



The AFCARS Report

Preliminary FY¹ 2020 Estimates as of October 04, 2021 - No. 28

SOURCE: Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) FY 2020 data²

Numbers at a Glance

Fiscal Year	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Number in foster care on September 30 of the FY	429,961	436,552	434,909	426,566	407,493
Number entered foster care during the FY	273,174	270,200	262,902	252,352	216,838
Number exited foster care during the FY	250,494	248,882	251,640	249,675	224,396
Number served by the foster care system during the FY	680,287	685,399	686,508	676,168	631,832
Number waiting to be adopted on September 30 of the FY	116,722	124,004	126,196	123,809	117,470
Number adopted with public child welfare agency involvement during the FY	57,176	59,497	63,091	66,208	57,881
Number waiting to be adopted for whom parental rights (for all living parents) were terminated as of the last day of the FY	65,533	69,921	71,907	71,860	63,815

Children in Foster Care on September 30, 2020 - N=407,493

Age as of September 30th	Years	Sex	Percent	Number
Mean	8.4	Male	51%	209,063
Median	7.7	Female	49%	198,387

Age as of September 30th	Percent	Number	Most Recent Placement Setting	Percent	Number
Less than 1 Year	7%	29,105	Pre-Adoptive Home	4%	16,559
1 Year	9%	35,289	Foster Family Home (Relative)	34%	137,356
2 Years	8%	31,240	Foster Family Home (Non-Relative)	45%	182,386
3 Years	7%	27,170	Group Home	4%	15,975
4 Years	6%	24,214	Institution	6%	22,824
5 Years	5%	22,300	Supervised Independent Living	2%	8,022
6 Years	5%	20,445	Runaway	1%	4,831
7 Years	5%	19,322	Trial Home Visit	4%	18,250

Age as of September 30th	Percent	Number	Case Plan Goal	Percent	Number
8 Years	4%	18,042	Reunify with Parent(s) or Primary Caretaker(s)	54%	216,876
9 Years	4%	17,166	Live with Other Relative(s)	4%	14,153
10 Years	4%	16,683	Adoption	28%	110,278
11 Years	4%	16,928	Long Term Foster Care	2%	6,989
12 Years	4%	17,426	Emancipation	4%	17,299
13 Years	4%	17,803	Guardianship	4%	16,445
14 Years	5%	18,622	Case Plan Goal Not Yet Established	4%	16,818
15 Years	5%	19,723			
16 Years	5%	21,080			
17 Years	5%	22,046			
18 Years	1%	5,779			
19 Years	1%	3,773			
20 Years	1%	3,227			

¹ 'FY' refers to the Federal Fiscal Year, October 1st through September 30th.

² Data from both the regular and revised AFCARS file submissions received by October 04, 2021 are included in this report. Missing data are excluded from each table. Therefore, the totals within each distribution may not equal the total provided for that subpopulation (e.g., number in care on September 30th may not match the sum across ages for that group). Note: Due to data quality concerns, many of which are associated with the lingering effects of Hurricane Maria, Puerto Rico's data are only included for the years 2019 and 2020 (foster care), and 2018 through 2020 (adoption). PR is in the process of addressing the quality of their excluded data.

Race/Ethnicity	Percent	Number	Time in Care	Months
American Indian/Alaska Native	2%	9,851	Mean	21.0
Asian	1%	2,061	Median	14.6
Black or African American	23%	92,237		
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	0%	1,070		
Hispanic (of any race)	22%	88,111		
White	43%	175,870		
Unknown/Unable to Determine	1%	5,597		
Two or More Races	8%	31,669		

Time in Care	Percent	Number
Less than 1 Month	5%	18,703
1 - 5 Months	17%	69,655
6 - 11 Months	20%	82,934
12 - 17 Months	17%	67,618
18 - 23 Months	11%	45,591
24 - 29 Months	8%	34,498
30 - 35 Months	6%	22,733
3 - 4 Years	11%	42,788
5 Years or More	6%	22,971

NOTE: All races exclude children of Hispanic origin. Children of Hispanic ethnicity may be any race.

Children Entering Foster Care during FY 2020 - N=216,838

Age at Entry	Years	Race/Ethnicity	Percent	Number
Mean	7.1	American Indian/Alaska Native	2%	4,983
Median	6.0	Asian	1%	1,325
		Black or African American	20%	44,215
		Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	0%	606
		Hispanic (of any race)	21%	45,983
		White	46%	98,680
		Unknown/Unable to Determine	2%	4,090
		Two or More Races	8%	16,245

NOTE: All races exclude children of Hispanic origin. Children of Hispanic ethnicity may be any race.

Age at Entry	Percent	Number	Circumstances Associated with Child's Removal	Percent	Number
Less than 1 Year	20%	43,694	Neglect	64%	139,255
1 Year	7%	15,792	Drug Abuse (Parent)	35%	75,761
2 Years	6%	13,964	Caretaker Inability To Cope	13%	28,771
3 Years	6%	12,588	Physical Abuse	13%	27,277
4 Years	5%	11,403	Housing	9%	20,534
5 Years	5%	10,637	Child Behavior Problem	8%	16,298
6 Years	5%	9,925	Parent Incarceration	6%	13,314
7 Years	4%	9,339	Alcohol Abuse (Parent)	6%	12,827
8 Years	4%	8,466	Abandonment	5%	9,866
9 Years	4%	8,035	Sexual Abuse	4%	8,604
10 Years	4%	8,078	Drug Abuse (Child)	2%	4,736
11 Years	4%	8,045	Child Disability	2%	3,595
12 Years	4%	8,480	Parent Death	1%	2,147
13 Years	4%	8,972	Relinquishment	1%	1,919
14 Years	4%	9,499	Alcohol Abuse (Child)	0%	826
15 Years	5%	10,035			
16 Years	5%	9,927			
17 Years	3%	7,085			
18 Years	1%	1,650			
19 Years	0%	760			
20 Years	0%	430			

NOTE: These categories are not mutually exclusive, so percentages will total more than 100% and counts will be more than the total number of entries.

Children Exiting Foster Care during FY 2020 - N=224,396

Age at Exit	Years	Race/Ethnicity	Percent	Number	
Mean	8.7	American Indian/Alaska Native	2%	4,997	
Median	7.8	Asian	1%	1,336	
		Black or African American	21%	46,433	
		Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	0%	628	
		Hispanic (of any race)	21%	46,475	
		White	46%	103,546	
		Unknown/Unable to Determine	1%	3,268	
		Two or More Races	8%	17,303	
NOTE: All races exclude children of Hispanic origin. Children of Hispanic ethnicity may be any race.					
Age at Exit	Percent	Number	Reason for Discharge	Percent	Number
Less than 1 Year	4%	8,965	Reunification with Parent(s) or Primary Caretaker(s)	48%	107,333
1 Year	8%	18,430	Living with Other Relative(s)	6%	12,463
2 Years	9%	18,931	Adoption	25%	56,568
3 Years	7%	16,208	Emancipation	9%	20,010
4 Years	6%	14,353	Guardianship	10%	23,160
5 Years	6%	13,110	Transfer to Another Agency	1%	2,263
6 Years	5%	11,910	Runaway	0%	528
7 Years	5%	11,062	Death of Child	0%	360
8 Years	5%	10,194			
9 Years	4%	9,491			
10 Years	4%	9,283			
11 Years	4%	8,838			
12 Years	4%	8,485			
13 Years	4%	8,565			
14 Years	4%	8,360			
15 Years	4%	8,647			
16 Years	4%	9,140			
17 Years	4%	8,615			
18 Years	7%	16,564			
19 Years	1%	1,713			
20 Years	1%	1,231			
Time in Care	Months				
Mean	20.5				
Median	15.9				
Time in Care	Percent	Number			
Less than 1 Month	7%	16,482			
1 - 5 Months	13%	28,632			
6 - 11 Months	19%	41,735			
12 - 17 Months	17%	38,107			
18 - 23 Months	13%	29,814			
24 - 29 Months	10%	21,897			
30 - 35 Months	7%	14,722			
3 - 4 Years	11%	24,098			
5 Years or More	4%	8,663			

Children Waiting to be Adopted³ on September 30, 2020 - N=117,470

Age as of September 30th	Years	Age at Entry into Foster Care	Years
Mean	7.9	Mean	5.2
Median	7.3	Median	4.3

Age as of September 30th	Percent	Number	Age at Entry into Foster Care	Percent	Number
Less than 1 Year	3%	3,854	Less than 1 Year	26%	30,687
1 Year	10%	11,267	1 Year	8%	9,358
2 Years	9%	10,659	2 Years	7%	8,365
3 Years	8%	9,108	3 Years	7%	7,652
4 Years	7%	8,009	4 Years	6%	7,169
5 Years	6%	7,369	5 Years	6%	6,986
6 Years	6%	6,616	6 Years	6%	6,706
7 Years	5%	6,285	7 Years	5%	6,355
8 Years	5%	6,007	8 Years	5%	6,012
9 Years	5%	5,799	9 Years	5%	5,760
10 Years	5%	5,535	10 Years	4%	5,197
11 Years	5%	5,669	11 Years	4%	4,777
12 Years	5%	5,803	12 Years	4%	4,128
13 Years	5%	5,642	13 Years	3%	3,565
14 Years	5%	5,632	14 Years	2%	2,523
15 Years	5%	5,517	15 Years	1%	1,463
16 Years	4%	4,939	16 Years	1%	655
17 Years	3%	3,760	17 Years	0%	95

Placement Type	Percent	Number	Race/Ethnicity	Percent	Number
Pre-Adoptive Home	12%	14,469	American Indian/Alaska Native	2%	2,311
Foster Family Home (Relative)	27%	31,067	Asian	0%	472
Foster Family Home (Non-Relative)	52%	60,589	Black or African American	22%	25,257
Group Home	3%	3,831	Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	0%	245
Institution	5%	5,887	Hispanic (of any race)	23%	26,520
Supervised Independent Living	0%	107	White	44%	51,128
Runaway	1%	689	Unknown/Unable to Determine	1%	1,240
Trial Home Visit	0%	568	Two or More Races	9%	10,079

Sex	Percent	Number
Male	52%	61,297
Female	48%	56,166

NOTE: All races exclude children of Hispanic origin. Children of Hispanic ethnicity may be any race.

³ Waiting children are identified as children who have a goal of adoption and/or whose parents' parental rights have been terminated. Children 16 years old and older whose parents' parental rights have been terminated and who have a goal of emancipation have been excluded from the estimate.

Time in Care	Months	Of Children Waiting for Adoption whose Parents' Parental Rights have been Terminated (N=63,815), Time Elapsed since Termination of Parental Rights as of September 30, 2020
Mean	32.7	
Median	26.9	

Time in Care	Percent	Number	Time Since TPR	Months
Less than 1 Month	0%	439	Mean	20.1
1 - 5 Months	3%	3,390	Median	12.0
6 - 11 Months	8%	9,477		
12 - 17 Months	15%	17,950		
18 - 23 Months	16%	18,343		
24 - 29 Months	15%	17,599		
30 - 35 Months	11%	12,503		
3 - 4 Years	21%	25,238		
5 Years or More	11%	12,531		

Children Adopted with Public Agency Involvement in FY 2020⁴ - N=57,881

Age at Adoption	Years	Time Elapsed from Termination of Parental Rights to Adoption	Months
Mean	6.5	Mean	12.1
Median	5.3	Median	9.2

Age at Adoption	Percent	Number	Time Elapsed from Termination of Parental Rights to Adoption	Percent	Number
Less than 1 Year	2%	1,040	Less than 1 Month	3%	1,584
1 Year	12%	6,834	1 - 5 Months	26%	14,843
2 Years	14%	8,194	6 - 11 Months	35%	20,069
3 Years	11%	6,204	12 - 17 Months	18%	10,284
4 Years	9%	4,999	18 - 23 Months	8%	4,696
5 Years	8%	4,372	24 - 29 Months	4%	2,175
6 Years	7%	3,867	30 - 35 Months	2%	1,176
7 Years	6%	3,328	3 - 4 Years	3%	1,529
8 Years	5%	2,927	5 Years or More	1%	494
9 Years	5%	2,680			
10 Years	4%	2,548			
11 Years	4%	2,335			
12 Years	3%	2,011			
13 Years	3%	1,801			
14 Years	3%	1,545			
15 Years	2%	1,167			
16 Years	2%	1,081			
17 Years	1%	823			
18 Years	0%	97			
19 Years	0%	16			
20 Years	0%	7			

Race/Ethnicity	Percent	Number
American Indian/Alaska Native	2%	936
Asian	0%	206
Black or African American	17%	9,588
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	0%	156
Hispanic (of any race)	20%	11,631
White	51%	29,325
Unknown/Unable to Determine	1%	691
Two or More Races	9%	5,304

NOTE: All races exclude children of Hispanic origin. Children of Hispanic ethnicity may be any race.

⁴ Note that the adoption data reported in this section are from the AFCARS Adoption file. Therefore, the number of adoptions reported here may not equal the number reported as discharges to adoption from foster care.

Adoptive Family Structure	Percent	Number	Sex	Percent	Number
Married Couple	68%	39,052	Male	51%	29,714
Unmarried Couple	3%	1,858	Female	49%	28,142
Single Female	25%	14,135			
Single Male	3%	1,974			
Relationship of Adoptive Parents to Child Prior to Adoption	Percent	Number	Receive Adoption Subsidy	Percent	Number
Non-Relative	11%	5,972	Yes	94%	53,716
Foster Parent	54%	30,423	No	6%	3,453
Stepparent	0%	100			
Other Relative	35%	19,456			

FY 2020 AFCARS Foster Care Data Release

After the release of the FY 2016 AFCARS Report, the Children’s Bureau brought to the attention of the reader our continuing efforts to address AFCARS data quality and highlighted the issue of “dropped cases” (i.e., cases that appear in one six-month AFCARS submission without a date of discharge and do not appear in the subsequent six-month submission). The following link’s “Technical Discussion” tab provides a more detailed description of the dropped cases issue:

<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/resource/trends-in-foster-care-and-adoption>

Early in our efforts to understand the dropped cases issue, it was understood that the majority fell into a category of those exiting care. However, more recent analyses include a category of instances in which 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. We do not believe the two aforementioned categories account for all dropped cases and will continue to work toward addressing the issue.

We have historically addressed the dropped cases by excluding these records from our AFCARS estimates, and we believe this has ameliorated most negative effects on the annual estimates.

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 FY 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.