

Suggested Questions for Adoption Agency Selection Process (International Adoption)

Use of a licensed adoption agency is generally required when pursuing an international adoption. The specifics of an agency's adoption program vary considerably by country. The following is a general list of suggested questions that are designed to help families in selecting an adoption agency for an international adoption. Families should also ask additional questions relating to specific country programs. However, a very important consideration in selecting an agency is determining whether the agency is a "good fit," and this can generally be achieved by ensuring that the family has accurate information and realistic expectations about the agency, its services and costs and its adoption process (in particular estimated wait times). In addition to obtaining answers to the following questions, adoptive families are strongly encouraged to read carefully any contracts or policies that they are asked to sign or agree to by the agency and to ask questions (including consulting an attorney, if necessary).

General Questions About the Agency:

- What are the agency's requirements for adoptive families (e.g., age, marital status (including previous divorce(s)), number of children already in the home, religious, criminal background, financial, health considerations)? *Note: Requirements will vary by country.*
- How long has the agency been in operation?
- In what countries does the agency have adoption programs? How long has the agency had an active adoption program in the country of interest?
- Has the agency's program in the country of interest ever been suspended or terminated (as a result of loss of accreditation or otherwise)? If so, why and for how long?
- What is the current adoption climate in the country of interest? How stable has the country program been in recent months/years?
- In what regions/cities within the country of interest does the agency work? Can families specify a specific region/city within the country?
- Does the agency have any religious or denominational affiliation?
- How long has the agency's director been working in the adoption field? How long has he/she been the director of the agency?
- How many professionals are on staff with the agency? What is the average length of service at the agency for the agency's case workers who are currently on staff?
- How long has the director for the country of interest (i.e., the country program director) been working with adoptions from the country of interest?
- What is the education and licensing background of the agency's director and professional staff?
- Will the agency provide contact with families who have recently used the agency to adopt from the country of interest (i.e., family references)?
- Are families allowed to specify the gender of the child they wish to adopt? *Note: The ability to specify gender will vary by country.*
- How are waiting children cared for in the country of interest (i.e., orphanages/institutions, foster homes, etc.)? How is the funding for such care provided?
- Does the agency have any affiliations with orphanages, social service agencies, facilitators or others in the country of interest that will be significantly involved in the adoption

process? If so, obtain details regarding such arrangements (including the length of such relationships).

- Who handles the agency's legal work in the country of interest? In the United States?

Questions About Fees and Costs:

- What fees and costs are charged by the agency in connection with the adoption process and when are they due?
- What costs and expenses will likely be incurred in addition to the agency's fees and costs (i.e., home study expenses, legal expenses, filing and processing expenses, etc.)? *Note: It is advisable that you request a total estimate for all fees, costs and expenses that can be expected in connection with the adoption process – not just the agency's fees and costs.*

Questions About Wait Time:

Note: All questions regarding wait times should be asked in relation to a specific country program.

- What is the current estimated wait time for families? How many families are currently waiting? *Note: Wait times at most agencies are often highly dependent on the adoptive family's parameters (e.g., age, gender and health factors that the adoptive family is willing to consider). To the extent that an adoptive family has already determined certain of its fundamental parameters, questions regarding wait times should be asked in specific relation to those parameters (e.g., what is the estimated wait time for an infant girl).*
- What is the longest wait time for any of the families that are currently waiting for an adoption?
- Have average wait times for families increased, decreased or remained generally the same over the past several years (and if they have increased or decreased, why)?
- How often should I expect to hear from the agency workers during the waiting process?

Questions About the Agency's Previous Placement Experience:

- How many children has the agency placed in each of the past five years from the country of interest?
- What number of failed adoption placements has the agency experienced in each of the past five years (i.e., how many instances of a family being matched with a child but such match did not result in a final adoption)? *Note: Although generally uncommon even in the context of domestic adoptions, "failed placements" are even more uncommon in the context of international adoption and the risk of a failed international placement will vary greatly by country.*
- How does the agency handle failed placements (e.g., where on the wait list is a family that has experienced a failed placement placed, are there any additional fees or costs imposed, etc.)?

Questions About the Agency's Matching and Finalization Process:

- What children are available in the country of interest (i.e., children of what age, gender, sibling groups, etc.)?
- How does the agency's matching process work for the country of interest?
- What background information (e.g., medical, social, family history, etc.) is generally available regarding the child and/or the child's biological family?
- Does the agency provide pictures and/or video of the referred child?

- Once matched, does the agency provide the adoptive family with pictures and/or videos of the child? Does the agency provide updates regarding the child's growth, medical condition and/or development?
- Once matched, does the agency allow the adoptive family to travel to visit the child? If so, are there any significant limitations regarding such visits?
- What are the travel requirements for the country of interest (i.e., are families required to travel in order to bring their child home or is an escort service available as an option)? Are both parents (if applicable) required to travel? How long must they stay in country?

Questions About Services Provided by the Agency:

- What pre-placement training does the agency offer to adoptive families? What other support services does the agency provide (e.g., support groups, social events, newsletters, etc.)?
- What post-placement services for adoptive families are provided? What help or services are available for adoptive families experiencing post-placement challenges and difficulties relating to their adoption – specifically relating to parenting children of a different racial, ethnic and/or cultural background?
- What humanitarian aid/support does the agency provide to the countries in which it operates?

Disclaimer: This document is not intended to constitute, nor does it represent, legal advice of any kind. A qualified attorney should be consulted with respect to any legal questions or issues.