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Aantal

datum

17/06/2025

Follow up on working visit of the Flemish Central Authority of Belgium

Dear [REDACTED]

First of all, the Flemish Central Authority (VCA) on intercountry adoption would like to express its sincere compliments to CARA. In particular, we would like to thank [REDACTED] and the entire team for the warm welcome and for taking the time to discuss our questions and concerns during our visit at the end of January. Such constructive consultations greatly contribute to effective collaboration. The many stakeholders on site, such as CWCs, DCPU, SARA, SAAs, etc., helped us gain a better understanding of the Indian adoption procedures. We are also very grateful to them for their time and for the information they shared with us.

Following our comprehensive written evaluation, conducted in collaboration with international experts such as UNICEF, ISS, and CHIP from our partner countries, we were able to examine additional questions in light of practical realities. This enabled us to gain a deeper understanding of the current context and to identify potential shortcomings. We would also like to take this opportunity to highlight the various observations and findings we made during our working visit to India, and to add a number of recommendations:

- On the child protection system in general:
 - Although Mission Vatsalya offers a progressive and child-centered vision, its implementation is uneven and varies greatly between regions. Strengthening preventive family support and avoiding out-of-home placements especially requires more resources, training, and local engagement.
 - We find it particularly valuable that more attention and importance is being given to foster care as an alternative caregiving method, as outlined in the Vatsalya mission. Even though foster care is still in its early stages and developed in a limited number of States, we'd like to emphasize a few important aspects:

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- In line with good practices in adoption, thorough preparation and screening of prospective foster parents is essential. Providing them with adequate training equips them with the necessary skills and knowledge to care for a, often vulnerable, child effectively. This is one of the most effective ways to prevent, or at least reduce the number of (early) disruptions and break-downs.
 - For the hard to place children, foster care is positioned as an important, family-based solution, especially when adoption is not feasible. However, we believe that the possibility of foster care should always be considered before adoption.
- Intercountry adoption today:
 - Effective collaboration in the field of intercountry adoption is essential, particularly between Central Authorities. Smooth coordination is crucial not only in straightforward cases but also in more complex or sensitive dossiers. We consider strong and transparent collaboration between Central Authorities essential in intercountry adoption. It has been observed that communication can at times be challenging in specific cases, particularly when unforeseen issues arise concerning a child's adoptability. In such instances, it is crucial that we are able to respond promptly and resolve any questions or uncertainties without delay.
 - The adoption regulations of 2022 have modified the administrative costs for intercountry adoption procedures. In case of the adoption of a child with normal health conditions the adoption fee shall be as that of a national adoption (Rs. 50 000) compared to \$ 5000 for a special needs child. When talking to specialized adoption agencies about this, this doesn't seem to be very logical as the need for prospective adoptive families for special needs children is higher.
 - Addressing the past:

We share a collective responsibility to provide high-quality services to the many thousands of individuals adopted from India, and fulfilling this commitment requires meeting several essential conditions:

 - Although no statutory preservation period of files is established, we have understood from various SAAs and CWCs that they have received instructions to retain files for a period of 10 years. In practice, the SAAs we visited appeared to maintain older archives as well. We would like to emphasize the importance of a sufficiently long preservation period. Long periods of record keeping are crucial to ensure that adoptees have the opportunity to trace their personal history, even many years after the adoption. This is especially important, as many adoptees only feel the need to access their records later in life. The Hague Convention on Adoption (1933) also emphasizes the importance of access to origin information in Art 30: The competent authorities of a Contracting State shall ensure that information

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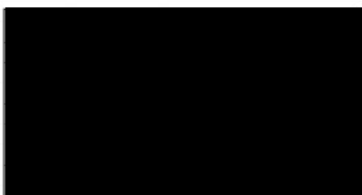
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held by them concerning the child's origin, in particular information concerning the identity of his or her parents, as well as the medical history, is preserved. This implies that States must retain information on parentage and the adoptee must be able to access that information.

- Effective support for individuals seeking to explore their roots is essential, particularly in the context of intercountry adoptions from the past, where little or no information is often available. In such cases, it becomes even more important to invest in high-quality guidance and strong psychosocial support. This process begins with access to information. We are keen to move forward with the idea of developing a webinar in collaboration with CARA and other relevant stakeholders. To that end, we would greatly value your advice on the most appropriate contacts to engage for further discussion.

We thank you for your constructive collaboration and remain open to further discussing or clarifying the above recommendations, as well as addressing any other questions or interpretations you may have.

With the highest esteem,



Director