



2025 Annual Survey Report

Human trafficking trends, service pressures and system
responses
across Ottawa and Eastern Ontario

8

organizations participated

50%

served 100+ clients

100%

encountered trafficking

Prepared by the Ottawa Coalition to End Human Trafficking (OCEHT)

Executive Summary

Human trafficking is a persistent form of exploitation that occurs in communities across Canada, including Ottawa. It can involve sexual exploitation, forced labour, or other forms of compelled service and is often sustained through coercion, manipulation, dependency, violence, threats, isolation, and abuse of trust. It does not require movement across a border. Because trafficking frequently occurs within relationships and systems that victims and survivors already know, it can be difficult to identify and is substantially under-reported.

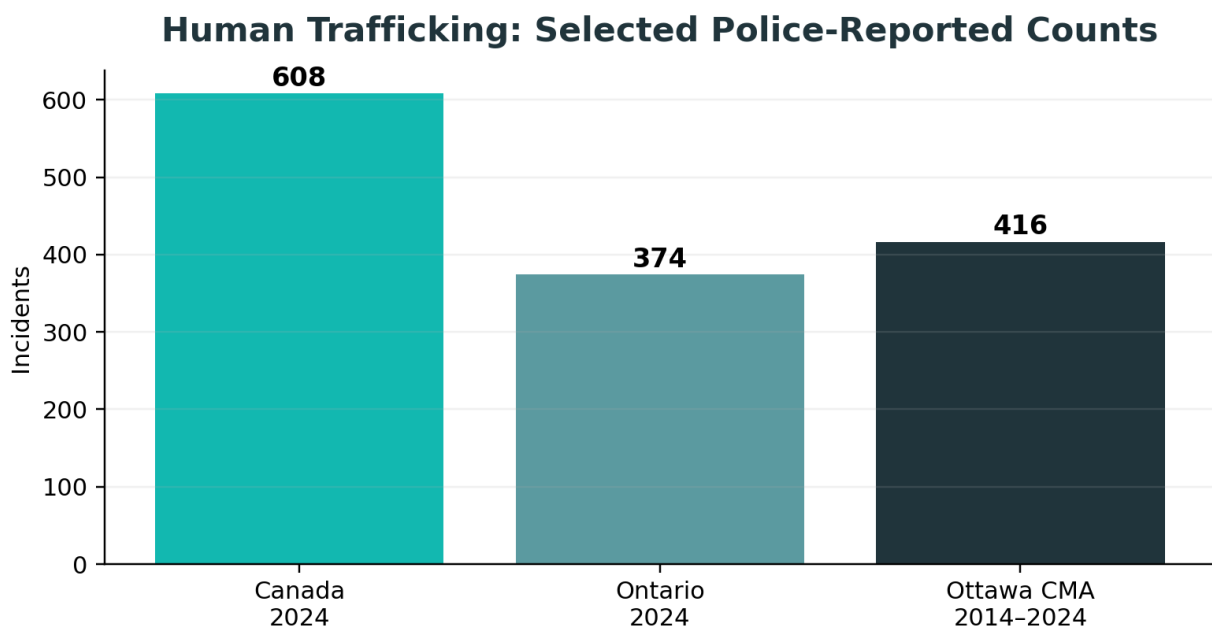
The most recent detailed national police-reported data underscore the scale of the issue. Statistics Canada reported 608 police-reported human trafficking incidents in 2024, up slightly from 605 in 2023. Across 2014–2024, 5,070 incidents were reported nationally. Ontario recorded 374 incidents in 2024 and a rate of 2.3 incidents per 100,000 population, above the national rate of 1.5. Over the 2014–2024 period, Ottawa accounted for 416 police-reported incidents—8.2% of all incidents in Canada—placing the Ottawa census metropolitan area among the five urban centres with the highest cumulative counts.

The gendered and youth-related dimensions remain pronounced. From 2014–2024, 93% of identified victims in police-reported incidents were women and girls, and two-thirds of women and girl victims were younger than 25. These data should be interpreted as detected cases rather than prevalence estimates; trafficking is hidden, disclosure may be delayed, and many incidents never come to the attention of police or formal systems.

Hotline data reveal a parallel picture of sustained demand for help. The Canadian Human Trafficking Hotline received more than 5,100 contacts in 2024, its highest annual volume to date. Between 2019 and 2024, the Hotline identified 2,311 trafficking cases and recognized 3,317 victims and survivors. Sex trafficking accounted for 69% of identified cases across the period, while labour trafficking reports rose sharply, reaching 100 cases in 2024.

Against this national and provincial context, OCEHT's 2025 survey provides a local system-level snapshot. Eight organizations across community, law-enforcement, health and education/prevention sectors participated. Half reported supporting more than 100 clients during the year, every participating organization reported encountering individuals at risk of or experiencing trafficking, and housing instability emerged as the most significant barrier to effective support. Self-referral remained the most common pathway into service, suggesting that many victims and survivors must recognize their own need and initiate help before systems identify them.

Taken together, the findings point to a clear policy and practice priority: Ottawa requires a coordinated, survivor-informed continuum that combines prevention and early identification with safe housing, sustained case management, culturally responsive services, healthcare, legal support, education, employment pathways, and long-term recovery. No single agency or sector can address trafficking alone. OCEHT's role as a cross-sector coalition is therefore essential to strengthening referral pathways, reducing duplication and service gaps, and keeping survivor expertise at the centre of community responses.



Sources: Statistics Canada, Trafficking in persons in Canada, 2024. Ottawa figure is cumulative 2014-2024.

Figure 1. Selected national, Ontario and Ottawa police-reported human trafficking counts.

Data note: Police-reported and Hotline data are indicators of detected or disclosed trafficking, not estimates of total prevalence. Differences in reporting, identification, definitions and access to services affect counts over time.

Message from the Chair

Human trafficking is not a distant problem. It is happening in Ottawa, across Eastern Ontario, and in communities throughout Canada. The 2025 findings reinforce what frontline workers, survivors, families and community partners have been telling us for years: people experiencing exploitation often face multiple, intersecting barriers long before they are able to reach safety, and those barriers do not disappear when trafficking ends.

For the Ottawa Coalition to End Human Trafficking, this report is more than a collection of survey responses. It is a call to strengthen the systems that victims and survivors must navigate. Housing instability, limited resources, fragmented services and uneven referral pathways can prolong vulnerability and undermine recovery. When a person is ready to seek help, the response must be immediate, coordinated, trauma-informed and grounded in dignity and choice.

The data also remind us that trafficking cannot be reduced to a single profile or a single pathway. While women and girls continue to be disproportionately represented in detected sex-trafficking cases, men and boys, Indigenous peoples, newcomers, migrant workers, 2SLGBTQ+ people, youth in care, people experiencing homelessness and others facing social or economic marginalization may encounter distinct risks and barriers to disclosure. Our response must be inclusive enough to recognize these differences without losing sight of each person's individual strengths, rights and expertise in their own life.

OCEHT remains committed to collaboration across sectors and to ensuring that lived experience informs the policies, programs and partnerships developed in response to human trafficking. Prevention, education, enforcement and prosecution matter, but they must be matched by safe housing, accessible services, long-term recovery supports and meaningful opportunities for survivors to lead change.

I extend my sincere appreciation to the organizations that contributed to this survey and to the professionals who continue to do complex work under significant pressure. Most importantly, we acknowledge the victims, survivors and lived-experience leaders whose knowledge continues to shape a more responsive and humane system. Their voices must remain central to what comes next.

Wendy Gee

Chair, Ottawa Coalition to End Human Trafficking

About OCEHT and the 2025 Survey

The Ottawa Coalition to End Human Trafficking was established to bring together organizations and individuals working to prevent human trafficking and support victims and survivors in Ottawa and surrounding communities. The Coalition creates a forum for cross-sector learning, coordination, advocacy and the development of practical responses to emerging needs.

Purpose of the 2025 Survey

The 2025 Annual Survey was designed to identify emerging local trends, pressures on services, referral patterns and barriers encountered by organizations serving people at risk of or experiencing human trafficking. Eight organizations participated across multiple sectors. The findings should be read as a system snapshot rather than a prevalence study: they reflect the experiences and service environments of participating organizations and are not intended to estimate the total number of people trafficked in Ottawa or Eastern Ontario.

2025 Survey Findings

The findings below combine the survey results with interpretive context. Each section describes what participating organizations reported, why the finding matters, and what it suggests for local coordination and service planning. As with the 2023 OCEHT report, the emphasis is on translating quantitative findings into practical implications for prevention, identification, service access and survivor support.

1. Sector Representation

The survey reflects a multi-sector response to human trafficking.

Participating organizations represented community-based services, law enforcement, healthcare, and education/prevention. This diversity is important because trafficking rarely presents as a single-service issue. A victim or survivor may come into contact with a school, emergency department, police service, shelter, child welfare professional, community outreach worker, legal service or counselling program at different points in their experience.

A multi-sector response improves the likelihood that trafficking indicators will be recognized and that referrals will be made before harm escalates. At the same time, representation across sectors creates a need for shared language, clear referral protocols, trauma-informed practice standards, and regular communication so that people are not required to repeatedly disclose traumatic experiences or navigate contradictory processes.

What this means: OCEHT can function as connective infrastructure between sectors—supporting shared protocols, training, warm referrals and coordinated problem-solving.

2. Client Demand

Half of participating organizations reported supporting more than 100 clients during the year.

The distribution of reported client volume shows that trafficking-related work is not confined to a small number of specialized files. For several organizations, the scale of service demand is substantial and exists alongside broader organizational mandates and existing caseloads.

High client volume has direct implications for staff capacity, wait times, continuity of care and the ability to provide intensive, relationship-based support. Human trafficking cases can require extended engagement, safety planning, system navigation, court accompaniment, housing advocacy, health and mental-health support, and coordination with multiple partners. As demand rises without parallel increases in staffing and flexible funding, organizations may be forced to narrow eligibility, shorten service periods or rely on informal coordination.

What this means: Sustainable funding needs to reflect not only the number of clients served but also the complexity, duration and coordination demands of trafficking-related support.

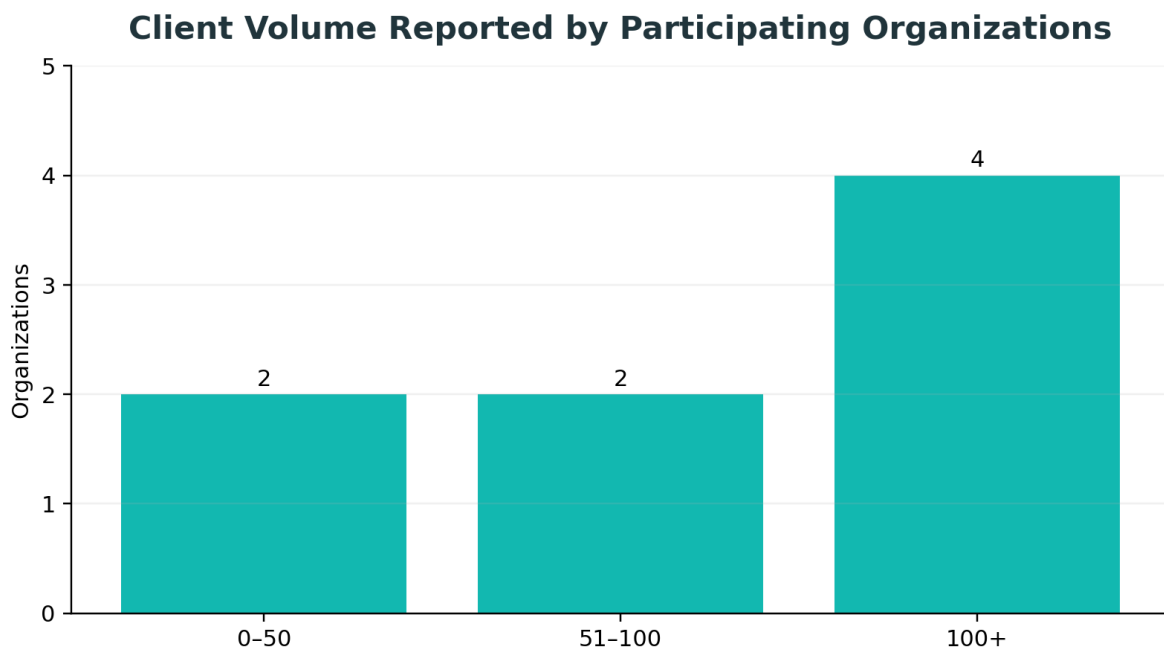


Figure 2. Distribution of organizations by reported client volume.

3. Human Trafficking Encounters

Every participating organization reported encountering individuals at risk of or experiencing human trafficking.

This finding demonstrates that human trafficking is visible across local service systems rather than within a single specialized sector. It also supports the need for universal baseline competency: staff in organizations that do not identify primarily as anti-trafficking agencies may still be among the first professionals to encounter a person experiencing exploitation.

Identification should not be understood as a one-time screening event. Disclosure often depends on safety, trust and relationship. Individuals may initially seek support for housing, health concerns, violence, substance use, financial instability, immigration issues or other immediate needs without naming trafficking. A trauma-informed response therefore focuses on indicators, choice, privacy, non-judgment, practical safety and repeated opportunities to access support.

What this means: Human trafficking training should be embedded across sectors and paired with clear, local referral options so identification leads to meaningful support rather than another dead end.

4. Referral Pathways

Self-referral was the most frequently reported pathway into service, followed by law enforcement and outreach.

The prominence of self-referral can be interpreted in two ways. It demonstrates the agency and resourcefulness of victims and survivors who identify a need and seek assistance. It may also indicate that formal systems are not consistently identifying trafficking early enough to initiate proactive, supported referrals.

Law enforcement remains an important referral partner, while outreach provides a lower-barrier pathway for people who may not be ready or able to engage formal systems. Schools and healthcare were reported less frequently than self-referral, even though both sectors can have repeated contact with young people and adults experiencing exploitation. Strengthening identification and referral capacity in these settings could reduce reliance on individuals having to navigate services on their own.

Warm referral practices are particularly important. A name or phone number is often insufficient when a person is managing fear, trauma, housing insecurity, coercive control or mistrust of systems. With consent, direct connection between providers, accompanied appointments, flexible intake and follow-up can reduce drop-off between services.

What this means: Referral pathways should be evaluated not only by how many referrals are made, but by whether people successfully connect to the next service and remain engaged.

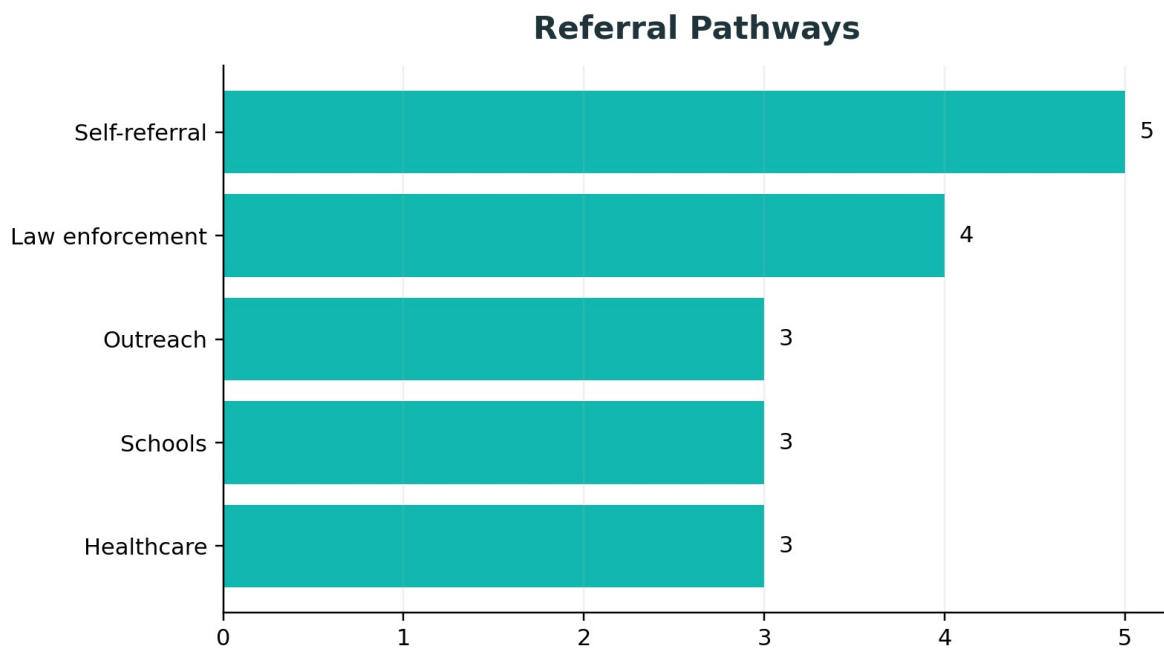


Figure 3. Referral pathways reported by participating organizations.

5. Barriers to Service Delivery

Housing instability was the most significant barrier identified by participating organizations, followed by funding limitations and system fragmentation.

Housing is both a prevention issue and a recovery issue. A lack of safe, affordable and appropriate housing can increase vulnerability to exploitation, limit a person's ability to leave a trafficking situation, and destabilize recovery after exit. The 2025 local finding is consistent with national Hotline data, where housing and shelter supports remain among the most frequent needs for people affected by sex trafficking.

Funding limitations compound the housing challenge by restricting staffing, outreach, case management and the ability to provide flexible supports that do not fit neatly within program categories. System fragmentation further increases pressure on survivors and providers when eligibility criteria, waitlists, geography, age mandates or service silos create gaps between programs.

Substance use was also identified as a barrier. A survivor-informed response should avoid treating substance use as a reason to exclude someone from support. For some individuals, substance use may be connected to trauma, coercion, coping or the conditions of exploitation. Integrated harm-reduction, treatment and mental-health pathways are therefore essential.

What this means: Safe housing is foundational. Without it, safety planning, health, employment, education, legal participation and long-term recovery are much harder to sustain.

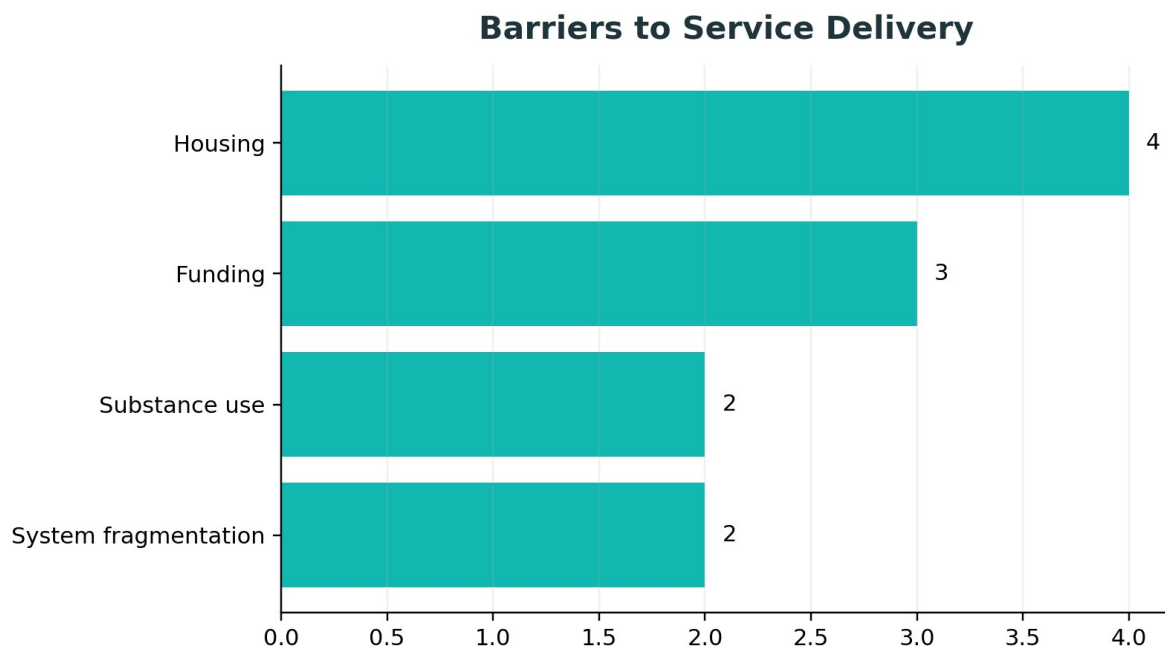


Figure 4. Most frequently reported barriers to service delivery.

6. Geographic Reach

Participating organizations serve people in Ottawa as well as surrounding and rural communities.

The survey indicates that trafficking-related needs extend beyond the urban core. Rural and regional communities may have fewer specialized services, limited public transportation, reduced anonymity, and longer travel distances to healthcare, shelter, legal support or culturally specific programming.

National Hotline findings similarly show that trafficking occurs in large urban centres, smaller municipalities and rural areas. Although major urban centres account for the largest volume of detected cases, a regional strategy is needed so that a person's postal code does not determine whether specialized support is available.

Regional coordination can include shared training, virtual consultation, mobile or outreach-based services, transportation assistance, formal referral agreements, and clear protocols for transferring support across municipal boundaries.

What this means: Ottawa should be understood as part of a broader Eastern Ontario service ecosystem. Regional access and transportation are core anti-trafficking issues, not secondary considerations.

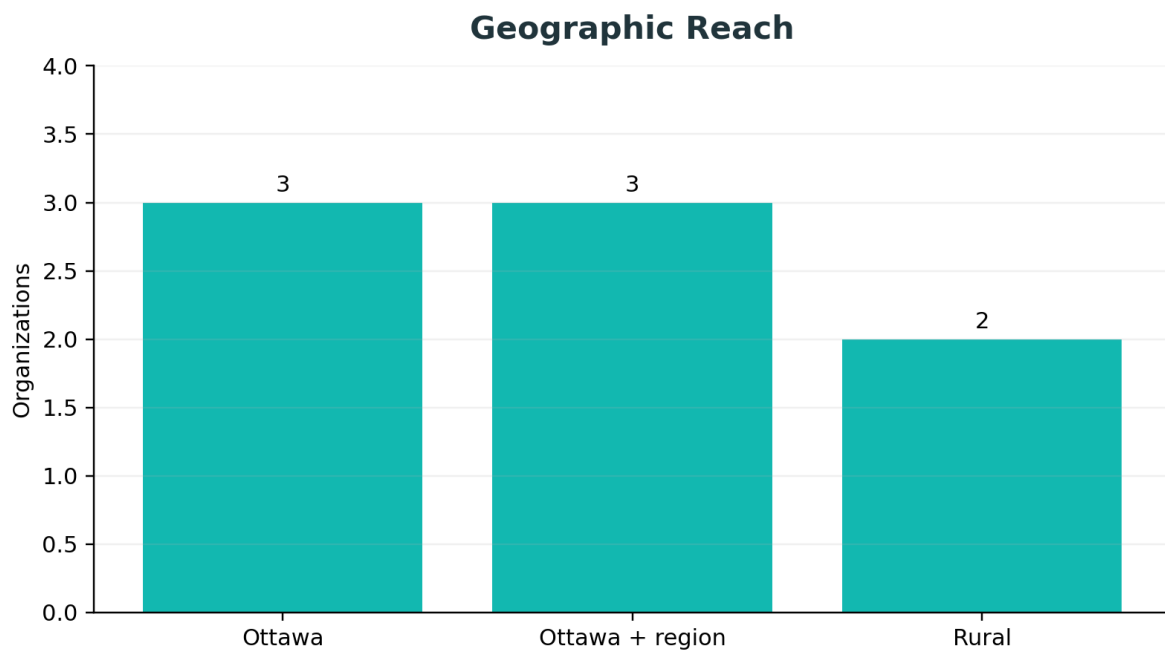


Figure 5. Geographic reach reported by participating organizations.

What the Findings Tell Us

Human trafficking is a systems issue

The 2025 results show that trafficking is encountered across community, health, education and law-enforcement systems. Effective response therefore depends on coordination, not simply on adding isolated programs.

Housing is a primary intervention

Housing instability was the most significant local barrier and is also a recurring national service need. Safe, appropriate housing must be treated as core anti-trafficking infrastructure.

Early identification remains uneven

The reliance on self-referral suggests that victims and survivors often carry a large burden for initiating help. Schools, healthcare, community programs and other first-contact systems need practical identification and referral pathways.

Long-term recovery requires flexible support

Trafficking-related harm can affect safety, mental health, physical health, relationships, income, education, legal matters and housing. Short-term crisis response is necessary but insufficient without sustained recovery options.

Survivor leadership strengthens quality

Policies and services are more responsive when people with lived experience have meaningful, compensated roles in design, governance, training, evaluation and accountability.

Priority Directions for OCEHT and Community Partners

1. Strengthen the housing continuum

Advocate for emergency, transitional, supportive and long-term housing options that are trafficking-informed, low-barrier and responsive to diverse survivor needs.

2. Build a coordinated referral framework

Develop clear cross-sector referral pathways, shared consent-based protocols, service maps and warm-transfer practices, including regional and rural pathways.

3. Expand prevention and early identification

Prioritize education for youth, caregivers, schools, healthcare, hospitality, transportation, community agencies and other sectors likely to encounter trafficking indicators.

4. Invest in workforce capacity

Support sustainable funding, specialized training, clinical consultation, staff wellness and manageable caseloads for organizations responding to complex trafficking-related needs.

5. Centre survivor and lived-experience expertise

Create compensated, protected and meaningful opportunities for lived-experience leaders to shape policy, training, research, evaluation and program design.

6. Improve local data and evaluation

Use consistent definitions and indicators, track successful referral completion as well as referral volume, and build longitudinal understanding of service demand while protecting privacy and safety.

7. Maintain an inclusive response

Ensure programs recognize sex and labour trafficking and are accessible to women, girls, men, boys, 2SLGBTQ+ people, Indigenous peoples, newcomers, migrant workers and others who may face distinct barriers to recognition and support.

Conclusion

The 2025 OCEHT survey confirms that human trafficking continues to place significant pressure on Ottawa and Eastern Ontario service systems. Participating organizations are encountering trafficking across sectors, supporting substantial client volumes, and working within a context where housing shortages, funding limitations and fragmented services impede effective response.

The findings also demonstrate the value of coalition-based work. Human trafficking cannot be addressed through one program, one profession or one level of government. A durable response requires prevention, identification, protection, accountability and long-term survivor support to operate as an integrated continuum. OCEHT is well positioned to convene this work locally by connecting organizations, advancing survivor-informed practice, identifying service gaps and translating frontline evidence into coordinated action.

The next phase should focus on converting these findings into measurable improvements: faster and more successful referrals, safer housing options, stronger regional access, broader cross-sector competency and sustained opportunities for survivors to influence the systems intended to support them.

Selected Sources and Data Notes

- 1. Statistics Canada (2025). Trafficking in persons in Canada, 2024. Juristat, released December 8, 2025.** Used for national, Ontario and Ottawa police-reported human trafficking statistics, including 2024 incident counts, victim characteristics and 2014–2024 trends.
- 2. Canadian Centre to End Human Trafficking (2025). Human Trafficking Trends in Canada, 2019–2024.** Used for Canadian Human Trafficking Hotline call volume, identified cases, victim/survivor counts, forms of trafficking and service-referral context.
- 3. Ottawa Coalition to End Human Trafficking (2024). Annual Report 2023.** Used as a structural and narrative reference for presenting local survey findings and interpreting service-system implications.
- 4. Ottawa Coalition to End Human Trafficking (2025). Annual Survey Findings.** Primary source for the eight-organization 2025 survey findings presented in this report.

Interpretation Note

The national data sources use different collection methods. Police-reported statistics reflect incidents known to and recorded by police. Hotline statistics reflect voluntarily disclosed information and cases assessed through the Canadian Human Trafficking Hotline. OCEHT survey findings reflect participating organizations. These datasets should not be combined to estimate prevalence; they are best read together as complementary indicators of detected trafficking, disclosure, service demand and system pressure.

