



**Monthly Review N° 6-7/2007
June-July 2007**

EDITORIAL

The adequate selection of prospective adoptive parents: A guarantee for ethical and successful adoptions 

Whilst in receiving countries, there is great concern about information relating to the health, psychological state of the child and his/her possible background, the same occurs in countries of origin in relation to the criteria of evaluation of prospective adoptive parents.

The approach taken to the selection of prospective adoptive parents plays a fundamental role in the adoption process, which is based on the right of the child to a family. The evaluation of applicants from this perspective makes it possible to guarantee adoptions respectful of the human interests at stake, and of the principles established by the 1993 Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption (HC-1993).

Reflections on the adoption project of the prospective adoptive parents

In some receiving countries, it is, each day, increasingly urgent not to continue declaring applicants suitable for adoption on the basis of criteria, which are not adapted to the needs of adoptable children internationally. Similarly to the change of profile of internationally adoptable children (a high number of them with special needs), the evaluation of applicants has to evolve correlatively. The responsibility for assuming the selection of prospective adoptive parents must therefore be entrusted to professionals concerned with the protection of the child and aware that adoption is a right of the child to a family and not the right of a parent to a child. The training of these professionals (in legal, social, medical and psychological fields), as much as the tools they are provided with, will

therefore have to be adapted to these fundamental considerations.

Indeed, the assessment of the candidates goes well beyond a simple administrative process, as mentioned by the French Psychoanalyst, Sophie Marinopoulos – whose article will be published in the next issue – and also consists of raising the awareness and of adequately preparing the candidates. Similarly, whilst the legal requirements and the social variables of the adoption applicants are ascertained – such as their professional stability, economic situation, family structure, it is also a matter of carrying out a psychological study, through which their adoption project will be worked on. The candidates will then be supported throughout this work – a genuine psychological journey – which will allow them to mature their adoption project during the required time to finally meet the – sometimes special – needs of adoptable children. For example, in many cases, the adoption candidates have faced difficult experiences linked to the infertility of one member of the couple. Mourning this infertility may provide candidates with better conditions, on which to build a family relationship with a child.

When this psychological support has not occurred – due to a lack of time within very short legal deadlines, or due to a lack of resources or adequate training of the professionals – and the prospective parents have been selected

irrespective of this issue, the risk of future destructive situations, as much for the child as for the candidates, is higher. Equally, some adoptable children have experienced instances of family or institutional violence, of sexual abuse or of other forms of mistreatment in their country of origin, which will arise at some point in the life of the adoptive family. The candidates who have matured their adoption project will be better prepared to confront these moments and to help the child through these crises. They will thereby also have more confidence in their own abilities to ensure the adopted child's wellbeing and to overcome difficult times, such as the disclosure of the adoption, the search of origins, and the adolescence.

Reflections on the health of candidates

Another essential point is the issue of the candidates' health. Sometimes, discrimination is raised where the candidates' application has not been accepted on grounds of health, even though this is not raised where candidates reject a child "with problems". Thus, it is also important for the candidates that the disclosure of information about their health be complete and clear. If a HIV/AIDS test may be required from the child, it may equally be requested from the applicants. Not mentioning an illness which threatens the life of the applicants goes against the objective of an adoption, which is, as a reminder, to offer a permanent family to a child. It is therefore a matter of carrying out a complete and accurate diagnosis of the physical, mental, emotional and relational health of the adoptive candidates, and, subsequently, of establishing a prognosis of their ability, or not, to respond to the needs of the child they will be entrusted with. This does not mean that all diseases prevent candidates from adopting. However, it is necessary to declare and evaluate these diseases in order to determine if the candidates have the conditions to adopt a child and of what profile. For example, in the case of candidates who present some disabling illnesses, the extent of the implications of their disability in their life, and their remaining or limited availability to care for a child, will be assessed. When the result of this evaluation is positive, it is then a matter of determining if their profile is considered adequate in responding to the needs of a particular child. In this example, it would be

advisable not to entrust them with a hyperactive child. This same approach should prevail in the evaluation of other characteristics of adoptive candidates, such as the suitability of their age in relation to that of the child they wish to adopt. On this issue, please refer to Editorial 2005/4, published by the ISS/IRC. The more the evaluation criteria for adoptive candidates meet the needs of the children, the higher the probabilities of success of the adoption.

Adequacy of a good evaluation of candidates and the respect for the ethical principles of adoption

The implementation of an adoption process, which respects the fundamental principles established by the HC-1993, will depend, amongst others, upon the quality of the assessment of the candidates. The submission of complete and correct reports on adoptive candidates to the countries of origin will enable, amongst others, a better implementation of the principle of subsidiarity. Indeed, in some cases, the Central Authorities of countries of origin spend too much time in reviewing, analysing and returning incomplete reports of foreign applicants. First, this implies less time to spend on the study of the situation of the child, and, secondly, less time on the assessment of domestic applicants. The principle of subsidiarity, which is enshrined in legislation, does not succeed in being as applied as it should be in practice. Furthermore, the evaluation of applicants, as well as the declaration of adoptability of the child, are at the centre of the principles of joint responsibility and reciprocity between receiving countries and countries of origin; these are principles on which the HC-1993 is based. With the aim of ensuring an adoption based on the best interests of the child, some guarantees must be obtained from both parties: country of origin – receiving country; adoptee – adopters. The guarantees relating to the capacities of the applicants must follow the same logic as those linked to those of the child. Satisfactory adoptive relationships providing a permanent protection to the child, and the respect for the human dignity of those involved, will depend upon the concerned actors' compliance with their obligations in this matter.

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