

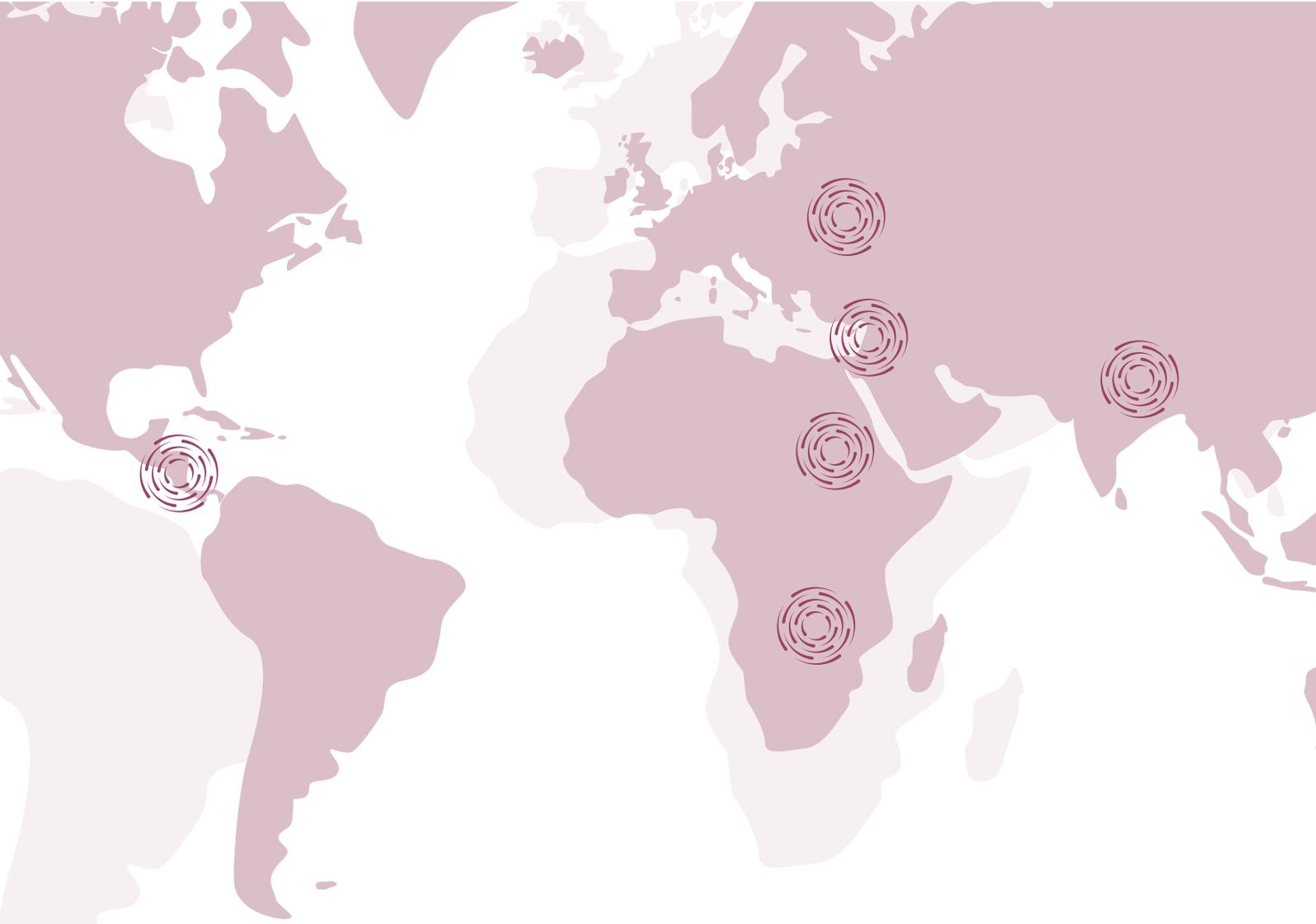


European Union
Global Diaspora Facility



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DIASPORA ENGAGEMENT IN TIMES OF CRISIS

Implemented by



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AUTHORS

Shabaka: Dr Bashair Ahmed (Project Lead); Desmond Awoonor-Gordon; Joshua Aspden; Kirstie Kwarteng; Lidiia Lukasevych; Marthe van der Wolf; Paul Asquith (Project Manager); Rania Amin

Shabaka is a values-driven, diaspora-led consulting and research organisation focused on diasporas' humanitarian preparedness, response, and recovery. It provides professional consultancy services to corporate, NGO, community, and government sectors. These include research and training on diaspora, migration, protection, and humanitarian action.

<https://shabaka.org/>

For any queries, please contact: info@shabaka.org

Coordinated by

EUDiF: Dr Aurélie Sgro (Senior Project Manager); Dr Fanny Tittel-Mosser (Knowledge Management and Research Officer); Mohammed Ameen Arimbra (Intern)

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<https://diasporaforddevelopment.eu/>

For any queries, please contact: EU-diaspora@icmpd.org

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Diasporas make considerable contributions to and have great potential for supporting humanitarian action in their countries or regions of origin. Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, diasporas have played a front-and-centre role in assisting their communities at home and abroad. However, their contribution is still significantly underresearched, poorly acknowledged, and hardly ever coordinated with other actors.

Against this backdrop, the European Union Global Diaspora Facility (EUDiF) commissioned this study to primarily unpack how diasporas respond to emergencies, decrypt current trends and challenges in this regard, and analyse systems of cooperation between diasporas and 'traditional' humanitarian actors. The study also aimed at elucidating the conditions that can facilitate or impede diaspora engagement during emergencies. Ultimately, the study provides actionable recommendations to better leverage and enhance the impact of diaspora contributions in times of crisis.

To provide comparative findings over time, across regions, and between types of crisis, the report examines diaspora humanitarian responses in six countries: Lebanon, Nepal, Nicaragua, Sudan, Ukraine, and Zambia.

KEY FINDINGS

Insights and lessons learned from the six crises covered by this study can be clustered at three levels:

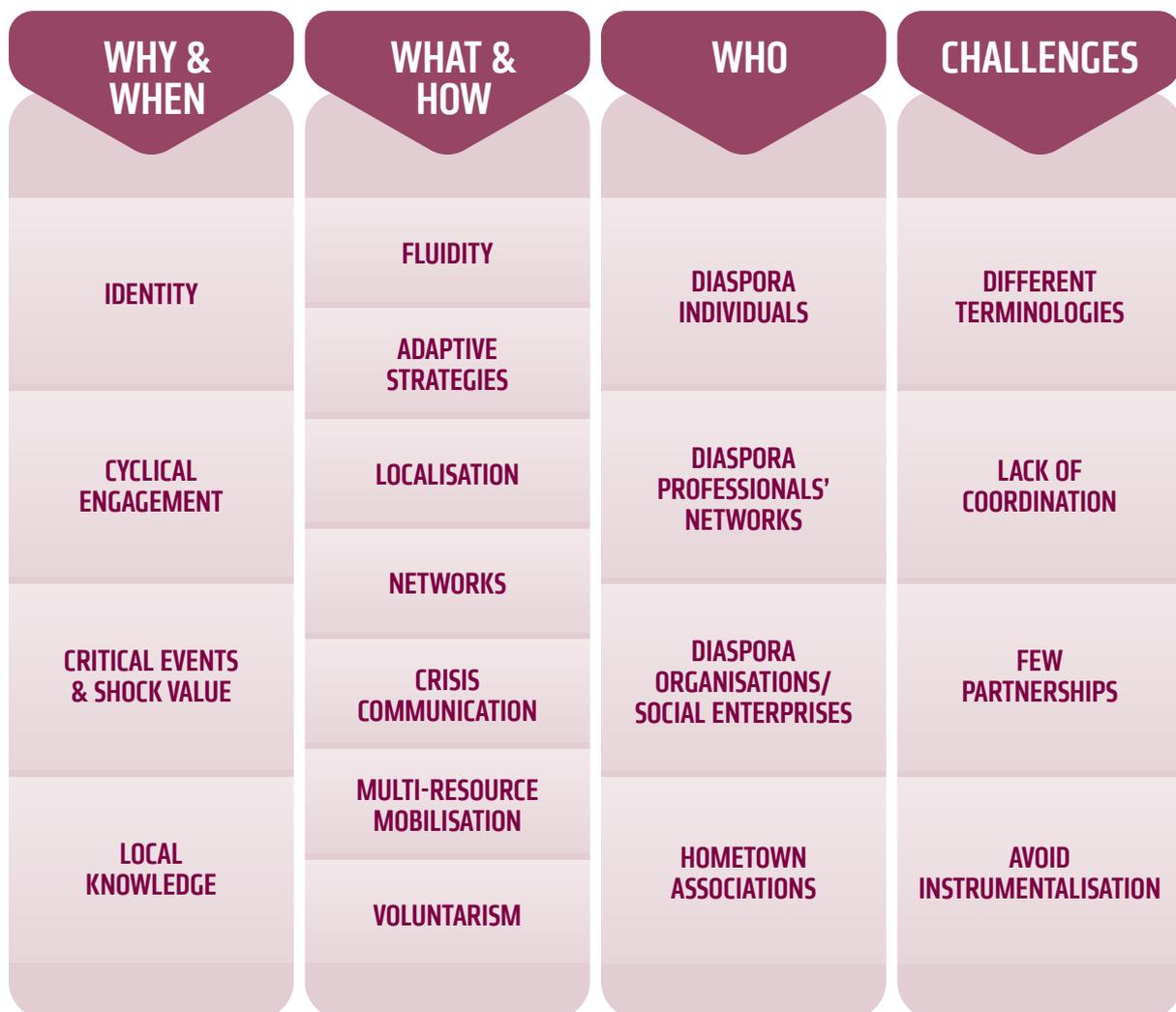
- I. Drivers of diaspora humanitarianism: why and when diaspora contribute to humanitarian response;
- II. Forms of diaspora humanitarianism: what contributions diaspora can make during crises and how these contributions are delivered;
- III. Challenges to diaspora humanitarianism: barriers and risks that impede the contributions of diasporas to humanitarian response.

A key finding is that contextual factors in the countries concerned – in particular the social, economic, political, and historical forces at work in each case – are more critical in shaping the contours of diaspora humanitarian responses than the type of emergency. This was found to be the case in all six countries studied.

It is also important to note that the COVID-19 pandemic has forced diaspora responders, development agencies, and NGOs to adapt to crisis response more broadly, and pandemic travel restrictions have forced diaspora and traditional humanitarian partners to deliver activities remotely.

We present the key findings below in three main areas: drivers of diaspora humanitarian response, forms of diaspora humanitarianism, and challenges to diaspora humanitarian interventions.

DIASPORA HUMANITARIANISM



I. DRIVERS

- Diaspora identities:** The ways in which diasporas express their identity shape their motivations at the roots of humanitarian action and influence how they provide support. Diaspora humanitarianism is not restricted to first-generation migrants (although they predominantly drive diaspora humanitarianism). Crises in home countries can stimulate new relationships and engagement among second-generation diaspora members. While humanitarian motivations are integral to diaspora emergency responses, social and cultural connections to countries of origin are also critical, driving a desire to achieve more direct, localised impact.
- Diaspora response to crises is often recurrent:** Diasporas are often used to responding to recurrent, cyclical crises in countries of origin, engaging before, during, and after crises. This means that they can draw on networks and expertise to identify needs, mobilise resources, and respond to crises. In addition, for some diaspora groups the memories of earlier historical crises provide lessons learned as well as a call to action.

These earlier crises can be relatively recent, as in the cases of Lebanon, Nicaragua, and Sudan, or they may have occurred further in the past, as in the case of Ukraine.

3. **Critical events and ongoing challenges:** Critical/unprecedented events can (re)invigorate diaspora response, while ongoing challenges (long-term political and economic instability) affect modalities of intervention. The shock resulting from the occurrence of an emergency, combined with existing distrust towards governments and INGOs' capacity to adequately respond to a crisis, has a strong effect of strengthening or rekindling connections to countries of origin, thereby mobilising diaspora responses. Arguably, the COVID-19 pandemic has also motivated diaspora engagement and response in Lebanon, Nicaragua, Sudan, Ukraine, and Zambia.
4. **Local context matters:** Understanding and navigating complex local contexts and the unique confluence of socio-economic, political, cultural, and historical factors in specific emergencies can be a comparative advantage for diaspora responders.

II. FORMS

5. **Fluidity of diaspora engagement across development and humanitarian interventions:** Diaspora can easily shift from a development to a humanitarian focus (or vice versa). This shift is usually harder for (I) NGOs and traditional humanitarian agencies, due to their structures and types of programmatic interventions. However, diaspora groups are less able to quickly leverage large amounts of additional funding, unlike humanitarian agencies and (I)NGOs that can more readily scale up their response.
6. **Different types of diaspora responders are active in crisis response:** Diaspora professionals' networks, such as medical professionals or engineers, can draw on specialised skills to provide technical assistance during crises in origin countries – both remotely and physically. Diaspora organisations and individuals also deploy their intellectual, social, and political capital in response, for example, through resource mobilisation, fundraising, lobbying, crisis advocacy to highlight the needs of affected people, and remote and physical volunteering. Examples of this were seen in all six countries.
7. **Diasporas display inspiring adaptive strategies:** More 'traditional' humanitarian agencies and NGOs, as well as governments in origin and settlement countries, can learn much **from diaspora-led humanitarian adaptive strategies** across the humanitarian-development nexus, and their focus on more direct, localised impact. Strong examples of this were seen in Lebanon, Nicaragua, Sudan, Ukraine, and Zambia.
8. **Diasporas drive forward the “localisation agenda”:** At the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit (WHS), humanitarian actors confirmed their commitment to the 'Grand Bargain', which aims to increase the role of – and resources allocated to – local civil society organisations involved in humanitarian response.

Diaspora responders are already delivering on the localisation agenda by working closely with local civil society organisations to improve impact and accountability. Diaspora responders in Lebanon, Nepal, Nicaragua, Sudan, Ukraine, and Zambia have provided examples of such collaboration and partnership.

9. **Networks are key:** While diasporas often respond as individuals, they also belong to, and set up, their own informal transnational networks, drawing on community and professional connections. Diasporas from all of the countries of origin studied demonstrated they belong to, and help create, **global networks**. **Principal settlement countries do not necessarily limit these networks**, but can influence network formation and types of diaspora engagements. Some of these diaspora communities (e.g. Lebanon, Ukraine, and to a lesser extent Nepal) have links to their countries of origin that span multiple generations. Respondents reported that **religious, linguistic, cultural, and other factors** are critical to maintaining these relationships.
10. **Crisis communication methods:** Online technology is used to its fullest by the diaspora communities surveyed, particularly applications, such as WhatsApp and Telegram, which facilitate instant communication, updates on needs on the ground, and the formation of new groups. Different information sources, including family and community networks, local newspapers, TV, and social media are also used to identify needs and track impact. Offline engagement is equally important. Community activities, such as fund-raisers and volunteering via faith groups, are critical engagement methods among diasporas.
11. **Diasporas mobilise a multitude of resources during emergencies:** Almost unanimously, the diasporas surveyed and interview respondents expressed **financial crisis solidarity**. This is a **natural extension of existing patterns of remittances** and support for extended family and kin. Diaspora responders were also involved in **sending money to other countries**, in addition to countries of origin. Furthermore, they donated **relief and medical supplies, volunteered their time and expertise, and contributed to awareness-raising as well as campaigns and advocacy**. Diasporas also support **post-crisis** reconstruction and recovery.
12. **Diasporas engage in mostly pro bono efforts:** Most diaspora humanitarian responders act on a voluntary **and informal basis**, rather than as part of established or registered institutions. 70% of diaspora survey respondents reported using their own income to fund their activities, while 62% reported using their own savings. It is thus critical to realise the fluidity of diaspora humanitarian engagement and introduce systems to facilitate voluntarism.

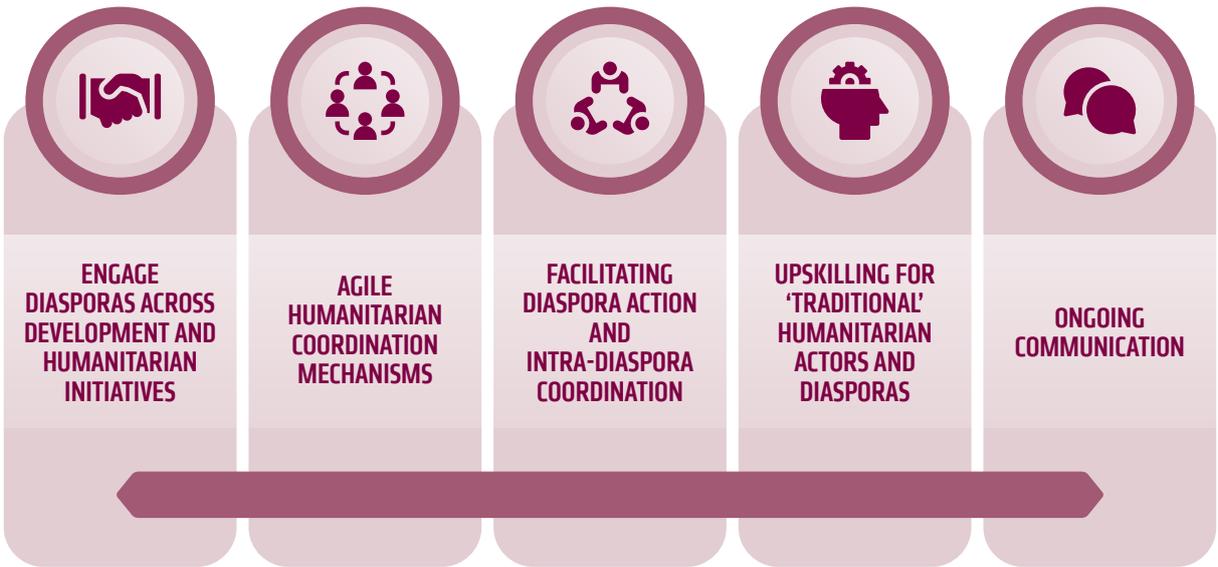


III. CHALLENGES

- 13. Diasporas and traditional humanitarian actors do not always speak the same language:** Diasporas might not share the same conceptualisations of humanitarianism as development partners and may not use the same technical vocabulary. Diaspora humanitarian activities are often not visible or understood as humanitarian responses by institutional humanitarian partners.
- 14. Need for dialogue and coordination:** Coordination and channels for coordination between diasporas and other institutional humanitarian actors are lacking. Even where diaspora relations with countries of origin are strained (as in the cases of Lebanon or Sudan) or even antagonistic (as in the case of Nicaragua), diasporas are still open to improving operational coordination in humanitarian response. However, coordination between diaspora groups and governments in countries of origin is not a prerequisite to diaspora crisis response.
- 15. Lack of access or opportunities to partner with international organisations:** Diasporas do not always have the financial resources needed to participate in key meetings and to gain access to key stakeholders involved in the coordination of humanitarian response, often seeing them as a closed club.
- 16. Diaspora humanitarianism is not an immediate solution to address increased humanitarian needs:** Diasporas can form an important and impactful part of humanitarian interventions but should not be seen as a panacea. Governments and humanitarian partners need to have realistic expectations of what can be achieved. This will require significant investments in time and resources.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This study makes the following recommendations directed to governments, humanitarian agencies, INGOs, and diaspora responders to better leverage and enhance the impact of diaspora humanitarian assistance:



1. ENGAGE DIASPORAS ACROSS DEVELOPMENT AND HUMANITARIAN INITIATIVES

RECOMMENDATION	RESPONSIBILITY OF	PRIORITY (SHORT-, MEDIUM-, OR LONG-TERM)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognise the importance of the humanitarian-development nexus, as diaspora intervention cuts across all emergency-development response spectrum phases. 	Governments Humanitarian agencies INGOs	Short-term
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish coordination and dialogue mechanisms to address the considerable gaps in coordination between diasporas and ‘traditional’ humanitarian actors. However, closer coordination where possible should be sought by all actors involved in all emergency contexts, as humanitarian actors are under increasing pressure to respond to the global COVID-19 pandemic. <p>This is also true for the community, as the voluntary sector is key to supporting government efforts to manage the outbreak. Needs are likely to include both preparedness and resilience-building on the one hand and post-crisis social and economic reconstruction post-outbreak on the other.</p>	Governments Humanitarian agencies INGOs Diaspora responders	Short-term
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop diaspora policies and programmes that are fit for purpose: There is potential to reap enormous rewards from diaspora engagement, but aspiration and engagement require much thought and action to realise this potential. <p>‘Traditional’ diaspora activities – e.g. conferences, small grants funding, and volunteering opportunities – should be complemented by a gradual expansion of the range of diaspora engagement frameworks and programmes available to address the varying needs, capacities, and aspirations of diaspora organisations in humanitarian response.</p>	Governments Humanitarian agencies INGOs	Medium-term
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amending legislation to enable officials to engage with diaspora responders on humanitarian issues, in specific cases where the legislation does not allow it (e.g. Nicaragua). 	Governments	Medium-term
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embed activities in the government’s vision and priorities, establishing clear and transparent cross-governmental mechanisms to facilitate diaspora social, human, and financial contributions. Policies and programmes are needed to help realise these ambitions. Governments’ diaspora policies must include a humanitarian action component, which helps facilitate diaspora humanitarian response. Currently, diaspora policies are primarily geared towards medium- to long-term development interventions. This also reflects a lack of policy coherence and integration between humanitarian and development strategies. 	Governments	Medium-term

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognise the diaspora’s transnational political capital and how this is deployed for political reform, peacebuilding, and reconstruction. In other words, diasporas need not be seen as a threat. 	Governments	Medium-term
	Humanitarian agencies	
	INGOs	

2. AGILE HUMANITARIAN COORDINATION MECHANISMS

RECOMMENDATION	RESPONSIBILITY OF	PRIORITY (SHORT-, MEDIUM-, OR LONG-TERM)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enable diaspora coordinators at the cluster level: Diaspora responders need to be involved in emergency coordination mechanisms with diasporas, governments, and humanitarian agencies working with the UN Cluster System. However, such agencies must consider the need for agility, as diasporas are not always engaged in a structured way. <p>Diasporas’ potential to act as conduits to facilitate information sharing around a particular crisis could be leveraged – through something akin to ReliefWeb.</p> <p>Information needs to be more regular and simplified so that it can easily be shared through WhatsApp and similar platforms.</p>	Governments Humanitarian agencies INGOs Diaspora responders	Short-term
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid creating additional barriers to diaspora humanitarian activities. Where governments are unable or unwilling to engage or support diaspora humanitarians, they should not create additional barriers to these activities, for example by seizing relief or medical supplies sent by diaspora responders. Traditionally, diasporas often face significant obstacles to sending money and supplies to countries in crisis. • Implement emergency measures to facilitate diaspora assistance. For example, temporary suspension of customs duties, or limitations on sending or withdrawing currency. Extend existing schemes and structures to support diaspora resource mobilisation in times of crisis, such as collecting and transferring funds from diaspora organisations via missions and embassies to agencies responding to crisis-affected regions. 	Governments Humanitarian agencies INGOs	Short-/Medium-term
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extend existing schemes and structures to support diaspora resource mobilisation in times of crisis, such as collecting and transferring funds from diaspora organisations via missions and embassies to agencies responding to crisis-affected regions 	Government	short-term
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide logistical support to diaspora humanitarians in terms of transporting relief and medical supplies to affected regions 	Humanitarian agencies INGOs	Medium-term

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish diaspora focal points: Partnering with diaspora for humanitarian response is a multi-dimensional process that includes country of origin, country of settlement, and humanitarian actors. <p>This requires building meaningful partnerships between diaspora organisations, INGOs, and governments, as policymakers need sustainable coordination.</p> <p>In terms of NGOs, a diaspora focal point at HQ level would open up opportunities to innovate, enable close interaction with diasporas, and allow for much closer engagement with affected communities. Also, diaspora focal points in countries of origin and settlement can assist in facilitating partnership building. Building operational and strategic partnerships with diaspora responders can help develop better joint responses to crises.</p>	<p>Governments</p> <p>Humanitarian agencies</p> <p>INGOs</p> <p>Diaspora responders</p>	<p>Short-/Medium-term</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop national pools of diaspora experts with skills relevant to humanitarian response (e.g. medical, engineering, WASH, reconstruction, etc.) that can be mobilised in times of crisis. 	<p>Governments</p> <p>Diaspora responders</p>	<p>Medium-term</p>

3. FACILITATING DIASPORA ACTION AND INTRA-DIASPORA COORDINATION

RECOMMENDATION	RESPONSIBILITY OF	PRIORITY (SHORT-, MEDIUM-, OR LONG-TERM)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learn from and coordinate with diasporas: It is vital to understand the importance of intra-diaspora learning and coordination, as many groups are keen to learn from each other. Thus, support is needed to foster peer learning. 	<p>Governments</p> <p>Humanitarian agencies</p> <p>INGOs</p> <p>Diaspora responders</p>	<p>Short-/Medium-term</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop recruiting and volunteering schemes to enable diasporas to harness their skills, knowledge, and expertise to improve humanitarian response and diversify workforces. 	<p>Governments</p> <p>Humanitarian agencies</p> <p>INGOs</p>	<p>Medium-term</p>

- **Address unequal power relations and structural inequalities** between diasporas and ‘traditional’ humanitarian partners. The Black Lives Matter protests in 2020 prompted urgent discussions about the historical legacies of racism and colonialism that impact on present-day issues facing the aid sector and the need to address these.

Governments
Humanitarian agencies
INGOs

Medium-term

Advancing the localisation agenda can be one way of achieving this, as it entails a reconfiguration of relations between Northern humanitarian agencies and civil society in the Global South. Diasporas are already delivering on this through their work with local civil society and communities in countries of origin, through skills sharing, advocacy, and direct funding, even if progress from institutional humanitarian partners is slow.

- **Consider directing funds to local and diaspora organisations:** Funding remains a pain point for diaspora organisations. However, despite limited resources, such organisations deliver activities that often have significant impact, even on a shoestring budget. The COVID-19 pandemic has only added more pressure; widely implemented social distancing rules have increased physical distance between clients/beneficiaries and international aid providers, and fewer small organisations are prepared to be more flexible and more responsive to the needs of local communities. Directing funds and other resources to diaspora humanitarians as well as local civil society groups also helps them to scale up their work with local communities/enhance their local impact.

Governments
Humanitarian agencies
INGOs

Medium-term

4. UPSKILLING FOR ‘TRADITIONAL’ HUMANITARIAN ACTORS AND DIASPORAS

RECOMMENDATION	RESPONSIBILITY OF	PRIORITY (SHORT-, MEDIUM-, OR LONG-TERM)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capacity development for governments and humanitarian organisations in the field of diaspora humanitarianism is needed in addition to capacity development intended to foster diaspora development collaboration (government diaspora engagement structures are generally not configured for emergency response). This would enable better ‘do no harm’ principles, as government and humanitarian agencies would better understand the dynamics of diaspora humanitarian initiatives. 	<p>Governments Humanitarian agencies INGOs</p>	<p>Medium/long-term</p>

5. ONGOING COMMUNICATION

RECOMMENDATION	RESPONSIBILITY OF	PRIORITY (SHORT-, MEDIUM-, OR LONG-TERM)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transparency and trust in partnerships: There is a need to establish MoUs between diaspora networks and international organisations (or cluster leads) to encourage regular dialogue. 	Governments Humanitarian agencies INGOs Diaspora responders	Short/Medium-term
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create targeted communication channels and content for and by diasporas: It is also critical for humanitarian agencies and governments to utilise diaspora communications channels by providing targeted and appropriate messaging about humanitarian needs and the ways in which diaspora humanitarians and other agencies can coordinate. Government websites should be updated regularly and include content in relevant languages in settlement countries to facilitate engagement with second and subsequent generations. 	Governments Humanitarian agencies INGOs	Medium-term
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing communication targeted at diaspora resource and skills mobilisation, for example in response to particular needs in an emergency, or to support fundraising campaigns for specific needs. 	Diaspora responders	Medium-term
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishing informal channels or mechanisms for operational coordination with diaspora responders on humanitarian assistance in cases where official communication is restricted (e.g. Nicaragua). 	Governments	Medium-term
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further research: recognising that diasporas are diverse and not static. Longitudinal research would be beneficial, as there is an opportunity to develop further insights into diaspora engagement trends. However, diaspora outreach should go beyond understanding diasporas and developing their strategic action; it should also establish joint development and humanitarian programmes. 	Governments Humanitarian agencies INGOs Diaspora responders	Medium-/long-term

