



Regeringen

**Annex to II:1 at Government meeting
of 1 February 2024**

Ministry for Foreign Affairs

**Strategy for Sweden's global development cooperation
activities in the areas of human rights and freedoms,
democracy and the rule of law 2024–2028**

1. Direction

The objective of Sweden's international development assistance is to create preconditions for better living conditions for people living in poverty and under oppression. Internationally agreed principles on aid and development effectiveness will be applied.

The strategy will apply in 2024–2028 and govern the use of funds under appropriation item 1:13 in the appropriation directions for Sida for each budget year, and funds under appropriation item 1:1.4 'Development Cooperation' and appropriation item 1:4.1 concerning administrative costs associated with implementation of the strategy in the appropriation directions for the Folke Bernadotte Academy (FBA) for each budget year.

In light of global democratic backsliding and serious global events, the overall objective of the strategy is to globally contribute to free, secure, fair, and inclusive democratic societies free from oppression and built on respect for human rights and freedoms and the rule of law.

The objectives in the strategy aim to strengthen and protect global norms and processes, independent institutions and systems, organisations, actors, and networks that work for human rights and freedoms, democracy and the rule of law, and people who are subjected to discrimination and oppression. As repression increases, there is a need to focus more clearly on promoting people's freedom, increased protection and strengthened resilience, which permeates the formulation of objectives. The strategy aims to utilise the added value that Sweden can contribute to this work.

Sida's activities will contribute to the following objectives.

Freedoms

- Enhanced global, regional, and national systems and institutions that safeguard and promote human rights and freedoms for everyone.
- Increased respect for, and protection and realisation of, human rights and freedoms, with a focus on people subjected to violence, discrimination, persecution and oppression, not least defenders of human rights and democracy, women and girls, children and young

people, people belonging to religious minorities, people with disabilities and LGBTIQ people.

Inclusive and democratic societies

- Strong and sustainable democracies, including strengthened conditions for free and fair elections, legally certain and effective institutions and strengthened democracy movements.
- Strengthened defence of freedom of expression, free and independent media, and an inclusive, open, free, and secure internet where human rights and freedoms are respected, and increased security for independent journalists and media workers.

Due process and accountability

- Strengthened conditions for due process, accountability and freedom from corruption, and increased protection of actors in the judicial system.

The activities of the Folke Bernadotte Academy (FBA) will contribute to the following objectives.

- Strong and sustainable democracies, including strengthened conditions for free and fair elections, legally certain and effective institutions, and strengthened democracy movements.

2. Context

Respect for democracy and the rule of law is key to the enjoyment of human rights and freedoms. Democracy is crucial for freedom, peace, and security, and to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Free elections form the basis of democracy. Development cooperation plays an important role in efforts to counter democratic backsliding in many parts of the world. Sweden must be a strong voice and actor for democracy, human rights and freedoms, and the rule of law so as to increase people's freedom and combat oppression.

Our era is marked by violence, conflict, coups, and security policy changes. Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine has political, economic, and

humanitarian consequences far beyond Ukraine. Through its actions, Russia is seeking to change the international rules-based world order. Repression is on the rise, while people's freedom is decreasing in our neighbourhood. Moreover, we are witnessing global democratic backsliding and diminished respect for human rights and freedoms, gender equality and the rule of law, a global education crisis, increased refugee flows, consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, economic downturn, and ongoing and increasing environmental and climate crises. The number of armed conflicts is at a historically high level. This has a devastating impact on people who live in poverty and under oppression, both in the short and long term, and particularly affects persons who are already in vulnerable situations. Today, more than 700 million people are living in extreme poverty, and many more live in multidimensional poverty where women and girls, LGBTIQ people and persons with disabilities often are particularly vulnerable.

Democracy, free, accessible, and fair elections in multi-party systems, freedom of expression and assembly, knowledge and education, and open, free, and pluralistic civil societies built as much as possible on different people's circumstances and needs are key in efforts to create sustainable societies, reduce poverty, prevent armed conflicts, and contribute to promoting peace and peacebuilding. They are also crucial to ensuring inclusive societies, maintaining accountability systems, and combatting corruption.

Respect for, and protection of, all human rights and freedoms, democracy and the rule of law are basic conditions for economic, social, and environmentally sustainable, peaceful, fair, and gender-equal development.

International systems for human rights and freedoms developed to promote, safeguard, and defend rights and freedoms are increasingly subjected to serious attempts to undermine them. Freedom of expression is a cornerstone of democratic systems and crucial to people's ability to fully enjoy their human rights and freedoms. A functioning democracy requires freedom of expression, independent media, as well as an open, free, and secure internet. Moreover, freedom of religion and belief, and the rights of persons belonging to religious minorities are at the core of an open society and need to be safeguarded. However, authoritarian states continue to seriously limit freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, and freedom of association, and impede the efforts of civil society and the democratic opposition,

including human rights defenders and democracy defenders, journalists, cultural practitioners, and free and independent media. Threats and reprisals, physical attacks, arbitrary detentions, and lethal force are becoming increasingly commonplace for human rights defenders and democracy defenders. Human rights defenders in particularly vulnerable situations include persons who defend the human rights and freedoms of women, LGBTIQ persons, persons with disabilities, environmental rights defenders and indigenous peoples.

Digital development brings opportunities, but also challenges, for the protection of human rights, and freedoms, and democracy. These challenges include malign information influence, misleading information, and cyber threats.

In order for women, girls, children, and young people, LGBTIQ persons and persons with disabilities to fully enjoy their human rights and freedoms, poverty and oppression need to be countered. Children and young people need to enjoy their human rights and freedoms and take part in democratic processes and decisions that concern their future. Much of this is called into question and threatened in many parts of the world. Sexual and gender-based violence against women, girls, persons with disabilities and LGBTIQ persons continues, and impunity is widespread. Human trafficking is a grave violation of human rights and freedoms, and human trafficking for sexual purposes is a serious form of sexual and gender-based violence. Violence against children is also a major global problem.

3. Activities

Sida and the FBA will carry out, monitor, and report on activities in accordance with the Government's guidelines for Swedish development cooperation and humanitarian assistance strategies (UD2017/21053). The guidelines state that activities will be actively directed towards achieving objectives and that actual performance will be monitored based on those objectives. The annual strategy report will be comprehensive and include an account, analysis, and assessment of the results of the activities in relation to the stated objectives. Performance information will be used for decision-making, learning and method development, and for ensuring transparency towards the general public. Monitoring will produce reliable and useful performance information in both the short and long term by using both qualitative and quantitative information where possible. Performance

monitoring based on current conditions will establish whether activities have made a difference, in what way and for whom. Statistics will be disaggregated by sex and age where possible.

This strategy contributes to sustainable development based on the 2030 Agenda and the financing for development commitments in the Addis Ababa Action Agenda.

Internationally agreed principles on aid and development effectiveness will be applied. Activities that provide global added value may be included during implementation. The same applies to activities that may be attributed to a single region or country. Global contributions will consist of support to help prioritised Swedish issues gain traction and influence international normative policy development in the strategy areas. Support may be given to organisations, networks or other actors that set standards and play a key role in issues prioritised by Sweden. In exceptional cases, contributions can be made to cooperation partners/actors in countries in the EU neighbourhood that are not receiving assistance in accordance with the OECD DAC when the aim is to contribute to peaceful and democratic development in the EU's eastern neighbourhood. In addition, work with actors in exile from their countries of origin may be supported. Issues where there is a considerable back-lash against globally established norms, and where Sweden represents fundamental values not sufficiently emphasised by other actors in international cooperation, should be considered.

This strategy will focus on initiatives that, in line with the Government's priorities, aim to achieve results to strengthen human rights and freedoms, democracy and the rule of law. Funding includes support within the framework of both multilateral and civil society actors. Focus will be on having a local impact in situations where there is a heightened need to protect human rights defenders, journalists, and persons in the judicial system. The initiatives that are chosen will complement the initiatives conducted within the framework of other strategies. This strategy may include local initiatives in situations where there is a heightened need for support to safeguard human rights defenders, journalists, and actors of the judicial system where there is a lack of opportunities within the framework of bilateral or regional strategies.

Activities will contribute to strengthening and defending international normative systems, institutions and mechanisms for human rights and freedoms, democracy, and the rule of law in all environments.

Protecting human rights and democracy defenders will be a key part of the focus of activities. Support to protect human rights defenders, democracy defenders, and independent journalists will be particularly prioritised, including in digital environments, and significantly increase during the strategy period. Priority will also be given to support that promotes religious freedom or belief, including the right to freedom from religion, as well as secular legislation and application of the law, and the rights of persons belonging to religious minorities – especially Christians, who currently constitute a particularly persecuted religious group in the world.

Support to pro-democracy movements, including networks and other smaller formalised groups in civil society, will be prioritised. The activities should enable organisations and actors that stand up for human rights and freedoms, democracy, and the rule of law to work democratically, securely, strategically and with a long-term perspective. Strategic support to change agents may be included in activities through support to culture and cultural actors. Activities to create conditions for free, fair, and accessible elections will also be promoted, including local election monitoring, and in war, conflict, and post-conflict environments. The support may include initiatives that span the whole electoral cycle. State and non-state actors that contribute to enabling free, fair, and accessible elections may be supported to the extent that the context allows.

Efforts to promote democracy that contribute to giving all persons, not least women and young persons, the opportunity to take part in political processes in a meaningful way, and the right to freely make their voices heard and have their views taken into account, may be considered. The same applies to safeguarding freedom of association and freedom of assembly, and promoting a vibrant and pluralistic civil society.

Support should be given to initiatives that contribute to ensuring that freedom of expression such as artistic freedom is safeguarded, including in digital environments. The conditions for, and protection and security of, independent journalists and other media workers, including female journalists and cultural actors, should be acknowledged, and strengthened.

An open, free, and secure internet is essential. The digital divide needs to be reduced and more people need to be able to utilise the possibilities of digital transformation and its positive effects, not least women, and girls. The development and application of secure digital administration is crucial. Norms and principles of human rights and freedoms, democracy, and the rule of law need to guide the development of future inclusive digital administration. Support in the digital area always needs to be accompanied by a cyber security perspective, so as to avoid creating new vulnerabilities.

Division of power and an independent judiciary are fundamental to democratic resilience, accountability, and the fight against corruption. Activities that strengthen institutions with the aim of strengthening the rule of law throughout the judicial chain need to be promoted, as do initiatives to combat corruption. Anti-corruption work is also key to promoting sustainable economic growth and investments.

Safeguarding actors of the judicial system, such as prosecutors, judges, and lawyers, is a prerequisite for due process, an independent judiciary, and the fight against corruption, and must therefore be an important part of the activities. All persons', not least women's and girls', access to justice and accountability is crucial. It is important to combat impunity for perpetrators.

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

A human rights-based approach should permeate all activities, including planning, implementation, results, and follow-up, and contribute to strengthening the capacity of those bearing responsibility, i.e. states, to fulfil their obligations. It should also enable rights holders, i.e. individuals, to be aware of and demand their rights.

Activities may contribute to giving people living in poverty and under oppression more opportunities to take part in, and contribute to, processes, programmes and decisions that relate to their situation in a meaningful way. Organisations whose primary aim is to promote democracy and human rights and freedoms are particularly prioritised.

Initiatives should be adapted to local conditions, support local ownership, and strengthen local capacity as much as possible.

Synergies will be sought between the strategy areas and with activities within the framework of other relevant strategies for Sweden's development cooperation and humanitarian assistance. Cooperation between Sida and the FBA will be promoted. Sweden will promote coherent and effective development and aid coordination, not least with the EU as a key development policy actor and with the multilateral system. Opportunities for collaboration with other donors and actors will therefore be sought. Based on the 'Team Europe' approach, Sweden will work toward effective implementation of EU development cooperation.