



Promote Freedom Fight Oppression

Respect for democracy, human rights and the rule of law are central for fighting poverty, for inclusive economic development, for sustainable investments and for peace and security and combatting corruption. Only one third of the world's population is today living in a democracy. In recent years a trend towards more authoritarian forms of governance and increased number of conflicts have been seen globally. Sida contributes to the promotion and protection of democracy, human rights and peaceful societies through its programmes and projects in the thematic area of Promoting Freedom and Fighting Oppression, which amounted to SEK 6.6 billion in 2024. It is Sida's largest thematic area, equivalent to approximately 25 percent of Sida's total disbursements.

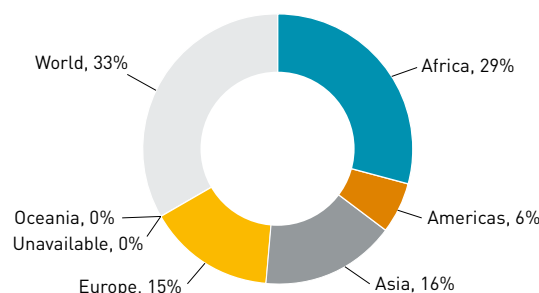


DEVELOPMENT IN THE WORLD

The global decline in democracy witnessed in recent years continues. The super election year 2024 did not make any significant change to the global trajectory, but many elections during the year did deliver on their promise to ensure that voters have a voice and seem to be the preferred way for people to elect their leaders.¹ The world has fewer democracies than autocracies for the first time in over 20 years and 72 percent of the world's population live in autocracies. Challenges to democracy are found in every part of the world.² The freedom of expression³ and the civic space are severely challenged.⁴ Global internet freedom declined for the 14th consecutive year⁵ and repression has become more digital.⁶ Threats, violence and killings of democracy and human rights defenders continue to increase. LGBTQI persons, women, indigenous peoples and journalists are particularly exposed.⁷ Digitalisation's impact on human rights continues to grow, posing opportunities but also increased risks related to surveillance, data privacy, and manipulation of information.⁸ Corruption continues to pose a major threat to democracy, human rights and economic growth. However, a number of countries are demonstrating that progress is possible. According to Transparency International's Corruption

Perceptions Index 32 countries have significantly reduced their levels of corruption since 2012. There are currently 56 violent conflicts and with fewer conflicts being resolved, either militarily or through peace agreements. Conflicts are also becoming more internationalized.⁹ In the midst of this democracy crisis civil society continue to mobilize for effective counter-narratives, taking legal actions, campaigning and engaging communities to prevent further backsliding and to protect those most exposed.¹⁰

FIGURE 1. GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION OF THE SUPPORT TO PROMOTE FREEDOM AND FIGHT OPPRESSION



MAIN AREAS OF SUPPORT

Sida has continued to focus its support to elections, political participation and democratic institutions as well as support to a vibrant civil society. An increased focus has been placed on supporting human rights defenders with particular emphasis on indigenous people, LGBTQI persons and environmental defenders. Freedom of expression and support to independent media have remained central. Conflict prevention and security

- 1 IDEA, The Global State of Democracy, Strengthening the Legitimacy of Elections in a Time of Radical Uncertainty, 2024
- 2 V-Dem Institute, Democracy Report 2025, 25 Years of Autocratization – Democracy Trumped?
- 3 Freedom House, Freedom in the World, The Uphill battle to safeguard rights, 2025
- 4 Civicus State of civil society report 2025
- 5 Freedom House, Freedom on the Net, The struggle for Trust online, 2024
- 6 IDEA, The Global State of Democracy, Strengthening the Legitimacy of Elections in a Time of Radical Uncertainty, 2024
- 7 Frontline Defenders, Global Annual Analysis 2023/2024
- 8 Council of Europe, Steering Committee for human rights, Human rights and artificial intelligence, 2024

- 9 Global Peace Index 2024
- 10 Civicus, State of Civil Society Report, 2025.

THE GLOBAL GOALS

The Global Goals for Sustainable Development include everyone - and we can all contribute. The goals are interdependent and therefore indivisible. Sida's main contribution is to implement development cooperation, thereby reducing poverty and saving lives. Together we can build a better future where no one is left behind.



Results

is the third largest area and has for example included mediation support, women's participation in peace processes and to strengthen local leaders and youth to participate in peace processes. In contexts that allow, Sida has collaborated with both duty bearers, often state institutions, and the rights holders through support to civil society or networks and smaller movements. A human rights based approach¹¹ has been applied in Sida's cooperation ensuring among others the integration of human rights in other thematic areas. The Global support has increased slightly since last year and represents 33 percent of the total thematic support. Africa is the region which receives the largest share of support, followed by Asia and Oceania and Europe and the Americas.

SIDA'S SUPPORT

Sida's support to promoting freedom and fighting oppression is Sida's largest thematic area with operational work implemented through almost all of the cooperation strategies that steer Sida. The Strategy with the largest amount of support to this area is the Strategy for Support to Civil Society followed by the regional strategy for Eastern Europe, Western Balkan and Turkey and the Global thematic Strategy for support to Democracy, Human rights and the Rule of law. The country receiving the largest share of support is Ukraine followed by the Democratic Republic of Congo. The most common agreement partner and implementer of Sida's support in the this area is a non-governmental organisation which manages 64 percent of the support. The second largest type of partner is a multilateral organisation of which United Nations Development Programme and Unicef are the largest. The following are examples of results from Sida's contributions 2024.¹²

Guatemala: Sida's support to political institutions and democratic processes has shown, that people can exercise power over decision-makers, for example in Guatemala. After the 2023 elections in Guatemala, the incumbent government contested the election results, which resulted in a difficult transition period. Sida initiated a cooperation to strengthen the transition process and the incoming government. In cooperation with other donors Sida's support contributed to the formulation of the new government's action plan and also strengthened the conditions for key people to plan and prepare for taking office.¹³

Malawi: Through Sida's support to the Swedish organisation We Effect which in cooperation with the local organisation SPRO-DETA was able to support that more than 100 women got access to land och 80 women were able to participate in local courts and other decision making bodies.¹⁴

Yemen: Sida's support to UNICEF has contributed to that action plans for the protection of children in armed conflict has been signed by both the Yemeni government and the de facto authorities in Sanaa.¹⁵

Western Balkan: Sida's support to the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN), which works with investigative journalism, has contributed to more people gaining access to objective reporting on democratic processes and thus also better conditions for demanding accountability from those in power. BIRN's audits and reporting have challenged and sometimes stopped undemocratic and non-transparent laws and decisions. For example, BIRN was able to reveal that the winner of a procurement for a large road construction in North Macedonia was wanted for fraud in Armenia.¹⁶

FIGURE 2. PROMOTING FREEDOM AND FIGHTING OPPRESSION DISBURSEMENTS IN 2020-2024, BY THEMATIC SUBTITLE (MILLION SEK)

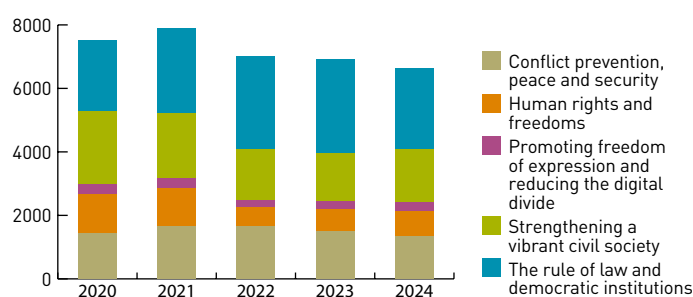
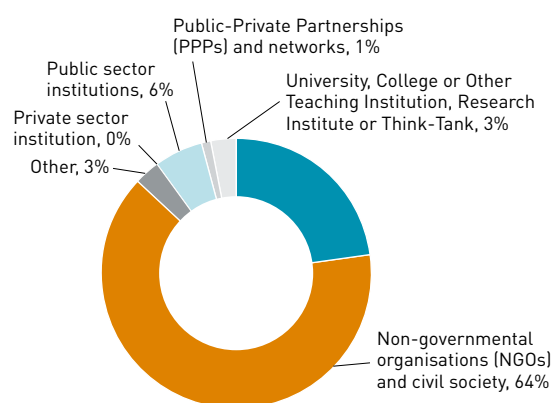


FIGURE 3. PROMOTING FREEDOM AND FIGHTING OPPRESSION DISBURSEMENTS 2024, BY IMPLEMENTING PARTNER



¹¹ A Human Rights Based Approach is a method that many development actors use to ensure that protection and promotion of human rights are integrated into the development process.

¹² Sida's årsredovisning 2024 [Sida's annual report 2024]

¹³ UNDP, Programa De Las Naciones Unidas Para El Desarrollo, Plan de iniciación, 19 September 2024. Poyecto, Fortalecimiento de planes y estrategias orientas el Desarrollo sostenible en Guatemala, 5 March 2024, UNDP, Programa De Las Naciones Unidas Para El Desarrollo, Fortalecimiento de planes y estrategias orientadas el desarrollo sostenible en Guatemala, 2024

¹⁴ We Effect, Annual Report, to Sida Civsam, 2023, page 4-4

¹⁵ Unicef, Final Report on Evidence Based Prevention and Response for Children Associated with Armed Forces and Armed Groups, November 2023, page 27

¹⁶ BIRN, Narrative report I, 30 September 2024, Dokumentnummer 22/000802-54, Insatsnummer 14254 Balkan Insights, Fraud Charges in Armenia no Obstacle to State Contracts in North Macedonia, 2023.

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