ParlAmericas

ORGANIZING VIRTUAL PARLIAMENTARY SITTINGS

This infographic provides general advice for parliaments transitioning to virtual plenary sittings and committee meetings, based on international standards and the experience of parliaments that have successfully conducted such virtual sittings, including the National Congress of Brazil, the National Assembly of Ecuador, and the National Congress of Chile.

Enabling Remote Access to Documents

Remote access to the parliament's network, data and systems can allow parliamentary staff and advisers to continue supporting parliamentarians, the administration of plenary sittings and committee meetings, and other parliamentary services at a distance.

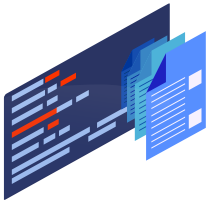
Virtual Private Network (VPN): Provides a secure communication between members of a group through the use of public telecommunications infrastructure.

File Hosting Services: Provides users the ability to upload files that can be accessed over the internet.

Cloud Based Servers: Provides a physical or virtual infrastructure that performs application and information processing storage.

Remote Desktop Protocol (RDP): Provides remote access to a computer, giving access to documents that are securely stored and backed up in a remote location, such as the Congress.

Virtual Machine: Provides the same functionality as a physical computer, it has the ability to run applications and has an operating system.



Proprietary Parliamentary Software: Parliaments may already have or create their own mechanism for this purpose which may be combined with a VPN, document management system, file hosting server or remote desktop protocol.

- **Brazil:** The Chamber of Deputies' mobile application "InfoLeg", which provided public information on the Chamber's legislative activities was modified to give parliamentarians private access to additional functionalities, including accessing documents for sittings. To gain access, the mobile device must be registered on the Chamber's intranet using a unique identification code generated after installing the app.
- **Chile:** The Chamber of Deputies' digital desk "Pupitre Electrónico" was enabled to be used remotely using a VPN through a mobile application or online.
- **Ecuador:** The National Assembly's digital desk "Curul Electrónica" is on an Intranet that can be accessed remotely with a personal login and using a remote desk protocol (AnyDesk). The Document Management System (DTS 2.0) provides access to documents.
- **Argentina:** The Chamber of Deputies is using Microsoft Teams to continue internal meetings and share work files.

Allowing and developing an electronic signature certification can facilitate document sharing and creation, as well as tracking modifications. It also guarantees the security and legality of official documents.

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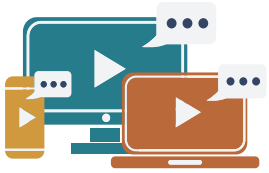
Video Conferencing

Various video conferencing platforms can be used to host virtual plenary sittings or committee meetings. For security reasons, parliaments can consider strictly using the video conference system for audio-visual communication and develop a parallel internal system for voting, attendance, and other required functions.

		Proprietary software developed for the parliament	Zoom	Microsoft Teams	Cisco Webex	BlueJeans
1	Up to 500 or more participants	✓	✓ Up to 1,000	✗ Up to 250	✓ Up to 1,000	✗ Up to 100
2	Registration of participants	✓	✓	✗	✓	Creates attendee list
3	Authentication	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
4	Live streaming	✓	✓ Youtube; Facebook Live	✓	✓ Vbrick Rev, IBM Video; Facebook Live	✓ Facebook Live
5	Recording	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
6	Guest participants	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
7	Interpretation to other language(s)	✓	✓ Built in	Inline message translation	Closed captioning or sign language feed	✓ Partnership with Interprefy

Witnesses can be invited to participate in committee meetings as guests. This can be done securely by enabling authentication features.



Most video conferencing platforms allow to record and livestream sittings through YouTube, Facebook Live and other platforms, and to integrate this feature with official parliamentary channels.

Some video conferencing platforms have a built-in function for simultaneous interpretation to conduct meetings in more than one language and others allow integration or separate use of interpretation platforms such as Interprefy, Verbavolant and Lighthouse Translations.

Attendance and Quorum

Registering attendance is important for transparency and accountability purposes as well as ensuring quorum. For this reason, a definition of what constitutes virtual presence is also required (i.e., the face of the parliamentarian must be visible for the duration of the sitting).

Brazil: Members of Congress register their attendance through the parliament's "InfoLeg" application, using a personal password. This information is used to determine quorum at the start of the sitting.

Brazil: The Senate registers attendance based on the voting records drawn up by the Remote Deliberation System (SDR) and monitors quorum based on the Zoom participant list at the start of the sitting, at 15 minute intervals and prior to voting, and submits it to the dedicated WhatsApp group.

Ecuador: Parliamentarians register their attendance through remote access to the National Assembly's Digital Desk (Intranet) using a password and/or biometrics, and parliamentarians must be visible on the screen. This information is also used to determine quorum.

Parliamentarians' attendance can be registered based on virtual presence, where parliamentarians must be visible on the screen.

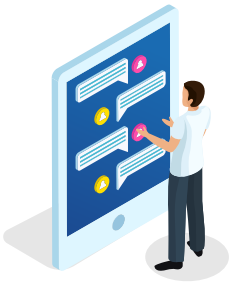
Attendance should be recorded and published on the parliamentary website.

Voting

Voting is a critical part of parliamentary work and it's important that virtual voting carries the same credibility as that conducted in-person.

Mobile application

- **Brazil:** Members of the Chamber of Deputies vote by selecting a button in the "InfoLeg" application and providing a password to confirm their choice, on their mobile that has been registered with the Chamber. After voting is completed, the results are transferred to the legislative system and the data is treated exactly as in traditional sittings. Senators receive a link to the voting system access page through SMS or WhatsApp from the Secretary General during the voting period. Upon voting by selecting a button, a picture is captured using the device's front facing camera and a code is sent by SMS/WhatsApp to confirm the vote.



- **Chile**: Members of the Chamber of Deputies vote by selecting a button in an application managed by the Secretary General and the Speaker, when prompted by a notification indicating that a bill requires a vote. To log in to the application they require two factor authentication, and to gain authorization to vote, they must be visible on camera and enter a personal pin. The application generates a verification code as proof of how the parliamentarian voted.

- **Local municipalities of Spain**: Councillors vote using a third party video conferencing application that is uniquely modified for the local council, with an integrated voting function.

Voting

E-mail

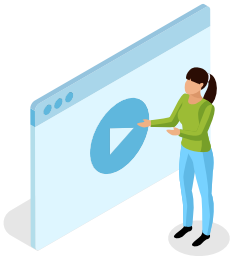
- **EU Parliament:** Parliamentarians vote by signing a ballot and submitting it through their institutional email.

Remote access of Digital Desk

- **Ecuador:** Members of the National Assembly vote by remotely accessing this function of the National Assembly's Digital Desk (Intranet). Their identity is verified through credentials associated with their institutional parliamentary email.

Manually via videoconference

- Parliamentarians can vote verbally, as the Speaker implements a vote by roll call. If the Speaker is physically at the parliament they may input each vote into the traditional vote tracking system, alternatively a spreadsheet can be used to record votes.
- **Peru:** Members of Congress vote by informing the leaders of their respective party, who provides his or her members' votes to the Speaker.
- **Paraguay:** Senators vote by using visual accessories: a green card for approval, a red card for rejection and a yellow for abstention.



Voting decisions can be confirmed by each parliamentarian to ensure that they were recorded correctly and a process can be developed to report an unexpected modification. Once confirmed votes can be published on the parliamentary website.

Security Measures

Security measures are required to ensure that only authorized users can access the systems supporting virtual sittings and its functionalities, such as video conferencing and voting.

Manage users and devices being used to access the remote network

- Register any devices using its Media Access Control (MAC) address to ensure only validated devices are used within the remote network.
- Allow the use of personal devices solely for video conferencing purposes.
- Install information sensitive applications on mobile devices rather than laptops as they are less often unsupervised.
- Delete users and groups that are no longer in use.

Network security

- Encrypt data by implementing measures such as public-key cryptography, SSH key authentication and running the system over HTTPS.
- Implement vulnerability scans of the systems used.

User Authentication

- Use biometrics, facial metrics, two-factor or multi-factor authentication to validate identity.
- Set-up unique credentials for parliamentarians to access their personal accounts and set up a unique password for each parliamentarian to use to confirm their attendance or vote.

Secure and private virtual meetings

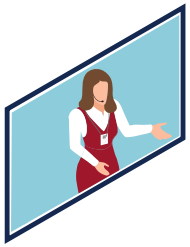
- Only share the meeting ID through secure channels and ensure it is set to private.
- Enable authentication features, including pin protection and change it regularly.
- Monitor and control the entry of participants and guests and use the waiting room function.
- Manage participant controls (microphone and video).
- Disable the document sharing function and the chat, or avoid sending any sensitive information through these functions.

Equipment and Personnel

Specific equipment and personnel are essential to host and participate in virtual meetings.

Devices (more than one may be required)

Professional background and centred image



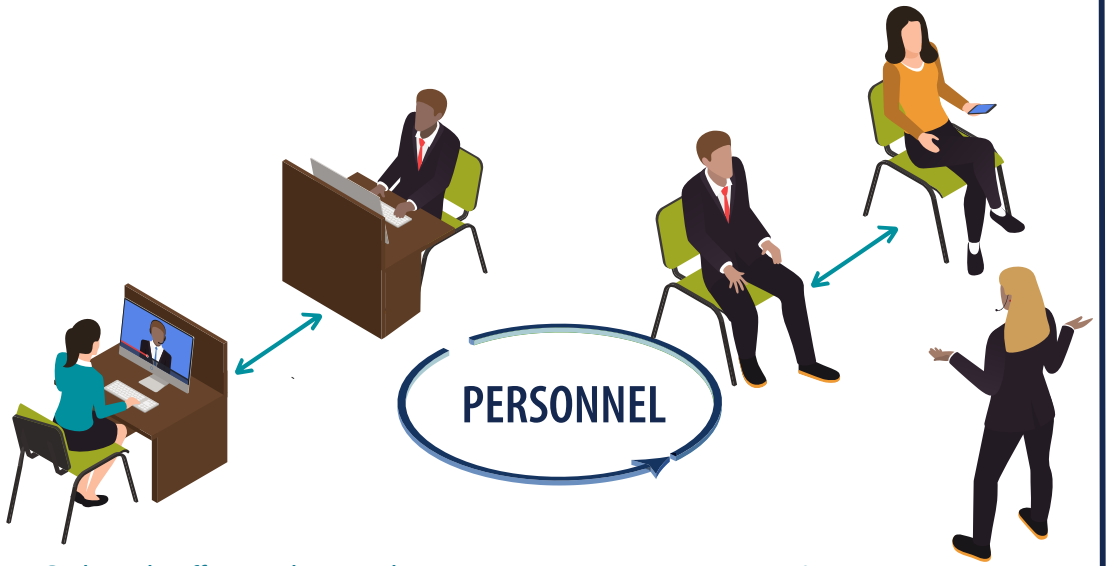
EQUIPMENT

Video and audio (microphone)

Good internet connection

Colombia: The administration is ensuring that all parliamentarians have good internet connection in order to properly conduct their parliamentary work.

Ecuador: The National Assembly of Ecuador dedicated a team of IT support staff to get parliamentarians set up to participate in virtual sittings, and provide on-demand support during these sittings.



PERSONNEL

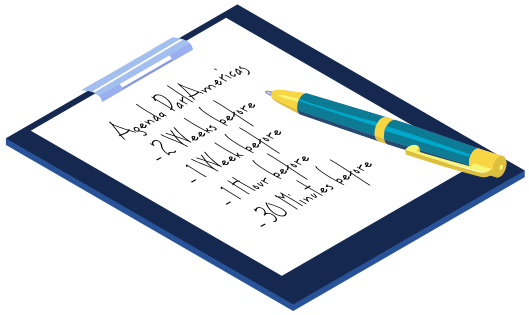
Dedicated staff to coordinate and support virtual sittings

Training for parliamentarians and parliamentary staff

Procedural Changes

Parliaments may be required to adopt constitutional reforms or to modify legislation or their standing orders to allow virtual sittings, as well as to adopt new parliamentary practices to conduct these sittings.

- Focus virtual sittings on essential issues.
- Indicate which sittings will be conducted virtually when establishing the weekly legislative agenda.
- Submit requests and notices of sittings through institutional email, and establish a minimum notice time (i.e. 24 hours in advance).
- Distribute bills or other relevant documentation that will be discussed prior to the sitting with enough time for parliamentarians to review (i.e. 24 hours in advance).
- Implement shorter debate times.
- Build the technical capacity of parliamentarians and parliamentary staff to enable a smooth virtual plenary.
- Ensure the safety of individuals that may be required to be physically present in the parliament for the virtual sitting.
- Use electronic documents and electronic signatures.



Procedural Changes

The following are examples of regulations that were amended or resolutions that were adopted for the implementation of virtual sittings:

- **Brazil:** The Chamber of Deputies approved Resolution 11/20 and the Senate approved the Rule of the Steering Committee N.7 of 2020.
- **Chile:** The Senate of Chile modified their Standing Orders to allow virtual sittings and remote voting and developed a Protocol for virtual meetings.
- **Ecuador:** The National Assembly approved Resolution CAL-2019-2021-213.
- **Paraguay:** The Chamber of Deputies approved Resolution 1222 and the Senate approved Resolution 1.286.

To ensure a smooth meeting or sitting it is recommended to:

- Assign the responsibility of unmuting participants to a parliamentary staff, Speaker/President or Committee Chair who is hosting the sitting or meeting.
- Promote the use of the chat or the 'raise hand' function in the videoconferencing platforms (or a separate chat or messaging board) for parliamentarians to request to speak.

Cyber Security Practices for Users

Cyber security practices are important to ensure the security of the parliament's information which may be more vulnerable as parliaments transition to working remotely.

- Control login information
  - Use complex passwords and change them regularly
  - Implement two-factor or multi-factor authentication when possible
  - Avoid sharing images on social media that may provide sensitive information (such as credentials or personal information)
- Store credentials securely through a password manager
- Install trusted software from credible and trusted sources
- Regularly update software and operating systems
- Regularly check for vulnerabilities using an antivirus software
- Enable a firewall on your device
- Use a personal VPN if the parliament doesn't already use one
- Avoid using a public Wi-Fi Network when conducting parliamentary work
- Connection should be secured by ensuring there is a lock icon in the URL address bar
- Browse safely, beware of phishing scams, don't click on pop-ups or suspicious links. Consider installing a pop-up blocker.
- Backup all your important files and encrypt backed up data that contains sensitive information. Consider protecting it with a password if possible.

Canada

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