



Special *Relate* supplement on voting

Local elections and elections to the European Parliament will be held in June 2009. It is likely that there will be a referendum at some time in 2009 and other elections may be held. This supplement tells you what you need to do to ensure that you can vote at these elections.

Who can vote

You are entitled to vote in elections in Ireland if:

- You are aged 18 or over and
- Your name is on the Electoral Register and
- You meet the residency and/or citizenship requirements for the particular election

Residency and citizenship requirements

Irish citizens living in Ireland are eligible to vote in all the following elections. Citizens of other countries are eligible to vote in some of them. The residency and citizenship requirements for the different elections are as follows:

Dáil elections

Citizens of Ireland and citizens of the UK who are living in Ireland are eligible to vote.

European Parliament elections

Irish citizens and citizens of the member states of the EU who are living in Ireland are eligible to vote.

Local elections

You do not have to be a citizen to vote in local elections – all you need is to be living in Ireland. All residents over the age of 18 who live in the functional area of the local authority are eligible to vote in local authority elections. People who are eligible to vote in local authority elections but not in other elections have the letter "L" after their names in the electoral register.

Referendums and Presidential elections

Irish citizens living in Ireland are the only people entitled to vote in referendums and in Presidential elections.

Irish citizens living abroad

Irish citizens who live abroad are not entitled to vote in Irish elections (except for members of the Defence Forces and diplomats).

Irish citizens living in other EU member states have the right to vote in local and European Parliament elections in the member state in which they live. Irish citizens living in the UK are also eligible to vote in national elections there.

The Electoral Register

You may have the right to vote but you cannot exercise that right if your name is not on the Electoral Register. The Electoral Register is compiled every year by the local authorities (county councils and city councils). The information for the register is compiled in September and October each year. At this stage, you may put your name on the register if you will be aged 18 or over when that register comes into effect, that is on the following 15 February. You must register at the address where you are living on 1 September. In order to be eligible to vote in all elections, you must be an Irish citizen on 1 September. A draft register is published on 1 November each year.

The register itself is published on 1 February each year and is valid from 15 February of each year. A new register comes into effect on 15 February 2009 and that will remain valid for any elections held between then and 15 February 2010. Copies of the register are normally available in post offices, public libraries and Garda Stations so you can check there to see if your name is on the register. You can also check online at www.checktheregister.ie.

If your name is not on the Electoral Register which is published in February, you may still be able to vote if you get your name on the Supplemental Register.

Getting on the Supplemental Register

If your name is not on the Electoral Register, or if it is on the register but you are no longer living at the place where you are registered, you may get on the Supplemental Register which is published before polling day for each election or referendum. You should do this as soon as possible – you do not have to wait until an election is called. There is a very short time immediately after the announcement of an election or referendum in which to get on the Supplemental Register.

You are eligible to get on the Supplemental Register if you will be 18 years old at the time of the election or referendum and you are living at the address at which you wish to be registered. You need to fill up a form which you can get from your local authority or download:

Form RFA2: this is for use if you are not on the register at all: www.checktheregister.ie/Portals/128/RFA2%20English%20-%20form.pdf

Form RFA3: this is for use if you are on the register but you have moved from the address shown on the register: www.checktheregister.ie/Portals/128/RFA3%20English%20-%20form.pdf

You must go to your local Garda Station to have your identity confirmed and the form signed. You should bring photographic identification with you – for example, a passport or a driving licence. You may also be asked for evidence of your address, for example, a utility (gas, electricity) bill. You must sign the form in the presence of a member of the Garda Síochána.

If you cannot go to the Garda Station, you may be able to complete the form at your local authority office – you need similar identification.

If you are unable to go to the Garda Station because you have a physical illness or disability, you may have part of the form completed by your doctor.

Time limits for the Supplemental Register

In order to get on the Supplemental Register in time for a referendum or election, you should have the necessary form completed and sent to your local authority at least 15 working days before polling day. (Sundays, public holidays and Good Friday are not counted as working days for this purpose.) This may mean that you have only a few days to do this if you wait until an election is announced.

Postal vote

Certain people – Irish diplomats serving abroad and their spouses and members of the Defence Forces (whether they are serving at home or abroad) are automatically granted postal votes. Others may apply for a postal vote.

You may apply for a postal vote if:

- You are a member of the Garda Síochána
- You are living at home but you are unable to go to a polling station to vote because of a physical illness or physical disability
- You are in an occupation which is likely to prevent you from voting at your local polling station on the day of the election or referendum – this includes full-time students who are registered at home but who are living elsewhere while attending an educational institution

If you have a postal vote, you may not choose to vote at a polling station.

The Register of Postal Voters is drawn up at the same time as the Electoral Register. In general you should apply to be on the Register of Postal Voters before 25 November. If you are not on the Register of Postal Voters, you may apply to be put on the Postal Voters Supplemental Register in the manner described above. You may apply at any time once you become eligible. The latest date for applying is 2 days after the dissolution of the Dáil in the case of a general election and 2

days after the making of the polling day order in the case of a Dáil bye-election, a referendum or a Presidential, European Parliament or local election.

Voters with disabilities

People with disabilities have the same voting rights as everyone else. There are arrangements in place to help people with disabilities to actually exercise their right to vote. These arrangements are for people who have a physical disability or a reading or writing disability.

Voting at a different polling station

You may be able to vote at a different polling station if your local station is not accessible. You must apply to the returning officer (the person responsible for the election in the constituency) at least a week before the vote to allow you to vote at a different polling station in the constituency. If this is possible, the returning officer issues you with a written authorisation to vote at the alternative polling station.

Help with voting

In certain circumstances you may be helped to vote, either by a companion or by the presiding officer (the person in charge of the polling station). Your ballot paper may be marked by a companion if you have a visual or other physical disability. Your companion must be aged at least 16, may not be a candidate or the agent of a candidate and may not help more than two electors at an election.

Special Voters List

The Special Voters List is for people with physical disabilities who are living in a hospital, nursing home or similar institution and who are unable to go to a polling station. The list is compiled at the same time as the Electoral Register. In general, you should apply for inclusion on the list by 25 November. Your first application must be accompanied by a medical certificate.

There is also a Special Voters Supplemental List. You may apply to be on this list at any time after you become eligible. The time limits are the same as for the Postal Voters Supplemental List.

If you are on the Special Voters List you exercise your vote at the hospital or other institution where you are living – in effect, a polling station is provided there for you.

Citizens Information

LOG ON
www.citizensinformation.ie

LO-CALL
1890 777 121 Open Mon to Fri, 9am to 9pm

DROP IN
For your local centre see Golden Pages listing