




# **THE EBA AID REVIEW**

## **2026**

**Aid Reconsidered**



A portrait of Millett Kangar at the JFK Medical Center and E.S. Grant Mental Health Hospital in Monrovia, Liberia.

*This report can be downloaded free of charge at [www.eba.se](http://www.eba.se)*

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# FOREWORD

The global geopolitical landscape is becoming increasingly precarious: the interests of the great powers are more and more at odds, there are more armed conflicts and greater humanitarian need. In times such as this, evaluation and time for learning are important aids to getting our bearings.

**I**NTERNATIONAL AID can have a significant influence on global development. In certain situations, it is absolutely crucial for human security, dignity or survival in individual countries and regions. This remains true even if aid is linked to priorities in other policy areas.

The effective design of aid demands knowledge. Evidence of what works –when, for whom and under what conditions – is obtained through research, evaluation and proven experience. This knowledge base is built up through individual studies and it benefits from being repeatedly summarised.

EBA is tasked with evaluating (that is, expressing a value judgment about) and analysing (in the sense of examining closely) issues of relevance to Swedish development assistance. By doing so, we contribute to the knowledge base concerning the opportunities for aid to make a difference.

During the past year, among other things EBA has published studies of effective long-term solutions to protracted refugee situations, how Swedish bilateral

aid has helped to strengthen healthcare systems, synergies between climate finance and trade, and China's role as a global development actor. The EBA Aid Review 2026 provides a summary of these and other contributions to the knowledge base.

The EBA Aid Review is the expert group's annual report to the Swedish Government, but we hope that this review, like EBA's other studies, will be of interest and relevance to a wider audience.

Stockholm, *March 2026*

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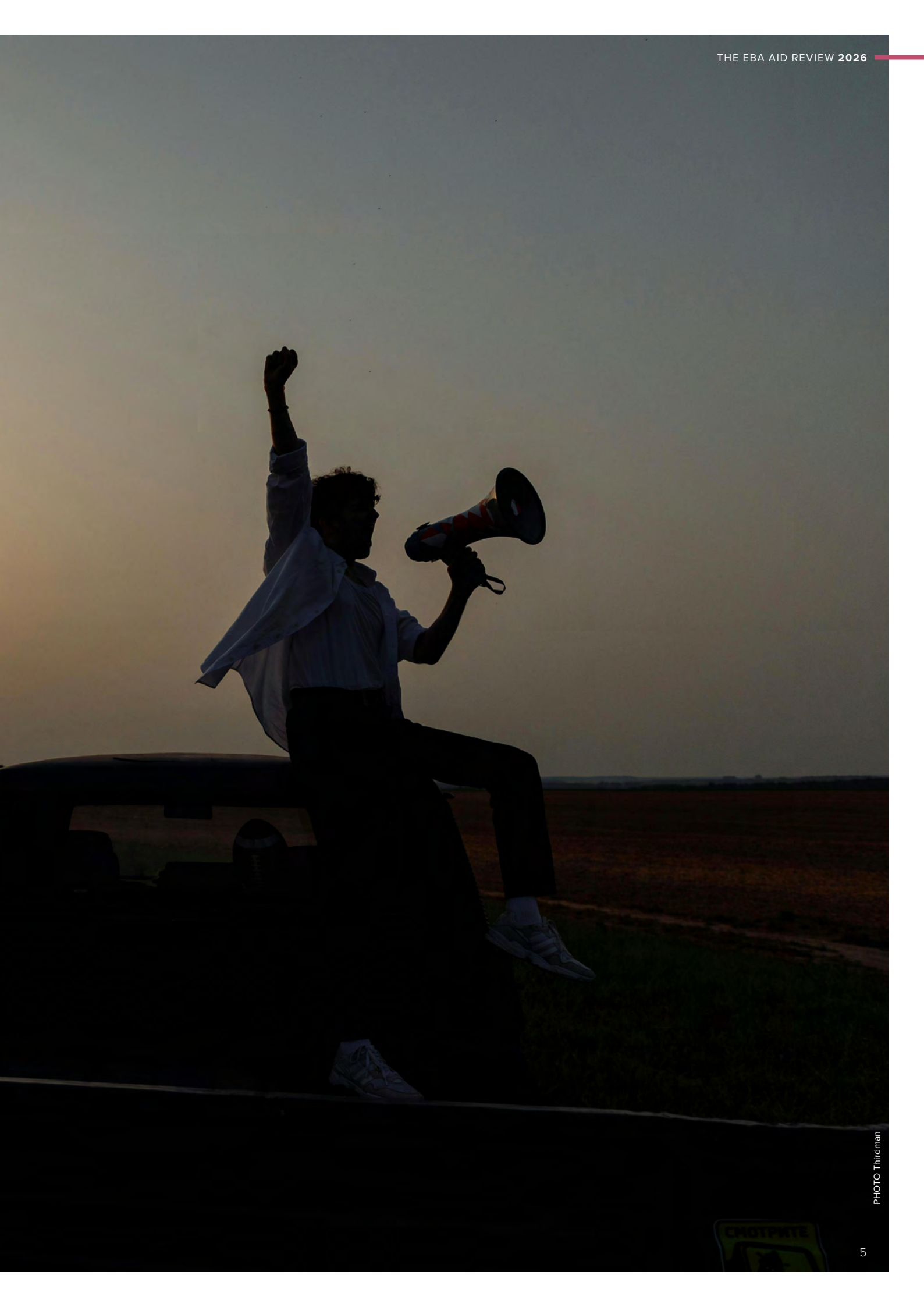
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# THE YEAR IN RETROSPECT

In a world in greater need, a world in which development assistance is changing and increasingly called into question, EBA's chair Torbjörn Becker gives his view of the year's challenges and the knowledge that may guide the way forward.

## How would you describe the aid year 2025?

Three major problem areas affecting the conditions and possibilities of aid have characterised 2025. Conflicts in many parts of the world – in Ukraine, Gaza and Sudan, to name the most high-profile – have created a humanitarian crisis of historic proportions. Extreme weather events have demonstrated our collective inability to both predict and deal with the effects of climate change, which is having a disproportionate impact on the most vulnerable.

We are also seeing dramatic changes in the aid landscape, as the world's largest aid donor has withdrawn and others have followed suit. More and more rich countries are using aid as a buffer against a failing economy. The void the West leaves behind it may be filled by other actors with completely different agendas and methods, such as Russia and China. In combination, all of this is leading to a growing imbalance between the enormous need and the aid being given.

## Tell us about this year's EBA studies. What knowledge do they provide in relation to global events?

What breadth we cover! EBA's studies relate to many of the major issues in aid and the world. The study *What Are They fighting For?* offers insight into how to design peace agreements that lead to a more sustainable peace. The anthology on China's role as a global development actor paints a diverse picture of China's engagement in the world and its implications for Sweden

and Swedish development cooperation. One of the year's studies explores how interventions to strengthen healthcare systems can be made more effective, while the study of multidimensional poverty reminds us of the fundamental aim of Swedish development assistance: to create conditions to improve the lives of people living in poverty and oppression.

”In a situation in which resources are scarce, private investment, entrepreneurship and trade will be crucial to creating economic growth and stability.”

## Do EBA's studies contribute to improving development assistance?

It's difficult to directly measure the impact of the knowledge base on decisions involving billions of kronor, but our follow-ups show that we are making both instrumental and conceptual contributions. EBA maintains an ongoing dialogue both internally and externally about our knowledge base and how we can ensure that it remains relevant. That said, aid today is clearly shaped



Torbjörn Becker,  
chair of EBA.

”Given the challenges development assistance and the world are facing, knowledge about what works is even more crucial.”

by more aspects than ever: trade, migration and national security policy are interweaved with development cooperation. And these are also areas we will be studying in future.

**How do you expect development assistance to evolve going forward?**

Given continued reductions in aid in a world of conflicts, we are facing major challenges. Humanitarian needs are enormous and will continue to

be given high priority. At the same time, we need to contribute to rebuilding and long-term development in the places where it is possible to do so. In a situation in which resources are scarce, private investment, entrepreneurship and trade will be crucial to creating economic growth and stability. My hope is that the West will play a critical role in this work and not leave too much space for actors with interests other than democratic values and human rights.

## THEME 1

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# The consequences of a new geopolitical reality

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A world in which strong men with little democratic legitimacy thrash out the world order, whether by agreement or based on tacit mutual recognition of spheres of interest, threatens to become the new geopolitical reality.

**N**ATIONS AROUND the world are gradually retreating from a declared belief in cooperation in joint organisations based on mutual interests and regulation. This is true of everything from the principles of effective development cooperation to the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda. In its place, a multipolar world is emerging based on the competing interests of the major powers, a world in which states are increasingly deprioritising joint concerns in favour of narrower national considerations.

International development assistance has at best a marginal influence over geopolitical change. One tangible challenge is reconciling national interests with a common development agenda. One approach to these challenges is to think in terms of security: human and common, as well as national. Many aspects of the link between aid

policy and security have been highlighted by EBA in previous and ongoing studies.

Among other things, EBA has studied ‘new’ aid actors such as Russia and China, who often have priorities other than the goals of official development assistance defined by the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC). In the vast majority of cases, the many armed conflicts around the world have repercussions beyond the geographical area in which they are being fought. EBA has explored the opportunities for development assistance to contribute to sustainable peace as well as democratic governance. EBA has also illuminated various aspects of development assistance for health. The drastic cuts to this assistance during 2025 had not only direct consequences but also obvious implications for security policy: health threats are often global and thus a matter of common human security.

Emergency workers and firefighters help civilians to extinguish a fire after a Russian attack on Kiev, Ukraine.



# AID AS A GEOPOLITICAL TOOL

Cuts to development assistance from the traditional donor countries create both unpredictability and a power vacuum. What are the implications of increased involvement by donors such as Russia and China, and how is Swedish aid affected when development cooperation is linked more closely to foreign, security and regional policy?

**T**HE AID LANDSCAPE in Sweden and internationally has undergone considerable upheaval. One of the world's largest aid organisations, USAID, has been shut down and many donor countries are reducing their development assistance, especially in the West. The vacuum left behind may be filled by actors who do not prioritise democratic principles or human rights. In a world increasingly marked by armed conflict and war (Brosché, Raattamaa and Loneragan, 2025), the role of geopolitics in development cooperation appears to be growing once again. A number of EBA studies have explored this from various perspectives during the year.

China has emerged as an important global actor in recent decades, not least in terms of the influence it exerts in developing countries, and its role has become more prominent as traditional Western donors have reduced their commitments. China's lending to low-income countries has however declined and it is unlikely that China can fill the void left by the United States, United Kingdom, Germany and other traditional donors. Still, the dismantling of USAID offers China an opportunity to present itself as a reliable partner for the Global South. Knowledge of China's global ambitions and influence is critical to understanding how Swedish development assistance will be



PHOTO Aleksey Klints

affected, and to identifying both opportunities for constructive engagement and areas where fundamental differences preclude meaningful collaboration. Evaluating China's role and influence presents a challenge due to lack of transparency and limited compliance with OECD DAC's international standards.

”Knowledge of China’s global ambitions and influence is critical to understanding how Swedish development assistance will be affected.”

Over 14 chapters, the anthology *China as a Global Development Actor: Transforming the International Aid Landscape* (Oud and Almén (eds.),

2025) explores thematically and geographically the various ways in which China influences global development. Among the many recommendations contained in the anthology is that Sweden should work with recipient countries to increase transparency in development projects, including those involving Chinese financing. With its good reputation and wealth of experience as a donor, Sweden should be focusing investment in areas where the country has a comparative advantage. That said, it is important to learn from other approaches, including China's, which recipient countries may prefer in certain situations.

”Western donors should maintain a presence in unstable areas to counter the influence of authoritarian states such as Russia.”

#### Russia's influence over development assistance

Russia has increased its presence on the African continent over recent years, and this presence has intensified since its full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Unlike traditional development assistance which, in theory at least, is founded on democratic principles, Russian development cooperation is strategic and transactional, with the emphasis on security, military support and contracts for natural resources. In the working paper *Perceptions and Power: Assessing the Impact of Russia's Influence on Development Cooperation and Attitudes in Africa*, Perotta Berlin (2025) examines how Russia's growing engagement in Africa is affecting the behaviour of Western donors and public opinion in recipient countries.

One of the main findings is that other donors adapt their strategies in response to Russia's presence. Many Western donors, including the United States and Germany, downsized or moved development assistance projects from areas in which Russian actors were active. The World Bank, on the other hand, intensified its engagement in regions with a Russian presence, espe-

cially after 2022. France also chose to consolidate its projects rather than withdraw.

Russia's activities, and the reaction of other donors to them, also appear to have influenced local attitudes in recipient countries. The author contends that the diminished profile and impact of Western aid may lead to Russia's anti-West propaganda and security promises gaining a stronger foothold in the minds of local populations. She also argues that Western donors should maintain a presence in unstable areas to counter the influence of authoritarian states such as Russia. This includes highlighting the benefits of Western aid and countering disinformation at local level.

### Swedish development assistance and security policy

The Swedish Government has repeatedly emphasised that international development assistance is a foreign policy tool for promoting and safeguarding Swedish interests. To this end, aid policy must clearly be coordinated with other policy areas, including national security. To enhance knowledge about the relationship between Swedish security and aid policy, during the year EBA has commissioned a study to identify potential synergies, overlapping or common goals, and areas where goal conflicts or risks may arise when linking these policy areas.

## CONCLUSIONS

- Sweden should continuously and strategically adapt its development cooperation in response to the emergence of donors such as Russia and China.
- National security and foreign policy concerns make it especially important to adopt a mindful approach and have up-to-date intelligence and an active policy in relation to the geopolitical ambitions of these donors.
- Efforts to strengthen democracy, respect for human rights and the rule of law should be intensified in response to influence operations and authoritarian narratives about international development assistance.

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Workers at an irrigation project in Tanzania.



# HEALTH THREATS INCREASE WHEN HEALTH AID IS CUT

Many countries, including Sweden, have reduced their development assistance to the health sector. The closure of USAID during 2025 has had particularly dire consequences for global health. Rapidly phasing out development assistance for health places enormous pressure on already weak health services. Fewer people are getting the care and medicine they need and the risk of infections spreading is increasing.

**T**HE LINK BETWEEN improved health and broader societal development is evident. Incidences of cardiovascular disease, diabetes, cancer and mental illness, as well as communicable diseases, are greatly influenced by people's living conditions, income, education, housing, sanitation and access to healthcare. Improved public health and respect for sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) demand progress and development within multiple areas of society (Sundewall and Ahrne (eds.), 2024). The previously positive trend in several areas of SRHR has levelled out, or is going in the wrong direction. SRHR has been weaponised in the global political discourse and opposition to many of these rights is well-organised and well-funded.

“SRHR has been weaponised in the global political discourse and opposition to many of these rights is well-organised and well-funded.”

Many low-income countries are in need of massive investment in health, but this will take time without financial and technical aid. This is addressed from a number of perspectives in the

EBA anthology of trends and perspectives on global health (Sundewall and Ahrne (eds.), 2024). An EBA report published in 2023 (Sundewall, Ekman and Schmidt, 2023) describes the tangible results of aid during the period 2002–2020 in terms of outcomes in three areas: maternal health services, contraception and HIV treatment. According to USAID, which was closed down in 2025, 26 million lives have been saved by HIV treatment in the last 20 years.

## Who fills the gap?

Many serious threats to health are global and demand international cooperation, stronger health systems and better preparedness, especially in low- and middle-income countries. As many traditional aid donors make cutbacks, countries such as China and the Gulf States find greater opportunities as partners and financiers of development in the Global South. Over recent years, China has increased its bilateral and multilateral support for health and SRHR, albeit from modest levels. This is described in two chapters of the EBA anthology *China as a Global Development Actor* (Oud and Almén (eds.), 2025).

In addition to the consequences for global health and society at large, the COVID-19 pandemic also posed significant challenges for development assistance. EBA has contributed to an OECD meta-evaluation of how the collective international response (UN, other multilateral organisations, bilateral donors and recipients) coped with the necessary adjustments. Based

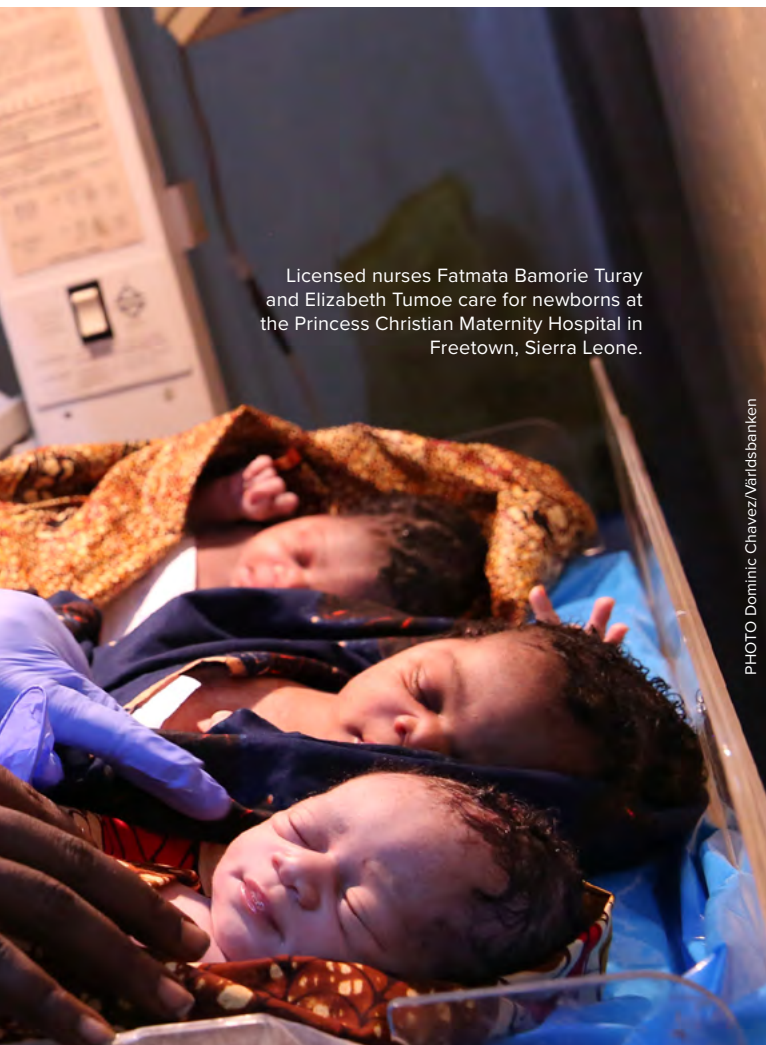


on input from the 60 institutions involved in the COVID-19 Global Evaluation Coalition, the final report (OECD 2025) reveals not only the challenges facing the global aid system, but also how these stimulated a higher level of cooperation, innovation and mobilisation of resources.

Stronger health systems are required to deliver basic universal healthcare, especially if they are to be resilient during crisis such as outbreaks of infectious diseases. Strengthening national health systems is key to ensuring that aid provides sustainable results in the form of improved public health and less risk of future pandemics. The term health system refers to all pieces of the puzzle that make up a functioning national health service, including staff, drugs, hospitals, primary healthcare, monitoring health data, regulation, legislation and funding. Awareness of the importance of strengthening national health systems has grown, not least from dealing with the ongoing HIV pandemic, still one of the main burdens of disease in Africa, which threatens to gather pace again after the sudden discontinuation of funds from USAID in spring 2025. HIV requires lifelong treatment and access to healthcare to reduce the economic and social consequences, and to prevent infection and premature

”Awareness of the importance of strengthening national health systems has grown, not least from dealing with the ongoing HIV pandemic, which threatens to gather pace again after the sudden discontinuation of funds from USAID.”

death. Preventive measures to reduce the risk of HIV infection are vital if countries are to afford the care of those already living with HIV. Swedish aid has contributed to this, including through the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency’s capacity-building and research collaborations. The EBA rapport *The Swedish Aid Response to the HIV Epidemic: An Overview* (Baatsen et al., 2023) demonstrates that Swedish aid has achieved good results, and that Sweden



Licensed nurses Fatmata Bamorie Turay and Elizabeth Tumoe care for newborns at the Princess Christian Maternity Hospital in Freetown, Sierra Leone.

PHOTO Dominic Chavez/Vårdsbanken

has exerted significant influence internationally and learned valuable lessons. Benefitting from the considerable investments Sweden has already made – in the form of financial resources, global leadership, advocacy and research – will require long-term investments in health and SRHR.

### Sweden can exert more influence

A research group from Lund University has evaluated whether and, if so, how Swedish bilateral development assistance for health has contributed to strengthening health systems during the period 2014–2023 (Sundewall et al., 2025). The evaluation focuses on Uganda and Bangladesh, two countries with which Sweden has long-standing cooperation on health. The authors note that, while Sweden has long been helping to improve health outcomes in several low- and middle-income countries, aid has had only limited success in strengthening health systems. Most interventions have involved delivering and improving immediate care, such as improved maternal healthcare, rather than focusing to a sufficient extent on changing the health system itself, thus contributing to better healthcare in the long term. That said, there are examples of

Swedish aid making a difference at system level. The authors argue that Swedish development assistance for health can make a real difference when support is long term and well supported in the recipient country, offering good examples such as investment in midwifery in Bangladesh and health funding reform in Uganda.

The overall picture is that there is great potential for Sweden to positively influence healthcare systems, but that it requires clearer, more explicit goals at system level, more collaboration with governments in partner countries, and improved conditions and greater competence in health economics within the Swedish development assistance administration. Greater emphasis is also needed on building sustainable structures rather than contributing to more temporary, if valuable, solutions.

## CONCLUSIONS

- Swedish development assistance has saved lives and helped to improve health in several low- and middle-income countries.
- Sweden has contributed to strengthening national health systems. Prerequisites for successful intervention include stated, measurable goals and collaboration with governments in partner countries to create clear ownership and sustainable structures.

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# FOCUSING ON CONFLICT ISSUES FOR SUSTAINABLE PEACE

The number of armed conflicts in the world is higher than ever, and many are civil wars. The changing nature of these conflicts, as well as increasing incidence of election-related violence, has made it more difficult to achieve sustainable peace.

**A**S COUNTERINTUITIVE as it sounds, the issues that armed rebel groups claim to be fighting for are regulated in only 43 per cent of the peace agreements signed during the period 1990–2013. Had this percentage been higher, the chances of sustainable peace would have increased significantly (Brosché et al., 2025). This analysis is based on a considerable amount of data collected on conflict issues specifically for the study. Rather than resolving conflict issues, peace agreements are often hurriedly prepared based on settlements and bargaining of various kinds that do not address the root causes of the conflict to a sufficient extent.

Is the fighting really about what the parties claim to be fighting over? While the authors' choice to take the parties at their word may be questionable, they contend that it is after all around these issues that rebels recruit and mobilise their members. So, there is a clear correlation between stated motives and a sustainable peace.

## Rebels or terrorists?

In recent years it has become increasingly common for governments and intergovernmental organisations to brand non-state armed groups as terrorists, and consequently suspend or termi-

nate all contact with them. This is often justified in as much as the rebels use methods designed to terrorise populations or communities. In such situations, while the rebels are usually roundly condemned by the members of the UN Security Council, UN peacekeeping forces on the ground often maintain contact with non-state armed groups. Such contacts will usually concern the non-violent aspects of the group's operations. These contacts can be useful in terms of successfully completing the peacekeeping mission (Kotajoki, 2025).

”Violence can break down a society even if it does not involve outright conflict between government forces and rebels.”

Violence can break down a society even if it does not involve outright conflict between government forces and rebels. Violence in conjunction with elections to legislative assemblies has become more common in many countries. This violence



Lviv, Ukraine.

PHOTO Alexander Zvir

may be perpetrated by security forces affiliated to governing parties or governments, it may be between supporters of rival parties, or groups affiliated to the opposition. How election-related violence is perceived depends on which party one sympathises with. When the sitting government is behind the violence, it further polarises government and opposition supporters – even on issues related to democracy itself (Olafsdottir, 2025). While the opposition becomes more committed to the struggle for democracy, supporters of the government become increasingly tolerant of authoritarian rule. Election-related violence may also have a negative impact on the ability to negotiate constitutional reform, as demonstrated in Turkey. All of this further threatens the balance of society.

Political violence affects the willingness and ability to enter politics. A study in Colombia examines why certain politicians stand up to threats of violence while others leave politics (Duque-Salazar, 2025). Security issues make it expensive to run a campaign. Furthermore, those who are not already part of the political machinery are more vulnerable, not least women. Access to money, and to a network that can help to protect the candidate, is therefore crucial to the ability to run for political office in Colombia.

## CONCLUSIONS

- Peace processes need to thoroughly address the conflict issues that the parties are fighting over.
- Aid actors should have a deep understanding of conflict issues as a point of departure for designing and implementing policies and programmes.

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## THEME 2


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# Evidence-based aid is possible

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**Expectations of aid are high: it must support the vulnerable and it must save lives.**

**The Swedish Government's reform agenda, *Development Assistance for a New Era*, emphasises the importance of basing aid on evidence of what is effective. Development assistance must be based on knowledge of how to achieve the desired results. EBA's role is to contribute to the knowledge base concerning what works where and for whom.**



**T**HANKS TO EXTENSIVE research, evaluation and proven experience, there is a wealth of knowledge about how to fight poverty. The importance of social safety nets, education and health, employment and economic growth is well known. We also know how to promote and support democracy. However, if development assistance is to succeed, this knowledge must be adapted to each unique situation.

To this end, development assistance must be designed and implemented based on continuously updated evidence. Learning must be a constant feature of the work. Recently, the governance of aid has been strongly focused on control and

auditing. To this, clearer demands on the knowledge base have now been added. Meanwhile, the appropriation for Swedish development research has decreased by 75 per cent since 2023, something that clearly has an impact on the ability to generate evidence.

On the following pages, EBA describes the conclusions of our reports concerning the fight against poverty, the importance of employment and multilateral aid. This themed section concludes with an account of how the operationalisation of the Government's reform agenda is changing Swedish aid, and how EBA's studies offer guidance in this ongoing work.

# LINGERING POVERTY

Progress in the global war on poverty has slowed. The Sustainable Development Goal of ending poverty in all its forms everywhere by 2030 is far from being achieved. To an increasing extent, the afflicted are in conflict-affected countries in sub-Saharan Africa. Among other things, EBA has evaluated the efficacy of the Multidimensional Poverty Analysis (MDPA) framework used by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), as well as how effective the agency's support is in fostering self-reliance among refugees.

**B**ANGLADESH IS ONE illustrative example of the problem of multidimensional poverty. Despite earlier pessimism concerning the country's circumstances, the economy has shown strong growth and multiple social indicators have improved considerably. While poverty has been halved over the last two decades, extreme poverty is still rife among religious and ethnic minorities. For these people, economic growth and conventional methods are not enough to reduce poverty (Akram et al, 2024).

Analyses of the dimensions of poverty show that discrimination, demeaning treatment and collective neglect keep the members of groups such as the Chakma, Santal and Dalits in poverty. These injustices are deeply rooted and the patterns hard to break. According to the report's authors, the just division of resources and social programmes, respect for diversity rather than unrealistic hopes for assimilation, and greater political influence for marginalised groups are among the necessary changes.

## The different dimensions of poverty

Sida has been systematically analysing multidimensional poverty since 2017. Each new development cooperation strategy must be based on such an analysis. The aim is to understand who is living in poverty and why, and to adapt aid accordingly. There is broad international consen-

sus about the importance of understanding all dimensions of poverty, not just the material. Sida's MDPA analytical framework, which looks at four dimensions plus additional contextual factors, is one of the most extensive instruments used by official development assistance donors.

An evaluation of MDPA conducted by Ternström and Tvedten (2025) found that the analytical framework has helped to maintain focus on the overall poverty goal in Swedish development cooperation, and to creating consensus on how poverty should be assessed and combatted. However, the evaluation identified a number of weaknesses. The authors demonstrate that MDPA is an unwieldy instrument that has failed to have any obvious direct impact on the choice or design of interventions. By helping to form consensus among Sida's staff about how poverty should be understood, the instrument has indirectly contributed to making activities more relevant. One general recommendation is that MDPA should be simplified and that a theory of change should be developed for its future use.

While the authors do not adopt a position on how MDPA should be used going forward, they do propose a few alternative ways to use the analyses in the strategy process. Another possibility is using the analyses for internal learning and dialogue on poverty reduction.

Measurements of the scope of global pov-



A child wearing shoes that are too big for them. Slovakia.

PHOTO Mano Strauch, Världsbanken

erty and where it is most widespread come to somewhat different conclusions depending on the method used. However, there is consensus that the reduction slowed during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Another contributory factor to lingering poverty is the growing number of armed conflicts around the world. In war or armed conflict, the possibility for people to support themselves is limited or non-existent. The number of refugees and forcibly displaced people globally is approaching 125 million, an unprecedented level. The majority of refugees are forced to live in exile for an extended period of time. The average is estimated to be 10 years. Those who find themselves in refugee camps are likely to be there even longer.

#### Can refugees be self-reliant?

As humanitarian need increases and humanitarian aid decreases, so the pressure increases on refugees to be self-reliant (Fellesson and Hårsmar, 2025). The 2018 Global Compact on Refugees places considerable emphasis on interventions to aid integration with the host community's local economy, so that long-term residence of refugee camps can become self-reliant. Other long-term solutions – returning home or migrating as a quota refugee – have become less realistic for a number of reasons.

Case studies conducted in Kenya and Uganda,

”In war or armed conflict, the possibility for people to support themselves is limited or non-existent.”

two of the largest refugee-hosting countries, show that, while there are a number of promising, praised and innovative self-reliance programmes supported by private actors and civil society organisations, the conditions to succeed are generally very poor. Host countries restrict the movement of refugees and prevent them from working outside the camps. Environmental and economic conditions are generally poor in the remote areas where refugee camps are located. Situations that ought to be addressed with long-term development assistance continue to be tackled with short-term humanitarian aid. This should be considered given the ongoing focus on humanitarian aid in the reform agenda. Unpredictability, ambiguity and unwillingness on the part of the donor community also undermines the will of host countries to support refugees (Fellesson and Hårsmar, 2025). Hosting refugees can have positive effects for the host country. Economic activity around refugee camps increases

as humanitarian aid flows in. This can be used to strengthen the local economy through, for example, market development, investments in education, skills enhancement and improved communications. However, if external humanitarian aid is inadequate, or if it decreases, discontent tends to grow in the host country – both locally and at national level. Managing such tensions is key to the success of programmes to integrate refugees (Fellsson and Hårsmar, 2025).

### Land tenure and climate adaption

One contentious issue is access to cultivatable land in and around the camp. Land tenure systems, and their actual and perceived strength, are hugely significant to the opportunities of individuals and households to support themselves. In a broader study of land tenure in Kenya, Klaus and Elfversson (2025) explore the importance of tenure to the ability to adapt to climate change. The strength of land tenure affects the willingness, or lack thereof, of households to engage in collective climate adaption measures. It also affects propensity to engage politically or support violence in order to defend or reclaim resources. These insights paint a more nuanced picture of the importance of land tenure than has thus far characterised climate debate and climate aid.

”Land tenure systems, and their actual and perceived strength, are hugely significant to the opportunities of individuals and households to support themselves.”

Perhaps the most powerful pathway out of poverty is to give people access to productive employment. However, when the evaluators attempted to answer the question of how many jobs Sida-funded initiatives had created in sub-Saharan Africa during the period 2011–2021, they found that the question was poorly formulated (Fox and Abudu, 2025). No-one can afford to be unemployed in the informal sector. Hence the number of jobs is not the key indicator. While job creation

would appear to be an obvious goal in a region with a young, rapidly growing workforce, the study suggests that this does not suit the local context and that interventions to help raise earnings are potentially more important. As such, aid actors need to adopt a new mindset.

The evaluators note that only 20 per cent of Sida’s interventions had the potential to create new jobs. The other interventions were aimed at increasing earnings from existing activities. The most common form of support was skills training. However, this support may be worth evaluating further, since cash transfers have in some cases been shown to have better effects.

## CONCLUSIONS

- The focus on poverty reduction should be maintained and multidimensional poverty analysis contributes directly to this.
- Fighting poverty among marginalised groups requires anti-discrimination measures that address structural exclusion and promote rights for the most disadvantaged groups.
- If refugees are to have a chance of self-reliance, reasonable conditions must be created through improved cooperation between the governments of donor and host nations.
- Employment initiatives should focus on value creation rather than counting the number of jobs created.

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# SUPPORTING EMPLOYMENT THROUGH AID

One of the most important routes out of poverty for countries and individuals alike is productive employment. Contributing to creating jobs has therefore long been a cornerstone of Swedish development assistance.

**L**IMITED JOB opportunities, poor working conditions and workers earning less than the living wage are widespread problems in many low-income countries. Over half of the global workforce is employed in the informal sector without an employment contract. Activities in this sector are not registered by any public authority, they do not generate tax revenue for the state, nor are those who work there covered by labour law or social security. Increasing opportunities for productive employment is therefore one of the most important means for reducing poverty and vulnerability. Creating pathways into the labour market and developing businesses and markets are also priorities of the Swedish Government's reform agenda for development assistance.

EBA has explored the contribution of Swedish de-

A potter from the Keyo Pottery Women's Group shapes an oven in Kisumu, Kenya.



PHOTO Peter Kapuscinski / Världsbanken



velopment assistance to employment in partner countries in several reports, and revealed that creating jobs as well as reporting on created jobs are challenging tasks. In one working paper, Burman (2024) examined whether the quantified results on employment published in Sida's annual reports are credible and presented in a factual and transparent manner. One conclusion was that, while the reported results are often very strong, especially regarding women and young people, they did not always correspond to the original source. Nor did Sida's reports state the total number of interventions, how representative the good examples described were or Sida's contribution to them, and no weak results were presented. All in all, this calls into question the reliability if the reports, undermines the agency's accountability and limits opportunities for learning.

#### **Increased earnings rather than new jobs**

To enhance knowledge, EBA conducted an evaluation (Fox and Abudu, 2025) of the contribution of Swedish development cooperation to job creation and increased earnings in sub-Saharan Africa, the region with the world's youngest population, a rapidly growing workforce and large informal sector, justifying Sweden's long-term focus. The evaluation reveals that Sida has a broad portfolio for inclusive economic development with

the potential to support structural transformation. Despite this, only 20 per cent of 124 studied employment interventions were deemed to have the potential to create new jobs. The majority were intended to increase the earnings of those already working but underemployed or earning below the poverty line by, for example, improving access to markets and financing. This approach was however deemed relevant in regions where increased productivity is a key challenge.

**“Only 20 per cent of 124 studied employment interventions were deemed to have the potential to create new jobs.”**

The most common intervention was skills training, although this rarely leads to new employment unless combined with other types of support. Case studies from Rwanda and Tanzania show that the best results are achieved when vocational training is linked to training in entrepreneurship, financing or improved market ac-

cess. Good results were also noted from projects that strengthened business expansion and from cash-based interventions to increase household earnings. In summary, the evaluation emphasises the need for a targeted portfolio adapted to the context, something Swedish development assistance has largely succeeded in, given the overall focus of interventions on strengthening demand for labour and increasing earnings. The importance of choosing the right type of interventions was also highlighted in an earlier EBA evaluation (Lindahl et al., 2018) of development cooperation with Bosnia and Herzegovina. This evaluation noted that the dominance of agricultural support in the portfolio – a sector deemed to have limited potential to create jobs – reduced the impact of cooperation on employment and job creation.

### Aid adapted to context

One group in particularly acute need of support in terms of opportunities for self-reliance are those in protracted refugee situations. Two thirds of the world's refugees belong to this group, which is growing due to war, crises and the ever stricter refugee policies adopted by higher-income countries. In an EBA evaluation from 2025, Fellesson and Hårsmar analyse interventions in Kenya and Uganda, two major host countries. Support for the private sector in Kenya, including renewable energy and financial services, yielded positive results. In Uganda, investments in smallholdings had beneficial effects thanks to improved farming conditions and greater opportunities for economic inclusion. Still, despite progress there were considerable obstacles. Refugees' limited freedom of movement, lack of access to land and difficulty in obtaining work permits restricted the impact of employment interventions. As with the evaluation of employment interventions in sub-Saharan Africa, it was found that vocational training often has limited effect without market analysis and complementary interventions. The report underlines the need for reforms to strengthen refugees' rights, develop local markets, widen interventions beyond refugee camps and improve coordination between donors and between donors and governments.

Like the working paper on Sida's results reporting, all three evaluations reveal shortcomings in the methods and tools used to follow up and evaluate the results of employment interventions. Baseline data is often inadequate, making it more difficult to measure impact over time.

As with the working paper, the evaluation of employment interventions in sub-Saharan Africa finds that results tend to be overestimated, partly due to the limited technical capacity of certain implementing partners and partly due to factors such as failing to take account of inflation when calculating earnings increases.

## CONCLUSIONS

- Swedish development cooperation has a broad portfolio for inclusive economic development in sub-Saharan Africa. A small percentage of interventions are aimed at actually creating new jobs; instead, the focus is on increasing the earnings of those already in work, which is a suitable focus in the region.
- Vocational training can be effective when combined with support such as training in entrepreneurship and improving access to finance and markets.
- The impact of interventions to promote opportunities for self-reliance for people in protracted refugee situations and host communities is limited by restricted freedom of movement and a lack of work permits, markets and resources.
- Shortcomings in the methods and tools used to follow up and report results – especially the lack of baseline data, uncertain measurement methods and a tendency to overestimate results – reduce the reliability of results reporting, undermines accountability and limits opportunities for learning.

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# THE EFFECTIVENESS OF MULTILATERAL AID

Over half of Swedish aid goes to multilateral organisations. As an important funder of the multilateral system with high expectations of its ability to tackle global challenges, Sweden has a significant interest in ensuring the desired results. In collaboration with evaluation bodies in other countries, EBA has during the year studied the effectiveness of different forms of multilateral aid.

**M**ULTILATERAL organisations channel a significant share of the world’s total aid and play a vital role in tackling global challenges such as climate change, poverty and threats to public health. Many major donor countries, including the United States, Germany and the United Kingdom, have considerably reduced their aid budgets over recent years. Aid is also being earmarked for specific purposes to an increasing extent, meaning that the percentage of multilateral core support – funding provided to the central budget of multilateral organisations without requirements that the money be used for a specific purpose – has declined.

## Sweden’s multilateral aid has increased

Bucking the global trend, Sweden and the other Nordic countries have increased their aid to or through multilateral organisations over recent years. This now accounts for 60 per cent of Sweden’s aid budget, or approximately SEK 30 billion. The combination of increased pressure on the multilateral system and a major financial undertaking on Sweden’s part underlines the importance of knowing the extent to which multilateral development cooperation, and specific activities, promote Swedish priorities, as well as which forms of aid are most effective. EBA and the German Institute for Development Evaluation (DEval) have conducted a systematic review of the state of knowledge concerning the effec-

”Multilateral organisations convey a significant percentage of the world’s total aid and play a vital role in meeting global challenges such as climate change, poverty and threats to public health.”

tiveness of multilateral core support, earmarked support, and support to multilateral trust funds (Ihl et al., 2025).

The review reveals that core support is more effective than earmarked support in terms of goal-achievement and cost-effectiveness. Core support affords multilateral organisations greater flexibility, thus improving internal process effectiveness and resource allocation. It also promotes collaboration between multilateral organisations. Core support provides flexibility during a crisis and reduces the administrative burden on recipient countries, as there are fewer individual agreements and donor requirements. That said, compared to other forms of aid, core support

significantly reduces the donor country's national profile and opportunities to demand accountability. There is also less opportunity for the donor country to promote its own political priorities.

### Financing via trust funds provides influence

An EBA study has shown that funding via certain trust funds can provide donor countries with tools for exerting influence (Lundgren and Strindvall, 2023). This conclusion is expanded on in a joint evaluation of Nordic support for multilateral trust funds (PEMconsult, 2025). The evaluation analyses how well trust funds contribute to promoting the Nordic countries' thematic priorities, how well the funds strengthen the multilateral system, and how well they deliver aid at country level.

The evaluation covers trust funds administered by the UN Multi-Partner Trust Fund Office, the World Bank and the African Development Bank. Support to a total of just over a thousand funds has been mapped. The Nordic countries have steadily increased support for trust funds over the past 20 years, although support has declined since 2022. The evaluators find that trust funds have generally been relevant and effective in promoting Nordic priorities, particularly with regard to gender equality, human rights and climate change. Weaknesses have been identified, however, including deficient results reporting, high transaction costs and limited mobilisation of private capital. While the Nordic countries have influenced the trust funds through financing and dialogue, Nordic coordi-

nation has been weak. The evaluation highlights lessons on how choice of fund, governance, follow-up and Nordic cooperation can be improved, as well as the need to improve communication of the results of the trust funds to policymakers and the public.

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A moment of warmth and community during a harsh winter in a Syrian refugee camp.

# A POLICY REFORM IN DEPTH

The policy reforms described in the Swedish Government's reform agenda *Development Assistance for a New Era* have begun to take more concrete form during 2025. The sharp increase in assistance to Ukraine has meant the phasing out of bilateral assistance to a further five countries. This reprioritisation has had significant consequences.

PHOTO Alex Stemmer

**S**INCE THE 1960S, with a few minor variations in its formulation, the overall goal of Swedish development assistance has been to fight poverty. The present goal adopted by the Riksdag in the 2014 Budget Bill is to: “create pre-conditions for better living conditions for people living in poverty and under oppression”. While the goal remains the same, the Government's 2023 reform agenda has entailed major changes to Swedish development assistance.

The one per cent goal – the stated ambition to allocate one per cent of gross national income (GNI) to international aid – was an aspirational goal as early as 1962, although it was not achieved until 1975. In 2023, after 48 years as a unilateral Swedish undertaking, the link between aid and GNI was abolished. Had this link been retained, the total aid budget for 2026 would have been SEK 72 billion, 19 billion more than the current figure of 53 billion. This change of policy will of

course have ramifications for the fight against poverty, capacity-building, development research, global health and the promotion of human rights. It has also necessitated reprioritisations.

### New priorities affect EBA studies

Another significant change has occurred in geographical priorities. The previous policy framework from 2016 prioritised countries facing the greatest challenges, with the greatest needs and lacking their own resources. The reform agenda has two clear geographical priorities: Ukraine and the Eastern neighbourhood, and reducing the number of countries with which Sweden has bilateral development cooperation to a maximum of 30. Thus far, among other things these priorities have taken the form of notification that Ukraine will receive at least SEK 10 billion in assistance in 2026, and the winding down of several development cooperation strategies, primarily with conflict-affected and low-income countries. Ukraine now receives more Swedish development assistance than the entire African continent.

It is EBA's task, based on its own and other knowledge bases, to contribute knowledge on which to base both the development and operationalisation of aid policy. When the priorities of aid policy change, this affects what EBA evaluates and analyses.

The Expert Group's analysis of the Government's reform agenda (EBA, 2024) suggests that, to all intents and purposes, the Government has given the goal of safeguarding Swedish interests parity with the goal of fighting poverty. A number of EBA studies have examined the conditions and opportunities for ensuring that Swedish priorities have an impact on both multilateral organisations (Lundgren and Strindvall, 2023; Dellmuth et al., 2022; Lundgren et al., 2022) and bilateral development cooperation (Towns et al., 2023; Guillaumont et al., 2023). One general conclusion of these studies is that it is vital that Sweden has a strong resource base with the capacity to push prioritised issues.

### Synergies and their limitations

One clear priority of the reform agenda is potential synergies between development assistance and other policy areas or broader Swedish priorities. The EBA report *Bridging Swedish Climate-Related Development and Export Finance* (Schmidt et al., 2025) examines the potential synergistic benefits of linking Swedish climate aid to

export finance. In an analysis that includes Sida, Swedfund, the Swedish Export Credit Agency and the Swedish Export Credit Corporation, as well as Business Sweden, the authors conclude that, while continuous progress is being made, there remains unutilised potential to realise synergies between climate aid and export finance.

”This mandate period has seen a significant change in activities in this policy area.”

The study highlights the differences between the actors focused on development (Sida, Swedfund) and those for whom sustainability is one of many priorities (Swedish Export Credit Agency, Swedish Export Credit Corporation, Business Sweden). The authors also note that activities are often conducted in different countries and within different sectors, limiting opportunities for substantial cooperation and reducing the potential total impact of Swedish climate aid. The authors also warn of a significant risk that Swedish business interests will be prioritised over the development needs of recipient countries.

### Advocacy at government level

Another ambition of the reform agenda is to increase collaboration between states. EBA has previously studied Swedish support for constitution-, institution- and state-building (Saunders et al., 2024; Allen et al., 2020; Andersen et al., 2019). The reform agenda also has the stated ambition of “strengthened government dialogue” where possible. In plain language, this means advocacy at governmental level in states with governments that are deemed likely to be receptive. One of the stated aims of such dialogues is to: “ensure understanding of what Swedish actors such as government agencies, businesses and civil society have to offer.” One tangible expression of this is a new funding instrument consisting of a combination of export credits and export credit guarantees. Other issues include migration and the cooperation of countries on the readmission of their citizens. At the time of writing, an ongoing collaboration between EBA, the Migration Studies Delegation (Delmi) and the European Migration Network (EMN) Sweden is



Construction boom  
in western Ukraine.

collating experiences from other OECD countries (Denmark, Norway, Germany and the Netherlands) of integrating migration issues with aid, and analysing the implications for Sweden.

The Government has emphasised the importance of coordinating aid policy with national security policy in both the reform agenda and its 2024 National Security Policy. An EBA project is currently underway to deepen understanding of the relationship between the two policy areas.

”Major changes to development assistance should as a rule be preceded by rigorous impact analysis.”

The intention is to identify and increase understanding of national security interests that might be affected by Sweden’s international development cooperation, and to explore potential synergies and goal conflicts.

#### **The importance of illuminating the effects of change**

In December 2025, the Government reached a crucial decision on the continued implementation of the reform agenda. A further five bilateral strategies are to be phased out in sub-Saharan Africa and Bolivia. This will take place during the first half of 2026. Moreover, SEK 5 billion will be redistributed from Africa and Asia to Ukraine. Grants to the United Nations Development Fund (UNDP), Adaption Fund and Green Climate Fund for the most underdeveloped countries will be discontinued. What remains will be humanitarian aid, support for the United Nations Population Fund and development



assistance for health. Meanwhile, development assistance to Ukraine will be increased to SEK 10 billion.

So, the Government's talk of a paradigm shift in the logic underpinning Swedish development assistance is taking tangible form.

This mandate period has seen a significant change in activities in the policy area. Development cooperation with several countries has been phased out and organisations and forms of assistance have been discontinued or undergone significant change. One important question is: What impact will this have not only on partner countries but also on Swedish interests, not least national security? EBA is of the opinion that major changes to development assistance, not least when it involves withdrawing aid and especially when it affects long-standing relations, should as a rule be preceded by rigorous impact analysis. EBA intends to illuminate this issue in future.

## CONCLUSIONS

- Being able to push Swedish priorities is dependent on the strength of Sweden's resource base. Reducing funding to development research has a negative impact on the resource base and thus the ability to produce evidence.
- There is potential for increased collaboration between Sida, Swedfund, the Swedish Export Credit Agency, the Swedish Export Credit Corporation and Business Sweden, but a balance must be found between the needs of developing countries and Swedish business interests.
- More knowledge is needed about the effects of withdrawing aid. The responsible phasing out of programmes demands careful planning to limit undesirable consequences.
- Future Swedish development assistance of a long-term nature will be facilitated by consensus-building across party lines.

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”EBA intends to study the impact of withdrawn funding and terminated cooperation, in particular where it affects long-standing relations.”

A man holds a sick child in the waiting room of a clinic in Marracuene, Mozambique.

PHOTO Eric Miller/Världsbanken

# LOOKING FORWARD

Significant changes to official development assistance have taken place, are ongoing and are impending. These changes can be viewed as both a response to an altered geopolitical landscape and a reflection of the changing priorities of many governments.

In this shifting landscape, Sweden's aid will be evaluated internationally.

**E**BA'S ASSIGNMENT is to contribute to the knowledge base for the development of Sweden's development assistance through studies of strategic importance to development assistance and aid policy. In performing these studies, consideration must be given to the Government's priorities. EBA is therefore planning or already conducting a number of studies related to how development assistance can best assist Ukraine and synergies between development assistance policy and other policy areas.

"It looks like 2026 will be a key year for OECD DAC and for the meaning of the term *development assistance globally*."

## Studies of deprioritised areas

The assignment also encompasses studies of deprioritised areas. The Government has repeatedly referred to the principle of "watering where the grass grows" in the interests of achieving tangible results. By this principle, the Government has signalled that it will no longer attempt to create fertile conditions but instead invest in areas with proven potential. EBA intends to study the impact of withdrawn funding and terminated cooperation, in particular where it affects long-standing relations.

Areas in which there is still consensus on Swedish aid policy, and where operations will continue, also need to be evaluated and analysed.

A rules-based world order – based on the rules, norms and institutions created to govern the behaviour of states globally – is one area in which development assistance can play a role through, for example, the UN's normative role or climate finance. Another is global public goods: goods, services systems or resources that benefit all countries and, therefore, all people, but that few are interested in funding.

## Swedish aid is also reviewed internationally

EBA is not the only body reviewing Swedish development assistance. As in 2021 and 2023, Sweden was ranked first in the Center for Global Development's *Commitment to Development Index 2025*. The Center does however note that Sweden's lead has shrunk each year.

OECD DAC will also be conducting a peer review of Sweden's development cooperation in 2026. In the last review in 2019, the assessment was generally very positive. The global situation has changed since then, as have the priorities of Sweden's and other countries' aid policies.

In 2024, total official development assistance from the 17 largest donors on the OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC) was just under US\$ 200 billion. At the time of writing, available budgets and notifications suggest that the figure for 2026 will be US\$ 145 billion. This is a considerable reduction. In response to this – and to donor countries' shifting priorities, a new geopolitical landscape and the expectations of recipient countries for more equitable partnerships – DAC is currently reviewing its operations. It looks like 2026 will be a key year for OECD DAC and for the meaning of the term *development assistance globally*.

# PRODUCTION AND COMMUNICATION

## About us

The Expert Group for Aid Studies (EBA) is a government committee mandated to independently evaluate and analyse the direction, governance and implementation of Sweden's international aid. EBA contributes knowledge to improve and develop development assistance, as well as illuminating relevant issues and important subjects that have not received adequate attention. The objective is to contribute to the effective and efficient implementation of well-designed development assistance.

The Expert Group has 10 members with expertise in various fields of relevance to development assistance. The Expert Group's decisions are executed by a secretariat with nine members of staff. EBA independently selects the subjects of its studies. EBA is independent in relation to its client, the Government of Sweden, and to the organisations under evaluation. The authors of EBA's reports are independently responsible for their analysis, conclusions and recommendations.

EBA studies general issues, not individual projects. We publish studies of various kinds, as well as arranging seminars and themed conferences. The target groups for the dissemination of knowledge are the Government, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, the Riksdag, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), researchers, civil society organisations and other aid actors. EBA builds bridges between politicians, researchers and practitioners – groups who do not always speak to one another. EBA's seminars are a natural forum for discussion on important issues related to development assistance. It is EBA's wish to be a forum in which research, practice and politics come together.

Our entire knowledge production – including reports, seminars and podcasts – is accessible on our website. In April each year, EBA summarises its operations in the annual report *The EBA Aid Review*.

## The results of EBA's outward communication 2025

The overall objective of EBA's communication is to ensure that EBA's knowledge is considered in the governance and implementation of Swedish international development assistance. To find out the extent to which we achieve this objective, we measure a number of key performance indicators for external communication. In brief, these indicators show that, during 2025, EBA has intensified outward communication with policymakers and those who implement Swedish development assistance, as well as a broader target group. Demand for EBA's expertise – in the form of presentations of our activities, participation in various discussions and media requests – has increased over recent years. We have seen increased engagement with our social media channels and newsletter. Our media and policy impact remained high during 2025, as it was in 2024. We had fewer visits to our website, a development that can be assumed to be related

to how measurements were taken but one that we will continue to monitor during 2026. During 2026, we plan to implement an interview study to enhance understanding of the value our activities create for our most significant target groups. In addition to highlighting benefits and impact, the study is expected to provide a basis for EBA's development work to ensure that we remain highly relevant.

## Following up communication of our 2024 reports

A separate communication plan is prepared at the beginning of each study, which is subsequently supplemented and concretised before the report is launched. The plan defines the report's purpose, target groups, communication goals, measurement methods, strategy, choice of media, message, risk management and an activity plan. One year after publication, a follow-up is performed to assess the extent to which the goals of the communication plan have been achieved. General lessons from the follow-up of reports published in 2024 include the following:

- One important factor in reaching the primary target group is for the group to be represented in the reference group and the work of preparing and launching the report. This brings deeper understanding to both the target group and the study.
- In a climate of heated debate, closed forums such as roundtable discussions are more effective at creating a common understanding.
- Presentations for individual organisations provide opportunities for learning without positioning.
- It is crucial that the stated goals of the communication plan are well-thought-out and relevant if follow-up is to be meaningful.
- Many reports remain relevant for many years and communication may therefore continue in contexts other than those described in the original communication plan.
- Certain studies may be fundamentally important and provide basic knowledge, but are difficult to communicate in themselves. Instead, their results can be communicated in a larger context or used as a basis and for learning when preparing new studies.

## Additional funds in the budget bills for 2024 and 2025

EBA's appropriation directions for 2025 direct EBA to report on how additional funds in the 2024 and 2025 budget bills have been used no later than 31 March 2026.

For 2024, additional net funds of SEK 678,000 were allocated (increase in appropriation SEK 900,000, reduction due to general cost cutting SEK 222,000), and for 2025, SEK 900,000. No rise in the appropriation is proposed for 2026.

In April 2024, EBA's annual administrative costs were increased by SEK 630,000. As a result, in June 2024 the Government granted EBA's request for adjusted appropriation credit. However, spending during

2024 could be adapted to the new circumstances and the additional credit was not utilised. A two-year review of EBA's website commenced (at a cost of SEK 150,000 in 2024).

The appropriation increase in 2025 was used through a utilised appropriation credit for 2024 (SEK 163,000), the continued update of the EBA's website and increased external communication (SEK 460,000) and an increase in the number of commissioned reports (SEK 200,000).

## ONGOING STUDIES

Each year, the Expert Group greenlights a number of new studies that culminate in a report, on condition that the study and report fulfil EBA's quality requirements. An EBA study may be initiated through a call for proposals or an idea proposed by a member of the Expert Group, the Secretariat or an external stakeholder. As of 1 January 2026, the following studies were underway. Learn more at <https://eba.se/en/pagaende-studier/>.

- **Mapping of Swedish development aid directed at children and children's rights**  
*Authors:* Matthew Gichohi, Sarah Tobin, Charlotte Ringdal, Arne Tostensen  
*Reference group:* Jenny Deschamps-Berger (chair)
- **Evaluation of Swedish Aid to Human Rights Strengthening in Partner Countries**  
*Authors:* Karen Da Costa, Swati Parashar, Hanna Frejd, Malin Nystrand  
*Reference group:* Malin Oud (chair)
- **Flexible Long-termism in Swedish Aid to Mozambique 2005–2026**  
*Authors:* Ingela Ternström, Inge Tvedten, José Jaime Macuane  
*Reference group:* Anna Mia Ekström (chair)
- **Mapping and analysis of gender mainstreaming in Swedish aid – a follow-up study**  
*Authors:* Elin Bjarnegård, Åsa Eldén, Cecilia Josefsson, Janithrika Jayasundara  
*Reference group:* Åsa Regnér (chair), Sofia Orrebrink (Sida), Fredrik Ugglå (Sida), Sarah Hendriks (UNW), Malin Rönnblom (KAU), Annika Karlsson (Swedish Gender Equality Agency)
- **Study of Negotiations on the EU's External Budget 2028–2034**  
*Authors:* Magnus Lundgren, Jonas Tallberg  
*Reference group:* Anders Pedersen (chair)
- **Mapping and analysis of Swedish CSO support**  
*Authors:* Noomi Weinryb, Zhanna Kravchenko, Olivia Gardell, Olof Larsson  
*Reference group:* Lars Niklasson (chair), Jannie Lilja (Ministry for Foreign Affairs), Bengt Jacobsson

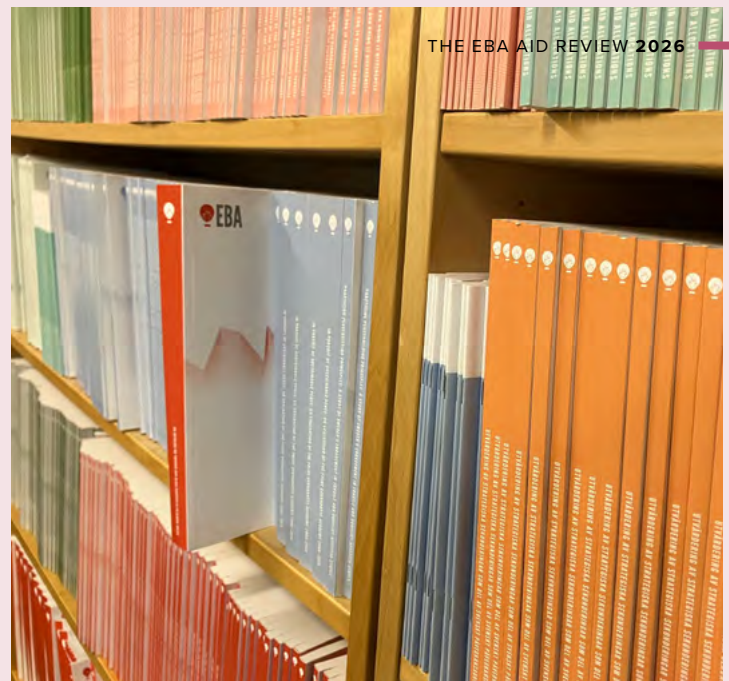


PHOTO Mattilda Widell

(Södertörn University), Åsa Thomasson (CONCORD), Ingrid Rydell (Sida), Håkan Johansson (Lund University)

- **Geospatial impact evaluation of Liberian Swedish Feeder Roads Project**  
*Authors:* Ariel BenYishay, Rachel Sayers, Pratap Khattri  
*Reference group:* Torbjörn Becker (chair), Carl-Henrik Olaison Jacobsson (UM-Monrovia), Jim Clarke, Tillmann von Carnap, Ingrid Wetterqvist (Ministry for Foreign Affairs)
- **Relations between Swedish development and security policy**  
*Authors:* yet to be decided  
*Reference group:* Katarina Tracz and Jenny Deschamps-Berger (chair), Lars-Olof Corneliusson (FHS), Lennart Båge (SEI), Gun-Britt Andersson, Fredrik Löjdquist (UI), Robert Dalsjö (FöDep/FOI), Staffan Herrström
- **Anthology on aid and migration**  
*Authors:* Editors: Henrik Malm Lindberg, Iris Luthman. Other writers: Catherine Talleraas, Jessica Schultz, Jesper Bjarnesen, Anja Simonsen, Frowin Rausis, Anna Knoll, Arjen Leerkes, Melissa Siegel, Pauline Veron  
*Reference group:* Torbjörn Pettersson (chair), Hugo Rickberg (EMN Sweden), Charlotte Kirotar (Swedish Migration Agency), Ingela Vinter-Norberg (Sida), Johan Schaar
- **Evaluation of the relevance of Swedish reform cooperation for EU accession**  
*Authors:* Erik Bryld, Dr. Erik Lundsgaard, Dr Aleksander Shumkovski, Samantha Smith  
*Reference group:* Torbjörn Becker (chair), Tobias Schumacher (NTNU), Anna Michalski (Uppsala University), Louise Bergstrand (Ministry for Foreign Affairs), Yngve Engström
- **Evaluating Unintended Effects**  
*Authors:* Timothy Leslie, Thomas Aston, Scott Chaplowe  
*Reference group:* Lars Niklasson (chair)



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## EBA REPORTS

EBA commissions external experts to conduct evaluations, analyses or other studies of Swedish international development assistance. While EBA always quality-assures a report before publication, the authors themselves are responsible for their analysis, conclusions and recommendations. EBA published the following reports in 2025:

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|--|---|
| <p><b>2025:01</b> What Are They Fighting For? An Issue-based Approach to the Analysis and Resolution of Civil War<br/><i>Authors: Johan Brosché, Sebastian Rataamaa, Kate Lonergan</i></p> | <p><b>2025:06</b> Bridging Aid and Trade: Exploring Synergies Between Swedish Climate-related Development and Export Finance<br/><i>Authors: Luisa Weber, Max Schmidt, Igor Shishlov, Sherri Ombuya</i></p>                                       |
| <p><b>2025:02</b> Land Tenure and Climate Resilience: Household Level Evidence from Kenya<br/><i>Authors: Kathleen Klaus, Emma Elfversson</i></p>  | <p><b>2025:07</b> Strengthening or Supporting Health Systems? Evaluating Swedish Bilateral Development Assistance for Health<br/><i>Authors: Jesper Sundewall, Björn Ekman, Jens Wilkens, Joseph Kazibwe, Adam Lagerstedt, Olga Kaartinen</i></p> |
| <p><b>2025:03</b> Forced Self Reliance? Protracted Displacement and Economic Inclusion: Cases from East Africa<br/><i>Authors: Måns Fellesson, Mats Hårsmar</i></p>                        | <p><b>2025:08</b> China as a Global Development Actor: Transforming the International Aid Landscape<br/><i>Authors: Editors: Malin Oud, Oscar Almén</i></p>   |
| <p><b>2025:04</b> Evaluation of Sida's Multidimensional Poverty Analyses<br/><i>Authors: Ingela Ternström, Inge Tvedten, Fredrik Ugglå</i></p>   |   |
| <p><b>2025:05</b> Employment and Earnings in Sub-Saharan Africa: Sida's Contribution<br/><i>Authors: Louise Fox, Derrick Abudu</i></p>   |   |

## JOINTLY FUNDED REPORTS

**OECD (2025)** *Strategic Joint Evaluation of the Collective International Development and Humanitarian Assistance Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic*, OECD Publishing, Paris

**PEMconsult (2025)** *Joint Nordic Evaluation of Contributions to Trust Funds*. December 2025. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark.



PHOTO Christian Schneider

## WORKING PAPERS

EBA also commissions working papers, shorter studies that independently address an issue or supplement an EBA report. EBA published the following working papers in 2025:

- June 2025** **The Effectiveness of Core and Earmarked Funding in Multilateral Development Cooperation** (joint with DEval, published as DEval Discussion Paper 2/2025)  
**Authors:** Judith Ihl, Ravneet Singh, Isabel Malandu Mukali, Helena Hede Skagerlind, Angela Heucher
- Dec. 2025** **Perceptions and Power: Assessing the Impact of Russia's Influence on Development Cooperation and Attitudes in Africa**  
**Author:** Maria Perotta Berlin

## DEVELOPMENT DISSERTATION BRIEFS

EBA's DDB series offers recently graduated PhDs the opportunity to present their doctoral thesis as it relates to Swedish development cooperation. The series disseminates knowledge about new research and new researchers in the field of aid to the Government, government agencies and other stakeholders. EBA published the following development dissertation briefs in 2025:

- 2025:01** **Stagnant Water and Waterborne Diseases: Implications for Children's Health and Education**  
**Author:** Steve Bergreen
- 2025:02** **Climate, Weather Shocks and Cities**  
**Author:** Nicklas Nordfors
- 2025:03** **Precarious Paths to Democracy: Electoral Violence and the Struggle for Democratization**  
**Author:** Gudlaug Olafsdottir
- 2025:04** **From Confrontation to Cooperation? The United Nations' Engagement with Non-State Armed Groups**  
**Author:** Jenniina Kotajoki
- 2025:05** **Why do some politicians withdraw from politics while others do not in violent elections?**  
**Author:** Juan Diego Duque-Salazar

## THE EBA PODCAST

In our podcasts (in Swedish), we invite experts, practitioners and policymakers to discuss topical aid issues. All episodes can be downloaded from eba.se or wherever you get your podcasts.

- Episode 77** New Year, New Assignments! Appropriation Directions for Development Assistance 2025.
- Episode 78** Conflict, the Climate Crisis and Reduced Support for SRHR: The New Reality for Development Assistant for Health.
- Episode 79** How Can Development Impact be Assured in a Changing Donor Landscape?
- Episode 80** Swedish Development Assistance in a Watershed Moment: Navigating a New World Order.
- Episode 81** The Reform Agenda in Practice: How Swedish Development Assistance is Changing.
- Episode 82** A New Strategy When Respect For Humanitarian Principles is Under Threat.
- Episode 83** A New Strategy for Gender Equality and Women's and Girls' Freedom and Self-determination.
- Episode 84** A Record Year for Conflict: What is Required for Sustainable Peace?
- Episode 85** Corruption and Obstacles to Development: One of Aid's Most Important Battle-grounds.
- Episode 86** Aid Budget 2026: Brickbats and Bouquets.
- Episode 87** COP30: What Was the Outcome of the Climate Change Conference?
- Episode 88** The Government Decommissions Five Country Strategies: A Discussion About Motives and Consequences.

## SEMINARS

EBA arranges seminars to present the results of the evaluations, analyses and studies we publish. We also arrange seminars on research conducted outside EBA's organisation and forums at which aid actors can meet to develop learning and collaboration on Swedish international development assistance. Most are filmed and posted on our website at eba.se. We arranged the following seminars in 2025:

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|---|--|
| <p><b>4 March</b> <b>Persistence of Poverty: Trends and Progress in Turbulent Times</b><br/>Point of departure: The World Bank's report <i>Poverty, Prosperity, and Planet Report: Pathways Out of the Polycrisis</i>.</p>  | <p><b>15 October</b> <b>Conflict, Democracy, and Peace: Exploring What Works</b><br/>Point of departure: EBA 2025:01 <i>What Are They Fighting For? An Issue-based Approach to the Analysis and Resolution of Civil War</i>.</p> |
| <p><b>11 March</b> <b>Health Challenges During the Migration Process: How Does Sweden Manage These?</b><br/>Arranged jointly with the Migration Studies Delegation (Delmi) and WHO Collaborating Center on Migration and Health Data and Evidence at Uppsala University.</p>  | <p><b>16 October</b> <b>Land Rights and Climate Resilience</b><br/>Point of departure: EBA 2025:02 <i>Land Tenure and Climate Resilience: Household Level Evidence from Kenya</i>.</p>   |
| <p><b>25 March</b> <b>Webinar: Lancet Commission on Investing in Health 3.0</b><br/>Point of departure: A roadmap for halving the number of premature deaths by 2050: <i>The Lancet Commission for Investing in Health 3.0, a chapter in EBA 2024:09 An Anthology of Trends and Perspectives on Global Health</i></p> | <p><b>12 November</b> <b>Public Opinion on Carbon Pricing and Revenue Uses in East Africa</b><br/>Webinar at COP30, point of departure: EBA 2024:03 <i>Public Opinion on Carbon Pricing and Revenue Uses in East Africa</i>.</p> |
| <p><b>29 April</b> <b>Tackling Poverty and Discrimination in Bangladesh</b><br/>Point of departure: EBA 2024:10 <i>Extreme Poverty and Marginalisation in Bangladesh: Drivers and Lessons for Development Cooperation</i>.</p>  | <p><b>25 November</b> <b>Understanding and Changing: Dimensions of Poverty</b><br/>Point of departure: EBA 2025:03 <i>Evaluation of Sida's Multidimensional Poverty Analyses</i>.</p>  |
| <p><b>20 May</b> <b>Climate-adapted Development: Perspectives From New Studies</b><br/>Point of departure: DDB 2025:01 <i>Stagnant Water and Waterborne Diseases: Implications for Children's Health and Education</i>, DDB 2025:02 <i>Climate, Weather Shocks and Cities</i>.</p>                                    | <p><b>12 December</b> <b>Developments in East Africa: A Situational Analysis</b><br/>Arranged jointly with the Nordic Africa Institute (NAI), on current developments in East Africa.</p>  |



## THE EXPERT GROUP

*The Expert Group decides the direction of EBA's work and which studies should be conducted. The group consists of members with academic and practical expertise and broad knowledge of fields related to aid.*



**TORBJÖRN BECKER**

Chair

Director of the Stockholm Institute of Transition Economics at the Stockholm School of Economics.



**MALIN OUD**

Deputy chair

Senior advisor at the Raoul Wallenberg Institute of Human Rights and Humanitarian Law.



**JENNY DESCHAMPS-BERGER**

Member

Head of the Analysis Support Division, Centre for Societal Security at the Swedish Defence University.



**ANNA MIA EKSTRÖM**

Member

Clinical Professor of Global Infectious Disease Epidemiology at the Department of Global Public Health at Karolinska Institutet.



**LARS NIKLASSON**

Member

Senior Associate Professor of Political Science at Linköping University.



**ANDERS PEDERSEN**

Member

International Director of the Swedish Red Cross.



**ÅSA REGNÉR**

Member

Secretary General of Save the Children Sweden.



**FREDRIK SJÖHOLM**

Member

Professor and Managing Director of the Research Institute of Industrial Economics.



**KATARINA TRACZ**

Member

CEO and founder of Solomós Communications.



**ANDREAS WLADIS**

Member

Professor of Disaster Medicine and Traumatology at Linköping University and Associate Professor of Surgery at Karolinska Institutet.

During 2025, the Expert Group also included member Martina Björkman Nyqvist, Professor of Economics and Executive Director of the House of Sustainable Society at Stockholm School of Economics.

The Expert Group's decisions are executed by a secretariat with nine members of staff: Jan Pettersson (Managing Director), Malin Ahrne, Anna Florell, Mats Hårsmar, Ravneet Singh, Helena Hede Skagerlind, Matilda Widell and Númi Östlund, and for part of the year Arizo Karimi and Amanda Rossling (substituting for Markus Burman, who is on leave of absence).



The Expert Group for Aid Studies (EBA) is a government committee mandated to independently evaluate and analyse the direction, governance and implementation of Sweden's international development assistance.

EBA's assignment is to contribute knowledge to the governance and implementation of Swedish development cooperation.

The EBA Aid Review is based on the reports published by EBA over the course of the year. This document is our annual report. It is available in digital and print form in Swedish and English.

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