

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 modified intercountry adoption procedures under the 1993 Adoption Convention? If so, what has your State done to ensure that the safeguards and procedures of the Convention have been, and continue to be, respected?</p> <p>Communication both nationally and internationally has involved more use of electronic documents instead of, or as well as, posting paper documents and use of video calling systems instead of, or as an adjunct to, face to face meetings.</p> <p>During periods of lockdown, progressing some work required video conferencing as a part of completing assessments and post-placement monitoring. However, face to face meetings and home visits remained an essential part of the process and these were scheduled and completed after lockdowns ended.</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 child had already been matched 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>India - 5</p> <p>Thailand - 6</p> <p>The Philippines - 1</p> <p>Regular communication occurred to report on children's' wellbeing to Prospective Adoptive Parents (PAPs) in order to reassure them. Where additional documents were needed, email was used where possible to send documents, with the undertaking of originals being sent afterwards. Through good communication we</p>

	were able to facilitate and complete several intercountry adoption cases during the pandemic.
3.	<p>What measures, if any, did your State take to deal with cases where the adoption decision had already been issued, but the child was still in the State of origin at the time of the COVID-19 outbreak in your State? How many children were in such a situation?</p> <p>The Philippines - 1 India - 4 Thailand - 4</p> <p>PAPs utilised repatriation flights, acquired COVID test certificates and completed isolation hotel stays to conform to various countries' requirements. Various special visas had to be obtained to enable PAPs to collect their children when this was possible.</p>
III. DURING COVID-19 (cases in transition and new cases)	
	<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 adoptability of the child: NA</p> <p>b) Matching: NA</p> <p>c) Socialisation period: NA</p> <p>d) Support and counselling to adoptable children: NA</p> <p>e) Adoption decision: NA</p> <p>f) Other stages: NA</p>
	<u>Receiving States only</u>
5.	<p>Has your State adapted, and if so how, the following stages of the adoption procedure:</p> <p>a) Eligibility and suitability of prospective adoptive parents: The eligibility and suitability criteria have remained the same.</p>

	<p>Some parts of the education programme for prospective adoptive parents were completed on-line.</p> <p>Group face-to-face adoption training days were postponed during lockdown periods, which in turn extended the overall suitability assessment timeframe for affected PAPs.</p> <p>Workshops and social worker visits for home assessments continued between lockdown periods in line with health requirements and adhering to appropriate safeguards.</p> <p>The documentation assessment process continued with documents scanned and emailed.</p> <p>b) Support and counselling to prospective adoptive parents:</p> <p>Social workers kept in regular contact with PAPs during lockdown periods for general welfare checks and to receive updates on progress with their documentation, training, assessment etc.</p> <p>Videoconference calls were utilised extensively for post adoption support.</p> <p>Email, phone calls and videoconferencing is how ongoing contact with PAPs occurs usually and this has continued. Services continued to operate with a flexible process.</p> <p>c) Other stages:</p> <p>Government adoption services and accredited non-government adoption agencies' staff were able to work from home, using electronic means of communication.</p> <p>Government departments responsible for issuing visas for children to enter New Zealand and for granting New Zealand Citizenship accepted that the challenges of Covid-19 required new processes. As a result they adjusted their processes and accepted emailed documents and issued visas or citizenship prior to parents departing to collect their children so that parents were able to complete requirements to return to New Zealand. This has reduced the time spent by PAPs in countries that have significant Covid-19 outbreaks.</p> <p>Parents have accepted the need for managed isolation in government facilities (designated hotels) for two weeks on arrival back in to New Zealand and have commented that this has assisted the early bonding with the child.</p> <p>New Zealand borders have remained open for New Zealand citizens and New Zealand resident visa holders, and others but only by exception. The New Zealand Central Authority advocated with the New Zealand Immigration Service for exceptions to be granted for intercountry adopted children to enable them to travel on critical purpose visitor visas on a Passport from their country of origin.</p> <p>The cost of travelling overseas for adoptive parents to collect a child they are matched with has increased significantly. New Zealand's Covid-19 border controls and the availability of a limited number of connecting flights have made it more difficult to plan and manage overseas travel.</p>
	<p>IV. USE OF TECHNOLOGY</p>
	<p><u>Both States of origin and receiving States</u></p>

<p>6.</p>	<p>Has the use of technologies (e.g, videoconferencing) evolved in the adoption procedures in place in your State since the outbreak of COVID-19 in your State? Please specify:</p> <p>a) any benefits and challenges:</p> <p>The acceptance of documents by email has improved the efficiency and speed of some parts of the adoption process. A challenge with this is that some systems cannot accept e-documents.</p> <p>More use of videoconferencing has enabled relaxed communication with parents. Body language is still able to be observed, along with tone of voice. The parents' ability to interact with their child under difficult circumstances was able to be seen. The challenge is that young children cannot stay in one place near the video camera for long, however, several shorter interviews can be used to overcome this. Video conferencing gave more flexibility to parents and staff for timing of interviews.</p> <p>Staff were able to spend more time on work instead of travel.</p> <p>No technological constraints were experienced. Recently implemented up to date digital devices enabled remote access to information and allowed workers to carry out all required tasks when working remotely from home.</p> <p>b) if your response to question 72 ("Use of new technologies") of the 2020 Questionnaire on the practical operation of the 1993 Adoption Convention (Prel. Doc. No 3) has changed:</p> <p>No change in our response to question 72.</p>
<p>V. POST COVID-19: LOOKING AHEAD</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 useful to mainstream into regular work 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>Overall, we have greater openness to use of videoconferencing and accepting information electronically.</p> <p>We now utilise a more balanced combination of home visits combined with videoconferencing.</p>
<p>8.</p>	<p>Please share any good practices and lessons learned by your State which may be applied in the event of another pandemic or similar state of emergency:</p> <p>Preparation of PAPs needs to include discussing their willingness to be ready to cope with change and complex travel situations.</p> <p>Government departments issuing visas, citizenship etc. can be more flexible in accepting e-documents from other government departments and accredited bodies.</p> <p>PAPs deciding to continue with intercountry adoption (during a global pandemic) have had to carefully consider if this is the right decision for their family in the current climate of uncertainty. Most have continued and have shown they are very committed to this journey and process.</p>

	<p>We have noted that it is important to consider in the assessment phase that PAPs may require considerable additional funds to cover the cost of travel and an extended leave of absence from work to travel internationally during a pandemic or similar state of emergency.</p>
<p>VI. ANY OTHER COMMENTS</p>	
	<p><u>Both States of origin and receiving States</u></p>
<p>9.</p>	<p>Please insert here any other comments you may have:</p> <p>Many parents reported that they enjoyed the time they were required to be in managed isolation and lock down with their children, although some felt it was difficult with older children.</p> <p>More focus may be required by sending countries on preparing and supporting adopted children through uncertainty, while they are waiting for their adoptive parents to arrive and collect them.</p> <p>It was noted that the overall number of enquiries about intercountry adoption from prospective adoptive applicants in New Zealand has increased since the pandemic.</p>