

The Swedish Mission Council's Gender Equality Policy

The policy was adopted by the Swedish Mission Council (SMC) Board on 25 September 2025 and applies until further notice.

1. Introduction & Purpose

This policy clarifies SMC's view on gender equality, particularly within development cooperation. It is a practical tool for SMC, member organisations, collaborating partners and consultants in their work to integrate gender equality into initiatives and ensure that they are rights-based, inclusive and sustainable. Together with SMC's other governing documents, this policy forms part of an integrated framework that ensures that SMC's and its partner organisations' interventions are effective and aligned with SMC's mission. Through active gender equality work, SMC challenges the structures that limit individuals' right to participation and empowerment, thereby promoting democracy, peace and sustainable development.

2. SMC's view on gender equality

Gender equality means that all people, regardless of gender, have the same rights and opportunities to shape their lives and influence society. Working for gender equality is crucial to our interventions to expand people's own choices, realise a just and sustainable world, and achieve the vision of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In accordance with our Christian values, gender equality is central to our work to promote human rights and contribute to God's mission of a just society. Religious actors have a major influence on societies where religion plays a central role. SMC's special expertise in faith-based leadership and organisational development, together with a broad network of faith-based member organisations, provides unique opportunities to promote gender equality in these contexts.

3. Principles & Approach

3.1 International commitments

SMC's gender equality work is based on international human rights commitments. These include the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms

of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) – the agreement that commits UN member states to eliminating all forms of discrimination against women – as well as commitments in the Beijing Platform for Action and from the Cairo International Conference on Population and Development (SRHR), UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security, and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which states that all goals are dependent on gender equality and women's empowerment.

3.2 A rights-based approach

SMC applies a rights-based approach in its development work, which means a two-pronged focus: on the one hand, we focus on eliminating structural barriers that limit people's rights, and on the other, we focus on strengthening individuals' capacity and opportunities to participate as active agents of change. The following principles guide this work: participation, connection to human rights, accountability, non-discrimination and equality, empowerment, capacity development, openness and transparency. These principles are applied in the planning, implementation and evaluation of interventions. In order to achieve lasting change, it is crucial that the people affected are able to define their needs and lead the change process themselves. Sustainable development is created when initiatives are based on people's own initiatives and commitments.

3.3 Gender mainstreaming

SMC integrates gender equality into all development interventions. Every initiative supported by SMC includes a gender analysis. This analysis forms the basis for how the intervention is designed – from goal formulation and activity planning to the selection of indicators and follow-up and evaluation (gender mainstreaming). Depending on the results of the analysis, organisations can either implement specific gender equality measures or integrate gender issues into all parts of a broader project. The important thing is that gender equality is taken into account throughout the process.

3.4 Inclusion, power analysis and agents of change

SMC's gender equality work is based on an inclusive approach where it is crucial to analyse who has access to resources, influence and representation. Such a power analysis also includes gender aspects – that is, how power is distributed between women and men, and whose voices are heard. This involves, among other things, ensuring that women themselves are given the opportunity to articulate their needs, rather than others speaking on their behalf. Particular attention is paid to groups at risk of double or multiple discrimination, such as

people with disabilities, indigenous women and LGBTQI+ people. These individuals are often particularly vulnerable to structural violence, prejudice and exclusion, which makes their inclusion in gender equality work particularly important. Religious organisations and churches play an important role in many societies and influence norms and values. Although they can sometimes perpetuate unequal gender structures, they have great potential to promote change. Through their local presence and trust, they can challenge discriminatory norms and strengthen gender equality. Religious leaders and key figures in faith-based communities can be crucial in driving this development. But change also requires internal reflection. Organisations need to review power distribution, decision-making processes and representation. Issues of resource access, division of responsibility and how people are portrayed in communications are central. By living up to the values we want to promote, SMC and our member organisations are credible role models in the work for greater gender equality and inclusion.

3.5 The importance of structural change

Effective gender equality measures are not just about strengthening women's position within existing structures. They must also challenge and change the norms, attitudes and power relations that perpetuate the unequal distribution of power and resources between the sexes. It is not enough to offer women access to work or income opportunities if the causes of the unequal distribution of responsibility and power remain unchanged. Achieving real and long-term change therefore requires work on several levels – in society at large, within organisations and at the individual level. A gender-equal society is based on the inclusion of both women and men in the work for equality. Both groups must be active target groups in efforts aimed at changing structures and attitudes, rather than simply adapting individuals to prevailing conditions.

4. Implementation and follow-up

SMC's management is responsible for ensuring that the policy and related documents are known and complied with within the organisation and that compliance with the policy is monitored. The policy shall be updated every three to five years and adopted by SMC's Board.