stable in 2021

There were 3,541 police-reported incidents of human trafficking in Canada between 2011 and 2021.³ During this time, human trafficking accounted for 0.01% of all police-reported crime, and the average annual rate was 0.9 incidents per 100,000 population.

The number of human trafficking incidents remained stable in 2021, with 552 incidents reported to police compared to 553 the year before (Chart 1). There was, however, a slight decrease in rate (1.4 incidents per 100,000 population in 2021 versus 1.5 in 2020). More broadly, the number of incidents of human trafficking increased year over year between 2011 and 2017, there was a notable increase between 2018 and 2019, and then it remained relatively unchanged between 2019 and 2021.

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



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 human trafficking includes offences under the *Criminal Code* and offences under IRPA. The overall stability in the number of human trafficking incidents between 2020 and 2021 was due to opposing trends: while there were 33 fewer *Criminal Code* incidents in 2021, there were 32 more IRPA incidents.

Of the human trafficking incidents that were reported to police between 2011 and 2021, seven in ten (69%) were related to the *Criminal Code* while three in ten (31%) were related to IRPA. While these proportions have remained somewhat consistent over the years, human trafficking IRPA offences increased every year since 2011. In contrast, human trafficking *Criminal Code* offences increased in general during the same period; however, they peaked in 2019 (387 incidents), remained relatively stable in 2020 (385) and declined in 2021 (352).

Nova Scotia, Ontario and Saskatchewan have a rate of human trafficking above the national average

Nova Scotia had the highest average annual rate of police-reported human trafficking between 2011 and 2021 (2.7 incidents per 100,000 population) (Table 1). In 2021 specifically, some provinces had rates of human trafficking that were higher than the national rate (1.4 incidents): Nova Scotia (5.3), Ontario (2.3) and Saskatchewan (1.8). Proportionally, 62% of all human trafficking incidents were reported in Ontario and 10% were reported in Nova Scotia, despite the respective populations for these provinces accounting for 39% and 3% of the Canadian population in 2021 (Statistics Canada, 2021).⁴

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 part of human trafficking corridors, used by traffickers to increase profits, avoid detection and isolate victims through psychological control (CCTEHT, 2021a).⁵ Further, with the high volume of land border crossings in Ontario, 36% of human trafficking incidents reported in the province between 2011 and 2021 were IRPA-related. In Nova Scotia, its coastal location is likely an important factor in the relatively high proportion of human trafficking incidents in the province. Since 2011, 42% of human trafficking incidents in Nova Scotia were related to IRPA offences, the highest of any province or territory.

More than four in five incidents of human trafficking reported to police in census metropolitan areas

Between 2011 and 2021, the large majority (83%) of human trafficking incidents were reported to police in census metropolitan areas (CMAs),⁶ and this was consistent in 2021 specifically (82%) (Table 2). Meanwhile, since 2011, a relatively smaller proportion of violent incidents (human trafficking or not) were reported in CMAs (57%).

Since 2011, more than four in ten (45%) incidents of human trafficking were reported to police in four CMAs: Toronto (776 incidents, 22% of all incidents in Canada), Ottawa⁷ (345, 10% of all incidents), Montréal (245, 7% of all incidents) and Halifax (216, 6% of all incidents). Four other CMAs also had a relatively high number of such incidents: Hamilton (140 incidents), St. Catharines–Niagara (120), Vancouver (118) and London (111). In all, these eight CMAs accounted for more than half (58%) of police-reported incidents of human trafficking in Canada.

CMA-level differences are likely impacted by regional differences, such as awareness campaigns, specialized training and local expertise about human trafficking. Because human trafficking is difficult to successfully prosecute (Farrell et al., 2014; Matte Guilmain & Hanley, 2020), other types of charges may be reported by police and pursued by the Crown instead. Further, certain CMAs are located along the route of human trafficking corridors and may act as hubs for such criminal activity (CCTEHT, 2021a).

During the same time period (2011 to 2021), the average annual rate of human trafficking was highest in Thunder Bay and Halifax (5.5 and 4.5 incidents per 100,000 population, respectively). This was followed by Peterborough (3.6), Ottawa (3.0), Windsor (2.4), Barrie (2.4) and St. Catharines–Niagara (2.3).

While the rate of human trafficking in Canada was 1.4 incidents per 100,000 population in 2021, and the overall rate for the CMAs was 1.7, several CMAs had a rate of human trafficking that was notably higher. The largest differences were observed in Thunder Bay⁸ (28.1 incidents per 100,000 population), Peterborough (10.9), Halifax (7.8), St. Catharines–Niagara (6.0), Belleville (5.2), Saskatoon (4.6) and Barrie (4.2).

About four in ten incidents of human trafficking have another type of violation, most often related to the sex trade

Between 2011 and 2021, 95% of police-reported human trafficking incidents had a *Criminal Code* or IRPA-related human trafficking offence listed as the most serious violation.⁹ Six in ten (59%) human trafficking incidents involved human trafficking offences only, while four in ten (41%) had another type of violation.¹⁰ Most often, associated offences were related to the sex trade (57%).¹¹ Just over one in three (35%) incidents with another type of violation had an offence related to physical assault, while one in four (25%) had a sexual offence and one in eight (12%) had a deprivation of freedom offence.¹²

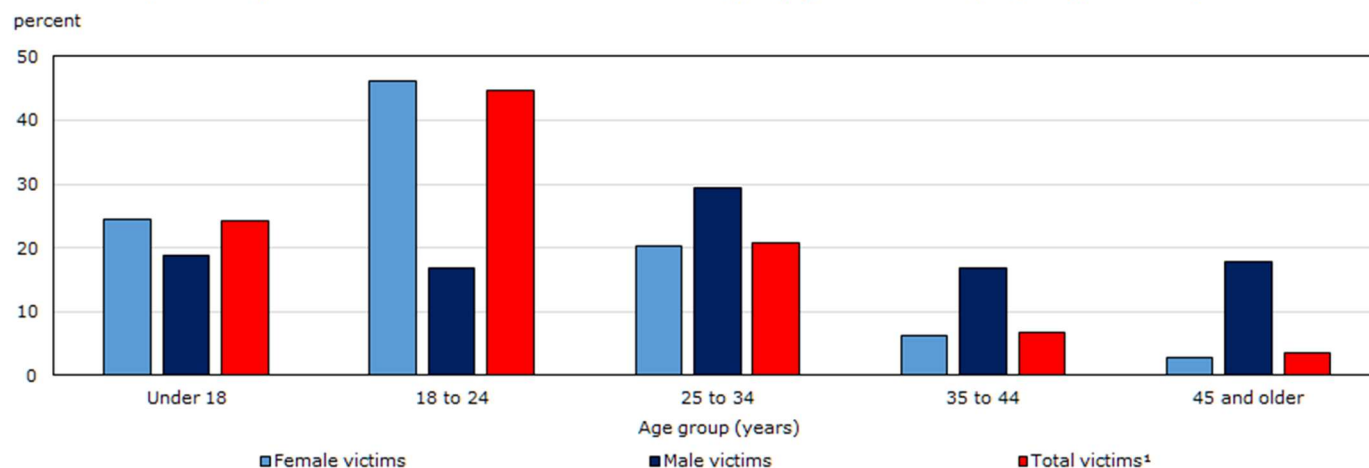
Women and girls account for nearly all detected victims of human trafficking, number of victims declined in 2021

There were 2,688 detected victims of police-reported human trafficking in Canada between 2011 and 2021.¹³ The vast majority (96%) of these victims were women and girls, while a small proportion (4%) were men and boys.¹⁴ Between 2019 and 2021, there were 1,203 victims of human trafficking. In 2019—prior to the COVID-19 pandemic—there were 411 victims of this type of crime, and the number remained stable in 2020 (410 victims). In 2021, the number of victims declined to 382, marking a 7% decrease from 2020 and 2019.¹⁵ In comparison, the number of victims of violent crime in 2021 was 4% higher than 2019 and 6% higher than 2020.

As mentioned, sexual exploitation is often the focus of human trafficking research, as are the experiences of female victims specifically. As such, male victims of sexual exploitation and victims of other types of trafficking might be overlooked (Cole, 2018; Dennis, 2008; Jones, 2010; Matte Guilmain & Hanley, 2020; Zimmerman & Schenker, 2014). Tien (2013) writes that, in many countries, human trafficking definitions have only recently included forced labour, the police and the public may associate human trafficking with sexual exploitation only, and forced labour is more likely to be hidden from public view (i.e., in factories, homes or fields) while sexual exploitation often occurs in public spaces in urban areas.¹⁶

Since 2011, victims were most often aged 18 to 24 (45%), while another quarter (24%) of victims were aged 17 and younger (Chart 2).¹⁷ The remaining victims were aged 25 to 34 (21%), 35 to 44 (7%) and 45 and older (3%). While seven in ten (71%) female victims were aged 24 and younger, male victims were not concentrated in the youngest age groups. Of the relatively small number (117) of men and boys who were identified as victims of human trafficking, they were most often aged 25 to 34 (29%) and the remaining victims were evenly distributed across other age groups: 17 and younger (19%), 18 to 24 (17%), 35 to 44 (17%) and 45 and older (18%). Overall, two-thirds (67%) of detected victims of human trafficking were women and girls aged 24 and younger.

Chart 2
Victims in police-reported incidents of human trafficking, by gender and age group, Canada, 2011 to 2021



1. Includes victims whose gender was unknown.

Note: 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 victims identified as “gender diverse” 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.

The UCR does not capture information about the mental and emotional impacts of human trafficking victimization. Other research, however, has shown that victims may experience a range of such issues, such as anxiety, depression, eating disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder and suicidal ideation (Casassa et al., 2021; Dell et al., 2019; Hemmings et al., 2016). Data from the UCR capture information about physical injury at the time of the incident or determined through investigation. It should be noted that—given the prolonged period of exploitation some victims of human trafficking experience—all physical injuries might not be captured by police. Regardless, police-reported data show that just over one-quarter (27%) of victims of human trafficking sustained an injury.¹⁸ Of these victims, the large majority (88%) had minor injuries, while about one in eight (12%) had major injuries.¹⁹

Text box 2
The progression of human trafficking

Human trafficking is a complex type of crime, where victims can be exploited over a prolonged period, in various locations and in various ways. This type of crime occurs in every country, affects a wide diversity of people and is a largely hidden crime (UNODC, 2021). Human trafficking research has discussed the various stages of this type of exploitation (Casassa et al., 2021; CCTEHT, 2021a; CCTEHT, 2021b; Cole, 2018; Fedina et al., 2019; Hagan et al., 2021). While pathways may vary, they do point to an increase in coercion and exploitation of victims in the pursuit of financial profit.

Recruitment and grooming

A common starting point for human traffickers is to recruit and groom potential victims. Vulnerable individuals—such as those who are socially or emotionally isolated, or financially desperate—are targeted and manipulated by traffickers, who may lure them or attempt to build trust with false promises, deception or drugs and alcohol. Traffickers build relationships with victims who may begin to rely on traffickers for daily needs.

Control, isolation and exploitation

Once potential victims have been recruited, many traffickers attempt to increase the level of control they have over victims. For instance, victims may be isolated from family and friends, and social ties and privacy are often removed or reduced so victims are unable to seek help. Traffickers may direct victims how to behave and dictate the work they must do, exercising a considerable amount of control over their daily lives. In addition, victims are often denied money, transportation and identity documents—preventing their ability to leave—and they may be moved around so they are further isolated.

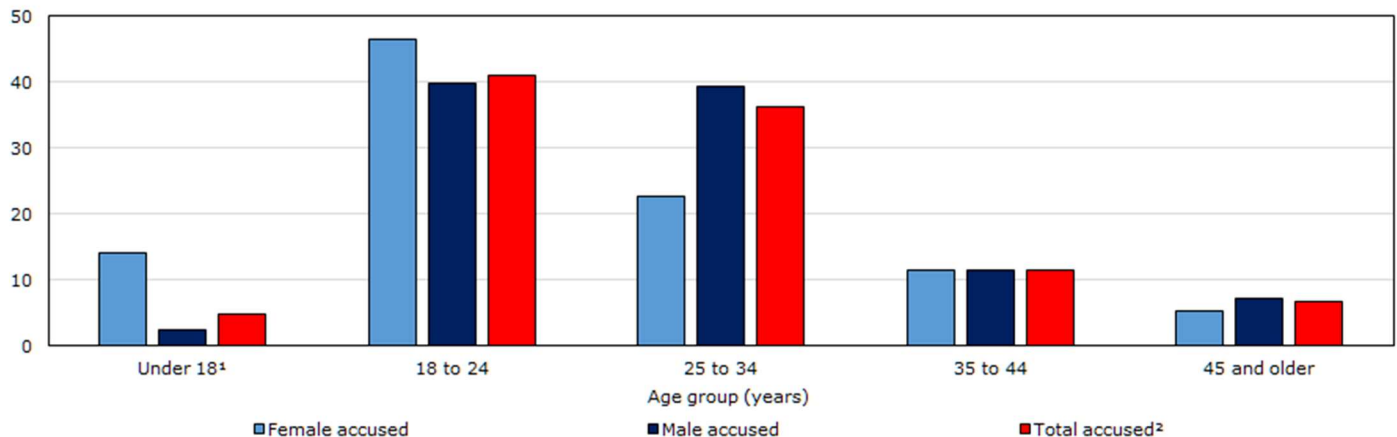
In many cases, traffickers escalate threatening behaviour, sometimes resorting to actual violence, and victims often live in a state of fear. Victims may try to appease traffickers to avoid punishment and retaliation. Due to ongoing abuse and trauma, some victims may bond with traffickers over time, becoming reluctant to challenge or to try leaving the situation. Eventually, victims may assume a recruiting and grooming role to lure others into trafficking.

More than six in ten accused persons are men aged 18 to 34, girls outnumber boys among youth accused

Between 2011 and 2021, there were 2,349 persons accused of police-reported human trafficking, the large majority (81%) of whom were men and boys.²⁰ Overall, accused persons were most often aged 18 to 24 (41%) and 25 to 34 (36%), while those aged 35 to 44 (12%) and 45 and older (7%) were less common (Chart 3). One in twenty (5%) accused persons were youth aged 12 to 17.

Chart 3
Accused persons in police-reported incidents of human trafficking, by gender and age group, Canada, 2011 to 2021

percent



1. Includes accused persons aged 12 to 17.

2. Includes accused persons whose gender was unknown.

Note: 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 "gender diverse" 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.

More than six in ten (64%) accused persons were men aged 18 to 34. In each adult age group, men outnumbered women among accused persons, accounting for about eight in ten accused or more. Among the relatively small number (110) of youth accused, however, girls outnumbered boys (56% versus 44%).

Miccio-Fonseca (2017) discusses youth victims of sex trafficking who observe and learn from those who trafficked them—individuals who are older and more experienced in "the trade"—and then behave in the same way toward other victims. These youth generally occupy the lower levels of the organization, but they sustain trafficking through targeting and recruiting

others with the goal of manipulating and controlling them. In addition, Kienast et al. (2014) reports that, compared to male recruiters, societal perceptions of women may make female recruiters seem more trustworthy to potential victims of trafficking.

Nine in ten victims trafficked by someone they know, most often an intimate partner

Nine in ten (91%) victims of police-reported human trafficking between 2011 and 2021 knew their accused trafficker, while a relatively small proportion (9%) of victims were trafficked by a stranger. In all, one-third (33%) of victims were trafficked by an intimate partner.²¹ It has been documented that traffickers often pose as potential romantic partners to recruit or lure individuals, with the end goal of trafficking them (Fedina et al., 2019; UNODC, 2021).

Nearly one-quarter (23%) of victims were trafficked by a casual acquaintance, followed by someone with whom they had a criminal relationship²² (13%) or a business relationship (11%). A relatively small proportion of victims were trafficked by a friend (6%) or a non-spousal family member²³ (3%).

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

Between 2011 and 2021, four in ten (42%) incidents of police-reported human trafficking were cleared by the laying or recommendation of charges, similar to the proportion of violent incidents overall (43%). Meanwhile, over half (54%) of human trafficking incidents were not cleared, meaning police have not identified an accused person. This was much less common among violent incidents generally (35%). The remaining incidents (4%) of human trafficking were cleared another way—an accused was identified by police but, most often, the victim requested that no further action be taken, the incident was cleared by another agency²⁴ or police used departmental discretion—compared to a larger proportion (22%) of violent incidents.²⁵

When an accused person was identified, charges were laid or recommended against nine in ten (91%) of those accused of human trafficking, and this was similar for female and male accused (92% and 91%, respectively). Compared to adults accused of this type of crime (91%), a slightly smaller proportion (88%) of youth accused had charges laid or recommended against them.

The Canadian Centre for Justice and Community Safety Statistics at Statistics Canada previously conducted a record linkage which analyzed prior contact with the police among those accused of human trafficking. Between 2009 and 2020, it was found that three-quarters (75%) had been accused of a crime prior to being accused of human trafficking. Following an initial contact with police for human trafficking, one in nine (11%) had been accused of human trafficking again during the reference period. For more information, see Conroy and Sutton (2022).

Charges more common for human trafficking incidents involving *Criminal Code* offences than *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act* offences

A much larger proportion of incidents of police-reported human trafficking that involved *Criminal Code* offences resulted in the laying or recommendation of charges compared to those that involved IRPA offences (55% versus 19%).²⁶ Meanwhile, four in ten (41%) incidents with *Criminal Code* offences were not cleared by police, three-quarters (76%) of IRPA-related incidents did not have an accused person identified. A similar proportion of incidents were cleared another way (4% of *Criminal Code* incidents and 5% of IRPA incidents).²⁷

Among those accused of human trafficking, a larger proportion of persons accused of *Criminal Code* offences had charges laid or recommended against them compared to those accused of IRPA offences (93% versus 81%).²⁸

Given the inherent cross-border nature of IRPA offences, victims of this type of crime may face additional hurdles in seeking justice. Matte Guilmain and Hanley (2020) describe victims of trafficking with a precarious immigration status. The combination of social coercion (loss of a work permit, fear of deportation) and administrative and financial control (withholding identity documents or wages) faced by these victims contributes to the rare result of a conviction, particularly when the abuse is psychological in nature and there is a lack of physical or sexual evidence. Instead, such victims may turn to human rights and labour law.

Text box 3**The Canadian Human Trafficking Hotline**

The Canadian Human Trafficking Hotline, launched in 2019, is operated by the Canadian Centre to End Human Trafficking (CCTEHT). The confidential and multilingual Hotline receives calls, emails and texts about potential human trafficking—including sex and labour trafficking—in Canada. The Hotline refers victims/survivors and other signalers (that is, those who contact the Hotline), such as family, friends, law enforcement and service providers, to a range of trauma-informed supports and services.

During its first year in operation (2019/2020), the Hotline identified 415 cases²⁹ of human trafficking involving 593 victims (CCTEHT, 2021b). That year, the large majority (90%) of victims who contacted the Hotline were female, almost half (44%) of victims were still being trafficked and seven in ten (71%) cases were classified as sexual exploitation. According to Public Safety Canada (2022c), the Hotline provided approximately 40 tips to law enforcement and children's aid societies between April and September 2020.

The latest available data show that there were 556 human trafficking cases involving 652 victims identified by the Hotline in 2021/2022 (CCTEHT, 2022). The referrals made by the Hotline to signalers were most often related to shelter and housing³⁰ (26%), supportive counselling (19%) and case management (17%). A relatively smaller proportion of referrals were related to legal issues (7%), financial support (4%), human trafficking survivor leadership and peer mentorship (2%) and clinical mental health treatment (1%).

The Canadian Human Trafficking Hotline is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week 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 www.canadianhumantraffickinghotline.ca.

Section 2: Human trafficking in adult criminal court

The Integrated Criminal Court Survey (ICCS) is the administrative data source for information on human trafficking cases that reach adult criminal and youth courts in Canada. The ICCS includes information about charges laid, court processing times, charge and case decisions, and sentencing outcomes. This section presents data on human trafficking cases completed in adult criminal court between 2010/2011 and 2020/2021 (for information specific to youth court, see Text box 4).

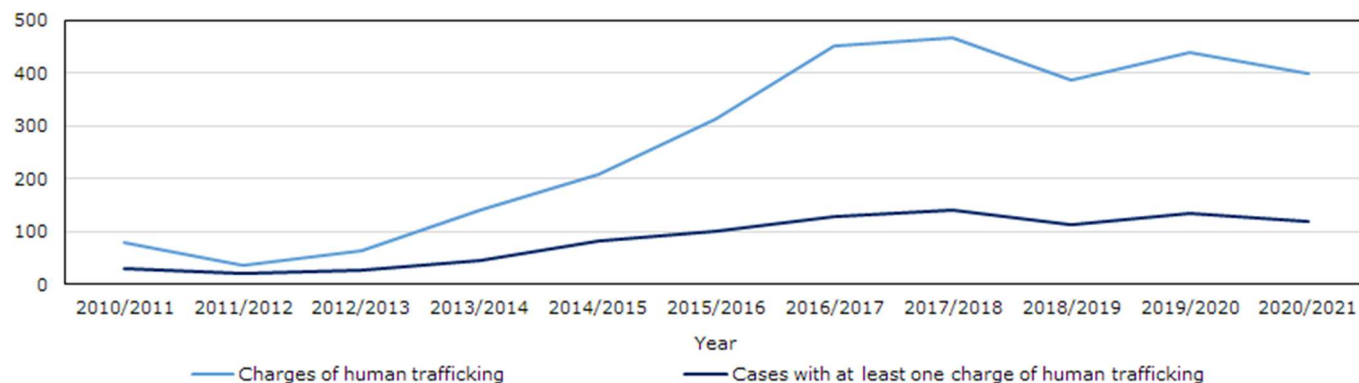
It should be noted that court data may not align with police data as not all incidents of human trafficking that are reported to police reach the court stage, and not all incidents identified by police as human trafficking are processed as such in court. Further, the time periods for the two data sources often differ as court cases are only counted in the ICCS database once all the charges in the case are complete or deemed complete.³¹

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

Between 2010/2011 and 2020/2021, there were 948 cases involving 2,992 human trafficking charges completed in adult criminal court in Canada.³² During this time, the number of human trafficking charges and cases increased in general (Chart 4). In 2010/2011, there were 30 completed cases that involved at least one human trafficking charge, and these cases involved a total of 81 charges of human trafficking. In 2020/2021, there were 119 completed human trafficking cases and 401 human trafficking charges, meaning there were four times as many cases and five times as many charges completed compared to 2010/2011.

Chart 4**Completed human trafficking charges and cases in adult criminal court, by year, Canada, 2010/2011 to 2020/2021**

number



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.

Compared to the previous year, there was a decline in the number of completed human trafficking charges and cases: there was a 13% decline in the number of cases in 2020/2021 compared to 2019/2020 (119 versus 136), while there was a 9% decline in the number of charges (401 versus 439). The number of completed cases and charges—human trafficking or not—is likely impacted by the ongoing challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, which affected court proceedings and created case backlogs in Canada (Department of Justice Canada, 2022a).

Human trafficking cases take more than twice as long to complete in court than cases involving sex trade or other violent offence charges

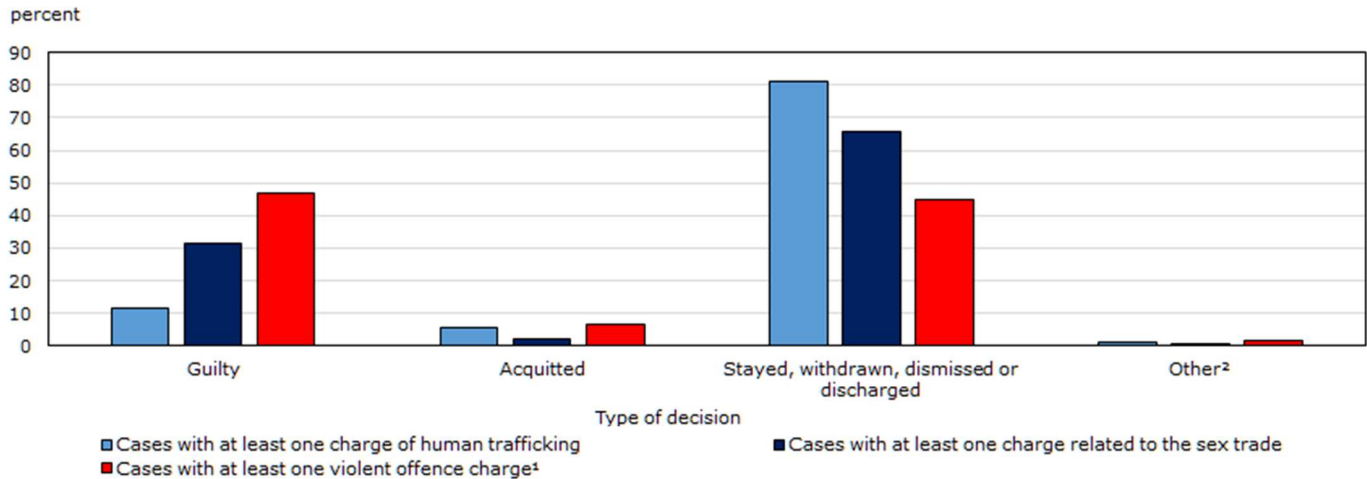
Between 2010/2011 and 2020/2021, the median length of time to complete a human trafficking case in adult criminal court was 382 days. This was more than twice as long as sex trade cases and other violent offence cases (147 and 181 days, respectively).

Completed adult criminal court cases that included at least one charge of human trafficking had an average of 17 charges per case—related to human trafficking or otherwise—between 2010/2011 and 2020/2021. In contrast, other types of court cases had notably fewer charges. For instance, over the same period, cases involving at least one charge related to the sex trade averaged five charges each, while cases with at least one other violent offence charge averaged four charges each.³³

Of the 930 multi-charge human trafficking cases completed since 2010/2011, just over three-quarters (77%) included a sex trade offence. Three in ten (30%) multi-charge human trafficking cases included a charge of kidnapping or forcible confinement, while just under three in ten (28%) included a charge related to a sexual offence.³⁴ In general, multi-charge cases are often more complex and may take longer to complete in court than single-charge cases.

Around one in eight completed human trafficking cases result in a guilty decision for a human trafficking charge

For the large majority (81%) of completed adult criminal court cases involving at least one human trafficking charge between 2010/2011 and 2020/2021, the most serious decision³⁵ rendered for a human trafficking charge was a stay, a withdrawal, a dismissal or a discharge (Chart 5).³⁶ Meanwhile, a relatively small proportion of such cases resulted in a guilty decision³⁷ (12%), an acquittal (6%) or another type of decision (1%)—such as being found unfit to stand trial or not criminally responsible—for the 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%), respectively. For sex trade cases, however, a stay, a withdrawal, a dismissal or a discharge was still the most common decision type (66%).

Chart 5**Type of decision in completed adult criminal court cases, by selected offence, Canada, 2010/2011 to 2020/2021**

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.

During the same period (2010/2011 to 2020/2021), when human trafficking cases resulted in a guilty outcome for a human trafficking charge, more than three-quarters (78%) resulted in a custodial sentence. A further 11% of these guilty cases resulted in probation as the most serious sentence and 11% received another type of sentence, such as an absolute or conditional discharge, or a community service order. Compared to human trafficking cases with a guilty finding for a human trafficking charge, a custody sentence was less common for cases involving a sex trade charge (43%) or a violent offence charge (41%) where there was a guilty finding for such charges. Instead, probation was more common for sex trade cases (28%) and other violent cases (43%) with a guilty finding than those with a human trafficking charge.

Text box 4**Human trafficking in youth court**

Between 2010/2011 and 2020/2021, 6% of completed human trafficking cases involved a youth accused aged 12 to 17. During this period, there were 56 cases involving a human trafficking charge completed in youth court, totalling 124 charges.

All but one of the human trafficking cases completed in youth court were multi-charge cases. Of these 55 cases, 69% included a sex trade charge, 36% included a sexual offence charge and 33% included a charge of kidnapping or forcible confinement.³⁸

In human trafficking cases where the most serious sentence was associated with a finding of guilt for the human trafficking charge, 47% resulted in a sentence of custody and supervision, 24% deferred custody and supervision,³⁹ 24% probation and 6% involved another type of sentence.

Summary

There were 3,541 police-reported incidents of human trafficking in Canada between 2011 and 2021, including offences under the *Criminal Code* and those related to the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act*. During this time, human trafficking accounted for 0.01% of all police-reported crime, and the average annual rate was 0.9 incidents per 100,000 population. The rate of human trafficking decreased slightly, from 1.5 in 2020 to 1.4 in 2021, while the number of incidents remained stable.

Of the 2,688 detected victims of human trafficking between 2011 and 2021, the vast majority (96%) were women and girls. In 2021, the number of victims declined to 382, marking a 7% decrease from the previous couple of years. While seven in ten (71%) female victims were aged 24 and younger, male victims were not concentrated in the youngest age groups—rather, they were dispersed across different age groups. Nine in ten (91%) victims of police-reported human trafficking knew their trafficker and one-third (33%) of victims were trafficked by an intimate partner.

The large majority (81%) of persons accused of human trafficking were men and boys. Among youth accused specifically, however, girls outnumbered boys (56% versus 44%).

Between 2011 and 2021, the majority (54%) of police-reported 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. When an accused was identified, charges were laid or recommended for nine in ten (91%) persons accused of human trafficking.

Between 2010/2011 and 2020/2021, there were 948 cases involving 2,992 human trafficking charges completed in adult criminal court in Canada. The median length of time to complete a human trafficking case was 382 days, more than twice as long as sex trade cases and violent offence cases (147 and 181 days, respectively). Compared to cases with at least one charge related to the sex trade (31%) and cases with a violent offence charge (47%), a relatively small proportion of human trafficking cases resulted in a guilty decision for the human trafficking charge (12%).

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 2021, 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 “gender diverse” 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 gender diverse have been assigned to either female or male 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. 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 2011 but were reported during the 2011 to 2021 reference period.
4. For reference, in 2021, Saskatchewan accounted for 3% of the Canadian population and 4% of police-reported human trafficking incidents.
5. The Canadian Centre to End Human Trafficking defines human trafficking corridors as “strips of land or transportation routes that include two or more major cities, that are used by traffickers to move individuals between sites of commercial exploitation” (CCTEHT, 2021a).
6. 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.
7. Ottawa refers to the Ontario part of the Ottawa–Gatineau census metropolitan area.
8. The rate of police-reported human trafficking in Thunder Bay has continually increased over the 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*.
9. Data are based on the Uniform Crime Reporting Survey, Trend Database.
10. 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.
11. 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.
12. Offences related to the deprivation of freedom include, for example, kidnapping and forcible confinement.
13. 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.
14. Given that small counts of victims identified as “gender diverse” 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.
15. As mentioned, victim information reflects human trafficking *Criminal Code* violations only (see note 13). As such, the decline in the number of victims of human trafficking aligns with the decline in incidents with human trafficking *Criminal Code* violations. Since 2011, the number of victims of human trafficking generally increased each year. Aside from the counts mentioned in-text, the other exception was that there were 17 fewer victims in 2018 compared to 2017 (279 versus 296).
16. It should be noted that the Uniform Crime Reporting Survey does not capture information about the type of human trafficking victims experienced.

17. Percent calculation excludes victims whose age was unknown and those where age was greater than 110 due to possible instances of miscoding of unknown age within this age category.
18. Percent calculation excludes victims where level of injury was unknown.
19. 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.
20. Given that small counts of accused persons identified as “gender diverse” 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 accused persons whose gender was unknown.
21. 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).
22. Includes relationships based on illegal activities.
23. Includes, for example, parents, siblings and extended family members.
24. Includes other municipal, provincial or federal agencies. If an accused person has been identified in connection with an incident in multiple jurisdictions, charges could be laid by one police service and not the other.
25. Among cleared human trafficking incidents specifically, 91% resulted in the laying or recommendation of charges.
26. Incidents that involved both *Criminal Code* offences and *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act* offences are counted twice.
27. Among cleared human trafficking incidents specifically, 93% with offences related to the *Criminal Code* and 79% with offences related to the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act* resulted in the laying or recommendation of charges.
28. Persons accused of both *Criminal Code* offences and *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act* offences are counted twice.
29. A case refers to a unique situation, event or series of events that prompted an individual to contact the Hotline.
30. Includes emergency and short-term, transitional and longer-term shelter and housing.
31. A charge is deemed complete when processed and resolved by the courts.
32. 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.
33. 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.
34. Percentages do not add up to 100 as some cases have more than two concomitant charges.
35. 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.
36. 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.
37. 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.
38. Percentages do not add up to 100 as some cases have more than two concomitant charges.
39. 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, 2011 to 2021

Province or territory	Human trafficking incidents reported in 2021				Human trafficking incidents reported in 2011 to 2021			
	<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	number	rate	number	number	number	rate
Newfoundland and Labrador	0	0	0	0.0	5	3	8	0.1
Prince Edward Island	0	0	0	0.0	0	0	0	0.0
Nova Scotia	29	24	53	5.3	167	121	288	2.7
New Brunswick	3	0	3	0.4	21	3	24	0.3
Quebec	36	2	38	0.4	333	35	368	0.4
Ontario	182	159	341	2.3	1,442	827	2,269	1.4
Manitoba	6	1	7	0.5	38	3	41	0.3
Saskatchewan	17	4	21	1.8	75	18	93	0.7
Alberta	38	9	47	1.1	174	60	234	0.5
British Columbia	40	1	41	0.8	194	12	206	0.4
Yukon	1	0	1	2.3	7	0	7	1.5
Northwest Territories	0	0	0	0.0	2	0	2	0.4
Nunavut	0	0	0	0.0	1	0	1	0.3
Canada	352	200	552	1.4	2,459	1,082	3,541	0.9

1. This rate is the average of the annual rates from 2011 to 2021.

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, 2011 to 2021

Census metropolitan area (CMA) ¹	Human trafficking incidents reported in 2021				Human trafficking incidents reported in 2011 to 2021				average annual rate ²
	Criminal Code	Immigration and Refugee Protection Act	Total	rate	Criminal Code	Immigration and Refugee Protection Act	Total		
St. John's	0	0	0	0.0	1	3	4	0.2	
Halifax	13	23	36	7.8	96	120	216	4.5	
Moncton ³	2	0	2	1.2	..	..	..	..
Saint John ³	0	0	0	0.0	..	..	..	..
Saguenay	0	0	0	0.0	0	0	0	0.0	
Québec	4	0	4	0.5	48	2	50	0.6	
Sherbrooke	0	0	0	0.0	1	0	1	0.0	
Trois-Rivières	0	0	0	0.0	0	0	0	0.0	
Montréal	26	1	27	0.6	230	15	245	0.5	
Gatineau ⁴	2	0	2	0.6	32	0	32	0.9	
Ottawa ⁵	38	2	40	3.6	334	11	345	3.0	
Kingston	2	3	5	2.9	3	22	25	1.3	
Belleville ⁶	2	4	6	5.2	..	..	..	..
Peterborough	14	0	14	10.9	36	14	50	3.6	
Toronto	58	34	92	1.4	502	274	776	1.1	
Hamilton	5	6	11	1.4	78	62	140	1.7	
St. Catharines–Niagara	3	26	29	6.0	30	90	120	2.3	
Kitchener–Cambridge–Waterloo	19	0	19	3.1	65	12	77	1.2	
Brantford	2	1	3	1.9	11	5	16	1.0	
Guelph	3	2	5	3.4	11	5	16	1.0	
London	8	0	8	1.4	84	27	111	1.9	
Windsor	3	3	6	1.7	24	66	90	2.4	
Barrie	5	6	11	4.2	34	29	63	2.4	
Greater Sudbury	5	0	5	3.0	30	1	31	1.7	
Thunder Bay	0	35	35	28.1	35	41	76	5.5	
Winnipeg	5	1	6	0.7	25	2	27	0.3	
Regina	0	3	3	1.1	4	9	13	0.5	
Saskatoon	15	1	16	4.6	55	7	62	1.7	
Lethbridge ⁶	2	0	2	1.6	..	..	..	..
Calgary	17	2	19	1.2	60	13	73	0.4	

See notes at the end of the table

Table 2
Police-reported incidents of human trafficking, by statute and census metropolitan area, 2011 to 2021

	Human trafficking incidents reported in 2021				Human trafficking incidents reported in 2011 to 2021			
	<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			
Edmonton	7	6	13	0.9	51	42	93	0.6
Kelowna	2	0	2	0.9	18	0	18	0.8
Abbotsford–Mission	6	0	6	2.9	8	0	8	0.4
Vancouver	22	1	23	0.8	110	8	118	0.4
Victoria	3	0	3	0.7	14	0	14	0.3
CMA total	293	160	453	1.7	2,045	892	2,937	1.0
Non-CMA total	59	40	99	0.9	414	190	604	0.5
Canada	352	200	552	1.4	2,459	1,082	3,541	0.9

.. not available for a specific reference period

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 2011 to 2021.

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 2011-2021 period are not available.

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.