

INTERCOUNTRY ADOPTION

U.S. Department of State • Bureau of Consular Affairs



INTERCOUNTRY ADOPTION DISPATCH

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Volume 5

The Office of Children's Issues (CI) intends the Intercountry Adoption Dispatch to be a regular series of communications to keep adoption service providers (ASPs) abreast of developments that may be relevant to your work in intercountry adoption. The information below is not intended to be comprehensive, but instead offers a snapshot of the issues we have focused on and information we believe may be useful to you as intercountry adoption professionals.

Past issues of the [Intercountry Adoption Dispatch](#) are available on our website. We welcome your input and feedback, as well as suggestions for future versions. As always, we want to hear from you about specific questions or concerns as well. Please email ASPadoption@state.gov.

Bilateral Engagement Division Chief, Matthew Gillen:



The Office of Children's Issues warmly welcomes Matthew Gillen as Chief of the Adoptions Bilateral Engagement Division. Matthew will be spearheading our overseas efforts to support adoptions including by engaging with foreign governments, adoption service providers, and prospective adoptive parents as well as promoting the safeguards of the Convention. Matthew is a career foreign service officer with over 20 years of experience overseas and Washington. His most recent overseas assignment was as Consul General in Santiago, Chile, and he has also served in Dhaka, Dublin, Ho Chi Minh City and London. Matthew grew up in the UK where his American parents were working for the U.S. military schools, and was educated at the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, VA. He looks forward to applying his diplomatic experience to intercountry adoptions.

Communicating with the Office of Children's Issues:

Email: As a reminder, we have established a dedicated email address for ASPs in order to enhance our ability to respond as efficiently as possible. That address is ASPadoption@state.gov. Our email address for the general public is Adoption@state.gov. If ASPs write to that address by mistake, the email will be forwarded to ASPadoption@state.gov but may experience a delayed response.

Listserv: Any employee of an accredited/approved ASP may be subscribed to the listserv we maintain for ASPs-only as well as the one we maintain for all Adoption Stakeholders. To request new or additional staff members be added, please email us at ASPadoption@state.gov with a list of names and email addresses.

Calls/Meetings: Engaging with the stakeholder community is important to us. ASPs who wish to arrange a call with the Office of Children's Issues are invited to email ASPadoption@state.gov to indicate the topic or question, and we will be happy to arrange a virtual meeting with the appropriate staff in the Bilateral Engagement and/or Adoption Oversight Divisions.

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If the topic or question pertains to all ASPs, or if we have received the same question from multiple ASPs, we will consider including others to ensure equitable access and information-sharing.

In the past few months, we have met with multiple advocacy organizations to hear their perspectives on intercountry adoption: National Council for Adoption (NCFA,) Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute (CCAI,) and Academy of Adoption and Assisted Reproduction Attorneys (AAAA,) and Christian Alliance for Orphans (CAFO). We also continue to hold calls [to hear views from the adoption community] on specific topics or countries and plan to continue holding such calls when we identify an interest or significant updates to share.

ASP Calls with AO Division Chief: As mentioned in the August 6 call with Adoption Oversight Division Chief Marisa Light, she will be holding one-on-one calls with all interested, currently accredited or approved ASPs. While these calls are intended to be informal and will not involve a specific agenda, we hope to gain insight about ASP priorities, feedback, concerns, and suggestions. We have already held several calls, including with ASPs that have raised specific questions as well as others, and appreciate the frank and cooperative interactions and discussion. If you would like to schedule a call sooner rather than later, please email ASPadoption@state.gov.

Updates on COVID-19's Impact on Intercountry Adoption:

In coordination with our colleagues abroad, we continue to track the status of foreign country travel restrictions. In those countries which limit travel, we continue to explore whether humanitarian exceptions to such restrictions can be granted for adoptions and under what circumstances. We also appreciate that ASPs and PAPs realize that if and when traveling, PAPs should expect to abide by all health-related conditions and requirements in that country, including mandatory quarantine periods and approved locations. CI and our Embassies are not in a position to request exceptions from those country-specific public health requirements.

Following Special Advisor Michelle Bernier-Toth and Children's Issues Director Scott Renner's calls with Prospective Adoptive Parents (PAPs) in July, we received nearly 250 emails from PAPs, sharing stories of the difficult and uncertain waiting process, and giving us their personal insights on the situations they and the children they seek to adopt are facing with this delay. Their perspectives are a vital component of our efforts at many levels of government-to-government communication to seek to open doors for travel. We have tried to respond to each and every email to assure PAPs that their families' stories matter to us.

In the China call, we shared that our office was seeking a meeting between our office as the U.S. Central Authority, with our Chinese counterparts. We remain hopeful this meeting will take place soon. Please know that Consulate Guangzhou continues in their regular communications with their CCCWA contacts at a working level.

The Department of State Level Four Global Health Advisory was lifted on August 6. Travel advisories are now specific to individual countries and [Country-specific COVID-19 travel information](#) and [Travel Advisories](#) for all countries are available on the [Department's website](#). Prospective adoptive parents who decide to travel at this time should review this information carefully, enroll in the [Smart Traveler Enrollment Program](#), and be aware that transportation options remain limited globally.

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IAAME Fall 2020 Training Sessions:

On September 2, IAAME hosted an online training session on the revised substantial compliance system. This was the first of a series of trainings that in addition to the substantial compliance system, will focus on topics including foreign supervised providers, parents acting on their own behalf, independent contractors, and IAAME's processes and procedures related to monitoring and oversight as ASPs. The next training session is September 23 at 2:00 p.m and will focus on demonstrating capacity and performance in reviews. We welcome IAAME's training and are pleased to participate in these sessions to provide context and information about the Adoption Oversight Division's role in the intercountry adoption process.

Training Opportunity - Post-Adoption Services/Supports:

ASPs may wish to be aware of the National Adoption Competency Mental Health Training Initiative (NTI.) Funded by a Department of Health and Human Services grant awarded to the [Center for Adoption Support and Education](#), NTI has developed two free, standardized, web-based trainings to build the capacity of child welfare and mental health professionals to effectively support adoptive families and children. More information is available on the [NTI website](#), and interested parties can [enroll at this link](#).

COUNTRY-SPECIFIC UPDATES

BURUNDI: U.S. Embassy in Bujumbura is in touch with the Burundian Central Authority regarding adoptions from Burundi to the United States but is constrained by the continued COVID-19 restrictions. The immigration office confirmed that adopting parents wishing to apply for a Burundian visa may do so by sending a visa request letter to the Ministry of Interior and Public Security requesting a Burundian visa. The letter should be delivered in person to Ministry of Interior and Public Security offices by a contact on the ground. Once the Ministry of Interior and Public Security grants approval, it will issue a letter of authorization to the adopting parents to be presented at the airport upon arrival. The immigration officers at the airport will then issue a three-day visa to the traveler. Travelers may request an extension of this visa from the Immigration Office." Please note that International travel to and from Burundi continues to be closed. At this time, we do not know when the airport in Bujumbura will reopen. We encourage agencies and families to monitor U.S. Embassy Bujumbura websites for latest alerts and updates, and to stay in touch with Embassy Bujumbura at BujumburaC@state.gov regarding their visa interview and travel.

COLOMBIA: On August 3, Colombia announced that visas may be issued to prospective adoptive parents (PAPs) for travel to finalize their adoptions. Although airports and borders remain generally closed to international travel, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs also advised that PAPs may travel on humanitarian flights organized by the Colombian government from overseas to Colombia. The Colombian Central Authority has informed adoption service providers of this important update. To date, 19 families are scheduled to travel to Colombia on a humanitarian flight in September to complete their adoption procedures. This positive new development is an important step in helping families finalize adoption processes and unite with their children.

JAMAICA: Thank you to ASPs participants in the September 4 call on intercountry adoptions in Jamaica. We appreciated learning more about your experiences working there. Your insights will be very useful as we prepare to meet with the Child Protection and Family Services Agency later this month. Thanks again for your participation! Please let us know if there are other Caribbean countries we should consider for future calls.

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LATVIA: Our office and Embassy Riga is monitoring closely the discussions in Latvia regarding the proposed revisions to their adoption laws that will impact intercountry adoptions. Our Ambassador and Special Advisor for Children's Issues have engaged with Ministry officials at every level to discuss the importance of intercountry adoption and the need for intercountry adoptions to remain an adoption for children in need of permanency. On September 9, the Parliament's Committee for Human Rights (Saeima) met to discuss the proposed amendments to the draft legislation. At this time, we do not have updates regarding the proposed changes to the draft legislation; however, we understand in the first reading of the proposed legislation, the Parliament has agreed that pending adoption cases must be finalized before the amended law is passed. In the current draft, the definition of transition cases only covers cases where prospective adoptive parents have received a referral to adopt prior to the passing of the new law. We are waiting for the Parliament to announce the date for the second reading of the legislation. We will continue to provide updates as the information becomes available.

REPUBLIC OF CONGO: The Department continues to seek clarification on the handling of adoption cases started before the Convention entered into force for the Republic of Congo on April 1 of this year. As stated in our prior notices, we have encouraged the Government of Republic of Congo to process cases initiated prior to the Convention's entry into force as "transition cases" under the pre-Convention process. The Government of Congo has not yet responded but we will continue to seek resolution and provide updates as soon as they are available.

RWANDA: The US Embassy Kigali has heard informally that the National Commission for Children (NCC) is now part of the Early Childhood Development (ECD). The Embassy is requesting a meeting with the Government of Rwanda to confirm this information and how, if any, this change will impact cases in progress. We will post a notice on our website, adoption.state.gov, as soon as we receive official confirmation regarding this information.

UKRAINE: We have received an inquiry from the government of Ukraine regarding adoptive families who have not submitted post-adoption reporting requirements, as required by Ukraine. As you are aware, accredited adoption service providers are required under federal regulations to make "good-faith efforts" to encourage adoptive parents to provide such reports (22 CFR 96.51(c)). We are reviewing the list of outstanding PARs, which includes over 900 cases, and will contact adoption service providers directly through ASPadoption@state.gov to arrange a time to discuss the efforts your agency and the adoptive families have made to respond to Ukraine's post-adoption reporting requirements.