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EDITORIAL

The preparation of prospective adoptive parents: Is it attuned to the development of intercountry adoption?

The increasingly longer waiting periods, the specific needs of adoptable children, the strengthened requirements of countries of origin, new technologies… these are the current issues of intercountry adoption, which all prospective adopters must be adequately prepared for, if this is not yet the case…

Intercountry adoption cannot escape from the speed, which the world develops, changes and shakes up mentalities and behaviours with. Challenges increase and require a permanent 'update' of the adoption process, starting with the preparation of the prospective adopters – the entry into the process, which deserves the maximum attention of countries and professionals.

A preparation that is accessible to all

Even though the importance of the preparation of prospective adopters no longer needs to be proven, as evidenced by its systematic inclusion on the agenda of the last three Special Commissions on the practical operation of the 1993 Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption, and its inclusion in the final recommendations, some gaps remain. The brief overview provided on page 5 highlights the significant differences from one country to another. One can only congratulate those countries that have included the preparation of prospective adoptive parents in their legislation and have made it mandatory – a practice, which the ISS/IRC promotes and which, it believes, should become a rule. Furthermore, in some countries, the preparation is very unequal from one region to another – an inequality which must be fixed. Indeed, all prospective adoptive parents should be able to benefit systematically from quality preparation, irrespectively of their place of residence and their financial resources (see p. 8).

A preparation respectful of all

First, respectful of the child, by providing him with parents, who are aware of the challenges that must be overcome, and who are suitable to respond to his individual needs. Faced with the particular needs of some adoptable children (older children, disabilities or illnesses, etc), the preparation must be adapted to the diversity of parental projects and must draw on innovative practices, such as the one developed in Belgium, where a specific component has been established for prospective adopters in the adoption of children with disabilities (see p. 7). A fair balance between classic and specialised preparation must, however, be found, in order to allow some prospective adopters to be supported in their specific parental project from the beginning, and for others to be able to widen their perspectives – one could then talk about a preparation that is respectful of the parents. This approach finds support in the creation of a bond and an

attachment in the United Kingdom, where the consideration of specific features must be combined with the classic process (see p. 10). In order to prepare prospective parents well, the professionals must, on the other hand, be well equipped and trained, in particular, on the various forms of parentality and the challenges that they may raise. Finally, it must be a preparation that is respectful of the wishes of the children's countries of origin, which, for some of them, may even impose their requirements on the content of the preparation of prospective adoptive parents (see p. 5).

A preparation in harmony with its time/s

The significant lengthening of waiting periods and the increasing state of uncertainty as to the outcome of adoption projects put prospective adoptive parents to the test. In order to help them accept this reality, and transform these difficult moments in opportunities, occasional activities, such as conferences, book clubs, film viewings, shoud constantly be offered to them (see p. 8). Alongside the latter, individualised support should be available in order to avoid that prospective adopters despair and resort to alternatives that are not compliant with ethics in this field. A study undertaken by the ISS/IRC has shown that some accredited adoption bodies use Skype or the Internet to offer support to prospective adopters during the waiting period. Furthermore, at a time of change, the preparation must include intercountry adoption's emerging aspects, such as the positive impact or the risks linked to the resort to new technologies in the adoption process, open adoption and its implications, or at least, the management of greater openness in the information shared and the potential contacts between the actors in the adoptive triangle. The ISS/IRC will address this issue again very soon.

In the spirit of the HC-1993, the ISS/IRC encourages States to include the preparation of prospective adoptive parents in their set of priorities. A preparation that is accessible to all, geographically and financially, that is respectful of all and in tune with the current context of intercountry adoption, contributes to the implementation of the rights of the child, prevents difficulties and contributes to the establishment of a safe framework for the thriving of adoptive families.

The ISS/IRC team
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32 Quai du Seujet ■ 1201 Geneva ■ Switzerland
irc-cir@iss-ssi.org ■ www.iss-ssi.org