

Trends in U.S. Adoptions: 2010–2019

There is no single source for the total number of children adopted in the United States, and there is currently no straightforward way of determining the total number of adoptions, even when multiple data sources are used. Two Federal agencies collect data on specific subsets of adoptions. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) collects data from State and Tribal public (title IV-E) agencies on all children who have been adopted with public agency involvement. The vast majority of the public agency adoptions are from foster care. The U.S. Department of State collects data about adoptions of children from other countries by U.S. citizens. However, Federal agencies do not collect data on other types of adoptions, such as those arranged through private agencies or stepparent adoptions. Those data are only available from individual States.

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The purpose of this report is to (a) provide estimates of the number of children adopted in each of the 50 States, plus the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico, for each year from 2010 to 2019; (b) provide data on the types of adoptions (public, intercountry, and other [e.g., stepparent, private agency]) in the United States; and (c) analyze adoption trends during that timeframe. Data for this report were primarily obtained through State courts, State departments of social services (DSSs), HHS, and the U.S. Department of State. This report only provides data up to 2019 due to the length of time it takes State courts and agencies to process the data and make them available. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused additional delays to the data-compilation process in some States.

Key Findings

The following are key findings from this report¹:

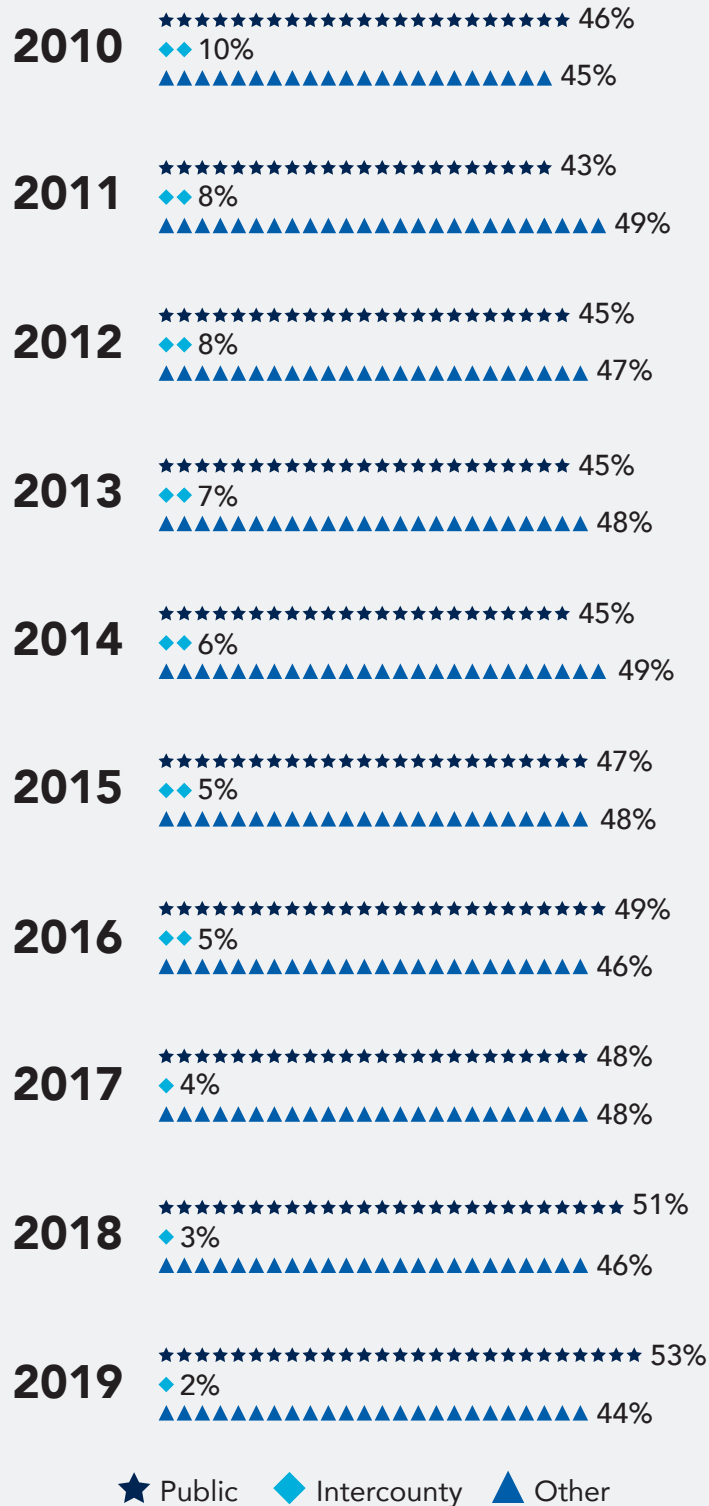
- In 2019, 120,869 children were adopted in the United States. This is a 5-percent increase (5,296) from the 115,573 children adopted in 2010 and a 9-percent increase (9,726) from the 111,143 children adopted in 2015.
- The adoption rate per 100,000 adults² was 47 per 100,000 adults in 2019, 44 per 100,000 adults in 2015, and 48 per 100,000 adults in 2010.
- The number of public agency adoptions—as well as the percentage of all adoptions achieved through public agencies—increased 24 percent (12,604) from 2010 to 2019. In 2019, 53 percent (66,035) of all adoptions were through public agencies, compared with 47 percent (53,536) of all adoptions in 2015 and 46 percent (53,431) of all adoptions in 2010.
- In 2019, U.S. citizens adopted 2,966 children from foreign countries, which was 2 percent of all adoptions. The number of intercountry adoptions decreased by 73 percent (8,065) from 2010 to 2019 and by 47 percent (2,667) from 2015 to 2019.
- Slightly under half of all adoptions were from other sources (i.e., not public or intercountry) throughout all the years studied. For example, adoptions from other sources (e.g., private agencies, Tribes, stepparent) accounted for 44 percent of all adoptions in 2019.

Exhibit 1 presents additional details about the proportion of public agency, intercountry, and other adoptions from 2010 to 2019.

¹ Data for Arizona and Puerto Rico were excluded from certain calculations and analyses due to issues with their data. When data for Arizona or Puerto Rico needed to be excluded from calculations of certain percentages, their data were excluded from both the numerator and denominator. For example, although national counts of public agency adoptions include counts of public agency adoptions for Arizona, calculations of the national percentage of public agency adoptions exclude Arizona counts from both the numerator (national public agency adoptions) and denominator (national total adoptions). See appendix A for more information about why data may be excluded and the [supplemental dataset](#) for more details about how calculations were made for specific categories.

² For this report, the adoption rate is the rate per 100,000 persons 18 years and older who, depending on State law, may be eligible to become adoptive parents. Since, in general, any single adult or a married couple jointly can be eligible to adopt (Child Welfare Information Gateway 2020), this report uses age 18 and older as a proxy for adulthood. For more information about State laws regarding who is eligible to adopt, refer to Information Gateway's [Who May Adopt, Be Adopted, or Place a Child for Adoption?](#) The adoption rate is calculated by dividing the number of adoptions (total, public, intercountry, or other) in a State by the number of individuals age 18 and older and then multiplying that number by 100,000.

Exhibit 1. Percentage of Adoptions in the United States by Type, 2010–2019



Differences in Data From Previous Versions

Child Welfare Information Gateway (2004, 2011, 2016), as well as other researchers or organizations (e.g., Flango & Caskey, 2006; Shuman & Flango, 2013), have aggregated national adoption data in other publications. Data for certain years may differ from publication to publication—even between the Information Gateway publications—due to a variety of reasons, such as changes in data sources, updates to data by the sources, or changes in methodologies. For example, in the 2016 version of this report, the total adoption data for South Carolina were from the Division of Biostatistics of the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control, but those data for South Carolina for this report are from the South Carolina Judicial Branch. Additionally, readers should be cautious when comparing total adoption data for a specific State over multiple years. Differences in total adoptions for a State could be a result of changes in methodologies (e.g., data were obtained from the State’s bureau of vital statistics in one year and the courts in the next year). Even with these differences, the data presented in this report represent the most reasonable known estimates of the total number of adoptions in the United States.

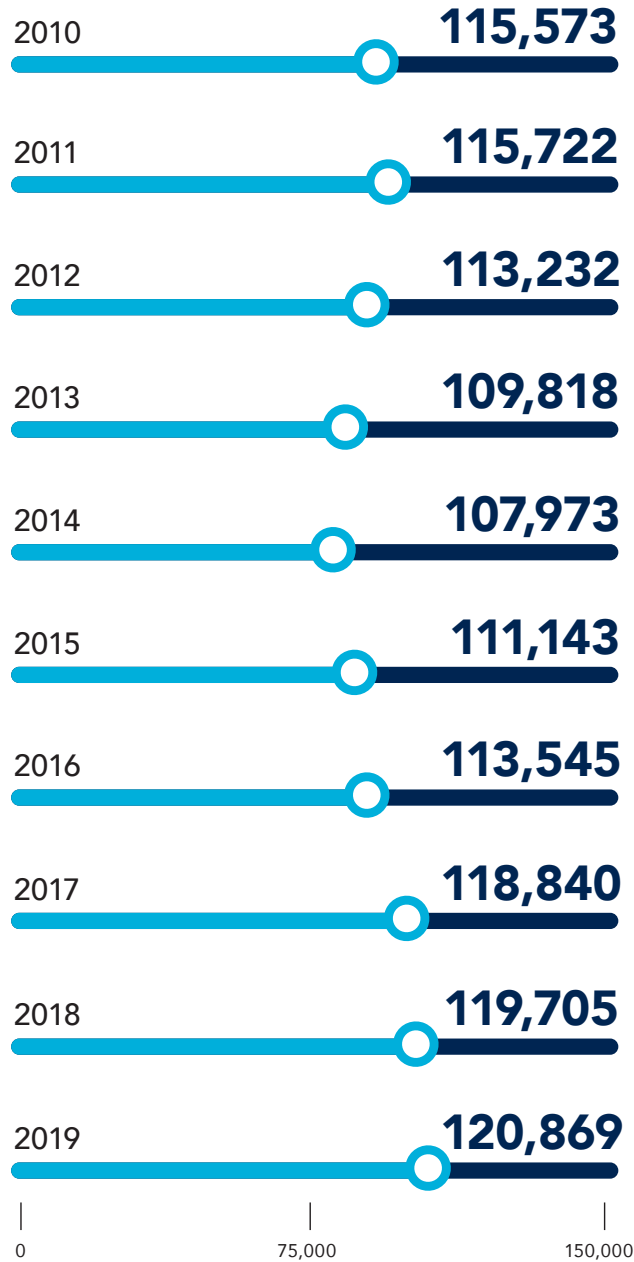
FINDINGS

This section provides data on the total number of adoptions in the United States during the period of 2010 to 2019 as well as data on the number of intercountry, public agency, and other adoptions. It is important to note that high or low adoption counts or percentages—overall or for a particular type of adoption—are not indicative of positive or negative results or practice within a State. The reasons for a child to be adopted or achieve another living arrangement are complex and dependent on the specifics of each child and family.

TOTAL ADOPTIONS

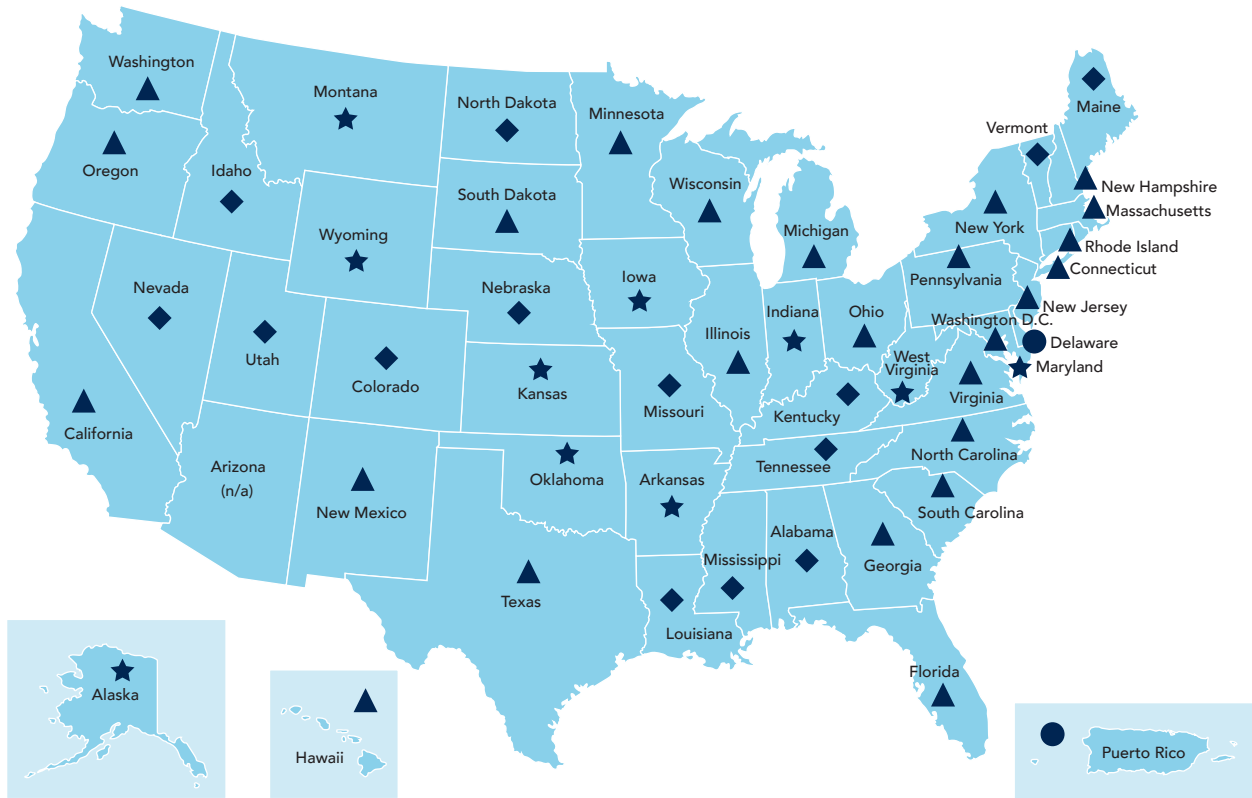
In 2019, 120,869 children were adopted in the United States across all types of adoptions, a 5-percent increase (5,296) from the 115,573 children adopted in 2010. From 2015 (111,143) to 2019, there was a 9-percent increase (9,726). The number of adoptions decreased from 2010 until a 10-year low of 107,973 in 2014 and then increased steadily in each following year. More than half of States (54 percent) increased their total number of adoptions from 2010 to 2019. Exhibit 2 shows the total number of adoptions in the United States for each year from 2010 to 2019.

EXHIBIT 2. TOTAL NUMBER OF ADOPTIONS IN THE UNITED STATES, 2010–2019



The adoption rate per 100,000 adults was 48 per 100,000 adults in 2010, 44 per 100,000 adults in 2015, and 47 per 100,000 adults in 2019. The adoption rate decreased 4 percent from 2010 to 2019 and increased 6 percent from 2015 to 2019. See exhibit 3 for additional information about the adoption rate in each State in 2019.

EXHIBIT 3. STATE ADOPTION RATES, 2019



Legend

★ 75+ total adoption rate ◆ 50 to 74 total adoption rate ▲ 25 to 49 total adoption rate ● 0 to 24 total adoption rate

For additional details about the counts, percentages, and rates of total, public agency, intercountry, and other adoptions by State and year, refer to the [supplemental dataset](#) available on the Information Gateway website.

ADOPTIONS BY SOURCE

This section provides information about the totals and trends for public, intercountry, and other adoptions. Relative or kinship adoptions may be included in any of the adoption types. Exhibit 4 (number) and exhibit 5 (percentages) show State-specific information of adoptions by type for 2019.

EXHIBIT 4. NUMBER OF ADOPTIONS BY TYPE BY STATE, 2019

STATE	PUBLIC	INTERCOUNTRY	OTHER	TOTAL
Alabama	738	63	1,269	2,070
Alaska	396	8	366	770
Arizona	3,373	25	n/a	3,112
Arkansas	984	3	2,122	3,109
California	6,981	208	932	8,121
Colorado	919	80	1,488	2,487
Connecticut	633	15	202	850
Delaware	129	4	29	162
District of Columbia	98	10	94	202
Florida	4,714	146	2,804	7,664
Georgia	1,668	99	998	2,765
Hawaii	206	9	133	348
Idaho	328	31	477	836
Illinois	1,747	134	1,113	2,994
Indiana	2,489	89	2,443	5,021
Iowa	1,228	51	938	2,217
Kansas	1,227	29	1,114	2,370
Kentucky	1,368	51	964	2,383
Louisiana	895	26	1,041	1,962
Maine	294	7	355	656
Maryland	291	84	4,047	4,422
Massachusetts	998	43	853	1,894
Michigan	2,161	93	1,434	3,688
Minnesota	1,347	86	254	1,687
Mississippi	719	22	846	1,587
Missouri	1,820	83	1,490	3,393
Montana	482	5	437	924
Nebraska	560	15	405	980
Nevada	805	9	443	1,257
New Hampshire	278	9	196	483

STATE	PUBLIC	INTERCOUNTRY	OTHER	TOTAL
New Jersey	1,162	50	868	2,080
New Mexico	336	18	174	528
New York	1,648	139	2,529	4,316
North Carolina	1,546	116	1,908	3,570
North Dakota	197	8	195	400
Ohio	1,665	103	2,719	4,487
Oklahoma	2,086	40	815	2,941
Oregon	792	31	835	1,658
Pennsylvania	2,849	113	1,730	4,692
Puerto Rico	n/a	0	n/a	198
Rhode Island	184	4	146	334
South Carolina	529	40	1,233	1,802
South Dakota	211	6	110	327
Tennessee	1,166	103	2,513	3,782
Texas	6,105	258	2,821	9,184
Utah	639	41	601	1,281
Vermont	260	3	87	350
Virginia	769	135	1,548	2,452
Washington	1,509	122	465	2,096
West Virginia	1,675	7	467	2,149
Wisconsin	711	75	633	1,419
Wyoming	120	17	272	409
Total	66,035	2,966	51,956	120,869

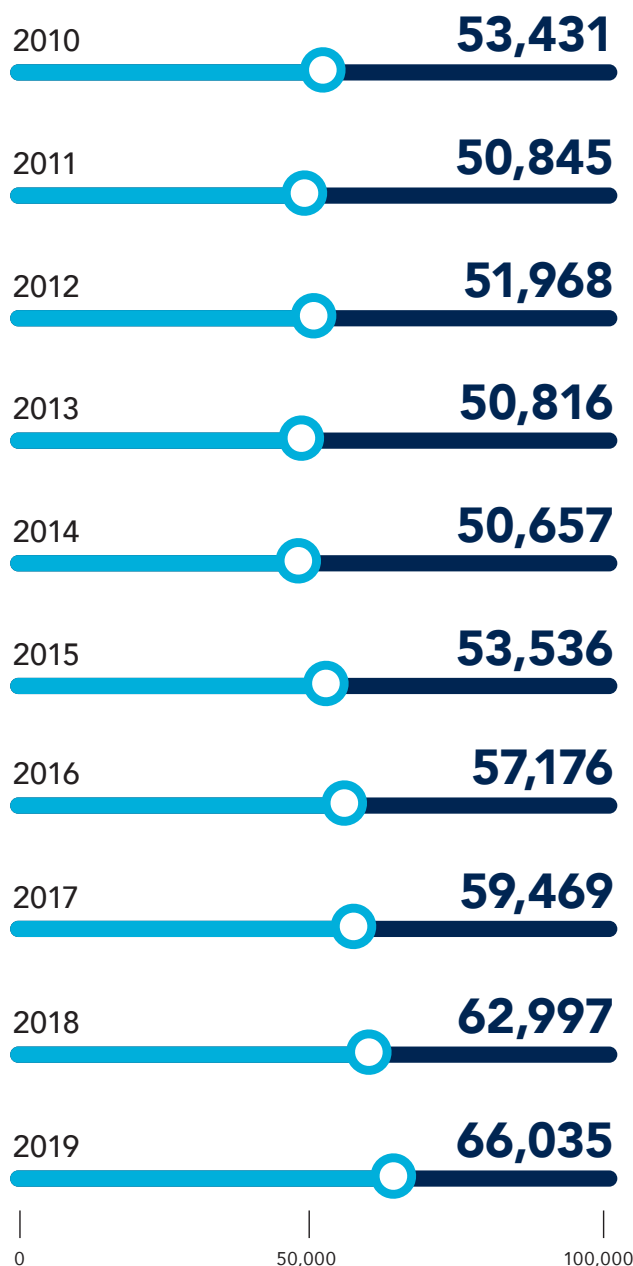
EXHIBIT 5. PERCENTAGE OF ADOPTIONS BY TYPE BY STATE, 2019

STATE	<i>% PUBLIC</i>	<i>% INTERCOUNTRY</i>	<i>% OTHER</i>
National	53%	2%	44%
Alabama	36%	3%	61%
Alaska	51%	1%	48%
Arkansas	32%	<1%	68%
California	86%	3%	11%
Colorado	37%	3%	60%
Connecticut	74%	2%	24%
Delaware	80%	2%	18%
District of Columbia	49%	5%	47%
Florida	62%	2%	37%
Georgia	60%	4%	36%
Hawaii	59%	3%	38%
Idaho	39%	4%	57%
Illinois	58%	4%	37%
Indiana	50%	2%	49%
Iowa	55%	2%	42%
Kansas	52%	1%	47%
Kentucky	57%	2%	40%
Louisiana	46%	1%	53%
Maine	45%	1%	54%
Maryland	7%	2%	92%
Massachusetts	53%	2%	45%
Michigan	59%	3%	39%
Minnesota	80%	5%	15%
Mississippi	45%	1%	53%
Missouri	54%	2%	44%
Montana	52%	1%	47%
Nebraska	57%	2%	41%
Nevada	64%	1%	35%
New Hampshire	58%	2%	41%

STATE	% PUBLIC	% INTERCOUNTRY	% OTHER
New Jersey	56%	2%	42%
New Mexico	64%	3%	33%
New York	38%	3%	59%
North Carolina	43%	3%	53%
North Dakota	49%	2%	49%
Ohio	37%	2%	61%
Oklahoma	71%	1%	28%
Oregon	48%	2%	50%
Pennsylvania	61%	2%	37%
Rhode Island	55%	1%	44%
South Carolina	29%	2%	68%
South Dakota	65%	2%	34%
Tennessee	31%	3%	66%
Texas	66%	3%	31%
Utah	50%	3%	47%
Vermont	74%	1%	25%
Virginia	31%	6%	63%
Washington	72%	6%	22%
West Virginia	78%	<1%	22%
Wisconsin	50%	5%	45%
Wyoming	29%	4%	67%

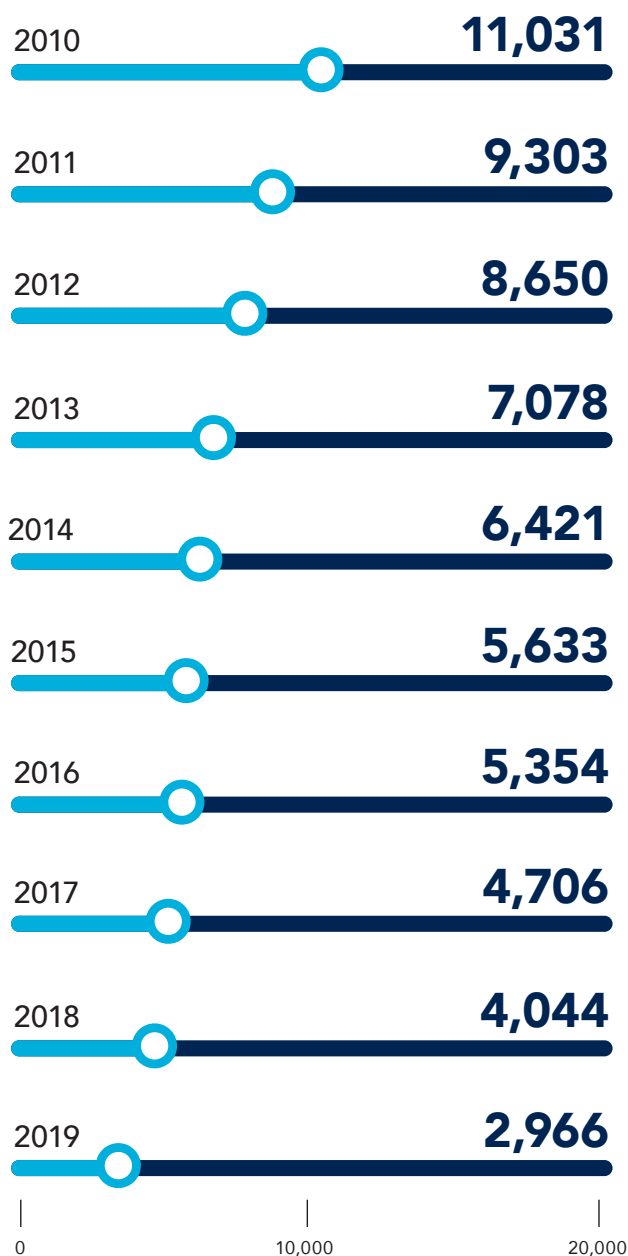
Public agency adoptions. Approximately half of all adoptions are through public agencies: 53 percent (66,035) in 2019, 47 percent (53,536) in 2015, and 46 percent (53,431) in 2010. Between 2010 and 2019, the number of public adoptions increased 24 percent (12,604), and between 2015 and 2019, the number of public adoptions increased 23 percent (12,499). Like the total number of adoptions, the lowest number of public agency adoptions over the 10-year period occurred in 2014 (50,657). In 2019, 33 States had 50 percent or more of their adoptions placed through a public agency, which is more than double the 16 States that had 50 percent or more in 2010. Additionally, 76 percent of States saw an increase in their public agency adoptions from 2010 to 2019. Exhibit 6 provides annual data for the number of public agency adoptions in the United States. See the [supplemental dataset](#) for the number of public adoptions, the percentage of total adoptions that are public adoptions, and the rates of public adoptions per 100,000 adults by State for 2010–2019.

EXHIBIT 6. PUBLIC AGENCY ADOPTIONS BY YEAR, 2010–2019



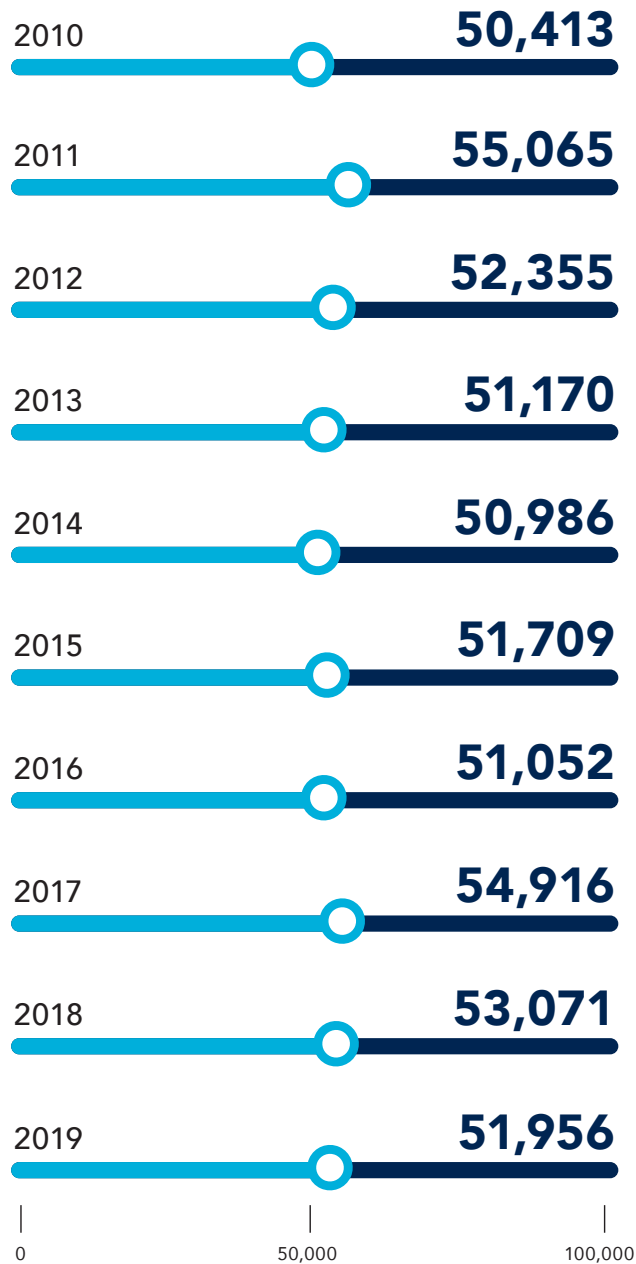
Intercountry adoptions. In 2019, U.S. citizens adopted 2,966 children from foreign countries (2 percent of all adoptions in the United States that year). The number of intercountry adoptions began to decline in 2005 and has continued to decline every year through 2019. The number of intercountry adoptions decreased by 73 percent (8,065) from 2010 to 2019 and by 47 percent (2,667) from 2015 to 2019. Exhibit 7 shows the number of intercountry adoptions in the United States from 2010 to 2019. The percentage of all adoptions that are intercountry also declined considerably during this time. In 2010, 10 percent of all adoptions were intercountry. This decreased to 5 percent in 2015 and 2 percent in 2019. The [supplemental dataset](#) provides the number of intercountry adoptions, the percentage of total adoptions that are intercountry adoptions, and the rates of intercountry adoptions per 100,000 adults by State for select years.

EXHIBIT 7. INTERCOUNTRY ADOPTIONS BY YEAR, 2010–2019



Other types of adoptions. The category of “other” adoptions includes all adoptions that are not public agency or intercountry. This includes private agency, Tribal, facilitated, independent, and stepparent adoptions. In 2019, 51,956 children were adopted through other sources, and in 2010, 50,413 children were adopted through other sources. The number of other adoptions remained relatively constant from 2010 to 2019, with an increase of 1,543 adoptions (3 percent) from 2010 to 2019 and a decrease of 247 adoptions (less than 1 percent) from 2015 to 2019. See Exhibit 8 for the number of other adoptions in the United States from 2010 to 2019. The proportion of other adoptions among all adoptions also remained relatively steady over time, with 45 percent in 2010, 48 percent in 2015, and 44 percent in 2019. The [supplemental dataset](#) provides the number of other adoptions, the percentage of total adoptions that are other adoptions, and the rates of other adoptions per 100,000 adults by State for select years.

EXHIBIT 8. OTHER ADOPTIONS BY YEAR, 2010–2019



DATA SOURCES

Since there is no single source of data for the total number of adoptions in the United States, data must be aggregated from several sources. This section describes the history of available sources for adoption data and the data sources used for this report.

HISTORY OF DATA SOURCES

A variety of sources have contributed data on the total number of adoptions during the past 70 years. From 1944 through 1975, the HHS Children's Bureau and the National Center for Social Statistics collected voluntary annual data from States about adoptions (Maza, 1984). The estimated number of adoptions in 1944 was 50,000, and the highest number of adoptions during that period (175,000) was in 1970 (Maza, 1984; Stolley, 1993).

From 1975 to the early 1980s, no national adoption data were collected. In 1983, the American Public Welfare Association (now known as the American Public Human Services Association), through funding from the Children's Bureau, implemented the Voluntary Cooperative Information System (VCIS) to collect national data on the adoption of children who were in, or passed through, the public child welfare system (Caliber Associates, 1998). Additionally, the National Council for Adoption (formerly, the National Committee for Adoption) collected and published State-by-State data on adoptions for 1982, 1986, and 1997.

In 1986, Congress passed an amendment to title IV-E of the Social Security Act (section 479) that established an advisory committee to address the collection of adoption and foster care data. In 1993, HHS issued a regulation establishing the [Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System](#) (AFCARS). The final rule required States to submit data to the Children's Bureau about all adoptions that were conducted through public child welfare agencies. States were first required to submit AFCARS data in Federal fiscal year (FFY) 1998. VCIS was phased out during the transition to AFCARS.

Additionally, the National Center for State Courts (NCSC) requests total adoption data from State courts on a voluntary basis. In the past, NCSC and Information Gateway staff have used the court data in combination with other sources, such as State bureaus of vital records, to develop estimates of the total number of adoptions (Flango, 1990; Flango & Flango, 1993; Flango & Flango, 1995; Flango & Caskey, 2006; Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2004; Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2011; Shuman & Flango, 2013).

DESCRIPTION OF DATA SOURCES

Data for this report were obtained from multiple sources, including State courts, State DSSs, State bureaus of vital records, and the Federal Government.

State courts. Because all adoptions of children born in the United States and an unknown, but significant, number of intercountry adoptions are finalized in U.S. courts, the courts are a key source of adoption data. State court data on adoption filings (requests to adopt that are submitted to the court) and dispositions (decisions by the court to grant or deny adoptions) were obtained from States, either through reports available online or through direct requests to court staff. If disposition data were available, those were used. If they were not available, filings data were used. State court data for Vermont for 2010–2013 were provided by NCSC.

HHS, Children’s Bureau. The total number of public agency adoptions in this study is based solely on [AFCARS](#) data obtained from the Children’s Bureau website. State child welfare agencies are mandated to report information semiannually on public child welfare agency adoptions and on children in foster care to AFCARS. This was established by the Federal Government to collect uniform, reliable information on children who were adopted under the responsibility of the State title IV-B/IV-E agency. State child welfare agencies are required to report case-specific information on each child in foster care, each child adopted from the public child welfare system, and any other adoption in which there was public child welfare agency involvement. AFCARS is the only national data source that also includes information about the characteristics of adopted children, their birth families, and their adoptive families. State agencies may voluntarily—and are encouraged to—report adoptions made under the auspices of private adoption agencies or individually arranged adoptions completed without agency involvement, but almost no States have the resources to collect data that are not mandated.

State departments of social services. Data from State DSSs or similar agencies were sometimes used when domestic adoption data could not be collected from the courts. In some States, the courts or other legal personnel (e.g., attorneys) submit records of all adoption petitions or finalizations to the State DSS.

State bureaus of vital records. Data from State bureaus of vital records (or vital statistics) were used when data were not available from the State courts or DSS. (Maine was the only State for which vital records data were used in this report). Bureaus of vital records are potential sources of adoption information because adoptive parents seek birth certificate amendments for the children they have adopted. Bureaus of vital records collect data for birth certificate amendments for children born in their State. Some of those children, however, may live in another State or abroad at the time of adoption. In contrast, AFCARS counts adoptions in the State where the adoption occurred, and courts count adoptions in the State where the petitions are filed.

U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Consular Affairs, Office of Children’s Issues. This office collects data on the number of immigrant visas issued to children to enter the United States for the purpose of an intercountry adoption. All intercountry adoption data for this study were obtained through the [annual reports](#) prepared by the Office of Children’s Issues. These reports also provide data on the country of origin for incoming adoptions to the United States

Private agency and independent adoptions. It is usually not possible to obtain data regarding [private agency or independent adoptions](#), which often involve the adoption of infants, because neither the agencies nor attorneys have requirements, incentives, or places to report data on the number of children placed for adoption by them or other information about the children and families involved. Data on these types of adoptions are reflected in the totals, but no subtotals for these types of adoptions are included in this report.

Other types of adoptions. The category of other adoptions includes all types of adoptions that are not public agency or intercountry. The total number for other types of adoptions can be estimated by subtracting both the number of public agency adoptions reported in AFCARS and the intercountry adoptions reported by the U.S. Department of State from the total number of adoptions reported by the courts, DSSs, or State bureaus of vital records.

Guardianships

The data in this report do not include legal guardianships, which create a legal relationship between the child and their caregivers without the necessity of terminating the parents' rights that occurs with adoptions. For more information, refer to Information Gateway's [Guardianship](#) webpage.

To view State-specific information about data sources or details about sources for public agency adoptions, intercountry adoptions, and the adult population, refer to appendix A. For additional information about adoption types, see appendix B.

DATA NOTES AND LIMITATIONS

There are several challenges to collecting the data needed to compile the total number of adoptions in the United States. First and foremost, there is no single source for the total number of adoptions. Although the Federal Government collects data on public and intercountry adoptions, these do not provide a complete picture. Additionally, there are no primary data sources for the number of other adoptions options; those data must be calculated using other data.

The data in this study are drawn from multiple sources, each of which uses different methodologies and definitions and are of varying quality. Some data caveats, such as the assumption regarding intercountry adoptions and data quality and consistency issues, have already been presented. The following provides additional caveats for the use of the data.

YEAR PARAMETERS VARY BY JURISDICTION

The year parameters for the data often change depending on the data source. For example, AFCARS and intercountry adoption data are for a FFY, which begins on October 1 and ends September 30 of the following calendar year (e.g., FFY 2019 begins on October 1, 2018, and ends September 30, 2019). Court, DSS, and vital records data, however, are nearly always reported by State fiscal year (SFY), which is either a calendar year (January 1 through December 31) or another timeframe—most often July 1 through June 30 of the next year (e.g., SFY 2019 begins on July 1, 2018, and ends on June 30, 2019). We cannot convert the data into one standard type of year because the data provided by these sources are not separated by month. Therefore, this report groups and aggregates data by year without consideration of the type of year. For example, adoptions listed in this report as being from 2019 may be from FFY 2019 or SFY 2019, depending on the source.

VITAL RECORDS DATA METHODOLOGY

The bureaus of vital records report when the birth certificate amendment was processed, which may not occur within the same year the adoption was finalized. For example, a child who was adopted in 2016 might not have a birth certificate amended until 2019 or later. Additionally, a State's bureau of vital records has adoption data only for children born in that State. For example, a child born in Maine may be adopted in Tennessee, but the birth certificate would be amended only in Maine. That may occasionally cause a double count of children in this report if a child was born in a State that provided data on birth certificate amendments and then was adopted in a State that provided court data. It is not known how many children fall into this category, but this is likely to have an insignificant impact on the data provided in this report.

OVERLAP OF DATA SOURCES

There is no overlap between AFCARS data and the data provided by the U.S. Department of State, but there may be overlap between data provided by the courts and the U.S. Department of State because children adopted abroad may also be adopted in a U.S. court. (See "Assumptions Regarding Intercountry Adoptions" for additional information.) There also may be overlap between State court data and data from the State bureaus of vital records, as explained earlier in this section.

USE OF COURT FILINGS DATA

Although nearly all petitions filed are granted, some are denied. Therefore, counting filings data may cause a very slight overestimate of total adoptions. In practice, however, the discrepancy is very small and unlikely to affect any conclusions drawn.

ASSUMPTIONS FOR INTERCOUNTRY ADOPTION DATA

Some families who adopt children from other countries choose to readopt their children in the United States as an additional protection of the adopted children's legal status, because their States do not fully recognize foreign adoption decrees, to obtain the documentation in English, or other reasons. There are no data, however, on the number or percentage of adoptions that occur abroad that are also processed by U.S. courts. This study uses information about which States have statutes giving full effect and recognition to intercountry adoptions to determine how to calculate the total adoptions for each State. Documents were available from Information Gateway that outlined which States in 2011, 2014, and [2018](#) had such statutes.

Furthermore, the annual reports on intercountry adoption issued by the Office of Children's Issues provide State data on (1) the number of "adoptions finalized abroad" and (2) the number of "adoptions to be finalized in the United States." Although referred to as "adoptions" in those annual reports, the second category does not technically refer to finalized U.S. adoptions since they have not yet been adopted according to U.S. law. Adding both of those categories together yields the number of intercountry adoptions.

For the purposes of this report, the assumption was made that (1) families in States that give full effect and recognition to adoptions finalized in other countries would not readopt their children in U.S. courts, and (2) families in States that do not give full effect and recognition would readopt their children in U.S. courts. This is a logical, practical, and conservative working assumption. It serves as a compromise between (1) including all adoptions finalized abroad as a subset of total adoptions and (2) adding all of them to the domestic total. This calculation potentially limits the accuracy of the data presented, but it presents a logical approach given the data limitations.

For States that had statutes that gave full effect and recognition to adoptions finalized abroad, the number of adoptions finalized abroad (F) was added to the domestic adoption data from the courts, DSSs, or bureaus of vital records (D) to create a State total (T), such that $F + D = T$. For States that did not have such statutes, the total from the courts, DSSs, or bureaus of vital records, (D) was used as the final total (T), such that $D = T$.

Give Full Effect and Recognition	Do Not Give Full Effect and Recognition
Finalized Abroad + Domestic = Total	Domestic = Total

In all States (regardless of whether they give full effect and recognition), the number of adoptions to be finalized in the United States is considered to have already been counted in the domestic totals provided by the courts, DSSs, or bureaus of vital records since they must be finalized in the United States.

One additional caveat is that the adoption data provided in the Office of Children’s Issues annual reports do not include foreign adoptions via an IR-2 visa. These visas are issued when there is a foreign adoption by a U.S. citizen that occurs abroad—including both intercountry adoptions and domestic adoptions in the foreign country—that is followed by at least 2 years of the child being abroad. For more information about this type of visa, see the U.S. Department of State’s [Family-Based Petition Process](#) webpage.

For more information about intercountry adoptions and the visa process, refer to Information Gateway’s [Intercountry Adoption: What Do I Need to Know?](#)

Additional Subcategories of Adoptions

Although having more granular data about child—or parent—demographics or types of adoption would be valuable to the evolution of adoption policy and practice, subcategories of adoptions beyond those presented in this report, such as by race/ethnicity, age, kin adoption, etc., generally are not captured and/or made readily available for total, intercountry, or other adoptions. [AFCARS reports](#), however, present more granular data, which allows for a more extensive examination of public agency adoptions.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Policymakers, government agencies, court personnel, social workers, adoption organizations, advocacy groups, and others need information on total adoptions, as well as the types of adoption, in the United States to help guide adoption practice and policy. These data can help agencies and organizations develop a better understanding of the demographics of their communities, determine strategies for increasing placements, enhance the recruitment of prospective adoptive families, plan for postadoption services, determine future funding and personnel needs, and cultivate policies and practices that meet current and emerging needs. For example, the steep decreases in intercountry adoptions may indicate that potential adoptive families who otherwise might have sought intercountry adoptions may be more receptive to other types of adoptive placements (e.g., from foster care). Adoption and child welfare agencies could adjust their outreach and marketing efforts to target these families.

Additionally, by analyzing State-level data, stakeholders can compare adoption rates overall and by source to determine if States have fewer or more adoptions than expected based on their populations. For example, Alaska, which has one of the smallest State populations, has one of the highest rates of total adoptions per 100,000 adults. Conversely, California, which is the most populous State, consistently has one of the lowest adoption rates. This does not necessarily mean that one State is doing better at ensuring children in need are being adopted while the other is not (particularly given the more recent emphasis on reunification as the primary case plan goal), but it is a starting point for asking questions about the policies, practices, and circumstances in each State.

The total number of adoptions in the United States increased by 5 percent from 2010 to 2019, largely driven by the increases in the number of children adopted from foster care. Over this same time, however, the number of intercountry adoptions saw a sharp decrease, from 11,031 to 2,966. This continues a trend that began in 2005 but was greatly amplified when the United States ratified the [Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption](#) in 2008, which affected how the United States participated with other countries in intercountry adoptions. For example, after the United States ratified the Hague Convention, it deemed that it could no longer receive adoptions from Guatemala, which had a noncompliant system for adoptions. Adoptions from Guatemala decreased from 4,112 in 2008 to 0 in 2019. Although the Hague Convention is not the sole reason for the drop in intercountry and total adoptions, it may be responsible for a significant portion. Another possible reason for the decline in intercountry adoptions could be that some countries experienced changes in social, economic, or legal conditions that either restricted intercountry adoption or promoted their own domestic adoptions (e.g., Bureau of Consular Affairs, 2019, 2020). For example, in 2010, there were 3,401 intercountry adoptions from China, and in 2019, there were 819. China has been promoting domestic adoptions and, in 2017, enacted laws that restricted activities by nongovernmental organizations, which may have led to decreases in adoptions from the country (Bureau of Consular Affairs, 2016, 2019). Another example is Russia, which saw a drop in outgoing adoptions to the United States from 1,079 in 2010 to 0 in 2015 and beyond, after it enacted a law in 2013 that prohibited the adoption of Russian children by U.S. citizens (Bureau of Consular Affairs, 2016).

The annual number of children being adopted through a public agency has risen from 2010 to 2019 (see exhibit 9), but it is not clear what contributed to this increase. According to AFCARS data, the number of children in foster care waiting for adoption has also increased during the 10-year period—from 108,000 to 124,000 (a 15-percent increase; see exhibit 10). This increase in adoptions and the number of children waiting to be adopted occurred while the number of entries into foster care decreased by 3 percent (260,000 to 252,000; see exhibit 11). Additionally, the percentage of children waiting for adoption in foster care has remained relatively steady from 2010 to 2019 at around 50 percent, although there has been a slight uptick in the last 2 years of that period (from 48 percent in 2017 to 53 percent in 2019; see exhibit 12). Therefore, the fact that there are more children waiting for adoption may be contributing to the higher number of adoptions through public agencies.

EXHIBIT 9. PUBLIC AGENCY ADOPTIONS, 2010–2019

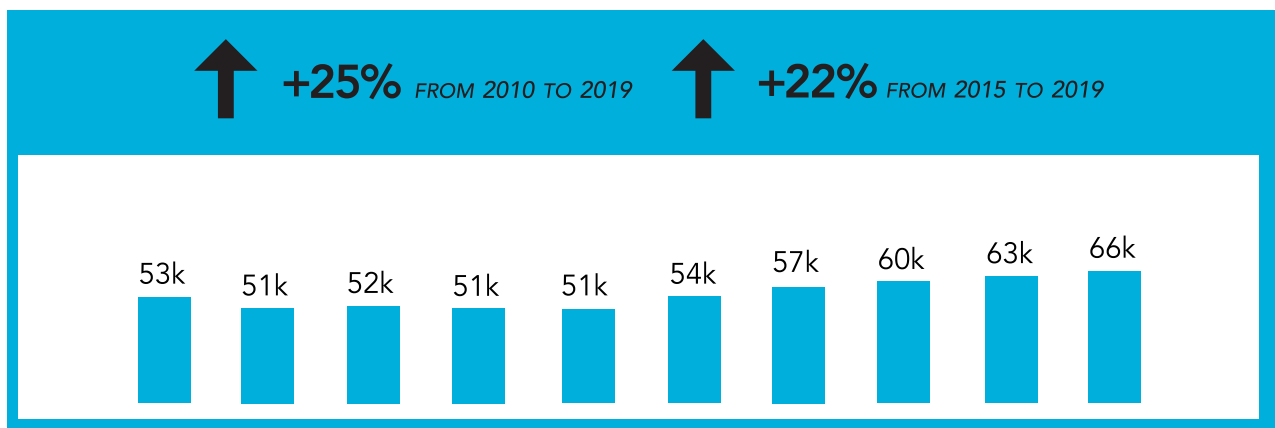


EXHIBIT 10. NUMBER OF CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE WAITING TO BE ADOPTED, 2010–2019

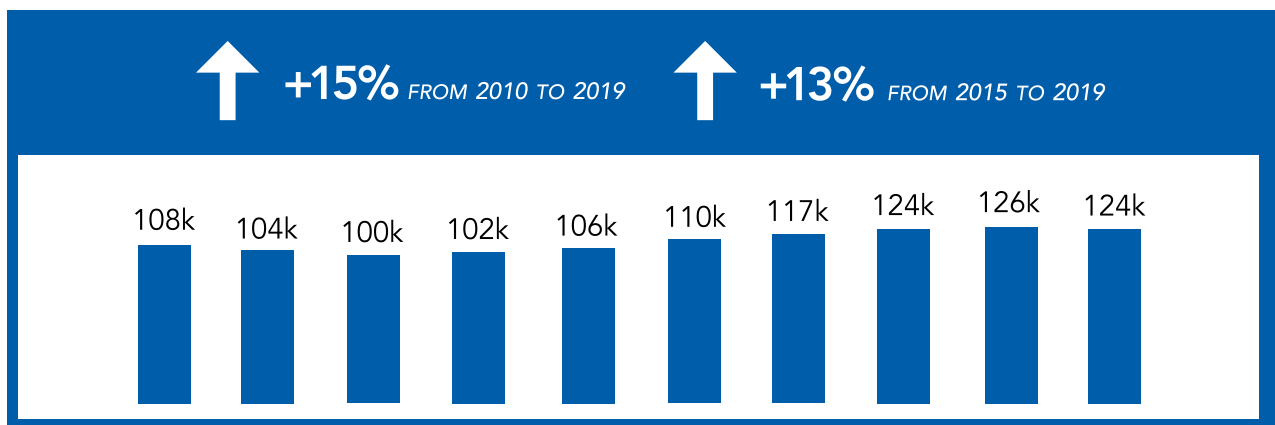


EXHIBIT 11. NUMBER OF CHILDREN WHO ENTERED FOSTER CARE, 2010–2019

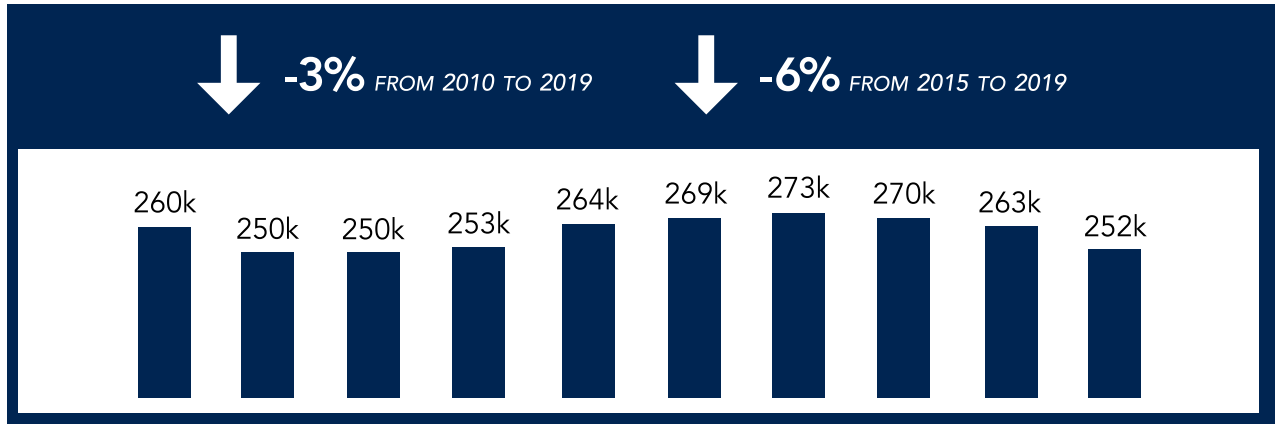
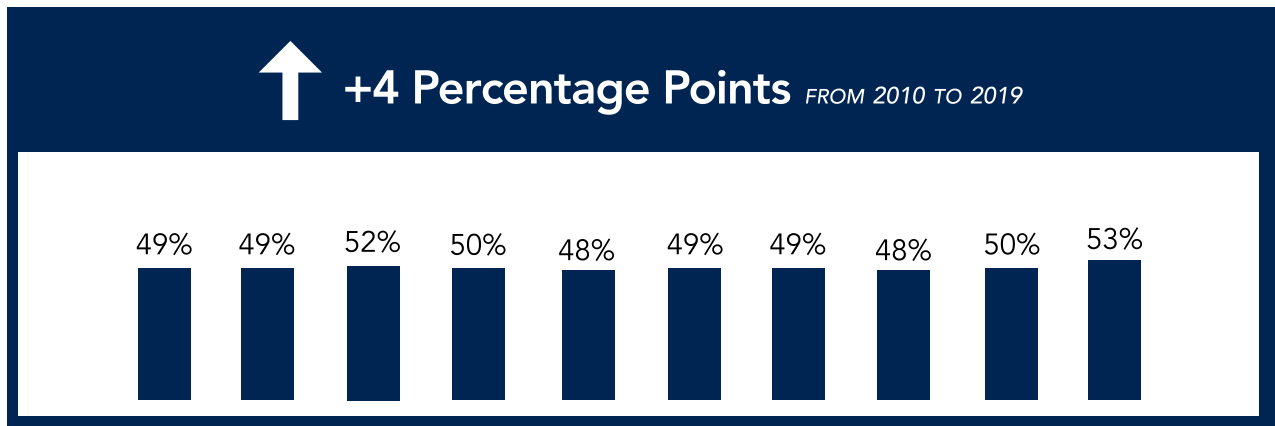


EXHIBIT 12. PERCENTAGE OF CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE WAITING TO BE ADOPTED, 2010–2019



State- and local-level policies and practices may be the primary driver of these changes, with modifications in rules or practices regarding termination of parental rights, court hearings, or other adoption-related practices potentially being contributing factors.

The decrease in intercountry adoption is another conceivable reason for the increase in public agency adoptions. With fewer incoming adoptions to the United States, families who may have sought intercountry adoptions may have instead turned to domestic adoptions through public agencies. Additionally, the increased number of children entering foster care with a removal reason of parental substance use could be a contributing factor. The percentage of children with parental drug or alcohol use as a reason for removal has grown steadily from 2010 to 2019 (from 28.5 to 38.9 percent), with approximately 60 percent of those children in 2019 being age 5 or younger (National Center on Substance Abuse and Child Welfare, n.d.). Although the research is not conclusive, at least one study found that children removed from the home due to substance use are more likely to achieve permanency through adoption than reunification (Akin et al., 2015), particularly for younger children (Boyd, 2019; Lloyd et al., 2017).

Assisted reproductive technology (ART) also could play a role in the number of adoptions that occur in the United States. Since its first use in the United States in the 1980s, the use of ART and the availability of fertility clinics has steadily increased in this country (Sunderam et al., 2020). From 2010 to 2019, the number of infants born who were conceived using ART rose 36 percent, from 61,556 to 83,946 (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021). Although infertility is not the sole reason families may adopt, the availability of ART may allow more individuals to have biological children, thereby possibly decreasing the number of families seeking to adopt (Potter & Font, 2021).

CONCLUSION

Although the overarching goal of child welfare should be to keep children with their families or reunify them after removal once it is safe to do so, adoption—both public and private—can provide permanent families for children for whom those options are not possible. This report provides the most reasonable known estimates of the total number of adoptions in the United States, and these data can provide agencies, policymakers, and others with information that can be used to assess and develop adoption policy and practice.

From 2010 to 2019, the total number of adoptions increased by 5 percent. This includes considerable changes in public adoptions—a 24-percent increase—and intercountry adoptions—a 73-percent decrease. It is difficult to attribute changes in national or State data to any one specific policy, practice, or other factor. The changes are likely caused by numerous national, State, and local—and even international—factors, perhaps including economic conditions, cultural shifts, or changes in adoption policy or practice. Even without knowing the exact causes of the trends presented in this report, the data provide policymakers, adoption professionals, and others with valuable information that can be used to inform policy and practice and better assist families.

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U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Administration for Children and Families
Administration on Children, Youth and Families
Children’s Bureau



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APPENDIX A DATA SOURCES

The following information provides additional details about the data sources for this brief:

- **Public agency adoption data** were obtained from the [“AFCARS State Data Tables 2010 Through 2019”](#) spreadsheet on the Children’s Bureau website. Those data were current as of June 23, 2020.
- **Intercountry adoption data** were obtained from the [annual reports](#) issued by the Office of Children’s Issues within the Bureau of Consular Affairs of the U.S. Department of State. The intercountry adoption totals in this report may not match the total number of intercountry adoptions listed in the annual reports because the annual report totals include Guam, the Virgin Islands, and overseas Americans, which are not included in the Child Welfare Information Gateway report.
- **Adult population data** used to calculate adoption rates per 100,000 adults in the population were obtained from 1-year estimates from the [American Community Survey](#) of the U.S. Census Bureau. For 2017 to 2019, the data were taken directly from the tables provided on the Census Bureau website. For 2016 and prior, the tables only provided the percentage of the State population that was 18 years and older rather than the number. To calculate the number of people 18 years and older, that percentage was multiplied by the total State population provided in the same table.
- **Total domestic adoption data** (or total adoption data for States that do not give full effect and recognition to adoptions finalized abroad) were obtained from State courts (either through the court website, communications with State staff, or through communications with the National Center for State Courts [NCSC]) unless otherwise noted in the following table, which includes State-specific details on whether those data are based on dispositions, filings, a mix of both filings and dispositions, or birth certificate amendments; the data source (courts, department of social services [DSS], bureau of vital records); and additional notes.

State	Data source and notes
Alabama	The Alabama Department of Human Resources (DHR) provided the total adoption data. The total provided by DHR included two sets of data: (1) disposition data for adoptions from foster care through DHR and (2) filings data for non-foster care adoptions, which was provided to DHR by the State courts.
Alaska	Filings data for total domestic adoptions were obtained from the annual reports on the website of the Administrative Office of the Alaska Court System.
Arizona	<p>Dispositions data for total adoptions were obtained from the annual reports on the Arizona Judicial Branch website.</p> <p>Based on conversations with staff from the Arizona Administrative Office of the Courts, the total adoption data are likely a significant undercount due the State court data being a count of petitions and not children. It is likely that many petitions involved multiple children, but it is not known how many petitions include multiple children or how many children are in those petitions. Therefore, Arizona adoptions are not included in any percentage-based data regarding national or State-level public, intercountry, or other adoption data since the Arizona rates would not be accurate and would affect the national percentages. The number of adoptions in Arizona, however, are included in counts for total, public, and intercountry adoptions since, although it is an undercount, it is the best available data and allows for a more complete view of the number of adoptions than would be possible excluding it. Additionally, the Arizona data are used in calculations for the rates of public and intercountry adoptions but not for total or other adoptions. Arizona data are not used in counts for other adoptions because that calculation yields a negative number of adoptions for many of the years being analyzed.</p>
Arkansas	Dispositions data for total domestic adoptions were provided by the Office of Research and Justice Statistics of the Arkansas Administrative Office of the Courts.
California	Filings data for total domestic adoptions were provided by the California Department of Social Services, Research and Data Insights Branch, Data Analytics Bureau.
Colorado	Filings data for total adoptions were obtained from the annual statistical reports on the website for the Office of the State Court Administrator for the Colorado Judicial Branch.
Connecticut	Adoptions in Connecticut are processed in both the superior and probate courts. Data on total adoptions were provided by the Connecticut Superior Court (dispositions) and the Office of the Probate Court Administrator (filings).
Delaware	Data on total domestic adoptions—dispositions for 2010–2014 and 2016–2019 and filings for 2015—were obtained from the annual reports on the Delaware Administrative Office of the Courts website. Only filings data were available for 2015.
District of Columbia	Dispositions data for total domestic adoptions were obtained from the annual reports on the District of Columbia Courts website.

State	Data source and notes
Florida	Dispositions data for total domestic adoptions for 2011–2019 were obtained from the statistical reference guides on the Florida Courts website. The 2010 guide did not have adoption data. Filings data for total domestic adoptions for 2010 were provided by the Florida Office of the State Courts Administrator.
Georgia	Dispositions data for total domestic adoptions were provided by the Georgia Division of Family & Children Services.
Hawaii	Data for total domestic adoptions were obtained from the statistical supplements on the Hawai'i State Judiciary website. Data for 2010–2016 are for filings, and data for 2017–2019 are for dispositions.
Idaho	Filings data for total domestic adoptions were obtained from the dashboard on the State of Idaho Judicial Branch website. To view adoptions data, select "Civil Cases," and select both "Adoption" and "Adoption and Termination of Parental Rights" under "Case Type."
Illinois	Dispositions data for total domestic adoptions were obtained from the statistical summaries on the Illinois Courts website.
Indiana	Dispositions data for total domestic adoptions were obtained from the Indiana Trial Court Statistics by County page of the Indiana Courts website.
Iowa	Filings data for total domestic adoptions were provided by the Iowa Judicial Branch.
Kansas	Filings data for total domestic adoptions were obtained from the annual reports on the Kansas Judicial Branch website.
Kentucky	Dispositions data for total domestic adoptions were provided by the Cabinet for Health and Family Services, Department for Community Based Services, Division of Protection and Permanency.
Louisiana	Dispositions data for total adoptions were provided by the Louisiana Department of Children and Family Services Public Records Center.
Maine	Birth certificate amendment data were provided by the Department of Health and Human Services, Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention, Public Health Systems, Vital Records.
Maryland	Dispositions data for total domestic adoptions were obtained from the annual reports on the Maryland Courts website. Adoption data are found in table CC-1.2 in the rows for Total Civil-Family: Adoption/Guardianship and Total Juvenile: Adoption.
Massachusetts	Adoptions in Massachusetts are processed in both the juvenile courts and the probate and family courts. Filings data for total domestic adoptions for the juvenile courts were obtained from the trial court statistical reports on the Mass. gov website. Filings data for total domestic adoptions for 2013–2019 processed in the probate and family courts were provided for this report by the Massachusetts Executive Office of the Trial Court, but data for 2010–2012 were not available. This report uses probate and family court filings data for 2010–2012 that were provided by the Administrative Office of the Probate and Family Court for the previous version of this report.

State	Data source and notes
Michigan	Dispositions data for total domestic adoptions were obtained from the statistical supplements on the Michigan Courts webpage.
Minnesota	Filings data for total adoptions were provided by the State Court Administrator's Office of the Minnesota Judicial Branch.
Mississippi	Filings data for total adoptions were provided by the Administrative Office of Courts of the State of Mississippi Judiciary.
Missouri	Filings data for total domestic adoptions were obtained from the supplements to the annual statistical reports on the Missouri Courts website. See table 41 (Juvenile Cases Filed by Case Type) for adoption data.
Montana	Filings data for total adoptions were obtained from the case filings and dispositions reports on the Montana Judicial Branch website. (See the District Court Statistics tab.)
Nebraska	Filings data for total adoptions were obtained from the county court annual caseload reports on the State of Nebraska Judicial Branch website.
Nevada	Dispositions data for total adoptions for 2011–2019 and filings data for 2010 were obtained from the annual report appendices available on the Nevada Judiciary website.
New Hampshire	Dispositions data for 2013–2019 and filings data for 2010–2012 were provided by the Administrative Office of the Courts of the New Hampshire Judicial Branch.
New Jersey	Dispositions for total adoptions were obtained from the court management statistics reports on the New Jersey Administrative Office of the Courts website.
New Mexico	Filings data for total domestic adoptions were obtained from the statistical addendums of the annual reports on the New Mexico Courts website. Some reports have two rows for adoptions. To calculate the total domestic adoptions for 2010–2012 and 2014, combine data from both "Juvenile Adoption" rows. For 2013, combine data from the "Adoption" and "Juvenile Adoption" rows. The reports for 2015–2019 only have one row titled "Juvenile Adoption." The reports also have disposition data, but staff from the New Mexico Office of the Administrative Courts suggested using the filings data for the purposes of this report.
New York	Dispositions data for total adoptions were obtained from the annual reports of the New York State Unified Court System. The annual reports for 2012–2019 were obtained from its website, and the reports for 2010 and 2011 were provided by the court system's Office of Court Administration. To calculate the total adoptions for a particular year, include adoptions from both the surrogate court and the family and supreme court but do not include adoption certifications from the latter court.
North Carolina	Filings data for total adoptions were obtained from the reports for civil issue filings/orders on the North Carolina Judicial Branch website. This report uses the "total cases filed" data under the statewide ADOP (adoption) issue code.

State	Data source and notes
North Dakota	Dispositions data for total adoptions were provided by the Children and Family Services Division of the North Dakota Department of Human Services.
Ohio	Dispositions data for total domestic adoptions were provided by the Supreme Court of Ohio.
Oklahoma	Filings data for total domestic adoptions were obtained from the annual reports for the Supreme Court of Oklahoma. The reports for 2011–2016 and 2019 were obtained from the Oklahoma State Courts Network website. The report for 2010 was provided by the Administrative Office of the Courts of the Supreme Court of Oklahoma. Data for 2017 and 2018 were not available in the reports. Estimates were calculated using linear interpolation.
Oregon	Filings data for total domestic adoptions were provided by the Oregon Judicial Department, Office of the State Court Administrator, Office of General Counsel.
Pennsylvania	Dispositions data for total adoptions were obtained from the caseload statistics reports on the Unified Judicial System of Pennsylvania website. The total adoptions are calculated by adding together the uncontested-granted and judge-granted adoption totals from the orphan's court.
Puerto Rico	Disposition data for total adoptions for 2010–2017 are from the annual reports available on the Poder Judicial de Puerto Rico website. Disposition data for 2018 were obtained from an annual report provided by the Poder Judicial de Puerto Rico, Oficina de Administración de los Tribunales, Oficina de Estadísticas. Filings data for 2019 were provided by the Oficina de Estadísticas. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has requested that Puerto Rico resubmit its AFCARS data; therefore, data for Puerto Rico are excluded from any counts of public adoptions, any percentages for national or State-level public or other adoptions, and counts of other adoptions, which rely on the number of public adoptions to be calculated. Data for Puerto Rico are included in intercountry adoption percentages as well as in counts and rates for total and intercountry adoptions. ^a
Rhode Island	Filings data for total domestic adoptions were provided by the Administrative Office of State Courts of the Rhode Island Judiciary.
South Carolina	Dispositions data for total adoptions were provided by the South Carolina Judicial Branch Court Administration.
South Dakota	Dispositions data for total domestic adoptions were provided by the South Dakota Unified Judicial System.
Tennessee	Dispositions data for total adoptions were obtained from the annual statistical reports on the Tennessee State Courts website. To calculate the State total, add the data from the chancery, probate, and circuit courts.

State	Data source and notes
Texas	<p>Dispositions data for total domestic adoptions for 2011–2019 were obtained from Texas Judicial Branch annual reports. The annual reports for 2011–2014 and 2016–2019 were obtained from the Texas Judicial Branch website. The annual report for 2015 was provided by the Texas Office of Court Administration.</p> <p>The Office of Court Administration was not able to provide any data for 2010. The Texas data from the prior version of this report was from the Vital Statistics Unit of the Department of State Health Services and was based on court filings. Those data were not used in this report for 2010, however, because the prior numbers of adoption for 2011 and 2012 were considerably higher than the numbers provided for this version. Therefore, the first verified value in the time series (7,993 in 2011) was used as a proxy for 2010.</p>
Utah	Dispositions data for total domestic adoptions were obtained from the district court caseload reports on the Utah Courts website.
Vermont	Filings data for total domestic adoptions for 2014–2019 were provided by the Supreme Court of Vermont. Filings data for 2010–2013 were provided by NCSC.
Virginia	Dispositions data for total adoptions were provided by the Office of Research and Planning of the Virginia Department of Social Services.
Washington	Dispositions data for total adoptions were obtained from the superior court annual reports available on the Washington Courts website.
West Virginia	Filings data for total domestic adoptions were obtained from the annual reports on the West Virginia Judiciary website.
Wisconsin	Dispositions data for total adoptions were obtained from the caseload summary reports on the Wisconsin Court System website.
Wyoming	Filings data for total adoptions for 2010–2013 and 2015–2019 were obtained from the statistical reports on the Wyoming Judicial Branch website. Data for 2014 were unavailable and were calculated using linear interpolation.

^a When data for Arizona or Puerto Rico needed to be excluded from calculations of certain percentages, their data were excluded from both the numerator and denominator. For example, although national counts of public agency adoptions include counts of public agency adoptions for Arizona, calculations of the national percentage of public agency adoptions exclude Arizona counts from both the numerator (national public agency adoptions) and denominator (national total adoptions).

**APPENDIX B
GLOSSARY OF ADOPTION TYPES**

Adoption Type	Definition	Possible Data Sources				
		State Courts	State Depts. of Social Services	State Bureaus of Vital Records	AFCARS	U.S. Department of State
Public agency	An adoption with public agency involvement, either directly through a public agency or through a private agency that is contracted by a public agency. The public agency usually has legal and physical custody of the child.	x	x	x	x	
Private agency	An adoption through a private agency that facilitates the adoption of the child after the birth parents relinquish their parental rights to the agency	x	x	x		x
Intercountry	An adoption of a child who is a citizen of one country by parents who are citizens of a different country	x	x	x		x
Tribal/ Customary	An adoption in an American Indian community that does not always require the termination of the birth parents' parental rights	x	x	x	x	
Nonagency	There are three general types of nonagency adoptions:					
	Facilitated: An adoption for which a facilitator links prospective adoptive parents with expectant birth mothers for a fee	x	x	x		

		Possible Data Sources				
Adoption Type	Definition	State Courts	State Depts. of Social Services	State Bureaus of Vital Records	AFCARS	U.S. Department of State
	Independent: An adoption for which an attorney or other person assists the prospective parents with the adoption process. The birth parents relinquish parental rights directly to the adoptive parents rather than an agency.	x	x	x		
	Stepparent: An adoption of a spouse's child by the stepparent	x	x	x		

Notes:

- The definitions in this glossary may not equate to definitions used by every jurisdiction.
- Relative or kinship adoptions may be included in any of the above adoption types.
- Although State courts, departments of social services, or bureaus of vital records may have data that include multiple types of adoptions, they may not be able to provide data broken out by each type of adoption. For example, a bureau of vital records may be able to provide a number for the total number of adoptions in the State, but it may not be able to provide data for the numbers of public, intercountry, or other adoptions that compose that total.