

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

<i>Identification for follow-up purposes:</i>	
NAME of STATE or territorial unit:	Canada
Name of contact person:	Erin O'Donoughue-Given
Name of Authority / Office:	Federal Central Authority for Canada
Telephone number:	613-297-5706
E-mail address:	Erin.ODonoughue-Given@CIC.GC.CA

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>Canadian provinces and territories ("jurisdictions") have ensured that all existing safeguards and procedures of the Convention have remained in place. In most jurisdictions, there has been a broader use of new technology for communication, such as ZOOM, Skype, and MS Teams. Jurisdictions have also noted a greater use of electronic submission of documents using secure e-mail transfer, password-protection documents sent via e-mail, and the use of electronic signatures, where possible. Jurisdictions are following their own provincial or territorial COVID-19 policies and procedures. In many jurisdictions, new safeguards have been implemented such as requiring the use of Personal Protective Equipment and requiring adoptive families to quarantine upon return from travel. Child proposals from States of origin have continued to be processed throughout the pandemic.</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>Jurisdictions advised prospective adoption parents (PAPs) not to travel due to the travel restrictions in Canada and States of origin. Accredited adoption bodies ensured constant communication with States of origin and the families about their proposed child's status and development, travel restrictions and possible delays to finalize adoptions. In some instances final court hearings were also postponed. However, in one jurisdiction, if the PAPs preferred not to delay their travel, they were</p>

	<p>allowed to proceed as long as travel plans demonstrated that they would follow health and safety guidelines in Canada and abroad. In another jurisdiction, families were asked to sign a travel risk waiver and to obtain valid medical insurance during their travels. At the time of the outbreak a total of approximately 25 children were in this situation. We would also like to note that a few jurisdictions did not encounter this situation.</p>
<p>3.</p>	<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>Jurisdictions advised adoptive parents not to travel based on travel restrictions in Canada and States of origin. However, there were families and children that were overseas during the outbreak, and with the assistance of provincial and federal governments, the adoptive families were able to travel safely back to Canada. There were also some adoptive families who chose to remain abroad with the child until it was safe to travel. These families were instructed to follow the local health directives in the State of origin. Some families had issues obtaining the child's foreign passport.</p> <p>One province coordinated an escorted repatriation of three children back to Canada during the pandemic. It was a special joint effort based on the agreement and coordination of the State of origin, the provincial Central Authority and federal authorities.</p> <p>There were approximately 43 children affected by this situation. We would also like to note that a few jurisdictions did not encounter this situation.</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>

	<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:</p> <p>In most jurisdictions, the Central Authorities have moved away from in-person assessments and are now completing these by phone or virtually in order to adhere to provincial or territorial recommendations for limiting in-person contact. However, most jurisdictions have maintained at least one in-person meeting in the home of the PAPs. Subsequent visits can be managed virtually through video chats, Skype, or Zoom platforms. In addition, each jurisdiction also adheres to their specific provincial or territorial public health guidelines and policies, based on their current restriction levels.</p> <p>In one province, psychological assessments were suspended at the start of the pandemic but these assessments have now resumed on a priority basis. Other jurisdictions were permitted to have in-person assessments with the use of Personal Protective Equipment and social distancing measures. In one province, submission of homestudies to the Central Authority for review and recommendation is being managed electronically, while the provincial letter of approval of PAPs suitability and eligibility to adopt is issued as a hard copy.</p> <p>Most of the jurisdictions have also shifted to offer mandatory educational trainings for PAPs using online platforms instead of in-person training.</p> <p>b) Support and counselling to prospective adoptive parents:</p> <p>Most jurisdictions have adopted various measures to provide support and counselling for PAPs through telephone contact or a variety of online platforms, such as Skype, ZOOM, and MS Teams. In one province, various support groups have been organized for PAPs, especially for families that have been matched but unable to travel overseas.</p> <p>Please note that several jurisdictions were able to resume in-person support measures or did not have any adaptations in this area.</p> <p>In respect to training, some jurisdictions were able to provide online courses or workshops, while other jurisdictions needed to develop online training programs.</p> <p>c) Other stages:</p> <p>In one province, the review and recommendation of the proposed adoption is being managed electronically while Article 17c is being issued as a hard copy.</p>
IV. USE OF TECHNOLOGY	
	<u>Both States of origin and receiving States</u>
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>Since the COVID-19 outbreak, the use of technology has become more prevalent to facilitate adoption processes and provide better access to adoption services. In</p>

	<p>most jurisdictions, accredited adoption bodies use online platforms to meet with their PAPs and offer training. The use of technology, including electronic signatures, has also expedited information exchanges and communication between Central Authorities and accredited adoption bodies and has facilitated quicker access to support services for families</p> <p>However, there are challenges when the technology does not function properly. There is also a need for continuous improvement of practices related to privacy, security of confidential information, and the management and protection of electronic records. Ongoing training on the use of these new technologies and digital tools can also be a challenge. Another challenge with using technology is the lack of human interaction between PAPs during training sessions. Accredited adoption bodies expressed a concern that this can lead to a lack of a close support network among PAPs.</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>Most jurisdictions do not have a different answer to Question 72. However, in one province, online technology was not used to meet with PAPs before the pandemic, except to connect and provide support to PAPs when they were in the States of origin for the matching process or to finalize the adoption. In another province, virtual meetings have been approved to complete interviews and home safety checks for the purposes of moving the file forward when in-person contact cannot occur. This is expected to return to the usual practice once in-person contact can resume. In one jurisdiction normal operations have resumed.</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>For most jurisdictions, the use of technology to meet with PAPs during the home study process as well as offering the online training has proven to be useful and a positive change, and the use will continue.</p> <p>There was also a greater reliance on electronic approvals and review, rather than being paper-based, including for matters related to child proposals. This practice would be useful to mainstream into regular work practices.</p> <p>However, as indicated in the response to question 6 b), some jurisdictions have or will return to normal practice after the pandemic.</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>The use of technology to facilitate the adoption process, as described above in previous responses, will be applied to similar situations in the future.</p>

VI. ANY OTHER COMMENTS	
	<u>Both States of origin and receiving States</u>
9.	Please insert here any other comments you may have: No further comments.