Department for Work & Pensions

Official Statistics

Child Maintenance Service statistics: data to September 2020 (experimental)

Published 16 December 2020

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This is the latest release of statistics on the Child Maintenance Service between January 2015 and September 2020. The release includes revisions to previously published statistics.

The next release is planned for March 2021.

1. Introduction

The Child Maintenance Service was introduced in December 2012 as part of the Government's Child Maintenance reforms. It replaced the Child Support Agency (CSA) and is for separated parents who cannot arrange child maintenance between themselves.

Direct Pay is where the Child Maintenance Service calculates the amount of maintenance to be paid and parents arrange the payments between themselves.

If parents cannot do this or they do not pay what was agreed, then the Child Maintenance Service can collect and manage the payments between the parents. This is the Collect & Pay service.

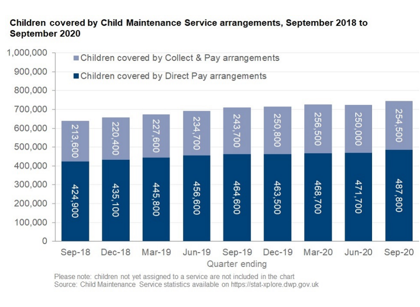
The Child Maintenance Service has a range of enforcement actions it can use if the Paying Parent refuses to pay their child maintenance.

Effect of COVID-19

During the previous quarter ending June 2020, the Child Maintenance Service was affected by the COVID-19 outbreak and the resultant changes made to the department's operational priorities. Lockdown began on the 23 March 2020, in the UK. This publication covers data up to the end of September 2020, during which time the Child Maintenance Service had resumed most parts of its service, with the exception of some enforcement activities, particularly those that require participation from key partners such as bailiffs and courts. The statistics continue to reflect the return to normal pre-COVID-19 levels of service delivery and include clearing any backlogs that may have built up during the height of the pandemic when resources were redirected to other parts of Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

2. Main stories

> 749,500 children are covered by Child Maintenance Service arrangements.

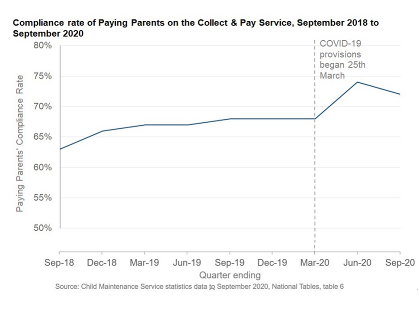


There are:

- 487,800 children covered through Direct Pay arrangements
- 254,500 children covered through the Collect & Pay Service
- 7,200 children not yet assigned to a service

The number of children covered by the Child Maintenance service has increased by 15,900 since the previous quarter. The number of children has increased steadily over the last two years.

> Compliance on the Collect and Pay service is at 72%.



In the quarter ending September 2020, 104,400 (72%) of all Paying Parents paid some of their child maintenance through the Collect & Pay service. The COVID-19 outbreak had 2 effects on the compliance rate during the quarters ending June 2020 and September 2020:

1. During the early stages of the COVID-19 outbreak, child maintenance deductions from Universal Credit (UC) were paused for one month between 10 April 10 and 9 May 9 2020. During this time the Government paid all child maintenance liabilities for parents paying via deductions from UC. This affected the compliance for the quarter ending June 2020 but no longer has any effect on the compliance for the quarter ending September 2020.
2. There was an increased movement of people onto benefits. Therefore, more parents are paying via Deduction from Benefits; these individuals are now more likely to contribute some maintenance, as deductions are made automatically. This affected the compliance for the quarter ending June 2020, and continues to have an impact on compliance for the quarter ending September 2020. The Deduction from Benefit cases typically account for 21% to 24% of all Paying Parents on the Collect & Pay service, for June 2020 it increased to 39%, and for September 2020 it increased further to 40% due to the COVID-19 outbreak. This effect is likely to persist over an extended time period.

3. What you need to know

Child maintenance is financial support between separated parents to help with the everyday costs of looking after children.

If they agree, separated parents can arrange child maintenance themselves. This is called a 'family-based arrangement' and is a private way to sort out child maintenance. Parents arrange everything themselves and no-one else has to be involved.

The Child Maintenance Service, which replaced the Child Support Agency (CSA), is for when parents cannot agree to a family-based arrangement. Parents wishing to use the Child Maintenance Service must first contact Child Maintenance Options (CM Options).

CM Options is a free service that provides impartial information and support to help separated parents make decisions about their child maintenance arrangements.

Read information on child maintenance arrangements made after speaking to CM Options.

Definitions

Receiving Parent
The Receiving Parent has the main day-to-day care of the children and receives the child maintenance.

Paying Parent
The Paying Parent does not have the main day-to-day care of the children and pays child maintenance.

Children covered
Children covered is the number of children for whom the Paying Parent has a child maintenance arrangement.

Compliance
Compliance is where parents using the Collect and Pay service have paid some child maintenance in the last three months.

See the Background Information document for more details.

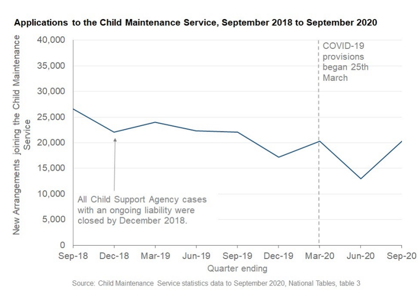
4. Applications to the Child Maintenance Service

Parents who want to apply to the Child Maintenance Service must pay a £20 application fee. Parents do not have to pay this if they:

- have been a victim of domestic abuse
- declare their child has been the victim of abuse
- are under 19 years of age

Some applications to the Child Maintenance Service are from: parents who previously had an arrangement with the Child Support Agency. All Child Support Agency cases with an ongoing liability were closed by December 2018, and parents were encouraged to make a new family-based arrangement or an arrangement through the Child Maintenance Service. However, the Child Maintenance Service may still receive applications from such parents, as they may have had a family-based arrangement in the interim.

> The number of new arrangements joining the Child Maintenance Service has increased this quarter.



In the last quarter, ending September 2020, the intake was 20,300 which is a return to pre-COVID-19 levels.

At the end of September 2020, the Child Maintenance Service was managing 531,300 arrangements for 498,000 Paying Parents. This is a 6% increase to the number of arrangements since the end of September 2019.

See tables 1-3 and 7 of the national tables for more information.

See Stat-Xplore for more information on arrangements.

5. Composition of cases on the Child Maintenance Service

When a parent makes an application to the Child Maintenance Service, they will be told how much child maintenance should be paid.

Some parents will then arrange the payments between themselves: this service is known as Direct Pay where the CMS calculates the amount of maintenance that should be paid and parents make their own arrangements for payments. The CMS simply provides the calculation and no further use of the service is required. Direct Pay can be chosen by either parent with the other's agreement. A £20 application fee is charged for this service (unless waived because of a domestic abuse issue). Neither parent pays collections fees under Direct Pay.

Parents are issued a text message 3 months after they set up a Direct Pay arrangement, and at each annual review, to check that the arrangement is still meeting their requirements.

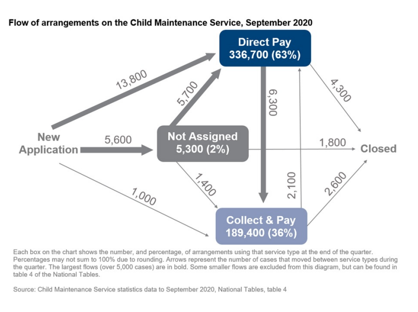
If parents cannot arrange payments between themselves, or if the Paying Parent does not keep up with the payments, the receiving parent can ask the Child Maintenance Service to switch the case to the Collect and Pay service.

Under the Collect and Pay service, the CMS calculates the amount of maintenance, including recovery of unpaid maintenance that built up under the Direct Pay service, then collects the payment from the Paying Parent and pays it to the Receiving Parent.

There are ongoing collection charges for use of the Collect and Pay service, payable by both the Paying Parent (20% on top of the maintenance amount), and the Receiving Parent (4% taken out of the amount of maintenance).

Non-compliance under the Collect and Pay service could lead to the use of enforcement powers.

> Most new applicants chose to start on Direct Pay.



The flow of arrangements around the Child Maintenance Service in the quarter September 2020 showed:

- most new applicants choose to start on Direct Pay: 13,800 new applicants joined Direct Pay during the quarter ending September 2020
- 63% of all Child Maintenance Service arrangements use Direct Pay, with 36% using Collect & Pay
- more parents moved from Direct Pay to Collect & Pay than the other way around: 6,300 parents switched to Collect & Pay during this quarter
- the number of arrangements increased by 12,500 during this quarter
- the number of arrangements not yet assigned to a service is down to 5,300 from 8,500 in the previous quarter ending June 2020

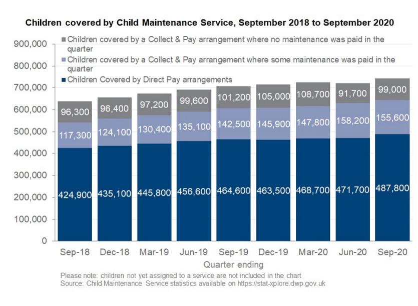
For the previous quarter ending June 2020, the response to the COVID-19 outbreak, outstanding work and resources, including the progress of new applications, needed to be re-prioritised, resulting in an increase in the number of arrangements not yet assigned to a service type. This quarter the figure has begun to decrease, dropping by 3,200. However, the number of arrangements not yet assigned to a service is still higher than previous pre-COVID-19 levels. We expect this to continue dropping as the Child Maintenance Service works through the backlog that has built up over the previous quarter.

See table 4 of the national tables for more information.

See Stat-Xplore for more information on arrangements.

6. Children covered by the Child Maintenance Service

> The number of children covered by Direct Pay arrangements continues to steadily rise.



At the end of September 2020:

- 487,800 children were covered by 336,700 Direct Pay arrangements
- 254,500 children were covered by 189,400 arrangements through the Collect & Pay service
- 155,600 of these children were covered by 110,900 Collect & Pay arrangements where the Paying Parent paid some maintenance during the quarter
- The number of children has increased steadily over the last two years

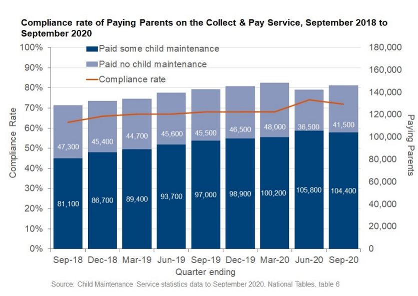
65% of all children covered by Child Maintenance Service are covered through Direct Pay arrangements, with 21% covered by Collect & Pay arrangements for which some maintenance was paid in the quarter. These proportions have changed little over the last 12 months (65% and 20% respectively in September 2019).

See Stat-Xplore for more information on children.

7. Paying Parents and the Collect and Pay service

This includes Paying Parents transferred from the Direct Pay service because they have failed to keep up with payments.

> Compliance on the Collect & Pay service is at 72%.



In the quarter ending September 2020, 104,400 (72%) of all Paying Parents paid some of their child maintenance through the Collect & Pay service. The COVID-19 outbreak had two effects on the compliance rate during the quarters ending June 2020 and September 2020:

1. During the early stages of the COVID-19 outbreak, child maintenance deductions from Universal Credit (UC) were paused for one month between 10 April and 9 May 2020. During this time the Government paid all child maintenance liabilities for parents paying via deductions from UC. This affected the compliance for the quarter ending June 2020 but no longer has any effect on the compliance for the quarter ending September 2020.
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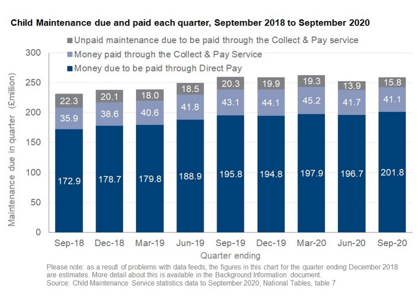
See table 6 of the national tables for more information.

8. Child Maintenance due and paid

The Child Maintenance Service monitors payments made through the Collect and Pay service and can take enforcement action where necessary.

Parents on Direct Pay with unpaid maintenance owed will first have to transfer to Collect and Pay before the Child Maintenance Service can take any action. This means the Collect and Pay service consists of a subset of Paying Parents who are less likely to pay.

> Child Maintenance due to be paid through the Collect & Pay service has increased from the previous quarter.



During the quarter ending September 2020, £258.7 million Child Maintenance was due to be paid.

£242.9 million was paid through the Collect & Pay service or due to be paid through Direct Pay arrangements:

- £201.8 million due to be paid through Direct Pay arrangements
- £41.1 million paid through the Collect & Pay service

Over the long term, the amount of money due to be paid through the Child Maintenance Service has been rising as the number of parents using the service has increased.

£15.8 million of maintenance due to be paid through the Collect & Pay service in the quarter ending September 2020 was not paid.

Since 2012, when the Child Maintenance Service began, £379.2 million in unpaid maintenance is owed through the Collect & Pay service. This amounts to 9% of all maintenance due to be paid since the start of the service and includes unpaid maintenance transferred from Direct Pay to Collect & Pay.

See tables 7 and 8 of the national tables for more information.

9. Enforcement

When a payment is missed, the Child Maintenance Service contacts the Paying Parent to arrange a recovery of what is owed or to make clear the actions that may be pursued in the absence of a payment.

For parents on Collect and Pay, enforcement is automatically pursued on their behalf.

For parents on Direct Pay (where the receiving parent asks the Child Maintenance Service to take action) the arrangement is first switched to the Collect and Pay service before any enforcement action can commence.

The Child Maintenance Service can collect unpaid child maintenance in 3 major ways:

1. deduction from earnings order or request – money is recovered from the paying parent's earnings via their employer, who will be instructed on the amount to deduct
2. deduction order – money is deducted directly from the paying parent's bank or building society account
3. courts – a paying parent can be taken to court over unpaid maintenance

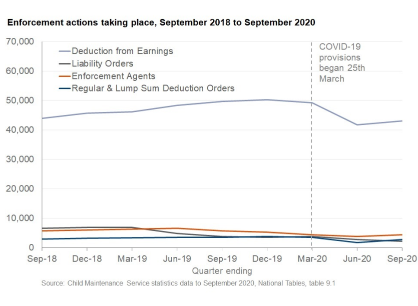
The courts can grant liability orders, which allow further action to be taken, such as referral to enforcement agents, who can seize goods and sell them to cover any unpaid maintenance and costs.

Where the paying parent is a homeowner, courts may grant a charging order against the property, which prevents any sale without repayment of the outstanding amount.

Ultimately, the court may grant an order for sale which forces the sale of the property. If these methods are unsuccessful, the Child Maintenance Service may apply for the courts to:

- disqualify the parent from holding or obtaining a driving licence
- disqualify the parent from holding or obtaining a passport
- send the parent to prison

> Enforcement Actions taking place this quarter have increased since last quarter but remains lower than pre-COVID-19 levels.



At the end of September 2020:

- 43,000 deductions from earnings orders and requests were in place
- 2,300 liability orders were in process
- 4,400 enforcement agent referrals were in process

- 2,900 regular and lump sum deduction orders were in process

Taking substantial enforcement action relies on third parties, including Her Majesty's courts, bailiffs and the banks, which are currently not in a position to support some avenues of enforcement action.

All banks are able to take Deduction Order requests. Liability Orders, which are the gateway measure to legal enforcement activity, require the most court involvement. They have been the most difficult measure to restart while social distancing requirements remain in place. The Child Maintenance Service is in contact with Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service to understand whether video conferencing could be used to hold hearings so cases can progress.

See tables 9.1 and 9.2 of the national tables for more information.

10. About these statistics

Comparisons

Comparisons between these statistics on the Child Maintenance Service and statistics on the Child Support Agency should not be made as the 2 services have different aims and cover different groups.

The government's changes to the child maintenance system in 2012 were designed to encourage parents to work together to provide for their children. Child Maintenance Options was created to support parents to set up collaborative, family-based arrangement. The Child Maintenance Service was intended for those parents who cannot make family-based arrangements.

Rounding

Figures contained within this publication are rounded to the nearest hundred, percent, or £100,000. Percentages are calculated prior to rounding.

Unrounded figures from the underlying data available on Stat-Xplore or in accompanying tables may not sum exactly to the rounded totals accordingly.

These statistics have been developed using guidelines set out by the UK Statistics Authority.

Changes made to this publication

Paying Parent Compliance

As stated in the previous publication, for the quarter ending June 2020 the compliance rate was inflated as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Between April 10th and May 9th 2020, all deductions from Universal Credit (UC) were temporarily paused and the Government paid all child maintenance liabilities for parents paying via deductions from UC. This resulted in a higher than usual rate of compliance for this group. In order to show the movement in compliance rates for groups not affected by this issues, we temporarily included the compliance rate excluding Deduction from Benefits cases within our data for the June 2020 quarter.

This measure has now been removed from the publication as payments from the Government ceased.

Children count

Please note that the count of children on the Child Maintenance Service has been retrospectively updated to reflect an improved methodology for calculating Qualifying Children. Previous counts were over-counting the number of children by up to 1%. More information about this change can be found in the Background information document.

Stat-Xplore

Data relating to Children covered by the Child Maintenance Service (formerly Table 5), Shared Care (formerly Table 6) and geography of Children covered by the Child Maintenance Service (formerly Regional Tables) has been moved over to the DWP Stat-Xplore tool.

We have provided the previously published tables as pre-made tables on Stat-Xplore for user ease.

This tool allows users to create custom statistical tables relating to children on the Child Maintenance Service with new breakdowns of the data and at a lower level of geography than previously provided.

This means the table numbering in the ODS tables has changed to reflect the fact two tables are no longer included in this way (see contents pages in the ODS files for further details).

Planned changes

We are hoping to move more of our regular statistics to the Stat-Xplore platform in the near future.

Where to find out more

Read previous releases of these statistics.

Read information and statistics on family-based arrangements.

Authors: Amy Grant and James Kerr

Lead statistician: Juwaria Rahman

Feedback is welcome, send comments to:
cm.analysis.research@dwp.gov.uk

ISBN: 978-1-78659-286-6

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