



L'ADOPTION INTERNATIONALE EN FRANCE EN 2015





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A WORD FROM THE AMBASSADOR



Odile Roussel Ambassador for the Intercountry Adoption Unit

Over the course of 2015, **815 children** were adopted by French families as a result of an intercountry adoption process (860 if we include children with a long-stay visa for visitors and placed in their future adoptive family with a view to adoption). The number of intercountry adoptions in France **decreased for the fifth consecutive year by 24% versus 2014**. This decrease concerned all of the host countries in a comparable way.

French people are adopting fewer children abroad—and this at a time when nearly 18,000 accreditations are being validated. But **are they adopting more effectively?** The legal framework of adoption processes is improving. Since 2014, there have been more adoptions conducted in the countries that are parties to the Hague Convention of 1993 (62.3% of adoptions) than those conducted in countries that are not parties to the Convention. Individual adoptions concentrated in Africa have continued to decrease in terms of percentage (25% of adoptions) to the benefit of adoptions assisted by an accredited adoption body (AAB) (50% of adoptions) or the French Adoption Agency (25% of adoptions). The children welcomed in France came from 53 countries.

In a ranking of the **top countries of origin**, which changes from one year to the next, Africa continued to be the most popular continent of origin of children adopted in France (35% of adoptions) and the six leading countries of origin of children adopted in France were: Vietnam (108 adoptions), Colombia (75 adoptions), Côte d'Ivoire (62 adoptions), Russia (51 adoptions) and China and Haiti (48 adoptions each). The gradual re-opening of adoptions in Haiti and the increase in adoptions conducted in Côte d'Ivoire and in Colombia did not offset the strong decline in adoptions observed in several large countries of origin (Ethiopia—54% and Russia—58% versus 2014). Moreover, the freeze or the suspension of intercountry adoptions in several countries of origin because they are

transitioning towards the implementation of the Hague Convention (Benin, Senegal, Laos, Ghana) or because they do not provide a sufficient level of legal and ethical security (Cambodia, Cameroon, Nepal, Central African Republic) also contributed to this decrease in intercountry adoptions. In the Central African Republic, the suspension of exit permits for children adopted by foreign families was extended in September 2014: this dramatic situation has affected the adoptions of more than 300 children (250 families in France) which have been pending for more than two years.

The changing **profile of children** up for intercountry adoption observed in recent was confirmed: the percentage of special needs children was 66% of adopted children (63% in 2014) and it was the age of the children that increased the most (41% of adopted children were older than five years old).

In 2015, against a backdrop in which training in the parenting of older and special needs children is essential, the Intercountry Adoption Unit continued **to strengthen the presence of French agencies and the French Adoption Agency abroad** by financially supporting the actions of AABs aiming to pool their efforts and professionalise their staff. The Intercountry Adoption Unit also pursued its **cooperation** action both in terms of institutional cooperation with central authorities of the countries of origin as well as financial support for projects in the area of the protection of children in need. Exchanges were organised with central authorities of countries of origin in the form of invitations to Paris (Albania, Armenia, China, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Romania, South Korea) and Intercountry Adoption Unit missions in countries of origin (Colombia, Philippines, Central African Republic, Slovakia).

COUNTRY FOCUS

Armenia

The Hague Convention of 29 May 1993 on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption ratified on 1 March 2007 entered into force in Armenia on 1 June 2007.

Despite the implementation of this Convention, until recently families used a non-secure individual process by directly contacting a local agency, since there were no accredited French agencies present. Following the accreditation of the accredited adoption body (AAB) Médecins du Monde (Doctors of the World) in May 2014, individual adoption processes were prohibited in Armenia. Only those submitted to the Armenian central authority before the accreditation of Doctors of the World were authorised to continue.

With 15 intercountry adoptions in 2015 (7 in 2014 and 13 in 2013), Armenia ranked 18 among countries of origin of children adopted from foreign countries. Most of them concerned special needs children (children with medical conditions that can be treated in France).



Bulgaria

The Hague Convention of 29 May 1993 on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption entered into force in Bulgaria on 1 September 2002.

Two agencies are accredited: the French Adoption Agency (public agency) and Doctors of the World (private agency).

With 19 intercountry adoptions in 2015 (46 in 2014 and 49 in 2013), Bulgaria ranked 15 among countries of origin of children adopted abroad. The Bulgarian authorities, seeking to comply with the principle of subsidiarity, focus on national adoption and adoption applications concerning special needs children (older children, siblings, children with medical conditions that are reversible to varying degrees).

Côte d'Ivoire

Côte d'Ivoire ratified the Hague Convention of 1993 in June 2015. It entered into force on 12 September of the same year.



Colombia

The ICBF, the Colombian central authority, extended the suspension of filing any new adoption applications for children aged 0 to 6 years and 11 months for two years as from 14 July 2015.

An increase was noted however in the matchings concerning families who were already on the waiting list. Some 75 adoption visas were thus issued in 2015. A number of adoptions can be noted of groups of two and even three siblings.

The ICBF took stock of the situation in early 2015 and identified 10,000 cases of potentially adoptable children, including 5,000 special needs children. Also, reforms were begun to establish individualised life projects for every child and to limit the time needed to prepare the adoptability cases. As a result, the number of children put up for intercountry adoption could increase significantly, in compliance with the principle of subsidiarity.



Djibouti

Act 56/AN/14/7th L of 30 September 2014 reformed the Djibouti Family Code. It prohibited adoption and established two ways to receive a child called "Adoption-Protection" similar in French law to a delegation of parental authority, via a notarial act or a ruling from a Tribunal de Grande Instance depending on whether the child is related or not. This change in legislation has caused a significant drop in adoptions (one in 2015 versus 11 in 2014 and 30 in 2013).



United States

The first "test cases" (three through adoption agencies) were sent to the United States in 2015. Effective cooperation was established between the AABs, US social services and US Hague Convention-accredited adoption agencies. The first matchings could be made in 2016. A report will be drawn up by the Intercountry Adoption Unit before AABs accept any new cases.

Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)

On 25 September 2013, the Congolese authorities suspended the issuance of exit permits for adopted children. The Intercountry Adoption Unit conducted a mission in April 2015 in DRC. It met with members of the different ministries involved in the matter, the other diplomatic representations and visited structures where children adopted by relatives residing in France are living. The Congolese Interministerial Commission (CIM) began working again in May but stopped for reasons unknown in June. To prepare for the validation of adoptions by the Congolese authorities, the Intercountry Adoption Unit asked AABs to send it copies of the 60 applications submitted to the CIM so that they could examine them and request, where necessary, additional documents and explanations. The three AABs were then invited to send all the applications that had already been the subject of a ruling. Some of the applications were effectively sent to the Intercountry Adoption Unit during the summer.

This made it possible to track the status of families' adoption applications more closely and alert the AABs of any problems that could arise between them. Therefore and after Congolese authorities announced the issuance of a number of exit permits, the Intercountry Adoption Unit granted long-stay adoption visas to children with Congolese CIM-validated applications. This only concerned 13 children, three of whom were in medically urgent situations. They arrived in France in November.



Slovakia

The Hague Convention of 29 May 1993 on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption entered into force on 1 October 2011 in Slovakia.

On 24 November 2015, the Intercountry Adoption Unit signed an administrative arrangement with the Central Authority of Slovakia in Bratislava establishing a cooperation framework for intercountry adoption.

This bilateral agreement opened intercountry adoption of Slovakian children to French adoption applicants or those residing in France.

As part of this cooperation, the Intercountry Adoption Unit accredited the French adoption body Destinées to assist families in their adoption projects as of 2016. Individual adoption is prohibited in Slovakia.



Russian Federation

For several years, Russia has tended to apply the principle of subsidiarity more strictly when it comes to adoption, promote and simplify the national processes and gradually limit intercountry adoption.

The bilateral treaty signed on 18 November 2011 between France and the Russian Federation on intercountry adoption cooperation and that entered into force on 27 December 2013 terminated individual adoption processes in Russia.

The use of one of the three accredited French agencies, the French Adoption Agency (public agency) and the associations De Pauline à Anaëlle and Enfance Avenir (private agencies), is compulsory.

The entry into force of this treaty and the overall decline in intercountry adoption can explain the considerable decrease in adoptions in this country (185 in 2013; 121 in 2014 and 51 in 2015). Special needs children (siblings, older children, children with medical

conditions that are reversible to varying degrees) are mainly concerned.

The Russian Federation ranked fourth among the countries of origin of children adopted abroad and because of this, it remains a major partner of France.



STATISTICS

Continuing decline in adoption

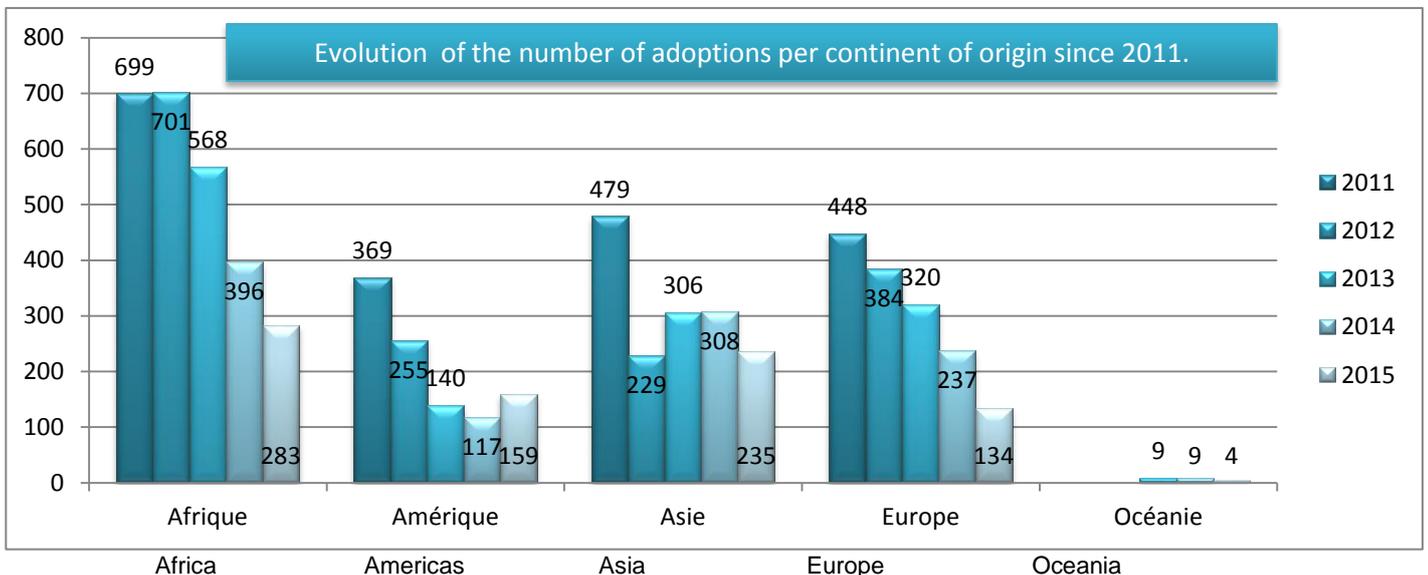
In 2015, **815 long-stay adoption visas** were issued, versus 1,069 in 2014, representing a **decline of 24%**. The number of intercountry adoptions **decreased for the fifth consecutive year**, which is comparable to that of other host countries.

A total of 860 children were welcomed into French families or those residing in France in 2015 if the 45 long-stay visitor visas are added to the 815 long-stay adoption visas issued to children placed with a view to adoption in their future adoptive family (from Benin, Senegal and Vanuatu) and whose adoption will be counted after the placement ends.

Several factors explain this downward trend:

- A strong decrease in adoptions in countries such as Russia (entry into force of the bilateral treaty, the remaining individual adoptions begun before 2013) and Ethiopia (application of the principle of subsidiarity, desire to secure adoptions) where the decrease in the number of adoptions over the last five years has been huge (dropping from 580 in these two countries in 2011 to 75 in 2015);

- This increase is not offset by the increase in adoptions in Colombia, Côte d'Ivoire or in Haiti: + 61 adoptions in these three countries between 2014 and 2015 (but a fourfold decrease in the number of adoptions in Colombia between 2011 and 2015);
- and the gradual resumption of adoptions in countries that re-opened intercountry adoption after ratifying the Hague Convention and introducing a system in compliance with the Convention (Haiti, Madagascar);
- The freeze or suspension of adoptions in a number of countries of origin, particularly in the countries transiting towards the application of the Hague Convention (Benin, Senegal, Guinea) or failing to provide a sufficient level of ethical and legal security (Cambodia, Cameroon, Central African Republic);
- The extension of the suspension of exit permits in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (since September 2013, more than 300 children have been blocked);
- The development of national adoption in certain middle-income countries with the development of an urban middle class (China, Brazil, Russia).



NUMBER OF ADOPTIONS PER COUNTRY OF ORIGIN IN 2015

VIETNAM	108
COLOMBIA	75
COTE D'IVOIRE	62
RUSSIA	51
HAITI	48
CHINA	48
THAILAND	41
MADAGASCAR	30
ETHIOPIA	24
CONGO	23
CAMEROON	21
BRAZIL	20
TUNISIA	19
PHILIPPINES	19
BULGARIA	19
LATVIA	18
BURKINA FASO	16
ARMENIA	15
MALI	14
DEM.REP. OF THE CONGO	13
NIGER	11
CENTRAL AFRICAN REP.	11
INDIA	9
CHILE	8
BENIN	7
ALBANIA	7
TOGO	6
SRI LANKA	6
KAZAKHSTAN	6
SOUTH AFRICA	5
SENEGAL	5
POLAND	5
UKRAINE	5
GUINEA	4
DOMINICA	4
VANUATU	4
GABON	3
RWANDA	3
PERU	3
ROMANIA	3
LEBANON	2
LITHUANIA	2
PORTUGAL	2
BURUNDI	1
DJIBOUTI	1
GHANA	1
MAURITIUS	1
NIGERIA	1
SIERRA LEONE	1
HONDURAS	1
SOUTH KOREA	1
LAOS	1
KOSOVO	1
TOTAL	815

Top countries of origin of children

Africa remained **the leading continent of origin** of children with 35% of adoptions (37% in 2014), mostly with processes by individuals and relatives, and risks in terms of legal and ethical security (adoptability of the child, informed consent of birth parents, properly conducted processes). The second leading continent of origin was still **Asia** accounting for 29% of adoptions. In 2015, **adoptions increased in absolute numbers in the Americas** (159 versus 117 in 2014), mainly due to the increase in adoptions conducted in Colombia (+19) and in Haiti (+25).



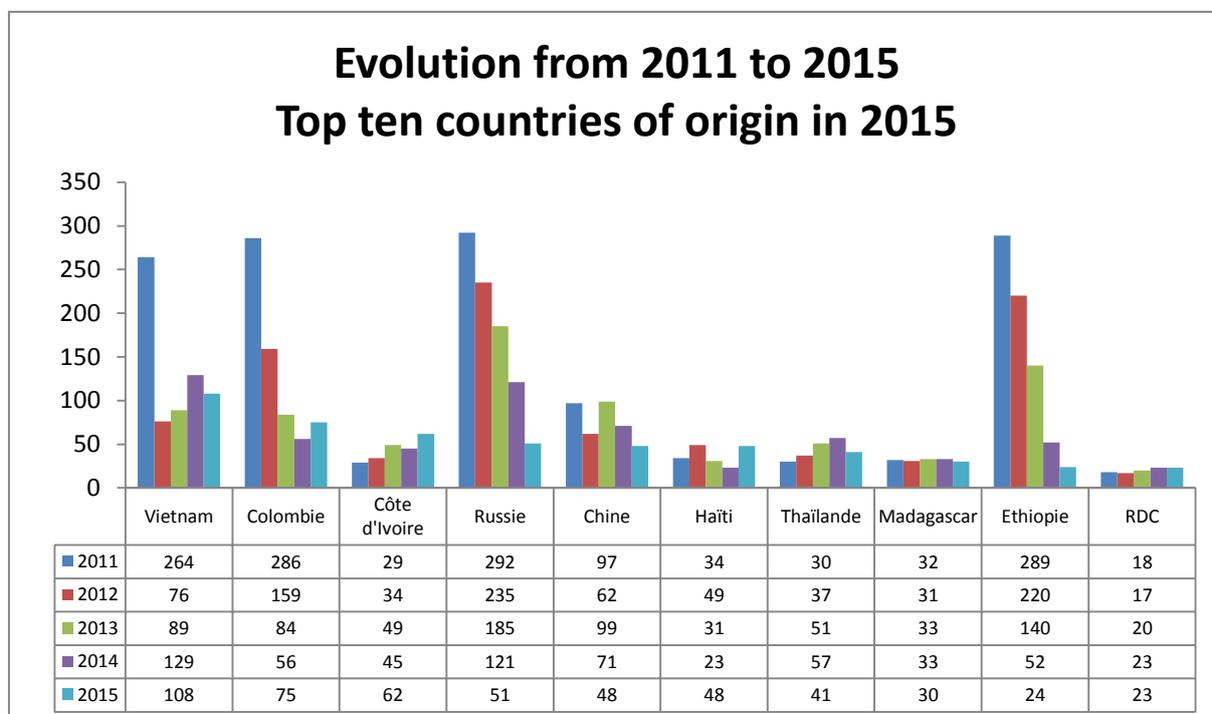
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Top countries of origin: the ranking of leading countries of origin has undergone **different changes**:

- 1) **Vietnam** with 108 adoptions (slightly falling),
- 2) **Colombia** with 75 adoptions (on the rise),
- 3) **Côte d'Ivoire** with 62 adoptions (on the rise),
- 4) **Russia** with 51 adoptions (nearly five times fewer than in 2012 before the suspension),
- 5) **Haiti and China** with 48 adoptions each, (one increasing and the other decreasing).

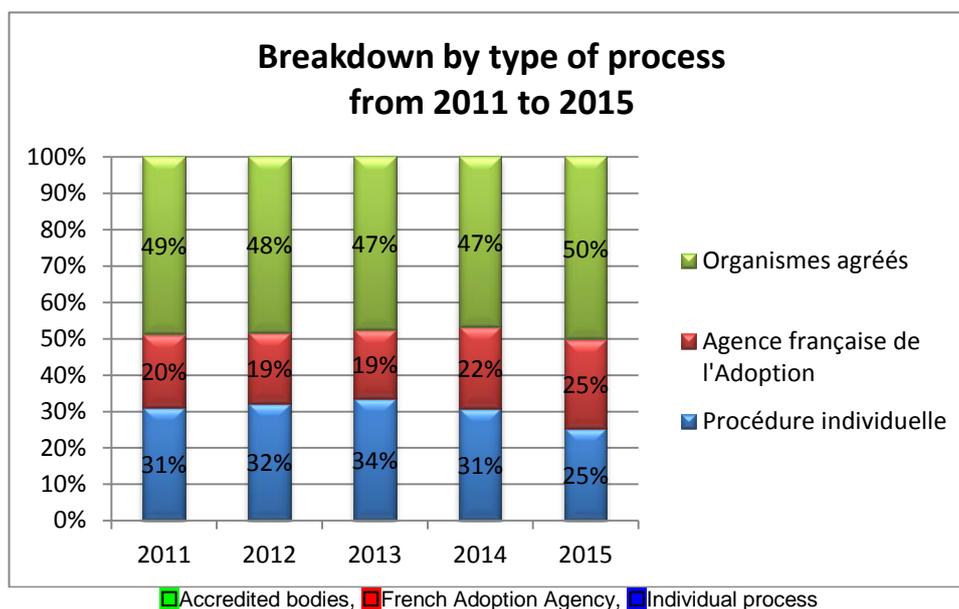
Colombia, Côte d'Ivoire and Haiti, on the rise, moved ahead of China and Thailand.

In 2015, children welcomed in France were **from 53 countries** (56 in 2014) and were concentrated in 20 of them (84% of adoptions) and especially the five leading ones (42% of adoptions).



Types of adoption

Agency-assisted adoptions accounted for 75% of adoptions in 2015, 25% of them with the French Adoption Agency (slightly increasing) and 50% with AABs.

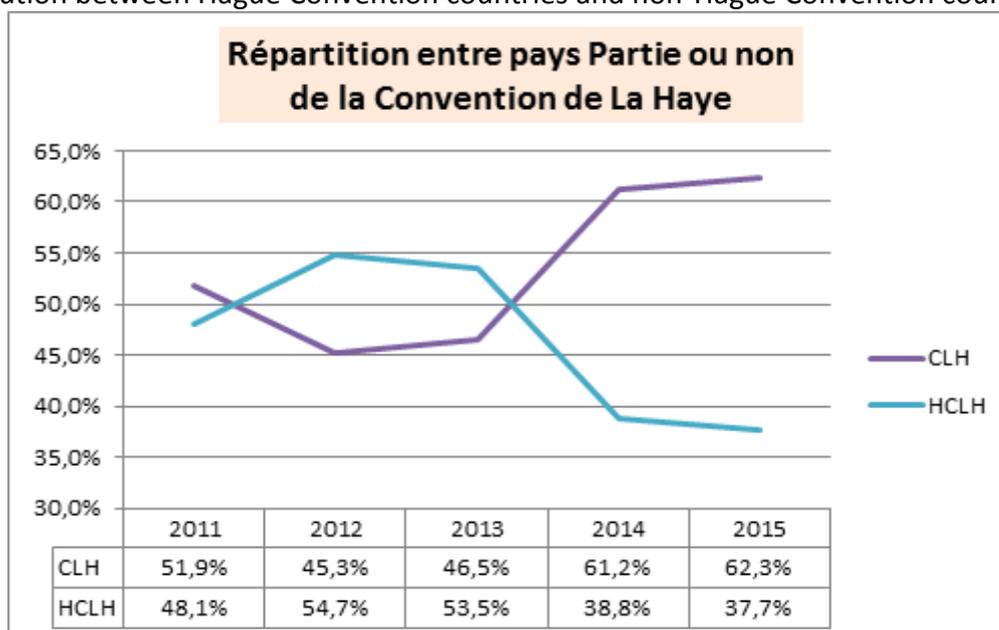


The **number of individual adoptions** continued to decline accounting for only one adoption in four in 2015 (versus 34% in 2013 and 31% in 2014). They were mainly in Africa (150 or 73% of adoptions) and in Russia (adoptions begun before the entry into force of the bilateral treaty).

The percentage of adoptions conducted in the Hague Convention countries continued to increase: 62.3% of adoptions in 2015.

Adoptions by relatives (including spouse's children) accounted for 9% of adoptions, like in 2014, and mainly occurred in a number of African countries: Côte d'Ivoire (38), Cameroon (18) and Togo and Guinea (4 in each country). Half of these adoption processes concerned children aged 11 to 16 years.

Distribution between Hague Convention countries and non-Hague Convention countries



ADOPTIONS IN 2015
Hague Convention Countries
Non-Hague Convention Countries

Hague Convention Countries	No. of visas
ALBANIA	7
ARMENIA	15
BRAZIL	20
BULGARIA	19
BURKINA FASO	16
BURUNDI	1
CHILE	8
CHINA	48
COLOMBIA	75
COTE D'IVOIRE	17
GUINEA	4
INDIA	9
KAZAKHSTAN	6
LATVIA	18
LITHUANIA	2
MADAGASCAR	30
MALI	14
MAURITIUS	1
PERU	3
PHILIPPINES	19
POLAND	5
PORTUGAL	2
ROMANIA	3
SOUTH AFRICA	5
SRI LANKA	6
THAILAND	41
TOGO	6
VIETNAM	108
TOTAL	508

Non-Hague Convention Countries	No. of visas
BENIN	7
CAMEROON	21
CENTRAL AFRICAN REP.	11
COTE D'IVOIRE	45
DJIBOUTI	1
DOMINICA	4
ETHIOPIA	24
GABON	3
GHANA	1
HAITI	48
HONDURAS	1
KOSOVO	1
LAOS	1
LEBANON	2
NIGER	11
NIGERIA	1
DEM. REP. OF THE CONGO	13
CENTRAL AFRICAN REP.	11
RUSSIA	51
RWANDA	3
SENEGAL	5
SIERRA LEONE	1
TUNISIA	19
SOUTH KOREA	1
UKRAINE	5
VANUATU	4
TOTAL	307

The profile of adopted children

In 2015, 66% of children adopted abroad were over five years of age, in a sibling group and/or suffering from a health problem mentioned during the process. This percentage varied little according to the type of process (62% of children adopted via the French Adoption Agency, 67% via an AAB and 66% with an individual process).

The percentage of adopted children under two years of age remained stable versus 2014. The same was true for those adopted in sibling groups or with health problems. However, the number of adopted children over five was proportionally more significant.

- 28% of adopted children in 2015 were under two years of age (28% in 2014, 30% in 2013, 36% in 2012). This percentage varied according to the geographic area (17% for the Americas, 22% for Europe, 24% for Africa, 42% for Asia).

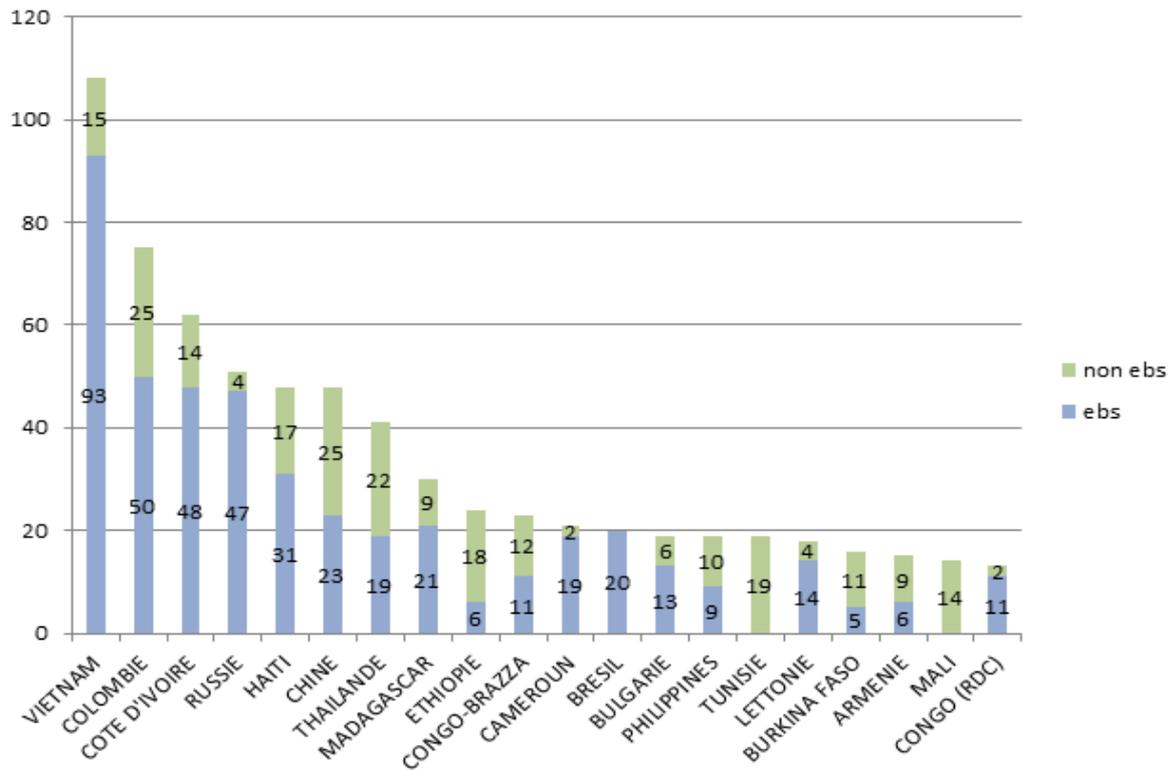
- 31% were between two and five years old (37% in 2014, 37% in 2013 and 34% in 2012).

- 41% were over five years old (35% in 2014, 33% in 2013 and 30% in 2012). This percentage varied according to the geographic area (57% for the Americas, 45% for Africa, 40% for Europe, 26% for Asia).

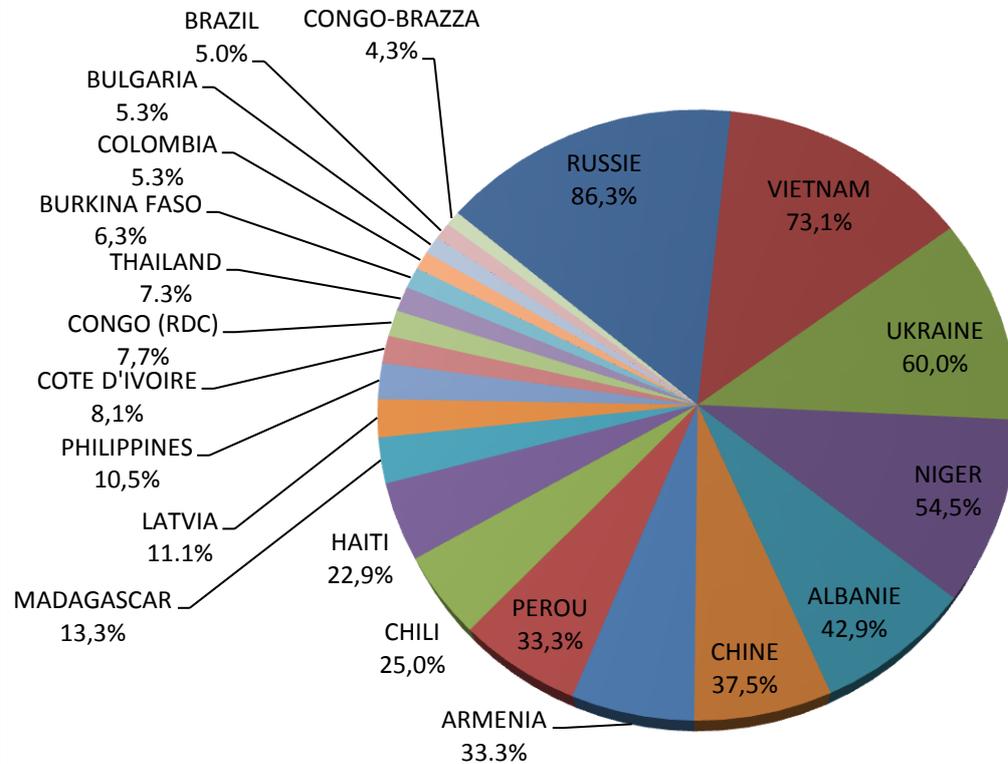


	Over 5 years of age	Sibling groups			Medical condition	SNC Adoptions
		2 children	3 children	4 children		
A.A.B.	133	56	15		148	275
F.A.A.	99	44	9		27	126
Individuals	102	48	3	4	30	136
Total	334	148	27	4	205	537
%	41%	22%			25%	66%
Total number of adoptions in 2015 = 815						

Breakdown of profiles of adopted children in the top 20 countries of origin



Percentages of children for which a medical condition was mentioned upon arrival compared to the total of adoptions in the given country



Russia Vietnam Ukraine Niger Albania China Peru

A summary of the main evolutions

- Continuation of the trends observed over the past four or five years in quantitative terms and in terms of children's profiles and types of adoptions;
- A significant decrease every year of 20 to 25%;
- Intercountry adoption at the same level as national adoption;
- More special needs children, particularly older children;
- A shift towards adoptions in Hague Convention countries and a drop in individual adoption;
- Unstable ranking of countries of origin and a more volatile situation in countries of origin (two examples: Russia, Ethiopia), which raises the question of directing adoption projects towards "secure" countries (legally and ethically) over the long term, given the longer waiting periods.

REPLIES TO INTERVENTIONS AND ASSISTANCE IN THE SEARCH FOR BIRTH ORIGINS

Why was an “interventions” unit created?

Adoptions are particularly sensitive, both at a humanitarian level (political situation of the country of origin, the child’s situation, the family’s situation) and from an emotional standpoint, especially when it comes to the prospective adoptive families.

These families often suffer greatly from the obstacles and the waiting periods they come up against. This leads them relatively frequently to plead their case to authorities or public figures they believe to have the means to solve their problems. They contact local elected officials, parliament members, government members, particularly the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Development or even the President of the French Republic directly.

The Intercountry Adoption Unit has therefore a special assistant whose job is to address what are called “interventions”. They take the form of letters or more and more frequently e-mails, sent either by elected officials (mostly parliament members, mainly National Assembly members), well-known public figures (medical professors, sociologists) or the interested parties themselves on an individual basis or on behalf of a group of adoptive parents.

Overview

The number of such interventions can vary significantly according to what is happening in intercountry adoption.

Some 235 interventions were addressed from 1 January to 31 December 2015, with peaks in activity in August and November.

These peaks mainly concerned the Democratic Republic of the Congo where it has been noted that processes have been blocked since September 2013. They can also be connected to effects of that announcement (whether they are verified or not), which caused the families concerned to act. The emergence of a major problem such as a natural disaster in a country (as was the case in Haiti) by the authorities of a country of origin or French

authorities can lead to an increase in correspondence. Yet, the number of countries concerned by the interventions is limited and the number of people involved is considerable for each of the cases.

Therefore, for three years the special assistant has periodically dealt with adoption cases in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Russia, Cameroon, Côte d’Ivoire, Senegal, Mali and the Central African Republic.

A more limited number of interventions concerned individual cases of families being blocked due to particular factors in a case (missing documents or those needing to be rectified, slow and complex local process, inappropriate individual initiatives).

Fairly often, interventions are requested for a same case. Some adoptive parents seek assistance from several public figures at the same time and repeatedly draw the competent authorities’ attention to their difficulties and to the fact that their adoption is not going through.

Some correspondence concerned kafala cases, a process used in countries applying sharia law (where adoption is prohibited) and considered under French law as a delegation of parental authority. The monitoring of such cases does not fall under the remit of the Intercountry Adoption Unit; it nevertheless seeks to redirect the people seeking assistance towards the competent bodies.

Team work

In order to provide the best assistance as swiftly as possible, the special assistant works in collaboration with the legal monitoring office, which compiles the elements required for a detailed reply according to the country considered.

Assistance from the consular post and the local central authority can also be sought.

A reply is not a solution in and of itself

All letters are systemically answered. Although every situation receives the attention it is entitled to receive from the administration, it is important to note that often difficulties cannot be resolved straight away. In some cases, the person requesting assistance must even be refused assistance.

As a party to the Hague Convention of 29 May 1993, France must meet the ethical criteria of intercountry adoption, especially when it comes to matching conditions and verification of the adoptability of the child with regard to the law of the country of origin and French law. It must also refrain from exerting pressure on the country of origin, which remains responsible for establishing their adoption policies even if they are inconvenient for the host countries and ultimately for the adoption applicants. The room for manoeuvre of French diplomacy is therefore not without limits, and the progress made is nearly always the result of the long and patient work of the Intercountry Adoption Unit, agencies and diplomats in posts in the partner country. It is therefore important to educate the people and users involved who expect concrete immediate results.

Questions from parliament members

The “interventions” special assistant is also in charge of drafting replies to written questions from parliament members to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Development concerning the remit of the Intercountry Adoption Unit (of which there were about ten in 2015).

This work requires the tactful, precise and concise drafting of texts and must first receive approval from the Minister himself because they are published in the Journal Officiel (the official gazette of France). For example, when a question is asked about the adoption situation in Russia or the Democratic Republic of the Congo, it is important to send a brief but factual and precise reply to provide the national representation with the information they have requested and that it has a right to expect from a member of government.

The search for birth origins

Since May 2015, the “interventions” special assistant has replied to requests from adopted people for information about their birth origins. Between May and December 2015, some 52 requests for access to a case were addressed. The cases were then transmitted to the departmental council of the place of the residence of the people concerned so that they could be assisted in the consultation of documents found in the diplomatic archives. The council has specialised staff in this area. This sector is growing and discussions are being held with other bodies (National Council on Access to Personal Origins, French Federation of Accredited Adoption Bodies) with a view to better understanding and dealing with this issue.



AGENCIES

Regulation and support for intercountry adoption agencies and relations with other actors

Accredited Adoption Bodies (AAB)

Like 2014, the year 2015 presented a difficult context for intercountry adoption agencies, especially for the 32 private law agencies (AABs), which have seen a significant drop in the number of intercountry adoptions. Many AABs experienced financial difficulties and had to adapt to this new environment.

Support for AABs

To address problems encountered by AABs, Intercountry Adoption Unit subsidies were increased in 2015 by more than 50% versus last year. Thanks to an additional increase in cooperation subsidies, the **overall annual funding for AABs reached €303,300 in 2015**. It is to be used to support and improve the efficiency and professionalisation of accredited bodies, and encourage the pooling of their means, in an increasingly competitive and changing context.

In 2015, a major part of these funds (€208,000 in 2015, or 69% of the total amount of subsidies) was paid under three-yearly agreements on objectives and funds that the Intercountry Adoption Unit established with six agencies (versus five in 2015).

Along with the agreements on objectives and means, 13 subsidies were granted benefiting 19 agencies in the end as part of pooled projects. **The annual subsidies totalled €95,600 (or 31% of the overall amount of subsidies). The criteria applied to receive a subsidy are as follows:** the quality of the work done; abilities to develop the public service mission it was given; actions to professionalise implementation; actions to strengthen their local system, particularly in countries that are considered strategic; the development of synergies with other AABs; and the number of adoptions conducted.

Subsidies helped finance training actions of AAB staff, several agencies' establishment of information and training sessions for families and information tools as well as missions in the countries of origin of intercountry adoption.



Control and regulation of AABs

In late 2015, a French agency, accredited in 2014 by the Intercountry Adoption Unit following a call for applications, was accredited in the Slovak Republic, which is a new country of origin for French intercountry adoption.

In 2015, four agencies, accredited in 2014 by the Intercountry Adoption Unit, began working in the United States, which is another new country of origin.

Apart from these two countries, intercountry adoption worldwide as a whole has not been conducive to many new AAB accreditations.

Pursuant to its mission to monitor and regulate agencies, the Intercountry Adoption Unit is working to introduce a limit for the accreditation period of AABs (currently unlimited) in French legislation and to harmonise the contracts concluded between agencies and adoptive parents.

It continued **to be vigilant when it comes to establishing and modifying expense reports** that AABs require adoptive parents to provide. It continued its work of extending the use of the new standard expense report form, introduced at the end of 2014 in line with recommendations of the Cour des Comptes (France's national audit institution) and the Permanent Bureau of the Hague Conference in order to improve transparency in this area. **The Intercountry Adoption Unit is also participating in the Expert Group on the Financial Aspects of intercountry Adoption established by the Permanent Bureau of the Hague Conference.**

As part of its **mission to monitor AABs**, the Intercountry Adoption Unit has moreover proceeded, in coordination with consulates and volunteers of intercountry adoption in posts abroad, to hold meetings to alert AABs and to establish a new approach after being informed of the existing problems.

Coordination of the action of French agencies

The Intercountry Adoption Unit pursued its policy of involving AABs and the French Adoption Agency in the visits of foreign delegations in France (Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea,

China, Armenia), meetings upon the return of missions, meetings focused on problems of a given country (Haiti, Vietnam, Colombia, Madagascar, Ethiopia) and thematic meetings (for example on health issues with adoption consultations).

It also involved agency representatives in several missions abroad or met with their local representatives.

Finally, it kept agencies informed of the changes in adoption processes and practices in countries of origin or other host countries.

The supervision of the French adoption agency

The Intercountry Adoption Unit continued to **actively oversee** public agencies and fully participate in governance bodies (bureaus, general assemblies and executive boards) of the agencies in order to provide strategic direction.

The French Adoption Agency conducted nearly 25% of intercountry adoptions in 2015 in France. In 2015, the Agency was accredited in another country, the Dominican Republic, and revitalized its partnership in Mexico.

Ways are being studied to enable the French Adoption Agency structure to work more closely with the public interest group Enfance in Danger.

Dialogue with associations

The Intercountry Adoption Unit continued **its dialogue throughout the year** with parent associations by country of origin, family associations, federations of associations or AABs and adopted people associations, particularly at country meetings and meetings to address certain adoption problems held at the request of these associations.

DEPARTMENTAL COUNCILS

The Intercountry Adoption Unit's work to inform families

The Intercountry Adoption Unit continued to visit French departments holding thematic interdepartmental meetings to present the major trends and evolution of intercountry adoption to the departmental councils. Its aim was to improve the information provided to French families with regard to the evaluation of their applications for approval.

The Unit visited the following five departmental councils and met with **17 adoption services** in 2015:

1) On 12 March 2015, the **Ille-et-Vilaine Departmental Council** with Morbihan, Côtes-d'Armor and Finistère Departmental Councils;

2) On 17 April 2015, the **Rhône Departmental Council** with Corse-du-Sud Departmental Council;

3) On 28 May 2015, the **Var Departmental Council**, with the Alpes de Haute Provence, Alpes Maritimes, and Vaucluse Departmental Councils;

4) On 24 June 2015, the **Nord Departmental Council**, with the Pas de Calais Departmental Council;

5) On 4 December 2015, the **Puy-de-Dôme Departmental Council**, with the Corrèze, Allier, Creuse and Cantal Departmental Councils.

As they do every year, these visits to departments provided an opportunity to present the Intercountry Adoption Unit, the service, its way of working, its institutional partners, its possibilities for the future, adopted children's health issues, adoption failures and the role of the special assistant of the Unit with regard to departmental councils.

They also provided an opportunity to discuss the following issues:

- Post-adoption monitoring reports (constraints),
- Adoption by relatives,
- Accredited adoption bodies, selection criteria,
- Adoption consultations, special needs children,
- Adoption failures, particularly information from the central authority of the country of origin,
- Notice review,
- Presentation of the National Approval Database,
- Training in adoptive parenting.

The seminar entitled "D'autres regards sur l'adoption internationale" ("other intercountry adoption perspectives") organised by the Intercountry Adoption Unit on 3 November 2015.

More than 300 people attended this sixth meeting representing 79 departments, the French Adoption Agency, Accredited Adoption Bodies, 17 adoption consultations and five associations of adoptive parents and adopted people.

This meeting was opened by the French Nationals Abroad and Consular Administration Director and was conducted in the presence and with the participation of a representative of the Department of Children and Families of the Social Cohesion Directorate-General at the Ministry for Families, Children and Women's Rights.

The meeting focused on the following themes:

- The evolution and new developments in intercountry adoption in France in 2015,
- National adoption legislative possibilities currently being studied,
- The geopolitical viewpoint on the presentation of the documentary entitled "Adoption Internationale : le choix des nations" (Intercountry Adoption: The Choice of Nations)¹,

¹ Film by Anne Georget



- The situation of adopted children via a survey conducted by the association Enfance & Familles d'Adoption (EFA) and two research centres "Le devenir des jeunes ayant grandi dans une famille adoptive (15-30 ans)" (What becomes of children growing up in an adoptive family (15-30 years)",
- The viewpoint of the National Council of Adopted Persons on new forms of adoptive parenting
- Testimonials of two families who adopted older children, special needs children or sibling groups,
- Training in adoptive parenting such as that offered by the Doctors of the World AAB,
- Support for families and parental guidance with the experience of the intercountry adoption centre at the Saint Anne Hospital in Paris.



This meeting had several highlights. First, the documentary film explaining intercountry adoption challenges in countries of origin. Issues raised included limits, especially those relating to the changes in notices—a sensitive but inevitable subject—and preparing families after they have been approved, which often helps the progress of an adoption. In this respect, training modules in adoptive parenting offered by agencies have been key and peer exchanges have proven to be beneficial.

The full report illustrated with photos and including all the interventions was published online in early December on the Ministry's website:

<http://diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/adopter-a-l-etranger/les-acteurs-de-l-adoption-internationale/les-conseils-departementaux/article/journee-d-echanges-et-de-partage-d-informations-03-11-2015>

Home study investigations conducted by consulates at the request of departmental councils for French expatriates.

French expatriates (mainly in the Americas, Asia and Europe) who have an intercountry adoption project pursuant to French law must establish contact with the adoption service of the last department in which they lived in France. The service can then write the Intercountry Adoption Unit to conduct the physical investigation at the prospective adoptive parents' home.

The Unit then asks the consulate social service in the country where they are living abroad to conduct the home study investigation (and only this investigation). The adoption services in France conduct social and psychological investigations and later post-adoption monitoring of the child.

There is an increasing amount of activity related to requests for material investigations abroad.

In 2015, adoption services contacted the Intercountry Adoption Unit about **71 cases**. Once investigations were conducted, it returned **75 investigation results** to the departments.

For information in 2014: **57 requests** for investigations and **49** investigation results returned.

MISSIONS AND VISITS FROM FOREIGN DELEGATIONS

Missions in countries of origin: They help establish and maintain direct trusting relationships with the central authorities or competent authorities of the different countries of origin of children adopted by French families:

- May 2015 – Colombia – Meeting with the central authority;
- June 2015 – Guinea Conakry – Launch of Guinean Child Month;
- August 2015 – Philippines – International Meeting on Adoption;
- November 2015 – Slovakia – Signature of an agreement;
- November 2015 – Côte d'Ivoire – Meeting with the central authority.

Visits from foreign delegations: They attend bilateral meetings and are able to have exchanges with agencies and adoptive families.

- Côte d'Ivoire: 12-12 February 2015;
- Guinea Conakry: 16-17 March 2015;
- South Korea (Korean Adoption Service): 4-7 June 2015;
- China: 12-16 June 2015;
- Albania: 28 September 2015;
- Romania: 2 October 2015;
- Armenia: 13-15 October 2015.

Participation in international and European fora and meetings as the central authority in charge of intercountry adoption in France.

- March 2015 - Denmark – Copenhagen Seminar of the Steering Group;
- June 2015 – Special Commission on the practical operation of the Hague Convention;
- October 2015 – Sweden – Europe Steering Group.

Special mission on the fate of children detained by the Kinasha authorities.

- March 2015 – DRC Kinshasa –



COOPERATION ACTIONS

Cooperation actions and the network of volunteers in child protection and intercountry adoption

The Intercountry Adoption Unit defines and implements a cooperation policy focused on countries of origin of intercountry adoptions. To this end, it has been granted a budget for interventions since 2009. In 2015, this budget amounted to €623,000 and action was directed towards:

- Institutional cooperation projects aimed at facilitating the implementation and strengthening of the central authorities of countries of origin that have ratified the Hague Convention,
- Support for actions conducted in countries of origin by local NGOs and aimed at helping to establish alternatives for the care of children without families.

The network of intercountry adoption volunteers was created in 2009. Initially established in coordination with the association France Volontaires, it experienced limited growth on account of difficulties relating to the financial participation of external contributors. Three international volunteers are currently working in the field: in Vietnam, in Ethiopia and the post of international volunteer in Madagascar was closed in July 2015 and redeployed to the Côte d'Ivoire.

The Unit continued to support the action of the International Social Service (ISS), a well-known NGO in the area of intercountry adoption with headquarters in Geneva.

The Unit renewed its participation in the Permanent Bureau of the Hague Conference's financing of the post of coordinator of the Intercountry Adoption Technical Assistance Programme. It also contributed to the Permanent Bureau's creation of a travel fund that enabled 33 experts from 25 developing and emerging countries (contracting and non-contracting States) to participate in the fourth meeting of the Special Commission on the practical operation of the Hague Convention of 1993 held in the Hague from 8 to 12 June 2015.

Main cooperation projects financed by the Intercountry Adoption Unit in 2015

Colombia

Two child protection projects were supported in 2015. The first one conducted in Cali by the Tobias Emanuel Institute provides care for disabled children. The second one conducted by the association Sol'enfance provides pre-schooling for very young children and carries out remedial work with children under 12 years of age, all from underprivileged backgrounds.

Ethiopia

The Intercountry Adoption Unit made considerable efforts in 2015 to implement cooperation projects in Ethiopia focusing on protecting endangered children, education and combating violence against women and children.



Some examples include:

- Assistance provided to the Mother and Child Rehabilitation Centre (MCRC) in Addis Ababa in order to increase the occupancy capacity of this structure that offers shelter and protection to mothers and children who are victims of gender-based violence and who are in distressing situations.



- Continued support for initiatives launched by Handicap International in Dire Dawa and Harar aiming at strengthening the protection of disabled children and mothers against all forms of violence and abandonment;
- Cooperation with the association Femmes Solidaires to ensure the protection of young Afar women from genital mutilations and child marriage (enrolment, education, creation of a boarding school) and with UN Women in Ethiopia in the Amhara region to combat violence and traditional practices that are harmful to women and girls.
- Support for the Ethiopia component of action conducted by ECPAT International to promote the adoption and application of stricter laws against the commercial sexual exploitation of children.

Haiti

In 2015, the Intercountry Adoption Unit maintained its support for the Haiti Central Authority, the Institute of Social Well-being and Research (Institut du Bien Etre Social et de Recherches, IBESR). As a priority, this cooperation aims to build IBESR's institutional capacity, particularly concerning organisation and operation and to support the implementation of recently enacted legal texts as well as professional training.

Also, as IBESR wanted to improve its internal operation both at Port au Prince and at the decentralised level in the 10 departments, the Intercountry Adoption Unit assisted in conducting an audit. This evaluation will help to define a plan for reform of IBESR in 2016 and to implement the recommendations made.

The other important cooperation area with IBESR concerns consolidating the legal framework and making texts more accessible. To address the apparent need for a better understanding of the principles that govern the respect of children's rights, the Hague Convention of 1993, adoption reform and the role that key partners such as mayors, regional authorities, judges, magistrates and police officers must play, the Intercountry Adoption Unit helped IBESR strengthen their awareness raising actions and relationships with them.

Support was also provided to the Haiti central authority in the area of child protection particularly to improve the monitoring of children's homes.





Togo

The Intercountry Adoption Unit helped the National Adoption Committee for Children in Togo (Comité national d'adoption des enfants au Togo, CNAET) to organise a training workshop on the adoption process (implementation of the Hague Convention of 1993 and Togolese process). This workshop, attended by Togolese magistrates and experts, aimed to share best practices and experiences.

Vietnam

In partnership with the Adoption Department of the Ministry of Justice, the Vietnamese central authority, a colloquium was held in September 2015 in Ho Chi Minh City on taking into account the social, psychological and medical differences of children in the matching process with a view to intercountry adoption. Seventy-eight people participated: 24 representatives of 22 provincial judiciary services, 14 professionals from ten orphanages, 38 representatives of 29 accredited bodies and two representatives of the Employment and Social Affairs

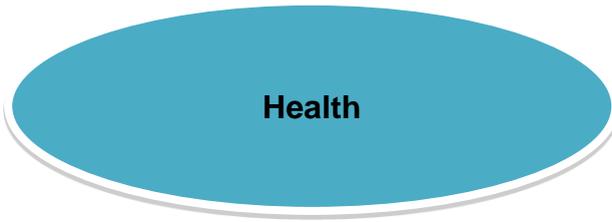
Department and the Police Department of Ho Chi Minh City.

Following a successful training session on preparing older children for adoption held in Ho Chi Minh City with the support of the Intercountry Adoption Unit in November 2014, the Adoption Department wanted to hold the same type of training session in northern Vietnam in 2015. It was conducted on 22 October in Hanoi and 72 people attended: 14 representatives of 13 accredited bodies, 54 workers from 34 orphanages, two representatives of the Justice Department, one representative of the Employment and Social Affairs Department and one representative of the Hanoi People's Committee.

The Intercountry Adoption Unit also provided support for two projects conducted by the NGOs:

- Action conducted by the Vietnamese NGO Anh Duong in the Hau Giang Province which aims to promote gender equality and support underprivileged women who are victims of marital violence and their children.
- The programme to strengthen the child protection system in Ho Chi Minh City implemented by the organisation Enfants & Développement to improve the skills of volunteers and paid staff working in the 250 places providing advice on children's issues in Ho Chi Minh City.





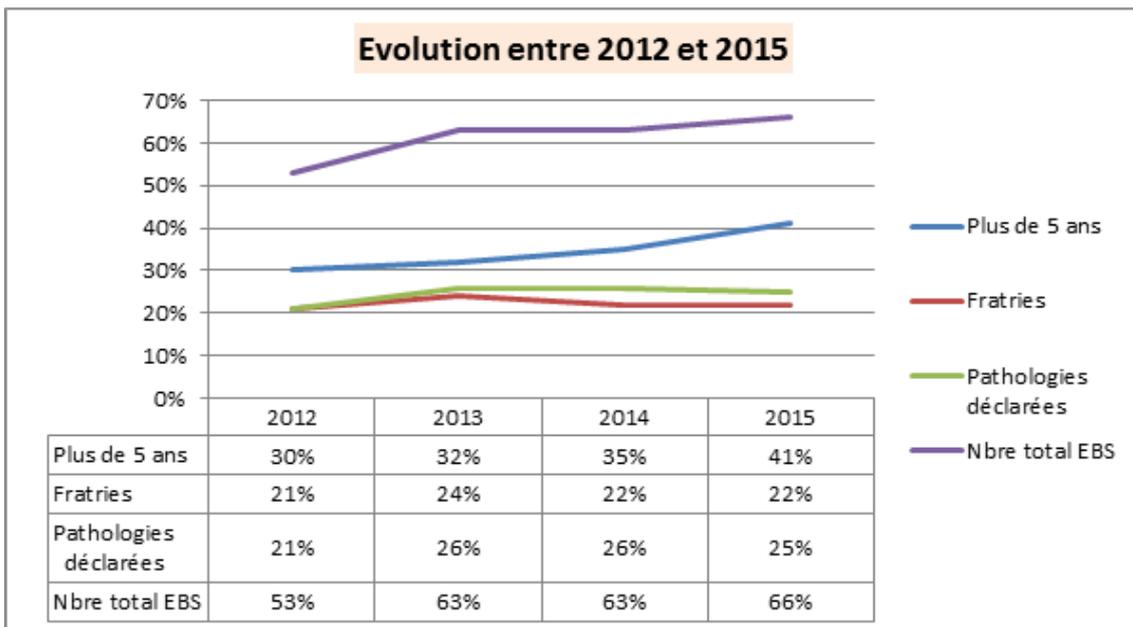
The health of adopted children

“Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, and does not consist merely in the absence of disease or infirmity.”²

Children offered up for intercountry adoption are mainly over five years of age (41%), adopted in sibling groups (22%) or suffering from health problems (25%). **This last percentage does not reflect the medical reality of intercountry adoption. If some illnesses are not confirmed during the initial medical examinations, others are discovered after the child arrives in France.**

These special needs children may have multiple problems due to the fact that they were abandoned, but also if they were institutionalised for long periods of time and repeatedly experienced cultural alienation or broken emotional bonds because of their age or late migration.

In addition to these different problems, they may suffer from illnesses or handicaps if they have not been properly treated before coming to France. For all of these reasons, the term “special needs child” is used internationally for this type of child adopted abroad.



■ Over five years, ■ Sibling groups, ■ Illnesses declared, ■ Total number of special needs children

² World Health Organization (WHO), 1946

The Intercountry Adoption Unit was assigned a health adviser by the Health Ministry to address the need to take into account the medical-psychological dimension of intercountry adoption that has been noted for several years. The health adviser plays a special role in answering people's adoption-related health questions and providing parenting support. In 2015, this health adviser (who is a doctor) was thus involved in Intercountry Adoption Unit visits to departments to educate local actors about the needs of children offered up for intercountry adoption, adoptive parenting issues and the prevention of adoption failures. In these very critical situations (16 reports to the Intercountry Adoption Unit in less than one year), the health adviser sought to ensure that France's international commitments under the Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Intercountry Adoption of 29 May 1993 were respected by maintaining close ties with the countries of origin when it comes to supporting and monitoring parents and children in need.

In order to share practices on medical evaluation and support for adoption projects, a workshop was organised on 9 October 2015 by the Intercountry Adoption Unit for health professionals from 21 of the 38 adoption centres around France and health representatives from 14 AABs and the French Adoption Agency.

Another collaborative project to provide adopting parenting training was also conducted in 2015 in a group coordinated by the Intercountry Adoption Unit made up of representatives of various agencies, health professionals, associations, departmental councils and institutions. It produced a brochure with three main points on how to prepare to be an adoptive parent intended for the general public³.

To improve information for adoption applicants and professionals, three new themes about staying in the country of origin, adoption professionals' training and studies were added to the preparing and assisting in adoption section on the Intercountry Adoption Unit website.



The health adviser also intervened at the request of diplomatic posts and AABs to evaluate in coordination with local correspondents certain critical medical situations of adopted children or those in the process of being adopted but not yet authorised to leave their country of birth.

As part of the exchanges with countries of origin, the adopted children system was enhanced through the organisation of visits of delegations in the adoption centres.

³ Available on the Intercountry Adoption Task Force website under the preparing and assisting in adoption section



Intercountry Adoption Unit workers take turns manning a hotline from Monday to Friday from 9:00 to 13:00.

The number of calls can vary from 0 to 20, with an average of 10 calls a day, which represents significant additional activity on account of the complexity of questions in the service.

It is a useful addition to the information available on the website of the Intercountry Adoption Unit, which is one of the most consulted websites of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Development.

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The hotline is helpful to adoption applicants who are often seeking general information about intercountry adoption processes, a particular country or the progress of their application being processed.

The number of calls concerning Africa (54%) is significantly higher than for other continents, followed by Asia (11%), America (8%) and Europe (6%). Some 21% of calls do not concern intercountry adoption and are redirected to the appropriate department.

The countries most concerned are Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). There is a significant upsurge in calls about the DRC because the no-exit policy of children adopted in foreign countries was extended.

The calls most often concern:

- Adoptions by relatives, especially in Africa,
- The issuance of Long-Stay Adoption Visas for children at the end of a process;
- General information concerning the choice of the child's country of origin or the choice of accredited adoption body,
- Attempts to get applications back on track after the process was not followed properly,
- Post-adoption action when the child is already living in France,
- Practical questions on keeping track of a case,
- Search for birth origins, etc.

CONCLUSION AND OUTLOOK

Based on these observations and analyses, the changing trends of recent years were confirmed in 2015 with:

- The significant and structural decrease in intercountry adoptions in France and in most host countries;
- A decrease in individual adoptions which accounted for 25% of processes in 2015 versus 31% in 2014 in keeping with the entry into force of the bilateral treaty in Russia prohibiting any new processes of this type.

A percentage of the adoptions conducted in Hague Convention countries slightly increased from 61.2% in 2014 to 62.3% in 2015. This is a significant qualitative indicator with regard to ethical and legal requirements of intercountry adoption. It should continue to rise. To this end, the Intercountry Adoption Unit, through its institutional cooperation projects, contributes to the creation and support of central authorities of countries which have signed the Hague Convention but still do not have the tools and skills needed to implement it.

Some 66% of adoptions conducted in 2015 were of special needs children, as the age of adopted children tends to rise. Therefore it is important to develop and increase assistance to families throughout the adoption process, before the child arrives, when the child meets the family and when they all return to France. This strategy requires the coordination of institutional actors and civil society and aims to prevent problems in forming a family.

The emergence of new problems such as adoption failures and a growing number of requests to find birth origins reflects the need to establish adoption projects that address a child's real needs and that are perfectly secured on a legal level so that over the long term, the young adopted person does not have any doubts concerning the legitimacy of his or her adoption.

**MINISTERE DES AFFAIRES ETRANGERES ET DU
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