

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>There was no specific modification, except for the preparation part of the procedure that every prospective adoptive parent has to follow (this doesn't only apply to the prospective adoptive parents for intercountry adoptions, but also for the prospective adoptive parents for domestic adoptions). Since information sessions, preparations and screenings could not take place physically, these were largely organized digitally. We also introduced the possibility for adoptees to consult their adoption file digitally.</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>The competent authorities in the country of origin were contacted in each pending file. In some countries, the courts and competent services were closed and we therefore had to wait for work to be resumed.</p>
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>We were confronted with approximately 12 intercountry adoption cases, during the first lockdown and closure of borders in Belgium. It is not possible to distinguish between cases where there was already an adoption decision or only a match since the first lockdown started in March 2020 and is still going (with easing in the travel policy from time to time).</p>

	<p>The legal tasks relating to the recognition of the adoption decision (if necessary) and the issuing of the visa to the child, are not within the competences of the Flemish Central Authority. These tasks belong to the Federal Central Authority, the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.</p> <p>The competent authorities, both in Belgium and in the country of origin, were contacted on a regular basis in order to find a swift solution for those children who had already been matched with prospective adoptive parents.</p> <p>There was no straight-line solution. Each problem had to be solved through a case-by-case approach. Since there were no passenger flights, some children had to be brought to Belgium by means of particular scheduled flights. In some cases, children had to be assisted by a chaperone because the adoptive parents were not allowed to go beyond Belgian borders.</p>
<p>III. DURING COVID-19 (cases in transition and new cases)</p>	
	<p><u>States of origin only</u></p>
<p>4.</p>	<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:</p> <p>Please insert text here</p> <p>b) Matching:</p> <p>Please insert text here</p> <p>c) Socialisation period:</p> <p>Please insert text here</p> <p>d) Support and counselling to adoptable children:</p> <p>Please insert text here</p> <p>e) Adoption decision:</p> <p>Please insert text here</p> <p>f) Other stages:</p> <p>Please insert text here</p>
	<p><u>Receiving States only</u></p>
<p>5.</p>	<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:</p> <p>Preparations and screenings could not take place physically, these were largely organized digitally.</p> <p>The procedure for determining the eligibility and suitability of prospective adoptive parents lies within the competence of the Federal Central Authority and the family courts.</p> <p>b) Support and counselling to prospective adoptive parents:</p> <p>In the first period of the covid breakthrough (March 2020), there was a complete lockdown in Belgium. Physical contacts were not allowed so the support and</p>

	<p>counselling to prospective adoptive parents had to be given through digital means (Skype, Zoom, ...); Towards the end of spring, beginning of summer, there were more possibilities to have a conversation face to face. Today, we offer the possibility to choose between digital counselling or counselling face to face.</p> <p>c) Other stages:</p> <p>/</p>
IV. USE OF TECHNOLOGY	
	<p><u>Both States of origin and receiving States</u></p>
6.	<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>We refer to our previous answers. We were forced to use the existing technology (such as videoconference - Skype / Zoom and online PowerPointpresentations) to make sure that the adoption procedure could continue to run. There was no investment in new specific technologies.</p> <p>b) if your response to question 72 (“Use of new technologies”) of the <u>2020 Questionnaire on the practical operation of the 1993 Adoption Convention (Prel. Doc. No 3)</u> has changed:</p> <p>/</p>
V. POST COVID-19: LOOKING AHEAD	
	<p><u>Both States of origin and receiving States</u></p>
7.	<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>Since the COVID breakthrough and the first lockdown, we started using online PowerPoint presentations to prepare and inform the prospective adoptive parents. We are planning to keep this practice for the futher. One of our accredited bodies also tends to preserve online presentations in their future practise to prepare prosective adoptive parents.</p>
8.	<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>We have experienced which procedural steps could or could not take place digitally and that much is possible today. It is possible that in the future we will invest more in digital tools in our procedure.</p>
VI. ANY OTHER COMMENTS	
	<p><u>Both States of origin and receiving States</u></p>

9.	Please insert here any other comments you may have: No further comments
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