

# **Ukraine war: OPD-led disability inclusive response and recovery**

## **Final evaluation report**

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**Executive Summary**  
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## **Preface**

This is the final evaluation report of the CBM International funded, 'Ukraine War: OPD-led disability inclusive response and recovery' programme. This programme was funded by CBM International between February 2022 and March 2025 and implemented by the European Disability Forum (EDF) in collaboration with OPD partners in the Ukraine, Moldova, Poland and Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia<sup>1</sup>. This report focuses on outcomes of the final evaluation, conducted between December 2024-February 2025.

## **Disability language**

This report is guided by the language of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability<sup>2</sup>. We recognise that disability language differs according to context and culture, and that this can lead to sensitivities and difficulties at times, and that there is no absolute correct way of referring to persons with disabilities. In this report we take an approach to language use that is consistently driven by inclusive values.

## **Consent and anonymity**

Informed consent was obtained from all stakeholders actively participating in this evaluation (survey respondents, focus group participants, and key stakeholders) and use of their data was secured from all participants in the evaluation. None of the participants are named in the report, but for the purposes of contextualisation, observations tend to be attributed to the role and organisation of the commenting individual.

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<sup>1</sup> During phase 1 (April 2022-June 2023) the programme funded activities in all of these countries. However, during phase 2 (July 2023-February 2025) programme activities were primarily conducted in Ukraine, Moldova and Poland.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ungeneva.org/sites/default/files/2021-01/Disability-Inclusive-Language-Guidelines.pdf>

## **Interpretation of evaluation results**

The evaluation context is complex and can present a challenge to the interpretation of the results. For example, the distinction between 'disability inclusion' and 'policy and advocacy influencing' is not always clear. Or the meaning of collaborative working and service delivery can get blurred. To optimise clarity, the evaluators have done their best to share clear definitions and justify how the report is separated into sections. We acknowledge some issues are overlapping at times, and that separation is not always true to the cross-cutting reality.

The evaluators acknowledge that where interpretative work such as this report is concerned there is always a risk of bias in how findings are interpreted. To mitigate this risk the evaluators have worked together to critically reflect on each other's findings. They have also held regular consultations with core members of the EDF team and OPD representatives to check the relevance and validity of emergent results.

## **Authors and acknowledgements**

This report has been produced by Elaine Green and Gemma Cook. Elaine Green is an independent disability inclusion, global health and international development consultant with more than 20 years' experience of influencing policy at local, national, regional and international levels. Gemma Cook is a disability research doctoral scholar and consultant, with special interests in policy and understanding the meaning of human experience. She also has a background as a neurological physiotherapist specialising in disability. Sincere thanks go to the teams at the EDF Secretariat, especially Gordon Rattray and Mariya Yassenovska as well as to the lead partners and consultants in Ukraine, Moldova, Poland and Latvia for their support and contributions to this evaluation.

## Acronyms

<b>AOPD</b>	Alliance of Organisations for Persons with Disabilities, Moldova
<b>ASRM</b>	Society for the Deaf, Moldova
<b>CBM</b>	Christian Blind Mission
<b>CDPD</b>	Centre for Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Moldova
<b>DG NEAR</b>	Directorate-General: European Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations
<b>EDF</b>	European Disability Forum
<b>FGD</b>	Focus Group Discussion
<b>IDP</b>	Internally Displaced Person
<b>LoS</b>	The League of the Strong, Ukraine
<b>NADP</b>	National Assembly of Persons with Disabilities, Ukraine
<b>OCHA</b>	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
<b>OHCHR</b>	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
<b>OPDs</b>	Organisations of Persons with Disability
<b>PFON</b>	Polish Disability Forum
<b>SUSTENTO</b>	Latvian Umbrella Body for Disability Organisations
<b>UNCRPD</b>	UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
<b>UNDRR</b>	UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction
<b>UNHCR</b>	UN Refugee Agency
<b>UNICEF</b>	UN Children's Agency
<b>UNPRPD</b>	UN Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
<b>WHO</b>	World Health Organization

## **Definitions**

### **The European Disability Forum (EDF):**

EDF is an independent NGO that advocates for the rights of 100 million Europeans with disabilities. EDF is a unique platform which brings together representative organisations of persons with disabilities from across Europe. EDF is run by persons with disabilities and their families. EDF aims to present a strong and united voice of persons with disabilities in Europe.

### **The EDF programme / the programme:**

Throughout the report, where ‘the EDF programme’ or ‘the programme’ is used this refers to the “Ukraine War: OPD-led disability inclusive response and recovery” programme, as funded by CBM International and implemented by EDF and partners between April 2022-March 2025.

### **Transition to community living / ‘deinstitutionalisation’:**

Transition to community living is the process of closing down institutions, moving towards independent living with the necessary community-based services and preventing the placement of persons with disabilities in institutions.

### **The UN CRPD Committee:**

The UN CRPD Committee is an international treaty body that monitors the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) by the State Parties.

## Executive Summary

### Introduction:

On 24<sup>th</sup> February 2022, Russia launched military action against Ukraine, with Russian forces crossing into the country from Belarus in the north, Russia in the east and Crimea in the south. By December 2023, UNHCR recorded more than 6.3 million Ukraine refugees across the world<sup>3</sup>, and estimated that more than 5 million people were displaced within Ukraine, and over 17 million people inside Ukraine were in urgent need of humanitarian assistance. The situation has been devastating for Ukraine's very large population of persons with disability.

In response to the launch of the military action by the Russian Federation, the European Disability Forum's (EDF) partners in Ukraine, and neighbouring countries<sup>4</sup>, identified the need for a rapid response to ensure the protection and respect of the rights of persons with disabilities.

A total of €6.5 million has been provided by CBM International to fund EDF's Ukraine programme to cover the period between April 2022 and February 2025<sup>5</sup>. The funding included allowance for an in-built evaluation process of the whole project. This report presents the findings of the final phase of this evaluation, covering the period from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024 to 28<sup>th</sup> February 2025. It presents a review of the activities conducted during this period in Ukraine and the three countries that continue to provide support to persons with disabilities affected by the military action in Ukraine, Moldova, Poland and Latvia. It also provides analysis of the overall programme highlighting significant achievements and key challenges experienced by the programme.

### Background and sustained achievements

The findings in this report build on achievements in meeting the needs of persons with disabilities that have been identified and sustained throughout the programme. These achievements were attributable to multiple factors but key to this was working

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<sup>3</sup> UNHCR: [Ukraine emergency | UNHCR](#)

<sup>4</sup> Neighbouring countries include: Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Poland, Romania and Slovakia.

<sup>5</sup> This includes €2,741,998.99 for phase 1 (April 2022-June 2023) and €3,800,596.77 for phase 2 (July 2023-February 2025).

in partnership with local OPDs, enabling greater innovation and flexibility. One notable achievement has been the programme's success at keeping essential disability support services running for persons with disabilities. This included providing uninterrupted contact via online support, while people moved from place to place and country to country, and was noted as being particularly beneficial for those with intellectual disabilities, who are amongst those most marginalised and most reliant on routine for wellbeing. Disability support services are denoted as one of the critical preconditions for inclusion by the Global Disability Fund, and unique to disability<sup>6</sup>. Details of these achievements can be found in the two previous evaluation reports.

### Evaluation methods

Evaluation methods for this period comprised of an online survey with key implementing partners (35 responses) two focus groups discussions (FGDs), an external stakeholder interview, and a document review. It also included a deeper analysis of selected areas of importance identified during the previous evaluation processes.

The survey and FGDs aimed to improve understanding of programme achievements and challenges from the perspective of OPDs and programme partners. The topics that emerged in prominence were working with the humanitarian sector, the funding model, advocacy and communication, and strategy. One external stakeholder interview was conducted to gather an external perspective, especially in relation to working with the humanitarian sector. The evaluation was framed by the four results areas that ran through the programme (see Box 1).

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<sup>6</sup> [https://unprpd.org/new/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/UNPRPD-Preconditions-to-disability-inclusion\\_1-13e.pdf](https://unprpd.org/new/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/UNPRPD-Preconditions-to-disability-inclusion_1-13e.pdf)

**Box 1: Ukraine War: OPD-led disability inclusive response and recovery programme results areas:**

- Result Area 1: Strengthen the disability movement in the long-term to better respond to humanitarian needs.
- Result Area 2: Ensure disability inclusion in the wider humanitarian response and reconstruction
- Result Area 3: Address immediate needs of all persons with disabilities in collaboration with organisations of persons with disabilities (OPDs)
- Result Area 4: Administration of the project and the achievement of its objectives have been ensured, through the involvement of relevant staff and experts.

## Main findings

Results of the four different elements of the final evaluation are summarised together under the relevant programme 'results areas' as in box 1. Key findings include the following:

**Stronger OPDs and a strengthened disability movement:** EDF's support has demonstrably strengthened the internal capacity of OPDs throughout this programme, has provided shared learning opportunities and has improved engagement and collaboration among OPDs that has contributed to building stronger OPD networks within and across countries. This has contributed to strengthening the disability movement in Poland and Moldova, although the unexpected, protracted war context in Ukraine has presented some challenges to building a stronger disability movement across Ukraine.

**Improved engagement with the humanitarian sector:** Engagement with the humanitarian sector gradually increased throughout the course of the programme (from February 2022 until February 2025), with significant progress being made during the final period of the programme (April 2024-February 2025). Contributing factors towards this included ongoing support from EDF throughout the programme

to strengthen OPDs' understanding of and capacity to engage with the humanitarian system. The appointment of a Disability Inclusive Humanitarian Action Advisor by the World Health Organization (WHO) was a critical contributing factor to increased engagement of OPDs with the humanitarian system in Ukraine. This role, which acted as a disability focal person within the humanitarian system helped signpost opportunities for engagement and supported more meaningful engagement of OPDs within key humanitarian processes and structures.

However, challenges in engaging with the humanitarian sector remained. Engagement with humanitarian clusters was pocketed with certain actors engaged with more than others, and numbers of OPDs engaging with key humanitarian agencies were relatively low. A more comprehensive reach across clusters, particularly the Age and Disability Working Group, would have been desirable. In hindsight, more in-depth training on Humanitarian Principles and minimum standards would also have been desirable.

**A flexible and values-driven approach:** EDF's approach to the implementation of this programme has been identified as a critical success factor in enabling OPDs to respond effectively, and rapidly, to the changing needs of people with disabilities affected by the war in Ukraine. Throughout the evaluation the **flexibility of the funding model** was highlighted as vital to enabling rapid responses by OPDs to the varied needs of individual people with disabilities. EDF's role as an intermediary body that included governance processes was fundamental to this success. The final evaluation found EDF's **values-driven approach**, based on trust and leaving no-one behind, was crucial to enabling OPDs to meet the needs of the most vulnerable, and those at greater risk of being left behind.

## Lessons Learned

Based on the outcomes of this final evaluation process, the evaluators identified the following lessons learned to be considered for future, similar programmes:

**Securing sustainable funding:** securing long-term, sustainable finance for OPDs from the humanitarian sector presents a challenge as civil society organisations that are not dedicated humanitarian responders may not be able to fully adhere to

humanitarian principles or deliver programmes at the scale required in an emergency response. To overcome this challenge, it is recommended that the financing model implemented by EDF, whereby humanitarian sector financing can be fast-tracked to OPDs through an intermediary body, be adopted and scaled up across humanitarian settings.

**Developing a clear strategy:** A common finding through the evaluation of this programme was a lack of a clearly articulated strategy that would enable external stakeholders to understand the expected impacts of the programme and the roles of different OPDs involved with the programme. The emergency context saw a rapid escalation of need and the requirement to respond immediately, and, while the programme developed clear aims, objectives and result areas, there were limited efforts to translate these into a clear strategy that could be easily understood by external stakeholders. Developing such a strategy could have further strengthened coordination among OPDs involved with the programme and, more importantly, with external stakeholders. A clearer articulation of the programme's strategy may also have created more opportunities to develop partnerships with other funders, civil society organisations and humanitarian agencies engaged in the emergency response in Ukraine.

**Ongoing training requirements:** The end of the programme saw ongoing training requirements. Although it was recognised that significant improvements were made in communication skills, the final evaluation found that OPDs would benefit from continuing to develop these skills, particularly in areas of advocacy and learning to communicate persuasively in high-pressured policy influencing contexts. Mentoring key advocacy staff on a one-to-one basis was suggested as one way that this could be taken forward in future programmes. In addition, OPDs indicated during the final evaluation that they would have benefitted from further training in responding effectively to humanitarian crises. More formalised training in humanitarian principles and humanitarian response could have increased understanding among the OPD partners of the important differences between the humanitarian sector ways of working and civil society human rights-based approaches.