



# The EU in 10 minutes



## The EU in our everyday lives

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.

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 be bought and sold across borders. For example, a company from another EU member state may be commissioned to manage bus services in your area.

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.
- **Fishing** 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. This contribution is often based on the economic state of the country concerned. Sweden pays approx. SEK 30–35 billion.

In total, the EU receives approx. SEK 1,300 billion per year. Around 85 per cent 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, to support research and education programmes in the labour market, and to 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 830 billion.
- Sweden's contribution to the EU is SEK 30–35 billion of the central government budget.
- Sweden gets back SEK 10–15 billion in the form of various kinds of support from the EU.



## 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 a 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. On the next page you will see how it works when Sweden and the other member states agree on new EU rules.





### The European Commission proposes a new law

The European Commission is charged with the task of proposing new laws. All the member states each have one Commissioner. The Commissioners' role is to promote the best interests of the EU as a whole, rather than representing their own particular countries.

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

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

The European Parliament participates in deciding on the EU's new laws. The MEPs are elected in general elections, and 20 of them are elected in 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

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

Once the Council of Ministers has decided on a new law, Sweden and 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.

## 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.

The task of the EU Court is then to decide on whether Sweden 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.

## Elections to the European Parliament, 2014

There will be elections to the European Parliament in all EU member states in May 2014. In Sweden, the elections will take place on 25 May, and we will be electing 20 MEPs. A total of 751 MEPs will be elected in the whole of the EU.

The members of the European Parliament represent their voters and their party. Parties that are similar to each other work together in the Parliament and form party groups.

Members of the European Parliament have several different tasks:

- They decide on new EU laws together with the Council of Ministers.
- They decide on how EU money is to be used together with the Council of Ministers.
- They monitor the work of the European Commission and can remove the Commission if it neglects its duty.

In Sweden, you are entitled to vote if you are a Swedish citizen and you have reached the age of 18 by election day at the latest. You are also entitled to vote in the Swedish election if you are a citizen of another EU member state and were registered in Sweden no later than 30 days before election day.

- The elections to the European Parliament are held in all Member States every five years.
- Countries with large populations have more MEPs than countries with small populations.

## It all started with six countries...

The EU today consists of 28 countries with an approximate population of 508 million. More countries would like to join, for example Serbia and Turkey.

Why did countries in Europe start working together in the first place? Straight after the Second World War, several countries wanted to prevent new wars. For this reason, six of these countries formed the European Coal and Steel Community 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 that it was now possible for member states to act together in matters such as foreign policy.

Since then, another 16 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 and 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

2013 Croatia

## How can you influence the EU?

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

- **Members of the European Parliament (MEPs)** There are a number of Swedish MEPs who participate in and influence EU decision-making. Contact information to MEPs is available on [www.europaparlamentet.se](http://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@ep.europa.eu](mailto:epstockholm@ep.europa.eu).
- **Members of the Riksdag** 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. 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](http://www.riksdagen.se).
- **Government ministers** They participate in the meetings of the Council of Ministers where they decide on new EU rules. Contact information to all Government ministers is available at [www.sweden.gov.se](http://www.sweden.gov.se).

- **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. Contact the Office of the European Commission in Sweden, tel. +46 8 562 444 11, e-mail [bursto@ec.europa.eu](mailto:bursto@ec.europa.eu). Their web address is [ec.europa.eu/sverige/index\\_sv.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/sverige/index_sv.htm)
- **Organisations** Many organisations cooperate at the European level to influence the EU.

## Do you want to know more about the EU?

**The EU Information Centre** is entrusted by the Riksdag to provide all-round, politically impartial information about the EU.

You can find out more about the EU on our website or ask us questions.

- [www.eu-upplysningen.se](http://www.eu-upplysningen.se)
- [eu.upplysningen@riksdagen.se](mailto:eu.upplysningen@riksdagen.se)
- 020-250 000 (calls inside Sweden)

Every day we hear in the news about what the EU has decided. Many of these issues affect our daily lives. Sweden and another 27 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!

SVERIGES   
RIKSDAG 