

Ministry for Foreign Affairs

Strategy for Sweden's humanitarian assistance provided through the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency 2025–2029

1. Starting points and added value

This Strategy governs Sweden's humanitarian assistance provided through the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) during the period 2025–2029.

Humanitarian assistance is a prioritised component of Sweden's foreign policy and global engagement. This support is based on global humanitarian needs and the humanitarian principles of impartiality, neutrality, independence and humanity, as well as international humanitarian law. It should be principled and needs-based in accordance with international commitments. There should be a focus on cost-effectiveness, new approaches and innovation.

The humanitarian system is facing serious challenges, with increasing humanitarian needs and a global reduction in funding for humanitarian response. Civilians are being affected by famine and climate-related disasters and increasingly by war and conflict, and more and more people are fleeing their homes. Children are hit particularly hard in these situations. Often, the unwillingness or inability of individual state leaders to take responsibility for their countries' own development and their people's well-being worsens societies' prospects of preventing and managing humanitarian disasters. Democratic backsliding in recent years has contributed to erosion of respect for international humanitarian law and the devastating effects of climate change being left unaddressed. Authoritarian regimes and non-state armed groups are increasingly impeding humanitarian access, which exacerbates crises. Together, this has resulted in humanitarian needs that are growing ever faster. Increased security risks for both civilians and aid workers and high inflation in recent years have also driven up the costs of humanitarian assistance.

The Government's ambition for humanitarian assistance is to globally reduce the expanding gap between needs and funding. Sweden's efforts focus on three overall areas: reducing humanitarian needs, expanding the donor base for humanitarian assistance and strengthening effectiveness in the implementation of humanitarian assistance.

This Strategy should ensure that support reaches the most vulnerable people to save lives, alleviate suffering and uphold human dignity – including in the world’s most forgotten and underfunded humanitarian crises.

Sida should prioritise effective life-saving humanitarian assistance initiatives and strengthened humanitarian diplomacy. This Strategy should help focus humanitarian support on the core humanitarian mandate by urging engagement by other actors and the use of instruments to ensure greater long-term sustainability of initiatives and reduce pressure on the humanitarian system.

2. Direction and objectives of Swedish development assistance

The starting point of this Strategy is the Government’s reform agenda for Swedish development assistance: [Development assistance for a new era – freedom, empowerment and sustainable growth](#) (UD2023/17726). The aim of Sweden’s international development assistance is to create conditions to improve the lives of people living in poverty and oppression. The normative framework for humanitarian assistance consists of international humanitarian law and the humanitarian principles. Humanitarian assistance should save lives, alleviate suffering and uphold the human dignity of people in need who have been or are at risk of being affected by armed conflicts, natural disasters or similar emergencies.

Sida’s activities should contribute to the following objectives:

- saving lives and alleviating suffering through humanitarian assistance and protection for crisis-affected people; and
- greater effectiveness in the implementation of humanitarian assistance.

Sida is responsible for developing the way to monitor and measure the objectives within the framework of its operationalisation of this Strategy, for example by formulating indicators and/or interim objectives. The Strategy’s annual report should describe the results and impact of the support, including at aggregated level. Reporting of results should also include a well-reasoned analysis of how the Strategy has helped counter worsened or new disasters and crises.

The Strategy will apply during the period 1 October 2025–31 December 2029 and concerns Sida’s activities. It governs the use of funds allocated under appropriation 1:1 Development assistance, appropriation item 1 Humanitarian initiatives in appropriation directions concerning Sida for each respective budget year.

3. Activities and objective-related analysis

The Strategy's implementation should help increase the proportion of support being channelled through local civil society organisations and strengthen humanitarian diplomacy, including through the establishment of new partnerships. Focus should be on increasing effectiveness and long-term sustainability in humanitarian response for the most vulnerable groups of people, including in the least accessible areas. Women and children – especially girls, but also people belonging to particularly vulnerable groups – are disproportionately affected by crises, war and conflict, and should therefore be at the centre of implementation. The focus of activities should primarily be at country level.

Implementation should be characterised by transparency and a clear operational logic in which the link between identified needs and the operational direction is clear. In the implementation of activities, Sida should especially consider the following.

Saving lives and alleviating suffering through humanitarian assistance and protection for crisis-affected people

In a world in which humanitarian crises are increasingly complex and urgent, swift, effective and coordinated life-saving initiatives and alleviation of suffering through humanitarian assistance and protection are required for those most severely affected by them. War and conflict, as well as climate change and extreme weather events, cause food insecurity, famine, illness and disease, mass and forced displacement, lack of access to emergency maternal health care, other emergency health care and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), and instability. Given these developments, access to emergency psychosocial support is important. In emergency response, humanitarian assistance needs to contribute to better collaboration between humanitarian actors, stronger local initiatives and activities that build resilience to future crises.

Operations should therefore focus on saving lives, alleviating suffering and upholding human dignity through principled and needs-based humanitarian support to the most vulnerable people in the most urgent humanitarian crises, including in areas of the world that are difficult to access. At the same time, Sida – as part of the humanitarian response – should continue to help reduce the risk of violence, threats and abuse against crisis-affected people, in line with the core humanitarian mandate and commitments in the humanitarian system. In light of the growing gap between humanitarian needs and funding, priorities should be set with the aim of achieving humanitarian response that is as effective and sustainable in the long term as possible.

To strengthen humanitarian response and access at country level, Sida should contribute to humanitarian diplomacy efforts, in dialogue with the Government Offices (Ministry for Foreign Affairs) and missions abroad.

This is particularly important in contexts where the humanitarian system is under immense pressure.

Operations within the framework of this humanitarian Strategy should focus on enhanced cooperation with civil society organisations – with a focus on local organisations – for swifter and more fitting humanitarian activities. This plays an important role in ensuring that emergency humanitarian assistance reaches areas that are difficult to access and particularly vulnerable groups. This especially applies in contexts where major international actors are limited by security-related or logistical obstacles.

Local actors often have more in-depth knowledge about social structures, culture and needs, which allows humanitarian assistance to be provided more quickly, more precisely and more effectively. Through strong local actors in emergency humanitarian response, Sweden helps improve conditions on the ground, which can reduce long-term dependence on development assistance. Sida should work towards the goal of at least 25 per cent of humanitarian funding going directly or via intermediaries to local organisations.

When people have access to food, water, health care and security, they are less likely to need to flee their homes. Humanitarian assistance saves lives and alleviates suffering and can thus help improve living conditions, which also reduces the driving forces of irregular migration. Given the large number of displaced people in the world (including those who are forcibly displaced), operations should strive to address their immediate needs close to their homes.

Greater effectiveness in the implementation of humanitarian assistance

The humanitarian system is under immense pressure. Lack of respect for international humanitarian law, the humanitarian principles, human rights and freedoms, and other frameworks for people's protection contributes to human suffering and increased humanitarian needs. It also undermines the effectiveness of the existing humanitarian system.

Operations should therefore help ensure a functioning and effective humanitarian system by:

- supporting activities in the field that can help strengthen respect for, and compliance with, international humanitarian law and other legal frameworks to protect crisis-affected populations;
- working through risk-informed needs assessments that form the basis for people with the most urgent needs and those who are particularly vulnerable gaining access to life-saving humanitarian assistance and protection;

- strengthening the global humanitarian system's capacity to generate comparable needs assessments and advance principled and transparent prioritisation in the humanitarian system;
- ensuring quality in humanitarian support through early disbursements of flexible and multi-year funding to help humanitarian actors be able to swiftly adapt activities to respond to increasing humanitarian needs and work in challenging environments;
- identifying and promoting the use of innovative methods and technological solutions to enhance the effectiveness of the humanitarian system; and
- developing the approach on anticipatory action within the humanitarian mandate's responsibility to save lives.

Synergies with development cooperation

Humanitarian assistance should focus on the core humanitarian mandate.

In protracted humanitarian crises, collaboration and synergies between humanitarian assistance, development cooperation and, when applicable, peacebuilding efforts needs to continue to be strengthened. Where relevant, consideration should be given to climate and environmental impact.

To reduce humanitarian needs and pressure on the humanitarian system, the reform agenda for Swedish development assistance – [Development assistance for a new era – freedom, empowerment and sustainable growth](#) – underscores the importance of pushing for:

- i) development actors, including the World Bank and regional development banks, to further strengthen their presence and engagement and maintain basic public services in fragile states and conflict areas where humanitarian crises are ongoing; and
- ii) building resilience, especially in protracted humanitarian crises, through development funding of climate adaptation in vulnerable communities.

Anticipatory action should also include measures to build capacity and reduce and prevent crises, such as early warning systems, risk reduction and disaster preparedness through development funding.

Long-term initiatives in development assistance build resilience, stability and opportunities through democracy and growth. They create prospects for people to build a future in their countries of origin.

Cooperation partners and collaboration

There should be a focus on transparency, effectiveness and new approaches when choosing partners and establishing new partnership models and technical tools for operations. It is important that partner organisations have good knowledge of the contexts in which they work.

Cooperation partners should respect democratic values and work in a way that promotes international law, including human rights and freedoms and international humanitarian law, and the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence. Cooperation partners should also have appropriate systems for preventing and countering sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment. Sida should ensure that civil society organisations and other partners that receive support do not have links to violent ideologies, extremism or Islamism. In addition, Sida should ensure that support does not go to activities that counteract the rules-based international order or Swedish interests. If there is doubt in any of these respects, a precautionary principle should be applied and other partners should be sought out.

Sida should simplify and clarify its guidelines and requirements, with the objective of facilitating the ability of civil society organisations and local actors to implement effective and sustainable humanitarian response in the field. Sida should report on the proportion of support that has reached local and national organisations and help achieve international goals for localisation.

In addition to the two formal consultations that will be held in the first and second half of the year between the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Sida, operations should be monitored within the framework of this Strategy through ongoing strategic dialogue. This should aim to ensure exchange of information and coherence in Sweden's action in the humanitarian sphere.