



INTERNATIONAL SOCIAL SERVICE TRACING WORK

Principles, working methods, services offered

Why tracing?

Every person has a universal right to know who they are, and where they belong. This knowledge grows through developing an understanding of one's origins and identity. The right to know one's origin is fundamental and deserves protection. It is expressed most clearly in article 7 of the CRC. Respecting this right requires robust preservation of information about one's origins - at the very least, registration of birth, including, at a minimum the time and place of birth, and information on the birth mother.

A "search for origins" should involve professional support provided to and on behalf of persons wishing to trace their birth roots. Such support is essential, given the risks associated with searches inadequately equipped to respond to multiple different outcomes, and the proliferation of social media.

ISS advocates for effective tracing through:

- Counselling and social support (sometimes psychological) for the searching person, which: assesses their motivations, hopes and expectations associated with the search; and prepares them for both the search process and possible outcomes.
- Maximising possible search avenues through gathering all available records and background information.
- Searches within framework of the applicable national laws of the country of origin (i.e. data protection laws)
- For negative search outcomes (e.g. the person cannot be located /does not respond/does not wish to be in contact with the other party) recognising the importance for the person who instigated the search of understanding what measures have been taken, with the professional being transparent and sharing information without compromising the other parties personal and confidential information.
- Professional support to facilitate initial contact between the parties is essential, and will often continue while the parties establish trust and rapport.
- Professionals need to conduct their work with a high level of sensitivity and discretion as the newly found family member may not have informed his/her new family about his/her past
- Establishing contact needs to be completely voluntarily and always with respect for the views and privacy of the person(s) concerned. This person(s) should not be unduly pressured about contact.
- All personal and contact information that is obtained through the process should remain confidential, only to be exchanged with the express consent of the person it relates to.

Guiding international standards and ISS internal documents:

- Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989
- UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children
- ISS Casework manual
- ISS Guide to research of origins (in the pipeline)

ISS casework services include:

- Counselling to persons looking for their roots
- Collecting background information; preparing necessary requests to competent authorities / persons; and establishing contacts if possible
- Provision of information to professionals and persons looking for their roots on standard procedures
- Training professionals in taking a sensitive approach

Our advocacy and technical assistance efforts include:

- Lobbying for, and producing publications on, the importance of the right to know one's origin
- Establishing a database of qualified professionals to help with search of origins in various countries
- Treaty body mainstreaming
- Training