

THE FLEMISH 'AFSTAMMINGSCENTRUM' IN BELGIUM

Since april 2021, the Afstammingscentrum (literally the Centre of filiation) has been open to the general public and its more specific target groups. This centre was established by the Flemish government as a neutral and independent centre for questions on filiation, kinship, genetic background, roots of adoptees and so forth.

The main target groups are adoptees (domestic and transnational), donorchildren and the (descendants of) metis persons from the Belgian colonisation. The centre does however take up questions from first parents; donors and adoptive families as well.

The centre has recently started but will become a relevant advocacy partner in the debate on the right to know one's roots, have access to (adoption) files or other documents relating to kinship, as well as the one on anonymity of donors. Especially regarding the rights of adoptees and their use of this centre, it is important to inform all central authorities and other actors on the field of adoption of this centre and its legal mission.

The centre was established by Flemish decree (April 26th 2019) and went public on April 1st 2021, under the coordination of Ankie Vandekerckhove, former Commissioner for Children's Rights in Flanders. The appointed team, of which two are adoptees themselves, will offer a combination of real life experience and professional expertise.

THE DECREE MENTIONS 3 MAJOR TASKS FOR THE AFSTAMMINGSCENTRUM:

to provide information and raise awareness about the right to know one's origins,

to offer technical and psychosocial support to people who are looking for genetic relatives, roots, first family... and to mediate in these issues where necessary

to develop into an expertise centre concerning all matters of filiation.

The centre will not do this all on its own but has been developing working relations with relevant partners such as the Flemish Central Authority for Adoption, the accredited adoption services in Flanders, centres for reproductive health care, organisations of target groups and experts of several disciplines. It is important to note that the centre will not be in a competitive relation with the adoption services but will collaborate with them in a complementary way, as these services themselves still have a task in providing aftercare to adoptees, of which a request regarding their files or roots can be a part. In addition to collaborations in Flanders, the centre will also develop commitments and cooperation agreements on an international level. For example with other central authorities and any other international institution working in the broad field of searches on filiation information.

