



Canadian Centre to  
End Human Trafficking

# Close the gaps: Creating a coordinated strategy to end human trafficking in Canada

Written submission for the 2026 federal budget

May 4, 2026



## **Recommendations**

**Recommendation 1:** Renew the *National Strategy to Combat Human Trafficking* within the next six months and ensure it is well resourced and funded.

**Recommendation 2:** Strengthen the national strategy by including a focus on labour trafficking.

**Recommendation 3:** Implement a framework that incentivizes and supports provincial and territorial governments in developing their own anti-human trafficking strategies.

## **Action Needed to End Human Trafficking in Canada**

The federal government has demonstrated leadership in the fight against human trafficking. The *National Strategy to Combat Human Trafficking (2019–2024)* – with its focus on empowerment, prevention, protection, prosecution, and partnerships – has achieved positive results, particularly on raising awareness and strengthening survivor supports.

Unfortunately, worsening socio-economic conditions are undermining this progress by increasing vulnerability across the country. Overlapping addiction, housing, and affordability crises are intensifying and increasing the risk factors for both sex and labour trafficking.

Recent data from the Canadian Human Trafficking Hotline illustrates the scale and urgency of this issue: since its launch in May 2019, the hotline received nearly 23,000 calls (CCTEHT, 2025, p. 6). A total of 2,311 trafficking cases were identified during that time, with a record number documented in 2024 (p. 7). Notably, labour trafficking cases surged by 137% in that same year (p. 10).

Despite clear evidence that trafficking occurs across the country, Canada's policy response remains fragmented. Federal, provincial and territorial governments have developed a patchwork of legislation and policies that are uncoordinated and underfunded. The national strategy, while achieving some progress, focused primarily on areas within federal jurisdiction. At the provincial level, only Ontario and Alberta currently have active anti-human trafficking strategies; others either lack dedicated plans or have allowed them to expire. As a result, most provinces do not have coordinated approaches across policy areas under their responsibility.

Since human trafficking intersects a broad array of systems – ranging from housing and health care to policing and immigration – it cannot be addressed by one government or department alone. A renewed, comprehensive pan-Canadian strategy is required. Such a framework should address root causes, embed lived experience, and provide trauma-informed supports for survivors.

This moment demands bold and decisive action: together, we must position Canada as a global leader in ending human trafficking and preventing exploitation across the country.

## **Recommendation 1: Renew the national strategy immediately**

Canada's renewed strategy must not be delayed any further. We are calling on the federal government to release an updated strategy to combat human trafficking immediately. Further, the 2026 budget must also allocate resources to support implementation, including sustained funding for:

- the establishment of a survivor advisory committee, which must be formed right away;
- grants to support growth and sustainability in the anti-trafficking sector;
- programs that address the needs of survivors across all social services;
- programs and training specifically targeted at addressing labour trafficking and supporting survivors (see Recommendation 2); and
- support for provincial and territorial strategy development and implementation (see Recommendation 3).

## **Recommendation 2: Increase attention and resources for labour trafficking**

While sex trafficking remains the most common form of human trafficking reported to the hotline, labour trafficking cases have increased significantly (CCTEHT, 2025, p. 10). A significant portion of these cases involves international students, migrant workers, and people with precarious immigration status. These populations are particularly vulnerable due to immigration-specific insecurities, such as restricted labour mobility, misinformation on rights and entitlements, limited access to social and settlement services, limited eligibility for permanent residency, and insufficient program oversight. These factors both increase exploitation and limit the ability of people to exit trafficking situations.

The 2026 budget should include funding to:

- phase out closed permits that tie workers to a single employer;
- expand pathways from temporary to permanent residency;
- extend eligibility for settlement services to those with temporary, precarious, or expired immigration status;
- make Employment and Social Development Canada's Migrant Worker Support Program a permanent, stable funding stream; and
- increase resources to monitor recruiters and employers in the hiring of temporary foreign workers to ensure compliance with federal and provincial legislation.

### **Recommendation 3: Incentivize and support provincial and territorial anti-human trafficking strategies**

Our work across Canada has made one thing clear: provinces with dedicated strategies are better positioned to prevent exploitation and support survivors. While a national strategy is crucial for coordinating federal action, provinces and territories – which deliver many of the services that survivors depend upon – must have dedicated strategies of their own. Strong federal-provincial alignment will help close policy gaps, strengthen prevention, and improve outcomes for survivors.

Federal leadership will be critical to achieving this policy goal. Historically, the Government of Canada has paired national strategies with conditional funding to align federal-provincial-territorial priorities. This approach has been used effectively in areas such as healthcare, childcare, and gender-based violence. A similar model should be applied to human trafficking.

The renewed federal strategy should establish core requirements that must be included in provincial and territorial strategies, including the integration of lived experience in policy and program design, prevention initiatives, public education and awareness, trauma-informed law enforcement responses, and trafficking-specific social services. Federal funding could then be used to incentivize provinces and territories to develop and implement strategies that incorporate these requirements while maintaining flexibility so jurisdictions can respond to local conditions. This approach would ensure consistent national standards and allow for context-specific implementation.

The federal government has already established consistent funding through the previous national strategy, totaling \$10.4 million annually. Expanding this investment while also requiring cost-sharing requirements with the provinces and territories could provide the financial foundation for the truly pan-Canadian approach that is needed. This approach would improve the federal government's return on investment by encouraging provincial and territorial participation, enhancing coordination and service delivery, and improving the sustainability of Canada's anti-human trafficking efforts.

### **Conclusion**

The 2026 Budget presents an important moment for all Canadians. By prioritizing these recommendations, the government can move beyond merely reacting to the

crisis unfolding in your borders. Proactive and innovative measures are needed to prevent exploitation and support survivors on their path to recovery. Canada has a rich legacy of combatting human trafficking. It is time to once again step up as a leader in this critical fight.

## **References**

Canadian Centre to End Human Trafficking. (2025). *Human trafficking trends in Canada, 2019–2024*.

<https://www.canadiancentretoendhumantrafficking.ca/human-trafficking-trends-in-canada-2019-2024/>

## **About the Canadian Centre to End Human Trafficking**

Founded in 2016, [The Canadian Centre to End Human Trafficking](https://www.canadiancentretoendhumantrafficking.ca/) (The Centre) is a national charity dedicated to ending all types of human trafficking in Canada. We work to mobilize system change by collaborating and working with various stakeholders, including survivors, all levels of government, frontline service providers, and private sector businesses to advance best practices. The Centre supports the anti-human trafficking movement through education and awareness, policy development and advocacy, research and data collection, convening and knowledge transfer.

In May 2019, The Centre launched the [Canadian Human Trafficking Hotline](https://www.canadiancentretoendhumantrafficking.ca/human-trafficking-hotline/) (the Hotline), providing a confidential, multilingual service, operating 24/7 to connect victims and survivors with immediate and localized support, including social services and/or law enforcement if they so choose, as well as receive third-party tips from the public.