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## EDITORIAL

### The fuss about numbers, goals and indicators...

*This Editorial highlights the importance and challenges of having accurate data about children deprived of their family or at risk of so being, ideally included in the global discussions about SDG indicators.*

Without doubt, numbers and indicators can be quite revealing about who we are and needs, for example body mass index, age and years of experience. Equally the lack of such figures can raise questions concerning health status and qualifications. Similarly, in child protection matters, particularly for those working in alternative care and adoption, existing or lacking data may disclose or conceal certain realities and challenges that children face.

#### Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

After three years of (intense) negotiations, the importance of numbers and qualitative indicators reached universal attention with the adoption of the 17 [SDGs](#) by the United Nations last month. With 169 specific targets as part of the '[Transforming Our World - The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#)', interrogations arise about the feasibility of effectively addressing the breadth of the topics covered by these goals and targets, from poverty to health to climate change to violence against children. The additional challenge will be to agree on global indicators, now standing at over 300 by March 2016.

#### Missing data

Whilst these goals and targets are admirable, especially the aim that 'no-one is left behind by global development' – it is likely that children without parental care will be one of the most vulnerable groups forgotten, due to inadequate

measuring mechanisms. Despite systematic recommendations by the Committee on the Rights of the Child to improve the situation, the great majority of countries do not have reliable data collection systems or means to do so. Even when there is political will and data systems are in place, many efforts are at a regional level and often data collection is divergent, therefore a national overview is challenging. Programming and resource allocation can therefore be extremely testing when exact needs are unknown. Moreover, one of the many benefits of having disaggregated statistics is that it provides a *de facto* measure that the principle of subsidiarity is being implemented in adoption matters.

#### Adoption trends

In this context as per its annual tradition, ISS has collected available statistics on the numbers of intercountry adoption – based on the statistics from receiving States (see p. 5). Yet, missing from these overall figures is the detail. From our experience, there are over-estimates of children with adoption plans, given that the majority of children living in institutions have a living parent and are solely in the institution due to poverty. Likewise, some children are declared adoptable without a proper legal and psycho-social assessment (*e.g.* director of the institution) or may even be falsely declared adoptable without parental consent or use of illicit measures. Paradoxically, there are under-estimates of



32 Quai du Seujet ■ 1201 Geneva ■ Switzerland  
irc-cir@iss-ssi.org ■ www.iss-ssi.org

numbers of children, who could have adoption plans. Many children are never considered for adoption due to discrimination such as children with disabilities (see p. 10) or from certain ethnic groups or where national policies are inadequate (see p. 8).

### **Call for action**

To ensure that children without parental care remain high on the SDG agenda amidst thousands of competing interests, a call for action led by the LUMOS Foundation via a joint open letter to the UN Statistical Commission has been prepared with over 30 organisations, including ISS as a co-sponsor. The letter to the UN Expert Group states: 'All children count, but not all children are counted. As a result, some of the world's most vulnerable children – those without parental care

or at risk of being so; in institutions or on the street; trafficked; separated from their families as a result of conflict or disaster; or recruited into armed groups – have largely fallen off the UN's statistical map. There are only limited data about how many children live in such precarious circumstances, except for scattered estimates from some specific countries'.

**ISS sincerely hopes that the UN Statistical Commission takes on board the two main recommendations to 'ensure that children living outside of households and/or without parental care are represented in disaggregated data' and to 'improve and expand data collection methodologies to ensure all children are represented'.**

The ISS/IRC team  
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