



BULGARIA

DOSSIER PACKET



Introduction

Dear Adoptive Family:

Welcome to what will become one of the most memorable experiences of your life, an incredible walk of faith that will ultimately unite you with your chosen child! We feel honored that you have chosen to work with All God's Children International (AGCI). This will be an amazing and unforgettable journey, resulting in one of God's greatest blessings to your family.

AGCI is located at 1400 NE 136th Ave., Suite 201, Vancouver, WA 98684. You can reach us directly by calling our main office toll free at 800-214-6719. Our office hours are Monday through Friday 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. We are closed on all major holidays.

We trust that in the coming months we can be an encouragement to you as we work together to bring your child home. If you need us at any time during the adoption process, our doors are open and we are only a phone call away.

Connie Cummings
International Adoption Specialist
All God's Children International
971-244-1466



“Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for He who promised is faithful.”

Hebrews 10:23

Before You Begin

Here are a few tips for you to read before you begin working on the paperwork phase of your adoption process. The adoption journey can be lengthy and requires much patience, and the paperwork phase of this journey can sometimes seem daunting. The tips in this packet will help facilitate the process and help you understand document and process requirements more clearly. We will work with you along the way to guide and support you through this process and to answer any questions you may have.

WHAT IS A DOSSIER?

The dossier (“*doss-e-ay*”) is a compilation of official documents, much like a portfolio, providing details about an adoptive family. The documents included in a family’s dossier are based on the requirements of the foreign government from which a family is adopting. The foreign government uses the information included in a family’s dossier to process and approve the adoption of a child from that country.

THE TABLE OF CONTENTS IS YOUR ROAD MAP:

Start by reviewing the table of contents. This is a list of all documents you’ll need to complete. **We have organized each section of this packet deliberately based on the order in which you should complete them.** Your paperwork process is composed of three “mini-processes”—your Home Study, Dossier, and Immigration Pre-approval. Your focus will first be on completing your home study process, including your adoptive parent education. Once this is almost completed you will focus your attention on completing the remaining dossier documents, and apply for immigration pre-approval. Once this is complete and your home study has been approved by AGCI, the next step is to send everything to be state apostilled and apply for immigration pre-approval. Once you have completed each of these “mini-processes,” they will merge together to become one final product—your dossier.

GETTING TO KNOW YOUR DOSSIER:

Each country’s government has strict policies regarding adoption documents, therefore, it is very important that you carefully read through this packet and meticulously follow the instructions and examples we have provided for you. Please highlight any areas you feel need to be clarified before you begin and feel free to ask as many questions as necessary, in order to avoid any confusion. Below is a list of guidelines that must be followed for each of your dossier documents:

- Unless noted, every document must be an original.
- Unless specifically stated, every document must be typed.
- Every document must state your legal name. (for example, if you commonly go by Matt but your legal name is Matthew, your documents must refer to you as Matthew.)
- Documents must not contain any corrected errors (i.e., white out, over-writes, cross outs, scribbles, etc.). This is to avoid any concern about the validity of a document and because your dossier will be translated. Even the slightest correction will result in you having to redo the document.
- All information must be consistent across all of your documents.
- Documents must not be hole-punched.
- All documents must be notarized on the same date on which they were signed.
- All documents must have notary commission expiration dates of at least 12 months into the future from when your dossier is submitted to AGCI.

Note: Any document with a notary commission that expires prior to authentication will need to be resubmitted with a valid expiration date.

ACCESSING DOSSIER DOCUMENT FORMS:

Along with this dossier packet, AGCI has provided all the templates, examples and official dossier forms you will need as you put together your dossier. These documents can be accessed through your family portal on AGCI's website. Within your family's portal, simply click "Choose a Country". This will navigate to a new web page. Click "Bulgaria". Again, this will navigate to a new web page where you can access any applicable file during the entire adoption process. From this screen, Click on the tab titled "Dossier" A drop-down menu will appear with a complete list of documents you need to download and complete.

If you do not already utilize Adobe Acrobat, we highly recommend downloading this program. The free version is Adobe Reader. Though it does not have saving capabilities, it can be downloaded at <http://getadobe.com/reader>.

SUBMITTING YOUR DOSSIER TO AGCI:

After you have completed your dossier documents, which includes your finalized home study you are able to submit your dossier to AGCI for review. At this point, you will still be waiting on your USCIS Approval Letter but you can send in these dossier documents without this.

Follow these simple steps for submitting your dossier:

Note: Failure to follow these instructions could result in the delay of your dossier registration.

- Put all documents in order according to the document checklist provided in the dossier section of the family portal.
- Make **two full color photocopies** of your entire dossier including copies of the notary page and state apostille page. Please keep one copy of the dossier for your records.
- Send the **original dossier** and **one color photocopies** to AGCI along with the appropriate fees according to your fee schedule. One copy will accompany your original dossier documents to Bulgaria.
- Please make sure one set of copies **DOES NOT** have any of the papers stapled together.
- AGCI will review your dossier to ensure it is complete and that all documents meet the government requirements. It is common for families to have documents to redo or correct.
- When you have documents completed, please mail via a trackable method (UPS, FedEx or DHL) to:

All God's Children
 ATTN: Connie Cummings
 1400 NE 136th Ave., Suite 201
 Vancouver, WA 98684

Note: We recommend insuring this packet in case of loss due to the expense it would take to redo these documents.

PLAN TO COMPLETE THE DOSSIER WITHIN SIX MONTHS:

In order to keep your adoption moving forward in a timely way, AGCI expects you to complete your dossier within six (6) months of receiving this packet. Per your AGCI contract, failing to submit a complete dossier, including a home study, within the six-month time frame can result in additional fees or your adoption being terminated. Please keep us informed if there are questions or obstacles in your paperwork process so that we can ensure you will meet this six-month deadline.

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DOCUMENT
TEMPLATES AND
EXAMPLES ARE
LOCATED ON THE
FAMILY PORTAL

Please be sure to keep a copy of all documents for your own records.



1. NOTARIZATION/STATE APOSTILLE



“Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.”

Colossians 3:12

1. Notarization/State Apostille

SECTION CHECKLIST

- Notarizing a Document
- County Certification
- State Apostille

a. Notarizing a Document

NOTARIZATION DEFINED:

A notarized document is one that has been witnessed by a notary public for the purposes of ensuring the identity of the person completing/signing the document. In order for a document to be notarized, the individual completing/signing the document must be present with the notary at the time of notarization.

WHO NOTARIZES A DOCUMENT:

A notary public is an individual authorized or commissioned by the government, typically by the secretary of state, to act as an impartial witness to the signing of official documents and to administer oaths. A notary public is not concerned with the accuracy of a document but instead can attest to the identity of the individual signing a document. Notary publics can often be found in banks or courthouses. You may need to call ahead to schedule an appointment.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW:

- 1. Notarization requires both parents' signatures.** Adoptive parents must both be present before the notary public at the time specific documents are notarized and cannot have each of their signatures notarized separately.
- 2. Dates must be identical.** The date a notary public notarizes a document must be the same date the document is being signed by the person completing that document.
- 3. Select one person to do your notarizing.** It is recommended that you identify one notary public to use consistently throughout your entire adoption, as you will be visiting the notary multiple times during the process.
- 4. Notary commission numbers are optional in some states.** Some states do not issue a commission number to a notary public. If your notary public does not have a commission number, it is acceptable for this line to be left blank on your documents. Make sure to confirm if this applies in your state and is not just an oversight by the notary public.
- 5. Notary language varies by state.** Every state has specific language that is used for the notarization of documents. Your notary public may add additional information to your document other than the basic requirements listed on the next page.
- 6. Document notarization differences.** Certain documents will be notarized differently than others. Some documents will be notarized as part of the original document with the signature of the person signing the form with the notary public's information located directly below the original text. Other documents will be notarized as a "True and Accurate Copy" and you will have these notarized as such. For examples, visit your family portal at <https://myagci.org>.
- 7. Statement of truth.** When notarizing a copy of an original document, your signatures will be notarized below a statement that attests that the document you are requesting be notarized is a true and accurate copy. In most cases, this statement should be typed on a separate 8 1/2 by 11-inch sheet of paper that you can attach to the document that you wish to notarize.

Note: When you are making copies of your documents, please do not remove any staples or brads for Notarized or Apostilled documents. This will invalidate the document. You can fold a document over when making a copy.

WHAT TO REMEMBER ABOUT THE STATEMENT OF TRUTH:

1. You must include in your statement *who* originally issued/signed the document.
2. If you use a notary cover sheet, the date on the cover sheet must be the same or an earlier date as the date you sign the documents.

Below is a sample “statement of truth” to use, if applicable, when notarizing a photocopy of an original document:

*I, (full name), attest that the attached is a true and accurate copy
of the original (name of the document) issued by the (Original Issuer).
(Signature—full name)*

COMMON NOTARIZATION MISTAKES TO AVOID:

A document may be denied a apostille at the Secretary of State’s office if the document is notarized incorrectly. Contact the Secretary of State if you are concerned about your notarized document being denied.

3. **Expired commission.** Please make sure your notary public’s commission does not expire for at least 12 months after your dossier is submitted to AGCI.
4. **Notary signature.** Please make sure that the notary public’s signature exactly matches the name he/she is printing on the document, as well as on his/her notary stamp. This includes middle initials/name.
5. **Notary stamp/seal.** Please make sure that the text of the notary public’s stamp/seal is clear and legible, as sometimes, a stamp will bleed on paper.
6. **The notary public must not make any corrections on the document.** Even the slightest over-write will result in you having to redo the document.

BEFORE YOU COMPLETE NOTARIZATION:

Review the following list of *minimum* information required for each document’s notarization to ensure each of your documents is properly notarized:

1. County and state
2. Statement of notarization (*i.e., Sworn to and signed before me on this _____ day of _____, 20____.*)
3. The notary public’s commission expiration date (*at least 12 months into the future from when your dossier is submitted to AGCI*)
4. The notary public’s signature signed exactly as it appears on the stamp or embossed seal
5. An official stamp and/or embossed seal

b. County Certification**COUNTY CERTIFICATION DEFINED:**

A document that is county-certified means that the notary public has been verified by the county government in which the notary public is commissioned. Not all states require county certification.

WHO CERTIFIES A DOCUMENT:

Your notary public should be able to direct you to the county office that handles his/her notary public commission. If the notary public does not have this information, you can contact the Secretary of State’s office.

WHICH STATES REQUIRE COUNTY CERTIFICATION:

Currently, county certification is required in addition to the notary statement in the following states: Alabama, California, Georgia, Kentucky, Tennessee, Maryland, and New York. You will need to contact your Secretary of State’s office to ask if your state currently requires county certification.

WHAT YOU NEED TO ASK:

It is important to ask your notary public which county they are commissioned in before your document is notarized so that you are aware of which county you will contact to receive your county certification.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW:

Once notarized, you can either mail your document for county certification or visit the closest office to get the county certification completed in person. The cost varies depending on the county, so call ahead to verify the fees and directions. This County Certification is in addition to the Notary and the State Apostille and does not replace either.

c. State Apostille**STATE APOSTILLE DEFINED:**

Document apostille means that the Secretary of State's office verifies the validity and correctness of the notary public that has witnessed the signatures on your documents. Apostille and certification are the two different forms of document certification offered by the Secretary of State's Authentications department. A state apostille is a separate document that will be attached to the dossier document that you present, and will read "apostille" at the top.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW:

1. **A cover letter must accompany state apostille.** When sending your documents to the Secretary of State's Authentications department, please prepare a cover letter informing them that your documents need to be apostilled for an international adoption in Bulgaria. If you forget to do this, the package may come back to you, and your documents will not be accepted by the Bulgarian government.
2. **Call the Secretary of State to verify address/fees.** You should call and verify the address and fees with your Secretary of State's office prior to mailing or hand-delivering your documents. When you call, ask to speak with the Authentications department. You can find the contact information for your state's office online.
3. **Use a reputable delivery service for your apostille package.** If you choose to mail your documents to the Secretary of State, it is important that you ship through a courier that can track your package. Remember to include a prepaid return envelope that is also traceable. It is always a good idea to send any and all dossier documents through a reputable courier. In the past, families have lost their entire dossier through regular mail because it was untraceable. As a result, we do not suggest using USPS for any mailings, even if you ask for a traceable package. Some suggestions for reliable couriers are DHL, UPS or FedEx.

COMMON MISTAKES TO AVOID:

1. **The actual name of the notary public that notarized your documents** must be the same name that is verified on the apostille page. If the names do not match, the document will not be accepted by the government in Bulgaria.
2. **Do not put several documents together and get one apostille.** Even if your documents share the same name and same date of a notary, each document in the dossier needs to be apostilled separately.
3. **Documents must be apostilled in the state in which the document originated.** While the documents you are gathering—home study, doctor's letters, power of attorneys, etc.—will most likely be apostilled in the state in which you are currently living, a marriage certificate or divorce decree may have to be apostilled at another state's Secretary of State's office.



2. HOME STUDY & PARENT EDUCATION



"I am greatly encouraged; in all our troubles my joy knows no bounds."

2 Corinthians 7:4

2. Home Study & Parent Education

SECTION CHECKLIST

- Basic Home Study Information
- Required Home Study Documentation and Interviews
- How to Request an FBI Check
- Adoptive Parent Education
- Home Study Review and Finalization
- Looking Ahead to Post-Adoption Reports

a. Basic Home Study Information

HOME STUDY DEFINED:

A licensed social worker, working through an AGCI cooperating agency, assesses your home environment and produces a home study for use in the adoption process.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW:

All God's Children International is a Hague accredited agency. Therefore, AGCI requires all home studies to be written to Hague standards. All of AGCI's cooperating agencies are aware of this requirement. If you have not contacted your home study agency, please be sure to do so right away to initiate the home study process. AGCI will provide a copy of our current home study guidelines, along with your country's specific requirements, to your home study agency.

Note: It is crucial that your home study agency follow the guidelines and requirements provided.

- 1. The home study process, timeline, and required documentation vary by state and agency.** Typically, the average time frame in which to complete a home study is **two to three months** after the home study agency has received all of your required documents. Due to the lengthy process, AGCI strongly encourages families to focus on the home study and adoption education before beginning work on the remainder of the dossier. **AGCI asks home study agencies not to begin home visits with families until the family's online adoption education is complete.** We have found it beneficial for families to discuss this training and any questions they might have with their social worker.
- 2. Once the home study draft has been written, AGCI asks that the home study agency send the study to you for review.** Once you have reviewed it, the home study is then sent to AGCI for review. AGCI has 5-7 business days to review the home study and each subsequent draft of the study. Once the home study has been approved by AGCI, the study can be finalized, and you will be provided with sufficient notarized originals for your dossier, USCIS I-800A application, and personal records.
- 3. Please ensure the documentation provided for your home study is consistent with the rest of the documentation in your dossier.** All home studies distributed for your adoption must be identical, and your home study must match your USCIS application for the number of children you are planning to adopt. If you decide to request approval for two or more children, you must ensure that your social worker approves your home study for the adoption of two or more children. If the numbers on your form and in your home study do not match, USCIS will hold your approval notice until further clarification from your social worker can be obtained.

b. Required Home Study Documentation and Interviews

Note: Some documents for your dossier can be completed at the same time as your home study documents.

Required documentation for the home study varies by state and agency. However, below is a general list of documents that you will most likely be asked to provide. Please keep in mind that this is only a general outline and agencies will likely require more information/documentation.

1. Personal profiles (*autobiographies*)
2. FBI clearances
3. Local criminal background clearances
4. Child protective services clearances
5. Medical examinations
6. Psychological reports
7. References (*Number varies by agency and state*)
8. Income tax returns
9. Employment Verification
10. Birth certificates/Marriage certificate/Divorce decree(s)/Death certificate(s)
11. Certificates of completion for adoption education
12. Face-to-face interviews
13. Special Needs Checklist

FBI clearances are essential for your home study and are mandatory for anyone in the home who turns 18 at any point during the course of the home study process. The FBI clearances you complete for your home study are a Hague requirement and are separate from the fingerprinting process for USCIS. These FBI clearances are not for your dossier. Generally, your home study agency will assist you in obtaining these clearances. If not, the directions on how to obtain your FBI clearance are located below. Please contact your adoption specialist if you need assistance with this process.

Child Protective Services (CPS) clearances are required for your home study. A CPS clearance must be obtained for any state or country that each adult household member has spent three or more consecutive weeks since the age of 18. This also includes any vacations, study abroad or missions trips. Start by making a list of all of these states and/or countries you have been in since you were 18. If your home study social worker is not aware of the process to request these clearances for a particular state or country, please contact the adoption specialist for this information.

Psychological Report. Adoptive parents are required to meet with a licensed psychologist or psychiatrist for a psychological evaluation. The psychologist must write a reference letter on letterhead, typed and notarized. A letter for each parent is required and will need to be state certified with the other dossier documents. A copy of this letter will need to be given to your social worker. The home study will not be approved until this is reviewed and approved.

References. Families are required to submit a minimum of six reference letters for the home study. More references will be needed if you have children—please see below for instructions. These references are in addition to the references required by your home study agency. The reference letters need to be sent confidentially to your home study agency. At least three of these references will be sent with your dossier to Bulgaria. Your social worker must notarize these as “True and Accurate” copies and send these references to AGCI. Your adoption specialist will save these for your dossier.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW:

- 1. Reference letters need to be completed by good friends** (have known the adoptive parents for at least two years), neighbors, employers, colleagues, church leaders, family doctors, children's teachers, adult children, etc.
- 2. All letters need to be dated, written, and signed by the reference** and mailed directly to the persons or agency completing the home study.
- 3. Six references are required.** They will be notarized by the home study social worker/agency and then forwarded directly to AGCI.
- 4. Reference letters should be** objective, true and detail the circumstances of the prospective adoptive family. For your dossier, your social worker should send at least three non-relative reference letters, a reference letter for any children over the age of 18 still living in the house, and any teacher reference letters for children still in school to AGCI.
- 5. Reference letters must include the following:**
 - a. Relationship with the adoptive family
 - b. How long they have known the family
 - c. Reason(s) they recommend the adoptive family
 - d. The adoptive parents' personality, character, maturity, merits, and shortcomings
 - e. Any knowledge the reference has about the mental health of the adoptive parents
 - f. The family atmosphere and stability
 - g. The behavior of the adoptive parents in the community
 - h. The adoptive parents' interpersonal relationships
 - i. The adoptive parents' ability to parent
 - j. Suitability to adopt and any reasons they are not suitable to adopt
- 6. If adult children are in the family, they must each write a reference letter.** These letters must include the following:
 - a. An evaluation of their relationship with his/her parents
 - b. Merits and shortcomings of his/her parents
 - c. Parenting skills and discipline
 - d. How often he/she speaks to the parents
 - e. Any family violence
 - f. Any maltreatment from his/her parents
 - g. Suitability to adopt and any reasons the parents are not suitable to adopt
- 7. If school-age children are in the family, each teacher must write a reference letter.** These letters must include the following:
 - a. Daily behavior of the child
 - b. Level of parents' involvement in school/classroom
 - c. Evaluation of the parenting skills of the prospective adoptive parents
 - d. Views on an adopted child living in the family
 - e. Suitability to adopt and any reasons they are not suitable to adopt

c. How to Request an FBI Check

Each adult over the age of 18 in the home must complete an FBI Identification Record (*FBI clearance*). FBI clearances are conducted through submitting fingerprints and can be done using ink-stamped cards or digital scanning. In some states, it is possible to obtain an FBI check through fingerprints submitted to the State Bureau of Investigation for your State Criminal Background Check. To find out if this is an option for your state, it is best to contact your home study social worker. Most often, an individual must request his/her own FBI check by following the instructions below. An FBI check cannot be requested by a third party (*i.e., home study or adoption agency*). The results will come from the FBI CJIS Division. For the home study, you can complete your FBI record check through any FBI-approved channeler. We suggest using: <http://fieldprintfbi.com/FBIHomePage.aspx?PostingID=540&ChannelID=264>.

WHAT YOU WILL RECEIVE:

No Record Response: Consists of a cover letter stating that “No Record” was found from the FBI in West Virginia. Be sure to give this to your home study social worker.

Note: This FBI Check can be Apostilled and also used for your Dossier. If you receive notification from the FBI that a record was found, please contact AGCI immediately!

d. Adoptive Parent Education

AGCI requires that all adoptive parent(s) complete courses through Families Are Forever (FAF™). These courses can be found at <http://familiesareforever.org>. The approximate cost for Phase 1 is \$300. This training is designed to help prepare families for the rewards and challenges associated with their international adoption. It is an expectation that adoptive parents work through the education together. AGCI expects that all required training is completed prior to a family’s first meeting with their social worker. This training meets Hague requirements and is supplemental to those required by your home study agency and/or state of residence.

FAMILIES ARE FOREVER PHASE 1 COURSES:

- Class 101: Preparing for the Journey of Adoption
- Class 102: Introduction to Trust Based Relational Intervention
- Class 103: Children’s Needs and Intercountry Adoption
- Class 104: Understanding Children’s Development
- Class 105: Common Medical Conditions
- Class 106: Understanding Attachment
- Class 107: Developing Attachment
- Class 108: Transracial Adoption: Building Cultural Awareness

These courses can be purchased individually or in a package.

Note: If you (returning families) have previously completed an adoption through AGCI and have completed the above education, please contact your adoption specialist to inquire about your family’s specific adoptive parent education requirements.

SUBMITTING YOUR CERTIFICATES:

Your course completion certificates will be submitted to AGCI automatically through FAF™ and stored in your family’s permanent file. For instructions on submitting your certificates to your home study agency, please consult with the agency and/or your social worker.

RECOMMENDED READING:

Finally, AGCI recommends that prospective adoptive parents read the following books, based on the age of the child(ren) at placement:

1. *The Connected Child* by Karyn Purvis, David Cross and Wendy Sunshine (*all ages*)
2. *Attaching in Adoption* by Deborah Gray (*all ages*)
3. *Parenting the Hurt Child* by Gregory Keck and Regina M. Kupecky (*ages 2 and up*)

e. Home Study Review and Finalization

AGCI is unable to review your home study until all Families Are Forever™ certificates and have been received by AGCI.

AGCI will review the study for compliance with the sending country's current requirements; however, we are unable to take responsibility for future changes in country standards, spelling/grammatical issues or factual misrepresentations.

AGCI staff will provide feedback to your social worker within 5-7 business days. Subsequent reviews may be required. Once all changes are made, the home study will be approved by AGCI and you will be provided with at least three notarized originals with notarized copies of the home study agency's license. Your social worker will be instructed by AGCI to also send a notarized original of the home study directly to AGCI to be maintained in your family file.

Note: The following documents must be included with your home study for the dossier:

- Home study agency's license

f. Looking Ahead to Post-Adoption Reports

Over the past few years, the role of post-adoption reports in international adoptions has become increasingly more important. Countries have increased adoption and post-adoption requirements and, in some cases, have closed international adoption in the country due to post-adoption report non-compliance.

AGCI requires post-adoption reports for all adoptions. These reports are extremely important as updates to your child's birth country as well as the stability of future adoptions. As a child-centered agency, it is very important to us to continue to support families throughout the life of their adoption. Completing post-adoption reports is key to this support.

AGCI, the State of Washington, and/or the foreign government has the right to request and/or require additional reports conducted by a social worker and/or self-written reports if deemed necessary. Please understand that failure to comply with post-adoption report requirements will result in a breach of your contract and will be addressed accordingly.

Please help AGCI continue to find forever families for orphaned children around the world by completing your post-adoption reports accurately and on time. Not doing so could have dire consequences for the children and families who come after you.



3. DOCUMENTS TO ORDER



“We also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.”

Romans 5:3-4

3. Documents to Order

SECTION CHECKLIST

- Marriage License
- Divorce Decree and Death Certificates
- Passports
- Citizenship and Naturalization Documents (*if applicable*)

a. Marriage License

MARRIAGE LICENSE DEFINED:

A marriage license documents the marriage of two people.

WHERE YOU OBTAIN THE CERTIFICATE AND/OR LICENSE:

You may order your marriage license online at www.vitalcheck.com, or you can call the Vital Records office and order these documents over the phone. In many states, you can call and pay for these documents by credit card and have them sent directly to your home. Other states require that your request is submitted in writing. If so, prepare the necessary cover letter and send it with a check or money order to the appropriate office. You can ask the Vital Records office to forward your documents to the Secretary of State to be state certified. Some Vital Records offices provide this service, while others will only mail directly to you.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW:

- 1. Church/hospital certificate is not acceptable.** You cannot use a certificate or license issued by a hospital or minister. Marriage licenses must be obtained from the Vital Records office in the state in which you were born and/or the state in which your marriage took place.
- 2. Original documents are required.** A copy of your marriage license is not valid. If you were born outside of the United States, you must order an original birth certificate from the country in which you were born.
- 3. Order a minimum of one certified copy of each document.** The original will be included in the dossier and sent to Bulgaria. The USCIS will accept a photocopy. Your home study agency usually accepts a photocopy. If they require an original, you will need to order more than one certified copy.
- 4. The License must be apostilled** in the state the document originated in.

b. Copies of Divorce Decree(s)/Death Certificate(s)

CERTIFICATES/LICENSES/DECREEES DEFINED:

Each certificate or decree attests to the statistics of divorce or death.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW:

You can order and send originals of these documents (see Section 3: Documents to Order). The USCIS will accept photocopies of your birth certificate, marriage license, divorce decree(s), or death certificate (of deceased spouse).

c. Passports

PASSPORT DEFINED:

A passport identifies you as a citizen of your country. It typically includes a photograph of you, as well as identifying information.

WHERE YOU OBTAIN THE PASSPORT:

Passport applications can be obtained online or at your local post office. The following website is a helpful place to start and has a list of FAQ's: http://travel.state.gov/passport_easy.html. It can take up to 14 weeks to receive a passport, so order early and request it be expedited.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW:

- 1. Make a high-quality color copy** of each of your passports. Make sure that your picture, personal information, and signature page are all included.
- 2. Name changes must be documented.** If you already have a passport and it has been amended for any reason (i.e. name change upon marriage), the amendment page of your passport must also be included.
- 3. Your passport must not be expired.** Please double check to make sure that your passport has not expired; if it has, it will need to be renewed before you can travel to Bulgaria for the adoption of your child.
- 4. Your passport must not expire within six months of your estimated travel date to Bulgaria.** Please make sure your passport will be valid for longer than six months after you return home.
- 5. Please make sure you sign your passport** before you sent to AGCI.

d. Citizenship and Naturalization Documents (if applicable)**CITIZENSHIP/NATURALIZATION DOCUMENT DEFINED:**

These documents were received by you when you became a U.S. citizen, and show that you are now a U.S. citizen.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW:

If you were born in another country and immigrated to the United States, either as a child or adult, please obtain certified originals of your citizenship and naturalization documents from USCIS.



4. DOCUMENTS PREPARED BY OTHERS



*“May He defend the afflicted among the people
and save the children of the needy.”*

Psalms 72:4

4. Documents Prepared By Others

Note: Please keep in mind that all documents listed in the following two sections must be under five months old at the time they are submitted to AGCI. Therefore, it is important to coordinate the completion of your home study and filing of your I-800A in accordance with when you begin completing sections five and six of this packet.

SECTION CHECKLIST

- Medical Letter(s)
- FBI Criminal Check(s)
- Parental Rights Letter with DCFS Check

a. Medical Letter(s)

MEDICAL LETTER DEFINED:

A doctor must perform a physical on each adoptive parent and complete a certificate using the example form provided.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW:

- 1. The medical letter must be** completely filled in and signed by your doctor. It must be notarized by a notary as the doctor signs this.
- 2. The physical and the letter must be completed by an MD** (not a PA or DO, nurse practitioner, etc.)
- 3. The medical letter** must be typed on the doctor's letterhead and signed by your medical provider. It will be notarized.
- 4. You will be required to complete this document twice.** (1) When you submit your initial dossier to Bulgaria and (2) After you accept the referral of a child.
- 5. Your Doctor must include** his/her full signature and license number.
- 6. Long-term medications** should be named, along with condition treated, and efficacy of treatment (This information should be included in an additional letter, described below).
- 7. Please make sure** that the date that the doctor signs the form matches the date it was notarized. This is a common mistake.
- 8. Please ensure the wording on the letter is typed exactly as it appears.**

Note: On the AGCI Portal there are two medical letters. One for "No Condition" and "Yes Condition". Please use "Yes Condition" if you have a current chronic illness or have/had major medical issues (cancer, heart disease, etc.). Only use "No Condition" if you have never had a chronic or no major illness or surgery. Please consult with your AIS if you have any questions.

COMMON MISTAKES TO AVOID:

- 1. Call in advance** to ensure there is a notary, or bring a notary with you to the appointment(s).
- 2. The notary must** notarize the doctor's signature, not yours.
- 3. The notary must** not white out, over-write, or cross out anything on the document. Even the slightest over-write will result in you having to redo the document.
- 4. The medical letter** must be notarized on the same day as the form is signed.
- 5. One form for each adoptive parent is required.**

b. FBI Criminal Check

FBI CRIMINAL CHECK DEFINED:

An FBI criminal check on each parent is required for your home study, dossier and USCIS/USCIS application. Please ensure the FBI checks are not more than 12 months old at the time of your court date. For this reason, you'll be asked to redo this document before your court date. Only the FBI Criminal check for your Dossier is required to be apostilled.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW:

1. **Schedule your FBI fingerprint appointment** through the link provided: <http://fieldprintfbi.com/FBIHomePage.aspx?PostingID=540&ChannelID=264>
2. **Fees are \$50 per person.**
3. **The fieldprint company will email you your appointment details**, which will be at a local office based on your zip code. Sometimes you'll be able to pick a FieldPrint site near you and schedule your own appointment date.
4. **Results will be emailed** to you within 48 hours.
5. **Please make sure to print the results in COLOR.**

WHAT YOU NEED TO DO:

1. **Prepare the authentication cover letter** "FBI Apostille Cover Letter" (provided on the family portal).
2. **Attach the cover letter to your results** and mail with applicable fees to the authentication office in Virginia. The mailing address is on the cover letter.
3. **Please make sure to enclose a 9 x 12 prepaid envelope** with your address on it.
4. **The office in Virginia will mail your apostilled results** back to you.

c. Parental Rights Letter with DCFS Check

PARENTAL RIGHTS LETTER DEFINED:

A parental rights letter is prepared by the social worker performing your home study. It states that you are approved as adoptive parents and have never been deprived of parental rights in the past.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW:

1. **Attach the child abuse clearances** to your parental rights letter verification from the Department of Child and Family Services (DCFS) or equivalent agency in your state. Your home study agency will be required to run this check and you can request a photocopy of the check to attach.
2. **The letter must be written on letterhead** from your home study agency.
3. **The letter must be signed by the social worker** and their signature must be notarized.
4. **The letter must be apostilled.**



5. DOCUMENTS PREPARED BY YOU



*"I will give thanks to the LORD because of His righteousness; I will sing
the praises of the name of the LORD Most High."*

Psalm 7:17

5. Documents Prepared By You

SECTION CHECKLIST

- Power of Attorney for AGCI and VESTA
- Ministry of Justice Application
- Special Needs Checklist
- Photos of Family and Home
- Two Complete Photocopies of Dossier
- Previous Bulgarian Post-Adoption Reports and Child's Passport Copies (if applicable)

a. Power of Attorney for AGCI and VESTA

POWER OF ATTORNEY DEFINED:

This document gives AGCI and VESTA the power to process documentation on an adoptive family's behalf with the Bulgarian government.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW:

1. **One original is required.** You are required to fill out one copy of the power of attorney document for AGCI. It must be signed, notarized and apostilled.
2. **Document must be state apostilled or county certified, if applicable.** Once the document is notarized, you must send it to be apostilled at the state level and certified at the county, if this is required in your state. Please refer to county certification and state apostille information in section one.

b. Ministry of Justice Application

MINISTRY OF JUSTICE APPLICATION DEFINED:

This document informs the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) of the family's basic personal information.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW:

1. **One original is required.** You are required to complete all questions on this form.
2. **The document must be notarized and apostilled.**
3. **The child parameters you document** that you are open to on the MOJ application must exactly match the approved parameters in your home study. This must be dated after the USCIS approval date.
4. **This document must be dated** after you receive your approval from the USCIS/USCIS. Please hold onto this form and send this in once your USCIS Approval Letter has been received.

c. Special Needs Checklist

SPECIAL NEEDS CHECKLIST DEFINED:

This document will inform VESTA of special needs you are open to considering.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW:

1. **The checklist needs to be signed,** but not notarized or apostilled.
2. **Be consistent** with the special needs you are approved for in your home study.

d. Photos of Family and Home

PHOTO PREPARATION DEFINED:

While you are working on your paperwork, you should be preparing the pictures required by the government of Bulgaria. Please take some time to present your home and yourselves in clear, well-presented photographs. These pictures will be used to give a visual impression of your family to the government officials who review your adoption case.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW:

1. **The photos do not need to be professional photos**, but should be clear pictures of you, your home, your family and things you enjoy doing.
2. **At least two of the pictures should show the adoptive parents.** Also include photos of the interior and exterior of your home, including your child's room and pictures of you and your family (if other children reside in home).
3. **Please print in color or mount all photos** on three 8.5x11-inch white sheets of paper. Please label the pictures.
4. Page 1: Include 3–4 photos of your family.
5. Page 2: Include 3–4 photos of the inside of your house (kitchen, living room, bedroom, etc.).
6. Page 3: Include 3–4 photos of the outside of your house (front of house, back of house, backyard).
7. **Plan to send your pictures to your international adoption specialist** along with your completed dossier.

e. Two Complete Photocopies of Dossier

PHOTOCOPIES DEFINED:

When your dossier is complete and all apostilles have been obtained, please put your documents in the order in which they are listed on the checklist in the dossier section on the family portal. Make two color photocopies of the entire dossier. One photocopied dossier is sent to our office with your complete, original dossier. The second photocopied dossier is for your records.

Note: Please do not staple photocopies. Please do not remove staples from notary or apostille. Fold over documents to copy.

f. Previous Bulgarian Post-Adoption Reports and Child's Passport Copies

PREVIOUS BULGARIAN POST-ADOPTION REPORTS DEFINED:

If you have previously adopted from Bulgaria, you will need to show evidence of complete naturalization of the previously adopted child(ren). This can be shown with a photocopy of the adopted child's United States passport.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW:

1. **You will also need to comply with current post-adoption requirements.** The current requirements for Bulgarian post-adoption reporting are five visits on the anniversary dates: three months, six months, twelve months, eighteen months, and twenty-four months. All reports must be apostilled and submitted with ten photographs and a copy of your adopted child's passport.

Note: Other documents may be additionally required by the Ministry of Justice during the adoption process. The Ministry of Justice will review your dossier and must be satisfied with its contents, and you must have USCIS approval before the adoption referral can continue.



6. USCIS



"Come near to God and He will come near to you."

Romans 4:8

6. USCIS

SECTION CHECKLIST

- USCIS Application Overview
- I-800A and Supplements
- Photocopies of Birth/Marriage/Divorce/Death Certificates
- Fees
- Home Study
- Home Study Approval Letter from AGCI
- FBI Fingerprinting
- USCIS Notice of Approval
- Checking Your USCIS Case Status Online

a. USCIS Application Overview

USCIS DEFINED:

The United States Citizenship & Immigration Services (USCIS). This is a new department that was created to process all incoming Hague Convention cases. The approval from the USCIS gives your adopted child permission to enter the United States.

CONVENTION COUNTRY DEFINED:

The Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Cooperation in Respect of Inter-Country Adoption (the Convention) entered into force with respect to the United States on April 1st, 2008. This Convention provides a framework for member countries to work together to ensure that children are provided with permanent, loving homes, that adoptions take place in the best interest of a child, and that the abduction, sale, or trafficking of children is prevented.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW:

1. Once you have completed your application and gathered all necessary documents, please send all documents to:

Express Mail: *(no USPS, only FedEx, DHL or UPS)*

USCIS

Attn: Hague

2501 S. State Hwy, 121 Business, Suite 400

Lewisville, TX 75067

2. **Do not send any application documents to your local USCIS field office.** Any documents sent to your local USCIS office will be returned to you. Only use the addresses stated above.
3. **Determine who sends your completed home study to USCIS/USCIS.** Some states will allow you to send in your home study with your I-800A application, and others require that the home study agency sends the report directly to the USCIS/USCIS office. Confirm with your social worker your state's process on filing your home study.
4. **Before you complete the USCIS application process:** review the following list of requirements before you begin the application process. Once you have gathered all of the documents/fees listed below, you will submit them to the USCIS/USCIS office:
 - I-800A Form
 - Photocopies of your Birth Certificates/Marriage License/Divorce Decree(s)/Death Certificate(s)
 - One check or money order for combined fees. This includes a \$775.00 I-800A fee and an \$85.00 (per person) fingerprinting fee
 - Notarized copy of your home study (*Does not need to be state apostilled*)
 - Approval Letter from AGCI stating that your home study was read and approved

Note: The estimated timeline for this application to be processed is 60-90 days.

b. I-800A and Supplements

I-800A FORM DEFINED:

Submission of the I-800A form, Application for Determination of Suitability to Adopt a Child from a Convention Country, initiates the immigration process for the child you intend to adopt from a Convention country. Form I-800A and supporting evidence are required for USCIS to determine your eligibility and suitability to adopt a child from a Convention country. This form can be downloaded at www.uscis.gov (click on immigration forms). There is also an example on the portal.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW:

1. **Type or print legibly in black ink** when completing the I-800A form.
2. **If extra space is needed, attach a continuation sheet**, indicate the part and the number of the item, and date and sign each sheet. Write your name and USCIS account number, if known, at the top of each sheet.
3. **I-800A is divided into parts 1 through 5, with three supplements.** Supplement 1 must be completed if there are additional adult members living with you. Supplement 2 must be completed to give consent to the USCIS to disclose information about your case to AGCI. Supplement 3 must be completed if you are requesting action be taken on an approved I-800A form (extension, change, etc.) and you have not filed an I-800 yet. *Note: A G-1145 can be filled out if you would like email notification from USCIS that your application was accepted.*
4. **You will need to fill out Supplement 2** which gives consent to the USCIS to inform AGCI about your case and access to receive information.
5. **If you answer “yes” to any of the questions concerning the criminal background**, please follow instructions given on the form I-800A precisely. If any of the requested additional information is missing, it could result in the denial of your petition.

BEFORE YOU COMPLETE YOUR I-800A FORM:

The I-800A must be filled out exactly as indicated in the example on the portal.

COMMON MISTAKES TO AVOID:

Your home study must match your I-800A form in the age range, approved special needs, and the number of children you are planning to adopt. For example, if you decide to request USCIS approval for two children, you must ensure that your social worker approves you and your home study for the adoption of “one or two” children. If these numbers do not match, USCIS will hold up your approval notice for further clarification from your social worker.

c. Copies of Birth Certificates/Marriage License/Divorce Decree(s)/Death Certificate(s)**CERTIFICATES/LICENSES/DECREES DEFINED:**

Each certificate, license, or decree attests to the statistics of birth, marriage, divorce, or death.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW:

You can order and send originals of these documents (see Section 3: Documents to Order). The USCIS will accept photocopies of your birth certificate, marriage license, divorce decree(s), or death certificate (of deceased spouse).

d. Fees**FEES DEFINED:**

USCIS fees cover the costs of application and fingerprinting.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW:

1. **Send one check.** You need to send a check or money order for the combined fees of a \$775.00 I-800A fee and an \$85.00 (per person) fingerprinting fee. Make check payable to **U.S. Department of Homeland Security**.
2. **Children 17 years of age must be fingerprinted.** If you have any children living in your home who are 18 years or older, they will have to be fingerprinted by USCIS as well. In this case, you need to add \$85.00 for each additional person needing fingerprints.

e. Home Study

HOME STUDY DEFINED:

A licensed social worker, working through an AGCI cooperating agency, assesses your home environment and produces a home study for use in the adoption process.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW:

1. For your USCIS application, you will need to include an original notarized copy of your home study, unless your state is listed as an exception to this rule.
2. If your state is an exception to the USCIS rule, you will need to make sure a notarized original home study is sent to the USCIS office by your licensed social worker.
3. You need to apply to USCIS as soon as the home study is completed, due to the lengthy processing time of applications. *Note: The estimated timeline for this application to be processed is 60-90 days.*

g. Home Study Approval Letter from AGCI

All God's Children International is a Hague-accredited agency, approving your home study written by your social worker. This letter is required by the USCIS.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW:

1. AGCI will email this letter to your family once the home study is approved.
2. Please print this letter in color and include it with your application.

h. FBI Fingerprinting**FBI FINGERPRINTING DEFINED:**

The Federal Bureau of Investigation uses fingerprints for identification purposes and background checks.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW:

After you have filed your application with the USCIS, you will be notified of a date to appear for fingerprinting. All fingerprinting is completed by appointment only. The office where your fingerprinting appointment is scheduled may or may not be the same location where you filed your application. Once you have appeared for your fingerprinting appointment, the USCIS will send the prints to the FBI for processing. This FBI Fingerprinting is different than all prior fingerprinting appointments and must be completed. No prior fingerprints can be used.

i. USCIS Notice of Approval**USCIS APPROVAL DEFINED:**

This letter notifies you that the USCIS has approved your application (I-800A) to adopt internationally.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW:

1. **You will receive the Notice of Approval after the USCIS receives your fingerprints.** Once the USCIS receives the fingerprinting results and your file is complete, they will send you an approval called a Notice of Approval in the mail to your address.
2. **You will receive the Notice of Approval within three months of sending in the application.** If you have not received your approval within three months of completing the USCIS requirements, please contact the office at which you filed your application. The USCIS will mail this letter directly to you after they have approved your application, but they will not forward a copy to AGCI unless you filled out the supplement 2 form.
3. **Certify the Notice of Approval.** You will need to notarize this as a "True and Accurate Copy". You are signing this cover sheet and not signing the bottom of the approval document. An example of this cover sheet is on the portal. State apostille a copy of your Notice of Approval to add it to your dossier. Mail this to AGCI to include it with the rest of your dossier.
4. **Your Notice of Approval is good for 15 months** from the date of initial approval. Please note the expiration date on your Notice of Approval.
5. **You will be updating this during your adoption process.** Please be prepared and know that with the current timelines for a referral, you WILL need to file and send a supplement 3 to the USCIS for an extension Notice of

Approval, which will expire 15 months from the date of approval, in order to immigrate a child into the United States. If you have any questions about how to do this, please ask your International Adoption Specialist.

j. Check Your USCIS Case Status Online

Families who have a receipt number for an application or petition filed at a USCIS Service Center can check the status of their pending case online through the USCIS website at www.uscis.gov. If you are not given a receipt number, you can continue to receive information about your case by calling the:

National Customer Service Center at 1-877-424-8374 or 1-800-767-1833 (TTY for the hearing impaired), or by visiting your local USCIS field office.