

# Intercountry Adoption: What Do I Need to Know?

Intercountry adoption can be a rewarding but complex process. It is subject to U.S. Federal and State laws as well as the laws in the country from which you wish to adopt. If you would like to build your family by adopting a child from abroad, an overview of the requirements, decisions, and steps and a list of resources will help you on that journey.

This factsheet provides a guide to intercountry adoption, including information on requirements and processes you may need before and after you are matched with a child; how to select the adoption service provider that is right for you; and eligibility, immigration, and citizenship requirements. You'll also find information about how to prepare for parenting an internationally adopted child, bringing your child home, and tips for adjusting to a new family structure for you and your new child.

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The U.S. Department of State is responsible for overseeing intercountry adoption to and from the United States, and you will find helpful information on its [Intercountry Adoption website](#). The U.S. Department of Homeland Security's U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) has jurisdiction over the suitability of the prospective adoptive parent(s) and the child's immigration requirements. USCIS's [Adoption website](#) also has helpful background information.

## THE HAGUE ADOPTION CONVENTION

The Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Co-Operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption (the Convention) went into effect in the United States on April 1, 2008. This international treaty is designed to promote the best interests of children, birth families, and adoptive families in adoptions between participating countries. It provides necessary and important protections to prevent the abduction, sale, and trafficking of children. In the United States, the Department of State is the designated Central Authority for the Convention, and the Office of Children's Issues in the Department's Bureau of Consular Affairs is responsible for executing the day-to-day functions required under the Convention.

USCIS also plays a significant role in determining the suitability of prospective adoptive parents and the child's eligibility to immigrate to the United States. For more information, visit the U.S. Department of State's [Understanding the Hague Convention webpage](#).

Note: Some resources or organizations refer to the Convention as "the Hague" and therefore use terminology such as "Hague adoption" or "non-Hague process" rather than "Convention adoption" or "non-Convention process." Although the terms are different, the meaning is the same.

## ADOPTING FROM HAGUE CONVENTION AND NON-CONVENTION COUNTRIES

There are two different intercountry adoption processes. One guides adoptions from countries that are party to the Convention. The other guides non-Convention countries. Adoption and immigration processes usually occur in tandem, but each has its own elements and requirements. Your adoption service provider will guide you through the entire process specific to the country from which you decide to adopt. Websites from the U.S. Department of State and USCIS provide a general overview of the adoption and immigration processes for each of these:

### U.S. Department of State

- [Hague Adoption Process](#)
- [Non-Hague Adoption Process](#)

### USCIS

- [Hague Process](#)
- [Orphan Process](#)

Over [100 nations](#), including the United States, are party to the Convention. In addition to providing important safeguards for children and families involved in the intercountry adoption process, the Convention dictates that countries must first consider national adoption solutions for placement of children domestically; ensure the child is legally

eligible for adoption; preserve information about the child and their family of origin; work to match the child with a suitable adoptive family; and thoroughly evaluate the suitability of the prospective adoptive family.

The Intercountry Adoption Act of 2000 (IAA) implemented the Convention in the United States. An important requirement under the IAA is that adoption services in Convention cases could only be provided by accredited agencies or approved persons, adoption service providers supervised by such accredited, or approved providers or by an exempted provider, unless all adoption services are provided by a public domestic authority.

The Intercountry Adoption Universal Accreditation Act of 2012 extends the safeguards provided by accreditation to orphans who are being adopted from countries that are not party to the Hague Adoption Convention, to their adoptive parents, and to their birth parents. This ensures that adoption service providers are all held to the same Federal standards, no matter from which country a child is adopted.

### **IMMIGRANT VISA PROCESSES: CONVENTION AND NON-CONVENTION DIFFERENCES**

Children adopted from other countries must obtain U.S. visas (IH-3, IH-4, IR-3, or IR-4) before they can travel or move to the United States. Because of the safeguards in place through the Convention, the immigration process is generally more streamlined in Convention adoptions. In non-Convention countries, there may be additional steps required of the U.S. Embassy responsible for adjudicating the immigrant visa application

and confirming the child's eligibility to immigrate. One key difference is that if the child is from a non-Convention country, the U.S. Embassy processes the I-604 form (Determination on Child for Adoption), commonly referred to as an "orphan determination." It generally takes several weeks or, in some cases, months, to complete the orphan determination. Refer to the U.S. Department of State's [Non-Convention Adoption Cases: Form I-604 Determination and Immigrant Visa Appointment Scheduling webpage](#) for more detailed information.

The U.S. Department of State provides an overview of the visa processes:

- [Hague Visa Process](#)
- [Non-Hague Visa Process](#)

## **ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS AND IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS**

If you're interested in intercountry adoption, you'll need to become familiar with the adoption regulations and guidelines of the U.S. Department of State. Additionally, you should be aware of USCIS's adoption eligibility requirements, your home State's laws on immigration and citizenship, and the laws of the prospective child's country of origin. It's also important to learn about the social and cultural context in which your prospective child was born and assess whether you can meet the child's needs.

## ADOPTIVE PARENT ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

Eligibility requirements are subject to Federal and State laws and the laws of the country from which you wish to adopt.

- **Federal eligibility.** USCIS determines the suitability and eligibility of prospective adoptive parents to adopt and the eligibility of the child to immigrate to the United States. In general, USCIS has two basic eligibility requirements for prospective parents:
  1. Unmarried applicants must be U.S. citizens and at least 25 years old when they file the petition to adopt.
  2. Married couples must jointly adopt the child, but only one spouse must be a U.S. citizen.U.S. requirements are addressed in more detail on the USCIS webpages for the [Hague](#) and [orphan](#) (non-Convention) processes.
- **State eligibility.** For State-specific information, visit Child Welfare Information Gateway's [State Recognition of Intercountry Adoptions Finalized Abroad](#).
- **Foreign country eligibility.** For country-specific information about foreign governments' eligibility requirements for prospective adoptive parents and the children they may adopt, visit the U.S. Department of State's [Country Information webpage](#). For general information about eligibility, visit its [Who Can Adopt](#) and [Eligibility to Adopt](#) webpages.

## IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS

Prospective adoptive parents may also want to think about these additional considerations:

- **Timeframe.** It generally takes 1 to 5 years to complete an intercountry adoption. The length and predictability of the process depend on the country, the adoption service provider, and the individual child involved. It can also depend on your background, including complex family issues and mental health or financial concerns that may affect the length to navigate the home study process.
- **Reasons the child needs a permanent family.** As with children in the United States, the main reasons children in other countries need adoptive families include maltreatment, parental illness or death, and abandonment. Factors in the child's country of origin, such as the economy, policies on population control, famine, and natural disasters, may also play a role in why the child is eligible for adoption. It is important to understand how these factors may have affected the life of the child you are considering adopting.
- **Ages of eligible children.** The international adoption of children less than 1 year of age has become increasingly less likely than in the past due, in part, to the Convention's commitment to the [principle of subsidiarity](#). According to this principle, it's in the child's best interests to remain with their birth or extended family whenever possible and domestic placements are prioritized before intercountry adoption may be considered. Consequently, the ages of children eligible for adoption vary widely depending on the country. In general, the ages of children

adopted from other countries ranges from 6 months to 16 years (although intercountry adoptions at the latter age are less common).

- **Lack of information on the child:** It is also very important for parents to understand that information provided about the child will likely be incomplete or inadequate. Parents need to be comfortable with missing and possibly incorrect information regarding the child. As a result, it is critical for parents to prepare for the unexpected.
- **Needs of the children:** Very often, these children are also in need of treatment to provide thorough nutritional, medical, and developmentally appropriate care. Also, some countries have regulations prohibiting the separation of siblings.

## DECIDING WHERE TO ADOPT FROM

You may have a variety of reasons for why you want to adopt from a particular country. Because agencies have different country programs, it is recommended that you choose where to adopt from before choosing your adoption service provider. If you are in the process of [deciding where to adopt from](#), the following information may help you narrow your search.

- **Age of child requested.** As part of the home study process, you will be approved to adopt a child within a specific age range. However, knowing in advance the age range you want to request allows you to choose a country that places children within that range. The majority of children waiting for adoption internationally are in an older range. Though infant adoptions used to be frequent, they are now quite rare in intercountry adoption.

- **Special needs.** The majority of children placed for adoption have some type of medical, developmental, behavioral, and/or mental health related special need. It can be helpful to understand the profiles of children available for intercountry adoption from a particular country to determine if it is a good match for the prospective adoptive family.
- **Institution or foster care placements.** In many countries, children who need permanent families are cared for in institutions or orphanages, which may increase their risk of exposure to serious trauma. Spending time in institutions early in life can cause harmful and sometimes permanent effects in children, such as developmental delays and behavioral and/or attachment concerns (McCall & Groark, 2015). The age when a child enters an institution, the length of time in institutional care, and the quality of the institution or foster family are important factors to consider when adopting. Children adopted from institutions or foster care may require additional medical, educational, and mental health support as well as families who understand their needs and how to help them.
- **Travel requirements.** Most countries require prospective parents to travel to the child's country to complete the adoption process. The number of trips required varies, as does the required lengths of stay. Traveling to your child's country of origin may offer the added benefit of learning about their culture. For more information on the benefits, refer to "[The Top 10 Secrets of Successful Adoption Travel](#)."

- **Processing time.** The length of time it takes to complete an adoption ranges from country to country—and often within a country depending upon the child request (e.g., age of child, openness to medical special needs, etc.). Adoption service providers can often provide estimates based on the previous cases they have processed for families.
- **Fees.** Fees also vary depending on the country, service provider, and needs of the adoptive child. They typically range from \$25,000 to \$40,000 and cover agency and foreign fees, a home study, and travel (R. Hanlon, personal communication, September 21, 2020). Accredited adoption service providers are required by law to provide a comprehensive schedule of expected fees. For more about the financial aspects of intercountry adoption, read Information Gateway's [Planning for Adoption: Knowing the Costs and Resources](#).

## WORKING WITH AN ADOPTION SERVICE PROVIDER

Per the accreditation regulations of the IAA, all agencies or persons providing any of the six specific intercountry adoption services listed below must be accredited or approved per the U.S. Federal regulations 22 CFR §96, §97, and §98, regardless of whether the adoption will fall under Convention or non-Convention processes.

According to the IAA, the following are the six intercountry adoption services (22 CFR § 96.2):

1. Identifying a child eligible for adoption and arranging an adoption
2. Securing the necessary consent to termination of parental rights and to adoption
3. Performing a background study on a child or a home study on a prospective adoptive parent and reporting on such a study
4. Making nonjudicial determinations of the best interests of a child and the appropriateness of an adoptive placement for the child
5. Monitoring a case after a child has been placed with prospective adoptive parents until final adoption
6. Assuming custody and providing (including facilitating the provision of) child care or any other social service pending an alternative placement when necessary because of a disruption before final adoption

In addition to the six adoption services, an accredited adoption service provider will assist you to obtain a home study, and complete required training and other preparation for an intercountry adoption.

To be approved or accredited, adoption service providers must meet eligibility requirements in nine areas, including ethical practices, information disclosure, and service planning. In addition, each Convention country may have its own accreditation requirements. Accredited providers generally handle intercountry adoptions from specific countries, and the country where you plan to adopt may also have authorization requirements that limit which provider you are able to use. To find an accredited and approved provider, visit the U.S. Department of State's [Adoption Service Provider Search webpage](#).

It's normal to work with a primary provider—the accredited agency or approved person responsible for ensuring that all six adoption services are provided—who is not in your

State and partner with a local home study agency. If you do not locate an accredited provider with a program that meets your needs or works in the country where you wish to adopt, please see [Locating an Adoption Service Provider](#) on the [Intercountry Adoption Accreditation and Maintenance Entity \(IAAME\) website](#). (IAAME is the U.S. Department of State-designated accrediting entity. If you have additional questions, you may [contact IAAME](#) for assistance.)

Many adoption service providers have detailed websites with helpful information for your search. A reputable provider will walk you through the adoption process and help you with the following:

- Prepare you to become an adoptive parent through classes on parenting and adoption issues or referrals to such programs
- Contact USCIS about immigration laws and [forms](#)
- Handle or help troubleshoot problems along the way
- Provide information or direct services for postadoption reporting, citizenship acquisition, and postadoption supports.

You should look for a provider who understands your values and priorities and will help you throughout the entire intercountry adoption and immigration processes. To decide on an adoption service provider who is right for you, research providers who have specific experience in your country(ies) of interest. Review providers' websites and contact them directly to learn more about the services they offer. Experienced providers will offer in-person or virtual sessions to answer your questions openly, including those about fees.

These sessions are usually free. Researching different providers may help you find the one that best meets your needs (Refer to [Choosing an Adoption Professional](#) for guidance on selecting one.) You can also ask to speak to adoptive families who used the provider's services or check with your local [Better Business Bureau](#).

For a list of agencies denied accreditation, visit the Department of State's [Agencies Denied or Subject to Adverse Action webpage](#). You may review information about complaints and adverse actions against all accredited adoption service providers on the [IAAME website](#).

### **QUESTIONS TO ASK ADOPTION SERVICE PROVIDERS**

The following questions can help you determine which provider may best meet your family's needs:

- By which State is the provider licensed? Is the license in good standing?
- Has the provider had any complaints filed against them, and if so, what were they about and what was the outcome?
- Has the provider ever been denied accreditation? Why?
- Does the provider offer all adoption services? What other organizations may be involved in providing some of these services in a specific case? (For example, if your adoption services provider is only helping to conduct your home study, ask which other providers may help identify a child for adoption, obtain the termination of the birth parents' parental rights, or monitor the case until the adoption is finalized.)

- Does the provider offer a written contract that outlines the services offered, fees, and expectations of the client and provider?
- What are the provider's minimum requirements for prospective parents?
- In which countries does the provider have intercountry adoption programs? How long has the provider had programs in those countries?
- How long has the provider been involved in intercountry adoptions?
- Can you speak with other families who have adopted a child with similar circumstances?
- How many children has the provider placed (both from the country of interest and overall)?
- How does the adoption service provider receive referrals (the packet of information about a potential adoptive child)?
- What training or support does the provider offer to help parents prepare to adopt and then parent a child with special needs?
- What training or support does the provider offer to help parents prepare to adopt and then parent a child who is culturally or racially different from them?
- Does the provider have overseas staff or use the services of facilitators or lawyers? How does the provider monitor or supervise the work of those individuals?
- How do the provider's contacts who work in other countries (such as staff, facilitators, or lawyers) identify children needing families? Does the provider travel regularly to the countries of origin?
- What services are provided after your child comes home? How long are they available?
- What happens if you change your mind and decide not to adopt?

- What, if any, is the refund policy if an adoption does not occur or if the country closes to adoptions? Can they provide that policy in writing?
- Does the provider offer services in the unlikely event that the adoption is dissolved?
- How many past clients have disrupted a placement or dissolved an adoption? What supports did the provider offer such families, and what were the reasons the families made their decisions?

## ADOPTING A CHILD

Whether you adopt a child from a Convention or non-Convention country, this section provides information on the general steps you will need to complete before and after the adoption is finalized. It includes health and mental health concerns to consider before you bring your child home, support services to help after your child is home, and how to complete the citizenship acquisition process for your child.

## PREPARING AND TRAINING FOR ADOPTION

Like all prospective adoptive parents, you will need to complete a [home study](#); submit immigration forms; and put together a dossier, which is a collection of your family's personal records (e.g., proof of identity, finances, health, other children in the home, fingerprints for clearance checks) required by the legal system of the child's country of origin to process the adoption. While the agency that conducts your home study must be licensed in your State of residence, the accredited adoption service provider that serves as the primary provider (or placing agency) may operate from anywhere in the

United States. You also must complete at least 10 hours of training before the adoption in addition to any other requirements of your State of residence. Your child's country of origin may have additional training requirements for prospective adoptive parents. You may be exempted from training by the primary provider if you already have completed other sufficient training.

### **Investing in Training and Development for Foster/Adoptive Families**

In 2017, the Children's Bureau awarded a 5-year grant to Spaulding for Children to develop the [National Training and Development Curriculum for Foster and Adoptive Parents](#) (NTDC). NTDC provides foster and adoptive parents with the training, knowledge, and ongoing skills they need to effectively parent children and youth. The curriculum addresses medical, psychological, developmental, emotional, and mental health considerations for prospective adoptive parents. The curriculum also includes several areas of knowledge and skills specifically for parents interested in intercountry adoption to help them support the children they adopt and help themselves understand the intercountry adoption process. It is also critical for prospective adoptive parents to get child-specific and country-specific training before traveling to the child's country of origin.

### **MATCHING AND PLACEMENT PROCESS**

A few months to a year or more after completing the required paperwork, your family may be chosen for a specific child for possible placement, or you may receive a specific child profile for consideration. The specific referral or matching process may vary depending on the country and adoption service provider involved.

A few countries may allow families to be directly involved in this step by viewing photolistings of waiting children. Many adoption service providers and some private advocacy organizations offer their own photolistings you can view that include pictures and brief descriptions of children eligible for intercountry adoption.

When a specific child is identified, you will receive a referral (a packet of information about the child). This packet usually includes the child's picture and information on their health and history, if available. Medical information, however, may be inaccurate or limited. You will likely have a minimum of 2 weeks to consider the available information and decide whether you can meet this child's needs. Ask questions of your provider or a doctor who specializes in internationally adopted children before you accept the placement. Some clinics specialize in intercountry adoptions, so you can use them to have the medical information reviewed by a doctor who is trained in this area. Pay particular attention to the information related to the child's health, prenatal health (if known), placement history, any exposure to trauma, and expected emotional or mental health needs. Do not be afraid to ask for additional information, particularly

if a professional raises issues that concern you (See the section below on physical and behavioral health considerations for additional information and resources.)

If you are unsure about whether you can make the changes necessary to incorporate the child into your family, it is better to stop the process before meeting them than to later risk a possible disruption (ending the adoption process after legal placement but before finalization) or dissolution (ending the adoption after finalization). Children who experience disruptions or dissolutions face new grief, rejection, and compounded trauma. More information on this topic is on Information Gateway's [Discontinuity and Disruption in Adoptions and Guardianships](#).

Children adopted through intercountry adoption may be at risk for unregulated custody transfer, sometimes referred to as "rehoming," which occurs when adoptive parents informally (i.e., without involving child welfare professionals or courts) place their child in a home other than theirs with the intention of permanently transferring custody. (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2018; U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2015). Unregulated custody transfer puts the child at risk of abuse, neglect, and other poor outcomes, and many State laws attempt to prevent it. (Refer to Information Gateway's [Unregulated Custody Transfers of Adopted Children](#) for more information.)

It is critical that families be as prepared as possible to move into this journey with commitment and a full understanding of the challenges that they may encounter. To reduce the likelihood of relational breakdowns, families should obtain support

prior to being matched, during the process of being matched, and after the child has been placed in the home. This could be through a formal or informal support group, mental health services, other adoptive families, books and trainings on topics specific to your adoption process, and through the support of your adoption agency.

### Adoption of Relatives

If you are interested in adopting a child to whom you are related, you are required to follow the same steps as you would for a nonrelative adoption. A prospective adoptive child who is related to you must qualify for intercountry adoption and immigration to the United States under the same criteria as unrelated children under the Convention or non-Convention processes. The specific requirements depend on the country in which your relative lives.

The adoption of a stepchild is not generally handled as an intercountry adoption.

For the most up-to-date information on adopting a relative through intercountry adoption, visit the U.S. Department of State's [Adopting a Relative for Immigration to the United States webpage](#) and USCIS' [Family-Based Petition Process webpage](#).

## PHYSICAL AND BEHAVIORAL HEALTH CONSIDERATIONS

Although there is a very wide diversity among children awaiting adoption in terms of their age, gender, skin color, religion, ethnicity, and other personal and socio-demographical aspects, there are some general factors that they share:

- They are primarily residing in orphanages, with some in foster care or other child welfare settings.
- Many children placed for intercountry adoption have known medical special needs. The needs can cover a wide range of issues—from minor, medically correctible needs to more profound needs that impact a child's daily independent functioning.
- Children without a diagnosed or suspected medical or cognitive special need may still have unreported short- or long-term special needs that could impact their health and development.
- Sibling groups often await adoption as a unit.

Children eligible for intercountry adoption often have special needs and health conditions that may be treated in the United States more easily than in the child's country of origin. These challenges may be accompanied by trauma from their early life experience as well as deep feelings of loss and grief for their birth families, culture, community, friends, food, and language. Refer to Information Gateway's [The Impact of Adoption](#) to learn more about core issues experienced in adoption.

Also, children who live in institutions are sometimes exposed to physical or sexual abuse and/or neglect, which can contribute to physical and behavioral health concerns. Sometimes children may not feel safe to share information, particularly about sexual abuse, until they feel comfortable with their adoptive families, who may be the first people to learn about the maltreatment.

Given the possible lack of health and other life history information about the child, you may learn of your child's special needs after placement, whether or not you had planned and prepared to adopt a child with special needs. Refer to Information Gateway's [Obtaining Background Information on Your Prospective Adopted Child](#) for details on how to find personal information about your prospective adoptive child.

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends a comprehensive health evaluation for all children who are adopted, including those adopted internationally (Jones et al., 2019). Reputable providers will give you as much medical information as possible from your child's country of origin, including the child's background. But they cannot guarantee the information is accurate or complete. The type and quality of available information will vary depending on the country and the child's situation. Health records will be in the language of the child's country of origin and may need to be translated, and translated records sometimes are not complete or accurate. Parents should consider requesting copies of the original medical records so that U.S. health professionals who are fluent in that language can review and translate them.

When reviewing the medical information of a child with whom you are matched, consider that child's expected health and behavioral health needs so you can have realistic short- and long-term expectations. A doctor familiar with intercountry adoption can help you understand the information you receive about your child's health and development.

Visit the following resources for general information on the health needs and concerns commonly associated with adopting a child from another country:

- [Health Considerations](#) (U.S. Department of State)
- [Medical Examination](#) (U.S. Department of State)
- [Intercountry \(International\) Adoption Health Guidance](#) (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)
- [Internationally Adopted Children: Important Information for Parents](#) (American Academy of Pediatrics)
- [The Role of Pre-Placement Medical Review in Contemporary Adoptions: Setting Expectations, Assessing a Child's Needs, and Supporting Successful Family Formation](#) (National Council For Adoption)

Arrange for your adopted child to have a medical exam with a pediatrician specializing in adoption health soon after you bring your child home.

## **OBTAINING LEGAL CUSTODY AND ADDITIONAL ACTIONS**

Your adoption service provider will guide you through the appropriate and required steps in the legal adoption process, which typically begins after you accept a referral for a specific child. Some countries may require you to

finalize the adoption in their jurisdiction. Other countries may only transfer legal custody/guardianship to you or your adoption service provider and not complete a final adoption. In that case, you must finalize the adoption in a U.S. court to establish the child's U.S. citizenship.

For a child from a Convention country, do not adopt or accept legal custody of the child until the following have occurred:

- USCIS has provisionally approved your petition to classify the Convention adoptee as an immediate relative (Form I-800).
- The U.S. Department of State has advised the central authority in the child's country of origin that you have been found suitable and that the child appears eligible to come to the United States if adopted or if legal custody for the purpose of adoption is granted. This is often referred to as the "Article 5 letter."

Additional actions may be required by U.S. immigration law, State law, the law or regulations of your child's country of origin, or your adoption service provider before or after you bring your child home. Requirements vary depending on the type of immigrant visa your child received. Your adoption service provider can tell you about what must be done in your specific case, but the following are possible other steps:

- **Finalize your child's adoption or readopt your child in a U.S. court.** If your child received an IR-4 or IH-4 category visa, which are generally issued when the foreign court issues a guardianship order instead of an adoption order, you must finalize the adoption in a U.S. State court before

your child can acquire U.S. citizenship. It is recommended to readopt your child in the United States if your child is not from a Convention country. If your child is from a Convention country, readoption is not typically required. For more information on State laws and why readopting in the United States may be beneficial in some cases, visit the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services' [U.S. Citizenship for an Adopted Child webpage](#).

- **Obtain documentation of your child's U.S. Citizenship.** USCIS will automatically issue a Certificate of Citizenship to children who enter the United States with an IR-3 or IH-3 category visa to reside with the adoptive parents. For children who do not automatically acquire citizenship and who parents must take additional steps in the State of residence, the parents may apply to USCIS for a Certificate of Citizenship or to the Department of State for a U.S. passport.
- **Obtain a Social Security number for your child.** The U.S. Social Security Administration will assign your child a Social Security number before you obtain proof of U.S. citizenship. If your child entered the United States on an IR-4 or IH-4 visa and was granted Lawful Permanent Resident status but did not acquire U.S. citizenship automatically, you will need to provide proof that your child subsequently acquired citizenship after you completed a full and final adoption and satisfied any remaining requirements. Records will not show your child is a U.S. citizen until you provide this proof with either a Certificate of Citizenship or a U.S. passport. For more information, refer to [Social Security Numbers for Children](#).

The following Information Gateway publications may be helpful in determining what additional actions may be required in your case:

- [State Recognition of Intercountry Adoptions Finalized Abroad](#)
- [Completing Intercountry Adoptions Not Finalized Abroad](#)

### **SERVICES FOR AFTER AN ADOPTION IS FINALIZED**

Your family will likely need some level of support and services after the adoption is finalized. This need may arise years after the adoption is finalized. Work with your adoption service provider before your child's adoption is finalized to ensure you know where and how to access services if the need arises. The following are examples of adoption support and preservation services:

- Support groups
- Therapy or counseling
- Respite care
- Camps, social events, and heritage activities
- Information resources
- Support in maintaining relationships with birth families, including search and reunion

Although the availability of services may vary depending on your State or locality, the Federal Government encourages States to provide services to any adoptive family that needs them (Children's Bureau, 2014). To view information on services by State, visit Families Rising's [Summary of State Adoption Assistance Programs webpage](#). It is important to note that adoption services may be offered by the child welfare agency but open to any family who has adopted.

The following are additional resources about adoption support and preservation services:

- [What to Expect After Adoption](#) (U.S. Department of State)
- [Providing Adoption Support and Preservation Services](#) (Information Gateway)
- [Finding and Working With Adoption-Competent Therapists](#) (Information Gateway)

### Submitting Postadoption Reports and Pictures

Many countries require parents to submit reports on the progress and welfare of their child after the adoption has been finalized. Postadoption reporting requirements vary by country. For example, some may require annual reports for 5 years or perhaps until the child is 18 years old. Ensuring these reports are filed in a timely manner is an important factor in fostering positive relationships between the United States and your child's country of origin, paving the way for future intercountry adoptions. Failure to submit these reports to foreign countries has caused adoption programs to shut down, so it's important that you are aware of reporting requirements and adhere to them. Visit the U.S. Department of State's [Post-Adoption Reporting Overview webpage](#) for additional information.

### ACQUIRING AND DOCUMENTING U.S. CITIZENSHIP

Acquiring and documenting your child's U.S. citizenship is important to ensure they are able to enjoy certain rights and privileges, including applying to colleges for financial aid, being eligible for certain types of employment, or registering to vote. Most children adopted from abroad acquire U.S. citizenship automatically when they enter the United States under the terms of the [Child Citizenship Act of 2000](#). In general, a child whose adoption is finalized abroad acquires citizenship automatically if the child meets the following conditions:

- Is under the age of 18;
- Enters the United States as a permanent resident; and
- Resides in the United States and is in the legal and physical custody of at least one parent who is a U.S. citizen

For many internationally adopted children, citizenship is acquired automatically, but documentation of citizenship is not. Therefore, obtaining documentation for them is important. A Certificate of Citizenship issued by USCIS, or a U.S. passport issued by the U.S. Department of State, provides proof of U.S. citizenship for children who become citizens through adoption. This is different than the certificate provided with Convention adoptions that states the adoption complies with the Convention. The process for obtaining the Certificate of Citizenship depends on the type of visa your child was issued. Check the stamp on your child's passport to determine the type of visa issued.

You may be able to [obtain a passport](#) for your child from the U.S. Department of State before receiving the Certificate of Citizenship, but the adoption must be full and final according to U.S. Federal law. The "full effect" of a foreign adoption decree means that you and your child have the same rights and obligations as you would have if a State court had issued the adoption decree. Even if you have obtained a passport for your child, the Certificate of Citizenship is still recommended as the best proof of citizenship as it does not expire and is issued from USCIS.

Your child will not acquire citizenship automatically if they enter the United States as a permanent resident with either an IR-4 or IH-4 visa. For example, one common scenario for issuance of this category of visa is if both adoptive parents do not travel to the child's country of origin, and both do not appear for the visa interview with the child. In this case, it is essential that you first finalize your child's adoption in the appropriate State court and meet other State-specific requirements before your child can acquire citizenship.

Some individuals who were legally adopted and have been U.S. residents for most of their lives learn later that they do not hold U.S. citizenship because their adoptive parents did not fulfill citizenship requirements. Some adoptees may discover this as young adults when applying for certain jobs, registering to vote, or applying for a U.S. passport.

Visit the following webpages for more information on obtaining and documenting citizenship for your child:

## U.S. Department of State

- [Obtaining Citizenship or Documenting Acquired Citizenship for Adopted Children](#)
- [Documenting U.S. Citizenship for Your Child Adopted Abroad](#)

## USCIS

- [U.S. Citizenship for an Adopted Child](#)
- [After Your Child Enters the United States](#)
- [Certificate of Citizenship for Your Internationally Adopted Child](#)

## ADJUSTING TO A NEW FAMILY STRUCTURE

Parents are often unprepared for the emotional challenges they and their children face when their family grows through adoption. Information Gateway provides several factsheets and webpages to help you and your child adjust:

- [Parenting Your Adopted Preschooler](#), [Parenting Your Adopted School-Age Child](#), and [Parenting Your Adopted Teenager](#) offer tips for helping your child adjust to a new home and family and explore common parenting considerations, including adoption and child development, gaps in developmental stages, discipline, and improving your child's school experience.
- [The Impact of Adoption](#) provides an overview of the seven core issues in adoption and how they may affect children and adults who have been adopted, birth parents, and adoptive parents.

The National Council For Adoption also provides an [Intercountry Adoption webpage](#) as another helpful resource for adoptive families.

During this transition and throughout your lives as an adoptive family, staff from the adoption service provider may be a valuable source of support. Your adoption agency may provide services that last from 6 months to several years after placement. You can locate resources and referrals for additional services from a variety of sources, such as the internet or the local library.

### Contact With Birth Families

With the enormous amount of information available online throughout the world, more people are finding each other through online searches. Children and youth who are adopted frequently search for their birth families and vice versa. Feel free to ask your adoption service provider about how you can support your child in safely using the internet and social media and how to navigate newly formed relationships with the child's birth family. It is important for adoptive families to share information they have about the birth family with the child and to be supportive in acknowledging and honoring not only the child's birth family, but their connection to their community, too. This supportive atmosphere will help the child to develop their full identity. For more information about maintaining connections and contact with birth families, visit Information Gateway's [Helping Your Adopted Children Maintain Important Relationships With Family factsheet](#).

## CONCLUSION

Navigating the laws and process of intercountry adoption is challenging, but an accredited adoption service provider can guide you through a successful journey, from arranging a home study to documenting your child's citizenship. If you decide that intercountry adoption is right for you, actively preparing for your child's needs and your own will smooth the transition for you and your growing family. Children who have endured potentially traumatic experiences before they join your family deserve parents who know their needs and how to care for them. Preparing for your child's physical and behavioral health and considering your family's adjustments will help ready you for the complex and exciting journey of welcoming a child from another country into your home.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

**Information Gateway:** Includes several publications and web sections on intercountry adoptions:

- [Exploring the Pathways to Adoption](#)
- [Obtaining Background Information on Your Prospective Adopted Child](#)
- [Adoption: Considering Your Options and Making a Plan](#)

**U.S. Department of State:** Provides information on a wide range of intercountry adoption topics, such as the Hague Convention, the adoption process, and country-specific notes

**USCIS:** Details Convention and non-Convention process for intercountry adoptions

### **University of Minnesota Adoption Medicine**

**Clinic**: Addresses health issues related to children adopted from other countries

**American Academy of Pediatrics**: Includes a listing of pediatricians by State who specialize in providing services to adopted children and information about health-related adoption issues

**ComeUnity**: Highlights information on health issues related to intercountry and domestic adoptions, including a list of clinics and doctors that specialize intercountry adoption

**International Adoption Help**: Lists adoption clinics that specialize in international medical and health information

**National Council For Adoption**: Offers a Convention-compliant training, "Intercountry Adoption Journey," that prepares prospective adoptive parents for the unique challenges of parenting a child adopted from another country

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