

# ISS/IRC Annual Report

# 2025



The International Reference Centre for the Rights of Children  
Deprived of their Families (ISS/IRC)



THE GLOBAL SOCIAL WORK ORGANISATION

# ISS/IRC Annual Report

## 2025

ISS/IRC expresses its sincere appreciation to the Central Adoption Authorities whose continued financial support makes its work possible.

The 2025 Annual Report provides a comprehensive overview of IRC activities and highlights those initiatives supported through annual contributions, as well as others made possible through additional and targeted funding.

We warmly thank the following Central Authorities: Andorra, Australia, Belgium, Canada, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Monaco, New Zealand, Norway, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the Netherlands.



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# Message from Leadership

Dear colleagues, dear friends,

2025 has been a year of transition for ISS. As with any period of change, it brings both challenges and opportunities. For an organisation with a century-long history, the ability to evolve has always been one of ISS's defining strengths.

This year, ISS has undergone important governance developments, marking the end of an important chapter. We extend our gratitude to Jean Ayoub for his dedication, leadership, and commitment to the organisation. We wish him every success in his future endeavours.

At the same time, this moment opens a new chapter for ISS. In a rapidly changing and complex global context, our priority is clear: to remain agile, responsive, and firmly anchored in our mission. We are committed to strengthening our capacity to act, to better support children and families, and to continue driving meaningful and lasting change. During this period, ISS is guided by a dedicated transition team ensuring continuity and strategic direction.

This evolution also invites us to reflect on how our services are structured and delivered. While ISS will continue to host and support services for Central Adoption Authorities, we are moving towards a more integrated approach through the development of a broader child protection centre. This approach aims to enhance coherence across our areas of work, while allowing for greater agility, flexibility, and responsiveness to emerging needs—beyond the framework of service delivery tied to specific mandates.

Against this backdrop, the IRC, as a programme of ISS, continues to advance knowledge, strengthen practice, and promote the protection of children's rights in the fields of child protection, alternative care and adoption. In parallel, there is a growing tendency towards more specialised and project-based work, addressing a wider range of thematic areas and responding to increasingly diverse and evolving needs.

We are pleased to present the 2025 IRC Annual Report, which captures an important year of transition, development and innovation for both IRC and ISS.

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to our donors and partners for their continued trust and support. We remain at your disposal and welcome any feedback or suggestions for further strengthening our work.

**Jeannette Wöllenstein-Tripathi**

Acting CEO  
Legal Representative of ISS  
Director of IRC



# Current Team



## ISS General Secretariat Transition Team

**Jeannette Wöllenstein-Tripathi** – Acting CEO, Legal Representative, and Director of IRC, providing leadership and ensuring institutional continuity.

**Sandrine Pepit** – Liaison Officer, strengthening connections with the ISS Network and statutory bodies.

**Olivier Geissler** – Operations Officer, managing daily operations and contributing to strategic reflection and organisational development.

Together, this Transition Team is working with a forward-looking approach, ready to meet emerging challenges while building on our rich legacy.

## IRC team

Our team remains **deeply committed** to advancing the mission of the IRC. We extend our sincere thanks to all our donors and supporters, your continued trust and backing are essential to sustaining and strengthening our work. In 2025, the IRC programme benefited from the **support of 20 countries**, in addition to funding received for specific projects and missions.

As of this writing, the IRC team is composed of:

- **Carlotta Alloero**, Senior Child Rights Lawyer.
- **Floriane Choplain**, Child Rights Specialist.
- **Giovanna Ricciardi**, PhD, Child Rights Specialist & IRC Partnerships Coordinator.
- **Beatriz Santaemilia del Hoyo**, Child Rights Specialist & ISS Advocacy Coordinator.
- **Alissa van Ham**, Child Rights Specialist.
- **Jeannette Wöllenstein-Tripathi**, Child Rights Specialist & IRC Director.
- **Sonia Liliana Perreten**, Senior Knowledge Sharing Coordinator.
- **Fanny Baert**, Accounting/Finance support.
- **Julie Daoust**, Child protection lawyer in Canada & Child Rights Officer/volunteer at IRC.
- **Megan Gould**, Master student in the UK, Child Rights Officer/volunteer at IRC.

The team works in **close collaboration** with colleagues from the **ISS General Secretariat**, the broader **ISS network**, and **external consultants**, ensuring a coordinated and multidisciplinary approach to its activities.



# Year in Review: Key Achievements in 2025



## 1 century.

Founded in 1924, ISS is a **long-standing organization** dedicated to child protection and cross-border family matters.

## 30+ years.

Over three decades of experience in building the **International Reference Centre (IRC)**, a unique global hub for research, resources, and advocacy.

## 120+ countries.

ISS operates across more than 120 countries through its **worldwide network of members**.

## Strengthening and Innovating Services

In 2025, IRC continued to expand and **enhance the quality** of its services to **primary beneficiaries, Central Authorities**, as well as to members and partners worldwide. The year was marked by a strong focus on **adapting** these services to better meet evolving needs.

### Communications

**283** newsletters were published in three languages. These publications reached over **5,000 professionals** directly and an estimated **60,000 people** overall, serving as a key platform for professional connection and knowledge exchange.

### Technical Assistance

In recent years, the IRC has responded to approximately **100 technical requests annually**, offering targeted support and expertise to national authorities, partners and members. To date, the IRC has also conducted more than **70 country missions** involving fact-finding, assessments, technical assistance, and capacity-building activities.

### Advocacy

Since 2009, IRC has submitted over **160** alternative reports and technical contributions.

### Research and Knowledge

The IRC database now includes around **150 country profiles** and around **50 SFO fact sheets** consolidating comparative data and best practices.



# Communications

IRC recognises that effective communication is central to achieving its mission. Ensuring that knowledge, standards, and emerging and promising practices are accessible to relevant stakeholders remains a key priority, helping to connect professionals, support informed decision-making, and strengthen child protection systems globally.

## Newsletters

The Newsletter is one of the **historic core services of the IRC for Central Authorities**. As both a communication tool and a service, its primary objective is to disseminate the latest developments and practices in the field, while contributing to ongoing reflection and the sharing of promising practices.

2025 marks a key year of transformation for the IRC Newsletter. In response to evolving communication needs and approaches, the team has initiated a **redesign of the newsletter format**. The new format aims to be more concise, accessible, and reader-friendly, enabling professionals to quickly grasp key developments in child protection, alternative care, and adoption as well as resources and events or different opportunities in a more efficient way.

In 2025, the IRC Newsletter explored a **wide range of topics**, including:

- Right to care and global care reform.
- International family mediation.
- Reverse flow in intercountry adoption for children with special needs.
- The right of adoptees and birth siblings to access and know their origins.
- Intercountry adoption through historical, research, and advocacy perspectives, including reflections on how adoption practices intersect with racial and cultural dynamics.
- Post-adoption practices and responses to historical cases, including national approaches such as those developed in Denmark and Finland.
- Institutionalisation, segregation, and the promotion of community-based housing, particularly for families with disabilities.
- Legal recognition of parenthood and its role in upholding children's right to identity, including in the context of same-sex parent families.
- Legal, policy and jurisprudential developments in surrogacy.
- The right of the child to be heard and access to justice in residential care.

# Online Knowledge Platform

In 2025, IRC has continued to strengthen its digital presence through updates to the ISS website, improving accessibility and the dissemination of key resources.

Within this context, IRC is exploring the **development of a complementary knowledge platform** to host content and resources, including research articles, promising practices, case studies, and comparative analyses. While such content continues to be featured in the Newsletter, it is now primarily shared through links, in line with the objective of keeping the format concise and accessible.

## Access to information and services

ISS/IRC continues to disseminate regular circulars to share updates on new publications and resources.

**CONTACT US**



These communications also provide guidance on secure and facilitated access, including the **reserved chapter of our website**, where professionals can access previous newsletters, tools, and key materials, ensuring they can easily benefit from available knowledge.

Ensuring effective communication and equitable access to information remains a priority for ISS/IRC. A dedicated focal point ([Liliana.Perreten@iss-ssi.org](mailto:Liliana.Perreten@iss-ssi.org)) is available to support interested parties with any questions or information needs, including requests for inclusion in our database or updates regarding team members wishing to benefit from our services.

Professionals may also contact us at [irc-cir@iss-ssi.org](mailto:irc-cir@iss-ssi.org) for any enquiries.

## Exchanges and meeting with Central Adoption Authorities

The IRC remains committed to maintaining **regular exchanges with Central Adoption Authorities** and to **fostering closer engagement** over time, whether bilateral or joint meetings.

These exchanges aim to better understand evolving needs and priorities, while providing a space to share updates, present new tools and resources, and discuss emerging trends and challenges. They also offer valuable opportunities to gather feedback on IRC services and outputs, ensuring their continued relevance and practical utility.

In addition to the exchanges organized by IRC, we sincerely encourage Central Adoption Authorities to keep approaching IRC staff and request meetings or exchanges as needed, and ideally at least once a year.



# Research and Knowledge

Since its creation, the IRC has served as a **global research and resource centre**. This function remains central to its work today. Through a multi-level approach, IRC combines comparative legal and policy analysis, practice-oriented insights, and the continuous monitoring of emerging trends to support evidence-based decision-making in the field of child protection, alternative care, and adoption.

A key strength of the programme lies in its **unique and longstanding database**, which enables both systemic and practice-level analysis across a wide range of national contexts. This allows ISS/IRC not only to document country situations but also to identify gaps, emerging challenges, and promising practices. Recent work on topics such as identity and search for origins, surrogacy and kafala illustrates the importance of this approach in addressing complex and evolving issues.

## Country Situations

For many Central Authorities, country situation analyses are of great importance for their daily work and have consistently received very positive feedback over the years.

In light of this, ISS/IRC has continued to prioritise this service, with **18 country situation analyses** prepared and published in 2025.

These documents provide a **comprehensive analysis** of child protection systems with a focus on alternative care and intercountry adoption. Our approach to comprehensive reports is guided by a **multidisciplinary and evidence-based methodology**. We work closely with Central Authorities and relevant authorities, local experts, ISS members and key stakeholders to ensure a holistic assessment.

### Country situations published in 2025:



## SFO Fact Sheets



Identity and the search for origins constitute a **core priority area for both IRC and ISS**. In this context, the SFO fact sheets represent a pioneering initiative developed by the IRC, responding to the needs of Central Authorities, adoptees as ultimate beneficiaries, and other key adoption stakeholders.

These fact sheets provide country-specific information on legal frameworks, procedures, and practices related to access to origins. With 16 SFO fact sheets developed in 2025, the ISS/IRC database of SFO documents currently covers around 50 countries (accessible via the reserved chapter).

The 2025 fact sheets include: **Brazil, Cambodia, Colombia, Ireland, Romania, South Africa, Chile, Ivory Coast, Mexico, Paraguay, Guatemala, Lebanon, Hungary, Moldova, Bulgaria, and Haiti**.

As the resource continues to expand in response to the needs of professionals and practitioners, it is increasingly establishing itself as a unique global reference, with no equivalent offering such a comprehensive and structured overview of this issue.

Since 2023, the IRC has implemented a **new way of working** by identifying priority countries for both country situation analyses and SFO fact sheets, based on an annual **survey conducted with Central Authorities** at the beginning of each year. In its second year of implementation, this approach has proven effective in enhancing responsiveness and ensuring that outputs more accurately reflect the priorities of Central Authorities.

## ISS Publications

In 2025, ISS strengthened its research and knowledge development through the publication of **Legal Trends in Surrogacy**, addressing a critical gap in consolidated data on surrogacy-related practices, legal frameworks, and emerging global trends.

This publication highlights key challenges in safeguarding the rights of children born through surrogacy and provides a foundation for further reflection, policy development, and advocacy.

In May, ISS organised a webinar to promote dialogue around the publication's findings, gathering over 100 participants to explore its implications across diverse legal contexts. We once again thank Ann Skelton, who contributed the publication and continues to collaborate with ISS on this and other areas of work.

If you wish to access all ISS publications, you can visit ISS webpage [here](#).

## ISS and IRC participation in external publications and expert meetings

Throughout the year, ISS actively contributed to external publications and participated in key international conferences and technical discussions, reinforcing its role in shaping global dialogue on child protection, alternative care, and cross-border family law.

- Academic contribution on cross-border kafala: IRC colleagues Giovanna Ricciardi and Jeannette Wöllenstein-Tripathi contributed to the book [Children in Migration and International Family Law: The Child's Best Interests Principle at the Interface of Migration Law and Family Law](#) which was published in 2025. Their article examines safeguards to ensure that cross-border kafala placements are carried out in the best interests of the child, contributing to ongoing reflections on rights-based approaches in transnational contexts.
- As part of its continued collaboration with the [Inter-American Children's Institute](#) (IIN-OAS), ISS contributed to their [Newsletter No. 20](#) (November 2025), an important regional publication dedicated in this edition to children's rights and mental health. The ISS article (in Spanish) specifically addressed the right to identity and the mental health of adopted children within the broader adoption and child protection frameworks.
- JPIL 20th Anniversary Conference – Journal of Private International Law Conference: In September 2025, ISS took part in this conference on "[The Functions and Futures of Private International Law](#)." Discussions explored key cross-border family law challenges, including children's rights in abduction cases, recognition of parentage, and the portability of civil status.
- On 6–7 February 2025, ISS participated in the Migrants in European Family Law conference organised by ERA (Academy of European Law), which explored complex issues arising from cross-border family situations. ISS presented on the topic of: Cross-border kafalah: comparative analysis & recommended practices. The presentation focused on the definition of scenarios constituting cross-border kafala, the applicable standards, current recognition and enforcement practices in the EU and possible avenues to respect the best interests of children in cross-border kafala.
- University of Genoa roundtable on reproductive technologies (March and June): Within the framework of the [UniPAR project](#), ISS actively contributed to several key expert spaces addressing reproductive technologies and children's rights. ISS participated in the European Stakeholders' Meeting held in Brussels, where it presented its work on the Verona Principles. ISS also contributed to the roundtable discussion "[Le nuove tecniche procreative e la circolazione degli status familiari: Problemi aperti alla luce del superiore interesse delle persone minorenni](#)", hosted by the University of Genoa, which brought together experts to examine the intersections between reproductive technologies, evolving family structures, and children's rights. Discussions, informed by ISS's report Legal Trends in Surrogacy, underscored the growing role of courts in addressing regulatory gaps and the need for comprehensive, child-centred legal frameworks.

# Technical Assistance and Capacity Building

Through both **advisory services** (supported by annual contributions from **Central Adoption Authorities**), and **targeted projects** (additional funding), IRC offers tailored, context-specific support grounded in comparative analysis and field experience. These activities aim to bridge the gap between knowledge and practice, responding to concrete needs while promoting rights-based approaches and sustainable system strengthening.



## Technical requests

The technical request service remains a **core function of the IRC since its inception** and continues to respond to a high level of demand.

In 2025, enquiries reflected a wide and diverse geographical scope, covering countries across Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Americas, as well as a number of global requests. Certain countries generated repeated requests, including Nigeria, Vietnam, Romania, Ethiopia, India and South Korea pointing to areas where demand for technical guidance remains particularly strong.

The content of requests also illustrates the range and complexity of issues faced by Central Authorities and practitioners. Requests often involve coordination with ISS members, local contacts, and experts, ensuring accurate, context-specific, and well-informed responses grounded in local knowledge.

Frequently requested information in 2025:

- Legal frameworks and procedures, such as applicable legislation or reform of legal acts.
- General updates on country-specific adoption systems.
- Suspension of intercountry adoption.
- Practical aspects of adoption procedures, such as probation periods, and eligibility criteria (including for single applicants or same-sex couples).
- Access to information and coordination, including contact referrals and identification of competent authorities.
- Past adoption practices, including historical adoption systems and illegal and illicit adoption practices.
- Questions related to nationality and residence requirements in adoption processes.
- SFO processes and practical information.
- Emerging issues, such as intrafamily adoption (including its links with surrogacy).

## Technical assistance and capacity building projects thanks to specific and additional funding

Technical assistance projects are an important component of IRC's work, providing targeted support and capacity building to national authorities and partners. These projects are made possible thanks to the specific financial support of certain key partners including Central adoption authorities, and they can be reinforced by the inclusion of additional human resources to the current IRC team.



### 1. SFO project – MAI-funded initiative (French Central Adoption Authority)

IRC, together with ISS France ([Droit d'Enfance](#)), continued the implementation of SFO technical assistance project, funded by the French government. This initiative aims to strengthen the capacity of professionals to support adoptees and their families throughout SFO processes.

The project forms part of a broader ISS global initiative developed in response to recommendations from the French inter-ministerial inspection on illicit intercountry adoption practices. It complements ongoing efforts such as the [RACINE project](#) and pilot initiatives implemented in several countries to provide direct support to adoptees and their families. In 2025, pilot projects were implemented in Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bulgaria, El Salvador, Ivory Coast, Madagascar, the Philippines, and Romania, offering tailored support to adoptees and their families, including assistance in accessing records, family tracing, and psychosocial support.

In 2025, activities implemented across Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the project included the organisation of webinars in Spanish and French, the development of specialized training modules, and the implementation of country missions in Côte d'Ivoire, Nepal, Brazil and Colombia. These missions combined capacity building, awareness-raising, and technical support tailored to national contexts, including training of professionals and support to local partners.

The project is increasingly adopting a regional approach. In Asia, ISS is strengthening a more structured regional dynamic, with country missions in Nepal (February 2025) and India (January 2026) contributing to enhanced cooperation, needs assessment, and support to national stakeholders. A similar approach is being developed in Latin America, notably through a combined mission to Brazil and Colombia, aimed at reinforcing regional collaboration and exchange among stakeholders.

## 2. Screening framework on SFO processes and collaborations – Flemish Government

ISS contributed to the development of a screening framework for potential collaborators involved in search for origins processes, supporting the Flemish authorities in strengthening oversight and quality standards.

## 3. Technical support on care and adoption reforms in Denmark

IRC initiated a new collaboration with the Danish Central Adoption Authority ([Ankestyrelsen/National Social Appeals Board](#)) and other national authorities under the Ministry for Social Affairs, Housing and Senior Citizens, providing technical expertise and country-specific assessments to support ongoing reforms in care and adoption systems.

## 4. Morocco – Strengthening child protection systems funded by UNICEF Morocco

In partnership with UNICEF Morocco, IRC supported the Ministry of Solidarity, Social Integration and Family and the Présidence du Ministère Public (PMP) for the consolidation of the national child protection system through the development of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs).

These SOPs aim to operationalise a national protocol for the care of vulnerable children by clarifying roles, responsibilities, and coordination mechanisms among stakeholders. The process involved extensive consultations and will be complemented by training tools for professionals.

## 5. Morocco – Belgium collaboration on kafala funded by French speaking community of Belgium

As part of a technical assistance mandate by ACC (francophone community of Belgium), IRC conducted a technical mission to Morocco to assess the kafala framework and support strengthened cooperation between Morocco and other States. Based on consultations with key stakeholders, developed recommendations to enhance safeguards and coordination in cross-border kafala cases.



### **Opportunities for Tailored Collaboration**

As illustrated by these examples, ISS/IRC develops targeted initiatives through complementary and ad hoc funding. These projects enable a more flexible and in-depth response to specific needs and emerging challenges.

We invite Central Authorities and partners to engage with us on tailored projects, drawing on our global expertise and network.

# Advocacy



The IRC actively contributes to the definition and implementation of ISS advocacy efforts, bringing its technical expertise and field-based knowledge to global policy discussions. Our approach is based on **evidence-based advocacy**, drawing on research and practice.



Advocacy activities are primarily carried out through **key international fora**, notably the United Nations and the Hague Conference on Private International Law (HCCH), where IRC engages on issues related to child protection, alternative care, adoption, and cross-border family matters.



The location of ISS headquarters in **Geneva** provides a strategic advantage, facilitating direct engagement with international organisations, mechanisms, and key stakeholders. Indeed, this facilitates advocacy, strengthened partnerships, and the amplification of ISS's voice in global policy discussions.

## United Nations



2025 has been a challenging year for the United Nations, particularly for its human rights mechanisms, in a rapidly evolving and constrained global environment, marked by the escalation of crisis and conflicts. In this context, ISS has continued to actively defend the relevance and effectiveness of international child rights frameworks.

### **Strengthening child rights advocacy amid UN reforms and crises**

Through its engagement in global movements and platforms such as Child Rights Connect, ISS has contributed to collective advocacy efforts calling on the UN to safeguard child rights monitoring systems, strengthen mandates, and ensure meaningful participation of stakeholders, amid the UN liquidity crisis and the UN80 reform process.



[Here](#) you can read Child Rights Connect's joint letter on the impact of the UN liquidity crisis and the UN80 Initiative on children's rights

## UN Treaty Bodies

IRC continues to play an active role in engaging with UN human rights mechanisms, particularly the Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC Committee):

- Periodic reviews: ISS contributed to the pre-sessional work of the CRC Committee for different countries working closely with national and international stakeholders to highlight key child rights issues and provide technical expertise.
- Technical contributions to international standards: ISS submitted several contributions within the framework of the drafting of the next General Comment No. 27 on access to justice and effective remedies, including:
  1. An [ISS general submission](#), developed with the ISS network, highlighting challenges faced by key groups, including children in alternative care, care leavers, adoptees, unaccompanied and separated children, children in family conflicts, and children born through surrogacy.
  2. A [joint submission](#) with partner organizations (Child Helpline International, ECPAT International, Eurochild, Tzuby's Kids, and World Without Orphans Europe) on institution-related trafficking.
  3. [Contributions](#) to the zero draft of General Comment No. 27.

ISS also engaged with the UN Committee on Enforced Disappearances by submitting a [technical contribution](#) to the forthcoming [General Comment No. 2](#), with a focus on girls and enforced disappearances.

## Hague Conference on Private International Law (HCCH)

The IRC, in coordination with ISS members, engages regularly with the HCCH, contributing to the development of international standards and influencing discussions on child protection, adoption, and cross-border family matters.

### **Development of international instruments – Parentage/Surrogacy Working Group**

ISS, through IRC, participated in the meetings of the [HCCH Working Group on Parentage/Surrogacy](#) held in April and November 2025. These meetings brought together State representatives, experts, and members of the HCCH Permanent Bureau to advance work on a potential new international instrument on the recognition of legal parentage, including in the context of international surrogacy.

Throughout these discussions, the Working Group continued reviewing draft provisions aimed at ensuring greater clarity, consistency, and legal certainty in cross-border parentage cases. The November meeting marked a significant milestone, with the finalisation of draft provisions and a report on the feasibility of a future convention on the recognition of decisions on legal parentage. The outcomes of this work were submitted to the HCCH Council on General Affairs and Policy in March 2026.

## Participation in technical exchanges and expert meetings (HCCH)

- Regional Workshop on Intercountry Adoption in Asia (Manila, March 2025): ISS members from the Asian region contributed to this [regional workshop](#) on the implementation of the 1993 Adoption Convention. ISS highlighted its work on the right to origins and shared experiences from pilot projects implemented in countries of origin. The Conclusions and Recommendations adopted are available on the HCCH website in [English](#).
- International Family Relocation Conference (Washington, April 2025): ISS members participated in the conference marking the [15th anniversary of the Washington Declaration](#), contributing to discussions on international family relocation.
- HCCH Asia Pacific Week (Seoul, June 2025): IRC closely followed the different sessions particularly those on the implementation of the 1993 Adoption Convention. Exchanges focused on key challenges and ongoing reforms, including developments presented by national authorities.

## Regional Advocacy

Even though IRC's focus is on global advocacy, advocacy action at ISS is conceived as multi-level. IRC and ISS also engage in regional advocacy processes, contributing to policy discussions and cooperation mechanisms across different regions. Some examples.

### **Europe – Council of Europe Consultation Group on the Children of Ukraine (CGU)**

ISS continues to engage in the Council of Europe's Consultation Group on the Children of Ukraine (CGU), a multilateral platform established in November 2023 to strengthen the protection of Ukrainian children displaced across Europe following the escalation of the war in 2022. Within this framework, ISS reiterated its position on adoption in situations of emergencies and armed conflict, building on a [joint statement](#) on forced deportation and adoption endorsed by 37 international and national organisations.

### **Africa – Engagement with the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC)**

ISS contributed to the 45th Ordinary Session of the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC) through a [written statement](#) highlighting key child protection challenges across the region. ISS emphasised the need for stronger national systems, capacity building, and effective prevention services, as well as addressing institution-related child trafficking and migrant children's rights. The statement also raised concerns about the lack of domestic adoption and unregulated surrogacy practices in Africa.



## Beyond institutional fora: Campaigns and Global and Regional Engagement

Beyond its engagement with formal international mechanisms, ISS also contributes to shaping global discussions on child protection, alternative care, and adoption through its participation in international campaigns, conferences, and collaborative platforms.

- **Global Care Reform Campaign:** On September 24, during the UN General Assembly, governments and civil society organizations launched the [Global Charter on Care Reform](#) –a landmark commitment to ensure that every child grows up in a safe, nurturing, and caring family environment. ISS officially endorsed the Charter and encourages its members and partners to do the same. The IRC, in support of ISS members, is also actively contributing to its dissemination. ISS further calls on States to sign the Charter and, for those that have already done so, to ensure its effective implementation.
- **Fifth World Congress on Justice with Children** (2-4 June, Madrid), ISS participated in this [major international event](#), which gathered over 750 in-person participants and more than 6,000 online attendees. The Congress provided an important platform to advance child-centred justice and promote the meaningful participation of children and young people.
- **World Congress on Enforced Disappearances** (15–16 January, Geneva): this [global forum](#) brought together experts and stakeholders to address enforced disappearances. ISS contributed to discussions on the protection of affected individuals and families, linking these issues to broader child protection concerns.
- **Kafala and care reform webinar – Transforming Children’s Care Collaborative webinar** (23 October): ISS participated in an expert panel discussing the integration of kafala within national care reforms, sharing insights on cross-border practices and emerging challenges. Recording [here](#).
- **General Assembly of Child Rights Connect:** ISS participated and contributed to discussions on key thematic issues and the future direction of the network, while reaffirming the importance of collaboration to strengthen global child rights advocacy.
- **International working meeting on search for origins – INEA** (7–8 October, Amsterdam), IRC joined members from France and the Netherlands in a working meeting focused on search for origins and identity, fostering exchange on current practices and opportunities for collaboration.
- **European Law Institute (ELI) project “Enhancing Child Protection”:** In 2025, ISS participated as an observer in this project which provides recommendations (see [report](#)) to EU institutions and Member States to strengthen private international law on filiation and improve the recognition of parent-child relationships in cross-border situations, in response to the European Commission’s 2022 proposal (COM/2022/695). It places particular emphasis on children’s rights, including identity and access to origins, as well as on enhancing legal certainty and coordination between legal systems.

# Working in Partnership:



## Strengthening Synergies Across ISS and Its Global Network

At the IRC, strong emphasis is placed on **building and maintaining strategic partnerships**. As part of ISS—an organisation with over a century of experience—the IRC benefits from longstanding relationships, a global presence, and trusted connections across regions and sectors. This unique positioning enables the IRC to convene diverse stakeholders, facilitate dialogue, and provide informed, context-specific support that bridges local realities and international law and policy frameworks. The IRC’s work is made possible through the **continued support of its institutional partners**, to whom ISS extends its sincere gratitude.

At the same time, the ISS global network remains central to its activities, underpinning its work in research, technical assistance, and advocacy. Close collaboration with members worldwide ensures that IRC actions are grounded in practice, enriched by local expertise, and responsive to evolving needs. This is further reinforced through coordination with the [ISS Network Development Department](#), which strengthens network engagement and capacities. Likewise, the IRC team actively contributes to internal ISS working groups on key thematic areas, including search for origins, cross-border family solutions (including placement), and family conflict and mediation, and participates in ongoing exchanges on cross-border casework methodologies and practices within the global network.

This collaborative approach is also reflected in ISS General Secretariat’s programmatic implementation, notably through the Alternative Care Programme “[A Better Future is Possible](#)”. Delivered in partnership with ISS members and local actors across Haiti, Chile, Ivory Coast, Burkina Faso, Vietnam, and Sri Lanka, the programme illustrates how operational work, research, and advocacy mutually reinforce one another. Field experience feeds into IRC knowledge production, while IRC expertise informs programme design and policy engagement. In 2025, the “A Better Future is Possible” programme directly supported over 330 children and families and reached more than 2,300 beneficiaries indirectly through capacity building, community engagement, and strengthened local services, with a particular focus on children with disabilities and family-based care.

Through these synergies, ISS ensures a continuous **exchange between practice and policy**, enhancing both the relevance of its field interventions and the impact of its global work.

# Looking Ahead



In continuity with this approach, ISS General Secretariat is exploring since 2025 the development of a **Centre on Cross-Border Child Protection** (title to be confirmed) aimed at further strengthening coherence and synergies across its activities. Building on existing programmes and expertise—including the IRC and “A Better Future is Possible”—the Centre represents an **evolution of current work at the General Secretariat**, designed to enhance coordination, visibility, and impact.

The Centre will be structured around a complementary, **twofold focus**: [strengthening domestic child protection systems](#) and [consolidating cross-border case-management mechanisms](#), reflecting ISS’s longstanding expertise in both national and international child protection responses. Within this framework, it will continue to address key priority areas such as identity rights and search for origins, children’s rights in adoption, protective family environments—including prevention and alternative care—and family-related cross-border challenges (e.g. surrogacy, family conflicts).

Importantly, this **development will not alter the nature or scope of services provided to Central Authorities in the field of intercountry adoption and search for origins**, which remain core pillars of IRC and ISS activities. These services will continue to be delivered with the same level of expertise and responsiveness. Their integration within the broader framework of the Centre will instead provide additional support, stronger linkages with related areas of work, and enhanced opportunities for knowledge-sharing and advocacy.

The Centre will contribute to strengthening synergies between programmes, research, and technical assistance; reinforcing collaboration with the ISS network through more structured joint initiatives; and enhancing the development of tools, training, and evidence-based advocacy across child protection themes.

By consolidating existing strengths while ensuring continuity of its core services, ISS is well positioned to enhance its collective impact—leveraging its global network and multidisciplinary expertise to respond to the complex and interconnected challenges of child protection worldwide.



ISS will keep its partners regularly informed of these developments and remains available for any exchanges or discussions as this reflection progresses.



The International Reference Centre for  
the Rights of Children Deprived of  
their Families (ISS/IRC)



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