



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

Register of Electors

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1. Introduction

This note is intended as a practical guide. It is not a definitive legal interpretation of electoral law. For more information you should consult the law relating to voter registration (see section 9 below).

In order to be able to vote at an election or referendum in Ireland, a person's name must be entered on the register of electors for the locality in which the elector ordinarily resides. The electoral registration process is set down in the Electoral Acts 1992 to 2022 and was significantly amended by the Electoral Reform Act 2022.

Registration authorities (county, city and city and county councils) are required by law to maintain and update the register of electors on an ongoing basis by adding, removing or updating details as necessary to ensure a complete and accurate register of electors. Registration authorities are also required to publish the register in force in advance of an electoral event.

The Electoral Acts also set down the provisions around access to, and use of, the electoral register. The register may only be used for electoral and other statutory purposes.

2. Conditions for Registration

The conditions are:

Age: a person who is resident and has reached the age of 18 years is entitled to be registered in the register of electors. The Electoral Reform Act 2022 made provision for a pending electors list which enables pre-registration for 16 and 17 year olds but they are not entitled to vote until they reach 18, at which point they are automatically added to the register.

Citizenship: while every adult resident is entitled to be registered, the registration authority needs to know a person's nationality because it is citizenship that determines the electoral events at which a person may vote.

The right to vote is as follows:

- **Irish citizens** may vote at every election and referendum;
- **British citizens** may vote at Dáil and local elections;

- **EU citizens** may vote at European and local elections;
- **all others** may vote at local elections only.

Residence: a person must be ordinarily resident at the address in question at the time of making the application to the registration authority to be entered in the register. A person may be registered at one address only.

- If a person has **more than one address** (e.g. a person living away from home to attend college), the registration authority should be informed of the address at which the person wishes to be registered.
- If a person has **no address** at which they can be registered, they may register with 'no fixed address' – this allows for provision of an address where the person can receive correspondence, and an address where the person spends the majority of their time and at which they wish to be considered resident.

A person who leaves his/her ordinary residence with the intention of returning there within eighteen months can continue to be registered there, subject to the over-riding condition that a person may be registered at one address only. A person who is absent on a temporary basis from his/her ordinary address, for example on holiday, in hospital or in the course of employment, should be registered at his/her ordinary address. A visitor or person staying temporarily at the address should not be registered.

3. Maintaining and updating the Register

The maintenance, updating and publication of the register is a matter for each registration authority. It is their duty, as far as possible, and with the cooperation and engagement of the public, to ensure a complete and accurate register of electors.

Registration authorities may carry out a range of activities to manage the register – this may include house-to-house or other inquiries; inviting people to register or update their details and checking that the register is accurate and complete.

Registration authorities are required to report annually to the Electoral Commission – *An Coimisiún Toghcháin* on their activities in this regard.

A registration authority may require a person to provide any information in his or her possession that the registration authority needs for this purpose. In respect of a person's own registration, the registration authority may require them to provide their Personal Public Service Number (PPSN), Date of Birth and Eircode. The registration authority may also request documentary evidence in support of eligibility to vote, e.g. a birth certificate or a passport or certificate of naturalisation in the case of citizenship.

A person can check and update their own details on the register at any time of the year directly with their registration authority or at www.checktheregister.ie. Mostly this can be done using an online form, or in some cases the relevant form will need to be downloaded at www.checktheregister.ie or requested from the registration authority.

Where a person lives in Dublin and has a verified MyGovID they can also engage with their registration authority via www.voter.ie.

Where a person checks the register and becomes aware of any errors or omissions in the register, they should be brought immediately to the attention of the relevant registration authority.

Registration authorities can also use information provided by an tArd-Chláráitheoir, the General Registrar, in relation to deaths of persons in the registration area of the registration authority to update the register.

4. Register to vote or update details

An eligible person, who is not listed in the register of electors, can register at any time of year directly with the registration authority where the person is ordinarily resident or online at www.checktheregister.ie. The same applies to a registered person whose details are out of date, they can update their details in the register of electors at any time of the year either directly with the registration authority where the person is ordinarily resident or online at www.checktheregister.ie.

An application to register or update details in the register must be received at least 15 days before polling day, (excluding Sundays, Good Friday and Public Holidays) in order to be considered for that election or referendum. Different closing dates apply to postal and special voting applications – see paragraphs 5.1 and 5.2 below. An

application received on or after the 14th day in advance of polling day will not be considered until after polling day.

Where an application cannot be completed online, or where a person prefers to submit a paper form, the relevant forms can be downloaded at www.checktheregister.ie or requested from the registration authority.

The relevant registration authority will consider and decide on each application to register or to update details as soon as practicable, and where an application is refused, the person will be notified of the reasons therefore and of their right to appeal the decision to the county registrar.

An elector can appeal against decisions of a registration authority to the county registrar. Ordinarily, an appeal must be made within 4 weeks of the date of the decision of the registration authority, but where a polling day has been set, this changes. As soon as possible after the date for an electoral event has been set, the County Registrar is required to give public notice of the last dates for receipt of an appeal in respect of that particular electoral event, in the case of postal voting or special voting, this will not be less than 2 days later than the last day for making an application.

5. Alternative voting arrangements

Generally, electors vote in person at their local polling station, however, in certain circumstances the following alternative voting arrangements are available.

5.1 Postal Voters List

Registration authorities prepare and maintain a postal voters list as part of the register of electors. Postal vote applications require some additional information, documentation or certification – the requirements vary depending on the reason for the application and are set out on the relevant application form.

The following categories of persons **must be registered** as postal voters:

- whole-time members of the Defence Forces - members who live in military barracks may be registered either at the barracks or at their home address; and

- Irish diplomats posted abroad and their spouses/civil partners - they are registered at their home address in Ireland.

The following categories of persons **may apply** for registration as postal voters:

- members of the Garda Síochána (police force);
- persons living at home who are unable to go to a polling station to vote because of an illness or disability;
- persons whose occupations are likely to prevent them from voting at their local polling station on election day, including full-time students registered at home who are living elsewhere while attending an educational institution in the State (under this arrangement, a ballot paper is posted to the elector at home who must arrange to have his or her declaration of identity witnessed by a Garda before marking the ballot paper and returning it by post to the returning officer.);
- electors unable to vote at their polling station due to circumstances of their detention in prison pursuant to an order of the court;
- certain election staff employed at a polling station outside the constituency where they live; and
- persons who consider their safety, or the safety of a member of their household would be at risk if their name and address were to be published may apply to be an anonymous elector – such electors may only vote by post.

An application for inclusion in the postal voters list can be made at any time once the elector is eligible for entry on the postal voters list however, the latest date for receipt of applications for a postal vote in respect of a specific electoral event is –

- two days after the date of dissolution of the Dáil in the case of a general election;
- two days after the polling day order is made in the case of a Dáil bye-election;
- in the case of a Presidential, European or local election or a Referendum an application must be received by the registration authority at least twenty-two days before polling day (excluding Sundays, Good Friday and Public Holidays).

Where an application is received after that time it will not have any effect for that electoral event.

As soon as possible after the date for an electoral event has been set, the County Registrar will set the last dates for receipt of an appeal in respect of that particular electoral event, in the case of postal votes, this will not be less than 2 days later than the last day for making an application.

An elector registered as a postal voter may vote by post only and may not vote at a polling station.

5.2 Special Voters List

Registration authorities also prepare a list of special voters comprising electors with an illness or disability which prevents them from going to a polling station to vote and who are living in hospitals, nursing homes, mental health facilities or similar institutions who wish to vote at these locations. In the case of a first application it must be accompanied by a certificate from a registered medical practitioner (such as a GP).

An application may be made at any time once the elector is eligible for entry on the special voters list however, the latest date for receipt of applications for a special vote in respect of a specific electoral event is –

- two days after the date of dissolution of the Dáil in the case of a general election;
- two days after the polling day order is made in the case of a Dáil bye-election;
- in the case of a Presidential, European or local election or a Referendum an application must be received by the registration authority at least twenty-two days before polling day (excluding Sundays, Good Friday and Public Holidays).

Where an application is received after that time it will not have any effect for that electoral event.

As soon as possible after the date for an electoral event has been set, the County Registrar will set the last dates for receipt of an appeal in respect of that particular electoral event, in the case of special votes, this will not be less than 2 days later than the last day for making an application.

Electors on the special voters list vote at the hospital, nursing home, mental health facility or similar institution where they are residing by marking a ballot paper delivered to them by a special presiding officer accompanied by a Garda.

A separate leaflet in this series sets out information for voters with disabilities.

6. Pending Elector List

Registration authorities are required to prepare and maintain a pending elector list to enable pre-registration of 16 and 17 year olds. A pending elector is a person who has reached the age of 16 years but has not reached 18 years at the time of making the application and who, other than in relation to his or her age, meets the conditions for registration set out at paragraph 2 of this leaflet.

These persons will then be included on the register from when they turn 18 years old. In the event that an election is called, persons that are included in the pending elector list will be included in the register of electors in force for that election even if they turn 18 on polling day.

The pending electors list is not part of the register, and it is not available for inspection.

7. Availability and use of the Register of Electors

The electoral register includes the name, address, and voting entitlement of electors. It also notes where a person has a postal or special voting arrangement.

The information contained in the register of electors can only be used for electoral or other statutory purposes, and any person who misuses, or causes or permits the misuse of the register, shall be guilty of an offence.

7.1 Inspecting the Register of Electors

Any person may inspect the register, for purposes related to the registration of electors, during office hours at the local authority offices or other place that the local authority considers appropriate – this may include libraries or post offices.

Any errors or omissions in the register should be brought immediately to the attention of the relevant registration authority.

Where a person:

- on inspecting the register of electors, has on reasonable grounds, or
- through personal knowledge (for example the death of a family member)

formed an opinion that information in the register is inaccurate in respect of an entry that is not their own, the person may submit a third party request to the registration authority to have an amendment made. The relevant form can be downloaded at www.checktheregister.ie or requested from the registration authority.

Registration authorities are required to consider all requests in respect of the register and make a decision on what action, if any, it should take. The registration authority is required to inform the requester and any person who, in the opinion of the registration authority, may be affected by its decision of the process to be followed. The person affected will have the right to appeal the decision to the county registrar. Registration authorities are required to prepare for inspection a list of claims received in the previous month.

7.2 Copies of the Register of Electors

Copies of the register are provided free to elected public representatives and election candidates who may use it for electoral purposes.

A copy of the register, or extracts thereof, may be purchased from the registration authority on the payment of a fee which shall not exceed the reasonable cost of providing such copy.

8. Anonymous Electors

The Electoral Reform 2022 amended the Electoral Acts to provide that where a person is concerned that their safety, or the safety of a member of their household, would be at risk if their name and address were to be published, they can apply to be an anonymous elector and vote by post. The application form is available on www.checktheregister.ie and from the local authority and requires some supporting documentation or certification. The information will still be available to registration authority staff and those administering postal votes but will not appear on the register that is available for public inspection.

An application for anonymous registration can be supported by:

- Documentation such as:

- A copy of a safety order, barring order, interim barring order, emergency barring order or a protection order issued under the Domestic Violence Act 2018;
- a copy of a restraining order under the Non- Fatal Offences against the Persons Act 1997; or
- a harassment order granted under the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2017.

Or

- Declaration by a qualified individual –
 - a member of the Garda Síochána (who must at superintendent grade or above); or
 - a registered medical practitioner for example a general practitioner (GP).

The declaration will state that in their opinion your safety or the safety of a member of your household would be at risk if the electoral register published or made available for public inspection contained your name and address.

9. Registration Law

The information contained in this leaflet does not purport to be a definitive statement of the law on the registration of electors. The law governing the registration of electors is contained mainly in the following legal provisions, as amended:

- Part II of, and the Second Schedule to, the Electoral Act 1992;
- Part VII and section 76 of the Electoral Act 1997;
- Part III of the Electoral Reform Act 2022.

These Acts are available from the Government Publications, Office of Public Works, Jonathan Swift Street, Trim, Meath. They may also be downloaded from the Oireachtas website at www.oireachtas.ie

10. Other Leaflets

Other leaflets available in this series on the Department's website (www.gov.ie/housing) are as follows:

- How the President is Elected
- The Referendum in Ireland
- How the Dáil (Lower House of Parliament) is Elected
- How the Seanad (Senate/Upper House of Parliament) is Elected
- European Parliament: How Ireland's MEPs are Elected
- How Members of Local Authorities are Elected
- Information for Voters with Disabilities

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