

Sida's Support to Civil Society Organisations

This paper provides an overview of Sida's financial support to civil society organisations (CSOs)¹. 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.



SIDA'S COLLABORATION WITH CSOs

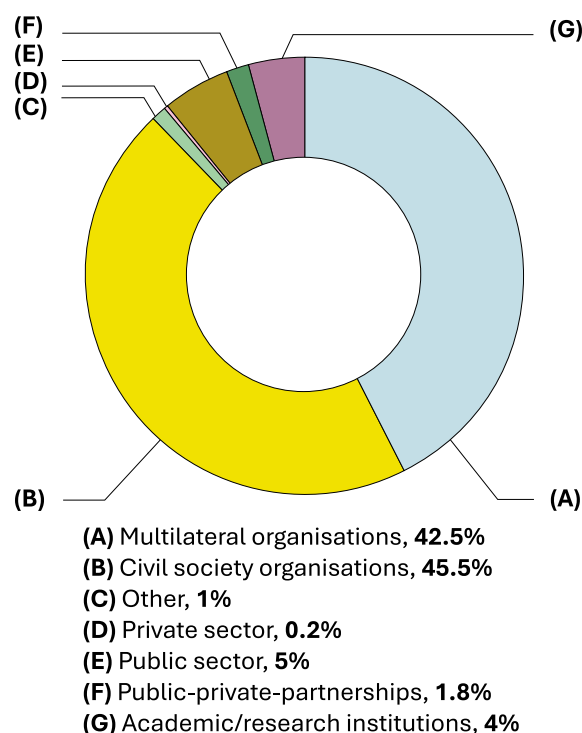
Sida recognises that civil society constitutes a wide variety of actors; formal and non-formal, democratic and autocratic. Sida collaborates with and provides financial support to democratic and human rights-based civil society actors in various capacities. Capacities include facilitation to gather the public to voice joint concerns, holding duty bearers to account for transparency and accountability, hosting and sharing contextual knowledge including on most marginalised groups, provision of capacity development to peer organisations to strengthen organisational systems to create resilient organisations, and provision of services to the public where public systems are inadequate. When these capacities are in place, they in turn contribute to democracy, welfare, economic growth, social capital, saving lives and alleviating suffering. Sida's collaboration with civil society ultimately aims to facilitate joint endeavours to deliver on sustainable growth and development and to hold duty-bearers accountable in doing the same. Financial support targets local, national, regional and international organisations and is provided to CSOs i.e. through flexible funding (core or programme support), as well as through CSOs for support to specific programme, project or activity areas.² Financial collaboration with CSOs covers both development support and life-saving humanitarian support.

CSOs' SHARE OF SIDA'S FINANCIAL SUPPORT

CSOs constituted Sida's largest financed partner group in 2025 with an amount of close to SEK 10.3 billion. The trend over the last five years has been marked by a financial peak in 2021 at SEK 11 billion followed by a slight decrease in CSO-funding over the following years. The support in 2025 was divided across 426 CSOs and through 611 agreements with ongoing activity periods. This equals more CSO partners in 2025 compared to 2024 which amounted to 393, but fewer agreements with ongoing activity periods which amounted to 739³. The collaboration with CSOs takes place in more than 100 countries. The three CSOs receiving the largest total

amount of Sida's financial support and humanitarian and development financing combined, were the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and Action Contre la Faim France (ACF), all three primarily humanitarian organisations.

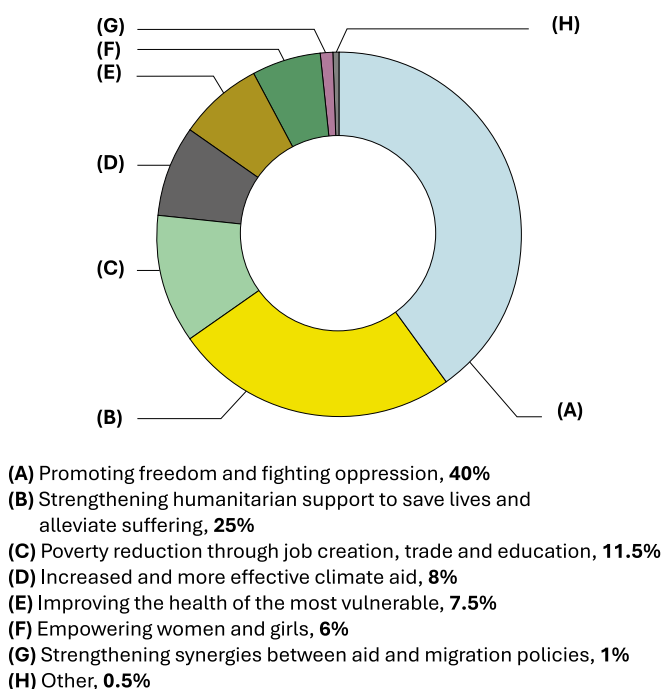
FIGURE 1: SHARE OF FUNDING BY PARTNERGROUP (2025)



The two CSOs that held the highest number of active agreements through different Sida strategies, were Diakonia with 15 agreements with ongoing activity periods and We Effect with 12. In both cases, this is a decrease in number of agreements from more Sida strategies as compared to the previous year.⁴ In 2025, three quarters of the support to CSOs continued as long-term development financing while the remaining quarter was humanitarian support. The largest share of Sida's financial support to CSOs continued to be invested in the thematic area "Promoting freedom and fighting oppression" at SEK 4.1 billion, followed by "Strengthening humanitarian support to save lives and alleviate suffering",

at SEK 2.56 billion. For the thematic field Promoting freedom and fighting oppression there is a continued decrease in funding compared to 2023 (SEK 4.4 billion) and 2024 (SEK 4.3 billion). Humanitarian support saw a minor increase as compared to 2024 from SEK 2.55 billion. An upward shift in funding is instead noted for “Improving health for the most vulnerable” and “Strengthening synergies between aid and migration policies”.

FIGURE 2: THEMATIC SHARE OF SIDA'S SUPPORT TO CSOs (2025)

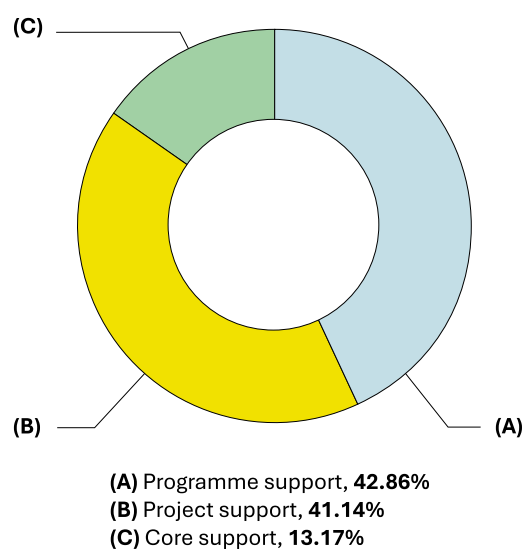


The three countries with the highest share of support channelled to CSOs (through different strategies) in 2025 were Ukraine, Mozambique and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). All three countries received a higher proportion of development aid compared to humanitarian aid (development aid at 82 per cent in the case of Ukraine and Mozambique, while at 55 per cent in the case of the DRC). The country where the largest support to CSOs was channelled from one single strategy allocation was Ukraine.

All Sida's strategies provide opportunities for collaboration with CSOs as a way to effectively implement development aid. The Sida strategy that channelled the largest level of support to CSOs in 2025 was The Strategy for Sweden's Humanitarian Support 2021-2025 with an amount of close to SEK 2.3 billion (22 per cent of Sida's total funding to CSOs). This was followed by the Development cooperation with civil society 2025-2029 at SEK 1.7 billion (17 per cent of Sida's total funding to CSOs). Analysing disbursements from an appropriation perspective shows that appropriation item humanitarian contributions has the largest share at SEK 2.56 billion (25 per cent of Sida's total funding to CSOs), followed by appropriation item Africa at SEK 2.1 billion (20 per cent).

Sida's support was channelled to CSOs as programme support at 42.86 per cent and through CSOs as project support at 41.14 per cent and to CSOs as core funding at 13.17 per cent. This is a decrease in programme funding compared to 2024 from 47 per cent, an increase in project funding that same year from 39 per cent and an increase in core funding from 11.74 per cent.

FIGURE 3: MODALITIES OF SUPPORT TO CSOs (2025)



GOVERNING POLICIES 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 governing document 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 instructions, annual appropriation letters, strategies, and budgets. Strategies have bilateral, regional or thematic objectives as well as objectives found in the specific strategy for collaboration with CSOs; **“Strategy for Sweden's development cooperation with the civil society 2025-2029”**.

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 with the aim of facilitating and enabling the work of civil society organisations operating in development and humanitarian cooperation.⁵ This is to be done by adapting an effective support to decrease transaction costs as well as recognizing civil society as equal development cooperation actors in their own right. 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. The recommendation builds on three principles, referred to as pillars, to achieve a successful collaboration with civil society:

1. Respecting, protecting and promoting civic space
2. Supporting and engaging with civil society
3. Incentivising CSO effectiveness, transparency and accountability

COORDINATION PLATFORMS FOR AND WITH CIVIL SOCIETY

CONCORD is the major Swedish coordinating platform for civil society organisations working for development 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 cooperation. GÅ is implemented and followed up by a working group where Sida is a standing member. At the 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 Society in Development Cooperation 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 open to all interested CSOs.

INTERNATIONAL TRENDS

The state of development in the world in 2025 has been described as unpredictable, geopolitically unstable and as an ongoing dismantling of the international rules-based order.^{6,7} Several major wars were raging in 2025 (e.g. Ukraine, Gaza, DRC, Sudan).⁸ Significant extreme weather events affected several regions with links to climate change (e.g. Afghanistan, Myanmar), as well as widespread social and political polarization (e.g. Georgia, Thailand, Belarus). Several countries have also continued to introduce laws that make it more difficult for CSOs to receive foreign funding.⁹ This development has negatively contributed to CSOs' ability to invest in long-term

development activities. CSOs' work on development now needs to respond to rapidly emerging priorities in light of volatile developments, while at the same time having access to less funding.^{10 11 12 13}

V-Dem reports that 2025 is the second year in a row where the world has more autocratic countries as compared to democratic ones (92 autocracies and 87 democracies). The vast majority of the world's population – 74 per cent or 6 billion – now live in autocracies. A minority of the world's population – 7 per cent - live in liberal democracies.^{14 15} Freedom of association and freedom of expression continued to decline in 2025. Freedom of association decreased in 24 countries while freedom of expression deteriorated in 44 countries.¹⁶ The shrinking democratic space to act is often politically sanctioned and reinforced by coincident developments such as technological development, climate change and countries' demographic developments.¹⁷

Traditional aid donors increasingly changed focus towards investment in national affairs with a consequence of reducing their international aid allocations. In 2024, net ODA and subsidised financing from DAC members, non-DAC countries and multilateral organizations totalled USD 254.8 billion, a decrease of 4.5 per cent compared to 2023 in real terms. This includes additional official flows from non-DAC donors to developing countries, mainly through private sector instruments, as well as outflows from the core budgets of multilateral organizations. In 2025 OECD reports that a further decrease of 23 per cent in aid was documented as compared to 2024.^{18 19}

In the shadow of the growing focus on autocracy a characterising feature of civil society in recent years is a reconstruction towards decentralised forms of organising with implications for a revitalisation of democracy and increased civic mobilisation around the world. Many of the newer movements are led by Gen Z, doing much with little. Many of these decentralised movements are addressing issues of so-called "everyday democracy" such as the cost of living, clean water, or good schools. But there are also global movements that are demanding accountability for climate change.^{20 21} Resistance from civil society towards increasing autocratisation is documented as mounting. CSOs continue their work in development as new social movements are formed to adapt to new challenges.²²

SIDA SUPPORT IN VIEW OF INTERNATIONAL TRENDS

Sida assesses that developments in the current phase have both paused progress towards the 2030 Agenda and, for the time being, reduced the scope for CSOs to operate. While there is a trend of a growing number of

non-registered civil societies working for democracy, neither Sida nor Sida's agreement partners can sign legal agreements with non-legally registered actors as these are categorised as non-legal persons. For 2026, Sida is instructed to increase collaboration with civil society organisations. In recently adopted strategies Sida is also instructed to increase a pluralistic portfolio of partners, including collaboration through direct agreements with local organisations and to increase collaboration with social movements. The 2025-2029 civil society strategy emphasises that Sida is to continue to use an aid- and development-effective approach to collaboration with civil society.

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 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.
- 3 The number of agreements with open validity periods (but with a closed activity period) amount to 679. The longer validity period serves to cater for reporting and repayments.
- 4 Diakonia had 21 active agreements with ongoing activity periods in 2024, while We Effect had 14.
- 5 <https://legalinstruments.oecd.org/en/instruments/oecd-legal-5021>
- 6 CIVICUS State of Civil Society Report 2026.
- 7 V-Dem Institute, Unraveling The Democratic Era?? Democracy report 2026.
- 8 According to the Uppsala Conflict Data Program ([UCDP - Uppsala Conflict Data Program](#), Department of Peace and Conflict Research), the number of armed conflicts has doubled since 2010. The International Committee of the Red Cross, ICRC, has identified over 130 ongoing armed conflicts and wars in the world.
- 9 CIVICUS State of Civil Society Report 2026.
- 10 CIVICUS State of Civil Society Report 2026.
- 11 OECD, Final OECD statistics on official development assistance (ODA) and other resource flows to developing countries in 2024.
- 12 A Juvonen and E Mantoïu (eds.) et al, China's Development Playbook: A Test for European Democracy Support, European Democracy Hub, 2026.
- 13 World Economic Forum, The Global Risks Report 20th Edition 2025.
- 14 V-Dem Institute, Unraveling The Democratic Era? Democracy Report 2026.
- 15 CIVICUS Monitor, People Power Under Attack 2025.
- 16 Ibid.
- 17 World Economic Forum, The Global Risks Report 20th Edition 2025.
- 18 OECD, Final OECD statistics on official development assistance (ODA) and other resource flows to developing countries in 2024.
- 19 [https://one.oecd.org/document/DCD\(2026\)8/en/pdf](https://one.oecd.org/document/DCD(2026)8/en/pdf)
- 20 R Youngs, E Panchulidze, C Magoga, A New Phase of Civic Movements: Implications for International Democracy Support, European Democracy Hub, 2025.
- 21 Merriman, H. et al., Fostering a Fourth Democratic Wave: A Playbook for Countering the Authoritarian Threat, Atlantic Council and International Center on Nonviolent Conflict, 2023.
- 22 CIVICUS State of Civil Society Report 2026.

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