



Sida's Support to Civil Society Organisations

This paper provides an overview of Sida's financial support to civil society organisations (CSOs). It is updated annually and may be used by Sida staff and Swedish embassy staff as reference material. It may also be disseminated to an external audience with interest in Sida's support to CSOs.

Despite a trend of shrinking space for civil society to operate, many civil society organisations continue their work for development and on life-saving as well as protecting democracy and human rights. New social movements are emerging as additional response to new challenges (please see Annex 1, International Trends).

SIDA'S COLLABORATION WITH CSOs

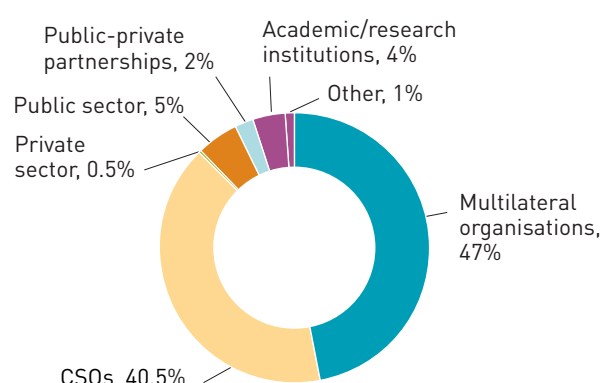
Sida acknowledges that civil society¹ constitutes a wide variety of actors; formal and non-formal, democratic and autocratic. Sida collaborates with, and provides financial support to democratically and human rights based civil society actors in their capacity to contribute to democracy, welfare, social capital and saving lives and alleviate suffering. The collaboration ultimately aims to facilitate delivery on the sustainable development goals (SDGs), to contribute to Agenda 2030 and to hold duty-bearers accountable in doing the same.² Financial support targets local, national, regional and international organisations and is provided both to CSOs, in their own right, i.e. flexible funding (core or programme support), as well as through CSOs for support to specific programme, project or activity areas.³ Financial collaboration with CSOs covers both long-term development support and lifesaving humanitarian support.

SHARE OF SIDA'S FINANCIAL SUPPORT

CSOs constituted Sida's second largest⁴ financed partner group in 2024 with an amount of SEK 10.6 billion, slightly less than in 2023 when it amounted to SEK 10.7 billion. The support was divided across 394 CSOs and through 747 agreements with ongoing activity periods⁵, in more than 100 countries. The three CSOs receiving the largest total amount of Sida financial support per organisation, humanitarian and development financing combined, were the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) and Save the Children, Sweden. The two CSOs that held the highest number of active agreements through different Sida strategies, were Diakonia with 21 agreements with ongoing activity periods and SALAR/Sveriges kommuner och regioner (SKR – Sweden's municipalities and regions) with 15 agreements. I.e. the highest number of agreements with Sida does not equal the highest amount of funding.

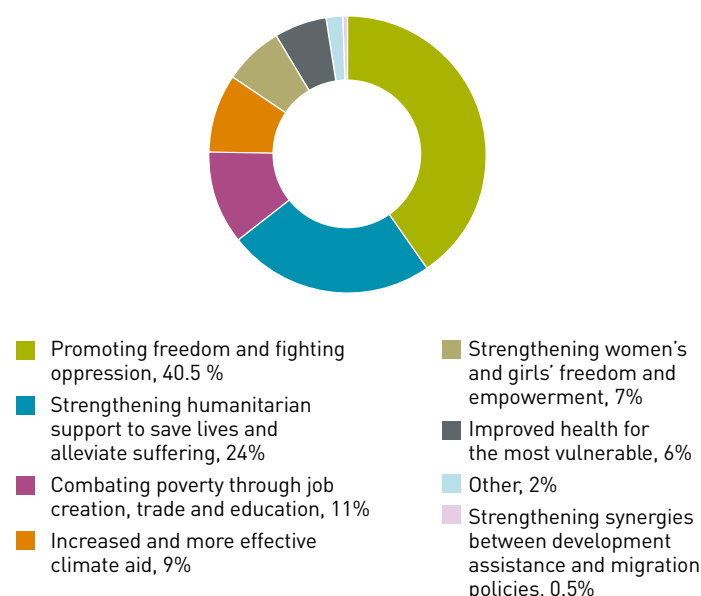
Three quarters of the support to CSOs was long-term development financing and the remaining quarter was for humanitarian support.

FIGURE 1: SHARE OF FUNDING BY PARTNERGROUP (2024)



The largest share of Sida's financial support to CSOs was invested in the thematic area "Promoting freedom and fighting oppression" at SEK 4.3 billion, followed by "Strengthening humanitarian support to save lives and alleviate suffering", at SEK 2,5 billion. Both streams have slightly decreased from 2023, with amounts at SEK 4.4 and 2.6 billion respectively. A corresponding increase is instead noted in the thematic areas "Combating poverty through job creation, trade and education" and "Increased and more effective climate aid".

FIGURE 2: THEMATIC SHARE OF SIDA'S SUPPORT TO CSOs:



Results

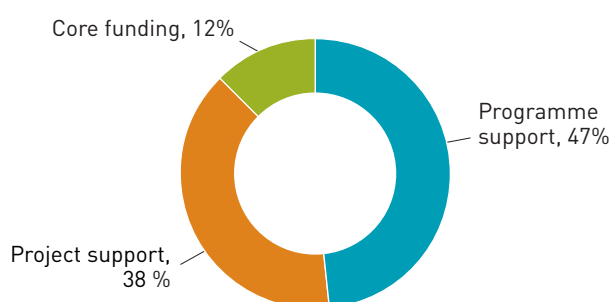
The organisations that received the largest financial support within each thematic area were:

- ForumCIV in the thematic area promoting freedom and fighting oppression,
- ICRC in the area of strengthening humanitarian support to save lives and alleviate suffering,
- Mercy Corps Europe in the area of combating poverty through job creation, trade and education,
- SNV Netherlands development organisation in the area of increased and more effective climate aid,
- Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation in the area of strengthening women's and girls' freedom and empowerment,
- Clinton Health Access Initiative (CHAI) in the area of improved health for the most vulnerable and SKR in the area of strengthening synergies between development assistance and migration policies.

The three countries with the highest share of support to CSOs in 2024 were Afghanistan, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Syria. Sida does not provide funding to the governments in these three countries. Funding for development and humanitarian activities is channelled through civil society or multilateral agents. Both Afghanistan and DRC received a higher proportion of development aid compared to humanitarian aid (development aid at 78 and 56 per cent respectively, humanitarian aid at 22 and 44 per cent, while Syria's proportion of humanitarian aid was higher than the development aid (development aid at 38 per cent and humanitarian aid at 62 per cent).

All of Sida's strategies in 2024 promote collaboration with CSOs as a way to effectively implement development aid. The strategy that channelled the largest level of support to CSOs in 2024 was The Strategy for Sweden's Humanitarian Support

FIGURE 3: MODALITIES OF SUPPORT TO CSOs, 2024



through Sida with an amount of SEK 2.5 billion (24 per cent of Sida's total funding to CSOs). This was followed by the 2024 Strategy for Sweden's development cooperation with CSOs at close to SEK 9 billion (8 per cent). Sida's support was channelled to CSOs as programme support at 47 per cent and through CSOs as project support at 38 per cent and to CSOs as core funding at 12 per cent. This equals a slight increase in programme support of 2 per cent compared to 2023, a corresponding decrease in project support and a short fall of 0.5 per cent in core funding can also be observed.

As from 2024, Sida has a new position to coordinate Sida's collaboration with civil society. The position is placed at Sida's Unit of Multilateral and Partner Coordination at the Department of Results. For more information, please contact Anne Lindeberg, anne.lindeberg@sida.se

STEERING OF SIDA'S COLLABORATION WITH CSOs

The government's development cooperation policy:

Development assistance for a new era – freedom, empowerment and sustainable growth constitutes the overarching steering of Sida and Sida's collaboration with CSOs. The policy is based on international agreements on development effectiveness. Direct instructions for Sida's collaboration with CSOs are established in government ordinances, annual appropriation letters, strategies, and budgets. Strategies that steer have bilateral, regional- or thematic objectives as well as objectives found in one specific strategy for collaboration with CSOs.

The OECD-DAC recommendation on collaboration with civil society was adopted in 2021; *DAC Recommendation on Enabling Civil Society in Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Assistance of OECD-DAC*⁶ with the aim of facilitating and enabling the work of civil society that are operating in development and humanitarian cooperation. The recommendation is an international normative policy instrument. Sida was a key contributor in the development of the recommendation and Sida's collaboration with CSOs is guided by the recommendation.

Since 2019 Sida also has a guideline for collaborating with civil society organisations; *Guiding Principles for Sida's engagement with and support to Civil Society*.⁷ Key messages in the Guiding Principles are to provide support to civil society in their own right⁸, uphold a respectful and equal dialogue, aim for long-term/predictable agreement periods and promote flexible funding of which core funding and programme funding should be preferred funding modalities.

CO-ORDINATION

CONCORD is the major Swedish co-ordinating platform for civil society organisations based in Sweden. Read more about CONCORD on their website: www.concord.se. In 2015 the Government of Sweden and CONCORD's members agreed on the "Joint Commitments" (*Gemensamma Åtaganden, GÅ*). These commitments provide a framework for dialogue and collaboration between civil society and the Swedish Government to strengthen development co-operation. GÅ is implemented and followed up by a working group where Sida is a standing member. At international level, Sida, representing Sweden, is also a member of the OECD-DAC community of practice on civil society, an informal DAC network of 32 bilateral donors. The focus for this informal network is to implement the DAC Recommendation on Enabling Civil Society⁹ in Development Co-operation and Humanitarian Assistance including identifying policy and research gaps to facilitate the implementation. OECD-DAC also has a formally adopted "Framework for Dialogue for the International Civil Society". The framework was adopted in 2018 to create a structure for dialogue between DAC bilateral donors and civil society. Under the framework for dialogue, civil society is represented by the CSO reference group which is a self-organised coalition of civil societies and open to all interested CSOs.

INTERNATIONAL TRENDS

Civil society working in development with a democratic and human rights approach have a capacity to contribute to protecting democracy and human rights as well as to achieve development and poverty alleviation. The development challenges facing the work of civil societies varies across the world but many are increasingly complex in that more than one challenge intersects and/or overlaps with another affecting peoples capacity to engage to claim or uphold their rights¹⁰. An increasing international autocratisation is amongst others reported by V-Dem¹¹, CIVICUS¹² and International IDEA¹³. CIVICUS Monitor 2024¹⁴ finds that only 40 out of 198 countries and territories have an open civic space rating. The double amount, 81 countries and territories, are rated in the worst two categories of having repressed and closed civic space. It is estimated that 72 per cent of the global population lived under repressive conditions in 2024 which was an increase of 1.5 per cent compared to 2023. An estimated 30 per cent live in countries where civic space was completely closed. The area with the highest drop in democratic backsliding is freedom of expression, a key component of civic space. The number of countries are increasing where freedom of association, including civil society, are restricted¹⁵. Different modalities are used by autocratic governments to threaten and/or close operations of civil society working in the area of democracy and human rights. These modalities include introducing restrictive laws or using laws for a different purpose than their original intent (for instance the foreign agent law);¹⁶ selective lawsuits to threaten potential activists; surveillance; smear campaigns; closing access to communication channels or funding polarising organisations with an aim of undermining the understanding and trust in democracy and human rights¹⁷.

Despite the trend of shrinking space, many civil society organisations continue their work for development and on life-saving as well as protecting democracy and human rights. New social movements are formed to adapt to the new challenges¹⁸. There are also examples of countries transitioning to democracy from a former autocratic governmental rule¹⁹.

There is a growing recognition of the role that civic space plays in facilitating more responsive, democratic and inclusive governance. OECD has recognized that OECD member countries are making efforts to protect civic space but often lack a comprehensive and strategic approach. For this reason OECD recently launched a practical guide for policymakers with concrete advice to protect and promote civic space and responding to government demand for specific guidance on actionable measures²⁰.

An increased focus on direct agreements with civil society in official development assistance (ODA) countries were reported on by OECD-DAC members during 2024²¹. The ambition is to increase local ownership, sometimes referred to the localisation agenda, and ultimately increase development effectiveness. Of note is that the 2023 OECD CSO statistics report show a continued low level of direct funding to civil society based in ODA countries at 1 per cent of the total ODA funding in 2023²². The figure is more or less unchanged from 2022. Moreover the 2023 OECD CSO statistics report shows that only 1 per cent was provided as flexible funding to civil societies out of the total bilateral aid in 2023²³. With flexible funding an organisation can adapt its operation in case of changing context, for instance in times of increased autocracy. Flexible funding hereby contributes to increased resilience in a shrinking civic space. The organisation can continue with its operation which in turn in the long run can contribute to counteracting autocracy.

CONSEQUENCES FOR SIDA OF INTERNATIONAL TRENDS

The increasing international trend of autocratisation and regulations to close operations of civil society organisations leads to an increase in civil society that need to de-register and operate as informal actors. Sida, nor Sida's agreement partners can sign legal agreements with informal actors as these are categorised as non-legal persons.

As previously mentioned, the Government of Sweden has a clear standpoint on aid- and development effectiveness for Sweden's development cooperation and has strengthened the ambition to increase direct agreements with local civil society organisations. This is reflected in the Government's reform agenda for development aid and strategies that are subsequently being formulated.

As from 2024 the Swedish Government has instructed Sida to review the levels of sub-granting in all our partnerships and avoid more than one sub-granting level. The justification for the instruction is to increase transparency of how Sida's funding is used and to decrease administrative costs.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Civil society refers to uncoerced human association or interaction by which individuals implement individual or collective action to address shared needs, ideas, interests, values, faith, and beliefs that they have identified in common, as well as the formal, semi- or non-formal forms of associations and the individuals involved in them. Civil society is distinct from states, private for profit enterprises, and the family. Civil society organisations (CSOs) are an organisational representation of civil society and include all not-for-profit, non-state, non-partisan, non-violent, and self-governing organisations outside of the family in which people come together to pursue shared needs, ideas, interests, values, faith and beliefs, including formal, legally registered organisations as well as informal associations without legal status but with a structure and activities. Source: *DAC Recommendation on Enabling OECD Legal Instruments Civil Society in Development Co-operation and Humanitarian Assistance* (2021:6)
- 2 www.news.un.org/en/story/2023/09/1140837; www.un.org/en/desa/civil-society-plays-a-critical-role-deliver-sdgs
- 3 Funding to: core contributions and programmes by CSOs. Funds are provided to CSOs for use at their discretion, for programmes and activities they develop and implement in their own authority. Funding through: CSOs to implement donor-initiated projects (earmarked funding). Funds are provided for CSOs to implement projects and programmes that providers (of funding) develop, and for which they (providers) are ultimately responsible. This includes joint-financing schemes where providers and CSOs consult about activities, jointly approve them and/or share their funding. Source: *OECD Funding Civil Society in Partner Countries, Toolkit 1* 2023 pp 24.
- 4 In 2023, CSO constituted the partner group with the largest share of Sida's funding
- 5 Sida have additional 121 agreements with open validity periods to cater for reporting and repayments. But the activity period has ended. The amount of partners and agreements have decreased from 2023 when Sida had 422 partners and a total of 981 agreements with open validity periods.
- 6 <https://legalinstruments.oecd.org/en/instruments/oecd-legal-5021>
- 7 Sida 2019 Guiding principles for Sida's engagement with and support to Civil Society
- 8 The terminology "in their own right" refers to an operation that has been democratically designed in an organisation as compared to an operation that has been designed by an external part, for instance a donor, but is implemented by a civil society organisation.
- 9 [https://one.oecd.org/document/DCD/DAC\(2018\)28/FINAL/en/pdf](https://one.oecd.org/document/DCD/DAC(2018)28/FINAL/en/pdf)
- 10 Evaluation of the Strategy for Support via Swedish Civil Society Organisations 2010-2014, Final Synthesis Report, Sida Decentralised Evaluation 2015
- 11 Democracy Report 2024: Democracy Winning and Losing at the Ballot, V-Dem 2024
- 12 People Power Under Attack, Civicus Monitor 2024
- 13 The Global State of Democracy 2024: Strengthening the Legitimacy of Elections in a Time of Radical Uncertainty, IDEA 2024
- 14 People Power Under Attack, Civicus Monitor 2024
- 15 Democracy Report 2024: Democracy Winning and Losing at the Ballot, V-Dem 2024
- 16 WWW.ICNL.ORG
- 17 Claiming back civic space, Towards approaches fit for the 2020s? Jean Bossuyt, Martin Ronceray for Belgium partner in Development & Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation, May 2020.
- 18 CIVICUS monitor 2023, Bright Spots
- 19 Democracy Report 2024: Democracy Winning and Losing at the Ballot, V-Dem 2024
- 20 OECD 2024, Practical Guide for Policymakers on Protecting and Promoting Civic Space, OECD Public Governance Reviews, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/6c908b48-en>
- 21 DAC Community of Practice (CoP) on Civil Society bi-annual meeting Summary 27-28 November 2024.
- 22 A total of 2.6 billion USD out of 27 billion USD to CSOs
- 23 Total bilateral aid in 2023 amounted to 208 billion USD. Total funding to and through CSOs constituted 13 per cent of the total bilateral aid 2023.