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EDITORIAL

Diversification of countries of origin and an increase in the age of adopted children against a background of inter-country adoption that continues to be tense. 

The fall in inter-country adoptions, which is common throughout the world, reflects amongst other things, an improvement in the provision of domestic care for children in the countries of origin. Faced with this situation, the receiving countries are looking for new countries to adopt in, particularly in Africa.

The 2007 statistics illustrate clearly: inter-country adoptions around the world are continuing to plunge (see the statistics on page 5). This pattern, which started for certain countries at the beginning of the 2000, was clearly confirmed in 2005, and seems to be continuing. It is explained by several factors that this bulletin has already addressed, namely, the fact that more and more countries of origin are developing and strengthening their national systems for child protection, particularly by means of family placement and domestic adoptions, thus reducing their need for inter-country adoption. Today, the latter therefore constitutes an appropriate response for older children and/or those suffering from problems of physical or psychological health, for whom it is more difficult to find a family

The increase in the age of adopted children requires a change in the plans of adoption applicants.

The profile of children adopted at the inter-country level has changed, as the following article shows. The data is still inadequate for drawing up a full picture of the adopted children, but the increase in their average age is a recognised fact. But such a change

implies a change of plans for the adopting applicants from receiving countries. The latter, of course, wish most often to adopt a young child in good health. It is therefore essential that the professionals in charge of their preparation transmit correct information and only authorise realistic projects. That requires significant work in order to create substantial progress amongst adoption applicants, guided and accompanied by professionals, who must also ensure that the applicants' plans are still genuine, and that they do not evolve just to be able to rapidly adopt whatever child.

The fact that the majority of the receiving countries are now convinced of the need to prepare adoption applicants, reflect this thinking. But if one notes that the reality of inter-country adoption is better and better known and mediated, there is still some way to go so that the wishes of adoption applicants correspond best to the needs of adoptable children.

The receiving States in search of new countries of origin to respond to their applicants

Even if existing data is not available, it is noticeable that the number of adoption applicants continues to rise. The waiting lists of accredited agencies are getting longer, and

in future one must wait several years for the country of origin to make its first proposal of a child. This imbalance thus creates pressures, both on the authorities and the professionals of the receiving countries, as well as on the countries of origin. Countries of origin are preparing different strategies to try to juggle with this pressure and avoid abuses by means of quotas or bilateral agreements, by being more demanding, as far as the profile of applicants is concerned, even deciding to suspend the procedures for more or less extended periods. These diverse provisions have incited the receiving States to look for new countries of origin for their adoption applicants.

An Africa that is courted more and more

The available figures show clearly that the African continent, occupies a position of growing importance in the inter-country adoption statistics, becoming even the first continent of origin for France. But if it is true that many African countries acknowledge a high number of children deprived of family, the majority of children are those with special needs (HIV AIDS orphans, older children, sibling groups). Like elsewhere, there are numerous difficulties that complicate adoption procedures. On the one hand, adoption, as it is conceived by the receiving countries is not a very widespread notion in Africa and is often misunderstood. It is sometimes difficult to obtain the well informed consent of the biological parents for the adoption, without forgetting that numerous populations are of the Muslim faith, and do not therefore practise adoption. On the other hand, the administrative and judicial social services are often scarcely able to guarantee transparency in the procedures. Several African states have, nonetheless, taken steps in an effort to limit risks and the abuse of time needed to put in place stricter procedures to ensure a better protection of children deprived of family (read the editorial of the monthly Bulletin 2008/5).

This phenomenon is comparable with the evolution, which can be seen in other parts of the world, particularly in the countries of Eastern Europe, and those of the former USSR.

A logical evolution that one must build upon

The diversification of the countries of origin is fully symptomatic of the evolution of inter-country adoption. The development of the countries of origin forces applicants to seek countries "where it's possible to adopt". Under these conditions, it is logical that the African continent is emerging since in some ways it was the last on the list. Inter-country adoption has spread across Asia, South America, Eastern Europe and Central Asia in the course of the last 40 years. It is now reaching Africa, where it is developing in a very unequal way between the countries so far concerned.

It is fundamental that this evolution be accompanied and built upon as closely as possible, so as to avoid the mistakes made elsewhere in the past. If the affair of Zoe's Ark has well illustrated that the worst is always possible, vigilance is essential when new adoption channels open up in countries that have neither experience, nor the resources to set up reliable systems. As stressed on several occasions in this bulletin, it is a question therefore of working to put in place a system of shared responsibility between the receiving countries and the countries of origin, making it possible to protect the latter from all pressures and to give them the necessary tools to respond to the needs of their children. As for the receiving countries efforts must be pursued, particularly to improve and generalise the preparation of adoption applicants to build upon the accredited agencies and encourage the adoption of children with special needs.

The ISS/IRC team
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