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Baby Box Saves First Unwanted Infant

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For the first time in the country's history, an infant was given up for adoption through a baby box — a modern take on a medieval device for mothers looking to abandon their unwanted newborns.

The child, a girl of 3.5 kilograms and aged between two and three weeks, was left in the baby box in the resort city of Sochi late Monday, RIA-Novosti reported.

The girl has no health problems, the head of the Krasnodar region's health care department, Yelena Redko, was quoted as saying.

No identification, toys or clothes were left with the infant, Redko added.

The child will stay in a local perinatal center for a month, during which time the mother will be able to reclaim her through a DNA test. If the mother does not have a change of heart, the baby will be sent to an orphanage.

"I think she will be adopted very soon because, unfortunately, there are fewer babies in our region than families willing to have a child," Redko said.

The first three baby boxes in Russia were installed in the Krasnodar region cities of Sochi, Novorossiisk and Armavir this month. Two more are to be set up shortly in the region's eponymous capital.

The practice dates back to the Middle Ages, when unwanted children were sometimes abandoned by the doors of churches, monasteries and hospitals. It thrived in the 18th and 19th centuries and was revived in Germany in 2000 after a string of incidents where newborn children were left to die in the streets.

A number of countries worldwide currently have functioning baby boxes or baby hatches, including 80 in Germany and about 300 in Pakistan. The practice is especially popular in Europe, where such devices are to be found in Austria, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Slovakia and Switzerland, though in the Netherlands the idea was met with public backlash and abandoned.

The Krasnodar boxes are of Czech make and cost a combined 2.7 million rubles ($83,000), Ogonyok weekly reported earlier this month.

Legal aspects of the practice remain murky. Current legislation allows a mother to give up a child in the perinatal ward, but not anonymously.

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