



The EU in 10 minutes



Everyday we hear in the news about what the EU has decided. Many of these issues affect our daily lives. Sweden and another 26 countries are members of the European Union.

- What does the EU do?
- How does the EU work?
- How much does Sweden pay for being a member?
- How can we influence the EU?

Here you can read more as we take you on a quick trip through the EU!

The EU in our everyday lives

Much of the EU's work is about making it easier for member states to trade with each other. This is why for example your coffee maker and your reading lamp are marked with the letters "CE". The "CE" mark is a stamp to show that they meet EU requirements for safe products. If a product is marked in this way, it can be sold in all member states.

It is not only goods, but also services that can cross borders. For example, a company from another EU member state may be commissioned to manage bus services in your area.

Did you know that approximately 60 per cent of decisions made by politicians in your municipality are influenced by EU rules? These may have to do with the quality of lake water for bathing or rubbish tips meeting EU environmental requirements.

The EU affects the everyday lives of each and every one of us.



You can travel, move and study

One objective of the EU is to make it easy to travel, move to another member state or study in another member state.

For example, you can now work in another member state without any special work or residence permit.

The euro is the currency in more than half of the EU's member states.

If you fall ill when travelling inside the EU, you are entitled to all necessary medical care provided you have your European health insurance card with you.



What does the EU actually deal with?

The EU deals with many areas. Here are some examples:

- *Environmental issues:* The EU has set goals for how member states should reduce their emissions of greenhouse gases.
- *Fisheries:* The EU decides how much fish may be fished in EU waters, which includes, for example, cod in the Baltic.
- *Police cooperation:* The police forces and prosecutors in the EU member states have the right to cooperate with each other to combat serious cross-border crime, such as drug smuggling, for example.
- *Regional support:* EU member states want to reduce economic and social differences between countries and regions in the EU. For this reason, a large amount of EU money is devoted to regional support.
- *Refugee policy:* The EU has a number of common rules concerning asylum for refugees including, for example, which country should deal with a particular asylum application.

This is what the EU **doesn't** do

The member states themselves are responsible for a large number of issues. Examples of such issues are income taxes, medical care, schools, pensions and child support.

How much does the EU cost and where does the money go?

All member states pay a contribution to the EU every year. Sweden pays approx. SEK 30 billion. This contribution is often based on the economic state of the country concerned.

In total, the EU receives approx. SEK 1,300 billion per year. Around 85 percent of this goes back to the member states in the form of support. Most of this is used to

- develop regions in EU member states, for example to improve roads, and to support research and education in the labour market.
- support agriculture, rural areas and fishing.

But money also goes for example to development assistance, support to culture and police cooperation. Sweden benefits from most of this support.

- Sweden's central government budget is approx. SEK 810 billion.
- Sweden's contribution to the EU is SEK 30 billion of the central government budget.
- Sweden gets about SEK 10–15 billion back in the form of EU support.



The European Council – summit between EU leaders

The European Council draws up guidelines for EU activities in the long term, but does not make any decisions regarding EU rules. The summit meetings take place four times a year. If necessary, extra summit meetings can be arranged.

The European Council consists of its President, the heads of state and government of the member states, and the President of the European Commission. The European Council elects its President for a two-and-a-half-year term.

How does EU decision-making work?

Sweden and the other member states decide on new EU rules together. This means that Sweden can influence EU decisions, but in certain cases Sweden also has to observe EU decisions that it opposes. This is how it works when Sweden and the other member states agree on new EU rules:

The European Commission proposes a new law

- 1 The European Commission is charged with the task of proposing new laws. Sweden, in common with all the other member states, has one Commissioner.

The Government and the Swedish Parliament – the Riksdag – adopt a position

- 2 The European Commission sends its proposals to all the member states. In Sweden they are submitted to the Government and the Riksdag. The Government informs the Riksdag of its view of the proposals and collects comments from the Riksdag. It is the Government that presents Sweden's views.



The European Parliament decides

3 The European Parliament participates in deciding on the EU's new laws. 736 MEPs were elected to the European Parliament in 2009, 18 of them from Sweden. The number of MEPs will increase to a total of 754, and 20 of them will be from Sweden. In the case of most issues, the European Parliament decides together with the Council of Ministers. For certain issues, the European Parliament does not make the decisions. These include EU foreign and security policy.

The Council of Ministers decides

4 The Swedish Government and all the other governments of the EU member states each participate in the EU Council of Ministers with one minister. The Council of Ministers decides on new EU legislation. The Swedish

Government will have discussed the proposals with the Riksdag in advance.

Sweden implements the legislation

5 Once the Council of Ministers has decided on a new law, Sweden and all the other member states will introduce the law. Sometimes the Riksdag may need to make amendments to Swedish laws to make them agree with the EU's new laws. In other cases, the EU's laws take immediate effect.



ADDITIONAL FACTS

The Commission

- The Commissioners' role is to promote the best interests of the EU as a whole, rather than representing their own particular countries.
- The Commission is appointed for a period of five years by the governments of the member states.
- The European Parliament has to approve the Commission.

Scrutiny by the Riksdag

In addition to scrutinising and giving its views to the Government, the Swedish Parliament – the Riksdag – also has another task in common with the other national parliaments in the EU. When the EU proposes new laws in certain areas, the national parliaments must first examine whether the rules are needed at EU level or whether it is better that each member state decides on the rules individually. This examination may result in the Commission having to reconsider its proposal.

The European Parliament

- Elections to the European Parliament take place every five years.
- The citizens in each country vote their members into the Parliament.
- Countries with large populations have more representatives than countries with small populations.

The Council of Ministers

- The government minister responsible for the particular issue for discussion participates in the Council. For example, if environmental issues are on the agenda, the Minister for the Environment will participate.
- In most cases, the Council can decide when a majority is in favour of the proposal. In the case of certain issues, all ministers in the Council must be in agreement for a decision to be taken.

What happens if Sweden does not follow EU rules?

The European Commission checks that member states follow the laws that the EU has decided upon. If the Commission considers that Sweden is not doing this, it may sue Sweden in the EU Court of Justice.

One of the tasks of the EU Court of Justice is to decide on whether a member state has violated EU rules. Swedish courts may also turn to the EU Court of Justice with questions on how EU rules should be interpreted.

If you consider that Sweden or any other member state is not following EU rules, you can report this yourself to the European Commission.



THE EU COURT OF JUSTICE

- The EU Court of Justice has one judge from each member state.
- The judges are appointed by the governments of the member states for a period of six years.

How can you influence the EU?

If you want to influence EU decisions, you can contact one of the following people or bodies working with EU matters.

- *Members of the European Parliament (MEPs)*: There are a number of Swedish MEPs who participate in and influence EU decision-making. The European Parliament has an information office in Sweden.
- *Members of the Riksdag (MPs)*: The members of the Riksdag make the laws in Sweden and submit points of view to the Government before decisions are taken in the Council of Ministers.
- *Government ministers*: They participate in meetings of the Council of Ministers that decides on new EU rules.
- *The European Commission*: The European Commission often invites points of view on draft laws. A million EU citizens may also urge the Commission to submit a proposed piece of legislation in a citizens' initiative. The Commission has an office in Sweden.
- *Organisations*: Many organisations cooperate at the European level to influence the European Commission.

For contact details, see the last page.

It all started with six countries

The EU today consists of 27 countries with an approximate population of 500 million. More countries would like to join, for example Iceland, Croatia and Turkey. How did the EU begin? After the Second World War several European countries wanted to work together to prevent new wars. For this reason the European Coal and Steel Community was formed by six countries in 1952. They decided to share responsibility for the production of coal and steel, which were important raw materials in the war industry. In this way, they would avoid a situation in which any individual country could begin to re-arm. This was the first step in the creation of the EU.

In 1958 this form of cooperation was extended to include other products, services and capital. The whole project came to be known as the EC, the European Communities. Over time such areas as the environment, agriculture and transport also became responsibilities for the EC.

In 1993, the EC became the EU – the European Union. This meant for example that it was now possible for member states to act together in matters such as foreign policy.

Since then, another 15 countries have become members of the EU, which also affects the forms of cooperation between member states.



MEMBER STATES

The EU member states joined the EU at different times:

1952	Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands
1973	Denmark, Ireland, the United Kingdom
1981	Greece
1986	Portugal, Spain
1995	Austria, Finland, Sweden
2004	Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia
2007	Bulgaria, Romania

Do you want to know more about the EU?

The EU Information Centre

The EU Information Centre (EU-upplysningen) is entrusted by the Riksdag to provide all-round, politically impartial information about the EU. Find out more at www.eu-upplysningen.se or ask us your questions on 020-250 000 (inside Sweden), +46 8 786 40 00 (from abroad) or by e-mail at eu-upplysningen@riksdagen.se.

Influencing the EU

The Government | Contact information to all Government ministers is available at www.sweden.gov.se.

The European Parliament | Contact information to the Swedish members of the European Parliament is available at www.europaparlamentet.se. You can also contact the Information Office of the European Parliament in Sweden, tel. +46 8 562 444 55, e-mail epstockholm@europarl.europa.eu.

The Riksdag – the Swedish Parliament | Contact a member of the Riksdag. Addresses to all of the 349 members of the Riksdag and to the political parties represented in the Riksdag are available at www.riksdagen.se.

The European Commission | Contact the Office of the European Commission in Sweden, tel. +46 8 562 444 11, e-mail bursto@ec.europa.eu, website www.ec.europa.eu/sverige.

You can also contact special interest groups and sectoral organisations.

