

International Social Service
(ISS/IRC)
32, quai du Seujet
1201 Geneva – Switzerland



Tel.: +41 22 906.77.09
Fax : +41 22 906.77.01
irc.iss@bluewin.ch
<http://www.iss-ssi.org>

ISS/IRC News Bulletin n° 65 March 2004

Editorial:

In the child's best interest, which is the supply and which the demand?

«A family for a child, rather than a child for a family». It is a principle easier said than done. How can one switch from the demand of prospective adopters in search of a supply of children «available for adoption» (the vocabulary used is often very indicative), to the supply of prospective adopters who meet the demand of children in need of adoption (psycho-medico-socially and legally «adoptable» children)? Here are a few ideas to explore.

Priority: knowing better the children in need of adoption

It presupposes that the States of Origin make an estimate of the number and profile of children likely to benefit from adoption so that they can, on this basis:

- estimate the number and the profile of prospective adopters who will be sought out at the national and international levels to meet the needs of these children. For example, if it seems that a high percentage of the children have special needs (because of their age, their state of health or the existence of brothers and sisters...), the search should be for prospective adopters likely to take these types of children in their care;
- to assess the chances of finding, at the national level, suitable adoptive families ;
- to pass on this information to the Receiving States (the accredited Authorities and agencies) so that they, in turn, notify the interested public and adapt their supply of prospective adopters to the needs of the children who cannot be adopted by their own nationals ;
- to identify the profile of the accredited bodies, either domestic or foreign, that are qualified to prepare and participate in adoptions with this kind of characteristics.

Next, to set up accredited bodies adapted to the needs of the children

If a State of Origin calculates that it will have to place about a hundred of children per year for inter-country adoption, two thirds of whom have special needs, is it advisable: for them to authorise 30 or 40 foreign bodies (and /or domestic ones), the majority of which into the bargain have only had experience or the chance of putting only very young children free from any serious problems up for adoption? or for Receiving States to accredit even more bodies to collaborate with this State of Origin ?

The intervention of accredited specialised bodies can be an asset in the turning the logic of supply and demand on its head, as well as in reducing the pressure and the abuses aggravated by the arrival in the country of origin of numerous foreign prospective adopters who do not fit into the system. But for that to occur, *the number and the professional and ethical profile of the accredited agencies active in or in co-operation with a country of origin must be amended and further developed*, starting with the needs of the children of the country of origin and not with the request of the adopters or of the intermediaries.

Regulating the number and the profile of the accredited bodies in inter-country adoption should be undertaken as a joint responsibility, through dialogue between Central Authorities. It seems to us that

there are several lines that could be pursued. For example, the Receiving State consults the State of Origin on its needs before starting to accredit a body that wishes to work with this State. Or, once its needs and criteria have been defined, the State of Origin requests the Central Authorities of the Receiving States (all of them or just some of them, depending upon the needs of its children) to transmit a list of their accredited bodies that, both meet the established criteria and are interested in collaborating. This would allow it to decide without pressure upon its possible authorisation (art.12 of the Hague Convention 1993).

Reversing the flow of individual files

To be really focused on the child, and not on the adopters, adoption should *result in the despatch of the files of children in need of inter-country adoption, by the States of Origin to the potential Receiving States* and not – as is more often the case at present – in the despatch by the receiving countries to the countries of origin of a great number of files of prospective adopters requesting the profiles of children who do not necessarily need a foreign family. In Porto Alegre (Brazil) for example, the reversal of the procedure (in other words the flow of files) has been implemented. The Authorities are no longer drowned in files of prospective adopters who do not take kindly to being kept waiting. They can, in collaboration with their partners in the Receiving States, devote themselves to their priority mission, namely the search for a family for each child who needs one, including children who are difficult to place.

By starting with the child and not with the adult, implies a change of mentality and structures. But, once the period of adaptation has been weathered, these changes are likely to simplify the task of the Authorities and the States, in reducing frustration and exasperation, and, thus, facilitating the search for the best interest of the children.