

INTERCOUNTRY ADOPTION

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



INTERCOUNTRY ADOPTION DISPATCH

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VOLUME 9

Introducing Adoption Division Chief for Bilateral Engagement —Tristan Spiceland: Tristan joined the Bilateral Adoptions Division in November 2021 as the Division Chief, having previously served in Children’s Issues since late 2019 as Branch Chief for European Abductions. Tristan joined the Department in 2006 and has served as a Foreign Service Officer in five overseas posts, including Moscow, Yekaterinburg, Quito, Santiago, and Santo Domingo. Tristan served as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Turkmenistan from 1996 to 1998. Tristan is married with two children and lives in Arlington, Virginia.

Looking Back at 2021 & Looking Ahead to 2022

Bilateral Engagement Division Chief, Tristan Spiceland

Thanks to the Bilateral team for a warm welcome. I’m so glad to be working with such a talented and committed group of people. Throughout my Foreign Service career, I’ve seen firsthand how consular officers touch the lives of people throughout the world, and this team is no different – we work together to make intercountry adoption an option for children in need of a secure and loving home.

The lockdowns and travel restrictions of the past two years certainly made life challenging in many ways, and those of us working in intercountry adoption saw firsthand the difficulties faced by parents and children trying to navigate an ever-changing web of travel restrictions and regulations. I know that the pandemic has placed great strain on the ASP community, who continue to weather the operational and financial challenges of the past two years but remain committed to helping children and families. Despite this year’s hurdles, I’ve seen the work on intercountry adoptions continue. At the Department, we held bilateral meetings, consulted with Congress on adoptions issues, hosted virtual training sessions, worked closely with countries newly acceding to the Convention, and facilitated Director Dilworth’s overseas travel to engage on children’s issues with our European allies. This close coordination with domestic and international stakeholders will continue to benefit children and families long after the pandemic subsides (continued on next page).

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LOOKING BACK AT 2021 & LOOKING AHEAD TO 2022 (CONTINUED)

I look forward with optimism to a 2022 during which the pandemic may finally recede, and we can continue with life in a more “normal” way. I joined the team just a few months ago but in those few short months have been impressed by the spirit of helpfulness and dedication to making intercountry adoption an option for families worldwide.

Adoption Oversight Division Chief, Marisa Light

While the global pandemic continued to result in unwelcome delays in adoption services for too many children around the world, we saw no such slowdown in our work in adoption oversight. Instead, we forged ahead with two “once in a decade” type initiatives to strengthen the intercountry adoption accreditation system and provide more support for ASPs and PAPs seeking to adopt.

Our first priority has been bolstering the stability of the accreditation system itself by seeking an additional accrediting entity to work alongside IAAME in both accreditation and monitoring and oversight responsibilities. We were fortunate to have two strong candidates come forward and spent much of the year in analysis and dialogue about the most viable way to bring our long-held goal of a more robust and stable accreditation system to fruition. We are pleased to be continuing these conversations in earnest with the Center for Excellence in Accreditation Services (CEAS) and IAAME. We are now preparing a formal recommendation to designate CEAS as an accrediting entity and pave the way for two national-level accrediting entities working together for the first time.

We have also been hard at work evaluating the 118 public comments we received in response to the Notice of Proposed Rule Making we released towards the end of 2020. Formal efforts were paused early in the year, but our oversight officers continued the work of carefully considering each and every piece of feedback we received and applying it to our proposed changes. The work is careful and deliberate, as it should be. We’re confident, though, that the due diligence we’re exercising in the process will have a positive impact on intercountry adoption by providing greater clarity, increasing transparency, and maintaining fidelity to both U.S. law and international commitments under the Hague Convention.

To support both historic efforts, we’ve also been assessing what has been working well and not so well in intercountry adoption accreditation. I’ve been grateful for the frank and candid thoughts shared with me in one-on-one conversations with ASPs throughout the year. For the first time in recent memory, we included a formal mechanism for ASPs to share input into the annual AE performance review (continued on next page).

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LOOKING BACK AT 2021 & LOOKING AHEAD TO 2022 (CONTINUED)

This mechanism surveyed more than 20 ASPs that underwent the reaccreditation process, in the time frame selected, about specific aspects of their experience. We may choose a different aspect of the AE roles and responsibilities to seek ASP feedback on in this coming year, but we will ensure this is incorporated as a standard part of our formal oversight processes from here on out. It has been gratifying to see how much confidence in the system has grown, and to hear as much praise as constructive feedback these days.

And finally, though it's a different kind of highlight, I can't pass up the opportunity to share my gratitude and pride in our adoption oversight team for keeping all this critically important work going as we also answered the call to assist U.S. citizens and Afghans seeking to leave Afghanistan as part of the Department's unprecedented Operation Allies Refuge. For more than two months, staff and leadership in both adoption divisions worked around the clock and from multiple locations to be a lifeline for so many individuals and families in the most vulnerable of circumstances. Whether in person, by phone, or over email, we had the privilege of demonstrating the U.S.' commitment to assisting its citizens overseas in times of great need and in as many cases as possible, welcoming them home.

Helping Americans during their time of need is a great honor for us – whether that's helping relocate a family out of Kabul or assisting families to bring their children home for the first time. I know this call to serve resonates with you and your teams, too. We hope that you stay safe and well in the coming year, and we look forward to continuing productive conversations and good work supporting children and families in 2022.

COUNTRY UPDATES

China

- CI Director Dilworth joined Michelle Bernier-Toth, our Special Advisor for Children's Issues, to meet virtually with more than 300 families waiting to adopt from China on Friday, January 14. We hope that representatives from your agencies were able to join the call, and we appreciate your assistance gathering questions from your clients prior to the call. We hope that the information we provided during our discussion offers some degree of reassurance to waiting families of the continued priority that our entire team places on this issue. As Director Dilworth mentioned during the call, we will hold more collaborative calls on China in the future, and we will look to all of you again to gather questions and comments from your waiting families.

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COUNTRY UPDATES (CONTINUED)

Latvia

- In December 2021, the Latvian Parliament passed new amendments which will ultimately prohibit intercountry adoptions from Latvia to the United States. Under the new law, intercountry adoptions from Latvia will only be permitted to countries that have ratified both the Hague Adoption Convention and the Convention on the Rights of the Child and have a bilateral agreement with Latvia establishing a legal framework for adoption. The new law is scheduled to go into effect on July 1, 2022. The U.S. Embassy in Riga will prioritize intercountry adoption cases from Latvia to the United States that are currently in process and is working with the Office of Children's Issues to identify all pending adoption cases. It is our understanding that all cases in which prospective adoptive parents (PAPs) have received referrals before June 30, 2022, will be able to continue their adoptions under current processes. If PAPs have not received a referral by June 30, 2022, they will not be able to pursue an intercountry adoption from Latvia after July 1, 2022.

Mexico

- The Office of Children's Issues will participate in a virtual meeting on intercountry adoption with the government of Mexico this spring. The meeting will include representatives from the *Secretaria de Relaciones Exteriores* (SRE) and *Sistema Nacional para el Desarrollo Integral de la Familia* (SNDIF). We would like to gain insight about your experiences and perspectives on the intercountry adoption process in Mexico before our meeting with the SRE and SNDIF. Please email your input to ASPAdoption@state.gov by February 28, 2022.

Ukraine

- We are closely tracking the security situation in Ukraine as concerning reports of unusual Russian military activity near Ukraine's borders and in occupied Crimea continue. Please monitor the U.S. Embassy in Ukraine website for all security updates and forward this information to prospective adoptive parents who are planning to travel to Ukraine. Please encourage them to take the actions outlined in the latest Message to U.S. Citizens. Do not hesitate to reach out to us with any questions or concerns by emailing ASPAdoption@state.gov. In our efforts to be proactive and to facilitate timely communication with adoptive parents, we ask for your assistance. If you have prospective adoptive parents who are currently in Ukraine or en route, please email us at ASPAdoption@state.gov using **subject line: Notification of family in Ukraine** and include the following information:

- ⇒ Names of prospective adoptive parents and their contact information
- ⇒ City/region where they are staying in Ukraine
- ⇒ Name of the child/children they adopt
- ⇒ Date of their planned departure from Ukraine

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GENERAL UPDATES ON INTERCOUNTRY ADOPTION



National Adoption Month 2021: In November, the Department commemorated National Adoption Month and the vital role of intercountry adoption and our mission to both support and safeguard the children and families involved in this process. The same month, Director Alison Dilworth traveled to Armenia and Austria to engage with overseas missions and foreign government counterparts on issues of child welfare. In Vienna, Austria, Director Dilworth had productive meetings with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs focused on ensuring that intercountry adoptions between our two countries are open, transparent, and provide safe, loving home to children in need. Pictured here, is Alison with an Austrian family judge learning more about his role supporting families and children in the courts. Other highlights from November's activities include a [blog post](#) by Special Advisor for Children's Issues, Michelle Bernier-Toth; a virtual town hall on November 31 with U.S. adult intercountry adoptees; participation in the annual Adoptive Parents Committee Conference on November 20; a Congressional telebriefing on intercountry adoption; participation in the American Bar Association Speaker Series; and the publication of a National Adoption Month [factsheet](#) for overseas posts to use in their outreach campaigns.

RESOURCE SPOTLIGHT

- **ASP Directory Live on IAAME Website:** This month, IAAME launched its new ASP accredited/ approved list at [this link](#). This tool hosts historical and current ASP information and features new search functions that can be used to your benefit.
- **Children's Bureau National Training and Development Curriculum:** This state-of-the-art [training program](#) provides tools and information for foster and adoptive parents to parent a child who has experienced trauma, loss, and separation. This program will be available to the public at no cost in June 2022. To learn how to access this material and and/or inquire about implementation, contact Sue Cohick at scohick@spaulding.org.
- **Ireland Publishes Birth Information and Tracing Register:** The Adoption Authority of Ireland has established a new Contact Preference register which will better support those seeking adoption information and tracing services. For more information visit the Adoption Authority [website](#).
- **Podcast Segment on Informal Adoptions in the Black Community:** PBS health and science podcast, The Pulse, released a podcast examining informal adoptions in the Black community in the United States. This segment discusses the intersection of race, culture, and generational trauma and recognizes the diversity of adoption experiences. Listen and/or read [here](#).

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