

Trends in U.S. Adoptions: 2000 to 2009

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Background

- Researchers and organizations collect vast amounts of data about the characteristics of adoptive families, children who are adopted, the reasons for adoption, and the many other factors and circumstances of adoption. Unfortunately, however, there is a scarcity of national, regularly collected data about the total number of adoptions (public, intercountry, and other), and there are no official statistics for the total number of adoptions in the United States.
- No single agency is charged with compiling this information, and agencies that do collect adoption-related data do so for their own purposes and therefore count adoptions differently (e.g., by court cases filed, by birth certificates modified), which makes compilation difficult.
- Over the past 20 years, only a handful of national, comprehensive statistics have been compiled on the total number of children adopted in the United States, such as Flango (1990), Flango and Flango (1993, 1995), Flango and Caskey (2006), and Child Welfare Information Gateway (2004, 2011).
- Information on total U.S. adoptions is needed by policymakers, government agencies, court personnel, social workers, adoption-related organizations, advocacy groups, and others to help guide adoption practice and policy, include strategies to increase placements, plan for postadoptive services, and determine funding and personnel needs.

Methodology

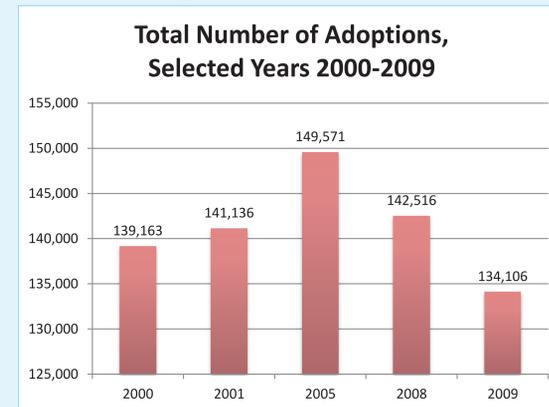
This study estimated the number of total adoptions in the United States (50 States plus the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico) by compiling data the following sources:

- **State courts:** Data on adoption filings (requests to adopt that are submitted to the court) and dispositions (decisions by the court to grant or deny adoptions) were obtained primarily from the National Center for State Courts (NCSC). Court data for several States in certain years, however, were obtained directly from the State or county courts because they did not submit data to NCSC.
- **State child welfare agencies:** The total number of public agency adoptions is based solely on data submitted by State child welfare agencies to the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) of the Children's Bureau of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Some total adoption data that were not available through NCSC were collected directly from State child welfare agencies, who usually receive that information from the court system.
- **State bureaus of vital records:** Data from bureaus of vital records (or vital statistics) were used when domestic adoption data could not be collected from the State court or State child welfare agency. Bureaus of vital records base their data on the number of requests to amend a birth certificate due to an adoption.
- **Department of State:** The Office of Children's Issues within the Bureau of Consular Affairs collects data on the number of immigrant visas issued to children to enter the United States for the purpose of an intercountry adoption. All intercountry adoption data for this study were obtained from the Office of Children's Issues website.

This study also yielded data for "other" types of adoption, which includes all types of adoptions that are not public agency or intercountry, such as private agency, tribal, facilitated, independent, and stepparent. The number of other types of adoption was estimated by subtracting both the number of public agency adoptions reported in AFCARS and the number of intercountry adoptions reported by the State Department from the total number of adoptions, as reported by the courts, State bureaus of vital records, or State child welfare agencies.

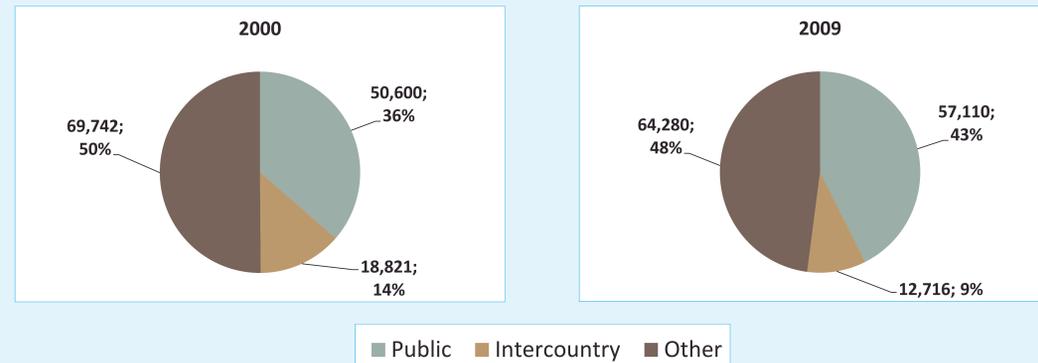
Results

Total Adoptions



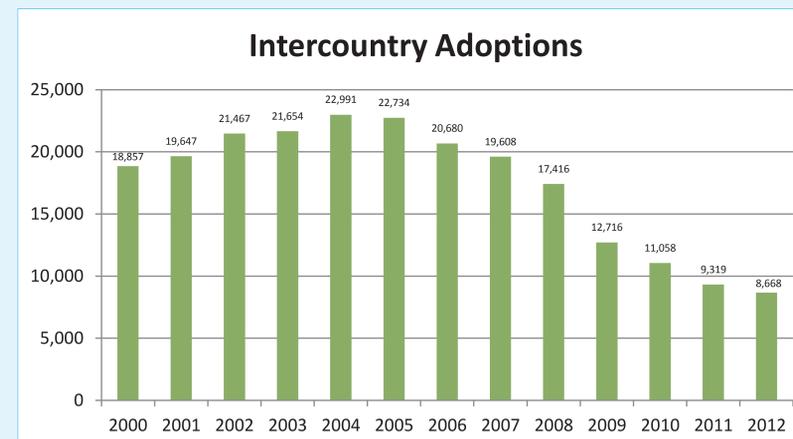
- 134,106 children were adopted in the United States in 2009.
- 139,163 children were adopted in the United States in 2000.
- There was a 4-percent decrease in the total number of adoptions from 2000 to 2009.
- There was a 13-percent decrease in the adoption rate per 100,000 adults from 2000 (65.6) to 2009 (57.0)
- States with the highest adoption rates per 100,000 adults in 2009: Alaska (148.95), Maine (120.15), and Arkansas (107.92)
- States with the lowest adoption rates per 100,00 adults in 2009: Puerto Rico (10.65), California (38.09), and New Jersey (40.87)

Adoptions by Type



- There was a 13-percent increase in public adoptions from 2000 to 2009.
- In 2009, 14 States had 50 percent or more of their adoptions placed by a public agency.
- Other adoptions remained relatively stable (50 percent in 2000 vs. 48 percent in 2009).

Intercountry Adoptions



- There was a 32-percent decrease in intercountry adoptions from 2000 to 2009.
- There was a 27-percent decrease in intercountry adoptions from 2008 to 2009.
- The decrease in intercountry adoptions from 2008 to 2009 represents 77 percent of the decrease in intercountry adoptions from 2000 to 2009.

Discussion

Although the study yielded estimates of the total numbers of adoption and trends in various categories over time, it does not explain why the data presented this way. The following are potential factors that may have affected the number of adoptions:

- The steep decrease in intercountry adoptions may have been caused or heightened by the United States' 2008 ratification of the Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect to Intercountry Adoption. The decrease in intercountry adoptions began in 2004, but the decrease of 4,700 adoptions from 2008 to 2009 represents 77 percent of the decrease from 2000 to 2009. Seventy-one percent of that decrease was due to a decrease in adoptions from Guatemala, from which the U.S. stopped receiving adoptions after ratifying the Hague Convention.
- Adoptions from foreign countries have historically varied considerably over time.
- The decline in the U.S. economy between 2000 and 2009 could have contributed to the decrease in adoptions, with that environment putting an additional monetary and personal strain on families who would have otherwise considered adoption.
- Improvements in the availability and treatment of infertility may have reduced the number of couples considering adoption since infertility is often reported as the primary reason for seeking to adopt a child (Bitler & Schmidt, 2012; Malm & Welti, 2010; Van Laningham, Scheuble, & Johnson, 2012).

It is most likely that numerous factors affected the number of adoptions in the United States, with factors probably varying to some degree from State to State.

Limitations

- There is no overlap between AFCARS data and the data provided by the Department of State, but there may be overlap provided by NCSC and the Department of State because adopted children may also be adopted in a U.S. court. Since there are no available data about the percentage of intercountry adoptions that are also processed in U.S. courts, we assumed that (1) families in states that give full effect and recognition to adoptions made in other countries *would not* readopt their children in U.S. courts and (2) families in states that do not give full effect and recognition *would* readopt their children in U.S. courts.
- The time parameters for the data (e.g., fiscal year, calendar year) often change depending on the data source. Since totals from the various sources tend not to change drastically from year to year, it is reasonable to make calculations using data gathered during different timeframes.
- Bureaus of vital records report when the birth certificate amendment was processed, which may not occur within the same year the adoption was finalized. This could cause a double count of children if a child was born in a state that provided data on birth certificate amendments and then adopted in a state that provided court data.
- Breakouts of types of adoption within "other" are not possible based on the available data.

References

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To view a webinar about the data presented in this study (*Who Cares About Adoption Data? We Do.*), visit <http://vimeo.com/80275588>.



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