



Department  
for Education



**About this release**

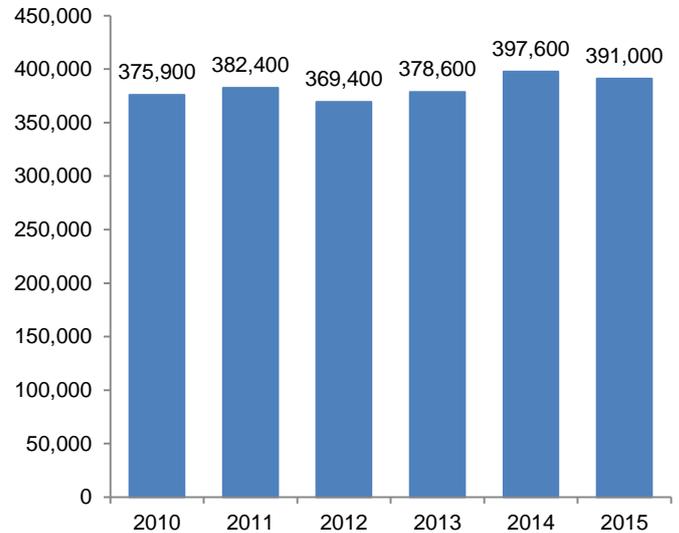
This statistical first release (SFR) provides numbers of referrals and assessments by children's social care in England. It releases the number of children assessed to be in need of social care services in the year ending 31 March 2015 and the number of children who became the subject of a child protection plan.

## Characteristics of children in need: 2014 to 2015

**The number of children in need decreased slightly in 2015 but the longer term trend remains relatively stable**

The number of children in need at 31 March decreased slightly this year. There were 391,000 children in need at 31 March 2015 which is a decrease of 2% from 397,600 last year.

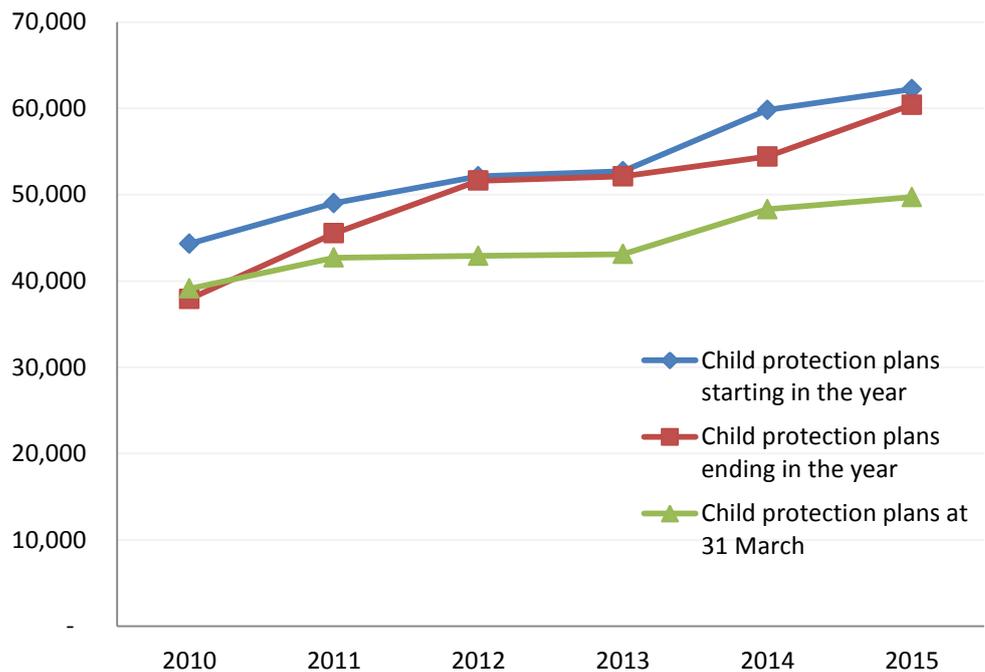
The trend over the last six years remains relatively stable with the time series fluctuating between 369,400 and 397,600.



### More children were the subject of a child protection plan in 2015

The number of children who were the subject of a child protection plan at 31 March continues to follow the upward trend of recent years - 49,700 children were the subject of a child protection plan at 31 March 2015, compared with 39,100 six years ago when the children in need census began.

The numbers starting and ending a child protecting plan in the year both continue to increase.



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### Children in need census

All the figures included in this statistical first release are taken from the children in need census. The DfE has been collecting the children in need census from local authorities for the full 12 month period since 2009-10. It collects information on all referrals to children’s social care, assessments carried out upon those children and whether the child became the subject of a child protection plan.

When a child is referred to children’s social care, an assessment is carried out to identify if the child is in need of services, which local authorities have an obligation to provide under section 17 of the Children Act 1989.

These services can include, for example, family support (to help keep together families experiencing difficulties), leaving care support (to help young people who have left local authority care), adoption support or disabled children’s services (including social care, education and health provision).

### In this publication

The following tables are included in the SFR:

- National and local authority tables (SFR41\_2015\_tables.xls)
- Underlying data (open format .csv and metadata .txt)

The accompanying quality and methodology information document, provides information on the data sources, their coverage and quality, and explains the methodology used in producing the data.

### Feedback

We are changing how our releases look and welcome feedback on any aspect of this document at [cin.stats@education.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:cin.stats@education.gsi.gov.uk).

# 1. Number of children in need (Tables A1, B1, B5)

## Methodology of counting the number of children in need

A child can start or end an episode of need more than once during the year but they should not have overlapping episodes. For example, if a child begins an episode of need in May 2014 which ends in August 2014 and the same child begins another episode of need in December 2014 and is still in need on the 31 March 2015, the child is counted as two starts, one end and one count at the 31 March 2015. A more detailed explanation is given in the accompanying methodology document and the data quality and uses document found alongside this publication at: [Statistics: children in need and child protection](#)

Note that the number of children in need at 31 March does not equate to the previous year's number plus the number started in the year minus those ceased. This is due to: improving data quality as local authority systems adapt to returning the census data; estimates calculated for missing data (estimates we need to calculate when a local authority has not been able to supply full data); the census is taken each year and local authorities do not have the facility to amend previous year's data returns.

The number of children in need at 31 March decreased slightly this year. There were 391,000 children in need, down 2% on last year but up 4% on 31 March 2010.

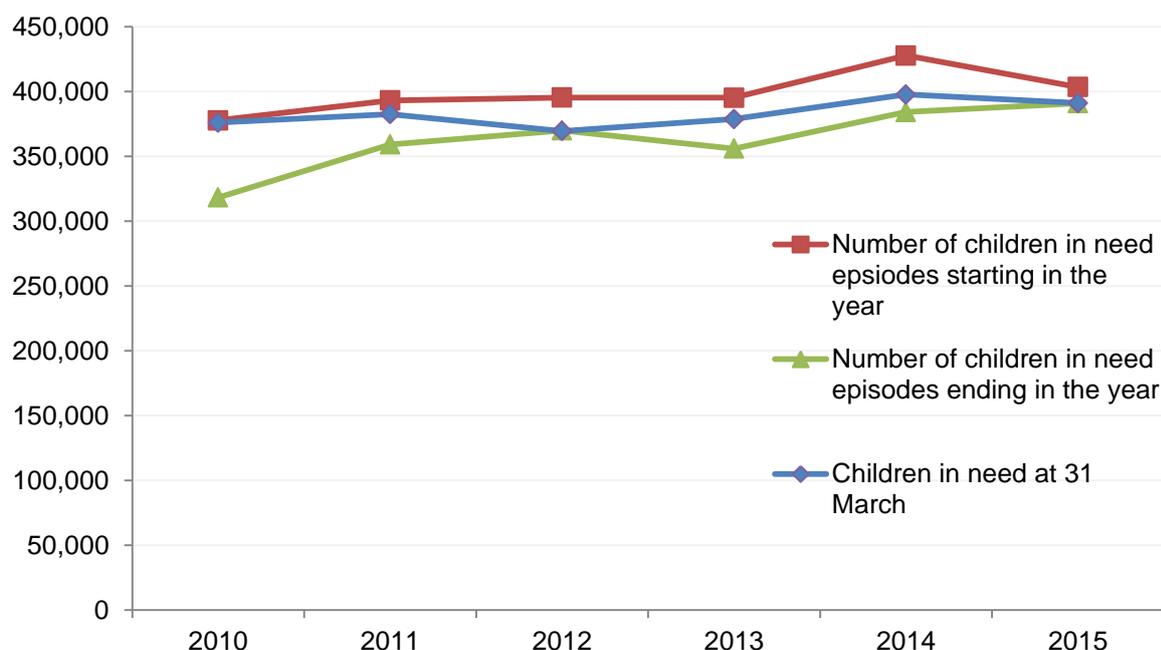
There was a slight decrease in the rate of children in need per 10,000 in the population from 345.6 in 2014 to 337.3 in 2015. There is considerable variability in the rates of children in need between local authorities which ranges from 141.9 in Wokingham and 152.7 in Leicestershire, to 670.8 in Stoke on Trent and 683.4 in Hull.

**Figure A: Number of children in need at 31 March 2010 to 2015**

Year ending 31 March	Number of children in need	Rate per 10,000 children aged under 18 years
2010	375,900	334.7
2011	382,400	339.0
2012	369,400	325.7
2013	378,600	331.4
2014	397,600	345.6
2015	391,000	337.3

Source: children in need census

**Figure B: The number of children in need episodes starting and ending in the year and those in need at 31 March**



The number of children in need episodes starting in the year has decreased by 6% from 427,700 last year to 403,400 in 2014-15. This change will likely be driven by the decrease in referrals (see section 2).

The number of children in need episodes ending in the year is up by 2% on last year. This increase could be explained by the sharp 8% increase in the number of episodes starting last year and the fact that the majority of episodes in need are under 12 months (see figure C).

**Figure C: Percentage of episodes ending in year by duration**

Duration	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
6 months or less	69.2	69.2	68.7	66.7	64.0
6 to 12 months	12.5	12.0	12.3	13.3	14.7
1 year or more	18.3	18.7	18.9	20.0	21.3

Episodes of need are lasting longer – of the episodes ending in the year 21.3% lasted a year or more compared to 18.3% in 2010/11.

### Characteristics of children in need

The gender split of children in need remains similar to previous years - 52.5% are male, 45.5% are female and 2.0% are unborn or of unknown gender.

The age split of children in need also remains similar to previous years. The largest age group is those aged 10-15 years accounting for 30.7% of children in need; 25.3% are under 5 years of age.

The proportion of children in need with a disability has dropped slightly over the last five years from 14.2% in 2010/11 to 13.0% in 2014/15.

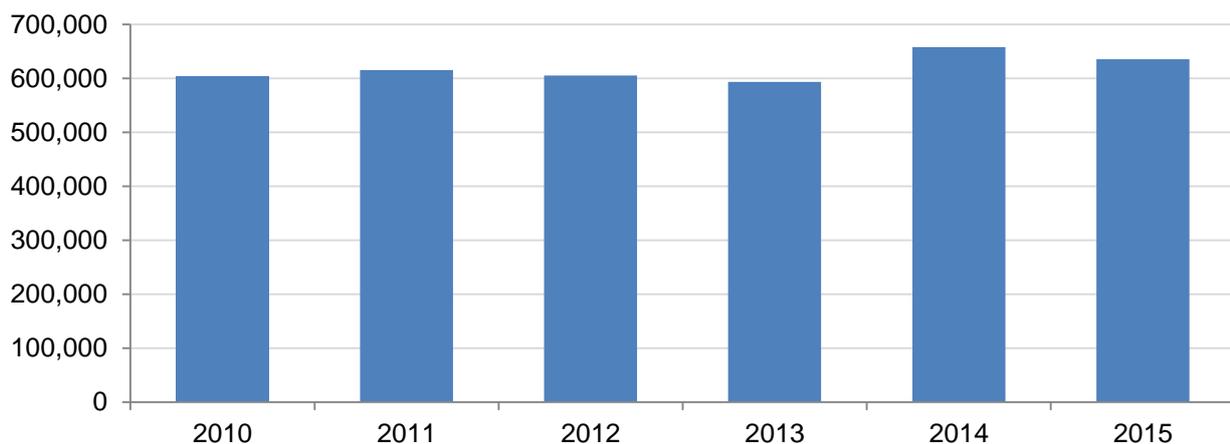
## 2. Referrals to children’s social care (Table C1)

A **referral** is defined as a request for services to be provided by children’s social care and is in respect of a child who is not currently in need. A referral may result in: an assessment of the child’s need; the provision of information or advice; referral to another agency; or no further action. If a child is referred more than once in the year then each referral is counted in the figures. New information relating to children who are already on an open episode of need is not counted as a referral.

A **re-referral** is where a child has been referred within 12 months of a previous referral. Further details on how these figures are calculated can be found in the accompanying methodology document found alongside this publication at: [Statistics: children in need and child protection](#)

**Figure D: Referrals to children’s social care have fallen, following an increase last year**

Number of referrals in the year ending 31 March

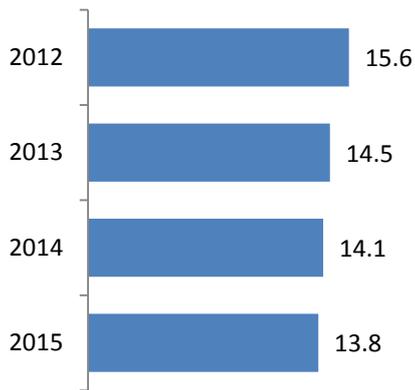


Referrals have dropped slightly this year after a larger than usual increase last year. There were 635,600 referrals in the year ending 31 March 2015 – down by 3% from 657,800 the previous year, but still higher than the four years before where the number of referrals fluctuated around 600,000 each year. Whilst there is no clear evidence, anecdotal evidence from local authorities suggests that increased media attention on child protection leads to an increase in the number of referrals they receive.

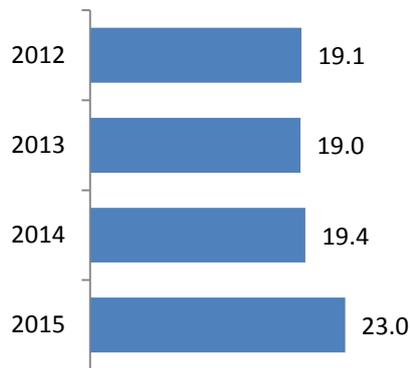
As a proportion of all referrals:

- 13.8% require no further action after initial consideration, similar to previous years;
- 23.0% are assessed and then require no further action, up from 19% last year;
- 24.0% were within 12 months of a previous referral, similar to previous years.

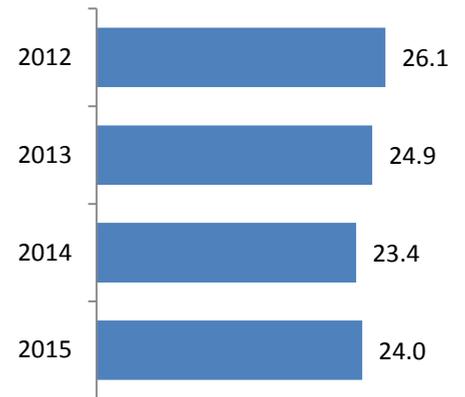
**Figure E1: Proportion of referrals leading to no further action**



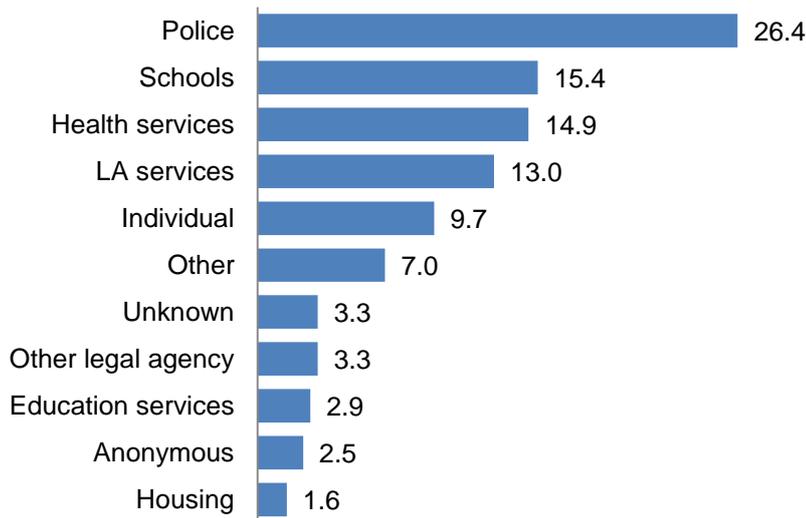
**Figure E2: Proportion of referrals which are assessed and then deemed not in need**



**Figure E3: Re-referrals within 12 months as a proportion of all referrals**



**Figure F: The police are the most common source of referral**  
Referrals in 2014-15 by source of referral (percent)



Most referrals are from the police – this year 26.4% of referrals were from the police, followed by schools with 15.4%, and health services with 14.9%.

The source of referral was collected for the first time last year. It can take a year or two for new data items to ‘bed-in’ so caution should be taken when comparing to last year’s data.

Where there is more than one referral for the same child, it is the referral source of the first referral reported in the children in need census.

### 3. Assessments (Table C2)

#### Changes to assessing children in need

Statutory guidance 'Working Together to Safeguard Children' was revised in 2013 giving local authorities more flexibility when assessing children.

Previously local authorities carried out an initial assessment within 10 working days and (where needed) a more in-depth core assessment within 35 working days.

Local authorities now have the flexibility to carry out a single continuous assessment within 45 working days.

There were 139 (91%) local authorities operating a continuous assessment model by the end of March 2015 (up from 71% by the end of March 2014). No distinction between the types of assessment carried out was recorded in the data collected this year.

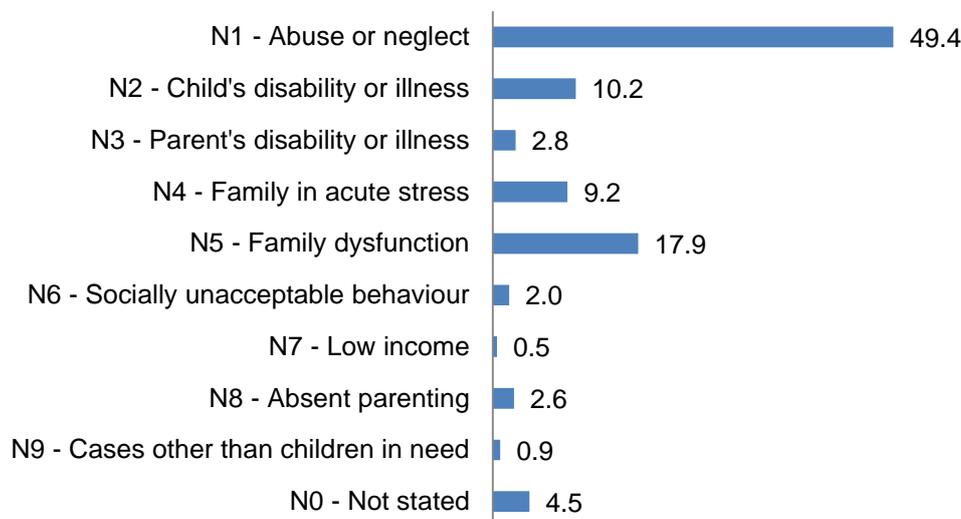
In the year ending 31 March 2015, 550,810 assessments were completed, with an average (median) duration of 28 working days.

#### Primary need identified at assessment (Tables B3)

When a child is assessed following a referral, the practitioner determines the child's **primary need at this first assessment**. Only one need can be reported here and the list of primary needs is hierarchical, so in cases where multiple needs are identified, the need highest in the list is reported in the census.

The categories are designed only to identify what kinds of pressures are placed on children's social services. The order of the categories relate to the specificity of the description and not necessarily importance. However, the order is fixed so that there is consistency.

**Figure G: "Abuse or neglect" is the most common primary need**  
Children in need at 31 March 2015, by primary need at first assessment



Most children's primary need is due to abuse or neglect and the proportion is up on last year, from 47.2% to 49.4%. Family dysfunction is the second most common need, 17.9% this year down from 18.6% last year.

#### Factors identified at the end of assessment (Table C3)

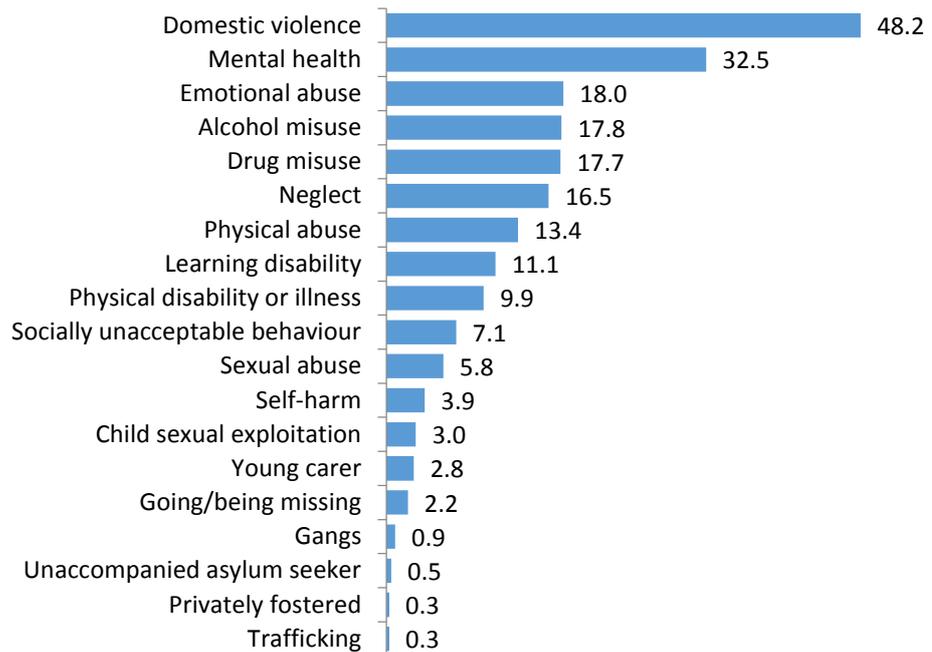
Factors identified at the end of assessment are in addition to the primary need identified at assessment and were collected and reported for the first time last year. If more than one factor has been identified at assessment, each can be reported within the census. Most children will have more than one factor identified and reported. Last year, data was only published at a national level due to the quality and coverage – only around 73% of assessments had factors recorded against them and this varied by local authority. The quality and coverage improved this year with around 94% of assessments having factors recorded against them. From experience it can take a year or two for new data items to 'bed-in' so treat the data with some caution when comparing to last year's results.

**Figure H: Domestic violence is the most common factor identified**

Factors identified at the end of assessment as a proportion of episodes assessed in the year

Domestic violence, which includes that aimed at children or other adults in the household, was the most common factor identified, flagged in 48.2% of episodes assessed in the year and with assessment factors recorded.

This was followed by mental health at 32.5%, which incorporates mental health of the child or other adults in the family/household.

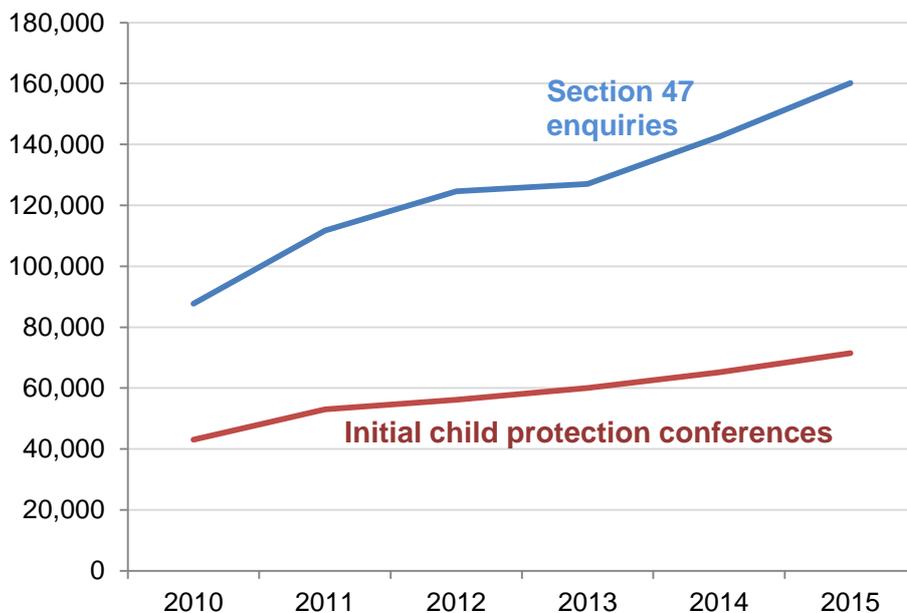


#### 4. Section 47 enquiries and initial child protection conferences (Table C4)

If the local authority identifies there is reasonable cause to suspect the child is suffering, or is likely to suffer significant harm, it will carry out an **assessment under section 47** of the Children Act 1989 to determine if it needs to take steps to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child. If concerns are substantiated and the child is judged to be at continuing risk of harm then **an initial child protection conference** should be convened within 15 working days.

**Figure I: Section 47 enquiries and initial child protection conferences are increasing**

Number of section 47 enquiries and initial child protection conferences



The number of section 47 enquiries carried out continues to increase this year resulting in more initial child protection conferences: 160,150 section 47 enquiries were initiated – an increase of 12% on last year.

There were 71,140 initial child protection conferences carried out, which is nearly a 10% increase on last year.

## 5. Child protection plans (Tables D1 – D9)

At the initial child protection conference, the decision will be made as to whether the child needs to become the subject of a **child protection plan**. When a child becomes the subject of a plan, the initial category of abuse is recorded.

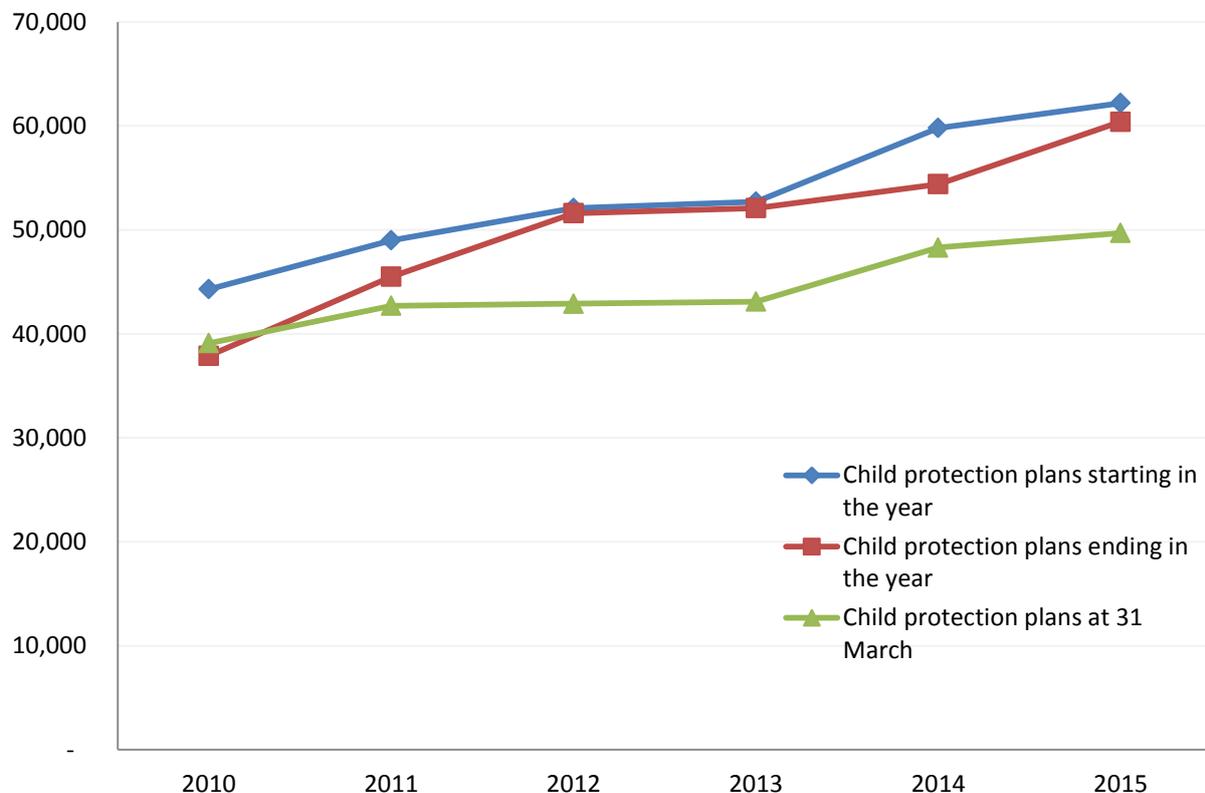
Plans should be **reviewed** within the first three months, and then at least every six months.

A child should **no longer be the subject of a plan** if it is judged they are no longer at risk of harm, or if the child has reached 18 years old, left the country or died. A local authority will end a plan if the family moves permanently to another authority and the receiving authority will start a new plan if deemed necessary.

More children became the subject of a child protection plan this year, continuing the recent trend. In 2015, 62,200 children became the subject of a child protection plan compared to 59,800 last year. The number of children starting a child protection plan is largely driven by section 47 enquiries. This year, there was an increase in section 47 enquiries therefore resulting in more children becoming the subject of a child protection plan.

### Figure J: Number of child protection plans starting in the year, ending in the year and at 31 March have all increased

Child protection plans starting and ending in the year, and at 31 March



A higher proportion became the subject of a plan for the second or subsequent time. In 2014-15, 16.6% became the subject of a child protection plan for the second or subsequent time which has been steadily increasing from 13.3% in 2010/11. Part of the steady increase is expected as the time series of the children in need census grows and there is more historical data.

This year, 94.0% of child protection plans were reviewed within the required timescales. This is down slightly from 94.6% last year.

The most common 'initial category of abuse' reported when a child becomes the subject of a plan is neglect at 43.2%, followed by emotional abuse (33.7%).

The durations of child protection plans that end in the year have remained fairly stable since 2010-11 but the proportion lasting more than 2 years has dropped from 4.5% last year to 3.7% this year.

## 6. Accompanying tables

The following tables are available in Excel format on the department's statistics website ([Statistics: children in need and child protection](#)):

### National figures

- A1 Numbers of children in need, referrals and assessments carried out by children's social services, years ending 31 March, England, 2010 to 2015
- A2 Number of section 47 enquiries and initial child protection conferences carried out by children's social services and the number of children who were the subject of a child protection plan, year ending 31 March, England, 2010 to 2015
- A3 Numbers of children in need at 31 March 2015, by gender, age (at 31 March) and primary need at assessment, England
- A4 Numbers of children in need at 31 March 2015, by age (at 31 March), gender and ethnicity, England
- A5 Number of children who were the subject of a child protection plan at 31 March 2015, by age (at 31 March), gender, initial category of abuse and ethnicity, England

### Local authority figures: children in need

- B1 Numbers of children in need. All children in need throughout the year, children starting, ending and at 31 March 2015, and rates per 10,000 children
- B2 Numbers of children in need at 31 March 2015, by disability
- B3 Numbers of children in need at 31 March 2015, by primary need at assessment
- B4 Numbers and percentages of children in need at 31 March 2015, by duration of open case
- B5 Numbers and percentages of children ceasing to be in need in the year ending 31 March 2015, by duration of episode of need
- B6 Numbers and percentages of children ceasing to be in need in the year ending 31 March 2015, by reason for case closure

### Local authority figures: referrals and assessments

- C1 Number of referrals in year ending 31 March 2015 and rates per 10,000 children, number of referrals within 12 months of a previous referral and number which resulted in no further action
- C2 Number of assessments completed by children's social services in the year ending 31 March 2015 by duration of assessment
- C3 Factors identified at the end of assessment for episodes in the year ending 31 March 2015.

- C4 Number of children who were subject to section 47 enquiries and initial child protection conferences in the year ending 31 March 2015, and rates per 10,000 children

- C5 Number of referrals completed by children's social services by source of referral

### Local authority figures: children who were the subject of a child protection plan

- D1 Numbers of children who were the subject of a child protection plan starting, or ending during the year ending 31 March 2015, at 31 March 2015 and rates per 10,000
- D2 Number of children who became the subject of a child protection plan during the year ending 31 March 2015, by initial and latest category of abuse
- D3 Number of children who became the subject of a child protection plan during the year ending 31 March 2015 who became the subject of a plan for a second or subsequent time
- D4 Number of children who were the subject of a child protection plan at 31 March 2015, by initial and latest category of abuse
- D5 Number of children who were the subject of a child protection plan at 31 March 2015, by length of time as the subject of a plan
- D6 Number of children who were the subject of a child protection plan at 31 March 2015, who had been on a plan for at least three months and had reviews carried out within the required timescales
- D7 Number of children who ceased to be the subject of a child protection plan during the year ending 31 March 2015, by length of time as the subject of a plan
- D8 Number of children who ceased to be the subject of a child protection plan during the first six months of the year, by the length of time the child remained in need
- D9 Number of children who were the subject of a child protection plan during the year ending 31 March 2015 who were seen by the lead social worker in accordance with the timescales specified in the plan

When reviewing the tables, please note that:

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Data confidence indicators and data quality and uses

Data confidence indicators enable more sensible comparison. Local authorities are allocated a 1 (low confidence in the data) to 3 (high confidence in the data). The quality and uses document gives more details, this can be found on the [Statistics: children in need and child protection](#) webpage.

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Rounding conventions and suppression

The National Statistics Code of Practice requires that reasonable steps should be taken to ensure that all published or disseminated statistics produced by the department for Education protect confidentiality.

In most tables the figures are presented as whole numbers while in some tables, percentages are displayed to 1 decimal point. The rounding convention is as follows: any fractions of 0.5 and above will be rounded up, anything less than 0.5 will be rounded down. Where any number is shown as zero (0), the original figure submitted was zero (0).

The following conventions have been used:

‘.’ means not applicable

‘..’ means not available

‘-’ means negligible count

‘x’ means a figure between 1 and 5 inclusive

Please note that further secondary suppression may have been applied on zeroes or numbers above 5 to preserve confidentiality where primary suppression could be derived.

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## 7. Further information is available

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Previous publications

Information on the numbers of children referred to and assessed by children’s social services for the year ending 31 March 2014.

[Statistics: children in need and child protection](#)

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The children in need census

The Department for Education has been collecting the children in need census from local authorities since 2008-09. The census collects information on all referrals to children’s social care, assessments carried out upon those children and whether the children became the subject of a child protection plan.

The first collection in 2008-09 covered the six month period from 1 October 2008 to 31 March 2009 – from 2009-10 the census was rolled out to cover the full 12 month period.

[Children in need census](#)

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Looked-after children

Statistics on children under local authority care at national and local authority level.

[Statistics: children looked-after](#)

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Children’s social workers

Statistics on children’s social care workers employed by local authorities.

[Statistics: children's social care workforce](#)

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Ofsted statistics	<a href="#">Ofsted</a> publish inspection outcomes for local authority children’s services and children’s social care providers in England.
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Statistics for other UK countries	<a href="#">The Scottish Government: Children’s social work statistics</a> <a href="#">Welsh Government: Social services statistics</a> <a href="#">Children’s services statistics for Northern Ireland</a>
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## 8. National Statistics

The United Kingdom Statistics Authority has designated these statistics as National Statistics, in accordance with the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 and signifying compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics.

Designation can be broadly interpreted to mean that the statistics:

- meet identified user needs;
- are well explained and readily accessible;
- are produced according to sound methods, and
- are managed impartially and objectively in the public interest.

Once statistics have been designated as National Statistics it is a statutory requirement that the Code of Practice shall continue to be observed.

The Department has a set of [statistical policies](#) in line with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics.

## 9. Technical Information

A quality and methodology information document accompanies this SFR. This provides further information on the data sources, their coverage and quality and explains the methodology used in producing the data, including how it is validated and processed.

## 10. Got a query? Like to give feedback?

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If from the media	Press Office News Desk, Department for Education, Sanctuary Buildings, Great Smith Street, London SW1P 3BT. 020 7783 8300
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If non-media	Anneka Nelson-Girtchen, Department for Education, 2 St Paul's Place, 125 Norfolk Street, Sheffield, S1 2FJ. 01142 742590 <a href="mailto:cin.stats@education.gsi.gov.uk">cin.stats@education.gsi.gov.uk</a>
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