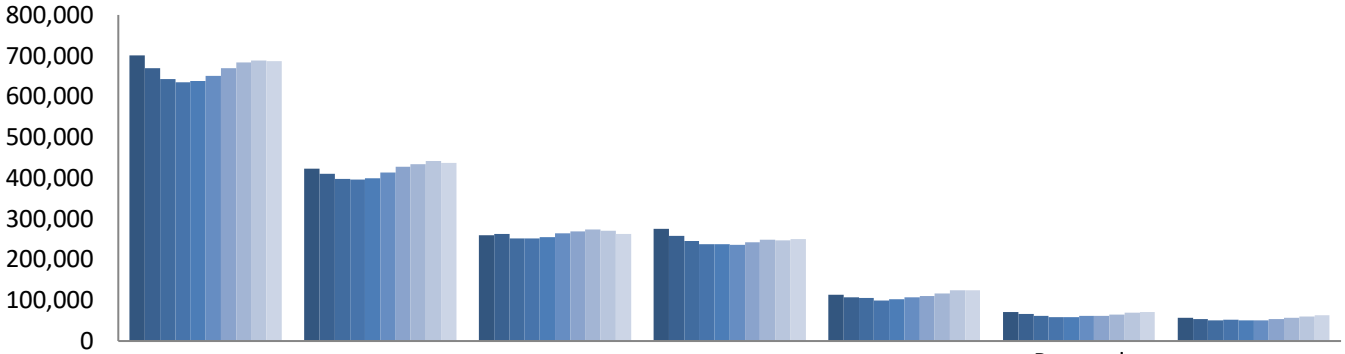
Trends in Foster Care and Adoption: FY 2009 - FY 2018

(Based on data submitted by States as of Aug 22, 2019)

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



	Served	In Care On Sept. 30th	Entered	Exited	Waiting	Parental Rights Terminated	Adoptions
2009	700,000	423,000	260,000	276,000	114,000	71,600	57,200
2010	669,000	411,000	262,000	258,000	108,000	66,000	53,500
2011	643,000	397,000	251,000	246,000	105,000	62,100	50,900
2012	635,000	396,000	251,000	238,000	100,000	58,400	52,000
2013	638,000	400,000	255,000	238,000	103,000	58,900	50,800
2014	650,000	414,000	265,000	236,000	107,000	61,200	50,700
2015	670,000	427,000	269,000	242,000	110,000	62,400	53,600
2016	683,000	434,000	273,000	249,000	117,000	65,500	57,200
2017	688,000	441,000	270,000	247,000	124,000	69,700	59,500
2018	687,000	437,000	263,000	250,000	125,000	71,300	63,100

This chart includes data submitted to the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) by States, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico by Aug 22, 2019.

Please note that, for all of the years shown, some of the data may differ from that shown in earlier versions of this chart. This is due to the fact that some States have resubmitted their AFCARS data after addressing data quality issues.

FY = Federal Fiscal Year (October 1 through September 30)

Discussion of Trends

Numbers of Children in Foster Care: Since FY 2012, the numbers of children in care on the last day of each fiscal year through FY 2017 have increased. FY 2017's 441,000 children represent an 11 percent increase over FY 2012's 396,000. The numbers of children in care on the last day of FY 2018 as compared to FY 2017 is virtually unchanged representing a decrease of slightly less than 1 percent.

Entries into and Exits from Foster Care: Trends for children entering the system follow a similar pattern. Beginning with FY 2009, number of entries to care generally declined through FY 2012 to 251,000, increased to a high of 273,000 in FY 2016 and decreased slightly to 270,000 in FY 2017, however the number of entries during FY 2018 showed a steeper decline of 7,000 to 263,000, a 2.6 percent decrease. The number of exits, which peaked in FY 2009 at 276,000, had been on a continual decline to 236,000 in FY 2014 before increasing to 250,000 in FY 2018.

Children Waiting to be Adopted: The numbers of children waiting to be adopted are a subset of those in care on the last day. As numbers of children in care were declining, the numbers waiting for adoption also declined. As the year end count began to increase as it has in the last six years, the numbers of children waiting for adoption has also grown going from a low in FY 2012 of 100,000 up to 125,000 in FY 2018. However, the percentage of children who are defined as waiting to be adopted has remained stable over the last decade, averaging between 26 and 28% of children in care on the last day.

Children Waiting to be Adopted Whose Parents' Rights Were Terminated: The percentage of children waiting to be adopted whose parents' parental rights had been terminated declined from nearly 63% in FY 2009 to 57% in FY 2013, and has hovered at that rate through 2018. Because the population of children waiting to be adopted has grown since FY 2013, in each year since there has been an increase in the absolute numbers of children whose parent's rights were terminated, increasing from 58,900 in FY 2013 to 71,300 in FY 2018.

Children Adopted: The number of adoptions that are finalized each year has remained relatively flat during the FYs 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2014. FY 2015's 53,600 adoptions represented a nearly 6 percent increase over FY 2014's 50,700. Each year since FY 2015 adoptions have increased each year to a historic high of 63,100 in FY 2018. As a proportion of the exits, during the FYs between 2009 and 2015 adoption has remained very stable, making up on average 21% of the discharges each year. Beginning with FY 2016, there has been at least a percentage point increase in adoptions as a percentage of discharges to a high of 25 percent during FY 2018.

Technical Discussion

In this report, each child is counted only once, using the report representing the child's most recent foster care episode. There are some children who exit foster care and re-enter during the year one or more times. These children would be counted as entries, but not as exits, if they remained in care through the last day of the fiscal year (September 30). In these circumstances, the prior exit is not counted, even though it occurred during the fiscal year. We estimate the number of these uncounted exits to be approximately 6,000 per year.

There is also a data quality issue that has had an impact on the number of exits, particularly for earlier years. AFCARS data are submitted every six months and cover a six-month period. Sometimes a child who is reported during one six-month period does not appear in the next period, and there is no record that the child exited. Case reviews have shown that the majority are situations in which the child actually exited, but the exit was not reported to AFCARS. However, because the actual number of these "dropped" exits cannot be calculated, they have not been accounted for in the exit count. The number of dropped cases ranges between 4,000 and 5,000 cases per period in the most recent years, but the numbers may drop over time as States correct and resubmit their data. These dropped cases range from about a half a

percent to one percent of the total population served in the year. Please note that dropped cases are excluded from all of the estimates shown in the table.

Definitions

1. **In Care 9/30**: This is an estimated count of all the children in foster care **on the last day** of the FFY. An individual child is included in the count for each year for which he or she is in foster care on the last day.

2. **Entries**: This is an estimated count of all children who entered foster care **during** the FFY. An individual child is counted only once for each year, even if the child entered, exited and reentered care during the year. The most recent date of removal from home is used to determine whether the child entered foster care during the period. If an individual child entered in one year and then exits and re-enters in a subsequent year, he or she is included in the count of entries for both years.

3. **Exits**: This is an estimated count of all children who exited foster care during the FFY **at the end of their most recent foster care episode**. An individual child is counted only once for each year, even if the child exited, re-entered and exited again during the year. The most recent date of discharge (from foster care) is the one counted. If an individual child exited care in one year and then re-enters and exits again in a subsequent year, he or she is included in the count of exits for both years.

4. **Waiting**: There is no Federal definition for children waiting to be adopted. For the purposes of this analysis, children waiting to be adopted include children with a goal of adoption and/or whose parental rights have been terminated. The "waiting" population excludes children whose parents' rights have been terminated, who are 16 years old and older, and who have a goal of emancipation. An individual child is included in the count for each year that he or she has these characteristics on the last day of the year. This trends table shows an estimated count of all children who are waiting to be adopted **on the last day** of the FFY. An individual child is included in the count for each year in which he or she is waiting to be adopted on the last day.

5. **Parental Rights Terminated:** This is an estimated count of all children in care **on the last day** of the FFY whose parental rights have been terminated and who are waiting for adoption. An individual child who has these characteristics on the last day of the year is counted only once for that year.

6. **Adopted**: This is an estimated count of all children adopted with public child welfare agency involvement **during the FFY**. An individual child is counted only once for each year, even if (in rare cases) the child was adopted multiple times during the year. In cases when an individual child is adopted in one year and then adopted again in a subsequent year, he or she is included in the count of adoptions for both years.

7. **Served**: This is an estimated count of all children who were in the public foster care system **during the FFY**. This number is the sum of two mutually exclusive groups of children: the children who are already in care on the first day of the fiscal year (as of October 1) and the children who enter foster care during the year. An individual child is counted only once for each year.