

Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee
Thursday 22 May 2025
17th Meeting, 2025 (Session 6)

Gaza

1. The Committee is taking evidence on Scotland's humanitarian response to Gaza.
2. The Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC) launched its Middle East Humanitarian Appeal on 17 October 2024¹. Announcing the launch, the DEC's Chief Executive, Saleh Saeed said—

“DEC member charities are responding right now in Gaza, Lebanon and the West Bank, providing lifesaving food, water, shelter and medicine – this humanitarian support is a vital lifeline for millions of people in overwhelming need of assistance.”

3. Figures published by the DEC show that 2.1 million people “the entire population of Gaza - do not have enough to eat” and that 1.9 million people have been displaced in Gaza².
4. The UK Government has matched the first £10million of donations from the British public to the DEC's Middle East Humanitarian Appeal.
5. The Scottish Government awarded £250k to humanitarian aid efforts in the Middle East in October 2024³. Of this, £200,000 was contributed to a fund shared between the Disaster Emergency Committee's 15 member organisations helping to provide food, water, medical assistance and shelter to displaced people in the region. In April 2025, the Scottish Government announced a further £240k for the DEC Middle East appeal⁴.
6. Previously the Committee took evidence on Gaza from the Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture on [2 November 2023](#).
7. We will hear this week from—
 - Frances Guy, Chief Executive, Scotland's International Development Alliance and Chair, Scottish Government's Humanitarian Emergency Fund Panel
 - Saleh Saeed, Chief Executive, Disasters Emergency Committee .
 - Jayne Crow, Head of Programmes, Disasters Emergency Committee

¹ <https://www.dec.org.uk/news-feed/5540?newscard=198>

² <https://www.dec.org.uk/appeal/middle-east-humanitarian-appeal>

³ <https://www.gov.scot/policies/international-development/humanitarian-response/>

⁴ <https://www.gov.scot/news/additional-support-provided-for-middle-east-appeal/>

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8. Attached at Annexe A is a written submission from the Disasters Emergency Committee

Clerks and SPICe, May 2025

DEC Middle East Appeal - Briefing for CEEAC Committee – May 22nd

Introduction

The DEC launched its Middle East Humanitarian Appeal in October 2024 in response to the crisis affecting not only Gaza but related urgent needs in Lebanon, Syria and the West Bank.

In the past 7 months, the Appeal has raised more than £45 million across the UK with an estimated £3.9 million here in Scotland. More details below.

In recent weeks, following the end of the ceasefire in Gaza, the humanitarian crisis in the territory has significantly deteriorated. More than 2 million people urgently need lifesaving aid. People are facing extreme levels of food insecurity, leaving the entire population at risk of famine. Most families are not having daily meals and malnutrition cases are rising fast, especially among children.

The multi-agency Integrated Food Security Phase Classification¹ (IPC) assessment, released on May 12th reported that the entire population of Gaza are at risk of famine, with some close to 250,000 currently experiencing the most severe, or "catastrophic" levels of food insecurity. It said more than 70,000 children under the age of five are expected to be acutely malnourished over next 11 months to April 2026.

When the temporary ceasefire was agreed in January many families moved back to their communities but have subsequently been forced to flee again. Access to proper shelter, sanitation, and clean water is increasingly scarce.

DEC charities and their local partners are still working tirelessly to support people in these unimaginably difficult conditions, as they have been doing throughout the crisis.

Their experience in responding during periods of both conflict and ceasefire over the past months has enabled them to ensure they have plans in place to continue some of their work as the situation changes, despite the enormous challenges they are facing.

During the ceasefire, many DEC charities were able to replenish much-needed supplies such as food, medicine and essential hygiene items. These have helped to sustain their operations over the past weeks. Communities are also still benefiting from longer-term progress made during that time, such as the repair of water systems and support for local farmers.

In the absence of external supplies, DEC charities have been working with local partners to secure the limited goods that are available from local markets and provide vital cash assistance and psychological support. Their trained medical staff are also supporting as many people as they can, even with medicine supplies running critically low.

¹ <https://www.ipcinfo.org/ipc-country-analysis/details-map/en/c/1159596/?iso3=PSE>

Government Support for the Appeal

Thus far the DEC Middle East Humanitarian Appeal has raised more than £45 million UK wide with an estimated £3.9m raised in Scotland.

These fundraising totals include £10 million in Aid Match from the FCDO and two tranches of support from the Scottish Government - £200,000 at Appeal launch in October 2024 and a further £240,000 in additional funding released in February 2025.

Through the Humanitarian Emergency Fund mechanism, the two non-DEC members of the HEF Panel, Mercy Corps and SCIAF were granted 20% of funds released by the Scottish Government, with the two agencies sharing £50,000 in October and £60,000 in February.

DEC Member Response since October

Gaza

The following are some of the examples of how DEC charities have been supporting people in Gaza since October 2024.

- Using DEC funds ActionAid have provided hot meals, shelter service, services, and winterisation items to more than 19,000 beneficiaries so far in the central and southern area of Gaza Strip.
- Action Against Hunger, with the support of DEC appeal funds, has provided lifesaving water to more than 120,000 individuals in north Gaza and Gaza City. As a result of damaged water systems, distribution through water trucking remains the only possible source of clean water in some areas.
- Oxfam and their local partners are providing families in the Deir al Balah and Khan Younis areas of Gaza with much-needed cash assistance. They will also be providing psychosocial support for women dealing with ongoing trauma.
- The British Red Cross and their local partners are providing vital medical care to some of the many sick and injured, supporting hospitals and clinics and providing essential medicines.
- Concern Worldwide and their local partners have been distributing clean water every two days in Gaza to displaced people living in camps. They are also distributing hygiene supplies and building sanitation facilities in camps.

Jamil Sawalmeh is Country Director for **ActionAid Palestine**. He describes the conditions that his colleagues in Gaza are working under:

"When aid is not getting in, that's where we are most needed... that's where money becomes the fine line between life and death."

"The ceasefire period was very important, because we had a significant amount of supplies that have come into Gaza, which actually made it possible for people to survive for 60 days. If we did not have that ceasefire period, I don't think many people in Gaza would have lasted a couple of weeks."

Zoe Daniels is Country Director for DEC member charity **International Rescue Committee (IRC)** in the occupied Palestinian territory. She explains:

“We partner with local organisations to reach the most isolated and vulnerable communities, ensuring they receive essential humanitarian aid, including healthcare and food. This collaboration allows us to continue delivering life-saving support despite the ongoing challenges.”

Karim Alqassab is Humanitarian Programme Manager for Age International in the Middle East

“Donations are very important because they enable us to maintain the structure of humanitarian assistance. We were only able to do what we did in the past six months because of the generous donations we have received through the DEC.”

Lebanon

The ceasefire agreement in Lebanon at the end of last year meant some of the hundreds of thousands of people displaced by conflict could return to their communities and start to rebuild their lives. But months on, many still have no home to return to, and many more are cut off from basic services including water, electricity, and healthcare.

DEC charities and their local partners are still providing essential support including food and basic supplies, as well as hygiene kits, shelter items, and cash distributions to meet people’s urgent needs. They are helping to repair damaged infrastructure like water systems and health centres. Training in skills such as financial literacy is allowing people to look to the future and work towards a sustainable livelihood.

Examples of how DEC charities have supported people in Lebanon:

- Oxfam has been providing people displaced outside of collective sites with vital food parcels and items in northern Lebanon.
- International Rescue Committee has been providing multi-purpose cash for displaced people and returnees in Bekaa, to meet their urgent and basic needs.
- Action Against Hunger has supplied 15,000,000 litres of water across 800 facilities and has reached over 90,000 people with support since October 2023.
- Plan International are providing food, and winter kits including blankets and mattresses, and reaching families with essential hygiene and baby kits.

West Bank

In January, a surge in settler attacks and an increase in Israel’s military action in the North of the territory, led the residents of three refugee camps to flee.

One DEC member charity provided 13,600 jackets to the most vulnerable children to keep them warm through the Winter.

Another DEC member supported villages, schools and civil defence centres to be better prepared to respond to emergencies. It included the supply of emergency medical kits and emergency response training.

Syria

The situation in Syria, like the rest of the region that is affected by the conflict, is extremely complex. Infrastructure has been damaged and efforts to rebuild are hindered by economic sanctions and limited resources.

DEC member charities have been working alongside local partners to help those who fled into Syria during the conflict in Lebanon and those forced to return. This includes health and hygiene support, shelter, food, protection and multi-purpose cash assistance.

Through cold Winter conditions warm clothing, mattresses and blankets have also been provided.

Background on DEC approach to the conflict

The January ceasefire agreement?

The DEC welcomed the January ceasefire which provided a degree of hope and relief to the millions of people whose lives have been devastated by this conflict. It also allowed DEC member charities to scale up their current aid distribution in Gaza and save more lives.

The role of the DEC is to provide a trusted and efficient way to donate in response to the world's worst humanitarian crises. As such, we are politically neutral and don't undertake advocacy or campaigning work, remaining entirely focused on providing humanitarian aid. This is important in order to ensure our work does not become politicised, therefore maintaining the widest possible access to people in need of support for DEC member charities and preventing aid workers from becoming targets in conflict.

As a non-political organisation the DEC is not able to comment on the terms of the ceasefire, or any military developments in the region.

Has the DEC done anything to support the families of hostages and those who were recently released?

The DEC's role is to bring together its 15 member charities to raise funds quickly and efficiently to address humanitarian needs. The DEC and our members have not been involved in the negotiations regarding the release of the hostages held in Gaza.

One of the DEC members is the British Red Cross, part of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, which includes the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

The ICRC has a role as a neutral intermediary between parties in conflict. It has helped reunite hostages with their families and the return of Palestinian detainees from Israel to the occupied Palestinian territory.

The ICRC has called on all parties to continue to adhere to their commitments to ensure future exchanges can take place safely, so that more hostages and detainees are released and reunited with their families. It also continues to call for the humane and dignified treatment of the hostages and for access to check on their welfare, provide medical treatment and re-establish contact with their families.

How has DEC been ensuring that aid doesn't get into the hands of Hamas?

The DEC only funds aid delivered through our member charities and their trusted local partners. It does not provide aid to or through official or de-facto authorities in any response.

DEC member charities have robust vetting procedures for new staff who sign up to their codes of conduct and humanitarian principles of neutrality and impartiality. Local partners that receive funding from DEC member charities are also vetted and commit to upholding humanitarian principles.