



Inter Country Adoptee Voices



RESEARCH REPORT

September 2026

INTERCOUNTRY ADOPTEE VOICES (ICAV)

Australian Intercountry Adoption Statistics & History

1968 – 2025

COMPILED ESTIMATE, 1970–2025

14,226 – 14,415

intercountry adoptions to Australia, including recorded expatriate
adoptions where identifiable

Contents

01	Introduction
02	How many intercountry adoptions have there been to Australia?
03	Australia's intercountry adoption history
04	Where did Australia's intercountry adoptees come from?
05	Country snapshots
06	How ICAV compiled these statistics
07	What these numbers do and do not show
08	Sources and contributions

01 Introduction

Intercountry adoption to Australia has taken place since at least the late 1960s, but there has never been one complete national dataset covering the entire period.

ICAV has brought together government statistics, historical research, country-specific records and adoption visa data to build the clearest national picture we can of how many intercountry adoptees were adopted to Australia, their birth countries, and how Australia's intercountry adoption system developed over time.

02 How many intercountry adoptions have there been to Australia?

14,226 – 14,415

Our current compiled estimate of intercountry adoptions to Australia from 1970 to 2025, including recorded expatriate adoptions where identifiable. Intercountry adoption began earlier, so the true 1968–2025 total is higher.

This estimate combines:

- **State-arranged intercountry adoptions**, recorded mainly through the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), and
- **expatriate adoptions**, where Australians living overseas adopted through another country's system and later obtained an Australian adoption visa.

The true total is likely to be higher because some early adoptions, private arrangements, and expatriate cases were not fully recorded in national statistics.

Intercountry Adoptees in Australia

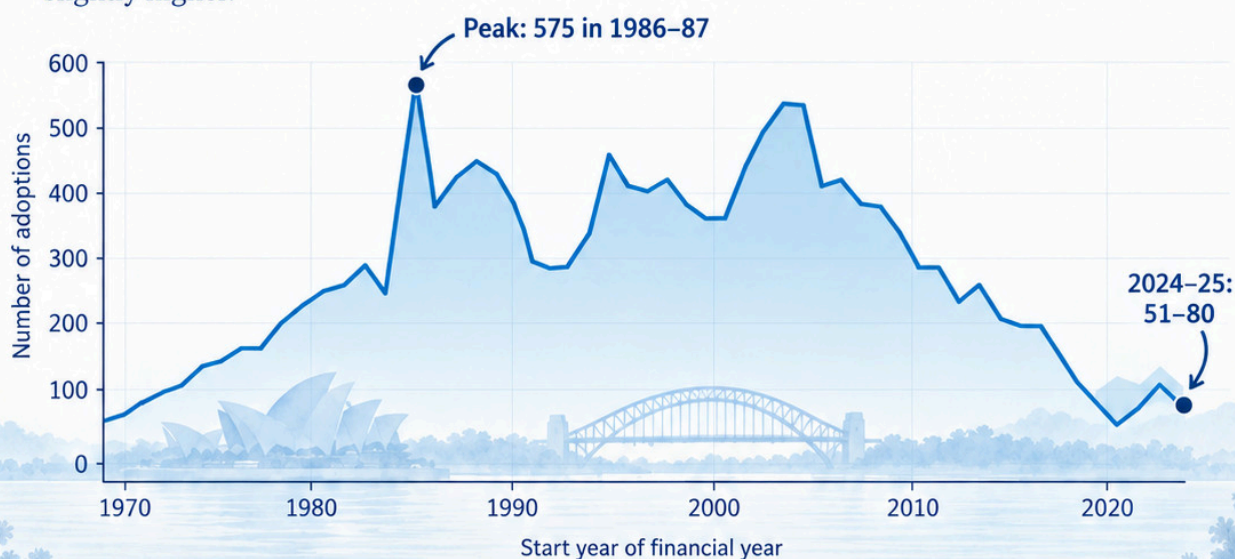
1968–2025

At least

14,226–14,415+

estimated intercountry adoptions to Australia, including expatriate adoptions

This minimum estimate combines state–arranged intercountry adoptions and recorded expatriate adoptions. Modern intercountry adoption to Australia began in 1968, but the quantified national estimate starts from 1970. The true 1968–2025 total is therefore slightly higher.



Gap years 1985–87 are filled from the 1989 Victorian review.
Recent years are shown as a range where expatriate visa recording is uncertain.

Sources: ICAV Australia ICA Statistics 1968–2025 master workbook;
AIHW Adoptions Australia series; 1989 Victorian review; Rosenwald 2009;
Korean MOHW for early years.

FIGURE 1 Australian intercountry adoption statistics 1968–2025

03 Australia's intercountry adoption history

The statistics make more sense when placed alongside the history.

Australia's intercountry adoption system developed in stages, from early ad hoc arrangements in the late 1960s, to parent-led programs, stronger State control, Hague Convention reforms, Commonwealth-State agreements, support services, and more recent investigations and accountability measures.

The timeline below gives a simple snapshot of the major national milestones that sit behind the statistics in this report. The statistical series runs to 2024–25; the history timeline includes national developments through 2026.



FIGURE 2 Australia's intercountry adoption history: major events

04 Where did Australia's intercountry adoptees come from?

Australia's intercountry adoptee community comes from many birth countries across Asia, Latin America, Africa, Europe and the Pacific.

The charts that follow show the countries with the highest minimum known or compiled totals to 2024–25, including identifiable expatriate adoptions where they can be allocated to a birth country.



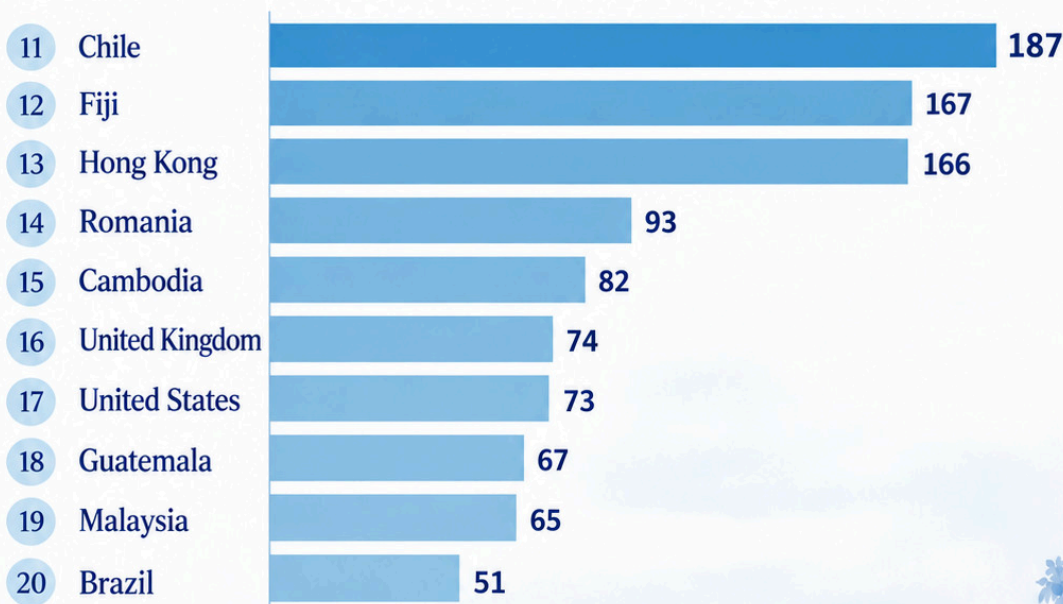
FIGURE 3 Australia's Top 10 Birth Countries for Adoption

Australia's 11–20 Birth Countries

Intercountry adoptee totals to Australia — minimum totals to 2024–25, including identifiable expatriate adoptions where known



This chart shows the birth countries ranked 11 to 20 by the highest minimum known or compiled totals of intercountry adoptees to Australia to 2024–25, including identifiable expatriate adoptions where they can be allocated to a birth country.



Sources: compiled from ICAV's Australia ICA Statistics 1968–2025 master workbook, Rosenwald (2009), AIHW Adoptions Australia series, country-specific sheets, and identifiable expatriate adoption data allocated to birth countries where known. Minimum totals may still undercount some early, undocumented, suppressed, or unallocable years.

Intercountry Adoptee Voices (ICAV)

FIGURE 4 Australia's other 11 – 20 Top Birth Countries

Note on rankings. These rankings are based on the best evidence currently available. They are minimum totals, not final totals, because some early, suppressed, undocumented or unallocated cases cannot yet be confidently assigned to a country.

05 Country snapshots

The national totals hide very different country histories. Some programs were large and long-running. Others were concentrated in a short time period. The snapshots below show the broad pattern for each of Australia's major birth-country groups.

South Korea

South Korea is by far Australia's largest intercountry adoptee birth-country group. Adoptions began in the late 1960s, rose sharply in the 1980s, and then declined over time. South Korean data are stronger than for many other countries because early figures can be reconstructed using Korean Government data as well as Australian sources.

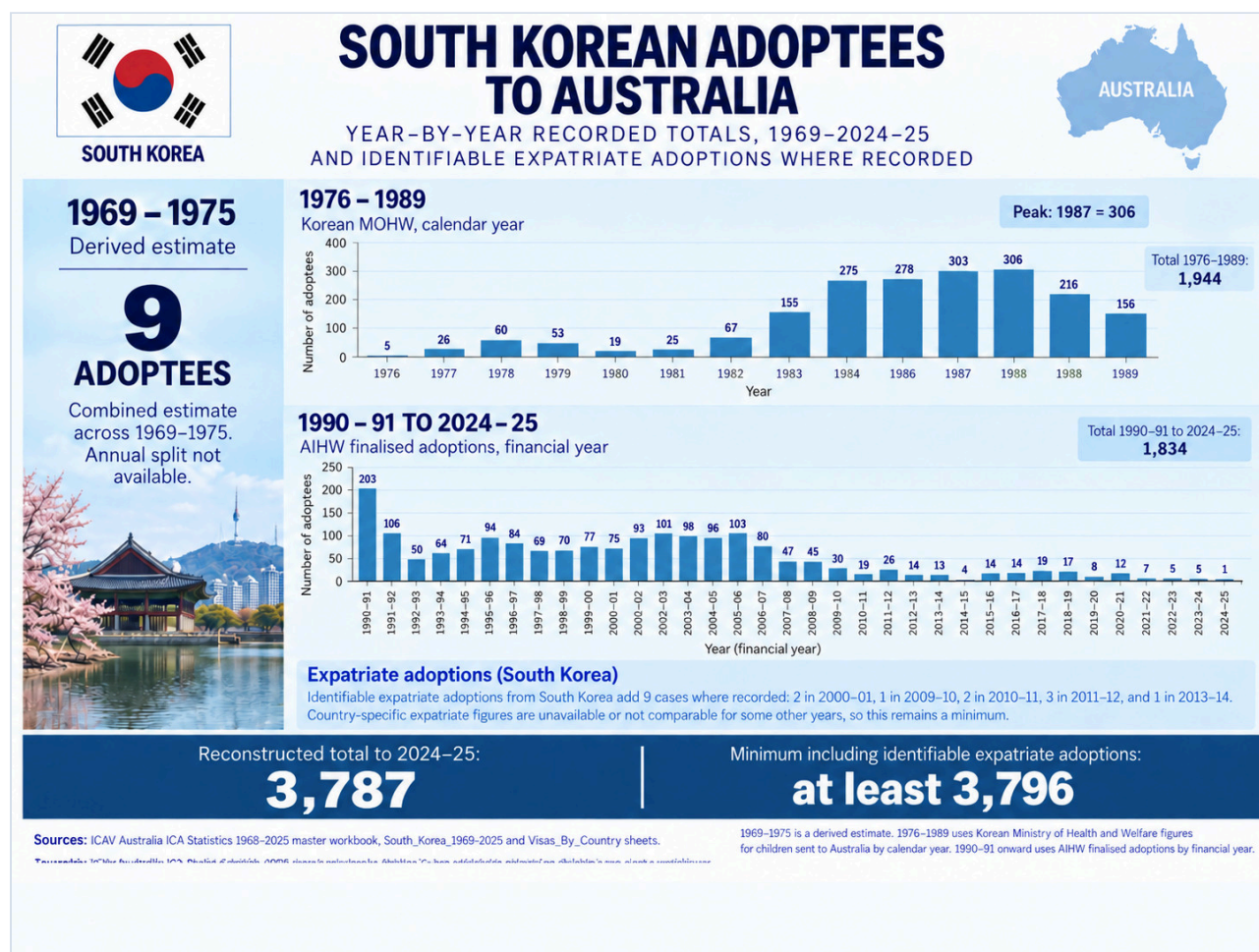


FIGURE 5 South Korean intercountry adoption statistics to Australia

Philippines

Philippine adoptions occurred in significant numbers before 1990 and continued across the following decades. Identifiable expatriate adoptions add further Filipino adoptees beyond the State-arranged totals.

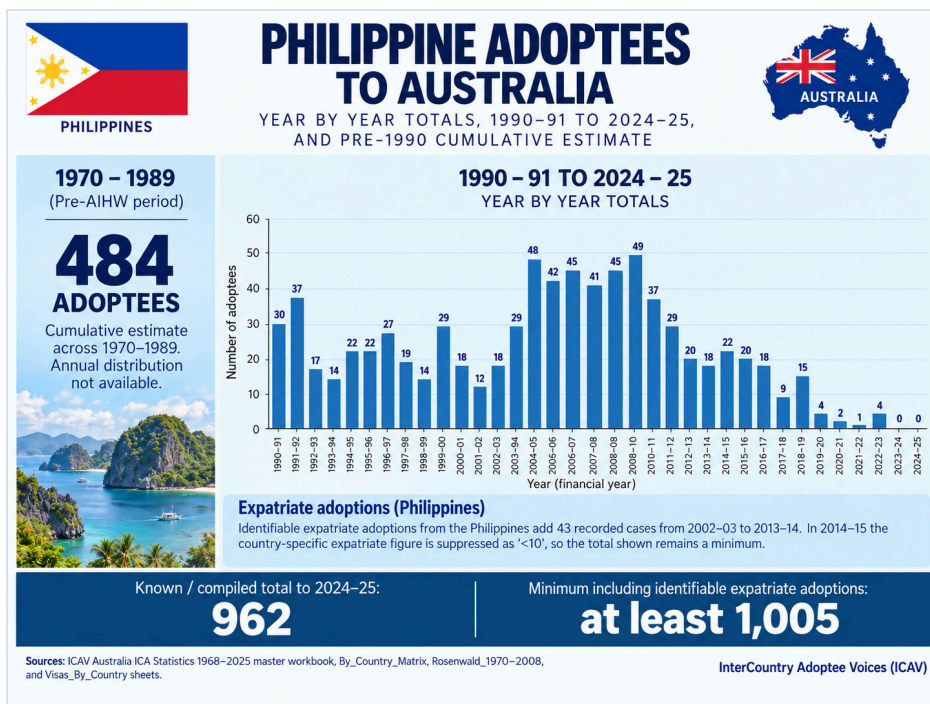


FIGURE 6 Philippine intercountry adoption statistics to Australia

India

Indian adoptions were already substantial before AIHW began publishing country-level annual data. The figures show a long-running program through the 1990s and 2000s, followed by a marked decline.

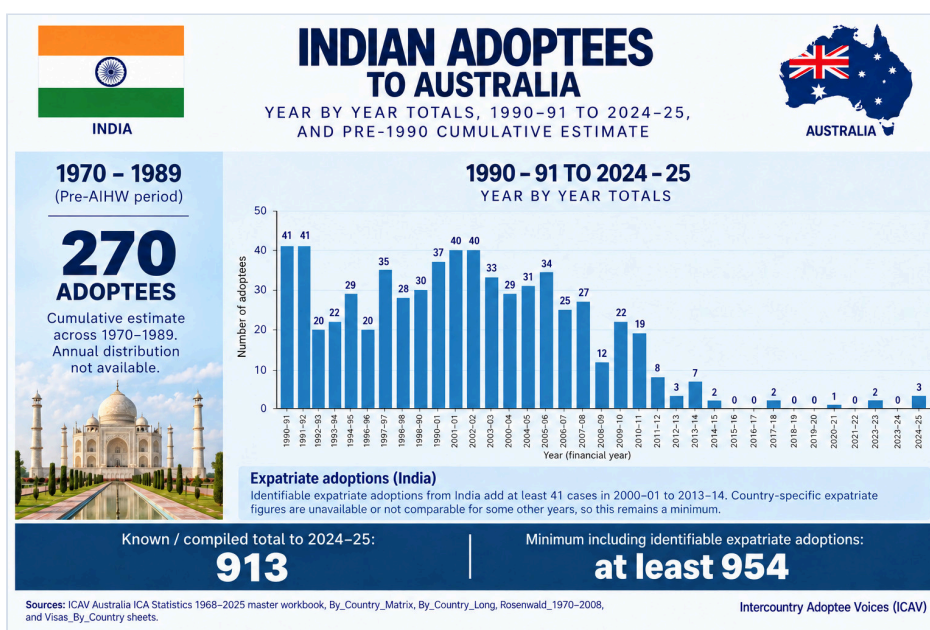


FIGURE 7 Indian intercountry adoption statistics to Australia

Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka is one of the clearest examples of a country where a large proportion of adoptions occurred before 1990. The later annual figures are much lower, showing how dramatically the pattern changed.

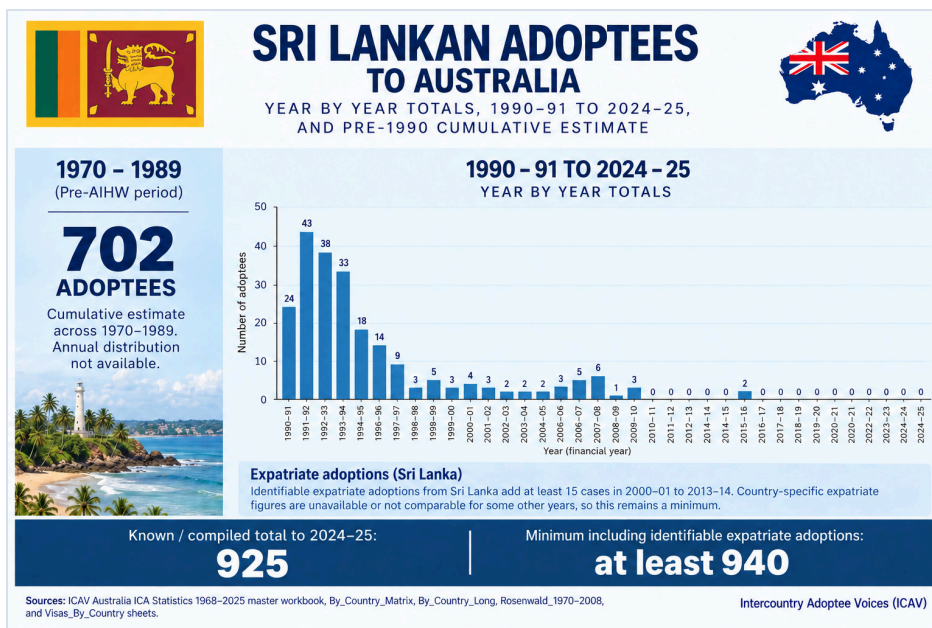


FIGURE 8 Sri Lankan intercountry adoption statistics to Australia

China

China had very few known adoptions to Australia before the 1990s. Numbers then rose quickly, peaked in the 2000s, and later declined. Identifiable expatriate adoptions add further cases to the minimum total.

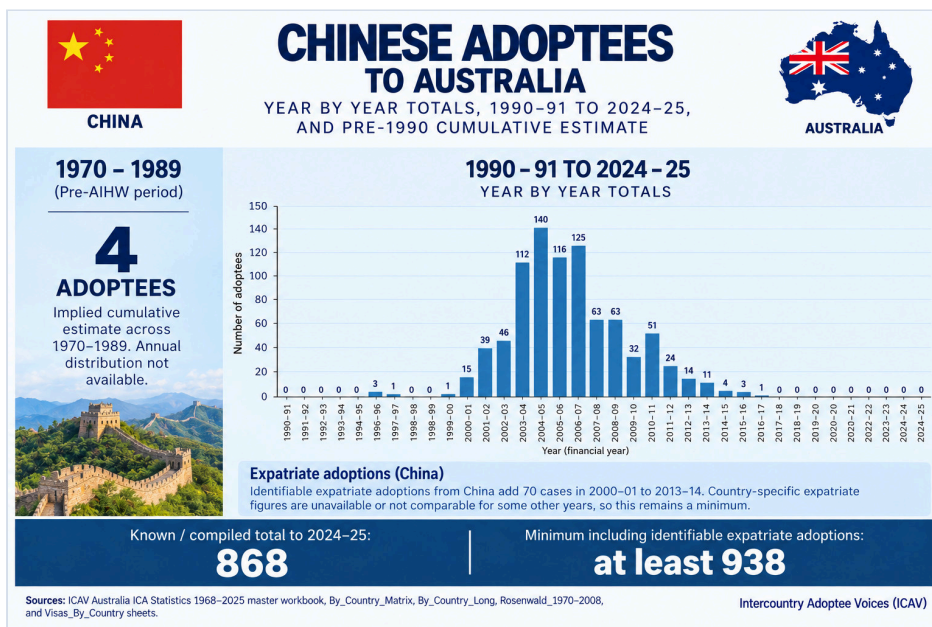


FIGURE 9 Chinese intercountry adoption statistics to Australia

Thailand

Thailand has one of Australia's longer-running intercountry adoption histories, with meaningful numbers both before and after 1990. Visa data also identify additional expatriate adoptions.

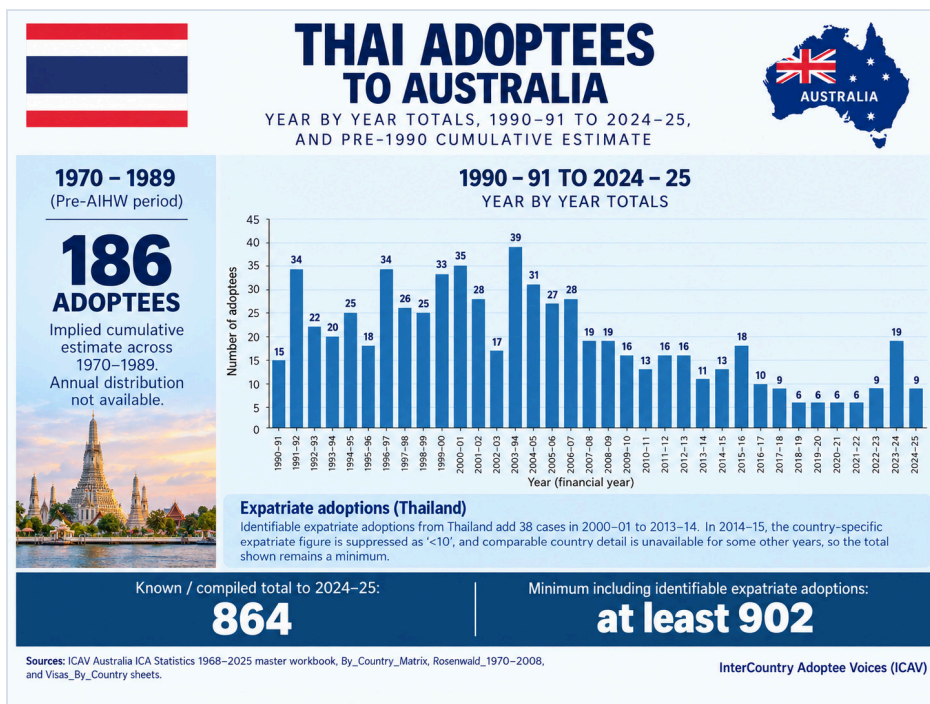


FIGURE 10 Thai intercountry adoption statistics to Australia

Ethiopia

Australian adoptions from Ethiopia were concentrated mainly between the mid-1990s and early 2010s. Ethiopia is also notable because identifiable expatriate adoptions significantly increase the minimum known total.

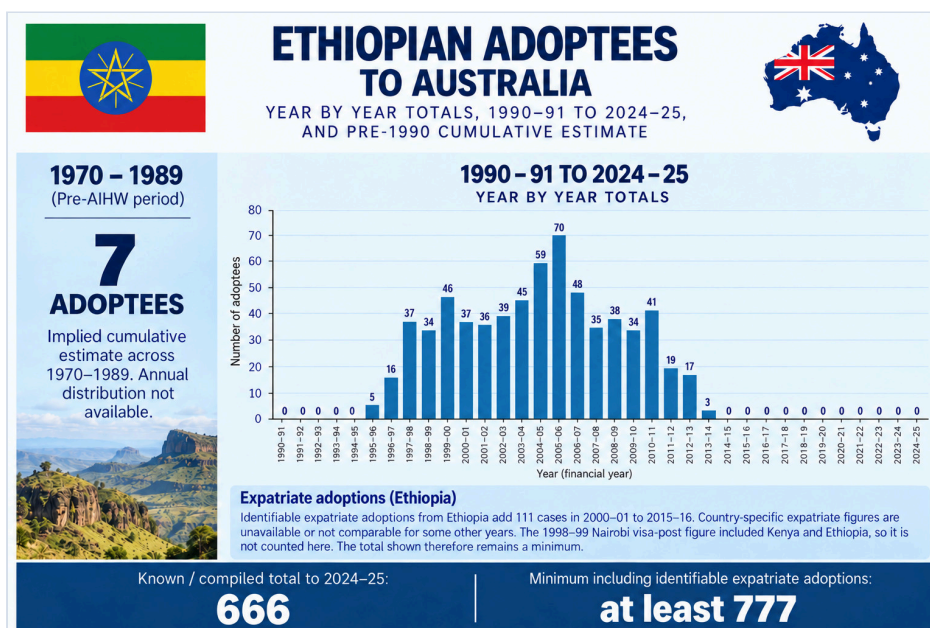


FIGURE 11 Ethiopian intercountry adoption statistics to Australia

Vietnam

Vietnam has a very different history from most other countries. Almost all known Vietnamese adoptions to Australia occurred in the early 1970s, especially during 1972–1975, including Operation Babylift arrivals in April 1975. Very few occurred after that period.

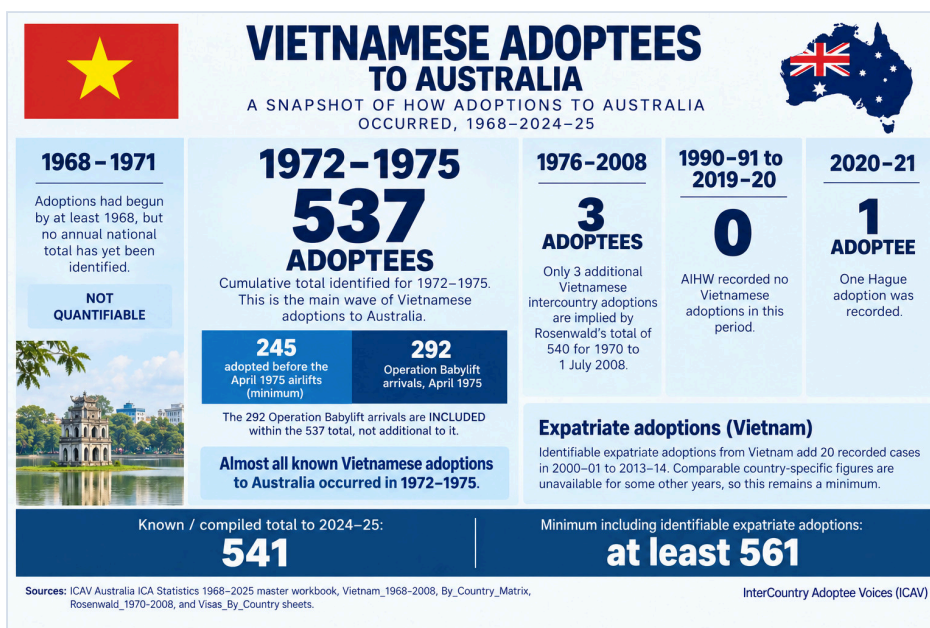


FIGURE 12 Vietnamese intercountry adoption statistics to Australia

Taiwan

Taiwan's history is more fragmented than some other countries. Early adoptions include the known Julie Chu cohort and a small number of other documented placements, followed by clearer annual data from the 1990s onward. Identifiable expatriate adoptions are also included where known.

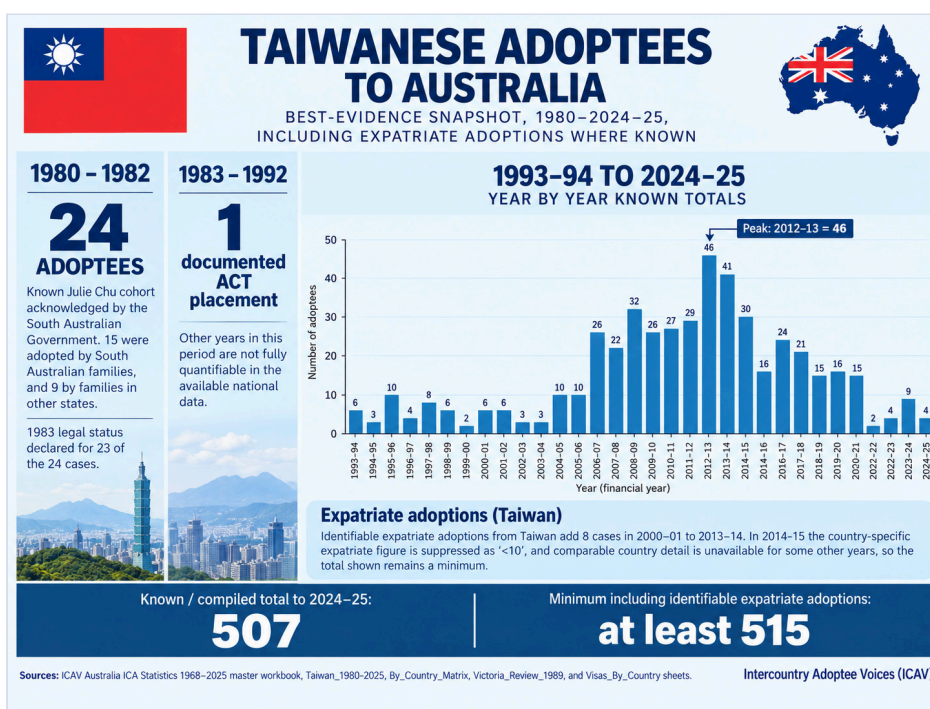


FIGURE 13 Taiwanese intercountry adoption statistics to Australia

Colombia

Colombian adoptions to Australia were already established before 1990. Numbers were highest in the early and mid-1990s and then declined significantly, although smaller numbers continued in later years.



FIGURE 14 Colombian intercountry adoption statistics to Australia

06 How ICAV compiled these statistics

These figures are based on a combination of historical and official sources, including:

- the AIHW *Adoptions Australia* series;
- Australian adoption visa data;
- Trudy Rosenwald's Chapter 11 in *Other People's Children: Adoption in Australia*, pp. 197–206;
- country-specific government and historical data;
- the 1989 Victorian Review of Intercountry Adoption;
- Korean Government data for early South Korean adoptions; and
- other country-specific records used to fill gaps where possible.

Because the historical record is incomplete, ICAV uses terms such as *known total*, *compiled total*, *minimum total*, *estimated*, and *at least*. These words reflect the fact that some intercountry adoptees are still not fully visible in Australia's official historical record.

07 What these numbers do and do not show

These statistics help show the scale and history of intercountry adoption to Australia but they do not tell the whole story. The figures do not fully capture:

- undocumented early adoptions;
- some private or informal arrangements;
- expatriate adoptions where detailed country data are unavailable; or
- the personal, legal and historical complexities behind each adoption.

08 Sources and contributions

ICAV's *Australia ICA Statistics 1968–2025* master dataset PDF contains the full list of data and sources used.

This dataset is intended to be a living resource. It may not capture every reliable source or piece of historical data currently available. If you notice a data issue, or have relevant adoption data or source material to contribute, please contact ICAV so it can be reviewed and, where appropriate, added in future updates.



InterCountry Adoptee Voices (ICAV)

Online version: intercountryadopteevoices.com/research/australias-intercountry-adoption-statistics-history/

First published September 2026 | Last updated September 2026