Canadian Centre to
End Human Trafficking

Human Trafficking Trends in Canada

2019–2024

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Contents

About us

4 About the Centre

4 About the Canadian Human Trafficking Hotline

Overview

5 Introduction

6 Key findings

Looking ahead

19 Summary of findings and a call to action

References

20 References

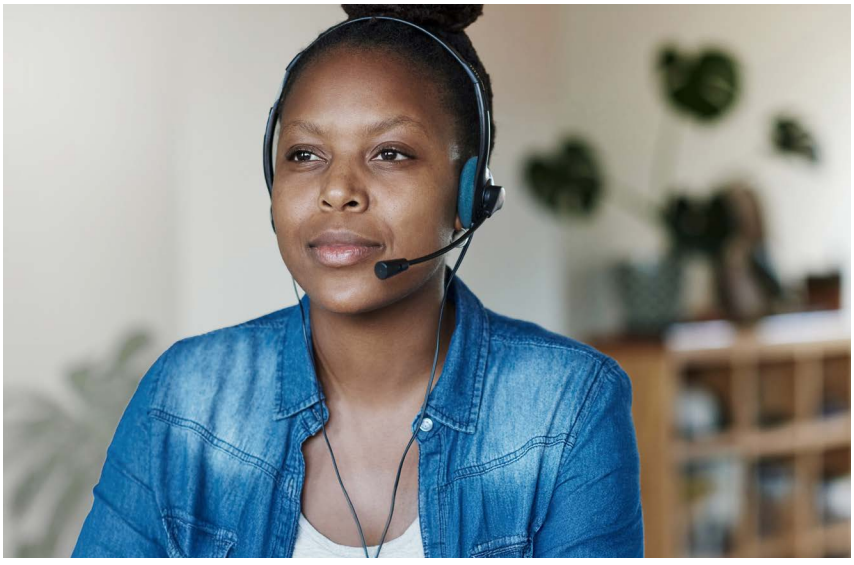
21 Appendix

About the Centre

The Canadian Centre to End Human Trafficking (the Centre) is a national charity, established in 2016, dedicated to ending all types of human trafficking in Canada. We bring together partners across sectors and people with lived experience of human trafficking to align efforts, build capacity and strengthen the national response to human trafficking.

About the hotline

The Centre launched the Canadian Human Trafficking Hotline in May 2019. This confidential, multilingual and trauma-informed service operates 24/7/365 to connect people being trafficked and trafficking survivors with local supports, services and law enforcement, if they choose. Trafficking happens in every region of Canada. It takes place in communities large and small across our country. The national hotline ensures that, no matter where victims and survivors are in Canada, they can get the support they need.



Introduction

Human trafficking is one of the most serious and misunderstood social issues in Canada. Because it often happens out of sight, many Canadians are unaware that it's taking place in every corner of the country.

This lack of awareness, along with common human trafficking myths and misconceptions, obscures the harsh realities faced by victims and survivors.[1] Far from being a distant or isolated problem, human trafficking affects people of all backgrounds and communities in Canada.

To help address this pervasive issue, the Canadian Centre to End Human Trafficking established the Canadian Human Trafficking Hotline in May 2019. This confidential, multilingual and trauma-informed service operates 365 days a year, connecting anyone impacted by trafficking with vital information, supports and services.

Drawing on data collected by the hotline between 2019 and 2024, this report sheds light on the scope and changing nature of human trafficking in Canada. Among the many findings, the data reveal that 39% of callers[2] associated with a trafficking case were identified as victims and survivors. This direct engagement demonstrates how the hotline acts as a critical support for those most impacted by trafficking.

[1] The phrase "victim and survivor" refers to anyone who is currently experiencing human trafficking or has experienced it in the past. People may choose to identify as a victim, a survivor, or use another term that feels right to them. The combined use of "victim and survivor" in this report is meant to acknowledge and include the full range of experiences and identities.

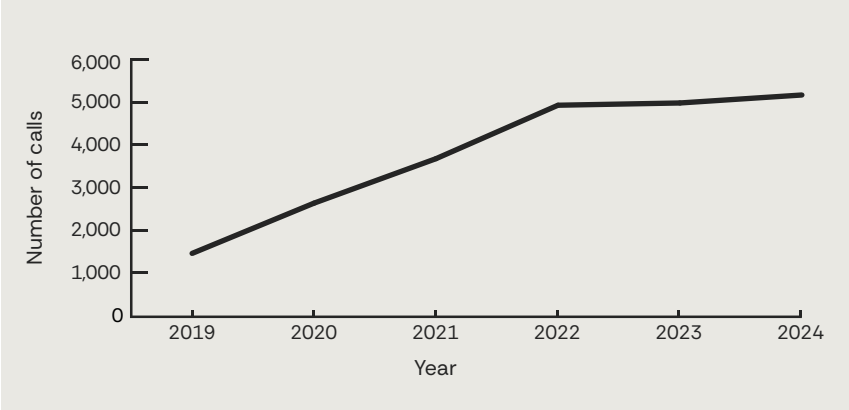
[2] People can contact the hotline through four different methods — phone calls, web chats, email or web forms. For the purposes of this report, the term calls" includes all four methods of communication with hotline staff.

Key Findings

The findings presented here highlight four broad trends that have emerged over the hotline's first six years of operation.

1. Call volume to the hotline continues to rise

Figure 1. Calls to the hotline per year



See Table 1 in Appendix

Note: Detailed data tables for all charts can be found in the Appendix.

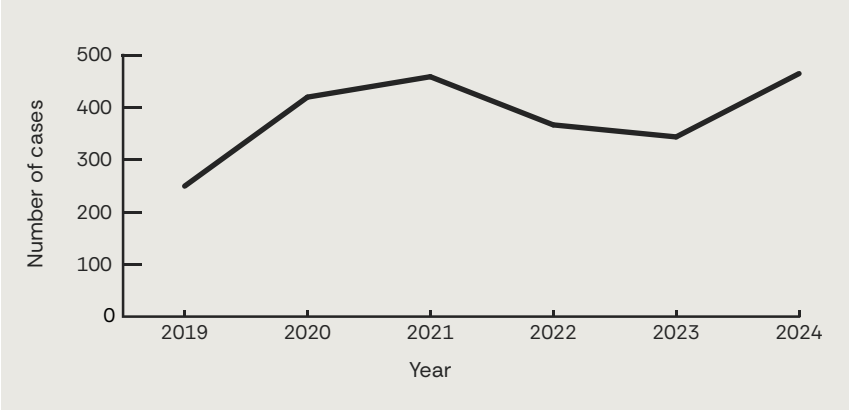
The number of people reaching out to the hotline has risen over the period covered in this report. In 2020, the hotline received just over 2,600 calls.[3] By 2024, that number had jumped to over 5,100. Cumulatively, nearly 23,000 calls were received between 2019 and 2024. The upward trend in calls may be a result of one or more of the following factors:

- greater awareness of human trafficking among the public and front-line responders;
- an increase in trafficking activity; and/or
- improved awareness of the hotline.

Regardless of the reason(s) for the rise, the growing call volume demonstrates the need to invest in prevention efforts as well as trauma-informed supports to assist the thousands of people in Canada who are impacted by human trafficking.

[3] Since the hotline was launched in May 2019, the data for that year only includes seven months. As a result, this report uses 2020, the first full calendar year of hotline data collection, as the baseline year.

Figure 2. Human trafficking cases identified by the hotline per year[4]



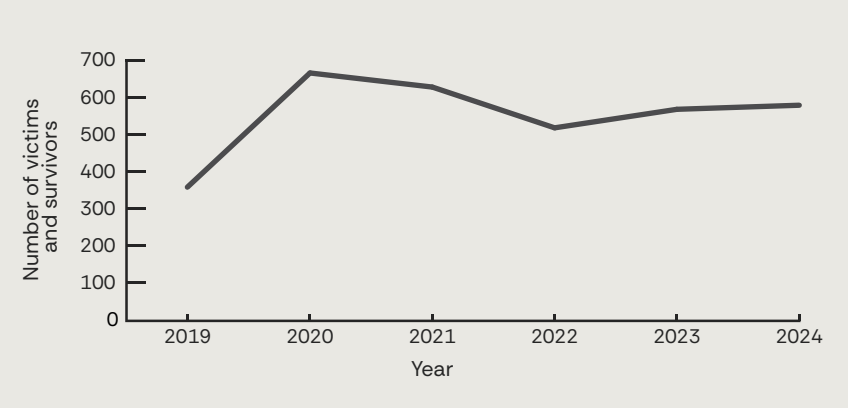
See Table 1 in Appendix

[4] The hotline gathers two primary categories of information: details about the person contacting the hotline (e.g., who they are and their reason for reaching out), and details about the situation (including what occurred and any indicators of trafficking). Staff use this information to assess potential cases, offer appropriate referrals, and strengthen support and awareness efforts.

Hotline staff identified a total of 2,311 trafficking cases between 2019 and 2024. The number of cases across the six years shows some minor variation. The hotline recorded 421 cases in 2020, the first full year of data collection. Case numbers fluctuated between 2021 and 2023, before hitting an all-time high of 466 cases in 2024.

Most Canadians confuse human trafficking with smuggling or kidnapping. In reality, it often mirrors intimate partner violence.

Figure 3. Human trafficking victims and survivors recognized by the hotline per year[5]



See Table 1 in Appendix

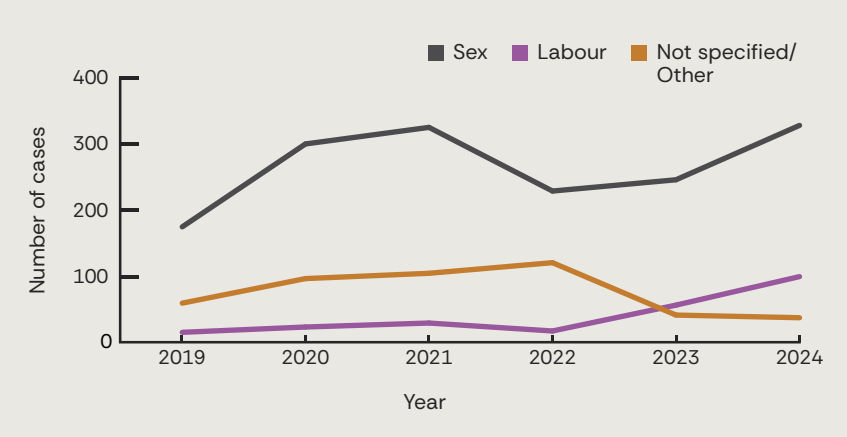
[5] This figure shows the number of potential victims and survivors related to a trafficking case per year between 2019–2024. The number of victims and survivors includes situations where the victim or survivor is self-reporting or when the case is reported by someone with direct knowledge of the situation.

Alongside cases, the hotline recognized 3,317 human trafficking victims and survivors between 2019 and 2024. It's notable that after 2019, the number of identified victims and survivors ranged between the low-500s and mid-600s each year. The sustained call volume from victims and survivors over this five-year span demonstrates the urgent need to strengthen survivor-centred supports nationwide.

Every call for help is an urgent reminder that Canada needs stronger prevention and support.

2. The hotline is documenting an increasing number of labour exploitation cases[6]

Figure 4. Human trafficking cases, by form, identified by the hotline per year[7] [8]



See Table 2 in Appendix

Sex trafficking remains the most common form of human trafficking, accounting for 69% of all identified cases; however, the number of reported labour trafficking cases has increased substantially. An average of 24 labour trafficking cases were reported each year between 2020 and 2022. This number increased to 57 cases in 2023 — a 137.5% increase compared to the 2020–2022 average. By 2024, the number of labour trafficking cases reported to the hotline grew to 100, representing a 317% increase over the same three-year average.

A similar trend emerged when looking at other forms of labour exploitation. In the 2020 baseline year, there were 24 abusive labour practices cases.[9] This increased to 28 in 2021 (+17%), 39 in 2022 (+63%), 96 in 2023 (+300%) and 64 in 2024 (+167%).

Although the hotline identified significantly more sex trafficking cases overall, labour trafficking had more victims and survivors per case. In 2023 and 2024 alone, there were 2.61 victims and survivors per labour trafficking case, compared to 1.14 per sex trafficking case. This finding may be partly explained by the fact that labour trafficking often occurs within workplaces, where larger groups of employees are vulnerable to exploitation.

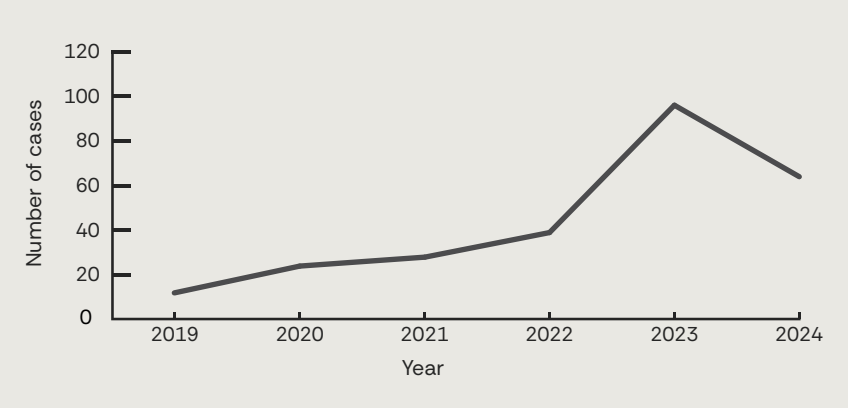
[6] For the purposes of this report, "labour exploitation" is being used as a broad term that includes both labour trafficking and abusive labour practices.

[7] Form of trafficking refers to the purpose of the exploitation. When it's not clearly stated, staff determine it based on case details, indicators, or the type of referral involved.

[8] Not Specified/Other includes less common forms of trafficking and cases lacking sufficient detail to determine the form of trafficking.

[9] Abusive labour practices involve the mistreatment of workers — such as unsafe conditions, unfair or unpaid wages, excessive hours, or workplace harassment — that violate employment standards and harm workers' well-being. However, these situations do not meet the threshold of labour trafficking because they lack the specific purpose of exploitation (i.e., forcing them to provide labour or service) that is central to trafficking cases.

Figure 5. Cases of abusive labour practices identified by the hotline per year



See Table 3 in Appendix

There could be various factors that explain the recent increases in labour trafficking and abusive labour practices cases identified by the hotline, including:

Education and Awareness Efforts

Education and awareness activities across Canada are shedding light on the prevalence of labour trafficking. In 2023, the Centre launched a campaign focused on increasing awareness of this issue among the general public and migrant communities. This two-phased campaign resulted in a rise in call volume to the hotline, as well as increased identification of labour trafficking. Similar initiatives have been led by the Canadian Council for Refugees (2019), Migrant Workers Centre (n.d.), FCJ Refugee Centre (Youth Alliance Against Human Trafficking, 2024), Public Safety Canada (2022) and the Government of Ontario (Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development, 2023).

Media Coverage

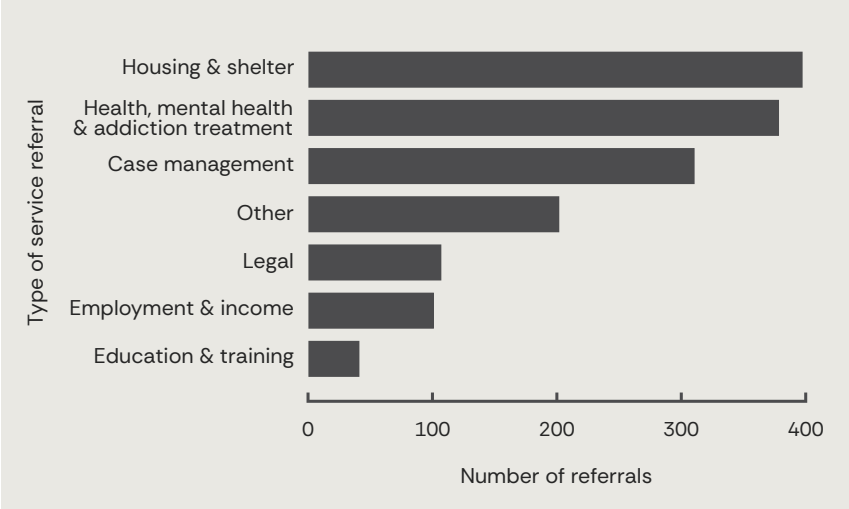
Several labour trafficking incidents were covered in the news over the past two years. In 2023, York Regional Police disrupted a labour trafficking operation that involved 64 Mexican nationals (Keith, 2023). The operation, named Project Norte, captured national headlines and brought attention to the dire conditions that those victims and survivors face. Also in 2023, a report by the United Nations

special rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery called Canada's temporary foreign worker programs "a breeding ground for contemporary forms of slavery" (United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, 2023). The report shed much-needed light on the harsh challenges experienced by migrant workers in Canada, as well as gaps in Canada's immigration system.

Many low-wage and temporary migrant workers face added risks because their ability to work in Canada depends on a single employer.

3. A wide array of services is required to support human trafficking victims and survivors

Figure 6. Service referrals provided to sex trafficking victims and survivors by the hotline, 2019–2024[10] [11]



See Table 4 in Appendix

[10] Referral counts are not mutually exclusive; cases may include one, multiple or no referrals.

[11] "Other" combines referrals for a wide range of supports, including crisis response, transportation, outreach, basic needs, drop-in programs, and community-based awareness. These referrals also encompass connections to external helplines, holistic programs, and specialized training or mentorship opportunities. For sex trafficking cases with referrals, immigration-specific services have been grouped into this same "Other" category due to low case counts.

While victims and survivors of sex trafficking and labour trafficking share many of the same service needs, the findings revealed some variation in the type of supports they depend upon. The most frequent referrals provided to sex trafficking victims and survivors were housing and shelter supports (397 referrals, 26%), health, mental health and addiction treatment (378 referrals, 25%), and case management (310 referrals, 20%).

Figure 7. Service referrals provided to labour trafficking victims and survivors by the hotline, 2019 - 2024[12]

See Table 5 in Appendix

[12] "Other" combines referrals for a wide range of supports, including crisis support, transportation, outreach, basic needs, drop-in programs, and community-based awareness. These referrals also encompass connections to external helplines, holistic programs, and specialized training or mentorship opportunities. For labour trafficking cases with referrals, shelter/housing and education & training services have been grouped into this same "Other" category due to low case counts.

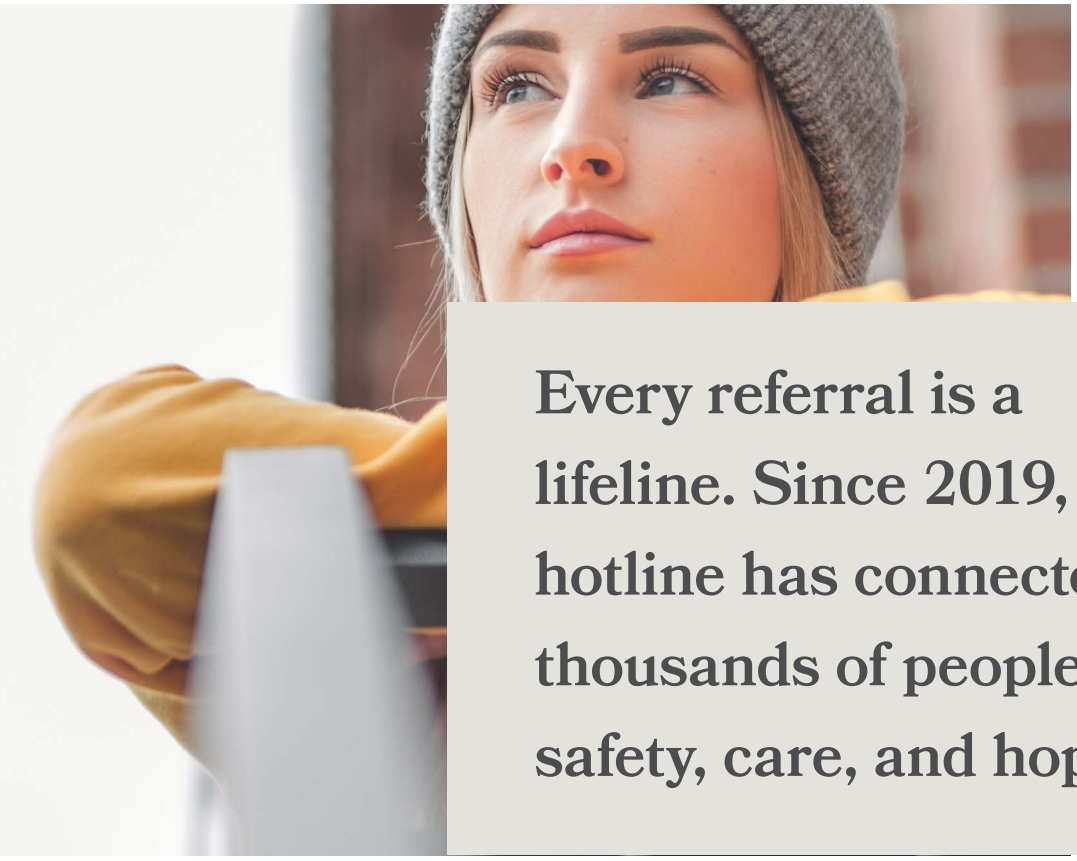
Throughout the period of 2019-2024, labour trafficking victims and survivors were most commonly referred to legal services (68 referrals, 37%) and case management (34 referrals, 19%). This pattern is unsurprising: trafficked migrant workers and international students must contend with navigating Canada's complex immigration processes, necessitating legal support and case management. An increased use in legal services was also reflected in data collected from abusive labour practices cases.

Evidence that victims and survivors of sex trafficking and labour trafficking have both shared and distinct service needs is consistent with other recent research:

- A 2020 report commissioned by Covenant House Toronto found that sex trafficking survivors require a wide array of services, many of which overlap with the needs of labour trafficking victims and survivors (Noble et al., 2020, p. 60). However, the report also found that people impacted by sex trafficking emphasize services that provide safety, income, transportation, communication, housing, clothing and food security.
- The International Centre for Criminal Law Reform (ICCLR) found that exploited workers prioritized legal services as well as transportation, shelter and housing, and financial assistance (Dandurand et al., 2023, pp. 36-39).

The precarious immigration status of many trafficking victims and survivors adds an additional layer of complexity when it comes to accessing supports. ICCLR's (2023, pp. 36-39) study, as well as research conducted by FCJ Refugee Centre and the Canadian Centre to End Human Trafficking (2023, p. 32), highlights specific barriers faced by labour trafficking victims and survivors. These barriers include fear of punishment or deportation, language and literacy limitations, lack of social supports and the absence of services.

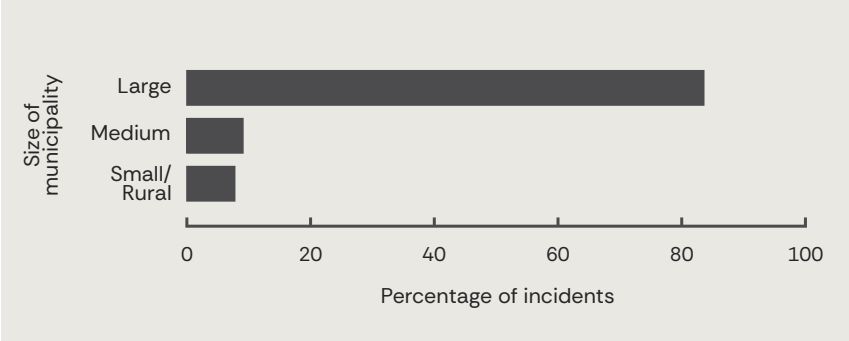
Together, these findings demonstrate the necessity for a broad, multi-sectoral response that can adapt to individual trauma histories and pathways to recovery. It also provides additional evidence that labour trafficking victims and survivors need expanded access to federal and provincial programs — such as settlement services — that are currently denied to them (Covenant House Vancouver et al., 2023).



Every referral is a lifeline. Since 2019, the hotline has connected thousands of people to safety, care, and hope.

4. Human trafficking is a pan-Canadian challenge, occurring in all provinces and territories, as well as in rural and urban centres

Figure 8. Human trafficking incidents recognized by the hotline, by municipality size, 2019–2024[13] [14]



See Table 6 in Appendix

Human trafficking is not confined to a single region, province, territory or community. Among trafficking cases where a location was disclosed, 83.57% of the reported incidents occurred in large urban centres with populations greater than 100,000. Interestingly, 16.43% occurred in smaller population centres (under 100,000) — a notable increase from the 13% reported in the Centre's last data release (Canadian Centre to End Human Trafficking, 2023).

[13] Each incident represents a distinct case of human trafficking identified through the hotline. Incidents are shown here by the size of the municipality where they occurred.

[14] Geographic data for trafficking incidents are categorized using Statistics Canada's Population Centre classification system, which categorizes locations as rural (population of <999 people), small (population between 1,000–29,999 people), medium (population between 30,000–99,999 people) or large (population of 100,000+ people). For this report, rural and small centres are combined.

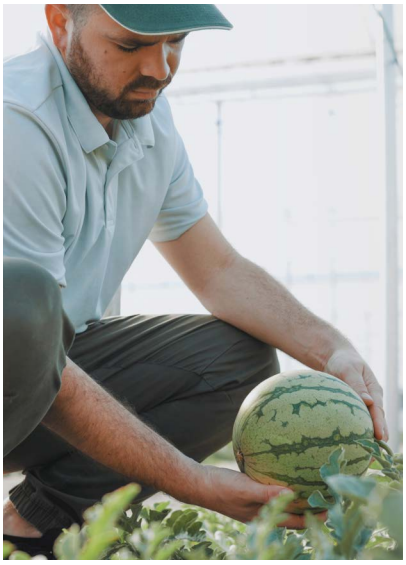
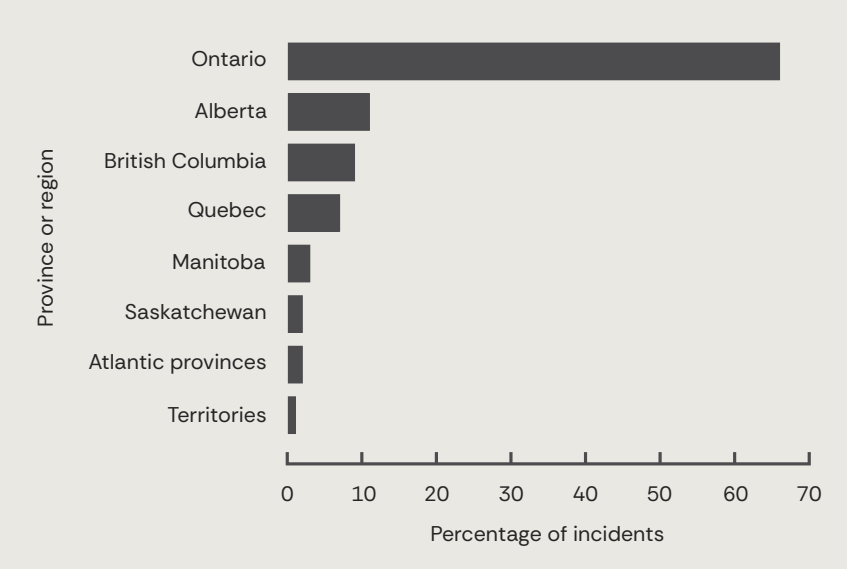


Figure 9. Human trafficking incidents recognized by the hotline, by province, 2019–2024[15] [16] [17]



See Table 7 in Appendix

[15] Data only include cases where the site of exploitation is in Canada and the province is known.

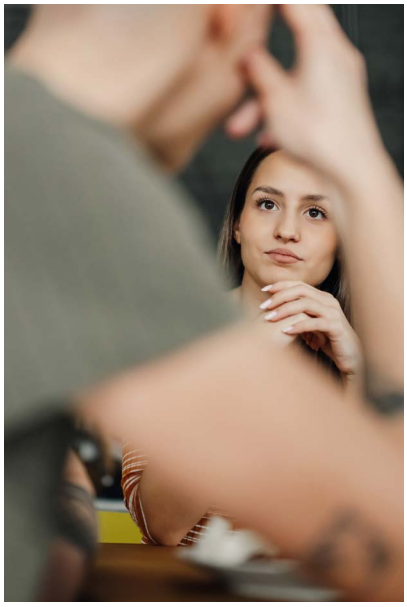
[16] The Atlantic provinces include New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island.

[17] The territories include Northwest Territories, Nunavut and Yukon.

Hotline data indicate that trafficking incidents were most frequently documented in the largest provinces. Ontario ranked highest, accounting for 66% of reported trafficking incidents. This was followed by Alberta (11%), British Columbia (9%), and Quebec (7%). By contrast, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, the Atlantic provinces and the territories saw the lowest rates.

It's important to note that looking at total human trafficking incidents per province offers only a partial view of its prevalence. Statistics Canada (2024) reports that Nova Scotia has the highest per capita rate of police-identified human trafficking in the country, despite ranking lower than other provinces in total police-reported cases. Across all provinces, Nova Scotia reported 6.3 incidents per 100,000 in 2023, well above Ontario (2.1), which ranked second, and the national average (1.4).

These findings offer a crucial insight: despite relatively low total numbers, smaller jurisdictions are often disproportionately impacted by human trafficking. This reality highlights the critical need for attention and resources from federal, provincial and municipal governments to address the unique needs of these jurisdictions.



Smaller jurisdictions are often disproportionately impacted by human trafficking.

Summary of findings and a call to action

Between 2019 and 2024, calls to the hotline increased, while identified cases and recognized victims and survivors remained steady with some year-over-year fluctuation.

Sex trafficking represented the majority of cases identified; however, in 2023 and 2024, there was a notable increase in identified labour trafficking cases and abusive labour practices. Although there is some overlap in service needs, victims and survivors of sex trafficking and labour trafficking often require access to different supports. Importantly, access to well-resourced social and legal services is vital to supporting recovery.

The report also found that human trafficking remains more prevalent in urban centres — particularly in Ontario — yet it's likely that significant underreporting persists in less populated regions and among certain communities. The fact that nearly 1 in 6 (16%) of trafficking incidents occurred in small towns, rural settings and medium centres underlines the importance of including low-density regions in prevention and response strategies.

If this report has one primary conclusion, it's that the hotline's data substantiates what Canada's social services sector has been saying for decades: social services are essential for supporting victims and survivors, should be tailored to their unique needs, and must be made available nationwide.

This report serves as both an educational resource and a call to action to Canadian governments. It demonstrates the need for every province and territory to develop or enhance strategies to address human trafficking. These strategies should:

- prioritize prevention initiatives so trafficking doesn't happen in the first place;
- devote additional resources to strengthen the social service agencies and organizations that play a vital role in supporting victims and survivors; and
- improve awareness and education to pierce through the myths and misconceptions that distort the public to the realities of this issue.

Only by creating holistic and coordinated strategies across Canada will we succeed at ending human trafficking in this country.

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Appendix

Table 1: Number of hotline calls (calls, chats, emails, webforms), cases, and victims and survivors identified, per year

Year	Calls	Cases	Victims/survivors
2019	1,459	251	358
2020	2,637	421	666
2021	3,679	460	628
2022	4,931	368	518
2023	4,984	345	568
2024	5,171	466	579
Total	22,861	2,311	3,317

Note: For all tables, the 2019 data only include seven months as the hotline was launched in May 2019.

Table 2: Number of human trafficking cases, by form, identified by the hotline per year

Form of trafficking	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Sex trafficking	175	300	325	229	246	328
Labour trafficking	16	24	30	18	57	100
Not specified/Other	60	97	105	121	42	38
Total	251	421	460	368	345	466

Table 3: Number of abusive labour practices cases identified by the hotline per year

Year	Cases
2019	12
2020	24
2021	28
2022	39
2023	96
2024	64
Total	263

Table 4: Service referrals provided to sex trafficking victims and survivors by the hotline, 2019–2024

Service referral type	N° of referrals	% of referrals
Housing/shelters	397	26%
Health, mental health & addiction treatment	378	25%
Case management	310	20%
Other	201	13%
Legal	106	7%
Employment and income	100	7%
Education and training	40	3%
Total	**1,532**	**100%**

Note: Percentages may not total to 100 due to rounding.

Table 5: Service referrals provided to labour trafficking victims and survivors by the hotline 2019–2024

Service referral type	N° of referrals	% of referrals
Legal	68	37%
Case management	34	19%
Other	34	19%
Employment and income	19	10%
Health, mental health & addiction treatment	15	8%
Immigration-specific	13	7%
Total	**183**	**100%**

Table 6: Human trafficking incidents recognized by the hotline, by municipality size, 2019–2024

Municipality size	% of incidents
Large	83.57%
Medium	8.88%
Small/rural	7.55%
Total	**100.00%**

Table 7: Human trafficking incidents recognized by the hotline, by province, 2019–2024

Province/Region	% of incidents
Ontario	66%
Alberta	11%
British Columbia	9%
Quebec	7%
Manitoba	3%
Saskatchewan	2%
Atlantic provinces	2%
Territories	<1%

Note: Percentages may not total to 100 due to rounding.

The higher proportion of trafficking incidents identified in Ontario may reflect the province's higher population relative to other provinces, as well as the provincial government's higher overall investments (e.g., awareness initiatives, dedicated police units, support programs for survivors, etc.) which may enhance Ontario's ability to detect trafficking.

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