



Ministry for Foreign Affairs

## Strategy for Sweden's development cooperation for health and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR)

### 1. Starting points and added value

This Strategy governs Sweden's development cooperation for health and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) for the period 2025–2029.

Health, SRHR and education are fundamental aspects of human development and crucial to laying the foundations for improved living conditions for those living in poverty and under oppression. Cross-border health cooperation can be justified, particularly in light of the universal consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic and disclosed limitations in global governance for health, national health systems and vaccination coverage, but also the vulnerability of individuals. At the same time, the ability to prevent and handle health threats and crises in countries of operation is a security issue for all countries, including Sweden. Health and SRHR are prioritised areas in Swedish development cooperation. Sweden has broad experience of contributing to improved health, including financial governance, control, transparency and anti-corruption within the sector. Furthermore, Sweden is an international driving force for gender-equal and inclusive social development, and defends LGBTIQ people's, women's and girls' empowerment, enjoyment of human rights and freedoms, and opportunities.

### 2. Strategic objectives

The objective of Sweden's international development assistance is to create conditions to improve the lives of people living in poverty and oppression. At the same time, development assistance is an important foreign policy tool

and can contribute to the promotion and preservation of Swedish interests and priorities.

Development cooperation within this Strategy will be based on the Government's reform agenda for Swedish development assistance: Development assistance for a new era – freedom, empowerment and sustainable growth (UD2023/17726). The principles specified in the Mission on the implementation and follow-up of development assistance strategies (UD2024/17865) will guide the implementation.

The Strategy covers the period 2025–2029 and provides Sida with a total of SEK 4.3 billion. The Strategy governs the use of funds allocated under appropriation 1.1 Development assistance, under appropriation item 34 Sustainable development in appropriation directions regarding Sida for each financial year, as well as funds allocated under appropriation item 34, Development assistance, regarding administrative costs in the implementation of the Strategy.

Within the reform agenda's prioritised themes 'Improved health for the most vulnerable' and 'Strengthening the freedom and empowerment of women and girls', Sida's activities, within the realm of this Strategy, will contribute to the following objectives:

- strengthened conditions for good health;
- strengthened capacity to prevent and combat health threats; and
- greater enjoyment of sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR).

Sida is responsible for developing the follow-up and measurability of the objectives within the parameters of its operation of the Strategy, for example through the formulation of indicators and/or interim objectives.

### **3. Activities and goal-related analysis**

Well-formulated development cooperation, together with other forms of financing, can underpin countries' own efforts to move from poverty to prosperity and achieve the global Sustainable Development Goals set out in the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement. The goals of the 2030 Agenda can only be achieved through the collaboration of a broad range of participants in both the public and private sectors, as well as within civil society.

Based on the principles of development effectiveness, Sweden's development cooperation should be effective, relevant and catalytic. Through clear and realistic demands, it should strengthen long-term development with broad local ownership in partner countries. It should be possible to carry out activities in an individual country, in a group of countries, in an individual region or globally. Even in globally focused initiatives, governance should ensure a concrete impact, for example, geographically. Initiatives should be able to include countries Sweden has a bilateral country strategy with, as well as those it does not. Activities will be implemented in low- and middle-income countries that are eligible for development assistance according to the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) regulatory framework.

The implementation of the Strategy must be characterised by transparency and show a clear logic where the link between identified needs, operational focus and desired results is clear. Synergies will be explored with relevant activities within the framework of Sweden's bilateral, regional, thematic and global strategies, to contribute to effective development assistance, increased impact and concrete improvements in the countries where the activities are carried out.

Major improvements have been made over recent decades with a long-term positive trend towards improved health, but a number of crises, such as the global pandemic, economic inflation and more, protracted armed conflicts have compromised these developments. For the first time in a generation, extreme poverty as well as maternal mortality increased in some countries during parts of the period. The consequences were particularly severe for people living in poverty, where basic health and health care services, including SRHR, basic vaccination and illness prevention and health promotion efforts were often overlooked.

The consequences of health crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and armed conflicts and climate change, have had a negative impact on vulnerable groups and worsened conditions in terms of economic empowerment, education, health care, as well as human rights, which have disproportionately affected women and girls. This has led to more child marriages and more teenage pregnancies as well as an increase in gender-based violence. More displaced people also lead to greater challenges in terms of access to basic community services, and children in particular have ended up being left out of routine vaccination systems and regular health checks during their upbringing.

Education and other social determinants are crucial for good health and SRHR, which in turn provide the conditions for less poverty, for people to reach their full potential and for the development and wellbeing of a society. Improving the health of society's most vulnerable requires a combination of strengthened health and medical care, strengthened preparedness to combat health threats and strengthened SRHR work. There are close links between health, SRHR, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) and the level of education in reducing maternal and child mortality and generally combating epidemics, slowing the spread of infection and limiting the increase in antibiotic resistance, inter alia. Within the framework of this Strategy and other relevant strategies, Sida's activities must look for synergies between these areas to provide the best possible chance of achieving the goals.

Health and medical care systems, including SRHR services and WASH, are necessary for the prevention and management of health threats. A growing number of fragile and crisis- and conflict-ridden countries with weak health and medical care systems need to address major challenges, including the consequences of migration and forced displacement in which girls and women are especially vulnerable. Sida's activities will take these conditions and needs into account in the implementation of this Strategy.

With a view to achieving the objective of *strengthened conditions for good health*, the activities will contribute to more resilient health care systems, increased access to health and medical care, including disease prevention and health promotion, and health initiatives aimed at the most vulnerable people in partner countries.

The activities will directly contribute to improved contingency planning and the capacity to *prevent and combat health threats*. Activities carried out should include strengthening communicable disease prevention and public health, reducing antibiotic resistance, preventing the spread of infections and resistant bacteria, access to, and responsible use of, antibiotics as well as improving access to clean water, safely-managed and sustainable sanitation and hygiene – especially within health and medical care and schools.

Access to, and knowledge of, high quality services such as comprehensive and accessible sexuality education and information, modern contraceptives and safe and legal abortions, must be promoted for *the increased enjoyment of SRHR* and translated into the countries of operation. Girls' education is one of the most effective ways to directly improve and strengthen SRHR: school

health care, sexuality education and vaccination programmes can be concrete activities. For greater gender equality, it is important that the roles, responsibility and perspectives of men and boys are highlighted in both ongoing and new initiatives. The activities can also include preventative measures, support and care following various types of sexual and gender-based violence, and must prevent harmful practices, such as female genital mutilation and forced sterilisation. By integrating SRHR into health and medical care, access to and the accessibility of these services will increase. As maternal and infant mortality can be largely prevented, the activities will contribute to increased access to adequate care, including greater access to midwives. Access to clean water, hygiene measures, sanitation and effective antibiotics is a prerequisite for safer health care and the provision of SRHR services.

To strengthen the long-term sustainability and effectiveness of development cooperation, the effects of climate change will be taken into consideration throughout, and opportunities to contribute emission reductions and adaptation measures will be considered in all activities. Where relevant, interim objectives related to climate and the environment can be included in initiatives that have primary objectives not related to climate.

The Strategy's activities can help reduce digital gaps and accelerate the digital transition, which can include supporting secure and trusted digital infrastructure, and related skills. Geopolitical interests as well as information and cyber security must be taken into consideration in these cases.

There are opportunities for synergies with Swedish interests and the Swedish resource base regarding trade, export promotion, life science, research, climate transition, access to energy, reduced environmental impact, strengthening of civil society, anti-corruption and humanitarian efforts.

Within the Strategy's theme, Sida will identify opportunities to use the Swedish resource base strategically, appropriately and flexibly, which refers to a broad group of Swedish actors in the public and private sectors, as well as academia and civil society. Where relevant, the Strategy's activities will include the use of Swedish solutions, expertise and services that low- and middle-income countries are in need of, for example through public-private partnerships that can effectively contribute to the objectives of the strategy. Sida will cooperate within Team Sweden where relevant.

Through the consultations that take place between the Government Offices (Ministry for Foreign Affairs) and Sida, information may be provided to Sida about the Government's thematic priorities, including priority countries.