
Coronavirus: “other” consequences of the pandemics. 43 adoptive families blocked abroad

Forty-three Italian adoptive families are presently "blocked" abroad. The coronavirus emergency also has a major adverse impact on couples who fulfilled their dream in the last few weeks, finally meeting their children in their countries of origin, often after having waited a long time. Their permanence abroad, to comply with the various adoption procedures, ranges from two weeks to a month and a half or even two months in Latin American countries. Most adopting couples, 25, are now in Latin America, the continent with the lengthiest procedures. They left their home countries when the spread of Covid-19 was not particularly alarming. Another 15 are in Eastern Europe and 3 in Asia. *Most of them don't know when they will return, since some have been quarantined*, especially in Latin America, notably in Colombia (the country with the largest number of international adoptions in the region). The International Adoption Commission (IAC) and accredited inter-country adoption bodies that a few months ago were grouped together in the Adoption 3.0 coordination, have asked the intervention of Foreign Minister Luigi Di Maio. The problem of couples stranded abroad as a result of Covid-19 is just one of many problems faced by international adoption, already suffering a serious crisis (for the first time, the number of adoptions in 2019 dropped to 1,000, ten years ago it was 4 times higher). *While the couples who have already met their children are stuck abroad, an even greater number will be unable to leave for who knows how long.* With a ripple effect, all agencies' operational activity risks being blocked. **Major co-ordinating efforts.** In this objectively complex situation, a sign of hope comes from the Adoption 3.0 coordinating activity. Since last autumn, its 49 member bodies, following years of misunderstandings and divisions which, partly due to the so-called "IAC black three-year-period", which resulted in a “war among the poor”, have now started to work together. **Pietro Ardizzi**, member of the Coordination's board of directors, together with Cinzia Bernicchi, Pietro Ardizzi, Gianfranco Arnoletti, Anna Torre and Marina Virgilito, communicates and tackles all the problems, along with the hopes raised by this new experience.

“Families stuck abroad are our main problem right now.

Some situations have been resolved and the couples have returned home. There is great concern for those parents who have already met their children, in some cases personally (for example in Russia, where the process requires a first trip to meet the child, ed.'s note) *Everything has been postponed and nobody knows until when.* The entire system is blocked, starting with the first step, involving training, which only a limited number of institutions manage to complete online, in order to proceed with the conferral of the mandate. Institutions are sustained primarily by the families who avail themselves of their services, but the whole process risks being stalled." **Agencies in distress, requests to the government.** For this reason, the Coordination sent a request to the Minister for Family Affairs, Elena Bonetti, to ensure that the Government provides financial assistance to the accredited agencies. "We calculated a sum amounting to 6.9 million Euros - Ardizzi said - We have been talking to the Minister, who has just arrived, in a positive climate, and so far we have had the opportunity to be heard. We are also working with IAC, although we are somewhat worried about the fact that the current vice-president, Laura Laera, is due to leave office in June. Our Coordination is doing a good job, indeed we are suffering from 6 or 7 years of utter 'distraction' from the political world, including "three horrible years" for IAC, - from 2014 to 2017. Obviously, we are aware that the decline in international adoptions has also other causes, starting with campaigns for national adoption in some countries. But undoubtedly, the attitude of politicians in recent years has been detrimental. *Nonetheless, our country remains a leading world country in terms of international adoptions, second only to the United States, which has a much larger population.*” **“We are working together.”** The Coordination's activity is something new and important for the accredited agencies. It

was confirmed by **Daniela Bertolusso** from Turin, coordinator of the association Amici di Don Bosco onlus, an accredited international adoption agency, inspired by the Salesian community: "This work is proving to be invaluable, testifying to the fact that unity is strength, and especially in times of crisis it is necessary to remain united. These efforts are yielding significant results. Even if they are not yet evident, families need to know that the agencies, even from home, are working for them and above all they are all working together. Of major importance, especially now, is *the coordinated action of the agencies in their relationship with IAC, the Ministry for the Family and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Adoption 3.0 has launched a census and mapping of couples abroad.* A letter was sent to Minister Di Maio, who replied promptly, reiterating his willingness and concern for the activities carried out by the agencies and for his fellow countrymen who are abroad." Relations with the International Adoption Commission, "now forced to work remotely, facing operational difficulties linked to the fact that the communication system between the agencies and the IAC does not envisage access by private users" are also difficult. The Commission is determined to ensure the utmost efficiency, with a dedication that extends beyond institutional responsibility. Moreover, the requests to Minister Bonetti are linked to the extremely difficult conditions that the agencies will have to deal with, at least for the whole of the first half of 2020. Like a wave, the virus is spreading all over the world. Among other things, the IAC is continuing its relations with foreign countries, marked by difficulties in complying with deadlines for the presentation of relevant documentation, regarding both individual procedures and the extremely important post-adoption monitoring phase." Bertolusso concluded: "*We can only accept the current restrictions, while understanding families' suffering.* This last period has been marked by great solidarity and we hope that this attitude will continue when the emergency is over."

Bruno Desidera