

Strategy for Sweden's reform cooperation with the Western Balkans and Turkey for 2021– 2027



1. Direction

The objective of Sweden's international development cooperation is to create conditions for improving the lives of people living in poverty and oppression. Development cooperation will be based on the principles of aid and development effectiveness, the 2030 Agenda, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, and the Paris Agreement.

The strategy for Sweden's reform cooperation with the Western Balkans and Turkey applies between 2021 and 2027 and provides a total of SEK 5.6 billion. Sida's activities in the Western Balkans¹ comprise approximately SEK 4.9 billion, and in Turkey up to SEK 525 million². The Swedish Institute's (SI) activities in the Western Balkans comprise SEK 90 million and in Turkey SEK 50 million. Activities at the Swedish Consulate-General in Istanbul (GKI) comprise SEK 63 million. The Folke Bernadotte Academy's (FBA) activities comprise SEK 56 million.

The strategy governs the use of funds allocated under appropriation item 23 in the appropriation directions for Sida for each fiscal year, funds allocated under appropriation item 21 in the appropriation directions for the SI for each fiscal year, funds allocated under appropriation item 1:1.4 'Development assistance' and 1.4.1 'Folke Bernadotte Academy' concerning administrative costs associated with implementation of the strategy in the appropriation directions for the FBA for each fiscal year, and for the GKI funds allocated under appropriation item 29.6 in the appropriation directions concerning appropriation 1:1 'Development assistance' for each fiscal year.

The Western Balkans

Sida's and the SI's activities will contribute to the following objectives:

Human rights, democracy, the rule of law and gender equality

- Better democratic governance and greater respect for human rights and the rule of law
- Improved conditions for accountability, increased transparency and reduced corruption
- Better prospects for a gender-equal society

¹ Cooperation with the Western Balkans covers Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia. In Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia and Serbia, both bilateral and regional initiatives should be possible. In Montenegro, there should be scope for regional initiatives.

² The distribution of funds in the strategy are to reflect an analysis of the countries' development in line with the strategy objectives.

Sida's and the FBA's activities will contribute to:

Peaceful and inclusive societies

- Better conditions for inclusive reconciliation processes and conflict and violence prevention efforts

Sida's activities will also contribute to the following objectives:

Environmentally and climate-resilient sustainable development and sustainable use of natural resources

- Reduced environmental and climate impact, and sustainable management and use of natural resources
- Increased resilience to climate change and improved conditions for protection, preservation and restoration of biodiversity and ecosystems

Inclusive economic development

- Improved opportunities for productive employment with decent working conditions
- Better conditions for open economies integrated into regional, EU and international value chains and markets

Turkey

Sida's, the SI's and the GKI's activities will contribute to the following objectives:

Human rights, democracy, the rule of law and gender equality

- Greater respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law
- Better prospects for a gender-equal society

2. Context

Developments in the EU's neighbourhood are of major importance to Sweden and the EU. It is in Sweden's interests to continue to cooperate with the countries of the Western Balkans and Turkey to promote democracy by focusing on human rights, the rule of law and gender equality.

The Western Balkans

Developments in the Western Balkans show a positive trend in many areas, but also continued political and economic challenges. The countries are pursuing important reform efforts, but the pace is uneven and further action is needed.

The countries of the Western Balkans are candidate countries or potential candidate countries for EU membership. Closer ties with the EU require extensive reforms and are a central driving force for development in the region. Focus is on strengthening democracy, the rule of law, respect for human rights, gender equality and establishing a functioning market economy.

In several of the countries, reform efforts are being hampered by a polarised political environment and widespread corruption. In some of the countries, the democratic space is shrinking and the opportunities for media and civil society to operate freely are being curtailed. Business interests and political power are often intertwined, which contributes to people's distrust of public institutions and of those in positions of power. Weak institutions provide a fertile ground for organised crime. Migration brings both challenges and opportunities for host societies in the region.

Better legislation has contributed to progress in strengthening gender equality, but major challenges remain with respect to implementation. Women's political and economic underrepresentation, the prevalence of gender-based violence and the lack of sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) are particularly challenging issues.

The region also faces major environmental challenges. These include energy challenges, the impact of climate change on the region, extensive pollution and the lack of sustainable management of natural resources. The EU's Green Agenda for the Western Balkans shows a high level of ambition to contribute to reducing environmental pollution, conserving biodiversity and focusing to a greater extent on a resource-efficient circular economy, sustainable food chains and transition from fossil-based production to renewable systems.

The countries are at different stages and at different levels of inclusive economic development, but income poverty is consistently high. The large informal sector in the economy that persist in many partner countries is an

obstacle to development. Economic growth has deteriorated in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and unemployment has risen, particularly among young people. Women are unproportionally affected by unemployment. These factors are expected to further accelerate emigration of young and educated people from the region.

The countries of the Western Balkans are still suffering from the effects of the war in the 1990s and the collapse of Yugoslavia. Unresolved conflicts and ethnic tensions in and between the countries hamper reform efforts. The region's inhabitants are affected by lack of security, including high levels of violence. There is therefore a need for strengthened regional cooperation and improved capacity for conflict resolution and conflict prevention, including confidence-building efforts.

Increasing influence from external actors is also challenging democratic development in the region. Disinformation has become more common and undermines democracy and reform efforts, and cooperation with the EU.

Turkey

In recent years, Turkey has distanced itself from the EU and has pursued an increasingly assertive foreign policy in its neighbourhood. At the same time, the shrinking of democratic space has continued and respect for human rights, the rule of law and gender equality have deteriorated.

There are major deficiencies regarding legal certainty and the independence of the judicial system. Investigative functions and functions to ensure a balance of power have been eroded. Freedom of expression and the independence of the media are severely curtailed, and freedom of association has been restricted, for example through arrests. Government control of academia has increased.

The situation is particularly serious for opposition politicians, journalists, people who belong to minorities, human rights defenders, trade union representatives and LGBTIQ people. Negative developments also entail difficulties for civil society organisations to operate.

The shrinking democratic space has also led to a deterioration in respect for women's full enjoyment of human rights. Gender equality efforts have been undermined by the country's withdrawal from the Council of Europe

Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention).

There are challenges when it comes to safeguarding the rights of refugees and migrants and ensuring sustainable integration and inclusion of the large number of refugees in Turkey.

3. Activities

Sida, the SI, the FBA and the GKI will carry out, monitor and report on results of the activities in accordance with the Government's guidelines for strategies in Swedish development cooperation and humanitarian assistance (UD2017/21053). The guidelines state that activities are to be actively directed towards achieving the objectives and that the actual results are to be monitored based on those objectives. The annual strategy reports are to be comprehensive and include a summary, analysis and assessment of the results of the activities in relation to stated objectives. Information about the results will be used for decision-making, learning and accountability, and for ensuring transparency towards the public. Monitoring will produce reliable and useful information about results in both the short and long term by using both qualitative and quantitative information where possible. Strategy reports will be submitted collectively for Sida's and the GKI's activities. Sida will have responsibility for coordinating these reports. The SI and the FBA will submit separate reports.

Sweden's strategy-based reform cooperation will also contribute to sustainable development based on the 2030 Agenda, the financing for development commitments in the Addis Ababa Action Agenda and the Paris Agreement. The activities' contributions are relevant to all of the 2030 Agenda's sustainable development goals (SDGs). Strategy reports to the Government will also include references to how activities contribute to implementation of the 2030 Agenda in relation to the strategy's priorities. Sweden's total development cooperation will contribute to poverty reduction, better conditions for democratic development and respect for human rights.

The Western Balkans

Activities will create better conditions for democratic and inclusive development. As a starting point, Sweden's development assistance should contribute to closer ties between these countries and the EU and complement EU-activities focusing on fundamental reforms. Priority will be

given to promoting efficient implementation of such reforms that are of benefit to the inhabitants of the partner countries and thus encourage continued reform efforts.

Activities will contribute to building and strengthening transparent, responsible, independent and more efficient public administration at national and local level. Better conditions to combat corruption and organised crime, including prevention, will be promoted. Support to capacity-enhancing activities for migration reception in line with EU standards and measures for reducing remittance costs can be explored.

Support to civil society in creating inclusive dialogue, promoting respect for democracy and contributing to increased trust in society will be strengthened, including better conditions for accountability and sustainable cooperation between a broad range of agents of change. Priority will be given to helping build resilience to anti-democratic influences, not least through support for freedom of expression and a free and independent media.

In the area of gender equality, activities will contribute to reducing gender discrimination, strengthening women's economic empowerment and rights, and supporting women human rights defenders, increasing women's influence and participation in political processes, and increased access to and respect for SRHR. This involves efforts to combat sexual and gender-based violence and changed social norms.

Activities will help increase the opportunities for development that are environmentally and climatically sustainable, including a sustainable use of natural resources. This includes support for a broader green transition through measures in the areas of renewable energy, emissions reductions, conservation of biodiversity and transitioning to a circular resource-efficient economy, and can include support to sustainable agriculture, more sustainable public services in the areas of water, sanitation, energy efficiency, and waste and chemicals management.

In the area of inclusive economic development, activities will help develop opportunities for employment with decent working conditions. Priority will be given to marginalised groups. Better conditions for free, fair, sustainable and inclusive trade and for integrating the partner countries' economies in regional and international value chains and markets, including the EU's, will

be promoted. The potential in increased intra-regional economic cooperation should be realised.

In the area of peaceful and inclusive societies, activities will mutually reinforce actions in the areas of democracy, human rights, the rule of law and gender equality. Addressing root causes of conflicts, contributing to conflict resolution and increasing resilience to conflict will be in focus. Increased influence and participation of women, young people and discriminated groups in conflict resolution, reconciliation, decision-making and transitional justice will be promoted. Priority will be given to reducing levels of violence, including gender-based violence. Opportunities to support efforts to reduce access to arms in society should be harnessed. Implementing agencies will coordinate their activities allowing these to efficiently contribute with their individual field of expertise. The FBA's activities should primarily focus on conflict resolution, conflict prevention and confidence-building efforts by creating better conditions for reconciliation and a less polarised society. Activities can be conducted with a strengthened bilateral focus in one or more of the partner countries.

Turkey

The overall objective of activities will be to promote an open and Europe-oriented democratic society. Actions will focus on supporting and safeguarding an independent and pluralistic civil society, freedom of expression and a free and independent media.

Democracy advocates will be supported with the aim of promoting democracy, social dialogue and cohesion. Supporting human rights defenders and promoting democratic participation among young people are particularly important. Focus will be on the strengthening the capacity to conduct dialogues, to scrutinise those holding political power, pursue advocacy efforts and contribute to accountability. In order to strengthen the rule of law, the support will be aimed at ensuring access to justice, equality before the law, legal protection for human rights and safeguarding the principle of non-discrimination. This also applies to refugees and migrants.

In the area of gender equality, activities should particularly focus on reducing gender discrimination, strengthening women's economic empowerment and rights and supporting women human rights defenders, increasing women's influence and participation in political processes, and increased access to, and respect for, SRHR. This involves efforts to combat sexual and gender-

based violence and changed social norms. Consideration will be given to the situation of women and girls among refugees and migrants.

Activities will involve a broad range of agents of change. The GKI's activities and role as a meeting place and platform for civil society actors are of great importance. The local level is of particular interest. Cooperation with public institutions and their representatives should only take place in exceptional cases and if this clearly contributes to promoting human rights, democracy, the rule of law and gender equality.

Horizontally

Sweden's development cooperation will be appropriate and effective. Sida, the SI, the FBA and the GKI will ensure a holistic approach to Sweden's total support and the support's complementarity and added value in relation to the countries' reform efforts in line with an EU perspective. Regional initiatives can be implemented or supported when they contribute to effective implementation of the strategy. The potential of digital transformation and innovation will be harnessed as a tool for achieving the objectives.

The expertise of each implementing agency will shape their contribution to implementation of the strategy objectives, cooperation between them and with the partner countries. Synergies will be sought between the strategy objectives and with activities within the framework of other relevant strategies for Sweden's development cooperation and humanitarian aid. Implementing agencies will also promote efficient coordination among donors through active coordination and cooperation with the EU and with other relevant multilateral actors.

When implementing the strategy, the implementing agencies will work to build broader, more self-sustaining and long-term relations between Sweden and the partner countries. This also includes opportunities to engage the Swedish resource base, including civil society and other agents of change such as academic institutions and the business sector. The SI's activities will encourage establishing people-to-people contacts that lead to increased trust and cooperation between Swedish actors and actors in the region. Priority will be given to providing agents of change with an increased understanding of, and opportunities to help achieve, the strategy objectives. Inter-agency cooperation will be used to contribute to institution-building and capacity development. The strategic approach to secondments should be developed.

Implementing agencies will conduct an active strategic communication linked to reform efforts to create legitimacy for activities and counter disinformation.