

## Geography In The News™



Neal Lineback  
and Mandy Lineback Gritzner

### GLOBAL CHILD ADOPTIONS DECLINE

After an earthquake hit Haiti in January 2010, thousands of requests to adopt the children orphaned in the disaster inundated the country. Few were actually granted, especially after American missionaries were arrested trying to take 33 Haitian children out of the country.

An article in *The Christian Science Monitor* by Scott Baldauf (Mar. 15, 2010) detailed new trends in global adoptions. Throughout the world, tougher laws aimed at protecting children have emerged in the last five years. In addition, cultural norms are changing and domestic adoptions are on the rise in many developing countries. International adoptions, in fact, are on the decline.

International adoption, or intercountry adoption, occurs when an individual or couple becomes the legal and permanent parents of a child who is a citizen of another country. In most cases, the parents must meet the legal adoption requirements of both countries.

Laws allowing international adoption vary by country. For example, some countries, such as the United Arab Emirates (UAE), expressly forbid international adoption. Others, including China and Korea, have relatively well-established rules and procedures for foreign adopters to follow.

Some countries, most notably in Africa, now require that adoptive parents be residents of that country. In essence, these laws disallow most international adoptions. The policies dictate that families within the country, preferably relatives, adopt orphaned children.

Approximately 180 countries worldwide allow international adoptions. In the last few years, however, some countries have

closed their doors to intercountry adoption over accusations of illegal child trafficking, including baby theft, coercion of birth mothers and selling of children.

Adoption was once a secretive and shameful process in many countries. International adoption was particularly difficult for some countries whose citizens felt embarrassed that they could not support their own orphaned children. But as more people from rich countries travelled abroad to adopt children, international adoption grew popular, hitting a peak around 2004.

The United States has always been at the top of the list of adopting countries. In 2004, for instance, 22,884 children found new homes in this country. Spain, Italy, France and Canada follow the United States, each with fewer than 7,500 adoptions yearly.

Until recently, the top countries from which children were adopted were China, Russia and Guatemala. In the last five years, however, each of these countries has reduced the number of children available for international adoption.

In China, the number of children sent abroad fell from 14,500 in 2005 to 5,942 in 2008. In the past, the one-child policy, in a culture where boys are more valuable than girls, left many girls up for adoption. Now, increased prosperity and changing cultural norms have made more Chinese parents

100,000 Russian children were placed in temporary foster homes in Russia. As the Russian government developed its adoptions and foster homes programs, more of the new Russian middle class began to welcome children into their families. This left fewer children available for adoption internationally.

In Guatemala, a different situation exists. Once Guatemala was the world's second-largest source for international adoptions, but the government halted the process for a while amid allegations of baby theft and coercion of birth mothers to give up their children. Now the process may be restarted later this year. Unfortunately, Guatemala's new rules may keep children in orphanages longer. Because most parents want infants or toddlers, in general, the adoptability of a child tends to decrease with age.

Haiti shut down international adoptions following the earthquake, in part because records were destroyed and the legal system was in disarray. The process may resume later, but it will likely continue to be slow and measured.

International adoption has never been inexpensive. The average total cost to adopt a child from another country is between \$20,000 and \$40,000. That total includes adoption program fees, individual country fees, U.S. visa fees, legal fees and miscellaneous travel expenses.

When compared with domestic adoption, international adoption is a relatively new phenomenon.

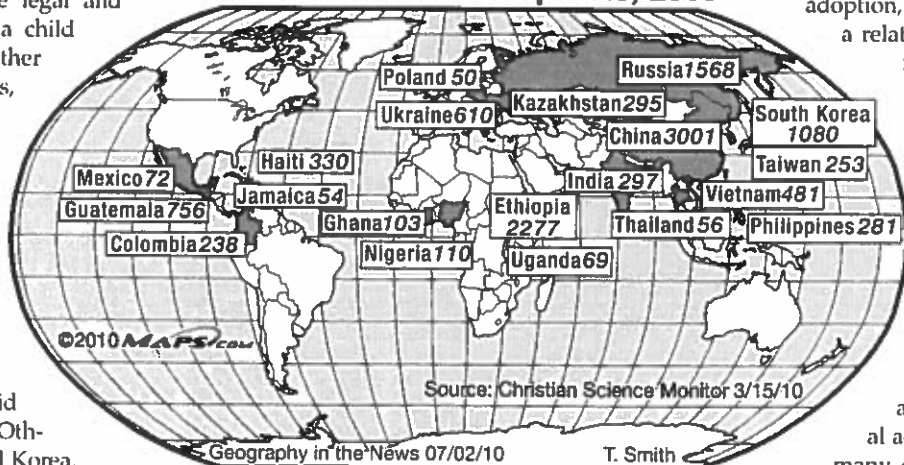
Some question whether a child has a sense of belonging in their new culture. Oftentimes, the adopted children are encouraged to explore the traditions and customs of their country of birth.

With the declining numbers of children available for international adoption, the trend raises many questions about what is "good" for the children. While many potential adopting couples are interested in providing disadvantaged international orphans with stable homes, many countries are deciding to keep their orphans "closer to home."

And that is *Geography in the News™*. July 2, 2010. #1048.

Co-authors are Neal Lineback, Appalachian State University Professor Emeritus of Geography, and Geographer Mandy Lineback Gritzner. University News Director Jane Nicholson serves as technical editor.

#### U.S. International Adoptions, 2009



Sources: Baldauf, Scott, "Adoption's Big Fix," *The Christian Science Monitor*, Mar. 15, 2010

likely to keep a girl. Furthermore, the Chinese government has encouraged domestic adoption.

In Russia, the trends are similar. In 2004, 9,400 Russian children were adopted internationally and Russian citizens adopted 7,000. By 2008, foreigners adopted only 1,198 Russian children and Russian citizens adopted 7,683. In addition, more than