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Adoptions decrease by 52% while foster care grants increase by 72%

The number of orphans in South Africa increased by 29%, from just over 4 million to approximately 5.2 million, between 2005 and 2009. In the same period adoptions decreased by 52% and foster care grants increased by 72%. This is according to the South African Institute of Race Relations.

There were 2 840 adoptions in 2005 and these decreased to 1 368 in 2009. Some 281 475 foster care grants were issued in 2005 and these increased to 483 800 in 2009. The trends are based on data from the Department of Social Development and may be attributed to three main factors.

Firstly, adoptions are not a frequent choice among South Africans. This is particularly true of Africans. A lot of orphans are looked after by their extended families or family friends in a private, informal arrangement known as kinship foster care. This type of arrangement is widely practised in South Africa even though it is not ordered or regulated by any statute or legal body. Statistics South Africa estimates that 1.4 million children (8%) live in such households.

Secondly, formal foster care comes with a financial incentive. The foster care grant is currently R770 a month. Many people opt to foster a child rather than adopt one.

Lastly, adoption requires that one be able to provide for the child's needs, both financially and otherwise. No financial assistance is provided by the Government. In addition, the adoption process is a lengthy and demanding one which often acts as a deterrent to prospective parents.

Ms Lerato Moloi, a researcher at the Institute, said that none of this is good news for the increasing number of orphans in the country. 'The Actuarial Society of South Africa estimates that by 2015, there will be more than 5.5 million orphans. Some 32% of these will be maternal, 56% paternal, and 12% double orphans.'

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