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**HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN
COLORADO:
2023 NEW RECORD YEAR
FOR TRAFFICKING CRIMES**

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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ABOUT COMMON SENSE INSTITUTE

Common Sense Institute is a non-partisan research organization dedicated to the protection and promotion of Colorado's economy. CSI is at the forefront of important discussions concerning the future of free enterprise and aims to have an impact on the issues that matter most to Coloradans. CSI's mission is to examine the fiscal impacts of policies, initiatives, and proposed laws so that Coloradans are educated and informed on issues impacting their lives. CSI employs rigorous research techniques and dynamic modeling to evaluate the potential impact of these measures on the economy and individual opportunity.

TEAMS & FELLOWS STATEMENT

CSI is committed to independent, in-depth research that examines the impacts of policies, initiatives, and proposed laws so that Coloradans are educated and informed on issues impacting their lives. CSI's commitment to institutional independence is rooted in the individual independence of our researchers, economists, and fellows. At the core of CSI's mission is a belief in the power of the free enterprise system. Our work explores ideas that protect and promote jobs and the economy, and the CSI team and fellows take part in this pursuit with academic freedom. Our team's work is informed by data-driven research and evidence. The views and opinions of fellows do not reflect the institutional views of CSI. CSI operates independently of any political party and does not take positions.

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INTRODUCTION

Colorado's crime surge in the early 2020s was not limited to property and violent crimes. Human trafficking also surged. These offenses come in two forms. Victims are either coerced into labor or into commercial sex acts, the latter of which represents the majority of Colorado's human trafficking. Colorado is not an outlier. Nationally, human trafficking has increased as well and reached a ten-year high in 2023.

Colorado's human trafficking is more severe than elsewhere. The state ranks among the states with the highest numbers of human trafficking reports and rates of human trafficking reports. To understand the problem of human trafficking better, leaders should consider better means of assembling data that would show trends among offenders and victims.

KEY FINDINGS

- In 2023, Colorado had the nation's 10th highest number of human trafficking reports, 84 in total.
- In the U.S., the total number of reported human trafficking incidents rose reached a 15-year peak in 2023, with 3,117, more than twice the number reported in 2019.ⁱ
- Colorado had the nation's 10th highest rate of human trafficking reports per 100,000 at 1.44.
- Colorado reached a record amount of human trafficking in 2023, with 84 reported incidents.
- On average, there have been 74 reports of human trafficking in Colorado in 2021, 2022, and 2023. Between 2016 and 2020, there were an average 48 per year.
- Adams County is the location for the largest share of Colorado's human trafficking both over time (27%) and in 2023 (26%).
 - › El Paso and Denver counties rank second and third from 2008 to 2024, with 21% and 18%, respectively.
- In the record year 2023, Adams, Boulder, and Denver counties had the highest shares of human trafficking at 26%, 15%, and 18%, respectively.

HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN COLORADO

Colorado experienced a record year of human trafficking in 2023, matching a national trend.

In the U.S., the total number of reported human trafficking incidents rose reached a 15-year peak in 2023, with 3,117, more than twice the number reported in 2019. The annual number of human trafficking incidents has been rising every year since 2010, when there were two. That figure had risen 1,398 in 2019.

Colorado reached a record amount of human trafficking in 2023 as well, with 84 reported incidents. Previously, 2021 had been the record year for Colorado human trafficking, with 77 reported incidents.

The new decade has seen more human trafficking in Colorado than the 2010s or 2000s. On average, there have been 74 reports of human trafficking in Colorado in 2021, 2022, and 2023. Between 2016 and 2020, there were an average 48 per year.

FIGURE 1 - REPORTED HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN U.S., ANNUAL TOTALS

Reported Human Trafficking In U.S., Annual Totals

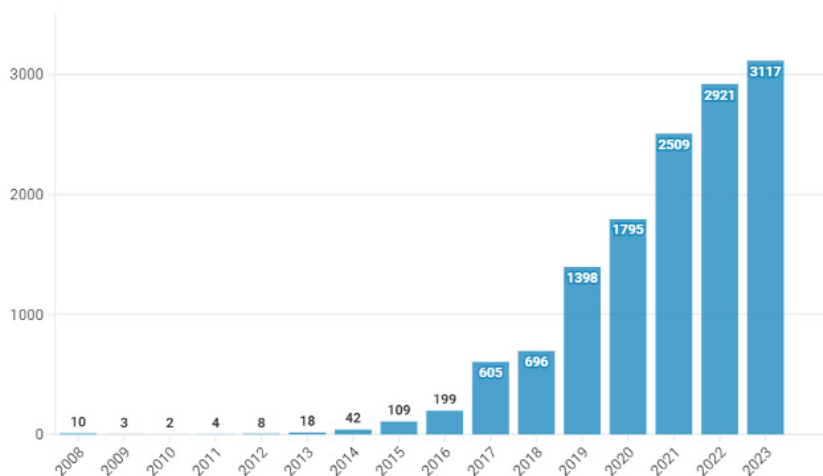
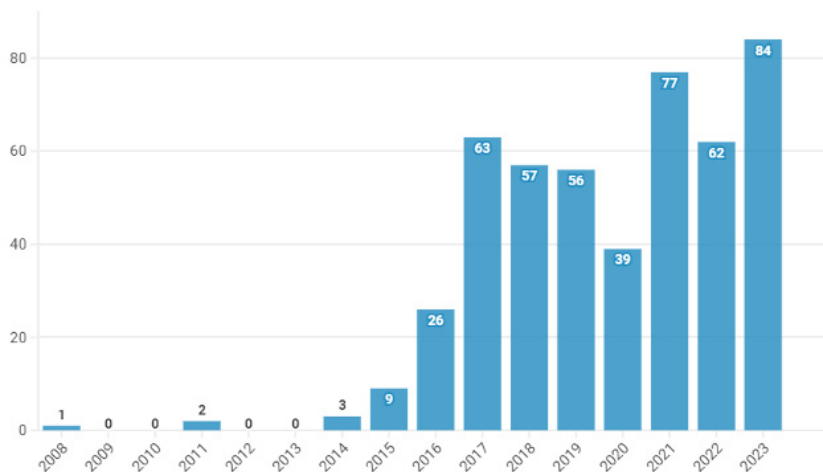


FIGURE 2 - REPORTED HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN COLORADO, ANNUAL TOTALS

Reported Human Trafficking In Colorado, Annual Totals



Colorado is not alone in its sharp increase in human trafficking, but it does have one of the nation's highest numbers of reported trafficking and one of the highest rates. Virtually every U.S. state saw human trafficking reports spike in 2021 and thereafter. All but 11 states saw human trafficking increase from 2020 to 2021.

In 2023, Colorado had the nation's 10th highest number of human trafficking reports, 84 in total. Indiana, Tennessee, Arizona, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Nevada, California, Georgia, and Texas had higher numbers.

Colorado also had the nation's 10th highest rate of human trafficking reports per 100,000. At 1.44 in 2023, this is a 15-year record rate of human trafficking. Texas, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Wyoming, Georgia, Nebraska, North Dakota, Nevada, and Alaska had higher rates.

FIGURE 3 - 2023 HUMAN TRAFFICKING TOTALS AND RATES RANKINGS AMONG U.S. STATES

State	2023 Total	2023 Rate per 100,000	2023 Total Rank	2023 Rate per 100,000 Rank
Texas	528	1.76	1	9
Georgia	302	2.77	2	5
California	293	0.75	3	28
Nevada	168	5.29	4	2
Wisconsin	112	1.90	5	7
Minnesota	106	1.85	6	8
Arizona	104	1.41	7	11
Tennessee	91	1.29	8	15
Indiana	89	1.30	9	13
Colorado	84	1.44	10	10
Washington	82	1.05	11	20
Maryland	80	1.30	12	14
Alaska	73	9.95	13	1
Virginia	69	0.79	14	26
Florida	68	0.31	15	42
Nebraska	57	2.90	16	4
Oregon	56	1.32	17	12
Kentucky	53	1.17	18	18
Ohio	53	0.45	19	40
North Carolina	49	0.46	20	38
Missouri	47	0.76	21	27
Michigan	46	0.46	22	37
Massachusetts	43	0.62	23	33

State	2023 Total	2023 Rate per 100,000	2023 Total Rank	2023 Rate per 100,000 Rank
Pennsylvania	42	0.32	24	41
Utah	41	1.21	25	16
New York	38	0.19	26	46
Oklahoma	33	0.82	27	25
Arkansas	26	0.85	28	23
Illinois	26	0.21	29	45
North Dakota	26	3.34	30	3
Louisiana	24	0.52	31	36
South Carolina	24	0.45	32	39
New Mexico	21	0.99	33	21
West Virginia	21	1.18	34	17
Idaho	17	0.88	35	22
Iowa	17	0.53	36	35
Wyoming	15	2.58	37	6
Montana	13	1.16	38	19
New Jersey	13	0.14	39	47
Hawaii	12	0.83	40	24
Connecticut	9	0.25	41	43
New Hampshire	8	0.57	42	34
Rhode Island	8	0.73	43	29
Alabama	7	0.14	44	48
Delaware	7	0.69	45	30
South Dakota	6	0.66	46	31
Vermont	4	0.62	47	32
Maine	3	0.22	48	44
Mississippi	3	0.10	49	49
Kansas	0	0.00	50	50

CONCENTRATIONS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN COLORADO

In Colorado, these offenses take place all over the state but are most heavily concentrated in a few counties. In 2023, they became more concentrated in Adams, Boulder, and Denver counties.ⁱⁱ

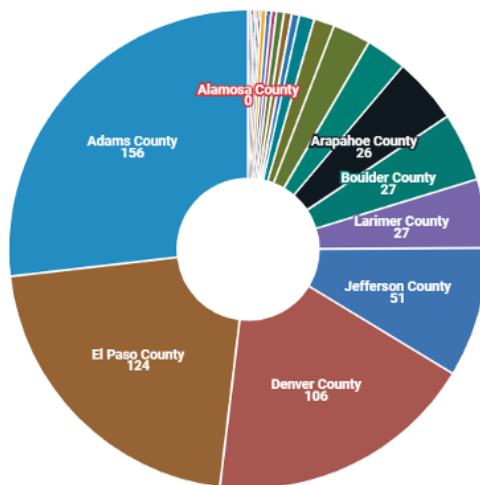
Between 2008 and August 2024, Adams County has the highest number of human trafficking offenses, with 156 total victims or 27%. Second highest is El Paso County with 124 or 21% followed by Denver County with 106 or 18%.

Over time, that concentration has shifted.

In the record human trafficking year of 2023, Denver and Boulder counties each had more human trafficking victims than El Paso County, ranking second and third for the counties with the most human trafficking with 18% and 15%, respectively.

FIGURE 4 - COLORADO HUMAN TRAFFICKING VICTIMS, 2008-2024

Colorado Human Trafficking Victims, 2008-2024 (Through July)

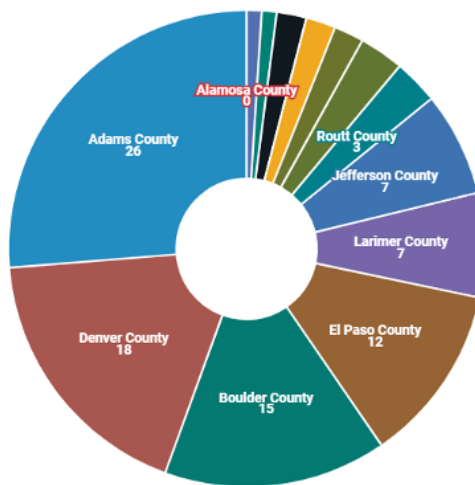


Source: [Colorado Bureau of Investigation](#)



FIGURE 5 - COLORADO HUMAN TRAFFICKING VICTIMS, 2023

Colorado Human Trafficking Victims, 2023



Source: [Colorado Bureau of Investigation](#)





BOTTOM LINE

The number of Colorado's human trafficking levels reached a peak in 2021 and again in 2023, with 99 victims statewide in the year. These offenses are concentrated in a handful of counties, in particular Adams County, El Paso County, and Denver County. In 2023, Adams, Boulder, and Denver counties were the locations of more than half the state's human trafficking. Leaders should consider methods to create more detailed data sets of profiles of both victims and offenders.

SOURCES

- i. FBI Crime Data Explorer, <https://cde.ucr.cjis.gov/LATEST/webapp/#/pages/explorer/crime/crime-trend>
- ii. Colorado Bureau of Investigation, <https://cbi.colorado.gov/>