



*Parliamentary Centre
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**VIRTUAL RESOURCES FOR PARLIAMENTARY
RESEARCHERS: PERSPECTIVES AND EXPERIENCE
FROM AROUND THE WORLD**

Prepared for:

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
PRESENTATIONS FROM AN ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF PARLIAMENTARY RESEARCH SERVICES AND LIBRARIES (IFLA)	1
Setting Up New Services	2
Overviews of Parliamentary Research Services	3
Research Services for Legislative Committees	3
Meeting Client Needs	4
Management and Organizational Challenges in Providing High-Quality Services to Parliaments	4
EUROPEAN CENTRE FOR PARLIAMENTARY RESEARCH AND DOCUMENTATION	5

INTRODUCTION

Many parliaments have established specialized research services to support their Members, legislative committees and other functions. If a parliament is considering creating such a service or an existing service is enhancing its capacities and scope, there is much to be learned from the experience of international counterparts. This document collects reflections and analyses from legislative research services around the world on the challenges they have faced in providing responsive and high-quality analysis in the unique and demanding environment of a modern parliament, and the lessons they have learned.

It could likely be used in three ways:

- as easily accessible but well-focussed background reading to support training programmes for new services being established or ongoing professional development workshops in established services;
- as part of orientation packages for new researchers in established services, likely combined with material on parliamentary affairs in general and on the traditions, processes and specific dynamics of the particular legislature;
- more specifically, as a source of comparative experience and analysis for managers on the service development, client relations, organizational and other challenges faced by their counterparts around the world.

PRESENTATIONS FROM AN ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF PARLIAMENTARY RESEARCH SERVICES AND LIBRARIES (IFLA)

There are relatively few forums where managers of legislative research services can meet to discuss common experiences and challenges. One of the most important is a day-long seminar held each year by the Library and Research Services for Parliaments section of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions at the latter's annual conference. IFLA is the pre-eminent international library body and these conferences provide an opportunity for senior staff from parliamentary libraries and research services from around the world to meet.¹ The following are some papers presented at these sessions over the last five years or so.²

This is not a representative survey of legislative research services around the world. Rather, this selection is intended to provide a range of interesting comparative perspectives on the client, service development and organizational challenges that all face. Unfortunately, because of financial and other limitations, many poorer parliaments cannot establish research services, fewer managers from poorer legislatures that do have research services are able to attend international

¹ Ironically, material is hard to find on IFLA's site. To browse other papers you can go to the parliamentary section's site at <http://www.ifla.org/VII/s3/conten-e.htm> or look at its listing of its conferences at <http://www.ifla.org/VII/s3/conten-e.htm#Conferences>.

² This material was first organized to support a training programme for a new research service being established in the Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina in the fall of 2004.

conferences, and fewer of the presentations of those who can are on-line. As a result, this selection is inevitably skewed towards the experience of the more resource-rich parliamentary research services. Nonetheless, there is a broad enough range to show the common challenges and the wealth of solutions that have been developed.

Setting Up New Services

Several presentations on setting up new research services are collected here. The first is creating the research and information services to support the new Scottish parliament:

<http://www.ifla.org/IV/ifla68/papers/157-077e.pdf>

The others focus on how research services were developed within established legislatures; in Cameroon:

<http://www.ifla.org/IV/ifla66/papers/137-98e.htm>

Egypt:

<http://www.ifla.org/IV/ifla65/papers/069-101e.htm>

Israel:

<http://www.ifla.org/IV/ifla69/papers/147e-Warshavsky.pdf>

Northern Ireland:

<http://www.ifla.org/IV/ifla68/papers/158-077e.pdf>

Norway:

<http://www.ifla.org/IV/ifla67/papers/066-103e.pdf>

and re-inventing integrated library and research services in Zimbabwe:

<http://www.ifla.org/IV/ifla67/papers/105-103e.pdf>

and in South Africa:

<http://www.ifla.org/IV/ifla65/papers/146-69e.htm>

and finally, a general review of setting up new services – does ‘one size fit all’?

<http://www.ifla.org/IV/ifla66/papers/079-098e.htm>

Overviews of Parliamentary Research Services

A 1998 but still very useful overview of research and analytical services for parliaments:

<http://www.ifla.org/IV/ifla64/088-100f.htm>

Then various discussions of specific services -- the Czech:

<http://www.ifla.org/IV/ifla69/papers/179e-Syllova.pdf>

Italian:

<http://www.ifla.org/IV/ifla67/papers/107-103e.pdf>

UK:

<http://www.ifla.org/IV/ifla70/papers/176e-Baines.pdf>

Several analyses of the role of research services in supporting specific activities or reforms of their legislatures. In Greece, on supporting legislative drafting:

<http://www.ifla.org/IV/ifla67/papers/104-103e.pdf>

Japan, which does in-depth research in the field as well as the range of policy analysis and information services common to most services:

<http://www.ifla.org/VII/s3/conf/2004-preconference-Watarase.pdf>

Mexico, focussing on how establishing research capacities was related to modernization of the legislature:

<http://www.ifla.org/IV/ifla66/papers/100-98-e.htm>

Poland, on the role of research services in supporting legislative activity related to European Union integration:

<http://www.psp.cz/kps/knih/ifla2003/pls.rtf>

Research Services for Legislative Committees

An overview from the Canadian parliament on providing research services to committees:

<http://www.ifla.org/IV/ifla68/papers/086-077e.pdf>

and of a more specific service in Poland that supports committee and parliamentary fiscal oversight:

<http://www.ifla.org/IV/ifla68/papers/085-077e.pdf>

Meeting Client Needs

Two Members commenting on the importance of parliamentary research and information services, from Australia and Ghana:

<http://www.ifla.org/IV/ifla67/papers/065-103e.pdf>

<http://www.ifla.org/IV/ifla67/papers/067-103e.pdf>

Two papers on developing effective client needs assessment; by the heads of the Ontario and Australian services respectively:

<http://www.ifla.org/IV/ifla68/papers/125-077e.pdf>

<http://www.ifla.org/IV/ifla68/papers/175-077e.pdf>

and a third on using the results to refine services – this revisits the Norwegian service 3 ½ years after it was set up:

<http://www.ifla.org/IV/ifla69/papers/195e-Floistad.pdf>

Management and Organizational Challenges in Providing High-Quality Services to Parliaments

Presentations on various aspects of ensuring that services to parliaments are of the highest quality. The first from Ontario on overall challenges in developing and delivering high-quality research services:

<http://www.ifla.org/IV/ifla66/papers/030-98e.htm>

from Australia on providing professional services in a highly partisan environment:

<http://www.ifla.org/IV/ifla69/papers/165e-Verrier.pdf>

on the particular challenges of smaller research services in general:

<http://www.ifla.org/IV/ifla66/papers/096-98e.htm>

and specifically in Ethiopia:

<http://www.ifla.org/IV/ifla69/papers/157e-Aberra.pdf>

a case study of building cooperative relations between the parliamentary library and research service in Sweden:

<http://www.ifla.org/IV/ifla68/papers/087-077e.pdf>

EUROPEAN CENTRE FOR PARLIAMENTARY RESEARCH AND DOCUMENTATION

The ECPRD is another forum where research and information services for legislatures are discussed and analyzed by leading European practitioners. Its site has useful background on legislative committees, codes of conduct and other facets of European parliaments. Its occasional seminars are an excellent source of comparative analysis.

One of its most useful recent publications is a comparative analysis of European parliamentary research services by Bill Robinson, a long-time leader from the Congressional Research Service in Washington. It not only surveys the range of organizational structures, capacities, resources and services throughout European legislatures, but succinctly outlines the central importance and key features of high-quality research for legislatures:

http://www.ecprd.org/Doc/publica/OTH/Robinson_def.pdf

A broader survey of all aspects of European parliamentary libraries is:

<http://www.ecprd.org/Doc/publica/GEN/TanfieldEn.pdf>