



Parliamentary briefing - Overseas constituencies for UK citizens abroad

This briefing sets out the case for overseas constituencies, what constitutes an overseas constituency, the rationale for introducing overseas constituencies, an estimate of the cost of introducing overseas constituencies and the call for action for parliamentarians.

1. Context

The Elections Act 2022 received Royal Assent on 28 April 2022.

Section 14, amending sections 1&2 of the Representation of the People Act 1985, removed the 15-year limit that had hitherto applied to electoral registration of British citizens who reside abroad. Now any British citizen resident outside the UK who was *previously registered* to vote in the UK or was *previously resident* in the UK is entitled to vote in Parliamentary elections.

Overseas voters can be registered either at the *last address they were registered to vote* before leaving (as now) or, for newly eligible people, at the *last address they were resident* in the UK before leaving.

Registration renewal is required every three years. Trials are underway in Birmingham (in June 2025) to test a simpler method for overseas voters to register.

2. Government rationale for extending the franchise beyond the 15-year bar

In its policy paper (Dept for Levelling up, Housing & Communities, 3 February 2022), the government argued that:

- Most British citizens overseas retain deep ties to the UK. Many still have family here, some will return here. Many will have a lifetime of hard work in the UK behind them, and some will have fought for our country.

- Advances in technology have enabled high-speed global communications, allowing British citizens to follow domestic affairs in real-time.
- Britons overseas are directly affected by decisions made in Parliament – for example, on foreign policy, defence, immigration, or pensions. It is therefore right that they have a voice in elections to that body.

3. Expected scale of overseas voters

In the Impact Assessment for the Elections Bill 2022, the Government estimated that the changes, ending the 15-year limit and allowing all British citizens previously resident to be eligible, will mean *around 3.5 million British nationals living overseas would be eligible to register to vote*.¹

For reference, the total registered electorate for the 2024 General Election was 48.2 million², of these, only around 190,000 were overseas voters.³

4. What is an overseas constituency?

An electoral district located outside of the state territory borders that is designated as a district for the representation of eligible voters residing temporarily or permanently there.

5. Overseas constituencies: global prevalence

There are at least 17 countries of different sizes and electoral systems with overseas constituencies, including several European countries – Croatia, France, Italy, Lithuania, North Macedonia, Portugal, and Romania.

6. Overseas constituencies: rationale

The rationale for overseas constituencies includes:

- *Weakened territorial link*: the removal of the 15-year bar strengthens the case for special representations for eligible voters residing abroad: whereas they retain interests on the national level that justify their enfranchisement, their links to a territorially bound constituency in the UK may be weak, and is likely to be weakened with the passage of time.
- *Aligned concerns and interests*: overseas voters' concerns and interests are more likely to align with electors formerly resident in other UK constituencies who now reside alongside them abroad. In the European/EU context, this is particularly acute given challenges arising from loss of EU citizenship and divergent practices across the EU-27 in respect of the implementation of the Withdrawal Agreement.

¹ <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/bills/cbill/58-02/0138/2021-05-07ImpactAssessmentREV.pdf>

² [General election 2024: Results and analysis](#)

³ [Overseas voters - House of Commons Library](#)

- *Representation:* Rather than their vote being drowned out and their interests dwarfed by the overwhelming number of constituents who reside in their UK Parliamentary constituency, they will have an opportunity to have their voice clearly heard through designated representation. The enhanced focus overseas constituency MPs would have on overseas voters' concerns would likely drive higher registration and turnout.
- *Simplification:* moving from registering for and voting in 650 Westminster constituencies to registering for and voting in overseas constituencies will make registration and potentially counting easier and would increase the chances of overseas voters postal votes being counted.

7. Why should politicians support overseas constituencies now?

UK overseas voters want overseas constituencies.

Effective representation for UK citizens abroad is of greater importance in a more dangerous world.

The Representation of the People Bill is the vehicle for delivering this change.

8. Potential boundary divisions

These would need to be established by the Boundary Commission but a possible division might be as follows: Europe; Australia & New Zealand; the Americas; Africa; the Middle East and rest of Asia.

9. Number of overseas constituencies

A sensible way forward would be to consider two stages: first, a registration drive to encourage greater numbers of UK citizens abroad to register; second, allocation of MPs based on the registered numbers. This would be determined by the Boundary Commission based roughly on the typical UK constituency electorate.

Importantly, the fact that there are British citizens previously excluded from voting who are now enfranchised suggests that the creation of overseas constituencies should not necessarily come at the expense of existing constituencies - if the electorate is larger, and the number of electors per seat remains the same, there should be more MPs.

10. Expected cost of overseas constituencies

10.1 Number of MPs in the UK Parliament remains the same

If the number of MPs remained the same (e.g. the number of MPs representing UK seats was reduced by the same number as the number of new MPs representing overseas constituencies) on-going costs would be roughly equivalent (although travel costs for overseas MPs would be higher).

There would be some one-off costs associated with the Boundary Commission review to establish the new overseas constituencies boundaries. But if this work was carried out as part of the next planned Boundary Commission review, there would be a marginal extra cost.

Extra travel costs: £7,000 per annum roughly for each overseas member of Parliament

10.2 Number of MPs in the UK Parliament increases

There would be some one-off costs associated with the Boundary Commission review to establish the new overseas constituencies boundaries. But if this work was carried out as part of the next planned Boundary Commission review, there would be a marginal extra cost.

Extra ongoing costs associated with each new MP:

Extra travel costs £7,000 per annum

Extra staffing costs £282,000 per annum (based on London allowance) (April 2025 figure)

Extra salary costs £93,000 per annum (April 2025 figure)

Total £382,000 per annum roughly for each additional overseas member of Parliament

By way of illustration, in France there are 11 overseas constituency MPs.

11. Call to action

We are asking Parliamentarians to support our campaign to introduce Overseas Constituencies for UK citizens living abroad. For instance by tabling parliamentary questions, initiating debates, signing [Early Day Motion 122](#), signing the petitions on our campaign pages below and pressing for the inclusion of overseas constituencies in party manifestos.

You can find out more about our campaigns and sign our petitions here:

[Unlock Democracy's Overseas Constituencies Campaign](#)

[New Europeans UK Overseas Constituency Campaign](#)

12. Organisations supporting the Overseas Constituencies' Campaign

Tom Brake, Director, Unlock Democracy, tom.brake@unlockdemocracy.org.uk

Ruvi Ziegler, Chair, New Europeans UK, ruvi.ziegler@neweuropeans.uk

Sarah Page, Vice Chair, European Britons, sarahpage1953@gmail.com

Sue Wilson, Chair, Breman in Spain, suewilson91@hotmail.com

Bruce Darrington, Chair, British Overseas Voters Forum, bruce@thedarringtons.com

Jenny Shorten, Chair, Liberal Democrats Abroad, jenny@libdemsabroad.org

13. Contact details

For more information about this briefing contact [Tom Brake at Unlock Democracy](#) or [Ruvi Ziegler at New Europeans](#)