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EDITORIAL

**A step forward is needed for child protection in Greece**

*Despite the fact that the economic crisis in Greece has been very present in the media for many months now, very little is said, and known, about the current situation of the child protection system in the country.*

**T**he child protection system in Greece – and despite ongoing efforts – still suffers from a number of lacunas. In the alternative care domain, we can observe a situation where there is widespread reliance on the institutionalisation of children, low rates of foster care, an absence of systematic monitoring and reliable data, as well as a shortage of staff and resources (CRC, 2012).

On the domestic and inter-country adoption front, an official public procedure often has a five-to-six-

year-waiting period before a child is proposed to the prospective adopters; this, in turn, drives prospective adopters to choose the private route, as it is much faster.

The Hague Convention entered into force in Greece on 1 January 2010. However, the current adoption procedure does not meet the standards foreseen by the Convention. For instance, private adoptions are possible and regulated in Greece, as children may be adopted with the involvement of an attorney or a gynecologist, who acts as a facilitator. A court decision remains necessary to enact the private adoption and the majority of private adoption intermediaries ensure that biological parents do not know the details of the adoptive parents, in order to exclude the possibility of blackmail attempts or any other unlawful action.

This said, private adoptions are well known for being a place of abuse, and Greece is, unfortunately, not an exception in this case. Several cases of illegal adoptions, involving foreign mothers and an exchange of money, were

already denounced and people condemned on grounds of trafficking.

Thus, much needs to be done to bring domestic laws in line with international standards.

There is a paradox emerging from this quick overview of child protection concerns in Greece: on the one hand, there is an increasing over-reliance on the institutionalisation of children and a non-functioning adoption system. On the other, there are numerous candidates ready to adopt, but who are weary and frustrated by the difficulties of the current adoption procedures, which could drive them down the illegal path to adopt a child.

Of course, there is no simple answer to such complex issues, and it would be wrong to believe that all children in institutions are adoptable. It is, in fact, the opposite, as these children are often placed because of economic constraints in their own families. However, alternative measures, such as foster and kinship care could be taken into consideration, notwithstanding the fact that the latter are also known for being much cheaper than keeping large institutions running. Adoption should therefore be considered as a measure of last resort.

Greece's endless financial and economic problems are not a secret anymore, and this situation may further deteriorate the conditions of institutionalised children, materially and psychologically as well as bring additional

complications to an already-strained and slow public adoption system, thereby opening its doors to abuse and trafficking.

With an established know-how and expertise in analysing similar situations, recommending legal and practical solutions through training and capacity-building schemes and in close cooperation and consultation with the Greek authorities, the International Social Service and its

International Reference Centre for the Rights of Children deprived of their Family can and is ready to assist in those situations, as has been done in many other countries with UNICEF and other partners.

ISS can contribute to bringing the issue of child protection in Greece a major step forward

The ISS/IRC team  
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