

Overall Conclusions and Findings

This independent evaluation of expenditure of DEC Kosovo appeal funds covers the period between April 1999 and January 2000. The report describes the operational and policy issues, complexities and challenges faced by the 12 DEC member agencies in responding to the Kosovo emergency. The DEC agencies found themselves in the unique situation of working in a crisis in which the UK government was a leading player in the military conflict and also, as with other NATO governments, a major donor to and participant in the humanitarian response. For the agencies, this raised difficult issues of impartiality and neutrality.

The Kosovo emergency was regional in nature and comprised three distinct but interlinked phases: the rapid flight of Kosovo Albanian refugees into neighbouring countries, the almost equally rapid return of the majority of those refugees to Kosovo and the subsequent flight of Kosovo Serbs and Roma from Kosovo, mainly into Serbia and Bosnia. The international humanitarian response met most of the basic needs of affected populations in terms of food, shelter and water supplies, in spite of the speed and scale of these population movements, the threat of a hard Balkan winter and, in some cases, the difficulties of access. There were very low rates of mortality and an absence of starvation and epidemics.

The evaluation notes that many factors contributed to this outcome, of which humanitarian aid may not have been the most important. However, international assistance did improve the conditions of the affected populations and the DEC agencies undoubtedly made a positive contribution.

In particular:

The assistance given by the DEC agencies was broadly relevant and appropriate to people's needs.

The evaluation found many examples of good practice by the DEC agencies.

In a context of sometimes poor coordination by international agencies, the DEC agencies mostly supported efforts to coordinate assistance and avoid duplication.

The evaluation expresses some concerns about programme quality, particularly in areas such as assessment, monitoring and evaluation and gender analysis.

The evaluation found that the DEC agencies have not yet all incorporated internationally agreed guidelines and standards on humanitarian assistance into their operations.

Given the highly politicised and militarised context in which the agencies worked, the evaluation found that:

DEC agencies avoided excessive alignment with NATO and governmental donors in their responses, but rarely had procedures to guide field staff in their relations with the military.

DEC agencies resisted the over-concentration of assistance on refugees in the camps in Albania and Macedonia by also responding to the needs of refugees in host families and host families themselves.

The major proportion of DEC funds was spent in Albania, Macedonia and Kosovo. However an important strength of the DEC money was its availability for use throughout the region and some DEC agencies were able to increase their response to growing needs in Serbia after the NATO bombing ended.

The evaluation notes that the Kosovo emergency raised some important policy issues for the DEC agencies related to preserving independence, neutrality and impartiality in complex political emergencies and lessons need to be learnt from these experiences.

Also noted was the lack of public advocacy by individual DEC member agencies on some key humanitarian issues, notably the plight of the one million people who remained in Kosovo during the NATO bombing campaign and the continued use of cluster bombs by the British government.

The Kosovo crisis highlights how issues of protection can be just as important as the provision of material relief assistance in war-induced emergencies. DEC agencies need to pay more attention to this.

The scale of this most successful of DEC appeals challenged both the agencies and the DEC secretariat and the evaluation report makes recommendations about the strengthening of the DEC mechanism in future appeals.