

# Strategy for Sweden's regional development cooperation with Asia and the Pacific Region in 2022–2026



**Government Offices of Sweden**  
Ministry for Foreign Affairs

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## 1. Strategic objectives

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

The strategy applies for the period 2022–2026 and comprises a total volume of SEK 2.75 billion, of which a maximum of SEK 600 million is intended for bilateral initiatives in Cambodia.

The strategy governs the use of funds under appropriation item 6 in the appropriation directions for the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) for each budget year.

Activities will contribute to the following objectives.

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

- Improved conditions for democracy and increased respect for human rights and the rule of law
- Greater gender equality, including reduced gender-based violence and greater economic empowerment for women
- Improved capacity to deal with migration in a way that safeguards the rights of refugees, internally displaced persons and migrants, and contributes to development.

### **Environmentally and climate-resilient sustainable management of ecosystems and biodiversity, and sustainable use of natural resources**

- Improved conditions for sustainable management and sustainable use of natural resources, with a focus on increased protection, conservation and restoration of biodiversity and its ecosystem services
- Improved adaptability and strengthened resilience to climate change and environmental and natural disasters
- Reduced climate impact, with a focus on increased access to renewable energy and higher energy efficiency

## **Human rights, democracy and the rule of law in Cambodia**

- Strengthened democracy and increased respect for human rights and the rule of law in Cambodia
- Improved conditions for accountability, increased transparency, increased gender equality and reduced corruption in Cambodia.

## **2. Regional context**

The rapid economic development of Asia and the Pacific Region has contributed to significantly reducing the proportion of the population living in poverty. At the same time, the prospects of Asia or the Pacific Region reaching the targets of the 2030 Agenda are slim. Many places still suffer severe and widespread poverty, with a large number of people living in hunger. Income disparities and other expressions of inequality have increased substantially. Increased trade has contributed to fighting poverty in the region, but major challenges must be overcome to make trade free, fair and sustainable. The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have exacerbated the situation for already vulnerable people, particularly women and girls.

Democratic development and respect for human rights and the rule of law have regressed in a number of cases. Space for the media and civil society to operate freely has shrunk markedly. This is evident not least in Afghanistan and Myanmar. This description also applies to Cambodia, whose situation demands particular attention. In addition, corruption is widespread in parts of the region, which contributes to a lack of legal certainty. Major challenges to gender equality exist in the region. Women's economic empowerment is central to achieving gender equality. Violence against women and girls is widespread.

Environmental and climate-related developments in the region have been negative in many ways, with more and increasingly severe natural disasters, and a serious decline in biodiversity in oceans and on land, for example. Extensive marine plastic pollution and large-scale and expanding chemical production are also major challenges. The links between environmentally and climate-resilient sustainable development and human rights, democracy and the rule of law in the region are clear – especially for people in vulnerable situations and people living in poverty.

Migration contributes to the region's development through remittances and increased knowledge exchange, but irregular migration and forced

displacement also have negative consequences. For example, the refugee situations in Myanmar and Afghanistan have led to millions of refugees and displaced people in neighbouring countries. This has given rise to challenges in a number of the strategy's areas.

### **3. Activities**

Sida 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 must be actively directed towards achieving the objectives and that actual performance must 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 accountability, 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 will primarily establish whether activities have made a difference, in what way and for whom. Based on the existing conditions, monitoring will determine the extent to which development cooperation has made a difference.

Sweden's development cooperation contributes 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' contribution will be particularly relevant to the following sustainable development goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda: 1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15 and 16. 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 development cooperation as a whole will contribute to poverty reduction in the region, better conditions for democratic development and respect for human rights.

The strategy comprises development cooperation in all of Asia and the Pacific Region. This includes small Pacific island states, with a special focus on environmental and climate-related activities, and strengthened resilience to negative changes and natural disasters.

The focus will be on regional collaboration and regional initiatives for managing cross-border problems. As an exception, initiatives solely in Cambodia will be possible. Initiatives can also be implemented for major

challenges that are common to many of the countries of the region but are not necessarily cross-border. Activities will take account of any intergovernmental organisations that are considered relevant. Cooperation with a range of actors from civil society and the research community is a central part of this. Cooperation with cultural actors can also be included. In certain contexts, direct cooperation with state actors can entail certain risks and should thus only take place following a thorough risk assessment.

Activities will contribute to stronger democracy, increased respect for human rights and the rule of law, and gender equality in the region in line with regional and international frameworks. This includes support to improve opportunities for citizens to influence political processes, demand accountability and have their human rights safeguarded. Increased security and safety for journalists and human rights defenders, including trade union rights, and the environment are especially important. Activities will contribute to increased accountability, increased transparency and reduced corruption. Public access to reliable information and strengthened rule of law are central. Moreover, activities will contribute to strengthening regional cooperation to increase and strengthen gender equality and women's economic empowerment. Activities will also contribute to increased knowledge of, access to and respect for sexual and reproductive health and rights, and reduced gender-based violence. Particular attention should be paid to the internet and social media throughout the region.

Activities will contribute to development with low climate impact, promotion of fossil-free energy and sustainable use of natural resources. Activities will contribute to increased knowledge and consideration of the environment and climate change, and their importance to poverty reduction and gender equality with inclusive sustainable economic development, including sustainable trade. The participation of women in decision-making processes related to the environment, climate change and sustainable use of natural resources will be prioritised, along with the participation of young people and indigenous peoples. Activities will contribute to creating conditions for regional cooperation on the use and management of cross-border natural resources, and a toxin-free circular economy. Priority will be given to support for conservation and enhancement of biodiversity and ecosystems, and sustainable chemical and waste management in line with undertakings linked to relevant conventions. An important premise for this work will be seeking to address the driving forces behind the loss of biodiversity and ecosystems. Particular focus will be given to coastal and marine environments, forests, water and sustainable land and water use. The

importance of food security will be given particular attention. Activities in this area will also be aimed at making it possible to contribute to mobilisation of environmental and climate finance through innovative partnerships. A rights-based approach focused on gender equality and a conflict perspective will inform all activities.

The two areas mentioned first are mutually reinforcing. An integrated approach between the two will be sought to the greatest possible extent. Activities will thus be conducted in a manner that strengthens the ability of regional actors to integrate an environmental and climate perspective into programmes related to human rights, democracy, the rule of law and gender equality, and that strengthen regional actors' efforts to promote increased respect for human rights and the rule of law, greater opportunities for democratic participation and gender mainstreaming in programmes for the environment, climate change and natural resources. Where deemed appropriate, initiatives that are not aimed at integration between these two areas are also possible.

Support for human rights, democracy and the rule of law in Cambodia will be pursued with non-state actors and a particular focus on civil society. Women's economic empowerment and political participation will be improved. An important point of reference is to support positive change processes. Cooperation with the multilateral system and the EU will be promoted. It is especially important to strengthen right-holder knowledge of human rights, democracy and the rule of law. Support for freedom of expression, freedom of opinion and the right to information, and freedom of association will be promoted with the aim of providing opportunities to demand accountability, primarily through civil society but to a certain extent also via other change actors – such as non-state institutions for accountability – for an open and sustainable society. Inclusive social dialogue in the labour market can contribute to reducing the level of conflict in society and will thus be supported where appropriate. Initiatives at local level may be particularly appropriate – this also applies in areas such as natural resource management.

Sweden's development cooperation will be relevant and effective. Activities within and between areas of the strategy will strive for an integrated approach and synergies will be sought with other strategies that are relevant to the development context. Sweden will strive for coherent and effective development and aid coordination. Opportunities for collaboration and

synergies with others will thus be sought, not least with the EU (based on the ‘Team Europe’ approach) and the multilateral system.

A particular focus on young people and important change actors in other age groups will be applied in all areas. Women and girls are an especially important group. Activities will utilise migration’s positive effects on development and contribute to sustainable solutions for both refugees and host societies by strengthening regional initiatives that promote this and are in line with the global frameworks for migration and refugees.

Regional development cooperation will, where possible, promote and build broader relations between Sweden and the region. The Swedish resource base will be utilised. Opportunities will be sought to mobilise the business sector’s expertise and resources, and trade union organisations to achieve productive employment with decent working conditions. The potential for digitalisation and innovation within regional development cooperation will be utilised in particular.