



Children's rights at the center of the 2030 Agenda

Sweden will be presenting its Voluntary National Review 2021 to the UN on its implementation of the 2030 Agenda during the UN High Level Political Forum 2021 and ahead of the forum we would like to remind the government about the child right perspective as a crucial approach to build back better after the pandemic.

Child rights at the centre of development cooperation

Swedish child rights civil society actors working in the field of international development have come together in this report to address the gaps in realizing the SDG:s for children and young people. The report is addressing the goals that are in focus at this year's HLPF (**1 no poverty, 2 zero hunger, 3 good health and well-being, 8 decent work and economic growth, 10 reduced inequalities, 12 responsible consumption and production, 13 climate action, 16 peace, justice and strong institutions, and 17 partnerships**).

The goals are all interlinked and goals such as education (SDG4) and Gender Equality (SDG 5) are crucial for children to recover after the pandemic, however this report focuses on the goals in focus at HLPF 2021. This report is not looking at the national context in Sweden, only at Sweden's international support from a child rights perspective, highlighting important areas for Sweden to stand up for globally during the nine years that are left until the deadline 2030.

Children and the pandemic

More than one year into the COVID-19 pandemic, progress has regressed across virtually every key child rights indicator. The number of children who are hungry, isolated, abused, anxious, living in poverty and forced into marriage has increased. These are some examples of how children are negatively affected:

- **7 million** additional children will suffer from wasting (acute malnutrition)
- An additional **10 million** child marriages will take place in the coming decade.
- The number of children forced into child labour has increased for the first time in 20 years.
- **30-40 million** children are at risk of not coming back to school after school closures.
- At least **80 million children** under one year have missed out on basic vaccinations.

The signs that children will bear the scars of the pandemic for years to come are unmistakable. Children must therefore be at the heart of recovery efforts.

UN Child rights convention and the SDG:s

The child rights convention and the SDGs go hand in hand. The convention has never been more relevant than it is today in reaching those children who are so often disadvantaged, excluded, and marginalized. Governments around the world have mobilized billions of dollars to save their own economies. But there is another impending and devastating loss if we do not act: **a lost generation of children**. Progress towards the SDGs and the CRC is slipping backwards, and children are the hardest hit. Climate change related setbacks are severely

threatening 15 rights in the CRC. Not only does this have grave consequences for children now, it is a threat to their future and our shared humanity.

SDG:s up for review at HLPF 2021

Goal 1: No poverty

Almost one in five children – 385 million – are living in extreme poverty, struggling to survive on less than US\$1.90 a day, and almost one in three children – 644 million – are living in households that are multidimensionally poor. The onset and ongoing crisis of the global COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated the situation for the most vulnerable children. An estimated 142 million additional children have fallen into poverty in 2020 as a result of the crisis.

All actors – including Sweden through its international development cooperation - should support and/or commit to:

- **Routinely measure and monitor child poverty.** Measuring child poverty both from monetary and multidimensional perspectives not only helps build knowledge and understanding about scale and scope of the issue but also sets the foundation for building evidence-based solutions to effectively address child poverty.
- **Prioritize child poverty in national development strategies and plans.** Selecting child poverty as one of the key indicators to measure development progress or including policies and programmes that target poor and vulnerable children could help channel national attention and resources to addressing child poverty.
- **Expand child-sensitive social protection programmes,** including within governments' immediate and longer term COVID-19 response and in climate change risk assessments and mitigation plans.
- **Safeguard social spending;** the current COVID-19 crisis has greatly impacted children and it is crucial to safeguard social spending on health, education, social protection and other social sectors.

Goal 2: Zero Hunger

The triple burden of malnutrition – undernutrition, hidden hunger and overweight – threatens the survival, growth and development of children, young people, economies and nations. Iron deficiency reduces children's ability to learn and iron deficiency anemia increases women and girls risk of death during or shortly after childbirth. In addition, child overweight is on the rise across every continent.

All actors – including Sweden through its international development cooperation - should support and/or commit to:

- **Empower families, children, young people and women to demand affordable nutritious food:** Stimulating demand for nutritious foods means not only educating consumers on the benefits of healthy diets, but also leveraging cultural and social aspirations and protecting consumers from the promotion of unhealthy foods.
- **Drive food suppliers to do the right thing for children:** Healthy food must be available, affordable, safe and convenient. Food producers and suppliers have a key role to play through their assortments and marketing. Governments need to create a level playing field for all producers and suppliers through effective policies and incentives that promote equal opportunities to make healthy choices for children and adolescents and help ensure that all actors in the food systems align their actions with children's best interests.

- **Collect, analyse and use good-quality data and evidence regularly to guide action and track progress:**

Lack of adequate data prevents governments from responding with effective policies, strategies and programmes. Accurate and timely data are needed to understand malnutrition, take coordinated, evidence-based action, and to hold all actors to account. Data collection methods and frequency must be transformed to expand what we know about the diets and nutrition of children, adolescents and women at every stage of life.

- **Empower families and communities in areas most affected by climate change and environmental degradation to adapt agriculture and other livelihoods** to the changing climate. Anticipatory action should be prioritized to prevent child malnutrition, stunting and wasting.

Goal 3: Good health and well-being

Despite progress made during the MDG era, major challenges remain with regards to health, including a large residual burden of preventable mortality. Universal access to quality health care, improving nutrition (both under- and over nutrition, and vitamin and mineral deficiency), preventing infectious diseases such as pneumonia, diarrhoea, HIV, tuberculosis and malaria, and addressing increases in non communicable diseases (NCDs). The lockdowns following the COVID-19 pandemic have had a major impact on children's health. Furthermore, reprioritizations within healthcare systems to address the pandemic, have had an adverse effect on other healthcare outcomes. This has had grave consequences; meant that many children have died as a consequence of lockdowns: women and adolescent girls have died in child-birth; and new-borns have died either during the delivery or soon thereafter. Children have died from pneumonia, malaria and diarrhea whilst malnutrition and lack of vaccinations have caused further deaths amongst children.

All actors – including Sweden through its international development cooperation - should support and/or commit to:

- **Strengthen primary healthcare systems and Universal Health Coverage** to reach every child. For health services to be resilient to crises, including the present COVID-19 crisis, all elements of health systems must function well, with no weak links, a life cycle approach is crucial since disease outbreaks like the current COVID-19 pandemic, are a major influence on health services and population wellbeing.
- **Focus on maternal, newborn and child survival.** It is necessary to scale up essential maternal and newborn care services, improve and sustain immunization programmes and support preventive and curative services for pneumonia, diarrhoea, malaria and other child health conditions.
- **Prioritize child and adolescent health and well-being, including mental health and comprehensive sexuality education, sexual and reproductive health and rights.** A healthy childhood and adolescence are crucial to a healthy and productive life. Financial and technical support is needed for services that provide age-appropriate health care, including mental health services, promote child and adolescent health and well-being, reduce the acquisition of risks for NCDs in later life, prevent injuries and provide support to children with developmental delay or disability.
- **Ensure health plans are climate informed,** taking into consideration both the direct and indirect health effects of environmental degradation and climate change on children, globally and locally.
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Goal 8: On decent work and economic growth

This goal is heading in the wrong direction for children. Child labour is on the rise. Child labour is harmful to the physical, emotional, social or moral development of a child, and interferes with their schooling. Economic vulnerability associated with poverty, social inequality, armed conflict, and other risks and shocks, plays a key role in forcing children to work. Child labour is both a cause and a consequence of poverty, reinforcing social inequality and discrimination. Young people living in alternative care or in vulnerable family situations are more likely to lack protections and safety nets.

- The number of children in child labour has risen to 160 million worldwide¹ – an increase of 8.4 million children in the last four years – with 9 million additional children at risk due to the impact of COVID-19.
- Progress to end child labour has stalled for the first time in 20 years, reversing the previous downward trend that saw child labour fall by 94 million between 2000 and 2016.
- The incidence of hazardous work in countries affected by armed conflict is 50% higher than the global average.
- 30 million children live outside their country of birth, increasing their risk of being trafficked for sexual exploitation and other work.

All actors – including Sweden through its international development cooperation - should support and/or commit to:

- **Support enforcement of legal standards** as fundamental to reductions in child labour and child recruitment.
- **Engage and advocate with businesses and industry platforms** on approaches that tackle wider child rights deprivations as the root causes of child labour. Help businesses understand how they can both assess the risk of child labour in their operations and supply chains and integrate results into company actions and strategy. Develop and implement promising solutions that can lead towards better working and living conditions for workers and their families in global supply chains.
- **Strengthen the reach, calibre and funding of the social service workforce**
- **Address harmful social norms** which perpetuate child labour, increasing access to quality education and supporting poverty reduction strategies, including social protection, which have been demonstrated to reduce child labour rates.
- Swedish enterprises have a responsibility to eliminate forced labour, human trafficking and child labour in their supply chains. It is important that the Swedish Government puts pressure on Swedish businesses to ensure that international guidelines and conventions are adhered to.
- **Actively advocate for a holistic and effective EU legislation on mandatory human rights due diligence** for corporations in line with international guidelines and standards. The EU-wide legislation should ensure that companies can be held accountable for the adverse human rights impacts they cause or contribute to and that anyone, particularly vulnerable groups, affected by negative impact can exercise the right to obtain remedy.
- **Adopt a climate prepared approach to preventing child labour** as a result of climate induced emergencies, be it slow-onset crisis or natural disasters..
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¹ <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/06/1093682>

Goal 10: On reduced inequalities

Across the world, girls and boys are excluded due to discrimination on the basis of gender, disability, language and ethnicity. All children and youth have the right to freely express their opinions and influence the decisions that shape the world around them. They are not always allowed to express their opinions at home, at school or in society. Children are rarely included in decision-making processes. Those who engage in civic or democratic spaces face many risks. The onset and ongoing crisis of the global COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the situation. Children, and girls in particular, who engage in the civic or democratic spaces face many risks such as harassment online and offline.

All actors – including Sweden through its international development cooperation - should support and/or commit to:

- **End child poverty.** With children constituting half of the global poor, an explicit child focus is essential to ending poverty for good.
- **Implement nationally appropriate social protection systems** and measures for all.
- **Safeguard Social Spending.**
- **Eliminate laws, policies and practices that discriminate against children,** including because of their gender, ethnic or racial group, age, migration status, disability, sexual orientation or other factors.
- **Ensure children with disabilities have access to services.** One in ten children globally are children with disabilities. Accessibility is a precondition for children with disabilities to live independently and participate fully and equally in society.
- **Support and ensure that development cooperation is directed to child- and youth-led organizations** in order to enable their participation in both democratic processes and institutions.

Goal 12: On responsible consumption and production

Unsustainable and unsafe consumption and production patterns lead to toxic waste and limited resources which disproportionately harms children's health, development and environments. Children and youth should be both protected from harmful pollutants and engaged in sustainability awareness and action.

All actors – including Sweden through its international development cooperation - should support and/or commit to:

- **Allocation to better preserve the planet and provide for people** is urgently needed. Current production and consumption patterns are not only polluting resources, but improperly allocated to children and families living in hunger.
- **Reduce the emissions of harmful pollutants** to prevent and mitigate their effects on children; emerging and alarming evidence is beginning to show the direct impact of chemicals and wastes on children. The size of children's bodies, the developmental stage of their internal organs and systems, and their characteristic habits make them far more vulnerable to health risks from pollution and toxins than the same exposure by adults.
- **Recognize the role businesses have in protecting child rights** and the role young people have in holding businesses to account. Given that business practices across industries will need to shift in order to meet SDG criteria, there is opportunity for smart growth in corporate economic, social and environmental responsibility. As companies adapt, explicit guidance is available on what it means for business to respect and support children's rights.

Goal 13: Climate change

Climate change and environmental degradation are equity issues that undermine the rights of every child, especially the most disadvantaged. According to the latest research from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), we have less than 11 years to make the transformation necessary to avoid the worst impacts of climate change. The level of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere would have to be cut by 45 per cent by 2030 to prevent global warming above 1.5oC – in other words, the threshold at which the worst impacts of climate change could be averted. This is the first time a global generation of children will grow up in a world made far more dangerous and uncertain as a result of a changing climate and degraded environment. Addressing climate change and mitigating its impact is imperative to protect the world's children and fulfil their rights.

All actors – including Sweden through its international development cooperation - should support and/or commit to:

- **Protecting children from the impacts of climate change** which requires increased focus and financing on adaptation and increasing the resilience of the services that children depend upon most - such as water, health, education and nutrition.
- **Address environmental degradation and reduce the effect of harmful pollutants on children:** Emerging and alarming evidence is beginning to show the direct impact of air pollution on children. Exposure to toxic indoor and outdoor air pollution kills over 600,000 children under the age of 15 every year.
- **Recognizing children as agents of change** and provide a platform to elevate their views, opinions and concerns, identifying solutions, and promoting environmentally sustainable lifestyles – setting an example for their communities. The participation of young people is both a necessity and also part of their fundamental rights (Article 12, Convention on the Rights of the Child).

Goal 16: On peace, justice and strong institutions

Peace, stability, human rights and effective governance, based on the rule of law are central to the realization of child rights; and a prerequisite for sustainable development. Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16 includes several explicit targets for children (16.2 on violence against children; and 6.9 on legal identity for all, including birth registration);

All actors – including Sweden through its international development cooperation - should support and/or commit to child specific targets; 16.2 and 16.9. We urge Sweden as a Pathfinder Country in the Global Partnership to end violence to push governments to:

- **Establish high-level oversight of a coordinated national policy agenda** to end violence against children.
- **Implement and reform laws** to ensure the prohibition of all forms of violence against children in all settings.
- **Implement safe school policies**, including focus on ending corporal punishment, bullying and sexual violence in schools.
- **Strengthen national coordination efforts** to implement multi sectoral programmes to prevent and respond to violence against children, underpinned by a robust social service workforce.
- **Take specific measures to fight online abuse, bullying and exploitation of children.** Access to the internet is increasing and must be made safe for children.
- **Include violence against children in the climate change risk analysis and**

climate adaptation plans, realizing the severe downstream effects environmental degradation and climate change have on children, such as child labour, child marriage, child soldiery, etc.

Target 16.9

A birth certificate is more than just a piece of paper – it's the right to an identity and the key to citizenship and rights such as attending school, receiving care or protection. Children who are not registered are amongst the most marginalized groups in societies, and without a legal identity, their opportunities decrease. Children who are forcibly displaced due to crisis and conflict are particularly vulnerable, as they often are not registered and therefore also risk being both state- and identity-less.

- **Sweden, with one of the oldest and best functioning birth registration systems, should share both their knowledge and experience and should also invest in programs that strengthen countries birth registration systems to ensure that all children obtain a birth certificate.**

Goal 17: On partnerships

Partnerships are the glue for SDG implementation and will be essential to make the agenda a reality. With 9 years to go to achieve the SDGs, UN Member States and the Secretary General have called for a “Decade of Action and Delivery” to accelerate progress on the SDGs from now until the year 2030. This is not happening fast enough.

All actors – including Sweden through its international development cooperation - should support and/or commit to:

- **Build, strengthen and expand partnerships with civil society and the private sector.** Platforms between different actors foster innovation. Partnering with the private sector allows for the possibility of a faster recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and accelerating the SDGs by driving inclusive economic growth, increasing access to essential services and developing innovative and environmentally sustainable solutions that meet social needs.
- **Leverage and pool resources, capacities, technology and data.**
- The 2030 Agenda specifically recognizes and ensures children as rights holders and partners in implementation with the right to participate in actions and decision-making processes affecting them, in accordance with their age and maturity. **Decision-makers should create platforms for their engagement**, provide access to information in line with their evolving capacities, and build their capacity to gain skills, knowledge, leadership capabilities and confidence. Children should be systematically involved in SDG processes, implementation, and monitoring, and in policy and program design.

Child right perspective in the ODA needed to deliver on the 2030 Agenda

Since 1975, Sweden has exceeded the UN's 0.7% target for the ratio of ODA-to-GNI. Since 2008, it has maintained its long-term commitment to spending around 1% of its GNI on ODA². However, there is currently a political debate around cutting down on the ODA levels. **From a child rights perspective that would be detrimental. Now is not the time to cut down.** ODA alone is insufficient to enable the finance needed to achieve the SDGs, but it remains an important source of financing. Sweden is recognized as a major contributor to ODA and a role model making a strong contribution to realizing children's rights around the world. However, **we seek an even stronger child rights perspective from Sweden** for other countries to follow suit. Children are often said to be a Swedish priority, but this is not always clear in its policies.

Our recommendations for a stronger child rights perspective from Sweden:

1. Children's rights must be a priority issue

- Children's rights must be a high priority in Sweden's foreign and development aid policy. This should be reflected in the overall policy document for development cooperation, the foreign declaration, Sweden's objectives for Agenda 2030 and thematic and regional strategies.

2. Development funds shall be directed at children's rights

- Sweden's development assistance must strengthen child rights, which must be clearly seen in specific initiatives, strategies and allocated budgets.
- There must be a consequence in how children's rights are emphasized in the strategies and how this is then reflected in the actual efforts and funds paid out.
- The child rights perspective must be a clear part of the analysis of the rights based approach. By that we mean all aspects and not just non-discrimination (which is now most often referred to in interventions).

3. Children's participation and influence

- Children must be seen as rights holders and their own actors with the right to influence decisions that affect them. Children should also be seen as important actors in charge for a more sustainable development and their potential as human rights defenders should be better utilized.
- Children must to a greater extent participate and have an influence in the planning and implementation of development assistance initiatives that affect them.
- Children should not only be seen as a particularly vulnerable group in need of help.

4. Resources and expertise of responsible authorities and politicians

- There must be special child rights expertise within Swedish authorities and ministries that work with development and foreign policy.
- There must be sufficient resources and competence in the responsible authorities (mainly the Ministry of Social Affairs, Sida and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) to be able to apply the child rights perspective.
- All relevant administrators must have basic knowledge of the child rights perspective.

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https://donortracker.org/country/sweden?gclid=Cj0KCQjw--GFBhDeARIsACH_kdanmJF5di__Fe9Z9smPLHiLKyMpV9D3uclsZO38iK0kXWM0Cp_wlz4aAsdcEALw_wcB

Conclusion

The ongoing crisis of the global COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated the situation for children, especially for the most vulnerable causing an immediate impact on children's well-being, and medium to long-term challenges to recovery. Sweden has an opportunity to become the leading child rights champion by incorporating a clearer child rights perspective **in its foreign and development politics**.

It is crucial to listen to children and young people and **include them in decision-making**. They are the ones that will be living with the impact of this pandemic for years to come and must therefore be included in decisions that affect their future. To fulfil our shared SDG overarching principle to Leave No One Behind, any action taken must prioritize the needs of the most marginalized children and young people. This includes girls, those facing poverty, exclusion, or violence, children with disabilities, children affected or displaced by humanitarian crises and children without parental care.

By prioritizing the key asks for children under each SDG in focus during this year's HLPF (as well as the rest of the SDGs) we can both mitigate the worst effects of the pandemic as it continues to spread around the globe and build back a better future in line with the Agenda 2030 for all children. Sweden can be the gamechanger in this endeavour.

Signatory organisations:

