Adoptions Australia 2020–21; Quality Statement

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Identifying and definitional attributes

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Data quality

Data quality statement summary:

- The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) Adoptions Australia collection contains data on adopted children, their adoptive families and parents, as well as information on the number of contact/information requests and vetoes lodged by parties to an adoption. Data are collected on intercountry, local and known child adoptions. Additional data are also collected on the length of time of different intercountry adoption processes and the number of visa applications approved for children adopted through expatriate adoption processes.
- The small population of the report creates some issues for reporting data. Proportional changes from one reporting period to the next, and rates based on small numbers must be interpreted with caution. Exploring trends over long periods (for example, 10 and 25 years) provides more robust results. The small population also increases the potential for identification of individuals. Further, disaggregation of analyses by Indigenous status is not possible due to the very small number of Indigenous children covered by the collection each year.
- The AIHW compiles the data each year using data extracted from the administrative systems of the state and territory departments responsible for adoptions. Some data are also provided by the Australian Government Department of Home Affairs.
- Overall, the quality and coverage of data in the Adoptions Australia collection are good; however, data are only partially available for 10 of the 31 collection tables with 2 jurisdictions unable to provide data for some tables.

Institutional environment:

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) is an independent corporate Commonwealth entity under the *Australian Institute of Health and Welfare Act* 1987 (AIHW Act), governed by a management Board and accountable to the Australian Parliament through the Health portfolio.

The AIHW is a nationally recognised information management agency. Its purpose is to create authoritative and accessible information and statistics that inform decisions and improve the health and welfare of all Australians.

Compliance with the confidentiality requirements in the AIHW Act, the Privacy Principles in the *Privacy Act* 1988 (Cth) and AIHW's data governance arrangements ensures that the AIHW is well positioned to release information for public benefit while protecting the identity of individuals and organisations.

For further information see the AIHW website www.aihw.gov.au/about-us, which includes details about the AIHW's governance (www.aihw.gov.au/about-us/our-governance) and vision and strategic goals (www.aihw.gov.au/about-us/our-vision-and-strategic-goals).

The data for this collection are collected by state and territory departments responsible for adoptions (Department of Communities and Justice, New South Wales; Department of Justice and Community Safety, Victoria; Department of Children, Youth Justice and Multicultural Affairs, Queensland; Department of Communities, Child Protection and Family Support, Western Australia; Department for Child Protection, South Australia; Department of Communities Tasmania, Tasmania; Community Services Directorate, Australian Capital Territory; Department of Territory Families, Housing and Communities, Northern Territory).

The data are extracted from the administrative systems of the state and territory departments according to definitions and technical specifications to which those departments and the AIHW have agreed.

The collection is part of the child welfare reporting series. Ongoing funding of this series is specified in the Memorandum of Understanding between the AIHW and state and territory departments responsible for children and families services and in the associated 3-year Schedule (2020–21 to 2022–23).

Under the collection agreement, the states and territories own the data contained in the national adoptions collection, and the AIHW acts as a central data custodian. All request to access the data, or undertake development work, require the approval of the data owners.

The Department of Home Affairs provide aggregate visa and citizenship application data to the AIHW. These data help inform an understanding of expatriate adoptions and other intercountry adoption practices.

Timeliness:

The reference period for *Adoptions Australia 2020–21* is from 1 July 2020 to 30 June 2021.

The state and territory departments responsible for adoption provide data to the AIHW annually, following the end of each financial year.

The data for each collection period are released in the AIHW's Adoptions Australia annual publication. In 2020–21, concurrent with the annual publication, key findings were released though a number of online products including interactive data visualisations and factsheets on intercountry, local and known child adoptions. Data from the AIHW Adoptions Australia collection are generally published in December of the final year of the reference period (that is, within 6 months after the end of the reference period). The report is accessible for free through the AIHW website.

Accessibility:

Publications based on the Adoptions Australia collection, including the annual Adoptions Australia reports, are available at www.aihw.gov.au/reports-data/health-welfare-services/adoptions.

Requests for unpublished data can be made by completing a data on request form at www.aihw.gov.au/our-services/data-on-request. Depending on the nature of the request, requests for access to unpublished data might require approval from the state and territory data custodians and/or the AIHW Ethics Committee.

For general enquiries about AIHW publications visit www.aihw.gov.au/contact-us.

Interpretability:

Supporting information on relevant legislation and jurisdictional policies are presented in the Adoptions Australia reports at Appendix A: Legislation. Supporting information is also provided in the footnotes to tables and in the Glossary. The Australian Government Department of Social Services—the Australian Central Authority for intercountry adoption—provides expert advice on current intercountry adoption programs, which is incorporated into the report to inform and contextualise analyses. Appendix C of the report provides an overview of the 3 types of adoption in the report and further contextual information. Readers are advised to consider all supporting and contextual information to ensure appropriate interpretation of analyses presented by the AIHW.

Metadata for the Adoptions Australia collection can be found on METeOR, the AIHW's online metadata repository.

Relevance:

The Adoptions Australia collection is the authoritative source of national adoptions data in Australia. As well as providing information on the most recent reporting period (for the 2020–21 reporting period this refers to data from 1 July 2020 to 30 June 2021), the collection also allows for comparable trend data to be examined. The collection is a valuable source for monitoring the role of adoption as part of Australia's response to issues of child welfare and safety.

Each year, the data collection includes information on intercountry, local and known child adoption placements, and finalised adoption orders. These data relate to adopted children, the adoptive families and, for local adoptions, the birth mothers of children with a finalised adoption order.

The collection also allows data on the number of contact/information requests and vetoes lodged by parties to an existing adoption to be examined. In addition, data from the Australian Government Department of Home Affairs on the number of visa applications approved for children adopted through expatriate adoption processes, and the program status of countries of adoptee citizenship for these adoptions provides complementary information. When combined, these data give a detailed view of adoption in Australia. The collection does not include information on adoptees' (and their adoptive families') access to support. Data on the long-term outcomes of adoption (such as rates of disruption or levels of educational attainment) are also not included.

Scope

A description of adoption and information on the sources of data for the collection are presented in Chapter 1 of the annual Adoptions Australia report. A description of the categories of adoption included in the collection is provided in Section 1.1.

The Adoptions Australia collection contains data relating to 2 populations of adopted children:

- **finalisations**—children whose adoption orders were finalised during the reporting period. This includes orders made in Australia, and, in the case of some intercountry adoptions, where the full adoption order was made in the country of origin
- **placements**—children, regardless of the status of their adoption orders, who were placed with their adoptive families during the reporting period (that is, for local adoptions, when the child is taken into care of the prospective adoptive parent(s), and for intercountry adoption, when the child enters Australia).

Accuracy:

Data for the Adoptions Australia collection are extracted each year from the administrative systems of the Australian state and territory departments responsible for adoption, according to definitions and technical specifications agreed by the departments and the AIHW.

Overall, the quality and coverage of data in the collection are good. In 2020–21, of the 31 data tables in the aggregate collection:

- 12 tables did not contain data for all jurisdictions.
- New South Wales was unable to provide data for 1 table (1 partially incomplete) and Western Australia for 8 tables.
- 4 tables contain data recorded as unknown.

The following issues impact quality and coverage of the data:

- For some types of adoption, such as known child adoptions by step-parents or expatriate adoptions, data are constrained by the limited involvement of the government departments in the adoption process.
- For intercountry adoptees, information about a child's history is constrained by the breadth of information recorded on state and territory databases for administrative purposes, as well as the capacity of the child's country of origin to capture relevant information about them and their families. The extent to which partner countries record information about a child varies between countries, and is influenced by economic and social factors. The amount of information available is generally inconsistent and of poor quality, making it unsuitable for reporting.
- For intercountry adoption, national data on the number of applicants who became official clients of a state or territory department responsible for adoption in a given year have been reportable since 2011–12. While useful, the data only reflect new applicants in a given year, and so cannot currently be used to determine the total pool of prospective adoptive parents who have become official clients and are still awaiting the allocation of a child.

Coherence:

The Adoptions Australia collection was initially developed in 1993. The annual Adoptions Australia report series started when the AIHW took over the national adoptions data collection in 1993. The first 3 editions were published in 1993 and 1994 (as data were collected back to 1990–91), and from 1995 an edition has been released annually. Before this, national adoptions data were collected and reported (briefly) by 2 other organisations: the National Working Party on Welfare Statistics (Australia) (from 1987–88 to 1989–90) and the Australian Bureau of Statistics (from 1979–80 to 1984–85). No national data were collected in 1985–86 and 1986–87, resulting in a break in trend data for these years.

From 1998–99 onwards, the categories of adoption used in Adoptions Australia reports differ from those in previous publications. The categories were changed to better reflect the types of adoptions, and to bring the terminology more in line with that used by state and territory departments responsible for adoption. However, the new categories of adoption introduced in 1998–99 can still be mapped to those reported before this period, avoiding a break in trend data. See *Adoptions Australia 2008–09* for further details.

Tables that have been consistently collected from 1990–91 onwards are comparable. In addition, data standards were carried over from the Australian Bureau of Statistics Adoptions Standards (March 1982), allowing comparable data from the years before the AIHW collection to be incorporated into trend reporting. The report series uses the long history of data collection to analyse trends over a 25-year period to capture the effect of changes to local and international societal views and policies.

In 2003–04, additional tables on the intercountry adoption process were included in the Adoptions Australia collection template. Before 2011–12, these data were not published as part of the Adoptions Australia report. In 2011–12, by agreement with the state and territory data custodians, these data were incorporated into the Adoptions Australia report (including trend data back to 2007–08). Due to restrictions on the release of Subclass 102 visa data to the AIHW by the Australian Government Department of Home Affairs, introduced by the *Australian Border Force Act 2015*, visa data in 2014–15 and 2015–16 were heavily suppressed. New collection tables and national technical specifications were introduced in 2016–17 to allow alternative reporting of these data.

From 2000 to 2007, the AIHW also provided the Australian Government Attorney General's Department with a detailed report on finalised intercountry adoptions from Hague countries as part of Australia's reporting responsibilities under the Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption. In 2008–09, tables with continuing relevance were incorporated into the main Adoptions Australia report series, and the separate report was ceased.

In 2016–17, a number of existing collection tables had their scope expanded to include adoptions by known carers, such as foster parents. These data were reported for the first time in *Adoptions Australia 2017–18*. This additional information was included in the national collection due to the growing prominence of this type of adoption in the Australian context (between 2000–01 and 2020–21 carer adoptions rose by over 240%).

From 2016, the AIHW collaborated with state, territory, and Australian Government agencies to develop national definitions, and improve the availability of data on the adoption of children with special needs. In *Adoptions Australia 2018–19,* data on the needs of intercountry adoptees placed with their adoptive families in 2017–18 were reported for the first time. This reporting continued in 2019–20 and 2020–21.Updated data on 'sex' and 'Indigenous status' were also included in the 2019–20 collection to make these compliant with national standards related to these demographic items.

The 2019–20 collection also saw the inclusion of a national estimate of intercountry adoptees adopted from 1979–80 to 2018–19—including an estimate of those adoptees who would now be 18 years or over. Reporting of this national estimate of intercountry adoptees was continued in 2020–21.

Limitations of existing data

Adoptions by carers

Development work undertaken since 2016 has allowed the collection of demographic information on adoptive families involved in known carer adoptions that is comparable to what is collected for intercountry and local adoptions. Children and young people involved in adoptions by known carers often have a complex pre-adoption care history that can involve child protection services. However, due to the aggregate nature of the Adoptions Australia collection, data on this pre-adoption history are currently unable to be reported.

Processing times for local and known child adoptions

Data in the Adoptions Australia report series currently provide an indication of the time involved in the intercountry adoption process and changes over time. However, data are not currently nationally available for the other types of adoption. For carer adoptions, complexities around when the process should be considered to have started make it difficult to capture nationally comparable data.

Source and reference attributes

Submitting organisation: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW)

Relational attributes

Related metadata references:

Supersedes Adoptions Australia 2019-20; Quality Statement
AIHW Data Quality Statements, Superseded 03/12/2021

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AIHW Data Quality Statements, Superseded 03/04/2024