

CLEARINGHOUSE FOR MILITARY FAMILY READINESS

Adoption and Military Families

Rapid Literature Review

Clearinghouse Technical Assistance Team

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Executive Summary

This report was developed in response to a request from the Office of Military Community and Family Policy. The Technical Assistance (TA) Team at the Clearinghouse for Military Family Readiness at Penn State (Clearinghouse) was asked to conduct a rapid literature review that analyzes seven questions:

- **What are notable differences across states on qualifications, processes, and laws for adoption by military families?**

Domestic adoption is subject to varying state adoption laws. These laws can be flexible with regard to parent age and marital status, how much time it takes for background checks to be performed, and whether and/or how a child's history can be accessed. The TA team focused on three states (i.e., Texas, North Carolina, and North Dakota) that have a large military presence in order to understand examples of potential differences in adoptions between states. In comparing Texas, North Carolina, and North Dakota, notable distinctions were identified between the states, such as minimum adoptive parent age requirements (e.g., 21, 18, and no limit, respectively) and variations in home-study procedures (e.g., agency protocols and the duration of the studies). However, they share commonalities such as background checks, training programs for prospective adoptive families, and post-placement study requirements.

- **How does the process of domestic adoption differ from international adoption for military families, and are there barriers unique to international adoption for military-connected individuals who wish to adopt?**

Domestic adoption requirements differ from international adoption conditions due to differing laws and flexibility issues. International adoption adheres to The Hague Convention in participating countries, which imposes age and marital status restrictions, requires extensive background checks, and offers limited child background information. Wait times for placement can be comparable but may be longer for international adoption as it can involve more extensive and costly travel. While costs are similar, the distribution varies, including potential time-off expenses. Post-placement assessments are required in both types of adoption, but international adoption may involve varying post-placement report requirements.

- **What adoption benefits do non-DoD federal agencies provide to their employees?**

All federal employees, regardless of the agency or branch they work for, are entitled to the same suite of benefits. Although agencies can customize compensation and benefits to compete with other employers, the TA team did not find any significant differences in adoption benefits offered by non-Department of Defense (DoD) federal agencies. Federal employee adoption benefits fall into six categories: leave, work/life programs, insurance, flexible spending accounts, and tax benefits.

- **Would the benefits provided by non-DoD federal agencies to their employees be feasible for the Department of Defense to implement?**

The adoption benefits provided to active duty Service members by the DoD currently meet or surpass those provided by the federal government to all other federal employees. For example, Service members have access to Military OneSource adoption-consultation resources; however, other federal employees do not.

- **What adoption benefits are offered in the commercial or private sector?**

Adoption benefits in the private and commercial sectors are voluntary policies that are funded by employers to support adoptive parents. These benefits typically encompass paid or unpaid leave, financial aid for adoption costs, and internal educational resources. As of 2020, approximately 40% of employers offered paid leave to adoptive parents.

- **Who are the key players in the adoption sector?**

In the adoption sector, key players include federally funded organizations and commercial, private, and nonprofit organizations. The Children's Bureau, under the United States Department of Health and Human Services, collaborates with various agencies to improve child and family well-being, and its subsidiary, the Child Welfare Information Gateway, offers resources on child-welfare topics. AdoptUSKids, funded by and operated in partnership with the Children's Bureau and Child Welfare Information Gateway, connects foster children with families and provides adoption-related resources. Commercial, private, and nonprofit organizations also play a vital role. For example, the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption focuses on increasing adoptions from foster care, and the National Council for Adoption offers expertise, advocacy, and support in adoption-related matters.

- **What adoption support services are offered in the commercial or private sector?**

Adoption agencies provide the bulk of direct-support services to adoptive families. They act as intermediaries and facilitate adoptions by matching parents with children, providing counseling, conducting home studies, offering education, handling paperwork, and managing post-placement visits.

This rapid literature review evaluates available information from state and federal guidance and examines published content from private and non-profit organizations in an effort to address the eight questions posed above.

The TA team did not locate any scholarly, peer-reviewed studies or academic literature targeting the effectiveness of adoption support services. However, this report includes information from grey literature and other resources that can help military families make informed decisions and ease the adoption process.

This report provides information on the following elements:

- Background and definitions;
- Domestic adoption information, potential barriers, and state comparisons;
- International adoption information, potential barriers, and comparisons to domestic adoptions;
- Non-DoD federal agency adoption benefits and support for federal employees;
- Commercial sector employer-provided adoption benefits; and
- Key players in the adoption sector.

Note, this rapid literature review provides a preliminary examination of the research. Thus, given the brief timeline, this report is not intended to serve as a comprehensive review of the literature, and the resources provided are not endorsed by the Clearinghouse. The information about the resources is provided to help professionals make a data-driven decision about next steps.

Introduction

The Technical Assistance (TA) team at the Clearinghouse for Military Family Readiness at Penn State (Clearinghouse) conducted a brief, rapid literature review on the seven research questions listed above and examined state and international adoptions and federal- and commercial-adoption agencies. Research that examines these topics was identified by searching peer-reviewed journal articles and grey literature, and an

emphasis was placed on research published between 2013 and 2023. Search queries included various combinations of the following terms: *adoption, military, international adoption, domestic adoption, foster to adopt, support services, federal agencies, adoption agencies, and employee benefits.*

Note, this report is provided as a supplement to evidence-informed reports already reviewed by the Office of Community and Military Policy. Specifically, this report addresses the topics of adoption and the barriers military family members face when adopting.

Background and Definitions

Although there are approximately 1.3 million active duty Service members and about 400,000 children who are waiting to be adopted, Department of Defense (DoD) data from 2016-2020 suggest that only 2,174 military families pursued adoption while on active duty during this time period (United States Government Accountability Office [GAO], 2021). The adoption process may be long and difficult for any family. However, military families endure added challenges when they pursue adoption, such as coping with frequent moves due to deployment or permanent change of station, adhering to differences in adoption laws between states or countries, and needing to enroll the adoptive child in the military benefit system.

Conversely, military families also offer unique advantages for adoptive children. Military families are skilled at adjusting to different environments and often live among different cultures. Due to their frequent relocations, military families receive guidance and training on learning how to be resilient, flexible, and organized, and they know how to keep their families strong during challenging times and times of separation. In addition, the military promotes a culture of service and belonging, which can be helpful in adoptive situations (Gilmore, n.d.). Adapting to new places, forming new relationships, and having support networks worldwide are some reasons why military families can make forever homes for these children and teach them skills they can use throughout their lives (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2021c).

Note, this report is intended to supplement research and evidence-informed findings that have been previously identified by the Military Community and Family Policy (MC&FP) Office. One report of note is the 2021 GAO's Report to Congressional Committee's "Military Families: Additional DOD Actions Could Better Support Military Foster and Adoptive Families (GAO-21-438)." This GAO report describes the detailed barriers military families face as they seek adoption and provides a list of

recommendations, for the DoD, that may improve support for military families who are seeking to adopt. A copy of the GAO report is available here:

<https://acrobat.adobe.com/link/review?uri=urn:aaid:scds:US:d6586c2a-54fd-371c-bb02-91d743361e8e>.

This rapid literature review seeks to extend and add to the knowledge provided by this GAO report. This review includes a discussion of how states differ in domestic adoption laws and policies and how these differences impact military families. Domestic adoption is the term used to describe when adoptive parents, birth parents, and the adopted child live within the United States. The process of domestic adoption involves multiple government agencies (i.e., federal, state, and local entities) and private organizations and is guided by state laws and policies. These various entities play different roles in finding homes for children through foster care or adoption.

At the federal level, the United States Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) supervises and monitors states to make sure their child welfare programs, including programs for families adopting through foster care, follow applicable federal laws and rules. However, HHS does not have a role in monitoring or managing private adoptions, which is when children are adopted through private adoption agencies or attorneys.

At the state level, each individual state has control over how adoptions happen within their jurisdictions, including private adoptions and adoptions through foster care. Each state has its own laws for assessing if an individual is suitable to be a foster or adoptive parent and uses a home-study assessment to make determinations. This assessment typically involves background checks, interviews, and home visits and can take 2 to 10 months to complete dependent on waiting lists and training availability. Most states require prospective foster and adoptive parents to go through training to help them understand the challenges of foster care and adoption. States also ensure children in foster care receive the services they need, especially if these children have been through traumatic experiences such as abuse or neglect. Children in foster care often need mental and physical health services, particularly if they come from a history of abuse or neglect, and each state offers these services. Infants adopted privately usually need fewer services since their adoptions often happen shortly after they are born (GAO, 2021).

Locally, different organizations (e.g., county and private placement agencies) directly assist families with the different stages of fostering or adopting. Private adoption agencies and attorneys usually assist with private adoptions, which are sometimes called open or independent adoptions (GAO, 2021).

Below are descriptions of the three different types of domestic adoptions: public agency, private agency, and independent.

Domestic Adoption

Forms of Domestic Adoption

Public-Agency Adoption

Public agencies, or private agencies hired by public agencies, find and prepare families to adopt children from foster care. Foster care is when children are removed from their families, due to lack of care, neglect, or mistreatment, and are looked after by a child-welfare agency. These children can range in age from infants to teenagers (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2021a). The agency intends to find a safe and temporary home for the child with the goal of reuniting the child with their own family when conditions are deemed to be safe. If that situation is not possible, the agency seeks to locate a new loving home for the child as soon as possible. Foster families can choose to officially adopt the foster child if reunification is impossible (GAO, 2021). This report will focus on adoption, as opposed to fostering, but will include foster-to-adopt situations.

Private-Agency Adoption

In a private-agency adoption, birth parents give up their rights as parents, and prospective parents work with a licensed agency to adopt infants shortly after birth. However, the agreement of birth parents to adoption is not fully confirmed until after the baby is born. Different states have different rules about when birth parents can give their agreement and the conditions under which they can change their minds. People who want to adopt should be familiar with these laws and realize that some birth parents may not continue with the adoption process. In addition, the amount of time prospective parents may need to wait for an infant adoption can vary greatly and could take several years or more. Private adoption agencies might have certain requirements that potential adoptive parents must meet in order to adopt an infant. These agencies provide training, support groups, and/or therapists or counselors to help adoptive families deal with any challenges they may face before or after the adoption is completed (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2021a). Since private-agency adoptions, generally, involve adopting infants shortly after birth or include stepparent adoptions of a spouse's child, the government

agency is not usually involved because the children are not in the foster care system (GAO, 2021).

Independent Adoption

Families who choose independent adoption often find expectant parents or the expectant mother without using an agency's assistance and employ a private attorney to assist in the process. In some cases, the lawyer may find expectant parents who are looking for adoptive families. Generally, infants are placed directly with the adoptive parents right after they are born, often while still in the hospital. Similar to private-agency adoptions, laws differ among states about when birth parents can give their consent and the time frames for them to change their minds as there is always the chance that birth parents might decide to raise the child themselves after the baby is born. Until birth parents officially give up their rights, they are legally the child's parents. Lawyers who help with independent adoptions must follow the rules set by the American Bar Association and any relevant state and federal laws. Some lawyers who specialize in adoption are part of the American Academy of Adoption and Assisted Reproduction Attorneys, which is a professional group that follows ethical practices (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2021a).

Interstate Domestic Adoption

Military families may adopt children who live in a different state than they do (i.e., an interstate adoption). The process for an interstate adoption involving multiple states is very similar to adopting a child within the same state. The process typically includes the following timeline: a family shows interest in adoption, a child is matched with the family, visits occur, paperwork and home study are completed, and the adoption is finalized in the court (AdoptUSKids, 2019).

The process that ensures how children are placed for adoption across state lines is guided by The Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC). The ICPC is an agreement that all 50 states, Washington, D.C., and the U.S. Virgin Islands follow, and it establishes and enforces rules to ensure that children remain safe and stable. The ICPC says that families must adhere to the receiving state's laws (i.e., adoptive family's state) and the sending state's laws (i.e., adoptive child's state). This requirement demands information sharing between all stakeholders. ICPC administrators assess the information to ensure it meets each state's laws.

The interstate adoption steps include the following:

1. The child's agency requests a home study and prepares details about the child's needs including form ICPC 100-A.
2. After receiving the packet from the agency, an ICPC administrator in the child's state reviews it and sends it to the ICPC administrator in the family's state.
3. The ICPC administrator in the receiving family's state reviews the information and sends it to the family's agency.
4. A home study is done by the family's agency to determine if placement is a good fit, and, then, the study is reviewed by both states.
5. If the child is placed with the family, the family's agency assumes responsibility for supervising the child's care. They report to the child's agency through the ICPC administrators.
6. The state where the child lives keeps legal and financial responsibility for the child until the adoption is finalized, the child turns 18 years old, or the child can support themselves. (AdoptUSKids, 2019).

The additional steps involved in the interstate adoption process listed above may negatively impact the ease of the adoption process for military families. For example, military families may need to choose their state of residence (e.g., duty station, home state), which may involve additional actions (e.g., updating legal documents, purchasing a home). In addition, home-study and post-placement processes may vary and, therefore, cause disruption if a Service member is relocated during the adoption process.

Barriers to Adoption for Service Members and Families Related to Location and State

State of Residence

Members of the Armed Forces can find it difficult to determine legal residence due to their transient lifestyles. Those who actively serve in the military will find that work and living locations are dictated by the military itself. However, where the military assigns a Service member for duty may not align with their "legal residence" because duty assignments are considered temporary, and a legal residence is more permanent and represents where a Service member intends to settle after their military service (Moy, 2016).

Changing legal residence is possible, but it's crucial to understand that the legal residence must be established. There are three prerequisites for changing an individual's legal residence: physical presence in the state, an intention to remain in that state indefinitely,

and an intention to abandon that person's previous legal residence. For instance, if a Soldier grew up in Maryland but is stationed in Texas and wishes to make Texas their legal residence, they must meet the aforementioned requirements. These conditions include the individual's physical presence in Texas due to military duty and their intent to consider Texas as their permanent home beyond military service. Demonstrating this intent involves actions like registering to vote, obtaining a driver's license, updating legal documents, paying taxes, purchasing property, and notifying the previous state's revenue department of the residence change. States, especially their tax departments, closely monitor these actions, so it is important to address any questions regarding tax payments to the previous state through the local Legal Assistance Office.

Changing state of residence involves completing DA Form 2058 and submitting it to the personnel office, which informs the Defense Finance and Accounting Service (DFAS) about the state for tax withholding. However, filing this form alone does not change one's legal residence; the change is completed after the requirements have been met.

Home-Study Process

The home-study process, which assesses the suitability of adoptive parents, may have different requirements and standards in each state; however, all states require one. In every U.S. state, including the District of Columbia, American Samoa, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands, every adoption applicant, whether they are single or a couple adopting together, must undergo an assessment as part of the adoption home-study process. In approximately 22 states, this evaluation extends to any adult who is living in the household. In 21 states, and in the District of Columbia and Guam, the home study encompasses all household members regardless of their age (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2021b).

State laws and regulations outline the specific individual or organization authorized to carry out a home study that the court will accept. In the majority of states, this is typically the department overseeing child-welfare or a licensed child-placing agency. In 12 states, a licensed social worker is permitted to perform home studies. In five states, a licensed psychologist or therapist is authorized to conduct these assessments. In 10 states and the Northern Mariana Islands, the court designates an individual to conduct the studies. In seven states, either a licensed or department-qualified agency or an eligible individual can complete the assessment of the prospective adoptive home (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2021b). In addition, the timelines of when these home studies need to be completed varies between states. An individual should ensure that the home study

conducted in their home state complies with the requirements of both their home state and the state from which they are adopting.

Background Checks

Adoption laws and procedures can vary significantly among states. In all U.S. states, the District of Columbia, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, and Puerto Rico, there are laws or regulations that mandate background investigations for prospective foster and adoptive parents and kinship caregivers. Many of these laws also necessitate background checks for all adults residing in the homes of prospective foster and adoptive parents.

These state-level statutes align with federal law that is outlined in Title IV-E of the Social Security Act. Under this federal law, states are obligated to incorporate provisions into their Title IV-E State plans that involve the completion of the following:

1. Criminal records' checks, which include fingerprint-based checks of national crime databases, for any potential foster or adoptive parent before approving the placement of a child regardless of whether financial assistance is provided on behalf of the child.
2. Checks of any state-maintained child abuse and neglect registry to gather information about prospective foster or adoptive parents and any other adults residing in the household.
3. Checks of the child abuse and neglect registry in any other state where a prospective parent or another adult has lived in the preceding five years.
4. Criminal records' checks, which encompass fingerprint-based checks of national crime databases, for relative guardians and any other adults residing in the homes of relative guardians before the relative guardian can receive kinship guardianship assistance payments on behalf of the child (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2019).

In summary, all states, the District of Columbia, and Guam mandate checks of state criminal records as part of the background investigation process for prospective foster and adoptive parents and other caregivers. Additionally, nearly all states require checks of national criminal records to ensure the safety and suitability of individuals caring for children in the foster care and adoption systems.

Post-Placement Requirements

Post-placement visits or reports may be required by the sending and receiving states. In the majority of states, the process of placing a child with an adoptive family involves ongoing supervision by a caseworker from the department or a child-placing agency until the adoption is officially approved by the court. During this supervisory period, the adoption professional will conduct regular home visits and interview all members of the adoptive family to assess how well the adopted child is integrating and adjusting to their new family environment. Based on these observations, the caseworker may suggest services to help the family address the specific needs of the adopted child.

The findings from these supervisory visits are documented in the family's case record. In five states, regular progress reports that detail the family's adaptation are submitted to the court. The caseworker also keeps records of any changes in the family's circumstances that could impact the child. In 21 states, legal requirements mandate an investigation and a report on the family's progress during the post-placement period. In 19 states, the report and a recommendation regarding the suitability of the adoption are also required (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2021b).

Because of the impact that different state's policies and regulations may impose on a successful adoption for military-connected families, these families need to understand the differences between state policies and the regulations that guide adoptions. While the scope of this report does not allow for a full comparison of the states, this report does provide a snapshot of the adoption policy and regulations in three states that have a significant military presence: North Carolina, North Dakota, and Texas. A sample comparison of some of the differences between these three states is provided in Table 1 below.

The TA team did not find any research to indicate that any specific state is more “military friendly” or more geared toward military families pursuing adoption.

Table 1
Comparison of Differences in Adoption by a Sample of States

	North Carolina	North Dakota	Texas
Number of children waiting to be adopted*	1,168	337	7,463

Eligibility by parental age	At least 18	No age limit	At least 21
Eligibility by marital status	No limitations (i.e., single, married, divorced, or widowed)	No limitations (i.e., single, married, divorced, or widowed)	No limitations (i.e., single, married, divorced, or widowed)
Eligibility by residence	No specific residency requirement	No specific residency requirement	No specific residency requirement
Definition of special needs (criteria used to determine financial assistance for adoptive families)	Child must be 6 years old or older or 2 years old or older (if minority) and be part of a sibling group of three or more children or part of a sibling group of two children in which one child meets criteria: has a medically diagnosed disability, psychiatric condition, or behavioral/emotional disorder and can be diagnosed as mentally challenged or be at risk due to prenatal exposure, abuse, or genetic history.	Child must be 7 years old or older and must belong to a minority race, be part of a sibling group that is being placed together for adoption, or is between the ages of 0-18 and must have a physical, emotional, or mental disability or have been diagnosed by a licensed physician as at high risk for such a disability.	Child must be 6 years old or 2 years old (if minority) and must be adopted with a sibling or has a verifiable disabling condition or meets medical or disability requirements for Supplemental Security Income, or the state deems the child to be unable to return home. Reasonable but unsuccessful efforts had to have been made to find an adoptive placement without adoption assistance.

Maximum amount of financial assistance	\$2,000 per child	\$2,000 per child	\$1,200 per child
Date adoption assistance payments begin	The month after adoption finalization	At adoption placement	The first month after the month of adoption placement. Medicaid and monthly benefits may begin prior to the finalization of the adoption.
Requirements of the home study	The Pre-Placement Assessment (PPA) must be completed by a county department of social services or an agency that is licensed by the department, and all individuals over 18 living in the home must be assessed. The home study must be completed or updated within the 18 months preceding placement.	The home assessment must be completed by a licensed child-placing agency. The assessment must include the adoptive parents and any other members of the household or close extended family. An approved home study is valid for 2 years.	A home study is conducted by a licensed agency, a licensed psychologist/therapist, or a person designated by the court. All household members (regardless of age) are evaluated, and all parts of the home, grounds, and outbuildings are inspected in this study. This must be completed within 6 months of the child's placement.
Requirements of the background check	Fingerprint-based criminal histories and abuse/neglect and sex offender registry checks are required of all prospective	Fingerprint-based criminal background check for any prospective adoptive parent and members of	A criminal history background check and an abuse/neglect check are required on all adults in the household. (Adults

	adoptive parents and individuals who are 18 years old or older who reside in the home.	the household is required.	are people ages 14 and older who live in or visit your household regularly.) In addition, Texas requires that the sex offender registry is checked.
Pre-Requisite training for adoptive parents	Trauma Informed Partnering for Safety and Permanence – Model Approach to Partnerships in Parenting training is required for foster families and is strongly suggested for families who are considering adopting from foster care.	Adoptive parents must be educated in the Foster/ Adopt PRIDE model, which is a training program for families who are adopting children from foster care.	Free training is offered, but not required, to learn about issues of abused and neglected children. The family may withdraw from the training meetings at any time. Foster and adoptive parents generally train together.
Requirements of the post-placement study	Post-placement investigation and a report are required. A face-to-face visit must be made within the first week of placement, and visits should be continued at least monthly with the child and the adoptive parents by the family's social worker. Then a recommendation of the suitability of the	Post-placement investigation and a report are required. These stipulations include interviews of all members of the household, a monthly in-person visit with the child in the child's home, and evidence of continued counseling and adoption support services. After	Post-placement investigation and a report are required with all members (4 and older) living full- or part-time in the home. In addition, a recommendation of the suitability of the adoption is required by the agency evaluator.

	adoption is reported.	post-placement requirements have been met and a recommendation of the adoption has been made, families may move to the finalization stage of an adoption.	
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* There is no federally established definition for a child categorized as "waiting for adoption." The Child Welfare Outcomes Report defines such children as those up to age 17 who either have a goal of adoption or have had their parents' parental rights terminated. Children who are 16 years old and older with terminated parental rights pursuing emancipation are excluded from this definition. Individual states may have their own unique definitions for this classification (Children’s Bureau, An Office of the Administration for Children & Families, 2021).

Considerations of How State Differences May Impact Adoptions in Military Families

While there are subtle variations in the adoption procedures across the three states examined in this report, the TA team discovered that there were no significant distinctions among these states when it came to the difficulties encountered by Service members who are in the process of adopting. The GAO report identified frequent relocations and deployments as obstacles in the adoption process in almost all military families interviewed (GAO, 2021). However, these obstacles are not dependent on the Service member's current state of residence. DoD personnel policy supports stability for Service members and their families by reducing the likelihood of families being relocated involuntarily during the adoption process, including the necessary post-adoption assessment. DoD Instruction 1315.18 (2015) “Procedures for Military Personnel Assignments” provides several provisions mitigating the risk of relocation during, or shortly after, the adoption process. Service members in the process of adopting an unrelated child under 18 may have their Permanent Change of Station move deferred to allow time for the adoption to be completed or to prevent disruption of the adoption process. Single Service members adopting a child may be deferred from overseas tours for at least four months, with the potential for longer deferment if operational requirements

allow. Military couples adopting a child can defer overseas tours or temporary assignments for the same period, with the option to waive the deferment. Similarly, single parents receive a minimum four-month deferment after a child's placement in the home as part of the formal adoption process. The High School Senior Stabilization Program, which aims to keep Service members in place in order to help meet the needs of the individual family is another example of a safeguard which was in place prior to relocation and deployment deferrals.

International Adoption

The process of international adoption (i.e., adopting a child from a country outside of the United States and otherwise known as intercountry adoption), may also pose unique challenges for military-connected families. To understand these challenges, one needs to understand how the process of international adoption differs from domestic adoptions.

The most important determinant of the rules and processes involved in an international adoption for all families is whether the adoption involves a country that is part of the Hague Convention. The Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Co-Operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption (known as the Convention or Hague Convention) is an international agreement that intends to prioritize the well-being of children, their birth families, and the families who are adopting them across countries that are part of the Convention. The Convention puts in place important safeguards to prevent children from being kidnapped, sold, or trafficked. The Hague Convention currently includes over 100 countries. In the United States, the Convention has been active since April 1, 2008. Although the TA team did not find any specific data on military families, the State Department's 2022 annual report on Intercountry Adoption reveals valuable insights, including adoption statistics from various countries, Hague Convention participation, adoption destinations in the United States, completion times, and median adoption fees, which may be of particular interest to Service members. The highest number of incoming intercountry adoptions come from Colombia (297), India (245), and Ukraine (235). Of those, the Ukraine is the only one not included in the Hague Convention. This report concluded that the three states children are most commonly adopted into are California (156), Illinois (83), and Texas (146). In addition, this report determined that Albania (385 days), Costa Rica (305 days), and Hungary (266 days) are the three Convention countries that have the shortest completion time, and this may be an important consideration for Service members. Cost is another consideration, and this report shows Guyana (\$5,763), Hong Kong (\$5,950), and Thailand (\$6,000) as being the Convention countries with the lowest median adoption fees. In addition, this report identifies four countries that have substantial regulations or laws that ban adoptions into the United States. These are the

Democratic Republic of Congo, the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, the Republic of Kenya, and the Russian Federation.

Successfully adopting a child from another country can be difficult to navigate considering that U.S. federal and state laws and the laws within the child's home country must be satisfied. The State Department is responsible for overseeing intercountry adoption to and from the United States. However, the responsibility for assessing whether the potential adoptive parent(s) are suitable and the immigration needs of the child fall under the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) within the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2020). Although adoption and immigration procedures usually happen together, each of them has its own specific aspects and requirements (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2020).

Comparison of Hague Convention vs. Non-Hague Convention Adoptions

The Convention was created to ensure that intercountry adoptions focus on the child's best interests. The specific processes that are required for an international adoption are determined by the adoptive child's country of origin and whether this country is part of the Hague Convention. In Hague Convention countries, adoption procedures are standardized and governed by the Convention's rules. However, in non-Hague Convention countries, adoption policies can vary widely because they are not bound by the Hague Convention's regulations. The State Department must rely on the country's Convention system and its Central Authority's certification in these countries to ensure that the adoptions comply with Convention standards. Generally, extensive investigations, such as those required in the "Orphan Process," are not needed unless there are signs of fraud or other serious concerns.

To evaluate a country's readiness to implement Convention standards, the State Department assesses its legal framework, practices, and infrastructure. This evaluation aims to confirm that the country has 1) established laws designating a Central Authority to carry out Convention functions, 2) enforced Convention principles to ensure the best interests of the child, 3) clearly defined and coordinated authorities' Convention functions and responsibilities within their local context, 4) established a Convention process compatible with the U.S. Convention adoption process, 5) authorized U.S. adoption service providers or ensured the provision of adoption services in accordance with the country's regulations, and 6) provided the necessary capacity and infrastructure for authorities to uphold Convention obligations effectively. If a country does not meet these standards, the State Department encourages the country to implement the required legal

framework and procedures before becoming a Convention party. Additionally, the State Department seeks to prevent disruptions in ongoing adoptions and minimize delays caused by the Convention's implementation.

Countries that do not adhere to the Hague Convention necessitate extra documentation to ascertain whether an adopted child aligns with the USCIS' orphan classification. Alterations in immigration and adoption regulations can influence the adoption procedure. Although the process of adoption is similar between Hague and Non-Hague countries, a few key differences as outlined by the State Department are listed below (U.S. Department of State, n.d.):

- **Accredited or Approved Adoption Agencies:** Only adoption agencies that have been officially recognized or given permission at the national level can provide specific important adoption services for adoptions in Convention countries. Hague Convention countries ensure the prospective adoptive parents that their agency has been checked by the Department of State's Intercountry Adoption Accreditation and Maintenance Entity, Inc. (IAAME). The IAAME evaluates agencies and individuals using the same standards to ensure they are acting professionally and ethically.
 - Note, in July 2014, the Universal Accreditation Act began requiring all agencies that help with international adoptions to be recognized or approved by an official body, be supervised by an approved agency, or have a special exemption.
- **Transparency:** When adopting a child from a Convention country, the approved adoption agencies must provide a detailed list, in writing, that shows all of the fees and estimated costs connected to the adoption before the adoption process begins. Apart from the fees they have listed, the agency can only charge extra for unexpected expenses in specific situations.
- **Certificates for Adoption and Custody:** Children adopted from a Convention country are issued a Hague Custody Certificate from the U.S. Embassy or Consulate after the United States' officials have determined that the adoption meets the requirements of the Convention and the U.S. Intercountry Adoption Act. In addition, before the adoption is finalized, a U.S. consular officer must ensure that the child meets the visa requirements, and the USCIS must determine if the child can move to the United States as a "Convention adoptee."

- Convention Forms and Visa Categories:** Two forms are required to be filed with USCIS to adopt a child from a convention country: Form I-800A, Application for Determination of Suitability to Adopt a Child from a Convention Country, and Form I-800, Petition to Classify Convention Adoptee as an Immediate Relative. The USCIS needs to approve Form I-800A **first** to ensure the prospective adoptive parent(s) are suitable and allowed to adopt from the country stated on their application. After USCIS approves Form I-800A and the parents are matched with a specific child, but before the adoption or custody is complete, Form I-800 is submitted to check if the child fits the definition of a “Convention adoptee” to be able to come to the United States. There are two visa categories, IH-3 and IH-4, used for these types of adoptions.

The following table provides a summary of how international adoptions differ from domestic adoptions for civilian and military-connected families. Note, international adoption requirements for civilian and military-connected families were found to be the same, so no distinction is made between military and civilian adoptive families.

Table 2
Comparison of Domestic and International Adoptions

Adoption Requirements and Processes	Characteristics of Domestic Adoption	Characteristics of International Adoptions
Adoption law	Adoption laws vary by state and are dependent on the state of residence for the adopting parents and the birth parents.	A country’s involvement in the Hague Convention determines the adoption process and the specific requirements for adoptive parents in the selected country.
Eligibility by parental age	The birth mother typically chooses the adopting parent(s) based on a personal set of criteria. The criteria may or may not include preferences on parental age. However, some agencies limit the parental age of adoptive parents to 40 years	Each country has individual age guidelines and restrictions. Many limit the age difference between the child and youngest parent to 40 years (e.g., a 10-year-old child and 50-year-old parents).

	old as older parents (i.e., over 40) are infrequently selected.	
Eligibility by marital status	No limitations on marital status exist (e.g., couples and singles can adopt). If a couple is married, evidence of marital stability is required.	Countries have different regulations on marital status. Some countries require couples to be legally married, married for a certain length of time, and/or without a record of previous divorce.
Parental sexual orientation (e.g., LGBTQI+)	U.S. federal law allows LGBTQI+ couples and individuals to adopt in all 50 states.	Countries have varying laws on LGBTQI+ couples adopting. Some countries (e.g., China) do not allow same-sex couples to adopt or do not recognize same-sex marriage, which eliminates a prospective adoptive parent's ability to meet the marriage requirement.
Requirements of home study and background checks	In addition to the home study by a state-licensed social worker, required background checks must be completed and include a history of arrest; a history of child abuse or neglect; and a history of domestic violence, sexual abuse, or child abuse.	In addition to the home study completed by a Hague-accredited home-study provider, additional background checks at the international, federal, and state levels are required for international adoption.
Age of eligible children	Children of any age can be adopted in a domestic adoption. Children in the foster care system available for adoption are typically 4 years old and older.	Children adopted internationally must meet local adoption requirements and must be made available to local families first before they become eligible for adoption by families in the United States. Therefore, children are usually at least 1 to 2 years old by the time they are adopted.

Processing times	Foster to adopt tends to take less time (6 – 18 months) for child placement than domestic, infant private adoption (1 – 7 years). However, this process can be decreased by a birth mother’s flexibility in choice of an adoptive family and adoptive parents’ flexibility in their child preferences, such as age or race, and through advertising and uninterrupted adoptions.	On average, an intercountry adoption may take 1 to 5 years to complete.
Availability of information on the child	Information about adopted children is governed by state laws. Adoptive parents can often obtain the birth parent’s health history and birth mother’s medical care records for young infant adoptees. In addition, these records can be obtained for older children to determine their social development, trauma, educational, and mental health history.	Medical histories and biological family histories are often unavailable or limited for international adoptees due to many children being left at hospitals or orphanages with little information about their biological parents. Records may contain medical appointments or treatment or social and educational information for older children since their time in those facilities.
Travel requirements	Adoptive parents can expect to travel to the place of their child’s birth twice: to obtain custody and, in some cases depending on the state, to finalize the adoption. This second visit may last 7-10 days. Adoptive parents also may choose to meet with birth parents during the pregnancy, which could require travel.	Families can expect to travel to the adopted child’s home country one or two times during the adoption process. The length of time a family may spend can range from a week to several months depending on the country and its court system. International adoption requires further and lengthier travel than domestic adoption.
Fees	\$28,000-\$35,000 is the average cost for private domestic	\$30,000-\$35,000 is the average cost for international adoptions.

	adoptions. Adoptions from foster care or of special needs children often cost significantly less.	However, the distribution of cost is different, and international adoptions may require more travel costs or work downtime.
Adoption service providers	Choose someone experienced in the state laws and who provides the advertising, matching, screening, or counseling services that may be needed.	The international adoption agency must be Hague-compliant, even if the country one adopts from is not. Most professionals do not actively work with all countries, so a professional who actively works in the adoptee’s country is imperative.
Post-Placement and finalization	Two to six post-placement visits will be conducted by a social worker to assess the adjustment of the child. Then, the adoption will be finalized in court.	Post-placement assessments and a finalization hearing are required, and some countries may require more post-placement reports than others.

Barriers in International Adoptions for Military Families

According to the GAO report, the adoption process can be complicated by frequent relocations and deployments, and this issue is more likely to arise during international adoptions because they generally take longer. Below are some other general considerations for families considering international adoption.

- Eligibility of prospective parents differs between countries, limiting a single person, unmarried couple, or LGBTQI+ individuals from adopting in certain countries. In this case, it would be important to check the specific country’s adoption laws before choosing a prospective child’s home country.
- Intercountry adoption requires agencies to attempt to match children with local families first and includes additional immigration requirements making adopting infants from other countries unlikely. Most children are one to two years old before being approved for immigration to the United States, an important consideration for families hoping to adopt an infant.

- Background information in intercountry adoptions is often limited due to minimal available records of the child and/or birth parents which hinders the ability of adoptive parents to know details about a child's medical history or family medical issues that may arise.
- The requirement to travel to the home country of the child, sometimes multiple times, during the adoption process means prospective adoptive parents must have the necessary documents, time off work, and funds to complete the adoption process.

To alleviate the barriers military families face in the process of adopting, both domestically and internationally, the MCFP office is reviewing the DoD's current offering of adoption services. In partnership with this work, the Clearinghouse has been tasked with reviewing adoption supports for employees available through other federal agencies and commercial entities outside of the DoD that could inform the services the DoD is presently providing. The following section provides an overview of our findings including adoption benefits provided by federal agencies and commercial entities to employees. Employee adoption benefits include employer-provided adoption assistance in the form of informational resources, financial assistance, and parental leave policies (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2012).

Non-DoD Federal Agency Adoption Benefits and Support for Federal Employees

All federal employees are generally provided the same benefits regardless of the agency or branch for which they work. Agencies can modify compensation and benefit packages to be competitive with other employers (e.g., bonuses for special agents), but all federal employees receive the same benefits package (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, n.d.; Office of Communication and Media Relations, n.d.). The TA team found no difference among non-DoD federal agencies and the adoption benefits provided to their employees.

The Child Welfare Information Gateway, a service of the Children's Bureau under the HHS, recognizes three categories of adoption benefits that employers can provide: information resources, financial assistance, and parental leave policies. Federal employees who adopt a child are eligible for the following five benefits:

- Leave

- Work/Life Programs
- Insurance
- Flexible Spending Accounts
- Tax benefits

Leave

Federal workers have the option to utilize their accumulated annual and sick leave or opt for unpaid leave to accommodate adoption-related obligations, such as attending court hearings, conducting home visits, seeking counseling, or traveling. Additionally, they may be eligible for the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), which grants workers a potential 12-week period of unpaid leave annually for specific family and medical circumstances including the adoption of a child.

Work/Life Programs

Federal workers have access to a range of work/life initiatives that intend to assist them in harmonizing their professional and family obligations, including adoption. These programs encompass telecommuting, flexible work hours, employee support services, child care financial aid, and well-being initiatives.

Insurance

Federal workers have the option to participate in the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program, which provides comprehensive coverage for adoption-related medical expenses including prenatal care, childbirth, hospitalization, vaccinations, and preventive healthcare.

Flexible Spending Accounts

Federal employees can participate in the Federal Flexible Spending Account (FSA) Program, which enables them to allocate pre-tax earnings from their salaries to cover specific healthcare and dependent-care expenditures. Federal employees can use Dependent Care Federal FSA to help cover essential costs for dependent care when an employee's ability to work is impacted, they are seeking employment, or they decide to pursue full-time education. These expenses encompass childcare, before and after-school care, and summer day camp expenses. The maximum annual contribution limits

are \$2,750 for a Health Care FSA and \$5,000 for a Dependent Care FSA or \$2,500 if married and filing separately.

Tax Benefits

Federal employees who adopt a child may be eligible for two tax benefits: the adoption credit and the adoption assistance exclusion.

- The adoption credit, which is a nonrefundable credit, serves to decrease the employee's income tax liability. In 2022, the maximum credit amount was \$14,890 per child.
- The adoption assistance exclusion enables the employee to exempt from their income the adoption assistance provided by their employer through an adoption-assistance program. The highest allowable exclusion for 2022 was \$14,890 per child.

Feasibility for the DoD to Implement the Same Adoption Benefits Provided by Non-DoD Federal Agencies to their Employees

The adoption benefits provided to active duty Service members by the DoD currently meet or surpass those provided by the federal government to all other federal employees. The GAO identified that the DoD provides support to assist military families who foster or adopt (United States GAO, 2021). These supports include adoption-related leave, non-medical counseling, and children and youth programs. However, the GAO reported that many military families, and prospective adoptive parents, have limited awareness of the adoption benefits that are available to them. The GAO also highlighted that concerns related to military adoption may be related to the efforts that intend to centralize and promote available support. The report suggests issues are not, necessarily, related to benefits and services, and the DoD may be failing to meet the needs of prospective adoptive families (United States GAO, 2021). **Ensuring military families are aware of and can easily access the adoptive services offered by the DoD may prove more beneficial to families rather than focusing on providing new services.**

The DoD has addressed two of the three recommendations offered in the GAO report. First, the DOD has updated its Military OneSource landing page “Adoption and Foster Care” (n.d.) to provide centralized information on parenting, including policies and support

for military foster and adoptive families. For example, Military OneSource currently provides robust support and resources for all parts of the adoption or foster care process through adoption specialty consultation. This process includes the following (Military OneSource, n.d.):

- Conduct an initial triage for information gathering.
- Assign to a family a Work-Life Consultant who can act as a facilitator and conduit of information between the Service member and adoption support agencies and may provide help with the following:
 - Gather information and resources;
 - Understand the types of adoptions, and determine the type of adoption the family is seeking;
 - Obtain DoD financial assistance;
 - Look for agencies across the adoptive parents' state;
 - Assist with beginning the family's unique adoption process;
 - Provide basic information on the general process of adoption, including home studies, length of time an adoption takes, and costs associated with adoption;
 - Locate military-related financial assistance;
 - Identify agencies that can help with a family's specific adoption needs, including information and referral;
 - Begin the foster care or an adoption process through foster care, and provide information on and referral to state or county licensed agencies, the Department of Child and Family Services, and/or the HHS;
 - Understand state-specific adoption and foster-care requirements; and
 - Provide information on adoption and foster-care agencies, support groups, and general adoption and foster-care literature.

A communication plan has also been developed to raise awareness about adoption and foster care information, using strategies such as promotional materials, emails, and social media posts. In addition, the DoD Human Resource Activity team identified and corrected content gaps in the annual Real-Time Automated Personnel Identification System (RAPIDS) workstation training to ensure access to accurate information on enrolling foster and pre-adoptive children. They deployed this updated training in January 2023, along with a tip sheet for RAPIDS technicians. The team informed the military of its services through messages of the day, newsletters, and pamphlets, promoting awareness of guidance for enrolling foster and pre-adoptive children and referencing relevant regulations and resources.

Commercial Sector Employer-Provided Adoption Benefits

Adoption benefits in the commercial or private sector are voluntary, employer-funded policies for employees who adopt a child. These benefits can include a combination of paid or unpaid leave, financial assistance for the costs of adoption (e.g., home studies, travel, application fees, immigration, agency or legal fees), and internal educational and resource assistance (Soronen, 2022).

According to a survey conducted by the Society for Human Resource Management in 2022, 28% of employers offered paid leave to adoptive parents (Society for Human Resource Management, 2022). The National Council for Adoption (NCFA) recommends that employers implementing adoption benefits should start by creating an adoption-assistance program (Soronen, 2018). This is an employer's written plan for the benefit of their employees. These assistance plans are voluntary and not legally required for employers. Employer adoption reimbursement typically ranges from \$7,500 per adoption to an unlimited amount. The national average is \$9,300. Some employers choose to offer a higher reimbursement for employees for special needs adoptions, which take a greater long-term financial toll on the adoptive parents (American Adoptions, n.d.).

The Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption's yearly survey evaluates U.S. employers to identify the top adoption-friendly workplaces. The 2022 edition of the 100 Best Adoption-Friendly Workplaces includes diverse organizations from 22 different industries. Employers were assessed based on three criteria: financial reimbursement, paid leave, and the percentage of eligible employees. On average, surveyed employers now provide \$12,000 in financial reimbursement. The average paid leave was 8.3 weeks. The following are examples of adoption benefits provided by five of the top ten companies from the survey (Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption, 2022):

NVIDIA

The Nvidia Adoption Assistance Plan does not list a current reimbursement cap and includes the following benefits (NVIDIA, 2021):

- Reimbursement to help cover the following:
 - Agency and placement fees (including home-study fees);
 - Legal fees and court costs;
 - Medical expenses for the adoptive child prior to placement for adoption;
 - Temporary foster-care costs;
 - Immigration, immunization, and translation fees; and

- Travel and transportation costs (including meals and lodging).
- Time Off
 - New parents are eligible for up to 12 weeks of fully paid leave and up to eight weeks of flex time to ease the transition back to work after their leave.

American Express

American Express reimburses employees up to \$35,000 of adoption expenses in addition to the following (Woltering, 2016):

- 20 weeks of paid parental leave;
- Back-up care, up to 20 days, per dependent, per calendar year, of in-home or center-based care;
- Healthy Babies, a program for expectant mothers, provides a wide range of healthcare resources and incentives; and
- Flexible work arrangements that can allow employees to work directly with their leaders to determine the best work arrangement for their role.

Snap Inc.

Snap Inc., a technology company, provides up to \$40,000 in adoption coverage and the following (Built in, n.d.):

- 16 weeks of paid parental leave;
- 1 month of flexible, paid return-to-work time;
- 120 hours of backup care per year (available in the United States only); and
- 6 weeks of paid family caregiver leave and dedicated family care support through Wellthy, a company that offers families help with ongoing care needs.

Bloomberg

Bloomberg does not list a financial cost cap on their website but provides reimbursement for eligible adoption and surrogacy-related costs in addition to the following (Levels.fyi, n.d.):

- 26 weeks of 100% paid, parental leave for primary caregiver. Non-primary caregivers are eligible for 4 weeks of 100% paid leave;
- Contact with maternity nurses who can provide support and answer questions; and

- Backup child care.

KPMG LLP

KPMG LLP, a multinational professional services and accounting organization, will reimburse adoptive parents up to \$35,000 in adoption-related expenses and also provides the following (KPMG, 2023):

- 12 weeks of paid parental leave;
- New parent coaching;
- Caregiver support; and
- Learning opportunities and activities for children and families.

Key Players in the Adoption Sector that Provide Adoption Support Services

Although states do not provide direct support services for adoption, they do bear the primary responsibility for child welfare, and each State maintains its unique legal and administrative frameworks and initiatives that are designed to cater to the needs of children and families. To qualify for federal funding in certain programs, states are obligated to adhere to distinct federal requirements and directives (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2019). Organizations that could be considered key players in the adoption sector fall into two categories: federally funded organizations and commercial, private, and non-profit organizations.

Federally Funded Organizations

The Children's Bureau

The Children's Bureau is an agency within the Administration for Children and Families under the HHS. The Children's Bureau partners with federal, state, tribal, and local agencies to improve the overall health and well-being of children and families. The Children's Bureau provides support and guidance to families regarding programs that focus on strengthening families and preventing child abuse and neglect, protecting children when abuse or neglect has occurred, and ensuring every child and youth has a permanent family or family connection (Office of the Administration for Children &

Families, 2023). More information on their focus areas can be found here: <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/focus-areas>

Child Welfare Information Gateway

The Child Welfare Information Gateway is a service of the Children’s Bureau. The Gateway provides access for families to information and resources that they can use to help them protect their children and strengthen their families. The Gateway’s website offers information on topics such as child abuse and neglect, adoption, foster care, and child-welfare services. It also provides a directory of national organizations that offer support to children and families. This directory can be found at their website <https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/adoption/> (Child Welfare Information Gateway, n.d).

AdoptUSKids

AdoptUSKids is a national project that supports child-welfare systems and connects children in foster care with families. The project is funded by the HHS’ Administration for Children and Families and is operated by the Ad Council in partnership with the Children’s Bureau and Child Welfare Information Gateway. The AdoptUSKids website provides resources for families, including information on the adoption process, parenting children who have experienced trauma, and how to find support after adoption. The website (<https://www.adoptuskids.org/>) also features a database of children in foster care who are available for adoption (National Adoption Association, 2023).

Commercial, Private, and Non-Profit Organizations

Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption

The Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption is a national, nonprofit public charity that aims to increase the number of adoptions of children waiting in North America’s foster care systems. The foundation implements evidence-based, national service programs and builds awareness around the need for and importance of foster-care adoption. They develop resources for employers and families to support the adoption journey. Through one of its programs, Wendy’s Wonderful Kids, the foundation provides grants to adoption agencies to hire and train recruiters in their child-focused recruitment model. The recruiters use this model to find permanent homes for children in foster care. Their website states that this model is up to three times more effective at serving children who

have been in foster care the longest, including older youth, siblings, and children with special needs. (Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption, 2023). The Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption website can be found here: <https://www.davethomasfoundation.org/>

National Council for Adoption

The NCFA provides trusted expertise and resources for individuals connected to adoption. They are a non-profit organization that was formed in 1980, and they intend to educate the public, media, policymakers, and other stakeholders about adoption-related issues. The NCFA monitors federal and state legislation and addresses policies and laws that create barriers to children finding families. They collaborate with adoption-service providers, other national advocacy and education groups, individuals, and child welfare authorities worldwide to promote child-adoption welfare (National Council for Adoption, 2023).

The NCFA states that they offer services to support every adoption experience, including offering guidance in the adoption process, preparing families for the challenges of becoming an adoptive family, and providing resources to inform and support birth parents throughout the process. They also offer resources, practical guidance, and contact with professionals in order to support adopted individuals (NCFA, 2023). Their resources can be found on the NCFA website: <https://adoptioncouncil.org/>

Adoption Agencies

An adoption agency is an intermediary for most adoptions. They are organized to facilitate adoptions and serve birth parents and hopeful adoptive parents. Adoption-agency support services include helping prospective parents complete a home study, providing training, helping prospective parents find and secure a placement, assisting families with becoming licensed to foster, and identifying or providing additional support services after adoption (National Adoption Association, 2023). Using an agency to help facilitate the adoption process can be helpful to prospective parents and may be required by the state in which the adoptive parents live. An adoption agency typically provides six different services (Jordan, 2017):

- Matching adoptive parents with a child
- Arranging counseling for birth parents
- Performing a home study

- Providing education
- Preparing paperwork
- Performing post-placement visits

This review identified three licensed adoption-service providers who are representative of vetted agencies that offer services across state lines.

American Adoptions

American Adoptions is a Hague-accredited adoption agency that provides adoption services to children, birth parents, and adoptive families in the United States. They offer services including the following: provide a home study; advertise to locate potential birth parents; and help connect families with a prospective birth mother, legal services, and support. American Adoptions is one of the largest domestic adoption agencies in the United States, and it facilitates and completes more than 300 domestic adoptions per year. They are a licensed, non-profit, domestic adoption agency that works with pregnant women and adoptive families; their services are listed on their website: <https://www.americanadoptions.com/> (American Adoptions, 2023).

Gladney Center for Adoption

Gladney Center for Adoption is a non-profit adoption agency that has provided adoption and advocacy services for over 135 years. They offer services including domestic infant adoption, international adoption, foster-care adoption, and child advocacy. Gladney Center for Adoption's domestic infant adoption program helps birth mothers and adoptive families navigate the adoption process with the help of experienced professionals. Their international adoption program helps unite children from around the world with families in the United States. Gladney Center for Adoption's foster care adoption program helps place children in need of a permanent home with families. They also provide post-adoption services to adoptees, birth parents, and adoptive families (Gladney Center for Adoption, 2023). Their adoption services can be found here: <https://adoptionsbygladney.com/i-want-to-adopt>.

Holt International

Holt International is a Hague-accredited adoption agency that provides services to children and families around the world. They offer programs that address adoption, child sponsorship, and family strengthening. Holt International's adoption program helps unite

children with families through international or in-country adoption. They also provide post-adoption services to adoptees, birth parents, and adoptive families. Holt International's child sponsorship program helps provide food, shelter, education, and other necessities to children in need around the world (Holt International, 2023). Their adoption services information is located here: <https://www.holtinternational.org/adoption/>.

Conclusion

This report, conducted at the request of the Office of MC&FP by the TA Team at the Clearinghouse, addresses an array of questions that are related to adoption by military families. Through a rapid literature review and analysis, this report offers insights into various aspects of adoption, including state-specific differences in adoption procedures, the distinctions between domestic and international adoption for military families, adoption benefits provided by non-DoD federal agencies, and adoption support services in the commercial and private sectors. It also highlights key players in the adoption sector and discusses the available resources that prospective adoptive families can use to make informed decisions in the adoption process.

This report acknowledges the absence of scholarly, peer-reviewed articles on the effectiveness and impact of adoption support services. Nevertheless, the available literature and other resources were leveraged to provide essential information on behalf of military families who are navigating the adoption process. This report serves as a starting point for those who wish to understand adoption options and benefits within the military context.

Given its constrained timeline, this report does not intend to provide a comprehensive review of the literature. Furthermore, the resources mentioned are not endorsed by the Clearinghouse but are presented to assist in data-driven decision-making for organizations that support military families interested in adoption. In summary, this report offers a foundation for further exploration and informed decision-making in the realm of adoption for military-connected individuals and families.

Additional Assistance

The TA specialists at the Clearinghouse provide support to professionals as they examine and make informed decisions about which programs fit specific situations and are worth the investment. Whether connecting one with the resources and tools to conduct a needs assessment in a specific community, suggesting the best evidence-based program or

practice for a certain situation, or developing an evaluation plan, the TA team of experts is a call or email away.

Please visit the Clearinghouse's website at www.militaryfamilies.psu.edu or call 1-877-382-9185 to speak with a TA specialist.

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