



# Monthly Review

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## EDITORIAL

### 2017 statistics: From figures to action

*In 2018, the ISS/IRC carried out its annual compilation of statistics relating to the number of intercountry adoptions undertaken during the previous year; but what do these figures imply in terms of actions for protection and cooperation?*

The compilation of statistics by Central Authorities, as required by Article 7 of the 1993 Hague Convention, is essential in order to identify, understand and address the needs of children in adoption, as well as the needs of those children separated, or at risk of being separated, from their families. It is also very important to adapt any intervention to the children and to the prospective adoptive parents, as well as the procedure in general, whilst assessing the impact of the 1993 Hague Convention. Thus, it is interesting to focus on the actions undertaken by receiving countries as well as by countries of origin in response to some of the statistical trends. However, the statistics are not exhaustive and do not always include adoptions by expatriates or *kafalah* placements as practised in Muslim countries (see Monthly Review No. 210 of March 2017 and Monthly Review No. 213 of July 2017).

#### **With the ongoing decrease in intercountry adoptions, what actions are required?**

It is common knowledge that the total number of intercountry adoptions in the top 12 receiving countries is continuously decreasing, and the total number for 2017 amounts to 8,998 in comparison with 10,752 in 2016. All receiving countries, except Belgium and Norway, are affected by this decrease. As for the countries of origin, China remains the top country, followed by Colombia and India, now in second and third positions, and then by South Korea, Haiti, Ukraine and Bulgaria. These increases are a cause for concern, particularly in the case of Colombia, which has renewed – for another two years – its suspension on the adoption of children under the age of six years and 11 months, and where some adoptions remain under no control of the Central Authority. Moreover, do poverty and the lack of support to families result in the separation of families in these countries, when this is contrary to all international standards, such as the Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children? A further concern is the over-representation of children of Roma origin in the child protection systems of many countries in Eastern Europe, for whom no domestic solution is found. Further increases

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can be found in Ethiopia, Haiti and Vietnam, whose protection systems need to be strengthened on key aspects, such as the children's files, donations and the treatment of some children with specific needs. The ISS/IRC is happy to meet the requests for support from these countries through assessment missions and training.

In view of the above, it is interesting to explore how some receiving countries have adjusted their regulations in relation to adoption applications (see Belgium's French Community<sup>1</sup> or Spain in Monthly Review No.194 of September 2015), or how they have adapted the preparation and support offered to applicants (see p. 7). Furthermore, together with the decrease in intercountry adoptions in some receiving countries, domestic adoptions have increased in Australia

Receiving countries	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
United States of America <sup>6</sup>	9 319	8 668	7 094	6441	5648	5372	4714
Italy	4 022	3 106	2 825	2206	2216	1872	1439
France	1 995	1 569	1 343	1 069	815	953	685
Canada <sup>7</sup>	1 785	1 367	1 242	905	895	790	621
Spain	2 560	1 669	1 188	824	799	567	531
Sweden <sup>8</sup>	538	466	341	345	336	257	240
Netherlands	528	488	401	354	304	214	210
Belgium <sup>9</sup>	360	265	219	144	136	121	133
Norway	297	231	154	142	132	126	127
Germany <sup>10</sup>	934 (579)	801 (420)	661 (272)	209	308	213	81
Denmark	338	219	176	124	97	84	79
Switzerland <sup>11</sup>	367	314	280	226	197	101	69
Australia <sup>12</sup>	215	149	129	114	83	82	69
<b>Total</b>	<b>23 258</b>	<b>19 312</b>	<b>16 053</b>	<b>13 103</b>	<b>11 966</b>	<b>10 752</b>	<b>8 998</b>

(13% compared with 2015-2016), where a major effort has been made for children to be adopted in foster families. In the USA<sup>2</sup>, domestic adoptions have continued to increase since 2013 (50,835 in 2013 compared with 59,430 in 2017). It is encouraging to see that the decrease in intercountry adoption has led some countries to review their priorities, including removing obstacles to the domestic adoption of their own children. As for countries of origin, the ISS/IRC also welcomes the efforts undertaken by many, for example Cambodia and Rwanda, as both of them are reinforcing their alternative care systems by implementing reintegration programmes and support for foster families.

### What actions are required for children with special needs?

The proportion of older children, groups of siblings, children suffering from diseases, disabilities or severe trauma is high. In France, in 2017, 38% of all children adopted abroad were over the age of five years, and 64.4% had special needs. It is important to point out that no adoption project is considered for a large number of children in the child protection system whose profiles are similar<sup>3</sup>. In Switzerland, of the 69 children adopted abroad, 34 were aged between five and 14 years; in Belgium, adopted children over the age of five represented 38.6% of all adoptions (compared with 17.4% in 2014-2015 and 10.9% in 2013). In the USA, 98% of the children adopted from China had special needs.

In view of the above, the individual needs of children with these characteristics are now addressed more comprehensively during the assessments of prospective adoptive parents (see Monthly Review No. 210, March 2017) and during their preparation. Instead of receiving only theoretical training, the prospective adoptive parents are placed in practical situations, and this has a greater impact on their decision-making and on the practical consequences of their project (see p. 7). Countries of origin have also developed strategies to improve the preparation process, in particular in relation to the age of children, as in Chile or the Philippines (see Monthly Review No. 199, February 2016 and Monthly Review No. 172, May 2013).

### What actions are required in view of the constant increase in post-adoption needs?

Receiving countries and countries of origin are paying more attention to these services, which provide support for the important variety and the increasing number of issues arising in post-adoption, in particular the search for origins (see p. 9). An increase in the number of requests in this field has been registered in Australia (2,755 requests for information during 2016-2017<sup>4</sup>), in the French Community of Belgium (47 requests between June 2017 and May 2018) and in Quebec (50 requests in 2017 compared with 21 in 2015). Adoption breakdowns in countries where they are registered have also increased. In France, 12 cases of

difficult situations or adoption breakdowns were reported to the Central Authority, three of which occurred at the time of the meeting with the child in the country of origin. Moreover, the *Observatoire national de la protection de l'enfance* (ONPE) takes into account the 'children admitted as "pupilles de l'Etat" (state wards) following an adoption breakdown': five in 2012, six in 2013, seven in 2014, nine in 2015 and 10 in 2016. The USA have also registered nine adoption breakdowns, four of which were for behavioural reasons, two due to the child's refusal and one due to a failure in bonding. The USA focused on the importance of post-adoption reports. In order to strengthen this post-adoption support, some countries, such as Belgium, grant subsidies to bodies in charge of providing support (see p. 7)<sup>5</sup>, or expand their teams, as in Quebec.

**Analysing these numbers and identifying the measures, which**

**receiving countries and countries of origin need to implement, is not an easy task. The ISS/IRC is pleased to continue helping countries in the development of strategies, which are more respectful of children's needs, and will continue to do so during the next compilation of statistics. See you next year!**

The ISS/IRC team,  
November 2018

Countries of origin	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
1. China	4 098	3 998	3 316	2734	2817	2475	2189
2. Columbia	1 522	901	562	355	359	314	542
3. India	688	362	298	242	233	323	518
4. Ethiopia	3 144	2 648	1 933	975	543	235	466
5. Haiti	142	262	460	551	236	324	398
6. South Korea	920	797	206	494	406	362	396
7. Vietnam	620	216	293	285	287	248	356
8. Russia	3 017	2 442	1 703	381	210	151	319
9. Philippines	472	374	525	405	354	313	304
10. Bulgaria	259	350	421	323	262	324	289
11. Ukraine	1 054	713	674	560	339	339	270
12. Hungary	154	145	104	77	84	88	233
13. Thailand	5.258	251	272	207	172	250	218
14. Nigeria	218	238	225	175	163	139	206
15. Poland	304	236	332	106	107	148	191
16. Taiwan	311	291	188	147	172	150	157
17. South Africa	120	81	147	176	172	103	130
18. Brazil	359	337	246	31	32	29	127
19. USA	97	178	167	155	160	147	89
20. Latvia	116	59	131	96	189	89	84
21. Uganda	219	246	289	203	208	191	60
22. DRC	339	499	580	240	229	627	54
23. Liberia							22
24. Ghana	107	172	188	128	93	32	22
25. Central African Republic <sup>13</sup>	19	43	73	44	15	7	14

## References:

<sup>1</sup> Direction de l'Adoption, Autorité centrale communautaire, Annual Report 2016-17. Available in French at: [http://www.adoptions.be/index.php?eID=tx\\_nawsecuredl&u=0&g=0&hash=ae77cc3c64f5e7f9f10cd33fa3e7a30999438eb8&file=fileadmin/sites/saac/upload/saac\\_super\\_editor/saac\\_editor/documents/Rapports\\_d\\_activites/Rapport\\_d\\_activites\\_2016-2017.pdf](http://www.adoptions.be/index.php?eID=tx_nawsecuredl&u=0&g=0&hash=ae77cc3c64f5e7f9f10cd33fa3e7a30999438eb8&file=fileadmin/sites/saac/upload/saac_super_editor/saac_editor/documents/Rapports_d_activites/Rapport_d_activites_2016-2017.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> AFCARS, Report of 10 August 2018, <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/cb/afcarsreport25.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> *Synthèse du rapport de l'ONPE sur la situation des pupilles de l'Etat au 31 décembre 2016*, [https://www.onpe.gouv.fr/system/files/publication/synthese\\_enquete\\_pupilles\\_31dec2016\\_2018.pdf](https://www.onpe.gouv.fr/system/files/publication/synthese_enquete_pupilles_31dec2016_2018.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> Adoptions Australia, Report 2016-2017, <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/adoptions/adoptions-australia-2016-17/contents/table-of-content>.

<sup>5</sup> *Supra* 1.

<sup>6</sup> Fiscal year: 1 October 2016 - 30 September 2017.

<sup>7</sup> For 2011, 2012, 2015, 2016 and 2017 the statistical data was provided by the Canadian Central authority; for 2013 and 2014, data came from statistics provided by the Hague Conference on Private International Law.

<sup>8</sup> For 2016, data refers to statistics provided by the Hague Conference on Private International Law. For 2017, statistical data was provided by the Swedish Central Adoption Authority (MIA).

<sup>9</sup> For 2016, the numbers come from the the French-speaking and Dutch-speaking Central adoption authorities, which refer to adoptions of children physically cared for by their adoptive families, while the final adoption order is sometimes formally pronounced months or even years later. For 2017, statistics were provided by the Hague Conference on Private International Law.

<sup>10</sup> For 2014, data published by the Hague Conference on Private International Law was referred to. In 2015 and 2016, reference is made to the website of the National Statistical Office 'Statistisches Bundesamt', whose numbers exclude relative adoptions

(see <https://www.destatis.de/DE/Publikationen/Thematisch/Soziales/KinderJugendhilfe/ErzieherischeHilfe.html>: For 2017, statistics were provided by the Hague Conference on Private International Law.

<sup>11</sup> Numbers for 2015, 2016 and 2017 come from the Federal Statistical Office. 2016 and 2017 data do not include relative adoptions, nor adoptions of adults. From 2011 to 2013, the numbers were provided by the Swiss Central authority, whilst those relating to 2014 were statistics published by the Hague Conference on Private International Law.

<sup>12</sup> Fiscal year: 1 October 2016 – 30 September 2017 (see <http://www.aihw.gov.au/WorkArea/DownloadAsset.aspx?id=60129553828>).

<sup>13</sup> According to ISS/IRC sources, children from the Central African Republic were only adopted by French, American and Canadian citizens.

*Several countries, such as Germany, Australia and Norway, cluster several countries under general categories, such as ‘several Asian countries’ or ‘other countries’; thus, it is impossible to determine with accuracy the specific countries of origin of these adopted children.*

#### **Errata**

- **The ISS/IRC wishes to amend an error in the position of Ian Anand Forber-Pratt, which appeared in Monthly Review No. 225. In the box on page 15, the mentioned position should read ‘Director of Global Advocacy at Children’s Emergency Relief International’.**
- **In the Editorial of Monthly Review No. 221 of May 2018, an amendment is needed on page 2, as the correct article to be mentioned should be Article 22(1) – rather than Article 22(2) – of the 1993 Hague Convention.**

**We are grateful for your understanding and ongoing support.**

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## **ISS/IRC NEWS**

### **Ghana: ISS training session and recommendations regarding the moratorium**

Ghana is in the process of implementing laws that bring the country’s adoption framework in line with the 1993 Hague Convention, and of lifting a moratorium on intercountry adoption that had been in place since March 2013.

Between 22 and 24 October, a training session was led by ISS on the international principles and standards relating to adoption and the provision of alternative care, particularly on the operation of the 1993 Hague Convention. Participants in the training included senior staff from the Department of Social Welfare in Ghana’s 10 regions, members of the Central Authority, members of the Technical Committee and members of the Judiciary. It was noted by a key participant that *‘the interaction was good for all of us. It drew attention to the international dimension of carrying out adoption and the role of the various players’*.

ISS considers that if and when the moratorium is lifted, it will continue to be important for receiving States to give Ghana time to implement the laws. Whilst participants at the training impressed with their high level of knowledge and skills, it was observed that there is a need to ensure that the training provided (as well as any prospective training) is further conveyed to frontline workers. It is particularly important that training is offered to all actors on their obligations in line with the new domestic laws, and that time be given for the new forms (which are important safeguards in ensuring that the 1993 Hague Convention obligations are met) to be properly disseminated and used.

ISS commends Ghana on the steps taken to date to bring the legal framework in line with international standards, and observed that Ghana is very keen on working with receiving States and accredited adoption bodies. Nonetheless, ISS is cautious of Ghana being overwhelmed by potential partners and encourages Central Authorities to undertake joint missions.

## BRIEF NEWS

### **Côte d'Ivoire: Lifting of the moratorium on intercountry adoptions, but ongoing vigilance required**

On 24 October 2018, the Council of Ministers of Côte d'Ivoire decided to lift the moratorium on intercountry adoptions. However, the ISS/IRC wishes to draw attention to the fact that, despite this decision, the legal, institutional and procedural framework relating to intercountry adoption in Côte d'Ivoire has not been amended, and requires further adjustments to comply with international standards, such as the Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children and the 1993 Hague Convention. According to the ISS/IRC's local contact, domestic legislation and standards on alternative care were edited at the end of 2015, but several obstacles still remain to their dissemination and implementation. The ISS/IRC looks forward to supporting the country in reforming its domestic laws in line with these standards, as well as in strengthening the adoption procedure on key aspects, such as the child's legal adoptability and the effective search for his or her biological family, the matching and the prohibition of independent adoptions.

Source: Mission de l'Adoption Internationale, November 2018, <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/adopter-a-l-etranger/les-conditions-de-l-adoption-internationale/les-fiches-pays-de-l-adoption-internationale/fiches-pays-adoption/article/adoption-en-cote-d-ivoire>.

### **How can article 3 of the UNCRC be used to ensure the international protection of children on the move?**

The ISS/IRC recommends the article by M. J. Pobjoy as a solid basis for advocacy efforts in relation to the best interests of children on the move, while being, at the same time, a precious tool for professionals, who assess the need for protection of these children. The best interests of the child must be a paramount consideration in every decision affecting directly, but also indirectly, the child, such as the parents' removal from the host State – a consideration that sometimes seems to be omitted nowadays.

**Why may Article 3 UNCRC be stronger than the [Refugee Convention](#)?** As the UNCRC is the most ratified convention in the world, a higher number of States are obliged to comply with its obligations than those having ratified the Refugee Convention. Additionally, its [Third Optional Protocol on a communications procedure](#) enables children to directly bring a complaint against a State. Furthermore, children who do not fall under the scope of the Refugee Convention could, nonetheless, be at risk of some form of harm. The use of Article 3 may therefore provide an additional layer of protection.

**In which ways may Article 3 UNCRC be used to protect children on the move?** It may help States in their understanding of their protection obligations, and offer information and interpretation of particular elements of the Refugee Convention's definitions. It may also create a new category of protected persons: when the child's removal is at stake, the question to be answered is whether this removal is in the child's best interests.

**On the basis of which criteria should the best interests of children on the move be assessed?** 'This determination should take into account the views of the child; the safety, security and socio-economic conditions awaiting the child upon return; the availability of care arrangements for the child; the child's level of integration in the host country; [his or her] right to preserve his or her identity, including his or her nationality, name and family relationship; and the desirability of continuity in a child's upbringing'.

Source: Pobjoy, M. J. (2015). 'The best interests of the child principle as an independent source of international protection' *International Comparative Law Quarterly* 327, 64(2). Available at: [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=2679568](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2679568).

## Child Protection Executive Education Course

The Harvard FXB Center for Human Rights is offering a course for mid-career professionals engaged in the protection and response to children vulnerable to abuse, exploitation and neglect, and who either work for an international organisation, a local NGO or a governmental agency. The aim is to strengthen the capacity of professionals around the holistic response needed for child protection, which requires a multi-sectoral and integrated approach. The one-week course will run in Boston in June 2019 for up to 10 country teams. The latter should be preferably composed of one governmental partner, one international partner organisation and one local partner NGO. The application period for the course is open until 15 January 2019, and the conditions for application and further information may be found at: <https://bettercarenetwork.org/sites/default/files/Harvard%20FXB%20Center%20-%20CPEEC%20Brochure.pdf>.

## LEGISLATION

### German Federal Supreme Court: Landmark decision on international surrogacy arrangements

*The Bundesgerichtshof clarified its position in a case of recognition of legal parentage in an international surrogacy arrangement (ISA) conducted in Colorado (USA) by German intending parents, of which one of them was genetically related to the surrogate-born twins<sup>1</sup>.*

The German legal framework<sup>2</sup> prohibits surrogacy arrangements to protect surrogacy-born children and surrogates from the involved risks. Yet, German authorities have been confronted with cases of recognition of ISAs approved by foreign Courts in countries that allow surrogacy<sup>3</sup>. In a 2018 case, the Federal Supreme Court (BGH) clarified its position by recognising a 2011 US Court decision granting legal parentage to German intending parents. The latter had entered into a contract with a Colorado-based surrogate, who had given birth to twins, conceived by using the intending father's sperm and an anonymous egg donation. Since 2011, the children were living in Germany. In 2012, a paternity determination test confirmed the intending father's genetic paternity. However, in 2013, the Civil Registry office and a District Court denied the approval of the US Court decision and birth certificates stating both intending parents as the legal parents, which is why the case was brought before higher Courts. Despite the ongoing judicial proceedings, the intending mother had been appointed the guardian of the twins in December 2016.

#### Refusal of legal parentage

On 12 April 2017, the *Oberlandesgericht* (OLG) also decided to refuse the US Court decision and to not grant legal parentage to both intending parents. It issued its decision, based notably on the following considerations:

- **Violation of the German *ordre public***, as the case was a typical example of intended circumvention of domestic provisions. The granting of legal parentage would legitimise *a posteriori* such 'reproduction tourism', and determination of parentage cannot be based on a contractual agreement. Furthermore, for the OLG, financial and social disparities and the motivations involved in the surrogacy arrangement, as well as the psychological attachment developed during pregnancy, were two important elements that needed to be given due weight in obtaining the surrogate's free consent. It highlighted, in particular, that the latter's consent had been granted six weeks prior to birth.

- **Impact of the surrogacy on the children's mental well-being and identity:** The Court did not question whether the children would grow up with the intending parents. Thus, it noted that the discrepancy between the social and genetic parentage would be much more importance for the children's psychological development than the legal child-parent relationship at stake, given the

uncertainties of their genetic identity as well as the circumstances of their conception and birth.

### Recognition of legal parentage

The BGH, however, rejected the OLG' arguments as follows:

- **No violation of the German *ordre public*:**

For the BGH, in light of the children's fundamental right to have their legal parentage established, and given that there was a genetic link with the intending father (as opposed to the surrogate), one could not conclude that there was a violation of the *ordre public*. Such violation would require a serious infringement of Germany's core values, which the Court rejected in relation to legal parentage. Furthermore, the payment and the potential existing social and financial disparities between the surrogate and the intending parents could not be considered as automatically affecting

the free nature of her consent, nor would her absence during the court hearings in Colorado.

- **Recognition of legal parentage as a child's right and key part of identity:** While the BGH acknowledged the general stance on prevention, it considered the establishment of legal parentage in relation to both intending parents to be a right of the children in accordance with the German Constitution and the European Convention on Human Rights. According to the BHG, the children's best interests needed to be understood as granting a child individual rights, including non-discrimination because of his or her birth circumstances. In addition to guaranteeing a stable familylife, the legal child-parent relationship is the entry point to further rights, such as maintenance, inheritance, name, nationality and residence.

**There is a clear tension between the two positions adopted by the German courts, both calling upon children's rights. The international principles currently developed by an ISS-led expert group (see Monthly Review No. 212 of May-June 2017) intend to solve this tension and to go even further. Indeed, none of the two Courts addressed the core aspects promoted by such principles, i.e. the prohibition of ISAs resulting in the sale of children, the surrogate mother as the legal mother at birth and the subsequent transfer of parentage, based on the necessary consents and the intending parents' suitability.**

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### References:

<sup>1</sup> See: *Bundesgerichtshof Beschluss XII ZB 224/17*, 5 September 2018.

<sup>2</sup> Applicable German provisions: Para. 1 I) Nr.7 Act for the Protection of Embryos; Para. 13 c)-d) Act on Adoption Placement (AdVermiG); and Para. 1591 Civil Code .

<sup>3</sup> See *Bundesgerichtshof Beschluss XII ZB 463/13*, 10 December 2014.

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## PRACTICE

### Preparation and support in Flanders (Belgium): How to support applicants in designing and putting their adoption project into practice?

*The ISS/IRC is pleased to present Steunpunt Adoptie, an organisation fully financed by the Flemish government, and which provides preparation and post-adoption services free of charge. Kristina Van Remoortel, a Clinical Psychologist, shares a description of their careful work.*

**Steunpunt Adoptie**, which was created in 2013, has seven professionals in Psychology, Educational Sciences and Social Work as well as an administrative team. This is the only centre of its kind in Belgium, which offers free access to specialised services to prospective adoptive parents as well as adoptees and adoptive families during the process and afterwards. This article

demonstrates the impact of this ongoing support on the success of an adoption.

#### Information sessions

The preparation courses begin with two half-days of information sessions provided both by the Flemish Central Adoption Authority and *Steunpunt Adoptie* to a group of around 60-70 persons with different circumstances: some doubting about

their motivations to adopt, others hesitating between adoption and foster care, etc. The aim is to give a realistic insight into adoption nowadays, by addressing the children's profiles, the 1993 Hague Convention, the procedure to adopt or to foster a child, etc. The second session, with a maximum of 25 persons, focuses on the prospective adopters and addresses attachment needs from the parents' and the children's perspectives; loss and grief; and parental skills to respect and strengthen the uniqueness of the child. Finally, motivations are discussed in groups; this enables people to express themselves more easily.

### Preparation days

Three full days of preparation are then offered in small groups of maximum 18 prospective adoptive parents.

Day 1: As a first step, participants take time to meet in order to create a safe and open atmosphere. Four themes are then addressed during the day:

- **Adoptive triangle:** Discrepancies between theory and reality are emphasised. This triangle will indeed be shaped depending on the age, the personality of each of its parts, etc. Videos showing interviews of birth mothers are used to illustrate the various reasons for choosing adoption, their wishes with regards to adoptive parents, etc. It helps prospective adopters to explore the place of birth parents and their perspectives in situations like contact requests.

- **Bronfenbrenner's ecological model:** It highlights the influence of the extended family and the social environment, both at micro and macro levels, in raising the child.

- **Qualities and limitations:** Through several pictures describing daily-life moments (cooking, sleeping, biking, etc.), prospective adoptive parents are asked to represent themselves as a family and to list their own qualities and limitations.

- **Special needs:** A video series presents the experience of three families, who adopted siblings, in order to address special needs issues. One question is then asked to the prospective

adopters in order to identify their education strengths: what additional qualities do parents need to have to care for these children?

Day 2: This day focuses on the children's profiles and attachment/trauma:

- **Children's profiles:** The participants are divided into groups of four, and interview each other on their previous list of qualities and limitations. They then receive five children's profiles (a Belgian child, a foreign child with physical problems, a group of siblings, and older child and a heavily traumatised child), whom each person in the group should be matched with. At the end, there is one profile left, and discussions are then carried out to understand why this child has not been matched.

- **Attachment/trauma:** Facial mirroring experiences with very young children are shared to outline the importance of attachment from a very early stage. The attachment pyramid model of Truus Bakker is used to guide parents on how to answer children's needs, by returning to the first basic level of the pyramid, even with older children. Reflections are also conducted on the prospective adoptive parents' own attachment style, in order to help them to cope with it. To deal with trauma, reference is made to the 'window

of tolerance', which illustrates how traumatic experiences can influence daily-life actions. The window of a traumatised person will be smaller and will therefore require support. Ideas and tools are shared with the prospective adopters, such as building routines with the child and focusing on the child's emotions. This therapeutic parenting sometimes requires help and parents are made aware of the support available. They are informed on how to find professional support (see the mapping undertaken at: <https://www.steunpuntadoptie.be/nl/adoptiekaart>).

- **Care plan:** To project prospective adoptive parents in their future family life, they are asked to answer several questions based on the child's profile and to develop their care plan (child's name, place and designation of the birth family, etc.).





Day 3: The following topics are addressed during the last day:

- **Components and changes in the identity** are explained, and a debate on the search for origins is launched, by addressing, among others, the way adoptive parents can cope with their own insecurity and answer their child's identity questions.

- **Racism and prejudices:** Parents should not be colour blind. The parents are provided with tools in order to help the child address racist or discriminating reactions from his or her environment. Parents should understand the crucial distinction between 'being equal' and 'being treated equally'.

- Finally, in order to **translate the theory learnt during the course into real life**, several case examples are discussed in groups in order to identify, together, answers to specific situations (sleeping difficulties, lies, etc.). The aim is to encourage prospective adoptive parents to adopt the perspective of the child.

#### Post-adoption support services

*Steunpunt Adoptie* also provides free post-adoption services through different means.

**The ISS/IRC encourages each receiving country to establish this kind of independent body, which is fully state-funded, and provides services to adoptive families and adoptees free of charge. It enables parents to be fully aware of the nature of adoption nowadays, and for them to take responsibility for the development and implementation of their project.**

## A journey back to one's origins: When international adoptees visit their birth country

*Marco Chistolini and Cristiana Carella, Scientific Managers at CIAI<sup>1</sup>, present their experiences in the preparation of, and support to, adoptees when travelling to their country of origin with their families and friends. They also explore the impact of this journey.*

**CIAI** was created in 1968 to find families for abandoned children, and to help them build their future and understand their personal story, by listening to their experiences and restoring bonds.

#### The personal story of adoptees: A cognitive and emotional process

A person's personal story is a comprehensive part of his or her identity. This is even more so in intercountry adoption, when the adopted child comes from a very different culture to that of his or her adoptive family. He or she needs to understand his or her story and the reason for his

Adoptive parents and adoptees can contact the centre to ask specific questions by phone or using the online contact form. Sometimes, they are encouraged to make an appointment for individual care sessions. These can lead to three or four sessions.

In addition, educational group sessions are offered on first attachment after arrival. They provide guidance and support to adoptive parents immediately after the arrival of the child, and address difficulties, such as the unusual loss of reflecting capacities and therapeutic skills by the adoptive parents. The experience from those services represents an important input to continuously improve the content of the preparation sessions.

Finally, the recent peer support project *A-Buddy* has successfully been launched, and offers adoptees the opportunity to anonymously chat online with other adoptees. If specific situations are raised, in relation, for example, to a particular country of origin, a match can be undertaken with the most appropriate adoptee to offer adequate support.

or her abandonment, in order to find a meaning to his or her story. This process is an internal psychological journey.

There is no right answer, but this is a journey of understanding, maturation and acceptance, following a cognitive and an affective path. At cognitive level, the adoptee needs to reflect, examine, assess what happened. At the same time, the journey entails strong emotions: suffering, sorrow, rage, loneliness, relief. The adoptive parents must stand by the child with patience and affection, in order to help him or her

figure out and understand his or her life and the abandonment. The journey back to his or her origins allows him or her to understand and accept, not only the fact that he or she was abandoned, but also his or her different ethnic origin.

### The role of the journey back to one's origins

This journey is important for at least four reasons:

**a) The adoptee needs not only to understand, but also to know more about his or her origins, personal story, the country he or she came from, the institution and the socio-cultural environment in the country of origin.** This knowledge is not only factual but also comes from being immersed in the atmosphere of the country. The adoptee needs to see the institution where he or she lived, slept, ate, played, wept tears, in order to build up that part of his or her story. The journey will bring home to him or her, whether he or she feels Italian, or whether he or she identifies more strongly with the local people in the country of origin and feels he or she belongs there.

**b) Acquiring this factual knowledge helps the adoptee to understand what has happened, and places the country of origin in the realm of reality.** For example, India, Brazil, Ethiopia, Cambodia really exist. He or she may like the country of origin or not, but it is a real place and a link to his or her own past.

**c) The journey back to one's origins is a strong experience, shared between the adoptee and the family, and enables him or her to confront his or her own past.** It becomes a common heritage for the whole family.

**d) The fact that the journey is a group experience is very helpful because every personal, unique story becomes both special and normal.** The adoptee is not alone, he or she is with other people who have the same joys, difficulties, doubts and light-heartedness.

### Organisation

The number of participants varies from a minimum of 15-20 to a maximum of 30-35. Admission is determined in accordance with the following criteria:

1. The adoption was concluded at least five years ago;

**For the adopted child, the journey back to his or her origins is an important and useful input to his or her story, and may be a stage in his or her identity building process. However, it is not essential, and should**

2. The child must be at least 10 years old;
3. The adopted child must truly wish to visit his or her country of origin;
4. Absence of particular psychological problems in the child and/or disturbing events or situations in his or her family or personal life;
5. Two persons must go with the participants: an operator with expertise in this type of journey and a psychologist specialised in adoption.

### Description of the journey

**Preparatory phase:** Registrations are selected so as to create a homogenous group, and to define a route. All participants are interviewed by a psychologist to discuss objectives, wishes and fears. Two to three meetings with the participants are organised in order to create a real team spirit, to explain the different stages of the journey, to clarify objectives, and to discuss expectations, desires, fears.

**Journey:** During the trip, visits are undertaken to the Central Authorities when possible, and also to the institutions and some tourist destinations. This provides the children with an overview of the country and its beauty, and enables them to be proud of their origins. Every day, there are moments of sharing emotions and reactions all together, or in small groups of children and parents. This strong group empathy is very useful and important. There is constant psychological support at individual or family level. The overall stay lasts for about 15 days.

**Post-journey phase:** A week after their return, the participants are asked to fill in a questionnaire, and two months later, one or more meetings are organised with participants in order for them to share their experiences and assess any changes.

### Feedback from the journey

The feedback has shown the general satisfaction of the participants, the journey having had a positive effect for the adopted children on their feelings of personal identity, their inner integrity and their relationship with their country of origin. They have 'closed the circle'. However, it is important to undertake the journey only after adequate preparation, because of the intense emotions involved. Visiting the country of origin is a step in the process of building an identity, and is not expected to result in a definitive change.

not take place if the adoptee is in a critical period of his or her life. It is possible to accept the past without undertaking this journey. Nonetheless, if the adoptee is truly willing to undertake this journey, and he or she is sufficiently mature, he or she must do so. Some even feel the need to undertake this journey several times.

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**Reference:**

<sup>1</sup> See: Centro Italiano Aiuti all'Infanzia, <http://www.ciai.it>.

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## FORTHCOMING CONFERENCES AND TRAININGS

- **France:** *Les journées numériques du Copes*, Copes, Paris, 11 January, 8 February, 22 March, 5 April 2019, etc. For further information, see: <http://www.copes.fr/>.
- **India:** *Institutionalised Children Explorations and Beyond, Special Edition: Childhood Sexual Abuse in Alternative Care Settings*, *International Journal on Alternative Care*. For further information, see: [https://www.udayancare.org/iceb-journal/publish\\_iceb.html](https://www.udayancare.org/iceb-journal/publish_iceb.html).
- **Kenya:** *Family Reunification based on Agape Model*, Workshop, Kisumu, 28 January - 1 February 2019. For further information, see: <http://www.agapemodel.org/>.
- **United Kingdom:** **a)** *Non Violent Resistance (NVR) in Fostering*, CoramBAAF, London, 17 January 2019; **b)** *Beyond Together or Apart: Planning for, assessing and placing sibling groups*, CoramBAAF, London, 21-22 January 2019. For further information, see: <https://corambaaf.org.uk/training-events>.
- **United States of America:** *One Child, Many Hands: A multidisciplinary conference on child welfare*, Call for papers until 15 December 2018. For further information, see: <https://fieldcenteratpenn.org/one-child-many-hands/call-for-presentations/>.
- **World:** *Introduction to the Standards of Quality for Family Strengthening and Support*, National Family Support Network, Webinar, 12 December 2018. For further information, see: <https://www.nationalfamilysupportnetwork.org/virtual-events>.

EDITORIAL COORDINATION: Cécile Jeannin

EDITORIAL BOARD: Christina Baglietto, Cécile Jeannin

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[irc-cir@iss-ssi.org](mailto:irc-cir@iss-ssi.org)  
[www.iss-ssi.org](http://www.iss-ssi.org)

**ISS**  
32 Quai du Seujet  
1201 Geneva / Switzerland