

EU Global Diaspora Facility

RESEARCH>>

DIASPORA RESPONSE TO HUMANITARIAN CRISES

- >> analyse practices
- >> extract lessons
- >> provide guidance

EDIF SHABAKA connect . collaborate . innovate

Funded by the European Union Implemented by ICMPD International Centre for Migration Policy Development

Online Proof-of-Concept Roundtable

22 October 2020

Event Summary

Background and Introduction

The Covid-19 outbreak has triggered unprecedented action from diasporas, in terms of human, social and financial support. Their role is front and centre both in their countries of heritage and host countries. The idea of this research came as a follow up to a request from the European Commission to understand better how the EU can support diaspora organisations in their response to COVID-19 and in their response to humanitarian crises in general.

Although diaspora organisations have been responding to humanitarian crises for decades, their contributions to emergency response are under-studied and often misunderstood due to a lack of knowledge of their work, the spotlight being on traditional crisis responders (governments and relief organisations). Against the backdrop of the current pandemic, the need to remedy this knowledge gap is critical in order to facilitate more effective and comprehensive diaspora engagement, and, to build resilience to withstand future crises.

In August 2020, The [European Union Global Diaspora Facility \(EUDiF\)](#) project implemented by the **International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD)** launched a case study on '**Diaspora Engagement in Times of Crisis**' in collaboration with [Shabaka](#) to undertake research on diaspora humanitarian response across six different country and regional contexts, namely:

- Lebanon (emergency response to the August 2020 explosion in Beirut)
- Sudan (COVID 19 response and recent floods, 2020)
- Zambia (responses to Cyclones Idai and Kenneth in southern Africa, in 2019)
- Nicaragua (political crisis since 2018)
- Nepal (floods in 2017)
- Ukraine (response to the conflict in Eastern Ukraine since 2014)

The overall objective of the case study is to **analyse practices and provide guidance and lessons learned on how diasporas intervene in times of crisis in their countries of heritage**. One of the central points of this research is to understand better whether and how the socio-economic and political context of a country as well as the type of crisis (man-made emergencies, natural disasters and complex emergencies) influence the way diasporas respond to crises.

As part of the process, an **online proof-of-concept roundtable** took place on **22nd October 2020** to raise awareness of the research among experts and researchers and validate the intended approach. **24 participants** including the research team, DG DEVCO and various stakeholders from UN agencies, INGOs, and academia attended the event.

Key Reflections

❖ Framework of coordination and the concept of 'cooperation':

- Need for a definition of 'coordination'.
- Researchers should take extra caution in assuming that 'coordination' is, by default, positive. Many diaspora-led crisis response actions are not formal (in the manner of 'traditional' humanitarian response) and this can be a good thing as coordination is not always the best course

of action. Coordinating with large organizations (IOs, for example) can compromise the ability of diaspora organizations to respond quickly to crises. This is in addition to the risk of creating a hierarchy between the different types of diaspora organizations. Whilst more established diaspora organisations are often highlighted and sought out for cooperation, smaller organisations who may be very active in 'deterritorialised spaces' such as youth-led initiatives can be missed. This is unfortunate, as their activities are very interesting, and they are often very quick to respond and mobilize action because they do not adhere to traditional models of implementation.

- Risk that only the better-connected organisations will be able to be captured in the research. The researchers need to consider (and address in the research) that the analysis will miss a lot of existing activities just because they are done at a small scale or by individuals and organisations that do not benefit of a lot of visibility. The study should acknowledge that it is not able to capture everything.
 - An example noted by one participant was the Africa COVID-19 Response Toolkit which is a robust set of open source technological resources to support African governments as they respond to COVID-19. This initiative emerged out of a nucleus of volunteer Ethiopian diaspora tech professionals that mobilised following a single Tweet.
 - Diaspora and formal humanitarian infrastructures can sometimes work in parallel and necessarily do not need to be integrated into formal structures to be effective. For example, the Liberian diaspora was heavily involved in various initiatives during the Ebola crisis, especially in raising awareness about cultural issues that were preventing public health measures from stopping the spread of the virus, and this proved very significant and effective. Most of the time these diaspora-led initiatives were not coordinated with the formal humanitarian system, yet they were very effective in using digital tools for information-sharing and raising awareness.
- ❖ **Need to consider the baseline level and type of diaspora engagement pre-crisis.** This is useful in measuring the impact and drawing important lessons across the different channels through which the diaspora reacts. For example, remittances and other mechanisms. DMA Global have been working with the AU and GIZ and have developed a diaspora engagement self-assessment scorecard for Africa - a standardised and systematic way to review and assess current diaspora engagement which may be useful in the baseline assessment (link attached below).
 - ❖ **Need to consider diaspora characteristics (age/socio-economic/trust in the government/ strength and size of networks etc.)** that may affect why and how a diaspora responds to humanitarian crisis. Analysing these different factors could be key in drawing important lessons on the way different typologies of diaspora actors respond to crisis and the different channels they use to respond.
 - ❖ There is a **difference between development and humanitarian work**: Diaspora engagement during crises is not always connected to the humanitarian architecture, and at the moment there is no mechanism to facilitate the coordination between the two. There already exist institutional mechanisms to facilitate the participation of diaspora in long-term development following a crisis through better engagement with the government, etc. However, in the short-term during crisis, there is very little understanding of how the diaspora is involved, as well as a lack of institutional coordination.

Conclusion

The EUDiF-Shabaka research project was welcomed by the participants as an opportunity to fill the knowledge gap that exists on diaspora humanitarianism. Taking the contexts of six different crises, the research could be key to understanding how diaspora involvement can be better facilitated and coordinated within the existing humanitarian architecture to respond to crises (especially in the short term). Possible synergies with other similar projects/programmes were also explored during the event and will be further explored.

Chat box links

Links to the project websites, social media accounts, and various resources mentioned in the chat box during the webinar by the research team and roundtable participants:

- [EUDiF website](#)
- [Shabaka website](#)
- [EUDiF twitter page](#)
- [Shabaka twitter page](#)
- [DMA Global diaspora engagement self-assessment scorecard for Africa](#)