



Quality Manual & Protocol for the Evaluation of Candidate Local Partners

June 2025

**Developed by International Social Service in close collaboration
with Vlaams Centrum voor Adoptie (VCA)**

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1. Executive Summary

1. Purpose of the initiative

The [Flemish Centre for Adoption \(VCA\)](#) launched the present initiative following findings of irregularities in past intercountry adoptions from Ethiopia. These inconsistencies in records raised concerns among adoptees and their families, leading to widespread calls for support in uncovering their origins. VCA is therefore seeking to establish collaborations with reliable, competent, and locally grounded partners in countries of origin (including domestic adoptions) to **carry out administrative case-related truth finding investigations**, which are often linked to **structured, ethical, and rights-based search for origins (SFO) services**. To ensure accountability and quality, VCA partnered with the [International Social Service \(ISS\)](#) to assess the suitability of candidate partners in countries of origin through a **structured, fair and transparent screening process**.

The role and responsibilities of Belgian actors (private, public or religious) will normally be the subject of global historical research, for which the initiative lies at the federal political level, as confirmed in the [federal coalition agreement 2025-2029](#).

2. Who is ISS and what is their role in this initiative?

ISS, with a century of cross-border child protection experience and a global network in 120+ countries, is the mandated evaluator for this initiative. ISS itself went through a public procurement and screening process to be involved in this initiative. [The International Reference Centre \(IRC\)](#) and the [Network Development & Training Unit \(NDT\)](#) at ISS HQ are jointly responsible for applying a standardised, yet context-sensitive assessment of candidate partners based on a specifically developed screening tool.

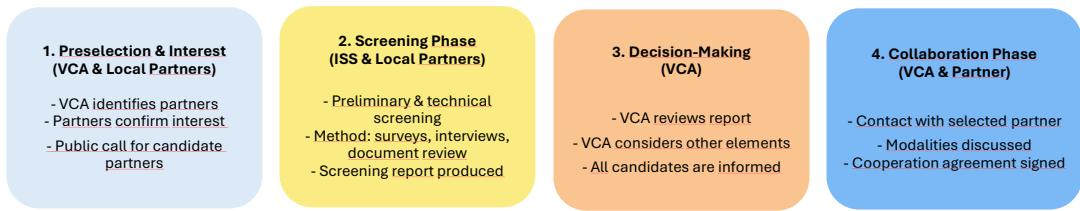
3. The quality manual

The present manual will explain the structure of the screening tool, the rationale behind the selected components, criteria, indicators, and the methodology implemented for the different phases of the assessment. It is therefore aimed as a guide for candidate partners that will be evaluated to provide transparency about the process and to convey the robustness of the selection procedure.

4. Structure of the evaluation process

The process is structured into four phases:

1. **Pre-identification by VCA:** Candidate partners are identified based on suggestions and ideas by Flemish adoptees or (adoptee-led) organisations within VCA's network. VCA initiated a first (online) exchange with each of these candidate partners. Those who were able to demonstrate field presence, relevant experience, and expressed their willingness to collaborate will be contacted by VCA to inform them about the comprehensive screening by ISS (cf. next phase).
2. **Screening by ISS:** Divided into preliminary and technical screening stages.
3. **Decision-making by VCA:** VCA reviews ISS findings, makes a final partner selection and draws up a motivation report explaining the reasons for selection.
4. **Collaboration phase:** Formalised via a cooperation agreement detailing roles, responsibilities, and expectations.



5. The screening tool

The ISS screening tool is designed to assess both **minimum eligibility** criteria and **in-depth technical competence**. It ensures consistency, transparency, and fairness across different partner profiles and contexts. The tool consists of two phases:

The preliminary screening determines whether a candidate partner meets the basic structural and operational requirements to be considered for collaboration. It acts as a gatekeeping step before proceeding with a more detailed technical evaluation.

The technical screening assesses the candidate partner's qualifications and readiness to ethically and effectively carry out SFO and truth-finding investigations. Key areas include knowledge of child rights, adoption systems, and identity issues; practical experience in child protection, adoption, SFO, and related fields; collaboration with authorities and communities; and independence from intercountry and domestic adoption involvement.

6. Evaluation process and methodology

The screening tool uses **both quantitative and qualitative evaluation methods** to ensure a comprehensive and balanced evaluation. The screening tool will focus on measuring quantitative predefined indicators across multiple areas. This evaluation is then nuanced by qualitative evaluation methods that capture elements on the context-specific reality of the country of origin, as well as the candidate partner's integrity, responsiveness, transparency, and ethical postures that are essential when working in emotionally sensitive and legally complex contexts.

Note: The numerical score is not decisive alone. Final decisions will weigh both scores and broader qualitative insight. The goal is to identify not only technically competent partners, but also those who align with the values and needs of adoptees and affected families.

7. What to expect?

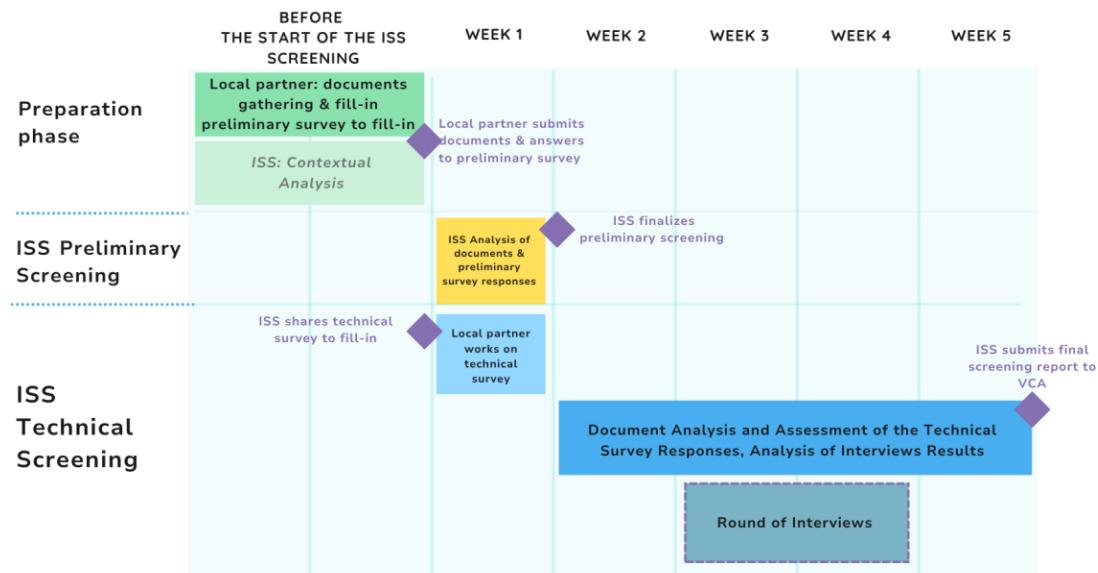
Candidate partners will be asked to:

- Submit a set of key documents.
- Complete two structured surveys (preliminary and technical).
- Participate in interviews and prepare responses to hypothetical case scenarios.
- Identify key stakeholders or references for follow-up.

The **entire screening process takes approximately 1.5 month**, with open communication between ISS, VCA and the candidate partner being essential to stay on track. Partners will

also be asked to sign a **Declaration of Commitment** confirming the accuracy of submitted information and willingness to uphold the values and standards of the initiative.

Note: The screening process will begin once all the documentation requested in advance by ISS has been received and the Preliminary Survey is filled-in, within a predetermined and fixed deadline. We kindly ask candidate partners to respect this deadline.



7. Need Support?

You can ask questions or raise concerns at any time during the process. A focal point will be communicated to you for this screening process.

2. Glossary¹

Abandonment: an act which may include:

- permanently leaving a child anonymously in a place where they may, or may not, be found and looked after; or
- entrusting a child to another person, without coming back to collect the child after a given period of time, and where it is impossible to contact or find the person(s) who entrusted the child.

Abduction of children: the 1980 Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction of the HCCH defined abduction as a removal or retention of a child where there

¹ Definitions from the glossary are drawn among others from the [Glossary of the HCCH Toolkit for Preventing and Addressing Illicit Practices in Intercountry Adoption](#), the [HCCH 1993 Adoption Convention](#), the [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#), the [HCCH Guide for Good Practice n°1](#), [HCCH Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction](#), [UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children](#), [Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography](#), [Moving forward: Implementing the 'Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children'](#) and [ISS Manifesto](#).

is a “breach of rights of custody attributed to a person, an institution or any other body, either jointly or alone, under the law of the State in which the child was habitually resident immediately before the removal or retention; and at the time of removal or retention those rights were actually exercised, either jointly or alone, or would have been so exercised but for the removal or retention” (art. 3).

Accredited Adoption Body: an organisation authorised by the Central Authority of a State to carry out adoptions and/or functions under the Hague Adoption Convention, including facilitating intercountry adoptions.

Beneficiaries: refers to any person who perceives services, support or intervention by an organisation or other entities. For this initiative, it mainly refers to (intercountry) adoptees, adoptive or birth family members.

Best interest of the Child: one of the four guiding principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child that is defined in article 3.1 “In all actions concerning children whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institution, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interest of the child shall be a primary consideration”.

Central Authority: a governmental authority designated to oversee intercountry adoption under the Hague Adoption Convention.

Childcare institutions: the UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children define childcare institutions as “any non-family-based group setting where children live and receive care from staff or caregivers who are not their relatives. This includes both short- and long-term residential care facilities such as orphanages, group homes, transit centres, shelters, and places of safety used in emergencies” (para. 29(b)(iv)).

Component: a broader category under which criteria are grouped in the assessment framework.

Conflict of interest: a situation in which an individual or organisation may have competing interests, potentially compromising impartiality, such as financial ties between adoption agencies and orphanages.

Country of Origin: the child’s country of birth, from which the adoption takes place.

Criteria: specific thematic areas within each component of the assessment framework that define the core elements to be evaluated. Each criterion addresses a particular aspect of organisational or individual performance or practice and is assessed through one or more indicators.

Direct involvement in intercountry and domestic adoption refers to active participation in key stages of the intercountry or domestic adoption process, such as determining a child's adoptability, matching the child with prospective adoptive parents, or undertaking other mediation tasks that directly influence the course of an intercountry or domestic adoption.

Due Diligence: a systematic process of assessing the risks and legitimacy of an organisation, individual or activity before engagement.

Falsification: the act of changing a document such that it contains false information. Falsification is a form of fraud.

Forgery: the creation of a false document. Forgery is a form of fraud.

Illegal adoption: “an adoption resulting from ‘abuses, such as abduction, the sale of, traffic in, and other illegal or illicit activities against children’ and usually prohibited by law” (HCCH Toolkit). Broadly, the term ‘illegal’ refers to actions that would be forbidden by law while ‘illicit’ could be either forbidden by law or unethical or immoral. Neither term refers solely to actions which are contrary to best practice.

Illicit practices in intercountry and domestic adoption: practices leading to “situations where a child has been (or is to be) adopted without respect for the rights of the child or for the safeguards of the 1993 Adoption Convention” (HCCH Toolkit).

Independent adoptions: cases where the Prospective Adoptive Parents are approved as eligible and suited to adopt by their Central Authority or Accredited Adoption Bodies. They then travel independently to a State of origin to find a child to adopt, without the assistance of a Central Authority or AAB in the State of origin. They do not satisfy the Convention’s requirements and should not be certified under Article 23 of the HCCH 1993 Convention as a Convention adoption.

Indicator: specific, measurable elements or questions used to evaluate performance or compliance under each criterion that guide the scoring.

Indirect involvement in intercountry and domestic adoption refers to support activities or roles that contribute to facilitating intercountry or domestic adoption without directly managing or making decisions in key processes. This could include administrative support, legal assistance, counselling, or working for or with stakeholders engaged in intercountry or domestic adoption.

Investigation: inquiries undertaken to examine suspected illegal or illicit practices in adoption procedures.

Technical screening: an in-depth evaluation of a candidate partner’s practices and history in areas directly relevant to intercountry and domestic adoption and the protection of children’s rights as to assess the capacity of the local candidate partner to provide timely and ethical services.

Neutrality: a guiding principle ensuring that assessments are carried out impartially, without bias or influence from interested parties.

Pattern of illicit practices: illicit practices should be understood as constituting a pattern where there have been repeated abuses of a similar type over a given period of time, usually involving the same actors.

Preliminary screening: the initial screening phase that provides a general screening of a candidate partner and an overview of its foundational structure, functioning and recognition of the partner and determines whether it meets the minimum thresholds to proceed with the technical screening.

Principle of necessity: one of the two basic principles of The Guideline for Alternative Care for Children that involves preventing situations and conditions that can lead to alternative care being foreseen or required, and the establishment of a robust ‘gatekeeping’ mechanism capable of ensuring that children are admitted to the alternative care system only if all possible means of keeping them with their parents or wider (extended) family have been examined.

Principle of suitability: one of the two basic principles of The Guideline for Alternative Care for Children that requires that if it is determined that a child does indeed require alternative care, it must be provided in an appropriate way. This means that all care settings must meet general minimum standards and that the care setting is matched with the individual child concerned

Private adoptions: where arrangements for adoption have been made directly between a birth parent in one Contracting State and Prospective Adoptive Parents in another State. Private adoptions arranged directly between birth parents and adoptive parents.

Prospective Adoptive Parents: person or persons wishing to adopt, regardless of whether they have been determined to be eligible and suitable for adoption.

Qualitative assessment: an evaluative process that uses narrative analysis and informed judgement rather than only quantitative metrics to assess a candidate partner’s conduct and integrity.

Receiving Country: the country to which the child is adopted and where they reside post-adoption.

Red Flags: specific issues or signs that indicate possible risks, irregularities, or ethical concerns.

Relinquishment: a legal parent’s decision to surrender parental rights and responsibilities in respect of a child, or to give consent to the adoption of a child, before an authority.

Sale of children: “any act or transaction whereby a child is transferred by any person or group of persons to another for remuneration or any other consideration” (OPSC, Art. 2(a)). This includes, among other things, “[i]mproperly inducing consent, as an intermediary, for the adoption of a child in violation of applicable international legal instruments on adoption” (OPSC, Art. 3(1)(a)(ii)).

Search for origins process: this term covers a series of steps undertaken by an adopted person to explore and reconnect their pre-adoptive past. This process may involve accessing both identifiable or non-identifiable information concerning their biological

parents, extended biological family, and broader background, including information about their background and socio-economic community until their entry into their adoptive family.

Scoring scale: the numerical or categorical framework from one to five that evaluates how well a candidate partner meets each indicator or criterion.

Subsidiarity principle: “a child should be raised by [their] birth family or extended family whenever possible. If that is not possible or practicable, other forms of permanent family care in the [State] of origin should be considered. Only after due consideration has been given to national solutions should intercountry adoption be considered, and then only if it is in the child’s best interests” (HCCH GGP No 1, para. 47).

Traffic in children²: “the payment of money or other compensation to facilitate the illegal movement of children for the purposes of illegal adoption or other forms of exploitation” (HCCH GGP No 1, para. 74).

Truth finding investigations: a term used in this framework to refer to an investigation that focuses on uncovering and verifying the circumstances surrounding intercountry and domestic adoptions that clarify how the adoption was conducted, while upholding the adoptee’s right to access to information regarding their origins and rights related to access to justice (remedies, legal actions, etc.).

Withdrawal of parental rights: involuntary termination of parental rights by a judiciary or administrative authority after due evaluation in light of child protection reasons and risks of rights violations for the child.

3. Foundational framework

3.1. Context of the initiative

In 2019, the Flemish Government mandated the [Flemish Centre for Adoption](#) (Vlaams Centrum voor Adoptie - VCA) to initiate an investigation into potential [irregularities in adoptions from Ethiopia](#) in the period of 1997-2015, conducted by an independent third party. This investigation revealed inconsistencies in several files, raising concerns about differences between original adoption documentation and information provided to adoptees and adoptive families. The publication of these findings prompted a broader awareness of adoptees, adoptive families, as well as birth families about their adoption stories.

In response, then-minister Crevits invited individuals with concerns about their adoption to reach out to VCA for information and support. By the end of 2024, a total of 203 individuals, of whom 153 were adoptees, 43 were adoptive parents, and 7 were birth parents (from

² While the terms traffic and trafficking in children are connected and often used interchangeably in certain contexts, they have distinct legal meanings. In particular, “trafficking in children” is defined under international criminal law (e.g. the UN Palermo Protocol) and international human rights law as the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring, or receipt of children for the purpose of exploitation.

Belgium and France), had contacted VCA with doubts or (confirmed) suspicions of irregularities in their adoption files. Some have already attempted to trace their biological origin(s) and family history and have faced obstacles, such as missing documentation and contradicting information. These developments highlighted the need for a structured framework to assist Flemish adoptees in their search for origins, especially in cases where there are indications of illicit or irregular practices, as well as the importance of reliable, independent, and competent local actors that can assist in these sensitive cases with respect for the rights of all stakeholders involved.

In this context, VCA is currently seeking to establish partnerships with local candidate partners, whether organisations or individual partners, in the relevant countries of origin that are equipped to carry out truth finding investigations by a qualified team or individuals, in sensitive contexts that adhere to ethical standards. These services would not only aim to assist adoptees in their searches for origins and in uncovering the circumstances in which the adoption took place, but would also respect the emotional, legal and ethical dimensions of each case for all individuals involved. Therefore, the candidate partner will play a meaningful role in search for origins processes, engaging with local stakeholders, local communities and public and private institutions, and building on the technical experience and knowledge in the fields of adoption histories and frameworks in the respective countries.

To ensure that the candidate partners are carrying out these services with the highest level of professional competence and necessary safeguards in place, VCA has commissioned the [International Social Service](#) (see below for more information) to develop and apply a screening tool that evaluates the qualifications, capacities and rights-based approaches of potential partners. The screening tool is intended to guarantee consistency, transparency and fairness, to ensure that all candidate partners will be evaluated equally and that those eventually selected by VCA to carry out local searches have the relevant expertise, experience and commitment to human rights. The objective for VCA is therefore not only to identify competent local partners, but rather to build a long-term collaboration based on tailored bilateral agreements.

In addition, it is currently being considered to develop a publicly funded service in Flanders aimed at covering the costs associated with truth-finding investigations in case of (confirmed) suspicions of irregularities in adoption files, recognising that financial barriers should not prevent adoptees from accessing their right to identity or their families from accessing information about the circumstances in which the adoption took place.

This evaluation framework and accompanying quality manual have therefore been developed to guide the assessment of prospective local partners. The tool is structured around objective, transparent, and field-tested criteria, and has been designed to ensure that candidate partners are assessed consistently, regardless of their size or location.

To assure independence and technical rigour, ISS developed the screening framework in close collaboration with VCA. Additionally, VCA requested ISS to include the feedback of adoptees, adoptee-led organisations and other experts with lived experience, as well as insight from 42 adoptees, birth parents and adoptive parents who have expressed doubts regarding their adoption story or information in their adoption files. This information, gathered through an online survey conducted by VCA, focused on the elements they consider most relevant for the organisation or individual responsible for investigating their

search for origins case-related information. The insights provided have been very valuable to reinforce some key priorities in the screening framework. This manual will explain the structure of the tool, the rationale behind the selected components, criteria, indicators, and the methodology implemented for the different phases of the assessment. It is therefore aimed as a guide for candidate partners that will be evaluated to provide transparency about the process and to convey the robustness of the selection procedure.

At the moment of drafting of this manual, the screening will cover one or more local actors in the following **21 countries: Belgium, Bolivia, Brazil, Burundi, Cambodia, Chile, China, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Guinea, Haiti, India, Poland, Rwanda, Russia, South Korea, Thailand, Togo, Uganda, Ukraine, and Vietnam.**

3.2. VCA selection and collaboration framework

As previously mentioned, the aim of this initiative is to establish a collaboration framework between the VCA and local partners that will carry out truth-finding investigations, often linked to search for origin processes in the relevant countries of origin (including Belgium) based on individual adoption cases. To evaluate which candidate partners are most fit to carry out this work, a structured, multi-phase evaluation and selection process has been developed by VCA and ISS. Additionally, VCA requested ISS to include the feedback of adoptees, including insights from Belgian adoptees, birth parents, and adoptive parents collected via an online survey, adoptee-led organisations and other experts with lived experience. The insights provided have been very valuable to reinforce some key priorities in the evaluation and selection process.

The evaluation process consists of four phases, as visible in the visual on the next page.

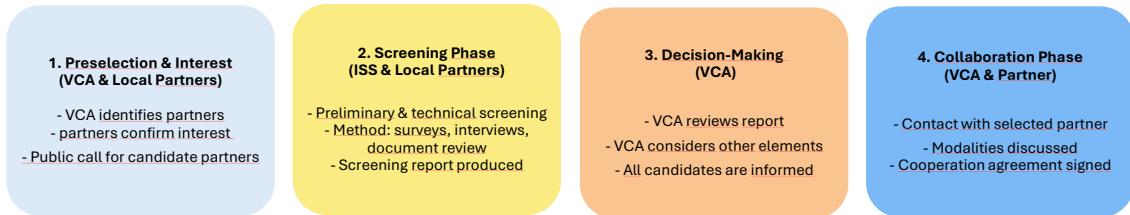
The first phase, the **pre-identification of candidate partners**, has been conducted by VCA to propose a selection of candidate partners that VCA considers having initial potential to assist in the truth-finding investigations in the selected countries. These partners are identified based on suggestions and ideas by Flemish adoptees or (adoptee-led) organisations within VCA's network. VCA initiated a first (online) exchange with each of these candidate partners. Those who were able to demonstrate field presence, relevant experience, and expressed their willingness to collaborate will be contacted by VCA to inform them about the comprehensive screening by ISS (cf. next phase).

The second phase, the **screening phase**, is made up by a **preliminary** and a **technical screening** that will be applied by the screening tool designed by ISS. It is important to note that this manual solely focuses on the screening phase, and more details will therefore follow in the next chapters. The purpose of this phase is to guarantee an objective and thorough evaluation that is equally applicable to partners in different contexts and will result in a final screening report that includes the outcome of the evaluation and other considerations that will be presented to VCA.

The **final decision-making phase** will be conducted solely by VCA. Drawing on the information presented in the final screening report, together with any additional elements deemed relevant, VCA will make an informed decision regarding the most adequate candidate to collaborate with. Naturally, the candidate partners that have not been selected

to collaborate with, within the framework of this specific initiative, will also be informed on the decision.

Collaboration phase between VCA and the selected local partner: VCA will contact the partners they wish to collaborate with, discuss modalities, and propose to sign a cooperation agreement that specifies the conditions, responsibilities and expectations for both parties.



3.3. Guiding principles

This screening process reflects the basis for the selection procedure in alignment with the principles of international human rights law. A rights-based approach is used based on principles delineated specifically in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children as well as the HCCH Conventions applicable to children. This way, the screening mechanism upholds the rights of all parties concerned and their concrete fulfilment by candidate partners will be specifically assessed. Particular attention is paid to the right to identity, assurance of equal treatment and non-discrimination, and the rights and dignity of birth families.

Due to the sensitivity of adoption stories and the inclusion of personal information, combined with the complexity of cross-border cases, **principles of confidentiality and data protection** govern this evaluation process. Therefore, the assessment procedure will aim to have personal data treated in accordance with applicable laws, such as the [EU General Data Protection Regulation](#) principles, a set of core guidelines that govern the lawful, fair, transparent, and secure processing of personal data, ensuring individuals' rights are respected and protected. Additionally, candidate partners will therefore also be asked what mechanisms are in place to safeguard personal data.

To encourage the **accountability and transparency** throughout the evaluation process, this manual aims to provide an overview with clearly defined steps, methodology and evaluation criteria that are shared with candidate partners that will be assessed. The evaluation will also be thoroughly documented, and communicated to VCA, both to assure an extra step of accountability and to assist VCA to be able to take an informed decision. It is also worth mentioning that persons and experts with lived experiences in adoption have been consulted on the structure and main features of the screening tool before the evaluations took place. This guaranteed that the screening tool captured those elements that are specifically relevant for persons with lived experience, but also created an additional external check-in. Moreover, to ensure objectivity and transparency, screenings conducted in countries where an ISS member organisation (or member *ad interim*) is being evaluated, will be subject to review by the External Supervision Committee. This committee is composed of three academics with lived experience and two representatives of the Dutch

Central Authority. The committee receives the relevant documentation, including the interview recording and the final report, and provides independent oversight by reviewing the evaluation process and outcomes. If any issues or questions arise, these are communicated to VCA and ISS, after which a dialogue is held to clarify the points of concern and determine whether any adjustments are needed. This review process applies to all candidates screened within those countries to ensure consistency and comparability across evaluations.

Beyond the elaboration of the tool itself, a core principle underpinning this process is the **commitment of the local partner to transparent and proactive communication when delivering future services**. This includes regular updates to VCA, and, where appropriate, to adoptees and beneficiaries themselves, to ensure clarity and trust throughout the process.

Additionally, the assessment has a specific instrument in place to **guarantee contextual and cultural sensitivities**, as well as qualitative nuances that are not always detected in quantitative screenings. The assessment therefore incorporates different social and cultural realities, as well as legal varying frameworks. Respectfully interacting with local stakeholders, which includes their participation, and ensuring that assessments are tailored to each situation and context, without unnecessarily enforcing external standards are paramount values that are respected in this framework. Furthermore, this principle is carefully complemented by the **encouragement towards local partners to adopt innovative approaches in handling extremely complex and sensitive cases**. This may involve engaging in collaborative efforts in contexts where formal partnerships with state institutions are difficult, while still operating within ethical and legal frameworks, as well as contextual and cultural sensitivities.

Lastly, the assessment focuses on a **strong ethical responsibility** that aims to avoid that the procedure results in any psychological, social, or legal harm for any of the actors involved. At every level, beneficiaries are treated fairly, honestly, and respectfully, and their autonomy is respected. The process therefore intends to create dependable, successful partnerships that can responsibly and sensitively support Flemish adoptees in their search for truth about their origins and identity, reflecting the ethical standards and professional integrity that both ISS and VCA uphold, while also taking into consideration the rights of birth or adoptive families.

3.4. ISS: the mandated screening entity

The [International Social Service \(ISS\)](#), is one of the longest-standing international non-governmental organisations – that celebrated its [100th year of existence](#) in 2024 – dedicated to assisting children and families confronted with complex socio-legal problems resulting from a migration or displacement across borders. Today, ISS is a network of 135 interconnected partner organisations present in 120 countries worldwide³ and a General Secretariat/HQ based in Geneva.

³ **ISS Global Network** is composed of partners that share core values and mission and see the benefits of being part of global network to deal with a myriad of different cross-border cases. ISS members detain different membership statuses, and are all independent structures with their own legal status, functioning, organisation, finances, governance etc.

Since 1924, ISS has played and continues to play a global role in advocating for individually tailored solutions grounded in the best interests of the child. Each year, ISS network assists globally over 75'000 families. While ISS interventions cover a wide range of areas such as child protection, children on the move, family conflicts, child abduction, and many more, supporting adoptees and their birth and adoptive families during a search for origins (SFO) or family reunification process is at the core of ISS' global action since its inception. Over the past decades, ISS has developed across its network a solid specialisation in SFO matters through individual casework, research & advocacy initiatives as well as specialised programs, capacity building and technical assistance projects.

Regarding identity rights of adoptees, starting point for ISS will always be providing individualised, holistic and adaptative approaches to each SFO process. In this context, ISS' support and actions also extend to situations where the legality of the adoption is in question or where the illegality is confirmed. In such cases, while support is still offered to the adoptee and their families, focus will be on the adoptee's requests and wishes and could entail equally referencing to specialised structures or professionals.

For this present VCA initiative, the ISS General Secretariat has gone through an application and screening process following the submission of a tender to the Flemish call for tenders that was published in January 2025, titled *Public procurement - Evaluatie van partnerorganisaties in het kader van onderzoek van adoptiedossiers*.

Following the approval of the ISS tender in April 2025, ISS has set up a dedicated team, composed of members of the International Reference Centre and the Network Development and Training Unit, both entities of the General Secretariat of ISS based in Geneva.

- The **International Reference Center (IRC)** is a specialised Resource, Knowledge and Expertise Hub funded by 22 Central Adoption Authorities, primarily from receiving States. The IRC has been a cornerstone of child protection efforts since 1993. The IRC is composed of multilingual child rights specialists who offer expert guidance in the areas of child protection, alternative care, adoption and search for origins. Over the past three decades, it has developed in-depth expertise and extensive experience, helping shape international standards and providing technical assistance to professionals worldwide in the protection of children at risk of, or who have been, separated from their families. In its more than 30 years of action, IRC has developed numerous resources in the field of SFO but also specifically on the topic of (past) illicit and illegal adoptions. Further, IRC has contributed to shaping coordinated responses and the narrative on this topic throughout its publications, its Newsletter, advocacy, technical assistance and capacity building initiatives. For instance, ISS has made significant contributions to the [HCCH Toolkit on preventing and addressing illicit adoption practices](#). Finally, conducting research and independent investigations based on systematic methods and proven research methodologies is part of IRC daily work.
- The **Network Development and Training (NDT) Unit of ISS** has as key function to develop the ISS network by identifying, screening and training local organisations and maintaining the ISS network through knowledge and information sharing, quality assurance, capacity-building, participation in internal working groups, etc. In their daily

work, members of this unit apply the well-established ISS Membership Procedures that are used by the ISS General Secretariat to conduct due diligence and evaluate a potential membership. It is also complemented by the ISS Casework Quality Standards that are used to evaluate and assess the performance of ISS members.

3.5. Disclaimer

ISS commitment to professional ethics

In alignment with the above-stated principles that underpin the present initiative, ISS stands for timely, professional and ethical service delivery grounded in a rights-based approach. ISS core values are child-centeredness, integrity, respect and inclusion, confidentiality, accountability, collaboration and child safeguarding, which ISS commits itself to adopting also in this screening project. To ensure these values are effectively translated into practice, the following safeguards were adopted:

- **Pre-identification by VCA:** candidate partners are identified only by VCA. ISS will carry out checks based on this pre-identification.
- **Specific and clearly defined screening tool:** ISS developed a tailored screening tool based on its long-standing experience of working as a global network of interconnected partners. This ISS recruitment and due diligence methodology has proven efficient, screening the credibility, stability, and professionalism of partners, and was adapted and complemented with specificities of the mandate and services required of local partners in a possible future collaboration with VCA. The tool is based on objective criteria linked with a clearly defined and transparent scoring system.
- **Incorporation of perspectives of people with lived experience:** the screening tool includes feedback received from adoptees through remote consultation and has been revised by VCA as well as experts, including people with lived experience.
- **Systematic application without any distinction:** The screening process and methodology are clearly outlined in this quality manual and will be systematically applied to all candidate partners that were pre-identified by VCA and expressed a willingness to cooperate with VCA.
- **External review mechanism:** To ensure objectivity and transparency, screenings conducted in countries where an ISS member organisation (or member *ad interim*) is being evaluated, will be subject to review by the External Supervision Committee. This committee is composed of three academics with lived experience and two representatives of the Dutch Central Authority. The committee receives the relevant documentation, including the interview recording and the final report, and provides independent oversight by reviewing the evaluation process and outcomes. If any issues or questions arise, these are communicated to VCA and ISS, after which a dialogue is held to clarify the points of concern and determine whether any adjustments are needed. This review process applies to all candidates screened in those countries to ensure consistency and comparability across evaluations.
- **Collaborative approach and validation by VCA:** All the documents and methodologies developed for the screening framework have been subject to validation and final approval by VCA prior to implementation.

Limitations of remote screenings: need for a continued assessment process of collaborations

The screenings will be conducted remotely and are based solely on publicly available information, documentation provided by the candidate partners themselves, and interviews or communications conducted at a distance. No in-person visits, site assessments, or direct observations will be carried out by ISS.

While every effort will be made to verify the information and ensure the accuracy of the findings, this review does not constitute a formal audit, investigation, or endorsement. The limitations inherent in remote assessments may affect the completeness and reliability of the information collected.

Therefore, the results of the screenings conducted by ISS should not be considered definitive or exhaustive. Any decision to engage with or support the local partner included in this project should be complemented by further due diligence as appropriate.

Indeed, evaluating the functioning, working methods and safety of a partner is a complex endeavour with inherent limitations, especially when done remotely. For instance, while the screening and due diligence processes of candidate partners is key in deciding whether to initiate collaboration, it should only form one part of a broader set of measures such as trial collaboration periods, training, among others.

The screened candidate partner will be required to emit a **declaration of commitment (see Annex 2)** towards providing accurate and reliable information. In this declaration, the local partner will also commit to the continuous nature of the assessment in the cooperation with VCA.

4. Assessment framework and scoring logic of the screening tool

4.1. Preliminary and technical screening and rationale of components and criteria

As mentioned previously, the screening tool is composed of **two sequential phases**: a preliminary and a technical screening. This two-tiered approach is chosen with the aim to have layered verification and reflection moments, and to allow a wide range of aspects to be covered.

The assessment framework of the screening tool is built on a multi-layered approach to ensure a robust, rights-based and context-sensitive assessment. Its structure combines different phases, internal logic, and forms of assessment:

Two sequential phases:

- **Preliminary Screening** – to determine basic eligibility or suitability.
- **Technical screening** – a more in-depth, substantive analysis.

Internal structuring logic: The tool is organised into **components**, each broken down into **criteria**, which are in turn detailed through specific **indicators**.

The tool uses both quantitative and qualitative evaluation methods:

- **Quantitative** – generates scores to allow for comparative or baseline analysis.
- **Qualitative** – captures contextual insights, reasoning, and nuance that inform interpretation of the scores.

Preliminary screening

The preliminary screening will be carried out by the ISS Network Development and Training (NDT) Unit and focuses on assessing the candidate partner's legal status, internal structure, operational capabilities, and credibility. It serves as a threshold assessment to confirm that the candidate partner has a strong foundation and the minimum requirements to function with professionalism and accountability.

The screening process will begin upon receipt of all required documents within a specified timeframe. We kindly ask candidate partners to respect this deadline.

Candidate partners that met these minimum requirements in the preliminary screening then proceed to the technical screening, which will delve into the technical and thematic qualifications, specialisations, approaches and neutrality of the candidate partner.

The preliminary screening consists of two components, each of which are divided into several interrelated criteria:

1. **Structure and Integrity:** This component assesses the candidate's internal governance, ethical conduct, and role clarity. It examines transparent decision-making, accountability, and the ability to maintain trust with stakeholders, reflecting integrity and responsible management. This component consists of the following criteria:
 - 1.1. **Legal status:** Assesses the candidate's legal status and compliance, ensuring formal recognition and authorisation to operate.
 - 1.2. **Mandate and Values:** Assesses clarity of mission and its alignment with activities, guided by a rights-based, inclusive approach.
 - 1.3. **Organisational Structure and Culture:** Assesses the clarity of operational roles, structure, and adherence to ethical standards ensuring accountability and a respectful environment.
 - 1.4. **Reputation:** Assesses the candidate's reputation, stakeholder trust, and ability to build credible, collaborative relationships and public engagement.
2. **Operational and Financial Capacity:** This component assesses how well the candidate manages operations and finances to fulfil their mission. It covers clear

processes, legal and ethical compliance, transparent decision-making, budget control, financial reporting, and income diversification, highlighting operational efficiency and financial resilience. It is comprised of the following criteria:

- 2.1. **Planning:** Assesses goal-setting and planning processes, focusing on strategic alignment, adaptability, and efficient use of resources.
- 2.2. **Human Resources and Personnel:** Assesses clarity in defining responsibilities, grievance handling, and compliance to demonstrate accountability and capability.
- 2.3. **Financial Resources and Sustainability:** Assesses transparent financial management, funding and income diversification (where applicable), and clear disclosure of any service fees.

Note: for individual candidate partners these criteria will be adjusted to allow for appropriate and meaningful measurement.

Technical screening

The technical screening will be carried out by the ISS International Reference Centre for the rights of children deprived of their family (IRC). It primordially focuses on evaluating the capacities of the candidate partners to accompany Flemish adoptees in their truth finding investigations in local settings in a way that respects human-rights and that is ethically and contextually sensitive. While the preliminary screening serves as a threshold assessment to confirm that the candidate partner has a strong foundation and the minimum requirements to function with professionalism and accountability, the technical screening analyses whether the candidate partner has the sufficient thematic expertise and experience, adequate and ethical methodologies, local network, independence and psychosocial sensitivity needed to carry out local search for origin and truth finding investigations requests.

The technical screening consists of **four components**, each of which are divided into several interrelated criteria:

3. **Knowledge on children's rights and child protection, including adoption in the past and present:** This third component assesses the candidate partner's level of knowledge and critical understanding of key concepts in children's rights, child protection systems, and adoption practices in both historical and current practices. These concepts cover for example: international instruments; rights-based perspectives; evolution of child protection and adoption norms; awareness of national and international challenges: societal views, post-adoption work and search for origins and truth finding investigations. It is comprised of the following criteria:
 - a. **Knowledge and understanding of children's-rights-standards and the child protection system in place** assesses the candidate partner's understanding and vision regarding children's rights and the national child protection system, including family support, prevention of family separation and alternative care.
 - b. **Knowledge and understanding of the current adoption system (domestic and intercountry adoption (hereinafter ICA))** evaluates the candidate partner's knowledge, understanding, and vision regarding both domestic and intercountry adoption in current practice, including legal and procedural concepts such as the

principle of subsidiarity, adoptability, matching, consent, and post-adoption support, as well as the roles and responsibilities of relevant authorities and actors.

- c. **Knowledge and understanding of past ICA and domestic adoption practices** assesses the candidate partner's knowledge and critical understanding of the historical evolution of ICA and domestic practices in the country, entailing awareness of the legal, institutional, and cultural changes that have shaped adoption policies and practices over time, as well as the candidate partner's understanding of how these shifts have influenced the treatment of children, birth families, and adoptive families.
- d. **Knowledge and understanding of identity rights and relevant implications** analyses the candidate partner's knowledge and understanding of identity rights as a core component of human rights, as well as the broader implications for individuals affected by adoption and alternative care.
- e. **Knowledge and understanding of search for origins processes and truth finding investigations in an ICA and domestic adoption context** is a crucial criterion that assesses the candidate partner's knowledge of, and sensitivity to, the processes, challenges, and ethical considerations involved in searches for origins and truth finding investigations by intercountry and domestic adoptees. It includes an understanding of the legal, administrative, and psychosocial dimensions of search for origin processes and truth finding investigations, as well as the emotional complexities faced by adoptees, birth families, and adoptive families.
- f. **Knowledge in other relevant fields related to other vulnerable subjects of rights (e.g. refugees, victims of trafficking, women's rights, access to justice, criminal justice, statelessness, etc.)** analyses the candidate partner's knowledge and understanding of other fields that intersect with child protection and adoption, particularly those involving vulnerable populations and rights-based frameworks, as to evaluate whether the candidate partner recognises the interconnected nature of vulnerabilities and rights violations.

4. **Technical capacity and practical experience:** While the previous component aimed at grasping existing or developing knowledge, this component on technical and practical experience focuses on the candidate partner's experience and concrete application of their knowledge in practice. This component evaluates the concrete practical experience in the fields of child protection, adoption, post-adoption services and search for origins and truth finding investigations. It assesses the candidate partner's ability to operationalise its knowledge into concrete, context-sensitive, and ethically sound practices and methodologies that demonstrate innovativeness. The component also considers the candidate partner's ability to adapt its experience to different contexts. It is comprised of the following criteria:

- a. **Experience in children's rights and child protection system in the country (including alternative care, prevention of violence against children, child trafficking, children in conflict with the law)** identifies the extent and relevance of the candidate partner's involvement with broader child protection systems. A strong foundation in this field provides experience and skills in fields closely related to search for origin procedures and truth finding investigations, which can be applied to search for origins processes.
- b. **Experience in the current adoption system (domestic adoption and ICA)** evaluates the candidate partner's hands-on involvement and technical experience

in addressing current domestic and intercountry adoption. Familiarity with the existing system and its implementation demonstrates that the candidate partner is cognisant of the administrative and relational competence required in search for origin and truth finding investigation processes.

- c. **Experience in the past domestic adoption and ICA system** identifies whether the candidate partner possesses experience in past domestic adoption and ICA systems, including practical capacities to navigate previous legal structures and different stages of the adoption procedures of the past. The experience of the candidate partner in this past system would help identifying potential malpractices, irregularities and enhance its potential to help adoptees in their search for origin and truth finding investigation process.
- d. **Experience in identity rights and search for origins and truth finding investigations and adaptation of skills** evaluates if the candidate partner has direct or indirect experience in the various steps of search for origin and truth finding investigation procedures and identity reconstruction, including legal, administrative, and psychosocial facets. A candidate partner with prior experience in this field is more likely to be familiar with the current landscape and details of the system thereby facilitating collaboration.
- e. **Experience working with other vulnerable subjects of rights (refugees, victims of trafficking, women's rights, access to justice, criminal justice, stateless persons):** This criterion considers the candidate partner's broader practical experience and technical capacities in working with vulnerable subjects of rights. Such experience allows for an understanding of trauma, rights-based and intersectional approaches and cross-border experience. Robust previous experience here demonstrates commitment to intersectional human rights approaches, and the ability to handle complex cases with the possibility to transfer skills and adapt methodologies to carry out search for origin and truth finding investigations requests.
- f. **Investigative methods, commitment to rights-based approaches, and persistence in problem-solving in search for origin and truth finding investigations processes or relevant fields** analyses whether the candidate partner uses diverse, legal, rights-based and innovative methods with persistence and ethical grounding. It specifies the degree of persistence and resourcefulness applied in overcoming bureaucratic and structural barriers. A rights-based approach ensures that the dignity, privacy, and autonomy of all stakeholders are protected.
- g. **Reporting, operational ethical safeguards and data protection** evaluates if and how the candidate partner reports its activities and outcomes, to ensure traceability, accountability, and quality. The criterion also determines if the candidate partner has accurate and ethically responsible approaches and documentation practices and possesses safe, respectful, and legally compliant procedures and systems for recording and storing sensitive personal data that allow for internal and external accountability.
- h. **Case fees and cost transparency** determines if the candidate partner provides cost information in a transparent and direct manner, practices fair prices, and provides assistance or alternatives if cost may be an impediment.

5. **Collaboration:** This fifth component examines the candidate partner's operational environment and its ability to engage collaboratively, safely, and ethically with key actors involved in search for origin work and truth finding investigations. It considers both the breadth of relationships and the quality and accountability of these engagements. It is comprised of the following criteria:
 - a. **Collaboration with public authorities** analyses the capacity to engage with child protection authorities, civil registries, judicial actors, archives, etc. relevant to search for origin, truth finding investigations or post-adoption support.
 - b. **Collaboration with civil society organisations in child rights and child protection fields** measures the extent and quality of cooperation with civil society actors and organisations.
 - c. **Collaboration with childcare institutions** evaluates the ability to engage with public and private childcare institutions (in the past and present), including child protection and residential care facilities, adoption agencies, foster care services, and faith-based organisations involved in alternative care and adoption.
 - d. **Collaboration and relationships with groups of people with lived experience, including adoptee-led groups** assesses the candidate partner's level of engagement, trust, and collaboration with groups of people with lived experience, including adoptee-led associations, networks or advocacy groups.
6. **Independence from domestic adoption and ICA:** This sixth component evaluates the candidate partner's past and present direct or indirect involvement in facilitating intercountry or domestic adoptions. Ensuring independence is paramount to avoid conflicts of interest, maintain ethical standards and gain the trust of adoptees in the families involved, especially in sensitive contexts and in search for origin and truth finding investigations processes. The evaluation takes into account financial, organisational, and individual ties to intercountry and domestic adoption and acknowledges the importance of both the perception and actuality of independence. It is comprised of the following criteria:
 - a. **Organisational and individual independence from past domestic adoption and ICA processes:** analyses the candidate partner's possible past direct and indirect involvement in domestic adoption or ICA processes.
 - b. **Organisational and individual independence from current domestic adoption and ICA processes:** analyses the candidate partner's possible current direct and indirect involvement in domestic adoption or ICA processes.
 - c. **Absence of ongoing or historical financial ties to domestic adoption and ICA:** assesses whether there are or have been financial ties linked to domestic or intercountry adoption, whether direct or indirect, creating an incentive to support or promote the practice.

4.2. Methodology of the screening tool

The screening tool employs a dual methodology, including quantitative and qualitative evaluation methods to ensure a structured and neutral screening that still allows for nuances and in-depth interpretations to be captured.

Quantitative Evaluation Method

As aforementioned, the screening tool exists out of 6 components (two for the preliminary and four for the technical screening) that are all comprised of different criteria. To analyse these criteria, each criterion is measured by different indicators, that serve as concrete points of reference as will be explained in further detail in the next section. To measure these indicators, the methodology draws on different methods of measurement such as the revision of documents, surveys, interviews, surveys with key partners of the candidate partner, interactive scenario-based exercises, etc. Each criterion will therefore be measured by different methods that promote cross-checking and reduce bias.

Qualitative Evaluation method

The technical screening also includes a qualitative evaluation method that aims to complement the structured scoring process, allowing a much deeper contextual and nuanced understanding of the candidate partner in question than quantifiable indicators on their own usually manage to offer. This qualitative approach will be used to provide a general landscape of the situation of children's rights or related fields in the respective countries. This will help contextualise the quantitative data within each country's setting and will also address qualitative questions about the candidate partner to capture elements that are arduous to assess through surveys. Therefore, where the scoring framework facilitates transparency and comparability, employing a qualitative evaluation method allows for including indicators such as the responsiveness of the candidate partner during the assessment, its willingness to confront itself critically, the integrity of the candidate partner's avowed value system with respect to its actual operational behaviour, and the candidate partner's cooperative spirit throughout the process, including its degree of transparency, receptiveness to feedback, and constructive engagement.

Cross-references and the intersection of the quantitative and qualitative assessment

The framework acknowledges that some elements may interact in complementary ways, but also occasionally in conflicting ways. These dynamics are viewed as crucial indicators for a more complex and multifaceted analysis rather than as anomalies. To produce a more balanced image of risk and strength, these evaluations are viewed in relation to one another rather than mechanically offsetting one another.

The qualitative evaluation methods examine these seeming contradictions in more detail to give the right weight to each of these indicators. Therefore, the framework's coherence stems from its ability to maintain balance across various dimensions rather than from its uniformity. It is constructed as an interplay between independence, ethical integrity, and contextual responsiveness rather than as a matter of box-ticking. In order to make sure that no factor can override worries about accountability, justice, or the dignity of those impacted by adoption practices, the final evaluation incorporates both the structured scoring data and the interpretive insights of the qualitative analysis.

4.3. Explanation of scoring logic and scoring scale

The preliminary screening uses a simplified scoring system with green, orange, or red indicating a basic suitability. A green score confirms that minimum standards are fully met, orange indicates partial compliance or areas requiring clarification, and red signals that essential criteria are not fulfilled. This screening phase fulfils a gatekeeping function.

The technical screening in return has a more detailed, in-depth assessment. In this phase, each indicator can score from 1 to 5, and every score has a precise scoring definition that guides it. A score of 1 would translate to a complete lack of capacities, understanding or approaches, or it could even imply infringements of legal compliance or rights, whereas a score of 5 would demonstrate that the candidate partner has the perfect capacity, that activities are carried out in a sustained way and in line with best practices. These definitions are meticulously adapted to each indicator to guarantee uniformity in the assessment.

The scores of the individual indicators are combined to complete the criterion, and each criterion then adds to the total score for the component it is categorised under. This makes it possible to see how well a candidate partner is performing both within as well as across the main dimensions of the screening framework. Nevertheless, it is important to note here that the quantitative assessment through its scoring system provides for a well-structured and equal assessment, it is not a stand-alone factor in the final decision-making process.

It is crucial to emphasise therefore that it is not the case that the candidate partner with the highest total score in the quantitative evaluation automatically will be selected for collaboration. VCA will eventually take this decision and will consider the outcome of the quantitative assessment, their prior experience with the entity, public funding limitations and the qualitative assessment that allows for a deeper understanding of the values, practices and contextual specificities that might not be adequately conveyed by numerical scores alone. The outcome of the ISS screening is therefore not treated as absolute judgments, but as part of a broader evaluative process.

4.4. Weighting of components

Following the identification of components, criteria, and corresponding indicators, a participatory process was carried out to ensure that the assessment framework reflects priorities and values of people with lived experience. With this aim, the tool was shared with both VCA and a group of adoptees and thematic experts, who were requested to review the framework and to indicate which indicators they considered most essential for a candidate partner to be able to carry out a successful, ethical, and respectful search for origin process and truth finding investigation. Additionally, VCA conducted an online survey among adoptees, birth parents, and adoptive parents who had reported doubts about their adoption story or information in their files. The survey invited respondents to rate the importance of a range of criteria for potential research partners, and a total of 42 individuals responded. These consultations therefore reinforced the technical rigour of the tool but also included lived experience as well as an external review mechanism.

Based on the feedback received from VCA, adoptees and experts, certain indicators of the tool were assigned additional weight in the scoring methodology, ensuring that the framework aligns with their priorities. This means that while all indicators of the screening are assessed and scored, the elements identified as most significant have a proportionally bigger influence on the final score of the technical screening.

Moreover, as for the technical screening, feedback received from adoptees and other experts were crucial in deciding the final weight of the overall components. Based on this, the following weighting was applied (totalling 100%): the component on **technical capacity**

and practical experience and independence from domestic adoption and ICA were both given 30% weight, whereas the components on **knowledge on children's rights and child protection** and collaborations were given 20%.

This approach allows the assessment to remain comprehensive, while ensuring that it reflects core values of VCA and experts with lived experience and reinforces the commitment to a balanced, and contextually informed screening process.

5. Applying the tool in practice: the screening process

5.1. Methodology of the screening process

First contacts & instructions from VCA

VCA is responsible for the pre-identification phase. Candidate partners are identified based on the suggestions and ideas by Flemish adoptees or (adoptee-led) organisations within VCA's network. VCA initiated a first (online) exchange with each of these candidate partners. Those who were able to demonstrate field presence, relevant experience, and expressed their willingness to collaborate will be contacted by VCA to inform them about the comprehensive screening by ISS (cf. next phase).

During this exchange, VCA will share the present quality manual and explain the screening process, including its purpose, steps, and expectations, as well as request the candidate partner to submit the required documentation (see Document 1, Annex 1).

Special emphasis will be placed on the importance of open collaboration and timely communication with the ISS team.

Screenings by ISS

As described above, the screening tool uses a combination of methods to gather essential information from the candidate partner. These include questionnaires, interviews, and consultations with key stakeholders that engage with the candidate partner.

While VCA establishes a first exchange with the local partner, ISS starts a contextual analysis as part of the qualitative evaluation methods used to nuance the screening.

The screening phase begins once the candidate partner submits the requested documentation within a specific deadline and fills-in the **Preliminary Survey**. Following the review of documentation and the survey, ISS will begin completing the relevant sections of the screening tool and drafting the **preliminary section of the final screening report**.

The technical screening also begins upon receipt of the documentation. This includes a **review of technical materials**, and the identification of key stakeholders.

ISS will then request the candidate partner to complete a **second, more detailed technical survey**, and will propose an **interview** (one to two online sessions), involving relevant staff and management. Before the interview takes place, hypothetical cases are shared with the candidate partner so that they can prepare an answer. At the same time, ISS will reach out

to key stakeholders and candidate partners indicated by the candidate partner, using a separate survey.

Note: Additional exchanges may take place throughout the process, depending on the candidate partner's preferred mode of communication (email, phone, or online meetings). ISS may also request further documents as needed to complete the assessment.

Final reporting process

ISS will present its findings to VCA in a written summary report, accompanied by the completed screening tool, including the quantitative and qualitative assessment and all the documentation gathered.

5.2. Tentative timeline

The total duration of each screening will take approximately 1.5 calendar months (25 working days), which therefore requires fluid and effective communication between ISS and the candidate partner. The figure on the next page will provide a visual representation of the screening structure.

Preparation phase by VCA

- In the weeks leading up to the evaluation, VCA will share the handbook and ask candidate partners to gather the required documents.
- ISS will then contact the candidate partner to provide the deadline for submitting the documentation and completing the preliminary questionnaire.

Preliminary Screening by ISS NDT Unit

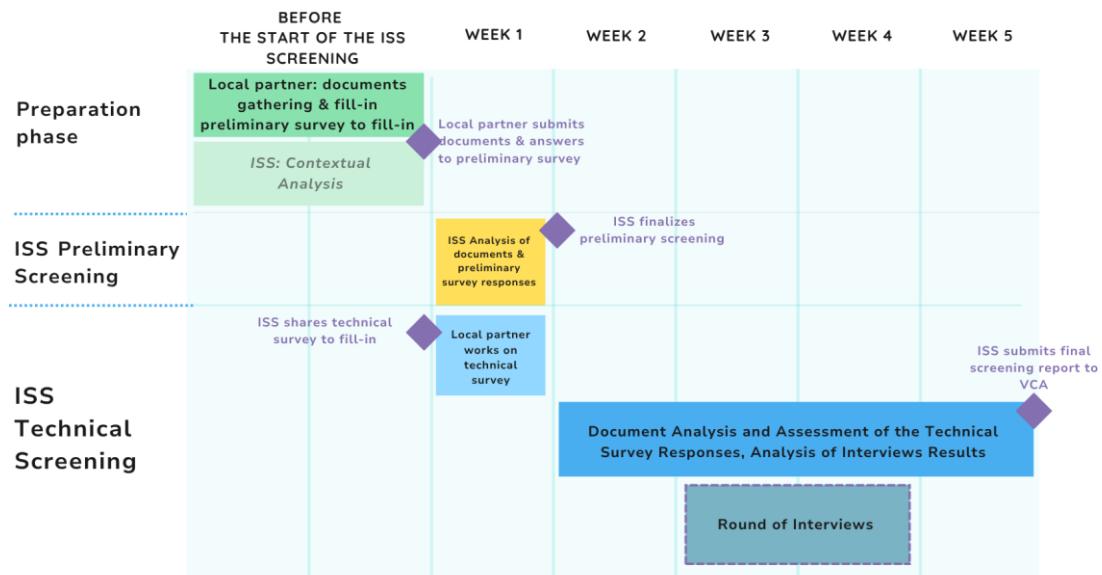
- **Week 1:**
 - ISS NDT Unit begins analysing the documentation received as well as the completed preliminary survey.
 - ISS NDT Unit completes the preliminary screening by filling in the Screening tool and providing recommendations to the IRC.

Technical Screening by ISS/IRC

- **Week 1:**
 - ISS IRC begins reviewing relevant documents, conducting a contextual analysis, and identifying key stakeholders.
 - ISS IRC sends a second email to the candidate partner, sharing the technical survey and proposing an interview schedule.
- **Week 2, 3 and 4:**
 - ISS IRC contacts key stakeholders that interact with the candidate partner with a separate survey.
 - The candidate partner submits the completed technical survey, and the ISS IRC begins its analysis.

- First interview is conducted. Before the interview, hypothetical cases are shared so that the candidate partner can prepare an answer.
- Possible second interview is conducted.

- **Week 5 and 6:**
 - Additional exchanges as needed, using the candidate partner's preferred communication method (email, phone, or meeting).
 - Final assessment is completed.



Annexes

Annex 1: Documents to request from candidate partners if available

Mandatory for any candidate local partner:

- Charter/Statutes & by-laws
- Registration certificate or a valid accreditation/license(s)

Specifically for organisations (if available):

- Organigram or explanation of the organisation's structure
- A list of the Governing Board members of the organisation with their responsibilities' description
- List of involved staff and management level and their CVs
- Confirmation on criminal record checks of staff involved (if legally required)
- Strategy and Implementation Plan

- Relevant policies or procedures, such as: management policy (staff regulations), grievance and conflict resolution procedures, code of conduct/ethics, consent form(s), confidentiality policy, and/or data protection policy, sexual harassment policy, anti-discrimination policy, complaint procedures/template, among others
- Relevant activity reports (up to 5)
- Financial reports (up to 5, incl. financial reports for projects) - if not available, Income Statement, Balance Sheet, and Cash Flow Statements
- Annual financial projections/budget for the previous and current year
- Specific reports about projects or programmes
- References or recommendation letters from non-governmental and governmental partners, academia, as well as donors/funders
- A list of all partnerships (NGOs, IOs, Governmental bodies, donors, etc.) and corresponding agreements/MoUs
- Pricelist of services
- Communication materials, such as newsletters, or presentations
- Evidence of advocacy participation (e.g., campaign materials, policy submissions, joint statements, correspondence)
- Donor feedback surveys or testimonials
- Beneficiary satisfaction surveys, testimonies (maybe anonymous), community feedback or assessments, service feedback forms, etc.
- Proofs of media endorsement (links, screenshots, photos, etc.)

Specifically for individuals (if available)

- CV
- Clear criminal record (if legally required in the country of origin)
- Specific reports about projects or programmes
- References or recommendation letters from non-governmental and governmental partners, academia, as well as donors/funders
- A list of all partnerships or collaborations (NGOs, IOs, Governmental bodies, donors, etc.) and corresponding agreements/MoUs
- Pricelist of services
- Evidence of advocacy participation (e.g., campaign materials, policy submissions, joint statements, correspondence)
- Proofs of media endorsement (links, screenshots, photos, etc.)
- Beneficiary satisfaction surveys, testimonies (maybe anonymous), community feedback or assessments, service feedback forms, etc.

Annex 2: Declaration of commitment

As a candidate partner in the framework of the VCA project on search for origin services and truth-finding investigations relating to intercountry and domestic adoptions from Flanders, I, the undersigned, hereby declare the following commitments in the framework of collaboration with VCA:

- 1. Commitment to accuracy and honesty:** I commit to providing complete and accurate information in all facets of the screening process, such as the written

questionnaires, interviews, and documentation. I understand that such information is vital to an equal and reliable assessment of my/our suitability to act as a local partner in search for origin and truth-finding services for Flemish adoptees.

2. **Responsibility for transparency:** I recognise that withholding information or providing misleading, untrue or misstating information and answers can taint the integrity of the assessment process and the trust between parties. I therefore undertake to disclose all relevant information to the best of my knowledge and to report errors and inaccuracies the moment I become aware of these.
3. **Ongoing and timely cooperation:** I understand that the assessment is part of an extensive, continuous process and commit to be receptive and responsive at any subsequent phase of collaboration, including potential re-assessments or follow-up inquiries.
4. **Respect for Principles and Ethical Standards:** In addition to the above, I express my respect for the guiding principles that underly this initiative, including the human-rights approach based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children, and relevant HCCH Conventions. I will act in accordance with the values of confidentiality, cultural sensitivity, and non-discrimination, and ensure that the dignity and rights of all parties are preserved.

Upon signing this declaration, I am confirming my honest participation in the screening process and my willingness to be evaluated transparently and fairly as a potential local partner for VCA.

Date:

Full name:

Function/title:

Signature: