



**Statement of the International Social Service (ISS)¹
at the occasion of the 45th ordinary session of the
ACERWC in Lesotho**

April 2nd, 2025

Based on its multi-layered work at individual casework and research levels as well as through its capacity building, technical assistance and evidence-based advocacy initiatives, ISS wishes to draw the ACERWC's attention to the following issues that put children's rights at risk in the African continent and beyond:

National child protection systems continue to require further strengthening through concrete capacity building initiatives and the development of technical resources that allow for harmonised, multisectoral and efficient approaches among child protection professionals. Through its work in Morocco, in collaboration with UNICEF Morocco and the Ministry of Solidarity, ISS is engaged in advancing the protection of children in vulnerable situations, whether they remain in their family environment or are placed in the child protection system through robust gatekeeping mechanisms, quality family-based alternative care options and family reintegration. However, ISS observes steadily decreasing budgets in child protection and prevailing obstacles to achieving sustainable change for children and families through effective prevention services and schemes. ISS work in Ivory Coast is an example of how to try to address [root causes of child abandonment](#) (2024 Study), advance on introducing specialised foster care and [develop community-based solutions](#) for families and children with disabilities.

Well-functioning child protection systems should equally consolidate **accountability mechanisms** and ensure accessible complaint mechanisms for children in care, as well as effective remedies when accessing justice. Limited work exists however when it comes to **institution-related child trafficking**. Despite the substantial evidence linking institutional care with trafficking, the connection between trafficking and the institutionalisation of children is generally not sufficiently addressed in laws, policies nor practice. Hence, ISS advocates globally (see [joint statement](#)) to address this phenomenon and encourages the ACERWC to link up with the ongoing work of the UNCRC Committee to develop [General Comment](#) n°27 - now up for consultation.

Despite the [constantly high numbers of children in migration in the African continent](#), the rights of migrant children especially those unaccompanied or separated are still at risk of being overlooked or side-lined. With robust laws, policies as well as technical tools available in this field, the issue seems to lie in the adequate implementation of the arsenal of protection means for those children. For instance, between 2019 and 2023, in cooperation with UNICEF Morocco and the *Présidence du Ministère Public*, ISS developed [Standard Operating Procedures for migrant children](#) in Morocco that were adopted nationally, yet never applied nor tested to a cohort of children concerned, a necessary step to ensure the SOP's effectiveness.

Regarding **adoption**, ISS observes that domestic adoption is still not a widespread child protection measure. While the number of African States having ratified the 1993 Hague Convention is increasing over the years, there are still some African States whose legislations and processes are **not Hague-compliant**, yet from which children keep on being adopted internationally. ISS wishes to share its concerns on the **lack of monitoring** that still prevails in many contexts despite the ratification of the 1993

Hague Convention. For instance, the figure of intrafamily adoptions is frequently used to circumvent existing immigration rules or stricter intercountry adoption procedures (in some cases even moratoria in place).

Further, there does not seem to be a widespread understanding on the importance to **address past illicit or illegal intercountry adoption practices**. Yet, there is a clear need for uncovering the past, especially in view of preventing future wrongdoings. Concrete actions are required considering especially the high demand of intercountry adoptees seeking to have answers and to know their origins. Mindful of this trend, several ISS members are implementing pilot projects aimed at supporting adoptees and their birth families in **search for origins processes**. Currently, ISS member in Ivory Coast and Madagascar are implementing such projects.

And finally, the **protection of the rights of children born through surrogacy**, either at domestic or international levels, requires urgent action. There is evidence that surrogacy arrangements are made in various African States especially in unregulated contexts. As an organization, ISS wishes to draw the attention to the [Verona principles](#) as an international guiding tool to introduce stronger safeguards for children born through this practice. Likewise, ISS is about to launch a report with recent global, regional and national trends that could inform the ACERWC's approach to the subject matter.

ISS remains committed to supporting the ACERWC and other stakeholders to join forces to address the above-mentioned areas of concern.

For further information, please contact: Beatriz Santaemilia del Hoyo, ISS Advocacy Coordinator, beatriz.santaemilia@iss-ssi.org.