International Social Service
Service Social International
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General Secretariat • Secrétariat général • Secretariado General

International Reference Centre for the Rights of Children Deprived of their Family (ISS/IRC)

Monthly Review N° 3/2007 March 2007

EDITORIAL

Intercountry adoptions: an ever tenser situation

Initial statistics for the year 2006 reflect a tendency towards a decrease in the number of intercountry adoptions. This slowdown, however, raises a number of questions, in relation both, to its possible causes and to its possible long–term consequences.

At the start of this new year, the first available figures seem to suggest that intercountry adoption decreased in 2006: 5% less in France[1] (2006: 3,977 / 2005: 4,136), 10% less in the United States[2] (2006: 20,679 / 2005: 22,728), 20% less in Sweden[3] (2006: 879 / 2005: 1,083) and 25% less in Norway[4] (2006: 448 / 2005: 582). Only Italy[5] carried out 10% more adoptions than in 2005, but still remains 10% below 2004 (3,402).

Germany[6] and Canada[7], for their part, had already registered a drop in 2005 and Spain[8] also fears it will see a drop in the number of its adoptions. These figures will, of course, have to be supplemented by those of other receiving countries.

Changes in countries of origin

The root causes of this slowdown are manifold, but the prevailing circumstances in some countries of origin clearly play an important part. Thus, and without claiming to be exhaustive, the new structures put in place by China when the HC-1193 entered into force, as well as the new norms relating to prospective adoptive parents[9], are undoubtedly slowing down the tempo of previous years. The new criteria for accrediting intermediaries in Russia have had the same effect (for example, the United States registers 1,413 fewer adoptions from China, and 933 less from Russia). Adoptions from Ukraine have decreased because of various reforms under way in that country; those from India continue to fall as a result of the rise of domestic adoptions; intercountry adoption has been extremely limited in Romania for a year; and Thailand[10] has pursued its programme of annual quotas.

On the other hand, we note that Kazakhstan, Vietnam, Guatemala and Ethiopia are heavily represented in the leading group of statistics of receiving countries. It is worth noting that none of these States have ratified the HC-1993, and that some of them are causes of serious concern in the field of adoption.

Communicating vessels

While applications to adopt are still very many in receiving countries, it seems they are increasingly becoming difficult to satisfy. The restrictions imposed by some important countries of origin, in terms of the number of intercountry adoptions per year, compel applicants to look elsewhere for adoption possibilities, since domestic adoption still remains scarcely explored.

However, the contemporary history of adoption clearly shows that if the pressure exerted on countries of origin becomes too strong, abuses inevitably arise, followed by increased political

and legal awareness, ending up with the introduction of structures reflecting greater respect for the rights of the child, but which will often also be more restrictive.

The joint efforts of international actors, such as the Committee on the Rights of the Child, the Hague Conference, UNICEF and NGOs (including local ones) play an ever more determinant role in the last phase of this development. Furthermore, if we believe that this trend is unavoidable, the day will come when the great majority of countries of origin will have gone through this process and will, as a consequence, limit the number of intercountry adoptions.

Awareness-raising of prospective adoptive parents

Once again, it therefore seems essential for receiving countries to devote more efforts to raising public awareness of this reality, by underlining the real meaning of intercountry adoption, as enshrined in international instruments. The placement of children for adoption is only possible if the development of closer cooperation with the States of origin is pursued. This would allow for the identification of those children who are in real need of adoption, especially of so-called children with special needs.

The ISS/IRC team

[1] Mission de l'adoption internationale (France), http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/les-francais-etranger_1296/conseils-aux-familles_3104/adoption-internationale_2605/statistiques_5424/statistiques-adoption-internationale_14683.html

[2] U.S. Department of State (United States), http://www.travel.state.gov/family/adoption/stats/stats_451.html

[3] Myndigheten för internationella adoptionsfrågor (Sweden), http://www.mia.eu/

[4] Barne-, ungdoms- og familiedirektoratet (Norway), http://www.bufetat.no/?module=Articles;action=ArticleFolder.publicOpenFolder;ID=790

[5] Commissione per le Adozioni Internazionali (Italy), http://www.commissioneadozioni.it/Contents/?idpagina=32

[6] Initiative A-H-A, http://www.adoinitiative.de/Statistik.htm

[7] Adoption Council of Canada, http://www.adoption.ca/news/news08172006_FRstats.htm

[8] *El Mundo*, http://www.elmundo.es/elmundo/2007/02/09/espana/1171029285.html

[9] See Monthly Review 1/2007.

[10] See Monthly Review 4/2006.