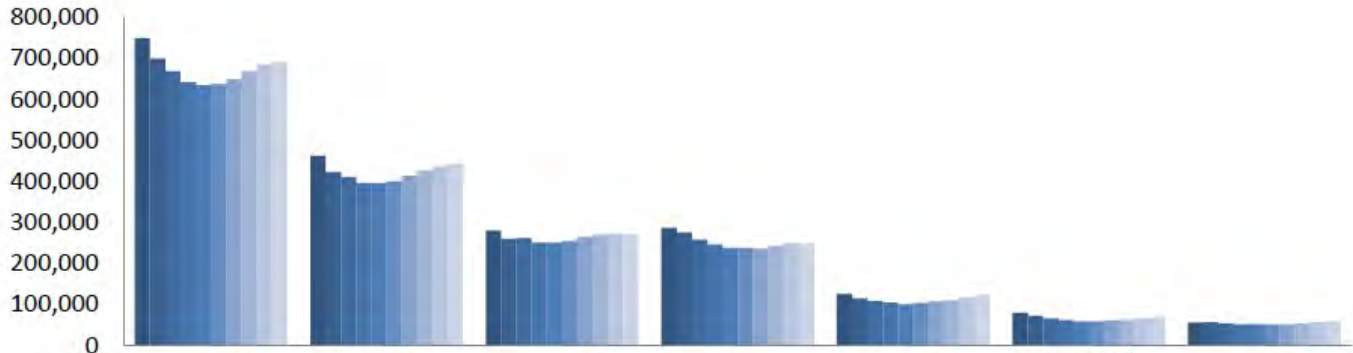




Trends in Foster Care and Adoption: FY 2008 - FY 2017

(Based on data submitted by States as of Aug 10, 2018)

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



	Served	In Care On Sept. 30th	Entered	Exited	Waiting	Parental Rights Terminated	Adoptions
■ 2008	750,000	463,000	280,000	287,000	125,000	79,500	55,300
■ 2009	700,000	423,000	260,000	276,000	114,000	71,600	57,200
■ 2010	669,000	411,000	262,000	258,000	108,000	66,000	53,500
■ 2011	643,000	396,000	251,000	246,000	105,000	62,100	50,900
■ 2012	635,000	396,000	251,000	238,000	100,000	58,400	52,000
■ 2013	638,000	400,000	255,000	238,000	103,000	58,900	50,800
■ 2014	650,000	414,000	264,000	236,000	107,000	61,200	50,700
■ 2015	669,000	427,000	269,000	242,000	110,000	62,300	53,600
■ 2016	685,000	437,000	273,000	249,000	117,000	65,500	57,200
■ 2017	691,000	443,000	270,000	248,000	123,000	69,500	59,400

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 August 10, 2018.

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.

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



Discussion of Trends

Numbers of Children in Foster Care: After declining by nearly 15% percent between FY 2008 and FY 2012 to a low of 396,000, the number of children in foster care on the last day of each fiscal year since has shown an increase. However, based on the most recent data the magnitude of these increases is decreasing. Specifically, the percent increases in the most recent years were as follows; FY 2017-1.4% increase, FY 2016-2.3% increase and FY 2015-3.1% increase.

Entries into and Exits from Foster Care: Trends for children entering the system follow a similar pattern. Beginning with FY 2008, the number of entries to care generally declined through FY 2012 to 251,000. The entries increased slightly to 255,000 in FY 2013 and continued to rise to 273,000 in FY 2016. FY 2017 represents a small decrease to 270,000, the first decline in 5 years. FY 2008's 287,000 exits represents the largest number of exits in the last decade. The number of exits, for the most part, steadily decreased to 236,000 in FY 2014. The number of exits increased consecutively for two years since FY 2014 to 249,000 in FY 2016. However, FY 2017's 248,000 represents little change in the number of exits.

Children Waiting to be Adopted: The numbers of children waiting to be adopted are a subset of those in care on the last day. As numbers of children in care were declining, the numbers waiting for adoption declined, as well. Similarly, in the last five years a significant increase in the numbers of children waiting for adoption has been observed, moving from a low in FY 2012 of 100,000 up to 123,000 in FY 2017. Despite the rise in the numbers, the percentage of children who are defined as waiting to be adopted has remained stable over the last decade, averaging between 26 and 28% of children in care on the last day.

Children Waiting to be Adopted Whose Parents' Rights Were Terminated: The percentage of children waiting to be adopted whose parents' parental rights had been terminated has shown a continuous decline, from 63% in FY 2008 to 56% in FY 2016. Nonetheless, the decreases in the percentages have been minimum since FY 2012, in particular (much less than one percentage point per year). The percentage for FY 2017 is unchanged at 56%. Each FY since 2013 there has been an increase in the absolute numbers of children whose parents' rights were terminated, increasing from 58,400 in FY 2012 to 69,500 in FY 2017.

Children Adopted: The number of adoptions that are finalized each year has remained relatively flat (ranging between 50,700 to 53,600) over the last decade, with the exception of FY 2009 and FY 2016, when the numbers rose to over 57,000. Since FY 2014 the numbers of adoptions each year have increased over the previous year to FY 2017's current high of 59,400. During the last decade as a proportion of the exits, adoption has remained very stable, during the first 7 years making up about 21% of the discharges each year. Nonetheless, since FY 2014, the numbers of adoptions as a proportion of exits has exceeded 21%, reaching a high of 24% for FY 2017.

Technical Discussion

Discussion of Trends

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. In addition to the exiting children/youth, recent analyses has identified that in some instances record numbers change (i.e., child



records undergo a merge process; hence, the child's record is in the subsequent submission, but with a different record number). The records merge process typically happens when a child's information exists in the State's information system, but the child is inadvertently assigned a new record number, sometimes due to a re-entry into care. 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. Although there has been some decrease in the numbers of dropped cases, we have begun formally addressing the issue with each applicable State, beginning with the 2017 AFCARS data. To the extent practicable and reasonable, we will attempt to address prior years' data. Thus, there may be some differences between historical numbers presented in this report compared to previous reports. Please note that dropped cases are excluded from all of the estimates shown in the table.

Definitions

- 1. In Care 9/30:** This is an estimated count of all the children in foster care **on the last day** of the FY. 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 FY. 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 FY **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:** 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. 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. This trends table shows an estimated count of all children who are waiting to be adopted **on the last day** of the FY. 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.

The "waiting" population excludes children who meet these three criteria: their parents' rights have been terminated, they are 16 years old and older, and they have a goal of emancipation.
- 5. Parental Rights Terminated:** This is an estimated count of all children in care **on the last day** of the FY 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 FY**. 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.



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Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau, <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb>

7. **Served:** This is an estimated count of all children who were in the public foster care system **during the FY**. 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.