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EDITORIAL

**Interesting initiatives to channel the flow of adoption requests and to reduce the pressure on countries of origin** 

*Since 2004, the Netherlands have developed a practice, in which the waiting period for prospective adoptive parents is arranged at the beginning of the procedure for obtaining an authorisation to adopt a first child. The compulsory preparation of prospective adoptive parents constitutes another way to channel the flow of adoption requests.*

**H**ow to deal with the ever-increasing number of prospective adoptive parents (PAPs)? How to reduce this flow in order to respond to the real needs of adoptable children and to avoid the risks of trafficking and abuses, which the pressure on countries of origin inevitably entails? These questions are the brain-teasers of every professional working in the intercountry adoption field and wishing to respond to the real needs of adoptable children. In addition, it is becoming urgent to find the responses to these questions and to develop solutions in order for intercountry adoption to achieve a lasting balance. The point is not to exclude as many applicants as possible, but rather to ensure that their wishes and capacities do correspond to the possibilities of adoption worldwide, and to set up efficient safeguards to prevent misbehaviours.

**Mandatory preparation of PAPs: An important tool in influencing the demand for adoption**

A mandatory preparation of PAPs is a first tool in reducing the flow of the demand for adoption and the pressure on countries of origin. It is encouraging to note that this is becoming the case in most European countries. Indeed, to our knowledge, some preparation is compulsory in 11 countries and strongly advised in one country. This step is essential in making the

PAPs understand the reality of intercountry adoption: what the meaning of adoption is and what the needs of the children are. Such awareness is a necessary way for the PAPs to lower their pressure on the actors in the adoption process. However, even though preparation plays a significant role in reducing the final number of applications, it does not seem to be a sufficient step in raising this awareness widely and in reducing the pressure on countries of origin, which remains very important. However, additional measures should be taken: for instance, it is still necessary for receiving countries to disseminate the right information about intercountry adoption to the general public. Obviously, the idealistic picture of adoption still prevails.

**The Dutch example in dealing with the flow of its prospective adoptive parents**

In this context, the Netherlands chose an interesting solution in dealing with the flow of its prospective adoptive parents. This country, in which the preparation of PAPs is mandatory, has developed a practice, in which the waiting period for PAPs is arranged at the beginning of the procedure for obtaining an authorisation, in principle, to adopt a first child. This system means that the number of parents flowing into

the procedure of pre-adoption counselling is geared, within a certain margin, to the number of children, which is expected in the following year(s). This number is estimated in collaboration with all parties involved in the procedure of adoption in the Netherlands. The latter periodically evaluate the developments with regard to the number of applications versus the number of children who are being adopted each year. Based on these figures, and possible other developments, an estimate of the number of children who are expected for the forthcoming year is fixed.

This system of regulation of the flow into the procedure was introduced in the Netherlands in 2004 because, like in most receiving countries, the waiting periods were very long. At that time, by the end of the procedure, with the mediating organisation, PAPs could wait from one to four years. The system was also introduced in order to achieve a balance between the “supply and demand” of adoption, and to reduce the pressure on accredited bodies with long waiting lists while the possibility for PAPs to adopt was limited. Indeed, this method avoids an excessive pressure on accredited bodies but, unfortunately, not on the Ministry of Justice which acts as the Dutch Central Authority. PAPs are, of course, complaining about this decision, given that, like in the other receiving countries, they remain very willing to “receive” a child in adoption and do not always understand the reality of the situation of intercountry adoption. However, by regulating the flow of PAPs into the procedure, such an option significantly reduces the pressure on countries of origin and thereby, the risks of abuse and traffic.

## **The role of countries of origin**

Whilst it is the task of receiving countries to reduce the flow of adoption requests towards countries of origin, the latter may help them in doing so by taking measures to channel the number and type of applications they receive. As mentioned several times in our Monthly Review, the reversal of the flow of the demand is probably one of the most useful solutions because it allows countries of origin to match the number of PAP files they receive with the needs of their children. Setting clear and strict adoption procedures and conditions relating to PAPs may also be a valuable option. China is often mentioned as an example in this context, because it has restricted its conditions officially. However, in practice, a number of other countries of origin are becoming more restrictive in relation to the profile and number of PAPs, by giving priority to married and young PAPs, with a sufficient income, etc. Clearly establishing these conditions and communicating them properly to receiving countries should enable countries of origin to receive only the files matching their criteria and to contribute to balancing the “offer and supply” of adoption.

A balance in intercountry adoption will only be achieved through a set of measures by receiving countries and countries of origin. In this context, the various initiatives described above are encouraging. They should be multiplied, duplicated and integrated in numerous countries in order to improve the global adoption situation and to better respond to the real needs of children worldwide.

The ISS/IRC team