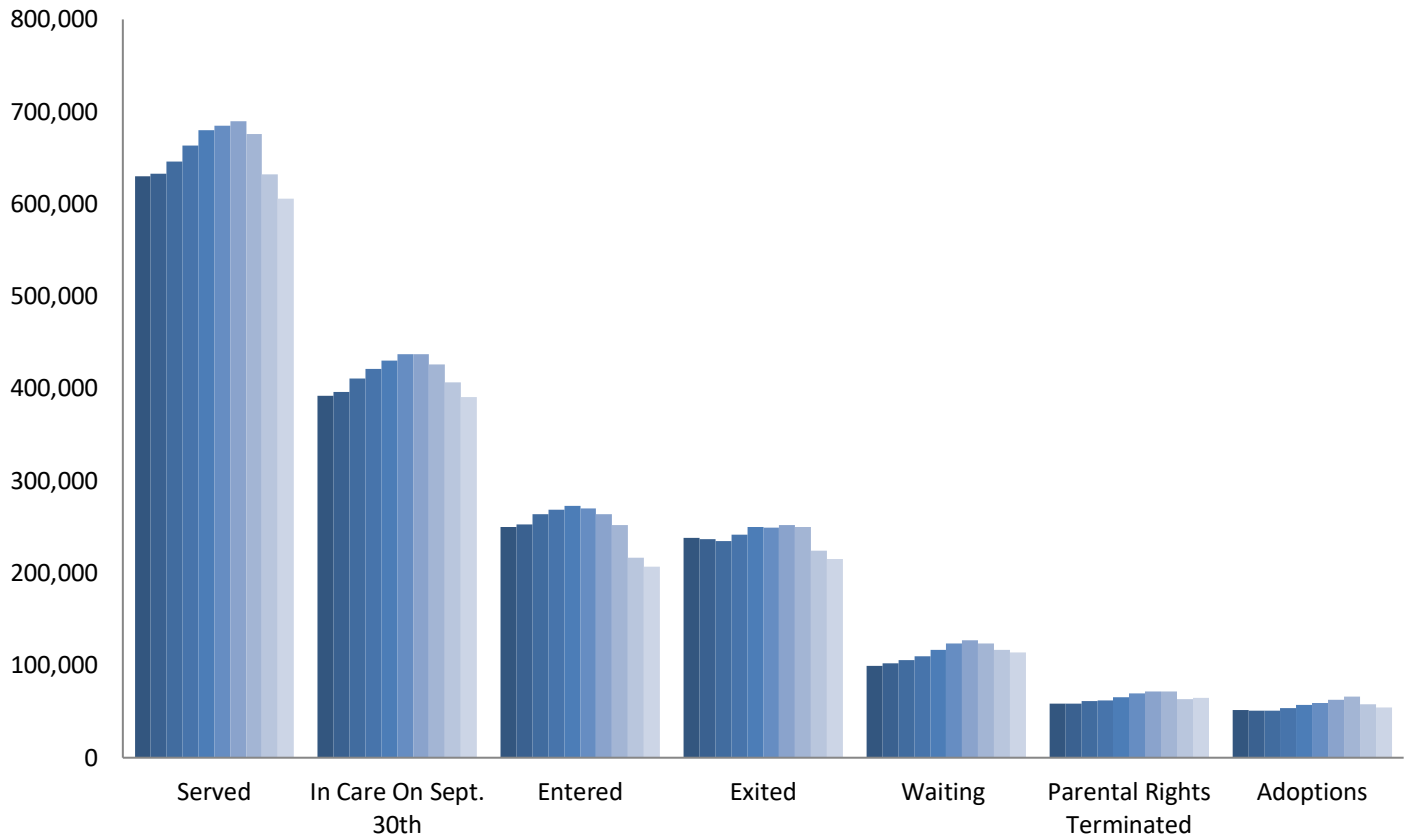




Trends in Foster Care and Adoption: FY 2012 - 2021

(Based on data submitted by States as of June 28, 2022¹)

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



FY	Served	In Care on Sept. 30th	Entered	Exited	Waiting	Parental Rights Terminated	Adoptions
2012	630,000	392,000	250,000	238,000	99,600	58,400	52,000
2013	633,000	396,000	253,000	237,000	102,000	58,900	50,800
2014	646,000	411,000	264,000	235,000	106,000	61,200	50,700
2015	663,000	421,000	269,000	242,000	110,000	62,200	53,500
2016	680,000	430,000	273,000	250,000	117,000	65,500	57,200
2017	685,000	437,000	270,000	249,000	124,000	69,900	59,500
2018	690,000	437,000	264,000	252,000	127,000	72,000	63,100
2019	676,000	426,000	252,000	250,000	124,000	71,900	66,200
2020	632,000	407,000	217,000	224,000	117,000	63,800	57,900
2021	606,000	391,000	207,000	215,000	114,000	65,000	54,200



This chart and other data in this document include data submitted to the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) by states and the District of Columbia by June 28, 2022.

¹ 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 2018 through 2021 for both foster care and adoption. PR is in the process of addressing the quality of their data.

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). All data in this report are based on the Federal Fiscal Year.

Discussion of Trends

Numbers of Children in Foster Care: Over the last decade, FY 2012 through 2021, the numbers of children in care rose from a low of 392,000 in FY 2012 to a peak of 437,000 in FY 2017 (FY 2018 remained at 437,000), representing a nearly 11.5 percent increase. Since FY 2018 the numbers in care began decreasing. FY 2019 fell 2.5 percent or 11,000 when compared to the peak of 437,000; FY 2020's decrease compared to 2019 was quite significant, falling 4.5 percent. This downward trend has continued with FY 2021 representing a 3.9 percent decrease from FY 2020. The number of children in care for FY 2021, 391,000, represents a more than 10.5 percent decrease from FY 2017's peak of 437,000.

Entries into and Exits from Foster Care: FY 2012's 250,000 entries into care represented the lowest level of entries during the first seven years of the decade, 2012 through 2021. Entries into care peaked with FY 2016's 273,000, while FY 2019's entries of 252,000 represented a decrease of 21,000 or 7.7 percent from FY 2016's peak. FY 2021's entries of 207,000 is a 17.9 percent decrease from FY 2019, and this is the lowest number of entries since the collection of AFCARS data began more than two decades ago. The number of exits during the first eight years of the decade from FY 2012 through FY 2021 fluctuated between 235,000 and 252,000; however, FY 2020's exits of 224,000 was a 10.4 percent decrease over FY 2019. Exits from care during FY 2021 fell 4 percent compared to FY 2020. Exits during FY 2021 represent a 14 percent decrease relative to FY 2019 and is the fewest number of exits since the collection of AFCARS data began more than two decades ago. The number of exits can be influenced by the decrease in entries; this is likely true, particularly for last three years.

Children Waiting to be Adopted: The numbers of children waiting to be adopted are a subset of those in care on the last day. Children waiting to be adopted include children in care with a goal of adoption and/or whose parental rights have been terminated. See more details in the definitions section, below. As numbers of children in care were declining, the numbers waiting for adoption also declined. When the year-end count of children in care increased from the from FY 2013 to FY 2017's peak of 437,000 (FY 2018 remained at 437,000), the numbers of children waiting for adoption also grew, going from a low of 99,600 in FY 2012 up to 127,000 in FY 2018. The count then decreased slightly to 124,000 for FY 2019 and decreased further to 117,000 for FY 2020, and FY 2021's waiting count decreased slightly to 114,000. However, notably, the *percentage* of children who are defined as waiting to be adopted has remained relatively stable over the last decade, averaging between 26 and 29 percent of children in care on the last day. For the last four years, FYs 2018 through 2021, the percentage has remained virtually unchanged at 29.1, 29.1, 28.7 and 29.2 percent, respectively.

Children Waiting to be Adopted Whose Parents' Rights Were Terminated: This is a subset of waiting children.

During the FYs 2012 to 2018, the percentage of children waiting to be adopted whose parents' rights had been terminated fluctuated between 56 and 58 percent. The population of children waiting to be adopted has grown since FY 2012, and as



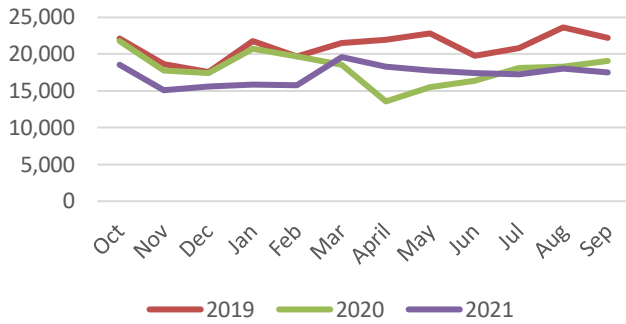
a result there was a yearly increase in the absolute numbers of children whose parents' rights were terminated. The number of children whose parents' rights are terminated increased from 58,400 in FY 2012 to 72,000 in FY 2018 and 71,900 in FY 2019. FY 2020's number of children whose parents' rights were terminated fell to 63,800, representing nearly 54.5 percent of the waiting children, the lowest percentage in the decade 2012 through 2021. FY 2021's number of legally free waiting children increased slightly to 65,000, representing 57 percent of the "Waiting Children," a percentage in line with the years 2012 through 2019

Children Adopted: The number of adoptions that were finalized each year remained relatively unchanged during the FYs 2012 through 2015. However, the 57,200 adoptions in FY 2016 represented a nearly 10.5 percent increase over the four-year average of 51,800 for FYs 2012 through 2015, and adoptions reached a historic high of 66,200 in FY 2019. During FYs 2012 through 2015, adoptions averaged 21.7 percent of all foster care discharges each year, and this was stable across those FYs. However, since FY 2016, there has been at least a percentage-point increase in adoptions as a percentage of discharges, to a high of 27 percent during FY 2019. Although the 57,900 adoptions in FY 2020 represents a decrease of 13 percent compared to FY 2019 adoptions, those adoptions accounted for 26 percent of the FY 2020 discharges. FY 2021's 54,200 adoptions represent a more than 6 percent decrease compared to FY 2020 and a more than 18 percent decrease from FY 2019's historic high of 66,200 adoptions. The 54,200 adoptions in FY 2021 make up 25 percent of all discharges in 2021. The more recent shifts coincided with the Covid-19 pandemic, but there is no way to confirm the reasons for the shifts. See the graphs below.

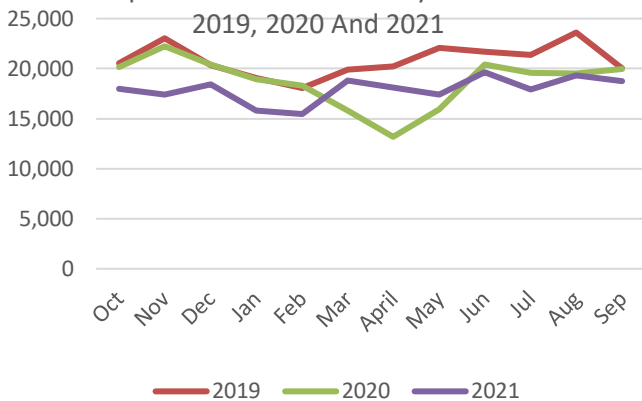


Foster Care Month to Month Changes FY 2019, FY 2020 and FY 2021

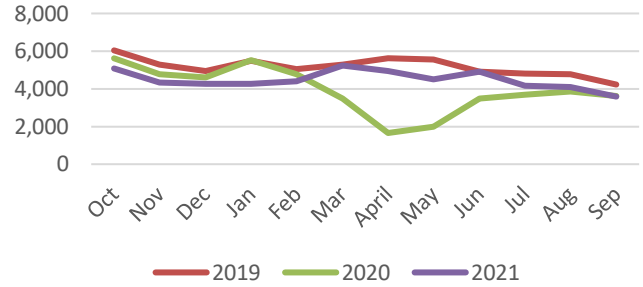
Graph 1: Foster Care Entries By Month FY 2019, 2020 And 2021



Graph 2: Foster Care Exits By Month FY 2019, 2020 And 2021



Graph 3: Number Of Children Becoming Legally Free Per Month FY 2019, 2020 And 2021



As presented in these graphs, the most dramatic changes (decreases) with respect to entries into and exits from foster care as well as those children becoming legally free (LF) occurred during March, April and May of FY 2020. This coincides with the arrival of the pandemic in the United States. Also, while the counts of children becoming LF appears to have recovered quickly to pre-pandemic levels, Graph 3, shows that the entries and exits appear to be recovering more slowly to pre-pandemic levels, Graphs 1 and 2.

A slower approach to fully opening schools, could have impacted the rate at which children became known to the child welfare system. This would be due to the fact that a significant number of maltreatment referrals are from the field of education, teachers. Without those common reporters of maltreatment, the counts would logically be expected to go down.



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 if they remained in care through the last day of the fiscal year (September 30), not as exits. In these circumstances, the prior exit is not counted, even though it occurred during the fiscal year. The Children's Bureau estimates 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 exact number of these "dropped" exits cannot be determined, it was impossible to account for them in the exit count. This is why the definitions shown below indicate this very slight uncertainty by calling the numbers "estimates." 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 half of one 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.

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 (October 1 through September 30). 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 enters 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 sometime during the FY, and within **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 exits 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. The "waiting" population excludes children whose parents' rights have been terminated and who are 16 years old and older, and 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 fiscal year. This trends table shows an estimated count of all children who are waiting to be adopted **on the last day** of the FY.



5. **Parental Rights Terminated:** This is an estimated count of all children in care **on the last day** of the FY whose parents had their parental rights 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 the unusual 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 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.