

PRESS RELEASE

Elections Act restores franchise to millions of Britons living abroad

Millions of British citizens living abroad will today regain the right to vote in national elections as part of the Elections Act, which received Royal Assent today.

While most democracies allow all their citizens to vote in their national elections wherever they live in the world, Britons based overseas have been disenfranchised after Labour introduced an arbitrary 15 years of living outside the UK limit. British citizens working and living abroad are also banned from voting in the national elections of their country of residence. This new Act restores the democratic right to vote in UK General Elections to an estimated 2.3 million¹ Britons living abroad.

The measure has been a Conservative Manifesto commitment but opposition from Labour and Liberal Democrats has, until now, prevented legislation from passing through Parliament.

British citizens living abroad can vote in the last constituency they were registered to vote in or of their last UK address. In 2010, around 30,000 registered to vote in the General Election. By 2019 this had increased to an estimated 245,048².

Heather Harper MBE, Chairman of Conservatives Abroad, which led the campaign to restore the franchise, welcomed the new legislation. "Millions of people living abroad, both working and retired, ranging from doctors and teachers to businesspeople in vital export sectors such as financial services and energy, have been prevented from exercising their democratic right to vote. This new legislation puts Britain back on a par with democracies such as the USA, France, Italy and New Zealand in recognising the importance of their citizens worldwide."

¹ Page 61 Elections Bill Impact Assessment – Cabinet Office, July 2021

² ONS Electoral Statistics, March 2020

History of the 'Votes for Life' campaign:- <https://www.conservativesabroad.org/votes-for-life>

Conservatives Abroad is the British Conservative Party's global network of its members living overseas.

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