

BULGARIA ADOPTION Letter of Understanding

As with ANY international adoption, the culture and lifestyle in any foreign country is very different from that of the United States. The following are points that Prospective Adoptive Parents (PAP) must understand as they commit to this international adoption program. We, at Children's House International (CHI), feel it is of utmost importance that families are aware of the pros and cons of any of our adoption programs.

As Adoptive parents:

1. I/We understand that the primary method of communication concerning our adoption will be through e-mail. I/We will inform CHI of any problems with our e-mail or change of address during the process so there will be no interruption of communication through e-mail.
2. I/We understand that the ages of waiting children vary by country and that referrals of babies are generally not possible. I/We understand that marital status requirements will vary by each country.
3. I/We understand that it is Children's House International's policy that our home study must be written by a Hague accredited agency. In situations where a Hague accredited agency is not available, the International Specialist and the Case Manager will work with the Prospective Adoptive Parents to find an agency that can write the home study.
4. I/We understand that during the home study process all of our children, including those who are adults and not living in our home, will be interviewed. We understand that they will be asked if they support us adopting another child(ren) and their responses will be written in to the home study.
5. I/We understand that all Children's House International's adoptive families are required to take Hague compliant, pre-adoption courses which includes a minimum of 10 hours of pre-adoption training. These courses are offered on the internet through various online resources including but not limited to Creating a Family, Adoption Learning Partners, and Heart of the Matter. I/We understand that course requirement will ultimately be determined by my/our Social Worker and the Social Services Supervisor. The following are recommended courses: "Hague Package for International Adoption" from Creating a Family. I/We agree to complete these courses and understand that these must be finished before my/our home study is completed. I/We understand that I/we will be required to complete additional training beyond the minimum 10 hours, including child specific training.
6. I/We understand that I/we will be required to take training every 6 months until final adoption on fundamental adoption issues.

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7. I/We understand that a completed home study must be received by CHI for review within 6 months from the date of application acceptance. If after 6 months a draft is not received, I/we will be billed \$250 per month late fee (quarterly invoice) until a draft is received by CHI for review. I/We understand that the home study will not be reviewed until the full late fee is paid, and that if after an additional 6 months the draft and all fees have not been paid the case will be closed. I/We understand that circumstances out of our control can arise that would cause us to be past the six-month requirement to submit our home study to CHI. Should this occur, we may write an appeal giving the reasons for the delay and it will be reviewed by the Executive Director, International Specialist and Case Manager. They will review the appeal within 2 weeks and decide if the time allowed and/or fee should be extended or waived. I/We understand that extension or waivers will not be granted for clients who are delayed due to family trip/vacations or school/education commitments.
8. I/We understand that I/we will be required to take additional training that addresses specific needs of the child identified for adoption, likely at the time of referral, and before I/we can travel to pick up the child. These are Hague requirements.
9. I/We understand that life in other countries can move at a much slower pace than here in the United States. Keeping in mind that customs are different, etc., I/we are willing to be patient with and understanding of the people of our adopting country and be good representatives of both CHI and the United States of America and to be patient with the difference in urgency or time.
10. I/We understand that CHI has no control over how often waiting children will be referred. The waiting time is dependent on each country. CHI can give us an idea of how things have moved in the past but cannot guarantee how things will move in the future. I/we further understand that I/we will not be allowed to travel to pick up our child without the permission of CHI and without all fees and documents completed and up to date.
11. I/We understand that I/we can only travel to country with permission from CHI. If I/we choose to travel before I/we am/are granted permission, I/we understand that this could cause delays in my/our process, and I/we could end up staying in the country longer than expected or may mean I/we must make multiple trips to the country. CHI is not responsible for any expenses/costs incurred for such delays.
12. Although I/we may have specified that I/we would like to adopt a "healthy" child, USCIS will not approve the diagnosis of 'healthy', and neither will the country where the child lives. I/We understand that a diagnosis of 'healthy' is not realistic, as all children will have some developmental delays, some trauma due to the lives they have had to live and experience prior to being legally adoptable. In addition, they may have additional psychological or medical needs that will be described in their medical and social histories. CHI will discuss all of these details with me/us to help me/us understand and decide what needs I/we are comfortable parenting. Additionally, I/we understand CHI cannot guarantee the results, validity or accuracy of examinations, tests, inoculations or assessments.
13. I/We understand that I/we will be required to pick our child or children up in Bulgaria between 5 and 6 weeks of our court date. CHI has no control over the care of your child in country and cannot guarantee the safety of your child while they remain in orphanage or foster care.
14. I/We understand that children being adopted from international countries sometimes come with scabies, malnourishment, parasites, etc. They may improve rapidly once they get the medical care and nutrition they need.

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15. I/We understand the child may have experienced physical, sexual, and/or emotional abuse prior to adoption and may exhibit sexualized behaviors in their new home. I/We understand that I/we will need to provide counseling or other resources to help the child deal with these experiences if these behaviors are evident once home. I/We understand that these behaviors may not be apparent to the foreign caregivers prior to adoption.
16. I/We understand that the medical records may not be complete when I/we receive a referral. I/We further understand that I/we may receive very basic medical information on the child and the biological parents if available.
17. I/We understand that I/we are not required to accept any **one** referral. CHI requests that a family who decides to decline a referral do so based on medical conditions, not physical attractiveness, hair color, eye color, skin tone, etc. I/we will be requested to give CHI a written reason for declining. An answer of yes or no must be given regarding the referral 2 weeks after the child is referred.
18. I/We understand that it is possible, if there is an unexpected delay, USCIS (US Immigration) documents may have to be re-submitted if our approval expires before our adoption is completed. USCIS fingerprints will have to be re-submitted before the USCIS approval time of 15 months. Home studies must be updated yearly. There may be more documents required to be re-done. I/We understand this is not CHI's policy, but they will be informing us of any new document requirements as they hear of them. These repetitive processes will likely involve additional financial investment.
19. I/We understand that, as specific information concerning our case comes along, private emails and phone calls will be made to us individually. CHI cannot call every family each week to say there is no news. Family phone calls to CHI are always welcome.
20. I/We understand that our court date will not be issued for our 2nd trip until I/we have paid all fees to CHI, then after our court date, our travel date will be made by our Bulgarian In-Country Representative. Travel is dictated by government requirements. It is impossible for CHI to promise you a specific time for travel in advance. Length of travel varies by country. I/We will be understanding and respectful of different cultures and religious backgrounds while traveling. Teacher's vacations and special travel requests are never honored in foreign countries. They expect you to be willing to travel when the time comes and to stay according to the time frame given.
21. I/We will learn as much as possible about our adoptive child's culture and help our child to know about his/her culture and participate in cultural activities as much as possible.
22. I/We understand that I/we will have CHI agents/representatives in our adoptive country to help us through the process. These reps will do their best to be sensitive to our needs and to help us through the adoption process. However, they do not request special treatment that might require 'bribes'. They will not do something illegal. They do not control the local governments or the law of that country.
23. I/We understand that a Post Adoption Report (PAR) deposit is required for all families who do not pre-pay all required Post Adoption Reports in advance. (Proof of prepayment is required for non-CHI Home Study Agencies)

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24. I/We understand that if I/we have paid a Post Adoption Report deposit to CHI, this money will not be refunded until CHI has received the required post placement reports written by a social worker, copies of the final adoption documents I/we received in country, and a copy of our child(ren)'s U.S. Certificate of Citizenship.
25. I/We understand that CHI strongly encourages that BOTH parents travel, or that the traveling parent has another adult accompany them. I/we understand that depending on the country I/we are adopting from, one parent may be allowed to travel on their own, or may be allowed to return home during the process, either by law or with previous permission granted by the local foreign government authorities.

I/We also understand that when only one parent travels there may be additional paperwork required by foreign government officials and the U.S. Embassy, and the time spent in the country could be extended. CHI is not responsible for additional costs or time incurred if only one parent travels or if one parent returns to the U.S. before the adoption can be finalized in country, including processing of the U.S. Visa.

26. I/We understand that I/we are expected to travel to the country to accompany the child home. I/We understand that if an escort is requested or needed, I/we must obtain prior approval from the Executive Director. I/We also understand that our request will only be granted in unique circumstances and if the country allows.
27. I/We understand that travel in other countries and contact with foreign-born children may expose us to health risks. It is my/our responsibility to consult with my/our health care provider or the Centers for Disease Control about vaccinations recommended or required before travel.

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As Adoptive parents:

1. I/We understand that our home study will be very specific about the number and ages of children I/we will be eligible to adopt from Bulgaria. Should I/we attempt an adoption that does not follow these guidelines, it may be rejected by the US Embassy at the time of the visa appointment. Even though the Bulgarian government may overlook such differences I/we may not be able to bring our child home if I/we do not adopt within our approved criteria. I/We therefore agree to only pursue adoption of child(ren) from Bulgaria based on the approval set forth by our social worker in our home study.
2. I/We understand that the paperwork process for a Bulgarian adoption can be very overwhelming. There is a standard dossier guide, but I/we could also be requested to complete more documents at the last minute. I/We are prepared to do what it takes to get these documents completed when they are needed.
3. I/We also understand that our home study and fingerprints must be updated during the process of our adoption.
4. I/We understand that there is the possibility that I/we may have to repeat the steps to apply for our USCIS approval or resubmit our fingerprints if the adoption process takes longer than expected. I/We further understand that I/we cannot travel to the country without current CIS approval and fingerprints.

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5. I/We understand that if I/we choose to submit our documents for pre-approval to adopt a waiting child and do not yet have a completed and approved dossier to the Ministry of Justice, there is a risk that the MOJ could refer this child to another family with an approved dossier. Should another dossier be presented for said waiting child before MOJ has approved my/our dossier, the child could be referred to the family with the dossier approved at the discretion of the MOJ. I/We understand that once approved to adopt a child, we have 6 months to send in our dossier to Bulgaria. If we do not provide a dossier within 6 months, we can lose the referral.
6. I/We understand that once our dossier has been submitted to the Ministry of Justice, it will be reviewed and an appropriate child or children will be referred to us. I/We acknowledge that this process may happen very quickly or take upwards of 48 months depending on the children available and the criteria of our home study.
7. I/We understand that referrals are provided in advance of our travel to Bulgaria. I/We further understand that children will be 6 months and older at the time of referral in country but families should be open for older child referrals of 2 years and up.
8. I/We understand travel times depend on many factors in Bulgaria which CHI is not in control of. I/We understand that the 0-48 month time frame does not start until I/we have completed all paperwork and it has been submitted for review by the Ministry of Justice. I/We will be prepared to go to Bulgaria when I/we are requested to be there.
9. I/We understand that the length of our stay in country may vary depending on the Bulgarian government and our specific adoption case. CHI will give estimates of the general time frame of the stay, but cannot guarantee that our adoption will happen in the time frame I/we want. I/We agree to be flexible about this and understand that none of this are in the control of CHI or the staff in Bulgaria. I/We are prepared to take two trips with a minimum stay of 5 business days for the first trip and 10 to 14 business days for the second trip to finalize our adoption.
10. I/We understand that the following documents cannot be more than 6 months old when submitted to the MOJ or presented to a judge, and will be required to be updated - Federal Bureau of Investigation Background Clearance, Medical Clearance, Affidavit of Parental Rights & Post Adoption Agreement, and Certificate (depending on the foundation). I/We also understand that the foreign courts can ask for any additional documentation in order to review our case. CHI is not responsible for any additional costs incurred for updating and obtaining these documents.
11. I/We understand that I/we are an ambassador for both the US and other adoptive families and must act in a prudent and appropriate manner or I/we could be sent home by the Ministry of Justice.
12. I/We understand that there also may be times when circumstances beyond the control of CHI result in a family being unable to adopt a child in Bulgaria.

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13. I/We understand that the adoption hearing takes place approximately 3 months after I/we travel out to the orphanage or foster care home to meet our child and accept the referral. Seven days after the final adoption hearing, the adoption will be final and I/we will become the legal parents of the child. Further, I/we understand that I/we cannot remove the child from the orphanage until 4-6 weeks after the final hearing and court decree being issued to allow for processing of the child's new birth certificate. I/we will travel to pick up our child no later than six weeks after court. I/We will accept full responsibility of this child as our own. Should I/we then, while still in country, decide I/we do not want to parent this child after being considered the legal parent(s), I/we agree to provide financial support for the child until the legal dissolution of the adoption is completed. I/We will be fully responsible for any court costs, attorney's fees, multiple travel or extended stay in country to dissolve the adoption. I/we will agree to pay these fees. I/We understand that if I/we leave the child without these arrangements in place, I/we can be charged with child abandonment and potential arrest in the country of the child's birth. I/We understand this is a serious situation and agree to be responsible, to stay in touch with Children's House International and to finish all the steps necessary so that the child can be re-referred to another family. I/We understand that **all fees** paid to the agency for the adoption of the child are non-refundable.
14. I/We understand that CHI has post placement requirements that must be met. I/We know that I/we will be required to provide six post placement reports written by a social worker every six months from court date (6, 12, 18, 24, 30 and 36 months). The 6- or 12-months report must contain a copy of the certificate of citizenship and include six (6) recent photographs of the child on photo paper. I/We also understand that the original report must be apostilled before being sent to CHI.
15. I/We agree to send to CHI upon arrival home with our child, a complete photocopy of the adoption documents and translations given to us in country, including a copy of our child's passport and visa. Immediately upon receipt of our child's U.S. Certificate of Citizenship in the mail, I/we agree to send a photocopy to CHI.

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After reading and carefully considering all the above listed items, I/we understand the unique program details as written above and agree to comply with those requirements. I/We are comfortable with pursuing an adoption through Children's House International's Bulgaria Adoption Program.

Date Signed _____

Prospective Adoptive Parent

Prospective Adoptive Parent

Printed Full Name

Printed Full Name

Children's House International Representative