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Reporting year 2024

Children in need: A focus on re-referrals

This is the latest release

Published 26 February 2026

Release type [Ad hoc statistics](#)

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Produced by [Department for Education](#)

This ad-hoc release contains statistics on re-referrals to children's social care services in England. This includes demographics of children referred and factors identified at assessment.

It contains data drawn from the children in need census. It presents breakdowns and analysis not included in the annual statistical release of [children in need statistics](#).

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.

The latest statistics and charts relate to the year ending 31 March 2024.

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[Children in need: A focus on re-referrals](#)

The standard period for data in this release is for the year ending 31 March 2017 to the year ending 31 March 2024.

Data from March 2020 to March 2022 may have been affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. This potential impact should be taken into consideration when interpreting trends over time.

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Headline facts and figures - 2024

Referrals in 2024

621,880

▶ Referrals

Re-referrals in 2024

139,080

▶ Re-referrals

Children re-referred in 2024

115,550

▶ Children re-referred

Re-referral rate within 1 year

23%

▶ One year re-referral rate

Re-referral rate within 3 years

43%

▶ Three year re-referral rate

Re-referral rate within 5 years

49%

▶ Five year re-referral rate

- There were 621,880 referrals in the year ending 31 March 2024, of which 139,080 were re-referrals within 1 year of a previous referral.
- Re-referrals to children's social care services make up over a fifth of all referrals.
- For initial referrals in 2019, the rate of re-referral in the following year is 23%, this rises to 43% within three years and 49% within five years. Nearly half of referrals leads to re-referrals within five years.
- White children are more likely to be re-referred than those from minority ethnic groups. White children make up 71% of all children re-referred but only 62% of those not re-referred.
- Children from deprived backgrounds make up a bigger share of the population of children who are re-referred. Children who are FSM eligible are 70% of school age children who are re-referred. This compares to only 59% of those not re-referred.

- Children are more or less likely to be re-referred depending on which assessment factors are recorded by social workers at assessment. Factors associated with harms outside the home have the highest re-referral rates.
- When children are referred to social care, those who exit at low levels of intervention are more likely to become re-referrals. When they come back higher level interventions are more common.
- Given similar referral volumes, less deprived local authorities are more likely to have higher re-referral rates.

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Referrals and re-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 621,880 referrals in (the year ending 31 March) 2024, of which 139,080 (22%) were re-referrals within 1 year of a previous referral.

The number of referrals has remained relatively stable since 2017 with the exception of a dip in 2021 which was caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Schools are a big source of referrals and their closures during the pandemic led to a fall in the number of children referred.

[Chart](#)

[Table](#)

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Referrals to children's social care in England between 2017 and 2024

	Referrals	Re-referrals
2017	646,120	141,680
2018	655,630	143,810
2019	650,930	147,380
2020	642,980	145,390
2021	597,760	135,850
2022	650,270	139,410
2023	640,430	143,770
2024	621,880	139,080

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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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Repeated referrals

The great majority of children referred to children's social care services are referred only once in a year. In the year to March 31st 2024, 89% of children referred had only one referral. A further 10% of children were

referred twice, 1% referred three or more times. That means 7,400 children were referred at least three times in a year.

[Chart](#)

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Children referred by number of referrals in England for 2024

	Children	Percentage
One referral within a year	488,820	89%
Two referrals within a year	54,890	10%
Three referrals within a year	6,370	1%
Four or more referrals within in a year	990	k

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Footnotes

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Source: Children in need census

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Re-referrals over one, three and five years.

Although most children only have one referral in a year, many children do return repeatedly to children's social care services. In fact, the re-referral rate increases as more time passes since the initial referral. For children initially referred in 2017, 24% were re-referred in the following year. This increases to 43% in the three years following the initial referral, and 50% in five years.

This pattern is consistent for children initially referred in 2018 and 2019 despite the effect of the Covid pandemic.

[Previous research \(opens in new tab\)](#) published by the Department of Education shows a similar pattern for earlier years. It studied a a cohort of all children referred to children's services in 2010-11. It showed that the re-referral rate after five years was 50% (for those who were still under 18).

Chart

Table

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Re-referrals in one, three and five years after initial referral in England between 2017 and 2023

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Referrals	661,660	671,300	662,280	651,210	601,510	652,790	644,880
Re-referrals within 1 Year	156,110	156,940	154,520	146,830	137,860	148,420	140,050
Re-referrals within 3 Years	284,370	285,030	278,630	274,850	253,310	z	z
Re-referrals within 5 Years	329,300	331,920	325,790	z	z	z	z
Re-referral Rate within 1 Year	24%	23%	23%	23%	23%	23%	22%
Re-referral Rate within 3 Years	43%	43%	42%	42%	42%	z	z
Re-referral Rate within 5 Years	50%	49%	49%	z	z	z	z

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Footnotes

1. The underlying data used here relates to the years 2017 to 2024. Hence it is not possible to calculate re-referral rates for three or five years for the later years of initial referrals.

Source: Longitudinal CIN Dataset (LCD)

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Duration of episodes

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. A child can have more than one episode during the year, but episodes should not overlap.

Almost half of all episodes ending in 2023 lasted 3 months or less, whereas 1 in 10 lasted for two years or more.

However the duration of episodes resulting from re-referrals tend to be longer than for initial referrals. Only 42% of episodes resulting from re-referrals last less than three months compared to 47% for those resulting from initial referrals. Re-referrals are more likely to result in episodes that last between 6 months and two years (32% of episodes) compared to initial referrals (28%).

[Chart](#)

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Duration of episodes in England for 2023

	Percentage		Episodes	
	Initial referral	Re-referral	Initial referral	Re-referral
3 months or less	47%	42%	126,750	35,620
More than 3 months but less than or equal to 6 months	16%	16%	42,420	13,960
More than 6 months but less than 1 year	16%	18%	42,340	15,410
1 year but less than 2 years	12%	14%	31,090	12,060
2 years and over	10%	10%	26,210	8,630

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Source: Longitudinal CIN Dataset (LCD)

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Source of referrals

Referrals to children's social care services can be made from various sources. Referrals from the police are the most common source, accounting for nearly 3 in 10 referrals. This was followed by those from schools, which accounted for 2 in 10 referrals.

Re-referrals are more likely to come from the police and local authority services, whilst initial referrals are more likely to come from schools and health services.

[Chart](#)

[Table](#)

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Share of referrals by source in the year to 31 March 2024

	Percentage			Episodes		
	Total	Initial referral	Re-referral	Total	Initial referral	Re-referral
Police	29%	29%	30%	170,650	133,040	37,610
Schools	20%	20%	19%	117,390	93,500	23,890
Health services	15%	15%	12%	85,780	70,360	15,420
LA services	14%	14%	17%	85,060	64,020	21,050
Individual	8%	8%	8%	47,000	36,330	10,670
Other legal agency	5%	4%	5%	26,330	20,090	6,230
Education services	2%	2%	2%	10,330	8,420	1,910
Anonymous	2%	2%	2%	9,440	6,960	2,480
Housing	1%	1%	1%	7,490	5,950	1,540
Other	4%	4%	4%	24,690	19,470	5,220
Unknown	1%	1%	1%	6,960	5,370	1,590

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Source: Longitudinal CIN Dataset (LCD)

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Primary need of children referred

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.

Nearly two thirds of children assessed in the year to 2024 had abuse or neglect identified as their primary need. This is similar for initial referrals and re-referrals.

This pattern is repeated for all other primary needs. There are only small differences between initial and re-referrals in the proportion of children assessed with each primary need. The largest difference is for family dysfunction where 10% of children initially referred had this primary need compared to 14% of children re-referred.

[Chart](#)

[Table](#)

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Number of children in need by primary need at assessment in the year to 31st March 2024

	Percentage		Episodes	
	Initial referral	Re-referral	Initial referral	Re-referral
N1 - Abuse or neglect	66%	64%	303,550	80,970
N2 - Child's disability or illness	4%	2%	16,220	2,580
N3 - Parent's disability or illness	2%	2%	8,380	2,550
N4 - Family in acute stress	9%	10%	43,600	12,660
N5 - Family dysfunction	10%	14%	48,230	17,210
N6 - Socially unacceptable behaviour	3%	4%	11,860	4,430
N7 - Low income	0%	0%	1,290	210
N8 - Absent parenting	2%	1%	9,700	870
N9 - Cases other than children in need	1%	1%	4,690	1,480
N0 - Not stated	4%	4%	15,990	4,650

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Source: Longitudinal CIN Dataset (LCD)

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Characteristics of children referred

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The 621,880 referrals in 2024 relate to 551,060 children of whom 115,550 (21%) had a referral in the previous year.

The number children of re-referred is stable over time at around 21%. The only substantial shift was in 2022 – which is due to the pandemic affecting the number of referrals in 2021.

[Chart](#)

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Children referred to social services in England between 2017 and 2024

	Children			Percentage		
	Total	Not re-referred	Re-referred	Total	Not re-referred	Re-referred
2017	571,000	453,240	117,770	100%	79%	21%
2018	581,280	461,090	120,190	100%	79%	21%
2019	575,290	452,040	123,250	100%	79%	21%
2020	568,600	447,130	121,460	100%	79%	21%
2021	529,490	416,750	112,740	100%	79%	21%
2022	576,420	460,310	116,110	100%	80%	20%
2023	566,960	447,650	119,310	100%	79%	21%
2024	551,060	435,520	115,550	100%	79%	21%

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Footnotes

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Source: Children in need census

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Gender

There is little difference in the gender split between children who are re-referred and those who are not. Males make up a greater share of the children referred (51%) than females (47%) . Males also form the majority of Children In Need and Children Looked After. However, they are no more likely to be re-referred than females. Males are 51% of the re-referred children compared to 49% who are female.

[Chart](#)

[Table](#)

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Referrals to children's social care by gender in England for 2024

		2024	
		Children	Percentage
Total	Female	256,800	47%
	Male	278,730	51%
	Unknown or Indeterminate gender	15,530	3%
Not re-referred	Female	200,720	46%
	Male	219,850	51%
	Unknown or Indeterminate gender	14,940	3%
Re-referred	Female	56,080	49%
	Male	58,880	51%
	Unknown or Indeterminate gender	590	1%

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Footnotes

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Source: Children in need census

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Age

Children who are re-referred are more likely to be older. Some of this effect is just a matter of time – older children have had more time to be re-referred. Those under 1 year and the unborn make up 7% of all referred children but only 3% of re-referred children. This compares to children aged 1 to 4 who make up 18% of all referred children but 19% of re-referred children.

The age of children re-referred is rising at about the same rate as for all referred children. The proportion of children referred who are aged 10 or over has risen from 42% in 2017 to 48% in 2024. Over that same time period the proportion of children re-referred, who are aged 10 or over, has risen from 43% to 51%.

[Chart](#)

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Referrals to children's social care by age in England for 2024

		Children	Percentage
Total	Unborn	11,910	2%
	Under 1 year	29,120	5%
	1 to 4 years	97,800	18%
	5 to 9 years	143,100	26%
	10 to 15 years	187,460	34%
	16 years and over	79,560	14%
	Unknown	2,110	k
Not re-referred	Unborn	11,640	3%
	Under 1 year	25,470	6%
	1 to 4 years	75,640	17%
	5 to 9 years	112,370	26%
	10 to 15 years	146,620	34%
	16 years and over	61,790	14%
	Unknown	1,980	k
Re-referred	Unborn	270	k
	Under 1 year	3,650	3%
	1 to 4 years	22,160	19%
	5 to 9 years	30,730	27%
	10 to 15 years	40,840	35%
	16 years and over	17,770	15%
	Unknown	130	k

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Source: Children in need census

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Ethnicity

Children who are re-referred are less ethnically diverse than those who are not. White children are more likely to be re-referred than those from minority ethnic groups. White children make up 71% of all children re-referred but only 62% of those not re-referred. This compares to Asian/Asian British children who are 7% of children re-referred but 10% of children not re-referred.

The ethnic make-up of referred children has been growing more diverse over recent years, in line with trends in the wider child population. White children made up 66% of all children referred in 2017 which fell to 64% in 2024. In that same period the proportion re-referred children who were white fell from 74% to 71%. The level of under representation of children in ethnic minorities in the re-referred population has not changed very much in this period.

Chart

Table

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Referrals to children's social care by ethnicity in England for 2024

		Children	Percentage
Total	White	350,200	64%
	Asian / Asian British	49,640	9%
	Black / African / Caribbean / Black British	47,930	9%
	Mixed / Multiple ethnic groups	44,710	8%
	Other ethnic group	19,900	4%
	Unknown	38,690	7%
Not re-referred	White	267,740	62%
	Asian / Asian British	41,560	10%
	Black / African / Caribbean / Black British	39,450	9%
	Mixed / Multiple ethnic groups	34,230	8%
	Other ethnic group	17,450	4%
	Unknown	35,090	8%
Re-referred	White	82,450	71%
	Asian / Asian British	8,080	7%
	Black / African / Caribbean / Black British	8,480	7%
	Mixed / Multiple ethnic groups	10,480	9%
	Other ethnic group	2,450	2%
	Unknown	3,600	3%

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Source: Children in need

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Disability

There is little difference in the share of children with a disability between those who are or are not re-referred. Children with a disability are 6% of those re-referred compared to 5% of those who are not.

[Chart](#)

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► Export options

Children referred by disability in England for 2024

		Children	Percentage
Not re-referred	Disability recorded	21,480	5%
	No disability recorded	414,030	95%
Re-referred	Disability recorded	6,570	6%
	No disability recorded	108,980	94%

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Source: Children in need census

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Free School Meals (FSM) and Special Educational Needs (SEN)

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The Children in Need Census is matched to the National Pupil Database (NPD) to find which children

are eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) or have Special Educational Needs (SEN). The matching is not perfect, a substantial share of the CIN population cannot be matched hence their FSM eligibility and SEN provision are unknown. For full details of CIN-NPD matching see the methodology for [Outcomes for children in need](#).

Free School Meals (FSM)

School age children referred to social services are much more likely to be eligible for Free School Meals (62% of those with known FSM status in 2024) than the general school population (25%).

The number of children who are eligible for free school meals has been rising over the past seven years. However, FSM eligibility is rising quicker among children referred than in the general school population. In 2017, 43% of children referred were FSM eligible compared to 14% of all school pupils.

Children from deprived backgrounds make up a bigger share of the population of children who are re-referred. Children who are FSM eligible make up 70% of school age children who are re-referred. This compares to only 59% of those not re-referred.

[Chart](#)

[Table](#)

► Export options

Referrals to children's social care of school age children by FSM status in England for 2024

		Children	Percentage	Percentage (excluding unknown)
Total	FSM Eligible	186,200	44%	62%
	Not FSM Eligible	116,770	28%	39%
	Unknown FSM status	117,840	28%	z
Not re-referred	FSM Eligible	137,250	42%	59%
	Not FSM Eligible	96,160	29%	41%
	Unknown FSM status	95,850	29%	z
Re-referred	FSM Eligible	48,950	54%	70%
	Not FSM Eligible	20,610	23%	30%
	Unknown FSM status	21,990	24%	z

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Source: Children in need census and National Pupil Database (NPD)

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Special Educational Needs (SEN)

School age children referred to social services are more likely to have special educational needs (36% of

those with known SEN provision) than the general school population (18%). Among children referred, 12% have education, health and care plans and 24% have SEN support.

Children who are re-referred are about as likely to have SEN as those who are not. Children with SEN make up 39% of children who are re-referred and 36% of those who are not re-referred.

[Chart](#)

[Table](#)

► Export options

Referrals to children's social care of school age children by SEN provision in England for 2024

		Children	Percentage	Percentage (excluding unknown)
Total	Education, health and care plan	36,820	9%	12%
	SEN support / SEN without an EHC plan	73,070	17%	24%
	No SEN provision	193,080	46%	64%
	Unknown SEN provision	117,840	28%	z
Not re-referred	Education, health and care plan	28,500	9%	12%
	SEN support / SEN without an EHC plan	54,530	17%	23%
	No SEN provision	150,380	46%	64%
	Unknown SEN provision	95,850	29%	z
Re-referred	Education, health and care plan	8,320	9%	12%
	SEN support / SEN without an EHC plan	18,550	20%	27%
	No SEN provision	42,700	47%	61%
	Unknown SEN provision	21,990	24%	z

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Source: Children in need census and National Pupil Database (NPD)

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Factors identified at the end of assessment

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Occurrence of assessment factors

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.

Assessment factors that are more common in re-referrals than initial referrals

The factors that are recorded at assessment are noticeably different in initial referrals compared to re-referrals. For instance, drug misuse is recorded in 17% of initial referrals but it is recorded in 21% of re-referrals. The rate is 17% for both initial referrals that lead to a re-referral and those that do not. These patterns are similar to that for alcohol misuse and mental health - they more frequently occur in re-referrals than in initial referrals.

However, we see a different pattern for neglect and emotional abuse. These factors are more common in re-referrals than in initial referral but there are substantial difference between initial referrals that lead to a re-referral and those that do not. For initial referrals where the child is later re-referred, neglect is recorded in 11% of referrals. This compares to initial referrals where the child is not later re-referred where neglect is recorded in 15% of referrals.

[Chart](#)

[Table](#)

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Assessment factors that are more common in re-referrals than initial referrals for 2023

	Initial referral: child later re-referred	Initial referral: child not re-referred	Re-referral
Mental health (any)	40%	40%	45%
Domestic abuse (any)	36%	35%	39%
Emotional abuse	15%	19%	22%
Drug misuse (any)	17%	17%	21%
Alcohol misuse (any)	16%	15%	20%
Neglect	11%	15%	18%
Learning disability (any)	10%	13%	12%
Socially unacceptable behaviour	8%	7%	10%
Physical disability or illness (any)	7%	9%	8%
Self-harm	5%	5%	6%
Going/being missing	3%	3%	5%
Child criminal exploitation	3%	3%	4%
Young Carer	3%	4%	4%

Child sexual exploitation	2%	3%	4%
Gangs	2%	2%	3%
Trafficking	0%	1%	1%
Abuse linked to faith or belief	0%	1%	0%
Privately fostered	0%	0%	0%
Unaccompanied asylum-Seeker	0%	2%	0%
Female Genital Mutilation	0%	0%	0%
Physical abuse (any)	11%	15%	13%
Sexual abuse (any)	5%	7%	5%

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Footnotes

1. Figures exclude the category 'no factors identified'.

Source: Longitudinal CIN Dataset (LCD)

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Assessment factors that are less common in re-referrals than initial referrals

Another group of assessment factors are less common in re-referrals than initial referrals. In all these cases, the factor is most common in referrals where a child is not re-referred. This group includes sexual abuse, physical disability or illness, learning disability and physical abuse. When these four factors are recorded at initial referral, a child is less likely to be re-referred within 12 months.

[Chart](#)

[Table](#)

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Assessment factors that are less common in re-referrals than initial referrals for 2023

		Initial referral: child later re-referred	Initial referral: child not re-referred	Re- referral
Percentage	Mental health (any)	40%	40%	45%
	Domestic abuse (any)	36%	35%	39%
	Emotional abuse	15%	19%	22%
	Drug misuse (any)	17%	17%	21%
	Alcohol misuse (any)	16%	15%	20%
	Neglect	11%	15%	18%
	Learning disability (any)	10%	13%	12%
	Socially unacceptable behaviour	8%	7%	10%
	Physical disability or illness (any)	7%	9%	8%
	Self-harm	5%	5%	6%
	Going/being missing	3%	3%	5%
	Child criminal exploitation	3%	3%	4%
	Young Carer	3%	4%	4%
	Child sexual exploitation	2%	3%	4%
	Gangs	2%	2%	3%
	Trafficking	0%	1%	1%
	Abuse linked to faith or belief	0%	1%	0%

	Privately fostered	0%	0%	0%
	Unaccompanied asylum-Seeker	0%	2%	0%
	Female Genital Mutilation	0%	0%	0%
	Physical abuse (any)	11%	15%	13%
	Sexual abuse (any)	5%	7%	5%
Referrals	Mental health (any)	25,570	114,570	46,460
	Domestic abuse (any)	23,160	99,160	40,570
	Emotional abuse	9,430	53,900	23,170
	Drug misuse (any)	10,660	46,830	22,210
	Alcohol misuse (any)	9,920	43,630	20,330
	Neglect	6,980	43,630	18,560
	Learning disability (any)	6,650	36,360	12,580
	Socially unacceptable behaviour	4,990	19,190	10,340
	Physical disability or illness (any)	4,670	25,890	8,560
	Self-harm	3,000	14,590	6,410
	Going/being missing	2,130	8,420	4,980
	Child criminal exploitation	1,780	7,080	4,270
	Young Carer	1,680	9,850	4,020
	Child sexual exploitation	1,510	7,730	3,730
	Gangs	1,350	5,140	3,250
Trafficking	1,000	1,770	510	

Factor	Initial Referrals	Re-referred	Total
Abuse linked to faith or belief	180	1,410	370
Privately fostered	170	1,260	450
Unaccompanied asylum-Seeker	80	5,180	160
Female Genital Mutilation	80	630	120
Physical abuse (any)	7,210	42,530	13,920
Sexual abuse (any)	3,040	20,640	5,520

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Footnotes

1. Figures exclude the category 'no factors identified'.

Source: Longitudinal CIN Dataset (LCD)

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Re-referral rates by assessment factor

The analysis above measured the proportion of all referrals that had each assessment factor recorded. For example, gangs is recorded at assessment in 1.8% of all initial referrals where the child is not re-referred, 2.1% of all initial referrals where the child is re-referred and, 3.1% of all re-referrals.

The re-referral rate in this section refers to the proportion of referrals for each assessment factor that are re-referrals. For example, there were 9,740 referrals where gangs were recorded at assessment, and 3,250 of these were re-referrals. Therefore the re-referral rate for gangs is 33%.

Children are more or less likely to be re-referred depending on which assessment factors are recorded by social workers at assessment. Factors associated with harms outside the home have the highest re-referral rates. Re-referrals make up over 30% of referrals where gangs, child criminal exploitation or going/being missing are recorded at assessment.

At the opposite end, re-referrals make up less than 20% of all referrals when abuse linked to faith or belief, sexual abuse, or Female Genital Mutilation are recorded.

[Chart](#)

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Re-referral rate within one year by assessment factor in England for 2023

	2023		
	Re-referral Rate	Re-referrals	Total referrals for assessment factor
Gangs	33%	3,250	9,740
Child criminal exploitation	33%	4,270	13,140
Going/being missing	32%	4,980	15,520
Socially unacceptable behaviour	30%	10,340	34,520
Child sexual exploitation	29%	3,730	12,970
Drug misuse (any)	28%	22,210	79,700
Alcohol misuse (any)	28%	20,330	73,890
Emotional abuse	27%	23,170	86,510
Neglect	27%	18,560	69,170
Self-harm	27%	6,410	24,000
Young Carer	26%	4,020	15,550
Domestic abuse (any)	25%	40,570	162,880
Mental health (any)	25%	46,460	186,590
Privately fostered	24%	450	1,880
Learning disability (any)	23%	12,580	55,590
Physical disability or illness (any)	22%	8,560	39,110
Trafficking	21%	510	2,470
Abuse linked to faith or belief	19%	370	1,960
Female Genital Mutilation	15%	120	840
Physical abuse (any)	22%	13,920	63,670
Sexual abuse (any)	19%	5,520	29,200

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Footnotes

1. Figures exclude the category 'no factors identified'.

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Journeys through social care

 Hide

When a child is referred to children's services there are a number of things that can happen, these range from social workers taking no further action (NFA) right up to the child being taken into care and becoming a Child Looked After (CLA). In this analysis, the levels of intervention have been ranked from smallest (NFA) to the biggest (CLA). Referrals have been classified based on the highest level of intervention.

CINO refers to children in need, excluding children on a child protection plan and children looked after.

Among initial referrals (children who have not been referred in the previous year), the highest level of intervention tends to be either NFA (18% of initial referrals), assessed as not in need (22%) or CINO (31%). Less than 30% of referrals get beyond a CIN plan but those that do tend to stop at a s47 enquiry. Only 1% of initial referrals lead to an Initial Child Protection Conference (ICPC), 7% to a Child Protection Plan (CPP) and only 4% lead to a child becoming looked after.

The pattern is different for children who will be re-referred in the coming year compared to those who will not. Referrals where the child will later be re-referred tend to have a lower highest level of intervention. They tend to follow one of three paths:

- No further action is taken on their referral

- They are assessed as not in need
- They become a Child in Need (but not be put on a CPP or become looked after)

A child that is subject to a s47 enquiry or a higher intervention is very unlikely to be re-referred within 12 months.

Chart

Table

► Export options

Initial referrals by highest level of intervention for 2023

	2023			
	Initial referral: child later re-referred		Initial referral: child not re-referred	
	Percent	Referrals	Percent	Referrals
1. No further action	21%	20,550	17%	69,180
2. Assessed as not in need	27%	26,230	21%	85,450
3. CINO	32%	31,090	31%	123,410
4. s47 Enquiry	16%	15,040	16%	63,650
5. ICPC	1%	1,040	1%	5,060
6. CPP	1%	990	8%	31,840
7. CLA	k	320	5%	20,620
None	1%	570	1%	2,380

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Source: Longitudinal CIN Dataset (LCD)

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The pattern of highest intervention is different for re-referrals, when children are referred back to children's services within one year of previous referral it is more likely that:

- a s47 enquiry takes place ,
- the child is placed on a Child Protection Plan (CPP),
- the child becomes looked after.

[Chart](#)[Table](#)

► Export options

Re-referrals by highest level of intervention for 2023

		2023	
		Percent	Referrals
Re-referral	1. No further action	17%	24,750
	2. Assessed as not in need	19%	28,520
	3. CINO	33%	47,840
	4. s47 Enquiry	14%	20,450
	5. ICPC	2%	2,680
	6. CPP	11%	15,600
	7. CLA	4%	5,640
	None	1%	1,690

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Source: Longitudinal CIN Dataset (LCD)

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The pathways through the social care system differ for children who will only have one referral in a year, children who will be re-referred in the coming year and children who already have been re-referred. When children are referred to CSC, those who exit at low levels of intervention are more likely to be re-referred. When they come back, higher level interventions are more common.

For initial referrals where the child is later re-referred, no further action is taken in 21% of referrals compared to 17% of those that do not lead to a re-referral. Similarly, 27% of referrals where the child is later re-referred are assessed but found not to be in need this compares to 21% for referrals where the child is not later re-

referred.

For re-referrals higher levels interventions are more likely. In 11% of re-referrals the child is placed on a CPP compared to 8% of initial referrals that will not lead to a re-referral. Although a similar share of re-referrals and initial referrals that lead to no re-referral lead to a child become looked after.

[Chart](#)

[Table](#)

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Share of referrals by level of intervention for 2023

	Initial referral: child later re-referred	Initial referral: child not re-referred	Re-referral
1. No further action	21%	17%	17%
2. Assessed as not in need	27%	21%	19%
3. CINO	32%	31%	33%
4. s47 Enquiry	16%	16%	14%
5. ICPC	1%	1%	2%
6. CPP	1%	8%	11%
7. CLA	k	5%	4%
None	1%	1%	1%

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Source: Longitudinal CIN Dataset (LCD)

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Regional variation in re-referrals

[Hide](#)

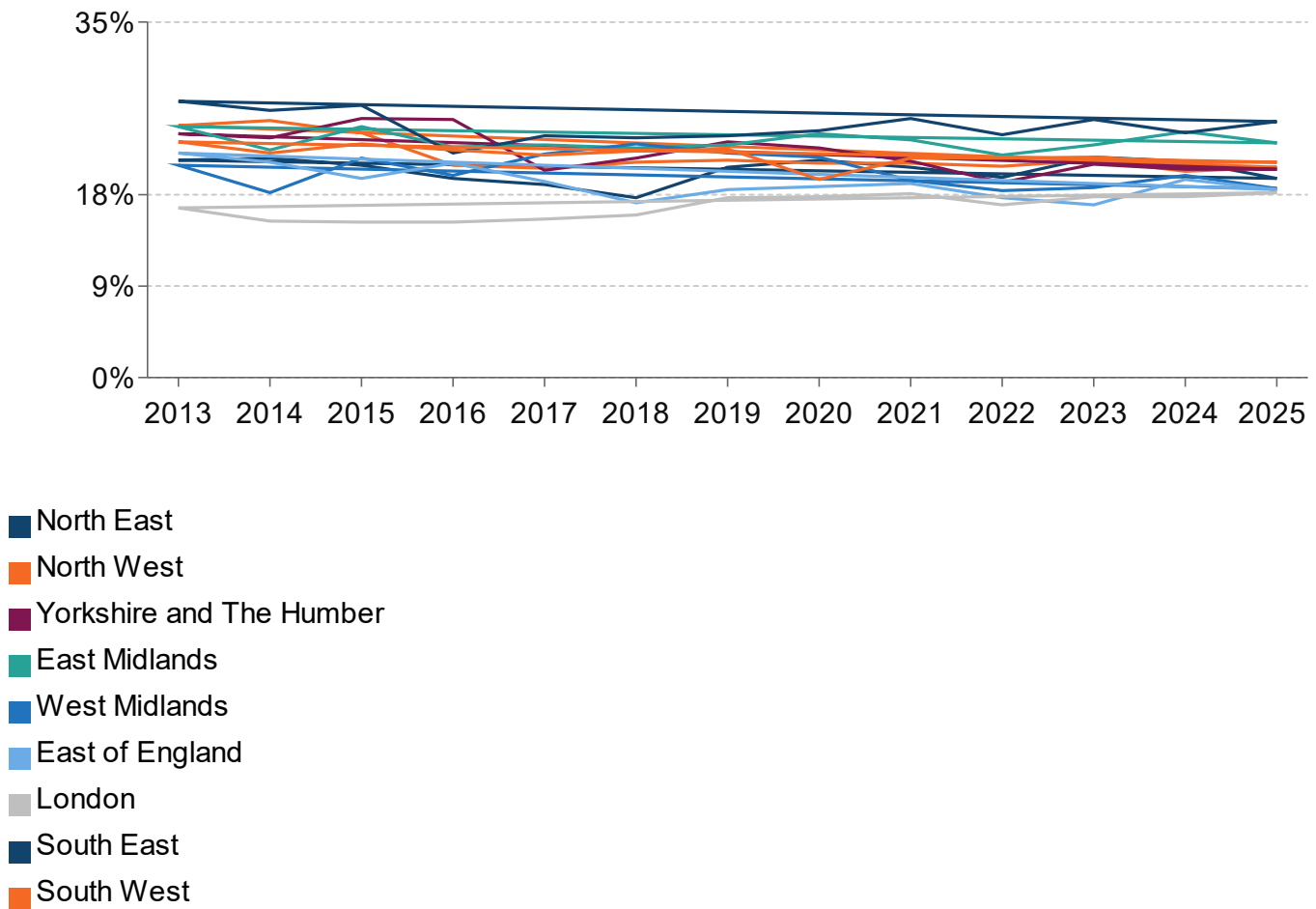
Over the past five years, re-referral rates have remained broadly stable at the regional level, with the exception of a slight dip observed in 2022. The South East and East Midlands regions have consistently reported the highest re-referral percentages, whereas London has recorded the lowest.

Chart

Table

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Re-referrals to children's social care by region 2013 and 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.

Source: Children in need census

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And whilst the South East has also reported high referral rates per 10,000 population, along with the North East

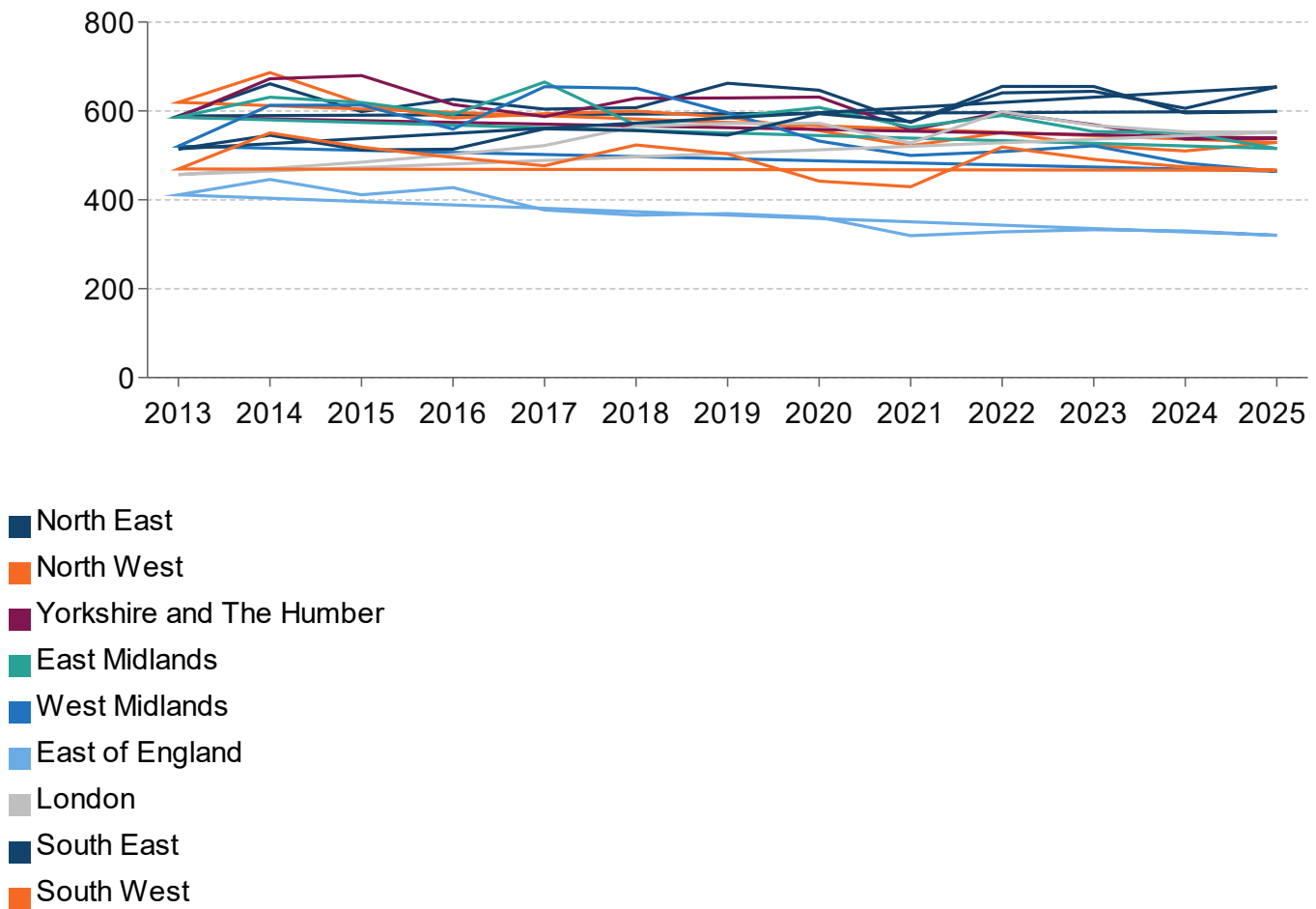
since 2021, it is the East of England that consistently records the lowest referral rates.

Chart

Table

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Rate of referrals per 10,000 children by region 2013-25



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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When a referral is made to a local authority's children's social care service, it is reviewed by a social worker

within 24 hours. A decision is then made regarding the appropriate course of action, which may include conducting an assessment of the child's needs, providing information and/or advice, or taking no further action.

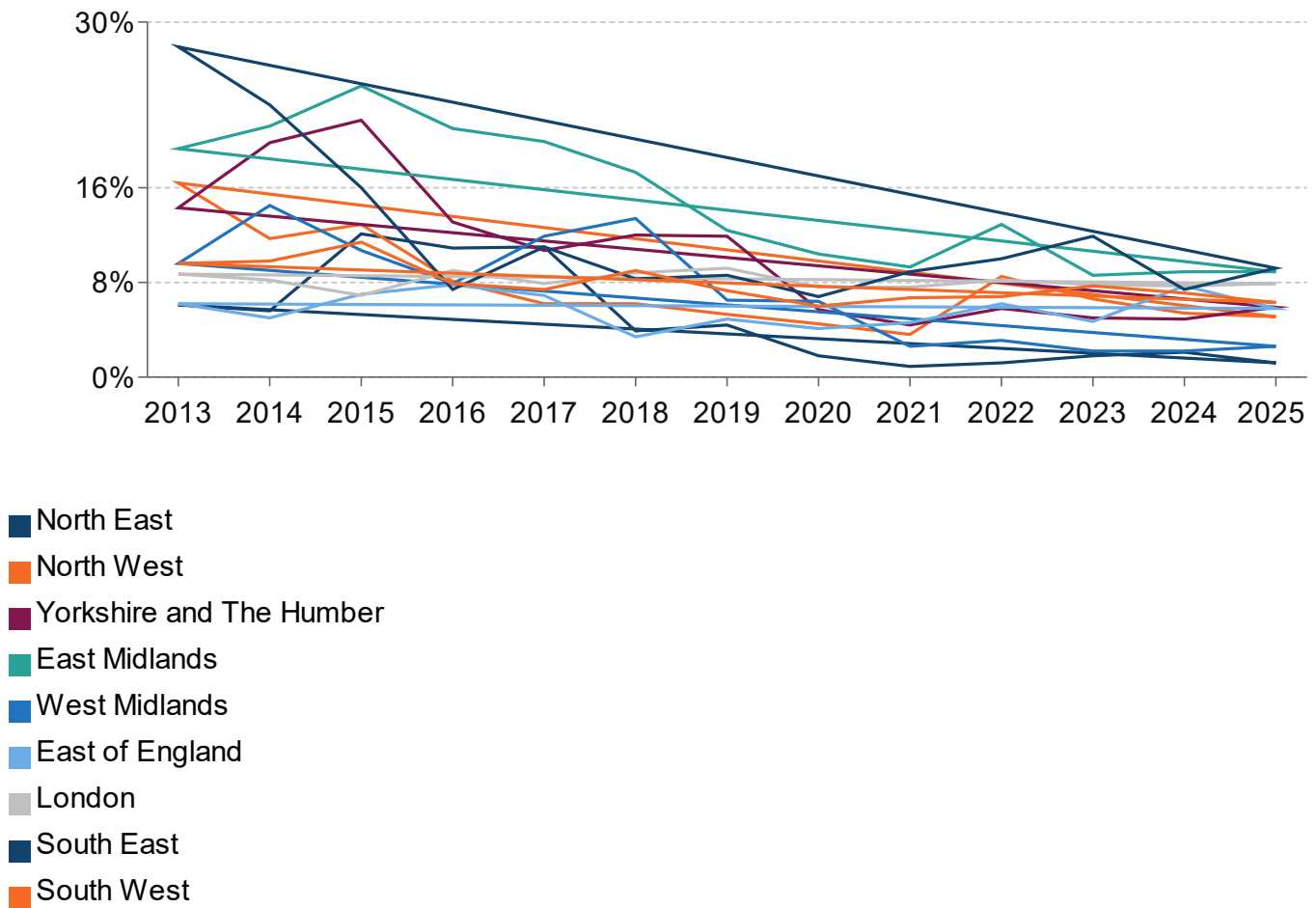
Since 2013, the proportion of referrals closed with no further action has declined, while the percentage of referrals assessed as not in need has increased, producing a low but non-negligible effect by 2025. This shift is generally positive, as it indicates that a greater number of referrals are being assessed. However, while it is difficult to determine an optimal level, sudden changes at the local level may signal issues at the 'front door'. In the most concerning scenarios, such fluctuations could suggest the rationing of protective services.

Chart

Table

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Percentage of referrals which resulted in no further action by region



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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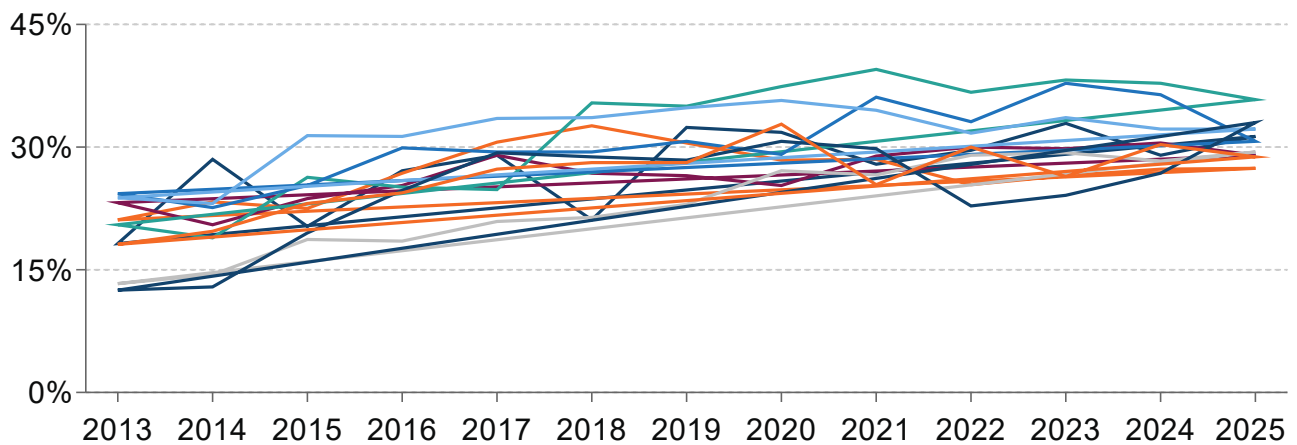
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Chart

Table

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Percentage of referrals where the child was assessed not to be in need (%) by region



- North East
- North West
- Yorkshire and The Humber
- East Midlands
- West Midlands
- East of England
- London
- South East
- South West

Footnotes

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Source: Children in need census

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Re-referrals by deprivation

The following chart illustrates a correlation between referral rates per 10,000 population and re-referral percentages at the local authority level. When overlaid with deprivation data, it becomes evident that more deprived local authorities tend to experience higher rates of referrals.

Interestingly, however, when comparing local authorities with differing levels of deprivation—such as a highly deprived area and a less deprived one—if both record similar referral volumes, the less deprived authority is more likely to exhibit a higher re-referral percentage. This suggests that deprivation alone does not fully explain patterns in re-referrals and that other factors, such as local authority capacity or variations in thresholds for support, may be influencing repeat contact with children’s social care.

[Chart](#)

[Table](#)

! Some rows and columns are not shown in this table as the data does not exist in the underlying file.

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Referrals, re-referrals and deprivation by local authority 2025

		2025		
		Level of deprivation (IMD 2025)	Children with a referral within 12 months of a previous referral (%)	Rate of referrals in the year per 10,000 children aged under 18 years
North East	County Durham	High	18%	536
	Darlington	Medium	13%	491
	Gateshead	High	14%	399
	Hartlepool	High	25%	958
	Middlesbrough	High	24%	1,021
	Newcastle upon Tyne	High	16%	512
	North Tyneside	Medium	23%	448
	Northumberland	Medium	19%	510
	Redcar and Cleveland	High	15%	715

	South Tyneside	High	17%	512
	Stockton-on-Tees	Medium	28%	878
	Sunderland	High	18%	562
North West	Blackburn with Darwen	High	21%	671
	Blackpool	High	23%	936
	Bolton	High	19%	503
	Bury	Medium	24%	649
	Cheshire East	Low	15%	313
	Cheshire West and Chester	Low	22%	493
	Cumberland	Medium	22%	642
	Halton	High	18%	619
	Knowsley	High	16%	429
	Lancashire	Medium	16%	304
	Liverpool	High	29%	860
	Manchester	High	18%	481
	Oldham	High	20%	655
	Rochdale	High	17%	477
	Salford	High	22%	616
	Sefton	Medium	25%	687
	St. Helens	High	19%	587
	Stockport	Low	21%	566
	Tameside	High	27%	934
	Trafford	Low	18%	331
Warrington	Low	16%	468	
	Westmorland and Furness	Low	16%	384

	Wigan	Medium	19%	479
	Wirral	High	21%	613
Yorkshire and The Humber	Barnsley	High	25%	626
	Bradford	High	22%	523
	Calderdale	High	20%	591
	Doncaster	High	27%	830
	East Riding of Yorkshire	Low	16%	399
	Kingston upon Hull, City of	High	21%	753
	Kirklees	Medium	19%	328
	Leeds	Medium	23%	585
	North East Lincolnshire	High	21%	597
	North Lincolnshire	Medium	13%	428
	North Yorkshire	Low	19%	488
	Rotherham	High	19%	489
	Sheffield	High	15%	422
	Wakefield	High	17%	644
	York	Low	22%	529
	East Midlands	Derby	High	22%
Derbyshire		Medium	27%	704
Leicester		High	16%	353
Leicestershire		Low	24%	458
Lincolnshire		Medium	22%	590
North Northamptonshire		Low	22%	563
Nottingham		High	25%	575

	Nottingham	High	25%	515
	Nottinghamshire	Medium	22%	372
	Rutland	Low	23%	481
	West Northamptonshire	Low	22%	472
West Midlands	Birmingham	High	20%	557
	Coventry	High	17%	567
	Dudley	Medium	21%	480
	Herefordshire, County of	x	15%	524
	Sandwell	High	22%	420
	Shropshire	Low	13%	250
	Solihull	Low	25%	614
	Staffordshire	Low	13%	294
	Stoke-on-Trent	High	20%	620
	Telford and Wrekin	Medium	15%	321
	Walsall	High	18%	467
	Warwickshire	Low	17%	398
	Wolverhampton	High	20%	651
	Worcestershire	Low	17%	400
East of England	Bedford	Medium	22%	448
	Cambridgeshire	Low	28%	452
	Central Bedfordshire	Low	15%	353
	Essex	Low	15%	173
	Hertfordshire	Low	15%	236
	Luton	High	18%	504
	Norfolk	Medium	17%	348

	Peterborough	High	19%	668
	Southend-on-Sea	Medium	16%	335
	Suffolk	Medium	19%	346
	Thurrock	Medium	16%	407
South East	Bracknell Forest	Low	18%	522
	Brighton and Hove	Medium	22%	694
	Buckinghamshire	Low	22%	423
	East Sussex	Medium	16%	393
	Hampshire	x	36%	1,425
	Isle of Wight	x	42%	2,083
	Kent	Medium	20%	676
	Medway	Medium	24%	729
	Milton Keynes	Medium	19%	449
	Oxfordshire	Low	18%	322
	Portsmouth	High	22%	654
	Reading	Medium	21%	603
	Slough	Medium	20%	678
	Southampton	Medium	19%	545
	Surrey	Low	19%	382
	West Berkshire	Low	21%	470
	West Sussex	Low	24%	438
	Windsor and Maidenhead	Low	19%	494
	Wokingham	Low	17%	400
South West	Bath and North East Somerset	Low	13%	251
	Bournemouth	Low	22%	453

	Southampton, Christchurch and Poole	Low	22%	460
	Bristol, City of	Medium	22%	460
	Cornwall	Medium	27%	749
	Devon	Low	19%	385
	Dorset	Low	14%	350
	Gloucestershire	Low	21%	611
	Isles of Scilly	x	0%	1,003
	North Somerset	Low	15%	254
	Plymouth	Medium	25%	538
	Somerset	Medium	21%	520
	South Gloucestershire	Low	17%	416
	Swindon	Low	22%	425
	Torbay	High	22%	713
	Wiltshire	Low	17%	266
Inner London	Camden	Medium	17%	591
	City of London	x	c	673
	Hackney	High	19%	674
	Hammersmith and Fulham	Medium	15%	521
	Haringey	High	18%	617
	Islington	High	16%	676
	Kensington and Chelsea	Medium	19%	670
	Lambeth	Medium	20%	532
	Lewisham	Medium	20%	729
	Newham	High	14%	556

	Southwark	Medium	17%	614
	Tower Hamlets	High	24%	766
	Wandsworth	Low	17%	370
	Westminster	Medium	18%	587
Outer London	Barking and Dagenham	High	20%	799
	Barnet	Medium	14%	293
	Bexley	Low	21%	573
	Brent	High	14%	474
	Bromley	Low	22%	630
	Croydon	Medium	24%	850
	Ealing	High	18%	507
	Enfield	High	21%	525
	Greenwich	Medium	13%	556
	Harrow	Low	15%	377
	Havering	Low	16%	563
	Hillingdon	Medium	20%	550
	Hounslow	Medium	11%	319
	Kingston upon Thames	Low	15%	442
	Merton	Low	20%	527
	Redbridge	Medium	16%	519
	Richmond upon Thames	Low	15%	325
Sutton	Low	18%	362	
Waltham Forest	Medium	19%	595	

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Footnotes

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Source: Children in need census

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Re-referrals and Ofsted judgements

Ofsted inspects and reports on the performance of local authorities children's services. They give one of four headline judgements - outstanding, good, requires improvement and inadequate.

There is a weak relationship between Ofsted judgements and re-referral rates. Local authorities who receive outstanding judgements tend to have a lower re-referral rate in the years before inspection. Those that are judged to require improvement tend to have higher re-referral rates in the years before inspection.

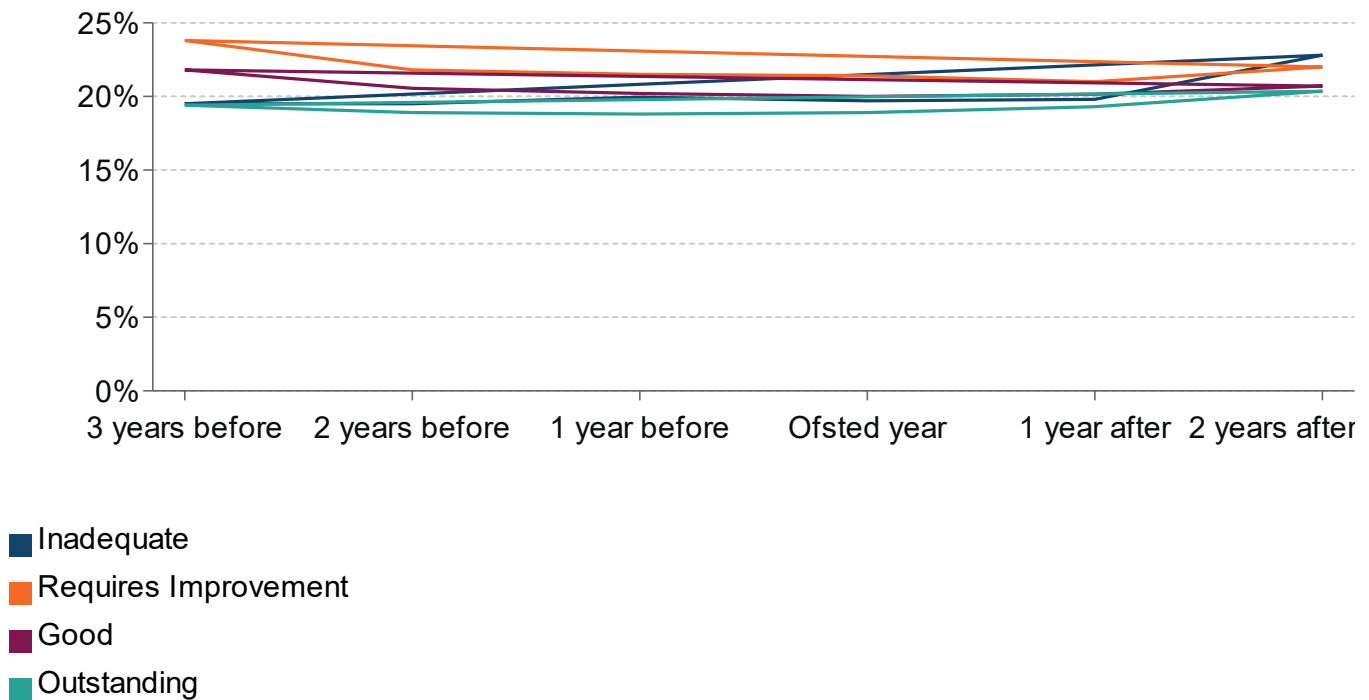
When a local authority's children's services are judged by Ofsted to be inadequate they tend to experience a rise in re-referrals in the years after inspection.

Chart

Table

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Percentage of re-referrals to children's social care by Ofsted judgement



Footnotes

1. National figures shown in this chart refer to the median re-referral rate for local authorities receiving each Ofsted judgement (using Ofsted overall judgement as at end of January 2026).

Source: Children in need census and Ofsted

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Methodology

Find out how and why we collect, process and publish these statistics.

[Children in need: A focus on re-referrals](#)

Ad hoc official statistics

Ad hoc official statistics are one off publications that have been produced as far as possible in line with the Code of Practice for Statistics.

This can be broadly interpreted to mean that these statistics are:

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

Find out more about the standards we follow to produce these statistics through our [Standards for official statistics published by DfE guidance \(opens in new tab\)](#).

Contact us

If you have a specific enquiry about Children in need: A focus on re-referrals statistics and data:

Children's Social Care Analysis and Research

Email: Bruce.GOLDING@education.gov.uk

Contact name: Bruce Golding

Press office

If you have a media enquiry:

Telephone: 020 7783 8300

Public enquiries

If you have a general enquiry about the Department for Education (DfE) or education:

Phone: 0370 000 2288

Opening times:

Monday to Friday from 9.30am to 5.30pm (closed on bank holidays)

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