

YOU CAN NOW VOTE ABSENTEE OVERSEAS

In the next Finnish parliamentary elections, Finns who are eligible to vote but living or residing overseas may vote absentee in advance. In order to do so, voters must order voting material well in advance from the Finnish Ministry of Justice. Advance voting at Finland's foreign representations will remain an option as well.

TEXT: JUHA PELTONEN

ABSENTEE voting has long been in use by almost all EU countries as well as the United States and Canada, among others. In Finland, the Finnish Expatriate Parliament has been calling for absentee balloting for nearly two decades. It will finally be allowed for next spring's Finnish parliamentary elections.

"The goal is to raise voting activity by making it easier to cast your vote," **Jarmo Virmavirta**, chair of the Finland Society, said at a seminar on Expatriate Finns and absentee voting in October.

In the 2015 Parliamentary Elections, the voter turnout of those living in Finland was 66.8 percent while the figure was just 10.1 percent among expatriate Finns. According to **Johanna Peltoniemi's** doctoral thesis, the primary reason for expatriates not voting was excessive difficulty because long distances to voting places.

In her research, Peltoniemi studied also how absentee voting affected turnout percentage in Sweden and Italy. In Sweden, absentee ballots have been in use since 2002. Since then expatriate Swedes' voting activity has increased steadily from one election to the next. In the 2014 election, the figure was 32.4 percent, while it was 26.8 percent in 1998, before introduction of absentee voting. The figures are not thoroughly comparable because of the changed registration requirement.

In Italy, the change has been more dramatic. The absentee voting, which was allowed in 2006, as well as having their own electoral district and candidates

raised expatriate Italians' voter turnout to 38.9 percent. In the previous elections in 2001 it had been only 4.4 percent.

Peltoniemi does not believe that absentee ballot will increase voting activity in Finnish elections as explosively, but rather gradually in the same way as in Sweden.

"Voting activity depends on how information on the new option will reach those eligible. The greatest challenge is that voters will realize that they need to order the absentee ballot material well in advance. The tight schedule may have an effect on the first elections," she says.

VOTERS MUST ORDER BALLOT MATERIAL THEMSELVES

Absentee voting is available for persons entitled to vote living or residing overseas during the election.

The Population Register Centre will send a notice to all Finns with the right to vote, including those living overseas, about 40 days before Election Day. The notification card is sent to the address which is known by the center 51 days prior the election.

If you do not receive the notification card, the most likely reason is

that the Population Register Centre does not have your address information. This does not prevent you from voting, but the card is useful in absentee voting. The notification card specifies the election district in which the voter is eligible to vote as well as the address of the

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IS YOUR MAILING INFORMATION UP TO DATE?

FINNISH citizens living overseas: Have you submitted your address to the Finnish population information system? All Finns entitled to vote whose address is registered in the system will receive a notice on the right to vote.

INSTRUCTIONS are available at www.maistraatti.fi/en/ (Instructions on relaying information about expatriate Finns)

YOU CAN file a notification with the electronic 'Change of address notification form for a person living abroad'.

THE FORM is available at www.maistraatti.fi/en/ by clicking Forms on the top menu and then 'Place of domicile and population data'

YOU CAN fill out and submit the form online or print it out in PDF format, fill it out, take a scan or photo of the filled form and send it as an email attachment to: address@maistraatti.fi

central election district to which the letter should be mailed. The notification card also provides advice on how to order the necessary material for absentee voting.

Each eligible voter is personally responsible for ordering the necessary documents for an absentee ballot in time. This is easiest to do through the order service which opens on the Justice Ministry's vaalit.fi website on January 14, 2019. The documents can also be ordered by mail or email. The order must state the voter's name, social security number and the overseas address to which the absentee ballot material should be mailed.

The ministry's customer service will provide advice by phone (+358 295 150 030) and by email (kirjeaanestys@vaalit.fi).

TWO WITNESSES NEEDED

The absentee balloting material includes voting instructions and the necessary documents: the ballot, election envelope and the absentee voting cover letter, which the voter must fill in. Moreover, there is a covering envelope into which the covering letter and election envelope must be sealed. You can place the notification card on top in the covering envelope so that the address of the central election committee shows in the address window of the envelope. The cover envelope can only be mailed from abroad, and this must be verifiable by the markings on the envelope, which must reach its destination no later than April 12, 2019

For the voting event, there must be two witnesses of voting age present. They will sign the covering letter to attest that the voting has taken place with respect for election secrecy and freedom. The witnesses may not be closely related to the voter.

The ballots which have arrived through absentee voting by the deadline are counted together with other advance votes.

Absentee voting is also available for persons entitled to vote who are residing overseas

while traveling or for other temporary reason during both the advance voting period and on the actual Election Day. In those cases, absentee voting material must be ordered to an overseas address and mailed from overseas. An absentee ballot cannot be mailed from Finland.

Voting in advance at Finland's foreign representations will remain an option alongside the absentee ballot. During the last Finnish Parliamentary Elections, there were voting places in 89 countries at Finland's representations and their branch offices. In all about 35,500 voters cast advance votes abroad.

A QUARTER OF A MILLION FINNS ENTITLED TO VOTE OVERSEAS

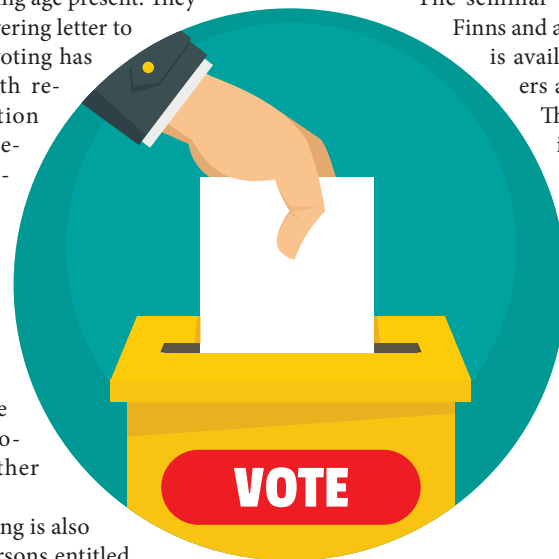
During Finland's last presidential elections, there were 251,201 persons with the right to vote overseas, which was 5.6 percent of all eligible voters. This figure exceeded that of the Central Finland election district, which elects 10 Members of Parliament, for example. Another population group of roughly the same size is Swedish-speaking Finns.

The election district with largest proportion of people with the right to vote living overseas, 22.7 percent, is Åland. Numerically, the Helsinki election district has most expatriate Finns, while the surrounding Uusimaa election district comes second.

"We are not speaking of a marginal group," Director **Johanna Suurpää** from the Ministry of Justice said at the absentee voting seminar on October 10, 2018.

The seminar on Expatriate Finns and absentee voting is available for viewers as a recording.

There is a link to it at the Finland Society's website.



ABSENTEE VOTING FOR FINNS RESIDING OVERSEAS

Are you a Finn living outside Finland or residing overseas during the election? If so, you can for the first time choose between two ways of voting in the spring 2019 Finnish parliamentary elections. As before, you can vote in advance at Finland's foreign representations and consulates. You can find information about advance voting places **for example** at www.vaalit.fi. Alternatively, you can vote by mail.

MORE INFORMATION ABOUT ABSENTEE VOTING

THE MINISTRY OF JUSTICE WEBSITE WWW.VAALIT.FI

- > offers advice for voters
- > advance voting sites overseas and information on candidates
- > election result service (updated constantly)

ABSENTEE VOTING CUSTOMER SERVICE HELPS YOU WHEN NEEDED

- > tel. +358 (0) 295 150 030, kirjeaanestys@vaalit.fi



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Notify the Finnish Population Information System of your correct address!

- > Print out the notification form at <https://www.maistraatti.fi/en/>
- > Services > Notification of move
- > Moving between the Nordic countries OR Moving from one address to another outside Finland/ - send the form to the Local Register Office by email to address@maistraatti.fi
- or by mail to:** Länsi-Suomen Maistraatti Seinäjoen yksikkö PL 168 FI-60101 Seinäjoki, Finland

MAISTRAATIT
MAGISTRATERNA 

The Finland Society

www.suomi-seura.fi
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- > Advice and information for Finns living and traveling overseas as well as support for Finnish expatriate communities



Finland Society

- > promotion of the interests of expatriate Finns



ULKOSUOMALAISPARLAMENTTI
UTLANDSFINLANDSPARLAMENTET - FINNISH EXPATRIATE PARLIAMENT

IF YOU VOTE ABSENTEE, DO IT THIS WAY:

1

Order the absentee voting material

Order the absentee voting material well in advance from the Ministry of Justice absentee voting material service system at www.vaalit.fi/kirjeaanestys. The order service opens on January 14, 2019. The customer service helps in need. (open on weekdays 8 am - 4 pm Finnish time)

2

Find out your election district and the number of your candidate

You will receive a notification of right to vote to that address which is marked in the Finnish Population Information System 51 days prior the election. You can also vote without the notification of right to vote. The card gives you the address of that central election committee to which you must send your absentee ballot.

3

Vote

You need two witnesses who are of age (18 or over). The absentee voting material contains more specific instructions.

4

Mail the absentee ballot to Finland

Mail your absentee ballot in time! You are personally responsible that your ballot reaches the correct central election committee by April 12, 2019 at 7 pm. Ballots arriving after this time will be disqualified. You cannot mail the absentee ballot envelope from Finland.