



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

STATISTICS, DOCUMENT

Children looked after by local authorities: April 2022 to March 2023

Information on children on care orders and in placements, adoptions from care and numbers of children and young persons leaving care for April 2022 to March 2023.

First published: 27 February 2024

Last updated: 27 February 2024

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Introduction

A child is a person who is aged under 18. Section 74 of the [Social Services and Well-being \(Wales\) Act \(UK legislation\)](#) 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 Sections 109, 114 or 115.

New data is based on the year 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023, or the position at 31 March 2023.

[Policy changes 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 \(Children looked after\)](#).

Main points

On 31 March 2023

- 7,208 children were looked after, an increase of 155 (2%) on the previous year. This is a rate of 116.3 per 10,000 population aged under 18, compared to a rate of 114.4 (r) in 2021-22.
- 82% of children looked after's legal status was under a care order.
- 69% of children looked after's placement was in foster care placements.

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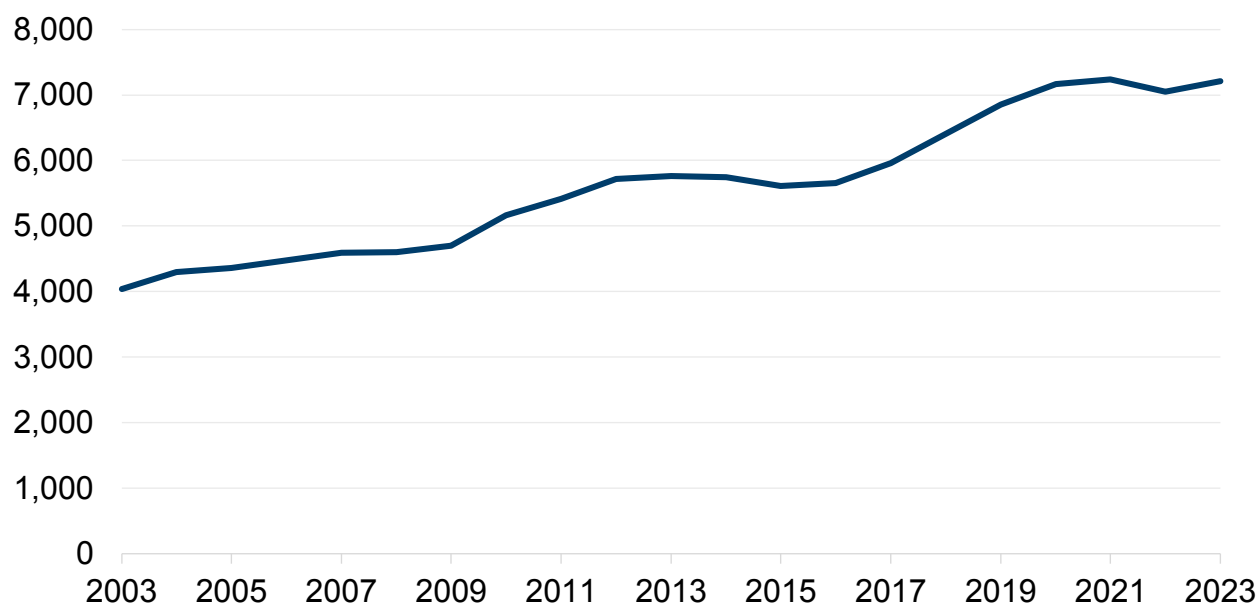
- 34% of children in foster care were placed with relatives or friends.
- 66% of children were placed within their home local authority.
- A higher proportion of children looked after were in the older age groups compared to the general child population.
- A lower proportion of children looked after were White or Asian/Asian British compared to the general child population, however a higher proportion of children looked after were from an Other ethnic group compared to the general child population.
- More males than females were looked after.
- 7% of children looked after were disabled compared to 4% of the general child population.

During 2022-23

- 1,903 children started to be looked after, an increase of 211 (12%) compared to the previous year. This is the first annual increase in the number of children starting to be looked after since 2016-17.
- Most children who started to be looked after during the year (58%) received care and support initially because of abuse or neglect.
- 1,758 children left care, a decrease of 107 (6%) compared to the previous year. This is the first annual decrease in the number of children leaving care since 2019-20.
- Half of children who left care during the year returned home to live with parents, relatives or other persons with parental responsibility.
- 708 children aged 16 and over left care during the year and ceased to be looked after.
- 243 children were adopted from care, a decrease of 43 (15%) compared to the previous year. This is the lowest number of adoptions since 2009-10.

Number of children looked after

Figure 1: Children looked after on 31 March, 2003 to 2023
[Note 1] [Note 2]



Description of Figure 1: Line chart showing that the trend in number of children looked after has been increasing since data has been collected in 2003 though has levelled off in more recent years since 2020.

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

Children looked after at 31 March by local authority, gender and age on StatsWales

[Note 1] Excludes children looked after exclusively under a series of short breaks.

[Note 2] Data has been revised for the years 2022, 2021, 2020, 2016 and 2010

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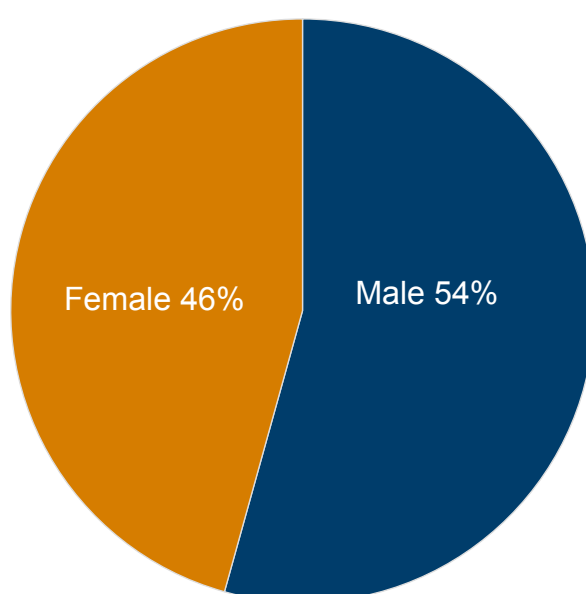
The number of children looked after has been on an upward trend in recent years and peaked at 7,241(r) in 2021. Following a decrease in 2022, the number increased to 7,208 (2%) in 2023.

The rate per 10,000 children aged under 18 was 116.3 in 2023, higher than the rate in 2022 (114.4(r)) and the second highest rate ever. See [quality and methodology information](#) for data quality statement for population data.

Characteristics of children looked after

Gender

Figure 2: Children looked after by gender, 31 March 2023 [Note 1] [Note 2]



Description of Figure 2: Pie chart showing that more males than females were looked after on 31 March 2023.

Source: Children looked after census, Welsh Government

Children looked after at 31 March by local authority, gender and age on StatsWales

[Note 1] Excludes children looked after exclusively under a series of short breaks.

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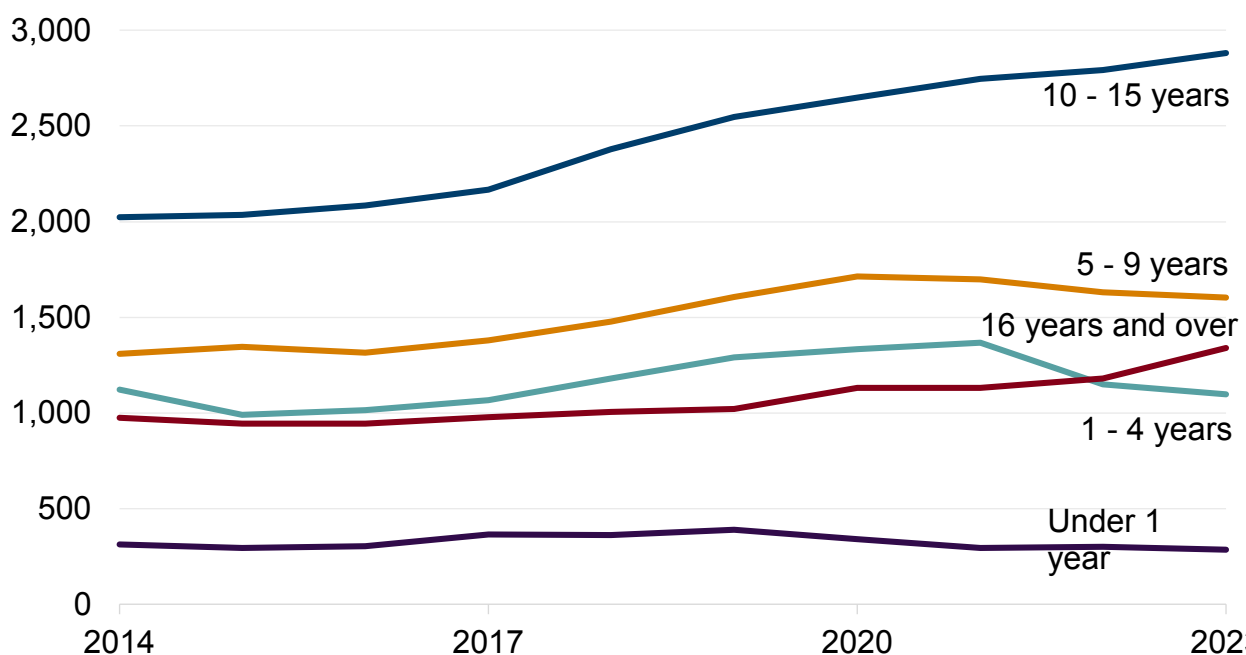
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[Note 2] Children with gender recorded as non-binary or not known are not included. These accounted for fewer than 1% of children looked after on 31 March 2023.

54% of children looked after were male and 46% were female on 31 March 2023. These proportions have been stable since data was first collected in 2003.

Age

Figure 3: Children looked after by age on 31 March, 2014 to 2023
[Note 1] [Note 2]



Description of Figure 3: Line chart showing that the age profile of children looked after has changed in recent years with a decrease in the proportion of children looked after aged under 5 and an increase in the proportion of children looked after aged 10 and over.

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

Children looked after at 31 March by local authority, gender and age on StatsWales

[Note 1] Excludes children looked after exclusively under a series of short breaks.

[Note 2] Data has been revised for the years 2022, 2021, 2020 and 2016 since previously published.

On 31 March 2023, 4% of all children looked after were aged under 1 years old, 15% were aged 1 to 4 years old, 22% were aged 5 to 9 years old, 40% were aged 10 to 15 and 19% were 16 years and over.

Compared to the general child population a higher proportion of children looked after are in the older age groups according to the [2022 mid-year population estimates \(ONS\)](#).

A greater proportion of children aged 10 and older were looked after than children aged 9 or younger. Using 2022 mid-year estimates 144.2 per 10,000 of children aged 10 or older were looked after compared to 91.3 per 10,000 aged 9 or younger. See [quality and methodology information](#) for data quality statement for age data.

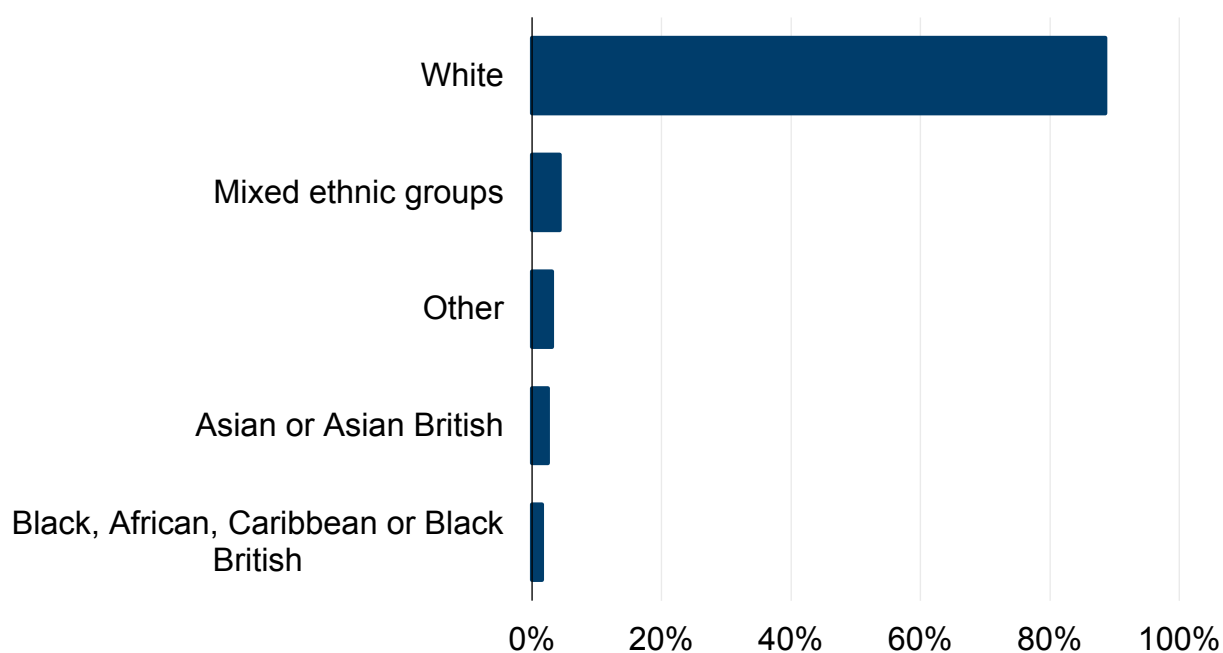
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Ethnicity

Figure 4: Children looked after by ethnicity, 31 March 2023
[Note 1]



Description of Figure 4: Bar chart showing that 88% of children looked after on 31 March 2023 were White.

Source: Children looked after census, Welsh Government

Children looked after at 31 March by local authority and ethnicity on StatsWales

[Note 1] Excludes children looked after exclusively under a series of short breaks.

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The proportion of children looked after who were White has decreased since 2014 and more sharply since 2021. The proportions of children looked after from ethnic groups other than White have generally increased over this time. The other ethnic group makes up the smallest proportion but has increased as a proportion the most over the last decade.

On 31 March 2023, 88% of children looked after were White, a decrease from 90% in the previous year. The proportions for all other ethnic groups increased slightly compared to the previous year.

A lower proportion of children looked after were from White or Asian/Asian British ethnic groups compared to the general population aged under 18 years old according to the [Census 2021 \(ONS\)](#). Whilst a higher proportion of children looked after were from an Other ethnic group compared to the general child population.

Disability

Where data was provided, 7% of children looked after on 31 March 2023 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 3% of the general population aged under 18 years old stated they had a long-term health problem or disability that limits their day-to-day activities a lot according to the [Census 2021 \(ONS\)](#). See [quality and methodology information](#) for data quality statement for disability data.

Unaccompanied asylum seeking child

4% of children looked after on 31 March 2023 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 from 2% in the previous year and is the highest number and proportion recorded.

Legal status of children looked after

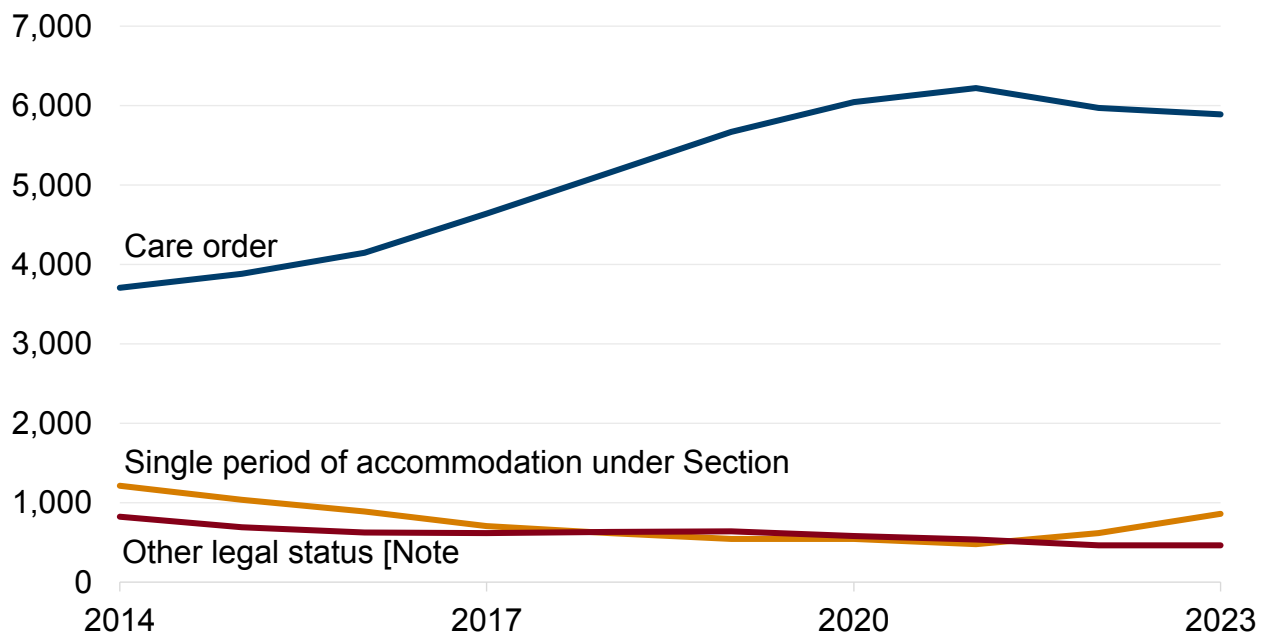
The legal status indicates the underlying legal reason describing why a child is being looked after.

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Figure 5: Children looked after by legal status on 31 March, 2014 to 2023 [Note 1] [Note 2]



Description of Figure 5: Line chart showing that though most children are looked after under care orders, the number and proportion has decreased in recent years.

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

Children looked after at 31 March by local authority and legal status on StatsWales

[Note 1] Excludes children looked after exclusively under a series of short breaks.

[Note 2] Data has been revised for the years 2022, 2021, 2020 and 2016 since previously published.

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[Note 3] 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).

On 31 March 2023, the majority of children (82%) were looked after under a care order, a decrease from around 85% 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.

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, however following an increase in 2022 there was a further annual increase on 31 March 2023 when 12% of children looked after were under voluntary accommodation.

The proportion of children looked after under other legal statuses has decreased in recent years and was 6% on 31 March 2023.

Placement of children looked after

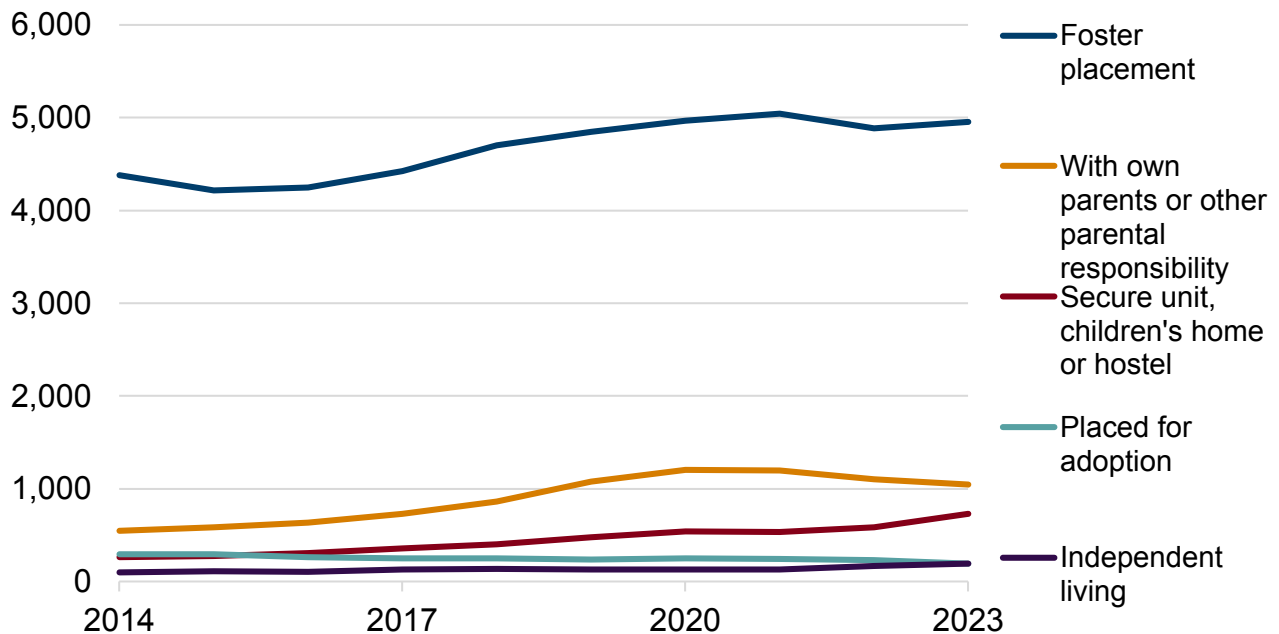
The placement indicates where children looked after are living whilst in the local authority's care.

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Figure 6: Children looked after by placement on 31 March, 2014 to 2023 [Note 1] [Note 2] [Note 3]



Description of Figure 6: Line chart showing that most children are looked after in foster care placements.

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

Children looked after at 31 March by local authority and placement type on StatsWales

[Note 1] Excludes children looked after exclusively under a series of short breaks.

[Note 2] Data has been revised for the years 2022, 2021, 2020 and 2016 since previously published.

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[Note 3] Other placement types, not shown in the chart, include 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 other placement not listed. 88 children were in other placements on 31 March 2023.

Type of placement

69% of children looked after were in foster care placements on 31 March 2023. This is a similar proportion since 2020 and a gradual decline from a high of 79% in 2011. A third (34%) of children in foster care were in placements with a relative or friend on 31 March 2023. This proportion has increased each year from 2015 when it was 20%.

14% of all children looked after were placed with their own parents or others with parental responsibility; these were mostly children subject to care orders. This proportion has decreased slightly compared to recent years and had been around 16% since 2019.

10% of children looked after were in secure units, children's homes or hostels; an increase from 8% in the previous year. The remaining other placement types have stayed broadly similar accounting for around 7% of placements in total.

Location of placement

Where information was provided, two-thirds (66%) of children who were looked after on 31 March 2023 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 7% were placed outside Wales. These proportions have remained broadly constant in recent years.

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Number of placements

There were 669 children looked after on 31 March 2023 who had three or more placements during the year, an increase of 52 children (8%) compared to the previous year. While the number of children who had three or more placements increased, the proportion of children with three or more placements has remained broadly the same in recent years at 9%, with the exception of 2021 when it was 7% (there were fewer placement moves in 2020-21 during the heights of the COVID-19 pandemic).

Children starting to be looked after

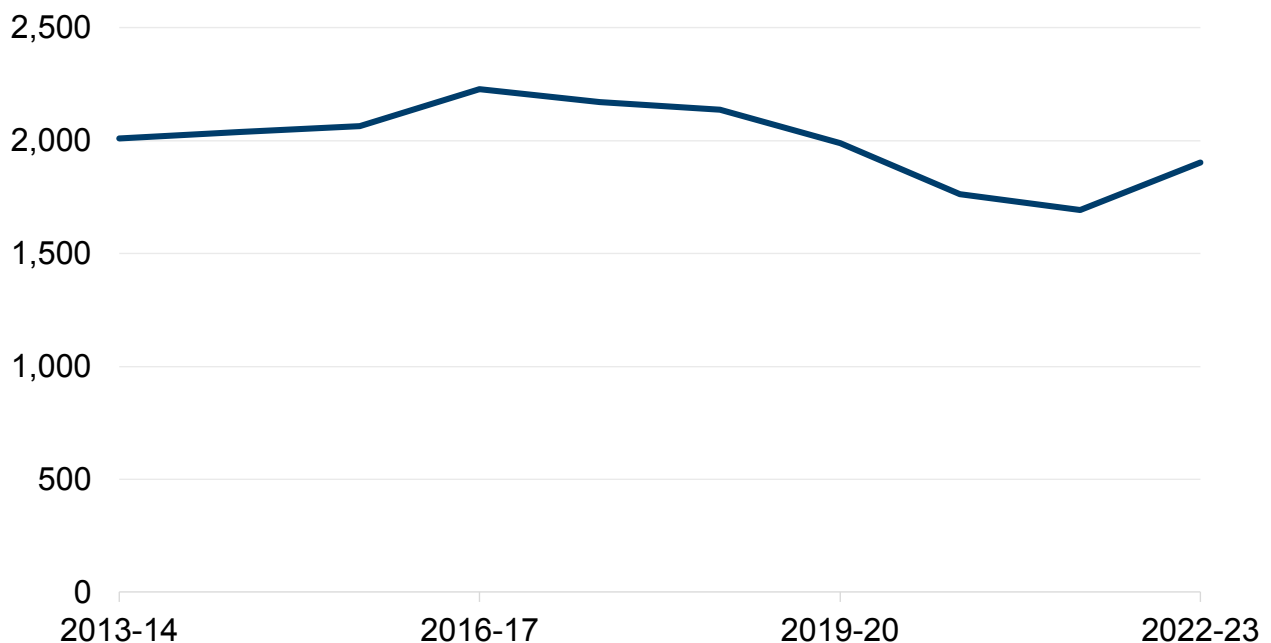
Children looked after for the first time, and children who had previously left care and start being looked after again during the reporting year are counted in this section. Where a child had multiple periods of care during the year only the first period is counted.

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Figure 7: Children starting to be looked after by year, 2013-14 to 2022-23 [Note 1] [Note 2]



Description of Figure 7: Line chart showing that the number of children starting to be looked after had been on a downward trend but increased in 2022-23.

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

Children starting to be looked after during year to 31 March by local authority and need for care on StatsWales

[Note 1] Excludes children looked after exclusively under a series of short breaks. Where a child had multiple periods of care during the year only the first period is counted.

[Note 2] Data has been revised for the year 2021-22 since previously published.

1,903 children started to be looked after between 1 April 2022 and 31 March

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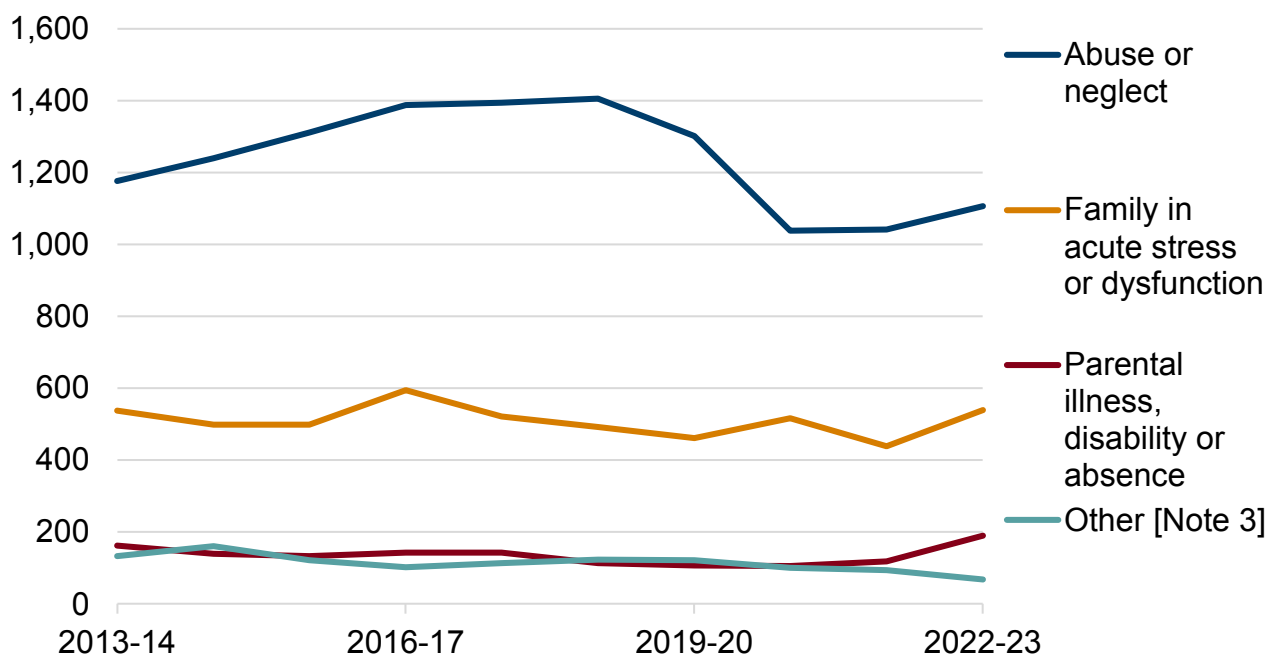
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2023, an increase of 211 children (12%) from the previous year. This is the first increase in the number of children starting to be looked after since 2016-17 and the biggest annual change since 2009-10.

Children starting to be looked after during the year were generally younger than those in care on 31 March 2023 and the general child population. Most noticeable was the difference in proportion of children aged under 1 which was 21% for those starting to be looked after compared to 4% of children looked after on 31 March 2023 and 5% of the general child population according to the [2022 mid-year population estimates \(ONS\)](#).

Of the children who started to be looked after during 2022-23, 62% 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 placements (69%); the same proportion as on 31 March 2023.

Figure 8: Children starting to be looked after by need for care and support, 2013-14 to 2022-23 [Note 1] [Note 2]



Description of Figure 8: Line chart showing that most children who start to be looked after receive care and support initially because of abuse or neglect.

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

Children starting to be looked after during year to 31 March by local authority and need for care on StatsWales

[Note 1] Excludes children looked after exclusively under a series of short breaks. Where a child had multiple periods of care during the year only the first period is counted.

[Note 2] Data has been revised for the year 2021-22 since previously published.

[Note 3] Includes child's disability or illness, socially unacceptable behaviour and

adoption disruption.

For children who started to be looked after during 2022-23, the most common reason why the child became looked after was as a result of, or due to the risk of, abuse or neglect (58%). This is a lower proportion compared to recent years.

The proportion of children starting to be looked after due to parental illness, disability or absence increased to 10% (compared to 7% in the previous year).

Children leaving care

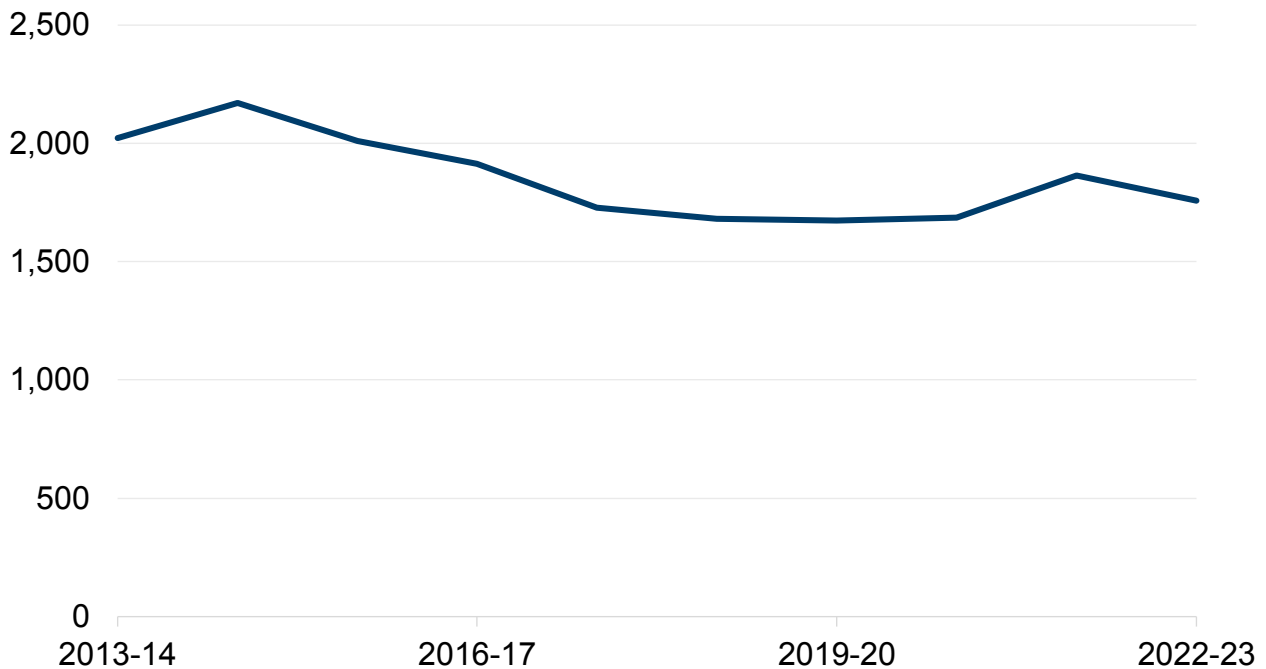
Children looked after who leave care during the reporting year are counted in this section; some children who leave care may come back into care during the year. Where a child had multiple periods of care during the year only the latest period is counted.

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Figure 9: Children leaving care by year, 2013-14 to 2022-23 [Note 1] [Note 2]



Description of Figure 9: Line chart showing that the number of children who left care had been on a downward trend though has levelled off since 2017-18.

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

Episodes finishing for children looked after during year to 31 March by local authority and reason for finishing on StatsWales

[Note 1] Excludes children looked after exclusively under a series of short breaks, children who died or where care was taken over by another local authority in the UK. Where a child had multiple periods of care during the year only the latest period is counted.

[Note 2] Data has been revised for the years 2021-22, 2020-21, 2019-20 and

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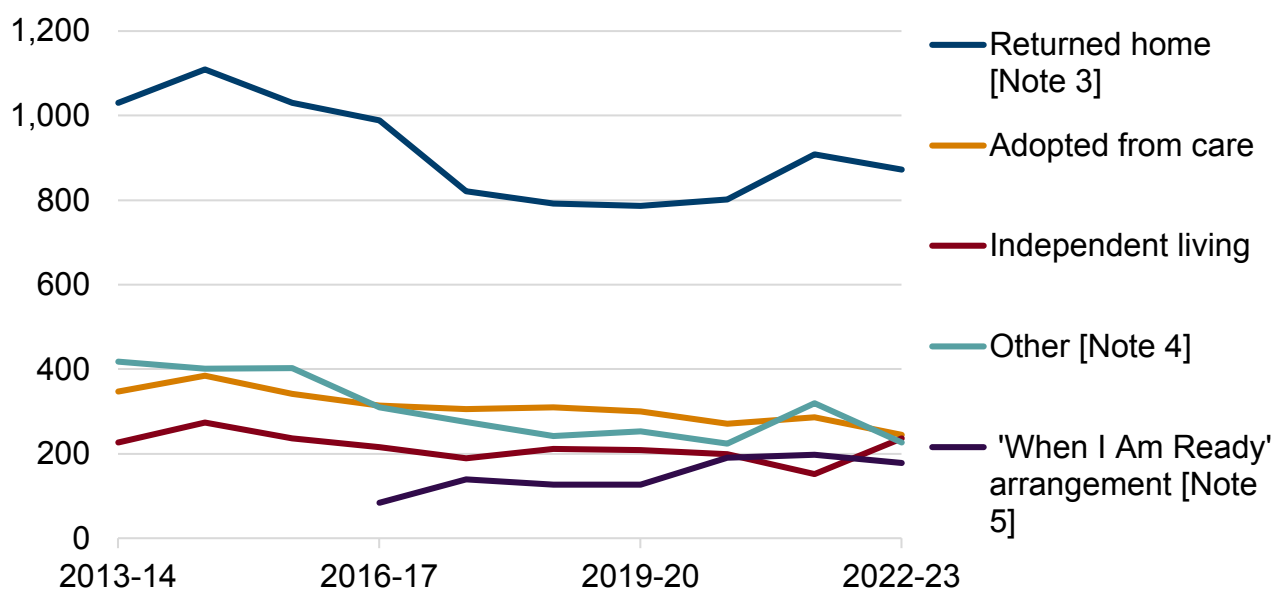
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2015-16 since previously published.

1,758 children left care between 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023, a decrease of 107 (6%) compared to the previous year. This is the first annual decrease in the number of children leaving care since 2019-20.

Children leaving care during the year were generally older than those in care on 31 March 2023 and the general child population. Most noticeable was the difference in proportion of children aged 16 and over which was 40% for those leaving care compared to 19% of children looked after on 31 March 2023 and 11% of the general child population according to the [2022 mid-year population estimates \(ONS\)](#).

Figure 10: Children leaving care by reason, 2013-14 to 2022-23 [Note 1] [Note 2]



Description of Figure 10: Line chart showing that the main reason for children leaving care is returning home to live with parents, relatives or others with

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parental responsibility.

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

Episodes finishing for children looked after during year to 31 March by local authority and reason for finishing on StatsWales

[Note 1] Excludes children looked after exclusively under a series of short breaks, children who died or where care was taken over by another local authority in the UK. Where a child had multiple periods of care during the year only the latest period is counted.

[Note 2] Data has been revised for the years 2021-22, 2020-21, 2019-20 and 2015-16 since previously published.

[Note 3] Returned home to live with parents, relatives or other person with parental responsibility. Includes special guardianship orders made to carers or former foster carers.

[Note 4] Includes transferred to care of adult social services, sentenced to custody and other reason not listed.

[Note 5] A young person turning 18 years old may continue living with their former foster parent(s) in a '**When I am Ready**' arrangement. Such arrangements have been in place since April 2016.

During 2022-23, 873 (50%) children left care to return home to live with parents, relatives or other person with parental responsibility. Special guardianship orders were made for 226 of these children. This proportion has increased in recent years.

244 (14%) children were adopted from care, 236 (13%) children were living independently and 178 (10%) children left care having turned 18 years old and continued to live with former foster parents under '**When I am**

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Ready' arrangements.

The proportion of children leaving care and returning home to live with parents, relatives or other persons with parental responsibility has increased in recent years, whilst there has been a decrease in the proportion leaving care having been adopted.

Young people (aged 16 and over) ceasing to be looked after

Children looked after aged 16 and over who leave care during the reporting year and do not come back into care are counted in this section. Typically, children cease to be looked after the day before their 18th birthday. 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.

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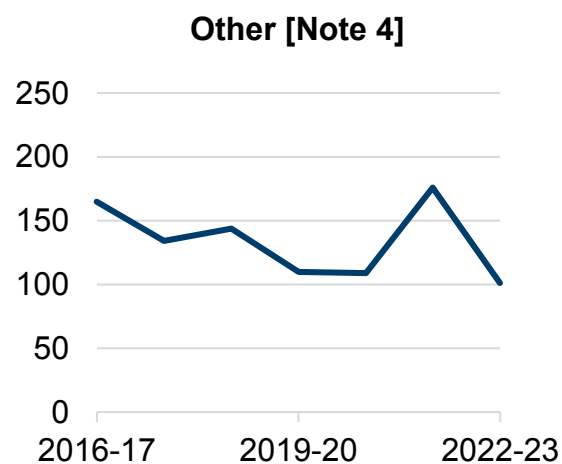
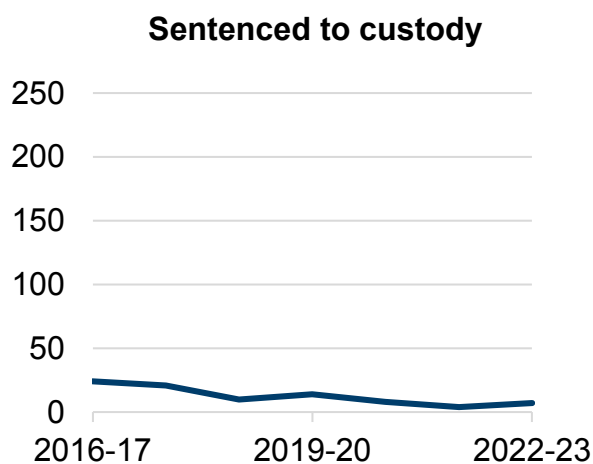
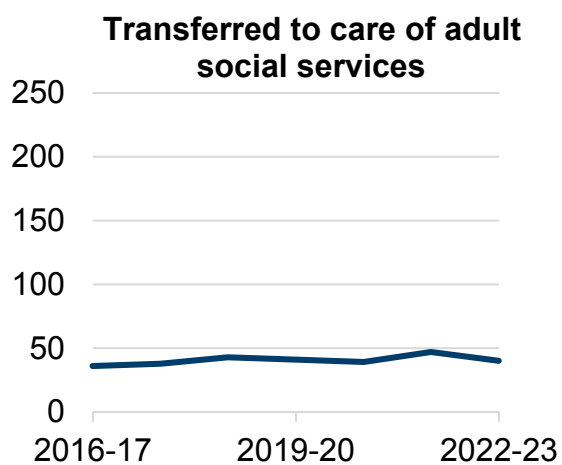
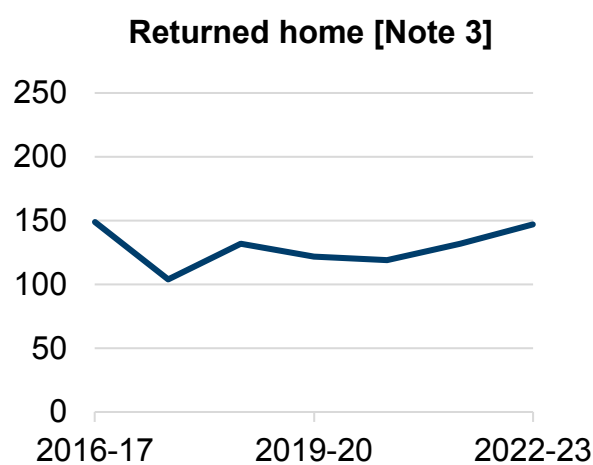
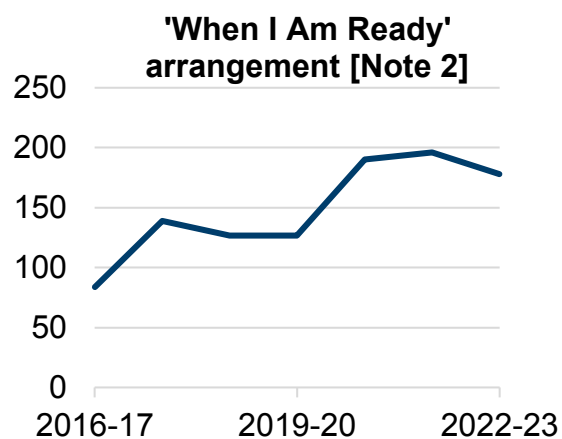
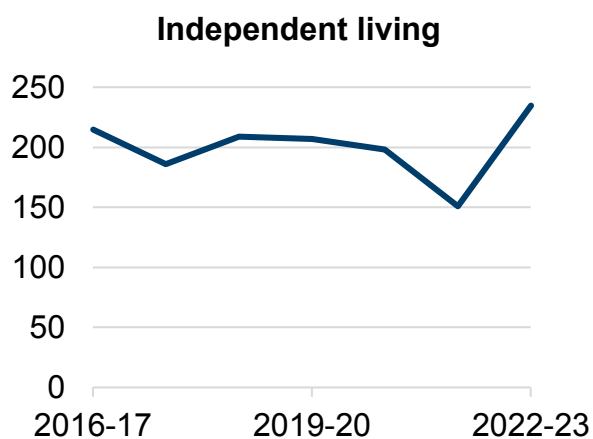
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Figure 11: Young people aged 16 ceasing to be looked after by reason, 2016-17 to 22-23 [Note 1]

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Description of Figure 11: Line charts showing the number of young people

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ceasing to be looked after moving into 'When I Am Ready' arrangements has increased since 2016-17 and the number sentenced to custody has decreased. The number of young people transferring to the care of adult social services has remained broadly stable and the number of young people ceasing to be looked after for all other reasons has fluctuated.

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

Episodes finishing for children looked after (aged 16 and over) during the year to 31 March by local authority, gender and reason for finishing on StatsWales

[Note 1] Excludes children looked after exclusively under a series of short breaks, children who died or where care was taken over by another local authority in the UK. Where a child had multiple periods of care during the year only the latest period is counted.

[Note 2] A young person turning 18 years old may continue living with their former foster parent(s) in a '**When I am Ready**' arrangement.

[Note 3] Returned home to live with parents, relatives or other person with parental responsibility. Includes special guardianship orders made to carers or former foster carers.

[Note 4] Includes adopted and other reason not listed.

708 young people aged 16 and over left care during 2022-23 and did not re-enter care prior to 31 March 2023, an increase of 2 young people compared with the previous year.

A third of young people (235) who ceased being looked after moved into independent living arrangements. This proportion has increased compared to 2021-22 (21%) however is more in-line with prior years.

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178 young people turned 18 years old and continued to live with their former foster parent(s) in a 'When I Am Ready' arrangement.

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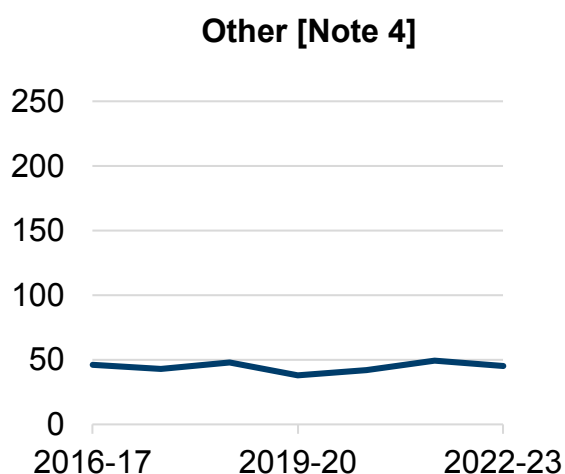
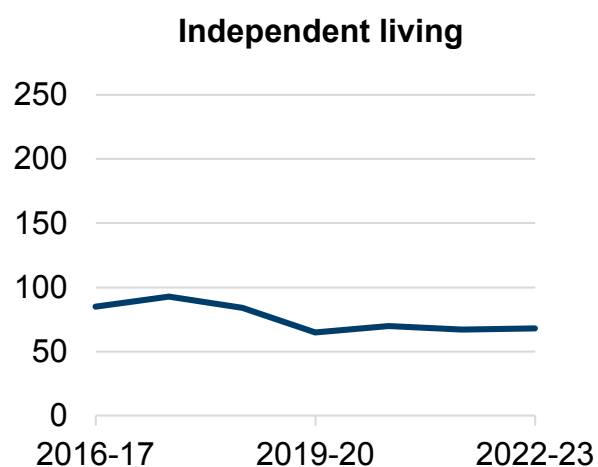
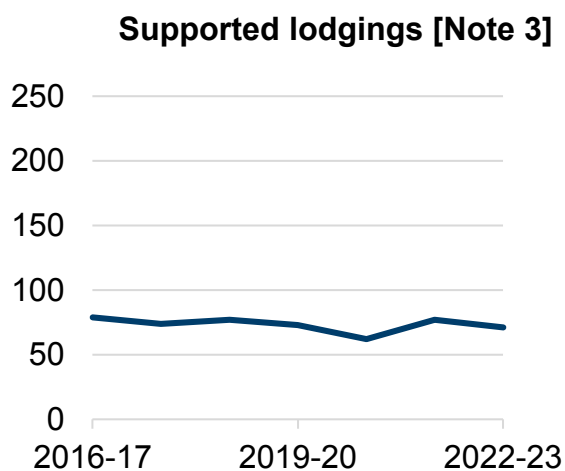
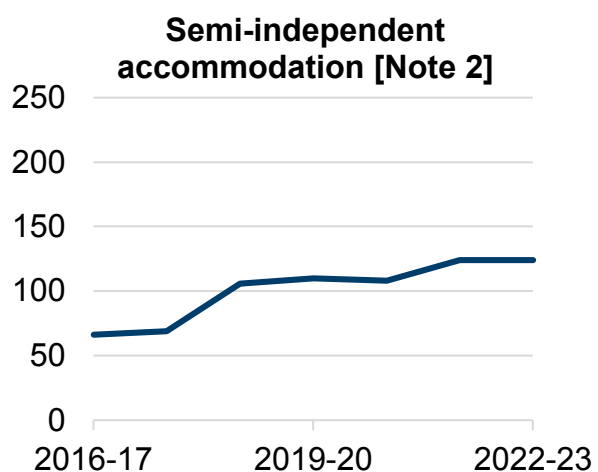
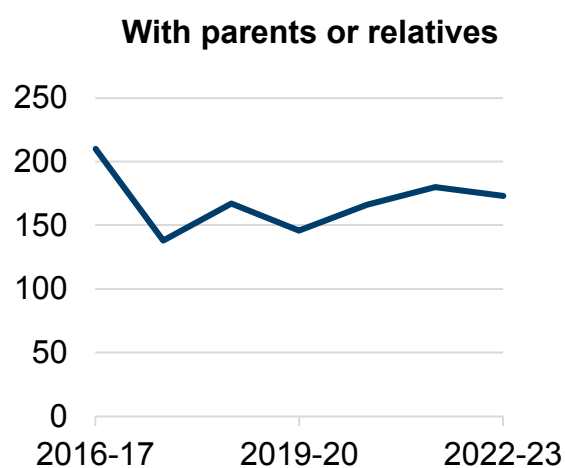
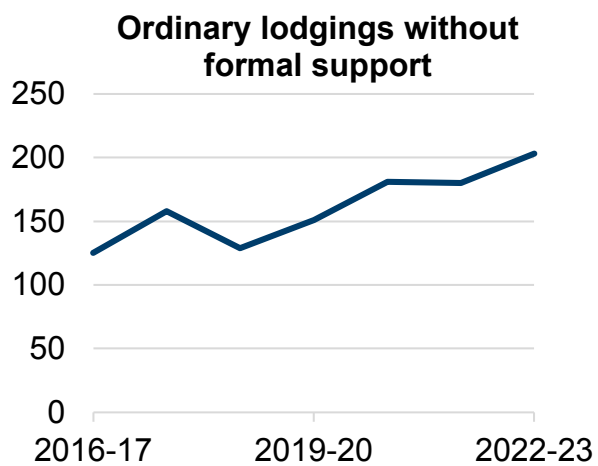
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Figure 12: Young people aged 16 ceasing to be looked after by type of suitable accommodation at date of leaving care, 2013-14 to 2022-23 [Note 1]

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Description of Figure 12: Line charts showing the number of young people ceasing to be looked in suitable ordinary lodgings without support and semi-independent accommodation has increased since 2016-17. The number of young people ceasing to be looked after in other suitable accommodation has fluctuated but remained broadly stable.

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

Accommodation at date of ceasing for children looked after during year ending 31 March (aged 16 and over), by local authority and accommodation type on StatsWales

[Note 1] Excludes children looked after exclusively under a series of short breaks, children who died or where care was taken over by another local authority in the UK. Where a child had multiple periods of care during the year only the latest period is counted.

[Note 2] Semi-independent, transitional accommodation; self-contained accommodation with specialist personal assistance support and self-contained accommodation with floating support.

[Note 3] Where supervisory staff or advice workers are available to provide formal advice or support.

[Note 4] Includes residential or nursing care such as an NHS establishment, foyers and similar supported accommodation, and other suitable accommodation.

Of the 708 young people aged 16 and over who left care during 2022-23 and did not re-enter care prior to 31 March 2023, 684 (97%) 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

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increased from 91%(r) in 2016-17 when data began being collected.

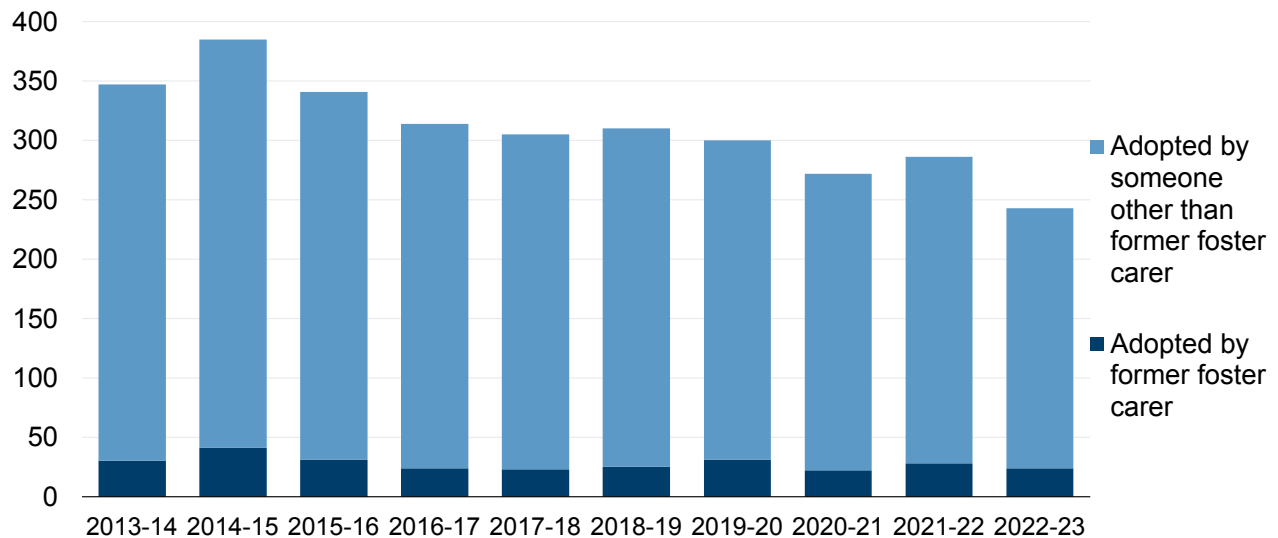
30% of young people in suitable accommodation were in ordinary lodgings without formal support at the date of ceasing to be looked after; this proportion has generally increased since 2016-17. 25% of young people were with parents or relatives, 18% were in semi-independent transitional accommodation, 10% were in supported lodgings and a further 10% were in independent living. The proportions of young people in different types of suitable accommodation has been fairly stable in recent years.

Accommodation is considered to be unsuitable if it clearly exposes the young person to risk of harm or social exclusion. The number, and the proportion, in unsuitable accommodation has decreased in recent years. The number of young people in unsuitable accommodation decreased by 5 (17%) from 29(r) to 24 compared with the previous year, equating to 3% of care leavers age 16 and over being in unsuitable accommodation at the point of ceasing to be looked after during 2022-23. 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 13: Adoptions of children looked after, 2013-14 to 2022-23 [Note 1]



Description of Figure 13: Stacked bar chart showing that the number of children adopted has decreased in recent years.

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

Adoptions of looked after children during year ending 31 March by age and gender on StatsWales

[Note 1] Data has been revised for the years 2021-22, 2020-21 and 2019-20 since previously published.

243 children were adopted from care between 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023; a decrease of 43 (15%) compared with the previous year; this is the lowest number of adoptions since 2009-10. The number of children adopted has decreased each year from a high of 385 children adopted during 2014-15, with the exception of 2021-22.

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10% of children were adopted by their former foster carer during 2022-23, a proportion that has remained broadly stable for the past decade.

The majority (80%) of children adopted during the year were in the 1-4 years age group. The average age of children looked after adopted during the year was 41 months at adoption. This is one month older than the average age for 2021-22 and the highest recorded average age since 2012-13 (44 months).

Further information on adoptions of children looked after, including the profile of adopters, can be found on [StatsWales \(Adoptions\)](#).

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](#). 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 \(UK legislation\)](#). 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](#) also provides detailed explanations of the legal, placement and other response categories captured within the data collection.

Refreshed data requirements were issued for the 2022-23 reporting year.

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Population estimates

The rate of children looked after per 10,000 population aged under 18 has been calculated based on the 2022 mid-year estimates provided by ONS. Children looked after rates for 2012-2022 have been revised following publication of rebased mid-year estimates.

Age

8 young people aged 18 or over were looked after on 31 March 2023.

Disability

One local authority was unable to provide disability data for about 26% of children looked after.

The Welsh Government is committed to the social definition of disability, in which it is recognised that people with impairments are disabled by barriers that commonly exist in society. However, data has been collected based on the Equality Act 2010 which uses the medical definition of disability.

Revisions

Minor revisions have been made as part of processing the 2022-23 data which have been agreed by local authorities. This affected data for several years. Revisions made to previous years' data are highlighted in notes.

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Statistical designation

These statistics are published as official statistics in development. More information on the designation of these statistics can be found in the [correspondence between the Welsh Government and the Office for Statistical Regulation](#).

A quality report will be published in due course. Further information on quality can be found in the [2020-21 statistical release](#).

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](#).

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Further information on the [Well-being of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act 2015](#).

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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Media: 0300 025 8099

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