

*Peter Selman*

## **The impact of intercountry adoption on the well-being of children in Europe**

The number of children sent for intercountry adoption has grown rapidly in the last fifteen years – to a total of over 45,000 worldwide in 2004 (Selman 2007). While this has undoubtedly saved many individual children from a life in institutional care, critics have raised many doubts about this movement of children asking whether it is a “global trade or global gift” (Triseliotis 2000), “a global problem or a global solution?” (Masson 2001).

This paper would focus on intercountry adoption in Europe where Norway, Sweden and Spain now have the highest level of intercountry adoption (per 1,000 live births) in the world amongst receiving States and Belarus, Bulgaria, Romania and the Ukraine have at various times have sent more children per 1,000 live births than any other State of origin. The impending accession of Bulgaria and Romania to the EU has resulted in pressure on those countries to reduce the number of children sent, despite the fact that EU countries lead the way in receiving the children and existing members such as Latvia, Lithuania and Poland continue to send many children. While China was the main source of children for Spain and Norway in 2004 and Vietnam for France, the Ukraine was the main source for Italy and Russia has sent many children to all European receiving States.

The paper would look at the demography of intercountry adoption in Europe, building on earlier work by the author (Selman 198; 2002; 2006); examine the current situation of receiving States and States of origin in the enlarged EU; and ask what the impact has been on the well-being of those children affected, with special attention to the history of the movement of children for intercountry adoption within Europe. Has intercountry adoption been a positive example of rescuing children from a childhood in institutions or a negative influence, preventing the development of in-country adoption in many of the sending countries (Dickens 2002)? Were pressures on potential members to end the practice motivated by a concern for the well-being of children or an example of the influence of Eurocrats and the pressure of individual MEPs such as Emma Nicholson, who is accused of having a very personal agenda?

Why is in-country adoption so rare in European nations other than the UK, where the level of intercountry adoption is in contrast very low (Selman & Mason 2005)?

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