



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

Final report

Prepared for // Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC)

By // IOD PARC

Date // 30 January 2026

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Acknowledgements

The IOD PARC team extends its sincere thanks to the Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC) staff for their outstanding support throughout the review of the Ukraine Humanitarian Appeal response. Their responsiveness, clear communication, and consistently collaborative approach greatly facilitated our work. We are especially grateful for the seamless logistical support they provided at every stage of the process. Their professionalism and dedication were invaluable in enabling us to carry out this review effectively and efficiently.

We also warmly thank all DEC members, partners and the community members who generously contributed their time, insights, and experiences during the inception phase, data collection process, and analysis stages. Their perspectives were essential in shaping the review and strengthening the overall quality and relevance of our findings. Their valuable insights and feedback throughout the review process have been hugely helpful and highly appreciated.

Acronyms and abbreviations

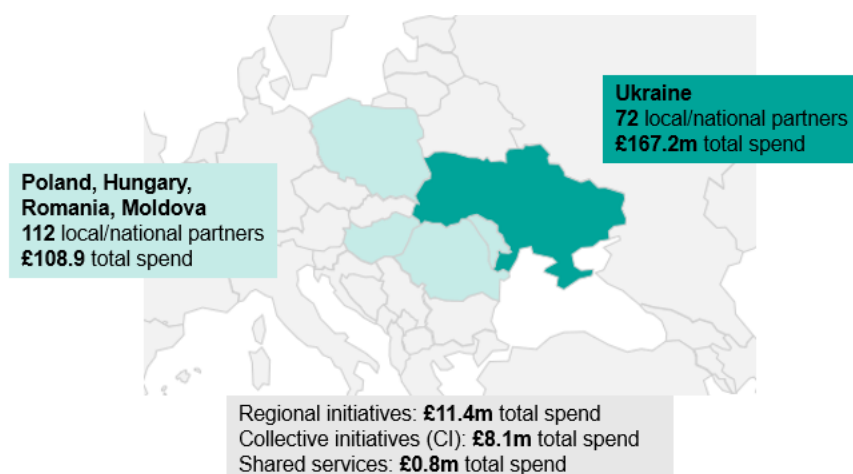
AAP	Accountability to Affected People
CBI	Cash-Based Interventions
CHS	Core Humanitarian Standard
CI	Collective Initiative
DEC	Disasters Emergency Committee
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
HQ	Headquarters
HR	Human Resources
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
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.

Introduction

The Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC) commissioned IOD PARC to conduct an independent external review of the DEC Ukraine Humanitarian Appeal (UHA) response in 2025. The overarching purpose of this review was to generate lessons learned and focused on the overall joint efforts of DEC members within Ukraine and the wider regional response in Poland, Romania, Moldova and Hungary. The focus was not on individual DEC members but rather on identifying broader lessons to:

1. Understand how the DEC-funded response has contributed to localisation and partnership approaches within the humanitarian response following the full-scale invasion of Ukraine
2. Understand DEC members' contribution to this response
3. Strengthen future humanitarian coordination efforts by DEC members and their partners.

The review draws on document analysis, 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 and synthesis of DEC member reports from throughout the appeal. The findings and recommendations are intended to inform future DEC appeals. The full methodology is presented in Annex 4.

The scope of the review covered the full cycle of the appeal from March 2022 to August 2025. This final review report presents main findings, analysis and recommendations, as well as the context underpinning these. The findings section includes headline findings, as well as structured evidence and analysis against the key review questions that guided the data collection and analysis process. Extracts from the meta-analysis of partner reports are included in highlighted textboxes to support and complement findings from the main data collection process. The full meta-analysis is included in Annex 5.

Context

Global context and review framing

The Grand Bargain, launched at the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit, set out a reform roadmap to make the global humanitarian system more efficient and effective. Central to this agreement between donors and aid organisations was the localisation agenda, understood as the process of shifting decision-making power and increasing funding for local and national actors while reducing reliance on international agencies. This approach recognises that humanitarian responders embedded within crisis-affected communities, despite their deep understanding of local contexts and needs, have historically been excluded from decisions that shape their lives and remain under-resourced, even though they are often first to respond, last to leave, and bear significant security risks in fragile environments.

Because many donors face challenges in directly funding local and national actors, intermediaries² can play a critical role in ensuring accountable, equitable partnerships and channelling a fair share of resources to these responders. While some intermediaries have made progress in building equitable partnerships, much more needs to be done to realise the ambitions of the Grand Bargain, and donors have an important role to play in facilitating this

² Intermediaries are an organisation, network or mechanism which acts as an intermediary between donors and national or local organisations through provision of funding or other support. Intermediaries typically have a higher capacity to absorb and manage funds compared to local or national organisations which makes them an attractive option for donors, particularly when resources need to be disbursed quickly or at scale to meet urgent humanitarian needs.

shift. In its dual capacity as a funder and coordinating body, the DEC plays a critical role in advancing this agenda by modelling and promoting more localised ways of working across the sector. The DEC encourages its member charities to adopt localisation approaches and foster equitable partnerships with partners based in countries of response programming. This review examines how the DEC has demonstrated and facilitated these approaches and assesses their impact on the nature and quality of member responses.

The scale, complexity, and duration of the Ukraine response created significant opportunities for learning, much of which has already been captured through various initiatives and knowledge products by DEC members and the wider humanitarian community. Rather than attempting to review the entire response which risked duplicating existing work and diluting key insights, the DEC commissioned this review with a deliberate focus on localisation and partnerships. This targeted approach aimed to ensure that the findings are actionable and relevant to the ongoing sector-wide effort to localise humanitarian responses.

Regional context

In February 2022, Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine, triggering the largest forced displacement crisis in Europe since the Second World War.³ The invasion led to massive civilian casualties and destruction of Ukraine's infrastructure.⁴ As of March 2025,⁵ over 6.9 people had fled Ukraine with 6.3 million displaced Ukrainians residing in Europe. As of November 2025, 5.3 million Ukrainians remain displaced in Europe with the largest populations in Poland, Czech Republic, Romania, Slovakia and Moldova.⁶ Displaced populations within and beyond Ukraine continue to have significant needs for shelter, mental health and psychosocial support, protection, water, sanitation and hygiene, cash assistance and livelihoods support.⁷ In neighbouring host countries, there is a strong need for protection, social integration, and socioeconomic inclusion.⁸

Overview of the DEC UHA response

The DEC UHA ran from March 2022 to August 2025. The appeal undertook an initial emergency response Phase 1 from March to August 2022 followed by Phase 2 from August 2022 to February 2025, which integrated a stronger focus on livelihoods, strengthening resilience, building local capacity and rebuilding.⁹ Given continuing donations into year 3 of the appeal, Phase 2 was extended until August 2025. Figure 2 outlines how funds were spent across response sectors.

³ UNHCR (2025) Ukraine Refugee Situation. Available at: <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine>

⁴ UNHCR (2025) Ukraine Refugee Situation. Available at: <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine>

⁵ The end of Phase 2a of the DEC appeal

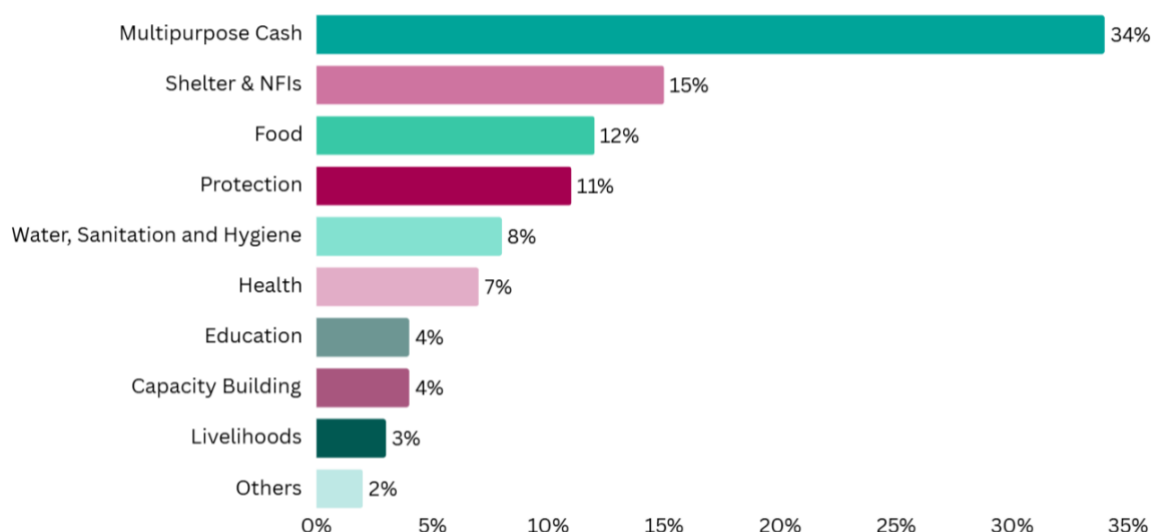
⁶ UNHCR (2025) Ukraine Refugee Situation. Available at: <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine>

⁷ DEC (2025) Ukraine Humanitarian Appeal Progress Update: Three Years On

⁸ UNHCR (2025) Ukraine Refugee Situation. Available at: <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine>

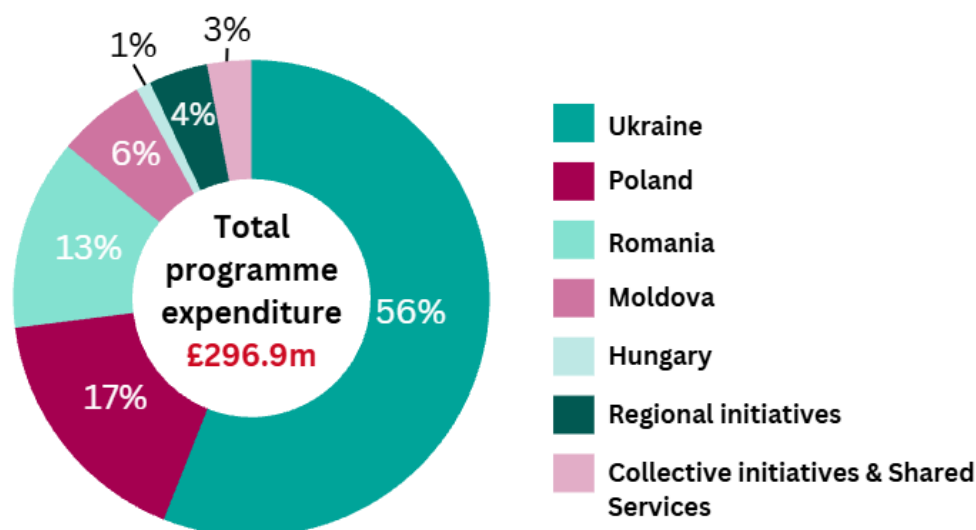
⁹ DEC (2025) Ukraine Humanitarian Appeal Progress Update: Three Years On

Figure 2: Expenditure of funds by sector between March 2022 and August 2025¹⁰



In total, the DEC UHA raised a total of £446.3 million. Of this, £314.4 million was raised from the DEC’s direct donors and UK Aid Match (70%) and £131.9 million raised by member charities (30%). The appeal response was implemented in Ukraine, Poland, Romania, Moldova and Hungary by 13 of the DEC’s members¹¹ Between February 2022 and March 2025, DEC member charities and partners reached 9.5 million people across these countries.¹² In total, appeal expenditure was £296.9 million between March 2022 and August 2025.

Figure 3: Total appeal expenditure breakdown between March 2022 and August 2025



¹⁰ DEC (2026) Ukraine Humanitarian Appeal. Available at: [Ukraine Humanitarian Appeal | Disasters Emergency Committee](#)

¹¹ 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.

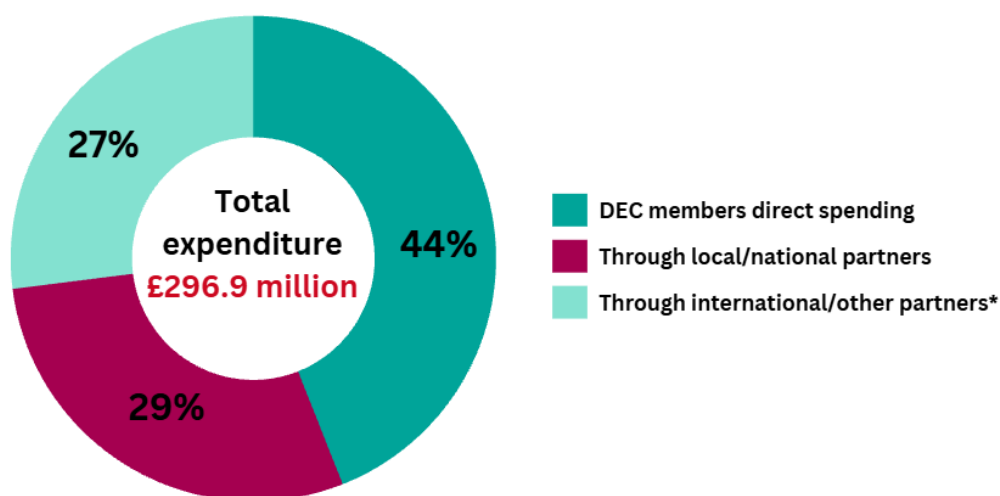
¹² DEC (2025) Ukraine Humanitarian Appeal Progress Update: Three Years On

Table 1: Total appeal expenditure by country and initiative

Country/initiative	Total appeal spend	Notes
Ukraine	£167.2m	Includes Ukraine pipeline funding
Poland	£50.8m	
Romania	£39.8m	
Moldova	£16.4m	
Hungary	£2.1m	
Regional initiatives	£11.4m	Includes Engine 2, ACAPs and SDD
Collective initiatives	£8.1m	
Shared services	£840k	
Total	£296.9m	

The DEC’s UHA programme enshrined a strong commitment to localisation and delivery through local and national partners in addition to cooperation with other international organisations. While most funds were spent directly by DEC members, a significant proportion was channelled via DEC members to 72 local and national partners in Ukraine and via 112 local and national partners across Poland, Romania, Moldova and Hungary.¹³

Figure 4: Total expenditure by members and partners



*International/other partners include partners such as DePaul International

The significant scale of funding raised through the UHA prompted the DEC to reflect on and strengthen its strategic approach to humanitarian response. In 2022, the DEC introduced the **Dual Strategy**, designed to fund innovative response approaches alongside members’ ‘business as usual’ emergency response. The overarching aim of the Dual Strategy was not only to meet immediate humanitarian needs but also to contribute to systemic improvements in how aid is delivered by enhancing the effectiveness, innovation, inclusivity, and sustainability of future responses.¹⁴

The Dual Strategy had multiple funding streams:

¹³ DEC (2025) Ukraine Humanitarian Appeal Progress Update: Three Years On

¹⁴ The Research People (2025) DEC Ambidextrous Strategy Review Final Report

- **Standard approaches** which focused on delivering rapid, life-saving assistance through established methods, such as the provision of food, clothing, shelter, and other essential services and resilience and livelihoods activities in Phase 2. This type of programming accounted for 93% of total expenditure across the response and was allocated according to the Indicator of Capacity (IoC) formula for each DEC member.¹⁵
- **Innovative approaches** which enabled DEC members and their partners to explore innovative initiatives, informed by frontline staff and community needs. This track supported experimentation with new models and ways of working, including research, capacity strengthening, collective work, and new partnerships. Key thematic areas included cash, safeguarding, localisation, accountability to affected populations, and the use of information as aid. These 'innovative' approaches included several funding sub-streams: regional initiatives, Collective Initiatives, and shared services.
- **Ukraine pipeline funding** which was an incentive designed to enable DEC members with lower IoC scores to access additional funding if they were able to operate and scale up their response in frontline areas where needs were most acute.

¹⁵ For more information on the DEC's IoC allocation strategy: <https://www.dec.org.uk/article/how-we-spend-and-allocate-your-money>

Findings

This section sets out the evidence and analysis from the data collection phase of the review. There are two main sections, namely 1) localisation and partnerships and 2) the Dual Strategy. Each section begins with a summary narrative of findings and then provides a deeper analysis of specific aspects of evidence and what this means for the DEC, DEC members and partners.

The meta-analysis and synthesis of DEC member reports generated four additional themes to focus on as part of the review in the main data collection and analysis phases. These were intended to complement the focus on localisation and partnerships. The four themes identified include: i) equitability of decision making; ii) management of exit strategies; iii) support in accessing (additional) funding; and iv) facilitation of role in coordination/cluster structures. These have been integrated into the localisation and partnerships section to ensure a clear narrative. Extracts from the meta-analysis are included and highlighted throughout these sections to complement the findings and analysis.

Localisation and partnerships

Headline findings

Across the Ukraine Humanitarian Appeal, DEC members' emphasis on localisation translated into largely equitable, trust-based partnerships that strengthened over time and enabled a more adaptive and contextually grounded response. While early phases of the appeal prioritised speed and scale, partnerships became increasingly collaborative over the course of the appeal as relationships stabilised, with local and national actors playing a more central role in decision-making, programme design and implementation. Flexible DEC funding, combined with members' partner-centred approaches, enabled practical mentoring and accompaniment rather than transactional delivery, supporting partners to strengthen organisational systems, manage risk, and expand their humanitarian capacities. These approaches enhanced the relevance, reach and quality of assistance for displaced Ukrainians and host communities, while also positioning partners to access additional funding and sustain services beyond the appeal. Localisation and partnership approaches were most effective where flexible funding, time and trust allowed relationships to mature and evolve. At the same time, the findings highlight some structural constraints, including short planning timelines, phased allocations, inconsistent risk sharing practices and variable exit strategies which limited some aspects of the depth and consistency of localisation across the response. Overall, the evidence demonstrates both the effectiveness of the DEC's localisation ambition in practice and the conditions under which it can be further strengthened in future appeals.

How did the DEC and its members contribute to progress on the recommendations made in the 2022 localisation scoping study?

In July 2022, the DEC engaged external consultants to undertake a localisation scoping exercise¹⁶ and provide recommendations on strategies to support and strengthen local humanitarian action in Ukraine. These recommendations were designed to guide the allocation of DEC funds and inform the programmatic approaches adopted by DEC members.

This section begins with an update on the progress made by the DEC and its members in implementing these recommendations. To provide an at-a-glance assessment, a RAG (Red, Amber, Green) rating system has been applied, offering readers an initial indication of areas where strong progress has been achieved and where further improvement is needed for future appeals. The accompanying table presents a high-level overview, while subsequent sections of the report will examine the priority areas identified in the recommendations in greater depth.

¹⁶ DEC (2022) Options for supporting and strengthening local humanitarian action in Ukraine: a scoping exercise report. Available at: <https://www.dec.org.uk/report/ukraine-scoping-exercise-report>

Table 2: Assessment of progress towards localisation scoping study recommendations

Priority area	Recommendations	Progress assessment
Priority 1: Funding and financial management		
High-level	DEC Secretariat: to commit to a 25% minimum target for funds transferred to L/NAs, meeting the target collectively at first, and agree a route map and timeframe with members that fail to meet this. Publish percentages.	Strong – 29% of appeal expenditure was spent through local/national partners. Member-level analysis was challenged by differing definitions of local/national vs. international partners, though this is being resolved in future appeals with the introduction of standard definitions.
New funding pots available for local organisations only	DEC Secretariat: to allocate funds for a ‘localisation collective initiative’ which might include the establishment of a fund to disburse grants to L/NAs, a platform to support and verify Ukrainian L/NAs, and other activities as outlined in the report. DEC ‘localisation collective initiative’ group: to consider establishing a fund which disburses small grants to L/NAs.	Strong – Through Collective Initiatives, the Women’s Humanitarian Leadership Fund (WHLF) provided flexible funding to Women’s Rights Organisations and the DEC funded a pilot of the Ukraine Local Pooled Fund (ULPF).
	DEC members: to consider contributing additional resources to new or existing pooled funds which provide grants for L/NAs.	Moderate – SHIFT and other Collective Initiative programmes implemented grant-giving programmes (not technically pooled funds), which allowed significant numbers of Ukrainian CSOs to access grant funding.
Reducing due diligence processes to access existing funds	DEC Secretariat: to facilitate or fund a mapping of international due diligence best practice with what is feasible for L/NAs registered in Ukraine.	Strong – Research on due diligence harmonisation in Ukraine was funded through the DEC’s Shared Services funding stream and several CIs focused part of their work on this issue.
	DEC Secretariat: to facilitate a meeting of member staff responsible for setting organisational due diligence requirements to conduct a joint review and mapping. This mapping should aim to develop a realistic, feasible and proportionate ‘due diligence minimum standards’ across all DEC members.	Moderate – While the DEC facilitated several meetings of relevant member staff and encouraged due diligence passporting amongst members, coordination did not lead to the development of ‘due diligence minimum standards’ across the membership. The federated nature of some members posed challenges to implementing minimum standards.
	DEC ‘localisation collective initiative’ group: to consider contributing ‘collective initiative’ funds for the establishment of a L/NA platform where Ukrainian L/NAs are supported to gather documentation and evidence necessary for international due diligence processes and provide a centralised verification scheme.	Strong – The Online Database Platform funded through the Engine 2 funding stream was developed by Philanthropy in Ukraine in 2024 and has received initial positive feedback.

Flexible, multi-year funding	DEC Secretariat: to encourage members to sign multi-year agreements with L/NAs for Phase 2 of an Appeal and require members to report on the number of multi-year agreements.	Moderate –The DEC’s Operation Manual encourages members to “commit and distribute funds to local partners in such a way that they can benefit from the advantages of the DEC’s multi-year funding.” However, no evidence was found that there was specific encouragement ahead of Phase 2 of the UHA.
	DEC members: to reflect the flexibility and multi-year funding they receive from DEC in agreements with partners.	Moderate – Funding to partners was perceived as highly flexible, though there was a lack of any long-term funding agreements in place.
Increasing allocations of indirect cost recovery (ICR) / overheads for L/NAs	DEC Secretariat: to require that DEC members budget a minimum 10% rate for ICR for partners in all future humanitarian response budgets.	Moderate – The DEC did not require members to budget a minimum ICR rate, although in July 2023 the DEC board approved the decision to allow members to provide up to 10% ICR to partners if they wanted to. In more recent appeals (e.g., in the Middle East and Myanmar) the DEC has formally added a separate budget line for partner ICR to the finance templates based on learnings from the UHA.
	DEC members: to develop organisational policies on ICR for L/NA partners which commit fair coverage.	Moderate – Some members had organisational policies in place, while others did not.
Funds for consortia of Ukrainian organisations to work together	DEC members: to consider supporting and funding consortia of L/NAs in Ukraine which enable peer learning and local coordination.	Moderate – Several Collective Initiatives incorporated elements of peer learning and were managed in consortia (e.g., Collaborative Cash Delivery Network, the Due Diligence Community of Practice, SPRAVA and the WHLF).
Priority 2: Capacity strengthening and organisational development		
Tailored training, mentoring, secondment or accompaniment as prioritised by Ukrainian organisations	DEC Secretariat and members: to consider how the impact of mentoring, accompaniment, exchange and secondment initiatives with L/NA partners could be monitored, measured and reported on more effectively.	Moderate – While member reports and select CI reporting (e.g., SHIFT and Pathways for Practitioners) covered the impacts of capacity strengthening initiatives to some degree, there was limited evidence of considerations for improving the monitoring, measurement, or reporting on these impacts.
	DEC Secretariat: to update the Operations Manual to clarify that members can and should invest in strengthening L/NA capacity. Create a budget line explicitly for capacity strengthening.	Strong – Members recognised and responded to expectation for capacity strengthening. Explicit budget line for capacity strengthening activities ensured this was prioritised.
	DEC members: to prioritise and provide tailored support, mentoring and accompaniment for L/NA partners following a joint assessment of their capacity strengthening / sharing needs.	Strong – Most members conducted joint capacity assessments and provided tailored support to partners in the form of mentoring and accompaniment.
	DEC members: to assess internal capacity to provide capacity strengthening support to L/NA partners in Ukraine. Where it is lacking, consider funding partners to participate in training courses.	Strong – Members reflected on their capacities as a partner and hired external consultants when they did not have necessary internal capacity or expertise.

Priority 3: Equitable partnerships		
A platform to verify local organisations and build bridges between Ukrainian and international organisations	DEC ‘localisation collective initiative’ group: to consider funding the establishment and maintenance of an online platform which develops a database of actors in Ukraine.	Strong – The Online Database Platform funded through the Engine 2 funding stream was developed by Philanthropy in Ukraine in 2024 and has received initial positive feedback.
An independent assessment on the quality of partnerships between Ukrainian organisations and international NGOs	DEC Secretariat: to integrate the Principles of Partnership into the DEC Operations Manual, proposal and reporting templates, and include them in the membership review process.	Moderate – Although the Principles of Partnership are not currently part of the membership review eligibility criteria, DEC members regularly report on their approaches towards the Good Partnership Principles and the Role of Intermediaries and several sections within the DEC Operations Manual cover partnership principles and localisation commitments.
	DEC ‘localisation collective initiative’ group: to consider budgeting for an independent assessment on the quality of partnerships between Ukrainian organisations and INGOs. As a minimum, such an assessment should be conducted for DEC members and their partners.	Strong – The DEC commissioned this review which investigated the quality of partnerships, and several members individually surveyed their partners for feedback. The Humanitarian Advisory Group also produced a Localisation Baseline for Ukraine: Progress Report in 2025 with support from certain DEC members.
Priority 4: Coordination and collaboration		
Establishing a coordination mechanism for Ukrainian organisations	DEC ‘localisation collective initiative’ group: to consider budgeting for an independent, online survey to understand the preferences of L/NAs on how best to support national coordination.	Weak – No evidence of this survey being conducted.
Improved coordination across DEC members	DEC Secretariat: to ask DEC members what coordination facilitation they want and invest in supporting it.	Strong – The DEC conducted consultations with members early in the appeal to understand their coordination preferences.
	DEC Secretariat: to connect L/NA partners of DEC members in Ukraine to allow cross-learning and sharing, the development of collective advocacy, and enable a collective feedback mechanism.	Moderate – While the DEC did not facilitate any standalone partner network, this review and the accompanying learning workshop enabled cross-learning and an opportunity to provide feedback in addition to other ad hoc opportunities facilitated via CIs.

How did members take into consideration their partners' parameters and reinforce localisation processes and what informed their decision making?

Local partners consistently described most DEC members as respectful, non-hierarchical and collaborative donors, treating partners as experts rather than implementers. Local NGOs from 5 countries covered by the appeal (Ukraine, Romania, Moldova, Hungary and Poland) praised DEC members for context-sensitive, partner-centred approaches that placed local expertise and contextual understanding at the centre of decision-making, enabling highly adaptive programming during a rapidly evolving humanitarian emergency.

Evidence indicates that in most cases, DEC members adapted their models to suit the context and legislation of the respective country. Feedback from local partners confirms that DEC members were proactive in seeking their partners' assessments of their organisational needs. However, several negative experiences were reported, including instances where programme planning did not match the reality on the ground and capacity strengthening activities imposed by some DEC members were perceived as being too basic and not tailored to the actual needs and capacity level of partners. Some examples include challenges such as: the impracticality of using post payment arrangements with suppliers operating near the frontline, where the supplier pool is already extremely limited and none are willing to accept delayed payments; and trainings that rely on outdated, basic materials, which were felt to be irrelevant for a local partner with more than 20 years of thematic expertise, payment arrangements with suppliers operating near the frontline, where the supplier pool is already extremely limited and none are willing to accept delayed payments; and trainings that rely on outdated, basic materials. payment arrangements with suppliers operating near the frontline, where the supplier pool is already extremely limited and none are willing to accept delayed payments; and trainings that rely on outdated, basic materials, payment arrangements with suppliers operating near the frontline, where the supplier pool is already extremely limited and none are willing to accept delayed payments; and trainings that rely on outdated, basic materials, payment arrangements with suppliers operating near the frontline, where the supplier pool is already extremely limited and none are willing to accept delayed payments; and trainings that rely on outdated, basic materials-payment arrangements with suppliers operating near the frontline, where the supplier pool is already extremely limited and none are willing to accept delayed payments; and trainings that rely on outdated, basic materials

Almost all local partners highlighted the significance of DEC members' flexible and partner-based approach that involved open dialogue on programme planning and implementation, accepting local organisations' proposals, encouraging course corrections, and allowing room for mistakes. This approach was praised as fostering a supportive environment for innovation and learning.

Another significant contribution to localisation was the alignment with local legislation and operational realities. Local partners noted that DEC members made a conscious effort to understand and respect national procurement rules, tax frameworks, data protection norms, and specific constraints such as disrupted markets, damaged infrastructure, etc. This has contributed to enabling local partners to take a leading role in project planning and implementation.

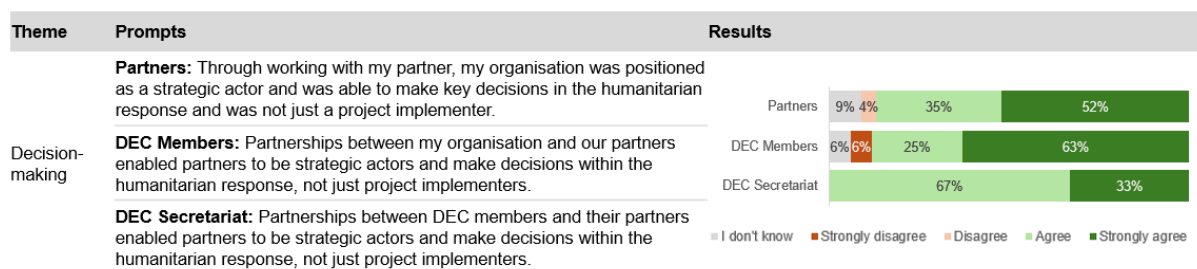
Evidence indicates that DEC members concentrated on practical capacity-strengthening/bridging initiatives, which partners described as transformative. Many partners expressed satisfaction with DEC members, citing the provision of practical mentoring as a key advantage over generic training programmes. This included developing MEL frameworks, collecting disaggregated data, building safeguarding systems, strengthening procurement and financial controls, setting up databases, and improving reporting structures. Several partners credited DEC members with helping them evolve from small, volunteer-led groups into fully structured organisations that meet international standards via this mentoring and accompaniment approach. Some partners expressed concerns regarding the underestimation of local partners' capacities and the provision of irrelevant or 'one-size-fits-all' training programmes by DEC members.

Equitability of decision-making

DEC members' decision-making was informed by several sources, including partner-identified needs, local contextual knowledge, intensive and efficient communications (which remained uninterrupted despite frequent staff turnover among DEC members), direct access to DEC members' staff (not only through focal points), participatory planning, direct consultations with community members, and the results of monitoring visits and field assessments.

Survey data illustrates a largely positive picture as to the equitability of decision-making between DEC members and partners. The majority of DEC members and partners, who hold the most in-depth knowledge of partnerships, responded 'strongly agree' to survey questions on decision making. Survey responses from the DEC Secretariat was less overwhelmingly positive, but this may reflect the Secretariat's distance from day-to-day partnership management.

Figure 5: Survey results on decision-making¹⁷



All data supports the survey's findings with both DEC members and partners providing very positive feedback on their experience of equitable decision making during the appeal. Partners and members both reported that equitable involvement was enabled by joint planning and target setting, to ensure that delivery was relevant and realistic to local contexts. In the spirit of more localised approaches, key informants agreed that DEC members were led by partners on determining delivering locations, target populations and activities. This leadership by local partners was increasingly embedded during Phase 2a and 2b as partnerships evolved and relationships of trust deepened. In contrast, equitable decision-making was less evident in Phase 1. This was due to the rapid nature of the response, which limited time for joint planning, and the fact that several DEC members used Phase 1 to identify their local partners. Overall, DEC members and partners highlighted that mutual dependency was a key foundation for equitable decision making because success depended on blending members and partners expertise and delivery capacity.

Some learning points did emerge. Firstly, partners reported that while they participated in joint decision making with DEC members, they did not have much opportunity to engage with the DEC Secretariat or to directly provide their feedback at this level. This led to a reliance on DEC members as intermediaries. Secondly, the tight planning and reporting timelines set by the Secretariat applied pressure to local partners, particularly as budgets were often unclear. This made joint planning harder as there was limited time and space to explore feasible activities without detail on budgets. Third, the meta-synthesis highlighted that DEC member reports varied in terms of how they detailed the extent to which partners were included in decision-making, highlighted in the text box below.

“Very few monitoring reports detail how local organisations are involved in decision-making on design and implementation. Local partners’ inputs to strategic decision-making were not consistently described across reports.”

¹⁷ Partners n=23; DEC members n=16; DEC Secretariat n=3

These learning points indicate a need for stronger understanding and connection between the DEC Secretariat and partners so that the Secretariat can provide a clearer steer on available resources and allow DEC members and partners to jointly scope use of resources alongside operational delivery demands. DEC member reporting could also be better framed to ensure clear tracking of progress on including partners in equitable decision-making.

What difference did the focus on localisation make in practice to supporting affected communities?

The scale and relevance of DEC members’ and partners’ direct and indirect support for displaced Ukrainians would have been far more limited without the clear and consistent focus on localisation. The evidence strongly indicates that without the clear focus on localisation and partnerships within the appeal from the outset, it would not have been possible for DEC members and partners to have had such a rapid and tailored joint humanitarian response; for DEC members to have had the same reach and trust with affected populations; for DEC partners to have had the flexibility and decision-making role in programme design to ensure its relevance and appropriateness; or for DEC partners to be in a stronger position to access other funding sources and networks post-appeal to continue supporting affected populations.

Evidence from the meta-analysis also indicates that DEC and DEC members’ focus on localisation improved services for affected populations. This included improved the contextual relevance of support; improved access and reach; improved quality and continuity of services; improved dignity, protection and wellbeing outcomes; and faster and more adaptive responses. This evidence is highlighted in relevant extracts from the meta-analysis in the textbox below.

Contextual relevance: “Local partners’ proximity to communities enabled interventions to be better aligned with local needs and changing contexts.”

Improved access and reach: “Collaboration with local organisations helped reach remote, rural and underserved areas where needs were growing. Local partners facilitated access to communities and public services that international actors would have struggled to reach alone.”

Improved quality of services: “Capacity strengthening of local organisations contributed to more consistent and professionalised service delivery. Several interventions were integrated into existing public systems, enabling continuity of services beyond the life of the appeal.”

Improved protection and wellbeing outcomes: “Local organisations’ understanding of social and cultural dynamics supported more appropriate protection and psychosocial support.”

Faster and more adaptive responses: “Local partners’ ability to adapt interventions quickly was essential in a fluid and high-risk context.”

Based on the analysis of the evidence, six specific factors emerged that contributed to the focus on localisation strengthening the quality of support to affected populations and ensuring tailored and relevant support for both displaced Ukrainians and host communities. These six factors include:

Table 3: Contributing factors

Contributing factors	Findings
----------------------	----------

<p>1. Funding flexibility for partners</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many partners indicated they would not have been able to reach affected communities or provide services or support without DEC funding (particularly for refugees in Moldova, Poland, Romania) • Flexibility of the funding enabled partners to provide faster and more tailored humanitarian responses for displaced Ukrainians and other affected populations.
<p>2. Mutual respect, shared values and knowledge sharing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DEC members shared their expertise on planning and implementing a humanitarian response, including trauma-sensitive and conflict-sensitive approaches and knowledge of the Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS). This enabled partners to understand the different and complex intersectional needs of affected people on the move and tailor their support accordingly. • Partners shared their knowledge of social norms and culturally sensitive approaches to engaging with government authorities and communities. This helped DEC members – particularly those with more limited presence and experience in the specific countries – to adapt their approach to service provision. • Feedback from the partners and community members indicated that this tailored support was appreciated and made a difference to the quality of services provided. For example, receiving MHPSS in native languages, feedback mechanisms for affected populations and knowledge of how to identify protection risks. • Partners also supported DEC members to better understand the operating context, including relevant legislation and the importance of engaging with national and local government. This included the role of local authorities, as well as how and when to engage with them to ensure their support. This meant that relevant approvals, programme delivery and support for affected populations were as efficient as possible. • The focus on social and cultural norms also helped DEC members understand the needs of both displaced and host communities more effectively and gain trust with marginalized groups that would otherwise have taken a lot more time, if even at all possible.
<p>3. Focus on social cohesion</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social cohesion is important in any setting affected by forced displacement and refers to the relationships and dynamics between displaced and host populations. Organisations working with/in these communities need to be aware of these dynamics and engage in a way that does not create or exacerbate tensions between different groups, e.g., by providing services for displaced people but not existing (host) communities, or by not addressing language/cultural differences. This is important in both Ukraine and the other four countries working with displaced and host communities. • There is strong evidence from both partners and communities that the focus on social cohesion was important and effective. • DEC members and partners worked together to understand the needs of both displaced Ukrainians and host communities and develop support services that addressed these needs holistically and in a way that sought to bring people together. • Good examples of this included children and parents through education and school events, and men and women through livelihoods support.
<p>4. Institutional capacity strengthening for partners</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most partners indicated that the organisational capacity strengthening they experienced via DEC members strengthened their support to affected populations in several ways. • This included stronger MEL systems which improved programme quality and real-time adaptation to ensure continuously relevant support to affected communities; technical training such as MHPSS, trauma-sensitive approaches to engaging with affected communities across all sectors; the

	<p>Core Humanitarian Standard; and accountability mechanisms to ensure Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safeguarding was also discussed by many of the partners as a new area of focus for them and that DEC members supported them to strengthen their safeguarding policies and practices which benefited affected populations through greater levels of protection. • Partners also discussed how the accompaniment support from some DEC members helped them with relevant transition processes, e.g. transitioning from education programmes for displaced children to working with schools to take in displaced children and integrate them into the education system. • Accompaniment support also covered recruitment processes, with several partners mentioning that DEC members supported them to recruit relevant staff and volunteers to support the response, including through practical support e.g., development of job descriptions focusing on relevant skills for engaging with displaced populations. • There is strong evidence from most partners that their systems were strengthened so effectively that staff turnover and scaling up/down of staff size did not impact on service delivery. • Partners also indicated that DEC members supported them to pilot new ways of working that enhanced their core offering to support affected communities more effectively. Examples given include MHPSS services, including for youth; flexible, client-centred models; Community Led Response (CLR) approaches; voucher systems and cash-based assistance; identification of more cost-effective and dignified modalities (e.g. cash assistance instead of food banks/baskets); joint vulnerability assessment tool that improved fairness and clarity in programme participant selection and helped explain criteria transparently to refugee communities; communication strategies; volunteer fire brigades; addiction support services; and evacuation services. • These examples are significant as they illustrate the multi-sectoral nature of the response.
<p>5. Support to integrate cross-cutting themes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Both DEC members and partners indicated that the focus on cross-cutting themes, e.g., <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ GEDSI: Gender, disability, older people and youth ensured <i>specific</i> services for these groups as well as <i>inclusive</i> services for all members of affected communities. ○ Triple nexus: Given that the conflict has evolved into more than an emergency crisis, DEC members also supported partners to understand humanitarian-development-peace nexus approaches in theory and in practice. ○ Partners did note, however, that the nexus approach is not always feasible in this context as one of the major challenges relates to funding for longer-term needs including housing support, employment assistance and legal support which is becoming increasingly important as temporary protection is expected to end.
<p>6. Multiplier effect of the localisation emphasis</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence from DEC members, partners and other external stakeholders indicates that DEC's emphasis on localisation led to impact beyond directly enhancing support to their own target affected population groups. • By creating guidance and facilitating collective thinking for members on localisation, DEC created an enabling environment for members to support others beyond the network. • For example, DEC members strong and consistent advocacy kept localisation firmly on the agenda and pushed others to work in this way and understand how to do this in practice. Larger NGO platforms and membership organisations appreciated this as it supported their own ambition to strengthen the focus on locally led approaches. • Technical support for partners made them stronger organisationally, including through more robust systems, experience, access to and

	<p>engagement with bigger networks and enhanced credibility. This then allowed them to access different types and higher levels of funding, which in turn enhances support both to displaced Ukrainians and to host communities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Another multiplier effect includes the ‘cascade effect’ of understanding humanitarian needs flowing from partners to other important stakeholders such as employers, communities, and schools. • Finally, partners and external stakeholders noted that the intentional and consistent focus on localisation strengthened civil society more broadly in Ukraine and surrounding countries and enhanced civil society space and capacity for human rights advocacy. This was important for partners in all countries, especially those operating against a backdrop of more conservative legislation and norms in relation to human rights.
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The majority of the data supporting these points came from partners who, as outlined above, strongly indicated that DEC members’ focus on localisation and equitable partnerships strengthened the scale and quality of their support to affected populations. Although there were fewer focus groups with affected populations,¹⁸ and as such likely not a fully representative sample, their views also indicated that the focus on localisation enhanced the support they received from DEC members’ partners. For example, they indicated that larger, international organisations had larger-scale programmes with a wider range of services than local organisations; however, they noted that this came with much more bureaucratic procedures with multiple interviews and extensive paperwork to access support and impersonal engagement. Conversely, they indicated that support from smaller, local organisations (DEC members’ partners) was much more personal and supportive, with simpler procedures for accessing support and that staff placed greater emphasis on their well-being, e.g., supporting positive integration into host communities. However, generally they also noted that local organisations provided smaller scale assistance and fewer services.

This combination of perspectives suggests a hypothesis that local organisations are well placed to support affected populations, and that empowering them to scale up their support and services would further benefit both displaced Ukrainians and host communities. This is evidenced by the fact that *partners* indicated that DEC member support has enhanced the scale and quality of their support to affected populations, coupled with the fact that *affected populations* indicated they felt a better connection with local organisations.

How is the DEC making progress on the overall partnership improvement vision proposed in the study undertaken by the Humanitarian Advisory Group: *Towards transformation: Progressing partnerships within the DEC?*

The 2024 report, *Towards Transformation: Progressing Partnerships within the DEC*, articulates a vision for the DEC to foster transformational, high-quality partnerships with local and national actors. The report leverages the six core capability areas underpinning effective intermediary roles in humanitarian response identified in the 2021 report, *Bridging the Intention to Action Gap: The Future Role of Intermediaries in Supporting Locally led Humanitarian Action*, as a framework for assessing partnerships between members and their local/national partners. The following section uses this framework to examine how the DEC made progress towards this partnership vision within the UHA, using the best practices associated with each capability area as a lens. The progress rating is based on all quantitative and qualitative data analysed as part of the review.

¹⁸ 33 interviews with DEC partners and 4 focus group discussions with representatives from affected populations

Table 4: Assessment of progress towards partnership vision

Capability area	Best practice	DEC UHA progress rating
Funding	Providing quality funding to local and national actors	Moderate
Organisational strengthening	Investing in institutional capabilities and shifting towards long-term capacity-sharing approaches, including mentoring, coaching and shadowing, rather than ad-hoc training initiatives	Strong
Risk management or risk sharing	Supporting risk sharing approaches across donors, intermediaries and local actors; investing in organisational risk management systems and processes; supporting capacity strengthening in risk management and resourcing risk management for local actors	Moderate
Due diligence, compliance, accountability and quality assurance	Supporting or taking on compliance and accountability requirements to meet sector and quality standards and donor requirements, including investing in local actor institutional systems and processes	Moderate
Brokering, advocacy, and facilitation	Brokering relationships with donors, advocating for increased funding and decision-making for local actors, and facilitating access, visibility and profile for local partners	Moderate
Technical capacity exchange	Sharing and supporting technical capacity in areas such as PSEA, protection, WASH, shelter, logistics, etc. to local actors where requested and in a way that meets prioritised needs	Strong

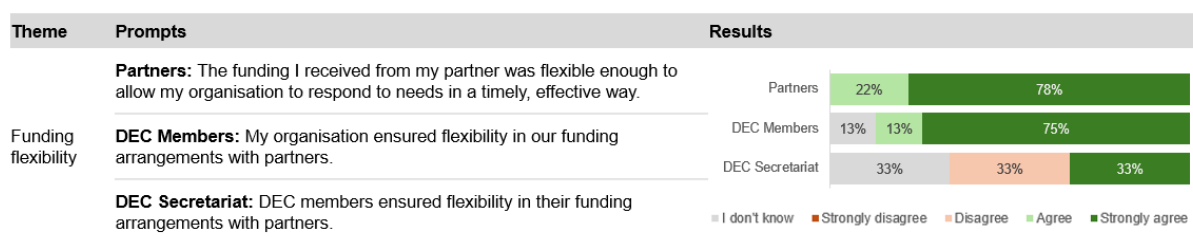
1. Funding

DEC funding was widely recognised as one of the most flexible and adaptive humanitarian financing streams, enabling organisations to respond effectively to rapidly changing needs. This flexibility allowed members to adjust targets, introduce new outcomes, and modify programming locations, partners, and activities without lengthy approval processes. Budgets could be reallocated across borders and sectors with relative ease, ensuring resources were consistently directed where they were most needed, as described in the meta-synthesis.

“DEC members consistently highlighted changes in approach and programming that required adaptation of their response; most of these changes related to the security situation as well as the shifting funding landscape in the humanitarian sector.”

Unlike many donors, the DEC did not strongly impose its own priorities. Instead, members and partners were empowered to define needs and adapt plans themselves – often with the aim of enabling community-driven responses. The majority of partners reported feeling confident in requesting programming changes, knowing they had the autonomy to voice their opinions and that funding would follow. This approach also minimised bureaucracy which in turn enabled rapid responses to unforeseen events, such as the Kakhovka dam destruction. Overall, the flexibility of DEC funding strengthened programme relevance, operational agility, and partnership quality, making it a critical enabler of effective humanitarian action.

Figure 6: Survey results on funding flexibility



While DEC funding was highly flexible, members and partners identified a few notable restrictions. A key challenge for a subset of member organisations was the inability to cover their UK-based staff costs. Even at times when UK-based staff were directly supporting programme delivery and partnership building, their time could not be charged to the DEC. As a result, members had to use internal funds to cover essential tasks such as capacity strengthening and partnership development. This restriction risks creating unintended incentives for members to set up local offices and/or poach staff from local or national organisations. It may also discourage peer-to-peer capacity strengthening if member staff cannot easily allocate time to mentoring or coaching partners. Additional limitations were noted by both members and partners, including the inability to use DEC funding for costs related to repairing infrastructure, such as a warehouse for supplies.

The flexible nature of DEC funding enabled members to share overheads, or Indirect Cost Recovery (ICR), with partners. Mid-way through the appeal in July 2023, the DEC board approved a measure allowing DEC members to allocate up to 10% ICR to local/national partners in their DEC-funded programming. This allowance promoted more equitable cost coverage; many members reported that these changes encouraged them to increase the amount of overheads they shared with their partners. However, the DEC did not require members to allocate a minimum ICR percentage in their budgets, resulting in significant variation across the membership in how non-programmatic cost coverage was passed on to partners. Some members applied a flat 10% ICR rate, while others adjusted the rate throughout the appeal based on funding levels. In certain cases, restrictive internal policies or structures prevented members from offering any standalone ICR to regional offices or partners. This variation highlights that, although the DEC's allowance for overhead coverage is a positive step and encourages members to include these costs, it does not guarantee consistent application. Some members remain constrained by internal systems, and without stronger guidance or policies from funders, there may be limited incentive to make changes.

The unpredictable nature of DEC funding created challenges for strategic planning and partnership development. Although the DEC Secretariat and members knew the appeal would span three years due to the scale of funds raised, the amount available at different intervals was uncertain because of the DEC's reliance on public donations, an inherently unpredictable funding source. As a result, the DEC Secretariat could not provide members with advance notice of exact allocation amounts throughout the response. This made it difficult for members to engage in proactive, long-term planning with partners, even when members worked with the same partner over multiple years. Consequently, there was no evidence of members entering into multi-year funding agreements with their partners; they instead relied on short project cycles, typically lasting six months to one year. Members also reported that when allocations were confirmed, the short turnaround time for submitting detailed spending plans to the DEC restricted their ability to jointly and collaboratively work with partners to map out programme design.

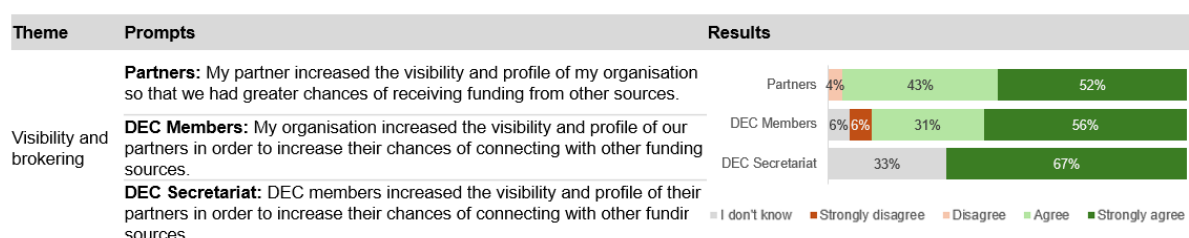
The requirement to spend a significant portion of DEC funds within the first six months created strong pressure on members to partner with established, international NGOs rather than community-based actors at the start of the response. Members reported that

the requirement to spend 30% of their first allocation in the first six months¹⁹ was difficult to reconcile with their preferred approaches of building trust and working with grassroots organisations, which typically need more time and support to absorb large funds. As a result, many members initially partnered with INGOs or well-established actors who could quickly mobilise and meet spending requirements. While these partnerships enabled rapid disbursement, they were often short-term and transactional, rather than strategic or locally led. Members noted that this approach undermined their localisation goals, and in some cases led to rushed implementation and missed opportunities for capacity strengthening. Several members emphasised that such spending requirements may be appropriate for shorter appeals but are misaligned with protracted crises like the ongoing conflict in Ukraine.

Support in accessing (additional) funding

As part of their exit planning, DEC members supported their partners in securing additional funding through a combination of capacity strengthening, networking, and joint fundraising initiatives. Survey results indicate that nearly all partners agreed or strongly agreed that collaboration with a DEC member enhanced their organisation’s profile, thereby improving their ability to access further funding opportunities.

Figure 7: Survey results on visibility and brokering



In practice, this involved members raising awareness of alternative funding sources, such as pooled funds, and delivering training on donor landscape mapping, crowdfunding, and proposal development. Members also provided practical guidance on managing donor contracts, creating donor databases, and producing promotional materials. To strengthen independent fundraising capacity, some members organised exchanges and workshops for partner staff. A notable example was an in-person workshop in the UK, where partner staff learned directly from a member’s fundraising team – a hands-on approach that partners highly valued and credited with equipping them with the right tools to raise funds independently. Additionally, there was evidence of some members facilitating introductions to potential donors and, in certain cases, collaborating with partners on joint funding applications beyond DEC resources.

Although there were strong examples of members helping partners position themselves for additional funding, there was no consistent approach across the membership. This could serve as a valuable discussion topic for members, enabling an exchange of successful practices and lessons learned to encourage uptake of effective approaches.

2. Organisational strengthening

DEC members employed diverse, often highly tailored approaches to capacity strengthening, with a strong emphasis on mentorship and accompaniment rather than standardised training. DEC funding supported a partner-led model of organisational development which prioritised autonomy and responsiveness over donor-driven compliance. Partners were typically encouraged to identify their own capacity gaps, such as financial

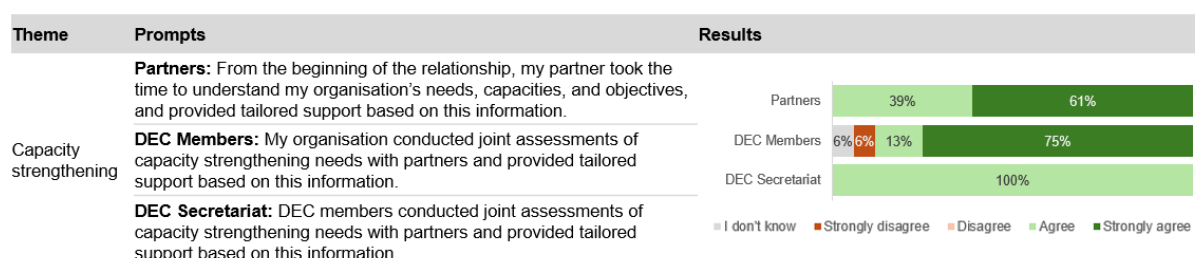
¹⁹ This is a requirement in all DEC appeals and aims to ensure that emergency needs of affected communities are met. The spending requirement is also tied to the requirements of FCDO, a significant donor to the DEC.

systems, proposal writing, or technical expertise, and create development plans that were revisited throughout implementation. Given that many partners had limited experience in humanitarian programming, support addressed both technical and organisational needs.

Modalities ranged from formal training sessions to embedded technical advisors, secondments, and accompaniment models where member staff worked alongside partners to co-develop policies, frameworks, and tools. Partners reported that capacity strengthening proved most effective in helping them develop organisationally when contextualized, iterative, and relationship-driven, focusing on practical implementation rather than imposing pre-packaged systems. Feedback loops and language accessibility were also critical to ensuring relevance and inclusivity.

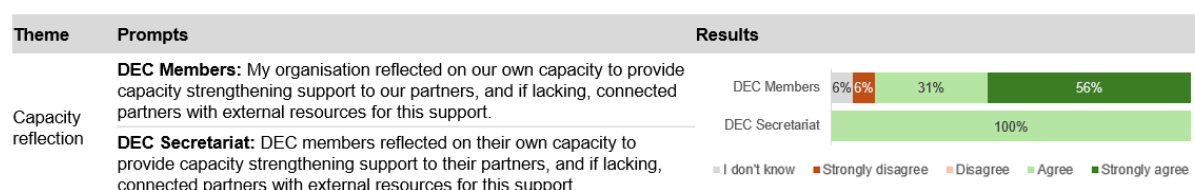
While this approach often fostered genuine partnerships and sustainable capacity, occasional misalignments occurred, such as overly basic training offered to partners. Some partners also expressed uncertainty about using dedicated budget lines for institutional strengthening, often due to unclear guidance on eligible costs or concerns about diverting resources from humanitarian programming.²⁰ Early encouragement and concrete examples of allowable expenditures were found to be helpful in overcoming these barriers.

Figure 8: Survey results on capacity strengthening



DEC members also evaluated their own capacity to serve as effective partners and, when necessary, sought external support to address gaps. For example, one member recognised insufficient internal resources to assist their partner in developing independent fundraising capabilities. Consequently, they engaged an external consultant to undertake this work. Survey findings reinforce this point, indicating that most members were aware of their own limitations and proactively addressed them when needed. There was a general awareness amongst members that capacity bridging was not solely a requirement for partners but also for themselves.

Figure 9: Survey results on capacity reflection



3. Risk management and risk sharing

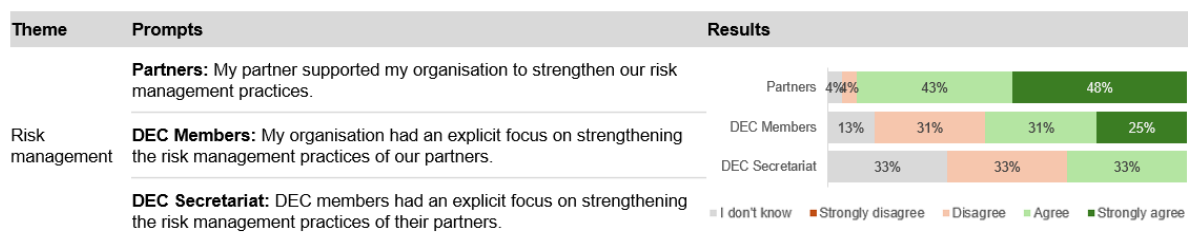
While collaborative risk assessment and organisational strengthening were features of programme design and implementation, risk sharing approaches overall lacked structure and were largely opportunistic. Members consistently demonstrated open communication and flexibility, rarely (if ever) dictating where partners should or should not

²⁰ The DEC clarified that the finance template did include a dedicated budget line for capacity building while members used 'A14 Other' to detail capacity building. However, the review showed that partners nonetheless expressed uncertainty in this regard.

implement activities. Organisational strengthening efforts also helped partners reduce fiduciary, legal, and operational risks. Further, some members directly resourced risk management for partners, hosting training sessions on risk analysis and mitigation strategies, deploying HQ security personnel for real-time support, and advising partners to include budget lines for staff wellbeing and PPE.

The DEC’s risk register and matrix have been effective in identifying potential risks; however, they lack clarity on the procedures to follow when risks materialise, for example, who is responsible for covering investigation costs or losses. Members have expressed the need for practical guidance from the DEC on cost-sharing and steps for addressing realised risks. Perceived limitations in flexibility and uncertainty regarding eligible costs have constrained the ability to respond to emerging security and safety risks. Members and partners often lacked clarity on which security and safety-related expenses were permissible, despite the DEC including a dedicated security budget line in the finance template. This points to a need for greater guidance and discussion amongst the DEC and its member on eligible costs and risk response protocols.

Figure 10: Survey results on risk management



As confirmed with the survey results, there was no evidence of a structured or explicit risk sharing process, such as the approach outlined in the Grand Bargain’s Risk Sharing Framework²¹ which calls for jointly identifying risks, agreeing on crisis management measures upfront, and equitably covering prevention and response costs. This lack of a structured approach was also echoed in the meta-synthesis findings.

“There is limited reference in monitoring reports to risk sharing between DEC members and local partners, even though the content of risk assessments in some monitoring reports indicates substantial operational, security, political and context-related shifts that could impact DEC members and local partners differently – particularly for interventions based in Ukraine.”

The absence of such structure appears to reflect a lack of focus rather than an inability to implement it. Importantly, the foundation of open communication and equitable decision-making between DEC members and partners provides a strong platform for improving risk sharing practices going forward.

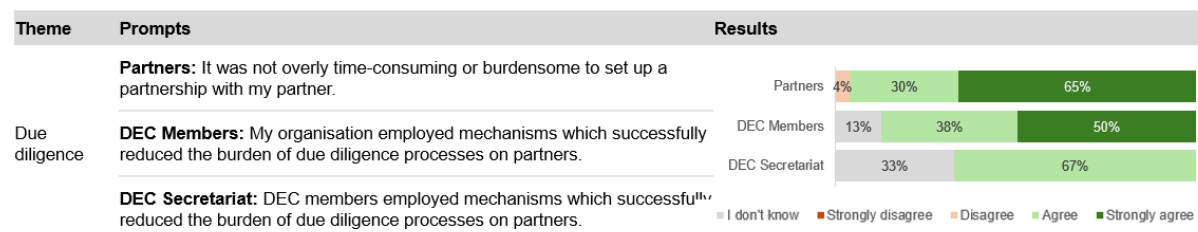
4. Due diligence, compliance, accountability and quality assurance

There were concerted efforts amongst DEC members to balance their due diligence requirements with equitable partnership principles, but approaches varied significantly. Overall, partners perceived members’ procedures as lighter than those of other donors, though processes ranged from transactional compliance exercises to more relational, capacity-focused processes. Most members carried out initial assessments covering safeguarding, financial systems, HR, and procurement and used the results to shape capacity

²¹ IASC (2023) Risk Sharing Framework. Available at: <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/grand-bargain-official-website/risk-sharing-framework>

strengthening plans. Others employed tiered approaches for smaller partners or streamlined templates to reduce administrative burden. Several members prioritised conversation-based assessments, completing templates collaboratively or on behalf of partners. On the other end of the spectrum, some members' due diligence processes were highly structured and compliance-driven, with the Ukraine programme teams adhering strictly to headquarter-mandated approaches with limited scope for reducing the burden on partners. There was no indication that DEC requirements made due diligence or compliance processes more difficult for partners. Instead, the processes followed by members largely reflected their own internal policies and headquarters' mandates, rather than those of the DEC.

Figure 11: Survey results on due diligence



Efforts to reduce the burden of due diligence on local partners focused on passporting and harmonisation, with mixed success. Most members aimed to accept due diligence assessments of partners previously conducted by other INGOs or recognised platforms, such as Philanthropy in Ukraine, to avoid duplication. Some members implemented passporting formally, allowing partners to reuse completed assessments, which partners found empowering and timesaving. Others adopted informal practices, such as leveraging existing documentation or filling out forms on behalf of partners to speed up processes. Collaborative initiatives to harmonise due diligence across INGOs were attempted but largely failed to materialise due to barriers such as varying standards, lack of trust in shared assessments, and differences in process rigour. Similarly, efforts to implement a passporting or harmonisation system amongst DEC members did not materialise despite comprehensive efforts.

5. Brokering, advocacy and facilitation

DEC members supported partners in several ways to strengthen their visibility, fundraising capacity, and influence, though advocacy was constrained by the DEC's funding rules. Members strengthened their partners' visibility and fundraising capacity by providing targeted training and capacity strengthening, including proposal-writing workshops and tailored support for website development, social media presence, and external communication strategies. Some brought in external experts to advise on crowdfunding strategies and donor mapping. There was also evidence of direct introductions to donors and facilitation of joint follow-on funding applications. Several members helped partners gain exposure by enabling participation in conferences and forums, both within Ukraine and internationally. Others featured partners in awareness campaigns or on their own communication platforms. These efforts were well received by partners, though they were largely ad hoc and not consistent across the membership.

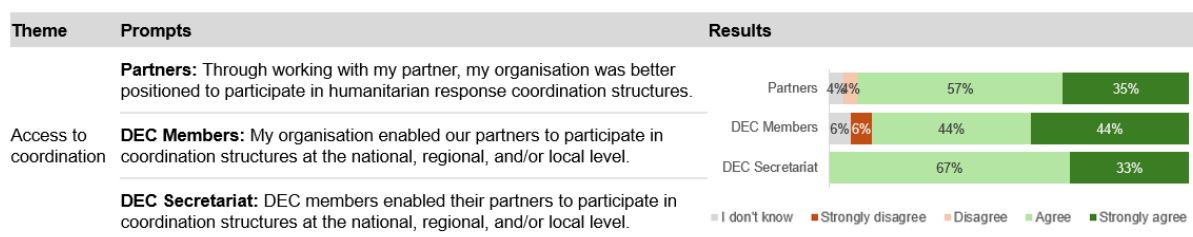
Several members expressed frustration that DEC funding cannot be used outright for advocacy activities. They felt this limitation prevented them and their partners from advocating for localisation-related changes on a national or local level, such as increasing civil society leadership within coordination structures.

Facilitation of role in coordination/cluster structures

There is strong evidence that DEC members actively encouraged partners to participate in various humanitarian response coordination structures at the national, regional and

local level. Survey results indicate that DEC partners confirmed the support provided by DEC members in better positioning to participate in such structures, and almost 90% of DEC members alongside 100% of the DEC Secretariat stated the same.

Figure 12: Survey results on access to coordination structures



Overall, most partners indicated enhanced access to coordination structures and networks as a direct result of DEC members support, with many local partners reported participating in cluster meetings, working groups, and NGO platforms that they had not previously engaged with. DEC members provided necessary trainings improving partners awarenesses on coordination mechanism that covered humanitarian architecture, standards, cluster functioning topics, etc. Most partners indicated that their participation in coordination mechanisms has enhanced their visibility, recognition, and credibility. This also contributed to sustainability, as awareness regarding the coordination mechanisms and resulting connections will endure well beyond the appeal.

At the same time, some partners raised critical reflections, primarily because they did not see any relevance or added value in coordination mechanisms, which they regarded as a resource-consuming burden rather than a crisis response priority. Several partners noted that cluster spaces felt exclusive and dominated by international NGOs. While involvement of local partners into coordination mechanisms increased, some indicated that the level of meaningful influence remained constrained.

Partners strongly emphasised the necessity of financial support to enable their participation in coordination mechanism. This includes covering overheads for the staff involved and related travel expenses. Without adequate financial support, these mechanisms can impose a substantial burden on smaller or more resource-constrained NGOs.

DEC members acknowledged that there is a need to balance encouragement to participate in coordination mechanisms with realistic assessment of partners' capacity. Several members expressed concerns about creating burdensome expectations or diverting partners from core mission work, noting this is an issue they monitor within their partnerships.

6. Technical capacity exchange

Technical capacity strengthening focused on a wide range of areas critical to humanitarian response. Key efforts included protection-related skills such as safeguarding policies, accountability frameworks, and child protection in emergencies, alongside mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS). Members supported partners in building robust MEAL and beneficiary management systems, including data collection and beneficiary registration tools, and feedback mechanisms. Training also covered cash and voucher assistance and humanitarian principles and standards, including International Humanitarian Law (IHL), Do No Harm, and rights-based approaches. Gender and social inclusion were also a common focus with members emphasising gender-sensitive programming and intersectional vulnerability analysis. Additionally, partners received support in communications and advocacy, including developing strategies, audience targeting, social media use, storytelling, and photography.

Two-way technical capacity exchange was a notable feature across the appeal. While DEC members provided extensive capacity strengthening support to partners, knowledge

sharing also flowed in the opposite direction. Partners contributed critical local expertise, including insights into relevant legal structures, government priorities, and the nuanced needs of affected communities. Their contextual understanding informed programme design and adaptation, ensuring that responses were aligned with what works in Ukraine and the

“Less evident in DEC member reporting is the extent to which capacity exchanges take place, i.e., drawing on the expertise and inputs of local partners.”

neighboring countries. Although members and partners highlighted examples of such exchange during interviews and group discussions, there is limited documented evidence to substantiate these instances, according to the meta-synthesis.

This gap indicates an opportunity to strengthen reflection on the value and impact of this form of capacity strengthening.

Management of exit strategies

There were mixed reflections from partners on the management of exit strategies. Experiences ranged from well-planned, phased transitions to abrupt funding stops and poorly managed exits. Most partner experiences were broadly positive, however, the negative cases - though fewer - were quite critical. This is supported by evidence from the meta-analysis, highlighted in the textbox below.

“The timing and depth of exit strategy planning varied considerably across DEC members. Later integration of exit planning limited the consistency of capacity strengthening support in some cases. Earlier planning for transition was associated with smoother handover and greater partner readiness.”

There is strong evidence that most DEC members put a lot of time and effort into considering the development and management of exit strategies. Across all five countries, there were good examples of jointly developed and planned exit strategies between DEC members and their partners, with consideration of these from the outset supported by early communication and clear timelines. There were also many good examples of some DEC members developing a vision for what a sustainable exit would look like, e.g., their partners being well-positioned to lead consortia and access other sources of funding by the end of the appeal. DEC members with strong, sustainable approaches to programming and organisational capacity strengthening handled exit strategies most effectively with clear partner appreciation. Several DEC members also committed to a focus on technical accompaniment and long-term capacity strengthening as funding ended.

There are good examples of different approaches to exit strategies which worked well. This included, for example, ‘soft exit’ or ‘transition’ strategies where some DEC members had a more gradual wind-down of support and/or continued to support partners beyond the appeal in various ways. This included extended timelines for support, as well as ongoing advisory support and technical accompaniment. Partners greatly appreciated this ‘transition’ approach, particularly as the needs of displaced Ukrainians remain high across all five countries.

There were a small number of negative partner experiences in relation to the management of exit strategies and processes. Some partners indicated that they were left unprepared due to sudden ends to partnerships, which forced an immediate halt to their services to affected populations. Abrupt or poorly managed exits had tangible operational consequences for both partners and affected populations, including services ending without

any support to establish referral pathways/systems for displaced people. In these cases, there was little or no communication about when funding would stop or how the partnership would end. In some cases, DEC members acknowledged that situations could have been managed more effectively and identified lessons learned. The reasons for such halt included shift of the focus towards smaller, newer, or more local partners in line with localisation principles, or a misalignment of values, including regarding gender and social inclusion. Regardless of the reason for early close of the partnership, partners noted that more consistent communication and jointly agreed timelines would have led to a more effective exit process.

Partners also expressed frustration that exit strategies are generally linked to funding cycles and not to an observed reduction in need. Most partners were not necessarily unhappy with the management of the exit process or strategy, but felt the exit was happening in a context of ongoing need, insufficient resources, and/or structural constraints. This is beyond the control of the DEC and its members and points more to the structural limits of humanitarian funding cycles. Partners indicated that within humanitarian funding structures, there needs to be a differentiation of humanitarian crisis typology, recognising that conflicts are not linear and can evolve into protracted crises, and that funding needs to be tailored accordingly.

What were the key enabling and constraining factors in relation to these findings?

Across the recurrent themes, a set of common enabling and constraining factors emerged.

Table 5: Enabling and constraining factors

Enabling/constraining factors	Equitability of decision making	Management of exit strategies	Support in accessing additional funding	Facilitation of role in coordination structures
Enabler 1: Professional values and buy-in to localisation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mutually leveraging member and partners expertise • Communication and willingness to listen to each other • Mutual trust and respect • Professionalism and organisation • Openness to partnership and DEC members relinquishing control within partnerships 	X	X	X	X
Enabler 2: Investing time in understanding partners' capacity needs and tailoring training approaches	X	X	X	X
Enabler 3: Transparent communication and early planning of exit strategies.	X	X	X	
Enabler 4: Leveraging innovative mechanisms for additional funding: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seeking funding from other donors to complement DEC programming/extend beyond end of UHA • Reserving DEC member funding to fund partner core costs after exit • Using Collective Initiatives to build partners capacity 	X	X	X	X
Constraint 1: Short timelines for planning and contract amendments impact ability to plan collaboratively	X	X	X	
Constraint 2: Partnerships set up quickly in Phase 1 did not always work out in long term as DEC members changed strategic direction.		X	X	
Constraint 3: Gap in grant management role in the DEC Secretariat		X		
Constraint 4: Limited partner bandwidth and funding to engage in activities, such as coordination structures, beyond direct implementation				X

Is there any significant divergence in the findings, and if so, what factors might affect or explain this?

Overall, there is no major divergence across enablers, which remain consistent across the four themes and reflect shared institutional and partnership approaches among DEC members and their partners. However, some divergence exists across constraints. Firstly, these constraints are not uniformly applicable to all partnerships; variations often stem from individual member approaches. For example, under Constraint 2, members adopted different strategies for establishing partnerships. While some managed transition planning effectively, others ended partnerships abruptly, creating a funding and support cliff edge for partners. Secondly, certain constraints are theme specific. For instance, limited partner staff capacity was raised primarily in relation to participation in cluster mechanisms, where this challenge is most visible.

Where common or consistent findings do occur, what indicative conclusions do these suggest?

Collectively, DEC members and partners demonstrate a strong commitment to equitable partnerships. While members are at varying stages of localisation, there is clear buy-in to shared decision-making and genuine collaboration across the response and thematic areas. Approaches were broadly consistent among members, meaning the aggregate DEC approach reflects its individual components. Clearly understanding partners capacities and investing in capacity sharing is beneficial across the appeal, from the inception of partnerships through to exit strategies, helping to ensure the sustainability of the response. This aligns closely with localisation commitments and efforts to help partners access additional funding within and beyond the appeal.

However, two constraints emerged consistently across themes. Firstly, short planning timelines limited partners' ability to engage in joint planning for implementation and exit strategies. Secondly, partnerships formed rapidly during Phase 1 did not always endure for the appeal's duration, particularly among members without an in-country presence. These issues have broader implications. Compressed timelines undermine collaborative planning and weaken the equitable partnerships approaches promoted within the response, while rushed partner selection can lead to misalignment with long-term objectives and abrupt funding discontinuities, once again challenging some of the key enablers.

Dual Strategy

Headline findings

The Dual Strategy introduced an important focus on innovation in DEC's approach to appeals by creating a dedicated space for experimentation, collaboration and system-strengthening alongside standard emergency programming. In principle, DEC members welcomed the strategy and recognised its potential to support innovation, collective learning and longer-term impact; however, in practice its implementation was uneven and its integration with standard programming limited. Understanding of the purpose, eligibility and added value of the different funding streams varied significantly across members and between headquarters and country-level teams, constraining uptake and reducing opportunities for synergies. Collective Initiatives emerged as the most visible and effective component, particularly in strengthening partner capacity and collaboration, while other streams remained siloed or less differentiated from standard funding. These findings suggest that while the Dual Strategy has clear strategic value, its effectiveness depends on clearer articulation, streamlined design and stronger operational integration to ensure innovative approaches meaningfully complement and inform core humanitarian delivery.

Overview of the strategy

The Dual Strategy (formerly referred to as the Ambidextrous Strategy) was designed in 2022 as a new DEC approach for the Ukrainian Humanitarian Appeal. The Dual Strategy combined multiple funding streams. The first was focused on supporting core/‘business as usual’ programming (standard Indicator of Capacity approach)²² and the second focused on funding innovative funding approaches which incorporated four funding streams: Regional Initiatives, Collective Initiatives, Pipeline Funding, and Shared Services.²³ The Dual Strategy evolved over the duration of the appeal, reflecting emerging needs (e.g., localisation, safeguarding, AAP) and the practicalities of strategy implementation. This was reflected through an increased focus on Collective Initiatives over Regional Initiatives and the introduction of a Collective Initiatives/ Regional Initiatives Working Group by the DEC Secretariat to communicate on updates, shared learning and challenges amongst DEC members.²⁴ This evolution affected how well the dual approaches were combined and strength of integration varied by workstream.

Table 6: New approaches overview²⁵

Funding stream	Focus	Funding and initiatives
Regional initiatives	Testing new approaches, innovation, and capacity strengthening	£11.4 million, 4 initiatives
Collective initiatives	Collaboration, localisation, and system change	£8.1 million, 11 initiatives
Shared services	Addressing system-wide capacity gaps with support from external organisations	£840k, 4 initiatives

Table 7: Pipeline funding overview

Funding stream	Focus	Funding and initiatives
Pipeline	Rapid funding to members with capacity in under-served areas	£9.9 million, 3 members

A midline review of DEC’s Ambidextrous Strategy/Dual Strategy was undertaken in 2024 and an endline review undertaken in 2025²⁶. The Ukraine Appeal and the Türkiye-Syria Appeal were included as case studies. The reviews focused on the relevance of the Dual Strategy and its effectiveness, including in communications and information sharing. It also examined the main successes of the strategic response and sought to identify any necessary changes for the strategy and associated MEAL framework. The evidence and analysis from these reviews are included in this section.

How were the two approaches combined during the length of the appeal?

In principle, DEC members welcomed the Dual Strategy, valuing its potential to strengthen collaboration and create space for piloting innovations that other donors might not fund. However, in practice understanding of various funding streams under the umbrella of innovative approaches was limited, and integration with standard programming remained weak. Awareness was highest among DEC member focal points members with direct contact with the DEC Secretariat, while many field-country-level member

²² Commonly referred to as ‘Engine 1’

²³ Although Shared Services are categorised as part of innovative funding approaches for the UHA, they are not a new approach having existed in previous appeals, albeit at a smaller scale

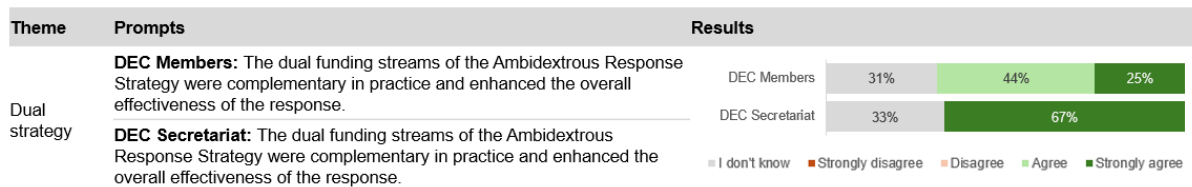
²⁴ The Research People (2025) Ambidextrous Strategy Review: Disasters Emergency Committee

²⁵ The Research People (2025) Ambidextrous Strategy Review: Disasters Emergency Committee

²⁶ Both the midline review (2024) and endline review (2025) were conducted by The Research People

staff (across all countries of the appeal) were unaware of the funding streams for innovative approaches, highlighting a disconnect between strategic intent and delivery. Beyond the Collective Initiatives, members had little visibility into the other streams, revealing both vertical and horizontal silos. This lack of clarity persisted despite the DEC’s efforts to improve communication through a dedicated Working Group for Collective Initiative/ Regional Initiatives focal points. Some informants noted that larger members with greater headquarters capacity found it easier to take advantage of the funding available for innovative approaches.

Figure 13: Survey results on the Dual Strategy



Of all strategy components, members had the greatest understanding of Collective Initiatives. Several were able to highlight examples where their Collective Initiatives had strengthened their standard programme implementation. Members saw Collective Initiatives, rather than the full portfolio of innovative approaches, as the main vehicle for trialling additional or new approaches that benefited their standard programming, potentially reflecting the broader uptake of Collective Initiatives compared with the other initiatives. While they highlighted collaboration as a benefit of Collective Initiatives, those who had led initiatives highlighted their added value for partner capacity strengthening and response sustainability as the key benefit.

Beyond Collective Initiatives, understanding of the other funding streams under the innovative approaches was limited. Where members engaged with these streams, interventions were largely siloed from their standard programming. Uptake of Regional Initiatives was minimal, with most funding directed to Save the Children’s Sustainable Humanitarian Innovation for Transformation (SHIFT) programme, which remained distinct from their field-level standard programming activities. More broadly, members struggled to differentiate Regional Initiatives from Collective Initiatives and therefore saw little value in them as separate funding mechanisms.²⁷ Collective Initiatives were preferred for pooling expertise and often supported innovation and capacity strengthening efforts that might otherwise have fallen under Regional Initiatives. Additionally, members noted that capacity strengthening was already embedded within their standard programming. These factors contributed to confusion about Regional Initiatives purpose, resulting in limited uptake and poor integration with standard programming. **Shared Services have remained largely siloed and less visible within the innovative approaches.**

Members who accessed Pipeline Funding expressed confusion about its separation from the IOC funding. Designed to enable rapid response on the frontlines by providing additional resources to members with existing capacity and partners, Pipeline Funding was used to scale standard programming activities. Its separation by the DEC Secretariat was intentional as it was designed to provide additional resource to members whose lower IOC would otherwise limit their operations. However, some members. Including recipients of Pipeline Funding, remained confused as to its purpose. In particular, DEC members perceived that Pipeline Funding was placed alongside funding for the innovative approaches meaning that they remained unclear as how this type of funding should be used. This was an important challenge as, indicatively, limited awareness undermined its uptake as a funding option. Many suggested Pipeline Funding would function better as an extension of IOC funding.

²⁷ The Research People (2025) Ambidextrous Strategy Review: Disasters Emergency Committee

What lessons can be drawn to enhance stronger linkages between the two main strands of fundings?

There is a clear need for greater clarity on purpose, funding access, and decision-making. The strongest message from DEC members is ongoing confusion about the strategic intent of the new approaches and how funding for them can be accessed. Members emphasized the need for the DEC Secretariat to clarify what types of interventions are eligible, the decision-making process for funding, what qualifies as a “new approach,” and which funding mechanisms are most appropriate. Currently, interpretations of the new approaches and their components vary widely among members, weakening uptake and opportunities to link with standard programming.

Beyond process-related confusion, members are unclear about which types of interventions should be supported by specific funding streams and which are most effective. There is a need for the DEC Secretariat to review and refine what falls under the new approaches stream of funding, ensuring the structure is streamlined and clearly communicated to partners. For instance, the strong preference for Collective Initiatives and Shared Services suggests these could form the core focus of funding. Members perceived that Pipeline funding was part of innovative approaches funding streams, causing confusion. Pipeline may fall better as an extension of standard programming.²⁸

Understanding of the Dual Strategy varies significantly between headquarters and country-level staff, limiting opportunities to integrate with standard programming implementation. Many country-level staff and partners had little awareness of these funding opportunities for new approaches. This was a critical gap, as these teams held the most direct insight into emerging needs related to their core activities. It would be useful for DEC members to explore why this gap exists and consider ways to address it to ensure maximum potential for the Dual Strategy.

There is limited awareness among DEC members of Collective Initiatives implemented by others, representing a missed opportunity to share learning. Although the DEC Secretariat introduced a Working Group to improve communication on these initiatives, members reported that throughout the appeal they had little visibility of initiatives led by peers. While awareness improved in later stages, members noted they had missed chances to benefit from others’ efforts – particularly those related to partner capacity strengthening. Greater visibility and stronger linkages could enhance overall sustainability planning.

DEC members require sufficient time to design effective interventions. Several reported only being able to engage with these initiatives later in the response, suggesting that integration of the dual approach will evolve gradually. The DEC Secretariat can play a key role in supporting members to identify potential interventions and in reinforcing awareness of the available funding mechanisms over time, particularly as needs emerge from standard programming.

²⁸ In line with this learning, DEC has already paused the Regional Initiatives workstream in other appeals

Conclusions and recommendations

The Ukraine Humanitarian Appeal demonstrated that localisation, partnership-based approaches, and flexible, adaptive programming can enable a high-quality humanitarian response even in complex, fast-changing conflict-affected environments. The appeal demonstrated the strength and profile of DEC members as sector leaders in localisation, with a clear and consistent focus on working through, and alongside, local partners from the outset. This approach enabled a rapid, relevant, and contextually grounded humanitarian response for displaced Ukrainians and host communities in Ukraine, Poland, Moldova, Romania and Hungary.

Partners and members widely described partnerships as trust-based, respectful, and collaborative, with high levels of flexibility that allowed partners to adapt quickly to shifting operational realities in each country. Feedback from partners indicated that working with DEC members was empowering due to the emphasis placed on shared leadership, transparency, and mutual trust from the outset. The support DEC members provided to partners in terms of understanding how to work in a humanitarian context and trauma-sensitive approaches, coupled with partners taking the lead on programme design grounded in cultural sensitivity enhanced the scale, quality and appropriateness of support for displaced Ukrainians and host communities.

A major success of the appeal was its emphasis on organisational capacity strengthening, which contributed directly to partner sustainability beyond the lifetime of the appeal. Investments in governance, financial systems, safeguarding, HR and MEL improved the long-term resilience of local organisations and positioned them well for future funding with a more diverse range of donors. DEC members also learned from partners through informal technical capacity exchanges which also contributed to the effectiveness of the response.

While DEC funding phases helped maintain stability, many partners highlighted that short funding windows created uncertainty and forced them into continuous adaptation. Predictable funding would have allowed deeper strategic planning, retention of key staff, and sequencing of capacity strengthening activities without disruption. Generally, exit strategies were well developed, collaborative, and responsibly managed; however, some key outliers highlighted the need for DEC guidance on minimum standards for responsible transition.

Overall, the appeal showcased the effectiveness of localised programming, flexibility, and strong partnership approaches in enabling a strong and consistent humanitarian response. At the same time, variations in partner experiences highlight key learning areas which inform the recommendations for future appeals for the DEC Secretariat, DEC members, partners and the broader humanitarian community.

These recommendations are set out below and have been developed based on i) insights from all stakeholders included in the review on what could be strengthened for future appeals and ii) analysis of the review team based on their wider experience of assessing multi-country, multi-partner and multi-dimensional responses and localisation-informed interventions. The recommendations are centred around 7 key learning areas arising from the analysis, namely:

1. Funding quality and predictability
2. Capacity strengthening and technical capacity exchange
3. Risk management and risk sharing
4. Due diligence processes and passporting
5. Development and management of exit strategies
6. Understanding the impact of localisation on affected populations (from affected populations' perspectives)
7. DEC coordination across members during the appeal

Table 8: Recommendations

#	Findings and conclusions	Recommendations
1	<p>Funding quality and predictability</p> <p>DEC funding was widely recognised as a highly flexible humanitarian financing stream, enabling organisations to respond effectively to rapidly changing needs.</p> <p>While the DEC’s allowance of ICR sharing has promoted more equitable cost coverage, there is still variance across members in terms of how much ICR, if any, they share with partners.</p> <p>The predictability of DEC funding posed challenges for strategic planning and partnership development. Additionally, the requirement to spend a significant portion of DEC funds within the first six months created challenges for members and partners and was found to be unaligned with the protracted nature of the humanitarian response in Ukraine and neighbouring countries.</p>	<p>DEC Secretariat</p> <p>1.1 Make 10% ICR sharing compulsory for members.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> As a first step, seek to understand why members are not taking advantage of current provision. <p>1.2 Reduce the impact of the phased allocation model on funding predictability and long-term partnership planning.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communicate allocation amounts with as much lead time as possible, giving members and their partners more time to jointly plan how they will spend the funds. Aim to reduce time it takes for revised IoC budgets to be signed off to ensure continuous and timely programme implementation. <p>1.3 Reconsider the requirement for members to spend 30% of first allocation in the first six months for appeals launched in response to a conflict or protracted crisis.</p> <p>DEC members</p> <p>1.4 Ensure internal policies on ICR align with the DEC’s requirements.</p> <p>1.5 Consider providing partners with non-binding partnership agreements to alleviate uncertainty around future funding and programming.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> These agreements should outline intentions of both partners for continued partnership, subject to additional funding allocations, and a shared vision for partnership progression over time.
2	<p>Capacity strengthening and technical capacity exchange</p> <p>Capacity strengthening and technical capacity exchange were core components of the appeal and were highly appreciated by partners. A specific budget line for capacity strengthening</p>	<p>DEC Secretariat</p> <p>2.1 Include a focus on capacity strengthening objectives, outputs and outcomes in appeal progress reports.</p> <p>2.2 Support members to explore opportunities for technical capacity exchange with partners.</p>

	<p>facilitated a diverse range of flexible approaches to supporting partners, with some approaches more effective than others. Partners indicated a strong preference for tailored mentoring, coaching, and technical accompaniment over one-size-fits-all training.</p> <p>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.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This could be included as part of the capacity needs assessment process, with DEC members also mapping their own knowledge/capacity gaps as part of this discussion with partners. • This could also be included in appeal progress reports. <p>DEC members</p> <p>2.3 Use partner-led capacity assessments to co-design multi-year organisational development plans.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ideally, this would include a specific associated budget to support this. <p>2.4 Monitor capacity strengthening via clear KPIs at both output and outcome level.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This could include, for example, fundraising income generated, MEL systems implemented, staff retention, or governance milestones. <p>2.5 Map 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.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It would be useful to track this over the course of specific appeals/partnerships to assess progress.
3	<p>Risk management and risk sharing</p> <p>While collaborative risk assessment and organisational strengthening were strong features of programme design and implementation, risk sharing approaches overall lacked structure and were largely opportunistic. Members found the DEC's risk register and matrix to be effective in identifying potential risks; however, noted that the tools lacked clarity on the procedures to follow when risks materialise.</p>	<p>DEC Secretariat</p> <p>3.1 Provide guidance outlining what members and partners can expect if different types of risks materialise.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This could include details on the categories of costs eligible for coverage through DEC funding, supported by illustrative examples of past scenarios and how these were managed collaboratively between the DEC, members, and their partners. <p>3.2 Consider convening discussions among members to identify and share best practices related to risk management and risk sharing.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This could include an exploration of options for extending insurance coverage to partners (e.g., commissioning a research study to identify viable models and best practices within the broader humanitarian sector).

		<p>DEC members</p> <p>3.3 Adopt risk sharing best practices.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review the IASC Risk Sharing Framework and incorporate relevant elements into your organisational approach. At a minimum, allocate time during partnership development to jointly map potential risks and agree on mitigation strategies and contingency plans with partners, including options for covering associated costs. Ensure these discussions are revisited periodically to remain responsive to evolving circumstances.
4	<p>Due diligence processes and passporting</p> <p>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. While some progress has been made in developing a passporting system, there is scope to develop this further and across all DEC members.</p>	<p>DEC Secretariat</p> <p>4.1 Convene due diligence leads from across DEC members to develop a due diligence passport system for all DEC members to use with partners during appeals.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> This would include guidance for members on simplifying and harmonising due diligence requirements. Develop a standard tool or template that can be accepted by all DEC members, with adaptations where required. This could also include the identification/development of ‘tiers’ of grant sizes and a shared DEC passport mechanism. The shared passport system could also include setting up an online shared evidence repository where partners upload core relevant due diligence documents (policies, financial statements, safeguarding policies). Draw learning from the Myanmar Collective Initiative focused on due diligence passporting to use as a platform to advance passporting. <p>DEC members</p> <p>4.2 Work together with the Secretariat and other members to develop a passporting tool for working with partners.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> As part of this, it would be important to look at what due diligence passporting initiatives are happening in each country, as Ukraine is leading the way on this with the Philanthropy in Ukraine platform having locally developed due diligence based on Charter for Change

		<p>model. Any passporting tool would need to be adapted to build on existing local efforts and initiatives.</p> <p>Partners</p> <p>4.3 Consider preparing a due diligence document package, responding to the requirements of major donors.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> This would help reduce the time for individual due diligence processes.
5	<p>Development and management of exit strategies</p> <p>Most partner experiences were broadly positive; however, the negative experiences - though fewer - were quite sharp and critical. Positive examples of exit strategy management included joint planning, early communication and clear timelines. There were good examples of different approaches to exit strategies which worked well, including, for example, 'soft exit' or 'transition' strategies with gradual wind-down of support and longer-term advisory support. Weaker examples included exit processes with hard stops, limited communication and unclear timelines.</p> <p>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. This refers to the fact that responses for tsunamis or earthquakes, for example, have more predictable timelines than conflict settings, which can range from short-term to longer-term crises.</p>	<p>DEC Secretariat</p> <p>5.1 Develop a collective responsible transition framework to guide members.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> This could cover practical points of consideration, including communication protocols, timelines, tapering approaches, likely phase-out triggers, and minimum commitments. This should emphasise that exit/transition planning ought to happen in Phase 1 of the response and be included in MoUs/partnership agreements/contracts. It would also be important to include guidance in the framework on how to include partners in this process to ensure the transitions processes are jointly considered and planned. Include an explicit focus on transition planning and documentation of transition steps in reporting. <p>5.2 Consider the nature of the appeal in relation to the type of humanitarian emergency, e.g., conflict vs. extreme weather event and develop the appeal (and transition strategies) accordingly.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider a potential alternative appeal modality to support more effective transitions for protracted crises. This could include, for example, a resilience/nexus approach to appeals; or an 18-month emergency response and then a small fund available to local partners for a longer period. <p>DEC members</p> <p>5.3 Develop a Collective Initiative focusing on exit/transition strategies.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> As part of this, facilitate learning exchanges on best practice for sustainable exit/transition strategies.

		<p>5.4 Begin exit/transition planning at the start of the appeal and include this in partnership agreements/funding contracts, e.g. a ‘Transition/Exit Annex’.</p> <p>5.5 As part of the transition planning discussion and process:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Link capacity assessment with transition strategy • Ensure partners can predict withdrawal at least 12 months ahead • Align exit/transition timing with needs, not funding cycle • Where possible, ensure continuity of support if/when funding ends, e.g., via technical support/accompaniment, referral pathways.
6	<p>Understanding the impact of localisation on affected populations</p> <p>It is clear that the scale and relevance of DEC members’ and partners’ direct and indirect support for displaced Ukrainians would have been far more limited without the partnerships with DEC members. Without the clear focus on localisation and partnerships within the appeal from the outset, it would not have been possible for DEC members and partners to have had such a rapid, tailored and effective joint humanitarian response. The vast majority of this evidence came from partners; it would be useful to consider how affected populations perceive the benefits of localisation and locally led responses.</p>	<p>DEC Secretariat</p> <p>6.1 Consider undertaking a cross-appeal study focusing on this topic.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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, e.g., DEC member and partner perspectives as well as perspectives from affected populations supported by DEC funding and partnerships. <p>DEC members</p> <p>6.2 Consider including a focus on this in monitoring structures.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This could be undertaken as a pilot in contexts with well-established monitoring processes and stakeholder engagement as part of this, including where strong engagement and relationships with affected populations already exists.
7	<p>DEC coordination across members during the appeal</p> <p>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</p>	<p>DEC Secretariat</p> <p>7.1 Establish regular learning exchanges early on during appeals to strengthen opportunities for collaboration and real-time learning.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At the beginning of an appeal, convene an in-person, in-country/regional meeting with all DEC members to facilitate joint discussions on programmatic and partnership objectives.

approaches and results could have been more focused. Members valued DEC-led workshops and indicated more early and regular exchanges would improve coherence, reduce duplication, and strengthen collaboration.

- Support DEC members to set up regular coordination meetings to ensure key topics are monitored and discussed at regular intervals during the appeal, e.g., operational challenges, partner feedback, programme updates, risk tracking, good practice sharing etc.
- Convene DEC member learning workshops earlier in the appeal response, bringing in partners as appropriate
- Facilitate the sharing of key findings from Collective Initiatives (CI) in a variety of formats for all DEC members. This could include, for example, a short learning brief; a one-slide summary; a 5-minute presentation for a DEC learning call.

7.2 Strengthen the Secretariat’s role in promoting consistency across members when working with partners.

This includes a harmonised approach to key points highlighted throughout the review process and the previous recommendations, such as:

- Due diligence processes
- Risk thresholds, risk sharing and risk management approaches
- Exit/transition expectations and planning
- Localisation commitments

Annex 1: Evaluation matrix

Review questions	Areas of inquiry	Data sources
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Localisation and partnerships</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How did the DEC and its members contribute to progress on the recommendations made in the 2022 localisation scoping study? 2. How did members take into consideration their partners' parameters and reinforce localisation processes and what informed their decision making? 3. What difference did the focus on localisation make in practice to supporting affected communities? 4. How is the DEC making progress on the overall partnership improvement vision proposed in the study undertaken by the Humanitarian Advisory Group: <i>Towards transformation: Progressing partnerships within the DEC?</i> 	<p>Map out recommendations from the localisation scoping study and understand what was intended to be done by members, and how (<i>inception phase</i>).</p> <p>Quantitative and qualitative evidence against the recommendations mapping exercise to understand the extent to which recommendations were implemented, including enabling and constraining factors for implementation (<i>data collection and analysis</i>).</p> <p>The extent to which members engaged with their partners initially on localisation considerations to understand partner needs, capacities, objectives, specificities, legal and administrative contexts in country, and the extent to which this was subsequently planned and implemented.</p> <p>Map out the overall partnership improvement vision to understand the six core capabilities outlined in the study (<i>inception phase</i>)</p> <p>Quantitative and qualitative evidence against the mapping exercise to examine the extent to which DEC members focused on these six core capabilities (<i>data collection and analysis</i>).</p> <p>Successes and challenges in relation to strengthening safeguarding and accountability knowledge, awareness and capacity amongst partners, noting that these topics were perceived to be relatively new in the context of actors in Ukraine, Poland, Moldova and Romania. (<i>Identified as a learning priority by DEC members during inception</i>)</p> <p>Perception comparison of DEC members and partners on how well partnership efforts were progressed.</p> <p>Perception comparison between 1) DEC members and 2) DEC members and partners on how well localisation efforts were progressed.</p> <p>Partner and community members' perceptions on the difference the focus on localisation made in practice to the provision of services. (<i>Identified as a learning priority by DEC members during inception</i>)</p> <p>Sustainability of localisation efforts and the likelihood of these efforts lasting following the end of the appeal. (<i>Identified as a</i></p>	<p>Document review:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Localisation scoping study • Progressing partnerships within the DEC report • Other literature on key localisation themes (e.g., risk sharing, ICR) • Member reports <p>Key informant interviews</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DEC Secretariat • DEC members • Partners • Community representatives <p>Survey</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DEC Secretariat • DEC members • Partners

	<i>learning priority by DEC members during inception)</i>	
<p><u>Dual Strategy</u></p> <p>5. A review of the Dual Strategy encouraging the implementation of both standard approaches and pilots of new approaches simultaneously, also called Engine 1 and Engine 2, was commissioned during the appeal.</p> <p>5a. How were the two approaches combined during the length of the appeal?</p> <p>5b. What lessons can be drawn to enhance stronger linkages between the two main strands of fundings?</p>	<p>Map out the practical steps DEC members took to implement both standard approaches and innovative approaches and how these were designed/intended to be synergistic.</p> <p>Evidence of results to which standard + innovative approaches contributed.</p> <p>Areas of potential strengthening in relation to links between standard and innovative approaches.</p>	<p>Document review:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DEC Ambidextrous Strategy midline and final reviews • Member reports <p>Key informant interviews</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DEC Secretariat • DEC members <p>Survey</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DEC Secretariat • DEC members
<p><u>Additional questions</u></p> <p>6. What are other key recurrent themes arising from the desk review? For each of these themes:</p> <p>6a. What are the main findings and learning points?</p> <p>6b. What were the key enabling and constraining factors in relation to these findings?</p> <p>6c. Is there any significant divergence in the findings, and if so, what factors might affect or explain this?</p> <p>6d. Where common or consistent findings do occur, what indicative conclusions do these suggest?</p>	<p>Four themes identified:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equitability of decision-making • Management of exit strategies • Support in accessing (additional) funding • Facilitation of role in coordination/cluster structures <p>Enabling and constraining factors in relation to the key themes/case studies.</p> <p>Convergence and divergence of evidence.</p> <p>Conclusions drawn from evidence and analysis for testing with the DEC and DEC members.</p>	<p>Document review:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meta-synthesis <p>Key informant interviews</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DEC members • Partners • Community members (if applicable) <p>Survey</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DEC Secretariat • DEC members • Partners

Annex 2: Review participants

Table 9: KII and FGD participants

Stakeholder category	KIIs completed	FGDs completed
DEC Secretariat	4	0
DEC Members	29	0
DEC Partners	33	0
Affected communities	0	4
Total	66	4

Table 10: Survey respondents

Stakeholder category	Completed
DEC Secretariat	3
DEC Members	16
DEC Partners	23
Total	42

Annex 3: Bibliography

#	Document title	Author
1	A Humanitarian Localisation Baseline for Ukraine (September 2023)	NGO Resource Center
2	A Humanitarian Localisation Baseline for Ukraine: Progress Report 2024 (November 2024)	NGO Resource Center
3	Affected Population Perception Survey – Poland, Moldova, and Romania (July 2023)	Ground Truth Solutions
4	Affected Population Perception Survey – Ukraine (February 2023)	Ground Truth Solutions
5	Affected Population Perception Survey – Ukraine (July 2023)	Ground Truth Solutions
6	DEC Ambidextrous Strategy Final Review (May 2025)	The Research People
7	DEC Ambidextrous Strategy Final Review Case Study – Collaborative Cash Delivery Network	The Research People
8	DEC Ambidextrous Strategy Final Review Case Study – Online Database Platform	The Research People
9	DEC Ambidextrous Strategy Final Review Case Study – Strengthening Capacities in Romania	The Research People
10	DEC Ambidextrous Strategy Midline Review (March 2024)	The Research People
11	DEC Ambidextrous Strategy Midline Review Case Studies	The Research People
12	DEC Exit Strategies Internal Workshop Notes (July 2025)	DEC
13	DEC UHA Phase 1 6-Month Report (January 2023)	DEC
14	DEC UHA Phase 2a 6-Month Report (July 2023)	DEC
15	DEC UHA Phase 2a 12-Month Report (March 2024)	DEC
16	DEC UHA Progress Update – 3 Years On (July 2025)	DEC
17	DEC UHA Real-Time Response Review – Hungary Country Report (February 2023)	Conflict Management Consulting
18	DEC UHA Real-Time Response Review – Moldova Country Report (February 2023)	Conflict Management Consulting
19	DEC UHA Real-Time Response Review – Poland Country Report (February 2023)	Conflict Management Consulting
20	DEC UHA Real-Time Response Review – Romania Country Report (February 2023)	Conflict Management Consulting
21	DEC UHA Real-Time Response Review – Ukraine Country Report (February 2023)	Conflict Management Consulting
22	DEC UHA Real-Time Response Review – Synthesis Report (February 2023)	Conflict Management Consulting
23	Options for Supporting and Strengthening Local Humanitarian Action in Ukraine: A Scoping Exercise Report (November 2022)	Lizz Harrison, with Dmytro Kondratenko and Kateryna Korenkova

24	Rapid Reflection on Cash Coordination for the Ukraine Response in Poland, Ukraine, Romania and Moldova – Regional Summary (February 2024)	Key Aid Consulting
25	Rapid Reflection on the Optimal Use of CVA for the Ukraine Response (December 2023)	Key Aid Consulting
26	Safeguarding Resource and Support Hub – Global Evaluation Report (July 2025)	Alinea International
27	Towards Transformation: Progressing Partnerships Within the DEC (June 2024)	Humanitarian Advisory Group
28-99	DEC members' Phase 1, 2a, and 2b Narrative Reports – Interim and Final versions	DEC

Annex 4: Review design

The approach to this review was first and foremost participatory. Key stakeholders were consulted throughout the review process to ensure their insights and perspectives continuously informed the approach, findings, and analysis and recommendations. The focus was on localisation, partnerships and the DEC’s Dual Strategy approach, recognising these areas are a key focus of DEC’s work and funded programming and an area where focused reflection could add the most value for future practice. The review was conducted in four main phases:

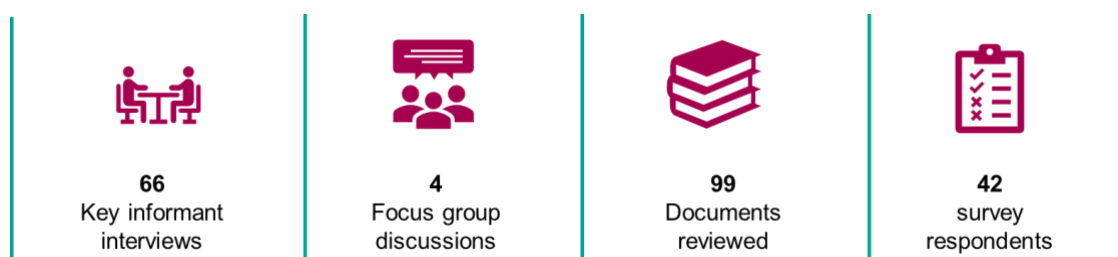
Inception phase: This phase focused on setting a strong foundation for the review process. Inception interviews were conducted with 11 DEC member staff and a participatory workshop was conducted with DEC members and partners to seek their views on the UHA and to help shape the review process. These activities, together with a review of relevant documents, informed the context analysis and development of the methodology for the data collection phase which was set out in the inception report. This included the review matrix and review questions guiding the process; the full review matrix is presented in Annex 1. The findings section of this report is structured around these key review questions.

Meta-synthesis: A meta-analysis and synthesis of all DEC member reports was conducted at the end of the inception phase and just before the data collection phase. This served as both a stand-alone product for the DEC as well as a tool to inform the review matrix. Key additional areas of focus for the review were generated by the meta-synthesis and were included in the review matrix, areas of inquiry and data collection tools.

Data collection and analysis: The figure below summarises the main data collection activities that supported the generation of evidence for analysis. The key methods included Outcome Harvesting, a retrospective methodology that enabled key participants to identify key changes that have occurred as a result of DEC funding and DEC members’ work and then, working backwards, to identify how DEC and members contributed to these changes. Outcome Harvesting was integrated into the data collection tools, including the survey, key informant interview guides and focus group discussion guides. A realist approach was also adopted to allow the team to probe further on the relationship between the programme/partnership approaches and the country contexts of implementation.

A midpoint analysis session was conducted halfway through the data collection phase to identify emerging patterns and data gaps to be addressed in remaining interviews and focus groups with DEC staff, DEC members, partners, peer organisations and community members. Given the depth and breadth of the qualitative evidence and data sources, the review team has the highest confidence levels in the evidence validity with strong triangulation of evidence and consistency of data. A more detailed breakdown of review participants is included in Annex 2.

Figure 14: Summary of data collection activities



Validation and reporting: A learning workshop was conducted with DEC members and partners at the beginning of this phase to test some of the emerging findings and to co-develop

recommendations for the DEC Secretariat, DEC members and DEC partners. Findings and draft recommendations were also presented and discussed with the Steering Group.

Limitations

There were several limitations associated with the review, and these were mitigated to the extent possible. These include:

- **Inclusion of Hungary in the review scope:** UHA activities in Hungary accounted for only 1% of the overall UHA budget and activities phased out much earlier than in other countries. Thus, whilst Hungary was included in the scope of the review, this was to a much lesser extent than the other four countries and there is much less data available for Hungary specifically.
- **Survey response:** the response to the online survey was quite low, with only 42 respondents. This was despite strong communications around the objectives of the survey, allowing the survey to run for four weeks instead of three, and issuing reminders to intended participants. This is likely due to a combination of factors, including high workloads, survey fatigue, the ongoing conflict in Ukraine and ongoing needs in neighbouring countries, and the fact that the appeal ended in August 2025, with many members having phased out their work. The low response was mitigated by other data collection activities and thus the review team were still in a strong position to triangulate survey data with evidence from the meta synthesis, document review, interviews, focus groups and the learning workshop.
- **No differentiation of analysis:** the focus of the review was on the collective implementation of the UHA response, not on individual DEC members or partners. While this is useful for the overarching scope and objectives of the review, it means that there is no differentiation of analysis of each member or partner for each aspect of the review.
- **Limited number of focus groups with affected populations:** given the focus of the review on localisation and partnerships, there were fewer focus groups with affected populations. However, this did not affect the evidence relating to the key review questions.

Annex 5: Meta-analysis and synthesis

Introduction

As part of the Post Appeal Review of the Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC) Ukraine Humanitarian Appeal (UHA) Response, we have conducted a meta-analysis and synthesis of a selection of partner reports from phases 1, 2a and 2b. The focus of this exercise is on localisation and partnerships specifically, with the aim of extracting good practices and gaps identified by partners in their periodic reporting. Where available, we have also extracted evidence on the effects of partnerships and localisation efforts on DEC members' partner organisations and communities. The meta-analysis and synthesis process was also the basis for the selection of four themes identified that will be further explored during the overarching post appeal review process (and that are detailed in the inception report): equitability of decision-making, management of exit strategies, support in accessing (additional) funding, and facilitation of role in coordination/ cluster structures.

In this paper, we provide a brief overview of the methodology employed for conducting the meta-analysis and synthesis before presenting the main findings in two sub-sections: 1) partnership set-up and management, and 2) localisation practices. Lessons learned and areas for attention, as well as examples of reported effects on local partners and communities, are mainstreamed within these two sections as appropriate.

Methodology

The methodology for the meta-analysis and synthesis is shaped by the intended focus of the post appeal review on partnerships and localisation. Using MAXQDA, a qualitative data analysis software, we devised a coding tree, detailed in Table 1, to extract evidence from selected documentation.

Table 11: MAXQDA codes for meta-analysis and synthesis

Partnerships codes	Localisation codes	Cross-cutting codes
Technical capacity exchange and organisational strengthening	Planning and design	Effects on local partners
Brokering, advocacy and facilitation	Coordination and collaboration	Effects on communities
Due diligence and compliance	Equitable partnerships	Learning and adaptation: good practices
Risk management and risk sharing	Capacity strengthening and organisational development	Learning and adaptation: gaps
Funding	Funding and financial management	Potential themes

A total of 60 DEC member monitoring reports were selected and are listed in Table 2 below.²⁹ To arrive at this sample, we applied a three-step approach covering two rounds of meta-analysis:

- **Step 1:** For the first synthesis round, we selected a long list of final reports for phases 1, 2a and 2b that were available to the team in October 2025. Where final reports were not available for phase 2b, we drew on the interim 18 months report. This long list consisted of 112 reports.

²⁹ Overarching documentation, such as the 2023 Humanitarian Localization Baseline and related Progress Report (2024), the Ambidextrous Strategy reviews, and DEC partnership research, were consulted as background and reference documents but are not included in this report.

- **Step 2:** We selected all phase 2b final and interim reports. Where interim reports were used for phase 2b, we selected the corresponding country final report for phase 2a. The remaining selection of phase 1 and 2a documents aimed for a spread of interventions that each DEC member implemented across UHA countries. We proceeded to synthesise 54 partner reports.
- **Step 3:** In November 2025, once all final DEC member reports had been submitted, we conducted an additional synthesis round selecting reports that had not been available under step 2. Sixteen documents were selected, and the synthesis report was updated accordingly. Three organisations – Action Against Hunger, CARE and World Vision – did not have reports reviewed under Step 3 as a satisfactory number of final reports were reviewed from previous phases in Step 2.

For the coding and analysis, we focused on the following sections of DEC member reports. These sections are presented in order of priority in relation to the aims of the synthesis:

- **Exit strategy and localisation:** This section relates directly to the focus of this synthesis exercise focusing on localisation.
- **Coordination:** This section provides details of collaboration between DEC members and local organisations, as well as interactions with local/ government stakeholders and cluster systems.
- **Risk management:** This section presents useful insights on how risks are identified by DEC members and local organisations and the extent to which they collaborate in the identification and mitigation of risks.
- **Lessons learned (in relation to partnerships and localisation):** This section is helpful for distilling the main learnings that DEC members have identified and that could offer guidance for future interventions.
- **Performance, results and changes (in relation to partnerships and localisation):** In this section, DEC members provide evidence of achievements as well as adaptations made to approaches or partnership arrangements.

Table 12: Selected DEC member reports for synthesis

DEC member	Phase 1 (n=13)	Phase 2a (n=13)	Phase 2b (n=28)	Phase 2b update (n=16)
Action Against Hunger (AAH)	Moldova – Final report	Ukraine – Final report	Ukraine – Interim report 18 months Moldova – Final report Poland – Final report Romania – Final report	
ActionAid	Poland – Final report	Romania – Final report	Ukraine – Interim report 18 months Poland – Interim report 18 months Romania – Interim report 18 months	Ukraine – Final Report Poland – Final report Romania – Final report
Age	Moldova – Final report	Ukraine – Final report	Ukraine – Interim report 18 months Moldova – Interim report 18 months Poland – Final report	Ukraine – Final report Moldova – Final report
British Red Cross (BRC)	Poland – Final report	Ukraine – Final report	Romania – Interim report 18 months	Romania – Final report
CAFOD	Ukraine – Final report	Romania – Final report	Ukraine – Interim report 18 months	Ukraine – Final report

CARE	Moldova – Final report	Ukraine – Final report	Ukraine – Interim report 18 months Romania – Final report	
Christian Aid	Ukraine – Final report	Romania – Final report	Ukraine – Interim report 18 months	Ukraine – Final report
Concern	Ukraine – Final report	Ukraine – Final report	Ukraine – Interim report 18 months	Ukraine – Final report
International Rescue Committee (IRC)	Ukraine – Final report	Poland – Final report	Ukraine – Final report Moldova – Interim report 18 months Poland – Interim report 18 months	Moldova – Final report Poland – Final report
Oxfam	Moldova – Final report	Romania – Final report	Ukraine – Interim report 18 months Poland – Final report	Ukraine – Final report
Plan	Romania – Final report	Moldova – Final report	Ukraine – Final report	Moldova – Final report Poland – Final report Romania – Final report
Save the Children	Poland – Final report	Ukraine – Final report	Ukraine – Interim report 18 months Poland – Interim report 18 months Romania – Interim report 18 months	Engine 2 – Final report
World Vision	Ukraine – Final report	Romania – Final report	Moldova – Final report Romania – Final report	

A note on terminology: To distinguish between DEC members and their local partners in the countries of implementation, we will refer to them as DEC members and local partners/ organisations, respectively. When referring to DEC members’ monitoring reports, we will use this term interchangeably with periodic reports.

Findings

Partnership set-up and management

The different starting points of DEC members in relation to their partnership set up in Ukraine and neighbouring countries is evident from the monitoring reports. DEC members, in some cases, already had country presence in their intervention contexts (e.g., Age in Moldova) and/ or established partnerships with local organisations (e.g., Oxfam). In these instances, mobilisation of funds and interventions was smoother and built on existing access and relationships. In other cases, such as Christian Aid with no pre-existing presence in Ukraine, additional time was required for selecting local partners and setting up partnerships, including navigating due diligence processes.

Due diligence and compliance

Due diligence processes are noted to impose significant pressure on local partners, with less experienced NGOs being particularly affected. Whilst the process of partnering under the DEC UHA has helped local organisations familiarise themselves with due diligence expectations, streamlining of processes and simplification of procedures is an area to consider going forward. DEC members have reported supporting local organisations in relation to due diligence and applying lighter due diligence procedures where possible to support access to funds for selected individual activists and groups (e.g., ActionAid). Due Diligence Passporting (DDP) is mentioned in several reports for phase 2b as an option that facilitated due diligence

checks by building on processes already undertaken by other DEC members. Some organisations such as Christian Aid felt that DDP, once in place, enabled them to focus more time on relationship building and on having joint discussions to set capacity strengthening priorities with local partners. Additionally, under Engine 2, DEC members (Christian Aid, Save the Children) report benefitting from Christian Aid's Platform for local and national actors in Ukraine project; over 160 organisations had signed up and 67 of them completed the full due diligence form.

Monitoring reports also provide information on reasons why delays and/ or barriers were encountered both in setting up partnerships and in the ongoing management processes. One reason for delays being experienced in implementation processes relates to navigating legal barriers, for instance for the transfer of funds to organisations that may not have a bank account set up (Age). Other delays, as highlighted by BRC in Romania, relate to their model of engaging with Red Cross local branches, which led to variances in the structuring of activities, considerations related to decision-making processes, and divergences in methodologies and data collection approaches. In terms of barriers, CAFOD highlighted that lack of clarity on indirect cost allocation, and administration of grants with out-of-country intermediaries, led to partners on the ground receiving 0% in indirect costs for phase 2a. While this shortcoming was addressed for phase 2b, it emphasised the importance of clarifying indirect costs among all downstream partners. Other barriers noted by Christian Aid include capacity to scale up in view of Ukraine's legislative and security context.

Brokering, facilitation and advocacy

In their periodic reporting, DEC members demonstrate efforts to broker and facilitate local organisations' access to alternative sources of funding beyond the DEC UHA. These efforts are more evident in reporting for phase 2b, although challenges in this respect are highlighted in reporting from earlier phases too. For example, in its phase 2b reporting Christian Aid notes tailored support was provided to local partners by contracting of a fundraising consultant to help them develop their approach in this respect. However, Oxfam includes mention and discussion of support provided to local organisations to access humanitarian coordination systems in phase 1 narrative reports. There is awareness across monitoring reports of the importance of supporting local organisations to secure funding to continue providing services and assistance (more on this under localisation below).

Reporting for phase 2b highlights the negative impact that the United States funding cuts are having on the sector, and the effect it is likely to have on DEC members and local partners' access to funding. Monitoring reports note disruption to operations across sectors, reduction of staff, scale back of interventions, and postponement of activities. The decrease in funding also impacts on local partners' capacity to engage in collaboration and cooperation within the cluster system as well as with other stakeholders (e.g., local authorities, other organisations operating in each context), which may negatively impact efforts to establish new partnerships and secure additional funding.

DEC members report on their advocacy efforts across national and international platforms to secure participation and membership of local partners in coordination networks and structures. Different approaches are reported in this respect, which include ensuring that local partners drive and participate in conversations on the Ukraine response at cluster level. In some instances, local partners are key participants in cluster groups – for instance ActionAid local partner in Poland, Polska Akcja Humanitarna (PAH), co-leads the Cash Working Group (CWG), coordinating with the CWG in Ukraine to minimise duplication in multi-purpose cash assistance interventions; PAH also chairs the NGO Forum for Polish CSOs. CAFOD's partner in Ukraine also plays an active role in the NGO Platform and National Network for Local Philanthropy Development, as well as engaging in Protection Cluster meetings. Oxfam describes a similar approach in facilitating partner-led engagement in cluster structures, which are positive for meaningful participation in humanitarian response.

Risk management and risk sharing

Discussion of risk management in DEC member reporting has a predominant focus on the procedures and application of standards of the DEC member, with variable detail on whether these are also applied to local partners. For example, CARE makes specific reference to compulsory safety training whilst other DEC members do not specify requirements from local partners. There are some examples of risk assessments that focus on the contributions and processes of local partners, and these take centre stage in the description of risks and mitigation strategies. For example, reports from CAFOD, Concern and Oxfam include risk management and mitigation measures implemented by local partners. Other DEC members detail joint processes for risk assessment. Christian Aid and World Vision describe processes for jointly reviewing their own and local partners' risk registers on a regular basis and discussing mitigation approaches.

DEC member reports contain increasing reference to risks related to staff and local partners burnout and trauma, as well as safeguarding risks. In relation to mental health and stress management, mitigation measures included increasing budgetary and support provisions for wellbeing and psychosocial health and bespoke training for those operating in high-risk environments. For safeguarding, mitigations included capacity development for local partners (policy development, training, safeguarding risk assessments and investigation capacity) and the establishment of community complaints and feedback mechanisms. Examples of DEC members addressing these risks include Age, BRC, CAFOD, Christian Aid and Oxfam and Save the Children.

There is limited reference in monitoring reports to risk sharing between DEC members and local partners, even though the content of risk assessments in some monitoring reports indicates substantial operational, security, political and context-related shifts that could impact DEC members and local partners differently – particularly for interventions based in Ukraine. For instance, whilst Age refers to their security procedures for staff travelling to restricted areas, it does not mention whether or how this type of scenario is managed with local partner organisations to mitigate risks.

In addition, most DEC member reports contain reference to risks related to due diligence processes, e.g., local partners' (operational) capacities and mitigation measures where needed in relation to supply chain management (AAH) or capacity to mobilise quickly (IRC). A risk that was detailed in some periodic reports related to staff turnover (e.g., BRC, Plan), including due to short-term secondment of DEC member staff. Furthermore, surge capacity was drawn on to support local organisations with more limited exposure to humanitarian response (e.g., Save the Children). In both instances, these arrangements may impact on DEC members' ability to establish relationships with local partners.

Additional considerations

Some additional considerations for partnership set-up and planning include:

- Instability in the global economic context with price and exchange rate fluctuations that impact on donor and internal budgets as well as local expenditure, especially where different currencies are used, call for **consideration of inflation and exchange rates in future budgeting and planning** (AAH).
- **Consideration of exit plans from the design stage**, whereby capacity needs of local partners are accounted and budgeted for from the outset in the partnership agreement (Oxfam). Areas for strengthening are not limited to technical capacity, but also include governance, programming, fundraising, operations and leadership.
- When operating remotely, Oxfam noted the importance of **establishing minimum requirements, tools and processes** for partnership scoping and due diligence processes **that respond to the needs of rapid-onset responses**, including

exchanges with peer-INGOs and identifying learnings to simplify procedures and increase timeliness.

- **Flexibility in DEC funding allocation** was key for enabling timely responses to emerging needs (Plan, Save the Children). This flexibility was also seen to enable greater innovation to support localisation efforts, as noted by Christian Aid in relation to the scale-up of the Supporting Community Led Response (SCLR) model and the incubation of the new locally led Access and Assist (A&A) approach. **Operational flexibility to adapt to challenges** related to displacement, legislative changes and changing needs was also noted to be essential (World Vision).

Localisation practices

Monitoring reports, with a dedicated section for (exit strategy and) localisation, offer details on the trajectory of DEC member partnerships in this regard. Consideration of localisation across DEC member reports is predominantly linked with capacity strengthening and capacity development. There are also variations in the extent to which local partners' roles are detailed – with a few DEC members deliberately designing local partner-led interventions (e.g., Oxfam), some emphasising delivery through local partnerships (AAH, BRC), and others noting incorporating local partners in certain elements or at later stages (e.g., IRC).

Design and planning

DEC members monitoring reporting suggests a positive trend towards greater incorporation of local partners' inputs in design and planning, although it is unclear whether feedback loops are systematically implemented. DEC members such as Oxfam detail highly participatory, reflective and equitable processes for design and planning from the outset, which build on existing relationships with local organisations. Save the Children noted that discussions as part of the SHIFT initiative to articulate the meaning of power shifts and definitions of localisation are essential to integrate from the outset to clarify role expectations and ownership trajectories. IRC established partnerships with five local organisations in phase 2b; for phase 1, it coordinated with local authorities and conducted community consultations to understand the needs of target groups in Ukraine, noting strong relationships were established with the Vinnytsia Oblast administration and the Hromada-level Offices for Social Policy. ActionAid in Poland incorporated capacity strengthening areas requested by its local partner Kuchnia Konfliktu in phase 2b, as well as programme quality and MEAL. BRC in Romania worked in collaboration with local branches of the Red Cross, leading to the design of interventions that drew on local knowledge of needs.

Periodic reports highlight key considerations in ensuring meaningful localised interventions that also respond to the agility required for humanitarian response. In its reporting, Oxfam highlighted that fully partner-led responses necessitate appropriate staffing to support smaller NGOs responsibly. Save the Children also noted that with some local partner organisations being newly exposed to humanitarian work, additional resources, efforts and time were required to support and guide them; and CARE observed that collaboration requires time to ensure standardisation of implementation, management and reporting processes. In contrast, IRC initially implemented its programming directly, bringing local partners on board at a later stage, citing the need to move quickly on its humanitarian interventions. These examples illustrate elements of time and resources that ought to be considered for supporting localised responses.

Capacity strengthening and capacity exchange

A predominant element of localisation detailed in periodic reporting is capacity strengthening provided by DEC members to local organisations – and in some cases, to government stakeholders. Capacity strengthening is conveyed as leading to localisation as well as being the cornerstone of exit strategies. Several reports emphasise:

- **Technical capacity enhancement through the provision of training** on sectors of intervention for local organisations and members of the community. The rationale in these instances is that capacity strengthening will contribute to greater sustainability. In addition to sector-specific capacity strengthening (e.g., in MHPSS, Psychological First Aid, Core Humanitarian Standards, Accountability to Affected Populations, or protection, safeguarding, migration, integration and cash assistance), some DEC members have also focused on needs assessments, project management, regulatory compliance, stress management skills, MEAL and financial training for local organisations (AAH, ActionAid, Age, CAFOD, Christian Aid, Oxfam).
- **Strengthened public services** (CARE and World Vision in Ukraine) or **negotiating access to public services** (Save the Children and World Vision in Romania) to ensure that the assistance provided under the DEC UHA can be absorbed by government actors. Interventions along these lines are reported by CARE, Save the Children, and World Vision in Romania and Ukraine. For World Vision in Ukraine, multi-purpose cash assistance was integrated into Ukraine’s Ministry of Social Protection.
- **Wellbeing of staff implementing programmes**, with several DEC members identifying the need to allocate resources for mental health and staff well-being, with trainings and support provided by ActionAid, BRC, CAFOD, CARE, Age to local organisations.
- **Sharing of knowledge and experience** through analyses, research and interactive sessions (AAH, BRC, Age), creating resources that can continue to be used by local organisations after funding under DEC ceases. Under Engine 2, Save the Children also applied a Training of Trainers (TOT) approach to strengthen knowledge and skills in areas such as Education in Emergencies (EiE) Fundamentals and Humanitarian Operations Programme (HOP).

Less evident in DEC member reporting is the extent to which capacity exchanges take place, i.e., drawing on the expertise and inputs of local partners, and whether partnerships are equitable. Some reports highlight instances where local partners have provided feedback on areas that have been challenging or where additional support was required. For example, Age, CAFOD and Christian Aid detail workshops held with local partners to support reflection and adaptation. Gaps identified in DEC members’ practices or capacities are not detailed except in relation to due diligence or access to local contexts. Apart from Oxfam and Save the Children (the latter in their Engine 2 reporting on development of shared approaches and principles), capacity is predominantly presented as one-way from DEC members to local partners, highlighting a gap in two-way reflective practices.

Coordination and collaboration

Information provided in DEC member reports on coordination offer insights on the extent to which local organisations are engaged in local and cluster exchanges, and the nature of this engagement. At the local level, DEC members’ operational cooperation with stakeholders is identified as key for the success of interventions. For example, Age in Moldova cooperated with the Local Department of Social Assistance, the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, and the National Agency for Social Assistance. In Romania, BRC coordinates with key actors including local authorities, social assistance services, and the Inspectorate for Emergency Situations to ensure alignment with government interventions. Coordination at the local level can either be based on DEC members’ existing networks or is facilitated by the contacts and expertise of local partners. In some DEC members’ reports, access to the local level is noted to be facilitated by local partners who are established organisations in their contexts of operation.

Participation in cluster mechanisms is described from two angles: for information sharing and coordination of interventions between members and participants, and

provision of inputs that can contribute to the design (and/ or adaptation) of interventions. For example, BRC notes that participation in the CWG in Poland contributed to programme design, including criteria for eligibility, transfer value and duration, during phase 1. CAFOD, also under phase 1, drew on materials and toolkits produced by the food cluster in Ukraine. Under phase 2a, CARE provides information on its participation in national and regional OCHA coordination meetings for the overall Ukraine response and support provided to cross-agency learning processes. More generally, all DEC member reports contain detail of their participation in cluster mechanisms on an ongoing basis, with more varied detail of the extent of participation of local partners in these mechanisms.

Exit strategies

Details on planning for exit strategies and the extent of local partner engagement in these processes varied, ranging from strategies that were considered from the outset to those that were put in place closer to interventions' end. The types of areas of attention – and action – as part of exit strategies were also varied, including consolidation of capacity strengthening efforts, facilitation of liaison with donors and INGOs for alternative funding options, as well as technical support. Some concrete examples to illustrate these approaches include:

- ActionAid provided **targeted technical and financial support** to local partners, tailored to each organisation's needs, and worked with them to prioritise knowledge transfer. Learnings from the scale down process in Poland informed their exit strategies in Romania and Ukraine.
- AAH put in place an exit strategy in phase 2b with its main local partner Nagle Sami. Norwegian Refugee Council was identified to **take over activities and continue providing financial and technical support** to Nagle Sami. AAH also provided its local partner organisations with recommendation letters.
- BRC's exit strategy included a core component of **handover of activities to branch management and local partners**. As a result, some branches are reported to have integrated MHPSS, language learning groups and social cohesion into their regular programming, building on their local partnerships and volunteer networks.
- CAFOD highlighted in its Ukraine phase 1 report the need to **invest in additional capacity early in the programme** to reap benefits during implementation, including deployment of capacity strengthening staff (in this case, supply chain specialists) for accompaniment. One-to-one mentoring was deemed more impactful than training alone in feedback provided by local partners.
- Christian Aid reports that the A&A approach, a locally designed, needs-based cash assistance mechanism piloted in phase 2b, has now been adopted by 10 local organisations. Local partners have assumed a **greater decision-making role** by adapting the A&A approach to their organisation's remit and contextual needs. Christian Aid is also providing **core funding beyond programme closure** to local organisations to enable smoother transitions.
- Both CARE and Oxfam highlight the **importance of not creating a parallel humanitarian response ecosystem and capitalising on existing ones**. CARE's local partners in Romania, SERA Foundation and the Federation of Non-Governmental Organisations for Children (FONPC), for example, already had collaborating relationships, which will continue when the programme ends. Oxfam facilitated conversations with local partners in Ukraine to tailor long-term support to their context and goals that outlive the partnership under the DEC UHA, enabling them to shape their own future beyond any single partnership.

- Age in Moldova emphasised **joint needs assessments to foster more integrated approaches, reduce costs, and close gaps in service delivery**, all of which are particularly crucial as resources become scarcer.
- IRC in Poland promoted **multi-stakeholder engagement and knowledge transfer to public sector actors**, collaborating with the Regional Chamber of Commerce and local Labour Offices. IRC also focused on training of their local staff and increased their numbers in **leadership roles** at IRC Poland.
- Plan Ukraine conveyed the importance of **engaging with local authorities to maximise potential for buy-in and sustainability**, including facilitation of peer-to-peer learning initiatives across different regions of Ukraine covered by the project.
- Save the Children dedicated 18 percent of the Engine 2 programme funding to local partners, who also **co-designed and co-delivered** the programming, additionally creating the foundations for longer term collaboration and contextualised delivery.
- World Vision in Ukraine engaged with local organisations during the planning phase to **align project objectives with the community's needs**. This engagement also had a positive effect on risk assessment and budget accuracy. Collaboration with government officials also helped to reach remote and rural areas, working more at Hromada level, to address unmet and growing needs there.

Lessons learned for future humanitarian appeals

DEC Secretariat and DEC members

Lesson 1: There is a need to factor in DEC members' starting point on localisation and partnerships in design and planning

DEC members had different starting points in terms of their presence in Ukraine and surrounding countries as well as in relation to existing partnerships with local organisations. In terms of design and planning for future humanitarian appeals, accounting for these differences may mean capitalising on existing access and relationships for interventions requiring quicker mobilisation, and factoring in time and resources required for setting up where DEC members do not have a presence or established partnerships. This tailored approach may mean adjusting expectations in terms of what is achieved within a given period and how it is measured to recognise different organisational trajectories for reaching results.

Lesson 2: Capitalisation on existing and/ or simplified due diligence processes ensures more agile humanitarian response

The evidence gathered from monitoring reports suggests that navigating due diligence requirements has had an impact on DEC members and local organisations, often slowing down processes. The issues encountered in this respect have been noted to affect decisions on eligibility and timeliness and have required time and staff resources to address. Future humanitarian appeals may consider ways in which DEC members can capitalise on each other's processes or simplified procedures in line with the agility required for humanitarian response. DDP and the Christian Aid Platform for local and national actors in Ukraine project are both highlighted as adaptations that have been positive for DEC members and local organisations in this respect.

Lesson 3: Early identification and appropriate resourcing of capacity needs support greater ownership by local organisations and more robust exit strategies

Local organisations' capacity strengthening is a consistent theme in all DEC members' reporting. However, early identification of capacity needs and their integration throughout the implementation timeframe can contribute to capacity strengthening benefitting implementation, embedding of expertise and greater sustainability. Attention to the importance of fostering local leadership through capacity strengthening is key too.

Lesson 4: Operational and funding allocation flexibility is key for timely and relevant humanitarian response

DEC members consistently highlighted changes in approach and programming that required adaptation of their response; most of these changes related to the security situation as well as the shifting funding landscape in the humanitarian sector. Operational flexibility to adapt to contextual changes and flexibility in DEC funding allocations are highlighted as crucial in ensuring that DEC members and their local partners responded in a timely and relevant manner to needs.

Humanitarian actors in Ukraine and surrounding countries

Lesson 5: Involvement of local organisations in design and planning and in decision-making is more likely to lead to meaningful localisation efforts

The review of monitoring reports over the UHA period suggests that DEC members' approaches to localisation are progressing in a positive trajectory. Some DEC member reports offer encouraging examples of partnering approaches where local organisations played a significant role in identifying their needs and designing interventions. Partnerships being underlain by deliberate discussions on shifting power and the meaning of localisation are also noted to positively contribute to their local partners' ownership. Gaps are found in relation to local partners' inputs to decision-making processes in some instances, which is an area that can be strengthened in humanitarian actors' partnering going forward.

Lesson 6: Fostering of local partners' participation in coordination structures supports greater role parity between local and international organisations

Divergences in the extent of reported engagement of local organisations in cluster and coordination structures were identified in this synthesis exercise – with some local partners playing leading roles in these structures. Meaningful involvement of local organisations in cluster and coordination structures is essential for ensuring greater parity with international organisations and effecting the intent of working towards capacity exchange and capitalisation on the comparative advantages of humanitarian actors.

Lesson 7: Joint approaches to risk identification and management between local and international partners is needed to move towards more effective risk sharing

Monitoring reports demonstrate that there are consistent processes to risk identification and management for DEC interventions, with variances in the extent to which risks are assessed jointly with local partners. To appropriately account for the differential risks that may be encountered by international and local organisations and mitigate their impact, there is room for improving the extent to which risks are shared in humanitarian response.

Conclusions

The meta-analysis of DEC member reports for this synthesis exercise has shed light on their approaches to localisation and partnerships over time and their differential trajectories in these respects. Monitoring reports demonstrate **consistent engagement** and consideration of localisation and efforts to build **meaningful partnerships**. Evidence provided over phases 1, 2a and 2b suggest an **increasing maturity of approaches** to localisation and partnering and more detailed thinking of sustainable exit strategies.

Partnership set-up and management findings highlight the **centrality of DEC members' processes** in the identification and selection of local partners. Monitoring reports demonstrate recognition of barriers in relation to due diligence and the need to capitalise on DEC member processes and simplify procedures. Note is also made of the additional resources required to support local organisations, including on due diligence expectations. The **iterative nature** of these adaptations is considered a strength that accounts for the agility requirements of humanitarian response and offers useful reflections going forward.

Monitoring reports also provide ample evidence of DEC members' **efforts to broker and facilitate local partners' access** to donors and other organisations that can continue to support their work once UHA funding concludes. These efforts take different forms; they involve directly connecting local organisations to international organisations working in the sector and contexts of operation, support in building capacity to apply for funding directly, or participation in cluster and coordination structures to strengthen networking. These initiatives are encouraging and can be built upon going forward.

Different models for reporting on risk are found in monitoring reports, which demonstrate varying levels of consideration and engagement with local organisations' risk processes. The angles through which risks are considered are appropriate and valid across reports, but gaps are identified in some reports in relation to integrating **risks faced by local partners**. Nonetheless, there are good practices identified in several reports including joint identification and assessment of risk between DEC members and local partners and greater focus on risk management processes of partners. There is also increasing attention to risks related to trauma and burnout as well as safeguarding. Good practices can be built on further to consider whether and **how risks are shared** between partners given the differential impact they may have on them.

Reported evidence on localisation efforts shows an overall positive trend towards greater inclusion of local partners in **design, planning and implementation**. Whilst some DEC members started from a more established basis – either having a presence in the countries of operation or capitalising on existing partnerships – all DEC members show increasing awareness of the importance of drawing on the expertise and knowledge of local partners and appropriately planning for handover of activities and implementation. Nonetheless, gaps were identified in the extent to which local partners are involved in decision-making – with very few monitoring reports detailing how local organisations are involved in decision-making on design and implementation. Weaknesses were also identified in reporting evidence relating to **capacity exchanges** between DEC members and local partners, with more reflective practices being reflected in phase 2b reporting.

Consideration of exit strategies varies between partners but overwhelmingly focuses on **capacity strengthening**. Reference is made to securing new partnerships, integrating services into public provision, increasing leadership opportunities and skills at local level, and diversifying funding. Details on the timing of planning for exit strategies differs across monitoring reports; a few DEC members embedded exit strategy planning from the outset whereas others have integrated reference to it in phases 2a or 2b. Evidence on integration of exit strategy planning earlier points to more **consistent support** provided to local organisations to build capacities and establish **alternative partnering relationships**. There is also evidence that some DEC members are applying learning from strategies applied in countries from which they exited earlier to inform these processes in other contexts.

Overall, monitoring reports demonstrate several strengths in DEC members' engagement with local and national actors, which have potential to contribute to greater **sustainability** of interventions. In some contexts, this engagement aimed to identify needs of targeted populations and/ or of professionals providing services to them, and in others it focused on securing coordination to facilitate implementation (e.g., to reduce duplication or to ensure buy-in from relevant stakeholders). The involvement of local organisations in coordination with local and national stakeholders is not consistently described across DEC members reports. However, strengths are identified where local organisations are **fully involved** in these coordination efforts and where DEC members **capitalise on the experience, networks and access** of partners for implementation.

In terms of cluster coordination, there are also variable levels of detail on the extent of involvement of local organisations. There is consistent evidence across reports that cluster coordination has been beneficial in the **provision of technical inputs** to DEC members' interventions and in supporting efforts to **reduce duplication** in the humanitarian response.

Monitoring reports detail local organisations' attendance in cluster meetings and coordination with sectoral counterparts, but with few exceptions, reports do not provide information on whether local organisations play leading roles in these structures. The **quality and extent of local organisations' engagement** in cluster coordination is an area for attention going forward, including recognising constraints local partners may face in terms of human and time resources for engagement in these fora.