

## Child Adoption In India

The Central Adoption Resource Authority (CARA) has been unable to bridge this gap between the number of children available for adoption and the number of prospective parents, resulting in prolonged delays in the adoption process. The waiting period for parents to receive an adoption referral has risen from 3 years in 2022 to approximately 3.5 years in 2025.

### State of Child Adoption in India (2024–25)

In 2024–25, a total of 4,515 children were adopted, marking the highest figure since 2015. Of these, 4,155 adoptions were domestic, indicating a growing social acceptance of legal adoption within India. The remaining adoptions were international, carried out under regulated legal frameworks.

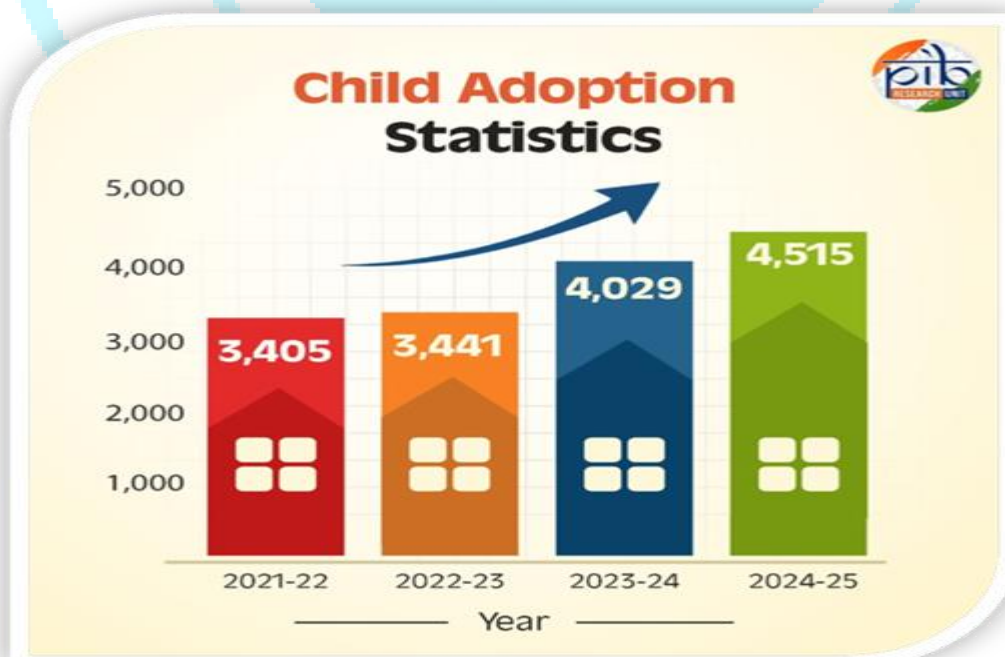
### Institutional Framework for Adoption

#### 1. Central Level

Central Adoption Resource Authority (CARA) functions as the nodal body, established under the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015. CARA regulates and monitors both domestic and inter-country adoptions. It also acts as the Central Authority under the Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption (1993), which India ratified in 2003.

#### 2. State/UT Level

1. State Adoption Resource Agencies (SARA) for state-level coordination.
2. Child Welfare Committees (CWCs) for declaring children legally free for adoption.
3. District Child Protection Units (DCPUs) for ground-level execution and monitoring.



## Legal framework

### 1. Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act (HAMA), 1956

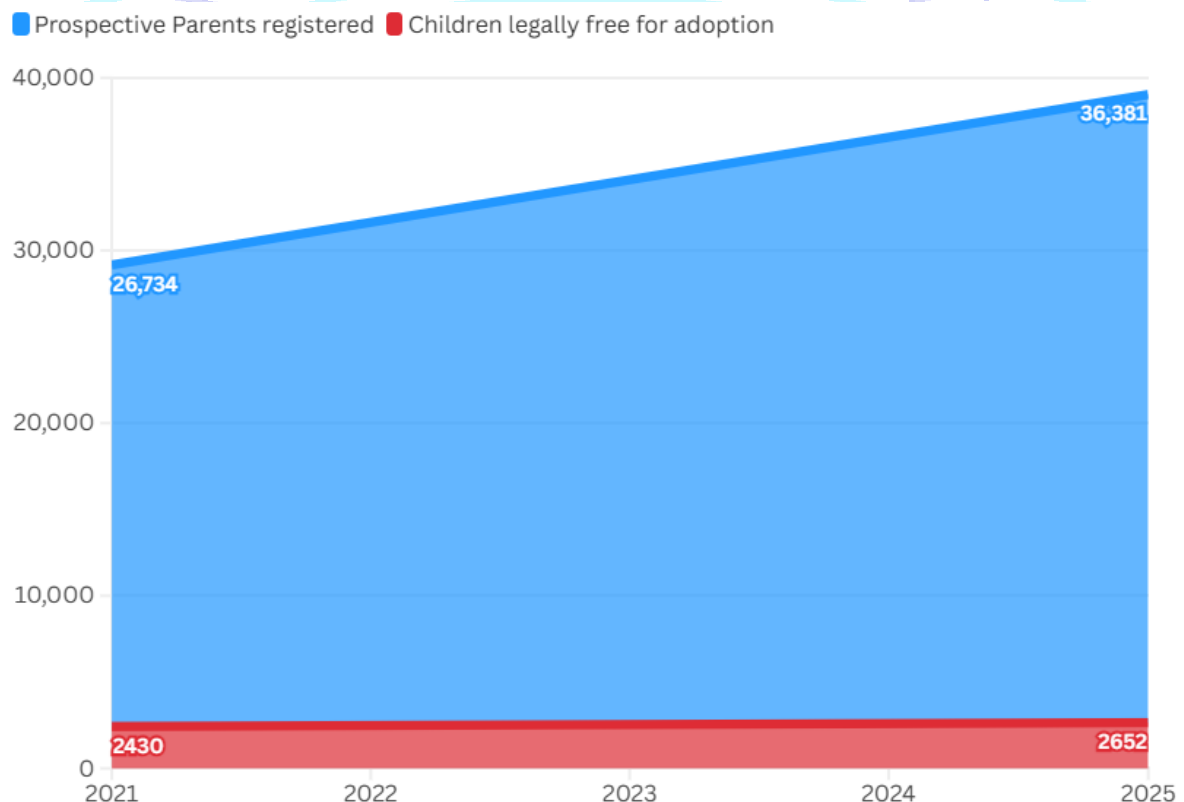
Allows legal adoption for Hindus, Buddhists, Jains, and Sikhs. Does not require registration with CARA. Offers a simpler process but lacks uniform oversight and transparency.

### 2. Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015

Applicable to all citizens regardless of religion. Requires prospective adoptive parents to register on CARA's portal. Involves a Home Study Report (HSR) by a Specialised Adoption Agency (SAA) to assess eligibility. Matching is done only with children legally declared free for adoption.

### 3. International Framework

The Hague Convention, 1993 ensures that international adoptions are ethical, legal, and transparent, protecting the best interests of the child.



## Key Challenges in Child Adoption in India

### 1. Widening Demand-Supply Gap

There is a severe imbalance with 13 prospective adoptive parents (PAPs) for every 1 adoptable child. A large proportion of children in Child Care Institutions (CCIs) are not legally free for adoption due to intact parental rights or incomplete legal processes. Waiting time for adoption has risen from 1 year in 2017 to 3.5 years in 2025, leading to concerns about illegal or informal adoptions.

## **2. Structural & Legal Hurdles**

Weak enforcement of the JJ Act, 2021 and poor coordination among adoption bodies. Delays due to absentee guardians or incomplete documentation. Parliamentary and Standing Committees have noted inconsistencies between HAMA (fast but less regulated) and JJ Act (regulated but slow).

## **3. Mismatch in Age & Parental Preference**

Around 34% of legally adoptable children are above 14 years old, but most Indian parents prefer infants (0–2 years). CARA (2024) data shows 60% of adopted children are female, and 80% are in the 0–2 age group, highlighting preference bias.

## **4. High Rate of Child Returns**

Between 2017–2019, there was a rise in children being returned by adoptive parents. 60% of returned children were girls, 24% had special needs, and many were above 6 years old. Lack of adequate pre-adoption counselling and preparedness contributed to the problem.

## **5. LGBTQ+ Adoption Barriers**

Lack of legal recognition for LGBTQ+ couples in adoption frameworks. Traditional family norms lead to their exclusion from formal adoption systems, increasing reliance on informal or illegal adoptions.

# **Recent Measures to Improve Adoption & Foster Care**

## **1. Child Pool Expansion**

CARA has included children from CCIs into the adoption pool, classified into 5 legal categories: orphan, abandoned, surrendered, no visitation, and unfit guardianship (as per 2023 Supreme Court directions).

## **2. Digital Reforms**

Upgraded CARINGS portal with foster care modules and improved workflows for relative/step-parent adoptions, reducing timelines to 3–4 months.

## **3. Mandatory Counselling (2025)**

Structured counselling introduced at pre-, during-, and post-adoption stages to help adoptive families and children adjust, especially for older and special needs adoptions.

# **Steps to Strengthen and Streamline the Adoption System**

## **1. Child-Centric Policy Shift**

Focus on children's right to family and protection, aligning with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

## **2. Simplification of Adoption Procedures**

Time-bound clearances, better integration between CCIs and CARA's portal, and appointment of dedicated adoption officers.

## **3. Enhanced Psychosocial Support**

Effective implementation of CARA's counselling mandate with trained psychologists and social workers.

#### **4. Public Awareness & Destigmatisation**

Large-scale campaigns to reduce stigma around adoption, encourage acceptance of older and special needs children, and promote inclusivity.

Source: <https://www.thehindu.com/data/for-every-child-free-for-adoption-13-parents-wait-in-line-data/article69823360.ece>

