



# Beyond the Headlines

Trends in violence affecting children

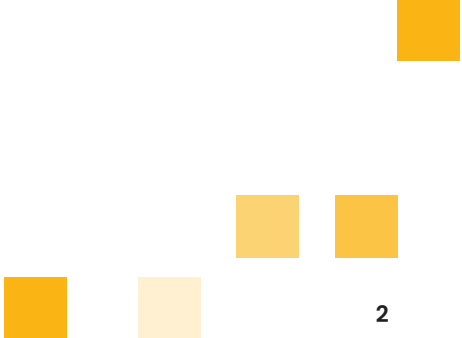
July 2024





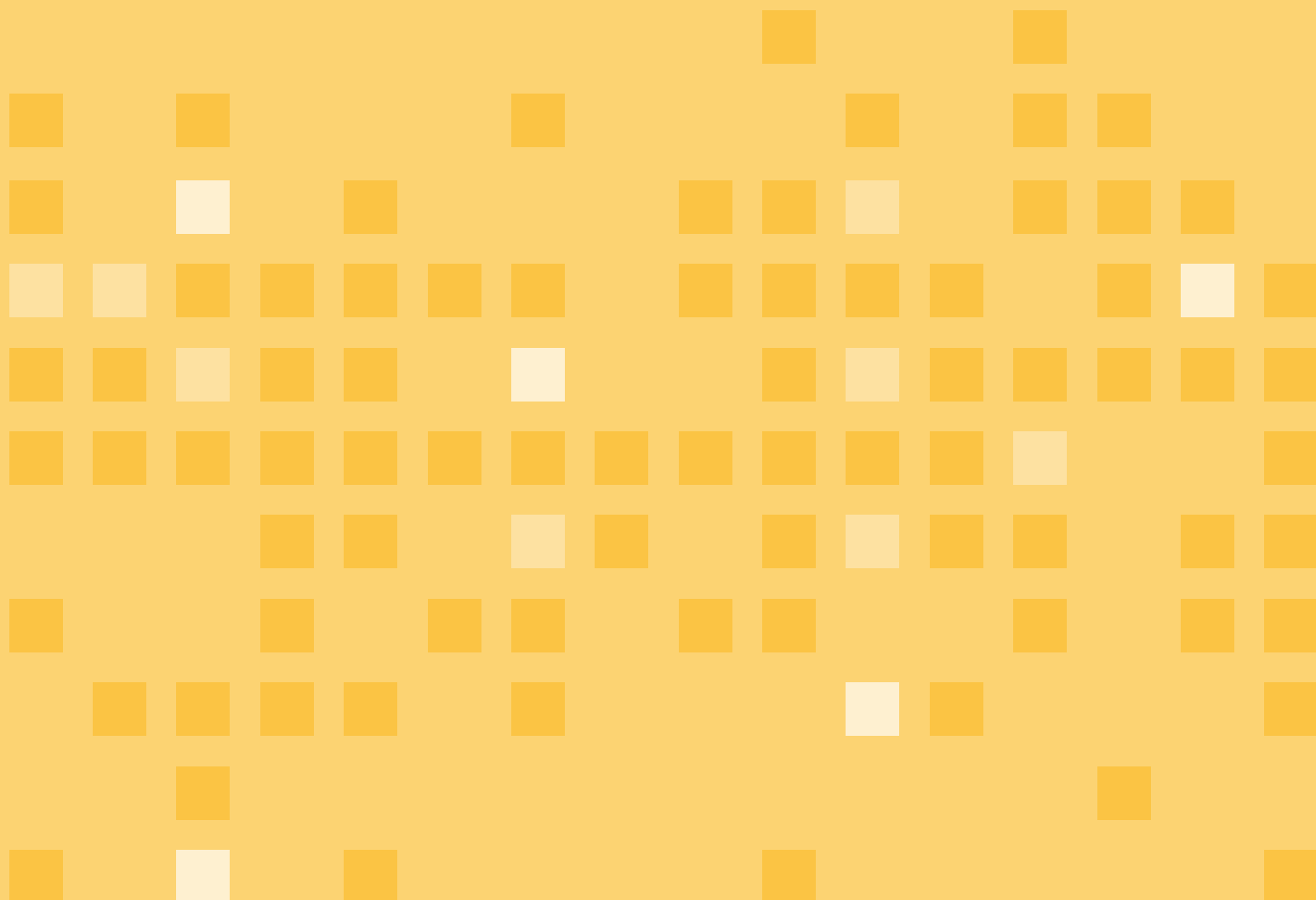
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# Part 1

Acknowledgements  
and foreword





# Acknowledgements

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# Foreword

Last year, 99 young lives were tragically cut short by violence in England and Wales. This is 99 too many. There were 467 cases of children being admitted to hospitals with injuries caused by a knife. No child should be scarred by violence – mentally or physically – and no child should have their future stolen by it.

In this report, we look at national data to understand the trends in violence over the last 10 years. It complements and builds on the findings in our Children, Violence and Vulnerability report, for which we surveyed 7,500 teenage children about their experiences of violence.

The data shows that there are things to be positive about. The number of first-time entrants to the youth justice system has fallen over the decade. So, too, have reoffending rates and arrests for violent offences. Homicides of young people and knife assaults have also started to fall from their 10-year peak in the mid-2010s.

However, cautious optimism must be tempered by concern. Levels of serious violence are higher today than they were 10 years ago. And many of the sectors working to protect children from harm, violence and exploitation are struggling.

The statistics in this report are important. They serve as a poignant reminder that more needs to be done and more support is needed – for both the children who are most vulnerable to violence and those working hard to protect them.

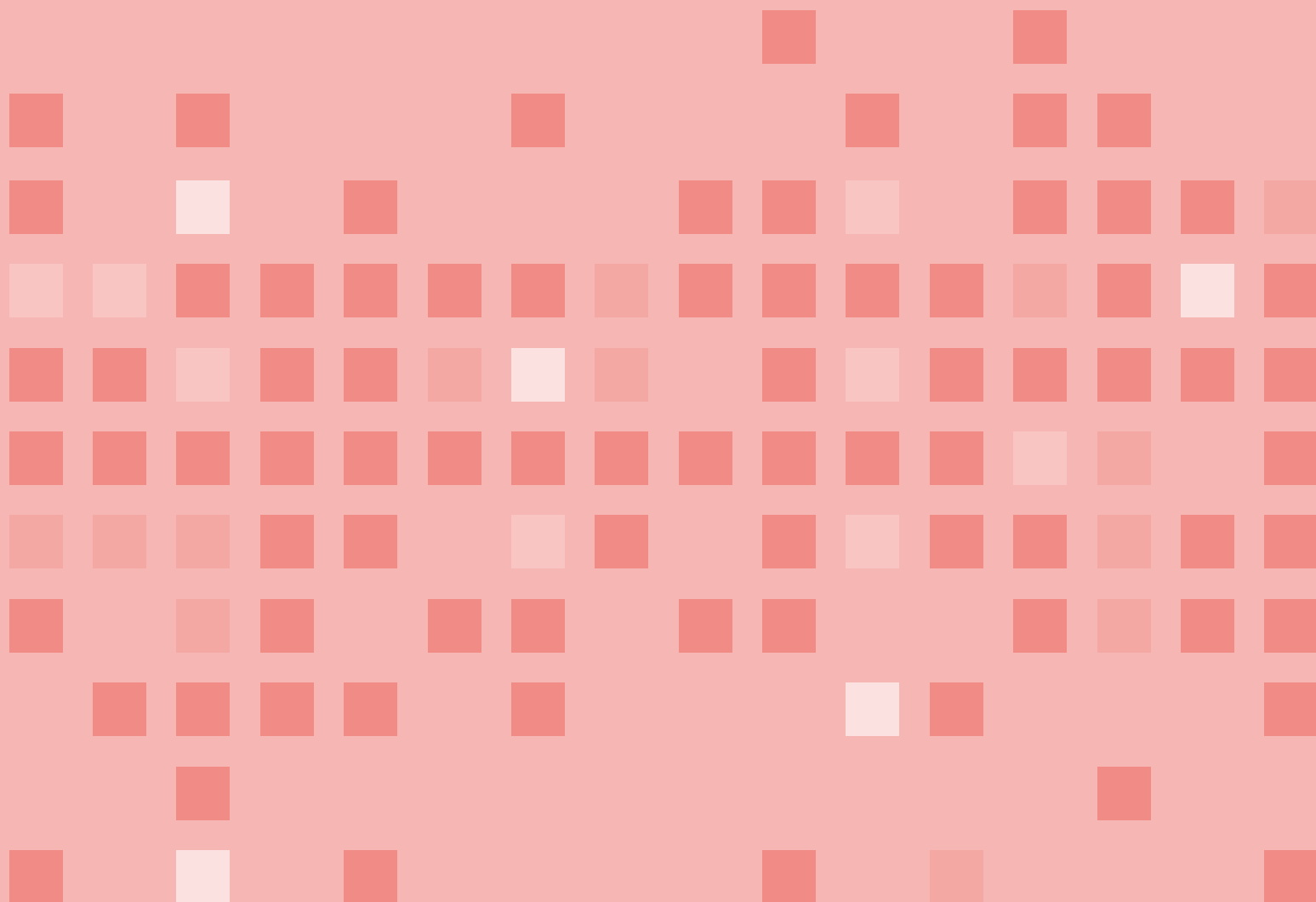
Yet, as we look at the data and examine the trends, we must never lose sight of the human toll. Behind every number in this report, there are real people – families torn apart, communities left grappling with unimaginable loss and young lives cut tragically short.



**Jon Yates**  
**Executive Director**  
**Youth Endowment Fund**

# Part 2

Main findings  
and summary



# Main findings

Serious violence affecting children and young people in England and Wales is now higher than it was a decade ago. The mid-2010s showed a sharp increase in serious violence, particularly knife crime. More recent years show violence is falling: homicides, hospitalisations for knife assault and violent offending by children are all below their pre-Covid-19 levels. But it remains too high, and certain children – particularly Black children, boys and those living in the poorest areas – remain disproportionately affected. And the sectors that support children are struggling. Most crimes go unsolved by the police. Growing numbers of children are missing education or taken into care. Children’s mental health is worsening, and many don’t get the support they need. Services for young people have seen funding fall over the past decade. The number of children in absolute poverty increased in 2022/23. However, despite these difficulties, there is growing evidence about what works to prevent violence.

## What we found:

### Children’s involvement in serious violence is higher than a decade ago, but it is now falling...

#### Serious violence increased sharply in the mid-2010s

Homicides of 16–24-year-olds spiked in 2017/18, up 69% from 2012/13. The number of 0–17-year-olds admitted to hospital for knife assault rose throughout the late 2010s, nearly doubling from 2012/13 to 2018/19.

#### In recent years, it has fallen

In 2022/23, homicides of 16–24-year-olds were down 30%, and hospital admissions of 0–17-year-olds were down 16% compared to 2019/20. These both started falling in the years before the pandemic. The number of violent offences committed by children has also fallen – down 31% from 2019/20 to 2022/23.

#### But it remains too high

Despite recent falls, homicides and hospital admissions of young people remained higher in 2022/23 than a decade ago – up 14% and 47%, respectively, compared to 2012/13. Violent offences made up a greater proportion of offences by children – 42% in 2022/23 compared to 27% in 2012/13.

### ...and some children are disproportionately affected.

#### Black children are overrepresented as victims and perpetrators

In 2022/23, Black children were over six times more likely to be victims of homicide compared to their share of the population, twice as likely to be arrested and over four times as likely to be in custody. This disproportionality has narrowed recently but remains worse than a decade ago.

**Boys are also far more likely to be involved**

In 2022/23, 87% of young homicide victims and 91% of knife-related hospital admissions were male. Boys committed 84% of proven violent offences by children. The proportion of male homicide victims has risen over the past decade. But violence against women and girls also remains a problem – three out of four hospital admissions for sexual assault in 2022/23 were female.

**Violence is concentrated in the poorest areas**

Violence is geographically concentrated, particularly in the poorest areas. Children living in the 10% most deprived police force areas (measured by childhood poverty rates) experience rates of violence over 2.5 times higher than those in the 10% least deprived areas.

**The safety nets, services and sectors which support the most vulnerable are struggling.**

**There are signs of improvement**

The youth justice system has become more effective at reducing reoffending, with rates falling from 41% in 2012/13 to 32% in 2022/23.

**But most sectors show signs of strain**

The police fail to solve most crimes – only 9% were successfully investigated in 2022/23, compared to 25% ten years ago. Spending on young people's services has more than halved since 2012/13. In the latest academic year (2022/23), 1.6 million pupils were persistently absent from school, equivalent to 1 in 5.

**And increasing numbers of children need support**

Over a million children were referred to mental health services in 2022/23 – up 11% from the previous year. Less than half that number accessed treatment. More children were taken into care – up 23% from 2012/13. And 3.6 million children were in absolute poverty, equivalent to 1 in 4.

**However, despite these difficulties, there is growing evidence about what works to prevent violence.**

**Prioritise what works**

There's strong evidence that approaches such as mentoring, therapies and hot spot policing can prevent violence. More resources should be directed at what's been shown to work. The [YEF Toolkit](#) identifies the approaches that should be prioritised.

**Improve how frontline services are delivered**

Our practice guidance recommends the ways frontline practitioners can keep children safe. The Youth Endowment Fund's (YEF's) recent [Education Practice Guidance](#) recommends the most effective approaches that education leaders can take to prevent children from becoming involved in violence.

**Reform systems to best protect and support children**

Our systems guidance recommends which policies and institutional practices need to change to make systems work better to protect children. Our latest guidance on [support for children who are arrested](#) recommends that children who commit low-level or first-time offences should not be given criminal records. Instead, they should receive targeted and timely support to prevent reoffending.

# Core indicators dashboard

Latest 2022/23\* values compared to recent performance

CORE INDICATOR	INDICATOR PERFORMANCE	LATEST VALUE*	CHANGE COMPARED TO...		
			Last Year (2021/22)	Pre-COVID (2019/20)	10 years ago (2012/13)**
CHILDREN AFFECTED BY VIOLENCE					
<b>Homicides</b> 16–24-year-old homicide victims	Mixed	99	- 19%	- 30%	+ 14%
<b>Knife crime</b> 0–17-year-olds admitted to hospital due to knife assault	Mixed	467	- 2%	-16%	+47%
<b>Justice system involvement</b> Proven violent offences committed by children	Improving	14,298	- 2%	- 31%	- 46%
<b>Disproportionality</b> Proportion of Black children in custody	Mixed	26%	- 2.0%pt	- 2.2%pt	+ 4.0%pt
SECTORS AND WIDER SOCIETY					
<b>Policing</b> Recorded crimes that were successfully investigated	Worsening	9%	- 0.1%pt	- 1.6%pt	- 16.1%pt
<b>Youth justice</b> Children's reoffending rate	Mixed	32%	+0.9%pt	- 2.0%pt	- 8.9%pt
<b>Neighbourhoods</b> No suitable measure	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

CORE INDICATOR	INDICATOR PERFORMANCE	LATEST VALUE*	CHANGE COMPARED TO...		
			Last Year (2021/22)	Pre-COVID (2019/20)	10 years ago (2012/13)**
<b>Education</b> Children persistently absent from school	Mixed	21%	- 1.3%pt	+ 10%pt	+ 7.6%pt
<b>Health</b> Child referrals to mental health services	Worsening	1.1m	+ 11%	+ 44%	+ 98%
<b>Children's services</b> Looked after children	Worsening	83,840	+ 2%	+ 5%	+ 23%
<b>Youth Sector</b> Local authority expenditure for youth services	Mixed	£448m	+ 3%	+ 8%	- 56%
<b>Poverty</b> Children in households in absolute poverty	Mixed	25%	+ 2.2%pt	+ 0.2%pt	- 3.8%pt

\* All latest figures are for the financial year ending March 2023 (2022/23), except for reoffending rates, which are for children in the criminal justice system in the 2021/22 financial year, and school absence rates, which cover the academic year.

\*\*All figures are compared to the annual figure 10 years ago (2012/13), except for referrals to mental health services, where data only extends to 2016/17.



# Executive summary

The causes of violence are complex. The data surrounding it can be, too. This complexity means questions like ‘Are levels of violence increasing or decreasing?’ aren’t always easy to answer. Multiple data sources can lead to multiple answers, sometimes painting conflicting accounts of what’s happening.

This report aims to cut through this complexity and provide a clear picture of what’s going on. To uncover and understand the trends in violence affecting children and young people, we’ve examined the most reliable published data and selected 11 key indicators to track over the past decade. These include measures of violence, racial disproportionality in the youth justice system, poverty and the sectors protecting children from violence.

Here’s what we found.

## **Children’s involvement in serious violence is higher than a decade ago, but it is falling.**

Looking back over the past decade, we see that violence appears to have worsened. Tragically, the number of children and young people who lost their lives to violence last year stands higher than 10 years ago [1]. So, too, does the number of children who were admitted to hospital for knife assaults [5].

In 2022/23, 99 young people aged 16–24 years were victims of homicide, compared to 87 in 2012/13. In the same year (2022/23), there were 467 instances of children being treated in hospital for injuries caused by a knife or sharp object – a 47% increase from 10 years previously (318 instances in 2012/13).

Examining the patterns of homicide and knife assaults over the past decade reveals consistent trends. Both saw notable increases in the mid-2010s, culminating in their decade peak in 2017/18 and 2018/19, respectively. Numbers have since declined, notably during the pandemic, but they have not yet dipped below the levels observed a decade ago.

### Hospital admissions for victims of assault (aged 0–17) with a knife or sharp object (England) and homicide victims aged 16–24 (England and Wales)



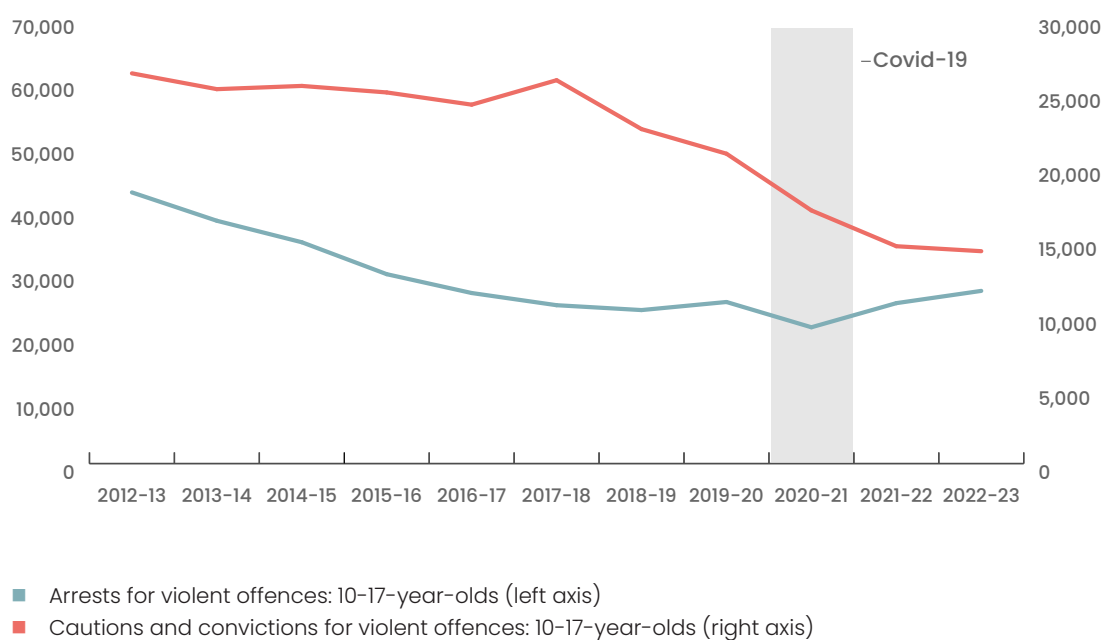
\*To account for the recognition of Hillsborough victims in the 2016/17 homicide figures, we've manually reduced the published homicide figures for 2016/17 based on data on the age profile of the Hillsborough victims [4].

\*\*Figures in these years were affected by several one-off events involving mass-casualties, including the Westminster Bridge attack, the Manchester Arena bombing, the London Bridge attack, and human trafficking victims who were found dead in a lorry in Essex.

Knife attacks continue to be the primary cause of homicides among 16–24-year-olds, claiming the lives of 69% of victims in the latest year (2022/23). Particularly alarming is the situation among teenage victims, where knives were involved in 82% of the homicides of 13–19-year-olds.

There's a slightly more positive picture when we look at the number of children being cautioned or convicted for violent offences [8]. Over the past decade, this has fallen. In the latest year (2022/23), there were 14,298 proven violent offences by 10–17-year-olds – down by nearly half compared to 10 years ago (2012/13). However, this downward trend is starting to level off, and the uptick in arrests of 10–17-year-olds for violent offences in the last two years should be cause for concern.

### Arrests and cautions/convictions of children for violent\* offences (England and Wales)



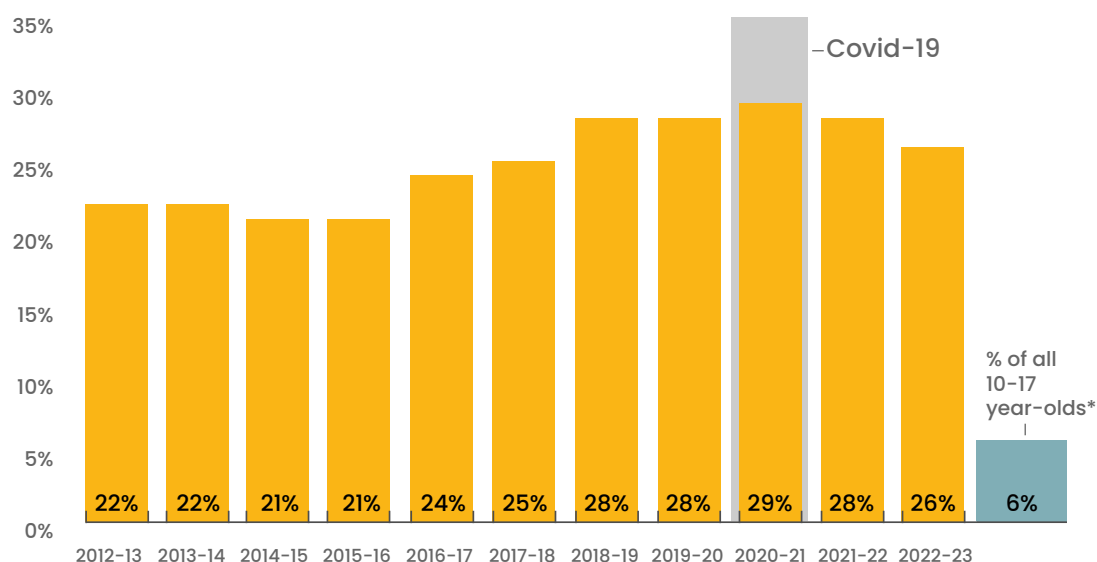
\*Violent offences include violence against the person, robbery and sexual offences.

### Some children are disproportionately affected.

Most children who interact with the police and justice system are White (for example, 73% of children arrested in 2022/23 were White). However, children from Black backgrounds are overrepresented compared to their share of the population. This is at all levels of the justice system.

A Black child is over twice as likely to be arrested, almost twice as likely to be cautioned or convicted and over four times as likely to be in custody relative to their share of the population (6%).

### Proportion of average monthly child custody population that is Black (England and Wales)



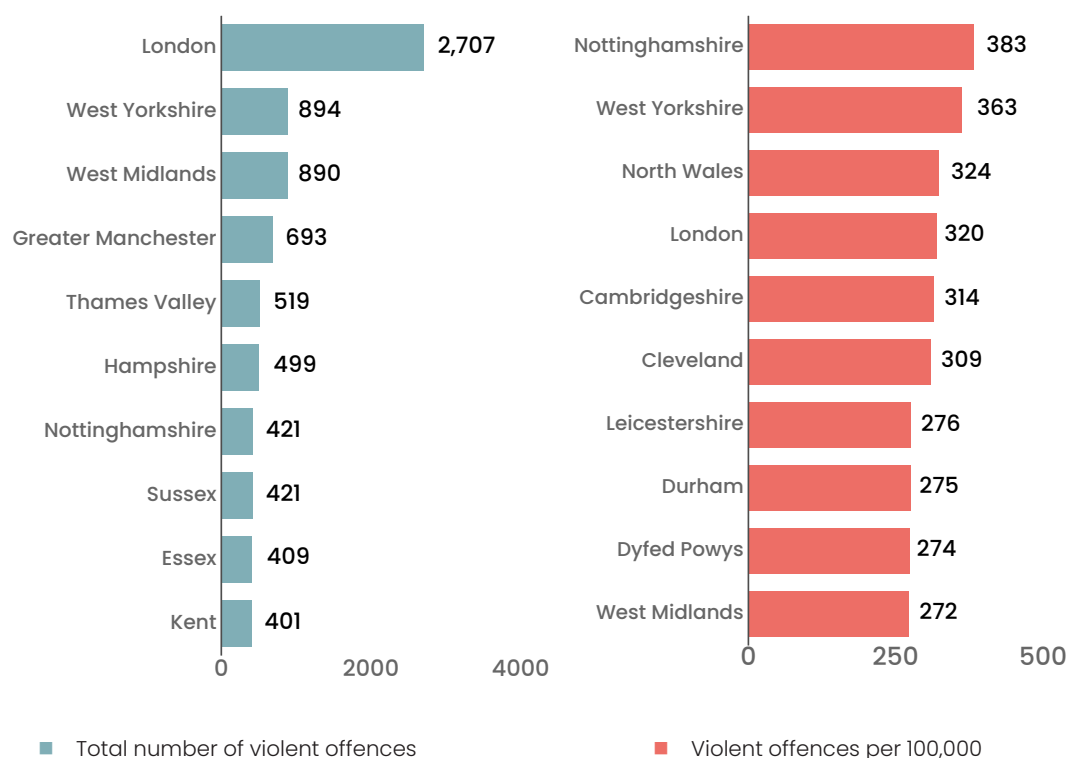
\*Based on latest census 2021 population estimates ([here](#)).

The overrepresentation of Black children in custody has worsened over the past decade. However, in the last two years, their share has fallen slightly and now accounts for 26% of the custodial population of children in England and Wales. Yet this is still four percentage points higher than 10 years ago.

Boys are also disproportionately affected by violence, a trend that has remained largely unchanged over the past decade. In 2022/23, males accounted for 83% of children cautioned or convicted for violent offences, 91% of all hospital admissions for knife assaults and 87% of victims of homicide aged 16 to 24.

However, it's crucial to recognise that these figures do not diminish the severity or impact of violence experienced by women and girls. In 2022/23, three out of four hospital admissions for sexual assault were females [5]. And female homicide victims are disproportionately more likely to have been in a relationship with the perpetrator [1]. A partner or ex-partner was implicated as the principal suspect in nearly a third (32%) of female homicide cases, contrasting starkly with 3% of male victims.

### Top 10 police force areas on numbers of violent offences committed by children and rate per head– 2021/22 and 2022/23 average (England and Wales)

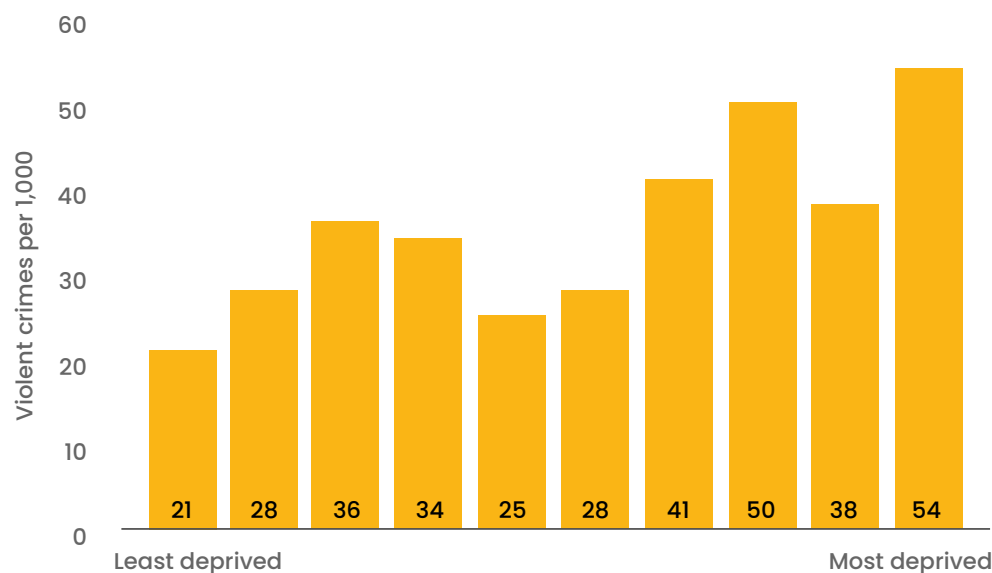


Violence is geographically concentrated. More children are affected by violence in London, West Midlands and West Yorkshire than in other parts of the country. These areas consistently report the highest number of children convicted or cautioned for violent offences [8]. However, this is partly because these areas are simply larger. When looking at the rate per head, children in other areas, such as Nottinghamshire, West Yorkshire and North Wales, are at a greater relative risk of being involved.

Although London ranks highest for the total number of young people involved in violence, it's shown relatively greater decreases in recent years compared to other areas. In 2022/23, proven violent offending by children in London was 38% down compared to the year before Covid-19 (2019/20) – a larger decrease than almost three-quarters (74%) of all police force areas.

Violence is also concentrated in the poorest areas. Children living in the most deprived police force areas (10% highest rates of absolute poverty) are 2.5 times more likely to be exposed to violent crime compared to those in the bottom 10% [57, 58].

**Police-recorded violent crime by areas ranked from lowest to highest poverty rates\*  
– 2022/23 (England and Wales)**



\*YEF calculations: Police force area poverty rates were derived using local authority estimates of the number of children growing up in absolute poverty from the Department for Work and Pensions' children in low-income families statistics [57]. Violent crime rate per head by police force area was derived from Home Office police-recorded crime and outcomes statistics [58]. Violent crime includes violence against the person, robbery and sexual offences.

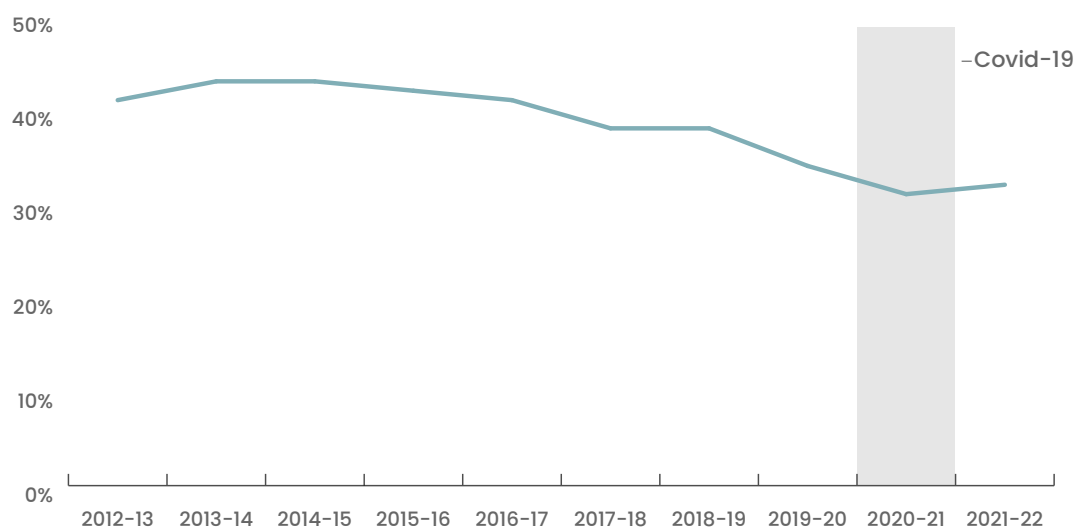
**The safety nets, services and sectors which support the most vulnerable are struggling.**

In addition to our core indicators on violence, racial disproportionality in the youth justice system and poverty, we've also chosen to track metrics which align with six key sectors involved in protecting children from violence. The purpose is to understand some of the broader issues affecting children and the challenges facing the professionals and services supporting them.

In some sectors, there have been signs of improvement. For instance, in the youth justice sector, the proportion of children convicted of a crime who reoffended within 18 months has decreased over the last decade [8]. In 2012/13, the reoffending rate stood at 41%, while in 2021/22 (the latest figures available), it had dropped to 32%.

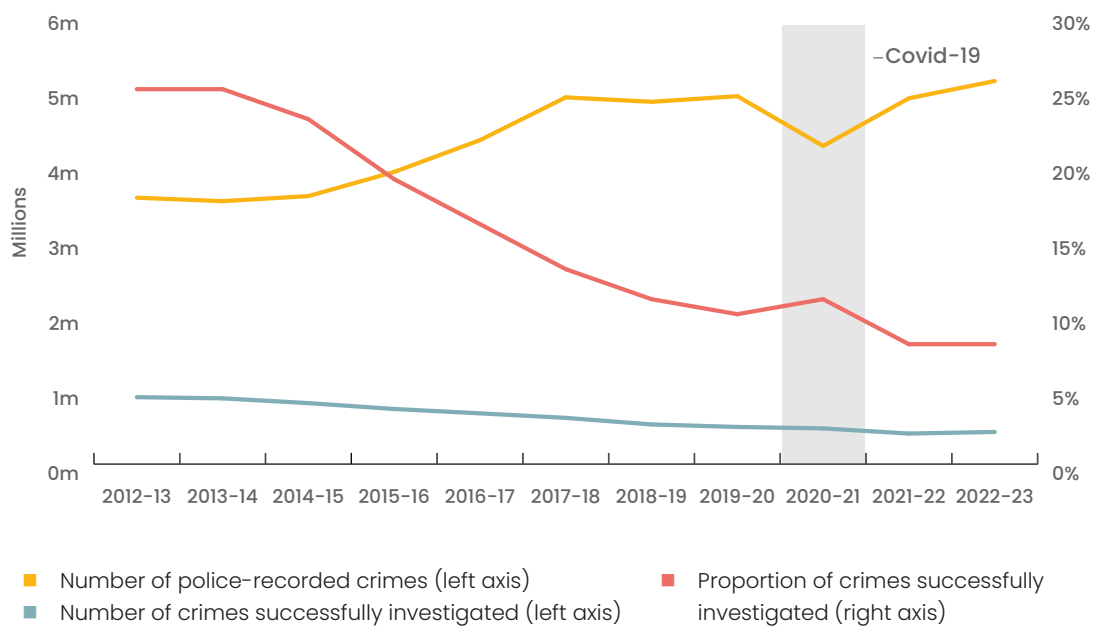
In policing, the youth sector, education, health and children's services, our indicators paint a less positive picture. There are signs of stretched services, financial pressures and increasing numbers of children in need of support.

### Proven reoffending rates – 10–17-year-olds (England and Wales)



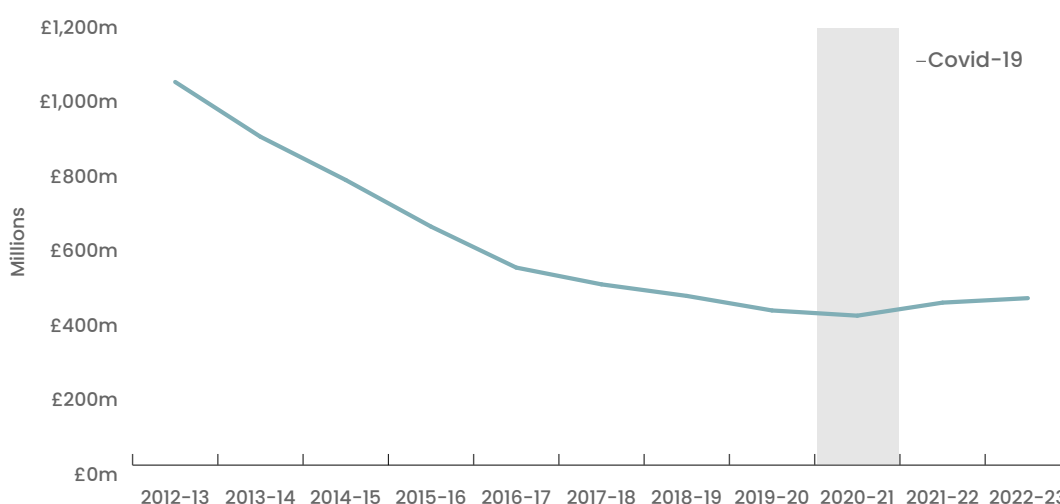
Today, if you fall victim to a crime, the chances of it being successfully investigated are lower than a decade ago [14]. In 2012/13, one in four (25%) recorded crimes led to a charge, summons or out-of-court disposal. By 2022/23, this figure had fallen to less than one in 10 (9%).

### Number and proportion of police-recorded crimes successfully investigated (England and Wales)



Over the last decade, spending on services for young people in England has halved – down by more than half a billion pounds since 2012/13 in real terms [49] – and the number of youth clubs operating in local authorities fell by 44% between 2011/12 and 2018/19 [48].


**Total annual local authority expenditure on services for young people – 2022/23 prices\* (England)**



\*Figures adjusted to account for inflation using the latest HMT GDP deflators.

In the aftermath of Covid-19, schools still face challenges getting children back into the classroom. The proportion of children missing 10% or more of their lessons has almost doubled [24]. Persistent absence rates reached 21% in 2022/23 – equivalent to 1.6 million pupils. This compares to 11% before Covid-19 (2018/19) and 14% a decade ago. Absence from school not only hampers academic progress but also deprives children of the safety and support that schools provide.

Even before the pandemic, the number of children being referred to NHS-funded mental health services was on the rise. But in the year after (2021/22), referrals jumped by 29% [31]. They increased again the following year. Over a million children were referred to mental health services in 2022/23 – nearly double (98% higher) the number in 2016/17, which is the earliest data we have. Unfortunately, NHS services are struggling to cope with demand, leading to longer waiting lists and children being unable to access support when they need it.




Every child deserves to grow up in a safe, supportive, loving home. Yet the number of children being taken into the care of the local authorities in England has steadily climbed over the past decade, with the latest figures showing a 23% increase over 10 years [44]. With more families struggling to cope, more support is needed to help looked after children in this particularly difficult phase of their lives.

**However, despite these difficulties, there is growing evidence about what works to prevent violence.**


Violence isn't inevitable. Research shows that certain approaches, such as mentoring, therapies and hot spot policing, can reduce children's vulnerability to violence. But knowing what works is pointless unless it's put into action and changes are made across systems.

To support the sectors key to keeping children safe – policing, the youth sector, education, health, children's services, neighbourhoods and youth justice – we've created the **YEF Toolkit**. This free resource summarises research from around the world about what works – and what doesn't – to prevent violence. So, when commissioners and policymakers are making decisions about what to do and where to direct resources, they can prioritise the approaches that have the best chance of making a difference.

 Visit the YEF Toolkit

To further help children and families access the most effective forms of support, we're committed to providing sector-specific guidance aimed at empowering frontline practitioners and reforming the systems that impact how, when and why children are supported.

The first practice guidance to be published is for the **education sector**. It recommends the most effective approaches that leaders in schools, colleges and alternative provision can take to keep children safe from violence, both inside and outside of school.

 Download our practice guidance for schools

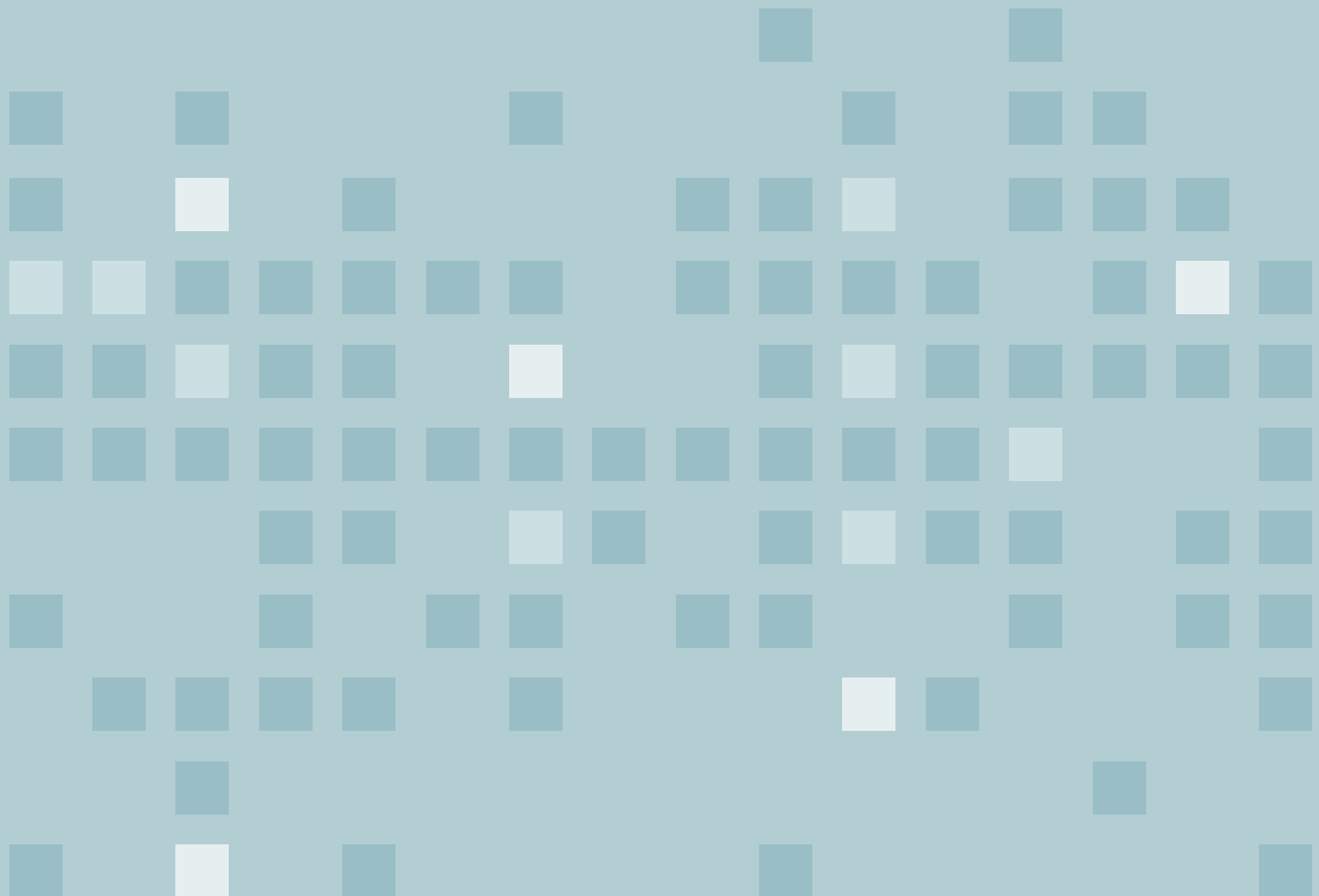
We've also published guidance aimed at improving support for **children who are arrested**. There's strong evidence that providing targeted support to children who have committed low-level or first-time offences instead of taking them to court reduces the rates and severity of reoffending.



Download our guidance  
for arrested children

# Part 3

## Methodology



# Background and approach

In this report, we want to cut through the complexity. We aim to provide a clear account of what's happening to violence affecting children and young people in England and Wales, whether it's getting better or worse, and how the sectors most important to supporting children and young people are performing. We've done this by selecting 11 core indicators that we'll track over time. This includes three core measures of violence, a measure of racial disproportionality in the youth justice system, a measure for six of our seven sectors of interest and a measure of poverty affecting children. We've also looked at a range of other data to provide greater context and dig into the detail behind the headline figures.

## Background and purpose

Are crime and violence getting worse? Are more children and young people being affected? How is society equipped to support them? These are just some of the questions that, on the face of it, should be easy to answer. However, figuring out how children's involvement in violence is changing is no easy task. There are multiple different data sources of varying quality that sometimes provide competing accounts of what's going on.

Our mission at the Youth Endowment Fund (YEF) is to prevent children from becoming involved in violence. For policymakers and practitioners to protect children and divert them away from violence, it's vital that we all have a clear picture of what's going on. The purpose of this report is to cut through the complexity and to provide a clear and simple picture of how children and young people's involvement in violence is changing. Is it getting better or worse? And what's happening to the sectors that support them?

We've approached this by looking at the most reliable published data and selected 11 key indicators, which we'll track over time. Four of the indicators relate to children's involvement in violence, including one focused on racial disproportionality. Six relate to the sectors that support them. One final indicator relates specifically to poverty.

## What do we mean by sectors?

To help us make the biggest difference, at the YEF, we've identified seven sectors in which we'll use evidence to find out what works and what needs to change so that children are better supported and violence decreases. These sectors have been selected for a number of reasons. First, they align with the professions that work most closely with vulnerable children. Second, there are clear gaps in the evidence within these sectors, where research and funding can help. And third, we think changes in policies and practice in these areas could lead to lasting positive change for children and young people, their families and communities.


**Table 1.1. Summary of YEF sectors**

Sector	Summary of priority area of interest
Policing	How does policing best prevent violence – including through working with other organisations where the police are not the lead?
Youth justice	How do we best support arrested children to prevent them from becoming involved in violence?
Neighbourhoods	How do we reduce crime and violence in specific neighbourhoods?
Education	What should happen in schools, colleges and alternative provision settings to prevent children from becoming involved in violence?
Health	How do we use therapy to support children's mental health and keep them safe from becoming involved in violence?
Children's services	How do we best support families facing challenges and help them create a safe, loving environment at home?
Youth	How do we use constructive activities like sports, drama and employment to prevent children from becoming involved in violence? How can a trusted adult outside the family help to keep a child safe?

For each sector, YEF is funding programmes and research to build a better understanding of what works to prevent violence, making the evidence accessible and working for change.

For the core indicator for each of these sectors we've assigned a rating based on whether it's improving, worsening or mixed. In addition to these core indicators, we've looked at a variety of other data sources to explore these issues in greater depth.

The YEF has a particular focus on racial disproportionality. As this report will go



on to show, children from minority ethnic backgrounds are overrepresented in the criminal justice system, particularly Black children. What leads to this overrepresentation is a complex mix of individual, societal and system-level drivers. Biases in offending data, which typically reports only those that have been arrested or charged rather than underlying patterns of offending, can also compound the disproportionality seen. It is beyond the scope of this report to fully unpack the influences each of these factors plays. However, these influences must be taken into consideration when interpreting the findings.

In addition to racial disproportionality, we also consider other dimensions, such as gender and geography. While these factors are often explored in isolation, it's important to emphasise that many of the issues that put children most at risk of involvement in violence overlap. And the intersection of different forms of disadvantage – including poverty, racism and access to support – can compound these risks.

# Selection of measures

## What indicators have we selected to measure the prevalence of violence affecting children and young people?

No one data source provides a complete picture of what's happening to children affected by violence. Police figures tell us what crimes get recorded; however, many crimes go unreported or detected. Data from the justice system tells us which children have been cautioned or convicted, which relies on someone being caught and charged. Other data, for example, children who are treated in hospital for assault, only focuses on the rarest and most extreme forms of violence.

To provide a comprehensive picture, we've therefore chosen three core measures of violence:

- The number of 16–24-year-olds who are victims of homicide.
- The number of 0–17-year-olds admitted to hospital due to assault with a knife or sharp object.
- The number of violent offences proven to have been committed by children.

In addition to these three measures, we've also selected an indicator that tracks disproportionality in youth offending outcomes. Here, we're using the proportion of children in custody who are Black.

## What indicators have we selected to measure our sectors of interest?

The purpose of selecting indicators in the core sectors that the YEF works with is to try and understand what is going on for young people at a national level, what challenges the professionals and services supporting them face and how these have changed over time.

Measuring how well-equipped individual sectors are to support children and protect them from violence is challenging. In some cases, we only have figures for the number of children being supported, and in other cases, how much money is being spent.

One sector we haven't provided an indicator for is neighbourhoods. The focus of the neighbourhoods sector is applying a place-based approach to addressing crime and violence by working with local organisations, systems and communities in specific local areas affected by violence. This hyper-local focus makes it difficult to choose one core indicator to track over time. We'll explore alternative metrics for this sector in future updates.

The table below summarises all 11 indicators and the data source used.

**Table 1.2. Summary of key indicators**




Area/sector	Indicator	Source
1. Homicide	16–24-year-old homicide victims (England and Wales)	Home Office – Homicide Index
2. Knife crime	0–17-year-olds admitted to hospital due to knife injury (England)	NHS Digital – Hospital Admitted Patient Care
3. Justice system involvement	Proven violent offences committed by children (England and Wales)	Youth Justice Board Statistics
4. Disproportionality	Proportion of children in custody who are Black (England and Wales)	Youth Justice Board Statistics
5. Policing	Recorded crimes that were successfully investigated (England and Wales)	Home Office – Crime outcomes in England and Wales
6. Youth justice	Proportion of 10–17-year-old offenders that re-offend (England and Wales)	Youth Justice Board Statistics
7. Neighbourhood	<i>No suitable indicator chosen</i>	<i>N/A</i>
8. Education	Proportion of pupils persistently absent from school (England)	DfE – Pupil absence in schools in England
9. Health	Referrals to secondary mental health services (England)	NHS Digital – Mental Health Bulletin
10. Children's services	Number of looked after children (England)	DfE – Children looked after statistics
11. Youth	Local authority expenditure for youth services (England)	DfE – Local authority and school expenditure statistics
12. Poverty	Children in households in absolute poverty (United Kingdom)	DWP – Households below average income

# How ratings have been assigned

For each of the indicators, we've compared the last available annual figures with three different time points: the previous year; the year before the Covid-19 pandemic (2019/20) and 10 years ago (or the longest available period if 10 years of data is not available).

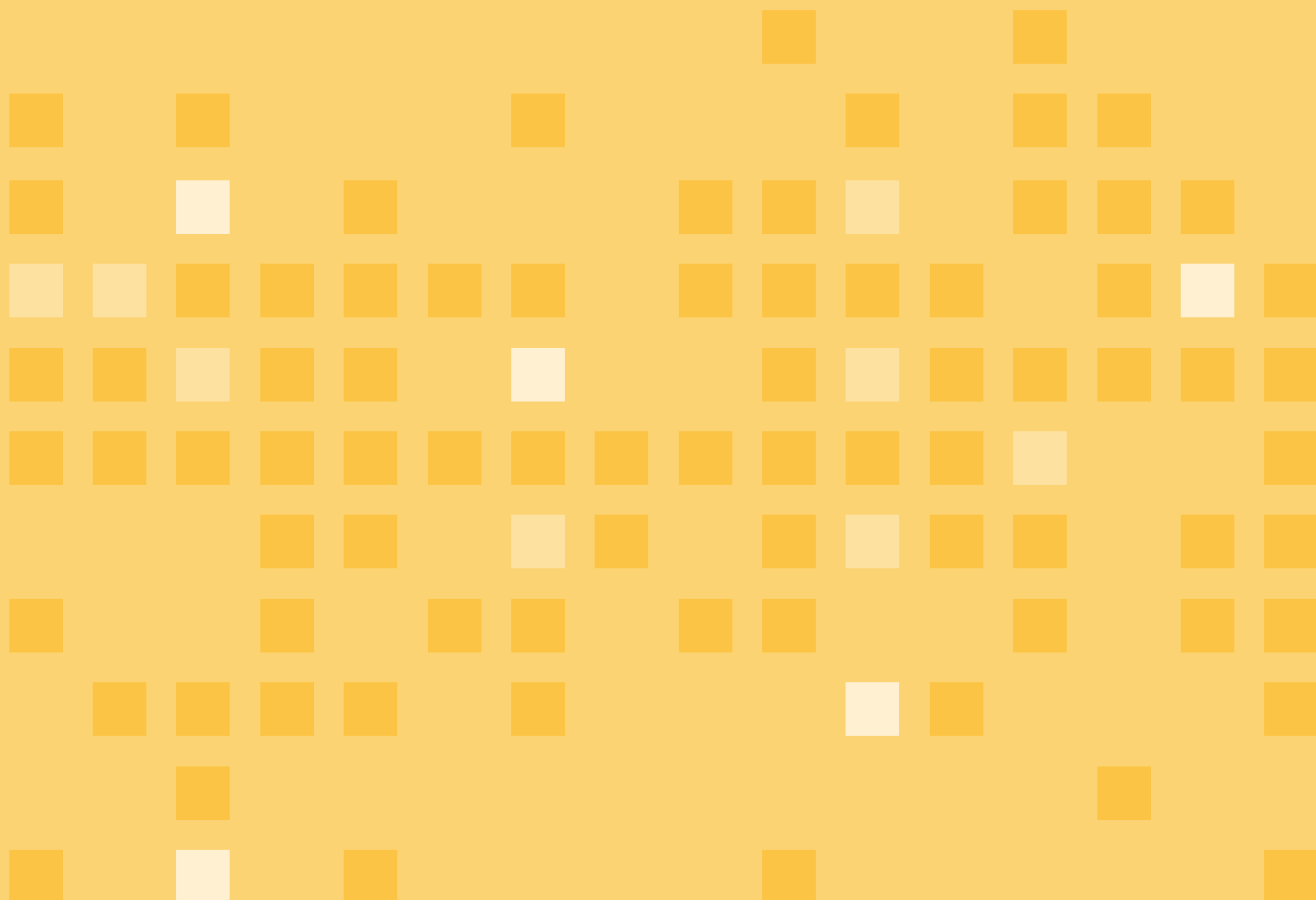
The first indicator provides a view of how the indicator has performed in the most recent period. The second indicator provides a sense of how the measure has performed since the pandemic. Covid-19 had a significant disruptive effect on many areas of society – how the indicator performs today relative to where it was before Covid-19 provides a sense of whether or not it has recovered or surpassed levels prior to the pandemic-related disruption. The third indicator provides a view of how the indicator is currently performing against the longer-run trend.

We've assigned ratings as follows:

-  **Improving:** For indicators where, at all three time points, the measure has shown improvement.
-  **Worsening:** For indicators where, at all three time points, the measure has got worse.
-  **Mixed:** For indicators where there is no clear trend based on the three time points (i.e. some point to improvement while others have got worse).

# Part 4

## Detailed findings



# Children affected by violence

Serious violence increased sharply in the mid-2010s. Homicides of 16–24-year-olds spiked in 2017/18 – up 69% compared to 2012/13. The number of children admitted to hospital for knife assault nearly doubled from 2012/13 to 2018/19. But in recent years, violence has fallen. Between 2019/20 and 2022/23, homicides fell by 30% and hospital admissions by 16%. The number of violent offences committed by children has fallen more consistently and is now down 31% from 2019/20. Despite recent falls, homicides and hospital admissions remain higher than a decade ago. And some children are disproportionately affected. Black children are significantly overrepresented, and violence is geographically concentrated in certain areas.

## 1. Homicides

CORE INDICATOR	INDICATOR PERFORMANCE	LATEST VALUE (2022/23)	CHANGE COMPARED TO...		
			Last year (2021/22)	Pre-COVID (2019/20)	10 years ago (2012/13)
Homicides 16–24-year-old homicide victims	Mixed	99	- 19%	- 30%	+ 14%

### COMMENTARY

Overall, this measure has a **mixed rating**. Homicides of 16–24-year-olds spiked in 2017/18. In 2022/23, the total number was down 19% from the year before and down 30% from the year before Covid-19 (2019/20), but it was up 14% compared to 10 years ago (2012/13).

### How are we measuring homicides?

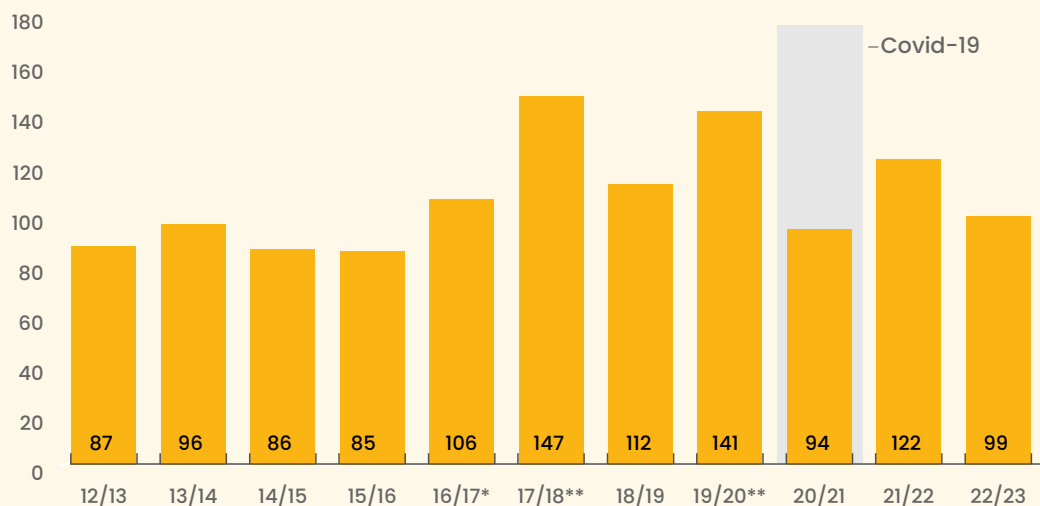
Homicides provide a measure of the most extreme consequences of violence. We're using the Home Office's [Homicide Index \[1\]](#) published by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) to measure how many 16–24-year-olds die by homicide each year. We have focused on this age range, as the data for 10–17-year-olds isn't available. Homicides are generally seen as one of the more accurate measures of violence, as the figures aren't affected by changes in reporting (nearly all homicides are reported and recorded accurately). However, these figures can be volatile due to the fortunately low numbers involved. Some events, such as acts of terrorism, can also have a disproportionate impact on the figures for the years in which they're recorded.

## Fewer young people were victims of homicide in the most recent year, but numbers are still up compared to 10 years ago.

Overall, total crime in England and Wales (as measured by the [Crime Survey of England and Wales](#)) has been on a downward trajectory over the past two decades [2]. But, since the mid-2010s, certain forms of serious violence started to increase. This prompted several initiatives to tackle the rise, including those set out in the government's [Serious Violence Strategy](#) [3].

One of the key indicators of this increase in serious violence is homicides. The total number of homicides fell by 35% in the 10 years between 2004/05 and 2014/15[1]. But after 2014/15, this number started rising. Homicides of 16–24-year-olds increased the following year – rising 25% between 2015/16 and 2016/17<sup>1</sup>. The data from 2017/18 and 2019/20 show particularly sharp spikes. Large increases in these years are partly due to mass-casualty events, such as the Manchester Arena bombing. However, those events don't entirely account for this increase. When we look at the total number of homicide incidents rather than victims (a figure much less sensitive to the number and scale of mass-casualty events), we still see an increase of 31% from 2014/15 to 2017/18 for homicides of all ages.

Figure 1.1. Number of 16–24-year-olds who died by homicide (England and Wales)



\* To account for the recognition of Hillsborough victims in the 2016/17 homicide figures, we've manually reduced the published homicide figures for 2016/17 based on [data](#) on the age profile of the Hillsborough victims [4].

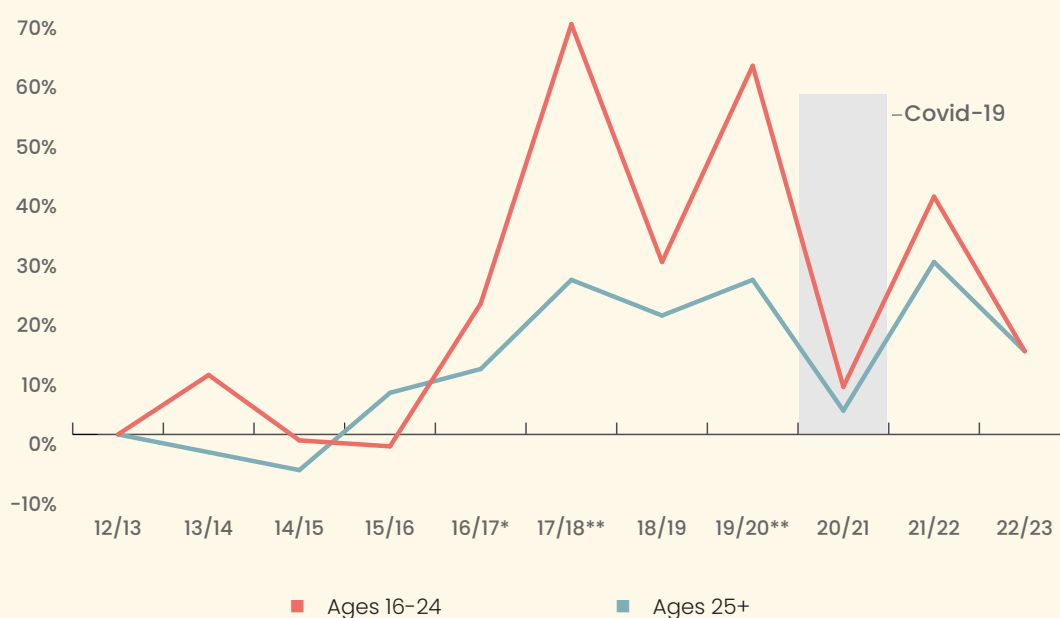
\*\* Figures in these years were affected by several one-off events involving mass casualties, including the Westminster Bridge attack, the Manchester Arena bombing, the London Bridge attack, and the human trafficking victims who were found dead in a lorry in Essex.

<sup>1</sup> These figures exclude the impact of Hillsborough fatalities.

During the Covid-19 pandemic and the ensuing national lockdowns, most forms of crime and violence fell, including homicides. The number of 16–24-year-old homicide victims was down 33% in 2020/21 from the year before. In the latest figures, homicides remain broadly down. There were 99 16–24-year-old victims of homicide in 2022/23 (the latest year we have data for), which is down 19% from the year before and 30% from 2019/20 (the year before Covid-19). However, this figure remains 14% up compared to 10 years ago (2012/13).

The spikes in homicides in 2017/18 and 2019/20 disproportionately impacted younger victims. The number of 16–24-year-old homicide victims increased 69% in 2017/18 compared to 2012/13, while the number of victims aged 25 and over increased 26%. However, the smaller number of 16–24-year-old victims means changes appear much greater proportionally. Overall, increases in homicides are now broadly the same for 16–24-year-olds and victims aged 25 and over, both up 14% between 2012/13 and 2022/23.

**Figure 1.2. Homicides by age: percentage change relative to 2012/13 (England and Wales)**



\*The published figures for 2016/17 have been adjusted to take account of Hillsborough victims.

\*\*Figures in these years were affected by several mass casualty events.

## 2. Knife crime

CORE INDICATOR	INDICATOR PERFORMANCE	LATEST VALUE (2022/23)	CHANGE COMPARED TO...		
			Last year (2021/22)	Pre-COVID (2019/20)	10 years ago (2012/13)
<b>Knife crime</b> 0–17-year-olds admitted to hospital due to knife assault	Mixed	467	- 2%	- 16%	+ 47%

### COMMENTARY

Overall, this measure has a **mixed rating**. Knife-related hospital admissions began to rise significantly from the mid-2010s. In the latest data, the number of children (0–17-year-olds) admitted to hospital due to knife assaults fell 2%, down from the previous year. Compared to pre-Covid-19 levels (2019/20), it's down 16%. However, it remains 47% up from where it was 10 years ago (2012/13).

### How are we measuring knife crime?

We're using the number of 0–17-year-olds admitted to hospital per year, where the cause for admission was assault with a sharp object, as our core knife crime indicator [5]. Hospital admissions data is seen as a more reliable guide to trends in knife violence than police or justice figures, as the data is less susceptible to changes in recording, reporting or sentencing practices. For more information on the difference between police reports and other measures of knife violence, see our blog [6].

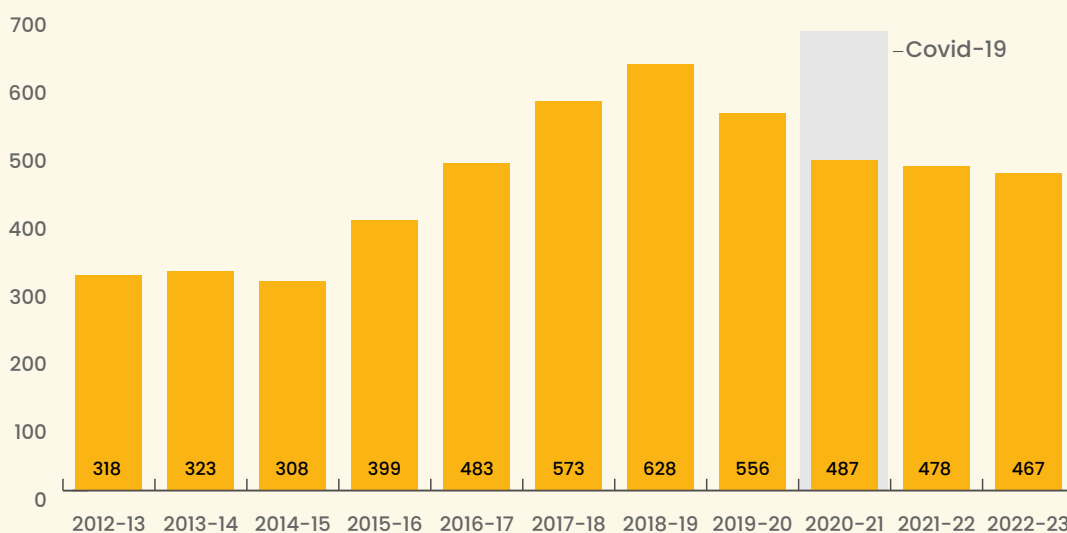
## The number of children admitted to hospital for knife assault is going down, but levels remain higher than they were 10 years ago.

Like other measures of violence, knife-related hospital admissions began to rise sharply in the mid-2010s. Between 2014/15 and 2018/19, the number of children admitted to hospital following assault with a knife or sharp object doubled – from 308 to 628 admissions per year.

In 2022/23 (the latest year we have data), there were 467 instances where a child was admitted to hospital following a knife assault. This was 2% down from the previous year and 16% down from the year before the pandemic.

Reductions in hospital admissions appear to be levelling off. In the last two years, they fell 2% each year – compared to 11% in 2019/20. The number of admissions in 2022/23 remains 47% higher than it was 10 years ago in 2012/13. And not all areas of the country are seeing decreases – just over a quarter (26%) of police force areas [7] have seen increased admissions in the latest year.

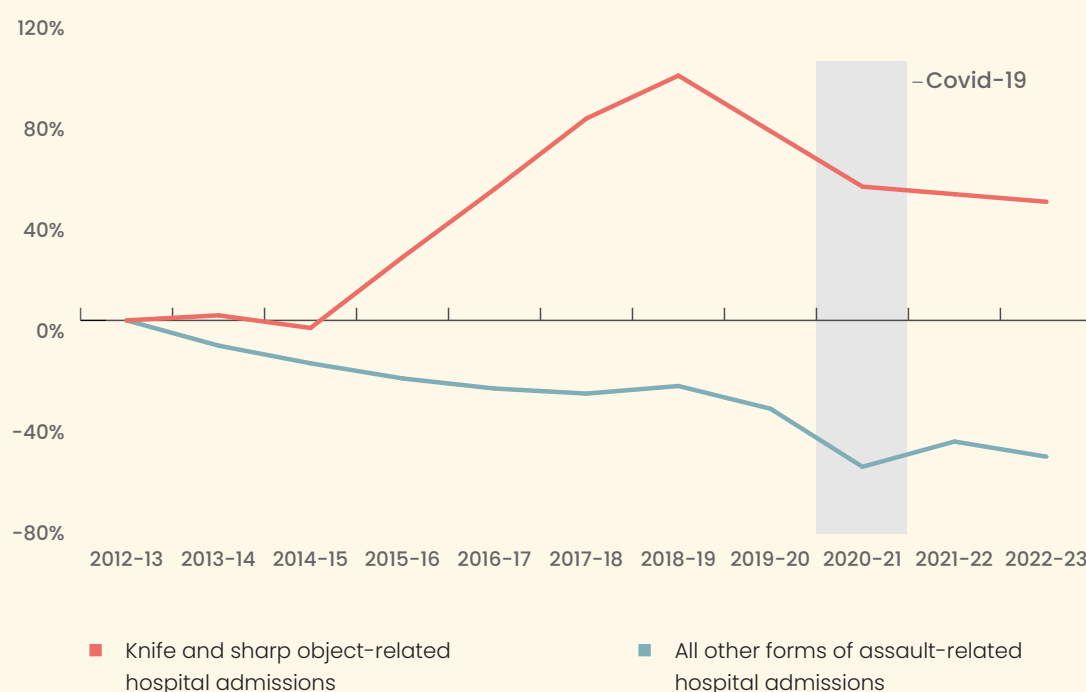
Figure 2.1. Number of hospital admissions of 0–17-year-olds due to assault with a knife or sharp object (England)



## The pattern of knife assault is different than other forms of violence.

While knife assaults grew rapidly in the mid-2010s, the same is not true for other forms of assault leading to hospital admissions. The number of children hospitalised for all other forms of assault (i.e. with other forms of weapons or without the use of weapons) has been falling for most of the past 10 years [5]. In the latest year (2022/23), all other forms of assault-related admissions were down 10% from the previous year, down 29% from the year before Covid-19 and down 54% from 2012/13.

Figure 2.2. Number of hospital admissions of 0–17-year-olds by type of assault, relative to 2012/13 (England)



## Assaults with knives are the main driver of homicides among young people.

Of the 16–24-year-olds killed in the latest year, 69% were killed with a knife or other sharp instrument [1]. This is a significantly greater share of homicides than it was 10 years ago (56% in 2012/13) but has stayed fairly stable for the last few years. The proportion of knife or sharp instrument homicides is even greater for teenage victims – 82% of 13–19-year-olds who died by homicide in 2022/23.

**Figure 2.3. Homicides of 16–24-year-olds with a sharp instrument vs all other causes (England and Wales)**



\*Figures in these years were affected by the recording of victims relating to several one-off events involving mass casualties, including Hillsborough, the Westminster Bridge attack, the Manchester Arena bombing, the London Bridge attack, and human trafficking victims who were found dead in a lorry in Essex. These figures have not been adjusted to take account of these mass-casualty events.

### 3. Justice system involvement

CORE INDICATOR	INDICATOR PERFORMANCE	LATEST VALUE (2022/23)	CHANGE COMPARED TO...		
			Last year (2021/22)	Pre-COVID (2019/20)	10 years ago (2012/13)
Justice system involvement Proven violent offences committed by children	Improving	14,298	- 2%	- 31%	- 46%

#### COMMENTARY

Overall, this measure has an **improving rating**. The number of children involved in the youth justice system has been consistently falling over the past 10 years. In the most recent data, proven violent offences by 10–17-year-olds are down 2% from the year before, 31% from pre-pandemic levels (as measured in 2019/20) and 46% compared to 10 years ago (2012/13).

#### How are we measuring justice system involvement?

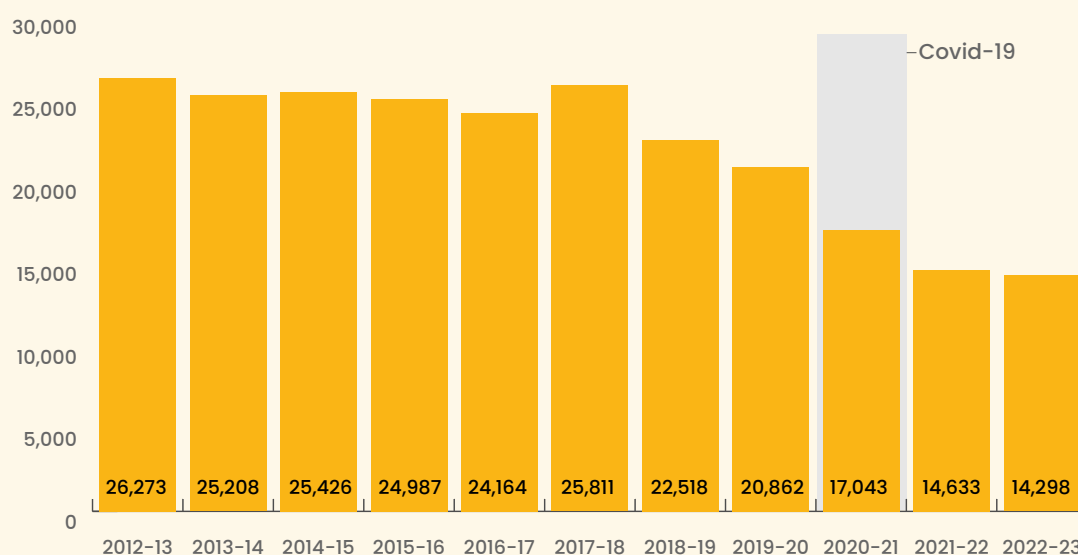
To get a sense of how much violence children and young people are perpetrating overall, we've used proven violent offences data from the [Youth Justice Board](#) [8]. For the purpose of this measure, we consider violent crimes to include violence against the person (including offences such as assault and homicide), robbery (which is theft with the use or threat of force) and sexual offences (including rape and other sexual offences). Proven offences are those for which a child received a caution or conviction.

It's important to bear in mind that other factors – such as how readily crimes are reported, the priority the police give to prosecuting certain types of offences and how successful they are at identifying and charging suspects – will affect the number of children with proven offences. This measure may, therefore, not provide a fully accurate measure of the underlying amount of violence and how it changes over time.

## The number of proven violent offences committed by children has been falling.

The number of children cautioned or convicted for violent offences has been falling since 2017/18. In the latest year (2022/23), there were 14,298 proven cases of violent offences by 10–17-year-olds. This is 2% down from the previous year, 31% from 2019/20 – the year before COVID-19 – and 46% from 10 years ago (2012/13).

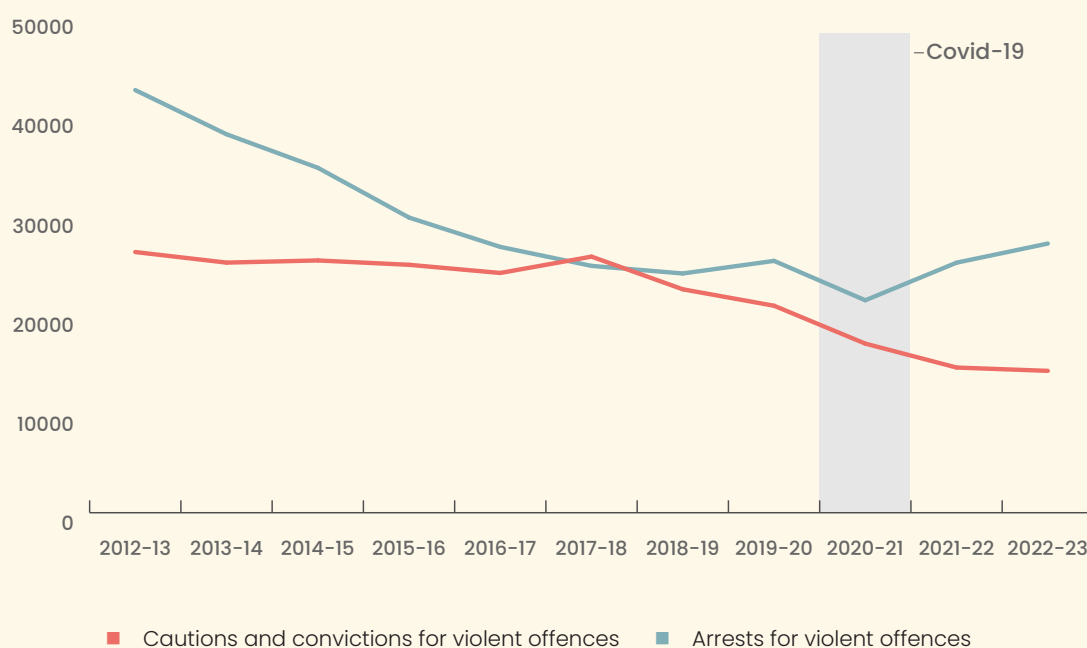
Figure 3.1. Numbers of cautions and convictions for violent offences committed by children (England and Wales)



### But this steady improvement may be levelling off.

Since 2017/18, numbers have been falling consistently, averaging a fall of 13% each year between 2018/19 and 2021/22. The fall of 2% in the latest year was the smallest decrease seen in the last five years. And the number of children arrested for violence has recently started to increase. Following a dip during Covid-19, the number of children arrested for violence-related offences has increased. In the latest figures, arrests were up 8% from the previous year and up 7% from the year before the pandemic (2019/20). Since the pandemic, the amount of time taken to prosecute a youth criminal case has increased from an average of 166 days in 2019/20 to 207 days in 2022/23. This could mean that there will be a delay in how quickly increases in arrests translate into increases in convictions.

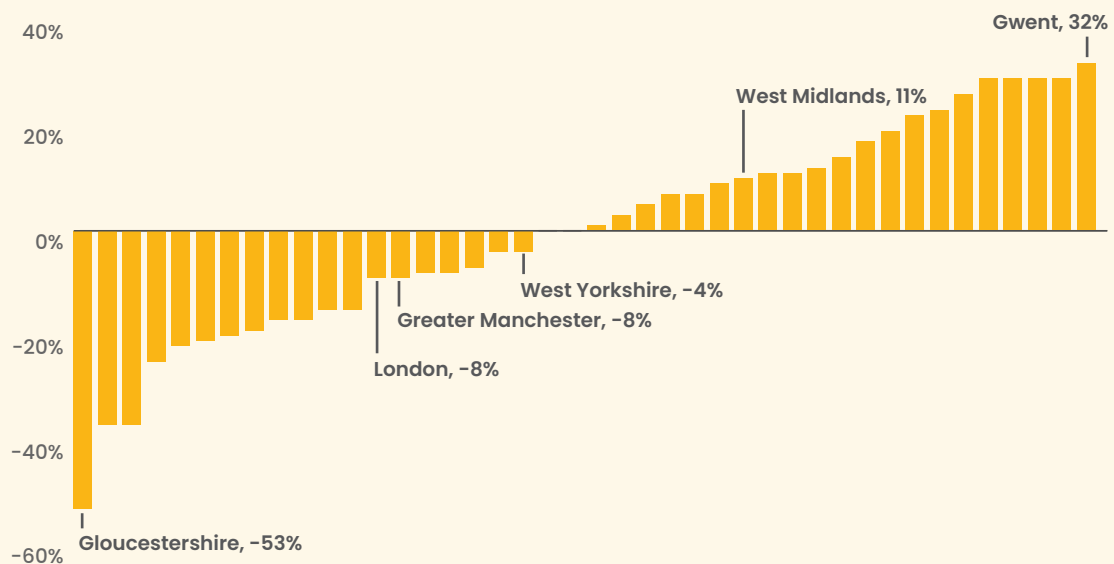
**Figure 3.2. Arrests and cautions/convictions of children for violent offences (England and Wales)**



## Half of police force areas have had increases in the latest year.

In the latest figures, the number of children cautioned or convicted for violent offences remained lower than levels before Covid-19 in nearly all police force areas. However, half of all areas experienced an increase in the past year. Gwent, Essex, Cheshire, Hampshire and Warwickshire all showed increases of almost a third (29–32%). West Midlands – one of the areas with the highest absolute numbers – experienced an increase of 11%.

Figure 3.3. Percentage change in violent offences by children in 2022/23 by police force area (England and Wales)



## 4. Disproportionality

CORE INDICATOR	INDICATOR PERFORMANCE	LATEST VALUE (2022/23)	CHANGE COMPARED TO...		
			Last year (2021/22)	Pre-COVID (2019/20)	10 years ago (2012/13)
Disproportionality Proportion of Black children in custody	Mixed	26%	- 2.0%pt	- 2.2%pt	+4.0%pt

### COMMENTARY

Overall, this measure has a **mixed rating**. In the most recent data, racial disproportionality in the youth justice system has fallen. The share of children from Black backgrounds serving custodial sentences fell two percentage points (2%pts) from 28% in 2021/22 to 26% in 2022/23. It's down 2.2%pts from 2019/20 – the year before Covid-19. However, the proportion of children in custody who are Black remains 4%pts higher than 10 years ago. Black children remain over four times more likely to be serving custodial sentences compared to their share of the population.

### What is our core measure of disproportionality?

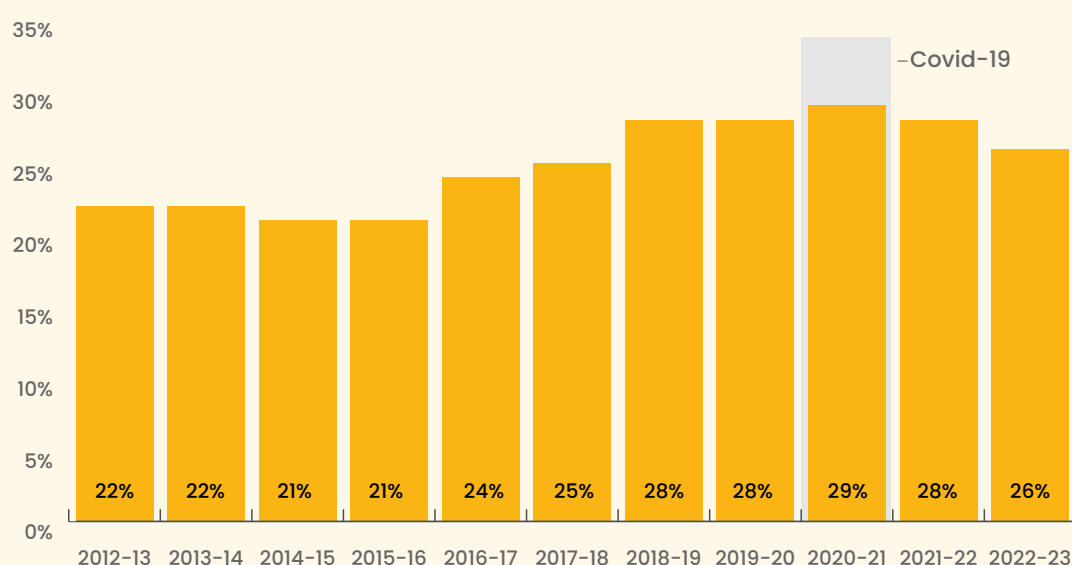
It's widely accepted that there are significant racial disparities in the youth justice system and who's affected by violence, particularly when it comes to Black children [9]. It's important that this remains central to our thinking about violence. For this reason, our core measure of disproportionality focuses on racial disproportionality. One of the areas where this disproportionality is most stark is in the ethnicity of children serving custodial or prison sentences. To track this, we've used the proportion of children in custody on an average month who are from any Black background [8].

## Black children are significantly overrepresented in the criminal justice system, but this has been narrowing recently.

Most children who interact with the police and youth justice system are White. White children make up 71% of 10–17-year-olds who are stopped and searched, 73% of those arrested and 72% of those cautioned or convicted for an offence. However, considering their share of the population, children from Black backgrounds are overrepresented at all levels. And historically, the degree to which children from Black backgrounds have been overrepresented has been getting worse. While the total number of children involved in the justice system has been falling, the proportion who are from Black or mixed ethnic backgrounds has been increasing.

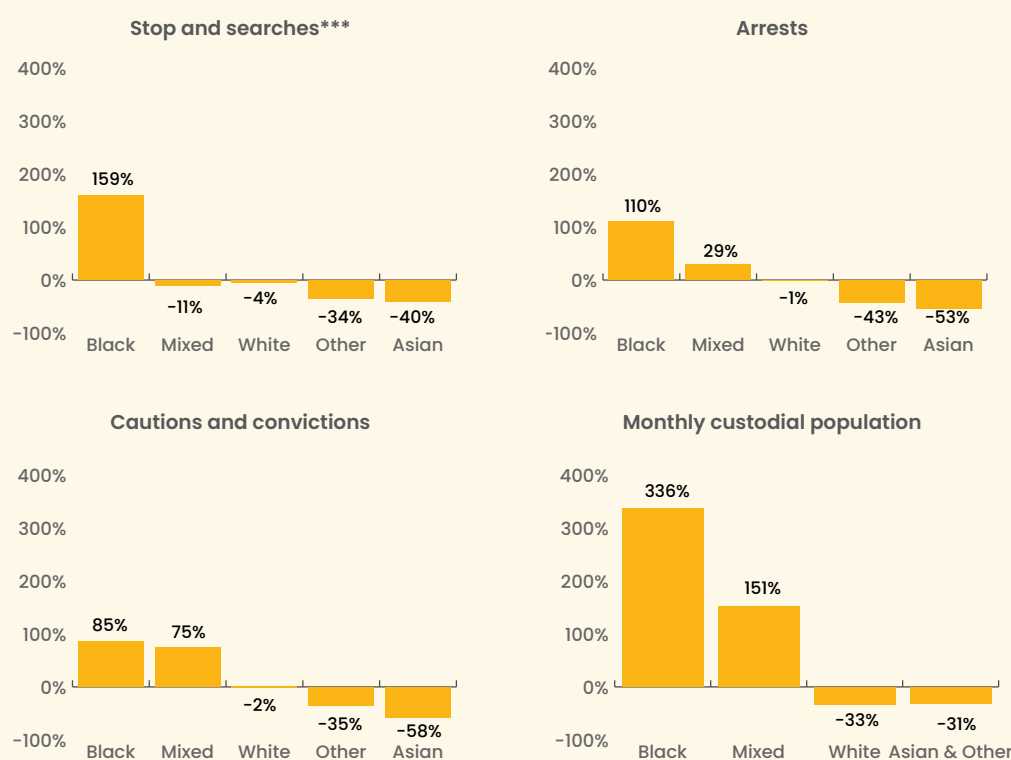
This overrepresentation is most stark when looking at our core measure – children serving custodial sentences. Black children make up 6% of all 10–17-year-olds, but in 2022/23, they accounted for 26% of children in custody – 4.4 times more than their population share. Over the past decade, the total number of children serving custodial sentences has fallen, but this hasn't impacted children of all ethnicities equally. The average number of White children serving custodial sentences fell by 58% between 2014/15 and 2020/21. In comparison, the average number of Black children only fell by 26%. This led to the share of Black children serving custodial sentences increasing over this period from 21% to 29%.

Figure 4.1. Proportion of average monthly child custody population that is Black (England and Wales)



However, in the past two years, the share of Black children in custody has fallen. The absolute number of Black children in custody also decreased more than any other racial group in the past year – down 9% from the previous year compared to a decrease of 4% for mixed ethnicity children, a 1% increase for White children and a 6% increase for Asian and other ethnicity children.


**Figure 4.2. The under- and overrepresentation of children relative to their population share\* at various points in the criminal justice system by race\*\* in 2022/23 (England and Wales)**



\*YEF calculations using various data sources. Calculations take the proportion of criminal justice interactions (e.g. arrests) accounted for by a given ethnic group (where race is known) and divide this by that group's share of the total population using the latest census 2021 population estimates (here). We've plotted the difference between the expected and observed proportion.

\*\*For stop and search and arrest figures, we used self-identified ethnicity. There is a relatively large share for whom ethnicity was not provided or not known (20% and 12%, respectively). This may lead to differences in our estimates of overrepresentation compared to other sources. However, using self-identified ethnicity allows for broad comparability between these two sources.

\*\*\*Figures on the racial disproportionality experienced within stop and search, when presented at the national level, can be misleading. This is due in part to the geographical concentration of where stop and search powers are most extensively used, particularly in London, and where there is a higher concentration of ethnic minority communities. However, the overrepresentation of Black children in stop and searches is reflected in figures across all forces, meaning the disproportionate use of stop and searches by some forces does not explain this disparity alone. An analysis of the drivers can be found here.



We see improvements in other data as well. The proportion of children stopped and searched, arrested and cautioned and convicted who are Black has also fallen in the last two years [8, 10]. However, despite these recent improvements, Black children remain significantly overrepresented across all measures of criminal justice involvement. In 2022/23, Black children were 2.6 times more likely to be stopped and searched compared to their share of the population, just over twice (2.1×) as likely to be arrested [10] and almost twice (1.9×) as likely to be cautioned or convicted [8]. However, these figures are not all directly comparable due to differences in how race is reported in stop and searches, arrests and the criminal justice system, particularly whether they are self-identified or identified by others and the proportion for whom race is not reported.

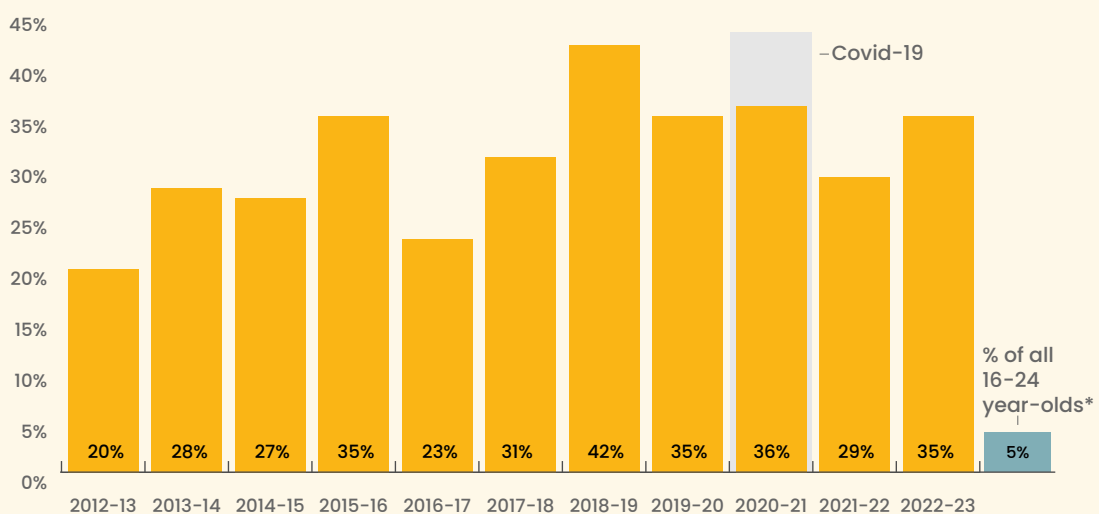
Children from mixed ethnic backgrounds also experience significantly higher rates of involvement with the justice system than expected by population share: 29% higher for arrests, 75% higher for convictions and cautions and 151% higher for those serving custodial sentences. In comparison, 10–17-year-olds from Asian and other minority ethnic backgrounds – along with White children – are underrepresented compared to their shares of the population.

It's important to emphasise that the overrepresentation of children from minority ethnic backgrounds in offending statistics is a complex mixture of individual, societal and system-level drivers. There is also some evidence that differential treatment and sentencing decisions of minority ethnic children also play a role. For example, analysis conducted by the Youth Justice Board found that Black children were more likely to receive a custodial sentence even when controlling for demographic and offence-related factors [11]. Differences in how Black children are assessed and treated appear to play a role in the degree of disproportionality experienced among the most severe sentencing decisions.

## Black children are also disproportionately likely to be victims of violence.

It's not just among those suspected and charged with committing acts of violence that Black children are overrepresented; they're also overrepresented among victims. For instance, 12% of victims (across all ages) admitted to hospital for assault with a knife or sharp object in 2022/23 were Black – almost three times their share of the population [7]. Over a third (35%) of all 16–24-year-old homicide victims in the latest year were identified as Black [1]. This is over six times more than their share of the population. And in the last few years, this has stayed consistently higher than it was 10 years ago (2012/13), when 20% of 16–24-year-old victims were Black.

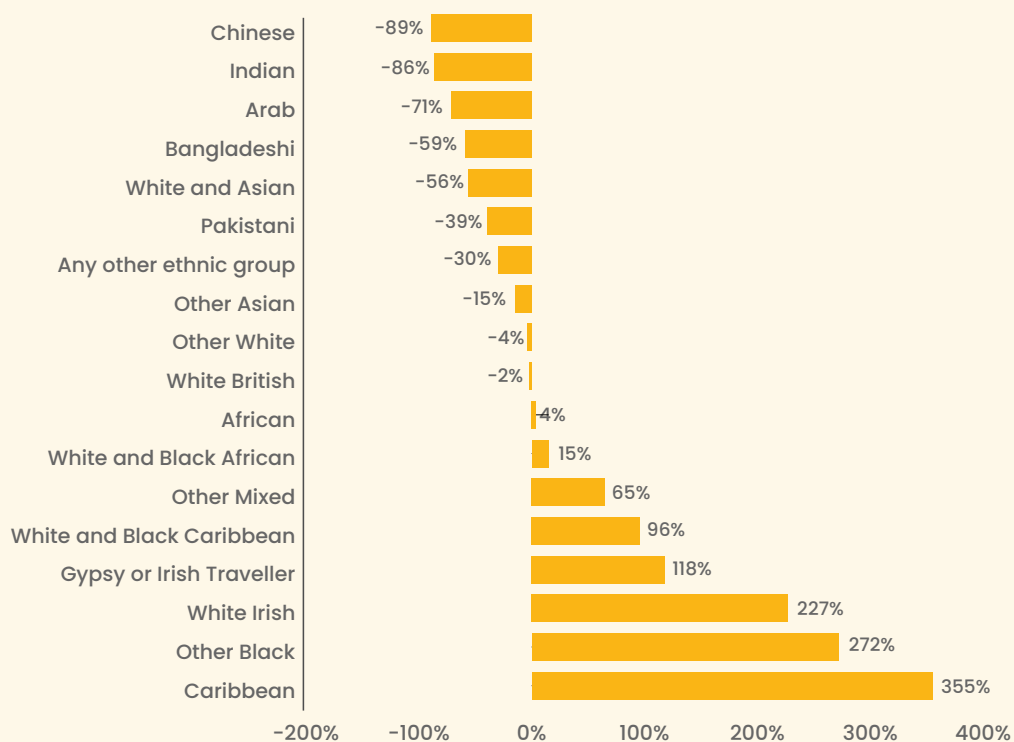
Figure 4.3. Proportion of 16–24-year-old homicide victims who are Black, compared to their share of the population (England and Wales)



### Overrepresentation varies by specific ethnic group.

It's important to emphasise that considering racial disproportionality by looking at broad racialised groups (i.e. Black, White, Asian, etc.) risks masking the underlying patterns of criminal justice involvement experienced by specific communities and groups of children. Below are the figures for arrests – one set of figures published with a granular breakdown by ethnicity [10].

Figure 4.4. Proportion of children arrested relative to their population share by granular ethnicity (18+) in 2022/23 (England and Wales)

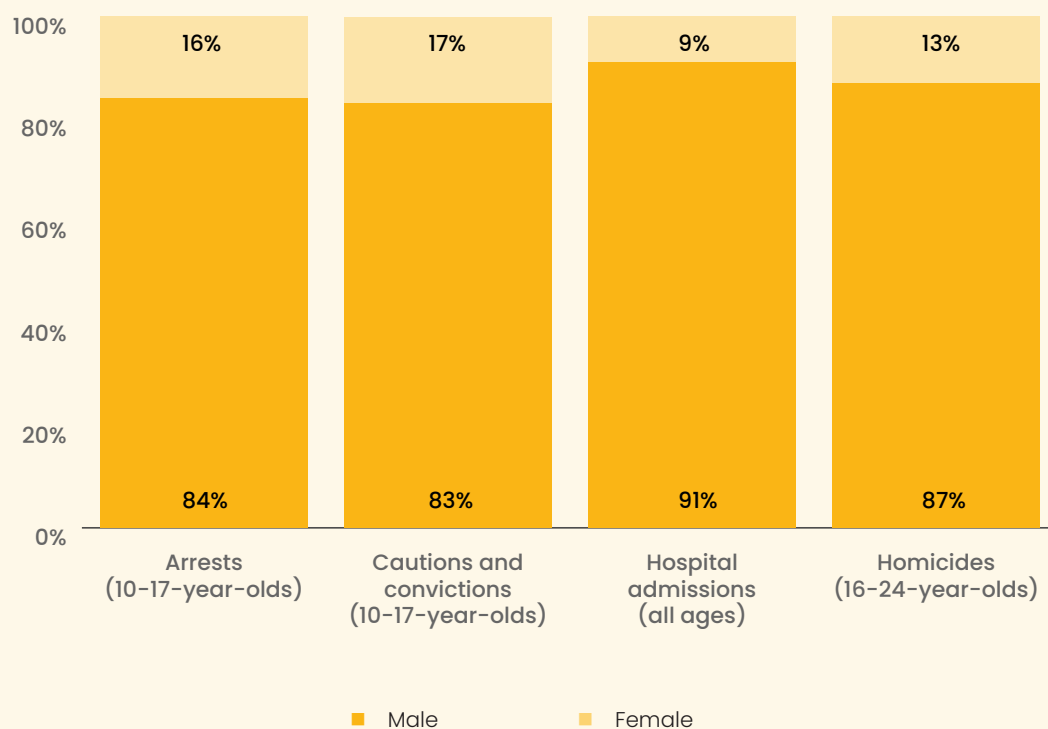


Children of Caribbean and Other Black ethnicities are the groups particularly driving the disproportional arrests of Black children. There is also significant overrepresentation in some smaller groups. For example, children from Gypsy and Irish Traveller backgrounds are 118% more likely to be arrested compared to their share of the population, and White Irish children are 227% more likely. Because these groups represent a small share of the population, they also make up only a small share of children in the youth justice system and can be overlooked when we only look at broad ethnic groupings.

## There is also a significant gender disparity in children affected by violence – boys are significantly more likely than girls to be involved.

In 2022/23, boys accounted for 80% of all arrests for violent offences and 83% of children cautioned or convicted for violent offences [8]. This increases to 96% of cautions and convictions for serious violent offences. Boys are also disproportionately victims of the most life-threatening forms of violence. Of all hospital admissions for knife assault in 2022/23, 91% were male [5]. The latest homicide figures show that 87% of 16–24-year-old homicide victims were male [1]. This gender split has remained stable over the past decade. Apart from homicides, where the proportion of male victims has been growing – up 9%pts over the past 10 years, from 78% of young homicide victims in 2012/13 to 87% in 2022/23.

Figure 4.5. Involvement in violence by gender in 2022/23 (England and Wales)



## **But violence against women and girls remains a serious problem.**

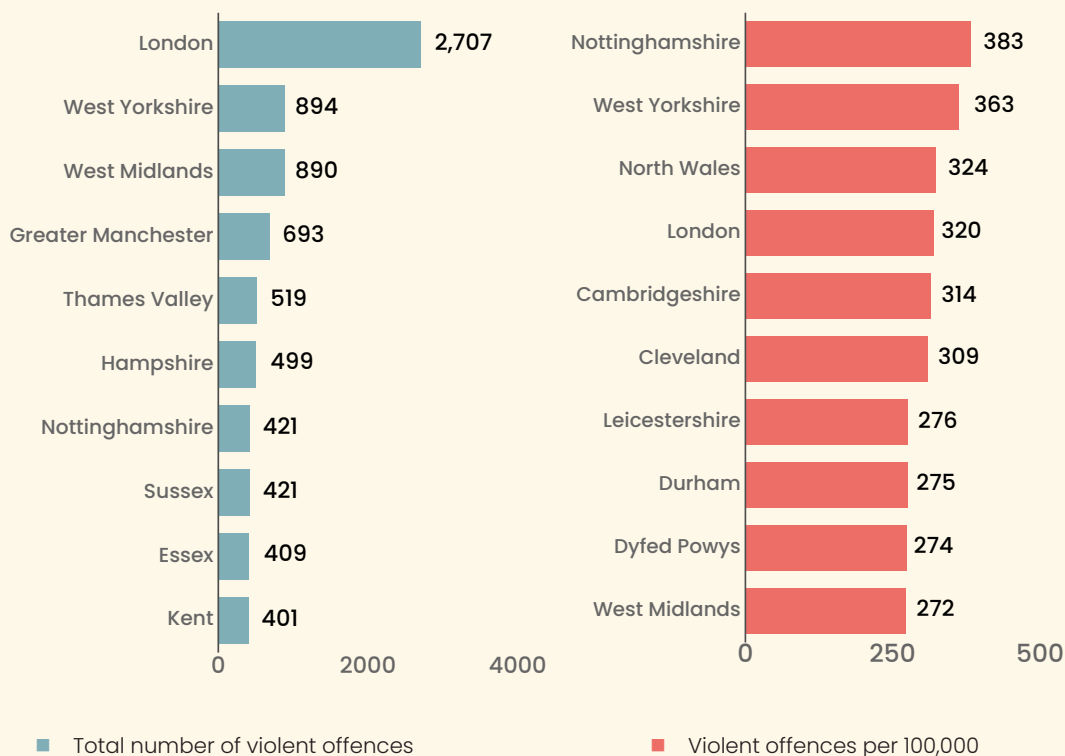
Male and female experiences of serious violence are different. While men are more likely to be hospitalised for knife assaults, women are more likely to be hospitalised for injuries related to sexual assault [5]. 75% of hospital admissions for sexual assault in 2022/23 were female, up from 61% in 2012/13. Across all ages, female homicide victims are more likely to have been acquainted with the suspect compared to male victims [1]. For example, a partner or ex-partner was the principal suspect for almost a third (32%) of female victims of homicide compared to only 3% of men in 2022/23. In contrast, male homicide victims are more than twice as likely to be killed by a friend or acquaintance (25%) or stranger (19%) compared to women (12% and 7%, respectively).

The number of women killed by a partner or ex-partner has fallen in the last 10 years – a decade ago, it accounted for 46% of women's deaths by homicide. But in that time, the share where no suspect was charged has more than doubled, so it's difficult to say what's actually happening.

## Violence is concentrated in certain areas.

Certain areas have consistently shown the highest levels of violence. London, West Midlands, West Yorkshire and Greater Manchester police forces report the highest absolute numbers across multiple violence metrics, including violent offending by children [8], police-recorded knife-enabled crime [12] and homicide [1]. London is consistently at the top.

Figure 4.6. Top 10 police force areas on numbers of violent offences committed by children and rate per head – 2021/22 and 2022/23 average (England and Wales)

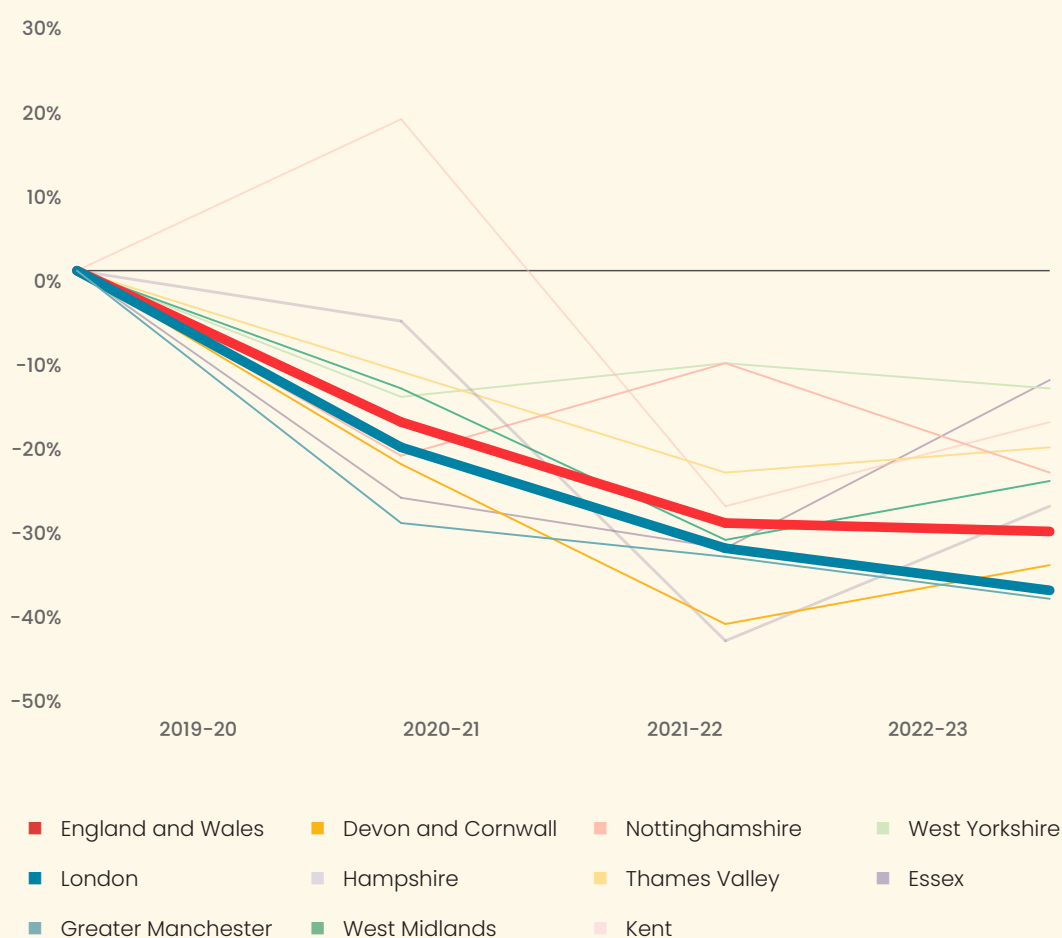


However, when we take the population of each area into account, we see a different pattern. London and West Midlands are still in the top 10 police force areas when we look at rate per head for all three measures, but other forces have higher rates. Looking at the average across the past two years (2021/22 and 2022/23), we see that children's violent offending rates have been highest in Nottinghamshire (383 offences per 100,000 of the population) and West Yorkshire (363 offences per 100,000) [8]. Rates of knife-enabled crime are highest in the West Midlands – 161 offences per 100,000 of the total population [12]. And homicide rates are highest in Cleveland – 1.71 homicides per 100,000 [1].

## London has the highest total of violent crimes, but other areas have shown more growth recently.

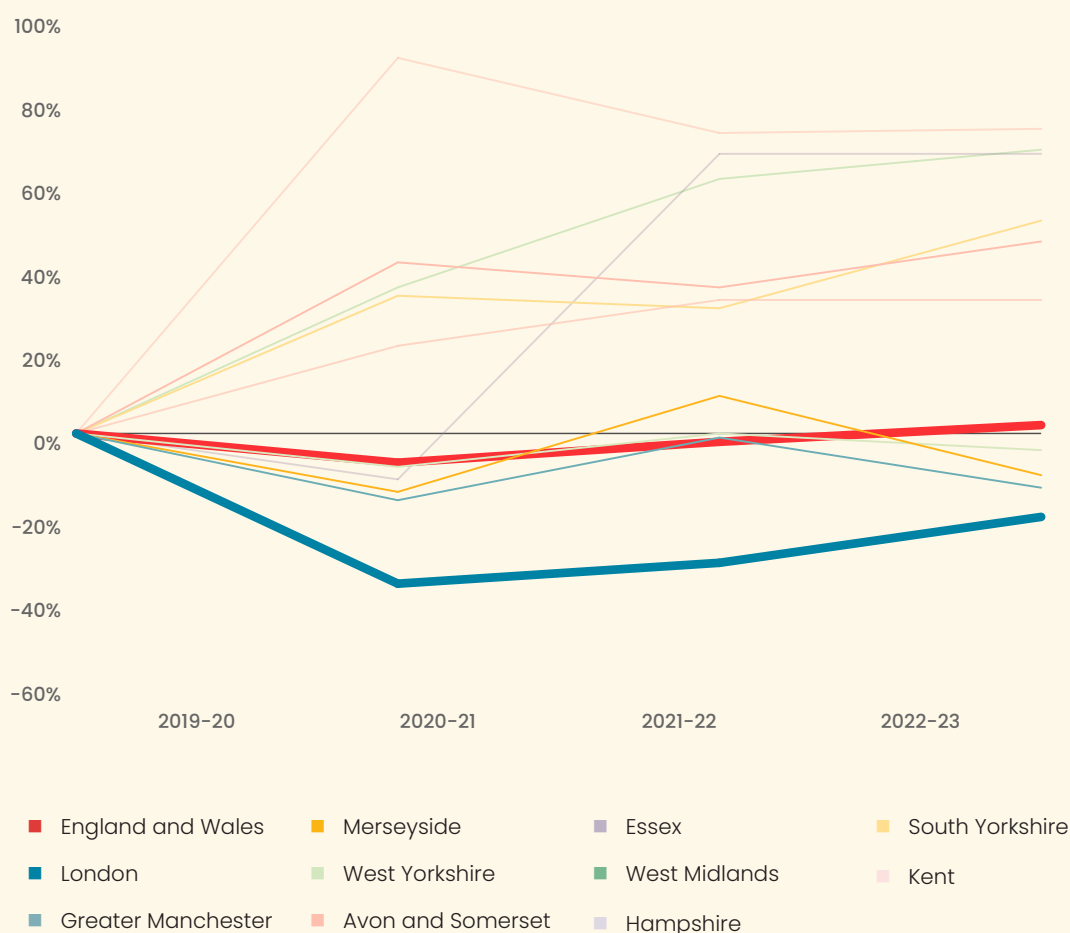
Although London ranks highest for the total number of children convicted or cautioned for violent offences, it's shown relatively greater decreases in recent years compared to other areas [8]. In 2022/23, children's violent offending in London was 38% down compared to the year before Covid-19 (2019/20). This was the second-largest fall among the 10 areas with the highest violence, following Greater Manchester, which had a 39% decrease. It's also larger than the 31% decrease recorded across the whole of England and Wales. The latest year (2022/23) has seen increases in proven violent offending by children in 50% of all police force areas, but, in London and Greater Manchester, numbers continued to fall.

**Figure 4.7. Change in proven violent offences by children since 2019/20 for the 10 police force areas with the highest number of violent offences in the latest year (England and Wales)**



Concerns about violence in London often focus on knife crime. In 2022/23, a quarter (25%) of all hospital admissions for knife assault were in London [7]. In the last year, London experienced one of the largest year-on-year increases in police-recorded offences involving knives – up 15% [12]. However, when we compare changes in knife-enabled crime in London over time to other high knife crime areas, we see that London has bigger falls from 2019/20 to 2020/21 compared to others. And while it has since started to rise again, it remains 20% below where it was pre-pandemic – a greater decrease than any of the other 10 police forces with the highest levels of knife-related crime. In comparison, the total amount of knife-enabled crime recorded across England and Wales in 2022/23 was 2% above where it was in 2019/20.

**Figure 4.8. Change in knife-enabled crime since 2019/20 for the 10 police force areas with the highest numbers of knife-enabled crimes in the latest year (England and Wales)**



# Sectors and wider society

The safety nets, services and sectors which support the most vulnerable are struggling. Some areas have improved. The youth justice system finds fewer children reoffending. However, most sectors are struggling. The police fail to solve most crimes – fewer than one in 10 are successfully investigated. Spending on young people's services has more than halved over the past 10 years. The proportion of pupils who are persistently absent from school has nearly doubled since before the pandemic. Less than half the number of children referred to mental health services receive treatment. The proportion of children in absolute poverty has increased for the first time in five years, and there are racial disproportionalities in exposure to risk and access to support across the youth justice, education, health and children's services sectors.

## 5. Policing

CORE INDICATOR	INDICATOR PERFORMANCE	LATEST VALUE (2022/23)	CHANGE COMPARED TO...		
			Last year (2021/22)	Pre-COVID (2019/20)	10 years ago (2012/13)
Policing Successfully investigated crimes	Worsening	9%	- 0.1%pt	- 1.6%pt	- 16.1%pt

### COMMENTARY

Overall, this measure has a **worsening rating**. While the total number of crimes recorded by police per year increased by 44% over the past decade, the proportion that resulted in a successful resolution (a charge, summons or out of court disposal) fell to a low of 9%. This was similar to the year before, but it was down 1.6%pts compared to before the pandemic (2019/20) and 16%pts compared to 10 years ago (2012/13). The public’s confidence in the police is also falling.

### What is this sector and how are we measuring it?

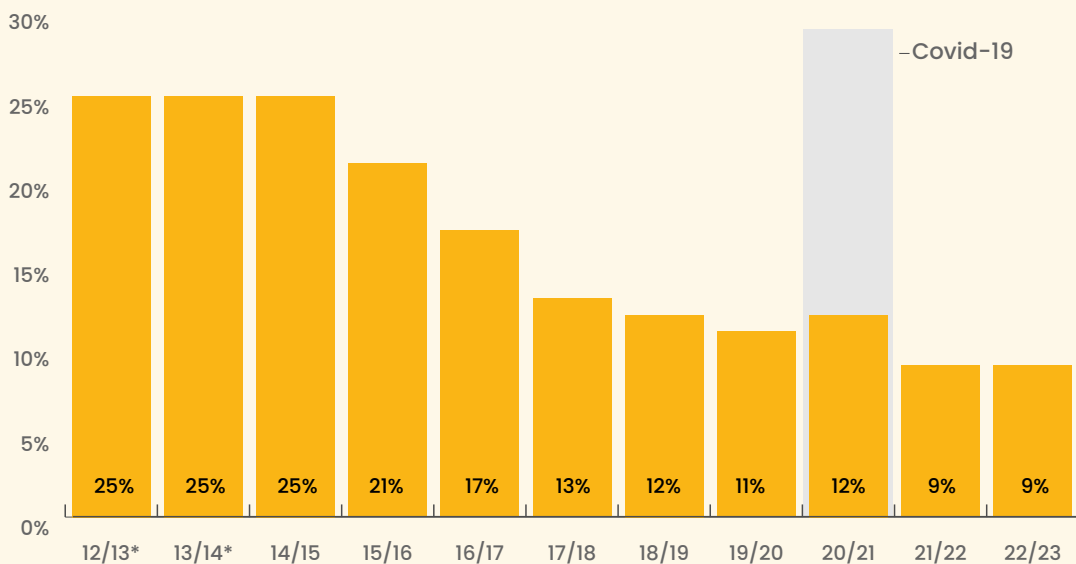
Policing is a core focus when thinking about crime and violence. The police prevent and solve crimes, provide support to victims, administer out of court disposals and collaborate with other organisations to provide targeted support where necessary.

There’s no single agreed measure that tracks the performance of this sector. As our core measure, we’ve used the proportion of crimes that are successfully investigated by the police [13]. We’ve considered a crime to be successfully investigated if it resulted in (1) a charge or summons or (2) a formal or informal out of court disposal. Investigation of crime is one of the primary duties of the police. It is also one of the key measures cited in the constabulary inspectorate’s most recent annual assessment [14] of policing. However, it can be affected by changes in the way crime and outcomes are reported.

## The number of crimes recorded by police is up, and the proportion successfully investigated is down.

Since 2013/14, the number of offences recorded by the police has increased year on year, while the total number of crimes that reach a successful outcome has continuously fallen until the latest year [13]. The outcomes framework changed in 2014/15, reducing our ability to make comparisons before that year [15]. But, apart from 2020/21 (the year most affected by Covid-19 restrictions), the proportion of crimes that were successfully investigated has fallen every year since [13]. In 2014/15, a quarter (25%) of all recorded crimes led to a charge, summons or out of court disposal. By 2022/23, it was less than one in 10 (9%). For violent crimes specifically, the rate of successful investigation has dropped even more – from 33% in 2014/15 to 10% in 2022/23. The most common outcome is investigations being concluded with no suspect identified – 39% of all crimes recorded in 2022/23.

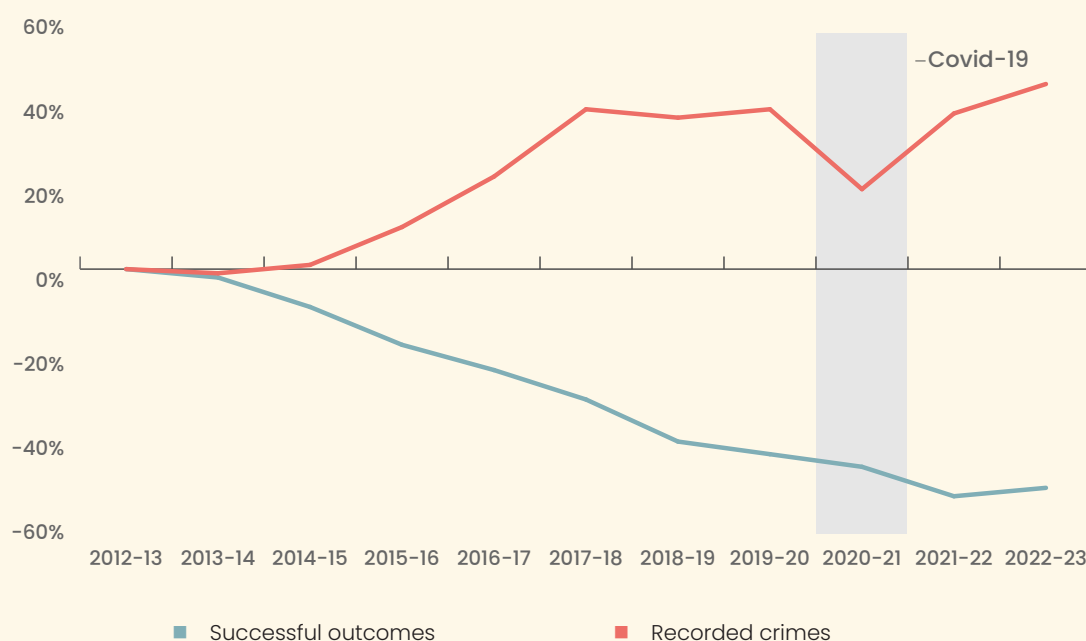
Figure 5.1. Proportion of police-recorded crimes successfully investigated (England and Wales)



\* Outcome classification was different in 2012/13 and 2013/14, so the figures are not directly comparable with later years.

In addition to fewer crimes being successfully investigated, it's now taking longer for crimes to reach a successful outcome. The median number of days for any offence to be assigned an outcome was 14 days in 2022/23, up from 10 days the year before the pandemic. Of all offences recorded, 39% took more than 30 days to be assigned an outcome, and one in five (20%) took more than 100 days. This is up from 16% the previous year and 13% the year before the pandemic. It's double the proportion that took more than 100 days in 2013/14 (10%) – the earliest year we have data.

**Figure 5.2. Police-recorded crimes and crimes with successful outcomes – percentage change since 2012/13 (England and Wales)**



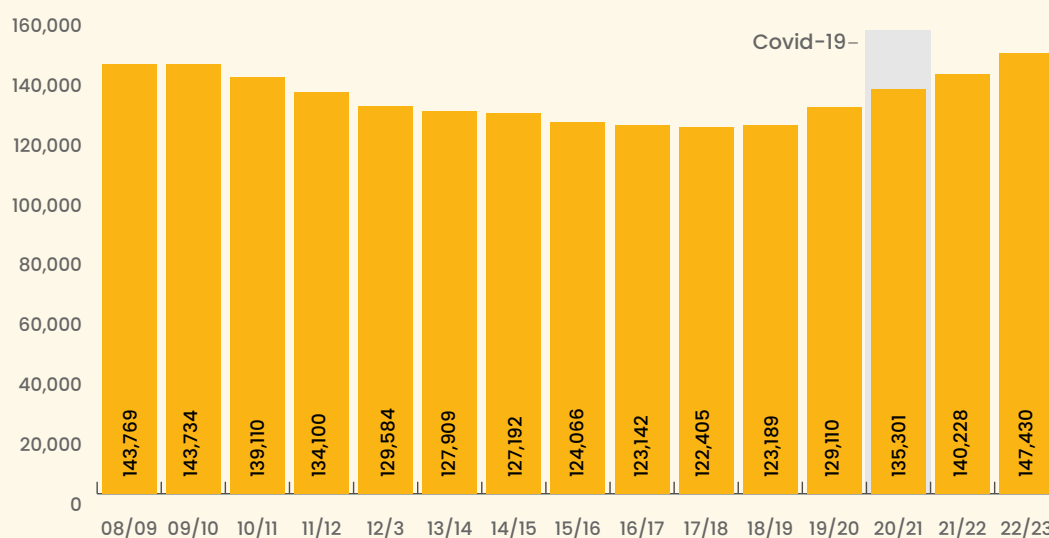
These trends may be due to several factors, such as increasing numbers of informal diversionary outcomes, changes in the types of crime being committed and increasingly stretched policing resources.

An increase in the number of offenders diverted away from formal justice processes may contribute to the reduction in cautions and charges recorded. Diversion is considered a successful outcome but has only started to be officially recorded in recent years, so it hasn't been included in our measure of successful investigations. An increase in diversions could, therefore, have a misleadingly negative impact on the count of successful outcomes. However, the most recent data suggests they account for a small proportion (0.6%) of outcomes, so they likely don't have a large impact on the overall figures.

Changes in the type of crimes being committed or reported and recorded by the police are also likely to affect how many investigations are successfully completed. All types of crime – bar drug offences – had a smaller proportion of successful outcomes in the latest year compared to a decade ago, but violence against the person seems to be driving the trend. This was the most common type of offence in 2022/23, showing one of the greatest increases in the number of offences over the decade, and had a significant reduction in the proportion with a successful outcome. The proportion of violence against the person offences that resulted in a caution, charge or summons fell from 34% in 2014/15 to 8% in the latest year. The absolute number of successful outcomes fell as well – down 26% from 2014/15 to 2022/23. This could be related to the specific types of violent offences being reported, which may be more difficult to investigate, solve or bring charges against.

Police numbers are likely to play a significant role. The more crimes there are, the more resources are needed to investigate. But resourcing hasn't kept up with demand [16]. The total number of police officers in England and Wales fell from 143,769 in 2008/09 to a low of 122,405 in 2017/18 – a decrease of 15% (over 21,000 officers). These numbers have since been rising, but in the latest year (2022/23), there were just 3% more police officers in England and Wales than there were in 2008/09, despite the population having grown by more than that. Nevertheless, the recent return to previous police numbers could be partially responsible for the uptick in the absolute number of successful outcomes in the latest year.

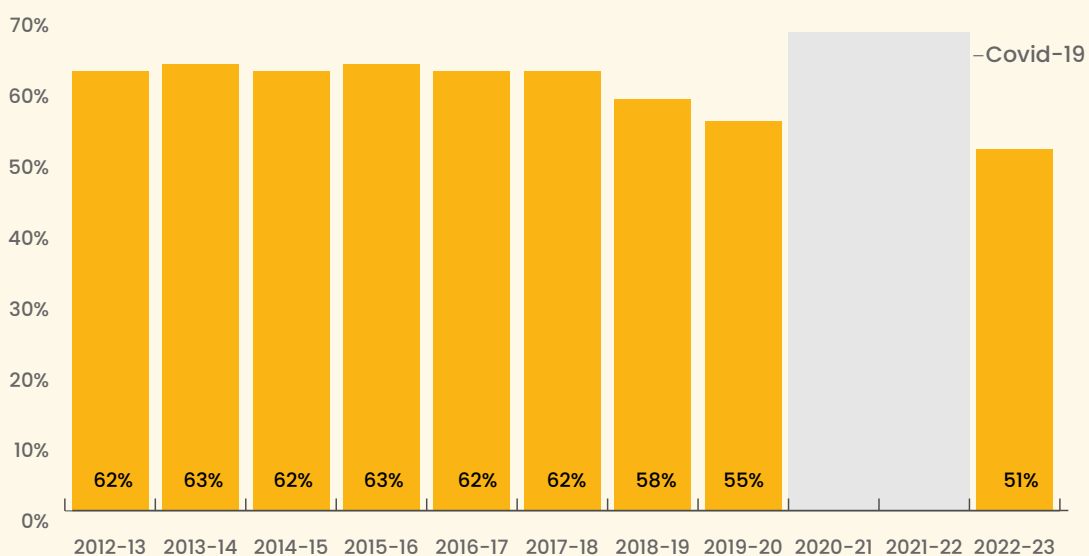
**Figure 5.3. Number of full-time equivalent police officers (England and Wales)**



## Public confidence in the police is falling.

According to the Crime Survey for England and Wales, public perceptions of police are the worst they've been this decade [17]. Between 2012/13 and 2017/18, the proportion of adult respondents who thought the police in their local area did a good or excellent job was around 60%. In the years before Covid-19, this had started to decrease. In the most recent data (prior years missing due to Covid-19), the approval rating continued to fall – with 51% of adults agreeing police were doing a good or excellent job. A higher proportion of adults thought the police could be trusted (71%), but this is 9%pts down from 2019/20, and 59% thought police would treat them fairly, down from 67% pre-pandemic.

Figure 5.4. Proportion of adults who think police do a good or excellent job (England and Wales)



Overall, children tend to have fairly high trust in the police compared to adults (73% of 10–18-year-olds in a 2022 survey), but opinions differ substantially by race [18]. Black children were much less likely to say they trusted the police – with just 36% saying they had their trust.

## 6. Youth justice

CORE INDICATOR	INDICATOR PERFORMANCE	LATEST VALUE (2021/22)	CHANGE COMPARED TO...		
			Last year (2020/21)	Pre-COVID (2019/20)	10 years ago (2012/13)
Youth justice Children's reoffending rate	Mixed	32%	+0.9%pt	- 2.0%pt	- 8.9%pt

### COMMENTARY

Overall, this measure has a mixed rating. Over the past decade, the proportion of children convicted of a crime who reoffended within 18 months has been consistently falling. The current rate is 32%, down from 34% in 2019/20 (the year before Covid-19) and from 41% in 2012/13 (10 years ago). However, in the latest data, reoffending increased by 0.9%pts from the previous year. This was mainly driven by increases in reoffending rates for theft (+5.5%pts), weapons possession (+2.0%pts) and drugs (+1.2%pts) offences. The number of first-time entrants and children remanded in custody also increased in the latest year.

### What is this sector and how are we measuring it?

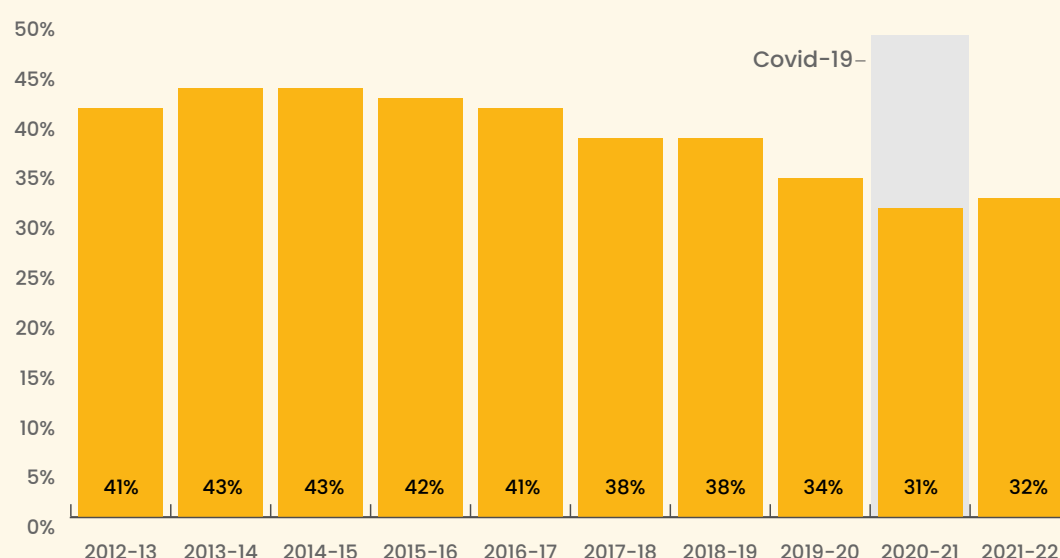
The aim of the youth justice system in England and Wales is to prevent children from offending and reoffending. One of the main predictors of a child becoming involved in violence is being arrested for lower-level offences. But what happens to children after the point of arrest – including whether they're diverted away from formal court processes and what forms of support they're given – can significantly affect whether children go on to reoffend.

To track how well the youth justice sector is functioning, we've chosen to use children's reoffending rates as our core measure [8]. An offence is considered reoffending if it leads to a caution or conviction within 18 months of a previous offence (at the point either a caution or conviction was served or a period of incarceration ended). Measures of reoffending, particularly when split by type of offence or reoffender characteristics, are affected by the functioning and priorities of the police and justice system.

## Children's reoffending rate has been falling but increased slightly in the latest year.

The proportion of children who reoffend has been coming down since 2013/14. In the latest year (2021/22), it was 32%, representing 4,447 reoffenders – equivalent to one in three. This is down 2%pts from the year before Covid-19 (2019/20) and down 9%pts from 10 years ago (2012/13). However, reoffending has shown a small increase in the latest year, up 1%pt from the previous year.

Figure 6.1. Proportion of children who reoffend (England and Wales)



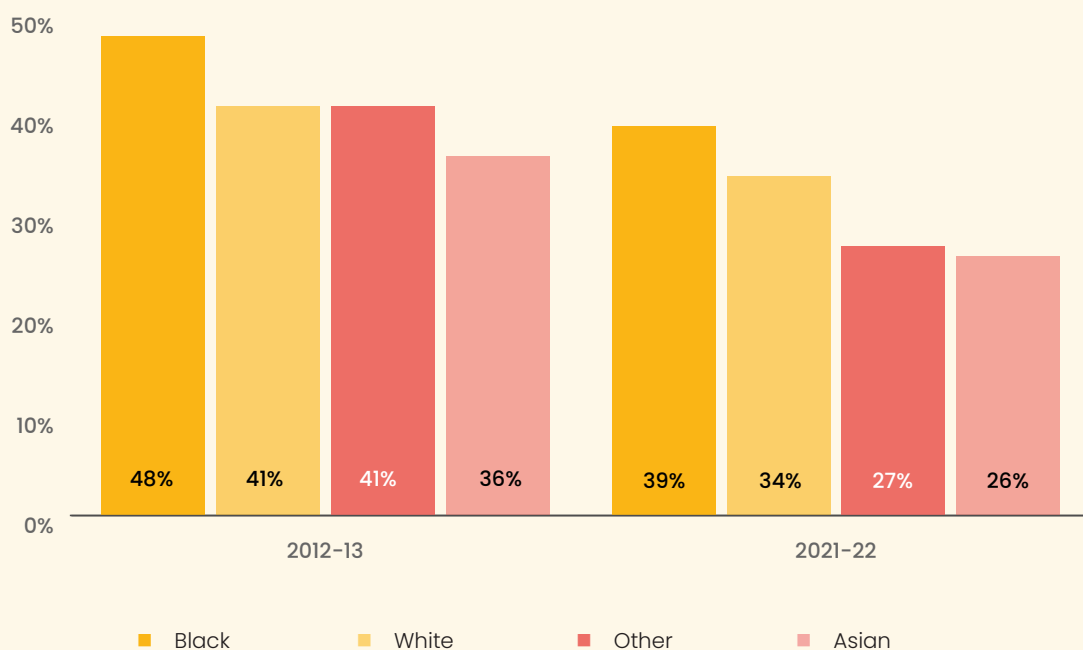
The number of children entering the youth justice system for the first time (i.e. first-time offenders) has also been falling over this period. In the latest year (2021/22), the number of first-time entrants was 8,395 – 10% down from the year before Covid-19 (2019/20) and 64% down compared to 10 years ago (2012/13). These falls may, in part, be due to fewer children offending or due to fewer offences coming to the attention of the police and fewer children being arrested. It may also be due to an increase in the number of children who are arrested being diverted away from formal youth justice processes.

Diversion tends to involve interventions such as mental health support or restorative justice work, and there is evidence that high-quality diversionary activity can help prevent children from offending in the future. The number of formally recorded diversion outcomes for adults and children has increased over the past two years [13]. But, there is a wide variety in how diversion is implemented, and inconsistent reporting makes it hard to track nationally. Improvements to the way data is collected are underway that will allow us to look at the total number of children diverted.

## Rates of reoffending are higher among boys and Black children.

Reoffending rates are higher for boys [8]. In the latest year, around a third (34%) of boys reoffended compared to around a quarter of girls (24%). Both show a similar pattern – mostly decreasing from 2013/14 onwards, with an increase in the latest year. Reoffending rates have also fallen for children of all ethnicities over the past 10 years. Black children have shown slightly greater decreases recently compared to White children – down 4%pts from the year before Covid-19 (2019/20) compared to 1%pt for White children. But rates remain highest for Black children – in 2021/22, the reoffending rate was 39% for Black children compared to 34% for White children, 26% for Asian children and 27% for all other children.

Figure 6.2. Children's reoffending rates by race (England and Wales)



## 7. Neighbourhoods

CORE INDICATOR	INDICATOR PERFORMANCE	LATEST VALUE	CHANGE COMPARED TO...		
			Last year (2021/22)	Pre-COVID (2019/20)	10 years ago (2012/13)
Neighbourhoods <i>No suitable measure</i>	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

### What is this sector and what work are we doing in it?

A lot of violent crime happens in very specific local areas [19]. To tackle violence effectively, it makes sense to focus on the areas where violence is most likely to happen and to work with the people and organisations in those neighbourhoods. More specifically, this could include community safety partnerships; local authority neighbourhood and community engagement teams; neighbourhood policing; the housing sector; local voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise sectors; community leaders; and others.

There is some evidence that place-based approaches can be effective in reducing children's involvement in crime and violence. For example, hot spots policing – targeting police resources to areas where crime is most concentrated – has shown some impact on reducing violent crime [20]. There is also promising evidence for focused deterrence approaches – a strategy that involves combining support, community engagement and deterrence [21].

At the YEF, we are working on several projects to build more evidence on how those working in the neighbourhoods sector can best protect children from involvement in violence. We are funding projects in hyper-local areas that are particularly affected by violence to test different models and approaches to community engagement. We are also funding projects through our Agency Collaboration Fund to find the most effective ways agencies can work together to identify and support the children most at risk.

Due to the place-based focus of our work in this sector, it's difficult to find a suitable indicator to track how neighbourhoods are doing nationally and over time that we can report here. Instead, to find out more about our neighbourhoods work, visit the YEF strategy [22]. In future updates to these statistics, we plan to investigate further whether a suitable indicator can be found.

## 8. Education

CORE INDICATOR	INDICATOR PERFORMANCE	LATEST VALUE (2022/23)	CHANGE COMPARED TO...		
			Last year (2021/22)	Pre-COVID (2018/19)	10 years ago (2012/13)
Education Children persistently absent from school	Mixed	21%	- 1.3%pt	+ 10.4%pt	+ 7.6%pt

### COMMENTARY

Overall, this measure has a **mixed rating**. The proportion of children who were persistently absent (missing 10% or more of possible sessions) in England's schools in 2022/23 was 21% – equivalent to 1.6 million pupils or one in five. This is up 7.6%pts compared to a decade ago – with nearly 80% more pupils persistently absent. While this is a fall on the year before – down from 23% in 2021/22 – this was mainly due to fewer authorised absences (e.g. sickness). Unauthorised absences and pupils severely absent (missing 50% or more sessions) continued to increase in the latest year. There is a similar picture in Wales.

### What is this sector and how are we measuring it?

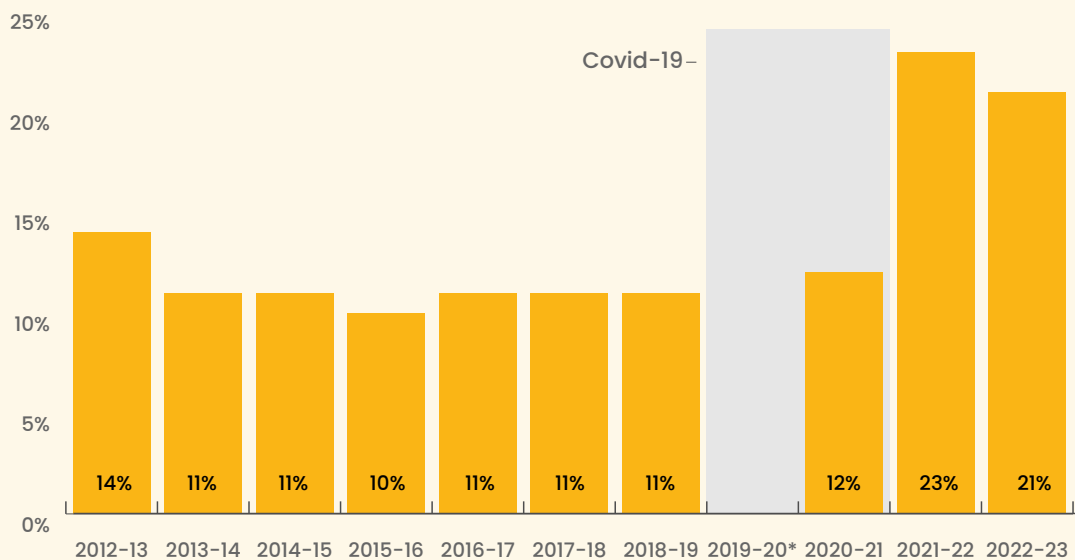
Schools and other education settings aim to provide a safe and positive place to learn and help children realise their potential. Absence from school (missed attendance, as well as temporary suspension and permanent exclusion) not only impacts students' attainment but is also associated with involvement in [violence](#) [23].

We're using the proportion of children persistently absent from school (primary, secondary and special schools) in England as our core indicator for this sector [24]. Research by the [Department for Education](#) shows children who are persistently absent without an authorised reason are between 1.2 and 2 times more likely to commit a serious violent offence after accounting for a range of factors [25]. While the DfE's research shows other indicators have a higher association with offending, the stark increase in school absence following the pandemic makes absence a priority focus of the education sector.

## Absences are up sharply post-pandemic.

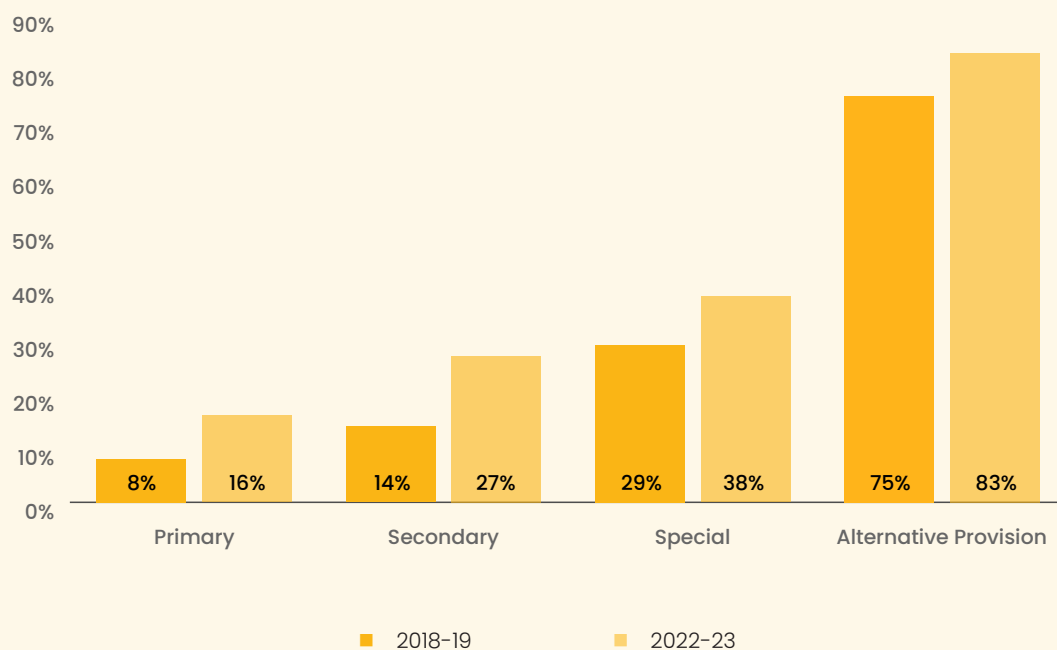
Since Covid-19, absences from schools in England have reached record highs [24]. The proportion of children who are persistently absent (missing 10% or more of possible lessons) reached 21% in 2022/23 – this is almost double the 11% rate before Covid-19 (2018/19) and compares to 14% a decade ago. In primary schools, the persistent absence rate increased from 8% to 16% between 2018/19 and 2022/23; in secondary schools, 14% to 27%; and in special schools 29% to 38%. In alternative provision (e.g. pupil referral units) – for which figures are reported separately – the persistent absence rate now stands at 83%, up from 75% in 2018/19.

Figure 8.1. Proportion of pupils persistently absent from school – primary, secondary and special schools (England)



\*Data not collected/reported

Figure 8.2. Proportion of pupils persistently absent by school type – 2018/19 and 2022/23 (England)

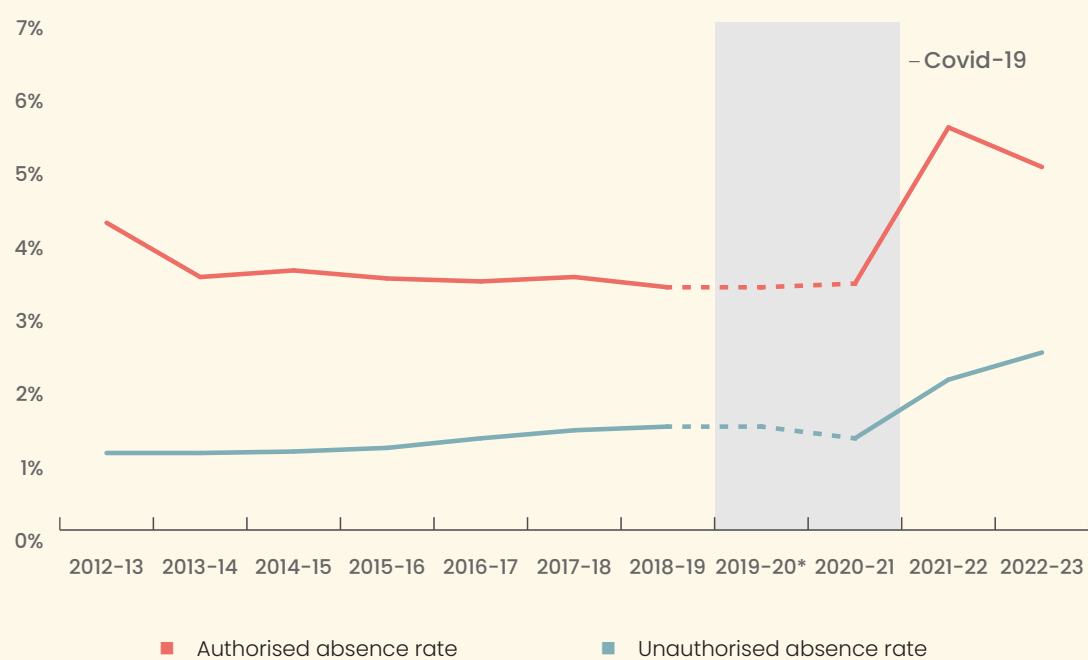


In Wales, the picture is broadly similar. In primary schools, the persistent absence rate (based on the 10% threshold) in 2022/23 was 29%, up from around 13% before the pandemic [26]. In secondary schools, the persistent absence rate was 40% in 2022/23, more than double the rate in 2018/19 [27].

## Absences are down overall in the most recent year, but unauthorised and severe absences both still increased.

Increases in absences since the pandemic have been driven by both authorised absences (absence agreed with the school for reasons such as illness) and unauthorised absences (where the school hasn't given permission for pupils to be off) [24]. The number of sessions missed due to authorised absences increased 69% between 2018/19 and 2021/22 (from 3.3% to 5.5% of all potential sessions). However, authorised absences fell 12% in 2022/23. The number of unauthorised absences increased 49% between 2018/19 and 2021/22 (from 1.4% to 2.1% of all potential sessions) and continued to increase in 2022/23 – up 15% on the previous year.

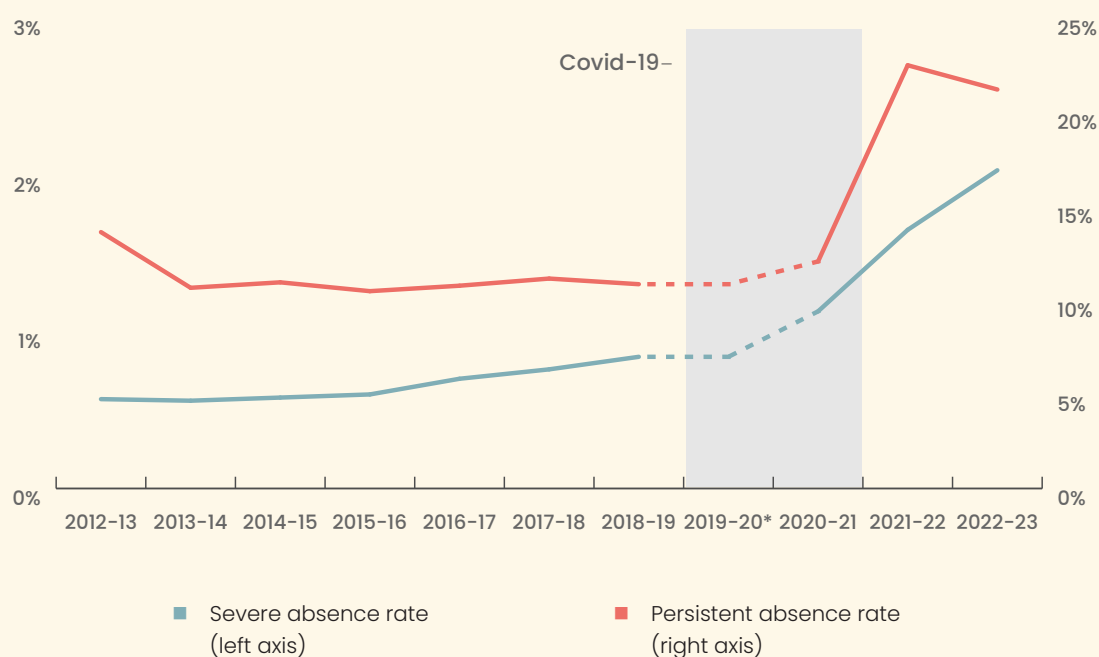
Figure 8.3. Proportion of sessions missed by reason for absence – primary, secondary and special schools (England)



\*Data not collected/reported

What's particularly concerning is the growth in pupils who are severely absent (missing 50% or more of potential sessions). The number of pupils persistently absent (missing 10% or more of sessions) increased by 113% between 2018/19 and 2021/22 but fell 5% between 2021/22 and 2022/23. In comparison, the number of pupils severely absent increased 100% between 2018/19 and 2021/22 and continued to increase in 2022/23 – up a further 25% from the previous year.

**Figure 8.4. Proportion of pupils persistently absent (missing 10% or more of possible sessions) and severely absent (missing 50% or more possible sessions) – primary, secondary and special schools (England)**

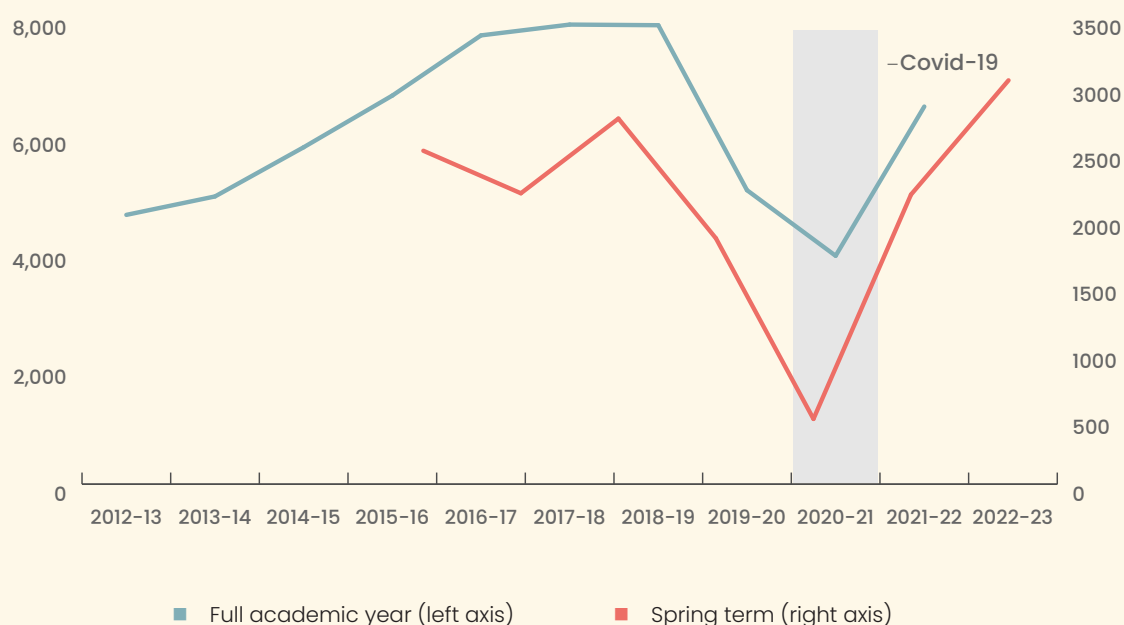


\*Data not collected/reported

## Exclusions have also bounced back from the pandemic and now exceed their pre-pandemic highs.

Research also shows being excluded from school is associated with later childhood involvement in violence, particularly at young ages [25]. School exclusions started to increase significantly from 2012/13 and were up 71% by 2017/18 [28]. In the latest full school year that we have data for (2021/22), there were 6,495 permanent school exclusions in England. This is up 65% on the year before – although this likely reflects a bounce-back due to pupils returning to full-time education following Covid-19 disruptions. More recent data is available for the spring term of 2023. This partial year data shows exclusions now exceed their pre-Covid-19 levels. There were 3,039 permanent school exclusions in the spring term of 2023, which is 10% above the level in the spring term of 2019 (the year before Covid-19).

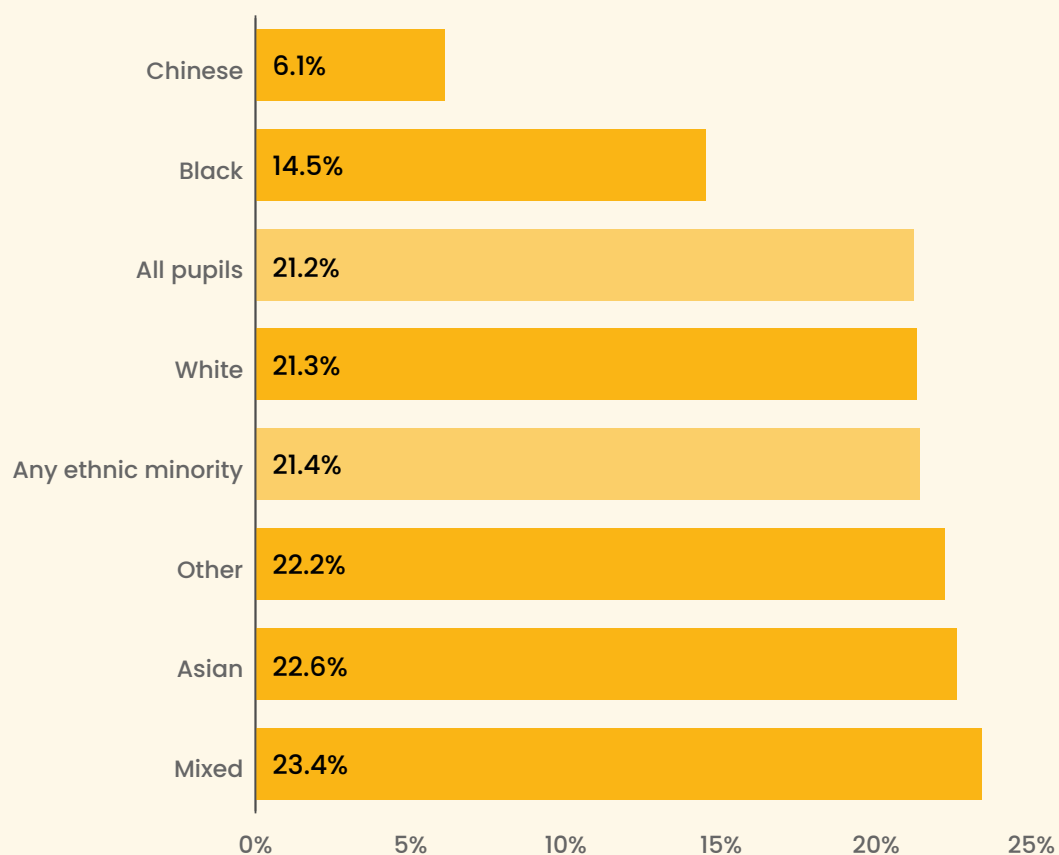
**Figure 8.5. Number of children permanently excluded from primary, secondary and special schools: academic year and spring term compared (England)**



**Black Caribbean children, Gypsy Roma children and children from an Irish traveller heritage have significantly higher rates of persistent absence.**

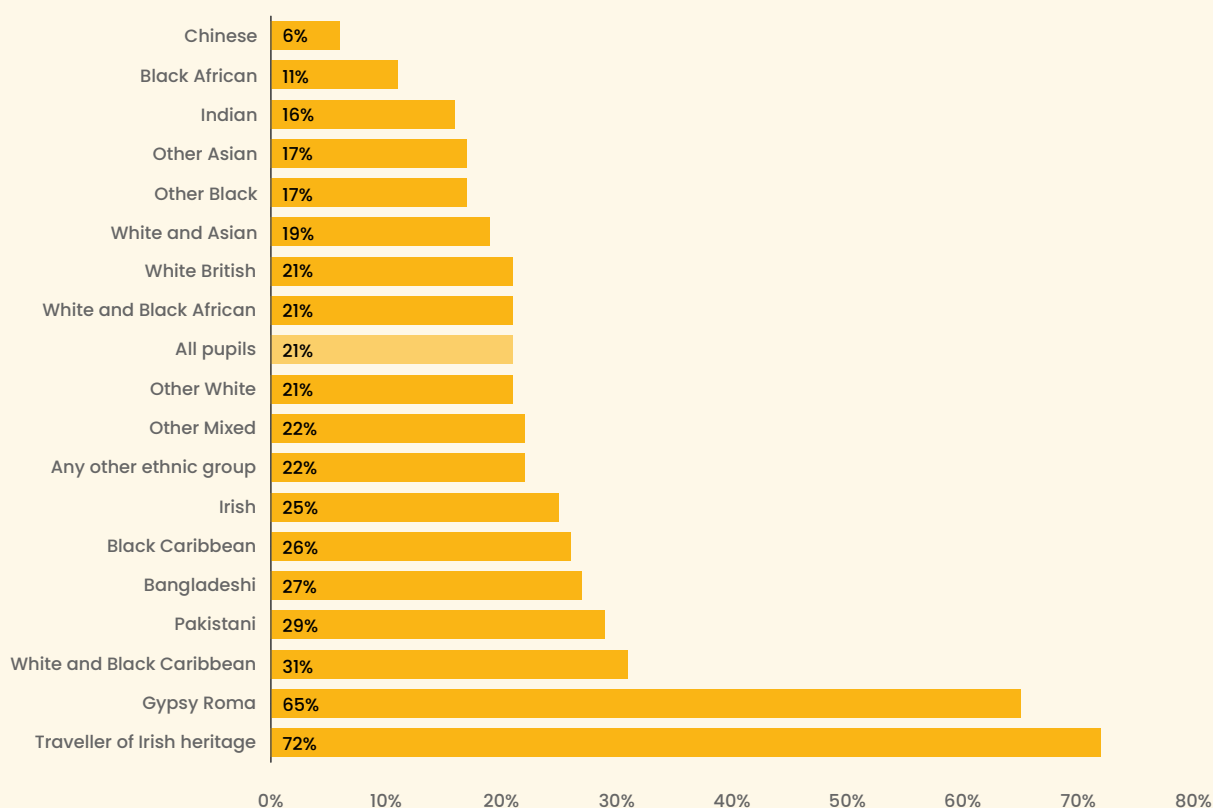
Looking at broad racialised groups, we see that children from Black and Chinese backgrounds have lower rates of persistent absence (15% and 6%, respectively) compared to pupils from White backgrounds (21%) [24]. Children from Asian (23%) and mixed ethnicity (23%) backgrounds have higher rates of persistent absence. The recent increase in persistent absence rates has been most extreme for children from Asian backgrounds – up 143% between 2017/18 and 2022/23 compared to 83% for children from White backgrounds.

**Figure 8.6. Persistent absence rates by race in primary, secondary and special schools, 2022/23 (England)**



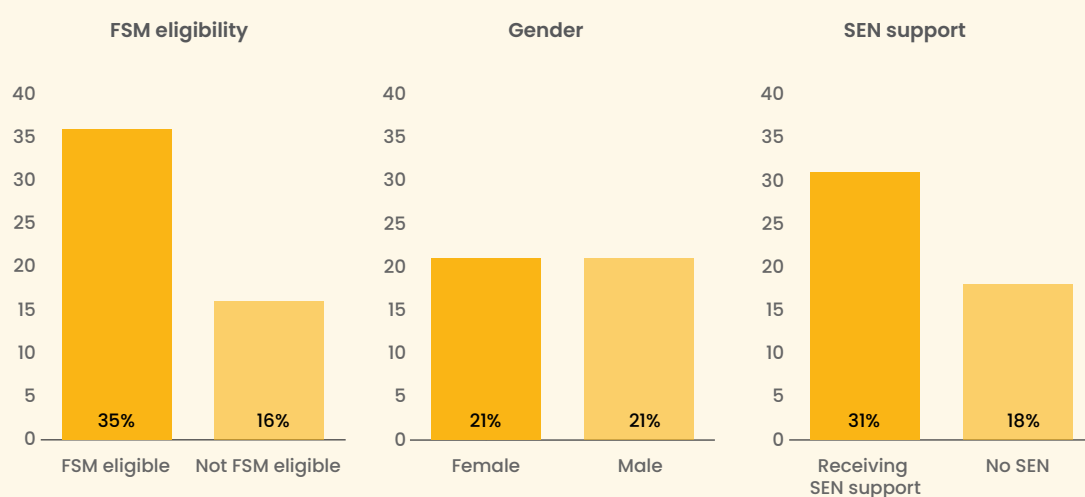
Splitting absence rates by these broad groups masks underlying differences. When broken down by more detailed ethnicity, a different pattern emerges. Children from Gypsy Roma and Irish Traveller backgrounds have consistently higher persistent absence rates than all other pupils – 65% and 72%, respectively. While the average absence rate for Black pupils is lower than the average for all pupils, this is mainly driven by the much lower absence rates for children from Black African backgrounds – 11%. Children from Black Caribbean and mixed White and Black Caribbean backgrounds have significantly higher than average rates of persistent absence – 26% and 31%, respectively. We see a similar pattern in the exclusions figures – with children from Black Caribbean backgrounds particularly overrepresented, although this has been reducing in recent years [28].

**Figure 8.7. Persistent absence rates by detailed ethnicity in primary, secondary and special schools, 2022/23 (England)**



Comparing other pupil characteristics, children who are eligible for free school meals (FSM) are significantly more likely to be persistently absent compared to those who are not – 36% compared to 16% [24]. Absence rates are broadly similar by gender – 21% of boys were persistently absent in 2022/23 compared to 21.4% of girls. Children who receive special educational needs (SEN) support are more likely to be persistently absent – 31% compared to 18% who receive no SEN support.

**Figure 8.8. Persistent absence rates by selected pupil characteristics in primary, secondary and special schools, 2022/23 (England)**



## 9. Health

CORE INDICATOR	INDICATOR PERFORMANCE	LATEST VALUE (2022/23)	CHANGE COMPARED TO...		
			Last year (2021/22)	Pre-COVID (2019/20)	Earliest data (2016/17)
Health Child referrals to mental health services	Worsening	1.1m	+ 11%	+ 44%	+ 98%

### COMMENTARY

Overall, this has a **worsening rating**. A number of indicators point to children's mental health worsening and increasing pressure on children's mental health services. The number of children referred to NHS mental health services (e.g. by a doctor) increased 11% in 2022/23. It's now up 44% from levels before the pandemic and almost double (98% higher) what it was in 2016/17 (the earliest year in our data).

### What is this sector and how are we measuring it?

Poor mental health can be a risk factor for serious violence. Rates of weapon carrying are higher among children with mental health problems, including conduct problems and hyperactivity, as well as those who self-harm [29]. We also know that receiving talking therapies can reduce violence and associated behaviours [30].

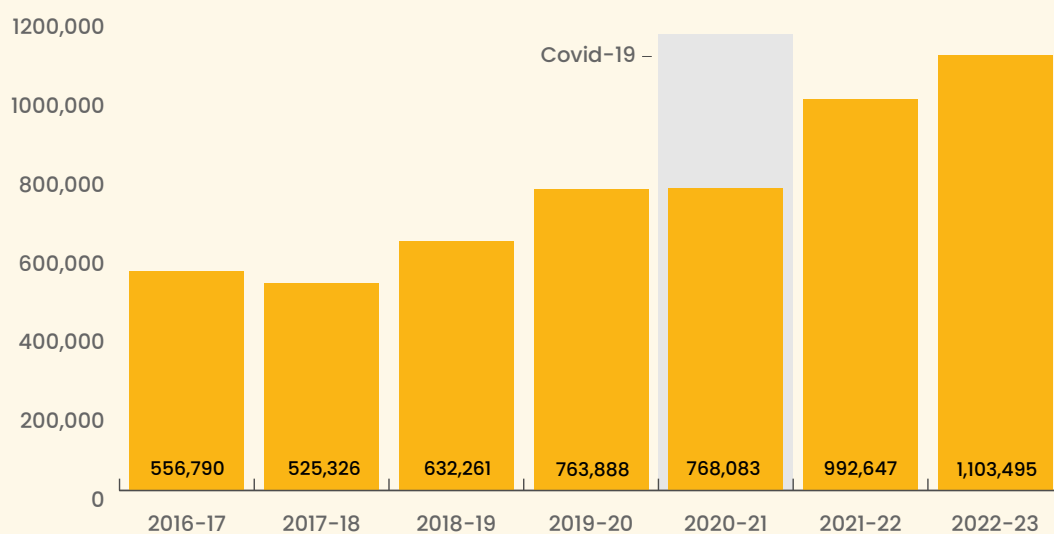
We've used the total number of children in contact with NHS-funded secondary mental health, learning disability and autism services as our core measure for this sector [31]. This captures children who have been referred to these services by their GP or another healthcare professional and includes both those who have received services and those who are still waiting to be seen. We don't have a specific measure of children seeking treatment for externalising problems, which may be most linked to violence.

This measure should count the children most likely to need help. But it's important to remember that it depends on whether a child or their family seek treatment and whether they receive a referral. This can be affected by changes in awareness and diagnosis. But more direct measures of mental health problems (e.g., self-injury) only capture a very specific group of children, so we've chosen to use a broader measure.

## Demand for children's mental health services continues to increase.

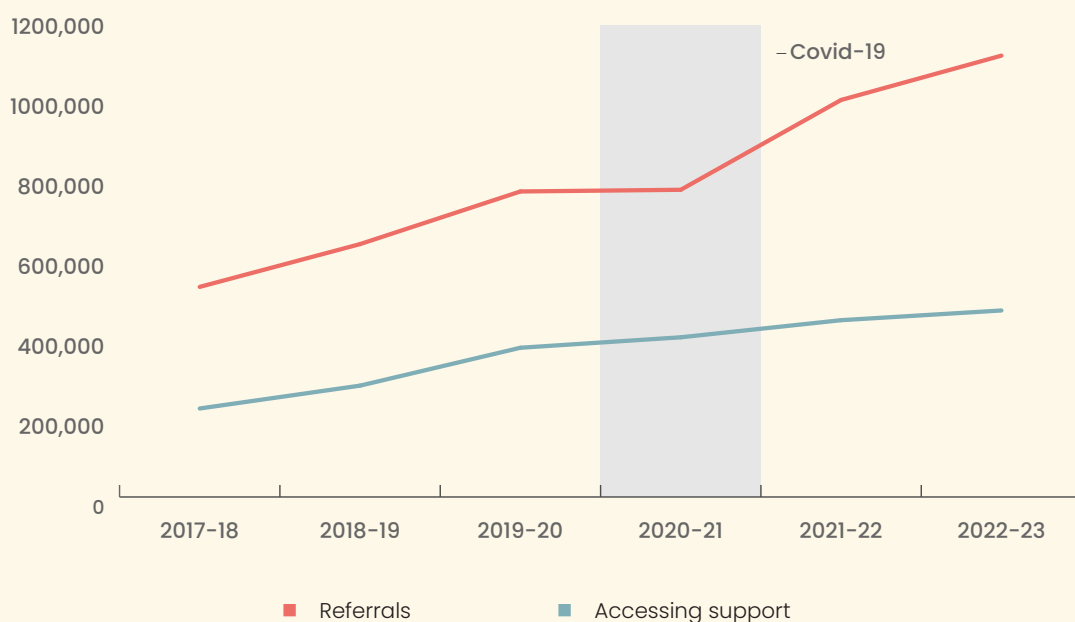
The number of children referred to NHS-funded mental health services has been increasing since 2017/18. There was a slight stall in referrals in 2020/21, likely due to Covid-19 restrictions, but numbers increased steeply afterwards. In the year after the pandemic (2021/22), referrals increased by 29%. In the latest year, they increased by 11% to over a million referrals in the year. This is 44% higher than pre-pandemic numbers and nearly double (98% higher) 2016/17 – the earliest our data goes. The number of children identified at school with an education, health and care (EHC) plan or receiving SEN support due to social, emotional and mental health difficulties also continues to increase [32]. It was up 10% in the 2022/23 academic year.

Figure 9.1. Children referred to NHS-funded mental health, learning disability and autism services (England)



However, the available services can't necessarily keep up with such demand. Our best estimate of how many children access mental health support was 466,336 in 2022/23 [31]. This is based on the number of children who had a second contact recorded with NHS-funded support. It's less than half the number of children referred in the same year. Between 2018/19 and 2020/21, this gap narrowed as the number of children accessing support increased at a greater rate than the number receiving referrals. But the gap between referrals and access has widened again. While the number of referrals increased by 11% in the last year, the number of children accessing support only increased by 6%. This means that some children are waiting longer to access support. Analysis conducted by the Children's Commissioner [33] found that about 15% of children who received support in 2022/23 entered treatment within four weeks of referral, compared to 19% in 2021/22 and 26% in 2020/21 [34]. In 2022/23, there were 6,300 children who had waited over two years before entering treatment [33].

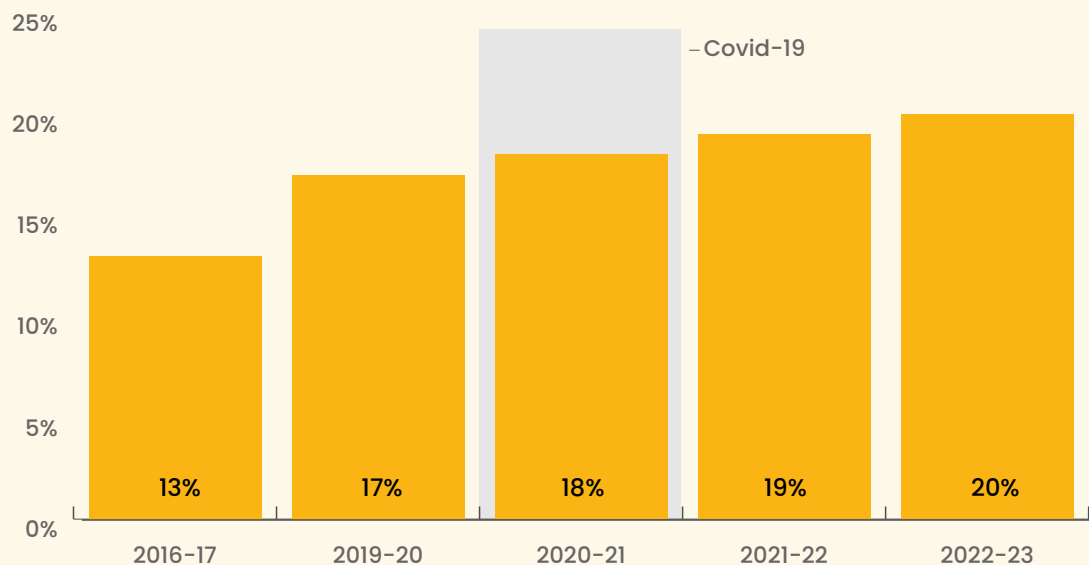
**Figure 9.2. Number of children referred to and accessing NHS-funded mental health support services (England)**



## More children are likely to have a mental health disorder.

Increases in referrals to mental health services could partly be explained by increased mental health awareness, changes in referral mechanisms and changes in reporting. However, other data also indicates children's mental health may be getting worse. According to the [NHS Mental Health of Children and Young People survey \[35\]](#), the proportion of children with a probable disorder has been increasing since 2016/17. In the latest year, 20% of 8–16-year-olds were estimated to have a disorder – equivalent to 1 in every 5. This is 3%pts higher than pre-pandemic and 1%pt higher than the previous year.

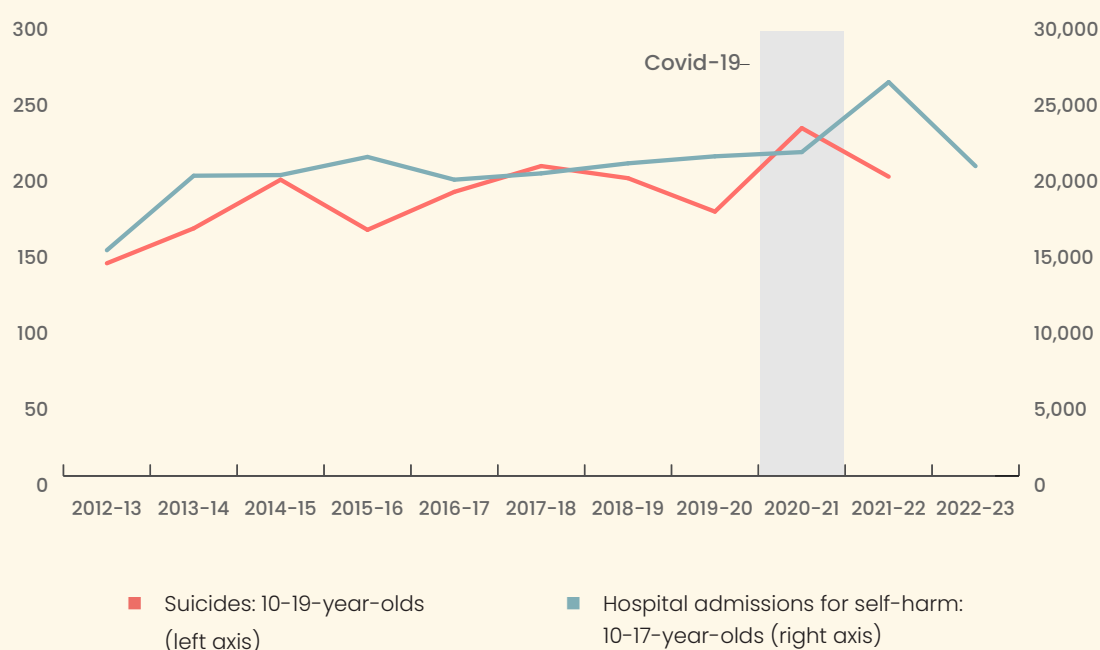
Figure 9.3. Proportion of 8–16-year-olds with a probable mental health disorder (England)



## And more young people are harming themselves.

Self-injury and suicide – some of the most extreme indicators of poor mental health – have also shown broadly upward trends over the last decade. In particular, the pandemic saw more young people harm themselves. But the most extreme cases may be coming back down. In 2021/22, 197 young people aged between 10 and 19 died by suicide – the most recent year for which we have data [36]. This is 14% down following a sharp peak during the pandemic. However, it remains 13% above where it was pre-pandemic and 41% up from 10 years ago (2012/13).

**Figure 9.4. Deaths by suicide and hospital admissions for self-harm among 10–19-year-olds (England)**



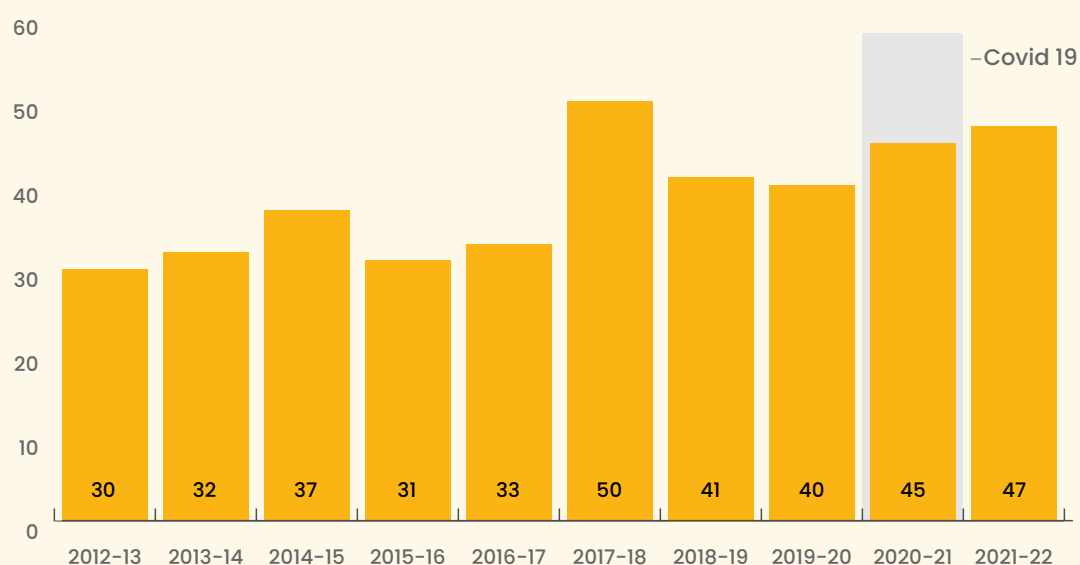
The number of young people admitted to hospital for self-harm peaked a year later than suicides, in 2021/22, the year following the pandemic [5]. The numbers had been gradually increasing since 2016/17 until the sharp spike in 2021/22, when there were almost 26,000 admissions for self-harm – up 22% from the year before. In the most recent year (2022/23), this number came down again to 3% below where it was pre-pandemic. It's unclear whether the upward trend will resume.

## Rates of drug use have remained relatively stable, but related harms may be increasing.

Drug use overlaps with both poor mental health and involvement in crime. Evidence shows that children who use drugs are more likely to get involved in violence [29]. Our own Children, Violence and Vulnerability survey (2023) found that 15% of children reported perpetrating violence in the previous 12 months, and this increased to 33% of children who said they used illegal drugs [37]. Drug use also makes children more vulnerable to exploitation, including into County Lines – where they're coerced into moving drugs or cash for drug gangs – and places them at greater risk of involvement in violence [38].

Over the past 10 years, the proportion of children trying illegal drugs has remained broadly the same. A national survey of secondary school pupils' drug habits in England found that in 2011, the proportion who had used any drug was 16.8% [39]. In 2021 (the latest data available), the figure was 16.6%. Although the proportion of children trying drugs has remained relatively stable, the most problematic forms of drug use may be increasing. The number of young people under the age of 20 who have died due to drug misuse has risen over the past 10 years, reaching 47 deaths registered in 2021/22 – the latest year for which we have data [40]. This compares to 45 the previous year, 40 the year before Covid-19 and 30 in 2012/13. It's in line with the overall growth in drug misuse deaths over the period – up 60% in 2021/22 compared to 2012/13.

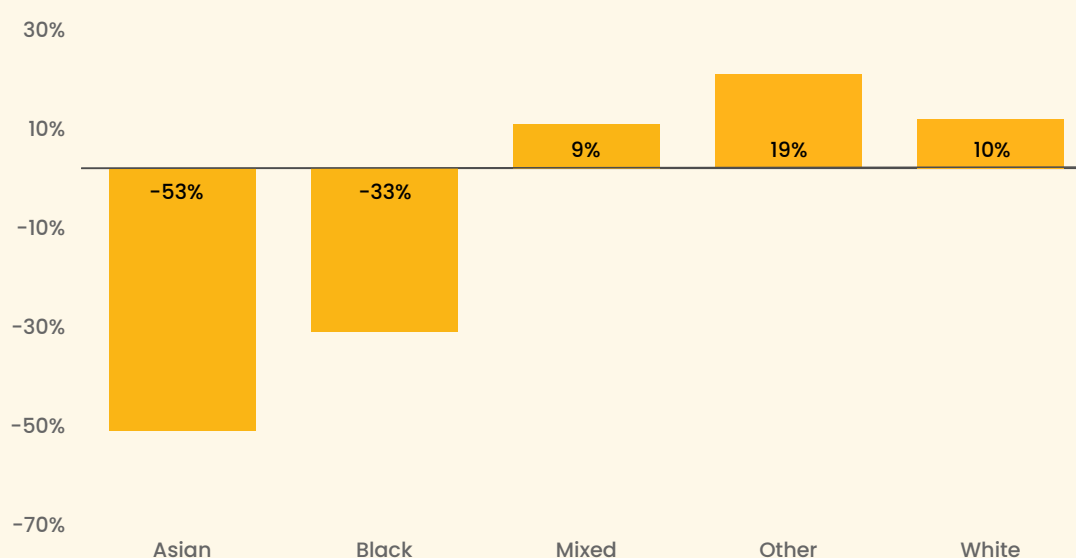
Figure 9.5. Deaths related to drug misuse for young people under 20 (England and Wales)



## Children from Black and Asian backgrounds and boys are less likely to receive mental health support.

Compared to their share of the population, Black and Asian children are less likely to be referred to mental health support [31]. Of children referred to mental health services in 2022/23, 4% were Black, despite making up 6% of the population – making them a third (33%) less likely to be referred compared to their share of the population. Asian children are also underrepresented, making up 6% of referrals but 12% of the population – making them half as likely to be referred.

Figure 9.6. Under- and overrepresentation of children referred to mental health services in 2022/23 by race (England)



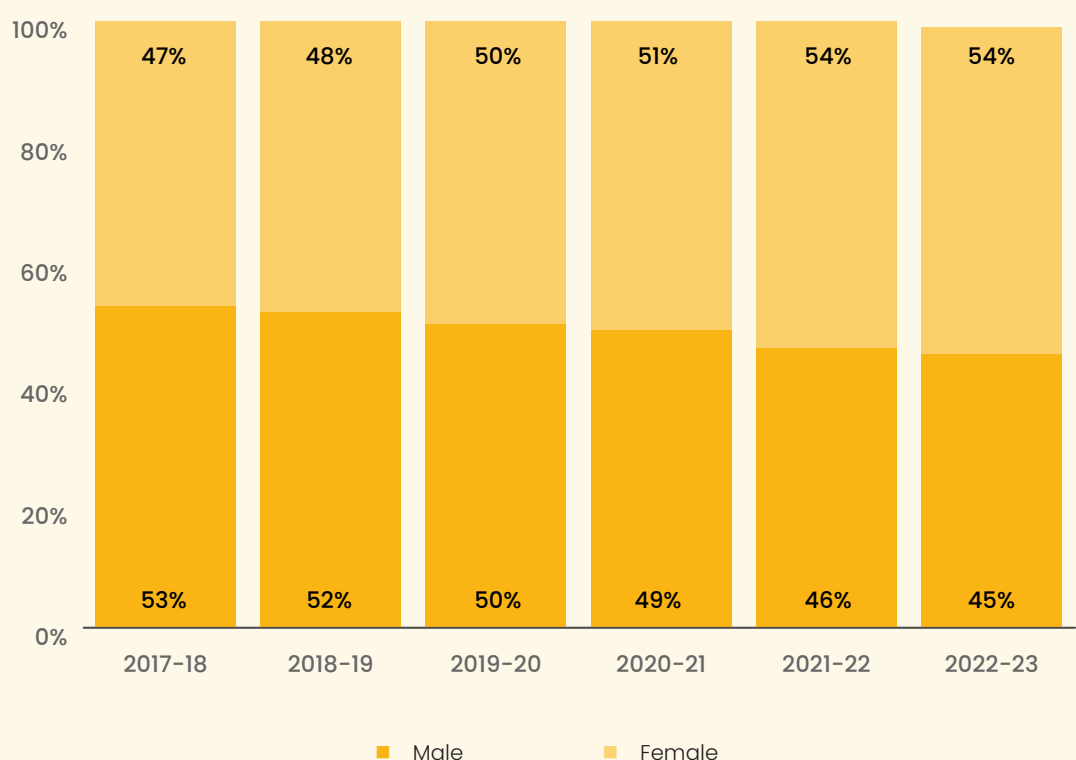
Once referrals have been made, people from Black and other racialised minority backgrounds are less likely to receive support. An analysis of [access to psychological therapies](#) found that in 2021/22, 55% of White people (across all ages) received a course of treatment following a referral. This figure drops to 53% of people from Indian backgrounds, 51% from Caribbean backgrounds, 50% from African backgrounds and 47% from Pakistani and Bangladeshi backgrounds [41].

The lower rates at which Black and Asian people are referred to and receive mental health treatment are not due to lower rates of mental health needs. A [national survey](#) of adults in 2014 found that Black (23%) and Mixed (20%) ethnicity adults were more likely to have common mental health disorders compared to

White adults (17%) [42]. But previous poor experiences with health services and fears of inappropriate, harsh or racist treatment can present barriers to seeking help from mental health services. And when individuals from racialised minority backgrounds successfully seek support, they are less likely to receive appropriate referrals and treatment [43].

The picture by gender shows that girls are somewhat more likely to access mental health support than boys [31]. Over the past six years (the period we have data for), girls have become more likely than boys to access services. Girls account for 54% of all children accessing NHS mental health support in 2022/23, compared to 47% in 2017/18. This is despite NHS figures suggesting girls and boys have similar rates of disorders (21% of boys and 20% of girls in 2022/23) [35].

**Figure 9.7. Children accessing mental health services by gender (England)**



## 10. Children's services

CORE INDICATOR	INDICATOR PERFORMANCE	LATEST VALUE (2022/23)	CHANGE COMPARED TO...		
			Last year (2021/22)	Pre-COVID (2019/20)	10 years ago (2012/13)
Children's services Looked after children	Worsening	83,840	+ 2%	+ 5%	+ 23%

### COMMENTARY

Overall, this has a **worsening rating**. As of 31st March 2023, 83,840 children in England were being looked after by the local authority. This is 2% up from the previous year, 5% from the year before Covid-19 (2019/20) and 23% from 2012/13. There is also some evidence to suggest that children are having their needs recognised later. At the end of 2022/23, over a quarter (26%) of looked after children were over the age of 16 compared to 21% in 2013/14.

### What is this sector and how are we measuring it?

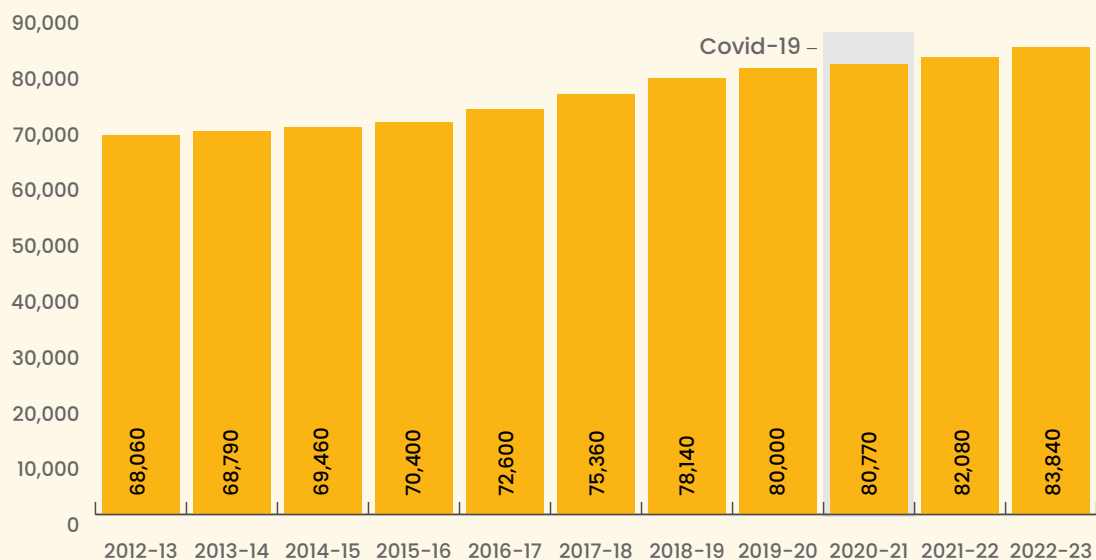
Local authority children's services exist to support families dealing with challenging situations and provide children with a safe and protective home, particularly in cases where a child may be at risk of neglect, abuse or other forms of harm. Children known to local authority children's services are more likely to be exposed to the risk factors associated with later offending [25].

One group of children particularly at risk of harm is those looked after by the local authority. For this reason, we are using the number of children looked after by the local authority as of 31st March of each year as our core indicator for this sector [44]. A child is considered looked after if they are provided with accommodation for longer than 24 hours or a court has ordered them to be placed in the care of the local authority or for adoption. Analysis by the Department for Education and the Ministry of Justice shows that 28% of looked after children go on to offend – 10% commit a serious violent offence [25]. This compares to 5% of all children committing any offence and 1% committing a serious violent offence.

## The number of children in care has increased.

As of 31st March 2023, 83,840 children were in the care of the local authorities in England [44]. This number has steadily increased over the past decade, and in the latest year, it was up 2% from the previous year (2021/22), 5% from the year before Covid-19 (2019/20) and 23% from a decade ago (2012/13). The majority (68%) were in foster placements, while 17% were in secure units, children's homes or semi-independent living; 7% were with parents or caregivers; 2% were adopted; and the remaining 6% were living in other residential settings or the community.

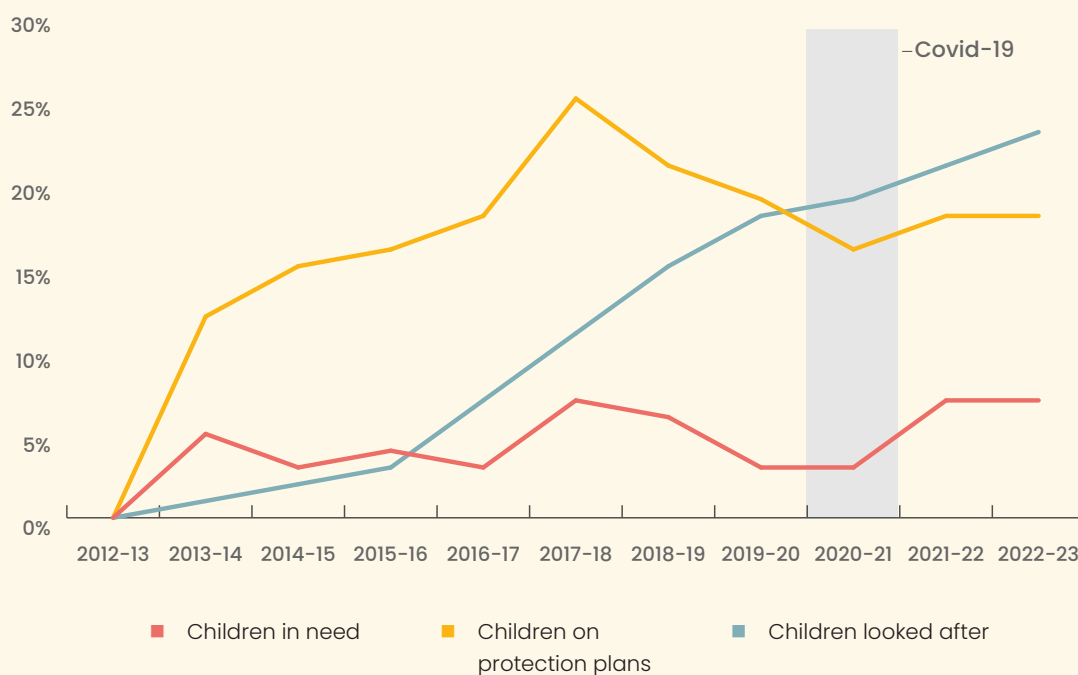
Figure 10.1. Number of looked after children as of 31st March (England)



Other groups of children known to local authority children's services have also grown in size in the past 10 years. Just over 403,000 children were thought to need help from local authorities' children's services in the latest year (2022/23) [45]. This number has stayed relatively stable over the past decade, with some fluctuations, but the latest two years have shown a slight elevation. In 2022/23, it was 4% up from the year before the pandemic (2019/20) and 7% from 2012/13. But it was slightly down compared to the previous year (2021/22) – by 0.3%.

The number of children on child protection plans (CPPs) – a higher level of intervention set up when a child is judged to be at risk of harm – similarly shows a mixed picture. Just under 51,000 children were on CPPs at the end of the latest year. This increased between 2012/13 and 2017/18 to a peak of 53,790 but has slowly come down since then. The latest year was 0.3% down from the previous year and 1% down from the year before Covid-19. But it remains 18% above where it was 10 years ago (2012/13). From the initial category of abuse recorded for children on CPPs, we can see that the most common problem is neglect – accounting for almost half of all CPPs. The next most common is emotional abuse, accounting for just over a third.

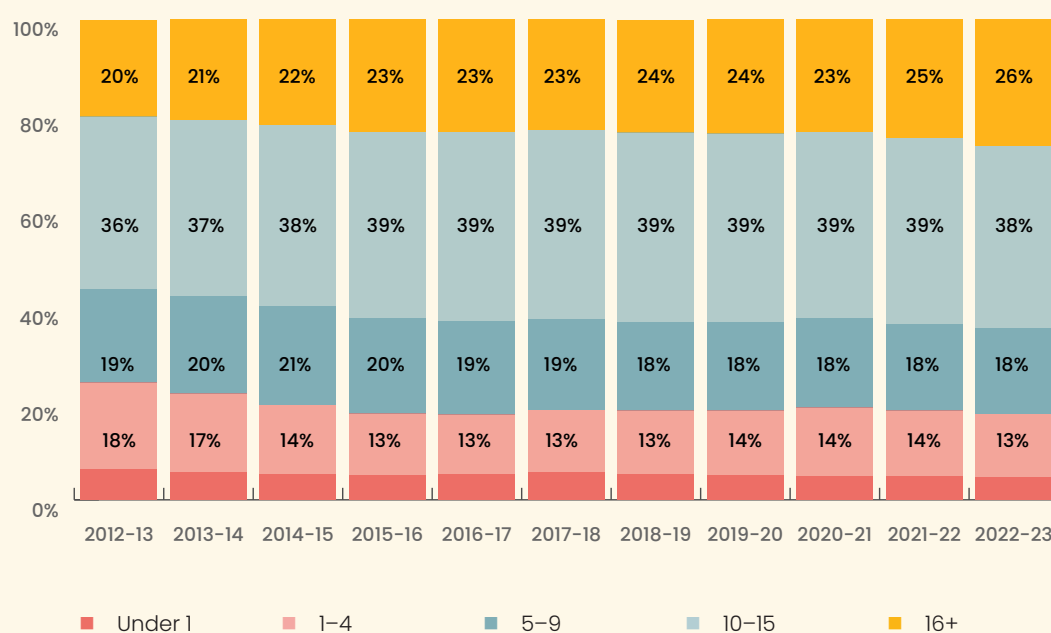
**Figure 10.2. Percentage change since 2012/13 on numbers of children in need, on child protection plans and looked after as of 31st March (England)**



## Children are being looked after at older ages.

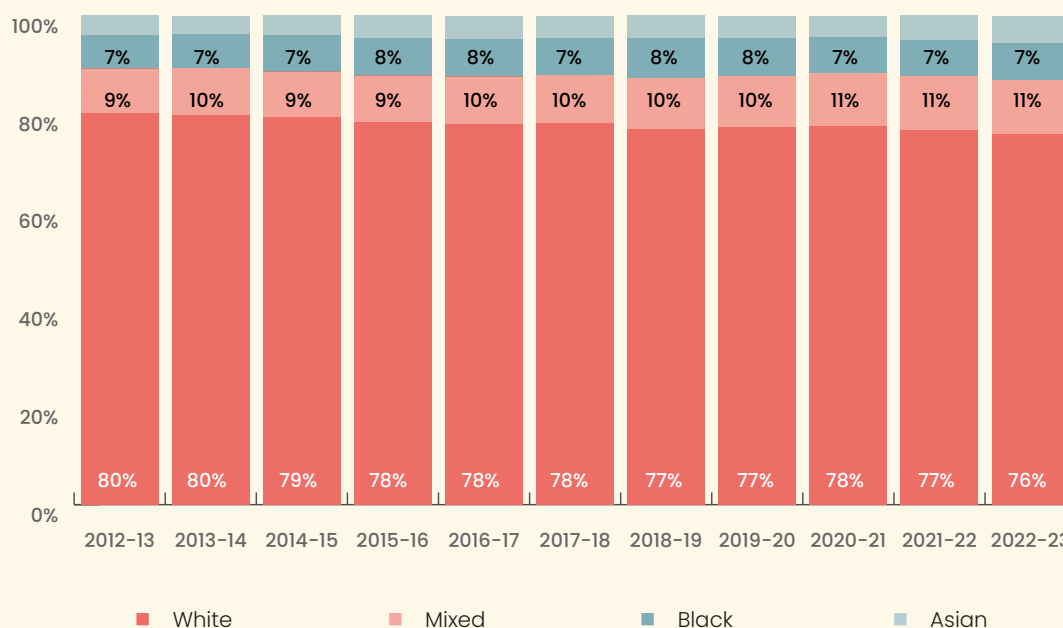
The trends in the numbers of looked after children differ for different age groups. The total number of children aged under five classed as looked after in the latest year (2022/23) was down 10% from 10 years ago [44]. But the number of older children has increased during that time, with older age groups showing greater increases. The number of 5–9-year-olds is up 12% from 2012/13, 10–15-year-olds is up 30% and children aged 16 and above is up 61%. This may reflect children having their needs recognised later than they were previously due to a lack of capacity and pressures on the sector.

Figure 10.3. Children looked after as of 31<sup>st</sup> March by age (England)



In the latest year, boys made up 57% of looked after children and girls made up 43%. This split hasn't changed a large amount over the past decade. When looking at race, White children made up 76% of all looked after children at the end of 2022/23, 2%pts higher than their share of the total population. However, the proportion of looked after children who are White has fallen slightly over the past decade, as there have been small increases in the proportion of Asian and Mixed ethnicity children. Asian children are still underrepresented, accounting for about 6% compared to 12% of the total population, while Black (7%) and Mixed (11%) ethnicity children are slightly overrepresented.

Figure 10.4. Children looked after as of 31<sup>st</sup> March by race (England)



## 11. Youth sector

CORE INDICATOR	INDICATOR PERFORMANCE	LATEST VALUE (2022/23)	CHANGE COMPARED TO...		
			Last year (2021/22)	Pre-COVID (2019/20)	10 years ago (2012/13)
<b>Youth Sector</b> Local authority expenditure for youth services	Mixed	£448m	+ 3%	+ 8%	- 56%

### COMMENTARY

Overall, this has a **mixed rating**. There have been significant reductions in the grants paid to local authorities over the past decade. Consequently, the amount of money spent by local authorities on youth services has also fallen. Since 2012/13, spending has fallen by more than half a billion pounds to less than half of what it was (down 56%). However, more recently, these falls have flattened, and spending on youth services has started to increase. In 2022/23, it rose 3% on the previous year – to 8% above pre-Covid-19 (2019/20) levels.

### What is this sector and how are we measuring it?

Youth services can provide young people with important spaces and sources of support outside of the home. Participation in positive activities, such as [sports](#) [46] and access to trusted adults or [mentors](#) [47], may also be effective in reducing children's involvement in crime and violence. We also know that budget cuts have led to increasing pressure on youth workers and the closures of many spaces for young people, such as youth centres. While the evidence isn't strong, a [report](#) by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport shows a link between decreases in youth expenditure and increases in bike theft, shoplifting, weapons possession and reoffending, although not violent crime [48].

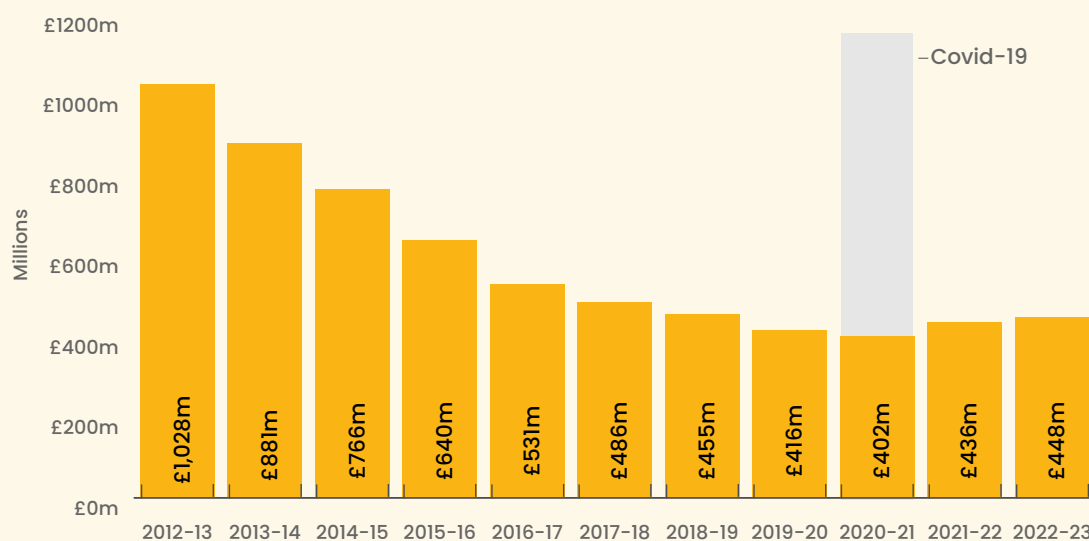
To give us a broad picture of what's happening in the youth sector, we've chosen [spending on young people's services](#) as our core measure [49]. This includes universal provision (e.g. leisure, cultural and sports-based activities, often based in youth centres) and targeted provision (e.g. substance misuse or teenage pregnancy services). We've adjusted these numbers to account for inflation using [GDP deflators](#) published by ONS and present all spending in real terms based on that adjustment [50].

It should be noted that there are other routes to providing services for young people that are not accounted for here. For example, in 2019/20, £35 million was allotted to set up Violence Reduction Units with the aim of tackling serious violence at a local level. At least 20% of this funding was to be used for interventions specifically with [young people](#) [51].

## Spending on young people has more than halved over the past decade.

For more than 10 years, spending on services for young people has been continually cut. Spending in England was £448 million in the latest year – less than half what it was 10 years ago in real terms [49]. The rate at which funding fell slowed in the second half of the 2010s, and the two latest years have shown slight increases. 2022/23 showed an increase of 3% on the previous year, rising to 8% above spending in real terms the year before the pandemic. However, this remains more than £1 billion down on spending in real terms in 2010/11. Alongside these falls in funding for youth services, youth provision has had to change. According to an analysis by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, the number of youth clubs operating in local authorities almost halved (44% lower) between 2011/12 and 2018/19 [48].

Figure 11.1. Total yearly expenditure on services for young people in real terms (England)



Changes to spending have differed between areas. The West Midlands and the North East were the regions that saw the greatest decreases in the past 10 years, down 74% and 70%, respectively, from 2012/13 [49]. And not all regions reported increased spending in the latest year. West Midlands had a small increase of 4% in 2021/22 but was down 16% from that in the latest year. The East of England had slight increases in 2017/18 and 2019/20 but has since been falling again. In the latest year, it was 10% down on the previous year and 17% on the year before the pandemic. Both the East Midlands and the North West reported falls of 2% in the latest year but are spending more than in 2019/20.

## 12. Poverty

CORE INDICATOR	INDICATOR PERFORMANCE	LATEST VALUE (2022/23)	CHANGE COMPARED TO...		
			Last year (2021/22)	Pre-COVID (2019/20)	10 years ago (2012/13)
<b>Poverty</b> Children in households in absolute poverty	Mixed	25%	+ 2.2%pt	+ 0.2%pt	- 3.8%pt

### COMMENTARY

Overall, this has a **mixed rating**. Over the past decade, absolute poverty (a measure of how much the poorest households earn) has been broadly falling. However, the latest year (2022/23) has shown an increase. While the proportion of children living in households in absolute poverty is down nearly 4%pts from 2012/13, it's up 2.2%pts from the previous year and up 0.2%pts from 2019/20. Other measures, such as relative poverty (which measures how much poorer houses earn relative to middle earners), show a consistently worsening picture. Housing, particularly for the poorest families, is a growing problem, with the proportion of households in temporary accommodation at record highs.

### What is our core measure of poverty?

Poverty is widely perceived as a key cause of violence affecting children. A recent [YEF-commissioned evidence review](#) into poverty and youth crime and violence found a small to moderate effect of poverty on crime and violence<sup>2</sup> when various individual and neighbourhood-level risk factors are controlled for [52].

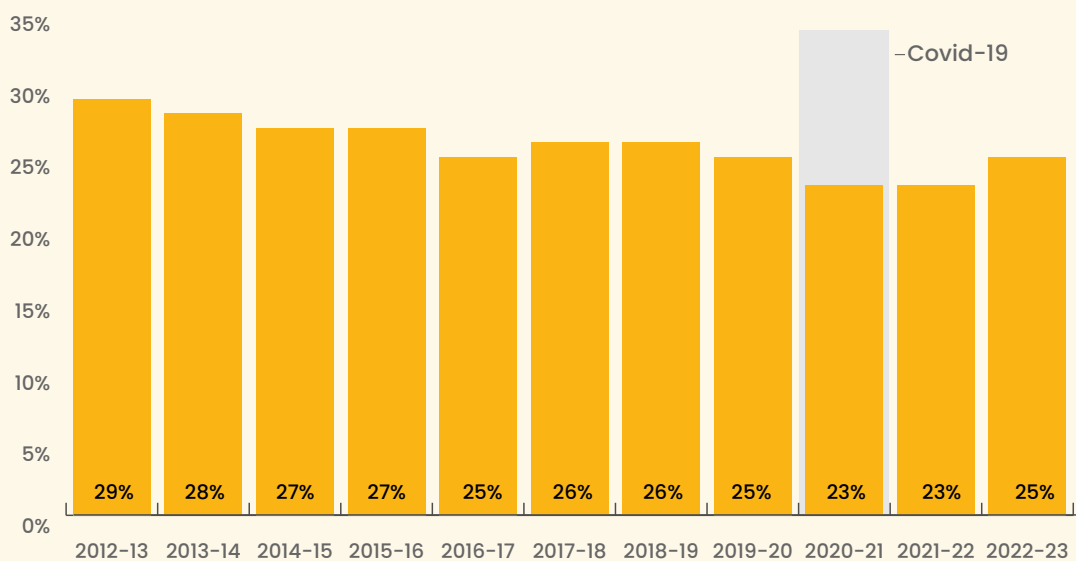
There is no agreed single measure of poverty. As our core measure, we've used the proportion of [children in households in absolute poverty](#) after housing costs [53]. Absolute poverty is defined as the share of individuals whose household income (adjusted for inflation) is below 60% of the median income in 2010. Other measures include relative poverty (defined as incomes below 60% of the median income that year), but this is affected by changes to the income distribution irrespective of what happens to the earnings of the poorest households.

<sup>2</sup> Note the final report is still pending publication, expected in Summer 2024.

## Absolute poverty was improving but has worsened in the most recent data.

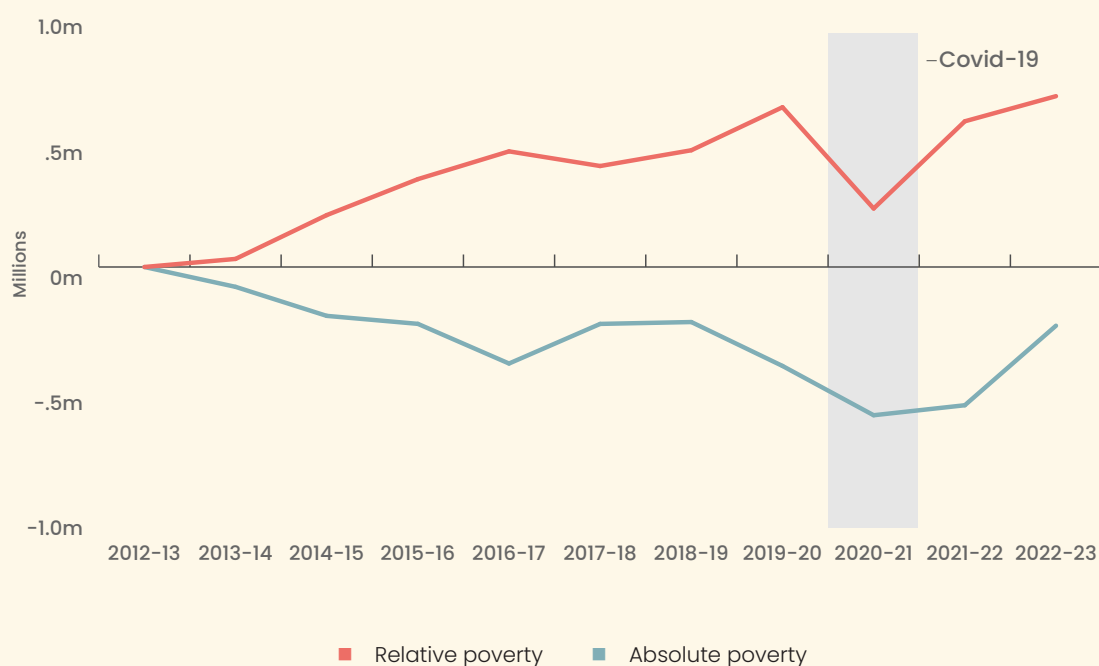
Over the past decade, the proportion of children in the UK living in absolute poverty (the share of children whose household income is below 60% of the median income in 2010) has broadly been improving. This was particularly true over the pandemic, with the various government schemes to boost income for the poorest households (in particular, the temporary £20 uplift to universal credit) [54]. In 2021/22, 23% of children were living in households in absolute poverty, down from 29% in 2012/13 [53]. The latest year (2022/23) has rebounded, increasing to 25% – equivalent to 3.6 million children. It's still 3.8%pts below where it was 10 years ago (2012/13). But it has increased 2.2%pts from the previous year and 0.2%pts from the year before Covid-19.

Figure 12.1. Proportion of children living in households in absolute poverty (United Kingdom)



Relative poverty – which measures income inequality by comparing incomes between the poorest people and middle-income earners – shows a different pattern. Compared to 2012/13, the number of children in the UK living in relative poverty has increased by 0.7 million – up from 27% to 30% in 2022/23. The differences imply that while the poorest households' earnings have increased in real terms over the past decade, they've grown at a lower rate compared to middle-income earners. Both absolute and relative poverty have seen significant increases since Covid-19.

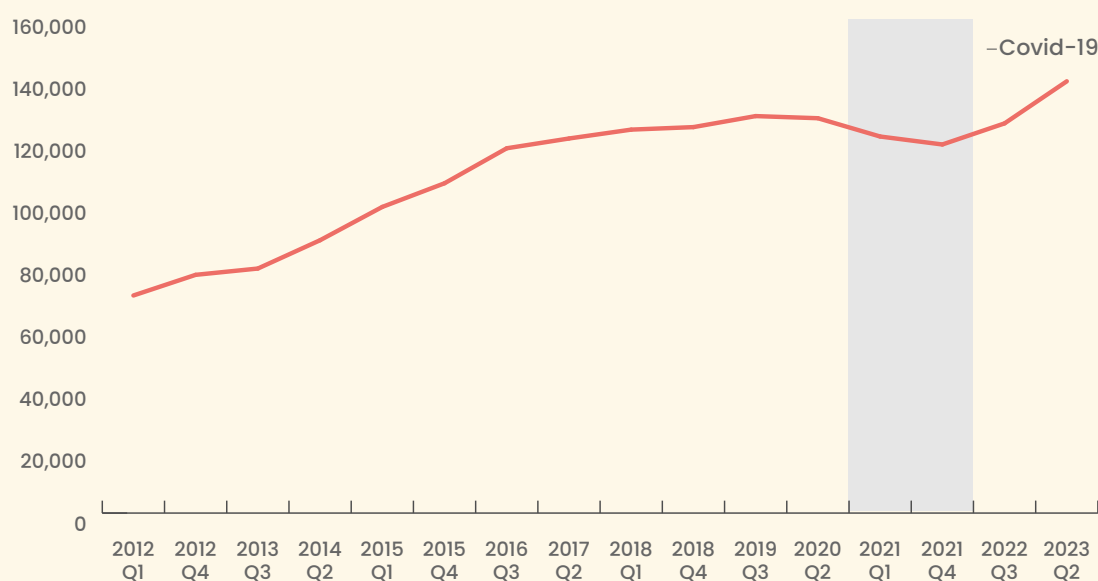
**Figure 12.2. Change in the number of children living in households in absolute and relative poverty compared to 2012/13 (UK)**



## Housing instability is a growing problem for many families with children.

The cost of housing, particularly for private renters, is putting increasing pressure on the poorest households. The number of children living in temporary accommodation is at a record high [55]. It increased significantly between 2012 and 2019. Despite falling during the pandemic – likely due to pandemic-related measures put in place to protect renters and mortgage holders – it has since continued to rise. At the end of September 2023, 142,490 children were living in temporary accommodation. This is up 14% from the same quarter the year before and 11% from the first quarter of 2020 (the pre-Covid-19 high). This number has more than doubled compared to the number in the same quarter in 2010.

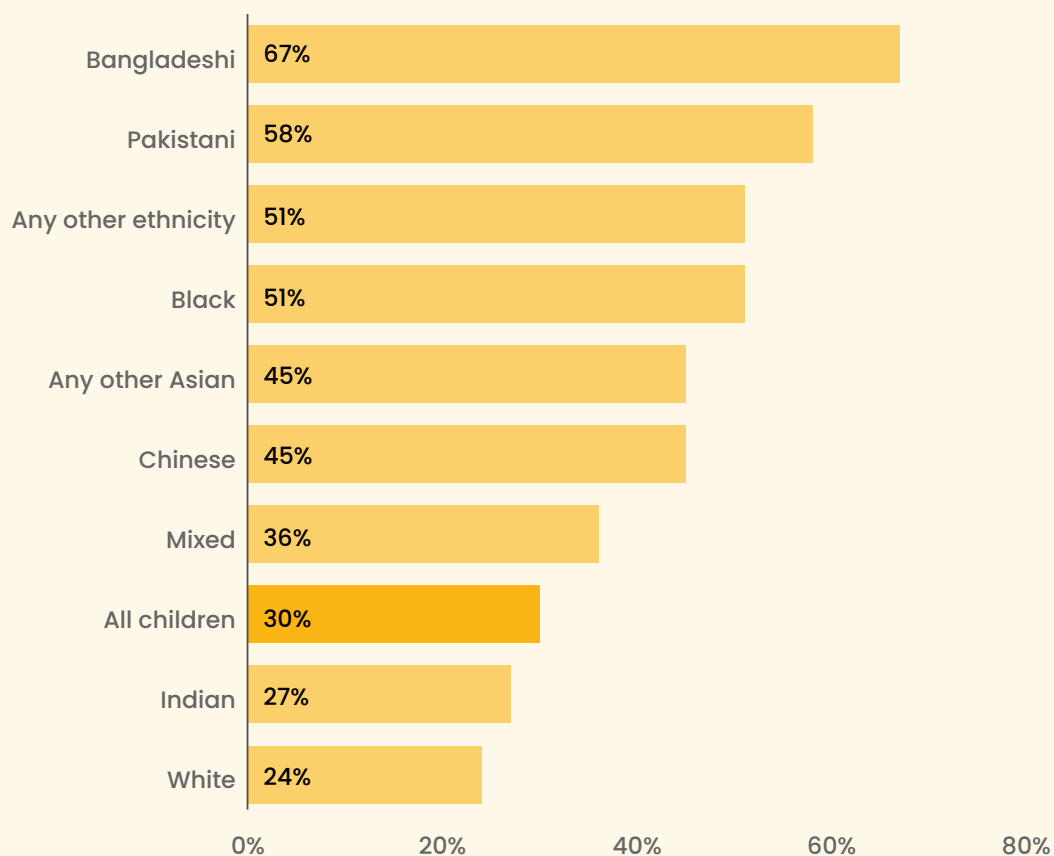
Figure 12.3. Number of children living in temporary accommodation (England)



## Children from most minority ethnic backgrounds experience significantly higher rates of poverty.

There are stark ethnic differences in poverty rates. According to the average rates from 2021/22 and 2022/23, children from Bangladeshi and Pakistani backgrounds are significantly more likely to experience relative poverty [53]. After accounting for housing costs, the estimated rate of relative poverty is 67% for children in Bangladeshi households and 58% for those in Pakistani households. Children from Black backgrounds are also more likely to experience relative poverty than the average, with a rate of 51%. This compares to a rate of 24% for children from White households.

Figure 12.4. Proportion of children in relative poverty after housing costs by ethnicity, 2021/22 and 2022/23 (UK)\*

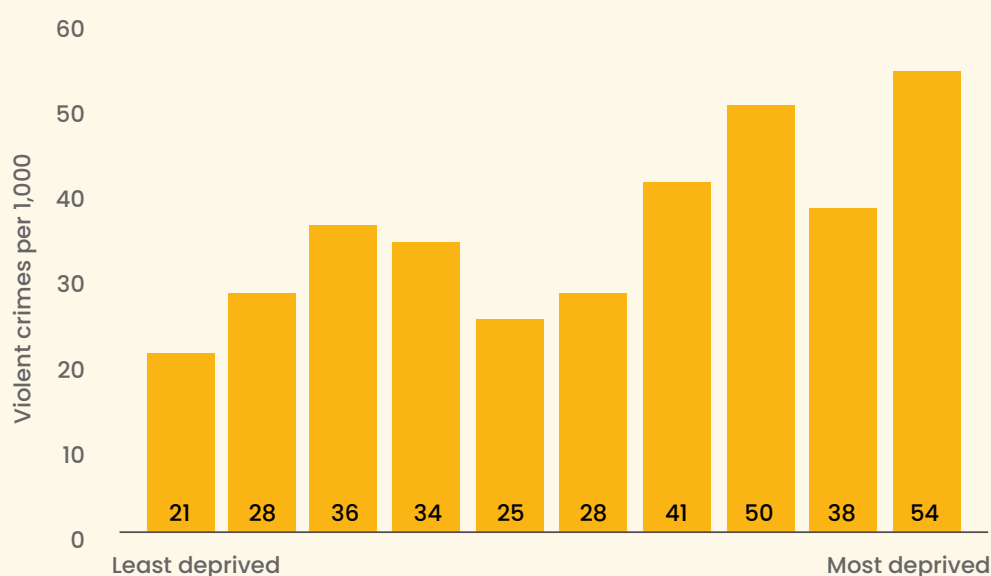


\* Only broad racial groupings were published in the Households Below Average Income data, except for Asian and Asian British ethnicities.

## Children living in more deprived areas are also more likely to be affected by violence.

It is well established that there is a high degree of association between poverty and where crime and violence are concentrated [56]. Our own analysis shows children living in the poorest police force areas face significantly higher rates of violence. There were 54 violent offences per 1,000 in the poorest 10% of police forces (based on the proportion of children in households in absolute poverty) in 2022/23 [57, 58]. This compares to 21 violent offences per 1,000 in the least poor 10% of households, making it over 2.5 times higher.

Figure 12.5. Police-recorded violent crime by areas ranked from lowest to highest poverty rates\* – 2022/23 (England and Wales)



\*YEF calculations – Police force area poverty rates were derived using local authority estimates of the number of children growing up in absolute poverty from the Department for Work and Pensions' children in low-income families statistics [57]. Violent crime rate per head by police force area was derived from Home Office police-recorded crime and outcomes statistics [58]. Violent crime includes violence against the person, robbery and sexual offences.

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