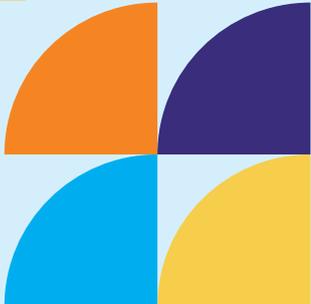
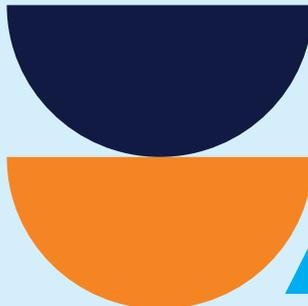




Fostering and adoption 2021–22

A statistical bulletin

Published November 2022



HAPPY TO TRANSLATE

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Key points

Foster care in Scotland

- **The number of foster care households in Scotland continued to decrease**
 - At 31 December 2021, there were 3,415 approved foster care households down 3.5% from 3,540 in 2020.
 - The proportion of households approved for all placement types was lower than the two years previous.
 - In 2021, 405 foster care households de-registered.
- **The number of children and young people in foster care continued to decrease**
 - At 31 December 2021 there were 4,344 children and young people using fostering services.
 - The number of children and young people using fostering services has decreased each year over the last 5 years, down from 5,315 in 2017.
- **Approval ranges continue to be exceeded to accommodate children and young people**
 - In 2021, households went out-with their approval range on 555 occasions.
- **Not all family groups of children are placed together**
 - In 2021, 25% of the family groups placed in foster care households, were placed separately (some following assessment, others due to emergency situation and lack of resource).
 - 70% of services said they had difficulties in 2021 recruiting households that will take family groups of children.
- **In 2021, 46 fostering services said they have a continuing care service**
 - In 2021 there were a total of 389 approved continuing care households and 395 young people accommodated in a continuing care placement.

Adoption in Scotland

- **The number of children and young people using adoption services continues to decrease**
 - In 2021, there were 209 children approved for adoption, 199 children placed with their new adoptive families and 189 children legally adopted. All of these figures are down from the previous years.
- **The age profile of children approved for adoption shifted in 2021**
 - In 2021, half (49%) of children approved for adoption were in the two to five age bracket and 45% were infants. Prior to this there were more infants than two to five-year-olds being approved.
- **More adoptions broke down in 2021 than in any of the four preceding years**
 - In 2021, 37 adoptions broke down.
- **In 2021, there was a change in direction in the number of adoptive households approved**
 - There were 268 new adoptive households approved in 2021, 36 more than in 2020.
 - Between the years 2017 and 2020, the number of new households approved decreased each year.
- **The number of households waiting for a child to be placed was higher in 2021 than in each of the three preceding years**
 - In 2021, 205 households were waiting for a child to be placed.
 - At the same time there were 134 children approved for adoption and waiting to be matched to an adoptive household (less than in each of the four preceding years).

Introduction and notes

This report provides insight into the operation of fostering and adoption services in Scotland over the past five years, and for the first time includes continuing care. At 31 December 2021, there were just under 12,000 care services registered with the Care Inspectorate, including 38 adoption and 59 fostering services provided by the local authority and the voluntary/not-for-profit sector.

This report is based on data collected by us from service providers in their annual returns over the last five years from 2017 to 2021. The most recent annual return data covers the period 1 January 2021 to 31 December 2021. This report also includes our evaluations of service quality, correct at 31 March 2022.

We hope this report is of use to all those with an interest in adoption and fostering services, and especially to providers of these services who invest significant time in providing information to us each year, as well as to other interested parties.

We have replaced the term 'sibling' with 'family group' in this publication. For the purpose of this publication, family group has the same definition as sibling in that it encompasses children who have a brother or sister relationship with each other or a brother or sister-like relationship with each other.

Please consider answering our short [feedback survey](#) on how you found this publication.

Grading

Up until May 2021, we evaluated fostering and adoption services across three quality themes – care and support, staffing, and management and leadership. Information on these evaluation criteria can be found in the document [How we inspect](#).

This approach was replaced by a new quality framework in May 2021, details of which can be found in the document [A quality framework for fostering, adoption and adult placement services](#). Some evaluations are therefore based on the old quality themes whilst the more recent ones are based on the new quality framework.

Fostering and adoption and the Covid-19 pandemic

The Covid-19 pandemic and the temporary changes made to legislation, policies and procedures in response to the pandemic¹ meant that in 2020, fostering and adoption services were not operating as they did in previous years. We expect that this has had some bearing on the numbers and trends published here.

Examples include:

- The lower number of children entering the fostering and adoption system in 2020 might in part be attributed to the cancellation of non-urgent children's hearings between April 2020 and September 2020, bearing in mind we were already seeing a downward trend.
- The amendment to the Looked After Children (Scotland) Regulations 2009 to allow local authorities, if they consider that it is necessary for a reason relating to coronavirus, to place more than the current maximum of three children with a foster carer and for a foster carer to look after more children than their current approval allowed. This may have resulted in instances that otherwise would have been recorded as a foster carer exceeding their approval range in the annual return not being recorded as such in recent annual returns.

We have not attempted to quantify the extent to which the pandemic may have disrupted the trends in this report although we have footnoted the tables and charts that we expect might have been affected.

Background

Foster care and adoption services are vital for assessing, approving and supporting foster carers and the recruitment and assessment of prospective adoptive parents to care for some of our most vulnerable children. Children who are placed away from their home require high-quality care that addresses their emotional and wellbeing needs. Matching children to families who can provide high quality care is essential to enable improved outcomes for children. Ongoing assessment and planning are crucial to make sure children are being looked after in families, either their own or in alternative family placements, that address their best interests throughout childhood. Where permanency is required, planning for a placement should not be delayed. This is so that children have the best opportunity to make new attachments within an alternative family placement where they can start to feel secure and cared for.

Local authorities have a legal responsibility for ensuring that children in need of foster care and adoption are safe and have appropriate placements. Local authorities in Scotland are legally required to provide fostering and adoption services within their authority areas. They can also work with voluntary/not-for-profit fostering and adoption services to place children with carers (where that is in the child's interest).

¹ Children's Hearings Improvement Partnership: Coronavirus (Scotland) Act 2020 – Guidance on looked-after children and children's hearings provisions (<https://www.chip-partnership.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Coronavirus-Scotland-Act-2020-guidance.docx.pdf>)

Over the summer of 2015, we worked with colleagues in the Scottish Government, service providers and their representative bodies to review the content of our annual returns. This work has enabled us to collate a meaningful summary of adoption and fostering statistics across Scotland. This is the sixth in the series of adoption and fostering statistical bulletins; all of which can be accessed [here](#).

We added some questions to the 2018 fostering annual return about continuing care for young people aged 16 to 21 years following the enactment of part 11 of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014, Continuing Care.² This year, for the first time we have included a summary of the continuing care data for the years 2019, 2020 and 2021. Please regard these statistics as estimates and let us know what you think of them by answering our short [feedback survey](#).

For ease of writing, throughout this bulletin ‘children and young people’ is often shortened to ‘children’.

Data quality note

Most of the data in this report was provided directly by service providers in their annual returns. In this publication, to accurately reflect trends over time and to allow year-on-year comparisons to be made, where a service has not completed an annual return, we impute data from information provided by the service in another year.

All but one of the 38 registered adoption services and one of the 59 registered fostering services submitted their 2021-22 annual return. For services that did not submit their annual return, we have used data from their last submitted return.

We have excluded one adoption service and two fostering services from the statistics that follow (except from our quality evaluations). This is because they are not involved in the approval of households or children for adoption or fostering and therefore many of the aspects we present in this report do not apply to them.

The data published in this report is consistent with figures published in the Scottish Government’s [Children’s Social Work Statistics 2020-21](#). The slight differences in numbers are due to different reporting periods, and differences in the level and criteria at which the data is gathered and cleaned.

² Continuing Care is the continued provision of accommodation and other assistance that is being provided immediately before a young person ceases to be looked after until their 21st birthday. Only children who cease to be looked after aged 16 years or over and were looked after away from home are eligible for Continuing Care.

Section 1: Foster care

Fostering services

At 31 December 2021, there were 59 fostering services in Scotland registered with us, made up of 32 local authority services and 27 voluntary/not-for-profit organisations (referred to as independent services in the statistics that follow). There were no new fostering services registered in 2021.

The 2021 data presented in this report is based on the data reported by 57 fostering services in their annual returns, together with evaluation data as at 31 March 2022 for all 59 adoption services.

This report covers five different aspects of fostering services:

- foster care households
- care experienced children and young people
- fostering service capacity
- continuing care
- fostering service evaluation.

Foster care households

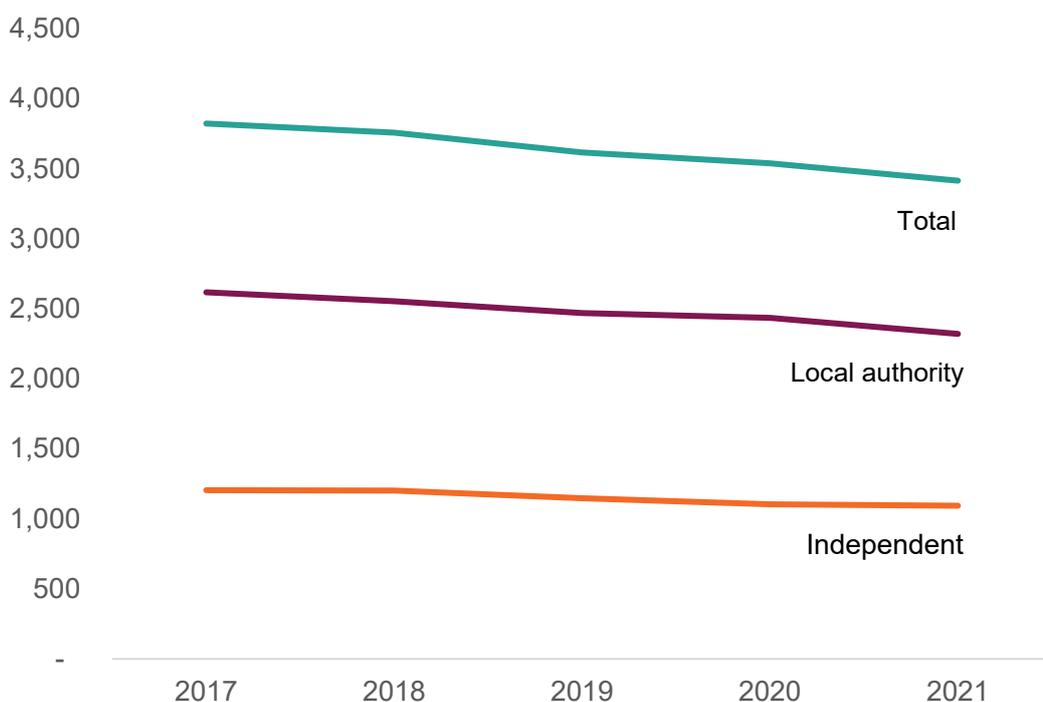
At 31 December 2021, the 57 fostering services in Scotland had a combined total of 3,415 approved foster care households³ (Figure 1.2). Similar to previous years, 68% of approved households were registered with local authority services and 32% were with independent services.

Figures 1.1 and 1.2 show that overall and in each sector the number of approved foster care households is decreasing over time, more so in the local authority sector.

At the service level, sixteen services had more foster care households in 2021 compared to the previous year, however 31 services had fewer households, resulting in the overall decrease of 125 households (3.5%) since 2020.

Figure 1.1 Overall and in each sector the number of approved foster care households is decreasing over time, more so in the local authority sector

Total number of approved foster care households at 31 December, with sector split



³ This may be subject to some double counting. Regulations allow a foster carer to be 'registered' with more than one agency, however this is intended as an enabling provision in certain circumstances not one which should be regularly used ([Guidance on the Looked After Children \(Scotland\) Regulations 2009 and the Adoption and Children \(Scotland\) Act 2007 – Chapter 11 The Assessment and Approval of Foster Carers](#))

Figure 1.2 Number of approved foster care households¹ at 31 December, with sector split

	Local authority	Independent	Total
2021	2,321	1,094	3,415
2020	2,435	1,105	3,540
2019	2,470	1,147	3,617
2018	2,555	1,203	3,758
2017	2,618	1,205	3,823
Percentage change between 2017 and 2021	-11%	-9%	-11%

¹ Excludes those approved exclusively for short breaks.

Figures 1.3 and 1.4 present the number of approved households split by their approval type, over time.

The number and proportion of local authority approved households with approval for all placement types was increasing each year from 2017 to 2019 in parallel with a decrease in interim only, long term only, and permanent only placement approvals. In 2020 the number and percentage of households approved for all types of placement fell, with a further smaller drop in 2021.

In local authority services the most common placement approval continues to be interim and approval for all types of placement (at 34% and 32% respectively). However, there was an increase in the number of households (480, 21%) approved to provide permanent only places in 2021.

In independent services, each year since recording under began, more than half of households were approved to provide all types of placements. In 2021 this reached the highest level so far, up to 80%, and there were fewer households approved for interim only and long term only placements than previously.

In 2021 there were no households approved for emergency only placements.

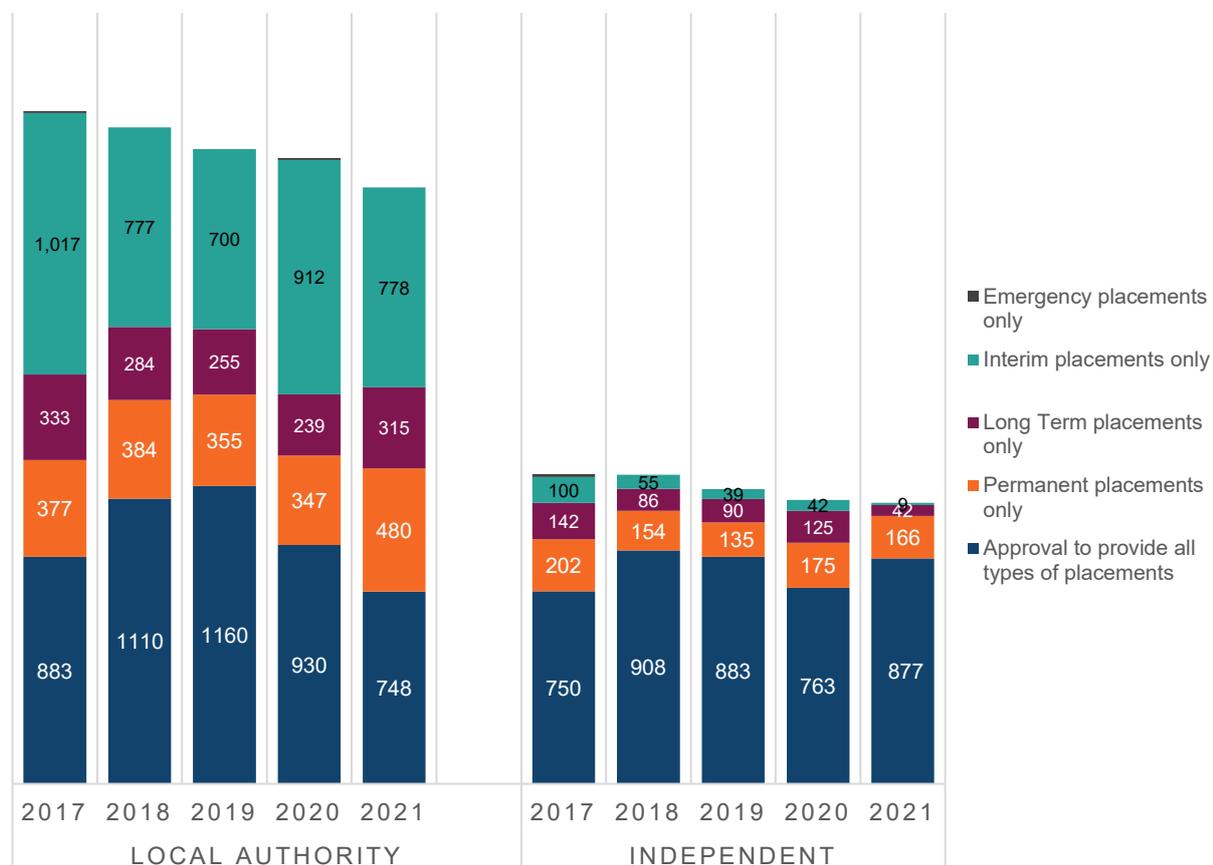
Figure 1.3 Number of approved foster care households¹ at 31 December, split by sector and placement type²

ALL SERVICES:										
	Approval to provide all types of placements		Permanent placements only		Long Term placements only		Interim placements only		Emergency placements only	
	count	%	count	%	count	%	count	%	count	%
2021	1,625	48%	646	19%	357	10%	787	23%	-	0%
2020	1,693	48%	522	15%	364	10%	954	27%	7	0%
2019	2,043	56%	490	14%	345	10%	739	20%	-	0%
2018	2,018	54%	538	14%	370	10%	832	22%	-	0%
2017	1,633	43%	579	15%	475	12%	1,117	29%	19	0%
LOCAL AUTHORITY:										
	Approval to provide all types of placements		Permanent placements only		Long Term placements only		Interim placements only		Emergency placements only	
	count	%	count	%	count	%	count	%	count	%
2021	748	32%	480	21%	315	14%	778	34%	-	0%
2020	930	38%	347	14%	239	10%	912	37%	7	0%
2019	1,160	47%	355	14%	255	10%	700	28%	-	0%
2018	1,110	43%	384	15%	284	11%	777	30%	-	0%
2017	883	34%	377	14%	333	13%	1,017	39%	8	0%
INDEPENDENT:										
	Approval to provide all types of placements		Permanent placements only		Long Term placements only		Interim placements only		Emergency placements only	
	count	%	count	%	count	%	count	%	count	%
2021	877	80%	166	15%	42	4%	9	1%	-	0%
2020	763	69%	175	16%	125	11%	42	4%	-	0%
2019	883	77%	135	12%	90	8%	39	3%	-	0%
2018	908	75%	154	13%	86	7%	55	5%	-	0%
2017	750	62%	202	17%	142	12%	100	8%	11	1%

- 1 Excluding those approved exclusively for short breaks.
- 2 Carers were categorised differently prior to the 2018 annual return.
- 3 The 2019 figures presented here are revised and therefore do not match those published in the Fostering and Adoption 2019-20 statistical bulletin.

Figure 1.4 The most common placement approval continues to be ‘interim’ and ‘approval to provide all types of placements’

Distribution of approved foster care households¹ at 31 December, split by sector and placement type²



- 1 Excluding those approved exclusively for short breaks.
- 2 Carers were categorised differently prior to the 2018 annual return.
- 3 The 2019 figures presented here are revised and therefore do not match those published in the Fostering and Adoption 2019-20 statistical bulletin.

At 31 December 2021 (Figure 1.5), there were 433 households approved to provide short breaks only (lower than the three previous years and down 11% from 488 in 2020). This decrease is driven by a decrease reported by one service. Excluding that service from the data produces positive net change in the number of short break households.

Figure 1.5 Number of foster care households approved only to provide short breaks at 31 December, split by sector

	number of households approved for short breaks only			number of services that have approved short break households		
	Local authority	Independent	Total	Local authority	Independent	Total
2021	294	139	433	28	20	48
2020	325	163	488	29	21	50
2019	320	146	466	26	21	47
2018	347	142	489	29	18	47
2017	285	138	423	28	17	45

Of the 3,415 approved households (Figure 1.2), 707 (21%) had approval to care for children of any age (Figure 1.6). This is in-line with the pre-pandemic figures and is up 17%, from 619 in 2020.

Figure 1.6 Number of households that have approval for any age range of child or young person at 31 December, split by sector

	number			% of all households		
	Local authority	Independent	Total	Local authority	Independent	Total
2021	339	368	707	15%	34%	21%
2020	249	370	619	10%	33%	17%
2019	269	439	708	11%	38%	20%
2018	300	602	902	12%	50%	24%
2017	342	544	886	13%	45%	23%

Private fostering

Private fostering is an arrangement where a parent makes an agreement with someone who is not a close relative of the child to care for that child for more than 28 days.

These arrangements are not facilitated by the local authority or a registered service. It is very possible that private foster carers will not be aware of their responsibility to notify the local authority of these arrangements or that local authorities do not recognise these

arrangements as private fostering. Therefore, it is likely that there are more private fostering arrangements taking place than we and local authorities are being notified of.

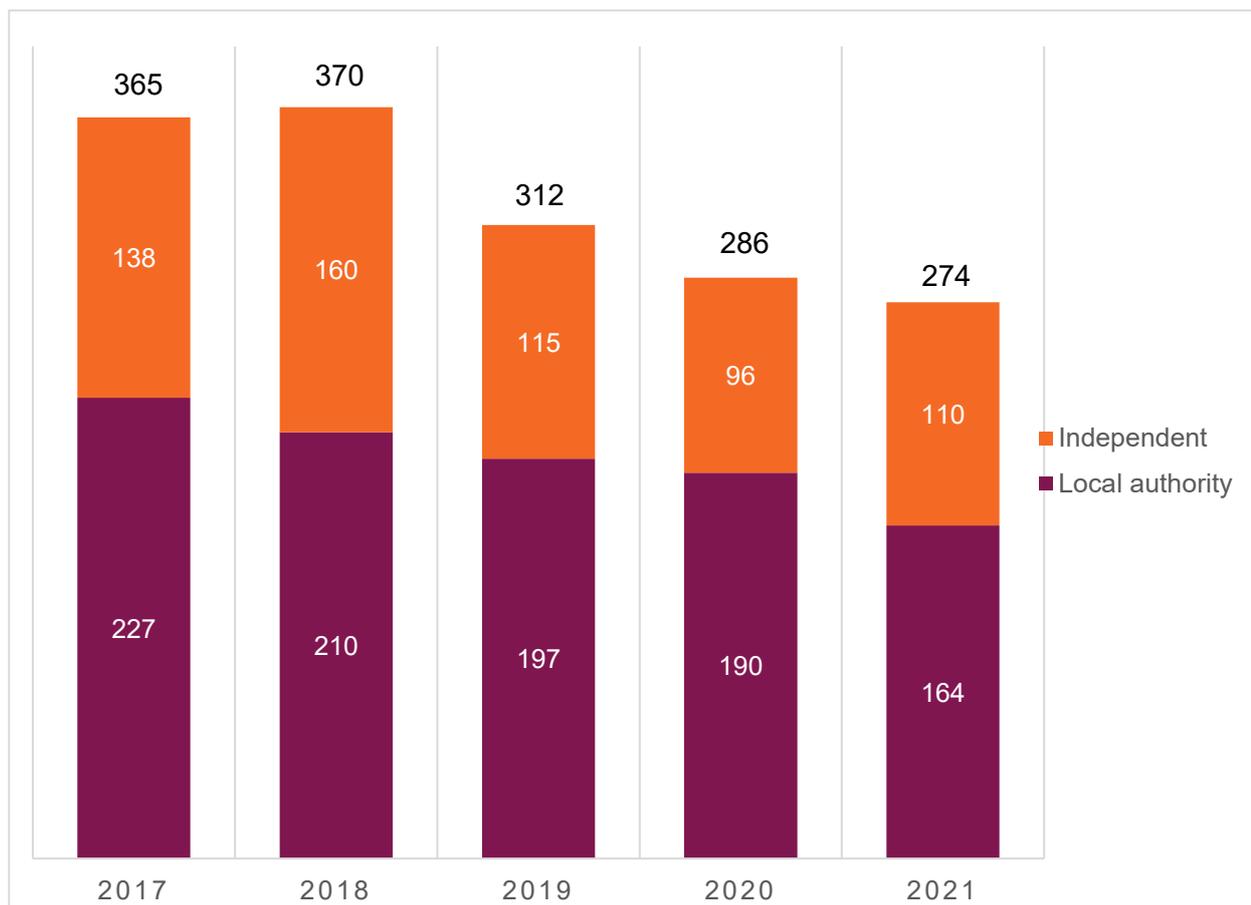
There were 11 notifications of private fostering in 2021, five in 2020 and six in 2019 and 2018.

Recruitment and de-registration

Over the course of 2021, there were 274 new foster care households approved (see figure 1.7 and 1.8). Eight fostering services did not approve any new households in 2021.

Figure 1.7 the number of new foster carers approved each year has fallen in each of the last three years.

New foster care households approved between 1 January and 31 December, with sector split



Sixty percent of the new households were approved by local authority services and 40% approved by independent services, with both sectors showing an overall downward trend over time.

Services varied in their recruitment success, with the number of new households ranging from 1 to 28 at the service level.

[Guidance on the Looked After Children \(Scotland\) Regulations 2009 and the Adoption and Children \(Scotland\) Act 2017](#) states that authorities should normally aim to complete an assessment within six months of receiving an application. Therefore, the length of the assessment should be measured as the time between when the application was received and approval by the agency decision maker. This is not defined in the annual return (although we will aim to address this) therefore there may be an inconsistency across services in how assessment time is calculated, which cannot be quantified in these statistics.

In 2021, 65% of the overall number of new foster carer assessments were completed within six months, which is the same as the previous year (see figure 1.8). Just over a quarter (27%) were completed between six months and a year. A smaller amount (24 assessments, 9%) took a year or more to complete.

Over the past five years, although there was a drop in the total number of assessments completed, there has been an increase in both the percentage and number of assessments completed within the target six month period. This shift is also evident in the independent sector and in the local authority sector to a lesser extent.

Figure 1.8 Number of new foster care households approved between 1 January and 31 December, split by sector and length of assessment completion

ALL SERVICES:							
	Total new carer households	assessment completion time					
		Up to six months		Between six & 12 months		12 months or more	
		count	percentage of total approved	count	percentage of total approved	count	percentage of total approved
2021	274	177	65%	73	27%	24	9%
2020	286	185	65%	76	27%	25	9%
2019	312	163	52%	130	42%	19	6%
2018	370	169	46%	173	47%	28	8%
2017	365	188	52%	145	40%	26	7%
LOCAL AUTHORITY:							
	Total new carer households	assessment completion time					
		Up to six months		Between six & 12 months		12 months or more	
		count	percentage of total approved	count	percentage of total approved	count	percentage of total approved
2021	164	89	54%	53	32%	22	13%
2020	190	116	61%	61	32%	13	7%
2019	197	85	43%	93	47%	19	10%
2018	210	99	47%	95	45%	16	8%
2017	227	115	51%	94	41%	14	6%
INDEPENDENT:							
	Total new carer households	assessment completion time					
		Up to six months		Between six & 12 months		12 months or more	
		count	percentage of total approved	count	percentage of total approved	count	percentage of total approved
2021	110	88	80%	20	18%	2	2%
2020	96	69	72%	15	16%	12	13%
2019	115	78	68%	37	32%	0	0%
2018	160	70	44%	78	49%	12	8%
2017	138	73	53%	51	37%	12	9%

1 The measure of assessment completion time does not include households that were not approved.

- 2 The number of new households that are approved may include a small amount of double-counting at the national level, owing to the rare situation where households have dual or derivate approval⁴ (are registered with more than one fostering service).

Recruiting households that would foster family groups (Figure 1.9) was a challenge for 40 fostering services (70% of all services) in 2021. This is the highest proportion since recording began, and has been increasing in the last five years, for local authorities and independent providers.

As in previous years, the main reason for this was accommodation constraints (services told us this was due to factors such as housing size, deprivation and local demographics). Difficulty recruiting households in a restricted market; the increased demand on placements arising from continuing care; and the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, were also cited as reasons.

Figure 1.9 Number of services that have difficulties recruiting households that will take family groups of children, split by sector

	Number			% of all services		
	Local authority	Independent	Total	Local authority	Independent	Total
2021	26	14	40	81%	56%	70%
2020	25	9	34	78%	36%	60%
2019	25	9	34	78%	36%	60%
2018	22	8	30	69%	31%	52%
2017	20	6	26	63%	23%	45%

Over the course of 2021, 405 foster care households de-registered from their fostering service (Figure 1.10), more than in 2020. Since 2017 the number of households de-registering from local authority fostering services has fluctuated each year, but overall has increased, while in independent services the number has decreased.

Comparing the number of households that deregistered with the number of new households gives a net change for each year and figure 1.10 shows the percentage of services that have experienced a net loss in households each year. At an individual service level, we estimate that 36 fostering services – 63% of all services that recruit and approve foster carers – experienced a net loss in foster care households in 2021 – this is the highest since recording began.

⁴ See ([Guidance on the Looked After Children \(Scotland\) Regulations 2009 and the Adoption and Children \(Scotland\) Act 2007 – Chapter 11 The Assessment and Approval of Foster Carers](#)) (regulation 23) for definition of dual approval and derivate approval.

Figure 1.10 Number of foster care households that de-registered between 1 January and 31 December, and the number/percentage of services that experienced a net loss of foster care households, split by sector

	Number of households that de-registered			Percentage of services that experienced a net loss in foster carer households		
	Local authority	Independent	Total	Local authority	Independent	Total
2021	250	155	405	69%	56%	63%
2020	226	123	349	56%	60%	58%
2019	265	169	434	53%	56%	54%
2018	263	143	406	47%	35%	41%
2017	228	175	403	38%	35%	36%

- 1 The number of households that de-register may include a small amount of double-counting at the national level, owing to the rare situation where households are registered with more than one fostering service.
- 2 The 2017 figure presented here for percentage of services is revised and will not match earlier reports.

In 2021, up to 30 June, fostering services across Scotland received approximately 5,706 enquiries from potential foster carers (Figure 1.11). Of these, 5% led to applications, 37% of which were approved.

To date, services reported the highest number of enquiries and applications received in 2020. Over the 5-year period, the number of enquiries has increased but the numbers of applications and approvals have fallen. Correspondingly, the percentage of enquiries that progress to applications and the percentage of applications that result in approvals have both fallen since 2017.

Figure 1.11. Recruitment of foster care households: approximate number of enquiries received between 1 January and 30 June, and the number leading to applications and approved households, split by sector

	Enquiries			Applications (as a percentage of enquiries)			Approvals (as a percentage of applications)		
	Local authority	Independent	Total	Local authority	Independent	Total	Local authority	Independent	Total
2021	984	4,722	5,706	143 (15%)	132 (3%)	275 (5%)	62 (43%)	39 (30%)	101 (37%)
2020	1,028	5,230	6,258	184 (18%)	174 (3%)	358 (6%)	85 (46%)	52 (30%)	137 (38%)
2019	954	4,238	5,192	170 (18%)	110 (3%)	280 (5%)	64 (38%)	49 (45%)	113 (40%)
2018	982	2,524	3,506	158 (16%)	110 (4%)	268 (8%)	57 (36%)	50 (45%)	107 (40%)
2017	1,038	3,094	4,132	173 (17%)	131 (4%)	304 (7%)	73 (42%)	55 (42%)	128 (42%)

Care experienced children and young people

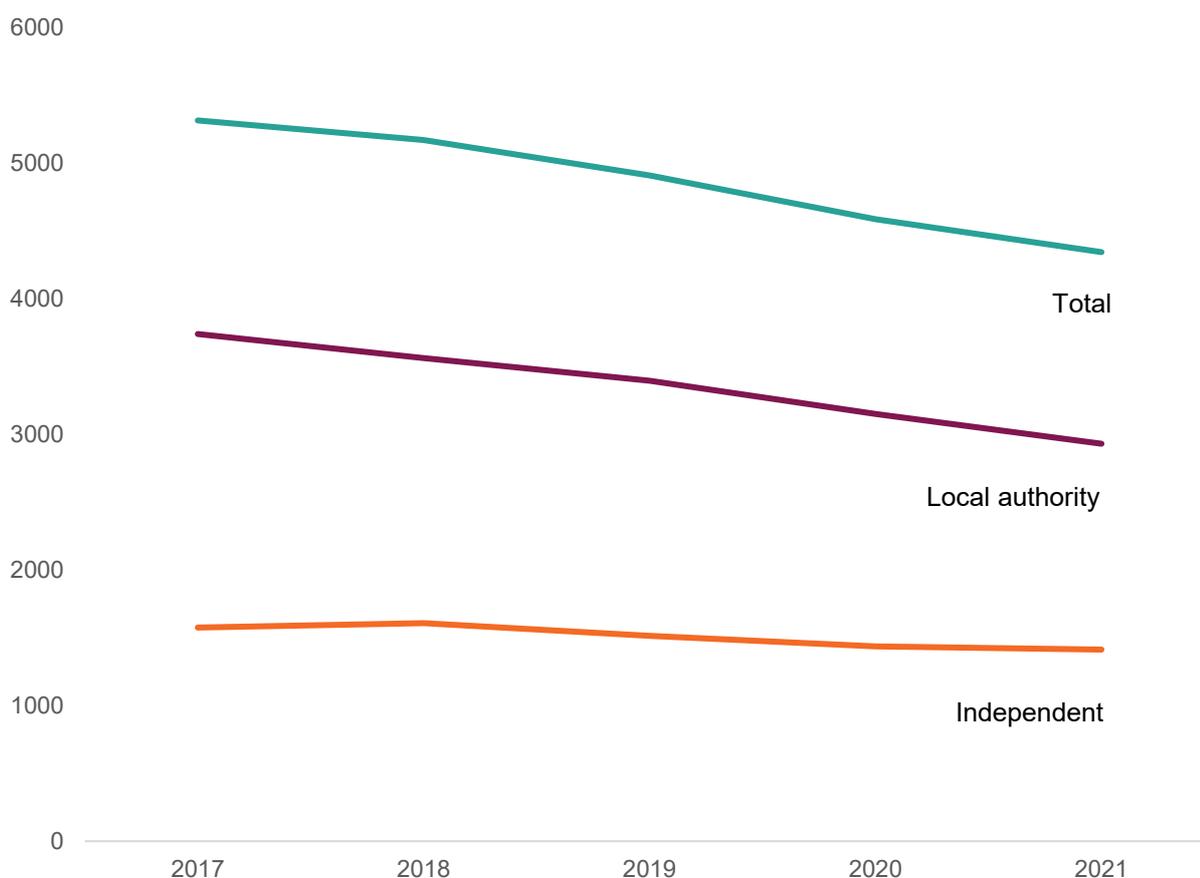
The Children (Scotland) Act 1995 and Adoption and Children (Scotland) Act 2007 places a duty on local authorities to provide fostering and adoption services. They are responsible for assessing and planning for children who, as an outcome of this assessment, require alternative care either through voluntary arrangements or compulsory measures of care. Local authorities, through service level agreements with independent fostering and adoption services, may place children with carers through these services. Independent fostering and adoption services also recruit, assess, and provide training and support to carers to ensure that they are providing a high-quality service to children and young people. When children are placed with an independent agency, it remains the responsibility of the local authority to support the child and to review the arrangement to ensure that it continues to meet the child's needs. Where permanency is required, this may be provided through a permanent foster placement or through adoption.

Placements

In 2021, there were 4,344 children and young people using fostering services (in a placement with an approved foster care household) (Figure 1.12 and 1.13).

Figure 1.12 The number of children using fostering services in 2021 was 243 fewer than the previous year, continuing the overall downward trend

Total number of children and young people using fostering services at 31 December, with sector split



- 1 'Using fostering services' means children who were placed by services into one of their approved foster care households. The data is gathered in a way that reduces double counting.
- 2 The decreasing trend may have been compounded by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Of the 4,344 children using fostering services, 67% (2,931) were in local authority approved households and 33% (1,413) were in households approved by independent services.

The number of children using fostering services in 2021 was 243 fewer than the previous year, continuing the overall downward trend. This is mainly due to the number of children in foster care provided by the local authority decreasing each year, with the number of children in independent foster care households decreasing to a lesser extent.

The overall trend is consistent with figures published in the [Scottish Government's Children's Social Work Statistics 2020-21](#), which also show a decrease over time in the number of children in a foster care setting.

Figure 1.13 Total number of children and young people using fostering services at 31 December, split by sector

	Local authority	Independent	Total
2021	2,931	1,413	4,344
2020	3,151	1,436	4,587
2019	3,396	1,514	4,910
2018	3,563	1,608	5,171
2017	3,740	1,575	5,315

1 Using fostering services' means children who were placed by services into one of their approved foster care households. The data is gathered in a way that reduces double counting.

Figures 1.14 and 1.15 show that, prior to 2020, the number of children placed in interim placements by local authority services was decreasing over time with a corresponding increase in permanent placements. The trend is disrupted in 2020 but does look to have partially rebounded in 2021 to 51% of children in interim placements (down from 55% in 2020) and 28% in permanent placements.

Figures 1.14 and 1.15 also show a pattern of decreasing use of interim placements by independent services over the time period with a corresponding increase in the use of long term placements. In 2021, long term placements became the most common type for the first time since recording began, however, it should be noted this is mainly driven by less than five independent services.

Figure 1.14 Children and young people using fostering services¹ at 31 December, split by sector and placement type²

		Permanent placement			Long-term placement			Interim placement			Emergency placement		
		No.	% of sector	% of total	No.	% of sector	% of total	No.	% of sector	% of total	No.	% of sector	% of total
2021	Local authority	824	28%	19%	596	20%	14%	1,481	51%	34%	30	1%	1%
	Independent	441	31%	10%	527	37%	12%	428	30%	10%	17	1%	0%
	Total	1,265		29%	1,123		26%	1,909		44%	47		1%
2020	Local authority	804	26%	18%	588	19%	13%	1,737	55%	38%	22	1%	0%
	Independent	432	30%	9%	487	34%	11%	508	35%	11%	9	1%	0%
	Total	1,236		27%	1,075		23%	2,245		49%	31		1%
2019	Local authority	1242	37%	25%	562	17%	11%	1,467	43%	30%	125	4%	3%
	Independent	471	31%	10%	431	28%	9%	590	39%	12%	22	1%	0%
	Total	1,713		35%	993		20%	2,057		42%	147		3%
2018	Local authority	1054	30%	20%	801	22%	15%	1,600	45%	31%	108	3%	2%
	Independent	472	29%	9%	351	22%	7%	777	48%	15%	8	0.5%	0%
	Total	1,526		30%	1,152		22%	2,377		46%	116		2%
2017	Local authority	981	26%	18%	920	25%	17%	1,769	47%	33%	70	2%	1%
	Independent	474	30%	9%	475	30%	9%	610	39%	11%	16	1%	0%
	Total	1,455		27%	1,395		26%	2,379		45%	86		2%

1 'Using fostering services' means children who were placed by services into one of their approved foster care households. The data is gathered in such a way as to eliminate double counting.

2 Placements are categorised based on the National Placement Descriptors.

3 Trends, particularly associated with interim placements, may have been disrupted by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Figure 1.15 Overall, interim placement types continue to be the most common

Children and young people using fostering services at 31 December, split by sector and placement type



- 1 'Using fostering services' means children who were placed by services into one of their approved foster care households. The data is gathered in such a way as to eliminate double counting.
- 2 Placements are categorised based on the National Placement Descriptors.
- 3 Trends, particularly associated with interim placements, may have been disrupted by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Children and young people awaiting permanent placement

At 31 December 2021, there were 207 children and young people identified as needing a permanent placement who were not already in or moving towards such a placement (Figure 1.16).

While the number fluctuates from year to year, relatively speaking the overall proportion of children using fostering services and not in a permanent placement is 7%, similar to the previous years.

At the same time, there were 15 children, across five local authority services who were living at home or with kinship carers and waiting on a foster care placement to become available.

Figure 1.16 Number of children and young people using local authority fostering services at 31 December needing a permanent placement and the number that were waiting for a foster care placement to become available

	Children not in or moving towards permanent placement		Waiting for placement to become available	
	Number and percentage of children ¹	Number of services	Number of children	Number of services
2021	207 (7%)	21	15	5
2020	203 (6%)	20	17	5
2019	188 (6%)	20	17	7
2018	232 (6%)	18	29	8
2017	224 (6%)	20	23	7

1 As a percentage of the children using fostering services and not in a permanent placement.

2 Only includes children and young people where a decision has been made to place them in foster care.

Placements ending on an unplanned basis

The table below (Figure 1.17) shows that 345 placements involving 319 children and young people ended on an unplanned⁵ basis throughout 2021. This is similar to the previous year.

Of the placements that ended, 63 (18%) were permanent placements – again, similar to the previous year.

⁵ Unplanned is defined as ‘when removal of a child from a foster placement stemmed from a crisis or unexpected event occurring’.

Figure 1.17 Number of foster placements that ended on an unplanned basis, between 1 January and 31 December, split by sector

		Total local authority placements	Household provided by placing authority	Household approved by another local authority, purchased by placing authority	Independent placements	Total
Number of placements ended	2021	218	185	33	127	345
	2020	213	190	23	135	348
	2019	248	206	42	147	395
	2018	235	199	36	137	372
	2017	232	203	29	123	355
Number of perm placements ended	2021	40	34	6	23	63
	2020	44	39	5	21	65
	2019	52	43	9	24	76
	2018	52	47	5	17	69
	2017	43	43	<5	28	71
Number of services where placements ended	2021	25	24	7	18	43
	2020	30	29	5	19	49
	2019	28	27	10	15	43
	2018	31	30	10	20	51
	2017	28	27	10	19	47
Number of children that experienced a placement end	2021	202	169	33	117	319
	2020	203	180	23	133	336
	2019	211	174	37	144	355
	2018	216	180	36	120	336
	2017			data not collected		

1 The 2018 figure presented here for 'Total' and 'Local authority placements' has been revised in this table and will therefore not match the figure published in the 2018-19 report.

2 The 2020 figure presented here for number of independent placements that ended is revised and will not match the figure published in the 2020-21 report.

Local authority commissioned placements

In 2021, 284 children were placed in a foster care placement purchased by a local authority (Figure 1.18) and this number has decreased by 50% over the last 5 years from 574 to 284. Most of the places (80%) were purchased through the national contract; 5% were exclusively short breaks.

Figure 1.18 Number of children and young people placed by a local authority into a foster care household approved by another service, between 1 January and 31 December

	Number of children and young people placed ¹	Number of placements purchased through the national contract (and percentage of placed)	Number of placements that were exclusively short breaks
2021	284	227 (80%)	15 (5%)
2020	330	261 (79%)	7 (2%)
2019	483	379 (78%)	16 (3%)
2018	490	339 (69%)	17 (3%)
2017	574	322 (56%)	14 (2%)

1 Includes placements that were exclusively short break situations, as well as temporary placements, permanent placements, and any other type of placement.

2 2020 decrease may have been compounded by the Covid-19 pandemic.

3 The figures presented here for 2017 are revised.

Asylum seekers and refugees

There are small number of children and young people placed in care services who have come to Scotland without the support of an adult and have the status of being asylum-seeking and refugee children and young people.

In 2021, 15 fostering services placed children with refugee or asylum-seeking status, and this number has increased over the last five years (Figure 1.19).

There were 46 children with asylum-seeking and refugee status using fostering services at 31 December 2021 (Figure 1.20). This number has increased over the past five years, more than doubling in the last year.

Figure 1.19 Number and proportion of services that had placed children and young people with asylum seeking and refugee status at 31 December, split by sector

	Local authority	Independent	Total
2021	11 (34%)	4 (16%)	15 (26%)
2020	7 (22%)	4 (16%)	11 (19%)
2019	10 (31%)	2 (8%)	12 (21%)
2018	7 (22%)	3 (12%)	10 (17%)
2017	7 (22%)	3 (12%)	10 (17%)

Figure 1.20 Number of children and young people with asylum seeking and refugee status using fostering services at 31 December, split by sector

	Local authority	Independent	total
2021	38	8	46
2020	14	5	19
2019	23	<5	23
2018	17	<5	17
2017	14	<5	14

1 Values with fewer than five observations have been removed and replaced with '<5'. These revised values have been excluded from totals and subtotals.

Fostering service capacity

In 2021, the number of children coming into foster care exceeded the number of new foster care households in 29 of the 32 local authority services (Figure 1.21).

Figure 1.21 Number of local authority services where the number of children and young people coming into foster care between 1 January and 31 December exceeded the number of new foster care households

	Total number of services where number of children exceeded new households	Percentage of services
2021	29	91%
2020	31	97%
2019	31	97%
2018	30	94%
2017	29	91%

In situations where the number of children exceeds the number of available foster care households, local authority services may commission places with other fostering services. Where this is not feasible or possible, the local authority services may approve placements with their own foster care households that result in the household exceeding their approval range.

Figure 1.22 shows that throughout 2021, households exceeded their approval range on 555 occasions across 31 local authority fostering services and 13 independent fostering services.

As with previous years, where foster care households exceeded their approval range, it was for a variety of reasons, mainly to keep children from the same family together and to facilitate respite placements. Other common reasons included: to enable child/young person to remain close to their home community and school; to enable existing placements to continue beyond age approval; to make the most appropriate match between child/young person and their foster carer.

We expect that the lower numbers in 2020 and 2021 reflect the Covid-19 related easing of restrictions on approval range. This ties in with there being fewer commissioned places in 2020 and 2021 (Figure 1.18).

Figure 1.22 Number of occasions and number of services where children and young people placed in foster care households resulted in the household going out-with their approval range, split by sector

	Number of occasions			Number of services		
	Local authority	Independent	Total	Local authority	Independent	Total
2021	487	68	555	31	13	44
2020	458	86	544	30	13	43
2019	595	116	711	32	14	46
2018	681	104	785	30	11	41
2017	619	130	749	32	11	43

- 1 Approval range can be age, gender, numbers or other.
- 2 Trend may have been disrupted by the Covid-19 pandemic.
- 3 The 2020 figure presented here for the number of independent services is revised and will not match earlier reports.

The Scottish Government laid in Parliament an amendment to The Looked after Children (Scotland) Regulations to introduce a maximum foster care placement limit of three unrelated children, with exemptions for family groups and emergency placements. The amended Regulations came into force on 29 December 2014.

To ensure compliance with this standard, the Final Report of the Scottish Government's Foster Carer Review recommends that all exemptions from the maximum limit that are granted by fostering panels, and all emergency placements made above the maximum limited, be recorded in the annual return. The information was first gathered in the December 2018 annual return (Figure 1.23).

In 2021, across 20 fostering services there were 57 placements above the maximum limit of three unrelated children.

Figure 1.23 Number of placements made above the maximum limit of three unrelated children, and the number of services where this occurred.

	Number of services	Number of placements above max limit	Decision made by the Panel	Happened on an emergency basis
2021	20	57	15	42
2020	16	55	19	52
2019	16	59	21	52
2018	18	76	28	71

- 1 This data was not collected prior to 2018
- 2 Trend may have been disrupted by the Covid-19 pandemic.
- 3 The figure presented here for number of services in 2020 is revised.

Family groups

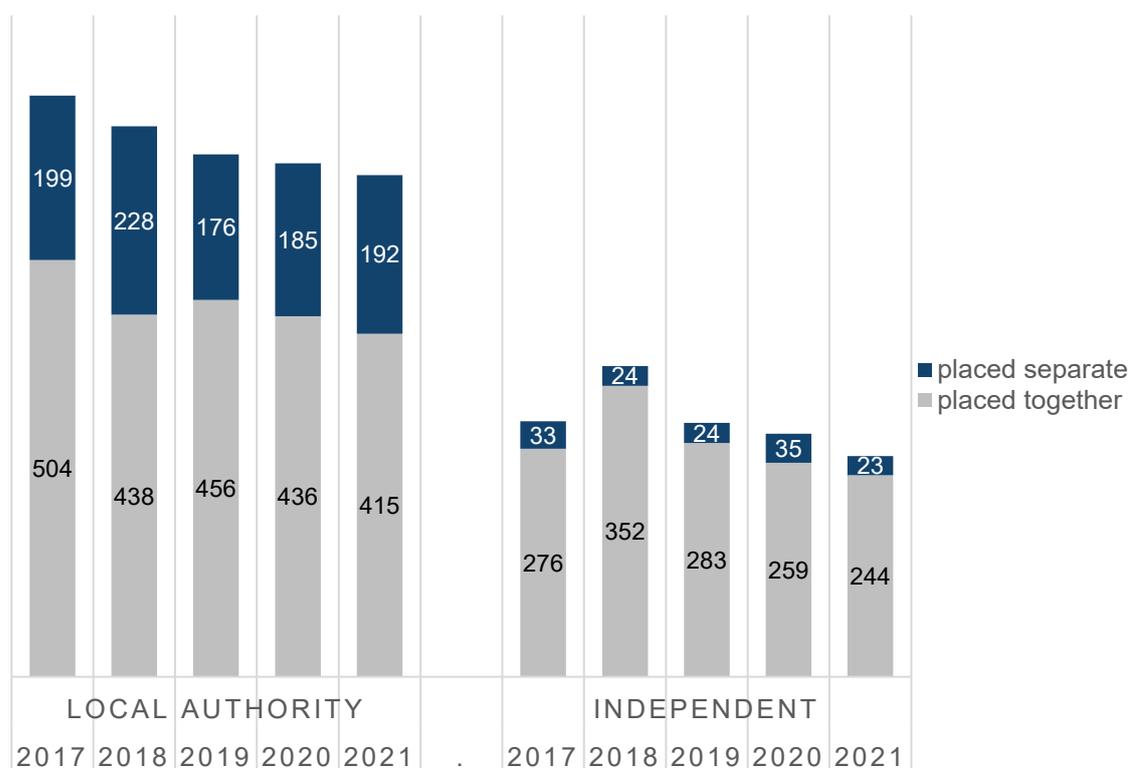
At 31 December 2021, there were 874 family groups of children in foster care (down 14% from 1,012 in 2017).

When placed in foster care households, 215 of the family groups (25%) were placed separately and 659 (75% of all family groups) were placed together. This pattern has been similar since recording began (Figure 1.24 and 1.25).

Local authority fostering services commission independent fostering services to place children if the independent service can place them together. Therefore, independent services have reported a consistently lower percentage of children being placed separately, and mostly cite 'following assessment' as the reason (indicating this was the best option for the children), while local authority services also cited 'lack of resource' and 'emergency situation' as reasons (Figure 1.26).

Figure 1.24 The number of family groups placed in foster care has decreased each year since 2015, and each year around 75% of family groups are placed together.

The number of family groups using fostering services 31 December and if they were placed together or separately, by sector.



1. Trend may have been disrupted/compounded by the Covid-19 pandemic

Figure 1.25 Number of family groups of children using fostering services at 31 December, and the number and percentage that were placed separately

	Local authority		Independent		Total	
	Number of family groups	Number (and %) of family groups placed separately	Number of family groups	Number (and %) of family groups placed separately	Number of family groups	Number (and %) of family groups placed separately
2021	607	192 (32%)	267	23 (9%)	874	215 (25%)
2020	621	185 (30%)	294	35 (12%)	915	220 (24%)
2019	632	176 (28%)	307	24 (8%)	939	200 (21%)
2018	666	228 (34%)	376	24 (6%)	1042	252 (24%)
2017	703	199 (28%)	309	33 (11%)	1012	232 (23%)

1 Trend may have been disrupted/compounded by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Figure 1.26 Reason cited by services for placing children separately

	Local authority				Independent			
	Following assessment	Lack of resource	Emergency situation	Other	Following assessment	Lack of resource	Emergency situation	Other
2021	15	22	10	6	8	<5	<5	5
2020	15	23	12	5	8	<5	<5	<5
2019	19	22	10	8	8	<5	<5	<5
2018	18	23	13	8	8	<5	<5	<5
2017	23	24	17	6	8	<5	5	<5

1 Services were able to select as many reasons as were applicable.

Fostering service evaluation (grading)

Based on Care Inspectorate evaluations over four inspection years, the overall quality of fostering services on 31 March 2022 was positive. As figure 1.28 presents, 85% of fostering services had evaluations of 'good' or better across all quality themes/indicators.

Five fostering services were inspected in the 2021/22 inspection year, and all were evaluated adequate or better across all quality themes/indicators (Figure 1.29).

Figure 1.28 Overview of fostering service grades at 31 March 2022, split by sector

	Local authority		Independent		Total	
	number of services	% of all graded services	number of services	% of all graded services	number of services	% of all graded services
Very good and excellent for all quality themes/indicators	7	22%	10	37%	17	29%
Good or better for all quality themes/indicators	25	78%	25	93%	50	85%
Adequate or better for all quality themes/indicators	27	84%	31	115%	58	98%
Less than adequate in any quality themes/indicator	1	3%	0	0%	1	2%

Figure 1.29 Overview of fostering service grades, by year of inspection.

		number of services	% of all graded services
Adequate or better for all quality themes/indicators	2021/22	5	100%
	2020/21	0	-
	2019/20	18	95%
	2018/19	23	100%
	2017/18	12	100%
Less than adequate in any quality themes/indicator	2021/22	0	0%
	2020/21	0	-
	2019/20	1	5%
	2018/19	0	0%
	2017/18	0	0%

Continuing Care

Since 2018 we have been collecting data about continuing care for young people over the age of 15 and under 26 years following the enactment of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014, Part 11 Continuing Care.

For the first time we are presenting the data for the years 2019-2021 (the 2018 data is not included for data quality reasons). Please regard it as an estimate.

In the 2021-22 annual return 46 fostering services said they have a continuing care service linked to them (Figure 1.30).

Figure 1.30 number of fostering services with a linked continuing care service

	Local authority	Independent	Total
2021	25	21	46
2020	25	21	46
2019	23	18	41

At 31 December 2021, there were 389 approved continuing care households across 42 services, this is more than in the years 2019 and 2020 (Figure 1.31).

Figure 1.31 Number of approved continuing care households (as a proportion of total) at 31 December

	Local authority		Independent		Total	
	approved households	number of services	approved households	number of services	approved households	number of services
2021	241 (62%)	25	148 (38%)	17	389	42
2020	243 (63%)	24	143 (37%)	17	386	41
2019	198 (69%)	22	87 (31%)	15	285	37

At 31 December 2021, 395 young people were using continuing care and most of them were age 18 and over (Figure 1.32). More young people were using continuing care in 2021 than in the preceding two years.

Figure 1.32 Number of young people using continuing care, and their age breakdown, at 31 December

	total number of young people	no. of young people age 16	no. of young people age 17	no. of young people age 18	no. of young people age 19	no. of young people age 20+
2021	395	10 (3%)	18 (5%)	122 (31%)	110 (28%)	135 (34%)
2020	384	13 (3%)	18 (5%)	133 (35%)	111 (29%)	109 (28%)
2019	311	11 (4%)	20 (6%)	135 (43%)	79 (25%)	66 (21%)

1 'Using' means being supported to remain in the same family placement with continuing care status

In 2021, 140 young people left continuing care as part of a planned ending, 26% of whom went to live independently in their own accommodation, (Figure 1.33).

Figure 1.33 Number of young people who left continuing care (as part of a planned ending) between 1 January and 31 December, and their destination.

	2021	2020	2019
number of young people that left CC	140	86	43
Destination:			
birth family or friend	18 (13%)	9 (10%)	11 (26%)
remained with carer family	23 (16%)	19 (22%)	<5 (<1%)
independent in own accommodation	36 (26%)	38 (44%)	24 (56%)
supported accommodation	16 (11%)	14 (16%)	<5 (<1%)
supported by Criminal Justice services	<5 (<1%)	0 (0%)	<5 (<1%)
homeless accommodation or became homeless	<5 (<1%)	<5 (<1%)	<5 (<1%)
joined the armed forces	<5 (<1%)	<5 (<1%)	<5 (<1%)
Other	47 (34%)	6 (7%)	8 (19%)

Of the young people who left continuing care in 2021, 64% were in education, training or employment (Figure 1.34).

Figure 1.34 Proportion of young people who left continuing care between 1 January and 31 December, by their employment status

	in education, training or employment	not in education, training or employment	not known
2021	64%	14%	22%
2020	80%	16%	3%
2019	58%	25%	17%

A small number of young people experienced an unplanned ending of their continuing care placement in each of the three years (Figure 1.35).

Figure 1.35 number of continuing care placements that ended on an unplanned basis between 1 January and 31 December

	number of placements that ended	number of children who experienced an unplanned ending
2021	15	15
2020	19	19
2019	12	11

Fostering summary

At the end of last year there were 3,415 foster care households spread over 57 fostering services and across Scotland (Figure 1.1). The number of households has decreased each year, more so in the local authority sector. Each year, for every new foster care household approved more than one de-registered. For example, in 2021 a total of 274 new foster care households were approved and 405 foster care households de-registered (Figure 1.8 and Figure 1.10).

Our data provides some insight into the recruitment and approval processes. In the first half of 2021 fostering services received approximately 5,706 enquiries from potential new foster care households, around 275 (5%) of these enquiries progressed to applications. By the end of the year around 101 (37%) of the 275 applications had become approved households (Figure 1.11). Although most (65%) new households were assessed and approved within six months in 2021, 27% took between six and 12 months and 9% took a year or more (Figure 1.8).

As the number of households continues to decrease over time so too does the number of children and young people using fostering services. However, in 2021 the number of children coming into foster care still exceeded the number of new foster care

households in most areas (Figure 1.21) and there continues to be occasions where households exceed their approval range to accommodate children (see Figure 1.22), mainly to enable family groups of children to be placed together.

There is a long-standing commitment across Scotland and a duty on local authorities to uphold relationships between family groups of children and keep them together where it is in the children's best interest to do so. [Plan 21-24 of 'The Promise'](#) requires that Scotland will stop the practice of separating family groups of children, unless for reasons of safety. In 2021, there were 874 family groups of children using fostering services, 659 (75%) were placed together and 215 (25%) were placed separately – a pattern that has been similar since recording began (Figure 1.24). Lack of resources was cited as the most common reason for placing children separately in 2021 and 2020.

Many services struggle to recruit households that will foster family groups (Figure 1.8), and the data indicates that each year more services find it difficult. Accommodation constraints is cited as the main reason.

Alongside the duty to keep children together is the programme to enable more children to experience permanence (Permanence and Care Excellence (PACE) programme, delivered by the Centre of Excellence for Looked After Children). In Scotland permanence can be achieved through four routes, one of which is a permanence order for a child who is living in foster care. In both the local authority and independent sector, over the past few years interim placement has been the most common placement type. However, the data shows early signs of a move away from interim being the most common placement type, with both local authority and independent services placing more children in permanent placements than previously (Figure 1.14 and 1.15). This pattern was interrupted in 2020 (when we saw a rise in the proportion of interim placements) but partially recovered in 2021. This coincides with an increase in the number of households approved for permanent only placements in 2021, to 646 (19% of all households) and the data showing an overall shift towards blanket approval (approval for all placement types) (Figure 1.3 and 1.4).

In each of the past few years around 7% of children in emergency, interim or long-term placements have been identified as needing a placement secured by Permanence Order but were not in or moving towards such a placement (Figure 1.16). Furthermore 63 permanent placements ended on an unplanned basis in 2021, a similar amount and proportion to previous years.

For young people aged 16 to 25 fostering services can offer continuing care, providing they have households approved specifically for continuing care, and we have published our initial estimates of this for the first time in this report. In 2021, 46 fostering services said they provide a continuing care service and 37 said they have approved continuing care households – 389 in total at 31 December 2021 (Figures 1.30 to 1.31). At the same time there were 395 young people in a continuing care placement (Figure 1.32). Throughout 2021, 140 young people were reported to have left continuing care as part of a planned ending (Figure 1.33) and 64% of them were in education, training or employment at the time (Figures 1.34).

Each year we report on the number of children and young people with asylum seeking and refugee status using fostering services. These numbers remain low but are increasing over time - there were 46 children at 31 December 2021 compared to 14 in 2017 (Figure 1.19 and 1.20).

Based on Care Inspectorate evaluations over four years, the overall quality of fostering services on 31 March 2022 was positive, with 85% of fostering services holding evaluations of 'good' or better across all quality themes/indicators. (Figure 1.28).

Section 2: Adoption

Adoption services

At 31 December 2021, there were 38 registered adoption services in Scotland; 32 were local authority services and six were voluntary/not-for-profit organisations (referred to as independent services in this report).

The 2021 data in this report is based on the data reported by 37 adoption services in their annual return together with evaluation data as at 31 March 2022 for all 38 adoption services.

This report covers four different aspects of adoption services:

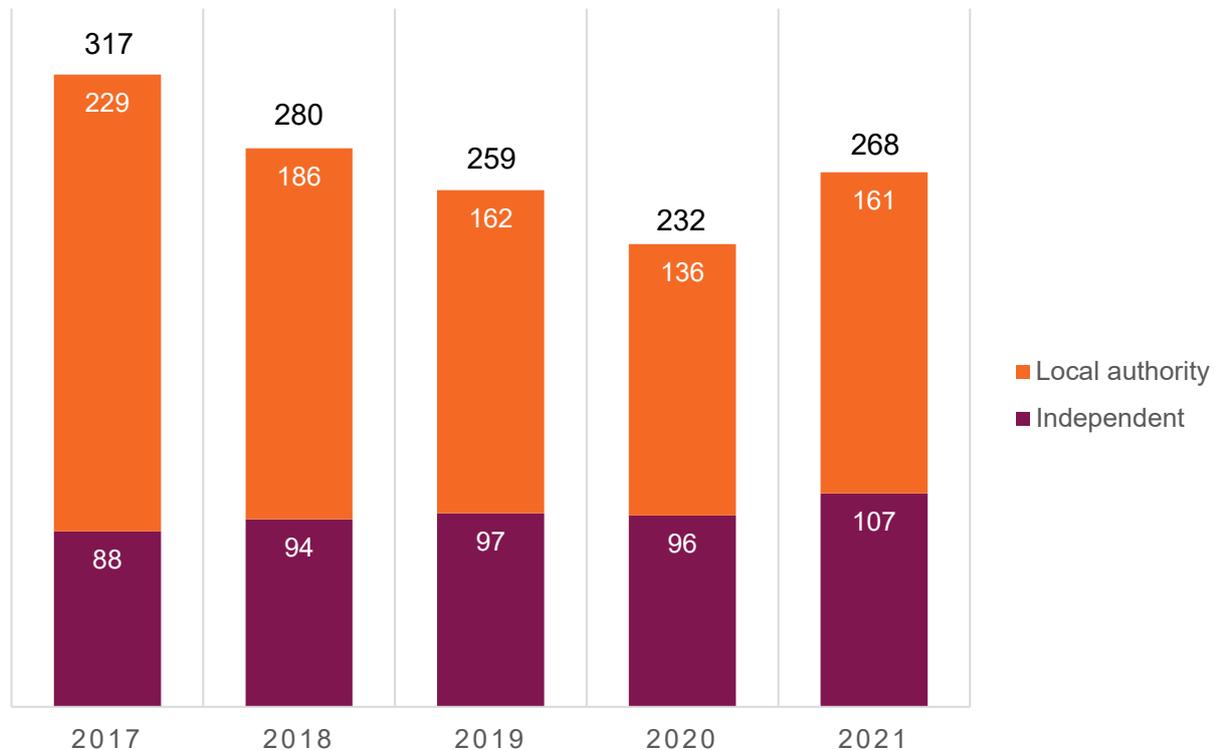
- new approved households
- children and young people
- other services
- adoption service evaluation.

New approved households

Since 2017 there has been a downward trend in the number of new households being approved for adoption each year. However, in 2021, there was an increase with 268 new adoptive households approved across 37 adoption services (Figure 2.1), up from 232 in 2020.

Figure 2.1 Since 2017 there has been a downward trend in the number of new households being approved for adoption each year

The number of new households approved between 1 January and 31 December, by sector



Timescales to approval

The approval completion time, of new households, took longer in 2020 than in 2021 – with 66% of 2021’s cases taking longer than six months to complete compared to 56% in 2020 (Figure 2.2).

We do not define the start point for calculating the approval completion time (but we will try to address this), therefore this may vary by service and as such the data in Figure 2.2 is an approximation.

Figure 2.2 Proportion of new adoptive households by length of approval completion time, between 1 January and 31 December

		completed within six months	over six months but less than a year	completed in a year or more
2021	Local Authority	43%	41%	16%
	Independent	20%	69%	11%
	Total	34%	52%	14%
2020	Local Authority	45%	42%	13%
	Independent	41%	51%	5%
	Total	43%	46%	10%

Age group approval

In 2021, most of the new households (71%) were approved to adopt children aged two to five years old; 49% were approved to adopt infants under two years old and 13% were approved to adopt children aged six plus (Figure 2.3). These proportions are similar to previous years with the exception of 2020 which saw a much lower number and proportion approved to adopt infants – although the number and proportion of households approved to adopt infants had been decreasing since 2017.

Figure 2.3 Number and proportion of new approved households approved between 1 January and 31 December, split by age range approval

		Approved to adopt children in the age range:					
		number of new households	less than two years old		two years old or more but less than six		Six years old or more
2021	268	131	49%	189	71%	36	13%
2020	232	66	28%	161	69%	27	12%
2019	259	104	40%	189	73%	28	11%
2018	280	148	53%	173	62%	35	13%
2017	317	145	46%	198	62%	50	16%

¹ the sum of the individual age categories do not match the total because some adoptive households will have approval across more than one category.

Family group approval

In 2021, 35% of the new households that were approved were approved for family groups of two children, similar to the previous year, but an increase from 28% in 2017. There were less than five households approved for family groups of three or more children.

Figure 2.4 Number and proportion of new approved households between 1 January and 31 December, split by family group approval

		Approved for family groups		Family group of two children		Family group of three or more children	
		No.	% of new households	No.	% of new households	No.	% of new households
2021	Local authority	56	35%	56	35%	<5	<1%
	Independent	39	36%	39	36%	<5	<1%
	Total	95	35%	95	35%	<5	<1%
2020	Local authority	45	33%	45	33%	<5	<1%
	Independent	38	40%	38	40%	0	0%
	Total	83	36%	83	36%	<5	<1%
2019	Local authority	48	30%	48	30%	<5	<1%
	Independent	27	28%	27	28%	<5	<1%
	Total	80	31%	75	29%	5	2%
2018	Local authority	48	26%	43	23%	5	3%
	Independent	35	37%	35	37%	0	0%
	Total	83	30%	78	28%	5	2%
2017	Local authority	59	26%	59	26%	<5	<1%
	Independent	30	34%	30	34%	<5	<1%
	Total	89	28%	89	28%	<5	<1%

1 Values with fewer than five observations have been removed and replaced with '<5' and '<1%'.

Households waiting

At the 31 December 2021, 205 approved households, across 27 of the 32 local authority services and in all five of the independent services, were waiting for children to be placed. This is up from the previous three years which might be a consequence of some children remaining in interim foster care placements longer than was previously the case. While this is based on anecdotal information, we do know from the fostering statistics presented earlier in this report that more children were placed in interim and long-term foster care in 2020 than previously (see Figure 1.15).

Figure 2.5 Number of approved households, at 31 December, that were waiting for children or young people to be placed, split by sector

	Number of Households			Number of Services		
	Local authority	Independent	total	Local authority	Independent	total
2021	118	87	205	27	5	32
2020	108	78	186	27	5	32
2019	111	70	181	27	5	32
2018	138	49	187	26	5	31
2017	159	56	215	29	5	34

1 Excludes those approved exclusively for inter-country adoptions.

Recruitment

In 2021, an estimated 961 enquiries from potential adopters were received across all adoption services between 1 January and 30 June (Figure 2.6). Of these, 18% progressed to applications, of which 27% were approved by 31 December 2021. Overall, a higher volume of enquiries and applications were received last year compared with previous years, but there was a drop in the number and proportion of approvals in 2021 compared to previous years.

Figure 2.6 Recruitment of adopters: approximate number of enquiries received between 1 January and 30 June, and the number leading to applications and approved households, split by sector

	Enquiries			Applications (as a percentage of enquiries)			Approvals (as a percentage of applications)		
	Local authority	Independent	Total	Local authority	Independent	Total	Local authority	Independent	Total
2021	525	436	961	105 (20%)	72 (17%)	177 (18%)	33 (31%)	15 (21%)	48 (27%)
2020	458	480	938	92 (20%)	81 (17%)	173 (18%)	30 (33%)	36 (44%)	66 (38%)
2019	388	431	819	95 (24%)	70 (16%)	165 (20%)	28 (29%)	48 (69%)	76 (46%)
2018	421	361	782	104 (25%)	71 (20%)	175 (22%)	16 (15%)	40 (56%)	56 (32%)
2017	372	399	771	89 (24%)	52 (13%)	141 (18%)	23 (26%)	29 (56%)	52 (37%)

Children and young people

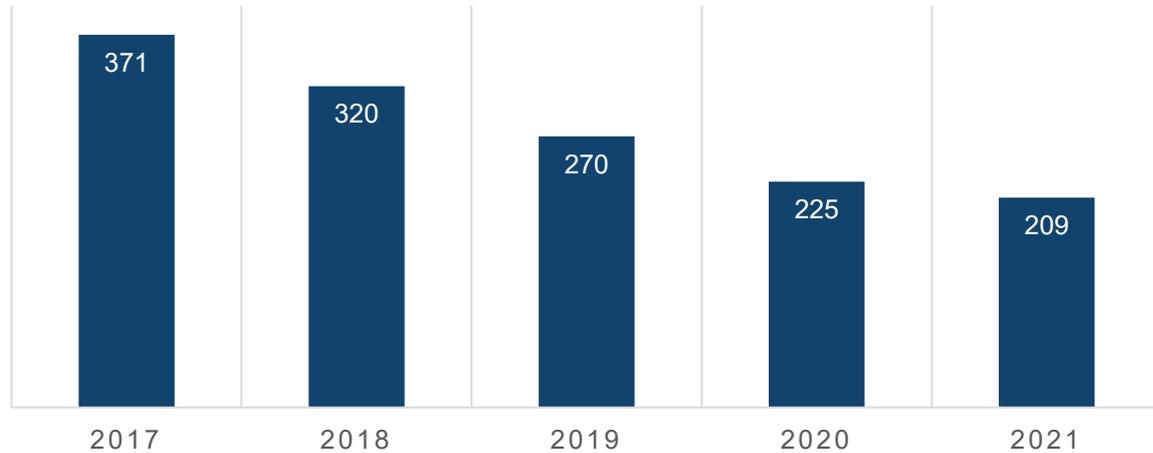
Children and young people approved for adoption

The Children (Scotland) Act 1995 and the Adoption and Children (Scotland) Act 2007 places a duty on local authorities to provide an adoption service. They are responsible for assessing and planning for children who require alternative permanent care. Local authorities may, after following robust legal and matching processes, place children with adopters approved by them or by independent adoption services. Local authority and independent adoption services recruit, assess and provide training and support to prospective adopters to ensure that they can meet the needs and provide high-quality care to children.

The number of children and young people approved for adoption each year continues to decrease (Figure 2.7). In 2021, there were 209 children approved for adoption (across 28 local authority adoption services), down from 225 in 2020 and from 371 in 2017.

Figure 2.7 The number of children and young people approved for adoption each year continues to decrease

Children and young people approved for adoption by local authority services between 1 January and 31 December



The downward trend from 2017 to 2020 presented in figure 2.7 is a consequence of decreases in the number of children and young people approved for adoption across many adoption services, however latterly, in 2021, the decrease was driven by a just a few of the larger adoption services, whilst the others reported more or the same number as the previous year.

Figure 2.8 shows that, in 2021, 49% of the children approved for adoption were aged two to five years old and 45% were younger than two years old (infants). This is a reversal compared to the previous three years where more infants were approved for adoption than two to five years olds. This might be a consequence of many children spending a longer time in interim foster care placements than was previously the case (based on anecdotal information), meaning that by the time they come to be approved for adoption they might have been in care for up to three years. We do know from the fostering statistics that more children were placed in interim and long-term foster care in 2020 than previously (see Figure 1.15).

Figure 2.8 Number of children and young people approved for adoption by local authority services between 1 January and 31 December broken down by the age of the child at the time of approval

	Total number of children approved for adoption	Age less than two years old		Age two years old or more but less than six		Age six years old or more	
		number	% of total	number	% of total	number	% of total
2021	209	94	45%	102	49%	13	6%
2020	225	113	50%	98	44%	14	6%
2019	270	136	50%	119	44%	15	6%
2018	320	171	53%	135	42%	14	4%
2017	371	166	45%	175	47%	30	8%

1 'Approved for adoption' means that the child has an approved plan for permanence, which recommends adoption. This includes all such children whether placed or not placed within the year.

Timescales to approval

Research has found that it is the early stages of care and permanence planning following a child being accommodated that take the longest time in the overall process⁶.

Once it has been identified that a child should be permanently placed away from home, the adoption and permanence panel decide whether to formally recommend adoption.

In the annual return, we ask local authority adoption services about their assessment completion time. This is from the point of the looked after child review agreeing the need for permanence to approval at the adoption panel.

Figure 2.9 below presents the variation in assessment completion time. The numbers represent the number of services. Zero services completed all assessments within three months and eight services took six months or over to complete all assessments.

Figure 2.9 Number of services by minimum and maximum assessment completion time, 2021

		Maximum time to assess		
		Within 3 months	3 to 5 months	6 months or over
Minimum time to assess	Within 3 months	0	1	6
	3 to 5 months		6	6
	6 months or over			8

1 Not all services provided data therefore the sum of the values does not match the total number of services.

⁶ Permanence Planning and Decision Making for Looked After Children in Scotland: Adoption and Children (Scotland) Act 2007, published by the Children's Reporter and Scottish Government, 3 December 2015.

Children and young people approved and placed with families

In 2021, 199 children were placed with their new adoptive family across 26 local authorities (Figure 2.10). This includes children approved for adoption in 2021 and in the previous year/years.

The number of children placed continues to decrease year on year. Not all services report decreases every year, although most of the larger adoption services display a downward trend over the years 2017-2021.

In 2021 61% of the children placed were placed in households approved by independent agencies – a proportion that has increased each year since 2017.

Figure 2.10 Number of children placed with prospective adoptive families between 1 January and 31 December

	Total number of children placed	percent placed in households approved by another local authority	percent placed in households approved by independent agencies
2021	199	14%	61%
2020	207	24%	47%
2019	242	21%	45%
2018	255	22%	44%
2017	352	14%	29%

1 Trend may have been affected by Covid-19 pandemic

Timescales to match

Adoption and permanence panels find a 'match' for the child in terms of who their long-term carer should be. In the annual return, we ask local authority adoption services about the time it took to match children with adoptive families, from the point of registration at panel to matching at panel.

Figure 2.11 presents the variation in matching time. The numbers represent the number of services and exclude services that carry out registration and matching at the same time. It shows that in ten services it took one year or more to match some children with adoptive families, whilst in four services all matching took less than six months. This does not factor in the quantity of matches, which will vary by service.

Figure 2.11 Number of services by minimum and maximum time to match children with adoptive families, 2021

		Maximum time to match			
		Within 3 months	3 to 5 months	6 to 11 months	12 months or over
Minimum time to match	Within 3 months	1	2	4	4
	3 to 5 months		1	2	5
	6 to 11 months			1	1
	12 months or over				1

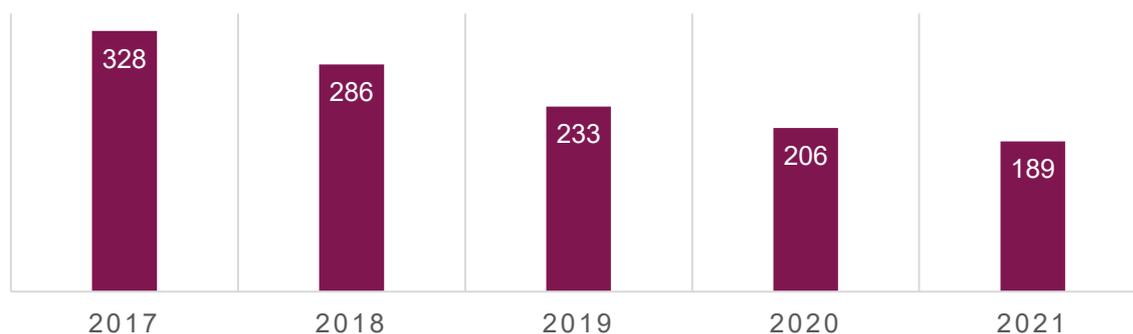
1 Not all services provided data, and some service match children at the time of registration therefore the sum of the values does not match the total number of services.

Children and young people adopted

In 2021, 189 children and young people were legally adopted. This is down 8% from 206 in 2020, and down 42% from 328 in 2017 (Figure 2.12)

Figure 2.12 The number of children and young people adopted (by court order) each year continues to decrease

Children and young people adopted (by court order) between 1 January and 31 December



This trend is consistent with that published in the [Scottish Government's Children's Social Work Statistics 2020-21](#) (table 1.1).

Almost all local authority services reported fewer legal adoptions taking place in 2021 compared to 2017 and 2020, resulting in the overall downward trend seen in figure 2.12.

Timescales to adopt

In the annual return, we ask local authority adoption services about the time it took to grant full adoption orders after placing a child with their adoptive family. Figure 2.13 presents the variation in the time taken to grant full adoption. The numbers represent the number of services. It shows that in 22 services there were cases where it took a year or more to grant the full adoption order. Zero services granted all orders within six months.

Figure 2.13 Number of services by minimum and maximum time to grant full adoption order, 2021

		Maximum time to grant adoption order		
		Within 6 months	6 to 11 months	12 months or over
Minimum time to grant adoption order	Within 6 months	0	2	6
	6 to 11 months		2	12
	12 months or over			4

1 Not all services provided data therefore the sum of the values does not match the total number of services.

Children and young people awaiting placement

At 31 December 2021, there were 134 children and young people that had been approved for adoption across 22 local authority services, waiting to be matched with approved adopters (Figure 2.14). Down from 148 in 2020, in line with the fall in the number of children approved for adoption.

Of the children waiting to be matched in 2021:

- 57 (43%) were part of a family group that services were trying to keep together (29 family groups in total).
- 38% had been waiting for over one year, up from 30% the previous year.

Figure 2.14 Number of children and young people approved for adoption waiting to be matched with approved adopters at 31 December, the number that were part of a family group, and the number that had been waiting for over one year

	Total number of children approved and waiting	Waiting and are part of a family group		Total number of family groups waiting	Waiting for over one year	
		number	%		number	%
2021	134	57	43	29	51	38
2020	148	70	47	33	45	30
2019	153	47	31	24	39	25
2018	194	67	35	33	43	22
2017	217	94	43	48	54	25

1 'Approved' means that the child has an approved plan for permanence which recommends adoption.

2 'Matched' refers to the making of a recommendation by the adoption panel.

3 Services were instructed to count children individually, so for example, two children who are part of a family group were counted as two.

We asked local authority services about the ages of the children and young people who were waiting to be matched.

Figure 2.15 shows that, as in previous years, at 31 December 2021 there were children of all ages waiting to be matched with approved adopters, although few services had children age six and over waiting to be matched.

Figure 2.15 Number and percentage of local authority services with children and young people waiting to be matched with approved adopters at 31 December, split by the age category of the children

	Less than two years old		Two or over but under six years old		Six or over but under 11 years old		Eleven years old or over	
	number	%	number	%	number	%	number	%
2021	16	73%	18	82%	6	27%	<5	<1%
2020	15	71%	19	90%	<5	<1%	<5	<1%
2019	17	74%	20	87%	8	35%	0	0%
2018	23	85%	22	81%	14	52%	0	0%
2017	17	65%	24	92%	14	54%	0	0%

1 'Matched' refers to the making of a recommendation by the adoption panel.

2 Values less than 5 are shown as <5 for disclose control purposes.

3 The 2020 and 2017 figures are revised and therefore differ from the figures published in previous reports.

Adoptions that break down

In 2021, 37 adoptions broke down (disrupted).

Of these breakdowns, the majority (29) happened before the adoption order was granted, with eight occurring after the adoption order was granted. While many of the breakdowns took place in households approved by the placing authority, there were also some interagency adoptions that broke down all of which were before the adoption order was granted.

Figure 2.16 Adoption breakdowns between 1 January and 31 December, by timing of placement and type of placement

	Before adoption order was granted	After the adoption order was granted	Total
2021	29	8	37
2020	18	<5	18
2019	21	14	35
2018	12	0	12
2017	16	0	16

¹ Values less than 5 are shown as <5 for disclose control purposes.

Other services

Post-adoption support

Local authorities have a duty to provide post-adoption support to families who adopt and to children who are adopted. They also have a duty to provide support and guidance to adult adoptees who wish to obtain their birth records.

All local authority adoption services provided post-adoption support to adoptive households in 2021, ranging from supporting fewer than five to supporting 432 households. In total, 2,391 households received post-adoption support from local authority adoption services, and 634 received post-adoption support from independent services.

Services outside Scotland

In 2021 there were 46 children and young people placed in adoptive households in Scotland from elsewhere in the UK, and a small number were placed out-with Scotland into adoptive households elsewhere in the UK (Figure 2.17). The numbers are low so tend to fluctuate from year to year.

Figure 2.17 Number of children and young people placed to and from elsewhere in the UK, between 1 January and 31 December

	Placed in Scotland from elsewhere in the UK	Placed elsewhere in the UK by Scottish local authorities
2021	46	<5
2020	42	13
2019	46	<5
2018	37	10
2017	13	31

1 The 2019 and 2020 figures are revised and therefore differ to the figures published in previous reports.

Adoption service evaluation

Based on Care Inspectorate evaluations over four years, the quality of adoption services on 31 March 2022 was positive. As figure 2.18 presents, 84% of adoption services had evaluations of 'good' or better across all quality themes/indicators.

Three adoption services were inspected in the 2021/22 inspection year, and all were evaluated adequate or better across all quality themes/indicators (Figure 2.19).

Figure 2.18 Overview of adoption service grades at 31 March 2022, split by sector

	Local authority		Independent		Total	
	number of services	% of all graded services	number of services	% of all graded services	number of services	% of all graded services
Very good and excellent for all quality themes/indicators	13	41%	4	67%	17	45%
Good or better for all quality themes/indicators	27	84%	5	83%	32	84%
Adequate or better for all quality themes/indicators	31	97%	6	100%	37	97%
Less than adequate in any quality themes/indicator	1	3%	0	0%	1	3%

Figure 2.19 Overview of adoption service grades, by year of inspection.

		number of services	% of all graded services
Adequate or better for all quality themes/indicators	2021/22	3	100%
	2020/21	0	-
	2019/20	12	92%
	2018/19	14	100%
	2017/18	8	100%
Less than adequate in any quality themes/indicator	2021/22	0	0%
	2020/21	0	-
	2019/20	1	8%
	2018/19	0	0%
	2017/18	0	0%

Summary of adoption

In 2021, 209 children were approved for adoption, 199 children were placed with their new adoptive family, and 189 children were legally adopted. These numbers have been decreasing for the past five years (see Figure 2.7, Figure 2.10 and Figure 2.12).

In 2021 there was a slight change in the age profile of the children being approved for adoption (see Figure 2.8). In the years 2018 to 2020 at least half of the children approved for adoption were infants (age less than two years old), and 42-44% were age two to five. In 2021 the pattern reversed so that half (49%) were in the age two to five bracket and 45% were infants. This might be an impact of more children being placed in interim and long-term foster care in 2020 than previously was the case (see Figure 1.15). Children can stay in an interim placement for up to two years and in a long-term placement for longer than two years meaning that by the time they come to be adopted they are no longer infants. This ties in with the finding that number of adoptive households waiting for children to be placed increased in 2021 (see Figure 2.5) and the number of children waiting to be placed decreased in 2021, from earlier years (see Figure 2.14).

Every year, a small number of adoptions break down, usually before the adoption order is granted. In 2021, 37 adoptions broke down, higher than in any of the four years previous (see Figure 2.16). This might be linked to the shifting age profile (described

above) – anecdotal information suggests that adoptions involving younger children are less likely to breakdown than those involving older children.

Almost all adoption services recruit and approve households for adoption and in 2021, 268 new households were approved across Scotland, 36 more than in 2020. Up until this point the number of new households being approved each year had been declining (Figure 2.1).

The decrease in the number of new adoption households approved each year and the number of children adopted each year will in part be linked to the changing landscape of kinship care in Scotland – there is an increasing number of children being placed in kinship care and we are likely to see a further increase in kinship placements in the future (Children’s Social Work Statistics, Scotland 2020-21).

Adoption services are of good quality overall with 84% of services holding a Care Inspectorate evaluation of good or better across all quality themes/indicators at 31 March 2022 (Figure 2.18).

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