

ActionAid Denmark's Consultation Response to the Danish Eastern Neighbourhood Programme 2027-2031

Copenhagen, 22 October 2026

ActionAid Denmark welcomes the opportunity to comment on the draft Danish Eastern Neighbourhood Programme (DANEP) 2027-2031. We support its focus on democratic development, green growth, resilience and long-term cooperation between Denmark and the countries of the Eastern Neighbourhood.

ActionAid Denmark recommends that the final DANEP give greater prominence to youth agency, locally led collective action and gender-transformative approaches. Young people should be recognised as organisers, innovators and leaders who can shape a democratic, peaceful, equitable and sustainable future. These priorities should be reflected across the programme's objectives, partnerships, portfolio and results framework.

Young people in the region are already driving change. In Ukraine, more than half have volunteered since the full-scale invasion (Rating Group, 2026), and 72% are ready to take part in recovery in their communities (Cedos/UNFPA/UNDP, 2023). Yet youth-led organisations remain under-resourced, with funding often too short term to build their organisations or pursue their own priorities (UNU, 2025).

1. Put youth agency and locally led collective action at the centre

Young people are rights-holders, leaders and drivers of change. Their agency depends on open civic space, strong local organisations and institutions willing to share power. DANEP should therefore embed youth agency and locally led development across the programme, rather than treating young people only as beneficiaries or target groups.

- Give young people and local civil society sustained influence over priorities, resources, implementation and learning.
- Provide accessible, long-term and flexible support to youth-led organisations, movements and informal initiatives.
- Promote equitable and intergenerational leadership, with particular attention to young women, displaced and refugee youth, young people with disabilities, rural youth and others facing barriers to participation.
- Build accessibility into programme design and disaggregate data by disability.

Recommendation: *Make youth agency, locally led development and inclusive leadership cross-cutting programme principles and explicit result areas. Measure the influence, resources and collective capacity of local and youth-led actors.*

2. Enable young people to shape a democratic, peaceful and sustainable future

Young people experience conflict, inequality, shrinking civic space, insecure livelihoods and climate change as interconnected challenges. DANEP should enable youth-led and community-led solutions that strengthen democratic resilience, peace and social cohesion while expanding access to decent and sustainable livelihoods.

Recommendation: *Integrate youth-led contributions to democracy, peacebuilding, resilient communities, decent livelihoods and an inclusive green transition across the portfolio. Measure both young people's influence and the changes achieved in their communities.*

3. Sustain youth leadership through long-term partnerships and adaptive support

To support cooperation beyond individual projects, DANEP should invest in long-term organising, regional youth networks and reciprocal partnerships among civil society, public institutions, educational institutions, social partners, media and businesses.

Support should be predictable and flexible, reflecting the volatile conditions facing many human rights defenders and organisations. It should include shared risk management, protection and partner-led learning, with digital security, legal assistance and psychosocial support where relevant.

Recommendation: *Provide long-term, flexible support for youth-led organising, regional networks and reciprocal partnerships, combined with protection, shared risk management and partner-led learning. Measure whether relationships and collective action continue beyond individual projects.*

4. Strengthen gender-transformative approaches and positive masculinities

Rigid gender norms and militarised narratives can legitimise violence, exclusion and nationalist mobilisation. They restrict the rights and participation of women and girls and put pressure on young men to conform to identities associated with dominance and aggression. DANEP should address these norms as part of its work on democratic resilience, peace and inclusive development.

This should include sustained support for women's rights, leadership and protection, alongside context-specific initiatives that engage men and boys as allies in promoting non-violent, democratic and caring forms of masculinity. Initiatives should be developed with women's rights organisations, youth-led groups and other local civil society actors.

Recommendation: *Integrate gender-transformative analysis across DANEP's democratic development, peacebuilding and youth objectives. Support women's rights and leadership*

while engaging men and boys in challenging harmful gender norms, preventing violence and strengthening inclusive democratic participation.

In overall, ActionAid Denmark considers the draft DANEP 2027-2031 a strong basis for Denmark's continued engagement in the region. A clearer commitment to youth agency, locally led civil society action, gender equality, inclusive leadership and sustained collective action would strengthen the programme and help young people shape the region's future.