



European Center for  
Not-for-Profit Law



**DCA**  
actalliance

# ADVANCING HUMAN RIGHTS AND CIVIC SPACE

Recommendations for Denmark's  
Development Policy Strategy

## Advancing Human Rights and Civic Space

The drafting of Denmark's development policy strategy comes at a time of unprecedented backlash in human rights, rule of law and democracy. This global pushback against hardly won rights and freedoms has been reflected in the lack of accountability for grave atrocities, attacks against international institutions built to protect human rights, and the dismantling of civil society as well as attacks on rule of law at all levels.

Those who suffer the most from these developments are the marginalised: grassroots civil society, vulnerable populations and human rights defenders. These attacks further result in instability and increases risks for security both offline and online and for other Danish engagements, including for the private sector. Upholding human rights, democratic principles and rule of law is an integrated element of promoting stability and local and regional security in the short, as well as in the long-term.

ECNL and DCA recognise Denmark's ambition in pursuit of multilateralism, human rights and civic space. We recommend that this strategy highlights Denmark's leading role in pursuing the protection of human rights and civic space at a global stage.

The strategy should reflect an ambition to:

- Re-emphasise the universality and interconnectedness of human rights in light of global pushbacks - recognising and addressing the specific vulnerabilities of groups such as women and LGBTQIA+, children and young people, and ethnic and religious minorities.
- Recognise the important role of a free and vibrant civil society across thematic areas and pillars of the Danish engagement. The strategy should recognise civil society's role as a driving force in sustainable policies and decisions locally and globally. Furthermore, the strategy should explicitly recognize how human rights defenders, democracy activists and civil society partners are valuable allies, providing crucial grounding on the importance of values and principles, in an increasingly polarised geopolitical reality.
- Denmark has rightly acknowledged the increasing role of informal civil society, including social movements, whose role has been vital particularly in restrictive contexts. Diaspora groups, cross-border movements, and loose networks pushing for human rights, rule of law and democracy must also be recognised as key players in civil society.



- Strengthen its vital diplomatic and economic support to human rights defenders, including environmental defenders. As defenders and civil society face increasing pressure from States, Denmark should ensure long-term, sustainable and flexible funding and strong protection mechanisms for those defenders at risk, in their own countries or temporally relocated abroad. Across its pillars, Denmark should push for accountability for the systematic violations of their rights.
- Support flexible and innovative operational models and systems, including through the use of technology, for local civil society operating in restrictive contexts, to ensure continuity of human rights work, as well as unimpeded access to humanitarian aid.
- Use its leverage within multilateral institutions to sustain and enhance standards for civic space and defenders' protections including upcoming UN, COP and other similar processes and bodies.
- Lead the pursuit and use of technology that is grounded on human rights principles. Increasingly, emerging technologies are being used to harm and stifle communities and civil society, while existing regulations remain insufficient in addressing these threats. Denmark has played a key role through its Digital Democracy Initiative, and within the Global Digital Compact; it must continue to push back against efforts to use technology to curtail civic space and undermine human rights.
- Counter the misuse of counter-terrorism and money laundering policies to attack civil society. National security policies and actions must be compliant with human rights and humanitarian principles and standards. The misuse of national security policies has crippled grassroots civil society and compromised the ability of human rights defenders to hold duty-bearers accountable. As a key player in the global stage, Denmark can uphold human rights as key criteria in the design and implementation of such policies.

