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Reporting year 2025

Children in need

This is the latest release



Published 30 October 2025

Next update October 2026

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Releases in this series

This annual release contains statistics on children in need in England and referrals to and assessments completed by children's social care services. Each reporting year covers the year ending 31 March.

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Methodologies

[Children in need](#)

Children in need are a legally defined group of children (under the [Children Act 1989 \(opens in new tab\)](#)), assessed as needing help and protection as a result of risks to their development or health. This group includes: those on child in need plans, those on child protection plans, children looked after by local authorities, care leavers and disabled children. Children in need also include children awaiting a referral to be considered, an assessment to start, or, for an assessment which has started, the assessment to be completed. Children in need also include young people aged 18 or over who continue to receive support from children's services, and unborn children.

Comparisons within this release have been made between 2025 and a year earlier. In addition, to help assess any potential longer-term impacts of COVID-19 on children's social care services, comparisons have also been made between the latest year and 2020, which (mostly) pre-dates the COVID-19 pandemic in England.

All 153 local authorities provided a return for the 2025 collection.

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Headline facts and figures - 2025

Summary

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Headline Children in Need figures, 2013 to 2025

	Children in need (as at 31 March)	Children in need per 10,000 children (as at 31 March)	Child protection plans (as at 31 March)	Child protection plans per 10,000 children (as at 31 March)	Referrals (year to 31 March)	Completed assessments (year to 31 March)
2013	378,030	331.5	43,190	37.9	593,470	x
2014	395,480	344.7	48,300	42.1	657,780	u
2015	390,130	338.2	49,690	43.1	635,620	550,810
2016	393,910	339.8	50,310	43.4	621,470	571,640
2017	389,040	333.3	51,080	43.8	646,120	606,910
2018	404,710	345.4	53,790	45.9	655,630	631,090
2019	399,510	339.8	52,260	44.5	650,930	644,730
2020	389,260	330.1	51,510	43.7	642,980	665,660
2021	388,490	329.6	50,010	42.4	597,760	625,960
2022	404,310	343.7	50,920	43.3	650,270	645,070
2023	403,090	338.7	50,780	42.7	640,430	655,540
2024	399,460	331.2	49,900	41.4	621,880	643,170
2025	402,400	330.3	49,420	40.6	632,830	648,830

[Data symbols](#) ?

Footnotes

1. Data for the years ending 31 March 2021 and 2022 is not available for Hackney local authority, therefore 2020 data for Hackney has been included in the 2021 and 2022 national totals and regional totals. Data for the year ending 31 March 2024 is not available for Hampshire local authority, therefore 2023 data for Hampshire has been included in the 2024 national and regional totals. Refer to the methodology page for more information.

Source: Children in need census

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Children in need

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There were over 400,000 children in need in 2025 (as at 31 March), equivalent to around 1 in every 30 children. The number of children in need increased in 2025, but the associated rate fell for the third consecutive year. Both the latest number and rate in 2025 were higher compared with 2020.

Whilst the number has fluctuated over the years, the rate declined annually, except in 2022 when it rose following COVID-19 restrictions on school attendance being lifted (see referrals section for more information).

Number and rate (per 10,000 children) of children in need at 31 March, 2020 to 2025

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Number	389,260	388,490	404,310	403,090	399,460	402,400
Annual change	-10,250	-770	15,820	-1,220	-3,630	2,940
Annual percentage change	-2.6	-0.2	4.1	-0.3	-0.9	0.7
Rate	330.1	329.6	343.7	338.7	331.2	330.3
Annual change	-9.7	-0.5	14.1	-5	-7.5	-0.9

Episodes of need in the year ending 31 March

An episode of need begins when a child is referred to children’s social care services and is assessed as being in need of children’s social care services. An episode of need ends when the case is closed and the child is no longer deemed to be in need of children’s social care services. Episodes of need exclude referrals which require no further action or where a child is subsequently assessed as not in need. However, episodes of need do include children awaiting a referral to be considered, an assessment to start, or, for an assessment which has started, the assessment to be completed. A child can have more than one episode during the year but episodes should not overlap.

The number of episodes starting in 2025 increased by 2,200 episodes or 0.6% compared to the previous year. Conversely, the number of episodes ending decreased by 3,000 episodes or 0.8%. In 2021, the number of episodes of need starting and ending fell to the lowest point in the series (which started in 2013), likely attributable to COVID-19.

Throughout the series, the number of episodes starting has been greater than the number of episodes ending. It should be noted that a child can have more than one episode during the year.

Chart

Table

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Number of episodes of need starting and ending in the year to 31 March, 2013 to 2025

	Number	
	Children in Need	
	Episodes of need starting in the year	Episodes of need ending in the year
2013	394,940	348,930
2014	425,710	373,100
2015	403,300	364,330
2016	401,480	353,590
2017	400,110	353,860
2018	406,770	349,130
2019	408,880	362,830
2020	408,310	371,070
2021	380,020	339,950
2022	413,320	359,830
2023	403,630	362,960
2024	394,660	356,690
2025	396,870	353,720

[Data symbols](#) 

Footnotes

1. Data for the years ending 31 March 2021 and 2022 is not available for Hackney local authority, therefore 2020 data for Hackney has been included in the 2021 and 2022 national totals and regional totals. Data for the year ending 31 March 2024 is not available for

Hampshire local authority, therefore 2023 data for Hampshire has been included in the 2024 national and regional totals. Refer to the methodology page for more information.

Source: Children in need census

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Duration of episodes of need in the year ending 31 March

Almost half (47%) of all episodes ending in 2025 lasted 3 months or less, whereas 1 in 10 lasted for two years or more. This pattern is similar to previous years.

Chart

Table

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Number of episodes of need ending in the year to 31 March by duration of episode, 2020 to 2025

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
3 months or less - number	177,440	162,250	171,360	169,080	169,290	166,140
More than 3 months but less than or equal to 6 months - number	58,500	49,320	55,710	57,520	52,720	52,520
More than 6 months but less than 1 year - number	57,610	53,520	56,800	57,740	56,160	56,620
1 year but less than 2 years - number	45,240	43,980	42,000	44,030	43,620	42,770
2 years and over - number	32,290	30,870	33,980	34,610	34,910	35,660

[Data symbols](#) ?

Footnotes

1. Data for the years ending 31 March 2021 and 2022 is not available for Hackney local authority, therefore 2020 data for Hackney has been included in the 2021 and 2022 national totals and regional totals. Data for the year ending 31 March 2024 is not available for Hampshire local authority, therefore 2023 data for Hampshire has been included in the 2024 national and regional totals. Refer to the methodology page for more information.
2. The duration of episodes of need ending in the year is calculated as the difference between the referral date and closure date.

Source: Children in need census

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Children in need at 31 March by characteristics

Sex

In 2025, males continued to be slightly over-represented in the children in need population: 55% were male, compared to 51% of the overall child population (as shown in the [latest ONS mid-year population estimates \(opens in new tab\)](#)).

Ethnicity

Where ethnicity was known, 67% of children in need were white in 2025. 33% were from all other ethnic groups combined, up from 25% in 2015 and slightly higher than the 27% reported for the overall child population in the [2021 census \(opens in new tab\)](#).

Age

The children in need population is aging and those aged 10 and over now comprise the majority (60% in 2025, up from 48% in 2015).

In 2025, young people aged 18 or over who continued to receive support from children’s services accounted for 15% of children in need. Unborn children accounted for 2%.

Children in need at 31 March by sex, ethnicity and age, 2015 and 2025

		2015 (%)	2025 (%)	Change (pp)
Sex	Female	45.5	43.3	-2.2
	Male	52.5	54.7	2.2
	Unknown or Indeterminate/Unborn	2.0	2.0	0.0
Ethnicity	White	75.1	67.4	-7.7
	Mixed	7.8	9.6	1.8
	Asian or Asian British	6.8	8.7	1.9
	Black or Black British	8.2	9.7	1.5
	Other Ethnic Groups	2.1	4.6	2.5
Age	Unborn	1.8	1.8	0.0
	Under 1 year	5.3	3.9	-1.4
	1 to 4 years	19.6	13.4	-6.2

5 to 9 years	25.0	21.4	-3.6
10 to 15 years	30.1	32.0	1.9
16 years and over	18.2	27.5	9.3

Child in need (CIN) plans

Previously, there statistics were published as [official statistics in development \(opens in new tab\)](#) i.e. official statistics that are undergoing development (previously called experimental statistics). The evaluation of these statistics is now complete and they are being published for the first time in 2025 as official statistics.

This is the fourth year in the series; data quality has improved over time and all 153 local authorities provided useable data in 2025 for the first year. However, comparisons with or between years prior to 2025 should be made with caution due to data quality issues and missing data for some local authorities in earlier years.

CIN plans require a lower level of intervention and are distinct from child protection plans, which are put in place when a child is found to have suffered or is likely to suffer significant harm. Children on CIN plans and children on protection plans are also distinct from: children looked after by local authorities; care leavers; those who are disabled but not on a CIN plan; and those who may potentially be on another type of plan or arrangement.

There were 106,800 children on CIN plans as at 31 March 2025, representing over a quarter (27%) of all children in need at the same point.

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Referrals

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A referral is defined as a request for services to be provided by children's social care and

is regarding a child who is not currently in need. A re-referral occurs when a child is referred within 12 months of a previous referral.

There were almost 633,000 referrals in (the year ending 31 March) 2025, up 11,000 or 1.8% from 2024. Whilst the figure has fluctuated, it is down 10,200 referrals or 1.6% from 2020.

The latest annual increase in 2025 contrasts with the falls seen in 2023 and 2024. 2021 represented the lowest figure since the first year of the series in 2013 and had the largest annual fall in the series (down 45,200). This was mainly driven by school referrals falling (down 35,800), attributable to COVID-19 restrictions on school attendance being in place for parts of the year. A rise followed in 2022, bringing the number of referrals roughly back to pre-COVID levels and likely linked to the restrictions being discontinued; this likely contributed to the increases seen in the other headline measures in 2022.

The number of re-referrals increased by 3,800 or 2.7% since 2024, following a fall in re-referrals the previous year. Re-referrals represented almost a quarter (22.6%) of referrals in 2025, a similar level to previous years (was 22.4% in 2024).

Chart	Table
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Number of referrals and re-referrals (within 12 months of a previous referral) in the year to 31 March, 2020 to 2025

	Referrals in the year	Re-referrals within 12 months of a previous referral	Re-referrals within 12 months of a previous referral (%)
2020	642,980	145,390	22.6%
2021	597,760	135,850	22.7%
2022	650,270	139,500	21.5%
2023	640,430	143,770	22.4%
2024	621,880	139,080	22.4%
2025	632,830	142,900	22.6%

[Data symbols](#) ?

Footnotes

1. Data for the years ending 31 March 2021 and 2022 is not available for Hackney local authority, therefore 2020 data for Hackney has been included in the 2021 and 2022 national totals and regional totals. Data for the year ending 31 March 2024 is not available for Hampshire local authority, therefore 2023 data for Hampshire has been included in the 2024 national and regional totals. Refer to the methodology page for more information.

Source: Children in need census

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Source of referrals in the year to 31 March

Referrals to children's social care services can be made from various sources. In 2025, referrals from the police remained the most common source, accounting for nearly 3 in every 10 referrals (28%). This was followed by those from schools, which accounted for over 2 in every 10 referrals (21%).

Most sources had an increase in referrals since 2024 with the notable exception of those from local authority services which decreased by 2,700 (3.1%). The source with the greatest numeric rise was health services (up 4,700) and with the greatest percentage rise was education services (up 10.4%).

Chart

Table

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Number of referrals by source in the year to 31 March, 2020 to 2025

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Police	184,760	195,270	191,840	184,530	177,210	178,890
Schools	117,010	81,180	129,090	128,650	126,460	130,050
Health services	96,300	95,670	96,170	92,350	91,370	96,090
LA services	90,810	87,260	87,300	90,070	87,980	85,290
Individual	52,290	50,940	53,160	53,020	49,870	50,140
Other legal agency	25,180	23,910	26,020	26,520	27,590	28,900
Education services	13,630	8,490	13,350	12,600	10,330	11,400
Anonymous	13,770	13,430	11,600	11,150	10,030	10,910
Housing	8,300	6,550	6,640	7,240	7,710	7,680
Other	31,630	29,180	27,840	27,560	26,120	26,140
Unknown	9,300	5,890	7,250	6,730	7,190	7,350

Data symbols ?

Footnotes

1. Data for the years ending 31 March 2021 and 2022 is not available for Hackney local authority, therefore 2020 data for Hackney has been included in the 2021 and 2022 national totals and regional totals. Data for the year ending 31 March 2024 is not available for Hampshire local authority, therefore 2023 data for Hampshire has been included in the 2024 national and regional totals. Refer to the methodology page for more information.
2. The source of referral is recorded for each new referral. Where there is more than one referral for the same child on the same day, the first referral should be recorded.

[Show 3 more footnotes](#)

Source: Children in need census

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Referrals requiring no further action or subsequently assessed as not in need in the year to 31 March

Between 2013 and 2021, the percentage of referrals which resulted in no further action after initial consideration (but no assessment) fell overall by over half. Since then the proportion has remained relatively stable and, in 2025, 6.5% of referrals resulted in no further action.

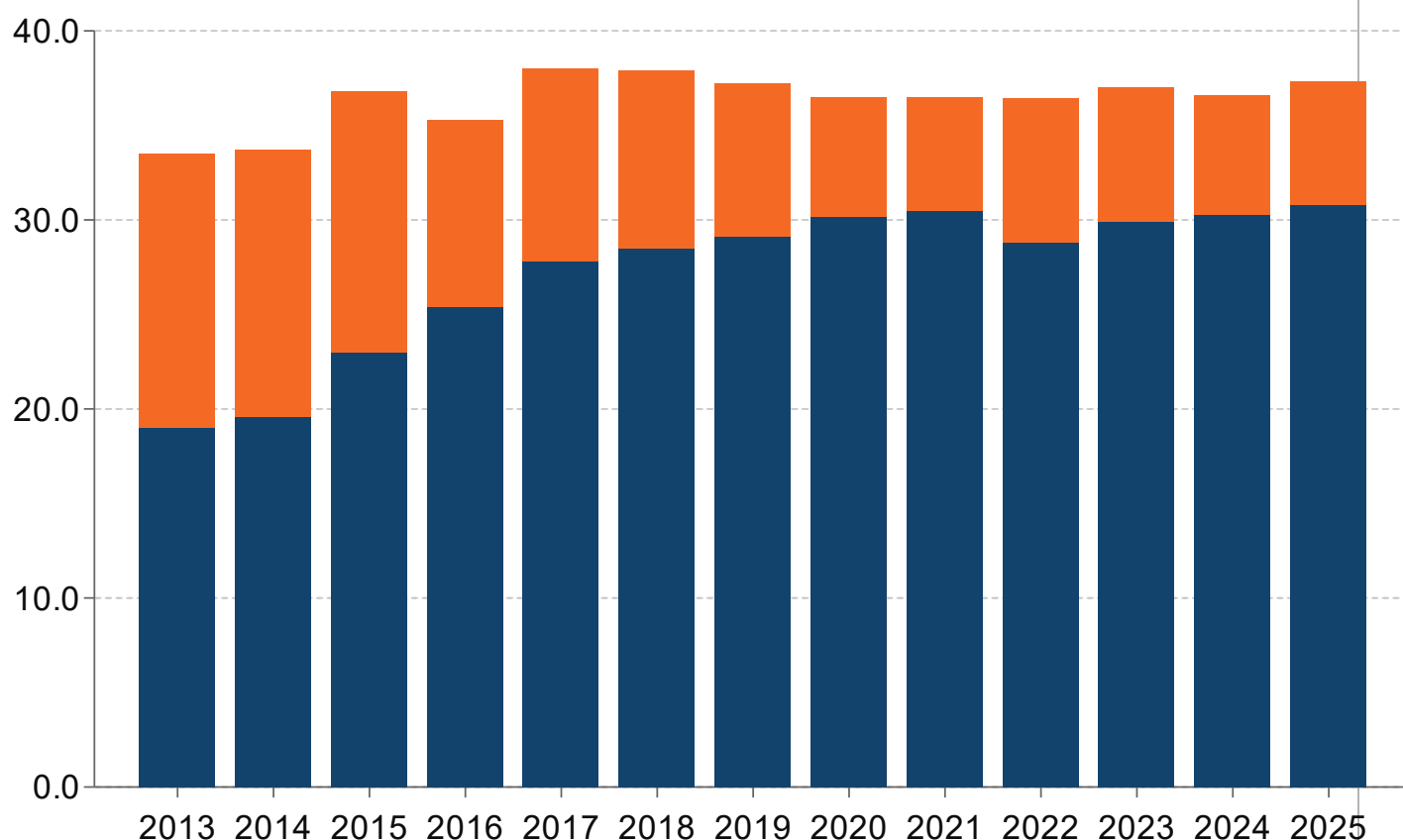
Information from local authorities suggests that while local practice varies, there has been a general trend in recent years for some children to be triaged to other services if required, for example early help, instead of being referred to children's services; those that are referred will have met the threshold for a social care assessment. This is likely to have contributed to the fall in referrals resulting in no further action.

Conversely, the percentage of referrals subsequently assessed as not in need increased each year between 2013 and 2021, rising overall by over half. Since then, following a fall in 2022, the proportion has remained relatively stable. Nonetheless, the latest 2025 rate of 30.8% is the highest in the series.

The proportion of referrals which either resulted in no further action after initial consideration or were subsequently assessed as not in need has remained fairly stable at over a third since 2015 (was 37% in 2025).

► Export options

Percentage of referrals requiring no further action or subsequently assessed as not in need in the year to 31 March, 2013 to 2025



■ Referrals which resulted in no further action

■ Referrals which resulted in an assessment and the child was assessed as not in need

Footnotes

1. Data for the years ending 31 March 2021 and 2022 is not available for Hackney local authority, therefore 2020 data for Hackney has been included in the 2021 and 2022 national totals and regional totals. Data for the year ending 31 March 2024 is not available for Hampshire local authority, therefore 2023 data for Hampshire has been included in the 2024 national and regional totals. Refer to the methodology page for more information.

Source: Children in need census

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Assessments

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When a child is referred to children's social care services, an assessment is carried out (usually within 45 working days of a referral) to identify if the child is in need of services. These services can include, for example, family support, leaving care support, adoption support or disabled children's services (including social care or education and health provision).

There were almost 649,000 completed assessments in 2025, up 5,700 assessments or 0.9% from 2024. Whilst the figure has fluctuated, it is down 16,800 or 2.5% from 2020.

2021 had the largest annual decrease in the series (down 39,700), which started in 2015, likely linked to referrals also falling (also the largest decrease in the series). This in turn was mainly driven by school referrals falling, attributable to COVID-19 restrictions on school attendance being in place for parts of the year. A rise followed in 2022, likely linked to the restrictions being discontinued.

The average (median) duration of an assessment decreased slightly to 33 days in 2025, from the series peak of 34 days in 2024.

► Export options

Number and average duration of assessments completed in the year to 31 March, 2020 to 2025

	Number of assessments in the year	Median (days)
2020	665,660	32
2021	625,960	30
2022	645,070	32
2023	655,540	33
2024	643,170	34
2025	648,830	33

[Data symbols](#) ?

Footnotes

1. Data for the years ending 31 March 2021 and 2022 is not available for Hackney local authority, therefore 2020 data for Hackney has been included in the 2021 and 2022 national totals and regional totals. Data for the year ending 31 March 2024 is not available for Hampshire local authority, therefore 2023 data for Hampshire has been included in the 2024 national and regional totals. Refer to the methodology page for more information.
2. The duration of an assessment is calculated as the time in working days between the assessment start date and the assessment end date.

Source: Children in need census

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Children in need at 31 March by primary need at assessment

A social worker determines the child’s primary need at their first assessment. Only one primary need can be reported at this point and is selected from a hierarchical list (as shown in the chart below). In cases where multiple needs are identified, the need highest in the list is reported.

Over half (58%) of children in need in 2025 had abuse or neglect identified as their primary need at assessment.

Since 2024, abuse or neglect had the largest numeric increase (up 2,700) and absent parenting had the largest percentage increase (up 2.9%). Family dysfunction had both the largest numeric and percentage decrease (down 5,600 or 11.7%).

Overall, primary need at assessment showed a similar pattern to previous years.

Chart

Table

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Number of children in need at 31 March by primary need at assessment, 2020 to 2025

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
N1 - Abuse or neglect	217,440	219,190	230,830	231,500	231,940	234,590
N2 - Child's disability or illness	31,940	32,140	32,160	32,790	32,150	33,030
N3 - Parent's disability or illness	9,420	9,460	8,930	8,540	8,270	7,730
N4 - Family in acute stress	32,860	33,120	34,740	35,540	34,410	33,810
N5 - Family dysfunction	54,810	53,500	53,600	51,160	47,900	42,290
N6 - Socially unacceptable behaviour	8,180	7,730	8,200	8,040	7,870	7,400
N7 - Low income	1,540	1,600	1,340	1,190	1,070	1,030
N8 - Absent parenting	15,950	16,410	18,410	20,970	21,930	22,570
N9 - Cases other than children in need	4,110	4,180	3,680	3,520	3,510	4,140
N0 - Not stated	13,010	11,160	12,420	9,830	10,430	15,800

[Data symbols](#) 

Footnotes

1. Data for the years ending 31 March 2021 and 2022 is not available for Hackney local authority, therefore 2020 data for Hackney has been included in the 2021 and 2022 national totals and regional totals. Data for the year ending 31 March 2024 is not available for Hampshire local authority, therefore 2023 data for Hampshire has been included in the 2024 national and regional totals. Refer to the methodology page for more information.

Source: Children in need census

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Factors identified at the end of assessment

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Factors identified at the end of assessment are additional factors that social workers record as being relevant in a case.

These figures are based on assessment factors recorded against individual episodes of need, which begin when a child is referred to children’s social care services and is assessed as being in need of children’s social care services. Each unique factor is counted once against a given episode, irrespective of the number of times the same factor was recorded in that episode. However, as a child can have more than one episode of need during the year (ending 31 March), the same child can be recorded more than once for a given factor.

The majority of children have more than one unique factor recorded for each episode of need. It should be noted that not all episodes have factors recorded, but this has improved over time. Nonetheless, there can be differences in the recording practices between local authorities therefore this data should be treated with caution and shouldn’t be taken to represent the national, regional or local authority level prevalence of particular issues.

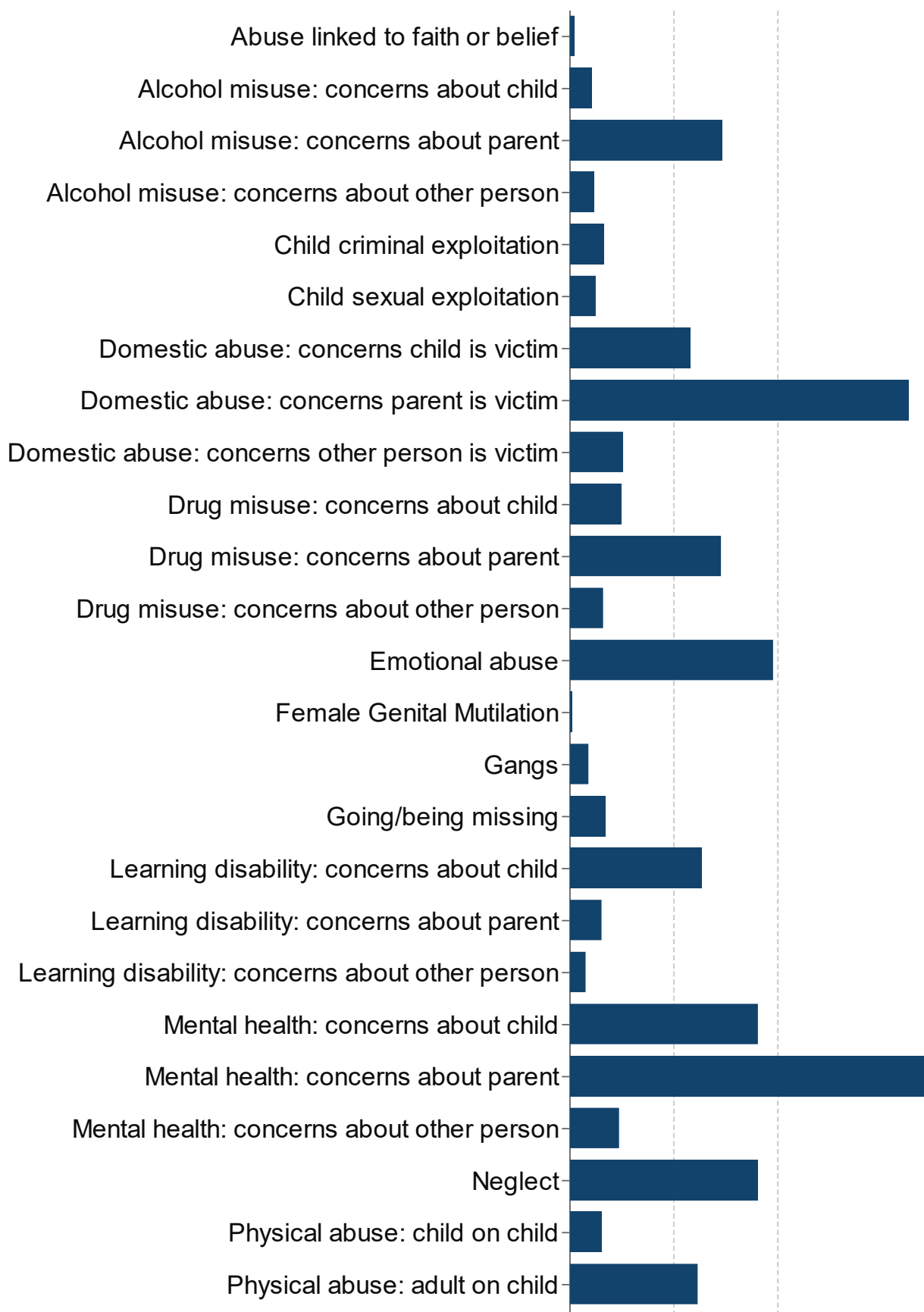
Concerns about the mental health of the child's parent/carer and the child’s parent/carer being the victim of domestic abuse remained the most common factors in the year to 31 March 2025, with both factors being identified in around one third of episodes with assessment factors recorded.

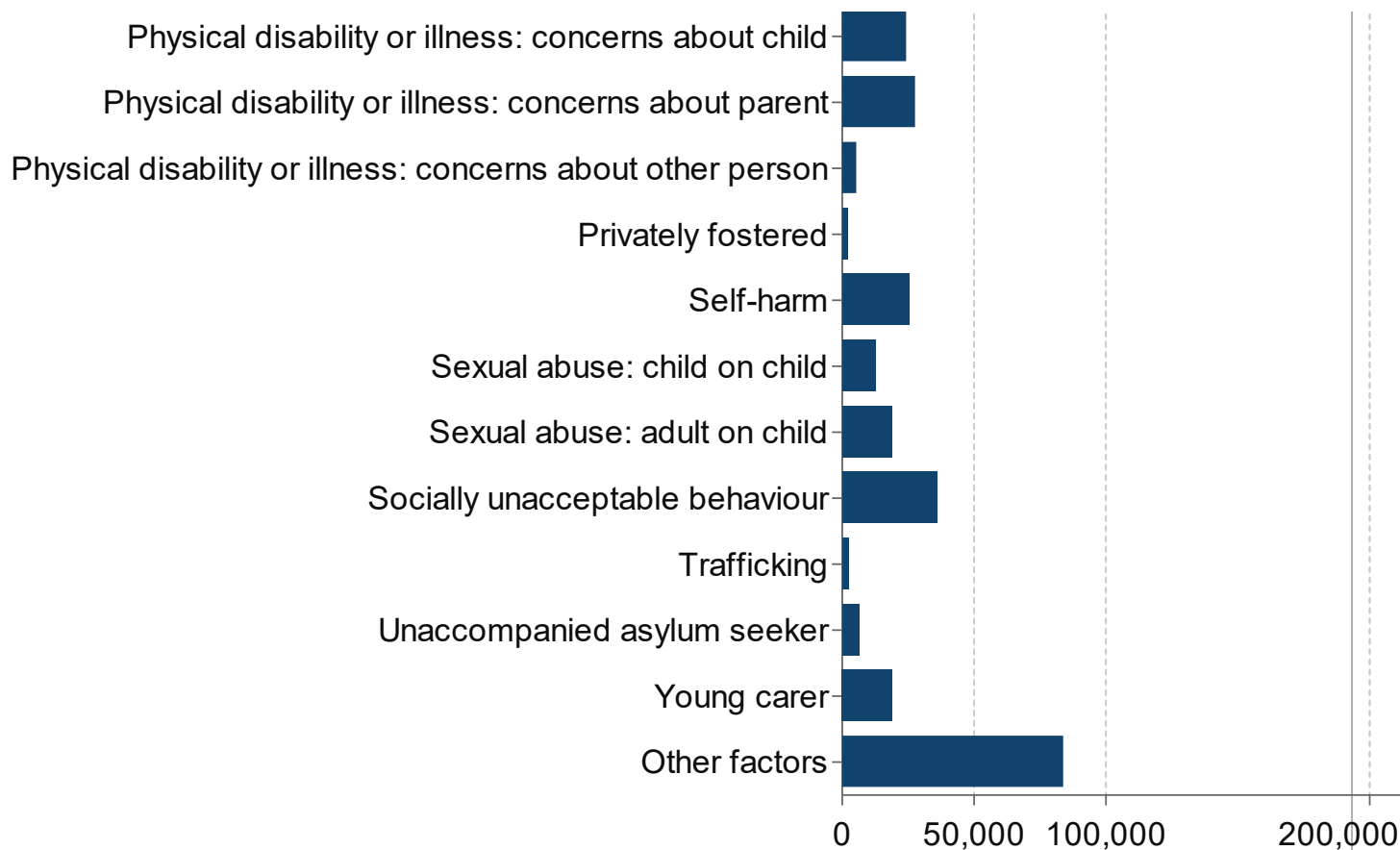
Chart

Table

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Factors identified at the end of assessment in the year to 31 March 2025





Footnotes

1. Data for the years ending 31 March 2021 and 2022 is not available for Hackney local authority, therefore 2020 data for Hackney has been included in the 2021 and 2022 national totals and regional totals. Data for the year ending 31 March 2024 is not available for Hampshire local authority, therefore 2023 data for Hampshire has been included in the 2024 national and regional totals. Refer to the methodology page for more information.
2. Figures exclude the category 'no factors identified'.

Source: Children in need census

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Section 47 enquiries and initial child protection conferences

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If a local authority identifies there is reasonable cause to suspect the child is suffering, or is likely to suffer significant harm, it will carry out an assessment under section 47 of the Children Act 1989 to determine if it needs to take steps to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child. If concerns are substantiated and the child is judged to be at continuing risk of harm then an initial child protection conference (ICPC) should be convened within 15 working days.

There were over 230,000 section 47 enquiries in (the year ending 31 March) 2025. The latest figure represents the series peak and continues the increasing trend seen in recent years; it is up 6,100 or 2.7% since 2024 and up 29,600 or 14.7% since 2020.

There were over 72,000 ICPCs in 2025. The latest figure is down 150 or 0.2% since 2024, continuing the relative stability seen since 2021. Nonetheless, the latest figure is the lowest since 2015 and is down 5,400 or 6.9% on 2020.

2021 had the largest fall in the series (started 2013) for both the number of Section 47s and ICPCs, likely linked to referrals also falling (also largest fall in the series). This in turn was mainly driven by school referrals falling, attributable to COVID-19 restrictions on school attendance being in place for parts of the year. A rise followed in 2022, likely linked to the restrictions being discontinued.

In 2025, the proportion of ICPCs to section 47s was nearly one third (31%), continuing the steady decline since 2013, when the rate was nearly half (47%).

Number of section 47 enquiries and initial child protection conferences, year to 31 March 2020 to 2025

		2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Section 47s	Number	201,000	198,790	217,800	225,400	224,520	230,590
	Annual change	-170	-2,210	19,010	7,600	-880	6,070
	Annual percentage	-0.1	-1.1	9.6	3.5	-0.4	2.7

change

ICPCs	Number	77,470	72,580	73,790	74,380	72,250	72,100
	Annual change	30	-4,890	1,210	590	-2,130	-150
	Annual percentage change	0.0	-6.3	1.7	0.8	-2.9	-0.2

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Child protection plans

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A child becomes the subject of a child protection plan if they are assessed as being at risk of harm at an initial child protection conference (ICPC).

There were nearly 50,000 children on protection plans in 2025 (as at 31 March), equivalent to around 1 in every 250 children or 1 in every 8 children in need. Both the number and the associated rate decreased for the third consecutive year in 2025, representing the lowest number since 2014 and the lowest rate since 2013 respectively.

2021 had the second largest fall in the series for the number of children on protection plans, linked to the decrease in Section 47s and ICPCs in the same year (see preceding section).

Number and rate (per 10,000 children) of children on protection plans as at 31 March, 2020 to 2025

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Number	51,510	50,010	50,920	50,780	49,900	49,420
Annual change	-750	-1,500	910	-140	-880	-480
Annual percentage change	-1.4	-2.9	1.8	-0.3	-1.7	-1.0

Rate	43.7	42.4	43.3	42.7	41.4	40.6
Annual change	-0.8	-1.3	0.9	-0.6	-1.3	-0.8

Child protection plans at 31 March by initial category of abuse

Neglect and emotional abuse remained the most common initial categories of abuse for children on protection plans in 2025, accounting for half (50%) and over one-third (37%) of children respectively. The pattern of initial category of abuse has remained steady in recent years.

Neglect had both the biggest numeric and percentage fall since 2024 (down 500 or 2.0%) whereas multiple categories had both the biggest numeric and percentage rise (up 160 or 17.2%).

Chart

Table

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Number of children on protection plans at 31 March by initial category of abuse, 2020 to 2025

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Number of children who were the subject of a child protection plan at 31 March	51,510	50,010	50,920	50,780	49,900	49,420
Initial: Neglect	26,010	24,120	24,430	25,050	25,350	24,850
Initial: Physical abuse	3,820	3,650	3,780	3,630	3,430	3,410
Initial: Sexual abuse	1,970	1,930	1,930	1,890	1,760	1,770
Initial: Emotional abuse	18,380	18,840	19,480	19,000	18,430	18,300
Initial: Multiple	1,330	1,480	1,280	1,210	930	1,090

[Data symbols](#) ?

Footnotes

1. Data for the years ending 31 March 2021 and 2022 is not available for Hackney local authority, therefore 2020 data for Hackney has been included in the 2021 and 2022 national totals and regional totals. Data for the year ending 31 March 2024 is not available for Hampshire local authority, therefore 2023 data for Hampshire has been included in the 2024 national and regional totals. Refer to the methodology page for more information.
2. 'Multiple' refers to instances where there is more than one main category of abuse. Children included in this category are not included in any other category of abuse, therefore a child is counted only once in this measure.

Source: Children in need census

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