

Recommendations for Ministry of Youth and Sports (MYS) for overseas youth mobilisation

Global Bersih (GB) has worked to enfranchise overseas voters effectively for many years. In 2019, GB compiled all the needed reforms in a document and has advocated these recommendations in recent years. Some of GB's recommendations that have been implemented in recent times have resulted in a significant increase in the numbers of overseas voters and made it easier for overseas Malaysians to exercise their right to vote and, at the same time, improved the efficiency of the system. The recommendations that have been implemented are :

- The implementation of Automatic Voters Registration (AVR)
- Lowering of voting age to 18 (Undi 18)
- The introduction of online registration for overseas voters on the Election Commission (EC) platform
- Inclusion of Malaysians living in Singapore, South Thailand, Brunei, and Kalimantan in the overseas postal voting system.
- Removal of the requirement for overseas Malaysians to have been in Malaysia for 30 days in the last five years before the registration date.

Thanks to the above reforms and other factors influencing this increase, it is undeniable that the number of overseas Malaysians entitled to vote will increase further. There were 7979¹ registered overseas postal voters for GE14, and in GE15, the numbers jumped to 48 109² registered overseas voters, which indicated a drastic increase of 603%.

According to the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the population of the Malaysian diaspora already stood at 1,860,037 as of 2020³.

Why now ?

The implementation of Undi18 and Automatic Voters Registration (AVR) alone has caused a growth of 42% from 14.9 million in GE14 to 21.1 million voters in the previous electoral roll in Malaysia⁴. Many of these "new" voters qualify as overseas voters.

The Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education reports that in 2019 alone, almost 73,000 Malaysians were studying abroad. Although this number decreased with the Covid-19 crisis and its global travel, health, and safety restrictions, industry experts predict a rebound.⁵ One of the common reasons is brain drain, according to a poll carried out by Asian Study Center More than 70% of Malaysian undergraduates harbour hopes of

¹ <https://www.themalaysianinsight.com/index.php/s/364145>

² <https://themalaysianreserve.com/2022/11/15/ge15-ec-issues-365686-postal-ballot-papers/>

³ https://www.un.org/en/file/105459/download?token=oh_ySkJg

⁴ <https://www.themalaysianinsight.com/index.php/s/364145>

⁵ <https://myunisearch.com/blog/why-malaysian-students-look-to-study-abroad>

studying overseas and obtaining permanent residence abroad.^{6 7} This proves that a big part of the growing diaspora are younger and there is a need to reach out to them.

MYS's mission and strategic plan emphasis on youth transition to the workforce, youth empowerment and improving the quality of life in youth. These highlight the importance of youth development and the transition period to adulthood, such as paving their future path. MYS acknowledged and envisioned to create a sense of belonging and community that are vital for youth development. The engagement with overseas youth is not only aligned with MYS vision but will also contribute to combat the ripple effect and challenges of brain drain in Malaysia by losing talented Malaysians.

The recent emergence of Malaysian youth activism locally and also internationally shows that the younger generation are very much invested in the future of the nation and see themselves as a part of the solution. These youth movements need to be galvanised as a platform to create more awareness about the existing system and concepts such as the voting system, the role of the different parts of the government and more importantly the be involved in the democratic process of Malaysia.

In GE15, the overseas Malaysians students played a pivotal role in the collecting and flying back ballots in GE15 through their Vote Malaysia initiative, such action indicated the importance of the mobilisation of overseas youth. A long term youth mobilisation programme by MYS is recommended to optimise youth empowerment and create a bond between MYS and future generations of Malaysia. Local political parties such as MUDA and DAP were also being more active in mobilising the international Malaysian youth and spur political interest among Malaysian youth.

Therefore, there is a need to reach out to the overseas youth especially the overseas students to ensure that they are aware of their rights and responsibility to be a part of the democratic system to cultivate holistic development of our youth.

Recommendations

Ongoing social media campaign for mobilisation of overseas youth.

Social media plays a pivotal role for overseas youth to stay connected with their family in Malaysia. The ministry should use social media as a leverage to reach out to the youth by having an ongoing social media campaign focusing on how to vote and the importance of voting no matter where they are. The ministry can reach out to Akademi Pilihanraya to discuss how to tailor the information to fit the needs of the overseas Malaysian youth. For example, a FAQ specially designed for overseas youth can be packaged into interesting formats to catch the attention and interest of the youth. The FAQ would also tackle challenges the overseas voters faced in General Elections- the ongoing misinformation on postal voting. This social media campaign should also be supported by other organisations related to overseas youth to create a sense of community and belonging for the future generation of Malaysia.

⁶ <https://www.asianstudycentre.com/ascnews/top-news/70-malaysian-students-want-study-overseas-says-poll/>

⁷ <https://myunisearch.com/blog/why-malaysian-students-look-to-study-abroad>

Include voter education as a part of their orientation for overseas students.

MYS can reach out to Jabatan Perkhidmatan Awam (JPA), MARA (Majlis Amanah Rakyat) and other involved organisations and encourage them to include voter education as a part of the orientation program for Malaysian students leaving for studies abroad. This will ensure that students are well informed and are aware of what they need to do to be able to vote from overseas. These organisations should also be encouraged to share overseas voting information on their online portals to leverage existing resources.

Encourage overseas students to engage with the local diaspora

Currently there is a slight rift in many countries between the student community and the general diaspora. There is a need to bring both communities closer together so that they can support each other when they are overseas. MYS can work with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Wisma Putra) to create opportunities for the students to meet with non-student members of the diaspora. A global perspective would generate interdependence between communities which would benefit students to engage in independent thinking by exchanging ideas and perspective on social, economic, religious and political situations in Malaysia. Government agencies must create a non-partisan, fear-free environment for students, especially scholarship students. Working with a non-partisan NGO such as Global Bersih will be a great way to do this.

How GB can help

Global Bersih has been mobilising overseas Malaysians for more than a decade, which enabled us to build and establish connections around the world to cater to the needs of overseas Malaysians including students. Global Bersih and MYS can join hands to reach out to Malaysian youth globally in a collective approach. Global Bersih is at your disposal to

- Identify the needs of overseas youth and provide feedback and recommendation to further improve on overseas youth mobilisation.
- Global Bersih can provide and disseminate information created by MYS to the diaspora.
- Working with Global Bersih will create a fear-free environment for the students to engage in democracy and/or voting-related activities to cultivate our future generations.
- Collaborating with Global Bersih can empower our youth to explore their identity and face challenges within a positive and non-judgemental environment when their safety nets are out of reach.

Global Bersih believes that we can work together in mobilising overseas Malaysians to foster a sense of community by organising events together to reach out to the Malaysian youth overseas.

Closing

The mobilisation of the diaspora and ensuring that Malaysians overseas can vote is consistent with the idea of an inclusive society and respect for all segments of the population, which are the core values of Madani - Sustainability, Prosperity, Innovation, Respect, Trust and Compassion. These core values can be strengthened by engaging more with Malaysians overseas and encouraging them to contribute to Malaysia's development. Involving them more in the democratic process will be a positive step in this direction

The recent GE15 Observation Report by Bersih(released 10 March 2023) also reflected that all these recommendations that Global Bersih has been working on for the last few years need to happen to ensure a more effective overseas postal voting system.

Global Bersih remains at your disposal for further communication on this matter, and we are willing to work together to reach out to the diaspora.

Global Bersih is a non-profit organisation established under the Swiss Civil Code. It aims to support Malaysian civil society's efforts to strengthen Malaysia's maturing democracy using peaceful and legal means of action. Global Bersih is proud to be part of the vibrant Swiss civil society as it enables a stronger international platform for it to advocate for its causes, taking advantage of the dynamic international human rights movement in Geneva, a global human rights capital. We aim to achieve:

- The full and effective fulfilment of Malaysia's right to a free and fair election that includes ensuring transparency of electoral roll, reform of electoral process and procedures, strengthening of public institutions, eradication of corruption and culture of impunity, and enhancing participation of international observers and media to monitor the polls.
- An independent and effective Election Commission of Malaysia, especially in monitoring electoral discrepancies.
- The advancement of human rights, rule of law and democracy in Malaysia.

What We Do

- We provide a global platform for the voices and stories of ordinary Malaysians and civil society to reach out to the international community, in particular international human rights bodies, diplomatic missions, foreign media and civil society.
- We enrich local and international exchanges of Malaysian issues, both in Malaysia and abroad to feed into national efforts related to electoral reform.
- We galvanize support and increase commitment from Malaysians across the globe towards creating a stronger international momentum for electoral and democratic reform in Malaysia.
- We carry out training and capacity building to encourage overseas Malaysians to participate in the civil society and electoral process.
- We promote all the above through peaceful and constructive dialogue.

For more info

Global Bersih

15 Cours des Bastions

CH-1205

Geneva, Switzerland

www.globalbersih.org

facebook.com/GlobalBersih

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instagram.com/global_bersih