

This is not a project; this is our life.

EVALUATION REPORT

External evaluation of the project “Empowerment of women with disabilities in Central Asian countries”

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1. Executive summary

The evaluation of project “Empowerment of Women with Disabilities in Central Asian countries” was conducted between December 2022 and March 2023. The evaluation is based on a desk review of 43 documents, 41 face-to-face and online interviews in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Finland as well as an anonymous online survey for summer school participants where 91 applicable responses were acquired, forming a representative sample of approximately 30% of summer school participants in the years 2018-2022. Results of the initial desk review were presented to the project partners in January 2023 and a draft evaluation report in early March. One of the consultants conducted an 8-day field trip to Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan to interview project beneficiaries, partner organizations’ staff and stakeholders in February. The results of the analysis are centred around the impact of the summer school activity, the project management capacity of partner organizations and the sustainability of the project. The report is concluded with recommendations to improve the efficiency and sustainability of the project.

The project and the summer school activity in particular has had a profound impact on the lives of persons with disabilities. The most significant changes are psychological; individuals’ self-esteem and self-confidence has changed for good. However, the project’s original focus on empowerment of women with disabilities has been diluted and the three Central Asian partner organizations do not have a shared view on the relevance of women-specific work. The decision to open the summer schools for both women and men is not based on solid analysis nor have the gendered impacts of this change been considered. Generally, the impact of the summer schools goes beyond the summer school participants but the wider impacts on the disability movement are less clear.

Participant data collection practices and processes require streamlining and standardization; standardization is also needed on the concept of the summer school in general to create a shared understanding of the activity across the three partner organizations.

The project has not evolved much during the nearly two decades of implementation and when changes have de facto taken place, detecting them or their justification in project documentation is difficult. The project’s results framework is based on the Disability Partnership’s programme results framework which does not capture the project’s original logic, losing relevant nuances and impacts on country level. The project reporting does not capture the project’s impact nor describe project management and implementation accurately. Data collection and management processes are time-consuming and inefficient and document management and storing are disorderly. Better knowledge management would improve the project’s efficiency and facilitate evidence-based advocacy. – The financial management practices are satisfactory in all partner organisations; however, financial risks and vulnerabilities are not sufficiently considered in financial planning or risk management processes. There is also a need to reassess budget allocation for administrative and programmatic work.

The flexible, programme-based funding provided by Threshold Association and Disability Partnership is a key success and sustainability factor that has allowed the long-term development of these organizations but on the other hand it has created donor dependency that increases vulnerability. The strong local ownership and committed leaders with a strong sense of mission are the driving force of the project, but there is a risk for work to become personified, rather than institutionalized. The coordinators provide collegial support for each other, but the Central Asian Network has potential that could be utilized more efficiently.

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the dynamics of the Central Asian Network making it less active than it was during the previous project phases.

Based on the findings it is recommended to improve the project's efficiency by refocusing the project, improving data collection and information management and building capacity in results-based management. In order to improve sustainability, it is recommended to strengthen the partner organizations' understanding on gender analysis and gender mainstreaming, expand the funding base, build capacity on evidence-based advocacy, enhance international networking, collaborate with regional research institutions and academia and to ensure a future generation of leaders for the disability movement.

2. Introduction: What is this report about?

This report represents findings of the external evaluation of the project “Central Asian Women’s Empowerment project in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan & Tajikistan”. The evaluation was conducted between January and March 2023 by a two-person group of external consultants.

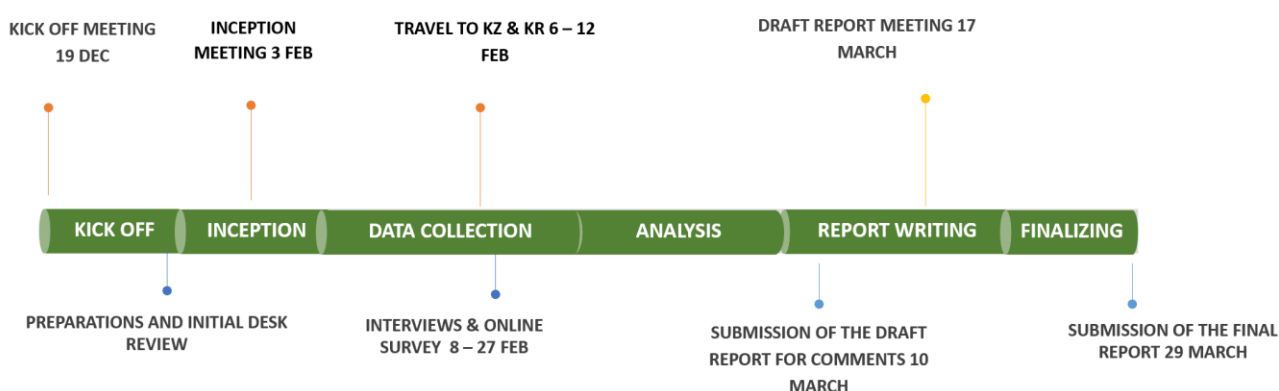
The objective of the evaluation was to get external understanding of the project and its performance. The main objectives of the evaluation, by assessing the implementation and impacts of the past phase, as stated by the Terms of Reference (ToR) were twofold:

- 1) Assessing the **impact of the summer camp activity**. What has been the impact of the project for the summer camp participants (women with disabilities), and
- 2) Providing **clear and actionable recommendations for changes** that can be made to strengthen the efficiency and sustainability of the project and its implementation during the current 2022 – 2025 programme period.

Following this introductory section, this report briefly describes the methods and the evaluation process, followed by the main section presenting the key findings of our analysis. The last section includes a brief assessment of the identified strengths, weaknesses, risks, and opportunities of the project, and provides our concrete recommendations on the steps that would strengthen the efficiency and sustainability of the project during the current implementation phase.

3. Methods: how did we do it?

PROCESS TIMELINE



The evaluation process consisted of the following phases: inception, data collection, analysis and the report writing. It was carried out by using a mixture of methods including a desk review, semi-structured stakeholder interviews, and an online survey. The methods applied in the process are described in detail in the following sections.

3.1 Desk review

The desk review included a critical analysis of the key documents, including relevant programme documents, implementation guidelines, and the previous evaluation report of the project at its early stage (2009). The desk review also covered analysis of the current results management frameworks, indicator frameworks, budgets, and annual reports. The comprehensive list of documents reviewed was compiled by consultants based on documents provided by the Threshold Association. The detailed list of documents is provided as an annex to this report.

3.2 Semi-structured stakeholder interviews

As part of the evaluation process, the consultants conducted a total of 41 semi-structured interviews with various project stakeholders in Finland, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan. Interviews in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan were conducted mostly face-to-face during a 6 working days long field trip, while the interviews in Tajikistan and Finland were conducted online.

The interviews were primarily conducted to collect views and information of Ishtirok's, Ravenstvo's, and Shyrak's staff members who are responsible for the coordination, accounting, and information sharing/communications of the Central Asian project. Interviews were also used for collecting information and views of the representatives of relevant local civil society organisations (CSO), organisations of persons with disabilities (OPD) and relevant government representatives, as was identified by the project coordinators in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan.

In the Central Asian countries, a number of participants of the summer school activity, both women and men, were interviewed in order to understand the impact of the summer schools on their lives. Majority of the project staff and participants' interviews were conducted with the help of a local interpreter.

In addition, key stakeholders in Finland, such as the key representatives of the Threshold Association (Kynnys ry) and Disability Partnership (DP) Finland (Vammaiskumppanuus) were interviewed together with an important implementation partner Family Federation of Finland (Väestöliitto). The recommendations for the persons to be interviewed were provided by the Threshold Association's project coordinators and by the coordinators of the partner organisations (POs), e.g., Ishtirok, Ravenstvo and Shyrak.

This method primarily contributed to questions around the project's impacts, effectiveness, sustainability, and coherence. The interviews and discussions were also used to identify the unique strengths, weaknesses, risks, and opportunities of the project.

These interviews were conducted with the use of pre-structured key questions, however the sessions allowed for flexibility and adaptability to cover topics and specific questions that arose on the spot.

3.3 Most significant change (MSC) -methodology

The evaluation team applied MSC techniques. This methodological approach was primarily used for tracking the most significant change for the women who had participated in the summer schools, and to identify the project's most important changes or impacts to the respective national disability movements. This method also contributed to collecting information of the project's long-term impact and sustainability. Most of the interviews were conducted individually, while a few interviews were conducted in a group of two to three participants.

Stories were collected through questions such as: “During and after the summer camp, in your opinion, what was the most significant change that took place for you / for the participants?” or “What are the most significant skills you have acquired through this project?” or “what is the most important thing you have done as a result of the summer camp?”.

Prior to interviews, all participants were provided with a brief introduction to the purpose of the interview and the evaluation process, and a permission to take notes and in some cases to record the conversations, was secured.

3.4 Online survey

As a complementary method, data about the impacts of the summer schools was also collected with an anonymous online survey. The most significant change methodology was additionally extended to this survey. The survey was conducted with Google Forms and was sent to summer school participants in by the project coordinators in each country using different channels such as WhatsApp in February 2023. The survey was translated into Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Tajik and Russian by the project coordinators. Some participants to the online survey are illiterate, therefore, in these cases the project coordinators supported the answering process.

The survey questions were closed-ended multiple-choice or checkbox questions except for one open ended question. The aim of the survey was to ensure that this evaluation has representative data of the most significant changes and impacts of the summer schools over the years.

A total of 101 responses were received by the deadline (27 February 2023) out of whom 91 had participated in the summer schools within the evaluation period starting from 2018. Out of the 91 applicable survey participants, 18 were from Kazakhstan, 47 from Kyrgyzstan and 27 from Tajikistan.

Of the participants, 77 were women, 11 were men and three identified as other. Responses covered the whole evaluation period (2018-2022): 10 participants in 2018, 15 participants in 2019, 18 participants in 2020, 14 participants in 2021 and 34 participants in 2022. In other words, majority of the survey results are from the year 2022. The largest age-group of the survey participants was between 25 – 34-year-olds (53 responses), the second largest between 18 -24-year-olds (19 responses). Third group 45–54-year-olds (13 responses), 55–65-year-olds (6 responses).

An exact number of summer school participants was not reported in project documentation. Based on the number of summer schools (one in each country every year) and an average of 20 participants in each group it can be estimated that roughly 300 persons have attended the summer schools in 2018-2022. Approximately every third—30%—of the summer school participants responded to the survey making it the sample representative, although the majority of respondents are from 2022.

The survey questions (English version) are included as an annex to this report.

Partner Organisations (PO) use the term summer schools instead of summer camps; in this evaluation report we have therefore decided to use the terminology that is familiar to the POs.

4. Results: What did we find?

This section presents the key findings of the evaluation. The evaluation’s main focus was on assessing the impact, efficiency, effectiveness, sustainability, and coherence of the project. Of these, the main focus was on assessing the impact, especially that of the summer camps, and

the sustainability of the project results, as well as the sustainability of the POs to operate in the long run.

The findings, therefore, will primarily be presented according to these elements, responding to the key research questions. Since many of the research questions are interlinked, there are elements that are addressed in several sections or sub-sections of the report.

In the first results section we are focusing on the impacts of the project at an individual but also societal level. The next section focuses on efficiency, under which we are assessing elements related to the project design, management of financial and other resources as well as data and knowledge management. The third section presents findings related to the project's sustainability, and the last section of the report provides information about the project's effectiveness and coherence.

The research questions and the evaluation matrix are included as an annex to this report.

4.1 Impact

Under this sub-section we are focusing primarily on presenting the findings regarding the impacts of the summer schools on the women with disabilities in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. According to the ToR, the focus of this impact assessment was limited to the previous and current implementing phases from 2018 to 2022. Evidence for these findings have been collected from selected project documents (annual reports mainly), participant interviews and the online survey.

Finding 1: The project reporting does not capture the project's impacts, and the concept of summer school concept is less standardized than expected.

The first observation regarding the impact is that based on the project's annual reporting, it is difficult to draw a coherent picture and an understanding of the overall impact this project and the summer schools have had. The results reporting is typically activity based, anecdotal, and there seems to be a lack of aggregated level of reporting, i.e., results are reported year by year and country by country and the added value of the regional network is not made explicit.

The concept of summer schools itself was found to be less standardized than expected. For example, while in Kyrgyzstan, the summer schools and the independent living schools were two distinct concepts, and the summers schools strictly for women with disabilities, in Kazakhstan and Tajikistan they were the same, and the schools open to both men and women alike. The length of summer schools varied between 3 to 6 days. Summer school programmes or agendas were not included in the evaluation data, so it is not possible to compare the content of the trainings conducted in the three countries.

Adding to the confusion, there are also other summer schools funded by different donors in two of the project countries. In Tajikistan, some summer schools are funded by the Family Federation of Finland, and in Kazakhstan by the government. While we have tried to ensure that we focus on analysing the impact of the summer schools that the Threshold Association is funding, it is impossible to exclude the potential impacts of the other activities to these specific findings. It was typical to the interviewed summer school participants that they had taken part in several trainings, and for them it was not always clear who might have been funding which activity.

Additionally, in the process of reviewing the documents, a lot of inconsistencies between different reports and reporting years were identified. This contributed to an added confusion and difficulty to form a comprehensive understanding of what the intended and actual results are. One example of this is the reported number of beneficiaries, which does not seem to

change during the years, the 1800 beneficiaries have been referenced in the reporting since 2009, which is fairly confusing.

4.1.1 Summer schools' impact on individuals

This section responds to the following research questions: How have the summer camps affected the lives of the women with disabilities who have participated in the camps 2018-2021? And what has changed in their lives?

Finding 2: Impact of the summer schools to individuals is profound.

Without the interviews, and the online survey, it would have been difficult to get on overall understanding of the relevance and impact of the summer schools.

Based on the stories heard in the face-to-face and online interviews, as well as the results of the online survey, however, the influence is unquestionable; the impact of the summer schools for the majority of the participants is significant - often fundamental and permanent in nature. Majority of the survey participants report that their life changed either entirely or significantly as a result of the training.

From the moment I participated in these camps, my life, my character, my attitude towards myself and the environment changed radically.

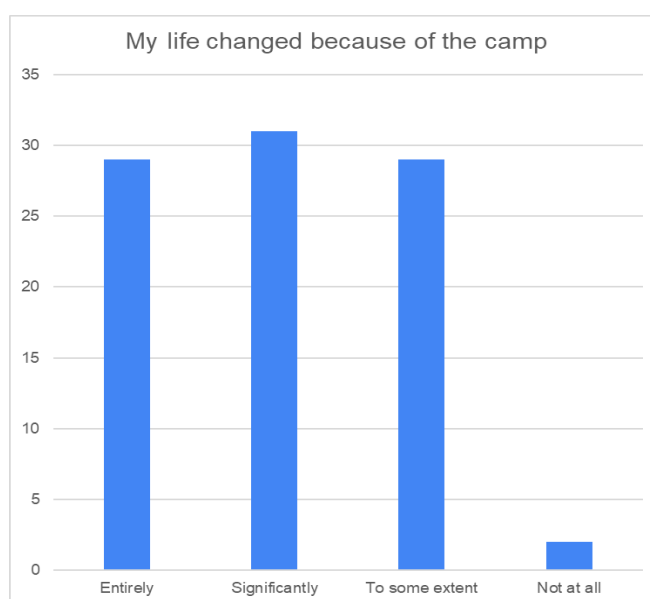


Figure 1. The way participants' lives had changed because of the summer school.

The changes that the participants experience during and after the summer schools are predominantly reported to be psychological. The most commonly self-reported changes include an improved self-esteem and - confidence.

I began to feel joy and happiness. I didn't feel it before.

The changes before and after the summer school are often described with stories about how these individuals used to stay at home and were afraid to talk to anyone, and how they after the training had enough confidence to connect and make contacts with new people, had enough confidence to start pursuing dreams, such as starting a family, continuing to secondary education, or establishing an organisation, as an example.

I didn't know anything before the camp, now I have a lot of friends and I started studying, I have gained confidence in myself, I wish there were more such camps.

Intellectual changes, such as changes in the participants' perception of disability, perception of one's own capabilities and possibilities in society, understanding that there are others also with disabilities, were typically reported changes. Acquiring social networks, new friends and in some cases new skills were also among the typical change-stories that the participants shared.

Finding 3: The most significant changes are psychological - individuals' self-esteem and self-confidence typically improves for good.

Especially in the face-to face shared stories, it was often highlighted how fundamentally the peer-support, and the fact that the participants were able to see role models with disabilities, had impacted their lives.



Figure 2. Most significant change reported on project level.

When asking about the concrete changes in the participants' lives as a result of the summer schools, the most common responses included employment and studies

Most important thing I have done after the training (s)

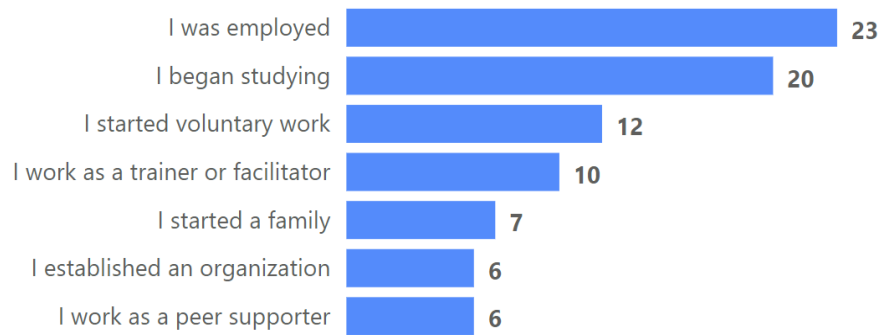
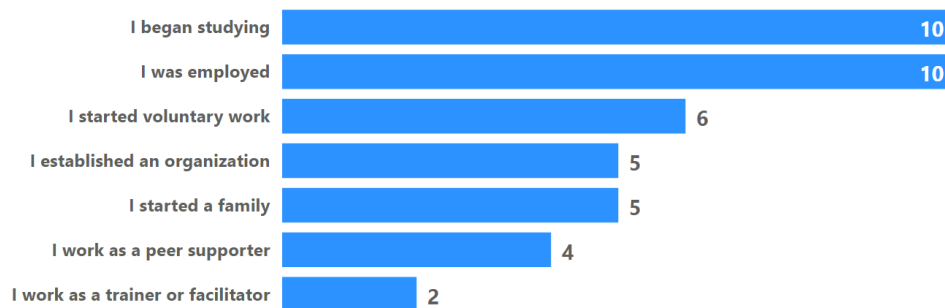


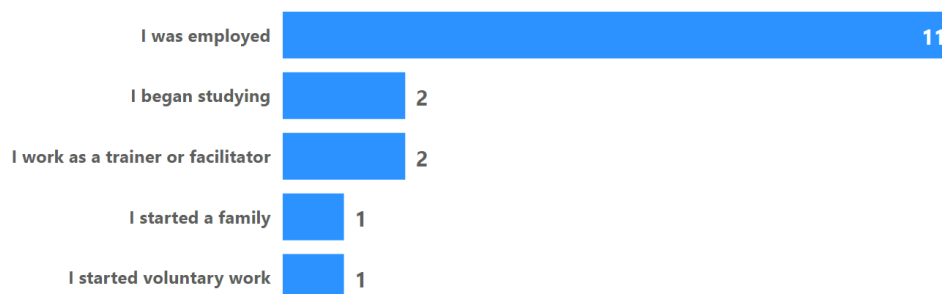
Figure 3. Most important thing I have done after the training reported on project level.

When disaggregating the data between the project countries, slight differences were detected.

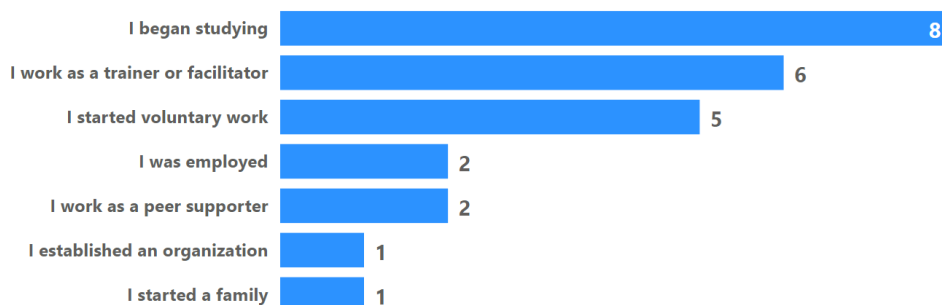
Most important thing I have done after the training(s) - Kyrgyzstan



Most important thing I have done after the training(s) - Kazakhstan



Most important thing I have done after the training(s) - Tajikistan



In Kazakhstan, with clear margins, the most common thing that has happened to the participants as a result of the trainings is employment. For Kyrgyzstan, employment and starting studies have been equally common. In Kyrgyzstan also working as a volunteer, starting a family, or establishing an organisation were also fairly popular changes. In Tajikistan, however, studying was most common together with volunteering and working as a facilitator. In Kazakhstan none of the respondents had established their own organisation, while in Tajikistan there was one (male), and in Kirgizstan there were five who responded having established an organisation of their own.

I became more confident; I began to respect myself. I made new friends and loved my life.

Now I work at the Union of people with disabilities... I am more involved in the life of the community of people with disabilities.

Based on the results of the survey and individual interviews, it is clear that the summer school concept is very successful and impactful. The summer schools' objective of empowering the individuals with disabilities is clearly achieved in majority of the cases, and summer schools change the individuals' lives profoundly.

I used to think that I was useless and weak, and then I refrained from many things, but after the camp I felt that I can do useful work in the society and in the family.

Finding 4: The focus on women's empowerment has been diluted and the POs' views around it are diverted.

On the other hand, there clearly is a disconnection between the actual changes and impacts, and what the project has been able to capture as results in the annual reports.

The consultants' task was to assess the impact of the summer schools to women with disabilities. While collecting the evidence for the evaluation it became apparent that the focus for gender equality or women's empowerment might not be as clear-cut as was presented in the ToR and the inception meeting in December: The summer schools have originally been organized exclusively for women with disabilities in all project countries, but it seems that around 2018 there has been a shift in the approach, and the summer schools in Kazakhstan and Tajikistan have been opened also to men with disabilities, and occasionally to family members without disabilities.

Based on the interviews of the project coordinators, the views on the importance of either having a women-only versus mixed gender schools (trainings) in these countries was surprisingly different: in Kazakhstan and Tajikistan it was considered a positive element to bring men to the trainings, while in Kyrgyzstan this was seen as risking the safe space for women with disabilities who more often than not have experienced violence or have traumatic or sensitive topics that might require women-only spaces.

The reasoning as well as the potential impacts of the change in the approach from women-only to mixed-genders, was enquired of all project coordinators and some of the local trainers or facilitators who themselves had also participated in the summer school. The views supporting this change were not based on any systematic assessment but seemed to be primarily based on assumptions and individual opinions.

Finding 5: Opening up the summer school concept for both women and men with disabilities is not based on solid analysis or assessment on the gendered impacts of this change.

While it may be very well justified to ensure that harmful masculine norms around gender-based violence and discrimination against women are being addressed with men, there did not seem to be a solid analysis, evidence, or an attempt to follow up potential or the actual impacts of this shift to the overall objectives and results of the project, or the impacts to gender equality and women's empowerment in particular. It is our concern that the focus of the project on gender equality and women's empowerment will be lost, or at least watered down unless there is an intentional effort to ensure, track and measure this objective.

In my opinion the Kynnys project should focus on women with disabilities.

I am against engaging men. Summer school is very specific, there are some sensitive issues that women don't want to disclose with men.

Before the summer school 2021 we found out that 80% of participants had experienced violence. We invited psychologist (in the summer school), she had different methods, girls became very open. They had fears but during the training they become fully open.

We made mixed school, because the men with disabilities stayed behind, it is more difficult for women to achieve their rights. In order to have the men not discriminating women, we started to work with men as well.

Girls' self-esteem increases, they use make-up and dresses when there are boys also, their self-esteem was increased more in mixed trainings.

The project related documentation also reflects the focus on women and gender equality inconsistently; in the project's human rights analysis, the focus on women with disabilities is explicit, while in the actual project activities as well as in the results framework and the respective indicators, it is much less evident.

The results framework that becomes as a standard framework from the Disability Partnership Finland, does not capture this dimension, and it may further dilute the original focus of the project. The very opposing views of this approach between Kyrgyzstan and the two other

project countries on the other hand also further underlines our concern that the evidence or justifications supporting this change in the approach might not be sustainable or justifiable.

4.1.2 Summer schools' wider impacts on communities and societies

This section primarily responds to the research question: What are the potential impacts for the wider community / local disability movement-building?

Finding 6: The impact of the summer schools clearly goes beyond the individuals but the wider impacts on the disability movement are less clear.

Looking at the wider impacts of the summer schools to the communities or the society, it is clear that the impacts of an individual's training seem to go beyond the individual's personal life.

Many reported that the relationship with their family members, such as their children or parents, had changed for better as a result of the summer schools and other trainings organized by the POs.

Many participants report becoming active members of their communities; They have either started volunteering in an organisation, started, or continued studying, got employed and in several cases have established their own organisation. Participants typically also start engaging more as volunteers, peer-supporters, facilitators, or mentors after attending these trainings. The role of newly established organizations of persons with disabilities and the national disability movement, is dealt in more detail under the section 3.4. on effectiveness and coherence

In conclusion, the impacts that are most likely sustain include the following:

- The internal and psychological changes in individuals' self-esteem, perceptions of oneself, as well as the intellectual changes regarding the understanding of disability, human rights, and sexual and reproductive health - and rights (SRHR)
- The external changes in the lives of women with disabilities, such as their studies, employment, their new families, independence, etc.
- Changes in the narratives around disabilities in communities and to some extent at the society level.
- Substance related and management capacity in the partner organisations and/or their staff as well as in some summer school participants and OPDs established by them.

4.1.3 Wider political and societal impacts

The Central Asian project's impacts for the wider society, its policies and laws are a contribution of a more complex combination of different project activities and networks at national level.

The summer schools have been able to build a so-called critical mass, or empowered individuals who have become active members in their communities, and in some cases have established new organisations. With the proliferation of organized persons with disabilities, as well as with the growing numbers of registered organisations, it has been possible for the project countries to mobilize political support, and demonstrate to the government, as an example, that persons with disabilities are not a marginal group of people.

Even though it has clearly supported the more organized movement building in each country, it is not entirely clear how influential or how well organized these OPDs individually and as

network(s) are. In addition, the overall operational landscape for the OPDs looks slightly different in each country. This is further elaborated in chapter 3.4.2.

Most of the political and legal transformations at national level, have been pushed under the project's third outcome on advocacy. As mentioned above, the results and circumstances concerning advocacy vary significantly from country to country: While in Kazakhstan the advocacy work is difficult because of the national political situation, in Kyrgyzstan the project actively implements public campaigns and advocacy towards the policy makers. Especially in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan advocacy through strategic networking and through building a profile as a thematic expert on violence against women with disabilities has been active by the key staff members. In Tajikistan, Ishtirok and some newly established OPDs have done advocacy side by side especially on accessibility of public spaces, conducting accessibility audits locally and basing further advocacy efforts on the audit results.

The project documents describe the outcome of advocacy as "Decision makers and governmental officers are engaged with disability issues" (project phase 2019-2021) and "Disability inclusion and rights are promoted in policy making processes and legislation in collaboration between OPDs and duty-bearers" (project phase 2022-2025). Especially the latter outcome is written in passive, and it does not require action from duty-bearers side to be fulfilled. Indicators for both advocacy outcomes and outputs are almost completely quantitative and focus on activities, such as the numbers of consultations, meetings, events, and campaigns. In the project results framework for 2022-2025, the advocacy output 3.2. "OPDs have increased skills to carry out advocacy work" seems misplaced and should rather be located under Outcome 1 which focuses on capacity building of partner organizations.

Impacts at the wider societal level that are likely to remain include:

- Changes within the national disability movement in terms of how the role of disability organisations is perceived.
- Law and policy reforms, especially the signings and ratifications of the CRPD and related national laws and decrees.

4.2 Efficiency

This subsection on efficiency focuses on presenting elements in the project design, management, resource allocation as well as information and knowledge management.

This section responds to the research questions on how well has the project been able to transform the available resources into the intended results? And are the resources allocated to the project sufficient, timely and fitted for the intended impact?

4.2.1 Project design and management

Finding 7: The project has not evolved much during nearly 20 years of implementation. De facto changes are difficult to detect in the project documentation.

The project design is largely based on the framework provided by Disability Partnership Finland. While the project's three outcomes are very relevant, they do not always adequately reflect the actual situation or some of the important nuances at country level, nor the project's original focus on the rights of women with disabilities.

On the other hand, the scope of the project seems to be spreading towards many different directions, and there might be a justified need to re-consider the core and the added value that this project can bring both nationally, regionally (Central Asia) and perhaps internationally. Re-assessing the core mission, objectives, methodology and the added value are also justified from the point of view that the project has been implemented for nearly 20 years without much

evolving. This also raises a question of whether and how the activities of this project have really been able to retain their relevance.

When looking at the annual project documents, and the programme documents for different implementation phases, the transitions from one project phase to the next are not very distinct. The project seems to have been implemented with the same formulae for decades. On the other hand, when we were able to detect shifts in the approaches or activities while interviewing stakeholders, it was difficult to backtrack the decisions or reasoning for those changes in the project documentation.

This appears as if the actual implementation and the project documentation live separate lives. For example, the cooperation with the Family Federation of Finland finished before the current project cycle but the project documentation does not reflect a change in summer school or training content or goals. In addition, one of the three project countries has strictly kept summer schools as a single sex activity for women because opening the activity for men would drastically change the nature of the activity, whereas at the same time two of the countries have opened this activity for both women and men during the ongoing and previous project phase claiming that the change has no impact on the content or the results of this activity. Similarly, project documents refer to Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan as members of Central Asian Network and project partners either in similar or smaller capacity to the three main partner countries and organisations. However, the Central Asian Network's connection to these two countries has been fading already prior to the evaluation period and completely cut during the current project period. This is not reflected in project documentation at all.

Changes in the approach nor justifications for such a change have not been documented. It also remains unclear for the evaluators whether the summer schools in terms of their content, are different in the respective project countries.

Finding 8: The current DPF-based results framework of the project does not capture all relevant nuances and impacts made at the country level.

It is our assessment that a lot of impactful implementation carried out at the country level is not ideally captured by the DPF-level results framework; at the same time we argue that the management structure that is "too far away" from the country level implementation seems to have led into a disconnection between some of the outcomes and respective results chains; the chains from activities to outputs, outcomes and impacts are not always consistent.

Examples of such gaps or disconnection include the following examples:

- The desk review documentation which covers some key documents from both project periods (2018-2021, 2022-2025) form a picture of a multitude of activities. However, key documentation for each project cycle alone is left with some gaps, for example the results matrix 2022-2025 does not connect project activities directly to project outcomes.
- Based on the annual reports, there seems to be a tendency to focus on reporting activities, rather than results or impact. For example: under capacity development results there might be a list of trainings that have been conducted, but not necessarily any information about the content of the training nor any assessment of what the impact of such trainings might have been.

Finding 9: Summer school participant data collection practices and processes require standardization and streamlining.

The beneficiary numbers seem to be relatively low compared to the project budget and the number of years that the project has been implemented. The beneficiary numbers are in fact lower than they were in 2009 at the time of the previous evaluation (then 1800 beneficiaries) but it was also difficult to gain a clear understanding of the exact number of project beneficiaries from the desk review documents. Beneficiary numbers are reported on an annual basis. Based on interview, survey, and desk review data many project participants take part in multiple activities and remain in the organizations' reach for a longer period of time. It is therefore unclear if the total beneficiary number of the project is the sum of these annual beneficiary calculations, or if the number of beneficiaries in each activity actually include the same individuals across different activities.

4.2.2 Financial resources and resource allocation**Finding 10: The POs' financial dependency on the Threshold Association's Funding increases vulnerabilities.**

The Programme Indicator Data sheets from 2020 and 2021 draw an overall picture of the donor portfolios of the three partner organizations. It is evident that for Ravenstvo and Shyrak, the role of DPF/Threshold Association's funding is essential, forming over 50% of these organizations' annual budget on each given year. It is difficult to form an exact analysis of the situation, as Abilis Foundation grant for Ravenstvo is reported in different ways in these documents and Shyrak's numbers are vastly different for all donors across these two documents.

For Ishtirok in Tajikistan, the DPF/Threshold Association funding has been smaller in share ranging between 9% and 17% over the evaluation period. However, over the evaluation period, the share has been increasing and according to the 2021 document, all of Ishtirok's funding comes from three different Finnish donors. This makes the organization's financial situation vulnerable as it is not only prone to risks from the general working environment, inflation and exchange rates but also vulnerable to any changes in the Finnish development policy and funding structures.

Finding 11: There is a need to re-assess budget allocations for administrative and programmatic work.

The financial resources of the project have grown by nearly 20% between the two project cycles evaluated, from approximately 83 000 euros to 100 000 euros. It is worth noting that only slightly over half of the project budget (51,5% in 2020, 52% in 2022, 54% In 2023) has been allocated for the implementation of project activities. A substantial share of the DPF/Threshold Association funding has been allocated for fixed costs such as office and maintenance costs as well as salaries of the three partner organisations. According to the evaluation interviews, DPF/Threshold Association is the only donor providing funding for these organizational costs.

Over the history of the project, supporting the disability movement of women with disabilities in Central Asia has been a core goal of the project. Therefore, the resources allocated for the partner organizations fixed costs should not be seen purely as administrative costs but rather as a project activity in itself even though investing in organizations' fixed costs does not show as a substantial increase in the number of beneficiaries.

The number of direct and indirect beneficiaries could perhaps be considered in relation to the budget used for project activities rather than the total budget of the project. On the other hand, those staff resources that are directly linked to project activities, could be budgeted under "Project activities" rather than "Personnel costs" to the extent their working time is directly dedicated to the implementation of project activities. In the draft budget for 2023 this has already been done for the costs of the project's PR manager.

Finding 12: The project's financial risks are not sufficiently considered in the risk management and financial planning.

In the project risk management matrix, the financial risk of inflation and exchange rates is described but both its likelihood as well as its consequence are considered low, and impacts are only described in relation to staff salaries and potential staff turnover. This is surprising, given that the risk matrix has been filled in late 2022 when global inflation rates have already risen strongly. The financial risks not only endanger staff salaries but have a drastic impact on partner organizations' ability to implement planned project activities when all implementation costs are increasing. Inflation and changes in exchange rates have stretched the project budget especially in Tajikistan.

In terms of financial planning, the project budget 2022-2025 has not taken inflation into account. For example, the staff salaries are planned to remain the same over the course of the whole project. However, the draft budget 2023 includes substantial increases in staff salaries.

KG/Ravenstvo	Monthly salary, total 2022	Monthly salary, total 2023	Change in salary (%)	Working time 2022 (%)	Working time 2023 (%)	Change in working time (%)	Real change in salary (%)
Contant person	300	370	23 %	80	50	-38 %	97 %
Accountant	300	330	10 %	80	60	-25 %	47 %
program coordinator	300	300	0 %	80	50	-38 %	60 %
Personal assistant	280	300	7 %	100	50	-50 %	114 %
PR manager	110	180,8	64 %	80	50	-38 %	163 %
KZ/Shyrak							
Contact person	300	350	17 %	50	30	-40 %	94 %
Accountant	230	200	-13 %	70	30	-57 %	103 %
TJ/Ishtirok							
Contact person	300	350	17 %	30	30	0 %	17 %
Accountant	110	100	-9 %	20	20	0 %	-9 %

Figure 7. Staff salaries and working time in 2022 and 2023. (Based on Annex 2 Project Budget 2022-2025 and Budget 2023 draft)¹

¹ After the delivery of the draft evaluation report on 10.3.2023 the partner organizations' coordinators provided this table with updated, corrected data. The updated table is included in Annex 5. The coordinators claimed that

All staff salaries have increased from 2022 to 2023 except for the salary of the programme coordinator in Kyrgyzstan whose salary has remained the same and accountants in Kazakhstan and Tajikistan whose salaries have decreased. At the same time with increase in salaries all staff members' working time in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan have decreased while those of staff in Tajikistan have remained the same. The increase in salaries and decrease in working time leads to exceptional raises in salaries ("Real change in salary").

Based on the interviews staff of partner organizations work more than the time recorded in different project planning documents. The changes in working time may therefore be explained by the attempt to find a technical means to balance the raising salary costs in the written budget whereas the change in actual working time may be smaller or non-existing. However, even if attention is only paid to changes in salaries, the changes are substantially different between staff members. As the raise in salary is explained by inflation and exchange rates, the increases should be the same or at least similar across each country.

Finding 13: The financial management practices are satisfactory in all POs.

The evaluation data shows that the overall financial management practices seem to be on a good level. The project's three accountants' duties cover not only financial responsibilities towards the project but project related responsibilities to the respective government authorities. The governmental requirements for financial reporting seem to exceed those of the project donor. The accountants are not part of the project's financial planning and planning of the resource allocation. Resource allocation seems rather technical; for many of the activities such as the summer schools, each country receives a third of the budget for the activity. This practice does not reflect the difference of financial realities of the project countries and does not ensure equal implementation of activities.

4.2.3 Information and knowledge management

In this sub-section we are presenting findings related to the practices and tools utilized for information and knowledge management. In the process of evaluating the project, we were trying to understand what kind of institutional memory the organisations have, and how well they are able to transform data into knowledge. In addition, we assessed what kind of tools are in use for both collecting, storing, and distributing data, and whether those tools are in optimal use, or if the tools that are being used actually enable the project to operate impactfully, sustainably, and efficiently.

Finding 14: Data collection and management practices are time-consuming and inefficient.

The key practices of collecting and analysing data about the summer schools and their impact to different individuals was enquired from each PO. While all of the organisations seem to utilize some tools, such as the pre- and post-training questionnaires, the opportunities of this kind of data collection have not been utilized effectively. It was clarified for the consultants, that for example the annual numbers of the summer school participants are manually harvested from the hardcopy registers and manually counted for the reporting purposes. This is an example of a practice which significantly consumes staff time-resources, and considerably

the data used for the table (from "Annex 2 Project Budget 2022-2025" in the desk study materials) included false data on staff working time which should have been corrected when the coordinating role of the project was shifted from Shyrak to Ravenstvo. This is indicative of the project management challenges: the change in coordination has happened prior to the start of this evaluation period (2018-2025) but the false data has been transferred over two project cycles 2019-2021 and 2022-2025. Similar unmatched data was found across the documents reviewed for the desk study, making it difficult to draw precise, reliable conclusions.

weakens the chances to backtrack and trace impacts across individuals and across different years.

Compiling the annual report.... Concerning the number of beneficiaries I would need time, one week, to calculate the numbers. We did not keep record of their (participants) progress, sometimes we phone them and they tell about their success of life. Women with disabilities come to the office regularly, we can see and keep track of their developments.

The practices of collecting the follow-up information of the participants were varying from ad hoc meetings with the participants, to following up the participants social media accounts to phone calls. While the data clearly is being collected, it is not systematically stored in any database where it could be further analysed and utilized for more systematic follow-up and for aggregated results reporting.

Information and knowledge management capacity that was identified to be weak in each PO, which has a significant impact on the efficiency of the project - how much time is invested, how well or not well they are able to plan their work, and on the other hand measure and report results and impact. This also hinders the systematic reporting and the reliability of it.

Finding 15: Better data and information management would improve the project's efficiency and facilitate strategic advocacy work.

The limited capacity in data collection and processing data into information on results and impact on both national and regional (Central Asian) level limits the project's success in other outcome areas; both advocacy and organizational capacity building would greatly benefit from strong information and knowledge management and ability to provide strong, coherent, and detailed evidence base for the rights of women with disabilities and the work of the Central Asian Network.

The ability to communicate impact and results backed up with reliable data on the hand, might significantly enhance opportunities of widening the funding base and finding new donors for different activities of the Network or the individual partner organizations. This would also be a critical element in ensuring a foundation for a strategic and impactful advocacy work nationally as well as across the region of Central Asia.

Finding 16: Project's document management and storing is disorderly.

Document hierarchy, management and storing seems unsystematic. There is also some overlap in the names of the documents and digital files, which contributes to confusion. Primary data collected from beneficiaries is stored as physical paper documents and data picked from those documents when it is needed instead of transferring data to a digital database.

Several documents did not match their file names, file names included information such as project codes from the previous project cycle. Some DPF templates did not include a space to mark the project code or the year in question which as a practice would require accuracy of the file names and creates confusion especially when documents are printed on paper. Files are transferred over email and each level of the project organization from DPF to Threshold Association and partner organizations seem to store their documents independently and

partially in staff members' personal files and email inboxes, not in a shared digital space where all parties would have access.

4.3 Effectiveness and coherence

This subsection analyses the effectiveness and coherence of the project in relation to the wider disability movement in Central Asia and the three project countries.

This section responds to the following research questions: to what extent has the project been able to support the disability movement and new-born organisations of persons with disabilities in their countries? And to what extent the project is in line and adds value to the other on-going interventions in the disability sector in the three countries.

4.3.1 Support to the disability movement and new OPDs

Finding 17: The coordinators provide collegial support for each other, but the Central Asian Network could be utilized more efficiently.

Based on interviews and document analysis, there seems to be no strongly unified disability movement in the Central Asian countries or on the regional level beyond this project. The Central Asian Network does exist, and the coordinators feel that they receive important support from each other through the project collaboration. However, it seems like what is described as the network, might be a group of colleagues who support and mentor each other. While this is important support, it is questionable whether the actual potential of the Central Asian Network is utilized optimally. Organizations of and for persons with disabilities exist beyond the Central Asian Network partner organizations, but especially in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, their approaches and foci differ from each other. This leads to all organizations working for their respective goals on national level, leaving the disability movement scattered. In Tajikistan, there are newer OPDs set up by Ishtirok's summer school participants, that are working as a more united front together with Ishtirok, forming a national network of OPDs.

The project partners claim to be the only organisations of persons with disabilities focusing on the human rights-based approach to disability, and the gender equality of women with disabilities, whereas other organisations of and for persons with disabilities are more focused in charity and distribution of aids and assistive devices. The partner organizations have been the first to raise the intersectionality of gender and disability into focus and the rights of women with disabilities are still mostly brought up by only these three partner organizations as well as by some of the new organizations set up by summer school participants.

On national level in all the three countries, the summer school activity has raised new disability advocates who have received capacity building in the form of thematic and technical trainings from the partner organizations after taking part in the actual summer schools. Based on the online survey and interviews this has led to summer school participants setting up their own OPDs in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. In Kyrgyzstan the new-born organizations are organizations of women with disabilities but in Tajikistan some of the organizations are profiled as organizations of youth with disabilities.

How the new Kyrgyz and Tajik organisations are organised and what their core function is, varies to some extent. In Tajikistan, Ishtirok considers some of these new organizations as peers and cooperates with them on joint advocacy actions on national level, especially on issues related to physical accessibility of public spaces and services. Based on the interviews, there is a national network of OPDs around Ishtirok which share an understanding of being part of a national network of OPDs working for some shared goals.

In Kyrgyzstan it seems that there are few very active disability rights advocates or organisations, including Ravenstvo. There are also newly established organisations that have been supported by Abilis Foundation, similarly to the situation in Tajikistan.

Based on interviews, the co-operation of disability movement in Kyrgyzstan is not very unified or coordinated at the moment. However, the organisations that may have varying perspectives and priorities, have been able to come together and push for the CRPD ratification. Since the ratification, the movement has not had any significant joint efforts and it has not been very unified.

In Tajikistan, the OPDs seem to be quite well organized. According to the interviews, Ishtirok's profile continues to be unique in the national context: majority of the organisations still focus on humanitarian aid and service provision, while Ishtirok's focus is on human rights of persons with disabilities and gender equality of women with disabilities. Ishtirok is also an active member of several networks and national coalitions, through which it can have access to government consultations. Ishtirok, similar to Ravenstvo, has been able to strengthen its expert position nationally, which has ensured that they are being consulted on matters around women with disabilities. Several of the stakeholder interview participants referred for example to the Network/League of Women with Disabilities in Tajikistan, through which they collaborate with each other and advocate for reforms towards the government. The Network also includes men or organisation run by men.

In Kazakhstan, newly established organizations did not come up in the data evaluated. Most of the ODPs encountered via interviews seem to be focusing on service provision, rather than in the disability rights work but it was not clear if these organisations were set up by summer school participants. Based on interviews, at least some organisations which Shyrak see as belonging to a national network of OPDs, do not identify with such a network themselves.

The advocacy activities of the project focus on the national level in the three project countries and the added value of the Central Asian Network on the partner organizations' advocacy does not show in the project documentation or interview data. It seems that the network has had a stronger role for each of the PO in the early days of the implementation, but while the POs have become stronger and more experienced, the meaning of the network has simultaneously been shrinking.

Disability Partnership Finland's programme's impact is defined as "Civil society is strengthened through vibrant organisations of persons with disabilities (OPD) who contribute to strong disability movement and promote the realization of human rights of people with disabilities in the Global South". However, supporting the disability movement or other OPDs outside of the implementing partner organizations is not described in the results framework of the project as neither outcome or output level objective, nor in the activities leading to those results. Both thematic and technical capacity building on human rights and different kinds of organizational management skills has been provided to women and men with disabilities as well as their family members outside the summer school scheme but the link of these activities to the wider disability movement is not described in project documentation. Outside of this project, some newly established OPDs have received funding from another Finnish donor, Abilis Foundation.

4.3.2 Added value to the disability movement

The victory has many fathers.

A stakeholder interviewee

It is clear that over the history of the project, each organisation has been able to influence the national laws and processes significantly. Kazakhstan signed the CRPD in 2008 and ratified in 2015, Kyrgyzstan signed in 2011 and ratified in 2019 but so far Tajikistan has only signed the Convention in 2018 but not yet ratified it. It is evident that the work of Ishtirok, Ravenstvo and Shyrak has contributed to the signing and ratification of the Convention. On the other hand, it is less clear and difficult to backtrack how much it is a result of these particular partner organisations only, as in each of the project countries these processes leading up to signing and ratifying the CRPD seem to have been enormous national processes where several different actors, and organisations of and for persons with disabilities have played a role. The project funding has been used to facilitate the national advocacy and lobbying for the ratification of the CRPD in the respective countries, and it is nevertheless clear that this project has had an important impact on the process.

Ratification of the CRPD has strengthened the operational, political, and legal environment for these organisations to sustain. It seems however that the ratification of the CRPD has led to slightly different situations in the respective countries: while in Kyrgyzstan the ratification seems to have ensured a more formal and institutionalized set-up for the collaboration of OPDs and the government and consultations, in Kazakhstan the operational space of OPDs seems to have been shrinking: Since the ratification, the government of Kazakhstan has started providing some funding via competitive procedures to the OPDs to deliver services. This together with the limited international donor funding available seems to have increased the competition between OPDs and on the other hand has discouraged them from advocacy and lobbying, which the government might not look favourably.

In Kazakhstan, the organisations in the region, the leaders in these organisations apply for social grants from the government, and above receiving them they become service providers. For advocacy among disability movement there is only Shyrak. Organisations know the government will not be happy about advocacy work.

In Kazakhstan, the ratification of the CRPD has led to more financing to disability services but many services are provided by giving funding for OPDs for service provision which has diluted the possibility of OPDs to keep a critical distance to the government and to act as an independent voice of the civil society and persons with disabilities. This shows also in the work of Shyrak in comparison to the work and role of Ravenstvo and Ishtirok in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. The advocacy activities are more limited and smaller in scale leading to marginal results in terms of duty bearers reached or policies changed through the project. In Kazakhstan, none of the 25 respondents of the survey had established their own organizations. Shyrak seems to focus strongly on outreach activities identifying women with disabilities and providing advisory services which support these women's access to existing disability services. However, Shyrak is not a service provider organization in itself.

4.4. Sustainability

Under the sub-section on sustainability, we are presenting findings and our views on one of the core research questions on how sustainable Ravenstvo, Shyrak and Ishtirok would be to continue their work for the disability rights and empowering women with disabilities in their societies after the ending of the project funding? And what elements have best supported sustainability?

The consultants' assessment of the sustainability was based on the understanding that elements required for sustainability and independent operational capacity include at least strong organisational and management skills, a reliable funding base, solid substance related

knowledge and skills as well as a society that enables or ensures conditions for operating on the cause.

Finding 18: Flexible, programme-based funding provided by DPF / Threshold Association is a key success and sustainability factor.

The flexible programmatic funding that Threshold Association and Disability Partnership Finland have provided for nearly 20 years has been elementary in ensuring long-term organisational development, impactful national advocacy, and development of the stronger national movement in each country. These results simply would not have been possible to achieve with funding allocated for short term projects with a narrower scope. This funding mechanism has enabled the POs and the Central Asian Network of women with disabilities to strengthen, and the successful summer school activity as well as some influential advocacy to take place. It has also allowed partner organisations to operate fairly freely without compromising the human rights agenda.

Especially in the early days, Threshold Association has been able to provide these organisations with a significant insight and inspiration to the ways of working and organizing themselves and as a result, Ishtirok, Ravenstvo and Shyrak were able to bring a unique, unforeseen agenda (human rights-based approach to disability and the independent living philosophy) to their respective countries. As pioneers to these approaches, they have had an opportunity to operate in a space that was not occupied by other actors.

Kynnys is more than partner or donor for us. We always thought that Kynnys was an example for the network, for the very beginning they provided us with the principles and the vision... The format of their activities was an example for us, which we are following still. For the first two years we thought the project is Kynnys,'s (project) but they showed us another type of partnership – they showed us the role of the owners. Kynnys wanted the local organisations to be the leaders in their own countries. Thanks for this we have an independent movement.

Finding 19: The funding from Finland is a mixed blessing: on one hand it has ensured the long-term development of these organisations, but on other hand it has increased vulnerability.

If the Threshold Association's funding is discontinued, the organizations' ability to continue their work in its current form is endangered. At the same time, the strong dependency on Finnish (DPF/Threshold and other Finnish organisations') funding also entails an element of vulnerability to changes in the Finnish political and funding landscape. It is crucial to start exploring possibilities to expand the funding base of the organizations as a means to strengthen sustainability. Nevertheless, finding external, especially international funding is difficult in Central Asia. Kazakhstan is no longer eligible for Official Development Aid (ODA) funding which has led to many international actors leaving the country. Some national funding for activities such as the summer schools has been available, but it is often competition based and allocated for a limited period of time and restricted to certain regions or districts. In Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, national funding opportunities are very limited.

Finding 20: Local ownership and leaders with a strong sense of mission are the driving force for this project, but there is a risk for the work to become personified, rather than institutionalized.

Strong local, country-level ownership has supported and ensured sustainability as well as the relevance of the project over the years. The committed leaders with a very strong sense of mission, whom most of them are also the founders of these organisations, are critical driving forces for this project and its successes. The continuity and sustainability of the project requires however that there is a systematic plan to breed and support the creation of future generation of leaders, both within each of the organisation as well as at the movement level. Based on the interviews and the desk review, we have got an impression, however, that while the organisations in each country have been able to institutionalize many managements related processes and practices, significant risks exist. For example, it appears that advocacy and relationships of the partner organisations and respective governments are at the same time strongly dependent on the charismatic individuals and their personal relations rather than an institutionalised arrangement. This was apparent in the situation of Shyrak, where a long-term director had suddenly left the organisation and it seems like the plan to ensure continuity of leadership, and some of the core activities of the organisation which include advocacy, had not been in place. A lot of capacity to influence and maintain regular dialogue with the government might have been lost with the change of leadership.

Finding 21: COVID-19 changed the dynamics of the Central Asian Network, and it has become less active as a result.

The global COVID-19 pandemic has also clearly changed some of the network level collaboration practices and dynamics between the POs, which seem to be having a negative impact to the possibilities of the project to leverage its resources and its full potential.

In the stories reflecting the pandemic related changes in the project, it was regularly brought up that less meetings and regional events than before the pandemic have been organized. On the other hand, all POs felt that their capacity to conduct online meetings has also improved and to that end, it has been easier to be in contact with the others. Our assessment is that the pandemic has substantially reduced communication and collaboration and some the operational practices of the Network. Without a deliberate effort to re-establish and reformulate the purpose and practices of the network, there is a risk that the network disappears and resolves, leaving communication of the three project coordinators as the only activity of the network.

In summary, the key elements supporting the sustainability of the project were found to be the flexible funding mechanisms, the strong local ownership, and the visionary leadership. At the same time, we found that there are risks involved in all of these elements, and the sustainability could not be solved solely by continuing business as usual. The preconditions for the project's sustainability and success in the future demand a shared understanding of the purpose and direction of the project; what it is meant to achieve, with what means and what resources? We also see that addressing the critical gaps in the data and information management capacity identified in each PO, is a fundamental element of sustainability.

5. Recommendations

Based on the evaluation data analysed, the unique strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and risks of the Central Asian Network's project were identified. As a deviation from the original

SWOT analysis', which is divided into external and internal factors, the following presentation classifies findings as internal strengths and weaknesses, external opportunities and both internal and external risks.

The recommendations focus on two main aspects: how to strengthen the efficiency and sustainability of the project and its implementation during the current 2022 – 2025 programme period.

5.1 Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and risks

Strengths

The key strength of the Central Asian Network is the local ownership and committed and strong leaders in each of the three countries. Their sense of human rights mission and a clear vision has been instrumental for the steady role Ravenstvo, Ishtirok and Shyrak have among the organisations of persons with disabilities in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Kazakhstan. The partner organizations have individual strengths; Ravenstvo has a unique political access and appreciation for their thematic expertise on the rights of women with disabilities and gender based violence, Kazakhstan has extensive and influential outreach activities that are able to identify marginalized women with disabilities and Tajikistan has been able to support new organisations of persons with disabilities to the extent that they have been partners working for shared goals across the country.

The summer school activity has had obvious impact on the lives of women with disabilities, on their self-esteem, role in families and communities as well as their opportunities in life in terms of education and employment. The Trainings of Trainers work has created long-lasting and sustainable peer support activities that cover regionally wide areas and are self-sustaining. Advocacy work has been influential especially in the national processes aiming at signing and ratification of the CRPD. The Network has potential to become a stronger regional voice and an international influencer if investments in advocacy capacity and international networking are made.

Weaknesses

Organizational capacity of the partner organizations and of the Central Asian Network in particular is embodied in specific staff members and volunteers. This makes the Network and the partner organizations vulnerable to changes in staff, especially in terms of project management and advocacy activities. Coordination and communication among the partner organizations is not as frequent and intense as it has been on some earlier project phases, leading to reduced learning from each other's practices and scattered views on the joint work and the added value of the Network.

The Network members vision in terms of women-specific work is blurred and the views of Ravenstvo differ from those of Ishtirok and Shyrak. Also partners in Finland see the project as a women's empowerment project which is also reflected in the project documentation. However, project activities (except for the summer schools in Kyrgyzstan) are mixed gender or directed at a wider audience. The arguments for mixed gender summer schools are not consistent and seem not to be based on proper analysis or an impact assessment.

Data collection as well as information and knowledge management capacity are limited in both Central Asian and Finnish organizations. Some labour-intensive practices such as participant data collection is handled on paper where it could easily be semi-automated on usual office

software such as Excel. Project documentation does not give an accurate picture of project management and implementation and the documentation includes errors in data that have been passed on in project documents over multiple years.

Shyrak in Kazakhstan has limited networks in the wider civil society. Networking with other civil society organisations is important, especially the women's rights movement. Ravenstvo has networks with both the women's rights movement as well as other civil society organisations and Tajikistan has some national networks outside the disability movement as well. Networking is essential for advocacy which could be further strengthened by systematic planning processes that would create organizational capacity and networks in advocacy.

Opportunities

The summer school or "school or independent living" activity has been very successful in empowering persons, especially women with disabilities and has potential for upscaling as has been done in Kazakhstan with additional, external funding. Possibilities of sharing the successful concept internationally could be explored. The summer school concept has potential to run as a candidate in Zero Project's Zero Conference where best practices for realizing the human rights of persons with disabilities are showcased and awarded. The Central Asian Network's summer schools would make an excellent candidate in the category "Independent Living, Political Participation, and ICT".

The possibility to link the summer schools more systematically to the national and regional (Central Asia) movement building could be explored; the summer school concept could be extended to a concept that trains future leaders and influencers. This would however require tailored capacity in advocacy and political influencing that the organisation don't currently have; it would need to be resourced externally.

The Central Asian Network could also collaborate with research institutions and academia regionally and internationally to produce and strengthen the evidence base for their national, regional and in the future also international work.

There is also potential in the relationship between the POs and the Disability Partnership Finland; the role of DPF could be focused on providing and facilitating networking opportunities and access to the wider international disability movement.

Risks

The largest internal risk is that the project has been led by the same key staff members for the duration of the project. This has led to substantial capacity building but also concentration of capacity in very few people. Any changes of key staff members, especially the project coordinators pose a significant risk of project management and implementation. Gaps in projects data collection practices and information management processes lead to inaccurate project documentation, causing insecurity and unreliability in project planning and conclusions drawn from project documentation.

Externally, one of the biggest risks is the funding base of the organizations focusing so strongly on the Disability Partnership Finland/Threshold Association funding, making the organizations vulnerable to shifts in the political and financial changes of the donor country Finland.

Locally and regionally the shrinking space of civil society and the current global inflation rates limit the operational space and strangle project implementation of the Central Asian Network.

5.2 Recommendations related to efficiency

Recommendation 1: Refocusing the project

Recommendation directed at Ishtirok, Ravenstvo, Shyrak, Threshold Association and Disability Partnership Finland

Refocusing the project and planning activities accordingly. The focus of the project in Kazakhstan and Tajikistan has shifted from promoting the rights of women with disabilities to promoting the rights of persons with disabilities more broadly, awareness raising or advocating for accessibility, ensuring persons with disabilities' access to existing governmental services (Kazakhstan) or cooperation of the national disability movement. A single project's scope cannot be this wide and therefore it is recommended to refocus the project on national level. Remarkable results such as the empowerment of women has been reached because of the very specific focus of the work and tailored activities.

It is recommended that Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan will be cut off from this project. Their participation in this project has been very restricted and in limited number of activities and is not realistic to expect the operational contexts to change in the near future.

Recommendation 2: Improve data collection and information management

Recommendation directed at Ishtirok, Ravenstvo, Shyrak and Threshold Association

For the purpose of being able to communicate the results more efficiently, it is highly recommended that the project would focus on strengthening the systems of data collection, and to ensure the indicators capture changes rather than conducted activities. Currently, the anecdotal reporting brings up genuine experiences and changes in individuals' lives that are representative of the project but fails to communicate the scale and extent of changes on project level across project phases. By reading the annual reports it is not possible to know if the individual examples represent few successful individuals among the project participants or whether most or all beneficiaries have experienced similar changes. Improving the efficiency of data collection and information management of results from the summer camp activity could be leveraged as a tool for more systematic and influential advocacy domestically and as evidence in future funding applications. It would also obviously save time that the project coordinators and staff are currently putting into collecting and counting the data for reporting purposes.

It is strongly recommended that the project would receive capacity building in designing data collection formats and in effective use of the office programmes, especially in how to utilize the Excel and Google Forms for the purpose of compiling and further analysing the project data, including the summer school participant registering and impact monitoring data. It is recommended that all coordinators and the social workers who are often involved in collecting the entry and follow-up data of the summer school participants in each partner organization would receive this training.

A shared database for sharing and storing key documents and results data, where all project coordinators and the Threshold Association and Disability Partnership Finland would have access, would support more systematic document storing and information sharing between the stakeholders. All project stakeholders in each project country as well as in Finland need to agree on common file naming conventions and folder structures. A cloud-based management

system could be in the Google Drive, or Microsoft SharePoint but only if sufficient IT support resource are available.

Recommendation 3: Strengthening the capacity in results-based management

Recommendation directed at Ishtirok, Ravenstvo, Shyrak, Threshold Association and Disability Partnership Finland

Results-based management of the project should be further strengthened. The current result chains from activities to outcomes are currently not consistent. Clarifying the results chains for each desired outcome could strengthen the strategic planning, management, and implementation of the project.

Related to the above, it was also noted that the annual planning for each project is focusing predominantly on activities rather than the desired outcomes or impacts. Shifting the focus from activities to impacts and ensuring that there are sound results-chains supporting the implementation, would strengthen projects overall management for results.

It is recommended that the POs, Threshold Association and Disability Partnership Finland would organize a joint, preferably face-to face, planning meeting, in which the added value, and the core objectives and intended impacts of this project are considered. Each of the results chains from activities to outcomes and impact indicators should be assessed to ensure their coherence and logic.

5.3 Recommendations related to sustainability

Recommendation 4: Strengthen understanding on gender mainstreaming and gender analysis

Recommendation directed at Ishtirok, Ravenstvo, Shyrak

Based on our assessment, we strongly recommend the project to focus on strengthening its understanding of gender mainstreaming and ensuring the gendered impacts of each of the project activities are recorded systematically. Otherwise, it is very difficult to see how this project could continue to be called a project focusing on women's empowerment, except for the project implementation in Kyrgyzstan.

Training on how to utilize gender analysis in data collection, designing activities and impact assessments, is recommended to the project coordinators.

Recommendation 5: Expanding the funding base

Recommendation directed at Ishtirok, Ravenstvo and Shyrak

Going forward, it is crucial to start ensuring broader funding base for these organisations; options for more diverse funding from national and international sources needs to be explored. Each country has a different conditions, challenges, and opportunities, so the suitable solutions should be local. However, sharing examples of possibilities for more diverse funding, as well as the possibility to apply joint funding at the Network level, should be investigated jointly.

Recommendation 6: Capacity building on evidence-based advocacy

Recommendation directed at Ishtirok, Ravenstvo and Shyrak

As the space for civil society is limited especially in Kazakhstan and Tajikistan, tailored capacity building on evidence-based advocacy is needed. Focusing advocacy on strategic networking as well as on building a profile as a thematic expert organization and establishing sustainable long-term linkages to government bodies and decision-making structures is a more subtle way of doing advocacy without creating tensions in the public.

Building and creating this kind of advocacy is a slow process and the expertise is easily personified, therefore external capacity building on advocacy for the whole organization would be necessary, preferably facilitated by someone who is familiar with the national context of each of these countries. As Kyrgyzstan has successful experience in this kind of advocacy, capacity building could be partially conducted internally within the network and further complemented by expert trainers from the international disability movement.

[Recommendation 7: Enhance international networking](#)

Recommendation directed at Disability Partnership Finland and Threshold Association

The Central Asian Network's work focuses on each national context of the partner organizations. The international dimensions of the project relate to the Central Asian project coordination and coordinating with the Finnish cooperation partners Threshold Association and Disability Partnership Finland. The Central Asian partner organizations would greatly benefit from connections to the wider international disability movement, especially the International Disability Alliance and their capacity building activities as well as other OPDs active on the UN level.

[Recommendation 8: Regional collaboration with research institutes and academia](#)

Recommendation directed at Ishtirok, Ravenstvo and Shyrak

It is recommended that CAN would actively seek collaboration with research institutes and academia, and to strengthen the evidence base with relevant research. This would be an opportunity to verify the successful models, such as the summer schools, also scientifically. Stronger evidence based could be used for more efficient advocacy and for seeking funding.

[Recommendation 9: Ensuring future generation of leaders](#)

Recommendation directed at Ishtirok, Ravenstvo and Shyrak

In order to ensure there will be a next generation of strong leaders with disabilities, it is recommended that the summer schools' concept would be used to further develop systematic training of young leaders. Focus on women with different disabilities should be prioritized in such movement building.

Annex 1: List of documents reviewed for desk study

The document list refers to the title of the document where there has been one. In the cases where the document title and file name differ significantly, file names are indicated in brackets. In cases where there has been no title in the document, the document is listed based on the name of the file.

Disability Partnership Finland

- Programme Budget 2022–2025 (Liite_ 5
c_VKO_ohjelmabudjetti_2022_2025_sopeutus_220120)
- DPF Programme Document 2022-2025

Project cycle 2018-2021

- CA Results Framework 2019-2021
- Project plan 2018 (CA Disability Partnership Project Plan 2019-2021)

2020

- CAS4021Ravenstvo DPF Programme Indicator Data 2020
- Cumulative Project Monitoring Sheet (CAS4021Ravenstvo Cumulative Project Monitoring Sheet 2020)
- Financial Report (CAS4005 Financial Report 2020)
- Independent Auditor Report (CAS4005 Ravenstvo Audit 2020)
- Project Annual Report 2020 (CAS4005 Ravenstvo Annual report 2020)

2021

- Auditor's report 2021
- CA Monitoring Report Template 2019-2021, Reporting period 01.02.2021-31.08.2021 (CA Monitoring Report 2021 Eng A UM)
- Cumulative Project Monitoring Sheet 2021 2802 U
- DPF Programme Indicator Data 2021 2802U
- Independent Auditor Report (Audit conclusions 2021)
- Project Annual Report Form 2021 (DPF Annual Narrative Report Form 2021 No 2 2022 2802 U)

Project cycle 2022-2025²

- Annex 4. Human Rights Assessment and Stakeholder Analysis (CAS4021 Annex 4 Human Rights Assessment and Stakeholder Analysis)
- CAS4021 Annex 2 Project Budget 2022-2025
- CAS4021 Annex 2 Project Budget 2022-2025 по годам ГК общий) последник
- DPF Risk Management Matrix Template
- Project Document (CAS4021 Project Document 2022-2025)
- Project Results Framework (CA4005 Annex 1 Results Framework)

2022

- Annual Financial Report Form 2022

² The file names in the desk study documents for project cycle 2022-2025 included project codes from previous cycles. The documents have been renamed on the 29 March 2023 in this final evaluation report as per request of the threshold Association.

- Audit Report 2022 CAS4021
- Baseline and target 09102022
- бюджет 2022 Казахстан
- бюджет кр 2022
- бюджет на 2022 Таджикистан
- DPF Project Results Framework 2022-2025 16.02.2023 UM
- DPF Results Framework 2022-2025 Baseline Collection 31102022
- DPF Results Framework 2022-2025 Results 2022
- Financial Report for the 4th Quarter September-December
- Financial Semi-Annual Report Kyrgyzstan January-April
- Financial Semi-annual report Kyrgyzstan May-August
- Project Annual Report Form 2022
- Project Results Framework CAS4021 (DPF Baseline Collection 1.6.2022 12 22 UM)

2023

- Budget 2023 draft
- Work plan 2023

Other documents

- Accessibility and empowerment of persons with disabilities (2018-2022)
- CENTRAL ASIAN NETWORK Jäsenistö
- Evaluation report by Hisayo Katsui 2009
- PO Ravenstvo 12092022
- Working hours and justification Ishtirok
- Working hours and justification Shyrak

Annex 2: Evaluation Matrix

Evaluation matrix			
Key research questions	Key interview questions or considerations to be analysed	Relevant stakeholders	Primary method
Impact			
How have the summer camps affected the lives of the women with disabilities who have participated in the camps 2018-2021?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What is the most significant change you experienced in the camp?• What is the most important thing you have done with the skills that you got in the camp?	Summer school participants	Semi-structure d interviews, online survey
What has changed in their lives?			
What are the potential impacts for the wider community / local disability movement-building?			
Efficiency			
How well has the project been able to transform the available resources into the intended results? The team will also consider the elements of management of the resources, and overall management of the project.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What kind of resources and skills each PO uses for planning, storing, and sharing information about the project implementation and – results?• How are the annual activities planned for each year?• What are the means of communication and how frequent is communication with partner organizations and the Threshold Association?	PO coordinators and accountants. Threshold Association, Disability Partnerships Finland.	Desk review, semi-structure d interviews
Are the resources allocated to the project sufficient, timely and fitted for the intended impact?			

Effectiveness			
To what extent has the project been able to support the disability movement and new-born organisations of persons with disabilities in their countries?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the role of the partner organizations and the Central Asian Network in the regional and national disability movement in these three countries? • What are the linkages between the newly established OPDs and the national movement? • How the partner organisations collaborate with the wider donor community in their respective countries? 	PO coordinators, project beneficiaries, DPO/NGO representatives	Desk review, semi-structured interviews
Sustainability			
How sustainable are Ravenstvo, Shyrak and Ishtirok to continue the work for the disability rights and empowering women with disabilities in their societies after the ending of the project funding?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do you ensure the knowledge and skill you gain through implementing the programme will remain in the project and partner organization? • What kind of funding situation each organisation has? What opportunities/risks each organisation has in terms of diversifying their funding base? • What are the key capacities/skills/resources utilized in each project and respective country? 	PO coordinators, Threshold Association, Disability Partnerships Finland, Family Federation Finland.	Desk review, semi-structured interviews
What elements have best supported sustainability?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will be assessed by each organisations' funding base, operational environment, respective PO management skill and capacities, organisational strength, and potential individual strengths that have so far supported sustainability. 	PO coordinators, Threshold Association, Disability Partnerships Finland, Family Federation Finland.	Desk review, semi-structured interviews
Coherence			

<p>To what extent the project is in line and adds value to the other on-going interventions in the disability sector in the three countries?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which national objectives or targets the project is supporting or advocating for? • Who are the most important partners and allies for the partner organizations beyond the project? • How is the advocacy work planned? How are objectives and methods for advocacy chosen? • Is the government supporting the projects' activities in any way? • What cooperation the project and the network have with local women's rights organisations and movement? • What concrete support (financial or other) the government is providing? 	<p>PO coordinators, project beneficiaries, DPO/NGO-representatives, Government representatives</p>	<p>Desk review, semi-structured interviews</p>
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Annex 3: List of persons interviewed for baseline study

Date of Interview	Name	Position / Organisation	Country
07-Feb-23	Aigerim Dauletbaeva	Director /Partner Organisation in Taraz	Kazakhstan
06-Feb-23	Ainur Syrlybayeva	Social worker / trainer Shyrak	Kazakhstan
09-Feb-23	Aidai Soltobeave	Summer school participant	Kyrgyzstan
06-Feb-23	Akbar Gaziz	Summer school participant	Kazakhstan
07-Feb-23	Akhbota	Summer school participant	Kazakhstan
07-Feb-23	Alima Beisembaeva	Community worker /partner organisation	Kazakhstan
16-Feb-23	Anja Malm	Disability Partnership Finland	Finland
16-Feb-23	Anna Koskivuo	Disability Partnership Finland	Finland
08-Feb-23	Askhar Zariiev	Summer school participant	Kazakhstan
09-Feb-23	Elina Korhonen	Family Federation Finland	Finland
17-Feb-23	Fatima Shamsidinova	Summer school participant	Tajikistan
17-Feb-23	Firuz Mansuro	Summer school participant	Tajikistan
07-Feb-23	Galina Batchayeva	Project accountant	Kazakhstan
08-Feb-23	Galina Grebennikova	Director, Association of Reproductive Health	Kazakhstan
09-Feb-23	Gulmairam Alymbek kyzy	Summer school participant	Kyrgyzstan
11-Feb-23	Gulmira Kazakunova	Network coordinator	Kyrgyzstan
09-Feb-23	Gulzar Dushenova	Summer school participant	Kyrgyzstan
08-Feb-23	Gulzat Ortayeva (F)	Summer school participant	Kazakhstan
09-Feb-23	Laura Lipsanen	Family Federation Finland	Finland
06-Feb-23	Lyazzat Kaltaeva	Former director of Shyrak	Kazakhstan
10-Feb-23	Mambetaipova Cholpon Asanalievna	Chief specialist, Department of Persons with Disabilities and Elderly, Ministry of Labour, Social Security and Migration	Kyrgyzstan
16-Feb-23	Nasiba Inoyatova	Social worker	Tajikistan
16-Feb-23	Nigina Ikromova	Summer school participant	Tajikistan
17-Feb-23	Nisso Shamsizoda	Summer school participant	Tajikistan

08-Feb-23	Nurbol Shukurov (M)	Summer school participant	Kazakhstan
11-Feb-23	Nurila Jamynchieva	Accountant Ravenstvo	Kyrgyzstan
10-Feb-23	Ryskulova ZulfiraAnarbekovna	Head of Quality Department for the Org. Of Medical Care and Drug Policy, Ministry of Health	Kyrgyzstan
23-Feb-23	Saida Inoyatova	Programme coordinator	Tajikistan
17-Feb-23	Salomat Asoeva	Accountant, Ishtirok	Tajikistan
06-Mar-23	Sanna Paasonen	Co-ordinator Threshold Association	Finland
14-Feb-23	Sharifjon Barotov	Summer school participant	Tajikistan
17-Feb-23	Sherali Mirayubov	Summer school participant	Tajikistan
16-Feb-23	Sitora Kurbonova	Summer school participant	Tajikistan
09-Feb-23	Sveta Esengazieva	Summer school participant	Kyrgyzstan
08-Feb-23	Tatyana Baklzhanskaya	Director, Shykar	Kazakhstan
10-Feb-23	Tolkunbek Isakov	Lawyer, Free Legal Assistance to Persons with Disabilities	Kyrgyzstan
11-Feb-23	Ukei Muratieva	Assistant Coordinator Ravenstvo	Kyrgyzstan
17-Jan-23	Veera Pensala	Kynnys ry /Threshold Association	Finland
11-Feb-23	Victoria Birukova	PR manager of Ravenstvo	Kyrgyzstan
08-Feb-23	Zhansaya Azhikova	Summer school participant	Kazakhstan
09- Feb - 23	Zhyldyz Dushenova	Trainer	Kyrgyzstan

Annex 4: Online survey for summer school participants

1. I am from:

- Kazakhstan
- Kyrgyzstan
- Tajikistan

2. I identify as a:

- Woman
- Man
- Other

3. I am (years old):

- 18-24
- 25-35
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55-65

4. I participated in the summer school in:

- 2018
- 2019
- 2020
- 2021
- 2022
- Some other year: _____

5. My life changed because of the camp:

- Not at all
- To some extend
- Significantly
- Entirely

6. The most significant change in my life was (choose up to 3 options that feel the most significant for you):

- My self-esteem improved
- I became more confident
- I started to feel more positive about myself and my life
- I made new friends

- I feel respected
- I know my rights
- I participate more in my family or community life
- I learnt new skills
- I learnt something new about disability
- I understand sexual and reproductive health and rights

7. The most important thing I have done after the training (s)

- I work as a peer supporter
 - I work as a trainer or facilitator
 - I started voluntary work
 - I was employed
 - I established an organisation
 - I began studying
 - I started a family
 - Something else. Describe the most significant change here with one sentence:
-

8. Briefly describe one important thing in your life that you do now but you did not do before the camp:

Annex 5: Updated table of Staff salaries and working time in 2022 and 2023

	Monthly salary, total 2022	Monthly salary, total 2023	Change in salary (%)	Working time 2022 (%)	Working time 2023 (%)	Change in working time (%)	Real change in salary (%)
KG/Ravenstvo							
Contant person	300	370	23 %	80	80	0 %	23 %
Accountant	300	330	10 %	80	80	0 %	10 %
program coordinator	300	300	0 %	80	80	0 %	0 %
Personal assistant	280	300	7 %	100	100	0 %	7 %
PR manager	110	180,8	64 %	80	100	25 %	31 %
KZ/Shyrak							
Contact person	300	350	17 %	30	30	0 %	17 %
Accountant	230	200	-13 %	30	30	0 %	-13 %
TJ/Ishtirok							
Contact person	300	350	17 %	30	30	0 %	17 %
Accountant	110	100	-9 %	20	20	0 %	-9 %