



Strategy for Sweden's development  
cooperation in the areas of human  
rights, democracy and the rule of law  
2018–2022



# 1. Direction

The aim of Swedish international development cooperation is to create preconditions for better living conditions for people living in poverty and under oppression. The development cooperation is based on the principles of aid and development effectiveness, and the new international agreements the international community agreed on in 2015<sup>1</sup>.

The overall objective of the Strategy for human rights, democracy and the rule of law is to contribute to secure, just and inclusive democratic societies that protect and respect the equal rights of all.

The strategy will apply in 2018–2022 and covers the funds allocated in the appropriation directions of the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) and Folke Bernadotte Academy for each budget year<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup>The development agenda encompasses the 2030 Agenda including its 17 Global Goals and 169 targets for sustainable development, the outcome document of the Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development (Addis Ababa Action Agenda), the New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States and the Paris Agreement on climate change.

<sup>2</sup>Activities within the framework of this strategy are financed in accordance with the appropriation directions concerning the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency and appropriation directions concerning the Folke Bernadotte Academy for each budget year”.

Sida's activities will contribute to the following objectives:

### **Inclusive democratic societies**

- Strengthened democratic principles, processes and governance for independent and transparent societies based on the rule of law.
- Increased democratic participation and influence.
- Strengthened preconditions for freedom of expression.

### **Equal rights for all**

- Strengthened global and regional processes and systems for the enjoyment of human rights.
- Greater respect for human rights, with particular focus on those subjected to discrimination.
- Strengthened preconditions for the full enjoyment of human rights by women and girls, empowerment of women and girls, and gender equality.

### **Security, justice and accountability**

- Reduced corruption and increased transparency and accountability.
- Strengthened rule of law and access to justice.
- Increased safety and security for actors and organisations working to uphold human rights.

The activities of Folke Bernadotte Academy will contribute to the following objective:

- Increased democratic participation and influence.

## 2. Context

Human rights are an integral part of international law and a prerequisite for upholding peace and security, and for just, equitable, gender-equal and sustainable development. They are integral both in definition and to upholding democracy and the principles of the rule of law. To be fully enjoyed, however, they require systems of democracy and the principles of the rule of law that include free and independent elections as essential elements. Democracy and respect for human rights, gender equality and the principles of the rule of law are goals in and of themselves, but also a means of achieving other goals. Women's and girls' enjoyment of human rights is central to all three dimensions of sustainable development, democracy and adherence to the rule of law. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights and subsequent human rights instruments are also a starting

point for the 2030 Agenda. A rights perspective and the need for democratic and inclusive societies permeate the entire Agenda.

Many countries have adopted laws strengthening the respect for human rights and the principles of the rule of law. The internet and the impact of social media have led to better-informed citizens – not least among young persons – and have contributed to a growing and independent civil society that is strengthened through innovative forms of cooperation. At the same time, respect for human rights, democracy and the principles of the rule of law around the world is declining. This is evident in international forums too, where international human rights commitments are being increasingly questioned. For many countries, human rights, democracy and the rule of law are no longer self-evident goals.

Instead, they are challenged and in competition with more authoritarian social models and political ideas. The democratic space is shrinking more and more, restricting people's rights and freedoms. This is also evident in the media landscape. In addition, many poverty-related societal problems such as resource waste, environmental degradation, discrimination and rights violations can be fully or partially explained by the rule of law being supplanted by abuse of power, arbitrariness and corruption, not least in relation to the exploitation of natural resources and land issues.

To keep pace with a changing world, development cooperation working methods must be continuously developed and adapted. Strengthening human rights, democracy and the rule of law requires long-term engagement, flexibility and creativity. Sweden needs

to continue to build and deepen both broad networks and strategic partnerships to ensure more better collaboration and sustainable results.

### 3. Activities

Sweden's development cooperation shall take as a point of departure and be characterised by a rights-based perspective and by the perspective of poor people on development. The rights perspective means that human rights and democracy are regarded as fundamental to development. Such an approach involves giving visibility, ahead of each contribution, to individuals and groups who are discriminated against, excluded and marginalised, so that all people, regardless of gender, age, disability, ethnicity, religion or other belief, sexual orientation, or transgender identity or expression, can enjoy their rights. The perspectives of poor people on development means that the situation, needs, conditions and priorities of poor women, men and children will be the point of departure for fighting poverty and promoting fair and sustainable development. Sweden's development cooperation must be economically, socially and

environmentally sustainable, and gender-equal. The development cooperation is based on a comprehensive approach to the challenges, needs and conditions of people and societies. The guiding principle is that economic, social and environmental conditions and processes are to be understood and managed in an integrated context. Gender equality and the empowerment and rights of women and girls are both goals in themselves and a prerequisite and a means for achieving sustainable global development. Violence and armed conflict are among the greatest obstacles to economic and social development, and development cooperation is an important part of conflict prevention. An environmental and climate perspective, a gender equality perspective and a conflict perspective shall therefore be systematically integrated into Sweden's development cooperation.

The strategy primarily covers activities that have a global added value, of which cannot be attributed to a particular continent, region or country. The support shall contribute to Swedish priority issues to impact and affect the international normative policy in the areas covered by the strategy and at the same time reach out broadly at regional, national and local level. Support may therefore be given to organisations, networks or other actors that are standard-setting and thus play a key role in Sweden's priority issues. Sweden shall especially stand up for rights issues that are not sufficiently emphasised by other international cooperation actors. Internationally agreed principles on aid and development effectiveness shall be applied. Sweden's resource base, including Swedish experiences, expertise and networks in different sectors of society are to be considered in implementation (where relevant). In

addition, strategic support to actors of change working for human rights, democratisation and the principles of the rule of law must be included in the activities, for example, support to culture and cultural actors.

The development cooperation will be based on the international human rights agreements and commitments, in particular the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, democracy and the rule of law.

A long-term approach combined with speed and flexibility is crucial for the ability of both Sweden and the international community to work effectively. Rapid response is of great importance for contributions at national and local level.

Activities shall provide support to meet global challenges and support global policy and methods development.

This may include support to multilateral organisations that contribute to the achievement of the strategy's objectives, including organisations based in the south.

Activities must be contextualised and inclusive, and provide support to nationally and locally owned and run processes, which is a prerequisite for inclusive democratic societies where the principles of the rule of law is respected and everyone can enjoy their human rights. Partners and forms of cooperation will be chosen based on the direction of activities. The partners and forms of cooperation that contribute most effectively to the strategy's implementation should be used. Support should be available through national, regional and global channels.

The political nature of the activities and the limited possibilities for development cooperation to separately address the causes of violations of human rights, democracy and the principles of the rule of law require a close dialogue between relevant actors. In this dialogue, activities within the framework of bilateral, regional and thematic strategies must be considered in order to promote complementarity. Combating the root causes of the shrinking democratic space for individuals and civil society organisations, as well as strengthening democratic processes and rule of law actors are also priorities.



Synergies between the different areas of the strategy must be harnessed. Synergies must also be sought with activities within the framework of other regional, bilateral and thematic strategies. Support via multilateral organisations, known as multi-bi aid, shall be compatible with Sweden's priorities and approaches in cooperation with multilateral organisations. When implementing a strategy, Sida must ensure an integrated approach to Sweden's total support to a region, a country, and in a thematic area.

A comprehensive and strategic dialogue on implementation of this strategy shall take place regularly and when warranted. The strategy's implementation must be characterised by a tailored and exploratory approach.

Folke Bernadotte Academy will in its activities focus on support to election observation missions, as per its mandate.

The strategy will be followed up according to the principles and processes set out in the Government's Guidelines for Strategies in Swedish International Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid.



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