

Summary Document

Voting Rights in presidential elections for Irish citizens outside the State

The Government decided on 7 March 2017 that a referendum should be held to amend Article 12 of the constitution to allow Irish citizens resident outside the State, including in Northern Ireland, to be allowed to vote in Irish presidential elections. The Government's decision is in line with the recommendations of the Convention on the Constitution, in their Fifth Report. Announcing the decision in Philadelphia as part of his St Patrick's Day programme, the Taoiseach noted:

"Today's announcement is a profound recognition of the importance that Ireland attaches to all of our citizens, wherever they may be. It is an opportunity for us to make our country stronger by allowing all of our citizens resident outside the State, including our emigrants, to vote in future presidential elections."

Extending the franchise in presidential elections to Irish citizens resident outside the State gives rise to a range of legal, policy and practical issues. In order to assist informed public debate on this issue, the Government published a detailed Options Paper setting out a range of options on the question of which citizens outside the State could be given the right to vote and on how such a change might be implemented. The Civic Forum panel on Friday morning on 'Voting Rights in presidential Elections' will discuss those options. Full text of the Options Paper is available here <https://www.dfa.ie/global-irish/staying-in-touch/latest-news/votingrights/>. The considerations at the Forum will inform the preparation by Government of the necessary legislation for a referendum.

Which citizens outside the State should have the right to Vote? - The Seven Options (section 2 of the Paper)

- All citizens resident outside the State;
- All citizens on the island of Ireland and all citizens outside the island of Ireland for a period of time who have lived in the State;
- All citizens on the island of Ireland and all citizens who have left the island in the previous 15 or 20 years;
- All citizens on the island of Ireland, and all citizens resident outside the State who hold a valid Irish passport;
- All citizens resident outside the State who were previously registered to vote in the State;
- All citizens resident outside the State who were born on the island of Ireland;
- All citizens on the island and all citizens resident outside the island of Ireland who were born on the island or who have lived in Ireland for at least one year.

How will people vote?

In the Options Paper (sections 3 to 6) operational issues including voter registration, method of voting, the implications for the administration of presidential elections and estimated costs are also addressed.

New arrangements for the registration of citizens outside the State will require modernisation of the voter registration process. The Government has agreed that work should now start on this significant task which will be undertaken over the next two to three years.

Postal voting would be the preferred option for voting by citizens resident outside the State, at the present time. Voting at embassies is not a practical proposal for a number of reasons set out in the options paper. E-voting may be a future solution but current e-voting systems are not universally accepted as secure.