

DUF input: Public consultation of the Danish Eastern Neighbourhood Programme 2027-2031

DUF – Danish Youth Council appreciates the opportunity to submit input to the Danish Eastern Neighbourhood Programme 2027–2031.

1. DUF welcomes several elements of the proposed strategy, particularly:

- **Continued prioritisation of youth:** DUF appreciates the continued focus on young people and youth mobilisation in the programme. In this regard, DUF emphasises the importance of recognising young people and youth organisations not only as target groups, but as independent actors and key drivers of democratic development and resilience within the region. DUF encourages the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to ensure that cooperation is carried out *by, with, and for* young people in line with Denmark's Strategy for Development Cooperation, *A Changing World - Partnerships in Development* (page 7).

Recommendation: DUF suggests the following amendment to the programme document:

Page 12: *All countries supported under DANEP face significant inequalities and/ or marginalisation based on gender, as well as marginalisation of communities based on ethnicity, sexual or religious orientation or age. Equality across gender, sexuality and age is also a fundamental principle of the EU Acquis. In this regard, young people should be recognised as key drivers of democratic development and resilience within the region, not merely as beneficiaries. Similarly, arts and culture are core aspects of human rights expression, and there remains a need for cultural exchange across countries in the region and with Denmark. Denmark will continue to support key actors promoting equality and empowerment as well as youth and culture, LNOB and non-discrimination.*

- **Flexibility in programme implementation:** DUF welcomes the emphasis on flexibility and adaptability in programme implementation, including the possibility of providing additional funding through top-ups. This aligns with DUF's experience working in the region, where rapidly changing political and security contexts require flexibility to respond to emerging needs and opportunities. Furthermore, the possibility of providing top-ups to existing grants will help reduce the administrative burden associated with managing additional grants.
- **Strengthened coordination and learning across partners:** DUF welcomes the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' ambition to take a stronger coordinating role across programme partners, including through yearly learning events and joint partner meetings. This presents valuable opportunities to strengthen synergies, facilitate knowledge-sharing and promote collaboration across different interventions within the programme.

2. DUF recommends strengthening the analysis of youth and youth-led civil society in the programme's context section to better reflect the significant emphasis placed on young people in the overall programme and budget.

Recommendation: DUF suggests to include the following in the context section:

- **Youth and demographic challenges:** Greater attention to the challenges facing young people across the region, including limited opportunities for meaningful participation in political and democratic decision-making processes, as well as youth emigration and brain drain, and their implications for democratic development, economic opportunities and the long-term resilience of societies.
- **Youth as drivers of democratic change:** Greater recognition of young people's role in democratic mobilisation and resilience, including their prominent role in the pro-European protests in Georgia. More broadly, increased emphasis on the contribution of civil society, including youth-led organisations and movements, to democratic resilience and social cohesion in the face of democratic backsliding, polarisation and shrinking civic space.

3. Building on the above, DUF recommends strengthening the focus on youth as a cross-cutting priority¹ throughout the programme document, on a more equal footing with gender equality. While youth is identified as a priority in the programme and budget, this is not consistently reflected across the different thematic areas and sections of the document. DUF therefore recommends systematically integrating youth inclusion alongside gender equality.

Recommendation: DUF suggests the following amendments to the programme document:

- **Page 9:** *"Gender equality, **youth inclusion** and LNOB. Linked to HRBA, all engagement will seek to integrate gender equality, **youth inclusion** and ensuring Leave No One Behind (LNOB). This means that outputs and indicators will be aligned with this policy priority wherever feasible."*
- **Page 11:** *"Under this strategic objective, DANEP will help build the capacity of actors promoting democracy and human rights as well as gender, **youth inclusion** and LNOB as grounded in EU values, and counter misinformation and other actions undermining democratic progress, as well as supporting green growth to the benefit of all in the countries supported."*
- **Page 12:** *"Support to state institutions working on improving legislation and implementation for enhanced equality, including in relation to women's **and young people's** meaningful inclusion in political processes."*
- **Page 13:** *"Support will be provided to capacity enhancement of the major labour market institutions and networks, while ensuring attention to gender equality, **youth inclusion** and LNOB in this work."*
- **Page 17:** *"The projects are also expected to contribute to results beyond their own results frameworks. As an example, media support and civil society capacity development contribute to the outcomes on free and fair elections and anti-corruption, gender equality **and youth inclusion** efforts contribute to inclusive governance results across projects, and the strengthening of accountable institutions contributes to the reform results pursued under the EU delegated cooperation."*

4. Finally, DUF has the following additional comments to the programme:

- **Clarifying the inclusion of the Western Balkans:** DUF recommends clarifying the geographical scope of the programme, particularly regarding the inclusion of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Western Balkans more broadly. The current programme document does not clearly specify when and how the Western Balkans are intended to be included. DUF therefore recommends clarifying which interventions and priorities will cover the Western Balkans during the programme period.
- **Building on experiences from the Danish-Arab Partnership Programme (DAPP):** In regards to the establishment of a dedicated Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL) Unit within the programme, DUF recommends drawing on relevant experiences and lessons learned from the Danish-Arab Partnership Programme (DAPP) to strengthen the MEAL Unit's efficiency and relevance to the programme and partners.

Best regards,

DUF – Danish Youth Council



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¹ As outlined on page 16 in the programme document.