

Utrikesdepartementet

New strategy for Sweden's global development cooperation on migration, returns and voluntary repatriation 2024–2028

1. Starting points and added value

Irregular migration and forced displacement have complex consequences for societies and put individuals at risk. Forced displacement has increased year on year over the last decade, and irregular migration feeds black markets for human smuggling and increases the risk of trafficking. Breeding grounds for criminality, exploitation and victimisation are created in countries of origin, along migration routes and in receiving countries. When individuals who do not have a legal right to remain in a country – including Sweden – do not return, confidence in the migration and asylum system is also undermined, and the ‘shadow society’ risks spreading. Functioning infrastructure in partner countries to help returnees’ integration into society and the economy can increase the incentives and possibilities for voluntary repatriation and contribute to social benefit locally in developing countries. Orderly migration requires international cooperation.

By strengthening synergies between migration policy and development assistance policy, the problems outlined above can be countered and strong partnerships built. This serves Swedish interests and counteracts the negative effects of irregular migration and forced displacement.

2. Direction and objective of Swedish development assistance

This strategy will contribute to counteracting irregular migration and stimulate well-functioning return that can contribute to sustainable growth and development in receiving countries, and effective action for voluntary repatriation. Development assistance will also contribute to effective measures to strengthen migrants’ and refugees’ enjoyment of their rights in

partner countries, support host communities, and strengthen asylum and migration management in partner countries.

Swedish development assistance can be made conditional, with the aim of ensuring that receiving countries follow principles of international law and cooperation with Sweden matters concerning readmission of their nationals, including the removal of impediments to enforcement such as not issuing travel documents.

The strategy will complement and reinforce other parts of Sweden's work on migration and development assistance – globally, regionally and bilaterally. Particular emphasis will be placed on coherence with Sweden's bilateral and regional strategies that include migration objectives within development cooperation, not least in countries that Sweden prioritises in terms of return. Interventions guided by the strategy will be coordinated with relevant missions abroad and, where possible, contribute to overall Swedish development cooperation in prioritised countries. The approach can be incentive-based and promote good cooperation in the area of migration. In addition, the strategy will support migration-related interventions in accordance with the Government's priorities in countries or situations where there is no applicable country strategy or regional strategy.

This strategy encompasses a total of SEK 3 billion between 24 October 2024 and 31 December 2028. SEK 50 million will be allocated for 2024 and SEK 350 million for 2025. An estimated SEK 800 million will be allocated for 2026, and an estimated SEK 900 million annually for 2027 and 2028.

This strategy encompasses the funds under appropriation item 35, 'Migration, return and voluntary repatriation', in the appropriation directions for the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) for each budget year. Sida's activities will contribute to the following objectives:

1. Enhanced conditions for increased return, including forced return, voluntary repatriation and sustainable reintegration, including through strengthening local capacity and infrastructure in countries of origin and transit.
2. Enhanced capacity for migration and asylum management in partner countries, including border controls, with a focus on counteracting irregular migration.

Context

There are currently approximately 280 million international migrants around the world, just over 35 million of them refugees and around 170 million of them labour migrants¹. Global income disparities, demographic developments, conflicts, disasters and climate change mean that migration and forced displacement will persist for the foreseeable future and may increase in the long term.

Safe, orderly and regular migration can be a positive force for development. Irregular migration leads to negative effects on national labour markets and welfare systems and entails security risks. Irregular migration often entails major risks for the individual concerned. Smugglers, human traffickers and potentially lethal travel routes are among the dangers they may be exposed to. Migrants dying along migration routes have numbered in the thousands every year for the last decade. In addition, irregular migration helps maintain criminal networks that profit enormously from smuggling and human trafficking. Development assistance can help pre-empt and prevent irregular, dangerous migration and enhance the conditions for safe, orderly and regular migration through measures and interventions along migration routes and through support to effective migration and asylum management in partner countries.

Millions of migrants return to their countries of origin every year. The majority return voluntarily, while others are forced to return. Non-functioning return risks undermining confidence in the asylum and migration systems in countries all around the world. To maintain functioning international migration and legally certain asylum systems, all states must live up to their obligation under international law to readmit their nationals. Functioning return – that is also sustainable over time – is also improved by offering returnees support and opportunities to reintegrate in their countries of origin. Development assistance can contribute to sustainable reintegration and help create conditions for increased return.

Development cooperation can also strengthen the positive contribution of returnees to development in low- and middle-income countries. Successful reintegration can, in some contexts, be an important factor in preventing and

¹ The gender balance is relatively equal globally, although there are some regional differences. However, according to the ILO more men (58.5 per cent) than women (41.5 per cent) were labour migrants in 2019. Women and girls also make up half of the refugee population, according to the UNHCR.

combating violent extremism and terrorism. At the same time, different forms of support to returnees must naturally be appropriate and not contribute to the challenges that they are intended to resolve.

Repatriation creates opportunities for individuals to get a fresh start in life, and can boost the economy and labour force in another country.

Development assistance will contribute to effective efforts for voluntary repatriation by promoting conditions that permit and stimulate it, e.g. through reintegration interventions, arranging contacts, and measures to ensure that individuals who choose to return can be an asset to the partner country and its economy. This can be facilitated through support from the international community and development assistance policy.

Given the international nature of migration and the forces that drive it, the phenomenon cannot be effectively managed solely by individual countries. Preventing and addressing the challenges effectively requires cooperation between states. At a bilateral level, for example, an incentive-based approach within development cooperation may contribute to strengthening migration partnerships between Sweden and its partners.

3. Activities

Activities within the area of this strategy will be designed to supplement Sweden's other migration-related development assistance, including core support to multilateral organisations, strategically targeted grants from the Government Offices (Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Justice), and bilateral and regional strategies, to ensure that activities under this strategy contribute to effective development assistance. The strategy will be used to pursue Swedish priorities in efforts concerning migration and return (including forced return) and voluntary repatriation via activities that are not facilitated through other strategies, and to implement interventions and support actors that leverage other Swedish engagements. To the extent possible, activities should take place in collaboration with the other Nordic countries, not least with a view to strengthening local capacity and infrastructure for returns, e.g. return centres. Activities will take particular account of migration routes to the EU and Sweden in close coordination with relevant regional development assistance strategies, and in cooperation within the EU. Interventions will be directed at achieving results in countries

that are prioritised in Swedish migration policy, including along transit routes.

In line with the above, activities will take the Government's priorities as their starting point, through clear synergies with bilateral and regional development cooperation strategies and with thematically related strategies. When outlining activities, Sida will consult with the Swedish Migration Agency, the Swedish Police Authority and other relevant Swedish government agencies and missions abroad. Within the framework of the strategy, Sida will strive for effective aid coordination with a particular focus on cooperation with the EU and like-minded donor countries. Activities will contribute to effective measures to strengthen migrants' and refugees' enjoyment of their rights in partner countries. Where relevant, the strategy will take account of how activities affect women and girls, and have a conflict perspective. Efforts to increase transparency and reduce corruption will be integrated throughout all activities.

Under the first objective of this strategy (see above), activities will contribute to strengthening conditions for return, repatriation and sustainable reintegration by strengthening local capacity and infrastructure in countries of origin or association/countries to which migrants have ties. This could be achieved through support to orderly reception and to return centres and local programmes, for example. Activities for sustainable reintegration will be undertaken in countries that are prioritised in migration policy and place particular emphasis on groups and individuals who have voluntarily returned or repatriated from Sweden.

Humanitarian assistance, long-term development cooperation, and peace, security and stabilisation will work in tandem with a view to counteracting the root causes of forced displacement and irregular migration and contributing to creating conditions for return, voluntary repatriation and sustainable reintegration, including support that prevents and counteracts violent extremism and terrorism. Activities will also provide tailored support to livelihood opportunities and education for both women and men who voluntarily return or repatriate.

Under the second objective of this strategy (see above), activities will contribute to enhanced capacity for migration and asylum management among authorities and institutions in partner countries. Interventions may be

implemented directly with authorities in partner countries, but may also be carried out in cooperation with international organisations or other relevant actors. Preventive measures and interventions along migration routes will be prioritised, including interventions such as physical and technical infrastructure to strengthen migration management in transit countries. Interventions can be implemented to maintain the ‘protection space’ in relevant refugee host countries. Activities will also contribute to combating migrant smuggling and human trafficking, taking particular account of the vulnerability of women and children.

Activities under both strategy objectives will strive to be catalytic and contribute to enhanced cooperation and dialogue with priority partner countries and to generating traction for Swedish interests. The approach can be incentive-based and promote good cooperation in the area of migration.

This strategy will be used to strengthen synergies between development assistance policy and migration policy in line with the reform agenda for development assistance. The starting point for interventions within this strategy is that Swedish development assistance is classified as ODA by the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC). Limited exceptions can be made to the extent that this is necessary to fulfil the strategy’s objectives.

4. Follow-up, collaboration and partners

A strategic dialogue on implementation of the strategy will take place quarterly between Sida and the Government Offices (Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Justice), convened by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. The strategic dialogue aims to ensure coherence in Sweden’s actions in the area of migration and is a forum for exchange of information, where notice can be given of planned interventions and interventions considered to be fundamental can be discussed. If necessary, the Government Offices (Ministry for Foreign Affairs) can summon Sida for additional dialogue and consultation on the activities. The Ministry for Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Justice will provide information on the Government’s migration policy priorities – including priority countries – in the strategic dialogue.

Activities will be followed up and reported on in line with what is prescribed in the current guidelines for development assistance strategies. The annual strategy report will include reporting, analysis and assessment of the results

of the activities in relation to the stated objectives. In order to highlight synergies with other assistance, it will also include a summary showing the countries where interventions carried out within the framework of the strategy have contributed to concrete activities. Where possible, gender-disaggregated statistics and a gender equality analysis will be included.

The strategy enables support to multilateral organisations, civil society organisations and state actors. Support via multilateral actors will contribute to effectiveness and concrete results at country level in geographical contexts prioritised by Sweden.