Democratic change and improved respect for human rights are essential for people living in poverty and under oppression, enabling them to influence their living conditions and hold governments accountable. Sida’s support to the thematic area of Democracy and Human Rights amounted to SEK 7 billion in 2020. This makes democracy and human rights Sida’s largest thematic area, equivalent to approximately 27 percent of Sida’s total disbursements that year.

**MAIN AREAS OF SUPPORT**

Democracy, human rights and the rule of law are priority thematic areas in Sweden’s development cooperation. A human rights-based approach and perspectives of people living in poverty are fundamental and shall be applied in all Swedish development cooperation. Support to democracy and human rights plays a fundamental role in combatting discrimination and oppression and reducing poverty in all its dimensions.

The Agenda 2030 declaration is clear in requiring respect for human rights and all Sustainable Development Goals relate to several human rights aspects. While democracy is only explicitly mentioned in the declaration, and not in the goals themselves, the broad agenda of goal no. 16 includes promotion of inclusive decision making, access to justice for all and effective and accountable institutions at all levels. Among the targets of particular relevance to the work of Sida within the thematic area of democracy and human rights are:

16.6 Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels.
16.7 Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels.
16.10 Ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements.

Goal 10 promotes social, economic and political inclusion and reducing inequalities in opportunities and outcomes:

10.2 By 2030, empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status.

16.3 Ensure equal opportunity and reduce inequalities of outcome, including by eliminating discriminatory laws, policies and practices and promoting appropriate legislation, policies and action in this regard.

The rights of persons with disabilities are highlighted under goal 4.5 and 8.5. The rights of the child are visible under a number of goals such as Goal 3, 4, 5 and especially:

16.2 End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children.

Following the launch of the Swedish government’s campaign Drive for Democracy, Sida was tasked with further developing the work in the area of democracy and human rights in order to strengthen the impact of Swedish development cooperation in promoting democratization. In 2020 Sida focused, among other things, on strengthening the ability to reach marginalised and discriminated individuals and groups, and supporting democratic advocacy voices such as human rights defenders as well as freedom of expression online.

The focus areas within the sector of democracy and human rights is reflected in the volume of the support. Democratic participation and civil society is the largest subarea (SEK 2.5 billion or 37 percent of disbursements), and human rights the second largest (18 percent). In terms of regional distribution, most funds are allocated to Africa (30 percent), followed by Asia & MENA (22 percent). Support to global programmes, for example through the UN or international NGOs, constitute 29 percent of total disbursement.

**THE GLOBAL GOALS**

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

DEMOCRACY IN THE WORLD

In a global perspective, respect for human rights and democracy has made great advances over the last four decades. However, in recent years a reverse trend towards increased autocratisation is accelerating globally. For the first time since 2001, a majority of the world’s population lived in non-democracies in 2019.\(^1\) Government measures to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic have further exacerbated limitations of political freedoms in many countries during 2020. Threats and violations against civil and political rights, in particular freedom of expression, assembly and association, occur in more than 100 countries. In many countries the space for civil society actors to freely exercise their civil and political rights is closing, including human rights defenders and anti-corruption activists. Sida’s partners in many countries continue to face oppression in the form of violence, threats and increased regulations of civil society as well as increased control of internet access and freedom. Many civil society actors work hard to adapt to these challenges. Despite the negative trend in many Sida partner countries, there are positive results at project level due to partners’ flexibility, adjusting to changing political landscapes and unpredictable developments.

SIDA’S SUPPORT

Sida’s democracy and human rights portfolio covers many sub-areas, as reflected in table 1. During 2020 many of Sida’s partners have had to adjust to the particular circumstances brought by the COVID-19 pandemic. Examples of results from 2020 include:

- Through Sida contributions, the NGO Protection International supports human rights defenders in their capacity development and security training, in over 20 countries. During the pandemic year 2020, increased focus has been set on strengthening digital security.

- Sida has supported the NGO International Disability Alliance, IDA, in its work to strengthen capacities among people with disabilities to demand their rights to information about the COVID-19 pandemic.

- Together with the UNDP, Sida has supported the work to put in place effective legislation against violence against women in Serbia, as well as to strengthen legal compliance and protection mechanisms.

- In Zimbabwe, Sida support though civil society actors has contributed to presenting a revised electoral code to the parliament, and monitored how electoral authorities and government have complied with recommendations put forward by electoral observation missions in 2018.