



Post Appeal Review for the DEC's Ukraine Humanitarian Appeal (UHA) Response

Executive Summary

Prepared for // Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC)

By // IOD PARC

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Acronyms and abbreviations

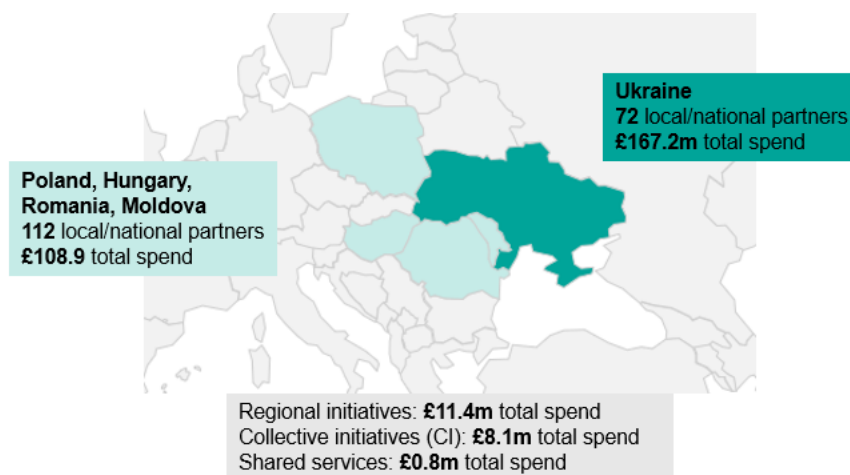
AAP	Accountability to Affected People
CBI	Cash-Based Interventions
CHS	Core Humanitarian Standard
CI	Collective Initiative
DEC	Disasters Emergency Committee
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
HQ	Headquarters
HR	Human Resources
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
ICR	Indirect Cost Recovery
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IoC	Indicator of Capacity
KII	Key Informant Interview
MEAL	Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NFI	Non-Food Items
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PDM	Post-Distribution Monitoring
PMER	Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation, and Reporting
PSEA	Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse
SRH	Sexual and Reproductive Health
UHA	Ukraine Humanitarian Appeal
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

Executive summary

The Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC) commissioned this independent review to generate learning from the Ukraine Humanitarian Appeal (UHA). The DEC Secretariat routinely conduct reviews of all appeals to consolidate and assess the DEC’s contributions. This independent review of the UHA had a specific focus on localisation, partnerships and new ways of working introduced during the response.

Between February 2022 and March 2025, DEC member charities and their partners reached **9.5 million people**. The total appeal expenditure was **£296.9 million**. The appeal represented one of the largest and most complex responses in the DEC’s history, operating across Ukraine and four neighbouring countries (Poland, Moldova, Romania and Hungary) in a rapidly evolving conflict environment with unprecedented displacement, political sensitivity and operational risk. **13 DEC members** participated in the response¹ alongside **72 local and national partners in Ukraine** and **112 local and national partners across Poland, Romania, Moldova and Hungary**.

Figure 1: UHA response overview



Rather than assessing the performance of individual DEC members, this review examines how the DEC-funded collective response functioned as a system. This includes a focus on how strategic intentions translated into operational practice; how relationships between the DEC, its members and local and national partners evolved over time; and how structural features of the appeal enabled or constrained progress towards more locally led, equitable and sustainable humanitarian action.

The review draws on document analysis, a meta-analysis and synthesis of DEC member reports, interviews, surveys and focus group discussions with DEC Secretariat staff, DEC members, local and national partners, and affected communities, as well as a meta-analysis of DEC member reports from throughout the appeal. The findings and recommendations are intended to inform future DEC appeals, as well as support learning within the humanitarian sector more broadly.

¹ The following 13 DEC members responded to the UHA: International Rescue Committee, Save the Children, World Vision, Plan International, Christian Aid, Action Against Hunger, Concern, ActionAid, CAFOD, CARE, Age International, Oxfam, British Red Cross. Tearfund responded independently without DEC funding.

Evolution of the response

Overall, the response demonstrated DEC's ability to combine speed, scale and flexibility with learning and adaptation over time, enabling members and partners to progressively strengthen locally led approaches while maintaining a focus on meeting urgent humanitarian needs. From the outset, the Ukraine Humanitarian Appeal was shaped by two defining features, namely i) its scale and complexity and ii) its explicit commitment to localisation and partnership-based delivery. DEC funding enabled members to respond immediately to the humanitarian crisis triggered by the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, supporting life-saving assistance at speed while working with and through a wide range of partners.

In the early phase of the appeal, the primary priority was to reach large numbers of people quickly in an exceptionally fluid and high-risk context. DEC's flexible funding and streamlined decision-making processes allowed members to act decisively, establish and scale up operations, and adapt delivery models across multiple countries. At the same time, DEC encouraged members to identify, assess and begin working with local and national partners, laying the foundations for more locally led approaches as the response stabilised and evolved.

As the appeal progressed, the DEC actively supported a shift from rapid emergency delivery towards deeper partnership and localisation. With the crisis becoming increasingly protracted, DEC members invested time and resources in strengthening relationships with partners, adapting their operational models to local contexts, and expanding joint planning

and decision-making. Over time, local and national actors assumed a more central role in shaping programme design, implementation and adaptation, drawing on their contextual knowledge, networks and proximity to affected communities.

A defining feature of this evolution was the DEC's emphasis on flexibility, trust and accompaniment. Members were able to adjust targets, reallocate budgets and modify activities in response to changing needs, enabling partners to innovate, course-correct and scale their work responsibly. Capacity strengthening was considered from the outset and became increasingly embedded within programming, moving beyond short-term delivery towards longer-term organisational development, sustainability and leadership by local actors.

Alongside standard humanitarian programming, the DEC introduced a Dual Strategy, designed to fund innovative approaches and system-strengthening initiatives in parallel with standard approaches to emergency response. This reflected a strategic ambition not only to meet immediate needs, but also to improve how humanitarian assistance is delivered, particularly in relation to localisation, safeguarding, accountability and collaboration.

Localisation and partnerships

Overall, the findings demonstrate that the DEC's localisation commitment was not only evident at a strategic level but was also actively realised through member and partner practice. This contributed to a more adaptive, contextually grounded and sustainable humanitarian response. The review found that the DEC's clear and consistent emphasis on localisation had a meaningful and positive influence on how the response was delivered and experienced, both by partners and by affected populations. By prioritising flexible funding, partnership-based delivery and member autonomy, the DEC created an enabling environment in which locally led approaches could develop and strengthen over time.

Local and national partners consistently described DEC members as respectful, collaborative and trust-based partners who recognised local actors as experts in their own contexts. This

approach enabled partners to play a substantive role in decision-making, programme design and implementation, particularly as partnerships matured. DEC funding flexibility allowed members and partners to adapt rapidly to changing needs, introduce new activities, and shift geographic focus without undue administrative burden; this flexibility was described as hugely beneficial in a highly dynamic conflict and forced displacement setting.

A particularly significant contribution of the appeal was the tailored approach to capacity strengthening. This included widespread use of mentoring, accompaniment and practical capacity strengthening, rather than reliance on standardised ‘one-size-fits-all’ training (though there were some examples of this). DEC members supported partners to strengthen governance, safeguarding, financial management, MEL systems and humanitarian compliance in ways that were tailored, iterative and responsive to partners’ needs and priorities. Many partners reported that this support strengthened their organisational resilience, professionalised internal systems, and positioned them to sustain and expand their work beyond the appeal, including through access to additional funding.

These partnership approaches translated into tangible benefits for affected populations. Evidence indicates that locally led delivery enabled more accessible, culturally appropriate and dignified support, including native-language services, simplified access procedures, and a strong focus on protection, mental health and social cohesion. Partners’ proximity to communities enabled rapid feedback, adaptation and trust-building, strengthening the relevance and quality of assistance for both displaced Ukrainians and host communities.

Learning for the broader humanitarian sector

There are important learning opportunities from the DEC UHA appeal for the wider humanitarian sector on localisation. In 2022, the DEC conducted a localisation scoping study to identify the most effective ways to support and strengthen local humanitarian action through this appeal. Subsequently, the DEC’s funding approach made a meaningful contribution to the global localisation agenda by demonstrating how flexible, trust-based funding can translate localisation commitments into operational practice at scale. By providing members with adaptable resources, limited earmarking and the autonomy to work through locally led partnerships, the DEC enabled decision-making to sit closer to partners and enabled partnerships to evolve beyond transactional delivery models. The appeal provides concrete evidence that localisation is not achieved through policy commitments alone, but through funding models and partnership approaches that prioritise flexibility, time and trust, offering a practical reference point for wider international localisation discussions and approaches.

The Dual Strategy

The Dual Strategy represented a deliberate and forward-looking effort by the DEC to strengthen collaboration, innovation and system-wide learning alongside standard humanitarian programming. By introducing dedicated funding streams for Collective Initiatives, Shared Services and other new approaches, the DEC signalled a clear commitment to addressing not only immediate needs, but also the structural and operational challenges that shape the effectiveness of humanitarian response.

DEC members welcomed this commitment and recognised the value of having a protected space to pilot new ways of working, collaborate across organisations, and invest in shared priorities such as localisation, safeguarding and accountability. Collective Initiatives emerged as the most visible and effective component of the Dual Strategy. They supported collaboration across members and partners, addressed shared challenges such as due diligence, safeguarding and localisation, and contributed meaningfully to partner capacity

strengthening. These initiatives generated practical learning, addressed shared constraints, and supported more coherent approaches across DEC membership.

While positive overall, the review also found that implementation of the Dual Strategy was uneven in parts and its integration with standard programming more limited than anticipated. Understanding of the strategy's purpose, funding streams and eligibility criteria varied significantly across members and between headquarters and country-level teams. This somewhat constrained uptake and reduced opportunities for synergies between innovative initiatives and core programming. Overall, the findings suggest that the Dual Strategy added clear strategic value and provides a strong foundation for future appeals. With clearer articulation, streamlined design and stronger integration with standard programming, it has the potential to further enhance the DEC's role as a facilitator of collective learning and system change.

Conclusions and recommendations

The Ukraine Humanitarian Appeal demonstrated the strengths of the DEC's operating model in practice. Flexible funding, member autonomy and a clear commitment to localisation enabled a rapid, large-scale response while also creating space for learning, adaptation and more locally led approaches. The DEC's convening role and willingness to innovate supported collaboration across members and partners and reinforced the DEC's position as a sector leader in partnership-based humanitarian action. The review also highlights important learning areas that can further strengthen future appeals. Predictability of funding, clearer articulation of innovative funding mechanisms, more structured risk sharing, and consistent approaches to transition and exit planning would enable deeper and more sustained localisation, particularly in protracted crisis contexts. Importantly, these are not shortcomings of intent, but areas where the DEC and DEC members' existing strengths can be refined and aligned more closely with strategic ambitions. The recommendations that follow focus on 7 key learning areas from the review and build on the positive foundations established during the appeal. They are intended to support the DEC Secretariat, DEC members and partners to consolidate good practice, address structural constraints, and further strengthen the DEC's role as an enabler of high-quality, locally led humanitarian responses.

Recommendations were developed based on seven key learning areas, with specific recommendations for the DEC Secretariat, DEC members and partners.

1. Funding quality and predictability

Although the DEC's ICR sharing provision has promoted more equitable cost coverage, members vary widely in how much ICR they pass on to partners. Funding predictability also remains a concern, complicating strategic planning and partnership development amongst DEC members and their partners. Further, the requirement to spend a large share of funds within the initial six months of the appeal was found to be particularly challenging and potentially misaligned with the protracted nature of the Ukraine response.

Recommendations for the **DEC Secretariat** include i) considering requiring members to share 10% ICR with partners. This would begin by understanding why some members are not using the current provision, addressing identified barriers, and then assessing the feasibility of making 10% sharing mandatory to strengthen quality funding practices. A second recommendation focuses on ii) improving funding predictability within the phased allocation model. This involves providing allocation information as early as possible to support joint planning between members and partners and aiming to speed up approval of revised IoC budgets to avoid delays in programme implementation. Lastly, iii) reassessing the requirement for members to spend 30% of the first allocation within six months for conflict or protracted

crisis appeals. While this is standard DEC practice, members reported that the requirement pressured them to spend quickly in ways that conflicted with their preferred partnership models. In particular, in crisis appeals. While this is standard DEC practice, members reported that the requirement pressured them to spend quickly in ways that conflicted with their preferred partnership models. In particular, it-crisis appeals. While this is standard DEC practice, members reported that the requirement pressured them to spend quickly in ways that conflicted with their preferred partnership models. In particular, it made early engagement with smaller or newer organisations difficult. Several members noted that internal pressure from their HQs meant they could not decline DEC funding, so entering transactional relationships with established partners in the early phase was unavoidable given the requirement. Adjusting this condition could create space for more intentional and equitable partnership development from the outset of an appeal.

Aligned with the above, the two recommendations for **DEC members** cover i) aligning internal ICR policies with the DEC's provisions on cost recovery, including identify and address internal barriers that prevent full use of the DEC's allowance for sharing up to 10% ICR with partners, and ii) considering issuing non-binding partnership agreements to reduce uncertainty around future funding and programme continuity. These agreements should set out each organisation's intentions for ongoing collaboration, subject to future DEC allocations, and articulate a shared vision for how the partnership may evolve over time.

2. Capacity strengthening and technical capacity exchange

Capacity strengthening and technical capacity exchange were highly appreciated by partners, with a specific budget line for capacity strengthening facilitating a diverse range of flexible approaches. However, partners indicated some approaches more effective than others. While there were some good examples of two-way technical capacity exchange between partners and DEC members, this was less structured and more ad hoc.

The two recommendations for the **DEC Secretariat** focus on i) including a focus on capacity strengthening objectives, outputs and outcomes in appeal progress reports. This includes a particular emphasis on outcome-level reflection and would provide members with the opportunity to reflect on both intended and unintended outcomes and adapt as necessary; and ii) supporting DEC members to explore opportunities for technical capacity exchange with partners. This could also be included in the appeal progress reports.

There are three recommendations for **DEC members**: i) to use partner-led capacity assessments to co-design multi-year organisational development plans; ii) to monitor capacity strengthening via clear KPIs at both output and outcome level; and iii) to map their own knowledge/capacity gaps as part of the structured capacity needs assessment with partners to develop an understanding of opportunities for two-way technical capacity exchange.

3. Risk management and risk sharing

Across the response, informal, collaborative risk assessment and organisational strengthening were strong features of programme design and implementation. However, approaches to *sharing* risk were less structured and tended to emerge on an ad-hoc basis rather than through intentional planning. Members generally found the DEC's risk register and matrix helpful tools for identifying potential risks but noted that they offered limited guidance on what should actually happen when those risks materialise.

The two recommendations for the **DEC Secretariat** cover i) developing clearer guidance on what members and partners can expect when different categories of risk occur and ii) convening members to exchange lessons and identify good practices in risk management and risk sharing.

DEC members are recommended to adopt established best practices in risk sharing, with reviewing the IASC Risk Sharing Framework and integrating relevant elements into organisational policies as a valuable starting point. At minimum, members should carve out time during partnership development to jointly identify potential risks, agree on mitigation strategies and contingency plans, and clarify options for covering associated costs.

4. Due diligence processes and passporting

Mixed views from partners on how proportionate and burdensome due diligence processes were indicate that it would be beneficial for the DEC and DEC members to consider how this could be strengthened for future appeals.

The recommendation for the **DEC Secretariat** focuses on convening due diligence leads from across DEC members to develop a due diligence passport system for all DEC members to use with partners during appeals. This would include guidance for members on simplifying and harmonising due diligence requirements, including, for example, developing standard tool or template that can be accepted by all DEC members, with adaptations where required.

This links to the recommendation for **DEC members**, focusing on working together with the Secretariat and other members to develop a passporting tool for working with partners. As part of this, it would be important to look at what due diligence passporting initiatives are happening in different countries as any passporting tool would need to be adapted to build on existing local efforts and initiatives.

There is also one recommendation for **DEC partners** which suggests preparing a due diligence document package, responding to the requirements of major donors. This would help reduce the time for individual due diligence processes

5. Development and management of exit strategies

Most partner experiences in relation to exit strategies were broadly positive; however, the negative experiences - though fewer - were quite sharp and critical. It was also noted by DEC members and partners that there is a difference between humanitarian crises triggered by conflict and by extreme weather phenomena and that appeals should reflect this.

There are two recommendations for the **DEC Secretariat**, including i) to develop a collective responsible transition framework to guide members which would cover practical points of consideration, including communication protocols, timelines, tapering approaches, likely phase-out triggers, and minimum commitments; and ii) to consider the nature of the appeal in relation to the type of humanitarian emergency, e.g., conflict vs. natural disasters and develop the appeal (and transition strategies) accordingly.

The three recommendations for **DEC members** focus on i) developing a Collective Initiative focusing on exit/transition strategies, including facilitating learning exchanges on best practice for sustainable exit/transition strategies; ii) beginning exit/transition planning at the start of the appeal and include this in partnership agreements/funding contracts, e.g. a 'Transition/Exit Annex'; and iii) as part of the transition planning process, to consider the linking capacity assessment with transition strategy, ensure partners can predict withdrawal at least 12 months ahead, and where possible, align exit/transition timing with needs, not the funding cycle.

6. Understanding the impact of localisation on affected populations (from affected populations' perspectives)

The benefits of localisation for DEC members, partners and the response more broadly are clear. It would be useful to explore how affected populations perceive the benefits of localisation and locally led responses and the extent to which a locally led approach makes a difference from their perspective.

The recommendation for the **DEC Secretariat** focuses on undertaking a cross-appeal study focusing on this topic. The methodology would benefit from a clearly defined process tracing approach to identify the localisation objectives for members, partners and affected populations and then track these through with a multi-stakeholder perspective. For **DEC members**, the recommendation focuses on including a focus on affected populations' perspectives in monitoring structures and could be undertaken as a pilot in contexts with well-established monitoring processes where strong engagement and relationships with affected populations already exists.

7. DEC coordination across members during the appeal

There was some evidence that DEC coordination across members and activities could have been stronger over the course of the appeal, and that oversight of localisation approaches and results could have been more focused. There are two key recommendations for the **DEC Secretariat**, namely i) to establish regular learning exchanges as early as possible during appeals to strengthen opportunities for collaboration and real-time learning, and ii) to strengthen the Secretariat's role in promoting consistency across members when working with partners. This would include a harmonised approach to key points highlighted throughout the review process and the previous recommendations, such as due diligence, risk sharing, exit/transition processes and localisation commitments