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# **Finnish Adoption Board Annual Review 2023**



**Valvira**

National Supervisory Authority  
for Welfare and Health

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## Foreword

Intercountry adoptions, which began in the 1960s, are now undergoing a 'third-generation reorganisation'. A critical reappraisal of operations at this time is appropriate in view of the information gained on earlier adoptions of children who have already reached adulthood. Risk awareness calls for continuous vigilance, considering that the very nature of the Hague intercountry adoption framework is that it is a risk management system. Ongoing development efforts in member states should thus be seen as a positive and necessary undertaking, and should be continued in the future. In the context of global cooperation, everything affects everything else, directly or indirectly.

The objectives of the Hague Convention remain clear: to protect the rights of the child in every individual adoption process and to clarify the division of duties and responsibilities in international multi-agency cooperation. The goal of the Convention is to prevent abuses, to increase transparency and to ensure that the actors involved are reliable. The Contracting States to the Convention have a shared interest in appraising the implementation standards of the Convention critically. New and stricter recommendations have been issued for governments in recent years. The most significant recommendation to come out of the most recent Special Commission in 2022 is that individual states should begin applying a working model for preventing illicit adoptions. Functional cross-border cooperation between authorities in case of suspected illegalities is also considered important. All these issues need to be addressed in Finland too.

When we address concerns about illegalities potentially having been committed, we easily forget that the safest adoption process for any individual child is through the official adoption system. It is beyond these, i.e. in adoptions that fall outside the scope of legislation or where there are no competent adoption authorities, that the risks to the children involved increase substantially. As a Contracting State to the Hague Convention, Finland supports essential prevention measures in intercountry adoption by extending cooperation as per the Convention to other States Parties. The job of the Adoption Board is to ensure that the cooperation we offer in adoption services is consistent with our legislation and that adoptive parents have received appropriate counselling and been screened suitable for adoption but also continue to receive the guidance and support they need during and after the adoption process itself.

We must remain constantly risk-conscious. It is highly important for information on the intercountry adoption system to be exchanged between authorities

across borders, so that risk assessments rely not only on information gained from our own operations but on a broader context.

Norway decided in autumn 2023 to launch a national investigation of the country's intercountry adoption cooperation. In Finland, debate on this topic has remained moderate. In 2021, the Adoption Board weighed in on the issue of a national investigation and joined Finnish adoption operators in endorsing such a national investigation if one were to be decided on. In the meantime, the principal task of the Adoption Board is to carry out its licensing and oversight activities as per the Adoption Act to as high a standard as possible while remaining abreast of current debate in the field.

The first generation of intercountry adoptees in Finland have reached middle age. At the Special Commission in 2022, the States Parties to the Hague Convention were recommended to involve grown-up adoptees in the further development of services. Indeed, in Finland there are particular needs for reaching out to and involving adoptees who are now in their 30s and 40s. These people have an exceptional viewpoint on our society and experiential expertise on the impact of adoption at various stages of life. Adoptees have valuable occupational expertise in their respective fields, and some have experience in exploring their adoptive backgrounds.

During the year under review, the Adoption Board noted that it is important to provide individual 'targeted support' to the parents of adopted children and adolescents, depending on their age. Adult adoptees could be involved in collecting and distributing the information needed for further development of services. Adoption operators in Finland have a genuinely developmental approach to their work, which is a strength that needs to be safeguarded amidst ongoing cuts in the public sector. The involvement of adult adoptees is necessary in the monitoring of developments in the adoption field, which the Adoption Board is doing.

Services for adult adoptees are also extremely important at this time. Statutory post-adoption services guaranteed for adoptees must be safeguarded now and in the future as client numbers grow. The current appropriation was set for 2018 and is insufficient in view of the growing number of post-adoption clients and the costs incurred by service providers. The Adoption Board considers that it is vitally important to revise funding. The high quality of post-adoption services available in Finland helps safeguard the statutory rights of adoptees to obtain information about themselves while supporting their contemplation of identity

issues. Finland should continue to uphold this service going forward and recognise the deeper importance of the service in safeguarding identity rights.

Helsinki, 20 August 2024

Irene Pärssinen-Hentula, Chair

# 1 Composition and duties of the Adoption Board

The Finnish Adoption Board operates under Valvira, the National Supervisory Authority for Welfare and Health, as a special expert, permission and supervisory authority in adoption matters. The Adoption Board grants permissions for both domestic and intercountry adoptions. The Adoption Board also licenses intercountry adoption service providers and supervises their operations. The general planning, steering and supervision of adoption counselling and intercountry adoption services fall within the purview of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health.

Adoption is regulated according to the Adoption Act (22/2012) and the Government Decree on Adoption (202/2012). In all decisions and other measures concerning the adoption of a minor child, the best interests of the child shall be the paramount consideration.

The Adoption Board is the central authority referred to in the Hague Adoption Convention (29/1997) on child protection and cooperation in international adoption and the national authority referred to in the European Convention on the Adoption of Children, made in Strasbourg (39/2012).

The Adoption Board meets in a Plenary Session and has a Section for International Matters and a Section for Adoption Permission Matters. The Chair or the Deputy Chair of the Adoption Board chairs the Plenary Session and the Sections. The Finnish Government appoints the Adoption Board for a maximum term of five years at a time. The Government appoints the Chair, the Deputy Chair, members and deputy members to the Board. The Chair, Deputy Chair and Secretaries are officials of Valvira. The Board takes decisions on presentation by the Secretary.

In 2023, the Chair of the Adoption Board was Irene Pärssinen-Hentula, Manager, and the Deputy Chair was Arttu Malava, Lawyer. The post of Secretary of the Adoption Board was held in 2023 by Johanna Huovinen, Lawyer (on leave of absence 15 Nov 2023 – 3 Aug 2025), Anne Ritari, Lawyer (11 Dec 2023 – 2 Aug 2025) and Minna Malviniemi, Senior Officer. Krista Palonen was the Assistant to the Adoption Board.

The **Section for International Matters** has at least four members in addition to the Chair or Deputy Chair. One of the members must be a representative from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland. The Section must also include members with expertise in legal matters relating to international adoptions, practical intercountry adoption operations and child welfare.

Members of the Section for International Matters in 2023 (principal member above, deputy member below in parentheses)

Member representing the Ministry for Foreign Affairs:

Henna Harju, Lawyer

(Mona Nyholm-Niemi, Lawyer)

Expertise in legal matters relating to intercountry adoptions

(Outi Kemppainen, Counsellor of Legislation, Ministry of Justice)

(Joanna Grandell, Senior Specialist, Ministry of Justice)

Expertise in practical intercountry adoption operations:

Anja Wikstedt, Adoption Curator, All Our Children, from 24 Oct 2023

Markus Söderlund, Executive Director, All Our Children, until 23 Oct 2023

(planner Jenni Heinonen, All Our Children, from 24 Oct 2023; adoption curator Anja Wikstedt, All Our Children, until 23 Oct 2023)

specialist in child protection:

Lucia Hakala, Senior Specialist, Central Union for Child Welfare, from 7 Dec 2023

Johanna Laisaari, Project Manager, Prime Minister's Office, until 6 Dec 2023

(Miia Pitkänen, Director, Centre of Excellence on Social Welfare in Uusimaa Socca)

Other members:

Tiina Muinonen, Ministerial Adviser, Ministry of Social Affairs and Health

(Susanna Hoikkala, Ministerial Adviser, Ministry of Social Affairs and Health)

Eeva-Maria Nieminen, Senior Adviser, Finnish Immigration Service

(Leena Turku, Senior Adviser, Finnish Immigration Service)

Maija Jäppinen, Assistant Professor of Social Work, University of Helsinki  
(Saana Raittila-Salo, social worker and doctoral student, University of Helsinki)

Members of the **Section for Adoption Permission Matters** in 2023 (principal member above, deputy member below in parentheses)

Specialist in child protection:

Päivi Sihvo, Social Worker, Western Uusimaa Social and Crisis Emergency Services

(Anna Klingenberg-Peltola, Social Work Manager, City of Vantaa)

Expertise in adoption counselling:

Maria Jensen, Social Worker, City of Helsinki

(Kaisa Tervonen-Arnkil, Development Manager, Save the Children, until 30 Jan 2023;

Kristiina Mattinen, Regional Director of Operations, Save the Children, from 31 Jan 2023)

Expertise in a child's growth and development:

Elina Kontu, Professor of Psychology, University of Tampere

(Saara Salo, Ph.D.(Psych.), University of Helsinki / Pilke Clinic)

Expertise in medicine:

Andreas Blanco Sequeiros, Director, Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, until 27 Apr 2023

Outi Linnaranta, Chief Physician, National Institute for Health and Welfare, from 28 Apr 2023

(Paula Häkkänen, Acting Chief Physician of Health Promotion, Hospital District of Helsinki and Uusimaa (HUS))

Other members:

Irja Hemmilä, Senior Officer, National Supervisory Authority for Welfare and Health

(Kari Raaska, Chief Physician, National Supervisory Authority for Welfare and Health)

**Plenary Session** in 2023 (principal member above, deputy member below in parentheses)



The aforementioned members and deputy members of the Section for International Matters and the Section for Adoption Permission Matters, and also:

Jenny Nyman-Ahokas, Executive Director, Adoptive Families in Finland (Lotta Ventelä, Communications and Organisational Secretary, Adoptive Families in Finland)

Saku Jokisalo, Adult Adoptees, domestic adoptions (Jaakko Rautavaara, Adult Adoptees, domestic adoptions)

Martha Vuori, All Our Children, Adult Adoptees, intercountry adoptions, until 9 Mar 2023

Anu-Rohima Mylläri, Adult Adoptees, intercountry adoptions, from 10 Mar 2023

(Anu-Rohima Mylläri, Adult Adoptees, intercountry adoptions, until 9 Mar 2023;

Parvathi Willberg, Adult Adoptees, intercountry adoption, as of 10 Mar 2023)

Aulikki Halmi-Kaikkonen, Senior Social Worker, City of Helsinki (Saara Leinonen, Adoption Coordinator, City of Helsinki)

Salla Hari, Director for Adoption Program, Interpedia ry

(Anja Ojuva, Executive Director, Interpedia ry, until 23 Oct 2023;

Ilona Kalliola, Executive Director, Interpedia ry, from 24 Oct 2023)

Pia Savio, Executive Director, Diverse Families network (Sofia Lindqvist, Diverse Families network)

Kristiina Mattinen, Head of Regional Activities, Save the Children Finland, until 30 Jan 2023

Päivi Pietarila, Intercountry Adoption Director, Save the Children Finland, from 31 Jan 2023

(Päivi Pietarila, Intercountry Adoption Director, Save the Children Finland, until 30 Jan 2023;

Maija Vihervirta, Development Manager, Save the Children Finland, from 31 Jan 2023)

Juha Jämsä, Executive Director, Sateenkaariperheet ry (Vilppu Järvinen, Sateenkaariperheet ry)

## 2 Adoption Board activities in 2023

### 2.1 Administration of the Adoption Board

The Adoption Board is an independent authority based at the National Supervisory Authority for Welfare and Health (Valvira). The Adoption Board was reassigned from the Social Welfare and Health Care Department at Valvira to the Administrative Department as of the beginning of 2023. The Adoption Board is an independent group within the Administrative Department, comprising the Chair (Irene Pärssinen-Hentula) and the Secretaries. The official who chairs the Adoption Board is the supervisor of this group.

### 2.2 Training and national cooperation

Each year, the Adoption Board offers training in adoption matters. The training is aimed at adoption counselling experts, intercountry adoption service providers and members and deputy members of the Adoption Board. The 2023 training session was a hybrid event held on 9 Feb 2023 with 75 experts working with adoptions attending.

The training day included a review of the Adoption Board's operations by the Chair, Irene Pärssinen-Hentula, with a look at the focus areas of the Adoption Board's current term, 2022–2027. She also introduced the topic of the day: viewing the service system from the perspective of the adoptions. Senior Adviser Krista Björkroth from the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health gave a talk about the launching of the wellbeing services counties. Service Line Director Titta Pelttari presented services for children, adolescents and families in the Pirkanmaa wellbeing services county. The programme for the training day included a panel discussion on adoptees and their families as users of social welfare and health care services. The panel discussion was moderated by Anja Wikstedt, adoption curator at All Our Children and member of the Section for International Matters of the Adoption Board. The panellists were: Anu Rohima-Mylläri, member of the Plenary Session of the Adoption Board; Satu Paavola; Päivi Partanen, development social worker, Save the Children Finland; Chief Physician Kirsi Kettunen, Save the Children Finland; and Ministerial Adviser Susanna Hoikkala, Ministry of Social Affairs and Health. Dutch child psychologist and intercountry adoption research expert Anneke Vinke PhD gave a presentation continuing on the topic of therapeutic parenting of adopted children, which she first brought up at the 2022 training session. Psychologist Anita Berner, senior consultant to the adoption secretariat at the Danish central adoption authority (Ankestyrelsen), presented the Danish model for supporting parents of teenager

adoptees and highlighted topics that are important for this work. Lawyer Johanna Huovinen and Senior Officer Minna Malviniemi, Secretaries to the Adoption Board, spoke about issues arising in the Board's application processing.

In the course of the year under review, the Chair, Deputy Chair and Secretaries of the Adoption Board attended a number of collaborative meetings of adoption operators. Chair Irene Pärssinen-Hentula attended round table talks on population policy and family policy held by Minister Kiuru on 2 and 7 Mar 2023.

With the support of the Adoption Board, the members of the Adoption Board Plenary Session who represent adult intercountry adoptees submitted a statement to the Government on 11 Aug 2023 for the hearings on the preparation of the Government statement to Parliament on measures to promote equality, gender equality and non-discrimination. The principal message in the statement was that adoptees must be more involved in preparation and development work.

## 2.3 Media liaison and publicity

In 2023, one letter to the editor from the Chair of the Adoption Board was published:

- Helsingin Sanomat 7 Aug 2023 “Adoptiolapsilla on oikeus turvalliseen lapsuuteen ilman vihapuhetta” (Adopted children have the right to a safe childhood without hate speech) <https://www.hs.fi/mielipide/art-2000009766329.html>

The Adoption Board website was revised with the Valvira website reform. The new website was launched in September 2023. The Adoption Board website was separated from the main Valvira website, the website structure was clarified, and the e-transactions pathway for adoption permit administration was simplified. The new website <https://valvira.fi/adoptiolautakunta> contains more information on the Sections of the Adoption Board along with information and guidance on post-adoption support. Instructions for adoptees on how to notify the authorities if they suspect illegalities in their adoption process were added to the website.

## 2.4 Plenary Session

The Plenary Session of the Adoption Board is tasked with monitoring trends in adoption matters and, where necessary, making initiatives in matters concerning adoption. The Plenary Session comprises the members of the Section for

Adoption Permission Matters, the members of the Section for International Matters, representatives of organisations within the domain of the Adoption Board, other members and experiential experts.

In 2023, the Plenary Session of the Adoption Board met three times. A wide range of current topics was discussed at the Plenary Session meetings, from the perspective of both domestic and intercountry adoption. The development plan for the Plenary Session of the Adoption Board was followed at meetings; this involved outlining themes for meetings and plan-based addressing of items such as Government Programme entries in respect of adoption matters. The overall goal is to establish plan-based working practices for the Plenary Session during the term of the current Board.

In autumn 2022, the Plenary Session of the Adoption Board specified four principal themes that would be addressed at meetings of the new formation of the Adoption Board in the term 2022–2027. These themes are: 1. monitoring efforts in enhancing post-adoption support; 2. monitoring efforts in enhancing specialist expertise in adoptions; 3. monitoring efforts in enhancing the identity rights of adoptees; and 4. analysing the past and future of the adoption system. A freeform working group will be appointed for each theme, reporting to the Plenary Session.

In 2023, the Plenary Session began a phenomenon-based analysis of adoption-specific support. The topic was discussed with a view to what services are currently available. Also, post-adoption support was examined from the perspective of adoptive families and adoptees themselves.

Current research related to adoption is discussed at Plenary Session meetings. Jenni Helenius, Development Manager at THL, presented preliminary results from the School Health Promotion Study 2023 for adoptees.

The Plenary Session continued to monitor the status of intercountry adoptions and current investigations on intercountry adoptions in various countries such as Norway and Sweden.

## **2.5 Section for International Matters and International Cooperation**

The Section of International Matters met eight times during 2023.

International cooperation by the Adoption Board is provided for in the Adoption Act and is based on the Hague Adoption Convention (29/1997) about child protection and cooperation in international adoption and on the European Convention on the Adoption of Children, made in Strasbourg (39/2012). The central authorities of each Contracting State are required to work in close cooperation with each other in adoption matters. In Finland, the Section for International Matters of the Adoption Board is the central authority for adoption matters.

According to the Government Decree on Adoption, the duties of the Section for International Matters are:

- to gather and maintain information, to an appropriate extent, about the legislation and practices concerning adoption and intercountry adoption service in foreign states and, on request, provide information about these to authorities and service providers;
- to monitor compliance with the Hague Adoption Convention in Finland and if necessary take action to ensure compliance,
- cooperate with the central authorities or the bodies responsible for the duties of a central authority in foreign states that are contracting states in the Hague Convention in order to achieve the objects of the Convention and to exchange the information referred to in the Convention;
- to liaise with designated national authorities in countries that are signatories to the European Convention on the Adoption of Children, made at Strasbourg on 27 November 2008, to exchange information as referred to in that Convention,
- to grant licences for providing intercountry adoption services and to revoke such licences,
- to grant licences for Finnish service providers to collaborate with a foreign service provider and to revoke such licences,
- to supervise the operations of service providers and their collaboration with foreign service providers,
- to issue reports as referred to in section 78 and statements as referred to in section 79 of the Adoption Act,

- to issue the agreement referred to in Article 17(c) of the Hague Adoption Convention and the certificate referred to in section 8 of the Government Decree on Adoption in cases where there is no service provider,
- to perform the central authority functions under the Hague Convention, unless a certain function has been delegated to another body by Act or Government Decree.

### **Intercountry adoption service**

The Section for International Matters monitored the circumstances of intercountry adoptions in countries of destination and engaged in discussions from Finland's perspective. The Section continued to monitor adoption processes from China, which had slowed down during the pandemic years.

The Section investigated issues in intercountry adoption processes from India, with particular reference to adoption confirmation issues in the state of Maharashtra. Interpretation policy for the guidelines of the central adoption authority in Colombia, the ICBF, was monitored along with the impacts of the permit terms of the Adoption Board on adoption applicants. Monitoring of countries of origin focused on the current state of adoptions in South Africa and Colombia.

In 2023, the Section for International Matters granted three permits for intercountry cooperation to Finnish service providers pursuant to section 90 of the Adoption Act. The City of Helsinki Social Services, Health Care and Rescue Services Division was granted a permit pursuant to section 90 of the Adoption Act (22/2012) for continued intercountry cooperation with a foreign service provider, the Happy Child Association (HCA) / Bulgaria. The Happy Child Association cooperation permit was revoked on 29 Jun 2023, and on the same date the City of Helsinki Social Services, Health Care and Rescue Services Division was granted a permit pursuant to section 90 of the Adoption Act for intercountry cooperation with the Sunny Child Association / Bulgaria. Save the Children Finland was granted a permit pursuant to section 90 of the Adoption Act for continued intercountry cooperation with the China Center for Children's Welfare and Adoption (CCCWA). This permit applies to adoption processes in progress and is in force from 6 Sep 2023 to 5 Sep 2025.

In 2023, the Adoption Board arranged one cooperation meeting with adoption counsellors. This meeting involved discussions about current adoption topics and responses to practical questions posed by service providers. The Adoption Board continued its annual monitoring of payments and post-adoption services of service providers.

## **Nordic Adoption NAC**

Arttu Malava, Deputy Chair of the Adoption Board, and Päivi Sihvo, the child protection expert member in the Section for Adoption Permission Matters attended the Nordic Adoption Council (NAC) Open Day conference in Iceland on 15 Sep 2023

. The Chair and Secretaries of the Adoption Board joined the conference via remote connection. The theme of the conference was 'Adoption – a lifelong process'.

## **Central authority cooperation**

Lawyer Johanna Huovinen and Senior Officer Minna Malviniemi attended the annual meeting of Nordic central authorities for adoption organised by the Swedish central authority, the Family Law and Parental Support Authority (*Myndigheten för familjerätt och föräldraskapsstöd*), in Skellefteå, Sweden on 26–27 Apr 2023.

Chair Irene Pärssinen-Hentula and Senior Officer Minna Malviniemi joined the Global Consultation Conference of the central authority of the Philippines (National Authority for Child Care, NACC) on 9–13 Oct 2023 via remote connection.

The Adoption Board's secretariat regularly replies to correspondence and enquiries from central adoption authorities and submits enquiries on behalf of the Board to adoption service providers and other central adoption authorities internationally. Occasionally, the secretariat also corresponds with other relevant authorities.

## **Implementation of the Hague Adoption Convention**

The Hague Conference on Private International Law (HCCH), tasked with monitoring and developing the implementation of the Hague Adoption Convention, last convened a meeting of the Special Commission in 2022. Between the meetings, the central authorities of the Contracting States, including the Finnish Adoption Board, continue to monitor and develop the implementation of the Hague Adoption Convention, including by responding to enquiries from the Hague Permanent Bureau.

The Adoption Board's secretariat joined the Regional Conference organised by the HCCH Permanent Bureau, South Africa and Finland on 7–8 Feb 2023, titled 'The HCCH and the relevance of its work for Southern Africa', via remote



connection. The event was hosted by the University of Pretoria (South Africa). Several HCCH agreements were presented at the conference.

Chair Irene Pärssinen-Hentula and Senior Officer Minna Malviniemi sat on the international Working Group on the Financial Aspects of Intercountry Adoption, set up by the HCCH in 2023. Both countries of origin and countries of destination are represented in the Working Group. The Working Group will sit until late 2024.

On 20 Jun 2023, the Chair of the Adoption Board attended a virtual workshop on post-adoption services for the Contracting States of the Hague Adoption Convention. As the national central authority, the Adoption Board is charged under the Hague Adoption Convention to monitor post-adoption services.

### **International Social Services (ISS)**

The Adoption Board makes use of country-specific information and reports received from the ISS and also requests information needed for its work. This is a particularly valuable resource for the Adoption Board when executing its oversight duties and when considering a licensing application from a Finnish service provider to work with a foreign partner. Valvira pays Finland's annual ISS membership fee, which allows the Adoption Board and other authorities to access its services.

Representatives of the ISS/IRC (International Social Services / International Reference Center for the rights of children deprived of their family) gave a talk on their operations at the meeting of the Section for International Matters on 16 Jan 2023.

The Adoption Board responded to a questionnaire sent to it by the ISS (International Social Services) concerning Ukraine-related adoptions.

## **2.6 Section for Adoption Permission Matters**

The Section for Adoption Permission Matters is responsible for processing applications for adoption permission and extensions to permissions already granted. The Section also considers applications for amending the terms and conditions of an adoption permission, notifications about material changes to an adoption applicant's circumstances and the cancellation of previously granted adoption permissions.



As a rule, an adoption permission is always required in Finland for adoptions involving a child under the age of 18. A permission must be applied for in domestic adoptions as per section 40 of the Adoption Act, in intercountry adoptions through a service provider as per section 41 of the Adoption Act and intercountry adoptions without a service provider as per section 42 of the Adoption Act. An adoption permission is not required for domestic adoptions if the applicant intends to adopt a child of his/her spouse (intra-family adoption) or a child who has been cared for and brought up by the applicant on an established basis.

The permission for adoption remains valid for a maximum of two years. If necessary, an extension to the validity of the permission must be applied for before the permission expires. In the event of a material change in the prospective adopter's circumstances during the validity period, the Adoption Board must be notified immediately.

The Adoption Board's Section for Adoption Permission Matters held 21 meetings in the course of 2023, convening in a full formation for 11 meetings and in a limited formation for 10 meetings. In its limited formation, the Section comprises the Chair or Deputy Chair of the Board along with a member or deputy member of a section with expertise in child protection or adoption counselling. A matter may be considered in a limited formation provided that, with regard to the circumstances of the case and previous decisions of the Board, it is evident how the matter should be decided. In its limited formation, the Board is authorised to grant adoption permissions under sections 40 and 41 of the Adoption Act, extend the validity of an adoption permission, approve the change of an adoption service provider or minor changes to the terms and conditions of an adoption permission, and decide that a notification regarding a material change in the prospective adopter's circumstances does not merit the cancellation of or a change to the terms and conditions of a permission already granted.

In 2023, the Section for Adoption Permission Matters granted 45 new permissions under section 41 of the Adoption Act for intercountry adoption taking place via a service provider and extended the validity of 56 permissions for intercountry adoption. (In 2022, by comparison, 5272 new permissions for intercountry adoption were granted, and the validity of 66 permissions was extended.)

In 2023, the Adoption Board's Section for Adoption Permission Matters granted 19 new permissions for domestic adoption and extended the validity of 37 permissions. (In 2022, the Adoption Board granted 26 new permissions and extended the validity of 13 permissions for domestic adoption.)

A total of 21 decisions were taken by the Board in 2023 in respect of notifications regarding a change in the prospective adopters' circumstances. (25 decisions were made in 2022 due to changes in circumstances.)

In some exceptional circumstances, it may not be possible to use the services of an intercountry adoption service provider. In these cases, permission for intercountry adoption under section 42 of the Adoption Act may be granted principally if the child is to be adopted by a close relative, if Finnish service providers do not operate in the child's country of origin and if intercountry adoption is in the best interests of the child. The Adoption Board's Section for Adoption Permission Matters deals with individual applications for adoption without a service provider.

### 3 Intercountry adoptions

As a rule, an intercountry adoption service provider must always be used for intercountry adoptions. In 2023, there were three adoption service providers operating in Finland: Interpedia, the Intercountry Adoption Service of Save the Children Finland and the service provided by the Social Services and Health Care Division of the City of Helsinki. The City of Helsinki service is no longer accepting new applications from prospective adopters. However, they will complete pending applications and provide post-adoption services for former clients. At the end of 2023, the three Finnish intercountry adoption service providers combined were licensed to operate in 8 countries.

Service providers are responsible for assisting prospective adopters in measures relating to the intercountry adoption of a child under the age of 18 years and ensure that the adoption takes place in the best interests of the child with respect for the fundamental rights of the child as recognised in international law and without anyone deriving improper financial or other gain from the process.

Under the Adoption Act, the service provider's statutory duties include providing post-adoption services in intercountry adoption. These must be considered to include at least the following: the obligation to retain documents as per section 92; support and counselling for access to information for post-adoption service clients as per section 93; and the obligation under section 33(2)3–4 to assist in gaining access to information about the child and their origin from the child's state of origin and provide the information recipient with the necessary support and guidance. This includes the support and counselling to be given to prospective adopters planning adoption travel or about to embark on adoption travel.

To ensure the availability of statutory post-adoption services, Valvira made the Government-approved appropriation for 2023 available to international adoption service providers for this purpose. The Adoption Board and Valvira are monitoring use of the funding. Service providers and the Adoption Board estimate that post-adoption services will increase in volume in the near future as the number of adoptees attaining adolescence and adulthood increases. The volume of post-adoption services will be a relevant indicator in the analysis of adoption work volumes in the future.

### 3.1 Service providers' international partners

The Adoption Board grants licences for the provision of intercountry adoption service and grants Finnish service providers licences to cooperate with a foreign service provider. Licences are granted for a maximum of five years. The tables below show the service providers' valid cooperation licences by country as at 31 December 2023.

**Table 1: Save the Children**

Country of origin	Central authority	Contact
Bulgaria	Ministry of Justice	ANIDO Association
The Philippines	National Authority for Child Care (NACC)	National Authority for Child Care (NACC)
China (PRC)	China Centre for Children's Welfare and Adoption (CCCWA)	China Centre for Children's Welfare and Adoption (CCCWA)
Thailand	Department of Children and Youth (DCY)	Department of Children and Youth (DCY) Thai Red Cross Children's Home (TRRCH)
Czechia	Office for international Legal Protection of Children (UMPOD)	Office for international Legal Protection of Children (UMPOD)

**Table 2: Interpedia ry**

Country of origin	Central authority	Contact
Bulgaria	Ministry of Justice	Family National Association (FNA)
South Africa	Department of Social Development	Abba Specialist Adoption & Social Services (Abba)
India	Central Authority Resource Agency (CARA)	Central Authority Resource Agency (CARA)

Colombia	Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar Familiar (ICBF)	Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar Familiar (ICBF) Fundación Casa de la Madre y el Niño La Fundación Ayuda a la Infancia Hogar Bambi Chiquitines
Thailand	Department of Children and Youth (DCY)	Department of Children and Youth (DCY)

**Table 3: City of Helsinki**

Country of origin	Central authority	Contact
Bulgaria	Ministry of Justice	Sunny Child Association
South Africa	Department of Social Development	Jo'burg Child Welfare (JCW)

### 3.2 Trend in number of children arriving in Finland

Since 1985, a total of 4,968 children have arrived in Finland via intercountry adoption facilitated by service providers. The largest number of children in any one year arriving facilitated by a service provider was 308, in 2005. Since then, the number of children arriving in Finland per year has declined, to 160 in 2010 and 93 in 2015. In 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic slowed down adoption processes in all countries of origin. In 2020, the number of children arriving in Finland was 27. In 2021, the number of children arriving was 67, returning to pre-pandemic (2019) levels. In 2022 and 2023, the number of arrivals was 57 and 53, respectively.

There are no statistics available on the number of domestic adoptions from outside the family, as the Adoption Board is not notified of adoptions taking place in Finland.

**Number of children arriving in Finland on an intercountry adoption facilitated by service providers in 1985–2023.**

	1985 – 2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Bulgaria														1			4			7	1	
Dominican Republic	6																					
South Africa	22	23	24	27	22	25	36	41	32	45	32	37	37	35	14	22	13	25	6	25	13	17
Ethiopia	191	6	7	5	15	13	14	16	10	10	3	3	3	1								
The Philip-pines	7	12	12	19	21	19	11	10	12	8	21	10	14	6	9	7	5	6	3	7	3	1
Guatemala	13																					
India	97	6	8	15	4	9	2	7	3	7	8	8	7	5	5	5	6	3	1	2	12	9
Republic of Karelia	3																					
Kenya									9	6	10	4	6	4								
China	265	61	133	140	49	46	18	33	23	41	62	47	33	27	10	13	7	1				1
Colombia	385	37	22	20	18	14	17	11	11	7	8	2	16	5	9	8	6	9	8	3	4	6
Poland	24	1	2	2																		
Romania	34																					
Sri Lanka	43																					
Taiwan	1															2	1	2	2			
Thailand	334	64	36	42	37	27	24	31	22	8	14	15	15	9	11	13	10	21	7	23	24	19
Russia	550	26	41	35	50	20	34	36	38	31	17	15	10									
Vietnam	35																					
Estonia	60	2	4	3	2	3	1	2					1									
<b>Total</b>	<b>2070</b>	<b>238</b>	<b>289</b>	<b>308</b>	<b>218</b>	<b>176</b>	<b>157</b>	<b>187</b>	<b>160</b>	<b>163</b>	<b>175</b>	<b>141</b>	<b>142</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>53</b>



# Valvira

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