

The cost of external voting: some examples

External voting processes involve logistical arrangements that often cost more per voter than elections organized in the home country. This section provides some examples of the costs associated with external voting in countries which have organized it. The figures shown are not complete or directly comparable, but they are presented to give an idea of how much external voting costs in some countries.

It is difficult to assess how much external voting costs, for several different reasons. The resources needed will depend partly on the procedures in place for external voting, so that some cost additional money while some involve using existing staff, premises or materials. Costs may also be paid for from different budgets, not all of them from that of the electoral management body (EMB), so that it is difficult to trace all the costs related to external voting at one election. For these reasons, it is equally difficult to compare costs between countries that organize external voting. For additional examples of the cost of external voting, see chapter 5.

Some of the data assembled here cover the costs of external voting for elections to the European Parliament, which is not dealt with further in this Handbook.

Afghanistan

The voluntary donation project budget of the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF) bears the expenses for voter registration and elections. The ARTF was set up in May 2002 to provide, among other things, support to Afghanistan in the area of recurrent costs of the government. Twenty-one donors, in addition to the United States, pledged altogether 430 million US dollars (USD). External election-specific fundraising was coordinated by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and 26.7 million USD were made available to the International Organization for Migration (IOM) on the basis of a cost estimate by the IOM as part of its proposal to the Joint Electoral Management Body (JEMB). The total costs of the programme amounted to

91 per cent of the initial estimate (24,289,322 USD), or approximately 20 USD per voter in Iran and 32 USD per voter in Pakistan (where advance registration increased the cost per voter). (See also the case study on Afghanistan.)

Australia

At the 2004 election, there were around 16,000 registered overseas electors. In addition, people who were overseas temporarily as tourists were able to use overseas voting facilities without having registered as overseas electors. Altogether approximately 63,000 people voted from overseas at the 2004 election. The costs of external voting can be estimated at 1.21 million Australian dollars (AUD, or *c.* 891,000 USD in the exchange rate prevailing at the time), broken down as follows: 32,000 AUD for permanent staff costs, 730,000 AUD for freight transport of material to and from overseas posts; 81,000 AUD for printing (postal voting forms, ballot papers); 322,000 AUD for reimbursement of the Department of Foreign Affairs and trade costs at overseas posts, including overtime, temporary staff, advertising, security and in-country postage; and 45,000 AUD for distributing the returned material to the correct division (electoral district) in Australia. The cost of external voting is not seen as excessively high, given that it only forms a small part of overall election costs of 75 million AUD. The average cost of the election per elector inside the country in 2004 was 5.29 AUD, and the cost of external voting per voter was 19.21 AUD.

Botswana

The Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) assesses the external voting in 1999 as well as in 2004 as too expensive when it is set against the very low turnout by external electors. In 1999, out of the 1,363 electors registered abroad, only 23.3 per cent voted, and in 2004, of 2,436 external electors registered, only 49.5 per cent voted. External travel expenses and the personnel costs of supervising elections abroad are among the main expenses that burden the general budget of the IEC. The IEC therefore claims that either the provisions relating to external voting should be reviewed in order to cut down the costly logistical preparations or additional funds should be made available. In the 2004 election the cost of external travel was 647,950 pula (BWP—*c.* 161,460 USD) excluding the costs of salaries, administration and supplies. The overall cost of the elections is estimated at 19 million BWP in 1999 and 21 million BWP in 2004. (See also the case study.)

Canada

External voting is done exclusively by post and is only possible with the use of a voting 'kit' that is sent to the nearest consular office, Canadian embassy or high commission. There are no polling sites established outside the country. In the 2004 general election a total of 13,830 ballot papers were mailed out to electors, of which 8,127 were sent back by citizens who were residing outside Canada and 1,368 by electors who were resident

in Canada but were temporarily out of the country on voting day. The total costs of the external voting programme for the 2004 elections amounted to 274,024 Canadian dollars (CAD, or *c.* 211,000 USD), of which 76,000 CAD was disbursed for initiatives and material costs between voting events and 198,024 CAD for expenses during an event. The latter included 115,000 CAD for human resource costs, 3,024 CAD for postage and around 80,000 CAD expenses for courier services from each embassy.

Estonia

It is difficult to separate the costs of external voting from the total election budget since different authorities are concerned and the amount of money involved is rather small. The electoral register is managed by the Ministry of the Interior and the ministry is not able to separate the costs for external voting from the total costs of elections. All printed materials for elections come from the National Election Committee, but since the amount of external voting materials is so small the costs are not counted separately. A large part of the work for external voting (staffing, transport of materials, postage etc.) is done by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. As an example, for the European Parliament elections in 2004, the National Electoral Committee allocated 450,000 Estonian crowns (EEK; *c.* 29,000 euros (EUR) or 35,000 USD) to the ministry. This money covered most of the costs of implementing external voting.

Finland

An estimate of the cost of external voting for elections to the European Parliament in 2004 was about 110,000 EUR (*c.* 137,500 USD at the exchange rate prevailing then). About 9,000 external electors voted. (The total Finnish electorate inside and outside Finland is about 4.1 million.) The cost per external voter was therefore roughly 12 EUR (15 USD). However, what this cost includes or excludes is not described in further detail.

France

According to the French EMB, the costs related to external voting in France are considered to be too high. As an example, in the referendum in May 2005, external voters represented only 1.09 per cent of all French voters, but more than 1.36 per cent of the total cost of the referendum. In particular, the cost of dispatching information for the electors to French consulates and diplomatic missions (705,786 EUR, or *c.* 1.4 million USD) contributed to the high expenses. The estimated costs related to the organization of external voting for the referendum (additional to the cost of dispatching information for the voters) are: 9,000 EUR for ballot boxes and polling booths; 678,000 EUR for postage; 86,000 EUR for voting by proxy facilities; 8,800 EUR for the diplomatic bag; 66,000 EUR for stationery; and 78,000 EUR for staffing. The total costs of external voting for the referendum were therefore around 1,631,000 EUR. Considering the low turnout by external electors in the referendum (the abstention rate was *c.* 67 per cent), external voting is seen as very costly in France.

Germany

The overall costs of external voting activities cannot be identified separately in Germany. Voting from abroad is only possible by postal voting and only for those who have applied to be included on the electoral register of the electoral district where they were formerly resident. They have to pay for the postage of their ballot papers themselves. The only costs that arise for the federal government in relation to external voting are therefore expenses for material and postage to foreign countries. Around 55,000 German citizens living temporarily or permanently abroad registered for postal voting in the 2005 elections for the Bundestag. No figures for turnout by external voters are available.

Greece

The table below shows the costs associated with external voting for the elections to the European Parliament in 2004. The Greek EMB estimates the costs of organizing external voting for those elections at approximately 1,108,985 EUR (c. 1,347,000 USD), although the costs are fairly difficult to assess. The number of external electors who voted was 25,546 and the cost per external voter was approximately 43 EUR. Turnout among registered Greek external voters at those elections was 74.9 per cent.

Table: Principal expenses for external voting in Greece in the European Parliament elections, 2004

Purpose of the expenditure	Cost (EUR)
Reimbursements of returning officers, supervisors and secretaries	383,070
Reimbursements of officials of the Ministry of the Interior	367,200
Procurement of consulates	260,000
Creation of software for the online handling of applications of voters abroad	31,270
National Printing House	353
Reimbursements of officials of other state services	44,100

EUR = euro.

Iraq

External voting was organised for Iraqis abroad in the January and December 2005 elections. January was the first occasion ever in which external voting took place, designed and implemented with the assistance of international partners (see Iraq case study). The cost reached a high of 92 USD -the most expensive external voting programme in history. Twenty five percent of that related to security costs, and 35% to personnel costs. The December election was organised mainly by the IECI and Iraqi partners and servants, reaching a cost of 17 million USD. Detailed information can be found in the final report of the January election by the IOM and the report of the December election by the IECI (see Annex C).

Mexico

For the preliminary arrangements and the initial setting up of the external voting mechanism, the Federal Electoral Institute (Instituto Federal Electoral, IFE) invested approximately 119.3 million pesos (MXN—*c.* 10.8 million USD at the prevailing exchange rate) during 2005. For the implementation phase throughout 2006, it devoted another 186 million MXN (16.9 million USD), making an estimated overall cost of 305 million MXN (*c.* 27.7 million USD).

Sweden

Around 115,000 Swedish citizens are entitled to vote from abroad in national elections. Turnout is low among external electors: in the 2002 general elections only 27.7 per cent of external electors voted. The costs of external voting—for example, for the 2004 European Parliament elections—have been significantly lower than estimated due to the low turnout. This applies mainly to the expenses for postal voting. For the 2004 European Parliament elections, 47,776 people were registered as external electors, but only 12,787 external votes were cast, including postal voting and personal voting. Another reason for the low costs is that some of the voting materials bought for the 2002 and 2003 referendums but never used could be used in 2004. The costs for external voting are mainly borne by the Swedish missions and authorities abroad, which are authorized to organize the external voting and which bear the costs of sending ballot papers back to Sweden. For postal voting from abroad, the voter bears the costs. The only data available about the costs of external voting for the Swedish EMB are data about the material costs for posting ballot papers to around 300 missions and authorities abroad.

Switzerland

No specific data are available on the costs of external voting in Switzerland, but the cost of postal voting can be estimated on the basis of the following information. There are around 110,000 external electors, of whom about 88,000 live inside Europe and 22,000 outside Europe. The costs for external votes from inside Europe are based on data about postal charges for priority mail within Europe, and are estimated at 381,300 EUR. External votes from outside Europe cost around 129,000 EUR. An amount of 146,700 EUR for personnel costs for the packing and advance posting of voting material has to be added. The overall expenses add up to 657,000 EUR.