

FAMILY

American Parents Are Adopting Fewer Children From Abroad

David Crary / AP
Apr 13, 2017



(NEW YORK) — The number of foreign children adopted by U.S. parents dropped almost 5 percent last year, continuing a steady decline that's now extended for 12 years, according to new State Department figures.

However, department officials said they have been working closely with numerous countries to strengthen international adoption procedures, and they suggested the numbers could rise if the U.S. adoption community helped to address some of those countries' concerns about ethics and oversight.

The department's report for the 2016 fiscal year, released on Thursday, shows 5,372 adoptions from abroad, down from 5,648 in 2015 and more than 76 percent below the high of 22,884 in 2004. The number has fallen every year since then.

China, as is customary, accounted for the most children adopted in the U.S. Its total of 2,231 was down slightly from 2015 and far below a peak of 7,903 in 2005.

Congo was second on the list with 359 adoptions. Many of those were adoptions that had been delayed for several years during a suspension — now lifted — that the Congo government imposed out of concerns over adoption fraud.

Ukraine was third on the list with 303 adoptions, followed by South Korea, Bulgaria, India, Uganda, Ethiopia, Haiti and the Philippines.

As adoptions from various countries have declined in recent years, adoption advocates — and the State Department — have cited Africa as an area where adoptions may increase. However, Susan Jacobs, the department's special adviser for children's issues, said this can present unique challenges because some African birth parents may incorrectly believe that adopted children would return home to care for them after living abroad temporarily to get a good education.



For a second straight year, there were no adoptions from Russia, which once accounted for hundreds of U.S. adoptions each year, but imposed a ban that fully took effect in 2014. The ban served as retaliation for a U.S. law targeting alleged Russian human-rights violators.

The last time there were fewer foreign adoptions to the U.S. overall was in 1981, when, according to U.S. immigration figures, there were 4,868 adoptions from abroad.

The State Department, in its new report, said it had identified three concerns that were causing some foreign countries to be wary of international adoption:

—Illegal or unethical practices by some U.S. adoption agencies or adoption facilitators operating abroad. One Ohio-based agency was recently barred by the State Department from engaging in international adoption for three years because of extensive improprieties.

—Lack of comprehensive, nationwide laws that prevent adoptive parents from transferring custody of adopted children to another family without official authorization. This practice, known as re-homing, has often involved children adopted from abroad who prove more challenging to raise than the adoptive family had anticipated.

—The failure of some U.S. families to complete required post-adoption reports. Trish Maskew, chief of the State Department's adoption division, said Kazakhstan and Guatemala were potentially interested in resuming long-suspended international adoptions to the U.S., but only if several hundred overdue reports were completed by parents who adopted children from those countries in past years.

Chuck Johnson, CEO of the National Council of Adoption and a critic of State Department adoption policy, acknowledged that lapses related to all three issues were "a black-eye on adoption." However, he said the State Department should have been providing more leadership in addressing the problems.

"These negative results are not the experiences of the great majority of internationally adopted children nor of their adoptive families; neither are the actions of a few providers indicative of the majority of accredited U.S. adoption providers," Johnson said in an email.

Adoption officials in the State Department "have a history of either personally opposing intercountry adoption or endorsing it in lukewarm fashion." Johnson wrote. As

Susan Jacobs urged the department's critics in the adoption community to consider what steps they could take to ensure that international adoption is ethical and transparent.

"We are committed to intercountry adoption. We want this to be available in every country in the world," said Jacobs. "But we can't do this without the cooperation of everybody involved in the process. We want this to be a practice that everyone can be proud of."

