

Donor profile: Sweden

Funding for water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) in the SDG era

Key findings

Sweden's Official Development Assistance (ODA) to Water Supply and Sanitation (WSS)¹ peaked in 2018, but unfortunately, that year appears to be an anomaly. The sector's share of total bilateral ODA lags behind that of other donors. The 2023 budget for ODA and available data on commitments and disbursements suggest that the decline in WSS ODA has continued into 2022 and 2023.

Furthermore, there has been a significant decrease in the proportion of aid allocated to WWS programmes aimed at directly improving gender equality². Sweden could further enhance the integration of water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) and water security for meeting basic human needs, as well as addressing health, climate, and nutrition issues.

In view of this, Sweden has opportunities to:

- Ensure that WASH has clear goals and objectives in bilateral, regional, and thematic strategies.
- Increase the share of bilateral ODA allocated to WASH.
- Improve integration of WASH in the health sector.
- Redouble the focus on empowering women and girls within and through WASH interventions.
- Increase financing for integrated water and climate responses and include WASH as an integral part of strengthening climate resilience.

¹ The term Water supply and sanitation in this briefing generally refers to the Organisation for Co-operation and Development's Development Assistant Committee (OECD DAC) sector 140: Water supply and sanitation. This includes some water resource management activities which enable WASH services, as well as solid waste management. Within WASH, ODA to drinking water and sanitation are partly reported in overlapping subsectors and there is no separate subsector for hygiene.

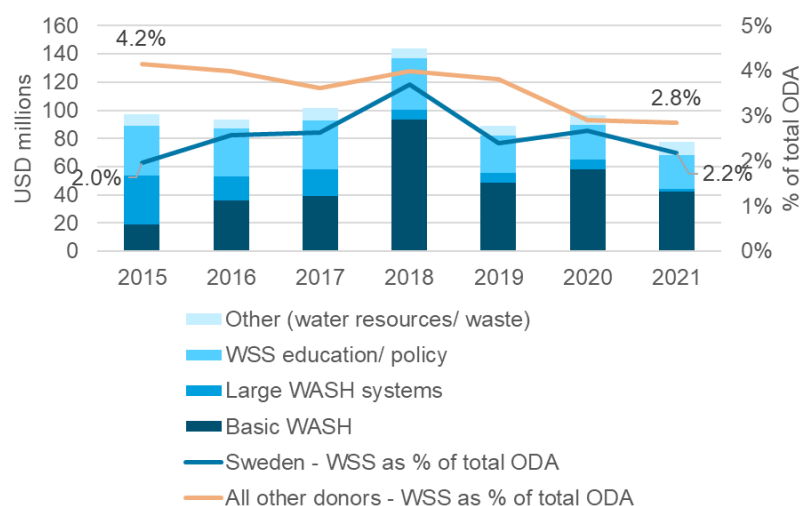
² Sida has consciously, and beyond WASH interventions, moved from prioritising projects with principal objectives to gender integration, which means higher focus on significant objectives. Greater attention has been placed on quality control of how the markers are used, which might have resulted in a more accurate but also lower rate of principle objectives. Another explanation might also be that some big projects have ended, some of which had been identified as having gender as a principle objective.

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Trend in support to WASH (2015-2021)³

- Sweden's ODA contribution to the WSS sector ranked 15th globally between 2015-2021, providing around US \$0.7 billion over the seven years.⁴ Its bilateral ODA share to WSS was lower compared to other donors (2.6% vs. 3.6%) over the same period (Figure 1).⁵

Figure 1: Sweden - WSS ODA disbursements from 2015 to 2021, both in total and as a share of total ODA.⁶



Source: OECD DAC CRS

- During the main COVID-19 response period for which data are available (2020-2021), average real-terms Swedish ODA disbursements for the WSS sector fell by 17% relative to the preceding years (2015-2019).

³ All data from OECD DAC Creditor Reporting System (CRS) database unless otherwise stated.

⁴ The term Water supply and sanitation in this briefing generally refers to the Organisation for Co-operation and Development's Development Assistant Committee (OECD DAC) sector 140: Water supply and sanitation. This includes some water resource management activities which enable WASH services, as well as solid waste management. Within WASH, ODA to drinking water and sanitation are partly reported in overlapping subsectors and there is no separate subsector for hygiene.

⁵ All financial values reported use data on gross bilateral disbursements in US dollars unless otherwise stated. Trends and averages over multiple years use constant US dollar values normalised to 2020 prices to aid interpretation over time. SEK to USD: 2015:8.43; 2016:8.56; 2017:8.55; 2018:8.69; 2019:9.46; 2020:9.21; 2021:8.58. 'Other donors' includes OECD DAC, non-DAC, and multilaterals providing ODA. Core contributions to multilaterals, over which donors do not have discretion to choose between WASH and other priorities, are excluded (for Sweden this was between 29% and 44% of the total, 2015-2021).

⁶ OECD DAC purpose codes/ subsectors categorised as follows – Basic WASH: 14030-14032; Large WASH systems: 14020-14022; WSS education/ policy: 14010, 14081; Other (water resources/ waste): 14015, 14040, 14050.

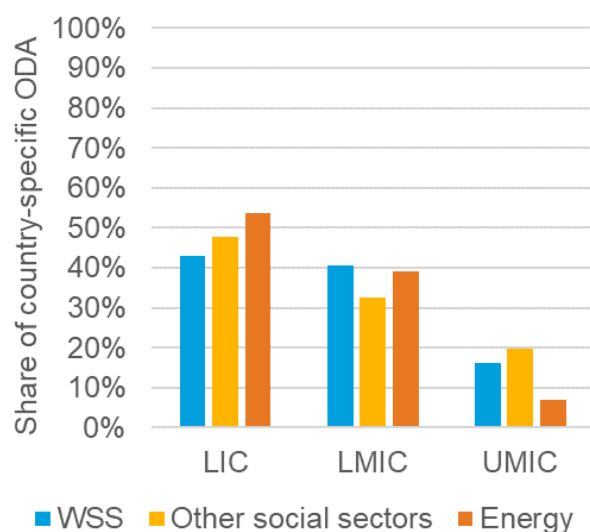
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- During the same period, ODA increased for all other social sectors – even when excluding significant allocations to COVID-19 control within the health sector – as well as for energy.⁷
- WSS ODA is weighted towards policy strengthening and education for the sector, more so than other donors (31% vs. 15%), and similarly towards basic WASH (48% vs. 21%). This potentially signals a focus for Sweden on system strengthening and serving the poorest communities.

Type of support and countries supported

- Sweden provided 100% of its WSS ODA as grants.
- A large majority of Sweden's WSS ODA is reported as regional in focus (i.e., to multiple countries - 68%). The specific country focus of Sweden's WSS ODA can therefore only be assessed for a third of the total.
- Sweden provides a larger share of bilateral grants to the poorest countries compared to other donors. However, when comparing Swedish aid to WASH with other social sectors and energy, bilateral WSS aid targets the poorest countries less (Figure 2).⁸

Figure 2: Sweden – country-specific ODA by country income groups for WSS, other social sectors, and energy from 2015 to 2021.



Source: OECD DAC CRS

⁷ WSS is compared with other social sectors and energy to reflect the social service and infrastructure elements of WASH. Calculation excludes ODA to purpose code 12664 – COVID-19 control, within the health sector (2020 and 2021). 'Real terms' = constant values normalised to 2020 prices. According to a report to Sweden's Expert Group for Aid Studies (EBA), Sweden allocated SEK76 million (~USD7m) in COVID-19 funding to the water and sanitation sector in 2020. It is not possible to directly compare these results with information from OECD DAC CRS due to the different data source used (PLANit). Schwensen, C., Lövkrona, J. and Scheibel Smed, L. (2022) [Swedish aid in the time of the pandemic](#). Expert Group for Aid Studies: Stockholm.

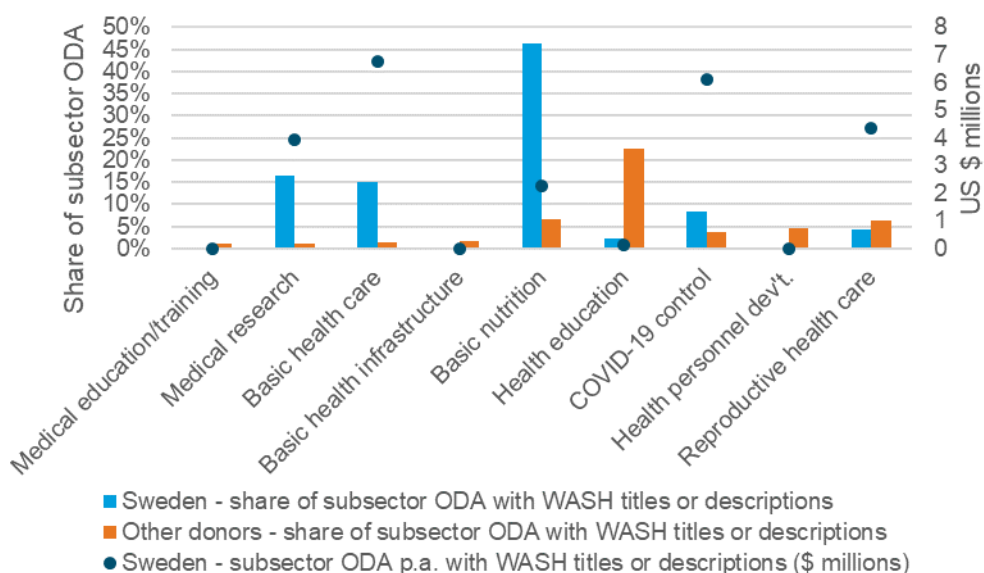
⁸ Countries categorised as low income by the World Bank in 2021. Analysis does not account for changes in income category for some countries over the period. Not shown on chart: negligible ODA to these sectors provided to 2021 high-income countries and countries not classified by income.

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Health

A WASH keyword search across health subsectors indicates some attempts to integrate WASH within Sweden's health ODA, but there is room for further improvement.⁹ WASH terms appear in project titles and descriptions in 15% or more of ODA to the medical research, medical services, basic healthcare, and basic nutrition subsectors – significantly more than other donors in all areas. They also feature in 8% of ODA for COVID-19 control (2020 and 2021 only), compared to 4% of this subsector's ODA from other donors. Other subsectors where WASH terms are present, although to a lesser extent and less than other donors, include health education (2% of ODA), health personnel development (0.2%), and reproductive health care (4%) (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Sweden – Health subsectors with WASH terms in project titles or descriptions: share of ODA (vs. other donors) and average ODA per year.



Source: OECD DAC CRS

⁹ This is a proxy for projects' attention to WASH. The keyword search for a range of WASH terms in English, French and Spanish was tested and refined and performed on project titles and descriptions in the OECD DAC CRS database. See accompanying briefing for WASH keyword search methodology and subsector codes. Excludes health subsectors related to non-communicable diseases; includes reproductive health care subsector from the population sector.

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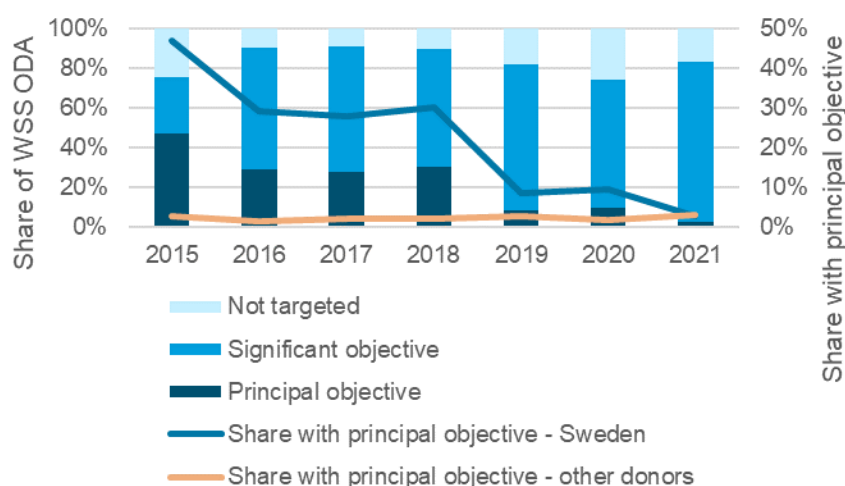


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Gender equality

Sweden screened virtually all its WSS activities for their contribution to gender equality. However, over the period, the share of WSS ODA with a principal gender equality objective has plummeted from a high of 47% in 2015, which was well above the average for other donors, to 3% in 2020 (Figure 4).¹⁰ The share with a significant or a principal objective has consistently been higher than that of other donors (averaging at 83% vs. 41%). However, the significant decline in Sweden's WSS ODA with a principal gender equality objective may suggest a diminishing focus on this area.

Figure 4: Sweden - WSS ODA disbursements from 2015 to 2021, with gender equality as principle or significant objective.



Source: OECD DAC CRS

Climate adaptation

Among other donors, there has been a general upward trend in the share of WSS ODA with climate change adaptation as a principal or significant objective, rising from 27% to 53% over the period (screened activities only). Sweden's WSS ODA has consistently had a higher share with climate change adaptation as a principal or significant objective, ranging from 67% to 85%¹¹ This suggests successful climate mainstreaming. However, there is a possibility of double counting, as Sweden reports a proportion of this ODA as climate finance to the UNFCCC, potentially overlapping with climate finance resources to the WSS sector.¹²

¹⁰ Only screened activities/ donors screening activities for gender equality objectives.

¹¹ Only donors screening activities for climate adaptation objectives using the Rio Markers (mainly DAC bilateral donors; some institutions including several multilateral development banks use a different system).

¹² Sweden reports 100% (principal objective) and 40% (significant objective) of ODA disbursements as climate finance to the UNFCCC. OECD (2023) [Results of the survey on the coefficients applied to Rio marker data when reporting to the UN Environmental Conventions](#). Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development: Paris.

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Outlook

- The 2023 budget proposal fixes total ODA at US \$5.3 billion (SEK 56 billion) annually to 2025.¹³ This amount is decoupled from GNI but represents 0.88% of projected GNI.¹⁴ Available data on OpenAid indicated that ODA to WSS continues to decrease and has reached its lowest point since 2014, at US \$66.2 million (SEK 713 million). There is no specific budget for WSS in 2023, so official estimates of WSS spending for this year are not available. Extrapolating historical WSS ODA disbursement trends and supplementing them with data on commitments from two sources would suggest that Sweden's real-terms WSS ODA disbursements continue to decline, to US \$63 million in 2023.¹⁵ This figure is not a prediction, and official figures are still awaited.
- SDG6, WSS, or WASH do not have a specific strategy but are rather integrated into different strategies. The strategy for Sweden's global development cooperation in sustainable social development is currently the most prominent strategy where WASH is addressed, with the goal is formulated as follows: *Improved access to clean water and safe and sustainable sanitation and hygiene in general, and within health care.*¹⁶ This strategy is expected to be revised or even replaced, and as of today, it is still uncertain if and how WASH will be included.

About this donor profile

This profile is part of a series covering key donors' support to WSS in the SDG era to date, highlighting their achievements and how they can do more. A briefing looking at all donors is also available [here](#). It was produced by Manatee Insight Ltd. for WaterAid. Authors: Nathaniel Mason, Matt Geddes and Nabaraj Mahanta. We gratefully acknowledge advice from Marcus Manuel, Charlene Watson and colleagues at WaterAid and the WHO GLAAS team, but all errors and omissions are our own.

¹³ As at 1.3.23, www.bloomberg.com/quote/SEKUSD:CUR

¹⁴ https://donortracker.org/donor_profiles/sweden

¹⁵ Extrapolated 2022 disbursements are based on the average of 3 sources: historical CRS and International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) commitments, and IATI disbursements for 2022. Extrapolated 2023 disbursements use just IATI commitments. Adjustments were made to stay within historical levels of volatility, and work around donor specific IATI data issues.

¹⁶ <https://www.government.se/international-development-cooperation-strategies/2018/11/strategy-for-swedens-global-development-cooperation-in-sustainable-social-development-20182022/>

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