



Borderwise:

Citizenship

This information sheet provides a general overview on elections, voting and the rules relating to British citizenship in Northern Ireland. Please note you may need legal advice to clarify your right to citizenship or to change your citizenship.



What elections take place in Northern Ireland?

- **The Northern Ireland Assembly elections** take place every four years but elections can be held earlier if two thirds of the members decide this or if a First and Deputy First Minister cannot be elected. There are 108 members of the Northern Ireland Assembly (MLAs).
- **A European Parliamentary election** is held every five years to choose Members of the European Parliament (MEP). Three MEPs are chosen to represent Northern Ireland.
- **Local Government elections** are held every four years to decide who will represent the community in your local council. Your representatives will be known as Councillors



Who is eligible to vote?

You are entitled to vote in elections in Northern Ireland if you meet the following conditions and if your name is on the electoral register:

- You are aged 18 or over (your name may go on the register if you are going to be 18 in the year after the register is published)
- You are entitled to vote because of your citizenship – Citizens of Britain, Ireland, Commonwealth Countries and European Union member states who are living in NI are entitled to vote in Assembly elections, European Parliament elections and in Local elections.
- You are living in the constituency and
- You are not excluded from voting, for example, because you are in prison or you have been convicted of corrupt electoral practices

Getting on the electoral register

The Electoral Register is a list of the names and addresses of people eligible to vote in Northern Ireland. It is compiled by the Electoral Office for Northern Ireland (EONI) Registration forms and details on who is eligible are available by contacting EONI www.eoni.org.uk

Going
North

UK citizenship

The rules of citizenship are complex. The following is a general description of who is entitled to be a UK citizen and how an Irish citizen may acquire UK citizenship. There are many Irish citizens who are automatically entitled to UK citizenship, for example, because they are the children of British citizens. Detailed information is available on the Home Office website www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk.

Citizenship by Birth

If you were born (or adopted) in the UK (including Northern Ireland) on or after 1 January 1983, you are a British citizen if either of your parents was a British citizen or if either of them was settled in the UK. In general, being settled in the UK means living there and having an indefinite right to live there. Irish citizens have an indefinite right to remain in the UK. There are more detailed rules if you were born between 1961 and 1983. As a result of the British Nationality Law which came into effect on 1st January 1983 there is no specific access to British citizenship for citizens born in the Republic of Ireland. Irish citizens seeking to become British citizens are usually required to live in the UK and become naturalised.

Citizenship by Naturalisation

You may become a British citizen by naturalisation if you meet various requirements but the award of citizenship is at the discretion of the Home Secretary. Reasons must be given for the refusal of an application. The main requirements are:

- you must be aged 18 or over and of “full capacity”
- you must meet the residence requirements – you must have been legally living in the UK for five years before you apply (or for three years if you are married to or are the civil partner of a British citizen)
- you must be of good character
- have sufficient knowledge of English, Welsh or Scots Gaelic
- have knowledge of life in the United Kingdom

There are additional rules which may also be applicable in relation to current residence and intention to make the UK your main home. The rules relating to citizenship are complex and you should refer to a specialist adviser for more detailed information.

Getting a British passport

You may apply to the UK Passport service for a passport. If you live in Northern Ireland you can apply to the Belfast Passport Office further information is available on the website: www.ukpa.gov.ie. The Passport Advice-line is open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week: 0870 521 041. If you live in Ireland you apply to the British Embassy in Dublin: www.britishembassy.ie

Contact Details

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