



Adoption Terminology

Abandoned: A child that has been abandoned or relinquished by the birth parent(s) to the country's social services/adoption authorities.

Adoption Agency: A public or private entity authorized to assume legal guardianship and to facilitate the adoptive placement of children. Licensing of adoption agencies is state mandated.

Adoption Assistance or Subsidy: Financial assistance available to families who adopt children from foster care. This assistance is designed to help the family meet the regular and special needs of the younger person.

Adoption Decree: The document issued by the court when an adoption is finalized. The adoption decree states that the adoptee is the legal child of the adoptive parents.

Affidavit of Support: An I-864 Form, which is a statement verifying that you have sufficient financial means to provide for a child.

Apostille: An authenticating seal placed on a document by the state Secretary of State where the document was issued. Certain countries only accept this type of authentication on documents.

Attachment & Bonding: A child's formation of stable emotional connections with primary care givers and significant people in his/her life. If a child does not establish these connections he/she may later have difficulties with social relationships.

Adoption Service Provider (ASP): Any entity providing adoption services.

Background Check: There are several kinds of background checks and clearances that may be required. Most states require a criminal and child abuse clearance for people wishing to adopt. In addition, the Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services (BCIS) conducts its own criminal clearance checks through the FBI.

BCIS, Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services: When adopting a child, he or she is considered an immigrant and therefore subject to all immigration requirements of the BCIS. Your family will work through your regional BCIS office at various points in your adoption process to get initial approval to adopt a child from abroad (I-600a, to include fingerprints, FBI background check).

Central Authority: The designated authority within the sending country that administrates and oversees the adoption process or the Department of State for the U.S

Contract Social Workers or Supervised Providers: Social workers employed on a part-time basis by adoption agencies to provide specific services (e.g. home studies and post-placement services), but who are not members of the agency's staff.



Court Hearing / Court Date: A court hearing is held within your child's country in which your documents and case requesting adoption of a specific child are reviewed and approved. Countries have various requirements regarding requirements for one or both parents to attend the hearing, acceptability of Power of Attorney representation and waiting periods in which the outcome of the hearing may be contested or before documents will be signed.

Direct and Interagency Adoptions: Direct placements involve a single agency. Interagency adoptions refer to cooperative efforts between several agencies. This latter form is particularly common in inter-country adoptions.



Disruption: The dissolution of an adoptive placement following the issuance of a final adoption decree.

Dossier: The dossier is a compilation of documents that is assembled for an international adoption and presented to the foreign government. Every country is unique and each has different document requirements. Typically, the dossier will include the following items: birth certificates of both parents, marriage licenses, proof of divorce from previous marriages, health status and statements, reference letters, financial statements (employer verification) and tax records, police records, state background checks and child abuse clearances and an approved home study.

Escort: Some countries do not require parents to travel to receive their child. These countries allow adoptive parents to exercise the option of using an escort to bring their child home. An escort is an individual who supervises the transit of children from sending to receiving countries.

Exempt Provider: A social work professional or organization that only performs a home study or a child background study in the U.S. in connection with a Convention adoption, and does not provide any of the other adoption services in the case is known as an exempted provider, and does not have to be accredited. However, the home study performed must subsequently be approved by an accredited adoption service provider.

Facilitators and Foreign Providers: In contrast to domestic adoptions, where these terms are used synonymously, these terms differ in the field of inter-country adoptions. Facilitators are individuals or groups working in the United States who assist in arranging inter-country adoptions. Facilitators are not licensed by state authorities, but they often make their services available to licensed agencies. Foreign Providers are individuals or groups working in overseas nations who assist in arranging inter-country adoptions. They are frequently attorneys.

Green Card (also called Permanent Resident Card or Form I-551): Your child will enter the U.S. on one of two types of immigrant visas. An immigrant visa gives permission to enter the U.S. and apply for permanent residence. The proof of permanent residence (the right to live and work in the U.S. permanently) is called a Green Card. If a child is coming to the United States and was adopted abroad, your child will be issued an IH-4 visa and will not acquire automatic citizenship upon entry to the U.S. but instead will become a permanent resident and automatically receive a Green Card (permanent resident card).



Hague Convention on Inter-country Adoption: The Hague Convention on Inter-country Adoption is a multinational agreement designed to apply to all international adoptions between countries that ratify it. This treaty was designed to promote the development of institutional structures for the supervision of adoption and to open lines of communication between sending and receiving countries. The United States has ratified this convention and implemented it on April 1, 2008. Only Hague Accredited adoption agencies can send or receive children with other Hague Signatory countries. If the sending country is not a Hague Signatory country, a non-Hague Accredited agency may still operate in that country.

Home Study: Families who wish to adopt a child must first be approved by a social worker approved to conduct adoption home studies in your state of residence. This may or may not be the agency facilitating your international adoption (your Adoption Service Provider). The social worker will gather documents from you, interview you, come into your home once or twice, and counsel you concerning adoption. A home study shows that you can provide the stability and home environment that a child needs. Documents you may be required to provide include information about yourself, references, health statements from your physician, child abuse clearances, criminal records clearance and a financial statement. The home study process may vary somewhat by state. Your social worker will assist you with the specific requirements for your state of residence.

Interstate Compact: An agreement among states to ensure protection and services to children and youth when they are placed across state lines for foster care, domestic adoption or living with a relative.

I-171H Letter: A form letter from the BCIS stating that they have processed and approved your Application to Advance Process Orphan Approval (I-600A or I-800A form). Approvals are primarily determined based on favorable FBI fingerprint clearances and home study content.

I-600A Form, “Application for Advance Processing of Orphan Petition”: For most people, this is the initial BCIS application submitted to their regional office. The I-600A can speed up the adoption process in the U.S. by allowing the BCIS to begin the part of the immigration approval regarding your ability to provide a proper home environment and your suitability as a parent.

I-600 Form, “Petition to Classify Orphan as an Immediate Relative”: This form is required for all international adoptions. It is utilized by the U.S. Embassy/BCIS when you are in-country/going through the exit process/interview after your completed court hearing. The form is very similar to the advanced processing form (I-600A) most people initially submit, with the exception that it states you have now identified your child. This form is used by the BCIS to determine whether the child the prospective parent(s) wants to adopt, meets the BCIS definition of an “orphan”.

I-604: I-604 Orphan Investigation. The purpose is to verify the orphan status of the child and to ensure that the child does not have a medical condition that the adoptive parents are not aware of.

I-800A Form: The purpose of this form is to adjudicate the eligibility and suitability of the applicant(s) to adopt a child who habitually resides in a Hague Adoption Convention country.

I-800 Form: The purpose of this form is to determine the child’s eligibility for classification as a Convention adoptee. The petition is filed by the U.S. Citizen Prospective Adoptive Parent (PAP) to finalize the immigration process of a child who habitually resides in a Hague Convention Country.

I-864 Form: See “Affidavit of Support” above



Moratorium: When a foreign country temporarily closes its international adoption program for reasons such as in order to restructure their programs.

Naturalization: When a child not born in the U.S. becomes a U.S. citizen.

Notary: Authentication of a signature on a legal document. When the signature on a document has been witnessed by a licensed notary of the state, it is said to be notarized. For some countries, this is just the first step in authenticating documents that will still need further authentication by county, state, U.S. and/or foreign authorities.

Orphan: A child without parents.

Orphanage: An orphanage is an institution dedicated to caring for orphans. They may be privately or publicly funded.

Passport: Passports are the identification documents, issued by the U.S. State Department, which you will need to have with you in order to travel to a foreign country. Your passport must be current if you plan to travel to your child's country. Your child will be issued a passport before exiting the foreign country, allowing him or her to begin the exit process at the U.S. Embassy and subsequently leave the country/enter the United States.

Police Clearance: A criminal clearance issued by your local Police or Sheriff's Department. This clearance may be required for your home study and/or included in your dossier. This check/clearance will be in addition to the state clearances/background checks and the BCIS background check through the FBI.

Post-Placement Report: Periodic reports due to your adoption agency and perhaps to your state's home study agency (depending upon agency/state/country). These reports help monitor your child's development, health and adjustment after the completion of an international adoption. The number of visits (if any) and length of post-placement supervision/reporting varies from state or country.

Power of Attorney: Your written, notarized permission for someone other than yourself to represent you. A Power of Attorney is sometimes used to allow someone in your child's country to represent you at your child's adoption hearing/court date.

Prospective Adoptive Parent (PAP): The parent that is making application or petitioning to adopt.

Primary Service Provider (PSP): A primary provider is responsible to develop and implement all six adoption services required by The Hague for Convention country adoptions. Those six adoption services include:

- Identifying a child for adoption and arranging an adoption.
- Securing the necessary consent to termination of parental rights and to adoption.
- Performing a background study on a child or a home study on prospective adoptive parents.
- Making non-judicial determinations of the best interest of a child and the appropriateness of an adoptive placement of the child.



- Monitoring a case after a child has been placed with the prospective adoptive parents until finalization of the adoption.
- When necessary because of a disruption before finalization of the adoption, assuming custody and providing facilitation of child care or any other special service pending an alternative placement.

** Please note when choosing a Primary Service Provider for a Hague Convention country adoption, only an accredited PSP can provide services for a Hague adoption.*

Receiving Country: The country into which a foreign born and adopted child will take citizenship and residence.

Referral: Your adoption agency will send you information about a specific child so you can decide if the child is right for your family. This is called a referral. A referral usually consists of the name and birthdate of the child, a photo, and some medical information. The quantity/quality of information varies. The prospective parents have a specific amount of time after a referral is made to decide whether to accept or decline the referral.

Relinquishment: The giving up of custodial and legal rights to a child by a birth parent. This is a legally binding, permanent procedure involving the signing of legal documents and court action.

Sending Country: The country where your adopted child resides prior to joining your family.

Special Needs Adoptions: This term may be used to refer to a child who faces challenges that may make it harder to find the child a permanent family. Special need encompasses disabilities that are correctable and non-correctable. Special needs children often include those over the age of 5, members of minority racial group or sibling group and/or child with physical, mental or emotional disability. These disabilities go beyond the institutionalized delays children incur in an orphanage setting.

Supervised Provider: A Supervised Provider is any agency, person or other non-governmental entity, including any foreign entity, regardless of whether it is called a facilitator, agent or attorney that is providing one or more adoption services in a Convention case under the supervision and responsibility of an accredited agency, temporarily accredited agency or approved person that is acting as the primary provider in the case.

Tax Credit (Adoption): A tax credit for qualifying expenses paid to adopt an eligible child. The adoption credit is an amount subtracted from the adoptive parents' tax liability.

Visa: A document issued by the country (for a fee) allowing a person to enter its borders for a specific time and reason. In order to enter the U.S., your child will require an immigrant visa. Prior to issuing a visa for your child, a Department of State Consular Officer must conduct an investigation in order to verify the orphan status of the child and to ensure that the child does not have a medical condition that the adoptive parents are not aware of.

USCIS (United States Department of Immigration and Naturalization Services): Parents must meet strict requirements and be approved by USCIS in order to bring a child into the U.S.