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**Special issue on foster care**

EDITORIAL

**Foster care: From the omission or non-existence of a measure to its idealisation**

*The numerous deinstitutionalisation movements worldwide have propelled foster care to the front row. As a reaction to this controversial phenomenon, the ISS/IRC has decided to dedicate a special issue to this form of child care.*

**S**cientific evidence on the harmful effects of the institutionalisation of children on their positive development is now widely recognised (see Monthly Review 4/2007). In response to this problem, legislative and political decisions have been approved in an increasing number of countries, which provide for the closing down of institutions, often in record time, and for the sudden promotion of foster care. Even though the latter offers undeniable advantages, such as preserving the bond between the child and his family of origin when the competent authorities are reluctant to terminate it, such decisions nonetheless reflect the gap, which sometimes exists between political will and the reality in the field. In order to adopt this type of measures, certain preconditions must be met, such as: are foster care systems able to respond to such a demand from one day to another? What about those countries in which a culture of foster care remains to be established? (see pp. 3 and 6)

**Family and professional resources**

One of the factors to be considered in order to adequately promote foster care is the availability and abilities of these families. Indeed, the changes in living circumstances (higher costs, the housing crisis, growing individualism, etc)

have resulted in the number of families, who may be applicants to the temporary care of children separated from their family, to become increasingly scarce. Furthermore, foster families too often also suffer from a lack of support from public entities in the fulfilment of their functions in relation to the children. Foster family recruitment campaigns, as well as an in-depth reflection on the support offered to the latter, therefore appear necessary (see pp. 5 and 7). Thus, for example in Burkina Faso, a decree has been drafted in 2011, aimed at promoting foster care.

Another factor, which is worth mentioning here, relates to the professional resources assigned to this form of child care. The development of foster care must necessarily occur jointly with a strengthening – as much with regards to their numbers as in relation to their training – of the teams appointed to work on the selection and provision of support (see pp. 3 and 9).

**About the specific definition of foster care**

Defining foster care as an antagonistic response to institutionalisation is a risk that must be strongly prevented, as it may jeopardise the children themselves. Indeed, foster care has a definition that is specific to one country or another – as evidenced by the various models

mentioned in this Review – and is not a response to the needs of all children, who are temporarily separated from their parents (see p. 7). Furthermore, the development of tools, which clarify the content of this measure, and the indicators to be taken into account when deciding on it, are another issue, which countries, such as Spain, have decided to address (see p. 9). In particular, this would make it possible to avoid the negative implementation of this measure, which often occurs in practice. Indeed, it is often the case that this so-called temporary form of placement becomes a *de facto* permanent measure (see pp. 3 and 7).

Finally, whilst one may notice, by addressing this issue, that foster care, as defined by Western societies and the international community, is often not well known, in some

countries, it is totally absent from the formal child protection system. Sometimes, it merely exists informally, or it is unrecognised by the population, in which case expecting to develop it requires time and resources (see p. 3). The adoption of the Guidelines on the Alternative Care of Children has allowed for considerable progress in this direction. These have been used as the basis for the development, by some, of new legislative and statutory instruments on this issue (see Monthly Review 12/2010). A change in mentalities, in order for this temporary measure of family care to be offered a correct position, or to have it restored, remains to be undertaken.

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