

INFORMATION
ANALYSIS
DIRECTORATE



Children's Social Care Statistics for Northern Ireland 2023/24



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About Community Information Branch: The purpose of Community Information Branch (CIB) is to promote effective decision making in children and adult social services by providing quality information and analysis.

We collect, analyse, and publish a wide range of community information that is used to help monitor the delivery of personal social services policy. Information collected by CIB is used to assess HSC Trust performance, for corporate monitoring, policy evaluation, and to respond to parliamentary/assembly questions. All publications can be found on the [Department of Health's website](#).

Our Vision and Values

- Provide up-to-date, quality information on children and adult social services and community health;
- to disseminate findings widely with a view to stimulating debate, promoting effective decision-making and improvement in service provision; and
- be an expert voice on social care information.

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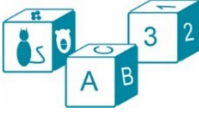


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Data tables can be downloaded from:

[Children's Social Care Statistics in Northern Ireland Web Link](#)

Children's social care summary

5 year comparison

		2018/19	2023/24	Direction of travel
	Number of Children in Need	24,289	22,450	↓
	Number on the Child Protection Register	2,211	2,334	↑
	Number of new Child Protection registrations	1,992	2,258	↑
	Number of Children in Care	3,281	3,999	↑
	Proportion in Foster Care	79%	84%	↑
	Number of Children's Residential Homes	47	55	↑
	Number of providers of Daycare	4,079	3,261	↓
	Number of Daycare places	60,501	55,645	↓
	Young people subject to Care Leaver Act	1,479	1,850	↑
	Trust recruited Foster Care Households	2,433	2,639	↑

Introduction

Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995

The Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 (the Children Order) is the principal statute governing the care, upbringing and protection of children in Northern Ireland. It affects all those who work and care for children, whether parents, paid carers or volunteers. The Children Order emphasises the unique advantages to a child being brought up within his or her own family. In practice, this means that the Children Order sees families as a major way of supporting and helping children. Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts have the power and in some circumstances the duty, under the Children Order, to help children by providing services to their families.

A child can be referred to Social Services for a variety of reasons. When a child is referred, Social Services undertake an initial assessment to determine if that child is a 'child in need' as defined by the Children Order. If a child is considered to be a child in need, services should be offered to assist the child's parents/carers to meet that identified need. Should there be concerns that a child may be suffering or at risk of suffering 'significant harm', Social Services will conduct an investigation under Article 66 of the Children Order and respond appropriately. A Child Protection Case Conference may be convened and the child's name included on the Child Protection Register and a Child Protection Plan drawn up to safeguard the child. If there are significant concerns that indicate authoritative intervention is required, Social Services may make an application to the Court for a Legal Order to enable them to afford an appropriate level of safeguarding to the child. This may include removing a child from its family and into the care of the HSC Trust.

Children in Northern Ireland

There are 436,622 children living in Northern Ireland¹. At 31 March 2024, 22,450 of these were known to Social Services as a child in need. Furthermore, 2,334 were on the Child Protection Register and 3,999 were children in care of the HSC Trusts (a looked after child).

Considerable resources go into safeguarding children with some 2,013 Social Service staff employed are specifically graded as Child and Family Care social workers². Many other work groups would also be involved in children's social care, such as managerial and administrative teams, multidisciplinary teams and staff in different residential settings. In addition, the Courts and educational system could also be involved in many aspects of children's social care.

This annual bulletin presents the latest figures on children in need, the Child Protection Register and looked after children, as well as information on residential homes, day care provision, foster carers and care leavers.

¹ Mid-Year Estimate 2023 (NISRA 2024).

² Whole-time equivalent, [Northern Ireland health and social care \(HSC\) workforce census March 2024 | Department of Health \(health-ni.gov.uk\)](https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/publications/northern-ireland-health-and-social-care-hsc-workforce-census-march-2024), DoH.

Table 1. Rate of Children in Need, on the Child Protection Register and Looked after per 10,000 child population in Northern Ireland at 31 March 2023

Source:

Delegated Statutory Functions / Corporate Parenting Returns

Population: For Northern Ireland: Mid-Year Estimate 2023 (NISRA 2024) and for HSC Trusts: Mid-Year Estimate 2022 (NISRA 2023) (HSC Trust MYEs have not been published for 2023).

HSC Trust	Children in Need (Rate per 10,000 child population)	Child Protection Register (Rate per 10,000 child population)	Looked after children (Rate per 10,000 child population)
Belfast	529.1	53.8	143.7
Northern	406.9	46.8	75.9
South Eastern	447.1	45.1	83.7
Southern	608.1	51.3	68.2
Western	605.3	75.6	100.9
Northern Ireland	514.2	53.5	91.6

Section One: Children in Need

A Child is in Need if:

- He or she is unlikely to achieve or maintain, or to have the opportunity of achieving or maintaining, a reasonable standard of health or development without the provision of services by an authority;
- His or her health or development is likely to be significantly impaired;
- Or further impaired without the provision of such services, or he or she is disabled.

Source: Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 – Guidance and Regulations.

Key Findings

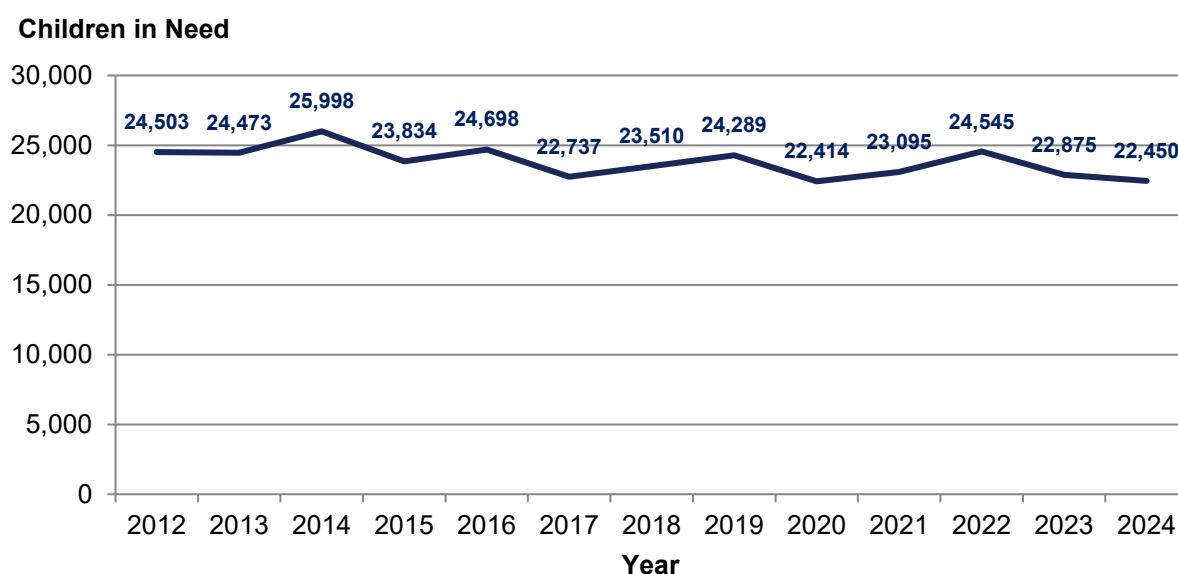
- At 31 March 2024, 22,450 children in Northern Ireland were known to Social Services as a child in need;
- The number of children referred to Social Services in Northern Ireland during 2023/24 is currently not available due to a revision of figures. Figures will be updated once revised and validated returns have been received.

Children in Need in Northern Ireland

At 31 March 2024, 22,450 children in Northern Ireland were known to social services as a child in need³. This represented 514 children per 10,000 child population⁴. The number of children in need regionally at 31 March 2024 was 2% lower than in 2023 when there were 22,875 children in need.

Figure 1. Number of Children in Need in Northern Ireland at 31 March (2012 – 2024)

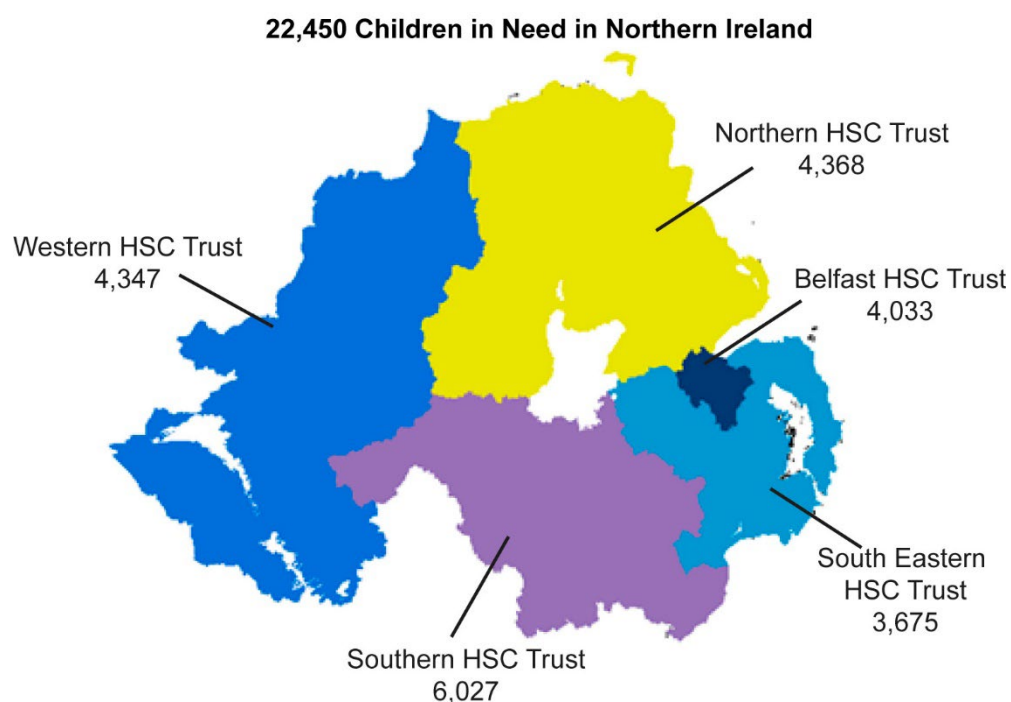
Source: Delegated Statutory Functions Return 10.1.1.



³ Known to social services indicates that social services has an open case file for a child.

⁴ Population for Northern Ireland: Mid-Year Estimate 2023 (NISRA 2024).

Figure 2. Number of Children in Need by HSC Trust (31 March 2024)



The Southern HSC Trust had the largest proportion (27%) of the children in need and the highest rate of children in need (608 children per 10,000 child population⁵). The Western HSC Trust figures increased by 10% compared with last year, whereas all other HSC Trusts saw smaller decreases. Year on year fluctuations in children in need figures, in each HSC Trust area, are not uncommon.

Table 2. Number and rate of children in need by Health and Social Care Trust 31 March 2024

Source: Delegated Statutory Functions Return 10.1.1.

Population: For Northern Ireland: Mid-Year Estimate 2023 (NISRA 2024) and for HSC Trusts: Mid-Year Estimate 2022 (NISRA 2023) (HSC Trust MYEs have not been published for 2023).

HSC Trust	Number of children in need	Number change from last year	Rate of children in need per 10,000 child population
Belfast	4,033	-159	529.1
Northern	4,368	-243	406.9
South Eastern	3,675	-61	447.1
Southern	6,027	-370	608.1
Western	4,347	+408	605.3
Northern Ireland	22,450	-425	514.2

⁵ Population: Census 2021 (used for HSC Trust rates as at the time of publication, HSC Trust MYEs had not been published for 2022).

Of the children in need at 31 March 2024, a higher proportion were male than female (55% and 45% respectively). This gap was slightly larger than the gender split in the child population in general, with 51% male and 49% female under 18 years of age⁶. The age profile of the children in need population was only slightly older than that observed in the general Northern Ireland population (see Table below).

Table 3. Age distribution of Children in Need at 31 March 2024 and the Northern Ireland Child Population

Source: Delegated Statutory Functions Return 10.1.1.
2023 Mid-Year Population Estimate (NISRA 2024).

Children in Northern Ireland	Under 1 year	1 – 4 years old	5 – 11 years old	12 – 15 years old	16+ years old
Children in Need	3%	16%	43%	26%	12%
Northern Ireland child population	5%	21%	40%	24%	11%

Children in Need – Religion and Ethnicity

Over a third (36%) of the children in need did not have religious background recorded. Of those with their religion recorded, some 48% were Roman Catholic; 36% were Protestant including other Christian faiths; and 9% had other religious faiths. Some 7% were recorded as having no religious beliefs.

Almost a quarter (24%) of children in need did not have ethnic background recorded. Of those with ethnic background registered, some 92% were White, 2% were Black, 1% Chinese and 5% other ethnic backgrounds, including Traveller, Asian and mixed ethnicities.

Children in Need with a Disability

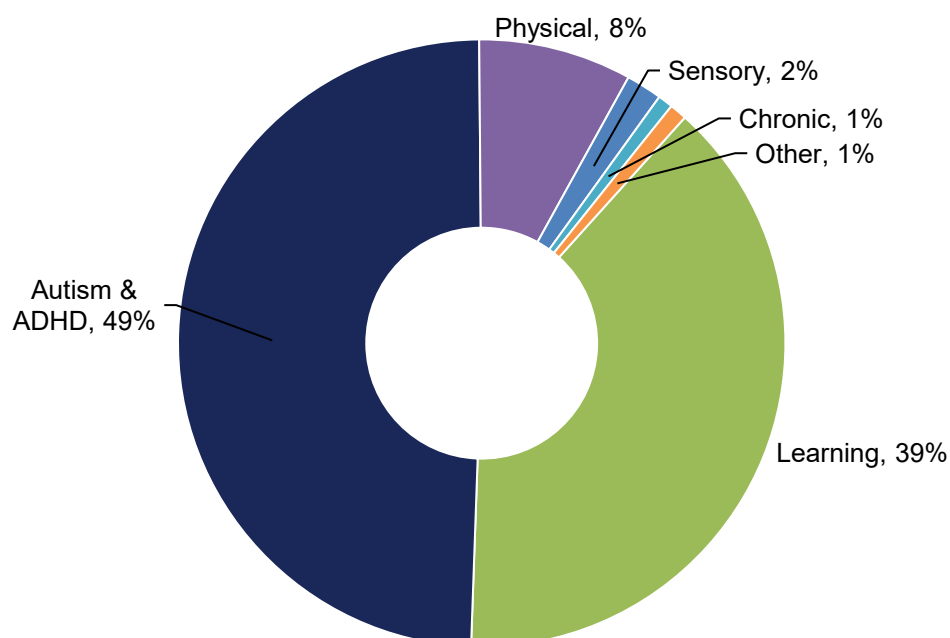
Of the 22,450 children in need in Northern Ireland, 25% (5,636) were recorded as having a disability. There is no statutory requirement for a child with a disability to be registered or have an open case file with the Social Services. The figures presented here therefore do not represent the prevalence of children with different disabilities in Northern Ireland but are rather a reflection of the service demand. The 2021 Household Census indicated that 8% of all under the age of 18 had a disability or long-term health problem in Northern Ireland⁷.

⁶ 2023 Mid-Year Population Estimate (NISRA 2024).
⁷ [2021 Northern Ireland Household Census](#), NISRA

Figure 3. Main type of disability of the 5,636 Children in Need who were recorded with a disability at 31 March 2024

Source: Delegated Statutory Functions Return 10.1.6.

Note: In cases where children have more than one disability, they are in the below recorded against their most prevalent disability.



The HSC Trusts reported more male children in need with a disability (30%) than females (19%) in 2024. The gap was most evident amongst those recorded as having autism and/or ADHD⁸ as their main disability, where 15% of the males and 9% of the females were reported to have autism/ADHD. These findings are consistent with those published in *'The Prevalence of Autism (including Asperger's syndrome) in School Age Children in Northern Ireland'*⁹, published on the Department's website.

Children in Need Referrals

A referral is defined as a request for services to be provided by children's social care and is in respect of a child who is currently not assessed to be in need¹⁰. A referral may result in an initial assessment of the child's needs, the provision of information or advice, referral to another agency or alternatively no further action.

Note: The South Eastern HSC Trust has advised that they have not been capturing referrals the same way as the other Trusts, causing a deflated value compared to the rest of Northern Ireland. South Eastern HSC Trust figures are therefore not included in the below table and subsequently, no Northern Ireland figure can be calculated. These figures will be updated when revised and validated returns have been received from South Eastern HSC Trust.

⁸ Autism and ADHD are recorded together due to the way the service is configured.

⁹ <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/articles/autism-statistics>

¹⁰ A referral for a child who is already assessed to be in need is treated as a 'significant event' and in the child's file is not counted as a new referral.

Table 4. Number of Children in Need referrals during the year ending 31 March 2024

Source: Delegated Statutory Functions Return 10.1.1.

Note: Figures for South Eastern HSC Trust and Northern Ireland overall will be updated when revised and validated returns have been received.

HSC Trust	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Belfast	6,771	6,919	7,472	7,501	7,601
Northern	8,325	7,125	8,064	8,086	8,611
Southern	7,671	8,255	8,909	8,226	8,299
Western	6,897	6,487	6,870	7,251	8,764

Number of children in need referrals can fluctuate substantially year on year at Trust level. In 2023/24, all Trusts saw an increase in referrals compared to the previous year.

Section Two: Child Protection

The Child Protection Register is a confidential list of all children in the area who have been identified at a child protection conference as being at significant risk of harm and for whom a specific Child Protection Plan has been set out to keep them safe from harm.

Source: Children's Legal Centre

Key Findings

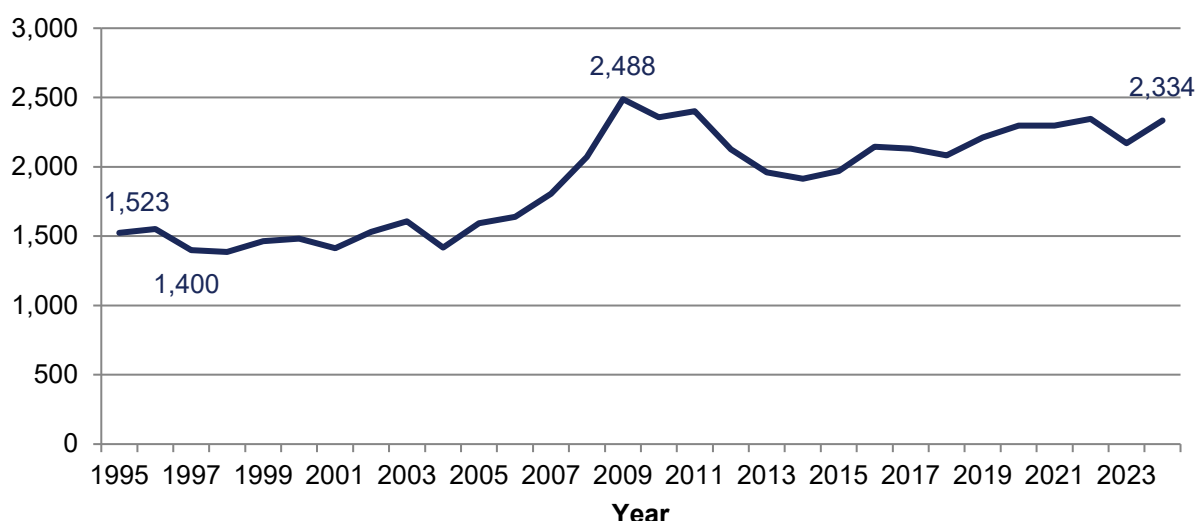
- At 31 March 2024, 2,334 children were listed on the Child Protection Register;
- Neglect and physical abuse were the main reasons for a child being on the Child Protection Register and accounted for 81% of all on the register;
- A total of 1,414 child protection referrals were received by HSC Trusts¹¹;
- There were 2,258 new registrations to the Child Protection Register and 2,065 de-registrations during the year.

The Child Protection Register

At 31 March 2024, 2,334 children and young people were listed on the Child Protection Register in Northern Ireland. This represented 53.5 children per 10,000 population under 18 years of age.

Figure 4. Number of children on the Child Protection Register in Northern Ireland at 31 March (1995 – 2024)

Source: Children Order Return CPR1.



¹¹ Referrals in regards to children without an open social work case file.

Since the introduction of the Children Order (1995), the highest number of children registered on the Child Protection Register occurred in 2009 (2,488), which may have been influenced by several high profile child protection cases covered by the media around this time. The lowest number of children on the Register occurred in 1997, when 934 fewer children were on the Register than in 2024. Overall, there has been a small, gradual increase of numbers since 2014, and, although a small dip in numbers in 2023, the 2024 numbers on the Register are similar to that of 2022.

There were slightly more males than females on the Register at 51% compared with 49%. This gap was similar to the gender split in the child population in general, with 51% male and 49% female under 18 years of age¹². However, the age distribution on the register did not mirror the general age distribution of the child population in Northern Ireland. The Child Protection Register had a higher proportion of children aged under five compared with the overall child population (32% and 25% respectively). Conversely, the Northern Ireland population had a higher proportion of those aged 12 and over than represented on the register (35% and 27% respectively).

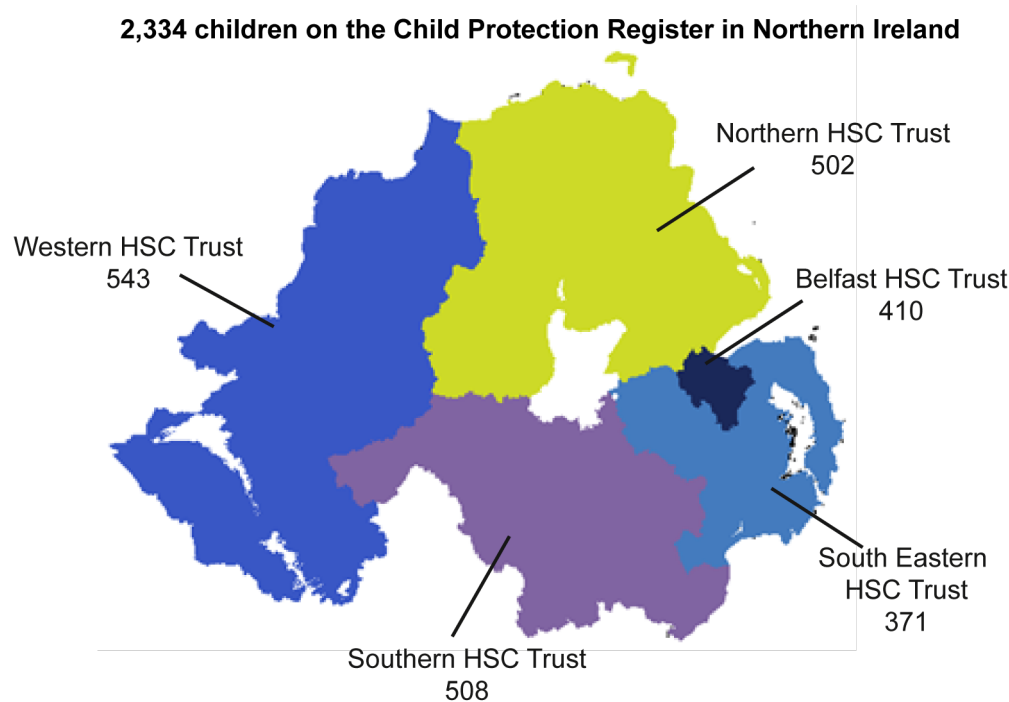
Table 5. Age distribution on the Child Protection Register at 31 March 2024 and the Northern Ireland Child Population

Source: Children Order Return CPR1.
Population Northern Ireland: Mid-Year Estimate 2023 (NISRA 2024).

Children in Northern Ireland	Under 1 year	1 – 4 years old	5 – 11 years old	12 – 15 years old	16 years old and over
Children on the Child Protection Register	9%	23%	41%	21%	6%
Northern Ireland child population	5%	21%	40%	24%	11%

¹² 2023 Mid-Year Population Estimate (NISRA 2024).

Figure 5. Number of children on the Child Protection Register by HSC Trust (31 March 2024)



The Western HSC Trust had the largest number of children on their Child Protection Register compared with the other HSC Trusts (23% of the overall number). When taking the Trusts’ child populations into account, the Western HSC Trust also had the highest rate of children on the Register (75.6 children per 10,000 child population). The South Eastern HSC Trust had the lowest rate with 45.1 children per 10,000 population.

Table 6. Number and Rate of Children on the Child Protection Register by HSC Trust (31 March 2024)

Children Order Return CPR1.
Population: For Northern Ireland: Mid-Year Estimate 2023 (NISRA 2024) and for HSC Trusts: Mid-Year Estimate 2022 (NISRA 2023) (HSC Trust MYEs have not been published for 2023).

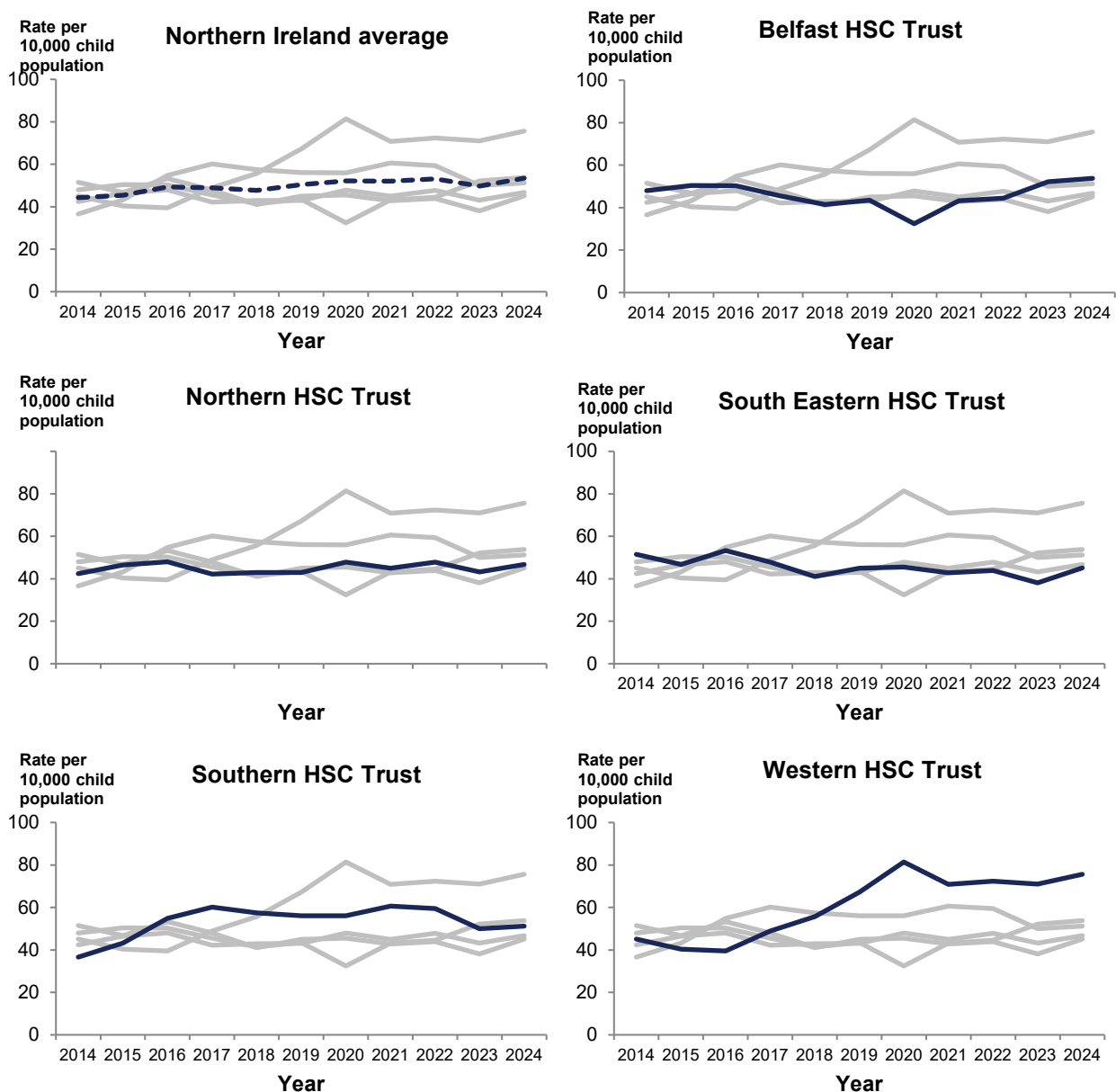
HSC Trust	Numbers on the Child Protection Register	Number change from the previous year	Rate of children per 10,000 child population
Belfast	410	+15	53.8
Northern	502	+38	46.8
South Eastern	371	+59	45.1
Southern	508	+16	51.3
Western	543	+35	75.6
Northern Ireland	2,334	+163	53.5

Figure 6 sets out the rate of children on the Child Protection Register per 10,000 child population between 2014 and 2024. The Northern Ireland rate has gradually risen over this period from 44.3 to 43.5 children per 10,000 of the child population.

There can be some year-on-year fluctuation in the rates at HSC Trust level, however the Western HSC Trust rate has seen a large increase since 2014 and the Northern HSC Trust has had the most stable rate.

Figure 6. Rate of Children on the Child Protection Register per 10,000 population under 18 by HSC Trust at 31 March (2014 – 2024)

Source: Children Order Return CPR1.



Category of Abuse

The category of abuse under which each child is considered to be at risk is decided at the Child Protection Case Conference. When agreement is reached that the child is at risk and protection is necessary, each child is recorded under the category that best reflects the nature of the risk.

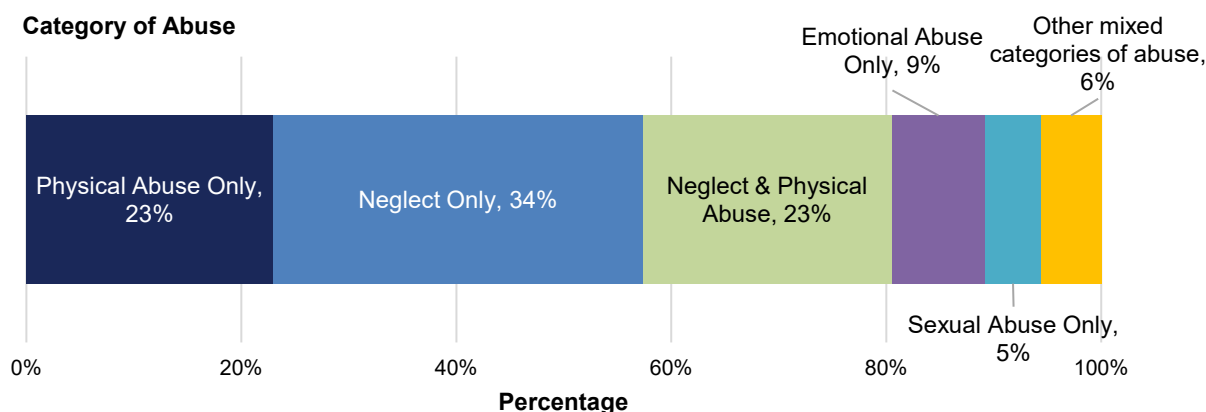
The four main categories used are: **neglect**, **physical abuse**, **sexual abuse**, and **emotional abuse**. For more complex cases mixed categories are used e.g. 'neglect and physical abuse' or 'physical and sexual abuse.'

- **Neglect:** Actual or likely persistent or severe neglect of a child, or the failure to protect a child from exposure to any kind of danger, including cold and starvation, or persistent failure to carry out important aspects of care, resulting in significant impairment of the child's health or development, including non-organic failure to thrive.
- **Physical Abuse:** Actual or likely deliberate physical injury to a child, or wilful or neglectful failure to prevent physical injury or suffering to a child including deliberate poisoning, suffocation or Munchausen syndrome by proxy.
- **Sexual Abuse:** Actual or likely exploitation of children or adolescents. The child may be dependent and/or developmentally immature.
- **Emotional Abuse:** Actual or likely, persistent or severe emotional ill treatment or rejection resulting in severe adverse effects on the emotional, physical and/or behavioural development of a child.

Neglect and Physical Abuse were the main reasons for a child or young person being on the Child Protection Register. The categories Neglect Only, Physical Abuse Only, and Neglect and Physical Abuse accounted for 81% of all cases on the Child Protection Register at 31 March 2024. Neglect Only was the largest single cause of a child being placed on the register (34%) while the combination of Neglect and Physical was the most common cause of the mixed categories (23%). Sexual abuse was the least likely single cause of a child being placed on the protection register (5%).

Figure 7. Children on the Child Protection Register by Category of Abuse at 31 March 2024

Source: Children Order Return CPR2.



There were some differences between the HSC Trusts in category of abuse. In the Northern and Southern HSC Trusts Physical Abuse Only was the most common category of abuse, Neglect and Physical Abuse in the Belfast HSC Trust, Neglect and Physical Abuse and Physical Abuse only in the South Eastern HSC Trust, and Neglect Only in the Western HSC Trust¹³.

There may be some year on year fluctuation in category of abuse at Trust level, however, the regional figures have stayed relatively stable. The proportion of children on the register in each category of abuse has only seen small percentage point changes over recent years¹⁴.

Legal Status

The Child Protection Register identifies any children for whom there are serious concerns, and as such, the children on the register do not need to have a specific legal status. Those children on the register with a legal status are in a number of cases likely to be crossovers with looked after children.

The majority, 88%, of children on the Child Protection Register at 31 March 2024 had no recorded legal status, 6% were Accommodated (Article 21), 2% had Interim Care Orders and 1% had Care Order (Article 50 or 59), 2% had Supervision Orders, and a further 1% had Other legal statuses¹⁵. These figures were similar to those recorded in previous years.

There was some variation between the Trusts, with 8% in the Northern and Southern HSC Trusts, 10% in the Western HSC Trust, and 11% in the South Eastern HSC Trust having a legal status, whereas in Belfast HSC Trust, 23% of children registered had a legal status.

Duration on the Register

Of the 2,334 children on the Child Protection Register at 31 March 2024, over two-thirds (71%) had been on the register for less than one year. Some 83 children (4%) had been on the register for three years or longer.

¹³ Some of these differences may in part be down to how the categories are recorded on the administrative systems.

¹⁴ Please see [Tables](#) for details of category of abuse broken down by HSC Trust and annual trend figures.

¹⁵ Please see Appendix B for definitions of different legal statuses.

Child Protection Referrals

A Child Protection Referral is one for which the initial assessment indicates that there may be Child Protection issues. The threshold for action should be the allegation or suspicion of child abuse. However the balance needs to be struck between taking action designed to protect the child from abuse while at the same time avoiding unnecessary intervention. Except in emergency situations or urgent cases when immediate protective action is required, referrals will require preliminary discussion with other professionals from the child protection agencies and with the referrer. In some cases it will be necessary to seek specialist opinion.

Source: 'Co-operating to Safeguard Children' DHSSPS, 2003.

A referral to social services that leads to a child protection investigation can take several routes. The definition above relates to a referral in regard to a child that is not already known to social services¹⁶. A referral can also be made for a child that is already known to social services, or who indeed is already on the child protection register. These referrals are called a 'significant event', indicating that an investigation may have to be carried out in light of new information relating to the child.

Although all routes may lead to a child protection investigation, only the first route described above is per definition a child protection referral. Historically, significant events have also been included in referral statistics. Separating significant events from the referral count has resulted in an artificial drop in number of referrals. Furthermore, the work of separating these strands occurred at different time period in the five HSC Trusts, due to the use of different administrative systems. HSC Trust comparison as well as year on year comparisons may therefore not be like-for-like. This must be kept in mind when interpreting the figures below.

Table 7. Child Protection Referrals and Significant Events that led to child protection investigation by HSC Trust, year ending 31 March 2024

Children Order Return CPR3 part 1 and part 2.

HSC Trust	Child Protection Referrals	Significant Events
Belfast	165	405
Northern	387	566
South Eastern	234	358
Southern	237	740
Western	391	644
Northern Ireland	1,414	2,713

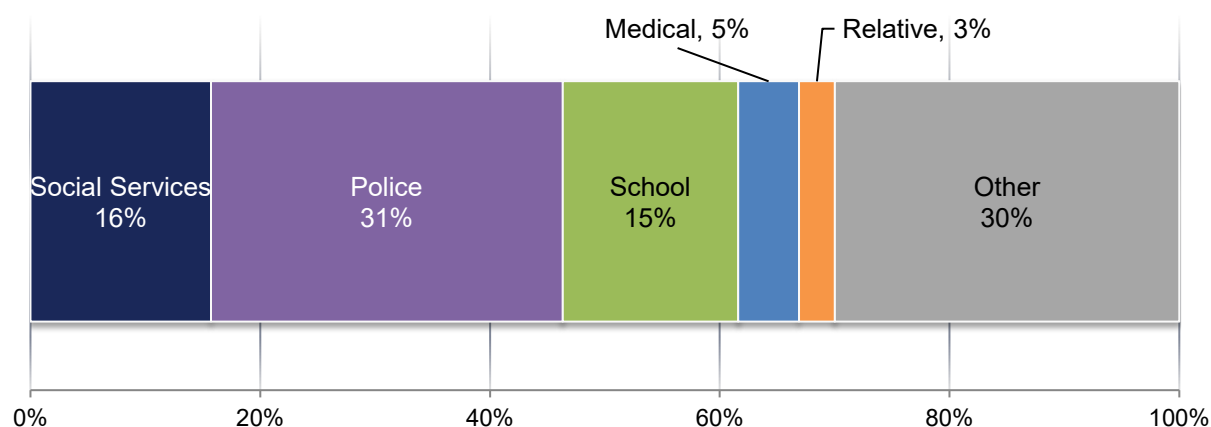
¹⁶ A child that currently does not have an open social work case file.

Figure 8. Child Protection Referrals by source of referral, year ending 31 March 2024

Source: Children Order Return CPR3 Part 1.

Note: Medical covers GPs, Community Nursing and Hospital.

'Other' includes Self, Anonymous, Voluntary Organisations and Other.



A total of 1,414 child protection referrals were received during the year ending 31 March 2024. This amounted to 32.4 referrals per 10,000 of the population under 18¹⁷.

During 2023/24, Social Services accounted for 16% of all child protection referrals received, with 31% from the police and 16% from schools. Furthermore, 3% of the referrals were made by relatives, neighbours or friends. Compared with previous years, there has been a decrease in the proportion of referrals from Social Services. This change in source of referral may have been influenced by the work of removing significant events from referral counts.

Child Protection Investigations

“Social Services and the police have, for some time, recognised the need to co-ordinate their investigations into suspected child abuse to ensure that each can fulfil its functions in a manner which best serves the child. Both are concerned about the child’s welfare, although the former’s concerns are dealt with by the civil law, and those of the police, by criminal law.”

Child Protection Investigations are classified using one of the following categories:

- Joint Protocol (carried out jointly by social workers and the PSNI)
- Social workers
- PSNI

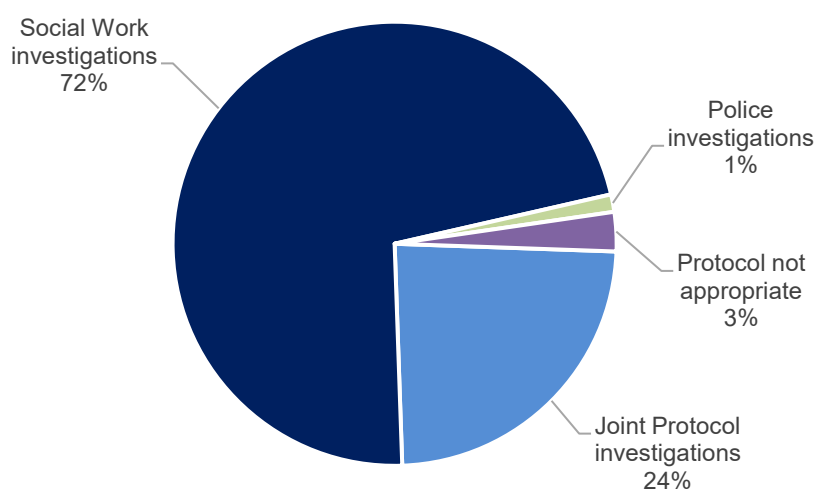
There were 3,465 child protection investigations carried out during 2023/24, an 11% increase from the previous year.

Over two thirds (72%) of the 3,465 child protection investigations were carried out by social workers, with a further 1% carried out by the police, and 24% Joint Protocol Investigations involving both the police and social workers. These figures were similar to those recorded the previous year. The remaining 3% (99 investigations) were deemed Protocol Not Appropriate.

¹⁷ Mid Year Estimate 2022 (NISRA 2023).

Figure 9. Child Protection Investigations (year ending 31 March 2024)

Source: Children Order Return CPR6.



Initial Case Conferences

The Case Conference is a meeting organised by the social work services to consult with other agencies to collate information about the child and family. The Child Protection Case Conference has a specific role regarding the protection of children. The purpose is to allow the participants to pool their knowledge of the child's health, development and functioning and the carer's capacity to ensure the safety and well-being of the child and assess risk.

During the year ending 31 March 2024, 2,597 Initial Case Conferences had been completed across Northern Ireland, an 8% increase on the previous year.

Some 87% of Initial Case Conferences resulted in a child being placed on the Child Protection Register during 2023/24. At HSC Trust level there was some variation ranging from 91% of case conferences resulting in registration in the South Eastern HSC Trusts to 80% in the Northern HSC Trust.

It is worth noting, the act of registration itself confers no protection on the child, and must be accompanied by a Child Protection Plan. It is the responsibility of the Case Conference to make recommendations on how agencies, professionals, and family should work together to ensure that the child will be safeguarded from future harm¹⁸.

¹⁸ Children's Services Definitions and Monitoring Guidance, Health and Social Care Board, 2014.

Registrations, De-registrations and Re-registrations

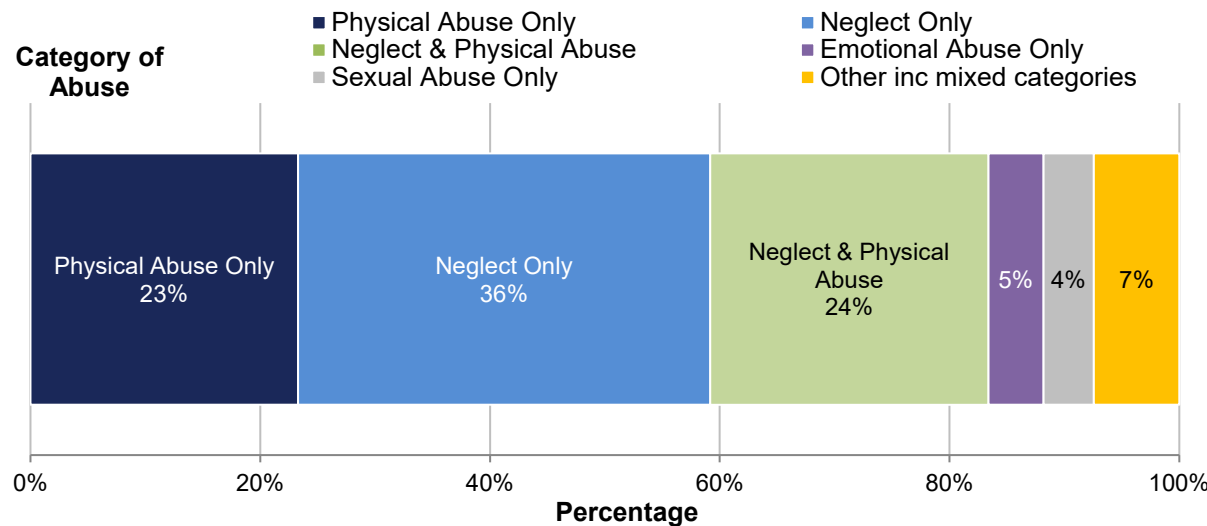
- **Registration:** The placement of a child onto the Child Protection Register. Where a child has moved on, or off the Register several times during the year each registration is recorded.
- **De-registration:** The removal of a child from the Child Protection Register. Where a child has moved on, or off the Register several times during the year each de-registration is recorded.
- **Re-registration:** The placement onto the Child Protection Register of a child who has already been on the register, irrespective of the date of their first registration on the Register.

During the year ending 31 March 2024, there were 2,258 registrations to the Child Protection Register, a 5% increase on the previous year. The largest number of registrations occurred in the Southern HSC Trust where 526 took place during the year, with the Belfast HSC Trust accounting for the least amount (373 registrations). By age group, young people aged 16 and over were the least likely to be registered (4% of the overall total).

As it might be expected, the category of abuse reasons for new registrations *during* the year were similar to those of children on the Child Protection Register at *the end* of the year (see previous section). Some 83% of those children registered during the year were likely to suffer from Physical Abuse Only, Neglect Only or a combination of the two. Neglect Only was the single largest category closely followed by Neglect and Physical Abuse, accounting for 36% and 24% of registrations respectively. Category of abuse broken down by HSC Trusts can be found in the Tables¹⁹; however, it should be noted that figures at Trust level are small and therefore may exhibit large year on year variances.

Figure 10. Registrations to the Child Protection Register by Category of Abuse year ending 31 March 2024

Source: Children Order Return CPR8.



There were 485 re-registrations to the Child Protection Register during 2023/24, an increase of 19% on the previous year when there were 408 re-registrations. Around a quarter of all

¹⁹ [Child protection register | Department of Health \(health-ni.gov.uk\)](#)

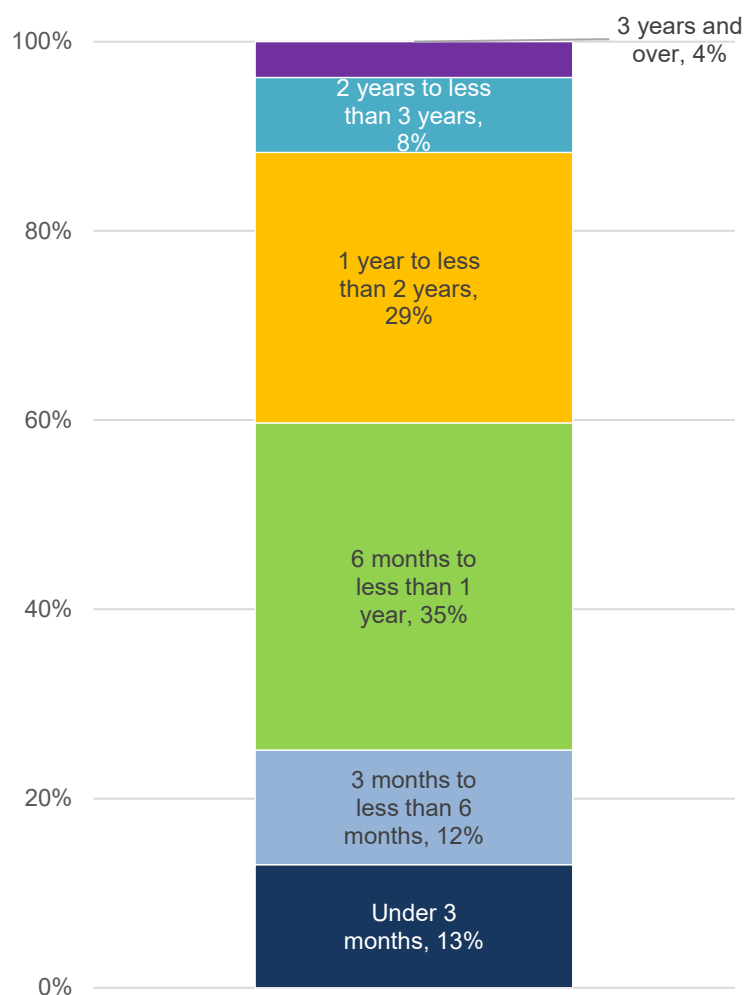
registrations in the Northern and South Eastern HSC Trusts were re-registrations (23% and 26% respectively), whereas the proportion in the other Trusts ranged from 16% to 21%.

Some 2,065 children were removed from the Child Protection Register during 2023/24, a decrease of 10% from the previous year when there were 2,298 de-registrations.

Over a third (35%) of children were de-registered after spending between six months and one year on the register. A further 29% had been on the register for between one and two years. Some 13% of the children were de-registered after being registered for less than three months.

Figure 11. Child protection de-registrations by duration on register year ending 31 March 2024

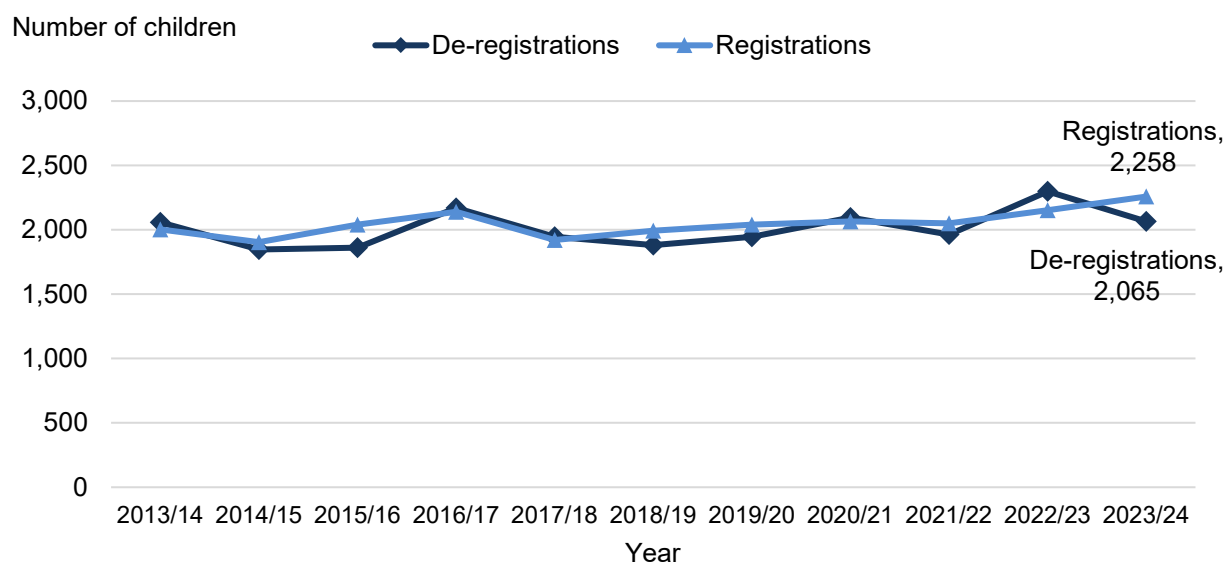
Source: Children Order Return CPR10.



Regionally, there were 193 more new registrations than de-registrations during the year. In general, the number of registrations and de-registrations have been similar the last years.

Figure 12. Number of registrations and number of de-registrations to the Child Protection Register, year ending 31 March (2014-2024)

Source: Children Order Return CPR10.



Child Protection Comparability across the United Kingdom

Child Protection systems across the United Kingdom vary but are generally comparable.

Scotland's collection year for these figures are year end figures at 31 July. In comparison the collections in England, Wales and Northern Ireland are at 31 March.

Child protection figures in Northern Ireland during the first years of the century show a much different pattern compared to the other UK countries. Up to 2009 there was a very steep rise in the rate; followed by a slow decline to 2014. It has since been similar or just above the rate in Wales and England. Scotland has consistently had the lowest, and most consistent rate of children on its child protection register

Figure 13. Cross UK comparison of rate of children on the Child Protection Register per 10,000 under 18's, 2004 – 2023

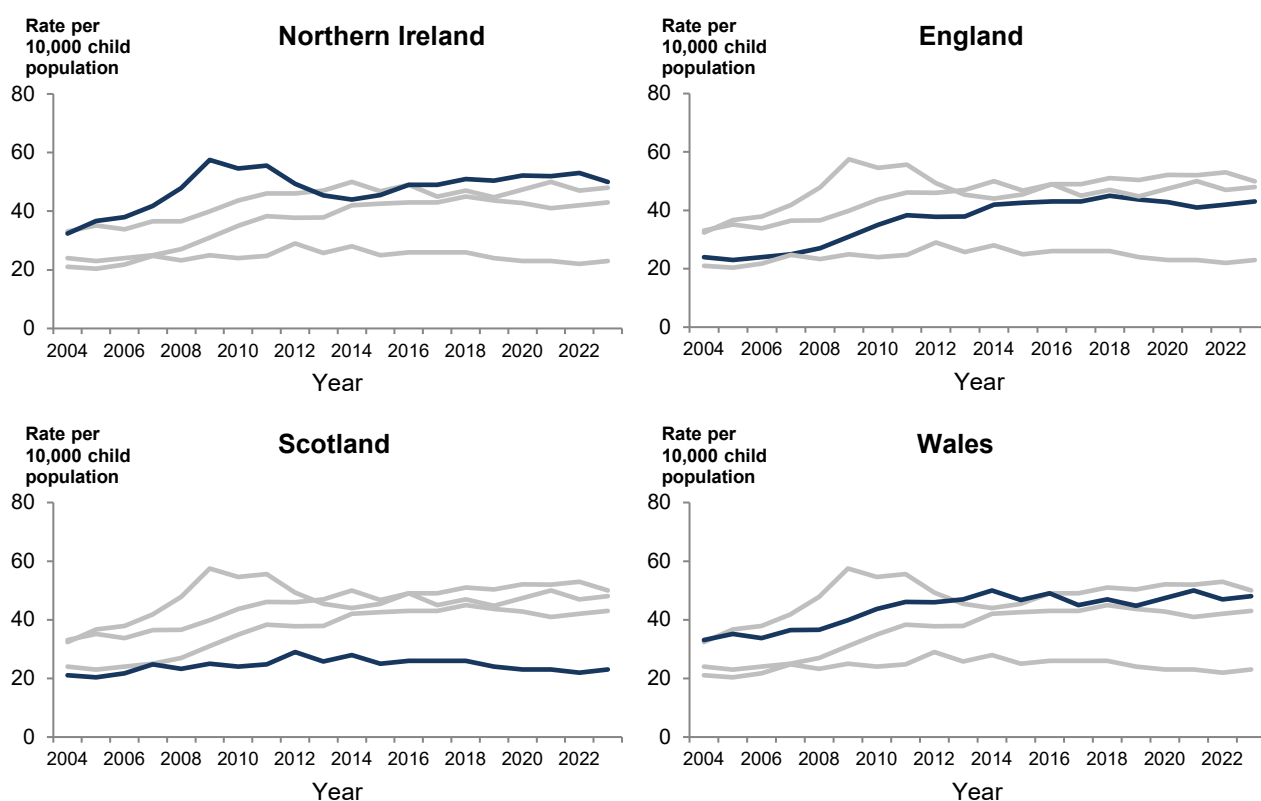
Sources:

England – '[Characteristics of Children in need](#)' (figures at 31 March). Note: England changed source of collection in 2010, so caution should be made when comparing 2009 and 2010 figures. The 2024 data has, at time of publication, not yet been released.

Wales – '[StatsWales](#)' (figures at 31 March). Note: Wales did not collect data for 2019/20 and figure has therefore been estimated. The 2024 data has, at time of publication, not yet been released.

Scotland – '[Children's Social Work Statistics](#).' (figures at 31 July). The 2024 data has, at time of publication, not yet been released. Please note Scotland reports the rate using NRS mid 2021 population estimates for age group 0-15 years.

Note: Figures may have been revised from previous publications.



Section Three: Children in Care

A Child is Looked After by an Authority if he or she is in their care or if he or she is provided with accommodation for a continuous period of more than 24 hours by the Authority in the exercise of its Social Services function.

Source: 'Northern Ireland Social Work Law', White, 2006.

Key Findings

- At 31 March 2024, 3,999 children and young people were in care in Northern Ireland. This was the highest number recorded since the introduction of the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995;
- Just over a quarter (28%) of looked after children at 31 March 2024 had come into care within the last year and a similar proportion (29%) had been in care for five years or longer.;
- Some five of six children in care were in foster care placements (84%), 6% placed with parents, 6% in residential care and 5% in other placements. This was similar to previous years;
- During 2023/24 there were 1,096 admissions to care and 866 discharges.

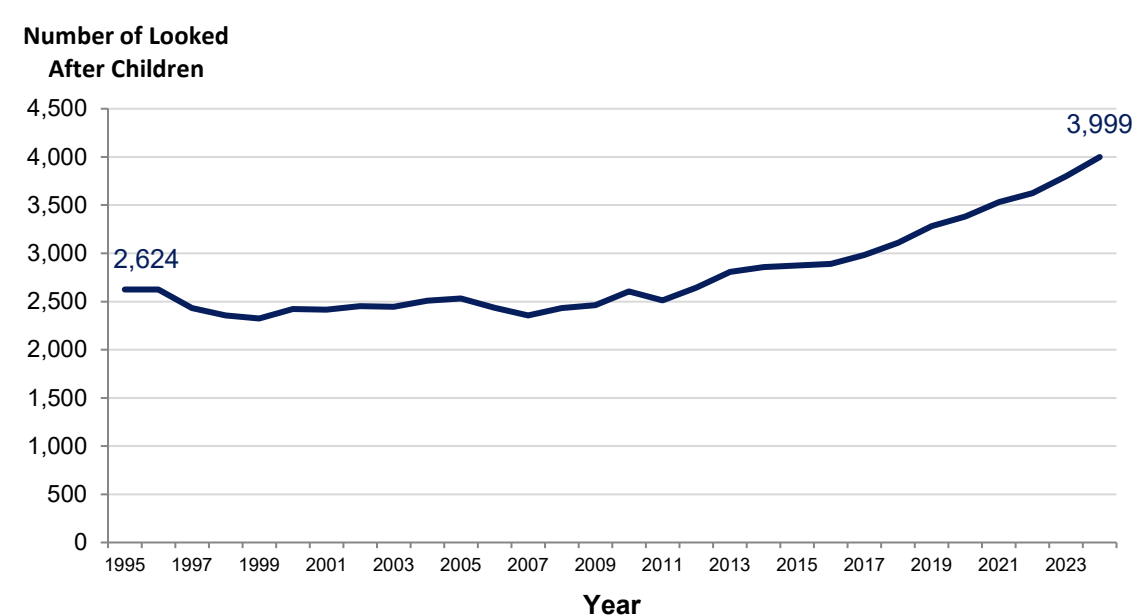
Children in Care in Northern Ireland

At 31 March 2024, 3,999 children were looked after in Northern Ireland. The number of children in care continues to rise and was again the highest recorded number of children in care since the introduction of the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995, representing 91.6 children per 10,000 of the child population²⁰.

²⁰ 2023 Mid-Year Population Estimate (NISRA 2024).

Figure 14. Children in Care in Northern Ireland at 31 March (1995 – 2024)

Source: Children Order Return LA1 & Delegated Statutory Functions Return 10.3.1.



The number of looked after children in Northern Ireland has risen by 40% in the last ten years and by 72% since 1999, the year with the lowest recorded number of looked after children under the 1995 Children Order legislation. The number of looked after children at 31 March 2024 was 5% higher than at the same time the previous year (3,801).

Of those children looked after at 31 March 2024, a higher proportion were male than female (54% and 46% respectively). This differed to the general childrens population in Northern Ireland where there is a more even gender split (51% male and 49% female)²¹.

Children in care had an older age profile compared with the general child population; 42% of the looked after population were aged 12 years and over whereas 35% of the general child population were in this age group (see Table 8).

Table 8. Age distribution of Children in Care at 31 March 2024 and the Northern Ireland child population

Source: Mid-Year Population Estimates 2023, NISRA (2024).

Source: Delegated Statutory Functions Return 10.3.1.

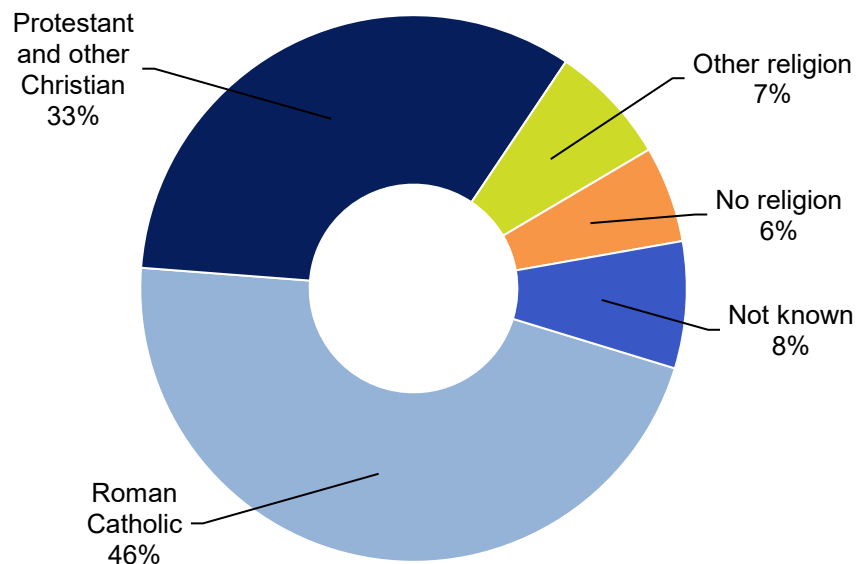
Children in Northern Ireland	Under 1 year	1 – 4 years old	5 – 11 years old	12 – 15 years old	16+ years old
Looked after children	3%	19%	36%	24%	17%
Northern Ireland child population	5%	21%	40%	24%	11%

²¹ 2023 Mid-Year Population Estimate (NISRA 2024).

Disaggregating on the basis of **religion** shows that the largest proportion of looked after children were Roman Catholics (46%), with 33% from Protestant or other Christian churches. Some 7% had other religious backgrounds and 6% were recorded as having no religious faith. Religion was unknown for 8% of the children in care.

Figure 15. Children in Care by religion (31 March 2024)

Source: Delegated Statutory Functions Return 10.3.2.

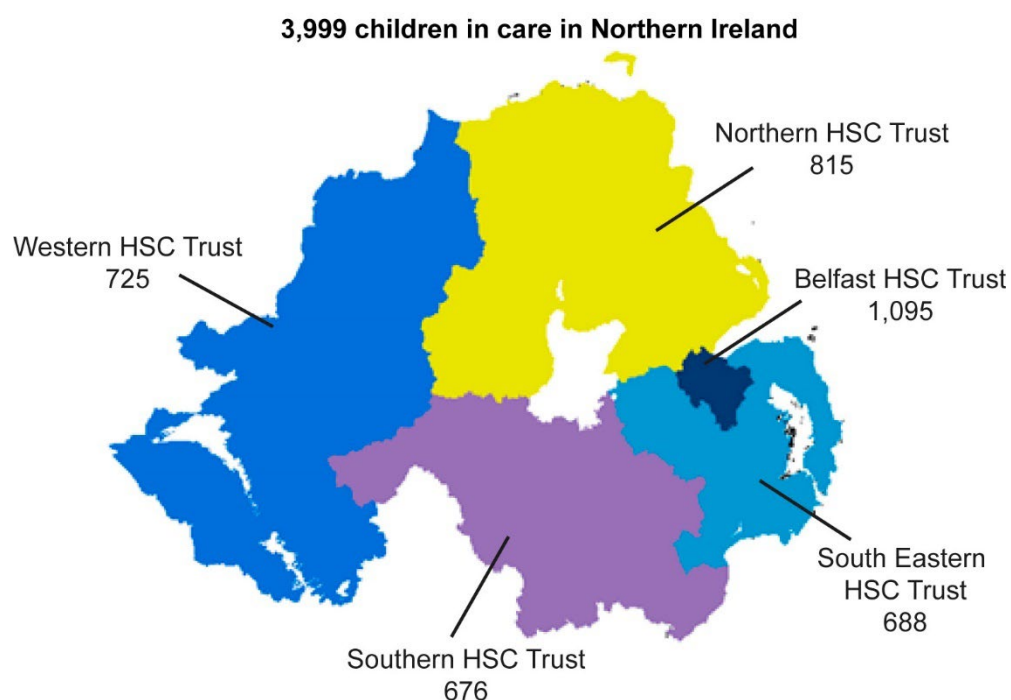


The **ethnicity** for the vast majority of children looked after in Northern Ireland was white (89%). Black made up 3% of the looked after population, Irish Traveller accounted for 1% and 5% were of mixed or other ethnicities. Ethnicity was not stated for 2% of the children in care.

At 31 March 2024, some 5% (200) of the looked after children were also on the **Child Protection Register** in Northern Ireland²². This was one percentage point higher than the previous year. Proportions ranged from 4% to 6% in all HSC Trusts.

²² Source: Delegated Statutory Functions Return 10.3.11.

Figure 16. Number of Children in Care by HSC Trust (31 March 2024)



Children in care by HSC Trust

The Belfast HSC Trust had the highest numbers of looked after children at 31 March 2024 followed by the Northern HSC Trust. Taking into account the size of the Trusts' general child population²³; the Belfast HSC Trust also had the highest rate of looked after children compared to the other Trusts followed by Western HSC Trust (see Table 9).

Changes in the number of looked after children in the HSC Trusts between 2023 and 2024 ranged from an increase of less than 2% in the South Eastern HSC Trust to an increase of 9% in Southern HSC Trust.

Table 9. Number and Rate of Children in Care by HSC Trust (31 March 2024)

Source: Delegated Statutory Functions Return 10.3.1

Population: For Northern Ireland: Mid-Year Estimate 2023 (NISRA 2024) and for HSC Trusts: Mid-Year Estimate 2022 (NISRA 2023)

HSC Trust	Numbers of children in care	Numbers change from the previous year	Rate of children in care per 10,000 child population
Belfast	1,095	+66	143.7
Northern	815	+41	75.9
South Eastern	688	+14	83.7
Southern	676	+53	68.2
Western	725	+24	100.9
Northern Ireland	3,999	+198	91.6

²³ Mid-Year Estimate 2022 (NISRA 2023).

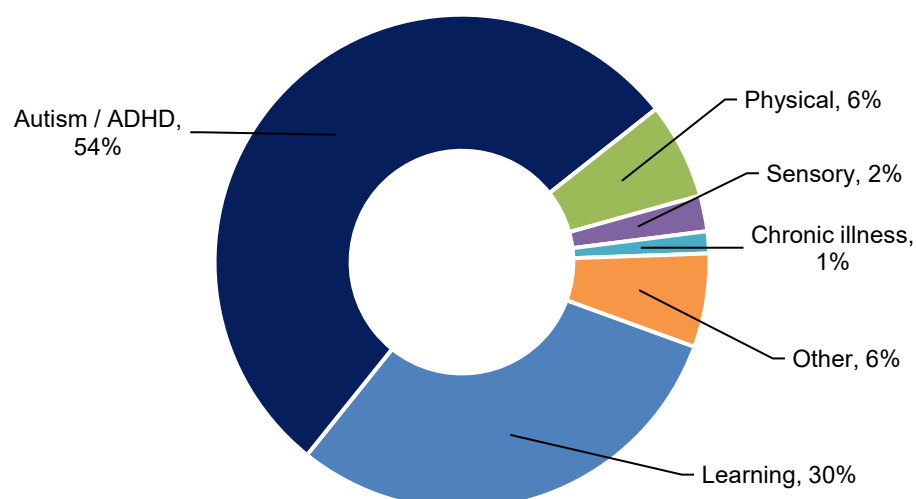
Children in care with a Disability

Of the 3,999 children in care in Northern Ireland, 14% were recorded as having a disability. Over half of these children and young people had autism and/or ADHD recorded as their main disability (54%), while a further 30% had a learning disability as their main disability.

Disability was more prevalent in the male population with 16% of males having a disability recorded compared to 11% of females. Generally similar proportion of males and females were recorded for each disability, with the main exception being autism and/ or ADHD. Some 9% of all males in care were recorded in this category compared with 5% of females. These findings are consistent with those published in *'The Prevalence of Autism (including Asperger's syndrome) in School Age Children in Northern Ireland'*²⁴, published on the Department's website.

Figure 17. Children in Care with a disability – main disability (31 March 2024)

Source: Delegated Statutory Functions Return 10.3.12.



²⁴ [Department of Health Autism Statistics link.](#)

Legal Status of Children in Care

Before a Court makes a Care Order it must be satisfied that the child is suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm; and that the harm, or likelihood of harm, is attributable to: '(i) the care given to the child, or likely to be given to him if the order were not made, not being what it would be reasonable to expect a parent to give him; or (ii) the child's being beyond parental control.

Source: White, C. 'Northern Ireland Social Work Law' 2006.

Minor annual variations in the legal status of children in care have been recorded in the last number of years. However, as in previous years, the majority, 57%, of looked after children were subject to a Care Order (Article 50) at 31 March 2024, and 26% were Accommodated (Article 21). Children accommodated under Article 21 have been placed in care with the consent of their parents. A further 14% of the children in care had an Interim Care Order and 3% had other legal statuses²⁵.

The trend in the HSC Trusts was similar to that of the region in general, however with some minor variations, as can be seen in Table 10.

Table 10. Legal Status of Children in Care at 31 March 2024

Source: Delegated Statutory Functions Return 10.3.1.

HSC Trust	Care Order (Art 50(1)(a))	Accommodated (Art 21)	Interim Care Order (Art 57(1))	Other	Total
Belfast	67%	16%	14%	2%	100%
Northern	56%	30%	13%	0%	100%
South Eastern	45%	34%	17%	3%	100%
Southern	54%	26%	16%	4%	100%
Western	57%	28%	13%	3%	100%
Northern Ireland	57%	26%	14%	3%	100%

²⁵ Definitions of the different legal statuses can be found in appendix B.

Placement of Children in Care

The favouring of foster care as a placement type can be linked to the philosophy running through the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 that safe family settings are a major way of supporting and helping children²⁶. Furthermore, over recent years there has been an emphasis on kinship care, which means the child is placed with a relative, friend or other person with a prior connection with the child. It is however essential to note that the needs and circumstances of each child are unique and that a kinship care placement is not suitable for every child.

More than four in five children in care were placed in some foster care arrangements, with 50% placed in kinship care placements, 24% in non-kinship and 9% with independent sector foster care placements at 31 March 2024. In general, children placed with non-kinship foster carers has reduced the last years, but this reduction has coincided with an increase of both kinship and independent sector foster care providers (see Figure 18).

At 31 March 2024, 6% of children had been placed with parents, 6% were in residential care and 5% in other placements²⁷.

The Northern HSC Trust had the highest proportion of children in kinship foster care (58%) whereas the Southern HSC Trust was the only one who had similar numbers of children in non-kinship and kinship placements (41% respectively). South Eastern and Belfast HSC Trusts had the highest use of Independent sector foster care providers (Table 11).

Table 11. Placement of children in care by HSC Trust, 31 March 2024

Source: Delegated Statutory Functions Return 10.3.3.

Note: 'Other' includes children placed for adoption, supported lodgings, jointly supported accommodation project, bespoke arrangements and other placements.

Placement	Belfast	Northern	South Eastern	Southern	Western	Northern Ireland
Residential Care	5%	4%	8%	4%	6%	6%
Non-kinship Foster Care	19%	25%	18%	41%	24%	24%
Kinship Foster Care	52%	58%	46%	41%	53%	50%
Independent foster care providers	14%	6%	16%	1%	6%	9%
Placed with Parents	6%	3%	7%	7%	6%	6%
Other	5%	3%	6%	7%	4%	5%

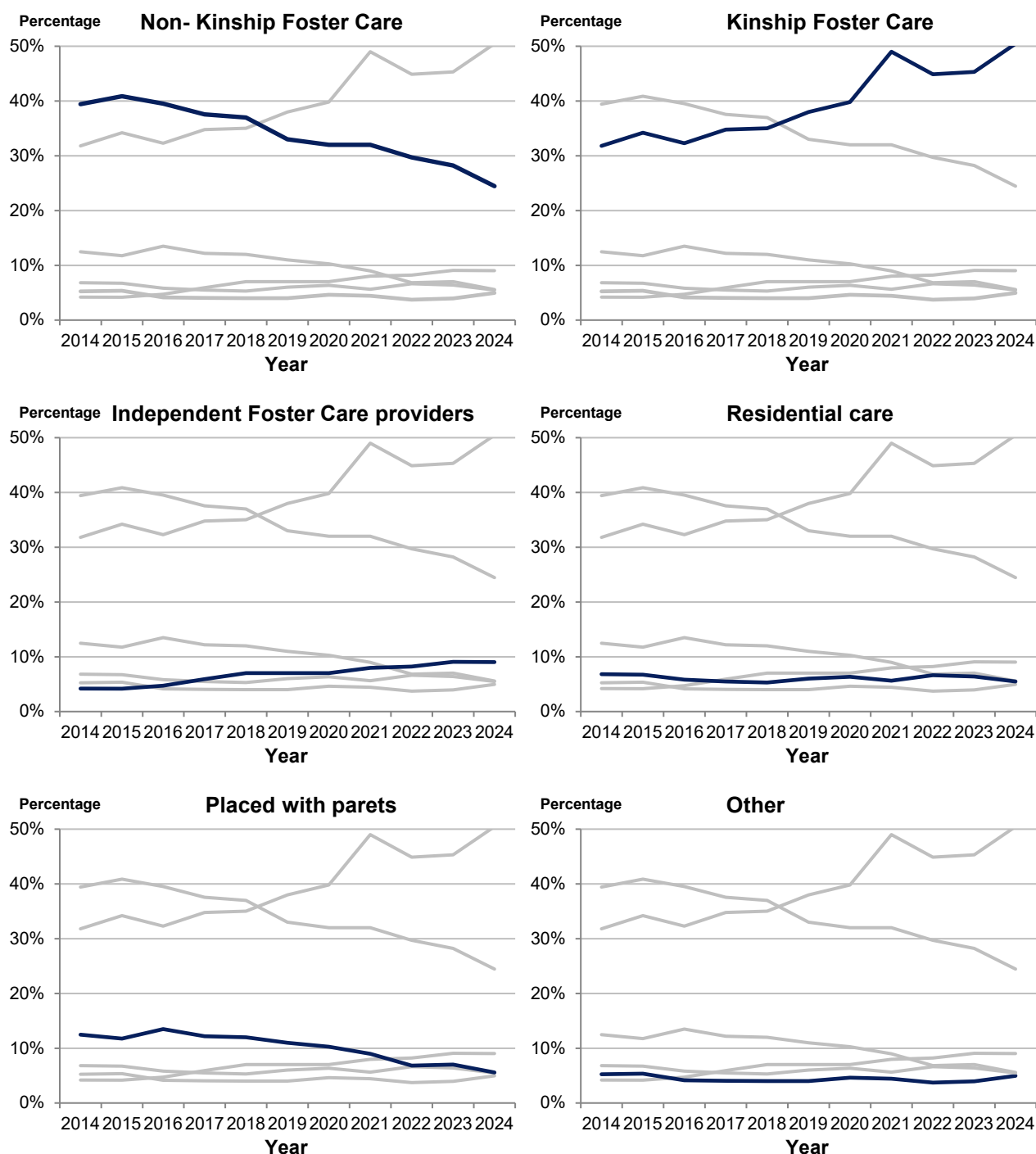
²⁶ See "Introduction" for further details.

²⁷ 'Other' includes children placed with prospective adopters while waiting for Adoption Order.

Figure 18. Children in Care by placement at 31 March (2014 – 2024)

Source: Delegated Statutory Functions Return 10.3.3.

Note: 'Other' includes children placed for adoption.



The age of a child in care can have an influence on the suitability of placement. In all age groups the majority of children were placed in foster care, though we can see from Table 12 that this proportion decreased for the older age groups, and only 63% of those aged 16 and over were in a foster care placement. Furthermore, post-primary school aged children were more likely than their younger counterparts to be placed in residential care, with 12% of those aged 16 and over in this placement.

Table 12. Placement of children in care by age group, 31 March 2024

Source: Delegated Statutory Functions Return 10.3.3.

Note: 'Other' includes children placed for adoption.

Children in Northern Ireland	0 – 4 years old	5 – 11 years old	12 – 15 years old	16 years old and over	All ages
Residential Care	0%	2%	11%	12%	6%
Non-kinship Foster Care	28%	24%	27%	18%	24%
Kinship Foster Care	52%	57%	47%	38%	50%
Independent foster care providers	9%	11%	8%	7%	9%
Placed with Parents	4%	5%	6%	8%	6%
Other	7%	1%	0%	17%	5%

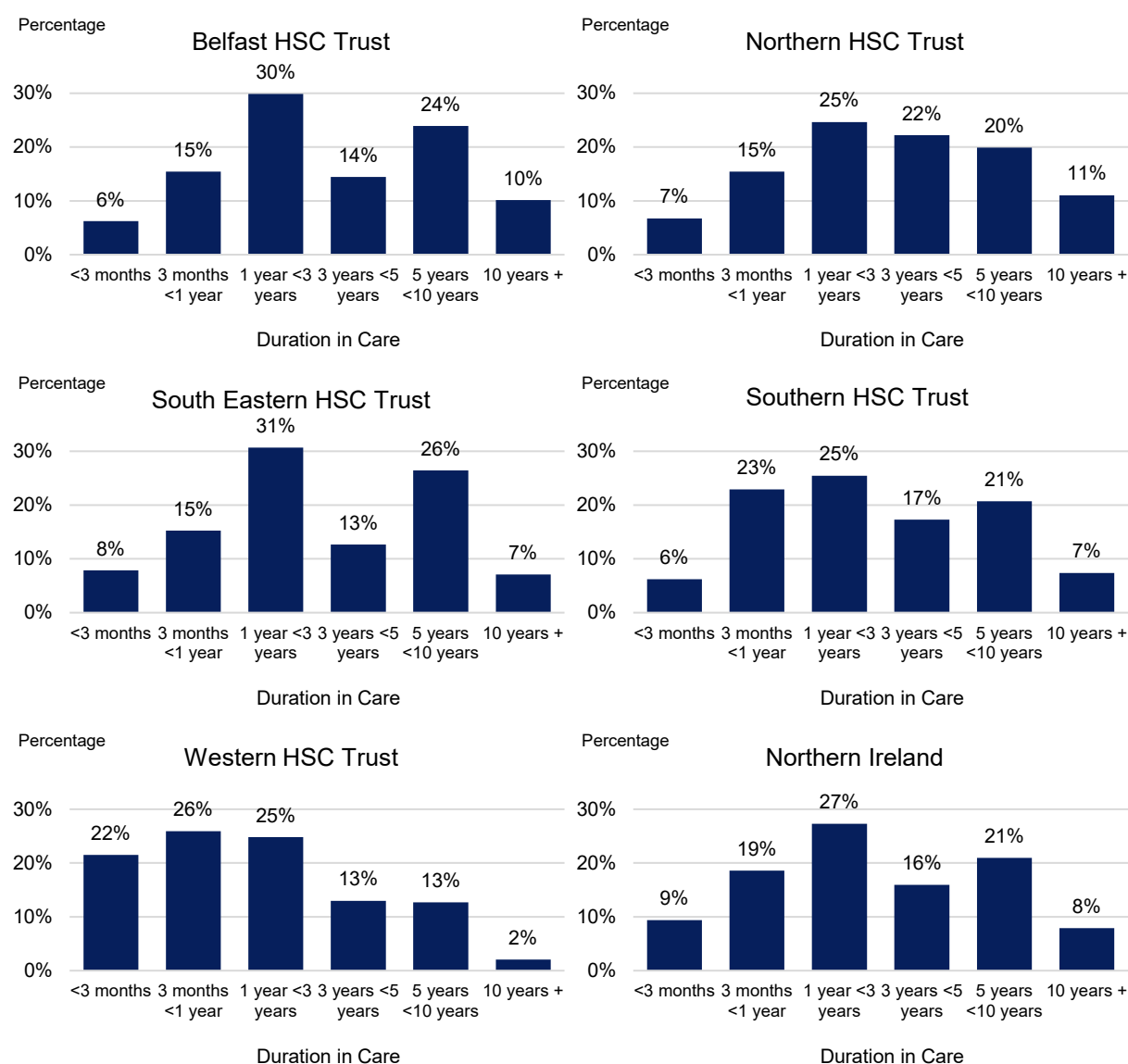
Duration in Care

Just over a quarter (28%) of looked after children at 31 March 2024 had come into care within the last year and a similar proportion (29%) had been in care for five years or longer. There is some HSC variation, with the most prominent variation found with the Western HSC Trust that, in comparison with the other Trusts, had more children in care for under a year and less children in care for over five years.

Age will naturally be closely linked with duration in care; for example a one year old child cannot have been in care for more than one year. Some 48% and 38% respectively of the 12 - 15 age group and the 16 and over age group had been in care for five years or longer.

Figure 19. Children in Care by duration in care and HSC Trust at 31 March 2024

Source: Delegated Statutory Functions Return 10.3.4.



Admissions to Care

During the period 1 April 2023 – 31 March 2024, 1,096 children were admitted to care in Northern Ireland; a 12% increase compared with the year before (980). The Belfast HSC Trust accounted for the largest proportion of admissions (26%), followed by the Southern HSC Trust (22%), whilst the remaining three HSC Trusts had between 17% and 19% of the total number of admissions.

The legal status for over three quarters of the children were Accommodated Article 21²⁸ at the time of admissions to care (77%). This pattern was evident throughout Northern Ireland.

Almost half of the children (49%) had been on the Child Protection Register at some point within the two years prior to entering care.

In recent years, the vast majority of children admitted to care have initially been placed in foster care. This is the sixth year in a row that more children were initially placed in kinship foster care than in non-kinship foster care.

²⁸ See Appendix B for description of legal statuses.

Figure 20. Admissions to care by placement during year ending 31 March (2014 – 2024)

Source: Delegated Statutory Functions Return 10.3.39.

Note: Non-kinship foster care includes placements provided by Independent providers.

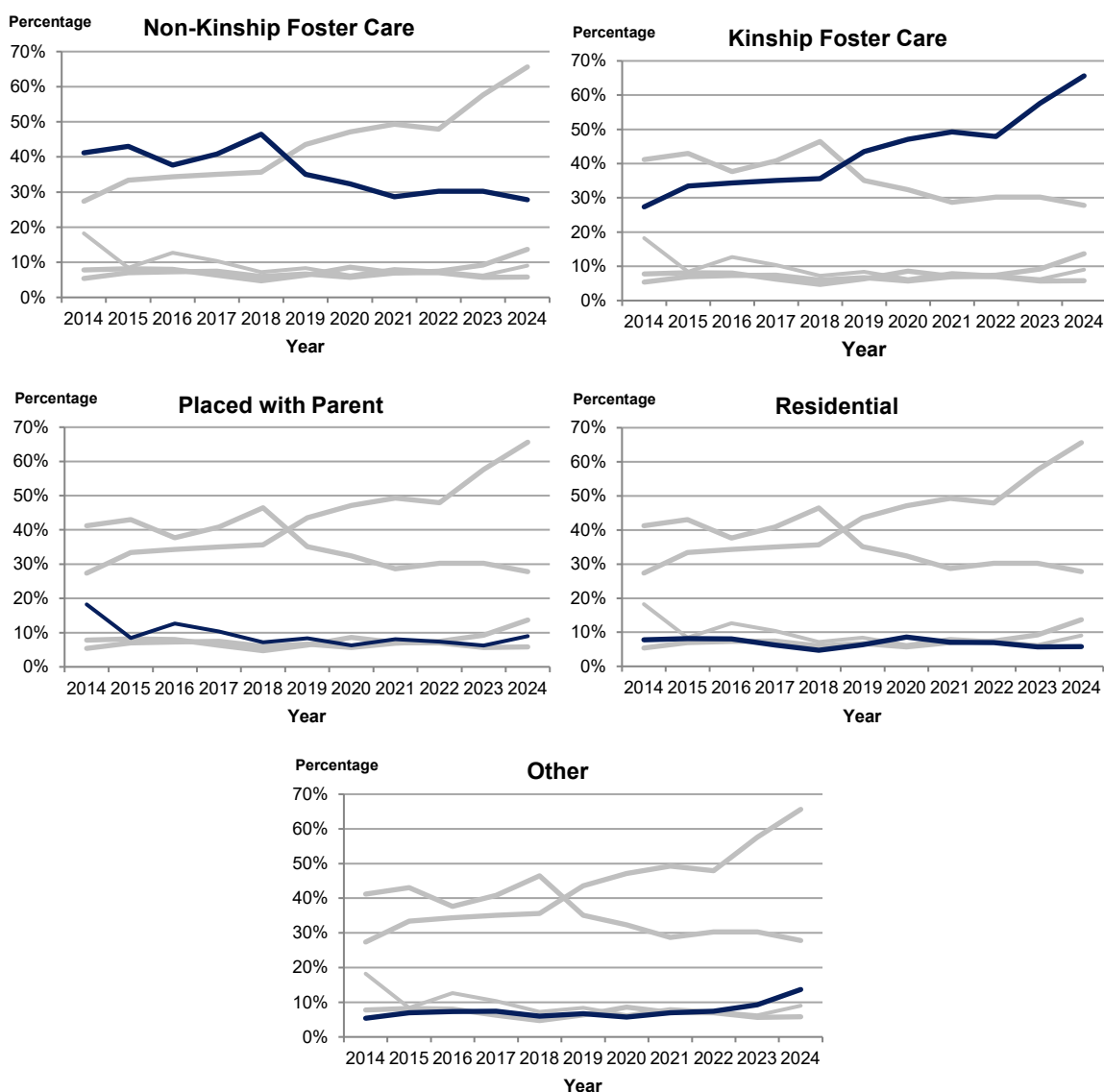


Table 13. Admissions to care by placement and age during year ending 31 March 2024

Source: Delegated Statutory Functions Return 10.3.39.

Note: Non-kinship foster care includes placements provided by Independent providers.

Placement	0 – 4 years old	5 – 11 years old	12 – 15 years old	16 years old and over	All children admitted to care
Residential Care	0%	1%	9%	16%	5%
Non-kinship Foster Care	32%	16%	26%	11%	23%
Kinship Foster Care	56%	71%	54%	24%	54%
Placed with Parents	8%	10%	5%	3%	7%
Other	4%	2%	6%	46%	11%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Age can have an influence upon the placement of those admitted to care. Across each of the age groups, foster care accounted for the largest proportion of admissions for all age groups with the exception of those aged 16 and over. Some 46% of those young people aged 16 or over who were admitted to care were placed 'other' placements.

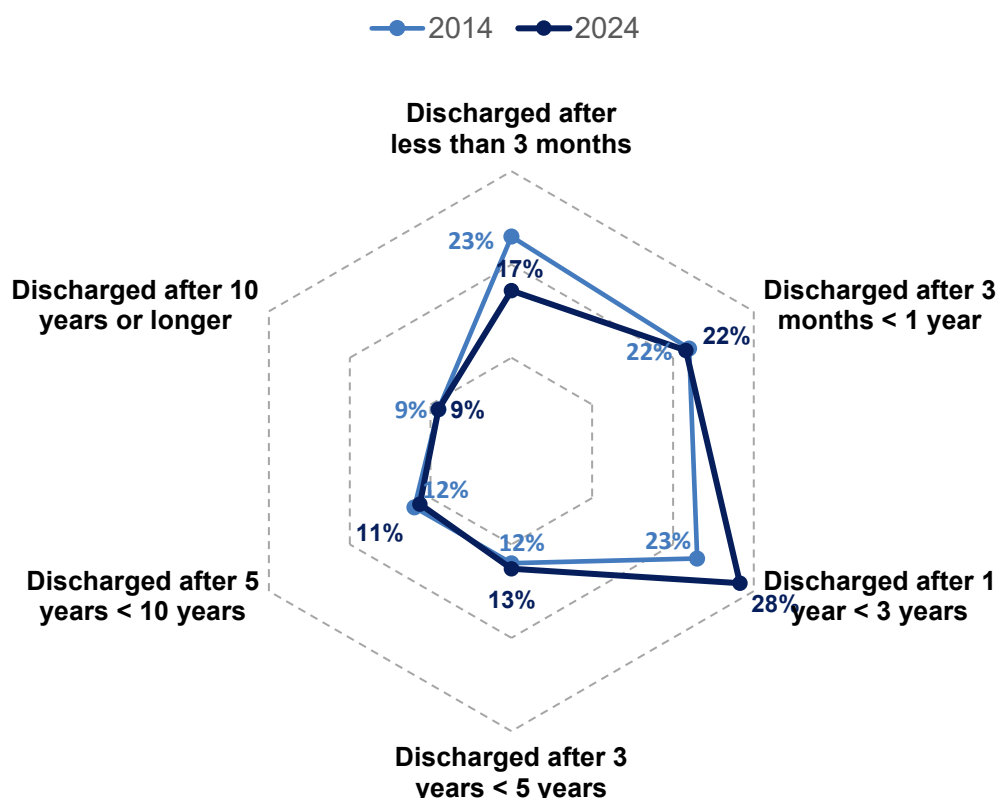
Discharges from Care

During the year ending 31 March 2024, there were 866 discharges from care in Northern Ireland. This was a 16% increase on the previous year (748 discharges).

In general, there has been a trend of children staying longer in care before being discharged. Prior to the year 2013/14, the highest group of discharges were by those who had been in care for less than three months of becoming looked after. Since then, the largest group have been discharged after 1-3 years in care. Please see Figure 21 below for comparison of 2013/14 and 2023/24 where this shift can be seen, although not as pronounced as in previous years.

Figure 21. Discharges by duration in care during year ending 31 March 2014 and 2024

Source: Delegated Statutory Functions Return 10.3.41.

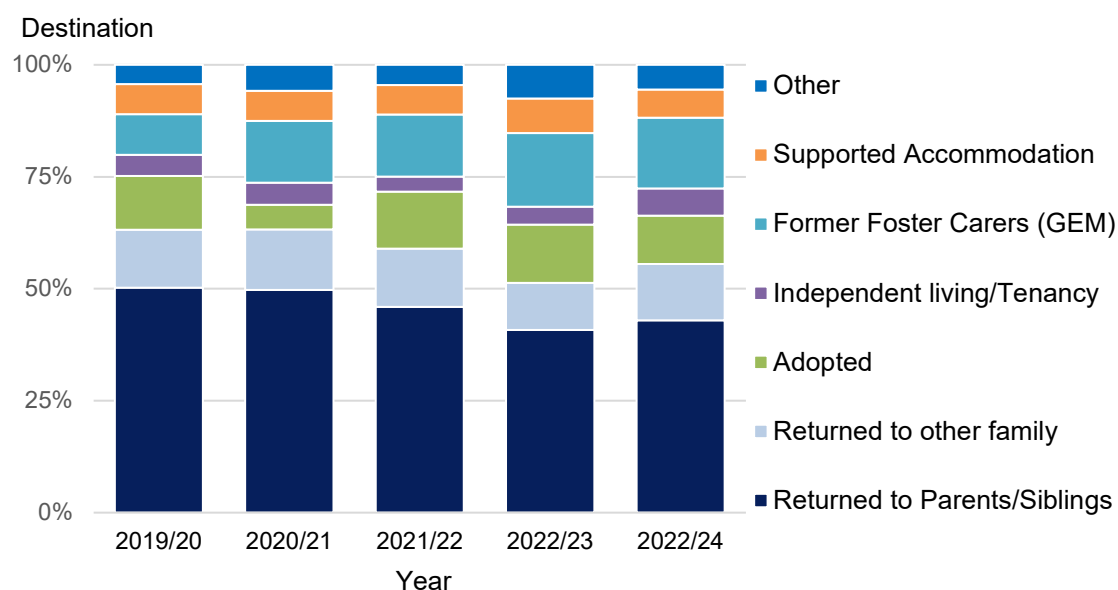


In 2023/24, 11% of discharges from care were due to the child being adopted (see Figure below). Some 43% of children discharged returned to live with their parents, and a further 13% went on to live with other family members or friends, 6% moved on to independent tenancy and 6% supported accommodation projects. Some 16% of the young people leaving care continued to live with their former foster carers via the 'Going the Extra Mile (GEM) Scheme. The GEM Scheme allows those aged 18 – 21 to live with their former foster carers promoting continuity in the living arrangements in post care life. The scheme ensures that appropriate and agreed levels of financial and other supports are available to assist carers to continue to meet the care, accommodation and support needs of these young people.

Figure 22. Destination of children and young people discharged from care during year ending 31 March

Source: Delegated Statutory Functions Return 10.3.42.

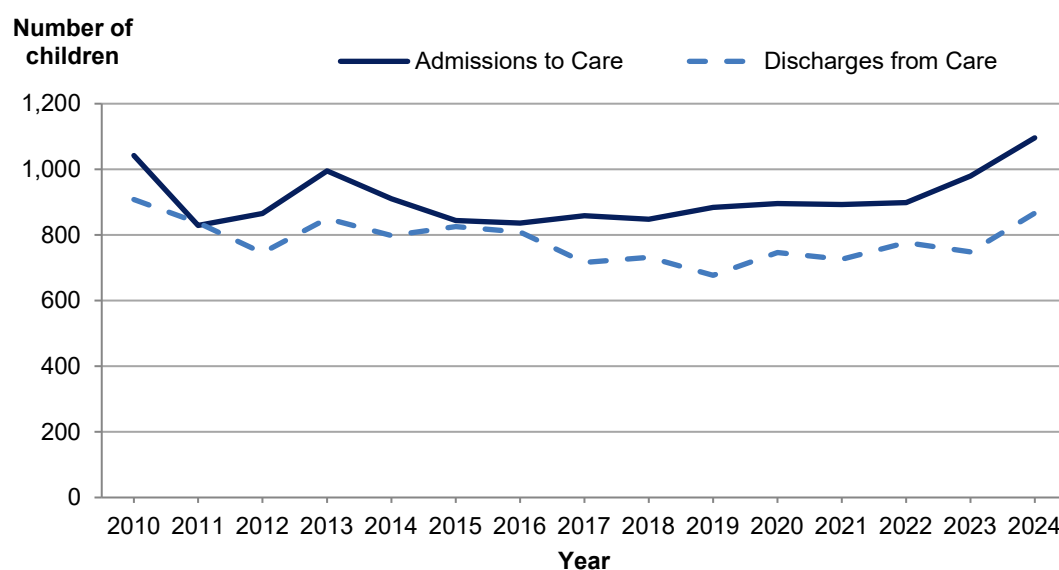
Note: Other Accommodation includes Bed & Breakfast, Hostels, Supported Board & Lodgings, Prison, Hospital etc.



Admissions to care has over the last years generally been greater than discharged from care, which would contribute to the rise in the number of looked after children during these years.

Figure 23. Admissions to and discharges from care during year ending 31 March (2010 – 2024)

Source: Delegated Statutory Functions Returns 10.3.40 & 10.3.41.



UK & Ireland Comparison of Children in Care Statistics²⁹

Definitions of what constitutes a child in care differs slightly across the different countries of the UK and Ireland. The main difference being that in Scotland children looked after at home under a compulsory supervision order are considered to be in the care of their local authority, this is not the case in the rest of the UK. The result of this is that simply comparing the rates of children in care leaves Scotland with much higher figures than the rest of the UK. The figure below therefore contains two trend lines for Scotland, one with all looked after children and one excluding those in care under a compulsory supervision order. Please note that as Scotland and England figures for year 2024 are not available, only figures up to 2023 will be compared.

Please see Figure 26 for details of the rate of children in care by 10,000 child population. The graphs show that the rate for all looked after children in Scotland has been dramatically larger in comparison to the rest of the UK and Ireland. However, when excluding those looked after under a compulsory supervision order, Scotland had up until recently similar rates of looked after children as in Wales.

The rate of looked after children in Northern Ireland remained on a par with the rate in England and the Republic of Ireland until recently, when a small gap emerged between Northern Ireland and England and a larger gap to that of the Republic of Ireland rate.

²⁹ As figures for England and Scotland for 2023 are not available, only figures up to 2022 are compared.

Figure 24. UK & Ireland comparison of rate of Children in Care per 10,000 children (2004 – 2023)

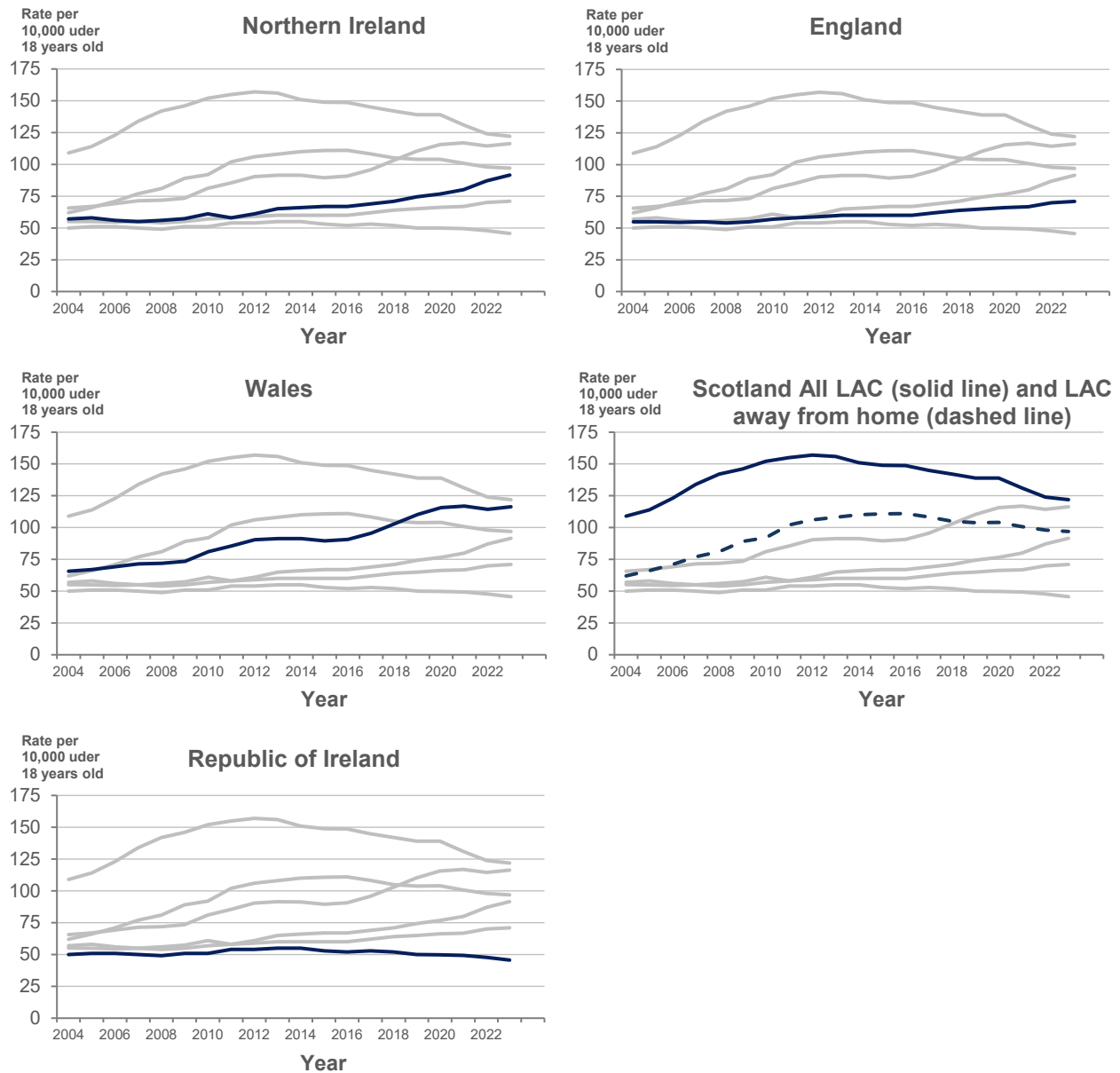
Sources:

England – '[Children Looked After in England including Adoption](#)'.

Wales – [StatsWales](#). Note – Wales rates have been revised since previous publications.

Scotland – '[Children's Social Work Statistics](#)'. Note: Scotland publishes figures for 31 July.

Republic of Ireland – [Monthly Performance and Activity Report](#), Tusla [and Central Statistics Office, Ireland](#).



Short Breaks

Short breaks refer to either a series of short-term pre-planned or ad-hoc placements where a child or young person moves temporarily from their parents/carers in order to allow the child and/or carer a period of respite. During a short break, the child becomes a looked after child by virtue of the short break arrangement. A child taken into care for a short break is however not included in official looked after children figures that have been presented in the previous sections.

During the year ending 31 March 2024 there were 4,147 episodes³⁰ of short breaks in Northern Ireland³¹. This was higher than the previous year when 3,703 episodes were recorded.

The largest proportion of short break episodes that took place during 2023/24 were in the Northern HSC Trust (44%), 33% in the Southern HSC Trust, and between 7% and 8% in the other three HSC Trusts.

³⁰ An episode is a period of involvement with Social Services.

³¹ Source: Delegated Statutory Functions Return 10.3.5.

Section Four: Children's Residential Homes

Statutory and Independent Residential Homes

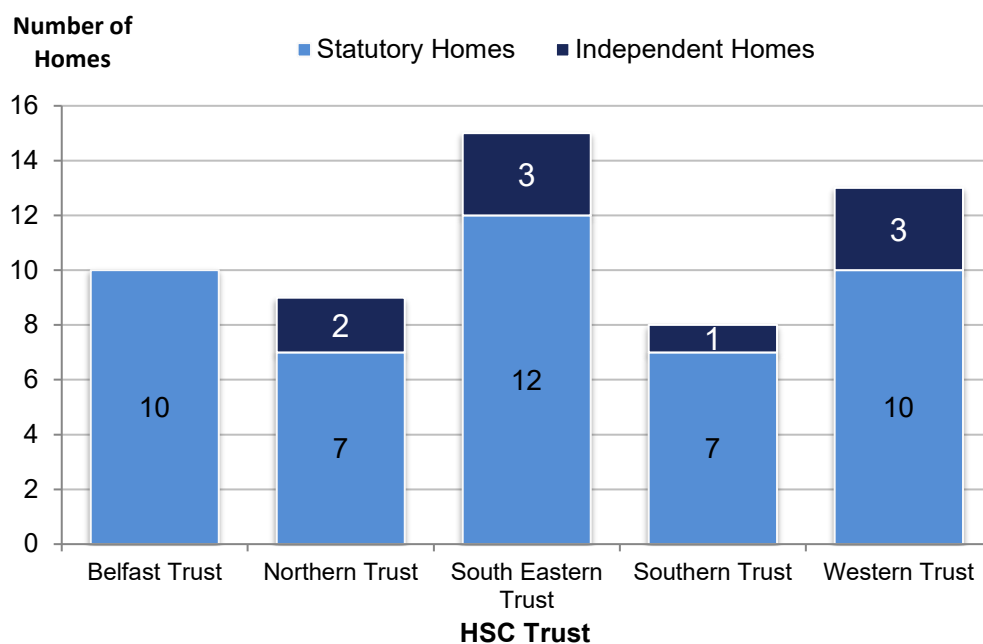
At 30 June 2024, there were 55 Children's Residential Homes in Northern Ireland, 46 homes were statutory and 9 were independent. Statutory homes provided 268 places at an average of six places per home; independent homes provided 27 places at an average of three per home.

The South Eastern HSC Trust had the highest number of Children's Residential Homes (15) whilst the Southern HSC Trusts had the fewest with eight homes.

The Belfast HSC Trust did not have any independent children's homes. South Eastern HSC Trust had the highest average number of places per statutory home at seven, while the Southern HSC Trust had the lowest average at four.

Figure 25. Number of Children's Homes by HSC Trust at 30 June 2024

Source: Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority.



Section Five: Children's Day Care

Key Findings

- At 31 March 2024 there were 3,261 individuals/facilities registered as day care provision for children aged 12 and under in Northern Ireland. This was a 4% decrease on the previous year;
- Similar to the previous year, childminders made up the largest number of day care providers followed by playgroups;
- At 31 March 2024 there were 55,645 registered places for day care in Northern Ireland representing a decrease of 3% on the previous year.

Children's Day Care Provision in Northern Ireland

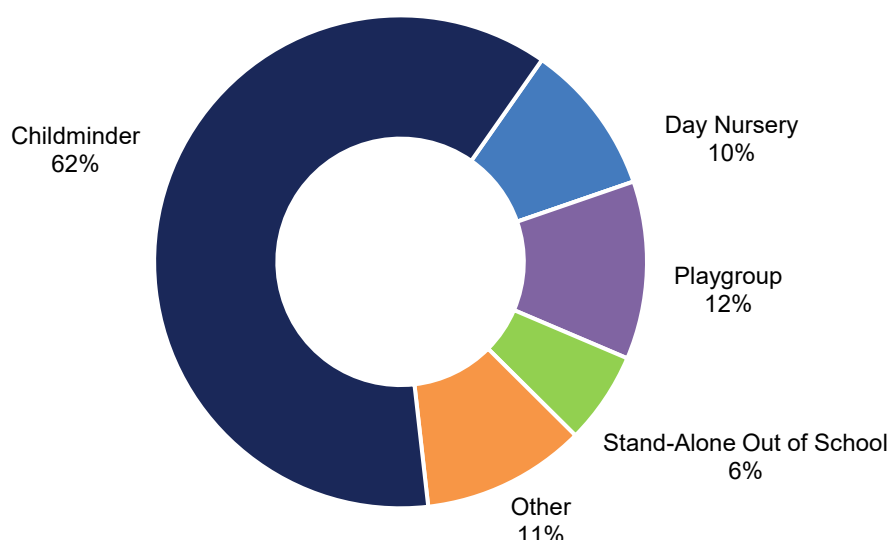
At 31 March 2024, 3,261 individuals or facilities were registered for the provision of day care for children under the age of 12 with HSC Trusts in Northern Ireland, providing 55,645 places³². In terms of those providing day care this was a decrease of 4% on the previous year, with a 3% decrease in the number of registered places.

Figure 26. Children's day care provision by provider at 31 March 2024

Source: Delegated Statutory Functions Return 10.7.1.

Note: Some 217 Day Nurseries are also registered as Out of School Clubs. A single registration only is required for a Day Nursery which also provides out of school services.

Note: 'Other' include crèches, approved home childcares, summer schemes and two year old programmes.



³² Note that 'Approved home childcares' do not have a number of places/children.

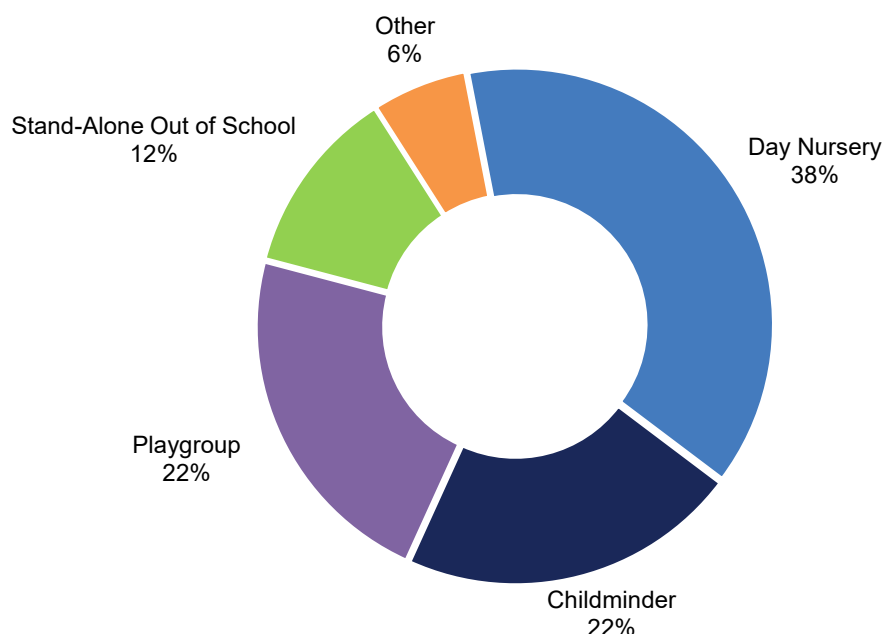
Figure 27. Children's day care provision by number of places at 31 March 2024

Source: Delegated Statutory Functions Return 10.7.1.

Note: Day Nursery proportion includes Out of School places provided by Day Nurseries that are also registered as Out of School Clubs.

Note: 'Other' include crèches, summer schemes and two year old programmes.

Note: 'Approved home childcares' do not include a number of places/children and is therefore excluded from this Figure.



Day care provision for children can be divided into five main categories; child-minders, playgroups, day nurseries, out of school clubs and other organisations.

A child-minder is someone who looks after children under the age of five or school age children outside school hours and in the holidays. They use domestic premises, usually their own home. This is a service often offered year round, with fees and conditions negotiated between the child-minder and parents. At 31 March 2024, there were 2,006 child-minders providing 11,970 day care places. This equated to over three-fifths of those providing day care services (62%) and just over one fifth of the total number of places available (22%) with an average of six child places per child-minder.

Playgroups provide sessions (lasting no more than four hours) of care for children aged between three and five years old, offering learning experiences through structured play in groups. Most of these groups are run on a self-help basis by groups of parents with some paid staff; they can also be run by Trusts or voluntary organisations such as the NSPCC. Playgroups accounted for just under one in eight (12%) of all day care providers and just over a fifth of the total number of places available (22%). In total there were 381 playgroups providing 12,413 places, an average of 33 places per playgroup.

Day nurseries provide care for children less than five years old for the length of the working day. Children can attend on either a full-time or part-time basis depending on needs. Nurseries may be run by voluntary organisations, private companies, community groups, or by employers for their workforce. There were 326 day nurseries in Northern Ireland at 31 March

2024 registered with HSC Trusts, offering 14,835 places. This meant an average of 46 places per nursery.

Out of School Clubs offer care for school age children from the end of the school day until a parent can collect the child. They can be run by a Trust, voluntary organisations or community groups. Some 6% of day care provision was made up of 197 stand-alone Out of School Clubs, providing 6,594 places. A further 6,497 out of school places were provided by Day Nurseries³³.

Other day care providers³⁴ made up the least number of places, 351 providers and 3,336 places.

HSC Trust Sponsored Places in Day Care

At 31 March 2024, HSC Trusts in Northern Ireland were sponsoring 582 places in day care for children. This was 14% lower than the previous year (674 places). The Belfast HSC Trust accounted for almost half of all sponsored places in day care (43%). Places in day nurseries accounted for the largest proportion of sponsored places (59%) followed by out of hours school clubs (25%).

³³ A single registration only is required for a Day Nursery which also provides out of school services.

³⁴ Other day care providers include 'Approved Home Childcarers'. Home childcarers enable parents to have their children cared for in their own home. They are professional childcarers, offering children safe, good quality care and providing them with play and learning opportunities that contribute to their development.

Section Six: Foster Carers

Key Findings

- At 31 March 2024, there were 2,639 HSC Trust recruited foster carers and a further 254 Independent sector foster carers;
- During 2023/24, 840 initial home visits were carried out by HSC Trusts and 451 fostering assessments were completed;
- During 2023/24, some 398 foster carers recruited by the HSC Trusts de-registered as carers.

Foster carers

A foster carer is someone who takes on the role of a primary carer for an unspecified period of time. It could be a day or a year, until the child reaches the age of 18 when care orders lapse or when the care plan dictates.

Foster carers may provide a home for one child, several children or sibling groups, and can be for short-term or long-term placements only, or a combination of both. Some families also apply to register as foster carers as part of the process of adopting a child³⁵.

Foster carers, or a foster household, can be kinship carers³⁶ (carers related or known to the child) or non-kinship foster carers (people unknown to the child). HSC Trusts also employ specialist foster carers³⁷ as dedicated carers to meet the needs of children in care.

The above foster carer categories are recruited and approved by the HSC Trusts; however, due to the nature of kinship placements there are a number kinship placements undergoing assessment for approval at any one time.

In addition to the Trust recruited carers, the HSC Trusts also avail of foster care provision for children in care provided by the Independent sector.

At 31 March 2024, a total of 2,639 Trust recruited foster carers were registered by the HSC Trusts, some 55% were kinship carers (approved or in the process of being approved), whilst 27% were non-kinship carers and 18% were specialist foster carers. A further 254 foster carers were from the Independent sector. Between 2022/23 and 2023/24, there was an overall 3% increase in number of Trust recruited foster carers. Within the different foster categories, kinship foster carers increased by 11% whilst non kinship foster carers decreased by 29%. There was a substantial increase in specialist foster carers, who more than doubled between the two years. There was a small decrease in independent foster care providers (4% decrease).

³⁵ Please see the publication [Children Adopted from Care in Northern Ireland](#) for statistics on different pathways for adoption.

³⁶ A kinship placement is only relevant for one specific child or sibling group, and when the child/children are no longer in care, this placement is void and not open for another child.

³⁷ These are grouped with non-kinship foster carers in chapter 3.

Table 14. Number of (a) Trust recruited carers / households and (b) Other Foster carers/households at year ending 31 March

Source: Delegated Statutory Functions Return 10.5.1 (a)(b).

Note: A small number of carers who provide care only to children with disability and not looked after children are excluded from this table.

a) Trust recruited carers / households	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Kinship Foster Carers	970	1,020	1,128	1,086	1,050	1,113
Carers in the process of being assessed as kinship carers	141	181	212	258	310	326
Non-kinship Foster Carer	1,083	996	1,094	1,040	1,014	719
Specialist Foster Carers (Fee Paid Carers)	239	203	206	220	188	481
Total Trust recruited carers/households	2,433	2,400	2,640	2,604	2,562	2,639

b) Other Foster carers/households	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Independent sector Foster Carers	170	197	211	218	265	254

Number of foster care placements

A foster household is approved for a specific number of places. The 2,639 HSC Trust recruited foster care households at 31 March 2024 were approved for a total of 3,639 places³⁸. Some 199 of these were vacant at the end of the financial year for various reasons, including the household being in the process of de-registration, prospective adopters dually approved as foster carers waiting to be matched with a child for adoption, or the carer may have taken a break due to health or personal circumstances.

Going the Extra Mile

Under the Going the Extra Mile (GEM) Scheme, foster carers and young people who are preparing to transition from care into adulthood can choose to maintain the placement arrangement when the young person is aged 18 and in after care. In these circumstances foster carers can continue to care for the young adult until age 21, or beyond if continuing in a course of education. Equally the carers can either continue to care for other looked after children alongside this GEM placement, or provide a GEM placement only.

At 31 March 2024, foster carers were providing a total of 355 GEM placements³⁹. This was a 18% increase from the previous year. This increase has been explained by a larger population of young people turning 18 who wished to remain in the long term fostering placements, which were then converted into GEMs placement.

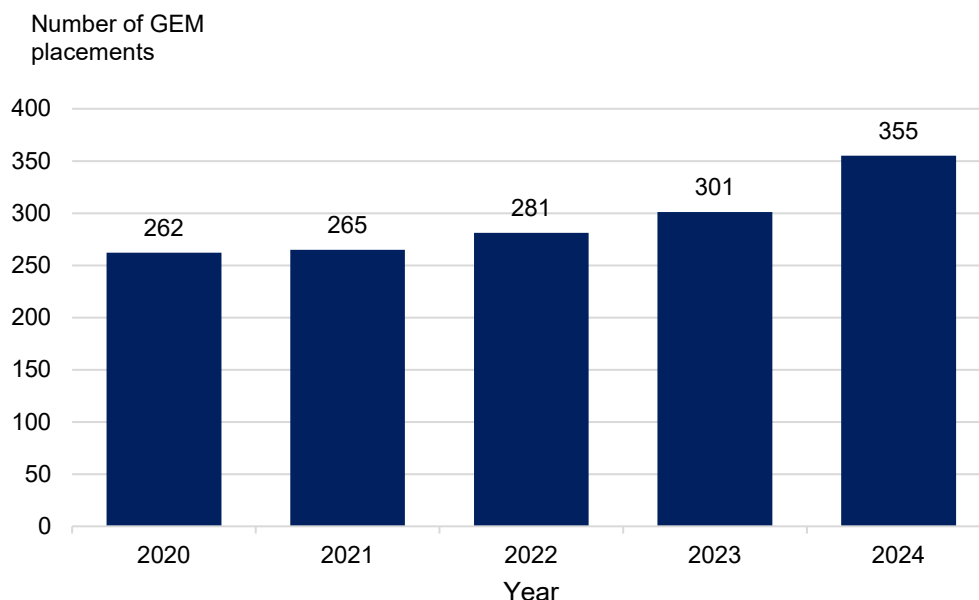
³⁸ This includes 193 prospective adopters dually approved as foster carers.

³⁹ The source for GEM is changed from the monthly SPPG GEM return to DSF 10.4.9 (c)(d) and figures for the time series has therefore been revised.

Figure 28. Number young people in Going the Extra Mile (GEM) placements arrangements at 31 March

Source: DSF 10.4.9 (c)(d)

Note: The source for GEM is changed from the monthly SPPG GEM return to DSF 10.4.9 (c)(d) and figures for the time series has therefore been revised.



Foster Care Recruitment

During 2023/24, some 840 potential fostering households had an initial home visit, and 451 fostering assessments were completed during the year. There was a marked increase in initial home visits (42% increase), which was mainly seen for potential kinship carers.

Table 15. Foster carer/household recruitment process activity year ending 31 March

Source: Delegated Statutory Functions Return 10.5.1 (d).

Recruitment Process Activity	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Number of Initial Home Visits	733	692	731	723	590	840
Number of Completed Assessments	475	335	401	411	398	451

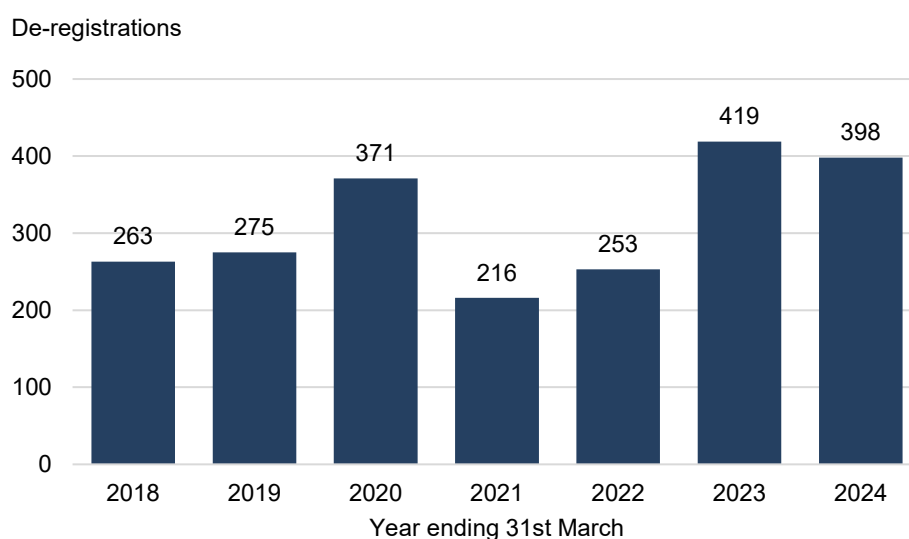
The approval of new foster carers is linked with the matching and placement of a child/ children. Therefore, it is currently not possible to report on the number of new approved foster carers during the year, only the number of assessments completed.

De-Registrations

During 2023/24, some 398 foster carers recruited by the HSC Trusts de-registered as carers. This was 5% lower than the year before when 419 carers de-registered.

Figure 29. Number of foster carer/household de-registrations (year ending 31 March)

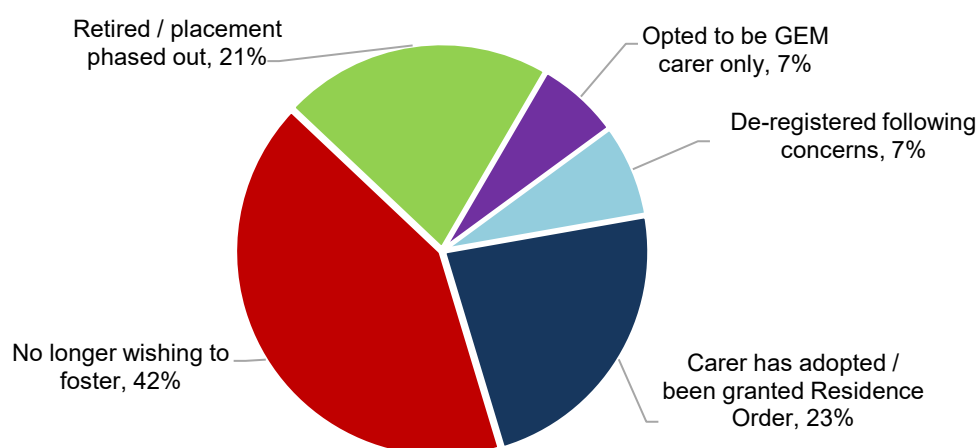
Source: Delegated Statutory Functions Return 10.5.1 (c).



Just over a two-fifths (42%) of all foster carer de-registrations that took place in 2023/24 were down to the carers no longer wishing to foster, one-fifth (21%) were due to the retirement of the carer or the placement being phased out, and a further fifth (23%) were because the carer had adopted or been granted a Residence Order. A small number of de-registrations took place due to concerns or allegations, accounting for 7% of all de-registrations.

Figure 30. Reason for foster carer/household de-registration at year ending 31 March 2024

Source: Delegated Statutory Functions Return 10.5.1 (c).



Section Six: Young People Subject to Leaving Care Act

Key Findings

- At 31 March 2024 there were 1,850 young people subject to the Leaving Care Act;
- Some 50% had both a named social worker and a personal adviser⁴⁰;
- Of those who had left care, a quarter (29%) were living in a GEM arrangement whilst 18% were living independently.

Leaving Care Act

A child or young person can leave care at any age; however, a specific cohort of young people will be subject to the Care Leaving Act. Generally, this relates to young people who were in care when aged 16 or 17 and who had been in care more than thirteen weeks since age 14. These are grouped into the categories 'eligible' (aged 16/17 and still in care), 'relevant' (aged 16/17 but no longer in care), and 'former relevant' (aged 18 or over and previously eligible or relevant). In addition, part of the Care Leaving Act applies to young people aged 16-21 who had not been in care for thirteen weeks since age 14 and these are categorised as 'qualifying'.

The publication [Care Leavers in Northern Ireland](#) describes the situation of young people aged 16-18 at the time of leaving care, as well as for those aged nineteen; however, these cohorts are slightly different to those covered below. The information below shows the total amount of young people covered by the Care Leaving Act, and as such reflects the workforce and resource requirements for social services.

Table 16. Young people subject to the Care Leaving Act at year ending 31 March 2024

Source: Delegated Statutory Functions Return 10.4.1.

Category	Definition	Number
Eligible	A young person aged 16 or 17 who has been looked after by a HSC Trust for a period of 13 weeks since the age of 14, and is still looked after.	640
Relevant	A young person aged 16 or 17 who has left care and before leaving care was an eligible child.	10
Former Relevant	A young person aged 18-21 (or beyond if, being helped with education or training) who, before turning 18 was either an eligible or relevant child, or both.	1,170
Qualifying	A young person aged under 21 who, after reaching the age of 16, but whilst still under 18, was looked after by an HSC Trust, accommodated in a voluntary children's home or privately fostered.	30
Total		1,850

⁴⁰ A small number of young people are not included in the calculation due to being in the process of having a social worker and/or personal adviser assigned.

Named social worker and personal adviser

The Care Leaving Act sets out the right for a named social worker and/or named personal adviser for each young person leaving care. Some 50% had both a named social worker and personal adviser whilst just over a quarter (28%) had only a named personal adviser. The latter group were almost exclusively former relevant young people.

Table 17. Named social worker and/or named personal adviser at year ending 31 March 2024

Source: Delegated Statutory Functions Return 10.4.5 – 10.4.7.

Note 1: Numbers will not match the table above as some young people were awaiting social worker or personal adviser allocation.

Note 2: Qualifying young people do not have the legislative right for a named personal adviser.

Note 3: Due to small numbers, relevant young people have been grouped together with 'Former Relevant'.

[S] number suppressed to avoid personal disclosure.

Category	Named Social Worker Only	Named Personal Adviser Only	Named Social Worker and Personal Adviser
Eligible	222	[S]	363
Former Relevant inc Relevant	143	474	498
Qualifying	11	[S]	15
Total	376	483	876

Accommodation of young people who had left care

Current accommodation of eligible young people describes their care placement and has been included in the figures set out in Section 3 of this publication. The current accommodation at 31 March 2024 of those who had left care (relevant, former relevant, and qualifying) are shown in Table 18. Some 29% of those young people who have left care and were covered by the Care Leaving Act were living in a GEM arrangement (i.e. living with their former foster carers) and a similar proportion (18%) were living independently.

Table 18. Relevant, former relevant and qualifying young people's accommodation at year ending 31 March 2024

Note: Figures may not exactly match figures in other tables due to missing values.

Source: Delegated Statutory Functions Return 10.4.9 (b), (c), (d).

Living Arrangements	N	%
Former Foster Carers (GEM)	355	29%
Tenancy (NIHE/Housing Association /Private)	221	18%
At Home with Parents/Siblings	191	16%
Jointly Commissioned Supported Accommodation Projects	89	7%
Relatives and/or friends	113	9%
Hostel, B+B, Foyer	60	5%
Supported Board and Lodgings	23	2%
Halls of Residence/Student Accommodation	67	6%
Prison	19	2%
Other	72	6%
Total	1,205	100%

Appendix A - Technical Notes

An Accredited Official Statistics Publication

These official statistics were independently reviewed by the Office for Statistics Regulation in November 2013 (Report 265). They comply with the standards of trustworthiness, quality and value in the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#) and should be labelled 'accredited official statistics'.

If you have any comments on this publication, please contact:

Community Information Branch

Department of Health

Annexe 2, Castle Buildings

Stormont, BT4 3SQ

Email: cib@health-ni.gov.uk

Tel: 028 90522580

Children's Social Care Statistics for Northern Ireland

'Children's Social Care Statistics for Northern Ireland', first published in 2012, provides a comprehensive series of data on the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995, replacing 'Children Order Statistical Tables for Northern Ireland' together with its companion publication the 'Children Order Statistical Trends for Northern Ireland,' which were first published in 2002 and 2005 respectively. Prior to this, information was published in 'Key Indicators of Personal Social Services for Northern Ireland'. These publications can be found on the Department of Health's [website](#).

Data Collection

The information presented in this bulletin derives from Children Order statistical returns and Delegated Statutory Functions (DSF) returns provided by each of the five Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts in Northern Ireland to the Strategic Planning and Performance Group (SPPG). The SPPG then supply validated data to Community Information Branch (CIB) in the Department of Health (DoH).

The statistical returns are aggregated counts relating to child protection, children in need, looked after children, care leavers, foster carers and day care provision for children. Figures relate to 31 March 2024 and for the year ending 31 March 2024, and breakdowns are available by age, gender and other key variables, such as length of time in care and duration on the Child Protection Register.

Statistics in Development

Official Statistics that has not prior been published can for a period of time be marked as statistics in development. Within this publication, the sections Foster Carers and Young People subject to Leaving Care Act were labelled in development the last two years due to the fact that it was their first official release. The information has however been collected over a substantial time period and the quality is deemed to be good. For the 2024 publication, the in development label has been removed.

Statement of Administrative Sources

Children Order and DSF returns are derived from Trust administrative systems used to support HSC Trusts in delivering social care services to children. A detailed 'Statement of Administrative Sources' is available on the Department's [website](#).

Data Quality

To ensure the statistical returns are accurate, HSC Trusts have six weeks to update the main electronic administrative system (SOSCARE or PARIS) with relevant information before submitting to SPPG. When returns are received by Community Information Branch, checks are carried out to verify that information is consistent both within and across returns. Trend analyses are used to monitor annual variations and emerging trends. Queries arising from validation checks are presented to SPPG for clarification and if required returns may be amended and/or re-submitted.

Counts of children in need for some Trusts exclude children whose details are not recorded on the electronic administrative system.

Note: due to COVID-19 pressures on HSC Trusts, the 2019/20 returns were not requested until three months into the next financial year.

A detailed quality report for children's community statistics is available on the Department's [website](#).

Rounding Conventions

Percentages have been rounded to whole numbers and as a consequence some percentages may not sum to 100. A 0% may reflect rounding down of values under 0.5%

Disclosure Conventions

To prevent disclosure of the identity of individual children it has been necessary to suppress figures whenever it would be possible to calculate the value of a cell with a low count by means of simple arithmetic. The CIB policy statement on disclosure and confidentiality is available on the Department's [website](#).

Revisions Policy

These data are revised by exception. If this occurs the circumstances of the revision are reported on our website and the dates figures are revised are noted both on the website and within the publication. The full revisions policy for these and other community statistics is published on the Department's [website](#).

Main Uses of Data

Data from the 'Children's Social Care Statistics' publication meets the information need of a wide range of internal and external users. Within DoH figures from the publication are used by policy officials to monitor the volume of activity, Inter Agency working and reasons for referrals and to compare characteristics of children in need, looked after children and children on the child protection register, monitor any increase in the children in need population and monitor the impact of policy and to report on achievement against targets.

Related Publications

Statistics on similar themes to those detailed within this bulletin, published by other countries in the United Kingdom and Ireland are outlined below.

England

[Children looked after in England including adoption](#)

[Characteristics of children in need](#)

[Childcare and early years providers survey](#)

Wales

<https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Health-and-Social-Care/Social-Services/Childrens-Services>

Scotland

[Children's Social Work Statistics](#)

Republic of Ireland

[TUSLA Child and Family Agency – Performance and Activity Reports](#)

Next Release

The next release of these statistics, for the year ending 31 March 2025, is scheduled for October 2025. The publication schedule for Health and Social Care statistics in Northern Ireland available from the DoH [website](#).

Appendix B – Data Definitions

Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995

The Children (Northern Ireland) Order was made on 15 March 1995. The Order deals with the care, upbringing and protection of children, including disabled children. It reforms, consolidates and harmonises most of the public and private law relating to children in a single coherent statutory framework along the lines of the Children Act 1989 in England and Wales.

Child

Under the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995, a child is defined as a person under the age of 18.

Children in Need Referral

A referral of a child to Social Services, regardless of the source of referral. A child may be referred several times over the course of a year.

Religion

Roman Catholic: Refers to anyone of the Roman Catholic faith.

Presbyterian: Refers to all stating their denomination to be Presbyterian. Include here also Church of Scotland but exclude all other groupings with 'Presbyterian' in their title, e.g. Free Presbyterian, Non-subscribing Presbyterian, etc. These groups are recorded under 'Other denominations'.

Church of Ireland: Refers to all stating their denomination to be Church of Ireland.

Methodist: Refers to all stating their denomination to be Methodist.

Other Denominations: Refers to all other Christian and non-Christian denominations and faiths.

None: 'None' refers to those with no religious persuasion.

Refused/Unknown: Refers to those who refuse to give details of their religious affiliation or whose religious affiliation cannot be established.

Ethnic Group

White: 'White' refers to all white or olive skinned people from Europe, North Africa, Middle East, the Americas and Australasia.

Chinese: 'Chinese' refers to all those belonging to the Chinese ethnic group, originating from mainland China, Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan and Malaysia.

Irish Traveller: 'Traveller' refers to persons sometimes known as gypsies or itinerants but excluding New Age Travellers. The term applies to those who travel from place to place, are temporarily based on a traveller site or who are settled in permanent accommodation on a traveller site.

Indian: 'Indian' refers to those from the India.

Pakistani: 'Pakistani' refers to those from Pakistan.

Bangladeshi: 'Bangladeshi' refers to those from Bangladesh.

Black Caribbean: 'Black Caribbean' refers to those of Afro-Caribbean origin.

Black African: 'Black African' refers to Black Africans.

Black Other: 'Black Other' refers to those of other origin including African Americans.

Mixed Ethnic Group: 'Mixed Ethnic Group' refers to those with mixed ethnicity.

Other Ethnic Group: 'Other' refers to those other ethnic groups. Included here are those from Malaysia (other than Chinese), Vietnam, Japan, etc.

Roma Traveller: 'Roma Traveller' refers to persons sometime know as gypsies or itinerants. The term 'Roma' is generally acceptable in collectively describing Travellers of European origin. Many have now settled into housing, however a Romani language is usually spoken in the home.

Not stated: Refers to those who refuse to give details of their ethnic group or whose ethnic group cannot be established.

Child Protection Register

A register must be maintained by each Trust listing every child in the Trust area who has been abused or who is considered to be at risk of abuse, and who is currently the subject of a child protection plan.

Child Protection Registration

Registration is the placement of a child on to the Child Protection Register. Where a child has moved on or off the Register several times during the year each registration is recorded.

Child Protection Deregistration

Deregistration is the removal of a child from the Child Protection Register. Where a child has moved on or off the Register several times during the year each deregistration is recorded.

Child Protection Re-registration

Re-registration is the placement on to the Child Protection Register of a child who has already been on the register, irrespective of the date of their first registration on the Register.

Child Protection Referral

Child protection referrals are those referrals for which the initial assessment indicates that there may be child protection issues. The threshold for action should be the allegation or suspicion of child abuse. However the balance needs to be struck between taking action designed to protect the child from abuse while at the same time avoiding unnecessary intervention. Except in emergency situations or urgent cases when immediate protective action is required, referrals will require preliminary discussion with other professionals from the child protection agencies and with the referrer. In some cases it will be necessary to seek specialist opinion.

In some cases action other than a formal investigation will be decided upon following the consultation process. This might include the provision of support for the family. Such a decision

should be discussed and agreed with a social worker in consultation with the team leader or supervisor; and recorded and communicated to senior management.

The definition is not taken to mean all referrals, as some may require action such as advice or family support rather than child protection procedures.

Child Protection Investigation

The purpose of an investigation is to establish whether a Trust should make an application for a court order or exercise any of its other powers, for example the provision of services under Part IV of the Children Order.

Protocol Not Appropriate: this option used when a Principal Social Worker or above makes the decision that the threshold for a case conference has been met. Article 66 of the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995, places a duty on the Health and Social Care Trusts to investigate whether a child is suffering or likely to suffer 'significant harm'. Child abuse, whether sexual, physical, emotional or neglect, may result in significant harm and Social Services have a duty to investigate. There may be cases of poor parenting and situations that may have an innocent explanations which need not be criminalised by involving Police from the outset.

Category of Abuse for Child Protection Registration

The category of abuse under which a child is registered will have been decided upon at the child protection conference, when agreement was reached that registration was necessary. If a child suffers multiple abuses, this should be recorded against the main category of abuse. The abuse may be potential, suspected or confirmed, although the terms 'actual' or 'likely' occur. Potential and suspected equate with 'likely' and confirmed with 'actual'. The categories are:

1. Neglect, Physical Abuse and Sexual Abuse

- 2. Main category - neglect
- 3. Main category - physical abuse
- 4. Main category - sexual abuse

5. Neglect and Physical Abuse

- 6. Main category - neglect
- 7. Main category - physical abuse

8. Neglect and Sexual Abuse

- 9. Main category – neglect
- 10. Main category - sexual abuse

11. Physical and Sexual Abuse

- 12. Main category - physical abuse
- 13. Main category - sexual abuse

14. Neglect (only)

15. Physical Abuse (only)

16. Sexual Abuse (only)

17. Emotional Abuse (only)

Neglect: The actual or likely persistent or severe neglect of a child, or the failure to protect a child from exposure to any kind of danger, including cold or starvation, or persistent failure to

carry out important aspects of care, resulting in significant impairment of the child's health or development, including non-organic failure to thrive.

Physical Abuse: Actual or likely deliberate physical injury to a child, or wilful or neglectful failure to prevent physical injury or suffering to a child including deliberate poisoning, suffocation or Munchausen syndrome by proxy.

Sexual Abuse: Actual or likely sexual exploitation of a child or adolescent. The child may be dependent and/or developmentally immature.

Emotional Abuse: Actual or likely persistent or severe emotional ill-treatment or rejection resulting in severe adverse effects on the emotional, physical and/or behavioural development of a child. All abuse involves some emotional ill-treatment. This category should be used where it is the main or only form of abuse.

Legal Status

The legal framework for compulsory intervention in the care and upbringing of children. If more than one legal status is indicated or in force for the child at 31 March, the latest one only is recorded.

Emergency Protection Order (Article 63 & 64): An Emergency Protection Order (EPO) is intended for use in urgent cases to protect a child in the short-term. Almost anyone with a concern can apply for an EPO, although in most circumstances a Trust will seek one. Where the applicant is a Trust or the NSPCC they must show that in the course of fulfilling their duty to investigate they are being unreasonably frustrated in gaining access to the child. Anyone else applying for an EPO they must show that the child is likely to suffer significant harm unless removed to, or allowed to remain, in a safe place.

An EPO last for eight days but can be extended on one occasion for a further seven days. An application to discharge the order cannot be made within the first 72 hours giving a Trust sometime to decide what actions to take in respect of the child. The person to whom the order is addressed also gains parental responsibility for the child for the duration of the order.

Accommodated (Article 21): Children with this legal status have been accommodated by a HSC Trust if there is no one who has parental responsibility for them, they have been lost or abandoned or of the person who has been caring for them has been prevented, for whatever reason, from providing them with suitable accommodation or care. Children are often accommodated with the permission of their parents.

Care Order (Article 50 or 59): A Care Order accords the HSC Trust parental responsibility and allows for the child to be removed from the parental home. This does not extinguish the parental responsibility of the child's parents but means that they cannot exercise this responsibility while the Care Order is in place. In order for a Court to make a Care Order it must be satisfied that the child is suffering or is likely to suffer significant harm and that the harm or likelihood of harm is attributable to the care given to the child, or likely to be given to the child, not being what it would be reasonable to expect a parent to give or the child being beyond parental control.

Interim Care Orders (Article 57): An Interim Care Order is put in place following an adjournment of proceedings for a Care Order or in any family proceedings in which a Court orders a Trust to

investigate the circumstances of a child. An Interim Care Order can be in place for up to eight weeks initially and for a further four weeks upon renewal and subsequent occasions that Court deems an Interim Order necessary.

Supervision Order: This order requires the Trust to advise, assist and befriend the supervised child and can only be granted if the same threshold conditions that apply for Care Orders are met. This Order does not give the Trust parental responsibility. It does allow a social worker to issue directions about the child's upbringing including place of residence and involvement in certain programmes. Schedule 3 of the Children Order sets out the full range of matters that may be addressed in a Supervision Order.

Interim Supervision Orders (Article 57): An Interim Supervision can be put in place following an adjournment of proceedings for a Supervision Order or in any family proceedings in which a question arises with respect to the welfare of any child, it appears to the court that it may be appropriate for a supervision order to be made with respect to him, the court may direct the appropriate authority to undertake an investigation of the child's circumstances.

Looked After Child / Child in Care

A child is looked after by an Authority if he or she is in their care or if he or she is provided with accommodation for a continuous period of more than 24 hours by the authority in the exercise of its Social Services function.

Placements

Residential Care: Residential care refers to care which takes place in statutory, voluntary or private children's homes. Within this publication, residential care also includes secure care and care in specialists units outside of Northern Ireland.

Non-kinship Foster Care: Foster care includes children fostered with persons who are not related to the child.

Independent Foster Care Providers: Foster care placements provided by Independent Sector Providers.

Kinship Foster Care: Kinship Foster care includes children fostered with a relative, friend or other person with a prior connection to the child. A 'connected person' means a relative friend or other person connected with the child. This may be someone who knows the child in a more professional capacity such as a childminder, a teacher or a youth worker although these are not exclusive categories.

Placed with parent: This refers to children for whom a Care Order exists and who are placed with their parents, a person who is not a parent but who has parental responsibility for the child or where a child is in care and there was a Residence Order in force with respect to him/her immediately before the Care Order was made, a person in whose favour the Residence Order was made.

Independent living: Independent living refers to any young person being looked after by an authority, who moves from his/her placement to live independently within the community before he/she is 18 years of age.

Short Breaks

This term refers to either a series of short-term pre-planned or ad hoc placements, where a child moves temporarily from their carer/parents in order to allow the child and/or the carer a period of respite.

Day Nursery Services

Day nurseries look after children under five years old for the length of the adult working day. They can be run by voluntary organisations, private companies, community groups or employers in the public or private sectors for their workforce. Children will attend part-time or full-time depending on their needs.

Childminders

Childminders look after children aged under five years and school aged children outside of school hours and in the holidays in domestic premises, usually the home of the childminder. This is a service offered all year round for the full adult working day. Parents and childminders negotiate the terms and conditions.

Playgroups

Playgroups provide session care for children between three and five years of age, in some exceptional cases they may accept younger children. They aim to provide learning experiences through structured play. Most playgroups are run on self-help basis by groups of parents with some paid staff. Some of these groups will be run by HSC Trusts or voluntary organisations such as the NSPCC. Some of these groups may be referred to as opportunity groups which cater for children with special needs. Playgroup sessions last no longer than four hours.

Out of School Clubs

These clubs care for school age children from the end of the school day until the parent can collect their child. Some clubs may also care for children before school. These clubs are not open access. Children will be escorted to the club by a responsible person and may not leave until they have been collected by a parent or person with parental responsibility. These clubs may be run by Trusts, voluntary organisations, community groups or privately.

Home Childcarers

Other day care providers include 'Approved Home Childcarers'. Home childcarers enable parents to have their children cared for in their own home. They are professional childcarers, offering children safe, good quality care and providing them with play and learning opportunities that contribute to their development.

Additional Information

Further information on Children's Social Care Statistics for Northern Ireland is available from:

Community Information Branch

Department of Health

Annexe 2, Castle Buildings

Stormont, BT4 3SQ, Northern Ireland

(028) 9052 2580

Email: cib@health-ni.gov.uk

This and other statistical bulletins published by Community Information Branch are available to download from the DoH internet at:

[Department of Health Statistics and Research Web Link](#)