

## Annual Report on Intercountry Adoptions Narrative

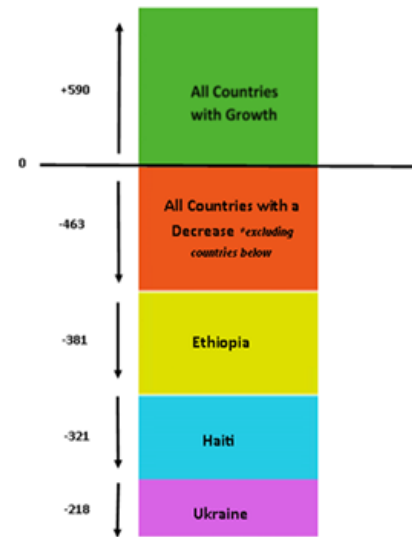
The FY 2015 Annual Report on Intercountry Adoption, required by Section 104 of the Intercountry Adoption Act of 2000, provides statistical data and other information on intercountry adoptions from October 1, 2014, through September 30, 2015. The report is released after a thorough review of the available data to ensure the information is accurate. This review includes summaries of outreach efforts to adoption service providers.

Table 1 provides the number of intercountry adoptions involved immigration to the United States. This data is based on the number of immigrant visas issued in FY 2015 to children who met the definition of orphan or Convention adoptee under the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA), and for whom a full and final adoption or grant of custody for the purpose of adoption in the United States was granted in accordance with local laws in the child’s country of residence.

### Overview of FY 2015

In FY 2015, consular officers issued 5,648 immigrant visas to children adopted abroad or coming to the United States to be adopted by U.S. citizens. Families in all 50 states plus the District of Columbia, Guam, and the Virgin Islands welcomed children from 89 countries.

FY 2015 Change in the Number of U.S. Intercountry Adoptions by Country



### Top 5 Countries of Origin and Top 5 Receiving States

<u>Country of Origin</u>	<u>Receiving State</u>
<b>1. China</b>	1. Texas
<b>2. Ethiopia</b>	2. California
<b>3. South Korea</b>	3. New York
<b>4. Ukraine</b>	4. Florida
<b>5. Uganda</b>	5. Georgia

In the past year, there was an increase in intercountry adoptions from several countries, including China, Kyrgyzstan, and Latvia. Children were adopted from several countries from which there were no intercountry adoptions to the United States in FY 2014, including the Central African Republic, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, and Timor-Leste. In other countries, the number of intercountry adoptions decreased because of changing policies and significant events inside those countries. The majority of countries saw only small fluctuations from

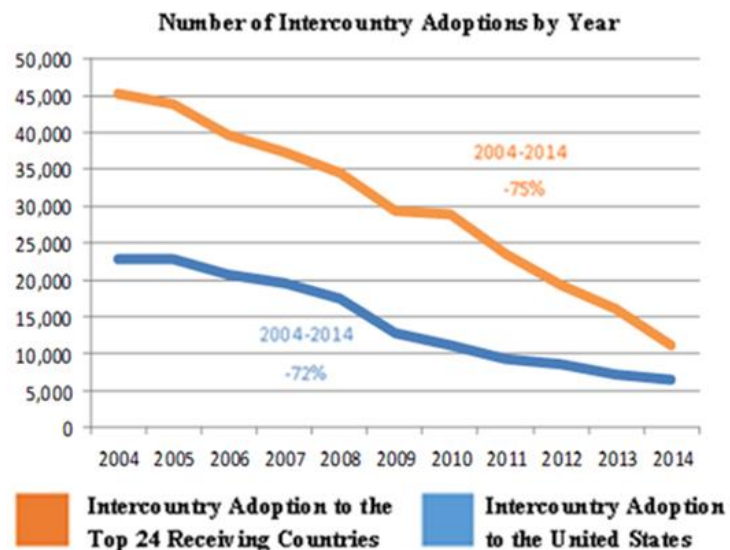
FY 2014, and positive growth was offset by a decrease of 920 adoptions in just three countries: Ethiopia, Haiti, and Ukraine.

Since April 1, 2008, more than 500 children resident in the United States have been adopted abroad (outgoing adoptions). The numbers have increased in the past fiscal years, from 25 cases reported in FY 2008 to 93 in FY 2015. This increase is attributed in part to the Department of State’s outreach to adoption service providers, state adoption authorities, and the adoption community. These numbers include Convention, non-Convention, relative, and non-relative outgoing adoptions. The majority of outgoing adoptions involve infants, but adoptions from the U.S. foster care system have increased gradually since 2010. Canada, the Netherlands, and Ireland are the top receiving countries for outgoing adoptions (in order of number of adoptions). The top sending states are Florida, New Jersey, California, and New York. The annual report only addresses outgoing adoptions reported to the Department. The Department has increased its outreach and education efforts to state domestic authorities by participating in workshops, hosting webinars, and creating an online reporting form on the [adoption.state.gov](http://adoption.state.gov) website to improve knowledge of the Convention and increase reporting of outgoing cases.

### **The Changing Landscape of Intercountry Adoption**

The intercountry adoption process varies significantly across countries, and can be affected by sometimes rapidly changing economic, social, and political factors within each country. Differences in the number of adoptions from a specific country of origin may be attributed to such changes, including shifting policies towards adoption and social change.

Intercountry adoptions have dropped significantly from FY 2004 (peak year for intercountry adoptions) to FY 2014. The United States saw a reduction in intercountry adoptions from 22,884 in FY 2004 to 6,441 in FY 2014. The 72 percent decrease reflects a global reduction in intercountry adoption. The number of

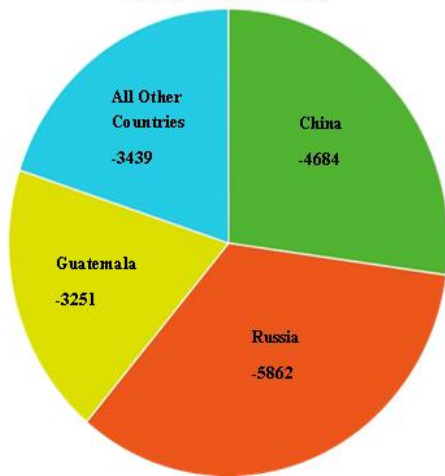


intercountry adoptions to the top 24 receiving countries for the same time period fell at a slightly faster rate of 75 percent.

This global decline can be attributed to a wide range of factors. In the specific case of the United States, 80 percent of the reduction in intercountry adoptions comes directly from three countries: China, Russia, and Guatemala.

### **China (27 percent of the last decade's decrease in intercountry adoptions)**

FY 2004 - FY 2015 Reduction in Yearly U.S. Intercountry Adoptions by Country



In FY 2015, U.S. families provided homes to 2,354 children from China, marking a more than 15 percent increase from FY 2014.

In the past 10 years, however, intercountry adoption from China by U.S. families has dropped by more than 70 percent, which corresponds to a worldwide decrease in all intercountry adoptions from China. During this time, the Chinese government increased its efforts to promote the domestic adoption of children in need of a permanent home. As a

result, some 20,000 to 30,000 children are now placed domestically in China each year.

The United States continues to work with the Chinese government to encourage intercountry adoption for those children who cannot find permanent families in China. There has been a growing trend in the international placement of children with special needs, as well as those who are older and/or are part of sibling groups. For example, the United States has observed that the profile of Chinese adoptees changed from 95 percent healthy girls in 2005 to more than 90 percent special needs children today, with boys constituting one third of adoptees to the United States. These changes reflect the overall positive changes made to the child welfare system in China over the last decade.

### **Russia (34 percent of the last decade's decrease in intercountry adoptions)**

During FY 2015, no children were adopted by U.S. families from Russia as a result of Russian Federal Law 272-FZ. Motivated by political sentiment unrelated to the adoption of children, this law prohibits the adoption of Russian children by U.S. citizens and entered into force on January 1, 2013.

Russia's decrease has greatly contributed to the overall decline in the number of intercountry adoptions by U.S. families. In FY 2004, U.S. families adopted a historic high of 5,682 Russian children, 25 percent of all intercountry adoptions to the United States that year.

The Department of State continues to encourage intercountry adoption as an option for Russian children. In our conversations with the Russian government, we have highlighted the devastating impact this ban has had on children who have met and bonded with their prospective adoptive parents, and encouraged a resolution for adoption cases that were in process prior to January 1, 2013. Moreover, it is evident there are many children in Russia who could benefit from intercountry adoption, and who remain institutionalized as a result of this ban. Despite our efforts, we have no reason to believe the Russian government will allow the resumption of intercountry adoption with the United States in the near future.

### **Guatemala (19 percent of the last decade's decrease in intercountry adoptions)**

In December 2007, the Government of Guatemala announced a suspension of new intercountry adoption processing while it worked to develop an adoption process compliant with the Convention that would address vulnerabilities which led to widespread corruption and fraud under the old process. This suspension affected all receiving countries, including the United States.

During FY 2015, Embassy Guatemala City issued 13 immigrant visas to children adopted from Guatemala by U.S. citizens adoptions initiated before the ban. This represents a significant drop from the FY 2004 number of 3,251 intercountry adoptions. The Guatemalan government has begun to establish the regulatory procedures and infrastructure to once again implement an intercountry adoption process. The United States stands ready to assist Guatemala to develop an adoption system that prevents fraud and safeguards the interests of children.

While most countries experienced normal fluctuations in the number of intercountry adoptions to the United States between FY 2014 and FY 2015, three countries witnessed significant drops.

### **Ethiopia**

Intercountry adoptions from Ethiopia fell from 771 in FY 2014 to 335 in FY 2015. Over the past several years, the Government of Ethiopia has been working to

strengthen intercountry adoption procedures at both the federal and regional levels. A number of regions are working with the international community to provide family preservation and reunification assistance to vulnerable children and families as part of a deinstitutionalization program for children in orphanages. The federal Ministry of Women and Children Affairs set forth new standardization guidelines for the regional approvals necessary for intercountry adoptions. Regional authorities also have tightened their control over the intercountry adoption process. The United States continues to work with the Government of Ethiopia to maintain intercountry adoption as a viable option for children in need.

## **Haiti**

Adoptions in Haiti decreased from 464 in FY 2014 to 143 in FY 2015. In FY 2015, the Haitian Central Authority concentrated on developing and reinforcing new processing procedures, which resulted in a slowdown in cases eligible for final orphan determinations and subsequent visa issuance. We expect numbers to increase within the limits established by Haiti's quota once the April 1, 2016, deadline for the Haitian Central Authority to match transition cases with Haitian children passes and the Haitian Central Authority begins processing Convention adoptions.

## **Ukraine**

Intercountry adoption from Ukraine in FY 2015 fell more than 40 percent from the previous fiscal year as a result of the Russian occupation of Crimea and the conflict with Russia-backed separatists in eastern Ukraine. Prior to the conflict, U.S. families adopted a significant number of children from parts of the Donbas region which is currently under the control of Russia-backed separatists. While intercountry adoption remains possible in Ukraine, a significant number of children who would otherwise be eligible for intercountry adoption in Luhansk and Donetsk were evacuated by Ukrainian authorities to safer locations, and dossiers are being reconstructed after records were left behind and/or destroyed.

## **Democratic Republic of the Congo**

On September 25, 2013, the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) suspended issuance of exit permits to Congolese children adopted by foreigners; the ban remains in effect. As of September 30, 2015, only a few exceptions to the exit permit suspension were made by the DRC government for medically urgent cases. In spite of the suspension, Congolese courts continue to

process adoption decrees. The Department of State engaged frequently, at all levels, with Congolese officials throughout FY 2015 to press for a resolution to the suspension.

### **Department of State Engagement to Support Intercountry Adoption**

In FY 2015, the Department of State's Bureau of Consular Affairs (CA) welcomed several foreign delegations to Washington, D.C., and engaged with individuals and organizations from a wide range of backgrounds to discuss intercountry adoptions.

Consular officers maintained regular communication with their foreign counterparts. Examples include: U.S. Embassy Bogota sponsored an annual luncheon for the Colombian Central Authority; U.S. Embassy Phnom Penh sponsored a group of Cambodian officials to travel to the United States to meet with U.S. adoption and child welfare counterparts; and both U.S. Embassy Abidjan and U.S. Embassy Lusaka worked extensively with their respective central authorities in the months prior to the Convention entering into force for Côte d'Ivoire and Zambia. Consular officers visited multiple countries on five continents to encourage intercountry adoptions as a viable option in host countries. Ambassador Susan Jacobs, Special Advisor for Children's Issues, traveled to 15 different countries to support the Department of State's efforts regarding intercountry adoption through meeting with foreign central authorities and our own overseas embassies. Assistant Secretary for Consular Affairs Michele Thoren Bond led multiple delegations to Kinshasa to push for an immediate end to the 2013 exit permit suspension.

Additionally, the U.S. delegation successfully participated in the Fourth Special Commission on Intercountry Adoptions in The Hague. This delegation, led by Assistant Secretary Bond, advanced our objectives and garnered support from other delegations at the Special Commission. The Department of State also utilized this opportunity to speak with representatives of numerous countries about adoption programs with the United States.

The Department of State views the U.S. adoption community as a valuable component of its efforts, and receives useful input and information from numerous members of this community. CA strives to maintain open communication through varied communication methods, in-person and virtual meetings and conferences, and the publication of adoption notices and alerts. This allows CA to relay information about ongoing developments, as well as gather information. In September 2015, CA hosted an Adoption Service Provider (ASP) Symposium,

welcoming more than 100 ASP representatives for a two-day conference to learn more about the needs of the adoption community and discuss CA's new intercountry adoption strategy.

Under CA's new intercountry adoption strategy, we assess the availability of intercountry adoption worldwide, develop tools and initiatives to support intercountry adoption, and improve the Department's communication with the U.S. adoption community. For example, by mapping the intercountry adoption process in other countries, the United States enhances our knowledge of each country's procedures. From Cambodia to Haiti to Zambia, this detailed understanding of individual countries' procedures helps CA be more focused and productive in bilateral discussions with foreign government officials. It also helps CA relay more accurate information to the public about the intercountry adoption process in specific countries.

The Department looks forward to the opportunity to continue diplomatic engagement and outreach efforts in FY 2016 and will work to proactively increase cooperation to make intercountry adoption a viable option in all countries.