

## Monthly Review N° 1/2008 January 2008

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### EDITORIAL

## 2007: A brief balance for a great year

*At the beginning of this new year, the ISS/IRC team wishes to present the various activities, which have marked this exceptionally rich year. Given that most of the readers of the Monthly Review do not have access to the Centre annual report, the latter believes it useful to go back over these projects in order to provide you with a more comprehensive picture of its services.*

**2**007 will have been a very full year: in addition to the basic services that remain at the heart of the ISS/IRC's activities (in particular, this Monthly Review), its team has taken on a whole series of assignments, which, even though they were not always easy to fit into our agendas,

have certainly been a source of inspiration and satisfaction.

### Projects

The most important project, in terms of time and resources, was carried out in Moldova. This project – entitled 'Development of Integrated Social Care Services for Families and Children

at Risk in Moldova', funded by the European Union (TACIS project) and implemented by the UNICEF Country Office – covered the various aspects required for the establishment of a nation-wide social reform. The ISS/IRC was in charge of legislative amendments, in line with the proposals issued by the experts in relation to the reorganisation of social services and alternative care measures for children. An outline for a Law on Children's Rights was drafted, as well as several frameworks for secondary legislation, such as on the accreditation of NGOs active in this field, on complaint mechanisms accessible to children in institutions, etc. This mandate was carried out in partnership with the Swiss Foundation of ISS, which was in charge of aspects linked to social policy (deinstitutionalisation, code of ethics, etc).

The second large-scale project took place within the framework of a study launched by UNICEF, and aimed at a better understanding of the problematic issues relating to adoption in countries of the former USSR. An initial assessment mission was carried out in Azerbaijan, followed by a 'double mission' in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. At the same time, a one-week training session was provided to members of the new Central Authority in Baku.

At the request of the government of Cyprus, the ISS/IRC elaborated a legislative framework proposal and attended a roundtable with a view to revising the Cypriot law on domestic and intercountry adoption; this project was completed in 2007. The Centre has also been consulted by Mauritania (Decree on the Abandoned Baby Reception Centre), and by Ireland (Commission in charge of the legislative reform relating to adoption).

### **Conferences, seminars and training**

The four members of the ISS/IRC have, in addition, travelled thousands of miles around the world to participate in several conferences dedicated to adoption: in Peru (organised by the Central Adoption Authority), in France (organised by the Agence Française d'Adoption), in India (organised by CARA), in Lithuania (meeting of European Central Authorities), and in Spain (organised by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs).

Commissioned by the Swiss NGO Children Action, two members of the ISS/IRC provided a three-day training session on the rights of children deprived of their family in Romania, within the framework of a postgraduate degree directed at social workers, psychologists and lawyers. The ISS/IRC was also involved in a

training seminar for adoption intermediaries in France, as well as in Switzerland in the framework of a postgraduate course in the protection of children.

### **Research**

The Federal Central Authority of Canada commissioned research on kafalah and adoption practices in a range of Muslim countries. In addition, the ISS/IRC also undertook a comparative study of the practice of kafalah in various Muslim and receiving countries. This study has been a success and was presented to the Central Authorities attending the meeting in Lithuania. If funds can be secured, it will be translated into English and Spanish, and edited this year. The study of the adoption of older children has, in the meantime, been translated into Spanish and English, and is ready for dissemination.

More limited research and studies have also addressed issues of open adoption, statistics, etc. The issue of protection and care of unaccompanied minors was the subject of a special series in the Monthly Review, published between June and December 2007, thanks to the support of UNICEF.

Finally, the project of 'Training Fact Sheets' comes to an end this month: 54 fact sheets have been published over the past two years, and have been disseminated to an ever-increasing number of beneficiaries (over 2,500 people in 120 countries).

Of course, the ISS/IRC's traditional activities have been carried out throughout the year: 10 Monthly Reviews, 15 country situation reports, whose access is limited to the Central Authorities, which finance the Centre, over 80 documented replies on a range of topics, etc.

### **Promising developments**

This lengthy enumeration reveals that the reputation of the Reference Centre is now well-established, and that its services are appreciated far and wide. Approximately fifteen years after its establishment, the development of activities – particularly the increasing importance of specific projects – not only enables the Centre to widen its sphere of competence and to develop its relations with professionals worldwide, but it also ensures the necessary financial income for its operation. In enabling it to deepen its expertise, it feeds the basic services provided to the authorities, which support the ISS/IRC; these services obviously remain a priority in the organisation of work.

The International Social Service and the IRC team convey their warmest thanks to their various partners for their support and for the trust they have shown throughout this past year. Its thanks go, in particular, to UNICEF's Regional Office for the CEE-CIS in Geneva and to its Country Offices for their excellent cooperation in carrying out the above-mentioned projects, as well as to the governments of Ireland and South Africa, which have joined the

group of countries supporting the Centre in 2007, thereby raising it to 20.


The ISS/IRC team also conveys its best wishes for the New Year to all its readers, and is pleased to pursue with them the struggles, which give meaning to our work and our commitment.

The ISS/IRC team


## IRC NEWS

- **Project on distance training and exchange of experiences – New Fact Sheets on the ISS/IRC website:** Fact sheets N° 53 and 54 have been issued. The first one addresses the prevention of trafficking and abuse in the field of adoption, and the second one compiles the bibliographical references of the whole series of fact sheets, which we have published. Indeed, these are the last fact sheets of this project, funded by the Canton de Genève, Switzerland. We have very much enjoyed the production of this series of training tools, and hope that these have proved, prove and will still prove to be very useful in your professional practice. All the fact sheets are available and accessible in English, French and Spanish at the following address: [www.iss-ssi.org/Resource\\_Centre/Tronc\\_DI/tronc\\_di\\_fic.html](http://www.iss-ssi.org/Resource_Centre/Tronc_DI/tronc_di_fic.html). In addition, and to the extent of available resources, we hope to publish a hard-copy of the entire series in the next year.

## IN BRIEF

**The United Nations General Assembly encourages the ongoing process of elaboration of UN Guidelines for the Appropriate Use and Conditions of Alternative Care for Children **: On 18 December 2007, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) adopted a Resolution on the rights of the child, by a vote of 183 to 1 (United States). Paragraph 16 of the document encourages States to adopt and enforce laws and improve the implementation of policies and programmes to protect children growing up without parents or caregivers. The UNGA also recognises that, where alternative care is necessary, family and community-based care should be promoted. In this context, it welcomes the ongoing process aimed at elaborating a set of UN guidelines for the appropriate use and conditions of alternative care for children. As a reminder, this project is the result of a joint initiative between UNICEF and ISS, launched in early 2004 (see Editorials of Monthly Reviews N° 72-73, 3/2006 and 9/2006). Brazil now leads on this project, and its final adoption is expected at UNGA's session, which will be held in 2008.

*Source:* United Nations General Assembly Resolution A/C.3/62/L.24/Rev.1 on the Rights of the child ([http://www.crin.org/docs/FileManager/un\\_ga\\_res\\_2007.pdf](http://www.crin.org/docs/FileManager/un_ga_res_2007.pdf)).

**Suspension of adoptions in the Republic of Congo (Congo-Brazzaville) **: In November 2007, the Congolese Government announced that intercountry adoption procedures would be suspended across its territory until further notice. This announcement appears in the wake of the arrests of members of the *Arche de Zoé* in Chad, as well as in the struggle against illegal adoption practices carried out by a Spanish adoption body in the Republic of Congo. These cases have raised the concerns of public authorities, which were aware of the roles and interests of various actors in the adoption process, in particular those of Congolese magistrates. They now wish to be stricter with the adoption procedure, as stipulated in the regulations and legal texts in force, in particular the Family Code, and whose principle does not seem to be questioned by the authorities. Organisations for the promotion and protection of human rights in this country are satisfied with this step, which should, however, give rise to practical measures for the improvement of the adoption system, rather than merely remain a suspension measure. However, this situation also fuels debates amongst the orphanages and NGOs involved in adoptions. Indeed, it appears that some of them – those whose procedures are rather questionable – have seen the number of children placed with them decrease, given that children have finally been able to reintegrate their families. Other bodies – more respectful of intercountry adoption procedures – believe that the current circumstances will only complicate these procedures even further.

Sources: 'Congo: Suspension des adoptions après les arrestations au Tchad' [Congo: Suspension of adoptions after the arrests in Chad], *IRIN News*, 2 November 2007 (<http://www.irinnews.org/fr/ReportFrench.aspx?ReportId=75133>); 'Suspension de toutes les procédures d'adoption en cours au Congo' [Suspension of all adoption procedures underway in Congo], *Agence de Presse Africaine*, 3 November 2007 ([www.apanews.net/apa.php?page=show\\_article&id\\_article=45853](http://www.apanews.net/apa.php?page=show_article&id_article=45853)); 'Le Congo suspend les adoptions internationales d'enfants congolais' [Congo suspends intercountry adoptions of Congolese children], *Panapress*, 18 December 2007; 'Le Congo suspend les adoptions internationales' [Congo suspends intercountry Adoptions], *NouvelObs*, 2 November 2007 ([http://tempsreel.nouvelobs.com/actualites/international/afrique/20071101.OBS2496/le\\_congo\\_suspend\\_les\\_adoptons\\_internationales.html](http://tempsreel.nouvelobs.com/actualites/international/afrique/20071101.OBS2496/le_congo_suspend_les_adoptons_internationales.html)); 'Arche de Zoé version congolaise' [Arche de Zoé Congolese version], *Tribune des droits humains – Genève*, 18 January 2008 (<http://www.droitshumains-geneve.info/spip.php?article2658>).

## PRACTICE

### **LATVIA: A recent study underlines the importance of adoption preparation for all children, whatever their age**

*The Central Authority of Latvia conducted a survey on the preparation of children for their adoption among 30 institutions and 7 orphans' courts in the country.*

**R**esources relating to the preparation of prospective adoptive parents are becoming voluminous. However, this is unfortunately not the case of information on adoption preparation for children. Indeed, this issue is still very under-documented. In this context, the survey conducted by the Central Authority of Latvia among 30 institutions and 7 orphans' courts in the country is precious. It reflects the importance of the children's preparation, even when they are younger than two years old. It also explains how the preparation is organised, who carries it out, and what the most common obstacles to the preparation are.

All the interviewed professionals consider that time must be devoted to preparing the child for adoption. However, not all of them agree on the best moment to conduct this preparation. Some professionals believe that it should start after the child has permanently been removed from his biological family. Others believe that it should start later, once the child has become legally adoptable, or even only once he has been matched with a family, in order to avoid unfulfilled hopes. Each of these arguments is defensible, but the ISS/IRC recommends accompanying the child as soon as possible, first with general information and, as the procedure progresses, with more specific preparation.

#### **Modalities and content of the preparation**

The preparation is usually provided through individual talks between the professionals and the child. It is also often carried out through the elaboration of a life book and through different

games. It involves a team of professionals, generally including a social worker, a psychologist and the director of the institution, and, often, also an employee of the orphans' court, members of the adoptive family and other persons close to the child. They all intervene with their specific skills.

In concrete terms, several subjects should be discussed with the child. Among them, his relation with his biological family should be addressed. The professional should explain to the child why he has been taken out of his biological family, why he cannot return, and what the possibilities of contact with the family members are. It is also important to discuss, with the child, about how he imagines his new family and, when known, the differences between this dream and the reality. The meaning and consequences of adoption should also be discussed with the child and his opinion about this project should be sought. The interviewed professionals also underlined the importance of explaining the adoption process to the child.

According to the survey, the questions and concerns expressed by the children during the preparation vary in accordance with their age. Children under two usually do not ask questions, but when they understand that they will have a mother and a father, they usually behave more self-confidently. Children between two and six are very much concerned with communication matters (the language they will talk in with their prospective family), with the relationship with their new family, and with their new living environment (whether they will have their own room and toys...). When children are older, they

also become concerned with the separation from their friends and with the possibility of returning to Latvia if they do not get along with their new family or when they become adults.

### Obstacles to the preparation

According to the survey, the preparation of children for adoption is not always an easy task because it faces obstacles such as the lack of information concerning the adopters. Too often, professionals have to prepare the child without sufficient photographs and information concerning the personality, the living conditions and the social environment of the adoptive family. It is therefore very important that receiving countries send complete PAP files with as much information as possible.

Among the other obstacles to the preparation of the children are the lack of specialised professionals available in Latvia, and the negative attitude of school workers towards

adoption. In this context, further efforts should be provided to train more professionals and to better inform the public on the real meaning of adoption. These steps are essential in changing this trend, and in setting up an adequate environment and tools to improve the preparation of children.

For further information: Ministry for Children and Family Affairs, Latvia ([www.bm.gov.lv](http://www.bm.gov.lv)).

### READING SUGGESTIONS



**Attachement et adoption** [Attachment and adoption], Deborah GRAY, Paris, De Boek Université, Collection Parentalité, 2007.

This publication is aimed at adoptive and foster parents, and introduces them to the various stages of any child's development, and explains how these stages may be addressed when the child has experienced the abandonment by his biological mother. It offers practical advice and suggestions relying on sound theoretical bases relating to attachment, development and early trauma. Topics such as trauma, mourning, attachment difficulties, cultural changes, pre-natal exposure to alcohol and drugs, or the identification of family challenges, and how to deal with them, are addressed in order to enable parents to assess the psycho-affective development of their child, the specific challenges of their family, and how to enable a child to develop his full potential.

The publication includes a preface by Cécile Delannoy, an adoptive mother and author of *Au risque de l'adoption* [At the risk of adoption] (La Découverte, Paris, 2006) and by Johanne Lemieux, also an adoptive mother, and a Social Worker from Quebec, who has developed the Adopteparentalité©, a bio-psychosocial method of support to adoptive families.

## SWEDEN: *Special parents for special children* - A comprehensive tool in the preparation of prospective adopters

*The course materials used in the preparation of prospective adoptive parents in Sweden provide a comprehensive overview of the adoption process and guide parents through the preparation necessary to adopt a child who has experienced the loss of at least one important adult.*

The Swedish Intercountry Adoptions Authority (Myndigheten för internationella adoptionsfrågor, MIA) has recently issued the English version of the preparatory course material for prospective adopters in Sweden, entitled *Special parents for special children*<sup>1</sup>. In this country, the course has been compulsory since 2005 for anyone contemplating a first intercountry adoption. In Sweden, the preparation takes place partly during the compulsory course for prospective parents, and continues during the home study and assessment. The purpose of the course is to provide prospective adopters with information and an opportunity to gain a better understanding of adoptive children and their needs, of the legal provisions involved, of the adoption process and of the help available if problems should arise. The course is also designed to stimulate emotional processes, and with the aim in view, it is suggested that the trainers use value clarification exercises, literature, films, radio programs, articles, home

work and group discussions. The ISS/IRC welcomes these initiatives given that they provide an additional guarantee for the success of intercountry adoptions.

### Content of the course materials

The course book is divided into the following seven themes, and offers extracts of personal experiences, suggests questions to ask oneself on each aspect of the preparation, and provides some additional resources and reading suggestions.

- *Intercountry adoption*: This chapter introduces the situation of adoption in Sweden and in its society, by offering an overview in a historical perspective and by raising issues such as ethical dilemmas, the principle of the best interests of the child, ethnic discrimination, and the international legal context.
- *Having a family*: This second part raises issues, which most often are at the heart of the decision to adopt and which must be addressed by the prospective adopters before deciding to adopt, such as fertility problems, involuntary childlessness, existing family relations and available support, and different forms of families and family concepts.
- *Becoming a person*: The following chapter addresses psycho-social issues relating to the needs and development of the child. These include the child's early interaction with, and attachment to, others, his linguistic development, his trauma in childhood, and the implications of the adoption triangle.
- *Which children need a family?*: This part provides comprehensive information on the reasons behind children being adoptable, and their medical and other characteristics. It also offers some reflection as to the characteristics of the prospective adopted child: age, siblings, country of origin, disability or special needs, relative adoption, domestic adoption, children on recuperative holiday.
- *Travelling to meet your child*: This aspect of the adoption process is addressed by offering prospective parents some information as to the waiting period, the possible processes in the child's country of origin, the preparation and organisation of the first meeting, and in relation to helping the child in adapting to a new language, and perhaps even a new name.
- *Becoming an adoptive family*: The course material also raises potential adaptation problems and how these may be identified and addressed. The former may be reflected through different forms of behaviour (fear, anxiety, sadness, sleeping and/or eating

problems, provocation, etc), and requires addressing past losses and trauma, visible differences and questions about the child's roots and origins.

- *Life as a family*: The final chapter of this course book emphasises the life-time implications of intercountry adoption. In particular, it addresses the various development stages of the child throughout his young life in which adoption feelings could resurface, how the child may be supported through these, and the consideration of return journeys, including for searching for biological parents.

### **Objective of the course book**

MIA intends, through *Special parents for special children*, to provide prospective adoptive parents with personal preparation to the challenge of adoption, rather than with mere information. It wishes to ensure that adopters feel secure to assume responsibility for the results of their actions, irrespective of the outcomes. The course book provides a tool of support to the preparation course, and offers parents a basis for reflection, for discussion, for further questions, and for addressing challenging issues. It offers a framework within which to consider their capacity to parent and to respond to the needs of children, and in particular of adopted children, who often carry with themselves the losses and trauma of their past.

The ISS/IRC is aware that preparation courses for prospective adoptive parents are available and may be compulsory in many other countries. Thus, any other experiences and materials on this subject would be very welcome.

<sup>1</sup> *Special parents for special children*, Socialstyrelsen (National Board of Health and Welfare) and Myndigheten för internationella adoptionsfrågor (MIA, Swedish Intercountry Adoptions Authority), August 2007, 130pp. The course book is available on MIA's website: <http://www.mia.eu/english/parents.pdf>, and may be ordered from MIA, Box 30, 101 26 Stockholm, Sweden; [info@mia.eu](mailto:info@mia.eu); Fax: +46 8 650 41 10.

## EUROPE: A new tool for post-adoption services

*Guidelines on Post-adoption Services have been published, in September 2007, by the European Network of National Observatories on Childhood – ChildOnEurope – and are intended for both, professionals and policy-makers.*

**T**he *Guidelines on Post-adoption Services* were drafted by a group of experts appointed by ChildOnEurope, and coming both from countries of origin and receiving countries. This specific issue has been chosen given its key role in the adoption process. However, in the majority of the countries involved in intercountry adoption, it remains insufficiently or inadequately addressed and still requires promotion. These Guidelines aim to facilitate this process through an interesting theoretical and practical analysis, establishing first the context, rationale and goals of post-adoption services, before studying their practical issues.

### **Context and main objectives of post-adoption services**

The Guidelines establish the legal framework of post-adoption services. At the international level, the 1993 Hague Convention on Intercountry adoption and the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child require States to undertake a range of functions to protect adoptive children and families, including the implementation of post-adoption services. At the European level, the European Parliament resolution on the improvement of the law and cooperation among the Member States in child protection procedures stipulates similar State obligations, focusing more on the support to candidates in domestic and intercountry adoption.

Also based on scientific studies, these Guidelines recognise and highlight the necessity to provide post-adoption services to respond to the physical and psychological needs of adoptive children, upon their arrival and after their adoption, as well as to those of adoptive parents and birth families. According to the Guidelines, post-adoption services find their main justifications in the necessity for adoptive parents to be helped by professionals in understanding their children and in responding in the most favourable way to their needs. In accordance with each individual situation, those needs may vary, the main areas dealing with the physical growth and health of the child, his emotional and cognitive development, his social

integration, behavioural and identity issues, the search for origins.

As stated by the Guidelines, post-adoption services should be set up within the context of professional network coordination, trust and joint responsibility between receiving countries and countries of origin. Moreover, some political, sociological, cultural and financial issues about the concept of adoption must be taken into account in order to better understand how post-adoption services are or are not implemented in each country, and how they are organised. In fact, the world context of international adoption, the role of mass media and some wide-spread irrational prejudices about adoption influence national policies on adoption as well as the dialogue between adoptive families and professionals and among professionals themselves.

### **Implementation of post-adoption services**

On the one hand, post-adoption services consist in providing follow-up reports on the situation of adopted children, for which the Guidelines offer a methodology for carrying them out, as well as for their content. On the other hand, they consist in providing professional support to the three groups forming the so-called 'adoption triangle': adoptees, birth parents and adoptive parents.

These Guidelines insist on the fact that the need for post-adoption services starts early, and that they should be accessible at all stages of the adoption process: on the day birth parents decide to abandon their child(ren), on the day the decision is made that a child is adoptable, on the day prospective adoptive parents apply for adoption. At the specific stage of the search for origins, professionals play a key role in supporting all actors involved, and as a mediator between the child, his history and his adoptive parents. The way post-adoption support is provided may vary very much from a country to another, a fact which is illustrated by this tool in presenting the experiences of several European countries (France, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, etc).

Public services specializing in adoption, or accredited bodies, are the main providers of

post-adoption services. The importance of training activities for the professionals of those services is underlined by the Guidelines, in order to better meet the specific needs of the different systems of post-adoption. General directives are suggested to meet this objective. Furthermore, in order to improve the effectiveness and quality of post-adoption services, the Guidelines also offer a monitoring system and insist on the importance of promoting research activities in this field. Both are an integral part of building and implementing a real post-adoption services system.

The wide dissemination of these Guidelines would be a real progress in the development of quality post-adoption services, at the same time, providing the professionals involved with a practical guide, and supporting the policy-makers in better addressing this issue in national legislation and through the child and family protection system.

An electronic version of the Guidelines is available at: [http://www.childoneurope.org/fr/activities/pdf/post-adoption\\_def2.pdf](http://www.childoneurope.org/fr/activities/pdf/post-adoption_def2.pdf).

It is also possible to request the printed version of the Guidelines to the ChildONEurope Secretariat by writing at: [childoneurope@minori.it](mailto:childoneurope@minori.it)

#### FORTHCOMING CONFERENCES, SEMINARS, SYMPOSIA AND COURSES

- **France** : *Les adoptions tardives: aspects psychologiques, juridiques et cliniques* [Late adoptions : psychological, legal and clinical aspects], Paris, 10-14 March 2008. This training is led by Omblin Ozoux-Teffaine, a Psychologist and Psychoanalyst, with the participation of several specialist stakeholders. It addresses topics, such as the preparation of applications for these adoptions, the conditions of contact which promote the involvement in an adoptive relationship, the possibilities to consider in cases of rejection, the role of intermediaries... *Contact* : COPES, 20 rue de Dantzig, 75015 Paris; Tel: +33 1 53 68 93 40; Fax : +33 1 53 68 93 45; [copes-formation@wanadoo.fr](mailto:copes-formation@wanadoo.fr); [www.lecopes.com](http://www.lecopes.com).
- **United Kingdom**: *Action hero, new man, strong silent type? None of the above? Understanding the contribution of men to caring for children*, London, 26 February 2008. This conference states that more single men and male same-sex couples are adopting or fostering, and are facing issues and dilemmas of their own as male carers. They may sometimes be unsure about applying to adopt or foster, concerned that their motivation may be viewed with suspicion. At the same time, there is a need to encourage more men to consider caring for children as a positive career choice. Although many agencies do recognise what men have to offer, there is much more to do to acknowledge and celebrate the contribution of male carers. This conference will address some of the thorniest issues of stereotyping and consider what can be learnt from research and practice to guide those working with men in the context of caring for children. *Contact*: Conference team, BAAF, Saffron House, 6-10 Kirby Street, London EC1N 8TS, [conferenceteam@baaf.org.uk](mailto:conferenceteam@baaf.org.uk)

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*Table of contents of the Bulletins 1997 - 2007:*

[www.iss-ssi.org/Resource\\_Centre/Resource\\_Center\\_EN/About\\_ISS-IRC/about\\_iss-irc.html](http://www.iss-ssi.org/Resource_Centre/Resource_Center_EN/About_ISS-IRC/about_iss-irc.html). See Activities.

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