

INFORMATION
ANALYSIS
DIRECTORATE



Children's Social Care Statistics for Northern Ireland 2020/21



Reader Information

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The statisticians within IAD are out posted from the [Northern Ireland Statistics & Research Agency](#) (NISRA) and the statistics are produced in accordance with the principles and protocols set out in the [Code of Practice for Official Statistics](#).

IAD comprises four statistical sections: Hospital Information, Community Information, Public Health Information & Research and Project Support Analysis. This publication is produced by Community Information Branch.

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We collect, analyse, and publish a wide range of community information that is used to help monitor the delivery of personal social services policy. Information collected by CIB is used to assess HSC Trust performance, for corporate monitoring, policy evaluation, and to respond to parliamentary/assembly questions. All publications can be found on the [Department of Health's website](#).

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- Provide up-to-date, quality information on children and adult social services and community health;
- to disseminate findings widely with a view to stimulating debate, promoting effective decision-making and improvement in service provision; and
- be an expert voice on social care information.

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CONTENT

READER INFORMATION	2
CONTENT	4
CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE SUMMARY	6
INTRODUCTION	7
Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995.....	7
Children in Northern Ireland.....	7
SECTION ONE: CHILDREN IN NEED	9
Key Findings	9
Children in Need in Northern Ireland.....	9
Children in Need with a disability	11
Children in Need – Religion and Ethnicity.....	12
Children in Need Referrals.....	12
SECTION TWO: CHILD PROTECTION	14
Key Findings	14
The Child Protection Register.....	14
Category of Abuse.....	18
Legal Status.....	19
Duration on the Register.....	19
Child Protection Referrals.....	21
Child Protection Investigations.....	22
Initial Case Conferences.....	23
Registrations, Re-registrations and De-registrations.....	24
Child Protection Comparability across the United Kingdom.....	26
SECTION THREE: CHILDREN IN CARE	27
Key Findings	27
Children in Care in Northern Ireland.....	27
Children in care by HSC Trust.....	29

Children in care with a Disability	30
Legal Status of Children in Care	32
Placement of Children in Care	33
Duration in Care	35
Admissions to Care	36
Discharges from Care.....	37
UK & Ireland Comparison of Children in Care Statistics.....	40
Short Breaks	42
SECTION FOUR: CHILDREN'S RESIDENTIAL HOMES.....	43
Statutory and Independent Residential Homes.....	43
SECTION FIVE: CHILDREN'S DAY CARE	44
Key Findings	44
Children's Day Care Provision in Northern Ireland.....	44
HSC Trust Sponsored Places in Day Care.....	46
APPENDIX A - TECHNICAL NOTES.....	47
APPENDIX B – DATA DEFINITIONS	50
ADDITIONAL INFORMATION.....	56

Data tables can be downloaded from:

[Children's Social Care Statistics in Northern Ireland Web Link](#)

Children's social care summary

5 year comparison

Children's social care	2015/16	2020/21	Direction of travel
Number of Children in Need	24,698	23,095	↓
Number of Children in Need Referrals	34,124	32,070	↓
Number on the Child Protection Register	2,146	2,298	↑
Number of new Child Protection registrations	2,040	2,065	↑
Number of Children in Care	2,890	3,530	↑
Proportion in Foster Care	77%	81%	↑
Number of Children's Residential Homes	45	48	↑
Number of Providers of Daycare	4,691	3,809	↓
Number of Daycare places	57,393	59,618	↑

Introduction

Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995

The Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 (the Children Order) is the principal statute governing the care, upbringing and protection of children in Northern Ireland. It affects all those who work and care for children, whether parents, paid carers or volunteers. The Children Order emphasises the unique advantages to a child being brought up within his or her own family. In practice, this means that the Children Order sees families as a major way of supporting and helping children. Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts have the power and in some circumstances the duty, under the Children Order, to help children by providing services to their families.

A child can be referred to Social Services for a variety of reasons. When a child is referred, Social Services undertake an initial assessment to determine if that child is a 'child in need' as defined by the Children Order. If a child is considered to be a child in need, services should be offered to assist the child's parents/carers to meet that identified need. Should there be concerns that a child may be suffering or at risk of suffering 'significant harm', Social Services will conduct an investigation under Article 66 of the Children Order and respond appropriately. A Child Protection Case Conference may be convened and the child's name included on the Child Protection Register and a Child Protection Plan drawn up to safeguard the child. If there are significant concerns that indicate authoritative intervention is required, Social Services may make an application to the Court for a Legal Order to enable them to afford an appropriate level of safeguarding to the child. This may include removing a child from its family and into the care of the HSC Trust.

Children in Northern Ireland

There are 441,108 children living in Northern Ireland¹. At 31 March 2021, 23,095 of these were known to Social Services as a child in need. Furthermore, 2,298 were on the Child Protection Register and 3,530 were children in care of the HSC Trusts (a looked after child).

Considerable resources go into safeguarding children. Just under £277m is spent annually on family and child care within Personal Social Services in Northern Ireland^{2,3} and some 2,022 Social Service staff employed are specifically graded as Child and Family Care social workers⁴. Many other work groups would also be involved in children's social care, such as managerial and administrative teams, multidisciplinary teams and staff in different residential settings. In addition, the Courts and educational system could also be involved in many aspects of children's social care.

¹ Mid-Year Estimate 2020 (NISRA 2021).

² Trust Financial Returns (TFR P), 2019/20, Personal and Social Service Spend (excluding Community Spend) for Family and Child Care Programme of Care (PoC3).

³ Children can also be treated under other Programmes of Care e.g. Independent and Statutory Residential Homes for Children with learning disabilities come under the Learning Disability PoC 6.

⁴ [Northern Ireland Health and Social Care Workforce Census \(31 March 2021\)](#), DoH.

This annual bulletin presents the latest figures on children in need, the Child Protection Register and looked after children, as well as information on residential homes and day care provision.

Figure 1. Rate of Children in Need, on the Child Protection Register and Looked after per 10,000 child population in Northern Ireland at 31 March 2021

Source: Delegated Statutory Functions / Corporate Parenting Returns
Mid-Year Estimate 2020 (NISRA 2021)

HSC Trust	Children in Need (Rate per 10,000 child population)	Child Protection Register (Rate per 10,000 child population)	Looked after children (Rate per 10,000 child population)
Belfast	474.9	43.2	112.9
Northern	455.5	45.0	67.4
South Eastern	471.4	42.8	78.2
Southern	555.2	60.6	59.4
Western	692.1	70.8	94.1
Northern Ireland	523.6	52.1	80.0

Section One: Children in Need

A Child is in Need if:

- He or she is unlikely to achieve or maintain, or to have the opportunity of achieving or maintaining, a reasonable standard of health or development without the provision of services by an authority;
- His or her health or development is likely to be significantly impaired;
- Or further impaired without the provision of such services, or he or she is disabled.

Source: Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 – Guidance and Regulations.

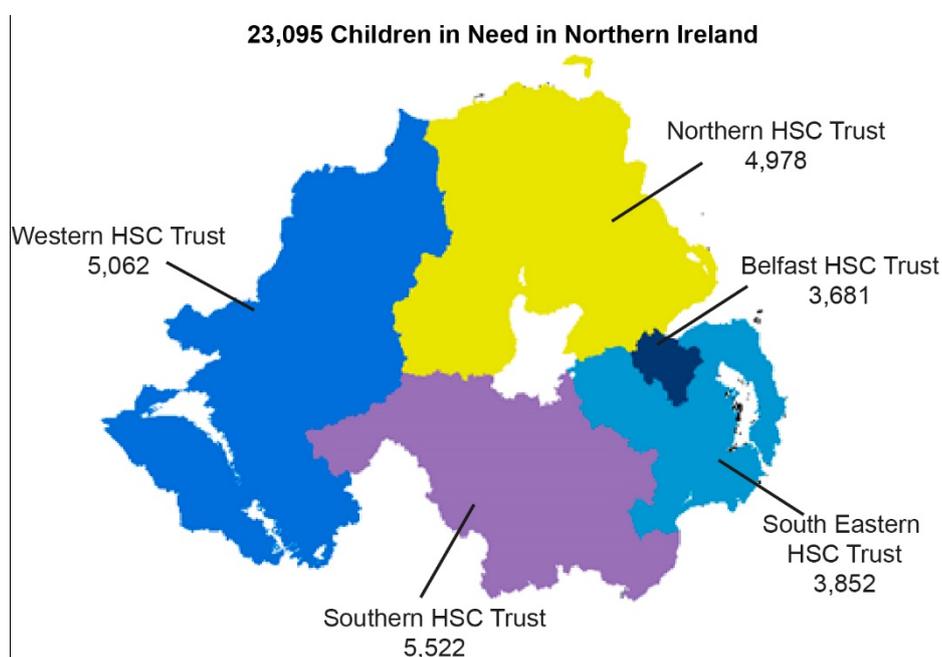
Key Findings

- At 31 March 2021, 23,095 children in Northern Ireland were known to Social Services as a child in need;
- Some 32,070 children were referred to Social Services during 2020/21, the largest proportion of these children were referred by the Police (39%).

Children in Need in Northern Ireland

At 31 March 2021, 23,095 children in Northern Ireland were known to social services as a child in need⁵. This represented 524 children per 10,000 child population⁶. The Southern HSC Trust had the largest proportion (24%) of children in need; however, the Western HSC Trust had the highest rate of children in need (692 children per 10,000 child population).

Figure 2. Number of Children in Need by HSC Trust (31 March 2021)



⁵ Known to social services indicates that social services has an open case file for a child.

⁶ 2020 Mid-Year Population Estimate (NISRA 2021).

Table 1. Number and rate of children in need by Health and Social Care Trust

Source: Delegated Statutory Functions Return 10.1.1.
2020 Mid-Year Population Estimate (NISRA 2021).

HSC Trust	Number of children in need	Rate of children in need per 10,000 child population
Belfast	3,681	474.9
Northern	4,978	455.5
South Eastern	3,852	471.4
Southern	5,522	555.2
Western	5,062	692.1
Northern Ireland	23,095	523.6

Of the children in need at 31 March 2021, a higher proportion were male than female (55% and 45% respectively). This gap was slightly larger than the gender split in the child population in general, with 51% male and 49% female under 18 years of age⁷. The age profile of the children in need population was similar to that observed in the general Northern Ireland population (see Table 2).

Table 2. Age distribution of Children in Need and the Northern Ireland Child Population

Source: Delegated Statutory Functions Return 10.1.1.
2020 Mid-Year Population Estimate (NISRA 2021).

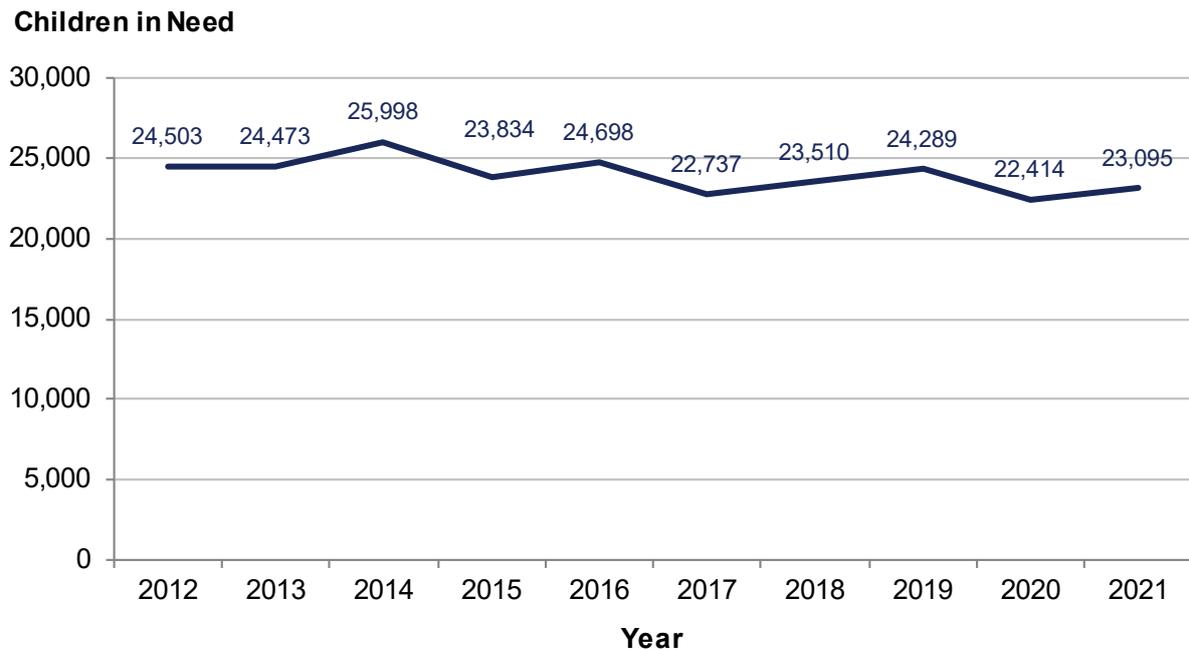
Children in Northern Ireland	Under 1 year	1 – 4 years old	5 – 11 years old	12 – 15 years old	16+ years old
Children in Need	3%	19%	44%	25%	11%
Northern Ireland child population	5%	22%	41%	22%	10%

The number of children in need regionally at 31 March 2021 was 3% higher than in 2020 when there were 22,414 children in need. Although the regional number was similar, there was some larger annual change within the Trusts, with the Western HSC Trust figure increasing by 25% and Northern HSC Trust decreasing by 15%. Year on year fluctuations in children in need figures, in each HSC Trust area, are not uncommon.

⁷ 2020 Mid-Year Population Estimate (NISRA 2021).

Figure 3. Number of Children in Need in Northern Ireland at 31 March (2012 – 2021)

Source: Delegated Statutory Functions Return 10.1.1.



Children in Need with a disability

Of the 23,095 children in need in Northern Ireland, 20% (4,545) were recorded as having a disability. There is no statutory requirement for a child with a disability to be registered with the Social Services; such issues may be dealt with by a GP only and Social Services may never be involved. The figures presented here therefore do not represent the prevalence of children with different disabilities in Northern Ireland but are rather a reflection of the service demand.

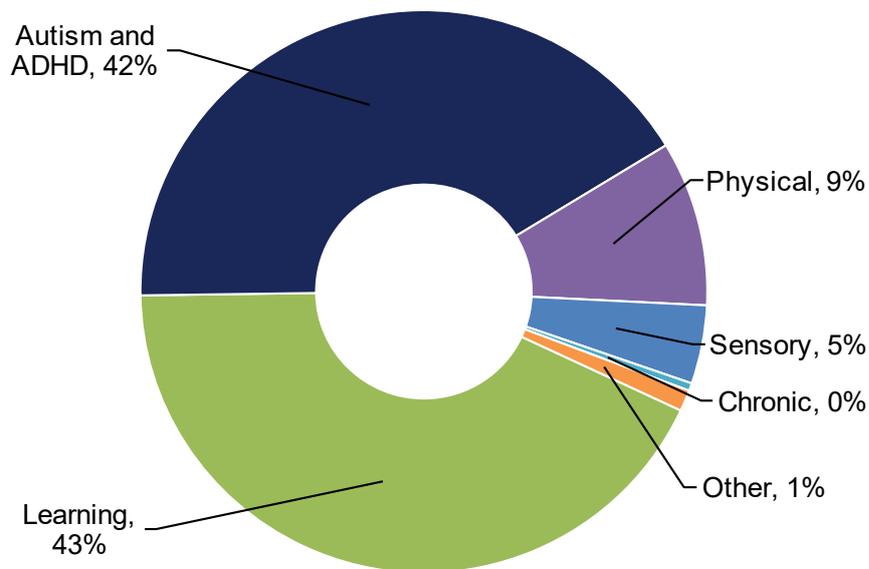
Having a disability was more prevalent amongst male children in need, with 24% of males being recorded as having a disability compared with 14% of female children in need.

Furthermore, each of the disability categories had higher numbers of males than females. This was most evident amongst those recorded as having Autism (including Aspergers) or ADHD, where almost three quarters (74%) were males. These findings are consistent with those published in *'The Prevalence of Autism (including Asperger's syndrome) in School Age Children in Northern Ireland'*⁸, published on the Department's website.

⁸ <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/articles/autism-statistics>

Figure 4. Type of disability of the 4,545 Children in Need who were recorded with a disability at 31 March 2021

Source: Delegated Statutory Functions Return 10.1.6, 31 March 2021.



Children in Need – Religion and Ethnicity

Just over a third of children in need (37%) had their religion recorded as Roman Catholic; 25% were Protestant including other Christian faiths; and 8% had other religious faiths. Some 11% were recorded as having no religious beliefs, while and religious affiliation was not recorded, not known or refused to be disclosed for 19%.

Over three quarters (76%) of the children in need were recorded as White, with 6% from Ethnic Minorities (including Irish Travellers, Roma Travellers, Asian, Black and those of mixed Ethnicity). Ethnic background was not recorded for 16% of children in need.

Children in Need Referrals

A referral is defined as a request for services to be provided by children’s social care and is in respect of a child who is currently not assessed to be in need⁹. A referral may result in an episode of care which may be an initial assessment of the child’s needs, the provision of information or advice, referral to another agency or alternatively no further action.

During the year ending 31 March 2021, 32,070 children were referred to HSC Trusts in Northern Ireland¹⁰, a decrease of 5% on the previous year. As in previous years, the South Eastern HSC Trust received the smallest proportion of referrals (10%), the other Trusts shared between 20% and 26% of all referrals¹¹. There was an increase of 8% in the number of

⁹ A referral for a child who is already assessed to be in need is treated as a ‘significant event’ and in the child’s file is not counted as a new referral.

¹⁰ Please note that to calculate this figure two half yearly collections are combined, therefore it is possible that some double counting may occur.

¹¹ See Tables for further details - <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/articles/children-need>.

referrals received by the Southern HSC Trust between 2020 and 2021, in comparison there was a 22% drop in the number of referrals received by the South Eastern HSC Trust.

As in previous years, the police were the source of the referrals for the largest proportion of children in need referred (39%), followed by Social Services (9%).

Table 3. Children Referred by Source Year Ending 31 March

Source: Delegated Statutory Functions Return 10.1.4(b), 31 March 2021.

Referral Source	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Police	29%	31%	33%	33%	39%
Social Services	20%	17%	12%	11%	9%
Hospital	7%	7%	7%	7%	6%
School/Educational Welfare Officer	7%	8%	8%	8%	5%
Relative	6%	5%	6%	5%	4%
Court/Probation Officer	5%	4%	3%	3%	2%
Anonymous	4%	4%	4%	4%	4%
General Practitioner	3%	3%	3%	3%	3%
Community Nurse/Health Visitor	3%	3%	4%	3%	3%
Voluntary Organisation	3%	2%	2%	1%	1%
Self	1%	1%	2%	2%	1%
Northern Ireland Housing Executive	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%
Other	11%	14%	16%	20%	23%

Section Two: Child Protection

The Child Protection Register is a confidential list of all children in the area who have been identified at a child protection conference as being at significant risk of harm and for whom a specific Child Protection Plan has been set out to keep them safe from harm.

Source: Children's Legal Centre

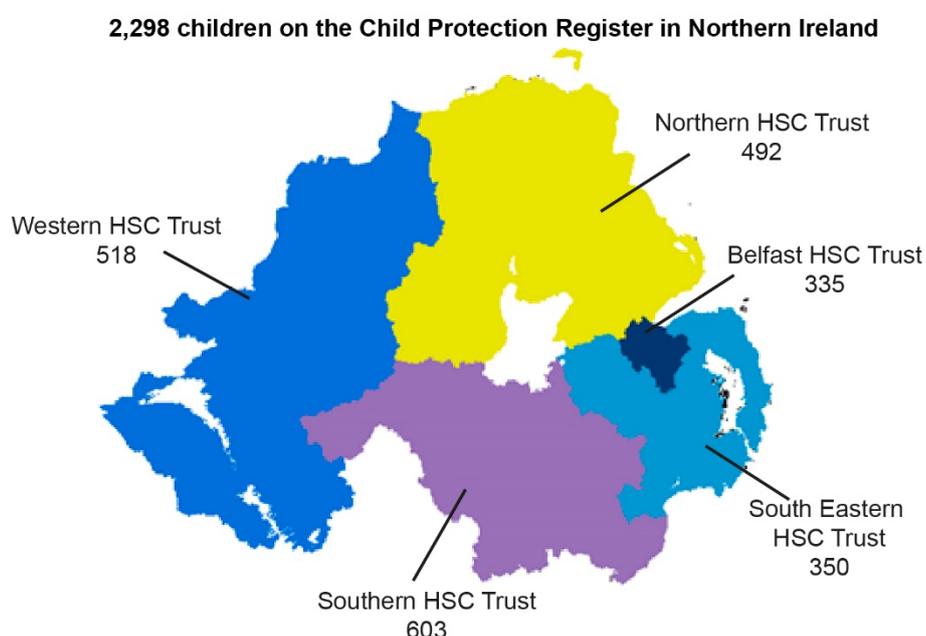
Key Findings

- At 31 March 2021, 2,298 children were listed on the Child Protection Register;
- Neglect and physical abuse were the main reasons for a child being on the Child Protection Register and accounted for over three quarters of all on the register (73%);
- A total of 1,921 child protection referrals were received by HSC Trusts;
- There were 2,065 new registrations to the Child Protection Register and 2,095 de-registrations during the year.

The Child Protection Register¹²

At 31 March 2021, 2,298 children and young people were listed on the Child Protection Register in Northern Ireland. This represented 52.1 children per 10,000 population under 18 years of age.

Figure 5. Number of children on the Child Protection Register by HSC Trust (31 March 2021)

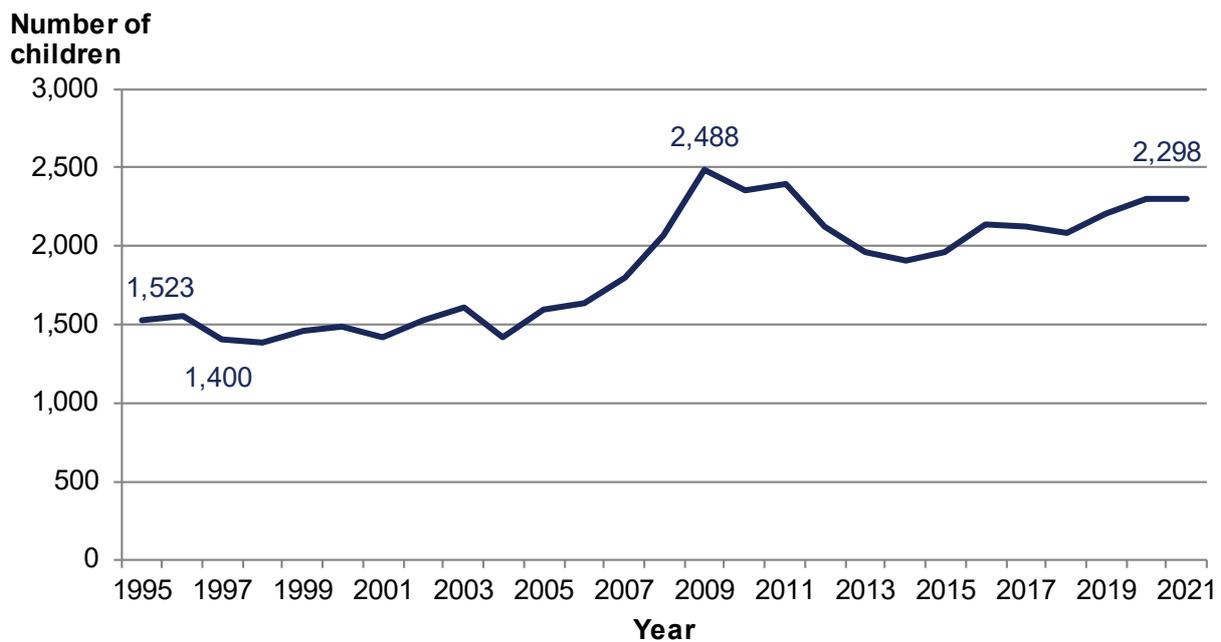


¹² The figures presented in this section relate to child protection statistics for the year ending 31 March. The Department of Health also publish [quarterly child protection](#) statistics.

The number of children on the Child Protection Register was the same as in 2020; this figure has remained relatively stable over the last six years, with figures just above 2,000 children on the Register. Since the introduction of the Children Order (1995), the highest number of children registered occurred in 2009 (2,488), which may have been influenced by several high profile child protection cases covered by the media around this time. The lowest number of children on the register occurred in 1997, when 898 fewer children were on the Child Protection Register than in 2021.

Figure 6. Number of children on the Child Protection Register in Northern Ireland at 31 March (1995 – 2021)

Source: Children Order Return CPR1, 31 March 2021.



Of the 2,298 children on the register, 52% were male and 48% were female, similar to the gender split in the general children’s population. However, the age distribution on the register did not mirror the general age distribution of the child population in Northern Ireland. The Child Protection Register had a higher proportion of children aged under 5 compared with the overall child population (39% and 27% respectively). Conversely, the Northern Ireland population had a higher proportion of those aged 12 and over than represented on the register (33% and 24% respectively).

Table 4. Age distribution on the Child Protection Register and the Northern Ireland Child Population

Source: Children Order Return CPR1, 31 March 2021.
2020 Mid-Year Population Estimate (NISRA 2021).

Children in Northern Ireland	Under 1 year	1 – 4 years old	5 – 11 years old	12 – 15 years old	16 years old and over
Children on the Child Protection Register	11%	28%	36%	19%	5%
Northern Ireland child population	5%	22%	41%	22%	10%

The Southern HSC Trust had the largest number of children on their Child Protection Register compared with the other HSC Trusts (26% of the overall number). When taking the Trusts' child populations into account, the Western HSC Trust had the highest rate of children on the Child Protection Register (70.8 children per 10,000 child population). The Belfast HSC Trust had the lowest rate with 43.2 children per 10,000 population.

Table 5. Children on the Child Protection Register by HSC Trust (31 March 2021)

Children Order Return CPR1, 31 March 2021.
2020 Mid-Year Population Estimate (NISRA 2021).

HSC Trust	Numbers on the Child Protection Register	Rate of children in need per 10,000 child population
Belfast	335	43.2
Northern	492	45.0
South Eastern	350	42.8
Southern	603	60.6
Western	518	70.8
Northern Ireland	2,298	52.1

Figure 7. Rate of children on the Child Protection Register per 10,000 population under 18 by HSC Trust at 31 March (2014 – 2021)

Source: Children Order Return CPR1, 31 March 2021.
2020 Mid-Year Population Estimates (NISRA 2021).

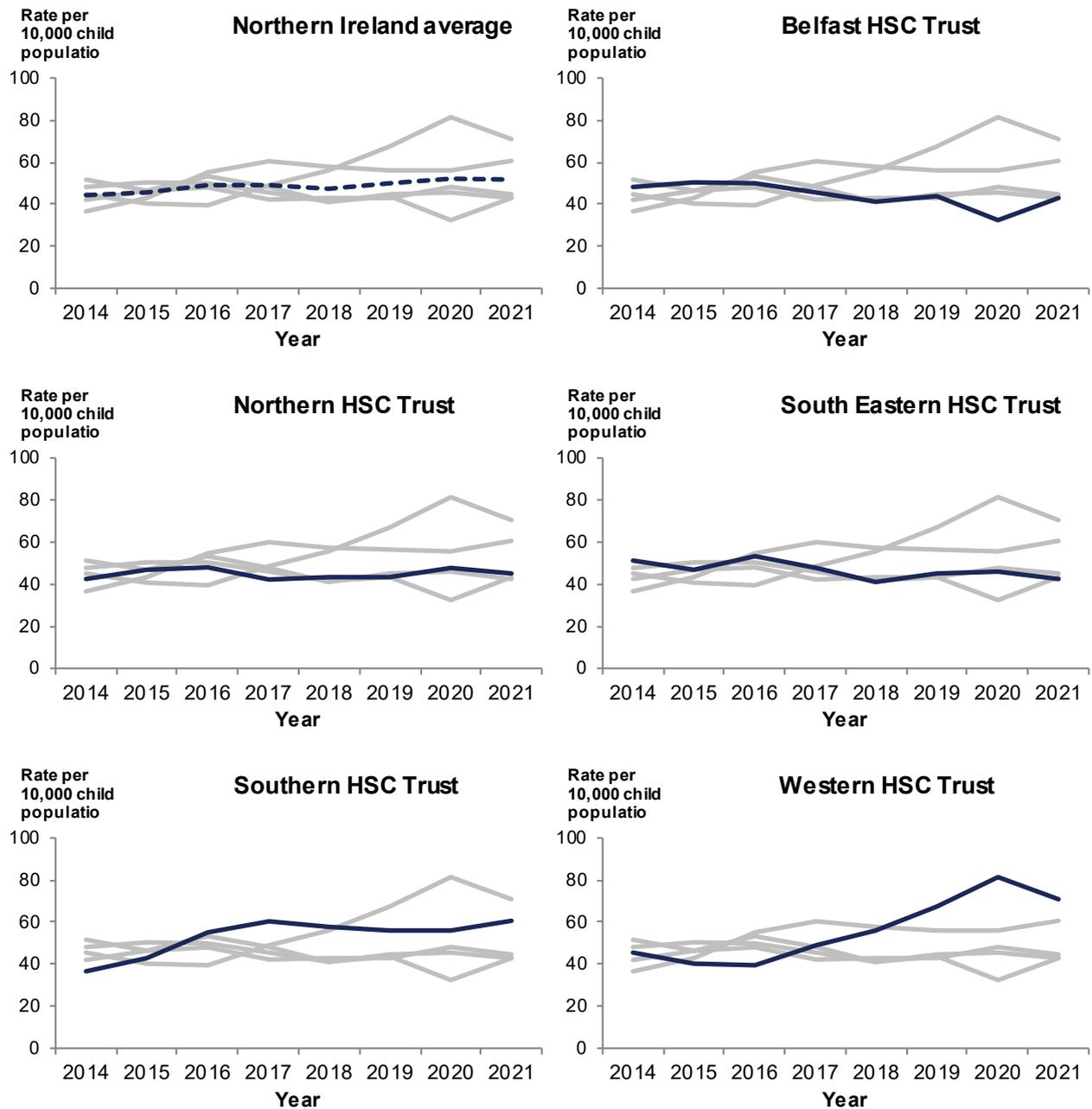


Figure 7 sets out the rate of children on the Child Protection Register per 10,000 child population between 2014 and 2021. The Northern Ireland rate has risen slightly over this period from 44.3 to 52.1 children per 10,000 of the child population.

The Western HSC Trust rate has seen a large increase since 2014, whereas the rates in the Belfast, Northern, and the South Eastern HSC Trusts have stayed relatively stable over this period. While the rate in the Southern HSC Trusts increased at the beginning of the period, it has been stable since 2017.

Category of Abuse

The category of abuse under which each child is considered to be at risk is decided at the Child Protection Case Conference. When agreement is reached that the child is at risk and protection is necessary, each child is recorded under the category that best reflects the nature of the risk.

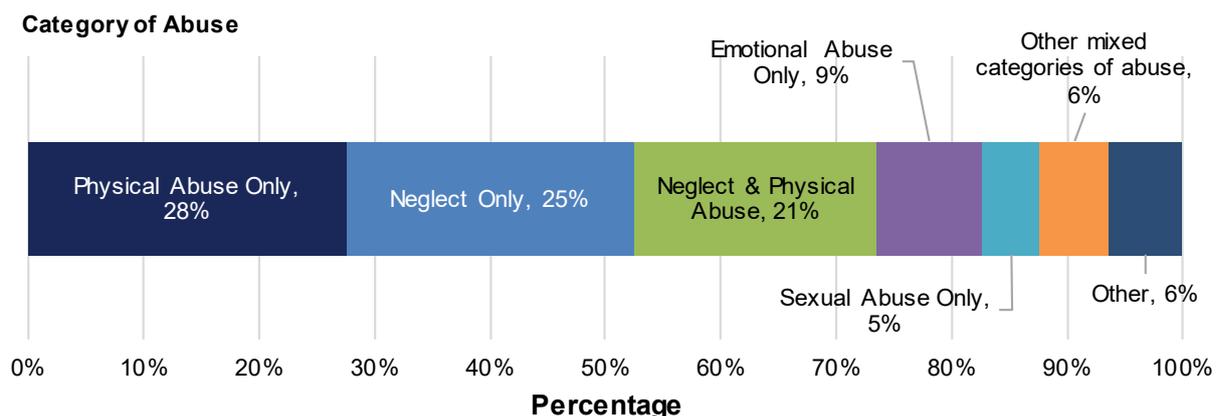
The four main categories used are: **neglect**, **physical abuse**, **sexual abuse**, and **emotional abuse**. For more complex cases mixed categories are used e.g. 'neglect and physical abuse' or 'physical and sexual abuse.'

- **Neglect:** Actual or likely persistent or severe neglect of a child, or the failure to protect a child from exposure to any kind of danger, including cold and starvation, or persistent failure to carry out important aspects of care, resulting in significant impairment of the child's health or development, including non-organic failure to thrive.
- **Physical Abuse:** Actual or likely deliberate physical injury to a child, or wilful or neglectful failure to prevent physical injury or suffering to a child including deliberate poisoning, suffocation or Munchausen syndrome by proxy.
- **Sexual Abuse:** Actual or likely exploitation of children or adolescents. The child may be dependent and/or developmentally immature.
- **Emotional Abuse:** Actual or likely, persistent or severe emotional ill treatment or rejection resulting in severe adverse effects on the emotional, physical and/or behavioural development of a child.

Physical Abuse and Neglect were the main reasons for a child or young person being on the Child Protection Register. The categories Neglect Only, Physical Abuse Only, and Neglect and Physical Abuse accounted for 73% of all cases on the Child Protection Register at 31 March 2021. Physical Abuse Only was the largest single cause of a child being placed on the register (28%) while the combination of Neglect and Physical was the most common cause of the mixed categories (21%). Sexual abuse was the least likely single cause of a child being placed on the protection register (5%).

Figure 8. Children on the Child Protection Register by Category of Abuse at 31 March 2021

Source: Children Order Return CPR2, 31 March 2021.



There were some differences between the HSC Trusts in category of abuse. In the Northern and Southern HSC Trusts, Physical Abuse Only was the most common category of abuse, whereas Neglect Only was most common in the South Eastern HSC Trust, and Neglect and Physical mixed category of abuse was the most common in Belfast HSC Trust. Due to a change of IT system, the Western HSC Trust had a large number of unknown category of abuse.

There may be some year on year fluctuation in category of abuse at Trust level, however, the regional figures have stayed relatively stable. The proportion of children on the register in each category of abuse has only seen small percentage point changes over recent years¹³.

Legal Status

The Child Protection Register identifies any children for whom there are serious concerns, and as such, the children on the register do not need to have a specific legal status. Those children on the register with a legal status are in a number of cases likely to be crossovers with looked after children.

The majority, 89%, of children on the Child Protection Register at 31 March 2021 had no recorded legal status, 6% were Accommodated (Article 21), 3% had Interim Care Orders, less than 1% had Supervision Orders, and a further 1% had Other legal statuses¹⁴. These figures were similar to those recorded in previous years.

There was some variation between the Trusts, with 5% in the Southern HSC Trust having a legal status whereas in all other Trusts, between 11% and 15% of children registered had a legal status.

Duration on the Register

Of the 2,298 children on the Child Protection Register at 31 March 2021, two-thirds (66%) had been on the register for less than one year. Some 74 children (3%) had been on the register for three years or longer.

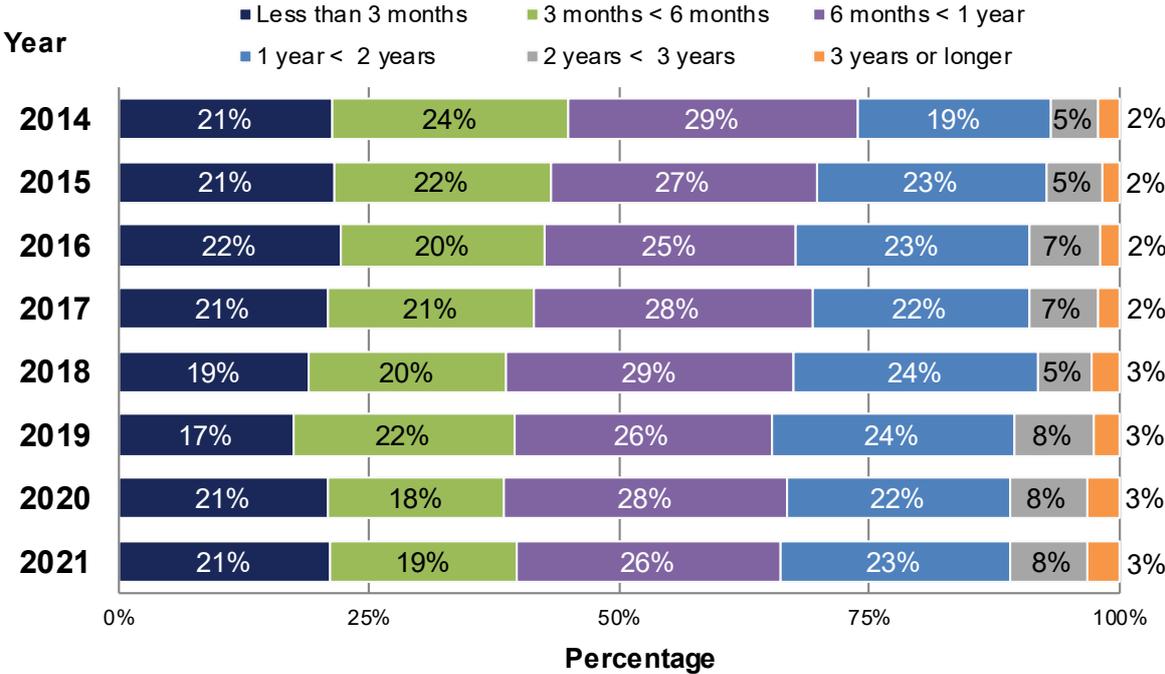
There has been a gradual increase in the duration children are on the Child Protection Register between 2014 and 2021 (Fig.9). Some 26% of children had been registered for a year or longer at 31 March 2014 compared to 34% at 31 March 2021. There were only minor differences in the duration on the Child Protection Register across the HSC Trusts (see tables for details).

¹³ Please see [Tables](#) for details of category of abuse broken down by HSC Trust and annual trend figures.

¹⁴ Please see Appendix B for definitions of different legal statuses.

Figure 9. Children on the Child Protection Register by duration at 31 March (2014 – 2021)

Source: Children Order Return CPR5.



Child Protection Referrals

A Child Protection Referral is one for which the initial assessment indicates that there may be Child Protection issues. The threshold for action should be the allegation or suspicion of child abuse. However the balance needs to be struck between taking action designed to protect the child from abuse while at the same time avoiding unnecessary intervention. Except in emergency situations or urgent cases when immediate protective action is required, referrals will require preliminary discussion with other professionals from the child protection agencies and with the referrer. In some cases it will be necessary to seek specialist opinion.

Source: 'Co-operating to Safeguard Children' DHSSPS, 2003.

A referral to social services that leads to a child protection investigation can take several routes. The definition above relates to a referral in regards to a child that is not already known to social services¹⁵. A referral can also be made in regards to a child that is already known to social services, or who indeed is already on the child protection register. These referrals are called a 'significant event', indicating that an investigation may have to be carried out in light of new information relating to the child. Lastly, a referral may be made to social services that initially is not deemed to be child protection (eg a family support referral), however, during the initial assessment, social workers regard the child's situation to require a child protection investigation.

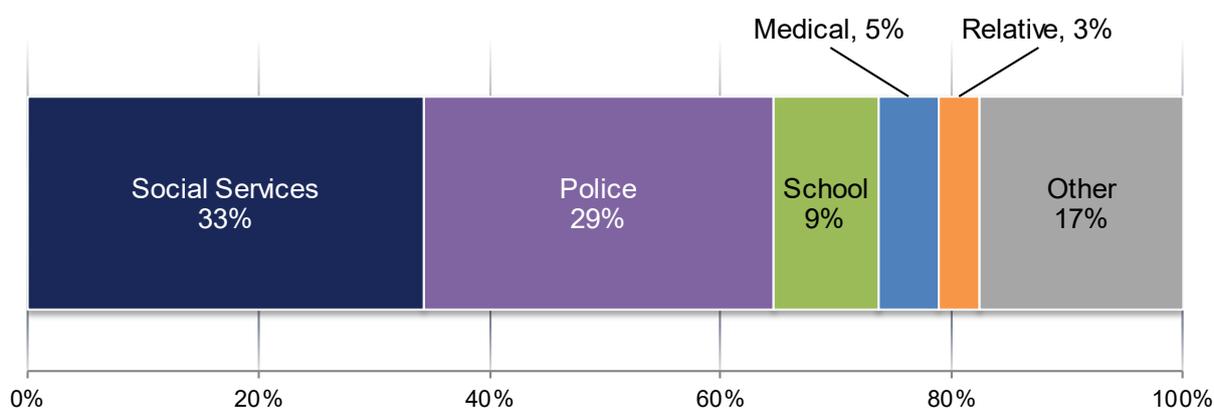
Although all routes may lead to a child protection investigation, only the first route described above is per definition a child protection referral. Historically, significant events have also been included in referral statistics. The work on trying to align these different strands of referrals in the five HSC Trusts into a consistent count is ongoing and therefore the reported referral figures have, as a result artificially dropped. HSC Trust comparison and year on year comparisons may therefore not be like-for-like comparisons. This must be kept in mind when interpreting the figures below¹⁶.

Figure 10. Child Protection Referrals by source of referral, year ending 31 March 2021

Source: Children Order Return CPR3.

Note: Medical covers GPs, Community Nursing and Hospital.

Other includes Self (1%), Anonymous (3%) and Voluntary Organisations (1%).



¹⁵ A child that currently does not have an open social work case file.

¹⁶ Please note that it is anticipated that all strands of referrals will be reported on in future publications.

A total of 1,921 child protection referrals were received during the year ending 31 March 2021. This amounted to 43.5 referrals per 10,000 of the population under 18¹⁷.

During 2020/21, Social Services accounted for 33% of all child protection referrals received, with 29% from the police and 9% from schools. Furthermore, 66 referrals were made by relatives, neighbours or friends (3%) and 12 referrals (<1%) were made by the child themselves. Compared with previous years, there was an increase in the proportion of referrals from Police combined with a reduction in the proportion from Social Services. This change in source of referral may have been influenced by measures put in place in connection with Covid-19 restrictions during the 2020/21 year.

Child Protection Investigations

“Social Services and the police have, for some time, recognised the need to co-ordinate their investigations into suspected child abuse to ensure that each can fulfil its functions in a manner which best serves the child. Both are concerned about the child’s welfare, although the former’s concerns are dealt with by the civil law, and those of the police, by criminal law.”

Child Protection Investigations are classified using one of the following categories:

- Joint Protocol (carried out jointly by social workers and the PSNI);
- Social workers;
- PSNI.

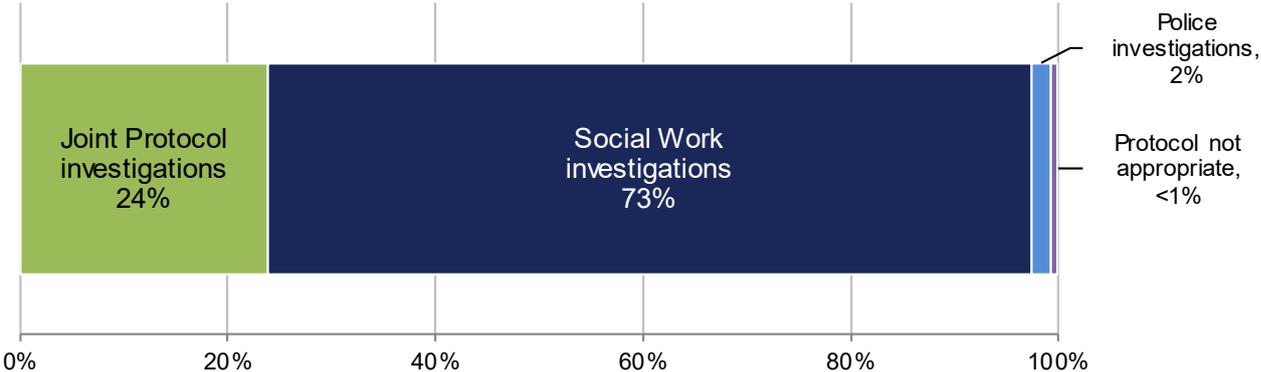
There were 2,963 child protection investigations carried out during 2020/21, a 4% reduction on the previous year.

Almost three quarters (73%) of the 2,963 child protection investigations were carried out by social workers, with a further 24% Joint Protocol Investigations involving both the police and social workers. These figures were similar to those recorded the previous year. The remaining 3% (78 investigations) were either recorded as carried out by police only (60) or were deemed Protocol Not Appropriate (18).

¹⁷ Mid Year Estimate 2020 (NISRA 2021).

Figure 11. Child Protection Investigations (year ending 31 March 2021)

Source: Children Order Return CPR6.



Initial Case Conferences

The Case Conference is a meeting organised by the social work services to consult with other agencies to collate information about the child and family. The Child Protection Case Conference has a specific role regarding the protection of children. The purpose is to allow the participants to pool their knowledge of the child’s health, development and functioning and the carer’s capacity to ensure the safety and well-being of the child and assess risk.

During the year ending 31 March 2021, 2,261 Initial Case Conferences had been completed across Northern Ireland, a 2% increase on the previous year.

Some 90% of Initial Case Conferences resulted in a child being placed on the Child Protection Register during 2020/21. At HSC Trust level there was some variation ranging from 94% of case conferences resulting in registration in the South Eastern and Southern HSC Trusts to 84% in the Western HSC Trust.

It is worth noting, the act of registration itself confers no protection on the child, and must be accompanied by a Child Protection Plan. It is the responsibility of the Case Conference to make recommendations on how agencies, professionals, and family should work together to ensure that the child will be safeguarded from future harm¹⁸.

¹⁸ Children’s Services Definitions and Monitoring Guidance, Health and Social Care Board, 2014.

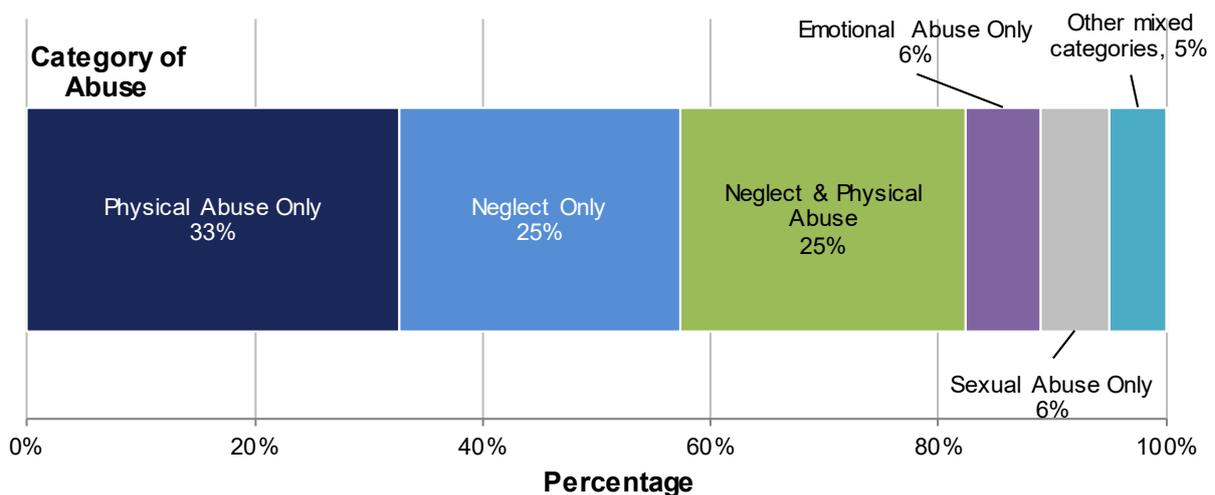
Registrations, Re-registrations and De-registrations

- **Registration:** The placement of a child onto the Child Protection Register. Where a child has moved on, or off the Register several times during the year each registration is recorded.
- **De-registration:** The removal of a child from the Child Protection Register. Where a child has moved on, or off the Register several times during the year each de-registration is recorded.
- **Re-registration:** The placement onto the Child Protection Register of a child who has already been on the register, irrespective of the date of their first registration on the Register.

During the year ending 31 March 2021, there were 2,065 registrations to the Child Protection Register, a 1% increase on the previous year. The largest proportion of registrations occurred in the Southern HSC Trust where 587 took place during the year, with the Belfast HSC Trust accounting for the least amount (258 registrations). By age group, young people aged 16 and over were the least likely to be registered (5% of the overall total).

Figure 12. Registrations to the Child Protection Register by Category of Abuse year ending 31 March 2021

Source: Children Order Return CPR8.



As it might be expected, the category of abuse reasons for new registrations *during* the year were similar to those of children on the Child Protection Register at *the end* of the year (see previous section). Some 82% of those children registered during the year were likely to suffer from Physical Abuse Only, Neglect Only or a combination of the two. Physical Abuse Only was the single largest category, accounting for a third of all registrations (33%). Category of abuse broken down by HSC Trusts can be found in the Tables¹⁹; however, it should be noted that figures at Trust level are small and therefore may exhibit large year on year variances.

¹⁹ [Northern Ireland Children in Need DoH Statistics Web Link](#)

There were 396 re-registrations to the Child Protection Register during 2020/21, an increase of 18% on the previous year when there were 336 re-registrations. The Northern HSC Trust accounted for almost a third (30%) of all re-registrations, in comparison a tenth (10%) of all re-registrations occurred in the Belfast HSC Trust.

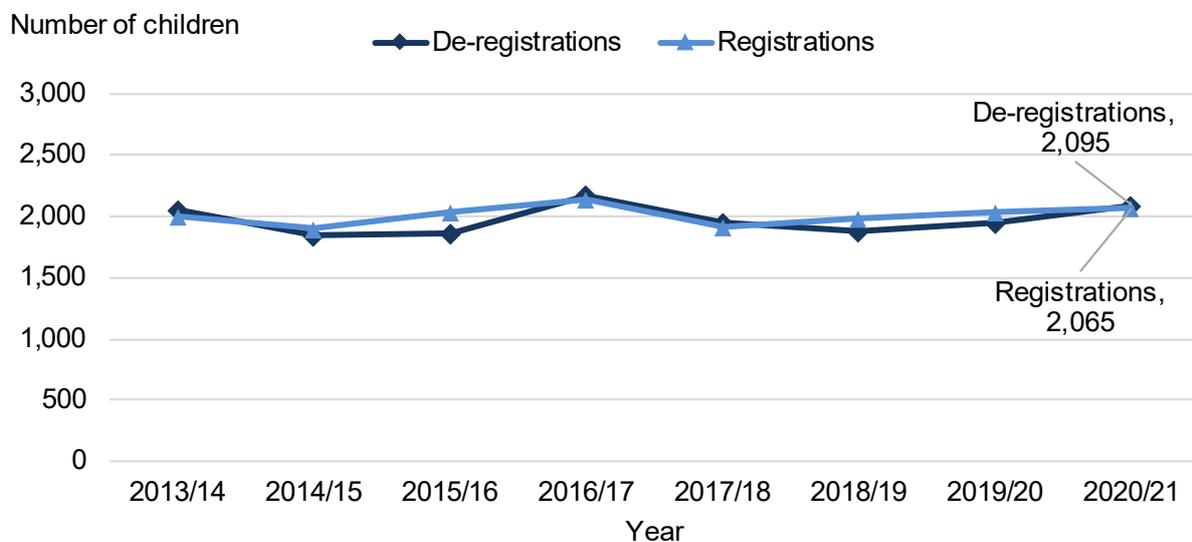
Some 2,095 children were removed from the Child Protection Register during 2020/21, an increase of 8% on the previous year.

Over a third (36%) of children were de-registered after spending between six months and one year on the register. A further 27% had been on the register for between one and two years. Some 9% of the children were de-registered after being registered for less than three months; 40% of these children were under one year of age when de-registered.

Regionally, there were 30 more de-registrations than new registrations during the year. In general, the number of registrations and de-registrations have been similar the last years.

Figure 13. Number of registrations and number of de-registrations to the Child Protection Register, year ending 31 March (2014-2021)

Source: Children Order Return CPR10.



Child Protection Comparability across the United Kingdom

Child Protection systems across the United Kingdom vary but are generally comparable. Scotland's collection year for these figures are year end figures at 31 July. In comparison the collections in England, Wales and Northern Ireland are at 31 March.

Child protection figures in Northern Ireland at the beginning of the century show a much different pattern compared to the other UK countries. Up to 2009 there was a very steep rise in the rate; followed by a slow decline to 2014. It has since been similar just above the rate in Wales and England.

Scotland has consistently had the lowest, and most consistent rate of children on its child protection register. A decline in numbers have been seen in both England and Wales the last years.

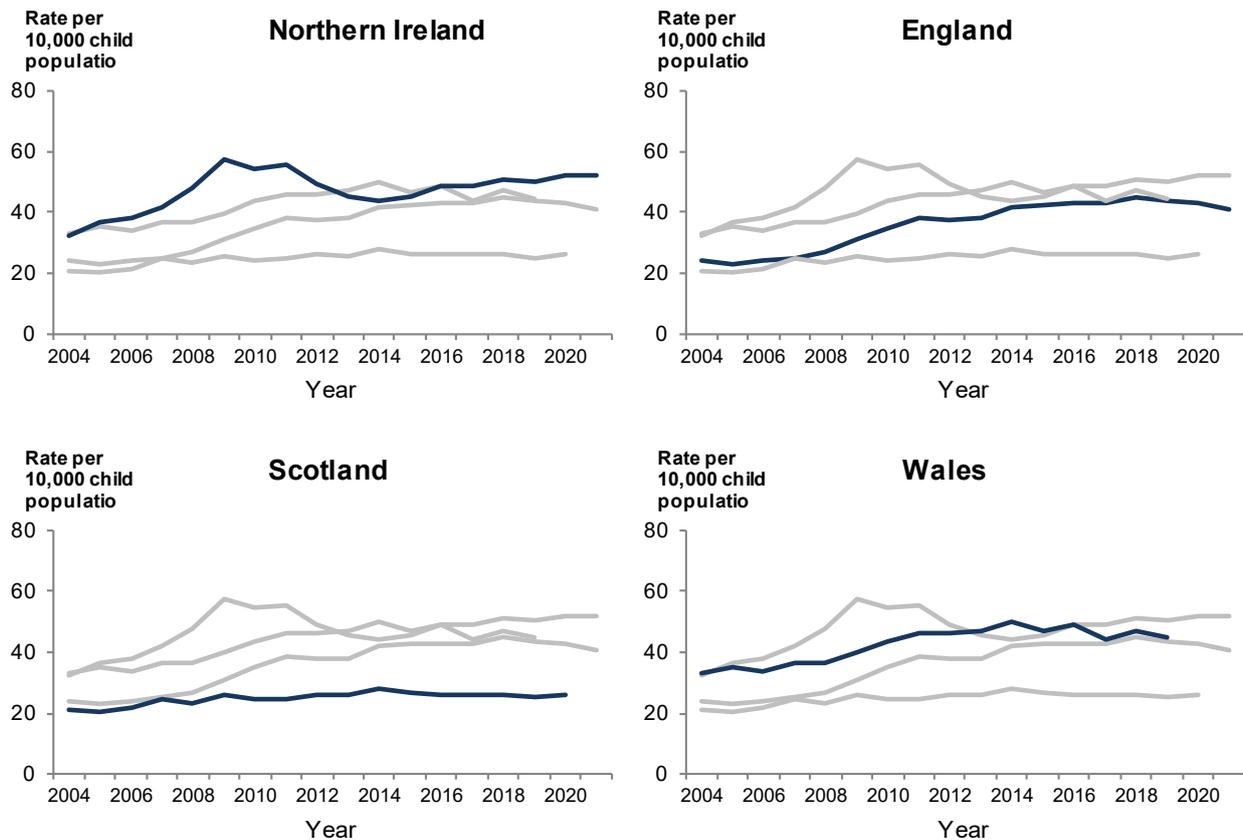
Figure 14. Cross UK comparison of rate of children on the Child Protection Register per 10,000 under 18's, 2004 – 2021

Sources:

England – '[Characteristics of Children in need](#)' (figures at 31 March). Note: England changed source of collection in 2010, so caution should be made when comparing 2009 and 2010 figures.

Wales – [StatsWales](#) (figures at 31 March). Note: Wales did not collect data for 2019/20 and 2020/21 data has, at time of publication, not yet been released.

Scotland - '[Children's Social Work Statistics.](#)' (figures at 31 July)



Section Three: Children in Care

A Child is Looked After by an Authority if he or she is in their care or if he or she is provided with accommodation for a continuous period of more than 24 hours by the Authority in the exercise of its Social Services function.

Source: 'Northern Ireland Social Work Law', White, 2006.

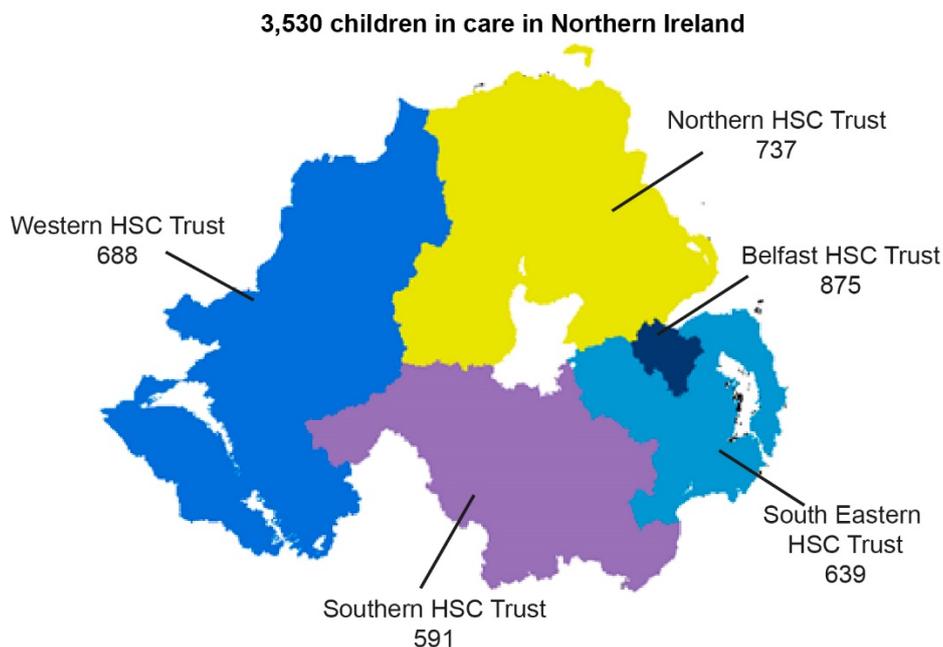
Key Findings

- At 31 March 2021, 3,530 children and young people were in care in Northern Ireland. This was the highest number recorded since the introduction of the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995;
- Some 21% of the children in care had been looked after for less than a year, with 31% looked after for five years or longer;
- Just over four fifths of the children in care were in foster care placements (81%), 9% placed with parents, 6% in residential care and 4% in other placements. This was similar to previous years;
- During 2020/21 there were 893 admissions to care and 726 discharges.

Children in Care in Northern Ireland

At 31 March 2021, 3,530 children were looked after in Northern Ireland. This was the highest recorded number of children in care since the introduction of the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995, representing 80.0 children per 10,000 of the child population²⁰.

Figure 15. Number of Children in Care by HSC Trust (31 March 2021)

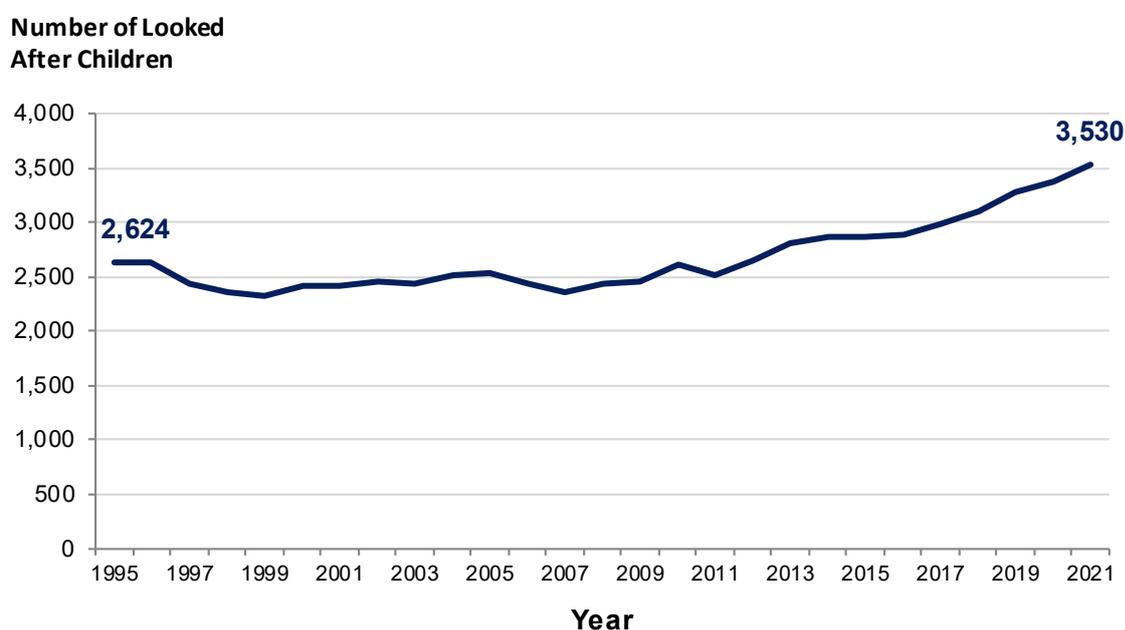


²⁰ 2020 Mid-Year Population Estimate (NISRA 2021).

The number of looked after children in Northern Ireland has risen by 41% in the last ten years and by 52% since 1999, the lowest recorded number of looked after children under the 1995 Children Order legislation. The number of looked after children at 31 March 2021 was 4% higher than at the same time the previous year (3,383).

Figure 16. Children in Care in Northern Ireland at 31 March (1995 – 2021)

Source: Children Order Return LA1 & Delegated Statutory Functions Return 10.3.1.



Of those children looked after at 31 March 2021, a slightly higher proportion were male than female (53% and 47% respectively). This differed to the general childrens population in Northern Ireland where there is a more even gender split (51% male and 49% female)²¹.

Children in care had an older age profile compared with the general child population; 41% of the looked after population were aged 12 years and over whereas 33% of the general child population were in this age group.

Table 6. Age distribution of Children in Care and the Northern Ireland child population

Source: Mid-Year Population Estimates 2020, NISRA (2021).

Source: Delegated Statutory Functions Return 10.3.1, 31 March 2021.

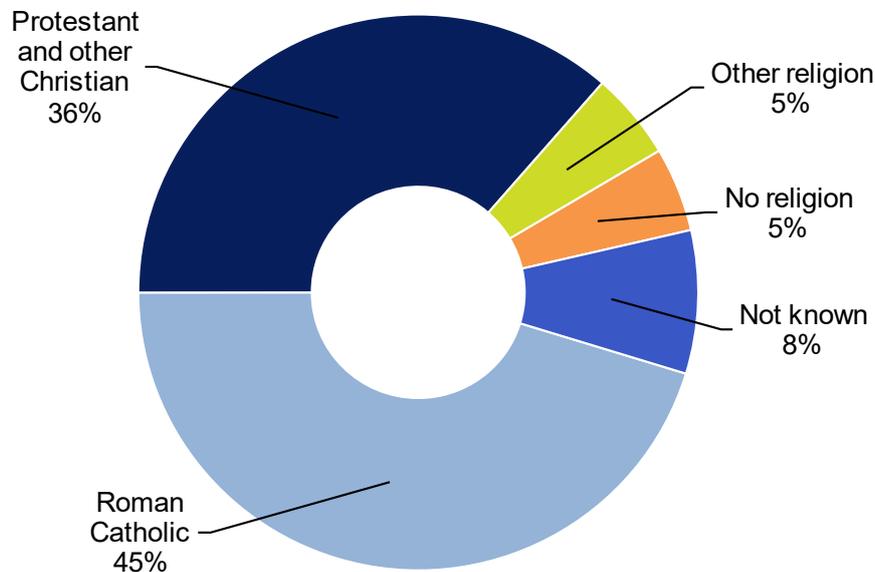
Children in Northern Ireland	Under 1 year	1 – 4 years old	5 – 11 years old	12 – 15 years old	16+ years old
Looked after children	3%	20%	36%	26%	15%
Northern Ireland child population	5%	22%	41%	22%	10%

²¹ 2020 Mid-Year Population Estimate (NISRA 2021).

Disaggregating on the basis of **religion** shows that the largest proportion of looked after children were Roman Catholics (45%), with 36% from Protestant or other Christian churches. Some 5% had other religious backgrounds and 5% were recorded as having no religious faith.

Figure 17. Children in Care by religion (31 March 2021)

Source: Delegated Statutory Functions Return 10.3.2, 31 March 2021.



The **ethnicity** for the vast majority of children looked after in Northern Ireland was white (88%). A further 6% was made up of a variety of ethnicities including Black, Irish / Roma Travellers, Chinese, Indian, Pakistani and mixed / other ethnic groups²².

At 31 March 2021, some 6% (229) of the looked after children were also on the **Child Protection Register** in Northern Ireland²³. This was one percentage point higher than the previous year. Proportions ranged from 5% in the Belfast, South Eastern and Southern HSC Trusts, to 10% in the Western HSC Trust.

Children in care by HSC Trust

The Belfast HSC Trust had the highest numbers of looked after children at 31 March 2021 followed by the Northern HSC Trust. Taking into account the size of the Trusts' general child population²⁴; the Belfast HSC Trust also had the highest rate of looked after children compared to the other Trusts (see Table below).

Changes in the number of looked after children in the HSC Trusts between 2020 and 2021 ranged from an increase of 93% in the Northern HSC Trust to an increase of one percent in the Belfast HSC Trust.

²² Ethnicity was not stated for 5% of the children in care.

²³ Source: Delegated Statutory Functions Return 10.3.11.

²⁴ 2020 Mid-Year Population Estimate (NISRA 2021).

Table 7. Children in Care by HSC Trust (31 March 2021)

Source: Delegated Statutory Functions Return 10.3.1
Mid-Year Population Estimate (NISRA 2021).

HSC Trust	Numbers of children in care	Rate of children in care per 10,000 child population
Belfast	875	112.9
Northern	737	67.4
South Eastern	639	78.2
Southern	591	59.4
Western	688	94.1
Northern Ireland	3,530	80.0

Children in care with a Disability

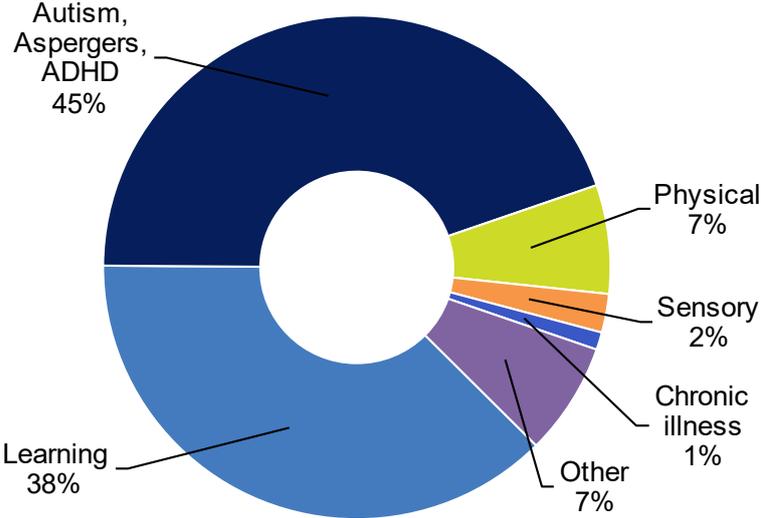
Of the 3,530 children in care in Northern Ireland, 13% were recorded as having a disability. Nearly half of these children and young people with autism (including Aspergers) or ADHD (45%), while a further 38% had a learning disability.

Disability was more prevalent in the male population with 15% of males having a disability recorded compared to 10% of females, however, the same proportion of males and females were recorded for each disability, with the exception of autism (including Aspergers) or ADHD. Some 8% of males were recorded in this category compared with 3% of females. These findings are consistent with those published in *'The Prevalence of Autism (including Asperger's syndrome) in School Age Children in Northern Ireland'*²⁵, published on the Department's website.

²⁵ [Department of Health Autism Statistics link.](#)

Figure 18. Children in Care with a disability (31 March 2021)

Source: Delegated Statutory Functions Return 10.3.12.



Legal Status of Children in Care

Before a Court makes a Care Order it must be satisfied that the child is suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm; and that the harm, or likelihood of harm, is attributable to: '(i) the care given to the child, or likely to be given to him if the order were not made, not being what it would be reasonable to expect a parent to give him; or (ii) the child's being beyond parental control.

Source: White, C. 'Northern Ireland Social Work Law' 2006.

Minor annual variations in the legal status of children in care have been recorded in the last number of years. As in previous years, the majority, 54%, of looked after children were subject to a Care Order (Article 50) at 31 March 2021, 27% were Accommodated Article 21, 16% had an Interim Care Order and 2% had other legal statuses²⁶.

There was some variation between the HSC Trusts, with a higher proportion of the looked after population in the South Eastern and Southern Trusts with an Interim Care Order, and a lower proportion of children in the Belfast HSC Trust were Accommodated under Article 21. Children accommodated under Article 21 have been placed in care with the permission of their parents.

Table 8. Legal Status of Children in Care at 31 March 2021

Source: Delegated Statutory Functions Return 10.3.1.

HSC Trust	Care Order (Art 50 or 59)	Accommodated Art 21	Interim Care Order (Art 57)	Other	Total
Belfast	66%	16%	14%	4%	100%
Northern	51%	34%	14%	0%	100%
South Eastern	45%	30%	22%	4%	100%
Southern	52%	24%	20%	4%	100%
Western	53%	35%	12%	1%	100%
Northern Ireland	54%	27%	16%	2%	100%

²⁶ Definitions of the different legal statuses can be found in appendix B.

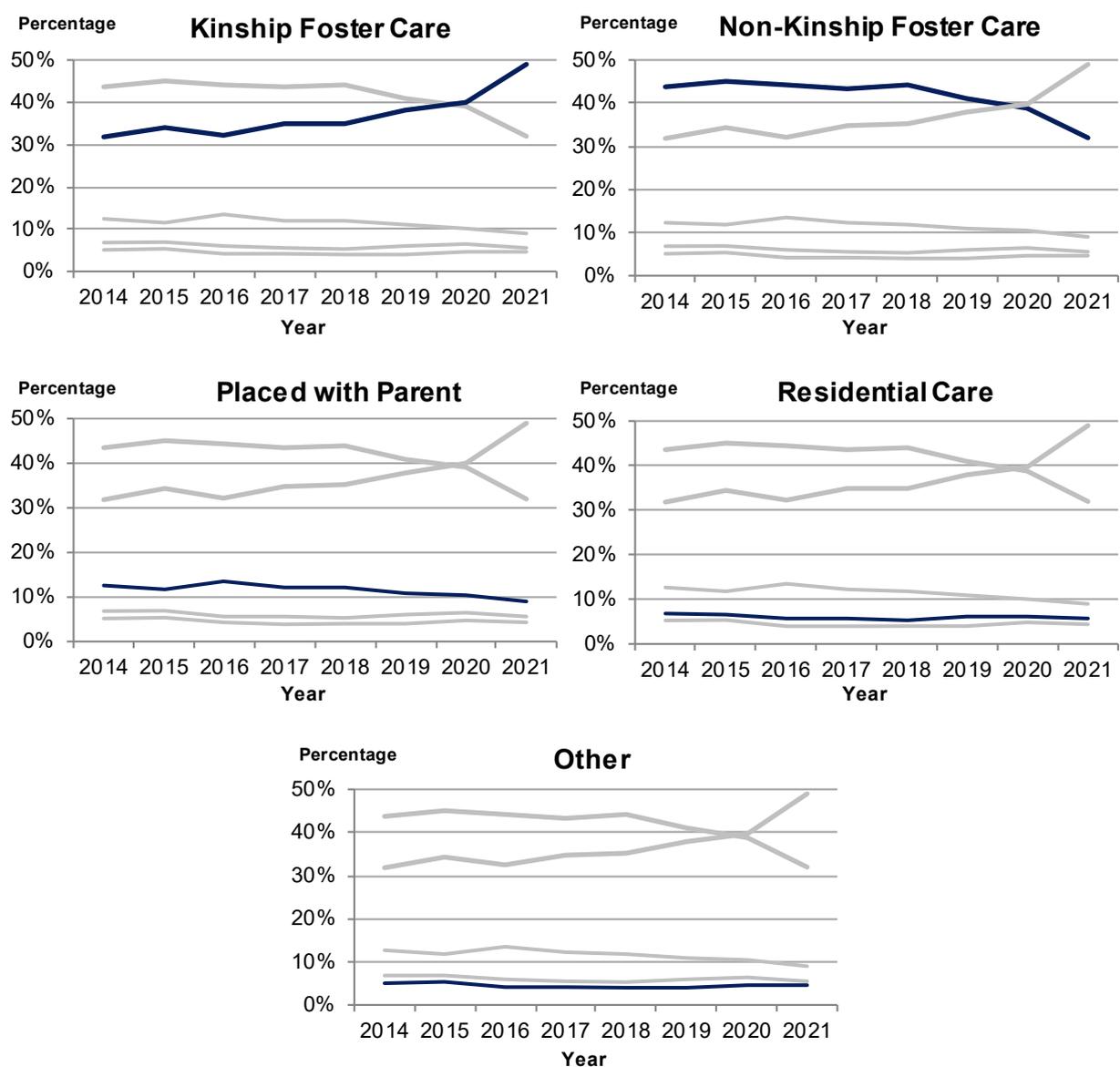
Placement of Children in Care

The favouring of foster care as a placement type can be linked to the philosophy running through the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 that safe family settings are a major way of supporting and helping children²⁷. Furthermore, there has been a recent emphasis on kinship care, which means the child is placed with a relative, friend or other person with a prior connection with the child. It is however essential to note that the needs and circumstances of each child are unique and that a kinship care placement is not suitable for every child.

Figure 19. Children in Care by placement at 31 March (2014 – 2021)

Source: Delegated Statutory Functions Return 10.3.3.

Note: Non-kinship foster care includes placements provided by Independent Providers.



²⁷ See "Introduction" for further details.

Fostering continues to be the preferred placement option for children in care, with 41% placed in kinship care placements and 40% in non-kinship or independent foster care placements at 31 March 2021. This is the second year that kinship care placements are higher than non-kinship foster placements. The Western HSC Trust had the highest proportion of children in kinship foster care (50%).

At 31 March 2021, 9% of children had been placed with parents, 6% were in residential care and 4% in other placements²⁸. There have only been minor variations to these proportions the last eight years.

Table 9. Placement of children in care by age group, 31 March 2021

Source: Delegated Statutory Functions Return 10.3.3.

Note: Non-kinship foster care includes placements provided by Independent providers.

Children in Northern Ireland	0 – 4 years old	5 – 11 years old	12 – 15 years old	16 years old and over
Residential Care	0%	2%	9%	18%
Non-kinship Foster Care	35%	30%	36%	25%
Kinship Foster Care	52%	57%	43%	34%
Placed with Parents	6%	8%	11%	13%
Other	6%	3%	2%	10%

The age of a child in care can have an influence on the suitability of placement. In all age groups the majority of children were placed in foster care, though we can see from Table 9 that this proportion decreased for the older age groups, and only 59% of those aged 16 and over were in a foster care placement. Furthermore, post-primary school aged children were more likely than their younger counterparts to find themselves in residential care, with 18% of those aged 16 and over in this placement. These figures are similar to those recorded in previous years.

²⁸ Description of placement types is included in Appendix B.

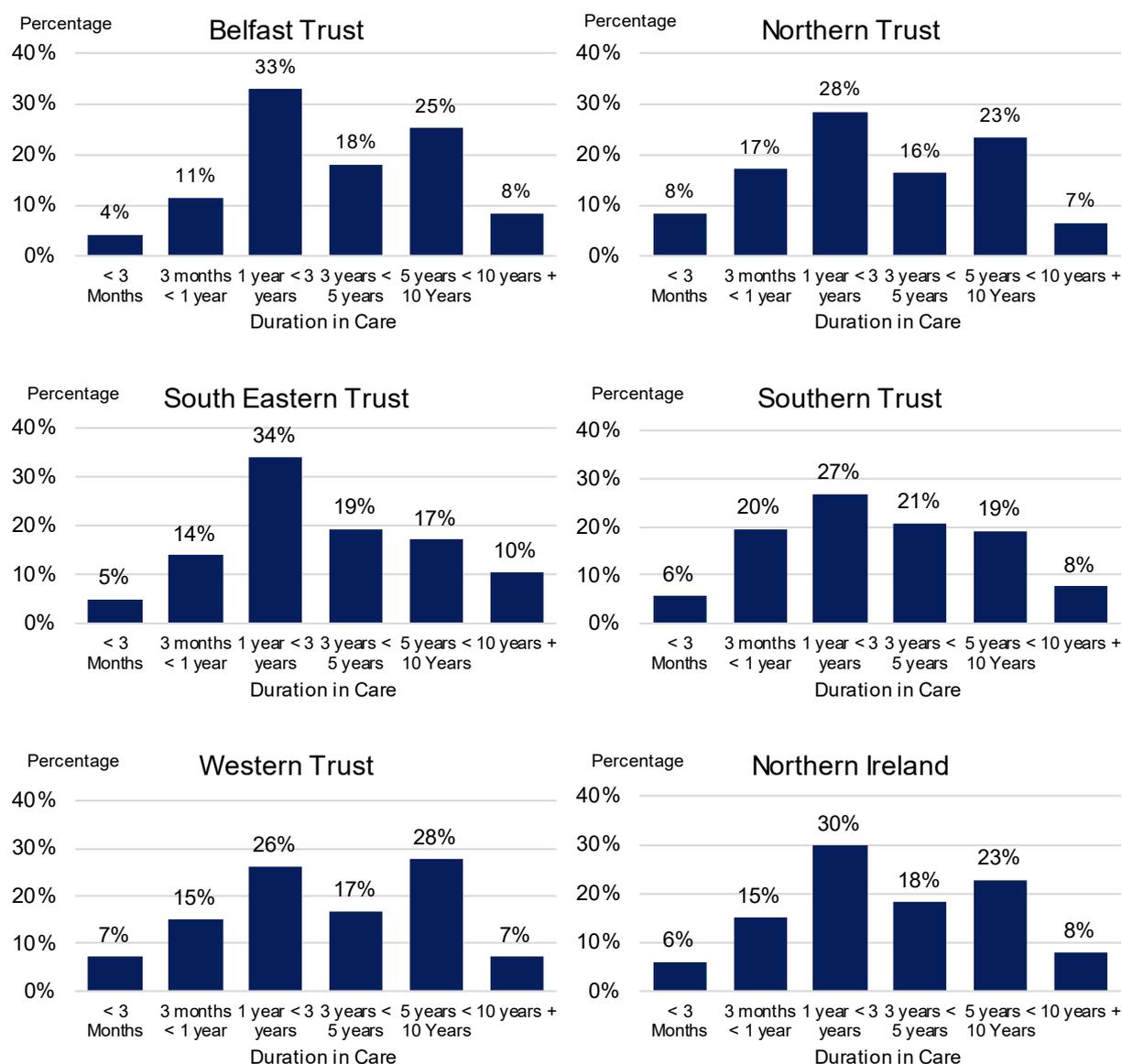
Duration in Care

Just over a fifth (21%) of looked after children at 31 March 2021 had come into care within the last year whereas close to a third (31%) had been in care for five years or longer. This has been the trend in the last number of years. Furthermore, there have been only minor differences in the duration in care between the HSC Trusts.

Age will naturally be closely linked with duration in care; for example a one year old child cannot have been in care for more than one year. Some 48% and 46% respectively of the 12 - 15 age group and the 16 and over age group had been in care for five years or longer.

Figure 20. Children in Care by duration in care and HSC Trust at 31 March 2021

Source: Delegated Statutory Functions Return 10.3.4.



Admissions to Care

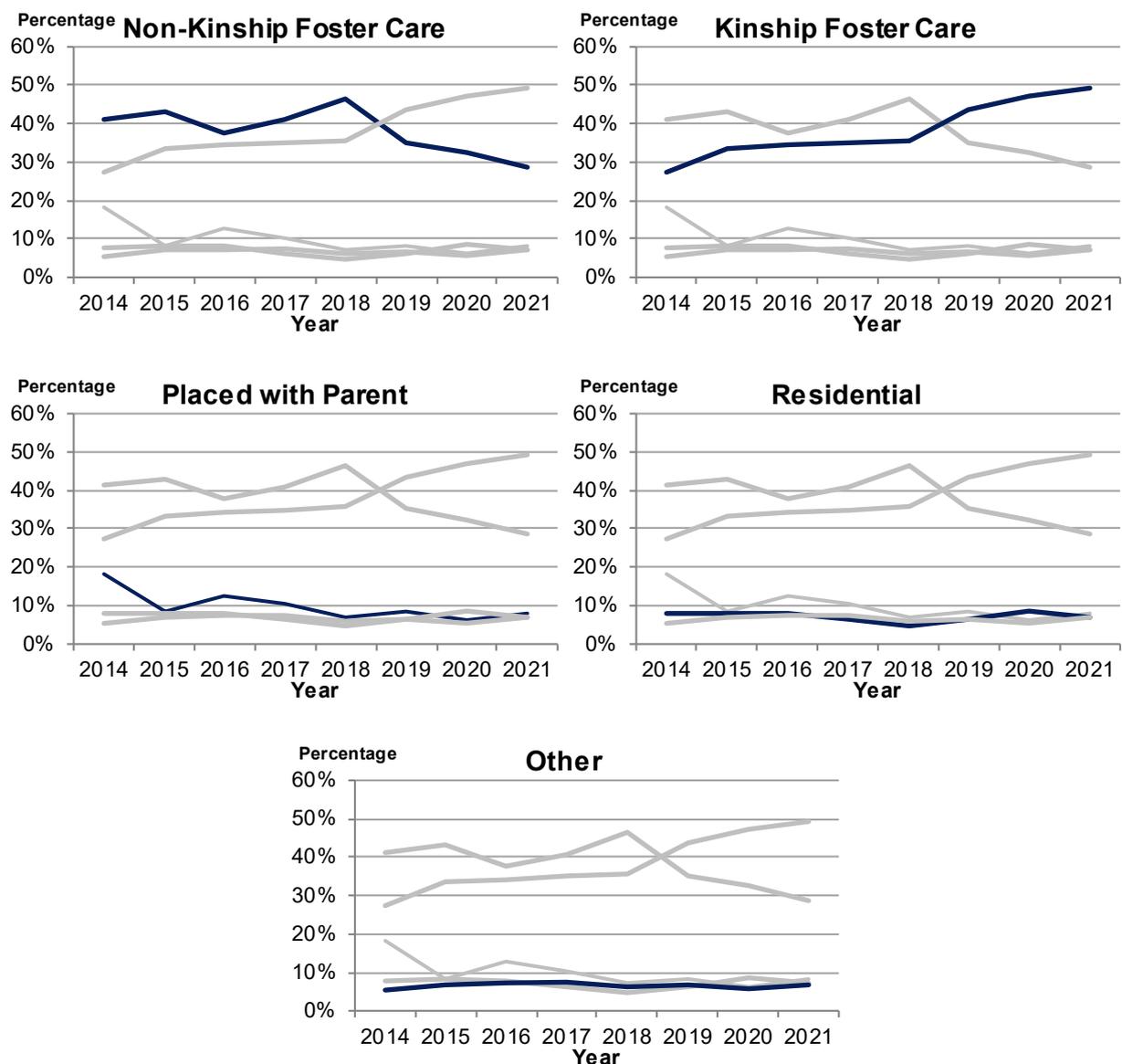
During 2020/21, 893 children were admitted to care in Northern Ireland; very similar to the year before (896). The Northern HSC Trust accounted for the largest proportion of admissions (23%), followed by the Belfast (22%), Southern and Western HSC Trusts (20%), with the smallest proportion of admissions in the South Eastern HSC Trust (15%).

The legal status for over three quarters (78%) of the children was Accommodated Article 21²⁹ at the time of admissions to care. This pattern was evident throughout Northern Ireland.

Figure 21. Admissions to care by placement during year ending 31 March (2014 – 2021)

Source: Delegated Statutory Functions Return 10.3.39.

Note: Non-kinship foster care includes placements provided by Independent providers.



²⁹ See Appendix B for description of legal statuses.

In recent years, the vast majority of children admitted to care have initially been placed in foster care. This is the third year in a row that more children were initially placed in kinship foster care than in non-kinship foster care.

There were some differences between the HSC Trusts in terms of the placement when admitted to care. In all HSC Trusts the majority of admissions were placed in foster care (kinship or non-kinship). Children and young people placed in residential care ranged from 2% in Northern HSC Trust to 12% in the South Eastern HSC Trust. Furthermore, 19% in Southern HSC Trust were placed with parent, whereas in all other HSC Trusts this proportion ranged from 2% - 9%. However, due to the low numbers involved when looking at the individual Trust breakdowns, caution must be taken when interpreting the figures.

Age can have an influence upon the placement of those admitted to care. Across each of the age groups, foster care accounted for the largest proportion of admissions. However, 88% of admissions of the younger children (under the age of 12) entered foster care, compared with only 36% of those aged 16 and over. Some 28% of those young people aged 16 or over who were admitted to care were placed in residential care.

Table 10. Admissions to care by placement and age during year ending 31 March 2021

Source: Delegated Statutory Functions Return 10.3.39.

Note: Non-kinship foster care includes placements provided by Independent providers.

Placement	0 – 4 years old	5 – 11 years old	12 – 15 years old	16 years old and over	All children admitted to care
Residential Care	0%	1%	16%	28%	7%
Non-kinship Foster Care	41%	25%	30%	12%	29%
Kinship Foster Care	48%	63%	39%	24%	49%
Placed with Parents	7%	9%	9%	3%	8%
Other	4%	2%	6%	33%	7%

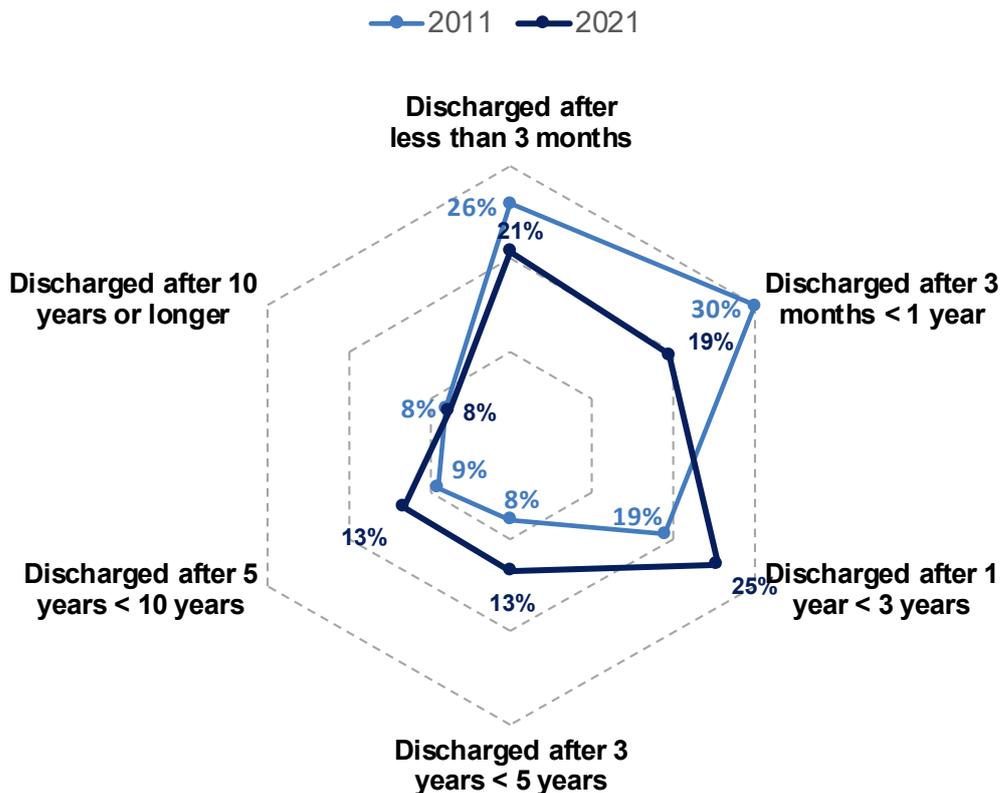
Discharges from Care

During the year ending 31 March 2021, there were 726 discharges from care in Northern Ireland, this was a 3% decrease on the previous year. The largest proportion of all discharges occurred in the Belfast HSC Trust (26% of all discharges), with the least occurring in the South Eastern HSC Trust (15%).

In general, there has been a trend of children staying longer in care before being discharged. In 2007/08, some 44% of children were discharged from care after less than three months of becoming looked after, compared with 21% in 2020/21. This decline has coincided with an increases in those discharged having spent longer time in care (see Figure 23 below for comparison of 2010/11 and 2020/21).

Figure 22. Discharges by duration in care during year ending 31 March 2011 and 2021

Source: Delegated Statutory Functions Return 10.3.41.

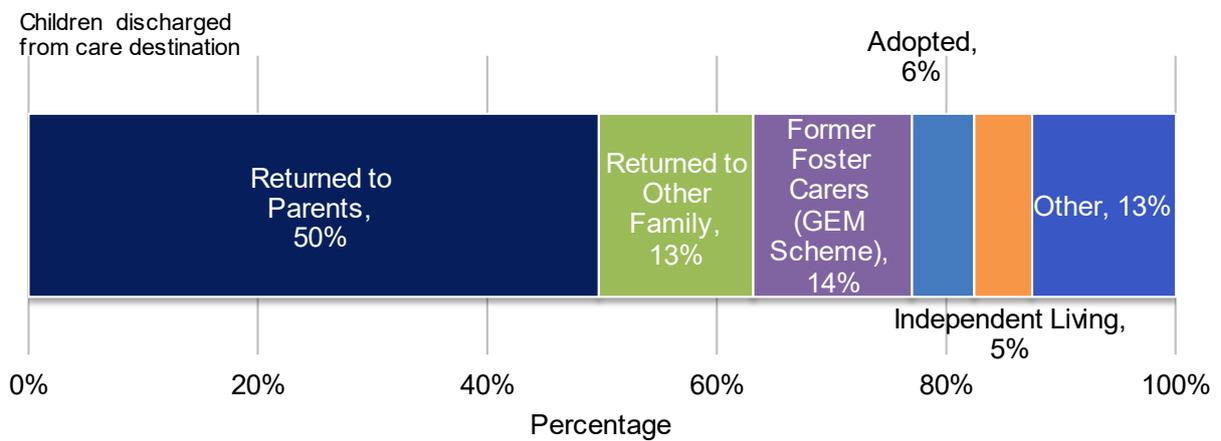


In 2020/21, 6% of discharges from care were due to adoption whereas half (50%) of children discharged returned to live with their parents, a further 13% went on to live with other family members and 5% to live independently. Some 14% were living with their former foster carers via the 'Going the Extra Mile (GEM) Scheme. The GEM Scheme allows those aged 18 – 21 to live with their former foster carers promoting continuity in the living arrangements in post care life. The scheme ensures that appropriate and agreed levels of financial and other supports are available to assist carers to continue to meet the care, accommodation and support needs of these young people.

Figure 23. Destination of children discharged from care during year ending 31 March 2021

Source: Delegated Statutory Functions Return 10.3.42.

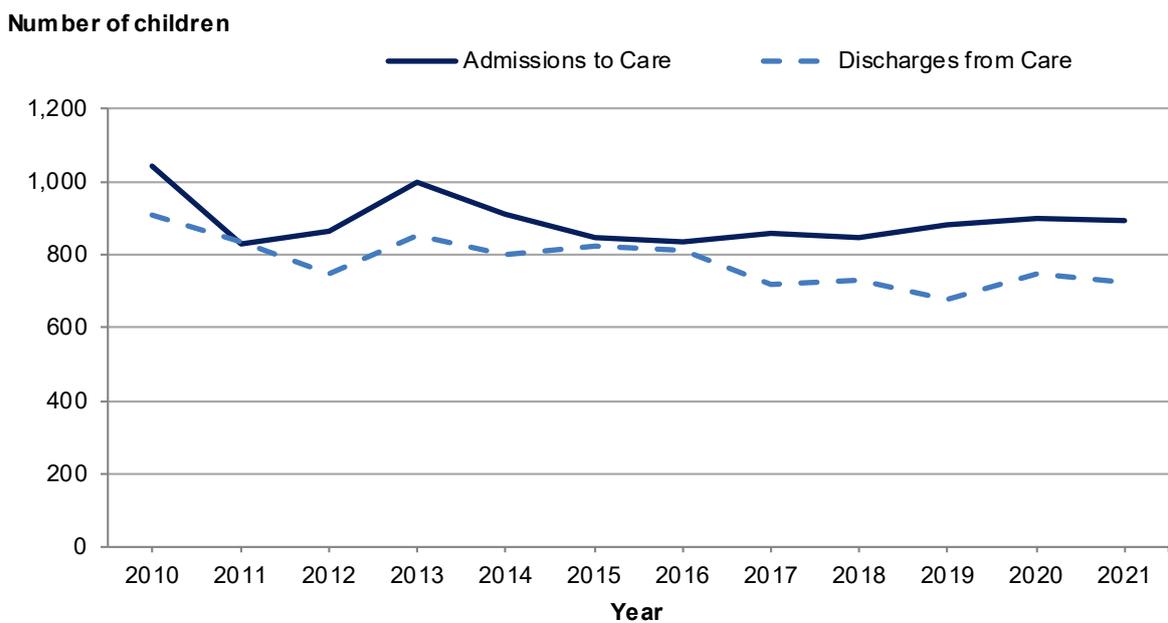
Note: Other Accommodation includes Bed & Breakfast, Hostels, Supported Board & Lodgings, Prison, Hospital etc.



Admittances to care has over the last years generally been greater than discharged from care, which would contribute to the rise in the number of looked after children during these years.

Figure 24. Admissions to and discharges from care during year ending 31 March (2010 – 2021)

Source: Delegated Statutory Functions Returns 10.3.40 & 10.3.41.



UK & Ireland Comparison of Children in Care Statistics³⁰

Definitions of what constitutes a child in care differs slightly across the different countries of the UK & Ireland. The main difference being that in Scotland children looked after at home under a compulsory supervision order are considered to be in the care of their local authority, this is not the case in the rest of the UK. The result of this is that simply comparing the rates of children in care leaves Scotland with much higher figures than the rest of the UK. The figure below therefore contains two trend lines for Scotland, one with all looked after children and one excluding those in care under a compulsory supervision order. Please note that as Scotland and England figures for year ending 2021 are not available, only figures up to 2020 will be compared.

Please see Figure 25 for details of the rate of children in care by 10,000 child population. The graphs show that the rate for all looked after children in Scotland is dramatically larger in comparison to the rest of the UK and Ireland. However, when excluding those looked after under a compulsory supervision order, Scotland had similar rates of looked after children as in Wales.

The rate of looked after children in Northern Ireland remained on a par with the rate in England and the Republic of Ireland until recently, when a small gap emerged between Northern Ireland and England and a larger gap to that of the Republic of Ireland rate.

³⁰ As figures for England and Scotland for year ending 2021 are not available, only figures up to 2020 are compared.

Figure 25. UK & Ireland comparison of rate of Children in Care per 10,000 children (2004 – 2020)

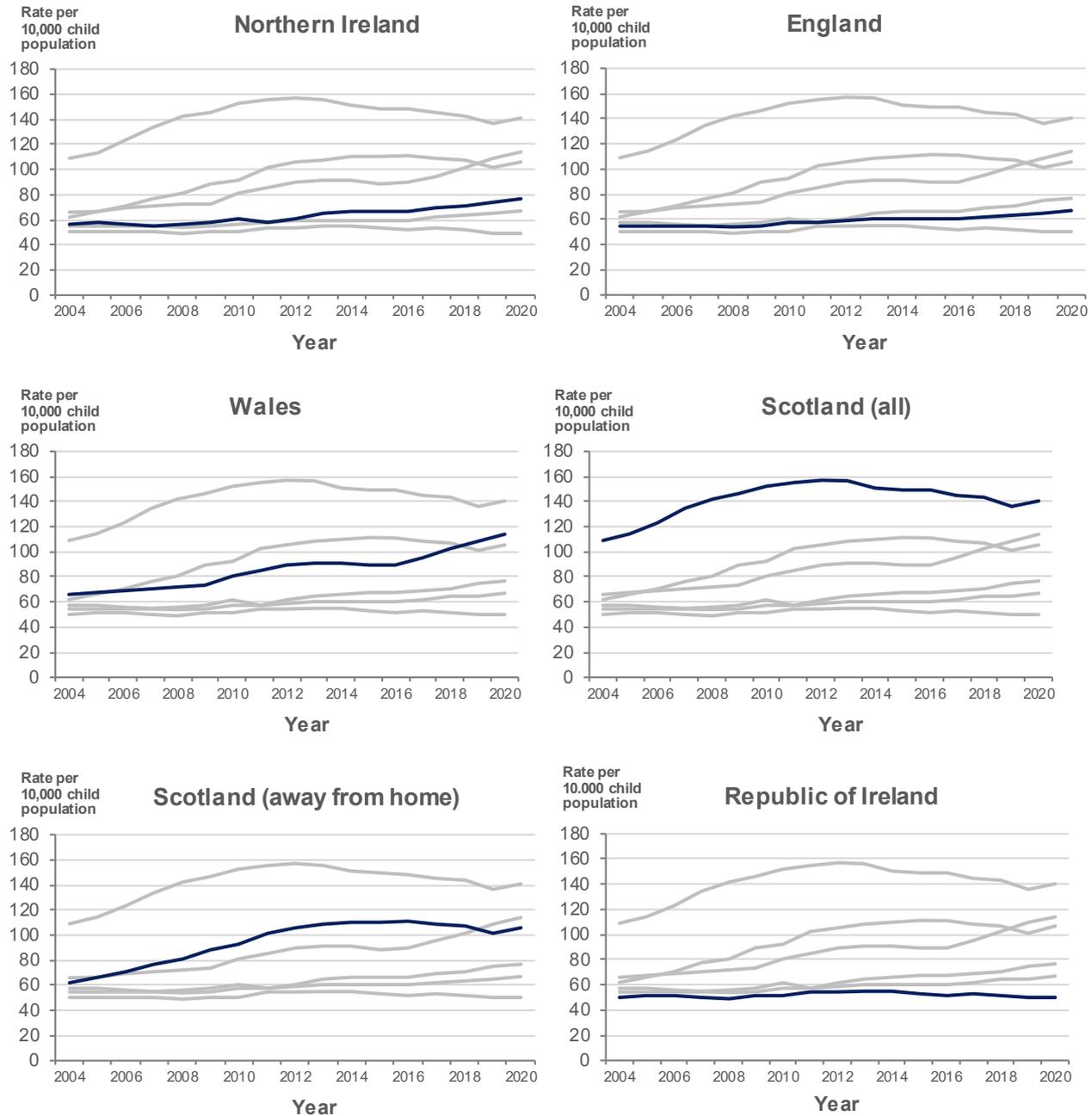
Sources:

England – [‘Children Looked After in England including Adoption’](#).

Wales – [StatsWales](#).

Scotland – [‘Children’s Social Work Statistics’](#). Note: Scotland publishes figures for 31 July.

Republic of Ireland – [Tusla Service Performance and activity Report](#).



Short Breaks

Short breaks refer to either a series of short-term pre-planned or ad-hoc placements where a child or young person moves temporarily from their parents/carers in order to allow the child and/or carer a period of respite. During a short break, the child becomes a looked after child by virtue of the short break arrangement. A child taken into care for a short break is however not included in official looked after children figures that have been presented in the previous sections.

During the year ending 31 March 2021 there were 2,813 episodes³¹ of short breaks in Northern Ireland³². This was substantially lower than in 2019/20, when 6,304 short break episodes took place. It is assumed that this reduction was influenced by Covid-19 restrictions and regulations.

The largest proportion of short break episodes that took place during 2020/21 were in the Northern HSC Trust (51%), 24% in the Southern HSC Trust, 11% in the South Eastern HSC Trust, 10% in the Belfast HSC Trust, and 3% in the Western HSC Trust.

³¹ An episode is a period of involvement with Social Services.

³² Source: Delegated Statutory Functions Return 10.3.5.

Section Four: Children's Residential Homes

Statutory and Independent Residential Homes

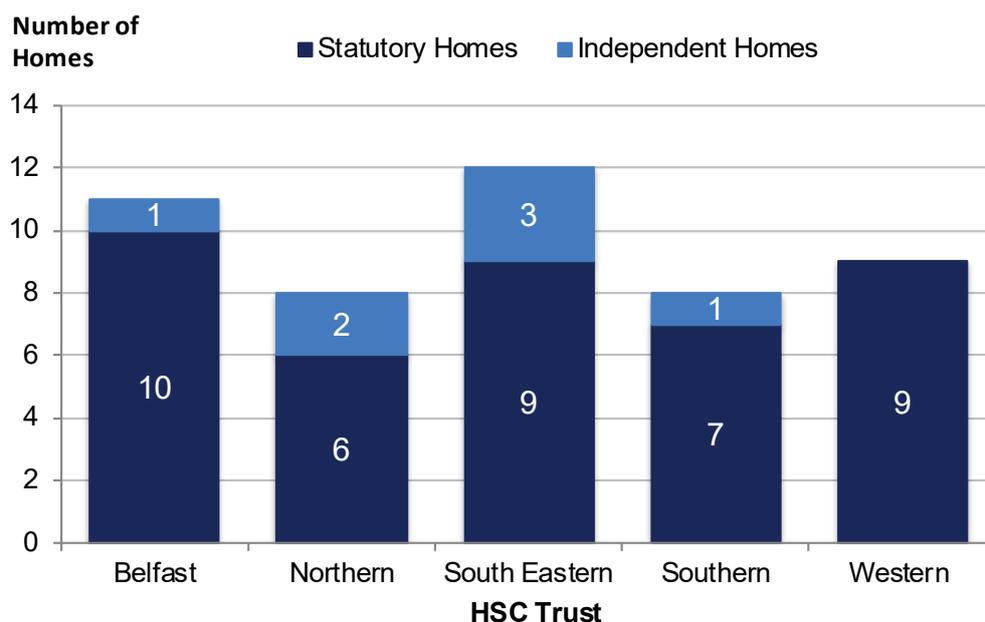
At 30 June 2021, there were 48 Children's Residential Homes in Northern Ireland, 41 homes were statutory and seven were independent. Statutory homes provided 260 places at an average of six places per home; independent homes provided 26 places at an average of four per home.

The South Eastern HSC Trust had the highest number of Children's Residential Homes (12) closely followed by Belfast HSC Trust (11). The Western HSC Trust had nine residential homes, and both the Northern and Southern HSC Trusts had eight homes.

The Western HSC Trust did not have any independent children's homes. The South Eastern HSC Trust had the highest average number of places per statutory home at eight, while the Southern HSC Trust had the lowest average at five.

Figure 26. Number of Children's Homes by HSC Trust at 30 June 2021

Source: Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority.



Section Five: Children's Day Care

Key Findings

- At 31 March 2021 there were 3,809 individuals/facilities registered as day care provision for children aged 12 and under in Northern Ireland. This was a 4% decrease on the previous year;
- Similar to the previous year, childminders made up the largest number of day care providers followed by playgroups;
- At 31 March 2021 there were 59,618 registered places for day care in Northern Ireland representing a decrease of 3% on the previous year.

Children's Day Care Provision in Northern Ireland

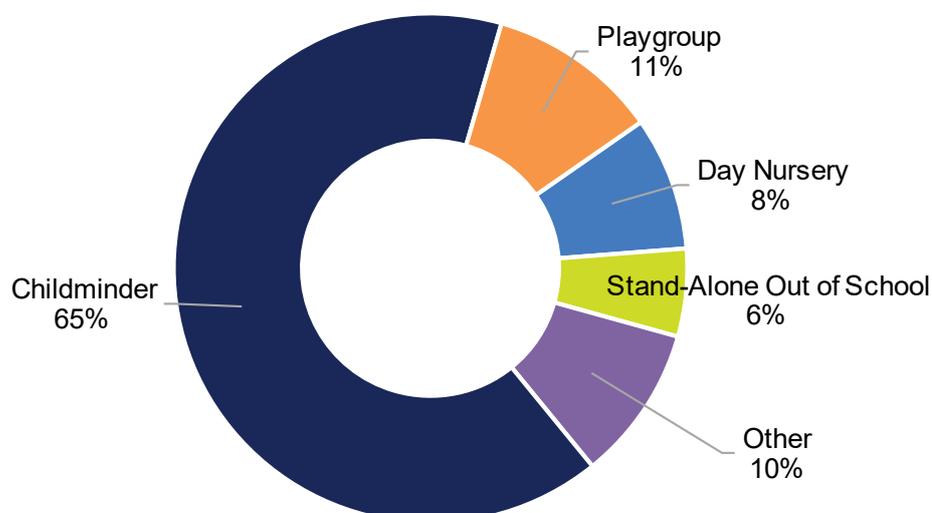
At 31 March 2021, 3,809 people or facilities were registered for the provision of day care for children under the age of 12 with HSC Trusts in Northern Ireland, providing 59,618 places³³. In terms of those providing day care this was a decrease of 4% on the previous year, with a 3% decrease in the number of registered places.

Figure 27. Children's day care provision by provider at 31 March 2021

Source: Delegated Statutory Functions Return 10.7.1, 31 March 2021.

Note: Some 229 Day Nurseries are also registered as Out of School Clubs. A single registration only is required for a Day Nursery which also provides out of school services.

Note: 'Other' include crèches, approved home childcares, summer schemes and two year old programmes.



³³ Note that 'Approved home childcares' do not have a number of places/children.

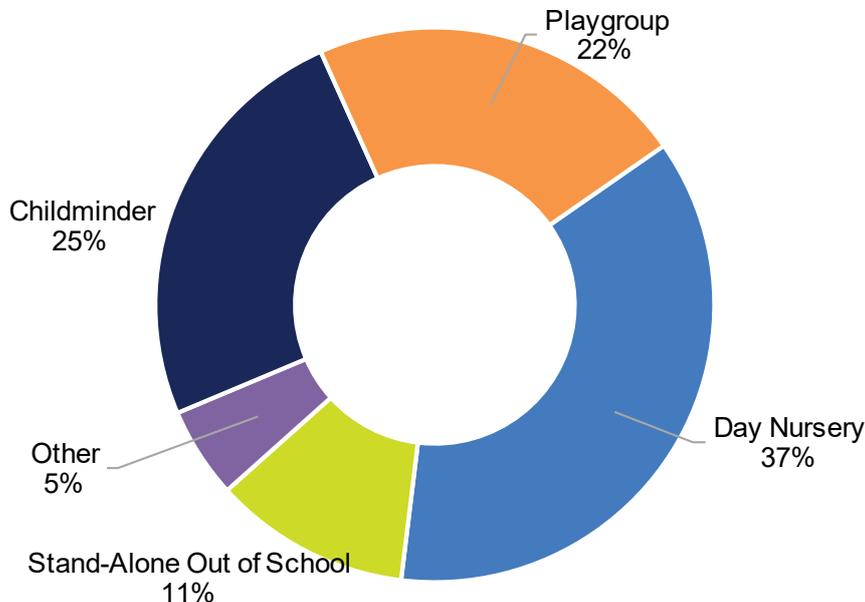
Figure 28. Children’s day care provision by number of places at 31 March 2021

Source: Delegated Statutory Functions Return 10.7.1, 31 March 2021.

Note: Day Nursery proportion includes Out of School places provided by Day Nurseries that are also registered as Out of School Clubs.

Note: ‘Other’ include crèches, summer schemes and two year old programmes.

Note: ‘Approved home childcares’ do not include a number of places/children and is therefore excluded from this Figure.



Day care provision for children can be divided into five main categories; child-minders, playgroups, day nurseries, out of school clubs and other organisations.

A child-minder is someone who looks after children under the age of five or school age children outside school hours and in the holidays. They use domestic premises, usually their own home. This is a service often offered year round, with fees and conditions negotiated between the child-minder and parents. At 31 March 2021, there were 2,488 child-minders providing 14,710 day care places. This equated to almost two-thirds of those providing day care services (65%) and a quarter of the places provided (25%) with an average of six child places per child-minder.

Playgroups provide sessions (lasting no more than four hours) of care for children aged between three and five years old, offering learning experiences through structured play in groups. Most of these groups are run on a self-help basis by groups of parents with some paid staff; they can also be run by Trusts or voluntary organisations such as the NSPCC.

Playgroups accounted for just over a tenth (11%) of all day care providers and just over a fifth of the total number of places available (22%). In total there were 412 playgroups providing 13,101 places, an average of 32 places per playgroup.

Day nurseries provide care for children less than five years old for the length of the working day. Children can attend on either a full-time or part-time basis depending on needs. Nurseries may be run by voluntary organisations, private companies, community groups, or by

employers for their workforce. There were 323 day nurseries in Northern Ireland at 31 March 2021 registered with HSC Trusts, offering 15,664 places. This meant an average of 49 places per nursery.

Out of School Clubs offer care for school age children from the end of the school day until a parent can collect the child. They can be run by a Trust, voluntary organisations or community groups. Some 6% of day care provision was made up of 212 stand-alone Out of School Clubs, providing 6,804 places. A further 6,187 out of school places were provided by Day Nurseries³⁴.

Other day care providers³⁵ made up the least number of places, 374 providers and 3,152 places.

HSC Trust Sponsored Places in Day Care

At 31 March 2021, HSC Trusts in Northern Ireland were sponsoring 564 places in day care for children. This was an increase of 40% on the previous year. The Belfast HSC Trust accounted for almost half of all sponsored places in day care (49%). Places in day nurseries accounted for the largest proportion of sponsored places (64%) followed by childminders (17%) and out of hours school clubs (15%).

³⁴ A single registration only is required for a Day Nursery which also provides out of school services.

³⁵ Other day care providers include 'Approved Home Childcarers'. Home childcarers enable parents to have their children cared for in their own home. They are professional childcarers, offering children safe, good quality care and providing them with play and learning opportunities that contribute to their development.

Appendix A - Technical Notes

A National Statistics Publication

The United Kingdom Statistics Authority (UKSA) has designated these statistics as National Statistics, in accordance with the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 and signifying compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics.

Designation can be broadly interpreted to mean that the statistics:

- meet identified user needs;
- are well explained and easily accessible;
- are produced according to sound methods; and
- are managed impartially and objectively in the public interest.

Once statistics have been designated as National Statistics it is a statutory requirement that the code of practice shall continue to be observed.

All assessment reports can be found on the UKSA [website](#). These statistics were first designated as National Statistics in October 2009 following a full [assessment](#) against the [Code of Practice](#).

If you have any comments on this publication please contact: [Community Information Branch](#).

Children's Social Care Statistics for Northern Ireland

'Children's Social Care Statistics for Northern Ireland', first published in 2012, provides a comprehensive series of data on the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995, replacing 'Children Order Statistical Tables for Northern Ireland' together with its companion publication the 'Children Order Statistical Trends for Northern Ireland,' which were first published in 2002 and 2005 respectively. Prior to this, information was published in 'Key Indicators of Personal Social Services for Northern Ireland'. These publications can be found on the Department of Health's [website](#).

Data Collection

The information presented in this bulletin derives from Children Order statistical returns and Health and Social Care Board Delegated Statutory Functions (DSF) returns provided by each of the five Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts in Northern Ireland to the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB). The HSCB then supply this data to Community Information Branch (CIB) in the Department of Health (DoH).

The statistical returns are aggregated counts relating to child protection, children in need, looked after children and day care provision for children. Figures relate to 31 March 2020 and for the year ending 31 March 2020, and breakdowns are available by age, gender and other key variables, such as length of time in care and duration on the Child Protection Register.

Statement of Administrative Sources

Children Order and DSF returns are derived from Trust administrative systems used to support HSC Trusts in delivering social care services to children. A detailed 'Statement of Administrative Sources' is available on the Department's [website](#).

Data Quality

To ensure the statistical returns are accurate, HSC Trusts have six weeks to update the main electronic administrative system (SOSCARE or PARIS) with relevant information before submitting to HSCB. When returns are received by Community Information Branch, checks are carried out to verify that information is consistent both within and across returns. Trend analyses are used to monitor annual variations and emerging trends. Queries arising from validation checks are presented to HSCB for clarification and if required returns may be amended and/or re-submitted.

Counts of children in need for some Trusts exclude children whose details are not recorded on the electronic administrative system.

Note: due to COVID-19 pressures on HSC Trusts, the 2019/20 returns were not requested until three months into the next financial year.

A detailed quality report for children's community statistics is available on the Department's [website](#).

Rounding Conventions

Percentages have been rounded to whole numbers and as a consequence some percentages may not sum to 100. A 0% may reflect rounding down of values under 0.5%

Disclosure Conventions

To prevent disclosure of the identity of individual children it has been necessary to suppress figures whenever it would be possible to calculate the value of a cell with a low count by means of simple arithmetic. The CIB policy statement on disclosure and confidentiality is available on the Department's [website](#).

Revisions Policy

These data are revised by exception. If this occurs the circumstances of the revision are reported on our website and the dates figures are revised are noted both on the website and within the publication. The full revisions policy for these and other community statistics is published on the Department's [website](#).

Main Uses of Data

Data from the 'Children's Social Care Statistics' publication meets the information need of a wide range of internal and external users. Within DoH figures from the publication are used by policy officials to monitor the volume of activity, Inter Agency working and reasons for referrals and to compare characteristics of children in need, looked after children and children on the child protection register, monitor any increase in the children in need population and monitor the impact of policy and to report on achievement against targets.

Related Publications

Statistics on similar themes to those detailed within this bulletin, published by other countries in the United Kingdom and Ireland are outlined below.

England

[Children looked after in England including adoption](#)

[Characteristics of children in need](#)

[Childcare and early years providers survey](#)

Wales

<https://stats.wales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Health-and-Social-Care/Social-Services/Childrens-Services>

Scotland

[Children's Social Work Statistics](#)

Republic of Ireland

[TUSLA Child and Family Agency – Performance and Activity Reports](#)

Next Release

The next release of these statistics, for the year ending 31 March 2022, is scheduled for October 2022. The publication schedule for Health and Social Care statistics in Northern Ireland will be available from the DoH [website](#).

Appendix B – Data Definitions

Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995

The Children (Northern Ireland) Order was made on 15 March 1995. The Order deals with the care, upbringing and protection of children, including disabled children. It reforms, consolidates and harmonises most of the public and private law relating to children in a single coherent statutory framework along the lines of the Children Act 1989 in England and Wales.

Child

Under the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995, a child is defined as a person under the age of 18.

Children in Need Referral

A referral of a child to Social Services, regardless of the source of referral. A child may be referred several times over the course of a year.

Religion

Roman Catholic: Refers to anyone of the Roman Catholic faith.

Presbyterian: Refers to all stating their denomination to be Presbyterian. Include here also Church of Scotland but exclude all other groupings with 'Presbyterian' in their title, e.g. Free Presbyterian, Non-subscribing Presbyterian, etc. These groups are recorded under 'Other denominations'.

Church of Ireland: Refers to all stating their denomination to be Church of Ireland.

Methodist: Refers to all stating their denomination to be Methodist.

Other Denominations: Refers to all other Christian and non-Christian denominations and faiths.

None: 'None' refers to those with no religious persuasion.

Refused/Unknown: Refers to those who refuse to give details of their religious affiliation or whose religious affiliation cannot be established.

Ethnic Group

White: 'White' refers to all white or olive skinned people from Europe, North Africa, Middle East, the Americas and Australasia.

Chinese: 'Chinese' refers to all those belonging to the Chinese ethnic group, originating from mainland China, Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan and Malaysia.

Irish Traveller: 'Traveller' refers to persons sometimes known as gypsies or itinerants but excluding New Age Travellers. The term applies to those who travel from place to place, are temporarily based on a traveller site or who are settled in permanent accommodation on a traveller site.

Indian: 'Indian' refers to those from the India.

Pakistani: 'Pakistani' refers to those from Pakistan.

Bangladeshi: 'Bangladeshi' refers to those from Bangladesh.

Black Caribbean: 'Black Caribbean' refers to those of Afro-Caribbean origin.

Black African: 'Black African' refers to Black Africans.

Black Other: 'Black Other' refers to those of other origin including African Americans.

Mixed Ethnic Group: 'Mixed Ethnic Group' refers to those with mixed ethnicity.

Other Ethnic Group: 'Other' refers to those other ethnic groups. Included here are those from Malaysia (other than Chinese), Vietnam, Japan, etc.

Roma Traveller: 'Roma Traveller' refers to persons sometime know as gypsies or itinerants. The term 'Roma' is generally acceptable in collectively describing Travellers of European origin. Many have now settled into housing, however a Romani language is usually spoken in the home.

Not stated: Refers to those who refuse to give details of their ethnic group or whose ethnic group cannot be established.

Child Protection Register

A register must be maintained by each Trust listing every child in the Trust area who has been abused or who is considered to be at risk of abuse, and who is currently the subject of a child protection plan.

Child Protection Registration

Registration is the placement of a child on to the Child Protection Register. Where a child has moved on or off the Register several times during the year each registration is recorded.

Child Protection Deregistration

Deregistration is the removal of a child from the Child Protection Register. Where a child has moved on or off the Register several times during the year each deregistration is recorded.

Child Protection Re-registration

Re-registration is the placement on to the Child Protection Register of a child who has already been on the register, irrespective of the date of their first registration on the Register.

Child Protection Referral

Child protection referrals are those referrals for which the initial assessment indicates that there may be child protection issues. The threshold for action should be the allegation or suspicion of child abuse. However the balance needs to be struck between taking action designed to protect the child from abuse while at the same time avoiding unnecessary intervention. Except in emergency situations or urgent cases when immediate protective action is required, referrals will require preliminary discussion with other professionals from the child protection agencies and with the referrer. In some cases it will be necessary to seek specialist opinion.

In some cases action other than a formal investigation will be decided upon following the consultation process. This might include the provision of support for the family. Such a decision

should be discussed and agreed with a social worker in consultation with the team leader or supervisor; and recorded and communicated to senior management.

The definition is not taken to mean all referrals, as some may require action such as advice or family support rather than child protection procedures.

Child Protection Investigation

The purpose of an investigation is to establish whether a Trust should make an application for a court order or exercise any of its other powers, for example the provision of services under Part IV of the Children Order.

Protocol Not Appropriate: this option used when a Principal Social Worker or above makes the decision that the threshold for a case conference has been met. Article 66 of the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995, places a duty on the Health and Social Care Trusts to investigate whether a child is suffering or likely to suffer 'significant harm'. Child abuse, whether sexual, physical, emotional or neglect, may result in significant harm and Social Services have a duty to investigate. There may be cases of poor parenting and situations that may have an innocent explanations which need not be criminalised by involving Police from the outset.

Category of Abuse for Child Protection Registration

The category of abuse under which a child is registered will have been decided upon at the child protection conference, when agreement was reached that registration was necessary. If a child suffers multiple abuses, this should be recorded against the main category of abuse. The abuse may be potential, suspected or confirmed, although the terms 'actual' or 'likely' occur. Potential and suspected equate with 'likely' and confirmed with 'actual'. The categories are:

1. Neglect, Physical Abuse and Sexual Abuse

2. Main category - neglect
3. Main category - physical abuse
4. Main category - sexual abuse

5. Neglect and Physical Abuse

6. Main category - neglect
7. Main category - physical abuse

8. Neglect and Sexual Abuse

9. Main category – neglect
10. Main category - sexual abuse

11. Physical and Sexual Abuse

12. Main category - physical abuse
13. Main category - sexual abuse

14. Neglect (only)

15. Physical Abuse (only)

16. Sexual Abuse (only)

17. Emotional Abuse (only)

Neglect: The actual or likely persistent or severe neglect of a child, or the failure to protect a child from exposure to any kind of danger, including cold or starvation, or persistent failure to

carry out important aspects of care, resulting in significant impairment of the child's health or development, including non-organic failure to thrive.

Physical Abuse: Actual or likely deliberate physical injury to a child, or wilful or neglectful failure to prevent physical injury or suffering to a child including deliberate poisoning, suffocation or Munchausen syndrome by proxy.

Sexual Abuse: Actual or likely sexual exploitation of a child or adolescent. The child may be dependent and/or developmentally immature.

Emotional Abuse: Actual or likely persistent or severe emotional ill-treatment or rejection resulting in severe adverse effects on the emotional, physical and/or behavioural development of a child. All abuse involves some emotional ill-treatment. This category should be used where it is the main or only form of abuse.

Legal Status

The legal framework for compulsory intervention in the care and upbringing of children. If more than one legal status is indicated or in force for the child at 31 March, the latest one only is recorded.

Emergency Protection Order (Article 63 & 64): An Emergency Protection Order (EPO) is intended for use in urgent cases to protect a child in the short-term. Almost anyone with a concern can apply for an EPO, although in most circumstances a Trust will seek one. Where the applicant is a Trust or the NSPCC they must show that in the course of fulfilling their duty to investigate they are being unreasonably frustrated in gaining access to the child. Anyone else applying for an EPO they must show that the child is likely to suffer significant harm unless removed to, or allowed to remain, in a safe place.

An EPO last for eight days but can be extended on one occasion for a further seven days. An application to discharge the order cannot be made within the first 72 hours giving a Trust sometime to decide what actions to take in respect of the child. The person to whom the order is addressed also gains parental responsibility for the child for the duration of the order.

Accommodated (Article 21): Children with this legal status have been accommodated by a HSC Trust if there is no one who has parental responsibility for them, they have been lost or abandoned or of the person who has been caring for them has been prevented, for whatever reason, from providing them with suitable accommodation or care. Children are often accommodated with the permission of their parents.

Care Order (Article 50 or 59): A Care Order accords the HSC Trust parental responsibility and allows for the child to be removed from the parental home. This does not extinguish the parental responsibility of the child's parents but means that they cannot exercise this responsibility while the Care Order is in place. In order for a Court to make a Care Order it must be satisfied that the child is suffering or is likely to suffer significant harm and that the harm or likelihood of harm is attributable to the care given to the child, or likely to be given to the child, not being what it would be reasonable to expect a parent to give or the child being beyond parental control.

Interim Care Orders (Article 57): An Interim Care Order is put in place following an adjournment of proceedings for a Care Order or in any family proceedings in which a Court orders a Trust to

investigate the circumstances of a child. An Interim Care Order can be in place for up to eight weeks initially and for a further four weeks upon renewal and subsequent occasions that Court deems an Interim Order necessary.

Supervision Order: This order requires the Trust to advise, assist and befriend the supervised child and can only be granted if the same threshold conditions that apply for Care Orders are met. This Order does not give the Trust parental responsibility. It does allow a social worker to issue directions about the child's upbringing including place of residence and involvement in certain programmes. Schedule 3 of the Children Order sets out the full range of matters that may be addressed in a Supervision Order.

Interim Supervision Orders (Article 57): An Interim Supervision can be put in place following an adjournment of proceedings for a Supervision Order or in any family proceedings in which a question arises with respect to the welfare of any child, it appears to the court that it may be appropriate for a supervision order to be made with respect to him, the court may direct the appropriate authority to undertake an investigation of the child's circumstances.

Looked After Child / Child in Care

A child is looked after by an Authority if he or she is in their care or if he or she is provided with accommodation for a continuous period of more than 24 hours by the authority in the exercise of its Social Services function.

Placements

Residential Care: Residential care refers to care which takes place in statutory, voluntary or private children's homes.

Non-kinship Foster Care: Foster care includes children fostered with persons who are not related to the child, including placements provided by Independent Providers.

Kinship Foster Care: Kinship Foster care includes children fostered with a relative, friend or other person with a prior connection to the child. A 'connected person' means a relative friend or other person connected with the child. This may be someone who knows the child in a more professional capacity such as a childminder, a teacher or a youth worker although these are not exclusive categories.

Placed with parent: This refers to children for whom a Care Order exists and who are placed with their parents, a person who is not a parent but who has parental responsibility for the child or where a child is in care and there was a Residence Order in force with respect to him/her immediately before the Care Order was made, a person in whose favour the Residence Order was made.

Independent living: Independent living refers to any young person being looked after by an authority, who moves from his/her placement to live independently within the community before he/she is 18 years of age. Do not count changes of placement or change of legal status within care as a re-admission, or children being looked after for respite care.

Short Breaks

This term refers to either a series of short-term pre-planned or ad hoc placements, where a child moves temporarily from their carer/parents in order to allow the child and/or the carer a period of respite.

Day Nursery Services

Day nurseries look after children under five years old for the length of the adult working day. They can be run by voluntary organisations, private companies, community groups or employers in the public or private sectors for their workforce. Children will attend part-time or full-time depending on their needs.

Childminders

Childminders look after children aged under five years and school aged children outside of school hours and in the holidays in domestic premises, usually the home of the childminder. This is a service offered all year round for the full adult working day. Parents and childminders negotiate the terms and conditions.

Playgroups

Playgroups provide session care for children between three and five years of age, in some exceptional cases they may accept younger children. They aim to provide learning experiences through structured play. Most playgroups are run on self-help basis by groups of parents with some paid staff. Some of these groups will be run by HSC Trusts or voluntary organisations such as the NSPCC. Some of these groups may be referred to as opportunity groups which cater for children with special needs. Playgroup sessions last no longer than four hours.

Out of School Clubs

These clubs care for school age children from the end of the school day until the parent can collect their child. Some clubs may also care for children before school. These clubs are not open access. Children will be escorted to the club by a responsible person and may not leave until they have been collected by a parent or person with parental responsibility. These clubs may be run by Trusts, voluntary organisations, community groups or privately.

Home Childcarers

Other day care providers include 'Approved Home Childcarers'. Home childcarers enable parents to have their children cared for in their own home. They are professional childcarers, offering children safe, good quality care and providing them with play and learning opportunities that contribute to their development.

Additional Information

Further information on Children's Social Care Statistics for Northern Ireland is available from:

Community Information Branch

Department of Health

Annexe 2, Castle Buildings

Stormont, BT4 3SQ, Northern Ireland

(028) 9052 2580

Email: cib@health-ni.gov.uk

This and other statistical bulletins published by Community Information Branch are available to download from the DoH internet at:

[Department of Health Statistics and Research Web Link](#)