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ADOPTION ADVOCATE NO. 100 POSTED OCT 01, 2016

(http://www.adoptioncouncil.org/publications/2016/10/adoption-advocate-no-100)

The Risks of Simultaneous Multiple Placements in Intercountry Adoption Practice

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Introduction

Since the mid-1940s, the practice of adopting orphaned children internationally has experienced peaks as well as periods of decline, driven in part by public interest, world wars, changing regulations and oversight, and politics. Reaching its height in numbers in the early 2000s, with more than 20,000 children adopted from abroad each year, intercountry adoption has been on the decline since its peak in 2004. The number of annual adoptions into the United States dropped to 5,647 in 2015.¹ With intercountry adoptions becoming more difficult to obtain, timelines for adoptive families lengthening, and the age range of available children widening, agencies are increasingly met with requests from families wanting to adopt more than one child at a time, adopt children who may be out of birth order with existing children, or adopt children close in age with existing children (often referred to as “artificial twinning”).

While some might look at the situation for many orphaned and institutionalized children and consider these simple, reasonable requests to grant, the reality is far more complex. Regardless of intent, adoption cannot benefit children when they do not thrive in their adoptive homes—and this sad outcome is doubly regrettable when contributing factors, such as the increased stress often caused by multiple unrelated child placements, could have been avoided.

This article seeks to examine the risks and implications of multiple simultaneous adoptions into one family, the ethics surrounding these decisions, and current best practices in this area.

The Current Landscape of Intercountry Adoption