



Source: P4EC

# Final Evaluation Report

Plan International Ukraine

## Evaluation of Plan International's Ukraine Humanitarian Response

On behalf of Plan International by Tanisha Jugran, Millie Santos (Mainlevel Consulting AG) and Maryna Khorunzha (Independent Local Expert)

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**Headquarters**

Kölner Straße 3  
65760 Eschborn  
Germany

Tel: +49 69 153 240 920  
Fax: + 49 69 153 240 929

**Berlin Office**

Jean Monnet Straße 2  
10557 Berlin  
Germany

Tel: + 49 30 610 819 184

[info@mainlevel.de](mailto:info@mainlevel.de)  
[www.mainlevel.de](http://www.mainlevel.de)

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## Acronyms

<b>AH</b>	Agglomerated Hromadas
<b>CVA</b>	Cash and voucher assistance
<b>DAC</b>	Development Assistance Committee (of the OECD)
<b>DEC</b>	Disaster's Emergency Committee
<b>GBV</b>	Gender based violence
<b>IDPs</b>	Internally displaced persons
<b>M&amp;E</b>	Monitoring & Evaluation
<b>MERL</b>	Monitoring, Evaluation, Research and Learning
<b>MHSS</b>	Mental health and psycho-social support
<b>MPCA</b>	Multi-purpose cash assistance
<b>OECD</b>	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
<b>P4EC</b>	Partnership for Every Child
<b>PI</b>	Plan International
<b>PIU</b>	Plan International Ukraine
<b>UNOCHA</b>	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
<b>WFP</b>	World Food Programme

## The project at a glance

<b>Project Name</b>	<b><i>Ukraine Humanitarian Response</i></b>
<b>Project objective</b>	Respond to the child protection and psychosocial needs of children, adolescents and their caregivers in Ukraine who were affected by the crisis, and ensure their access to safe accommodation as well as quality, gender, age and disability-appropriate support services.
<b>Geographical delimitation</b>	Ukraine
<b>Funding Agency</b>	Disaster's Emergency Committee and Plan International (DEC)
<b>Project duration</b>	1st September 2022– 30 <sup>th</sup> June 2024 (no-cost extension after Feb 2024)
<b>Budget</b>	2,540,278 GBP (2,942,879 EUR)
<b>Partners</b>	Depaul and Partnership for Every Child (P4EC)
<b>Key interventions</b>	Activities focus on providing 1. psychosocial support, legal aid, and basic services for children. 2. safe accommodation for vulnerable individuals, emergency food and hygiene assistance, and 3. supporting internally displaced children and at-risk families through multi-sectoral assistance in shelter, social, and economic aspects.
<b>Target group(s)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Girls and boys and adolescents (0-17 years) affected by the crisis</li> <li>• Young people and adults affected by the crisis</li> </ul>

## Executive Summary

### Introduction

Plan International Ukraine (PIU), funded by the Disaster's Emergency Committee (DEC), implemented a two-phase humanitarian response project in Ukraine from September 2022 to June 2024. The project was executed in collaboration with Depaul and Partnership for Every Child (P4EC) and aimed to address the urgent needs of internally displaced persons (IDPs), children, adolescents, and their families across several Ukrainian oblasts. This evaluation, commissioned to Mainlevel Consulting AG, assesses the project's performance, focusing on key achievements, challenges, lessons learned, and good practices to inform future humanitarian efforts.

The conflict in Ukraine since February 2022 led to a severe humanitarian crisis, displacing millions and creating urgent needs for basic services, protection, and psychosocial support. The Ukraine Humanitarian Response Project was designed to address these needs, with a focus on vulnerable groups, particularly children and adolescents.

### Scope and Purpose of the Evaluation

This evaluation was conducted to assess the effectiveness, impact, sustainability, and overall performance of the project. This evaluation focuses on the project period from 1 March 2023 to 30 June 2024, with a no-cost extension after February 2024. The overall project duration was 1 September 2022 – 30 June 2024 (no-cost extension after February 2024), divided into Phase 2A (March 2023-August 2023) and Phase 2B (September 2023-June 2024). The evaluation's objectives included documenting outcomes, evaluating the project's coherence with Plan International's broader strategies, and providing actionable recommendations for future interventions.

### Methodology

The evaluation adopted a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative data collection. Methods included key informant interviews, focus group discussions, and a comprehensive review of project documentation. The evaluation was guided by the OECD DAC criteria—Relevance, Effectiveness, Efficiency, Impact, Coherence, and Sustainability. The evaluation employed a participatory and gender-sensitive approach, ensuring that the voices of diverse stakeholders, including children, were included. Data collection involved consultations with a broad range of stakeholders, such as local communities, implementing partners, government officials, and beneficiaries, including children, adolescents, and families. This inclusive approach prioritized gathering insights from vulnerable groups like internally displaced persons (IDPs), women, people with disabilities, and children. The evaluation team utilized a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods, including interviews, focus group discussions, and surveys, ensuring that the data collection process was respectful, inclusive, and sensitive to the needs of all participants, particularly children.

### Key Findings

#### Relevance

The project was found to be highly relevant to the urgent needs of vulnerable populations in Ukraine, particularly children, adolescents, internally displaced persons (IDPs), and people with disabilities. The project's design was aligned with the specific needs of these groups, ensuring that interventions were tailored to address their unique challenges, such as providing mental health support, legal assistance, and food distribution. However, some gaps were noted in the provision of cash assistance and community services, indicating areas where additional support could have enhanced the project's relevance.

#### Coherence

The project demonstrated strong internal coherence by aligning with Plan International's broader humanitarian strategy and other DEC initiatives in Ukraine. Collaboration with other DEC partners and alignment with local authorities ensured a cohesive response, though challenges such as language barriers and heavy workloads sometimes hindered full engagement in coordination meetings. Externally, the project effectively aligned with other donor-funded initiatives, though further integration with national government efforts and other NGOs could have improved overall coherence.

### **Effectiveness**

The project successfully delivered multi-sectoral support to vulnerable populations in Ukraine, achieving significant impacts despite numerous challenges. It exceeded many targets, particularly in food assistance, cash transfers, and psychosocial support, through effective collaboration with partners like Depaul and P4EC. Key achievements included the establishment of inclusive playgrounds, sensory rooms, and enhanced legal and psychological support for children and families in crisis. However, challenges such as operational inefficiencies, logistical barriers, and limited coverage for individuals aged 25-50 were noted. The project's adaptive approach and strong partnerships were essential in navigating these challenges and ensuring continued support. Despite some negative unintended consequences, such as fostering a consumerist mindset among beneficiaries, the project significantly improved access to essential services and promoted child rights, gender inclusion, and accessibility. Further efforts in gender integration and overcoming logistical challenges will enhance future initiatives.

### **Impact**

The project significantly improved livelihoods for children, adolescents, and adults by integrating gender-sensitive and inclusive approaches. It enhanced social cohesion, provided vital support to young families, and offered psychological and social assistance to children, especially those with disabilities. Inclusive resource centers and targeted support positively impacted beneficiaries, though the lack of monitoring limited overall assessment of children's well-being. While the project effectively addressed psychosocial needs and fostered inclusivity, some minority groups were underrepresented, indicating areas for future improvement.

### **Efficiency**

The project efficiently utilized its budget, with the majority of funds allocated directly to project activities, ensuring that resources were effectively transformed into tangible outputs. Donor flexibility allowed for the adaptation of activities to meet evolving needs. However, issues related to financial reporting, communication, and the categorization of expenses highlighted areas where efficiency could be improved, particularly in the management of resources across different sectors and regions.

### **Sustainability**

The project made significant strides in building sustainable capacities within the communities it served, particularly through initiatives like inclusive playgrounds and social service centers. The project has significantly improved the livelihoods of children, adolescents, and adults, particularly through gender-sensitive cash assistance, social cohesion efforts, and support for families with special needs. It effectively addressed psychosocial needs and promoted inclusive practices. However, sustainability is challenged by funding uncertainties and limited collaboration with key partners. While innovative approaches have strengthened capacities and laid a foundation for ongoing impact, risks persist, particularly regarding future funding and local partner capabilities. Strategic planning and continued support are crucial to ensuring long-term sustainability.

The evaluation findings identify some key factors of success and weaknesses related to the project.

Factors of Success	Factors of Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <b>Professionalism of the Staff:</b> Exceptional dedication and professionalism of staff, who went beyond their duties, greatly enhanced the project's outcomes and sustainability.</li> <li>➤ <b>High Quality of Services Provided:</b> The project delivered high-quality services, laying a foundation for sustainable, positive impacts.</li> <li>➤ <b>Flexibility and Adaptability:</b> The project's ability to adjust services to evolving needs, supported by flexible funding from DEC, was crucial in a dynamic humanitarian context.</li> <li>➤ <b>Effective Training and Multidisciplinary Cooperation:</b> Comprehensive training and well-coordinated multidisciplinary teams enhanced service delivery and project sustainability.</li> <li>➤ <b>Individualized Approach to Beneficiaries:</b> Tailoring support to individual needs rather than generalized groups improved service quality and sustainability.</li> <li>➤ <b>Identifying and Addressing Unrecognized Needs:</b> The project highlighted and fulfilled previously unrecognized needs, leading to the retention of key social services by local budgets post-project.</li> <li>➤ <b>Ongoing Specialist Support and Community Integration:</b> Continued specialist support and strong relationships with beneficiaries ensured sustained impact beyond the project's formal end.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <b>Great Volatility of the Situation:</b> The ongoing conflict in Ukraine introduced extreme volatility, undermining project stability and effectiveness.</li> <li>➤ <b>Concerns for Staff Safety:</b> Operating in conflict zones like Kharkiv posed serious threats to staff safety, limiting project scope and impact.</li> <li>➤ <b>Lack of Clear Communication of Goals:</b> Significant issues with defining and communicating the project's goals, both final and interim led to improvisation and inefficiencies among staff.</li> <li>➤ <b>Lack of Communication Between Field Staff and Plan International:</b> Ineffective communication hindered coordination and execution of project activities, weakening overall effectiveness.</li> <li>➤ <b>Capacity and Expertise Limitations:</b> Gaps in capacity and expertise among local partners raised concerns about the sustainability of project efforts.</li> <li>➤ <b>Limited Gender Inclusivity:</b> The project's predominantly gender-neutral approach limited its effectiveness in addressing gender-specific needs.</li> <li>➤ <b>Funding and Resource Constraints:</b> Uncertainties around funding and the lack of an exit strategy posed significant risks to sustaining project efforts.</li> <li>➤ <b>Lack of Monitoring and Evaluation:</b> Inadequate monitoring limited the ability to comprehensively evaluate the project's impact, particularly on children's well-being and mental health.</li> </ul>

### Good practices:

Good Practices	
The project contracted specialists through community agreements, where local authorities hired specialists using provided budgets. This approach ensured sustainability, with about 90% of specialists staying in their communities to continue their work.	The project adopted an "individually oriented" and "universal" social services model, where multidisciplinary teams addressed multiple issues faced by beneficiaries holistically, without referring them to other agencies. This approach could inform the Ministry of Social Policy's reform efforts to align with European best practices.

### Key Recommendations:

Finding	Key Recommendations / Options for Action
Lack of monitoring visits to assess children's well-being and mental health.	1. Implement regular monitoring visits focused on children's well-being and mental health in future projects.
No follow-up sessions with psychologists after the project ended.	2. Continue supporting children's psychologists in the hromadas post-project.
Sustainability challenges due to the phase-out of DEC funding and lack of an exit strategy.	3. Develop an exit strategy and seek alternative funding to ensure service continuity.
Limited engagement with minority groups, like the Roma community.	4. Design inclusion strategies to ensure representation of all minority groups, not just IDPs.



Finding	Key Recommendations / Options for Action
Temporary shelters were not fully equipped for people with disabilities (PwD) or pets.	5. Ensure future shelters are accessible for PwD and accommodate families with pets, including necessary infrastructure and training.
Gender mainstreaming was not integrated into project activities.	6. Conduct gender analysis during project design and integrate gender-sensitive approaches throughout the project.
Successful creation and retention of social worker and psychologist positions in hromadas post-project.	7. Support the establishment of essential social services and advocate for their inclusion in local budgets.
Need for development of innovative approaches, such as personalized services and feedback mechanisms.	8. Refine and expand innovative practices, including personalized aid and robust feedback mechanisms.
Local partners have limited capacity to sustain activities independently.	9. Provide training and establish long-term partnerships to enhance the sustainability of local partners' activities.
Experience exchange between participating hromadas was beneficial.	10. Facilitate knowledge sharing between participating and non-participating hromadas to spread successful practices.
Need to adopt successful project models into evidence-based policies.	11. Collaborate with implementing agencies to integrate successful project models into national policies.

# 1 Introduction

The escalation of the war in Ukraine, which began in February 2022 when Russia launched a full-scale invasion, has evolved into a prolonged and intense conflict. The conflict has led to significant territorial battles, a severe humanitarian crisis, and extensive global economic repercussions. The people affected by the war in Ukraine have pressing needs that span various critical areas. Foremost among these is the need for immediate humanitarian aid, including food, clean water, medical supplies, and shelter, as millions have been displaced from their homes. Access to healthcare is crucial, particularly for the injured, chronically ill, and vulnerable populations such as children and the elderly. There is also a significant demand for psychological support to address the trauma experienced by those impacted by the conflict.

Plan International Ukraine (PIU) focuses on supporting children and adolescents affected by the humanitarian crisis inside of Ukraine, especially (internally displaced) girls and young women in their protection (incl. protection from gender-based violence (GBV), sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR), access to education and learning as well as access to mental health and psycho-social support (MHPSS).

Plan International as an independent development and humanitarian organisation strives to advance children's rights and particularly equality for girls around the globe in over 80 countries to date. Plan International's Ukraine Humanitarian Response, funded by the Disaster's Emergency Committee (DEC), aimed to support children, adolescents and their families in Ukraine with accommodation, emergency relief, child protection and mental health and psycho-social support services.

## 1.1 Context Analysis

The humanitarian situation in Ukraine has sharply deteriorated due to the ongoing conflict which began in February 2022 and attacks on critical infrastructure. The conflict has caused significant territorial disputes, a severe humanitarian crisis, and global economic impacts. Those affected in Ukraine urgently need humanitarian aid such as food, clean water, medical supplies, and shelter, especially as millions have been displaced. Essential healthcare is crucial for the injured, chronically ill, and vulnerable populations like children and the elderly. Additionally, there is a strong need for psychological support to address the trauma experienced by those impacted.

According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), 17.6 million people in Ukraine currently require humanitarian assistance, with only 44% of the necessary funds secured to meet these needs. The conflict has displaced around 8 million people to neighbouring countries and left approximately 5.3 million people internally displaced within Ukraine. This population includes 42,000 infants, 284,000 children under five, and over 3 million adults. The situation has been further exacerbated by attacks on energy infrastructure, particularly during the winter months. These attacks have left millions without access to essential services like heating, electricity, and water. For example, in July 2023, Kharkiv experienced significant power outages due to such attacks, which have compounded the difficulties faced by internally displaced persons (IDPs) and returnees during the cold months.<sup>1 2 3</sup>

PIU's Humanitarian Crisis Response Strategy for 2023-2024 focuses on providing life-saving humanitarian assistance, enhancing child protection systems, expanding mental health and psychosocial support, promoting sexual reproductive health rights, ensuring quality education, and scaling up responses to gender-based violence. The strategy aims to support civil society

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<sup>1</sup>United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA). (2024). "Ukraine Humanitarian Response 2023

<sup>2</sup> International Organization for Migration (IOM) (2024). "World Migration Report 2024.

<sup>3</sup> United Nations News (2023). "Guterres warns countries, laying out his priorities for 2023

partners in reducing vulnerabilities for refugees and displaced individuals, particularly girls, young people, and minority groups, by enhancing their resilience and agency.<sup>4</sup>

Within the context of the Humanitarian Response Project in Ukraine, PIU focused on aiding crisis-affected children, particularly internally displaced girls and young women, covering protection, education, mental health, and reproductive health. The six key sectors of PIU's response include providing life-saving assistance, enhancing child protection systems, expanding mental health services, ensuring quality education, addressing gender-based violence, and promoting sexual and reproductive health rights.

Following the localised, partner led approach, the project was implemented by Depaul and Partnership for every Child (P4EC) and addressed the child protection and psychosocial needs of crisis-affected individuals in Ukraine. Phase 2 of the project ran from September 2023 to June 2024 (no-cost extension after Feb 2024) and involved collaborations with both Depaul and Partnership for Every Child, focusing on providing integrated services, safe accommodation, and gender-responsive support. In Sub-Phase 2A, PI partnered with both Depaul and Partnership for Every Child to enhance their initiatives. Moving into Sub-Phase 2B, the collaboration continued exclusively with Partnership for Every Child.

With the implementing partner, Depaul integrated services in Kharkiv Oblast, including food, non-food relief (hygiene), cash assistance, and shelter were provided. Depaul adapted to the changing needs in Ukraine, focusing on the most at-risk individuals and offering comprehensive support and accommodation services. Gender-responsive child protection and mental health services for children and their caregivers were also provided.

Additionally, in collaboration with Partnership for Every Child, multi-purpose cash assistance (MPCA), family-based care for internally displaced children, supported at-risk families to prevent separation, and strengthened the social services workforce in Kharkiv and other regions were provided.

The project focused on four main outputs. First output, focused on providing a support centre and mobile teams in Kharkiv by Depaul to provide psychosocial support, child protection, legal aid, and basic services to children, adolescents, young people, and adults. Second, safe accommodation was made available for these groups and other vulnerable households. Third, Depaul ensuring that emergency food and hygiene assistance reached those in need. Finally, Partnership for Every Child (P4EC) provided multi-sectoral support, including shelter, social, and economic services, to internally displaced children in alternative care and children in at-risk families.

## 1.2 Scope and purpose of the evaluation

**Functions and objective of the evaluation:** Mainlevel was commissioned by Plan International with the task of conducting a final evaluation of the Ukraine Humanitarian Response project. The evaluation of the project comprises the assessment of the second phase (Sept 2022-June 2024) of the project and primarily aims to assess the project's effectiveness, impact, and sustainability, while identifying areas for improvement and adjustments for long-term success. It also aims to document achievements, challenges, and best practices to guide future projects. The objectives of the evaluation can be summarised as follows:

- Documentation of evidence of the outcomes of the project;
- Assessment of the relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability of the project components up to the date of evaluation;

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<sup>4</sup> Ukraine Humanitarian Response Strategy, Plan International, 2023-2024

- Assessment of the extent to which the project addresses the specific needs of minority groups and persons with disabilities and integrates gender equality;
- Provision of insights and recommendations for project steering and project design for future projects;
- Provision of lessons learned regarding the planning, implementation (activities), reporting and management of the project.
- Assessment of the flexibility of the programme to adapt and respond to the changes and sustainability of the project.
- Ensuring accountability and transparency towards Plan International UK, the donor-DEC, stakeholders and the beneficiaries of the project.

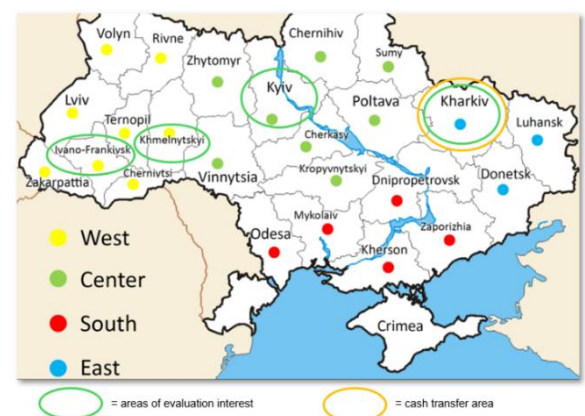
### 1.2.1 Definition of the evaluation objective

**Evaluation object:** This evaluation concerns Plan International's humanitarian response in Ukraine, funded by the Disaster's Emergency Committee. The project aims to respond to the child protection and psychosocial needs of crisis-affected children, young people and their caregivers in Ukraine, ensuring their access to safe shelter and quality, gender-, age- and disability-sensitive support services.

**Temporal delineation:** This evaluation focuses on the project period from 1 March 2023 to 30 June 2024, with a no-cost extension after February 2024. The overall project duration was 1 September 2022 – 30 June 2024 (no-cost extension after February 2024), divided into Phase 2A (March 2023-August 2023) and Phase 2B (September 2023-June 2024).

**Financial delimitation:** The project has been financed by DEC and is implemented by Plan International UK and Plan International Ukraine. The total budget of the project was 2,540,278 GBP (2,942,879 EUR), fully funded by DEC Ukraine. With regards to expenditure distribution among partners, DePaul utilized 1,476,677 GBP (58%) of the total costs, P4EC 471,565 GBP (19%) and Plan Ukraine 592,036 GBP (23%).

**Geographical delimitation:** The project was implemented in four Oblasts in Ukraine – **Kyiv** (central project offices), **Kharkiv**, **Ivano-Frankivsk** and **Khmelnyskyi**. A specific delimitation/sample of the regions was considered during the evaluation phase.



### 1.2.2 Evaluation questions and criteria

Based on the evaluation questions included in the terms of reference for the project, the findings from a detailed document analysis, the kick-off workshop and initial explorative interviews with key stakeholders, assessment criteria were derived to specify the overarching evaluation questions. In a second step, these assessment criteria were operationalized through measurable indicators, which helped to determine the achievement of intended results. The evaluation questions were reviewed by the project team as well as by Plan International safeguarding team. Mainlevel conducts systematic evaluations along evaluation matrices, thus covering all evaluation questions, assessment criteria and indicators in a systematic way. Within the matrix, triangulation also becomes evident, as different sources are named alongside each other.

### 1.2.3 Evaluation team

Mainlevel's evaluation team consisted of two evaluators, Tanisha Jugran as the lead evaluator and Millie Santos as the Technical Expert and one independent local expert, Maryna Khorunzha.

## 2 Methodology

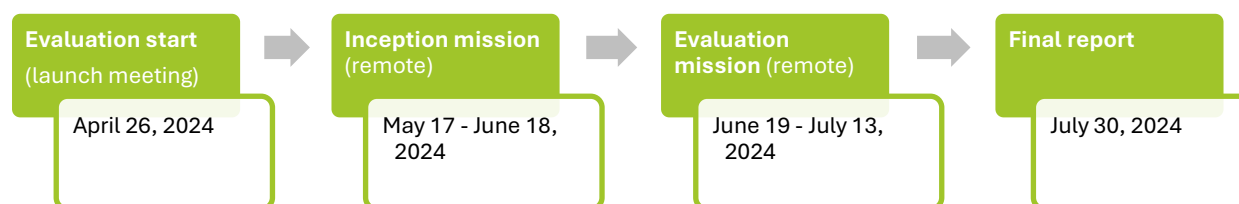
### 2.1 Description of methods used and rationale

The evaluation applied a mixed method approach which allows for triangulation of data increasing the robustness and validity of the results. The evaluation is based on both secondary data and primary data retrieved from diverse relevant stakeholder groups. The findings from the desk review (secondary data) were validated and triangulated with insights from the key informant and in-depth interviews (primary data). The following methods were used:

**Sampling:** The evaluation team, with the support of the project team, identified a sample of stakeholders to include in the planned interviews and focus group discussions. The evaluators took into account the location and gender of the stakeholders and the accessibility of the local consultant to contact them either in person or remotely.

### 2.2 Data collection

#### Evaluation process:

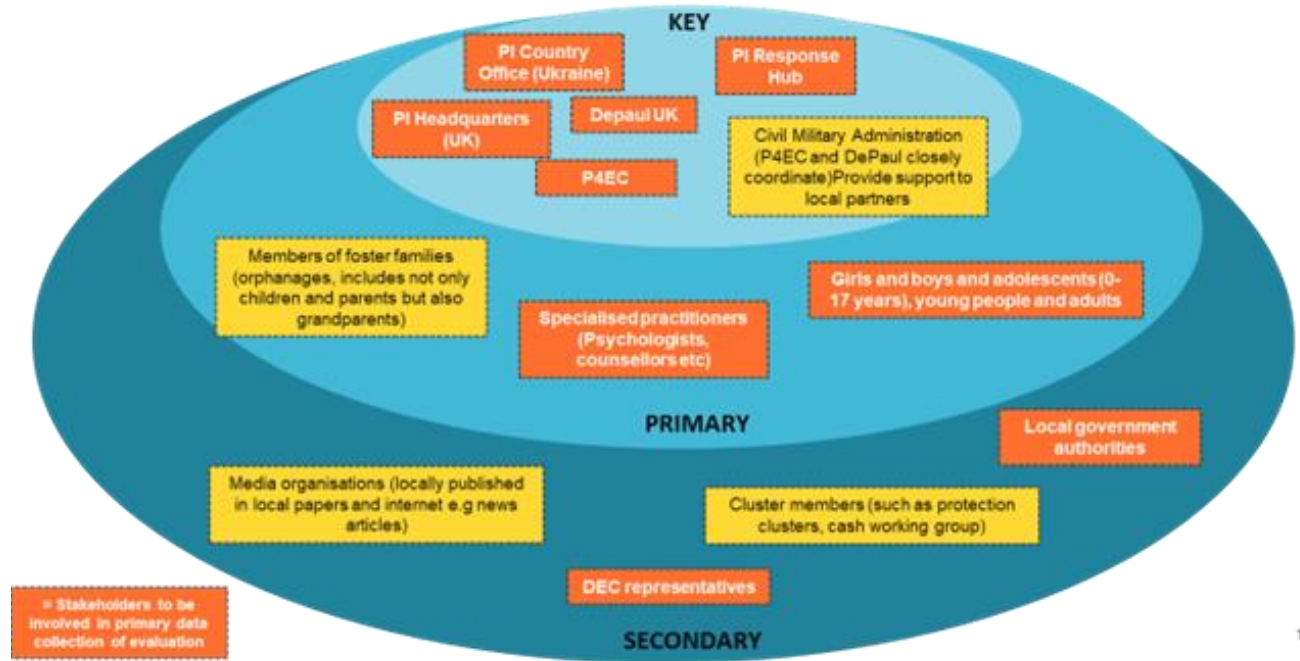


**Primary data sources:** The primary data sources for the evaluation included explorative interviews and key informant interviews with key PI staff and the implementing partners from P4EC and Depaul as well as focus group discussions with the target group which included children, parents, parents of children with disabilities, alternative care families within internally displaced people and interviews with other stakeholder groups such as the specialized practitioners (social workers and psychologists) and with the representative of the National Social Services of Ukraine.

**Selection of interviewees:** The involvement of various stakeholders in the evaluation is key to useful and robust evaluations. It strongly determines the success of the evaluation and acceptance of the evaluation findings and recommendations. During the inception phase, the evaluation team closely collaborated with the Depaul and P4EC core project teams to map crucial stakeholders of the project and discuss their involvement in the evaluation (see figure 1).

In total, **68 adults** were involved in the evaluation (53 female and 15 male) as well as **5 children**.

Figure 1: Map of project stakeholders



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They were sampled by the respective implementing partners with the support of Plan International Ukraine. To ensure that gender perspectives were thoroughly incorporated into the evaluation findings, we included a diverse group of stakeholders, with particular emphasis on ensuring a balanced representation of both female and male voices. This approach was crucial in capturing gender-specific experiences and insights, thereby enriching the evaluation's depth and ensuring that the findings addressed the needs and perspectives of all genders. In addition, Plan International's (PI) staff (National / country officer, Regional focal point, technical experts, Project coordinator, Country Finance Manager and DEC representative) were spoken to as resource persons to provide context and background to fully understand the project context and design, identify key issues, and understand stakeholder perspectives, among others. Please refer to Annex 7.1 for the detailed list of interviewees.



No. of interviews	Target group representatives	Implementing partners	Specialized Practitioners	Local govt. authorities
23 (9 KIIs and 14 FGDs)	Children, Parents, Alternative Care Families within IDPs	Field staff, local /project from P4EC and Depaul	Social workers and psychologists	Head of the service for children

**Secondary data sources:** Relevant project documents (Ukraine Humanitarian Response Strategy 2023-2034, Annual and interim narrative reports, family and community project results-P4EC, descriptive cases of families-P4EC, activities in Agglomerated Hromadas (AH)-P4EC, logframe (MERL Framework for Depaul and P4EC), output/results model, financial reports and plan of operations and risks assessment) were available to the evaluation team. Specific references to documents will be made throughout the evaluation report and listed under references.

## 2.3 Data Analysis

For efficient data management and analysis, the evaluation team compiled all qualitative findings from documents, interviews, and focus group discussions, and employed qualitative data analysis methods. Initially, notes were taken during each interview. Subsequently, the evaluation team coded the data as the interviews progressed and added these notes to a transcripts folder. None of the interviews were recorded. To analyse different data sources, a results-based category/coding system was developed, guided by the evaluation questions and open to adaptations and enhancement of categories during the analysis. By following this procedure, information gathered from different data sources regarding specific evaluation questions was retrieved and contrasted. Findings and recommendations were then summarized in a comprehensive and clear manner.

Quantitative data, primarily retrieved from monitoring data, was analysed descriptively. To contextualize the quantitative results and add detail to the findings, these results were triangulated with the qualitative analysis results, enhancing the rigor and robustness of the findings.

## 2.4 Limitations and constraints, potential bias and mitigations measures

The evaluation team would like to express gratitude for the continuous support received from both the Plan UK and Ukraine core project team and the implementing partners Depaul and P4EC during the evaluation process. Their assistance played a significant role in ensuring a smooth implementation of this evaluation. However, despite the provided support, the evaluators encountered certain limitations, as outlined in the following.

Firstly, the evaluation experienced overall delays in its initiation and subsequent data collection phases. The contact details for the P4EC-related interviewees were provided only after the initial data-collection deadline, resulting in a two-week extension. These delays necessitated a reduction in the number of stakeholders interviewed, which may have affected the representativeness of the data. Consequently, the data collected is more anecdotal in nature, potentially limiting the depth and breadth of insights gained. Certain limitations arose due to **coordination and process delays**, particularly caused by a lack of timely submission of consent forms by interview partners. Mainlevel closely cooperated with the team on preparing the consent forms, but there were delays in sending them to stakeholders after submission. These consent forms were essential prerequisites for the evaluators to conduct interviews and FGDs in line with Plan International requirements. There was a significant delay in adapting consent forms for child interviewees by PI/P4EC, which required additional time and effort. Confusion arose from receiving consent forms in both English and Ukrainian, leading to a misunderstanding that all stakeholders needed to sign these forms, not just the parents of child interviewees. This issue contributed to the late provision of contact details for adult respondents. Striving to maximise participation, the evaluation team extended the originally foreseen data collection phase to more than three weeks. However, it is regrettable to report that the team was ultimately unable to conduct interviews and FGDs with all children, parents' groups, specialised practitioners and local government officials identified for the evaluation. Additionally, some interviews could not be

conducted due to a lack of response from the contacted entities. In the same vein, the **responsiveness** of key informants (KI) posed another challenge, including instances of no-shows or delayed replies to interview invites. The evaluators were required to reschedule meetings, causing further disruptions and impeding the progress of the evaluation. Security risks and frequent electricity outages also resulted in missed interviews and poor connection quality, including interruptions and background noise.

An additional limitation experienced in some FGDs was related to **participation of interviewees outside of their original planned FGD**. There were issues with mixing representatives from different groups, leading to confusion and potentially mixing responses. Additionally, the names of stakeholders on the contact list often did not match those who joined the interviews, further adding to the confusion.

The evaluation team acknowledges that many of the faced difficulties are oftentimes inherent to virtual settings and is convinced that, in spite of some challenges, insightful data could be gathered from all involved Plan International offices and stakeholder groups. Valuable lessons learned from these limitations may, however, serve to inform future evaluation processes, enabling further improvements to the implementation.

## 2.5 International standards used as reference for the evaluation

The evaluation involved children in the age group 0-17 years affected by the crisis. Considering the potential vulnerability of this target group, the evaluation team, together with Plan International, ensured data confidentiality and security throughout the evaluation. Adhering to international standards, the evaluation team followed ethical considerations throughout the implementation of the evaluation. The most important key principles that guided all activities of the evaluation were: consent, anonymity, confidentiality and, youth and child safeguarding. Our child safeguarding approach fully adhered to the Ethical MERL Framework and Plan international's Child and Youth Safeguarding Policy.

**Training of the evaluators:** As part of short induction to Plan's approach to Monitoring, Evaluation, Research and Learning (MERL), the evaluation team undertook an online training on safeguarding essentials which included orientation to ethical issues: gender-sensitive and inclusive data collection and child and young people safeguarding facilitated by Plan International's Safeguarding & AAP Specialist.

**Preparation and Submission of Ethics, Safeguarding and Data Privacy documents:** With support from the Plan International safeguarding specialist and project team, the evaluation team prepared and submitted the following ethics, safeguarding and privacy documents: ethics application form, data collection tools, inception concept, the MER Safeguarding Risk Assessment, consent forms for adults, children and parents/guardians. Plan International's Ethics Review Committee reviewed and approved all documents before data collection.

**Consent:** Informed and voluntary consent is based on providing the necessary information in a language that can be well understood by the subject, clearly stating that the ultimate decision on whether to answer or not to all or some questions lies with them and with them only. It is particularly important for studies involving children and youth and vulnerable groups of the population. Interviews were conducted with participants who submitted the consent forms stating their agreement to participate in the interview. The interviewer read out the key points including the key purpose of the interview, details about the confidentiality of data, duration of the interview and stating that the interview is completely voluntary, before taking a formal consent from the participant/s.

**Confidentiality and Data protection:** Adhering to international standards, evaluation team followed ethical considerations throughout the implementation of the evaluation. All interview sources are codified in the final evaluation report to prevent re-traceability of specific statements



to individual respondents. In addition, the evaluators asked the respondents during the interview whether they could be quoted directly in the report. The evaluation team ensured the privacy of and maintained anonymity with respect to identifying data collected from involved informants in the evaluation with utmost integrity and honesty. Data collected through individual KIIs and FGDs are stored securely at Mainlevel's data storage drive. The data privacy and protection officer in the organisation is responsible for storing it securely and destroying the data 6 months after the completion of the assignment as per the organisation's ethics and safeguarding protocols.

**Youth and Child Safeguarding:** Research that involves children especially girls and young people require additional considerations. At the beginning of each FGD with children, the consent information was verbally presented. Easy language was used to ensure that the children could follow the interview purpose and questions easily. The data collectors furthermore also clarified if the content was understood easily or if there were any questions.

#### Adopting child-friendly and participatory methods

In the scope of this assignment, the evaluators – with the support of the project team – identified appropriate qualitative tools to enhance children's participation in the study. These were based on participatory and easy to understand 'yes' or 'no' questions. Based on international guidelines and Plan International's expertise, the evaluation team adhered to ethical guidelines by informing children of the purpose of the evaluation and giving them the choice to participate or not. Children were gently encouraged to speak up during group discussion, also respecting their silence. The five girls interviewed were between 10 and 12 years old. Simple language, tailored to their understanding, was used when asking questions from the interview guidelines. A friendly demeanor was maintained, and when it was inquired whether they knew each other (which they did), this seemed to put them at ease. To break the ice, a few jokes were shared, and the children were asked about their extracurricular activities as well as what they did during the summer when school was out.

### 3 Assessment according to OECD/DAC and CHS criteria

Based on the findings from a detailed primary and secondary data analysis, the assessment criteria were derived to specify the overarching evaluation questions. These criteria were operationalized through measurable indicators, which helped to determine the achievement of intended results.

The evaluators therefore systematically built an evaluation matrix, thus covering all evaluation questions, assessment criteria and indicators in a systematic way – see Annex 7.3 Within the matrix, triangulation also becomes evident, as different sources are named alongside each other.

The data analysis process will therefore consider the Organisation for Economic Co-operation Development - Development Assistance Committee (OECD-DAC) criteria and the Core Humanitarian Standards (CHS) criteria integrated into the evaluation matrix.

#### 3.1 Relevance

Under the relevance criterion, the evaluation assessed to what extent the project was aligned with the policies and priorities of Ukraine, with the needs and capacities of the beneficiaries. The criterion also assesses the appropriateness of the design and the projects' adaptability to change.

**Alignment of the project with the needs and priorities of the beneficiaries and stakeholders, particularly children, adolescents, internally displaced groups, people with disability (LNOB)**

In crisis-affected areas of Ukraine, the project provided a rapid response tailored to the specific needs of children, caregivers and adults, particularly targeting the most vulnerable populations,

aiming to leaving no one behind (LNOB). By March 2022, P4EC, in partnership with UNICEF, had begun supporting around 33,000 children in foster care and was monitoring a total of 62,000 children. By July-August 2022, the project prioritised areas such as the occupied communities in Kharkiv and adapted its interventions accordingly. By September 2022, P4EC had coordinated with local social protection specialists to avoid duplication of resources, selecting communities based on needs and existing local team capacity. This approach included training local teams to identify needs and vulnerabilities. Interventions included the New Home Programme for large families and Temporary Home Support for smaller families, as well as integration events for local communities (FGD\_FS\_3).

Key areas of intervention included food distribution (hot meals such as soup), hygiene kits, legal support, psychological support services (PSS) for evacuated children and specific support for groups such as single mothers with children (INT\_FS\_7). Participation in cluster meetings was instrumental in identifying the different needs in different sectors (INT\_FS\_7). The project successfully addressed the needs of all population groups, with a particular focus on vulnerable families (INT\_PI\_5).

The project managed to cover almost all categories of vulnerable people, in particular IDPs, families with children and vulnerable families. This included support to alternative care families, such as children's homes (FGD\_FS\_1, 4, FGD\_parents\_1, 4, 5, FGD\_1, 2, 5, INT\_1). The training provided by the project also led to an increase in the number of people willing to host children (FGD\_5).

People with disabilities, including children and adults, were the main beneficiaries of the project's services. The project created inclusive spaces, provided a special lift, and offered early intervention support for children with various disabilities (FGD\_2, 5, FGD\_parents\_2, INT\_1). Beneficiaries included families in need, families with children (including those in alternative forms of care), children with disabilities, families where both parents had lost their jobs, and demobilized persons (FGD\_parents\_2, 4, FGD\_FS\_2). Psychological support was also provided in dedicated spaces for affected families, which facilitated the adaptation of IDP children (FGD\_FS\_2, FGD\_parents\_2).

However, there were some challenges and unmet needs. While the project covered a wide range of services, the need for cash for rent and community services was highlighted as an area where additional support would have been beneficial (INT\_PI\_3). Horodotska AH, known for its rehabilitation centre, served many people with disabilities, including those injured in the war (FGD\_2). The selection and identification process for assistance always prioritised vulnerable groups, including single headed households and those close to the frontline. The Building Blocks database, coordinated by the World Food Programme (WFP), was used to avoid duplication of services, although there was limited information on support to LGBTQ or ethnic communities (INT\_PI\_4).

Despite the comprehensive coverage, there were cases where the assistance provided was insufficient due to the extreme needs of some families. The project also faced limitations, such as a lack of dedicated staff for cash and voucher assistance (CVA), and its capacity to provide multi-purpose cash assistance (MPCA) was somewhat limited. Nevertheless, the project complemented other activities with additional support where possible (INT\_PI\_4).

**In conclusion**, the project demonstrated a strong alignment with the needs of diverse beneficiary groups, including children, adolescents, IDPs, and people with disabilities, aiming to leave no one behind. It effectively addressed critical needs through food distribution, hygiene supplies, legal aid, psychological support, and targeted interventions for vulnerable families and individuals. Despite its broad coverage and tailored approach, challenges remained, such as insufficient cash assistance and no/limited support for specific groups like LGBTQ and ethnic communities. The

project adapted well to varying needs and capacities, though gaps in resources and support were identified, emphasizing areas for future improvement.

### **Appropriateness of the design and delivery of activities**

The narrative reports, highlight the project's approach to implementation as comprehensive and multi-faceted, emphasizing a data-driven, inclusive strategy that prioritizes ethnic minorities, individuals with disabilities, girls, and single-parent households. By leveraging disaggregated data (SADD), the project designs interventions to meet diverse needs while ensuring safe, dignified programming through adherence to humanitarian standards and safeguarding policies. Coordination with local and national stakeholders, including regular participation in humanitarian coordination mechanisms, helps avoid duplication and ensures a cohesive response. The project also addresses environmental concerns by reducing waste, using green distribution methods, and selecting sustainable materials. Risk management is robust, with proactive measures for operational, security, and logistical challenges. However, the project faces challenges such as instability in high-risk areas which complicates coordination and operational presence, potential delays in response due to security constraints, and the need to balance rapid delivery with thorough, needs-based interventions. Overall, the approach integrates local capacity-building and environmental sustainability into its framework, aiming for a resilient and effective humanitarian response despite these hurdles.<sup>5</sup>

The design of the DEC Ukraine project involved two phases, with Phase 2A being implemented by the partners Depaul and Partnership for Every Child (P4EC), and Phase 2B executed as a no-cost extension by P4EC (INT\_PI\_5). The initial design phase was notably limited, as this was DEC's first institutional grant in this context. The project had to be developed from the ground up, with the absence of established office and necessary technical personnel, representing a new operational environment for Plan International in Ukraine (INT\_PI\_3). The project successfully leveraged the concept of AH in Ukraine to implement its activities, enhancing local governance and community engagement and enabled productive collaboration in Hromadas.

Overall, the project's M&E focal point confirmed that the project indicators were met, and the selection criteria focused on the most vulnerable, including female-headed households (INT\_PI\_1).

One of the challenges encountered during the project was related to mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS), an area in which the Depaul team, for instance, had limited prior experience. Although there was a desire to expand these services, additional support from DEC was not secured. This gap was particularly felt in Kharkiv, where the need for such services was high, but continuation into Phase 2B was not feasible (INT\_PI\_3).

The project's scope and geographical implementation also required adaptation over time. Humanitarian support was needed in multiple regions across Ukraine, necessitating adjustments to the areas of focus throughout the project period (INT\_FS\_7). While the western regions experienced less displacement and destruction, Kharkiv was an active war zone, and regions like Ivano-Frankivska and Khmelnytska oblasts became major receivers of internally displaced persons (IDPs). In these areas, specific approaches, such as supporting family-type children's homes, were introduced to cater to the distinct needs of relocated populations (INT\_1).

The project's design also facilitated the provision of services in a legally compliant manner, with centers now offering expanded services beyond their initial roles. A memorandum was concluded to provide financial and legal support, thereby formalizing these extended services (FGD\_2).

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<sup>5</sup> DEC Ukraine Humanitarian Appeal, Narrative Plan, Phase 2B

In terms of partner selection, strategic considerations were made based on the existing presence and experience of organizations in certain oblasts. Depaul had field offices in Kharkiv, Ivano-Frankivska, and Khmelnytska, areas with significant IDP populations. P4EC had previous experience working in Ivano-Frankivska and Khmelnytska oblasts (INT\_PI\_5). Plan International collaborated closely with Depaul to deliver integrated services such as food and non-food relief items (NFIs), cash and voucher assistance, accommodation, and shelter support in Kharkiv Oblast. The program was aligned with other DEC partners and remained flexible to respond to the evolving needs and context, particularly focusing on the most at-risk households and individuals (INT\_PI\_5).

In addition to immediate relief efforts, Plan International and Depaul worked to integrate gender-responsive child protection and MHPSS services into the programming, ensuring that children, adolescents, and their caregivers affected by the crisis received appropriate support (INT\_PI\_5). During Phase 2A, Depaul conducted activities funded by Plan International from 2022 to 2023 and continued these activities with support from other donors. The collaboration also involved P4EC, which provided family-based alternative care for displaced children and adolescents, supported at-risk families to prevent separation, and strengthened the social services workforce in Kharkiv and other regions (INT\_PI\_5).

**In conclusion**, the project was both comprehensive and adaptive, effectively addressing the complex needs of diverse beneficiary groups. The project's approach prioritized inclusivity and utilized disaggregated data to tailor interventions for ethnic minorities, individuals with disabilities, girls, and single-parent households. It demonstrated robust coordination with local and national stakeholders, adhering to humanitarian standards and environmental sustainability. However, challenges such as instability in high-risk areas, delays due to security constraints, and limited experience in mental health support were noted. The project successfully adapted to evolving needs across various regions, leveraging local governance structures and maintaining flexibility in its approach.

### **Alignment of the project' activities and outputs with the overall goal and the attainment of its objective**

Firstly, the project's activities and outputs were strongly focused on responding to the needs of people affected by the war in Ukraine. To achieve this, the project successfully tailored its services to provide treatment, rehabilitation, rental assistance, winter shelter and the development of child sponsorship services. It also addressed conflict resolution and social support for internally displaced persons (IDPs) (INT\_1). The establishment of working relationships between **Agglomerated Hromadas (AH)**, local social service providers and the Ministry of Social Policy of Ukraine further underscored the overall achievement of the intervention objective (FGD\_FS\_2).

In Ukraine, **Agglomerated Hromadas (AH)** are local government units formed through the voluntary merging of smaller communities, such as villages and towns. This consolidation is part of a broader decentralization reform aimed at improving local governance and public service delivery. Each AH has its own elected council and mayor, with financial autonomy to manage local projects and services, thereby enhancing community development and self-governance.

The support from local leaders and regular meetings between PI and regional administrations, as well as community engagement activities were significant factors for the project's success. (FGD\_parents\_2, FGD\_FS\_2, FGD\_5, INT\_3). The head of the AH expressed strong support for the project structure, praising its outcomes even after the project's completion. The motivation fostered by the project helped bring the group together, and the relationships within the group remained friendly. The head of Agglomerated Hromada highly valued the project's results, particularly highlighting the effectiveness of the training and discussion groups that included IDPs and alternative care families (FGD\_2, 5). The integration of IDP children into local schools was

another indicator of the project's positive impact on community cohesion as shared by the interviewed children (FGD\_children\_1).

Moreover, the activities of Plan International and its partners, including P4EC, were extensive and well-coordinated. They adopted a localized approach, leveraging the experience of local humanitarian leaders. The project's interventions included cash transfers, multi-purpose cash assistance, and food distribution, focusing particularly on vulnerable groups through case management. The Cash Working Group, co-led by OCHA and involving 63 organizations, played a crucial role in coordinating these efforts. However, the evaluation noted that government regulations at the time only covered individuals physically affected by the war, whereas the humanitarian response aimed to provide broader coverage (INT\_PI\_4).

**In conclusion**, the project effectively aligned with Ukraine's policies and local needs, adapting to the challenges posed by the war. Through active engagement with local administrations and support from AH leaders, the project successfully integrated IDP children into schools and fostered community cohesion. Its comprehensive approach—offering cash assistance, rehabilitation, and social support—demonstrated strong alignment with the overall goal and the attainment of the project's objective.

### **Adaptability – response to change (e.g. Covid-19, crisis / political changes)**

The adaptability of the DEC Ukraine project was demonstrated through its flexible response to evolving community needs and external challenges, such as political changes and the ongoing crisis.

Initially, the community played a key role in identifying the types of specialists required, such as experts for children with special needs and legal advisors. As the project progressed, the community recognized an increasing need for social assistance. In response, the project team adjusted by forming a specialized group of professionals based on these evolving needs (FGD\_FS\_2, FGD\_1, INT\_3). This adaptability led to an enhancement in the quality of social services provided, allowing for the identification and resolution of emerging problems. A range of services, including social prevention, adaptation, support, and representation of interests, to children, adults, IDPs, families of survivors, and families of military casualties were provided. The actual needs within the community were recognised, contrasting them with what the providers had assumed the needs to be. Based on this evidence, they adjusted the team of social services providers to better address the identified needs; for example, they hired psychologists and additional social workers, replacing a legal consultant in some regions. Thus, the quality of social services at the centre improved, with problems identified and resolved, and the project also funded the hiring of a psychologist and a lawyer (FGD\_5).

Following the de-occupation of certain areas, about 15,000 residents returned to the hromada, where the local social services centre had been destroyed. In response, the project added another social worker to the staff, demonstrating its ability to adapt to the increased demand for social services (FGD\_2). The project provided individualized assistance, initially focusing on creating a safe space for children. As the situation changed, the approach shifted to organizing activities for fixed groups, and then reverted to a drop-in format due to the constant mobility of beneficiaries. Additionally, the project expanded to include another location for distributing humanitarian aid (FGD\_FS\_1, 4, FGD\_parents\_2).

The project exhibited significant flexibility, with strong community involvement and an emphasis on socially oriented initiatives for children and youth (INT\_1). However, the adaptability also faced challenges, such as the difficulty of gathering people in one place due to safety concerns specifically in the Kharkivska Oblast, which affected the organization of psychological support groups (FGD\_2).

In one of the interviews with specialized practitioners, it was mentioned that before the project, their work rarely involved IDPs. However, under this project, they had to quickly adjust to the new reality of working with a large number of IDPs, many of whom were facing particularly difficult circumstances. (FGD\_1). Initially, under the project an inclusive playground was established but later redirected its focus to address the broader needs of families, thus enhancing the inclusivity of the project's outcomes (FGD\_2). Further, the interim narrative report for phase highlights, that DePaul adjusted its targeting in Kharkiv from a broad focus to prioritizing IDPs with children, the elderly, or those with disabilities as shelling decreased, reflecting a refined approach to current vulnerabilities.<sup>6</sup>

The project started with DePaul beginning its activities as planned and P4EC starting around March 2023. Despite challenging situations, the project eventually systematized its efforts. This included establishing a methodology and enhancing the flexibility and expertise of the involved specialists. As a result, a more structured and professional response to the needs of children was developed, building on the foundation laid by the initial volunteer efforts. (INT\_1).

**In conclusion**, the project demonstrated notable adaptability by effectively responding to changing community needs and external challenges, including political shifts and the ongoing crisis. Initially focusing on specialist support and social assistance, the project evolved to meet emerging demands by adjusting its services and expanding its staff. It enhanced social services, addressed the needs of IDPs, and adapted its approach to include diverse beneficiary groups. Despite facing challenges like safety concerns and initial delays, the project successfully refined its methodology and response strategies, highlighting its flexibility and responsiveness in a dynamic environment.

### 3.2 Coherence

Under the coherence criterion, the evaluation assessed aspects of internal coherence within Plan International and other DEC initiatives in Ukraine. It also assessed alignment with other donor projects in Ukraine.

#### **Internal coherence – Alignment with other Plan International and DEC projects in Ukraine**

The DEC is a funder of major disasters and coordinates with various members and partners, including Plan International, to implement actions through different clusters. In Ukraine, DEC collaborates with 13 partners, such as Action Against Hunger, Aid International, Red Cross UK (LGBTQI), Christian Aid, Plan International, Save the Children (education), Oxfam, Help Aid international, etc., to ensure inclusiveness, trust-based activities, avoiding dictating activities from HQ level. Cooperation among partners ensures budget efficiency with respect to usage of resources and achievement of objectives and efficient resource use (INT\_2). Donor coordination is managed by the UK office, which provides significant flexibility in its approach. Regular meetings are held with local partners, who are integrated into the cluster system. However, most clusters operate in English, and due to heavy workloads, many partners have struggled to attend these meetings consistently. During one of the interviews with the PI staff, it was mentioned that PI participated in two DEC meetings with all implementing partners but had limited interaction with other DEC members in Ukraine. The focus of other organizations varies, with some concentrating on hygiene and cash assistance, while others focus on child protection, leading to a lack of collaboration across different areas of work (INT\_PI\_3).

Implementing partners coordinated their activities with local authorities and made use of their previously established contacts with various state agencies. Plan International had good

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<sup>6</sup> DEC Ukraine Humanitarian Appeal, Interim Narrative Reporting, Phase 2

coordination with the implementing partners. Meetings were also held by PI in hromadas, including discussions with local leaders (FGD\_FS\_1, FGD\_FS\_4, FGD\_2).

**In conclusion**, the project within DEC cluster projects in Ukraine is largely effective, with strong partner cooperation and resource efficiency. While the UK office manages donor coordination flexibly, language barriers and heavy workloads have hindered consistent partner engagement in cluster meetings. The project has had limited interaction with other DEC members in the cluster but has maintained good coordination with local authorities and partners, ensuring productive collaboration in hromadas.

### **External coherence – Alignment with other donor projects in Ukraine**

The external coherence of the project involves ensuring alignment with other donor initiatives and effectively coordinating with various organizations working in Ukraine. To achieve this, partners systematically identified organizations operating in targeted areas and participated in cluster meetings to delineate their respective work areas. For instance, the World Food Programme (WFP) provided meal boxes with nutritious products to cover basic needs, targeting specific villages, and coordinated with Depaul to fill coverage gaps. They also addressed distribution issues related to non-cooking meals and stove supplies (INT\_FS\_7). Myrna Nebo focused on distributing hot meals in the region (INT\_FS\_7). P4EC supported local authorities in developing local-level initiatives, enhancing their understanding of project life cycles and key outputs. This support included technical assistance from international specialists (INT\_PI\_5). The regional civil-military administration played a crucial role by providing official support letters and logistical aid, which facilitated coordination between Depaul and P4EC with local authorities (INT\_PI\_5).

Additionally, the project engaged with various cluster systems, including UN clusters, protection working groups, MHPSS working groups, and cash working groups, to ensure alignment and coordination (INT\_PI\_5). Media organizations also helped by publishing project-related work through local newspapers and news websites, sometimes coordinated by P4EC with local stakeholders (INT\_PI\_5).

Despite these efforts, challenges persisted, including a lack of local authority support for connecting different organizations (INT\_FS\_7). While field staff from implementing organizations benefited from their prior experience and maintained good coordination with local authorities, PI faced difficulties due to its initial implementation in Ukraine. However, these issues were successfully managed, and PI ultimately maintained positive relationships with local authorities (INT\_PI\_5). It was also shared during one of the interviews that while many international organizations offered help, it often ended with needs assessments rather than immediate assistance and it was only P4EC that delivered on their promises after identifying the beneficiaries' needs (FGD\_FS\_2). Project beneficiaries received additional support from the UN, the Red Cross, SOS Children's Town, UNICEF, and local councils, including monetary aid, clothes, and home electronics (FGD\_parents\_1, 2, 4, 5). However, there was no significant relationship with other NGOs (INT\_PI\_5). The involvement of the national government varied, with occasional invitations to observe practices and attend events, while local authorities were more actively engaged in integrating local specialists (INT\_PI\_5). Communication and coordination related to cash and voucher assistance (CVA) were aligned with the cash working group's recommendations, with no significant issues reported in this area (INT\_PI\_4).

**In conclusion**, the project demonstrated external coherence by effectively aligning with other donor initiatives and coordinating with various organizations in Ukraine. While there were challenges such as limited support from local authorities and variable involvement from the national government, the project successfully integrated efforts with key partners, addressed coverage gaps, and provided comprehensive assistance to beneficiaries.

## **3.3 Effectiveness**

Under the effectiveness criterion, evaluation assessed what contributed to the successful or unsuccessful implementation of program activities, the lessons learned, the major factors influencing the achievement or non-achievement of objectives, and the extent to which the project's objectives were achieved.

### Achievement of objectives

The project aimed to provide comprehensive support to various vulnerable groups through four key outputs. **Output A** focused on delivering psychosocial support, child protection, legal assistance, and basic services to girls, boys, adolescents (0-17 years), young people, and adults in Kharkiv. These services were offered both through a support center and mobile teams, with implementation by DePaul. **Output B** concentrated on ensuring that girls, boys, adolescents (0-17 years), households, and other vulnerable people had access to safe accommodation, also implemented by DePaul. **Output C** targeted the provision of emergency food and hygiene assistance to girls, boys, adolescents (0-17 years), households, and other vulnerable individuals, with DePaul responsible for implementation. Finally, **Output D** supported internally displaced children in alternative care families and children in at-risk families through multi-sectoral support, including shelter, social, and economic assistance. This output was implemented by P4EC. Based on the output trackers for phase A and B provided by the project, the table below show the target value, and the population reached per output indicator.

#### Phase 2A and 2B

Output	Indicator	Target	Reach (Phase 2A)	Reach (Phase 2 B)	Achievement rate
A1.1.1	No. of individuals [adults] receiving legal assistance/advice	240 Individuals	241 Individuals	N/A	Achieved
A1.2.1	No. of individuals [children & adults] accessing mental health or psychosocial support (MHPSS)	120 Individuals	285 Individuals	N/A	Overachieved
A1.3.1	No. of individuals [children & adults] provided with hygiene kits	145 Households	250 Individuals	N/A	Overachieved
A2.4.1	No. of individuals [children & adults] accessing mental health or psychosocial support (MHPSS) through mobile teams	500 Individuals	533 Individuals	N/A	Achieved
A3.5.1	No. of stakeholders [staff & volunteers] trained in child protection and MHPSS	10 Sessions	20 Sessions	N/A	Overachieved
B1.1.1	No. of households provided with accommodation	175 Households	19 Households	N/A	Underachieved
B2.3.1	No. of stakeholders [accommodation staff] trained in safeguarding, child protection, and feedback mechanisms	50 Individuals	6 Individuals	N/A	Underachieved
B2.4.1	No. of accommodations that meet safeguarding standards	-	2 Accommodations	N/A	Achieved
B3.5.1	% of inputs received through community	-	123 Responses	N/A	Achieved



	feedback mechanism and actioned				
<b>C1.1.1</b>	No. of individuals receiving food assistance [via weekly food baskets]	848 Individuals	4,387 Individuals	N/A	Overachieved
<b>C2.2.1</b>	No. of households provided with hygiene kits	2,168 Households	2,503 Households	N/A	Overachieved
<b>C2.1.1</b>	No. of individuals receiving food assistance [via soup kitchens]	300 Individuals	438 Individuals	N/A	Overachieved
<b>C3.1.1</b>	No. of stakeholders [staff & volunteers] trained in safeguarding and feedback mechanisms	75 Individuals	33 Individuals	N/A	Partly achieved
<b>D1.1</b>	Number of households (at-risk families) benefitting from MPC (EUR 250-300)	38 Households	81 Households	104 Households	Overachieved
<b>D1.2</b>	No. of child protection & community social workers at community level	30 Individuals	81 Individuals	21 Individuals	Overachieved
<b>D1.3</b>	No. of households [alternative care] benefitting from cash assistance for shelter repair	20 Households	20 Households	19 Households	Overachieved
<b>D1.3</b>	No. of households [alternative care] benefitting from cash assistance for rent	30 Households	15 Households	7 Households	Partly achieved
<b>D1.4</b>	No. of stakeholders [social & child protection professionals] trained in Child Protection	30 Individuals	86 Individuals	18 Individuals	Overachieved
<b>D1.4</b>	No. of stakeholders [social & child protection professionals] trained in Child Protection	1000 Individuals	111 Individuals	22 Individuals	Underachieved
<b>D1.4</b>	No. of individuals accessing mental health or psychosocial support (MHPSS)	1000 Individuals	1,605 Individuals	1385 Individuals	Overachieved
<b>D1.4</b>	No. of individuals accessing mental health or psychosocial support (MHPSS)	1000 Individuals	2,905 Individuals	1825 Individuals	Overachieved
<b>D1.5</b>	Number of staff trained in Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP)	21 Individuals	N/A	21 Individuals	Achieved
<b>D1.5</b>	Number of staff and family members that participated in wellbeing activity (Family day)	38 Individuals	N/A	38 Individuals	Achieved

During Phase 2a of the project, significant progress was made in providing multi-sectoral support across various areas, including legal assistance, mental health services, hygiene provision, and accommodation for displaced families. In the Protection Sector, the project achieved its target by providing legal assistance to 241 individuals, meeting the goal of 240. Mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) services reached 285 individuals in the Kharkiv center, surpassing the target of 120, while mobile teams provided MHPSS services to 533 individuals, achieving the target of 500. In the WASH Sector, hygiene kits were distributed to 250 individuals, exceeding the focus on the initially targeted 145 households. The Capacity Building Sector saw the completion of 20 training sessions for staff and volunteers, doubling the target of 10 sessions. However, in the Shelter Sector, accommodation support underperformed, with only 19 households receiving assistance compared to the target of 175. Additionally, training in safeguarding, child protection, and feedback mechanisms for accommodation staff fell short, with only 6 individuals trained against a target of 50. Nevertheless, the project met its goal in ensuring that 2 accommodations met safeguarding standards and successfully actioned 123 responses through the community feedback mechanism. In the Food Assistance Sector, the project exceeded expectations by providing weekly food baskets to 4,387 individuals, far surpassing the target of 848, and supporting 438 individuals through soup kitchens, exceeding the target of 300. However, training in safeguarding and feedback mechanisms for staff and volunteers was partly achieved, reaching 33 individuals against a target of 75.

During Phase 2b of the project, the implementation focused on various outputs aimed at supporting at-risk families, particularly IDPs in Ukraine. The interventions covered areas such as Multi-Purpose Cash (MPC), where the project aimed to assist households with cash transfers to meet their protection needs. The target was set for 38 households, and the project exceeded this target, ultimately reaching 104 households in Kharkiv oblast. In Protection and Social Support, the project overachieved by reaching 81 individuals for training in child protection and community social work, exceeding the target of 30. Additionally, while cash assistance for shelter repair met its target of 20 households, the assistance for rent fell short, reaching only 7 out of the targeted 30 households. For training child protection professionals, the project overachieved by training 86 individuals against a target of 30 in one instance, but underachieved in another, training only 22 individuals against a target of 1,000. In the domain of Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS), the project significantly exceeded its target, with 2,905 individuals accessing MHPSS services, far surpassing the goal of 1,000 in one case, and similarly overachieved in another case by reaching 1,825 individuals against a target of 1,000. Finally, the project achieved its targets by training 21 staff members in Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP) and involving 38 individuals in well-being activities, including the Family Day initiative.

Throughout its implementation, the project aimed to provide comprehensive support to vulnerable populations in Ukraine, particularly single mothers and internally displaced persons (IDPs), amidst challenging circumstances and notable successes.

The final narrative report 2A, shows that both partners demonstrated significant achievements with quantifiable impacts on beneficiaries, while also facing challenges that influenced their ability to fully meet objectives. Depaul, aided around 10,000 beneficiaries through food, hygiene products, and cash transfers, successfully transitioned 600 people to more stable living conditions and secured alternative funding in place for critical services for 12 months post-programme. Depaul faced challenges, including the impact of the war, which led to difficulties in maintaining service delivery in highly volatile areas like Kharkiv, particularly in the Dergachiv community, where ongoing shelling impeded the provision of consistent social services. On the other hand, P4EC achieved 75% of planned indicators in 6 months, with new services and community initiatives launched and provided community support, developed plans for new initiatives and expansion to additional regions based on identified needs. However, P4EC also

faced challenges, particularly in the systemic work and provision of social services in high-risk areas like the Kharkiv region.<sup>7</sup>

The interim narrative report for phase 2B highlighted significant progress and impact achieved by Plan International and P4EC in their humanitarian efforts in Ukraine. The inclusion of compelling case studies provided a vivid picture of the programme's effectiveness and underscores the real-world impact of the interventions. Some of the impact stories included providing shelter, food, and hygiene supplies to internally displaced persons (IDPs), which greatly improved their living conditions. The program also created child-friendly spaces and trained social workers, enhancing child protection efforts in the community. Additionally, cash assistance allowed families to address urgent needs like medical expenses, while capacity building for local organizations ensured sustained support beyond the project's timeline. Despite challenges in managing the transition between Phase 2a and Phase 2b, particularly in financial reporting and budget management, the feedback indicated a strong commitment to refining processes and ensuring that the aid remains responsive to evolving needs. The extension of the project by a few months also allowed for continued support to communities, addressing both immediate and longer-term needs.

Partnerships played a crucial role in delivering impactful services. Project partners, Depaul and P4EC were instrumental in providing support tailored to the needs of single mothers, including cash transfers and psychological support, which significantly empowered beneficiaries at the community level (INT\_2). The collaboration extended beyond direct aid, incorporating capacity-building initiatives for social workers, enhancing their ability to address the complex needs of the communities they served (INT\_PI\_3). Local authorities showed remarkable enthusiasm, actively engaging in peer-to-peer learning initiatives that facilitated knowledge exchange across different regions of Ukraine (INT\_2). This collaborative spirit not only strengthened local governance but also fostered a supportive environment crucial for sustaining project outcomes.

However, the project encountered substantial challenges during its course. In Kharkiv, where the conflict had inflicted severe damage on social service centres, operational inefficiencies arose as services had to be relocated across various sites (FGD\_FS\_3). The departure of specialists from affected regions compounded the difficulty of maintaining consistent service delivery, highlighting the ongoing struggle to secure qualified professionals amidst heightened demand.

Resistance from Alternative Care Families posed another hurdle, as some families hesitated to commit to long-term solutions due to uncertainty about their future living arrangements (FGD\_FS\_3). Moreover, logistical barriers such as inadequate registration tools and insufficient shelter options further strained efforts to meet immediate needs effectively.

Despite these challenges, the project's adaptive approach facilitated successful outcomes. Flexibility in fund allocation enabled timely responses to emerging needs, demonstrating effective coordination between stakeholders (INT\_PI\_1). However, although there was overall stability in the key positions needed for the project, some interviews highlighted that initial internal staff turnover within Plan International and communication inefficiencies regarding reporting templates posed operational challenges that affected project efficiency. (INT\_PI\_1).

Furthermore, issues like no-cost extensions and delays, coupled with challenges in managing transfer values and addressing duplicative assistance, underscored the complexities inherent in humanitarian efforts (INT\_PI\_4). While partnerships with Depaul and P4EC proved pivotal in leveraging their expertise in cash distribution and sectoral cash programming, sustaining engagement with these partners and ensuring alignment with broader project goals remained critical for long-term success (INT\_PI\_4).

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<sup>7</sup> DEC Ukraine Humanitarian Appeal, Final Narrative Report, Phase 2A

**In conclusion**, the project successfully delivered vital multi-sectoral support to vulnerable populations in Ukraine, achieving significant impact across key areas despite numerous challenges. Through effective collaboration with partners like Depaul and P4EC, the project exceeded many of its targets, particularly in providing food assistance, cash transfers, and psychosocial support. However, challenges such as operational inefficiencies, resistance from beneficiaries, and logistical barriers highlighted the complex nature of delivering humanitarian aid in conflict-affected regions. The project's adaptive approach, including flexible fund allocation and strong partnerships, proved essential in navigating these challenges and ensuring continued support for those in need.

### Achievement of project's outputs

**Output 1:** Girls and boys and adolescents (0-17 years), young people and adults receive psychosocial support, child protection, legal and basic services through a support centre in Kharkiv and mobile teams.

**Improved psychosocial support & child protection services:** The project provided crucial psychosocial support and child protection services, especially to families in crisis, helping them find psychological and social well-being support. It also addressed educational gaps and needs for children in shelters. A notable achievement was the establishment of an inclusive playground, which not only gained visibility but also provided a safe space for children with disabilities. Capacity building on safeguarding and accountability was a key focus, with Plan International playing a significant role (INT\_PI\_5).

P4EC contributed directly to promoting inclusion and accessibility, establishing an Inclusive Resource Centre for children with disabilities and supporting young women with children by providing legal assistance. The project also set up sensory rooms for communities working with children with disabilities and collaborated with other stakeholders to address additional needs, such as procuring school buses (INT\_PI\_5).

The project's impact on children cannot be overstated. In Kharkiv, where facilities like the metro school were scarce, the adaptation center provided much-needed socio-psychological assistance. This initiative not only offered a place for children and teenagers to socialize and receive support but also showed improvements in the anxiety levels and concentration of the children who participated, along with their parents (FGD\_FS\_4). The project was responsive to the specific needs of children, providing legal and psychological consultations and redirecting those for whom the children's center was not suitable. It was noted that even men and families with small children benefited from the services, highlighting the broad impact of the support provided (FGD\_FS\_1).

Although the age group 25-50 is largely the focus of DePaul rather than PI, some interviewees identified this as a limitation in the project's design in Kharkiv, where DePaul implemented its activities, leaving a gap in service provision for this demographic. (FGD\_FS\_1).

**Improved Legal and Basic Services:** The project also made strides in improving legal and basic services. Social work included redirecting children if the children's center was not suitable and providing legal and psychological consultations. This support was crucial, particularly for men and families with small children or those affected by the conflict (FGD\_FS\_1). The mobile teams

*"I went to a psychologist, we did breathing exercises and art therapy on an individual basis. I liked it very much!! It was very soothing. When I was sad and my hands were shaking, after [the sessions with the psychologist] I she came out feeling like a different person... Children are sad during the war, but after seeing the psychologist they are feeling better". (CHILD\_1, FGD\_children\_1)*

played a vital role in addressing urgent needs on the ground, offering guidance, reassurance, and referrals to psychologists, especially for individuals who were left homeless or jobless due to the war (FGD\_FS\_4).

Beneficiaries, including families in hardship, single parents, IDPs, and families with children with disabilities, received unexpected and comprehensive support. The project not only provided financial assistance but also facilitated access to treatment and rehabilitation services. Various specialists were involved, ensuring that everyone's needs were met, and the support extended beyond one-time aid, lasting for three to six months (FGD\_FS\_2). However, the exclusion of people aged 25-50 from the project's scope remained a notable gap (FGD\_FS\_1).

**In conclusion**, the project effectively delivered psychosocial support, child protection, and legal services, notably improving well-being for children and families in crisis. Key achievements include the creation of an inclusive playground and sensory rooms, along with enhanced legal aid and psychological support. The initiative significantly benefited vulnerable groups in Kharkiv, though it missed addressing the needs of individuals aged 25-50. Overall, the project made a substantial impact, though there is room for broader coverage in future efforts.

**Output 2:** Girls and boys and adolescents (0-17 years), households and other vulnerable people have access to safe accommodation.

**Improved access to safe accommodation:** The project successfully provided access to safe accommodation for girls, boys, adolescents, households, and other vulnerable individuals. Key initiatives included setting up day care centers and hostels, offering essential services and support. A day care center was established in rented premises in the city centre, strategically located in a basement to ensure safety. The center operated on an appointment basis to prevent overcrowding. Unemployed individuals were provided with essential first aid, including food and hygiene products. Additionally, the project supplied winter kits, folding beds, and convectors to equip empty rented apartments, ensuring that the accommodation was both safe and comfortable for the occupants (FGD\_FS\_1).

In Kharkiv, the project also ran a hostel specifically for the IDPs with children. This facility not only provided shelter but also facilitated the placement of children in local schools and children's centres. The hostel offered comprehensive support to parents, including hot lunches, groceries once a month, financial assistance, and essential items such as clothes and blankets. Families could stay at the hostel for up to three months, with the option for shorter stays of 3 to 14 days, effectively serving as a transit center for those in immediate need (FGD\_FS\_4).

Unexpectedly, the project went beyond basic shelter provision by refurbishing the residences, creating a more homely environment for IDPs settling in Western Ukraine. This transformation had a positive impact on the families, encouraging parents to become more active in the community and engage more fully with the support services available (FGD\_FS\_2).

**In conclusion**, the project significantly improved access to safe accommodation for vulnerable groups by establishing day care centers, hostels, and refurbishing residences. These efforts provided essential support, such as food, hygiene products, and winter supplies, and facilitated school placements for children. The initiative ensured safe, comfortable living conditions and positively impacted community engagement.

**Output 3:** Girls and boys and adolescents (0-17 years), households and other vulnerable people receive emergency food and hygiene assistance.

**Improved access to emergency food:** The project significantly enhanced access to emergency food for vulnerable groups, including children, families, and disabled individuals, particularly in Northern Saltivka (area of Kharkiv) and recently de-occupied territories. The need was urgent, as many people were facing severe food shortages. The intervention prioritized families with children and the disabled, delivering critical food supplies. Due to the high demand, a second location was established in Saltivka to serve the elderly population who remained in the area. While renovations were ongoing at the dining room, hot lunches were purchased and distributed to ensure continuous support (FGD\_FS\_1, 4). Additionally, hot food and hygiene products were delivered directly to de-occupied territories, addressing the immediate needs of the most affected populations in Kharkiv (FGD\_FS\_1).

**Improved Access to Hygiene:** The project's hygiene assistance was equally crucial, providing high-quality hygiene products to areas in Kharkiv that were otherwise neglected by other aid organizations. The beneficiaries expressed high regard for the hygiene packages, noting that they were uniquely comprehensive. This support was vital in meeting the needs of homeless people and those in the de-occupied regions. At the Humanitarian Day Center, the project ensured that people received necessary groceries, hygiene products, and winter kits, offering a comprehensive care package that addressed both food and hygiene needs (FGD\_FS\_1).

**In conclusion**, the project effectively improved access to emergency food and hygiene assistance for vulnerable populations in Kharkiv and recently de-occupied areas. It provided critical food supplies and hygiene products, including setting up additional distribution points to meet high demand. This support was crucial for addressing severe shortages and was highly valued by beneficiaries.

**Output 4:** Internally displaced children in alternative care families and children in at-risk families are supported through multi-sectoral (shelter, social and economic) support.

**Contribution to IDPs with regards to multi-sectoral (shelter, social and economic) support:** The project provided comprehensive multi-sectoral support to internally displaced children in alternative care families and children in at-risk families. This support included shelter, social, and economic assistance, aimed at facilitating the reintegration process for IDP families. For instance, the project supported local authorities financially to conduct integration trainings for orphans and other vulnerable groups. Additionally, alternative care homes of family type displaced from eastern Ukraine received furniture, housing, rent assistance, and continuous social support, making it the sole provider offering such extensive aid (FGD\_parents\_1, 5, FGD\_FS\_2).

The intervention also addressed and mitigated negative stereotypes associated with displaced families, fostering a more inclusive community environment (FGD\_5). A notable success story involved a foster family in Ivano-Frankivsk, where the project's support helped children with traumatic histories cope and start anew. This included the development of new home care services for children with disabilities, where caregivers now visit homes, providing much-needed support. Additionally, a short-term program was established in some communities and continues in collaboration with UNICEF (FGD\_FS\_3).

**Economic Support:** The project offered multi-purpose cash assistance (MPCA) and cash for rent, significantly aiding the economic stability of the families involved. This financial support helped alleviate the immediate needs and provided a safety net for these vulnerable groups (FGD\_FS\_3).

**Feedback System and Safeguarding Issues:** The project attempted to establish a feedback system using QR codes and other methods. The partners also received capacity building on this topic. It was shared by Plan interview partners that while P4EC was effective in managing complaints, Depaul was less clear in their feedback processes. It was further shared that the safeguarding hotlines were found to be ineffective, and a safeguarding issue arose involving a

minor. This issue was complicated by a conflict between national and international law. Throughout the case, state services were consistently involved to support the family and prioritize the best interests of the minor. (INT\_PI\_1, 3).

**In conclusion**, the project provided crucial multi-sectoral support to internally displaced children in alternative care families and at-risk children, covering shelter, social, and economic needs. Key achievements included financial support for integration trainings, provision of furniture and rent assistance for care homes, and development of new home care services for children with disabilities. Economic support through cash assistance improved financial stability for families. However, challenges with feedback systems and safeguarding issues, underscored the need for enhanced monitoring and adherence to child protection policies.

### Quality of implementation

**Strategy and cooperation with partners (DePaul and P4EC):** The project is part of regional strategy of Plan which includes Ukraine, Poland, Moldova and Romania. It utilized a response hub based in Poland and the UK to coordinate efforts across Ukraine, Poland, Romania and Moldova. Plan International Ukraine employed a community-based and partnership-led response, fostering open and friendly relationships with local communities. Communication was facilitated through programme focal points who were proactive in participation and maintained high levels of ownership in meetings (INT\_2). Depaul received capacity-building support from other donor organizations, particularly in areas like safeguarding and feedback mechanisms (INT\_FS\_7).

To ensure active participation from affected communities, the team engaged directly with beneficiaries, conducted needs assessments, and established hotlines for feedback and requests. Information was disseminated through Facebook, and Depaul systematically compiled feedback for donors in reports (INT\_FS\_7). Despite these efforts, challenges persisted in disseminating information from the DEC level, not only specific to PI but also across different cluster members (INT\_2). Communication with Plan International, particularly regarding financial audits and MEAL management, was sometimes inefficient and lacked clarity. In absence of clear directives, the partners continued their work as usual, such as the DePaul project, which has been addressing homelessness in Kharkiv for 8 years. They adapted their efforts to include new vulnerable groups, such as those newly displaced by the war, and adjusted to the wartime context. Implementers relied on their personal knowledge and connections with local, state, and NGO services, as well as volunteers they knew personally, to meet the beneficiaries' needs as effectively as possible. (INT\_FS\_7).

Coordination was also challenging due to partners juggling different projects with various donors, which limited their availability (INT\_PI\_5). Additionally, Depaul's lack of experience in Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) created technical coherence issues in certain meetings (INT\_PI\_5).

The project faced bureaucratic challenges, especially with the DEC's reporting templates and risk assessments, which were perceived as tedious. Discrepancies in budget reporting, with allocations received in pounds but reported back in euros, further complicated the process (INT\_PI\_5). Issues of common understanding also arose, as local partners struggled with formal communication and technical terms such as integration and social cohesion (INT\_PI\_5). Nevertheless, project implementers practiced an "unofficial approach," proactively contacting various social services to provide coverage beyond what the project officially offered. This network, established before the war, included connections with the State Migration Service and other organizations, ensuring comprehensive support for beneficiaries (FGD\_FS\_1, 4, FGD\_3).

**Processes and Monitoring:** The project's monitoring and evaluation (M&E) mechanisms were in place, with reporting mechanisms every six months and detailed monthly data reports from partners. P4EC and Depaul both had their own monitoring systems, sharing information from communities and collecting data through regional coordinators. Data was compiled and reported

to Plan International Ukraine, with all information uploaded to a central monitoring system. The monitoring included both contractual and non-contractual indicators, with disaggregated data detailing the financial contributions and services provided to over 11,000 beneficiaries. Specialized support tools, such as Telegram groups, were developed for specialists needing additional support (INT\_2, INT\_FS\_7, FGD\_FS\_3).

However, the narrative reports often lacked depth, and while disaggregated data was collected, it wasn't always utilized meaningfully (INT\_2). The project demonstrated flexibility in its management of activities, adapting to fluctuating needs and individual cases.

**Internal Collaboration:** Internal collaboration was generally strong, with inclusive coordination and ongoing training for specialists. Feedback from the first phase led to adjustments in the second phase, such as hiring a qualified psychologist based on community feedback (FGD\_FS\_4, FGD\_1). However, there were issues with managing expectations, particularly regarding the duration of stay for families in shelters, which had to be clarified to avoid misunderstandings (FGD\_FS\_4). Communication between field staff and Plan International was indirect, with instructions passed down through leadership (FGD\_FS\_1). Staff went beyond their official duties to find solutions for specific needs, such as securing medical equipment for individuals in hostels (FGD\_FS\_4).

**Learning and Innovation:** The project scaled up using a global framework adapted to the Ukrainian context (INT\_2). Although the interviews with the Plan staff indicated ineffective use of the hotlines, the interviews with field staff revealed a contrary picture. The interviewees shared that the innovations included feedback mechanisms such as a hotline and a suggestion box where a comment could be left anonymously. Additionally, the book of suggestions and hotline was actively used by beneficiaries (FGD\_FS\_1, 4). The project had a significant positive impact, particularly on children, who benefitted from psychological first aid and other supportive activities. However, challenges remained in assessing the degree of need and motivating individuals once basic needs were met (FGD\_FS\_4). The project's success was attributed to the mutual assistance, strong relationships, genuine interest, and the effort put into solving problems. There is a focus on self-realization and learning, with participants gaining valuable insights into effective child support strategies. This includes understanding different family dynamics, such as those involving foster families, and acquiring new skills and knowledge to better support children's needs. Additionally, there is an emphasis on continuous learning and applying these lessons to enhance the support provided to children. (FGD\_5).

**In conclusion,** the project demonstrated strong implementation quality through effective strategies and partnerships, utilizing a regional response framework and fostering community-based, partnership-led efforts. Depaul and P4EC actively engaged with beneficiaries and maintained feedback mechanisms, though challenges persisted with communication, bureaucratic processes, and technical coherence. Monitoring and evaluation systems were robust but occasionally lacked depth in narrative reports. Internal collaboration was generally effective, with adaptive management practices and innovative solutions tailored to beneficiaries' needs. Despite some communication and coordination hurdles, the project's strong relationships and focus on learning and innovation contributed to its overall success and positive impact.

## Unintended results

**Positive Unintended Results:** The project yielded several positive unintended outcomes. One notable impact was the unexpected necessity for specialists to provide feedback forms and inform beneficiaries about the available services and safeguarding measures. This addition proved essential and significantly beneficial, even though it was not initially planned (FGD\_FS\_3). The beneficiaries' gratitude for the quality of services provided was particularly touching, with many expressing heartfelt thanks (FGD\_FS\_1), (FGD\_parents\_4). Contrary to initial expectations, there was a high and consistent level of interest and participation among the target groups, indicating that the project reached a much broader audience than originally anticipated (FGD\_1,



2, 5). Additionally, P4EC implemented a unique approach by providing top-up cash assistance to families who were inadvertently receiving duplicate aid, a strategy not commonly employed by other organizations (INT\_PI\_4).

**Negative Unintended Results:** Despite the positive outcomes, the project also faced some negative unintended consequences. Some families exhibited a lack of personal responsibility, blaming others for their circumstances despite receiving significant support, including job search assistance and consultations. This led to a consumerist mindset where beneficiaries began to view the aid as an entitlement rather than a temporary support, believing that project staff had jobs solely because of their existence (FGD\_FS\_4). Although, the project implemented initiatives to ensure the wellbeing of the staff such as the Family Day but discussions with the interviewees revealed, adverse effects on the mental health of staff and implementers, as they found it challenging to internalize the often-distressing stories of the people they were helping (FGD\_FS\_1). Moreover, the temporary shelters for internally displaced persons (IDPs) were not fully equipped to accommodate people with disabilities (PwD) or pets, highlighting a need for more comprehensive training in these areas (FGD\_FS\_4).

### Counterfactual: What Would Have Happened Without the Project?

According to statements from different stakeholders, the absence of the project would have negatively impacted the lives of many beneficiaries, particularly children with special needs. Without the project's support, these children would have been confined to their homes, missing out on social interactions and essential resources like gifts and stationery sets. The project provided a safe space for children to spend their days, especially when school was not in session, thereby enhancing their social adaptation (FGD\_parents\_2). Families also faced severe financial constraints, making it difficult to afford necessary medications and tests. The project alleviated some of these pressures, improving the emotional and psychological well-being of both children and their parents. For example, families no longer had to travel to the city for psychological services, as these were now available within their communities. This not only reduced stress but also gave parents more time, as their children received the care they needed closer to home (FGD\_parents\_1, 3, 4, 5).

**In conclusion**, the project yielded both positive and negative unintended results. On the positive side, it unexpectedly enhanced service delivery through feedback forms and safeguarding information, deepened beneficiary engagement. However, challenges included fostering a consumerist mindset among some beneficiaries, increased mental health strain on staff, and insufficient accommodation for people with disabilities. Without the project, many vulnerable individuals, especially children with special needs, would have faced greater isolation and financial strain, missing out on crucial support and resources. The project significantly improved access to essential services, underscoring its critical role in enhancing beneficiaries' well-being and social adaptation.

### Child rights, gender and inclusion

The project made significant strides in engaging girls, young women, children with disabilities, and minority groups. Inclusive resource centers, which play a crucial role in the Ukrainian education system, collaborated closely with the project to enhance these efforts. One of the standout achievements was the creation of an inclusive playground in the Ivano-Frankivsk oblast, designed to meet the specific needs of the community. Specialists who worked with these groups of children were consistently available. The inclusivity centers welcomed both the children and their families. Additionally, all project staff and specialists received training in safeguarding policies and Core Humanitarian Standards, ensuring safe and effective engagement with the communities they served. However, despite the specialists' dedication to creating barrier-free spaces and accessible infrastructure, budget limitations prevented these goals from being fully realized (FGD\_FS\_3).

In terms of gender sensitivity, the project's approach was rated as average or neutral. While gender was not systematically mainstreamed across all four projects part of the regional strategy, there was an effort to at least maintain gender sensitivity. The presence of a Gender Advisor at Plan UK underscores the organization's commitment to these issues, although the rush to implement interventions in an emergency context made it challenging to integrate comprehensive gender-transformative approaches. It was shared that the project in Romania adopted a more tailored approach as compared to the Ukraine project. The activities implemented during Phase 2a in Ukraine, included distribution of specific hygiene kits to girls. Phase 2b, however, focused mainly on providing financial support. The training provided during Phase 2a included a range of specialists, covering social and financial aspects, among others, indicating a broader scope of activities during this phase (INT\_PI\_1).

**In conclusion**, the project made notable progress in promoting child rights, gender inclusion, and accessibility. Significant achievements included the establishment of an inclusive playground and the integration of gender-sensitive practices across 80% of the communities involved. Specialists received comprehensive training in safeguarding and humanitarian standards, enhancing the quality of engagement with vulnerable groups. However, budget constraints limited the full realization of barrier-free spaces. Gender sensitivity efforts were present but varied in effectiveness, with some phases focusing more on financial support rather than comprehensive gender-transformative strategies. Overall, while the project made strides in inclusivity and rights protection, further refinement in gender integration and accessibility remains necessary.

### 3.4 Impact

Under the impact criterion, the evaluation assessed the real difference or changes the activities made to the target group, including how adolescents, caregivers, and other beneficiaries perceive and describe these changes. It also explored potential positive or negative unintended consequences the program might be generating.

#### Higher-level (intended) development changes

##### Contribution to improving livelihoods of children/adolescents/adults:

The project significantly contributed to improving the livelihoods of children, adolescents, and adults. A notable aspect was the inclusion of gender-sensitive approaches, going beyond mere tokenism by specifically targeting cash assistance to families, particularly those comprising women and children who had to relocate due to the conflict (INT\_PI\_3). The project's focus on social cohesion and community mobilization was evident through its tailored approach to identifying and addressing community needs. This included creating accessible playgrounds for children with disabilities and working closely with government authorities to formulate policies promoting political cohesion (INT\_PI\_5).

“[The project mostly affected] young families with children, [it helped them] to find work, to adapt. We supported the children, and this way the parents got some time for themselves”.

Young families, especially those with children, greatly benefited from the project. They received support in finding employment and adapting to new

environments, which provided parents with time for personal activities. The project also addressed the social needs of children, helping them to socialize and integrate better into their communities. Parents, particularly mothers, found solace in support groups, while teenagers formed new friendships, significantly impacting their social development (FGD\_FS\_4). The project facilitated the transition of families from temporary accommodations to more stable living conditions and provided critical support to the elderly through medication and rent assistance

(FGD\_FS\_4). Many beneficiaries, after receiving initial support, were directed to other services, preventing them from returning to precarious situations (FGD\_FS\_4).

The project's success extended to creating inclusive resource centers, which were initially met with scepticism by the community. These centers highlighted the needs of children with special needs, fostering a more inclusive approach in social service provision. Significant resources were allocated to children and adults with disabilities, supporting both the children and their mothers who often stayed home due to limited support options (FGD\_2). The psychological support offered to children who had lost parents or loved ones was another critical aspect, enabling these children to return to school full-time and participate in camps that facilitated social integration (FGD\_FS\_2). In the Kharkiv oblast, families with children with special needs, including those in foster care, received essential financial support for medical checkups, educational materials, and specialized services such as speech therapy (FGD\_parents\_4). The project also funded social workers to provide "help at home" services, significantly improving the quality of life for these families (FGD\_parents\_4).

*Day center for children: "It helped a lot! We were confused when we first came to [to the western Ukraine] from Donetsk region. Thanks to the specialists, my son, a child with special needs, opened up, began to communicate with other children... [Without this project] the child would have been stuck in his room, without live communication... My son spends 6 hours a day in the center when school is out. This way I can make time for myself!" IDP mother of a child with special needs. (FGD\_Parents\_2)*

*"It certainly meets the needs! I have a hyperactive autistic child... The child has become more open, he is not afraid of the crowd on the street! He is more confident! I am delighted that my child likes it, and there is also work with the parents taking place at the center, the psychologist spoke with the parents, asked us for our opinion..." Local mother of a child with special needs. (FGD\_Parents\_2)*

However, a notable gap in the project's implementation was the lack of monitoring visits from Plan's side to assess the overall impact on children's well-being and mental health, highlighting an area for improvement (INT\_PI\_3).

*"[The project mostly affected] children, 5-6 years olds, who already faced [education] shortages during COVID so as not to miss the time to go to kindergarten. [The project affected] 7-8 years olds who were experiencing lack of socialization, [during the time] when girls and boys are becoming differentiated. [The project provided] support for parents regarding the changes taken place in children. Mothers of 3-4-year-old children were soothed at support groups. Teenagers - and there were no permanent groups - they formed new ones [during the project implementation]."*

**Contribution to Improving Psychosocial Needs of Children:** The project made substantial contributions to addressing the psychosocial needs of children. A psychologist at a music school provided individual and group sessions, which were highly appreciated by the children. These sessions included activities like breathing exercises and art therapy, which had a calming and positive impact on the children's mood and self-belief. The psychologist's

support extended beyond therapy, offering reassurance even before performances, which helped the children deal with sadness and fear (FGD\_Children\_1, INT\_3). The project also facilitated group work and creative events that encouraged children, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, to open up and form new friendships. This was particularly important for children who had experienced loss, as these activities helped them process their emotions and improve their mental well-being (FGD\_5, FGD\_parents\_2).

The project's impact was evident in the noticeable improvements in the children's mental state, as they exhibited lower anxiety levels and better concentration. The ongoing support from specialists who stayed on after the project's official end demonstrated a sustained commitment to these children's needs (FGD\_FS\_4). The project also played a crucial role in integrating IDP children into their new communities, providing them with necessary psychosocial support and addressing issues not previously recognized by their parents (FGD\_FS\_2, FGD\_5, FGD\_parents\_2).

**Contribution to Inclusive Approaches:** The project emphasized inclusive approaches, particularly in terms of gender and support for IDPs and people with disabilities. Boys and girls were given the freedom to participate in activities together or separately, based on their preferences, fostering an inclusive environment. Families with children with special needs received individualized attention and support, ensuring fair treatment and catering to their specific requirements (FGD\_parents\_2, 3, 4).

The project acknowledged the different needs and responses of boys and girls, tailoring the support accordingly. For example, it was noted that the girls were more open, interactive, and boys more reserved, and required careful handling. This difference was subsequently taken into account. A psychologist conducted separate sessions for boys and girls, addressing specific gender-related issues (INT\_3, FGD\_parents\_3). Efforts were made to create a comfortable and respectful environment, such as establishing separate queues for men and women at assistance points and providing hygiene kits tailored to the needs of homeless women (FGD\_FS\_4). The project also catered to the needs of people with disabilities, offering assistance with mobility aids and ensuring accessible facilities like ramps and showers (FGD\_FS\_1, 4, FGD\_1).

Although the project defined minorities primarily as IDPs, interviewees noted that some minority groups, such as the Roma community, were not represented in the project's activities (FGD\_parents\_2). To address this gap, it is essential for future projects to design comprehensive inclusion strategies that ensure all minority groups are effectively integrated and represented, beyond just focusing on IDPs. Despite these gaps, the project made significant strides in fostering an inclusive environment, bringing together healthy individuals and those with special needs to promote mutual understanding and support (FGD\_5).

### **Challenging Factor – Measuring Impact in War Contexts**

One of the major challenges highlighted by stakeholders was the difficulty in measuring the project's impact due to the ongoing war context. This complex environment made it challenging to quantify the improvements in children's well-being and overall project outcomes.

**In conclusion**, the project significantly improved livelihoods for children, adolescents, and adults by integrating gender-sensitive and inclusive approaches. It enhanced social cohesion, provided vital support to young families, and offered psychological and social assistance to children, especially those with disabilities. Inclusive resource centers and targeted support positively impacted beneficiaries, though the lack of monitoring limited overall assessment of children's well-being. While the project effectively addressed psychosocial needs and fostered inclusivity, some minority groups were underrepresented, indicating areas for future improvement.

### 3.5 Efficiency

Under the efficiency criterion, the criterion efficiency looks at how well resources were being used. This criterion describes the extent to which the intervention delivers results in an economic and timely way (relationship between input and output, outcome and impact level). The evaluation dimension “production efficiency” refers to the appropriateness of the relationship between inputs and outputs, whereas “allocation efficiency” refers to the appropriateness of the relationship between the inputs and the results achieved (project/development objective; outcome/impact level) by the intervention.

#### Production efficiency – relationship between inputs and outputs

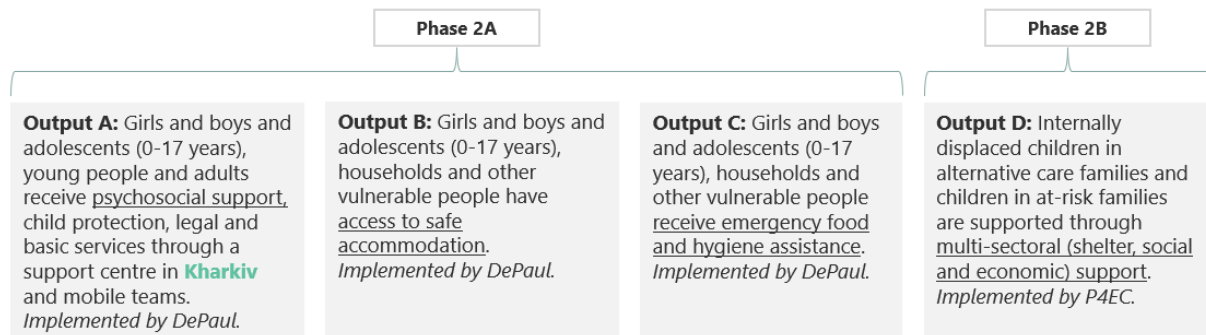
The evaluation dimension production efficiency assessed to the appropriateness of the relationship between inputs and outputs. Based on the project offer and current financial monitoring sheets, the total project budget was 2,540,278 GBP (2,942,879 EUR), fully funded by DEC Ukraine. With regards to expenditure distribution among partners, DePaul utilized 1,476,677 GBP (58%) of the total costs, P4EC 471,565 GBP (19%) and Plan Ukraine 592,036 GBP (23%).

The following tables show in more details the current budget expenditure with respect to different budget lines (Table 1):

Table 1. Budget lines expenditure

	Current project contribution	Budget utilization (%)
<b>Project activity (direct) costs</b>	1,727,844 GBP	69%
<b>Personnel costs</b> - <i>International staff</i> - <i>National staff</i> - <i>Development workers / other staff</i>	406,334 GBP	16%
<b>Travel costs</b> (national staff)	107,660 GBP	4%
<b>Procurement costs</b>	100,505 GBP	4%
<b>Other costs</b>	164,082 GBP	7%

Based on financial monitoring data, most project expenses were allocated to the execution of Output A, which concerns the overall provision of psychosocial, child protection, legal and basic services support. Output C comprises the second largest output-related budget expenditure pot, followed by Output B and D. Based on the results provided in Table 1, the evaluation team considers the project efficient in terms of transforming outputs, as most of the expenditure was directly related to project outputs, i.e. activity costs.



Based on the interviews, the activities were delivered in a cost-effective manner, as the same budget could be adapted to reach additional communities beyond the target areas. Funds were diverted as needed, and activities from phases 2a and 2b were moved accordingly, in part thanks to donor flexibility.

### **Allocation Efficiency – relationship between the inputs and the results achieved (project/development objective; outcome/impact level)**

The evaluation dimension allocation efficiency refers to the appropriateness of the relationship between the inputs and the results achieved (outcome/impact level) by the project. The assessment of allocative efficiency is very much influenced by the contribution to the achievement of outcome and impact goals described above. Nevertheless, further criteria were identified that had a positive or negative influence on the preconditions for efficiency.

**Project implementation:** Positive aspects of the project implementation included effective coordination at national, regional, and international levels among different organizations, despite the inherent difficulties. Coordination was actively encouraged and facilitated. Local partners valued in-person meetings with open agendas alongside cluster members, focusing on key areas such as coordination, collaboration, and networking. The technical expertise of the partners, their brand recognition, positive government relations, and key contributions like hygiene and food packets were significant. Flexibility from the donor was commendable, especially given that the proposal was written before the situation was fully known. The donor provided large sums of money and demonstrated 100% flexibility. P4EC's sub-granting to local authorities ensured accountability, and the areas of implementation were highly relevant to internally displaced persons (IDPs), utilizing a targeted approach. The split of implementation areas between the two partners ensured comprehensive coverage (INT\_PI\_3).

However, implementation faced constraints such as geographical challenges, making it difficult to coordinate the needs and actions of IGOs working in different areas, leading to operational silos (INT\_2). Communication issues with partners were also identified. In early 2023, P4EC experienced communication problems and organizational challenges. Once the partnership agreement was signed, meetings were organized to improve coordination, and organizational and capacity challenges were addressed. PI facilitated communication with Plan UK and other donors. DePaul faced capacity needs, such as for mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS), prompting PI to establish weekly meetings to support these needs. Despite short deadlines for narrative reports, the overall communication and collaboration with Plan UK were strong (INT\_PI\_5). For partnerships, opportunities with international development actors like UNICEF were pursued, and proposals were submitted to different donors (INT\_PI\_1).

According to interviewee statements, considering the rapidly evolving context in Ukraine, Plan International could have used funds more strategically and economically. No one currently involved in the project was present during its design phase, leading to a lack of institutional knowledge regarding the selection process. Additionally, there was a lack of financial guidance,

as partners did not receive any induction and there was no financial manager, resulting in insufficient initial guidance for partners.

The collaboration with PI, Ukraine, the head office in the UK, and Depaul had several positive aspects. PI made efforts to support specialists by providing training and responding to their consultation needs. The program manager served as the central point of contact for the project, ensuring smooth operationalization. P4EC was also invited to participate in activities and initiatives of other projects, indicating an open and cooperative environment. Overall, the project was well-received by the targeted communities as it effectively responded to their needs and demonstrated flexibility, not being strictly bound to fixed targets. However, there were challenges in the collaboration. Frequent changes in international and local specialists, with international staff only allowed to stay in the country for three months, led to efficiency losses. The constant turnover of internal Plan International staff hindered the project's stability and effectiveness (FGD\_FS\_3). Communication issues led to problems in the last reporting, and internal documents complicated the process.

**Financial management and monitoring:** Perspectives shared during the evaluation interviews pointed out that the financial report template was not well-received due to inadequate guidance on budget line expenditures, which generally does not apply to Plan International. A major reported challenge is the use of separate report templates per output, leading to misaligned information. Additionally, insufficient guidance was highlighted with regards to categorizing expenses under cash versus protection sectors, with DEC providing minimal direction. The reports focused on value for money but often lack detailed information and receipts, relying heavily on trust. There is a clear need for mechanisms to enhance accountability (INT\_2).

Overall, financial monitoring was effective, with financial expenditure tracked through the SAP system. In Ukraine, issues were reported with regards to double reporting of targets 2A and 2B, requiring corrections and causing delays (INT\_PI\_1).

**Usage of results-based monitoring for steering:** The project's monitoring involved both P4EC and Depaul using their own systems to share community information and collect data, which was then compiled and reported to Plan International Ukraine. The monitoring covered both contractual and non-contractual indicators for over 11,000 beneficiaries, with specialized support tools like Telegram groups created for specialists. The evaluators observed that while activities and outputs were monitored throughout the project, the lack of achievement rates was a significant drawback, as there were no clear actual values to compare with targets or the baseline. Incomplete results monitoring significantly hampers project steering by limiting the ability to accurately assess progress, make informed decisions, and adjust strategies as needed. This lack of data-driven insight can lead to inefficiencies, missed opportunities, and ultimately, the project's objectives being compromised.

In addition, statements revealed that narrative reports often lacked depth, and the collected disaggregated data wasn't always effectively used. Yet, the project showed flexibility in managing activities, adapting to changing needs (INT\_2, INT\_FS\_7, FGD\_FS\_3).

**Human resources and responsibilities:** Delayed recruitment of staff (e.g. P4EC) impacted the overall effectiveness and timeliness of the project's implementation. With better management, they could have completed phase 2b much sooner and utilized funds more efficiently (INT\_PI\_1). For instance, Depaul's food distribution could have been more cost-effective if food had been purchased locally, avoiding high import taxes from other countries. Additionally, budget allocations could have been optimized to improve outcomes. Investments into office setups were considered strategic, benefiting not only Ukraine but all ongoing assignments (INT\_PI\_3).

Project managers played a crucial role in selecting focal points for the project, ensuring adherence to various standards such as Safeguarding and Child Protection. They managed the entire project cycle, including documentation and implementation of activities, to achieve the

desired outcomes. Furthermore, they ensured that partners' operations were compliant with donor requirements (INT\_PI\_5). P4EC also ensured that salaries for local specialists were paid directly to them, and in some instances, families received money directly from P4EC, with no funds being diverted to local authorities (INT\_PI\_5).

**In conclusion,** the project implementation had several positive aspects, including effective coordination at various levels, valued in-person meetings with open agendas, and significant contributions from partners like hygiene and food packets. The donor's flexibility was commendable, and P4EC's sub-granting to local authorities ensured accountability. However, geographical challenges and communication issues with partners, particularly in early 2023, created operational silos and delays. Efforts to improve coordination, such as establishing weekly meetings, were made. Delayed staff recruitment and inefficient budget allocations also impacted project effectiveness. Project managers played a crucial role in compliance and successful implementation, ensuring adherence to standards and direct salary payments to local specialists.

### 3.6 Sustainability

Under the sustainability criterion, whether prerequisites for sustainability are in place that corroborate results and results pathways outlined in the effectiveness and impact chapters, and the extent to which achieved results are expected to be durable over time was assessed.

#### Contribution to supporting sustainable capacities

**Project continuation:** The sustainability of the DEC Ukraine project, particularly in supporting sustainable capacities, is evident in several areas. While the conflict continues, Plan International's office plans to remain operational in the region, ensuring some level of continuity beyond the project's formal end (INT\_2). This continued presence is expected to multiply the effects of local partners by working closely with Plan International, thereby enhancing the sustainability of efforts made during the project.

Capacity building within social services has proven sustainable, particularly through initiatives like the inclusive playground and sensory room, which continue to provide support and resources for children with disabilities. Even though the partner organization is now operating with funds from another international non-governmental organization (INGO), albeit smaller, these capacities remain in place (INT\_PI\_3).

The communities involved with P4EC are expected to maintain their contact and collaboration beyond the project's conclusion. P4EC aims to involve these communities in future projects, fostering a close and continuous cooperation (FGD\_FS\_3). The project has also aimed to create synergies with other initiatives, suggesting a potential continuation of some activities through these interconnected efforts (FGD\_FS\_3). DEC interventions were strategically aligned with other projects, sharing specialists and benchmarks, which helps in preventing an abrupt cessation of activities and indicates a likely continuation of some project elements (FGD\_FS\_3).

There is a recognized value and understanding in the hromadas of the importance of professional social workers, including psychologists and social workers. The project did not introduce new models but rather addressed existing needs where state mechanisms fell short, particularly in the early war period when there were no budgetary funds or frameworks for project activities. The presence and ongoing demand for psychologists and social workers, even after the project's conclusion, highlight the project's sustainable impact (INT\_1, 3, FGD\_5).

The project's outcomes are already making a lasting impact. When hromadas organize events, they continue to consider the needs of various beneficiary categories, including IDP families and people with disabilities. The "Believe in Yourself" event exemplifies this ongoing engagement. The level of expertise among specialists has improved, and there is a growing openness among the community to seek psychological help. The specialists remain proactive, providing needs



assessments and addressing identified needs, maintaining the high standards set during the project (FGD\_2, 5). The project successfully established relationships with a broad range of beneficiaries, including IDPs, families with children, and military personnel's families, relationships that continue despite the project's formal end in February 2024 (FGD\_1).

However, the sustainability of these efforts faces challenges. DEC funding for Plan International Ukraine phased out in June 2024, which means that future activities will depend on support from other humanitarian organizations that may not be as well-funded. This presents a significant protection risk, particularly in the context of ongoing war events (INT\_2). While other projects funded by DEC, via organizations like Oxfam, are ongoing, there are no new plans for projects under Plan Ukraine (INT\_PI\_5). Additionally, Multi-Purpose Cash Assistance (MPCA) activities are unlikely to continue, and there is a noted absence of an exit strategy for this project phase, despite the project having been extended once (FGD\_FS\_3).

Moreover, following the project's finalization, there has been a noticeable shortage of psychologists and social workers, across the country, which is concerning given the rapid increase in domestic violence incidents (FGD\_1, 5).

**Innovative approaches or practices introduced which contributed to improved sustainability:** The project implemented several innovative approaches that significantly contributed to its sustainability. A key aspect was the incorporation of core humanitarian standards and commitments, which guided the project's execution and ensured high-quality, ethical practices (FGD\_FS\_3). It was also shared during one of the interviews that, future initiatives can build on the experience from other previous DEC projects, elements such as awareness-raising, media campaigns, social cohesion initiatives, and child-friendly feedback mechanisms can be integrated. These practices can help to create a more inclusive and responsive project framework, applicable in future initiatives (INT\_PI\_5).

A standout innovation was the project's focus on individualized needs, such as providing specific items like microwaves or heating systems. This approach created a personalized system that encouraged participant ownership, as individuals felt directly involved in addressing their own needs (FGD\_FS\_3). The introduction of the safeguarding specialist position before the conflict also underscored a proactive stance on protection and welfare (FGD\_FS\_1).

The project's emphasis on individualized social services was particularly notable. Many communities, or hromadas, had not previously understood the value of social services. The project sponsored social workers and specialists, which led to the creation of social services centers and the hiring of experts, even at the communities' own expense. This initiative not only filled immediate gaps but also instilled a lasting recognition of the need for such services (FGD\_FS\_2, FGD\_1, INT\_1). Inclusive access was another innovation, with children's spaces being created that catered to families and specialists alike. These spaces provided continuous services and were staffed by professionals, distinguishing them from other organizations like UNICEF, where such facilities were not always available or consistently staffed (FGD\_FS\_2).

The project also built capacity within the hromadas, teaching them how to manage, finance, and report on projects. This knowledge has empowered communities to implement projects independently, sustaining the benefits of the project's capacity-building efforts (FGD\_FS\_2, FGD\_2). Additionally, the exchange of experience through visits to other regions and communities was a key aspect of the project. Local coordinators from P4EC noted that they visited regions such as Ivano-Frankivska, Khmelnytska, and Kharkivska oblasts to learn from each other and share local practices. These visits facilitated the introduction of new practices across communities, reflecting the project's adaptation to varying needs and leading to diverse implementations in different hromadas (FGD\_FS\_2).

Extensive training provided to involved specialists further enhanced sustainability. The training sessions were interactive and tailored to meet the needs of participants, promoting a culture of mutual support and continuous professional development (FGD\_5, INT\_1).

Moreover, the project established feedback mechanisms e.g Google forms, “black boxes” for anonymous comments, stickers with comments, etc. ensuring that participants could voice their concerns and experiences, thereby improving the responsiveness and quality of services (FGD\_2, 5, INT\_3). However, there were challenges such as issues with confidentiality breaches and triggering discussion topics among participants, indicating areas for improvement in future initiatives (FGD\_5).

**Sustainability risks:** The sustainability of the project faces several risks that could impact its long-term success and continuity. One significant challenge is the lack of flexibility from other donors to continue support, which poses a risk to the project's ongoing activities and expansion (INT\_2). Additionally, in some participating hromadas, successfully implemented interventions might not be sustained in the future due to insufficient local budget allocations (INT\_2).

There are also concerns about the capacity strength of local partners, organizations, and civil society organizations (CSOs). Many of these entities have limited prior experience, particularly in the humanitarian sector, and lack expertise in areas such as writing proposals and documenting achievements (INT\_2). This gap in skills and experience raises questions about their ability to sustain project activities independently.

While Plan International has committed funding until 2026 and has an ambition to remain involved for the long term, as a grants-funded office, its future activities depend on continued financial sustainability, which is currently growing. A report submitted by P4EC in March indicated that 80-90% of trained professionals were offered jobs and are likely to continue working in their communities. However, the sustainability of specific activities, such as shelter rehabilitation, remains uncertain without continued partner funding. Although PI Ukraine will seek additional funding in the future, no exit strategy has been established (INT\_PI\_1).

The discontinuation of activities with Depaul and P4EC poses a potential risk to sustainability. However, it's important to note that P4EC is a large organization that has been active in Ukraine since before the full-scale invasion. Despite this, the absence of ongoing collaboration with these partners could impact future efforts. Plan International, as a well-established organization, has been instrumental in achieving significant results, and the capacity-building approaches developed during the project are crucial for sustaining these outcomes. Specifically, the reliable Ukrainian banking system has facilitated smooth cash distribution. Additionally, the insights gained from Cash and Voucher Assistance (CVA) initiatives will be important for organizations like P4EC as they pursue new funding opportunities and engage with other donors. (INT\_PI\_4).

**In conclusion,** the project has made substantial contributions to improving the livelihoods of children, adolescents, and adults, particularly through gender-sensitive cash assistance, social cohesion initiatives, and support for families with special needs. It has successfully addressed psychosocial needs and promoted inclusive practices. Despite these achievements, the project's sustainability faces significant challenges, including funding uncertainties and a lack of ongoing collaboration with key partners. The innovative approaches implemented have strengthened capacities and created a foundation for continued impact, but risks remain, especially concerning the future of funding and local partner capabilities. Ensuring the sustainability of these efforts will require strategic planning, continued support, and addressing identified risks effectively.

## 4 Conclusions

### Success factors:

**The People Factor – Professionalism of the Staff:** The exceptional professionalism and dedication of the staff were critical to the project's success. Staff members went above and beyond their official duties, offering personal support such as helping children with their homework at a hostel in Kharkiv. This deep commitment to assisting their suffering compatriots significantly enhanced the project's outcomes. The staff's high professional qualities and personal investment in their work were key success factors, contributing to both positive and sustainable results (FGD\_FS\_1, 2, 4, FGD\_2).

**High Quality of Services Provided:** The project was marked by the high quality of services delivered. This excellence in service provision was a direct result of the staff's dedication and the project's overall approach. The focus on high-quality support not only met immediate needs but also laid a foundation for sustainable, positive impacts (FGD\_FS\_1, 2, 4).

**Flexibility and adaptability:** The project demonstrated remarkable flexibility and adaptability throughout its implementation. It adeptly adjusted its services to meet the evolving needs of beneficiaries and responded effectively to changing conditions. Additionally, the flexibility in funding provided by the donor (DEC) played a crucial role, proving to be invaluable in the dynamic context of humanitarian work.

**Effective Training and Multidisciplinary Cooperation:** The comprehensive training provided under the project facilitated a well-organized and efficient response. The division of duties and the formation of multidisciplinary teams allowed for a swift and coordinated approach to service delivery. This structured collaboration between various organizations and agencies created a de facto "one-stop-shop" for psycho-social services, enhancing the project's effectiveness and sustainability (INT\_3, FGD\_FS\_2).

**Individualized Approach to Beneficiaries:** The project's new practice of addressing each beneficiary's needs individually, rather than grouping them as prescribed by social services legislation, was a notable success factor. This tailored approach ensured that specific issues were addressed effectively, improving the overall quality of support and contributing to the project's sustainable positive results.

**Identifying and Addressing Previously Unrecognized Needs:** The project successfully identified and addressed previously unrecognized needs within the community, leading to the establishment and retention of social worker and psychologist positions in hromadas. Some of these unrecognized needs primarily involve socio-psychological support. This includes the role of a 'help at home' social worker who assists with childcare, including for children with special needs, allowing guardians (often mothers) to attend to other responsibilities or take time for themselves. Many of these mothers are unaware that someone else can look after their children and do not realize the importance of taking time for their own well-being. This resulted in a popular demand for such services, with some newly created positions being maintained by local budgets even after project funds ended. This demonstrates the project's effectiveness in highlighting and fulfilling essential services that beneficiaries were initially unaware of.

**Ongoing Specialist Support and Community Integration:** The project's integration of specialists and the establishment of strong relationships with beneficiaries, including IDPs and families with children, contributed to sustained impact beyond the project's formal end.

### Weakening factors / challenges:

**Great Volatility of the Situation:** The ongoing conflict in Ukraine, now well into its second year, has introduced extreme volatility, with continuous displacement, destruction, and an increasing array of humanitarian needs. The persistent and evolving nature of the crisis creates unprecedented challenges for social service provision, necessitating constant adjustments and

adaptations. This relentless need for recalibration places immense strain on service providers, undermining the project's stability and effectiveness.

**Concerns for Staff Safety:** The inherent risks of operating in a conflict zone, particularly in high-risk areas like the Kharkiv oblast, pose serious threats to staff safety and well-being. The constant danger from military aggression affects the ability of project staff to perform their duties effectively and safely, limiting the scope and impact of project activities.

**Lack of Clear Communication of Goals:** There were significant issues with defining and communicating the project's goals, both final and interim. Staff from implementing partners reported a lack of clarity, which forced them to improvise and work with incomplete information. Additionally, poor communication with Plan International and DEC exacerbated these issues, leading to confusion and inefficiencies.

**Lack of Communication Between Field Staff and Plan International:** Ineffective communication between field staff and Plan International further weakened the project. Staff reported difficulties in maintaining clear and consistent communication, impacting the coordination and execution of project activities. This gap in communication hindered the overall effectiveness and operational efficiency of the project.

**Capacity and Expertise Limitations:** The capacity and expertise gaps among local partners raised concerns about their ability to maintain project efforts independently. Local partners and CSOs faced challenges in sustaining project activities due to limited prior experience and expertise, particularly in proposal writing and documentation.

**Limited gender inclusivity:** Despite the project's efforts, there was a notable lack of comprehensive gender inclusivity. While the project adopted some gender-sensitive approaches, it remained predominantly gender-neutral in practice. This was evident from the findings in the report, which suggested that gender-specific needs and perspectives were not fully integrated into all aspects of the project, limiting its overall effectiveness in addressing the diverse requirements of different genders.

**Funding and Resource Constraints:** Funding uncertainties and the lack of an established exit strategy poses significant risks to sustaining project efforts. The phasing out of DEC funding and the reliance on potentially less well-funded humanitarian organizations present risks to the continuation of project activities.

**Lack of Monitoring and Evaluation:** The absence of adequate monitoring affected the comprehensive evaluation of the project's impact on beneficiaries. A noted gap in monitoring visits from PI highlighted limitations in assessing the overall impact on children's well-being and mental health.

### Good Practices:

A good practice involved contracting specialists through agreements with the communities, where money was sent to the communities, and they hired the specialists. By providing the budget to the communities, they could hire locals through local authorities. This approach ensured sustainability, as approximately 90% of the specialists remained in the communities to continue their work. Although this method was more expensive, it generally led to a higher retention rate of specialists.

Under the project, social services were described as "individually oriented" and "universal," meaning that a social service provider did not merely concentrate on tackling an issue directly prescribed by his or her job description but did their best to address multiple issues a beneficiary was facing. Multidisciplinary teams were created to provide holistic solutions immediately, avoiding the need to refer beneficiaries to other agencies. This successful experiment could help the Ministry of Social Policy of Ukraine, which is looking to reform public social services to align with the best European practices.

## 5 Recommendations

Addressed to	Findings	Relevant OECD-DAC	Recommendation
Plan International	Lack of monitoring visits to assess the overall impact on children's well-being and mental health.	Effectiveness & Impact	Implement regular monitoring and evaluation visits focused specifically on children's well-being and mental health for future assignments.
	No follow-up sessions with psychologists after the project was over.	Sustainability	Continue supporting the services of the children's psychologists in the hromadas.
	Sustainability challenges due to the phase-out of DEC funding and lack of an exit strategy.	Sustainability	Develop a detailed exit strategy and seek alternative funding sources to ensure the continuity of essential services.
	Limited engagement with certain minority groups, like the Roma community.	Relevance	Although the project defined minorities primarily as IDPs, there is a need to design comprehensive inclusion strategies to ensure representation and involvement of all minority groups that are effectively integrated and represented, beyond just focusing on IDPs.
	Temporary shelters for internally displaced persons (IDPs) were not fully equipped to accommodate people with disabilities (PWD) or pets.	Relevance	Future projects should prioritize the design and adaptation of shelters to ensure full accessibility for people with disabilities and provide accommodations for families with pets. This includes implementing necessary infrastructure changes and offering comprehensive training for staff to address the specific needs of these vulnerable groups.
	Gender mainstreaming did not become a part of any of the project activities. Project beneficiaries reinforced gender roles. The rush to implement interventions in an emergency context further hindered the integration of comprehensive gender-transformative planning.	Relevance	Conduct gender analysis during the project design phase and integrate gender-sensitive approaches into all activities. Strengthen gender-transformative planning by systematically mainstreaming gender considerations throughout the project, ensuring interventions promote gender equality from the

			outset, even in emergency contexts.
	Successful creation and retention of social worker and psychologist positions in hromadas, even after project funding ended, along with the identification of previously unrecognized needs among beneficiaries.	Sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Support the establishment of essential social services by identifying latent needs within communities and advocating for their inclusion in local budgets.</li> <li>- Enhance needs assessment processes to uncover hidden or emerging needs and provide training to local authorities on the importance of sustaining these roles.</li> <li>- Document and share successful case studies to encourage broader adoption and long-term sustainability.</li> </ul>
<b>Project Partners</b>	There is a need for further development of innovative approaches such as personalized services and feedback mechanisms.	Effectiveness & Efficiency	Continue to refine and expand innovative practices, including tailoring humanitarian aid to meet the specific needs of different communities and individuals (e.g. customizing food and non-food item distribution, health services, based on demographic and regional differences. Develop robust feedback mechanisms that allow beneficiaries to share their needs, concerns, and satisfaction levels more effectively (e.g. user-friendly digital platforms, regular surveys, and community consultation forums).
	Local partners have limited experience and capacity to sustain activities independently.	Effectiveness & Sustainability	Mobilize trained personnel and resources to provide cascade trainings / ToT to enhance the ability of local partners to sustain project activities. Establish long-term partnerships between different local organizations to function as a support system beyond initial training sessions (e.g. regular check-ins, co-implementation of activities, continuous mentoring).
<b>Participating Hromadas/ Non-</b>	Experience exchange between the hromadas which participated in the project was fruitful and such hromadas	Impact & Sustainability	Facilitate knowledge sharing and best practice dissemination between participating and non-participating hromadas. Non-

<b>Participating Hromadas</b>	learned new practices from their peers, implementing them (e.g. “help at home” with children).		participating hromadas could learn a lot about project implementation, specific practices and policies successfully introduced in “treatment” hromadas (e.g. introducing the positions of psychologists and social workers).
<b>Ukrainian government</b>	The need for adopting successful project models into evidence-based policies.	Impact	Collaborate with implementing agencies to integrate successful project models into national policies and frameworks.

## 6 Annexes

### 6.1 List of groups of people interviewed (anonymized), site visited.

Partner Organization	Targeted Region / Oblast	Targeted group	Number of participants / Data collection method	Gender (Male / Female)	Code
P4EC	Kyiv	Field staff at Central Office	1 FGD	3 Female 1 Male	FGD_FS_3
	Regional coordinators	Field staff	3 interviews	Female	FGD_FS_2
				Female	
				Female	
	Kyiv	National Government	1 interview	Male	INT_1
	Kharkiv (not mandatory)	Parents	1 FGD (6 people)	Female	FGD_parents_2
				Female	
				Female	
				Female	
				Female	
				Female	
	Specialized practitioners	1 FGD (3 people)	Female	FGD_5	
			Female		
			Female		
	Local/Project coordinators	1 FGD (2 Kharkiv) (2 Ivano-F.) (3 Khmelny.)	Female	FGD_6	
			Female		
Female					
Female					
Female					
Female					
Parents	1 interview (2 people)	Female	INT_3		
		Female			
Ivano-Frankivska oblast	Specialized practitioners	1 FGD (4 people)	Female	FGD_1	
			Female		
			Female		
			Female		
			Female	FGD_parents_1	



Partner Organization	Targeted Region / Oblast	Targeted group	Number of participants / Data collection method	Gender (Male / Female)	Code
		Alternative Care Families within IDP	<b>1 FGD (6 female, 1 male)</b>	Female	
				Female	
				Male	
				Female	
				Female	
				Female	
	Local / national gov authorities	<b>1 FGD (4 people)</b>	Male	<b>FGD_3</b>	
			Female		
			Female		
			Male		
	Khmelnyska oblast	Parents	<b>1 interview (2 people)</b>	Female	<b>FGD_parents_3</b>
				Female	
		Specialized practitioners	<b>1 interview (2 people)</b>	Female	<b>INT_3</b>
				Female	
Alternative Care Families within IDP		<b>1 FGD (3 people)</b>	Female	<b>FGD_parents_4</b>	
			Female		
			Female		
Local / national gov authorities		<b>1 FGD (3 people)</b>	Male	<b>FGD_2</b>	
	Female				
	Female				
Children	<b>1 FGD (5 children)</b>	5 girls	<b>FGD_children_1</b>		
Depaul	Kyiv	Staff at Central Office	<b>1 INT</b>	Male Female	<b>INT_FS_7</b>
		Field staff (if possible)	<b>2 FGDs</b>	Male	<b>FGD_FS_1</b>
				Female	
				Female	
				Female	
		Field staff (if possible)	<b>2 FGDs</b>	Male	<b>FGD_FS_4</b>
Female					
Plan International	UK / Ukraine / global	National / country officer	<b>1 interview</b>	Male	<b>INT_PI_3</b>
		Regional focal point	<b>1 interview</b>	Male	<b>INT_PI_1</b>

Partner Organization	Targeted Region / Oblast	Targeted group	Number of participants / Data collection method	Gender (Male / Female)	Code
		M&E officer	1 interview	Male	INT_PI_6
		Technical experts	1 interview (2 people)	Female	INT_PI_4
		Project coordinator	1 interview	Male	INT_PI_5
		Country Finance Manager	1 interview (2 people)	Male	INT_PI_2
UK / Ukraine / global		DEC representative	1 interview	Female	INT_2

## 6.2 List of documents consulted, and secondary data

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7. Plan UK, Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC). (2023). Outputs Report, Phase 2a, 27 July, Ukraine. Plan UK.
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### 6.3 Evaluation matrix

OECD-DAC CRITERION RELEVANCE			
Assessment Dimensions	Evaluation Question	Assessment Criteria/ Clarification (Optional)	Foreseen Sources
<b>Dimension 1: Alignment with policies and priorities</b>	Does the project objective and output align with the policies and current strategic priorities in Ukraine? (conflict/context sensitivity)	(conflict) context of the project adequately analysed and considered for the project concept	Project documents  KIs and FGDs with the PI staff, implementing partners and the target group
<b>Dimension 2: Alignment with the needs and capacities of the beneficiaries and stakeholders</b>	To what extent did the program suit the needs and priorities of the target/vulnerable group? (Knowledge interest)  How were the different needs of the stakeholders taken into consideration in the design and delivery of activities?	Needs and capacities of disadvantaged and vulnerable beneficiaries and stakeholders	
<b>Dimension 3: Appropriateness of the design</b>	Were the activities and outputs of the program consistent with the overall goal and the attainment of its objective?	Realistic and appropriate design of the project	
	What was quality of approaches? Were inputs from partners included in project design? (knowledge interest)  Were the activities and outputs of the program consistent with the intended impacts and effects?		
<b>Dimension 4: Adaptability – response to change</b>	To what extent did the project identify significant changes in the context and how the project responded to these changes?	Response to changes in the environment over time (risks and potentials)	

OECD-DAC CRITERION COHERENCE			
Assessment Dimensions	Evaluation Question	Assessment Criteria/ Clarification (Optional)	Foreseen Sources

<b>Dimension 1: Internal Coherence</b>	To what extent was the relationship between the PIU and implementing partners equitable? Were plans for coordination with clusters, DEC members, local NGOs, and government services in place and followed?	Synergies between PI and implementing partners and other stakeholders	KIIs with representatives of PI and implementing partners Annual Reports and other project documents
<b>Dimension 2: External Coherence</b>	How did the organisations harmonise and coordinate their interventions with other partners?	Synergies with interventions of other donors	KIIs with representatives of PI and implementing partners Annual Reports and other project documents

<b>OECD-DAC CRITERION EFFECTIVENESS</b>			
<b>Assessment Dimensions</b>	<b>Evaluation Question</b>	<b>Assessment Criteria/ Clarification (Optional)</b>	<b>Foreseen Sources</b>
<b>Dimension 1: Achievement of the (intended) objectives</b>	To what extent were the campaign demands, their objectives, and the overall objectives of the project achieved?	Project targets Stressed results from summarized results/output matrix	Interviews with all involved stakeholders FGDs with target group Annual narrative reports
<b>Dimension 2: Contribution of activities to results</b>	What were the major factors influencing or preventing the outcomes of objectives? What has contributed to the successful/unsuccessful implementation of program activities? What are the lessons learned? What were the major factors influencing the achievement or non-achievement of the objective?	Assessment of conducive and hindering factors	Interviews with all involved stakeholders FGDs with target group Summarised results/output matrix Annual narrative reports

<b>Dimension 3: Unintended results</b>	Did project activities/outputs lead to other intended or unintended results?	Unintended results at target group level  Unintended results within PI	Interviews with all involved stakeholders (Outcome Harvesting)  FGDs with target group  Summarised results/output matrix  Annual reports
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OECD-DAC CRITERION IMPACT			
Assessment Dimensions	Evaluation Question	Assessment Criteria/ Clarification (Optional)	Foreseen Sources
<b>Dimension 1: Contribution to higher-level development results/changes</b>	<p>Among which target groups did the project influence change? What are the characteristics of these changes?</p> <p>What real difference/changes have the activities made to the lives of children/adolescents/adults? How do the adolescents, caregivers and other beneficiaries see the impact themselves and how do they describe the changes?</p> <p>What potential positive or negative unintended consequences the program might be generating? What contributed to change?</p>	Impact results from output/results matrix	<p>Interviews with all involved stakeholders</p> <p>FGDs/Interviews with the target group</p> <p>Annual narrative reports</p>

OECD-DAC CRITERION EFFICIENCY			
Assessment Dimensions	Evaluation Question	Assessment Criteria/ Clarification (Optional)	Foreseen Sources
<b>Dimension 1: Production efficiency</b>	<p>Were the program activities delivered on time, to the right people, of the right quality as set out in the program documents and as reported?</p> <p>Were activities cost-efficient?</p>	Maximization of results with given resources	<p>Interviews with PI staff members and partners</p> <p>Analysis of financial documents shared</p>
<b>Dimension 2: Allocation efficiency</b>	Was the program or project implemented in the most efficient way compared to alternatives?	input-output relation and alternatives as well as cost risks	<p>Interviews with PI staff members and partners</p> <p>Analysis of financial documents shared</p>

OECD-DAC CRITERION SUSTAINABILITY			
Assessment Dimensions	Evaluation Question	Assessment Criteria/ Clarification (Optional)	Foreseen Sources
<b>Dimension 1: Prerequisites for sustainability</b>	<p>To what extent are the benefits of the program going to continue, or are likely to continue?</p> <p>Were any innovative approaches or practices introduced which contributed to improved sustainability?</p> <p>What were the major factors which influenced the achievement or non-achievement of sustainability of the program?</p>	<p>Capability of stakeholders to maintain results</p> <p>Durability of achieved results</p> <p>Requirements of stakeholders for future support / expectations towards PI</p> <p>Risks to sustainability</p>	<p>Interviews with all involved stakeholders</p> <p>FGDs/Interviews with the target group</p> <p>Annual narrative reports</p>

<b>Cross cutting issues</b>			
<b>Assessment Dimensions</b>	<b>Evaluation Question</b>	<b>Assessment Criteria/ Clarification (Optional)</b>	<b>Foreseen Sources</b>
<b>Dimension 1: Gender and Inclusion</b>	<p>How has gender been integrated throughout the project? (knowledge interest)</p> <p>How effectively did the project identify and address the specific needs of minority groups and persons with disabilities?</p> <p>To what extent were individuals in remote areas provided with support and actively included in the project?</p> <p>What consultation as well as specific feedback mechanisms were considered and implemented for this project and how effectively did, they work?</p>	<p>Appropriateness of chosen approaches to involve envisioned target groups</p>	<p>Derivation from findings under OECD DAC criteria</p> <p>Interviews with all involved stakeholders</p> <p>FGDs with target group</p> <p>Systematic document analysis</p>