



Child protection Australia 2021-22

Web report | Last updated: 06 Jun 2023 | Topic: [Child protection](#) | [Media release](#)

About

This report provides an overview of children in the child protection system in 2021-22, including children subject to notifications, investigations, and substantiations of maltreatment, and the ways children were supported. Over the next 12 months, quarterly updates will be made to the report to include content specifically focussing on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the system, the safety of children in care and pathways from out-of-home care.

Cat. no: CWS 92

- [Data](#)
- [Technical notes](#)
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Findings from this report:

- [In 2021-22, about 178,000 children came into contact with the system, a decrease from about 179,000 in 2020-21](#)
 - [Between 2017-18 and 2021-22, the rate of children who were subjects of notifications increased from 44 to 49 per 1,000](#)
 - [Between 2017-18 and 2021-22, the rate of children with substantiations remained relatively stable around 8.0 per 1,000](#)
 - [Between 30 June 2018 and 30 June 2022, the rate of children in out-of-home care remained stable around 8.0 per 1,000](#)
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Child protection system in Australia

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- [Children in the child protection system](#)
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Child protection refers to preventing and responding to violence, exploitation, abuse, neglect, and harmful practices against children (UNICEF 2021). When children cannot live safely at home, child protection systems prioritise children's physical, mental and psychosocial needs to safeguard their lives and futures (UNICEF 2021). Child protection functions to protect the fundamental rights of children which include safety, freedom from violence and a stable family environment (UN General Assembly 1989).

The child protection system aims to protect children from maltreatment in family settings.

Child maltreatment is the abuse and neglect that occurs to children under 18 years of age. It includes all types of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect, negligence and commercial or other exploitation, which results in actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power (WHO 2020).

In Australia, state and territory governments are responsible for statutory child protection. Relevant departments support vulnerable children:

- who have been, or are at risk of being, abused, neglected or otherwise harmed
- whose parents are unable to provide adequate care or protection.

This report looks at children aged under 18 years who came into contact with the child protection system in 2021-22. This includes being:

- subjects of investigations for alleged child maltreatment notifications
- on a care and protection order, which gives child protection departments partial or full legal responsibility for their welfare
- placed in out-of-home care as they were unable to live at home due to child safety concerns.

Children in the child protection system

In 2021-22, around 1 in 32 (178,000) Australian children aged under 18 came into contact with the child protection system (see: Data table 2.2). About 1 in 124 (45,500) Australian children aged under 18 became subjects of substantiated maltreatment (see: Supplementary data table S3.3). That is, an investigation concluded that they were being, or were at risk of being, maltreated.

A summary of children by components of the child protection system is outlined in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1 Summary of children in the child protection system, 2021-22

Component of the child protection system	Description	Number of events	Number of children
Notifications of alleged maltreatment	A report made to a child protection department alleging child maltreatment or harm to a child (Notifications do not count as a contact with the system until an investigation is undertaken)	471,000	275,000
Notifications resolved by means other than an investigation	For children who were assessed as having low risk of harm, notifications made about them were resolved without an investigation, such as by providing advice or referring to services (These notifications do not count as a contact with the system)	292,000	152,000
Investigations of alleged maltreatment notifications	Child protection departments obtain more detailed information about a child who is the subject of a notification and make an assessment about the harm or degree of harm to the child and their protective needs	178,000	119,000
Substantiated maltreatment	An investigation concluded that a child had been, was being, or was at risk or significant risk of being, maltreated	61,900	45,500

Not substantiated allegation of maltreatment	An investigation concluded that there was no reasonable cause to suspect prior, current or future maltreatment of a child	73,300	55,300
Investigation in process	An investigation that began for a notification received in the financial year, but was not completed by 31 August the following year	34,300	12,200
Care and protection orders	Legal orders or arrangements that give child protection departments some responsibility for a child's welfare	39,800	72,300
Out-of-home care placements	Overnight care for children for which there is ongoing case management and financial payment	116,000	55,800
Child protection system	Includes children who were subjects of investigation, on a care and protection order and/or in out-of-home care	334,000	178,000

Notes

1. Number of events includes the total occurrences of the specific component of the child protection system.
2. For the Number of children count, a child is counted only once, even if they had multiple occurrences of the event during the year.
3. For care and protection orders, the number of events are orders that were issued in 2021-22, while the number of children are those who had an ongoing care and protection order during 2021-22.
4. For readability, numbers have been rounded.

Sources: Data tables 2.2, supplementary data tables S3.1, S3.3, S4.1, T1, unpublished data, AIHW Child Protection Collection 2021-22.

Nationally, focus is increasingly on early intervention and family support services to:

- help prevent children entering or returning to the child protection system
- minimise the need for more intrusive interventions (AIHW 2021; Bromfield & Holzer 2008; DSS 2021).

Most jurisdictions have enacted strategies that help families in a more holistic way, by:

- coordinating family support service delivery
- providing better access to different types of child and family services (DSS 2021).

More information on the performance of governments in providing child protection services across Australia can be found in the [Report on Government Services 2023 - external site opens in new window](#).

Impact of COVID-19

Measures put in place as part of government responses to COVID-19 during 2020 and 2021 (including travel bans/restrictions, lockdowns limiting non-urgent face-to-face work, remote learning for students and quarantine requirements) may have affected child protection processes during 2019-20 to 2021-22. The long-term impact of COVID-19 on child protection processes is still unknown. No specific impacts on the annual data are highlighted in this report, however effects may become apparent in future years.

Some potential impacts of COVID-19 on Australian children in child protection are explored in [Child protection in the time of COVID-19](#). The report presents monthly child protection data from March 2020 to September 2020 compared with 2019. It contains selected information on risk factors for child abuse, including income and housing stress, parental mental health, substance use, and domestic violence.

For information on the impact of COVID-19 on population data, see Box 1.1 in the [Technical notes](#).

Where do I go for more information?

For more information on this topic, see [Child protection, state and territory departments responsible for child protection and Department of Social Services - external site opens in new window](#).

References

AIHW (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare) (2021) *National framework for protecting Australia's children indicators*, Catalogue number CWS 62, AIHW, Australian Government, accessed 6 February 2023.

Bromfield L & Holzer P (2008) *A National Approach for Child Protection: Project Report - external site opens in new window*, Australian Institute of Family Studies, Australian Government, accessed 6 February 2023.

DSS (Commonwealth of Australia Department of Social Services) (2021) *Safe and Supported: the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021-2031 - external site opens in new window*, DSS, Australian Government, accessed 6 February 2023.

UN General Assembly (United Nations) (1989) *Convention on the Rights of the Child - external site opens in new window*, UN General Assembly, accessed 6 February 2023.

UNICEF (The United Nations Children's Fund) (2021) *[Child Protection Strategy 2021-2030](#)* - external site opens in new window, UNICEF, accessed 6 February 2023.

WHO (World Health Organization) (2020) *[Child maltreatment](#)* - external site opens in new window, WHO, accessed 6 February 2023.

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Insights

The process of determining child maltreatment: Key findings

In 2021-22, 275,000 children were subjects of notifications of alleged maltreatment.

In 2021-22, 119,000 children became subjects of investigations.

In 2021-22, 45,500 children in finalised investigations were subjects of substantiations of maltreatment.

Supporting children: Key findings

In 2021-22, 36,200 children commenced intensive family support services.

At 30 June 2022, 61,100 children were on care and protection orders.

At 30 June 2022, 45,400 children were in out-of-home care.

Insights

The process of determining child maltreatment

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Key findings

In 2021-22,

- 275,000 children were subjects of notifications of alleged maltreatment.
- 119,000 children became subjects of investigations.
- 45,500 children in finalised investigations were subjects of substantiations of maltreatment.

Notifications, investigations, and substantiations are the entry point for children into the child protection system. These components are sequential:

1. An initial notification of alleged child maltreatment is made to a child protection department.
2. If the notification meets the threshold for further action, an investigation of the alleged maltreatment is conducted.
3. The investigation ends with a substantiation decision about whether there is reasonable cause to believe that a child has been, is being, or is at risk or significant risk of being, maltreated.

Refer to the [Appendices](#) for more information on the notifications, investigations, and substantiations components of the child protection system.

The data in this section relate to children for whom notifications were made about them to child protection departments between 1 July 2021 and 30 June 2022.

Due to differences in the way jurisdictions collect and report on notifications, investigations and substantiations, data are not comparable between jurisdictions. Refer to the [Appendices](#) for more information on differences in jurisdictions' policy and practice.

How many children were subjects of notifications and investigations?

In 2021-22, 275,000 children were subjects of notifications (49 per 1,000) (see: Supplementary data table T1).

The most common sources of notifications were:

- school personnel (25% or 67,600)
- police (24% or 65,200)
- medical or health personnel (11% or 29,900).

Source: Unpublished data from the AIHW Child Protection Collection

The child protection collection contains more than one notification where it relates to different events of alleged maltreatment, or a different person believed responsible. Of children who were subjects of notifications:

- about two-thirds (67% or 185,000) had a notification made about them for one event of alleged child maltreatment
- about one-third (33% or 89,800) were subjects of 2 or more notifications for different events of alleged child maltreatment.

Source: Unpublished data from the AIHW Child Protection Collection

In 2021-22, more than half (55% or 152,000) of children were assessed as having low risk of harm and therefore notifications made about them were resolved without an investigation. Of these:

- more than half (55% or 83,100) did not require further action as they were not at risk of potential or actual harm
- about one-third (33% or 50,000) were provided with advice or referred to other services
- about 13% (19,300) required other intervention, for example, in cases where children were assessed as low risk but still in need.

Source: Unpublished data from the AIHW Child Protection Collection

About 43% (119,000) of children for whom notifications were made about them became subjects of investigations. Of these:

- the majority (85% or 101,000) had a finalised investigation with an outcome of either substantiated (45% or 45,500) or not substantiated (55% or 55,300)
- about 10% (12,200) had an investigation in process

- about 5% (6,000) had an investigation closed with no outcome possible, for example, in cases where families have relocated.

Source: Supplementary data table S3.3

In 2021-22, about 1,300 children were awaiting an assessment decision on whether to undertake an investigation.

Source: Unpublished data from the AIHW Child Protection Collection

How many children were subjects of substantiated maltreatment?

In 2021-22, about 45% (45,500) of children in finalised investigations were subjects of substantiations of maltreatment (see: Supplementary data table S3.3). Of these:

- 13,600 were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (40 per 1,000 Indigenous children)
- 30,500 were non-Indigenous children (5.7 per 1,000 non-Indigenous children).

Source: Supplementary data table S3.9

The higher rate of Indigenous children in child protection substantiations is complex, and may have been affected by:

- the legacy of past policies of forced removal
- intergenerational effects of previous separations from family and culture
- a higher likelihood of living in the lowest socioeconomic areas
- perceptions arising from cultural differences in child-rearing (HREOC 1997).

More information on Indigenous children will be included in the report over the coming months.

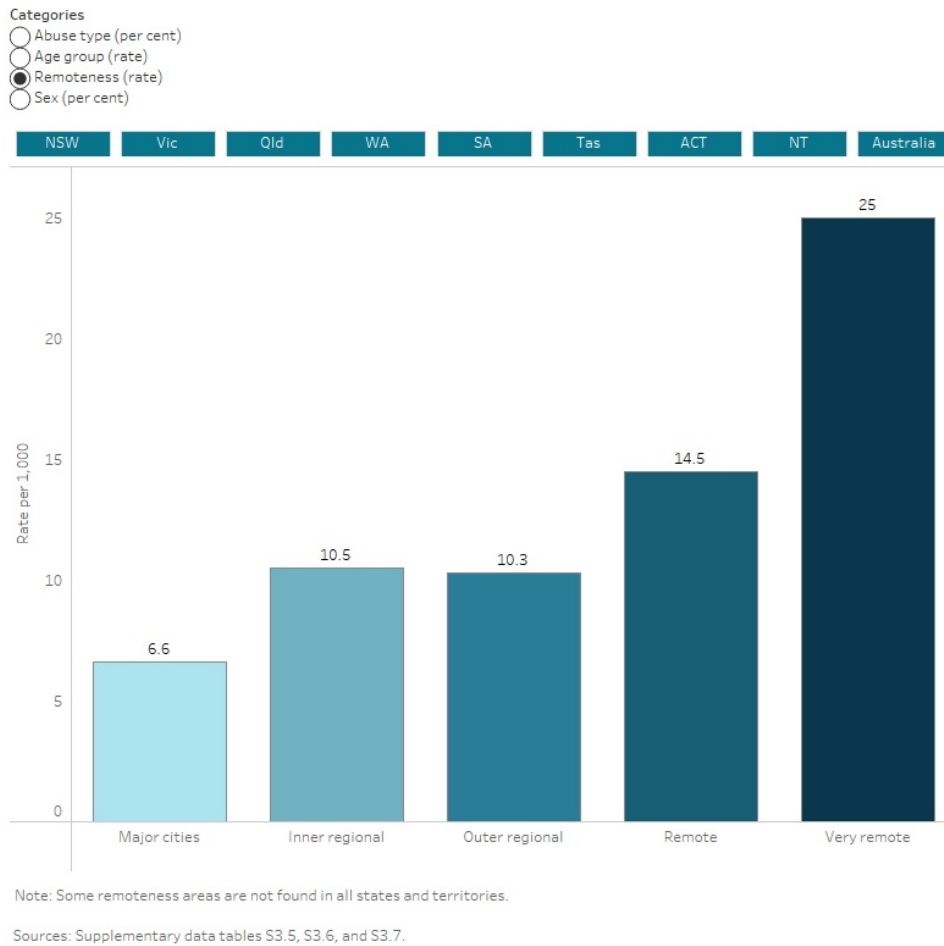
Characteristics of children with substantiated maltreatment

For children who were subjects of substantiations:

- about 81% (36,900) had only one substantiation (see: Supplementary data table S3.4)
- about 51% (23,000) were girls and about 47% (21,600) were boys (see: Supplementary data table S3.5)
- emotional abuse was the most common type of maltreatment (57% or 25,900), followed by neglect (21% or 9,400) (see: Supplementary data table S3.5)
- children living in very remote areas (25 per 1,000) were almost 4 times more likely to be maltreated than children living in major cities (6.6 per 1,000) (see: Supplementary data table S3.7)
- about one-third (33% or 15,100) were from the lowest socioeconomic areas (see: Supplementary data table S3.8)
- infants aged under one were more likely to be maltreated than any other age group (15 per 1,000) (see: Supplementary data table S3.13).

Figure 1: Characteristics of children with substantiated maltreatment, by state or territory, 2021-22

This interactive data visualisation shows the number of children with substantiated maltreatment disaggregated by abuse type, age group, remoteness, and sex in the year 2021-22. Data are displayed for each state or territory and Australia.



Has the number of children in the system changed over time?

From 2017-18 to 2021-22, the rate of children who were:

- in the child protection system increased from 29 per 1,000 to 31 per 1,000
- subjects of notifications increased from 44 per 1,000 to 49 per 1,000
- subjects of substantiations remained relatively stable from 8.5 per 1,000 to 8.0 per 1,000.

Source: Supplementary data table T1

While notifications increased, the rates for substantiations remained steady across these timeframes. This could be a result of:

- legislative changes, such as the expansion of the list of occupations that is mandated to report cases of suspected child maltreatment
- increased public awareness from inquiries into child protection processes.

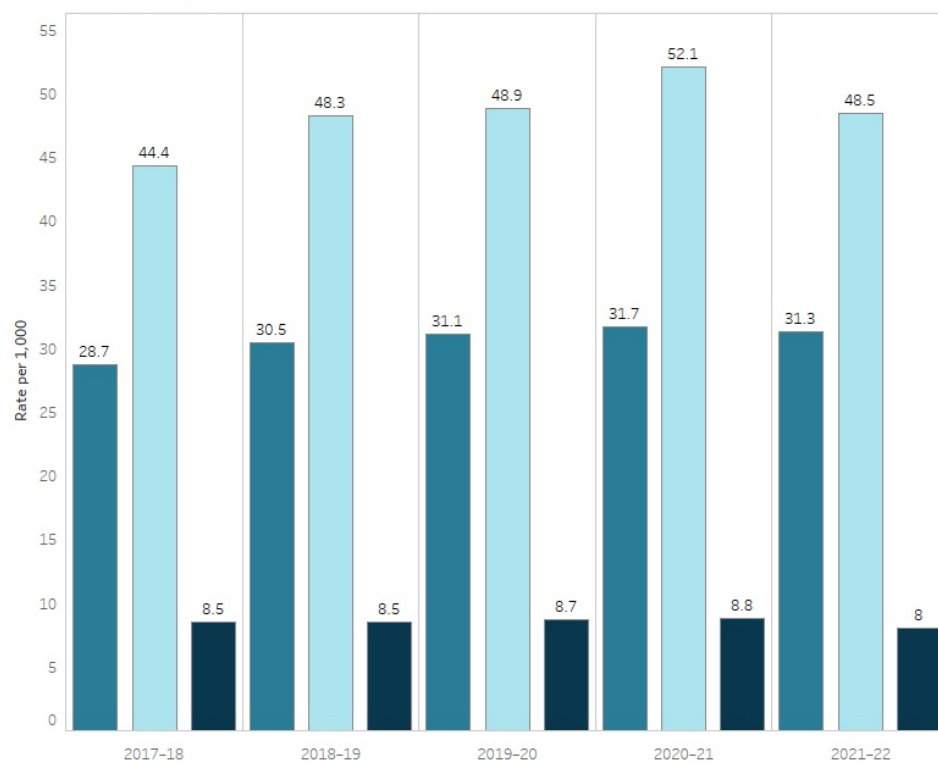
Refer to the [Appendices](#) for more information on legislative changes and various inquiries into the child protection system.

Figure 2: Number of children in different components of child protection, 2017-18 to 2021-22

This interactive data visualisation shows trends in the number of children in different components of the child protection system between 2017-18 and 2021-22.

Categories

- Child protection system
- Subjects of notifications
- Subjects of substantiations



Note: New South Wales provided limited substantiations data in 2017-18 due to the implementation of a new client management system. Therefore, substantiations rates for 2017-18 have been calculated excluding New South Wales and should not be compared with rates in other reporting periods.
Source: Table T1.

Insights

Supporting children

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Key findings

- In 2021-22, 36,200 children commenced intensive family support services.
- At 30 June 2022, 61,100 children were on care and protection orders.
- At 30 June 2022, 45,400 children were in out-of-home care.

Child protection departments provide and/or fund a range of services to support children in the child protection system to ensure they have stable, long-term care arrangements. These include:

- intensive family support services
- care and protection orders
- out-of-home care.

Intensive family support services

What is the role of intensive family support services?

Child protection departments may also work to strengthen families with referrals to intensive family support services at any time for advice, education, and support.

In 2021-22, 36,200 children commenced intensive family support services. Of these, about 3 in 5 (63% or 22,800) were aged under 15 (see: Data table 8.1).

These services aim to:

- support parents to care for their children
- prevent separation of children from parents
- achieve reunification where separation has already occurred.

More information on intensive family support services, including government expenditure, can be found in the [Report on Government Services 2023 - external site opens in new window](#).

Care and protection orders

What is a care and protection order?

Care and protection orders are legal orders or arrangements that give child protection departments some responsibility for a child's welfare. Children can be placed on care and protection orders for various reasons, including:

- having been seriously harmed
- being at risk or significant risk of harm
- having no other care options.

The 3 main categories of legal responsibility conferred by care and protection orders include arrangements where:

- parents retain legal responsibility
- departments are given legal responsibility
- nominated carers are given legal responsibility.

A substantiated notification of maltreatment does not necessarily mean that a child will be placed on an order. In 2021-22, just over one-fifth (22% or 11,200) of children who were subjects of substantiations were subsequently placed on an order within 12 months following substantiation (see: Supplementary data table S4.2).

In cases where parents have made changes to ensure their children's safety and wellbeing at home, or are prepared to do so, the department may decide an order is unnecessary and consider other options, including:

- referring the family to support services
- putting a safety plan in place
- determining that no further action is needed.

Refer to the [Appendices](#) for more information on the different types of care and protection orders.

How many children were on care and protection orders?

At 30 June 2022, 61,100 children were on care and protection orders (11 per 1,000). Of these:

- 24,600 were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (72 per 1,000 Indigenous children)
- 36,500 were non-Indigenous children (6.8 per 1,000 non-Indigenous children).

Source: Supplementary data table S4.9

In 2021-22, around 10,600 children were admitted to care and protection orders (see: Supplementary data table S4.3). Of these:

- about three-quarters (76% or 8,100) were admitted for the first time (see: Data table 4.2)
- over one-quarter (28% or 3,000) were aged 1-4 years (see: Supplementary data table S4.3).

More (11,700) children were discharged from care and protection orders. Of these, about one-fifth were continuously on an order:

- between one to 2 years (21% or 2,500)
- for 8 years or more (21% or 2,400).

Source: Supplementary data table S4.4

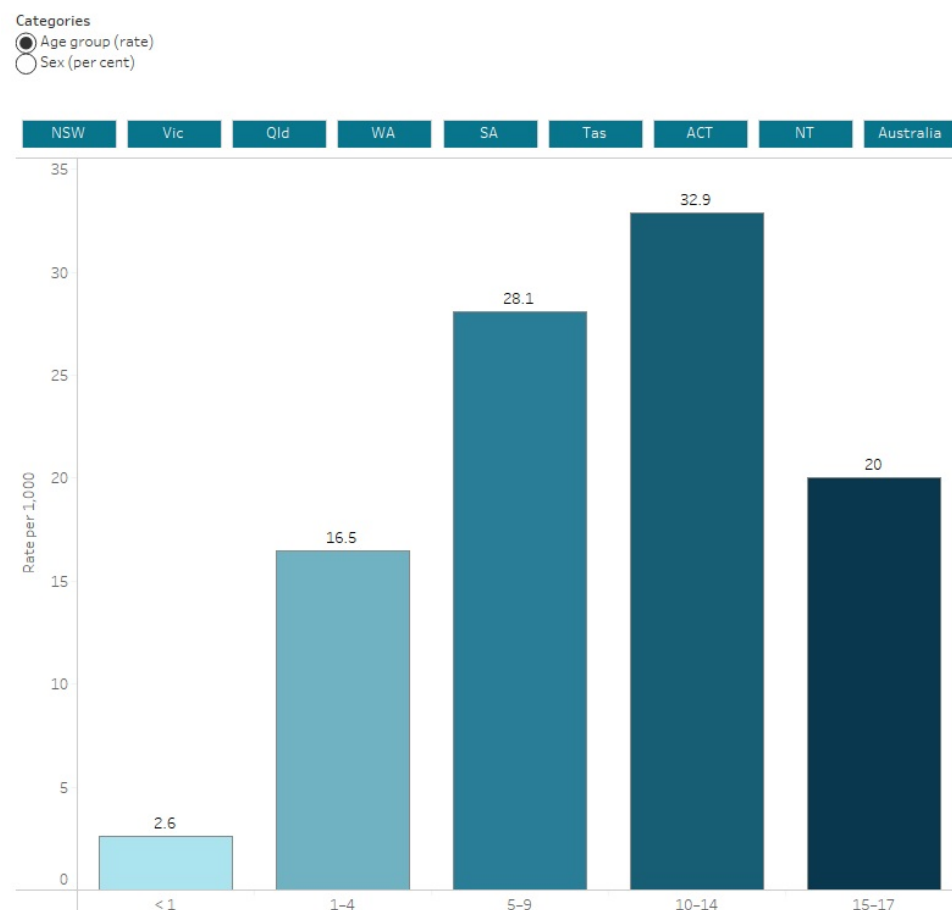
Characteristics of children on care and protection orders

For children who were on care and protection orders at 30 June 2022:

- 2 in 5 (40% or 24,300) were living with relatives/kin in home-based care (see: Supplementary data table S4.5)
- about one-third (33% or 20,100) were aged 10-14 years (see: Supplementary data table S4.6)
- about 3 in 5 (63% or 38,600) were on finalised guardianship or custody orders (see: Supplementary data table S4.10).

Figure 3: Characteristics of children on care and protection orders, by state or territory, 2021-22

This interactive data visualisation shows the number of children on care and protection orders disaggregated by age group and sex in the year 2021-22. Data are displayed for each state or territory and Australia.



Sources: Supplementary data tables S4.7 and S4.8.

Has the number of children on care and protection orders changed over time?

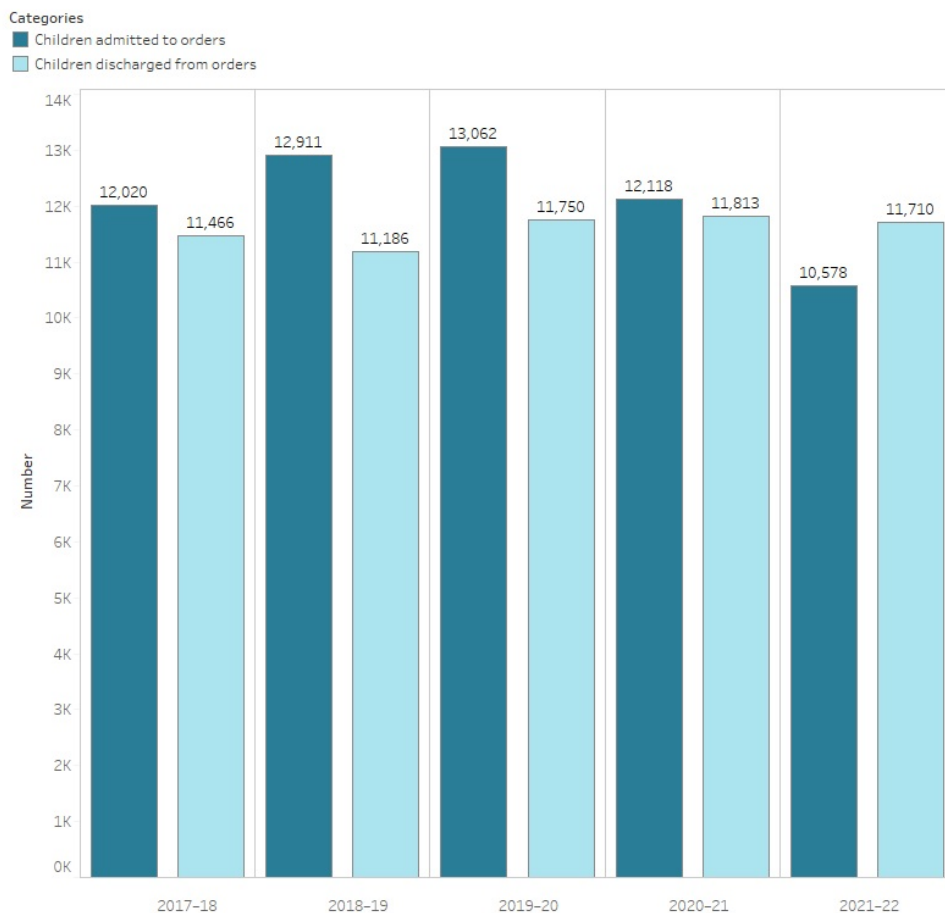
Between 30 June 2018 and 30 June 2022, the rate of children on care and protection orders remained steady, at around 10 per 1,000 to 11 per 1,000 (see: Supplementary data table T1).

From 2017-18 to 2021-22, the number of children:

- admitted to orders decreased from about 12,000 to about 10,600 children (see: Supplementary data table S4.11)
- discharged from orders remained stable, from about 11,500 to about 11,700 (see: Supplementary data table S4.12).

Figure 4: Children admitted to and discharged from care and protection orders, 2017-18 to 2021-22

This interactive data visualisation shows trends in the number of children admitted to and discharged from care and protection orders between 2017-18 and 2021-22.



Sources: Supplementary data tables S4.11 and S4.12.

Out-of-home care

What is out-of-home care?

Out-of-home care is overnight care for children aged under 18 who are unable to live with their families due to child safety concerns. This includes placements approved by the child protection department for which there is ongoing case management and financial payment (including where a financial payment has been offered but has been declined by the carer). This nationally consistent definition for out-of-home care was implemented in 2018-19.

Out-of-home care includes:

- legal (court-ordered) placements
- voluntary placements
- placements made for the purpose of providing respite for parents and/or carers.

Children are placed in out-of-home care for many reasons, including:

- being the subjects of substantiations and needing a protective environment
- having parents who are incapable of providing adequate care
- needing alternative accommodation during times of conflict
- having parents or carers who need respite.

Consistent with the principle of keeping children with their families where it is safe and appropriate to do so, out-of-home care placements are considered as a last resort.

The national definition for out-of-home care excludes children on third-party parental responsibility orders as the minister or executive no longer has guardianship of children on these orders. However, all states and territories continue to fund carers of children on third-party parental responsibility orders and some (New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia and the Australian Capital Territory) continue to provide some level of case management.

As at 30 June 2022, there were about 10,200 children on third-party parental responsibility orders (see: Supplementary data table T3). Children on third-party parental responsibility orders are considered to have achieved a more permanent arrangement.

Refer to the [Appendices](#) for more information on the different types of out-of-home care placements.

How many children were in out-of-home care?

As at 30 June 2022, 45,400 children were in out-of-home care (8.0 per 1,000) (see: Data table 5.1). Of these:

- 19,400 were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (57 per 1,000 Indigenous children)
- 25,900 were non-Indigenous children (4.8 per 1,000 non-Indigenous children).

Source: Supplementary data table S5.5

In 2021-22, the rates of children admitted and discharged from out-of-home care were around 2.0 per 1,000 (see: Supplementary data tables S5.1 and S5.2). Nationally:

- 10,300 children were admitted to out-of-home care (see: Supplementary data table S5.1)
- 11,000 children were discharged from out-of-home care (see: Supplementary data table S5.2).

Children in the youngest age group (under one) had the highest admission rate of 6.7 per 1,000 compared with less than 2.0 per 1,000 for other age groups (see: Supplementary data table S5.1).

The discharge rate was highest for children in the oldest age group (15-17 years) at 4.4 per 1,000 compared with less than 2.0 per 1,000 for other age groups (see: Supplementary data table S5.2).

Characteristics of children in out-of-home care

For children who were in out-of-home care at 30 June 2022:

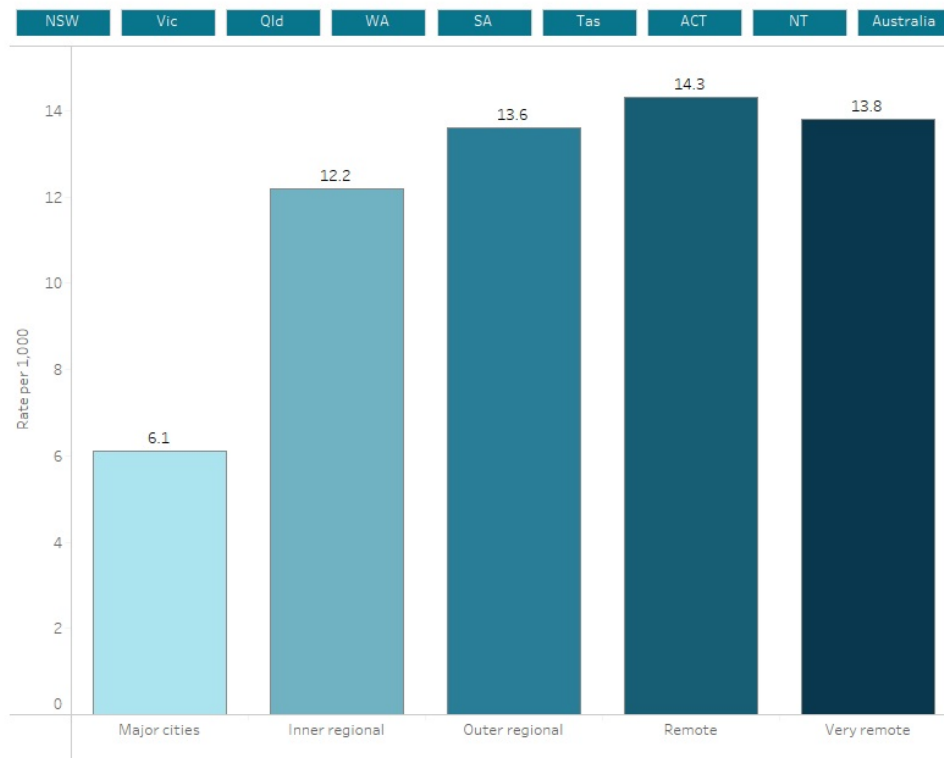
- about 90% (40,900) were in home-based care (foster care, relative/kinship care and other home-based care) (see: Supplementary data table S5.3)
- about 3 in 5 (61% or 27,900) children were aged 5-14 years (see: Supplementary data table S5.5)
- disability status was known for 71% (32,300) of children in care, of whom 29% (9,300) had a disability (see: Supplementary data table S5.8)
- the rate of children living in inner and outer regional (13 per 1,000) and remote and very remote (14 per 1,000) areas were more than twice that of those living in major cities (6.1 per 1,000) (see: Supplementary data table S5.9)
- most (95% or 42,900) were on a care and protection order (see: Supplementary data table S5.13).

Figure 5: Characteristics of children in out-of-home care, by state or territory, 2021-22

This interactive data visualisation shows the number of children in out-of-home care disaggregated by age group, placement type, remoteness, and sex in the year 2021-22. Data are displayed for each state or territory and Australia.

Categories

- ☐ Age group (per cent)
- ☐ Placement type (per cent)
- ☒ Remoteness (rate)
- ☐ Sex (per cent)



Sources: Supplementary data tables S5.3, S5.5, S5.6, and S5.9.

Characteristics of children in long-term out-of-home care

In 2021-22, 70% (31,700) of children in out-of-home care had been in care for 2 years or more, known as long-term care (see: Supplementary data table S5.15). Of these:

- about 69% (21,800) were aged 5-14 years (see: Supplementary data table S5.15)
- about 81% (25,800) were on a long-term guardianship arrangement (see: Supplementary data table S5.16).

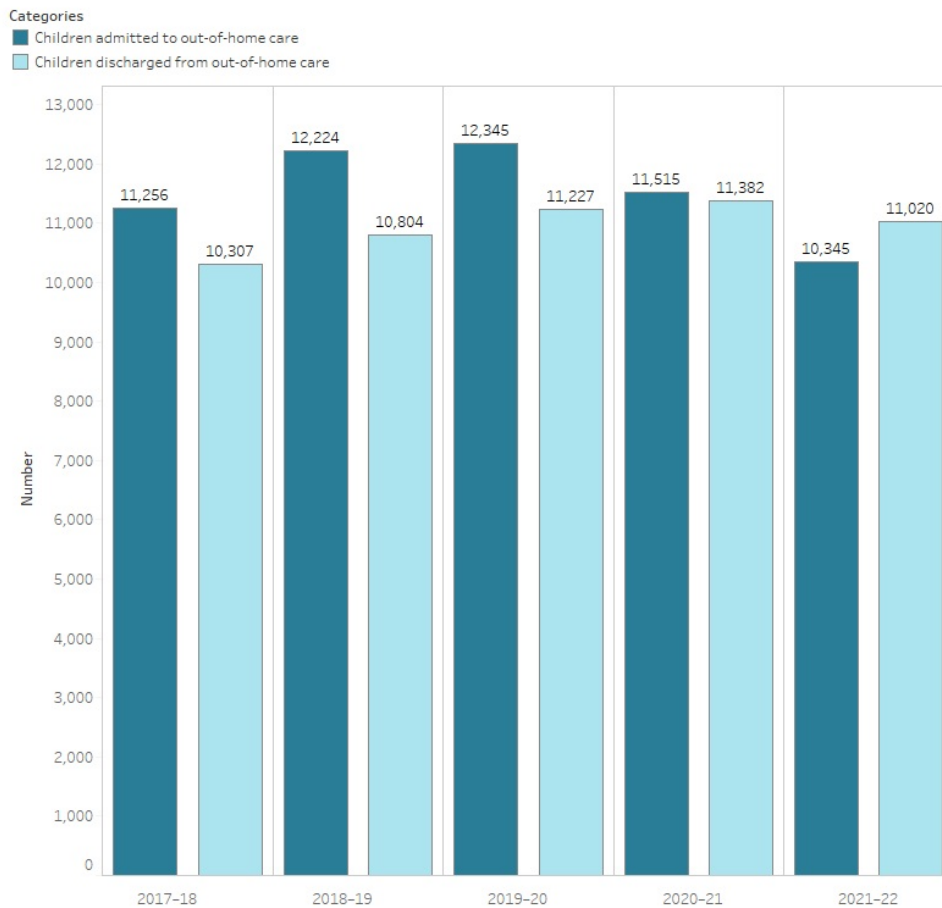
Has the number of children in out-of-home care changed over time?

Between 30 June 2018 and 30 June 2022, the number of children in out-of-home care fluctuated each year, but overall, the rate has remained relatively stable around 8.0 per 1,000 (see: Supplementary data table T1).

Similarly, from 2017-18 to 2021-22, the number of children admitted and discharged from care changed somewhat each year, but the overall rates remained relatively stable at about 2.0 per 1,000 (see: Supplementary data tables S5.17 and S5.19).

Figure 6: Children admitted to and discharged from out-of-home care, 2017-18 to 2021-22

This interactive data visualisation shows trends in the number of children admitted to and discharged from out-of-home care between 2017-18 and 2021-22.



Source: Supplementary data tables S5.18 and S5.19.

What types of carers are there?

Carers are people who have been assessed and approved by the relevant department or agency to provide care in their private households for children in funded and non-funded out-of-home care.

The main types of carers include:

- foster carers who are not related to the child
- relative/kinship carers who are related to or know the child
- long-term guardianship carers who may or may not be related to the child
- respite carers who provide short-term accommodation where the intention is for the child to return to their prior residence (out-of-home care or family home).

How many children were placed in unique carer households?

The reporting of the total number of unique carer households can give insight into the total number of children placed in the household, regardless of the placement type, as some carer households might be approved/authorised to provide more than one care type.

It also allows information about carer households that provide placements other than foster or relative/kinship care to be included in the count.

As at 30 June 2022, there were about 24,200 unique carer households with a placement. Of these:

- more than half (59% or 14,300) had one child placed with them
- about 39% (9,500) had 2-4 children placed with them
- 2.0% (500) had 5 or more children placed with them.

Source: Supplementary data table S7.1

How many children were placed with foster or relative/kinship carers?

As at 30 June, there were about 8,700 foster carer households with one or more children placed with them. Of these:

- about half (51% or 4,400) had one child placed with them
- about 46% (4,000) had 2-4 children placed with them
- 3.3% (300) had 5 or more children placed with them.

Source: Supplementary data table S7.2

As at 30 June, there were about 15,500 relative/kinship carer households with one or more children placed with them. Of these:

- almost two-thirds (64% or 9,900) had one child placed with them
- over one-third (35% or 5,500) had 2-4 children placed with them
- 1.2% (200) had 5 or more children placed with them.

Source: Supplementary data table S7.3

The prevalence of households with multiple child placements might reflect that, in many jurisdictions, priority is given to placing siblings together.

How many children were new or repeat clients?

In 2021-22, 178,000 children aged under 18 years came into contact with the child protection system (see: Data table 2.2). Of these, the majority (70% or 123,000) of children were repeat (which also includes continuing) clients (see: Supplementary data table S2.2).

Repeat clients are children who have previously been in contact with the child protection system. These include children:

- who have been the subject of an investigation
- were discharged from any type of national care and protection order or funded out-of-home care placement (excluding respite placements lasting less than 7 days)
- whose earliest order and/or placement in the current reporting period is part of a preceding continuous episode of care.

Data on new and repeat clients provide some insight into the extent to which new clients, or those with prior involvement, come into contact with the child protection system, and whether this differs across the system components.

In 2021-22:

- More than half (55% or 65,000) of the 119,000 children who were subjects of investigations for alleged child maltreatment notifications were repeat clients.
- Most (96% or 69,300) of the 72,300 children on a care and protection order were repeat clients.
- Most (95% or 53,200) of the 55,800 children placed in out-of-home care were repeat clients.

Source: Supplementary data table S2.2

Refer to the [Appendices](#) for more information on the child protection system.

How safe were children in care?

Sometimes children in out-of-home care can be the subject of further abuse, for example, by their carer or another person in the household or care facility.

In 2021-22, 1,200 children were subjects of substantiations of abuse in care.

Source: Unpublished data from the AIHW Child Protection Collection

More information on the safety and abuse of children in care will be included in the report over the coming months.

How were children supported to transition out of care?

To support children to find stable long-term care arrangements, child protection departments undertake permanency planning for children in out-of-home care.

Permanency outcomes include:

- reunifying children with their families
- placing children in a third-party care arrangement
- placing children on long-term guardianship or custody orders
- adoption.

In 2021-22, 9,000 children exited out-of-home care to a permanency outcome.

Source: Unpublished data from the AIHW Child Protection Collection

More information on children's transition from out-of-home care will be included in the report over the coming months.

References

HREOC (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission) (1997), *Bringing them home: Report of the national inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families* - [external site opens in new window](#), HREOC, accessed 6 February 2023.

Technical notes

Rounding of data

Data in this report have been rounded for readability. The following rounding rules have been applied:

- Numbers over 100,000 and under a million are rounded to the nearest multiple of 1,000.
- Numbers between 1,000 and 100,000 are rounded to the nearest multiple of 100.
- Numbers between 500 and 999 are rounded to the nearest multiple of 10.
- Numbers between 100 and 499 are rounded to the nearest multiple of 5.
- Numbers between 10 and 99 are rounded to the nearest whole number.
- Numbers under 10 are rounded to one decimal place.

Care and protection orders

The following rules apply to the counting of admissions, discharges and length of time for care and protection orders:

1. A renewal of an existing order is not counted as an admission. A change to an order is counted as an admission. However, if a new care and protection order is applied in 5 days or less of the discharge of another order (regardless of that type of order), neither an admission nor a discharge are counted.
2. If a child is on multiple care and protection orders/ arrangements, all orders/ arrangements must be discharged before a discharge is counted.
3. If a child is admitted to, or discharged from, multiple care and protection orders/arrangements, the child is counted for only one admission and/or one discharge for the year.
4. The length of time continuously on an order is counted only for the first order/arrangement from which the child is discharged during the year.
5. If a child is discharged from an order and a new care and protection order/arrangement is applied in 5 days or less of the discharge, the orders are deemed to be consecutive (that is, the length of time on an order will include both orders).
6. Each child is counted for one admission for the year.

Population data

Population estimates for all children aged 0 to 17 years are sourced from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). Population estimates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are sourced from Indigenous population projections produced by the ABS. Non-indigenous population estimates are derived by calculating the difference between the total population and the corresponding estimate from the Indigenous population projections.

The most up to date time series of population estimates from the ABS are used in all trend calculations. This will result in differences to data published in previous *Child protection Australia* reports.

Population estimates used to calculate rates are available in the [Supplementary data tables P1-P5](#).

Box 1.1: COVID-19 impact on population estimates

The COVID-19 pandemic, and the resulting Australian Government closure of the international border from 20 March 2020, caused significant disruptions to the usual Australian population trends. This report uses Australian Estimated Residential Population (ERP) estimates that reflect these disruptions.

In the year July 2020 to June 2021, the overall population growth was much smaller than the years prior, and in particular, there was a relatively large decline in the population of Victoria. ABS reporting indicates these were primarily due to net-negative international migration ([National, state and territory population | Australian Bureau of Statistics - external site opens in new window](#)).

This change in usual population trends may result in some rates and proportions being greater than in previous years due to decreases in the denominator (population size) of some sub-populations.

Calculation of rates

This report uses both December and June population data, depending on the point of analysis (see Points of analysis). December population data are used when calculating rates for during the year counts. June population data are used when calculating rates for 30 June counts.

Population rates are calculated by dividing the number of children for a specific measure or group (for example, children on care and protection orders) by the corresponding population. For example, the rates of children on care and protection orders at 30 June are calculated as follows:

Rate ratio

Rates can be compared using a rate ratio, which is one rate divided by another. Rate ratios should be interpreted with care where there are small denominators or where a large proportion of data is recorded as 'unknown'.

In *Child protection Australia* reporting, rate ratios are mainly used to compare Indigenous and non-Indigenous rates, and measure the level of Indigenous over-representation. Rates are also presented to guide interpretation.

Rate ratios are not calculated where one or both of the rates have fewer than 5 children or young people in the numerator.

Age

Age is always calculated in whole years. For example, a child who was aged 5 years and 9 months is recorded as being aged 5.

Throughout *Child protection Australia*, age is calculated at different points in time for a child, depending on the analysis in question:

- For 30 June analyses, age is calculated as at 30 June.
- For analyses of events occurring during the year, age is calculated at the relevant point in time during the year:
 - For analyses of children who were the subject of a child protection notification or substantiation, age is calculated at the earliest date of notification during the period.
 - For analyses of children who were admitted to, or discharged from, a care and protection order or an out-of-home care placement, age is calculated at the date of first admission and first discharge during the period.
- For analyses of children in contact with the child protection system, age is calculated at the earliest point of contact or at 1 July of the relevant reporting period if the child was on an ongoing care and protection order, or in an ongoing out-of-home care placement at the beginning of the period.

Average

Averages or means are calculated by summing all the values of interest, and dividing by the total number of observations of interest. In *Child protection Australia*, averages are used in the reporting of the average co-occurrence of abuse and neglect.

Identification of Indigenous status

Children

The practices used to identify and record the Indigenous status of children vary across states and territories. The quality of the data is therefore unknown.

In this collection, children are counted as Indigenous if they are identified as such in the state and territory data collections. Where possible, children whose Indigenous status is recorded as 'unknown' are excluded from the calculations of rates and proportions. So, the counts for Indigenous children are likely to be an underestimate of the number of Indigenous children in the child protection system.

Caregivers

In the out-of-home care data collection, the Indigenous status of caregivers is collected. Carers who are identified as being Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander are included in the Indigenous category for caregivers. In instances where there is no single caregiver, such as facility-based care, the caregiver will be recorded as Indigenous if the facility is specifically for Indigenous children and/or has Indigenous management. However, in [Supplementary data table S5.12](#) children are not counted as living with Indigenous caregivers in Indigenous led facility-based care as this is not a preferred placement type under the [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle](#). If Indigenous children are living in other types of facility-based care, the caregiver are not counted as Indigenous.

Points of analysis

During the year

Each child is counted only once, even if a child had multiple occurrences of the event during the year.

For example, when calculating the number of children who were the subjects of substantiations of child protection notifications during the year, a child will be counted if a notification received during the financial year was substantiated. However, the child will only be counted once, regardless of how many notifications were substantiated for them in the financial year. Where details relating to the substantiation are reported (for example, type of abuse or neglect, or age of the child) the first substantiated notification is counted.

30 June (at the end of the financial year)

Counts of people at 30 June are calculated by counting each distinct person for whom the event of interest was ongoing at the end of the financial year. Each person is counted only once, even if that person had multiple occurrences of the event ongoing at 30 June.

In instances where a child or young person has multiple child protection orders ongoing at 30 June, the child or young person is counted against the national order type that represented the highest level of intervention.

In instances where a child or young person has multiple living arrangements ongoing at 30 June, the child or young person is counted against the living arrangement type that is considered their usual placement.

For example, when calculating the number of children and young people on a care and protection order at 30 June, a child or young person will be counted if they were on a care and protection order during the reporting period, and the order had not ended, or ended after 30 June. If the child or young person had an ongoing finalised guardianship order and an ongoing interim order at 30 June, they would be counted in the finalised guardianship order category, as this represents the higher level of intervention of the 2 orders.

Trends

Trends are reported as 5-year periods unless specified otherwise. Increases over time in the number or rate of children in the child protection system or children receiving support may relate to legislative changes, such as the expansion of the list of occupations that is mandated to report cases of suspected child maltreatment, or increases in public awareness from inquiries into child protection processes.

It is standard practice to present 5-year trends in data, as changes in state and territory legislation, policy/practice, and information management systems reduce the ability to accurately compare data over longer periods.

Changes that have an impact on the data are provided as caveats to the data, in the Technical Notes, and in [Appendices B-E](#).

Socioeconomic area

Child protection Australia reporting uses the Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA), developed by the ABS to analyse socioeconomic status (ABS 2018b).

The SEIFA comprises 4 indexes that are created using information from the Census of Population and Housing. These indexes are:

- the Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage
- the Index of Relative Socio-Economic Advantage and Disadvantage
- the Index of Economic Resources
- the Index of Education and Occupation.

The Index of Relative Socio-Economic Advantage and Disadvantage is used to compare the average level of socioeconomic advantage and disadvantage. It is the SEIFA index used in this report, ranking geographical areas on a continuum from ‘most disadvantaged’ to ‘least disadvantaged’ using a combination of income, education, employment, occupation, housing, and other Census variables (ABS 2018b).

The AIHW uses postcode data to match SEIFA information to child protection data and to calculate population quintiles. The population datasets used to calculate the quintiles for SEIFA were based on regional population data the ABS published in 2017 (ABS 2017).

For more information on SEIFA refer to [Socio-economic indexes for areas: getting a handle on individual diversity within areas. ABS cat. no. 1351.0.55.036 \(ABS 2011\)](#). - external site opens in new window

Remoteness area

Child protection Australia reports use the Australian Statistical Geography Standard Remoteness Structure developed by the ABS to analyse the remoteness of a child’s usual place of residence at the time of notification, and the remoteness of a child’s living arrangement (ABS 2018a).

The AIHW uses SA2 or postcodes to match remoteness information to child protection data. These data include SA2 / postcode at notification and SA2 / postcode of living arrangement. Some SA2’s and postcodes do not map to single Remoteness Areas. For these SA2’s and postcodes, the data are weighted according to how the population is distributed across the SA2 / postcode and how this overlaps with the relevant Remoteness Area/s. Some children and young people might appear in remoteness areas for which there is no population within that state or territory. This is due to records whose SA2 / postcode is in a different state or territory to the one in which they received a notification, or were in out-of-home care.

For more information on the Australian Statistical Geography Standard Remoteness Structure refer to [Australian Statistical Geography Standard Remoteness Structure. ABS cat. no. 1270.0.55.005](#) - external site opens in new window.

References

ABS (Australian Bureau of Statistics) (2011) [Socio-economic indexes for areas: getting a handle on individual diversity within areas. September 2011](#) - external site opens in new window, ABS, accessed 21 April 2023.

ABS (Australian Bureau of Statistics) (2017) [Regional population by age and sex, Australia, 2016](#) - external site opens in new window, ABS, accessed 21 April 2023.

ABS (Australian Bureau of Statistics) (2018a) [Australian Statistical Geography Standard \(ASGS\): volume 5 - Remoteness Structure](#) - external site opens in new window, ABS, accessed 21 April 2023.

ABS (Australian Bureau of Statistics) (2018b) *Census of Population and Housing: Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA), Australia, 2016 - external site opens in new window*, ABS, accessed 21 April 2023.

ABS (Australian Bureau of Statistics) (2023) *National, state and territory population, Australia, 202 - external site opens in new window*³, ABS, accessed 21 April 2023.

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Glossary

Refer to the AIHW's [child protection glossary](#) for definitions of terminology used in this report.

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Notes

Data quality statement

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Data





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