

# SWEDEN AND THE LEAVING NO ONE BEHIND PRINCIPLE

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Nationally and Globally



# MAIN MESSAGES

## Realising human rights and gender equality

The individual is at the heart of the 'leaving no one behind' (LNOB) principle. The right of every individual to fulfill their potential is reflected in the overarching ambition of the 2030 Agenda and a prerequisite for realising the goals for all, everywhere. We need to identify the structural causes of inequality, lack of gender equality, lack of respect of all human rights, be they civil or political rights, economic, social or cultural rights as well as discrimination on any ground that marginalizes and excludes individuals from realizing their capabilities, claiming their rights and holding duty bearers accountable. Sustainable development and gender equality cannot be achieved in leaving majority of the population behind. Accelerated action to reach the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030 should be guided by the norms and principles enshrined in international and regional human rights instruments.

## Strengthening empowerment and participation

Designing policies that can capitalise on synergies and resolve trade-offs between the SDGs can only be done through multi-stakeholder dialogue between all segments of society. It is particularly important to include groups who are frequently left out of the conversation in this process, not least women and girls. Cultivating trust in, and





support for, governments from the local to the global level requires strengthening representation, engagement, and respect for civil rights, including freedom of speech, freedom of religion or belief, and freedom of assembly and association. Gender equality efforts are integral to any solution. Sweden supports open, inclusive and sustainable trade as an important tool for inclusive growth and poverty reduction, as well as the participation of developing countries in global trade.

## Advancing the transition towards resource-efficient, resilient and climate-neutral economies

Directing more of the benefits of expanding global economic activity towards the world's poor will enable more rapid and steady progress towards socio-economic and environmental sustainability. Strengthening resilience, disaster risk reduction, climate change mitigation and adaptation, including safeguarding nature's contributions to people, is essential to ensuring that those in vulnerable situations are not disproportionately affected by environmental and disaster risks. Women and indigenous people should participate in decision-making. We need to secure environmental sustainability and access to food for future generations through a resource-efficient transition, the decoupling of growth from environmental degradation and the integration of Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) in national policies. Sustainable trade practises can enhance green transition by the dissemination of emission reduction technologies and services globally. Trade in environmental goods and services should therefore be facilitated. Special attention must be paid to the social and gender dimension of the transition, in order to ensure that no one, particularly people living in poverty, is left behind when society implements measures to become climate-neutral.



## Promoting multidimensional poverty reduction

Poverty is multidimensional and viewed not only as a shortage of material assets, but also as a lack of influence over one's own situation, choices and safety, and as a lack of respect for the full range of human rights, including a lack of gender equality. If we are to reach those furthest behind, it is important to recognize the full range of shortages in resources, access to services, health, education and life choices. Food security and nutrition for all are fundamental to health and realizing the fulfilment of other rights.

## Promoting social dialogue and decent work

Full and productive employment, fundamental rights in working life, social protection, social dialogue and gender mainstreaming are all a necessary for sustainable economic development and poverty reduction, leaving no one behind. Freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining are crucial for democratic development and to a sustainable working life. Poor working conditions, social injustice, inequality and lack of gender equality have been an important drivers of strikes, popular protests and social unrest. A functioning labor market, with a trusting relationship between employers, trade unions and the state, has contributed to productive employment with decent working conditions for people of diverse gender identities, reducing inequality and strengthening the voice of workers.

## Progressively realizing universal social protection

Everyone has the right to social security and access to basic services. Universal social protection, including floors, is a powerful tool for alleviating poverty, tackling inequalities and lack of gender equality, social exclusion, and increasing resilience to social, economic and



environmental shocks, and promoting equal opportunities for all, across generations and gender identity. Sweden's experiences from the last century resonate with current research showing that universal programmes are more effective than poverty-targeted programmes in reaching both their intended recipients and those living in extreme poverty.

## Improving data and monitoring

Targeting action at those left behind requires having a proper monitoring system to identify and follow up on policies aimed at improving the conditions of those facing marginalisation and exclusion. Data must be disaggregated beyond age and sex, including such information as migratory status, ethnicity and disability etc. Such disaggregated data need to be collected and handled in an ethical and responsible way that does not expose those who are already at risk to any harm. Who is part of a group in vulnerability is determined by various intersecting characteristics and can differ over time, between countries and contexts. Improving the availability of reliable, high-quality and disaggregated data needs to be partnered with a holistic monitoring and evaluation system to assess the conditions of people in vulnerable situations.

# LEAVING NO ONE BEHIND – A GOAL OF AND A PREREQUISITE FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic illustrates the interconnectivity of our challenges. Local crises quickly become global. Everyone is affected but the impact is disproportionately negative for people in vulnerable situations.

Women, men and people belonging to different minority groups are affected in different ways. Particularly at risk are people who are older, sick or disabled, people living in poverty and marginalization, and people who have limited access to health care services and water, sanitation and hygiene. Racism and xenophobia are often exacerbating factors. Some women and children, as well as LGBTI people, who are isolated at home and subjected to domestic violence. Small businesses and groups with precarious or informal employment contracts are experiencing severe economic uncertainty. Food insecurity is increasing and the pandemic risks pushing another 130 million people into hunger during 2020<sup>1</sup>.

The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated that the world is falling short on its commitment to leave no one behind.

## Who is being left behind?

Leaving no one behind is both an overarching objective of the 2030 Agenda and a prerequisite for achieving the 17 SDGs. The principle implies targeting efforts at populations that are experiencing multiple, intersecting disadvantages linked to socio-economic conditions, governance mechanisms and discriminatory policies, as well as reaching the furthest behind first. Income inequalities have been growing in recent decades, leaving many people behind with regards to healthcare, housing, education, good-quality nutrition, water, sanitation and other services and rights. Discriminatory laws, norms and barriers to political participation prevent women and marginalised groups from achieving empowerment and influence. Shrinking democratic space and restrained political freedoms hamper the possibilities to organise, formulate collective demands, and hold governments accountable. Over 50 per cent of the population living in extreme poverty reside in five countries in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia<sup>2</sup>. Sub-Saharan Africa has the largest gender poverty gap<sup>3</sup>. By 2030, a majority of those living in extreme poverty will be living in fragile and conflict-affected states<sup>4</sup>. The livelihoods of the poor are more severely threatened by climatic shocks, including changes in temperature, floods, and droughts. Smallholder farmers produce 36 per cent of the world's food<sup>5</sup> and often operate in the informal sector<sup>6</sup> which makes them more vulnerable.

Universal and life-cycle based social protection is most effective in reaching and supporting the poorest and those in the most vulnerable situations, not least women and girls. In addition, specific programmes need to be implemented to address the needs of all children, youth, people with disabilities, people living with HIV/AIDS, older people, indigenous peoples, refugees and internally displaced persons, migrants and others who face exclusion and marginalisation due to various circumstances. Sweden is committed to addressing gender inequalities nationally while accelerating action to remove all legal, cultural, social and economic barriers to achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls globally through our feminist foreign policy.

## Empowering future generations

As we step into the Decade of Action, a special focus needs to be placed on the conditions and opportunities of future generations. The proportion of young people in the world is the largest in history, with 90 percent residing in developing countries. Ensuring that young people and children are not left behind in terms of access to health, education, connectivity, economic opportunity and political participation will be crucial for future sustainable development. The situation of girls needs special attention. Global shocks such as the COVID-19 outbreak can disturb and even reverse progress in SDG outcomes

for children and youth through the closing of schools (SDG 4), domestic violence (SDG 16.2), strained health care systems and isolation (SDG 3), sexual and gender based violence (SGBV) and harmful practices (SDG 5), as well as decreased food security (SDG 2).

The empowerment and recognition of young people as agents of change and meaningful partners in decision-making and negotiations are the foundation of resilient systems. Young advocates are raising issues of intergenerational fairness and should be included as advisors in realising social, economic and ecological sustainability. Young leaders from local communities around the world are contributing daily to more peaceful and inclusive societies for the betterment of all. It is vital that all young people's varied experiences, opinions and perspectives are represented and mirrored in meaningful participation. Young people are not a homogenous group and are facing different risks of being left behind. A special focus needs to be placed on refugee children and young people, especially girls and young women, as well as those in the asylum process. Inclusion must be practiced in a spirit of partnership where young people are stakeholders and agents in their own lives, and where their opinions are heard and recognised and can serve as a basis for decision-making.

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1 FSIN, 2020, Global Report on Food Crises (WFP)

2 Global Sustainable Development Report 2019

3 World Bank

4 Global Sustainable Development Report 2019, 85%

5 <http://www.fao.org/3/ca7036en/ca7036en.pdf>

6 <http://www.fao.org/family-farming/data-sources/dataportrait/farm-size/en/>

# OPERATIONALIZING THE LNOB PRINCIPLE

The 2030 Agenda offers a framework for building more inclusive, sustainable and resilient societies equipped to face pandemics, climate change and other global challenges. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals must be realised for all, everywhere.

Leaving no one behind is central to achieving the SDGs, both at home and globally. To tackle these challenges, new partnerships are being formed and there is a growing awareness of the urgency to act now. Implementation involves a step-by-step approach towards a modern and sustainable welfare state, nationally and as part of the global system. Multilateral cooperation is more important now than ever before.



# SWEDEN AT WORK NATIONALLY

Sweden has a feminist Government and pushes for gender integration in all policies. In 2016, the Government adopted a national strategy for human rights aimed at establishing a platform for continued work to promote full respect for Sweden's international human rights commitments. Furthermore, the Government has presented a new goal for national disability policy with a clearer rights perspective and incorporated the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) into Swedish law. In recent years, several reforms have been introduced to secure equal rights for LGBTI people. However, LGBTI people, particularly transgender and intersex people, still face challenges in Sweden. Funds have been provided to raise the level of ambition on enabling the Sami people to retain and develop their culture. Sweden has also developed a national plan to combat racism, similar forms of intolerance and hate crime. One priority is preventing and combating honour-related violence and men's violence against women.

Sweden's municipalities and regions are committed to sustainable development. Large parts of the Swedish business community see sustainability as a competitive advantage. Sustainability is increasingly being integrated into the core of business models and is driving new innovations. Civil society is paving the way through its own efforts and by pushing decision-makers to act. More than ever before, young people are recognised as being key to transformative change, and the large and growing number of older people are actively contributing to society in many ways. The Swedish research community contributes cutting-edge research on sustainable development. Seventy-nine Swedish government agencies have approved a joint declaration of intent to implement the 2030 Agenda and are now finding new ways to collaborate to deliver on the SDGs.

Sweden's aim to become the world's first fossil-free welfare state, reaching net zero emissions by 2045 at the latest, responds directly to SDG 13. The global shift from carbon-intensive to carbon-neutral development that is needed will also contribute to the implementation of the whole 2030 Agenda – notably SDGs 7, 9, 11, 12. When implementing this shift, consideration should be given to safeguarding

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nature’s contribution to people and ecosystem services, biodiversity and strengthening land tenure rights, with a particular emphasis on the vulnerability of people living in rural areas. Investment needs to be redirected from fossil-based energy production to renewable energy and resource-efficient products and services; infrastructure and buildings; and to carbon-neutral and nontoxic materials – all contributing to a circular economy. For instance, the Swedish Government recently adopted a strategy for sustainable production and consumption. The Government has also tasked the Swedish National Debt Office with issuing green bonds in 2020. These are bonds that are used to fund budget expenditure on sustainable investments and projects.

According to the latest review of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda by Statistics Sweden, 2 per cent of Sweden’s population live in “severe material deprivation”, a poverty measure formulated by the EU. Yet, challenges remain when adopting an intersectional perspective on social exclusion. The rate is higher among the foreign-born population, people with disabilities, and the unemployed. Socio-economically disadvantaged areas in Stockholm have also been worse hit by COVID-19, exacerbating existing challenges around segregation, exclusion, and marginalisation. In a response to these existing challenges, in July 2016 the Government launched a long-term reform programme for reduced segregation in 2017–2025.

Sweden’s ambitious welfare ambitions are underpinned by maintaining a high level of employment for both women and men. An active labour market policy, combined with transition agreements developed by the social partners, enables swift structural change by supporting mobility in the labour market and making it easier for unemployed to return to employment. Strong and independent social partners is the linchpin of a functioning labour where both sides of industry can negotiate to reach solutions that are acceptable to everyone. The Swedish collective agreement system gives room for flexibility and solutions adapted to the realities of the labour market.



Sweden has a long history of a universal, rights-based and comprehensive system of social protection. It includes publicly funded education systems, subsidised preschools, social services such as health care, affordable childcare and care for older people, as well as social security for people in need. Sweden also has a social insurance system providing sickness insurance, unemployment benefits, universal child allowance, pensions and paid parental leave for both parents, for example. Since 2015, action has been taken to further develop some of these areas. Child allowance and maintenance support, for example, have been increased. Also, a review of the Swedish pension system, with a specific focus on decreasing the pension gap between women and men, has been carried out and has resulted in an action plan to tackle this challenge. The Government has also launched a programme of measures for better health and reduced sickness absence from work, which has curbed the rising number of people on sick leave. In addition, the Riksdag (Swedish Parliament) has adopted a public health bill for good and equitable public health for the entire population with the aim of closing avoidable health gaps within a generation.

The 2030 Agenda specifies several background variables according to which the statistics should be broken down to identify groups in vulnerable situations. For reasons of confidentiality and integrity, such breakdowns have not always been possible in Sweden. Statistics Sweden has formed a working group tasked with improving the visibility of groups in vulnerable situations in the domestic follow-up process, with the ambition of reviewing the implementation of the LNOB principle in its 2020 report.

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# SWEDEN AT WORK GLOBALLY

Sweden pursues a feminist foreign policy, including a feminist trade policy. These policies aim to strengthen women's human rights, countering discriminatory laws and norms, sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) as well as combating child marriage and all forms of gender-based violence. Sweden also prioritizes women's economic and social rights, women's economic empowerment, and their power over economic decisions, resources and opportunities.

For the Swedish Government, respect for universal human rights and gender equality are not just foreign policy goals in themselves – they are means for global development and security. Sweden is convinced of the link between inclusiveness, gender equality, justice, and peace, and is committed to the implementation of UN Security Council resolutions on women, peace and security, youth peace and security, and children in armed conflict. Sweden promotes respect for international conventions and standards set by the International Labour Organization (ILO) to ensure that workers' fundamental human rights are fulfilled. Sweden promotes social dialogue, decent work and inclusive growth through the Global Deal partnership. Sweden also prioritises protecting, migrants' human rights and facilitating safe, orderly and regular migration.

The Swedish Drive for Democracy focuses on strengthen civil society, human rights, the rule of law, free and independent media, democratic processes as well as women's and young people's democratic engagement. The Drive for Democracy was launched in 2019 following growing concerns about the threats and challenges to democracy: These challenges have been exacerbated by the many restrictions imposed by governments aimed at limiting the spread of the COVID-19 virus.

Sweden continues to be a strong advocate for a free, open and rules-based trading system and gender equal trade policies as well as enhancing the participation of developing countries in global trade, including through trade-related development assistance (Aid for Trade). Sweden is a driving force in safeguarding the participation of Major



Groups and other Stakeholders in the review of the High-level Political Forum (HLPF) and advocates for higher degrees of accountability and peer-learning in countries' Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs).

Sweden has a long history of supporting climate change mitigation and adaptation action in developing countries, in an array of sectors and on a long-term basis and has scaled up its ambitions since the adoption of the Paris Agreement. In 2019, Sweden decided to increase financial support to three major climate funding mechanisms<sup>7</sup>. Sweden is leading a global program on sustainable lifestyles together with Japan to advance global action on sustainable production and consumption. Indigenous people play a crucial role in ensuring the sustainable management of land resources, providing ecosystem services and maintaining biodiversity fulfilling SDGs 13, 14 and 15. One way Sweden supports this is through the Tenure Facility. The United Nations Tax Committee and the Coalition of Finance Ministers for Climate Action are two of the forums in which Sweden is sharing its long and positive experiences of carbon taxation, hoping more countries will use economic measures to put a price on carbon. Sweden has also offered to host a high-level meeting in 2022 at the 50th anniversary of the 1972 first United Nations conference on the human environment, with the aim to support faster action.

The situation, needs, preconditions, and priorities of poor populations, including women, girls, men, boys and other marginalized groups constitute the starting point for the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency's (Sida) work on poverty reduction. Sida has developed a multidimensional poverty framework to be considered in the analysis, planning, implementation and follow-up of Swedish development cooperation. Poverty is viewed in terms of a lack of material resources, power, voice and respect for human rights, opportunities and choice, and lack of human security. Women and girls make up the majority of the world's population, but they still do not have the same rights or access to resources. Swedish develop-

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<sup>7</sup> The Adaptation Fund, the Least Developed Countries Fund and the Green Climate Fund

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ment cooperation takes as its starting point poor people’s perspectives on development and the rights perspective. In addition, three thematic perspectives are prioritised: conflict, gender equality, and environmental and climate change.

Sweden’s experience from universal social protection programmes is valuable in the growing global discussion on how universal social protection programmes can be implemented in different country-contexts, and how existing targeted protection systems can potentially become more universal over time. A growing proportion of Swedish development cooperation efforts are being focused on advancing universal protection systems, such as universal pensions. Sida recently became part of the Universal Social Protection (USP) 2030 initiative. Sweden also has a long history of supporting universal access to education (SDG 4) and health (SDG 3). Sustainable health systems that offer everyone equal access to good services, known as universal health coverage (UHC), are currently a global priority. The outbreak of COVID-19 has illustrated the importance of a gender and rights-based approach to health services, where access for everyone, regardless of ability to pay, is fundamental. It is more common for women and girls to be outside social protection systems or not to have equal access to them.

Statistics Sweden supports the development of statistical capacity throughout the world. In 2018, the Swedish Government adopted the ‘Strategy for capacity development, partnership and methods that support the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development’, which aims to improve possibilities and strengthen capacity for actors in partner countries to implement and follow up the 2030 Agenda, including support for improved statistical capacity. In November 2018, Sweden hosted the Inter-agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators (IAEG-SDG) meeting in Stockholm. After consultations with UN organizations and civil society, a report was prepared highlighting policy priority areas for groups in vulnerable situations<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> Statcom, 2018. Data Disaggregation and SDG Indicators: Policy Priorities and Current and Future Disaggregation Plans: <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/50th-session/documents/BG-Item3a-Data-Disaggregation-E.pdf>



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