

FACT SHEET #10: ABOUT VOTING RIGHTS.ie

www.votingrights.ie

Tá ceart ag gach saoránach na hÉireann vóta a chaitheamh i dtoghchán na hUachtaráinachta

Who we are: Voting Right.ie was founded in 2016 by a small group of Irish citizens concerned that Irish emigrants and citizens in Northern Ireland are denied their basic rights to vote in any election because of current restrictions. These restrictions included the time emigrants can be away from Ireland (only 18 months) before being dropped from the voting rolls and the requirement that they must be on the island to vote on Election Day. These restrictions put the Republic at odds with the vast majority of democracies around the world and with other nations that make up the E.U. According to the most recent IDEA global democracy report (January, 2021) a total of 125 states and territories allow people living abroad to participate in legislative elections, 88 allow participation in presidential elections and 73 countries and territories allow citizens overseas to participate in referendums. <https://www.idea.int/our-work/what-we-do/global-state-democracy>. Ireland is not one of them

Our Vision - All citizens of Ireland should have the right to vote in Presidential elections. Our immediate goal is the passage of a national referendum allowing Irish emigrants and citizens living in Northern Ireland the right to vote in future Presidential Elections. This referendum was one of the key recommendations of the 2013 Constitutional Convention and is included in the current programme of government. Since our founding we launched several initiatives including development of a policy paper for the 2017 Global Civic Forum where Senator Billy Lawless gave the key note speech. In March of 2021 we organized a virtual conference entitled “Citizenship, Emigrants and Voting Rights Post Brexit” with the support of the Clinton Institute for American Studies at UCD. We also released at the conference a major set of 40 essays entitled “The Citizenship Papers.” <https://citzpap.ie/>.

Executive Committee

Former Senator for the Diaspora Billy Lawless from Galway is the Chair of our executive committee and one of several co-founders. Billy immigrated to Chicago in 1998 and created successful restaurant business and becoming a leader in immigration reform. Billy was appointed to the Seanad in 2016 by then Taoiseach Edna Kenny becoming the first Senator to represent emigrants and the wider Diaspora. Billy is a recipient of the Irish Presidential Distinguished Service Award

Ciaran Cannon T.D., the former Minister for the Diaspora, is our Vice Chair in the Republic. Cannon is member of the Fine Gael party representing East Galway. Ciaran previously served as a [Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills](#) between 2011 and 2014.

Emma DeSouza, the well-known citizen activist, acts as our Vice Chair in Northern Ireland. Emma is the coordinator of Women in Leadership at the National Women’s Council of Ireland. She is also a writer and political commentator for [@IrishTimesOped](#). She is a resident if Fermangh, Northern Ireland,

Hilary Biere, originally from Roscommon is the Chair of the NYC Saint Patrick's Day Parade Foundation and represents Voting Rights.ie in New York City. Hilary has been the Executive Secretary of the NYC Saint Patrick's Parade since 2002

Noreen Bowden is Director of Policy and a co-founder of Voting Rights.ie. She is an expert in the field of emigration studies and the global Irish diaspora. Noreen served for many years as the Director of the Dublin based Emigrant Advice Network. She is a graduate of Notre Dame University, holds Masters in Irish Studies from Boston College and Masters from the Harvard Kennedy School of Government.

Dave Coleman acts as a legal advisor and is the Founder and Managing Partner at Coleman Legal. He is a solicitor nationally and internationally recognized for his expertise on a wide range of legal issues such as Multi-Party Actions, Personal Litigation, Sexual Abuse, and Public and Administrative Law.

Larry Donnelly A legal research lecturer at [National University of Ireland, Galway](#) (NUIG), he is a regular political commentator on [RTÉ Radio 1](#) and the nightly television news bulletin, [RTÉ News on Two](#), also contributing to his local radio station [Galway Bay FM](#). He has a political column in [The Sunday Business Post](#).

Jackie Gilna Turton born and raised in South Dublin and is Canadian resident and a multilingual entrepreneur with years of international experience in business strategy. A participant in previous Global Irish Forums, she has a strong focus on Global Irish Diaspora needs and in 2022 created [www.werareglobalirish.com](#) Jackie is the Chairperson of the Irish-Canada Business Council and President and co-founder of the Irish Canada Chamber of Commerce Ottawa.

Ben Kelly, originally from Derry and now a London based journalist Ben is the Vice Chair of VICA <http://www.vica.ie/>, as well as our press spokesperson and Director of Social Media. Ben is Deputy Social Media Editor at The Independent. As a writer, he also covers political and social stories from Ireland, and regularly contributes comment pieces to Voices and other long read features.

Professor Liam Kennedy, the Executive Director of the Clinton Institute for American Studies at UCD, directs our conference proceedings. He is currently researching contemporary Irish America and also preparing edited books on the election and presidency of Donald Trump and on diaspora and diplomacy.

Rachel O'Sullivan, originally from Dublin is Director of Research. Rachel is a member of the Social Democrats. She has a Ph.D. in German History and is currently doing a Postdoc at the Centre for Holocaust Studies in Munich, Germany

Ted Smyth: Ted was an Irish diplomat for 15 years before becoming a senior executive at two Fortune 200 companies. He is now President of the Advisory Board of Glucksman Ireland House NYU and is Chair of the Clinton Institute for American Studies in University College Dublin.

Kevin J. Sullivan is a co-founder of Voting Rights.ie and served for nine years as the Chair of the Washington Ireland Program (WIP). Kevin is currently the Project Director for the US based Ad Hoc Committee to Protect the Good Friday Agreement. Kevin was instrumental in creating Civic Link, a joint USA/Irish cross community/ cross border education initiative which was announced in the immediate aftermath of the GFA by President Clinton in 1998. Kevin's mother emigrated to NYC from Tyrone and his father's family is from Passage West, Cork.