

Summary Report: ADEPT-IOM-Shabaka Webinar Series on Engagement of Diasporas in Humanitarian Crises (October 2022 - February 2022)

Summary and Key Takeaways

The engagement of diasporas in humanitarian crises, whether through in-kind donations, money transfers or volunteerism, is well established. Diasporas are often among the first responders on the ground, providing immediate relief to populations in need, and their skills, networks and resources can be mobilised at various crisis stages. However, so far, there has been little systematic coordination between diasporas and institutional humanitarian actors, as well as among the diasporas, in humanitarian settings. The effectiveness and reach of humanitarian assistance could therefore be increased.

Between October 2021 and February 2022, the International Organization for Migration ([IOM](#)), [Shabaka](#), and [ADEPT](#) jointly organised a series of three webinars to explore different perspectives on diaspora engagement in humanitarian assistance.

The webinars had three main objectives:

- Enhancing peer-to-peer collaboration among actors in the humanitarian landscape
- Strengthening trust among diasporas and stakeholders responding to humanitarian emergencies
- Contributing to the recognition of diaspora members as legitimate humanitarian actors and stakeholders

The three webinars focused respectively on key alliances and the transnational humanitarian system; transnational responses developed by diaspora communities; and diaspora leadership and intergenerational engagement.

Participants at the three webinars included diaspora actors, practitioners in the humanitarian and development sectors, and staff from UN agencies.

Key takeaways from the webinar series include:

- **Diaspora are key actors on the ground** and are **present before, during and after crises**. However, there is still little recognition of diasporas as legitimate humanitarian actors and partners by institutional humanitarian organisations.
- The **impact and reach of humanitarian assistance** can benefit from more **streamlined cooperation** between diaspora and humanitarian actors. This should happen through inclusive and diverse platforms that harness the ideas and perspectives of diaspora, especially diaspora young people.
- **Lack of trust from humanitarian actors and from local populations towards diaspora**, as well as the **lack of opportunities for sharing resources, information and learnings** among diasporas and with other humanitarian actors were highlighted as **key challenges to effective assistance**.

- **Diaspora often respond to crises beyond those happening in their countries of origin** – this can be driven by solidarity but is also the result of shifting migration patterns (i.e. more international movements and migrants/refugees stranded in third countries). Diaspora also play a role in providing humanitarian responses in countries of origin, settlement, and transit, including migrant protection.
- **Inter-generational engagement and learning** can allow young diaspora to re-connect with their identity and empower them to become leaders of change, whilst drawing on the skills, knowledge, and experience of older diaspora actors.

Introduction

This report summarises some of the key points raised during the three discussions and brings together the main takeaways/lessons from the series.

Diasporas represent a key element in transnational humanitarian assistance because they may act as bridges between local, national, regional, and international actors. In addition, diasporas' attachment to their homeland motivates them to create alliances with key stakeholders and navigate complex humanitarian systems to protect their communities from abroad.

This webinar series aimed to better understand the motivations, alliances, and flows of resources and expertise behind diaspora engagement in humanitarian settings.

Objectives of the webinar series included:

- **Enhance peer-to-peer collaboration** among the actors involved in the diaspora humanitarian landscape.
- **Strengthen trust** among diasporas and stakeholders responding to humanitarian emergencies at the local, national, regional, and international levels.
- **Contribute to the recognition of diaspora members as humanitarian actors** and stakeholders with capacities and skills.

Webinar #1: Key alliances and the transnational humanitarian system – 13 Oct 2021

Speakers: Tauhid Pasha, Roberta Romano (IOM); Bashair Ahmed (Shabaka); Carine Nsoudou (ADEPT)

Moderator: Paul Asquith (Shabaka)

Discussants: Niloufar Rahim (Keihan Foundation, NL), Shey Tatah (Nso Family Union, Denmark), Magalie Emile-Backer (Haiti Renewal Alliance, USA)

The first webinar discussed existing and potential alliances, partnerships and coordination systems, to strengthen the diaspora's work in humanitarian assistance.

The webinar investigated how diaspora organizations and coalitions have been responding to current crises, focusing on the humanitarian emergencies in Haiti, Afghanistan and Ethiopia.

Speakers representing Haitian, Afghan and Cameroonian diaspora organisations shared their experiences of responding to these different crises. They highlighted that although they already work with institutional humanitarian partners and other diaspora organisations, this cooperation

should be streamlined, in order to increase reach and efficiency. They also noted that the lack of funding/resources and trust between partners, both among diasporas and with government institutions, especially due to corruption, are key barriers to effective cooperation.

Participants emphasised the need for coordination mechanisms that ensure resource- and knowledge-sharing, build on diaspora organisations' strength and foster trust and accountability between and within the diaspora and with governments, as well as increasing the legitimacy of diasporas as humanitarian actors. The discussion also highlighted the need for a more systematic understanding/collection of information about diaspora activities and measuring of impacts.

IOM also presented a new **framework for diaspora engagement in humanitarian assistance**¹, developed in partnership with Haiti Renewal Alliance (HRA), which aims to facilitate and streamline coordination both among diasporas and between diaspora and institutional humanitarian organisations.

Webinar #2: Transnational responses developed by diaspora communities – 30 Nov 2021

Speakers: Tauhid Pasha, Larisa Lara (IOM); Bashair Ahmed (Shabaka); Carine Nsoudou (ADEPT)

Moderator: Paul Asquith (Shabaka)

Discussants: Dr Maher Azzouz (Syrian-American Medical Society Foundation, USA), Dima Haddad (IOM Lebanon), Cinzia de Santis (Healing Venezuela, UK)

The second webinar drew attention to diaspora's broader interest and focus on responding in third countries, different from their countries of origin or settlement. The webinar discussed cases of diaspora transnational humanitarian involvement and response beyond origin countries, which included support to migrant and refugee communities in third host and transit countries as well as returnees. Kinds of support ranged from immediate emergency response to trainings of professionals, to advocacy.

One of the challenges highlighted was acceptance by the receiving community and ensuring that diasporas interventions benefit equally individuals with whom they share origins and host communities. To achieve this, mutual trust, transparency and open communication between diasporas and people on the ground is crucial.

The discussion highlighted the need to recognise diasporas as humanitarian actors beyond their connection with their country of origin and to step out of this narrow view acknowledging their support to humanitarian crises anywhere. Diasporas are often able to move quickly and work with local actors applying their experiences and expertise to various contexts; there is a great opportunity for mutual learning between humanitarian organisations and the diaspora.

The discussion built on recent discussions and research by Shabaka, IOM, and ADEPT and practical examples from diaspora groups and networks.

¹ Available here <https://www.idiaspora.org/en/projects/framework-diaspora-humanitarian-assistance>.

Webinar #3: Diaspora Humanitarianism: intergenerational engagement and leadership – 14 Feb 2022

Speakers: Tauhid Pasha, Roberta Romano (IOM); Bashair Ahmed (Shabaka); Carine Nsoudou (ADEPT)

Moderator: Paul Asquith (Shabaka)

Discussants: Walla Elsheikh (Birthright Africa, USA), Mabrouh Ahmed (Restless Beings, UK), Robert Banez (PUSO, USA), Megan Hunsberger (African Diaspora Network, USA).

The third and last webinar of the series examined diasporas' motivations and approaches to engage in humanitarian crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, exploring generational differences in supporting humanitarian development, crisis prevention and recovery.

The discussion highlighted a leadership and diversity crisis among the diaspora; it emerged that younger generations are often disconnected from the reality on the ground and that the space in which diaspora organisations operate lacks diversity of voices and of structures for young people to become active.

Mentorship and nurturing youth leadership were seen as key priorities in this context. Panellists highlighted the important role of elder generations in helping diaspora youth to internalise their identity and heritage to become leaders and drive change in their countries of origin while protecting them from older generation's trauma. They also stressed the need for platforms and programmes of engagement which can harness the energy and fresh approaches of younger diasporas in humanitarian action while connecting them to needs on the ground.

In particular, discussants highlighted the potential of diaspora leadership and inter-generational engagement and learning to challenge 'business as usual' across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus and contribute to the delivery of the 'localisation agenda'.

Conclusion and Next Steps

The three webinars drew attention to a number of key takeaways, listed above in the summary, which can inform future collaborations between diaspora and other humanitarian actors. A common finding from all three webinars was the **need for better coordination mechanisms between institutional humanitarian partners and diaspora humanitarian actors**.

These resonate with the recommendations of the Framework for Diaspora Engagement in Humanitarian Assistance, which was developed through several consultative processes, and the creation of a Diaspora Humanitarian Hub which is currently being discussed².

The recent COVID-19 pandemic, along with the Ukraine refugee crisis from March 2022 and the recent devastating floods in Pakistan, have shown both the interest and the commitment of diaspora actors to respond to crises in countries of settlement, transit, and origin, as well as other countries affected by crises.

Mitigating the effects of climate change and associated migration issues is another area of interest to diaspora organizations and networks as well as international organizations such as IOM and other UN agencies.

² For more information see <https://www.idiaspora.org/it/node/5976>.

It is recommended therefore that:

- Institutional humanitarian partners and diaspora humanitarian actors **develop mechanisms to enhance coordination and exchange of information** on humanitarian needs and responses
- **Diaspora humanitarian actors**, supported by institutional humanitarian actors and governments of countries of residence, **develop platforms and networks to strengthen inter-diaspora coordination on humanitarian response** as well as to facilitate collaboration and visibility with institutional humanitarian partners
- **Institutional humanitarian partners** (such as IOM) and diaspora networks and organisations (such as ADEPT and Shabaka) **develop joint initiatives focussing on the diaspora's role in mitigating the adverse impacts of climate change and disasters**, including on migration and displacement patterns, as this will be an issue of increasing importance over the next few years.