

OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL

**EVALUATION OF EXTERNAL VOTING PROGRAMMES:  
AN ANALYSIS OF IOM'S ROLE IN KOSOVO**

*October 2001*

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IOM International Organization for Migration  
OIM Organisation Internationale pour les Migrations  
OIM Organización Internacional para las Migraciones

## FOREWORD

This External Evaluation Report is the result of a joint initiative on the part of the Programme Manager of IOM external voting programmes in Kosovo, the Office of the Inspector General at IOM Headquarters (OIG) and the Programme Support Department at Headquarters (PSD). The decision to evaluate the External Voting Programmes in Kosovo stems from a strong interest within IOM to analyse its performance in the implementation of such programmes, which so far have not been evaluated. IOM's strategy for participation in these post-conflict activities and collaboration with the institutions in charge of the election process also deserved further analysis. The main focus of the report is on the most recent experience in Kosovo but also covers former IOM programmes in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in East Timor. The evaluation also makes recommendations on future IOM involvement in external voting programmes in general.

OIG is presenting this external report as one of its own evaluations for two main reasons: 1) the programme covered by the evaluation — including its scope and methodology — meets the criteria for evaluations conducted by OIG; 2) the evaluation exercise has been piloted by OIG, with inputs from the programme manager and PSD. An external consultant, Jeremy Grace, was recruited to conduct the evaluation. He has served on multiple electoral missions, including postings as IOM Country Representative to Croatia, OSCE Out-of-Kosovo Coordinator in Pristina, and IOM Deputy Country Representative of the External Voting for East Timor in Indonesia. Jeremy Grace currently teaches international relations at the State University of New York (SUNY) at Geneseo and consults for the World Bank Group.

It is expected that the report will be of interest to IOM and the donor community that contributes to such programmes. In addition, it will provide material for academic debate on 'Out-of-Country' elections. The Office of the Inspector General would like to thank the consultant for his professionalism in conducting the evaluation, as well as the Programme Manager and the Programme Support Department for showing interest in this type of evaluation and for funding it.

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

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<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>I) History and Programme Context.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>II) Evaluation Scope and Methodology.....</b>	<b>5</b>
Scope	5
Outline	5
Methodology	6
<b>III) Definitions and Strategy.....</b>	<b>6</b>
Background on External Voting	6
Some Basic Aspects of External Voting	8
Major Challenges	9
Types of External Voting Programmes	9
<b>IV) Operations, Administration and Staffing.....</b>	<b>10</b>
Background	10
Key Tasks	11
Administration	12
Coordination and By-mail Office	13
Regional Offices and the In-person Programmes	15
Pristina Liaison Office	16
Permanent IOM Staff and Field Missions	19
<b>V) Key Issues.....</b>	<b>21</b>
Management of Eligibility Criteria and Integrity of the Process	21
Timelines and Operational Plans	23
Host Government Relations	26
Relations with UNMIK and OSCE	29
Finances and Cost-effectiveness	31
Information Technology Components	33
Security of Electoral Materials and IOM Staff	35
<b>VI) Information Campaign.....</b>	<b>35</b>
Background	36
Issues	38
<b>VII) Political Issues and External Voting.....</b>	<b>40</b>
Refugee Elections	41
Diaspora Elections	48
<b>VIII) Relevance and Possible Future Roles for IOM in External Voting Programmes.....</b>	<b>51</b>
Relevance of External Voting to IOM's Mandate	51
IOM's Comparative Advantage in Organizing External Voting Progs.	52
Prospects for Continued IOM Involvement in External Voting Progs.	53
Institutionalizing External Voting Programmes in IOM	55
<b>Annex I: Terms of Reference</b>	<b>56</b>
<b>Annex II: List of works cited and interviews</b>	<b>60</b>

## ABBREVIATIONS

AEC	Australian Electoral Commission
BiH	Bosnia and Herzegovina
CEC	Central Elections Commission (Kosovo and BiH)
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
EC	Elections Canada
ECAC	Election Complaints and Appeals Commission (OSCE Kosovo)
EPC	Emergency and Post Conflict Division (IOM)
EVET	External Voting for East Timor
FRY	Federal Republic of Yugoslavia
FYROM	Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia
ICMPD	International Center for Migration Policy and Development
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IFES	International Foundation for Electoral Systems
JRT	Joint Registration Task-Force
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
OAS	Organization of American States
OCV	Out of Country Voting (BiH Elections)
ODIHR	Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE)
OKCAC	Out-of- Kosovo Claims and Challenges
OKR	Out-of- Kosovo Registration
OKV	Out-of- Kosovo Voting
OSCE	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
PEC	Provisional Elections Commission (BiH)
Pristina LO	Pristina Liaison Office
PRM	United States Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration
RESG	Refugee Election Steering Group
RO	Regional Office (Montenegro, Macedonia, Albania)
RS	Republika Srpska (BiH)
UNAMET	United Nations Assistance Mission in East Timor
UNEAD	United Nations Electoral Assistance Division
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNMIK	United Nations Mission in Kosovo
UNTAG	United Nations Transition Assistance Group
UNV	United Nations Volunteers
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
Vienna CO	Vienna Coordination Office
Vienna IC	Vienna Information Cell

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 1990s witnessed two seemingly unrelated phenomena: dramatic increases in cross-border migration and the rapid expansion of democratic institutions and practices. While both issues attracted sustained attention from the international community, the linkage between migration and democracy has been little explored. Yet an increasing number of migrants find themselves alienated from the political process in both their countries of origin *and* residence, while providing important economic, cultural, and social benefits to both sending and receiving states.

Since 1996, IOM has played an important role in providing refugees and other displaced persons with the chance to vote by absentee ballot in internationally supervised elections. Beginning with the elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina, IOM has provided hundreds of thousands of individuals with the chance to cast a ballot and exercise a voice in the political affairs of their home state. These exercises have formed the foundation upon which peace is being rebuilt in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and have played a key role in the political settlement of long-enduring conflicts in East Timor and Kosovo.

This evaluation stems from a strong interest inside the IOM to analyze: 1) its role in the implementation of external voting programmes and lessons learned; 2) the political consequences of these operations and whether they support the goals of democratization and creating the conditions for refugee and IDP returns into post-conflict countries and territories; and 3) the relationship between external voting and IOM's mandate, with an eye towards continued service provision in this area. The primary reference for the evaluation is IOM's participation in the 2000 Out-of-Kosovo Voting Programmes in cooperation with the United Nations and Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. IOM's experiences in Bosnia and East Timor are also referenced.

Sections I – VI examine the background, operations, and operational lessons learned from IOM's involvement in external voting programmes. The primary emphasis is on how these programmes can be most efficiently and effectively administered. The key observations and conclusions stemming from the analysis include:

- 1) IOM has a unique comparative advantage in organizing external voting programmes. Its network of field offices and highly flexible and responsive administrative structures allow the organization to implement a cost-efficient programme within the tight timeframes required by elections.
- 2) IOM's performance in external voting since 1996 has been publicly recognized as outstanding. IOM has consistently implemented these programmes in a transparent and professional manner. The UN and OSCE have both acknowledged that IOM's participation has been crucial to the success of their elections programmes.

- 3) Operationally, the 2000 OKV programme improved upon previous programmes. Most notably, the creation of the Pristina Liaison Office was instrumental in overcoming communication and coordination problems between the IOM and the UN/OSCE. In addition, the use of direct funding from the US Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (USPRM) was a major benefit, allowing operations to begin immediately and maintaining institutional knowledge between projects.
- 4) The information campaign created to notify Kosovars about the external registration and voting was extremely sophisticated. The programme identified and contacted over 2,000 Kosovar clubs and associations, placed advertisements in a wide variety of media outlets, and provided direct, personal, links between the programme and individual registrants and voters through the use of a telephone hotline. As a result, the programme received applications for registration from well over 90% of the estimated Kosovars residing outside Kosovo (excluding Serbia and Montenegro)

Many factors contribute to a successful external voting operation. Thus, the report identifies key issues facing IOM as it undertakes a project. First, external voting requires staff with extensive experience in elections design and implementation. While regular IOM staff must be involved at every level, *the technical work must be undertaken by specialists.*

Second, IOM needs to work very closely with staff inside the elections headquarters. Intense time constraints, communications problems, and weak infrastructure can hamper the success of even the best-designed programme. *It is imperative that IOM maintain a presence in elections headquarters in order to overcome these problems.*

Third, IOM's relationship with governments hosting refugees and IDPs has occasionally been rocky. IOM is an implementing partner in external voting programmes, and should be very cautious when its role becomes political (and elections are probably the most political area in which IOM works). The OKV programme very nearly derailed IOM's other work on Yugoslavia. *IOM should be very cautious about issues of sovereignty, and pass all political questions to the implementing organization or to governments.*

Fourth, external voting should drive operational timelines. Any operation that relies on global mail will require extended deadlines and time parameters in order to meet its objectives. This issue must be addressed early with elections administrators, and *IOM should be very cautious of entering a programme where the timelines are not feasible.*

Finally, information technology has repeatedly proven to be a weak link in external voting. Experience demonstrates that IOM should always ensure that it maintains control over the IT component of any election. This requires establishing budget lines for qualified IT specialists, and *close working relationships with the IT department in elections headquarters.*

Section VII addresses the political issues surrounding external voting. The report notes a growing acceptance of the basic principle that a country's citizens ought to be provided with a political voice regardless of their country of current residence. However, claims that external voting makes a significant contribution to creating the conditions for refugee returns and the anchoring of democracy in post-conflict countries must be weighed against the realities of the social and political dynamics of these countries. From a theoretical perspective, it is obvious that in any conflict resulting in mass refugee flows, the peace process ought to provide a political voice to this population. In some instances, it is clear that the external vote has had a profound effect on local political dynamics, forcing political parties and actors to work with each other through democratic institutions, rather than on the battlefield. However, the experience of elections in Bosnia suggests that these programmes have had only limited effect in creating the conditions necessary for refugees and IDPs to feel secure in returning to their original homes and communities. Furthermore, it is far more difficult than imagined for external voting programmes to remain free and fair after the international community departs. In the case of Kosovo, the report notes that while the project appears to have contributed to anchoring democracy, the Serb boycott and the demographics of the province leave many questions unanswered about the efficacy of external voting.

This section also addresses the linkages between migration, citizenship and voting. While it seems appropriate that migrants should not be stripped of their political voice solely due to absence from a country's territory, special attention should be focused on ensuring that this participation is not used as a political tool to the benefit of powerful political actors. In a number of instances, states have found that the Diaspora vote can be structured in such a way as to favor certain interests. In other situations, the disenfranchisement of the Diaspora can also play into the calculations and strategies of political actors. Care must be taken when deciding on an appropriate policy response to this issue.

Finally, Section VIII notes that external voting programmes are clearly linked to IOM's mandate. As a service providing inter-governmental organization dedicated to migration, IOM is in a unique position to institutionalize its experience in external voting programmes and offer technical support and advice to governments in this area. An increasing number of countries are interested in the provision of external voting services, but face technical and financial difficulties in implementing the programmes. IOM, working with other organizations, could play a lead role in the provision of advice and technical support to these countries. However, a number of institutional issues should be addressed within IOM in order for the organization to take full advantage of the capabilities and knowledge developed during previous external voting operations.