



# **LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND**

From words to reality in Swedish  
development cooperation

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# Introduction

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), adopted by world leaders at the Sustainable Development Summit in September 2015, constitutes the most ambitious agenda for development that the world has ever seen. It applies to everyone, everywhere, rich and poor, north and south, and aims to end poverty in all its form by 2030, while fighting inequalities and climate change. It integrates the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development and the 17 goals are integrated and indivisible, meaning that they must be achieved together.

The agenda is a broader and more substantial continuation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), that guided decisions for global development before 2015. Like the MDGs, the SDGs are not legally binding on countries. However, they were adopted with the aim of making the world a better place for everyone, everywhere. The main responsibility for taking action in order to reach the goals lies with countries and their governments.

One of the potentially most profound aspects of the new agenda is the focus on equality and the principle of ‘Leave no one behind’. The importance of equality and to close the gaps in health, income, education, security and other dimensions of human welfare became a key ambition through the inclusive process that led up to the summit and the formulation of the SDGs themselves.

The leave no one behind pledge contained in the 2030 Agenda means more than purely expanding progress to include everyone and to stop discrimination. It also means closing the gap between the worst-off and best-off

– so the most vulnerable see the greatest improvements in living standards. This means that none of the goals can be considered met unless they are achieved for all. This commitment requires universal social policies, as well as the prioritisation of those furthest behind. It will also need targeted, fast-track efforts to lift the poorest and most marginalised people, groups and countries.

It is urgent to act if this promise is to be fulfilled. According to ODI, “Unless significant progress is made in reaching the poorest and most marginalised people the goals and their underlying commitment to leave no one behind will not be met. The longer countries take to start delivering on the leave no one behind, the more expensive it will be to do so”.<sup>1</sup>

Reaching the 17 SDGs for all requires political will, inclusive policies, improved disaggregated data and considerably more financing. While development aid (ODA) is a small share of all the resources needed, it plays a unique role as it is the only one that has poverty reduction as its core purpose. Therefore, it has a critical role to play in reaching the people furthest behind.<sup>2</sup> In addition, countries identified as being most at risk of being left behind receive particularly low levels of international financing beyond ODA, compared with other developing countries.<sup>3</sup>

It is critical that international development aid is aligned with the commitment to leave no one behind and reaches those furthest behind. Donors, therefore, have a responsibility to ensure their ODA is being spent in line with the priorities of the 2030 Agenda and the promise to leave no one behind.



## Leave no one behind means

1. Ending extreme poverty in all its forms
2. Reducing inequalities among individuals and groups
3. Addressing discriminatory barriers

It is a commitment to reach those furthest behind first and to ensure that all the 17 goals are achieved for all.

# Leave no one behind – why it matters

The introduction of equality as a common good in the global agenda addresses a criticised omission from the MDGs. The MDGs were developed essentially as output indicators that countries could agree upon. The means to achieve the targets were left to individual governments and countries. As a result, progress came to be measured as averages by country, region or globally, thereby concealing or overlooking marginalised people, regions and minorities.

In recent years, focus on the equity of progress and public goods has increased. One important indicator of this is the number of reports on equality published by major multilateral organisations in the UN system, the World Bank and the IMF and other institutions that deal with economic and social development.

One reason for this is increased knowledge and research on the scope and consequences of inequality. Inequality

hampers progress in everything from economic growth and poverty reduction to social cohesion and political stability. Inequality also undermines human rights, peace and sustainable development.<sup>4</sup> Economic and social inequality is one of the most pressing obstacles in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. According to the World Bank the goal to eliminate extreme poverty will not be achieved by 2030 without significant shifts in within-country inequality.<sup>5</sup>

In spite of tremendous progress for many people and countries, on a number of important indicators of social and economic development, there is still a significant number of people that have not seen much progress. Others have seen a deterioration in crucial aspects of their lives over many years. The poorest people are falling further and further behind. Income gaps are growing, consumption floors remain functionally stagnant and critical investments are not made in social protection and building human capital.<sup>6</sup>

This has shown that it is simply not enough to increase the size of common goods if their distribution still denies large groups of people access to progress. Global or national averages can easily hide a skewed distribution and pockets of poverty.

Extreme poverty fell from 1.9 billion people in 1990 to about 736 million in 2015. The overarching goal to halve extreme poverty by 2015 was reached with a margin.<sup>7</sup> At the same time, the number of people in Sub-Saharan Africa living in extreme poverty increased by almost 48 per cent, from 280 to 413 million in 2015.<sup>8</sup>

This shows how increases in household income and consumption have not been distributed evenly across the globe. However, it says nothing about the situation in Sub-Saharan Africa, where extreme poverty varies widely. In Mauritius, less than one per cent of the population lives in extreme poverty. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, that number is 77 per cent according the latest survey from 2012.<sup>9</sup>

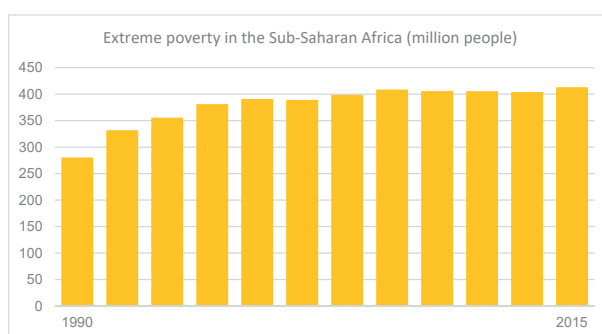
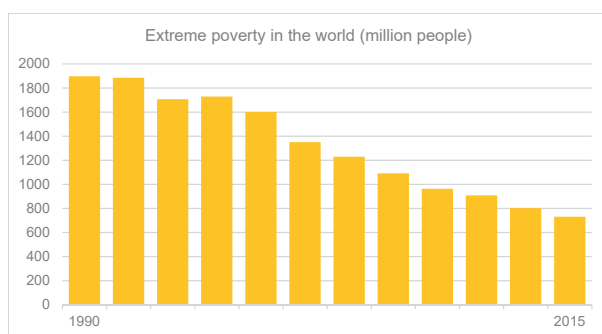


Figure 1: Extreme poverty globally and in Sub-Saharan Africa  
Source: World Bank (Poverty & Equity Data Portal)

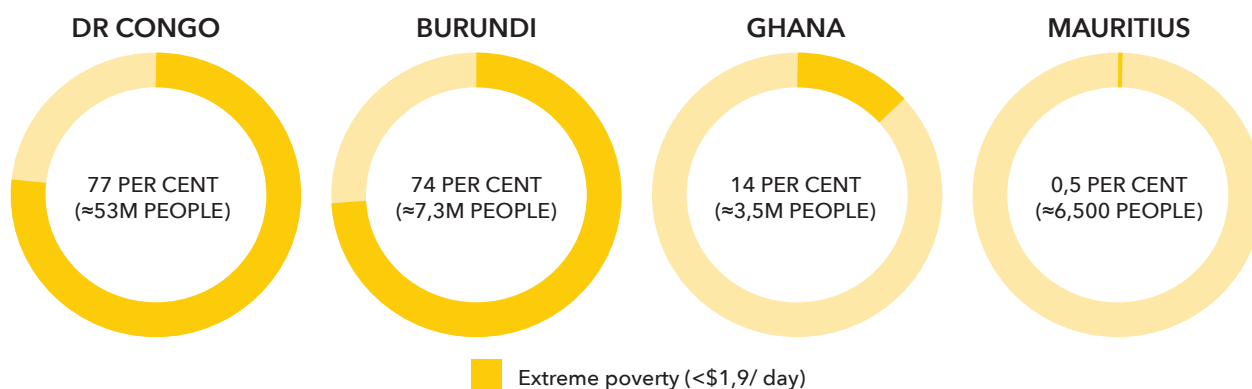


Figure 2: Examples of distribution of extreme poverty in the African region  
Source: World Bank (Poverty & Equity Data Portal)

Some countries in the region have seen great progress in poverty reduction. For example, Mauritania cut poverty from around 40 per cent in 1990 to less than 6 per cent in 2014; and Uganda went from 87 per cent in 1990 to 35 per cent in 2012. Others have not been as successful. For Zambia, the latest survey from 2015 shows that 58 per cent of the population was living in extreme poverty, a slight increase from 1990 levels. In Madagascar poverty increased from 70 to 78 per cent between 1990 and 2012.<sup>10</sup>

Socioeconomic inequalities still exist in all parts of the world. Income inequality within countries has increased in almost every region in recent decades. People face inequalities in opportunities and outcomes relating to education, health, food security, employment, housing, health services and economic resources.<sup>11</sup> Inequalities constitute one of the biggest obstacles for a future where everyone can participate, on their own terms, in their societies.

### Who is at risk of being left behind?

Individuals who are left behind are often members of social groups that are more vulnerable than others, such as girls and women, children and youth, the elderly, people with disabilities and mental health problems, ethnic and religious minority groups, refugees and migrants, and those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersexual (LGBTI).

Poverty is a fundamental problem. However, it is not the only reason for people being left behind. Discrimination and exclusion because of sex, age, income, ethnicity, religion, disability, sexual orientation, nationality or asylum status can all prevent people from taking part

in the development progress. Geography and access to infrastructure further affect the possibility to move out of poverty.

Crises and conflicts are other factors that intensify vulnerability. Consequently, the preconditions and current status of where you live have a significant impact on your risk of being left behind. If you belong to a marginalised group in a crisis or conflict area, this risk increases even further. Fragile states are also the countries that face the highest risk of being left behind, and where poverty is forecast to persist.

Lack of good governance, corruption, weak rule of law and discriminatory laws are also factors that leave people behind.<sup>12</sup>

### Inequality and the 2030 Agenda

Based on this background, the new global development agenda puts inclusiveness and equality as key priorities in the run-up to 2030. The promise to leave no one behind means focusing on the countries, people and parts of societies that are furthest behind, to reach them first to ensure that all goals and targets are met by all people, everywhere. In the final declaration, the principle is placed as one of the most central statements in the introduction:

**4. As we embark on this great collective journey, we pledge that no one will be left behind. Recognising that the dignity of the human person is fundamental, we wish to see the Goals and targets met for all nations and peoples and for all segments of society. And we will endeavour to reach the furthest behind first.**<sup>13</sup>

## Business as usual will not be enough

The reduction in global poverty was one of the great successes of the MDGs. As stated in the Declaration for Sustainable Development: “we can be the first generation to succeed in ending poverty”. But there is still a long way to go. Despite all regions having seen a reduction in extreme poverty over the past 25 years, latest estimates suggest that one tenth of the global population lives below the international poverty line of \$1.9 per day. This means that 730 million men, women and children are struggling every day, with the smallest of margins.<sup>14</sup>

Business as usual will not be sufficient to meet the target of eradicating extreme poverty by 2030. The main reasons for this are the composition of the extremely poor, and the growth rate in countries where they live. A large and growing share of people living in poverty live in Sub-Saharan Africa. As the number of people in extreme poverty has decreased in East and South Asia, the concentration of poverty has shifted towards Sub-Saharan Africa. Today, the region already makes up for more than half of the world’s poor, and if current trends persist, in 2030 almost all extreme poverty in the world will be concentrated in Sub-Saharan Africa.



Member of the Amazon Theatre Group in Manyatta-Kisumu. Amazon Theatre is one of the local groups under Kisumu Progressive Youth, a Wajibu Wetu partner that uses art in form of theatre for educative community outreaches. Photo: Alamin Mutunga

## 5 GENDER EQUALITY



### Goals for equality

The 2030 Agenda includes two goals that explicitly focus on reducing inequality.

SDG 5 emphasises gender equality and empowerment of women and girls. Its targets pledge actions on ending discrimination and violence against women and girls; eliminating harmful practices, ensuring full participation in leadership and decision-making; ensuring universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights; ensuring equal rights to economic resources; and strengthening policies and legislation for the promotion of gender equality.

## 10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES



SDG 10 emphasises socially sustainable development and reduced inequality, both within and between countries. Its targets pledge actions on reducing income inequality; promoting social, political and economic inclusion; eliminating discrimination; ensuring equal opportunity and outcome; adopting fiscal and social policies that promotes equality; and reforming global governance.



# Does Swedish aid live up to the ambition?

The principle to leave no one behind focuses on the poorest, most vulnerable and furthest behind – those who are often the hardest to reach. According to OECD DAC, ODA allocations do not yet meet the needs of the furthest behind.<sup>15</sup>

ODA remains a vital source of financing for the least developed countries (LDCs) and in fragile and conflict-affected contexts. DAC donor countries are making slow progress reaching the target of 0.15 per cent to the LDCs. ODA to the least developed countries expressed as a percentage of provider countries' gross national income still amounts to only 0.09 per cent.<sup>16</sup> While bilateral aid to the LDCs increased by 4 per cent in real terms in 2017, after several years of decline, preliminary statistics show a decrease again of 2.7 per cent in 2018.<sup>17</sup> Allocations to fragile and severely off-track countries are particularly volatile from one year to the next, making long-term development strategies difficult to implement and undermining effectiveness, states the report.<sup>18</sup>

A global outlook on aid allocation shows that ODA is not being sufficiently targeted to countries identified as being left behind.<sup>19</sup> In addition, how aid is spent within countries is also becoming an increasingly important issue in the context of the leave no one behind agenda. The report *Beyond the Tyranny of Averages* by AidData shows that, aid allocations tend to be concentrated in wealthier regions with more numerous beneficiaries, rather than the neediest regions. The report states that “the aim to leave no one behind will require a major shift in how we allocate resources and measures progress”.<sup>20</sup>

## Leave no one behind in Swedish aid

The 2030 Agenda consists of a wide set of measurable goals and targets. The idea is to measure progress by following indicators and targets, in relation to their individual starting point and deadline. But the overall principles in the declaration have no deadlines. They do not have an agreed definition or statistical code that captures how well countries live up to them. As a part of

the 2030 Agenda, the principle to leave no one behind is integrated in all parts of the international development agenda.

This report examines how leave no one behind impacts planning, prioritisation or execution of Swedish international aid, in the following areas:

- Official policy documents
- Overall allocation of the aid budget
- Refugee costs
- Aid provided by the EU
- The implementation of the poverty perspective in Swedish aid

## The need for policy clarification and a definition

While Swedish support for the 2030 Agenda is clearly expressed, there is no official definition or declared interpretation of leave no one behind. Without giving the commitment a practical meaning or a statement of intent, it is difficult to determine whether it has an impact on Swedish aid policy or simply is attached to goals and plans already in play.

## Where should the new agenda make a policy impact?

The final declaration of the 2030 Agenda states the intent of the principle to leave no one behind. Not only should the goals and targets be met for all countries and all people, the furthest behind should be reached first.<sup>21</sup> It is about fighting inequality and closing gaps. That ought to mean prioritisation, to focus on the poorest, most vulnerable and marginalised first.

This prioritisation can take place on several different levels: in the overarching strategy and goals, (which in Sweden would be the policy framework<sup>22</sup>), and in the distribution of funds within the budgetary posts, (which countries and regions, which thematic areas and which recipients are being prioritised). It can take place within the different portfolios and countries, (in the strategies for countries or organisations), and in every

single project. It would also need to be measured as a specific point in evaluations.

### Looking at the numbers

To measure the impact of the 2030 Agenda on Swedish aid, a quantitative analysis of the aid budget is necessary. However, goals such as equality and poverty, are not limited perspectives with a statistical code in recorded data. One obvious reason for the lack of a clear definition on what the principle should mean, is that, many developing goals and perspectives are overlapping and contribute to each other.

The data part of this report will therefore try to answer how well Swedish aid has been directed to people, countries, groups of people and focus areas that could fit the description of the people in risk of being left behind, according to the declaration.

### Leave no one behind in official documents

The findings from analysing the policy impact of the 2030 Agenda and leave no one behind in official documents indicates that, even if the 2030 Agenda was indeed the starting point and the underlying agenda in most official policies, the actual impact of the principle to leave no one behind, in terms of changed focus or prioritisation, is limited.

### The policy framework

In December 2016, the Swedish government outlined the new direction for development cooperation, after the new global development agenda was adopted, including the 2030 Agenda, the Paris Agreement on Climate Change and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on Financing for Development.<sup>23</sup>

The principle of leaving no one behind is not a major theme in the policy framework. The only direct reference to leave no one behind is on the geographical distribution of Swedish ODA. Here, Swedish government policy makes a case for concentrating resources on the countries with the greatest needs. It also states that the choice of recipients is constantly under review.

**Development cooperation must primarily be focused on the countries that face the greatest challenges and shortcomings in terms of their own resources, with the most extensive needs and where Swedish development cooperation**

**has the greatest opportunity of contributing towards the aim of development cooperation. The starting point of the 2030 Agenda is clearly to leave no one behind.**

**There is a need to regularly review where the added value of Swedish development cooperation is highest. Countries must be chosen based on an overall assessment and a clear basis for assessment founded on where Sweden is particularly well-placed to carry out effective development cooperation.<sup>24</sup>**

So far, there has been no initiative to refocus the distribution according to the intention above. However, redirecting resources from one recipient to another is not a quick process.

### The Swedish action plan and Sweden's reporting to the UN

The Swedish government has adopted an action plan for the 2030 Agenda.<sup>25</sup> The plan outlines the actions Sweden needs to take to reach the goals contained in the Agenda. Just as most of the reporting on the 2030 Agenda either to different UN organisations or national reporting and evaluation, it mainly focused on the efforts that Sweden needs to make within its borders. When it comes to ODA and international development cooperation, most documents refer to the Policy Framework (mentioned above) or the internal work of the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida).

Sweden reported on its implementation of the 2030 Agenda at the UN High-level Political Forum in 2017. The principle of leaving no one behind received little attention in the report and is not mentioned in relation to Swedish development cooperation.<sup>26</sup>

### Comment: leave no one behind in official policy documents

Leave no one behind is mentioned in relation to a number of perspectives and situations in some Swedish ODA policy documents, but not in an organised manner. Transparency and understanding, as well as ODA-programming and execution, would benefit considerably if the government and Sida declared what the principle means for different stages in the ODA-chain, and how they want to define and use this in actual strategies.



## Overall allocation of Swedish aid

The Swedish aid budget is tied to one per cent of GNI. This has been the case since parliament established the target in the 1970s. The goal was first fully implemented in 2006. Since then, the total aid budget has equalled one per cent of projected GNI.<sup>27</sup> Since the Swedish ODA is tied to the overall economic growth, the ODA has increased almost every year.<sup>28</sup>

The overall allocation has varied substantially over the years. In 2006, 84 per cent of the total aid budget was allocated to actual aid activities through bi- or multilateral aid. The rest was equally distributed between administration costs, Sweden's contribution to EU aid, and domestic costs for refugees seeking asylum in Sweden. In 2015, (due to a spike in the number of refugees seeking asylum in combination with the model used to calculate deductible costs), less than 70 per cent of the aid budget was used to fund actual aid activities. Twenty-two per cent, or SEK 9.4 billion<sup>29</sup>, was withheld by the government and allocated to cover refugee costs incurred in Sweden.

Of the 20 largest recipient countries of Swedish bilateral aid over the past four years, 13 are LDCs, 12 are countries with low Human Development Index (HDI), according to the Human Development Report. Five countries are neither LDC or a country with low HDI. Four of them are countries in conflict or post-conflict situations.

The distribution of Sweden's programmable aid has been a target for discussion over the years. OCED-DAC peer review states that Sweden's development cooperation still lacks geographical concentration and recommend that Sweden should allocate a higher share of its development assistance to a prioritised set of partner countries.<sup>30</sup>

The peer review also states that Sweden is highly committed to deliver on its pledge to leave no one behind. In 2017, Sweden spent 0.19 per cent of GNI to support LDCs which is the second-highest percentage among DAC countries in relative terms. Sweden was also the sixth-largest DAC provider to fragile contexts in absolute terms.<sup>31</sup>

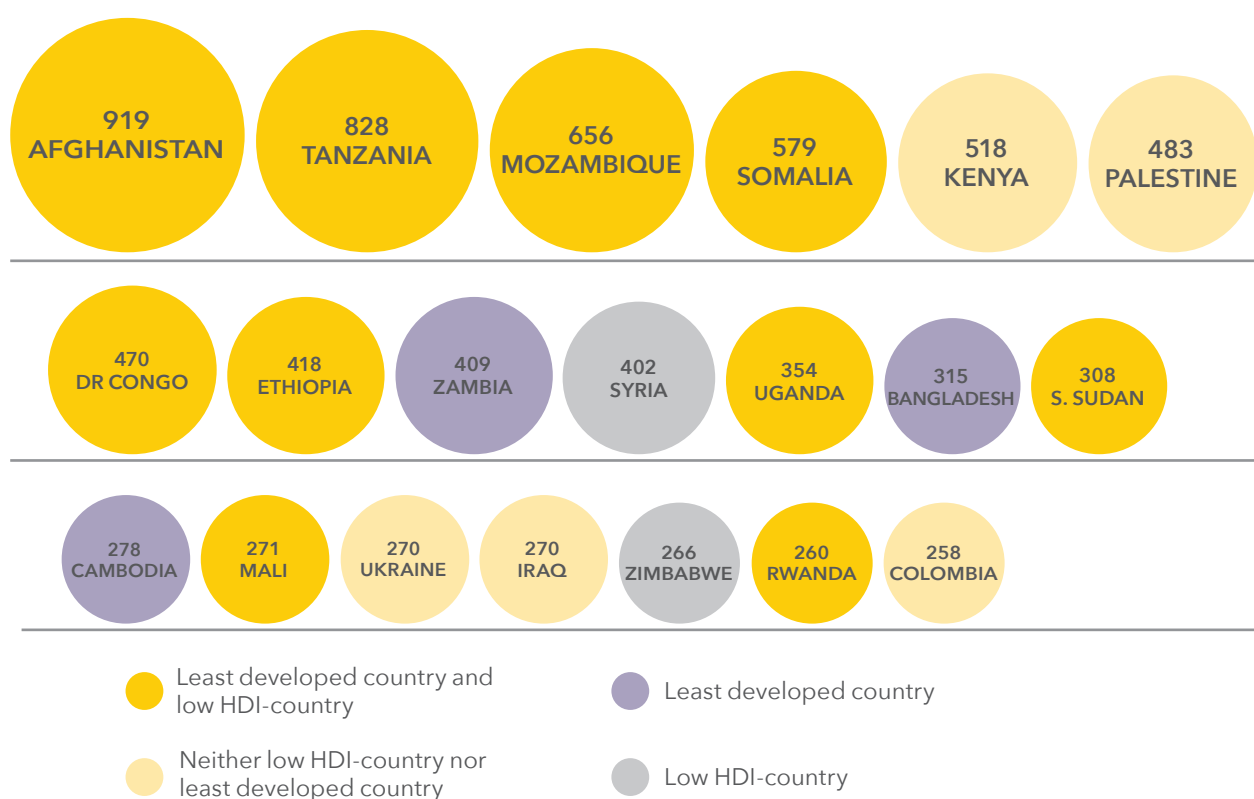


Figure 3: Average yearly ODA (2014-2017) in million SEK to the 20 largest recipients of Swedish aid  
Source: Open Aid

## Domestic refugee costs reported as aid

The policy to cover domestic costs for asylum seekers through the aid budget has been heavily debated in Sweden and internationally. The Swedish government has received substantial critique from the National Audit Office and from Swedish aid organisations for the deductions.<sup>32</sup> There is broad consensus among Swedish aid organisations that the policy does not benefit the poor and is not in line with Sweden's goals for development cooperation, the initial purpose of international aid, nor international agreements on aid effectiveness.<sup>33</sup>

In 2017, the OECD-DAC clarified the reporting standards for in-donor refugee costs after internal DAC-reviews showed big differences in how the rules to include in-donor refugee costs as official development assistance (ODA) were interpreted by donors.<sup>34</sup> The new guidelines urge donors to be “conservative” in their estimates and calculation approaches if they choose to report in-donor refugee costs in ODA. DAC members are also asked to share their calculations and estimates with the DAC Secretariat for validation.<sup>35</sup>

The Swedish government has adopted a new model for calculating in-donor refugee costs which, according to the minister for international development cooperation, will bring down donor-refugee costs.<sup>36</sup> However, new types of costs were also added in the model.<sup>37</sup> This cannot be considered conservative. There is still a lack of transparency on the calculations of in-donor costs. In relation to the 2030 Agenda and the principle of leaving no one behind, one could certainly make the argument that refugees are a vulnerable group. Refugees, migrants and internally displaced persons are explicitly mentioned in the declaration as example of marginalised and vulnerable groups that needs increased global effort and increased protection.

But reporting domestic refugee costs as international aid fails to support people forced from their homes. It can

hardly be regarded as support from a donor to a recipient country, which is the main purpose in the official definition of ODA, since no funds are transferred between countries and the complete absence of development potential for the recipient or emigration country.

## Aid through the EU

Around four per cent of the Swedish aid budget is controlled at the EU-level.<sup>38</sup> The actual amount is calculated from Sweden's share of the EU's aid budget, funded by the annual membership fee, and then deducted from the aid budget, (the same way that refugee costs are calculated). This means that Sweden has no direct influence on neither the size nor distribution of this part of the aid budget. It also means that these funds have other goals and guidelines, that are separate from the Swedish aid policy.

Since the amount is included in the overall aid budget, it also needs to be evaluated against the 2030 Agenda in the same manner as the rest of the budget, especially as the allocation of the EU budget differs substantially from Swedish priorities.

Between 2006-2016 a total amount of SEK 22 billion has been deducted for EU aid. During that time, 25 per cent of EU aid was allocated to neighbouring countries in Europe. That is more than LDCs (23%), and even slightly more than all low-income countries combined (24.5%).

This disproportional distribution, in favour for countries that are not among the poorest, has increased further during the years leading up to the 2030 Agenda. The share of EU aid going to LDCs fell by two thirds between its highest point in 2008 (38%) to the record low level in 2014 (13%).<sup>39</sup> This trend finally reversed in 2017, more global ODA was targeted to LDCs, rising by four per cent from 2016. EU reached a level of 0.11% of EU GNI and is still far from the target of providing 0.15% of EU GNI to LDCs.<sup>40</sup>

### Comment: Refugee costs

There is no doubt that aid in support for refugees and internally displaced people is an important ingredient in the efforts to fulfill the 2030 Agenda. But Sweden's policy to automatically count domestic refugee costs as international aid is one of the most problematic issues in relation to the leave no one behind-principle.



Photo: Georgios Giannopoulos

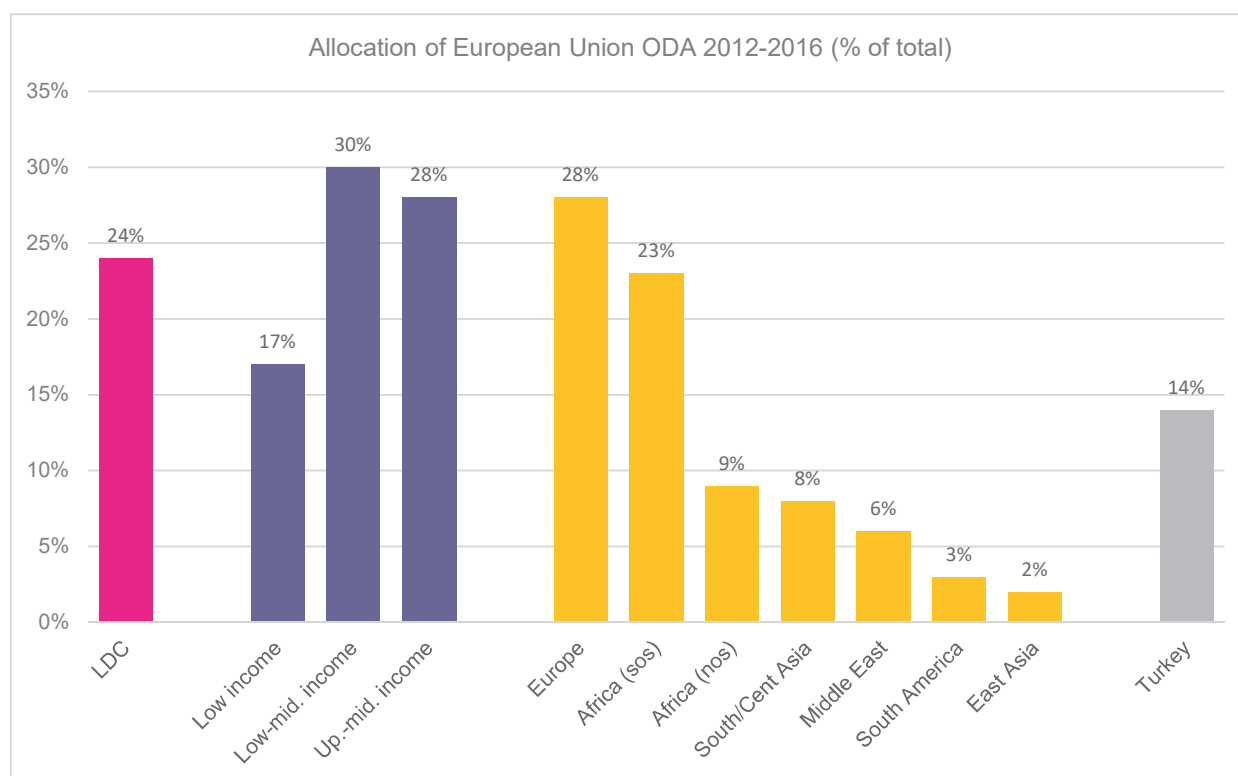


Figure 4: Allocation of EU ODA 2012-2016.<sup>41</sup> Note, the categories above are sometimes overlapping. Source: OECD/DAC

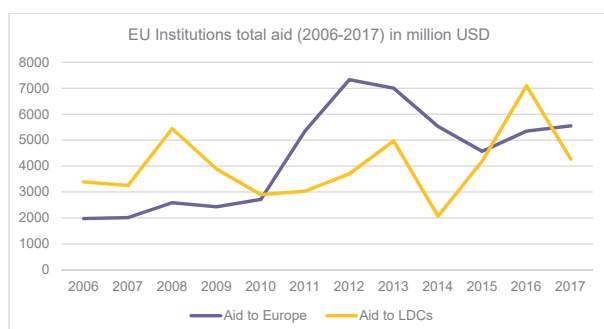


Figure 5: EU's total aid budget (2016-2017) in million USD<sup>42</sup>  
Source: OECD/DAC

Reducing poverty is the primary aim of EU development cooperation but the focus on poverty eradication is at stake. In recent years, we have seen how EU member states shift the priorities for development cooperation. EU aid policy is increasingly guided by the member states' migration and security policy priorities - diverting money away from the world's poorest and towards the national interest of donor countries. EU aid is used to control and impede migration. Aid is also conditioned to encourage the cooperation of developing country partners in migration and border control efforts. This shift is evident in the European Commission's proposals to the next EU long-term budget for 2021-2027, where migration is at the centre of the external instruments.<sup>43</sup>

### Comment: The lack of poverty focus in EU-aid is worrying

The distribution profile of EU's aid is questionable both from a poverty perspective and in relation to the leave no one behind principle. 28 per cent of EU-aid is allocated to other European countries, which makes Europe the largest recipient region of EU-aid. In addition, Turkey, as a single country, receives half the total ODA to Europe. 14 per cent of the Unions aid in 2012-2016 was allocated to Turkey.

Turkey is a founding member of OECD, and an observer in OECD-DAC. The last years, Turkey has participated in DAC-meetings including High Level Meetings discussing the definitions and rules for international aid. Both OECD-DAC and Turkey are regarding the country as a donor country.

The allocation of EU's international aid means that over SEK 300 million from the Swedish aid budget is allocated to Turkey, which puts Turkey among the biggest Swedish aid recipients, before countries such as Bangladesh, Cambodia, Iraq or Rwanda.



# Sida and leave no one behind

In its response to the Policy Framework in 2016, Sida requested clarification on the government's position on leave no one behind.<sup>44</sup> Sida has also requested more flexibility within the thematic posts to better meet changing needs.<sup>45</sup>

Since then, Sida has taken steps to operationalise the commitment in its operations. In 2018, Sida adopted a new vision which states that the SDGs and the commitment to leave no one behind are important starting points for all development cooperation. The vision also emphasises the multidimensional understanding of poverty and the goal to stimulate development for the poorest and most vulnerable people.

In an OECD DAC survey, Sweden is highlighted as one of the donor countries that has the most developed operationalisation of leaving no one behind.<sup>46</sup> This means that Sweden has an opportunity to take the lead within the international donor community and contribute with knowledge and best practice.

## Implementation and execution of aid policies

The design and prioritisation of aid programmes in the field plays a pivotal role in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Overarching aid policies and planning determines where aid is directed, to which regions or countries, towards what sectors and a recommendation on focus areas. But it is actual aid activities that determine ultimate outcomes.

In relation to leave no one behind, it is worth mentioning that Swedish aid policy already incorporates a similar principle that guides Swedish aid policy, at least partially. The 'Poverty Perspective' introduced in the Swedish Policy Coherence for Development in 2003, was interpreted to mean that the needs, interests and priorities of people living in poverty and marginalisation should be at the starting point of every aid effort. It is supposed to permeate every aspect of Swedish aid. However, in reality, it has often not been prioritised or been overlooked entirely. This should be a warning for

when implementing the leave no one behind principle. Sweden's track record is not great.

## Previous lack of poverty focus

A 2014 synthesis report<sup>47</sup> commissioned by Sida found an alarming lack of poverty focus, both in evaluations but also in aid programmes themselves. The report, that analysed 84 decentralised evaluations of aid activities in 2013, even questioned Sweden's commitments to the objectives of poverty reduction.

### Findings included:

**Less than half of the evaluation reports looked at the contribution of the interventions to poverty reduction, and most of those only analysed poverty reduction to a limited extent. When poverty is discussed, very little rigorous evidence is presented, and poverty is mostly assessed in relation to the relevance. This suggests cause for concern with regard to Sweden's commitments to core policy objectives of poverty reduction.**<sup>48</sup>

The findings failed to attract publicity or public scrutiny, but the issues have, according to Sida<sup>49</sup>, been very much in focus for improved models of implementation and evaluations. Sida has improved the concept of poverty in a more multidimensional sense. New and more fact-based assessment models have been introduced, to better analyse and follow-up every step in the aid chain, so that adjustments can be made continuously in a fact-based, manner.

## Is Swedish aid better prepared to focus on the poor today?

It certainly seems that the 2030 Agenda and the leave no one behind principle has brought back the question of improved poverty focus. This, at least, is the picture that emerges from official documents, from official policy statements and in interview with Sida staff.

Sida considers itself to be well prepared to implement the Agenda and to be able to translate leave no one be-

hind into operational strategies and practical aid work, according to Eric Ringborg, Senior Advisor and Agenda 2030-coordinator at Sida.<sup>50</sup>

In 2016, Sida developed a new and broader definition of poverty that will affect all links in the aid chain. The multidimensional poverty-approach<sup>51</sup> is a new conceptual framework for understanding poverty in multiple dimensions. The purpose of the new strategy is to strengthen the poverty focus and to contribute to the 2030 Agenda.

By implementing the broader approach to poverty in the initial steps of Sida's contribution in the country- or programme-strategy cycle, Sida believes they have the tool-box in place to catch people and groups, risking being left behind, in a wide range of dimensions, such as power and voice, access to recourses, opportunities and choice, and human security.

The new approach is seen as an operational tool and will be implemented for the first time in the upcoming half-time reviews of several country strategies. Therefore, there is no present experience on the results. The multidimensional poverty approach is highlighted by OECD-DAC as an example of operationalising the commitment to leave no one behind within development cooperation.<sup>52</sup>

An official follow-up on the results in the 2014-report has yet to be performed to ensure that poverty and poor people are in focus and not treated as something additional that maybe can be applied on top of other concerns and goals or in some cases treated as implicit in Sida's work and therefore not prioritised or in focus.

### **Comment: implementation of aid strategies and poverty focus**

Given the earlier difficulties to give a meaningful emphasis to the perspectives, needs and priorities of people living in poverty and marginalisation in the implementation of Swedish aid, a warning should be issued regarding the implementation of leave no one behind and the 2030 Agenda. Extra caution should be used when assuming that new agreed policies automatically will affect the actual aid activities.

An official follow-up study, on the findings from the 2014 Synthesis Report and the lack of poverty focus, should be performed, to evaluate if the problems still exists.



Isabell Massías Gonzáles from Nicaragua is blind. With the help of specialist teachers and the right tools, she is now included in the school. Photo: MyRight

# Recommendations

- Sweden should clearly define what the commitment to leave no one behind means within its development cooperation and for the planning, prioritisation, implementation and evaluation of aid.
- Sweden should take the leadership globally for the commitment to leave no one behind and for making it a guiding principle for international development cooperation.
- An official follow-up study on the findings from the 2014 synthesis report and the lack of poverty focus, should be performed to evaluate if shortcomings have been addressed.
- Sweden should continue to dedicate 1% of GNI to international aid and 0.15-0.2% to the least developed countries.
- Sweden should phase out the counting of in-donor refugee costs as aid. Meanwhile, Sweden should adhere to the urge made by OECD DAC, and apply the most conservative interpretation of OECD DAC guidelines to minimise deductions from aid programmes.
- Sweden should uphold the focus on ending poverty in the definition of aid, and work against attempts to weaken this focus within the EU and the OECD DAC.



# LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND



# End notes

- 1 ODI (2018) SDG progress Fragility, crisis and leaving no one behind. p 11
- 2 Development Initiatives (2018) Investments to end poverty 2018. p 30
- 3 Ibid. p 67
- 4 United Nations System (2017) Leaving no one behind: Equality and Non-Discrimination at the Heart of Sustainable Development. p 15
- 5 World Bank (2016). Poverty and Shared Prosperity: Taking on Inequality, p. 2
- 6 Development Initiatives (2018) Investments to end poverty 2018. p. 10
- 7 World Bank (2018) The number of extremely poor people continues to rise in Sub-Saharan Africa
- 8 World Bank (2019) Poverty & Equity Data Portal: Sub-Saharan Africa
- 9 World Bank (2019) Poverty & Equity Data Portal
- 10 World Bank (2019) Poverty & Equity Data Portal
- 11 United Nations System (2017) Leaving no one behind: Equality and Non-Discrimination at the Heart of Sustainable Development. p 17
- 12 UNDP (2018) What does it mean to Leave no one behind?
- 13 UN (2015) A/RES/70/1 Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development
- 14 UN (2019) The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2019. p 22.
- 15 OECD (2018) Development Co-operation Report 2018: Joining forces to Leave no one behind. p. 216.
- 16 Ibid. p. 43, 229.
- 17 OECD (2019) Newsroom: Development aid drops in 2018, especially to neediest countries.
- 18 OECD (2018) Development Co-operation Report 2018: Joining forces to Leave no one behind. p. 44
- 19 Development Initiatives (2018) Investments to end poverty 2018. p. 39
- 20 AidData (2017) Beyond the Tyranny of Averages p. 31.
- 21 UN (2015) A/RES/70/1 Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
- 22 Government of Sweden (2016) Government Communication 2016/17:60 Policy framework for Swedish development cooperation and humanitarian assistance.
- 23 Ibid.
- 24 Ibid. p. 49
- 25 Government of Sweden (2018) Handlingsplan Agenda 2030 2018-2020. Fi 2018:3
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- 27 Government of Sweden. Budget Bills.
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- 29 OECD-DAC. In 2018 value, adjusted for inflation. (8894 million SEK in current value).
- 30 OECD (2019) OECD Development Co-operation Peer Reviews: Sweden 2019. p. 21.
- 31 Ibid. p 16.
- 32 Riksrevisionen (2016) Ett förutsägbart bistånd 2016:17 and Concord (2017) Är det bistånd? En granskning av Sveriges avräkningar från biståndet.
- 33 Concord (2017) Är det bistånd? En granskning av Sveriges avräkningar från biståndet.
- 34 OECD (2017) DAC High level communiqué: 31 October 2017
- 35 Ibid. p. 14
- 36 Sveriges Radio (2019) Mindre bistånd ska gå till flyktingkostnader.
- 37 Government of Sweden (2019) The Budget Bill for 2020. Prop. 2019/20:1 Expenditure area 7 International development cooperation. p. 10
- 38 Ibid. p. 15
- 39 OECD/DAC: Creditor Reporting System (CRS). ODA Commitments, all sectors, Constant Prices. NOTE: The categories above is sometimes overlapping (Turkey is for example also included in Europe, many countries in Africa is also included in LDC)
- 40 Council of the European Union (2018) “Investing in Sustainable Development” and Annual Report 2018 to the European Council on EU Development Aid Targets. - Council conclusions (22 May 2018) p. 7 Council conclusions
- 41 OECD/DAC: Creditor Reporting System (CRS). ODA Commitments, all sectors, Constant Prices.
- 42 OECD/DAC: Creditor Reporting System (CRS). ODA Commitments, all sectors, Constant Prices
- 43 Concord Europe (2018) AidWatch 2018 Aid and Migration: The externalisation of Europe’s responsibilities
- 44 Sida (2016) Remissvar: Policyramverket för det svenska utvecklingssamarbetet. p. 3
- 45 Sida (2015) Sidas budgetunderlag 2016–2018. p. 5
- 46 OECD (2018) Development Co-operation Report 2018: Joining forces to Leave no one behind. p. 217
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- 48 Ibid, p. 10
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- 50 Interview with Eric Ringborg, Senior Advisor and Agenda 2030-coordinator at the Director-General’s Office at Sida. 14 November 2018.
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## LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND

When the 2030 Agenda and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals were adopted in 2015, world leaders did not only commit to end extreme poverty, tackle climate change and promote peace and justice, but also to reduce inequalities. Our leaders committed to 'leave no one behind' and made a pledge to endeavour to reach those furthest behind first. It means that none of the goals can be considered met unless they are achieved for all.

To leave no one behind is the most important commitment in the 2030 Agenda because it puts equality and inclusion at the centre of the development agenda. It has a particular focus on the poorest and most vulnerable people – those who often are the most difficult to reach. Development aid has a critical role to play in reaching people furthest behind and donors have a responsibility to ensure that aid is being spent in line with the promise to leave no one behind.

This report examines how leave no one behind impacts Swedish development cooperation. It examines official policy documents, allocation of the aid budget as well as the implementation of the poverty perspective in Swedish aid.



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