

## Questionnaire on the impact of COVID-19 on intercountry adoptions under the 1993 Adoption Convention

<i>Identification for follow-up purposes:</i>	
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I. OVERARCHING QUESTIONS	
	<u>Both States of origin and receiving States</u>
1.	<p>In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, has your State <b>modified</b> intercountry adoption procedures under the 1993 Adoption Convention? If so, what has your State done to ensure that the <b>safeguards and procedures</b> of the Convention have been, and continue to be, respected?</p> <p>The Finnish Adoption Board monitored the adaptations that the accredited bodies made in response to the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure that these measures have been in accordance with the Finnish adoption legislation, the Hague Convention principles and such that they serve the best interest of the children in adoption processes. Adoption procedures were modified in the sense, that videoconference meetings in adoption counselling and preparation of PAPs were accepted and encouraged when face to face meetings were not possible. There was however no actual modification into procedures as such. Each adoption process needs to meet the requirements of the legislation just as before. The Finnish Adoption Board raised the accredited bodies attention to reporting responsibilities in case of procedural irregularities in order to ensure that each adoption case is in accordance with the legislation and Hague Convention irrespective of the possible effects of the pandemic. The Finnish Adoption Board as the adoption Central Authority informed Finnish adoption applicants of the role of different authorities and the priorities in ensuring the safe adoption processes for children.</p>
II. OUTBREAK OF COVID-19 (cases in transition only)	
	<u>Both States of origin and receiving States</u>
2.	<p>What measures, if any, did your State take to deal with cases where the <b>child had already</b> been <b>matched</b> with prospective adoptive parents, but no adoption decision had been issued at the time of the COVID-19 outbreak in your State? How many children were in such a situation?</p> <p>In Finland the COVID-19 outbreak took place in late spring of 2020 (April - May) with first lock-down, followed by a relatively calm phase in June-July. Concern and effects of the second wave were notable as of August. At that point there were a total of 29</p>

	applicant families who had been matched, adding up to 32 children. Most of these children were in countries that were affected by lock-downs and travel restrictions.
3.	<p>What measures, if any, did your State take to deal with cases where the <b>adoption decision</b> had already been <b>issued</b>, but the <b>child</b> was <b>still in the State of origin</b> at the time of the COVID-19 outbreak in your State? How many children were in such a situation?</p> <p>The Finnish adoption board addressed a letter to the adoption central authorities of the states of origin in question to offer adoption central authority level collaboration if needed. Families were addressed with information of the situation in general, addressing questions such as what are the responsibilities of accredited bodies and central authorities in such a situation and how these officials are working within their powers and responsibilities. Special attention was put that families understand the need to comply with authorities travel restriction policies and accept that procedures may need to be adjusted. Awareness was risen that all adjustments need to comply to adoption legislation and Hague Convention principles, securing the best interest of the child. Accredited bodies were encouraged to be active in their communication and information sharing with applicants as well as adjusting their services with new technologies to secure that meeting, training and support to families is available irrespective of restrictions in face-to-face activities. The Finnish Adoption Board invited the accredited bodies to meetings on a monthly or twice a month base to secure that the adoption central authority and accredited bodies shared the same information of the general situation.</p>
<b>III. DURING COVID-19 (cases in transition and new cases)</b>	
	<u>States of origin only</u>
4.	<p>Has your State adapted, and if so how, the following stages of the adoption procedure:</p> <p>a) Declaration of <b>adoptability</b> of the child: Please insert text here</p> <p>b) <b>Matching</b>: Please insert text here</p> <p>c) <b>Socialisation</b> period: Please insert text here</p> <p>d) <b>Support</b> and counselling to adoptable children: Please insert text here</p> <p>e) Adoption <b>decision</b>: Please insert text here</p> <p>f) Other stages: Please insert text here</p>
	<u>Receiving States only</u>

<p>5.</p>	<p>Has your State adapted, and if so how, the following stages of the adoption procedure:</p> <p>a) <b>Eligibility</b> and <b>suitability</b> of prospective adoptive parents:                  Please insert text here</p> <p>b) <b>Support</b> and counselling to prospective adoptive parents:                  Please insert text here</p> <p>c) Other stages:                  Please insert text here</p>
<p><b>IV. USE OF TECHNOLOGY</b></p>	
<p><u>Both States of origin and receiving States</u></p>	
<p>6.</p>	<p>Has the use of technologies (e.g, videoconferencing) <b>evolved</b> in the adoption procedures in place in your State since the outbreak of COVID-19 in your State? Please specify:</p> <p>a) any <b>benefits</b> and <b>challenges</b>:</p> <p>Adoption counselling social workers have largely adjusted their work to partly videoconference based meetings with applicants. Home visits and at least one other face to face meeting has however been the minimum requirement of face to face meetings for most adoption counselling work units during the pandemic. There were some differences between adoption counselling units in how much videoconference based social work they saw possible, with some units seeing that videoconferencing may be used and other seeing this possible only in some cases. Reading non-verbal communication was seen also a part of the social workers evaluation. The possibility to have at least some face to face meetings were also seen necessary to fully understand the family and build the trustful communication required in adoption counselling. Applicants have been more relaxed in videoconference meetings from their homes, which is a benefit. Use of videoconferences in the first meetings of social workers with families that have returned home with the child was seen to bring the benefit of earlier scheduled first meetings than prior the pandemic. Videoconferencing made some meetings with birth parents possible, which might not have been the case without the video-conference alternative. Consent of birth parents are taken only during face to face meetings. Social workers have felt that videoconferencing has brought the benefit of saving time. There is a general wish that videoconferencing will continue to be used in adoption counselling also after the pandemic.</p> <p>Accredited bodies have reported that videoconferencing has allowed adoptive applicants to participate in training and information gatherings more easily, adding to equality among applicants living in different areas of the country. Accredited bodies have reported that especially the procedures regarding communicating the child proposal to and with the family has progressed. Communication directly after child proposal used to take place by telephone, now videoconferencing allows deeper communication on the parents emotional experience of receiving a child proposal. Videoconferencing has added the amount of communication between accredited bodies in the sending and receiving country. Videoconferencing has made it possible to have some level of contact with the children's home / foster</p>

	<p>family and child after the matching, which supports understanding what sort of an individual the child is and how parents may prepare to meet the needs of the child. Some sending countries (f.eg. Bulgaria) have modified their first meeting with the adoptive family by replacing face to face meeting with videoconference meeting.</p> <p>In the daily work of the Finnish adoption board videoconferencing has been largely applied to secure all planned meetings of the Finnish adoption board in all three sections of the board (permit section, section of international matters and the plenum) as well as in meetings with Finnish accredited bodies, foreign adoption central authorities and other stake holders. This adjustment secured f.eg. that processing of adoption permits has not lagged behind or taken longer time than prior the pandemic restrictions. As videoconferencing has become part of daily activities, also preparedness to videoconference over country borders has risen, which is a general benefit. It is important that international conferences also adjust as a continuing multinational dialogue is necessary to maintain understanding of the prolonged pandemic situation and continuous discussion is needed. The Finnish adoption board arranges a yearly training day for accredited bodies and adoption counselling providers. The training day took place by videoconference in November 2020.</p> <p>The Finnish Adoptive Families organisation reported that the adjustments made with new technologies were positively welcomed by the adopters. The biggest benefit has been increased equality between adopters in different regions of the country, as access to services is now based more and more on on-line services. Adoption know how is also accessible from different countries and this sort of sharing of information is increasing, which benefits adopters who do not have Finnish language skills.</p> <p>b) if your response to <b>question 72</b> (“Use of new technologies”) of the <a href="#">2020 Questionnaire on the practical operation of the 1993 Adoption Convention (Prel. Doc. No 3)</a> has changed:</p> <p>Following national guidelines of digitalizing state services, The Finnish adoption board is following a work plan to digitalize the adoption permit application procedure and simultaneously change all Finnish Adoption Board's workprocesses from paper to digital form. This is a work in progress.</p>
<p><b>V. POST COVID-19: LOOKING AHEAD</b></p>	
	<p><u>Both States of origin and receiving States</u></p>
<p>7.</p>	<p>Has your State developed any practices during this pandemic period that would be <b>useful to mainstream into regular work</b> practices? If so, please elaborate on what those practices are and how you plan to go about mainstreaming them into regular work practices:</p> <p><a href="#">Please insert text here</a></p>
<p>8.</p>	<p>Please share any good practices and lessons learned by your State which may be applied in the event of <b>another pandemic or similar state of emergency</b>:</p> <p>The Finnish adoption board arranges a yearly training day for accredited bodies personel and adoption counselling social workers. In 2020 the training day included</p>

	a session where good practices regarding adjustments to the pandemic conditions where discussed and shared.
<b>VI. ANY OTHER COMMENTS</b>	
	<u>Both States of origin and receiving States</u>
9.	Please insert here any other comments you may have:  