

Adoption fact file – UK wide

Q: What is adoption?

A: Adoption is the legal process by which a child or a group of siblings who cannot be brought up within their birth family become full, permanent and legal members of their new family. Adopters become the child's legal parents with the same rights and responsibilities as if the child was born to them.

Most children who become adopted have lived in foster care before their adoption. Foster care is usually temporary guardianship for children whose birth parents cannot look after them. Mostly, children are fostered within a foster family rather than in an institution. Their time in foster care can range from days to several years. Less commonly, children stay in a foster family long term.

The majority of adopted children have suffered significant abuse, violence or neglect in their birth families. Adoption gives these children a second chance of stability, permanence, and the love and nurture that all children need.

However, adoption is not a silver bullet. The trauma suffered in early childhood is carried with children into their adoptive families. Those families need consistent, specialist support to help them give their children the best possible chance of a brighter future.

Q: How many children are adopted each year?

A: Around 4,000 children are adopted across the UK each year.

Q: How many children are currently waiting in care to be adopted?

A: Across the UK there were around 3,000 children waiting for adoption in 2020.

Sources:

Gov.uk [Education Secretary urges overhaul of adoption system - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/education-secretary-urges-overhaul-of-adoption-system)

Care Inspectorate [Fostering and Adoption 2019-20 Master \(2\).pdf \(careinspectorate.com\)](https://www.careinspectorate.com/~/media/Files/2020/02/Fostering_and_Adoption_2019-20_Master_(2).pdf)

hscni [Frequently Asked Questions - Adoption & Fostering \(hscni.net\)](https://www.hscni.net/~/media/Files/2020/02/Frequently_Asked_Questions_-_Adoption_and_Fostering.pdf)

Q: Are there enough adoptive parents?

In England there were around 2,400 children waiting for adoption in 2020 but just over 1,800 approved adopters who are ready to give them a home. In Scotland 270 children and young people were approved for adoption in 2019, while 259 new households were approved for adoption that year. There are no equivalent statistics in Wales, or Northern Ireland.

Children with disabilities, children aged four or older and sibling groups are all deemed harder to place – meaning they will be less likely to be adopted. Children from ethnic minorities also wait longer which is why there is a need for more prospective adopters from the black and ethnic minority community.

There are believed to be at least 55,000 adoptive families in the UK. Official figures do not exist – this is an Adoption UK estimate, based on extrapolation from the average annual number of adoptions.

Key statistics – England

The latest official statistics from [the Department for Education figures](#) show the number of looked after children who were adopted dropped to 3,440 in the year leading up to the end of March 2020, down from a peak of 5,360 in 2015. The number of children leaving care through adoption fell by 4% in the last year alone, continuing the downward trend.

Awaiting Adoption

On 31 March 2020:

- 3,880 children had an adoption best interest decision but were not yet placed.
- 2,440 children had a placement order but were not yet placed.

Waiting Times

During year ending 31 March 2020:

- 459 - the average number of days between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family.

Adopter Characteristics

During year ending 31 March 2020:

- 89% (3,050) of children were adopted by couples and 11% (390) by single adopters.
- 17% (570) of children were adopted by same sex couples (either in a civil partnership, married or neither).

Looked after children

On 31 March 2020:

- 80,080 children were in the care of local authorities, up 2% on 31 March 2019
- Of these children, 3% (2,402) were placed for adoption

Q: Who can adopt?

A: There are very few things that automatically bar a person from becoming an adopter.

To adopt, you must be:

- Aged over 21
- Legally resident in the UK, the Channel Islands, or the Isle of Man, for at least 12 months.

If you or a member of your household have a criminal conviction or caution for offences against children, or for serious sexual offences, you will not be able to adopt. Those are the only automatic exclusions from adoption. People who are single, gay, living in rented accommodation and already have children can all adopt. Disabilities and health conditions do not automatically rule you out.

Sources:

Department for Education: [Children looked after in England including adoption: 2019 to 2020](#)

Key statistics – Northern Ireland

ADOPTION

Adoptions from Care

111 looked after children were adopted in the year ending 31 March 2020

Waiting times

For children adopted in 2019-20, the average length of time between the last entry into care and the granting of the Adoption Order was 3 years 1 month.

Types of Adopters

During year ending 31 March 2020:

- 45% (50) of children adopted from care were adopted by concurrent carers
- 26% (29) of children adopted from care were adopted by dual approved carers
- 15% (17) of children adopted from care were adopted by former foster carers
- 14% (15) of children adopted from care were adopted by adopters only

Adopter Characteristics

During year ending 31 March 2020:

- 84% of adopters were married couples, 10% were same sex couples and 6% were single females adopters
- Of the adopters, 7 had previously adopted a child or children and 19% had dependent birth children in the household

Children in care

On 31 March 2020:

- 3,383 children were in the care of local authorities

Sources:

Department of Health: [Children's Social Care Statistics for Northern Ireland 2019-20](#) (previously Children Order Statistics)

Department of Health: [Children Adopted from Care in Northern Ireland 2019-20](#)

Department of Health: [Children in Care in Northern Ireland 2018-19](#)

Key statistics – Scotland

Looked after children

On 31 July 2019:

- 14,262 children were in the care of local authorities, a decrease of 2% from 31 July 2018.

Placements

On 31 July 2019:

- 1% (212) were living with prospective adopters

ADOPTION

Adoptions from Care

265 looked after children were adopted during the year ending 31 July 2019

Sources

Scottish Government: [Children's Social Work Statistics Scotland 2018-19](#)

Key statistics – Wales

LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

On 31st March 2020:

- 7,170 children were in the care of local authorities, an increase of 5% on the previous year

Placements

On 31st March 2020:

- 3% (245) were placed for adoption

ADOPTION

Adoptions from Care

- 295 children were adopted from care during the year ending 31st March 2020.

Foster Carer Adoptions

- 30 of the children adopted from care in the year ending 31st March 2020 were adopted by their former foster carer. This accounts for 8% of adoptions of looked after children.

Adopter Characteristics

During the year ending 31 March 2020:

- 90% (265) of adoptions were by couples and 10% (30) were by single adopters
- 19% (55) of all adoptions were by same sex couples - 35 of these by male same sex couples and 20 by female same sex couples

Sources:

Welsh Government Stats Wales: [Children's Service Statistics](#)

Welsh Government: [Children looked after by local authorities: April 2019 to March 2020 | GOV.WALES](#)

Ends