

From Tuesday, 16th January, 3.5 million Brits abroad become eligible to vote in this year's UK General Election, potentially impacting results in key marginal seats

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

With a crucial UK General Election on the horizon this year, Liberal Democrats Abroad are urging millions of Brits living overseas to make sure they register to vote so they can exercise their full democratic rights.

Up to now, British citizens living overseas could only vote in UK elections if they had lived in the UK over the previous 15 years and had previously registered to vote.

However, **on Tuesday 16 January, all that changes** as 2.1 million more UK citizens will now be eligible to vote, bringing the total number of Brits abroad eligible to vote to around 3.5 million. This is an electorate almost the size of Scotland's.

Lib Dems Abroad are spearheading an overseas voter registration campaign on behalf of the Liberal Democrat party in the UK, in partnership with the Electoral Commission, alongside the two other mainstream UK parties. This means the Liberal Democrat party will effectively contest a General Election across the globe for the first time.

Lib Dem Chief Whip and President of Lib Dems for Electoral Reform, Wendy Chamberlain MP, commented: "Liberal Democrats are delighted that our campaign to abolish the arbitrary 15-year rule has finally succeeded.

"Liberal Democrat MPs will always advocate for their overseas constituents and the issues that matter to them. We will continue to lead calls in Parliament to secure overseas

constituencies, so that all UK nationals living overseas will be represented by full-time voices in Parliament."

Among the issues of major concern to British citizens living abroad include the need for the UK to rebuild its reputation abroad, strengthening ties with Europe, unfreezing state pensions, climate change mitigation, improving embassy and consular support, and ensuring speedier evacuation of vulnerable British citizens in times of crisis. Their votes could well make a huge difference in key marginal seats where the incumbent is sitting on a small majority.

"Lib Dems Abroad believe, as a matter of principle, that overseas voters should be treated equitably to those who continue to live in the UK, especially given British citizens overseas now have full democratic rights. The needs and interests of overseas voters need to be taken properly into account in UK legislation," said Lib Dems Abroad Steering Committee Chair, George Cunningham.

DETAIL

Amendments in the 2022 Elections Act have abolished the rule that blocked British citizens who have lived for more than 15 years outside the UK, or never registered to vote when resident in the UK, from voting.

These changes mean that:

- As from Tuesday, British citizens overseas will now be able to vote in UK parliamentary elections, no matter how long they have been away from the UK. They will need to have previously lived in the UK.
- The registration period will change from every year to every three years. Anyone registering from now will ensure their vote is valid for the next UK General Election, which must be held by January 2025.

All newly-eligible overseas voters can start preparing before registering by gathering details of their proof of identity (for example, their National Insurance number, plus current or expired passport). In addition, they will need to provide the postcode and address of their last place of residence or of voter registration in the UK. Then please go and register at gov.uk/register-to-vote

In addition to urging all British citizens to register to vote, Lib Dems Abroad say they should also strongly consider appointing proxies.

“As General Elections are often last-minute, proxies are needed to make sure votes from overseas count as from many areas the post can be slow and postal votes can easily go astray,” said Lib Dems In Europe Chair, David Sapiro.

“We’ve heard from British citizens living abroad that they are worried about how long it can take to receive and return their ballots by post at election time. That’s why we’re strongly advising people to think about who they can nominate as their proxy in the UK to vote on their behalf. ”

“The person exercising the proxy doesn’t even need to be from the constituency where they have a vote. They just need to be eligible voters in the UK, who will then receive and return the ballot paper back by post for them. This should give people a much wider choice of those to ask, and could be especially important for those who have lived outside the UK for more than 15 years.”

Proxies can be nominated by using the existing online system at gov.uk/register-to-vote.

“I left the UK a long time ago, but still pay UK taxes on a public service pension” says John Ketchell, resident abroad since 1990. “Getting the vote back at long last will help European residents to push for a much-needed improved relationship between the UK and its European neighbours.”

END

Notes to editors

- The Liberal Democrats are a UK political party currently with 15 Members of Parliament in the House of Commons and 84 members in the House of Lords.
- Lib Dems Abroad, whose steering committee is chaired by George Cunningham, is made up of *Lib Dems in France*, *Lib Dems in Europe*, and *Lib Dems Overseas*.
- Lib Dems Abroad are already reaching out to British voters overseas to ensure they are fully informed of their voting rights, as requested of UK political parties by the Electoral Commission. Please see our explanation of the electoral changes and how to make the most of the opportunity at <https://www.britsabroad.vote/>

Interview availability

- Lib Dems in France Chair - Jenny Shorten
- Lib Dems in Europe Chair - David Sapiro
- Lib Dems Overseas – George Cunningham

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