



**Strategic evaluation of the IRC | International
Reference Centre for the Rights of Children Deprived
of their Family**

INTERNATIONAL SOCIAL SERVICE

To the attention of the Secretary General - Geneva

Introduction

Created with the aim of defending children's rights and advancing reforms and public policies on delicate situations (adoption, placement of children outside their family of origin, children born of surrogate mothers, etc.), the IRC (International Reference Centre on the Rights of Children Deprived of their Family) offers a range of services and tools that make it a key player today and very much appreciated (this evaluation confirms it) by professionals in the field of protection and the authorities concerned throughout the world.

In recent years, the IRC has focused on providing its basic services (monthly bulletin, inquiry service, country files) while developing specialized services (circulars, expert opinions in international fora), partnerships (with the United Nations, the Hague Conference on Private International Law, international child protection networks), technical assistance missions (Cambodia, Malta, Sweden, Mexico...), specialized publications and online training (MOOC). There are dozens of actions and they are praised for their quality. This record is all the more honourable given that the IRC team, based mainly in Geneva, is small (less than 10 people and occasional external experts).

Today, the IRC is at a crossroad, and not only because of the impact of the Covid 19 pandemic on its activities. The last evaluation of its activities was several years ago. Resources are decreasing, as are the contributions of the partner Central Authorities in a context of drastically decreasing international adoption. Part of the IRC team has recently left, and the recruitment of a new director must be done quickly while the team still in place is facing some difficulties in their work.

Its positioning is delicate: hailed for the quality of its work and the relevance of its services, the IRC sometimes seems to be caught between the desire for independence and strategic autonomy and the desire to satisfy, above all, the main contributing central authorities. The only way to avoid being used is to seek financial independence by multiplying the number of tools and services for which fees are charged and by broadening the target audience.

Moreover, its expertise in intercountry adoption is no longer to be demonstrated, but it seems to have locked it into this speciality, to the detriment of other fields related to the protection of children deprived of their family, and of other professionals who would nevertheless be quite happy to benefit from tools of equivalent quality on subjects related to adoption.

In this context, the ISS General Secretariat has therefore commissioned an evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of the IRC, through the analysis of its current activities and work perspectives, with a view to reinforcing its added value for ISS, the authorities and entities benefiting from its services.

The specific objectives of this evaluation were to:

- *Assess the current functions and activities of the IRC*
 - *Research and publication (on CLH 1993) including the bulletin*
 - *Country sheets/reports for the CRC/general inquiries*
 - *Technical support in the field (projects financed by UNICEF, governments, etc.) for projects to accompany and structure the central authorities in charge of adoption and alternative care*

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- *Explore with central authorities and other relevant actors the desirability and feasibility of developing similar or complementary activities on new themes, including training needs for ISS social workers:*
 - *Tracing*
 - *1996 Hague Convention (in whole or in part)*
 - *2007 Hague Convention*
 - *Any other relevant opportunity*
 - *Explore with different actors the opportunity and relevance of strengthening advocacy, with regard to the original mission of the IRC and the possible contributions to ISS in general*
 - *Assess the impact of the IRC's work on central authorities and propose ways to further strengthen the relevance and added value of these services*
 - *If time permits; study the opportunities for strengthening the use of technology in the service of the IRC (content layout, communication, brand image, tools and methods, strengthening interactivity, etc.).*

As part of this evaluation, 26 grantees were interviewed or responded to the questionnaire, specifically:

- *5 IRC team members and the ISS Secretary General*
- *7 Central Authorities of receiving countries (Adoption)*
- *4 Central Authorities of countries of origin (Adoption)*
- *2 experts actively contributing to the activities of the IRC*
- *7 members of the International Social Service network.*

Through a detailed questionnaire (see appendix), offered in English and French, and telephone interviews, it was possible to determine certain trends that would allow for an objective diagnosis of the IRC's activities and to formulate recommendations in 4 main areas:

- ***the positioning of the IRC and the needs of beneficiaries with regard to it (Chapter 1)***
- ***the tools and services offered by the IRC (Chapter 2)***
- ***work prospects and topics of interest (Chapter 3)***
- ***the general management and the desired profile of the future IRC Leadership***

NB: Due to time constraints, the part of the evaluation devoted to the opportunities for strengthening the use of technology at the service of IRC (presentation of content, communication, branding, tools and methods, strengthening of interactivity, etc.) could not be completed and will have to be the subject of in-depth work within IRC itself and/or of external support.

Chapter 1: The positioning of the IRC

From this evaluation, it is very clear that beneficiaries are unanimous about the quality of the work provided by the IRC and the usefulness of its services. According to them, the IRC provides clear and practical information that is regularly updated, especially in the event of legislative changes. Good and not so good practices are carefully identified and shared with beneficiaries. The opinions and analyses proposed by IRC experts are appreciated for their accuracy and objectivity. The Central Authorities of the host countries rely on the IRC's opinions when considering a new collaboration with a country of origin. The impact of the IRC's activities is therefore immediate and tangible. The IRC justifies without any doubt its title of "reference centre" on which professionals from all over the world rely in their daily activities related to the protection of children deprived of their family.

The division of roles between the IRC and the ISS, or more specifically the positioning of the IRC within the ISS, is confusing to most interviewees. The two are equated, even within the ISS network.

Regarding more specifically the strengths of its positioning:

Compared to institutions such as the Permanent Bureau of the Hague Conference or UNICEF, the IRC overcomes the obstacles and slowness of diplomacy and bureaucracy by providing quick responses. The IRC's expertise in adoption matters is well established, whereas the HCCH or UNICEF have a broader scope of intervention. Its deep commitment to the rights of children deprived of their family is recognized, as is its neutrality. Dialogue with states is ongoing, but from the perspective of interviewees, state interests do not seem to influence recommendations or opinions. Its extensive research based on field experience (including that of ISS network members) allows it to assess the implementation of international standards and to make pragmatic proposals to strengthen these standards.

Compared to other child protection NGOs, it is the adoption expertise that makes all the difference. The very targeted information on procedures, the knowledge of the trends in intercountry adoption, the strict respect of fundamental principles and the credibility of this information are all elements that distinguish the IRC from other NGOs working in the field of child protection. Its independence and impartiality are underlined by the interviewees (Central Authorities). The fact that the IRC provides specific technical assistance to Authorities is also an added value.

Compared to the Central Authorities, the IRC is generally considered to be impartial and multidisciplinary, which allows it to formulate objective and complete comments and analyses. The fact of having a global view and a distanced technical approach allows the IRC to issue respected and followed opinions. It is also appreciated that the IRC can ask sensitive questions and gather information freely, without apparent political or diplomatic bias. Similarly, it seems easier for the IRC to make recommendations about collaboration with a particular state, or about the weakness of its protection and adoption system, without diplomatic embarrassment. Finally, its federative position allows it to promote exchanges between countries, between authorities of countries of origin and/or receiving countries.

From the point of view of the interviewees, the opinion on the IRC and its unique positioning is very favourable. It should be noted, however, that several people questioned the reality of the IRC's independence and impartiality because of the way it is financed, i.e. mainly through contributions from the Central Authorities of the host countries (questions sometimes even coming from these same authorities!). Similarly, and no doubt because of this financial link, a large proportion of the people interviewed (Central Authorities and ISS members alike) consider that the primary beneficiaries of ISS services and therefore their *raison d'être* are the Central Authorities of the host countries.

This search for financial independence is one of the main projects of the General Secretariat and should be ranked among the major priorities in the coming months, to avoid the impartiality of the IRC, which is one of its main assets, being called into question.

ISS members are the most critical of the IRC's communication:

"In general, the IRC should be much more strategic about its communication externally and internally. Membership often does not know about projects, and there doesn't seem to be an organized strategy to engage with the network to help disseminate published projects. Finally, there needs to be more communication between membership and the IRC about developing joint projects. More could be done so that the IRC Centre is more known within member organisations – and perhaps more online sessions are needed to get to know more IRC. "

"Communication has been the thorn in the IRC Side. Communication is difficult in terms of they never took their right place always letting other agencies take the lead. Never seeing it's value and selling it as such. The IRC has been giving away documents and research when states should have been paying for the information. The IRC also had a hard time keeping their password secret and I know states were taking advantage of that...I have often felt that the IRC was "sheeply" looking to others to steer it in the right direction. Except for surrogacy which came to the IRC following a PAC meeting in Banff."

The lack of communication about the tools and the sometimes too distant links to the activities of ISS members are important criticisms, which refer to the difficulties of positioning the IRC.

Recommendations:

- *to quickly and ardently seek the financial independence of the IRC, by multiplying the sources of income (notably through the sale of publications, the offer of paying MOOCs, the enlargement of the offer to groups such as adoptees seeking their origins or future adoptive parents)*
- *demonstrate at all times this impartiality, not hesitating to denounce the bad practices of countries or Central Authorities, even for contributing States.*
- *to put the principles of ISS / IRC at the heart of all missions: protection of all children deprived of their family, ratification of the Conventions and promotion of international standards, development of knowledge, exchanges and dialogue.*
- *develop a real communication policy, both internal and external (for tools, see Chapter 2)*

Beneficiaries' needs and expectations of the IRC (according to the interviewees) :

- *establish country status reports and research on issues related to intercountry adoption*
- *promote the voice of children and their needs*
- *provide guidance and support*
- *to have accurate and up-to-date information on legislation, the child protection system, the adoption procedure with regard to the principles of the Hague Convention of 1993*
- *provide specific training on child protection*
- *provide technical support in the socio-legislative reform of child protection systems*
- *assisting countries of origin in improving their programs for children deprived of their family, including training for child protection professionals*
- *conducting credible, in-depth research*
- *capture, collate and share experience and lessons learned from knowledge of many countries and systems in an impartial manner*
- *increase the exchange of good practices*
- *ensure that in receiving States as well as in States of origin (in the context of adoption), the interests of the child are always the most crucial consideration.*

Chapter 2: Review of the tools and services offered by the IRC

IRC users unanimously praise the quality of IRC publications and services and their usefulness, when known. Central authorities and other child protection professionals have become accustomed to receiving information on a regular basis, which they consider reliable. The format of the tools is sometimes questioned, as well as some of the tools themselves. Clearly, not all resources can be useful to everyone to the same degree, but in a time of scarce financial and human resources, it is appropriate to question the relevance of certain tools and their adequacy to the concrete needs of IRC beneficiaries. Several interviewees also stressed the fact that they were not aware of certain recent tools, which had required a great deal of effort from the IRC team in their development.

THE MONTHLY BULLETIN

Generally appreciated for its timeliness and reliability, the Monthly Bulletin is a flagship tool of the IRC, funded by 22 partner authorities. It is sent monthly to over 5,000 central authorities and child welfare professionals. Topics are carefully covered, and the information is perceived as relevant. Recipients appreciate being kept informed of recent developments, policy changes and major news in the world of adoption, and more broadly of children deprived of a family. They appreciate the exchange of experiences on legal and psychosocial issues in different countries, which allows them to better understand the intervention contexts and to make the right decisions. The Bulletin is generally considered practical, accessible and easy to read. The statistics are considered to be authoritative. The authorities recognize that such quality work justifies the funding provided.

Within the IRC team, the work around the preparation of the monthly Bulletin is very consistent with the production of three versions (French / English / Spanish). The division of tasks in this regard is not always clear (see Chapter 4).

However, beneficiaries agree that the current format of the Bulletin no longer meets their needs, and ISS employees themselves question the relevance of the tool in its current form given the time required to develop it and its uncertain impact.

It should be noted that the vast majority of respondents said they did not read the entire Monthly Bulletin. A thorough reading would take several hours (one expert said 5 hours!), which is difficult to find in busy schedules. This is also due to the redundancy (perceived or real) of the topics and points of view expressed ("It's always the same thing"): in order to meet the expectations of the central authorities who finance this tool, intercountry adoption takes centre stage to the detriment of other themes relating to the protection of children deprived of their family.

Other remarks came up regularly during the interviews and in the replies to the questionnaires:

- the density of the presentation, the lack of photos, the outdated design
- the lack of interactivity
- the lack of diversity of opinion and use of new external experts
- the lack of signature for articles, or the assimilation of individual works to an IRC teamwork
- recurring topics, lack of new topics, loss of quality of content, non-hierarchical information
- the density of information, the lack of a common thread, the lack of synthesis, of short and dynamic notes that would allow a quick and efficient reading

And in a subsidiary way:

- the space taken by footnotes, which suffocate the reading
- the lack of precision in the information and news (e.g. contact details)

The proposal to replace the monthly Bulletin with a weekly bulletin was rejected. Instead, a central authority and ISS members proposed that the IRC hold a monthly meeting on ZOOM to present the Bulletin's outline to authorities and partners who may wish to attend, with the aim of fostering dialogue and exchange on the issues addressed.

The question of broadening access to the monthly bulletin was also raised. The vast majority of central authorities and partners are in favour of this. They emphasize that the sharing of good practices can only be beneficial to all, while recalling that the content dedicated to Central Authorities should keep a certain specificity to justify paying for it. Information shared more widely could benefit different groups such as adoptee groups, NGOs, prospective adoptive parents or academics.

Recommendations:

- *broaden the themes dealt with beyond intercountry adoption*
- *choose a main theme and avoid dispersion on several subjects*
- *shorten the bulletin, by publishing some information in the news section of the website instead*
- *make the link with the work done in the conferences in which the IRC participates*
- *offer a keyword search in the archives*
- *redesign the Bulletin*

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- *work on interactivity: dynamic links to other sites*
 - *include the experiences of ISS network members among the topics or editorials*
 - *extend the Bulletin to other categories of beneficiaries, by proposing a version for the general public, and a (paying) version for central authorities*

Recommendations for topics to be addressed (suggestions gathered from interviewees):

- *financial aspects of adoption (e.g., cost tables)*
- *table of contacts and organizations in each country, updated annually, and verified by the IRC as an independent organization*
- *preparation of adoptable children*
- *the evaluation of the candidates for adoption*
- *the matching process*
- *illegal practices*
- *adoption risk management and supervision methods*
- *the effects of cultural differences*
- *development of post-adoption services*
- *post-adoption information, resources, research*
- *the needs of adoptees (adults and children)*
- *the principle of subsidiarity in practice*
- *open adoptions (expectations and opportunities)*
- *intercountry adoption in the context of the Covid pandemic¹⁹*
- *how to respond to cases of illicit adoption prior to the 1993 Hague Convention and how to collaborate with the authorities of the countries of origin*

STATUS REPORTS

Status reports are technical sheets that clarify the child protection systems and procedures (especially adoption procedures) of a given country. They are the preferred tools of Central Authorities in receiving countries, and many Central Authorities rely on these documents to make policy or strategic decisions.

Here is what some Central Authorities say about them:

- *"It is an important, reliable, and useful resource for understanding the issues that children face in countries of origin."*
- *"These fact sheets are essential when considering working with countries of origin"*
- *"It provides reassurance that some countries have practices that are in line with the Hague Convention and that the interests of the child are being protected"*

Some emphasize the need to have more details, more in-depth information, complementary to that collected at the level of the Permanent Bureau of the Hague Conference. Others would like the ISS/IRC, thanks to its neutral position and its status as an NGO, to be able to provide more concrete information on the realities on the ground, beyond what the authorities say. In addition, the reliability of field information is sometimes questioned, given the absence of an ISS office in the countries studied: some wonder if it is not a synthetic compilation of reports from other structures rather than a field survey. The IRC claims to have "a local contact person" review the situation reports. The IRC team emphasized that they are pressured to "act quickly," preventing overly extensive investigations.

Furthermore, it appears that some central authorities have ordered the IRC to focus its work on certain countries, depending on the opportunities for the development of intercountry adoption in those countries. If true, this practice would question the independence of the IRC and the ethics of its positioning.

Finally, it is interesting to note that a few interviewees from outside ISS/IRC understood the difference between the Country Status Reports and the Country Fact Sheets (which are a shorter version of the Status Reports, developed for use by bodies such as the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child). The latter facilitate discussions in these bodies and the drafting of concluding observations.

Recommendations:

- *reinforce the reliability and timeliness of the information gathered by multiplying local sources of information (authorities, NGOs, AIOs) and, if necessary, local collaborations (short missions of local experts)*
- *Insist on practical experience and realities on the ground*
- *use its position as a neutral NGO to go further in the information that can be revealed and to freely choose the countries on which to concentrate efforts*
- *to revise/update as much as possible the situation reports and to put forward these updates on the website or in the monthly Bulletin*
- *Expand certain sections, especially those related to tracing and state-specific illegal practices*
- *Include links to adoptee groups in the countries concerned*
- *have recourse to the experts of the ISS network to complete the information*

INQUIRIES / REQUESTS FOR INFORMATION

ISS inquiries/requests for information are very popular and appreciated. More than fifty countries and thirty topics are addressed each year. Beneficiaries emphasize the quality and speed of the answers given by the IRC team.

One beneficiary country summarizes it as follows:

"We contact the IRC when we need an update on the legislation in force in the countries of origin, or when we need clarification regarding the content of a status report. We also ask the IRC for the contact of reliable partners in the countries of origin, especially when additional information is sought."

There were no specific recommendations regarding the requests. It is a useful and appreciated service. However, internally, a reorganization of this service should be considered (see Chapter 4).

TRAINING SHEETS

At the time of their development, the Topic Sheets were very useful to Central Authorities and child protection professionals in laying the groundwork for training on the main principles of alternative care and intercountry adoption.

But these records have not been updated for several years. Some authorities are not aware of them and no one interviewed referred to them.

However, these sheets could be recycled and updated for short training manuals or as a basis for exchanges of best practices.

Recommendations:

- *update the data sheets*
- *modernize their format and enhance their interactivity*
- *communicate about these tools, especially with central authorities and accredited adoption bodies*

OTHER TOOLS: COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS, PROFESSIONAL MANUALS, MOOC ...

When they are known by the beneficiaries (and this is far from always the case), these tools are considered to be detailed and very qualitative, allowing to reinforce expertise and knowledge. They are useful on a daily basis, not only for Central Authorities but also, when shared by them, for adoption accredited bodies. Among the recent publications, the most read were, in decreasing order: *kafalah*, financial aspects of adoption, intra-family adoptions.

It should be noted that among the persons interviewed, several seem to have become aware of the tools during this evaluation, which reveals a problem of communication around these publications.

For comparative or thematic studies, it would be interesting to develop shortened versions or summary sheets.

The MOOCs have been relatively well attended, but few of those interviewed expressed the view that they should be developed further. One hypothesis is that the name MOOC is not very well known by potential beneficiaries.

For MOOCs, topics of interest and suggestions:

- *a live session per month that would summarize the Monthly bulletin, with the main information*
- *good practices to guarantee the best interests of the child*
- *post intercountry adoption*
- *the responsibilities of each (governments and parents)*
- *good practices regarding expatriate adoptions, including national adoptions*
- *MOOC based on the realities and field experience of ISS members*

Finally, a comment was made by ISS members that the resources developed by the IRC should support and sustain the work of the network. Its competencies should therefore coincide with the competencies of ISS members around the world.

Recommendations:

- *develop targeted communication for the publication of certain studies*
- *modernize their format and enhance their interactivity (e.g., by offering a specific ZOOM meeting to present the publications)*
- *develop shortened versions or summary sheets published online*
- *develop tools related to the subjects covered by ISS members and with their support and expertise*

Main topics of interest mentioned for future publications:

- *post-adoption support*
- *adoptions within the framework of expatriations (problems and guarantees)*
- *ad hoc adoptions*
- *search for origins and/or family reunification*
- *assessment of prospective adoptive parents*
- *manual to help deal with suspected illegal adoptions (for receiving States and States of origin).*

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE MISSIONS

Reduced or even cancelled due to the Covid 19 pandemic, technical assistance missions occupied a significant part of the IRC's working time until 2020. Honduras, Malta, Mexico, Vietnam... a variety of countries have received technical support on adoption-related issues from IRC, either at their request or at the request of UNICEF. The authorities interviewed who have received such missions are generally very satisfied with them. In general, the Central Authorities of the receiving countries consider them complementary to what the Permanent Bureau of the Hague Conference is doing and appreciate the information gathered. The ISS members interviewed were not aware of these missions.

It should be noted that Central Authorities of receiving countries (adoption) have also commissioned and funded training missions on the 1993 Hague Convention. However, few people responded to the question of how these missions should be funded (less than 10% of responses).

Two suggestions were made:

- Priority should be given to countries that have recently ratified the 1993 Hague Convention;
- The costs could be covered by the countries requesting this assistance.

It is interesting to note that only adoption is envisaged as a topic on which the IRC could provide technical support, for insights into the implementation of the 1993 Hague Convention - instead of the Permanent Bureau in The Hague? According to several interviewees, the IRC could however provide useful technical support on issues related to de-institutionalisation, tracing etc. It is on these subjects that the IRC could distinguish itself, bring a real added value and reach the core of its missions, namely the defence of the rights of children deprived of their family.

Similarly, one Central Authority suggested that the IRC could work on the supervision of OAAs, for example by proposing an in-depth study and technical support to Central Authorities on this subject. This would be a topic on which the IRC could easily find more funding, according to this authority.

Mission reports are relatively unknown and unread by IRC grantees, who only refer to them if in-depth country research is needed.

Recommendations:

- *to widen the scope of intervention of the IRC (cf. suggestion on the supervision of OAA)*
- *to seek to develop a specialisation in related subjects concerning the protection of children deprived of their family, in order to legitimately support authorities or organisations on these subjects*
- *as regards adoption, try not to carry out missions on the express order of a CA of receiving countries, but on the request of countries of origin*
- *concerning the mission reports: think about a better communication around transversal subjects of general interest and/or not to give too much time to them*

ADVOCACY

The core of IRC's mission is to defend the rights of children deprived of their family, by working for a better protection of these children, for a wide ratification of international conventions aimed at this protection, for global policies advocating for the best interests of children and for spaces of dialogue, exchange and knowledge sharing.

In order to accomplish this mission, IRC has been engaged in advocacy for several years. This role is particularly appreciated by the Permanent Bureau in The Hague, which invites the IRC as an observer on intergovernmental technical groups and appreciates its ability to engage in advocacy for children's rights on difficult and sensitive issues - where one would expect more neutrality from the Permanent Bureau.

When asked if the IRC's advocacy efforts were known, responses were mixed. Some respondents were able to cite examples (e.g., children with special needs, Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children, importance of a complete child file, etc.). But many are not aware of these actions or give them little importance, especially the Central Authorities of receiving countries (*Responses given: "Some I have heard, but these have not been so much a focus of our interest." "The provision of data has been most important to us so far" "Maybe not as important as provision of independent information, when looking from the perspective of a receiving state"*).

When asked about IRC's role in advocacy, the majority of respondents are in favour of such actions, but a significant portion of respondents are undecided. Those in favour would like to see a more courageous engagement on certain issues, particularly surrogacy.

The areas in which respondents felt advocacy could have an impact were:

- *Children's rights and best interests*
- *Global child and family protection policies*
- *All aspects related to adoption issues (working with non-Hague countries, financial transparency, children with special needs, post-adoption and adoptees etc.)*
- *Promotion of good practices based on international standards*
- *Assisting Central Authorities in countries of origin to comply with the rules of the Hague Convention*

THE WEBSITE & OTHER COMMUNICATION TOOLS

In the responses to the questionnaire, opinions diverge on the IRC's communication policy, including its website. Some of the respondents find it easy to use and complete while other users find it cluttered and not very modern.

Objectively, the website has little interactivity with users, few images or photographs, and long paragraphs of text that are sometimes a little indigestible for the reader. The site does not really highlight the singularity of the IRC nor does it explain in a concrete way its contribution to the cause of the protection of children deprived of their family.

The question of traffic was left open due to the lack of precise statistics (e.g. on the main searches, the most visited pages, etc.).

Substantive recommendations:

- *explain what the IRC is, in an educational way*
- *highlight news in a dynamic way (short articles, photos, etc.)*
- *reserve a section for the general public: resources on adoption, search for origins, etc.*
- *remove outdated resources and put them in an "archives" section*
- *rewrite the main pages in a synthetic and more modern way*
- *for publications: propose a short summary, a cover photo, a table of contents, etc. to make them more attractive (on the model of CAIRN for example)*

Form recommendations:

- *make the presentation airy, banish blocks of text*
- *include images, videos*
- *include colours*
- *limit yourself to two or three fonts*
- *adapt the site to be read on a smartphone*
- *adopt a hierarchy in the main menu*
- *make sure that a click on the logo takes you back to the home page*
- *work on the footer: reminders, shortcuts, contacts...*

General recommendations:

- *obtain statistics on site traffic, to see which pages generate the most traffic and thus adapt the content*
- *work on the referencing of the site on search engines (SEO audit)*
- *think about an interactive version of the site (e.g.: chat with avatar?)*
- *involve the whole IRC team in the renovation of the website*

Chapter 3: Development perspectives for the IRC

The Authorities, ISS members and other partners who responded to this evaluation insist on the need to maintain existing services.

However, they suggest some interesting general ideas:

- *that the IRC become an "adoption training centre" that would provide live information on current topics*
- *that the IRC regularly publish a list of available tools and publications*
- *that the IRC focus on children deprived of a family, children with disabilities in institutions and children born through surrogate motherhood*
- *that the IRC develops information, knowledge and analysis on children adopted through international adoption*
- *that IRC study the impact of the Covid 19 pandemic on all policies and practices for the protection of children deprived of a family (social challenges, care issues, etc.)*

On the following specific topics, respondents provided the following food for thought:

1996 Hague Convention

Half of the respondents abstained from answering, the others were rather in favour, suggesting to work on good practices in this field, *kafalah* (NB: this topic has already been the subject of a specific publication), practices related to parental responsibility and the link with the Guidelines on Alternative Care and Inter-country Adoption. It should be noted that the Permanent Bureau of the Hague Conference is working specifically on these issues, including the preparation of comprehensive and detailed Country Profiles, for which the IRC could have a significant input on the model of the States of situation in the field of adoption.

2007 Hague Convention

Respondents showed very little interest in IRC involvement in this area.

The search for origins

This issue is the subject of a plebiscite: almost all respondents were in favour of IRC involvement in this area. Not surprisingly, it is a subject of particular concern to the Central Authorities of host countries.

Specifically, the IRC is expected to focus on the following topics related to the search for origins:

- *how the different States deal with the requests of adoptees for information on their origins*
- *information and good practices in this field (psychological support, availability of information, reliable partners in the countries of origin to accompany adoptees in their research, etc.)*
- *the implementation of administrative procedures to guarantee adoptees effective access to information*
- *post-adoption follow-up*
- *research methodologies*
- *practical considerations on how to ensure transparency from the beginning of the adoption process*
- *development of a database and reference contacts*

Surrogacy

In this area as well, the majority of respondents favoured greater involvement of the IRC.

More specifically, the IRC is expected to focus on the following topics related to surrogacy:

- *cross-border implications*
- *the approach of different countries to surrogacy and the rights of children to know their gamete donors*
- *best practices in legislation*
- *a comparative approach to surrogacy in different countries*
- *adoption as a way to legalize surrogacy*

Children on the move / unaccompanied minors

Central Authorities and partners have expressed little opinion on this topic, but ISS members are in favour of further work on these issues.

The areas of concern are:

- *child trafficking and trafficking of underage migrants*
- *to better understand the needs, contexts and means to support children in mobility*

Chapter 4: Conclusion

This evaluation comes at a time of management change for the IRC, with the departure of two key figures from the centre (director and deputy director), but also at a time of opportunity to consolidate the existent services and look forward for new directions and service development opportunity making the necessary rapprochement with the ISS Network.

Specific recommendations regarding the profile of the future IRC Director:

- *excellent knowledge in areas other than adoption and complementary to adoption: tracing, surrogacy*
- *demonstrated commitment to child protection and the best interests of children*
- *a sense of ethics and the ability to maintain impartiality*
- *a team player*
- *excellent listening and dialogue skills (team leader)*
- *creativity, initiative*
- *excellent interpersonal and diplomatic skills*
- *ability to prioritize*
- *sense of communication and new technologies*
- *ability to organize work and manage a team in a friendly spirit*

The IRC summarized in 3 words

To conclude the interviews or questionnaires, respondents were asked to summarize the IRC in three words. Here is a list of all the words used, in no particular order. What emerges is a true and sincere appreciation of the services of the IRC, and encouragement to continue this delicate mission, with the implementation of changes and good practices beneficial to all.

- *Resources, Tools, Advocacy*
- *Efficiency, large workload, thinking ship*
- *Research, pressure, self-giving*
- *Expertise, Sharing, Questioning*
- *Professional, Useful*
- *Information, Help, Communication*
- *Good Job*
- *Accessible, Informative, Autonomous*
- *Commitment, Integrity, Ethics*
- *Advocacy, Technical Expertise, IMS Showcase*
- *Informative, comprehensive*
- *Child focused, Reliable, Informative*
- *Country Information Sheets, Reliable, Adoption specific expertise Practical, useful and relevant*
- *Independence, expertise, service*
- *Expertise, standard, and active role in protecting the rights of children deprived of their families.*
- *Global. Informed. Considered.*
- *Child-centred. Independent. Unbiased. Useful, Global, Current*
- *Database, statistics, Evaluation of the 1993 Hague Convention*
- *High quality/expert knowledge, Quick response to our inquiry, Unique position between the hands on-actors and international organizations*
- *Admired, professional and productive!*
- *Guarantor of rights, Family and children, Transnational character Important, up to date, informative*
- *Professional, expert, under recognized*
- *Rich (in information), unique: no one else like them, humble: and we have to stop... Accessible and useful.*

*Report written by Mrs. Emmanuelle HARANG
Independent consultant
Lomé, April-May 2021*

