

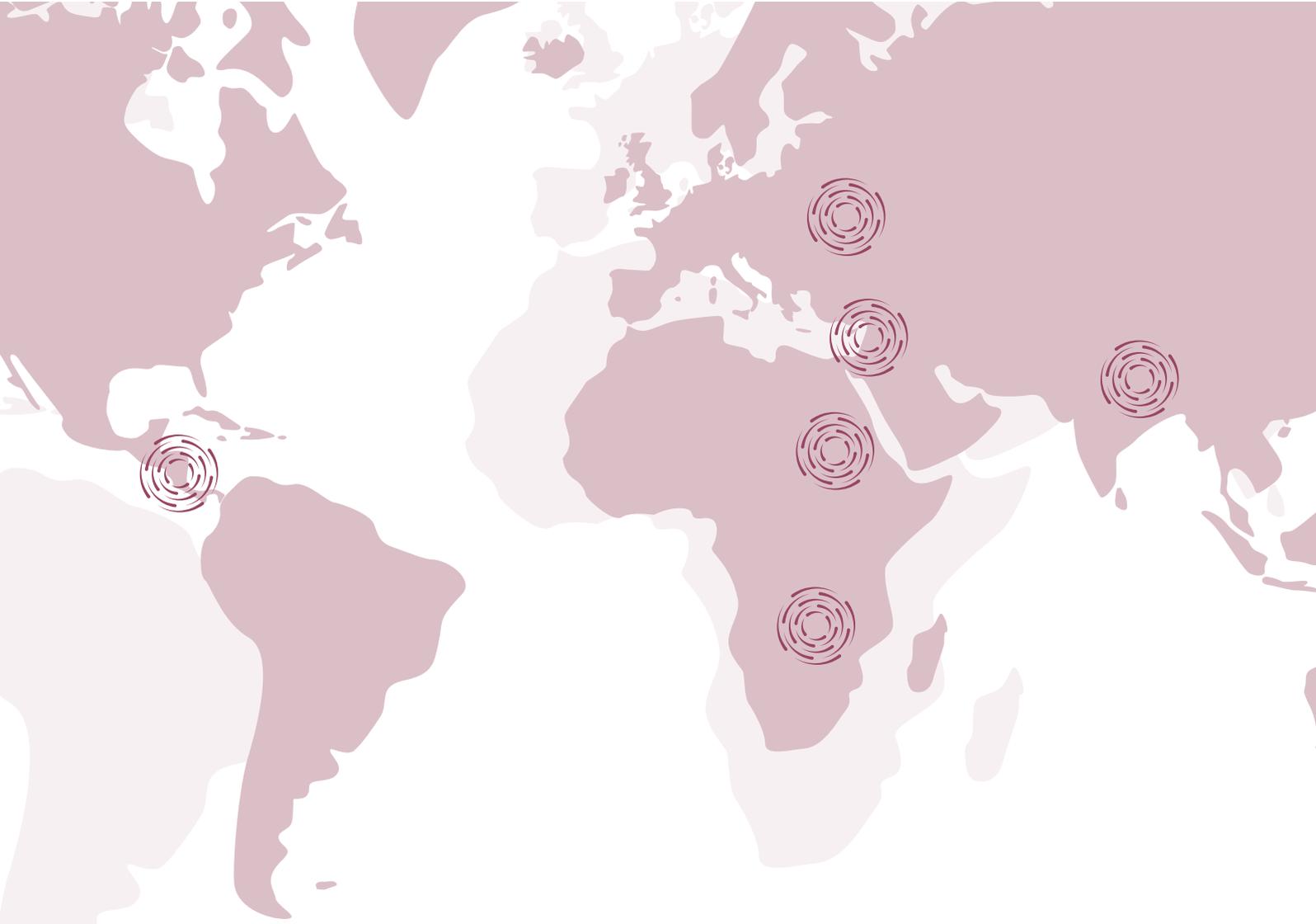


European Union  
Global Diaspora Facility



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# DIASPORA ENGAGEMENT IN TIMES OF CRISIS

Implemented by



**ICMPD**

International Centre for  
Migration Policy Development

Funded by  
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# CONTENTS

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<b>ACRONYMS</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>GLOSSARY</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>PROJECT TEAM</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b>	<b>9</b>
Key findings	9
I. Drivers	10
II. Forms	11
III. Challenges	13
Recommendations	13
<b>1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND</b>	<b>19</b>
Key research questions	19
Background: Diaspora engagement in humanitarian preparedness, response, and recovery	20
Diaspora actors and the humanitarian-development spectrum	20
The critical role of remittances in humanitarian action	23
Diaspora philanthropy	24
More than just ‘cash machines’	24
Structures of diaspora organisations involved in humanitarian response	25
Socio-economic and political context of humanitarian crises	26
<b>2. METHODOLOGY</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>3. COUNTRY CASE STUDIES</b>	<b>31</b>
Lebanon – Beirut explosion in 2020	31
Nepal – floods in 2017	35
Nicaragua – political crisis in 2018	38
Sudan – COVID-19 and the 2020 floods	41
Ukraine – conflict, 2013–present	45
Zambia – Cyclones Idai and Kenneth in Southern Africa in 2019	50
<b>4. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS</b>	<b>53</b>
Identity and sustaining transnational links to ‘home’	53
Engaging with formal institutions	54
Hearing the news – trusted sources of information for the diaspora	57
Diaspora responders in action	61
How can humanitarian responses be improved?	72

<b>5. CONCLUSION</b>	<b>76</b>
Conceptualising diaspora humanitarianism	76
Adapting, responding, and resilience building: learning how diasporas deal with crises	77

<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	<b>78</b>
---------------------	-----------

## LIST OF FIGURES

---

Figure 1. Humanitarian-development nexus and the phases of diaspora emergency and development response	21
Figure 2. IOM: Beirut Port Explosions, Lebanon – August 2020	31
Figure 3. Nepal Floods 2017	35
Figure 4. Map of Nicaragua	38
Figure 5. Map of people and areas affected by flooding in Sudan, November 2020	41
Figure 6. Sudan Floods: affected people and areas, 2020	45
Figure 7. Ukraine humanitarian snapshot, 2019	50

## LIST OF CHARTS

---

Chart 1. Information sources deemed trustworthy by diaspora	58
Chart 2. Information sources used by survey respondents	59
Chart 3. Information sources used to assess impact of humanitarian interventions	60
Chart 4. Membership of organisations and networks	61
Chart 5. Funding sources for diaspora humanitarian activities	63
Chart 6. Types of humanitarian support provided	64
Chart 7. Forms of diaspora resource mobilisation by country context	65
Chart 8. Humanitarian causes supported	66
Chart 9. Obstacles to diaspora response	70
Chart 10. Ways in which humanitarian efforts could be improved	72

# ACRONYMS

<b>AFFORD</b>	The African Foundation for Development
<b>APS</b>	Annual Population Survey
<b>AU</b>	African Union
<b>CIDO</b>	Citizens and Diaspora Directorate
<b>DEMAC</b>	Diaspora Emergency Action and Coordination
<b>DFID</b>	Department for International Development
<b>DVA</b>	Diaspora Volunteering Alliance
<b>ECHO</b>	European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>EUDiF</b>	EU Global Diaspora Facility
<b>FCDO</b>	Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (replaced DFID from September 2020)
<b>FGD</b>	Focus Group Discussion
<b>GCM</b>	Global Compact for Migration
<b>GDP</b>	Gross Domestic Product
<b>GISR</b>	Global Initiative on Somali Refugees
<b>GIZ</b>	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
<b>HC</b>	Humanitarian Coordinator
<b>IASC</b>	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
<b>ICMPD</b>	International Centre for Migration Policy Development
<b>IDPs</b>	Internally displaced persons
<b>INGO</b>	International non-governmental organization
<b>IOM</b>	International Organization for Migration
<b>KII</b>	Key informant interview
<b>ODI</b>	Overseas Development Institute
<b>OECD</b>	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
<b>OSN</b>	Office of National Statistics
<b>SDGs</b>	Sustainable Development Goals
<b>SEEDA</b>	Supporting Entrepreneurs and Enterprise Development in Africa
<b>UNESCO</b>	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children's Fund
<b>UNHCR</b>	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
<b>USAID</b>	United States Agency for International Development
<b>WASH</b>	Water, sanitation and hygiene
<b>WHO</b>	World Health Organization
<b>WHS</b>	World Humanitarian Summit

# GLOSSARY

TERM	DEFINITION USED
<b>Diaspora</b>	For the purpose of this study, a diaspora is a group of persons with origins in one of the case study countries who: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• have resided abroad for one year or more (first-generation); or</li> <li>• were born to parents with heritage in one of the case study countries (second and subsequent generations); and</li> <li>• have contributed, or are interested in contributing, to humanitarian relief efforts in the case study contexts (such contributions may include financial donations/philanthropy, donation of relief supplies/materials, and social remittances/voluntarism, either involving physical volunteering and/or virtual/remote volunteering).</li> </ul>
<b>Diaspora humanitarianism</b>	Diaspora crisis response interventions in countries of origin, settlement, or other countries.
<b>Localisation of aid (agenda)</b>	As part of the ‘Grand Bargain’ agreed at the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit, humanitarian institutions and partners confirmed their commitment to increased localisation of aid spending, with a target of 25% of funds to be directed towards local and national civil society rather than international organisations ( <a href="#">Humanitarian Leadership Academy, 2017</a> ).
<b>Remittances</b>	Financial transfers by migrants and diasporans to countries of origin/heritage or transit.
<b>Social remittances</b>	Sometimes used to refer to non-financial forms of diaspora capital deployed in countries of origin or transit such as skills exchange (intellectual capital), access to trust networks (social capital), advocacy, political engagement (political capital), and voluntarism.
<b>Complex emergencies</b>	A humanitarian crisis in a country, region, or society where there is a total or considerable breakdown of authority resulting from internal or external conflict, which requires an international response that goes beyond the mandate or capacity of any single agency, and which has been assessed to require intensive and extensive political and management coordination ( <a href="#">OCHA, 2008</a> ).
<b>Phases of emergency response</b>	<p><b>Preparedness:</b> preventative and mitigation measures and preparing to handle an emergency.</p> <p><b>Response:</b> experiences and activities carried out during a disaster/emergency (natural, man-made, or complex).</p> <p><b>Recovery:</b> returning to normal life after an emergency and (re)building resilience (adapted from <a href="#">ERHA, 2020</a>).</p>
<b>Cluster system</b>	<p>Clusters are groups of humanitarian organisations, both UN and non-UN, in each of the main sectors of humanitarian action, e.g. water, health, and logistics. They are designated by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) and have clear responsibilities for coordination (<a href="#">OCHA, 2020</a>).</p> <p>The cluster system emerged to fill accountability gaps in international humanitarian responses. It spreads accountability for the delivery of services (health, shelter, etc.) across different cluster lead agencies, and as a result, no single agency is accountable for the entire response. Overall accountability for coordination and delivery rests with the Humanitarian Coordinator (HC) in each country situation (<a href="#">UNHCR, 2015</a>).</p>

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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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:

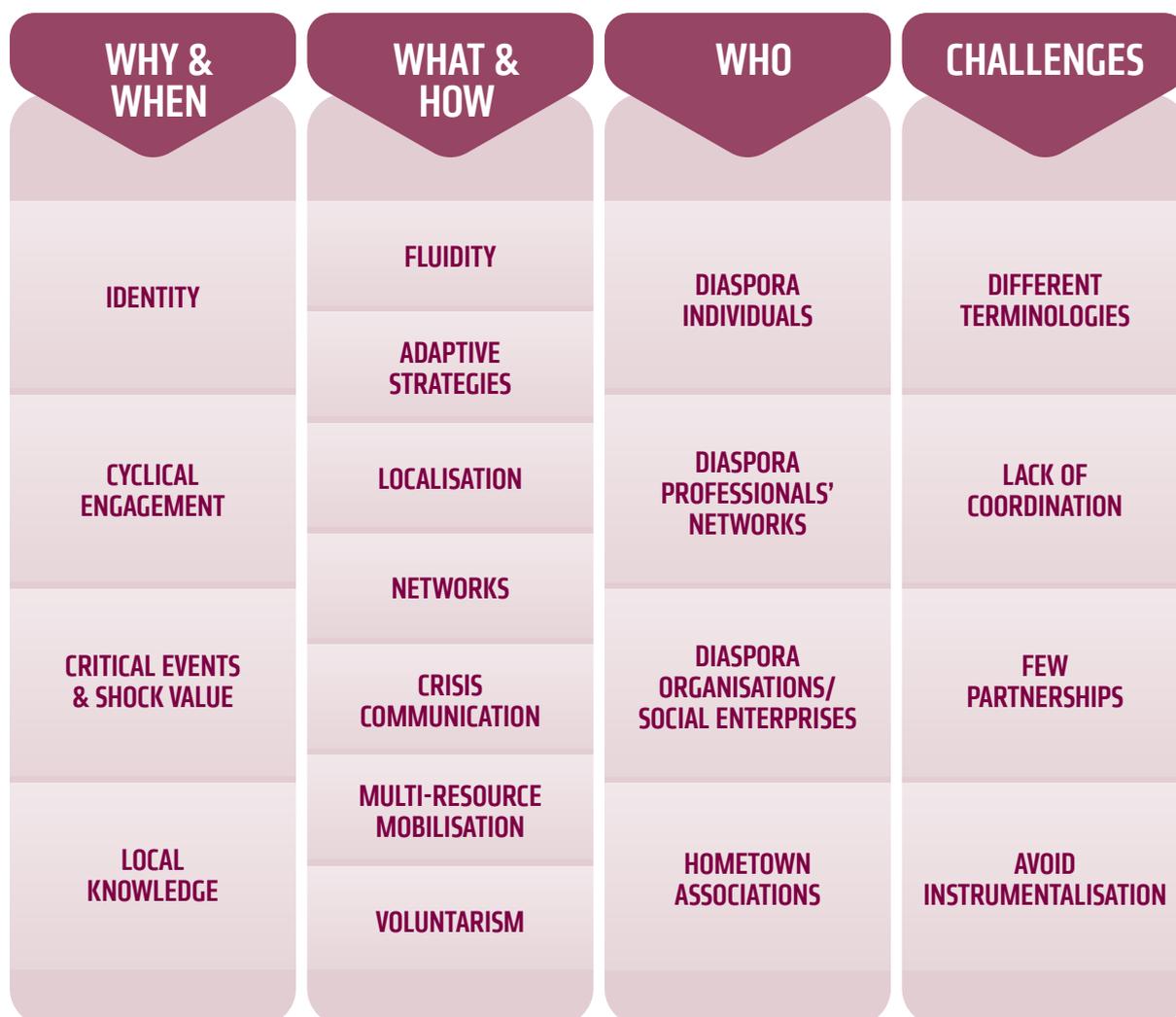
- I. Drivers of diaspora humanitarianism: why and when diaspora contribute to humanitarian response;
- II. Forms of diaspora humanitarianism: what contributions diaspora can make during crises and how these contributions are delivered;
- III. Challenges to diaspora humanitarianism: barriers and risks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

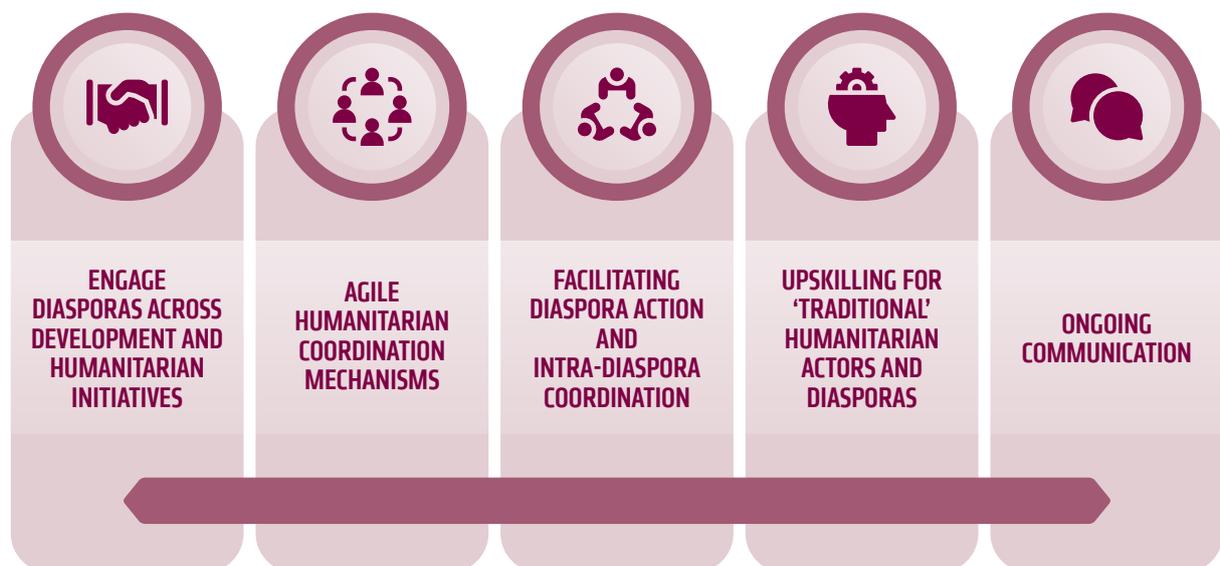


### III. CHALLENGES

- 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"> <li>• <b>Recognise the importance of the humanitarian-development nexus</b>, as diaspora intervention cuts across all emergency-development response spectrum phases.</li> </ul>	Governments Humanitarian agencies INGOs	Short-term
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Establish coordination and dialogue mechanisms</b> 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.</li> </ul> <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"> <li>• <b>Develop diaspora policies and programmes that are fit for purpose:</b> There is potential to reap enormous rewards from diaspora engagement, but aspiration and engagement require much thought and action to realise this potential.</li> </ul> <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"> <li>• <b>Amending legislation</b> to enable officials to engage with diaspora responders on humanitarian issues, in specific cases where the legislation does not allow it (e.g. Nicaragua).</li> </ul>	Governments	Medium-term
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Embed activities in the government’s vision and priorities</b>, 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 <b>include a humanitarian action component</b>, 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.</li> </ul>	Governments	Medium-term

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Recognise the diaspora’s transnational political capital</b> and how this is deployed for political reform, peacebuilding, and reconstruction. In other words, <b>diasporas need not be seen as a threat.</b></li> </ul>	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"> <li>• <b>Enable diaspora coordinators at the cluster level:</b> 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.</li> </ul> <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"> <li>• <b>Avoid creating additional barriers to diaspora humanitarian activities.</b> Where governments are unable or unwilling to engage or support diaspora humanitarians, they should not <b>create additional barriers</b> 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.</li> <li>• <b>Implement emergency measures to facilitate diaspora assistance.</b> For example, temporary suspension of customs duties, or limitations on sending or withdrawing currency. <b>Extend existing schemes and structures</b> 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.</li> </ul>	Governments Humanitarian agencies INGOs	Short-/Medium-term
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Extend existing schemes and structures</b> 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</li> </ul>	Government	short-term
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Provide logistical support to diaspora humanitarians</b> in terms of transporting relief and medical supplies to affected regions</li> </ul>	Humanitarian agencies INGOs	Medium-term

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Establish diaspora focal points:</b> Partnering with diaspora for humanitarian response is a multi-dimensional process that includes country of origin, country of settlement, and humanitarian actors.</li> </ul> <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"> <li>• <b>Develop national pools of diaspora experts</b> with skills relevant to humanitarian response (e.g. medical, engineering, WASH, reconstruction, etc.) that can be mobilised in times of crisis.</li> </ul>	<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"> <li>• <b>Learn from and coordinate with diasporas:</b> It is vital to understand the importance of <b>intra-diaspora learning and coordination</b>, as many groups are keen to learn from each other. Thus, support is needed to foster peer learning.</li> </ul>	<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"> <li>• <b>Develop recruiting and volunteering schemes</b> to enable diasporas to harness their skills, knowledge, and expertise to improve humanitarian response and diversify workforces.</li> </ul>	<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"> <li>• <b>Capacity development for governments and humanitarian organisations</b> 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.</li> </ul>	<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"> <li>• <b>Transparency and trust in partnerships:</b> There is a need to establish MoUs between diaspora networks and international organisations (or cluster leads) to encourage regular dialogue.</li> </ul>	Governments Humanitarian agencies INGOs Diaspora responders	Short-/Medium-term
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Create targeted communication channels and content for and by diasporas:</b> 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.</li> </ul>	Governments Humanitarian agencies INGOs	Medium-term
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Developing communication targeted at diaspora resource and skills mobilisation,</b> for example in response to particular needs in an emergency, or to support fundraising campaigns for specific needs.</li> </ul>	Diaspora responders	Medium-term
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Establishing informal channels or mechanisms for operational coordination</b> with diaspora responders on humanitarian assistance in cases where official communication is restricted (e.g. Nicaragua).</li> </ul>	Governments	Medium-term
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Further research: recognising that diasporas are diverse and not static.</b> 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.</li> </ul>	Governments Humanitarian agencies INGOs Diaspora responders	Medium-/long-term

# 1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

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The **European Union Global Diaspora Facility** (EUDiF), fully funded by the European Union and managed by the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD), was established in 2019 to consolidate efforts on diaspora engagement for development globally. It works to bridge existing gaps between policy development and research, test out concrete modes of engagement, and create a laboratory of innovative ideas and policies based on needs and priorities. In August 2020, EUDiF launched a case study on *Diaspora Engagement in Times of Crisis*, a collaboration between ICMPD and Shabaka, to undertake research on diaspora humanitarian response across six different countries and regional contexts, namely:

- The emergency response to the August 2020 explosion in Beirut, Lebanon
- The response to the floods in Nepal in 2017
- The response to the political crisis in Nicaragua since 2018
- The 2020 response to COVID-19 and floods in Sudan
- Responses to the political crisis and conflict following the Euromaidan revolution<sup>1</sup> in Ukraine in 2013/2014
- Responses to Cyclones Idai and Kenneth in Zambia in 2019

The overall objective of these case studies is to analyse practices and provide guidance and lessons on how diasporas intervene in times of crisis in their countries of origin in order to better leverage and enhance the impact of their contribution.

The case study findings will directly inform EUDiF strategic and programming work in its four strands of intervention: knowledge management and research, dialogue, capacity development, and mobilisation of diaspora expertise. Messages and recommendations will also be conveyed to relevant stakeholders, including the European Union.

## KEY RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the key types of diaspora engagement in a crisis response cycle (preparedness, response and recovery)?
2. What are the current trends in terms of diaspora engagement during crises?
3. What type(s) of context facilitates or impedes diaspora engagement?
4. What are the systems of cooperation between diasporas and 'traditional' humanitarian actors, if any?

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1 The Euromaidan revolution (Ukrainian: Євромайдан, *Yevromaidan* or *Yevromaydan*, literally 'Euro Square') was a wave of demonstrations and civil unrest in Ukraine, which began on the night of 21 November 2013 with public protests in *Maidan Nezalezhnosti* (Independence Square) in Kiev.

5. What can we learn from previous diaspora responses to improve responses to the COVID-19 pandemic and humanitarian crises more broadly? What are the main pitfalls and challenges?
6. What new forms of diaspora engagement have emerged in response to the COVID-19 outbreak, if any?

## BACKGROUND: DIASPORA ENGAGEMENT IN HUMANITARIAN PREPAREDNESS, RESPONSE, AND RECOVERY

Diasporas are major financial, political, and social contributors to their countries of origin, and several studies have demonstrated that diaspora engagement in development and humanitarian response is a growing global phenomenon (Plaza and Ratha, 2011; Aman, 2014; Nagarajan et al., 2015.; Horst et al., 2015). The convergence of social and institutional networks, technologies, and practices that enable individuals to collaborate with development and humanitarian entities offers an opportunity for further cooperation in areas ranging from knowledge production and advocacy to peacebuilding and humanitarian action. The fluidity between development and humanitarian engagement is also indicative of how diaspora responders view their interventions as responding to needs on the ground, rather than restricting their activities to particular phases of response in the humanitarian-development nexus.

Through remittances, diasporas provide lifelines for their families and communities in the homeland, helping them cope better during crises. The financial efficacy of diaspora organisations is also seen in their transnational organisational structures, which tend to be lightweight and have reduced operational overheads, i.e. they rely predominantly on local volunteer staff and have few physical structures to manage (DEMAC, 2018). However, as in development contexts, diaspora contributions during emergencies go beyond remittances and can be intellectual, political, social, or cultural. However, responses from diaspora individuals and groups, particularly in humanitarian aid, are often not recognised and may be limited by inflexible systems that make direct access to funds difficult (Svoboda and Pantuliano, 2015).

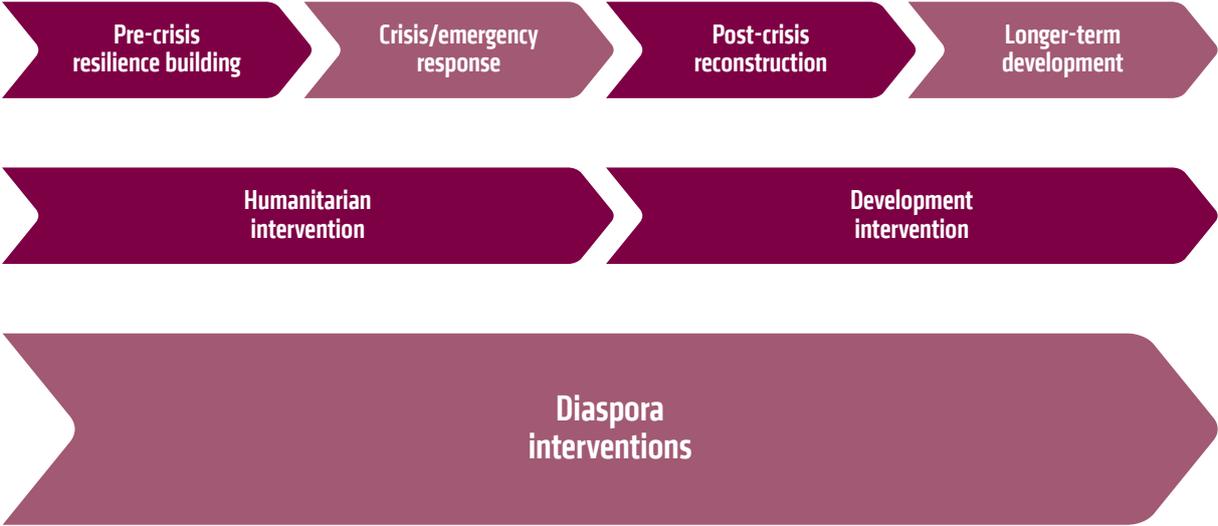
## DIASPORA ACTORS AND THE HUMANITARIAN-DEVELOPMENT SPECTRUM

The concept of a 'humanitarian-development nexus', or a 'humanitarian-development-peace nexus', was developed in response to the growing recognition of the parallel and mutually inter-dependent nature of humanitarian relief, development programmes and peacebuilding initiatives. This notion encapsulates the understanding that rather than each of these components being discrete, serial processes, they are in fact all required at the same time to coherently address people's vulnerability before, during, and after crises (OCHA, 2019; DG ECHO, 2019).

The global humanitarian system, particularly multilateral agencies and INGOs, has evolved over the past 75 years in response to global crises. As such, the system has developed procedures, processes, and operational terminologies that reflect (and maintain) the distinction between humanitarian response and longer-term development interventions (Karahan, 2020). However, this distinction, which is also reflected in policymaking and donor contexts, is not necessarily recognised or reflected by diaspora actors (DEMAC, 2018). Often, diasporas do not distinguish between the two and remain engaged in the spectrum of development and humanitarian interventions on an ongoing, continuous basis. Thus, diasporas engage at all stages: in pre-crisis resilience building (preparedness), interventions during a humanitarian crisis or emergency (response), post-emergency

reconstruction, and longer-term development (recovery). Indeed, diaspora actors' lack of familiarity with technical terminology has been, in some contexts, used by more traditional humanitarian partners to exclude diaspora actors from operational and strategic discussions (ibid).

**FIGURE 1. HUMANITARIAN-DEVELOPMENT NEXUS AND THE PHASES OF DIASPORA EMERGENCY AND DEVELOPMENT RESPONSE**



Source: Shabaka

Therefore, it is important to recognise the 'humanitarian-development spectrum' in the context of diaspora humanitarian interventions. As shown above, diaspora groups and individuals often intervene at all stages, from preparedness and resilience building pre-crisis, to emergency response, post-crisis recovery and reconstruction, and longer-term development (Ahmed and Asquith, 2020).

Diaspora groups and individuals have also developed capacity and expertise in humanitarian response and in building organisational preparedness and resilience in target communities, thus increasing their capacity to withstand future crises (this was seen in most of the country contexts studied here).

Among international organisations, civil society, and governments, diasporas are widely recognised as critical international development partners. The European Union and many European States have partnered with and supported many diaspora organisations with their development initiatives, notably through their development agencies, but this often obscures diaspora involvement in humanitarian action.

Although the diaspora is increasingly recognised as an impactful humanitarian actor, the notion has only gained traction in recent years and is now being explored in a direct and specific way (see, inter alia, Horst et al., 2016; DEMAC, 2018; Shabaka, 2019; Centre for Humanitarian Leadership, 2019). Moreover, several diaspora engagement networks and initiatives are now cutting across the development, humanitarian, and peacebuilding fields. These initiatives cover four main categories: research projects that aim to better understand diaspora humanitarian responses; capacity development for diaspora humanitarians; volunteering and skills exchange initiatives; and networking initiatives (see table below).

## RELEVANT EXAMPLES

Diaspora volunteering initiatives in Europe	Mainstream overseas development volunteering programmes, including in emergency or post-emergency contexts, such as <b>Service Volontaire (SV)</b> in Belgium, Canada, and Vietnam; <b>France Volontaires (FV)</b> in France; <b>Sudwind</b> in Austria; or <b>Diaspora Volunteering Alliance</b> in partnership with <b>Voluntary Services Overseas (VSO)</b> and <b>International Citizen Service (ICS)</b> in the UK from 2002 to 2013.
Diasporas for Peace (DIASPEACE)	<b>DIASPEACE</b> was an EU-funded cooperation project which ran from 2008 to 2011 and studied the transnational political activities of Somali, Ethiopian and Eritrean diaspora organisations based in Europe.
Diaspora volunteering initiatives in Africa	Since 2012, the AU has provided volunteering placements for young Africans in a range of different African countries, including post-emergency contexts through programmes such as the AU Youth Volunteer Corps, the AU Humanitarian Corps and Africa CDC's <b>African Health Volunteers Corps (AVoHC)</b> , a team of African diaspora volunteer medical and public health professionals established by the AU to support emergency response to disease outbreaks in Africa.
Africa-Europe Diaspora Development Platform (ADEPT)	A network of African diaspora organisations in Europe engaged in development initiatives and humanitarian action in Europe and Africa, established in 2013. In 2020, <b>ADEPT</b> piloted the 'African Diaspora Heroes (Un)Masked' campaign to promote the role of diaspora members during the COVID-19 pandemic.
Diaspora Emergency Action and Coordination (DEMAC)	<b>DEMAC</b> was a research, advocacy, and capacity building programme funded by DG ECHO and delivered by the Danish Refugee Council (DRC), AFFORD, and the Berghof Foundation from 2016 to 2018. DRC is implementing a subsequent phase.
USAID Diaspora Unit	Established under USAID/the Public-Private Engagement Team (PPET) of the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA), the USAID Diaspora Unit builds partnerships to leverage: diaspora entrepreneurship and investment; voluntarism and post-disaster response; business networks and market linkages; and mentorship and skills transfer.
Migrants in Countries in Crisis (MICIC): supporting an evidence-based approach for effective and cooperative state action	The 2015-2019 EU-funded <b>MICIC</b> project, implemented by ICMPD and IOM, provided capacity development support and tools to promote and leverage the role of diasporas in supporting fellow nationals abroad during emergencies.
Diaspora Humanitarianism in Complex Crises (D-Hum)	<b>D-Hum</b> is a research project supported by Danida from 2019 until 2024, with a focus on the Somali diaspora's humanitarianism, examining the humanitarian-development nexus.
AU-CIDO/Shabaka Mapping Study on the Role and Faces of African Diaspora Humanitarianism during COVID-19	Research project in 2020 to map African diaspora humanitarianism in response to the COVID-19 pandemic in DR Congo, Nigeria, Somalia, Sudan, and Zimbabwe.
IOM Washington	IOM Washington is implementing a new project entitled ' <b>Developing and Piloting a Framework for Diaspora Engagement in Humanitarian Assistance</b> '. In cooperation with the Haiti Renewal Alliance, IOM has begun conducting remote consultations with key actors worldwide. It has also launched a survey for diaspora organisations to explore best practices migrants can leverage to strengthen their engagement.

# THE CRITICAL ROLE OF REMITTANCES IN HUMANITARIAN ACTION

The impact of remittances in developing countries and on recipient households has been widely recognised. Remittances play a vital role in boosting the household income of recipients, contributing to meeting their essential needs, from daily consumption, to housing, education, and healthcare.

The World Bank estimates the amount of remittances globally in 2019 to be US\$714,249 million (World Bank, 2020). The table below outlines the 2019 remittance flows to case study countries:

TOTAL REMITTANCE INFLOWS, 2019 (SOURCE: WORLD BANK, 2020) <sup>2</sup>	
Country	Value (US\$)
Lebanon	7,467m
Nepal	8,128m
Sudan	425m
Ukraine	15,814m
Venezuela	279m
Zambia	128m

However, it is important to note that these figures only consider remittances sent through official channels and, therefore, underestimate the actual amounts.

Access to funding continues to be a significant issue for the humanitarian sector. Hence, remittances give diasporas an advantage over traditional humanitarian actors, allowing for the opportunity to quickly send money or increase contributions to a crisis (see, inter alia, Majid, Hammond et al., 2020; Lindley, 2010). Another advantage of remittances is the relatively minimal cost attached and the fact that they can go directly to affected households, so that families can purchase what they need (Bryant, 2019). While remittance transfer costs can vary according to location and reach as high as 20% in some ‘high-risk’ corridors such as West Africa, they are often much lower than this. Diaspora responders often prefer to remit funds rather than donate to humanitarian organisations. In this way, they feel confident that more money reaches local people in need rather than being used to support the expensive overheads and staff costs of INGOs and international organisations.

Remittance transfers contrast with voucher systems and in-kind assistance. In-kind assistance often needs to be resold to be useful to recipients. Both systems limit purchases and force households to buy from a set pool of goods and services. Such systems may be inaccessible to populations affected by conflict and disaster situations (UNHCR, 2020). In most cases, remittances would still be accessible and enable the population to plan their expenses to avoid food shortages. It is interesting to note that institutional humanitarian partners, includ-

2 World Bank 2020a, Bilateral Remittance Matrix. Available at: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/migrationremittances-diasporaissues/brief/migration-remittances-data>

ing UN agencies and INGOs, have come to recognise the advantages of providing cash assistance in emergencies rather than in-kind assistance. In this sense diaspora responders have been 'ahead of the curve' (see, inter alia, Doocy and Tappis, 2016; UNHCR, 2012; and HPG, 2005).

## DIASPORA PHILANTHROPY

Diaspora philanthropy can be considered separate from, but parallel to, remittance-sending patterns and refers to diaspora fundraising and financial transfers for specific causes. This is often in response to humanitarian emergencies in countries of origin or settlement, or other countries, but diaspora philanthropy is not limited to emergency contexts. Diaspora members drawing on their own savings and income and pooling community resources from other diaspora members typically finance diaspora philanthropy. Diaspora faith networks can be critical in this regard, for example diaspora church and mosque networks are active in pooling and mobilising community resources for people affected by crises in countries of origin or settlement, and other countries (Shabaka, 2019). Examples of pooling of community resources were seen in all of the countries studied in this report.

Diasporas are generous donors to fundraising appeals on humanitarian causes in countries of origin or settlement, and third countries (Pharoah et al., 2013). Diaspora organisations sometimes also launch their own fundraising appeals. The rise of online crowdfunding approaches has been embraced by the diaspora (along with other groups) as an effective way of raising money from a broader (online) community and the general public. It allows them to reach beyond their community to mobilise resources and support for a cause with relatively little technical expertise or resources required. Among the diaspora responses studied in this report, the Lebanese diaspora seemed particularly active in using crowdfunding campaigns to support their emergency response efforts.

## MORE THAN JUST 'CASH MACHINES'

While diaspora financial capital and remittance flows have received much attention, this has arguably obscured other ways to contribute to development and humanitarian responses in countries of settlement and origin/heritage. Indeed, diaspora response can also take other forms such as social, intellectual, and political capital, and voluntarism. This is also sometimes referred to as social remittances.

For example, diasporas often deploy their **social capital** by leveraging trust networks in countries of origin and settlement to mobilise resources and gather information on local needs. They deploy their **political capital** by engaging with political structures, processes, and groups in countries of origin and settlement via **lobbying and advocacy**. As diasporas form part of transnational communities, they are often very active online, and media advocacy for emergency needs in countries of origin was common to all the diasporas studied in this report. Diaspora **intellectual capital** is deployed in the form of diaspora expertise and diaspora skills exchange. In humanitarian contexts, this may be **technical assistance** in specific fields, such as WASH or reconstruction, either on the ground or remotely. Diaspora intellectual capital is also deployed in settlement countries and online spaces to support other emergency responses.

Underpinning all of these forms of diaspora capital is **diaspora voluntarism**. Diaspora organisations and interventions in both development and humanitarian settings rely heavily on voluntary contributions. Diaspora volunteering includes volunteering time and skills on the ground in affected areas (for example, transporting

relief supplies or providing technical assistance) and remotely (for example, skills exchange interventions or media advocacy). Remote volunteering has become more common since the introduction of COVID-19 travel restrictions. Diaspora humanitarianism and voluntarism are, therefore, phenomena of growing importance.

## STRUCTURES OF DIASPORA ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED IN HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE

The term 'diaspora organisation' is quite broadly defined and can refer to an initiative, network, umbrella, or group of volunteers, not necessarily formally registered organisations (DEMAC, 2018). In many cases, such entities may not self-identify as diaspora organisations, preferring to define themselves as informal grassroots groupings. In the context of humanitarian action, diaspora groupings can take multiple forms: as diaspora communities, initiatives, networks, organisations, and platforms. Such groupings may form only temporarily around critical events. The diversity in nomenclature and structure is indicative of the diversity in diaspora forms of engagement and mobilisation. Examples of the different types and structures:

**Individual diaspora actors** are the most prevalent form of diaspora engagement in humanitarian action. Individuals from diaspora communities provide humanitarian assistance, which can range from collecting and transporting relief supplies to deploying specialist skills in emergency contexts. An example of this is the [Sudanese Doctors Union for the UK's response to the cholera outbreak in Sudan in 2017](#) (Shabaka, 2017).

**Diaspora organisations** are typically small, often volunteer-run community organisations that serve either a specific community in countries of residence or communities in countries of origin; or sometimes both. They may be registered charities, but many are not formally structured or legally registered. They can include diaspora professionals' networks, as well as hometown associations. Both play critical roles during crises but the scope and nature of their action can vary.

**Diaspora social enterprises** are organisations with a formal structure that enable diaspora groups to re-invest profits from income-generating activities. One example is [Impact Lebanon](#), which has supported reconstruction efforts, provided food packages to local people affected by the Beirut blast, and is now working to help local people start Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs) to rebuild livelihoods.

**Diaspora-led networks/platforms** can be formed by diaspora groups and individuals in order to improve coordination. A case in point is the [Africa-Europe Diaspora Development Platform \(ADEPT\)](#), a network of African diaspora groups based in 30 European countries active in African development and humanitarian response.

Diaspora humanitarians, like diaspora communities themselves, are very diverse and internally complex. Indeed, it is evident that no diaspora is homogeneous, and the same is true for diaspora humanitarian actors. Spatial and temporal contexts play a key role in developing diaspora organisations. Moreover, host societies' configurations also induce differences in diasporic experiences, even between diasporans originating from the same homeland (Feron and Lefort, 2019). For example, the types of engagements demonstrated by Sudanese living in the Gulf region differ from those of Sudanese residing in North America: contributions from those in the Gulf are often financial, whereas those in North America can include advocacy and information sharing.

The variations in size, structure, aims, and practices of diaspora organisation (not to mention their region of operation or their members' profile) render direct comparison of their relative effectiveness or impact significantly more challenging. Certainly, diaspora organisations are not structured, and lack the capacity to mobilise and deploy relief on a large scale compared to institutional humanitarian partners (i.e. UN agencies and INGOs). Most diaspora humanitarian interventions are small-scale and directed at the local level, making their interventions much less visible. At the same time, however, this is also an area of comparative advantage for diaspora responders. They have the agility to respond more quickly and connect with communities that are hard to reach.

## **SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL CONTEXT OF HUMANITARIAN CRISES**

Understanding the local context and socio-economic and political dynamics at play is fundamental to effective humanitarian response. It is also important to understand the ways in which socio-economic and political dynamics can interplay in different types of crises; in many ways, such factors appear to be more important than the type of crisis itself. For example, Nicaragua, Sudan, and Ukraine have all undergone conflict and political crises. However, it was the specificities of each local context that affected the modalities of diaspora response, including: government attitudes towards the diaspora; logistical challenges of moving money and supplies to affected regions; evolving needs on the ground; and the experiences and memories of earlier crises.

Humanitarian actors (whether governmental, inter-governmental, civil society, or diaspora) can fail to adequately understand the local context and/or attempt to fit the local context into pre-existing schema or typologies, leading to ineffective, even counterproductive interventions (Barbelet, 2018; Hammond, 2011).

## 2. METHODOLOGY

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### RESEARCH METHODS

This study adopted a mixed methodological approach to gathering information on the patterns of diaspora humanitarian response with regard to our case study countries, which included the following activities:

- Desk research
- A proof of concept online roundtable to raise awareness among the research's key stakeholders and validate the approach, as well as to collect additional qualitative data (gathered in October 2020)
- Key informant interviews
- An online survey

### DESK RESEARCH

Desk research was carried out to find data and information on the relevant target groups to develop an understanding of diaspora humanitarian actors in the countries studied. In addition, this phase also involved identifying gaps in the literature that were further explored in this study, namely regarding the influence of a particular country's socio-political context on the way the diaspora responds to a humanitarian crisis.

### KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS (KIIS)

The KIIS participants targeted included the following three groups:

- **Diaspora humanitarians** (organisations or individuals with experience providing humanitarian assistance during crises in countries of origin/heritage (and crises in other/'third' countries);
- **Government officials** in crisis-affected countries responsible for, or with experience of, engaging with diaspora humanitarians related to the selected countries;
- **(I)NGO staff** with experience in providing humanitarian assistance in the selected countries and in engaging with diaspora humanitarians.

Other types of participants included representatives of local civil society organisations and academic researchers.

A total of 48 KIIS were conducted (an average of 8 per case study country), and researchers sought to ensure that participants were representative of both genders where possible. The target number of interviewees for each country was 2-3 government officials, 2-3 INGO staff, and 4-5 diaspora humanitarian responders.

The table below sets out the total number of KIIs conducted by respondent type (and gender):

**KII INTERVIEW BREAKDOWN**

CASE STUDY COUNTRY	DIASPORA HUMANITARIANS	GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS	(I)NGO STAFF	TOTAL
Lebanon	3 (1 M, 2 F)	3 (1 M, 2 F)	3 (1 M, 2 F)	9 (3 M, 6 F)
Nepal	3 (3 M)	0	3 (1 M, 2 F)	6 (4 M, 2 F)
Nicaragua	8 (5 M, 3 F)	0	1 (1 F)	9 (5 M, 4 F)
Sudan	5 (3 M, 2 F)	2 (1 M, 1 F)	1 (1 M)	8 (5 M, 3 F)
Ukraine	7 (3 M, 4 F)	2 (1 M, 1 F)	2 (2 F)	11 (4 M, 7 F)
Zambia	2 (1 M, 1 F)	2 (2 F)	1 (M)	5 (2 M, 3 F)
<b>Total</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>48 (24 M, 24 F)</b>

KIIs were conducted remotely due to the travel restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Respondents were offered a choice of online platforms – such as MS Teams, Zoom, and WhatsApp – and interviews carried out depending on their preference. Snowball sampling (otherwise known as chain-referral sampling) was the primary method used to select interviewees. The researchers also sought to cover various geographical locations and sub-types of actors (i.e. different types of diaspora organisations based in different countries).

**KIIS - LIMITATIONS AND CHALLENGES**

Recruiting respondents was one of this study’s main challenges, as it required significantly more time and resources than initially anticipated. This was primarily true for interview respondents, as some potential respondents – especially government officials and diaspora actors – were reluctant to participate. Moreover, the research team encountered mistrust and/or misunderstandings among potential and actual respondents regarding the study’s true purpose. Among diaspora respondents, there was a lack of trust in institutional partners and they expressed a sense of unease about how the information they provided might be used. Among government respondents, there was concern about the potential professional and political implications of their participation.

The reasons underpinning challenges in participant engagement, as identified through outreach and interviews, included:

- Research fatigue among the target groups – this was arguably the most commonly cited factor. So-called ‘Zoom fatigue’, as many respondents were working remotely due to pandemic restrictions, meant that many potential respondents had limited appetite for participating in online interviews.

Diaspora respondents, in particular, were also wary of the extractive nature of this type of research. Respondents’ time is a precious resource. They are often expected to provide information with little in return other than the prospect of potential change in the medium- to longer-term. It is also important to

acknowledge the asymmetrical information flows and power relationships between researchers and research subjects (Kouritzin & Nakagawa, 2018). Shabaka sought to mitigate this through the use of diaspora researchers and 'insider researchers'.

- Mistrust about the study's real objectives (especially concerns about how data would be used and for what purpose).
- Challenging political contexts in some of the six case study countries, combined with political volatility and turnover of relevant government staff, were barriers to recruiting government official respondents. Respondents may have good reason to be reluctant to speak about their work and experiences due to potential risks to themselves, their families, and even their networks.
- Perceptions of the EU Global Diaspora Facility and Shabaka as organisations that did not connect with, or understand, the case study countries/contexts. Diaspora groups can act as gatekeepers. If they do not have prior experience of the organisations conducting the research, they can often be wary, as they may have had negative experiences of outside organisations failing to understand their needs or the contexts in which they operate.
- Perceptions of the EU Global Diaspora Facility and/or Shabaka as being too close to European governments, the European Union, or state actors in the selected countries.
- Lack of interest or lack of faith in the EU Global Diaspora Facility's commitment to successfully implement the research findings, make pertinent recommendations, or develop appropriate programmatic responses. A small number of respondents reported that they had participated in previous research or initiatives, which had not yielded expected results.
- While questions of ethnicity and political leaning are interesting, they remain incredibly sensitive. While the researchers sought to avoid such questions to maintain trust, concerns about this from potential respondents were barriers to engagement. This is particularly pertinent when respondents consider themselves and their families at risk; thus, they may opt for self-censorship, even if they do not live in the country of origin.

## **SURVEY**

The online survey was launched and managed by the EU Global Diaspora Facility, running from 22 October 2020 until 31 January 2021. The survey was aimed at the same three respondent sub-groups as the KIIs: diaspora responders, government officials with experience or knowledge of diaspora engagement, and NGO and UN agency staff familiar with the country contexts. It was also translated from English into Arabic, Spanish, and Ukrainian and made available in all four languages. Snowball techniques, official communications with governments, and online marketing were used to recruit respondents for the online survey.

In the end, 117 survey responses were received.

48% of survey respondents were diaspora humanitarians, 26% worked for humanitarian agencies, and 7% were government officials. This breakdown was broadly comparable with the KII dataset, where diaspora responders

made up 60% of interview respondents, humanitarian agency staff represented 22%, and government officials stood at 18%.

Survey respondents were predominantly based in European countries (84%), with the remainder based in North America (12%) and elsewhere (4%). In contrast, 28% of interviewees were based in Europe, 20% in North America, 12% in Africa, 10% in the Middle East, 6% in Asia, and 3% in Latin America. Among Europe-based respondents, most were in the UK (18%) or France (16%), with smaller percentages based in Belgium (10%), Spain (10%), Ireland (6%), and the Netherlands (4%). This is consistent with diaspora residence patterns from the six case study countries. Diaspora interview respondents shared a similar profile, inasmuch as the majority (65%) were based in Europe, with the remainder based in North America (25%) or elsewhere.

## **SURVEY LIMITATIONS AND CHALLENGES**

This method aimed to capture the views of a relatively small sample of officials, expert stakeholders, and diaspora humanitarian actors, in part due to potential risks of harm to themselves or their families, especially in politically sensitive contexts such as Nicaragua, Sudan and Ukraine. Although significant efforts were made to reach the widest possible audience, i.e. through proactive use of the EU Diaspora Facility and Shabaka's media channels and networks, certain limitations affected the exercise's overall results. Recruiting survey respondents, especially government officials and NGO staff, was a challenge.

Online surveys and questionnaires also come with design limitations; not all respondents will answer all questions or will necessarily do so consistently, especially when asked a series of questions on a particular topic. Furthermore, it is possible that some interviewees also completed the survey, so there might be some slight overlap between datasets.

## **PROOF-OF-CONCEPT ROUND TABLE**

A proof-of-concept online roundtable was organised on 22 October 2020 to bring together experts from UN agencies, think tanks, and academia to explore diaspora response to humanitarian crises, discuss the research concept, and raise awareness among potential respondents. While the research approach was approved, these stakeholders also made incisive and thoughtful comments on some of the assumptions underpinning the approach, such as the importance of coordination between the diaspora and other humanitarian actors (see the Discussion chapter below).

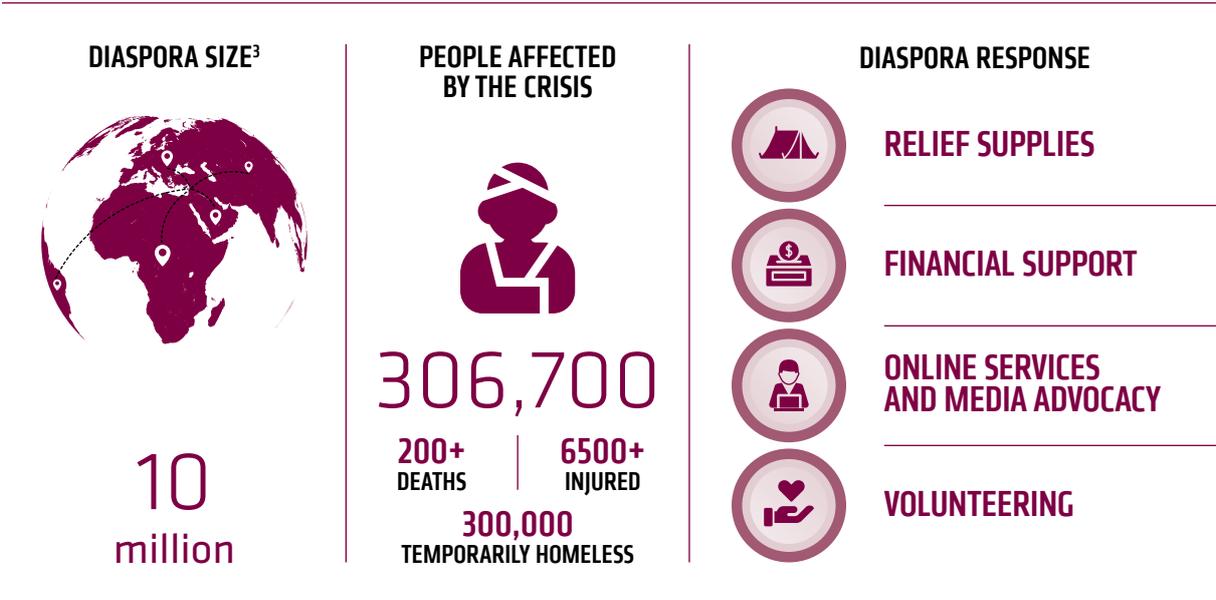
## **ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS, CONSENT, AND PRIVACY**

Researchers ensured that ethical principles and the EU Global Diaspora Facility's data protection policies were respected throughout this exercise, while at the same time protecting the privacy of respondents. Participation was solicited voluntarily, and informed consent was sought and maintained throughout. Respondents were provided with an information sheet (in Arabic, English, Spanish, and Ukrainian) on the purpose of the exercise – to understand diaspora humanitarian response patterns concerning the selected case study contexts – and consent forms. However, most interview respondents preferred to give their consent verbally. Participants' personal information will remain anonymous and will be deleted by the end of 2022.

# 3. COUNTRY CASE STUDIES



## LEBANON BEIRUT EXPLOSION IN 2020



On 4 August 2020, a large fire at the Port of Beirut triggered a devastating explosion of ammonium nitrate stored in containers at the port, killing at least 200 people and injuring more than 6,500. As many as 300,000 people were made temporarily homeless and collective losses might amount to US\$10-15 billion (BBC, 2020a). The explosion has had a devastating effect on Beirut’s health services due to both the high numbers of casualties, which significantly overwhelmed a health system already stretched by a socio-economic crisis and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, and the physical damage sustained by the country’s health infrastructure (World Bank, 2020b).

The Lebanese government’s handling of this crisis has caused deep anger across Lebanon and the diaspora, and many government ministers and officials have resigned. Local people in Beirut, supported by the diaspora, have been leading reconstruction.<sup>4</sup>

Lebanon’s diaspora support in times of crisis is well attested, especially during the country’s civil war, the subsequent reconstruction, and after the 2006 conflict with Israel (Tabar and Skulte-Ouais, 2009). Historically, response patterns were often aligned with the sectarian or communal divisions in Lebanese society, but a few

3 Lebanon’s understanding of diaspora counts 10 million people (Economic Vision report, 2018) whereas UN and World Bank Emigration data counts 844,158. For more information, see our [factsheet on Lebanon](#).

4 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-53673957>

younger respondents argued that this time, the response was (relatively) non-sectarian. Not everyone agreed with this assessment, however. Interview respondents from all categories noted that the Beirut blast was but the latest in a series of crises affecting the country in recent years, in addition to the COVID-19 pandemic. The succession of crises has affected the very fabric of Lebanese social, economic, and political life, testing the Lebanese people's resilience:

“

With my colleagues I counted the number of crises Lebanon has undergone over the last year... and the total was six, six crises indeed! [...] When you talk about the financial, social, and banking crises and the explosion [in Beirut]. That's aside from the migration crisis [Syrian refugees and Lebanese brain drain], for sure.

- Lebanese diplomat, Europe

## PATTERNS OF DIASPORA HUMANITARIANISM

All Lebanese diaspora respondents actively participated in mobilising resources to respond to the blast from their own savings, those of friends and family, and crowdfunding initiatives. **Funds** were sent – both directly to extended family, kin, or neighbours of extended family, and to local civil society initiatives set up or adapted in the aftermath of the blast. Respondents described this support as an extension and intensification of existing remittance patterns. One network allocated US\$2 million to hospitals, medical support, shelters, and reconstruction efforts (*Executive Bulletin*, 2020). One interviewee reported that Lebanese doctors in the US had raised US\$10 million in one day to provide medical and other relief supplies to hospitals in Beirut. Others reported that the money they sent was used to provide for basic needs (food packages were a typical example), reconstruction efforts, shelter, or in the case of the *Dawrati* initiative, to distribute sanitary pads for women (*dawrati* means 'my period' in Arabic).

However, some respondents expressed distrust of fundraising initiatives whose targets were too large to track their impact:

“

We follow the money... If I'm going to do a project where I can't follow the money, I don't want to do it... Honestly, whenever it gets too big, whenever we're speaking about millions and millions, I'm not going to get involved.

- Lebanese diaspora fundraiser (F), US

People employed a range of ways to send money in response to the crisis. For smaller amounts, where people had multi-currency bank accounts in Lebanon, direct bank transfers were used. However, for amounts above a certain threshold (above US\$2,000), interviewees reported having to organise transfers from registered NGOs in the country of residence to registered NGOs in Lebanon to circumvent controls initially designed to prevent money laundering and capital flight.

The diaspora also collected and sent **relief supplies** including clothes, medical supplies, and foodstuffs. These supplies were typically sent by air (whether with passengers or as freight) due to both the port's destruction and the need for swift delivery. Indeed, Middle East Airlines increased luggage allowances to permit passengers to carry an additional suitcase per person – even if this was not necessarily the most economical way of transporting supplies – and the government promised to remove customs duties. Donations also included **in-kind contributions**; one example cited was the fact that diaspora members made their properties in Beirut available to people in need of shelter. This was organised in an informal way using social media. Again, the emphasis was on meeting needs on the ground more directly. While the customs clearance process was made smoother in some cases, several respondents raised customs issues as problems in both Lebanon and countries of origin. In one example, a Lebanese grandmother tried to take cartons of baby milk with her when travelling from the US to Lebanon, only for the milk to be seized by US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) agents due to US flight security regulations.

Lebanese diaspora and grassroots civil society groups responding to Beirut's emergency are extremely savvy and active social media users. They use various online channels to network and leverage support for their humanitarian activities from the worldwide diaspora; rather than project websites, such actors use multiple channels, particularly Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, and WhatsApp. Diaspora responders' **online activities** also encompassed a range of tasks such as identifying potential beneficiaries or needs at the local level, coordinating with local civil society partners on the ground in Beirut, verifying the impact of activities on beneficiaries, and developing **media advocacy** in Lebanon.

Diaspora professionals – including health workers, humanitarian staff, engineers, and climbing specialists – **volunteered** their time to support emergency response and reconstruction efforts in the wake of the blast, where government responses were notably absent. However, due to pandemic travel restrictions in 2020, diaspora volunteering is increasingly being conducted remotely.

## STRUCTURES FOR DIASPORA HUMANITARIANISM

Government structures for engaging Lebanese diaspora humanitarians are limited. While there is a dedicated **Directorate of Emigrant Affairs** within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Emigrants (MoFAE) that runs structured diaspora engagement programmes, such as **Lebanese Diaspora Energy** which promotes diaspora success stories, their focus is primarily on harnessing diaspora resources and skills for longer-term economic focused engagements, including investments in infrastructure projects, entrepreneurial activities, and trade.<sup>5</sup> However, MoFAE diaspora engagement structures are not currently configured for short-term and speedy emergency response and coordination of diaspora humanitarian efforts, which requires different types of modalities: for example, facilitating aid delivery to crisis-affected populations.

Nevertheless, the Lebanese officials interviewed for this study expressed a great willingness to help where they could and had provided diaspora responders with information in the aftermath of the explosion. They also acknowledged the diaspora's interest in more direct, localised initiatives, along with their distrust of the Lebanese government, and sought to avoid being a barrier to diaspora humanitarian responses.

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5 It should be noted that, in 2019, Lebanese embassies and consulates provided financial and other assistance to Lebanese students in European countries affected by Lebanon's economic and banking crises. For an overview of the diaspora engagement landscape in Lebanon, please consult the **EUDIF Lebanon country factsheet**.

## BARRIERS

Diaspora, government, and NGO interviewees raised issues of coordination of humanitarian efforts. Diasporas were not engaged with formal coordination mechanisms. Perhaps predictably, most diaspora groups were wary or dismissive of trying to coordinate with the government regarding their humanitarian activities, arguing that there was little point in the absence of any government leadership or response to the crisis.

NGO staff and diaspora respondents noted that this lack of coordination with the government was not a barrier necessarily, as dynamic partnerships had been formed between local civil society groups and diaspora responders to coordinate local responses. What was seen as a more significant barrier to the efforts of respondents was the lack of coordination between institutional humanitarian partners and local civil society groups, and diaspora responders.

Other barriers cited included restrictions on sending sums of money exceeding a ceiling of US\$1500 per transaction, restrictions on foreign currency withdrawals in Lebanon, and restrictions in place in many settlement countries on taking food items onto aeroplanes.



# NEPAL DIASPORA RESPONSE TO FLOODS IN 2017

DIASPORA SIZE AS A PROPORTION OF NATIONAL POPULATION<sup>6</sup>



7.8%  
(2,285,364)

PEOPLE AFFECTED BY THE CRISIS



1.1  
million

DIASPORA RESPONSE



RELIEF SUPPLIES



TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE & EXPERTISE



FINANCIAL SUPPORT



VOLUNTEERING



RECONSTRUCTION

Nepal is among the most disaster-prone countries in the world. It ranks fourth and 11th regarding climate change vulnerability and earthquake vulnerability, respectively, and 20th in terms of multi-hazard vulnerability. Nepal is one of the most remittance-dependent countries worldwide – remittances in 2019 made up nearly 30% of the country’s GDP (EUDiF, 2020b).

From 11 to 14 August 2017, incessant rain led to severe floods across 35 of Nepal’s 77 districts, with a further 18 being severely impacted (Government of Nepal Planning Commission, 2017). Over a million people were affected, particularly women and children (Government of Nepal Planning Commission, 2017; UNFPA, 2017). The most heavily affected sectors included housing, health, education, agriculture, transport, WASH, and energy, and the cost of damages was estimated at nearly 3% of Nepal’s GDP (Malla et al., 2020). Nepalese local authorities’ capacity to respond was limited; they lacked preparedness, constraining effective response during the disaster (ibid.).

Aid came from the Nepalese government and humanitarian actors, such as the Nepal Red Cross Society (NRCS), the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), UN agencies, and Nepali diaspora communities worldwide. While the international aid sector accounted for approximately 15% of the total aid provided, **diaspora humanitarians provided over a third of assistance**, and the Government of Nepal only 6% (HPG, 2019). Indeed, “the diaspora provided levels of financial support that had small absolute value, but which was important in terms of speed and appropriateness, and in the sense of community support and solidarity they provided” (ibid.). It should be noted that, according to one interviewee from the Centre for Disaster Man-

6 As diaspora definitions vary widely, we use comparable data on emigration for all case studies, with the caveat that this does not cover all those who self-identify as diaspora. The emigration statistics for the six countries come from the UN and World Bank 2019 datasets.

agement, diaspora contributions made up no more than 5-10% of overall relief efforts, most of which came instead from bi- and multi-lateral donors.

## PATTERNS OF DIASPORA HUMANITARIANISM

While the diaspora responded to the 2017 floods by mobilising **funds and supplies**, interview respondents were less familiar with this action than the diaspora response to the 2015 earthquakes. The response to the 2017 floods appears to have been on a smaller scale and received less media coverage (HPG, 2019). One interviewee suggested this was linked to the scale and location of the different emergencies<sup>7</sup>.

Support was mobilised via community networks, both on and offline, and directed to both local communities in affected areas and Nepal's embassies worldwide. Respondents cited financial support as the most common form, in part because, for many, this was the most practical response the diaspora could provide as it was more cost-effective than sending relief supplies to affected areas. Given the cost of sending materials to Nepal and the potential for customs delays or problems, some respondents reported that they collected and donated supplies (such as clothes, food, and cooking equipment) to Nepalese embassies for onward transport and distribution.

Non-resident Nepalese actively fundraised in response to the floods and other natural disasters affecting Nepal. Even though individual donations may be small – e.g. £20 per person – community resources have been pooled to increase their impact. One interviewee gave the example of **fundraising dinners** organised by Nepalese restaurants in the UK and US. Others reported diaspora-organised **charity collections** in the streets. Interviewees recognised that funds donated to the government would be deployed more slowly, influencing their donation patterns. Money was typically sent using MTOs and bank-to-bank transfers. Respondents also expressed concerns about the potential for corruption or siphoning funds. One interviewee pointed to a US-based diaspora organisation that has been accused of pledging millions of dollars but only delivering a fraction.

Additionally, diaspora professional associations and networks – such as the **America Nepal Medical Foundation (ANMF)**, the **American Society of Nepalese Engineers (ASNEng)**, the **Computer Association of Nepal-USA (CAN-USA)**, and the **Nepalese Doctors Association (UK)** – provided **technical assistance and expertise** during the crisis.

Some interviewees referred to diaspora support for reconstruction efforts after the 2017 floods and 2015 earthquake in the post-crisis phase. These demonstrated the extension and adaptation of existing diaspora development initiatives, for example, by strengthening support for poverty-reduction programmes or building houses.

## STRUCTURES FOR DIASPORA HUMANITARIANISM

Although the Nepalese government's approach to diaspora engagement for development is relatively well developed<sup>8</sup>, limited structures exist for engaging the diaspora in coordinating diaspora humanitarian efforts. Some interviewees felt this was an area for improvement for the Nepalese government. Diaspora humanitarian

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7 The 2015 earthquake was perceived to be a bigger emergency and affected Kathmandu particularly badly.

8 For an overview, please refer to the [EUDiF Nepal country factsheet](#).

engagement does not appear to be a priority area for the government and it was challenging to engage government officials in the research.

There was little recognition by the government of diaspora humanitarian activities during the floods, partly because according to diaspora and other interviewees the level of diaspora support seems to have been lower than in previous emergencies. However, there was at least some awareness of diaspora resource mobilisation trends, as several Nepalese embassies served as collection points for money, relief, and medical supply donations.

## **BARRIERS TO DIASPORA HUMANITARIANISM**

All interviewees reported that coordination among humanitarian actors in Nepal was challenging, partly because of changes introduced by the government modelled on the UN cluster system. These changes give local and municipal authorities the responsibility for local humanitarian coordination. However, diaspora respondents did not report engaging with local or municipal authorities at all.

Interviewees also drew attention to the cyclical nature of natural disasters in Nepal and the fact that the country was still recovering from a decade-long insurgency. Diaspora interventions have to encompass all stages of humanitarian action: preparedness, response, and recovery, with the added layer of dealing with the complex dynamics of a post-conflict situation, which requires peacebuilding and reconstruction alongside responding to emergency needs in affected communities.

In addition, some interviewees also pointed to the informality of some diaspora organisations and networks as a barrier, as lack of formal registration in countries of residence impedes fundraising and distribution efforts.





# NICARAGUA

## DIASPORA RESPONSE TO THE POLITICAL CRISIS IN 2018

DIASPORA SIZE AS A PROPORTION OF NATIONAL POPULATION



10.4%  
(682,865)

PEOPLE AFFECTED BY THE CRISIS



100,000+

DIASPORA RESPONSE



FINANCIAL SUPPORT



MEDICAL SUPPLIES

The Nicaraguan political crisis began on 18 April 2018 when the government announced controversial pension and social security reforms. The protests initially confronted the government on this issue only, but this soon developed into a broader protest against the Nicaraguan government (HRW, 2018). The resulting government crackdown, police violence, political repression, and human rights violations (Guardian, 2018) have led to more than 100,000 people fleeing Nicaragua since 2018. As of August 2020, an estimated 81,000 Nicaraguan refugees were living in Costa Rica (UNHCR, 2020a), with other principal destinations including the USA, El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala, and Spain. This follows the pattern of migratory destinations for previous generations of Nicaraguans who fled during the Sandinista Revolution and Contra War (Orozco, 2008).

The political crisis has deepened with the economy contracting by -5.9% in 2020 (World Bank, 2021), hurricanes Eta and Iota devastating parts of the country (IFRC, 2021), and the ongoing response to the Covid-19 pandemic (New Humanitarian, 2020). Since the 2018 political crisis, the government crackdown has also extended to the diaspora, who were explicitly targeted by two new laws.<sup>9</sup> The Law for the Regulation of Foreign Agents and the Special Law on Cybercrimes were enacted by the Nicaraguan government in 2020 (Deutsche Welle, 2020; COF, 2020). The Regulation of Foreign Agents' Law requires Nicaraguans working for "governments, companies, foundations or foreign organizations" to register as foreign agents with the country's Interior Ministry. There are now stringent reporting requirements on foreign funds which need to be submitted to the Interior Ministry. The new law has placed restrictions on remittances, according to Nicaraguan diaspora groups (Deutsche Welle, 2020). The Special Law on Cybercrimes has been brought in to combat what the Nicaraguan Government describes as the "use [of] online platforms to spread false information or information that could raise alarm among people" (COF, 2020). Many in Nicaraguan diaspora groups believe that this law will target dissidents or families of dissidents.

9 Please refer to the EUDiF Nicaragua country factsheet for an overview of diaspora engagement in the country.

In February 2021, the Nicaraguan political crisis of 2018 still continued unabated, growing precariously worse. A recent report has documented even more severe human rights repression and crisis in the country, with no end in sight (Amnesty, 2021).

## PATTERNS OF DIASPORA HUMANITARIANISM

Nicaraguan diaspora interviewees were active in mobilising resources in response to Nicaragua's humanitarian needs. However, these activities were mainly focused on **raising and sending money** rather than goods and supplies, as even sending clothes could be potentially problematic for the Nicaraguan government, as reported by 88% of interviewees. Since the start of the pandemic, diaspora groups have tried to send **personal protective equipment** (PPE), **medical supplies**, and money to buy more supplies. One respondent reported raising enough to ship PPE for 80 doctors, as the state hospital was not providing the necessary equipment for health workers. However, sending these supplies was not always successful. One diaspora humanitarian reported having tried to send face masks, but the authorities seized and destroyed the shipment for 'being contaminated with COVID'. Furthermore, customs procedures and bureaucracy also made sending supplies more complicated.

Money was primarily sent to families, local communities, political prisoners, 'solidarity partners' (i.e. local civil society groups, however informal), rural activists, and local support centres. While extended families and kin were the main focus of diaspora humanitarian activities, some respondents also reported having sent money and supplies to Nicaraguan migrants in Costa Rica. Diaspora respondents raised funds from their own and their families' savings and by pooling community resources. Furthermore, several respondents also referred to fundraising appeals across diaspora networks in Europe and the US. Such efforts were not described as crowdfunding approaches as they aimed to raise money only from within the community. Instead, this was seen as pooling resources across diaspora networks. Appeals for funds were often closely linked to specific beneficiary needs at local level; for example, food for students. Beneficiaries typically used the money to purchase food vouchers, other basic supplies, and medicine/medical advice. Diaspora responders typically saw this as an extension of previous remittance-sending patterns, including the methods used to send money, i.e. MTOs and mobile applications.

## STRUCTURES FOR DIASPORA HUMANITARIANISM

The Nicaraguan diaspora's organisational and mobilisation patterns were primarily informal and voluntary. Many diaspora organisations were not formally registered. While this may reflect the relatively new nature of diaspora response to Nicaragua's political crisis (since 2018), some respondents also saw this as an asset to avoid government interference. Others stressed that, due to the situation in the country, informality and keeping a low profile were of utmost importance:



The security situation in Nicaragua is really bad... Anyone we help is at risk.

- Nicaraguan diaspora responder, F, Europe



We don't want to declare too much as this will give the government a reason to give us problems.

- Nicaraguan diaspora responder, M, US

A relatively small number of Nicaraguan diaspora organisations and many diaspora responders are involved in several organisations in different capacities. Some respondents considered this fluidity of organisation and affiliation an asset.

## BARRIERS TO DIASPORA HUMANITARIANISM

Undoubtedly, the government's (often hostile) attitude and policies are the most significant barriers to diaspora humanitarian activities. The diaspora is seen as a political threat. It was clear that most Nicaraguan diaspora responders interviewed for this study held politicised views of the crisis and the current government. Indeed, the introduction of the Law for the Regulation of Foreign Agents mentioned above made it very challenging for government officials to engage with the diaspora in a meaningful way. It prohibits officials from unauthorised engagement with overseas organisations or individuals. Diaspora responders have adapted to these restrictions by working with NGOs and local partners, and by increasing their financial support for beneficiaries.

Several diaspora respondents had been political prisoners in Nicaragua before leaving the country, and only a handful travelled back regularly. While all diaspora respondents could be characterised as political opponents of the current Nicaraguan government, they were primarily interested in helping their extended families and vulnerable groups.

All interviewees pointed to coordination with humanitarian agencies and NGOs as an area for improvement, with the potential to increase the impact of humanitarian work in Nicaragua. Improved coordination would avoid duplication of efforts and help to support advocacy work in countries of residence. This is all the more critical given the Nicaraguan government's lack of engagement and coordination mechanisms. However, coordination would need to remain informal in order not to increase tensions with the authorities.

Registration requirements complicated diaspora support for Nicaraguans in Costa Rica, as organisations must be registered to operate and access support. A minimum turnover of USD 30,000 per year is required for registration. Most (if not all) Nicaraguan diaspora groups cannot meet this threshold, limiting their ability to deliver projects in Costa Rica. The Costa Rican authorities are also reluctant to formally recognise the needs of Nicaraguan migrants, as doing so would require the government to offer them support.



# SUDAN

## DIASPORA RESPONSE TO COVID-19 AND THE 2020 FLOODS

DIASPORA SIZE AS A PROPORTION OF NATIONAL POPULATION<sup>10</sup>



4.8%  
(2,040,613)

PEOPLE AFFECTED BY THE CRISIS



875,000+

DIASPORA RESPONSE



RELIEF SUPPLIES



KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE & ADVISORY SUPPORT



FINANCIAL SUPPORT



VOLUNTEERING



ADVOCACY & LOBBYING

Following the former President Omar Al-Bashir’s ouster, Sudan began its journey to overcome 30 years of negligence, a lack of infrastructure investment, and its fragile economy. After over two decades of war and conflict and having barely survived South Sudan’s independence in 2011, the country was in a dire economic state. International sanctions and appearing on the US government’s list of designated state sponsors of terrorism only exacerbated Sudan’s desperate situation, as it was difficult for the diaspora to move money into the country through formal channels. However, the lifting of sanctions in 2017 and Sudan’s subsequent removal from the list of state sponsors of terrorism are developments that the Sudanese government views as an opportunity to encourage financial transfers from abroad (Middle East Monitor, 2018b; VOA, 2021).

In 2019, Sudan’s new Transitional Government inherited an already extremely vulnerable and disrupted health-care system, among other challenges, which has only been further aggravated and compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic (UNOCHA, 2020). In April 2020, Prime Minister Hamdok launched the ‘Stand for Sudan’ campaign, calling on Sudanese nationals around the world to contribute financially to support the country’s economy during this time of crisis.

In addition to the pandemic, economic crisis, conflict, displacement, and a lack of essential services, Sudan has also declared a state of emergency due to unprecedented rainfall that resulted in historic flooding in parts of the country in August/September 2020. While flooding is an annual event in Sudan, these floods were the worst in 100 years and have affected more than 875,000 people (Aljazeera, 2020b; EMRO, 2020; UNOCHA, 2021). Over 100 were reported dead and thousands of homes were destroyed, forcing residents to seek shelter in schools (UNOCHA, 2020).

<sup>10</sup> As diaspora definitions vary widely, we use comparable data on emigration for all case studies, with the caveat that this does not cover all those who self-identify as diaspora. The emigration statistics for the six countries come from the UN and World Bank 2019 datasets.

## PATTERNS OF DIASPORA HUMANITARIANISM

The Sudanese diaspora's emergence and involvement in their home country and towns has been visible since the late 1980s. It has contributed by sending remittances, sharing skills and knowledge, and mobilising support for the country internationally. While many diaspora communities maintain intermittent or continued connections to Sudan in the form of circular financial and social remittances, advancements in telecommunications and lower transportation costs have been pivotal to sustaining these connections intergenerationally. Despite the current challenging situation, the Sudanese diaspora have supported the transitional government in various ways, including **media advocacy, knowledge exchange**, and resource mobilisation. Sudanese diaspora responders have also been active in mobilising **financial resources** and **relief materials** to assist people affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and floods.

Remittances, in-kind support, and philanthropy have served as a critical safety net for communities in Sudan, especially during recurrent crises of recent decades. As one interviewee noted:

“ I've worked in a number of countries and have studied the way people show solidarity to one another and find that the level of social solidarity in Sudan is exceptional.

- Former UN agency official based in Sudan

Diaspora respondents also reported continued or increased remittance flows in response to Sudan's multiple crises. For example, they sent additional funds to help fight the country's economic crisis, providing critical **medication** that is not accessible in Sudan and enabling more information sharing. Interviewees also gave examples of fundraising across community networks to respond to the needs of people in Sudan affected by these crises. This was seen as a natural extension of existing support patterns of social and economic remittances to extended family and kin.

After Sudan's popular revolution (2018-2019) and especially since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and flooding, fundraising efforts have consequently grown and focused primarily on enabling the purchase of relief and medical supplies. For example, Sudanese diaspora health professionals' networks in the UK raised several hundred thousand pounds to purchase critical oxygen tanks and PPE supplies and shipped them to Sudan. Working closely with the Sudan Ministry of Health (MoH) and local community leaders, these networks continue mobilising resources, transporting medical supplies and equipment, translating and providing **guidance for medical staff** in the country, and **advising MoH** officials on COVID-19 preparedness, both remotely and on the ground. Furthermore, these networks have successfully **lobbied** international partners to lift economic sanctions on Sudan during the public health crisis (SSWA, 2020).

Although sanctions have now been lifted and the country is expected to be removed from the US list of state sponsors of terrorism after normalising relations with Israel in 2020, the legacy of these restrictions continues to affect diaspora remittance flows. As these obstacles had made it difficult for the diaspora to send money to Sudan directly, most diaspora respondents reported the development of workarounds, typically by transferring money to individuals and organisations based in the Gulf to send on to Sudan. However, one diaspora respondent noted that Sudanese health professionals' networks often preferred to use transfers from organisations and companies than payments to individuals, as this was more transparent, easier to monitor, and did not entail using the black market.

Diaspora responders also reported significant **volunteering** activity as part of their emergency response, particularly in the areas of education, women's rights, human rights, peacebuilding, and other forms of technical assistance. Active since the outset of the revolution in late 2018, diaspora volunteers have supported Sudan's situation through **media advocacy** (especially through social media), sharing information and advice with activists on the ground, raising funds, and mobilising supplies and other resources. They have also shared information on COVID-19 and respective government guidelines with Sudanese communities in countries of residence, many of which have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic. One diaspora organisation providing remote volunteering and mentoring for women in Sudan, Sudaniya Mentoring, noted that demand for its remote volunteering project had exploded over the last year, with thousands of applications received.

## STRUCTURES FOR DIASPORA HUMANITARIANISM

The **Secretariat of Sudanese Working Abroad** (SSWA) – which sits within the Ministry of Cabinet Affairs – is responsible for diaspora affairs, policy development, and coordination of diaspora services. SSWA aims to provide a one-stop service centre for Sudanese diaspora when they visit Sudan and e-services for those abroad.<sup>11</sup> However, the secretariat is not structured for emergency response or trusted by the diaspora due to associations with the former regime of Omar El-Bashir.

As for the COVID-19 response, the Ministry of Labour and Social Development (MoLSD) has played an essential role in facilitating diaspora contributions, whether financial donations or supplies, to the appropriate ministries, notably the Ministry of Health (MoH). This has included, for example, assisting with airport arrivals and transportation of PPE kits and medical equipment for the MoH.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs provided support to Sudanese stranded abroad when borders were suddenly closed. Some of the largest numbers were stuck in Egypt, where many Sudanese go to seek medical services, and much anger and frustration led to protests where hundreds stormed the Sudanese embassy in Cairo (**Asharq Al-Awsat**, 2020). Although the embassy was closed, staff coordinated with Egypt-based Sudanese diaspora members and Sudanese and Egyptian civil society groups to support those stranded until borders reopened.

However, significant gaps remain in efforts to create pathways for diaspora engagement. As part of its response to COVID-19, in March 2020 the government established new structures, including a cross-governmental, high-level coordination group, the Higher Committee for Health Emergencies (اللجنة العليا للطوارئ الصحية in Arabic), which is responsible for decision-making and integrated response to the pandemic. The committee includes members of Forces of Freedom and Change (FFC) and civil society organisations. Its main objectives are coordinating and facilitating civic engagement by deploying national expertise to support institutional capacity building and reform efforts. This has entailed the creation of a **roster of Sudanese experts**, mainly focused on the diaspora, contributing their particular skills and knowledge to government. This is an interesting example of an attempt to streamline diaspora engagement within government at a high level; however, the pilot had not yet been launched at the time of writing.

Despite the creation of these new structures, coordination of humanitarian efforts in Sudan and diaspora transnational activities outside the country remain as challenges. All interviewees, who argued that greater coor-

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<sup>11</sup> Please consult the **EUDiF Sudan country factsheet** for further information.

dination would increase the impact of diaspora and other humanitarian efforts and reduce duplication, raised this issue. However, an example of effective coordination provided by interview respondents was Sudan's past response to communicable diseases, such as the Cholera outbreak in 2017 ([Shabaka, 2017](#)). This brought together local and diaspora health professionals and experts to share information and good practices, develop vaccination campaigns, raise public awareness, and train staff (*ibid.*).

Several interviewees stressed that coordination must go hand in hand with interventions focused on the humanitarian-development nexus that strengthen local coping capacities, improve local involvement, and stimulate local economies. Interviewees noted that coordination mechanisms were also needed in the diaspora to bring together diaspora responders, identify and mobilise diaspora skills and expertise, and harness this energy to respond to specific needs. An example of this is the Sudanese Doctors Union-UK, which has engaged in response to crises by securing oxygen supplies for the Ministry of Health, as previously mentioned, and raising funds for flood response. They also hold health webinars in Arabic for Sudanese communities in the UK and Sudan, and share knowledge and expertise with Sudanese colleagues across the globe.

## **BARRIERS TO DIASPORA HUMANITARIANISM**

Respondents viewed the Sudanese government's information about crises, specific needs, and facilitation of response as inadequate and not updated frequently enough in response to evolving needs on the ground. Moreover, some government websites – such as the SSWA website – were only available in Arabic, excluding many second and subsequent-generation diaspora respondents who may not be able to read Arabic.



# UKRAINE

## DIASPORA HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE TO CONFLICT, 2013–PRESENT

### DIASPORA SIZE AS A PROPORTION OF NATIONAL POPULATION<sup>12</sup>



16%  
(6,848,100)

### PEOPLE AFFECTED BY THE CRISIS



3.5  
million

### DIASPORA RESPONSE



RELIEF & MEDICAL SUPPLIES



COMMUNITY SOLIDARITY  
EVENTS



RAISING AND  
SENDING FUNDS



VOLUNTEERING



ADVOCACY & LOBBYING

Historical and more recent emigration waves from Ukraine have created significant diaspora communities in North America, Europe, and Russia (Ukrainians in Russia make up approximately half of all Ukrainians in the diaspora). They have differently mediated relationships with their country of origin/heritage, especially related to Ukrainian independence since the collapse of the Soviet Union and its relationship with Russia (Voytyv, 2020; Bagno-Moldavsky, 2015; Roasaria, 2018).

Following the contested Ukrainian revolution and Euromaidan movement, the outbreak of civil war in 2014 divided the diaspora. Ukrainians based in Russia largely chose not to get involved. In contrast, many based in North America and Europe carried out media advocacy and sought to mobilise Ukrainian communities and their resources to help people affected by the Donbas conflict region (The Ukrainian Weekly, 2017).

One interesting dynamic of the conflict in Ukraine was the instrumentalisation of its sizeable Russian diaspora – including both ‘ethnic Russians’ and Russian speakers – as a pretext for Russian involvement in the contested regions. This involvement has further complicated diaspora relations between the two countries and arguably made it more difficult for the Ukrainian diaspora in Russia to engage publicly with events in Ukraine, even on a humanitarian basis (The Conversation, 2014). Simultaneously, Russians (including those in the diaspora) have mobilised resources to support the Russian diaspora in Ukraine (ibid.).

The crisis has also prompted the government to reappraise the importance of diaspora engagement. In recent years, President Zelenskyy has repeatedly emphasised the importance of the Ukrainian diaspora. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has added another dimension to diaspora engagement and (voluntary or involuntary) return to Ukraine, with large numbers of Ukrainian diasporas returning home in the face of the outbreak (IOM, 2020).

12 According to the Statistics provided by MFA of Ukraine, the diaspora is 6 848 100 or 16% of the total population.

## PATTERNS OF DIASPORA HUMANITARIANISM

Following the Euromaidan revolution and subsequent conflict in 2014, the Ukrainian diaspora deployed humanitarian relief efforts and a range of different mobilisation strategies – including transnational activities, such as organising **community solidarity events**, from ‘London Euromaidan’ to ‘Warsaw Euromaidan’, and similar demonstrations in Toronto, Tokyo, Sydney, New York, and Frankfurt (Nychyk, 2016). These aimed initially at raising awareness of the crisis and evolved to mobilise support and resources for the Ukraine crisis. According to Tatar (2019), the protests, rallies, and humanitarian activism in Canada’s Ukrainian diaspora developed as “a coherent supplement to the burst of civic activism in Ukraine”. Indeed, Lapshyna (2018) argues that events in Ukraine have prompted the diaspora to mobilise, grow more robust, and become more outward-looking in its engagement with Ukrainian affairs (see also Boichak, 2019).

The diaspora’s motivations for providing emergency response included a desire to help their country of origin/ heritage and aspirations of a more direct connection with beneficiaries to better monitor their activities’ impact. In Europe and North America, diaspora individuals and organisations reported their resource mobilisation involvement following the crisis, including gathering **funds** for humanitarian activities, **relief and medical supplies**, and equipment, typically launching appeals via social media and fundraising sites. Beneficiaries included people in need in Ukraine’s affected areas, children who lost parents in the conflict, and those fighting on the government’s behalf. At times, diaspora activities created tension with humanitarian agencies and others working in Ukraine, as these tend to work within particular frameworks or under mandates that the diaspora do not always share.

Remittances had already been high before the crisis and only increased after it began; remittances make up over 10% of Ukraine’s GDP, and although flows were projected to fall by US\$2 billion compared to 2019 figures, in 2021 the National Bank of Ukraine reported increased remittance levels for 2020, having risen by US\$200 million to US\$12.212 billion (IOM, 2020; 112 International, 2021). The Euromaidan crisis has arguably motivated and intensified diaspora money transfer patterns to include humanitarian activities. Diaspora funds are sent to Ukraine using a range of methods, including MTOs, card transfers, and cash carried by hand via aeroplane, hired transport, or bus.

In addition, diaspora responders also reported having sent so-called **‘dual use’ equipment and supplies**, such as body armour, helmets, or drones. Indeed, some interviewees talked openly about sending equipment purely for military use (such as ammunition):

“ For the last six years, well... we sent more than £1,200,000. Ammunition, berets, devices, uniforms, cars, drones. And this was done on a regular basis, seven days a week. Collected, searched, bought, sent. Buses departed from London every week [carrying] up to four tons of everything.

- Diaspora responder (F), UK

These supplies were also sent by freight, and diaspora would help transport them across the border. Where items could potentially encounter customs problems or delays, some diaspora humanitarians reported having coordinated with Ukrainian officials and diplomatic staff to help solve such issues. In other cases, groups of

diaspora responders would collaborate to transport 'dual use' equipment by plane (using individual carry-on allowances) or hire trucks and drive all types of supplies to the affected regions.

Diaspora respondents referred to two types of diaspora **volunteering** in Ukraine, humanitarian and (para-)military. They also explained how these overlap, and highlighted that some volunteers' initial motivations were more directed towards supporting the Ukrainian government in the conflict than in mounting a purely humanitarian response, and that these could become blurred. As one interviewee noted:

“ In the beginning, it [our intervention] was only military. It was very important that we reached those on the first front line, those who were in need. Later, we somehow started helping orphanages.

- Ukrainian diaspora responder (F), Europe

Government officials interviewed also acknowledged the importance of other forms of support such as **lobbying and advocacy**:

“ When those Ukrainian oligarchs withdraw money offshore from Ukraine, the Ukrainian diaspora pours large sums [back into the country] to help their families, as well as NGOs in Ukraine; they sponsor various projects in Ukraine as well, and this is a big contribution... Not only do they send money out of their own pockets, but they also help in many countries where we have influence; they actively call on the authorities of those countries of residence to financially help Ukraine in this time of crisis in the form of military assistance.

- Ukrainian diplomat (M), North America

## STRUCTURES FOR DIASPORA HUMANITARIANISM

The Ukrainian government established diaspora engagement structures partly in response to the diaspora's crisis mobilisation. The Ukrainian Ministry of Foreign Affairs includes the **Directorate General for Worldwide Ukrainians, Cultural and Humanitarian Cooperation**. However, its work is focused on broader diaspora engagement rather than on coordinating or enabling diaspora humanitarian response.<sup>13</sup>

The Ukrainian diaspora has also established diaspora organisations and networks, including umbrella networks such as the Ukrainian World Congress. Some of these organisations are long-established; the United Ukrainian American Relief Committee, for example, was formed in 1944 to support Ukrainian refugees during WWII and helped over 70,000 refugees and internally displaced people (IDP). Consequently, these organisations have ex-

<sup>13</sup> For an overview of diaspora engagement in Ukraine, please refer to the [EUDiF Ukraine country factsheet](#).

perience in providing emergency response. Memories of earlier humanitarian crises also appear to have been a factor in diaspora mobilisation (Nikolko, 2019). Respondents reported a good level of coordination in responses to the crisis among diaspora groups, despite some tensions between the more established diaspora organisations that were less focused on humanitarian response and the newer ones set up in response to the crisis. However, there remains a lack of formal coordination mechanisms for diaspora humanitarian activities supporting affected regions in Ukraine. Diaspora responders (individuals and organisations) did report having established operational partnerships with civil society groups in Ukraine, but these have tended to develop organically and informally.

Diaspora responders sought to coordinate with officials and humanitarian agencies operating in Ukraine, even though tensions could arise in these relationships when diaspora groups did not appreciate the systems and processes used by other agencies, such as humanitarian principles or beneficiary identification. Diaspora actors valued speed of response, and their expectations did not always fit with other humanitarian agencies operating in Ukraine:

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“ I wouldn't say the diaspora is not neutral in providing assistance, it is rather a non-compliance with the mandate, a certain expectation of a donor. Here I consider the diaspora a donor. In an armed conflict, the Red Cross mandate does not always allow assistance to the categories the donor wants [to assist]. The Red Cross has certain beneficiaries and we have to work with them. In this case, the diaspora was easier and faster [in delivering aid], and this is the most important thing when providing assistance.

- Former Ukrainian Red Cross staff member (F), Europe

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## BARRIERS TO DIASPORA HUMANITARIANISM

Interviewees from all three respondent groups cited trust – both within the diaspora and between the diaspora and other humanitarian actors – as a barrier to coordination. It takes time to get to know what different groups are doing and to build trust:

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“ A lack of trust has soaked through everything, including the volunteer environment. Therefore, because of it, centralisation of actions or coordination does not seem possible, very often everything is about trust in personalities.

- Ukrainian diplomat (M), Europe

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Interviewees also cited corruption and lack of trust in Ukrainian institutions as barriers to diaspora humanitarian activities. Indeed, as another responder noted:

“

Ukraine is a big mess. I asked for transport, and the guys told me that the transport used is Ukrainian, so they have no problems with customs. That is, they have their channels; carriers have their channels at customs, thanks to corruption [laughs]... they can drive [straight through]. It's normalised and has its own tariffs, but it works.

- **Diaspora humanitarian (M), France**

Following on from this, respondents also raised the fact that the relative informality of diaspora humanitarian initiatives – and lack of experience in some cases – could make working with other agencies more challenging, especially the government, with a lot resting on personal connections. Reliance on a volunteer base perhaps contributed to this trend of informality.





## ZAMBIA

# DIASPORA RESPONSE TO CYCLONES IDAI AND KENNETH IN SOUTHERN AFRICA IN 2019

DIASPORA SIZE AS A PROPORTION OF NATIONAL POPULATION<sup>14</sup>



2.7%  
(493,087)

DIASPORA RESPONSE



POST-DISASTER RECOVERY



FINANCIAL SUPPORT & DONATIONS



VOLUNTEERING



ADVOCACY & LOBBYING



MATERIALS & SUPPLIES

Cyclone Idai hit Southern Africa in March 2019, followed by Cyclone Kenneth in April. The cyclones wrought havoc mostly in Zimbabwe, Mozambique, and Malawi. Zambia was one of the least affected countries in the region, with the most damage caused in Mozambique and Zimbabwe. However, Zambia suffered damage to infrastructure and the economy, as the landlocked country depends heavily on neighbouring countries' ports (AfDB, 2019). Due to climate change, similar emergencies are predicted to befall the region in the future, creating needs in terms of resilience building (Norton et al., 2020).

The Zambian diaspora has formed various community groups, some of which are actively involved in development and fundraising efforts, particularly in the medical and agricultural sectors (CS Monitor, 2019). Some of these helped mobilise responses to those affected by the cyclones in Southern African countries. However, relatively little data is available, in either academic or grey literature, on the scope, scale, or nature of these contributions.

Diaspora humanitarian efforts lacked visibility to international humanitarian agencies and media; aside from the fact that the Zambian diaspora is relatively small, one reason for this was that such efforts focused on the micro-level.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup> As diaspora definitions vary widely, we use comparable data on emigration for all case studies, with the caveat that this does not cover all those who self-identify as diaspora. The emigration statistics for the six countries come from the UN and World Bank 2019 datasets.

## PATTERNS OF DIASPORA HUMANITARIANISM

Even though Zambia was less affected by the disaster, Zambians in the diaspora helped mobilise resources and relief supplies, coordinated with humanitarian agencies operating across the region in response, and assisted in **post-disaster reconstruction and economic recovery**.<sup>15</sup>

Interviewees and survey respondents reported resource mobilisation, predominantly **financial donations**, both through existing fundraising appeals by traditional humanitarian agencies and by launching their own small-scale fundraising campaigns. Money was usually sent to affected people in the region via MTOs and bank-to-bank transfers, where available. However, there was little awareness of the Zambian diaspora's emergency response, and interviewees suggested that diaspora donations and relief efforts tended to be small-scale and locally focused, where beneficiaries were often respondents' extended family and social networks. Interviewees also noted that some donations were made to Zambians residing in countries more severely affected by the damage caused by the cyclones. Correspondingly, the Malawian diaspora in Zambia also mobilised supplies and funds to support Malawi's relief efforts (UNOCHA, 2019). This is therefore an interesting example of regional diaspora solidarity, where diaspora responses are not limited to channels between countries of settlement and origin, but instead draw on regional and transnational communities.

Diaspora responders also supported Zambia and neighbouring countries' activities through various avenues, including **fundraising, collecting and transporting supplies and materials, and volunteering** for local development projects, particularly in the agriculture, education, and livelihoods sectors. Diaspora responders were also active in **media advocacy and lobbying** to raise awareness of the needs of those affected by the crisis in neighbouring countries, including the Zambian diaspora in those countries.

Community members also pooled resources to **donate to relief efforts**. However, no interviewees or survey respondents reported having sent relief supplies or materials themselves to the region. Indeed, interviewees highlighted the costs and delays that would be incurred in such cases, arguing that it was more cost-effective to send money to buy supplies locally.

## STRUCTURES FOR DIASPORA HUMANITARIANISM

The Zambian government is increasingly seeking to engage its diaspora as important national stakeholders, as attested by the adoption of a National Diaspora Policy in 2019.<sup>16</sup> However, the role of the diaspora in humanitarian response is not yet factored in at national level.

Zambia's humanitarian response was organised by the Vice President's Office of Disaster Management and Mitigation Unit (DMMU). The Unit provided relief, such as medical supplies and dignity kits, to Malawi and Zimbabwe (MoneyFM Zambia, 2019).

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15 This was also one of the findings of a community consultation organised by AFFORD in London in April 2019 around the diaspora's response to Cyclones Idai and Kenneth.

16 Please consult the [EUDiF Zambia country factsheet](#) for an overview of the diaspora engagement landscape.

Due to a lack of capacity, clear engagement, coordination structures, and demand, there was little coordination with diaspora humanitarian efforts. Indeed, diaspora efforts were not even visible to Zambian officials and international humanitarian agencies; none of the Zambian officials interviewed for this study were aware of diaspora responses to Cyclones Idai and Kenneth. However, diaspora responders coordinated with diaspora partners in Zambia's more severely affected neighbouring countries. As one interviewee recalled:

“ I did not hear about the cyclone in Zambia. I did hear about the cyclone in Malawi. And in Tanzania and Zimbabwe, because I've got [diaspora] programme partners there. And they adjusted their budgets and supported them [Zambians]. And they were able to deliver [relief supplies to affected people].

- Zambian diaspora responder (F), UK

## BARRIERS TO DIASPORA HUMANITARIANISM

Respondents cited their lack of visibility to humanitarian partners – INGOs and the Zambian government – and a lack of information about needs and how these factors can act as barriers to diaspora humanitarian response in Zambia. Government agencies tended to view the diaspora as beneficiaries in need in neighbouring countries, rather than as partners in humanitarian response. This suggests a need – and an opportunity – for humanitarian agencies and the government to provide targeted information for diaspora communities and more training and support for diaspora responders. Providing more targeted information would enhance general ability to mobilise funds and resources for people affected by emergencies. Moreover, training and other support for diaspora responders would improve coordination with institutional humanitarian partners.



## 4. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

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In this chapter, we analyse and discuss key findings across all six countries covered by the case study. We examine how sustaining diaspora identities and transnational communities, and how the impact of crises can (re-)invigorate relationships with countries of origin. We also consider barriers to diaspora action, the impact of government-diaspora relations, and coordination with other humanitarian partners on diaspora responses. The total number of respondents was relatively small: 48 KII respondents and 117 survey respondents. Also, in some countries, the number of respondents was quite limited, such as the case of Zambia, with only four survey respondents and five KIIs having participated. The study nevertheless demonstrated considerable consistency between the KII and survey data and presented a rich overall dataset for the research team to analyse.

During the KII data analysis, it became apparent that much fluidity and overlap existed between respondent groups. Many interviewees cut across two or three of these subgroups, e.g. government officials who also happened to be diaspora members with experience in the humanitarian sector, or humanitarian professionals with diaspora backgrounds. This fluidity of identity and categories of activity between respondent groups was an interesting finding and underscores the importance of recognising the fluidity of diaspora humanitarian response.

KIIs and survey findings were analysed using an inductive approach to establish key themes identified by respondents. These key themes are presented below.

### IDENTITY AND SUSTAINING TRANSNATIONAL LINKS TO 'HOME'

A key point of interest is how diasporas maintain a link with countries of origin or with others based in other locations. Diaspora from all of the origin countries studies demonstrated they belong to, and help create, global networks that are not necessarily limited by principal settlement countries. 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. Interview respondents reported that religious, linguistic, cultural, and other factors are critical to maintaining these relationships. This also suggests the **importance of social and cultural capital** to diaspora connections, which can enable diaspora humanitarian response in times of crisis.

Survey take-up was highest among respondents with connections to Sudan (26%) and Lebanon (20%), followed by Ukraine (13%). Survey respondents also stated that they were **predominantly first-generation** diasporans (71%), with second-generation diasporans accounting for 24%. No respondents stated that they were third- or subsequent generation. This is supported by interview data, which showed that diaspora respondents maintain links both with countries of origin/heritage and transnational communities that have formed on the basis of shared culture and heritage. 85% of diaspora interviewees described themselves as being first-generation, although many of these could be described as 'generation 1.5', inasmuch as they left their country of origin as small children, and grew up in settlement countries in their formative years.

**Identity** is thus an essential component of understanding diasporas' relationships with their countries of origin, which may have been built on memories, experiences, or stories shared by parents or other individuals. Express-

sions of identity are also very relevant in understanding their motivations and the types of engagements they seek. Diasporas show highly **diverse motivational factors** at the root of humanitarian response, such as emotional ties, personal development opportunities, social connections, and community influence (Shabaka, 2017). This was also reflected in the interview data. In the cases of Ukrainian and Lebanese diaspora humanitarian response, motivations varied between those who were first generation (and who felt a more direct connection to the country) and those who were second or subsequent generation – for example, Ukrainians in North America whose ancestors left Ukraine in the 1930s, or Lebanese in Latin America whose ancestors left Lebanon in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Identity is also a critical factor in the ways in which diasporas remain **engaged in protracted crises** for many years and not just at the point of a specific crisis itself. Diaspora members are all too often used to responding to crises in their homeland, which can be cyclical in nature, using family and community networks. In Lebanon's case, existing diaspora networks and existing diaspora humanitarian response patterns of sending money and relief supplies inherited from earlier crises in the country (for example, the civil war or the Israeli invasion of Lebanon) were built on or reactivated. In Ukraine, some diaspora responders were motivated by concerns that the country was in danger of succumbing again to earlier historical crises, notably the Holodomor. Similarly, Sudan and Nicaragua have undergone recent and historical humanitarian crises, and diaspora responses and networks have evolved out of these.

**Diaspora identities thus shape how diasporas provide support and how they connect to their countries of origin and heritage.** Moreover, the **'shock' of emergencies** in countries of origin can forge or (re-)invigorate connections to the homeland for second and subsequent generations. This can be seen in Sudan's case, where the popular revolution of 2018 and the COVID-19 pandemic and flooding experienced in 2020 have motivated a new (second) generation of the diaspora to engage with the country. Ukraine is another example, where the Euromaidan revolution also provided an important impetus for mobilising the Ukrainian diaspora, at least in Europe and North America. While diaspora respondents raised this point most frequently, officials and NGO staff interviewed also cited it.

Diaspora identity also influenced how diaspora responders sought to respond to crises in the six country contexts. Diaspora, government, and NGO respondents noted that diaspora responders showed a preference for targeting support at a local level, whether to extended family or other people affected by the emergency in question, in a more direct way, making it easier to monitor the impact by contacting beneficiaries, for example. Resource mobilisation was therefore perceived to be more personal.

## ENGAGING WITH FORMAL INSTITUTIONS

### DIASPORA PERSPECTIVES

Part of this diaspora preference for supporting local-level initiatives was seen to relate to perceptions and previous experiences of engaging with formal institutions, governments, and humanitarian agencies. Many diaspora interviewees were **distrustful or ambivalent about engaging with governments** in countries of origin and settlement, partly due to a lack of visibility of diaspora humanitarian activities to these governments, but mostly due to lack of trust. This is also related to the context(s) in which a diaspora engages with its government.

For example, the Sudanese diaspora distrusted the previous government's institutions, who they saw as corrupt. This is often the case in politically volatile contexts. However, this does not mean that diasporas disengage from humanitarian action in this case; they find alternative ways to engage and support. A similar point can be made about Nicaragua. Diaspora responders and NGO staff reported that the Nicaraguan government saw the diaspora as political opposition and restricted engagement with them. It was not possible to interview Nicaraguan officials to ask for their perspective. However, while the diaspora are distrustful of the current government, they are still willing to engage with it on humanitarian action issues. Even in contexts like Ukraine and Lebanon, where governments are open to working with the diaspora and where government respondents reported having provided a degree of facilitation for diaspora responders, this was typically unstructured and reactive. It is also important to note that **relations between diasporas and governments are not monolithic and are always fluid**. Even in contexts where relations are difficult today, there may be opportunities for increased engagement tomorrow. The diaspora will often seize opportunities to engage that are presented by political changes in settlement countries.

Additionally, diaspora respondents were also **distrustful of traditional humanitarian agencies** because of racism (perceived and actual) from these institutions and the 'white saviour complex'. This issue took on added urgency in light of the Black Lives Matter movement and decolonisation agenda, which have started essential discussions in the UN and INGO sectors on structural racism and privilege issues (for example, see [Global Development Institute, 2020](#)); [SSAP, 2020](#); [DEVEX, 2020](#)). This was most commonly expressed by respondents in all six countries in terms of **asymmetries of power relations, resources, and information flows** between diaspora responders and institutional humanitarian partners, and a **failure to recognise diaspora responses** as humanitarian responses and the impact of their actions. Interviewees also expressed scepticism at the commitment of institutional humanitarian partners towards the localisation agenda. This is in terms of how institutional partners found reasons to delay implementing the agenda, for example citing a lack of capacity and expertise in local and national civil society groups to manage and deploy resources effectively (c.f. [New Humanitarian, 2021](#)). Some interviewees in Lebanon, Nepal, and Nicaragua also noted that certain international organisations tried to 'rebadge' country offices as national organisations as a way of retaining resources, which narrowed the opportunities – and financing – available to national and local civil society groups; this was also a barrier to achieving localisation (see also [Singh, 2021](#)).

Furthermore, diaspora respondents articulated concerns that these asymmetries meant that the diaspora were not considered as equal partners in humanitarian response. In their experience, many NGOs (and governments) tended to view them either as merely 'cash machines', i.e. potential sources of humanitarian financing, or as 'beneficiaries' of capacity development programmes, thereby relegating diaspora organisations to small NGOs, without reflecting on the weaknesses of these models.

A source of frustration was that **engagement tended to be one-way**, predicated on diaspora responders adapting to institutional partners' norms and frameworks, rather than a two-way exchange that leveraged the comparative advantages of both.

## GOVERNMENT PERSPECTIVES

There were varying levels of knowledge and awareness among government officials interviewed about diaspora humanitarian activities in countries of origin and settlement. All government interviewees were **aware of diaspora humanitarian action in an abstract sense**. Officials in Lebanon, Ukraine, and Zambia had engaged with

the diaspora in relation to specific issues – for example, providing advice and information on customs procedures or support in repatriating people (or bodies of deceased expatriates), but did not necessarily consider this to be part of the humanitarian response.

All officials interviewed acknowledged that the diaspora engagement structures they worked within were not structured for emergency response. Most of these – typically diaspora directorates within foreign ministries or diplomatic missions overseas – focus on harnessing diaspora investments and skills and expertise for national development. They also highlighted a need for greater coordination of diaspora and other humanitarian actors, even if they recognised that asking diaspora humanitarians to work more closely with existing structures as currently configured could prove challenging.

The **(lack of) trust** between diaspora responders and governments in countries of origin was raised as an issue in many, if not most, country contexts. In Lebanon, the diaspora's lack of trust in the country's political leadership, and by extension the entire government, was freely recognised by officials and 'priced in'. In their view, their role was to provide information and otherwise not impede diaspora responses, rather than mobilise or coordinate them. In Ukraine, officials interviewed noted that the lack of trust among diaspora responders, as well as a lack of engagement structures, served as a barrier to increased impact:

“ In the beginning, I think that the authorities in Ukraine were not accustomed to such cooperation with non-governmental organisations, including the Ukrainian diaspora. And we had to get used to cooperation, ways of cooperating, [of building] trust... There is a need for structured relations between the authorities of Ukraine and civil society, so that such assistance is more effective.

- Ukrainian official (M), North America

All officials interviewed supported diaspora responses in the humanitarian contexts concerned and expressed **pride and admiration of diaspora activities and motivations**, acknowledging their deep connection with their country of origin or heritage, even across generations.

## IEWS EXPRESSED BY HUMANITARIAN AGENCIES AND NGOS

Humanitarian agencies, NGO staff, and researchers interviewed were also positive about diaspora responders' activities in each of the country contexts studied, even if they acknowledged some challenges. Although they reported that diaspora may not have experience of navigating humanitarian systems, in Lebanon and Ukraine NGO staff acknowledged that **diaspora interventions could be more agile than those of larger organisations, and their focus on direct local impact was effective**. NGO staff also pointed out that diasporas working with grass-roots civil society groups had proved better able to deploy and to adapt to the emergency than some larger NGOs.

Perhaps the biggest challenge cited by NGO interviewees and researchers from all six countries was the **lack of coordination and information sharing mechanisms** with diaspora responders. This made it hard to track who was doing what, where, and also to include diaspora responders within existing coordination and information

sharing structures. In Nepal, Sudan, and Zambia some humanitarian agency staff interviewed noted that diaspora responses lacked visibility as well as effective engagement structures. NGO staff and researchers also expressed reservations about diaspora resource allocation to beneficiaries, especially communal or sectarian lines.

Humanitarian agency and NGO staff working in Lebanon and Nicaragua also reported that they were **targeting information and fundraising materials at diaspora communities** in community languages; for example, the British Red Cross included its first Arabic language messaging in its information and appeals in response to the Beirut blast. Some NGO staff (and diaspora) respondents expressed concern that this should not be undertaken in an opportunistic way to raise additional funds.

NGO staff also noted that there were **missed opportunities for recruiting both staff and volunteers from diaspora** communities to improve their skills and experience base, which would diversify NGO workforces. Although NGOs were starting to take on board the implications of the Black Lives Matter movement and decolonisation agenda, some NGO staff felt significant progress was needed.

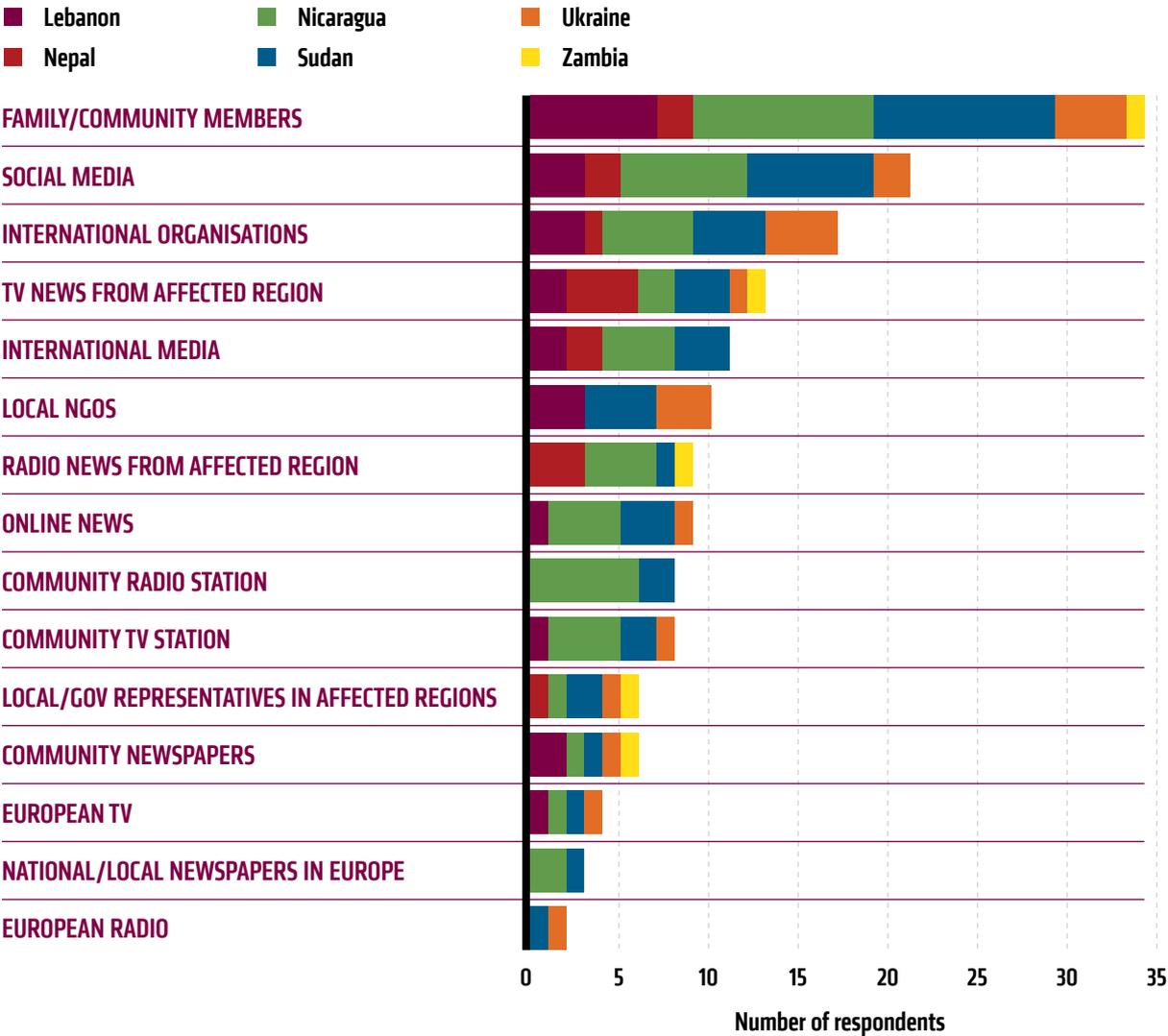
## HEARING THE NEWS – TRUSTED SOURCES OF INFORMATION FOR THE DIASPORA

When a crisis occurs, the **sources of information diaspora and ‘traditional’ humanitarian actors trust are clearly different**, which can affect communication between the different actors at critical moments Chart 1 below shows trusted information sources for diaspora survey respondents in each of the six country contexts. **Chart 1. Trusted information sources regarding humanitarian crises identified by diaspora respondents for each country emergency context**

It can be observed that diaspora respondents were most likely to trust information from family and community members and via social media, which suggests that trust networks are essential in evaluating information. However, diaspora responders were slightly more likely to trust information and reports from international organisations and international media than from local organisations or local media. Interestingly, the least trusted sources of information were European media, followed by community media and government in affected areas.

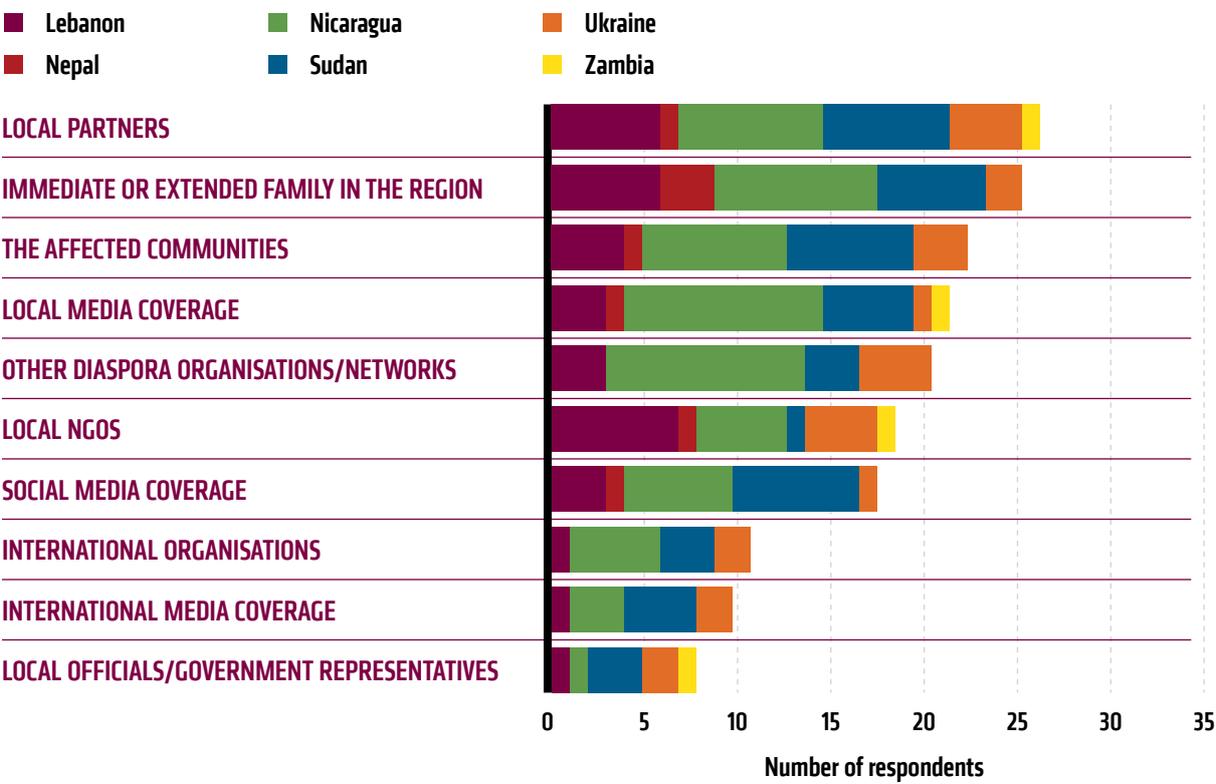
In contrast, no government or NGO survey respondents answered this question. However, data from interviews indicated that these two groups relied more on official reports from governments and international organisations, and media reporting. This underscores how institutional humanitarian partners (governments and NGOs) prioritise communication sources and channels differently from diaspora responders, affecting how diaspora and institutional humanitarian partners collaborate.

# CHART 1. INFORMATION SOURCES DEEMED TRUSTWORTHY BY DIASPORA



**Technology** is being used to the fullest by the diaspora, especially phone-based communication tools, such as WhatsApp and Telegram, which have been used extensively to facilitate instant communication, updates, and the forming of new groups. Different information sources were also used to identify needs and track impact (see Chart 2 below).

## CHART 2. INFORMATION SOURCES USED BY SURVEY RESPONDENTS



Zambian diaspora respondents relied on various information sources to learn about the needs of people affected by the cyclones and to track relief efforts. Although personal and social media networks and messaging applications predominated, diaspora responders also relied on local and international news media and NGO reports to assess needs. Respondents valued social media channels and messaging applications for their usefulness in identifying beneficiary needs.

In the case of Ukraine, the online diaspora space formed a vital part of the Euromaidan movement from 2013 onwards, and it was mainly through online social media channels that many in the Ukrainian diaspora first heard about the movement:

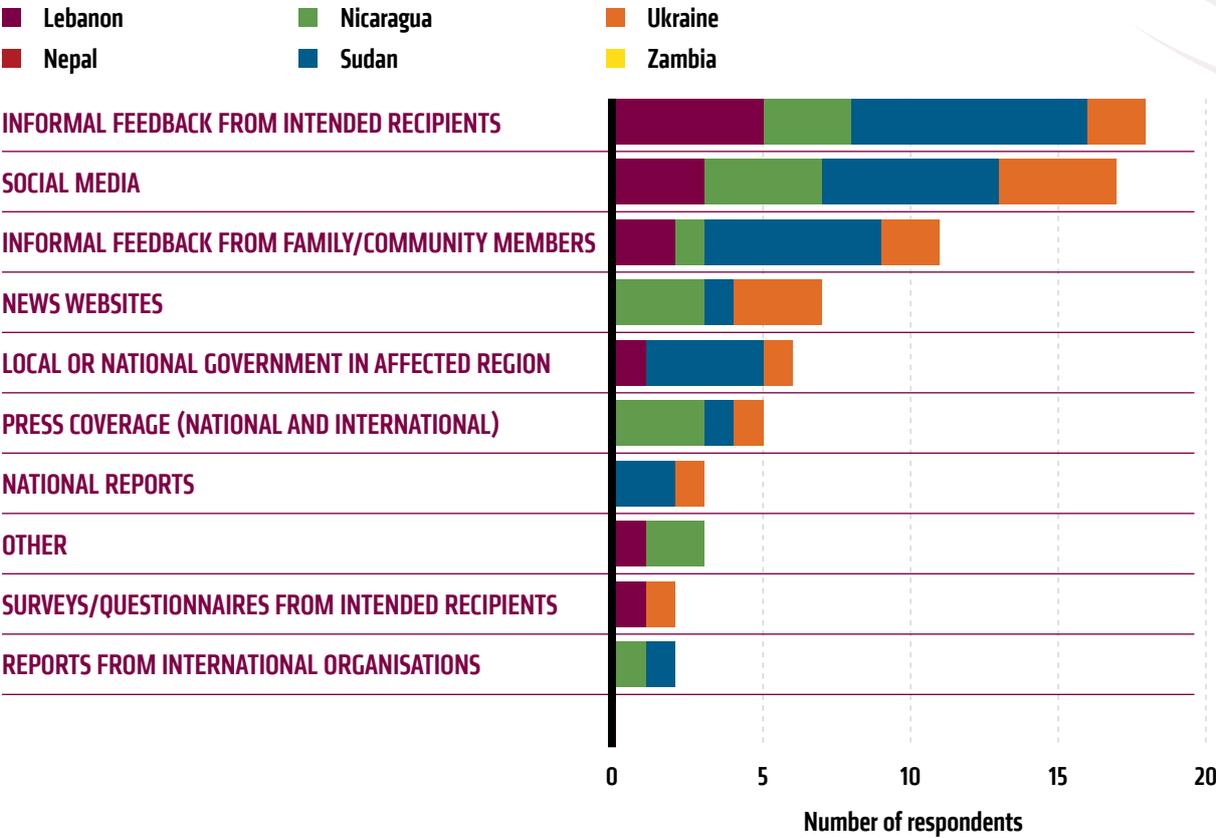
“This is something natural and unconscious, as Ukraine is in trouble. Euromaidan has greatly affected people... Many could not sleep at night, they were in front of their computers all the time, watching, laughing at Yanukovich and Azarov.”

Diaspora activist (M), France

Ukrainian diaspora responders use this online space to mobilise people and resources, raise funds, and conduct media advocacy about the crisis.

Diaspora respondents were also asked what information sources they used to assess the impact of humanitarian efforts, and their responses are set out in Chart 3 below.

### CHART 3. INFORMATION SOURCES USED TO ASSESS IMPACT OF HUMANITARIAN INTERVENTIONS



Diaspora respondents consulted local and international media, but the most prominent tools used were social media and messaging applications to help monitor the impact of diaspora humanitarian activities – for example, by sharing photographs or video clips of beneficiaries receiving money and supplies. Communication was primarily on a very informal basis, not least due to a desire to keep a low profile in some contexts, as with the Nicaraguan diaspora. Interviewees noted that the diaspora, especially young people, use social media channels and messaging applications to monitor the impact of their emergency response:

“ You can see through Facebook; you can see through the videos that they send... that they have been delivered to the local people. [You can] look at, you know, local areas, local communities and see the people in these small boats... distributing relief packages to the most needy people.

- Diaspora responder (M), UK

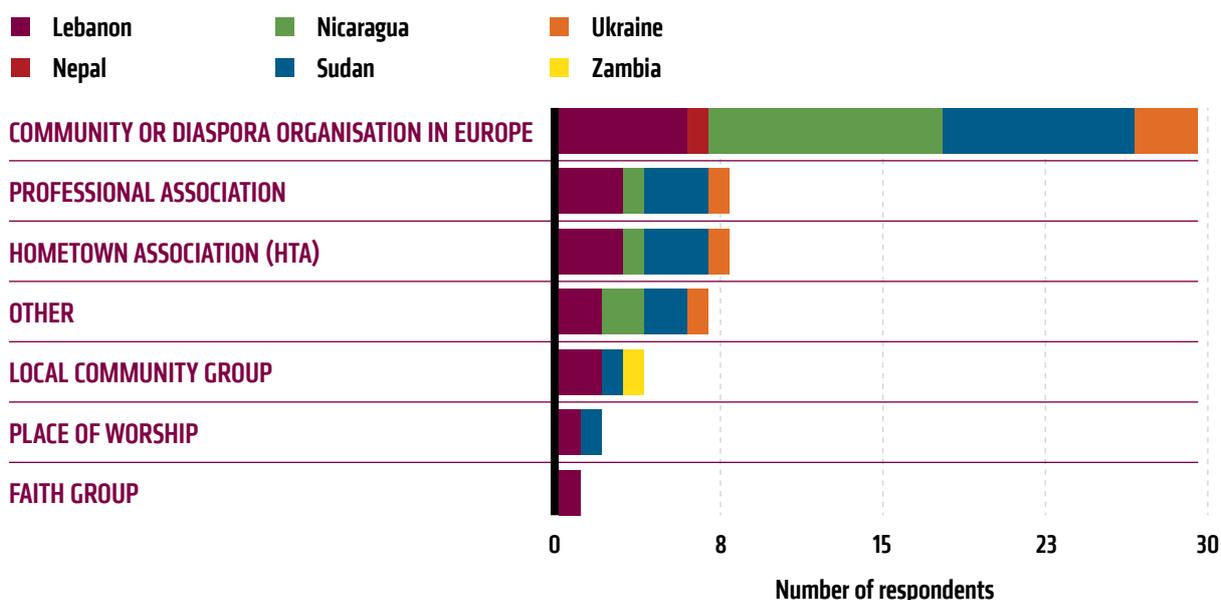
Ukrainian and Zambian interviewees also reported having used social media and messaging applications to monitor their impact on beneficiaries.

# DIASPORA RESPONDERS IN ACTION

## MEMBERSHIP OF DIASPORA NETWORKS AND ORGANISATIONS

71% of survey respondents reported that they belonged to diaspora or community networks. When asked to qualify this further, responses (n=31) were broken down as follows (see Chart 4 below).

### CHART 4. MEMBERSHIP OF ORGANISATIONS AND NETWORKS



Unsurprisingly, perhaps, **diaspora** organisations were the most popular (87%), but **professional associations** (23%) and **hometown associations** (19%) were also well represented. This underscores the importance of diaspora identity in forming and maintaining networks. This trend was also reflected among interviewees, where all diaspora respondents belonged to diaspora organisations, in some cases with multiple affiliations (this was especially noticeable among Nicaraguan diaspora interviewees, although this could also result from sampling biases). Interview responses showed that in many – if not most – cases, these different organisational forms were formally registered in settlement countries, as well as (in a few cases) in countries of origin.

This also reflects the structural factors at play in settlement countries, where there are pressures and incentives to adopt particular organisational models, for example registration as non-profit organisations. Several diaspora interviewees – from all six countries – expressed frustration at this, as the drive to professionalise in the NGO model takes time and resources (e.g. bureaucracy, but also developing and submitting very technical funding applications), without necessarily increasing their humanitarian impact for local people in affected areas.

## PATTERNS OF DIASPORA HUMANITARIANISM

In terms of respondents' patterns of **giving and philanthropy**, 79% of survey respondents (n=43) reported that they sent money monthly or bi-monthly to family or for other household or business needs, and 93% of survey respondents stated that they had provided some form of humanitarian assistance during a crisis in the six country contexts in question. This suggests that diaspora giving patterns to countries of origin reflect ongoing engagements with these countries that are then stepped up in times of crises, irrespective of the type of crisis concerned. This was consistent with interview findings, suggesting that diaspora emergency responses and philanthropy form a **natural extension of existing patterns of remittance sending** and support for extended family and kin. This trend was noted across interviews from all six countries studied. For example, in the case of Nicaragua, remittance sending has long been a pattern of the Nicaraguan diaspora, and interviewees reported that they would typically remit US\$ 100 per month or US\$ 1,000 every six months or so (c.f. [Jennings and Clark, 2005](#); [World Bank, 2020](#)). However, since the political crisis of 2018, the diaspora are increasingly sending money for emergency needs, underscoring the blurring of distinctions. Similarly, in Nepal, sending money for emergency response is seen as a natural extension of existing remittance-giving. Interviewees noted that remittances to Nepal increased after natural disasters such as the 2017 floods, and have continued with the current COVID-19 pandemic, with diaspora members supporting local people made destitute by lockdowns in Nepal or organising 'social kitchens' for local people in partnership with local civil society groups.

Diaspora responders were also involved in **sending money to other countries**, in addition to countries of origin. Thus, diaspora responders reported having supported Nicaraguan migrants in need in Costa Rica, or Zambians based in Southern African states affected by the 2019 cyclones. Similarly, among Sudanese respondents, fundraising activities were not limited to Sudan and included fundraising for other emergencies worldwide. For example, respondents reported fundraising for victims of the Beirut explosion and Rohingya refugees. Interview respondents reported that their motivations for sending money to other countries were either to respond to needs within the diaspora based in these other countries affected by crises (as in the case of Nicaragua or Zambia), or out of a humanitarian impulse to help people in need affected by other emergencies (as in the case of support for Rohingya refugees, the people of Beirut, or other causes such as the emergency in Yemen). This is an interesting trend consistent with other studies and warrants further research ([Shabaka 2019](#), [Pharoah et al., 2013](#)).

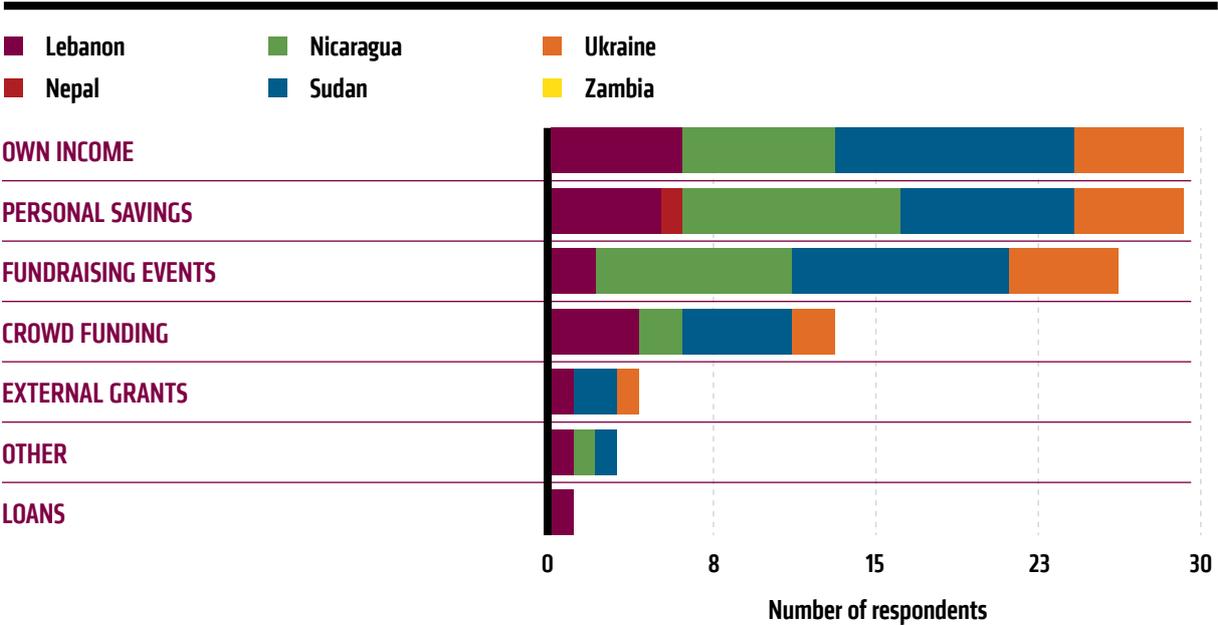
Diaspora philanthropy entailed both pooling community resources (i.e. mobilising and raising funds from within the community), and crowdfunding approaches where resources were sought from other communities and the general public in settlement countries. Pooling community resources was a trend across all six countries, and seemed particularly important in the Nicaraguan, Ukrainian, and Zambian contexts, but crowdfunding approaches were also used in relation to Lebanon, Nepal, and Sudan, suggesting that it was easier to mobilise support from outside the community in relation to natural disasters and complex emergencies, rather than political crises or conflicts.

The **modalities of sending money also varied**. Most survey respondents reported having sent money via direct bank transfers (50%), cash donated by friends and families (43%), or by using online platforms (36%) and MTOs such as Western Union (29%). The number of survey respondents answering this question was small (n=14), and so these figures should be treated with some caution, but it is broadly consistent with interviewees who identified challenges in sending money to the specific countries in question, such as to Lebanon or Sudan. Diaspora respondents' strategies for sending money to affected regions were also adaptive: where one route was not available, diaspora responders would use alternative methods, including those listed above, such as

cash collected from diaspora members or friends and family. A key consideration in terms of choice of transfer modalities was to use the simplest way of transferring funds to beneficiaries: for some countries (such as Nicaragua, Nepal, and Zambia), MTOs and online platforms were easier to use to send funds, while in Lebanon bank-to-bank transfers and MTOs were preferred due to limitations on obtaining foreign currency. Indeed, in the case of Lebanon, interview respondents described having sent money via MTOs, where beneficiaries had to visit multiple branches of the MTO due to the lack of foreign currency held by individual branches. In the case of Sudan, international restrictions on transfers to the country due to Sudan being on a US list of state sponsors of terrorism meant that the Sudanese diaspora typically sent money to the Gulf, from where it was transferred to beneficiaries in Sudan.

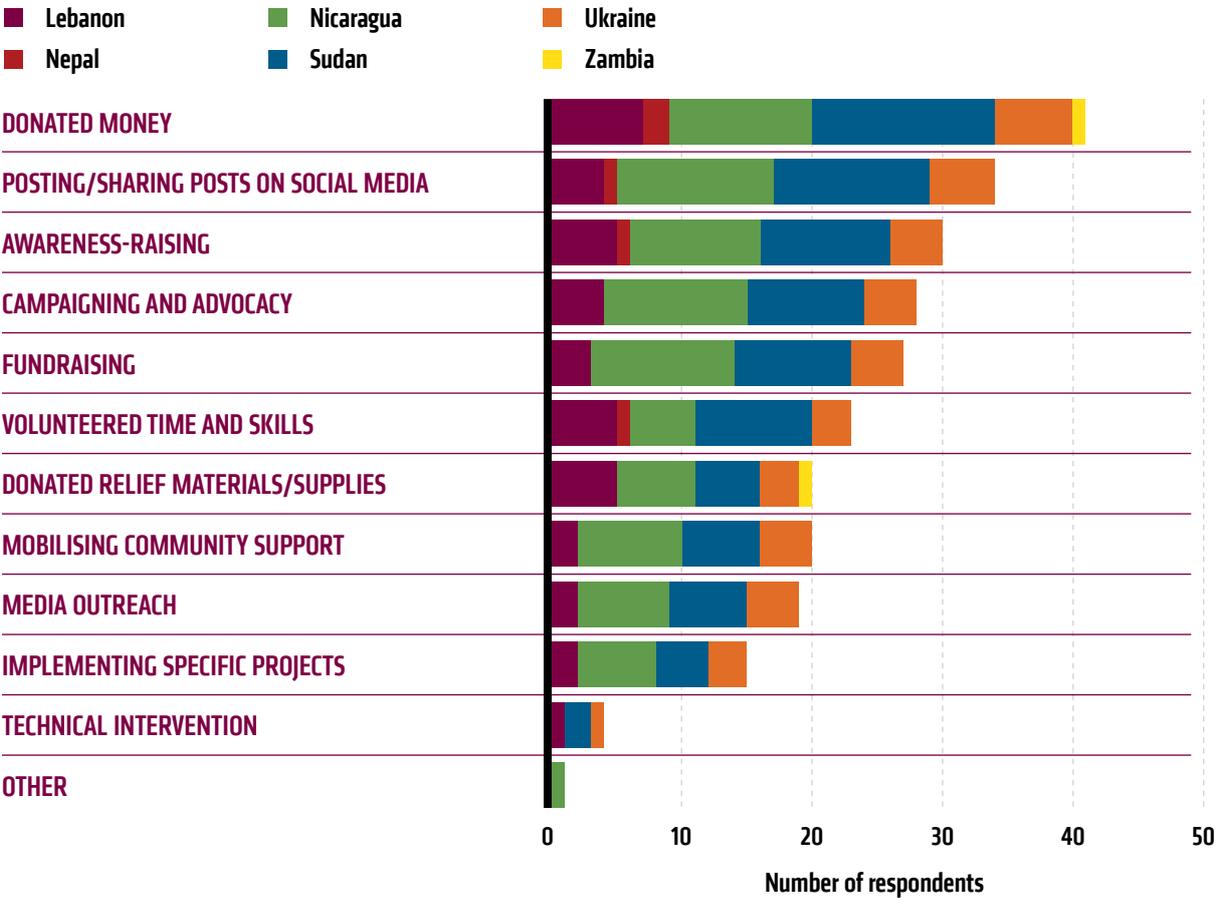
Respondents were also asked how they fund their humanitarian activities (see Chart 5 below). The majority stated (n=37) that they funded their activities through their income (70%), personal savings (65%), fundraising events (63%), or through crowdfunding (30%).

### CHART 5. FUNDING SOURCES FOR DIASPORA HUMANITARIAN ACTIVITIES



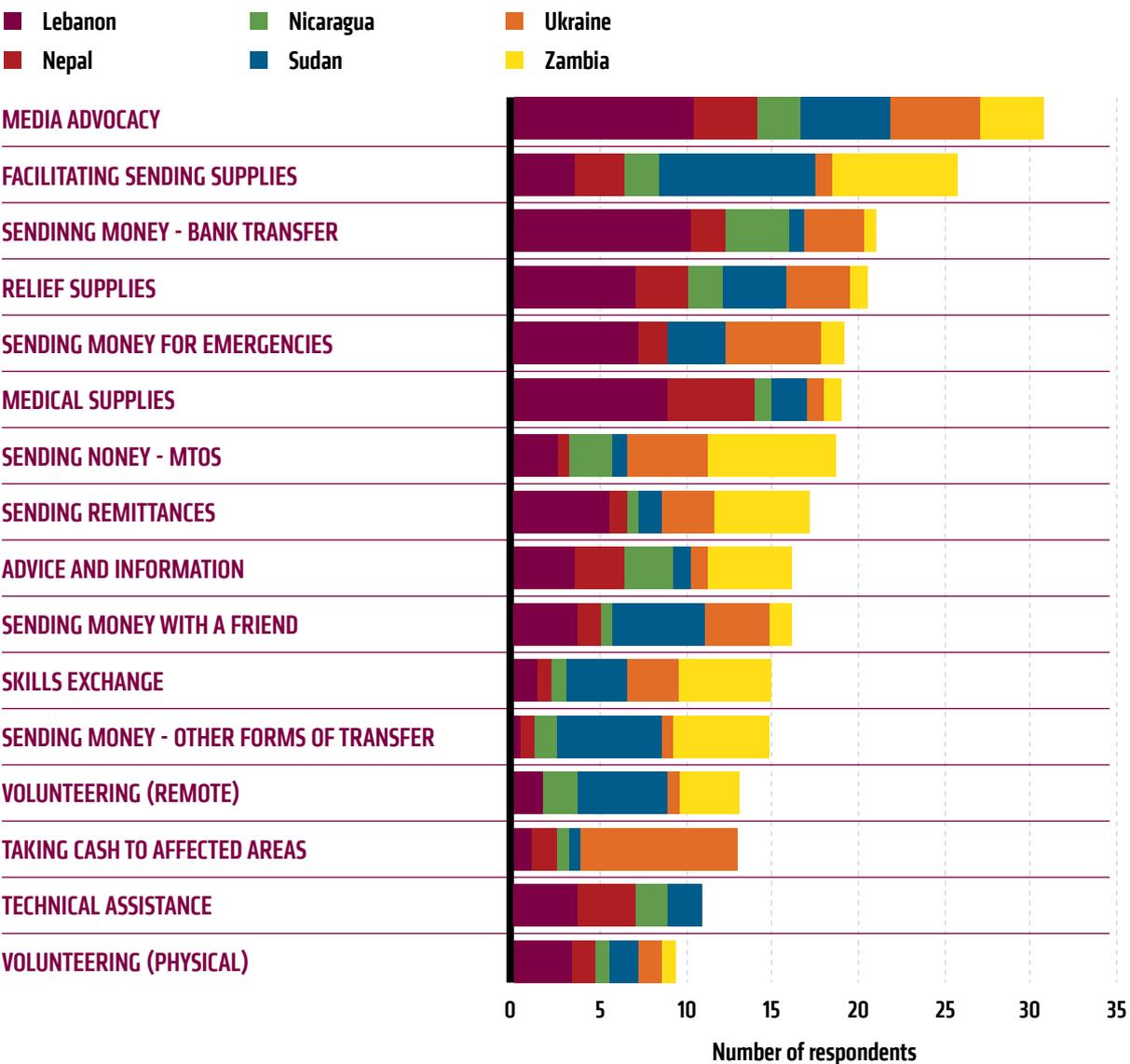
When asked to clarify what forms of humanitarian support they had provided, survey respondents reported a wide range of activities (see Chart 6 below). These were clustered around raising (58%) and donating (88%) funds, as well as donating relief supplies (50%), and raising awareness (73%) or campaigning and advocacy (65%).

## CHART 6. TYPES OF HUMANITARIAN SUPPORT PROVIDED



Again, this was consistent with findings from interviewees, as chart 7 below demonstrates. In terms of the types of supplies sent, food items and clothes were common across all six countries studied, although in most cases the diaspora preferred to send money for these to be purchased locally as this was more cost-effective. Across all six countries, key considerations for diaspora responders were needs on the ground and accessibility – i.e. how easy or difficult it was to move materials and people into affected regions. Again, **diaspora resource mobilisation patterns were adaptive** in this regard; where barriers were identified, diaspora responders would seek to find alternative ways of providing support.

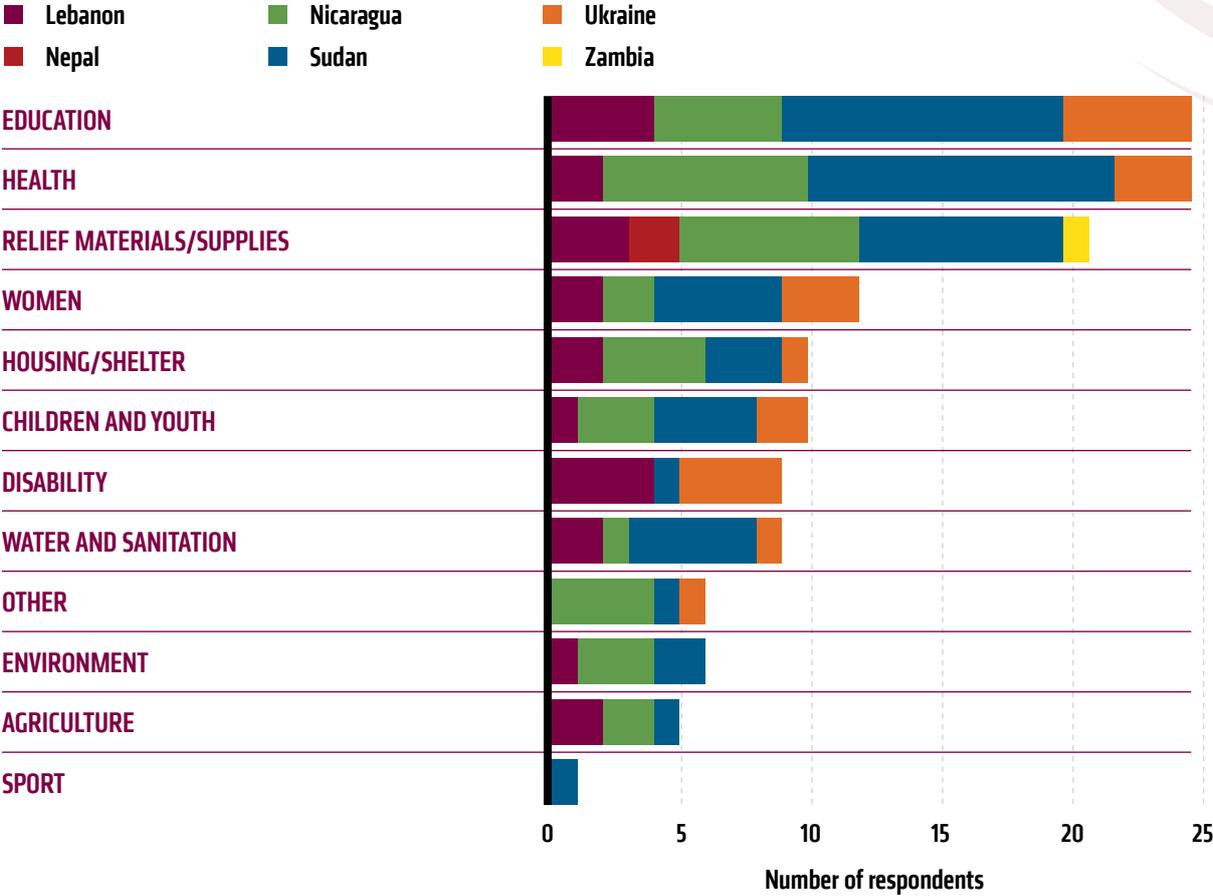
# CHART 7. FORMS OF DIASPORA RESOURCE MOBILISATION BY COUNTRY CONTEXT



**Funds sent were used for basic needs** such as food, housing/shelter, and medicine; funds were also leveraged to support specific initiatives (such as educational materials for schoolchildren), to purchase medical supplies, or even to help finance COVID isolation wards. Several interviewees noted that they preferred to send money to local communities and institutions to purchase the supplies they needed. It was more cost-effective for them to do so, while at the same time stimulating local economies. However, where some items were unavailable locally, such as powdered milk in Lebanon, diaspora responders would bring or send these to affected areas. Unusually, supplies sent by diaspora responders to Ukraine included ‘dual use’ equipment such as body armour, helmets, and radios, as well as military equipment such as ammunition. This was also consistent with a trend reported by interviewees that remittance sending patterns were adapted in times of crisis to meet needs on the ground among beneficiaries.

Survey respondents were also asked what humanitarian causes they supported, as set out in Chart 8 below.

# CHART 8. HUMANITARIAN CAUSES SUPPORTED



As can be seen, **diaspora humanitarians support a wide range of humanitarian needs**, although the most popular among those cited included health (55%), education (50%), relief materials (45%), and promoting women’s rights (30%). This indicates the types of needs that diaspora respondents felt were most important, or where their support might have the greatest local impact. There also appears to be correlations between the country/ crisis context concerned and the types of support provided: for example, in Sudan health causes were supported because of the impact of the pandemic – and to a lesser extent the flooding; while in Ukraine disability causes were supported due to the numbers of people becoming disabled by conflict-related violence.

## DIASPORA SOCIAL, INTELLECTUAL, AND POLITICAL CAPITAL: VOLUNTARISM AND SKILLS EXCHANGE

Most diaspora humanitarian responders engage on a voluntary basis and informally, rather than as part of established or registered institutions. It is critical to realise the fluidity of diaspora humanitarian engagement and to **create systems to facilitate voluntarism**.

While all government and humanitarian agency staff interviewed recognised the importance of diaspora voluntarism, the only example cited of plans to engage diaspora volunteers from the six countries was from Sudan’s

Ministry of Labour and Social Development (MoLSD), which is setting up a coordination hub for diaspora volunteers. However, this is focused on diaspora development volunteering initiatives, rather than humanitarian response. This perhaps represents a missed opportunity for governments and especially humanitarian agencies and NGOs to harness diaspora voluntarism and build engagement with diaspora responders.

The Nepal Centre for Disaster Management, a Nepalese research institution (established and run by diasporans), developed policies and standard operating procedures (SOPs) for government departments on strengthening humanitarian coordination. There was less evidence of diaspora volunteering in Nepal in response to the crisis, although one interviewee noted that Gurkhas from the British Army had travelled to affected regions as volunteers to provide support and technical assistance. Diaspora interviewees expressed pride in these volunteer efforts and noted that this had also happened in the aftermath of the 2015 earthquake when the UK government deployed British Army Gurkha regiments on relief operations in the country. Diaspora responders also reported having volunteered their time and skills to support Nepal's relief efforts after the 2017 floods through fundraising in countries of settlement (from diaspora communities and the broader public), media advocacy, and awareness-raising about the needs of Nepalese people affected by the crisis.

**All diaspora respondents interviewed volunteered their time and services** to pursue humanitarian and advocacy activities.

For example, in Ukraine, diaspora respondents conducted all of their humanitarian activities on a voluntary basis, raising money and drawing on their savings to cover relief supplies and transportation costs. While much of their activity was conducted online, some diaspora responders travelled to Ukraine to provide technical assistance on the ground. Interviewees noted that Ukrainian diaspora health professionals mobilised to volunteer their services in affected regions of the country. Others assisted the transport of relief supplies and medical equipment, including prosthetic limbs for the wounded militia, and provided other logistical support forms. The majority of these activities were organised informally through networks of families and friends and online social networks.

Zambian diaspora responses to the cyclones also relied heavily on volunteer efforts. Diaspora responders volunteered their time and skills to help raise funds and conduct media advocacy about people affected by the disasters in the region. Most of this voluntary activity was carried out online, although interviewees gave examples of diaspora responders travelling from other countries within the region to transport relief and medical supplies. A notable example is the case of a Zambian diaspora interviewee who worked for a UN agency in Mozambique and was appointed Honorary Consul to facilitate his relief activities for Zambian diasporans in the country who had been affected by the cyclones.

However, the reliance on volunteering to support their humanitarian and advocacy work was cited as a limiting factor for Nicaraguan diaspora respondents in particular. This created a significant turnover of personnel, which affected the institutional capacity and memory of diaspora organisations. Some respondents were volunteering for multiple organisations, in addition to their jobs.

**Volunteering was increasingly conducted remotely**, including skills exchange, as the cases of Lebanon and Sudan demonstrate, in the wake of travel restrictions and also, as in the case of Nicaragua, due to restrictive political environments. For example, diaspora health professionals have translated and shared information and guidance on treating COVID-19 with medical staff in Sudan and advised MoH officials on COVID-19 preparedness. Across all six countries, diaspora interviewees increasingly perceived the situation as too difficult (in terms of travel re-

strictions) or too dangerous for them to return to volunteer on the ground. Another logistical barrier to diaspora returns for humanitarian purposes mentioned by respondents was the cost of flights from settlement countries; some respondents based in Europe argued that it was better to send money rather than spend it on flights.

The importance of voluntarism to diaspora responders also suggests a gap where the government is unable or unwilling to serve their citizens, and 'traditional' humanitarian INGOs as such are failing to meet local needs; diasporas are motivated to fill this void. Arguably, this also poses more critical questions about responsibility and accountability for the humanitarian sector.

## **BLURRED LINES: HUMANITARIAN-DEVELOPMENT NEXUS**

Diaspora engagement is not limited to humanitarian crises. Thus, the concept of crisis or humanitarian emergency can take on a different meaning for the diaspora, as this is integrated into various factors, such as particular political events, as well as the needs of beneficiaries. A key finding from interviewees is that **diasporas and traditional humanitarian actors do not always speak the same language**. Many diaspora interviewees raised the point that some diasporas deal with perpetual, often cyclical crises; thus, it is critical to understand the **humanitarian-development nexus** interplay. It was a relatively straightforward adaptation for many diaspora responders to shift their activities from a development to a humanitarian focus (or vice versa), which diaspora and NGO respondents noted could be harder for NGOs and traditional humanitarian agencies to do as their systems, processes, and governance were rooted within either international development or humanitarian architectures.

For example, Sudan's revolution in 2018/2019 became a factor in engaging many Sudanese diasporans, including the second generation, in connecting and seeking to support political causes, but it was also a pathway for humanitarian engagement as they utilised the networks established to support communities affected by COVID-19 and floods. Similarly, the Euromaidan revolution in Ukraine became a rallying cry and focal point for Ukrainian diaspora humanitarian response, as well as for diaspora engagement more broadly.

A key consideration that emerged from interviewees was the link between humanitarian and development activities. Indeed, the distinction between the two was mostly not recognised among diasporas, even where respondents had significant international aid and development sector experiences (see also Ahmed and Asquith, 2020). Respondents described their activities in terms of a range of interventions across the full spectrum of humanitarian-development response:

- Preparedness, risk reduction resilience, and capacity-building activities in the form of development interventions, such as building WASH facilities in rural areas;
- the response through direct interventions, such as training on COVID-19 management in hospitals or the sending of supplies; and
- post-emergency reconstruction, such as upskilling for medical professionals to build robust protocols at health clinics.

The global COVID-19 pandemic has only made this more visible, as most organisations are now being forced by events to adapt to delivering humanitarian as well as development and other interventions. As a result, there is

increasing focus on the humanitarian-development nexus in the aid sector, and there is perhaps an opportunity for aid providers to learn from diaspora responders in this regard.

To ensure diaspora engagement in humanitarian response is maximised, appropriate enabling policies must be put in place by governments and humanitarian agencies in order to facilitate diaspora resource mobilisation and strengthen the connections that make it possible for diasporas to engage more fully.

## **DYNAMIC PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN DIASPORA HUMANITARIANS AND LOCAL CIVIL SOCIETY**

A sense of shock and concern over emergencies arising across all the case study countries seem to have proved very effective in mobilising diaspora responses. This, combined with distrust in and a perceived lack of response from governments and INGOs, has prompted a diverse range of local, grassroots, and community-based initiatives. These are continually being developed and provide vital activities such as the provision of medical supplies and food packages for the people of Beirut who have lost their homes and livelihoods after the blast in 2020.

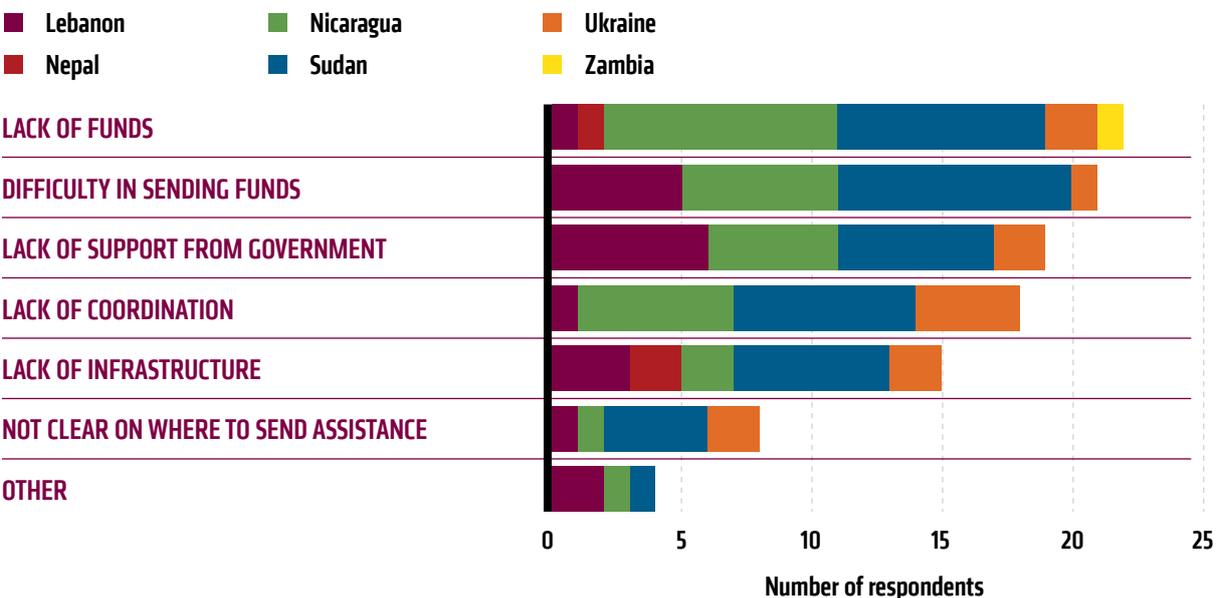
**Diaspora responders clearly recognise the importance of the localisation agenda**, and often reported cooperation with local NGOs and civil society organisations in countries of origin and at times in third countries to advance the agenda in practical terms. For example, Lebanese diaspora responders are proactively forging dynamic partnerships with local community and civil society groups to support them and ensure a more direct impact on their humanitarian activities. These partnerships developed out of a concern to ensure that money and other resources were not diverted from local people in need and as a practical response to the fact that diaspora responders were unable in many cases to return to Lebanon to assist in reconstruction. Local civil society groups took responsibility for receiving money and supplies, conducting due diligence, and monitoring distribution and impact on beneficiaries.

## **OBSTACLES TO DIASPORA HUMANITARIANISM**

Survey respondents and interviewees described various obstacles to their emergency responses in the six case study countries. Survey respondents cited a range of barriers, as set out in Chart 9 below.



## CHART 9. OBSTACLES TO DIASPORA RESPONSE



Similar trends were observed among interviewees: the most commonly reported barrier from all respondent groups was the **difficulty in sending money and supplies** to the country due to international sanctions and other restrictions. These constraints meant that diasporans who wished to provide emergency aid, such as sending funds or goods to countries of origin, were not able to do so through official channels. This was a challenge for all humanitarian actors, but a particular challenge for diasporas who do not often have formal structures for obtaining the necessary permissions or exemptions. This caused delays and increased the cost of sending money and relief supplies. In many cases, there was an interplay between external factors (such as international restrictions or transfer costs) and internal factors (including government policies on sending relief supplies). Respondents reported that barriers to sending money and supplies were usually context-specific; in the case of Sudan, this was linked to international financial restrictions, while in the cases of Nicaragua and Ukraine, this was linked to policy decisions being taken by respective governments or interpretations of these policies by officials to control – to varying extents – inflows of supplies and material. In the Nicaraguan example, diaspora responders preferred to send cash as relief supplies were liable to be seized, while in the Ukrainian case government facilitation of inflows (materials and money) could not always be relied upon, due to a lack of formal systems in place. In Lebanon, barriers to sending money were more linked to restrictions on the size of transfers (imposed to prevent terrorist financing) and on foreign currency withdrawals from MTOs and banks due to the economic crisis.

**Lack of trust** was a recurrent theme across all of the case study countries. In Lebanon, for example, a lack of trust in the authorities was cited by all respondents, including officials. This distrust was directed for the most part towards the political classes, which were described as corrupt, ineffective, mired in sectarianism, and at the mercy of Lebanon’s regional and international supporters (the US, Iran, Israel, and Saudi Arabia were mentioned repeatedly in this regard). However, respondents’ lack of trust was also directed at humanitarian and other INGOs operating in Lebanon, which were perceived as complicit in a corrupt political system, or even corrupt themselves. Interestingly, the only government institution trusted by diaspora respondents was the Lebanese Army (which is involved in the coordination of relief operations). The only INGO that diaspora and other respondents considered trustworthy was the Lebanese Red Cross and Red Crescent.

Interview respondents also reported several challenges that impede diaspora humanitarian action in the case study countries and more generally. These included:

- Relations with governments in countries of origin are not always conducive to diaspora engagement, including the humanitarian sphere; nonetheless, diasporas find alternative (even if more expensive and challenging) ways to assist.
- Lack of access or opportunities to partner with international organisations. Diasporas do not have the resources to collaborate with international organisations, often seeing them as a closed club.
- Access to capital at the time of need: diasporas utilise their resources and skills. However, they may lack the ability to quickly scale up humanitarian response, even though they have access and networks on the ground. Funders need to identify methods and opportunities to facilitate diaspora response with emergency cash.

## **DIASPORA, CONFLICT, AND PEACEBUILDING**

Finally, another aspect of diaspora resource mobilisation and humanitarian response that should be considered is linked to conflict and peacebuilding. However, this was not a primary focus of this study. Undoubtedly, some resources mobilised by the diaspora in response to conflicts in countries of origin end up being used for security rather than humanitarian purposes, whether this involves diverting remittance flows to buy arms or sending military or 'dual use' equipment and supplies to affected regions.

Ukraine was the only conflict context studied, and the candour with which some interviewees spoke about regularly sending both dual-use (e.g. body armour, medical kits) and military equipment (ammunition) to affected regions in Ukraine was unexpected. In addition, interviewees reported examples of government support and facilitation in terms of managing customs procedures at the Ukrainian border. This type of activity was presumably also conducted in connivance with the authorities in settlement countries, given the extensive security and surveillance structures that have developed over the last twenty years to interdict the financing and equipment of armed groups and terrorist organisations.

While both Nicaragua and Sudan have undergone conflict due to past political crises, we have little or no information about diaspora mobilisation of security or dual-use material with regard to these conflicts. Moreover, the specific crises studied in these two countries are not necessarily useful comparators. Sudan is still in an armed conflict situation, however the existence of arms embargoes and other restrictions means that respondents would be unwilling to talk about such activity openly. Moreover, a more useful and more nuanced perspective recognises the diaspora's role in helping to resolve political crises diplomatically rather than through armed struggle by deploying their social and political capital in countries of origin and internationally.

The Ukrainian case (as noted above in the country case study section) was an illustration of the way in which military and humanitarian missions and relief supplies can become blurred. This can be seen in examples of diaspora response in other conflict contexts (for example, Lebanon, Syria, and Somalia). Indeed, armed factions are also well aware of the uses (and misuses) of humanitarian aid, access to which is becoming increasingly weaponised in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (c.f. *Armed Conflict Survey, 2019*; *de Waal, 2017*; *Pérouse de Montclos, 2014*). No other examples of this phenomenon were reported in any of the other countries under consideration.

The **risks to diasporas of blurring military and humanitarian interventions** are potentially high. Indeed, the Russian Federation has declared some Ukrainian diaspora organisations, such as the well-known Ukrainian World Congress as “destructive in nature and threaten[ing] the fundamentals of the constitutional order and security of the Russian Federation” (*Ukrainian Weekly*, 2019 ). In Europe and the US, some Muslim diaspora responders have faced prosecution for their humanitarian activities in conflicts in Africa and Asia, in countries of origin and settlement (see, inter alia, *Third Sector*, 2019; *The Guardian*, 2019; *Al-Jazeera*, 2016; and *Charity and Security Network*, 2011).

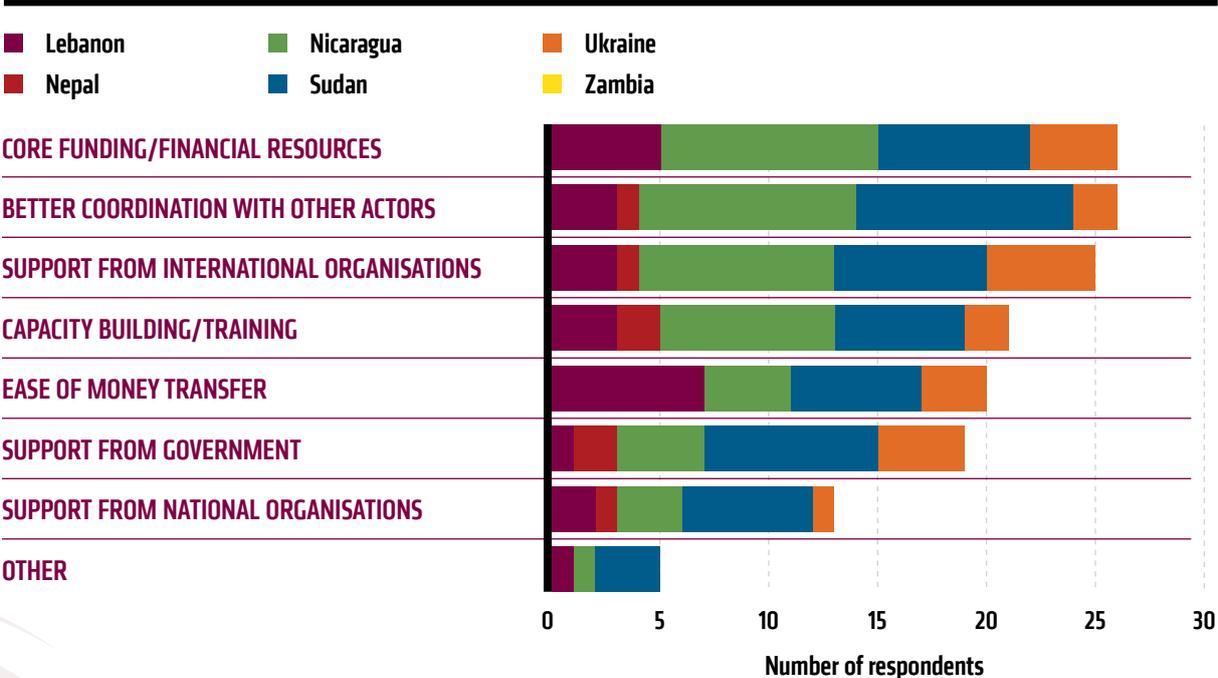
Certainly, diasporas can be seen as an asset and a risk in volatile situations by governments (and humanitarian agencies) in countries of origin and settlement. The blurring of distinctions between humanitarian and other forms of assistance has become increasingly common – for example, many governments use aid as a form of soft power diplomacy – which also underscores how conceptualisations of ‘humanitarianism’ have become blurred across the sector.

### HOW CAN HUMANITARIAN RESPONSES BE IMPROVED?

Survey respondents and interviewees were asked in what ways diaspora humanitarian responses could be improved. Only diaspora respondents answered this survey question; their responses are set out in Chart 10 below.

The most popular areas for improvement included improved coordination with other humanitarian actors (77%), easier money transfer (62%), and core funding/financial resources for diaspora organisations (74%).

**CHART 10. WAYS IN WHICH HUMANITARIAN EFFORTS COULD BE IMPROVED**



For understandable reasons, ease of money transfer was a greater concern to respondents in relation to Sudan; but diaspora and NGO interviewees in relation to Lebanon, Nepal, Nicaragua, Ukraine, and Zambia raised the issues of bureaucracy and the expense of transfer costs. As noted previously, diaspora interviewees in all countries reported that their remittance sending was adaptive, inasmuch as they would find the most cost-effective modalities of transfer and adapt or extend their remittances according to the changing needs of beneficiaries. .

Respondents' interest in core funding was expected; as mentioned before, most diaspora organisations are run almost entirely on a voluntary basis, which makes organisational sustainability more challenging. Diaspora organisations typically lack financial reserves or core funding to support staff and volunteers, which can limit their impact. Moreover, diaspora organisations often lack access to additional capital or credit to support increased activities in times of crisis. They often struggle to compete for limited funding resources with small and medium-sized NGOs. They may also lack human resources to dedicate to bidding processes that can be technocratic and bureaucratic.

### **CLOSER COORDINATION OR MORE INFORMAL COOPERATION?**

A common theme evoked by interviewees of all respondent types was the lack of coordination, and channels for coordination, between the diaspora and other institutional humanitarian actors. Coordination between institutional actors and governments with diaspora humanitarian responders may well provide a more impactful humanitarian response across all types of emergency. However, there are several caveats to this proposition.

Firstly, it is essential not to instrumentalise diaspora humanitarianism and improved coordination as a sine qua non of more effective humanitarian response. A barrier repeatedly cited by interviewees from all respondent groups was a lack of coordination mechanisms – in the case study countries and across diasporas – to facilitate humanitarian activities. This was exacerbated in many cases by a lack of official diaspora engagement structures focused on diaspora humanitarian, rather than development, efforts. In the cases of Nepal and Sudan, the diaspora saw coordination with the government as necessary. However, some Sudanese respondents were also wary about supporting a government responsible for deteriorating humanitarian and security situations. As one NGO respondent noted:

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“For too long in Sudan, humanitarian coordination from the government side was perceived more from a security angle than from a service provision angle”.

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In Lebanon's case, Beirut residents and the Lebanese diaspora mobilised to fill the vacuum caused by the collapse in trust in the government's response to the Beirut blast. Diaspora and NGO interviewees noted that they preferred not to rely on the government. Several suggested that it would be helpful if the government could “get out of the way” and not seek to coordinate with their activities. Nicaraguan, Ukrainian, and Zambian diaspora responders also viewed the lack of coordination between diaspora groups, and between diasporas and NGOs operating in those countries, as a barrier to more effective response. Several diaspora respondents suggested a need for an interactive website that contained information on needs on the ground and organisations involved in affected regions to avoid duplication and increase impact.

Many respondents (of all respondent types) saw the **diaspora's lack of formality as a factor that enables a faster response. However, the same lack of formality also could act as a barrier** to diaspora responders. In Nepal's case, the relative informality of many Nepalese diaspora organisations and networks, many of which are not formally registered, also created a barrier to fundraising, at least in the UK (one workaround developed by Non-Resident Nepalese was to donate money to the Nepalese embassy). Diaspora respondents reported that the lack of formality creates other barriers too: for example, for many diaspora responders who took part in this study, their activities are additional to their day-to-day jobs, which means they are not always engaged consistently. This can also make it hard for humanitarian agencies and NGOs to know who to partner with, a point raised by several NGO staff interviewees. Similarly, in the absence of formal structures or channels, governments can only engage with a small percentage of diasporas.

## **LISTENING TO DIASPORA VOICES AND RECOGNISING DIASPORA AGENCY**

The government and NGO staff interviewed in relation to all countries noted a **lack of dialogue with diasporas on humanitarian response**. They recognised that there were limited channels for such dialogue to take place.

A recurrent theme derived from diaspora interviewees was the **lack of visibility** of their efforts to other humanitarian agencies and governments in countries of origin and settlement and the lack of recognition of their activities and experiences. NGO staff and government officials, most of whom acknowledged that diaspora humanitarian expertise – whether in terms of skills or experience – was not used as effectively as possible, mirrored this.

This research revealed that there are few, if any, coordination mechanisms in place for diaspora humanitarian response in the six countries studied; plus, there are no mechanisms for consulting diaspora responders that could be used to inform humanitarian responses by governments and humanitarian agencies. In some countries, the establishment of such mechanisms was hindered by poor or toxic relations between governments and diasporas, an issue raised by interview respondents from all groups in relation to Nicaragua, and to a lesser extent in Sudan and Ukraine.

In the case of Nicaragua, diaspora and NGO interview respondents agreed that the government's refusal to engage with the diaspora increased the importance of improving coordination between NGOs and diaspora responders. In Sudan and Ukraine, there are legacies of distrust not only between diaspora and government, but also within the diaspora itself, which present barriers to improved coordination. However, each of these cases shows how the factors at work are uniquely context-specific – social, economic, historical, and cultural – and this highlights the importance of understanding each specific context.

Diasporas are doing a lot more work than initially anticipated. However, they are far from being equitable partners. **Humanitarian actors are putting the onus on the diaspora to learn and join an increasingly broken humanitarian system, rather than the other way around**, as evidenced by the numerous capacity-building programmes targeting diasporas (see, for example, [DEMAC](#), [ADEPT](#), and [EUDiF Capacity Lab](#)).

## BUILDING TRUST

Many diaspora groups and organisations are keen to develop closer collaborations with the ‘traditional’ humanitarian system. However, they are also wary (and perhaps weary) of what appears to be an **extractive process for engaging with diaspora organisations**. Diaspora organisations are often under-resourced but expected to deliver high impact change on shoestring budgets. Nonetheless, humanitarian actors, including large-scale funders, are increasingly reaching out to diaspora organisations to draw on their expertise, experience, social capital, and knowledge.

A similar situation can be observed in countries of origin, where governments realise their diasporas’ political, economic, and social capital, yet continue to reinforce the stereotype of diasporas as potential ‘cash machines’ for funding large development projects. As a result, diaspora policies end up being framed mostly around harnessing diaspora remittances.

In both cases, this fundamentally undervalues the complexities and needs of diasporas, and often represents a missed opportunity to build the trust needed to harness other valuable contributions from diaspora humanitarians.



## 5. CONCLUSION

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### CONCEPTUALISING DIASPORA HUMANITARIANISM

This research aimed to provide a better practical understanding of the challenges and opportunities for governments – in countries of origin and settlement – and for other actors involved in crisis response in engaging with diasporas to support humanitarian aid across a range of contexts. Potential solutions are suggested in the form of a catalogue of recommendations.

One of the research questions this study sought to answer was what type(s) of context and other factors facilitate or impede diaspora humanitarian response and engagement. The research team was curious to gauge the extent to which political emergencies and conflicts can impede diaspora humanitarian response and engagement compared with other types of emergency. A key finding is that diaspora responses depend greatly on the diverse factors at play in local contexts. The nature of crises can also impact diaspora response – and in the context of volatile relations between governments and their diasporas, this can result in support through official channels being impeded (as seen in Nicaragua). However, our findings suggest that it is the unique confluence of factors in each local context – political, economic, cultural, and historical – that determine the contours of diaspora humanitarian engagement, rather than the type of emergency or crisis. Nevertheless, and critically for our purposes, these do not prevent the diaspora from assisting; instead, they affect the modalities of their response. Diaspora responses are adaptive, and they find solutions to barriers to their emergency response.

Diaspora action in countries of origin is often fluid and highly context-specific, and there is a risk of simplifying this as a model of enabling and limiting factors. Instead, data from the research suggests that it may be more helpful to talk about **critical events that (re-)invigorate diaspora response** (unprecedented events) and **ongoing challenges** (long-term political and economic instability).

As noted in the discussion section, there are perhaps four broad factors that can be derived from the six country contexts studied:

- Positive (or at least neutral) political relations with governments in countries of origin, and **enabling policy environments in countries of origin and settlement**, can support diaspora humanitarian response.
- **The impact on diaspora consciousness of a specific emergency context** (the shock factor) can motivate diaspora emergency response and stimulate broader engagement with countries of origin.
- **Accessibility to the country is a fundamental issue**, i.e. how hard is it to get money, materials, and people there (although the ways in which diaspora responders have adapted to pandemic travel restrictions perhaps show that this is less of a limiting factor in practice).
- There are ongoing challenges related **to longer-term political and economic instability** in countries of origin.

It is also evident that diasporas and traditional humanitarian actors do not necessarily speak the same language. Diasporas' conceptualisations of crises, and their multi-dimensional activity across various interventions, especially in the humanitarian-development nexus, are often not recognised by or visible to governments and 'traditional' humanitarian agencies.

## **ADAPTING, RESPONDING, AND RESILIENCE BUILDING: LEARNING HOW DIASPORAS DEAL WITH CRISES**

Diaspora humanitarianism in times of crisis is an area of growing interest to policymakers and researchers alike. Data collected as part of this study demonstrates the patterns and modalities of diaspora humanitarian response in the specific crisis contexts concerned in each of the six countries studied.

One recurring theme was the question of how other actors view diasporas, which might be problematic in practice. Diasporas are not all recipients of aid, nor perpetual 'beneficiaries', nor 'cash machines' for financing international organisations or their governments. There is a critical need to see diaspora humanitarian responders as humanitarian actors, an important bridge between partners in the Global South and Global North.

Equally, there is much that more 'traditional' humanitarian agencies and NGOs, as well as governments in countries of origin and settlement, can learn from diaspora humanitarians' adaptive strategies across the humanitarian-development nexus, and their focus on more direct, localised impact. Similarly, diaspora responders are already driving forward the localisation agenda, working closely with local civil society organisations to improve impact and accountability.

Finally, it is hoped that the findings of this research will help to strengthen coordination and dialogue between governments, humanitarian agencies, INGOs, and diaspora humanitarians in order to improve crisis response.

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