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## STATISTICS

# Children looked after by local authorities: April 2021 to March 2022

Information on children on care orders and in placements, adoptions from care and numbers of children and young persons leaving care for April 2021 to March 2022.

**First published:** 22 November 2022

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# Introduction

This annual statistical release presents figures about children looked after by Welsh local authorities.

A child is a person who is aged under 18. Section 74 of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act states that a child who is looked after by a local authority is a child who is in its care; or provided with accommodation, for a continuous period of more than 24 hours, by the authority in the exercise of any functions which are social services functions, apart from functions under section 15, Part 4, or section 109, 114 or 115.

New data is based on the year 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022, or the position at 31 March 2022.

**Policy changes** (<https://gov.wales/looked-after-children-childrens-rights-impact-assessment>) primarily focusing on reducing the numbers of children in need of care across Wales were introduced in 2019-20. Local authorities set plans in place to reduce safely the numbers of children in need of care, including targets for 2019-20, 2020-21 and 2021-22, which were monitored by Welsh Government officials.

Data included in this release and further information for individual local authorities is published on **StatsWales** (<https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Health-and-Social-Care/Social-Services/Childrens-Services/Children-Looked-After>).

## **Main points**

### **At 31 March 2022**

- 7,080 children were looked after, a decrease of 167 (2%) on the previous year. This is a rate of 112.4 per 10,000 population aged under 18, compared to a rate of 115.1 in 2020-21. This is the first decrease in the number and rate of children looked after reported annually since 2015.
- 85% of children looked after's legal status was under care orders.
- 69% of children looked after's placement was in foster care placements. There has been a gradual decline in the percentage of children looked after in foster care placements from a high of 79% on 31 March 2011.
- Nearly a third of children in foster care were placed with relatives or friends.
- More males than females were looked after.
- Nearly 2 out of 5 children looked after were aged 10 to 15.
- A lower proportion of children looked after were White or Asian/Asian British compared to the general population, however a higher proportion of children looked after were Mixed ethnicity or Black/African/Caribbean/Black British compared to the general population.
- 7% of children looked after were disabled compared to 4% of the general population.

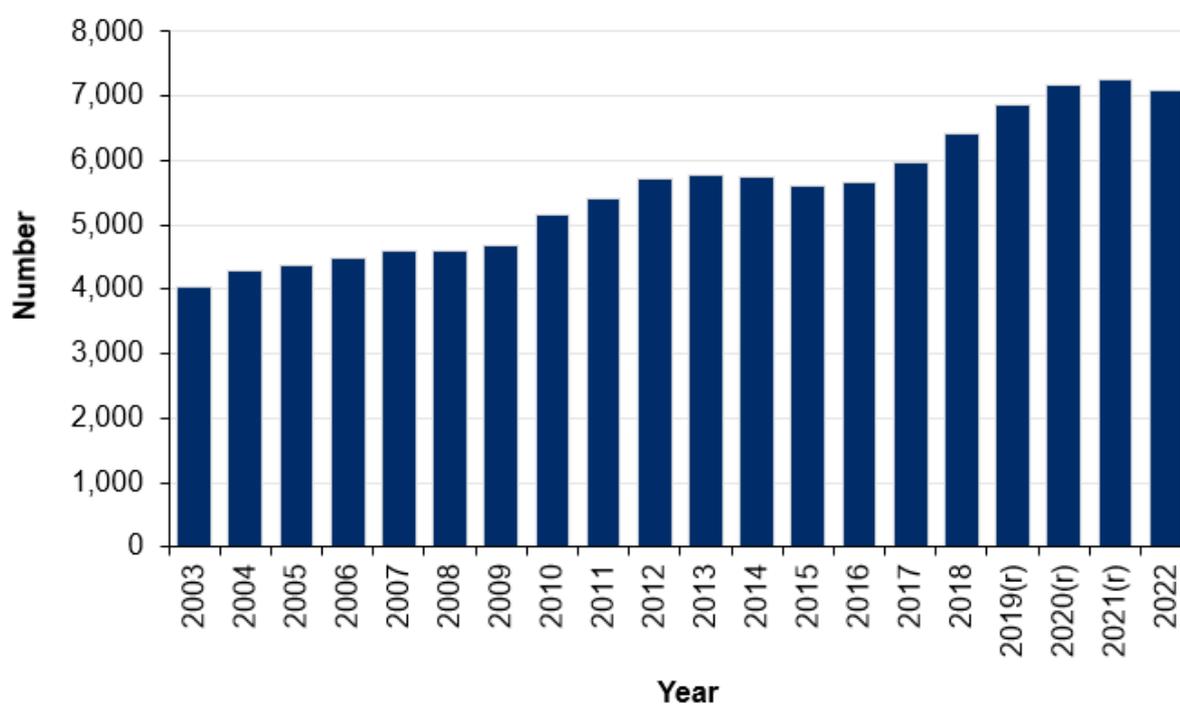
### **During 2021-22**

- 1,691 children started to be looked after, a decrease of 71 (4%) compared with the previous year. Fewer children in total have started being looked after each year since 2016-17.
- 62% of children who started to be looked after received care and support initially because of abuse or neglect.

- 1,839 children left care, an increase of 157 (9%) compared with the previous year. This is the highest number of children leaving care since 2016-17.
- 49% of children leaving care returned home to live with parents, relatives or other persons with parental responsibility.
- More children left care than started to be looked after during the year for the first time since 2014-15.
- 283 children were adopted from care, an increase of 12 (4%) on the previous year. The number of children adopted had been decreasing in recent years from a high of 385 children adopted during 2014-15.

## Number of children looked after

**Figure 1: Children looked after at 31 March, 2003 to 2022 (a)**



Source: SSDA903 return and Children looked after census, Welsh Government

(a) Excludes children looked after exclusively under a series of short breaks.

(r) The data has been revised since previously published.

The number of children looked after has been on an upward trend in recent years and peaked at 7,247 in 2021. However, there was a slight decrease in 2022 where 7,080 children were looked after, a decrease of 2% since the previous year.

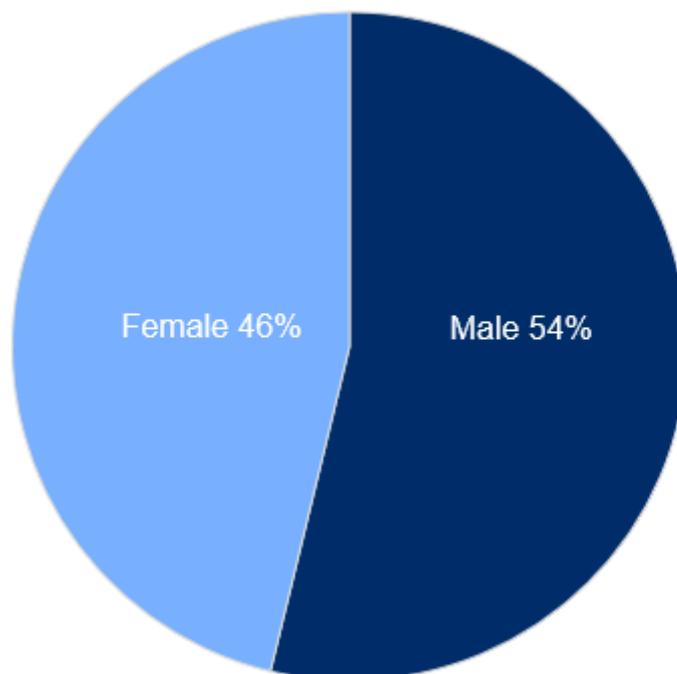
The rate per 10,000 children aged under 18 was 112.4 in 2022, slightly lower than the rate in 2021 (115.1). See [quality and methodology information \(#section-109878\)](#) for data quality statement for population data.

Note that children looked after exclusively under a series of short breaks, who normally live at home but are accommodated by a local authority in a series of short periods of care, are not included in these counts.

# Characteristics of children looked after at 31 March 2022

## Gender

**Figure 2: Children looked after by gender, 31 March 2022 (a)**



Source: Children looked after census, Welsh Government

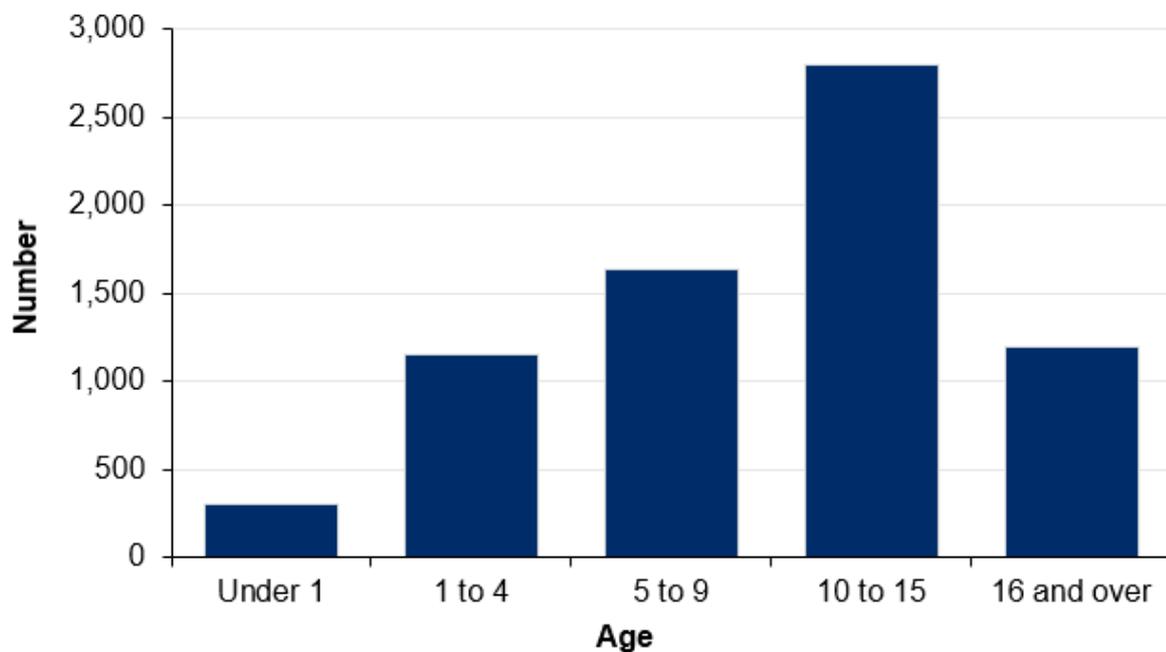
(a) Excludes children looked after exclusively under a series of short breaks.

54% of children looked after were male and 46% were female. These

proportions have been stable since data was first collected in 2002-03. See [quality and methodology information \(#section-109878\)](#) for data quality statement for gender data.

## Age

**Figure 3: Children looked after by age, 31 March 2022 (a)**



Source: Children looked after census, Welsh Government

(a) Excludes children looked after exclusively under a series of short breaks.

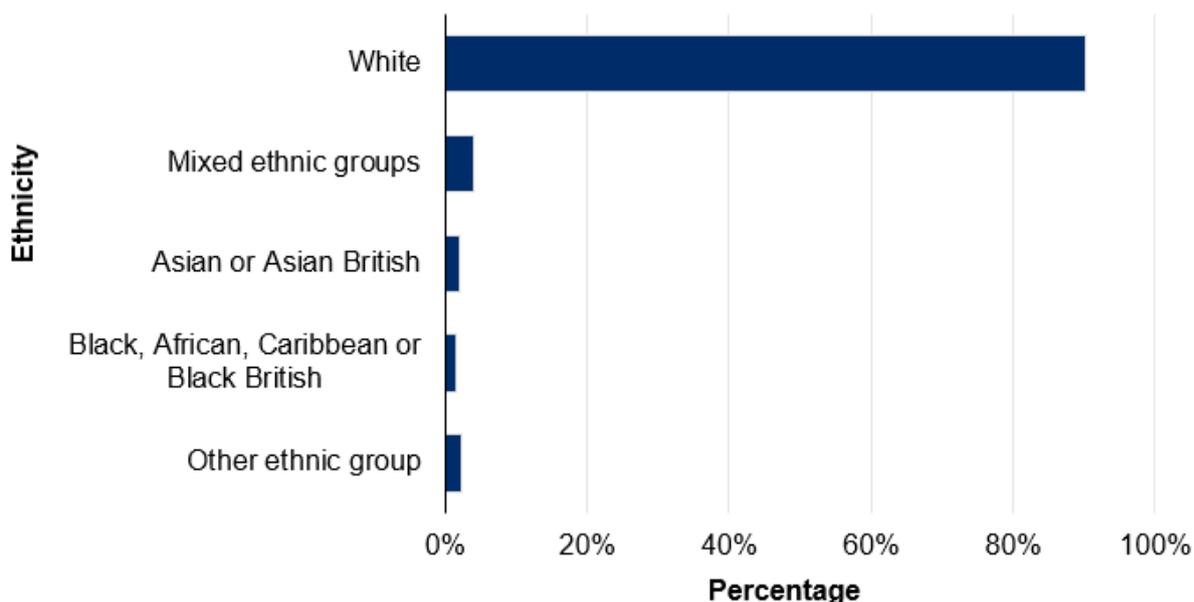
The age profile of looked after children has changed slightly in recent years with a small increase in the proportion of children looked after aged 10 to 15 and a small decrease in the proportion of children looked after aged under 5.

On 31 March 2022, nearly 2 out of 5 children looked after were aged 10 to 15 and fewer than 1 in 20 were under 1.

A greater proportion of children aged 10 and older were looked after than children aged 9 or younger. Using 2020 mid-year estimates 139.4 per 10,000 of children aged 10 or older were looked after compared to 89.9 per 10,000 aged 9 or younger. See [quality and methodology information \(#section-109878\)](#) for data quality statement for age data.

## Ethnicity

**Figure 4: Children looked after by ethnicity, 31 March 2022 (a)**



Source: Children looked after census, Welsh Government

(a) Excludes children looked after exclusively under a series of short breaks.

Where ethnicity was recorded, 90% of children looked after at 31 March 2022 were White, a decrease from 92% in the previous year. The proportions for all other ethnic groups increased slightly compared to the previous year.

The percentage of White or Asian/Asian British children looked after was lower

than the percentage of White or Asian/Asian British children in the general population according to the 2011 Census. 90% of children looked after were White, compared to 93% of the general population; 2% of children looked after were Asian/Asian British compared to 3% of the general population.

In contrast 4% of children looked after were Mixed ethnicity compared to 2% of the general population; and 2% of children looked after were Black/African/Caribbean/Black British compared to 1% of the general population. See [\(#\\_Quality\\_and\\_methodology\)quality and methodology information \(#section-109878\)](#) for data quality statement for ethnicity data.

## Disability

Where data was provided, 7% of children looked after at 31 March 2022 were disabled; where the child had a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. This proportion has been broadly stable in recent years.

The percentage of disabled children looked after was higher than that for children in the general population, where 4% of the general population aged under 16 stated they had a long-term health problem or disability that limits their day-to-day activities in the Census 2011. See [\(#\\_Quality\\_and\\_methodology\)quality and methodology information \(#section-109878\)](#) for data quality statement for disability data.

## Unaccompanied asylum seeking child

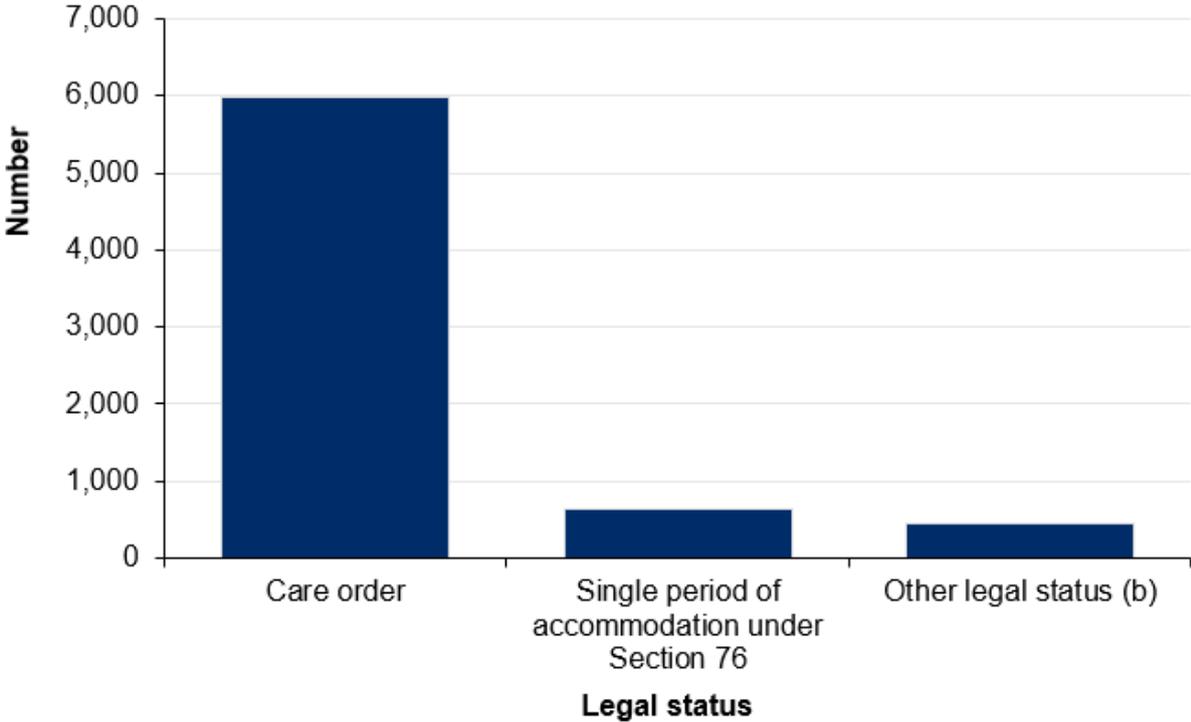
2% of children looked after at 31 March 2022 were an unaccompanied asylum seeking child. An unaccompanied asylum seeking child (UASC) is an individual, who is under 18, who has applied for asylum in their own right, is separated from both parents and is not being cared for by an adult who by law or custom has

responsibility to do so. This proportion has increased slightly from 1% in the previous year.

## **Legal status of children looked after**

The legal status indicates the underlying legal reason describing why a child is being looked after.

**Figure 5: Children looked after by legal stauts, 31 March 2022 (a)**



Source: Children looked after census, Welsh Government  
 (a) Excludes children looked after exclusively under a servies of short breaks.  
 (b) Includes placement order granted; wardship granted in High Court and child in local authority accommodation; under police protection and in local authority accommodation; emergency protection order; under child assessment order and in local authority accommodation; remanded to local authority accommodation or youth detention accommodation; and detained in local authority accommodation under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act (PACE).

The majority of children (85%) were looked after under a care order, with the proportion having increased in recent years. 87% of the children looked after under care orders were looked after under full care orders compared to 13% looked after under interim care orders.

Whilst the trend for the number and proportion of children looked after under voluntary accommodation in a single period of accommodation (under section 76

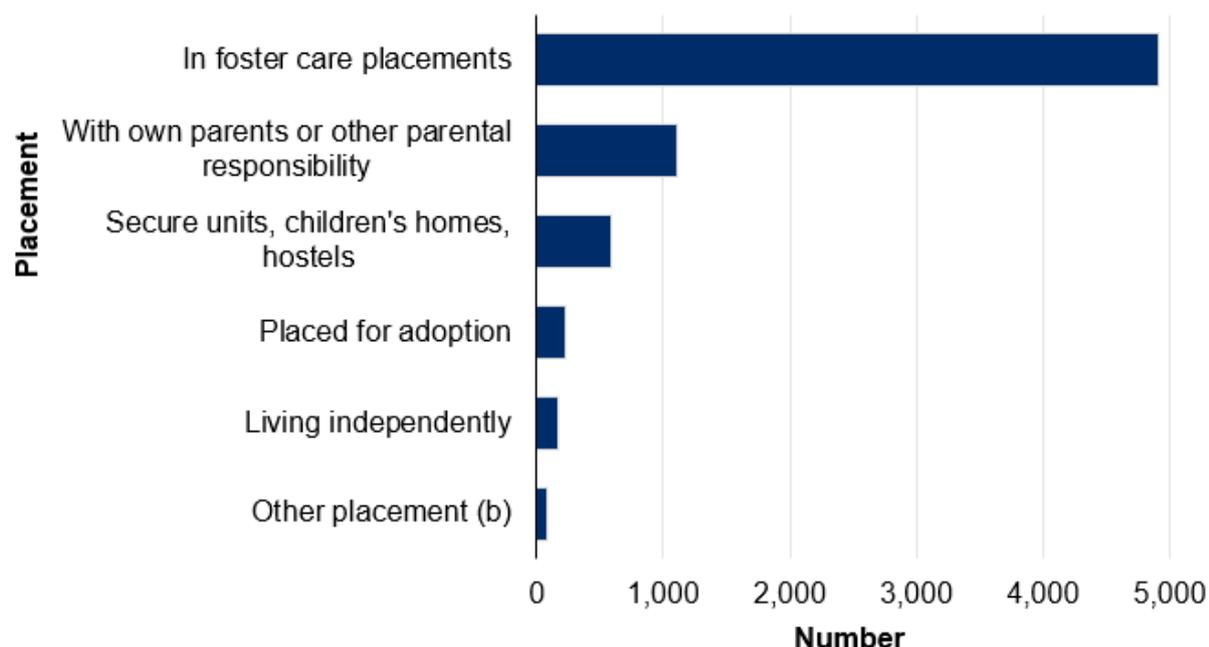
of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014) had been decreasing in recent years, there was a 32% annual increase on 31 March 2022.

The proportion of children looked after under other legal statuses has decreased in recent years.

## **Placement of children looked after**

A looked after child's placement indicates where they are living whilst in the local authority's care.

**Figure 6: Children looked after by placement, 31 March 2022 (a)**



Source: Children looked after census, Welsh Government

(a) Excludes children looked after exclusively under a series of short breaks.

(b) Includes residential care home; NHS/Health Trust or other establishment providing medical or nursing care; residential family centre or mother and baby unit; youth offender institution or prison; residential school; residential employment and whereabouts unknown.

## Type of placement

There has been a gradual decline in the percentage of children looked after in foster care placements, from a high of 79% on 31 March 2011 to 69% on 31 March 2022. Nearly a third (32%) of children in foster care were in placements with a relative or friend on 31 March 2022. This proportion has steadily increased from 21% on 31 March 2016.

16% of all children looked after were placed with their own parents or others with

parental responsibility; these were mostly children subject to care orders. Following an increase from 31 March 2014, this proportion has been stable since 31 March 2019. The proportions of children in the remaining other placement types have stayed broadly similar accounting for around 14% of placements in total.

## **Location of placement**

Two-thirds (67%) of children who were looked after at 31 March 2022 were in placements inside the local authority where they were living when they first became looked after. 27% of children were in placements outside their home local authority but within Wales and a further 6% were placed outside Wales. These proportions have remained broadly constant in recent years.

## **Number of placements**

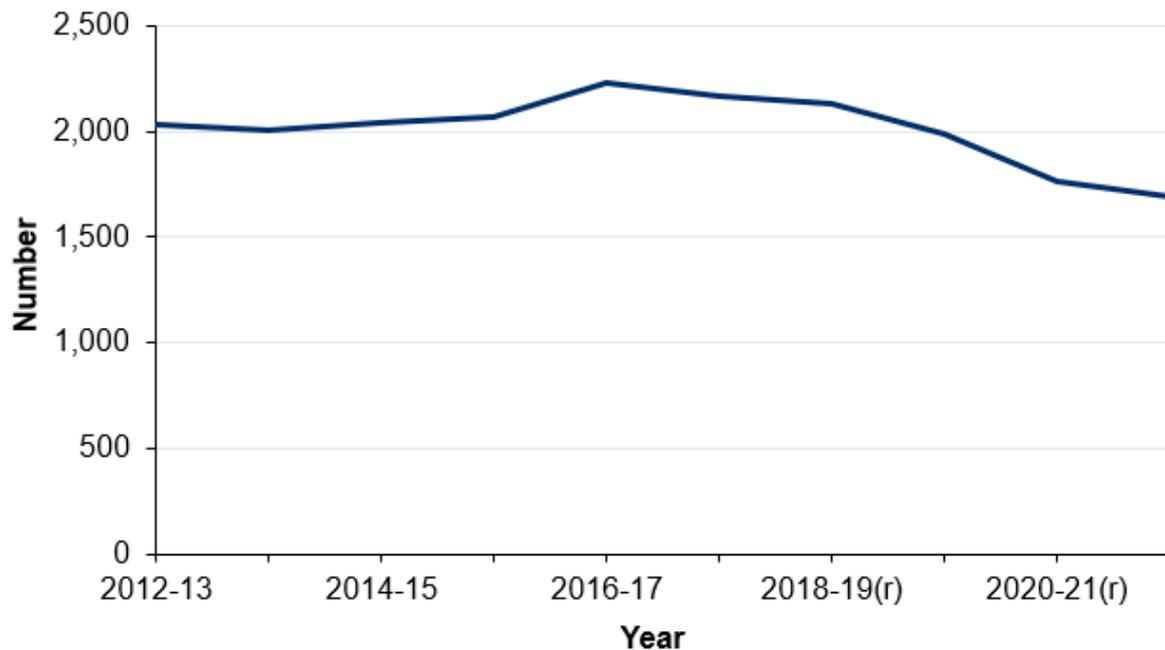
There were 604 children looked after at 31 March 2022 who had three or more placements during the year, an increase of 75 children (14%) compared with the previous year. While the number of children who had three or more placements increased, the proportion of children with three or more placements remained broadly the same as in years prior to the pandemic at 9%. There were fewer placement moves in 2020-21, during the heights of the COVID-19 pandemic.

## **Children starting to be looked after**

Children looked after for the first time, and children who had previously ceased to be looked after and start being looked after again during the reporting year are counted in this section. Where a child had multiple periods of care during the

year only the first period is counted.

**Figure 7: Children starting to be looked after by year, 2012-13 to 2021-22 (a)(b)**



Source: SSDA903 return and Children looked after census, Welsh Government

(a) Excludes children looked after exclusively under a series of short breaks.

(b) Where a child had multiple periods of care during the year only the first period is counted.

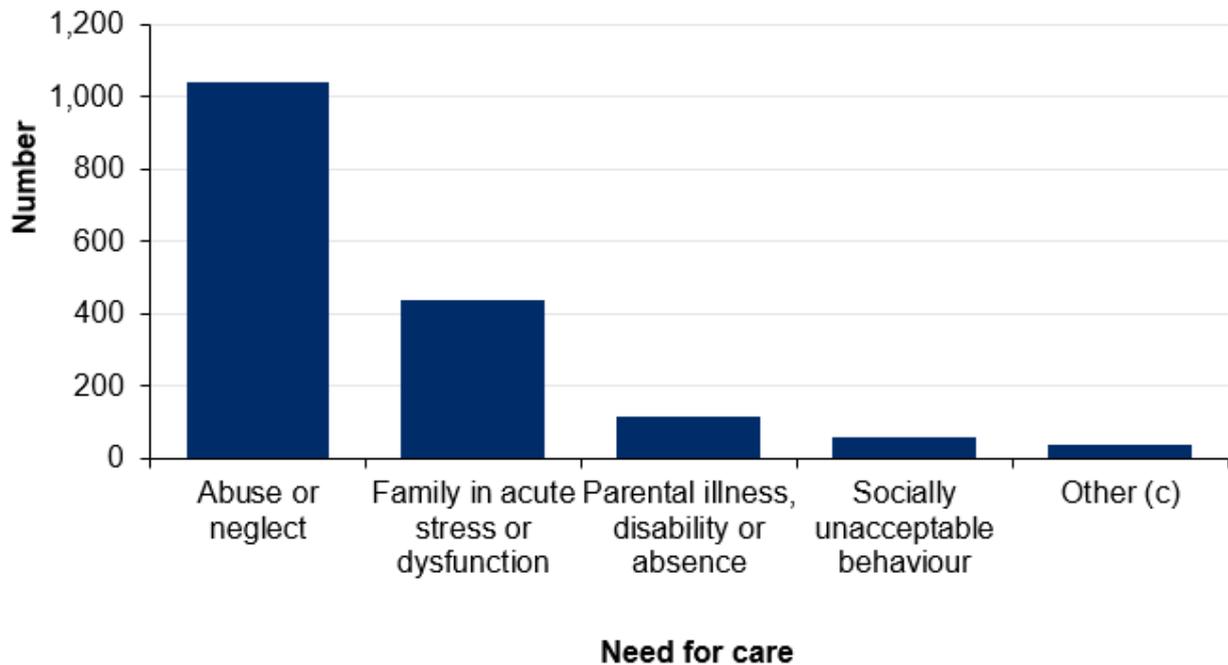
(r) The data has been revised since previously published.

1,691 children started to be looked after between 1 April 2021 and 31 March 2022, a decrease of 71 children (4%) from the previous year. Since 2016-17, fewer children in total have started being looked after each year; this is more apparent from 2019-20 onwards.

Of the children who started to be looked after during 2021-22, 58% were initially looked after under voluntary accommodation in a single instance of accommodation (under section 76 of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales)

Act 2014). The majority were initially placed in foster care (71%) and a lower proportion were initially placed with their own parents or other persons with parental responsibility (10%) than at 31 March 2022.

**Figure 8: Children starting to be looked after by need for care and support, 2021-22 (a)(b)**



Source: Children looked after census, Welsh Government

(a) Excludes children looked after exclusively under a series of short breaks.

(b) Where a child had multiple periods of care during the year only the first period is counted.

(c) Includes child's disability or illness and adoption disruption.

For children who started to be looked after during 2021-22, the most common reason why the child received care and support initially was because of abuse or neglect (62%). This is a higher proportion compared to the previous year (59%) but similar to the trend prior to the pandemic.

The proportion of children receiving care and support due to family in acute

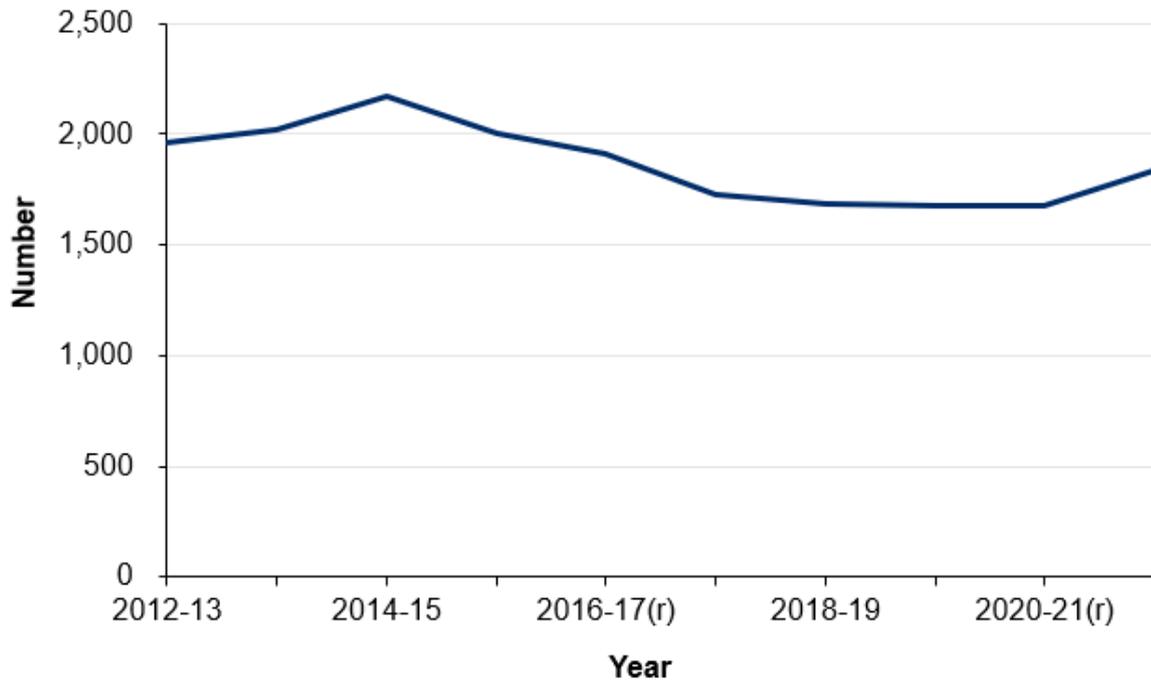
distress or dysfunction decreased to 26% in 2021-22 (from a high of 29% in 2020-21 which was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic).

The proportion of children looked after receiving care and support for other reasons has remained broadly similar at 12% of the total.

## **Children leaving care**

Typically, children cease to be looked after the day before their 18th birthday. Where a child had multiple periods of care during the year only the latest period is counted in this section.

**Figure 9: Children leaving care by year, 2012-13 to 2021-22**  
**(a)(b)**



Source: SSDA903 return and Children looked after census, Welsh Government

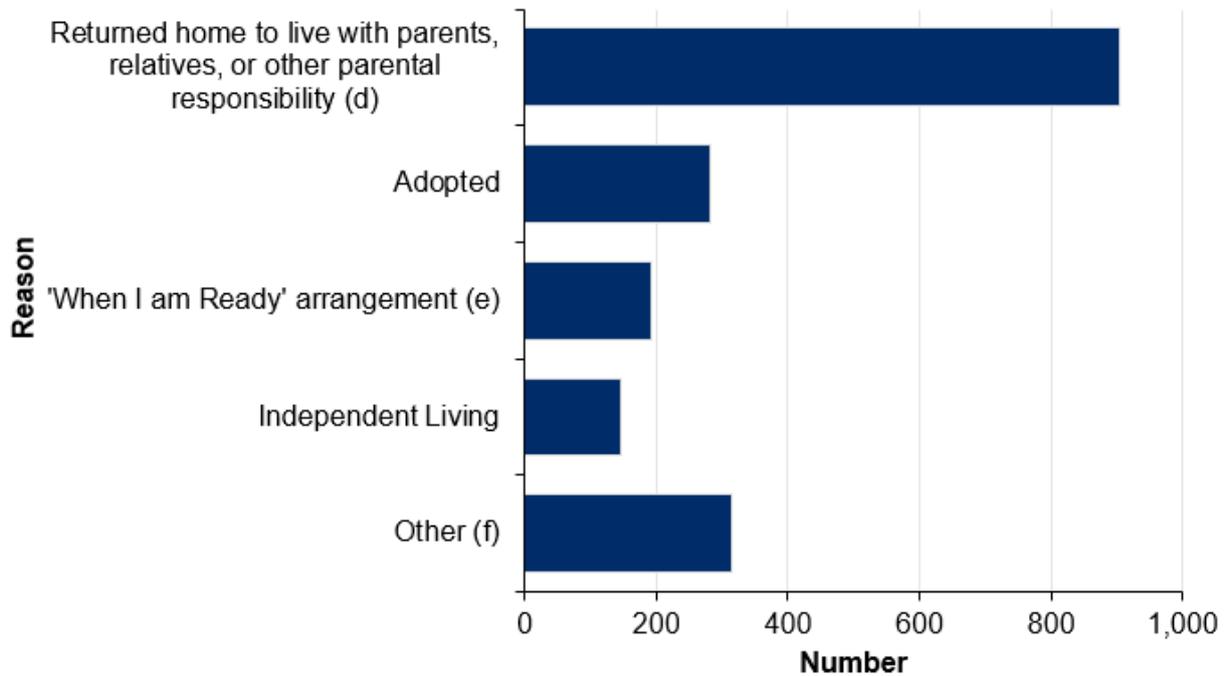
(a) Excludes children looked after exclusively under a series of short breaks.

(b) Where a child had multiple periods of care during the year only the latest period is counted.

(r) The data has been revised since previously published.

1,839 children left care between 1 April 2021 and 31 March 2022, an increase of 157 (9%) compared with the previous year. This is the highest number of children leaving care since 2016-17.

**Figure 10: Children leaving care by reason, 2021-22 (a)(b)(c)**



Source: Children looked after census, Welsh Government

(a) Excludes children looked after exclusively under a series of short breaks.

(b) Where a child had multiple periods of care during the year only the latest period is counted.

(c) Excludes children who died or where care was taken over by another local authority in the UK.

(d) Includes special guardianship orders made to carers or former foster carers.

(e) A young person turning 18 years old may continue living with their former foster parent(s) in a 'When I am Ready' arrangement.

(f) Examples include young people turning 18 years old; short-term placements; entering hospital; staying with friends; away from placement without authorisation and whereabouts unknown.

During 2021-22, 903 (49%) children left care to return home to live with parents, relatives or other persons with parental responsibility. Special guardianship orders were made for 297 of these children.

192 (10%) children left care having turned 18 and continued to live with former foster parents under <sup>4</sup> (<https://gov.wales/children-local-authority-care-code->

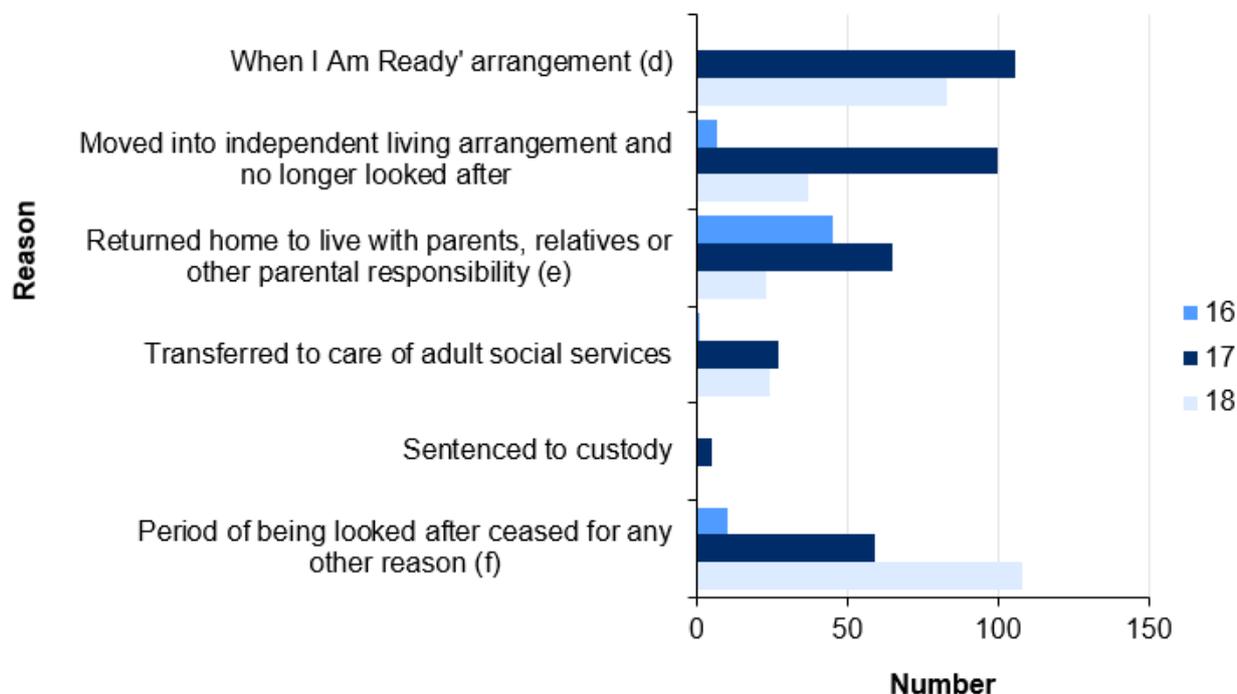
practice) **When I am Ready' arrangements** (<https://gov.wales/children-local-authority-care-code-practice>) and 283 (15%) children were adopted from care; both similar proportions to 2020-21.

The proportion of children leaving care and living independently has decreased compared to previous years, whilst there was an increase in the proportion leaving care for other reasons.

## **Young people (aged 16 and over) leaving care**

Some young people may need to be accommodated by the local authority up to their 21st birthday if they are being looked after in a community home which is suitable for children aged 16 and over. In practice these are few in number and tend to be young persons with severe physical or mental disabilities.

**Figure 11: Young people aged 16 and over leaving care by age and reason, 2021-22 (a)(b)(c)**



Source: Children looked after census, Welsh Government

(a) Includes young people looked after exclusively under a series of short breaks.

(b) Where a young person had multiple periods of care during the year only the latest period is counted.

(c) Excludes young people who died or where care was taken over by another local authority in the UK.

(d) A young person turning 18 years old may continue living with their former foster parent(s) in a 'When I am Ready' arrangement.

(e) Includes special guardianship orders made for carers or former foster carers.

(f) Examples include young people turning 18; entering hospital; Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Child aged over 18 years old; and unknown.

700 young people aged 16 and over left care between 1 April 2021 and 31 March 2022, an increase of 24 young people (4%) compared with the previous year. 275 (39%) of those leaving were aged 18 or over when they left care, a lower proportion than the previous year but higher than seen in years prior to 2020-21. 189 young people turned 18 years old and continued to live with their former foster parent(s) in a 'When I Am Ready' arrangement.

The proportion of young people leaving care moving into independent living arrangements and were no longer looked after decreased to 21% in 2021-22, compared to 29% in 2020-21. The proportion of young people where the period of being looked after ceased for any other reason increased to 25% compared to the 16% in the previous year.

**Table 1: Young people aged 16 and over leaving care by age and accommodation at date of ceasing to be looked after, 2021-22 (a) (b) (c)**

Accommodation	Age 16	Age 17	Age 18	Total
<b>Suitable accommodation</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>343</b>	<b>266</b>	<b>670</b>
<b>With parents or relatives</b>	45	84	57	186
<b>Ordinary lodgings without formal support</b>	2	104	69	175
<b>Semi-independent, transitional accommodation, and self-contained accommodation (d)</b>	6	77	39	122
<b>Supported lodgings (e)</b>	2	29	43	74
<b>Independent living</b>	4	27	33	64
<b>Residential or nursing care such as an NHS establishment</b>	2	13	13	28
<b>Foyers and similar supported accommodation which combines the accommodation with opportunities for education, training or employment</b>	0	1	3	4

<b>Accommodation</b>	<b>Age 16</b>	<b>Age 17</b>	<b>Age 18</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Other suitable accommodation</b>	0	8	9	17
<b>Unsuitable accommodation</b>	2	19	9	30
<b>Total</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>362</b>	<b>275</b>	<b>700</b>

Source: Children looked after census, Welsh Government

(a) Includes young persons looked after exclusively under a series of short breaks.

(b) Where a child had separate periods of care during the year only the latest period is counted.

(c) Excludes young people who died or where care was taken over by another local authority in the UK.

(d) Includes self-contained accommodation with specialist personal assistance support and self-contained accommodation with floating support.

(e) Where supervisory staff or advice workers are available to provide formal advice or support.

Of the 700 young people aged 16 and over who left care between 1 April 2021 and 31 March 2022, 670 (96%) were in suitable accommodation at the date they ceased to be looked after. Accommodation is regarded as suitable if it provides safe, secure and affordable provision for young people. The proportion of young people in suitable accommodation has increased from 92% in 2016-17 when data began being collected.

28% of young people in suitable accommodation were with parents or relatives and 26% were in ordinary lodgings without formal support. The proportion of young people in ordinary lodgings without formal support has generally

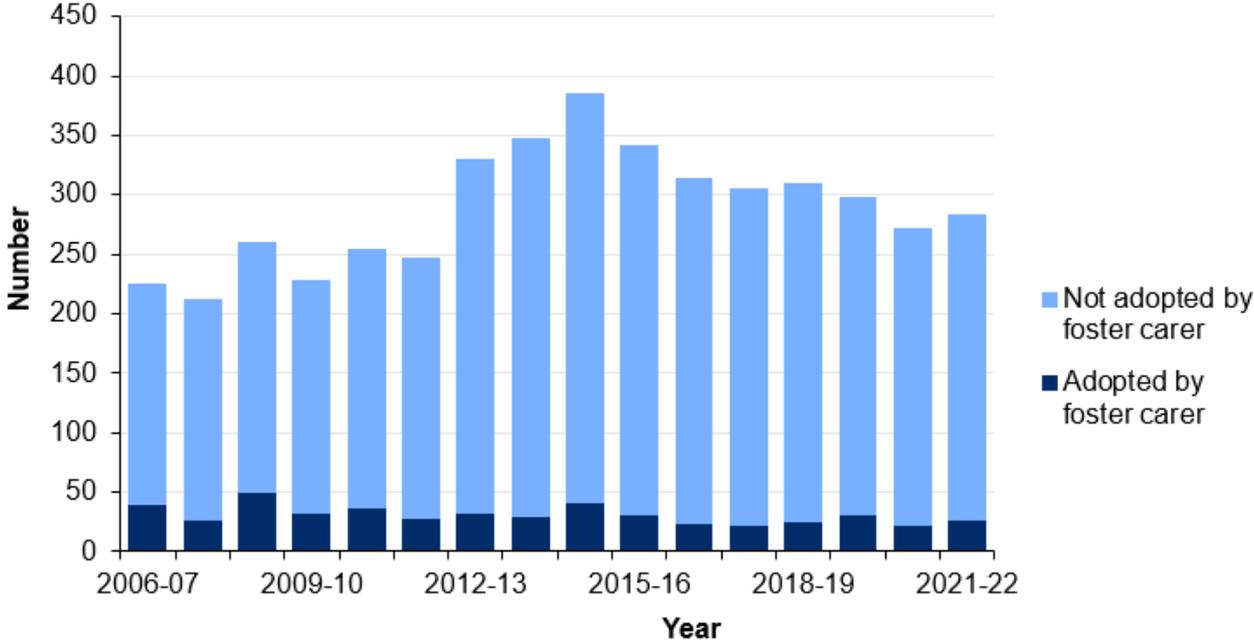
increased since 2018-19, as has the proportion in semi-independent transitional accommodation (about 18%). The proportion of young people with parents or relatives, in independent living and in suitable supported lodgings have generally decreased over this time.

Bed and breakfasts are considered unsuitable accommodation, in addition, other types of accommodation are considered to be unsuitable if they clearly expose the young person to risk of harm or social exclusion. The number, and the proportion, of care leavers in unsuitable accommodation has decreased in recent years. The number of care leavers in unsuitable accommodation decreased by 5 (14%) from 35 to 30 compared with the previous year, equating to 4% of care leavers being in unsuitable accommodation at the point of leaving care during 2021-22. This is the lowest proportion since data began being collected in 2016-17.

## **Adoptions of children looked after**

An adoption refers to when a child ceases to be looked after on the granting of an adoption order.

**Figure 12: Adoptions of children looked after, 2006-07 to 2021-22**



Source: AD1 return and Children looked after census, Welsh Government

283 children were adopted from care between 1 April 2021 and 31 March 2022; an increase of 12 children (4%) compared with the previous year. The number of children adopted had been decreasing in recent years from a high of 385 children adopted during 2014-15.

10% of children were adopted by their former foster carer during 2021-22, a proportion that has remained broadly stable for the past decade.

Most (86%) of the children adopted during the year were in the 1 to 4 years age group. The average age of looked after children adopted during the year was 40 months at adoption. This is three months older than the 37 months recorded each year from 2018-19.

Further information on adoptions of children looked after, including the profile of adopters, can be found on **StatsWales** (<https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Health-and-Social-Care/Social-Services/Childrens-Services/Children-Looked-After/Adoptions>).

## Quality and methodology information

From 2016-17 individual level data in relation to children looked after has been collected through the **Children Looked After Census** (<https://gov.wales/data-collection-local-authority-social-services#section-12706>). Data on children looked after was previously collected through the SSDA903 and associated returns.

The collection adheres closely to the definition of children looked after provided in law as detailed in the **Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 (UK legislation)** (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/anaw/2014/4/enacted>). In a small number of instances where there is scope for confusion, guidance on how to interpret the term 'looked after' for statistical purposes is given. This is to achieve consistency in data so that there is comparability between local authorities' figures. The **data collection guidance document** (<https://gov.wales/data-collection-local-authority-social-services#section-12706>) also provides detailed explanations of the legal, placement and other response categories captured within the data collection.

### Population estimates

The rate of children looked after per 10,000 population aged under 18 has been calculated based on the 2020 mid-year estimates provided by ONS. 2021 estimates are not yet available. Looked after children rates will be updated following publication of revised mid-year estimates.

## **Gender**

For transgender children, their gender identity at the present time is recorded. Non-binary will be included as a category for the 2023-24 data collection.

## **Age**

17 young people aged 18 were looked after at 31 March 2022.

## **Ethnicity**

Ethnicity was not recorded for 24 (0.3%) children looked after at 31 March 2022.

## **Disability**

Disability data has not been provided by one local authority. One further local authority was unable to provide disability data for about 17% of children looked after.

## **Revisions**

Minor revisions have been made as part of processing the 2021-22 data which have been agreed by local authorities. Revisions made to previous years' data are labelled with an 'r'.

## **Statistical designation**

These statistics are published as experimental statistics. More information on

the designation of these statistics can be found in the **correspondence between the Welsh Government and the Office for Statistical Regulation** (<https://osr.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/correspondence-list/?keyword=welsh+government&theme=&date=&archive=true>).

Data collection requirements for the Children Looked After Census have recently been reviewed and refreshed data requirements have been issued for the 2022-23 reporting year.

A Quality Report will be published in due course. Further information on quality can be found in the **2020-21 statistical release** (<https://gov.wales/children-looked-after-local-authorities-april-2020-march-2021>).

## **Well-being of Future Generations Act (WFG)**

The Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015 is about improving the social, economic, environmental and cultural wellbeing of Wales. The Act puts in place seven wellbeing goals for Wales. These are for a more equal, prosperous, resilient, healthier and globally responsible Wales, with cohesive communities and a vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language. Under section (10)(1) of the Act, the Welsh Ministers must (a) publish indicators (“national indicators”) that must be applied for the purpose of measuring progress towards the achievement of the wellbeing goals, and (b) lay a copy of the national indicators before Senedd Cymru. Under section 10(8) of the Well-being of Future Generations Act, where the Welsh Ministers revise the national indicators, they must as soon as reasonably practicable (a) publish the indicators as revised and (b) lay a copy of them before the Senedd. These national indicators were laid before the Senedd in 2021. The indicators laid on 14 December 2021 replace the set laid on 16 March 2016.

Information on the indicators, along with narratives for each of the wellbeing goals and associated technical information is available in the **Wellbeing of**

**Wales report** (<https://gov.wales/wellbeing-wales>).

Further information on the **Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015** (<https://gov.wales/well-being-future-generations-wales-act-2015-guidance>).

The statistics included in this release could also provide supporting narrative to the national indicators and be used by public services boards in relation to their local wellbeing assessments and local wellbeing plans.

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