

A pair of hands, one on the left and one on the right, are shown holding a globe of the Earth. The hands are rendered in a light, semi-transparent style, and the globe is centered between them. The background is a light, neutral color.

Evaluating Sweden's intercountry adoption investigation: methods, findings, and policy implications.

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The purpose of this presentation

- To present an overview of the Swedish intercountry adoption investigation and the Singer report that followed (SOU 2025:61).
- A written summary by myself and a team of interdisciplinary scholars, practitioners, social workers, concerned individuals, and others. We examined the investigation and its various elements and offered critique of its scope, methodology, analytical framework, and results.
- To offer vocabulary and analytical tools to address state-led investigations.

Investigation Overview

Purpose of the Investigation

Investigation Commission

The Swedish government, in 2021, initiated the investigation to review the ethical and legal aspects of intercountry adoptions to Sweden. To carry out such an investigation, Anna Singer, who together with an adoption commission, was assembled.

Focus on Illicit Practice

The investigation targeted issues like corruption, lack of consent, and falsified documents in adoption cases.

Children's Rights Emphasis

Special attention was given to adopted children's rights to identity, cultural heritage, and language.

Data Collection Methods

The commission conducted interviews, reviewed records, and visited countries to gather comprehensive data.

Findings and Proposed Actions

Findings

Aoptee documentation was inconsistent

Adoptees who were interviewed expressed that much of their adoption documentation was either missing or incomplete compared to that of other adoptees. As such, it was argued that documentation had been withheld from adoptees or that, at some point during the adoption process, procedures were not properly followed.

Need for closure through finding biological relatives

Adoptees expressed a need to explore their biological origins and therefore called for opportunities to return to their birth countries to search for biological relatives.



Findings

Adoptees' emotional and mental health

Adoptees expressed a need for psychosocial support. It was argued that adoptees are at an increased risk of mental health issues. Singer suggested that this is supported by much of the existing research on adoptees and mental health.

Loss of identity, culture, and language

Adoptees expressed sorrow over being separated from identity, culture, and language tied to their birth countries.



Findings

Visiting birth countries

When visiting birth countries and various care institutions, Singer argued that these institutions were suitable environments for children to grow up in. Furthermore, biological parents and lawyers expressed that adoptions had not always been carried out correctly.

Documentation was missing

When reviewing archival records, Singer argued that documentation was missing that should have been present in adoptees' files.

Colorblindness

Sweden was described as not being adequately equipped to recognize and address racial differences—specifically, the needs and challenges associated with raising a child of a different ethnicity than the adoptive parents.



Proposed Actions

Termination of intercountry adoptions

The report recommends ending intercountry adoptions to Sweden due to ethical concerns and systemic issues identified in some adoption cases.

Post-adoption services center

The establishment of a national resource center is proposed to support adoptees through services such as DNA testing, psychosocial support, and assistance with origin tracing.



Proposed Actions

Public apology

The investigation team on intercountry adoption also ask for a public apology and that the state takes accountability for every adoption, not just those who were done through illicit practice.

Financial support

The team is also suggesting financial support to adoptees wanting to visit their country of origin.



Summary

Findings

- Aoptee documentation was inconsistent
- Need for closure through finding biological relatives
- Adoptees' emotional and mental health
- Loss of identity, culture, and language
- Visiting birth countries
- Documentation was missing
- Colorblindness

Proposed Actions

- Termination of intercountry adoptions
- Post-adoption services center
- Public apology
- Financial support

Response and Critique

Overview of the written response

**Written response regarding the Singer report:
SOU 2025:61**

Anthropological point of view.

Interdisciplinary support

Called for support through ICAR8, International Conference on Adoption Research.



Overview of the written response

Overarching critique

Scope (purpose)

Methodology (data points and structure)

Analytical framework (lens)

Results (findings and proposed actions)

Improving Post Adoption Services and
Final Reflections



Overview of the written response

Scope (purpose) - critique

The scope of the investigation was to determine whether there have been illicit practices tied to intercountry adoption.

Key questions to ask:

- 1) Who is the person conducting the investigation?
- 2) How will this affect the investigation and the result as a whole?
- 3) What is their positionality, and are they transparent about it?



Overview of the written response

Methodology (data points and structure) – critique

Consider the findings: “*Visiting birth countries...*,” “*Documentation was missing...*,” and “*Adoptee documentation was inconsistent...*”

Looked at the tools used for recruiting participants, the questions asked, which countries were visited, how those reviewing the archival documents were trained, and how the expert group was included.

-Only visited 4 countries out of the 7 they decided to include in the report (SOU 2025:61, v. 1, p. 105),

-Lack of diversity of representatives, time, and resources (SOU 2025:61, v. 1, p. 111-112).



Overview of the written response

Methodology (data points and structure) – critique

Quotes were often taken from individuals not groups at large, and suggestions were made using an **inductive reasoning**.

Mattingly “*Narrative phenomenology*” (2010).

-“*According to one judge...*”

-“*We met one adoptee who lived in Colombia...*”

-“*We had one meeting with birth parents in Bogotá...*”

-“*We met with one researcher...*” (SOU 2025:61, v. 1, p. 108-112).



Overview of the written response

Methodology (data points and structure) – critique

Key questions to ask:

- 1) Who was interviewed?
“Opinions from the expert group is to be acknowledge, but it is ultimately up to the investegator to decide what changes should be made” (SOU 2025:61, v. 1, p. 101).
- 2) Who was not included?
- 3) Do participants have an agenda when answering certain questions or participating?
- 4) Is this confirmation bias?



Overview of the written response

Analytical framework (lens) – critique

Colorblind (Singer, 2025; Patton, 2002)

- Singer cites my master's thesis incorrectly.
- This creates a general apprehensiveness toward the report as a whole.



Overview of the written response

Analytical framework (lens) - critique

-There is danger of self-proclaiming terminology, you can skew the data and the results.

-”Cognitive linguistics” (Trouillot, 1995), own definition.



Overview of the written response

Analytical framework (lens) - critique

Singer define illicit practices such as:

- 1) Corruption, bribes or falsified documents,
- 2) Not collecting birth parents' consent through the correct way,
- 3) To accept financial support to carry out an adoption,
- 4) To allow an adoption to be carried out based on past laws and policies (SOU 2025:61, volume 1, p. 94-95).



Overview of the written response

Analytical framework (lens) - critique

Key questions to ask:

- 1) Which lens is the data being viewed through?
- 2) Is the person who coined the term/concept biased towards the data to begin with?
- 3) Is the analytical framework openly looking at the data from various perspectives?



Overview of the written response

Results (findings and proposed actions) – critique

“Adoptees has an increased chance of mental health issues...”

False causality

- Variable 1 (internationally adopted)
 - Variable 2 (multiple separations)
 - Variable 3 (insufficient PAS in receiving country)
 - Variable 4 (other social and psychological factors)
- = increased risk of emotional and mental health issues.



Overview of the written response

Results (findings and proposed actions) - critique

Key questions to ask:

- 1) Is the study allowing for dialogue or simply stating what the author believe their data shows?
- 2) Is there any false causality where the results are forced to fit a particular narrative?
- 3) Is the result in any way determined by the scope, methodology, and analytical framework?



Improving Post Adoption Services and Final Reflections

Improving Post Adoption Services

Complementary investigation

A new investigation should be conducted with much stricter rigor and balance of its inclusivity of participants. The narrow scope will otherwise again result in a fragmented picture of the adoptee experience and the support needed.

Inclusive Frameworks for PAS

Frameworks like Design Justice (Costanza-Chock, 2020) and an “Adoptee Competence Lens” ensure PAS meets diverse adoptee needs and experiences.

International Model Inspiration

Drawing from global models like C.A.S.E. (Center for Adoption Support and Education) supports comprehensive training and professional adoption services.



Final Reflections

Importance of International Adoption

International adoption remains a vital option for children needing permanent families despite its challenges.

Ethical Adoption Practices

Policy decisions must ensure ethical processes that protect children's rights in practice, not just theory.

Call for Reform and Support

Focus on reforming adoption systems to provide lifelong support.



Thank you!

Questions?

Contact information:

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