Intercountry adoption in France

“The child, for the full and harmonious development of his or her personality, should grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding.”

(Preamble of the Hague Convention of 29 May 1993 on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption)
International Cooperation

Institutional cooperation projects

The MAI draws up and implements intercountry adoption cooperation for countries of origin. This includes:

- Firstly, State-to-State cooperation aimed at consolidating the central authorities of countries of origin that are already parties to the Hague Convention or to encourage them to accede, through training (on the ground) and equipment provision.

- Secondly, through NGOs and service providers, with whom, supported by our embassies and under their tight control, projects are implemented concerning child protection in private family life.

The Intercountry Adoption Unit enjoys in this capacity subsidy credits aimed at implementing this institutional cooperation. Since 2009, the MAI has been provided with a significant budget envelope of close to €800,000 annually, despite a context of structural budget streamlining.

These resources make it possible to implement alternatives to adoption concerning children without families. Such actions have already been conducted in Haiti, Madagascar, Vietnam, Cambodia, Guatemala, Ethiopia, India, Colombia, Benin, Kazakhstan and Mali.

Volunteers in child protection and intercountry adoption

The French Ministry of Foreign Affairs has set up, along with the France Volontaires volunteering platform, private companies and territorial communities involved in financing efforts, a volunteer network for children without families.

Launched in Cambodia in August 2008, it has been extended to other countries. As of 2013, these volunteers work in strategic regions: Madagascar, Haiti, India, Ethiopia and Vietnam.

The missions of these volunteers, working in embassies, are subject to strict requirements in terms of ethics and rigour so that they can:

1. help implement projects to provide care locally for children without families, relying on NGOs active in the field and in liaison with local authorities;

2. help draw up, implement and follow up institutional cooperation and technical assistance projects to help countries of origin apply the principles laid down in international agreements on child protection and intercountry adoption;

3. provide support as needed to families in their adoption application and assist operators (central authority, French Adoption Agency, Accredited Adoption Bodies, lawyers, interpreters, etc.) in their work.

France Volontaires website: http://www.france-volontaires.org

Intercountry Adoption in Figures

Total number of children adopted abroad by French families in 2012: 1,569

Top five countries of origin:
Russia: 235
Ethiopia: 220
Colombia: 159
Democratic Republic of the Congo: 84
Vietnam: 76

To find out more:
French Ministry of Foreign Affairs
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Ministry of Foreign Affairs website
The Central Authority: the Intercountry Adoption Unit (MAI)

For France, the Central Authority for intercountry adoption under the Hague Convention is a department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MAE): the Intercountry Adoption Unit (Mission de l’Adoption Internationale, MAI).

Its composition

The MAI has a staff of about 20 people from the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Justice and Health. It is headed by the Ambassador for Intercountry Adoption, appointed by the President of the French Republic in July 2011.

Its roles


It maintains relations with other States and between Central Authorities, both with child countries of origin and with the authorities of other receiving countries, and is involved in negotiating and renegotiating bilateral agreements and multilateral instruments on intercountry adoption;

The SAI regulates and monitors operators:
• It supervises the action of the French Adoption Agency (AFA).
• It issues accreditation, monitors private-law Accredited Adoption Bodies (AABs) and supports them, where necessary, by means of subsidies.

The MAI conducts cooperation efforts in intercountry adoption matters:
• In this capacity, it conducts cooperation actions in a certain number of countries of origin, with the support of our embassies.

The MAI has an expertise and legal watch role:
• It collects and updates information on adoption procedures, adoption conditions abroad and the problems French citizens come up against.
• Following close examination by the MAI’s desk officers, it issues authorization for long-stay adoption visas by consular services, under the supervision of a judicial magistrate.

The MAI prepares the replies of the Minister of Foreign Affairs:
• To the many letters sent to him concerning intercountry adoption, both by members of parliament and political leaders and by individuals and associations. Similarly, the MAI is responsible for drafting responses to written parliamentary questions, which are published in the Official Journal and addressed to the Minister.

The MAI implements a true outreach policy:
• For example, it manages the intercountry adoption section of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs website.
• Since 2010, it has organized an annual day of exchanges and information-sharing for all French adoption stakeholders, and particularly Conseils Généraux (departmental councils).
• It regularly releases publications (newsletters; annual reports; brochures) aimed at informing all those concerned by intercountry adoption, including national and foreign institutions, individuals and specialists.

http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/
National and international reference texts
Intercountry adoption stakeholders

The French Adoption Agency (AFA)
The French Adoption Agency, a public-law legal entity under government supervision, was set up by Act 2005-744 of 4 July 2005. It has a general role as a provider of information, advice and guidance to candidates for intercountry adoption throughout the French territory and regarding all countries. It is also authorized to act as an intermediary for the adoption of foreign minors under 15 years old in the countries of origin of adopted children, following accreditation by the authorities of those countries, without prejudice to the private accredited adoption bodies (AABs) which are so authorized. A new Agreement on objectives and resources has been signed between the State and the AFA for 2012-2014. AFA website: www.agence-adoption.fr

Accredited Adoption Bodies (AABs)
There are 33 Accredited Adoption Bodies (AABs), private-law legal entities which act as intermediaries for adoption or pre-adoption placement of minors under 15 years old.

AABs must receive prior authorization from Conseils Généraux of the Departments where they wish to operate. They are approved by the central authority for the country in which they wish to handle adoptive parents’ applications and then accredited by the authorities of the country of origin.

AABs engage in the following activities:
• help in preparing adoption applications and advice for compiling them;
• information on the technical and legal aspects of adoption procedures;
• determining, in liaison with the competent authorities of the country of origin, the procedures for choosing an adoptive family;
• submitting applications by candidates for adoption to the competent persons or institutions for them to make an adoption decision;
• oversee proceedings in accordance with existing legislation;
• supporting families once the child has arrived.

The MAI supports the work of AABs through subsidies totalling €196,735 annually (2013). These subsidies encourage them in their efforts to ensure professionalism and synergies (pooling of resources).

A list of AABs and their contact details is available at the following address: http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr

Conseils Généraux
In France, child protection was made a competence of the social assistance departments of Conseils Généraux by the Act of 6 January 1986. These departments often have adoption units. The 101 Conseils Généraux are thus responsible for:
• approving prospective adopters and informing them, on this occasion, of the realities of intercountry adoption;
• providing post-adoption follow-up of the adopted children. The MAI has constant, sustained relations with the Conseils Généraux. It is notably participating in drawing up their future national approval database.

Adoption Guidance and Advice Consultations (COCA)
The goal of these specialized consultations (some 40 in France) is to advise future parents and then support them once the child arrives and throughout his or her development. Thanks to a multidisciplinary approach (paediatricians, child psychiatrists, psychologists and parasite specialists, etc.), they can address the child’s health needs by organizing, where necessary, suitable care, in liaison with the child’s GP. They can also support parents when difficulties arise (difficulty integrating at school, questions about identity during teenage years).


A list of associations can be consulted on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs website: http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/

The High Council for Adoption (CSA)
Its composition
The High Council for Adoption (CSA) is a consultative body under the supervision of the Ministries of Justice and the Family. It is chaired by a member of the French Parliament and has 30 members. They meet at least once every six months and also at the request of its President, the Minister of Justice, the Minister of the Family, or the Minister of Foreign Affairs. The CSA’s role is to put forward to government authorities any measures to facilitate adoption, particularly by ensuring better coordination among all the bodies involved, and to help inform the public. It issues opinions on all topics relating to adoption and drafts proposals for legislative amendments before submitting them to the Government.

The National Council for Access to Personal Origins (CNAOP)
The National Council for Access to Personal Origins (Conseil national pour l’accès aux origines personnelles, CNAOP) was created by the act of 22 January 2002. The CNAOP was officially established that September. Its essential goal is to facilitate access to personal origins. This role is carried out in liaison with Departments, overseas communities and authorized adoption bodies (AABs). The MAI is a full member.

Associations for adoptive parents and adopted children
Associations for adoptive parents by country of origin (APPO) and adopted children, which are not approved agencies, have great experience in the field. They are closely involved in the MAI’s work formulating intercountry adoption strategy. In France, there are eight APPOs (MASF, APAEC, APEG, etc.) and two adopted children’s associations (Racines Co-réennes and La Voix des Adoptés).