



**MIGRANT  
DEMOCRACY  
PROJECT**

**THE CASE  
FOR RESIDENCE-BASED  
VOTING RIGHTS**

**#OURHOMEOURVOTE**





## INTRODUCTION

Migrants' daily lives in the UK look the same as those of any British-born citizen. They pay **taxes**, attend **schools, universities, community centres** and **churches**, obey the **same laws**, access **social services**, and form **relationships**.

But there is one key difference. **About 1 million people have no right to vote** at all simply because of their nationality.

Non-enfranchised residents lack political power. Consequently, their interests are often overlooked by politicians both at national and local level.

**Democracy is for everyone.** No one should be excluded from representation and politics.

Migrants from countries such as Brazil, Japan, Ukraine, and Sudan can live, work, and study in the UK but have no right to elect representatives and make their voices heard on issues that matter to them.

We don't believe this is fair.

This is **Our Home**,  
we want **Our Vote**.

This report covers Migrant Democracy Project's campaign for residence-based voting rights and the voices of those migrants who wish they could participate in democracy in their home, the UK.

**RIDA  
POZZETTI**  
Brazilian  
in London



**“London is my home.** The UK is my home. My partner, my job, and my future are here. I care about my community. I volunteer with local groups keeping our streets clean and green. The only thing missing from making me feel like I fully belong is the right to vote. My partner is Italian and he can vote in local elections. I think it’s right he can vote but I also want to vote. The effects of not being able to vote go beyond the ballot box. I can’t even improve my credit score fully because I cannot be on the electoral roll. **I hope everyone gets the right to vote.”**

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# MIGRANT DEMOCRACY PROJECT

**Migrant Democracy Project (MDP) is a not-for-profit organisation bringing democratic participation to migrants in the UK.** We want to empower migrants to actively participate in politics and shape a fairer immigration system.

There is a democracy gap in the UK. Many eligible migrants are not registered to vote and many migrants have no right to vote at all.

We want to change that.

Our campaign **Our Home Our Vote** bridges that gap by promoting voter registration and democratic participation and advocating for residence-based voting rights.

We have the energy, the enthusiasm and a plan for residence-based voting rights. This briefing paper guides us on **a journey to democracy for all.**





***I am an American living in the UK since 2021. I am frustrated by the fact that other nationalities are able to be on the electoral roll and I am not. Particularly because being on the electoral roll also helps build one's UK credit score. I feel a double punishment based on my nationality. I am a taxpayer and as a skilled worker immigrant we pay an incredibly high price to reside in this country and access the NHS. I feel it is only just to have a say in those systems.***

**American in Bristol**



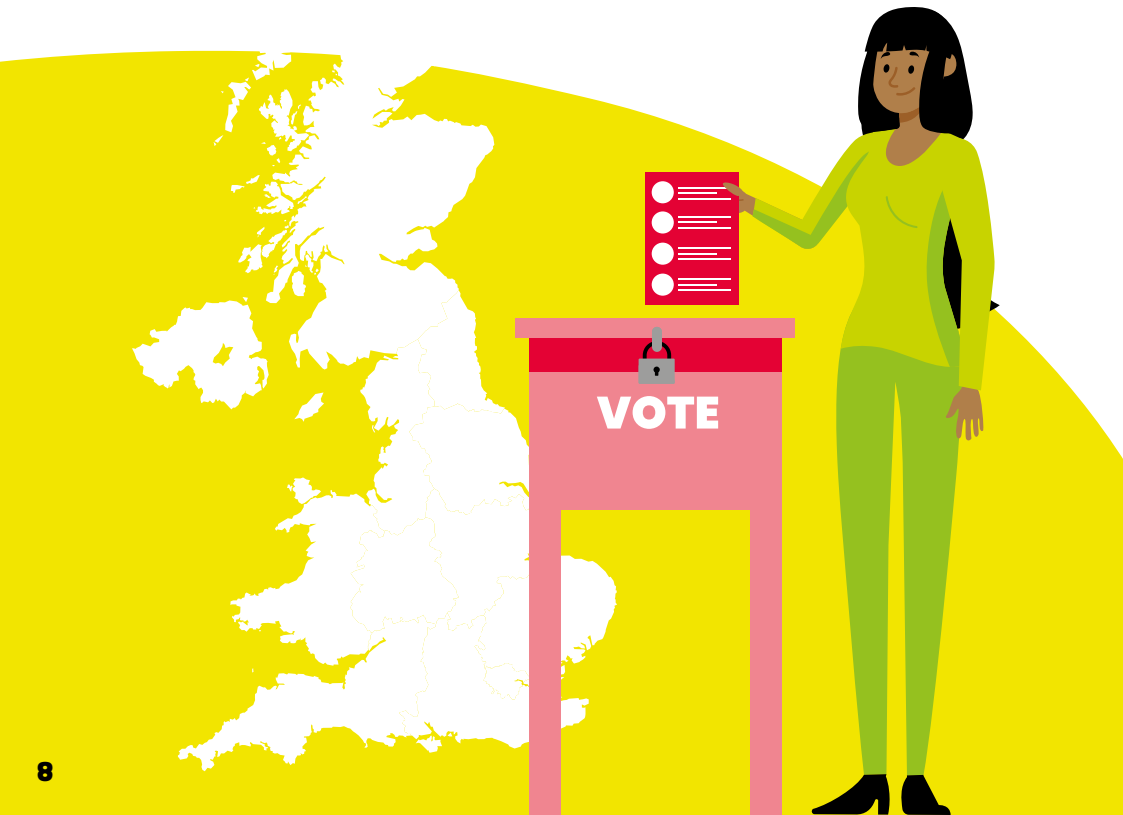
## CURRENT VOTER ELIGIBILITY

**The voting rights system in the UK is complex!** The right to vote depends not only on citizenship but also where you live in the UK and the type of election taking place.

For Westminster General Elections (elections of Members of Parliament), only British, Irish, and qualifying Commonwealth citizens can vote.

In local elections (for councillors, London Assembly members, directly elected mayors, and Police and Crime Commissioners) in England and Northern Ireland, British, Irish, Commonwealth and EU citizens can vote.

In Scotland and Wales, all residents, no matter their nationality, can vote in local and devolved national elections (The Senedd and Scottish Parliament).





Election Type <sup>1</sup>	Voting Age	British Citizens	Resident Irish citizens	Resident qualifying Commonwealth citizens	EU citizens	Citizens of other countries
<b>UK Parliamentary elections</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>✓ YES</b>	<b>✓ YES</b>	<b>✓ YES</b>	<b>NO</b>	<b>NO</b>
<b>ENGLAND</b>						
<b>Police and Crime Commissioner</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>✓ YES</b>	<b>✓ YES</b>	<b>✓ YES</b>	<b>✓ YES</b>	<b>NO</b>
<b>Elected Mayor</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>✓ YES</b>	<b>✓ YES</b>	<b>✓ YES</b>	<b>✓ YES</b>	<b>NO</b>
<b>Council</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>✓ YES</b>	<b>✓ YES</b>	<b>✓ YES</b>	<b>✓ YES</b>	<b>NO</b>
<b>NORTHERN IRELAND</b>						
<b>Northern Ireland Assembly</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>✓ YES</b>	<b>✓ YES</b>	<b>✓ YES</b>	<b>✓ YES</b>	<b>NO</b>
<b>Council</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>✓ YES</b>	<b>✓ YES</b>	<b>✓ YES</b>	<b>✓ YES</b>	<b>NO</b>
<b>WALES</b>						
<b>Senedd Cymru</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>✓ YES</b>	<b>✓ YES</b>	<b>✓ YES</b>	<b>✓ YES</b>	<b>✓ YES</b>
<b>Council</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>✓ YES</b>	<b>✓ YES</b>	<b>✓ YES</b>	<b>✓ YES</b>	<b>✓ YES</b>
<b>Police and Crime Commissioner</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>✓ YES</b>	<b>✓ YES</b>	<b>✓ YES</b>	<b>✓ YES</b>	<b>NO</b>
<b>SCOTLAND</b>						
<b>Scottish Parliament</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>✓ YES</b>	<b>✓ YES</b>	<b>✓ YES</b>	<b>✓ YES</b>	<b>✓ YES</b>
<b>Council</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>✓ YES</b>	<b>✓ YES</b>	<b>✓ YES</b>	<b>✓ YES</b>	<b>✓ YES</b>
<b>National Parks Authority</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>✓ YES</b>	<b>✓ YES</b>	<b>✓ YES</b>	<b>✓ YES</b>	<b>✓ YES</b>

\* Note the implementation of the Elections Act will change voter eligibility for EU citizens.

<sup>1</sup> <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-8985/>

# ELECTIONS ACT ELIGIBILITY CHANGES

## EU citizens

The Elections Act has brought changes to who can vote and how we vote. At the time of writing (September 2023), the changes affecting EU citizens have not yet been implemented.

### The relevant changes are:

Only EU citizens who have entered the UK by the 31<sup>st</sup> of December 2020 and secured lawful status in the UK will automatically continue having the right to vote in local elections in England and Northern Ireland.

EU citizens who entered the UK from 2021 onwards will only have the right to vote in local elections in England and Northern Ireland if their country of origin has secured bilateral voting rights agreements with the UK.

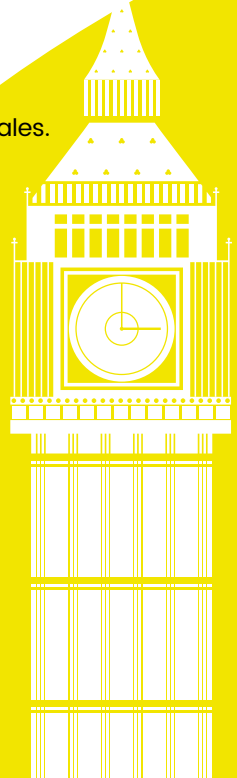
As of September 2023, only

- **Poland**
- **Luxembourg**
- **Portugal**
- **Spain**

have secured these agreements.

These changes do not affect EU citizens in Scotland and Wales.

It is expected that these changes will only be implemented **after the local elections of May 2024.**



## Photo ID

The Elections Act also introduced the need to show a Photo ID at the polling station to vote in some elections (all Parliamentary elections, all local elections in England, and Police and Crime Commissioner elections in Wales. In Northern Ireland, the use of Photo ID has been in place since 2003).

**From May 2023, all electors must present a valid Photo ID when voting in person at the polling station.**



## ACCEPTABLE PHOTO IDs INCLUDE:

- ➔ **Passport** issued by the UK, any of the Channel Islands, the Isle of Man, a British Overseas Territory, or an EEA state or a Commonwealth country;
- ➔ **Driving licence** issued by the UK, any of the Channel Islands, the Isle of Man, or an EEA state (this includes a provisional driving licence);
- ➔ **A Blue Badge;**
- ➔ **National identity card** issued by an EEA state;
- ➔ **Biometric immigration document.**

**A full list can be found on the Electoral Commission website.<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/voter/voter-id/accepted-forms-photo-id>

# PROBLEMS WITH THE CURRENT VOTING RIGHTS MODEL

## Unfairness

**Too many people are denied a democratic voice in the UK** simply because of where they were born. Like any other resident, migrants work, study, pay rent, use public services, pay taxes, and simply live in their home – the UK. Unfortunately, those from countries such as Egypt, Colombia, Japan and others have no right to decide how their area is run, ranging from the parks to housing development.

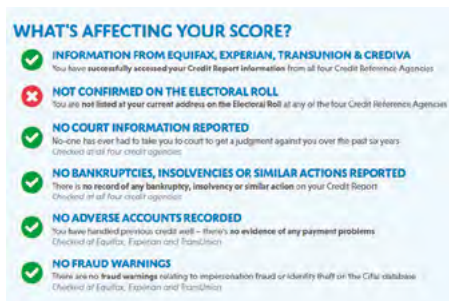
**With the new rules being introduced through the Elections Act, we will see further disenfranchisement in the system.** *Imagine an Italian resident who arrived in the UK in 2017. She will continue being able to vote in local elections. However, her cousin coming to the UK to study in 2023 will not be able to vote. New eligibility will exclude more people from democracy.*

The fight for universal suffrage is far from over. We are a diverse society. We move for many reasons and form bonds in new places we call home.

The right to vote must reflect that by being attached to residence and not just nationality. Democratic countries must adapt to pluralism and to new social configurations and revisit their voter eligibility criteria for a full democracy.

## Credit Score

**In the UK, being on the electoral roll improves one's credit score.** This is essential to improve individual and community wealth building in the UK. Without a good credit score, migrants face further barriers when buying a new phone, applying for a bank loan, or even a mortgage, affecting their financial opportunities.





## Complexity

**The current voter eligibility system is complicated. Once the Elections Act changes are fully implemented, it will become ever more complex.**

This makes it difficult for electors to understand their voting rights. Equally, politicians and campaigners find it challenging to promote democratic participation.



Voter registration levels are already low amongst migrant voters. In 2022, **87% of UK citizens** were registered to vote, compared to **66% of EU and Commonwealth voters**.<sup>3</sup>

At Migrant Democracy Project's voter registration drives, we regularly meet people who are simply **unaware of their voting rights**. A combination of lack of information provision in different languages and anxiety over becoming active in politics means many eligible migrants stay away from the democratic space. Many already struggle to understand the eligibility criteria and the changes being brought by the Elections Act will only cause further confusion.

**We must remove, rather than add, barriers to democratic participation.**

## Unequal rights

Residence-based voting rights systems already exist in the UK but only for migrant voters living in Scotland and Wales. A Brazilian resident in Edinburgh can vote for their councillor but if this same resident were to move to London, they would **lose that right**.

Similarly, Commonwealth migrants have the right to vote in all UK elections whilst EU citizens can vote in all local elections.

Why should some migrants be excluded from this valuable right?

**We need a levelled up system of voting rights where all residents have a say across the UK.**

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/who-is-registered>

## OUR HOME OUR VOTE WHAT WE ARE ASKING FOR

**We believe democracy is for everyone.** Migrant residents in the UK obey decisions approved by councils and Parliament just like any other citizen. In addition, migrants are affected by a range of immigration policies with deep effects on their lives, from No Recourse to Public Funds to family reunion rights. Due to the lack of the vote, they often have no say over decisions made for or against them.

Migrants need to be part of the democratic conversation shaping their own futures. To that end, and to resolve the problems set out above, **we are campaigning for residence-based voting rights.**

The concept of “residence” in the UK is not straightforward. Unlike some countries, the UK does not have residence cards. Instead, migrants have different sets of lawful status to enter and stay in the UK.

Nonetheless, there are ways forward. Using the examples of Scotland and Wales where a residence-based voting rights system is already in place, we can create **an inclusive voting eligibility model** for the rest of the UK for local and Parliamentary elections.



# PROPOSALS FOR RESIDENCE-BASED VOTING RIGHTS

## 1/ Residence-based voting rights in local elections in England and Northern Ireland

***Every lawful resident should have the right to vote, no matter their nationality.***

**By local elections, we are referring to:**

- Council elections;
- Police and Crime Commissioner elections (this would also apply in Wales);
- Directly elected mayors in England;
- Northern Irish Assembly.

**By lawful resident, we are referring to:**

- Any resident with pre-settled status/Limited Leave to Remain;
- Any resident with settled status/Indefinite Leave to Remain;
- Residents with refugee status.

This eligibility change would bring voting rights in England and Northern Ireland in line with voting rights in Scotland and Wales.

## 2/ Residence-based voting rights in Parliamentary Elections across the UK

Many migrants, such as those from Commonwealth countries, already have the right to vote in General Elections. To that end, we also encourage law-makers to consider a model of residence-based voting rights in Parliamentary elections. We propose:

***Every settled resident should have the right to vote in Parliamentary elections.***

By settled resident, we mean all those that have Settled Status/Indefinite Leave to Remain which generally means at least 5 years of residence in the UK.

These changes would bring a democratic voice to all residents currently disenfranchised in the UK.

## 3/ Candidacy rights

We believe candidacy rights should reflect voting rights. The same criteria should apply to both voter and candidate eligibility with regards to **residence and lawful status in the UK.**

# HOW MANY RESIDENTS WOULD GAIN THE RIGHT TO VOTE?

It is important to note that exact data on who would be enfranchised is difficult to obtain. This is because many migrant residents in the UK have more than one nationality conferring them different voting rights. Take, for example, a Bolivian-born UK resident who also has Spanish citizenship. If we look at them as a Bolivian UK-resident, we would assume they do not have the right to vote whereas in fact they do based on their EU citizenship.

To that end, we have avoided using statistics categorising UK residents by country of birth and have opted to use the Office for National Statistics (ONS)'s data on Passports Held. According to the ONS, where a person recorded having more than one passport, they were counted only once, categorised in the following priority order: 1. UK passport, 2. Irish passport, 3. Other passport.<sup>4</sup>

Furthermore, the ONS census was carried out in 2021 but as of May 2023, around 174,000 people had moved to the UK under the Ukraine Family Scheme and Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme.<sup>5</sup>

With these caveats in mind, our research shows:

## 1/ Number of potential voters in Local Elections in England and Northern Ireland

Around  
**1 MILLION  
RESIDENTS**  
would gain  
the right to vote  
in Local Elections.

How we calculated:

ONS Passports held data shows that there were 875,620 non-British, non-Irish, non-EU, and non-Commonwealth residents in England and Wales during the Census 2021.<sup>6</sup> However, in Wales, all residents already have the right to vote in devolved elections so we must deduct them from the total. According to the Welsh Senedd's own research, 33,000 residents in Wales were enfranchised by their extension of the right to vote.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, the number in England alone is 842,620. In addition, the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA)'s Passport Held data shows that there were 11,809 non-British, non-Irish, non-EU, and non-Commonwealth residents in Northern Ireland during the Census 2021.<sup>8</sup>

With this in mind, we suspect the number of residents to be enfranchised is around 1 million given recent migration trends and the fact that not everyone completes the Census.



## 2/ Number of potential electors in Parliamentary Elections across the UK

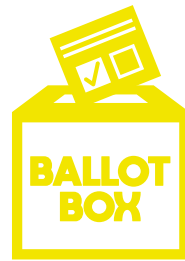
Over  
**5 MILLION RESIDENTS**  
in the UK could gain  
the right to vote  
in General Elections.



How we calculated:

According to the ONS Passports Held data based on the 2021 Census, there were 875,620 non-British, non-Irish, non-EU, and non-Commonwealth residents and 3,853,730 EU citizens in England and Wales. According to NISRA's Passports Held data based on the 2021 Census, there were 11,809 non-British, non-Irish, non-EU, and non-Commonwealth residents and 69,926 EU citizens in Northern Ireland. According to the National Record of Scotland's 2019 data, there were 234,000 EU citizens in Scotland.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, according to the Scottish Governments' own research, 59,000 non-British, non-Irish, non-EU, and non-Commonwealth residents were enfranchised by their extension of the right to vote.<sup>10</sup> This brings the total number of usual residents without the right to vote in Parliamentary elections to 5,104,085.

*Note that this number does not differentiate between residents with pre-settled or settled status. The Government would have to decide which status criteria to use to enfranchise residents in General Elections.*



4 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/census/census2021dictionary/variablesbytopic/internationalmigrationvariables/census2021/passportsheld>

5 <https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/briefings/ukrainian-migration-to-the-uk/#:~:text=Around%20174%2C000%20people%20had%20moved,to%201%2C000%20in%20March%202023.>

6 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/census/census2021dictionary/variablesbytopic/internationalmigrationvariables/census2021/passportsheld>

7 <https://senedd.wales/laid%20documents/pri-ld12877-em/pri-ld12877-em-e.pdf>

8 <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/publications/census-2021-main-statistics-demography-tables-passports-held>

9 <https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/files/statistics/rgar/2019/Pages/mig-sec.html#:~:text=Of%20all%20non-British%20nationals,%25%20were%20EU%20nationals%2C%20and>

10 <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-elections-franchise-representation-bill-eqja/>

## HOW MUCH WOULD IT COST?

At the moment, there is no definite amount of how much it would cost to extend the franchise. The Scottish and Welsh cases identified there would be no extra cost particular to registering foreign nationals in ordinary elections.

Electoral Registration Officers currently access the Home Office system to assess immigration status, which they will continue to use at no extra cost.

Nonetheless, there is a cost per voter. In Scotland, these costs were identified to be (on average) around **£3 per voter**<sup>11</sup> whereas in Wales, it was identified as **£1.22 per voter**.<sup>12</sup>

We ask the Government for an immediate assessment of potential costs involved in extending the franchise so this policy can be comprehensively considered and implemented.



11 <https://www.parliament.scot/-/media/files/legislation/bills/current-bills/scottish-elections-franchise-and-representation-scotland-bill/introduced/financial-memorandum-scottish-elections-franchise-and-representation-scotland-bill.pdf>

12 <https://senedd.wales/laid%20documents/pri-ld12877-em/pri-ld12877-em-e.pdf>

## WHAT DOES THE PUBLIC THINK?

We commissioned an opinion poll to test the level of public support for residence-based voting rights. We are emboldened by the level of public support for the extension of the right to vote to all residents. It's time the Government and political parties follow suit and implement voting rights for all.



**54%** of people believe that all adults living legally in the UK, regardless of citizenship, **should have the right to vote in local elections.**



Considering political party support, **45%** of those who voted Conservative in 2019 support this policy. **66%** of those who voted Labour and **66%** of those who voted Liberal Democrat in 2019 **support this extension.**



**60%** of people believe that all adults with Settled Status or Indefinite Leave to Remain in the UK **should have the right to vote in General Elections.**



Again, breaking it down by party political support, **52%** of those who voted Conservative in 2019 support this policy whereas **73%** of those who voted Labour in 2019 support such extension. **78%** of those who voted Liberal Democrat in 2019 **want to see the vote extended to all.**

This shows majority support for our residence-based voting rights both at the local and the national level. This extension of the right to vote is not only a practical and fair policy, but it is also one that enjoys public support.

People know exclusion from the franchise is not compatible with 21<sup>st</sup> century democracy.

For full results and other Migrant Democracy Project research, [read our reports at migrantdemos.org.uk/publications](https://migrantdemos.org.uk/publications)

# WHICH COUNTRIES ALREADY HAVE RESIDENCE-BASED VOTING RIGHTS?

**The extension of voting rights is happening across the world.**

More and more democracies are recognising that residence, not nationality, should be the criterion for deciding who is granted electoral rights.

In 1910, 33 million **migrants lived in countries** other than their own; by the year 2000, **that number had reached 175 million.**<sup>13</sup> Consequently, voter eligibility and well as the meaning of citizenship itself is adapting.

In the UK alone, Scotland and Wales have already taken steps to extend the right to vote to all lawful residents in local and devolved elections.

Here are some countries that have extended their franchise.

## National Elections

Country	Criteria
<b>New Zealand</b> <sup>14</sup>	<b>12 months</b> of residence
<b>Chile</b> <sup>15</sup>	<b>5 years</b> of residence
<b>Uruguay</b> <sup>16</sup>	<b>15 years</b> of residence
<b>Malawi</b> <sup>17</sup>	<b>7 years</b> of residence
<b>Ecuador</b> <sup>18</sup>	<b>5 years</b> of residence

## Local Elections

Country	
• <b>Belgium</b> <sup>19</sup>	• <b>Netherlands</b> <sup>29</sup>
• <b>South Korea</b> <sup>20</sup>	• <b>Hungary</b> <sup>30</sup>
• <b>Denmark</b> <sup>21</sup>	• <b>Lithuania</b> <sup>31</sup>
• <b>Estonia</b> <sup>22</sup>	• <b>Slovakia</b> <sup>32</sup>
• <b>Iceland</b> <sup>23</sup>	• <b>Slovenia</b> <sup>33</sup>
• <b>Ireland</b> <sup>24</sup>	• <b>Colombia</b> <sup>34</sup>
• <b>Luxembourg</b> <sup>25</sup>	• <b>Paraguay</b> <sup>35</sup>
• <b>Norway</b> <sup>26</sup>	• <b>Argentina</b> <sup>36</sup> (some cities)
• <b>Sweden</b> <sup>27</sup>	• <b>Venezuela</b> <sup>37</sup>
• <b>Finland</b> <sup>28</sup>	

The criteria for eligibility on this list ranges from just a few months residence to over a decade. Governments have taken their own approach to the franchise based on their local picture.

This is also not a comprehensive list. In some countries, voter eligibility is devolved to local municipalities. For example, some municipalities in Switzerland and the US have extended the right to vote to all residents in some elections.

Whatever the criteria, it is telling that **various governments across the world have decided to find proactive ways** to incorporate migrants in their channels of decision-making.

There is a wide range of campaigners who are calling for the extension of the right to vote! Alongside the “Our City, Our Vote”<sup>38</sup> campaign in New York, “Wir Wählen” in Germany, or the “J’y suis, j’y vote” in France,<sup>39</sup> **Our Home Our Vote** is part of this fight for a shared future where all voices matter in democracy.

It’s time for England and Northern Ireland to join the list of countries **allowing all residents a vote!**

13 Pedroza, 2019: 25.

14 <https://vote.nz/enrolling/get-ready-to-enrol/are-you-eligible-to-enrol-and-vote/> – 15 <https://www.bcn.cl/portal/leyfacil/recurso/como-votar> – 16 <https://www.impo.com.uy/bases/constitucion/1967-1967/78> – 17 <https://mec.org.mw/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/electoral-laws-final.pdf> – 18 [https://aceproject.org/epic-en/CDCountry?set\\_language=en&topic=VR&country=EC](https://aceproject.org/epic-en/CDCountry?set_language=en&topic=VR&country=EC) – 19 <https://be.brussels/living-in-brussels/participation-in-public-life/political-life-elections> – 20 <https://www.nec.go.kr/site/eng/03/10301030000002020070601.jsp> – 21 <https://www.norden.org/en/info-norden/right-vote-denmark> – 22 <https://www.eesti.ee/en/citizenship-and-documents/citizenship/the-right-to-vote> – 23 <https://island.is/en/eligibility-to-vote> – 24 <https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/government-in-ireland/elections-and-referenda/voting/right-to-vote/> – 25 <https://elections.public.lu/en/systeme-electoral/communales-mode-emploi/conditions.html> – 26 <https://www.norden.org/en/info-norden/right-vote-norway> – 27 <https://www.norden.org/en/info-norden/right-vote-sweden> – 28 <https://www.norden.org/en/info-norden/right-vote-finland> – 29 <https://prodemos.nl/kennis/informatie-over-politiek/verkiezingen/het-kiesrecht/voting-rights-for-non-dutch-nationals/#who-can-vote> – 30 <https://www.valasztas.hu/web/national-election-office/right-to-vote/> – 31 <https://www.lrt.it/en/news-in-english/19/1921099/guide-to-lithuania-foreigners-rights-in-local-elections> – 32 [https://www.slovensko.sk/en/life-situation/life-situation/\\_right-to-vote-of-union-citizen/#vote](https://www.slovensko.sk/en/life-situation/life-situation/_right-to-vote-of-union-citizen/#vote) – 33 <https://www.gov.si/en/topics/local-elections/> – 34 <https://www.registraduria.gov.co/Asi-pueden-inscribirse-los-extranjeros-residentes-en-Colombia-para-votar-en-las.html> – 35 [https://tsje.gov.py/preguntas\\_frecuentes/](https://tsje.gov.py/preguntas_frecuentes/) – 36 <https://www.argentina.gob.ar/interior/observatorioelectoral/normativa-electoral/voto-de-extranjeros-as-residentes-en-argentina> – 37 [http://www4.cne.gov.ve/web/normativa\\_electoral/ley\\_organica\\_sufragio/leyorg\\_03.php](http://www4.cne.gov.ve/web/normativa_electoral/ley_organica_sufragio/leyorg_03.php) – 38 <https://ourcityourvote.org/> – 39 [https://xn--wir-whlen-z2a.org/wevote\\_en/](https://xn--wir-whlen-z2a.org/wevote_en/)

## WHY NOT WAIT FOR BRITISH CITIZENSHIP?

Attaching the vote to nationality has not always been the norm.

Until the early twentieth century, nationality was less relevant than criteria like property, gender, or race to exercise voting rights in many states.<sup>40</sup>

Citizenship can also come in many forms, with the concept of “legal citizenship” being only one of them. Active participation, supporting communities, volunteering, respecting rules, as well as voting are also strong signifiers of citizenship.

Putting theoretical debates aside, British naturalisation is simply out of reach to many.

Firstly, many countries do not allow dual nationality. Countries like Estonia and Japan, for example, do not permit dual nationality.<sup>41</sup>

Choosing between maintaining the nationality someone was born with versus voting in their new home should not be a choice anyone has to make.

In addition, the cost of applying for British naturalisation is unaffordable to many. Once a migrant obtains Indefinite Leave to Remain, an already long and expensive journey, the cost of the citizenship application fee alone will be £1,500 from October 2023.<sup>42</sup>

### **We cannot rely on British citizenship alone as the source of voter eligibility.**

The vote is an incredible source of power and meaning and will be kept locked out from many migrants unless we implement a residence-based voting rights system.



40 Pedroza, 2019: 30

41 <https://www.eesti.ee/en/citizenship-and-documents/citizenship/estonian-citizenship> and <https://www.moj.go.jp/EN/MINJI/minji06.html>

42 <https://freemovement.org.uk/new-immigration-application-fees-from-4-october-2023/>

## MASHA GOUBERNIK

Ukrainian refugee,  
based in Liverpool



***“I am 23 and I have already fled war twice, as an internal refugee and now a refugee in the UK. Most of my family and friends are refugees and migrants, and we might stay in this status our whole life due to political situations out of our control. That shouldn’t mean we are excluded from the right to vote in our home, the UK. We want to be equal and active parts of society. We want to shape our own future, we want to vote.”***



## JARED VALLEJO

Guatemalan asylum seeker,  
Liverpool resident

***“As someone that has been forced to leave my country, it would be reassuring to have a voice through the voting process. I want to have a say in democracy in the place which will hopefully end up being my new home. I am an asylum seeker and can’t wait to be fully part of my new home in Liverpool. For too long, I have been excluded from full rights and participation. When I get my refugee status, I want to be able to vote just like my friends from the UK, the Commonwealth and the EU.”***

# GETTING RESIDENCE-BASED VOTING RIGHTS

Changing the law is simple. It just requires political will.

In this briefing we provide opinion polling, evidence of those affected, as well as potential legislative solutions.

We are on the right path to extend the right to vote. The **Our Home Our Vote** campaign has worked tirelessly to secure support from politicians to extend the right to vote.

When the Elections Bill was being debated, MPs and Lords spoke in support of the extension of the right to vote.

Labour MP Alex Norris tabled an amendment for the right to vote to be extended to all settled residents in General Elections.<sup>43</sup>

Lord Shipley, Liberal Democrat, tabled an amendment for all eligible to pay council tax to have the right to vote.<sup>44</sup>

Thanks to motions from party members, the Labour Party's National Policy Forum 2023 document states that "those who contribute to our society should have a say in how it is governed."<sup>45</sup>

The Green Party also states as a policy that "all visa residents will have the right to vote in all elections and referendums."<sup>46</sup>

The London Assembly as well as 5 local authorities have also passed motions in support of the extension of the right to vote.<sup>47</sup>

There is already a lot of support for the extension of the right to vote from representatives of all main political parties across the UK.



**A future where all residents can vote is near!** But we must keep the pressure on politicians.

43 [https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/bills/cbill/58-02/0178/amend/elections\\_rm\\_rep\\_0112.pdf](https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/bills/cbill/58-02/0178/amend/elections_rm_rep_0112.pdf)

44 <https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3020/stages/16188/amendments/92197>

45 [https://labour.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/WR-366\\_23-NPF-final-report-for-Conference-v10-UPDATE.pdf](https://labour.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/WR-366_23-NPF-final-report-for-Conference-v10-UPDATE.pdf)

46 <https://policy.greenparty.org.uk/our-policies/long-term-goals/migration/>

47 <https://www.migrantdemos.org.uk/politicians>



# SUPPORT VOTING RIGHTS FOR ALL

**The fight for universal suffrage is ours! We need everyone involved in bringing about democratic change.**

Here is what you can do:

## ► Are you a migrant without the right to vote?

**Write to your representatives today** asking them to support the extension of the right to vote. No matter where you are from, your elected representatives still represent you and can act on your behalf. Ask them to bring about residence-based voting rights.



**Visit our website to use our tool and write to politicians.**

**You can also share your story with us.** Send us an email with your name, your nationality, where you live and tell us more about why you want to have the right to vote. We can promote this on social media and gain new supporters.

## ► Are you an elected representative?

**If you are a councillor,** you can pass our motion in support of the extension of the franchise in your next council meeting.

We have a template motion ready for you to use. Show all your residents you are there for them and want them to fully participate in democracy.



**If you are a directly elected mayor,** you can sign our statement in support of residence-based voting rights, letting everyone know that you want your city to be an inclusive democracy.

**If you are a Member of Parliament,** you can table a question, start a debate, influence your party, and host a group of migrants without the right to vote in Parliament.

## ► Are you a supporter?

**You can still write to your representatives** asking for the extension of the right to vote.

**Sign up to our mailing list** to stay in touch with our future campaign actions.

If you have any questions, you can get in touch with us at [info@migrantdemos.org.uk](mailto:info@migrantdemos.org.uk)



## THANKS TO:

Migrant Democracy Project's work could not happen without the support of great organisations and funders in the sector.

We would like to say a special thanks to the team at **POMOC** and **the3million** for supporting the launch of our organisation and always collaborating on the **Our Home Our Vote** campaign.

Special thanks also to **JRRT** for funding our advocacy work.

Migrants' rights can only happen in collaboration.

If you are an organisation working on migrants' rights or democratic reforms, you can join our coalition of supporters today.

<https://www.migrantdemos.org.uk/partnerships>





# MIGRANT DEMOCRACY PROJECT

[migrantdemos.org.uk](https://migrantdemos.org.uk)

f t i d @migrantdemos

