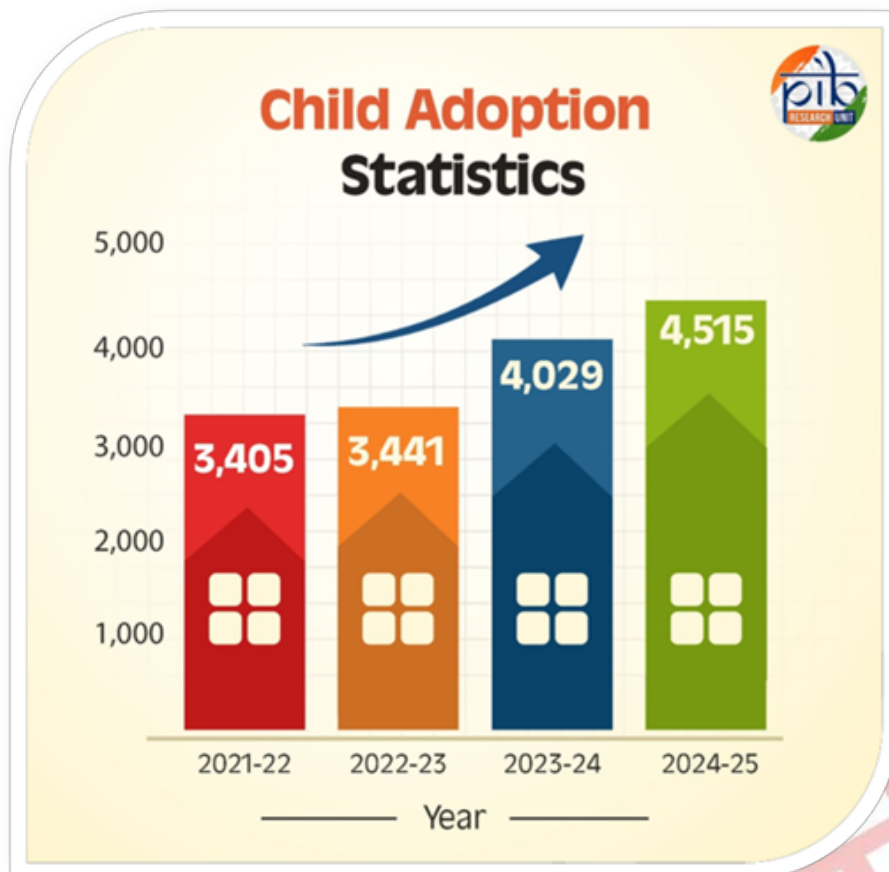# Child Adoption in India

Source: TH

Why in News?

The **Central Adoption Resource Authority (CARA)** has been unable to **bridge this gap between the number of children available for adoptio**n 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.**

What is the Status of Child Adoption in India?

- **State of Child Adoption in India:** In 2024–25, **4,515 children were adopted**, the highest since 2015.
    - Of these, **4,155 were domestic adoptions**, reflecting a growing acceptance of legal adoption in the country.

Child Adoption Statistics

Year	Adoptions
2021-22	3,405
2022-23	3,441
2023-24	4,029
2024-25	4,515

- **Nodal Central Agency:** The Central Adoption Resource Authority (CARA), established under the **Juvenile Justice Act, 2015** is responsible for overseeing **both domestic and international adoptions.**
- **State/UT Responsibility:** The implementation of the Juvenile Justice Act, 2015 at the state and Union Territory level is carried out by various agencies, including:
  - State Adoption Resource Agencies (SARA)
  - Local Child Welfare Committees
  - District Child Protection Units (DCPUs)
- **Legal Framework:**
  - **Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act (HAMA), 1956: HAMA, 1956** permits **legal adoption for individuals from the Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, and Sikh** communities.
    - Notably, **adoptions under HAMA do not require registration with CARA**.
  - **Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015:** It governs **adoptions for all citizens** in India, **regardless of religion**.
    - Under this Act, prospective adoptive parents are required to **register on CARA's portal**, following which a **Specialised Adoption Agency (SAA)** conducts a **Home Study Report (HSR).**
    - If found eligible, they are **matched with a child** who has been **declared legally free for adoption**.
- **International Framework: The Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Cooperation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption (1993**) ensures that international adoptions are carried out in an ethical, legal, and transparent manner.
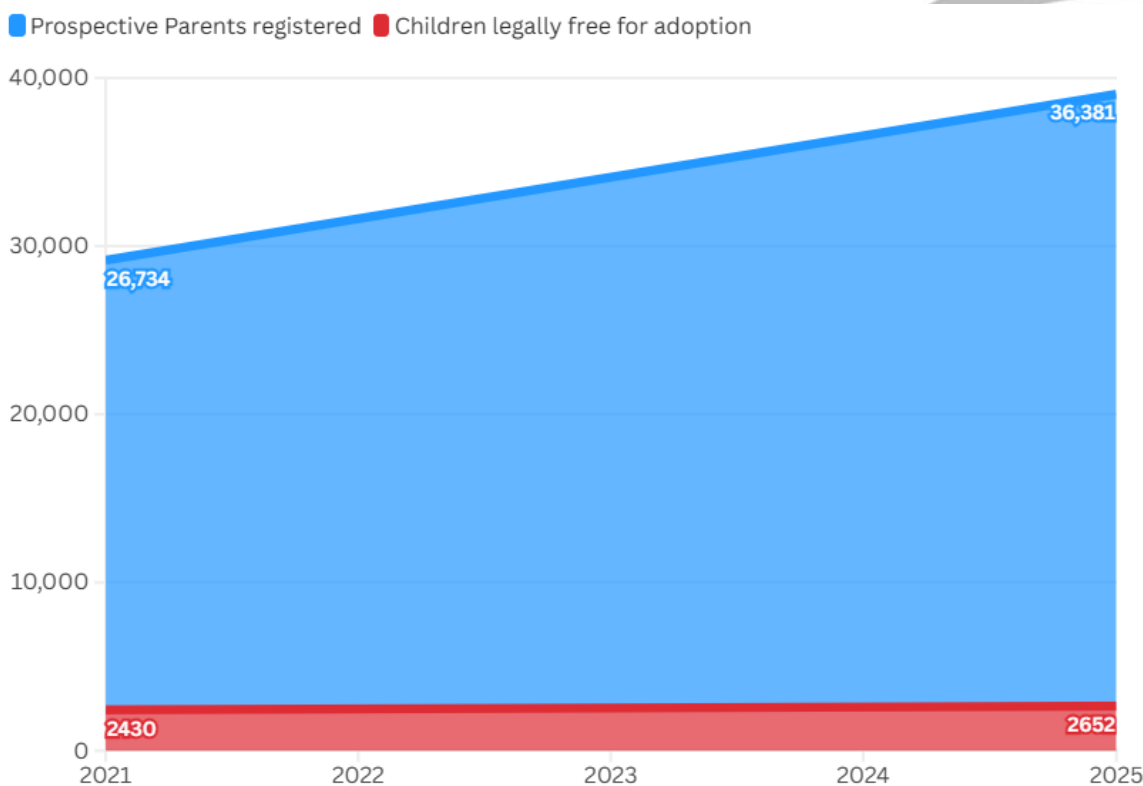
Central Adoption Resource Authority (CARA)

- **About**: **CARA** is a **statutory & autonomous body under the Ministry of Women & Child Development**.
- **Objectives & Functions:**
  - It facilitates adoption of **orphaned, abandoned, and surrendered children** through its

recognised adoption agencies.

- It **monitors and regulates domestic adoptions** under the [**Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015**](#).
- It also serves as the **Central Authority** for **inter-country adoptions** under the [**Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption, 1993**](#), which **India ratified in 2003.**

What are the Key Challenges Hindering the Child Adoption Process in India?

- **Widening Demand–Supply Gap:** There is a **significant gap** between **Prospective Adoptive Parents (PAPs)** and **adoptable children (13:1)**, with only a small fraction of children eligible for adoption due to issues like **intact parental rights and lack of legal free status.**
  - Adoption delays have increased from **1 year in 2017 to 3.5 years in 2025,** leading to concerns over **illegal or informal adoptions**, as highlighted by a Parliamentary Committee.

- Prospective Parents registered ■ Children legally free for adoption

	2021	2025
Prospective Parents registered	26,734	36,381
Children legally free for adoption	2430	2652

- **Structural & Legal Hurdles:** [**JJ Act, 2021**](#) faces **weak implementation, poor coordination among agencies, inadequate training,** and **legal hurdles** like **absentee guardians** causing delays in adoption.
  - The [**2022 Standing Committee**](#) flagged inconsistencies between **HAMA (simpler but lacks transparency)** and the **JJ Act (regulated but slower)**, raising concerns over trafficking and procedural delays.
- **Mismatch in Age & Parental Preference:** Around **34% of adoptable children** are **above 14 years**, while most Indian parents prefer **infants (0–2 years)**. This **preference bias** results in older and special needs children being overlooked.
  - As per **CARA data (2024)**, **60% of adopted children are female**, and **80% belong to the 0–2 age group**, reflecting a strong parental preference for younger children.
- **High Rate of Child Returns:** Between 2017–2019, there was a **rise in adoptive parents returning children**, **60% were girls**, **24% had special needs**, and many were **over 6 years**

old.
- ○ This reflects **challenges in adjusting to adoptive homes** due to **inadequate counselling and preparation.**
- ■ **LGBTQ+ Adoption & Legal Barriers:** Due to **traditional family norms** and lack of **legal recognition**, **LGBTQ+** individuals and couples face **exclusion from formal adoption** systems. This has led to a **rise in informal or illegal adoptions** within the queer community.

Eligibility Criteria for Prospective Adoptive Parents (Regulation 5 of Adoption Regulation, 2022)

Adoption Eligibility Criteria in India

Who Can Adopt	Who Cannot Adopt
Married Couples: • Must be married and living together for at least two years. • Age difference with the child should not exceed 45 years. • Should not have more than two living biological children. **Single Parents:** • Must be above 30 years of age. **General Eligibility:** • Anyone, regardless of gender or marital status, can adopt. • Must meet other criteria like age, financial stability, and ability to provide a supportive home.	• Convicted of an offense involving moral turpitude or punishable under IPC or other laws. • Found guilty of child abuse or cruelty towards a child. • Found guilty of abandoning or neglecting a child. • Undergoing treatment for any life-threatening or infectious disease. • Declared of unsound mind by a competent court. • If one spouse in a couple has been declared of unsound mind or is undergoing treatment for any life-threatening or infectious disease. • Divorced or legally separated couples. • Individuals under 21 years of age, married or single • Single male cannot adopt a girl child.

Measures Taken to Improve Adoption and Foster Care in India

- ■ **Child Pool Expansion:** CARA added **children from Child Care Institutions (CCIs)** to the **legal adoption pool** and classified them under **5 categories (Orphan, Abandoned, Surrendered, No Visitation, Unfit Guardianship)** as per Supreme Court directions (**SC, in 2023** while hearing a petition filed by a NGO)
- ■ **Digital Reforms:** Upgraded **CARINGS portal** with **Foster Care modules** and new workflows for **relative/step-parent adoptions,** reducing processing time to **3–4 months**.
- ■ **Mandatory Counselling (2025):** CARA introduced **structured counselling** at **pre-, during-, and post-adoption stages**, with qualified counsellors to support **adoptive families and**

children.

What Steps Can Be Taken to Strengthen and Streamline the Adoption System in India?

- **Child-Centric Approach:** Prioritize **children's right to family, care, and protection** by shifting from **parent-centric to child-centric adoption policies**, aligned with the **UNCRC.**
- **Simplify Adoption Procedures:** Streamline **JJ Act, 2021** and **Adoption Regulations, 2022** with **time-bound clearances**, **digital CCI–CARA integration,** and **dedicated adoption officers.**
- **Strengthen Psychosocial Support:** Ensure **proper implementation of CARA's counselling mandate** with trained professionals to **minimise disruptions and support family bonding.**
- **Promote Awareness & Destigmatise Adoption:** Launch **IIEC (Information, Education, and Communication) campaigns** to counter stigma around **non-biological parenthood,** and encourage adoption of older and special needs children.

Drishti Mains Question:

Examine the social attitudes towards adoption in India. How can public awareness and institutional reforms together build a more adoption-friendly culture?

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