

The Expert Group for Aid Studies**Invitation for proposals: Evaluation of the relevance of Swedish reform cooperation for EU accession**

The Expert Group for Aid Studies (EBA, www.eba.se) is a government committee under the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs mandated to evaluate and analyse issues related to Sweden's official development assistance. EBA consists of an expert group of eight members and a secretariat placed in Stockholm. EBA works with 'dual independence'. This means that EBA independently defines what issues to explore and which studies to commission while conclusions and potential recommendations are the responsibility of the author(s).

EBA hereby invites proposals for an evaluation of Swedish reform cooperation in Eastern Europe. The purpose is to assess the relevance of Swedish aid in assisting partner countries to meet the requirements and frameworks set up by the EU to be accepted as members.

Background

The Swedish government has decided to prioritize aid to countries in Sweden's immediate neighbourhood in the coming years. This refers to countries in Eastern Europe, the Western Balkans and Caucasus. In the Swedish Government's conclusions that it "...intends to maintain a clear focus on democracy, human rights and reform for future EU membership for countries in the neighbourhood that are pursuing it, and to contribute to improved conditions for their EU integration" (Government Offices of Sweden, 2023).

Support to EU accession has been the overall aim of Swedish development co-operation to this region for a long time. When Sida describes its work in European countries, this is almost always done in relation to EU rapprochement. This is especially the case when it comes to Ukraine, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Montenegro, Moldova, North Macedonia, Serbia, and Kosovo.¹ Having had this priority for a long time, and in so many countries, more knowledge about Swedish reform cooperation is needed.

Who is this evaluation for? Intended users

The main target groups for this evaluation include staff working with EU-related issues, the EU enlargement, Eastern Europe and the Western Balkan at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Swedish embassies and at Sida who will develop or prepare future strategies for reform cooperation. Additional target groups are people in civil society and who work with development effectiveness and governance of Swedish development assistance. The

¹ There are regional Government strategies for Eastern Europe (2021—2027) and the Western Balkans (2021—2027). Previous strategies have also emphasised support for the EU accession process.

evaluation could also be of interest for people working on enlargement issues within the EU administration.

Aim and Evaluation Questions

The purpose of this evaluation is to assess the relevance of Swedish aid for EU rapprochement and accession in relation to the requirements and frameworks set up by the EU for new countries to be accepted as members.

The evaluation will focus on countries where Swedish reform cooperation has been conducted to assist the country in becoming a member of, or approaching membership of, the EU.

The following question shall guide the evaluation: *What is the relevance of Sweden's reform cooperation in enabling countries to approach EU membership?*

Evaluation components

The evaluation shall focus on Swedish reform cooperation with nine countries: North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Albania, Moldova, Ukraine, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, and Georgia. In practice, it covers all Swedish ODA to these countries in one year (2023). Sweden supports in total about 600 interventions. Humanitarian assistance is however not included.

The evaluation should include:

1. A **mapping of the overall composition** of Swedish development cooperation on a portfolio level, for all nine countries. The mapping should provide descriptive insights into Swedish reform cooperation, covering such things as the strategic objectives, the intervention types, partners and expected outcomes. The mapping data should also be used as a basis for the selection of country cases.
2. **In-depth analyses of three country portfolios.** The team shall, during the project, suggest and motivate a strategic selection of country portfolios that maximises the evaluation's double purpose of accountability and learning.² Selection could for example be motivated by difference in accession status, region or overall composition of the Swedish portfolio. The country cases should include all Swedish interventions in the selected countries.

A key component in the project is to assess the worth and merit of Swedish reform cooperation in terms of **relevance**.³ OECD DACs relevance criteria (Is the intervention doing the right thing?) concerns in this case the extent to which the Swedish reform cooperation interventions' objectives and design respond to EU priorities, per case study country.

The assessment should be done in relation to the EU law as expressed in the Treaty, secondary legislation, and the EU's policies (acquis of the European Union) focusing on the requirements set up by the European Council in Copenhagen in 1993 and

² Ukraine should not be one of the selected country cases.

³ One reason why the study should focus on this question is that EBA have noted varied relevance in this regard earlier (see EBA 2020:04).

subsequent European legislation or praxis. It should also include relevant enlargement policy and analyses, such as annual enlargement packages, country progress reports and strategies.

The evaluation of relevance must also take other interventions into consideration. The country cases should thus also include **internal and external coherence** of Swedish interventions in the assessment. That is, relevance must be evaluated not only project by project but also by assessing all Swedish projects as a portfolio. In addition, the projects and the overall portfolios should be assessed in relation to the interventions of other donors as well as processes, preconditions and characteristics pertaining to the national contexts.

It is crucial that the relevance criteria developed for this evaluation enables a critical analysis of relevance.⁴ Not everything can be equally relevant. For a critical discussion of the conventional use of the relevance criteria in aid evaluations see Samoff (2021).

The evaluation shall include **a comprehensive literature review** to give background and context. The literature review should be performed by a trained researcher and summarize current knowledge about the relevance and effectiveness of aid for EU rapprochement.

Study design

The main objective of the evaluation is to provide grounded, rigorous, and elaborated response to the evaluation question. Tenderers are encouraged to let their expertise in EU enlargement, Eastern Europe, reform cooperation and advanced research methodology guide the choice of approach in answering the evaluation question, including analytical framework, specific methodological approach, and delimitations. A central reference is EBA's "Policy and guidelines for quality assurance of studies" (EBA, 2020).

For the study to contribute to learning for key audiences, we emphasise the importance to understand how contextual factors have played in, how conclusions relate to previous research and evaluations, and if interventions have been designed in the right way. EBA welcomes proposals that engage intended users during the process.

If needed, the evaluator(s) may, after the award decision, be given the opportunity to, in dialogue with EBA and the study's reference group, slightly refine or adjust the formulation of the evaluation question.

Potentially important empirical material for the study includes written sources from the MFA, Sida, and other Swedish actors, such as country, regional, and thematic strategies, evaluations, mid-term reviews, and final reports, as well as previous research etc. While there is no requirement for the main applicant to understand Swedish, the evaluation team should include someone with the ability to analyse documents written in Swedish.

⁴ See for example The European Court of Auditors (2022) where it is concluded that EU's support to rule of law in the Western Balkans did not sufficiently address the lack of political will and reform ownership.

General structure and deliverables

EBA works under what is termed “double independence”. This means that EBA defines which questions and areas are to be studied, independently of the MFA. At the same time, analysis, conclusions, and potential recommendations in each study are the responsibility of the author(s).

For all studies, EBA sets up a reference group consisting of experts in the field. Members are assigned by EBA in dialogue with the evaluators. The overall purpose of the reference group is to strengthen the quality of the report. The group will be chaired by one of EBA’s members.

The team shall deliver:

- A report (in English) presenting the results from the evaluation to be published in EBA report series.
- The length of the report should not exceed 22 000 words (approx. 45-50 A4-pages), excluding annexes.
- The report shall include a summary in English and Swedish.
- The evaluator(s) shall present the final report at a public seminar or other dissemination event (details to be specified in consultation with EBA at a later stage).

Procurement procedure, budget, and timetable

The procedure will be a restricted procedure in two stages.⁵ At both stages, tenderers are expected to disclose potential conflicts of interest pertaining to members in the evaluation team, as this may be a ground for exclusion of a proposal. We expect tenderers to argue for why a certain condition will not constitute a conflict of interest.

First stage: Application to submit tenders

All suppliers have the right to apply to submit tenders (expression of interest). EBA will invite five (5) suppliers to submit tenders.

Applications to submit tenders shall be registered at the tender portal Kommers Annons eLite www.kommersannons.se/elite, no later than 28 October 2024. The application shall contain:

1. CV of the principal investigator
2. A list of the principal investigator’s most relevant publications (at most 5 studies from the last 10 years are to be listed) (academic or grey)
3. Preliminary team (if more than one author. Described using at most 300 words.)
4. Three full sample studies conducted by members of the proposed team. At least one shall have been authored by the principal investigator. Note that the studies should be sent in as files, not as links in a document.
5. A short account for how, according to the authors, respective study has contributed to new, reliable knowledge of relevance for this evaluation (at most 300 words, i.e. 100 words per study).

⁵ The Public Procurement Act (2016:1145), chapter 6, section 3.

Applicants are kindly asked not to submit any unsolicited material.

Selection of applicants to invite to submit tenders will be based on the submitted material assessed against sub-criteria 1-5 of criterion 2 (see Appendix 1). Since the proposed team is preliminary, main weight will be put on the principal investigator's experience and competence.

Suppliers must submit a self-declaration in the form of a European Single Procurement Document (ESPD) by filling in the tender form at www.kommersannons.se/elite.

Please make sure enough time is allocated for completing the ESPD form when submitting the expression of interest. Note that you might need to consult colleagues in your team before completing the ESPD.

Second stage: Submission of tenders

Selected suppliers are invited to submit a full proposal. The proposal shall be written in English and no longer than 10 pages. The proposal shall include a detailed presentation of evaluation design, methods used and delimitations. Choices made shall be clearly justified. It is up to the tenderers themselves to choose the design and method of the evaluation.

EBA will provide the selected suppliers with an excel file listing relevant contributions via Sida during 2023 for use in the proposal writing.

The proposal shall also include a presentation of the members of the research team, a detailed schedule, clear allocation of time and tasks between the members of the group, and a budget (stated in SEK, including price per hour for each team member).

As appendices to the proposal shall be included: (i) CVs; (ii) at most three sample studies (reports or articles) carried out by members of the proposed team. At least one shall have been authored by the principal investigator. These studies may be the same as or different from the ones in the first stage.

The maximum cost for this evaluation is SEK 2 000 000 excl. VAT. The budget shall be denominated in SEK. The budget shall enable four meetings with the evaluation's reference group (to be appointed by EBA) and participation at the launching event. The reference group will meet in Stockholm, but one or two meetings may be conducted online.

The proposal shall be registered at the tender portal Kommers Annonc elite www.kommersannons.se/elite, no later than 15 December 2024. Tenderers are advised to monitor the tender portal regularly, as it is not possible to guarantee the receipt of e-mails.

Proposals shall be valid until 31 March 2025.

Selection of proposals in the second stage

An assessment group comprising members of EBA will assess proposals received based on the relationship between price and quality. The following criteria will be used when assessing proposals received:

- Quality of proposal, in terms of design, methods and plan for implementation (weight: 50 per cent).
- Experiences and qualifications of team members in the areas of interest (weight: 40 per cent).
- Cost (weight: 10 per cent).

See Appendix 1 for the factors that will be considered under each of these three criteria. The assessment of each proposal will be based on the material submitted by the tenderer by the end of the bidding period.

Questions to EBA during the process

During the procurement process, EBA is not permitted to discuss documentation, tenders, evaluation or any such questions with tenderers in a way that benefits one or more tenderers. All questions shall be sent to the Questions and Answers function on the procurement portal Kommers Annons eLite, www.kommersannons.se/elite. Questions and answers to questions are published anonymously and simultaneously to everyone registered for the procurement.

Any questions related to the first stage may be posed until 17 October 2024.

Any questions related to the second stage may be posed until 4 December 2024.

Preliminary timetable

Last day to apply to submit tenders (first stage)	28 October 2024
Invitation to (5) suppliers to submit tenders	8 November 2024
Last day to submit full tender (second stage)	15 December 2024
Decision by EBA	29 January 2025
Contract signed	February 2025
First reference group meeting (inception phase)	March 2025
Full draft report delivered	August 2025
Final report delivered	November 2025
Final reference group meeting	December 2025
Decision by EBA	February 2026
Launch event	April 2026

Confidentiality

After the communication of EBA's selection, all submitted proposals will become official documents, meaning that the Swedish principle of public access to official records applies. Sentences, sections, or paragraphs in a document may be masked in the public version if "good reasons" (thorough motivations in terms of causing economic damage to the company) can be provided and deemed valid. The tenderers are fully responsible for making their claims of confidentiality.

References

Allen, R., et. al. (2020), Institution Building in Practice: An Evaluation of Swedish Central Authorities' Reform Cooperation in the Western Balkans, EBA Report 2020:04, Expert Group for Aid Studies (EBA), Sweden.

The European Court of Auditors (2022), Special report 01/2022

Government Offices of Sweden (2023), Development Assistance for a New Era: Freedom, empowerment and sustainable growth

Government Offices of Sweden (2021a), Strategy for Sweden's reform cooperation with Eastern Europe for 2021–2027

Government Offices of Sweden (2021b), Strategy for Sweden's reform cooperation with the Western Balkans and Turkey for 2021–2027

Samoff, Joel (2021) Relevant? Almost Always – Relevance in Development Cooperation, EBA Working Paper, March 2021, Expert Group for Aid Studies.

Appendix 1 – Assessment criteria

Criteria	1. Quality of proposal in terms of design, methods and plan for implementation. (Weight: 50 per cent)	2. Experiences and qualifications of team members in the areas of interest. (Weight: 40 per cent)	3. Cost. (Weight: 10 per cent)
Scale	Criteria 1 and 2 are graded on a scale of 0–5 where: 5=Extraordinary or exceeds all expectation; 4=Very good; 3=Good; 2=Fair, reasonable, in line with what can be expected; 1=Sub-standard; 0=Not applicable/not possible to assess. Sub-criteria are assessed in falling importance according to number but are not graded numerically.		Continuous grade [0,5] as a share of the lowest bid offer, where the lowest bid is graded 5.
	Each criterion is finally weighted (0.50*Criterion 1+ 0,40*Criterion 2 + 0,10*Criterion 3) to obtain a total grade in the interval [0, 5].		
Specifications (numbered in order of importance)	<p>1. Does the evaluation design, i.e. suggested methodological approach and plan for implementation, make it possible to fulfil the evaluation's purpose?*</p> <p>2. Have the approach and method(s) been described in a specific, detailed and transparent manner?</p> <p>3. Have important or pertinent limitations with the suggested design and method been described and discussed clearly?</p> <p>4. Will the evaluation design enable conclusions that can be expected to form the basis of use, learning and reflection among the evaluation's target groups?</p> <p>5. Does the proposal have a thorough and realistic workplan and timeline?</p> <p>* An overall assessment that the evaluation is feasible to implement and that it can be implemented without any ethical breaches occurring is presupposed. While such an appraisal is required, it is not included as a separate sub-criterion.</p>	<p>The team participants' expertise in:*</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Evaluation and/or research in areas related to the topic, i.e., EU enlargement, pre-accession assistance/aid, aid to eastern Europe, reform cooperation. 2. Relevant advanced evaluation or research methodology. 3. Quality of the studies attached to the proposal. 4. Conducting relevant work in the geographical context 5. Academic merits of the team members. 6. The team members' engagement in the evaluation as specified in the proposal's work and time plan and as shares of proposed budget. <p>* Sufficient language skills in relation to the needs of the assignment are required to be shown and are therefore not specified as a separate sub-criterion.</p>	Total price in SEK (VAT excl.)