



## Adoptions Australia data visualisations 2018-19

Web report | Last updated: 13 Dec 2019 | Topic: [Adoptions](#) | [Media release](#) |


### Citation

AIHW

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## About

The Adoptions data visualisations allow you to explore data on adoptions through customisable charts and tables. The displays are updated annually and contain data back to 1998-99. Data in the displays are based on the National Adoptions Dataset Specifications.

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## Overview of adoptions

Adoption is a legal process involving the transfer of the rights and responsibilities for the permanent care of a child from the child's parent(s) to their adoptive parent(s). When an adoption order is granted, the legal relationship between the child and their parent(s) is severed. Any legal rights that existed from birth regarding the parent(s), such as inheritance, are removed. In relation to the adoptive parents, the legal rights of the adopted child become the same as they would be if the child had been born to the adoptive parent(s). A new birth certificate may be issued for the child recording the name(s) of the adoptive parent(s) as the legal parent(s) and, if given, the new name of the child.

### Adoptions processes

There are three types of adoption in Australia:

1. Known child adoption, which includes step-parent, carer and relative adoptions;
2. Local adoption, and
3. Intercountry adoption

The process of adopting a child through each of these adoptions vary between each other and under each state and territory adoption agency.

### What is affecting adoptions in Australia?

A range of factors contribute to changes in the number of children adopted in Australia. These factors vary based on the type of adoption.

Factors affecting the number of adoptions of Australian children (local and known child) include, but are not limited to:

- declining fertility rates;
- the wider availability of effective birth control;
- increased support for single parents; and
- the emergence of family planning centres.

Legislation introduced by state and territory departments supporting the use of alternative legal orders, such as third party parental orders that transfer permanent guardianship and custody of a child to a relative or carer other than the child's parents, can also replace the need for adoption.

Factors contributing to the decline in intercountry adoptions include economic and social changes that enable children to remain with their birth family or be adopted in their country of origin. This results in fewer children needing intercountry adoption, leading to countries of origin working to reduce or manage the number of adoption applications they receive; for example, by introducing more stringent eligibility requirements, or quotas.

### Has the age of adoptees changed over time?

The age of an adopted child can be influenced by circumstances related to the type of adoption. In known child adoptions, the age at which an adoption occurs can be affected by legislative requirements. For example, carers seeking to adopt a child need to have known the child for a certain length of time prior to an adoption being considered. In the case of step-parent adoptions, additional time is involved in forming step-families.

The age of children for whom intercountry adoption is considered appropriate can be affected by characteristics of the child and characteristics of the adoption process. This includes time taken to determine if intercountry adoption is in the best interests of the child, which may include initially seeking a suitable adoptive family in the child's country of origin.

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See the [source data tables](#) for further information and footnotes about this data.

### Explanatory notes

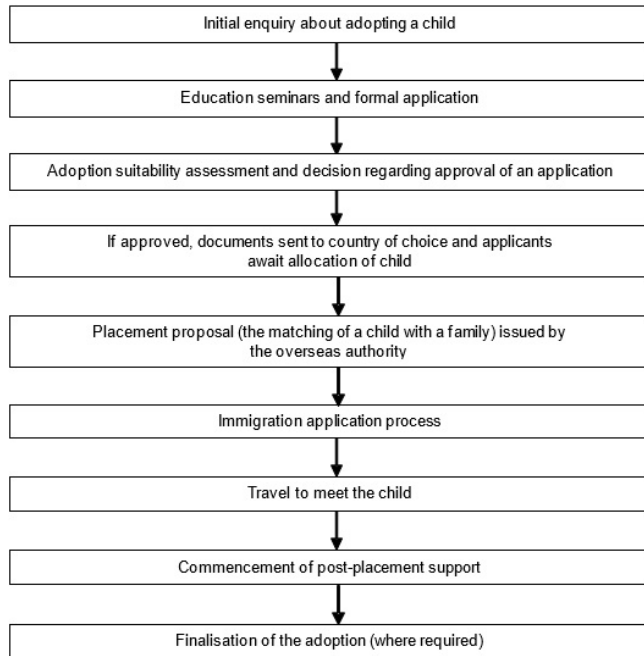
Age is calculated from date of birth, in completed years. For known child adoptions, this is the age when the adoption order for the child was granted. For local and intercountry adoptions, it is the age at which the child was placed with the adoptive family.

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## Intercountry adoption in Australia

Intercountry adoption refers to the adoption of children from countries other than Australia through one of Australia's official adoption programs. These children are legally able to be placed for adoption, but generally have had no previous contact or relationship with their adoptive parent(s). The diagram below presents a simplified overview of the intercountry adoptions process in Australia.

**Figure 1: Overview of the intercountry adoption process in Australia**



*Note:* Intercountry adoptions may be finalised in various ways, depending on the type of adoption. Processes might vary between jurisdictions.

Changes in overseas domestic adoption practices, and social factors such as the degree of acceptance of single motherhood or falling fertility rates in countries of origin, can affect the number and characteristics of children for whom intercountry adoption is considered appropriate. As traditional countries of origin improve in areas of economic and social development, options for domestic care also improve, and fewer children need intercountry adoption. This can result in more stringent eligibility criteria or further program restrictions for adopting young children, and an increasing proportion of those in need of intercountry adoption being children with complex backgrounds, health issues or impairments.

Directly influenced by the countries with which Australia has an adoption program, the majority of intercountry adoptions in Australia have consistently been from Asian countries of origin. Variations in the intercountry programs, including restrictions on these programs by either Australian authorities or authorities in the country of origin, contribute to changes in intercountry adoption trends.

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### Adoptions in Hague countries

Australia has been a party to the *Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption* (the Hague Convention) since December 1998. The Hague Convention establishes:

- Uniform standards and procedures between countries, including legally binding standards and safeguards;
- A system of supervision to ensure set standards and procedures are observed;
- Channels of communication between authorities in countries of origin and countries of destination for children being adopted; and,
- Principles that focus on the need for intercountry adoptions to occur only where it is in the best interest of the child with respect to their fundamental rights, and to prevent abduction, sale, or traffic of children.

Not all of the countries with which Australia has an adoption program are parties to the Hague Convention. However, programs are established only where Australia can be satisfied that the principles of the Hague Convention are being met, regardless of whether the country is a signatory. In this context, bilateral arrangements exist with South Korea and Taiwan, which have not currently ratified the Hague Convention.

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### Processing times

Several factors outside of the control of Australian authorities can affect processing times, including the number and characteristics of children in need of intercountry adoption, the number of applications received, and the resources of the overseas authority. For example, Australia's partner countries generally have more applications from prospective adoptive parents willing to parent healthy younger children and infants than there are such children in need of adoption.

In contrast, a growing proportion of children in need of intercountry adoption are considered to have special needs and more complex care requirements. Targeted programs in countries of origin can assist with matching eligible prospective adoptive parents with these children and potentially reduce processing times.

It is also possible that some Australian applicants have their application in a country for a number of years with no outcome, and may change their application to an adoption program in another country of origin before they are successfully matched with a child

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### Adoption of children with special needs

Special needs in the Australian adoptions context is defined as the level of resources or support services required by the adoptee and/or their adoptive family to foster healthy development and wellbeing, and to support positive family functioning and prevent adoption disruption. Special needs is examined through a continuum of level of need that is broken down into the following categories: no additional care needs, minor additional care needs, and moderate to substantial additional care needs. Children with special needs represent a growing proportion of children for whom intercountry adoptions is deemed appropriate and the adoption process can be more difficult due to the need to find families who can care for the child's specific needs.

Data on children with special needs are available for the first time in the *Adoptions Australia* report series using information on intercountry adoptees who were placed with their adoptive families in 2017-18. These data exclude Western Australia and the Australian Capital Territory for which data were not available.

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See the [source data tables](#) for further information and footnotes about these data.

### Explanatory notes

Age is calculated from date of birth, in completed years. For intercountry adoptions, it is the age at which the child was placed with the adoptive family.

Only countries of origin with which Australia had an active adoption program since 2011-12 are presented. As at June 2019, Australia had an active intercountry adoption program with 13 countries: Bulgaria, Chile, China, Colombia, Hong Kong, Latvia, Philippines, Poland, South Africa, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Taiwan and Thailand.

Since 1998, adoptions where the Hague Convention had not entered into force in the adoptive child's country of origin before the file of the prospective parent(s) was sent were referred to as 'non-Hague' adoptions for national reporting purposes. Commencing 2017-18, the term 'bilateral' is used to refer to such adoptions.

The median length of time calculated for intercountry adoption processing times is reported in whole months. It is not suitable to calculate the median length of time for countries of origin with less than 4 placements.

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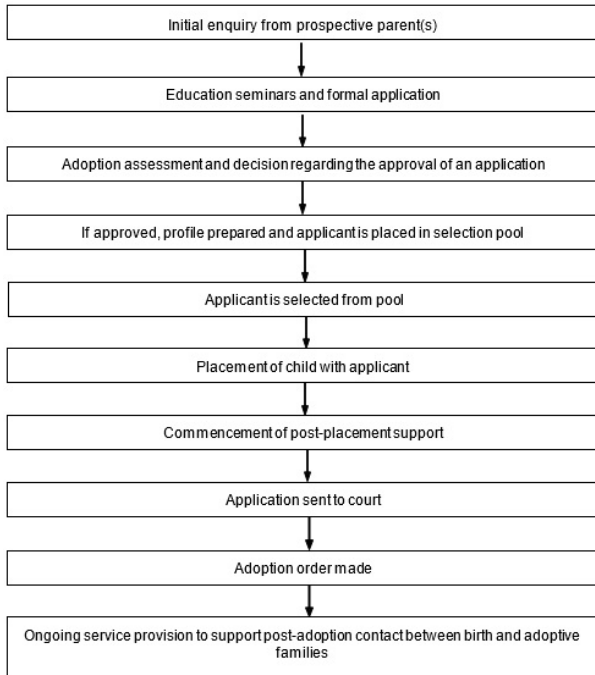
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## Local adoption in Australia

Local adoption refers to the adoption of children born or permanently residing in Australia before the adoption who are legally able to be placed for adoption, but generally have had no previous contact or relationship with the adoptive parent(s).

The diagram below presents a simplified overview of the local adoptions process in Australia.

**Figure 2: Overview of the local adoption process in Australia**



Note: The number and order of the steps may vary between jurisdictions.

A complex interplay of social, economic and legislative factors influence the number of children in need of adopting and the characteristics of families seeking to adopt. These include:

- increased acceptance and financial support for unwed mothers,
- a reduction in the stigma around illegitimacy,
- the end of forced adoption practices in Australia,
- the increasing labour force participation of women,
- improved contraception and legalised abortion, and
- the postponing of having children and reproductive innovations.

In general, children adopted through local adoption tend to be younger than those adopted through intercountry or known child adoptions.

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Since the 1980s, Australian adoption laws that govern the way information about an adoption can be accessed have undergone substantial changes. The secrecy that surrounded past adoption practices in Australia has largely given way to a system predominantly focused on the needs of the child and characterised by the open exchange of information. Access to the adopted child by parties to an adoption (referred to as an 'open' adoption) is facilitated in all states and territories, although the degree to which this occurs varies across the jurisdictions.

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### Birth mothers and access to information

In general, compared to all Australian mothers giving birth in a given year, mothers of children who are adopted tend to be younger and unmarried when the child was born. The marital status of these mothers is likely to be influenced by age, and patterns of decreasing registered marriages and increasing de facto relationships in the general population.

Consent from both parents is generally required for an adoption order to be granted. However, a court may declare that the consent of a parent is not required. Grounds for dispensation applications are under individual state and territory legislation. In some jurisdictions, where the father's identity is unknown, his consent is not required and so it is not necessary to dispense with his consent.

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See the [source data tables](#) for further information and footnotes about these data.

## Explanatory notes


Age is calculated from date of birth, in completed years. For local adoptions, it is the age at which the child was placed with the adoptive family.

The mother's age is her age in completed years at the date of birth of the child.

Where the data indicate 'Mother only' or 'Father only', the other parent's consent was either dispensed with or not required. Where the data indicate 'dispensations', both parents' consent was either dispensed with or not required.

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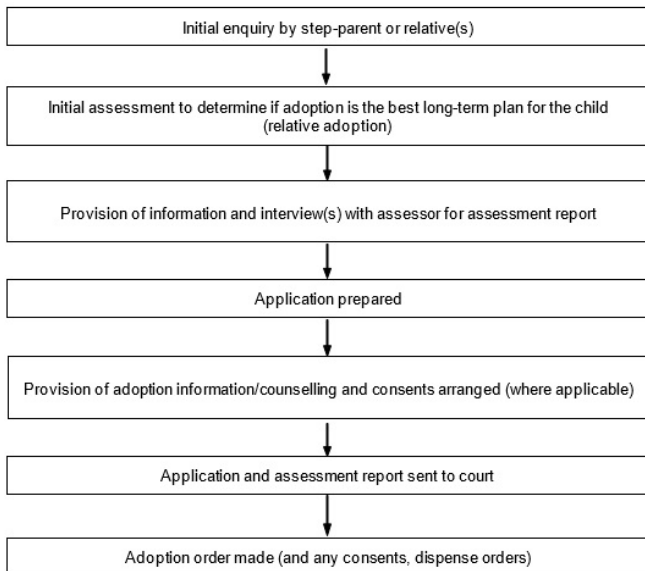
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## Known child adoption in Australia

Known child adoption refers to the adoption of children who were born or permanently residing in Australia before the adoption, who have a pre-existing relationship with the adoptive parent(s) and who are generally not able to be adopted by anyone other than the adoptive parent(s). Known child adoptions include adoptions by step-parents, other relatives, and carers.

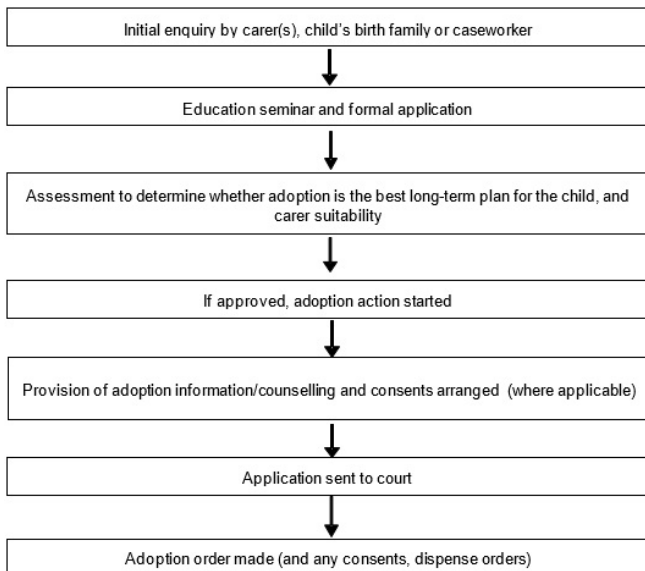
The diagram below presents a simplified overview of the known child adoption process for step-parent and relative adoptions (Figure 3) and carer adoptions (Figure 4).

**Figure 3: Overview of step-parent/relative (known child) adoptions in Australia**



Note: The number and order of the steps may vary between jurisdictions.

**Figure 4: Overview of carer (known child) adoptions in Australia**



Note: The number and order of the steps may vary between jurisdictions.

Known child adoptions are administered and/or recorded by the department responsible for adoption in each state and territory. The aim of this type of adoption is to provide the child with a clear legal position, status, and stability within the family arrangement. In some circumstances, the adoption may be finalised after the adoptee is legally considered an adult. The majority of known child adoptions are by step-parents adopting their partner's children, or by long-term carers, such as foster parents, of children placed in their care.

Adoptions by relatives other than step-parents are less common, as states and territories have policies that promote the use of parental responsibility orders (e.g. permanent care and guardianship/custody orders) rather than adoption when a child is to be permanently cared for by another relative. Known child adoptions by people who are not carers or relatives, such as by commissioning (surrogate) parents, are uncommon in Australia.



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## Age of known child adoptees

The older age of children in known child adoptions is affected by minimum age requirements for some types of known child adoptions and, in many jurisdictions, the length of time the intended adoptive parent(s) needed to have had a relationship with the child before an adoption was possible. Children adopted by step-parents are generally older than those adopted under other types of adoption, including other categories of known child adoption, in part, due to the additional time involved in forming step-families.

Visualisation not available for printing

See the [source data tables](#) for further information and footnotes about these data.


## Explanatory notes

Age is calculated from date of birth, in completed years. For known child adoptions, this is the age when the adoption order for the child was granted.

‘Other known’ was introduced as a reporting category in 2000-01, but not consistently used as a reporting category until 2007-08. In addition to adoptions from commissioning parents, adoptions recorded as ‘other known’ prior to 2007-08 may include adoptions where the relationship with the adoptive parent was unknown.

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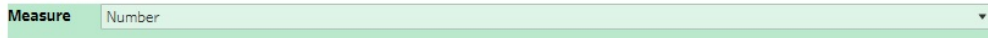
## Data visualisations help

The *Adoptions data visualisations* are designed to allow you to explore data to find out more about adoption in Australia. This page will help you get the most of the displays.

### Exploring displays

#### Switching between number and proportion

Where available, a dropdown menu above each chart can be used to switch between displaying numbers and proportions. Generally, number will be selected by default when you open a display page.



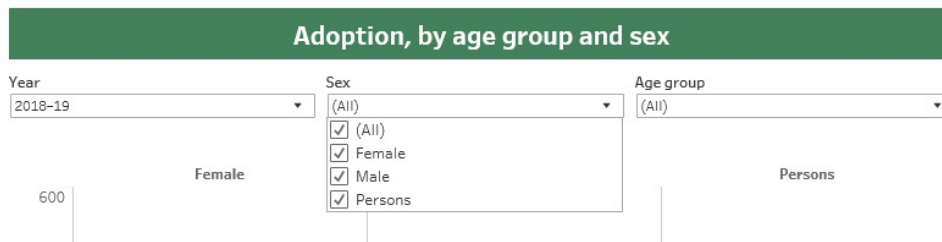
Measure Number

#### Reading data points

Clicking or hovering over a bar in a bar chart, or a point on a trend line, will display additional information. This includes the value represented by the bar/point.

#### Customising displays

Use the filters and dropdown menus on a display to select and deselect variables. These are located across the top of each display. Charts will automatically update to reflect the chosen variables.




**Adoption, by age group and sex**

Year: 2018-19 | Sex: (All) | Age group: (All)

600 | Female | Persons

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## Notes


### Data quality statement

[Adoptions Australia 2018-19 data quality statement.](#)

Data on the displays are based on the [National Adoptions Dataset Specifications.](#)

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## Related material

### Latest related reports

- [Adoptions Australia 2018-19](#) | 13 Dec 2019
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## Data

[Source data tables: Adoptions Australia dynamic display tables](#)

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[Data tables: Adoptions Australia data visualisations](#)

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