



Strategy for Sweden's cooperation with UNESCO 2022–2025



On 24 March 2022, the Government adopted a strategy for Sweden's cooperation with UNESCO for 2022–2025. This document contains the text of the strategy.

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1. Scope of the strategy

This strategy provides the basis for Sweden’s cooperation with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) for 2022–2025. It sets out objectives, priorities and working methods. The strategy guides the work of the Swedish Government Offices, the Swedish National Commission for UNESCO and relevant missions abroad. Support channelled to UNESCO by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) and other government agencies through multilateral organisations (multi-bi aid) will be in line with this strategy.

To complement the strategy, the Government Offices prepares specific instructions for delegates to the UNESCO General Conference and for meetings of UNESCO committees and boards, and other relevant UNESCO contexts in which Sweden participates.

The overall direction and governance of activity implementation and follow-up is set out in the Government’s guidelines for Swedish development cooperation and humanitarian assistance strategies (UD2017/21053), and in the strategy for multilateral development policy (UD2017/21055).

2. UNESCO’s mission and activities

UNESCO was founded in 1945 and is a legally, financially and organisationally independent specialised agency of the United Nations. UNESCO’s mission is to contribute to peace and security through cooperation between the Member States in education, the sciences, culture, communication and information. UNESCO is a knowledge-based organisation with a normative and standard-setting mandate.

At global, regional and national level, UNESCO should contribute to capacity-building in Member States by developing and adopting normative documents, compiling and disseminating recommendations and best practices, compiling statistics and conducting monitoring and follow-up activities, and promoting international and regional cooperation, knowledge exchange and partnerships.

The organisation’s strategic plan (Medium Term Strategy) for 2022–2029 includes four strategic objectives that set out UNESCO’s work to advance education for all and sustainable, just, and peaceful societies. According to its mission statement, UNESCO contributes to “the building of peace, the eradication of poverty, and sustainable development and intercultural dialogue through education, the sciences, culture, communication and information”.

UNESCO's two global priorities are Africa and gender equality.

Prior to the development of this strategy, the Government Offices (Ministry of Education) conducted an assessment of UNESCO's results and achievement of objectives, and its relevance in relation to the objectives of Sweden's development cooperation. The assessment concludes that UNESCO is an effective multilateral organisation with global leadership in knowledge and policy development in its areas of activity. It is considered to possess unique expertise in areas such as education, cultural heritage, the safety of journalists, and ocean and water issues. UNESCO's production of data and information on global societal challenges continues to play a major role. UNESCO has an important normative role, not least in support for global education. It also plays an important role as convener and coordinator. UNESCO's work on several of the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda and cross-cutting issues such as gender equality and human rights is assessed as satisfactory. The challenges identified include resource mobilisation, results reporting and intersectoral collaboration. One of the challenges that UNESCO shares with other parts of the UN system is that certain Member States oppose its work for human rights, gender equality, intersectoral cooperation and the inclusion of non-state actors such as civil society and young people.

3. Sweden's direction and thematic priorities

The overall objective of Sweden's international development cooperation is to create the conditions to improve the lives of people living in poverty and oppression (Govt Bill 2013/14:1 expenditure area 7, Committee Report 2013/14:UU2, Riksdag Communication 2013/14:75). In addition to contributing to this objective, cooperation with UNESCO is part of Sweden's implementation of the 2030 Agenda (Govt Bill 2019/20:188) and should take its starting point in the 2030 Agenda's principle of leaving no one behind, aid and development effectiveness, and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda – the UN global framework for financing sustainable development.

Direction of Sweden's involvement in UNESCO

Sweden's involvement in UNESCO will primarily prioritise issues where UNESCO's activities play a strategically important role in the UN system and where Sweden can contribute specific knowledge and expertise. Sweden will bring experience gained at a national level to global cooperation and, at the same time, lessons from global cooperation will strengthen national efforts.

In UNESCO, Sweden will stand up for democratic principles and support democratic development. Sweden's commitment to UNESCO will contribute to strengthening the multilateral system and an effective, transparent and open UN that applies a rights-based approach throughout its work.

Particular weight will be given to certain challenging issues in UNESCO's mandate, where Sweden is deemed to be able to make a difference globally. These issues include, first and foremost, freedom of expression and safety of journalists, artists and scientific researchers as well as gender equality, LGBTIQ rights and rights of indigenous peoples, and issues concerning comprehensive sexuality education and sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Through its work with UNESCO, Sweden will promote resilient societies that are capable of withstanding and recovering from crises and conflicts, climate change, pandemics and social, political and economic uncertainty, and that respect human rights. Education, culture, the sciences and communication are powerful tools for this, and cooperation in these areas can lead to greater mutual respect and understanding.

Sweden will contribute to strengthening UNESCO's role in promoting every person's right to education and lifelong learning, including basic reading, writing and arithmetic skills. It is also essential to safeguard and promote education for sustainable development, its role in poverty reduction, peaceful and inclusive societies, conflict resolution and dialogue.

Overall priorities in cooperation with UNESCO

In cooperation with UNESCO, Sweden will pursue the priorities outlined below. This means that these issues will be monitored, and Swedish representatives will be prepared to pursue the overall priorities regardless of the area in which the work is carried out.

Sweden will promote and monitor that UNESCO:

- undertakes a rights-based approach and, through an inclusive and intersectoral approach, promotes rights for all and contributes to the 2030 Agenda's principle of leaving no one behind;

- works to combat all forms of discrimination and stereotypes on the basis of sex, transgender identity or expression, ethnicity, religion or other belief, disability, sexual orientation or age;
- integrates a gender perspective into its work and that gender analyses are conducted systematically and as part of its planning, implementation, monitoring and reporting processes;
- reinforces its efforts to strengthen the position of women in research, culture, the media and education;
- integrates climate and environmental sustainability into its work, in line with the Paris Agreement and other relevant multilateral environmental and climate agreements;
- ensures that its climate and environment action is science and evidence-based, and that the organisation makes clear that climate change calls for new and innovative solutions at local and global level, and contributes to formal, informal and non-formal learning in this field.

Specific focus areas

The two focus areas for this strategy period are the universal right to education and the universal right to freedom of expression.

Regarding education, Sweden will promote and monitor that UNESCO:

- acts to strengthen the Member States' respect for education as a human right and its capacity to coordinate and support Member States globally in the implementation of SDG 4 of the 2030 Agenda – quality education for all;
- takes a holistic approach to lifelong learning, focusing on national education systems characterised by equitable, gender-equal and inclusive quality education in a safe environment, and highlighting the central role of teachers and teacher training;
- promotes and highlights the contribution that education makes to sustainable development in accordance with the 2030 Agenda and to the promotion of human rights and democratic

principles through, for example, the development and transfer of knowledge, skills, values and action competencies for sustainable development;

- strengthens its normative work on comprehensive sexuality education as a means of promoting the full enjoyment of sexual and reproductive health and rights for all;
- promotes and pays particular attention to the role of education during and after crises, wars and conflicts, including girls' right to education, and how poor access to quality education affects marginalised individuals and individuals in vulnerable situations in particular;
- strengthens access to educational data and analyses for monitoring and evaluation as a prerequisite for evidence-based education policies.

Regarding freedom of expression, Sweden will promote and monitor that UNESCO:

- strengthens its normative work on freedom of the press, freedom of expression, artistic freedom and academic freedom;
- strengthens its efforts to improve working conditions and safety of journalists and other media workers, cultural workers and scientific researchers, and to counter threats and hate speech against these groups;
- pays particular attention to the vulnerability of women, young people and LGBTIQ people in the media, culture and sciences;
- strengthens its work on Target 16.10 of the 2030 Agenda to ensure universal access to information and to protect fundamental freedoms, including through work on media and information literacy and everyone's right to information.

Priorities in other areas

In addition to working on the overarching priorities and the two specific focus areas, UNESCO is doing qualitative and important work in several other sectors and programmes.

During the strategy period, Sweden will work actively to ensure that UNESCO:

- is committed to globally promoting a rich and independent cultural scene, a diversity of cultural expressions and international cultural exchange;
- takes steps to strengthen and give visibility to the importance of culture and cultural heritage, including world heritage, for community building, sustainable development, peacebuilding and dialogue;
- particularly in the areas of world heritage and intangible cultural heritage, prioritises quality in the work on listing and nominations through decision-making based on expertise, integrity, governance, diversity and international cooperation;
- promotes conditions for engagement and participation of practitioners and civil society in the work on intangible cultural heritage;
- continues its efforts to prevent the destruction of cultural heritage and the illicit trade in cultural property;
- emphasises the role of independent academic research in sustainable and democratic societies, and continues its work to strengthen research systems by promoting interdisciplinary knowledge, open science and high-quality research;
- bases its work in artificial intelligence on international law, human rights, gender equality, and climate and environmental sustainability;
- ensures that its Man and the Biosphere Programme continues to be of high quality and that the role of this programme as a model for sustainable development becomes more visible;

- strengthens the work on oceanographic challenges and that UNESCO's coordination of the Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development 2021–2030 is supported.

4. Priorities concerning UNESCO's working methods

According to the Ministry of Education's assessment, UNESCO's internal efficiency is satisfactory. UNESCO has strengthened its results-based management and continues to develop in the right direction. However, its activities are considered to be too heavily influenced by projects financed by earmarked funds. Implementing a robust strategy for resource mobilisation and management along with flexible financing would help UNESCO prioritise and bring its activities into focus. Greater cooperation between the various sectors of UNESCO is also needed. UNESCO also needs to improve gender mainstreaming across all its processes, and increase the visibility of, and implement, working methods that have proven to be successful and cost-effective. Lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic show that UNESCO is able to quickly adapt parts of its programme activities when circumstances change, partly thanks to flexible support from Sweden, among others.

Based on this, Sweden will promote and monitor that UNESCO:

- continues, to develop and strengthen its normative, standard-setting, advisory and capacity-building role within its areas of activity ;
- undertakes work that is science- and evidence-based;
- is characterised by effective and results-based management that includes accountability and transparency;
- continues its efforts to comply with the cost recovery policy in accordance with the UN's Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review (QCPR);
- adapts and develops effectively dimensioned activities at country and regional level in line with its strategic plan (Medium Term Strategy);
- improves its external communications activity to increase the visibility of, and implement, working methods that have proven to be successful and cost-effective;

- emphasises expertise and safeguards the role of experts on boards and committees, including civil society representatives;
- increases its cooperation with other UN agencies and other relevant actors to gain greater traction for its priorities.

5. Advocacy and forms of collaboration

The Government Office (Ministry of Education, in close dialogue and consultation with other relevant ministries) has primary responsibility for Sweden's cooperation with UNESCO. The Swedish National Commission for UNESCO and the Permanent Delegation of Sweden to UNESCO have important roles in this work. To ensure strategic, coherent and effective advocacy, information exchange with the relevant authorities and close cooperation with civil society will take place. The importance of civil society for democratic development will be highlighted and promoted. The participation of civil society and young people is therefore a priority during the strategy period.

Sweden will work actively to gain traction for the priorities outlined above, including by:

- being an active and credible member of the UNESCO committees and UNESCO boards that Sweden participates in, and emphasising the importance of international commitments, including through periodic reporting;
- being an active participant in high-level dialogues and ministerial meetings to follow up Sweden's positions and promote political priorities, and to prioritise ongoing dialogue with UNESCO representatives at different levels;
- cooperating with the Nordic countries and seeking new alliances with a view to gaining greater traction for common priorities;
- harnessing Swedish expertise and experience in UNESCO's areas of activity by strategically promoting the recruitment of Swedes to UNESCO's services and operations, and through various programmes for resource base development.

6. Monitoring and follow-up

Results monitoring of UNESCO's strategic plan and its associated results frameworks should be conducted, based on its annual report, evaluations, etc., and the regular monitoring of the organisation's activities. Sweden's priorities and identified challenges set out in this strategy should receive particular consideration. As the timeframe of the strategy coincides with the latter part of the 2030 Agenda, the monitoring should specifically focus on the sustainable development goals that UNESCO is responsible for.

Monitoring of the organisation's activities and results should be used for the day-to-day management of the organisation, performance reporting and the next organisational assessment.