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EDITORIAL

What is the outlook for intercountry adoption?

In this review examines ISS/IRC explores the evolution of intercountry adoption, as well as the 2010 statistics and its project supporting children with disabilities.

As we do every year, ISS/IRC has gathered available statistics concerning the number of intercountry adoptions undertaken the previous year. The analysis of the 2010 figures presents a fairly complete overview of the situation, covering the ten main receiving countries and 25 principal countries of origin.

In general, 2010 gives the impression of a certain degree of “stabilisation” where no surprises are identified among the main actors in intercountry adoption leaving aside the unique situations in Haiti and Guatemala.

Waiting prospective adoptive parents: the great unknown

Like noted last year, the decrease in intercountry adoptions should have resulted in a proportionate, or greater, increase in the number of “waiting” prospective adoptive parents, both with central authorities and accredited adoption bodies. Whilst it remains extremely difficult to obtain precise information on this subject, it is essential to try and assess the situation, even if only its scale. Supposing the demand remains stable, and considering the fact that intercountry adoptions have decreased by a third in five years, there are thousands of prospective adoptive parents who come each year, resulting in an inflation of waiting lists. And yet, frustration can lead to choosing alternatives that do not always respect ethical rules to protect children. The fact that 58% of cases recorded in our statistics fall outside THC-93 is already a telling sign.

The children's profile

The general average age of children remains between one and four years, but obviously we notice large disparities depending on the country of origin. For example, according to the French statistics, 98% of children adopted in Mali were under two years old; this percentage was 93% in Vietnam; while Italy shows the average age of children adopted in that country was 1.3 years in 2010. Conversely, for France, nearly 80% of adoptions undertaken with Cameroon (which has not ratified THC-93) involved children over seven years of age, and 100% of the children adopted by Italians in Belarus fit into the older children category.

Therefore as always, it is important to precisely know the factors that influence this data. As the Quebec annual report highlights, “*the adoptions completed in 2010 through an approved body are still aimed at children aged under two years old while the trend announced by the authorities in partner countries and by the other international authorities [show] the children up for intercountry adoption are and will be increasingly older, sometimes siblings, and present physical and psychological special needs. Therefore the phenomenon is to be watched closely, as it can lead us to question whether the needs of the children presented for intercountry adoption are appropriately matched to the expectations of the Quebec people wishing to adopt*”.

Among children with special needs, it is not always easy to statistically identify the proportion

of those with medical conditions. Their number is nevertheless increasing, like for example in Italy (15.7% of cases). However, this issue must also be analysed from the point of view of the countries of origin. While some of them have made important progress integrating these children into the intercountry adoption system (Brazil and Lithuania for example), there are still many who neglect this child population. Although it is obviously not a matter of undertaking more adoptions, we often notice

during field missions that too many children are excluded from adoption (domestic or intercountry), purely because of their disability, without a professional assessment of the real extent that they might benefit from an adoption. That is the purpose of the project launched by ISS/IRC, which is presented in more detail on page 7.

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