



CHILDREN'S RESILIENCE FUND, PHASE II:
STRENGTHENING CSOS IN UKRAINE

EVALUATION SUMMARY

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1. THE CHILDREN'S RESILIENCE FUND (CRF) PHASE II. BACKGROUND

The Children's Resilience Fund (CRF) Phase II was a grant-making and capacity-strengthening initiative led by Integrity Action in partnership with Crown Agents Ukraine and funded primarily by a private foundation, with additional support from other private-sector partners for specific components, such as the external evaluation. The grant pool under CRF Phase II was capped at GBP 1.6 million. Building on the achievements of the previous programmatic iteration, Phase II focused on enhancing the capacity of 15 partner civil society organisations (CSOs)¹ in Ukraine to design and deliver high-quality, inclusive services for children affected by conflict, while also strengthening organisational systems and longer-term sustainability of these civil society partners.

CRF Phase II was implemented in the context of a full-scale war in Ukraine. As such, partner-CSO teams operated under persistent security threats, resource disruptions, and under extreme, double psychological duress. Project implementation was constantly affected by safety and security risks, including threats to life and injuries, as well as heightened vulnerability and stress among children, staff and beneficiaries, which sometimes led to psychological burnout.



RESPONDING TO URGENT NEED. SITUATION OVERVIEW

War is the daily reality for children in Ukraine. The UN Human Rights Office verified that between February 2022 and December 2024 at least 669 children were killed and 1,833 injured, mostly by explosives in populated areas. An estimated 737,000 children were displaced inside Ukraine alongside 1.7 million who have become refugees abroad. UNICEF estimated that over 1.5 million children were at risk of depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder and other mental health problems – a grim aftermath of endless aerial raids and bombardments, chronic sleep deprivation, displacement and prolonged disruption of schooling. At the same time, Ukrainian authorities report that more than 19,500 children have been illegally deported (kidnapped) and transferred to the Russian Federation or Belarus, prompting the creation of an International Coalition for their return and underscoring the scale of the protection crisis.

Against this backdrop, civil society organisations, charitable foundations and volunteer networks provide an essential, often last-resort and last-mile lifeline. In 2024 the Government, intergovernmental players, civil society and charities reached 9.8 million people, including 2.5 million children, with humanitarian assistance such as health care, mental health and psychosocial support, education and cash assistance, much of it channelled through trusted local actors. Major child protection actors highlight that frontline Ukrainian organisations are the ones accompanying internally displaced children, supporting learning, and creating safe spaces in shelters and basements, even under fire. Yet localisation surveys show that, despite implementing a large share of activities, Ukrainian NGOs still receive less than 1% of international funding directly, leaving many of these frontline groups overstretched, burnt-out, heavily dependent on short-term sub-grants and operating under constant security and emotional strain.

¹ One of the grants was terminated prematurely, and therefore the evaluation focused on 15 participating partner CSOs and their projects, rather than the 16 organisations that originally signed the grant agreements.

Reports submitted to the donor and consultations with stakeholders highlighted a severe shortage of qualified personnel in many locations, slowing recruitment and occasionally affecting continuity of services. Inflation and rising service fees from external vendors, as well as frequent disruptions caused by air raids, missile and drone attacks, created additional pressure on project timelines and delivery.

Despite this unwelcoming and harsh implementation environment, CRF Phase II not only persisted but thrived. Flexible working arrangements, thoughtful use of the flexible funds available for each of the partner-CSOs, and sustained mentoring from the CRF implementing team experts enabled the grantees to adapt their activities, protect staff and beneficiaries as much as possible, and continue to deliver meaningful, inclusive, child-focused interventions. The programme offered a combination of financial support, tailored organisational development (OD), and CSO-coaching that helped organisations support children and caregivers in some of the most difficult circumstances Ukraine has faced in recent history.

2. THE EVALUATION AND ITS METHODOLOGY

PURPOSE AND TIMING

This end-of-programme evaluation was commissioned to both “prove and improve” the effectiveness of CRF Phase II. As set out in the Terms of Reference (TOR), the evaluation was designed to assess how effectively the initiative had enhanced the capacity of partner-CSOs to support conflict-affected children, whether these CSOs were delivering meaningful and sustainable change within their thematic domains, and what legacy the programme was likely to leave beyond the immediate period of grant funding.

The evaluation was also intended to generate learning for Integrity Action (IA), Crown Agents Ukraine (CAU), and potential future donors. At a moment when partners are considering whether and how to extend or replicate the CRF model, it was timely to distil what worked particularly well, what could be further strengthened, and how the programme architecture might evolve in any future Phase.

Two external consultants were engaged to design and deliver the evaluation, working closely with the CRF implementation team while remaining independent in their analysis and conclusions.

Importantly, the task at hand *was not to deliver a financial or performance audit of the programme*. Rather, the evaluation focused on designing and delivering an in-depth learning exercise on selected aspects of CRF Phase II explicitly specified in the TOR. Areas such as medical equipment procurement or the work of the Patients of Ukraine Charitable Foundation fell outside its scope and, therefore, were not explored.

The evaluation team is grateful to the combined implementation team of IA and CAU, as well as the 15 partner-CSOs who have made this evaluation work possible despite all the challenges and limitations of war-time programming and programme delivery under immense stress.

EVALUATION PHILOSOPHY AND APPROACH

In consultation with the implementing team, the evaluators applied a *conflict-sensitive local systems approach*, treating CRF not merely as a grant-making business process but as an essential part of a broader ecosystem of actors supporting children and caregivers during wartime. The approach was guided by the OECD DAC criteria of relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability, and was sensitive to local power dynamics, social vulnerabilities and systemic barriers that affect service delivery and inclusion in a conflict-affected environment.

Analytically, the evaluation was structured around three Pillars (thematic clusters of issues) that together provided a holistic picture of CRF Phase II performance:

- **PILLAR 1 – CRF PERFORMANCE AS A PROGRAMME.** The evaluators examined how the programme was designed and administered, and how it was implemented in practice, including the selection of grantees, the roles of the IA and CAU teams, and the design, value, and lasting effects of the OD component. The Pillar focused on whether CRF supported CSOs beyond the narrow remit of project delivery and whether the programme strengthened grantee capacity to support conflict-affected children.
- **PILLAR 2 – PROJECT EFFECTIVENESS AND EFFICIENCY.** The evaluators, in consultation with the implementing team, selected four partner-CSOs and gathered material for case studies to explore what the four implemented projects achieved for children and caregivers. The Pillar examined how project designs were translated into practice, what changes parents, caregivers and professionals observed in children, and how resources and partnerships were used to deliver safe, inclusive and meaningful services.
- **PILLAR 3 – VALUE OF THE PROGRAMME AND DISTINCTIVE FEATURES.** The evaluation team assessed how CRF Phase II was perceived by partner-CSOs, what worked particularly well and why, what did not work as intended and for what reason, and what lessons (including those from other donor-funded initiatives) could inform potential future Phases. The Pillar looked beyond individual projects to examine the added value of CRF as a donor mechanism and capacity-strengthening model compared to other funders.

Together, the three Pillars allowed for a *multi-layered perspective*: from programme architecture and OD, through selected project-level results, to perceptions of value, fit and lessons learned.

METHODS AND LIMITATIONS

The evaluation employed a mixed-methods design. The team drew on:

- Key informant interviews with CRF staff, thematic experts and other stakeholders
- Key informant interviews and focus group discussions with partner-CSO leaders, staff, and, where appropriate, parents or caregivers
- An online survey of partner-CSOs under Pillar 3
- Direct observation of selected OD training sessions and the summary learning event in Uzhhorod, Zakarpattia oblast, Ukraine in September 2025
- A review of partner-CSO reports and monitoring data, as well as internal reports prepared by the CRF implementation team
- Participatory exercises, including an in-person session in Uzhhorod that allowed partners to reflect on CRF Phase II and co-create ideas for possible Phase III.

The evaluation team conducted *40 interviews*, interactive sessions, validation events, and interactive exercises, spanning over *50 hours* of face time with CRF stakeholders.

The evaluation respected strict ethical and safeguarding requirements, including informed consent, protection of personal data, and a clear protocol that either restricted interviewing or recording children, or allowed for proper safeguards when children were present or participated in the interview given by their caregiver.

Limitations included the impossibility of engaging equally deeply with all 15 partner-CSOs within the available time and resources, security-related constraints on travel, and the inherent difficulty of attributing longer-term organisational and child-level outcomes to a single programme in a highly dynamic conflict setting. These constraints were explicitly acknowledged and mitigated through the triangulation of sources and careful case selection.

3. FINDINGS

CRF Phase II emerges from this evaluation as a **highly successful and very timely programme: the right intervention, at the right time, and with the right focus for war-affected children and their caregivers in Ukraine**. It is a well-designed and well-implemented mechanism that combines grant support, additional small-scale flexible funds, and a rich organisational development offer, and has been delivered with integrity, flexibility and care by a combined team of IA and CAU, even in the highly challenging context of full-scale war.

CRF has provided targeted, high-quality support to some of the most vulnerable children and families, while significantly strengthening the capacities and resilience of the CSOs that serve them. Self-assessment data and partner feedback point to substantial, CRF-attributed organisational gains. Partner-CSOs expressed almost universal full satisfaction with CRF Phase II and a strong desire to participate in any future phases, and the evaluation team sees a clear case for continued and expanded investment in the CRF model. The suggestions put forward by stakeholders and evaluators alike are framed as refinements that would help *an already outstanding programme* realise its full potential in future iterations, rather than as remedies for fundamental problems.



CRF AS A UNIQUE VEHICLE FOR SUPPORT

Robust blend of expertise. The CRF team pairs international standards, and compliance with trusted Ukrainian technical and implementation leadership on the ground.

Localisation through partners. Implementation is delegated to Ukrainian organisations that design programme content, ensuring context-sensitive support and genuine ownership.

Helping the helpers. The programme combines grants with capacity-building, helping CSOs strengthen policies, systems and professionalism alongside child-focused services.

Flexible, trust-based funding. Readiness to approve reallocations allows partners to adapt to changing conditions and emerging needs.

Comprehensive portfolio. CRF Phase II supported diverse, complementary interventions, from art therapy and integrated physical-psychological rehabilitation to legal action for children kidnapped by the Russian Federation.

Justice as healing. CRF links psychological healing with the pursuit of justice and has strengthened collaboration among key child-focused CSOs.

Emerging partner ecosystem. CRF has strengthened cooperation between organisations such as RCHR, Save Ukraine and Mom Plus Me, creating practical synergies that enhance both the reach and quality of support for children.

To address questions about what worked well and what did not work as intended, the evaluation team summarised extensive feedback into the following clusters to provide a high-level overview of CRF Phase II. The relevant summary table is followed by more detailed observations for each evaluation Pillar.

Dimension	Strengths / What worked well?	Challenges / What could be developed or changed?
Relationships with partner-CSOs	Trust: The implementing team showed respect for partner expertise with minimal interference and a trust-inducing, partnership-oriented approach	Perceived overload: A small focal point team made some partners hesitant to seek clarifications, causing anxiety about potential penalties for decisions
Grant management and administration	<p>Flexibility: The team's accommodation of reasonable changes (budget redistributions or waiving of specific requirements when justified by changing contexts) helped ease organisational burdens and allowed focus on project delivery</p> <p>Responsiveness: Key staff were available by phone, and approvals were often made within 1-2 days</p>	<p>Nebulous guidance: Event planning and formats were sometimes unclear, causing participant discomfort</p> <p>Tranche system and reporting pressures: As per usual practice in Ukraine, the final tranche was withheld until report submission, which created cash flow stress; tight deadlines with no buffer for account reconciliation; reporting forms and criteria provided late in the project cycle</p>
Quality of organisational development content	<p>Comprehensive curriculum: The systematic programme of support was unique in its thematic breadth and perceived quality</p> <p>Practicality: Training provided concrete, working tools with tangible results</p>	Calibration: Some content was either too foundational for partner-CSOs with higher capacity, or too advanced for the smaller ones
Delivery of the organisational development component	<p>Individualised: Personalised consultations focused on specific organisational contexts, and flexible funds for OD (£4,000) meant priority needs could be prioritised</p> <p>Open and accessible: Staff beyond the project teams could attend training, improving overall capacity</p>	<p>Information overload: The high volume of training delivered in parallel in a short space of time made full attendance difficult for some CSOs, and may have hindered knowledge retention</p> <p>Scheduling: Lack of advance information sometimes hindered staff planning or participation</p>
CSOs acting on gains in organisational development	<p>New policies: Partner-CSOs developed or updated policies (including in GESI, HR, safeguarding), which in turn enabled new funding opportunities</p> <p>New practices: Partner-CSOs adopted new practices, including RBM, improved communications, AI integration, and theory of change development</p>	Prerequisites: Foundational themes (such as development or refinement of an organisational strategy) need to be completed before a partner-CSO could act on upgraded fundraising skills
Enabling CSO outcomes	Catalyst for change: Programme enabled CSOs to scale services, test new formats, reach new beneficiary groups, launch pilots, and make strategic infrastructure investments	Flexible funds limitations: While mostly open to use of the designated flexible funds for various purposes, further programming could allow for limited purchase of office technology (e.g., computers) or small-scale renovation or venue repurposing

PILLAR 1. **CRF PERFORMANCE AS A PROGRAMME**

Pillar 1 examined how CRF Phase II was designed and administered, and how effectively the IA and CAU teams supported CSOs *beyond grant-making* and ensuring compliance. Overall, the evaluation finds that CRF Phase II was designed and implemented in a way that combined integrity, flexibility and context sensitivity, and that it succeeded in strengthening partner-CSOs both organisationally and programmatically.

PROGRAMME DESIGN AND ADMINISTRATION

Evidence from reports, interviews and focus groups indicates that the joint IA and CAU implementing team delivered a complex grant-making and OD programme in highly challenging conditions with professionalism and care.

Partner-CSOs consistently described the CRF team as responsive, humane and committed. They highlighted the advantages of working with a team that, while bringing suggestions on applying international good practice, would be very knowledgeable on the Ukrainian context and operational realities.

The partner-CSOs valued the trust that enabled them to become part of the programme, as two of the 15 grantees were brought in as alternates and given a chance to prove themselves and their project implementation capacities as part of CRF. The partner-CSOs also appreciated the thematic focus of the programme, which centred on children's resilience, trauma-informed support, and inclusive services. This focus was seen as well aligned with the pressing needs in communities affected by the war.

Partners noted multiple times that the CRF model went beyond funding. The combination of flexible funds, mentoring, practical administrative support and access to OD opportunities created a holistic support package that many organisations contrasted favourably with other donors, where funding was often more rigid, cumbersome, and less accompanied. This holistic approach strengthened internal systems, including financial management, safeguarding, monitoring and evaluation, and staff care.

At the same time, some partners reported that the lean implementation team appeared overloaded at times, especially at peak loads when reports were coming in or other synchronised queries came in as waves. There were also isolated examples of procedures, such as branding requirements and expectations for large events, being communicated later than partners would have found ideal. These issues are best understood as operational adjustments in a demanding implementation environment rather than fundamental flaws in programme design.

THE ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT COMPONENT

The Organisational Development (OD) component emerged as one of the most valued parts of CRF Phase II, according to multiple testimonies. All partner-CSOs described OD opportunities as highly relevant and practically useful. They particularly appreciated the combination of group workshops, individual consultations and mentoring, as well as the quality and commitment of the Ukrainian trainers and thematic experts who delivered them.

Feedback indicates that the OD component helped organisations improve in areas such as:

- Strategic planning and programme design
- Monitoring, evaluation, and learning
- Financial management
- Human resources, staff wellbeing and volunteer management
- Safeguarding
- Gender equality and social inclusion
- Communications, fundraising, digital presence and other thematic areas

Many organisations reported that OD support had already translated into tangible changes in policies, procedures and staff skills. For example, CSOs spoke about updating or introducing new financial procedures, improving HR policies, rethinking safeguarding practices, or learning how to design more

robust logical frameworks and evidence-based project proposals. Several organisations explicitly linked successful applications to other donors to the knowledge and expertise gained through CRF OD activities.

Self-assessment data collected at the beginning and end of the programme suggested improvements across multiple capacity areas, with organisations that engaged most deeply with OD offers and attributed positive change to CRF interventions tending to show higher average scores than those that did not participate as fully or did not attribute change to CRF. This suggests that CRF's investment in OD is likely to have lasting benefits beyond the lifespan of Phase II.



Analysis of baseline and endline self-assessments shows that self-perceived organisational efficacy, professionalism and quality of project design and implementation increased more where CRF provided support: the positive change was on average **1.09 points** (10-point scale) **higher** in thematic areas where **organisations received CRF OD assistance** than in areas they addressed on their own.

In parallel, partner-CSOs and OD trainers identified areas where the OD component could be further refined. These included:

- Spreading OD activities more evenly over the programme period to avoid overload during particularly busy months.
- Tailoring OD pathways even more closely to each organisation's starting point and strategic priorities.
- Allowing more time for follow-up and consolidation so that new knowledge can be translated into outcome-level change, including through learning-by-doing microprojects.
- Strengthening the coordination and mutual learning among trainers themselves so that synergies can be maximised.

These suggestions point to ways to make an already strong OD component *even more strategic* and outcome-oriented in any future phase.

AREAS FOR FURTHER STRENGTHENING UNDER PILLAR 1

In summary, Pillar 1 concludes that CRF Phase II functioned as a well-designed, well-implemented programme that provided much more than financial support. Partner-CSOs emerged from the programme better equipped to support conflict-affected children, families and caregivers, with strengthened systems and improved confidence in engaging with other donors.

Areas for further strengthening relate mainly to:

- Considering further improvements to the process of selecting partner-CSOs through open calls for proposals, while retaining a focus on high-performers in Phases I and II.
- Calibrating staff workloads and communication flows within the implementation team to sustain the high level of responsiveness as the portfolio evolves.
- Making key procedures and expectations, including branding and event formats, even clearer and more predictable from the outset.
- Refining OD intervention sequencing, formats and tailoring, building on the rich learning and feedback generated during Phase II.

PILLAR 2. PROJECT EFFECTIVENESS AND EFFICIENCY

Pillar 2 explored how four selected partner-CSOs designed and delivered their CRF-supported projects, and what changes these projects generated for children and caregivers. The case studies were selected purposively, in close partnership with the CRF implementing team, to reflect different thematic focuses, organisational profiles, and geographical locations. Together, they illustrate both the breadth and depth of CRF-funded work on the ground.

Across all four case studies, the evaluation found that projects were implemented effectively and efficiently, with a strong emphasis on child safety, psychosocial wellbeing, inclusive participation and meaningful engagement of caregivers. The projects not only provided immediate support in the form of safe spaces, structured activities and psychosocial assistance, but also contributed to longer-term improvements in children's emotional resilience, social skills and sense of belonging.

POSITIVE RESULTS FOR CHILDREN AND CAREGIVERS

Parents and caregivers who participated in interviews and focus groups reported noticeable positive changes in children's behaviour, emotional state and wellbeing. They described children becoming more open, communicative and confident, showing improved emotional regulation and reduced anxiety, and rebuilding social ties after displacement or traumatic experiences. Many spoke about children looking forward to programme activities, viewing them as safe and enjoyable spaces where they could be themselves, make friends and receive support from trusted adults.



Rehabilitation camp "Everything will be Ukraine!" by "Law and Democracy": Improvements are reported for over 70% of children. Over the latest camp iteration with CRF support, anxiety levels for participant children decreased in 82% of cases. A sense of support and interaction increased in 85%. Feelings of loneliness decreased in 84% and sleep improved in 82% of participating children.

Caregivers also benefited from interventions that helped them better understand their children's needs and provided tools for supporting them at home. In several projects, parents' groups and counselling sessions offered safe spaces for adults to share experiences, receive guidance from psychologists and social workers, and reduce their own feelings of isolation or helplessness. This dual focus on children and caregivers aligned closely with CRF's intention to strengthen resilience at the family level rather than supporting children in isolation.

CSO staff and volunteers emphasised the importance of trauma-informed and rights-based approaches that underpinned project design and implementation. Even where resources were limited, organisations found creative ways to make spaces more accessible and ensure that no child was turned away solely because of their background or status.

EFFECTIVE USE OF RESOURCES AND PARTNERSHIPS

From an efficiency perspective, the case studies showed that partner-CSOs used CRF resources prudently and strategically. Organisations often complemented CRF grants with their own in-kind contributions, volunteer time and partnerships with local authorities, schools, social services and even other CRF grantees. This allowed them to reach more children than would have been possible with grant funds alone and to integrate project activities into broader community support systems.



Art therapy at the heart of "Save Ukraine" approach to recovery of children: In CRF Phase II, "Save Ukraine" supported 321 children and 205 adults. Among children in group therapy, 70-80% were showing signs of developmental or educational delays. Art therapy and group psychology have proven to be effective in helping children become more socially active and engaged with multiple individual stories featured in the full report.

The organisations made thoughtful use of the flexible funds to respond to emerging needs. For example, some invested in essential materials and equipment for child-friendly spaces, while others used flexible funds to adapt interventions to new locations or to ensure continuity of support during periods of heightened insecurity. The ability to adjust budgets within agreed parameters was repeatedly cited as a key strength of the CRF model and its delivery through trusted CAU experts with IA approval and oversight.



A partnership between RCHR, “Save Ukraine” and “Mom Plus Me”:

RCHR as a human rights partner for children's rights and restorative justice works closely with other actors. Where RCHR provides expert legal support, its partners offer direct access to children and long-term rehabilitation services. This synergy ensures more holistic care for affected children. RCHR works directly with two CRF partners – “Save Ukraine” and “Mom Plus Me”. It has conducted several children's rights trainings for beneficiaries of both partner-CSOs.



“Mom Plus Me” aiding a unique category of children:

“Rooms of Happiness” is a unique “Mom Plus Me” initiative funded by CRF that supports children removed from abusive homes who, despite being physically healthy, can spend 6 to 9 months in hospitals that are not equipped to care for them and often see them as a burden. The “Mom Plus Me” team and volunteers are often the only adults who regularly spend time with these children, creating play spaces, providing toys, clothing and therapeutic sessions, including art therapy, to help them rebuild trust in adults and feel safe again. “Mom Plus Me” is the only organisation in Ukraine working with this extremely vulnerable group.

Despite inflation and price fluctuations, the organisations managed to deliver planned activities, sometimes by identifying more cost-effective vendors or renegotiating arrangements. The evaluation did not find evidence of systemic inefficiencies; rather, it identified examples of careful stewardship of funds in a very difficult economic environment.

ORGANISATIONAL LEARNING AND SUSTAINABILITY AT PROJECT LEVEL

The case studies also show how project implementation acted as a learning laboratory for organisational growth. Through CRF-funded projects, CSOs:

- Tested new models of service delivery, such as group-based psychosocial support, creative art therapy, or integrated services that combined child-focused activities with support for caregivers.
- Strengthened internal coordination between programme staff, psychologists, social workers and volunteers.
- Built or deepened relationships with local schools, municipalities and service providers, positioning themselves as trusted partners in child protection and resilience.

Many organisations reported that they planned to continue key project elements beyond the end of CRF funding, either through applications to other donors, integration into their core programmes or continued collaboration with local authorities. In this way, project-level results were fed directly into broader CRF objectives of sustainability and longer-term impact.

AREAS FOR FURTHER STRENGTHENING UNDER PILLAR 2

While the overall picture from Pillar 2 is very positive, several cross-cutting learning points emerged:

- In some case studies, the compressed timeframe of Phase II limited the extent to which outcome-level changes could be documented and analysed. Additional time between the end of OD activities, project completion and final reporting would make it easier to capture and evidence deeper outcomes.
- Partners identified a desire for more systematic outcome harvesting support, particularly in relation to documenting stories of change and translating them into learning that can be shared across the network and with other donors.
- Staff wellbeing and psychological support for those working daily with children in distress was a recurring theme. While some organisations had access to supervision or support, others expressed a need for more structured, funded staff-care arrangements.

As noted before, these are areas where an already successful project portfolio could be taken further.

PILLAR 3. **VALUE OF THE PROGRAMME AND DISTINCTIVE FEATURES**

Pillar 3 focused on how partner-CSOs perceived CRF Phase II, especially in comparison with other donors, and on what made the programme distinctive in the Ukrainian landscape. It drew on an online survey, focus groups, individual interviews and interactive exercises at the Uzhhorod learning event on 23 and 24 September 2025.

Overall, the evidence analysed under this Pillar suggests that CRF Phase II was the right intervention, at the right time and with the right focus. Partner-CSOs consistently highlighted a strong fit between CRF priorities and their own mission and work with children and families affected by war.

How satisfied are you overall with your organization's participation in the second phase of the CRF?

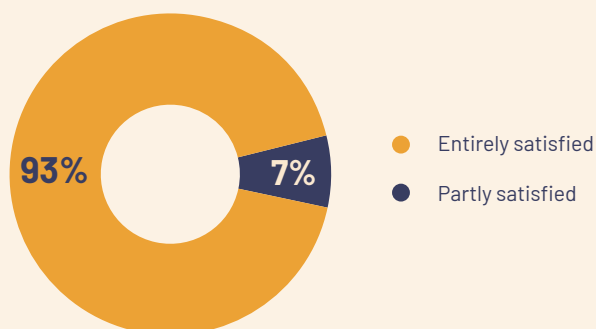


Figure 1: The partner-CSOs report almost universal full satisfaction with the CRF Phase II as a programme

PERCEIVED VALUE AND SPECIAL FEATURES

Survey data and consultations indicate that CRF's added value lay in several interlocking features:

- A trust-based, partnership-oriented relationship between the CRF team and grantees. Partners almost universally emphasised the programme's humane, respectful and responsive communication style, which helped them feel supported rather than scrutinised.
- A holistic support package that combined financial resources with OD, mentoring, informal advice and flexible funds. This mix is relatively rare in the Ukrainian donor landscape and was highly appreciated.
- A clear thematic focus on children's resilience and wellbeing that resonated strongly with partner-CSOs and enabled them to deepen or expand their work in this area.
- The emphasis on Ukrainian expertise, both within the CAU team and among trainers and thematic experts built trust and ensured that support was grounded in local realities.

Partners commonly rated CRF equal to or better than other donors on dimensions such as communication, flexibility, understanding of context, integrity and value for money. Many respondents reported that CRF had contributed substantially to their long-term capabilities in project design, MEL and engagement with other donors, and that they felt very or rather confident they could sustain key gains beyond the grant period.

Satisfaction with CRF Phase II was almost universal. All respondents expressed keen interest in participating in any future CRF phases, and no organisation indicated that it would abstain from doing so.

LESSONS AND IDEAS FOR FURTHER GROWTH

Alongside this very positive picture, partner-CSOs shared some practical suggestions for making any future phase even stronger. These largely concerned programme architecture and learning processes rather than core design:

- A recurring theme was the desire for more structured networking and peer-learning opportunities. Given the diversity and quality of the cohort, partners felt that more regular, well-facilitated spaces for sharing methods, tools and experiences could have added further value.
- Respondents suggested further smoothing the scheduling of OD activities, with more advance notice and better alignment with peak periods of project delivery.

- Some partners saw scope for clearer and earlier guidance on reporting formats, procurement rules and tranche schedules, to avoid strain toward project completion.
- There were calls for modest adjustments to rules governing eligible costs, including the flexible fund, to allow strategic investments in areas such as fundraising, and specialist expertise for programme design.

In the view of partner-CSOs, CRF has set a high standard, and the suggestions are intended to help it continue to evolve and remain at the forefront of good practice in supporting CSOs working with conflict-affected children.

4. SUGGESTIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND PROPOSALS

Based on insights from all three Pillars and the comprehensive recommendations in the main report, the following list highlights ten key areas where CRF can further strengthen its already solid foundation. These suggestions, recommendations and considerations are presented without ranking.

Local leadership and expertise. The CRF implementation team should continue to anchor the programme in strong Ukrainian expertise. Retaining highly qualified Ukrainian professionals at the centre of design, delivery and OD support will maintain the high level of trust and contextual relevance already achieved. This balance between international standards and Ukrainian grassroots leadership in implementation is a key ingredient of CRF's success and should be preserved and further nurtured.

Application and selection process. The CRF architecture could be made even more robust by refining how projects are solicited, co-designed and selected. An open-call-based staged process, where initial concepts are screened and a smaller number are then co-developed with focused mentoring, would allow better use of limited staff time. Using an independent expert panel (Advisory Expert Council or similar) to score compliant proposals and jointly reviewing recommendations with donors would help share responsibility for choices and reduce reputational risk.

Human-rights-based framing. The programme is already sufficiently framed in terms of GESI. It could further benefit from positioning more explicitly within a broader human-rights-based approach (HRBA). Making use of accessible HRBA guidance and tools would help partners analyse power, participation and accountability in their work with children and caregivers. It would also allow CRF to frame results in a way that resonates with a wider set of donors that explicitly prioritise HRBA, potentially broadening future funding options.

Evolving the flexible fund. The good practice of limited but not insignificant flexible funds should be retained, and their use purposes should be expanded strategically to support long-term sustainability. Allowing carefully framed use for activities that help generate future funding, such as targeted online advertising or fundraising support, and project design services from external vendors would increase the developmental value of this instrument. Clear exclusions and simple safeguards can preserve accountability while giving CSOs more room to invest in their resilience.

Grant disbursement and cash flow. The grant disbursement model could be fine-tuned to ease cash flow pressures while preserving accountability. CRF could discuss reducing or designing tiers to determine the share of the final withheld tranche and, for very small grants, consider a two-tranche scheme that would help smaller organisations that do not have financial reserves. These adjustments would maintain performance incentives while making participation more feasible for a broader range of CSOs.

Early organisational development overview. Grantee experience could be further improved by presenting the full OD architecture and setting clear expectations of the workload and commitments from partner-CSOs at the outset. Providing a clear overview of OD themes, formats and indicative timing during the initial orientation (induction meeting) would help organisations plan staff workloads and engagement. This would also underline that OD is a strategic investment in organisational resilience rather than an optional add-on.

Organisational development waves, timing, and pacing. The implementation team is encouraged to retain and refine the wave-based structure of OD delivery. Organising OD into a limited number of waves and avoiding a concentration of activities during peak delivery months would reduce overload for CSOs and trainers. Starting trainer procurement early and drawing on CRF-implemented OD scans to prioritise themes could support a gentler and more strategic pacing.

Outcome harvesting and timing. To capture deeper outcome-level change, timing and learning tools could be adjusted and complemented by outcome harvesting. Building in a short buffer between the last OD activities and final narrative reporting would give organisations time to apply new practices, observe and capture results. A light outcome harvesting exercise several months after Phase II end (potentially built into Phase III) would help identify significant changes that standard end-of-project reporting might miss.

Three-channel organisational development model. The OD component could continue to develop along three complementary formats that move from knowledge to practice. Combining structured training with individual consultations and coaching for learning-by-doing microprojects would support both understanding and application. This practice-oriented element would make it easier to demonstrate how OD support translates into observable organisational change.

Systematic outcome evidence. The CRF team may wish to make the documentation of outcome-level cases an explicit part of thematic OD experts' roles. Asking each expert to record at least one concrete outcome case per CSO, especially where learning-by-doing microprojects are involved, would systematise emerging good practice. This would give CRF and its donors a clearer, programme-wide picture of how support is contributing to real-world change for children, caregivers and organisations.

5. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Taken together, the findings from all three Pillars lead the evaluation team to a clear conclusion: **CRF Phase II has been a highly successful programme that provided the right kind of support at a critical time for children and caregivers in Ukraine.** It did so while significantly strengthening the capacity, resilience and confidence of the CSOs that serve them.

CRF Phase II combined grant support with a carefully designed OD component, flexible funds and close accompaniment from an implementation team that understood both international standards and the Ukrainian context. Partner-CSOs almost universally expressed full satisfaction with their participation. Many credited CRF with helping them improve internal systems, become more competitive in applying to other donors, and deepen the quality and inclusiveness of services for children and families affected by war.



CRF support beyond funding – such as mentoring, OD, experience-sharing and informal advice – was rated “extremely useful” by 10 organisations and “mostly useful” by the remaining 5

The programme was implemented in extraordinarily demanding conditions, yet it maintained integrity, flexibility and a child-centred focus throughout. Security threats, currency instability, staff shortages and constant disruptions did not prevent CRF from fulfilling its aims. Instead, they underscored the importance of the support it provided and highlighted the commitment and adaptability of both the implementation team and partner-CSOs.

The evaluation, therefore, sees a strong case for continuing and expanding investment in the CRF model.

Subject to funding, extending the duration of support and, where appropriate, increasing the level of flexible and potentially institutional funding would enable partner-CSOs to consolidate gains, plan strategically and continue providing high-quality, inclusive services to conflict-affected children and their caregivers.

The suggestions for refinement presented in this Summary Document and in the main report are offered in the spirit of partnership and continuous learning. They are designed to help CRF build on its achievements, deepen its impact and further strengthen Ukraine's civil society ecosystem in support of children's resilience.

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The opinions, conclusions or recommendations expressed in the report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of Integrity Action, Crown Agents Ukraine, or of the agencies, institutions or entities funding the Children's Resilience Fund (CRF) Phase II.

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- Boyarka Community Foundation
- "Charitable Foundation "MOM plus ME"
- Charitable Foundation "Save Ukraine"
- Charitable Foundation "SOS Civil Defense Headquarters"
- Dignity Online
- Early Birds
- Emmaus
- Family Center "You Too"
- "Hope Worldwide Ukraine" Charity Foundation
- International Bridge
- International Charitable Organization Roma Women's Fund Chiricli
- Regional Center for Human Rights
- Regional Public Charitable Foundation "Law and Democracy"
- Renewal of Ukraine ICF
- Women's Power

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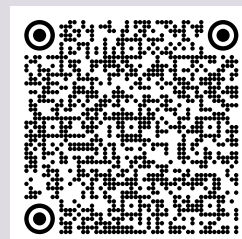
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<https://www.integrityaction.org/what-we-are-learning/learning/evaluation-strengthening-csos-in-ukraine/>



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