

Minutes from meeting in the Council for Development Policy
on 11 September 2025

- Members: Professor Anne Mette Kjær, University of Aarhus (Chair)
Deputy CEO and International Director Jarl Krausing, CONCITO (Deputy Chair) (Agenda items 1, 2, 4, 5, 6)
Secretary General Charlotte Slente, Danish Refugee Council (DFC)
Director Charlotte Flindt Pedersen, Danish Foreign Policy Society (Agenda items 1, 2, 4, 5, 6)
Chief Advisor Mattias Söderberg, DanChurchAid
Head of Secretariat Lone Ilum Christiansen, The Danish Trade Union Development Agency (DTDA)
Senior Researcher Adam Moe Fejerskov, Danish Institute for International Studies (DIIS)
Political Director Jonas Manthey Olsen, Danish Youth Council (DUF)
Political Consultant and Project Officer of DAPP Lucas Højbjerg, The Danish Chamber of Commerce
Director for Global Development and Sustainability Marie Gad Hansen, Confederation of Danish Industries (DI)
- MFA: Under-Secretary for Development Policy Ole Thonke
Head of Department Tove Degnbol, Department for Evaluation, Learning and Quality, LEARNING
Deputy Head of Department Mette Bech Pilgaard, Department for Evaluation, Learning and Quality, LEARNING
Head of Section Lotte Blom Salmonsén, Department for Evaluation, Learning and Quality, LEARNING
Student Assistant Sofie Brix Lassen, Department for Evaluation, Learning and Quality, LEARNING
- Agenda item 2: Chief Advisor Mirja Crone, Department for Africa, Development Policy and Financing, AFRPOL
- Agenda item 3: Deputy Head of Department Thomas Nikolaj Hansen, Department for Humanitarian Action & Civil Society, HUMCIV
Chief Advisor Serena Hebsgaard, Department for Humanitarian Action & Civil Society, HUMCIV
Chief Advisor Marie Groth Kruse, Department for Humanitarian Action & Civil Society, HUMCIV

- Agenda item 4: Ambassador Jakob Linulf, Embassy of Denmark in Accra
Head of Cooperation Rikke Enggaard Olsen, Embassy of Denmark in Accra
Sector Advisor (Water) Mathias Thuborg Madsen, Embassy of Denmark in Accra
- Agenda item 5: Head of Department Tove Degnbol, Department for Evaluation, Learning and Quality, LEARNING
Deputy Head of Department Mette Bech Pilgaard, Department for Evaluation, Learning and Quality, LEARNING
Evaluation Specialist Ninja Ritter Klejnstrup, Department for Evaluation, Learning and Quality, LEARNING

Agenda Item No. 1: Announcements

The Under-Secretary opened the meeting by inviting the Head of Mission of the Danish Representative to Palestine Sigurd Halling and Ambassador of Denmark to Israel Thomas Winkler to give an orientation to the Council. The Under-Secretary then proceeded to elaborate on the humanitarian situation in Sudan, Afghanistan, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Furthermore, the Under-Secretary spoke of his participation in the Africa Climate Summit and finally presented the proposed changes to quality assurance and approval procedures for new grants. Council Members commented on the proposed changes and underlined the importance of involving representatives of the development community in the new architecture and of ensuring transparency in the form of public consultations and sharing minutes of meetings. The Under-Secretary confirmed that transparency would continue to be adhered to and that representatives of the development community would play an important role in the new procedures.

With reference to the Rules of Procedure for the Council for Development Policy, Charlotte Flindt Pedersen announced a conflict of interest in relation to agenda item 3 due to her membership on the Board of Danish Institute for Parties and Democracy (DIPD). Jarl Krausing announced a conflict of interest in relation to agenda item 3 due to his spouse's membership on the Board of DIPD. Charlotte Flindt Pedersen and Jarl Krausing left the room during the deliberations of agenda item 3.

Agenda Item No. 2: Orientation about the government's proposal for the Finance Act 2026

For information and discussion

Department for Africa, Development Policy and Financing (AFRPOL)

Summary:

The Finance Bill for 2026 and the Government's priorities for Danish development cooperation was presented to the Council.

Key points presented by AFRPOL:

- AFRPOL represented by the Chief Advisor informed the Council about the key figures concerning the budget for development cooperation on the Finance Bill for 2026.
- The Government had allocated 0.7 percent of GNI to development cooperation corresponding to approximately DKK 23.1 billion. With the adjustment of the realised assistance in 2024, the total allocation was approximately DKK 23.3 billion. Of this, DKK 5.1 billion was expected to be used on expenses outside § 06.3. Bistand til udviklingslandene, e.g. on development cooperation through EU and in-donor refugee costs. The rest amounting to DKK 18.2 was allocated to § 06.3.
- The presentation included a brief overview of selected new initiatives as part of the main priorities i) Job creation, economic growth, trade and investment ii) Response to conflicts, forced displacement, and irregular migration, iii) A just, sustainable and green transition iv) Democracy and human rights v) Education and health.

Key observations from the Council:

- The Council thanked the Department for Africa, Development Policy and Financing for the presentation. Members of the Council posed questions on the new trade instruments and asked how the Small to Medium-sized Enterprise's (SME) would be included.
- Further, Council Members inquired about the rather broad manner in which the term 'partnership' was used and what this implied for choice of partner and geographical region, including a possible shift in development cooperation away from African countries and towards Middle-Income Countries (MICs).
- Members asked for examples of what Denmark would do as part on the announced tech agenda.
- Finally, Members of the Council asked how the UN80 reform was reflected in the Finance Bill.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs' (MFA) response:

- In response the Chief Advisor, AFRPOL, emphasised that the new trade instruments would take lessons learned into account since existing instruments already had a focus on SME's.
- The Chief Advisor stressed that more funds were allocated to bilateral engagements in African countries in 2026 compared to 2025, including relevant growth economies as South Africa and Nigeria.

- As for the tech initiatives, the Chief Advisor highlighted a new tech initiative in Nigeria planned this year, the multi-annual Digital Democracy Initiative, and the upcoming Innovation Centre in Nairobi.
- The Chief Advisor underlined that Denmark played an active role in the UN80 reform work. With the Finance Bill it was emphasised that although Danish contributions would be concentrated on fewer agencies, the UN continued to be a strong multilateral partner for Denmark.

Agenda Item No. 3: Danish Institute for Parties and Democracy: Support to democracy through partnerships with political parties

For discussion and recommendation to the minister

DKK 175 million

The Department for Humanitarian Action & Civil Society (HUMCIV)

Summary:

The objective of the project is to contribute to capacity-building and development of representative democratic political parties and other political actors that actively engage in developing multiparty democracy and political solutions responding to citizens' interests and rights, as well as to support the development of multiparty democracy in developing countries.

The Council for Development Policy recommended 'Danish Institute for Parties and Democracy: Support to democracy through partnerships with political parties' for approval by the Minister for Foreign Affairs. Concern was expressed concerning the modality, based on Danish political parties' direct support to selected national political parties in partner countries, and concerning the enlargement of the mandate to also encompass support to civil society organisations in addition to the direct support to political parties.

Key observations and recommendations from the Council:

- While appreciating the document on the support to Danish Institute for Parties and Democracy's (DIPD), Members of the Council asked whether it had been considered to rethink the constellation of the DIPD board. The representation of Danish political parties in the board, which had as its mandate to oversee the activities of the same political parties was considered a deviation of the principle of ensuring arm's length.
- The Council commended DIPD's compliance with the recommendations in the recent review of the organisation. Members, however, expressed concern about the quality assurance procedures and whether Danish political parties had enough support to undertake appropriate project management. It was noted that external quality assurance was an expensive way of addressing administrative issues, and Members recommended to focus more on strengthening the capacity of the secretariat to support the parties.

- Members of the Council challenged the modality of DIPD's project, in particular Danish political parties' direct support to specific national political parties, which was found out of sync with contemporary development policy and risked offending national authorities. It was recommended to focus on multiparty cooperation and to support overall democratic processes instead.
- Members of the Council expressed concern regarding DIPD's proposed support to other types of actors, including civil society. It was pointed out that this could adversely impact or overlap with the work of civil society organisations working on human rights and democracy. The added value of this was not entirely clear.
- Finally, Members pointed out that a considerable share of the funding seemed to be used in Denmark, and it was asked how much funding reached the political parties in partner countries.

Other issues mentioned by the Council included whether partnerships between Danish and national political parties could be considered equal, whether tech cooperation could constitute a greater focus area for new projects, the role of Danish embassies in the cooperation, the involvement of global parliamentarian cooperation, the distribution of the budget with same share on all activity types, and the timing of the announcements before the approval of the new grant.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs' (MFA) response to key issues:

- The Deputy Head of HUMCIV emphasised that DIPD is subject to monitoring and quality assurance similar to other partners. This includes regular reviews (most recently in 2023), financial monitoring inspections (most recently in 2025), appraisals, and other quality assurance and oversight mechanisms. On this basis, MFA had concluded that DIPD had notably improved its management and administrative capacity.
- The Deputy Head further explained that the supportive role of the DIPD secretariat vis-a-vis the Danish political parties had been significantly strengthened with regular visits and monitoring visits to both Danish and national partners. The grant mechanism had been redesigned in light of the most recent review to allow for clearer separation of duties. DIPD had introduced a partnership manual and updated guidelines to further improve the administrative support to the Danish parties. The new design with an external quality assurance committee and the secretariat in an advisory role reflected practices from the Danish pooled funding mechanisms such as CISU.
- On the modality of DIPD, the Deputy Head argued that concentrating efforts in fewer countries would allow for more political parties to be present in the same country, hence allow a more balanced engagement across the political spectrum. Multiparty cooperation was also prioritised in the new project, and activities such as the People Dialogue Festival

in Kenya bringing together parties across the political spectrum and other actors were examples of such efforts.

- The Deputy Head addressed the question about the added value of support to other actors than political parties, and pointed out that working with a broader set of partners was clearly mentioned in the law establishing DIPD and added legitimacy to DIPD's work in often difficult political contexts.
- Finally, the Deputy Head of HUMCIV agreed to the importance of equal partnerships and localisation and stressed that the new support to DIPD set an ambitious target of 75% of funding to Danish political parties going directly to national partners.

The Chair of the Council concluded that the Council recommended Danish Institute for Parties and Democracy: Support to democracy through partnerships with political parties for approval by the Minister for Foreign Affairs. Concern was expressed concerning the modality, based on Danish political parties' direct support to selected national political parties in partner countries, and concerning the enlargement of the mandate to also encompass support to civil society organisations in addition to the direct support to political parties.

Agenda Item No. 4: Water Access and Water Efficiency for Low-Income Urban Areas in Ghana 2025-2029

For discussion and recommendation to the minister

DKK 100 million

The Embassy of Denmark in Accra

Summary:

Implemented in partnership with UNICEF and Ghana Water Limited, the project aims to scale up water access to low-income urban communities and increase water use efficiency, providing equitable, affordable and climate-resilient water access to 105,000 people, including 40,000 children, in targeted urban and peri-urban areas. About 90% of people will gain access through tap installation at household level and 10% via public water standposts. This will be achieved by supporting the operationalisation of Ghana Water Limited's 'Social Connection Fund' to facilitate low-income household connections, improving strategies for 'Non-Revenue Water' (preventing water loss), and limited network expansion in areas of excess production capacity. Communities will be trained and mobilised to promote shared accountability for water resources. Most interventions will take place in vulnerable urban areas in northern Ghana, exposed to the effects of spill over from violent extremism.

<p><i>The Council for Development Policy recommended Water Access and Water Efficiency for Low-Income Urban Areas in Ghana 2025-2029 for approval by the Minister for Foreign Affairs.</i></p>
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Key observations and recommendations from the Council:

- The Council took note of the project's strategic relevance and asked if it linked up to an overall Danish strategic engagement on water (the total allocation of DKK 1 billion for various water-related projects was mentioned). Was the project related to the Danish Strategic Sector Cooperation in Ghana? Council Members also inquired about Ghana's national priorities and how these were reflected in the Danish strategic choices.
- Members of the Council inquired about the extent to which the project development had been prepared in partnership with Ghana. Considering the previous government of Ghana's vision of 'Ghana beyond aid', did the government appreciate a development project such as this? And further, what were the broader strategic considerations with regard to resuming development cooperation in Ghana? Members also asked if the embassy had the necessary capacity to engage in development cooperation, after the past decisions to phase out Denmark's development activities in Ghana had led to significant reduction of development staff.
- Council Members asked for elaboration of the choice of the implementing partner. While UNICEF was considered a professional implementer, concern was raised regarding the very high overhead cost of UNICEF. Members expressed support to the appraisal recommendation of a Danida-advisor but inquired about possibilities for using national technical assistance.
- In relation to sustainability, Members emphasised the importance of ensuring a sufficient level of government ownership to secure the project's implementation. They also asked if there was a payment strategy for citizens, particularly in this case where citizens are expected to cover costs themselves, and Members questioned how the project would remain viable if citizens chose not to pay. Members of the Council remarked that the project would primarily serve urban areas, though there was more need to address water access issues in rural areas in Ghana. Concerns regarding the potential risk of drought were raised.
- Finally, the Council asked about the role foreseen for Ghanaian and Danish companies in the project.

Other issues mentioned by the Council included questions regarding scalability of the activities supported, possible link to health sector activities, the link to other donor-funded activities, and the procurement procedures foreseen.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs' (MFA) response to key issues:

- The Ambassador explained how access to water and efficiency of water distribution was part of Denmark's renewed development engagement in Ghana, integrating strategic sector cooperation, a peace and stabilisation programme, limited other development activities, and economic diplomacy.

- The Head of Cooperation explained the alignment with Ghana’s national development plan and stressed that Ghana Water Limited (GWL) had ownership of the project. The Ambassador added that ‘Ghana beyond aid’ was a vision of the former government, not shared by the current government. Key Ghanaian stakeholders such as GWL and Ministry of Works would be members of the Project Steering Committee together with UNICEF and the Embassy.
- The Head of Cooperation stated that during several years, UNICEF had been a trusted partner with a well-established cooperation with the Embassy in the water sector. It would be ensured that UNICEF’s project overhead did not exceed the threshold outlined by UNICEF’s global cost-recovery policy.
- The Sector Advisor shared details about the project’s sustainability (improving standards to ensure a more robust and water-efficient system and establishing a social connection fund). It was explained that the project’s focus on urban and peri-urban populations was due to the potential in these areas for maximising impact by enhancing and extending existing infrastructure.
- Finally, the Sector Advisor also outlined the envisioned role of the private sector to develop a scalable Non-Revenue Water plan capable of attracting loan funding, which was expected to require water specific technical assistance beyond UNICEF.

The Chair of the Council concluded that the Council recommended Water Access and Water Efficiency for Low-Income Urban Areas in Ghana 2025-2029 for approval by the Minister for Foreign Affairs.

Agenda Item No. 5: Annual orientation about the Evaluation Programme

For information and discussion

The Department for Evaluation, Learning and Quality (LEARNING)

Summary:

The presentation of planned, ongoing, and concluded evaluations and studies is done in biannual rolling evaluation programmes. In addition to an overview of planned evaluations and the considerations guiding choice of thematic focus, the status of ongoing works, and highlights of evaluations published or soon to be published, the evaluation programme for 2025-2026 gives and outline of Danish support to international evaluation activities and fora, and presents considerations concerning management of evaluations. Evaluations are undertaken by independent evaluators contracted through an EU tender process. Criteria guiding the evaluation programme are stipulated in the Evaluation Policy for Danish Development Cooperation (2020). The 2025-2026 programme is available at this link [Evalueringsprogram](#).

Key observations and recommendations from the Council:

- The Council welcomed the topics for planned evaluations and particularly appreciated the continued focus on climate adaptation, the planned evaluation on development engagements with Ethiopia, and the planned study on collaboration with philanthropic funds. Concerning an evaluation under preparation of the African Guarantee Fund established in 2012 to enhance access to finance for small and medium-sized enterprises across Africa, Members suggested that comparisons should be made to new finance instruments currently applied.
- Additional suggestions for new issues or themes were provided, including support to youth (a priority since at least 2016), support through Impact Fund Denmark, institutional investors, equal partnerships, the consortia modality, the experience so far with integration of economic diplomacy and development cooperation, and multilateral support seen in the context of the UN80 reform process.
- The use of evaluation results by the MFA was considered a key issue by the Council, and Members found that this could have been better presented in the evaluation programme. The upcoming Evaluation of Management of Danish Development Cooperation was mentioned as a case in point, since it was expected to contain valuable learning important to decisions on issues such as the balance between country-based activities and activities implemented from Headquarters.
- Members of the Council requested more information on Nordic evaluation cooperation, joint evaluations with partner countries, and cooperation with partners on specific evaluations. It was asked if the External Panel, expected to be established in January 2026, would discuss coming evaluation programmes.

Other issues discussed included the possible use of artificial intelligence (AI) in evaluations, communication of evaluation results to the wider public in Denmark and internationally, and possibilities of making larger ‘evaluation events’.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ (MFA) response to key issues:

- The Head of the Department for Evaluation, Learning and Quality (LEARNING) thanked the Council for the many relevant comments and recommendations. Concerning the specific question on the possible role of the future External Panel in discussing the evaluation programme, she informed that details of the mandate of the Panel had not yet been fully decided.

Agenda item no. 6: Any Other Business

No issues were raised under this agenda item.