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**EDITORIAL**

**A step forward is needed for child protection in Greece** 

*Despite the fact that the economic crisis in Greece has been very present in the media for many months now, very little is said, and known, about the current situation of the child protection system in the country.*

**T**he child protection system in Greece – and despite ongoing efforts – still suffers from a number of lacunas. In the alternative care domain, we can observe a situation where there is widespread reliance on the institutionalisation of children, low rates of foster care, an absence of systematic monitoring and reliable data, as well as a shortage of staff and resources (CRC, 2012).

On the domestic and inter-country adoption front, an official public procedure often has a five-to-six-

year-waiting period before a child is proposed to the prospective adopters; this, in turn, drives prospective adopters to choose the private route, as it is much faster.

The Hague Convention entered into force in Greece on 1 January 2010. However, the current adoption procedure does not meet the standards foreseen by the Convention. For instance, private adoptions are possible and regulated in Greece, as children may be adopted with the involvement of an attorney or a gynecologist, who acts as a

facilitator. A court decision remains necessary to enact the private adoption and the majority of private adoption intermediaries ensure that biological parents do not know the details of the adoptive parents, in order to exclude the possibility of blackmail attempts or any other unlawful action.

This said, private adoptions are well known for being a place of abuse, and Greece is, unfortunately, not an exception in this case. Several cases of illegal adoptions, involving foreign mothers and an exchange of money, were already denounced and people condemned on grounds of trafficking.

Thus, much needs to be done to bring domestic laws in line with international standards.

There is a paradox emerging from this quick overview of child protection concerns in Greece: on the one hand, there is an increasing over-reliance on the institutionalisation of children and a non-functioning adoption system. On the other, there are numerous candidates ready to adopt, but who are weary and frustrated by the difficulties of the current adoption procedures, which could drive them down the illegal path to adopt a child.

Of course, there is no simple answer to such complex issues, and it would be wrong to believe that all children in institutions are adoptable. It is, in fact, the opposite, as these children are often placed because of economic constraints in their own families. However, alternative measures,

such as foster and kinship care could be taken into consideration, notwithstanding the fact that the latter are also known for being much cheaper than keeping large institutions running. Adoption should therefore be considered as a measure of last resort.

Greece's endless financial and economic problems are not a secret anymore, and this situation may further deteriorate the conditions of institutionalised children, materially and psychologically as well as bring additional complications to an already-strained and slow public adoption system, thereby opening its doors to abuse and trafficking.

With an established know-how and expertise in analysing similar situations, recommending legal and practical solutions through training and capacity-building schemes and in close cooperation and consultation with the Greek authorities, the International Social Service and its International Reference Centre for the Rights of Children deprived of their Family can and is ready to assist in those situations, as has been done in many other countries with UNICEF and other partners.

ISS can contribute to bringing the issue of child protection in Greece a major step forward

The ISS/IRC team  
August 2012

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## IRC NEWS

### Sébastien Bertrand and his show *Chemin de la belle étoile* came to Switzerland

The ISS/IRC is pleased to share the success of Sébastien Bertrand's show *Chemin de la belle étoile* [Path of the beautiful star], organised by the General Secretariat of the International Social Service, with the support of the association *Espace Adoption* and the Swiss Foundation of the International Social Service.

The show, which was performed in Delémont, Neuchâtel and Geneva on 12, 13 and 14 June, tells, through a double narrative and musical story, the return trip from France to Lebanon of an adoptee – Sébastien Bertrand himself – in search of his origins. The result of this fabulous trip back is the delivery of an intimate and very fulfilling perspective of the adoption experience.

The funds raised through the show will be allocated to the funding of projects for children undertaken by these three organisations.

## ACTORS

Source: Hague Conference on Private International Law: [http://www.hcch.net/index\\_en.php?act=conventions.status&cid=69](http://www.hcch.net/index_en.php?act=conventions.status&cid=69).

- **Finland:** This country has updated the contact details of its Central Authority.
- **Greece:** This country has updated its Country Profile.
- **Malta:** This country has appointed its accredited bodies.

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## BRIEF NEWS

### **Ethiopia: Closure of the adoption programme**

The Australian authorities (Australian Government Attorney-General's Department) have published a note, in which they notify the closure of the adoption programme in Ethiopia, following the moratorium of 2009 and early 2010. The latter also state that this difficult decision was made due to the situation in Ethiopia, which is increasingly 'unpredictable', complex, uncertain y leaves many Australian adopters in a limbo for years.

Source: Attorney-General's Department, [www.ag.gov.au](http://www.ag.gov.au).

### **Romania: Entry into force of the new Law on Adoption**

According to information by the U.S. Department of State, and confirmed by the Romanian Office for Adoptions, the new Law on Adoption came into force on 7 April (Law N° 233/05.12.2011). The new Law introduces important amendments in relation to intercountry adoption, by limiting the latter to families and individuals with Romanian citizenship, who live abroad. Thus, the adoption of Romanian children is only foreseen in the following circumstances: 1) the adoptive family must be a relative up to the fourth degree of kinship of the adoptable child; 2) one of the spouses of the adoptive family must be a Romanian citizen; 3) the adopter must be the spouse of one of the child's biological parents.

Source: U.S. Department of State,

[http://adoption.state.gov/country\\_information/country\\_specific\\_alerts\\_notices.php?alert\\_notice\\_type=notices&alert\\_notice\\_file=romania\\_1](http://adoption.state.gov/country_information/country_specific_alerts_notices.php?alert_notice_type=notices&alert_notice_file=romania_1).

### **Russia: Ratification of bilateral agreements on adoption between the Russian Federation and the United States**



According to information by the U.S. Department of State, on 10 June, the Duma ratified the bilateral agreements between Russia and the United States in matters of adoption, previously signed by the Secretary of State (Hillary Clinton) and the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs (Sergey Lavrov). The entry into force of these agreements will allow for the inclusion of additional safeguards for the protection of the well-being and the rights of children and of all the parties involved in intercountry adoption proceedings.

Source: U.S. Department of State,

[http://adoption.state.gov/country\\_information/country\\_specific\\_alerts\\_notices.php?alert\\_notice\\_type=notices&alert\\_notice\\_file=russia\\_5](http://adoption.state.gov/country_information/country_specific_alerts_notices.php?alert_notice_type=notices&alert_notice_file=russia_5).

### **Rwanda: Ratification of the 1993 Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption**

According to information by the U.S. Department of State, on 1 July, Rwanda ratified the 1993 Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption. However, the Government of Rwanda has confirmed the current suspension of all new intercountry adoption proceedings until the effective and full implementation of the Convention.

Source: U.S. Department of State, <http://adoption.state.gov/>.

## Peru: Assessment of the *Ángeles que aguardan* programme

*This article briefly presents this line of action that promotes the domestic and intercountry adoption of children with special needs.*

Initiated by the Ministry of Women and Social Development (MIMDES), through the National Adoptions Secretariat (SNA) in 2004, the campaign *Ángeles que aguardan* [Awaiting angels] aims to promote priority adoptions, i.e. the adoption of children aged five years and over, adolescents, groups of siblings, children with health problems and special needs, who are suitable to be placed for adoption<sup>1</sup>. We suggest the presentation of this programme, by addressing, mainly, the conditions that the prospective adoptive parents must fulfil as well as the exemption process, and by analysing the results that have been obtained since its creation.

### Background and brief presentation of the programme

The programme *Ángeles que aguardan* was created to reduce the number of children with specific needs living in institutions, who have not been able to be placed for adoption due to a late judicial declaration of abandonment, thus preventing them from being entered on the register of adoptable children. This programme therefore allows these legally-adoptable children to benefit from a family environment that is favorable to their development.

Within the SNA, the Office for the Promotion of the Adoption Culture and Priority Adoptions [*Oficina de Promoción de la Cultura de la Adopción y Adopciones Prioritarias*] is competent to deal with priority adoptions. It fulfils its mission within the framework of Law N° 26981 dated 1 October 1998 on the administrative adoption procedure for judicially-declared adoptable children (*Ley de Procedimiento Administrativo de Adopción de Menores de Edad Declarados Judicialmente en Abandono*) and this Law's Regulations (*Decreto Supremo N° 010-2005-MIMDES*). However, the conditions that apply to the prospective adoptive parents are not provided for formally in these instruments and may be adapted on a case-by-case basis.

### An atypical procedure aimed at encouraging prospective adoptive parents

The following may adopt children with specific needs: spouses or single persons with Peruvian

or foreign citizenship, who are in good mental and physical health, who can evidence their moral integrity and sufficient financial, social and intellectual resources to successfully assume the specific needs of their prospective child. The applicants must be aged between 25 and 55 years and, in accordance with their age, they will be able to adopt a child of a given age, in line with the usual procedures.

Couples, who already have at least two children may also submit a request to adopt a child registered with this programme.

The applicants identify a child registered on the programme's list and have access to his file, which contains medical, psycho-social and legal information. They are then assessed by the SNA's professionals (psychologists, social workers and lawyers) within 30 days. If they are declared suitable to adopt, their application to adopt the identified child is submitted to the National Adoption Council. It is therefore a direct matching, exempting them from the traditional rules of 'matching'<sup>2</sup>.

This pre-selection of the child's file by the prospective adoptive parents may raise questions in relation to the best interests of the child and the principles governing the 'matching' process, the cornerstone of any adoption process. The ISS/IRC recommends an active assessment by the professionals of the prospective adoptive parents, who are suitable to respond to the children's special needs, with the starting point of the 'matching' always being the child, and not the family. Similarly, the assessment should be undertaken before the applicants are able to make this pre-selection.

Finally, it should be stated that applicants wishing to adopt Peruvian children through this programme are not affected by the quotas imposed by Peru on each receiving country (20 applications per country).

### An ever-increasing number of children with special needs adopted thanks to the programme

The *Ángeles que aguardan* campaign has rapidly shown results. In 2005, 53 children with specific needs were adopted through this programme; in August 2006, while 337 children

over the age of five years were waiting to be adopted in Peru, 31 children found a home thanks to this programme.

As regards the last two years, we have the following data: in 2009, 246 children were adopted both nationally and internationally. Among the latter, 71 were adopted through the *Ángeles que aguardan* programme, amounting to approximately 29%, 26% of them internationally. In 2010, 163 children were adopted by foreign citizens, 47 of them within the framework of this programme.

The ISS/IRC enthusiastically notes the increase in the number of children with special needs adopted within the framework of this programme and, although it seems that the domestic adoption of these children remains to be encouraged in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, this programme is a model to be followed as it visibilises these children, who, for most of them, live in institutions, and increases their opportunities of growing up in a family

environment, when this is considered to be the most adequate solution to their needs and to be in their best interests.

<sup>1</sup> See the promotional video on *youtube*: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BVWcNps-OIM>.

<sup>2</sup> Once the child has been judicially declared in a situation of abandonment, the SNA suggests the files of two or three prospective adoptive parents for the child in order to choose the most suitable family (arts. 19-21 of the Regulations of the 1998 Law).

Sources: MIMDES, <http://www.mimdes.gob.pe/>, Federal Office for Migration (Switzerland), <http://www.bfm.admin.ch/content/dam/data/gesellschaft/adooption/publikationen/ber-tagung-genf10.pdf>, Junta de Andalucía (Spain), [http://www.juntadeandalucia.es/igualdadybienestarsocial/export/Infancia\\_Familia/HTML/paises/peru.html](http://www.juntadeandalucia.es/igualdadybienestarsocial/export/Infancia_Familia/HTML/paises/peru.html), Programa Integral Nacional para el Bienestar Familiar (Peru), <http://www.inabif.gob.pe/portalweb/portal/portaldeestadisticas/mensual.php>.

## Italy: The Italian Central Authority provides training to actors in the field of adoption

*The Italian Commissione per le Adozioni Internazionali, in collaboration with the Institute degli Innocenti, is organising three training sessions for those involved in adoptions.*

**T**he Italian Central Adoption Authority, in collaboration with the Institute degli Innocenti, is introducing a new training programme for adoption professionals. These courses will complement those from previous years, which have addressed many topical issues, in particular the adoption of children with special needs, the use of support groups for parents and adopted children, and the establishment of appropriate services for the waiting period. A collection of studies and research bringing together the subjects addressed in seven volumes is available on the website of the Commissione per le Adozioni Internazionali<sup>1</sup>.

This year, approximately 300 participants from the regional services, accredited agencies and children's courts from all over Italy will have the opportunity to take part in this training, which covers the following subjects:

- **From pre to post intercountry adoption – Core module** (Florence, 9-10 October and 13-14

November 2012): This course is aimed at participants, who are at the start of their career and aims to deepen their understanding of many issues relating to the overall situation of intercountry adoption.

- **Access to origins in intercountry adoption - Legal, psycho-social and cultural aspects** (Florence, 16-17 October and 27-28 November 2012): This course will be an opportunity to learn and explore the details of this issue, which is a complex reality and of growing interest because of the increasing age of adopted children and the ever-wider use of social networks.

- **Support for the adoptive family from when the adopted child starts going to school – The characteristics of the adoptions of 'special needs children'** (Florence, 23-24 October and 11-12 December 2012): This third course aims to explore how to strengthen the means of support to the adoptive family when constructing this new family unit. In this context, elements of risk, those

that facilitate the child's integration, and the creation of the family-belonging bond, will be analysed.

<sup>1</sup> Commissione per le Adozioni Internazionali, [www.commissioneadozioni.it/it/bibliografia/studi-e-ricerche.aspx](http://www.commissioneadozioni.it/it/bibliografia/studi-e-ricerche.aspx).

## EveryChild's report on foster care: A new international tool

Fostering better care, Improving foster care provision around the world<sup>1</sup>, published by EveryChild, is the second part of a series on positive choices in alternative care<sup>2</sup>. It offers a relevant and comprehensive analysis of foster care.

Following an outline of the resort to this practice worldwide, this report reviews the prerequisites and elements to be taken into account for this measure to be as efficient as possible, including legal and more pragmatic aspects for social workers.

The authors start with the statement that numerous efforts remain to be made for the option of foster care to be incorporated into child protection policies in countries, in which there remain cultural and economic obstacles. However, some countries have been able to overcome these difficulties and offer this new placement measure, the important aspect being to adapt the practice to the local context – a guarantee for success. This report presents many examples of good practices in southern countries: in Sudan, Save the Children has developed a foster care programme in a refugee camp, based on the children's traditional model of education. Despite a difficult context, Guyana has also set up a pilot project for the development of foster care as an alternative to institutionalisation.

In a very pedagogical manner, the authors describe in which framework resorting to foster

care is the best alternative for children, and stress the fact that it must be a protection measure that is assessed in accordance with the needs and the best interests of the child; thus, a measure made to measure as every child and every situation are unique. Even though this placement measure offers numerous advantages (a family environment, low costs, the flexibility to adapt to the situation), it also has its limits and risks: for example, it should not substitute family reintegration or mediation initiatives, or be undertaken to the detriment of the support provided to families with difficulties.

It is, therefore, an essential document for all childhood professionals and organisations interested in this practice and willing to set up such a programme in their countries.

<sup>1</sup> The report is available at: <http://www.everychild.org.uk/docs/FosteringBetterCare.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> The first report *Scaling Down* on institutionalisation is available at the following address: [http://www.everychild.org.uk/docs/ScalingDown\\_LowResProof\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.everychild.org.uk/docs/ScalingDown_LowResProof_FINAL.pdf).

## The situation of Roma children in Europe

*Reports on the situation of Roma children in Central and South-Eastern Europe reveal a situation of marginalisation that explains the over-representation of Roma children in institutions as well as their extremely reduced inclusion in the adoption process.*

The issue of the Roma population has been a challenging one throughout its history. Estimated between 10 and 12 million<sup>1</sup>, the Roma represent the largest ethnic minority in Europe, predominantly found in Central and South-Eastern countries. Across Europe they often remain on the edge of society, marginalised in many spheres of public life. In the backdrop of a growing intolerance towards the Roma<sup>2</sup>, their

children constitute a particularly vulnerable group that does not seem to benefit from national child protection systems on an equal footing with the rest of the child population<sup>3</sup>.

### Institutionalisation

The European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC) has recently presented the findings of a multi-country study<sup>4</sup> revealing significant over-representation of Romani children in state care institutions in

Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Italy, Romania and Slovakia. This rate varies from 30% in Bulgaria to peaks of 80% in some regions of Romania and in Slovakia.

The study's findings show that for many institutionalised Roma children, reintegration in their family setting is very low. Due to the prevailing prejudice and discrimination against Roma, this means that in most cases, the institutionalisation of Roma children translates into a life sentence, with the majority of these children spending their entire childhood in state care without benefiting from alternative options. These findings are not the first of their kind. In 2007, another groundbreaking report<sup>5</sup> by the EERC, carried out in Hungary in the same year, revealed that Roma children accounted for 58% of the children living in children's homes, whereas they account for only 13% of the child population in this country. In addition, a disproportionate number of these children in state care were found to be labelled as mentally disabled, often because of their learning delays caused by their *de facto* exclusion from the education system.

### Roma children and adoption

When it comes to the adoption process, ethnic identity plays once more a decisive role against the fulfilment of Roma children's rights: according to available data, prevailing and deeply-rooted prejudice negatively affects their chances of adoption<sup>6</sup>. Concerns in relation to the low adoption rate of these children have been raised by the UN Committee of the Rights of the Child, which, in its Concluding Observations, has noted the discrepancy between the high number of Roma children in institutions in spite of the fact that some of these children may benefit from adoption<sup>7</sup>. The plight of Roma children, however, goes far beyond the adoption system of certain countries. Tackling the issue of Roma children requires a two-folded approach: on one hand, the improvement of national child protection systems currently lacking specific programmes aimed at favouring their integration; on the other – and more challenging – hand, much remains to be

done to bring about positive change in people's mentality and the way the Roma are perceived.

### Conclusions

In June 2010, the European Commission endorsed the EU framework for national Roma integration strategies<sup>8</sup>. In line with this initiative, the EU Agenda for the Rights of the Child also included, amongst its 11 action points, paying particular attention to children in the context of the EU Framework for national Roma integration strategies, notably by promoting a more efficient use of structural funds for the integration of Roma<sup>9</sup>. These steps represent an unprecedented commitment of European leaders to the improvement of the condition of the Roma across the European Union. It is certainly hoped that these words will quickly turn into action, allowing Roma children to benefit of all their rights, breaking the cycle of exclusion and disadvantage that so far has affected the Roma across generations.

<sup>1</sup> *The situation of Roma in Europe and relevant activities of the Council of Europe*, Doc. 12174, 26 February 2010.

<sup>2</sup> As examples of controversial initiatives undertaken by European countries in the past years: evictions from camps and fingerprinting in Italy as a security measure (2008) and France's mass expulsion policy of the Roma (2010). The EU did not take a stand for the situation in Italy, whereas it condemned France's repatriation of Roma migrants.

<sup>3</sup> *Breaking the cycle of exclusion - Roma children in South East Europe*, UNICEF, 2007.

<sup>4</sup> Soon available at: <http://www.errc.org/en-research-and-advocacy-roma-intro.php>

<sup>5</sup> *Dis-interest of the Child: Romani and the Child Protection System*, EERC, 2007.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, p. 65.

<sup>7</sup> As an example, please refer to the Concluding Observations of the Committee of the Rights of the Child on Hungary, CRC/C/HUN/CO/2, 17 March 2006.

<sup>8</sup> Doc. IP/11/400 available at: <http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/11/400&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>.

<sup>9</sup> EU Agenda on the Rights of the Children, available at: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:52011DC0060:en:NOT>.

## Launch of a joint strategy to raise the profile of alternative care issues at the UN

*To raise awareness of the issues facing children deprived of their family, in the international arena, a joint campaign by the two working groups on alternative care based in Geneva (co-convened by ISS and SOS-CVI\*) and New York (co-convened by BCN and SOS-CVI\*) has been developed.*

**T**he UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and specifically the UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children (hereafter, 'Guidelines') seek to provide safeguards for children in need of alternative care. However, the full implementation of children's rights embedded in these international standards remains inadequate.

To address these gaps, the working groups (WGs) on alternative care issues in Geneva<sup>1</sup> and New York<sup>2</sup>, which include a consortium of dedicated NGOs, UN agencies and professionals, have been working closely to promote a better protection of these children, particularly at the United Nations.

### Consolidating synergies

Whilst both WGs have individual plans of action, including activities mostly relevant to only Geneva or New York due to location<sup>3</sup>, there are some cross-cutting initiatives that both groups are actively involved in. By uniting efforts and developing a joint strategic plan for two years incorporating these common initiatives, we hope that there will be a greater impact globally, especially within the two primary hubs of the UN, in Geneva and New York. There are three main objectives with set activities as described next.

### Objective 1: Promote the guidelines via the implementation and monitoring (IM) handbook

As mentioned in Monthly Review 05/2012, both WGs will facilitate the development of the IM handbook by providing practices/policies to be included as well as providing comments on drafts. Once the IM handbook is finalised, the WGs will aim to organise simultaneous launch events in early 2013, at the Human Rights Council (Geneva) and the General Assembly (New York).

### Objective 2: Identify/build 'champions' within country missions to raise the profile of alternative care issues within the UN framework

Efforts to move forward and gather momentum in the UN system require partnerships with NGOs and especially the different governments represented. It is essential that the WGs identify 'friendly' governments and organise briefing sessions on alternative care issues for upcoming UN events. This will include supporting the

establishment of a ministerial forum (similar to that used for promoting awareness of the Paris Principles) to facilitate an annual Ministerial Level Meeting at the UN General Assembly starting in 2013 or 2014. The WGs will also aim to engage champions (i.e. friendly States) to promote the Guidelines and their implementation through bilateral and multilateral meetings with an aim for alternative care to be the theme for the 2014 Omnibus Resolution (drafting by the Latin American and Caribbean Group).

### Objective 3: Day of General Discussion 2014 (DGD) – strengthening and supporting families and caregivers

The two WGs will further be working on lobbying the Committee on the UNCRC, NGOs, UN agencies and others to support having the 2014 DGD on the theme of strengthening and supporting families and caregivers. This will involve finalising the concept note and identifying the expected outcomes. If successful and 2014 is dedicated to this theme, they will then help with the logistics in organising speakers, publicity as well as encouraging submissions of relevant documents and papers.

### Call for partners

An exciting two years jam-packed with activities lie before the two WGs. We will need all the help they can to achieve these objectives. If there are any professionals or organisations interested in working on any of the activities mentioned beforehand, they can contact the co-convenors as per the details in the reference section. Together, we can make a difference for this group of children, far too often, forgotten.

<sup>1</sup> NGO Group for the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Children without parental care, <http://www.childrightsnet.org/NGOGroup/childrightsissues/WithoutParentalCare/>.

<sup>2</sup> NGO Committee on UNICEF, <http://www.ngocomunicef.org/> (coming soon); the NY WG is part of the NGO Committee on UNICEF.

<sup>3</sup> For example, specific activities related to the Geneva WG include treaty body mainstreaming and the Human Rights Council, and for the New York WG, activities related to UNICEF's Executive Board and the UN General Assembly.

\* ISS (International Social Service), SOS-CVI (SOS Children's Villages International), BCN (Better Care Network).



## The story of an adoption told by a child and his adoptive parents: A good support tool

*The Agence française de l'adoption, a public body, has recently started offering an album<sup>1</sup>, a type of diary that can be downloaded from its website by adoptive parents.*

**A**vailable free of charge, it comes in several versions depending on the parents' situation: couples, single mothers or single fathers. More than an album recording a child's youth that can be completely personalised, this is also a support tool as it addresses at least twenty issues relating to adoption (for example, the separation from the biological family, the adoptive parents' story and their decision to adopt, the adoption process, the first meeting...). This book appears to be a very useful means to allow the child to express his emotions, fears and questions when going through the pages with his parents. Throughout the pages, the child is, always playfully, asked to

recall memories, give his opinion, collect information on his culture of origin and cut, stick and colour in.

On the other hand, the parents themselves are also involved, they are asked to trust, to express their feelings and to leave their mark on the child's album.

Finally, we must give a special mention for the illustrations that give this adoption album a nice poetic touch.

<sup>1</sup> *Il était une fois... Notre histoire* [Once upon a time... Our story], Agence française de l'adoption, <http://www.agence-adoption.fr/home/>.

## A guide for the parents of children with a cleft lip

*The Government of the Autonomous Community of Navarre (Spain) has published a guide aimed at explaining to the parents of children with a cleft lip, or with the possibility of an adoptable child with these characteristics, the nature of this congenital deformity and the forms of treatment.*

**A**ccording to the Government of Navarre, an increase in children with a cleft lip has been observed in this Spanish region over the past few years. The Government puts this increase down to the intercountry adoption programme known as *Pasaje verde* [Green path], which provides for the adoption of children with health problems. In this context, it recently prepared a guide<sup>1</sup> aimed at, among others, adoptive parents, or prospective adoptive parents, and which intends to inform them on the meaning of a lip-palate fissure and its possible causes, before providing them with practical advice on the treatments that are currently available to secure an adequate recovery.

### From the causes and consequences of this deformity...

Lip-palate fissures occur in one out of 700 births and their cause is unknown. According to the guide, there may be a genetic influence in one third of the cases, but they generally result from

external factors, which are difficult to identify. This deformity will have implications in different areas of the child's life, such as feeding, speaking and hearing, the dentition, and at another level, in his integration into a society that is not always open to differences. These special needs will require some essential knowledge among the parents, as well as the intervention of various professional sectors, starting with the gynecologist, who will be able to identify the deformity thanks to an ultrasound.

### ... to its treatment by a multidisciplinary team

The guide puts an emphasis on the importance granted nowadays to the need for a multidisciplinary team to provide care to the affected child and to support his family. It presents, in details, the scheme of the treatment plan, which the child must be subjected to during the various stages of his development. Furthermore, it explains to the parents, in a very accessible language, the scientific reasons for each suggested intervention (surgical, dental, orthopedic-orthodontic treatment, intervention of an otorhinolaryngologist and a speech therapist),

their results, and offers them practical advice on some actions to adopt that may considerably help their children (hygienic dental care for the child, in order to prevent early losses, active collaboration of the parents in the use of plates, which help in the closing of the palate or lip, etc).

This guide explains how, thanks to the collaboration of the professionals and the parents, a child with a cleft lip may 'develop normally, talk in an understandable manner, and not show any esthetic stigma that may make his relations

difficult'. It is a very useful tool in offering advice to parents, who raise a child affected by this deformity.

<sup>1</sup> *Labio leporino y fisura palatina, Guía para padres* [Cleft lip and palate fissure: A guide for parents], <http://www.navarra.es/NR/rdonlyres/CD9CD033-0F06-44E6-9695-6E6FFB8FC2EE5/181045/GUIAPARAPADRESLABIOL EPORINO.pdf>. Source: *El periódico de la adopción* N°92, Adoptantis, April 2011.

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## READERS' FORUM

### Adoptees in search of their origins: How do you know who you are when you do not know where you come from? 🏠

*The issue of origins is important for all of us, but for adoptees it is fundamental since their history has grey and unknown areas that sometimes prevent them from feeling "whole".*

Since the end of the 1980s, requests relating to a search for origins have been pouring into the *Service d'Adoption Thérèse Wante asbl* (hereafter, the 'Service')<sup>1</sup>, one of the oldest accredited adoption bodies in the French Community in Belgium. While, in the past, these requests primarily concerned adopted adults and biological family members, who gave their children up for adoption before 1970, it is clear the Service is now increasingly being consulted by children, adolescents and young adults. The changes adoption has undergone (more thorough preparation of applicants, better record-keeping, greater understanding of attachment disorders and preventive actions) are gradually influencing the requests for searches of origins as families are contacting the Service increasingly earlier, in charge of requests from young children. Thus, stakeholders must be trained in this aspect of the work and the respect for the need of some to *know* and of others to *be reassured*.

#### Fundamental questions from children, adolescents and adults on the matter

The latter's fundamental questions are the same: 'Why did my mother abandon me?', 'Do I have brothers and sisters?', 'Is she happy without me, does she think of me?'. Nevertheless, for adults, the requests relating to origins come with an element of risk, a general reconsideration of

those things that could enable them to access greater knowledge of themselves. Indeed, an adult does not take these steps at just any point in his life. Whilst the wish to 'know' has always been there among many of them, specific events prompt the active search for information on their biological mother and the circumstances of their abandonment (separation, marriage, arrival of a child, for example). This request often seems to be linked to a feeling of unease and incompleteness, together with a wish to rebuild a more secure and complete identity.

*'If I knew, I would be freer, I would feel more entitled to the right to live'*

For children, requests cover other issues. Paying attention to the adopted child as he searches for information on his origins will mainly enable him to build himself. He will build a means of preventing attachment disorders or even some potential learning difficulties. It is therefore essential to address these issues linked to his origins with the child throughout the follow-up process, so as to overcome any potential difficulties that the child may have integrating with or becoming part of his new family. Furthermore, requests relating to a search of origins by children or adolescents raise other ethical issues, particularly regarding access to information and privacy. To this effect, it is worth highlighting the preventive role the adoption body may play when the child's full file is being prepared. For example, this file could contain, in the section on the family of origin, the biological parents' views on possible

reunions in addition to information and photographs.

### Psychological implications of the search for origins for the child

The psychological implications linked to the search for origins fall within the domain of identity building, family loyalties and the pathological effect of the secret. On the first point, in order to build himself, an adopted child has additional tasks to complete. Thus, thanks to gradual and detailed information on his history, with time, he will be able to build a personal, cultural and social identity. As to the second point, the child must also be able to express his loyalty towards any person who has played a role in his life. Yet, a conflict of loyalties often prevents the adoptee from sharing his need for information about his background with his adoptive parents. It is worth mentioning that the death of an adoptive parent is often the trigger for this search for origins in adults.

Finally, the adoptee is the main character of his own story and this must remain so. Anything unsaid on his origins may consequently be harmful to the individual and affect the symbolic character of the transmission of life.

### Supporting the search for origins

Even though current Belgian law includes post-adoption support in the adoption accredited bodies' mission, there is no specific guideline when it comes to the support of one's access to origins. However, for over 20 years, the team at the Service has always considered this search to be a fundamental right of all adoptees. It therefore believes that the adoption body plays a role of mediator within the adoptive triangle and it

is both, a place to listen where words are exchanged, and a place where information is stored and transmitted. Of course, the necessary psycho-social approach requires knowledge and specific techniques from the actors in charge of these issues.

Furthermore, each request deserves a personalised approach as the suffering experienced is unique to the personal experiences of each adoptee. When a request for a search of origins is submitted, time will be an essential factor. The search for origins must therefore be considered as a true *process*, which must inevitably take place within a certain temporality. Ensuring everyone's appropriate pace, on this path to a potential meeting, is essential to its successful development. Each person must be able to feel autonomous and not confined by an overly invasive framework. People must feel free to express their wishes regarding the pace of the process, in accordance with their emotional, intellectual and psychological capabilities. Some reunions will be organised, if and only if, the parties concerned agree and have been prepared. Furthermore, even when they have been, these meetings often raise certain existential problems and require significant psychological work in order to find a new balance at a later stage'.

*'I cannot face the future with a hole in my past'*

Michèle van Egten,  
Coordinator at the *Service Thérèse Wante asbl*,  
Team Member of *L'Envol*,  
<http://www.lenvol-adoption.be/>

<sup>1</sup> Service d'adoption Thérèse Wante,  
<http://www.guidesocial.be/theresewante/page.php?page=2>.

## FORTHCOMING CONFERENCES, SEMINARS AND COURSES

- **Australia:** *Strengthening Care 2012: Best outcomes*, The Foster Care Association of Victoria Inc and Australian Foster and Kinship Carer Partnership, Sebel Albert Park, Melbourne, 19-21 October 2012. For further information: <http://www.strengtheningcare2012.com.au/>.
- **Australia:** *The 10<sup>th</sup> Australian Adoption Conference Melbourne 2012*, Melbourne Convention Exhibition Centre, Melbourne, 22-23 October 2012. For further information: <http://www.cvent.com/events/the-10th-australian-adoption-conference-2012/event-summary-be61deee6b08426f90d7aab3db030a11.aspx>.
- **Spain:** *III Simposio Internacional sobre Familias Monoparentales. Nuevas monoparentalidades: procesos de autodefinición y legitimación* [Third International Symposium on Single-Parent Families. New forms of single parenthood: processes of self-definition and legitimisation], Faculty of Political Sciences and Sociology, Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Campus of Somosaguas, Pozuelo de Alarcón, Madrid, 25 and 26 October 2012. For further information: [http://ddd.uab.cat/pub/afin/afinSPA/afin\\_a2012m5n39iSPA.pdf](http://ddd.uab.cat/pub/afin/afinSPA/afin_a2012m5n39iSPA.pdf).
- **United Kingdom:** *Orphanage care, adoption and afterwards, The British Chinese, the English Romanian and the Greek adoption studies*, BAAF, Woburn House Conference, London, 11 October 2012. For further information: <http://www.baaf.org.uk/training/allevnts/2012-10-11t000000>.
- **Switzerland:** *Child Rights and the Business Sector: Urging States and Private Companies to meet their obligations*, International Institute for the Rights of the Child (IDE), International Seminar, 14-17 October 2012, Sion Switzerland, For further information: [http://www.childsrights.org/html/site\\_fr/index.php?c=for\\_sem](http://www.childsrights.org/html/site_fr/index.php?c=for_sem)

**Erratum:** A mistake occurred in the Brief News *Kyrgyzstan: Resumption of intercountry adoption*, published in our most recent Monthly Review. It mentioned the Central Authority of Quebec in its sources; however, this was not the case. The source should have read: 'Kyrgyz President Signs Law Allowing Foreign Adoption', Radio Free Europe, [http://www.rferl.org/content/kyrgyz\\_president\\_signs\\_law\\_allowing\\_foreign\\_adoptions/24093888.html](http://www.rferl.org/content/kyrgyz_president_signs_law_allowing_foreign_adoptions/24093888.html), as confirmed by the Permanent Bureau of the Hague Conference on Private International Law.

Furthermore, the Authority of Quebec wishes to specify that, in relation to the resumption of intercountry adoptions in Kyrgyzstan, the proceedings of foreign applicants will be managed by a body that has been duly accredited by this country's authorities, <http://www.adoption.gouv.qc.ca/download.php?f=98c39c72330b56c236eab6a96a297d98>.



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