



Children Adopted from Care in Northern Ireland 2024/25



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Reader Information

Document purpose	This bulletin details statistical information relating to children adopted from care in Northern Ireland during the year ending 31 March 2025.
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The statisticians within IAD are out posted from the [Northern Ireland Statistics & Research Agency](#) (NISRA) and the statistics are produced in accordance with the principles and protocols set out in the [Code of Practice for Official Statistics](#).

IAD comprises four statistical sections: Hospital Information, Community Information, Public Health Information & Research and Project Support Analysis. This publication is produced by Community Information Branch.

About Community Information Branch: The purpose of Community Information Branch (CIB) is to promote effective decision making in children and adult social services by providing quality information and analysis.

We collect, analyse, and publish a wide range of community information that is used to help monitor the delivery of personal social services policy. Information collected by CIB is used to assess HSC Trust performance, for corporate monitoring, policy evaluation, and to respond to parliamentary/assembly questions. All publications can be found on the [Department of Health's website](#).

Our Vision and Values

- Provide up-to-date, quality information on children and adult social services and community health;
- to disseminate findings widely with a view to stimulating debate, promoting effective decision-making and improvement in service provision; and
- be an expert voice on social care information.

Key findings

This publication details statistical information relating to children adopted from care in Northern Ireland during the year ending 31 March 2025, including a range of information about these children and their adopters, and durations between different stages in the adoption process. The publication is based on the Department of Health's statistical return AD1 2024/25¹, collected from each of the Health and Social Care Trusts in Northern Ireland.

- During the year ending 31 March 2025, 96 children were adopted from care in Northern Ireland;
- The average age of children at the time of adoption was at 4 years 6 months, and ranged from 1 year 1 month to 17 years 6 months;
- From the child's last entry into care, the average length of time for a child to be adopted in 2024/25 was 3 years 6 months. This was similar to the last three years;
- For children adopted in 2024/25, the average duration from the HSC Trust proposal that adoption was in the best interest for the child (the Looked After Child Best Interest Proposal) to the Adoption Order was 2 years 3 months; and
- In 2024/25, the timing for foster carers who went on to adopt their foster child have exceeded five years for the first time since 2019. The timing for this type of adoption have consistently been longer than for other adopter types, which is expected due to the different circumstances of these adoptions.

¹ See Appendix for details of the return.

Introduction

Adoption, unlike any other permanence option, involves the ending of a child's legal relationship with their birth parents and family and the creation of a lifelong relationship with new parents and family. The arrangements for adoptions, including those for assessing children and prospective adopters, placing children for adoption, and the particular procedures to be followed before and after a child is placed for adoption are all specified in legislation – the Adoption (Northern Ireland) Order 1987 and the Adoption Agencies Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1989.

The Adoption and Children Act (Northern Ireland) 2022, which received Royal Assent on 27 April 2022, will modernise existing adoption legislation. Work is ongoing to implement the Act on a phased basis over a number of years, with timescales for implementation depending on the provision of additional and sustained funding. Once implemented, the Act will largely replace the 1987 Order. The Act will also amend the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995, which is the primary law relating to the care and protection of children. As most children are adopted from the care system, the amendments are designed to improve planning and permanence for children in care.

***Family and Children's Policy Directorate
Department of Health
September 2025***

Children Adopted from Care in Northern Ireland 2024/25

1. Adoptions from care

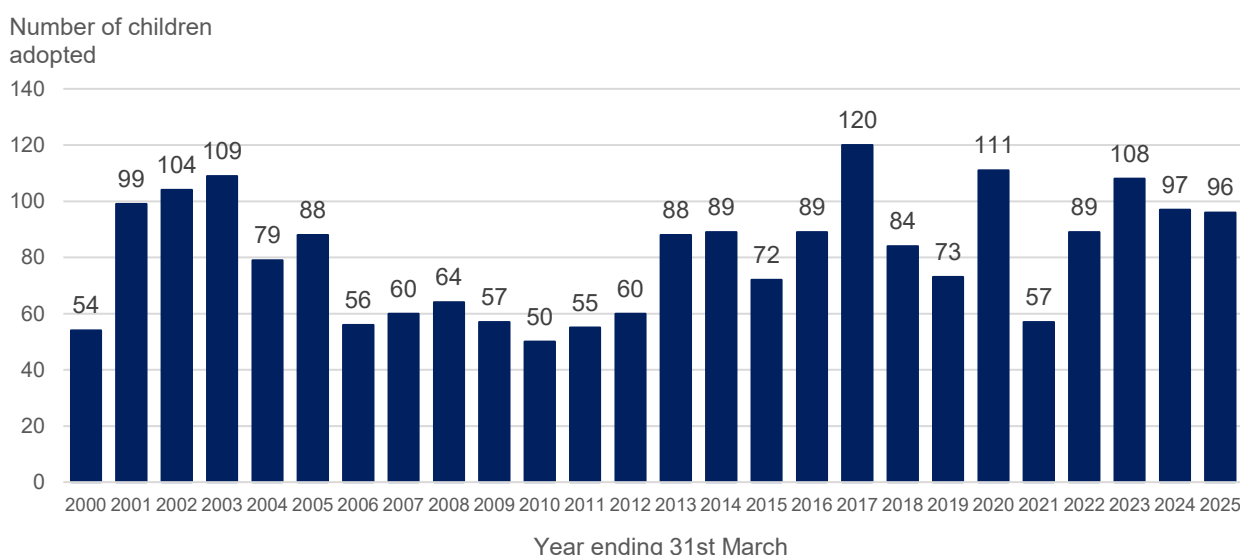
During the year ending 31 March 2025, 96 children were adopted from care in Northern Ireland. Figure 1 sets out the yearly number of adoptions from care. It shows that adoption numbers were notably high between 2001 and 2003 – this is thought to be due to an emphasis by all Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts on encouraging prospective adopters to register as foster carers, resulting in a placement for children at the earliest juncture with foster carers who would then go on to adopt the child². Between 2005/06 and 2011/12, the numbers of adoptions were steady, however somewhat lower than in recent years. The increase from 2012/13 could be linked with renewed focus on adoption and the timeliness of the adoption process, for example with the establishment of Adoption Regional Information System to help identify suitable parents for children in a timely fashion. The drop in number of adoptions during 2020/21 could be linked to the impact of Covid 19 on services.

Figure 1 Number of children adopted from care in Northern Ireland (year ending 31 March)

Source for years 2000 and 2001: Adopting Best Care, Social Services Inspectorate, DHSSPS May 2002

Source from 2003: AD1 returns, DoH <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/articles/children-adopted-care>

Note: Number of adoptions has been estimated for the years 2002, 2007, 2009 and 2011.



² Adopting Best Care, Social Services Inspectorate, DHSSPS May 2002.

The Southern HSC Trust had the largest number of looked after children adopted from care in 2024/25 (33 children), followed by the Western HSC Trust where 21 children were adopted and Belfast HSC Trust where 20 children were adopted from care. As the number of children adopted in each HSC Trust is quite small, care must be taken when making between-Trust or year on year comparisons³.

Table 1 Number of children adopted from care by HSC Trust year ending 31 March 2025

HSC Trust	Number	% of all children adopted from care
Belfast	20	21%
Northern	10	10%
South Eastern	12	13%
Southern	33	34%
Western	21	22%
Northern Ireland	96	100%

2. The adopters

The majority (85%) of the adopters were different sex couples who were either married or unmarried. Some 9% were same sex couples who were married, in a civil partnership or unmarried. A further 5% were single female or male adopters.

Of all the adopters, 8 had previously adopted a child or children⁴, and 17 had dependent birth child/children living in the household.

The age of the adopters ranged from early thirties to mid-sixties, with the majority of the adopters being in their forties at the time of the adoption (59%).

³ Please see Appendix for yearly trend figures.

⁴ Please note that this is based on the 96 adoptions during 2024/25, hence adopters who have adopted more than one child during the year will have been counted more than once.

3. Children adopted from care

Table 2 sets out the main characteristics of children adopted from care in Northern Ireland in 2024/25⁵. The average age of children adopted from care was 4 years and 6 months and ranged from 1 year and 1 month to 17 years and 48 months.

Table 2 Children adopted from care year ending 31 March 2025 by gender, age and religion⁶

Children adopted from care	Number	Percentage
All children adopted	96	
Females adopted	50	52%
Males adopted	46	48%
Age 1 and 2 years old at adoption	37	39%
Age 3 and 4 years old at adoption	29	30%
Age 5 to 6 years old at adoption	15	16%
Age 7 and older at adoption	15	16%
Roman Catholic background	63	66%
Protestant background	22	23%
Other, no or not known religious background	11	11%

Among those 96 children adopted from care during 2024/25, two-thirds (66%) of children were from catholic religious backgrounds, whilst almost a quarter (23%) of children were from protestant religious backgrounds. Some 11 (11%) came from other, no or unknown religious background.

Most of the children adopted from care were of white ethnic background (89%). Some six children (6%) were Irish Traveller or mixed ethnic group.

Twenty-one children (22%) had special needs or a disability. This included emotional, behavioural or mental health difficulties, sensory impairment, physical or long-term health conditions, autism and learning disability.

In 2024/25, 57 of the children (59%) were adopted as a single child adoption, whereas 39 children were adopted as part of a sibling group (41%).

⁵ See [Tables](#) for yearly trend figures.

⁶ Please note that rounding may cause the total percentage to exceed 100%.

4. Duration of the adoption process

In 2024/25, the average length of time between the date of the child's last period of care started to the Adoption Order was granted was 3 years and 6 months. Some 14 of the children (15%) were adopted within two years of entering the final period of care, for 35 children (36%) it took between 2-3 years, and for almost half of the children (47 children, 49%), the last period of care lasted three years or longer.

For some children who enter care, adoption is the preferred means to secure permanency and stability, and the agreed care plan would be identified at an early juncture. For other children, adoption may not be considered until the child has spent some time in care; for example, after changes to the child's family situation which makes it unlikely that the child can return home to birth parents. This will in some cases explain variation in durations, where the shortest time from entering care to adoption was 1 year 1 month and the longest time was 10 years 1 month.

Although every child's situation is unique, with regards to the children adopted during 2024/25, the average length of the adoption process was longer than last year (see [Table 3](#) below). There are a number of factors; however, that may cause delays to the duration of the adoption process, and in 2024/25, 14 reported issues impacting the timing of the adoption. These included issues within the court system (for example appeals being lodged or delays in judgements being made), difficulty in matching child to the adoptive family due to additional needs, delays with sibling applications, or change in social worker.

Table 3 Duration of final period of care prior to Adoption Order (year ending 31 March)

Duration	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Average duration (yrs:months)	3:1	3:1	3:2	3:5	3:7	3:4	3:6
Minimum duration (yrs:months)	1:3	1:1	1:3	0:10	1:2	1:7	1:1
Maximum duration (yrs:months)	8:2	9:8	9:6	6:11	8:9	8:10	10:1

5. Average duration between different stages of the adoption process

Figure 2 and Table 4 sets out the duration between different stages of the adoption process. The Best Interest Proposal is the child's Looked After Child Review where it is agreed to pursue adoption as an option and refer the child's circumstances to the Adoption Panel for recommendation. For some children, this route to permanency will have been identified at birth or the point of last entry into care, whereas some children will have been in care for several years before this option is considered. The average duration from last admission into care to the Best Interest Proposal for children adopted in 2024/25 was 1 year and 3 months, which was slightly longer than previous years.

In general, it took 8 months from the Best Interest Proposal to when the Trust accepted the Adoption Panel's recommendation that adoption was in the best interest of the child (Best Interest Decision); this period ranged from 1 month to 2 years 1 month for the children adopted. Furthermore, the average duration from Best Interest Proposal to the date the Trust accepted the Panel's recommendation that the adopters were suitable for the particular child was 1 year 6 months.

For children adopted in 2024/25, the average duration from the Trust Looked After Child Best Interest Proposal to adoption was 2 years 3 months, slightly shorter than the previous four years. In 2024/25, this ranged from 1 year 0 month to 5 years 5 months.

Table 4 Average durations between different stages of the adoption process (year ending 31 March)

Note 1: Durations are displayed as years:months

Note 2: Some children may be excluded from calculations due to missing values

Note 3: Figures may have been revised from previous years.

Stages in the adoption process	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Last admission to care to Trust Looked After Child Review Best Interest Proposal	0:11	0:9	0:11	1:1	1:0	1:3
Trust Looked After Child Best Interest Proposal to Best Interest Decision	0:7	0:8	0:8	0:8	0:8	0:8
Trust Looked After Child Best Interest Proposal to Panel recommend adopters as suitable for child	1:5	1:7	1:9	1:6	1:4	1:5
Trust Looked After Child Best Interest Proposal to Trust Accept Adopters Suitable	1:6	1:9	1:10	1:6	1:6	1:6
Trust Looked After Child Best Interest Proposal to Placement	1:8	1:9	1:10	1:11	1:8	1:7
Trust Looked After Child Best Interest Proposal to Adoption Order	2:3	2:6	2:7	2:6	2:4	2:3

Figure 2 Average durations between different stages of the adoption process (year ending 31 March 2025)

Note: The time between different stages of the adoption process may not add to the total time as a small number of cases have been excluded from some of the interim calculations due to missing values or dates; or rounding issues.

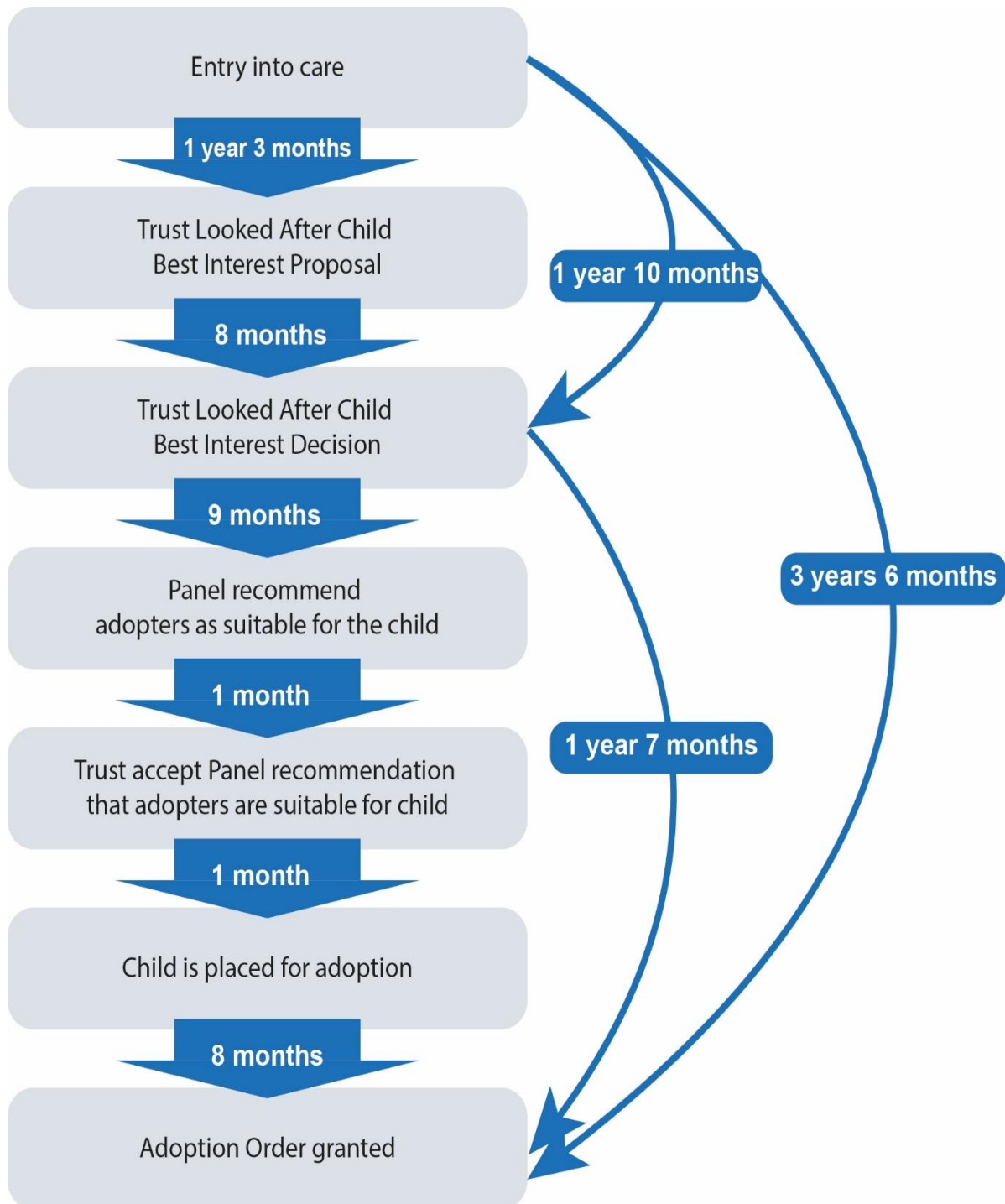


Table 5 sets out the average age of the child at different points in the adoption process. In 2024/25, the average age of children at the time of their last admission into care was 1 year 1 month; similar to that in 2019/20 and 2021/22; and slightly older than that in the last two years. Furthermore, the children were on average older in 2024/25 at the time of the Adoption Order compared with the last two years, however younger than in 2021/22.

Table 5 Average ages of children at different stages of the adoption process (year ending 31 March)

Note 1: Durations are displayed as years:months.

Note 2: Some children may be excluded from calculations due to missing dates or values.

Note 3: Figures may have been revised from previous years.

Average age (years:months)	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
- at last admission into care	1:1	0:8	1:1	0:9	0:9	1:1
- at Best Interest Proposal	1:11	1:4	1:11	1:10	1:10	2:3
- at Best Interest Decision	2:6	2:1	2:7	2:6	2:5	2:11
- when Panel recommended adopters as suitable for child	3:4	2:11	3:8	3:4	3:2	3:8
- when Trust accept recommendation that adopters are suitable for child	3:5	3:1	3:9	3:4	3:3	3:10
- when placed for adoption	3:7	3:1	3:10	3:9	3:6	3:10
- at Adoption Order	4:2	3:10	4:7	4:4	4:1	4:6

6. Adoption process by age group

Of the children adopted in 2024/25, 72 children (75%) had entered their final period of care when they were under one year of age. Some 12 children (13%) entered the final period of care when they were aged one or two, and 12 children (12%) were aged between three and ten years.

Table 6 sets out the adoption process broken down by the age of the child at the time of entering the last period of care. There was a variance of up to 1 year and 8 months for the different age groups of the time between last entry to care and the Adoption Order in 2024/25. It is however worth noting that the numbers involved are small and care must be taken when making in-year or year on year comparisons.

Table 6 Average duration between different stages of the adoption process by age at the start of the last period in care (year ending 31 March 2025)

Note 1: Durations are displayed as years:months.

Note 2: The time between different stages of the adoption process may not add to the total time as some cases may be excluded from the in-between calculations.

Average durations	Age under 1 year	Aged 1 year	Aged 2 years	Aged 3 years or over	All children
Average duration between entry into care and Trust LAC Best Interest Proposal	1:0	1:3	1:2	2:6	1:3
Average duration between date of Trust LAC Best Interest Proposal and matching of child and adopters	1:7	1:5	1:4	1:7	1:6
Average duration between date of matching and date placed for adoption	0:1	0:1	0:3	0:3	0:2
Average duration between date placed for adoption and granting of the Adoption Order	0:8	0:7	0:9	0:9	0:8
Average duration between last entry into care and adoption	3:3	3:4	3:6	4:11	3:6

Adoption may not have been identified as a permanency plan for the child at the time of entering care, therefore, the below table sets out the average duration from the Trust Looked After Child Best Interest Proposal to adoption by the age of the child at the time of the Best Interest Proposal. This shows that, in 2024/25, the average duration was longer for children aged 1 or aged 3 and over at the time of the Best Interest Proposal.

Table 7 Average duration between Trust LAC best interest proposal and adoption by age, year ending 31 March 2025

Note: Some children may be excluded from calculations due to missing values.

Age at Trust LAC Best Interest Proposal	Number of Children	Average duration between date of Trust Looked After Child Best Interest Proposal and Adoption Order (Years : Months)
Under 1	39	1:11
1	26	2:7
2	7	2:2
3 and over	24	2:7
All children	96	2:3

7. Type of adopters

Recent years have seen a change in the way adoptions are processed prior to the Adoption Order is granted. In general, there are four pathways that can be followed, from the traditional route where a child is placed with approved adopters for the purpose of adoption, to being placed with concurrent carers while the future of the child is being decided⁷. In the latter case, social services will work with birth parents to assess if the child can return to their care, and if the child cannot return safely to their birth family's care (and pending the approval of the courts) then the child goes on to be adopted by the concurrent carers.

Table 8 Type of adopters / pathways to adoption (year ending 31 March)

Type of adopters / Description	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Adopters Only: The child is placed with approved adopters for the purpose of adoption after Freeing Order has been granted by the courts.	15 (14%)	4 (7%)	2 (2%)	9 (8%)	14 (14%)	14 (15%)
Concurrent Carers: The child is placed with carers who are approved as foster carers and adopters while the future of the child is still being decided. Social services will work simultaneously with the birth parents and the prospective adopters. The primary plan is for the child to return home, but if this is not possible, the carers adopt the child.	50 (45%)	32 (56%)	34 (38%)	45 (42%)	44 (45%)	43 (45%)
Dual Approved Carers: The carers are both approved as foster carers and adopters. The child is placed with the dual approved carers after Best Interest Decision is made by the Trust, and the carers act as the child's foster carers up until the point when the child's legal status is changed to 'placed for adoption'.	29 (26%)	15 (26%)	35 (39%)	35 (32%)	20 (21%)	24 (25%)
Former Foster Carers: The child is initially placed in foster care and foster carers, who subsequently become approved as adopters for the child, go on to adopt the child.	17 (15%)	6 (11%)	18 (20%)	19 (18%)	19 (20%)	15 (16%)
All adoptions	111 (100%)	57 (100%)	89 (100%)	108 (100%)	97 (100%)	96 (100%)

Like concurrent carers, dual approved carers are also approved as both foster carers and adopters. Dual approved carers take the placement of a child after the Trust has agreed that the care plan for the child is adoption but prior to the court's decision whether to free the child for adoption. So, in this instance the child is also initially placed on a fostering

⁷ The distinction between these four types of carers/adoption pathways was included in these returns for the first time in 2016/17.

basis. Both the options above reduces the time it will take to reach the Adoption Order and as such, permanency and stability for the child will potentially be achieved at an earlier stage. Finally, children who are adopted from care can be placed on a fostering basis with foster carers or kinship foster carers. When the child’s care plan changes to adoption, the foster carers, at that point, seek to become approved adopters to enable them to provide permanence for that specific child.

The choice of the kind of carers the child is placed with will depend on the child’s unique circumstances. For a child to be placed with concurrent carers, it must be identified that there is likelihood, based on past history that the child may not be able to safely return home to the care of birth family. However, the birth parents are afforded an opportunity to engage with service to demonstrate their parenting capacity and have their child returned. Another child may be placed in foster care; however, the pathway of adoption may not be relevant for the child until sometime down the line. Because of these differences, it is expected that the time from a child’s last entry into care to the Adoption Order will differ between the four adoption routes. Table 9 indeed sets out that children adopted by former foster carers have consistently had the longest duration in care prior to adoption.

Table 9 Average durations (years:months) from last entering care to Adoption Order by type of adopters (year ending 31 March)

Note 1: Durations are displayed as years:months.

Note 2: Some durations may be based on small number of adoptions.

[S] Figure excluded due to very small number of adoptions.

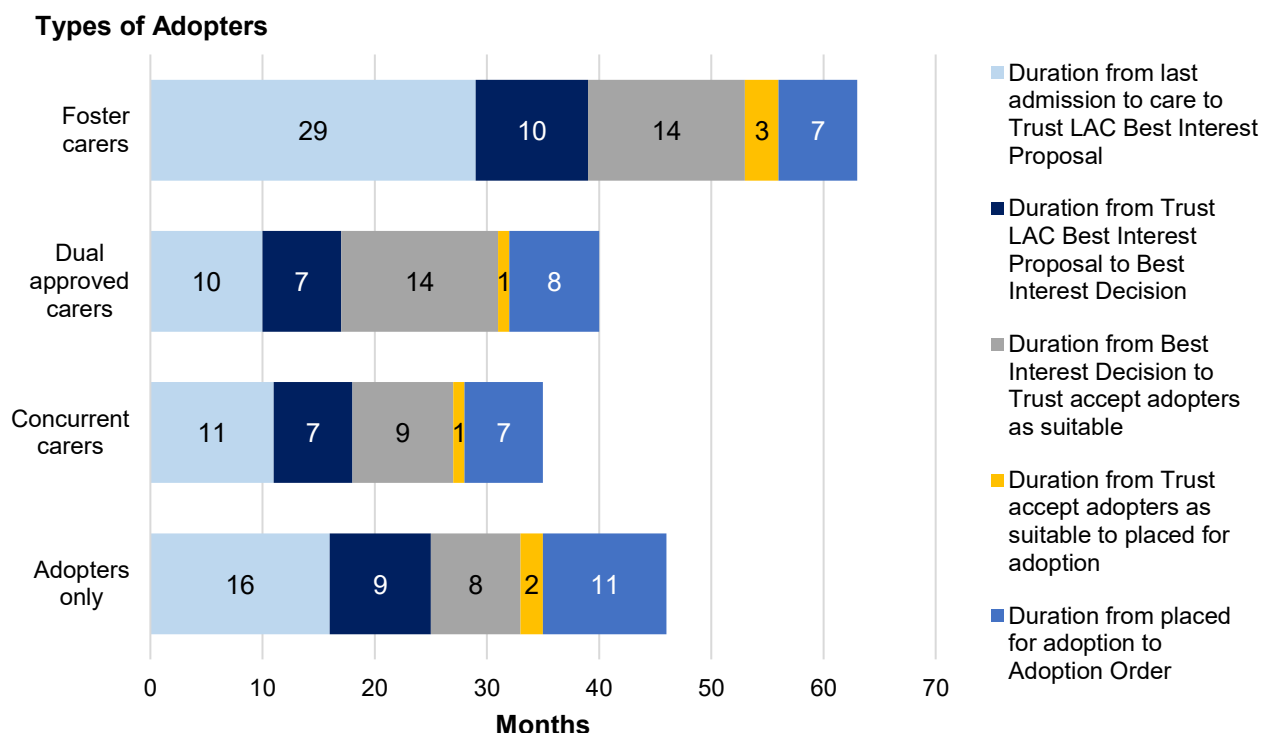
Note 3: Some figures have been updated from previous publications.

Type of adopters	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Adopters Only	3:1	3:7	[S]	3:8	3:3	3:10
Concurrent Carers	2:7	2:9	3:3	3:3	3:2	2:10
Dual Approved Carers	3:2	3:4	3:5	3:7	3:2	3:4
Former Foster Carers	4:8	4:5	4:2	4:5	4:0	5:3
All adoptions	3:1	3:2	3:5	3:7	3:4	3:6

[Figure 3](#) sets out the duration of stages of the adoption process for 2024/25 for the different type of adopters. Care must however be taken when interpreting and comparing these figures, due to the small number of children.

Figure 3 Average durations of different stages of the adoption process by type of adopters, year ending 31 March 2025 (months)

Note: Some children may be excluded from calculations due to missing values or dates.



It is expected that children in the four adoption routes may relate to somewhat different age cohorts. As can be seen in Table 10, children adopted by dual approved carers were on average younger at the time entering care through to the stage that panel recommended adopters as suitable for the child, compared with those adopted through other routes.

Table 10 Average ages of children at different stages of the adoption process by type of adopters (year ending 31 March 2025)

Note 1: Durations are displayed as years:months.

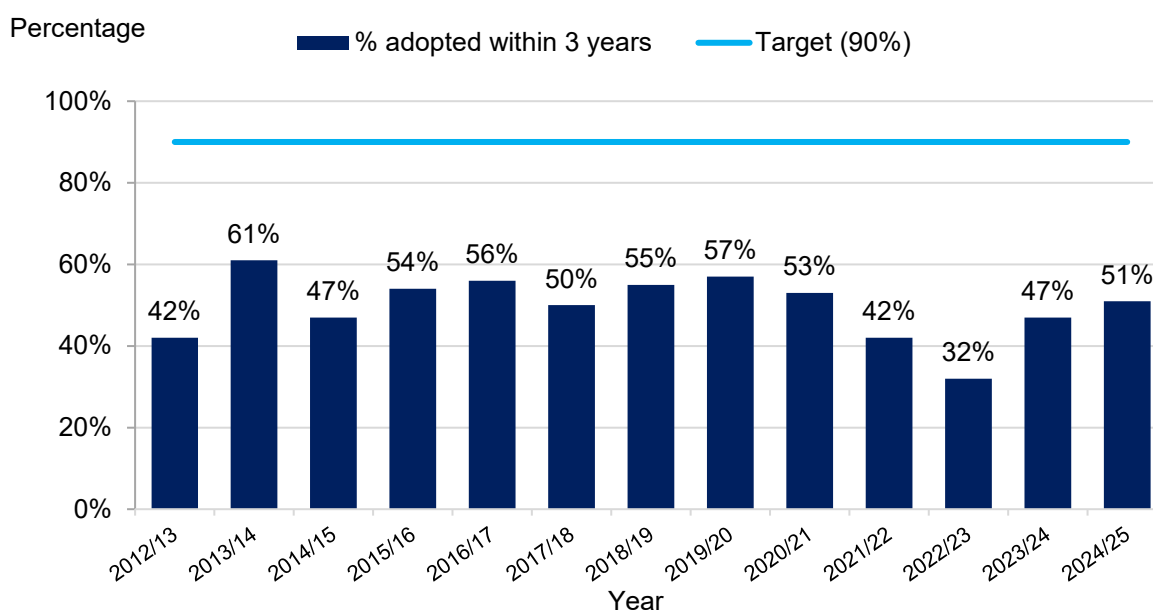
Note 2: Some children may be excluded from calculations due to missing values or dates.

Average age (years:months)	Adopters Only	Concurrent Carers	Dual Approved Carers	Foster Carers	All adoptions
- at last admission into care	1:2	1:1	0:10	1:4	1:1
- at Best Interest Proposal	2:6	2:0	1:8	3:9	2:3
- at Best Interest Decision	3:3	2:7	2:4	4:7	2:11
- when Panel recommended adopters as suitable for child	3:10	3:2	3:2	5:9	3:8
- when Trust accept recommendation that adopters are suitable for child	3:10	3:3	3:6	5:9	3:10
- when placed for adoption	4:0	3:3	3:6	5:11	3:10
- at Adoption Order	5:0	3:11	4:2	6:7	4:6

8. Timing of the adoption process

Adoption is not the best option for every child in care; however, for those children where adoption would be in their best interest, it is important that this is identified early to ensure that the child can be placed in a stable family setting. Ensuring the timeliness of the adoption process is a priority for the Department of Health, and the Department has had an ongoing target that 90% of all adoptions from care should be completed within three years of the child's last admission to care.

Figure 4 Percentage of children who were adopted within three years of last entering care (year ending 31 March)



The target has not been met. After gradually declining from 57% in 2019/20 to a recent low of 32% in 2022/23, the percentage increased again to 47% in 2023/24 and 51% in 2024/25. It is worth noting that in 2022/23, some 12% of the adoptions stated a delay due to COVID-19 related issues. Furthermore, the timing of the adoption relates to many factors and is unique for each individual child. Two factors that may influence the adoption journey are the child's age when entering care and if the child has a disability. The type of adopters that the child can suitably be placed with is a reflection of the child's care history and its personal circumstances and can also be an indication of the timing of the adoption process.

As can be seen in Table 11, a higher proportion of younger children; those without disabilities; and those who were placed with concurrent carers were adopted within three years of last entering care.

Table 11 Percentage of children who are adopted within three years of last entering care by category of adoption, disability and age when entered care (year ending 31 March 2025)

Note: Some of these calculations are based on very small number of adoptions.

Category of adoption / cohort of children	Percentage adopted within three years of last entering care
Concurrent Carers	63%
Dual Approved Carers	54%
Foster Carers	13%
Adopters only	50%
Child with no disability	59%
Child with a disability	24%
Aged under 1 when last entered care	56%
Aged 1 when last entered care	33%
Aged 2 and over when last entered care	39%

The overall adoption process involves court activity which may contribute to delays in the adoption process. The time up to the Best Interest Decision, however, reflects the part of the process that is mainly down to the HSC Trusts. As set out in Table 12, the time from the start of the final period in care to the Trust's decision that adoption is in the best interest for the child was 1 year 10 months in 2024/25, which was longer than previous years.

Table 12 Average length of time for Best Interest Decision to be reached in the adoption process (Years: Months)

Note 1: Some children may be excluded from calculations due to missing values or dates.

Year ending 31 March	Average length of time between entering care and Best Interest Decision
2016	1:4
2017	1:3
2018	1:6
2019	1:3
2020	1:5
2021	1:4
2022	1:6
2023	1:8
2024	1:8
2025	1:10

9. UK adoption statistics comparison 2023/24

There is no common legislative framework operating across the United Kingdom relating to adoption, hence any statistics showing data for the four jurisdictions will not necessarily provide like-for-like comparisons. Bearing this in mind, Table 13 sets out some of the statistics published in Northern Ireland, England and Wales. Please note that as adoption figures for England and Wales for 2024/25 have not yet been published, only figures relating to 2023/24 are compared.

Table 13 Adoption statistics for Northern Ireland, England and Wales (year ending 31 March 2024)

Source: [Children adopted from care in Northern Ireland 2023/24](#)

Source: [Children looked after in England including adoption: 2023 to 2024](#)

Source: [Stats Wales - Adoptions](#)

[S] Figure has been suppressed to avoid personal disclosure.

Note: There is no common legislative framework operating across the United Kingdom relating to adoption, hence any statistics will not necessarily provide like-for-like comparisons.

Key statistics	Northern Ireland	England	Wales
Number of children adopted from care	97	2,980	255
Rate of children adopted per 1,000 children in care (31 March)	24	36	35
Aged at adoption under 1 year old	[S]	4%	[S]
Aged at adoption 1-4 years old	74%	76%	78%
Aged at adoption 5-9 years old	26%	19%	20%
Aged at adoption 10+ years old	[S]	1%	[S]
Average age at adoption (years:months)	4:2 ⁸	3:4	3:4
Average duration of last period of care prior to Adoption Order (years:months)	3:4	2:5	2:5 ⁹

In general, children adopted from care in Northern Ireland were on average older and had spent longer time in care than that of children adopted from care in England and Wales.

The average duration from last entry into care to the granting of the adoption order in 2023/24 was 2 years and 5 months in England and Wales. While in Northern Ireland the average duration was considerably longer at 3 years 4 months in 2023/24.

⁸ Average age at adoption for Northern Ireland in 2023/24 was revised in September 2025.

⁹ 903 days.

Appendix A – Technical Notes

Data Collection

The figures for “Children adopted from care in Northern Ireland 2024/25” are derived from the ‘AD1’ data collection of children adopted from care in Northern Ireland. The AD1 data collection return was provided by each of the five Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts in Northern Ireland to Community Information Branch (CIB) within the Department of Health (DoH).

The AD1 data collection was introduced in 2004, and its primary aim is to monitor the numbers of children adopted from care and the timescales between different stages in the adoption process. It is an individual level return, with one record for each young person fitting the parameters for the collection. Returns are completed online by nominated HSC Trust staff using a secure web-based application. Records are pseudo anonymised to protect the confidentiality of the young people whose details are included in the return.

Guidance notes and other documents associated with the completion of the AD1 returns are available to view or download from the DoH [website](#).

Methodology

The adoption process is set out in stages, where one event, recommendation or decision would naturally follow the next. However, with the focus on improving the timing of the somewhat lengthy adoption process, the natural order of the events may not be followed. This may cause, when calculating duration between different stages of the adoption process, a 'negative' duration to be calculated. This mainly relates to the Trust Looked After Child Best Interest Proposal occurring prior to last entry into care.

Instead of excluding these negative values from analysis (e.g. treat as 'missing'), the negative values are recoded to '0' as the negative value may be a reflection of efficiency and improved service. This means that, for the example above, where the Best Interest Proposal was agreed prior to the last entry to care, the calculations show that no time passed between the child entered its last period of care and the Best Interest Proposal was in place (time = 0 month).

Format of historic figures

Any historic figure including '12 months' has been revised to the format of '1 year'. For example, '0:12' is now displayed as '1:0' and '2:12' is displayed as '3:0'.

Missing dates and Rounding

Some children may not have all the key dates referred to in this publication. For example, children adopted from care with parental consent (Article 16) may not have a Trust Looked After Child Best Interest Proposal date. Children with missing dates will be excluded from analysis involving those specific dates but included in all other calculation. The total number of children included in each stage of the adoption process may therefore vary. Furthermore, due to missing dates, summing average durations between key dates may

give a different result when the same duration is calculated directly without using intervening dates. These differences may be further compounded through rounding.

Data Quality

All information submitted by HSC Trusts is validated at the point of entry, where Trust staff is asked to correct or amend data as required, and provide appropriate explanations if information is missing. CIB perform further checks, using historical data to monitor annual variations and emerging trends.

A detailed quality report for the AD1 statistical return is available on the [DoH website](#).

These statistics were designated as National Statistics in November 2013 following a [full assessment](#) against the [Code of Practice](#).

If you have any comments on this publication, please contact Community Information Branch cib@health-ni.gov.uk.

Accredited Official Statistics

These accredited official statistics were independently reviewed by OSR in November 2013 in the [Assessment of Statistics on Looked After Children](#) (Report 265). They comply with the standards of trustworthiness, quality and value in the Code of Practice and should be labelled National Statistics (or 'accredited official statistics').

Related Publications

Details of statistics on children adopted from care published by other countries within the UK (United Kingdom) can be found as detailed below.

England: [Children looked after in England including adoption: 2023 to 2024](#)

Wales: [Stats Wales - Adoptions](#)

User Feedback

Any comments you have regarding this, or any other publication produced by CIB are welcome. Your views help us to improve the service we provide to users of this information and to the wider public.

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Appendix B - Additional Tables

Table 14 Number of Children adopted from Care in Northern Ireland (year ending 31 March)

Source for years 2000 and 2001: Adopting Best Care, Social Services Inspectorate, DHSSPS May 2002

Source from 2003: AD1 Returns, DoH <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/articles/children-adopted-care>

Note: Number of adoptions has been estimated for the years 2002, 2007, 2009 and 2011.

Year	Number of children adopted from care	Year	Number of children adopted from care
2000	54	2013	88
2001	99	2014	89
2002	104	2015	72
2003	109	2016	89
2004	79	2017	120
2005	88	2018	84
2006	56	2019	73
2007	60	2020	111
2008	64	2021	57
2009	57	2022	89
2010	50	2023	108
2011	55	2024	97
2012	60	2025	96

Table 15 Number of Children Adopted from Care by HSC Trust (year ending 31 March)

HSC Trust	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Belfast	13	23	12	22	25	9	25	24	19	20
Northern	31	40	15	16	32	16	11	24	15	10
South Eastern	10	17	22	9	12	11	21	29	23	12
Southern	19	15	16	8	26	4	22	18	21	33
Western	16	25	19	18	16	17	10	13	19	21
Northern Ireland	89	120	84	73	111	57	89	108	97	96

This statistical bulletin and other statistical bulletins published by Community Information Branch (CIB) are available to download from the [Department of Health website](#)

For further information on children adopted from care in Northern Ireland, please contact:

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