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**A TEAM PLAYER AND FREE AGENT: SWEDEN'S ENGAGEMENT  
WITH EU COUNTRY AND JOINT PROGRAMMING**

Erik Lundsgaarde



# A Team Player and Free Agent: Sweden's Engagement with EU Country and Joint Programming

Erik Lundsgaarde

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The Expert Group for Aid Studies (EBA)

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# Table of Contents

<b>Foreword by EBA .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Sammanfattning .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Summary .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>1 Introduction .....</b>	<b>8</b>
Background.....	8
Study Objectives and Approach.....	11
Structure of the Report.....	15
<b>2 EU-Member State Cooperation: Characterizing the Policy Agenda .....</b>	<b>17</b>
The Development of Joint Programming.....	17
Academic perspectives on EU-Member State Collaboration	22
<b>3 EU Development Cooperation .....</b>	<b>25</b>
Framing EU Development Cooperation .....	25
The EU's Development Cooperation Roles.....	27
EU Country Programming.....	28
EU Joint Programming.....	32
Avenues for Member State Influence.....	34
<b>4 Sweden and EU Development Cooperation .....</b>	<b>39</b>
Comparing Swedish and EU Cooperation Profiles.....	39
Sweden's EU Aid Contribution.....	43
Sweden's Influence in the EU Development Cooperation Arena .....	45
Swedish Country Programming.....	47
Sweden and EU Country Programming.....	49

<b>5</b>	<b>Country Cases.....</b>	<b>52</b>
	Bangladesh.....	53
	Colombia.....	64
	Georgia.....	73
	Mali .....	83
	Uganda .....	92
<b>6</b>	<b>Lessons on EU-Member State Cooperation and Swedish Engagement with the EU.....</b>	<b>102</b>
	Summary of Case Study Findings.....	102
	The Substance of Swedish Engagement .....	104
	Opportunities for Engagement .....	107
	Resources for Engagement .....	110
	EU Influence on Swedish Programming .....	112
<b>7</b>	<b>Conclusions .....</b>	<b>115</b>
	Joint Programming alone does not resolve coordination challenges .....	116
	Sweden should enlarge its agenda on effective EU cooperation .....	117
	<b>References.....</b>	<b>121</b>
	<b>Annex 1. List of Interviewees .....</b>	<b>131</b>
	<b>Annex 2. List of Abbreviations .....</b>	<b>134</b>
	<b>Previous EBA reports .....</b>	<b>136</b>

# Foreword by EBA

For Sweden, the European Union (EU) represents a central platform for advancing foreign and development policy goals. The EU is not only the largest development cooperation provider but also a global actor that can wield influence internationally and in partner countries. The EU can also act as coordinator with other Member States and EU institutions.

This study explores the relationship between Sweden and the EU in development cooperation. It focuses on programming at the partner country level, where a majority of development cooperation is programmed and implemented. The country level is thus a key arena for coordination, collaboration and cooperation between the EU and the Member States. This study analyses Sweden's engagement in EU country programmes and joint programming against the backdrop of increased efforts to prioritize collaboration among the EU and Member States.

In this report the author, Erik Lundsgaarde, describes Swedish efforts to engage in EU country processes in five case countries. The cases illustrate that there is a potential to increase and develop these links, to improve coordination and to further Swedish policy priorities.

As this report focuses on the collaboration between EU and its Member States, I hope that it will find an audience among aid practitioners involved in country programming around Europe. The study has been conducted with support from a reference group chaired by Magnus Lindell, member of the Expert Group. The author is solely responsible for the content of the report.

Gothenburg, August 2022



Helena Lindholm

# Sammanfattning

För Sverige utgör EU en central plattform för att främja utrikes- och utvecklingspolitiska mål. EU är inte bara den största biståndsgivaren, utan också en global aktör med inflytande såväl internationellt som i partnerländer. EU kan också fungera som samordnare med andra medlemsstater och EU-institutioner.

Utvecklingssamarbetet planeras och genomförs ofta på landnivå. Detta gäller inte bara för Sverige, utan även för EU. Det blir därför viktigt att förstå hur EU verkar på landnivå och på vilka sätt medlemsstaterna kan samarbeta med EU och deras landprogram.

Den här studien undersöker EU:s två centrala processer på landnivå – land- och gemensam planering – och hur Sverige engagerar sig i dem. Syftet är att öka förståelsen för de möjligheter som Sverige har att bidra till utformningen av EU:s samarbetsprogram. Men också vilka prioriteringar Sverige för fram för att forma hur EU genomför utvecklingssamarbetet på landnivå.

EU:s *landprogrammering* avser utformningen av EU:s egna landprioriteringar och fördelning av bistånd. Det är en strukturerad process som leder till en specificerad och standardiserad produktion – ett flerårigt vägledande program – inom en fastställd tidsram.

*Gemensam planering* är den process där EU och dess medlemsstater utvecklar sitt samarbete på landnivå. Den kan särskiljas från EU:s landprogrammering som en process som inte är obligatorisk. Den ger också mer utrymme för initiativ från EU-delegationer, medlemsstater och andra deltagande aktörer om hur processen ska organiseras och vilka resultat som är relevanta för att främja målen för närmare samarbete i en given landsmiljö.

Dessa två processer kan informera varandra eller överlappa varandra, och båda kan göra det möjligt för medlemsstaterna att ge synpunkter på EU:s samarbetsstrategier. EU-delegationer har utrymme i hur de organiserar båda processerna, och resultatet är att de varierar mycket mellan länderna.

Studien innehåller fallstudier av fem partnerländer (Bangladesh, Colombia, Georgien, Mali och Uganda) med en översikt över EU:s och Sveriges givarprofiler i respektive land. Analysen synliggör EU:s olika roller som samarbetsaktör, och lyfter fram dess mandat att administrera bistånd och främja samordning. Dessa uppgifter återspeglas i processerna för landprogrammering och gemensam planering.

## **Slutsatser**

Den övergripande slutsatsen är att även om Sverige identifierar EU som en av sina viktigaste utvecklingssamarbetspartner, finns det många utmaningar för att stärka engagemanget på landnivå. Dessa utmaningar inkluderar osäkerhet om EU:s samarbetsroll och status för gemensamma planeringsprocesser, Sveriges engagemang i andra länders processer, och det varierande engagemanget från andra medlemsstater i gemensamma EU-initiativ.

Som en viktig politisk arena och den största internationella biståndsgivaren har EU en central roll i såväl internationell politik som utvecklingssamarbete. Sveriges engagemang i EU:s program på landnivå representerar en betydande potential för att främja både svenska prioriteringar och agendan för utvecklingseffektivitet.

Om man betraktar Sverige, i ljuset av de fem fallstudierna, är den övergripande slutsatsen att nivån på engagemanget, både i EU-länder och gemensam programmering, är positiv men begränsad. Sverige signalerar ett åtagande att aktivt främja samordning och gemensam planering i sina landstrategier. Studien visar också att Sverige konsekvent stödjer EU:s samordningsinitiativ. Sverige är erkänt av andra europeiska givare som en aktiv deltagare i samordningsprocesser. Men som nämnts ovan var de studerade gemensamma planeringsprocesserna begränsade i omfattning. Svenskt engagemang i EU:s arbete på landnivå sträcker sig längre än till gemensam planering. Som

exempel kan nämnas deltagande i politisk dialog och medfinansiering av EU-stödda verksamheter. Relationernas mångfacetterade karaktär återspeglas dock inte väl i svenska landstrategier.

Studien drar också slutsatsen att Sverige kan förbättra sitt engagemang i EU genom att fokusera mer på underliggande utmaningar som begränsar samarbetet mellan europeiska partner, och inte bara genom aktivt stöd till EU-initiativ. Detta skulle kunna stärka EU:s och dess medlemsstaters kollektiva biståndsinnsatser.

Detta kräver engagemang inte bara i EU-institutioner utan även i andra medlemsstater. Detta för att bättre anpassa planeringscykler och identifiera vilka typer av beslut som mer konsekvent kan delegeras till landnivå. Sverige och andra EU-biståndsgivare bör också undersöka om personal- och ekonomiska resurser är tillräckliga för att samarbeta, antingen genom pågående samordning eller de nya Team Europe-initiativen.

Att ta gemensamma initiativ kräver ekonomiska resurser. I en tid av begränsade samarbetsbudgetar behöver man klargöra vilka investeringar som krävs för att stärka samarbetet mellan EU och medlemsstaterna och vad den ökade prioriteringen av samverkan kommer att innebära för engagemang i andra agendor.

## Summary

For Sweden, the EU represents a central platform for advancing foreign and development policy goals. The EU is not only the largest development cooperation provider but also a global actor that can wield influence internationally and in partner countries. The EU can also act as coordinator with other Member States and EU institutions.

Development cooperation is often programmed and implemented at the country level. This is true not only for Sweden, but also for the EU. Understanding how the EU operates at the country level and the ways in which Member States can engage with the EU and in its country programming thus becomes important.

This study examines the EU's two key country level processes – country and joint programming – and how Sweden engages in them. The objective is to further the understanding of the opportunities that Sweden has to contribute to the formulation of EU cooperation programmes and the priorities it advances in shaping how the EU implements development cooperation

*EU Country programming* relates to the formulation of the EU's country priorities and indicative financial allocations. It is a structured process leading to a specified and standardized output – a Multi-annual Indicative Programme – within an established timeframe.

*Joint programming* reflects efforts to move toward common frameworks for action for the EU and its Member States. It can be distinguished from the EU's country programming as a process that is not compulsory. It also leaves more room for initiative from EU delegations, Member States and other participating actors on how to organize the process and determine what outputs are relevant in furthering goals of closer collaboration in a given country setting

These two processes can inform one another or overlap, and both can provide opportunities for Member States to offer input on EU cooperation approaches. EU delegations have discretion in how they organise both processes, and the results is that they vary greatly between countries.

The study presents case studies of five partner countries (Bangladesh, Colombia, Georgia, Mali and Uganda) with an overview of the characteristics of the EU and Sweden as cooperation providers. The analysis draws attention to the diverse roles that the EU plays as a cooperation actor, highlighting its mandates to manage aid delivery and foster coordination. These tasks are reflected in the processes of country programming and joint programming.

## **Conclusions**

The overall conclusion from the study is that while Sweden identifies the EU as one of its most important development cooperation partners, there are numerous challenges to strengthening country level engagement. These challenges include uncertainty about the cooperation role of the EU and the status of joint programming processes, Sweden's commitment to other country level partners and processes, and the varied engagement of other Member States in common EU initiatives. As an important policy arena and the largest international aid donor, the EU has a central role in both international politics and development cooperation. Sweden's engagement with the EU's country level programming represents a significant potential to further both Swedish priorities and the development effectiveness agenda.

Looking at Sweden, through the lens of the five case studies, the overall conclusion is that the level of engagement, both in EU country and joint programming, is positive but limited. Sweden signals a commitment to actively promote coordination and joint programming in its country strategies. The study also suggests that

Sweden consistently supports EU coordination initiatives. Sweden is recognized by other European cooperation providers as an active participant in coordination processes. But as noted above, the joint programming processes studied were limited in scope. Swedish engagement with the EU's country level work extends beyond joint programming. Examples include involvement in political and policy dialogue and the co-financing of EU-supported activities. The multi-faceted character of relations is however not well reflected in Swedish country strategies.

The study also concludes that Sweden can improve its engagement with the EU by focusing more on underlying challenges that limit collaboration among European partners, and not only through active support of EU initiatives. This could strengthen the collective aid efforts of the EU and its Member States.

This requires engagement not only with EU institutions but also with other EU Member States at headquarters level to examine the potential to improve the alignment of planning cycles and identify what kinds of decisions can more consistently be delegated to country level. Sweden and other EU aid providers should also examine the adequacy of financial and human resources to undertake collaboration, whether through ongoing coordination or the new Team Europe Initiatives.

For Sweden, other Member States and EU delegations themselves, engagement in coordination processes involves personnel and resource commitments. Undertaking joint initiatives requires financial resources. In an era of limited cooperation budgets, there is a need to clarify the investment required to strengthen EU and Member State collaboration and what the increased prioritization of collaboration will mean for engagement with other agendas.

# 1 Introduction

European Union (EU) Member States have a dual role within the EU's development policy system. On the one hand, they shape EU cooperation priorities and approaches as participants in the policymaking processes that determine the cooperation profile of EU institutions. On the other hand, Member States pursue cooperation programmes of their own, guided by national decision-making processes.

This study explores the relationship between Sweden and the European Union in development cooperation, focusing on programming at country level. It analyses the linkages between Swedish and EU country programmes against the backdrop of efforts to promote collaboration among the EU and Member States to increase the effectiveness and visibility of European development cooperation. The study analyses the priorities that Sweden advances to influence the EU's development cooperation profile and the characteristics of the setting that shapes how the EU and Member States interact at country level. The status of the joint programming agenda and process related to the formulation of the EU's country strategies are the main elements of the setting that the study examines.

## **Background**

The EU and its Member States have made political commitments to improve their collaboration to ensure that their actions are complementary and mutually reinforcing. Understanding and clarifying the respective roles that the EU and Member States play as development actors and how they interact is relevant in promoting a more efficient collaboration and allocation of development resources.

The commitment to complementary action is outlined in policy frameworks in Sweden and at EU level. The Policy Framework for Swedish Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Assistance from 2016 clearly notes that “Sweden cannot and must not do everything everywhere,” indicating that an analysis of other donors’ engagement is a foundation for identifying where Sweden can make the most valuable contributions (Government of Sweden, 2016). Due to its large aid budget, Swedish cooperation covers a wide spectrum of geographic and thematic engagement as well as diverse channels for implementation. Successive OECD DAC Peer Reviews of Sweden have pointed to the potential for further geographic concentration as well as the consolidation of thematic policy priorities to limit aid dispersion and contribute to more effective aid management (OECD, 2013; OECD, 2019).

At the EU level, debates on the external action role of EU institutions highlight a political interest in clarifying the respective contributions of the EU and Member States. The Lisbon Treaty strengthened the status of development cooperation as an area of shared competence, noting that EU and Member State development policies should “complement and reinforce each other” (EU, 2007). The 2011 Agenda for Change underscored that the EU’s roles as a coordinator, convener, and policymaker across multiple fields of external action were key in distinguishing EU-level action from the profiles of Member States (European Commission, 2011). Recent policy frameworks including the EU Global Strategy and New Consensus on Development Policy are viewed as comprehensive frameworks for the EU and its Member States, signalling the potential for the EU institutions to assume a larger coordinating role.

In deliberations on the Multiannual Financial Framework for 2021–2027, the Commission indicated that its proposal for a consolidation of external financing instruments would foster added value as a result of the volume of resources provided, as well as the flexibility and predictability of instruments employed. Other

advantages of EU engagement that the Commission emphasizes include the EU's potential to exert political leverage, engage in sensitive contexts where many Member States are not active, and build on longstanding expertise in thematic areas such as food security and peace and conflict (European Commission, 2018).

Ongoing efforts to strengthen the collective impact of the EU and its Member States in development cooperation are framed within a discourse calling for the EU to become more strategic and assertive in advancing its values and interests on the global stage (von der Leyen, 2019). Motivations to enhance EU and Member State collaboration stem not only from longstanding effectiveness considerations but also from an explicit geopolitical orientation.

In spite of policy commitments to demonstrate added value, distinguishing the respective development cooperation roles of the EU institutions and Member States is a subject for continuing debate. The most recent OECD peer review of EU development cooperation made note of the examples of EU earmarked funding for multilateral organisations as well as funding for bilateral development financing institutions as funding streams where there is potential to more clearly identify added value, given that such funds may also be channelled directly to implementers from bilateral donors (OECD, 2018).

Development cooperation decision-making takes place at multiple levels, involving interplay between headquarters and foreign missions. The *Policy Framework for Swedish Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Assistance* characterizes EU development cooperation as a central platform for advancing the Swedish government's development priorities, and underlines the importance of strong advocacy efforts in both Brussels and country level cooperation (Government of Sweden, 2016).

As the process of defining priority areas for implementation, country programming provides a framework for how cooperation actors engage with partner organisations and fellow aid providers.

Setting priorities involves balancing the strategic objectives of aid providers with the needs and interests of stakeholders in partner countries. Ideally, this process is also informed by an identification of the added value of a given aid provider's contributions in relation to the commitments of other actors. In the EU context, the division of labour and joint programming agendas illustrate an awareness of the relevance of allocating aid following consideration of the respective priorities of European development partners. The analysis of EU Member State engagement with EU programming provides insight into the setting for coordination among European development partners while highlighting the Member State interests in shaping the EU's country level development cooperation.

## **Study Objectives and Approach**

This section outlines the study direction and presents an overview of the research approach.

### **Guiding Questions**

In examining the relationship between Sweden and the EU in development cooperation programming at the country level, this study emphasizes the opportunities that Sweden has to contribute to the formulation of EU cooperation programmes and the priorities it advances in shaping how the EU implements development cooperation. It is guided by three questions:

1. How is EU country level development cooperation programmed?
2. How does Sweden engage in country level programming?
3. How can Sweden's engagement with EU country level cooperation be improved?

## Method

To characterize the context for and substance of Swedish–EU interactions in the development cooperation arena, this study combines a broad review of headquarters-level engagement between Sweden and the EU with a more detailed analysis of cooperation in five partner countries.

EU policy documents and academic literature on EU development cooperation provide a basis for outlining the agenda for cooperation between the EU and its Member States at headquarters level. Interviews with officials at headquarters level provided input on Swedish interests in EU level cooperation as well as perceptions of Swedish influence in Brussels.

To elaborate the country level context for interaction between Sweden and the EU, the study presents case studies of cooperation in Bangladesh, Colombia, Georgia, Mali and Uganda. These priority countries for Swedish cooperation represent diverse cooperation settings, reflecting differences in levels of development and in terms of the importance of the EU and Sweden as cooperation providers in the country, as Table 1 indicates. The countries also vary with respect to the status of EU joint programming. The study seeks to identify common themes that emerge from the analysis of programming in these divergent settings.

The country cases present descriptive data to outline the sectoral priorities of Sweden and the EU and present an overview of their main implementation channels. To characterize the arena in which European aid providers interact, the case studies analyse the dynamics of EU joint programming. The review of policy documents including EU country strategies contributes to the analysis of the profiles of aid providers and the status of joint programming. Interview input from country level aid officials supplements the document review. The interviews provided information on perceptions of the comparative advantages of the EU as an aid provider, opportunities for Member State influence

on the EU’s country level work, the state of the cooperation agenda involving the EU and its Member States, as well as factors that are relevant in understanding the potential of European cooperation providers to collaborate more closely.

**Table 1: Overview of Case Study Countries**

	<b>Bangladesh</b>	<b>Colombia</b>	<b>Georgia</b>	<b>Mali</b>	<b>Uganda</b>
EU Aid (Mil. USD)	763.57	373.03	1,202.77	1,358.38	656.38
SE Aid (Mil. USD)	203.25	157.01	103.37	216.44	292.91
EU Share of Total Official Aid	3.01 %	3.36 %	25.43 %	15.93 %	5.61 %
EU + MS Share of Total	11.29 %	32.07 %	42.11 %	40.64 %	19.51 %
SE Share of Total	.80 %	1.41 %	2.19 %	2.54 %	2.50 %
Aid per capita	19.72	24.79	134.68	75.97	45.57
Aid as % of GNI	1.26	0.38	3.15	9.41	5.89
Income Category (2021)	LMIC	UMIC	UMIC	LIC	LIC

Note: Volumes of aid and shares of total official aid are cumulative figures for the period 2014–2019.<sup>1</sup> The calculation of EU and Member State aid as a share of total aid excludes the United Kingdom for the entirety of the period. Aid per capita and aid as a percentage of GNI are averages for the period.

Sources: OECD.Stat (2021c); World Bank (2021). In this study, the term ‘EU aid’ refers to the aid that EU institutions manage and does not cover the aid collectively provided by the EU and its Member States.

<sup>1</sup> The period 2014 to 2019 is used throughout this study to summarize aid flows for two main reasons: it covers available data for the previous programming period for EU development cooperation (2014–2020) and accounts for possible annual variability by presenting a descriptive summary over a longer timeframe.

A total of 44 interviews (involving 46 individuals) were carried out in preparing this study. Eighteen interviewees were affiliated with Swedish organisations (Sida, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and foreign missions), while another 10 interviewees were affiliated with EU institutions at headquarters level and in the field. Seventeen interviewees represented European development partners apart from Sweden and the EU, and one researcher also provided input.

To provide more depth to the discussion of Sweden's engagement with EU programming, the author also reviewed documentation of Swedish development cooperation, including background notes for the preparation of Swedish country strategies, country strategies and strategy results reports. A primary focus of the review was to identify Swedish priorities for engagement with the EU and how Sweden assesses the setting for EU coordination and Sweden's own contribution to EU coordination processes.

## **Scope and Limitations**

The engagement of the EU and Sweden in developing countries extends beyond development cooperation funding, encompassing a range of political and economic relations. The term 'beyond aid' has become an important reference point in policy discourse to acknowledge the transforming setting for development cooperation, taking note of the proliferation of cooperation providers, the rise of innovative financing tools and the catalytic role of aid, and the contribution of varied public policy fields in addressing global development objectives (Janus et al., 2015). While the study aims to characterize the context in which the EU and Member States interact in formulating country level development funding priorities, it does not assess EU–Member State relations in fields of external action such as trade or security cooperation in depth. The study also does not examine the potential transformation of EU development cooperation linked to the

innovative financing agenda, which would require additional consideration of the dynamics of cooperation among development finance institutions.

The study focuses on the relationships among European aid providers rather than identifying the interests of partner country stakeholders in European coordination initiatives. It also does not assess the consequences of EU-Member State cooperation for achieving development objectives. Statements on partner government interests and involvement in EU processes reflect European perspectives on how partner governments have engaged with them. Local ownership remains a central determinant of effective development cooperation. Ownership can be examined from different stakeholder perspectives, including executive or legislative entities in partner countries, civil society organisations or the private sector (Keijzer et al., 2018). Further assessment of partner views on how EU initiatives serve the interests of local stakeholders would be relevant in informing how the EU and Member States can balance goals of increasing collective impact and visibility with the aim of strengthening local ownership.

## **Structure of the Report**

This study begins by outlining the policy agenda on improving collaboration among European donors. The next chapter starts with an overview of the evolution of the EU cooperation agenda leading to the promotion of joint programming and the Team Europe approach. It provides a brief review of literature conceptualizing the development cooperation relationship between the EU and its Member States. A subsequent section elaborates on the context for interaction between the EU and its Member States by outlining core features of EU development cooperation such as its organisation, key EU cooperation roles, guidance for country programming and joint programming efforts, and avenues for Member State influence.

The study then situates Sweden's country level engagement in a broader context by comparing EU and Swedish aid profiles, identifying the weight of EU aid within Sweden's aid portfolio as well as Sweden's interests in influencing the EU, before depicting the Swedish country programming process and examining Swedish engagement in EU country programming.

Case studies of Bangladesh, Colombia, Georgia, Mali and Uganda are a core part of the study. The case studies compare Swedish and EU aid profiles, outline features of the context for EU programming, and analyse Swedish engagement with the EU at country level. A final substantive section of the study builds on findings from the case studies to present lessons learned and point toward areas of reflection for to improve future collaboration between Sweden and the EU.

## 2 EU-Member State Cooperation: Characterizing the Policy Agenda

This section reviews policy commitments to improve collaboration among European aid providers and highlights entry points from the academic literature for studying the relationship between the EU and its Member States in the development cooperation arena.

### **The Development of Joint Programming**

The division of labour agenda provides a starting point for studying the respective roles of EU aid providers and how they collaborate. An outgrowth of aid effectiveness commitments in the 2005 Paris Declaration, division of labour promised to counter transaction costs resulting from the presence of many donors in the same geographies and sectors. The agenda encouraged donor specialization to allocate resources more evenly across partner countries and focus in areas of demonstrated advantage to limit overlaps and fill gaps in underserved areas. Assessments of comparative advantage could apply varied criteria to accommodate the characteristics of diverse European aid providers (Mürle, 2007).

Within the EU, the guidelines in the *EU Code of Conduct on Division of Labour in Development Policy* from 2007 urged EU donors to limit their country level assistance to two sectors where they had a comparative advantage, in addition to providing general budget support and supporting civil society organisations. Aid reallocation through mechanisms such as delegated partnerships or general budget support was encouraged to limit fragmentation (European Commission, 2007). Thus, the division of labour agenda involved identifying the potential for reducing donor engagement alongside opportunities for specialization and joint implementation.

Building on the *Code of Conduct*, the 2009 Operational Framework on Aid Effectiveness outlined three steps to improve the division of labour at country level: 1) consultation with partner governments and mapping of aid flows; 2) assessment of comparative advantages; and 3) reallocation and reprogramming of aid. The EU *Fast Track Initiative on Division of Labour* offered an impulse for strengthening the coordination role of EU delegations and increasing the emphasis on joint analysis and programming among European donors (Council of the European Union, 2009).

The introduction of EU joint programming, which was piloted in Haiti in 2010 and subsequently extended to a wide range of country contexts, carried forward the division of labour agenda (Galeazzi et al., 2013). Joint programming reflects a commitment to common planning of development cooperation and external action among development funders in a given country. Core elements of the planning process include a joint analysis of challenges and opportunities in the country as well as the formulation of a joint response consisting of an agreement on priorities and an indicative financial framework to address them. The EU institutions view the synchronization of donor planning cycles with those of partner governments as a key step in facilitating the alignment with partner priorities (DG DEVCO, DG NEAR and EEAS, 2018).

Recent EU policy frameworks preserve elements of division of labour thinking while departing from the specific commitments that earlier initiatives included. Under the label of ‘working better together’, the *New European Consensus on Development* restates the EU commitment to development effectiveness, calling for greater coordination and coherence while taking into account the comparative advantages of the EU and its Member States (European Union, 2017b). The *Consensus* encourages more collective action through joint programming and joint implementation, but signals that joint approaches should be context-specific and flexible, limiting the concrete guidance on how European aid providers should engage in any given setting.

As the joint programming agenda has evolved, assessments have noted several challenges in its implementation. O’Riordan et al. (2011) emphasize that there are multiple dimensions of donor practice that need to be flexible in order to facilitate joint programming. Donor difficulties in adjusting funding and programming cycles to fit with partner country time horizons as well as variations in the scope of country level activities covered by donor strategies are examples of administrative barriers to pursuing common planning approaches.

A European Commission-funded evaluation of early experiences with joint programming indicated that the process fostered improvements in coordination by increasing information exchange and mutual awareness among EU donors. While the evaluation pointed to advantages in terms of joint analysis and mapping efforts linked to field level engagement, it noted that the additional step of formulating joint responses was more difficult due to its dependence on headquarters-level decision-making (ADE, 2017). In addition, joint programming was viewed as a European undertaking with limited involvement from partner country governments. The evaluation encouraged policymakers to adopt a pragmatic and flexible approach to joint programming emphasizing the role of the process in promoting common strategic approaches at country level (ADE, 2017).

The EU commitment to joint programming was reiterated in the regulation creating the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI-Global Europe), the EU’s new consolidated development instrument. The regulation was proposed in 2018 and was finally adopted in June, 2021 following negotiations with the European Parliament and Member States. In the regulation, joint programming is referred to as “the preferred approach for country programming” (European Commission, 2018). The regulation indicates that regular consultations with partner governments, Member States and other relevant stakeholders should provide a key input to the preparation of EU country programmes. Even in cases where a

joint strategy for EU and Member States does not materialize, there is an expectation that the EU and Member States will prepare a joint document outlining EU policy toward a given partner (European Commission, 2018).

Framed in line with an explicitly geopolitical understanding of EU cooperation, the ‘Team Europe’ agenda (launched in 2020) was conceived as a means of promoting EU norms and values as well as shared policy objectives such as the prioritization of a green approach to economic recovery in the wake of the global pandemic. The agenda stresses the need for coordination among Team Europe members and advocates for increasing the visibility of European contributions in addressing development challenges (Council of the European Union, 2021). The agenda proposes an expansive approach to joint planning by seeking to integrate a range of strategic issues beyond development cooperation. At the same time, it reflects continued interest in advancing a European division of labour through a concentration of aid activities and the identification of opportunities for joint implementation among donors (European Commission, 2021b).

The Team Europe agenda emerged in 2020 as a means of demonstrating the large collective effort of the EU and Member States in addressing global health and socio-economic challenges. It has since evolved to encompass collaboration on a wider spectrum of issues such as engagement with multilateral organisations and debt relief and has also spawned a slate of country and regional level ‘Team Europe Initiatives’ (TEIs) that are intended as a vehicle for the EU and Member States to work more closely together to promote visibility and impact (Keijzer et al., 2021).

Although the TEIs are understood to be distinct from the joint programming process, political guidance from Brussels indicates that TEIs should ideally contribute to reinforcing the preference for increasing joint programming (Council of the EU, 2021). In programming guidance, TEIs are presented as ‘flagship’ initiatives that seek to pool European resources effectively. The guidance

suggests that the structure and implementation approaches of TEIs are adaptable to the challenges they seek to address, as both a mix of modalities and partners may be considered (European Commission, 2021b). While the TEIs may be narrower in scope than joint programming exercises, they share a common underlying orientation to move in the direction of encouraging closer collaboration between the EU and Member States.

The phrase ‘working better together’ offers an umbrella term for closer cooperation between the EU and Member States. It reflects EU and Member State policy commitments to increase coherence and coordination in development cooperation, aiming not only to enhance the effectiveness of aid delivery but also to make the collective EU contribution to development goals more visible. ‘Working better together’ appears as a heading within the *New European Consensus for Development*, where it references a variety of means for strengthening the collective orientation of EU and Member State cooperation, including formulating common positions in international forums and pooling resources through joint implementation (European Union, 2017b). The working better together agenda provides a broad container for more specific initiatives, and joint programming and the TEIs are core expressions of this general concept (European Commission, 2021b). As a broad label, ‘working better together’ can also be applied in country level cooperation to reflect EU-Member State collaboration that does not meet the definition of joint programming or Team Europe Initiatives.

The concepts of ‘working better together’, ‘joint programming’ and ‘Team Europe’ all express a similar ambition to strengthen collaboration between the EU and its Member States. Although joint programming and Team Europe have more specific connotations, these terms can themselves reflect processes varying in scope and objectives.

## **Academic perspectives on EU-Member State Collaboration**

The division of labour and joint programming agendas highlight a fundamental challenge in development cooperation related to the similar and potentially overlapping profiles of donors. The agendas encourage reflection about the respective roles of different Member States as well as of the EU. However, the comparison of the role of the EU institutions as aid providers with that of Member States has been a special focus in the academic literature on this topic. The changing policy and organisational set-up for EU development cooperation provided a stimulus for such analysis. Since the Lisbon Treaty's arrival, the agenda for EU development policy has broadened to reflect the wide range of political and economic interests that EU external relations incorporate as well as the role of the European External Action Service (EEAS) in integrating foreign and development policy (Bergmann et al., 2020).

The academic literature on EU development cooperation presents several views on how to conceptualize the relationships between EU and Member State cooperation programmes. A first perspective focuses on the nature of geographical and sectoral specialization of the EU institutions. As Kugiel (2020) argues, the definition of EU comparative advantage as a basis for a clearly defined division of labour has been complicated due to the expansive agenda that EU development policy covers. Numerous sectoral priorities create the potential for overlap with Member States and limit the distinctiveness of the EU's cooperation profile. To exploit unique attributes of the EU in the cooperation landscape, Kugiel proposes prioritizing the EU's competencies in the areas of regional cooperation and economic integration.

A second perspective focuses on the EU's coordination role. The EU's commitment to the aid effectiveness agenda and the reform of the EU's external action apparatus provided impetus for the EU

to adopt a stronger federating role in development cooperation vis-à-vis Member States. However, research on European aid coordination has highlighted limitations in the EU's capacities to pursue a strong coordination role. Delputte and Orbie (2014) note that the EU's administrative requirements and the desire for political control and visibility among Member States as well as different perceptions of the utility of specific aid modalities explain the limited extent of centrifugal tendencies in EU development cooperation. As the motivation for the EU to assert its coordination role has evolved from promoting aid effectiveness to increasing the collective visibility, impact and leverage of EU cooperation, there is a tension between EU coordination efforts and broader donor coordination initiatives. Diverse Member State preferences on what purposes aid should serve and how it should be coordinated at country level may amplify this tension (Delputte and Orbie, 2020).

A final perspective on the role of the EU as a cooperation actor involves the concept of Europeanization, which refers to the EU's potential to shape institutions, norms, and practices in Member States (Lightfoot, 2010). As an example, EU accession requirements provided a stimulus for the Europeanization of the development policies of Central and Eastern European Member States, as the established EU development policy system could offer direction in terms of policy priorities and aid management. Yet even in this case, Lightfoot (2010) points to the persistence of national preferences concerning aid objectives and influence from multilateral actors beyond the EU as signs of limited Europeanization.

Although EU requirements were critical in jumpstarting new Member State aid programmes, Lightfoot and Szent-Iványi (2014) argue that several factors hindered the socialization of these states within an EU aid community, including capacities for engagement and limited expertise on development issues. Limited participation in deliberations on EU development policy influenced the

perception of the relevance of transferring EU level policy commitments to the new Member States (Szent-Iványi, 2014). In an assessment of the extent of Europeanization in well-established Nordic development policies, Elgström and Delputte (2016) conclude that a top-down process of Europeanization has been weak with respect to the Nordic donors. Instead, Nordic donors themselves have contributed to a convergence among EU donors in norms and practices by advancing effectiveness principles and issues including gender equality. This work on Europeanization highlights the influence of Member States in shaping the direction of EU development policy.

### 3 EU Development Cooperation

The lenses for viewing the relationship between the EU institutions and Member States related to specialization, coordination and Europeanization outlined in the previous section provide a foundation for comparing the EU's qualities as a cooperation actor to its Member States. This section summarizes important traits of the EU as a development cooperation provider, outlines the different development cooperation roles that the EU plays, provides an overview of EU country programming, and identifies the avenues that Member States have to influence EU development cooperation.

#### **Framing EU Development Cooperation**

A main feature of the EU's aid role is the large scale of its engagement. From 2014 through 2019, the EU institutions provided USD 94.5 billion in ODA, or roughly 16 percent of total aid from OECD DAC donors (OECD, 2022). The NDICI-Global Europe instrument that serves as the main vehicle for EU development cooperation within the Commission's 2021–2027 Multiannual Financial Framework involves funding commitments of €79.46 billion through 2027. It intends to provide an integrated framework that is global in scope and consolidates previously separate instruments (European Commission, 2021a).

EU institutions perform different roles in the formulation and implementation of EU development policy. The Council of the European Union, representing Member State governments, provides input on policy directions and shares a legislative role with the European Parliament, which has additional responsibilities with respect to budgetary oversight and scrutiny of implementation (OECD, 2018). The Parliament is expected to strengthen its oversight role in EU development policy in the current budgetary

period, in part because the European Development Fund (EDF) will no longer exist as an extra-budgetary fund (Burni et al., 2021), although the implementation of many EDF-funded activities is still ongoing.

The European Commission plays a central policy and implementation role, having responsibilities for proposing legislation and aid management. Within the Commission, the Directorate-General INTPA (formerly DG DEVCO) covers geographic cooperation with Sub-Saharan Africa, Asia and the Pacific, as well as the Americas and the Caribbean. INTPA also covers cooperation with Overseas Countries and Territories (OCTs) linked to the Decision on the Overseas Association, including Greenland (DOAG). INTPA's responsibilities related to thematic cooperation include the management of programmes for civil society organisations, human rights and democracy as well as global challenges. INTPA also manages the European Instrument for Nuclear Safety Cooperation.

DG NEAR manages cooperation with countries in the EU's Eastern and Southern Neighbourhood as well as candidate countries for EU enlargement. Cooperation with enlargement countries is managed separately from the NDICI-Global Europe instrument under the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA III). NEAR and INTPA share management responsibilities in some areas. One example is joint management of the resilience component of the NDICI-Global Europe rapid response pillar. The joint risk management unit supporting implementation of the European Fund for Sustainable Development Plus (EFSD+) provides another example (Lundsgaarde et al., 2022).

DG ECHO has responsibility for the management of EU humanitarian aid. The European External Action Service has a development policy coordination role and participates in aid management due to its authority over EU delegations (OECD, 2018).

In addition to responsibilities linked to the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy, the Foreign Policy Instrument Service (FPI) manages NDICI-Global Europe's Peace, Stability and Conflict Prevention thematic programme, as well as the elections observations mission component of the Human Rights and Democracy programme and the crisis response and foreign policy needs components of the rapid response pillar.

## **The EU's Development Cooperation Roles**

The EU's cooperation identity can be defined in relation to different types of roles that highlight the diverse ways that the EU relates to its Member States in this policy area.

First, the EU can be conceptualized as a *policy system*. It is a collective entity composed of supranational institutions and constituent Member states. Policy directions within this system are determined by the interplay of supranational institutions representing different interests, including the interests advanced by Member States with diverse priorities and administrative structures for global engagement. These actors work together to develop common frameworks for action. Because development policy is an area of shared competence, Member State administrations nevertheless maintain autonomy in implementing bilateral programmes (Bodenstein et al., 2017).

Second, the EU may be considered a *global actor in its own right*. The EU's 'actorness' is tied to its capabilities, including resources and instruments for external action, but may also be shaped by the recognition of its role within specific policy fields (Rhinard and Sjøstedt, 2019). An important intention in the Lisbon Treaty was to strengthen the EU's capacities for autonomous external action through organizational reform in foreign affairs. The EU's global role compared to Member States can vary by policy arena, with international trade negotiations providing an important example due to the EU's exclusive competence.

Third, the EU acts as a potential *coordinator* within the system composed of EU institutions and Member States. The EU's initiative in promoting joint programming as an extension of the development effectiveness agenda is a key expression of its country level coordination role. Joint programming has faced numerous challenges. Diverse views among EU institutional actors, Member States, and partner governments on the value of EU-driven coordination have constrained the agenda's advancement (Carbone, 2017).

Finally, the EU also acts as a *development cooperation provider*. It has the possibility to provide funding across a wide spectrum of geographies and sectors, making use of a range of modalities including budget support, grants and blended development finance. A broad range of partner organisations implements EU aid, including partner country governments, civil society organisations, multilateral organisations and development finance institutions. Through delegated cooperation, the EU also makes use of Member State development agencies as aid implementers (ECORYS, 2016).

## **EU Country Programming**

The EU defines programming as “the process through which the EU defines its medium and long-term international cooperation priorities” (European Commission, 2022). Programming may either be geographic, focusing on the definition of priorities in particular countries and regions, or thematic, relating to funding for cross-cutting concerns such as democracy and human rights with a global scope for engagement.

*Country programming* is a process of defining core EU priority areas and indicative funding allocations that respond to challenges specific to a country context while reflecting broader EU policy goals (not to be confused with *Joint programming*, as described below). Guidance in the form of programming guidelines and instructions from Brussels provides a starting point for the country

programming process, after which EU delegations take responsibility for conducting contextual analysis and convening stakeholder consultations at partner country level. A draft proposal sets out priorities that provide a basis for dialogue between the delegation and the Commission and the EEAS (Herrero et al., 2015). This second round of negotiation results in the preparation of a document formerly called a National Indicative Programme (NIP) but currently labelled a Multiannual Indicative Programme (MIP), which is formally adopted through the comitology procedure, allowing EU Member States influence over programming choices (Herrero et al., 2015).

Prior to the adoption of the NDICI-Global Europe instrument in 2021, different instruments provided the framework for country programming. For the countries falling under the umbrella of the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI), which have substantive partnership agreements with the EU encompassing multiple policy fields, programming priorities were previously outlined in a document known as a Single Support Framework (SSF) (European External Action Service, 2015). The NDICI-Global Europe instrument places cooperation with different geographies in a common framework and MIPs are the standard programming output.

Within the EU system, Commission services (DG INTPA, DG NEAR, FPI and DG ECHO) have a central role in crafting and implementing development policy and humanitarian assistance, while the European External Action Service assumes a coordination role particularly through the EU delegations (OECD, 2018). Although the EEAS takes the formal lead in programming exercises, the EEAS and Commission services share responsibilities for providing programming guidance and accompanying country programme proposals through the inter-institutional decision-making process in Brussels (Tannous, 2013). The complications resulting from multiple institutional actors involved in the approval of long-term

programming decisions has motivated recommendations for the EU to simplify administrative procedures and decentralize decision-making to the country level to a greater extent (OECD, 2018).

Country programming follows from the EU multiannual budgetary cycle. For the current budgetary period, the creation of the NDICI-Global Europe instrument reflects an important innovation in the programming of EU development cooperation, as the new instrument presents a framework to consolidate funding that was previously disbursed through separate instruments. Programming for the NDICI-Global Europe instrument was launched in November 2020 and concluded with the adoption of Multiannual Indicative Programmes (MIPs) at the end of 2021.

The NDICI-Global Europe Regulation outlines the EU's general approach to geographic and thematic programming.<sup>2</sup> The regulation calls for inclusive consultations between the EU and Member States early in the programming process and throughout the programming cycle. Multi-stakeholder consultations with other actors including donors, civil society organisations, local authorities and private sector actors are also foreseen as input (Regulation (EU) 2021/947, Title 2, Chapter 2, Article 12). The presentation of programming principles in the regulation indicates that the programming period should be aligned with partner country strategy cycles where appropriate. Geographic cooperation frameworks are expected to reflect a consideration of five key factors: 1) partner country development needs; 2) partners' capacities and commitments to promote shared values; 3) partners' commitments to fulfilling criteria related to policy concerns in areas including political reforms, economic and social development, environmental sustainability, and the effective use of aid resources;

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<sup>2</sup> Regulation (EU) 2021/947 of 9 June 2021 establishing the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument-Global Europe, OJ L 209, 14 June 2021, pp. 1–78.

4) the potential impact of EU funds in a given geography; and 5) partner capacities to mobilize, manage and implement development resources (Regulation (EU) 2021/947, Title 2, Chapter 2, Article 13).

Programming builds on context analysis and consultations taking place prior to the formal start of the programming process, resulting in a first attempt for EU delegations to outline priorities (CONCORD, 2020). At the time of the launch of country programming, the European Commission and the EEAS issue guidelines to EU delegations to emphasize core policy goals, identify programming principles and outline standard features of the process as well as the output.

With respect to *policy goals*, the NDICI-Global Europe programming guidelines highlight the importance of consistency with the EU's internal and external agenda, referencing a commitment to green economic recovery, combatting inequality, advancing multilateralism, promoting and preserving human rights and democratic governance, and fostering peace and security, among other goals (European Commission and European External Action Service, 2020). In terms of *programming principles*, the guidelines note the importance of the 'policy first principle' that requires an alignment of partnerships with EU strategic objectives as well as a 'geographisation principle' that makes funding through country and regional programmes a clear priority. With respect to the *process*, the guidelines stress the importance of inclusive consultations with local stakeholders, other aid providers, and European actors and note that EU delegations have discretion on how to organize these processes. Guidance for the country programming *outputs* encourages the EU to identify at most three priority areas for intervention and up to two Team Europe Initiatives and provide indicators to monitor results (European Commission and European External Action Service, 2020).

## EU Joint Programming

As described above, EU *country* programming refers to the process involving the elaboration and approval of multiannual indicative programmes, which provide a legal basis for cooperation implemented by EU institutions with specific countries. *Joint* programming can represent a distinctive process, where the identification of a common framework for action between the EU and Member States as well as other participating cooperation providers such as Norway and Switzerland in the form of a joint programming document is a main output.

Joint programming can be distinguished from the EU's country programming as a process that is not compulsory and which leaves more room for initiative from EU delegations, Member States and other participating actors on how to organize the process and determine what outputs are relevant in furthering goals of closer collaboration in a given country setting.<sup>3</sup> In EU policy documents, joint programming is characterized as “voluntary, flexible, inclusive and tailored to the country context” (European Commission, 2021: 11). In general, however, joint programming processes are expected to involve an element of joint analysis of the country context, a review of the respective contributions that participating actors make to shared objectives, and the identification of a joint response emanating from the analysis of challenges and collective capabilities. A joint results framework should ideally accompany the joint response (European Commission, 2021b).

EU country programming and joint programming may overlap with one another, depending on country-specific cooperation dynamics. EU guidance on joint programming from 2018 indicated that a joint programming document could replace the EU's own country programming documents, though it pointed to only one case (Laos) where such a replacement had been implemented by

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<sup>3</sup> Interview 37.

that time (European Commission 2018a). Beyond the EU, only six Member States (Austria, France, Germany, Greece, Italy and Sweden) had confirmed the possibility of replacing bilateral country strategies with a joint EU strategy as of 2021 (European Commission, 2021b).

The NDICI-Global Europe Regulation signals an intention for the EU to raise the profile of joint programming, indicating that joint programming should be “the preferred programming approach” (Regulation (EU) 2021/947, Title 2, Chapter 1, Article 12). The guidance for the programming of the NDICI-Global Europe instrument from 2020 notes that MIPs should provide a summary of the status of joint programming processes or an explanation for why these have not taken place (European Commission and European External Action Service, 2020).

In spite of the distinctiveness of the processes and outputs, EU joint programming follows a timeframe that is similar to EU country programming, lasting 1 and a half to 2 years. In line with the flexible character of joint programming and the variable replacement of EU country programming documents with joint programming documents, joint programming may take place alongside country programming, emerge as country programming is already underway, or serve as a follow up process to a completed country programming process. Joint programming documents are expected to clarify the consistency of joint programming priorities with those outlined in MIPs as well as providing an overview of the linkage between EU financial allocations and priorities presented in the joint programming document (European Commission 2018a).

## **Avenues for Member State Influence**

EU Member States have opportunities to shape EU development cooperation at both headquarters level and in the field.

At headquarters level, EU Member States have the potential to have direct influence over the strategic orientations for EU development policy through their representation in the Council of the European Union. In this capacity, Member States can shape EU geographic and thematic priorities and preferences for specific implementation approaches.

Participation in working groups and committees under the umbrella of the Development Council, itself under the authority of the Council of Foreign Ministers, has been a main avenue for Member States to provide input on general policy frameworks, the EU's use of specific instruments, and the content of country programmes (Bodenstein et al., 2017), thus shaping the roles that the EU plays in development cooperation. The Working Party on Development Cooperation and International Partnerships (CODEV-PI) is currently the primary committee assigned the task of preparing for Development Council meetings (Council of the European Union, 2022).

Member State experts can also provide informal input in programming discussions, for example through their participation in the Practitioners' Network, where the development of Team Europe Initiatives has been a focus of programming-related dialogue (Practitioners' Network for European Development Cooperation, 2021). Additional consultations with Member States take place outside of the Council setting in relation to regional and thematic programmes.

Member States have opportunities to provide input on EU country programmes through consultations at country level, which can take place in the context of regular EU donor coordination meetings or on a more informal basis. Member States with a country presence

have a knowledge sharing and advisory role vis-à-vis EU delegations. In this context, it is relevant to underline that EU delegations work within a framework that is shaped by the policy agendas, programming guidance and instructions coming from Brussels. While delegations have some flexibility in how they respond to instructions, programming documents ultimately reflect a balance between headquarters and country level considerations. This can present a constraint on Member State influence at country level.

**Table 2: Member State Roles vis-à-vis the EU at Country Level**

<b>Role</b>	<b>Description</b>
Political coordination	Engages in deliberation on common positions in preparation for dialogue with partner government
Aid coordination	Exchanges information, provides advisory input and takes part in consultations on how the EU and Member States work together in development cooperation at country level
Co-financer	Provides funds for programmes or projects that are also supported by the EU as an aid provider and contributes to design, oversight and assessment
EU Implementer	Has responsibility for carrying out EU-funded activities through delegated cooperation agreements
Complementary actor	Independently implements MS programmes and projects that are aligned with the EU's development policy agenda

At the country level, Member States play different roles in relation to the EU as a cooperation actor (see Table 2 above). In line with their diplomatic functions, the EU delegation and Member State missions fulfil roles beyond their development cooperation activities, and Member State engagement with the EU on one level can take the form of political coordination related to engagement with the partner

governments. This political coordination role potentially overlaps with a coordination role related to development cooperation implementation.

As the discussion of EU programming processes above indicates, Member States can shape the framework for collaboration among EU donors through participation in joint programming processes or provide suggestions on the content of the MIPs. Member States may also act as co-funders of EU programmes or as EU implementing agents.

The operational profile of Member States can shape their patterns of interaction with the EU. Member States with a larger capacity to implement delegated cooperation may have more opportunities than Sweden to engage with the EU, for example.<sup>4</sup> Table 3 presents an overview of development cooperation funding managed by Member State agencies on behalf of the Commission through delegated cooperation (see below). This is known as the mode of indirect management following EU terminology.

While all EU Member States implement a share of EU development cooperation funds, Table 3 reflects that German and French implementing organisations have played an especially large role in EU delegated cooperation. The GIZ (*Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit*) and KfW Development Bank (KfW) are the primary operational actors within the German development cooperation system, respectively focusing on technical and financial cooperation. The GIZ, an organisation with both public and private components and nearly 24,000 staff globally, has reported that its total business volume with EU institutions nearly tripled between 2015 and 2020, amounting to EUR 428 million in 2020 (GIZ, 2021). Together with the *Agence Française de Développement* (AFD), a development bank with mixed tools at its disposal, these organisations stand out from other Member State agencies due to the scale and history of their roles as EU implementation partners.

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<sup>4</sup> Interview 6, Interview 17.

The AFD and KfW have also been among the most important implementers of EU guarantees and blended finance projects. The policy concept of an open investment architecture within NDICI-Global Europe’s investment framework signals an interest in expanding participation of a wider range of Member State implementers in EU cooperation, however (Lundsgaarde et al., 2022). The Spanish International Development Cooperation Agency (AECID) and Belgian’s technical cooperation agency Enabel are further examples of Member State operational entities with a more extensive linkage to the EU through delegated cooperation than The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida).

**Table 3: European Commission Development Cooperation Funding Implemented by Member State Agencies (2014–2021)**

<b>Member State</b>	<b>Contracts</b>	<b>Amount Contracted (EUR)</b>	<b>Contract Percent</b>	<b>Percent Total</b>
Germany	370	4,227,598,708.19	24.06	38.98
France	375	3,400,721,854.38	24.38	31.35
Spain	120	744,476,529.30	7.80	6.86
Netherlands	54	613,994,805.26	3.51	5.66
United Kingdom	65	461,088,363.70	4.23	4.25
Belgium	86	402,573,734.62	5.59	3.71
Italy	38	223,205,246.64	2.47	2.06
Portugal	36	160,456,292.55	2.34	1.48
Sweden	39	114,445,440.66	2.54	1.06
Austria	38	109,885,145.00	2.47	1.01
Denmark	14	98,380,442.67	0.91	0.91
Poland	22	65,807,430.00	1.43	0.61
Romania	25	37,152,133.02	1.63	0.34
Czech Republic	21	24,122,860.00	1.37	0.22
Finland	3	22,109,427.67	0.20	0.20
Greece	25	21,709,314.95	1.63	0.20

<b>Member State</b>	<b>Contracts</b>	<b>Amount Contracted (EUR)</b>	<b>Contract Percent</b>	<b>Percent Total</b>
Hungary	20	20,517,075.00	1.30	0.19
Bulgaria	19	14,047,799.50	1.24	0.13
Lithuania	20	13,935,996.00	1.30	0.13
Slovakia	22	12,933,618.32	1.43	0.12
Luxembourg	18	10,937,352.09	1.17	0.10
Croatia	18	10,856,494.00	1.17	0.10
Ireland	18	10,042,033.20	1.17	0.09
Latvia	19	9,937,456.00	1.24	0.09
Slovenia	18	9,172,124.00	1.17	0.08
Cyprus	15	3,178,243.30	0.98	0.03
Malta	15	1,572,052.40	0.98	0.01
Estonia	5	1,149,425.16	0.33	0.01
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,538</b>	<b>10,846,007,397.58</b>		

Notes: The table presents data on EU development funding implemented by Member State organisations through the management mode of indirect management, which requires that implementing organisations undertake a review of business practices and accountability set-ups known as a pillar assessment. The author thanks the Effective Development Policy and Team Europe Unit at DG INTPA for providing this data.

## 4 Sweden and EU Development Cooperation

This chapter provides background for the analysis of Swedish engagement with EU country level cooperation in specific settings by presenting a broad picture of how the aid profiles of Sweden and the EU compare, what place engagement with the EU has within the Swedish aid programme, and what linkages exist between Swedish engagement and EU country programming.

The chapter first outlines the geographical and sectoral focus of EU and Swedish aid and identifies preferred implementation channels. It then situates the importance of Swedish contributions to European development cooperation within the broader Swedish aid portfolio. The chapter continues with a presentation of core aspects of Sweden's headquarters-level engagement with the EU, including an overview of the policy priorities that Sweden has advanced in Brussels. Finally, the linkages between Sweden and the EU in country programming are elaborated with discussions of the guidance on Swedish engagement with joint programming in the context of country strategy development and the nature of guidance provided by Stockholm to foreign missions regarding participation in EU country programming.

### **Comparing Swedish and EU Cooperation Profiles**

A high-level comparison of geographic and sectoral funding trends indicates that while the EU and Sweden share core priorities, their profiles are also distinct in light of the broader scope for European engagement.

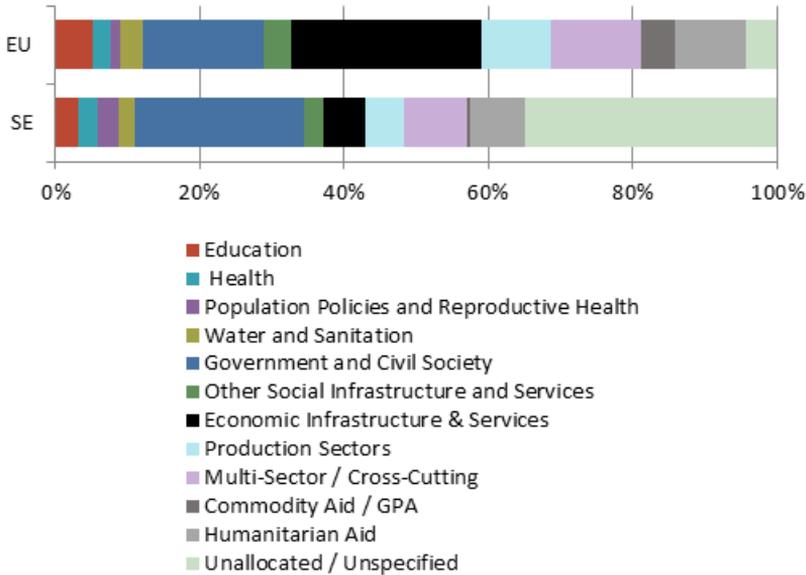
Sub-Saharan Africa was the single largest regional destination for aid flows from both the EU and Sweden between 2014 and 2019, accounting for thirty percent of net disbursements from the EU and 24 percent of Swedish net disbursements (OECD.Stat, 2022). Sweden's focus on Sub-Saharan Africa is evident from the fact that 20 of its 44 priority countries are located in the region. The EU's net aid disbursements to the European (22 percent of net ODA) and North African (8 percent of net ODA) regions were more important as a share of its overall portfolio compared to Swedish aid (OECD.Stat, 2022). This reflects the EU's prioritization of funding to its regional neighbourhood. Sweden does not have any bilateral partner countries in North Africa. Four countries in the Middle East, four in Asia, four in Latin America and twelve in Europe are currently listed as priority geographies for Swedish engagement (Sida, 2022b).

The majority of Swedish aid provided between 2014 and 2019 was directed to low income countries (LICs). LICs received 53 percent of Swedish aid, while Lower Middle-Income Countries (LMICs) and Upper Middle-Income countries (UMICs) respectively accounted for 26 percent and 21 percent of net ODA.<sup>5</sup> In contrast, the EU's portfolio showed a larger focus on middle-income countries. The EU provided 29 percent of its aid to LICs, 38 percent to LMICs and 33 percent to UMICs. At the same time, Sweden and the EU provided a similar share of ODA to LDCs (29 percent for Sweden and 27 percent for the EU), which was close to the DAC average but higher than the average for EU members of the DAC (21 percent) (OECD.Stat, 2021c).

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<sup>5</sup> The LIC, LMIC and UMIC designations follow World Bank categorization.

**Figure 1: Priority sectors of EU and Swedish Aid in Comparison**



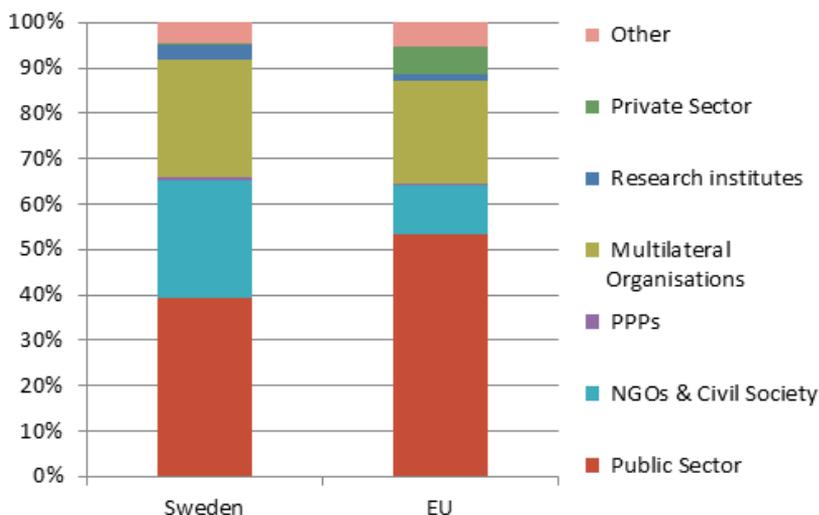
Source: OECD.Stat (2021a).

Notes: A large share of Swedish aid, 35 percent of the total, is labelled as unallocated or unspecified in this sectoral overview. The category refers to funds that do not fit in other sectoral categories, with the OECD naming aid to non-governmental organisations and administrative costs as examples. Sweden’s large unallocated aid share likely reflects the importance of core multilateral contributions in its aid portfolio as well as ODA-eligible costs for hosting refugees and asylum seekers.

Further similarities and differences in emphasis are visible in comparing Swedish and EU sectoral priorities (see Figure 1). For Sweden, the sectoral overview points to the prioritization of funding to governance and civil society, the emphasis for 24 percent of Swedish ODA in the period 2014–2019. The same area is also an important destination for EU funds (17 percent of total). In contrast, the EU directs significant shares of its aid to economic infrastructure and production sectors (26 percent and 10 percent, respectively) and also stands out from Sweden for its continued use of general programme assistance (budget support), even though only 5 percent of EU funds were attributed to this sector. The stronger EU focus on economic sectors and budget

support also distinguishes it from the broader community of EU Member States as well as DAC donor countries in general (OECD.Stat, 2021a).

**Figure 2: Swedish and EU Implementation Channels (2014–2019)**



Source: OECD.Stat (2021b).

Differences in sectoral emphases contribute to varied preferences for specific implementation channels. As Figure 2 illustrates, public sector implementing entities are the largest destination of aid from both the EU and Sweden, though the EU distributes a larger share of its aid (53 percent from 2014–2019) via the public sector than Sweden (39 percent in the same period). Sweden prioritizes funding to civil society organisations to a larger degree, accounting for 26 percent of bilateral aid between 2014 and 2019 in comparison to 11 percent for the EU. According to this data, Sweden also implemented a slightly larger share of its bilateral aid through multilateral organisations (26 percent) than the EU (22 percent) (OECD.Stat, 2021b).

The EU views itself as a promoter of multilateralism and is a major contributor to multilateral development organisations. One relevant distinction between the EU and Member States is that EU aid to multilateral organisations consists overwhelmingly of non-core funding (Weinlich et al., 2020). In light of Sweden’s large core multilateral contributions in addition to reliance on multilaterals as a bilateral implementation channel, multilateral aid has a greater weight in the Swedish system compared to the EU.

This brief comparison of aid profiles points to different ways of interpreting how EU development cooperation can complement Member State funding. From one perspective, EU aid can complement Member State cooperation by engaging in priority areas or with partner organisations where Member States are less active, as the examples of economic infrastructure and greater public sector engagement in comparison to Sweden illustrate. A second perspective on complementary engagement emphasizes the overlaps within particular sectors such as governance and civil society and the opportunities this presents to reinforce common priorities and ensure that contributions from different actors address multiple aspects of similar underlying challenges.

## **Sweden’s EU Aid Contribution**

Sweden considers the EU as its “most important foreign policy platform” (Government of Sweden, 2019:47). The place of EU development cooperation in the overall Swedish aid budget is also significant. Between 2014 and 2019, Sweden’s development funding to the EU via its contribution to the EU budget and through the extra-budgetary European Development Fund (EDF) totalled USD 2.38 billion, representing 6.7 percent of total aid disbursed to developing countries and multilateral organisations (OECD, 2021a).

Although development funding to the EU is included under Sweden's budget heading for international aid and selected results of EU aid are highlighted in the annual budget proposal (Regeringskansliet, 2020), Sweden's role in the governance of EU development cooperation primarily reflects its Member State status rather than directly reflecting its role as a contributor. Sweden's large aid budget and extensive support to multilateral organisations means that Swedish ODA via the EU amounts to a more limited share of its overall portfolio in comparison to other EU Member States. This is true not only in relation to smaller European aid providers, for which EU aid represents the overwhelming majority of their multilateral ODA, but also larger Member States including France and Germany and historically like-minded countries including Denmark and the Netherlands (Karlsson and Tallberg, 2021). Between 2014 and 2019, Sweden's ODA via the EU amounted to 21.2 percent of its core funding to multilateral organisations. In light of extensive non-core funding to organisations in the UN family and World Bank Group, overall contributions to the EU represented 14.3 percent of Swedish funds channelled through the multilateral system in this period (OECD, 2021b).

These alternative ways of highlighting the importance of EU development cooperation for Sweden point to some ambiguity on the status of Sweden-EU relations in the development sphere. On the one hand, the EU is a key point of reference for Sweden's international relations, while on the other hand the strong commitment to other multilateral actors means that engagement with the EU is one piece of a larger multilateral portfolio. The scope and long history of engagement with the UN system has provided many individuals within the development administration with a personal knowledge base on other multilateral entities. This contrasts with a lower level of direct experience of working with EU institutions.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Interview 9.

## Sweden's Influence in the EU Development Cooperation Arena

The multiple roles of the EU in development cooperation outlined above imply that there are alternative avenues for Member States to influence the substance of the EU's global engagement. Sweden's development budget justification indicates that the first avenue for influence over a common European development policy is participation in Council working groups. Engagement in implementation committees, expert groups, and via embassies can provide additional opportunities for shaping EU development policy (Regeringskansliet, 2020).

Sweden expresses interest in influencing the EU as a development actor at both headquarters and field levels. Engagement with the work of EU institutions in Brussels has multiple aims. One aim is to promote operational synergies through knowledge exchange. A related objective is to ensure that lessons from implementation inform policy choices. Policy engagement with the EU can also be a means of extending the reach of Swedish priorities beyond Swedish partner countries in light of the global scope of EU action.<sup>7</sup>

At the headquarters level, Sweden has been an advocate for maintaining high levels of aid, preserving poverty reduction as a central EU development objective, and initiatives including joint programming and Team Europe that aim to advance effectiveness ideas. Sweden's geographic preferences for aid to LDCs and support to Eastern Partnership countries reflect the focus of its own bilateral programme, as does a thematic agenda for influence focusing on climate and environmental issues, democracy and human rights promotion, and gender equality. Building on its pioneering use of guarantees, Sweden has also provided inspiration for the EFSD+, a major component of the EU's consolidated NDICI-Global Europe instrument.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Interview 13.

<sup>8</sup> Interviews 1, 3.

Staffing resources dedicated to development policy, including a liaison officer from Sida at Sweden's permanent representation in Brussels, are perceived to have strengthened Sweden's capacity to shape the EU development agenda.<sup>9</sup> Investments in other areas, such as strengthening EU-oriented legal expertise provide further evidence of the attention to expanding capacities throughout the organisation.<sup>10</sup>

The possibilities for Sweden to influence the EU in country level cooperation represent an area of ongoing reflection within the Swedish aid administration.<sup>11</sup> More than a decade ago, an evaluation of Swedish influence over the EU at field level noted several challenges for Sweden to exert influence over the EU's country level work. The evaluation signaled that influence efforts at country level tended to be ad hoc rather than systematic, and attributed the lack of structured approaches to influence to a lack of clear guidance on how to engage with EU institutions, different perceptions in field offices on the necessity of influencing the EU, and limited focus on equipping field staff with knowledge about how EU institutions function and skills to exert influence (SADEV, 2009).

The evaluation recommended that the Ministry for Foreign Affairs should clarify the priority of influencing the EU in relation to influencing EU Member States or other actors and suggested that more attention should be given to human resource issues including strengthening the knowledge of EU institutions among country staff (SADEV, 2009). This evaluation focused on policy guidance and the human resources set up for advancing Swedish priorities. It was carried out prior to the reforms of the EU external relations architecture following from the Lisbon Treaty.

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<sup>9</sup> Interview 1.

<sup>10</sup> Interview 13.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

## Swedish Country Programming

As with the EU, Swedish aid decisions are embedded in a broader policymaking context. Responsibility for the overall aid budget resides with the parliament, which provides an annual framework for aid allocation and authorizes governmental actors to disburse development funding (EBA, 2018).

The Ministry for Foreign Affairs (MFA) and the Swedish International Cooperation Agency (Sida) are the primary governmental actors responsible for aid management, although numerous other offices have authority over specific budget lines. The MFA and Sida share responsibilities in country level aid management, as the MFA and Sida both provide instructions to embassy staff who work on development cooperation. The delegation of decision-making to country-level representatives on how to direct funds depends on the volume of the funding envelope under consideration as well as the capacities of the mission (EBA, 2018). Under delegated decision-making, an embassy has authority to make autonomous decisions.

Decision-making at country level is guided by multiannual country strategies, though some funding priorities may be shaped by thematic strategies, commitments to civil society organisations, or humanitarian strategies that fall outside of the scope of country strategies (EBA, 2018).

The delegation of many funding decisions to the Heads of Cooperation at Swedish embassies is considered an asset for the Swedish aid system, promoting flexibility and responsiveness to country level needs (OECD, 2019).

The Swedish government's guidance for formulating development cooperation and humanitarian strategies provides a common basis for strategies developed in different country contexts and for multilateral organisations. A poverty reduction focus and rights-based approach to development are presented as

two overarching perspectives that should guide all strategies and Swedish aid choices. In addition, gender, environment and climate, and conflict provide three common thematic perspectives that offer a starting point for strategy development. According to the guidance, strategies should be adapted to circumstances and flexible, but also results-oriented. The process for strategy development represents a mixture of headquarters-level and country level input, underlining that cooperation seeks to strike a balance between the promotion of partner-driven and Swedish priorities (Government Offices of Sweden, 2017). In the process, Sida, with support from foreign missions, presents a background analysis of the country context and experiences in aid implementation to inform the selection of priorities for the next strategy period.

The guidance foresees that Swedish strategy development may be linked to EU joint programming in different ways, depending on what stages the Swedish process and joint programming in the country have reached. Early stages of the process can provide input to Swedish positions within joint programming and inform EU joint strategies. The guidance raises the possibility that EU joint strategies may serve as a replacement for Swedish bilateral country strategies but does not indicate under what circumstances this would be considered. The guidance presents Swedish participation in joint programming as a means of contributing to a division of labour in line with development effectiveness objectives (Government Offices of Sweden, 2017).

In more detailed guidance published in 2010, the Swedish government listed considerations of division of labour, comparative advantage, and the role of other donors and EU and multilateral actors as elements of background analysis to inform preparations for strategy development, alongside other considerations focused on country level development challenges. In addition to indicating that Sweden would contribute to the implementation of the *Code of Conduct on Division of Labour*, the guidance noted that Sweden should

work to identify and advance opportunities for cooperation with the EU, with participation in the formulation of EU country strategies and policy dialogue providing examples (Regeringskansliet, 2010).

## **Sweden and EU Country Programming**

The participation of Swedish foreign missions in the EU country programming process is guided by input from Stockholm and Brussels-based staff of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Sida, who inform country offices about the general policy context for programming and encourage country level engagement with EU processes.

An important characteristic of the programming of the NDICI-Global Europe instrument was that it commenced prior to the instrument's formal adoption. According to one aid official, the nature of Sweden's headquarters-level engagement with EU programming reflected the status of negotiations to the extent that a formalized process for engaging with foreign missions on programming only emerged toward the end of the programming process, with an especially structured process taking place in the fall of 2021 in preparation for committee meetings in Brussels to review the MIPs.<sup>12</sup>

The Ministry for Foreign Affairs encouraged Swedish missions abroad to actively participate in the development of the Team Europe approach at country level from an earlier point in time, as Team Europe arrived on the EU agenda already in the spring of 2020. Engagement with the Team Europe approach was framed as a component of participation in country programming, with an emphasis placed on possible initiatives dealing with gender equality and climate issues (Utrikesdepartementet, 2021a).

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<sup>12</sup> Interview 40.

In May 2021, shortly before the final approval of the NDICI-Global Europe instrument, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs issued a communication to country offices highlighting areas of successful Swedish influence on the content of the instrument to stress the importance of building on this success through involvement in analysis, planning and implementation of the instrument. Examples of core Swedish priorities named in the document included the promotion of ambitious climate action, as well as strengthening the focus on democracy and the rule of law, human rights, gender equality, and sexual and reproductive health and rights. This communication called on country offices to engage in continuous dialogue with EU delegations, noting the prospects for stronger influence based on engagement early in the programming cycle. (Utrikesdepartementet, 2021b).

As noted previously, the key output of the EU programming process is the adoption of MIPs. In preparation for the final discussions on documents presented for review in the Council of the European Union, foreign missions are requested to contribute to the analysis of the documents carried out by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Sida that provide a basis for the Swedish position (Utrikesdepartementet, 2021d).

Following the adoption of MIPs at the end of 2021, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs expressed satisfaction with the Swedish contribution to EU processes. The Ministry's Unit for International Development Cooperation suggested that Sweden had helped to ensure that development effectiveness principles, gender equality, human rights, democracy and rule of law as well as climate issues were clearly integrated into EU programming. Although the unit acknowledged variations in the extent of engagement with EU programming across country settings, it concluded that Sweden was recognized as an engaged and constructive participant in programming efforts. Early contributions to the process and mobilization with like-minded partners were mentioned as aspects enabling Sweden to play a constructive role. The unit encouraged

country offices to continue to pursue close dialogue with EU delegations in order to shape the content of Annual Action Plans emanating from the strategic priorities outlined in the MIPs and the development of Team Europe Initiatives (Utrikesdepartementet, 2022).

## 5 Country Cases

The case studies in this chapter provide a foundation for a subsequent synthesis chapter that summarizes findings across the case countries. **Readers who are more interested in the consolidated lessons learned from the study than the detailed information from individual countries presented in this chapter may wish to proceed to the next chapter for a broader overview.**

As noted above, the policymaking arena in Brussels represents a primary arena for Swedish engagement with EU development. However, Sweden's *Policy Framework for Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid* indicates that effective Swedish advocacy for development goals requires a strong, active and coherent effort to engage with EU cooperation at multiple levels, including in country level cooperation. The framework views the EU as an actor that is well-placed to promote political transformation and engage on sensitive topics, and suggests that the goal of Swedish engagement with the EU is not only to advance Swedish priorities but also to strengthen the EU's role as a development actor (Government of Sweden, 2016).

To examine the relationship between Sweden and the EU in the country level cooperation arena, this section presents case studies from five partner countries: Bangladesh, Colombia, Georgia, Mali and Uganda. As noted earlier in the study and reflected in Table 1, these countries reflect the diversity of country contexts in which Sweden and the EU interact. They vary with respect to their levels of development, the importance of the EU and Sweden as cooperation providers in the country, and with respect to the status of joint programming. The analysis identifies common themes that emerge from examining EU-Member State cooperation in these divergent settings.

The case studies are presented with a common structure. They first situate EU and Swedish engagement in the broader cooperation setting and present the profiles and core priorities of the two aid providers. The case studies then focus on the arena for EU-Member State interaction by discussing the status of joint programming efforts in the country and the relationship between joint programming and EU country programming. An overview of EU programming concludes by identifying factors that interviewees highlighted to explain challenges to EU-Member State collaboration. A final section of each case study addresses the relationship between Swedish and EU country programmes, with attention to how Swedish strategies and strategy reports identify objectives and results of engagement with the EU.

## **Bangladesh**

Bangladesh stands out in comparison to the other cases as the country where both Swedish and EU aid represent the smallest share of overall aid flows in the country (see Table 1). At the same time, it occupies a middle position within this selection in terms of the cumulative volume of aid from the EU and Sweden. The low aid share persists even when aid from the EU and its Member States are combined, with the World Bank Group, Asian Development Bank, Japan, the United States, the United Kingdom and the Republic of Korea providing important sources of development finance. Only five EU Member States (Denmark, France, Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden) have sizeable development cooperation portfolios in the country.

The goal of achieving middle-income country status has been a central development objective for the Government of Bangladesh in recent years. The government's National Sustainable Development Strategy emphasizes the need for increasing investment and productivity in core economic sectors while addressing development challenges such as population pressures,

urbanization, threats from climate change and environmental degradation and governance (Government of Bangladesh, 2013). The government's current five-year plan acknowledges that foreign assistance has declined in relation to the size of the economy but has increased in real terms and remains an important source of funds to address national investment needs. The government notes continued challenges related to the proliferation of standalone projects, low harmonization and reliance on country systems, and limited coordination among government agencies as obstacles to effective cooperation (Bangladesh Planning Commission, 2020).

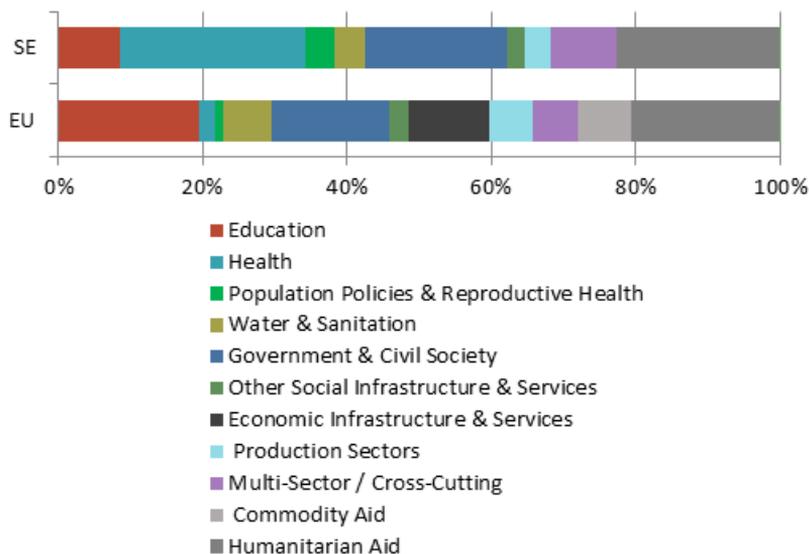
## **EU and Swedish Priorities and Aid Profiles**

With reference to the Government of Bangladesh's five year development plan from 2015 to 2020, the EU's Multi-annual Indicative Programme for Bangladesh during the programming period from 2014 to 2020 prioritized EU action in three sectors: 1) democratic governance; 2) food and nutrition security; and 3) education and skills development, with a larger volume of funding directed to the latter two sectors (European External Action Service and Europeaid, 2014). Core elements of that agenda were incorporated into the latest round of country programming, which outlines human capital development, green inclusive development, and inclusive governance as EU priority areas (European External Action Service and European Commission, 2021a).

The Swedish strategy for cooperation with Bangladesh in the 2014–2020 period points to a similarity of Swedish and EU priorities, as Sweden's strategy highlighted five priority areas: 1) democracy, equality and human rights; 2) economic and educational opportunities for the poor; 3) environmental protection and climate resilience; 4) sexual and reproductive health; and 5) capacity development with respect to conflict and disaster prevention, particularly in parts of the country hosting refugees

(Regeringskansliet, 2014a). The current Swedish strategy presents four priority areas: 1) democracy, human rights, the rule of law and gender equality; 2) climate and environment; 3) inclusive economic development; and 4) health, including sexual and reproductive rights. The strategy shows similarity with the first four priority areas in the previous strategy but also reflects an adjustment in objectives, and indicates that the priority areas should guide continued assistance to address refugee issues (Regeringen, 2020a).

**Figure 3: Aid disbursements by sector for Sweden and the EU institutions in Bangladesh (2014–2019)**



Source: OECD.Stat (2021b).

As Figure 3 indicates, the broad category of aid to social infrastructure and services was important for both Sweden and the EU. For Sweden, health was the single largest sectoral funding priority, accounting for 26 percent of its allocations. Education was a larger priority for the EU (20 percent of allocations). Sweden has phased out support for primary education in light of other actors’ engagement in the sector and a perception that funding to other activities could play a catalytic role on democracy and human rights

issues (Sida, 2020e). For both aid providers, humanitarian aid and support to government and civil society were key funding areas in this period. The EU notably directed a larger share of its aid to the water and sanitation sector and the area of economic infrastructure and services.

One clear difference in the aid profile of the EU and Sweden in Bangladesh relates to their preferred implementation channels (see Figure 4). The EU implemented nearly 40 percent of its aid through public sector entities, including both European public sector actors and the national government, while Sweden disbursed less than 10 percent of its aid via the public sector in the same period. Sweden and the EU share a strong commitment to civil society organisations: both aid providers directed roughly one third of their resources to NGOs and civil society. The strong preference of Sweden for using multilateral organisations as implementing partners at country level is evident given that more than half of Swedish aid was channelled through multilaterals, while the EU relied on multilateral organisations to deliver 24 percent of its aid.

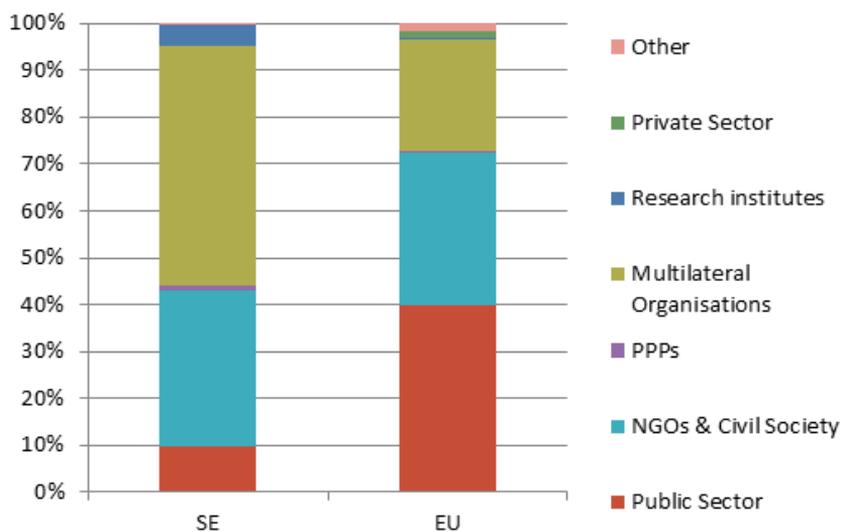
The low public sector component in Sweden's aid in Bangladesh reflects a shift away from cooperation implemented through the government. The EU has continued to employ budget support as a modality, while Member States have lowered their interest in the approach.<sup>13</sup> Although both the EU and Sweden make funding to civil society organisations a priority, there are also differences in how they disburse these funds, as Sweden is understood to have greater flexibility in its ability to provide direct support to local civil society organisations in its development cooperation programme.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Interview 11.

<sup>14</sup> Interview 5, Interview 23.

**Figure 4: Channels of Assistance for Sweden and the EU in Bangladesh (2014–2019)**



Source: OECD.Stat (2021b).

In line with the stronger governmental orientation in EU funding, European development partners note that the EU has an advantage in engaging with the Government of Bangladesh, making it an important partner in the area of policy dialogue.<sup>15</sup> The weight of the EU as a political actor is especially linked to its trade role, with market access negotiations related to the General System of Preferences reflecting a key focus.<sup>16</sup> As the EU is Bangladesh's largest export market, trade relations occupy a higher place on the government's agenda than aid relationships with European development partners.

<sup>15</sup> Interview 5, Interview 15.

<sup>16</sup> Interview 5, Interview 8, Interview 11.

## EU Programming

EU joint programming has been a component of the EU coordination agenda in Bangladesh for a decade but the commitment to joint programming has been uneven over this period. In 2013, the EU delegation and a small group of donors (Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom) endorsed a roadmap for joint programming. This document signalled an interest in moving forward with joint analysis in spite of a lack of synchronization in EU donor planning cycles and highlighted a need for common assessment of drivers of change and uncertainties in the country (European Union, 2013). It also noted that coordination encompassing political and trade issues would likely increase the relevance of the EU as a cooperation actor in light of the comparatively small scale of EU and Member State aid.

A joint evaluation of EU, Danish and Swedish aid reported that the initial joint programming initiative produced a donor mapping exercise and the development of common messages as a basis for further coordination. At the same time, the evaluation noted that this did not entail a formal division of labour. The EU delegation intended to pursue the gradual development of joint programming, though challenges related to differences in planning cycles and approaches among EU donors remained (ADE, 2016). However, two interviewees suggested that joint programming was not prioritized by the EU delegation in the subsequent period.<sup>17</sup> One challenge to strengthening EU coordination was the attention directed to other donor coordination processes, with the onset of a major humanitarian crisis due to the influx of Rohingya refugees presenting heightened demands on donor capacities from 2017 onward.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Interview 26, Interview 36.

<sup>18</sup> Interview 36.

The most recent cycle of joint programming in Bangladesh was initiated in March 2020. At this stage, a mapping of Member State engagements across key sectors and a set of proposed priorities for country programming had already been prepared.<sup>19</sup> This stage of the joint programming initiative provided a basis for discussions on joint flagship initiatives which evolved into Team Europe Initiatives.<sup>20</sup>

In the case of Bangladesh, dialogue on joint programming preceded the formulation of the MIP. The Multi-annual Indicative Programme for Bangladesh for 2021–2027 indicates that joint programming efforts informed the substance of the EU’s country programming document and briefly highlights the ongoing contribution of Member States to joint programming through monthly meetings of EU+ Heads of Cooperation.<sup>21</sup> It also presents the goals and status of Team Europe Initiatives dealing with the themes of decent work and the green energy transition (European External Action Service and European Commission, 2021a).

The main reference to a joint response covering EU and Member State engagement is a set of tables at the end of the country programming document which outlines human resource capacities and financial commitments related to the MIP’s broad priority areas (European External Action Service and European Commission, 2021a). While the earlier joint programming initiative provided input to the country programming process, the MIP thus does not constitute a joint planning document but rather presents the EU’s own planned cooperation focus.

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<sup>19</sup> Interview 42.

<sup>20</sup> Interview 12.

<sup>21</sup> The EU+ term signifies that development partners outside of the EU can also take part in EU coordination. In Bangladesh, Norway and Switzerland participate in EU coordination alongside the EU Delegation and EU Member States.

Aid officials identified both positive aspects of joint programming in Bangladesh and critical perspectives in interviews. Although joint programming appears to largely relate to the mapping of priorities, it is also understood as a means of improving the knowledge that European donors have about their respective areas of engagement. This can in turn serve as a basis for identifying opportunities for closer collaboration within the EU+ community.<sup>22</sup> As such, the consultative processes linked to joint programming can provide a forum for information exchange and strengthen ties among EU donors.

From a more critical perspective, joint programming was characterized as an EU-driven process that the national government has not been engaged with and is oriented toward discussions among EU donors.<sup>23</sup> To the extent that it incorporates analysis of the development context that is not unique to the joint programming process, it builds on already accessible knowledge, but may still be time-consuming for participants.<sup>24</sup>

The development of TEIs was increasingly prioritized in the recent programming period, with one aid official commenting that TEIs had displaced joint programming as a cooperation emphasis within the EU+ donor grouping.<sup>25</sup> The TEIs were viewed as a time-consuming element of the EU country programming process.<sup>26</sup> One advantage in participating in TEIs raised in interviews was their possibility to provide a vehicle for strengthening collective engagement and influence with governmental actors.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Interview 16.

<sup>23</sup> Interview 12, Interview 26.

<sup>24</sup> Interview 11.

<sup>25</sup> Interview 26.

<sup>26</sup> Interview 42.

<sup>27</sup> Interview 15, Interview 16.

The EU plays a coordination role beyond the organisation of the joint programming or the development of TEIs. Coordination with respect to the humanitarian response to the Rohingya refugee crisis and work related to CSO engagement provide examples.<sup>28</sup>

Although the EU development partner group is small in Bangladesh, interview input pointed to several challenges for collaboration among EU+ actors. With respect to the general aid context, EU coordination is not perceived to be a priority for the Government of Bangladesh, partly due to the small scale of EU cooperation compared to other bilateral and multilateral actors.<sup>29</sup> The government may also have an interest in maintaining fragmented aid delivery channels.<sup>30</sup> While interviews point to general agreement in policy priorities among EU donors, differences in the interests guiding the cooperation programmes of Member States can also sustain more autonomous approaches. The increasing focus of Denmark and the Netherlands on the linkages between the aid and trade agendas was highlighted as one example of varied national emphases even among historically like-minded actors.<sup>31</sup> Diverse priorities can contribute to varying levels of engagement of EU Member States in common initiatives including joint programming.

Differences in administrative procedures can also present a complication, as the EU and Member States are subject to varied constraints from their respective headquarters and do not have the same level of flexibility in making decisions locally.<sup>32</sup> Further clarification and formalization of the types of decisions that should be taken at country level could facilitate collaboration.<sup>33</sup> The

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<sup>28</sup> Interview 12, Interview 23.

<sup>29</sup> Interview 11.

<sup>30</sup> Interview 5, Interview 12.

<sup>31</sup> Interview 26.

<sup>32</sup> Interview 5, Interview 26.

<sup>33</sup> Interview 12.

orientation of the EU delegation toward fulfilling headquarters-level mandates can not only be viewed as a hindrance for coordination efforts, but also as a means of limiting the influence of Member States on EU country level priorities.<sup>34</sup> Finally, multiple interviewees pointed to staffing capacities as a limitation on the extent of coordination, as coordination requires an investment of time and resources in addition to other responsibilities.<sup>35</sup>

## **Sweden's Country Level Engagement with the EU**

In spite of the differences in emphasis among Sweden and the EU in terms of sectoral allocations and disbursement channels noted above, there are also areas of direct cooperation on themes of common interest. The larger scale of EU aid makes the EU an attractive partner as a co-funder of projects supported by Sweden, and the EU is considered a like-minded donor.<sup>36</sup> An example of co-funding is the LoGIC initiative on climate change adaptation implemented by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Capacity Development Fund (UNCDF), for which Sida and the EU provide the bulk of the funding and contribute similar shares of resources (EEAS, 2021).

Another initiative receiving funding from both Sweden and the EU is the Better Work programme implemented by the International Labour Organisation focusing on labour standards and conditions, linked to a Swedish priority area promoting labour rights and the business climate (Sida, 2020a). In the context of co-funding programmes or projects, the relationship between Sweden and the EU may involve developing common positions on management issues.<sup>37</sup> The examples point to the similar roles that Sweden and the EU can play vis-à-vis specific implementing organisations.

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<sup>34</sup> Interview 8, Interview 11.

<sup>35</sup> Interview 8, Interview 12, Interview 23, Interview 36.

<sup>36</sup> Interview 15.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

In Sweden's newest strategy for Bangladesh, reference to the EU is limited to a short phrase indicating that Sweden should actively participate in EU joint programming in the context of efforts to contribute to effective donor coordination (Regeringen, 2020a). This echoes a similar statement from the previous strategy (Regeringskansliet, 2014a).

While Sweden has stressed its active contribution to joint programming, the in-depth results report covering the previous country strategy period emphasized the value of cooperation with the EU beyond joint programming to advance priorities on issues including climate action and labour rights (Sida, 2019a). The downplaying of the focus on joint programming may reflect several considerations. First, Sweden acknowledges that the conditions for ambitious joint programming have not been favourable in the country (Sida, 2019a). Second, the Local Consultative Group, with the UN Resident Coordinator assuming a leading coordination role for development partners, is considered the most important coordination forum (Sida, 2021a). Third, coordination with the EU takes place in other forums, particularly in connection with humanitarian engagement in Cox's Bazar, cooperation on civil society funding, or thematically focused engagement including Team Europe Initiatives (Sida, 2021a).

As a background to the development of Sweden's current cooperation strategy for Bangladesh, Sida made note of the future potential to strengthen joint programming. In addition, Sida pointed to work to develop pooled financing mechanisms to support civil society organisations and climate and environmental issues as areas where further cooperation with the EU could be fruitful. At the same time, alliances with other like-minded partners, including with Canada and the United Kingdom in the field of sexual and reproductive health and rights remain relevant in advancing Swedish priorities (Sida, 2020e).

Sweden's engagement with EU programming has reflected its interests in promoting core priorities related to climate change, human rights and democracy, gender equality and the decent work agenda.<sup>38</sup> At the end of the recent EU country programming process, Sweden's position on the MIP was supportive and suggested satisfaction with the alignment of the MIP with Swedish priorities. Sweden reminded the EU of the importance of gender mainstreaming throughout the country programme and encouraged initiatives to strengthen civil society (Regeringskansliet, 2021a).

A main conclusion from a review of Sweden's engagement with the EU in Bangladesh is that participation in joint programming as well as the Team Europe Initiatives that reflected a core commitment related to the MIP represented only one piece of a broader relationship with the EU as a cooperation actor. The brief analysis of Sweden and the EU within the cooperation setting in Bangladesh suggests that consideration of how Sweden can promote effectiveness goals with the EU should encompass the political and policy dialogue roles of the EU as well as its status as a co-funder of Swedish priority areas to better reflect the objectives Sweden pursues and the scope of Swedish-EU engagement on development issues within the country.

## **Colombia**

Colombia is the country case in this study where overall aid flows are the smallest in relation to the size of the economy (see Table 1). It also has the distinction of being an OECD member country, a status it gained in 2020. Colombia is a cooperation provider in its own right and has been an international advocate for knowledge sharing around South-South Cooperation (Rondón, 2021). The United States, Inter-American Development Bank, and World Bank are important development actors in the country, while the

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<sup>38</sup> Interview 5, Interview 16.

EU donor community includes a small number of large donors alongside the EU institutions. Sweden was the fourth largest EU Member State donor in the country between 2014 and 2019 behind France, Germany and Spain. It is notable that the aid contributions of France and Germany have substantially exceeded the financial footprint of the EU in this period.

## **EU and Swedish Priorities and Aid Profiles**

The peacebuilding process provides a central reference point for donor strategies for engagement with Colombia.

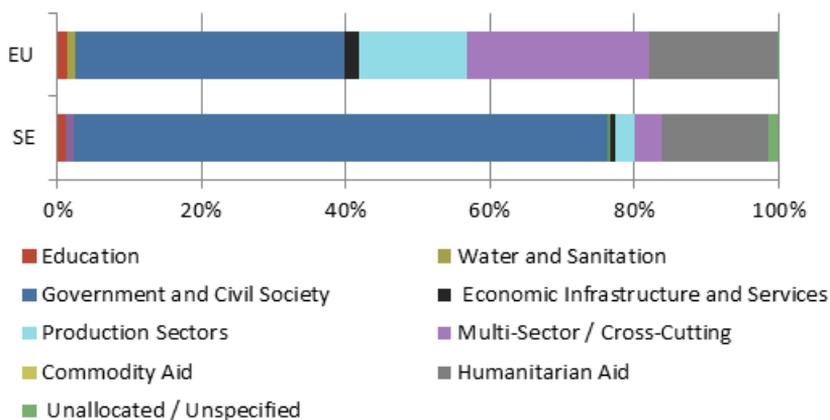
For the 2014–2017 period, the EU’s Multi-annual Indicative Programme highlighted two sectoral priority areas: 1) local development and institution building; and 2) sustainable trade and investment. The first priority area was expected to guide 80 percent of funding, responding to challenges of inequality across regions and the limited reach of public administration (European External Action Service and European Commission, 2014). The European Union Trust Fund for Colombia, a multi-donor funding vehicle spearheaded by the EU, similarly provides support for projects to address peacebuilding goals, investing in reconciliation, economic and social reintegration of former combatants and inclusive economic development among other areas (EU Trust Fund for Colombia, 2021). The recently approved MIP for Colombia for the period 2021–2027 advances peace as well as environment and climate change as the two main priority areas for the EU country programme (European External Action Service and European Commission, 2021b).

The priorities presented in Sweden’s country strategy for Colombia for the period 2016–2020 also emphasized statebuilding and peacebuilding objectives. Under the banner of promoting sustainable peace and human security, the strategy indicated that Sida should prioritize engagement on themes such as the inclusion of women and youth in dialogue and implementation related to the peace

process and the promotion of inclusive economic development in conflict-affected regions. The strategy expected the Folke Bernadotte Academy to serve the same overarching agenda with contributions addressing capacity building in the public sector on conflict prevention and peacebuilding themes (Regeringskansliet, 2016a). The most recent strategy carries forward a similar set of priorities, emphasizing the promotion of a peaceful and inclusive society, respect for democracy, human rights and the rule of law, as well as environmental protection and the sustainable use of natural resources (Regeringen, 2021).

The alignment of both EU and Swedish aid with a peacebuilding agenda is evident in their aid disbursements by sector (see Figure 5). Funding to the sector of government and civil society was especially pronounced for Sweden in the period 2014–2019, reflecting 74 percent of aid allocated by sector. This sector was also the single largest priority area within the EU portfolio, amounting to 37 percent of its aid. The EU’s profile indicates a wider spread of activities across sectors in comparison to Sweden. Multi-sector aid was the second largest sectoral priority area for the EU (25 percent of total). This reflects the importance of environmental issues in the cooperation relationship.

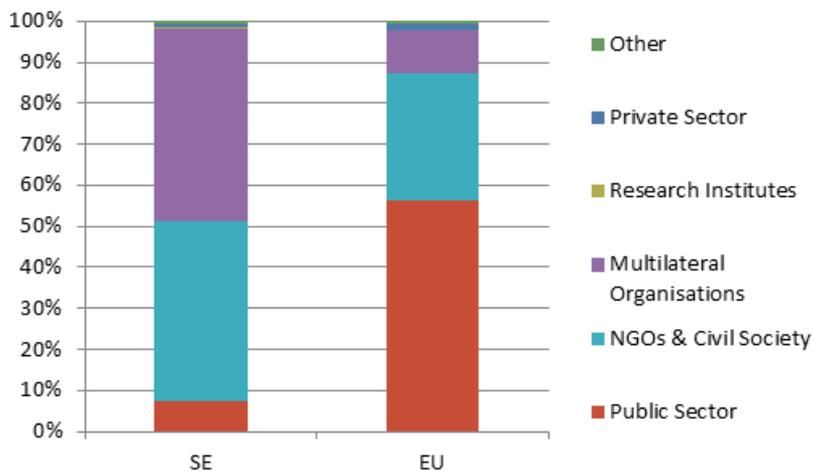
**Figure 5: Aid disbursements by sector for Sweden and the EU institutions in Colombia (2014–2019)**



Source: OECD.Stat (2021b).

A further distinction between the EU and Sweden is that the EU disbursed the majority (56 percent) of its aid through public sector entities, while Sweden only disbursed 7 percent of its aid through the public sector (see Figure 6). Multilateral organisations were the preferred channel for Swedish implementation (47 percent of the total), while civil society organisations followed closely behind (44 percent of the total). In spite of the larger overall EU cooperation programme, Sweden’s funding through multilateral organisations was more than twice the volume of EU use of multilateral implementation in Colombia in this time period.

**Figure 6: Channels of Assistance for Sweden and the EU in Colombia (2014–2019)**



Source: OECD.Stat (2021b).

Even though the EU has a smaller cooperation programme than the largest Member States active in Colombia, aid officials point to the EU’s political weight and its access to governmental actors as strengths in pursuing high-level political dialogue, including on sensitive issues such as human rights.<sup>39</sup> The EU’s continued use of

<sup>39</sup> Interview 30, Interview 35, Interview 38.

budget support is one element of its cooperation profile that provides a linkage to governmental actors.<sup>40</sup> The EU also plays a distinctive role in relation to Member States as a coordinating actor.<sup>41</sup>

## **EU Programming**

In the Colombian context, EU-focused coordination has taken place without the formalization of a joint programming process. As the current MIP for Colombia indicates, EU joint programming did not exist in the country up through 2020. As a partial explanation for this, the MIP notes that the EU Trust Fund for Peace, which included contributions from 21 Member States as well as the United Kingdom and Chile, provided a forum for coordination within a primary sector for engagement (European External Action Service and European Commission, 2021b). The MIP stated an intention to pursue joint programming consistent with the aspirations of the NDICI-Global Europe instrument.

The pre-programming phase for the current MIP was initiated in 2018. Several aid officials characterized the country programming process as EU-centred, reflecting an orientation toward fulfilling the EU delegation's obligations toward headquarters rather than involving extensive consultation with European donors.<sup>42</sup> Interviewees noted some confusion about how Member States could engage with the process as well as uncertainty concerning how input provided on drafts of the MIP were incorporated into the document.<sup>43</sup> However, there was not a universal view among Member States concerning opportunities to influence the process and the extent to which suggestions were taken on board, with one aid official characterizing the process as informal in nature.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Interview 30, Interview 35.

<sup>41</sup> Interview 33, Interview 41, April 4 Correspondence with Aid Official.

<sup>42</sup> Interview 32, Interview 35, Interview 41.

<sup>43</sup> Interview 32, Interview 35, Interview 39, Interview 41.

<sup>44</sup> Interview 43.

An initial joint programming initiative in the country emerged prior to the preparation of the MIP in the spring of 2021. Still, joint programming efforts took a backseat to the MIP and a joint programming document was therefore not completed synchronously.<sup>45</sup> The development of TEIs also advanced in the same time period. The MIP proposes two TEIs that reinforce the EU's strategic priority areas of peace and the environment. The initiatives intend to provide an umbrella for existing EU and Member State activities in these fields and aim to encompass a mix of modalities, including political dialogue, development cooperation, support to civil society organisations, and trade and investment (European External Action Service and European Commission, 2021b). A concentration in these sectors of engagement reflects the priorities of Member States as well as the EU, as 10 European development partners are active in the peace sector, while 7 make cooperation on environmental and climate change issues a priority (European External Action Service and European Commission, 2021b).

Joint programming and TEIs became a larger focus for the European donor community following the decision to close the EU Trust Fund for Colombia.<sup>46</sup> Interviewees noted that this decision was not based on an in-country assessment of the functionality of the trust fund but rather global considerations on the EU use of trust funds stemming from Brussels.<sup>47</sup> Perceived advantages of the trust fund included the broad representation of aid providers in its governance, the participation of governmental actors, and the fund's operational orientation.<sup>48</sup> According to one aid official, a key distinction between the trust fund and joint programming and TEIs is that the trust fund had a pooled funding approach as a point of departure, while the newer initiatives seek to bring separate

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<sup>45</sup> Interview 41.

<sup>46</sup> Interview 32.

<sup>47</sup> Interview 30, Interview 33.

<sup>48</sup> Interview 30.

cooperation activities under a common intervention logic.<sup>49</sup> Two interviewees raised questions about the results achieved through the trust fund, however, signalling an interest in reflection on the lessons learned from its performance and not only from its governance.<sup>50</sup>

The collaboration in the trust fund setting can be understood as a foundation on which European donors can build to strengthen future cooperation.<sup>51</sup> Notwithstanding positive experiences with coordination in this setting, interviewees pointed to several challenges for future European coordination efforts. Several aid officials highlighted the existence of alternative forums for coordination in the country that involve a wider range of aid providers and their potential overlaps with EU-oriented processes.<sup>52</sup> Another challenge concerns the limitations of missions to allocate staffing capacities to participate in coordination and joint work.<sup>53</sup> Differences in the political and economic interests of Member States, varying levels of Member State engagement with EU initiatives, and differences in funding cycles and budgetary processes among donors were also named as factors hindering closer collaboration among European donors.<sup>54</sup>

With respect to joint programming, a lack of political commitment to improving coordination at headquarters level was mentioned as a further barrier to more ambitious collaboration, as foreign missions adhere to guidance from their capitals.<sup>55</sup> Interviewees pointed to different characteristics of the joint programming process. The EU-led rather than joint character of the initiative, the absence of

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<sup>49</sup> Interview 33.

<sup>50</sup> Interview 35, Interview 39.

<sup>51</sup> Interview 41.

<sup>52</sup> Interview 30, Interview 32, Interview 35, Interview 38, Interview 39.

<sup>53</sup> Interview 32, Interview 33, Interview 35.

<sup>54</sup> Interview 32, Interview 35, Interview 43, April 4 Correspondence with Aid Official.

<sup>55</sup> Interview 43.

engagement with the government, limited interest among Member States in the process, and limited clarity about its relationship to other coordination efforts including the Team Europe Initiatives were all named in reviewing the status of joint programming initiatives.<sup>56</sup>

## **Sweden's Country Level Engagement with the EU**

Sweden's current strategy for cooperation with Colombia does not mention the EU or how Swedish engagement should relate to the role of the EU in the country (Regeringen, 2021). However, in background analysis for the strategy, Sida characterized the EU as a close ally of Sweden on agendas related to peacebuilding, the protection of human rights advocates, gender equality, civil society, local capacity building, rural development, reintegration of combatants and transitional justice (Sida, 2020f). The same document makes note of Sweden's active participation in relation to Team Europe discussions but also highlighted the lack of joint programming at that time (Sida, 2020f). The strategy for 2016–2020 did include a short reference to EU cooperation, noting that Sweden should actively engage in EU coordination as a means of promoting aid effectiveness (Regeringskansliet, 2016a).

Interviewees indicated that Sweden lived up to the expectations from its country strategy inasmuch as it contributed consistently, actively, and constructively in both trust fund coordination and other EU dialogue.<sup>57</sup> Sweden has contributed to discussions not only as an advocate for issues such as gender equality and environmental sustainability but also provides input on the functionality of coordination approaches, including the consideration of how to develop a successor mechanism to the

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<sup>56</sup> Interview 35, Interview 38, Interview 43.

<sup>57</sup> Interview 32, Interview 35, Interview 41.

trust fund.<sup>58</sup> While Sweden is perceived to be one of the more engaged EU actors in the country, aid officials suggested that other Member States including Germany and Spain displayed a higher level of engagement with TEIs and joint programming.<sup>59</sup> The limited role of EU delegated cooperation arrangements in Swedish relations with the EU's country programme provides one explanation for this.<sup>60</sup>

In the context of the discussions on the final approval of the MIP at the end of 2021, Sweden made note of the alignment of the EU's country programme with Sweden's own priorities and signalled satisfaction with the opportunities for Member States to provide input on it. However, Sweden also expressed lingering concerns about the MIP proposal at this stage. First, proposed cuts to the EU's financial allocation to Colombia were viewed negatively in light of the MIP's stated commitment to expanding joint EU and Member State initiatives. Second, Sweden raised concerns about the organisation of common European initiatives, which were perceived as vehicles for bringing smaller donors to the table rather than strengthening the collective impact of aid providers with large cooperation programmes in the country. Finally, the position highlighted concern about the adequacy of joint programming as a replacement for the coordination structure provided by the trust fund (Government Offices of Sweden, 2021a).

During the period covered by the last strategy, Sweden reported that its status as a major aid provider among EU Member States active in the country has enabled it to advance priorities in the country, while its large contributions to UN organisations have also facilitated Swedish influence (Sida, 2021b). Sweden has contributed to multiple multilateral trust funds beyond the EU Trust Fund (Sida, 2021b). This underlines that Sweden sees value in advancing priorities through forums apart from EU-centred processes.

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<sup>58</sup> Interview 32, Interview 39.

<sup>59</sup> Interview 33, Interview 39.

<sup>60</sup> Interview 32, Interview 33.

The scale of Sweden's contribution to the peace fund also reflects this: from the creation of the trust fund in 2016 to the start of 2019, Sweden had provided 3 million € out of a 93 million € budget for the EU trust fund (Sida, 2019b). Although Sweden has expressed a commitment to strengthening coordination processes beyond the EU, the strategy report from 2019 stated an interest in closer engagement with the EU delegation outside of the trust fund context as a means of advancing Swedish views on equality as a basis for peace and sustainable development within the wider EU donor community (Sida, 2019b).

This analysis points to uncertainty in Colombia about how the role of the EU as a cooperation actor is defined both in relation to key Member States, including EU donors with a larger financial footprint, and the broader donor community, where Canada, Norway, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States are important players. In light of capacity limitations facing the EU delegation and Member State missions in the country, Sweden's engagement with EU initiatives such as the nascent joint programming process and Team Europe Initiatives should build on an existing interest in reviewing the functionality of coordination approaches to contribute to the clarification of the added value of EU-specific coordination.

## **Georgia**

In comparison to other cases included in this study, Georgia receives the highest share of EU aid in relation to total aid in the country (see Table 1). Development cooperation is one component of a comprehensive political and economic agenda for engagement between Georgia and the EU linked to an Association Agreement signed in 2014. Although Georgia is a middle-income country, it receives a high amount of aid per capita. Apart from the EU, numerous EU Member States have a cooperation relationship with Georgia. France and Germany provide the largest amount of funding among EU Member States. Central and Eastern European

donors are also present as development partners, reflecting their prioritization of the Eastern Neighbourhood and interest in transferring knowledge relevant for political and economic transitions (Administration of the Government of Georgia, 2021). Sweden was the third largest EU Member State aid provider in the period 2014–2019.

## **EU and Swedish Priorities and Aid Profiles**

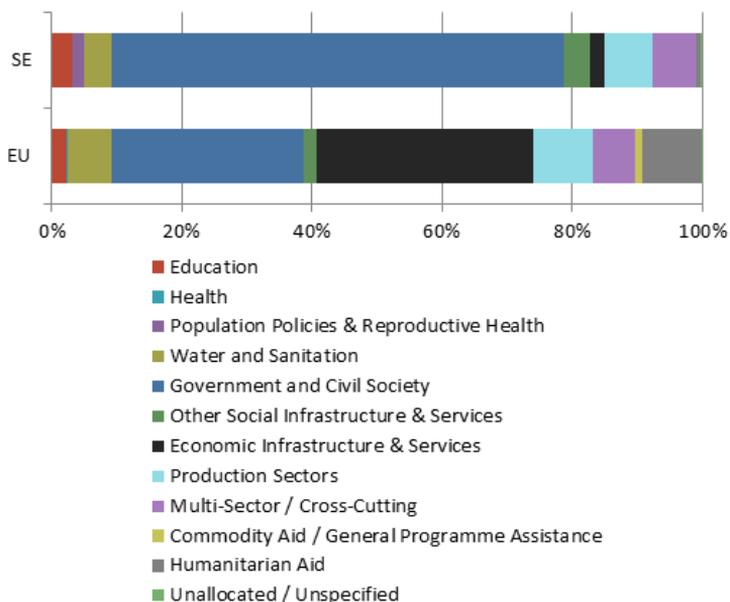
The EU's Single Support Framework for the period 2017–2020 prioritized four thematic areas for EU funding: 1) economic development and market opportunities; 2) strengthening institutions and good governance; 3) connectivity, energy efficiency, environment and climate change; and 4) mobility and people-to-people contacts. The first area was expected to account for 40 percent of the cooperation budget, while the remaining priority areas were respectively anticipated to represent 20 percent, 15 percent and 10 percent of EU cooperation (European Union, 2017a). In contrast to the other case study countries, the EU has not yet published a multi-annual indicative programme for Georgia for the most recent programming period. However, regional priorities encompassing a portion of EU cooperation with Georgia are outlined in a regional MIP for the Eastern Neighbourhood (European External Action Service and European Commission, 2021c).

Supporting Georgia's efforts to fulfil obligations under the Association Agreement has also been a central priority in the Swedish strategy for cooperation with Eastern Partnership countries including Georgia. The strategy proposes three priority areas: 1) increased economic integration; 2) strengthening democracy, respect for human rights, and rule of law; and 3) improving the environment and limiting climate impacts. The second category has been the largest destination for funds as well as the cooperation area that is considered more challenging in terms of achieving desired results (Sida, 2020b). The current Swedish strategy for cooperation with countries in the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood outlines similar

priorities, with peacebuilding and reconciliation and inclusive economic development emphasized as additional cooperation goals (Regeringskansliet, 2021c).

As Figure 7 illustrates, Swedish aid to Georgia from 2014 through 2019 was overwhelmingly directed to the governance and civil society sector, representing nearly 70 percent of aid. For the EU, economic infrastructure and services was the largest single funding category, accounting for one third of its aid to the country. The governance and civil society sector was the second largest funding area for the EU, receiving 29 percent of funds. While this overview gives an indication of the weight of priorities within each aid provider’s portfolio, it is important to emphasize that the EU provides a substantially higher volume of funding to Georgia than Sweden. EU funding to the governance and civil society sector was more than six times the size of Swedish funding in real terms in spite of the concentration of Swedish resources in this sector.

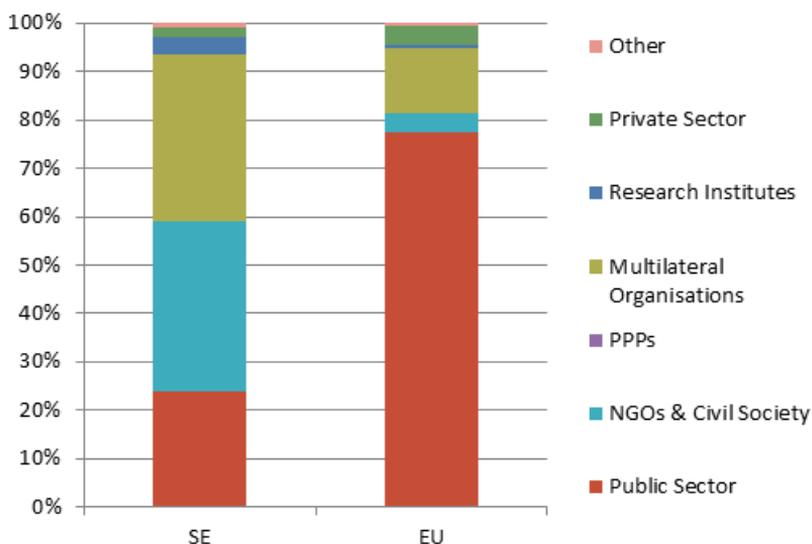
**Figure 7: Aid disbursements by sector for Sweden and the EU institutions in Georgia (2014–2019)**



Source: OECD.Stat (2021b).

Sweden and the EU differ with respect to their implementation profiles (see Figure 8). For the EU, the preference for channelling aid through public sector entities is evident, amounting to 77 percent of EU aid. For Sweden, greater preference is given to civil society organisations (35 percent of total) and multilateral organisations (34 percent). Due to the larger scale of EU aid, the EU’s absolute volume of funding to civil society and multilateral implementing partners was nevertheless 1.5 times the size of Swedish civil society funding and nearly six times the volume of Swedish funding to multilaterals as implementers of bilateral aid.

**Figure 8: Channels of Assistance for Sweden and the EU in Georgia (2014–2019)**



Source: OECD.Stat (2021b).

The large financial weight of the EU as a cooperation provider is a key area of advantage in comparison to Member States in Georgia. The broad scope of funding gives the EU a substantial role in

various sectors, including infrastructure, governance and security.<sup>61</sup> It also supports a strong political role of the EU in the country, with a leading role in political and policy dialogue linked to the EU's Eastern Partnership and Georgia's Association Agreement.<sup>62</sup> A final element of differentiation with Member States linked to the scope of EU cooperation relates to the different instruments the EU utilizes, with budget support and twinning projects as examples.<sup>63</sup>

Consistent with the prioritization of implementation through public sector entities outlined above, the EU plays an important role in engaging with the government.<sup>64</sup> While the EU shows strength vis-à-vis Member States on these dimensions of engagement, there are also different perceptions of the added value of EU instruments compared to the funding approaches that Member States have at their disposal, particularly with reference to the flexibility of approaches to respond to local needs.<sup>65</sup> However, one interviewee indicated that the EU responded more quickly to the COVID-19 pandemic than Member States, suggesting that comparative advantages can vary depending on the specific issue examined.<sup>66</sup>

## **EU Programming**

The central place of the Eastern Partnership and Association Agreement in European cooperation with Georgia reinforces the primacy of the EU as a coordinating entity. In 2014, the EU reported that European Heads of Cooperation had agreed to pursue joint programming and prepare a full joint programme for

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<sup>61</sup> Interview 22, Interview 24.

<sup>62</sup> Interviews 6, 14, 19.

<sup>63</sup> Interviews 6, 21.

<sup>64</sup> Interview 24.

<sup>65</sup> Interviews 6, 19.

<sup>66</sup> Interview 22

the period after 2017, aiming to align the activities of European partners with the national development strategy and synchronize planning cycles. The preparatory process for the move toward joint programming acknowledged policy level coordination challenges due in part to the differences among donors with respect to their interlocutors in the Georgian government, highlighting a lack of clarity on coordination responsibilities on the side of the national government (European Union, 2014).

Although European donors participated in joint programming processes as an extension of this earlier commitment, as of the fall of 2021, interviewees noted that there was not an active joint programming process in Georgia.<sup>67</sup> One reason advanced for the lower prioritization of joint programming was that the previous round of joint programming was considered a resource-intensive process.<sup>68</sup> In spite of the lack of interest in the preparation of a full joint programme, European donors nevertheless retain an interest in preserving elements of the joint programming process, for example with respect to joint analysis.<sup>69</sup> Donors also recognize the value of promoting a more efficient division of labour in light of the continued potential for overlaps in areas of donor engagement and demands from the partner government.<sup>70</sup>

The focus of European donor coordination in Georgia has turned to providing European donors with a common political direction rather than planning joint implementation.<sup>71</sup> A mechanism for doing so is the formulation of “joint messages” covering selected thematic areas. These short documents outline key challenges in the development context in the country, present core policy priorities, and indicate the central issues for European donors to incorporate in cooperation programmes and mention in dialogue with the

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<sup>67</sup> Interviews 14, 19.

<sup>68</sup> Interview 6, Interview 19.

<sup>69</sup> Interview 6.

<sup>70</sup> Interviews 21, 22.

<sup>71</sup> Interview 14.

partner government. They are considered an advantageous basis for collective action that is more flexible than comprehensive situation analysis.<sup>72</sup> Taking the common policy agenda of the Eastern Partnership as a starting point, the documents aim to promote consistency in the approaches of European donors but do not prescribe implementation choices. The EU considers the joint messages as a main output from a joint programming exercise that came to an end in February 2020 (European Commission, 2021b).

Interviews suggested that EU coordination functions well even though joint programming in the country has diminished in prominence as a concept.<sup>73</sup> Improving the division of labour among EU donors remains relevant on the cooperation agenda and aid officials point to rising interest in joint implementation.<sup>74</sup> Continuous consultation processes at country level provide a platform for information exchange among European donors and the promotion of greater awareness of the activities of other donors' engagements which can provide a basis for identifying possibilities for further joint implementation.<sup>75</sup> However, donor representatives also point to persistent challenges in improving collaboration among EU donors on the ground.

The limited scope for decentralized decision-making at country level presents one constraint on country level coordination.<sup>76</sup> Donor headquarters can influence the setting for collaboration among European development partners through the mandates that they provide for Member States to engage in coordination, their role in shaping funding priorities or through decisions to synchronize planning cycles to enable alignment with national planning frameworks.<sup>77</sup> Interviewees also noted the limitations of

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<sup>72</sup> Email correspondence with aid official, September 21, 2021.

<sup>73</sup> Interview 14, Interview 21, Interview 22.

<sup>74</sup> Interview 6, Interview 19, Interview 21, Interview 22.

<sup>75</sup> Interview 21.

<sup>76</sup> Interview 19, Interview 24.

<sup>77</sup> Interview 6, Interview 19, Interview 22.

missions in terms of staff and resources to engage in coordination efforts.<sup>78</sup> With respect to joint implementation, capacity constraints can require donors to make a choice between continuing programmes where they have a record of engagement and involvement in joint work such as the Team Europe Initiatives.<sup>79</sup>

Beyond these administrative considerations, political differences among Member States can introduce challenges in EU cooperation.<sup>80</sup> For example, Member States do not have a unified view on the priority that the EU should attach to political conditionalities or agree on a fundamental question of whether the ultimate aim of cooperation is to prepare Georgia to become an EU Member State.<sup>81</sup>

## **Sweden's Country Level Engagement with the EU**

The strategy guiding Swedish cooperation with Georgia from 2014 to 2020 underlines an objective of aligning Swedish engagement with the policy priorities outlined in the EU's Eastern Partnership and seeking complementarity and coordination with the EU and Member States as a means of promoting closer ties between the EU and the countries of the Eastern Partnership. This reflects Sweden's role as an advocate for European enlargement and the Partnership (Regeringskansliet, 2014b).

The report summarizing results achieved in the implementation of the strategy in Georgia characterizes Sweden as one of the driving forces for increasing EU ambitions with respect to joint programming in the country (Sida, 2020b). From the Swedish perspective, higher EU ambitions involve working as a strategically unified, consistent and effective coalition through both joint

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<sup>78</sup> Interview 6, Interview 22, Interview 24.

<sup>79</sup> Interview 21.

<sup>80</sup> Interview 6, Interview 22, Interview 24.

<sup>81</sup> Interview 24.

programming and the nascent Team Europe Initiatives. In Georgia, support for a better coordinated and more effective European coalition has a place alongside other policy goals such as promoting UN country level reforms, encouraging a movement from project-oriented aid toward more systemic approaches and prioritizing flexible forms of support (Sida, 2021c).

In Sweden's current strategy, Swedish cooperation with Georgia is grouped together with support for other partner countries within the Eastern Partnership. In its input to the strategy development process, Sida noted that joint programming processes in the region were poorly developed. Alongside Swedish efforts to identify how Sweden can play a catalytic and complementary role in relation to the EU in aid implementation in these countries, the background document proposes that Sweden should pursue strategic dialogue with the European Commission in Brussels to advance both Swedish programming priorities and the strengthening of joint programming efforts. The same document emphasizes the value of synchronizing Sweden's strategy period with the seven-year timeframe for the EU's budgetary framework (Sida, 2021e).

As noted above, Georgia presents an exception in comparison to most EU partner countries due to the lack of a country-specific multi-annual indicative programme for the current programming period. EU cooperation with Georgia has only been formally programmed in the framework of a regional MIP for the Eastern Neighbourhood (European Commission and European External Action Service, 2021c). While Sweden supported this document, it also noted challenges in advancing issues such as gender equality, democracy and media freedoms as part of a values-driven agenda in the region due to opposition from Member States such as Hungary and Poland as well as different views from DG NEAR (Regeringskansliet, 2021b). The lack of a finalized MIP for Georgia reflects a delay in the negotiations for the renewal of the Association Agreement between Georgia and the EU, which has consequences for envisioned financial allocations from the EU budget (Sida, 2022c).

Sweden has actively supported the development of Team Europe Initiatives as a means of strengthening the position of the EU as a cohesive coalition. In its recent review of results covering 2021, the mission emphasizes the role of Sweden in advancing normative dialogue in the country beyond its financial contribution to development cooperation, and highlights an agenda-setting role on gender equality and democracy issues. Efforts to increase engagement of EU Member States around the EU's Gender Action Plan (GAP III) provide an example of Sweden's advocacy role, which involves political dialogue beyond its development cooperation activities (Sida, 2022c). Sweden works to promote development effectiveness concerns among EU donors and in wider donor coordination forums, calling not only for strengthening common positions in the EU group but also for encouraging a shift from project-focused work toward more systemic approaches (Sida, 2022c).

The EU has acknowledged Sweden as an important co-funder of EU projects, and recognizes the Swedish contribution to integrating gender concerns into project design (European Commission, 2021b). Sida's newest strategy report for Georgia highlights one example of delegated cooperation, involving the provision of SEK 16.3 million for the implementation of activities addressing climate and environmental objectives (Sida, 2022c). However, Sweden's role in coordination processes appears to be a central element of Sweden's engagement with the EU in this country context. Sweden has been considered an active donor among European partners with particular influence on issues of gender equality, governance and human rights issues.<sup>82</sup> Sweden is also viewed as a bridge builder between the EU and other actors in the country, with involvement in efforts to align EU and UN coordination toward national line ministries providing an example.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Interview 14, Interview 19.

<sup>83</sup> Interview 14, Interview 22.

The large scale of EU funding in Georgia and the broad scope of its political engagement linked to the Association Agreement provide justifications for positioning the EU as a strong coordinator vis-à-vis Member States. Still, the engagement of a variety of Member States in the country with different histories of cooperation, political interests, and ways of working present challenges for strengthening the collective EU cooperation effort. Sweden can further examine the substance of these cooperation obstacles and how they can be bridged to support its role as an EU coordination advocate in the country.

## **Mali**

Development cooperation in Mali takes place in a context of political instability and conflict in the country that stretches back a decade. The EU and its Member States have had an active role not only in economic cooperation but also in implementing a security agenda involving military operations. As Table 1 indicates, more than 40 percent of aid to Mali between 2014 and 2019 was provided by the EU and its Member States. The World Bank Group and the United States were other important sources of development funding in this period. Development funding from the EU institutions is substantially larger than the bilateral programmes of individual Member States. However, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden, Denmark, Belgium, Luxembourg and Spain all had sizeable aid programmes in recent years.

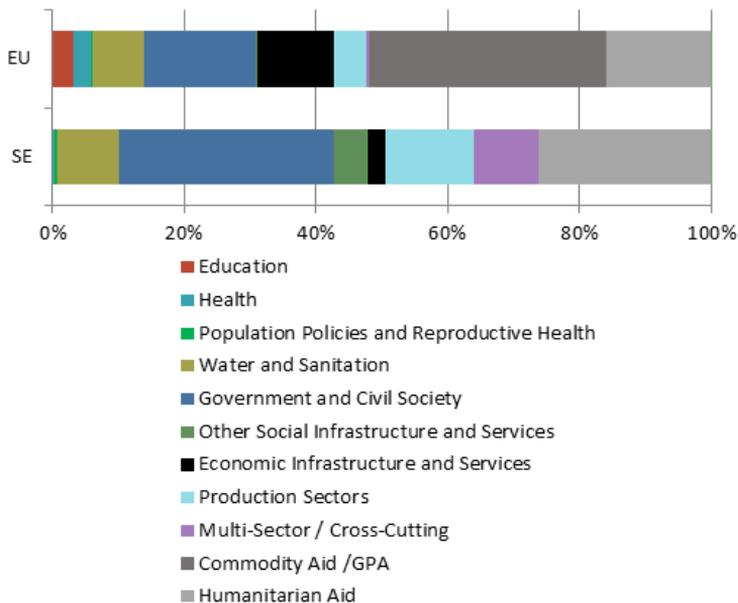
## **EU and Swedish Aid Priorities and Profiles**

EU activities span multiple sectors. The National Indicative Programme for 2014–2020 presented four priority sectors for EU institutions: 1) state reform and consolidation of the rule of law; 2) rural development and food security; 3) education, and 4) roads (Mali and Union Européenne, 2014). The first category,

encompassing measures to promote democratic governance, improve decentralization outcomes, and support economic governance was the most important funding area, representing nearly half of the indicative allocation. For the 2020–2024 period the EU has proposed three broad priority areas for EU and Member State actions relating to: 1) improving the functionality of the state; 2) promoting sustainable economic growth; and 3) developing human capital (European External Action Service and European Commission, 2021e).

The Swedish cooperation strategy for the 2016 to 2020 period emphasized the priority of strengthening political capacities in government and civil society, promoting peace and reconciliation, and climate resilience (Regeringskansliet, 2016b). The most recent strategy similarly advances human rights, democracy and rule of law and climate and environmental issues as important priority areas (Regeringen, 2020b).

**Figure 9: Aid disbursements by sector for Sweden and the EU institutions in Mali (2014–2019)**

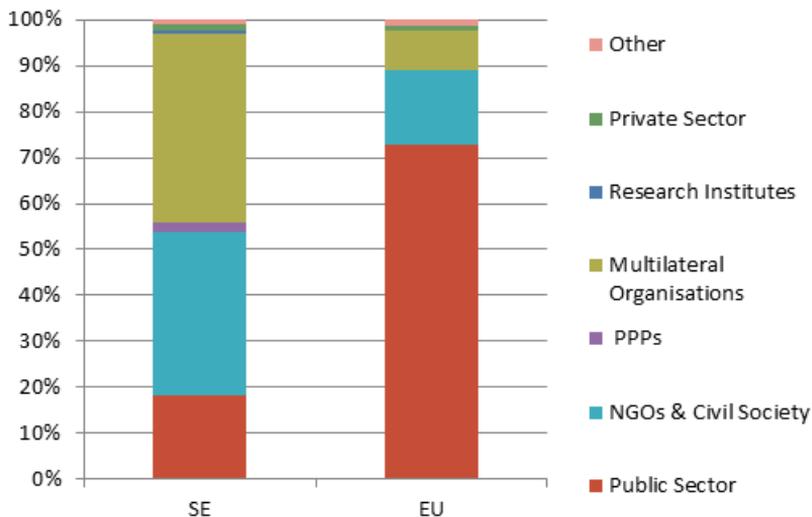


Source: OECD.Stat (2021b).

As Figure 9 illustrates, the EU’s funding profile is distinct from Sweden’s due to the large portion of EU funds directed to budget support (general programme assistance). This amounted to 36 percent of EU aid in this period. Funding to the category of government and civil society was Sweden’s largest priority area, reflecting one third of its allocations. Swedish funding to production (13 percent of total) and multi-sector initiatives (10 percent) reflects investments in the agricultural and environmental sectors.

Consistent with trends in other case countries, the EU and Sweden differ in the profile of their implementation partners in Mali (see Figure 10). Public sector entities are the dominant implementation channel for the EU (73 percent of total), while Sweden selects multilateral organisations (41 percent of total) and civil society organisations (35 percent of total) as its main partners.

**Figure 10: Channels of Assistance for Sweden and the EU in Mali (2014–2019)**



Source: OECD.Stat (2021b).

The scale of the EU's country programme enables a breadth of engagement in the country that individual Member States do not match. The extent of the EU's use of budget support as a modality also sets it apart from Member States.<sup>84</sup> The scale and nature of engagement contribute to a larger political role for the EU, which is perceived to have a facility in maintaining access to governmental actors, a special role with respect to policy dialogue, and greater leverage toward the government.<sup>85</sup> Beyond its political role, the larger size of the EU's country presence can provide advantages in the area of human resources, both with respect to the range of expertise represented in the EU delegation and its ability to draw on a francophone network relevant for implementing cooperation in the region.<sup>86</sup>

## **EU Programming**

The EU is also distinguished from Member States in the country due to its coordination role. Joint programming exercises provide a key illustration of this function. In the aftermath of the 2012 political crisis, the EU guided a joint programming exercise to provide a basis for cooperation in the 2014 to 2018 period. The joint programming document that emerged from this exercise included an analysis of challenges across multiple sectors and focused especially on the contribution of the EU in responding to them, outlining the main objectives for cooperation. In addition, the document highlighted the need to maintain flexibility to adapt to national reform processes and presented general principles for funding choices (Union Européenne, 2014).

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<sup>84</sup> Interviews 25, 29.

<sup>85</sup> Interviews 28, 29, 27.

<sup>86</sup> Interview 28.

Principles included favouring differentiated partnerships and pursuing a mix of modalities to strike a balance between support for actors in and outside of government. The document referenced the importance of a division of labour both with respect to coverage of diverse sectors and a distribution of aid resources across regions within Mali. Reflecting these points, the joint programming document included a summary of EU Member State engagement across priority areas, sectors and regions (Union Européenne, 2014).

As the timeframe for the validity of the previous joint programming document expired in 2018, European development partners acknowledged that the output from the earlier joint programming process was not a working document. There was therefore an interest in pursuing a more action-oriented approach in the next iteration.<sup>87</sup> The driving role of the EU's Head of Cooperation, political commitments from headquarters and embassy levels, and the ownership among Member State country level representatives in the process are factors that were perceived by EU cooperation officials to have contributed to a positive cooperation dynamic.<sup>88</sup>

The joint programming process in Mali is highlighted at the EU level as a success story for fostering closer collaboration among European actors in a difficult setting. The initiative resulted in a joint programming document for the period 2020–2024 as well as the preparation of 14 sector-specific documents (European Commission, 2021b). The latter documents reflect the interest in pursuing a more action-oriented approach and the engagement of Member States in leading work streams on areas of specialization. Another result from the process has been information sharing on the activities of the EU and Member States in the process, expected

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<sup>87</sup> Interviews 25, 29.

<sup>88</sup> Interviews 25, 28, 29.

to be formalized to a greater extent through the maintenance of a common database and the creation of a country level secretariat to facilitate the consolidation of knowledge (European Commission, 2021b).

Mali is the only country in this study where the joint programming document provides the basis for multi-annual programming of the NDICI-Global Europe instrument and not only an input into the process. In this case, the joint programming document replaces a country-specific MIP, though an annex to the document elaborates on the EU-specific programming process. The annex references the organisation of consultations with private sector actors, youth and selected stakeholders as an element of the programming process. The elaboration of EU programming also indicates that Member States were widely consulted in the process and approve of the integration of EU country programming in the framework of the joint programming effort (European External Action Service and European Commission, 2021e).

Programming of the NDICI-Global Europe instrument maintains the time horizon for planning within the joint programming document, presenting cooperation priorities for the 2021–2024 period. In line with other MIPs, the annex identifies the expected division of EU financial commitments across the three core priority areas and likely choice of implementation modalities. The annex also briefly describes the goals of three TEIs, noting an indicative financial contribution only from the EU for their implementation (European External Action Service and European Commission, 2021e).

The joint programming document is considered a basis for regular and ongoing dialogue among the EU delegation and Member State country representatives.<sup>89</sup> The elements of common analysis and presentation of a shared sense of direction can thus provide a

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<sup>89</sup> Interview 27.

foundation for further planning. While there is a focus on common objectives, the joint programming documents do not necessarily provide a practical implementation guide for Member States, which may rather view the outputs as offering context for their concrete programming choices.<sup>90</sup> The joint programming document itself emphasizes that the phrases ‘common vision’ and ‘framework for action’ offer more apt descriptions of the character of the output than the joint programming term, given the lack of European harmonisation of programming cycles (European External Action Service and European Commission, 2021e).

The early stage of development of the country level secretariat indicates that efforts to improve coordination within the European development community in Mali remain a work in progress. The continued autonomy of bilateral programmes means that there are still potential overlaps among European partners or unexplored ways to reinforce the approaches of other Member States.<sup>91</sup> The continuation of efforts to improve the availability of quality information as a basis for added mutual awareness is therefore a priority area for advancing the working better together agenda.<sup>92</sup>

The decentralization of donor decision-making authority and synchronization of programming cycles are other administrative measures to facilitate collaboration.<sup>93</sup> At the same time, there continue to be underlying differences in the interests of European partners as well as alternative views on how to engage with the partner government that present a challenge for a more unified European aid effort.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Interview 28.

<sup>91</sup> Interview 29.

<sup>92</sup> Interviews 27, 28.

<sup>93</sup> Interviews 25, 29.

<sup>94</sup> Interview 29.

## **Sweden's Country Level Engagement with the EU**

Sweden provides some of its support in Mali to organisations and projects that also receive funding from the EU. A current example is funding for a political reform and electoral assistance project run by UNDP in partnership with the The United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) and UN-Women, to which the governments of Canada and Norway also contribute (UNDP, 2022).

In Sweden's strategy reports, the EU is mainly mentioned in reference to its coordination role in the country through joint programming in the presentation of the cooperation context. The focus of the reports is on the presentation of how implementation choices address Swedish objectives. The reports provide only limited references to the EU's implementation role that are related to Sweden's co-financing of EU-supported activities.

Reviewing the context for implementation of its strategic priorities between 2016 and 2020, Sweden noted that while donor coordination functioned well at technical and implementation levels in the country, growing politicization of aid and an interest in visibility had negatively affected donor interest in coherence and harmonization (Sida, 2020c).

Sida's in-depth strategy report published in 2019 indicated that EU joint programming was in alignment with Swedish priorities in the country and proposed that Sweden should actively support the process. In addition, the report recommended that EU joint programming should provide a steering function in relation to the development of Sweden's bilateral country strategy (Sida, 2019c). As an extension of its leadership role and coordination experiences in the environmental and climate domains, the report noted an expectation that Sweden would contribute to the natural resource agenda within the joint programming context (Sida, 2019c). In Sweden's cooperation strategy for Mali, reference to EU joint programming is limited to a final sentence reinforcing the message

that Sweden should play an active role in the process (Regeringen, 2020b). Beyond its sector-specific leadership, the Swedish mission provided funds in 2020 and 2021 for technical assistance in the joint programming secretariat, following on a contribution from the Swiss government to support the secretariat (Embassy of Sweden in Mali, 2020).

Sida's first results report on the implementation of the current Swedish strategy indicates that the joint programming process constitutes a central factor in the strategy's implementation (Sida, 2022d). However, the report also stresses Swedish engagement in a variety of sectoral working groups beyond the joint programming context, indicating that EU coordination is not an exclusive focus. Sida stresses its instrumental role in promoting the creation of a Team Europe Initiative dealing with environmental and climate themes and signals an interest in the Swedish mission to continue to promote joint initiatives (Sida, 2022d).

In the context of the comitology meeting discussing the joint programming document, its annex concerning the EU country programme, and the first action plan for cooperation with Mali, Sweden offered both support for EU priorities and questions about the likely implementation emphasis. While Sweden stressed the relevance of EU priorities and characterized the joint programming process and dialogue on TEIs as inclusive, it also raised concerns about the use of budget support as an aid modality in light of the political situation in Mali and pointed to the potential for added emphasis on the mainstreaming of gender equality, democracy and human rights concerns in EU initiatives as well as the greater prioritization of a 'triple nexus' approach in implementation (Utrikesdepartementet, 2021c).

This case study suggests that EU joint programming has been a success in Mali due to the leadership provided by the EU delegation, a wide buy-in from Member State missions in the process, and the provision of dedicated resources to facilitate

coordination with the establishment of a joint programming secretariat. As the analysis indicates, the output from the joint programming process creates a framework for further collaboration among the EU and its Member States in the country. Addressing underlying barriers to closer collaboration, such as improving information availability on donor activities and harmonizing decision-making practices could facilitate a stronger collective EU development cooperation effort in the future.

## **Uganda**

Uganda provides an illustration of the evolution of the context for development cooperation for the EU and its Member States. While the country has historically provided fertile ground for the implementation of development effectiveness commitments, cooperation between the national government and OECD DAC aid providers has experienced challenges over the last decade due to the national political context. At the same time, new sources of development financing including from non-DAC donors have become more prominent, further complicating donor coordination processes (Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development, 2020). The United States remains a major donor in the country. Beyond the EU institutions, several EU Member States have had long-term engagement. In terms of net aid provided in the 2014 to 2019, Sweden was second only to Germany in the Member State community. Denmark, Ireland, the Netherlands, Belgium and France are other key contributors.

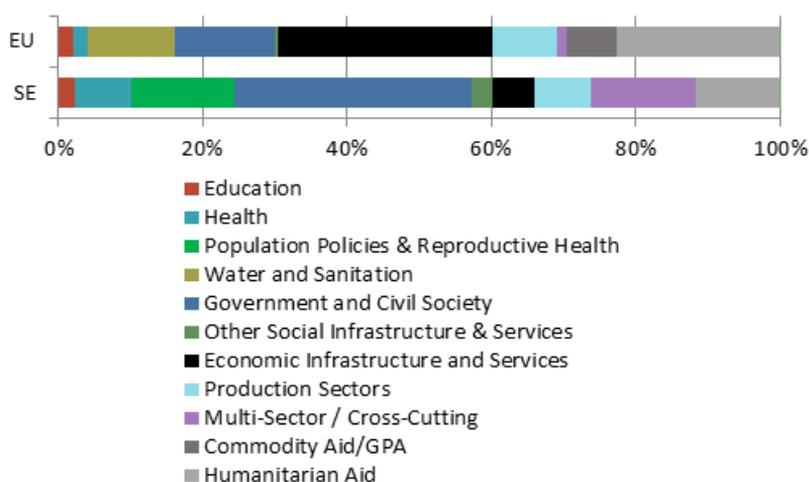
## **EU and Swedish Priorities and Aid Profiles**

The EU's National Indicative Programme for the period 2014 to 2020 identified three main priority areas for EU support: 1) transport infrastructure; 2) food security and agriculture; and 3) good governance. Though the transport sector represented the

largest expected area for investment, the indicative programme emphasized EU policy concerns related to the protection of political freedoms and respect for human rights, with investments in governance and support for civil society organisations together amounting to roughly one third of the indicative allocation (Government of Uganda and European Commission, 2014). The three priority areas outlined in the 2021 MIP indicate some overlap with earlier priorities but also demonstrate shifts in emphasis on the EU policy agenda. These areas are: 1) green and climate transition; 2) sustainable and inclusive growth and jobs; and 3) democratic governance and social inclusion (European External Action Service and European Commission, 2021d).

Promoting democracy, human rights, rule of law and equality feature as the first priority in Sweden’s cooperation strategy for the period 2018 to 2023, alongside commitments to the environmental and health sectors (Regeringskansliet, 2018).

**Figure 11: Aid disbursements by sector for Sweden and the EU institutions in Uganda (2014–2019)**

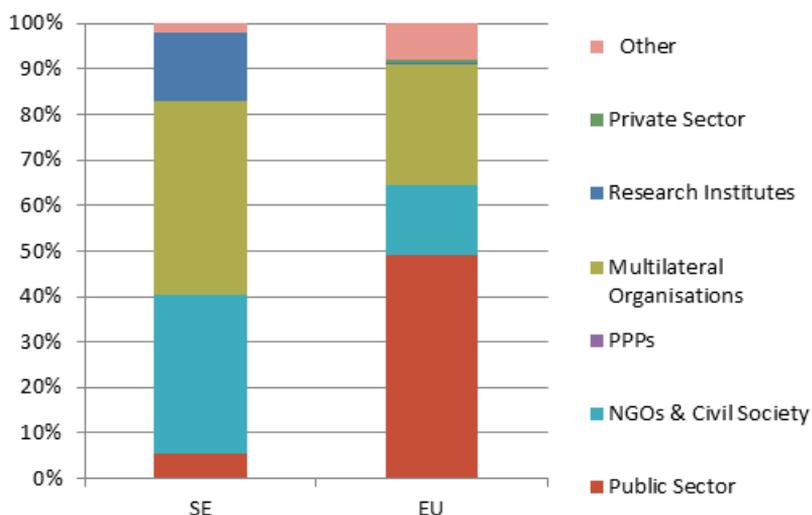


Source: OECD.Stat (2021b).

The disbursements reported in Figure 11 illustrate the priority the EU and Sweden have attached to different sectors. Consistent with the indicative programme's transport focus, nearly 30 percent of EU aid flowed to economic infrastructure and services between 2014 and 2020, while humanitarian aid occupied a second place in the portfolio (22 percent of total aid). Seven percent of EU aid in this period was classified as general budget support, based on reported disbursements for 2014 and 2015 alone. Sweden provided one third of its aid to the category of government and civil society, and the cumulative disbursement of USD 98 million came close to EU funding of USD 104 million. Sweden also distributed a larger share of its aid to health and population programmes and cross-cutting environmental initiatives consistent with its strategic priorities.

With respect to implementation channels, Figure 12 presents a familiar pattern. Nearly half of EU aid to Uganda was implemented through public sector entities. For Sweden, contributions to multilateral organisations (42 percent of the total) and civil society organisations (35 percent of the total) dominate the funding profile, while funding to research organisations also reflect a special area of emphasis (15 percent of total). EU country level contributions to multilateral organisations were significantly larger than Sweden's in real terms (USD 203 million compared to USD 127 million), while contributions to civil society organisations were closer in volume (USD 115 million for the EU versus USD 103 million for Sweden).

**Figure 12: Channels of Assistance for Sweden and the EU in Uganda (2014–2019)**



Source: OECD.Stat (2021b).

Perceived advantages of the EU as a cooperation provider are in part linked to its higher aid volume. First, the EU possesses broad knowledge of sectors and has the potential to pursue a wider range of interventions compared to Member States.<sup>95</sup> Second, its added financial weight offers the possibility of increasing its leverage in policy dialogue with the government.<sup>96</sup> This role has been important in promoting good governance and human rights concerns in the country, with the EU leading political coordination with European missions on these issues.<sup>97</sup> It is not only the scope of EU action but its status as a collective entity and competences in specific sectors that sets it apart. The EU plays a convening role in relation to Member States and offers expertise on trade and regional integration issues, for example.<sup>98</sup>

<sup>95</sup> Interview 17.

<sup>96</sup> Interview 20.

<sup>97</sup> Interview 34.

<sup>98</sup> Interview 17.

## EU Programming

Over the last several years, the EU and Member States have shown reluctance to pursue fully fledged joint programming, though EU-specific coordination continues to promote information exchange and the identification of common directions for action.

A joint programming document from 2015 signalled a broad political commitment among European development partners to take joint analysis as a starting point and pursue further concentration in sectoral areas of engagement to advance a division of labour (European Union, 2015). While the document reported that European development partners had a balanced division of labour based on an inventory of priority areas for different donors, it also noted continued challenges in coordinating forward planning. The lack of synchronization in donor planning cycles was highlighted as a key complication limiting the extent of joined up work in the country, as differences in planning cycles were also linked to how flexible donors could be in making adjustments to their programmes (European Union, 2015). The limited synchronization of donor planning cycles continues to present a development cooperation challenge in Uganda.<sup>99</sup>

In 2019, following impetus from a global workshop organized in Uganda to share lessons learned from EU joint programming in different country settings, the EU proposed the creation of a joint programme for the country. However, Member States did not show a collective interest in pursuing a joint programme.<sup>100</sup>

Against the backdrop of limited Member State ambitions concerning joint programming, the working better together agenda took the place of joint programming as a broader umbrella for dialogue among European development partners. The working

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<sup>99</sup> Interview 10, Interview 20.

<sup>100</sup> Interview 34.

better together agenda is understood to be less resource intensive compared to joint programming. It also differs with respect to its ambitions. As noted above, because programme cycles are not synchronized, joint planning is difficult. Thus, the working better together document gives weight to agreement on common strategic priorities that provide a broad framework for action.<sup>101</sup> The dialogue process associated with the elaboration of the document can serve as a means of learning about the activities of other donors which may provide a basis for further collaboration.<sup>102</sup>

The current MIP for Uganda affirms the lack of formalized output from joint programming and points to a ‘joint vision and position paper’ as an alternative output incorporating common analysis and offering a statement of common commitments of the EU and Member States to strengthen future cooperation (European External Action Service and European Commission, 2021d). The ‘working better together’ document presents an overview of how EU and Member State priorities in Uganda are linked to broader strategic frameworks and names ongoing coordination processes as a platform for assessing shared challenges and promoting joint action. According to one aid official, the process for developing the document could be considered more important than the output itself, as the process provided a platform for information exchange to identify opportunities for further collaboration.<sup>103</sup>

The development of the MIP was a main focus of monthly meetings among EU Heads of Cooperation between 2020 and 2021 leading to the document’s elaboration.<sup>104</sup> In this process, Member States had opportunities to provide input on EU country

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<sup>101</sup> Interviews 10, 17, 20.

<sup>102</sup> Interview 10.

<sup>103</sup> Interview 10.

<sup>104</sup> Interview 34.

priorities through consultations and participation in a survey.<sup>105</sup> As one aid official characterized the process, consultations involved sharing ideas rather than directly shaping the MIP document.<sup>106</sup> Member State input was one element of broad consultations that also involved EU dialogue with the government and local stakeholders.

Team Europe Initiatives have developed separately from the working better together process, with a more specific aim of promoting synergies in implementation.<sup>107</sup> While they may reflect different levels of action, with working better together referring to strategic choices and Team Europe Initiatives linked more to implementation, they share an orientation toward placing bilateral activities under a common umbrella rather than consolidating implementation.

The presentation of TEIs in the current MIP identifies potential contributions of Member States. For the TEI on demography and social services, diverse Member State priorities are highlighted, including water and sanitation, health, education and social protection measures. The TEI also proposes working at different governance levels as well as within refugee communities. A second TEI, Sustainable Business for Uganda, builds on an existing EU initiative and there is limited reference to the scope of Member State engagement in the MIP (European External Action Service and European Commission, 2021d).

The issue of unfulfilled synchronization of planning cycles is an illustration of the challenge of fostering a more unified European approach in a context where Team Europe members represent different development policy systems. The differences among European donors are not limited to the planning cycles, but also

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<sup>105</sup> Interview 20.

<sup>106</sup> Interview 44.

<sup>107</sup> Interview 17.

relate to the scope of decision-making authority on the choice of priorities and instruments at country level, as embassies do not have the same level of local flexibility to work with other donors and adjust their activities.<sup>108</sup> Beyond administrative differences, divergent viewpoints also exist on the appropriate approaches for addressing development challenges, with debates over the balance between support to the government and support to civil society organisations providing an illustration in the governance arena.<sup>109</sup>

Interviewees also point to capacity constraints as a limitation in advancing the EU working better together agenda in Uganda. This relates in part to the availability and continuity of staff but also to the constraints on Member States to reallocate funds to contribute to new joint initiatives such as the TEIs.<sup>110</sup> Another aspect of capacity relates to the strength of the role that the EU delegation is able to perform as a coordinator, in light of limited formal processes for the EU to provide input on the bilateral programmes of Member States, for example.<sup>111</sup>

## **Sweden's Country Level Engagement with the EU**

The Swedish bilateral cooperation strategy for Uganda presents active engagement with EU joint programming as the most important priority area in advancing development effectiveness through donor coordination (Regeringskansliet, 2018). Sweden's results reports reference ongoing efforts to improve coordination under the banner of Working Better Together but do not clarify how Sweden engages with this process or what Sweden's expectations are for what it should achieve (Sida, 2020d). The reports also do not generally offer assessments of the factors

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<sup>108</sup> Interviews 10, 17.

<sup>109</sup> Interview 34.

<sup>110</sup> Interview 10, Interview 17, Interview 34.

<sup>111</sup> Interview 17, Interview 20.

limiting donor coordination. As an exception, Sida's 2016 strategy report noted that although development partners shared an awareness of problems that fragmented aid delivery presented, there was no agreement on how to resolve them. With respect to EU coordination, the report pointed to a lack of interest among Member States in supporting joint funds and programmes. The report also suggested that Sweden's promotion of gender equality within the European donor grouping was challenging due to the limited will of Member States to provide targeted assistance to gender issues (Sida, 2016).

Against the backdrop of a new national development strategy that signals a governmental shift toward a programmatic rather than sectoral approach to engagement with development partners, the 2021 results report indicated that Sweden would review its strategic participation in coordination forums, and consider how to strengthen the voice and visibility of the EU at country level (Sida, 2021d). Strategy reports stress that Sweden plays an active role in EU coordination efforts, while pointing to ongoing engagement in other aid coordination forums in the country (Sida, 2021d; Sida, 2022a). Coordination initiatives beyond the scope of the working better together exercise include participation in the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework involving representatives of the government, international organisations, non-governmental organisations, and development partners, as well as the more EU-specific Joint Humanitarian and Development Framework to enable coherence across different EU and Member State funding streams (Sida, 2018).

Strategy reports focus on the funding relationships between Sweden as a cooperation provider and results achieved through partner organisations. One prominent example of a common funding priority was support for the Democratic Governance Facility, which provided support to Ugandan civil society organisations via a multi-donor fund. This was a primary pooled funding mechanism where Sweden contributed alongside the EU

and other Member States. It was closed in 2021 by the Government of Uganda, illustrating the challenges facing European development partners in the current political context (European Union, 2021). Sweden's strategy reports point to the importance of partnerships beyond the EU. This includes close collaboration with Nordic aid providers on sexual and reproductive health issues as well as partnerships with the country offices of UN agencies and the World Bank (Sida, 2021d).

In the discussion of the MIP for Uganda toward the end of 2021, Sweden only raised a question about the funding level, encouraging a clarification on the explanation for a proposed reduction in funds compared to earlier proposals (Government Offices of Sweden, 2021b). This signalled a high degree of satisfaction with the content of the MIP, which can be attributed to a perception of strong alignment between Swedish priorities and the EU delegation's proposal.

This case study points to challenges in promoting a more unified European development cooperation effort due to differences in Member State interests, planning cycles and preferred instruments. The analysis notes that the EU and Member States have a common strategic vision, and that coordination on policy dialogue is an important function of the EU delegation distinct from EU joint programming efforts. At the same time, broader donor coordination forums present an alternative to EU-specific coordination. There is therefore room to further consider what kinds of EU-centred coordination activities are most relevant in strengthening the voice and visibility of European cooperation providers and how the EU's coordination role should be distinguished from other avenues for promoting aid effectiveness.

## 6 Lessons on EU-Member State Cooperation and Swedish Engagement with the EU

This chapter adopts an analytical and synthetic perspective on Sweden's engagement in EU development cooperation at country level, drawing on the preceding chapters of this report and a review of all of the interviews conducted for this study. The chapter first presents a brief summary of general findings from the case studies and then identifies three dimensions of Swedish engagement: 1) the substance of engagement; 2) opportunities for engagement, and 3) resources for engagement. A final section turns to the question of how EU development cooperation can influence Swedish programming choices.

### **Summary of Case Study Findings**

Though case study countries face some similar underlying challenges – Bangladesh, Colombia, and Uganda are all important host countries for refugees from neighbouring countries to name one example – they also differ with respect to the weight of aid in their economies and the complex of issues that are the focus of domestic and international political agendas. The experiences with EU joint programming described in the case studies are also diverse, but point toward common themes.

The countries vary in terms of how long joint programming has had a place on the EU-Member State cooperation agenda and what form it has taken. At one end of the spectrum, joint programming is a recent arrival in Colombia, and its role alongside other coordination avenues is still being defined. At the other end of the spectrum, EU development partners have been through two cycles of joint programming in Mali and the output from the most recent

process provides a shared vision and framework for action for the EU and Member States. It is the only example in this study where the joint programming process offered a foundation for the EU’s country programming document. The trajectory of joint programming in Bangladesh, Georgia, and Uganda highlights that outputs from the process have largely related to joint analysis and the development of common visions or political positions rather than joint planning of implementation.

As Table 4 indicates, factors that pose challenges for closer cooperation between the EU and Member States at country level are remarkably similar across the case studies despite the differences in these cooperation settings. Many of these challenges relate to differences in interests, administrative procedures and resources for engagement among aid providers, which are strongly shaped by headquarters-level decision-making.

**Table 4: Description of the status of joint programming and core challenges for EU and MS collaboration in case countries**

Country	Joint Programming Description	Cooperation Challenges
Bangladesh	Focuses on analysis and mapping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Multiple coordination arenas</li> <li>• Lack of interest from government</li> <li>• Differences in agendas and engagement of MS</li> <li>• Capacities for coordination</li> </ul>
Colombia	At early stage of development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alternatives to EU coordination forums and overlaps across coordination forums</li> <li>• Staffing constraints of missions</li> <li>• Differences in political and economic interests of MS</li> <li>• Varied funding cycles and budgetary processes</li> <li>• Lack of political commitment at HQ to EU initiatives</li> </ul>

<b>Country</b>	<b>Joint Programming Description</b>	<b>Cooperation Challenges</b>
Georgia	Emphasizes agreement on common political positions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited decentralization of decision-making</li> <li>• Staffing resources</li> <li>• Political differences among MS</li> </ul>
Mali	Basis for EU programming Common analysis, vision and framework for action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited decentralization of decision-making</li> <li>• Lack of synchronization of programming cycles</li> <li>• Divergent MS interests, including different views on how to engage with government</li> </ul>
Uganda	Limited to shared analysis and joint vision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited synchronization of donor planning cycles</li> <li>• Varied scope of decision-making authority for missions</li> <li>• Divergent views on appropriate balance between approaches</li> <li>• Capacity constraints in engaging with new initiatives</li> </ul>

## The Substance of Swedish Engagement

The commonalities in Swedish priority areas across country strategies underline the role of consistent policy guidance favouring a strong profile with respect to gender equality, democracy and human rights, and environmental issues. Sweden is recognized by European cooperation providers for its engagement on these thematic issues as well as for its support to civil society organisations at country level.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Interviews 14, 17, 19, 22, 29.

In promoting its thematic priorities in EU cooperation, Sweden thus tends to seek to strengthen the alignment of the EU's aid profile with Sweden's profile, rather than emphasizing an approach focused on the potential complementarity of different cooperation priorities. The case study of Mali highlights that the interest in alignment can extend to preferences for specific modalities, given the reservations expressed toward the EU use of budget support in that country. The comparison of EU and Swedish aid profiles indicates that there are overlapping priorities in areas such as governance and civil society support but also different emphases in the selection of implementation channels.

Sweden signals a commitment to actively promoting coordination and joint programming in its country strategies. The expression of support for joint programming provides the main reference to cooperation with the EU in these strategies and the results reports charting the Swedish country programme's implementation progress. The study suggests that Sweden does consistently support EU coordination initiatives. It is recognized by other European cooperation providers as an active participant in coordination processes.<sup>113</sup>

The general interest in supporting joint programming is an indication of a continued Swedish commitment to aid effectiveness principles. However, policymakers also express an awareness of the mixed record of achievement of joint programming at field level.<sup>114</sup> This study suggests several reasons why the automatic association of joint programming with the goal of promoting more effective European development cooperation is problematic.

First, joint programming itself is framed as a flexible and country-specific process, which is dependent on initiative from both EU delegations and European development partners. An

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<sup>113</sup> Interviews 14, 17, 19, 22, 41.

<sup>114</sup> Interviews 1, 2, 3.

implication is that a preference for joint programming should reflect country level cooperation dynamics. One challenge in moving away from a view that joint programming is a universal aspiration for EU cooperation is that it has been identified as the preferred approach to country programming in the current legislative framework.

Second, experiences with joint programming have highlighted that it falls short of ambitions to develop a common planning framework for European development partners. In Bangladesh and Uganda, joint programming initiatives have involved joint analysis and the identification of common priorities. In Georgia, the main output from joint programming consists of statements of common positions. The case study of Mali presents a success story of EU joint programming, but also emphasizes that the output remains at the level of formulating a common strategy rather than a common implementation framework. Continuing differences in the planning cycles of European partners present a challenge for moving beyond shared strategic visions.

Third, the linkage between joint programming and other dimensions of effective cooperation are uncertain. Joint programming is perceived as an EU-centred process.<sup>115</sup> The case studies point to an absence of engagement with partner governments or other stakeholders as an expression of the ownership dimension of the effectiveness agenda. Thus, the added value of EU-specific coordination to local stakeholders and intended cooperation beneficiaries requires further consideration. In a similar vein, there is a challenge in positioning EU joint programming within a broader donor coordination context. This is evident in Colombia, where joint programming is in its infancy and European development partners view a potential for duplication with the wider donor coordination set up. A similar need to define

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<sup>115</sup> Interview 4, Interview 7.

the advantages of EU-specific coordination exists in Uganda, where OECD donors together face a changed context in light of advancing non-DAC activity and political challenges.

Inputs to joint programming including joint analysis may not be unique to the EU community, raising questions about the necessity of maintaining separate processes. Ultimately, there is a risk that an investment in EU-centred coordination can come at the expense of engagement in other forums which may be valuable in strengthening broader alliances and addressing core development objectives.

Fourth, efforts to strengthen EU cooperation via joint programming are not the only arenas for European partners to work more closely together. For example, Heads of Mission coordinate to develop common political positions and there is coordination related to the management of humanitarian aid.

The supportive attitude that Sweden adopts toward EU joint programming reflects an interest in strengthening the collective voice and visibility of the EU as a cooperation actor. This study's summary of joint programming experiences highlights that although advocacy for joint programming is an expression of support for increasing the effectiveness of the EU as a cooperation actor, it should be understood as one avenue among others for advancing effectiveness goals.

## **Opportunities for Engagement**

The study points to Sweden's contribution to advancing a consistent thematic agenda in different country settings and supporting EU coordination initiatives. It also places emphasis on a characterization of the setting for cooperation among European development partners rather than focusing on specific cases of Swedish influence. Participation in EU joint programming and country programming is a component of ongoing dialogue that

takes place through regular meetings of Heads of Cooperation at country level. These commonly take place on a monthly basis, although input from Mali indicated a bi-weekly frequency there.<sup>116</sup> The opportunities that Sweden and other Member States have to shape the EU's country level work extend beyond programming discussions.

One reason that it is challenging to demonstrate the direct influence of Sweden on EU country level programming is that there is an affinity between the aid providers on important issues.<sup>117</sup> The affinity may itself reflect a history of engagement with the EU, where Sweden and other like-minded states have been influential in shaping EU development cooperation (Elgström and Delputte, 2016). In this respect, influence efforts in Brussels can reduce the necessity of embassies to seek influence over EU country programmes. In light of the like-mindedness of Sweden and the EU, influencing the EU is not always an explicit goal of Swedish country level cooperation. There can instead be an emphasis on identifying opportunities for collaboration.<sup>118</sup>

At the same time, the importance of headquarters-oriented decision-making in guiding the EU's country level choices can restrict opportunities for Member States to shape the EU's agenda in a given country. Member State representatives have opportunities to provide input during the preparation of the MIP and may also comment on other EU programmes presented for discussion as they are developed. Input from informants suggests that the extent of consultation can vary from country to country, depending on how the EU delegation seeks to involve Member States.<sup>119</sup> There can also be different perceptions among Member States within a single country on the level of inclusiveness of country programming

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<sup>116</sup> Interview 25, Interview 27.

<sup>117</sup> Interview 20.

<sup>118</sup> Interview 15.

<sup>119</sup> Interview 40.

processes, reflecting both the variety of interests and expectations toward the process.<sup>120</sup> Delegations reach out to Member States via meetings, surveys, or information sharing on the status of the MIP, for example.<sup>121</sup>

Member State representatives point to an interest in encouraging EU delegations to be more open to input from Member State staff on the ground.<sup>122</sup> From a critical perspective, certain consultations are perceived as a way of checking boxes to satisfy headquarters-level expectations on organizing consultations rather than providing a meaningful forum for Member States to provide input.<sup>123</sup> These concerns highlight the different character of the arena for influencing the EU at headquarters and country levels. The EU has an obligation to be responsive to Member State interests through the comitology process at headquarters level while EU delegations may view their primary focus as carrying out decisions made within the EU policy process. As the case studies highlighted, the role of headquarters in shaping the leeway available to field missions to engage with other actors is not uniquely an issue for EU delegations but also applies to varying degrees to Member States.

Another avenue for engagement with the EU relates to its role as a co-funder of programmes supported by Member States or as a source of development funding. Sweden's implementation profile differs from Member States which have large capacities to implement programmes through national agencies. This factor contributes to Sweden engaging less actively with the EU in some contexts.<sup>124</sup> The case studies nevertheless presented several examples of co-financing where the EU and Sweden collaborate as

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<sup>120</sup> Interviews 35, 39, 41, 43.

<sup>121</sup> Interview 20.

<sup>122</sup> Interviews 11, 28, 29, 31.

<sup>123</sup> Interviews 11, 31.

<sup>124</sup> Interview 17, Interview 33.

contributors. Sida also has the possibility of acting as an implementing partner for the EU through the mechanism of delegated cooperation. Participation in delegated cooperation has expanded but remains limited compared to other Member States. Interviews point to a continuing institutional learning process on working with the EU on joint implementation.<sup>125</sup>

## Resources for Engagement

The evaluation of Sweden's country level influence on the EU more than a decade ago indicated that human resources issues were relevant in understanding prospects for more effective engagement (SADEV, 2009). This relates to the knowledge and skills of staff on the one hand and staffing capacities on the other.

The familiarity of staff with EU institutions and processes is still viewed as an asset that can facilitate an active Member State role within EU development cooperation.<sup>126</sup> Experiences with EU policymaking in Brussels may be especially helpful in providing staff with relevant knowledge of instruments and administrative procedures to understand the constraints under which EU delegations operate as well as the flexibility that they have in implementation.

Another human resources issue relates to the leeway that staff in foreign missions has to engage in dialogue or coordination tasks in addition to other responsibilities. Pursuing greater coordination or engaging in joint implementation activities, whether within the EU development partner group or in the broader community of aid providers, presents demands on staff resources.<sup>127</sup> With limited personnel available to manage a large amount of funding, there is a

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<sup>125</sup> Interviews 6, 13, 18, 25.

<sup>126</sup> Interviews 9, 25.

<sup>127</sup> Interviews 6, 10, 23, 43.

need for consideration of how to balance a willingness to work more with EU partners against the need to pursue other implementation interests.<sup>128</sup> Limited staff capacities in addition to a lack of financial resources to redirect to new initiatives can serve as a constraint on Swedish engagement in Team Europe Initiatives in spite of Sweden's support for this agenda, for example.<sup>129</sup> One aid official proposed that assigning national staff to serve as a dedicated EU focal point within a country mission could offer one solution to maintaining field level knowledge on how the EU works in order to improve engagement.<sup>130</sup>

Similar human resource issues affect the EU delegations as well as other Member States.<sup>131</sup> While delegations are understood to have a broader staff resource base in relation to most Member State representations, they also face competing demands and an expectation of performing coordination and programme management roles at the same time. These management challenges can be compounded with the introduction of new initiatives that missions are expected to engage with.<sup>132</sup> One aid official suggested that new mandates provide stimulus for reflection on the potential to pool common functions in country level representations to address capacity limitations.<sup>133</sup>

This discussion highlights the relevance of clarifying the staffing demands for promoting collaboration among development partners and ensuring that expectations on participation in new initiatives are matched by a commitment to providing the personnel and financial resources needed for implementation.

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<sup>128</sup> Interview 23.

<sup>129</sup> Interviews 9, 10.

<sup>130</sup> Interview 36.

<sup>131</sup> Interviews 8, 12, 22, 24.

<sup>132</sup> Interview 41.

<sup>133</sup> Interview 28.

## EU Influence on Swedish Programming

The extent to which the EU influences Member State aid choices is an important area for debate. On one level, influence can be understood in passive terms, with awareness of EU and Member State activities informing Sweden's understanding of its own added value as an aid provider and shaping decisions on where to allocate resources. Across the countries studied, expanded knowledge on other European partners' aid programmes and the identification of opportunities for further collaboration were presented as an advantage of joint programming.

The case studies suggest that the EU's cooperation activities and joint programming processes provide context for Swedish country priorities. In Georgia, Swedish country priorities are shaped explicitly by the priorities of the EU Association Agreement. In Mali, the joint programming process was explicitly named as an input into the Swedish country strategy. However, in other cases the EU does not seem to have any special status in influencing the content of Swedish country strategies.

On another level, influence can be conceived as a direct result of EU efforts to shape the programming choices of Sweden or other Member States. Interviews for this study suggest that there are challenges for the EU in exerting this kind of direct influence.<sup>134</sup> While Member States express frustration about the extent of opportunities for involvement in EU country level decision-making, EU delegations may experience similar frustrations due to the lack of invitations to provide input on Member State strategies and programmes. In the case of Sweden, country strategy development is a headquarters-led process, follows a nationally determined cycle, and is understood as a parallel

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<sup>134</sup> Interviews 12, 17, 20, 29.

process in relation to EU activities.<sup>135</sup> There may be opportunities for the EU to provide guidance to Member States, but delegations do not have any formal authority to direct Member State action.

Although Sweden perceives itself as a strongly decentralized actor with high country level flexibility, there seems to be ambiguity on how much room for manoeuvre country strategies leave for country representatives. The extent to which strategies are prescriptive can vary. Factors including the continuation of historical relations with partners also shape programming choices.<sup>136</sup> More detailed steering to country offices can limit the scope for direct EU influence on programming choices. The Swedish country strategies reviewed in this study mainly reference the EU in the context of a Swedish goal of supporting joint programming. The lack of more direct references to Swedish-EU cooperation in the strategies possibly reflects that the EU's role provides part of the cooperation context that informs the selection of strategic priorities, while the strategies focus on outlining the main areas of implementation for funding priorities.

As the presentation of Sweden's general aid profile and the country studies confirm, Sweden's focus in implementation is directed toward multilateral organisations and civil society organisations, whereas foreign missions mostly do not manage funds provided to the EU. This is another explanation for the limited EU footprint in Swedish strategies.

A recent report by the Swedish National Audit Office (*Riksrevisionen*) points to broader uncertainty about how Sida selects country level approaches and implementation partners. The report concludes that the considerations made in country level decision-making are not always explicit or clearly traceable. The report indicates that the multitude of priorities that Sida must take into account and Sida's

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<sup>135</sup> Interview 9.

<sup>136</sup> Interview 18.

internal learning process in clarifying theories of change as a basis for implementation choices contribute to the limited transparency of decision-making (Riksrevisionen, 2022). Limitations in observing how EU activities shape Sweden's choices at country level reflect the reality that missions must balance a variety of considerations in country programming.

## 7 Conclusions

This study set out to examine the relationship between Sweden and the EU in development cooperation at the country level. The focus has been to understand the EU's role at the country level and the processes used to program and coordinate EU and Member State development cooperation, country and joint programming. Building on this, the study also aimed at understanding how Sweden engages with the EU in these processes, and what lessons can be learned.

The overall conclusion from the study is that while Sweden identifies the EU as one of its most important development cooperation partners, there are numerous challenges to strengthening country level engagement. These challenges include uncertainty about the cooperation role of the EU and the status of joint programming processes, Sweden's commitment to other country level partners and processes, and the varied engagement of other Member States in common EU initiatives. As an important policy arena and the largest international aid donor, the EU has a central role in both international politics and development cooperation. Sweden's engagement with the EU's country level programming represents a significant potential to further both Swedish priorities and the development effectiveness agenda.

As the case studies have indicated, the governmental emphasis in EU aid enables a stronger role in comparison to Member States with respect to policy dialogue. The distinctive political coordination role of the EU is in part an extension of the large volume of funding that it provides. However, it also relates to other dimensions of its external relations, with the role of the EU in enabling market access offering a key example of its potential leverage.

## **Joint Programming alone does not resolve coordination challenges**

The study shows that EU country and joint programming processes constitute important potential arenas for collaboration with EU development cooperation. While country programming processes have a common output in the form of a MIP, joint programming processes have more context-specific outputs, and their character differs across countries. This places pressure on Sweden and other Member States to ensure sufficient competence and human resources for effective engagement.

Although other multilateral actors offer alternatives to the EU as country level coordinating entities, the EU has a clear advantage relative to its Member States as a potential coordinator. Joint programming has been a centrepiece of the European agenda to encourage greater coherence and coordination among EU development partners at the country level. Interview informants acknowledged the relevance of joint programming for providing a platform for mutual awareness-raising and learning and for identifying prospects for working better together. However, the general evolution of joint programming in the studied countries has been to reduce the scope for joint programming initiatives and planning efforts to focus on identifying joint objectives and a common direction. Even in Mali, regarded as a successful example of joint programming in a difficult cooperation setting, the output document from the joint programming process is understood as a common framework for action rather than a joint response.

Explanations for the restrained ambitions of joint programming include factors identified in early joint programming assessments made a decade ago. The lack of synchronization of planning cycles, the variation in the extent and nature of decision-making responsibilities delegated to country level representatives, and differences in interests among Member States remain problematic.

The challenges observed in relation to joint programming should provide a note of caution as the EU and its Member States develop Team Europe Initiatives to bring activities under a common umbrella and strengthen their collective impact at country level. These common initiatives will likely have a more solid foundation if the EU and Member States address underlying barriers to collaboration. Advantages of TEIs mentioned by interviewees included the possibility of strengthening local communication among European actors, providing a platform for the EU and Member States to enhance engagement in policy dialogue with governments, and offering added voice and visibility to European development partners.<sup>137</sup> However, interviewees also suggested that the level of Member State commitment to and engagement in these initiatives vary. They also highlighted the additional coordination burden that participation in them places on EU delegations and Member State missions.<sup>138</sup> The limited commitment of new resources to TEIs was another key concern.<sup>139</sup>

## **Sweden should enlarge its agenda on effective EU cooperation**

The title of this study names Sweden as both a team player and a free agent. It is a team player as it adopts a supportive view of efforts to advance EU and Member State collaboration, including in the context of EU joint programming and the Team Europe Initiatives. However, it is also a free agent to the extent that it retains an autonomous development policy in which EU cooperation is only one element of a larger portfolio. It shares this quality with other Member States given that EU development policy is an area of shared competence.

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<sup>137</sup> Interviews 5, 10, 13, 15, 16, 31, 34.

<sup>138</sup> Interviews 7, 9, 28, 31, 35.

<sup>139</sup> Interviews 10, 17, 32.

The policy interest in ensuring that the activities of the EU and its Member States “complement and reinforce each other” provides a key reference point for this study. The main difference between the EU and Sweden emphasized in this study is that the EU has a stronger orientation toward providing government funding. Sweden, in turn, favours channelling resources through multilateral organisations and civil society organisations to a larger extent. The difference in orientation suggests that clarifying the intended synergies between Sweden’s non-governmental approach and the EU’s governmental channels for country level engagement is central to identifying how EU and Swedish funding can be complementary on the ground.

The lack of formalization of the goal of exploiting synergies with the EU means that progress on this front is not accounted for in results reports on the implementation of Swedish strategies. To prioritize the promotion of synergies with the EU, the Swedish government can therefore present EU cooperation as a separate objective in results reports to enable progress to be tracked consistently across countries and over time.

This study indicates that there is a discrepancy between advocacy for joint programming as a vehicle for promoting effectiveness principles at headquarters level and the country level ambitions attached to joint programming. The study concludes that country level coordination can be further developed, both in terms of how Sweden and other Member States contribute, but also in terms of the EU’s approach.

In strategic guidance for its country programmes, Sweden emphasizes active engagement with joint programming processes as a main expression of a commitment to promote effectiveness in EU development cooperation. The analysis affirms Sweden’s supportive role in these processes. However, in light of the limitations of joint programming and the other dimensions of the EU’s cooperation role that are relevant at country level, the Swedish government should reconsider its focus on joint

programming by itself as the objective highlighted in country strategies to reflect a commitment to promoting more effective collaboration among European development partners.

This study suggests that the focus on joint programming reflects a narrow view of how to support more effective EU-Member State collaboration. The Swedish government can promote an expanded view of effectiveness by acknowledging the diverse forms of EU and Member State interaction, including political coordination and co-financing activities in strategies.

One implication of the analysis is that Swedish priorities to improve coordination should look beyond country level processes of information exchange and planning and focus more attention on how to promote consistency in EU Member State decision-making at headquarters level to enable further collaboration at country level. This can involve work to identify the factors that contribute to continuing difficulties in aligning budgetary and planning cycles and the reluctance of Member States to further delegate decision-making to the field level. In preparation for the mid-term reviews of MIPs in 2024, Sweden can promote dialogue among Member States on the reasons for limited synchronization in country level planning, for example.

Engagement with other Member States is also essential in advancing dialogue about the balance of responsibilities between the EU and Member States and how their respective activities can best reinforce and complement one another. Despite agreement on consolidated EU policy frameworks, Member States pursue different cooperation priorities and differ in how they implement aid. They can also hold different views on the purposes that EU aid should serve at country level and whether the EU's coordination role should be strengthened. Since field missions follow guidance issued by headquarters, high-level dialogue among Member States can serve to build consensus on the desired roles of the EU.

In light of different complexes of interests across world regions and country settings, dialogue on geographic cooperation should ideally be focused on regions or types of cooperation settings as a starting point.

In light of the special character of EU cooperation, where funding largely originates from Member State contributions to the EU budget rather than aid allocation decisions, strengthening a Member State's 'Team Europe' orientation is not reducible to a reallocation funds in the aid portfolio. Rather, it requires consideration of how Member States can support the EU in defining the desired focus of EU action and exercising the different cooperation roles EU institutions play more effectively.

This conclusion does not imply that Sweden as a Member State needs to offer unambiguous support to the EU in strengthening all the different cooperation roles that it plays. In the context of limited resources, advocacy for effective EU development cooperation can also involve focusing EU action on areas where it has clear advantages in relation to Member States, such as governmental dialogue, while encouraging a reduced focus on activities that overlap with other initiatives that Member States invest in, such as UN-driven aid coordination. This may include lowering the priority attached to EU-specific analysis and organizing coordination processes that can stretch the capacities of EU delegations.

The political will to expand the 'Team Europe' approach globally is an important foundation for strengthened collaboration. However, fulfilling the ambitions of this agenda requires further consideration of the financial and personnel resources among Member States and EU delegations to execute it effectively, as well as the trade-offs involved in strengthening EU-centred cooperation at the expense of other alternatives.

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# Annex 1. List of Interviewees

Interview partners are listed here with an indication of their role and affiliation at the time the interview was conducted. References to interviews are numbered chronologically in the text to respect confidentiality.

General Coordinator of Spanish Cooperation	AECID, Embassy of Spain in Colombia
Head of Office	Austrian Coordination Office Kampala
Policy Officer	DG INTPA
Trainee	DG INTPA
Deputy Head of Unit, Effective Development Policy and Team Europe	DG INTPA
Policy Officer	DG INTPA
Head of Cooperation	Embassy of Belgium in Mali
Deputy Head of Mission, Head of Cooperation	Embassy of Belgium in Uganda
Development Counsellor	Embassy of Denmark in Bangladesh
Deputy Head of Mission, Head of Cooperation	Embassy of Denmark in Mali
Counsellor for Cooperation and Culture, Director of the French Institute in Georgia	Embassy of France in Georgia
Deputy Head of Mission	Embassy of Ireland, Colombia
Head of Cooperation	Embassy of Norway, Colombia
First Secretary, Private Sector Development	Embassy of Sweden in Bangladesh
Deputy Head of Embassy, Head of Cooperation	Embassy of Sweden in Bangladesh

First Secretary, Environment and Climate Change, Development Cooperation Section	Embassy of Sweden in Bangladesh
Senior Programme Officer	Embassy of Sweden in Bangladesh
Second Secretary, Coordinator for Cox's Bazar	Embassy of Sweden in Bangladesh
Head of Cooperation	Embassy of Sweden in Colombia
National Programme Officer for Environment and Climate	Embassy of Sweden in Colombia
Deputy Head of Embassy, Head of Cooperation	Embassy of Sweden in Georgia
Head of Cooperation	Embassy of Sweden in Mali
Ambassador	Embassy of Sweden in Mali
Head of Cooperation	Embassy of Sweden in Uganda
Deputy Head of Mission, Head of Cooperation	Embassy of Switzerland in Bangladesh
Deputy Head of Mission, Head of Cooperation	Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, Georgia
Desk Officer, Political, Economic Affairs, and Development Cooperation	Estonian Embassy, Georgia
Development Cooperation Contact Point	Estonian Embassy, Tbilisi
Project Manager	EU Delegation
Head of Cooperation	EU Delegation in Mali
Head of Cooperation	EU Delegation, Bangladesh
Head of Cooperation	EU Delegation, Colombia
Head of Cooperation	EU Delegation, Georgia
Head of Cooperation	EU Delegation, Uganda
Head of Cooperation	German Embassy, Bangladesh
Head of Cooperation	German Embassy, Colombia
Head of Cooperation	German Embassy, Georgia
Head of Cooperation	Luxembourg in Mali

Desk Officer	Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Sweden
Desk Officer	Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Sweden
Managing Partner	Scanteam
Senior Policy Specialist	Sida
Head of Unit, Iraq	Sida
Head of Multilateral Unit	Sida
Senior Policy Specialist, EU Coordinator	Sida
Minister Counsellor and Group Coordinator	Sweden's Permanent Representation to the EU

## Annex 2. List of Abbreviations

AECID	Spanish International Development Cooperation Agency
AFD	Agence Française de Développement
CODEV-PI	Working Party on Development Cooperation and International Partnerships
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DG ECHO	Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations
DG INTPA	Directorate-General for International Partnerships
DG NEAR	Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations
DOAG	Decision on the Overseas Association, including Greenland
EDF	European Development Fund
EEAS	European External Action Service
EFSD+	European Fund for Sustainable Development Plus
ENI	European Neighbourhood Instrument
EU	European Union
FPI	Service for Foreign Policy Instruments
GPA	General Programme Assistance
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für internationale Zusammenarbeit
IPA	Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance
KfW	KfW Development Bank
LDC	Least Developed Country
LIC	Low Income Country
LMIC	Lower Middle-Income Country
MFA	Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs
MIP	Multiannual Indicative Programme
NDICI	Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument
NIP	National Indicative Programme
OCTs	Overseas Countries and Territories

ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
Sida	The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
SSF	Single Support Framework
TEI	Team Europe Initiative
UMIC	Upper Middle-Income Country
UN	United Nations
UNCDF	United Nations Capital Development Fund
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
USD	United States Dollar

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Europeiska unionen (EU) är en central aktör i det internationella utvecklingssamarbetet, både som den enskilt största givaren och en politisk agendasättare. Att samarbeta med EU, och andra medlemsstater, på landnivå är en förutsättning för att få ett genomslag för svenska biståndspolitiska prioriteringar. Den här studien undersöker hur Sverige engagerat sig i samarbete med EU i fem olika partnerländer (Uganda, Bangladesh, Georgien, Mali och Colombia).

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The European Union (EU) is a central actor in international development cooperation, both as the single largest donor and as a political agenda setter. Cooperating with the EU, and other member states, at country level is a prerequisite for impact on Swedish aid policy priorities. This study examines how Sweden engaged in cooperation with the EU in five different partner countries (Uganda, Bangladesh, Georgia, Mali and Colombia).