

Voting from abroad in European Parliament elections

SUMMARY

Across the European Union (EU), national provisions regarding the right to vote for citizens living abroad are not consistent. However, recent legislative changes seem to suggest a positive trend towards allowing out-of-country voting in most EU Member States.

When it comes to voting from abroad, countries need to carefully assess and address various issues. These include: the identification of potential voters; how to inform them about their right to vote and stand as a candidate from abroad; the design and implementation of timely registration processes; the training of staff in diplomatic missions (for in-person voting in consular and diplomatic missions); the design and implementation of secure voting procedures, as well as the possible transportation of ballots from abroad.

Against this backdrop, the legal and practical arrangements for voting in the European elections for citizens who live or are temporarily outside their home Member State vary greatly between the Member States. Most allow voting at embassies or consulates abroad, several allow citizens living abroad to vote by post, a few allow voting by proxy, and one (Estonia) allows electronic voting. On the other hand, Czechia, Ireland, Malta and Slovakia do not permit their citizens to vote in the European elections from abroad.

Ahead of the European elections in June 2024, this briefing provides an overview of the national provisions concerning voting from abroad in the 27 EU Member States.

This briefing is an update of one published in September 2023. The latest elections-related statistical information about the Member States is from August 2023, with the exception of Greece and Belgium, for which it was updated in March 2024.



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Introduction

The right to vote is recognised as a fundamental right by international, EU and national legal instruments. When it comes to the right to vote from abroad, the matter becomes more complex and requires an answer to some legal and practical questions. For instance, should individuals permanently living in another country have the right to vote in elections in their country of origin? If so, under what conditions? Should the country of origin facilitate the exercising of this right from abroad or should it require its citizens to return to its territory to exercise their right? **Out-of-country voting or voting from abroad** is [defined](#) as: 'procedures which enable some or all electors of a country who are temporarily or permanently outside the country to exercise their voting rights from outside the national territory'. Although the debate around out-of-country voting is quite recent – as, even in long-established democracies, citizens resident in other countries were [not granted](#) the right to vote until the 1980s – it has become salient in a globalised world where more and more people are residing temporarily or permanently in a country other than their country of origin. According to the estimates of a 2021 [report](#) by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) one in every 28 people in the world (a total of 281 million people), is living abroad.

In 2019, it was [estimated](#) that around 17 million EU citizens lived in an EU Member State of which they were not nationals; 14 million of them were of voting age. Following the UK's departure from the EU, **the number of mobile EU citizens** went down to **13.3 million, 11 million of whom were of voting age**. Although there are no international standards regarding the right to vote of citizens residing abroad, it is [reported](#) that the international trend is favourable towards out-of-country voting. Overall, **73 % of the surveyed countries allow for some form of voting from abroad**, which represents a 16 % increase compared to 2007. The **most common type of voting from abroad is in-person voting** (108 countries), followed by voting by post (54 countries), proxy voting (19 countries) and e-voting (15 countries). Some countries offer their citizens the possibility to choose between different voting methods.¹

The arguments for and against exercising the right to vote from abroad are well known. Those in favour argue that citizens living abroad may keep a link with their home country, thus enforcing their sense of belonging and contributing to their home country's political life. Those against argue that individuals residing abroad would not be directly affected by political decisions taken in their home country, with which they have lost connection over time. Moreover, for countries with a large diaspora, citizens living abroad could have a disproportionate influence on the home country's politics and policies or could potentially 'swing the vote' in elections, although the Council of Europe [recognised](#) back in 1999 that a 'more realistic perspective can help to overcome strong public fear of a hypothetical mass invasion of electors from abroad'. A 2020 Venice Commission [report](#) recognised that it is within the scope of a country's sovereignty to decide whether to grant the right to vote to citizens residing abroad, but suggested that, where this right was not yet present, countries might consider introducing out-of-country voting. Equally, the 2002 Venice Commission [Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters](#) stipulates that both the right to vote and to be elected may be accorded to citizens residing abroad.

Procedures for enabling citizens to vote from abroad vary from one country to another. Differences may include: eligibility requirements; registration requirements; voting methods; and types of elections. For instance, as the 2021 International IDEA [report](#) confirms, some countries have taken a very open approach towards eligibility criteria and, de facto, any citizen residing abroad temporarily or permanently can vote. Some countries take voting rights away from citizens who live abroad for a long period of time, whereas others allow only citizens who reside abroad permanently to vote, etc.

Registration and voting arrangements also differ from one country to another. Despite many differences, there are **four recurrent types of voting from abroad: in person-voting** (usually at diplomatic/consular missions); **postal voting**; **proxy voting**; and [e-voting](#).

Voting rights of EU citizens

EU citizens have the [right](#) to move and reside freely in other EU Member States, to petition the European Parliament, to apply to the European Ombudsman, and to enjoy, in a third country, diplomatic and consular protection from any other Member State, if their own lacks representation there. Article [10\(3\)](#) Treaty on European Union (TEU) recognises EU citizens' right to participate in the democratic life of the Union, while Article [20\(2\)\(b\)](#) Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) recognises **the right to vote and to stand as a candidate in both European Parliament elections** (European elections) and **municipal elections** in the Member State of residence, even when they are not nationals of that Member State. **EU mobile citizens** (those living in another Member State than their own) **enjoy these rights under the same conditions as the nationals of the host Member State** (Article [22](#) TFEU and Article [39](#) of the EU Charter), based on the principle of non-discrimination on grounds of nationality within the scope of application of the Treaties. Furthermore, Council [Directive 93/109/EC](#) laid down detailed arrangements for exercising the right to vote and stand as a candidate in European elections for EU citizens residing in a Member State of which they are not a national. In 2021, the Commission [proposed](#) the [revision](#) of the Council Directive; in February 2023, under the consultation procedure, Parliament [adopted](#) a legislative resolution by a large majority. The [Council](#) is expected to adopt the proposal by unanimity, though it is not bound by Parliament's position.

Besides EU instruments, a number of international instruments recognise the right to vote. Article [3](#) of [Protocol No 1](#) to the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) recognises the right to free elections and has been interpreted by the European Court of Human Rights as a right to vote and a right to stand for election (*Mathieu-Mohin and Clerfayt v. Belgium*, 1987, §§ 48-51; *Ždanoka v. Latvia* [GC], 2006, § 102). In *Shindler v. the United Kingdom* (2013), the Court clarified that Article 3 does not impose any obligation on states to ensure the exercise of the right to vote for their non-resident citizens. On other [occasions](#), the Court has declared restrictions to the right to vote, based on the residence criterion, compatible with Article 3 under certain conditions. These [include](#) 'the presumption that non-resident citizens are less directly or less continuously concerned by their country's day-to-day problems and have less knowledge of them; the close connection between the right to vote in parliamentary elections and the fact of being directly affected by the acts of the political bodies thus elected; and the legitimate concern the legislature may have to limit the influence of citizens living abroad in elections concerning issues which, while fundamental, primarily affect those living in the country'. Article 25 of the [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#) recognises individuals' right and the opportunity, without unreasonable restrictions, to take part in the conduct of public affairs, to vote and to be elected at genuine periodic elections, and to have access to public services in their country. Article 41 of the International Convention on the [Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families](#) recognises the right of migrant workers and their family members to 'participate in public affairs of their State of origin and to vote and to be elected at elections of that State, in accordance with its legislation'.

The European electoral law

Already modified several times after its initial adoption in [1976](#), the current [European Electoral Act](#) **does not provide for a uniform electoral system applicable in all the EU Member States in European elections**. However, it contains a set of common principles that should be respected by the different domestic laws applicable to European elections. In 2018, the Council agreed on further amendments to the 1976 Act (Council Decision (EU, Euratom) [2018/994](#)), which was expected to enter into force before the 2019 European elections. However, the decision, approved by the Council, is still not in force, because Spain has yet to approve it in accordance with its respective constitutional requirements. The decision provides that Member States could grant the possibility of advance voting, postal voting and electronic and internet voting in European elections (Article 4a), though it does not specifically refer to EU citizens residing in third countries. However, Article

9a requires Member States 'to allow those of their citizens residing in third countries to vote in elections to the European Parliament'.

In May 2022, Parliament adopted a [legislative resolution](#) seeking to repeal the 1976 Act. Parliament's draft legislative act proposes to further harmonise [several aspects](#) of the electoral procedure applicable in European elections, including by introducing more detailed provisions on postal voting and voting from abroad. Among the [novelties](#), Article 6 of the draft legislative act requires Member States to ensure the right to vote in European elections for EU citizens residing in a third country, those without permanent residence, those living in closed residential settings, those experiencing homelessness and those serving a prison sentence. Similarly, aiming to facilitate the exercising of the right to vote, including from third countries, Article 8 of the draft legislative act proposes to oblige Member States to provide for postal voting and the possibility to allow advance physical voting, proxy voting, and electronic and internet systems for voting.

Domestic provisions in the 27 EU Member States²

Belgium, Bulgaria, Greece³ and Luxembourg provide for **compulsory voting**). **Twenty-three Member States recognise their citizens' right to vote from abroad** in European elections, with some differences. For example, Bulgaria and Italy recognise their citizens' right to vote from abroad only if **they reside in another EU Member State** (i.e. not in a third country). Czechia, Ireland, Malta and Slovakia **do not recognise their citizens' right to vote from abroad** in European elections, so their respective citizens must return to their home country in order to vote. Ireland, however, allows a few specific categories of people (e.g. military and diplomatic staff) to vote from abroad.

Eighteen Member States recognise their citizens' right to **vote in person in diplomatic and/or consular missions**. There are differences between these Member States, though. For instance, Hungary gives the right to vote in person only to its citizens who have a domicile in Hungary but who wish to exercise their right to vote abroad. Hungarians with no address in Hungary and living outside the EU can vote by post only. Moreover, some Member States (e.g. Belgium, Cyprus, Poland, Romania and Spain) may establish, under certain conditions, polling stations in places other than diplomatic and consular missions. **Fourteen Member States** allow for **postal voting**; Denmark also uses the term 'voting by post' for what is, in practice, advance voting. Some of these Member States cover the costs of sending the postal ballot through regular post (e.g. Austria, Hungary) or reimburse them ([Spain](#)), whereas others provide that the postal costs be borne by the voter (e.g. Estonia, Germany and the [Netherlands](#)). Only Belgium, France and the Netherlands allow **proxy voting**; in all three Member States, other forms of voting are also recognised, i.e. in-person voting and/or postal voting. Certain Member States, such as [Germany](#), explicitly prohibit voting by proxy. Only Estonia allows its citizens to **vote electronically** (internet voting).

Voting from abroad for crew or passengers on ships in foreign waters

Eleven EU Member States specifically provide in their law that crew members and/or passengers on ships who are thus abroad on election day(s) may also cast their vote in European elections. The [Belgian Electoral Code](#) provides that sailors and their family members living with them may vote by proxy if unable to go to a polling station. [Bulgarian law](#) provides that polling stations may be created on sailing vessels under the Bulgarian flag outside the country, if there are no less than 10 voters (crew and passengers). [Croatia allows](#) crew members on vessels sailing under the Croatian flag outside its borders to vote on election day at special polling stations designated by the competent ministry. [Danish](#) sailors and passengers on [ships](#) in foreign waters may vote in advance with a vote receiver. [Estonian voters](#) may also vote, in advance or on election day, on board a ship flying the national flag of Estonia and located in foreign waters. [Finland allows](#) crew members of a ship to vote in advance while the ship is in foreign waters. Advance voting may start on the 18th day before the election and must end at the same time as voting at the embassy, i.e. on the eighth day before election day. [German seafarers](#) at sea must apply in time for their postal voting documents. [Lithuanian voters](#) (crew members and passengers) on ships flying the flag of Lithuania have the right to vote on board, if they have sailed from Lithuania at least four days before election day and have not returned until election day, or they are prevented from voting until the day of the election in an established

polling station (such as in a diplomatic or consular post); however, voting on board shall not be organised if the appropriate conditions are lacking. **Poland** allows [polling stations](#) to be created for voters staying on Polish seagoing vessels that are travelling during election day, if there are at least 15 voters and it is possible to send the results immediately after the completion of the vote to the competent electoral commission. Citizens wishing to vote on a ship must declare their will to do so to the captain of the ship no later than 30 days before elections. **Spain** provides for [postal voting](#) by personnel embarked on ships of the navy, the merchant navy or the fishing fleet, flying the Spanish flag, abroad. **Sweden** also [allows](#) crew members and passengers on board a ship in foreign waters to vote by post. They cast their vote in the presence of two witnesses; afterwards, the postal ballot is sent to an election authority.

Austria

Austrian voters **who have their residence** or are **temporarily** abroad may vote in European elections (Articles 2 and 4 of the European Voter Registration Act ([Europa-Wählerevidenzgesetz \(EuWEG\)](#)) and Article 46 of the Federal Act on the Election of Members of the European Parliament ([Europawahlordnung \(EuWO\)](#)). The minimum [voting age](#) is set at 16. Austrians abroad may vote by **postal ballot**, after they have registered on the [European electoral register](#); voting by postal ballot can take place immediately after receipt of the voting card. The sealed voting card must be sent in good time to the electoral authority entitled to receive it, and voters must sign an affidavit that they have filled out the voting card personally, unobserved and uninfluenced. The [postal ballot](#) may also be handed in at any Austrian embassy, consulate or honorary consulate, which will forward it free of charge to the electoral authority; this may be done up to the sixth day before election day for diplomatic representations in the countries of the European Economic Area or Switzerland and up to the ninth day before election day elsewhere. Austrian citizens living abroad may also vote with their voting card at any polling station in Austria on polling day or vote in person in the municipality in which they are registered, provided they have not applied for or received a voting card.

Belgium

Belgian citizens living in another EU Member State or in a third country and who are **registered at the consular post** in their country of residence have the obligation to vote as stipulated in Article 39 of the [Law on the election of the European Parliament](#) (correlated with [Articles 207-210](#) of the Electoral Code, which provide for sanctions for non-justified absence from the vote). In June 2022, the [right to vote](#) in European elections for young Belgians aged 16 to 18 was introduced, provided they make a request to this end ([Articles 1\(1\) and 1\(2\)](#) of the Law on the election of the European Parliament). However, in July 2023 the Constitutional Court [annulled](#) the obligation for 16- and 17-year-olds to request their inclusion on the electoral lists in order to vote. As a result, individuals in this age range will automatically be included on the voters' list. While voting is compulsory in Belgium, the law of [25 December 2023](#) (following on from the July 2023 court ruling) stated that it would not be compulsory for 16- and 17-year-olds. However, this provision was [suspended](#) by the Constitutional Court on 21 March 2024, with the effect that voting will also be compulsory for 16- and 17-year olds.

Adult Belgian citizens residing abroad must choose a voting method in advance: voting **in person** or **by proxy** in a polling station in Belgium, or **in a consular post** in their country of residence, or **by mail** ([Article 5](#) of the European Parliament election act). The same article states that the voting method cannot be different from the [method](#) chosen for the election of the Belgian House of Representatives. While it is possible to [modify](#) the voting method, the change is only valid from the first day of the fourth month after submitting the request. For the [European elections in 2024](#), voters abroad may register on the consular lists until 29 February 2024. The [registration](#) is valid from the first day of the fourth month after the submission of the request. Voting in person or by proxy abroad will take place on 5 May 2024 at the consular post where the voter and the person mandated to vote in his/her place are registered, or in other ad hoc [polling stations](#). For postal voting, postal ballots received by 16 May 2024 must reach Belgium by 9 June at 14:00.

Bulgaria

According to the Bulgarian [Electoral Code](#), voting is compulsory in Bulgaria (although any sanctions for failing to do so were declared [unconstitutional](#) and abolished). Bulgarian citizens have the right to vote in the European elections **only if they reside in Bulgaria or in another EU Member State**. According to Article 350(1) of the Bulgarian Electoral Code, citizens may vote in European elections if they are at least 18 years old, have lived for at least the past 3 months in Bulgaria or in another EU Member State, are not serving a prison sentence and are not banned from voting. Bulgarian citizens living in other EU Member States can exercise their right to vote **in person** in **consular representations** (Article 14 of the [Electoral Code](#)) or in **polling stations** formed under conditions and procedures determined by the Central Electoral Commission (Articles 14 to 17). They must declare their intention to vote no later than 25 days before election day by following the procedure for requesting the opening of a polling station (Article 16), by submitting a form to the Bulgarian diplomatic mission or consular representation in the relevant Member State, or by an electronic application via the website of the Central Electoral Commission. However, a citizen fulfilling the necessary requirements of Article 350 can also be added to the electoral roll of any polling station abroad upon presenting an identity document and a declaration form; in addition, they must declare that they have not voted and will not vote elsewhere in the same elections (Article 33).

Croatia

According to Article 45 of the [Constitution](#) of the Republic of Croatia, Croatian citizens who permanently reside abroad have the right to vote **in person** in the European elections at polling stations in the Croatian diplomatic-consular offices in their country of residence. The same article provides that Croatian citizens resident in Croatia but who are temporarily abroad during the elections may exercise the right to vote 'in the diplomatic-consular offices of the Republic of Croatia in the foreign countries in which they [are] located or in some other manner as specified by law'. Article 9 of [The Republic of Croatia European Parliamentary Elections Act](#) states that voters who **have registered their domicile in Croatia** and are outside the borders of the Republic of Croatia shall vote in the **seats of diplomatic missions and consulates** of the Republic of Croatia with prior registration or confirmation for the purpose of voting outside their place of domicile. Voters who have their registered domicile in Croatia but who are in service in the armed forces on the election date, those who are serving in peace missions of the United Nations on the election date, those who are crew members on maritime and riverine vessels flying the Croatian flag outside its borders, and incarcerated voters shall vote at **special polling stations** designated in compliance with the procedure set out in Articles 37 and 38 of the [European Parliamentary Elections Act](#).

Cyprus

Not all Cypriot citizens may vote from abroad in [European elections](#). Article 4 of the [Law on the election of Members of the European Parliament](#) provides that, in order to [register](#) on the permanent electoral lists in Cyprus and thus have the right to vote, Cypriot nationals (at least 18 years old) must have their habitual residence in Cyprus for a period of at least six months immediately preceding the date of acquisition of electoral qualifications (as defined in the [Law on Civil Registry](#)). They can also vote if they had their habitual residence for the same six-month period in any other Member State, provided that, on the day of registration in the electoral roll, they have their habitual residence in Cyprus (see also Article 92 and subsequent articles of the [Law on Civil Registry](#)). Therefore, Cypriot nationals who reside abroad permanently mostly do not have the right to vote from abroad, unless they had met the six-month residency requirement prior to registering on the electoral roll and moved abroad thereafter (in this case, their registration on the electoral roll is not revoked). Cypriot authorities **may establish polling stations abroad**, in **embassies or elsewhere**, if more than 50 voters make a request to vote from there (Article 27(2) of the [Law on the election of Members of the House of Representatives](#)). Voters abroad are registered on a special electoral roll and shall cast their vote only **in person** on election day.

Czechia

According to Article 2(4) of [Act No. 62/2003 Coll., Act on Elections to the European Parliament and on Amendments to Certain Acts](#), Czech law does not recognise the right to vote from abroad. Article 30(3) of the same act provides that each holder of an election card is entitled to vote in the elections to the European Parliament on any election day (in Czechia, European elections are held over the course of two days) in any election district located **within Czechia**. Czech citizens who are temporarily abroad or who have their permanent residence abroad and are registered with their embassy on a special electoral roll may request a voting absentee card with which they can vote in Czechia in any polling station. Citizens who live abroad permanently and are not registered with their embassy cannot vote unless they ask to be registered no later than 40 days prior to election day.

Denmark

The [Act concerning the election of the Danish Members of the European Parliament](#) limits the right to vote from abroad to certain categories of Danish citizens (Part 2, sections 3, 3a and 3b). In principle, [Danish voters](#) who live abroad permanently do not have the right to vote. Whereas Danish citizens who reside permanently in another EU Member State have the right to vote without conditions, Danes living in a third country may vote in European elections if, for instance: they are public officials or employees of a private company on duty abroad; they are residing abroad for training or education or on health grounds; or they intend to return to Denmark within a period of 2 years from their departure. Their spouses and registered partners may also vote abroad. Danish nationals living in third countries must apply to be enrolled in the electoral register (Section 14b).

Section 57(2) of the [Folketing \(Parliamentary\) Elections Act](#), applicable to European elections, provides that Danish voters living [abroad](#) or temporarily abroad may cast their vote in advance. Advance voting (also known as '[voting by post](#)')⁴ can take place **at a Danish embassy or consular representation** abroad or with a **vote receiver** appointed by the Minister of Interior. Voting in advance with a vote receiver is mainly used to serve Danish military personnel abroad or Danish sailors and passengers on Danish ships in foreign waters. Section 26(2) of the Act on the election of the Danish Members of the European Parliament states that, in the Faroe Islands, Greenland, foreign countries, on Danish ships in foreign trade, and Danish off-shore installations outside Danish territory, advance voting can take place within the last three months prior to election day. Article 61 of the [Folketing \(Parliamentary\) Elections Act](#) sets the detailed procedure for advance voting.

Estonia

Voting in a foreign state for Estonian voters who **reside permanently in the foreign state and voters who are staying there temporarily** is [organised](#) by the foreign missions of Estonia (Section 48 of the [European Parliament Election Act](#)). Voters must apply for a voting card, to be sent to them no later than 60 days before election day (Section 48(2)). Voters may vote **by post** after sending an application to the relevant Estonian foreign mission no later than 30 days before the elections (Section 49), vote **in person at the Estonian foreign mission** on specified days in advance of election day (Section 53), or make use of **electronic voting** by casting their [vote online](#) (Section 47).

Finland

Finnish [voters](#) who do not have a municipality of residence in Finland and those who reside or stay abroad throughout the advance voting period and on election day may vote from abroad. Chapter 5 (Section 46) of the [Election Act](#) provides for the possibility of [voting in advance](#) **at Finnish diplomatic missions abroad** (between the 11th and eighth day, inclusive, before election day). Since 2018, [Chapter 5a](#) of the Election Act also provides the option to **vote by post** from abroad. Voters wishing to [vote by post](#) must order the postal voting documents from Finland [3 months](#) before election day at the earliest. The voter must vote in the presence of two witnesses.

France

French nationals established outside France may exercise their [right to vote](#) in the European elections in accordance with the provisions of [Organic Law No 76-97 of 31 January 1976 relating to consular electoral lists and the vote of French nationals established outside France for the election of the President of the Republic](#). French citizens living abroad must be registered on the [consular electoral list](#) in order to vote in European Parliament elections. They may cast their vote by making use of the ballot boxes available in designated French **consulates (or embassies)** or by [proxy](#). [Postal voting](#) and [internet voting](#) are not allowed for European elections.

Germany

Section 6(1) and Section 6(2) of the [European Elections Act](#), together with Section 12(2) of the [Federal Elections Act](#), allow German citizens living in third countries to vote in European elections if they comply with the general eligibility requirements (i.e. [16 years of age](#) and not disqualified) and satisfy additional requirements. Section 6(1) of the European Elections Act enshrines the right to vote for all Germans who, on election day, have been residing for at least three months in Germany or in other EU Member States. Moreover, according to Section 6(2) of the [European Elections Act](#), in conjunction with Section 12(2) of the Federal Elections Act, Germans residing outside Germany also have a right to vote in European elections if: (1) after reaching the age of 14 years, they had a domicile or were otherwise permanently resident in Germany for an uninterrupted period of at least three months, and this period dates back no more than 25 years; or (2) they have become familiar, personally and directly, with the political situation in Germany and are affected by it. Only persons listed in a voters' register or having a polling card may vote; Germans living abroad who **do not have a registered domicile** in Germany are not automatically entered into a [voters' register](#). If German [expatriates](#) wish to participate in European elections, they must [request](#) to be included in the voters' register before each election, at the latest on the 21st day before election day. Germans who are abroad temporarily (e.g. on vacation) and **still have a registered domicile in Germany** will be entered ex officio into the voters' register of their municipality. [Germans abroad](#) and registered in the voters' register receive a polling card and may vote by [postal ballot](#). Postal ballots must reach the competent authority by 18:00 on the Sunday of the election (9 June 2024).

Greece

While voting is [compulsory](#) in Greece for all voters registered on a special electoral roll (Article 51(5) of the Constitution of Greece and Article 6 of [Presidential Decree 26/2012](#)), it is [not compulsory](#) for voters over the age of 70 or voters who are situated over 200 km from their polling station on election day (Article 48(7) of [Law 4555/2018](#)). Since 2019, [Law 4648/2019](#) has allowed Greek citizens living abroad to exercise their right to vote in parliamentary and European elections, as well as referendums. However, Article 1 of the law limits its scope to any Greek citizen who has an active right to vote, is registered in the electoral rolls, and is permanently or temporarily outside Greece on election day. Greeks living abroad must apply to be registered in a special electoral roll in order to vote and can only **vote in person in special polling stations** designated by the government, in Greek diplomatic missions or in other suitable premises (Article 1(3)). In July 2023, Law 4648/2019 was [amended](#) to remove the [restrictions](#) on registration in the special electoral lists for voters abroad (namely, residence and tax [requirements](#) for Greeks living in a non-EU country).

Under [Law 5044/2023](#), Greeks living abroad (in the EU and outside the EU) are required to meet two [criteria](#) (Articles 2(1) and 2(10)) in order to vote: to be registered in the electoral roll of a Greek municipality and to have an active right to vote. In 2024, [Law 5083/2024](#) established **postal voting** in [Greece](#) for the first time, making it easier for voters to participate in **European elections and national referendums**. Without imposing any limiting criteria, the law made postal voting available to all Greek citizens who are registered in the electoral rolls and wish to vote by post, whether they live within Greece or abroad. As a result, polling stations will not be set up in foreign countries,

whether within or outside the European Union. Chapter III lays out the provisions on exercising the right to vote by post. These provisions apply exclusively to the elections for the nomination of Greek Members of the European Parliament, as well as to the holding of a national referendum. However, in [cases](#) where European elections or a national referendum are being held at the same time as parliamentary elections, these provisions do not apply. Instead, the provisions of Law 4648/2019 (A' 205) apply. According to this law, the right to vote is exclusively exercised in electoral departments established within or outside Greek territory. In practice, the inclusion of voters on the basic electoral roll and any other changes made to it are allowed up to 40 days before the day of the elections. Additionally, postal votes must have been received by the Postal Vote Collection Committee by 17:00 on the eve of the election day.

Hungary

Section 2/A (1A) of [Act CXIII of 2003 on the election of Members of the European Parliament](#) grants the right to vote to Hungarian citizens who have no domicile in Hungary but live there, and to those who have no domicile in the EU. As of 2019, only **Hungarian citizens who live outside the EU and have no address in Hungary, and those who live in Hungary without having an address** can [vote by post](#) in the European elections. These voters have to request to be registered in the postal voter electoral register no later than the 25th day before election day (Section 266 of the [Act XXXVI of 2013 on the election procedure](#)). Postal voting is therefore not allowed for everyone. Hungarian citizens **who have a Hungarian address but vote abroad** may only do so **in person** at polling stations in **embassies or consulates**. [Voters](#) with a Hungarian address, if they want to vote abroad, must request to be registered in the foreign representation register prior to election day. Hungarian citizens who have their domicile in another EU Member State and have no address in Hungary cannot vote on Hungarian lists.

Ireland

Eligibility to vote in Irish elections is conditional on being ordinarily resident in Ireland. According to [Section 14](#) of the Electoral Act, 1992, only Irish diplomats and their spouse/civil partner ([Section 12](#)), **members of the defence forces or national police** posted overseas may vote abroad **by post**.

Italy

Italian citizens who are **permanent residents of another EU Member State** and those **living temporarily in an EU Member State for work or study purposes** may [vote](#) in person in the polling stations established in Italian embassies or consulates. Citizens living **temporarily** in an EU Member State can exercise this right by submitting to the competent consulate an application addressed to the mayor of the municipality in whose electoral lists they are registered, no later than 80 days before the elections (Article 3 (1) and (3), [d.l. n. 408/1994](#)). Italian citizens who reside **permanently** in an EU Member State and who are enrolled in the register of Italians residing abroad (AIRE) do not need to submit a request. On the contrary, Italian voters **residing outside the EU** cannot vote from abroad in European elections. [Article 50 of Law 1979/18](#) provides that Italian [voters residing in non-EU countries](#) or in the overseas territories of EU Member States may vote in European elections **at the commune in Italy** on whose [electoral roll](#) they are registered. They may also benefit from travel [fare discounts](#).

Latvia

Section 32 of the [Election to the European Parliament Law](#) provides that voters staying in foreign countries may participate in the elections **by voting by post or in person at a polling station**. Voting in polling stations established in foreign countries shall take place in accordance with the procedures in Chapter III of the abovementioned law. While prior registration for voters choosing to vote in person at a polling station abroad is [no longer needed](#), those wishing to vote by post must

make an (electronic) application between the 35th and eighth day before election day. The postal ballot must be received by the polling station commission before the counting of the votes starts.

Lithuania

Article 58(2) of the [Electoral Code](#) provides that, for the European elections, Lithuanian citizens who vote abroad are entered in the lists of voters who vote abroad. Electors who wish to vote at a diplomatic mission or consular post of the Republic of Lithuania may be added to the electoral registers of the relevant diplomatic mission. Articles 144-146 of the Electoral Code regulate voting in foreign countries and on ships. Lithuanian voters in foreign countries have the right to vote in European elections at the **diplomatic missions and consular posts** of the Republic of Lithuania, **in additional polling places abroad at a Lithuanian diplomatic mission or consular post**, and on **ships flying the flag of Lithuania**. Voters may cast their votes during at least three days at each diplomatic mission or consular post. Article 137 of the [Electoral Code](#) regulates **early voting** at special polling stations for personnel (civilian and military) deployed on international military operations abroad. Voters abroad who cannot come to the Lithuanian representative office on election day may vote [by post](#), the postal ballot being sent to the nearest Lithuanian diplomatic mission or consular post; however, they must indicate this choice when registering for voting.

Luxembourg

Voting in European elections is mandatory for all registered voters. According to Article 3(4) of the [electoral law of 18 February 2003](#) and Article 328 and subsequent articles, Luxembourg citizens living abroad can vote **by post** in European elections. They can make a [request](#) to this end between 12 weeks and 40 days before election day. The envelopes containing the vote must arrive at the relevant polling station on election day by 14:00 at the latest.

Malta

Voting from abroad is not permitted, and voters in the European elections are required to have their residence in Malta registered in the electoral roll. According to Article 11(c) of the [European Parliament Elections Act](#) (CAP. 467 of the Laws of Malta), residence in any EU Member State shall be deemed to be residence in Malta for registration in the European Union Electoral Register and for voting in European elections (see also the [General Elections Act](#) (CAP. 354 of the Laws of Malta)). Therefore, citizens residing abroad have to return to Malta in order to vote, **either in early voting or on election day**. [Reportedly](#), these voters from abroad may acquire state-subsidised flight tickets.

The Netherlands

Article Y6, together with articles D2 and D3, of the Dutch Electoral Act ([Kieswet](#)) provides for the right of Dutch citizens to cast their vote for the European elections when they are abroad in other EU Member States and third countries. To this end, they have to [register](#) once at the municipality of The Hague at least six weeks before polling day. Those living in a third country may vote **by proxy** (Article L1 Kieswet), **by post** (Chapter M Kieswet), or **by post** through postal polling stations established in certain **diplomatic or consular representations** or in certain Dutch military bases abroad (Article M13 Kieswet). Dutch citizens who are [temporarily](#) abroad to travel or study can vote from abroad (**by post or by proxy**) only if they are registered with a municipality in the Netherlands.

Poland

The [Polish Electoral Code](#) (2011, last [amended](#) in January 2023) allows voting abroad. Article 14(1) provides that, for the European elections, **voting precincts shall be established for Polish citizens residing abroad if there are at least 15 voters in the area of the precinct** and if it is possible to transmit the results of the vote to the competent electoral commission immediately after its completion. Voting abroad is possible **in person** in embassies and consulates, but also in [other](#)

[places](#) (e.g. churches and parish buildings, Polish cultural centres, etc.). Polish voters who are staying abroad must request to be registered on the electoral roll drawn up by the competent consul no later than the fifth day before elections (Article 35). Moreover, voters who change the place where they are staying close to the elections may request a certificate stating their right to vote between 44 and three days before the elections (Article 32(2)). If a voter is registered on an electoral roll abroad, the certificate is issued by the competent [consul](#), allowing the person to vote in any other polling station abroad or in Poland.

Portugal

According to Article 3 of the [Electoral Law for the European Parliament](#), citizens [living abroad](#) and registered on the electoral roll at the consular post are allowed to vote **in person** on the election days in the voting sections established in the [consular](#) missions abroad. According to Article 79B of [Law No. 14/79 of 16 May 1979](#), [voting in advance](#) (in person) at the embassies or consulates established by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is possible for certain [categories](#) of persons who are registered in Portugal but who are abroad temporarily, such as civil servants relocated abroad or persons relocated abroad for business reasons or abroad for sports competitions; students, researchers and professors at higher institutions abroad; patients being treated abroad; as well as persons accompanying voters mentioned in the above situations.

Romania

Articles 5(8) and 13(3) of [Law 33/2007](#) on the elections to the European Parliament establish that citizens residing abroad can **vote in person** at any polling station organised abroad, if they have the right to vote. They are registered in supplementary electoral lists. Besides the diplomatic missions and consular offices of Romania, **one or more polling stations may also be organised, including in localities other than those in which the diplomatic missions or consular posts are located**, with the agreement of the government of the country concerned (Article 34 of [Law 33/2007](#)).

Slovakia

Under the current rules, Slovakia **does not allow voting from abroad**. Citizens of Slovakia living abroad can vote in European elections **only if they are present in Slovakia on the day of the election**. Section 72(2) of [Act no. 180/2014 Coll.](#) allows Slovak citizens who do not have a permanent residence in Slovakia or in any other EU Member State, but who are **staying in Slovakia on the day of the elections**, to vote in European elections. They can vote in any polling station in Slovakia in person.

Slovenia

According to the [Act](#) on the Election of Members of the European Parliament from the Republic of Slovenia ([ZVPEP](#)), together with Article 82 of the National Assembly Election [Act](#) ([ZVDZ](#)), Slovenian citizens who **reside abroad** may **vote by post or in person at a diplomatic or consular representative office** of Slovenia where ballot boxes are placed. [Slovenian citizens](#) who are abroad **temporarily** may cast their vote from abroad if they communicate this to the National Electoral Commission 30 days in advance of the elections. Slovenian citizens with permanent residence abroad may also vote abroad if the state where they reside allows such voting or if this is allowed by an international agreement.

Spain

Spanish citizens who [reside abroad permanently](#) may cast their vote **by post** or **in person**, by making use of the **ballot boxes available in designated Spanish consulates or embassies** or in the places that are enabled for this purpose, where they are registered (Article 75 of [Organic Law 5/1985 of 19 June 1985](#)). These voters are sent the voting documents to their registered address

abroad. They may send their ballot by registered post to the consular office to which the voter is attached no later than five days prior to election day; it must arrive at least two days prior to election day (Article 75(7)). Alternatively, they may [deposit their vote](#) in person in the ballot boxes at the consulate or embassy between eight and three days before election day. According to [Royal Decree 1621/2007](#), in order to vote, Spanish citizens who are abroad **temporarily** must register as non-residents at the consulate corresponding to their temporary residence abroad. They must also make a request to the consulate no later than the 25th day after the elections have been called, in order to receive the voting documents at their address abroad. Voters must send their vote by registered **post** to the polling station in Spain no later than the third day prior to the election.

Sweden

According to Chapter 5, Section 2, [Elections Act](#), Swedish citizens who are no longer registered in the population register database and in the land register shall be included in the **electoral roll for 10 years** from the date on which their registration ceased. Thereafter, they shall, for 10 years at a time, be included in the electoral roll only if they have notified their address to the Tax Agency or if they exercise their right to vote. Those voters can [cast](#) their votes by different means, including voting **in missions abroad** ([advance](#) voting, starting from the 24th day prior to election day) and **postal voting**. Postal voting is only allowed for voters who are staying abroad or are on board a ship in foreign waters, who vote in the presence of two witnesses (Chapter 7, Sec. 11-15, [Elections Act](#)).

ENDNOTES

- ¹ According to [International IDEA's Voting from Abroad Database](#), which covers 216 countries: 126 countries allow their citizens to vote from abroad in legislative elections; 89 allow this in presidential elections; 23 allow it in subnational elections; 23 (out of 27 EU Member States) allow out-of-country voting in European elections; and 76 countries allow it in referendums.
- ² This section looks at the domestic provisions in 27 Member States relating to the arrangements for voting from abroad for EU citizens who are temporarily abroad and long-term resident abroad at the time of the European Parliament elections. It has been compiled on the basis of information provided by the European Centre for Parliamentary Research and Documentation ([ECPRD](#)) and by the European Parliamentary Research Service. The data were verified in July-August 2023 by country specialists from the EPRS Members' Research Service.
- ³ It is [not mandatory](#) for voters over the age of 70 or voters who are situated over 200 km from their polling station on election day (Article 48(7) of Law 4555/2018).
- ⁴ Danish authorities use the term '[advance voting](#)', i.e. this kind of voting must take place before election day. The term 'postal voting' refers to the fact that the votes which are cast in a controlled environment (under the auspices of Danish authorities or vote receivers appointed by the Danish authorities) are sent by regular mail by the vote-receiving authorities to the relevant Danish municipality where the voter in question is resident.

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eprs@ep.europa.eu (contact)

www.eprs.ep.parl.union.eu (intranet)

www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank (internet)

<http://epthinktank.eu> (blog)

Annex 1 – Comparison of existing provisions in the 27 EU Member States

Member State	Voting permitted abroad	In person*	By post	By proxy	Internet voting
Belgium	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Bulgaria	EU Member States only	✓			
Czechia	Not possible **				
Denmark	✓ **	✓			
Germany	✓		✓		
Ireland	Not possible **				
Greece	✓		✓		
Spain	✓	✓	✓ **		
Estonia	✓	✓	✓		✓
France	✓	✓		✓	
Croatia	✓	✓			
Italy	EU Member States only	✓			
Cyprus	✓	✓ **			
Latvia	✓	✓	✓		
Lithuania	✓	✓	✓		
Luxembourg	✓		✓		
Hungary	✓ **	✓	✓		
Malta	Not possible **				
The Netherlands	✓		✓	✓	
Austria	✓		✓		
Poland	✓ **	✓			
Portugal	✓	✓			
Romania	✓	✓			
Slovakia	Not possible **				
Slovenia	✓	✓	✓		
Finland	✓	✓	✓		
Sweden	✓	✓	✓		

Source: EPRS.

* In person voting abroad usually takes place in diplomatic and consular missions. For Austria and the Netherlands, while voters may hand in their postal ballots at the embassy or consulate, we consider this to be postal voting and not in person voting.

****Denmark:** Danes who live abroad permanently do not have the right to vote (except for those living in another EU Member State).

****Ireland:** Not possible, with the exception of very limited categories of people (e.g. diplomats and their spouses, military forces and national police on mission abroad) who can vote by post.

****Spain:** Spanish citizens who are temporarily abroad may only vote by post.

****Cyprus:** Voting abroad is generally not allowed for Cypriots who reside abroad permanently. Polling stations may be established in embassies or elsewhere if more than 50 voters make a request to vote from there.

****Hungary:** Voting from abroad is not allowed for Hungarians without an address in Hungary who are domiciled in another EU Member State. Hungarian citizens a) living outside the EU and having no address in Hungary and b) living in Hungary without having an address can only vote by post.

****Poland:** Special polling stations are created abroad if there are at least 15 voters in the area and if it is possible to send the results to the competent electoral commission immediately after completing the vote.