Report
IFLA-IPU Conference
Parliamentary library & research services:
towards an agenda for the next decade

6-8 October 2021

An exciting collaboration between IFLA and the Inter-Parliamentary Union led to a successful virtual event, addressing some key issues on the agenda of parliamentary library & research services in the next decade.

The conference attracted almost 500 registrations worldwide and around 150-220 simultaneous participants throughout the three days it was running. This compares well with the typical attendance at our regular pre-IFLA WLIC satellite conferences. The Standing Committee and IPU will make a full evaluation of participant feedback.

Full information on the conference, including the names and details of all the presenters, and integrated links to videos and slides can be found in English, French and Spanish online versions of the conference programme. Please note that the recordings and slides are in the original language and we cannot provide translations.

A summary of proceedings follows the acknowledgements and call for new contributions.

Acknowledgements

IFLAPARL wishes to thank the IPU and its Secretary-General Martin Chungong for the partnership that made the event possible. It thanks Andy Richardson, the IPU programme manager, in particular, for his faith, good advice and diligence that made the event happen; and Karen Chica Gomez for flawless technical support.

The President of IFLA, Barbara Lison and the staff of IFLA HQ are also thanked for their help and support.

The event was made – and made well - by all the individual presenters who delivered an impressive and stimulating body of work. Participants with their questions, contributions and good will made for a good atmosphere and lively event. Thank you all.

Curating the content of the event was primarily the responsibility of IFLAPARL and that aspect of the project was delivered for IFLAPARL by a team of volunteers coordinated by Iain Watt, Chair of IFLAPARL to August 2021. Most of the volunteers were also moderators in the conference – they were directly responsible for conceiving and delivering the content for their

session, working with the presenters, over a period of months. Iain wishes to thank the team for their successful efforts and making his job easy. Members of the IFLAPARL Standing Committee who were on the team: Ellie Valentine, Fabiola Rosales, Ida Kelemen, Janice Silveira, Jonathan Curtis, Josefa Fuentes, Julie Anderson, Karin Finer and Sonia Bebbington. A very special thanks to Edward Wood who is not a Standing Committee member but who brilliantly led much of the work for the third day of the event.

Call for new contributions

All members of the IFLAPARL mailing list are invited to add their own case studies and contributions on the themes of the conference. You can do so through the Global Public Square for Parliamentary Library & Research Services (GPS-PLRS). IFLAPARL would love you to join this big conversation on the agenda for the next decade!

One theme that could be followed-up by a wider set of participants is the **'agenda for the next decade'** itself that the conference title refers to. Is there a common agenda and did we get the list right? The themes of the conference were practical challenges we believe face services now and for the foreseeable future:

- How to do parliamentary strengthening that works for library & research services?
- How is the pandemic changing our services?
- How is data being used in parliamentary research services?
- How do services address questions of diversity, inclusion and accessibility?
- Are clients and their needs changing?
- What new service strategies are relevant in the new environment?
- What does it mean to be 'impartial' as a service?
- What kind of people do we need now, how should they work and how should they be organised?

Certainly, we omitted some key topics due to lack of time. One missing was the concept of **'evidence'** in relation to policy and the role of parliamentary library and research services in delivering it, with a clear link to SDG16. That had, however, been the subject of our successful session at the IFLA WLIC in August. Another was the practicalities of **business continuity planning**, an issue that emerged from the IFLAPARL pandemic surveys. This might be broadened to a more general question of **resilience** including in relation to the impacts of climate change on parliamentary services. (A suggestion of the Scottish Parliament service). How to work and manage a service **ethically** has been a topic of previous IFLAPARL meetings and it appeared again, spontaneously, in this conference. The management and consequences of **digital transformation** was a vein running through many, if not all, sessions. Wider questions were integral to the conference discussions – Is **democracy** retreating, in the face of populism and authoritarian government and/or evolving to more direct forms, with more citizen participation? Does the agenda on inclusion, diversity and accessibility imply fundamental change? What do these several questions imply for maintaining an effective library & research service? It is quite critical to understand what an 'effective service' means now and in the future if, for example, one is designing a parliamentary strengthening programme. At a meta level the conference addressed another question for this decade: what is the future **role of IFLAPARL**, how does it sit in relation to the (blossoming) regional organisations and to other stakeholders such as the IPU and the many providers of parliamentary strengthening support on library & research services?

Summary of the event

Introduction

This report summarises the event with links to videos and slides. The title of each session below includes a link to the full-length video of the session, including any slides. Other links are to excerpts and to separate files with slides.

Day 1 – Introducing IPU and IFLAPARL and two leading issues

The conference was opened with messages from the President of IFLA, Barbara Lison, and the Secretary-General of the IPU, Martin Chungong.

The introductory sessions provided short presentations of IFLAPARL and the IPU. The Josefa Fuentes, current Chair of IFLAPARL, gave an overview of the Section and its ambitions for the future [Video in Spanish], while Andy Richardson, Programme Manager, gave an introduction to the IPU, its services and activities. [Video in English] [Slides - English] The IPU sustains an array of very useful activities and services. PARLINE, for example, is a treasure-trove of data well-worth discovering.

The programme for the first two days addressed an agenda of key topics for the next decade in parliamentary library and research services. These topics were identified by IFLAPARL with the help of a survey of subscribers to its mailing list. The headline session, **parliamentary strengthening - what works for library & research services?**, covered the topic that received the most votes in the survey. This is a wide field of activity with many players over the years but there has not been much public exchange of practice. The session began with an introduction by Ellie Valentine, former parliamentary strengthening practitioner in the library/research field, who also moderated. (To view just Ellie's introduction, follow these links: [Video - English] [Slides - English]). The remainder of the session brought together a stellar panel of contributors – both givers and receivers of support - who testified that the development of parliamentary library & research services could be achieved by a range of methods. Some methods are more effective than others, however. Three key points, amongst many to be picked up from this session, were

1. Whatever development you do, make sure it aligns with the needs of Members. More than that, make sure the decision-makers in the house – Members and secretariat – understand and support the development. Build their trust.
2. The IFLA guidelines and the IFLAPARL network are free resources – use them. Build your own network of support and expertise.
3. Have a clear structure and plan, with agreed objectives and expected outcomes. Ensure participants and stakeholders understand and agree their commitments – involve them.

The second topical session, moderated by Janice Silveira, looked at the **impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the operations of parliamentary library & research services**. A new IFLAPARL survey report, with responses from this year, has just been published. The report was introduced [Video in English] [Slides - English] and we heard direct from colleagues round the world in three case studies about their experience, focusing on

- Adaptation and change in strategy [Video in English] [Slides - English]
- Rapid transition from a hard copy base towards digital services [Video in Spanish] [Slides - English]
- Measures to ensure well-being [Video in English] [Slides - English]

The overall picture is of resilience and radical change, themes which reappeared in later sessions.

Day 2 – three leading issues

The second day featured sessions on three further topics on the 'agenda for the next decade'. The first session, prepared by Karin Finer and Jonathan Curtis and moderated by Jonathan, was on '**the role of data in Library and Research Services for Parliaments: challenges, opportunities and best practices**'. The session had four rich and practical presentations covering the use of data in the form of parliamentary procedures [Video in English] [Slides - English], spatial data [Video in English] [Slides - English], mapping data [Video in English] [Slides - English] and visualisations [Video in English] [Slides - English]. The potential for the use of data in parliamentary libraries and research services is massive, and that potential is beginning to be realised in some services. While there are approaches that require a high level of technical support and specialist staff – to produce stunning results – it was encouraging to hear (in the case study on visualisations) that results can also be achieved with everyday technology and regular staff. In the first presentation we learned also that even with the most sophisticated technical approaches, librarians and information specialists are still sometimes needed to identify critical information! This session generated a lively interest from attendees.

The conference then addressed one of the most significant topics of recent years, which is how parliamentary library and research services manage **accessibility, diversity and inclusion**, in a session moderated by Julie Anderson. These are not new issues, by any means, but they have recently become urgent in many jurisdictions. We looked at the issue through the lens of language. Three practitioners shared their work on the use of plain language [Video in English] [Slides - English], the creation of inclusive glossaries [Video in French] [Slides - French and English] and the ways different languages can be respected [Video in Spanish] [Slides - Spanish]. This was a wide-ranging session including tips on inclusive design of publications and insights into the challenges of serving multi-lingual and multi-cultural democracies. While the focus of our services might be on Members, many services also have a window open to the wider community – or rather, communities. We heard how legal and parliamentary information could be adapted to be accessible to different communities.

The last topical session was moderated by Ida Kelemen and addressed **service strategy for the new environment**. Presenters described how their service had responded to crisis [Video in English], found new ways to identify and meet client needs [Video in English] and made progress towards a sustainable legislative process [Video in Spanish] [Slides - English]. This last concerned a parliamentary library & research service informing citizens – or at least civil society organisations – to support participation in the democratic process, which provoked a lively discussion.

We also heard how the pandemic had accelerated change in services, with some of that adaptation surely permanent. There was a reference to **Business Continuity Planning**, which featured in the first IFLAPARL survey and is certainly another big topic for the decade ahead.

Day 3 – Workshops on the guidelines for parliamentary libraries

The programme on the third day was intended to take a different format, with interactive workshops where all conference attendees were called on to actively participate. It began with a **plenary session providing an overview of the forthcoming IFLA guidelines for parliamentary libraries**. The guidelines were last published in 2009 and an update is being prepared by IFLAPARL for publication in partnership with the IPU. Although the title refers to 'libraries' the text also has coverage of parliamentary research services. The draft guidelines

were introduced by Ed Wood, a Director of the House of Commons Library, United Kingdom. [Video in English] [Slides - English]. The introduction was followed by a vote on a topic for plenary discussion, from which 'ICT in parliamentary libraries' emerged as the winner. Following this plenary discussion, participants broke out into groups to look at three key topics in the guidelines. These topics were

- **'User needs and engagement: are parliamentarians needs changing?'** with an introductory presentation from Fabiola Rosales, who also moderated the session, [Video in Spanish] [Slides - English], and two presentations on the pandemic, changing client needs and changing engagement [Video in English] [Slides - English] [Video in English] [Slides - English]. These were followed by a period of questions & answers by the presenters.
- **'Impartiality in practice'** moderated and introduced by Ed Wood [Slides - English] This workshop sparked a great deal of participant response, with some themes connecting very much with the IFLAPARL ethics checklist.
- **'New staffing and working models'** moderated and introduced by Sonia Bebbington [Slides - English]. The pandemic has produced and accelerated change in ways of working, some of which will be permanent. It was clear from the discussion that this is a challenging area for service managers.

The conference reconvened in a **final plenary session** to hear a report back from the moderators. The conference then concluded with Andy Richardson and Iain Watt thanking to all concerned, and a final message from Josefa Fuentes, Chair of IFLAPARL, thanking the organisers and giving a tour d'horizon and call to action. Josefa described our services' mission as being to work for a better world, through their contribution to knowledge management, the democratisation of documentation and sharing the knowledge of the history and study of parliaments. IFLAPARL's role is to ensure that these efforts and professional expertise are shared – even if collaboration can be a challenge, we must work at it, taking small steps if necessary but always aiming for the objective.

Iain Watt, former Chair of IFLAPARL

7 November 2021