

## FACTS ABOUT THE RIKSDAG

# Parties and MPs – how they work



PHOTO: MELKER DAHLSTRAND

The members of the Riksdag assembled in the Chamber. They have fixed seats and sit according to their constituency rather than party, unlike the norm in many other countries.

The system of government in Sweden is based on various political parties. A party may be described as a group of people with common objectives who have joined forces to try and realise them.

Today, there are eight parties in the Riksdag (see next page). However, there was a considerably larger number of parties that stood for election at the last election, but they did not all succeed in entering the Riksdag.

A party group consists of members from a party who have been elected to the Riksdag. The party groups play an important and influential role in the work of the Riksdag and the political life of Sweden. All major issues are discussed in the party groups before the members take any decisions. Party groups cooperate closely with party colleagues outside the Riksdag.

### **Party groups have a strong position**

The work of the parliamentary party groups is not regulated by law. It is the provisions of each particular party and accepted practice that determine how the work is carried out. Despite this, the way the party groups are organised and the way they work tend to be quite similar.

The work of a parliamentary party group is influenced to a great extent by whether or not the party is part of the Government. Another significant factor influencing the work of the Riksdag is whether or not the parties forming the Government have a majority in the Riksdag. The size of each particular party is also important. In the case of smaller parties, the workload of each individual member of parliament is greater.

The work of a party that is in Government in the Riksdag to a great extent involves taking part in the formulation of Government policy and then guiding it through the Riksdag. If the Government is in the minority, the result of this work will be more difficult to predict.

The main task for a party in opposition is to put forward political alternatives to Government policy and to try to gain a majority for them.

### **Organisation and working procedures**

Extensive knowledge of all areas of society is required for work in the Riksdag, but it is impossible for each and every member to be fully informed about everything. This is why work in the Riksdag is organised in

such a way that individual members can work in the areas in which they have special knowledge.

The parliamentary party groups are headed by a board or an advisory group. The Green Party is headed by what it terms a coordination group. The group leaders are responsible for the day-to-day work of the party groups.

Members in the party groups are organised in committees. In these groups private members' motions are prepared as well as positions on Government bills. The 15 parliamentary committees are each responsible for different policy areas.

During a large part of the parliamentary year, the whole party group will meet at least once a week. Here, the members discuss how policies are to be shaped and how they are to act in committees and when they meet in the Chamber. These meetings are held behind closed doors.

### Financial support provides independence

Free political parties, free coverage of news and freedom to form opinions are fundamental elements of a democracy. The political parties play an important

role in helping people form their opinions. It is therefore important that the political parties receive financial support. The purpose of this is to make them independent of any pressure that might be exerted by any other possible donors and to enable long-term planning of work at party level.

This is the reason for public financial support to the political parties, which has been their greatest source of income since the middle of the 1960s. The state, municipalities and county councils provide financial support to parties that have been voted into power in the parliamentary and local elections.

Support from the state amounts to approx. 460 MSEK per year. Approx. 63 per cent of this goes to work in the Riksdag, the rest is in the form of general support to the national organisations of the political parties. The general support is determined by how many seats a particular party has received during the last two elections to the Riksdag.

Parties not represented in the Riksdag with more than 2.5 per cent of the votes in either of the last two elections also receive support. For parties that have left the Riksdag, there are rules determining how the support is to be phased out.

Thanks to the financial support for work at the Riksdag, each party group is able to have a secretariat with experts, political advisers and assistants. The party group is also an employer, and employs its staff. The secretariat is headed by a head of secretariat. The size of each party secretariat varies depending on the size of the party. The financial support to the party is also used to finance travel abroad, for example in connection with the EU and international conferences abroad.

### Being an MP no nine-to-five job

Being an MP is not like having a nine-to-five job. There are strict requirements that members of the Riksdag should always be available. Since Sweden has been a member of the EU, these requirements have become even stricter. When members are not in the Riksdag, they are often working at home in their constituencies or involved in political activities at an international level.

In their constituencies, they meet party colleagues and participate in meetings in order to gather opinions and attitudes. They meet citizens personally or are in contact with them by telephone, e-mail or social media. They visit workplaces and schools. MPs also write articles and give interviews in the press and on the radio and TV. They take part in parliamentary

#### Eight parties in the Riksdag

Following the 2014 elections, the Social Democratic Party and the Green Party formed a government with Stefan Löfven as Prime Minister. Together, these two parties have 138 seats, which is less than half of the total number of seats in the Riksdag. The Government therefore requires the support of other parties in order to win approval for its proposals in the Riksdag.

PARTIES IN THE RIKSDAG	NUMBER OF SEATS/MEMBERS
The Social Democratic Party (SocDem)	113
The Moderate Party (Mod)	84
The Sweden Democrats (SweDem)	49
The Green Party (Grn)	25
The Centre Party (Cen)	22
The Left Party (Lft)	21
The Liberal Party (Lib)	19
The Christian Democrats (ChrDem)	16



PHOTO: MELKER DAHLSTRAND

A typical working week in the Riksdag. Members also work very much outside the Riksdag.

commissions of inquiry, are members of various boards and can have a number of offices in municipal and county councils.

### **Elected – not employed**

Being a member of the Riksdag means being elected to a position of trust. A member is thus not employed, and the laws of the labour market therefore do not apply. Instead, the working conditions of the members are determined by the Instrument of Government, the Riksdag Act and other provisions.

The Riksdag Administration is the public authority responsible for the working conditions of the MPs and for supporting them in their work at the Riksdag. Another important task of the Administration is to inform the general public of the work of the Riksdag.

A member of parliament receives a special remuneration rather than a salary. This is paid monthly and is taxable. The Riksdag Remunerations Board decides the extent of the remuneration. The Speaker, who leads the work of the Riksdag, receives a remuneration that is the same as that of the Prime Minister. The Riksdag Administration is also responsible for ensuring that the members are provided with offices and technical equipment.

In the case of absence due to illness, their remunerations are reduced in virtually the same way as determined by the rules for state employees. One important difference is that members work seven days a week. They do not have holiday and therefore do not receive holiday pay. In the case of parental leave, their fee is reduced in virtually the same way as for state employees.

In order to give members who leave the Riksdag financial security for a transitional period, there are certain severance packages. A new system of financial redeployment support was introduced for members elected in the 2014 parliamentary elections or later. For members of the Riksdag who were re-elected in 2014, the old system of guaranteed income applies.

Members receive an old age pension from the Riksdag as a complement to their national pension. This supplementary pension can be earned during a maximum period of 30 years.

All travel undertaken by a member when in service at the Riksdag is considered as official travel, including travel between his/her home and the Riksdag. The Riksdag Administration provides members with overnight accommodation adjacent to the Riksdag. Those who have other forms of accommodation are given compensation for this.

### Loyalty both to the party and the voters

At election time, when the political parties have presented their programmes, it is up to the voters to choose the party whose views are closest to theirs. The MPs who are elected then attempt to implement the programme their party has presented in the election. This is the basis for solidarity within the party and for the loyalty of its members.

At the same time, each member of the Riksdag has been given a personal mandate by the electorate and is therefore under no formal obligation to support the party line. A member can therefore see his or her task as an obligation to represent the views of the voters. Another possibility is to rely on his or her own judgment.

In practice, however, it is usually the party principle, i.e. party loyalty, that prevails. This is especially true when the member in question is part of the ruling majority, because the political consequences of departing from the party line are usually greater in this case – especially if there is a risk that they may lose their majority.

The Administration is responsible for daily allowances and other travel compensation. There is a travel agency in the Riksdag that deals with travel bookings for members.

### Officials support decision-making

Apart from the functions typical for all authorities, such as finance, human resources, IT and property management, the Riksdag Administration has functions that are directly linked to the decision-making process.

When a proposal from the Government and a counter-proposal from the opposition are to be discussed in a committee, it is the officials who prepare the meetings and make sure that the members have all the information they need. Afterwards, they

compile the necessary documentation for the debate and decision in the Chamber – the committee report. An official is a kind of ghost writer whose task it is to reproduce the positions both of the majority and the opposition in the best way possible.

There are also officials working in the committees who follow up and evaluate Riksdag decisions and monitor research and future issues.

Media technicians video everything that happens in the Chamber. A group of officials take care of all the services in the Chamber, for example they ensure that the members have the right background information. The official reporters of the parliamentary record note what is said on paper and then draw up the preliminary record of parliamentary proceedings.

The Security Department is responsible for security in connection with entry, evacuation and rescue services.

### Knowledge and information service

There are several functions in the Riksdag Administration with the task of providing the members with background information to help them with their decisions.

The Riksdag Research Service produces tailor-made factual documentation at the request of the members. The researchers have a broad knowledge base, work impartially and on a confidential basis if necessary. It is the client in each case who determines whether the result should be available to the public.

The Riksdag Library is one of Sweden's largest social science libraries, and it is open to the public. The Riksdag Library is also responsible for the Riksdag Archives.

### Information to the world at large

The website [www.riksdagen.se](http://www.riksdagen.se), a range of printed matter and guided tours of the Riksdag buildings meet the needs of external target groups regarding information on the Riksdag. On the website you can see videos produced by media technicians, both live and recorded.

### Read more

- Current and in-depth information on party groups and members is available on [www.riksdagen.se](http://www.riksdagen.se)