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It's estimated that at least 40,000 children are adopted internationally every year. The aim of the system is to give abandoned children in developing countries a home, and childless couples in the West a family. It would seem an ideal solution.

But recent reports in the Dutch press show that there is a decidedly darker side to the system.

"...Every child has the right to grow up in a loving family or a family replacing situation."

One example is the story of Rahul, a young boy adopted from India by a Dutch couple. It turned out that Rahul had actually been stolen from his biological parents and sold to an orphanage before being adopted abroad.

The UN Treaty of the rights of the child



Critics say the scandal is just the tip of the iceberg and that it illustrates the serious flaws in the system.

Some go as far as to say it's no more than 'legalised child trafficking' and call for inter-country adoption to be banned altogether.

Are they right? And what of those who are the centre of the debate: the children - what's best for them?

The Panellists:

Dutch EU official **Roelie Post**. She was employed to work on the 'Romanian children dossier' of the EU Commission. Author of the recently published *Romania: for export only. The untold story of the Romanian 'orphans.'*



David Smolin, a law professor of the Cumberland School of Law in Alabama. An expert on International children's issues, including inter-country adoption. He's also the creator of a website on international adoption called Adoptinginternationally.



Ina Hut, the director of *Wereldkinderen*, the largest childcare and adoption agency in the Netherlands.



Key Quotes:

David Smolin's personal experience of adoption:

"We adopted two girls who were ten and twelve when they came into our household from south India. It did turn out that they had been stolen from their original family."

"... The means of doing that was to persuade the mother whilst she was vulnerable to place the children in care. Often times the poor in India and other countries place them just to get an education and when they're under some stress, without meaning to give them up. This is what happened to this mother, when she went back for them, she wasn't permitted to have them back."

You can read more about David Smolin's experience [here](#)

Ina Hut on the fact that it's not possible to guarantee adoptive children are not trafficked:

"This [illegal practise] is happening because there are a lot of couples who are childless and there are always persons and organisations, abroad also, who want to profit from this childlessness. And they want to make money out of it"

"You can never be sure for 100 percent but for 99.9 percent. I am sure about the backgrounds of the children. But I can never guarantee 100 percent... I can't give the guarantee that we at Wereldkinderen never have adopted a child who was involved in child trafficking. No organisation can guarantee that."

"I don't know why we think taking the children of the poor from poor countries as a humanitarian act"

David Smolin

David Smolin on why so many people want to adopt from abroad:

"Some of the demand side is fuelled by agencies that promote the idea that this is an act to save children... We had sons, we did not have daughters, so we would like to have daughters, and we had been part of a child sponsorship thing, so we had known about the problem of the girl child there, the problem of female infanticide, abandoned girls, so we put the two together."



The desire for children in the West creates a market - Roelie Post

"But there is, of course, another group of parents who can't have children, and that fuels a lot of demand as well. But it's not just those people. It's the idea that is promoted that this is the best way to help children overseas, that many times the adoption agencies create demand as well."

Roelie Post on how demand feeds supply:

"We have to realise also that there is an enormous competition between countries to get children and this competition as in any free market drives up the price.... It's all about children in the beginning."

There are many, many people who want children for adoption and those people are in Spain, France, Italy, the Netherlands, the United States and so on. This has created a market."

On the big role money plays in the adoption process:

David Smolin:

"I have looked into this deeply and I have found that there are often systematic patterns of obtaining children. I call this child laundering because the children are taken illegally and then given false paper work and then systematically processed through the system. What troubles me about the way the system operates is the

fees that are provided to the overseas agencies often create a motivation for this."

Ina Hut:

"We don't want to pay extra money for the children, so what do you see? Children from children homes abroad are going to other countries than the Netherlands, like the USA, France, Spain or Italy."

David Smolin on whether there is a real need for inter-country adoption:

"I don't think we will know whether there is a true need until we reform the system...so that every single agency, every single program, was number one: helping families first, number two: looking for local solutions and number three: there was no extra money, it was transparent. We don't know the true need because the need gets inflated."

"I've been to different kinds of orphanages in India and it's very remarkable that orphanages orientated around adoption magically tend to have babies in them, very young children. Orphanages that are around child welfare tend to have older children and tend to be helping them with their families."

Roelie Post on why adoption from abroad be banned:

"All the years that Romania was the biggest sending country the numbers of children in institutions and children's homes remained high, because every child that left, every empty space was immediately filled because of the market."

"It was only when inter-country adoption stopped that less children came, there was less attraction to get children into children's homes. The children would go to Romanian foster families, families would be supported. So [international adoption] puts everything upside down and it means children are getting into children's homes, which normally without adoption wouldn't be there."

David Smolin on whether international adoption should be stopped:

"I'm not for banning international adoption but I am for a reform of the system.... In both European countries and the US the way we have operated is to create this demand-side entitlement idea: that we entitled are to the children of the poor from other countries."

Ina Hut on how inter-country adoption can work properly:

"If every adoption agency is working according to the same ethical rules, I do think it's possible to set up a system for international adoption which is good for the children who otherwise will stay in their own countries in children homes. I think adopting a child to the Netherlands or abroad is better than letting the children stay in children's homes."

Roelie Post on the alternative to inter-country adoption:

"The alternative is to provide assistance there.... we can support countries to create care in the countries like we have it here, we're working with double norms and standards. In the European Union countries there are children in care, there are children in homes, there are children in foster families, there are disable children. But we have to look after them. And I think we should help other countries to do the same."

Your emails:

Jude Kirkham, Vancouver, Canada:

That there are serious problems with international adoptions is undeniable, but I fear simply banning the practice will drive out what legitimate operators there are and do for adoption what prohibition does for drugs. Are there not less extreme methods, which can be taken to address failings in the system?

Brian Merritt, Canada:



Whats the best way to care for children in need of a home?

Like any other business where the demand outstrips the supply, the price of the product goes up. In some overseas markets there are certain criminal elements involved in supplying such a child. Proper government overseeing such adoptions is vital. In Quebec the government actually gives the child at no charge to the adoptive parents, after carefully vetting them. There is however a probation period of one year to allow the biological mothers a second chance of rearing her child.

Jasmin, Amritsar, India:

Adoption of orphans is a great thing as it gives them a loving family and an identity but taking away children from their parents by deceit is very cruel as the child is torn between the parents and the foster family and the cultures. The adopted child can never be true to himself, parents or the foster family and it must be a torture for the child to feel that the parents and the siblings continue to live in extreme poverty. Secondly much depends upon the intentions of the foster parents. Most of the foster families are sincere and loving but there are many instances too where the foster parents abuse the adopted children in various ways. These black sheep in our society are maligning the practice of adoption.

AMD, California USA:

What is preventing people from following existing law in the matter? I think that adopting children from underdeveloped countries as well as ghetto areas and depressed areas in the States is probably a good thing. But it should be done legally. We don't want to encourage a slave trade.

Peter Lunenburg, Netherlands:

Why not adopt children at home who were undesired and unwanted and otherwise would have been aborted? This avoids causing havoc for the woman having abortion and avoids problems for the adopted child pulled out from their foreign roots.

David L. Blatt, Chicago, IL, USA:

My wife and I adopted a wonderful little boy from Guatemala in 2001. I can't imagine our lives without him or seeing him denied the opportunities we gave him by grafting him into our family!

Roberto C. Alvarez-Galloso, CPUR, Miami Florida:

International Adoptions should be regulated by organizations. The reasons is to make sure prospective parents are profiled and to prevent baby trafficking.

Bram v, New Jersey:

I would like to know what solution Ms Post is suggesting for dealing with orphans in developing countries. Who, in the developing countries, is going to take care of these children? A large amount of people can just barely, or in many cases not even, take care of themselves. There are always international NGOs that work with orphanages providing services for them, but even if the needs of the child are met (food, education, clothing, etc) they are still being forced to grow up without the guidance and love of a parent.



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Reaction(s):

Brian Douglas, 11-07-2007 - Romania

Intercountry adoptions have proved to be not in the child's best interest, plus the plain fact is that it is now very clear that organized crime gangs who prey on children have entered the often unchecked adoption agencies in many countries. If one really puts the child's best interest above all other interests, then one can clearly see that national adoption is far better than intercountry adoption for many reasons, not least the fact that the child in national adoption retains all of its cultural and national identity. More countries must do the same as Romania boldly did and reform their childcare systems to re-integrate children back into their natural families, adopt foster care and national adoption, before considering intercountry adoption.

Mike Smith, 09-07-2007 - USA

Any reform of international adoption must include some way of capping the fees charged by adoption agencies.

