

“ENSURING THE ENFRANCHISEMENT OF MONGOLIAN DIASPORA”

POLICY BRIEF

INTRODUCTION

Countries with large diaspora communities who may demand inclusion in the electoral process of their country of origin¹ conduct an “Out-of-Country Voting (OCV)” operation with activities such as electronic voting, mail-in-ballot, increasing the number and reach of polling stations, and improving voters’ education. Many countries around the world implemented the OCV program combining electronic and mail-in options with traditional voting methods.

MONGOLIA’S EXPERIENCE WITH THE OCV AND THE CURRENT SITUATION

Mongolia enfranchised its diasporas in the parliamentary election of 2012, and the presidential elections of 2013, 2017, and 2021 respectively. The voter turnout among the diaspora tends to be lower due to factors such as discrepancies between registration timelines, stages, and polling dates, as well as a lack of human and financial resources to conduct the operation. Furthermore, political parties often fail to include any election promises concerning the diaspora communities, and emigrants with documentation issues fear the possibility of gathering the attention of the residing country’s immigration authorities while casting their vote at the diplomatic mission.

The population group of the Mongolian diaspora comprises a large number of highly educated, and young people² who are of voting age. Hence, the State Great Khural and the General Election Commission (GEC) are working toward improving the legal framework to ensure the diaspora enfranchisement and voters’ education through digital initiatives such as electronic voting machines (EVM), electronic registration (for voters in Mongolia), and digital access of information about the polling station and list of the voters. The full potential of ensuring the enfranchisement of Mongolian diaspora via mail-in-ballot and e-voting is soon to be realized.

As an international organization dedicated to assisting member countries in migration management, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) has formulated the following recommendations to uphold the embodiment of the enfranchisement of Mongolian diaspora.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

The current voter turnout among the diaspora is low even though the Mongolian Diaspora population group comprises a large number of highly educated, and young people who are of voting age.

GoM and the GEC are incorporating various digital initiatives to ensure the diaspora enfranchisement and enhance voters’ education.

Action towards the diaspora community inclusion in the election campaign agenda, choosing efficient channels and preferred formats to disseminate voters’ education contents, and diversifying their ways to cast a ballot are recommended.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Increase the number of polling stations abroad.** Mongolian citizens living abroad must cast their vote in person exclusively at the diplomatic mission offices. As of 2023, a total of 211,611 Mongolians reside in over 80 countries around the world of which only 35 of them have Mongolian diplomatic missions in their 49 cities, indicating inadequate polling stations. IOM has experience in providing full support to the member states and their election management

1. IFES (International Foundation for Electoral Systems), White Paper Series, Out-of-Country Voting: A Brief Overview
2. IOM, IDF. Discussion Paper: “Understanding the Situation of the Mongolian Diaspora”, 2023

body (EMB) in conducting OCV operations. Applying the best practices of related international organizations (IOs) and collaborating on election management activities to conduct OCV operations in the cities with a substantial amount of Mongolian diaspora yet no diplomatic missions.

2. **Enhance voters' education.** During the last election, the GEC jointly held an “Election Data Hackathon” with the “LEAD – Foreign Graduates Alumni Association” to encourage youth engagement in the election. According to a study², the most efficient information channel for disseminating information and communicating with the diasporas is through social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram. In recent years, people have shifted their attention to reels and infographics rather than photos and texts. Hence, producing voters’ education content in such formats with the collaboration of IOs and civil society organizations (CSOs) will enhance the quality and engagement of information.
3. **Diversify ways to cast diasporas' ballots.** Just as the new citizen registration system contributed to the successful launching of the automated election system, the digitization of government services is creating a foundation for e-voting. The voter turnout will surely go up once they can register online from wherever they are. Furthermore, GoM should enable multiple ways for the diaspora community to cast their votes, such as via mail-in ballots or e-voting. The following steps are necessary for the implementation:
 - a. The Ministry of Digital Development and Communications (MDDC) reported that 12 out of 49 Mongolian diplomatic missions have installed a “Khurdan” kiosk center in their office and the remaining missions will receive it within the year 2024. Meanwhile, relevant organizations such as the General Authority for State Registration (GASR) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) should provide secure connections between the diplomatic mission and the service center via VPN. Thus, the voter’s registration gets simplified and swiftly corrects the inconsistent information in the system.
 - b. To enable voters to register and cast their ballots from where they are via mail to the nearest diplomatic mission or directly to the GEC.
 - c. To register and vote electronically, citizens must acquire a digital signature to verify their identity. Obtaining a digital signature can be incorporated into the process of renewing a passport that can be managed under certain regulations.
4. **Raise citizens’ sense of responsibility, and effectively promote policies and activities aimed at diaspora communities.** The low level of trust in the government is observed in common conceptions such as “My vote will not affect the election results” which resulted in the lower voter turnout. If GoM focuses greatly on the diaspora engagement policy and promotes it efficiently, this newfound relation can bear fruit of better voter turnout and active diaspora engagement in homeland development. Article 9.5 of the Law on Travel Abroad for Personal Purpose and Immigration to Foreign Countries mandates citizens who have been abroad for more than 6 months or who have emigrated abroad to register their address at Mongolian diplomatic missions. It is crucial to make citizens understand the importance of abiding by this law and how it is there to only serve the interest of Mongolian citizens abroad to protect their interests and rights, not to disclose their information to the residing country’s government agencies, as misconceived among diasporas. This information needs to be broadly disseminated to the diaspora communities.
5. **Include content concerning diasporas in the election campaign.** The number of Mongolians living abroad is equal to the voting-age population of 1-2 provinces in Mongolia. By informing political parties about the capacity of voters abroad, they will be motivated to run targeted election campaigns. Therefore, it is necessary to refer to the regulations regarding the inclusion of content aimed at citizens abroad in the election campaigns of political parties. Also, appointing the registration date following the campaign date can reduce the risk of missing voter registration among diasporas.

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