

Going abroad to find a baby?

C OUPLES who find themselves unable to have children of their own have a second shock in store when they make inquiries about adoption. There is, quite literally, a baby famine in the developed world when it comes to adoption, and Ireland is no different.

Adoption is fading out. Most Irish adoption societies have closed their waiting lists and are concentrating their energies on adult adoptees seeking information on their backgrounds.

With the latest Eurostat figures indicating that one third of couples in Europe are childless, more and more prospective adopters have been forced to look to poorer countries overseas to help them start a family.

Now a new book, *Intercountry Adoptions — Laws and Perspectives of the "Sending" countries*, tackles this area.

In early 1990, when it was reported that there were many Romanian children living there in appalling conditions and available for adoption, many Irish couples went to Romania to offer themselves as parents.

The result is that we now have more adopted Romanian children in Ireland per capita than any other country in the world.

W HILE there were thousands of children living in Romanian orphanages, very few were actually 'orphans' and even fewer actually available for adoption.

A change in the Romanian adoption laws in late 1990 led to a black market in children. Between 1 August 1990 and 16 July 1991 children changed hands for up to \$10,000 each, with virtually no restriction.

The situation in Romania since then has improved. Now only children chosen by the Romanian Adoption Committee are available, and local couples get first preference. Foreign adoption has slowed to a trickle.

One of the unfortunate aspects of intercountry adoption is that it tends to get either rave reviews or else a very bad press.

Jaffe's book tries to recognise both the good and bad aspects, and everything in between.

It acts as a step-by-step guide to the various "sending" countries — mostly in South America and Eastern Europe.

The various chapters are written by committed, locally-based professionals and the book is aimed at adoption professionals abroad, as well as prospective adopters.

This is the first book of its kind to look at the subject from the perspective of

Kieran McGrath comes across a new book about foreign adoptions

the sending countries, and it points especially to the adversity faced by children in these places.

In Brazil each year, 250,000 infants die. One child in every four suffers irreversible brain damage due to poor malnutrition. In the Greater Sao Paulo area, 200,000 children do not live with their mothers.

To caring childless couples in the developed world, such suffering and death seems an obscenity.

But the goodwill of adopters can be easily exploited. For example, police sources in Brazil estimate that for every 1,500 children who leave the country legally for adoption, 3,000 are taken out illegally.

Large amounts of money change hands. In Sri Lanka, an impoverished mother may receive \$50 for placing her child. That same child can then be sold for up to \$5,000 on the black market.



● Foreign adoption can be the only option for childless couples.

Worse horror stories come from places like Ecuador, where children have been kidnapped and sold to unwitting adopters. As the writers point out, "adoption can degenerate into a very profitable business for dishonest attorneys."

Intercountry adoption will never solve the vast problems of poverty and corruption that cause children such suffering in developing countries; only huge social and economic change can help the multitudes.

But for a small number of children, properly conducted adoption can offer real hope of a better life.

● Kieran McGrath is editor of *Irish Social Worker*

● *Intercountry Adoption — Laws and Perspectives of the "Sending" countries* is edited by Eliezer D. Jaffe and available from Martinus Nijhoff Publishers.