



Government Offices of Sweden
Ministry for Foreign Affairs



Vincent Tremeau/World Bank

Sweden's development assistance for health

2023

Status report

The global health situation in 2023 was impacted by the continuation of elevated geopolitical tensions, conflicts, climate change and rising inflation. Together with the COVID-19 pandemic, these concurrent crises have put major pressure on health care systems around the world. The ability to provide basic care, vaccinations and medicines has been particularly affected in low- and middle-income countries. The prospects of achieving the 2030 Agenda's health-related goals appear bleak.

Sweden continues to be an important actor and donor in the area of global health. In 2023, its development assistance for health increased to a total of SEK 5.7 billion. Sweden's extensive bilateral support to Ukraine included an increase in its development assistance for health, to respond to the strains on Ukrainian health care infrastructure caused by Russian attacks and the increased burden of disease in Ukraine as a result of the war. Ukraine is now the third-largest recipient country of Swedish development assistance for health.

Extreme weather events resulting from climate change continued to affect developing countries with high existing burdens of disease and weak health care systems. Climate change also continued to affect access to, and availability of, the most basic essentials, such as clean air, water and food. It also increased the risk of spreading mosquito- and water-borne diseases such as malaria, cholera and typhoid fever – in both new contexts and where the effects were already severe.

Widespread and well-organised opposition to human rights and freedoms – particularly against women's and girls' full enjoyment of sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) – continued in 2023. The continued stigmatisation of SRHR restricted women's, girls' and LGBTIQ people's right to self-determination over their own bodies. Alarming, maternal mortality rates – as an indicator of access to and quality of SRHR – have stagnated since 2015¹.

Despite the extensive challenges, there were a number of significant successes in health and SRHR in 2023: global child mortality sank to historically low levels²

¹ World health statistics 2023: monitoring health for the SDGs, Sustainable Development Goals. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2023. Licence: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO. [World health statistics 2023 – Monitoring health for the SDGs \(who.int\)](#)

² UNICEF. Levels and Trends in Child Mortality. UNICEF, 2024 [Levels and trends in child mortality – UNICEF DATA](#)

and the number of people infected with HIV was at a record low³. A number of countries took forceful legal measures to strengthen SRHR, including through more liberal abortion laws and decriminalisation of abortion. Access to contraceptives and SRHR services increased in a number of countries.

The increased global health awareness that resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic was reflected in the international agenda in 2023. Global health was prioritised under the Swedish Presidency of the Council of the European Union. This included the adoption of a new Council recommendation for the EU's efforts against antimicrobial resistance (AMR)⁴. Sweden also led negotiations on Council conclusions on the EU's new global health strategy, which were subsequently adopted in January 2024 under Belgium's Presidency of the Council of the EU⁵.

Three high-level meetings on health were held during the UN General Assembly High-level Week in September 2023, on the topics of pandemic prevention, universal health coverage and the fight against tuberculosis. In the political declaration that was adopted, countries committed to speeding up their efforts and implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda. Efforts to integrate health and climate issues continued throughout the year, including during the UN Climate Change Conference (COP28) in Dubai with discussions on the impact of climate change on health⁶ and food systems⁷.

Basic premises for Sweden's global health efforts

The report presents the results of development assistance for health in 2023. Unlike previous years, a separate annex with statistical reports (including methodology) has been published. The report highlights four focus areas: Sweden's overall development assistance for health, multilateral recipients of development assistance for health from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, bilateral health support from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) and Sweden's overall support to SRHR.

³ UNAIDS. Global AIDS Update 2024. UNAIDS, 2024. https://www.unaids.org/sites/default/files/media_asset/2024-unaids-global-aids-update_en.pdf

⁴ Regeringen. Den svenska strategin för arbetet mot antibiotikaresistens förlängs. Press release, 5 December 2023. [Den svenska strategin för arbetet mot antibiotikaresistens förlängs – Regeringen.se](#)

⁵ European Council. EU Global Health Strategy: Council approves Conclusions. Press release, 29 Januari 2024. [EU Global Health Strategy: Council approves conclusions – Consilium \(europa.eu\)](#)

⁶ World Health Organization. Global Health Achievements 2023. WHO, 2023. [Global health achievements 2023 \(who.int\)](#)

⁷ Norden.org. En milstolpe för mat och hälsa: Det nordiska samarbetet visade värden på COP28. Norden.org, 2024 [En milstolpe för mat och hälsa: Det nordiska samarbetet visade vägen på COP28 \(norden.org\)](#)

Sweden's health support was based on the view that good health, including women's and girls' full enjoyment of SRHR, is a fundamental right. One of the main focus areas of Swedish development assistance for health has therefore been to strengthen national health and medical care systems. Resilient medical care systems are a prerequisite to maintain good health in times of crisis and conflict. Good health and SRHR are more than just a matter of rights; they are essential for people to reach their full potential. Investments in health and SRHR have enabled greater productivity and been an investment in the development of society as a whole.

Sweden's overall efforts and engagement to promote global health involve cooperation with and support to both multilateral actors, such as the EU and the UN, and bilateral initiatives through partner organisations. In 2023, Sweden invested in preventive health measures such as water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) and improved access to vaccines and medicines. Extensive support has been allocated to combatting contemporary health risks and preventing future ones through treatment of communicable diseases, such as malaria, HIV and tuberculosis.

Sweden has been actively involved in efforts with partners and partner countries to counteract attempts to undermine people's rights and freedoms, including SRHR. Sweden is pushing the agenda forward through dialogue and advocacy, such as by means of board work and support to multilateral organisations to increase country-level impact and promote people's rights and freedoms.

In December 2023, the Government presented its reform agenda, 'Development assistance for a new era – freedom, empowerment and sustainable growth', which outlines the new overall direction for Swedish development assistance. Global health is one of seven thematic priorities in the reform agenda, focusing on good health for the most vulnerable people, enhanced pandemic preparedness, sustainable and resilient health care systems and everyone's full enjoyment of SRHR.

Special emphasis is placed on increased cooperation with civil society actors as implementing partners. Promotion of Swedish innovations is highlighted as a key in further efforts to improve global health. Implementation of the reform agenda's global health priorities and SRHR began in 2024 and will be reflected in the 2025 development assistance for health report.

Sweden's overall development assistance for health in 2023

Sweden's development assistance for health amounted to approximately SEK 5.7 billion in 2023, accounting for 10.4 per cent of Sweden's total development assistance, excluding deductions for asylum costs. Approximately SEK 3.4 billion (equivalent to 61 per cent) of this was channelled via the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. The remaining funds, just over SEK 2.2 billion (corresponding to 39 per cent), were channelled via Sida's bilateral, regional and global strategies. Table 1 presents an overview of Sweden's development assistance for health in 2019–2023.

The total amount of development assistance for health has varied over the years. In 2020–2021, it was record high in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Percentage-wise, total development assistance for health in 2023 decreased slightly compared to pre-pandemic levels. During the period 2019–2023, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs managed a larger financial share of Sweden's development assistance for health than Sida.

Table 1 Sweden's development assistance for health 2019–2023, reported in millions of SEK.

	2019		2020		2021		2022		2023	
	MSEK	%	MSEK	%	MSEK	%	MSEK	%	MSEK	%
Total development assistance for health	5 208	11.2	6 199	11.1	6 566	13.6	5 937	11.4	5 713	10.4
Ministry for Foreign Affairs	2 820	54.1	3 493	56.3	3 554	54.1	3 869	65.2	3 476	60.8
Multilateral core support	2 787	98.8	3 119	89.3	3 132	88.1	3 143	81.2	2 943	84.7
Other	33	1.2	374	10.7	422	11.9	727	18.8	533	15.3
Sida	2 388	45.9	2 706	43.7	3 012	45.9	2 067	34.8	2 237	39.2
Bilateral strategies	1 167	48.9	1 385	51.2	1 546	51.3	1 155	55.9	1 120	50.0
Regional strategies	414	17.4	455	16.8	504	16.7	283	13.7	569	25.4
Global strategies	807	33.8	866	32.0	962	31.9	629	30.4	549	24.5

Recipients of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs’ development assistance for health

The majority of Sweden’s development assistance for health in 2023 that was managed by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs was channelled as multilateral core support. The largest recipient of Swedish development assistance for health in 2023 was the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, followed by the World Bank, the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), Gavi (the Vaccine Alliance) and the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF). A complete list of recipients of multilateral core support is presented in Figure 1. Recipients of development assistance for health have only shifted marginally over the years, which can be interpreted as an indication of Sweden’s long-lasting cooperation with international partners and their work at country level. Compared to development assistance for health in 2022, the biggest changes are UNFPA’s decreased core support and the inclusion of the International Vaccine Institute (IVI) as a recipient of core support.

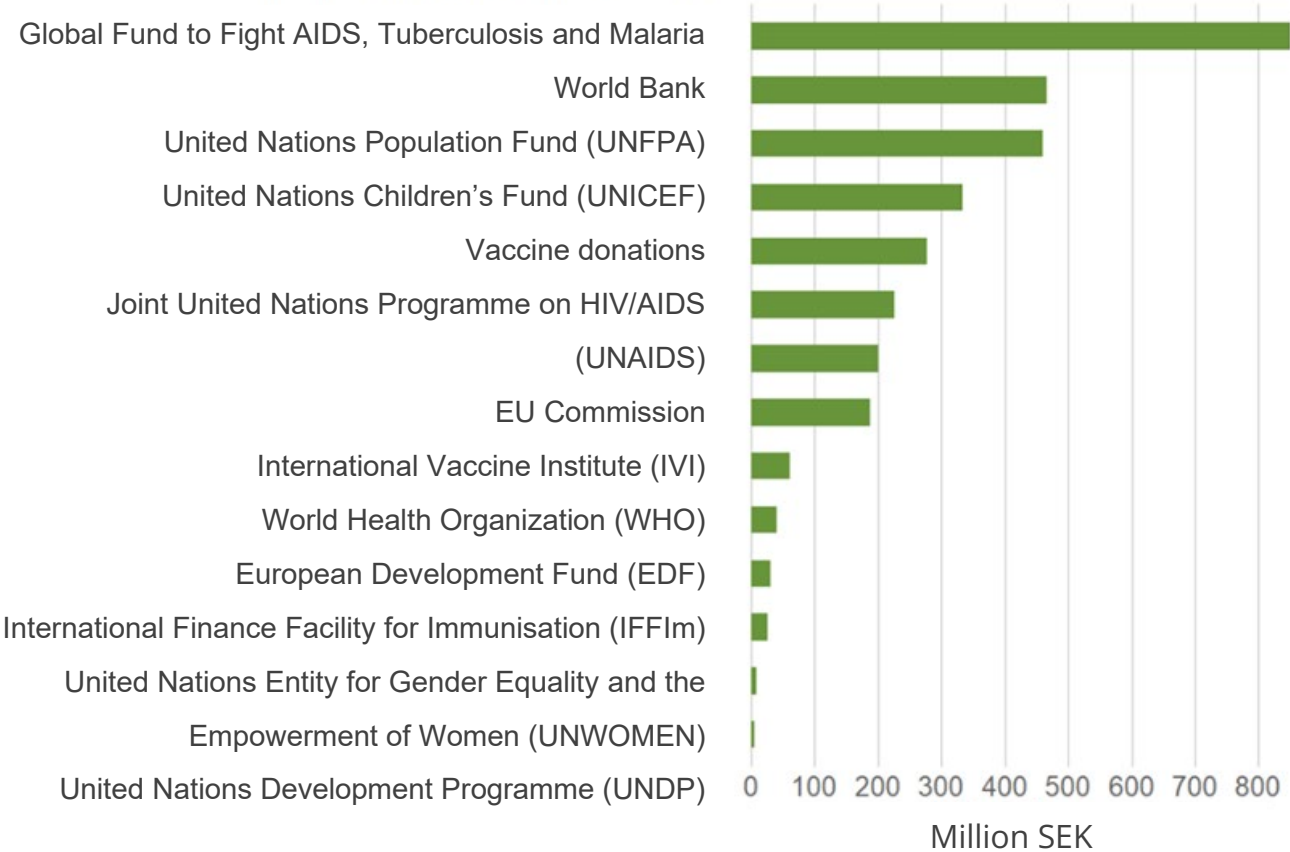


Figure 1 Recipients of development assistance for health via the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in 2023 (in million SEK)

Sweden's substantial support to, and active cooperation with, a number of leading development and humanitarian actors has contributed to the implementation of Swedish priorities. The largest recipient of development assistance for health is the **Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria**, whose work has helped strengthen and develop resilient health systems in low- and middle-income countries. The Global Fund has supported the integration of HIV, tuberculosis and malaria programmes in national health structures. In 2023, the Global Fund's targeted efforts to tackle these three diseases had major impact at country level, including 24.5 million people treated for HIV, 220 million mosquito nets distributed to protect against malaria and 6.7 million people treated for tuberculosis⁸.

Through the **World Bank**, Sweden has helped strengthen primary care and public health care in low- and middle-income countries. Between 2010 and 2022, the World Bank funded basic health services for more than 1 billion people and vaccination efforts for around 440 million children. In Yemen, for example, Sweden's support to the World Bank helped enhance monitoring and early warning systems to detect and respond to climate-sensitive disease outbreaks such as cholera⁹. Sweden's support also contributed to targeted efforts in Bangladesh to improve primary care in areas with limited access to public health care¹⁰.

Through **Gavi**, Sweden has supported funding to increase vaccination coverage among children in developing countries and supported countries' transition to independent funding of child vaccination programmes. Since 2000, Gavi has helped approximately 1 billion children to receive their routine vaccinations and 54 vaccine programmes, originally supported by Gavi, in low- and middle-income countries to be funded entirely by the countries themselves¹¹.

Swedish support to UNICEF helped to reach more than 70 per cent of children under the age of 5 in 47 countries with high vulnerability and mortality rates with targeted efforts to combat malnutrition. UNICEF's vaccination efforts also led to the delivery of 6.2 million doses of the world's first malaria vaccine to a number

⁸ The Global Fund. Results Report 2023. The Global Fund, 2023. https://www.theglobalfund.org/media/13263/corporate_2023resultsreport_report_en.pdf.

⁹ World Bank. Annual Report 2023. World Bank, 2023. [Annual Report 2023 \(worldbank.org\)](https://www.worldbank.org/annual-report-2023)

¹⁰ World Bank. World Bank Helps Bangladesh Improve Primary Healthcare in Cities. Press release, 30 August 2023. [World Bank Helps Bangladesh Improve Primary Healthcare in Cities](https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2023/08/30/world-bank-helps-bangladesh-improve-primary-healthcare-in-cities)

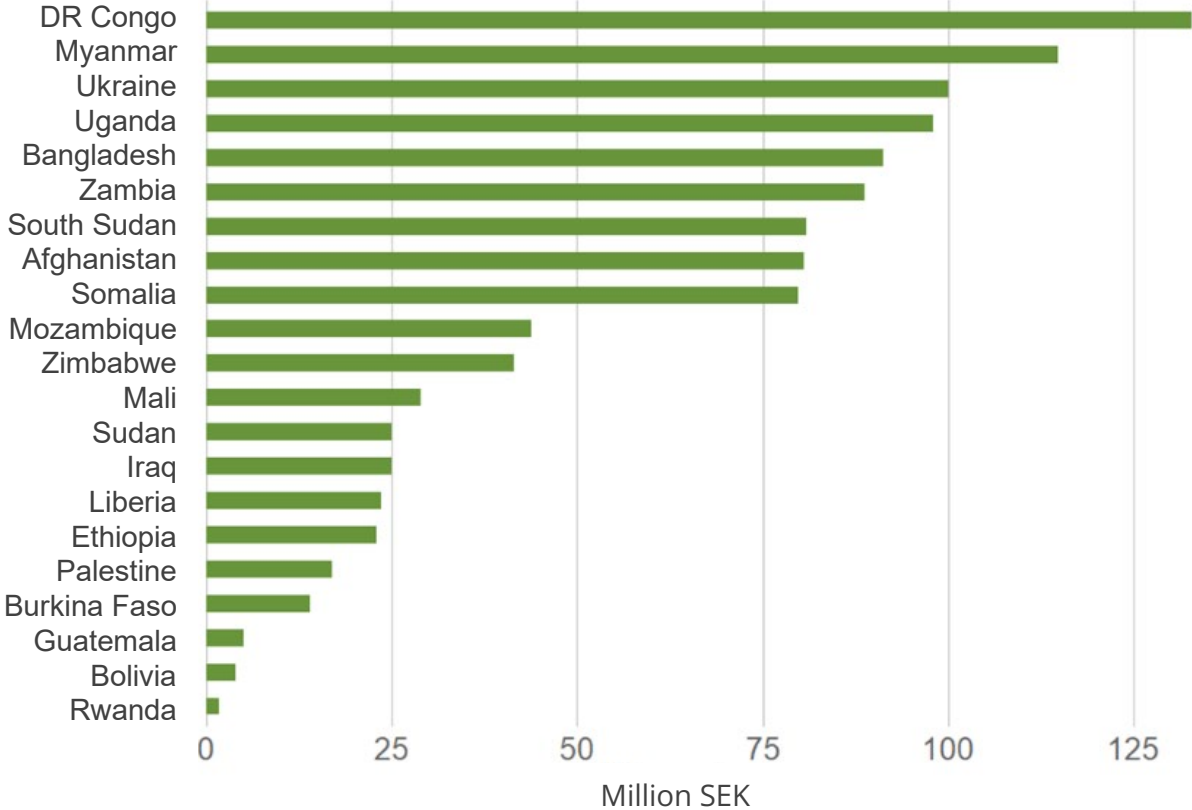
¹¹ Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance. Progress report 2022. Gavi, 2022. <https://www.gavi.org/sites/default/files/programmes-impact/our-impact/apr/Gavi-Progress-Report-2022.pdf>.

of African countries and the vaccination of 132 million children against measles – including 32.4 million children in humanitarian contexts¹². Efforts aimed at increasing children’s protection against potentially life-threatening diseases are an investment in their opportunities to attend school and grow up free from preventable infectious diseases.

Sida’s bilateral development assistance for health in 2023

Sida’s development assistance for health in 2023 amounted to SEK 2.2 billion, an increase of SEK 170 million – corresponding to 8 per cent – from 2022. The majority of Sida’s development assistance for health was channelled through bilateral strategies (country partnerships), followed by regional and global strategies. In 2023, three countries each received more than SEK 100 million in bilateral development assistance for health: the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Myanmar and Ukraine. Bilateral support to Ukraine increased from 2022, making it the third-largest recipient country.

Figure 2 Development assistance for health via Sida in 2023 – the largest recipient countries of bilateral support (in million SEK)



¹² UNICEF. Annual Report 2023. UNICEF, 2023
<https://www.unicef.org/media/157491/file/UNICEF%20Annual%20report%202023%20EN.pdf>.

In Sida's bilateral, regional and global support, there is a diversity of implementation partners, including multilateral organisations, civil society organisations and states/authorities, of which the former two represent nearly 90 per cent of Sida's health partnership. Cooperation with civil society increased from 2019 to 2023, accounting for over 40 per cent in 2023, while cooperation with public organisations has varied over the years and accounted for 4.2 per cent in 2023.

Sida's efforts to achieve the goal of equitable health focused on increased awareness and access to SRHR, sustainable national health systems and institutions, and access to clean water, safe and sustainable sanitation, and hygiene. Equitable health was identified as a thematic area in 12 out of 47 Sida strategies, including the strategy for sustainable social development 2018–2023, the regional strategies for Africa (2022–2026) and Latin America (2021–2025), and nine bilateral strategies.

Sweden's support to WHO's work in Ukraine helped 5.6 million Ukrainians to receive care for non-communicable diseases in 2023; 38 000 received access to emergency surgery and trauma care, and 23 000 people were reached by efforts to prevent and address mental ill health¹³. In Myanmar, the largest share of Swedish health support was provided through a fund that has contributed to basic maternal and health care. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Swedish support to actors such as UNFPA helped improve the country's maternal care and childcare, and secure access to contraception, especially among young people¹⁴.

Sweden's overall support to improve sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR)

Sweden's SRHR support in 2023 amounted to approximately SEK 2.8 billion, equivalent to about 5.1 per cent of total development assistance and a 5.6 per cent decrease from 2022. This decrease was on the part of both the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Sida, which was a consequence of migration deductions, changed strategy terms and agreements. Figure 3 shows the levels of Sweden's development assistance for SRHR between 2019 and 2023.

¹³ Sida. Strategirapport för Global strategi för hållbar social utveckling 2018–2023. Sida, 2023. [Mall strategirapport \(openaid.se\)](#)

¹⁴ Sida. Sida's work in Democratic Republic of the Congo Sida, 2023. [Sida's work in Democratic Republic of the Congo | Sida](#)

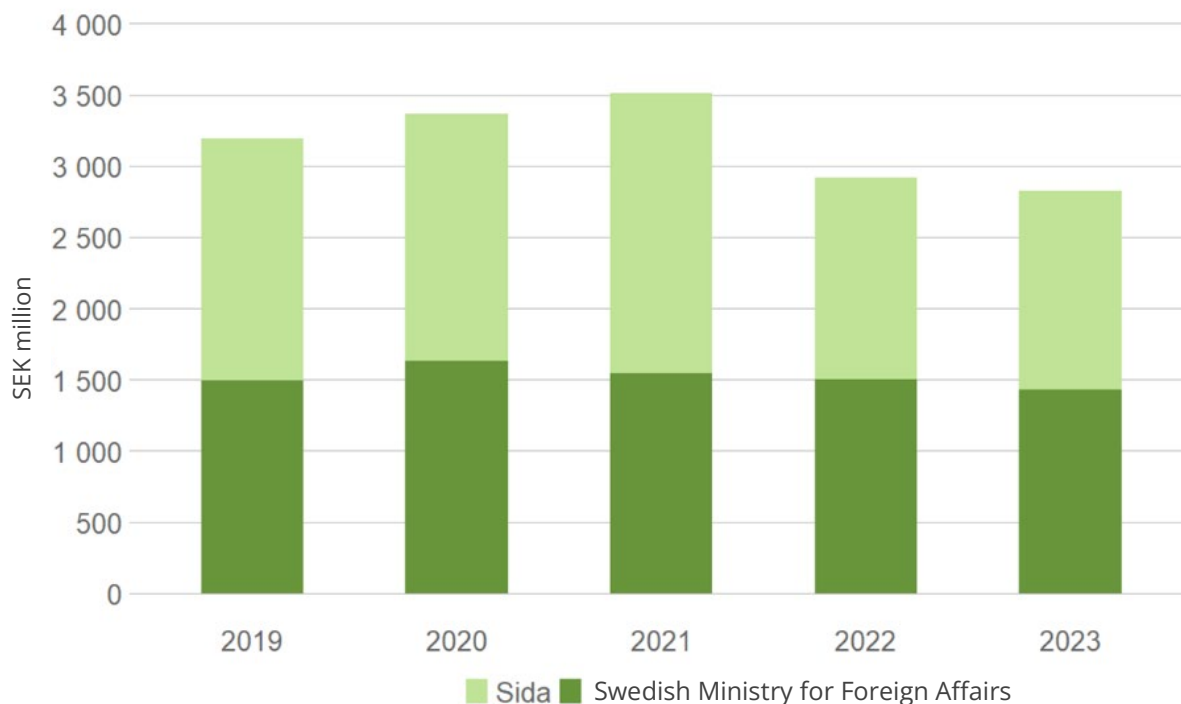


Figure 3 Swedish development assistance for SRHR in the period 2019–2023, allocated to Sida and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs respectively, in millions of SEK

Sweden’s support to, and efforts to promote, SRHR included a wide range of initiatives, such as access to comprehensive sexuality education, contraception, maternity care and safe abortion, prevention of sexual and gender-based violence, child marriage and female genital mutilation, prevention and treatment of HIV, and LGBTIQ people’s full enjoyment of human rights.

The support to UNFPA had an impact in many countries, including through the UNFPA Maternal Health Fund, which contributed to the education of 84 000 midwives around the world and safe maternity care for 2.4 million women. In Ukraine, UNFPA contributed to life-saving maternal health care and sheltered housing for survivors of gender-based violence, as well as the adoption of a new gender equality strategy and implementation plan in the education sector¹⁵. Through Sida and the Global Safe Abortion Dialogue network, Sweden worked to promote access to quality-assured abortion medicines in 2023¹⁶. In 2022–2023, Sweden – through UNFPA – helped more than 270 000 girls avoid female genital

¹⁵ Sida. Sida Annual Report 2023 Sida, 2024. [Sida årsredovisning 2023](#)

¹⁶ Sida. Strategirapport för Global strategi för hållbar social utveckling 2018–2023. Sida, 2023. [Mall strategirapport \(openaid.se\)](#)

mutilation. It also helped to ensure 2.4 million safe and assisted births in 39 humanitarian contexts¹⁷.

In international forums, such as the UN Human Rights Council, the UN Commission on Population and Development, and the UN Commission on the Status of Women, Sweden continued to push for strengthened norms and initiatives that promote women's and girls' empowerment and SRHR.

¹⁷ United Nations Population Fund. 2022-2023 Report. UNFPA, 2023. <https://www.unfpa.org/2022-2023-report>



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