



**AFSTAMMINGS**  
CENTRUM

# The fundamental right to know

**ART and children's rights**

**Oñati, May 29th 2025**

# THE “AFSTAMMINGSCENTRUM”

- Flemish law of April 26th 2019
- Input of target groups since the start, now steering committee
- Open for public on April 1st 2021 (covid time)
- Legal mandate: **INFORM – SEARCH AND SUPPORT – EXPERTISE**
- Mission statement: the Afstammingscentrum upholds the fundamental **right** to know one’s origin and guarantees professional and tailored support to anyone with questions in this matter

# MULTIDISCIPLINARY TEAM

- 1 Coordinator 80%
- 8 case workers at 100% (temporarily)
- 2 case workers at 80%
- 1 case worker 50%
- Psychology, law, geneology, archeology, social work, cultural athropology
- Three adoptees, one 3rd generation metis, one 2<sup>e</sup> generation sous-X



# TARGET GROUPS

## PRIMARY

- Adoptees
- Donorchildren
- Metis colonisation
- Family questions and secrets
- 'First'/'birth' parents

## SECONDARY

- Adoptive parents
- Donors
- Other relatives

# THE *RIGHT(S)* APPROACH

- CRC (art 3, 7 and 8) and ECHR (art.8)
- Art 30 Hague Convention adoption
- National legislation e.g. on access to files for adoptees
- Case law (national and ECtHR)
- Delicate message: there is no right TO a child

# OTHER SOURCES

- Concluding observations of the CRC committee (e.g. Belgium, 2019)
- Reports of the SR on Sale of Children on surrogacy
- Constitutional court Belgium



”

*“The legislative provisions preventing the donor child from obtaining any information about the gamete donor from the fertility centre are unconstitutional”*

*“The Court holds that those provisions are unconstitutional in that they give absolute priority to the interests of the donor, to the detriment of the interests of the conceived child. Indeed, they absolutely deprive donor children of any possibility of ascertaining their parentage through the fertility centre.”*



**Judgment constitutional court  
Sept. 26th 2024**

# SEARCH AND SUPPORT



# SERVICES

- Information and tailored advice, with or without actual search
- Practical support in searches, interpretation of results...
- Psychosocial support (also when there are no results!)
- DNA-search and database (CME)
- Access to (adoption) files and support in this process
- Mediation, roads to personal contact (?)
- Balancing rights
- Add and update search information and -systems, contact persons



- Quality handbook
- One case worker per case
- Psycho social support framework
- Step by step
- Every question is unique
- The client sets the pace, detailed **consent** form
- Search info, country sheets, local connections.....
- Referrals
- Waiting list
- **Result** = satisfying answer to the question

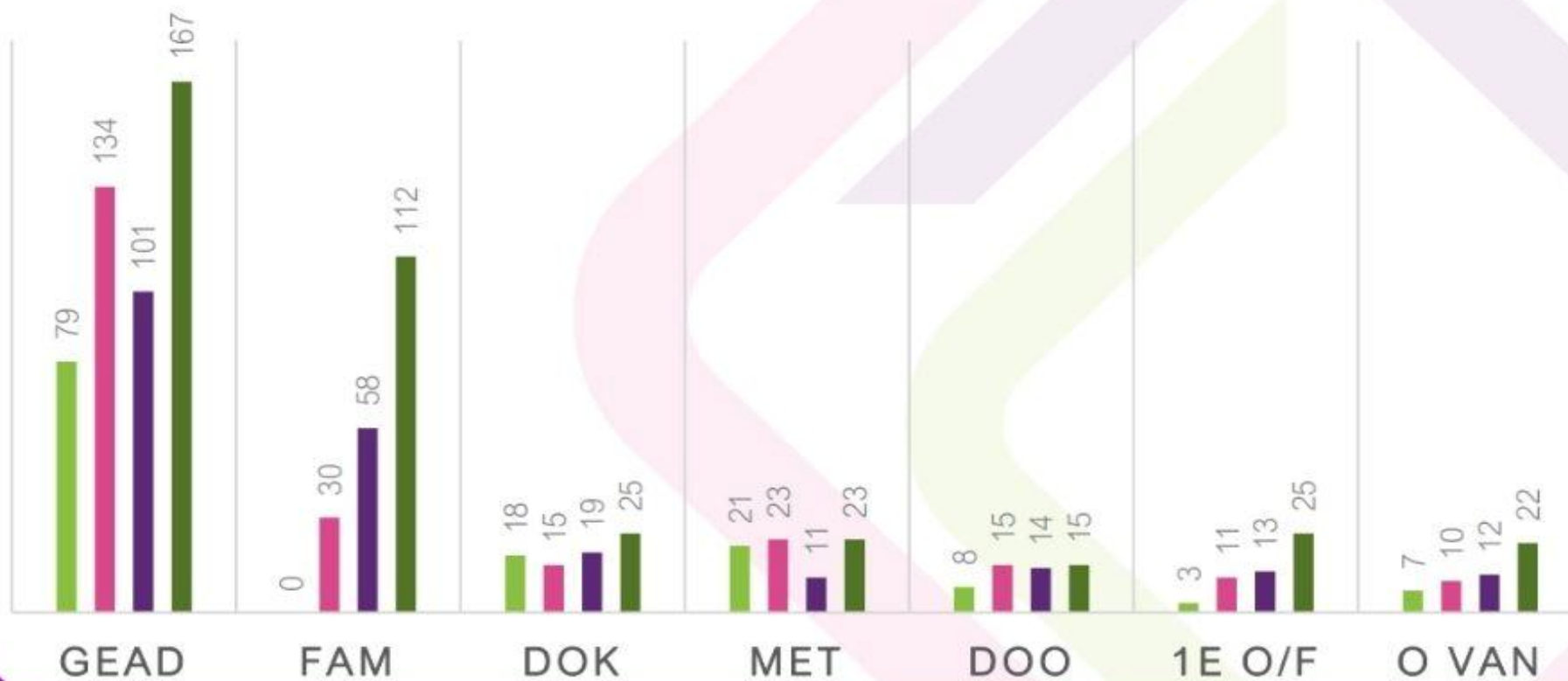
# EVERY QUESTION IS UNIQUE

- Get a clear view of what the real question is, what does the client really want? When? Emotions, memories, narratives...
- What does the client bring at the start? Documents, memories, DNA-material, results of previous endeavours...
- What can be found, with authorities here and abroad?
- What contacts do we have in countries of origin? Are they trustworthy?

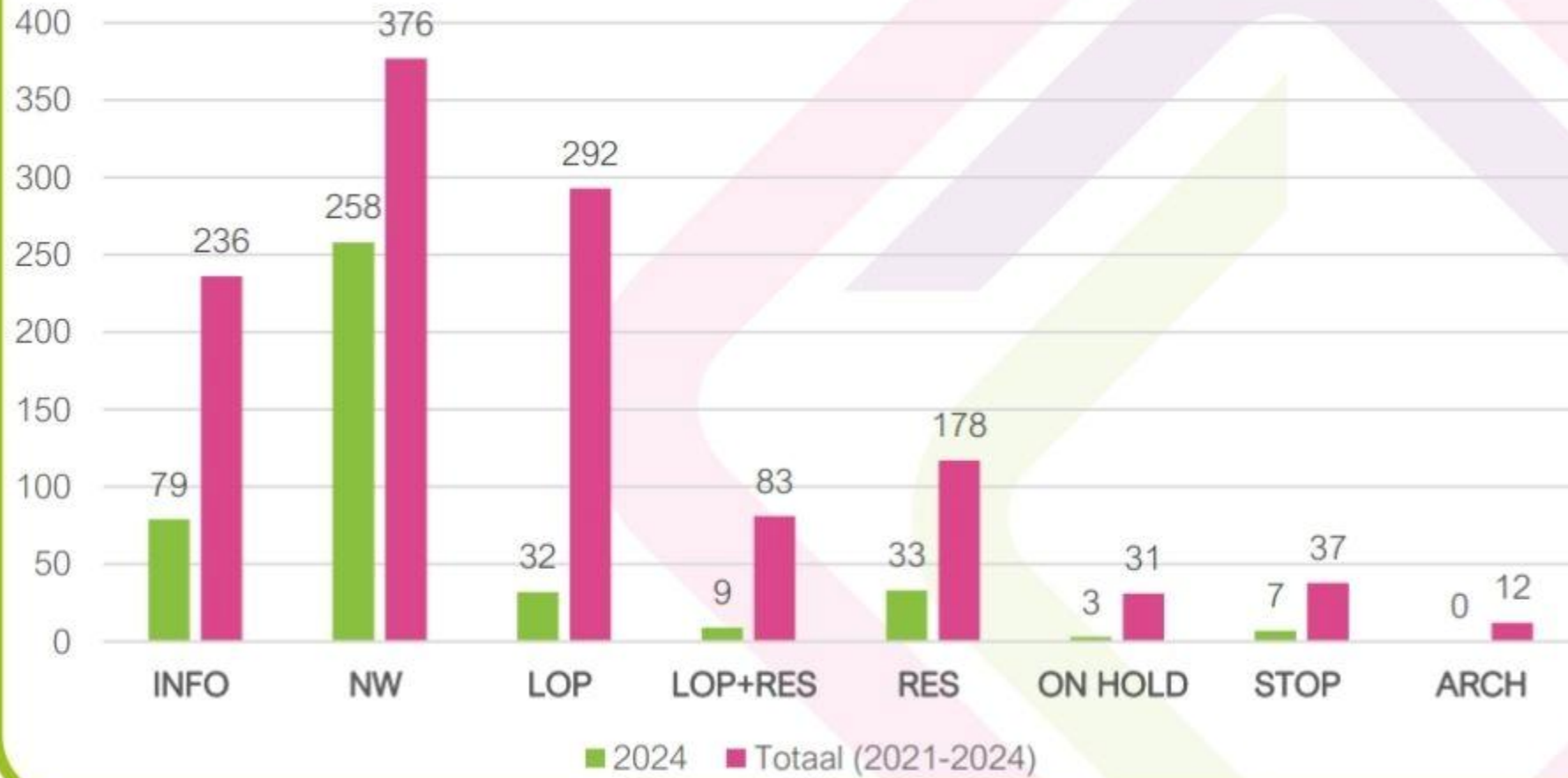
Not all cases are about actual contacts.

## DOELGROEPEN IN ABSOLUTE CIJFERS

■ 2021 ■ 2022 ■ 2023 ■ 2024



## DOSSIERSTATUS 2024 vs. TOTAAL





## EVALUATIE

Indien u wenst, kan u ons hier meegeven wat u van ons eerste collo  
anoniem. We houden het eenvoudig en laten u een score geven op  
De schaal gaat van ++ (zeer goed), + (goed), +/- (middelmatic), -



Recht op  
afstammingsinformatie,  
een verkenning



# Infobrochure

# INFORM

t Afstammingscentrum:

# INFORM (1)

- No campaigns (yet)
- Present in traditional media
- Active on social media
- General and specific brochures, different languages, online and in print (e.g. for donors, for central adoption authorities...)
- Presentations, colloquia, conferences

## INFORM (2)

- Website (multilingual)
- Annual reports
- Contacts with policymakers
- Accessible events: theatre, movies...

Issues in the media (adoption fraud, donor scandals...) always result in more cases.





You can count on your counselor for support in sometimes confrontational searches, for explanations when interpreting search results, when thinking about a roots trip, for dealing with any bad news and so on. If desired, we also communicate with other organizations involved. The same program counselor will assist you throughout the entire process.

Where necessary, the Ancestry Center will also make targeted referrals to other specialized care providers. Your counselor will also remain available for referrals, when and how you want.



I felt very relieved now that I can tell it again at my pace and say what my wishes are. You give me hope and courage back and I felt a little better. Thank you madam for the good conversation, it was a relief.

Anonymous testimony



EXPERTISE

# EXPERTISE

- Continuous update and collection of relevant research, publications, narratives
- Sources: our own casework and experience, academic research, narratives and expertise of target groups, court cases (ECtHR...)
- Meetings with experts from different disciplines, committed to our work
- Trainings, webinars: on our own initiative or co-organising
- Developing networks and partnerships
- Policy recommendations
- Articles

# POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- On donor anonymity and why it should be lifted
- On the position of adoptees before, during and after adoption procedures
- On criteria for screening countries of origin and whether or not to cooperate with those
- (In progress) on surrogacy and 'discreet' delivery

# POLICY

- Belgium as a federal state: complicated division of powers.
- Promising government declaration on modernising filiation laws:
  - focus on the higher interest of the child,
  - Including the right to identity and access to information on origins
  - abolish donor anonymity and
  - provide adequate support and guidance
  - consider how to restore the balance between rights of children, prospective parents and donors (also for the past)

# OUTPUT AND SUCCESSES



# SUCCESES?

Hard to tell

- In almost 1/5 of the cases we have a result (satisfying answer to the question)
- The annual evaluation by the clients is overwhelmingly positive with heartwarming compliments for the caseworkers
- Some impact of our policy recommendations
- A change in vision and approach by the general public
- Donors coming forward voluntarily

# CONTACT

- [www.afstammingscentrum.be](http://www.afstammingscentrum.be)



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