Humanitarian Emergency Fund Annual Report 2025 – 2026

Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba

Acknowledgements

This Annual Report provides an overview of work delivered during 2025/6 through the Scottish Government's Humanitarian Emergency Fund (HEF). The report has been produced by the Scottish Government in collaboration with the Disasters Emergency Committee and HEF Panel members.

We would like to recognise the particular effort of Emily McDonnell Thomas and Huw Owen at the Disasters Emergency Committee for drafting the report and to Frances Guy, the Chair of the HEF panel, the panel members (British Red Cross, Christian Aid, Islamic Relief Worldwide, Mercy Corps, Oxfam, Save the Children, SCIAF and Tearfund) and their delivery partners.

Particular thanks go to, Mark Adams, Jonathan Dames, Jenny Walter, Jamie Livingstone, Pamela Woodburn, Valerie Brown, Nadeem Baqir, Alistair Fergusson, Natasha McKinnon, and Lorna McDonald for contributing case studies and other inputs to the report and for their engagement in the peer review and delivery of HEF projects.

Finally, thanks also go to Steven Thistleton for their quality assurance.

Ministerial Foreword

Simita Kumar – Minister for Equalities and International Development

Across the world, millions of people are enduring the devastating consequences of conflict, displacement and disaster, losing loved ones, homes and livelihoods while facing an increasingly uncertain future.

We are living through a dangerously unpredictable shift in global politics which makes it all too easy to overlook the enormous humanitarian impact of war on the world's most vulnerable communities. Millions of the world's most vulnerable people, whose lives have long been blighted by poverty and inequality, are also threatened by the accelerating impact of climate change driven extremes and flood and drought. As humanitarian needs soar, aid budgets have been cut to fund increased defence and other spending in the UK and beyond. Long held humanitarian principles are being undermined with aid workers increasingly targeted as they put their own lives on the line to save others.

Against this desperate backdrop, the Scottish Government remains committed to play its part in helping some of the most vulnerable people survive these deadly crises and help them rebuild their lives. That is the aim of the Humanitarian Emergency Fund (HEF) which, since 2017, has supported Scottish-based charities and their expert local partners to deliver the most appropriate life-saving support, not only for high profile disasters but also major crises that, despite their scale and impact, all are too often overlooked.

It remains a key pillar of this government's long held ambition for Scotland to be a good global citizen and is firmly aligned with our wider International Development Programme. Reflecting long-standing global inequalities, this means our humanitarian funding helps shift power to global south organisations and gives local communities a greater voice in aid policy and delivery. It also actively prioritises support for women and girls through our **Feminist Approach to International Relations (FAIR)**.

Over the past year, funding was released 5 times to support wider responses to conflict and climate-driven crises in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sudan, Afghanistan, Malawi and a devastating earthquake in Myanmar.

This report provides comprehensive details on the impact of these projects and how Scottish-based humanitarian experts, guided by local partners and communities, have positively collaborated to rapidly deliver the most appropriate responses for those most in need.

Over the past year, there has been a thorough review of the focus and the effectiveness of the HEF and the Scottish Government has recently published its response. There is a commitment not only to increase our overall spending on international development but also the percentage released for humanitarian projects. We will direct more of this rising budget through pooled funding mechanisms such as the START Network's Global Start Fund. We will also continue our support for Disasters Emergency Committee appeals.

With long established global norms threatened like never before, the Scottish Government will adapt our approaches but keep to our values and principles as we play our part in this vital global effort.

Executive Summary

Introduction

The United Nations (UN) has estimated that in 2026, 239 million people around the world require humanitarian assistance totalling $33 billion[1], as a result of protracted and escalating conflict, ongoing displacement, and recurring climate shocks.

Sudan remains one of the world's most devastating humanitarian crises, with millions displaced by conflict, hunger, and collapsing essential services. In Gaza, catastrophic levels of suffering and the destruction of civilian infrastructure have contributed to overwhelming humanitarian needs, while escalating instability across the Middle East continues to force families from their homes and deepen regional insecurity. Protracted crises in Syria and Ukraine continue to drive urgent humanitarian need, compounded by severe food insecurity, economic collapse, and limited access to basic services. Climate-related disasters, including droughts, flooding, and earthquakes, have intensified existing vulnerabilities for already fragile communities in countries such as Afghanistan and Myanmar. Despite these rapidly escalating needs, deep global funding cuts and chronic shortfalls are severely constraining the humanitarian response, leaving millions of people without access to critical, life-saving assistance.

The Humanitarian Emergency Fund (HEF) was set up by the Scottish Government in 2017 to ensure that its humanitarian funding is used effectively and transparently. The HEF awards a minimum of £1 million every year through an expert panel comprising representatives of eight Scottish humanitarian charities. The panel meets regularly to assess global crises and advise the Scottish Government where this funding can have the greatest impact. This enables the charities to respond swiftly and appropriately to both sudden onset emergencies as well as protracted crises. The HEF uses a rigorous peer review process to select the most appropriate projects. Supported by the Disasters Emergency Committee[2] (DEC) who administers the Fund, this process brings greater accountability whilst also fostering a culture of continuous improvement and innovation in humanitarian response.

In the financial year April 2025 to March 2026, £1 million was allocated across five countries in response to four humanitarian crises. These were the Myanmar earthquake (March 2025), Democratic Republic of Congo crisis (June 2025), Sudan and regional response crisis (September 2025), and Afghanistan crisis (December 2025).

The Scottish Government allocated an extra £400,000 in February 2026 to support Malawi's ongoing acute food crisis.

In total, the Scottish Government provided £1.4 million of humanitarian funding through the HEF mechanism.

This report details the impact and key learnings of the HEF responses in the past year, which are summarised below.

[1] UN OCHA Global Humanitarian Overview 2026
[2] DEC Website

2025-2026 in numbers

£1.4 million
Allocated

10
HEF projects

6
Countries

63,944
total people reached directly

40,323
females reached directly

23,621
Males reached directly

2017-2026 in numbers

27 countries

47 activations

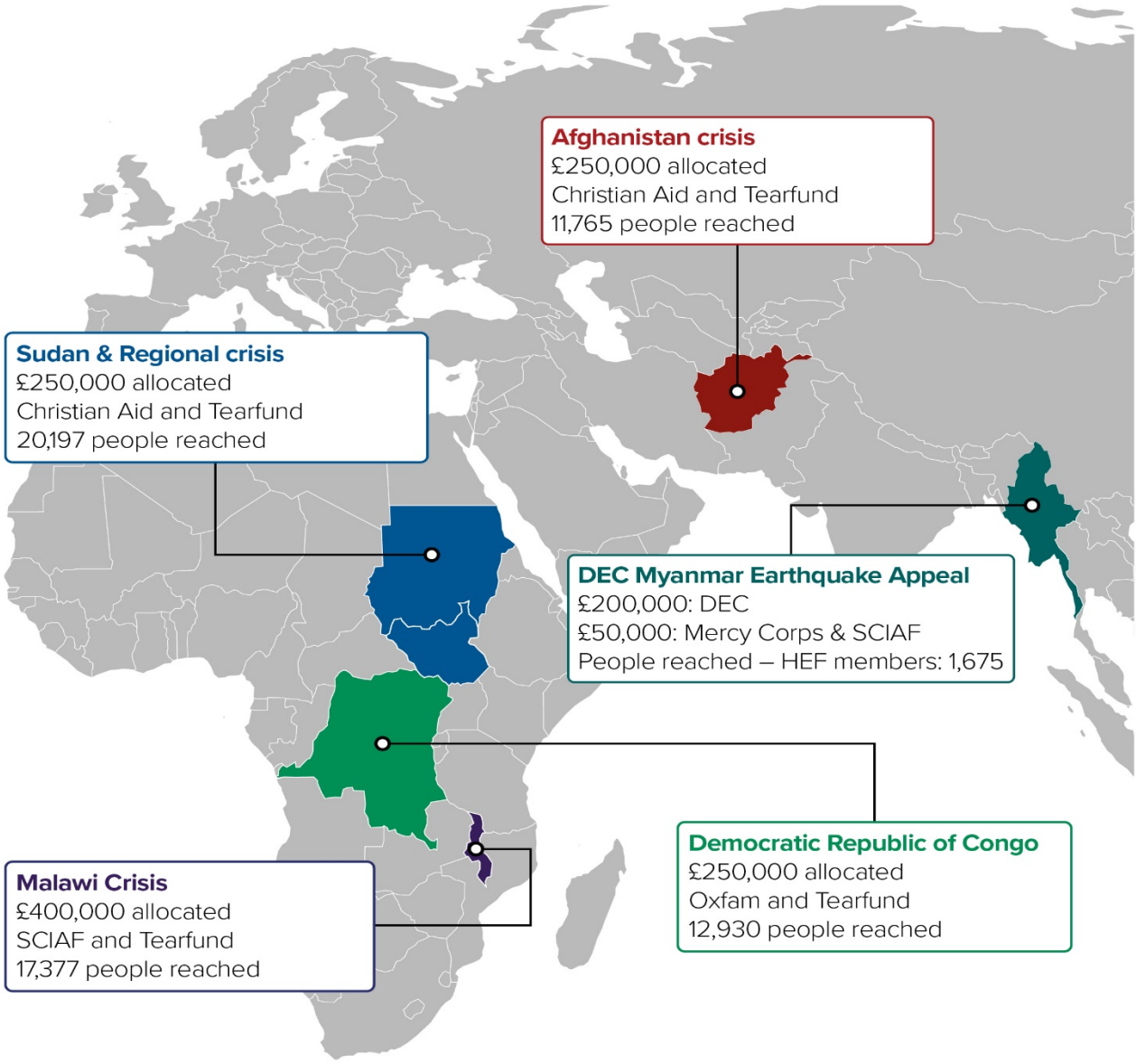
£4.95m
DEC appeals

£9.05m
HEF projects

£4m
Additional humanitarian funding

933,493
Total people reached by HEF projects

Additional humanitarian funding refers to SG funding delivered outside the HEF process/£1 million commitment



Acronyms

DEC: Disasters Emergency Committee
GBV: Gender-based violence
HEF: Humanitarian Emergency Fund
ICRC: International Committee of the Red Cross
IDP: Internally Displaced Person
IFRC: International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
NFI: Non-food items
PDM: Post-distribution monitoring survey
PHCC: Primary Health Care Centres
WASH: Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene

Contents

Ministerial Foreword 3
Executive Summary 5
Introduction 5
Section A. Introduction to HEF 9
Background to the HEF 9
Aims and objectives of the HEF 9
Section B. HEF Achievements in 2025/6 10
Impact of HEF funds 10
Responses 10
Myanmar earthquake – March 2025 – Stream 1 10
Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) – June 2025 – Stream 2 12
Sudan & Regional crisis – September 2025 – Stream 2 15
Afghanistan crisis – December 2025 – Stream 2 18
Malawi crisis – February 2026 – Additional Funding 20
Section C: Thematic Good Practice 24
Section D: Communications 2025/6 25
Section E: Looking ahead 26
The HEF Review 26
Next Steps 28

Section A. Introduction to HEF

Background to the HEF

In 2017, the Scottish Government established a £1 million a year Humanitarian Emergency Fund (HEF) to respond to humanitarian emergencies. It comprises an expert Panel (HEF Panel) with representatives from eight leading humanitarian aid organisations based in Scotland. Funds from the HEF are allocated to crises that meet a range of criteria, based on recommendations from the HEF Panel, supported by the HEF Secretariat administered by the Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC).

Aims and objectives of the HEF

The aim of the HEF is to provide immediate and effective assistance to reduce the threat of life and wellbeing (e.g., hunger, disease, or death) for a large number of a population caused by disasters, disease, or conflict.

In addition, the HEF should:

- Build public awareness in Scotland of humanitarian crises and raise additional funding.
- Demonstrate the Scottish Government's role as a responsible global citizen with a vested interest in responding to global humanitarian challenges.
- Bring enhanced transparency and predictability to the SG's emergency funding.

How the Fund is activated

The Fund is activated in one of two ways:

- **Stream 1:** Funds are awarded by Scottish Ministers after a UK-wide humanitarian appeal is launched by the Disasters Emergency Committee. Smaller sums can also be released to Scottish-based organisations who are part of the HEF Panel but are not part of the UK's DEC coalition via this channel.

- **Stream 2:** When a UK-wide DEC appeal is not immediately anticipated but a crisis, often a protracted crisis, meets the Fund's activation criteria, then projects can be approved by Scottish Ministers for funding after a competitive, peer-reviewed process amongst all HEF Panel members.

Section B. HEF Achievements in 2025/6

In 2025 and 2026, the HEF prioritised addressing global emergencies by using funding from the Scottish Government to support a variety of humanitarian crises, from conflict and refugee responses, to displacement, earthquakes, and food crises. This section details the achievements of the HEF Panel with Scottish Government funding across 2025 to 2026, by crisis and HEF panel member.

Impact of HEF funds[3]

In 2025 to 2026, the HEF reached **63,944** people, including **40,323** females and **23,621** males.

HEF funded programmes in 2025-2026 were grounded in the principle that crisis responses are most effective when shaped by the knowledge, leadership, and priorities of affected communities and front-line actors. Working through local partners and existing community networks and structures, programmes promoted inclusive participation and locally informed decision making, helping responses remain relevant and accessible in rapidly changing contexts. This approach was particularly important in reaching groups facing heightened barriers and risks, including women and girls, people with disabilities, and communities affected by conflict, displacement, and climate-related crises.

Across interventions, HEF members prioritised approaches that not only addressed immediate needs but also supported dignity, choice, and longer-term recovery. Cash assistance remained a key mechanism to achieve this, enabling people to determine their own priorities while also contributing to local economic activity and livelihood recovery. Through collaboration and coordination, the HEF Panel ensured that funds were channelled through organisations with trusted community relationships and who had the capacity to respond quickly and effectively. In doing so, the Panel contributed to the Scottish Government's wider commitment to localisation, gender equality, and shifting power and decision making towards actors in the global South.

Responses

Myanmar earthquake – March 2025 – Stream 1

1,675 people (903 f / 772 m) reached directly
£50,000 allocated to Mercy Corps and SCIAF

On 28 March 2025, a powerful 7.7-magnitude earthquake struck central Myanmar, resulting in widespread loss of life, large-scale displacement, and an estimated US$10.97 billion in

[3]Headline figures include people directly reached through a HEF funded programme. This means a person, group, or organisation that has been directly supported through delivery of goods or services which includes but is not limited to food, non-food items (NFIs), drinking water, temporary shelter, or participated in activities like vocational training, recreational activities, or attendance at safe spaces. This includes anyone who can be identified individually. When cash or food is delivered, then the whole household can be considered as direct beneficiaries, with the assumption that all will benefit from the assistance provided to the head of the household.

direct economic damage [4]. The region continued to experience seismic activity in the months that followed, including aftershocks and additional tremors such as a 5.4-magnitude earthquake in July 2025[5]. Amidst an ongoing neglected humanitarian crisis due to conflict, human rights abuses, and cyclical weather patterns, needs escalated further across earthquake affected areas. The DEC launched a humanitarian appeal on 3 April 2025 in response to the earthquake. The Scottish Government supported the DEC's appeal with £200,000 from HEF's Stream 1 allocation, with an additional £50,000 shared by Mercy Corps and SCIAF for their Myanmar projects. As of 2nd June, the DEC appeal total in Scotland had reached £2.4m in Scotland with more than £28.1 million raised across the UK.

Mercy Corps used the £50,000 from the Scottish Government to contribute to a pooled fund in Myanmar, bringing together resources from multiple donors. This funding enabled Mercy Corps to carry out an emergency market mapping and analysis in the hardest-hit areas and provide life-saving assistance to affected households across Sagaing, Mandalay, and Southern Shan. Given the sensitivity surrounding direct cash transfers in the current context, vouchers were selected as the modality to assist communities. This approach enabled families to address their most urgent needs according to their own priorities and preferences, while also strengthening local markets by increasing purchasing power and supporting early recovery. By the end of August 2025, Mercy Corps had reached 186 families with vouchers through Scottish Government funding.

U Kyaw Soe's story

U Kyaw Soe and his family rely on fishing in Inle Lake as their primary source of income. Their lives were severely disrupted when a recent earthquake damaged their home and destroyed most of their property, including essential fishing equipment. The family is currently living in a temporary bamboo shelter supplied through donor assistance. With their fishing engine completely broken and only a manual rowing boat available, generating income became extremely challenging. Fishing by hand was exhausting, risky, and limited their daily catch, particularly during bad weather or strong waves.

When Mercy Corps organised a meeting to discuss cash-voucher support, U Kyaw Soe was overjoyed at the opportunity. Using the voucher, he was able to purchase a new boat engine—a critical tool for restoring his livelihood. With the additional income, U Kyaw Soe is now saving to build a more durable wooden house, replacing their temporary bamboo shelter.

SCIAF's Scottish Government funded response was delivered through their partner Karuna Mission Social Solidarity (KMSS), the humanitarian arm of the Catholic Church in Myanmar and member of Caritas Internationalis. KMSS targeted their support for townships across the most earthquake impacted areas of Mandalay, Sagaing, Naypyitaw, Bago, Kayin and Southern Shan to deliver emergency assistance. KMSS provided cash for food assistance, multi-purpose cash assistance, housing renovation, water supply, hygiene kits, hygiene

[4] Myanmar Economic Monitor, June 2025: Economic Aftershocks - Myanmar | ReliefWeb
[5] Overall Orange Earthquake alert in Myanmar on 18 Jul 2025 09:30 UTC

promotion, and protection awareness information for affected families. With Scottish Government funds, SCIAF, through KMSS, were able to reach 920 people with this vital support.

Daw Hla Hla's* story

Heavy rains and thunderstorms hampered recovery efforts and increased the vulnerability of earthquake survivors in Mandalay. Displaced families, like Daw Hla Hla* and her 6-month-old baby, faced challenges accessing nutritious food, water, and essential sanitation facilities.

"Before the earthquake, I was looking after my baby. My husband works in a tea shop making traditional snacks. It was sufficient for our family. We stayed on the second floor of an apartment block, but when the earthquake happened, the ground floor of the building collapsed. I was worried as it's not safe, so I moved to stay here at the temporary shelter provided by Caritas immediately since the earthquake on 28 March 2025. During the earthquake, I was very afraid for my baby.

I prefer to stay in my own house as there are a lot of people here and it's an open area with no privacy. Some charities and groups come and distribute food and medicines to us. They also provide drinking water.

The current situation is not good for safety, no shelter, and in the public area. There was heavy rain last night [5 April] and now it's raining too. However, it's not only me in this situation; a lot of people are suffering from the earthquake, so I'm just trying to get by."

KMSS with Scottish Government funds is helping to support mothers like Daw Hla Hla start the process of rebuilding their lives by providing shelter, food and water, and will be there for the long term as an integral and trusted element of Myanmar civil society.

*Name changed to protect identity

Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) – June 2025 – Stream 2

12,930 people (8,190 f / 4,740 m) reached directly
£250,000 allocated to Oxfam and Tearfund

In 2025, the humanitarian situation in the DRC continued to deteriorate. At the beginning of the year, the conflict in the east escalated with the M23, an armed group operating in the country, capturing Goma, followed by Bukavu in February. By the end of March 2025, 2 million people had been internally displaced due to the conflict[6], many of them from the camps where they had been living. Families lost their land and livelihoods, further exacerbating humanitarian needs and worsening widespread food insecurity. Access to critical health services was also disrupted, leaving many people without essential care. These overlapping shocks left already vulnerable communities with fewer coping mechanisms, which have disproportionately affected women and girls. The Scottish Government granted

[6] UN OCHA DRC Sit Rep May 2025

£250,000 in total, with Oxfam and Tearfund being awarded £125,000 respectively for their responses.

Oxfam received £125,000 for their project which delivered cash assistance and protection awareness raising and support for gender-based violence (GBV) survivors in Goma, using a participatory, community-based approach, through their local partner Solidarité pour la Promotion Sociale et la Paix (SOPROP). Each targeted family received USD 170 to support their immediate needs in a dignified and flexible way. Families reported that they used the cash assistance to buy mattresses and other household items, as well as renting fields to grow food. Additionally, Oxfam through their local partner, supported 263 survivors of gender-based violence, 97% of whom were women, with cash for protection and psychosocial support. This support contributed to improved emotional well-being, increased resilience, and, for some households, the start of small income-generating activities that strengthened economic independence.

27 members of community protection structures were trained through four capacity-building sessions, enhancing their knowledge of protection issues, human rights, and advocacy. Two community protection plans and two women-led protection plans were also developed, identifying key protection risks and locally driven mitigation measures. SOPROP delivered awareness-raising activities which reached 2,334 people through three mass campaigns and eight targeted sessions on gender-based violence, early marriage, and inheritance rights. These initiatives contributed to improved community attitudes towards women's rights and a reduction in reported stigma and abuse of survivors.

Uwineza's story

"My name is Uwineza. I am a mother of four children, and I lost my fifth child. Now, I am pregnant again, hoping that this time life will give me another chance. I live in Humule village, in Masisi territory, North Kivu. When the war reached our area, we had to flee overnight. I still remember that day vividly: I couldn't take anything with me not even my children's clothes. All I carried was fear, exhaustion, and a fragile hope to find safety somewhere.

After arriving in Humule, everything had to start from scratch. I had no house, no land, nothing at all. And the little I managed to save was looted a few weeks later. I felt like life had turned its back on me. I would look at my children and wonder how I would feed them the next day. That was before I received cash assistance of 85 USD, provided in two instalments — a total of 170 USD. I will rent a small piece of land. As I had already received seed support through another project, I plan to start farming again. By cultivating the land, my children won't go hungry anymore. And if I sell part of my harvest, I will be able to pay their school fees and treat them when they fall sick. I don't want to live on handouts anymore. I want my hands to work the land and make our future grow".

In total, 500 returnee households in Humule received the same cash assistance of 170 USD each, through the financial support of the Scottish Government and implemented by Oxfam.

Picture credit: Oxfam. Picture caption: Uwineza receiving cash support

With £125,000 funding from the HEF, **Tearfund** and its local partner, the Eglise Anglicane du Congo (EAC) Diocese of Goma, provided urgent humanitarian relief to 925 conflict-affected families who had recently returned to their communities of origin after two years in displacement camps. They faced significant challenges, finding their homes destroyed and livelihoods lost. A participatory approach involving local authorities, community committees, and local leaders ensured that those in the greatest need were prioritised. 88% of recipients were female-headed households, with assistance also heavily prioritising households with older people, individuals with disabilities, and pregnant or breastfeeding mothers.

Families received cash assistance via mobile phone transfers, enabling them to decide for themselves how to best use the support received. Households primarily utilised the funds to purchase food, secure essential healthcare, pay school fees, and/or invest in livelihood recovery by renting agricultural fields, purchasing seeds, and buying basic tools. Alongside the cash transfers, the project distributed tailored dignity kits to 925 women and girls, which strengthened menstrual hygiene management and protection, reducing the risk of infection and social stigma. The project also focused on reducing protection risks and mitigating the threat of exploitation. EAC strengthened community-led safety structures by training 30 returnee and accountability committee members in human rights, accountability mechanisms, and the prevention of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). These trained committee members went on to share the knowledge throughout the wider community, conducting outreach campaigns that reached 9,550 community members. This enhanced local awareness of protection issues, improved understanding of human rights, and established referral pathways for survivors.

Mrs. Vumiliya Kahindo Sifa's story

"I lived in the Rusayo IDP camp in Goma for over a year after fleeing the violence in our village of Malehe. On April 4, we heard that the M23 rebels were planning to destroy the camp within just two days. Everything happened so fast… We had no time to prepare.

In a rush, I gathered my children and we set off on foot back to Malehe, carrying nothing with us; no food, no clothes, not even cooking utensils. We walked all day in the rain, filled with fear.

When we arrived in Malehe, I had no idea how I would feed my children or where we would sleep. It felt like starting life all over again, with nothing. A few weeks later, I was identified as a beneficiary of the Immediate Assistance and Protection Project for Returnees. Thanks to this support, I received $108 and a dignity kit. It was a blessing; I was able to buy food, a small piece of land to farm, bean seeds, and some clothes for my children.

We are truly grateful. With the money, I bought a field and planted the bean seeds, which have already begun to grow. I've been able to make the most of that support.

Recently, I also received another kit containing a plastic bucket, sanitary pads, underwear, munganga soap, and laundry soap. This is quite a huge change in my situation from despair to hope."

Picture credit: Tearfund. Picture caption: Mrs. Vumiliya Kahindo Sifa receiving cash and a dignity kit

Sudan & Regional crisis – September 2025 – Stream 2

20,197 people (15,244 f / 4,953 m) reached directly
£250,000 allocated to Christian Aid and Tearfund

Since conflict broke out in Sudan in April 2023, the crisis has deepened into one of the world's most severe humanitarian emergencies. By September 2025, more than 30 million people were in urgent need of humanitarian assistance. 2025 saw a significant shift in frontlines and conflict dynamics, with fighting subsiding notably in Khartoum and Aj Jazirah, and hostilities increasing significantly in much of the Darfur and Kordofan regions. UN bodies have raised the alarm over reports of atrocities and have warned of large-scale ethnically motivated violations around the city[7]. Acute food insecurity more than tripled since the pre-conflict period, and famine conditions were confirmed in parts of North Darfur[8]. In South

[7] UN News November 2025
[8] Sudan Humanitarian Response Plan - January 2025

Sudan, border areas continue to receive displaced families fleeing the conflict amid the country's pre-existing humanitarian crisis. New arrivals lack food, shelter, and essential non-food items, and are reliant on humanitarian assistance for support. The Scottish Government granted £250,000 in total, with Christian Aid and Tearfund being awarded £125,000 respectively for their responses in Sudan and South Sudan.

Christian Aid's Scottish Government funded project in Renk, South Sudan, focused on cash assistance, counselling and psychosocial support for refugees, returnees, displaced families, and host communities. Christian Aid worked through their local partner HDC to distribute USD 120 to 31 host community households, 330 refugee households, and 518 returnee households, enabling them to purchase what they needed to support themselves and their families. 99% of the cash assistance provided was spent on food, highlighting that this was the greatest need for returnees and refugees in the camps and transit centers. Other families spent their cash on cooking fuel, water, shelter, and medical supplies.

Additionally, 100 GBV survivors were provided with critical counselling, psychosocial support, and cash assistance as part of protection case management. HDC conducted community awareness raising sessions to address GBV prevention, early marriage, and the inclusion of women and girls in decision making. GBV help desks were also established for community members to access and were managed by trained HDC protection staff.

Picture credit: Christian Aid. Picture caption: Akech receiving cash assistance

Tearfund's project in East Darfur, Sudan, focused on supporting food insecure households and internally displaced families. Tearfund implemented the project in partnership with its local partner, Alswaid Alkhadara Organisation (AAO), whose local knowledge and presence were critical to reaching crisis-affected communities. Unconditional multi-purpose cash

assistance was delivered to 750 families, who spent the funds on essential staples like wheat, oil, onions, split peas, and sugar. Families with members living with disabilities and/or chronic illnesses were prioritised to ensure they were reached and could have some of their most urgent needs addressed.

In addition, the project reached 11,050 people with protection interventions and GBV prevention initiatives. Displaced women and community leaders received training to enable them to be frontline advocates against abuse in camps. Other critical networks, including the judiciary and police, received GBV training, and community leaders were trained in case management, psychological first aid, and safe referral pathways. 20 survivors received cash assistance for transport and for their immediate needs to access critical services.

Huda Salih's* Story

Huda, a 32-year-old widow and mother of five, is internally displaced and currently living in Al Manar Camp in Sudan. Before the conflict, the family lived a comfortable life, where the father worked as a pharmacist at a major regional hospital and the children attended school.

In June 2025, during Ramadan, Huda's life was shattered when her husband was killed amid the conflict. Forced to flee with her children, she endured a two-month journey through Khartoum and Kordofan before finally reaching East Darfur. They arrived with nothing - no belongings, shelter, or support - having walked long distances in search of safety.

Huda and her children remain in Al Manar Camp under extremely difficult conditions, lacking proper shelter, beds, latrines, and sufficient water. Their most urgent challenge is securing enough food, while the children continue to cope with the trauma of displacement and the loss of their father.

Through Scottish Government funds, Tearfund's local partner was able to provide Huda with 350,000 SDG (approximately $150) in emergency cash assistance. This came at a critical moment, allowing her to provide food and essentials for her children. For Huda, the support was more than financial aid - it restored a sense of dignity and choice, enabling her to manage household expenses and prioritise her family's immediate needs. By helping meet their basic food requirements, the cash support stabilised the family's situation and offered hope amidst the daily challenges of camp life.

This support was delivered alongside other ongoing work by Tearfund's local partner in the area. Access to food, clean water, shelter, and sanitation facilities is being prioritised, while protection services and psychosocial support help the children cope with the emotional impact of displacement. These interventions not only help to restore dignity but also offer hope for a safer and more secure future.

*Name changed to protect identity

Picture credit: Tearfund. Picture caption: Huda with her family

Afghanistan crisis – December 2025 – Stream 2

11,765 people (6,319 f / 5,446 m) reached directly
£250,000 allocated to Christian Aid and Tearfund

As of 2025, approximately 21.9 million people[9] in Afghanistan are in need of humanitarian assistance due to decades of conflict, economic fragility, political instability, and recurring climate shocks. This already severe situation was further worsened by two major earthquakes in August and November 2025, which caused widespread loss of life and extensive destruction of homes in eastern and northern parts of the country, significantly increasing shelter and basic needs. As of mid-November 2025, approximately 6,000 earthquake affected families were still displaced in six temporary camps across Kunar and Nangarhar provinces[10]. As winter approached and temperatures dropped, the situation was further compounded due to poor shelter, water and sanitation services, and little to no heating for displaced families. Women and girls remain the most disproportionately impacted by the ongoing crisis and subsequent additional shocks, with their access to basic services such as health care, education, employment, and protection support, being extremely limited.

Christian Aid's response in Afghanistan was implemented through their long-standing national partner in Kunar. The project successfully reached all targeted households within a short implementation window, providing them with cash assistance, winterisation and hygiene kits, and psychosocial support. This enabled families to meet their urgent basic needs in the face of a harsh winter. Through the PDM, the partner found that 30% of the cash was spent on food, and 40% on healthcare and essential items for shelter repairs or educational materials. The partner also delivered psychosocial support and hygiene interventions including hygiene kit distribution. These activities ensured inclusive access and participation for all, through regular communication and coordination with local authorities.

[9] UN OCHA Afghanistan Humanitarian Response Plan - December 2025
[10] WHO Afghanistan Sit Rep - November 2025

Tearfund's Scottish Government funded programme was delivered through its local partner in Kunar and supported 830 earthquake affected families. 145 households received winterisation and hygiene kits to help them survive the harsh winter conditions. 685 families received multi-purpose cash assistance. Monitoring data showed that the majority of recipients used cash assistance to meet multiple needs including food, clothing and medicines. Some also spent cash on hygiene, shelter and livelihood related needs.

In addition, Tearfund's local partner supported the strengthening of protection and psychosocial support services. 10 frontline staff members were trained in psychological first aid, and 685 people received counselling during household visits. 40 of those were then referred for specialised mental health care, including transport and medicines. Participants reported improved wellbeing and a restored sense of stability following the intervention.

Shehnaz's story

After the devastating earthquakes in Eastern Afghanistan, twelve-year-old Shehnaz and her family were forced to relocate to one of the nearby displacement camps. Having tragically lost her father, life in the camp during the harsh winter was a severe struggle. "The winter is very difficult for us because we had never lived in tents like this...these days rains and snows are falling so the tents are very cold and my small siblings are getting sick." Shehnaz explained.

With rain and snow falling, the tents became freezing cold, and her younger siblings quickly fell ill. Without a source of income, the family could not afford the medicine they desperately needed to treat the children. Tearfund's local partner in Afghanistan provided multi-purpose cash assistance to families in the camp, and, following a careful needs assessment, Shehnaz's family received the equivalent of £150.

This vital cash injection enabled her mother to immediately purchase medicine for her sick children, as well as other essential supplies. The intervention lifted a heavy emotional and economic burden from the young girl's shoulders.

Shehnaz was overjoyed to receive the help, sharing, "Thank you so much ... my mother can buy the basic supplies we need".

By giving the family the flexibility to prioritise their own urgent needs, the assistance brought relief to the struggling family. While this project successfully met immediate winter survival needs, there is a critical ongoing need to help families like Shehnaz's to repair their homes and rebuild their lives. Tearfund and its local partner remain deeply committed to working alongside these communities to ensure their long-term recovery and resilience.

Picture credit: Tearfund's local partner in Afghanistan. Picture caption: Shehnaz receiving cash

Malawi crisis – February 2026 – Additional Funding

17,377 people (9,667 f / 7,710 m) reached directly
£400,000 allocated to SCIAF and Tearfund

Malawi continues to face a severe, multi-faceted humanitarian crisis as overlapping climate shocks, health emergencies, and widespread food shortages compound ongoing critical needs for affected communities. Heavy rainfall at the start of 2026 triggered devastating floods, damaging critical infrastructure and roads, displacing tens of thousands of households in districts. Previous agricultural damage caused by prolonged dry spells and droughts have further reduced households' resilience and ability to withstand cyclical climate shocks. Widespread crop failures and livestock losses have escalated crisis levels of food insecurity, with 4 million people experiencing acute food insecurity between October 2025 and March 2026, during the lean season[11].

The humanitarian situation is further compounded by recurring cholera and polio outbreaks, which have significantly heightened health risks for vulnerable groups, particularly children, older persons, and pregnant and breastfeeding women. In severely affected areas such as Nkhotakota District, intersecting challenges of food insecurity and rising malnutrition are forcing families to resort to negative coping strategies, including skipping meals and selling assets to buy food. Current humanitarian funding for this crisis remains insufficient to meet these escalating and widespread humanitarian needs. The Scottish Government granted £400,000 in total, with SCIAF and Tearfund being awarded £200,000 respectively for their responses.

[11] IPC Analysis for Malawi - October 2025 - March 2026

SCIAF responded through their local partner CADECOM in Nsanje, rural Lilongwe, and Nkhotakota Districts, areas which have been severely impacted by rising food insecurity, malnutrition, and climate shocks. The project targeted the most at-risk families, particularly those with children who were moderately or severely malnourished. In total, CADECOM reached 3,145 vulnerable households with £44 each, in addition to nutrition packs to support malnourished children and enable them to have access to vital protein and micronutrients.

SCIAF's local partner also placed the community at the centre of the response by encouraging and strengthening active and inclusive participation in the project decision making processes, and focused on amplifying the voices of women, marginalised groups, and people with disabilities. This contributed to the partner receiving robust community feedback which helped shape decision making throughout the response, and drove accountable, responsive, and impactful programme delivery.

Maria's story

With failed harvests, poverty, and rising living expenses, many households were struggling to meet basic food needs. The project's goal was to help vulnerable households deal with the crisis by giving them cash transfers and food assistance. One of the project's participants was Maria Patrick Bello, a visually challenged mother of six children from Malawi's Nsanje District in Nyathando Village, T/A Ndamera.

As well as managing severe personal and financial challenges, she is the sole carer for her children. Living in extremely challenging circumstances, the household frequently experiences food shortages. Maria found it difficult to serve regular nutritious meals and take care of other household needs, with the family frequently relying on sporadic and meagre sources of income, insufficient to keep the home running.

Maria received a one-off grant of MK100,000 (approx. £44) and a 10 kg bag of fortified food blend through the project. Even though the assistance was temporary, it significantly improved the family's day-to-day existence. Maria was able to improve the household's nutrition and hygiene by buying soap and supplementary food supplies. The assistance provided Maria and her children with comfort during a very trying time. While the monetary transfer allowed Maria to respond to the family's most pressing needs, the food assistance helped the household maintain more regular meals. In addition to providing material assistance, the intervention gave the family hope and assurance that they had not been overlooked during the crisis.

Picture credit: CADECOM Malawi. Picture caption: Maria with her family

Tearfund's Scottish Government funded project was implemented through their local partner, AG Care, in TA Mwadzama, Nkhotakota District, an area that has been hit hard by cyclical climate shocks including flooding and drought, causing agricultural and livestock losses and rising food insecurity. 2,030 priority households facing hunger during the lean season each received MK180,000 via mobile money to help them meet their basic needs for two months. Post-distribution monitoring indicated that the assistance successfully enabled households to meet their immediate food and basic needs. Consequently, this timely support reduced reliance on negative coping strategies, preventing families from having to skip meals, sell off essential household assets, or engage in charcoal production. The communities expressed high satisfaction, highlighting the flexibility and dignity of the intervention.

One widowed mother, Alima Chikonda, whose entire maize crop had been destroyed by flooding and who had been surviving on one meal per day, said: "Before the cash support, my children would sleep hungry. I had no hope. With the money, I bought maize and soap, and now my family is eating at least twice a day. I feel relieved."

In addition, AG Care carried out awareness raising activities to strengthen community sensitisation on the prevention of cholera and waterborne diseases, through provision of information and materials. The PDM that was carried out showed an improved knowledge of disease transmission and adoption of safe hygiene practices amongst the community members. Louis Banda, a community member from TA Mwadzama, shared: "We knew about cholera before, but we did not fully understand how it spreads. Now we will treat our water and wash our hands regularly. This information has helped us protect our families."

Jennifer's story

With support from the Scottish Government, Tearfund's local partner in Malawi provided emergency cash assistance to families experiencing severe hunger after droughts and floods devastated crops and livelihoods. Jennifer was among those who received this support and shared her story.

"Our area of Chimphungu has relied on farming for a very long time, and it has great potential for agricultural businesses to thrive when nature cooperates. Before the climate shocks intensified, I was an active farmer. As an elderly widow and single mother, I could still till my land, manage my household independently, and regularly walk to my church to worship without the shadow of starvation hanging over my home. But recently, our community was hit by a sequence of extreme weather shocks.

First, a severe drought struck our valley, and the heat burned most of the crops I had planted in my fields. If that wasn't enough, we suffered a cruel double blow: immediately following the drought, a large, destructive flood swept through our area and flooded the rest of the surviving crops. I was left with nothing. I completely lacked food, and out of sheer desperation, I was forced to resort to reducing meals or skipping some just to keep my family alive.

The cash distribution provided me with the financial means to purchase food supplies, relieving our food crisis and stabilising my home. This relief was paired with hygiene training and cholera awareness messages, extending beyond just filling our plates".

Picture credit: Titani Mkanalumo, Tearfund. Picture caption: Jennifer with the food she purchased

Section C: Thematic Good Practice

Localisation and Shifting Power South

A key component of the Scottish Government's International Development principles is taking a decolonised lens in supporting to shift power south[12]. This approach is embedded in HEF funded programmes, with the majority of HEF members delivering their programmes through trusted local/national partners who have access to communities and strong contextual knowledge to ensure assistance is appropriate and accountable.

For the DRC HEF funded response, Tearfund worked through Eglise Anglicane du Congo (EAC), in Malehe, which is inaccessible to most humanitarian actors due to conflict in the area. EAC has a deep-rooted local knowledge of the affected area and were able to facilitate the relevant targeting of the community and conflict sensitive delivery in a highly constrained operating environment. Additionally, focus group discussions with the community, led by this trusted local partner directly shaped which activities were delivered and which specific community members to target. Through adopting this highly localised approach, and embedding the shift of power within their programming, Tearfund were able to support those most in need in an exceedingly complex operational environment.

Gender-based Approaches

Women and girls are often disproportionately at risk during humanitarian crises, meaning that it is critical for responses to be gender-sensitive throughout programme design and delivery. As this is one of the Scottish Government's International Development principles, HEF members took a gender-focused approach in their responses in 2025-6, prioritising the inclusion of women-headed households, pregnant and breastfeeding women, and survivors of GBV. For example, in South Sudan, Christian Aid, through their local partner HDC, provided dedicated support to GBV survivors through counselling, psychosocial care, case management, and targeted cash assistance.

Alongside this targeted support, HEF members worked with their local partners to strengthen protection and gender equality at the community level. In the DRC response, Oxfam supported access to GBV services, the strengthening of community protection structures through training for committee members, and women-led protection planning, supporting the identification of protection risks. In this way, across the responses, HEF members have put women and girls at the centre of their programmes; these approaches have supported addressing the immediate protection concerns in addition to contributing to women's participation, leadership, and strengthening of community resilience.

[12] Scottish Government International Development 2023 Programming Presentation Text

Section D: Communications 2025/6

An additional long-term objective of the Fund has been to increase public awareness of humanitarian crises and encourage fundraising as wider demonstration of a commitment that Scotland should be a 'good global citizen.' The HEF members collaborated positively once again during the year to secure media coverage, particularly important for less widely reported hidden crises.

There was Scottish newspaper coverage for all Stream 2 projects in DRC, Sudan, Afghanistan and Malawi, with corresponding digital and social media publication by members receiving funding. The DEC also coordinated additional end of calendar year media coverage about the overall work of the Fund.

There was further public engagement about the HEF during a question-and-answer session at the Beyond Borders Festival in August, a gathering of human rights and peace thought leaders as well as the public.

As engagement for the DEC's ongoing Middle East Humanitarian Appeal continued throughout the year, there was a briefing for the Scottish Parliament's External Affairs Committee, on how DEC member charities and partners were overcoming significant security and logistics challenges to reach the most vulnerable communities in Gaza.

The DEC also collaborated with the student community in Glasgow to raise awareness of its Myanmar Earthquake Appeal in Scotland. A digital animation was created and shared widely among the student community and further raised the profile of the appeal in the media.

Section E: Looking ahead

The HEF Review[13]

In 2025, following significant global aid cuts across the sector and governments, the Scottish Government commissioned an independent and external review of their existing humanitarian spending and funding streams, one of which is the HEF mechanism. All HEF Panel members and the DEC were interviewed and consulted as part of the process. Feedback and reflections were incorporated into the report. An external review of the HEF mechanism was undertaken in 2019 by the Cora Foundation; the 2025 review incorporated and built on these findings.

The recommendations from the review and the summarised Scottish Government's responses[14] are as follows:

Recommendation 1:

Review the level of humanitarian funding with a view to increasing the proportion of the International Development budget spend on humanitarian to at least 20% of overseas development aid.

Scottish Government response:
We note the importance of a defined budget and accept the recommendation of the report to increase the proportion of our ODA that is dedicated to humanitarian responses but cannot confirm a percentage figure at this stage. This increase of our humanitarian budget as a proportion of our ODA spend will take place in a phased manner aligned with an overall increase in ODA budgets.

Recommendation 2.1:

Invest in pooled funds: recommendation to contribute to Disasters Emergency Committee appeals

Scottish Government response:
The Scottish Government values the work of the DEC and its members in mobilising funding for response to large-scale disasters and providing a coordinated response across the UK. We therefore intend to continue supporting DEC appeals as they arise and will maintain a dedicated budget within our overall budget for humanitarian response for ongoing contributions to DEC appeals.

Recommendation 2.2:

[13] Scottish Government - Humanitarian funding review: our future response to global humanitarian crises - March 2026
[14] Humanitarian funding review recommendations: Scottish Government response - March 2026

Invest in pooled funds: recommendation to investigate and carry out a comparative analysis on potential impacts of investing in DEC or START network on an ongoing basis with a view to making an informed decision in future on which channel best aligns with Scottish Government needs.

Scottish Government response:

We are currently evaluating which pooled funds provide the best opportunities to effectively deliver humanitarian funding in line with our objectives and Principles. In March 2026 we have made an initial £200,000 contribution to the Global Start Fund. At the same time as contributing to thematic pooled funds, we also intend to continue to contribute to DEC appeals.

Recommendation 3:

Consider the launch of HEF 2.0 – a simplified mechanism which is less transaction heavy and for the Scottish Government to have direct line of sight of fund, and/or further consideration of other models in consultation with key stakeholders.

Scottish Government response:

We do not consider that this would be achievable in the way described in the Review without a similar level of administration and resource to the current model. However, we intend to explore alternative options for a model of delivery of Scottish Government humanitarian funding that would complement our contribution to pooled funds and the DEC, to be implemented in the 2027-2028 financial year.

Recommendation 4:

Invest in a global south pooled fund - carry out due diligence and invest in NEAR Change fund

Scottish Government response:

We consider pooled funds to be an effective way to deliver our humanitarian funding. We are also mindful that that investing in emerging global south-based pooled funds would align well with our commitment on shifting / equalising power to the global south. There are a number of such pooled funds that support our international development and FAIR objectives, and we will review these options with a view to investing in a humanitarian pooled fund that specifically furthers our international development Principles, including our commitments on shifting/equalising power.

Recommendation 5:

Establish an independent humanitarian advisory body to consult with on humanitarian crises and action.

Scottish Government response:

We intend to consider the options available for either establishing a new panel, leveraging existing Scottish Government mechanisms or engaging with existing groups that provide international expertise.

Next Steps

Looking ahead, the humanitarian sector faces a defining period of pressure and transformation as global funding cuts collide with rising needs driven by conflict, climate shocks, displacement and economic instability.

In the context of the ongoing 'humanitarian reset[15]', there is growing recognition that the system must move beyond internationally led, short-term delivery models and fundamentally rethink how power, resources and decision-making are shared. This includes accelerating the shift towards locally led responses and pooled funding mechanisms that place greater trust and investment in national and local actors, particularly in the Global South, who are often best positioned to deliver sustainable and context-driven humanitarian action.

At the same time, the sector must strengthen equitable and quality partnerships, while embedding gender-informed approaches that recognise the disproportionate impact crises have on women, girls and marginalised groups.

With resources becoming increasingly constrained, there is an urgent need to prioritise underfunded and overlooked crises that receive limited political or media attention, ensuring humanitarian response remains principled, inclusive and accountable to affected communities.

[15] UN News - Humanitarian Reset - March 2025

Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba

© Crown copyright 2026

OGL

This publication is licensed under the terms of the Open Government Licence v3.0 except where otherwise stated. To view this licence, visit **nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3** or write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: **psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk**.

Where we have identified any third party copyright information you will need to obtain permission from the copyright holders concerned.

This publication is available at **www.gov.scot**

Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at

The Scottish Government
St Andrew's House
Edinburgh
EH1 3DG

ISBN: 978-1-80775-379-5 (web only)

Published by The Scottish Government, August 2026

Produced for The Scottish Government by APS Group Scotland, 21 Tennant Street, Edinburgh EH6 5NA
PPDAS1769746 (08/26)