



Ministry for Foreign Affairs

## **Strategy for Sweden's development cooperation with Iraq 2022–2026**

### **1. Strategic objectives**

The objective of Sweden's international development cooperation is to create conditions to improve the lives of people living in poverty and oppression. Sweden's 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 in 2022–2026 and provides the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) with a total of SEK 1.2 billion and the Folke Bernadotte Academy (FBA) with SEK 45 million.

The strategy governs the use of funds allocated under appropriation 1:1 Development assistance, item 17 Middle East and North Africa in the appropriation directions for Sida for each budget year, and funds allocated under item 1:1 Development assistance, item 4, and appropriation 1:4 Folke Bernadotte Academy in the appropriation directions for the FBA for each budget year.

### **Peaceful and inclusive societies**

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

- Improved conditions for sustainable peace, social cohesion and inclusive governance.

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

- Improved and equal access to basic services.
- Sustainable solutions for refugees, internally displaced persons and host communities, and strengthened conditions for safe, orderly and regular migration, including return and reintegration in a way that contributes to development.

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

- Strengthened respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law, including reduced corruption.
- Increased gender equality and respect for women's and girls' full enjoyment of their human rights.

### **Environment, climate and sustainable development**

- Improved adaptability and resilience to climate change, including protection of ecosystems.
- Sustainable development and a green transition, including through the sustainable use of natural resources and increased access to renewable energy.

## **2. Country context**

Iraq faces extensive challenges. The country is in a post-conflict phase with residual risk for newly emerging conflicts. The security situation is unstable and the fight against Daesh remains a major challenge. The situation is heavily influenced by decades of armed conflict, deep-seated sectarian conflicts, and regional and geopolitical tensions. To build sustainable peace, the root causes of the conflicts must be addressed. Social, political and economic reforms are necessary to improve governance, strengthen social cohesion, combat the widespread corruption, offer the population better and more equal living conditions and increased gender equality, and diversify the oil-dependent economy. The COVID-19 pandemic has put serious strain on Iraqi society, not least within the context of the economy and health and medical care.

Although Iraq is a middle-income country that, in the long term, has conditions to provide for its own needs, the situation for the population is marked by poverty, hunger, a fragile humanitarian situation, deficient basic services, inequality, a democratic deficit, lack of respect for human rights and growing environmental and climate challenges with serious water shortages. The reconstruction of Iraq's shattered infrastructure is proceeding slowly and has been aggravated by factors such as the security situation, and further aggravated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Iraq's ethnic and religious minority groups, such as the Yazidis, have been hit particularly hard by the conflict with Daesh, and their traditional home regions in Iraq have suffered extensive destruction. The unstable security environment has slowed the return of internally displaced persons. Nearly 1.2 million people have still not been able to return to their previous home regions due to the conflicts in recent years. Even the southern regions of the country, which were not directly impacted by the conflict with Daesh, face major problems due to inadequate basic services and environmental and water pollution. There is a continued need for support for long-term sustainable stabilisation, reconstruction and democracy development.

Respect for, and compliance with, human rights are weak. The situation for women, youth and minorities is especially vulnerable. Women's and girls' space is limited, and sexual and gender-based violence is widespread. Domestic violence is commonplace. Significant obstacles hinder women's participation in political processes, including discriminatory legislation and traditional norms and values. Migration contributes to Iraq's development through remittances, increased knowledge exchange and diaspora engagement, but it also has negative aspects such as irregular migration and forced displacement. At the same time, migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons are especially vulnerable and often lack protection and rights. Especially vulnerable groups are women, children, LGBTIQ people, ethnic minorities and irregular migrants.

Iraq is largely characterised by low confidence in political processes and those in power, as well as a weak social contract between the citizens and state. The state and local authorities are weak, and corruption is widespread. In connection with the protests in late 2019, democracy activists were subjected to extensive violence and threats. At the same time, political engagement is strong among the younger generation, and an emerging Iraqi identity was strengthened in connection with the protests.

Iraq has been hit hard by the effects of climate change. The years of conflict have had strong negative environmental impacts in the country, including due to the direct destruction of oil wells. Iraq faces acute water shortages which, combined with rising temperatures and extreme weather events, threaten the population and undermine development opportunities. In 2021, Iraq's government ratified the Paris Agreement and submitted the country's first Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) under the Agreement.

### **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 analysis, learning and lessons learned should be an integral part of Sweden's development cooperation. Focus will be on results at all stages of the strategy process. The supporting information will give a general account of the conditions for implementation and of how monitoring is intended to take place in the specific context. 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 of the 2030 Agenda: gender equality, clean water and sanitation for all, responsible consumption and production, climate action, ecosystems and biodiversity, and peaceful and inclusive societies. 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 country, better conditions for democratic development and increased respect for human rights.

The complex, unstable context and the still challenging security situation place great demands on flexibility when implementing the strategy, including reprioritising activities as necessary. Consequently, the implementation needs to be characterised by a conflict-sensitive approach and requires close dialogue and follow-up with cooperation partners. Synergies between the different areas of the strategy and the mutually reinforcing objectives should be promoted in an integrated approach that clearly factors in these links.

Sida and FBA activities in the area of *peaceful and inclusive societies* will focus on social cohesion and inclusive governance. In particular, synergies between the activities of the respective agencies within the area will be sought. Sida will contribute to sustainable peace by strengthening the Iraqi people's capacity for peaceful coexistence. In particular, use should be made of opportunities to counter violent extremism. Sida's activities should contribute to the rebuilding of, and equal access to, basic services. Support for mine clearance efforts remains relevant. People in vulnerable situations, such as minorities, should be given particular focus, and their influence and participation should be promoted. Activities should also utilise and strengthen the positive effects of migration on development. Sida will support sustainable solutions for refugees, internally displaced persons and host communities, and contribute to Iraq's capacity to manage every dimension of migration in a manner that safeguards the rights of refugees, internally displaced persons and migrants, and contributes to development. Activities will contribute to creating opportunities for return and sustainable reintegration, and address factors that lead to, or have led to, people being forced to leave their homes or obstructs the possibility to return. In line with the women, peace and security agenda, the situation and participation of women and girls will permeate the activities of Sida and the FBA. Both agencies should contribute to promoting increased influence and participation of young people in advocacy and decision-making processes. The FBA's activities will also be permeated by the youth, peace and security agenda, and should be aimed at dialogue and peace mediation, and promoting the rule of law. The FBA should work to create conditions for participation and increased trust between rights holders and those bearing responsibility, and cross-generational understanding and dialogue.

In the area of *human rights, democracy and the rule of law, and gender equality*, Sida will contribute to both capacity-building for democratic governance in relation to public administration and support to civil society. Accountability in the relationship between citizen and state, and strengthened independent media, are important areas of activity. Focus should be on promoting democratic development, respect for human rights, transparency, participation and reduced corruption. In civil society, Sida should contribute to long-term sustainable, economically sound and independent organisations. Support to strengthening civil society and independent media can also include support to cultural actors and other actors of change. In the context of gender equality work, Sida should focus on the changing of structures, norms and attitudes among both women and men, on strengthening women's economic empowerment and possibilities to take part in working life, on activities that prevent sexual and gender-based violence, and on sexual and reproductive health and rights. Sida should support Iraqi women's rights organisations and women's broader participation and influence in decision-making and peacebuilding processes.

Sida's work in the area of *environment, climate and sustainable development* should focus on knowledge exchange, capacity-building measures, transparency and accountability at local and national level. Sida should work for improved adaptability and resilience to climate change and environmental and natural disasters. This includes access to, and sustainable management of, ecosystems and may also include other work related to biodiversity. Sida should support national policy development in the area of the environment and climate, particularly in relation to Iraq's further development and implementation of the NDC under the Paris Agreement. Sida should utilise the opportunities to promote environmentally and socially sustainable economic development and trade, productive employment with decent working conditions, and broader economic relations between Sweden and Iraq. Particular focus should be on a green transition with sustainable use of natural resources, water and agriculture, increased use of renewable energy and diversification of Iraq's economy with a focus on the oil dependency. The potential for cooperation on innovation and climate-smart technology, where Sweden has extensive expertise and experience, should be utilised. Sida can prioritise utilising catalytic financial solutions when possible.

Sweden's development cooperation will be relevant and effective. Sida and the FBA will ensure a holistic approach to Sweden's collective support and

its complementarity and added value. 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, such as the regional MENA strategy and the strategy for Sweden's humanitarian assistance. Sida will work for effective donor coordination, where EU coordination and cooperation with the EU and other EU Member States are particularly prioritised, when possible.

The linkages between long-term development cooperation, humanitarian aid and peacebuilding will be harnessed. In the long term, activities should contribute to reducing dependency on humanitarian aid.

To counter the widespread corruption, an anticorruption approach should be integrated throughout all activities. Integrating a gender equality analysis within the context of the anticorruption work is prioritised, as women's and men's vulnerability to corruption differ.

In implementing the strategy, Sida and the FBA will work to build broader relations between Sweden and Iraq. This also includes the Swedish resource base, with both civil society and other actors of change, such as academic institutions and the business sector. Further development of various types of exchange with Swedish actors and collaboration at municipal level should be promoted. Opportunities to contribute to institution-building and capacity-building through inter-agency cooperation will be utilised. Opportunities for cooperation with the Iraqi diaspora in Sweden will also be considered. The development assistance is expected to constitute catalytic support and be complementary to Iraqi reform efforts. Capacity support, innovative partnerships and work through the Swedish resource base allow a broader approach and strategic impact even with small-scale initiatives.