



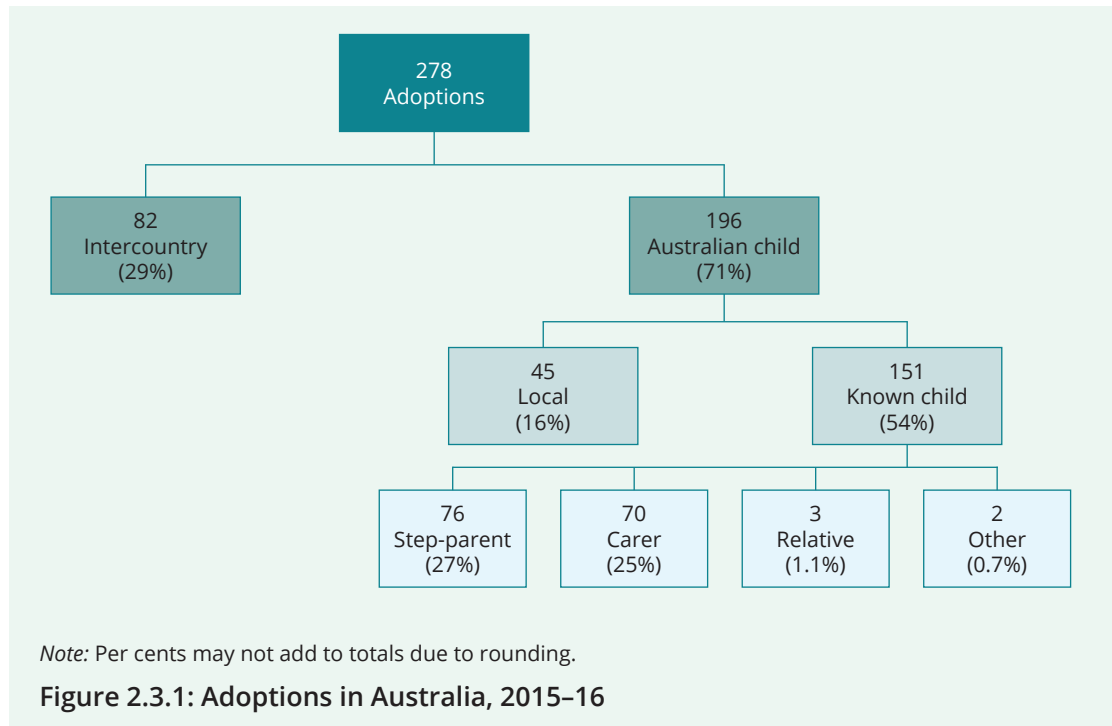
2.3 Adoptions

Adoption is one of the options used to provide permanent care for children not able to live with their families. It is a process where full parental rights and responsibilities for a child are legally transferred from the child's parent/s to his or her adoptive parent/s. Other options for permanent care include long-term care and protection orders (see Chapter 2.5 'A stable and secure home for children in out-of-home care').

Types of adoption

There were 278 adoptions in Australia in 2015–16. An adoption of an Australian child can be either a 'known child adoption' (where the child and the adoptive parent/s were previously known to each other) or a 'local adoption' (where the child and the adoptive parent/s are not known to each other). Children can also be adopted from overseas—an intercountry adoption (Figure 2.3.1). Generally, with intercountry adoptions, the child and the adoptive parent/s are not known to each other.

Among Australian children, there were 151 known child adoptions and 45 local adoptions in 2015–16. Most known child adoptions were by step-parents and foster carers (27% and 25% of all adoptions, respectively). In 2015–16, there were 82 intercountry adoptions, 90% of which were from Asian countries.





Trends in adoption

Adoptions have declined by 74% over the last 25 years, from 1,052 in 1991–92 to 278 in 2015–16 (Figure 2.3.2). Similar declines have occurred for both Australian child and intercountry adoptions (73% and 76%, respectively). Known child adoptions represent an increasing proportion of all adoptions, as the overall number of adoptions continues to fall. They accounted for 54% of adoptions in 2015–16, compared with 18% in 2006–07. Within known child adoption, adoption by carers (such as foster parents) rose from 21% in 2006–07 to 46% in 2015–16, while step-parent adoption fell from 76% to 50% over the same period.

These changes are due to a complex interplay of factors. These include views on the circumstances in which adoption might be considered appropriate, and the availability of both contraception and legalised abortion, and financial support for single parents. They also include increasing labour force participation of women, reproductive innovations, and efforts to improve the outcomes for children in out-of-home care through alternative legal orders or adoption by carers. Similarly, economic and social changes have enabled children who might otherwise have needed intercountry adoption to remain with their family or be adopted in their country of origin.

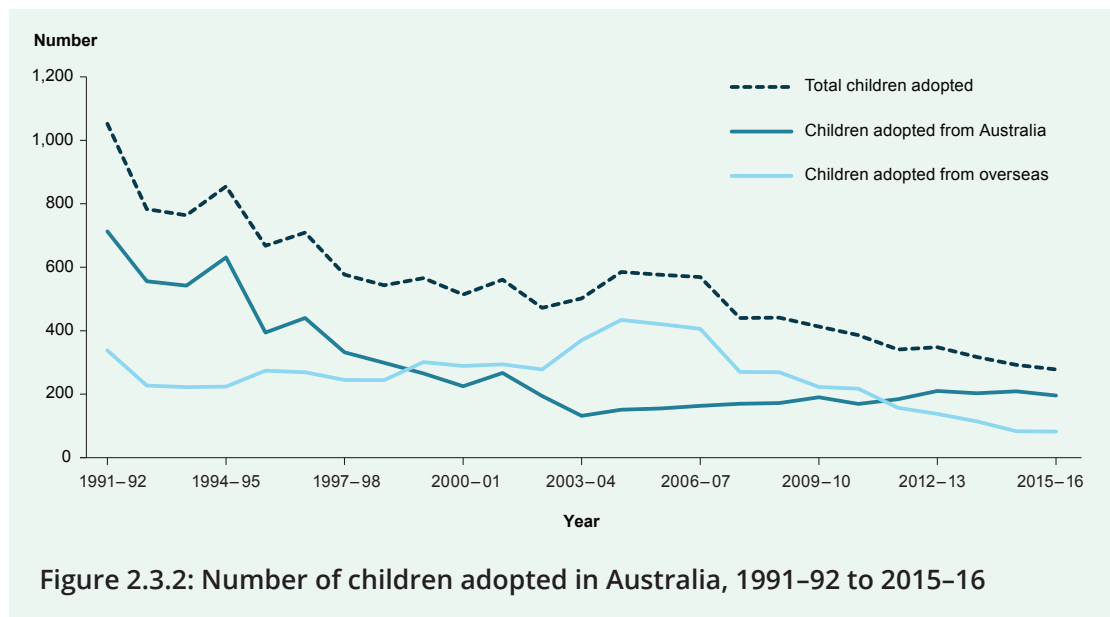


Figure 2.3.2: Number of children adopted in Australia, 1991–92 to 2015–16

Characteristics of adoptees and adoptive parents

In 2015–16, 3 in 5 (60%) adopted children were boys. The difference was more pronounced among children aged under 10 (63% boys), than children 10 and over (55%). The age profiles of adoptees also varied by type of adoption—100% of local adoptees, 71% of intercountry adoptees and 8.6% of known child adoptees were aged under 5. For intercountry adoption, the proportion of infant (aged under 12 months) adoptions declined from 47% in 2005–06 to 8.5% in 2015–16.





The majority of intercountry adoptions in Australia have consistently been from Asia, in line with global adoption trends. In 2015–16, 90% of intercountry adoptions were from Asian countries. The most common countries of origin were the Philippines (24% of intercountry adoptions), Thailand (22%), Taiwan (20%) and South Korea (17%). The main country of origin has changed over time, from China or the Philippines between 2005–06 and 2009–10, to Taiwan or the Philippines since.

The characteristics of adoptive parents also varied with the type of adoption. In 2015–16, 48% of local adoptive parents and more than 80% of intercountry adoptive parents were aged over 40. This proportion increased from 62% in 2006–07 for intercountry adoptive parents but has remained largely unchanged for local adoptive parents (47% in 2006–07).

What is missing from the picture?

Little is known in Australia about the long-term outcomes of adoptions, including the proportion of adoption disruption (breakdown between placement and legal finalisation of adoption) or legal dissolution of adoptions over time.

Data on expatriate adoptions (when an Australian living abroad for 12 months or more adopts a child through an overseas agency) and known child intercountry adoptions (where the child and adoptive parent/s are previously known to each other) are also limited. These types of adoptions are generally excluded from the data for intercountry adoptions described in this section.

Where do I go for more information?

More information on adoption in Australia is available on the AIHW website www.aihw.gov.au/adoptions/. The report *Adoptions Australia 2015–16* is also available for free download.

