

**SWEDEN'S NEW NATIONAL ACTION PLAN
FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE UN
SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTION WOMEN,
PEACE AND SECURITY, 2024-2028**
– an analysis by civil society



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INTRODUCTION

In 2006, Sweden was among the first countries in the world to adopt a national action plan (NAP) for the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and subsequent resolutions¹. Resolution 1325, adopted in 2000, marked a significant step forward in recognising the role of women in peace processes, and emphasised the importance of protecting women's rights during conflict and promoting women's active participation in peacebuilding efforts. Over the years, Sweden has continued to revise and update its strategy to better meet the challenges and needs that arise in the work to promote the agenda. In 2023, Sweden adopted its latest action plan for women, peace and security.

The purpose of this analysis is to examine and evaluate the new action plan by comparing it with its predecessor, furthermore, the analysis intends to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the new strategy and how it can be reinforced and improved. Furthermore, we have considered the recommendations made in the reports from 2020 and 2022 evaluating the previous plan, to see how well these recommendations are addressed in the new plan. Each of them provided suggestions for the updating of the new plan. These reports were prepared by Sweco at the request of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and were based on interviews and workshops with stakeholders and document studies².

The analysis presents what we see as the most important differences between the current and previous action plans, both in terms of their overall objectives and in a number of key areas of implementation. It is produced by the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom Sweden (WILPF Sweden), Kvinna till Kvinna and Operation 1325, which are all members of the National Action Plan Working Group in Sweden.

PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN AND GIRLS IN CONFLICT PREVENTION EFFORTS

With regard to conflict prevention, the action plan states that Sweden will contribute to promoting equal participation of different groups of women and girls in prevention efforts. It is positive that the plan emphasises that women and girls are not a homogenous group, and that the different needs of women and girls' are taken into account. However, there is no reference to the role and participation of men and boys, which was highlighted in the previous action plan. The inclusion of men and boys is a necessity. To challenge deeply rooted power relations and norms. We believe that it is regrettable that the new plan does not include the previous language about "counteracting structural root causes of conflict and violence", as it is by rethinking the norms and behavioural patterns that perpetuate gender inequality that we can really create change.

¹ Irsten, et al. FN:s Agenda för Kvinnor, Fred och Säkerhet" (2022), IKFF. fns-agenda-for-kvinnor-fred-o-sakerhet-final.pdf (ikff.se) s.7

² Utvärdering av Sveriges tredje nationella handlingsplan för kvinnor, fred och säkerhet 2016-2020- Sweco (2020); Framtagande av Sveriges nya nationella handlingsplan för kvinnor, fred och säkerhet- Swecos rapport (2022)

The action plan emphasises the importance of preventing armed conflict by investing in gender equality and women's rights, but there are no references to important methods such as disarmament, mediation, diplomacy and women's empowerment. These are crucial tools to effectively prevent conflict and promote peace and stability.

We welcome the fact that the action plan recognises the important relationship between conflict and climate change and that related risks are taken into account in conflict prevention efforts. Here it would have been desirable to emphasise the importance of equal participation, and how changes in climate affect the security of different social groups as climate change increases the need for protection³.

INCLUSIVE AND GENDER-EQUAL PEACE PROCESSES AND PEACEBUILDING

The overall objective of the new action plan is that "Sweden will make visible and strengthen women's equal participation and influence in peace processes and in peace and state building, at all levels of society." Here too, the wording on the importance of engaging men has disappeared, as has the reference to "norms, attitudes and structures". We find this unfortunate. The new action plan emphasises that gender-equal peace processes are essential for long-term peace and security. This requires that work on gender equality is not just an issue for women, but something that concerns everyone in society.

It is also worrying to see that some key aspects in the field of disarmament have disappeared from the new action plan, including multilateral agreements, disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration processes (DDR), security sector reform (SSR) and informal disarmament initiatives. Increased access to weapons reinforces unequal power relations between genders and increases the risk of violence, including sexual violence against women and girls. Leaving out disarmament issues in the plan implies a lack of a holistic approach and risks affecting questions of participation and decision-making in disarmament processes, which are crucial for prevention and protection.

STRENGTHENING THE PROTECTION OF WOMEN AND GIRLS

With regard to the objective of strengthening protection against violence for women and girls, there are both similarities and differences with the previous plan. The previous plan emphasised the need for women affected by conflict to be actively involved in the planning, implementation and evaluation of humanitarian action. In the new action plan, women's active participation is not as prominent. Instead, it aims to strengthen access to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), strengthen the protection of women and girls before, during and after conflict. SRHR is described not only as a fundamental right but a key to strengthening women's and girls' economic empowerment and active participation in society. A greater focus on SRHR is positive, as there is currently a backlash against SRHR

³ Irsten, et al. "FN:s Agenda för Kvinnor, Fred och Säkerhet" (2022), IKFF. s.23

which represents a threat to the rights and security of women and girls⁴. However, it is important to integrate this into a broader strategy that addresses multi-faceted barriers to women's and girls' rights, and participation in society. It is also important to avoid reducing women to mere recipients of protection, but instead promoting women as active agents of change⁵.

We welcome the fact that the new plan retains wording on the particular vulnerability of women human rights defenders and women in political positions in conflict countries, and that Sweden should continue to contribute with support and protection to these groups. It is also positive that digital violence is included in the framework of gender-based violence.

LEADERSHIP AND EXPERTISE

The overall objective is: *Actions that contribute to the realisation of the Women, Peace and Security agenda should be mainstreamed in all relevant national and international activities.* One change from the previous plan is the addition of "relevant". We view with some concern such wording in the action plan, which opens the door for implementing authorities and actors to disregard integrating implementation when they wish, due to the arbitrariness of the concept.

CLIMATE

The action plan mentions climate under the section on the participation of women and girls in conflict prevention efforts: "In recent years, the links between climate change and conflict have become increasingly clear. Climate-related security risks should therefore be taken into account in the conflict prevention, both nationally and internationally." This is a step forward compared to the previous action plan, which did not refer to climate change and its link to conflicts at all. However, a clearer wording on how this "consideration" in conflict prevention is to be achieved could have been envisaged, especially when it is now linked to the participation of women and girls.

INTERSECTIONAL PERSPECTIVE

Sweco's evaluation showed that there was a demand for a clearer intersectional perspective in the action plan, i.e. "a perspective that visualises how different social categories and power categories and power structures interact and reinforce each other to create superior or inferior orders, and how factors such as age, ethnicity, socio-economic situation, geography, etc. interact with gender"⁶. The report argued that such a perspective

⁴ "Center Works to Combat Global Regression on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights" (2021), Center for Reproductive Rights.

⁵ Irsten, et al. "FN:s Agenda för Kvinnor, Fred och Säkerhet" (2022), IKFF. s.6

⁶ Zhou, et al. "Utvärdering av Sveriges Tredje Nationella Handlingsplan för Kvinnor, Fred och Säkerhet. (2020). Sweco. s. 17

is an important starting point for achieving results and change, and that the action plan should define intersectionality not only as a theory but as a method and approach and provides nine examples of how the action plan could include an intersectional approach.

The action plan makes no reference to intersectionality or intra-sectional approaches. The target group, women and girls are only developed with the statement: "Sweden will make visible and support particularly marginalised groups, such as women with disabilities, LGBTI people, young people and the elderly." However, no guidance is given on how this should be done.

FOCUS COUNTRIES

The geographical priorities of the action plan have been revised. In the previous plan, there were twelve focus countries, which were particularly prioritised and where "the embassies and consulates together with partners should have a stakeholder role, and where country-specific results can be followed up and contribute to learning". Sweco's evaluation, however, showed that the designation of focus countries had little effect, partly due to the unclear purpose and too large a number of focus countries⁷. Based on the evaluation, Sweco made several proposals for redesigning the focus countries, such as reducing the number, using focus countries as case studies in order to be able to follow up results in a more in-depth manner, or to work in new ways with collaboration between different Swedish actors in a country.

The new plan has removed the focus countries. The geographical prioritisation is only for Ukraine. The action plan does not name it as a focus country but states that: "Support for Ukraine is one of the government's most important foreign policy priorities. This will also be reflected in the work on the agenda for women, peace and security", "Special priority will be given to Ukraine and countries affected by Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine", and that "a priority is also to promote women's participation in Ukraine's reconstruction efforts. The Women, Peace and Security agenda is of course highly relevant to Ukraine. However, to ensure a robust action plan, it is important to integrate the overall Ukraine strategy into the implementation, rather than having Ukraine as the sole focus country of the action plan. In the long term, this may also create problems, as Ukraine's situation and needs may change in relation to other countries and contexts during the implementation period of the plan 2024-2028. Furthermore, other countries in which Sweden has previously had extensive involvement in the work for the Women, Peace, and Security agenda should not be forgotten, so that this work is maintained and can be built on.

Regarding the implementation through Sweden's embassies and consulates (where the focus countries previously had specific mandates for implementation), the new action plan states that "Sweden's international authorities abroad shall, where possible, be able to assist in the action plan for women, peace and security based on the activities of the implementing authorities." We believe this is a weakening of the mission and mandate for

⁷ Ibid.

the foreign authorities to carry out the work, and risks lead to lowered ambition, resourcing, and prioritisation.

GOVERNANCE ISSUES

Issues related to governance have already been discussed in the past, including in the action plan's working group. The unclear role of the plan as a steering document has been emphasised by the implementing authorities, who said that their activities have clearer governance via letters of appropriation and business plans, and that the action plan (2016-2020) had an unclear relationship with these. Sweco's 2022 report suggested changes to "identify which authorities are responsible for contributing to the respective orientation", to "describe briefly how each strategic orientation is relevant to each authorities' mandate" and to "provide some guidance and examples of how the authorities' activities and goals can be formulated". One proposal was also that the action plan should establish "common impact targets and visions"⁸.

The new action plan aims to be less detail-oriented, and to give greater ownership to the authorities, who will then be better able to integrate the implementation with their regular operations. This is also in line with Sweco's recommendations. However, there are no guidelines for how this should be done. The authorities are encouraged to "identify appropriate forms for implementation" and are not given any further guidance on how the plans should be designed. In terms of cooperation, various actors are mentioned, including regional, multilateral, and civil society actors, but there is no specification of this and how the responsibilities are allocated. The proposed changes from the Sweco report have not been included.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs will not have an implementation plan, as it is considered that the authorities are the implementing actors. This is a clear change from the previous plan, which stated that "Within the Government Offices, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Justice will implement the action plan. Some parts of the Ministry of Social Affairs and the activities of the Ministry of Education are affected by the plan". The previous plan also stated that: "The Government Offices (under the leadership of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) take clear political leadership and responsibility for monitoring the implementation of the action plan".

We believe that the very vague guidance risks leading to a reduction in ambition in implementation. The assignment on women, peace and security is often a marginal assignment in relation to the authorities' total activities, and without a clear mandate in terms of objectives and reporting, this work risks not being resourced or prioritised.

It would have been desirable for the strategic objectives to be formulated in such a way as to make it possible to assess the effectiveness of the work and the achievement of results. To ensure effective implementation we would have liked to see clearer visions and impact

⁸ Framtagande av Sveriges nya nationella handlingsplan för kvinnor, fred och säkerhet- Swecos rapport (2022) s. 10

targets, to allow for analyses during the implementation period, in order to evaluate progress, identify any obstacles and adapt as needed. Now, instead, this governance and goal formulation is left entirely to the respective authority, which we believe risks weakening the overall implementation. We would have liked to see a mechanism in the action plan that coordinates the implementing actors' plans for implementation and ensures that the entire agenda contains concrete operationalisations, and that these are sufficiently ambitious enough to contribute meaningfully to the objectives.

THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY

Civil society is mentioned as an actor in the new action plan: "Important for the implementation is also a close cooperation and partnership with civil society organisations locally, nationally, regionally and globally".

The previous plan stated that: "Civil society organisations and academia in both Sweden, and in conflict and post-conflict countries are important partners in the work on women, peace and security. The expertise, commitment and experience of civil society actors must be supported and utilised in the implementation of Sweden's action plan". Since the production of the previous plan, there have been additions of Security Council resolutions such as 2467⁹ and 2496¹⁰ which even more clearly emphasises the importance of the role of civil society. This is not reflected in the new action plan. In particular, regarding the role of civil society in Sweden, its implementation of the agenda both nationally and internationally including the support from Swedish civil society to the work of women's rights activists in other countries, and their role as bearers of knowledge and accountability. As civil society has been a driving force behind the emergence, development, and implementation of the agenda, we would have liked to see a greater inclusion of the of civil society's perspectives, views and contributions.

The process of developing the action plan was also not as inclusive of civil society as the previous action plan. The civil society actors who are part of the working group for the action plan have not been consulted in a meaningful way in the process of designing the new plan and were treated differently from the authorities in the working group in terms of information and influence on both process and content. This violates the practice of how Sweden has worked with the implementation of the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda.

Already before the preparation of Sweden's first action plan (2006) there was a working group consisting of relevant civil society organisations and authorities. Since then, the working group has played an important role in the development of new action plans, implementation, and evaluation of Sweden's work for Women, Peace, and Security. Prior to the previous action plan, Kvinna till Kvinna and WILPF Sweden were asked to consult with women's organisations. WILPF Sweden was asked to conduct consultations with women's organisations and women peacebuilders in five countries. Commissioned by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, WILPF Sweden wrote a report based on consultations with civil society and

⁹ United Nations Document, Resolution 2457, S/RES/2467(2019) (undocs.org)

¹⁰ United Nations Digital Library, Resolution 2496, Resolution 2496 (2019) / (un.org)

affected authorities in Sweden¹¹. WILPF Sweden, Kvinna till Kvinna and Operation 1325 then participated in the writing process of the action plan.

However, in the process of developing the new plan, Sweco was instead hired to carry out consultations with civil society and the implementing authorities, which meant less transparency and dialogue between civil society and the relevant authorities and ministries. The actual consultation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on the design of the action plan consisted of two short meetings, which lacked an agenda, a draft text on which to base the discussion, and in which no intended priorities were communicated. It is positive that the current action plan mentions the working group: "In consultation with the concerned ministries, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs coordinates a working group for authorities and civil society tasked with implementing the action plan". But it would have been desirable for this mission to be clarified, including wording on how frequently the group should meet and to clarify the role of the civil society in the work.

The meaningful participation of civil society is crucial and has been a success in Sweden's work. This is reflected in the previous action plan (2016-2020), and in Sweco's reports. They emphasise civil society's competence, commitment, and experience, and that an inclusive process creates ownership. The inclusion of civil society in the development processes of national action plans is also something that Sida emphasises as a prerequisite for the process to be inclusive, which Sweden encourages when support is given to these processes in other countries.

We are concerned about the marginalisation of civil society organisations that has occurred during the process of developing the plan. It is of utmost importance that the implementation continues to safeguard the role of civil society, as experts who can provide support and act as safeguards for accountability of implementing authorities both in Sweden and around the world.

FUNDING

Regarding the financing of the implementation of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda, both the current and the previous action plan state that funding is provided within the framework of the regular budget. The previous plan included a separate chapter on the issue of financing, which specifically pointed out that: "Sweden has a long tradition of generous and ambitious aid. Swedish aid should be clear in its values and courageous in action. The goal is for aid to reach one per cent of Sweden's gross national income. The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) has been tasked with ensuring an integrated conflict perspective and gender equality perspective in all development co-operation".

And: "During the period of the action plan, the government also intends to implement a specific catalytic initiative to support women as actors for peace: women as mediators, women as actors in peace processes and peacebuilding, women's rights defenders in conflict-affected countries." The current plan has only retained the first sentence from the

¹¹ Konsultationsrapport 1325, IKFF. 2015, s.4, s.22 [2015-Konsultationsrapport-1325-IKFF.pdf](#)

previous chapter on financing: "The implementation of the women, peace and security agenda shall be an integral part of the activities and funding is provided within the framework of the regular budget allocation".

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Gender equality issues tend to be de-prioritised in times of crisis. This is known to organisations that have been working for many decades and is a fundamental reason why the UN Security Council Resolutions for Women, Peace and Security were put in place in the first place. The vagueness of the new action plan risks leading to that outcome, that gender equality and the role and rights of women are forgotten. We therefore propose the following recommendations for the work ahead:

- Clarify the role of Ministry of Foreign Affairs in co-ordinating the work, including through clearer guidance to the authorities.
- Resource this work within the Government Offices of Sweden, including ensuring regular meetings with the entire action plan working group.
- Ensure that Sweden's security policy partnerships (including in the EU, NATO and the OSCE) do not prevent implementation of the women, peace, and security agenda.
- Enable implementing agencies to prioritise this work, including by providing adequate resources to create clear implementation plans with monitorable targets.
- Take advantage of the role of civil society and women's organisations in implementing the work, both in Sweden and globally, and clarify the importance of resources for women's rights organisations in conflict.
- Create broad political support for the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda, including through transparent implementation processes that also involve the Swedish Parliament.

POWER TO WOMEN IN PEACE PROCESSES



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