

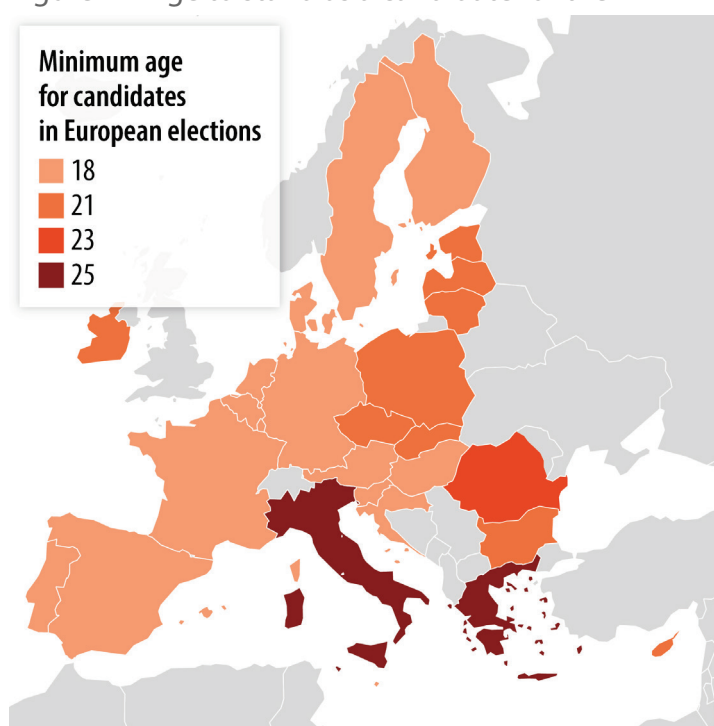
Minimum age to stand as a candidate in European elections

The European Electoral Act of 1976 allows the EU Member States to set the minimum age for standing as a candidate in European elections. While in May 2022 Parliament proposed a uniform minimum age of 18, the next round of elections – in 2024 – will be governed by the existing rules. The minimum age therefore varies among the Member States, ranging from 18 (in the majority of countries) to 25 (Italy and Greece).

Variation across the Member States

The existing rules on European elections are based on a combination of the common principles established in the [European Electoral Act](#) of 1976, as amended by [Council Decision 2002/772](#), and the different national rules implementing those principles. The minimum age for standing as a candidate for the European Parliament is **determined by the individual Member States**, in line with Article 8 of the European Electoral Act. Across the EU, this age currently varies as follows: the rules in 15 Member States provide for **18 years of age**, nine for **21** (Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czechia, Estonia, Ireland, Lithuania, Latvia, Poland and Slovakia), one (Romania) for **23**, and two (Italy and Greece) for **25**. Through a [law](#) adopted in 2021, **Belgium** lowered the minimum age from 21 to 18, and those new rules will apply for the 2024 elections.

Figure 1 – Age to stand as a candidate for the EP



Source: Compiled by EPRS, May 2023.

Parliament proposes a harmonised age of 18 for candidates

In May 2022, Parliament tabled a [proposal for a Council regulation](#) on the election of MEPs by direct universal suffrage, which would replace the existing European Electoral Act ([2022/0902\(APP\)](#)). The proposal harmonises a number of rules applicable to European elections, **including the minimum age for eligibility to stand as a candidate for an MEP**. According to its recital 17, a 'single harmonised age ... for standing as a candidate should be introduced across the Union in order to ensure equality and to avoid discrimination in access to those most fundamental civic and political rights'. Article 5(1) of the proposal sets the age at **18** and, in contrast to the voting right, provides for no exceptions. To enter into force, the regulation needs the unanimous approval of the Council and the approval of all Member States in line with their constitutional requirements.



Table 1 – Legal bases setting the age for candidates in European elections in the EU-27

Member State	Minimum age	Legal basis in national law
Belgium	18	Article 41 of the European Parliament Elections Act 1989 as modified by Act of 12.12.2021
Bulgaria	21	Article 351 of the Electoral Code
Czechia	21	Article 6 of the European Parliament Elections Act
Denmark	18	§ 6 of the Act Concerning the Election of the Danish MEPs
Germany	18	§ 6b of the European Elections Act
Estonia	21	§ 4(5) of the European Parliament Election Act
Ireland	21	Section 11 of the European Parliament Elections Act 1997
Greece	25	Article 2(1) of Law 4255/2014 on European elections in conjunction with Article 55 of the Constitution
Spain	18	Article 6 of the Organic Law 5/1985 of 19 June 1985
France	18	Article 5 of the EP Elections Act in conjunction with Article L.127 and L.2 of the Electoral Code
Croatia	18	Article 5 of the European Parliament Elections Act in conjunction with Article 45 of the Constitution
Italy	25	Article 4 of the Law on the Election of Italian MEPs 1979
Cyprus	21	Article 13 of the European Parliament Elections Act
Latvia	21	§ 4 of the Act on Election to the European Parliament
Lithuania	21	Article 10(6) of the Electoral Code
Luxembourg	18	Article 285(1)(3) of the Electoral Act 2003
Hungary	18	Article XXIII of the Fundamental Law in conjunction with § 2:10 of the Civil Code (age of majority)
Malta	18	Article 19(1) of the European Parliament Elections Act 2004
Netherlands	18	Article Y4(a) of the Electoral Act
Austria	18	§ 29 of the European Elections Ordinance
Poland	21	Article 11 § 1(4) of the Electoral Code
Portugal	18	Article 4 of the Electoral Law for the European Parliament in conjunction with Articles 1 and 4 of the Law Governing Elections to the Assembly of the Republic
Romania	23	Article 5(7) of the European Parliament Elections Law
Slovenia	18	Article 10 of the Election of MEPs from the Republic of Slovenia Act
Slovakia	21	§ 73(1)(a)(b) of Act No 180/2014 Coll. , on the conditions for the exercise of the right to vote
Finland	18	§ 164 of the Elections Act in conjunction with § 14(II) of the Constitution
Sweden	18	Avdelning V, 4 § of the Elections Act

This 'At a glance' note is one in a series of publications examining various aspects of EU electoral law. It has been compiled on the basis of information provided through the European Centre for Parliamentary Research and Documentation (ECPRD). In addition, the data have been verified in May 2023 by country specialists from the EPRS Members' Research Service.