

Extended Abstract:

This paper analyzes the impact of the 2010 Haitian earthquake on intercountry adoptions (ICAs) through an examination of adoptions from Haiti in the decade immediately preceding the 2010 earthquake and in the immediate aftermath. Data are United Nations Hague Convention statistics. Reports from Convention members contextualize this flow with flows of Haitian intercountry adoptees to the top receiving Hague convention members (Canada, Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Spain, Switzerland, and the United States). As the countries have vastly differing populations, for comparison persons analyses use three metrics of intercountry adoptees: adoption rates per 100,000 population; adoption rates per 100,000 aged 0-4, and adoption ratio per 1000 births. Population characteristics used, from the United States Census International Database, are the midyear population, the birth rate per 1,000 births, and the population aged zero to four. The increased flow highlighted issues of compliance with Hague convention standards.

This paper addresses intercountry adoptions both from the perspective of Selman (2006) and Lovelock (2000) as a form of migration; and an echo of the abuses Bartholet (1993) described following the media frenzy highlighting Romanian orphanages. Thus, I address the research question of how did the 2010 earthquake impact the flow of intercountry adoptees to the United States and to the U.S. in comparison to other nations?

Background describes adoption as a migratory flow, and the risks involved in relying adoptions as crisis management of children in disasters. The Romanian orphan abuses, Bartholet (1993: 97) has described how, following a CBS News Broadcast about an estimated 100,000 children living in about 600 orphanages in Romania in destitute conditions, there was a stampede by Americans to adopt these Romanian orphans. According to the Immigration and Naturalization Service,

2,287 Romanian children were adopted by Americans from Oct. 1, 1990 to Sept. 4, 1991 (Larson, 1991). Unfortunately, although the media images of the deplorable conditions led to a massive humanitarian adoptive effort, they also led to exploitation. Children were often sold, and parents who could have kept their children with financial support, were pressured into using placement as their only viable option (Bartholet, 1993). The Romanian adoption scandals were part of the driving force behind the development of the Hague Convention of 1993 on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption (United Nations Hague Convention, 1993).

The United States joined the 1993 Hague Convention in December 2007 (United Nations Hague Convention, 2008). (Although Haiti had not joined the Convention at the time of the earthquake convention members were to comply with standards for both member and nonmember adoptions.) United Nations Hague Convention (2010) found a doubling of adoptions from Haiti in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake. Data were of the 2,107 intercountry adoptions from Haiti, 1200 were to the United States. Policy issues raised by the increased flow are issues of compliance with Hague convention standards, especially in times of disaster or international crises. These issues included are Hague Convention standards for the protection of children in disasters; the extent of the earthquake; the lack of infrastructures required for Hague compliance; and existing alternatives for care for children in Haiti in 2010.

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