

MELLEMFOLKELIGT SAMVIRKE **act:onaid**

ActionAid Denmark submission to public consultation on “*Strategic Framework. Denmark’s Partnership with Ukraine July 2025 – June 2028*” Draft for Public Hearing, 5 December 2024

Copenhagen, 19-12-2024

ActionAid Denmark (AADK) would like to thank the Danish Foreign Ministry for the opportunity to provide input. We find the Strategic Framework for Denmark’s engagement in Ukraine ambitious and relevant, and we agree with the overall direction and content of the document.

AADK expresses alignment and support to CISU’s consultation-response, highlighting many important recommendations on the centrality of an inclusive, people-centred approach to achieving the framework’s ambitious goals.

AADK’s recommendations are grounded in lessons learned from its triple nexus programming in Ukraine and the broader region. Since 2022, AADK has exemplified localization principles by supporting a locally led humanitarian response, focusing on building the capacity of civil society organizations (CSOs) that work with the most marginalized and vulnerable groups impacted by the full-scale invasion. These insights stem from continuous reflection, action, and strategic processes, fostering meaningful and trust-based collaborations with over 38 locally rooted partner organizations. These partners represent diverse communities, including young people, women, LGBTQIA+ individuals, national minorities, and other intersectional identities.

Acknowledging the ongoing decolonization processes within Ukrainian society, particularly the shift away from Russian influence, is essential. Programs should strengthen civil society participation, adopt a human rights-based approach, and celebrate diversity to counteract the emergence of divisive movements, which history has shown often arise during and after major crises and military conflicts. Grassroots civil society and movements must be supported through targeted resources and timely technical assistance, with the aim of fostering leadership at the community level and strengthening resilient cultural and civic identities.

Young people should play a central role in this process as the driving force for systemic change and movements for justice and equality. By strengthening young people’s capacity for organising and transformative action on a community level and leveraging Ukraine’s decentralised democratic system – the presented strategic framework can be a critical resource for the growth of active citizenship and community engagement in the management of the Ukrainian hromadas rooted in human rights, democratic values, inclusivity, and diversity.

1. Vulnerable and marginalised target groups

AADK finds the focus on supporting Ukraine’s most vulnerable and marginalized groups essential and relevant.

AADK recommends that the Framework explicitly include LGBTQIA+ and Roma communities, as these groups face heightened risks of discrimination, violence, and lack of access to essential services such as healthcare, safe shelter, education, and mental health support. The war has worsened existing stigmas, putting further strain on already marginalized and underserved communities, particularly in rural areas where humanitarian-development-peacebuilding actors are scarcely present despite lack of public services.

A holistic, people-centered, and intersectional approach is vital to meaningfully addressing the unique challenges of the mentioned and other high-risk groups, who often fall between the cracks of humanitarian-development-peacebuilding actors. By explicitly prioritizing marginalized communities and targeting hard-to-reach areas, the Framework can support human rights-based organization in filling in critical gaps and ensuring equitable support for those facing highest risks because of their identity or physical location.

Suggestions to existing text (in **bold**)

Part 2. Analysis of the context, challenges, and risks: Social cohesion and vulnerable groups (p.9)

Vulnerable population groups, including survivors of war crimes and sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), veterans, women providing care for children, older people, internally displaced people, **LGBTQI+ community, Roma and other minorities, stateless people, refugees, migrants,** people living with disabilities and people living with illnesses, are at increased risk of **human rights violations,** psychological distress and mental disorders as the war continues. **Evidence shows that people with intersectional identities are in an extremely vulnerable position during the ongoing conflict.**

Strategic Goal 1: Local conflict management capacities and structures are strengthened with a focus on inclusive and meaningful participation by the local population, including women, internally displaced persons, youth, and veterans aiming at furthering social cohesion and peace building. (p.19)

Locally-anchored, lasting peace requires meaningful inclusion of the local population groups, including especially women, young people, **LGBTQI+ community, Roma and other minorities, migrants, people with disabilities and other vulnerable groups, especially those with intersectional identities,** in the peace and security initiatives, **with a specific focus on those living in rural areas far from bigger cities. Social cohesion programs should be grounded in a human rights-based, intersectional approach to effectively address the complexity of rights violations. These programs must be participatory and accountable, ensuring ownership by local actors, including civil society organizations, formal and informal movements, and grassroots activists. By fostering leadership at the community level, these initiatives can empower local actors to drive long term, sustainable social change and strengthen cohesion.**

2. Young People, Social Movements

AADK celebrates the Framework's recognition of civil society, women, and young people as key agents of change and its commitment to strengthening their capacity, facilitating meaningful engagement in democratic processes, claim their rights, and hold duty bearers accountable. Based on AADK's experience in Ukraine, it is crucial to focus on building the capacity of civil society, particularly young people and women, to actively participate in decision-making and drive social and political transformation rooted in human rights and democratic values.

AADK recommends that the Framework, especially in section 8.4.4, emphasize a focus on rural youth in decision-making processes, educational activities, and activism. Rural youth face greater risks due to limited access to education, social services, and other resources compared to their urban peers. Addressing these gaps is essential for equitable participation and representation across the country while setting the scene for young people to leverage Ukraine's progressive tools established via the decentralization reform.

Strengthening intersectional, feminist, and grassroots youth-led groups, organizations, and social movements is vital for fostering social cohesion and countering various risks relating to human rights, shrinking civic space and other democratic pillars. Youth-led initiatives grounded in human rights, diversity, and equality can drive participatory democracy and systemic change in Ukraine and the region, ensuring a resilient and inclusive society.

AADK's experience shows that with proper support, resources and tools, young people can play a transformative role in building inclusive, democratic futures.

Suggestions in existing text (in **bold**):'

Page 46 (section 8.4.4):

... At the same time, civil society organisations play a central role in building a democratic society with active citizenship holding national and local authorities accountable - where they, among other things, are helping to give a voice to vulnerable groups, including people living with disabilities, veterans, internally displaced persons, **LGBTQI+ communities, Roma and other minorities.**

Under the Ukraine Transition Country Programme, support will also be provided to Ukrainian civil society organisations, **social movements, and informal youth-led groups** with a focus on their role as democratic actors. Civil society in Ukraine has traditionally been limited by a narrowly organised base, with a limited membership and donor funding. Denmark will seek to promote the growth of democratic and member-based Ukrainian civil society organisations, where voluntary work and membership quotas contribute to the sustainability of the organisations, including financial sustainability. In addition, it will also be looked into – to the extent possible – how to support more informal and ad-hoc based civil society activities on current issues in Ukraine. **These activities should tackle a diversity of relevant issues, including women's rights, human rights, shrinking civic space and labor conditions and include systems for meaningful support to young people as humanitarian leaders, peace builders, and human rights defenders.**

Special focus will be placed on mobilising and organising communities of young people **also in rural areas**. Young people are tomorrow's leaders, voters and political actors – it is mainly amongst younger people that a new organisational culture will be created.

The Danish support will include a specific involvement of young people in Danish funded programmes where possible and relevant, and will also include continued support for the Ukrainian-Danish Youth House in Kyiv. The youth centre will function as a safe meeting place and, in a difficult time, be an inspiration for organising and involving young people. The house must also support and strengthen the 'youth infrastructure' created by the Ukrainian Ministry of Youth and Sports.