

# Adoptions Australia 2021–22; Quality Statement

Exported from METEOR (AIHW's Metadata Online Registry)

© Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2024

This product, excluding the AIHW logo, Commonwealth Coat of Arms and any material owned by a third party or protected by a trademark, has been released under a Creative Commons BY 4.0 (CC BY 4.0) licence. Excluded material owned by third parties may include, for example, design and layout, images obtained under licence from third parties and signatures. We have made all reasonable efforts to identify and label material owned by third parties.

You may distribute, remix and build on this website's material but must attribute the AIHW as the copyright holder, in line with our attribution policy. The full terms and conditions of this licence are available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

Enquiries relating to copyright should be addressed to [info@aihw.gov.au](mailto:info@aihw.gov.au).

Enquiries or comments on the METEOR metadata or download should be directed to the METEOR team at [meteor@aihw.gov.au](mailto:meteor@aihw.gov.au).

# Adoptions Australia 2021–22; Quality Statement

## Identifying and definitional attributes

<b>Metadata item type:</b>	Data Quality Statement
<b>METEOR identifier:</b>	776081
<b>Registration status:</b>	<a href="#">AIHW Data Quality Statements</a> , Superseded 03/04/2024

## Data quality

### Data quality statement summary:

### Description

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 include the duration of different intercountry adoption processes and the number of visa applications approved for children adopted through expatriate adoptions.

### Summary of Key Issues

- The small population creates some issues for reporting data. Interpreting proportional changes between reporting periods and rates based on small numbers must be undertaken with caution. Exploring trends over 10 years or more 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 in the collection each year.
- Data are compiled annually by the AIHW 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 8 of the 31 collection tables with one (1) jurisdiction 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](http://www.aihw.gov.au/about-us)), which includes details about the AIHW's governance ([www.aihw.gov.au/about-us/our-governance](http://www.aihw.gov.au/about-us/our-governance)) and our role and strategic goals ([www.aihw.gov.au/about-us/our-vision-and-strategic-goals](http://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, Western Australia
- Department for Child Protection, South Australia
- Department for Education, Children and Young People, 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 requests 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 2021–22 is from 1 July 2021 to 30 June 2022.

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 published annually in the AIHW Adoptions Australia report series. Data for 2021–22 was published in April 2023. The report is accessible for free through the AIHW website. Data from the AIHW Adoptions Australia collection are generally published within 6 months of the receipt of suitable 'clean' data, as per the AIHW's [Customer Care Charter](#).

**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](http://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](http://www.aihw.gov.au/our-services/data-on-request). Requests for access to unpublished data may require approval from the state and territory data custodians and/or the AIHW Ethics Committee, depending on the nature of the request.

For general enquiries about AIHW publications visit [www.aihw.gov.au/contact-us](http://www.aihw.gov.au/contact-us).

**Interpretability:** Appendix A of the Adoptions Australia report provides an overview of the 3 types of adoption and further contextual information. The Australian Government Department of Social Services—the Australian Central Authority for intercountry adoption—provides expert advice on current intercountry adoption programs, which can also be found in Appendix A. Supporting information on relevant legislation and jurisdictional policies are presented in Appendixes B to D. Other supporting information is provided in table footnotes, the technical notes, and the [Glossary](#). Users are referred to 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. It provides information on the most recent reporting period (for the 2021–22 reporting period this refers to data from 1 July 2021 to 30 June 2022) and allows for comparable trend data to be examined. This collection contributes a valuable resource to Australia's response to issues of child welfare and safety by monitoring the role of adoption in providing a safe and permanent family for children and young people.

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 provides data on the number of contact/information requests and vetoes lodged by parties to an existing adoption.

Data from the [Child Protection National Minimum Dataset](#) is used to inform on third-party parental responsibility orders, which are used as an alternative to adoption in some jurisdictions.

In addition, the Australian Government Department of Home Affairs provides data 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.

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 or data on the long-term outcomes of adoption (such as rates of disruption or levels of educational attainment).

### Scope

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 2021–22, of the 31 data tables in the aggregate collection:

- 8 tables did not contain data for all jurisdictions.
- Western Australia was unable to provide data for 8 tables.
- 10 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.

**Limitations of existing data****Adoptions by carers**

Demographic information on adoptive families is collected for carer (known child) adoptions following development work undertaken since 2016. These data are comparable to data on adoptive families 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. Due to the aggregate nature of the Adoptions Australia collection, data on 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 how this changes over time. These 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.

## Coherence:

The Adoptions Australia collection was initially developed in 1993. During the same year the annual Adoptions Australia report series commenced when the AIHW took over the national adoptions data collection. 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 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. 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.

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, several 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 Australia (between 2000–01 and 2021–22 carer adoptions rose by over 220%).

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 care 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 has continued in the 2021–22 report, where the terminology used to describe children with 'special care needs' was changed to children with 'additional care needs'. 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 was continued in the supplementary data tables for 2021–22.

## Source and reference attributes

**Submitting organisation:** Australian Institute of Health and Welfare

## Relational attributes

### Related metadata references:

Supersedes [Adoptions Australia 2020–21: Quality Statement](#)  
[AIHW Data Quality Statements](#), Superseded 28/04/2023

Has been superseded by [Adoptions Australia 2022–23: Quality Statement](#)  
[AIHW Data Quality Statements](#), Standard 03/04/2024