

# USP 2025 Resolutions

## COMMITTEE ON CITIZENSHIP

### 1. Promoting Equal Access to Postal Voting and Delivery of Election Materials by Email

The postal voting system introduced in 2019 significantly improved voting opportunities for Finns living abroad. A person entitled to vote who permanently lives abroad or is abroad during the election can now vote in general elections by mail instead of visiting an advance polling station. However, the voter turnout has remained low.

To increase voter turnout among Finns abroad, information about postal voting must continue to be widely disseminated. The postal voting process has a tight timetable — from ordering the materials to the vote arriving on time, including postal delays.

As much time as possible should be allocated for postal voting. Since it may be difficult for some voters to determine the correct return address, it is essential that instructions clearly state which authorities should be contacted to determine the central municipal election board of the municipality listed in the voting register as the voter's home municipality, electoral municipality, or population register municipality in Finland.

A voter who wants to vote by mail orders the ballot documents abroad, votes once they arrive, and returns the ballot in a transmission envelope to Finland, to the central municipal election board of their municipality. Voting by mail depends heavily on the voter's own initiative and technical ability, as the postal voting documents must be ordered separately for every election.

The voter sends their ballot, sealed in accordance with instructions, to the central municipal election board of the electoral municipality recorded for them in the voting register. The voter must determine this municipality themselves. If the voter's up-to-date foreign address is known to the Digital and Population Data Services Agency (DVV), they may have received — possibly in time — a notice of voting rights, which includes the address of the central municipal election board. This address can be placed in the return envelope window or copied onto the envelope.

Postal voting could be made easier, for example, by having postal voting documents sent automatically to Finns abroad. Missing address information could be corrected when materials are ordered. In the ordering process, it could be considered whether a person with voting rights should be required to provide their name and foreign address three months in advance. This would allow the voting-rights notice and return address to be utilized.

Receiving a notice of voting rights could serve as an incentive for individuals to update their information, which also facilitates other citizen services, such as passport and ID card applications. Another possibility would be allowing individuals to register in the population information system that they wish to vote by mail, in which case the postal voting documents would be sent automatically for each election to those who have expressed this preference. It

should also be examined whether voting materials could be sent electronically to voters who have updated their information digitally.

### ***FEP RESOLUTION:***

***The Finnish Expatriate parliament urges Finnish authorities to continue informing citizens about postal voting and to make postal voting easier for Finns abroad — including exploring the possibility of sending postal voting materials to the voter’s email address upon request. All solutions that improve election security and clarity, including simplifying instructions and timelines, should be examined and promoted.***

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## **2. Making Finnish Citizenship Permanent**

Under Section 34 of the Nationality Act (359/2003), a person who has Finnish citizenship and also the citizenship of another country will keep their Finnish citizenship upon turning 22 only if they have a sufficient connection to Finland.

The Ministry of the Interior’s statement on Resolution 14/2017 addressing this issue states:

“The current Nationality Act takes a positive approach toward multiple citizenship. It is in the state’s interest to retain, as citizens, those born or who have moved abroad — even if they hold another nationality — for as long as they maintain a close connection with Finland. ...

The provision on retaining citizenship is designed to make retention as easy and efficient as possible for both individuals and authorities. The Immigration Service informs individuals of the risk of losing citizenship and the possibility of retaining it for those who have lived in Finland for less than seven years. This notice is sent annually to people turning 18 whose address is available in the population information system. The recipient then has the years from age 18 to 21 to actively demonstrate the required connection to retain citizenship. ...

Because of the notification obligation imposed on authorities, a person who has acted in any way described in the Nationality Act to show sufficient connection does not need to report it themselves, as information is passed between authorities. ...

Finnish citizenship can also be regained through a paid notification process if it was lost at age 22 due to insufficient connections. ...

Changing the law so that Finnish citizenship would remain automatically without notification would simplify matters for both authorities and Finns abroad. Authorities would no longer need to send notices, and Finns abroad would not need to prove anything. Bureaucracy would be reduced and money saved.”

### ***USP RESOLUTION:***

***The USP proposes amending the Nationality Act so that a Finnish citizen by birth who also holds another nationality automatically retains Finnish citizenship. They should no longer need to demonstrate sufficient connections to Finland or notify authorities before turning 22.***

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### **3. Right to Finnish Citizenship for Adult Children of Finnish Mothers and/or Fathers**

A child of a Finnish citizen acquires citizenship through their parents at birth (principle of inheritance). The principle of inheritance is always applied in accordance with the citizenship law in force at the time of the child's birth. The current citizenship law came into force on June 1, 2003. Children born before June 1, 2003, are subject to the old citizenship law. According to the 1968 citizenship law, a child born outside of marriage acquired Finnish citizenship if his or her mother was Finnish. A child acquired Finnish citizenship if his or her married father was a Finnish citizen. A child born in wedlock acquired Finnish citizenship through their mother, "unless the child acquires the citizenship of a foreign state at birth" (401/1968). Since multiple citizenship was not accepted, many children born into multinational families acquired citizenship other than Finnish through their father. Amendments were made to the Citizenship Act in 1984 (584/1984), changing the criteria for obtaining citizenship so that a child of a Finnish mother automatically obtained Finnish citizenship. Dual citizens could lose their Finnish citizenship when they turned 22 if they had not applied to retain their citizenship by that time. Certain persons born after August 31, 1966, were given the opportunity to apply for Finnish citizenship through a notification procedure without renouncing their previous citizenship.

The most significant reform of the Citizenship Act, which came into force on June 1, 2003 (359/2003), was the broader acceptance of multiple citizenship. A Finnish citizen does not lose their Finnish citizenship when they acquire foreign citizenship, nor does a foreign citizen lose their citizenship when they acquire Finnish citizenship. Whether a person becomes a dual citizen or not depends on the legislation of the other country. A person with multiple citizenships may lose their Finnish citizenship at the age of 22 if they do not have "ties to Finland that demonstrate a sense of belonging." To demonstrate this, it is sufficient to declare that they wish to retain their citizenship.

As of June 1, 2003, children born outside of marriage to a Finnish father abroad are entitled to Finnish citizenship upon notification, in which case they will receive Finnish citizenship only after the notification has been made. The notification for a minor child must be submitted by a guardian or trustee. If the child was born before June 1, 2003, citizenship must be applied for by means of a citizenship application.

Section 60 of the Citizenship Act, which came into force in 2003, contained a transitional provision on the notification of citizenship to be made by former Finnish citizens within a specified period. According to the provision, a person who had lost Finnish citizenship by

acquiring the citizenship of another country could reapply for it through a notification procedure, and the transitional provision also extended to their descendants (and their children under the age of 18) even if they had never had Finnish citizenship or had never lived in Finland. The transitional period specified in the Act began on June 1, 2003, and ended on May 31, 2008.

Finns living abroad consider this issue important: resolutions 50/2005, 2/2007, 4/2007, 15/2010, and 5/2017 have been made on the same subject.

***USP RESOLUTION:***

***The USP proposes that the Nationality Act be amended so that the descendants (persons over the age of 18) of former or current Finnish citizens by birth and their minor children can also obtain Finnish citizenship through a notification procedure.***

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#### **4. Determination of the electoral district for expatriate Finns**

In parliamentary and presidential elections, every Finnish citizen who is at least 18 years of age on election day is eligible to vote, regardless of their place of residence. The right to vote cannot be lost except by renouncing Finnish citizenship. The right to vote based on Finnish citizenship is equal. In European Parliament elections held in Finland, every Finnish citizen who has reached the age of 18 by election day is eligible to vote, regardless of their place of residence (as are citizens of other EU member states who meet certain conditions). The right to vote in municipal elections is granted to residents of the municipality who have reached the age of 18 by election day. The right to vote in municipal elections is lost by permanently moving abroad. The right to vote is determined by the date of establishment of the voting register. The electoral register therefore determines in which municipality a person is eligible to vote and, in Finland, where the actual polling station is located on election day.

The problem is that the electoral municipality is determined by the last municipality of residence in Finland, i.e., the permanent municipality where the person was registered. If you have not had a permanent municipality of residence in Finland, your municipality of residence is determined by the municipality of residence of your mother, father, or spouse. If that municipality of residence is no longer part of Finland, Helsinki is entered as your municipality. In this way, the population information system forms the basis for voting rights.

As a result, many Finns living abroad have to vote for candidates from a constituency where they lived a long time ago and perhaps only for a short period, even though their ties to Finland are now elsewhere. In the example, a person who moved from Finland to the United States in 1980, 41 years ago, lived in Imatra only during their high school years: "We lived in Imatra only because of my father's job at the time, and my parents moved away from there 22 years ago. Nowadays, all my closest relatives live in Helsinki, and I also have my own apartment there. Therefore, I consider Helsinki to be my home in Finland, and I would like to vote for candidates in that constituency."

The situation may also be the opposite: a person may have a better understanding of the parties, their programs, and candidates in the area where they grew up or in their summer residence municipality, motivating them to vote there. Second-generation Finns born abroad may have no contact whatsoever with their electoral community.

The voting rights of Finns living abroad are not realized if they are not allowed – like all other Finns – to vote for candidates from the city/constituency with which they have the strongest ties. The opportunity to vote in the constituency to which they feel they belong would increase the participation of expatriate Finns in parliamentary elections.

Finns living abroad are motivated to vote, but they have little knowledge about the election. It is also worrying that information about the parties, candidates, and election programs is incomplete. Political parties should care about their voters living abroad and consider which issues are particularly important to them. It is important to obtain relevant information from political parties and, in particular, their candidates, because in Finland, voters vote for both. What are their election programs?

**USP RESOLUTION:**

***The USP proposes that the Ministry of Finance amend the Municipality of Residence Act so that Finnish citizens permanently residing abroad can choose and/or change their electoral district according to the locality to which they currently have the strongest ties and with which they feel a greater sense of belonging. At the same time, the parties are asked to improve the information provided to expatriate Finns about the parties, candidates, and election programs.***

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## **5. Strong identification for all expatriate Finns, regardless of their country of residence**

Strong electronic identification refers to the electronic verification of identity. Strong electronic identification allows citizens to securely verify their identity in various electronic services. The identification tools used for identification are the online banking credentials used by banks and the citizen certificate.

Depending on the length of their stay abroad and other personal circumstances, Finnish citizens living abroad do not always have a customer relationship with a Finnish bank or telecom operator that offers these means of identification. The only identification tool available to such persons is the citizen certificate issued by the Digital and Population Data Services Agency. To use the citizen certificate, you first need a physical ID card, and the citizen certificate on the card must be activated separately with an activation code sent to your home. A card reader and software are also required to activate the citizen certificate.

A particular challenge for Finns living abroad, especially those outside the EU/EEA, may be accessing a Finnish Foreign Affairs service point where they can apply for an ID card.

Finland has moved into the world of virtual identification, but options are becoming increasingly limited, especially for those outside the EU/EEA area. Banks are not obliged to maintain bank accounts for Finns living abroad or to provide identification services through them. Other means of electronic identification verification may be impossible or expensive. As a result of previous resolutions, DVV began work to solve the problem but abandoned its own national project. Finland joined the EU's joint eIDAS project, which should solve the problem for EU residents by the end of 2026.

The eIDAS project will produce an authentication mechanism that different organizations can implement in their own applications. The completion of the eIDAS project alone will not immediately solve the problem of strong authentication; a solution to authentication will only be found when customer organizations start using it.

Representatives of the region have received inquiries concerning strong authentication, such as:

1. How to handle the estate of a close relative who has died in Finland
2. How to update address information, e.g., postal voting forms are sent to the address known to the DVV
3. How to obtain a Finnish mobile phone with a number that will remain the same?

For strong identification for residents of EU/EEA countries, a so-called digital wallet is planned to be introduced by the end of 2026. This can be used, for example, for strong electronic identification required by public services. This will only remedy the situation for residents of EU/EEA countries and will not help, but rather complicate the position of those living outside the EU/EEA if banks decide to stop providing strong authentication.

#### **USP RESOLUTION:**

***The USP proposes that all Finnish citizens be guaranteed the easiest possible, secure, and free method of authentication for Finnish public services, regardless of their country of residence. The lack of identification options jeopardizes the ties of Finns living abroad to their home country and makes it difficult for them to stay in touch and access public services.***

***The USP hopes that the Finnish eIDAS system will also take into account the essential needs of Finns living outside the EU/EEA for strong electronic identification when continuing the pan-European Digilompakko project and developing its Finnish features.***

## 6. Facilitating the return of expatriate Finns

When expatriate Finns who have lived and worked abroad for a long time return to Finland, they may encounter many unexpected obstacles, both on a practical level and in terms of social attitudes. The USP urges the Presidium to investigate possible obstacles to return migration and to strive to remove them and promote a positive image of returnees.

Numerous studies have been conducted on issues affecting returnees, highlighting problems with integration services and employment, difficulties encountered by young people, and practical cornerstones.

### **USP RESOLUTION:**

***The USP Presidium is aware of the practical obstacles to return migration. The reasons for this may be due to a number of different factors, such as the actions of the authorities, attitudes, legislation, or operating practices. The USP notes that the subject is too broad for the USP to address.***

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## 7. The right of Finnish citizens living abroad to open a bank account in Finland

Legislation concerning the right of Finnish citizens to open a bank account in Finland if they reside outside the EU/EEA is incomplete. Finnish citizens residing outside Finland cannot currently open a bank account in Finland unless they have a permanent income in Finland.

This situation excludes, for example, people who pay property tax to Finland on Finnish real estate but who do not necessarily have a permanent income from Finland.

The USP notes that banks are private operators and have the right to refuse to open a bank account for a customer. Without a bank account, it is impossible to pay taxes from countries where banks do not generally use BIC and IBAN codes. Below are quotes from the Tax Administration's website:

-The Tax Administration does not accept checks. Taxes must be paid in euros to the bank accounts specified by the Tax Administration.

-People who live abroad or are moving there should always tell the Tax Administration about any changes to their address. Read more: [Change of address](#)

-If you're staying abroad permanently or for a long time, it's a good idea to tell the Tax Administration about someone who lives in Finland to act as your representative. Tax decisions and other mail from the Tax Administration will then be sent to the representative.

### **USP RESOLUTION:**

***The USP proposes that all Finnish citizens be guaranteed the right to basic banking services regardless of their country of residence and that the Tax Administration facilitate the payment of property tax and other taxes for Finns living abroad by developing other payment methods, such as accepting credit card payments.***

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## **YOUTH, STUDY AND EDUCATION COMMITTEE**

### **8. Distance learning school Kulkurin / Distansskolan Nomadin Funding for distance learning for pupils of compulsory school age living abroad**

Distance learning is permitted under the Upper Secondary Schools Act, and upper secondary school pupils living abroad can participate in upper secondary education free of charge in their own mother tongue. The Basic Education Act also guarantees the right to study their native language and second national language for pupils temporarily living abroad who attend local or international schools.

The distance learning school Kulkuri/Distansskolan Nomad, which operates under the Finnish Adult Education Association, has been operating on discretionary funding for 50 years. During this time, Etäkoulu Kulkuri/Distansskolan Nomad has developed distance learning practices for primary school-aged children and built a modern online school, which is attended by more than 400 primary school-aged pupils living abroad each year.

Kulkuri/Distansskolan Nomad is a recognized operator: at the end of 2019, it became the first online school in Finland to receive the Okka Foundation's sustainable development certificate and the first online school in the world to receive UNESCO school status. In 2020, Kulkuri was a finalist for the Cygnaeus Award presented by the Finnish National Agency for Education. With the second prize in the Lukuklaani competition in 2018, an e-library was opened for students living abroad.

There are six Finnish schools providing basic education abroad. As a rule, students of basic education age also participate in face-to-face teaching abroad. However, there are exceptional circumstances in which attendance at local schools is not possible or appropriate:

- The student lives in a developing country where local schools do not have the resources to accept foreign-language students and there is no international school in the area.
- A student who moves abroad during the 9th grade does not know the language of the local school and wants to complete their basic education in their native language and obtain a Finnish basic education certificate.

- A student who has lived abroad for years and attended school in a foreign language is preparing to return to Finland and attend a Finnish school.
- The student has special needs that cannot be met in local schools (reading difficulties, dyslexia, etc.).
- The student is unable to attend face-to-face teaching due to social or psychological problems.

The students of Kulkuri/Distansskolan Nomad distance learning school live in around 60 different countries. When living abroad temporarily, it is important to maintain and develop native language skills so that the return to Finnish school is successful.

At Kulkuri Distance School/Distansskolan Nomad, students can follow Finnish language and literature lessons in accordance with the Finnish curriculum. At Kulkuri/Distansskolan Nomad, students can also study another national language, which makes it easier for them to return to Finnish schools. At Nomadskolan, Finnish Swedes living abroad can study Swedish as their native language and Finnish as their second national language.

An amendment to the Finnish Basic Education Act, which allows for exceptional teaching arrangements and distance learning in exceptional circumstances, came into force on January 1, 2021. Pupils living abroad who do not have access to face-to-face schooling are in a permanent exceptional situation. Under certain conditions, it should be possible to arrange distance learning for them in a legal and appropriate manner.

A written question has been submitted to Parliament on the development and funding of Finnish schools and distance learning for pupils of basic education age living abroad. The question refers to the memorandum of the working group that developed the status and future of schools abroad (Ministry of Education and Culture 2019:28), which states that the possibilities and needs for change in the development of more accessible,

systematic and high-quality distance learning for pupils living abroad should be investigated: "Finland lacks a legally recognized and systematic concept for distance and online learning for pupils living abroad."

**USP RESOLUTION:**

***The USP urges the Ministry of Education and Culture to comply with the will of Parliament and take measures to ensure that the state subsidy for the Etäkoulu Kulkuri / Distansskolan Nomad, which is maintained by the Finnish Lifelong Learning Foundation, receive sufficient state subsidies to raise the level of online education to the required standard, so that its operations can be guaranteed to the extent necessary. USP emphasizes that this must be funding specifically allocated to Etäkoulu Kulkuri/Distansskolan Nomad, which does not reduce the shares of other actors in the budget item.***

## 9. Funding for Finnish schools

The funding for Finnish schools has been on an uncertain footing for years. The state subsidy received by Finnish schools has traditionally been between €390,000 and €450,000. As a result of lobbying and the efforts of the Finnish Expatriate Parliament, the Finnish Parliament has granted an additional subsidy of between €150,000 and €350,000 each year.

The budget for Finnish schools should be permanently increased to a sufficient level, as this has been the will of the Parliament year after year. In addition, as Finns are traveling more around the world, the number of Finnish schools and Finnish schoolchildren is constantly growing. When there is a constantly growing number of people to distribute the money, the amount of aid per student decreases. With cost savings and cuts threatening many sectors in Finland, especially education and training, it is extremely important to ensure that funding for Finnish schools continues and even increases as the need grows. Finnish schools are also a strategic investment for Finland, as Finnish schools can provide Finland with the international, multilingual, and multicultural experts with Finnish language and cultural skills that it so desperately needs, as many young Finns living abroad come to Finland to study, do internships, or work. However, as many studies show, proficiency in Finnish is essential when applying for jobs in Finland. Supporting Finnish schools helps Finnish children living abroad to maintain and improve their proficiency in their second native language, Finnish, and strengthens their connection to Finland.

Development of appropriations granted to Finnish schools from 2009 to 2025:

Year	Ministry	Parliament	Total
2009	450 000 €	-	450 000 €
2010	450 000 €	-	450 000 €
2011	450 000 €	200 000 €	650 000 €
2012	450 000 €	150 000 €	600 000 €
2013	450 000 €	150 000 €	600 000 €
2014	450 000 €	150 000 €	600 000 €

2015	450 000 €	150 000 €	600 000 €
2016	390 000 €	200 000 €	590 000 €
2017	424 000 €	230 000 €	654 000 €
2018	429 000 €	150 000 €	579 000 €
2019	429 000 €	250 000 €	679 000 €
2020	429 000 €	300 000 €	729 000 €
2021	429 000 €	300 000 €	729 000 €
2022	429 000 €	300 000 €	729 000 €
2023	429 000 €	300 000 €	729 000 €
2024	429 000 €	350 000 €	779 000 €
2025	429 000 €	300 000 €	729 000 €

There are 140 Finnish schools in 45 countries, with approximately 4,000 students. Finnish schools can be found in Europe, North and South America, Asia, Australia, and Africa. The largest numbers are in countries with large Finnish immigrant populations, such as Sweden, Germany, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Canada. There are also Finnish schools in smaller Finnish communities, for example in South America, Japan, and Argentina.

**USP RESOLUTION:**

***The USP calls on the Ministry of Education and Culture to comply with the will of Parliament by increasing state subsidies for Finnish schools on a permanent basis, taking into account the steadily growing number of Finnish schools and the need to secure the operations of existing Finnish schools, as well as to ensure the continuity of support even in times of cost savings and cutbacks.***

## **10. Ensuring funding for training days for teachers and administrative staff at Finnish schools abroad and in Finland**

Sufficient funds should be allocated for the annual international and regional training and administration days organized for Finnish schools, in which teachers and administrative staff from Finnish schools participate, so that all interested teachers and administrative staff can attend. Participants in the annual international training and administration days held in Helsinki pay all their own travel and accommodation costs, but otherwise the training is free of charge. Finnish schools pay the participation fees and any other expenses incurred by participants in regional training and administration days, as the costs of regional training days for teachers and administrative staff at Finnish schools vary from country to country.

In order to enable even small Suomi schools to send their teachers and administrative staff to international and regional training and administration days, it would be good if Suomi schools received a subsidy for participation. If Finnish schools could apply for grants for training and administration days, this would certainly increase enthusiasm for participation and more teachers and administrative staff would take part. Many Finnish schools do not have the necessary funds for this. The goal should be to enable all interested teachers and administrative staff to participate in the training and administration days offered to teachers and administrative staff at Finnish schools, both in Helsinki and regionally.

### ***USP RESOLUTION:***

***The USP proposes that a sufficiently high annual budget be allocated to cover the participation costs of Finnish school teachers and administrative staff in international and regional training days, thereby ensuring regular and equal continuing education.***

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## **11. Taking the General Language Proficiency Test (YKI) outside Finland and/or virtually**

The General Language Proficiency Test (YKI) is a competence-based test for adults that assesses their command of general language in practical situations. The YKI exam is part of the Finnish government's official language testing system. A YKI certificate can be used to officially demonstrate language proficiency when applying for a job or place at an educational institution, or when applying for citizenship (Finnish and Swedish language exams). The YKI test assesses four language skills: speaking, listening comprehension, writing, and reading comprehension, and can be taken at the basic, intermediate, and advanced levels. The general language test can be taken in nine languages in Finland. This initiative only applies to language tests in Finland's official languages taken outside Finland and/or virtually. According to the law, the National Board of Education is responsible for the general language testing system and its

development, and it is authorized to enter into agreements with higher education institutions regarding the implementation of language tests.

At present, with a few exceptions, the YKI test cannot be taken outside Finland. YKI tests are held regularly at the University of Tallinn, but they are administered by a Finnish institution, the University of Jyväskylä. A recent pilot project was carried out in Singapore, where the YKI test was administered at the Finnish Embassy. However, taking the test at the embassy was quite expensive. Previously, YKI exams have also been held on an exceptional basis a few times in London and Düsseldorf, where the experiences have been positive and the exam arrangements successful.

The National Board of Education has been contacted regarding the YKI exam in May 2021. According to the National Board of Education, the coronavirus pandemic has led to an increase in inquiries regarding the digital administration of the YKI exam and its administration outside Finland. The National Board of Education does not see any actual legal obstacles to administering the exam outside Finland.

Due to the pandemic, not everyone who wanted to take the YKI exam in Finland has been able to do so, and the number of people left out has increased during the pandemic. Discussions about an online test have been going on for years, and some parts of the test, such as registration, have been digitized, but digitizing the entire exam would take years of work. The important news is that the Ministry of Education and Culture is appointing a digitalization working group to promote the issue.

Finland's accession to the European Union also gave the Finnish language a new international status that it had never had before. Finnish is a living national language, and we Finns are responsible for its future. Our language deserves all possible support and appreciation, even beyond Finland's borders. One way to "market" our language is to make it possible to take language exams outside Finland and virtually.

There is particular interest in organizing language tests in countries where there are also many Finnish schools, whose pupils would benefit from the opportunity to demonstrate their language skills and obtain official certification of their language proficiency. However, the resources of Finnish schools alone are not sufficient to organize language tests; a local partner that teaches Finnish is also needed.

National Board of Education press release, September 26, 2025

"Language tests to be digitized in stages

The National Board of Education is currently developing a set of language tests. The development work is driven by occasional congestion in the general language proficiency test (YKI) and the government language proficiency test (VKT), as well as a significant increase in the number of customers. In particular, changes to the Aliens Act, which are currently being debated in Parliament, could double the number of people taking the YKI test if they are implemented.

The intermediate level YKI test in Finnish and Swedish can be used to demonstrate language proficiency, for example when applying for Finnish citizenship. Interest in the Finnish language YKI test in particular has grown rapidly in the 2000s, and the most popular test sessions fill up quickly. The number of participants in the intermediate Finnish language test has multiplied: for example, in 2019 there were over 7,000 participants, and in 2024 there will be over 8,400.

Intermediate-level YKI tests in Finnish are held six times a year throughout Finland and, on a trial basis, also in Tallinn, Estonia. In 2024, a total of 404 test sessions were held in 35 locations, with a total of nearly 11,900 test places available. This means that almost a third of the places remained unfilled.

Statistics show that there is an oversupply of test places, but supply and demand do not match. Although the most popular test sessions, for example in the capital region, fill up very quickly, in the end there are still places left unfilled. Cancellations for various reasons have been a challenge. For example, places may have remained unfilled because people did not pay the registration fee. This has now been solved by building a queueing function, which makes it easier to find participants for canceled places, says Joonas Mäkinen, Head of the Recognition of Qualifications and Language Skills Unit at the National Agency for Education.

The statistics also show that more than half of the test results do not reach level 3, which is required, for example, when applying for Finnish citizenship.

"It seems that many people try to take the language test with fairly poor language skills," Mäkinen sums up.

Legislative changes will further increase customer numbers

The challenges associated with the YKI test have long been known to the National Board of Education. Extensive development work is now underway, as we have received significant funding for 2025 and 2026.

Expected legislative changes, which will further increase customer numbers, have put additional pressure on development. In particular, the amendment to the Aliens Act currently being debated in Parliament and the related proposal to tighten the conditions for permanent residence permits could double the demand for the YKI test.

"We have set out to reform our services and develop new functionalities: the aim is to introduce digital tests that provide an electronic certificate upon successful completion. All paper tests will gradually become a thing of the past. The development work is progressing in stages, and some of the technical innovations, such as the possibility to queue for a test, are already available to customers, Mäkinen says.

Digitization alone will not solve the challenges posed by the anticipated growth in customer numbers; broader structural reform of the system and process development are also needed. This work is also underway, in cooperation with legislators and those who carry out the tests in practice.

Our goal is to complete the development work by the end of 2026. By then, the process of applying for and taking the test will be much smoother. We are working hard to ensure that YKI tests will not be congested in the future and that our services will run more smoothly," says Paula Merikko, Director of Customer Relations and Information at the National Agency for Education.

#### **USP RESOLUTION:**

***The USP urges the Ministry of Education and Culture to continue promoting the digitization of the YKI test coordinated by the National Board of Education so that in the future, the Finnish language proficiency test can be taken entirely virtually and/or at designated locations outside Finland at a reasonable price. In addition, the USP proposes that, once the Ministry of Education and Culture has appointed a working group on digitization, it should take into account the needs of Finnish communities abroad with regard to the YKI exam for Finns living abroad.***

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## **POLITICAL AND OFFICIAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

### **12. Securing the position of the USP**

There are approximately 300,000 Finnish citizens living abroad, of whom approximately 264,000 are eligible to vote. In total, there are approximately two million expatriate Finns living around the world, including second- and third-generation Finns.

Since its establishment in 1997, the Finnish Expatriate Parliament has served as a link and advocate for expatriate Finns for 28 years. Its activities are well established, it has good connections with decision-makers in society, and its work is successful. Its most significant achievements include the new citizenship law of 2003 allowing dual citizenship, the 2018 law enabling postal voting, and the tax reform on pensions paid abroad.

The well-known and respected position of the USP should be formalized through legislation and brought within the scope of direct state aid. Formalization would rationalize the promotion of interests and stabilize operations.

The Finnish Expatriate Parliament has been funded by the Finland Society, which has been in decline in recent years, causing vulnerability and instability in the Finnish Expatriate Parliament's activities. The formalization could take place in the same way as in 1985, when the status of the Folktinget, representing approximately 280,000 Swedish-speaking Finns, was formalized. The law was subsequently amended in 2003. The Sámi Parliament, representing 10,000 Sámi people, has also been operating since 1995 on the basis of the law. These bodies, such as the Youth Parliament, which enjoys the support of the Finnish Parliament, complement participatory democracy. The USP operates in the same way.

Until the early 2020s, the Finnish Expatriate Parliament was funded by the Finland Society. The Society's office provided the Parliament with a secretariat. A parliamentary secretary was hired separately, but the entire staff was involved in the activities, especially during the session years. At that time, the costs were approximately €170,000, and in the years between sessions, approximately €100,000.

The status of the Finnish Expatriate Parliament has been discussed before, and the proposal has been on the table for over a decade. Making the USP's status official would require a law to be passed on the USP and its state subsidy. The status and tasks of the Finnish Expatriate Parliament would remain largely unchanged, but it would become a legal entity. According to the proposal, the law would include provisions on the tasks, legal capacity, composition, meetings, office, and accounting of the FEP. The law would also stipulate that the state budget must include an appropriation for the tasks assigned to the FEP by law. In this case, the granting and monitoring of the USP's state subsidy would also be transferred from the Ministry of Education and Culture to the Ministry of Justice.

As a legislative project, consolidating the status of Parliament through legislation would not be burdensome, as Parliament already operates in accordance with the rules. In addition, a draft bill has already been prepared by three lawyers: Kimmo Sasi, former chair of the Constitutional Law Committee of the Finnish Parliament, and Fredrik Forsberg, senior advisor to the Ministry of Education and Culture, who also helped draft the law on the Folktinget and signed as well as the Government Decree on the Finnish National Commission for UNESCO, and Professor Jarmo Virmavirta, former editor-in-chief and chair of the Finland Society. There is therefore no shortage of expertise.

Activities related to expatriate Finns must be made participatory and future-oriented so that the full potential of expatriate Finns can be harnessed for the benefit of Finland and Finnishness and also converted into economic activity, now that digitalization allows networks to be expanded at very low cost.

In 2016, the then Minister of the Interior, Petteri Orpo, gave his strong support to the establishment of a working group appointed by the Ministry of the Interior to consider the role of the Finnish Expatriate Parliament. In addition, the Government's Expatriate Policy Program 2017-2021 (p. 36) states that: "The project to establish the Finnish Expatriate Parliament would give the program new impact."

In its report (Ministry of the Interior publication 27/2018), the Ministry of the Interior stated that "Finns abroad are a significant resource for Finland, and their importance cannot be overemphasized when considering how important it is to promote Finland around the world or what kind of expertise and knowledge they bring to Finland when they return." However, the Ministry was not enthusiastic about drafting legislation and stated in 2018: "As a conclusion to the report, the Ministry of the Interior considers paying particular attention to the nature of the Finnish Expatriate Parliament and its tasks, as well as the added value or change that permanent status would bring, that there are currently no grounds or conditions for establishing the status of the Finnish Expatriate Parliament through legislation."

However, the situation has changed completely: Today, the Finland Society no longer has the financial or human resources to support the traditional USP. Furthermore, the society no longer complies with the rules of the Finnish Expatriate Parliament.

Many countries, including France, Italy, Greece, and Switzerland, grant official status to their expatriates. By securing USP status, Finland will gain valuable additional information about the problems faced by Finns living abroad in relation to Finnish legislation and practices.

This information can be used to facilitate the work-related immigration and return migration of expatriate Finns, promote cultural knowledge and awareness, and increase democracy and civic engagement. This information can be used to facilitate the work-related immigration and return migration of Finns living abroad, promote cultural knowledge and awareness, increase democracy and civic engagement, engage Finns living abroad in Finnish society, and establish important business contacts.

The embassies of several countries have expressed interest in the concept of the Finnish Expatriate Parliament. The fact that the Finnish Expatriate Parliament has been asked at the EU level and with funding from the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) to give a presentation to several ministries in Georgia is also a sign of its high regard. Finland cannot afford to lose this success story.

#### ***USP RESOLUTION:***

***The USP proposes to the government that, due to the changed situation, the status of the USP be consolidated and brought within the scope of legislation.***

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### **13. Permanent representative for expatriate Finns**

An expatriate Finn is a person who lives outside Finland and is a Finnish citizen or has Finnish roots. A total of approximately 2 million Finns live abroad. Most of them live in Sweden, the United States, and Canada. Approximately 300,000 Finnish citizens live abroad. More than 264,000 of them are eligible to vote in parliamentary and presidential elections.

Awareness of Finnish roots or traditions is another factor that encourages Finns living abroad to maintain their Finnish identity and connection to Finland. Finns living abroad are an important and diverse resource for Finland.

There is a government program or strategy for Finns living abroad, which is updated every five years. However, there are shortcomings in its implementation in terms of continuity, as the policies set out in the program and the measures resulting from them are only proposals without any obligations. The program has no separate budgetary implications outside the spending limits of each ministry.

The Finnish Expatriate Parliament makes proposals to the government on matters of importance to Finns living abroad. For example, dual citizenship and the right to vote by mail have been achieved in this way. The Finnish Expatriate Parliament is undoubtedly an important actor in raising awareness and promoting the interests of Finns living abroad, but its resources are not always sufficient to reach the right authorities.

Before the government's first policy program for Finns living abroad was approved in 2006, the Finnish Expatriate Parliament proposed that an ombudsman be appointed to represent the interests of Finns living abroad. At its second session in 2000, the Representative Council of Finns Abroad adopted Resolution 8/2000 on the establishment of an ombudsman for Finns living abroad.

The main point of the government's response was that, since the Finnish Expatriate Parliament had already been established as an advocacy organization with the Finland Society acting as its secretariat, the Finland Society was already effectively acting as an "ombudsman for Finns living abroad" and that the establishment of such a position would be unnecessary.

The situation has now changed, as the resources of the Finland Society have been significantly reduced, it no longer acts as the traditional secretariat of the Finnish Expatriate Parliament, and it no longer complies with the rules of the Finnish Expatriate Parliament.

People's mobility and communication with each other have also changed, as has the concept of being a Finn living abroad. This also means that the development of operating principles concerning Finns living abroad must not be limited to existing practices. A systematic operating model for expatriate Finns is needed, one that continues beyond election cycles and includes indicators, monitoring, interim evaluations, and forecasts. Matters concerning expatriate Finns need to be coordinated and promoted systematically within the state administration. This would mean a new way of allocating resources. Finns living abroad must be seen as a resource, not a cost item. This would clearly outweigh the costs at all levels of decision-making.

#### **USP RESOLUTION:**

***The USP proposes that a permanent Finnish expatriate representative be appointed to the state administration. The representative's task would be to monitor the interests and equal treatment of Finnish expatriates in the enactment and implementation of laws and to promote effective operating principles concerning Finnish expatriates, coordinate matters relating to expatriate Finns, and promote and monitor the implementation of USP resolutions in the state administration and the government.***

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## **14. Constituency for Finns living abroad**

The voting rate among Finns living abroad has risen by a few percentage points with the introduction of postal voting. However, it remains low. Representation is further weakened by an

electoral system in which the votes of Finns living abroad are scattered across different constituencies. This means that Finns living abroad have virtually no political representation in Finland. From the point of view of equality, this is an anomaly.

Abroad, the problem has been solved by creating separate constituencies for expatriates or by allocating the votes of expatriates to a single constituency. A separate constituency would give expatriate Finns direct representation in Finnish parliamentary groups and a significantly better position to promote issues affecting expatriate Finns. It is also very likely that this, together with increased voting options, would significantly increase the interest of expatriate Finns in participating in Finnish parliamentary elections and, as a result, increase the interest of political parties in campaigning outside Finland.

There are 13 electoral districts in Finland. In the 2023 parliamentary elections, there were 226,000 eligible voters in the Central Finland electoral district, with 10 members of parliament; in Satakunta, there were 177,000 eligible voters and 8 representatives; in the Häme constituency there were 210,000 eligible voters and 14 seats. More than 264,000 eligible voters permanently residing abroad correspond to an electoral district that can be assumed to entitle them to approximately 10 members of parliament.

The USP understands that forming an electoral district is politically challenging and requires a change in the law. However, this should not be an obstacle to resolving the issue.

***USP RESOLUTION:***

***The USP proposes that the Ministry of Justice, together with the political parties, investigate how a separate constituency can be formed for Finns living abroad.***

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## **15. Extension of the national D visa**

A Finnish residence permit allows the holder to live and stay in Finland for more than 90 days and is required for all non-EU citizens. A residence permit can be obtained on the basis of, for example, work, study, family ties, humanitarian reasons, or entrepreneurship.

Residence permit applications are usually submitted electronically via the Enter Finland service, and identity is verified at a Finnish embassy or the Finnish Immigration Service's service point. The first permit is granted for a fixed period, usually 1–4 years, after which you can apply for an extension. After four years of continuous and legal residence, it is possible to apply for a permanent residence permit. The cost of the application varies depending on the type of permit and the application method, usually between €350 and €600.

The D visa is a long-term visa introduced in Finland to facilitate entry into the country when a residence permit has been granted but the actual residence permit card is not yet ready. It can be granted, for example, to employees, special experts, students, researchers, start-up entrepreneurs, and their family members. A D visa can also be granted for entry to Finland to a

residence permit holder residing abroad whose residence permit card has, for example, been lost, stolen, or expired. In this case, the residence permit must still be valid.

With a D visa, you can travel to Finland immediately after a positive residence permit decision and start your stay without delay, and the card will be delivered to Finland later. The visa is usually valid for 100–365 days and also entitles the holder to travel within the Schengen area for a short period. The D visa application fee is €120, or €95 if applied for electronically.

The D visa is mainly intended to facilitate work-related immigration before the residence permit arrives. If the D visa were also granted to expatriate Finns, they and their family members would not have to limit their stay in Finland to three months, as permitted by the visitor visa or visa waiver agreement.

Extending the D visa regulations would enable, among other things:

- Family members of Finnish returnees to wait for their residence permit and residence permit card in Finland.

- Participation in longer-term education lasting less than one year for people arriving in Finland from outside the EEA (e.g., participation in folk high school courses, such as Finnish language courses, is not grounds for obtaining a student visa to Finland).

- Longer-term stays for pensioners or expatriate Finns working remotely in Finland, for example at their summer residence.

Expanding the grounds for granting visas would also support objective 7 of the Strategy for Finns Abroad 2022–2026 (Ministry of the Interior 2021:42) and related measures: "The need to streamline the residence permit process for family members of Finnish citizens will be examined when developing the residence permit system as a whole."

#### **USP RESOLUTION:**

***The USP proposes that Finland expand the grounds for granting a national D visa for longer stays (91–365 days) to persons from outside the EU/EEA by adding expatriate Finns and their family members to the grounds for granting a D visa.***

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## **16. Opening one border crossing point on the eastern border under certain conditions**

Starting in November 2023, Finland gradually closed all border crossing points with Russia in response to Russia's instrumentalized immigration. In December 2023, the government decided to open two border crossing points on a trial basis, but asylum seekers began arriving in the country again. After that, it was decided to close the eastern border completely.

There are approximately 36,000 people with dual Finnish and Russian citizenship living in Finland. It is estimated that around 30,000 of them are Ingrian Finns who moved to Finland between 1991 and 2016. They still have close ties with their relatives living in Russia.

Many young people from Russia who speak Finnish are still able to study in Finland. They may be Ingrian Finns, dual citizens, or Russians. Their parents are no longer able to send money across the border and have to travel to Russia via Estonia, which is expensive, slow, and difficult.

**USP RESOLUTION:**

***The USP proposes that the initiative be left unprocessed, as the Finnish government justifies the closure on the basis of intelligence information indicating that the threat of instrumentalized entry into the country still exists. Furthermore, the closure is temporary, and traveling from Russia via Estonia is not unreasonable. The journey from St. Petersburg to Helsinki takes about 10-12 hours, while the bus journey from St. Petersburg to Helsinki takes about 7 hours.***

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## **17. According to the USP (1997), the preparation of Finland's expatriate strategy and monitoring programs for its implementation**

The Finnish Expatriate Parliament (USP) was founded by 131 expatriate communities at the House of the Estates in Helsinki in August 1997. Since then, it has functioned effectively as a separate, independent actor and advocate for expatriate Finns, bringing their views and concerns to the attention of the Finnish authorities. Significant improvements and legislative changes have been achieved thanks to numerous plenary sessions and the joint resolutions adopted at them, such as those on dual citizenship and postal voting. The USP (1997) has been and continues to be a channel for all expatriate Finns to influence their rights, interests, and status in Finland. The Finnish Expatriate Parliament has always acted as a balanced and impartial link between Finnish decision-makers and expatriate Finns. The main focus of the USP's activities has been in the hands of expatriate Finns through their regional activities and regional spokespersons, and there has been no reason to filter this influence through external actors or intermediaries.

The government's first policy program for expatriate Finns (Työhallinnon julkaisu 369. 2006) covered the years 2006-2011, after which programs were made for five years at a time. These policy programs were drawn up on the basis of resolutions made at USP meetings. The opening statement of the latest policy program for 2017–2021 stated: "The preparation of the policy program for Finns abroad has been coordinated by the Ministry of the Interior. Five other ministries (Ministry of Education and Culture, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, Ministry for Foreign Affairs), the Finland Society, and the Finnish Expatriate Parliament were consulted in the preparation of the program." The current program is called the Expatriate Strategy and is coordinated by the

Ministry of the Interior. Based on this background, the USP (1997), together with the regional spokespersons, would be the right, significant, and credible actor to participate and bring the views of expatriate Finns to the government's strategy for expatriate Finns for 2027-31 as a permanent and full participant.

### **USP RESOLUTION**

***The USP proposes that the Ministry of the Interior, which is responsible for coordinating matters relating to expatriate Finns, invite representatives of the USP's regional chairpersons, established in 1997, to participate as permanent and full participants in the preparation of the government's strategy for expatriate Finns when the government's fifth expatriate policy program/strategy for 2027-31 is being drafted for 2027-31 and invites them to annual follow-up webinars to report on the progress of the strategy.***

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## **18. Voluntary membership of the Finnish employment pension system**

The Finnish pension system has been created on its own terms and its principles are deeply rooted in the country's economy, labor market, and culture in general. The starting point for the statutory employment pension system is therefore membership of Finnish society.

Employees of international, intergovernmental organizations who are Finnish expatriates do not have permanent and continuous employment pension security. Such organizations include, for example, the United Nations, Interpol, the World Trade Organization, the International Monetary Fund, the European Union, and NATO. Finnish employees are not eligible to join the Finnish employment pension system on a voluntary basis either, as they are bound solely to a Finnish employer in Finland.

Finnish employees do not have the option of joining the Finnish employment pension system on a voluntary basis either, but are bound solely to a Finnish employer in Finland or abroad. The employer chooses which employment pension company it wants to insure its employees with. The civil servants' proposals for alternative employment pension contributions are limited to private pension funds.

The Finnish legislature should therefore amend the law so that the Finnish employment pension system would allow private employees to pay pension contributions into a state-run employment pension fund set up specifically for this purpose. This is already the practice in at least some EU countries, such as Italy and France.

With this change in the law, Finland would show concern for its citizens who have built international careers and are now elderly, and would support their possible return to Finland upon reaching retirement age. At the same time, Finland would collect voluntary funds in the Finnish pension fund.

### **USP RESOLUTION:**

***The USP proposes that the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health (STM) should set up a working group together with the Ministry of the Interior, the Social Insurance Institution (KELA), and the Finnish Centre for Pensions (EKT) to look into setting up a state-run employment pension fund for voluntary pension contributions from private individuals.***

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## **FINANCE AND RULES COMMITTEE**

### **19. Support for the Finnish Expatriate Parliament Association in mapping out funding**

USP's funding has been handled by the Finland Society since its establishment in 1997, when the society acted as the USP's secretariat. Suomi-Seura has received annual government grants from various ministries, and these funds have also been used to cover the USP's expenses. The USP's expenses have been relatively small compared to Suomi-Seura's overall budget. After Suomi-Seura's own financial situation deteriorated and the position of parliamentary secretary was abolished in 2021, Suomi-Seura has no longer contributed funds to the USP's activities.

The Finnish Expatriate Parliament Support Association was established in August 2024 to support the activities of the USP. It is a newly established association and its funds are still limited at this stage. Therefore, improving the financial situation is of primary importance.

#### ***USP RESOLUTION***

***The USP proposes that the Finnish Expatriate Parliament Support Association and its board actively seek out various sources of funding, foundations, and other potential targets, such as associations, companies, and individual donors, both in Finland and abroad, to which grant applications can be made. Furthermore, the Parliament urges that a permanent and active membership campaign be implemented in each USP region to increase membership. To this end, a link should be added to the Tuki ry website, listing various payment methods (such as Visa, PayPal, and bank transfer) and linking directly to the association's account, through which as many expatriate Finns and donors as possible could easily make their payments. For the future of the USP, it would be useful to get its financing in order and make it a top priority. The use of external fundraising actors and crowdsourcing services should also be explored, as well as the possibility of grants from various government agencies and authorities.***

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### **20. Streamlining and reforming the USP's operating model**

The operating environment, communication methods, and interaction and communication among expatriate Finns have changed significantly since the USP was founded in 1997. People

no longer join clubs to the same extent as before, but many are involved in various Facebook or other social media groups. Club activities are declining everywhere and clubs are being closed down. Finns are moving around the world more than ever before and moving from one country to another. The current operating model is time-consuming, cumbersome, slow, and perhaps too bureaucratic. Filling out numerous forms and keeping to schedules for plenary sessions seems complicated and frustrating to many clubs and officials. Traveling to physical meetings is expensive due to the general rise in prices and long distances, and hiring a full-time parliamentary secretary/secretariat to handle USP matters is uncertain due to a lack of financial resources. Based on these facts, it is clear that the USP's current operating model should be reformed and simplified to bring it more in line with the times.

However, it is essential to activate all expatriate Finns, including clubs, communities, and individuals, and get them involved in the USP's activities. The USP must involve all expatriate Finns. The main purpose of the USP is to map the views, grievances, and circumstances of expatriate Finns and to convey their views to Finnish decision-makers and various authorities. We live in a digital age, and communication with Finnish decision-makers must keep pace with the times and the changing operating environment. The parliamentary spirit of the USP, its regional activities, and its regional spokespersons are a central and important part of this work, and these aspects must be preserved in order to maintain regional expertise and personal contact with local communities. It is extremely important that initiatives and viewpoints are purely those put forward by expatriate Finns in the regions, rather than being directed and controlled from Finland by an external actor. The main focus of all activities must be in the hands of expatriate Finns.

## **USP RESOLUTION**

***USP proposes establishing a working group composed of expatriates and/or regional speakers, tasked with streamlining and modernizing the USP operating model to make it lighter and faster, and to enhance communication with Finnish authorities. The main responsibility must remain in the hands of expatriate Finns.***

***For example, regional speakers could collect initiatives annually, process them in their own working groups, and focus only on a few key initiatives each year, which can be forwarded to the Finnish authorities when necessary. Virtual and lighter sessions and/or webinars may be held annually as needed on current issues, and various experts may be invited to give statements on relevant problems.***

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## **21. New USP Rules and Rules of Procedure**

USP's rules and rules of procedure were drafted in 1997 at its founding and were approved at the first plenary session in 1998. They have been followed for almost 25 years while Suomi-Seura ry served as the USP Secretariat.

Since Suomi-Seura's financial and personnel resources have decreased, and the organization has announced that it will no longer act as the USP Secretariat but will instead develop its own advocacy concept, the USP rules must be updated to reflect the current situation.

USP's rules and rules of procedure must be a living and dynamic document that can be updated when necessary as the operating environment changes. Based on the proposal of the USP Presidium, the USP rules and rules of procedure will be amended as follows:

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## **USP RULES 2025**

### **Article 1**

USP consists of representatives of Finnish communities operating around the world. Any community wishing to participate in USP must approve the USP rules and notify the Secretariat of ratification in writing.

### **Article 2**

Representatives of expatriate Finnish communities may participate in the USP plenary session. Each community is entitled to send one representative. A community with more than 500 members may send two representatives, and a community with more than 1,000 members may send three representatives.

The community must notify the Secretariat of its intention to participate within the timeframe set in the Rules of Procedure. The plenary makes the final decision on representation rights.

### **Article 3**

USP convenes every two to three years. Sessions may be held physically and/or remotely. The Parliament may also convene at the initiative of expatriate communities if the Presidium so decides. Every fifth year, during a jubilee year of the Republic of Finland, a larger celebratory session is organized if resources allow.

### **Article 4**

The plenary elects the Secretariat and the Speaker. It also elects regional speakers and deputy speakers for the session term from candidates nominated in the regional meetings preceding the plenary.

Regional speakers and deputies must represent the geographic areas confirmed by the plenary and must reside in the areas they represent. The USP Speaker and regional speakers form the Presidium, which also meets between sessions.

The Presidium should represent the various groups of expatriate Finns as broadly as possible.

### **Article 5**

All Finnish communities that have ratified the rules, the Presidium, and the Secretariat have the

right to submit initiatives to USP. Other external parties or individual expatriate Finns may submit proposals to the Presidium, which may, at its discretion, convert them into official initiatives.

Initiatives must be submitted to the Secretariat by the deadline. Correspondingly, initiatives and any expert opinions obtained by the Secretariat must be delivered to representatives well in advance of the session.

#### **Article 6**

When USP is in session, representatives attend plenary sessions and participate in committee work. Committees prepare draft resolutions based on initiatives, which are then presented and discussed in the plenary.

#### **Article 7**

Standing committees are:

- Citizenship Committee
- Culture Committee
- Youth Committee
- Study and Education Committee
- Political and Official Affairs Committee
- Social Affairs Committee
- Senior Committee
- Rules Committee
- Finance Committee
- Communications Committee

Other committees may be established or merged as needed. Representation from all USP regions in committees should be ensured whenever possible.

#### **Article 8**

The Presidium may meet in an expanded session with selected experts when necessary.

#### **Article 9**

The official languages of the Parliament are Finnish, Swedish, and English.

#### **Article 10**

Minutes are kept at all USP meetings.

#### **Article 11**

The Secretariat is committed to acting in accordance with USP decisions. If the Secretariat does not act according to the rules, the Presidium may appoint a new Secretariat between sessions. The Secretariat helps implement USP decisions by contacting Finnish and, when possible, foreign authorities and by actively informing the media, decision-makers, and USP communities.

## **Article 12**

Amendments to these rules require a two-thirds majority in the plenary. Amendments to the Rules of Procedure are decided by a simple majority vote.

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# **USP RULES OF PROCEDURE 2025**

## **§ 1**

USP convenes in session every two to three years.

## **§ 2**

The Secretariat shall send an invitation primarily by email to all registered Finnish communities that have ratified the USP Rules no later than six months before the session.

## **§ 3**

Finnish communities must notify the Secretariat of their participation no later than three months before the session. At the same time, they must submit the initiatives they wish to have considered.

The names of the representatives and observers of USP communities, as well as any other persons attending to follow the Parliament's work, must be known to the Secretariat no later than six weeks before the session.

## **§ 4**

No later than one month before the session, the Secretariat shall send — primarily by email — the agenda of the session, including all initiatives, to all registered representatives and observers. At the same time, a report on the measures taken to implement the decisions of the previous session shall be delivered.

A summary of initiatives and the activity report shall be published on the Secretariat's website and/or other social media channels.

## **§ 5**

At the opening of the session, the registered communities, the list of representatives, and the agenda — including all matters to be addressed in the session — shall be approved. Other persons present who are following the session shall also be noted.

## **§ 6**

Parliamentary sessions are chaired by the Speaker of USP. In the Speaker's absence, the session shall be chaired by a regional speaker selected from among the Presidium, or by another person appointed to the task.

## **§ 7**

At the beginning of each session, the Parliament shall confirm the committees previously proposed by the Presidium in accordance with Article 7 of the Rules, and at the same time confirm the chairpersons of the committees.

Committees shall appoint any other necessary officers themselves.

Committee meetings shall be closed to outsiders unless the committee decides otherwise and/or invites experts to participate in its work.

## **§ 8**

After organization, the work of the Parliament shall begin with a general debate on the Secretariat's report. This debate shall also serve as the referral debate for initiatives.

In the general debate, each representative has the right to express their opinion on all matters, regardless of whether an initiative has been submitted on the matter or not. Requests to speak shall be submitted in writing and granted in the order of registration. With the consent of the Parliament, the Speaker may limit the length of speeches, deviate from the speaking order, and declare the debate closed. Short reply speeches are permitted in connection with the speech to which the reply relates.

During the general debate, it may also be decided to add an urgent matter to the agenda and refer it to the relevant committee.

## **§ 9**

Standing and ad hoc committees shall prepare a report on each initiative referred to them, which must include a draft resolution. The report may either express a position on the matter or propose not to take a position on the issue raised in the initiative. Committees may, if they so wish, hear expert opinions.

## **§ 10**

In the plenary session, representatives of the committees shall present the committees' proposals as parliamentary resolutions. These proposals must be distributed to representatives in writing and/or electronically before the final decision.

Any counterproposals presented in the session — other than proposals for rejection — must likewise be submitted in writing and/or electronically before the decision is made.

## **§ 11**

The Parliament shall make its decisions either unanimously or by vote. Voting shall be conducted by show of hands or electronically.

In elections of persons, a secret ballot or secure online voting shall be conducted if requested.

At least half of the plenary representatives must be present for any vote.

The regional speakers of the Parliament shall serve as vote counters.

## **§ 12**

The Secretariat shall prepare minutes of the parliamentary session, which shall be reviewed by the regional speakers. The minutes shall be sent by email to each USP community and to all representatives and observers who participated in the session no later than three months after the session. The minutes shall be published on the Secretariat's website and social media channels.

## **§ 13**

In all other respects, the provisions of the Finnish Associations Act shall be followed.

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# **INFORMATION AND CULTURE COMMITTEE**

## **22. ETIAS Travel Authorization**

The EU Travel Information and Authorisation System (ETIAS) allows authorities to assess the admissibility of visa-exempt third-country nationals before they travel to the Schengen area and determine whether they pose a security risk, an illegal immigration risk, or a serious epidemic risk.

ETIAS travel authorization is a new requirement for entry into the Schengen area, and travelers without a valid ETIAS will not be admitted.

Equivalent pre-travel authorization systems have existed in countries such as the United States, Australia, and Canada for many years.

Currently, many dual citizens travel to Finland using their "foreign" passport. This is due to long travel distances for passport applications and the higher cost of passports abroad. ETIAS cannot be issued to a person who holds citizenship of a Schengen country; therefore, travel to the Schengen area must be done using a Schengen passport.

ETIAS enters into force next October.

## ***USP RESOLUTION***

*USP proposes that Ulkosuomalaisparlamentin Tuki ry, together with USP, organize one or more webinars on ETIAS with EU officials (to be clarified who handles EU matters in Finland).*

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## **23. Access to Finnish Libraries' E-Services for Expatriate Finns**

Finnish library services are becoming increasingly digital, enabling the use of materials regardless of place of residence. Many libraries already lend digital books, and the service continues to grow.

It would be beneficial for expatriate Finns to have access to the Finnish national library network, as digital books (e-books, facsimile books), audiobooks (downloadable), and other digital media can easily be borrowed from anywhere in the world. This was demonstrated during the COVID-19 pandemic when demand for remote digital services increased sharply.

Libraries in Finland are municipal services, and access requires a library card. To obtain a library card, the applicant must have an address in Finland and present valid Finnish identification containing a photo and personal identification number. Expatriate Finns without a Finnish municipality of residence cannot obtain a library card and therefore cannot access Finnish library services.

As the proportion of digital resources continues to grow, access to library services would be important for people of all ages who know Finnish — an effective way to maintain their connection to Finland. Access to library e-services would provide a strong link to Finnish culture and the preservation of Finnish identity.

If expatriate Finns were granted access to Finnish libraries' diverse digital services, the availability of these services should be widely communicated to expatriates.

### ***USP RESOLUTION***

***USP urges authorities to examine and inform expatriate Finns about the possibility of obtaining access — even paid — to Finnish library digital services for those permanently residing outside Finland and without a Finnish address.***

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## **24. Following Finnish TV and Radio Programming Abroad**

Expatriate Finns wish to watch Finnish television programs and follow events in Finland. Wider access to Yle Areena for expatriates would help them stay informed and maintain their Finnish

language skills. This would be especially important for children abroad and Finnish School students to maintain and strengthen their connection to Finland.

The EU portability regulation allows video services like Yle Areena to be viewed throughout the EU. However, this applies only to those officially residing in Finland while temporarily in another EU country and requires logging in, which verifies permanent residence in Finland.

Yle has previously stated that it cannot open all Yle Areena content worldwide due to copyright restrictions. Yle does not buy — or is not sold — global rights for many programs, such as international content, inserts, musical content, and international sports rights.

However, it is important for expatriate Finns that Yle, as a public service broadcaster, strives to improve accessibility for all users, including Finns abroad — many of whom pay the Yle tax without receiving adequate access to services.

It would be desirable for Yle to negotiate copyrights in order to make as much content as possible available globally. Yle could also invest more in its own productions and aim to avoid using copyright-restricted elements (such as music or international inserts) in its programming to ensure more content is viewable abroad.

## ***USP RESOLUTION***

***USP urges Yle to continue negotiating copyright and rights issues with relevant parties so that Yle could offer Areena content to expatriate Finns worldwide as streaming — even for a fee.***

***USP also urges the Presidium to negotiate with the Finnish government about the unfair aspects of the Yle tax, which forces expatriate Finns to pay even when they cannot access the services abroad.***

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