



Highlights of [GAO-06-133](#), a report to the Chairman, Committee on Foreign Relations, U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

U.S. intercountry adoptions nearly tripled from more than 8,000 to more than 22,000 between fiscal years 1994 and 2004. While the Department of State (State) and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) manage the process, factors ranging from corruption to inadequate legal frameworks in foreign countries could lead to abuses such as the abduction of children. GAO (1) describes the U.S. intercountry adoption process, (2) assesses the U.S. government's efforts to manage the intercountry adoption process, (3) assesses U.S. efforts to strengthen safeguards and mitigate against the potential for fraudulent adoptions, and (4) describes the Hague Convention (Convention) and the statuses of U.S. and top sending countries' implementation of the Convention.

What GAO Recommends

To improve the management of the U.S. intercountry adoption process, GAO recommends that the Secretary of Homeland Security work with the Director of USCIS to formalize its quality assurance process so it can assess the quality of the adoption process over time and identify areas where training or guidance may be warranted, and to consider establishing a formal and systematic approach to document specific incidents of problems identified in foreign countries to retain institutional knowledge and analyze trends. DHS and State agreed with our findings and recommendations.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-06-133.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Jess Ford at (202) 512-4268 or fordj@gao.gov.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Agencies Have Improved the Intercountry Adoption Process, but Further Enhancements Are Needed

What GAO Found

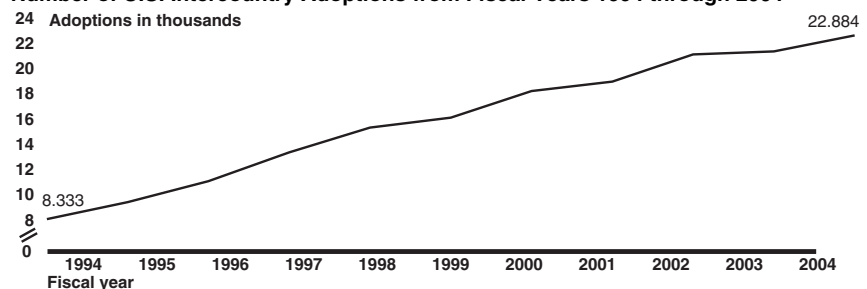
Adoptive parents must meet domestic and foreign government requirements to complete intercountry adoptions. However, factors such as foreign governments' procedures may contribute to varying time frames for adoptions. USCIS and State are the domestic agencies responsible for intercountry adoptions.

USCIS and State made efforts to enhance the process by improving interagency coordination and communication with parents and developing additional guidance on adoptions. In addition, USCIS streamlined the intercountry adoption process by eliminating the application and fees for parents to obtain U.S. citizenship certificates for eligible children. While USCIS has taken measures to review the quality of the adoptions process, GAO found that the agency does not have a formal quality assurance program in place where results are summarized and reported to senior agency officials so that an assessment of the quality of the intercountry adoption process can be made over time.

Factors in foreign countries' environments may allow for abuses in adoptions. To reduce the likelihood of such abuses, USCIS and State have taken such steps as holding diplomatic discussions with foreign governments and imposing additional U.S. procedural requirements. However, USCIS has not established a formal and systematic process for documenting specific incidents of problems in foreign countries. Such a process would allow for a systematic approach to analyze problematic trends and retain institutional knowledge.

The Hague Convention governing intercountry adoptions establishes minimum standards designed to help alleviate some of the risk associated with the adoption process. The United States has signed the Convention and taken several steps toward implementing the Convention; however, key steps remain, including formal ratification of the Convention. Since its creation, 66 countries (which represented about 39 percent of all U.S. intercountry adoptions in fiscal year 2004) have ratified the Convention.

Number of U.S. Intercountry Adoptions from Fiscal Years 1994 through 2004



Source: GAO analysis of State data.