

2025

2026



Адвансність  
штубами і в закати  
зворотній зв'язок  
Стратегія +  
реалізація  
Результат

activities largely  
unchanged

Визначити  
дугай

Новий  
рівень  
сприйняття проблем  
та поїрей подія з інвалідами

Восновна  
Вибір

ПРОФЕСІЯ  
Канале  
міє історію  
жінки!

Результати  
а спонсорів  
Сила  
кака  
знос  
мис

# Empower Ukraine Programme

## External Evaluation Report

Evaluation period: Jul – Nov 2025

Programme period under review: Sep 2023 – Oct 2025

Conducted by Open Space Works Ukraine

Можливо  
обмеже  
різномпа  
допомог  
майбу  
Зміна



We thank the people from Ukraine, representatives of local authorities, representatives of local implementing organisations – **“League of Strong”** and **National Assembly of People with Disabilities** – regional and local coordinators, who took the time to speak to us and share the insight presented in this report.

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Photo credit: Phillipa Tucker

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## Abbreviations

**ALNAP** – Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action  
**CBM** – Christian Blind Mission  
**CRPD / UNCRPD** – (United Nations) Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities  
**DAC** – Development Assistance Committee (OECD)  
**DIHA** – Disability-Inclusive Humanitarian Action  
**EDF** – European Disability Forum  
**EU** – European Union  
**FGD** – Focus Group Discussion  
**GFFO** – German Federal Foreign Office  
**IDP** – Internally Displaced Person  
**KII** – Key Informant Interview  
**LoS** – League of the Strong  
**MEAL** – Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning  
**MHPSS** – Mental Health and Psychosocial Support  
**mhGAP** – Mental Health Gap Action Programme (WHO)  
**MSC** – Most Significant Change  
**NAPD** – National Assembly of Persons with Disabilities of Ukraine  
**NHSU** – National Health Service of Ukraine  
**NGO** – Non-Governmental Organisation  
**OECD** – Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development  
**OPD** – Organisation of Persons with Disabilities  
**OSWU** – Open Space Works Ukraine  
**UN** – United Nations  
**OCHA** – UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs  
**WASH** – Water, Sanitation and Hygiene  
**WHO** – World Health Organization

## Glossary

### **Assistive devices / assistive technologies**

Equipment such as wheelchairs, hearing aids, walkers, or hygiene aids, often procured and distributed through humanitarian programmes to compensate for gaps in state provision.

### **Cluster system**

The UN-led coordination mechanism for humanitarian response, organised by thematic areas (e.g. Protection, Health, WASH, Shelter). In Ukraine, clusters operate at national and sub-national levels and coordinate both international and national actors.

### **Hromada**

The basic unit of local self-government in Ukraine. A hromada may include one town or a group of towns and villages. Hromadas are responsible for local budgets, social services, and community-level decision-making and are central actors in humanitarian and recovery programming.

### **IDPs**

Internally displaced persons forced to flee their homes due to conflict but remaining within Ukraine; a legally recognised status with specific entitlements.

### **Local council**

Elected governing body of a hromada responsible for local policy decisions, budget allocation, and oversight of municipal services

### **Oblast**

A first-level administrative division of Ukraine, comparable to a region or province. Oblasts coordinate state policies and services across multiple hromadas and play an important role in linking national strategies with local implementation.

### **Regional / Oblast administration**

The state executive authority at oblast level, representing national government and coordinating sectoral policies (social protection, health, education) across hromadas.

### **Starosta**

An elected local representative of one or several villages within a hromada. The starosta acts as a liaison between residents and the hromada administration and plays a crucial role in identifying vulnerable households and facilitating access to assistance in rural and remote areas.

### **Territorial community**

The formal legal term for a hromada, emphasising its status as a self-governing territorial entity with elected bodies and budgetary authority.

# 1. Executive Summary

## Overview of the programme and evaluation purpose

The “*Empower Ukraine Programme*” began in September 2023, was extended twice and will end in May 2026. It was formulated in the context of Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine, which has disproportionately affected persons with disabilities through disrupted services, displacement, economic loss, and barriers to humanitarian access. Coordinated by the European Disability Forum (EDF) and implemented by two Ukrainian organisations of persons with disabilities (OPDs) – the National Assembly of Persons with Disabilities of Ukraine (NAPD) and the League of the Strong (LoS) – the programme combined immediate humanitarian assistance with advocacy, capacity strengthening, and movement-building. Its stated ambition was to operationalise the principle of “*Nothing About Us Without Us*” by placing OPDs at the centre of humanitarian response and recovery efforts. The project was funded by the German Federal Foreign Office (GFFO) and the Christian Blind Mission (CBM).

This external evaluation was conducted by Open Space Works Ukraine between July and November 2025. It assessed the programme’s relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability in line with OECD-DAC and ALNAP criteria, while also capturing the most significant changes (MSC) perceived by partners, local authorities, and programme participants. The evaluation served both accountability and learning purposes, with an explicit focus on disability rights, localisation, participation, and safeguarding

## Headline findings across DAC criteria

### **Relevance**

The evaluation finds that *Empower* was highly relevant to the needs and rights of persons with disabilities in both rural and semi-urban areas, particularly in oblasts that had received limited humanitarian attention since 2022. The programme design reflected prior OPD-led assessments and consultations and aligned strongly with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). While the initial design phase was constrained by time pressure and subsequent budget reductions, the presence of OPDs as implementing partners ensured that assistance was grounded in lived experience rather than externally imposed templates. Field evidence consistently confirms that transport support, assistive devices, and flexible cash assistance addressed critical gaps in access to health care, rehabilitation, and daily functioning.

### **Coherence**

*Empower* demonstrated **strong** coherence with national and international disability rights frameworks and contributed to improved integration of disability inclusion within humanitarian coordination spaces. OPDs engaged actively with clusters and local authorities, using programme evidence to advocate for more inclusive standards and practices. At local level, coordination with municipal social services helped reduce duplication and positioned OPDs as credible partners within local governance systems. Internally, coherence between EDF, NAPD, and LoS strengthened over time through regular coordination and joint reflection, though methodological differences between the two OPDs were not fully aligned at inception and required adaptive management during implementation.

### **Effectiveness**

The programme achieved its intended outputs and outcomes across five result areas: humanitarian

assistance, health and rehabilitation, MHPSS, protection and advocacy, and OPD capacity strengthening. Quantitative monitoring data indicates that the programme reached approximately 26,000 direct beneficiaries, while qualitative evidence highlights improvements in dignity, mobility, and confidence among persons with disabilities and caregivers. Advocacy efforts at both local and national levels contributed to increased visibility of disability issues within humanitarian and recovery discussions. Importantly, effectiveness extended beyond service delivery: OPDs strengthened their leadership, coordination, and advocacy roles, moving from implementers of aid to institutional actors shaping response priorities.

### **Efficiency**

*Empower* was implemented with a high level of financial discipline and adaptive management despite the constraints of wartime operations. EDF's role as a backbone coordinator ensured compliance, risk management, and continuity, while delegating operational decision-making and financial responsibility to Ukrainian partners. CBM played an essential complementary role, cross-checking donor compliance, facilitating and actively supporting change and extension requests, and providing technical support throughout implementation. This localisation-oriented model increased responsiveness and ownership but also placed significant workload demands on regional coordinators, many of whom combined multiple roles. Efficiency gains were therefore achieved at a notable human cost, underscoring the need for more realistic staffing and wellbeing provisions in future OPD-led programmes.

### **Impact**

At individual and household level, the programme generated tangible improvements in access to health care, rehabilitation, and basic needs through cash assistance, transport services, and assistive technologies. At community and system levels, *Empower* contributed to improved trust between persons with disabilities, OPDs, and local authorities, and in some cases catalysed renewed municipal investment in inclusive services. At civil society level, the programme strengthened the organisational maturity, credibility, and confidence of Ukrainian OPDs, enabling them to engage more effectively with donors, humanitarian actors, and government institutions. A recurring impact identified across regions was the transition from isolation to participation – both for individuals and for OPDs as collective actors.

### **Sustainability**

The evaluation finds moderate to strong prospects for sustainability, particularly in relation to strengthened OPD capacities, partnerships with local authorities, and embedded safeguarding and accountability practices. While continued funding remains essential to sustain service delivery, many of the programme's outcomes – such as OPD leadership, advocacy skills, and local coordination mechanisms – are likely to persist beyond the project cycle. Sustainability is strongest where OPDs have institutionalised learning, safeguarding, and staff support systems, and where relationships with municipalities have moved towards co-governance rather than ad hoc cooperation.

## **Most significant changes (MSC)**

Across MSC stories collected from beneficiaries, coordinators, and local officials, three interlinked changes stand out. First, individuals with disabilities reported a shift from dependency and invisibility to mobility, agency, and renewed engagement with community life. Second, OPDs

experienced a transition from fragmented, under-resourced actors to organised, confident leaders capable of managing complex humanitarian programmes. Third, relationships between OPDs and local authorities evolved from transactional interactions to more trust-based collaboration, including joint problem-solving and advocacy for inclusive services. These changes illustrate *Empower's* contribution not only to meeting immediate needs but also to reshaping power relations within humanitarian action.

## Forward-looking considerations

The evaluation concludes that *Empower* offers a credible, practice-based model for OPD-led, disability-inclusive humanitarian response in protracted crises. Future EDF and CBM programming would benefit from deeper co-design at inception, sustained investment in staff wellbeing, and more structured horizontal learning between OPDs. This includes meaningful engagement of CBM not merely as a compliance intermediary but as an active co-facilitator of programme design, given CBM's established expertise in disability-inclusive humanitarian action and its growing direct partnership with Ukrainian OPDs. For donors, the programme provides evidence that Ukrainian OPDs can assume greater contractual and leadership responsibility when supported through accompaniment rather than control. Strengthening these approaches will be essential for inclusive recovery and reconstruction in Ukraine..

## 2. Introduction

## Purpose and objectives of the evaluation

The purpose of the external evaluation was to assess the **relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability** of the “*Empower Ukraine Programme*” in accordance with ALNAP and OECD-DAC criteria, and to capture the **most significant changes (MSC)** perceived by stakeholders and communities. The evaluation aimed to generate **credible, evidence-based learning** to inform future CBM, and GFFO programming on disability-inclusive humanitarian action and recovery in Ukraine.

Specific objectives were to:

- Assess how effectively the programme addressed the **rights, needs, and priorities of persons with disabilities**, consistent with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD);
- Analyse the contribution of the programme to **localisation and leadership of organisations of persons with disabilities (OPDs)** in humanitarian and recovery processes;
- Identify systemic, institutional, and behavioural changes resulting from *Empower*, both within partner organisations and in local governance systems;
- Document **good practices and lessons** for scaling disability-inclusive humanitarian programming, especially in protracted and conflict-affected contexts;
- Capture **stories of change** that reflect empowerment, participation, and shifts in power relations between communities, OPDs, and institutions.

The evaluation thus served both an **accountability** and a **learning** function, with emphasis on reflective and appreciative inquiry rather than performance scoring.

## Intended users and utilisation focus

Primary users of the evaluation are:

- The Ukrainian implementing partners – National Assembly of Persons with Disabilities (NAPD) and League of the Strong (LoS) as local national OPDs implementing the majority of the project activities.
- The European Disability Forum (EDF) – as programme coordinator and advocacy lead for EU opportunities.
- CBM as co-funding partner and liaison with GFFO as the principal funder.
- German Federal Foreign Office (GFFO) as the principal funder.
- The wider Ukrainian disability movement, humanitarian aid community, and government stakeholders – to inform their own work.

The evaluation is designed for **utilisation** in project design, strategic planning, policy dialogue, and advocacy on other future humanitarian aid programmes. Findings are expected to guide future programmes, influence donor approaches to OPD-led localisation, and support Ukrainian partners in evidence-based decision-making and resource mobilisation.

## Programme overview and context

The “*Empower Ukraine Programme*” was launched in September 2023 amid Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine, when millions of civilians – including at least 2.7 million persons with disabilities – faced disrupted services, displacement, and economic loss. Persons with disabilities,



older adults, and caregivers were among those **most excluded from humanitarian response** due to barriers in mobility, communication, and accessibility.

The programme was implemented between July 2023 and May 2026 with a total budget of approximately **€4.97 million**, funded by the German Federal Foreign Office (GFFO) and CBM as a technical and administrative partner and coordinated by the European Disability Forum (EDF). The programme sought to operationalise the principle of “*Nothing About Us Without Us*” in humanitarian action by **placing organisations of persons with disabilities at the centre of design and implementation**. *Empower* combined immediate humanitarian assistance – cash, assistive devices, transportation support and improved access to primary health care and MHPSS – with structured capacity-building.

Alongside humanitarian assistance and improved service delivery, *Empower* invested in movement-building. The programme supported OPDs to strengthen community-based structures, develop peer-support and self-advocacy groups, and expand their role within humanitarian coordination mechanisms.

*Empower* built on earlier collaboration of the four partners under the “Disability Inclusive Response to the Ukraine Crisis” (2022-2025), making a deliberate shift from **short-term emergency response toward strengthening local humanitarian leadership**. In addition to providing assistance the programme invested in the organisational capacities that enable OPDs to operate as reliable humanitarian actors. It also supported **local leadership pipelines**, training municipal officials, health providers and volunteers, and equipping community-level activists – many of them people with disabilities or caregivers – to lead disability-inclusive responses in their communities.

*Empower* **embedded advocacy and movement-building as integral components of the humanitarian response.** OPDs consolidated their role not only as implementers of assistance but as **institutional actors within Ukraine's humanitarian system.**

## Implementation partners

The programme was coordinated by the **European Disability Forum (EDF)** in partnership with **Christian Blind Mission (CBM)** and major funding from the **German Federal Foreign Office (GFFO)**. Implementation in Ukraine was led by two national OPDs:

- **National Assembly of Persons with Disabilities of Ukraine (NAPD)** is a nationwide umbrella OPD representing regional and local disability organisations across the country. Working through an established network of member organisations, regional coordinators and local disability councils, NAPD implemented *Empower* activities in Poltava, Volyn and Chernivtsi oblasts.
- **League of the Strong (LoS)** is a national organisation that brings together OPDs and activists to advance accessibility and social participation for persons with disabilities. The organisation implemented *Empower* activities in Ternopil, Ivano-Frankivsk and Cherkasy oblasts through its network of regional and local coordinators.

All three OPDs staffed the project with persons with disabilities across leadership and field positions, resulting in high levels of meaningful participation and self-representation. The coordination model for *Empower* reflected a deliberate strategic choice. In 2023, CBM and EDF opted for this set-up to create synergies with an ongoing programme and facilitate closer collaboration between Ukrainian OPD partners and the European disability movement at a time when CBM did not yet have a local coordination structure in place in Ukraine. EDF served as the primary coordination point to flatten decision lines and ensure smooth access for partners to vital humanitarian funding. CBM held main accountability for the project toward GFFO, ensured compliant implementation through financial controlling, and maintained close representation and coordination with GFFO. This dual structure – with EDF as programme coordinator and CBM as accountable grant holder – was a deliberate design choice and a key feature of the *Empower* partnership model. The change in coordination set-up under new grant applications addresses earlier challenges arising from this arrangement and positions CBM for a more direct partnership role.

For both Ukrainian OPDs, *Empower* represented a significant step-up in scale and operational demands.

For the League of the Strong, it was the first large programme of this type. The project was led by an experienced humanitarian aid expert but required LoS to establish monitoring, verification and data-management systems almost from scratch. For NAPD, the programme was also a major expansion, though building on **long-standing advocacy and disability-rights expertise.** The shift into sustained, multi-oblast delivery required NAPD to extend its coordination structures, strengthen data collection, and work more intensively with hromadas and regional administrations. Across 6 locations in 3 oblasts, NAPD regional coordinators had to adjust from primarily advocacy-focused roles to **direct interaction with municipalities, social-service centres and health workers**, supporting referrals, clarifying procedures, and ensuring persons with disabilities could receive humanitarian assistance, access services and entitlements. Evaluation interviews indicate that coordinators broadly experienced this shift as professionally meaningful and empowering, though also

demanding: most described a steep learning curve in the early phase, which gave way to growing confidence and a stronger sense of institutional legitimacy as the programme matured. The workload, however, remained a significant challenge, particularly for those who combined multiple roles throughout implementation.

As a result, both OPDs entered the programme with strong rights-based foundations and prior experience in project management, while having more limited exposure to managing large-scale, multi-component humanitarian assistance programmes. The *Empower* partnership therefore functioned not only as an assistance delivery mechanism but also as a space to further strengthen capacities in humanitarian programme management, field coordination, MEAL, risk management, and collaboration with local authorities.

EDF provided strategic oversight, compliance with CBM and GFFO standards, advocacy within Ukraine, at the EU level and sometimes Global level, and guidance on some movement building components (security, safeguarding, humanitarian standards including MEAL etc) while CBM contributed technical and administrative support on compliance with GFFO, including cross-checking donor compliance, facilitating and actively supporting change and extension requests, conducting regular reviews of financial and narrative reports, and providing technical assistance on humanitarian standards, disability inclusion, and safeguarding. As the grant holder accountable to GFFO, CBM also represented the programme towards GFFO and its administrative agency BfAA, and trained partners in GFFO regulations and standards throughout implementation.

## Geographic coverage

Empower operated in **six oblasts (provinces)** across central and western oblasts of Ukraine: Poltava, Volyn, Chernivtsi, Ternopil, Ivano-Frankivsk, and Cherkasy. The selection reflected a deliberate focus on **underserved, rural, and host communities** where humanitarian actors were largely absent and municipal systems were overstrained.

Each oblast team engaged multiple municipalities and rural hromadas (villages), establishing partnerships with local social-service centres, primary healthcare institutions, and barrier-free councils. Approximately **70 % of all beneficiaries lived outside oblast capitals**, confirming that *Empower* reached communities beyond the main humanitarian corridors.

## Target groups and thematic components

The programme targeted persons with disabilities affected by war and displacement, their families and caregivers, and other groups experiencing intersecting vulnerabilities. Specific sub-groups included:

- at-risk internally displaced persons (IDPs), especially IDPs with disabilities,
- veterans with injuries or acquired disabilities,
- older persons (60+),
- women with disabilities and women caregivers,
- low-income households in rural and semi-rural communities.
- single headed households
- returnees
- adults and children in institutions
- members of host communities, with and without disabilities

**Its five thematic components were:**

1. Improving basic living conditions for persons with disabilities – The programme sought to ensure that people with disabilities and their families could meet essential needs through cash assistance, support with assistive items.
2. Strengthening access to inclusive primary healthcare – *Empower* worked to reduce barriers to essential healthcare by supporting transportation and training local health providers to deliver disability-inclusive primary care.
3. Expanding access to inclusive mental health and psychosocial support - The programme helped communities access MHPSS services adapted to the needs of persons with disabilities, and trained frontline staff and municipal actors in psychosocial first aid.
4. Raising awareness and influencing humanitarian practice – *Empower* aimed to shift how humanitarian and local actors understand and address disability – strengthening awareness of rights, needs, and best interests of persons with disabilities.
5. Supporting sustainable OPD leadership and staff well-being – The project invested in organisational resilience, helping partner OPDs grow in a sustainable way and build disability movement.

## Evaluation scope and key questions

The evaluation covered the period **September 2023-October 2025**, including the first extension phase. It assessed outcomes across all five result areas, examining both quantitative achievements and qualitative change processes.

Guiding evaluation questions included:

1. **Relevance:** To what extent did *Empower* respond to the rights, priorities, and evolving needs of persons with disabilities during the war?
2. **Coherence:** How aligned was *Empower* with national frameworks, humanitarian coordination mechanisms, and CRPD principles?
3. **Effectiveness:** What outcomes were achieved across the five result areas, and how did they contribute to empowerment and inclusion?
4. **Efficiency:** How effectively were resources, partnerships, and management processes used to ensure timely, transparent, and adaptive delivery?
5. **Impact:** What significant and lasting changes occurred at individual, household, community, and institutional levels?
6. **Sustainability:** Which results and practices are likely to continue, and what factors support or constrain institutionalisation?
7. **Learning and localisation:** How did *Empower* strengthen local ownership, OPD capacity, and leadership of persons with disabilities within humanitarian and recovery systems?

# 3. Approach and process

## 3.1 Evaluation framework and guiding principles

The evaluation applied an *appreciative and feminist lens*, guided by the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and ALNAP Evaluation Criteria<sup>1</sup> – *relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability* – complemented by two additional lenses: **localisation** and **learning for inclusion**. This meant valuing community agency, focusing on learning from what worked, and positioning persons with disabilities as rights-holders and agents of change, not aid recipients. Participatory and Most Significant Change (MSC) techniques were used to ensure that local perspectives shaped both findings and interpretation.

The evaluation approach was explicitly:

- **Participatory and appreciative** – valuing local knowledge and focusing on what worked, why, and under what conditions;
- **Trauma-informed** – recognising the emotional and psychological impact of the war on participants and ensuring respectful, safe engagement;
- **Localisation-driven** – prioritising the voices and analysis of Ukrainian OPDs, local authorities, and beneficiaries over external interpretation.

This combination ensured that findings reflect both *community realities* and *institutional learning* within EDF and its partners.

## 3.2 Methodological design

The evaluation was designed and implemented by **Open Space Works Ukraine (OSWU)** between **July and November 2025**. It combined qualitative and quantitative methods to capture both the **breadth of results** and the **depth of lived experience**.

Key methodological components:

1. **Document and data review:**
  - Programme proposal, logframe, narrative and financial reports, MEAL dashboards (2023-2025), and safeguarding documentation.
2. **Key informant interviews (KIIs):**
  - 24 semi-structured interviews with EDF, CBM, NAPD, LoS national staff, regional coordinators, and local government or service representatives.
  - Interviews were conducted remotely or in person.
3. **Focus group discussions (FGDs) and meetings with beneficiaries:**
  - 3 FGDs held in Poltava oblast and Ternopil oblast, as well as individual conversations with beneficiaries, caregivers, and community social workers in Ivano-Frankivsk, Volyn, Chenivtsi, Cherkasy oblasts;
  - Each discussion explored perceived benefits, challenges, and *most significant changes* (MSC) experienced through the project.
4. **MSC storytelling and outcome harvesting:**
  - Stories were collected from participants, OPD coordinators, and municipal partners to identify qualitative shifts in empowerment, visibility, and cooperation.

<sup>1</sup> [ADAPTING THE OECD CRITERIA FOR THE EVALUATION OF HUMANITARIAN ACTION. AN ALNAP GUIDE, 2025](#)

- These stories were triangulated with quantitative data to verify frequency and depth of similar outcomes.

#### 5. Validation workshop (October 2025):

- Participants from EDF, NAPD, and LoS jointly reviewed preliminary findings and identified lessons for future programming.
- The workshop also validated MSC stories.

#### 6. Data triangulation and synthesis:

- Cross-analysis of transcripts, internal project monitoring data, reports from Ukrainian implementation partners ensured reliability and eliminated single-source bias.
- Evidence was coded along DAC/ALNAP criteria and cross-cutting dimensions (gender, inclusion, localisation, advocacy, and sustainability).

## 3.3 Data coverage and participant profile

The evaluation engaged over **70 direct contributors** across national, regional, and community levels:

- 8 EDF and CBM staff;
- 11 NAPD and LoS national managers;
- 2 external experts (Safeguarding expert and Safety and security expert);
- 18 regional and local coordinators;
- 21 municipal and social-service officials;
- 35 programme participants, caregivers, and community members throughout Poltava, Cherkasy, Volyn, Ternopil, Cherkasy, and Ivano-Frankivsk oblasts.

Internal project monitoring data and partner reports covering **26,000 direct beneficiaries** provided quantitative context, while the interviews and FGDs supplied qualitative nuance and interpretation.

## 3.4 Ethical and safeguarding considerations

The evaluation adhered to **ethical standards consistent with EDF and CBM safeguarding policies** and OSWU's participatory research protocols. Key safeguards included:

- **Informed consent:** All participants confirmed voluntary participation and agreement to audio recording (where applicable).
- **Confidentiality:** Names and identifiers were anonymised; quotes are attributed by region only.
- **Do No Harm:** Sensitive topics were handled carefully to avoid retraumatisation; participants could withdraw at any time.
- **Psychological safety:** Interviewers received briefing on respectful communication and trauma awareness; referral contacts were available for participants requiring follow-up support.

These measures ensured compliance with humanitarian evaluation ethics while centering dignity and agency.

## 3.5 Analytical process

Data analysis followed three interlinked stages:

1. **Thematic coding** of transcripts and notes against evaluation questions and DAC/ALNAP criteria, using inductive categories that captured recurring concepts such as *trust, dignity, participation, local ownership, and partnership efficiency*.
2. **MSC synthesis**, where recurring stories of change were grouped under transformative outcomes (e.g., *from isolation to mobility; from advocacy to co-governance; from aid to agency*).
3. **Triangulation with MEAL, partners narrative report, and dashboard data** to validate the scale, consistency, and plausibility of reported results.

This iterative process ensured that findings were **grounded in evidence** and **interpreted collaboratively** with OPDs and EDF. The validation workshop served as a final check, confirming that reported findings accurately reflected partners' and participants' perspectives.

## 3.6 Limitations and mitigation

Several limitations influenced data collection and interpretation for this evaluation:

- **Workload and availability of local staff:** Regional coordinators continued the project implementation, which was limiting their time for evaluation participation.
- **Documentation gaps:** While safeguarding systems functioned well during Empower, systematic documentation of partner-level feedback and safeguarding cases was uneven, suggesting that future programmes should embed standardised safeguarding reporting templates and feedback logs from the outset to ensure lessons are evidence-based rather than anecdotal.
- **Social desirability bias:** Given the good contacts between OPDs, local coordinators, local partners and beneficiaries, some feedback may have been positively framed. Triangulation and validation mitigated this risk.

Despite these constraints, **data richness and consistency across regions** provided sufficient evidence to ensure credible and balanced conclusions. The participatory validation process further strengthened reliability by allowing partners to review and refine emerging interpretations.

## 3.7 Reflections on the evaluation process

The evaluation itself functioned as a **capacity-strengthening exercise**. For Ukrainian OPD staff, it was their first direct involvement in a structured external evaluation process. Participants noted that the collaborative reflection “felt like a continuation of the *Empower* approach” – learning through dialogue rather than audit. This meta-learning outcome illustrates *Empower's* broader impact: building confidence among Ukrainian OPDs not only to implement but to **document, assess, and communicate their own results**.

# 4. Key Findings by DAC Criteria

## 4.1 Relevance

### 4.1.1. Alignment with needs and rights of persons with disabilities

The *Empower* programme was designed and approved under significant time pressure during the summer 2023 GFFO funding cycle, when many staff across all organisations were on leave. The initial proposal was drafted centrally by CBM and with active engagement of EDF, NAPD and LoS for review and adjustment of the design before submission. Subsequent budget cuts introduced at full proposal stage further reduced staff allocations and removed or underfunded several activities (e.g., realistic MH-GAP training costs). This created gaps between the proposal and what was feasible in practice, requiring partners to adapt approaches during implementation. Despite these constraints, the partnership did make use of available opportunities to refine the programme design after submission: the two project extensions and multiple change request processes enabled partners to adjust staffing structures, rebalance budget lines, and add monitoring capacity that had been underfunded at the outset. Taken together, these adaptations demonstrate that while the original design was constrained by timeline and budget pressures, the partnership responded constructively within the limits of the donor framework. Future programmes should build in a dedicated co-design phase prior to proposal submission to reduce the gap between initial design and implementation reality from the start.

Despite these constraints, having two OPDs as implementing partners ensured that the programme drew on lived experience and community knowledge rather than externally imposed templates. Both organisations shaped assistance based on their long-standing presence in communities and their roles as representative OPDs. However, the compressed design phase meant that some methodological differences (e.g., in needs assessment models, MEAL structure, or advocacy scope) were not aligned at the outset and had to be reconciled during implementation.

The programme's logic reflected the CRPD's core principles of equality, participation, and accessibility. Both implementing partners used the Convention as a guiding framework for identifying needs and designing inclusive solutions, ensuring that interventions addressed rights rather than welfare needs.

#### ***Needs identification and participatory design***

According to both NAPD and EDF respondents, the *Empower* proposal was grounded in **prior** consultations and rapid assessments conducted by OPDs in 2022-2023. Both partner organisations reported that initial design discussions explicitly differentiated between urban and rural contexts and between different disability groups (mobility, sensory, and psychosocial disabilities). The inclusion of transport and assistive technologies emerged directly from local consultations.

#### ***Unique deep rural reach and responsiveness to the context of war and displacement***

Field evidence demonstrates how relevant the project's integrated approach was for rural and semi-urban areas that had seen little humanitarian presence. In project locations that are further remote from frontline and big humanitarian hubs that provided support to internally displaced people, beneficiaries repeatedly noted that this was the only humanitarian assistance they were able to receive since the start of the full-scale invasion.



**“We found people in remote villages who thought they would live their whole life alone. Now they know about us, they know about their rights, and they know they are not alone.” – Chernivtsi oblast**

**“For three years no donor reached our village. This time people received assistance, wheelchairs, transport, and counselling – the first support since the war began.” – Poltava oblast**

only *for* but *by* persons with disabilities. Evidence from beneficiaries and local stakeholders consistently confirms that assistance was timely, appropriate, and complementary to municipal services. Remaining needs – especially long-term rehabilitation and additional assistive-technology supply – extend beyond the current project scope but were identified for future programming.

#### 4.1.2. Adaptation to changing humanitarian and recovery contexts

Across all six oblasts, both implementing partners – **League of the Strong** and **National Assembly of Persons with Disabilities** – demonstrated a high degree of **context sensitivity and adaptive management**, adjusting their activities, coverage, and approaches to meet evolving local needs while upholding inclusion and rights-based principles. The flexibility was supported by regular coordination calls and close communication with EDF and CBM, allowing local teams to propose small-scale design changes without bureaucratic delay.

Both partners introduced adjustments to the assistance package in response to beneficiary feedback and monitoring data. Cash assistance levels were reviewed during the project extension phase to ensure adequacy amid inflation. NAPD continued to apply a flexible mix of in-kind and cash support, recognising that for some persons with disabilities, accessibility constraints made physical distribution preferable.

These adjustments reflected the project’s **appreciative and participatory learning cycle**, in which community feedback was not treated as complaint data but as a co-design input. LoS’s weekly coordination meetings and NAPD’s beneficiary feedback channels (flyers, phone lines, local coordinators) enabled continuous and incremental improvement.

#### ***Bridging humanitarian and recovery approaches***

The project applied a humanitarian–recovery nexus approach, using immediate response activities as an entry point to strengthen locally led, inclusive systems. Both OPD partners were supported to move beyond distribution-focused roles toward meaningful participation in coordination, advocacy, and service restoration. In parallel to humanitarian assistance, NAPD contributed to the sustainability of MHPSS services at community level by supporting the training of medical professionals, who completed WHO-certified programmes. This enabled local health facilities to improve the quality of mental health and psychosocial support services and to meet the requirements for contracting and reimbursement through the National Health Service of Ukraine (NHSU).

Complementing this, LoS integrated core protection and MHPSS components into humanitarian distributions, ensuring that assistance addressed both material needs and wider inclusion barriers. Activities included community awareness sessions, training on barrier-free environments (co-delivered with NAPD), and psychosocial support for educators and community workers. By embedding these elements into the response, the project strengthened community resilience and mainstreamed disability inclusion across sectors. This combined approach facilitated a shift from short-term relief toward sustainable, locally driven recovery and more accountable humanitarian action.

### ***Navigating donor and institutional changes***

*Empower's* adaptive capacity also stemmed from its partnership model. EDF and CBM maintained an open, non-hierarchical communication channel with implementing OPDs, prioritising dialogue and mutual accountability over top-down oversight. Partners described this as a distinctive feature of the Empower model, distinguishing it from more control-oriented programme management approaches. The **project extension** phase exemplified this flexibility: additional staffing (MEAL officer and assistant positions for LoS) and new expenditure lines were approved to address emerging administrative and monitoring needs. This responsiveness ensured that localisation did not become a burden on small OPDs but an opportunity to strengthen institutional systems.

#### **4.1.3. Data led response: Geographic and thematic focus – appropriateness and coverage**

The *Empower* programme deliberately balanced its geographic scope and thematic content to reach both high-risk and structurally underserved areas. Its six-oblast coverage reflected the intention to complement, rather than duplicate, the wider humanitarian architecture. Implemented by **LoS in Ivano-Frankivsk, Cherkasy, and Ternopil**, and by **NAPD in Poltava, Chernivtsi, and Volyn**, the programme combined geographic diversity with operational feasibility. This distribution followed the recommendations of the 2022 CBM-EDF Cash Feasibility Assessment, which highlighted large disparities in service accessibility between western and central oblasts and advised targeting areas with weak humanitarian presence and high concentrations of internally displaced persons (IDPs) with disabilities.

#### ***Geographic appropriateness***

Evidence from community interviews and internal MEAL data confirms that *Empower* extended humanitarian support into rural and semi-urban areas that mainstream actors rarely reached.

- In Chernivtsi, Poltava and Volyn oblasts, local officials described the *Empower* programme – implemented through NAPD's regional networks – as “*the first structured assistance for persons with disabilities since the war began*,” filling gaps left by humanitarian partners concentrated closer to the frontline.
- In Cherkasy, Ivano-Frankivsk and Ternopil oblasts, LoS similarly reached remote settlements with limited transport links and inaccessible service infrastructure, ensuring that households facing geographical and environmental barriers could access essential assistance and referrals.

The internal MEAL data indicate that **nearly 70 % of beneficiaries lived outside oblast capitals**, confirming that the project effectively reached peripheral communities. This localisation of delivery

also increased cost-efficiency and ownership, as activities were channelled through existing OPD networks and local social-service departments rather than parallel NGO systems.

### ***Thematic coverage and relevance***

The programme's thematic portfolio – **cash assistance, assistive devices and transport support, health and MHPSS, advocacy and movement building** – remained coherent across the six oblasts but varied in emphasis depending on context:

- **LoS** prioritised **direct humanitarian delivery** (cash, in-kind support, and transport), coupled with awareness-raising on barrier-free environments.
- **NAPD** alongside the humanitarian assistance focused on **systemic advocacy and service linkage**, using cash and assistive-device provision as entry points for policy dialogue with local authorities.

The MEAL feedback system confirmed high satisfaction with the relevance of support:

- Over **90 % of respondents** rated the assistance as “meeting their main needs,” with **cash and transport support** ranking highest.
- Beneficiaries most frequently cited being able to purchase medicine, hygiene products, and mobility aids, items rarely covered by municipal budgets.

## **4.2 Coherence**

### **4.2.1. Coherence with policy frameworks**

The *Empower* demonstrated strong **vertical and horizontal coherence** between humanitarian, national, and rights-based policy frameworks.

The programme's architecture reflected a rights-based understanding of disability consistent with the **UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)**. At the design stage, EDF required all partners to use the CRPD as the normative reference. Both implementing OPDs framed their role not merely as service deliverers but as agents of systemic change, linking immediate humanitarian support with longer-term inclusion and advocacy.

Through their participation in working groups and cluster coordination, NAPD and LoS acted as conduits between national policy commitments and community-level realities.

NAPD's role in providing annual recommendations to humanitarian clusters and the Ministry of Social Policy helped ensure that persons with disabilities were recognised as a cross-cutting concern in the Humanitarian Response Plans 2023-2025.

At the subnational level, both partners established functional collaboration with local governments and social-service centres. LoS's field teams in Cherkasy, Ivano-Frankivsk, and Ternopil oblasts involved municipal authorities in need of identification and advocacy on inclusive infrastructure. NAPD's engagement with local councils in Chernivtsi, Poltava, and Volyn oblasts led to the

reactivation of dormant disability-support programmes within community budgets. In several municipalities, local administrations adapted their assistance or accessibility plans after observing *Empower's* model, an example of policy diffusion rather than dependency.

#### 4.2.2. Synergy with Donor and Humanitarian Architectures

The programme maintained coherence with GFFO and CBM's broader strategic commitments under the **Global Disability Summit and Charter on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action as well as the UNCRPD and IASC Guidelines**. By embedding localisation and OPD leadership, *Empower* offered a practical demonstration of these global pledges in an active war context. Coordination with humanitarian clusters and UN agencies was continuous: NAPD reported regular collaboration with the Protection, WASH, Shelter clusters, Gender in Humanitarian Action Working Group. Both organizations participated in the Ukraine Recovery Conference, Global Disability Summit etc. as a means to bring technical expertise and advocacy to these spaces and stakeholders.

Importantly, *Empower* complemented rather than duplicated other humanitarian assistance. It filled geographical and thematic gaps left by larger actors focused on frontline or IDPs solely. Local officials confirmed that *Empower's* flexible cash and transport modalities were "bridging mechanisms" between humanitarian relief and municipal social services, ensuring that persons with disabilities in remote locations were reached without creating parallel systems.

#### 4.2.3. Internal coherence between EDF, NAPD, and LoS programming

The programme's internal coherence between its humanitarian, psychosocial, and advocacy pillars was another strength. Each component reinforced the others: humanitarian assistance restored dignity and trust; MHPSS activities built psychosocial resilience; and advocacy converted individual empowerment into institutional visibility. This multi-level design mirrored both the EDF strategic framework and the localisation objectives outlined in the evaluation plan, contributing to a coherent humanitarian-to-development continuum.

## 4.3 Effectiveness

### 4.3.1. Achievement of outputs and outcomes across five result areas

The *Empower* had **met or exceeded nearly all planned results**, performing strongly across its five result areas: humanitarian assistance, health and rehabilitation, psychosocial support, inclusion and advocacy, and organisational capacity strengthening. Both implementing partners effectively used their established networks, credibility, and contextual knowledge to deliver activities in complex and shifting wartime conditions.

The programme's progress, verified through the final logframe, internal MEAL system, and partner reports, demonstrates that *Empower* delivered **both scale and systemic change**, achieving quantitative targets while embedding inclusion and rights-based approaches in every component.

#### ***Humanitarian assistance and cash support***

By the time of writing, *Empower* reached 9,721 persons with disabilities and their families, specifically, LoS – to 1,083 people, and NAPD – to 8,638 people, through **cash assistance** totalling €

1.2 million. Cash support directly improved nutrition, housing, and living conditions, enabling recipients to buy food, medicines, hygiene products, and essential household goods.

Monitoring data and community interviews confirm that beneficiaries valued **autonomy and flexibility** in decision-making: most preferred unrestricted cash and reported using it for medical consultations, rehabilitation, and mobility-related expenses.

Post-distribution monitoring also showed high satisfaction and transparency: over 95 % of surveyed households confirmed receiving the expected amount and understanding the purpose and process of assistance.

**“This is real help for people who truly need it,” said one recipient, reflecting a common perception of Empower as practical and dignified support rather than charity.**

### ***Health and rehabilitation***

Under the health component, by the end of 2025 **10,955** persons gained access to **inclusive primary healthcare and rehabilitation services**, including mobile transport and assistive support. This achievement not only met but exceeded planned coverage, largely due to the integration of accessible transport, coordination with local social-service centres, and flexible budgeting for medical items not covered by state schemes.

A total of **2,054 individuals received assistive devices, specifically, LOS – to 1,135 persons, and NAPD – to 919 persons** – more than double the original target – together with personalised training on use and maintenance. These devices included mobility aids, hearing devices, and adapted hygiene equipment, improving independence and participation in daily life..

**“Now I can move around and visit the clinic myself,” reported a participant from Chernivtsi, illustrating the link between assistive technology and personal empowerment.**

### ***Mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS)***

The project reached by the end of 2025 **13,073 beneficiaries** who were provided with resources, information, and referrals to specialists in mental health and psychosocial first aid throughout its implementation period. The project overperformed against its target of 10,000 beneficiaries, reaching **130% of the planned target**.

Eight inclusive support groups were established (target four), providing safe spaces for persons with disabilities, caregivers, and displaced persons to share experiences and rebuild confidence. Drawing on NAPD’s more than 15 years of experience in community-based peer support, the groups were framed as inclusive self-support spaces rather than explicitly labelled as mental health

interventions, which helped reduce stigma and increase participation. League of the Strong (LoS) led the establishment and facilitation of self-help groups at community level; while this format was relatively new for the organisation, initial implementation challenges informed ongoing adaptation and learning, contributing to gradual uptake and participant engagement..

Beneficiary feedback highlighted that group sessions reduced isolation and fostered mutual solidarity. Local coordinators noted increased demand for continued psychosocial support, confirming the relevance of expanding this component during the project extension phase.

### ***Inclusion, advocacy, and systems strengthening***

The project delivered sustained awareness and capacity-building initiatives for healthcare providers that helped embed more inclusive, person-centred approaches into everyday service delivery.

A total of **1,198** psychosocial and primary health care personnel received WHO mhGAP awareness training, psychosocial first aid, and disability-inclusive healthcare by the end of 2025. Of these, **855** were trained through LOS and **343** through NAPD. This demonstrates strengthened capacity in psychosocial and primary health care, as well as in providing support aligned with WHO mhGAP, psychosocial first aid, and disability-inclusive healthcare.

*Empower's* inclusion and advocacy work produced tangible institutional outcomes. Both OPDs contributed to mainstreaming disability within humanitarian coordination mechanisms and local governance processes.

Both **NAPD** and **LoS** contributed to institutionalising disability inclusion at the municipal level.

NAPD's coordinators built consistent working relationships with local councils and social-service departments through a structured cycle of community-level advocacy campaigns. Each year, campaigns focused on different priority themes, resulting in 18 local advocacy campaigns implemented across six communities over three years. These sustained efforts contributed to tangible results: local officials confirmed that cooperation with NAPD prompted renewed municipal funding for assistive and hygiene items, improved coordination between social workers and OPDs, and the co-development of accessibility and social-support programmes in several communities.

LoS pursued a complementary approach, focusing on **community-level awareness, accessibility audits, and training for service providers**. LoS local teams supported local administrations in establishing or activating *barrier-free and inclusion councils*, promoting collaboration among municipal officers, educators, and OPD representatives.

Together, the two organisations bridged the gap between national inclusion standards and local practice. Their actions helped shift disability inclusion from a project-bound activity to a **recognized element of local governance**, illustrating how OPD-led humanitarian work can strengthen state-civil society cooperation even amid crisis conditions:

- Both OPDs implemented their own **advocacy and capacity-building actions** at *local, regional, and national* levels, including structured **training for local authorities and humanitarian actors** on the human rights model of disability, universal design, and person-centred planning.

- **Both partners worked through existing social-service structures** to deliver assistance and advocacy along existing social services and institutions, reinforcing collaboration with municipal and regional authorities. Municipal representatives described the partnership as “**a continuation of our own social policy.**”
- LoS local coordinators described **joint barrier-free councils** and awareness sessions with teachers, social workers, and municipal officers, where “*the local administration asked us to help them review buildings and prepare recommendations.*”
- Through *Empower* EDF had helped raised awareness at high-level platforms, linking OPDs’ local work with national and even international fora such as the Ukraine Reconstruction Conference, where disability issues were discussed for the first time;

### **Organisational capacity and localisation**

*Empower* significantly reinforced the **institutional and technical capacities** of both implementing OPDs. Staff training, financial management mentoring, and MEAL system development improved programme quality and accountability. Partners expanded their teams, introduced clearer internal procedures, and enhanced coordination with EDF.

Across both partner organisations, *Empower* strengthened the leadership role of persons with disabilities in humanitarian response. While the proportion of staff with disabilities varied by organisation, each partner ensured that persons with disabilities were directly involved in programme coordination, beneficiary verification, MEAL processes and delivery of assistance. This reflects a deliberate shift toward disability-led humanitarian action, consistent with the project’s localisation and inclusion objectives.

The *Empower* Ukraine programme achieved or exceeded its quantitative and qualitative targets across all five result areas. It delivered large-scale, inclusive humanitarian aid while fostering longer-term systems change.

#### **4.3.2. Reach and inclusion of target groups**

The *Empower* programme demonstrated consistent success in **reaching its intended target groups**: persons with disabilities, internally displaced persons, older persons, veterans, and low-income households in rural and semi-rural areas. Targeting remained broad yet precise, prioritising households facing intersecting vulnerabilities and communities previously excluded from humanitarian aid. This achievement was the result of systematic outreach, community-level coordination, and flexible delivery modalities designed and led by organisations of persons with disabilities (OPDs).

Project data confirm that by the end of 2025 *Empower* has directly supported 20,676 beneficiaries with cash assistance, assistive devices, and transport (**within an overall programme reach of approximately 26,000 people**). According to the latest disaggregated data, 63% of beneficiaries are women and children, and 78% are persons with disabilities. This focus directly responded to findings from the 2022 *Disability-Inclusive Cash Feasibility Assessment*, which identified physical inaccessibility, transport costs, and lack of information as the main barriers preventing persons with disabilities from accessing humanitarian aid.

Field evidence from communities supports that the programme **filled critical gaps** left by other actors. Local social-service departments repeatedly noted that persons with disabilities in their areas had not previously received external support.

**Good practice:**

NAPD's collaboration with local councils and social workers allowed for joint verification lists and outreach visits to identify isolated individuals, particularly older persons and families of persons with complex disabilities.

The MEAL data and post-distribution monitoring confirm that **targeting criteria were consistently applied** and that over 80 % of beneficiaries identified themselves as persons with disabilities or caregivers of persons with disabilities and the remaining 20% as family members living with persons with disabilities.

***Inclusive and context-appropriate delivery***

Empower's **cash-first approach** was central to its inclusive design. By transferring cash assistance directly to households, the project enabled people to address diverse priorities, from health care and mobility to heating and nutrition. Beneficiary feedback confirmed that **flexibility of use was the most valued aspect** of the assistance, particularly for individuals in remote areas who could not access voucher-based schemes.

Cash assistance emerged as one of the most relevant and valued components of the programme. Across communities, beneficiaries consistently described cash as the form of support that most enhanced their sense of dignity, choice and personal agency – especially within a social protection system that offers limited flexibility and does not easily accommodate individual needs or preferences. Interviews with project beneficiaries show that cash enabled people to prioritise essentials such as medicines, transport, rent, heating or personal care, and reduced the stress associated with having to “fit” their needs into pre-determined in-kind packages. These findings align with wider research in Ukraine, which highlights that affected people overwhelmingly prefer cash because it allows them to exercise autonomy, plan for their households, and avoid the stigma often associated with state benefits or in-kind aid. Empower's cash modality therefore reaffirmed an established evidence base: where feasible, cash should remain a first-line option in humanitarian programming, as it best supports people's dignity, agency and self-determination.

Accessibility measures, such as door-to-door communication, adapted information materials, and cooperation with local taxi and transport providers, made the assistance physically reachable for those with severe mobility limitations.

***Participation and visibility***

Both OPDs implemented proactive feedback mechanisms through community focal points and local helplines. MEAL reports show that **over 90 % of respondents felt able to express feedback or complaints**, and satisfaction levels with relevance and accessibility exceeded 95 %.

Persons with disabilities were engaged at every stage – as coordinators, enumerators, and community focal points – enhancing trust and accountability. Regional advocacy initiatives

promoted inclusive public spaces and accessibility councils, while cooperation with local authorities strengthened the visibility of OPDs as reliable humanitarian actors.

Overall, Empower’s reach was **broad, targeted, and verifiable**. Its methodology went beyond numerical coverage: by combining OPD-led outreach, accessibility adaptations, and cash flexibility, the programme ensured that persons most excluded from humanitarian assistance could participate on equal terms. Empower set a practical benchmark for equitable humanitarian delivery led by organisations of persons with disabilities in Ukraine.

### 4.3.3. Perceived benefits and challenges from partner and participant perspectives

Across stakeholder interviews, the Empower programme was consistently described as **timely, practical, and highly trusted**. Respondents – including beneficiaries, local authorities, and local social service providers – emphasised that assistance arrived when institutional systems were under strain and when persons with disabilities had few or no alternatives. At the same time, they underlined several constraints, including limited scale, short funding cycles, and uneven inclusion of some groups of persons with disabilities.

#### *Perceived benefits*

**Timeliness and relevance:** Beneficiaries described Empower as the only available channel of support during periods when municipal and humanitarian assistance had stopped, highlighting that support was both contextually relevant and delivered at a critical time. Local social-service staff noted that the project “relieved pressure on community budgets” by covering basic food, heating, health, and hygiene expenses for persons with disabilities who were previously unsupported.

**Improved mobility, health access, and autonomy:** Accessible transport and assistive devices were repeatedly cited as the **most transformative elements** of the programme. In most of the communities beneficiaries recounted that transportation services enabled them to attend rehabilitation, access significant healthcare and social services. In Shumsk, the local coordinator described how wheelchairs and transport “finally connected people to hospitals and community centres.” In all locations these services also reduced the caseload of municipal social workers, who could redirect resources to other needs. MEAL data show that by the end of 2025 8901 individuals were transported to medical and rehabilitation facilities (34 % above target) and 2054 received assistive devices.

**Learning, confidence, and participation:** Training activities – including first-aid and self-help sessions – had strong psychosocial value. NAPD local coordinators shared that participants not only learned practical skills but also **redefined their self-image from “recipients” to capable community members**.

**“When we talk about self-help for persons with disabilities, usually they are the ones being rescued by others, but here they learned to help themselves.”**  
– NAPD coordinator

MSC stories further illustrate this change:

- In one community, a woman who had previously avoided public events began volunteering as a peer supporter after attending self-help training.
- In another, caregivers who met during MHPSS sessions created informal support circles that continue to meet monthly without project funding.
- One woman shared that these shared rides helped her break a long-standing pattern of isolation at home; for the first time, she felt free to speak openly with other women and to travel without her husband's control.

These accounts indicate that the programme strengthened not only individual resilience but also **horizontal solidarity networks** that outlasted direct assistance.

**Trust, cooperation, and credibility of OPDs:** Partners highlighted the project's participatory management style and the **responsiveness of coordination mechanisms**. Regular exchange with EDF, and the availability of project managers for troubleshooting, fostered a sense of accountability and mutual respect. Local authorities in several oblasts confirmed that collaboration with OPDs changed their perception of disability organisations – from advocacy groups to **reliable humanitarian partners**.

### ***Perceived challenges***

**Scale and continuity:** Despite high satisfaction, many beneficiaries emphasised that the **one-off nature of assistance** could not meet ongoing needs. Cash payments and hygiene kits were quickly exhausted. Both LoS and NAPD regional teams reported growing waiting lists for mobility support and psychological counselling. Beneficiaries suggested integrating Empower services into local budget lines, an idea echoed by municipal officials who had begun allocating small funds for hygiene and medicine procurement.

**Feedback and accountability:** Partners maintained open communication through helplines and direct contact, but documentation of feedback at community level was inconsistent. Teams sometimes equated “no complaints” with “no feedback,” leaving learning opportunities under-captured.

The project's main strengths – accessibility, and participatory management – were offset by structural constraints from funding limits: limited duration, staff capacity. Nevertheless, the evidence demonstrates that Empower advanced a shift from transactional aid delivery toward **co-production between OPDs, local authorities, and communities**, strengthening both service access and the social contract of inclusion in war-affected Ukraine.

### **4.3.4 Comparative approaches of NAPD and League of the Strong**

While both organisations are represented as OPDs and share a commitment to disability inclusion, their operational methodologies, organisational histories and geographic strategies diverged in the ways they shaped implementation. These differences did not undermine programme coherence; rather, they produced complementary strengths that enhanced both the reach and quality of assistance.

LoS adopted a **wide-area humanitarian coverage model**, operating across entire oblasts (provinces) rather than in fixed hromadas (villages). As a starting point, using Ukraine social services lists of households facing poverty, LoS mapped people in most vulnerable situations that were eligible for being beneficiaries. This allowed the team to reach **the poorest and most isolated individuals**, including those not registered with social services.

For the League of the Strong (LoS), Empower was the organisation's first major humanitarian programme. The LoS team was led by an experienced humanitarian aid staffer who began by ensuring LoS therefore invested heavily in building **MEAL, verification and referral systems from scratch**, including a KoBo-based data collection / needs assessment and structured documentation procedures.

Coordinators cultivated strong relationships with local health facilities and social-service centres, facilitated training, and conducted accessibility audits. The LoS team implemented the project directly in accordance with humanitarian principles and over-delivered on many of the key performance indicators.

NAPD adopted a **targeted, community-based human rights model**, working in six selected hromadas (villages) in three oblasts (provinces). In each, the organisation conducted a **comprehensive demographic screening** at project start, mapping persons with disabilities, caregivers, older people, children, veterans and displaced populations. This assessment guided the planning and monitoring of humanitarian support.

Importantly, NAPD's humanitarian strategy aimed at **broad coverage within each selected community**. Coordinators sought to reach **all persons with disabilities and their caregivers**, rather than focusing only on a narrow subset of eligible households. This approach helped ensure equity within communities and strengthened the visibility of persons with disabilities in local service systems. Similarly to LoS, NAPD also over-delivered on many of the project indicators.

NAPD teams worked closely with **municipal social services, rehabilitation institutions and local administrations**, co-developing accessibility actions, inclusive social-support practices and disability-awareness activities. Their work extended beyond the distribution of humanitarian assistance to support the **long-term strengthening of the local disability movement**, identifying isolated families, nurturing existing and / or new OPD groups, and mentoring emerging community advocates.

Analysts could describe this as going above and beyond the scope of the project. It reflects NAPD's rights-based mandate and its role as a national umbrella OPD seeking not only to deliver aid but also to embed inclusive governance practices consistent with the CRPD.

## 4.4 Efficiency

### 4.4.1. Resource utilisation, management processes, and delivery mechanisms

The Empower Ukraine programme demonstrated consistently high financial and managerial efficiency. By October 2025, **88% of the total approved budget for the project period until end 2025 (€4.52 million)** had been spent, indicating a **high level of implementation progress** and alignment

between planned and delivered activities. The remaining balance was linked to **activities scheduled for the final implementation phase** and does not indicate under-delivery.

Approximately 30% of total resources were channelled directly to cash assistance, ensuring that funds reached beneficiaries rapidly and with minimal transaction costs. EDF, NAPD and LoS together receive 86% of the admin lump sum to reinforce their operational capacity.

### ***Financial oversight and efficiency controls***

As lead partner, EDF played a central coordination and accompaniment role between CBM, GFFO and the two Ukrainian OPDs, supporting compliance and accountability requirements while enabling national partners to focus on programme delivery and organisational strengthening. CBM's role was equally valued: it maintained accountability for the project towards GFFO, ensured compliant project implementation through financial controlling and high-quality reporting, and served as the key liaison with GFFO and BfAA on funding regulations, project adaptation and reporting requirements. Both NAPD and LoS repeatedly emphasised that EDF absorbed a substantial portion of the coordination and reporting workload that would otherwise have fallen on them. Instead of parallel communication with CBM and the German Federal Foreign Office, local partners interacted primarily with the EDF focal point, which **significantly reduced administrative load**, prevented duplication of requests, and provided a clear and predictable workflow during implementation.

EDF oversaw donor compliance and served as a **backbone coordinator** that ensured consistency of financial and MEAL procedures across NAPD and LoS. Its compliance function included three formal monitoring visits per year, continuous desk review of financial reports, and monthly coordination calls on expenditure and delivery performance. This compliance and accountability function was further supported by CBM through regular reviews and finalisation of financial, narrative and data reports, project visits, and close liaison with GFFO to reinforce operations, raise visibility and communicate relevant regulatory changes.

Both NAPD and LoS used 1C and Medoc accounting systems with dual authorisation and electronic tracking of each payment. Partner-level audit trails were verified by EDF and CBM, providing a full audit chain from donor disbursement to beneficiary payment.

To maintain liquidity amid wartime banking and logistical disruptions, EDF introduced automated rolling financial-risk review and adaptive disbursement schedules, releasing funds in smaller tranches linked to verified delivery milestones. This project management mechanism mitigated exposure to currency volatility and enabled uninterrupted field operations and ensured accurate planning across the project.

This aligns strongly with current humanitarian localisation principles, positioning EDF as a **backbone coordinator** that enhances partner effectiveness without reducing their autonomy or agency.

### ***Monitoring and adaptive performance management***

Financial and narrative reporting occurred quarterly, complemented by continuous internal MEAL tracking of efficiency, timeliness, and accountability indicators. The consolidated 2024 Internal MEAL assessment rated implementation 9.3 / 10 for resource efficiency and adaptive management.

Post-distribution monitoring confirmed that 94 % of recipients used assistance as intended and expressed satisfaction with delivery timeliness.

Decentralised financial responsibility at field level increased responsiveness while keeping overheads low.

#### **4.4.2 Management and partnership efficiency**

Beyond financial efficiency, Empower's efficiency rested on a collaborative and capacity-oriented management model. EDF functioned not only as a grant manager but as a learning facilitator, strengthening partners' technical and administrative systems through regular mentoring. According to Phillipa Tucker, EDF's role was to "build capability while ensuring accountability," reflecting a shift from compliance-based oversight to partnership-based accompaniment. CBM complemented this model by maintaining overall accountability to GFFO, providing technical guidance on regulatory requirements, and supporting a continuous quality assurance function across financial and narrative reporting that enabled EDF to focus on programme facilitation and learning.

##### ***Capacity development and adaptive learning***

Throughout 2023-2024, EDF and CBM provided targeted support in procurement, donor reporting, and audit preparation. Both NAPD and LoS introduced new internal policies on procurement, data protection, security and safeguarding as a result. CBM contributed significantly to this process through training partners in GFFO regulations and standards, conducting regular reviews of financial, narrative and data reports, reviewing employment models, and supporting financial audits, MEAL processes and terms of reference. CBM also played a central role in the preparation and review of change and extension requests, including two project extensions and multiple change request processes covering employment models, staff lists, financial balances, and the administrative lump sum. Quarterly reflection sessions with EDF allowed partners to review MEAL findings, identify bottlenecks, and adjust implementation plans – an example of real-time learning that improved overall programme agility. Partners also viewed the project extension as collaborative and well-aligned with field needs: EDF consulted both organisations on remaining gaps, drafted a focused extension plan, and finalised it only after partner validation, ensuring continuity for communities without adding administrative burden.

##### ***Localisation and localised decision making***

Decision-making authority and financial responsibility were intentionally delegated to Ukrainian partners. Partners determined operational priorities within approved budgets while EDF ensured coherence and donor compliance. This approach fostered ownership and accountability rather than dependency, reinforcing OPDs' institutional legitimacy with donors and national authorities alike.

The management and partnership model combined rigorous oversight with developmental support. EDF's backbone role, together with CBM's technical input, compliance support and GFFO liaison, enabled national OPDs to operate at international humanitarian standards while preserving local decision-making autonomy. This partnership configuration proved both efficient and empowering, advancing localisation through practice rather than policy rhetoric.

The localisation achieved through Empower also shifted traditional power relations in aid delivery. Ukrainian OPDs – not international agencies – defined priorities, managed budgets, and led implementation. This represents a concrete step from "participation" to *power-sharing*. For EDF, this

partnership served as a proof of equitable localisation in practice, revealing that genuine local leadership requires not only trust and funding, but also mutual capacity exchange and flexibility from international partners.

### 4.4.3 Challenges and efficiency constraints

While Empower Ukraine demonstrated strong financial discipline and adaptive management, partners and EDF identified several structural and operational challenges that influenced overall efficiency. These constraints were not primarily the result of weak management but of the complex wartime operating environment and the rapid institutional growth of implementing OPDs.

Regional coordinators often performed multiple roles simultaneously – logistics, communication with local beneficiaries, and collecting questions / feedback – which created efficiency bottlenecks. Despite these challenges, partners consistently delivered on schedule, but at significant personal workload cost. Future programmes would benefit from resourcing staffing structures at a level that safeguards staff wellbeing and ensures sustainable implementation.

The evaluation noted that resolving technical support questions sometimes took time, in part due to the multi-layered coordination structure (NAPD/LoS – EDF – CBM – GFFO). This was a structural challenge inherent to the coordination model rather than a reflection of limited capacity. CBM proactively offered technical support on disability inclusion and humanitarian action on multiple occasions; however, some offers were not taken up by partners, who indicated they already had relevant in-country expertise. Future programmes would benefit from jointly defining technical support needs at inception, so that CBM's proven expertise in disability-inclusive humanitarian action can be deployed more effectively and responsively. Conversely, Ukrainian OPDs demonstrated practical, context-grounded expertise, indicating readiness to work directly with humanitarian and recovery donors in future cycles. This experience underscores the need for donors and intermediaries to align technical structures with the capacities of local rights-holders' organisations they intend to support.

Empower's efficiency constraints were primarily contextual, stemming from wartime logistics, administrative workload. NAPD and LoS had to learn reporting, procurement, and documentation requirements need for implementation of big humanitarian programmes, while simultaneously delivering a complex programme under crisis conditions – a steep but manageable learning curve. EDF and CBM supported this process through flexible financial management and hands-on capacity support. The experience demonstrated that localisation requires not only trust and funding but also systematic investment in organisational systems and staff well-being to sustain efficiency under crisis conditions.

## 4.5 Impact

### 4.5.1. Impact on people and households.

#### **Tangible individual impacts (cash, assistive technology, and transport) enabled access to care and daily functioning**

The project had a direct and visible impact on the lives of persons with disabilities and their families. The distribution of assistive technology, social transport, and cash assistance significantly

improved mobility, access to healthcare, education, and daily functioning. Respondents reported that access to wheelchairs, walking aids, tablets for learning, and financial support allowed individuals to reach medical facilities, attend school, and manage essential household needs.

The programme's impact was particularly visible among women with disabilities and women caregivers. In line with feminist localisation principles, many of the project's community coordinators and self-help leaders were women who transformed personal experience of caregiving or disability into leadership and advocacy. This demonstrates the gendered dimension of empowerment, shifting women from invisible carers to recognised community actors.

Evidence from community meetings showed that even basic financial assistance proved valuable, particularly in rural and remote communities where humanitarian aid was limited. Beneficiaries and local authorities appreciated that the project reached deep into local communities, demonstrating that localised OPD-led delivery models can effectively extend support beyond urban centres.

The provision of assistive devices and accessible transport also produced lasting effects. Project-funded transport and medical equipment continue to be used after project completion, supporting persons with disabilities and older adults to access clinics, social services, and workplaces. This shows that material inputs can create sustainable individual-level outcomes without ongoing external funding.

**“Thanks to financial assistance, a person with a disability and stage four cancer was able not only to purchase the necessary medicines and receive treatment in our oncology hospital, but also to travel to Kropyvnytskyi for additional examinations. We were very happy that we could help this person.” — Local authority representative**

### *Psychosocial wellbeing and self-efficacy gains*

Beyond material assistance, the project had a strong psychosocial impact on participants, contributing to greater confidence, social connection, and emotional wellbeing. Persons with disabilities described feeling valued, visible, and supported by their communities, a change that many linked to their participation in OPD activities and peer groups.

Regular contact with local coordinators, inclusive community meetings, and the opportunity to contribute to shared activities helped reduce isolation and build a sense of belonging. Respondents emphasised that the project reminded persons with disabilities of their worth and strengthened mutual support within families and communities. These outcomes demonstrate how empowerment and participation can complement direct aid to achieve lasting improvements in quality of life..

### *Household-level benefits beyond direct recipients*

The project's impact extended beyond individual beneficiaries, improving the wellbeing of entire households. When assistive devices, transport services, or financial support entered a family, they eased daily routines, reduced caregiving burdens, and strengthened overall household resilience. Beneficiaries noted that the provision of assistive devices and transport not only improved the

quality of life of persons with disabilities but also **reduced stress and workload for entire households.**

## **4.5.2. Impact on local services and systems**

### ***Municipal responsiveness and practical adaptations***

The project fostered steady, results-oriented cooperation between OPDs and local governments, leading to tangible improvements in municipal responsiveness. Through consistent dialogue and trust-building, OPDs successfully encouraged many local authorities to address accessibility gaps, adjust service delivery, and implement small but meaningful adaptations in community infrastructure and transport.

Local officials appreciated the project's practical and collaborative approach – focusing on problem-solving rather than criticism – which helped establish a culture of partnership between civil society and municipal administrations. These examples show that even modest, well-facilitated cooperation can yield structural changes and strengthen local accountability.

### ***Municipal awareness and professional practice improved***

The project significantly enhanced the understanding of inclusion among local authorities and service providers. Municipal leaders who previously lacked exposure to disability inclusion now “speak the language” of accessibility and recognise the social and developmental importance of OPD work.

Through participation in project activities and direct engagement with OPDs, local administrations became more aware of accessibility standards, respectful communication, and the broader human rights-based approach to disability. As a result, many municipalities began proactively consulting OPDs and incorporating inclusive practices into their local planning and social policies.

### ***System navigation and access to humanitarian assistance increased***

By strengthening OPD networks and coordination with local authorities, the project expanded access to humanitarian assistance and services for persons with disabilities. Improved system navigation – through referrals, information sharing, and community focal points – allowed vulnerable individuals to access previously unreachable forms of aid, such as medical, psychosocial, and livelihood support.

### ***Social cohesion and solidarity effects***

Beyond formal service improvements, the project contributed to greater social cohesion and solidarity at the community level. Joint initiatives between OPDs, local authorities, and volunteers helped foster mutual support and a sense of belonging among persons with disabilities and their neighbours.

Respondents described how regular contact, shared events, and collective problem-solving created new relationships of trust and empathy. This strengthened the social fabric of communities, embedding inclusion not only in policy but also in everyday interactions – a foundation for long-term resilience and cooperation.

**“Now, in the Cherkasy region, the League of the Strong is one of the most well-known organisations. Even in communities where we did not work directly, everyone knew about it. And even now, when the project is almost over, people are asking what will happen next and how to continue cooperating. This is a big result.” – Local authority representative**

**“We aimed for coordinators to come from local organisations, to live in the community, to know its needs, and we strengthened their organisations. As a result, they became recognised in their communities.” – NAPD representative**

### 4.5.3. Impact on OPDs and civil society

#### ***Organisational recognition and community leadership***

The programme substantially increased the visibility and legitimacy of participating OPDs at the local level. By intentionally selecting coordinators from within communities, organisations such as NAPD and the League of the Strong strengthened their local presence and credibility. Community-based coordinators acted as trusted intermediaries between citizens and local authorities, ensuring that the voices of persons with disabilities were directly represented in decision-making.

Local authorities confirmed that OPDs had become recognised community actors, known beyond project sites and appreciated for their professionalism and reliability. This enhanced standing created new opportunities for partnership and sustained engagement in social planning

#### ***Advocacy achievements at national and local levels; discourse shift***

The project advanced advocacy on disability inclusion at both national and local levels, contributing to a visible shift in public discourse. OPDs led campaigns on accessibility and inclusion, engaged local governments in dialogue, and promoted the use of inclusive language and standards. Their participation in policy discussions and public events helped normalise disability topics in mainstream social and political conversations.

#### ***Presence and credibility in international fora and clusters***

Across the Empower implementation period, EDF fulfilled a bridging function between Ukrainian OPDs, the wider humanitarian system, and European decision-making structures. Interview evidence indicates that EDF's sustained engagement in Brussels and relevant global fora contributed to elevating disability-inclusive humanitarian action (DIHA) within discussions on Ukraine's response and recovery. Through targeted participation in EU institutions, UN mechanisms and events such as the Global Disability Summit and the Ukraine Recovery Conference, EDF facilitated meaningful representation of NAPD and LoS, helping position Ukrainian OPDs as credible actors in international policy dialogue. This exposure strengthened partners' confidence and their ability to engage in future multi-level advocacy processes.

**EDF's contributions were also visible within the humanitarian coordination architecture, particularly where its convening role reinforced partners' technical advocacy.** Both NAPD and LoS reported that, compared with early project stages, disability considerations became increasingly embedded in

cluster deliberations. A notable example was EDF's engagement following two coordination meetings in Kyiv convened by NAPD with WASH actors, where EDF's participation helped elevate and unlock stalled discussions. Within days, concrete follow-up actions were observed.

Within the Protection and WASH clusters – where partner OPDs participate – disability-related considerations began to feature more systematically in technical planning and operational discussions, reflecting a gradual shift toward treating disability inclusion as an expected component of principled humanitarian action. This was evidenced by concrete adjustments to sectoral guidance, including the WASH Cluster's revision of hygiene assistance guidelines to explicitly include assistive hygiene items (e.g. catheters, incontinence products, colostomy supplies).

**This experience illustrates the added value of EDF's role as a regional actor able to complement national advocacy, particularly in contexts where national coordination spaces are fatigued or less responsive.** While effective in this instance, not all efforts by NAPD and EDF were as effective, representing a missed opportunity by other stakeholders to more systematically deploy OPD technical expertise, (national and regional) in support of disability inclusive humanitarian action..

### ***Knowledge diffusion and professional standards across the sector***

The project stimulated a broader transfer of knowledge and good practices within Ukraine's disability sector. Partner OPDs acted as regional catalysts, spreading professional standards of inclusive communication, accessibility, and safeguarding. Local authorities and peer organisations increasingly sought their expertise and training, creating multiplier effects that extend beyond the project's direct beneficiaries.

This diffusion of know-how has strengthened the professional identity and reputation of OPDs as technical leaders in the inclusion field.

### ***Accumulative impact across project phases***

The project built on earlier initiatives and partnerships, producing a cumulative impact across phases. Prior groundwork on institutional development and advocacy created a solid base for the *Empower* programme, which then amplified results by expanding networks, scaling up successful practices, and deepening collaboration with authorities and humanitarian actors.

This layered approach – from pilot interventions to institutional strengthening – allowed for progressive capacity growth and more sustainable, system-level influence.

## **4.6 Sustainability**

### **4.6.1. Prospects for continuity of results and institutionalisation**

#### ***Local authorities are beginning to carry forward inclusive practices, though unevenly and within financial limitations***

The project design explicitly aimed “to deliver through local systems (e.g., primary healthcare, social service providers, municipal administrations) for longer-term sustainability and to influence broader humanitarian inclusion.” Activities were embedded within local governance and service-delivery structures rather than implemented in parallel.

Interviews with OPDs and local authorities indicate that several municipalities have started continuing inclusive actions introduced through the project – for example, maintaining accessible entrances and providing assistance to persons with disabilities in the Chernivtsi oblast, or taking over social transportation services throughout oblasts. Respondents from local authorities also noted that **learning new strategies and methods of supporting persons with disabilities** is itself a sustainability achievement that remains after project closure.

At the same time, fiscal constraints and wartime pressures limit systematic uptake. While many communities express commitment, readiness to fully assume responsibilities remains uneven, and long-term continuity depends on budgetary space and local leadership.

### ***Embedding services in public systems and leaving durable artefacts provides anchors for continuity***

The *Empower* proposal identified integration with public health and social-care systems as one of the key sustainability pathways. Both implementation partners observe progress in this area, especially where the project left behind formal documentation or certified practices – such as accessibility audit reports or community screening data.

When hospitals receive accessibility assessments or when clinicians obtain certifications, these artefacts serve as institutional memory that outlasts staff turnover and enable gradual improvements once financial conditions permit.

**“Even the accessibility audits that we conducted are lasting documents that provide grounds for making the necessary changes in the future, when budgets become available.” – LoS representative**

**“We provided certificates for doctors, and they opened services – this is sustainability at the community level. Thanks to the screening we conducted, we were also able to speak with other humanitarian organisations working, for example, on reconstruction.” – NAPD representative**

### ***Community-level structures such as self-help groups and OPD leader networks show potential for continuation***

The *Empower* project design envisaged the formation of **self-help and peer-support groups** to reinforce local ownership and psychosocial recovery within communities. Even though the number of such groups remained limited, they are likely to continue functioning voluntarily beyond the project period.

These community-based groups received positive feedback from beneficiaries. Although initiated within the project, they now rely primarily on **voluntary participation, mutual support, and local initiative**, which allows them to operate independently of external funding.

### ***OPD-municipality data partnerships strengthen local institutional follow-through.***

By systematically mapping community demographics and service gaps, **NAPD** created evidence that 6 partner municipalities in Poltava, Chernivtsi, and Volyn oblast can use for planning, targeting social services, and attracting humanitarian or recovery funding. This data-driven approach positioned the organisation as a **credible expert partner** both locally and nationally, reinforcing its institutional role in inclusive development.

**“Our “Supermoms” club will continue its work. We are already engaging, where possible, other sponsorship programmes and projects to further improve its opportunities.” – local authority representative**

The resulting datasets have become reference points for municipal authorities, enabling them to identify accessibility needs, allocate budgets more effectively, and coordinate with other humanitarian actors.

**“We are probably the only organisation that can clearly state: we know that in this community, for example, there are 24 villages; the total number of residents; how many men and women with disabilities; how many children with disabilities; how many veterans; whether there is a social institution; whether there is public transport that is adapted and accessible; whether there is a hospital and access to it; how many social workers are employed, and how many people are served.” – NAPD representative**

### ***Increase of partners advocacy capacity***

Linking Ukrainian OPDs with European counterparts and EU institutions has helped to **anchor disability inclusion within broader recovery frameworks**, ensuring that advocacy priorities extend beyond the project’s lifetime. Cooperation with EDF gave national partners access to European networks, experience, and policy tools relevant to Ukraine’s EU-accession path.

### ***Tangible assets and integrated practices create “no-turning-back” obligations for public providers.***

Where the project supplied infrastructure, equipment, or established inclusive community spaces, local authorities now perceive a **responsibility to maintain and operate them**. These tangible results – from adapted premises to assistive materials and furniture – have become part of municipal infrastructure, making discontinuation practically and politically unacceptable.

**“I believe that in the communities that participated in the project, there will definitely be results, and they will continue even without the project because they now have the means to do so. When civil society organisations organise spaces for children or equip community centres — set up tables, chairs, and assistive materials — today, as part of the municipal sector, we simply have no right to stop this work. To bring all of this in and then say, ‘We have it, but we’re not using it’ — that’s not acceptable. We were given opportunities so that we could move forward.” — Local authority representative**

This sense of shared ownership reinforces the institutionalisation of inclusive practices and signals a shift from temporary humanitarian aid to long-term support to persons with disabilities at the community level.

#### 4.6.2. Organisational capacities and local ownership of OPDs

##### ***Strengthening core organizational capacity of partner OPDs***

Partners highlight development of internal policies and processes, new staff positions, clearer division of roles. These changes enhanced organisational resilience and professional credibility, reinforcing donor and public trust in the partner OPDs.

Another contribution of the programme was the **strengthening of communication capacities**. Media engagement was introduced as part of the project’s *Visibility and Advocacy* component, aimed at improving public communication and representation of Ukrainian OPDs at both national and European levels. The project funded the recruitment of communications specialists for the League of the Strong and NAPD and provided mentoring from EDF.

Even limited in the scope of the project the contribution increased partners’ confidence in working with media and helped them influence European narratives on disability inclusion.

##### ***Capacity building in safeguarding created enduring internal systems***

Safeguarding integration became one of the **core capacity-building pillars** of the programme. The safeguarding component was intentionally designed to ensure that partner organisations could continue developing and implementing safeguarding systems independently. The design itself built sustainability into the process: it combined institutional policy development with practical coaching. All materials, trainings, and tools were **contextualised to Ukrainian realities**, significantly increasing the likelihood of sustained implementation.

Having trained focal points at both national and community levels now enables the partners to maintain and further develop safeguarding standards without relying on external expertise.

##### ***Security management capacities are now internalised and supported by accessible e-learning tools***

The project called for the development of *permanent security protocols and learning systems adaptable to crisis conditions*. The partnership with **Safer Edge** successfully met this objective, leaving behind a **self-managed, participatory, and context-appropriate security framework**.

Work with Safer Edge was grounded in Ukrainian realities. Partners co-developed all policies and procedures jointly with the consultant, ensuring that each organisation's system reflected its specific operating context and field structure. As a result, staff can now independently update procedures, train new team members, and manage security tasks without external support.

The e-learning platform created through the partnership provides ongoing access to training materials, ensuring that security knowledge is retained even amid staff turnover, limited connectivity, or power outages – a particularly relevant safeguard in wartime conditions.

# 5. Most Significant Changes (MSC)

## 5.1. Purpose and role of MSC in this evaluation

## 5.2. Synthesis of changes emerging from MSC stories

### ***“This project became a lifeline” – basic functioning restored***

**Key change:** humanitarian support delivered where state systems and other actors could not, preserving dignity amid extreme fiscal scarcity.

Empower filled a critical humanitarian gap by providing life-sustaining support to persons with disabilities when local budgets and other aid channels had collapsed.

During the war, municipal budgets were redirected toward defence, infrastructure repair, and emergency relief. Social-service departments reported being unable to purchase hygiene supplies or assistive items for months. Empower became the **only project in many districts specifically supporting persons with disabilities**, delivering cash, hygiene kits, and transport to those left outside all other aid schemes. Local authorities confirmed that Empower’s outreach “covered people we could not reach at all.” Beneficiaries consistently used cash for medicines, food, and heating – basic needs no longer financed by local budgets. For many, the assistance meant the difference between coping and destitution.

**“This project was our lifeline. Without it, we wouldn’t have survived the winter.” – Beneficiary**

**“We simply have no [municipal] funds for these needs. Empower was the only help for such families.” – Social-service representative**

### ***From isolation to mobility and dignity***

**Key change:** Improved individual autonomy and service access.

Before Empower, persons with severe disabilities in small towns like Karlivka and Shumsk had no way to reach hospitals or public services. With accessible transport and new wheelchairs, they began leaving their homes again. One woman described attending rehabilitation for the first time in two years; another returned to part-time work. Local social-service staff said that requests for emergency home visits decreased as people “could finally get to the doctor themselves.” The shift from confinement to movement restored both health and dignity.

**“Now I can go to the doctor myself. Before, I waited until someone had time to drive me.” – Project beneficiary**

**«People stopped being invisible; we see them in town again.»  
– Local social worker**

### ***From advocacy groups to governance partners***

**Key change:** Institutionalising inclusion in local governance

Before Empower, OPDs and social services worked in parallel. Through joint planning meetings, shared beneficiary lists, and regular communication, these relationships became institutionalised. In Poltava and Chernivtsi oblasts, NAPD moved from advocacy to co-governance, jointly planning support with local councils. Municipalities began co-financing hygiene items and transport after seeing Empower's results. In Cherkasy, LoS's accessibility audits informed the design of the new Administrative Service Centre, where ramps and sanitary facilities were built to their specifications. Officials now describe OPDs as "partners who know their communities best." This cooperation marks a shift from ad hoc engagement to structured collaboration in local planning.

**«We treated them as partners who know the needs better than we do.» – Local council official**

**«After Empower, the city started calling us for consultations, not just to check boxes.» – LoS coordinator**

### ***Expanding the disability movement into rural areas***

**Key change:** rural inclusion expanded the movement's reach.

Empower extended the reach and representation of the disability movement by engaging isolated rural communities and transforming recipients into active participants.

Empower deliberately prioritised areas long excluded from both state and humanitarian systems, where persons with disabilities often lived unseen and unsupported. LoS and NAPD coordinators, working with village heads and social workers, conducted door-to-door mapping to identify individuals who had never received external help. In Karlivka and Shumsk, this outreach revealed dozens of households previously unknown to municipal records. Beneficiaries began connecting with OPDs, attending self-help sessions, and volunteering in community activities. Several later joined accessibility or barrier-free councils, amplifying local advocacy.

By mobilising rural communities, Empower strengthened the national disability movement from the periphery inward, creating new leadership, visibility, and networks where none had existed.

For many, the change was profound – from isolation to belonging.

**«We found people who thought they would live their whole life alone. Now they know about us, their rights, and that they are not alone.» – Local coordinator**

**«Before Empower, for three years no donor reached our village. This was the first real support since the war began.» – Beneficiary**

### *From beneficiaries to peer leaders*

**Key change:** Empowerment and community-led continuation.

Many participants entered Empower as participants but left as active volunteers. In Chernivtsi, members of MHPSS groups started peer circles that continue meeting monthly without external funding. NAPD's beneficiaries are supporting others in using the assistive devices or handling local bureaucracy. These initiatives reflect a growing sense of agency and collective responsibility, showing that inclusion also produces leadership.

**“At first, I came just to get help. Later, I stayed to help others.” – MHPSS participant**

**«She was shy at the start, now she leads discussions in her group.» – Local psychologist**

### *Confidence replaces silence*

**Key change:** Empowerment and leadership.

Across MHPSS sessions, persons with disabilities who once avoided public spaces began speaking, sharing, and supporting each other. “We are not alone anymore,” one participant said during the focus group discussion. First-aid and self-help trainings reframed people's identities from passive recipients to active helpers. Caregivers reported that their relatives became more optimistic and open to participating in community life. For many, this psychological transformation – the confidence to be visible – was as significant as the material aid.

**“We are not alone anymore; someone finally listened.” – Project participant**

**«They started laughing, sharing, planning, that's how you know healing begins.» – Local social worker**

**“Before, we waited for rescue; now we can act.” – Project participant**

## ***Advocacy turns into tangible accessibility fixes***

**Key change:** advocacy translated into institutional and infrastructural change

Empower’s advocacy and awareness efforts resulted in concrete accessibility improvements and institutionalised inclusion practices.

Empower turned advocacy into action. Through systematic accessibility audits, dialogue with municipal authorities, and awareness training for local officials, both partner organisations influenced how public infrastructure is designed and maintained. Local governments began using Empower’s accessibility checklists, technical maps, and universal design guidelines in their construction and renovation processes. As a result, entrances, toilets, and service areas in public buildings became physically accessible, and inclusion standards were integrated into local planning procedures.

This shift marks a transition from one-off awareness events to policy-informed, technically supported advocacy that leads to measurable change in the built environment and institutional norms.

**“For the first time, persons with disabilities can enter our office without help.» – Municipal employee**

**“Even the accessibility audits that we conducted are lasting documents, they give grounds for making the necessary changes when budgets allow.” – LoS representative**

## ***Localised aid builds trust and accountability***

**Key change:** strengthened legitimacy of local delivery

Community members consistently described Empower as transparent and fair. Regular communication, visible coordinators, and clear selection criteria created trust even in resource-scarce settings. Beneficiaries said they understood why and how assistance was provided. This transparency strengthened social cohesion and modelled accountable localisation practices that others could replicate.

Empower restored confidence in municipal social-service institutions through respectful interaction, rapid response, and visible collaboration between OPDs and local authorities.

Before Empower, many persons with disabilities avoided local offices, perceiving them as formal and unresponsive. Through joint implementation with LoS and NAPD, social-service staff began engaging people in a different way – visiting homes, delivering aid personally, and inviting beneficiaries to inclusive community meetings. These seemingly small gestures – listening over tea, checking follow-up needs, calling by name – transformed relationships built on mistrust into those based on care.

In communities, officials noted that Empower “relieved pressure on community budgets” while showing residents that their municipality still cared despite wartime constraints. Empower

demonstrated that inclusion is not only about access to resources but also about rebuilding the social contract between citizens and local government.

**“They listened and treated me like a person, not a problem.”  
– Beneficiary**

**“Trust came back when people saw real help coming through the local office.” – Local authority representative**

**“They always called, explained, checked if I received it and not just dropped a package.” – Beneficiary**

# 6. Forward-looking learning and recommendations

The Empower evaluation demonstrated that **disability-inclusive humanitarian action can serve as a pathway to systemic social change** when led by organisations of persons with disabilities. The following forward-looking insights summarise how the lessons from Empower can inform EDF, CBM, and OPDs' future programming:

- **Localisation as power-sharing, not delegation:** Empower showed that when OPDs – led and staffed by persons with disabilities who make the key programmatic and budget decisions – control implementation and local budgets, efficiency, relevance, and legitimacy increase. Future programmes should measure localisation not by the percentage of funds channelled locally, but by the level of decision-making power transferred to these OPDs, including direct funding, leadership in programme design, and authority over targeting, delivery, and accountability.
- **Intersectional leadership as the backbone of resilience:** Women with disabilities and caregivers were pivotal to building trust, enabling psychosocial recovery, and sustaining local organisation throughout the project. Their leadership – shaped by intersecting experiences of disability, gender, rurality and poverty – proved essential for reaching the most isolated households. Future programmes should continue to invest in their leadership while also intentionally creating space for broader intersectional representation (e.g., Roma communities, LGBTQ+ persons, displaced minorities), whose perspectives were largely absent but are critical for inclusive humanitarian governance.
- **Bridging humanitarian response and recovery systems:** Empower demonstrated how disability-inclusive humanitarian assistance can reinforce local systems when aligned with municipal services and social-protection structures. By positioning OPDs as implementing actors within these systems, the programme supported the approach where meeting immediate humanitarian needs while simultaneously strengthening local referral pathways, institutional cooperation and the capacities of municipal actors to sustain inclusive services. Future programme design and donor frameworks should build on this logic – ensuring that short-term assistance contributes to more resilient, disability-inclusive local systems without exceeding humanitarian mandates.
- **From accessibility to accountability:** The project showed that inclusion cannot rely solely on accessible infrastructure; it depends on attitudes, relationships, and institutional accountability. OPDs' partnership with social-service centres restored trust in local government – a key resilience factor.
- **Partnership as a learning ecosystem:** EDF's facilitative management model worked because it emphasised accompaniment over control. Embedding reflective learning structures into future programmes will sustain innovation and adaptive practice.
- **Data as a foundation for policy influence:** Both NAPD and LoS generated granular data on disability demographics, service gaps and accessibility barriers across their target oblasts (provinces) and municipalities. NAPD's structured mappings informed municipal budgeting and planning, while LoS used their community-level assessments and accessibility audits to advocate for improvements in local service delivery and barrier-free infrastructure. These evidence partnerships demonstrated that when OPDs supply reliable, context-specific data, local authorities are more able – and more willing – to act. Future programmes should replicate and systematise such OPD-municipality data collaboration to strengthen policy influence from the local level upward.
- **Sustainability through legitimacy.** Inclusion is sustained not by assets alone but by trust between citizens and local authorities. Empower strengthened this legitimacy, showing that rights-based humanitarian action contributes to democratic accountability.

The above listed learnings inform the recommendations to key stakeholders for further uptake of the Empower results.

For CBM and other humanitarian donors: on power shifts and localisation

- **Align technical accompaniment with local and thematic expertise:** CBM holds proven expertise in disability-inclusive humanitarian action, OPD partnership, and technical disability inclusion (DI) standards. While CBM did not have a local coordination structure in Ukraine during Empower's implementation, it offered technical support on inclusive humanitarian action, safeguarding, and GFFO regulatory requirements throughout the project. Future programmes should build on CBM's technical strengths through clearer co-design of support offers at inception, ensuring that accompaniment is jointly defined and responsive to partners' expressed needs.
- **Plan for phased localisation and direct funding pathways:** Empower showed that EDF's facilitative management model – centred on accompaniment rather than control – was effective in enabling OPDs to lead implementation, troubleshoot operational challenges, and build confidence in managing humanitarian programming. The next step is not to replace this model, but to **sequence it toward greater power-sharing**. A phased localisation roadmap should outline how more management authority and financial responsibility can gradually shift to Ukrainian OPDs, including piloting direct donor contracting where feasible. This shift requires careful attention to preconditions: adequate organisational capacity, sustainable staffing, accessible accountability frameworks, and sustained accompaniment from international partners including EDF and CBM during transition. NAPD and LoS demonstrated increasing readiness to autonomously manage complex interventions, and any roadmap should build on this demonstrated capacity rather than impose a predetermined timeline.
- **Pilot direct contracting or Ukrainian OPD-led consortia:** Based on the strong operational performance of NAPD and LoS, donors should consider piloting funding mechanisms that allow established Ukrainian OPDs to take on greater contractual responsibility – either through direct contracting or through OPD-led consortia with international partners. Empower demonstrated that local OPDs can meet humanitarian accountability requirements when supported through an accompaniment model. Donors should progressively test models that place Ukrainian OPDs in lead contractual roles.
- **Fund peer learning and horizontal exchange:** Include budget for OPDs to share methodologies, tools, and lessons.
- **Promote recognition of OPD-led models in humanitarian and reconstruction frameworks:** Ensure disability-inclusive and OPD-led approaches are reflected in national response plans, EU reconstruction programmes, and donor coordination platforms. Empower's model provides a replicable blueprint for inclusive recovery.

For the EDF Secretariat: on programme design, advocacy, and management

- **Improve coordination between Safeguarding and Security experts and functions:** Create joint review mechanisms ensuring that safeguarding principles and security procedures are mutually reinforcing. Safeguarding and security systems worked well but were developed in parallel.

For NAPD and League of the Strong: on capacity strengthening, safeguarding, and organisational leadership

- **Sustain safeguarding and well-being mechanisms:** Continue to build on the existing safeguarding frameworks created through Empower through periodic refreshers, internal audits, and staff counselling. Safeguarding capacity has matured; continued practice will continue to ensure an embedded culture of care and accountability.
- **Invest in staff well-being and equitable workloads:** Continue creating internal peer-support and staff well-being mechanisms (retreats were mentioned among efficient mechanisms) to mitigate burnout among coordinators juggling multiple roles. Efficiency came at personal cost; sustainable localisation requires care for staff resilience.

Cross-cutting recommendations: on monitoring, inclusion, communication, coordination

1. **Enhance programme co-design and inception processes:** Early planning stages were compressed, and OPDs sought more time to shape indicators reflecting rights and inclusion rather than output delivery. Formalise co-creation workshops with OPDs before final proposal submission. Allow time for joint definition of indicators, MEAL tools, and safeguarding procedures that reflect CRPD principles.
2. **Build on existing learning practices to strengthen cross-partner and regional exchange:** Future programmes could build on the learning practices already evident within individual partners and their regional teams, as well as the cross-partner learning moments facilitated by EDF, including during the external evaluation process. While bilateral reflection between EDF and each Ukrainian OPD was constructive, future programming may benefit from institutionalising light but predictable spaces for broader cross-partner and regional exchange involving EDF, NAPD and LoS. Combining joint reflection on MEAL findings, advocacy outcomes, and community-level results with peer-to-peer exchange among coordinators and managers across oblasts would support shared sense-making, deepen mutual understanding between different OPD models, and further strengthen strategic alignment across humanitarian and recovery efforts.
3. **Coordinate communication and evidence-sharing functions.** Partners' communications staff worked largely separately, reflecting the diverse roles and strategic positions of NAPD and LoS within the disability movement, including NAPD's stronger movement-building focus. Future programmes could explore selective joint outputs (e.g. shared evidence briefs or learning notes) to strengthen external visibility and policy influence while preserving organisational autonomy.

**Enhance coordination through lighter, reflective structures.** Weekly calls at LOS and NAPD project team levels worked well but focused on logistics. Introducing simple mechanisms – such as short thematic reflections, shared learning notes, or quarterly joint sense-making sessions – would strengthen collective intelligence across the partnership. These low-burden practices would enable partners to surface emerging insights earlier, compare approaches, and adapt programming more coherently.

# Annexes

# Annex 1: Evaluation of the Extension Period

November 2025-March 2026

*Empower Ukraine Programme | External Evaluation*

## 1. Purpose and scope of this annex

This annex extends the external evaluation of the Empower Ukraine Programme to cover the period from November 2025 to March 2026, following the previous evaluation period which concluded in October 2025. It draws on a validation workshop held with EDF, CBM, NAPD, and League of the Strong in late November 2025, individual interviews with NAPD and LoS representatives in March 2026, and the workshop transcript material covering project design reflections, challenges and trade-offs, partnership learning, and closing reflections.

The annex follows the same DAC/ALNAP analytical framework as the main report and applies the same appreciative-critical lens. Where findings are consistent with earlier evidence, they are noted as confirmation. Where the extension period surfaced new insights or tensions – particularly around design constraints, localisation trade-offs, partnership hierarchies, and safeguarding – these are analysed in depth.

## 2. Context: the second extension and its rationale

The second extension – covering January 2026 to May 2026, with this annex addressing findings through March 2026 – was approved in December 2025 following confirmation from EDF and CBM that field delivery remained strong and that community needs had not abated. Unlike a programmatic gap or delivery shortfall, the extension was driven by the logic of continuity: both OPDs had demonstrated reliable implementation and communities were still actively receiving and requesting support.

For implementing teams, the announcement of the extension came after a period of psychological uncertainty. This account illustrates a feature of the extension that quantitative reporting does not capture: its significance as a signal of trust and care toward implementing staff, not only toward beneficiaries. The decision to extend communicated that partners' work was valued, and that wellbeing – both of communities and of teams – was a programme priority.

From the perspective of programme logic, the extension also enabled NAPD and LoS to reach individuals whose eligibility had been confirmed during the main implementation phase but whose paperwork – particularly for recently registered veterans with acquired disabilities – had not yet been finalised. The coordinator described this as reaching people the main phase could not quite close:

**"It is not that something went wrong and we needed to extend. It is more that we still had five months to help someone else. Maybe we had forgotten someone. Or those cases where someone was in the process of getting disability status – especially veterans – and the bureaucracy stacks up. And we know the certificate will come, and they will qualify. So we can help them. That is what the extension was for." – NAPD coordinator**

### 3. Key findings by DAC criteria

#### 3.1 Relevance

Continued alignment with community need

Evidence from the validation workshop and the individual interviews confirms that the extension period remained fully relevant to the needs of programme participants. No saturation of need was identified; rather, OPD teams described ongoing and, in some communities, growing demand for assistive devices, transport support, and psychosocial services.

Workshop participants noted that the programme's geographic positioning – in oblasts away from the frontline, with high concentrations of IDPs and under-resourced municipal systems – meant that Empower continued to operate in areas where no comparable programme had since filled the gap. In the words of one participant:

**"In those areas where we worked, practically all persons with disabilities, children with disabilities – they were all recorded, they all received humanitarian assistance, medical assistance, they were fully covered. But there is still so much more." – NAPD coordinator**

Reflections on design constraints and the need for longer planning cycles

The validation workshop surfaced candid reflections on the programme's design phase that reinforce and deepen the main report's findings. Several participants described how the compressed summer design timeline – combined with budget reductions introduced during proposal finalisation – created gaps between initial planning and field realities. CBM and EDF representatives acknowledged this directly:

**"I would avoid writing proposals in the summer. That is my learning from that." – EDF representative, validation workshop**

**"Of course, summer is never ideal to plan a project fully, and this is something that is a bit difficult to influence. You get informed you can submit a full proposal, and then you only have a few weeks to hand it in, which is inefficient." – CBM representative, validation workshop**

Participants drew a direct line from this design pressure to the subsequent need for multiple change requests and their reflection in the extensions: not because implementation failed, but because the original design had not fully accommodated the scale of need or the staffing requirements for a programme of this complexity. The extensions and change request processes were retrospectively valued as corrective mechanisms that enabled the programme to deliver well despite an imperfect starting point.

Looking ahead to future programming, the workshop reached consensus that earlier engagement in proposal development – building on existing needs assessments and community data generated through Empower – would significantly reduce this compression. Both NAPD and LoS entered the new proposal cycle with substantially richer community-level data than they had in 2023, positioning them to contribute more meaningfully to co-design from the outset. Participants reflected that while the original proposal development was rapid and involvement relatively concentrated, their current evidence base is significantly stronger, making this a more grounded starting point for collaboration.

### 3.2 Effectiveness

Completion of activities and continued outreach during the extension

During the extension period, both implementing partners continued delivering across all five result areas. NAPD focused in particular on completing outreach to individuals who had been identified but not yet assisted, including newly registered veterans and households in communities where advocacy campaigns had expanded the pool of known beneficiaries. LoS continued its humanitarian distribution model, maintaining regular contact with beneficiary households and completing pending assistive device provision and transport cycles.

Workshop participants confirmed that the extension did not introduce new activities but deepened the reach and completion of existing ones. From OPD's perspective, the extension period was experienced as a continuation, not a departure:

**"Honestly, from our side, and from what we talked about in the team – we hardly noticed the difference. For us it was simply the continuation of work." – OPD coordinator**

Advocacy during the extension: consolidation rather than expansion

Advocacy activities during the extension focused primarily on consolidating relationships established during the main implementation phase rather than launching new campaigns. In Poltava and Chernivtsi oblasts, NAPD coordinators continued engaging with local councils on the findings of accessibility audits and demographic screenings, reinforcing the evidence base that municipalities had begun to use for inclusive social planning.

The NAPD coordinator reflected candidly that while the programme's local-level advocacy had been strong and visible – particularly where concrete accessibility changes had occurred – the national-level advocacy component had been more limited in scope than it might have been, in part because of modest budget allocations for national-level work.

This observation suggests that for future programmes, light-touch national-level knowledge products – handbooks, briefing materials, accessible data summaries – can extend advocacy reach beyond direct beneficiaries at relatively low cost, even when budget allocations for this level are modest. Pairing such outputs with EDF's convening role in EU and international fora could further amplify impact without requiring proportionally larger investment.

Complementarity of NAPD and LoS approaches: deepened during the extension

The validation workshop surfaced a rich comparative discussion of how NAPD and LoS pursued advocacy and community engagement through distinctly different channels and how these differences, rather than being a source of tension, produced complementary systemic effects.

LoS, building on its community-awareness and public-mobilisation approach, described moving work increasingly toward public spaces and community events, engaging broader populations in conversations about accessibility and rights. NAPD, in contrast, continued to work through established institutional channels – local councils, social-service centres, and cluster coordination structures – building on the policy infrastructure it had systematically developed over three years.

**"NAPD does it more locally and feeds into different systems. LoS goes more to the public square, raising people, asking questions. On the one hand, a government official sees the big systemic picture; on the other hand, he sees the specific results on the ground. They come to the same result from different directions." – EDF representative, validation workshop**

This complementarity – acknowledged by both organisations – represents a structural asset for the wider disability movement in Ukraine: when OPDs using different models operate in the same humanitarian space, their combined reach and influence exceeds what either could achieve alone.

### **3.3 Efficiency**

Workload and the human cost of localisation: towards sustainable models

The validation workshop surfaced the localisation-versus-workload tension as one of the most significant and underexplored findings of the programme. While the main report noted that efficiency gains were achieved at a notable human cost – particularly for regional coordinators combining multiple roles – the workshop generated substantially richer discussion about what this means for future programme design.

OPDs coordinators framed the issue with particular clarity, describing how the programme's combination of complex reporting requirements, active field delivery, and ongoing community engagement left very little space for staff wellbeing practices, even where these had been formally built into the programme.

Workshop participants from both OPDs described how localisation – while deeply valued as a model – can become extractive if not adequately resourced. The transfer of decision-making authority and financial responsibility to national partners is meaningful only if staffing structures are calibrated to the actual volume of work that authority entails. Several coordinators noted that their workloads had, at points, exceeded what was sustainable, and that the quality of their community engagement was occasionally constrained by administrative demands.

At the same time, participants were clear that this tension does not argue against localisation – it argues for more honest resourcing of it. NAPD offered a concrete model of what well-supported localisation can look like: building the programme team from local community representatives, investing in their professional development, and using the programme itself as a capacity-strengthening mechanism. The result was a network of coordinators who, by the close of the

extension period, were described as professionals recognised in their communities and sought after for their expertise:

**"Our coordinators were initially representatives of local communities. We gave them recognition, we gave them professional development. And as a result, at the community level we formed powerful, skilled coordinators. That is what localisation looks like in practice." – NAPD national coordinator, validation workshop**

**Good practice:**

building sustainability through local coordinators

OPDs, selecting coordinators from within target communities and investing in their professional development over the course of the programme resulted in community-based coordinators who are now recognised as local disability inclusion experts, sought out by municipal authorities and peer organisations. Where this approach was applied, the programme served as a professional pathway, not just a deployment mechanism. However, this was not consistent across both organisations or sustained throughout the full project period. Given its evident impact where it did occur, this model should be explicitly designed and budgeted for in future programmes.

For future programming, three structural responses to the localisation-workload tension could be offered: first, more realistic staffing ratios that reflect the actual scope of multi-role field coordination; second, explicit wellbeing budget lines that are treated as operational requirements rather than supplementary provisions; and third, phased induction of new programme activities – particularly complex reporting and MEAL requirements – to reduce the steep learning curve experienced in Empower's early phase.

Financial management and extension planning

The extension period was managed with the same level of financial discipline reported in the main evaluation period. Both partners operated within approved budgets and maintained their dual-authorisation accounting systems throughout. NAPD noted specific instances where transport budget lines required flexibility to carry over into the extension period, which was accommodated through the existing change request mechanism: an example of the adaptive financial management that partners identified as a key strength of the programme model.

The extension also enabled CBM and EDF to support the preparation of final financial and narrative reporting for the full programme period, with CBM conducting its regular review and quality assurance function across consolidated reports. Partners confirmed that this support materially reduced the administrative burden on NAPD and LoS during a period when teams were simultaneously closing programme activities and beginning work on new proposals.

### **3.4 Impact**

Cumulative impact by close of the extension period

By the close of the period covered by this annex (March 2026), the Empower programme had reached its full intended beneficiary population and exceeded most quantitative targets across all five result areas. The extension period added measurably to beneficiary numbers, particularly in assistive technology provision and transport support, as the pipeline of individuals identified but not yet assisted during the main phase was completed.

More significantly for the evaluation's impact analysis, the validation workshop confirmed that the systemic and behavioural changes documented in the main report – improved OPD-municipality relationships, embedded safeguarding practices, strengthened community coordinators, and increased visibility of disability inclusion in local governance – were holding and in several communities deepening as the programme approached completion.

From project results to movement building: the extension as consolidation

A recurring theme in the workshop was the transition from programme results to movement infrastructure. Both LoS and NAPD described the extension period as an opportunity to consolidate relationships and practices that the programme had seeded, rather than to launch new activities. Community coordinators continued engaging with local authorities; self-help groups continued meeting without project facilitation; and several local organisations that had been mentored through Empower began positioning themselves for future partnership roles.

For LoS, the extension deepened its profile as a recognised organisation across communities in which it had not previously been present.

For NAPD, the extension saw continued engagement with communities on advocacy campaigns and education events, with participants from earlier cycles returning and bringing new people. The coordinator observed that communities had become proactively interested in the organisation's work – a qualitative shift from the programme's early phase, when outreach required significant effort to mobilise participation.

### ***Impact on the organisations themselves: staff and institutional identity***

One of the most striking findings from the closing workshop was the depth of personal and institutional transformation reported by implementing staff. Participants described changes in how they understood their own roles, capacities, and professional identities – changes that the programme had catalysed and that would continue beyond its formal closure.

The project coordinators from OPDs described how the programme had changed their relationship to her own identity and to the broader disability rights community:

**"I personally learned – not just not to hide it, but to relate to it more easily. To understand that yes, I genuinely have certain needs. And EDF shows through their missions that it is completely normal when all of us have certain nuances – we take them into account and we simply adapt to this diversity. We are learning how to live." – OPD coordinator**

Workshop participants across organisations echoed this dimension of impact, describing how working alongside persons with disabilities in positions of leadership – and being themselves led by people with lived experience – had reshaped professional norms, interpersonal dynamics, and organisational culture in ways that extended well beyond the project's formal objectives.



reconstruction and recovery funding from national sources, which represents a form of sustainability that extends the programme's data infrastructure far beyond its direct delivery period.

Handover planning and the transition to a new programme cycle

Both LoS and NAPD entered the extension period with awareness that a new programme cycle was under development. Workshop participants reflected on how this parallel process affected the extension: on one hand, it created some psychological complexity for staff who were simultaneously wrapping up one programme and contributing to the design of another; on the other hand, it ensured that lessons from Empower could be incorporated in real time into the new design.

OPD coordinators described this transition process with characteristic pragmatism, noting that the organisation had learned to identify where it was strongest and to focus future proposals on those strengths rather than expanding into new domains. Central to this transition was EDF's deliberate decision to remove itself from the funding stream entirely and stepping back as coordinator in order to allow local OPDs to receive funding directly. This was not an incidental outcome but a principled localisation choice, reflecting EDF's confidence in the capacity of local OPDs to manage funding independently. This decision carries broader advocacy value as a concrete example that international organisations can and should consider removing themselves from funding streams when local partners are ready to lead..

This institutional self-awareness – knowing what one can deliver reliably and at quality – is itself a sustainability outcome of the programme: it reflects the maturation of OPDs organisational identity from a general advocacy organisation to a specialised, community-grounded implementer of disability-inclusive humanitarian and recovery programming.

## **4 Thematic findings from the extension period**

### ***4.1 Localisation, workload, and models for sustainable power-sharing***

The question of how to balance the ambition of localisation with the operational burden it places on national OPDs was the central learning challenge of the validation workshop. It was not treated as a critique of localisation – participants were unanimous that the model was the right one – but as a design and resourcing challenge that future programmes must address more honestly from the outset.

Several concrete observations emerged from the workshop discussion that go beyond the general finding already reflected in the main report:

- The workload associated with localisation is not evenly distributed. Coordinators in the field, who combined beneficiary verification, delivery coordination, MEAL data collection, and community liaison – carried disproportionately heavy workloads relative to national or secretariat-level staff. Future programmes should calibrate staffing ratios specifically to field-level coordination demands, not aggregate headcounts.
- Capacity assessments – while valuable for donor accountability – can become a significant additional burden when multiple donors require separate assessments in the same period. One of local OPDs reported conducting six or seven capacity assessments in a single year at the request of different donors. Harmonised or mutually recognised assessment frameworks would significantly reduce this duplicative load.

- Localisation is more sustainable when local coordinators are rooted in communities from the outset, rather than being placed externally. NAPD's model of building coordinators from within communities created organic accountability and reduced turnover – a structural efficiency gain that was not originally designed by international project partners but emerged from the organisation's rights-based mandate and community networks.
- Large international organisations can support localisation at the system level by advocating with other donors for more flexible contracting and less prescriptive reporting requirements. EDF's bridging role – absorbing a portion of the reporting and compliance workload on behalf of Ukrainian partners – was consistently named as one of the most valued aspects of the programme's management model, and one that could be explicitly designed and funded in future cycles.

Workshop participants also reflected on the systemic significance of localisation in the Ukrainian context, noting that the humanitarian sector's localisation discourse often lags behind practice and that projects like Empower represent tangible evidence that Ukrainian OPDs can and do meet international humanitarian accountability standards. Additionally, working with local professionals across key functions, including financial auditors, safeguarding leads, security advisors, and external MEAL staff, proved to reduce costs, eliminate translation fees, save time, and bring a deeper understanding of local laws, regulations, and context. These efficiencies strengthen the operational case for localisation beyond the principled one and are worth ensuring are captured in the main report.

## **4.2 Partnership communication, hierarchy, and dialogue**

The validation workshop provided an important space for partners to reflect on communication dynamics within the EDF-CBM-OPD partnership, specifically on whether the formal coordination structures had ever created perceived power imbalances, and what practices had helped maintain genuine dialogue across what was structurally an asymmetric partnership.

The overall finding was positive: partners consistently described EDF's communication style as non-hierarchical, responsive, and open – a distinctive feature that distinguished Empower from other programmes in which Ukrainian OPDs had participated. This was experienced not only in formal coordination calls but in informal exchanges, responsiveness to questions, and the willingness of EDF and CBM staff to visit communities and witness programme realities firsthand.

**"We feel that behind us stand two powerful players who simply support us. We did the work with our own hands. Without their support, this would not have happened. But they taught us to respect ourselves first, to respect the work we do." – OPD coordinator**

At the same time, several observations from the workshop and interview point to structural features of the coordination model that, while not experienced as problematic in Empower, deserve attention in future programme design:

First, the EDF-CBM-NAPD/LoS chain involved multiple layers of reporting and compliance, and while EDF effectively absorbed much of the interface between Ukrainian partners and the broader

accountability structure, Ukrainian partners and EDF were not always fully aware of the institutional reasons for certain requirements. Greater transparency about the regulatory context – why specific GFFO reporting standards exist, what the accountability implications are for CBM as grant holder – can help partners understand compliance requirements as shared rather than externally imposed.

Second, as the programme transitions to a model in which CBM takes on a direct partnership role with Ukrainian OPDs, the communication norms established under Empower should be explicitly carried forward. The open, accompaniment-oriented style that partners valued is not a default feature of any coordination model – it requires deliberate practice, adequate time in coordination interactions, and organisational cultures that genuinely prioritise partner voice.

Third, and most fundamentally, the next stage of localisation requires that communication practices evolve from 'keeping partners informed' to 'designing with partners'. Workshop reflections on the new proposal cycle suggested that, despite best efforts, time pressure remained a constraint on genuine co-design – something both CBM and EDF acknowledged and framed as a structural challenge of the donor funding cycle that requires multi-partner advocacy to address.

### ***4.3 Safeguarding: consolidation and future systematisation***

The main report noted that safeguarding systems functioned well during Empower but that documentation at partner level was uneven – with some feedback logs and incident records maintained informally rather than through standardised templates. The validation workshop and closing interview confirmed this picture while adding a more nuanced reading of why the unevenness occurred and what future programmes should do differently.

Participants noted that safeguarding capacity had genuinely matured through the programme. Both NAPD and LoS now have trained safeguarding focal points, contextualised policies, and internal reporting mechanisms that function independently of external support. The challenge is not the absence of safeguarding practice but the absence of standardised documentation systems that can produce aggregated, evidence-based learning over time.

The issue is less about whether safeguarding is taken seriously – it clearly is – and more about whether the institutional learning from safeguarding practice is being systematically captured. As the main report notes, future programmes should embed standardised safeguarding reporting templates and feedback logs from the outset. The extension period did not introduce new safeguarding incidents of note, but did reinforce the operational reality that in a wartime context with high staff turnover risk, documented systems are more resilient than systems held in institutional memory.

On the specific question of whether safeguarding should be further systematised in future programming: the answer is yes, with an important qualification. Systematisation should mean clearer documentation standards and templates – not increased bureaucratic burden. The most effective safeguarding cultures are those where documentation is embedded in daily practice rather than treated as a separate compliance exercise. Future programmes should design documentation tools that coordinators find intuitive and useful, rather than tools designed primarily for donor reporting.

**"Two years ago, I could not speak about myself and my problems calmly, the way I can now. I think this is my strength. It is very important. And I am teaching my parents to look at me differently too." – LoS team member**

**"These were very difficult times – days without electricity, without internet, without heating. We were constantly writing to our communities: how are you, are you all alive? And we were genuinely glad when our assistive technology finally reached them." – NAPD team member**

**"For me, this was one of the first projects working in an organisation of persons with disabilities, after twenty years as a state official. I thought the state gives everything people need. Thanks to NAPD, that transformation is happening in me now." – NAPD team member**

**"Friendship. That was my first word. And opportunity." – LoS team member**

#### **Recommendation: integrated safeguarding documentation**

Design a single, lightweight safeguarding log that coordinators complete as part of their regular field reporting – capturing feedback received, any concerns observed, and follow-up actions taken. This log should be aggregated quarterly at national OPD level and reviewed by the safeguarding focal point. The goal is not more paperwork but better institutional memory: ensuring that the programme's safeguarding culture can be assessed, learned from, and handed over to new staff without dependence on the memory of individuals.

## **5. Most Significant Changes: closing workshop voices**

At the close of the validation workshop, participants were asked individually to reflect on and share the single most significant thing they were taking from the project. These closing circle contributions – offered as personal rather than organisational statements – provide a final layer of qualitative evidence on the programme's deepest impacts. Selected contributions are reproduced below, as they represent some of the most direct and honest expressions of programme significance offered across the entire evaluation.

Taken together, these closing reflections point to a programme impact that transcends service delivery metrics: Empower created a community of practice – across organisations, countries, and roles – grounded in shared values of dignity, inclusion, and mutual learning. For many participants, that community will persist beyond the programme's formal closure.

**"I wrote one word: humanism. This project has been very influential. Our attitude to the Ukrainian team, our attitude to each other – it created a kind of community. And as each project ends, I always have hope. I hope people will not be afraid to be persons with disabilities.." – EDF representative**

**"What I take is my personal mission to further amplify the voice of the unique approach you have taken to humanitarian assistance. It is not regular assistance – it is really based on rights and lived experience. That is my personal takeaway: to keep sharing this message." – CBM representative**

## 6. Forward-looking considerations from the extension period

The extension period and the validation workshop together surface several forward-looking considerations that complement and in some cases sharpen the recommendations in Section 7 of the main report. These are presented here as practical insights from the final phase of Empower, directed at EDF, CBM, and the Ukrainian OPDs as they enter the next programming cycle.

### On programme design

- Start planning earlier. The summer design cycle remains a structural constraint, but the data infrastructure and community knowledge that NAPD and LoS have built through Empower means that future proposals can be grounded in existing evidence rather than requiring fresh assessment. This should be explicitly leveraged to compress the gap between call and submission without compromising quality.
- Build in realistic staffing from day one. The extension period confirmed that the staffing model – particularly for field coordinators combining multiple roles – was stretched throughout implementation. Future budgets should resource field coordination at a level that reflects actual workload, including time for documentation, MEAL, and team wellbeing, not only beneficiary-facing activities.
- Treat wellbeing provisions as operational requirements. Psychological support and staff retreat provisions were valued but inconsistently accessed during Empower. Future programmes should treat these not as supplementary benefits but as components of programme quality – budgeted, scheduled, and monitored like any other activity.

### On partnership and localisation

- Define technical support needs jointly at inception. The next programme cycle should include a structured scoping conversation at inception, jointly defining where CBM's technical input would add most value and how it should be delivered.
- Advocate jointly with donors for harmonised capacity assessment standards. Multiple parallel capacity assessments represent one of the most concrete inefficiencies identified across the programme. EDF, CBM, and partner OPDs should collectively advocate for



frameworks that allow one quality assessment to be accepted across multiple donors – freeing OPD staff time for implementation rather than assessment compliance.

#### On learning and knowledge management

- Systematise community data handover. The demographic and service-gap datasets produced by NAPD and LoS represent a public good that outlasts the programme. Future programming should formalise the handover of such datasets to municipalities and, where appropriate, national actors, ensuring that the data infrastructure built through Empower continues to serve community planning long after project closure.
- Document safeguarding learning systematically. As noted in Section A.4.3, the shift from functional safeguarding practice to evidence-based safeguarding learning requires standardised documentation tools embedded in regular field reporting. This should be treated as a design priority, not a mid-implementation correction.

## 7. Conclusion

The second extension period of the Empower Ukraine Programme confirmed and in several respects deepened the main evaluation's findings. It was not a period of new directions but of careful completion: reaching people who had been waiting, consolidating relationships that had been built, and supporting communities – and organisations – to absorb and carry forward the changes that three years of sustained, rights-based work had generated.

The extension also provided the space for the kind of reflective conversation that intense implementation rarely permits. The validation workshop and closing interviews produced some of the evaluation's most candid and insight-rich material – on design constraints, localisation trade-

offs, partnership dynamics, safeguarding, and the personal dimensions of humanitarian work in a country at war. That material is captured in this annex not merely for accountability purposes but because it represents institutional knowledge that deserves to travel forward into the next programme cycle.

The Empower model – OPD-led, community-grounded, rights-based, and oriented toward genuine power-sharing – has proven itself in a context of extraordinary difficulty. The task for the next cycle is to build on that proof of concept with more honest resourcing, more structured learning, and more ambitious localisation. The people and organisations who carried Empower have earned that investment

*This annex was prepared by Open Space Works Ukraine in March 2026, drawing on findings from the November 2025 validation workshop and a March 2026 interview with OPD programme staff. It forms part of the final evaluation report for the Empower Ukraine Programme.*



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