

# Action programme for gender equality in the Riksdag for the electoral period 2022–2026

## Summary

The action programme for gender equality for the electoral period 2022–2026 has a continued focus on the way we treat one another and on the possibility for members to combine their assignment in parliament with family life.

Greater emphasis will be placed during the current period on how members are treated outside of the Riksdag. The increasingly challenging climate that politicians operate in, and its consequences for members of the Riksdag from a gender perspective, must be highlighted.

In-depth studies are proposed on combining the day-to-day duties as a member of parliament with family life, on how women and men are treated during debates in the Chamber and on members' exposure to threats and expressions of hate.

## Background

In June 2006, the Riksdag decided that continuous and systematic work to promote gender equality should be carried out in the Riksdag and that the Riksdag Board should have special responsibility for this. The Board is responsible for establishing an action programme for gender equality for each electoral period. Work on gender equality is followed up and evaluated. The programmes should concern working conditions in the Riksdag rather than aspects of gender equality within various policy areas. In the last four electoral periods, the Riksdag Board has established an action programme for gender equality and appointed working groups to implement the programmes.

Quantitatively, the Riksdag has a high degree of gender equality. There is a balanced gender distribution according to the 40/60 measure, that is, the share of either of the sexes is at least 40 per cent, with the exception of some deviations for leadership positions.

A good picture of how members themselves perceive gender equality in the Riksdag has been obtained through previous surveys. The surveys show shortcomings in the qualitative aspects of gender equality in the Riksdag in terms

of attitudes and approach. The action programme for the previous electoral period of 2018–2022 therefore focused on highlighting the way we treat one another, but also on the possibility of combining the assignment in parliament with family life. The research study on leadership in the Riksdag, which the working group commissioned during the same period, confirmed that these challenges remain in place.

The Swedish Parliament is, and should remain, an international role model on these matters: partly because of the existing gender equality work and its results, but in particular because of continuous work for additional improvement.

### **Work procedures**

On 9 November 2022, the Riksdag Board decided to establish a working group on gender equality. The working group consists of representatives from all of the political parties of the Riksdag and has an even gender balance. The Board appointed the First Deputy Speaker as the Chair of the working group and the Second Deputy Speaker as the Deputy Chair.

The working group was tasked with preparing a proposal for an action programme for the electoral period 2022–2026 and, after being ratified by the Board, implementing the programme.

The Speaker has decided on the composition of the working group following nominations from the party groups. The Secretary-General of the Riksdag decides on administrative support and sets the annual budget for the working group.

The gender equality work in the Riksdag must be integrated into all Riksdag activities. The success of the action programme is therefore dependent on broad support within the party groups. The members of the working group form a natural link in the process of obtaining broad support.

The valuable exchanges of experience with other Nordic parliaments, which have been initiated through gender equality work within the scope of earlier programmes, should continue during the current electoral period. Meetings should be in-person. This does not exclude the working group from taking the initiative to exchange information and inspiration with other parliaments.

The working group has proposed the following action programme for gender equality during the electoral period 2022–2026. It was ratified by the Board on 10 May 2023. The group may get back to the Board with proposed decisions on further activities and measures which it considers are needed to implement the action programme. The working group will on an ongoing basis, at least once per term, report on its work to the Board.

## Objective

The overall objective of the action programme is to work for a gender equal parliament, meaning that women and men are given equal opportunities to enable them to carry out their assignment in parliament and that the gender distribution is equal in various bodies, positions and contexts<sup>1</sup>. Furthermore, that gender equality work is integrated into all activities and various processes, that both women and men participate in the Riksdag's gender equality work, that there is an internal culture where both women and men are respected and resources are gender equal, and that the balance between the assignment in parliament and family life is facilitated.

## Focus for the electoral period 2022–2026

Gender equality is a precondition for a representative democracy where everyone can participate in the political dialogue and decision-making on equal terms. This concerns practical working conditions, as well as treatment and attitudes.

Challenges in these areas need to continue to be highlighted in order to uphold a free and vital democracy where different voices can be heard.

The action programme for 2022–2026 focuses on cultural issues and attitudes between members internally within the Riksdag, as well as on the external treatment and exposure which members of parliament may be subjected to.

A more in-depth knowledge is required of the day-to-day duties of members and how they view the opportunities to combine their assignment in parliament with family life. The two development areas within the action programme for the previous electoral period of 2018–2022 continue to be prioritised: the assignment in parliament - treatment and exposure and combining the assignment in parliament with family commitments.

Measures carried out to promote a gender-equal Riksdag should be knowledge-based. As a result of earlier research studies that have been carried out in the Riksdag, it has been possible to implement targeted initiatives to bring about improvements. The studies have highlighted the situation of members in various respects. As circumstances can change over time, earlier studies need to be followed up, complementary studies carried out as required and statistics need to be updated.

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<sup>1</sup> According to the 40/60 percentage measure

## Activities

### 1. The assignment in parliament - treatment and exposure

Work in this area focuses on internal treatment in the Riksdag, between the members themselves, but also in relation to the public in terms of threats and expressions of hate, for example, and how members of the Riksdag are portrayed in the media. All members can from time to time be targeted, but it appears that women are more often affected than men. Activities aimed at providing members with support and tools to carry out their daily tasks are to be implemented.

The issue of treatment needs to be expanded compared to earlier work programmes and also needs to include the issue of members being subjected to threats and expressions of hate. How politicians are portrayed in media ought to be examined from a gender perspective, as this can influence general willingness to become politically involved and to participate in the political debate which, in the long term, impacts our democracy.

#### *a) Treatment - internal interaction*

##### *1. Workshop: Communicative strategies*

A workshop on communicative strategies should be offered to party group leaders and other members during the electoral period to highlight how we communicate with each other and to provide information about tools to manage situations that might arise. The workshop must reach as wide an audience as possible.

##### *2. Research study: How are men and women treated in debates in the Chamber?*

To commission a quantitative text analysis as an initial step in order to collate more knowledge on gender patterns during debates in the Chamber and to get back to the Board with a study proposal. It is recommended that age differences between debaters are also taken into account.

##### *3. Follow-up: Leadership study*

During the previous electoral period, the study “Gender-equal leadership in the Riksdag” was carried out. The study was a quantitative and qualitative study of the leadership in the Riksdag and included members’ own experiences of the leadership role. The results indicated that various forms of support may be required to further encourage members to want to take on leadership assignments. The study will be followed up.

##### *4. Follow-up: Increased support in cases of sexual harassment*

At the end of the electoral period 2018–2022, the Riksdag Board decided offer increased support in cases of sexual harassment

following a proposal submitted by the working group. This support includes preventative measures in the form of lectures which are to be provided to all party groups as well as various forms of counselling in cases where a member has been subjected to sexual harassment.

The increased support will be followed up and evaluated.

**b) Exposure - external interaction**

1. *Survey: Models for support to members in the event of threats or expressions of hate*

Outline how other parliaments work with this issue and in light of such an inventory, come up with proposals for how support to members of the Riksdag can be improved.

2. *Research study: Psychological violence against members*

Knowledge gathering on psychological violence against politicians, for example factors which increase the risk of being exposed, if there are methods for changing the behaviour of perpetrators and how the parties work to support their members. Based on obtained information, the working group will put forward proposals for a detailed research study and will get back to the Board for a decision on implementation.

3. *Seminar: Strategies for tackling threats and expressions of hate on social media*

A seminar will be arranged to which all members will be invited in order to highlight the knowledge that exists on perpetrators and recommended strategies from police and government agencies in dealing with online abuse. Party secretariats' heads of security should be involved in the event.

4. *Seminar: How politicians are portrayed in the media*

People's willingness to become elected representatives is affected by the picture that the media paints of the role of the member of parliament. A seminar based on current research on how female and male members of the Riksdag are portrayed in the media will be held.

**2. The assignment in parliament combined with family life**

Earlier research studies have indicated recurring difficulties for members to combine their assignments in parliament with a functioning family life. This applies in particular to members with younger children, single parents and members with elderly parents. Members from constituencies outside of Stockholm find it particularly difficult to meet the challenges of daily life.

Conditions that concern the working week in the Riksdag, such as general meetings and meetings in the Chamber, but also childcare services that are provided by the Riksdag Administration are areas that are mentioned in the studies. The possibility to provide additional support, especially to members who are single parents, should be reviewed. A more in-depth knowledge base on the subject is required.

1. *Research study/focus groups: Day-to-day duties and family life of members of parliament*  
 Researchers are commissioned through focus groups and surveys to examine what members consider to be the most important gender equality issues, what men versus women spend time on during their assignment in the Riksdag, what support they receive, as well as how they achieve a balance between their assignment and their private life. Based on obtained information, the working group will put forward proposals for more detailed supplementary research studies and get back to the Board for a decision on implementation.
2. *Needs analysis: Work procedures/the working week in the Riksdag*  
 In the light of the findings of the research study on gender equality issues and the balance with family and private life, the working group will conduct a needs analysis concerning work procedures/the working week in the Riksdag, that is, timings of group meetings and other meetings, the possibility to work remotely and/or hold digital meetings as well as the scheduling of weekly votes.
3. *Needs analysis: Childminding in the Riksdag*  
 In the light of the findings of the research study on gender equality issues and the balance with family and private life, the working group will conduct a needs analysis concerning childminding.

### **3. Statistics and estimates**

In addition to activities orientated towards both of the focus areas above, the working group will also produce documentation which can be used as a basis for considering additional measures to promote gender equality in the Riksdag.

1. *Statistics: The work of the Riksdag*  
 Relevant statistics on gender equality in the Riksdag are to be compiled, including the gender distribution of interpellations. The materials are to be translated into English so that they can be used in international contexts.
2. *Statistics: Representation*  
 In contrast to when the working group for gender equality is appointed, there is often no mandate to achieve an even gender

balance when internal forums or working groups in the Riksdag are appointed.

The working group will produce documentation on the gender distribution in various forums.

3. *Analysis: The Riksdag as a gender-sensitive parliament*

An analysis of ongoing work on gender equality in the Riksdag is to be carried out according to the Inter-Parliamentary Union's model for gender-sensitive parliaments: "Evaluating the gender sensitivity of parliaments - A self-assessment toolkit".

## **Communication**

In order for the work with the action programme to have as great an impact as possible, planned communication must exist for all of the group's activities.

The work is communicated both internally and externally. Within the Riksdag, the working group communicates its work on the intranet and through invitations to seminars and other knowledge-enhancing activities which the working group arranges.

An important part of the communication is that each member acts as a link to their party group. In order for the group's work to lead to change and for the gender equality target to be met, the working group's members are to keep party groups informed about the work and also to collate feedback back to the working group. Communication aids, for example PowerPoint presentations, are provided to party members.

The activities of the working group will serve as an example of how a parliament can work to achieve the goal of being a gender-equal parliament. The working group's presidium, independently or together with other members, are encouraged to participate in various contexts to provide information on the Riksdag's work on gender equality. This may, for example, mean participating in international visits where the topic of gender equality will be discussed.

## **Follow-up**

At the end of the electoral period, the working group follows up and evaluates its work and submits a final report to the Riksdag Board. Within the report, a message to the next action programme may be proposed.