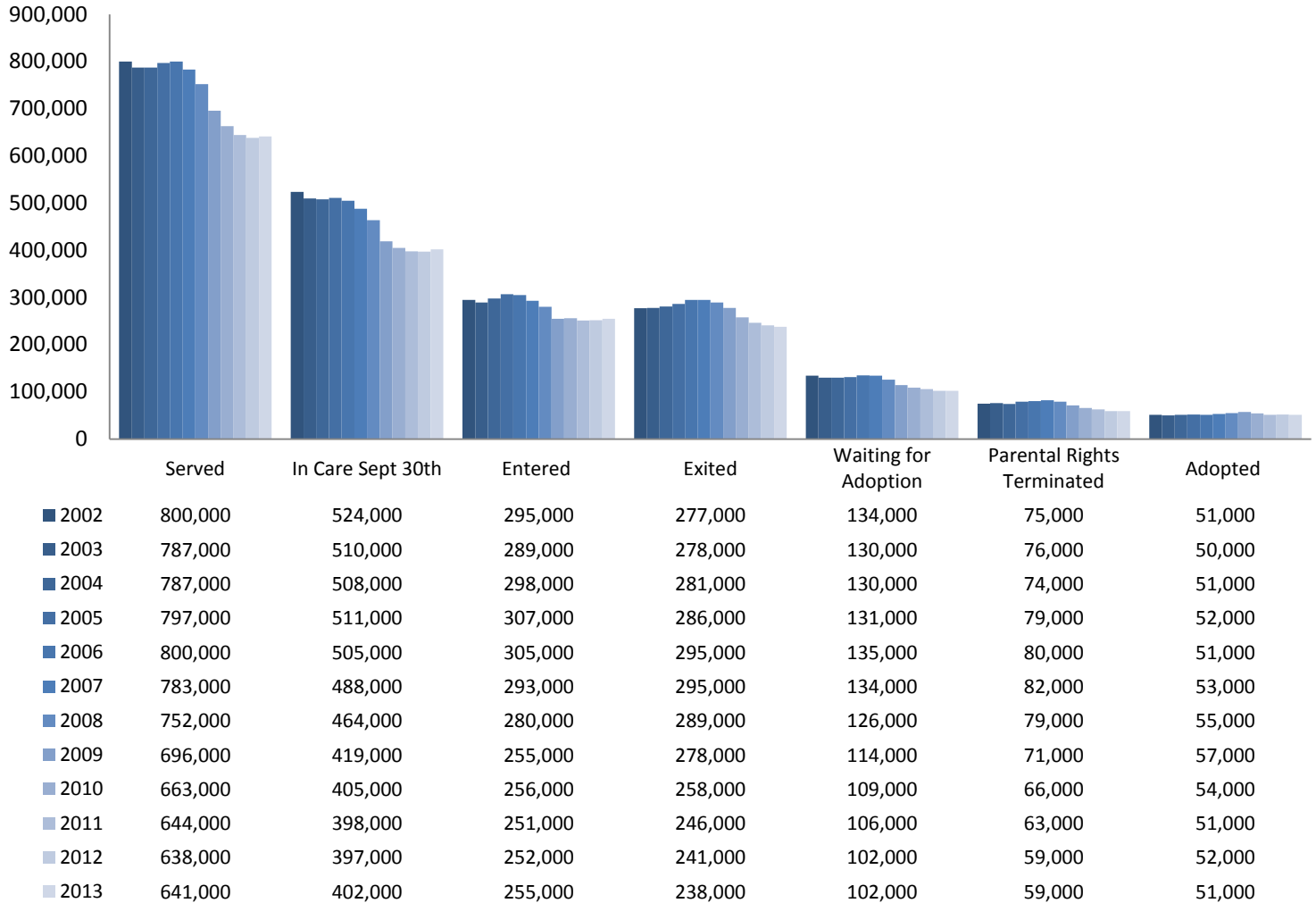




Trends in Foster Care and Adoption: FFY 2002-FFY 2013

(Based on data submitted by States as of July 21, 2014)

Source: AFCARS data, U.S. Children's Bureau,
Administration on Children, Youth and Families



Discussion of Trends

This chart includes data submitted to the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) by States, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico by July 21, 2014.

Please note that, for all of the years shown, some of the data may differ from that shown in earlier versions of this chart. This is due to the fact that some States have resubmitted their AFCARS data after addressing data quality issues.



FFY = Federal Fiscal Year (October 1 through September 30)

Sub-population Definitions

- 1. In Care 9/30:** This is an estimated count of all the children in foster care **on the last day** of the FFY. An individual child is included in the count for each year for which he or she is in foster care on the last day.
- 2. Entries:** This is an estimated count of all children who entered foster care **during** the FFY. An individual child is counted only once for each year, even if the child entered, exited and reentered care during the year. The most recent date of removal from home is used to determine whether the child entered foster care during the period. If an individual child entered in one year and then exits and re-enters in a subsequent year, he or she is included in the count of entries for both years.
- 3. Exits:** This is an estimated count of all children who exited foster care during the FFY **at the end of their most recent foster care episode**. An individual child is counted only once for each year, even if the child exited, re-entered and exited again during the year. The most recent date of discharge (from foster care) is the one counted. If an individual child exited care in one year and then re-enters and exits again in a subsequent year, he or she is included in the count of exits for both years.
- 4. Waiting:** This is an estimated count of all children who are waiting to be adopted **on the last day** of the FFY. An individual child is included in the count for each year in which he or she is waiting to be adopted on the last day. There is no Federal definition for children waiting to be adopted. For the purposes of this analysis, children waiting to be adopted include children with a goal of adoption and/or whose parental rights have been terminated. The "waiting" population excludes children whose parents' rights have been terminated, who are 16 years old and older, and who have a goal of emancipation. An individual child is included in the count for each year that he or she has these characteristics on the last day of the year.
- 5. Parental Rights Terminated:** This is an estimated count of all children in care **on the last day** of the FFY whose parental rights have been terminated and who are waiting for adoption. An individual child who has these characteristics on the last day of the year is counted only once for that year.
- 6. Adopted:** This is an estimated count of all children adopted with public child welfare agency involvement **during the FFY**. An individual child is counted only once for each year, even if (in rare cases) the child was adopted multiple times during the year. In cases when an individual child is adopted in one year and then adopted again in a subsequent year, he or she is included in the count of adoptions for both years.
- 7. Served:** This is an estimated count of all children who were in the public foster care system **during the FFY**. This number is the sum of two mutually exclusive groups of children: the children who are already in care on the first day of the fiscal year (as of October 1) and the children who enter foster care during the year. An individual child is counted only once for each year.

Technical Discussion

In this report, each child is counted only once, using the report representing the child's most recent foster care episode. There are some children who exit foster care and re-enter during the year one or more times. These children would be counted as entries, but not as exits, if they remained in care through the last day of the fiscal year (September 30). In these circumstances, the prior exit is not counted, even though it occurred during the fiscal year. We estimate the number of these uncounted exits to be approximately 6,000 per year.



There is also a data quality issue that has had an impact on the number of exits, particularly for earlier years. AFCARS data are submitted every six months and cover a six-month period. Sometimes a child who is reported during one six-month period does not appear in the next period, and there is no record that the child exited. Case reviews have shown that the majority are situations in which the child actually exited, but the exit was not reported to AFCARS. However, because the actual number of these "dropped" exits cannot be calculated, they have not been accounted for in the exit count. The number of dropped cases ranges between 4,000 and 5,000 cases per period in the most recent years, but the numbers may drop over time as States correct and resubmit their data. These dropped cases range from about a half a percent to one percent of the total population served in the year. Please note that dropped cases are excluded from all of the estimates shown in the table.

Data Discussion

Numbers of Children in Foster Care: The last decade showed a decline in the numbers of children in foster care on the last day of each year, with the most precipitous change occurring between FY 2008 and FY 2009, when the population declined by almost 10%. But the decline slowed down in more recent years, and FY 2013 shows a slight increase over the prior year, from 397,000 in FY 2012 to 402,000 in FY 2013.

Entries into and Exits from Foster Care: In FY 2005, the number of entries into foster care reached its highest point to date with 307,000 entries reported that year. The number of entries to care was declining until FY 2011, and has since shown a slight increase, from 251,000 in FY 2011 to 255,000 in FY 2013. The number of exits, which increased between FY 2002 (277,000) and FY 2006 (295,000), has been on a continual decline to 238,000 in FY 2013. The count of exits excludes those children who exited and later re-entered care during the same year, as well as any children who left care but the discharge dates were missing from the file (see technical discussion above).

Children Waiting to be Adopted: Since FY 2006, the number of children waiting to be adopted has been declining (from 135,000 in FY 2006 to 102,000 in FY 2013). Because the numbers of children waiting to be adopted are a subset of those in care on the last day, we would expect the numbers to decrease, just as the numbers in care have. However, looking at the waiting children as a percentage of those in care on the last day, we see they have been rather consistent, ranging between 25% to 27% of the population in care on September 30th.

Children Waiting to be Adopted Whose Parents' Rights Were Terminated: The number of waiting children whose parents' parental rights had been terminated as of the last day of each year increased from 74,000 in FY 2004 to 82,000 in FY 2007. Since FY 2007, the number has declined to just 59,000 in FY 2013. The percentage of children waiting to be adopted whose children whose parental rights had been terminated has shown a similar decline, from 63% in FY 2008 to 58% in FY 2013. There was little change between FY 2012 and FY 2013 in the numbers of children waiting for adoption and with TPR, both as a proportion and in absolute numbers. The number of children whose parents' rights were terminated *during* the year has remained very consistent over the past several years (around 32,000), but the proportion that they make up of all waiting children with TPR increased, from 44% in 2004 to 56% in 2013, suggesting that the population of children legally free for adoption may be shifting toward more children who *more recently* had parental rights terminated, as states have improved in their efforts to get more children with TPR to adoption.

Children Adopted: Between FY 2002 and FY 2006, the number of adoptions remained relatively flat, ranging between 50,000 and 52,000. We saw an increase from 51,000 in FY 2006 to 57,000 in FY 2009, but the numbers decreased back to fewer than 51,000 in FY 2013. Note that although the numbers declined in FY 2010 and FY 2011, the proportion of adoptions to all exits from foster care has been very consistent, at approximately 21%, since FY 2009.