

# HOW DO AUSTRALIA-BASED MIGRANTS HELP IN TIMES OF CRISIS?

*A case study of diaspora responses to the 2021  
military coup in Myanmar*



August 2023



The research team is very grateful to members of the Myanmar community in Australia who participated in this study for their generous contribution of time and valuable insights.

This study was made possible by funding from the Australian Research Council Linkage Grant Diaspora Humanitarians: How Australia-based migrants help in crises abroad (LP200200817), and from the University of Melbourne Faculty of Arts Policy Enhancement Grant 2022.

Research team contributors to this report:

Research co-design: Saw Chit Thet Tun, Louise Olliff, Lorenza Lazzati, Delvin Verghese, Bina Fernandez

Data Collection: Saw Chit Thet Tun

Data Analysis: Saw Chit thet Tun, Louise Olliff, René Rejón, Lorenza Lazzati

Report Writing: Louise Olliff

Report Production and Design: Lorenza Lazzati

Suggested citation:


Olliff, L., Saw Chit Thet Tun, Rejón, R., L., Lazzati, L., Verghese, D., Fernandez, B. 2024. How do Australia-based migrants help in times of crisis? A case study of diaspora responses to the 2021 military coup in Myanmar. University of Melbourne.











## About the research

In 2022, researchers from the University of Melbourne undertook a project exploring how Australia-based migrants (diasporas) help in times of humanitarian crises overseas. The project involved community researchers from eight diaspora communities (Afghanistan, Indonesia, Lebanon, Myanmar, Nepal, Pacific Islands, South Sudan and Syria) to co-design methodology, engage communities and collect data to find out how, why and what was done by communities in Australia in response to specific crises or events. The project aims to better understand the strengths and challenges faced by Australia-based migrants responding to different kinds of crises (disasters, conflicts and complex crises), and to identify potential tools that can support diaspora communities in their responses in the future. More information about this project can be found at <https://diasporahumanitarians.com/>.

## About this report

This report is a summary of findings for the case study on **diaspora responses to the 2021 military coup in Myanmar**. Saw Chit Thet Thun was the community researcher leading the research for this case study, in collaboration with Professor Bina Fernandez (Chief Investigator), Dr Louise Olliff (Research Associate), Lorenza Lazzati (Project Officer) and Dr René Rejón (Research Associate).

Data was gathered using the following mixed methods:

- **Interviews:** In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with 22 participants from diverse backgrounds (age, gender, ethnicity, city of residence, and years living in Australia). Interviews were held by Zoom or in person (in Melbourne, Adelaide, Murray Bridge and Sydney) between July and October 2022. Interviews were conducted in Burmese and English and were audio recorded and then translated and/or transcribed. Transcripts were thematically coded using Nvivo.
- **Survey:** 64 community members completed an online or paper survey in either English or Burmese (see appendix for survey sample). Data was analysed using Qualtrics.

The names of participants quoted in this report have been changed unless otherwise requested.

*Photograph courtesy of Anthony Edgar*





## FINDINGS:

### Crisis context:

#### How did the nature of the crisis shape diaspora responses?

On 1 February 2021, the Myanmar military (also known as the Tatmataw) launched a coup d'état against the civilian government, declaring the results of the November 2020 general election invalid and instating a one-year state of emergency. The **impacts of this coup were widespread and complex** and included significant political, social and economic disruption, leading to rampant inflation, closure of schools, health and government services and businesses, internal and cross-border displacement, and wide-spread human rights violations. The coup also coincided with the Covid-19 pandemic, with this public health crisis made worse by disruptions to social order, including to medical services across the country.

*... economically, in health care, in education, every single person is suffering from problems in every sector. (Myat, translation)*

*If someone says that there are also people who are doing well in the country, those may be 0.001 percent of the total population. There are some groups who are affiliated with the military and doing well, but the rest of the country is in the crisis. (Aye, translation)*

While there had been armed conflict in Myanmar for decades prior to the 2021 coup, fighting was largely restricted to regional or border areas between the central government and ethnic minority groups. **After the coup, violence spread to other areas and to the capital city**, with the military targeting anyone

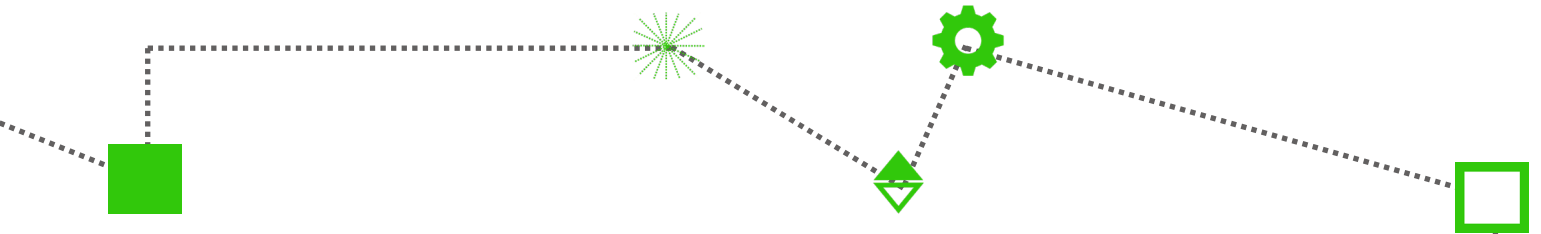
associated with the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM)<sup>1</sup> and peaceful demonstrations. This meant that segments of the Myanmar population that had not experienced active conflict and intimidation at the hands of the Tatmataw, including from the Bamar ethnic majority, were exposed to extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrest and violence against civilians. This also meant that a wider cross-section of the Myanmar diaspora in countries including Australia mobilised to respond.

While the CDM<sup>2</sup> movement began as peaceful protests by civil servants and healthcare workers in opposition to the coup, armed anti-coup resistance forces formed as time went on. That armed groups opposing the military—and the Tatmataw itself in some cases—were heavily involved in providing life-saving assistance to civilian populations meant **a lack of clear-cut separation between humanitarian actors and parties to the conflict**.

*The violation of human rights is the biggest matter [...]. People live under fear. And after more than one year, armed clashes became more intense and the*

<sup>2</sup> The CDM is a national civil resistance movement that began in response to the 2021 coup. Starting with civil servants and healthcare workers, protesters mostly employed nonviolent forms of demonstrating their opposition to the military, which include acts of civil disobedience, labour strikes, public demonstrations, a red ribbon campaign, a military boycott campaign, and a pot-banging movement. ANU (2021). [The Centrality of the Civil Disobedience Movement \(CDM\) in Myanmar's Post-Coup Era](#)



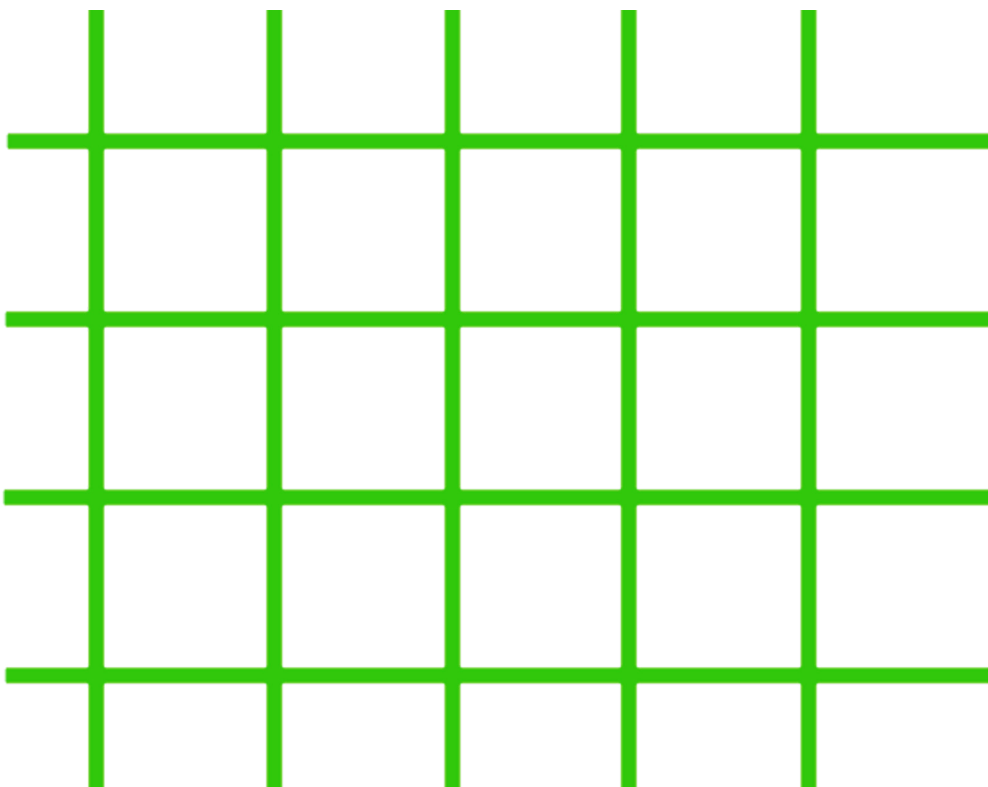


*war is happening. So, if someone is watching from the beginning to now, it is only getting worse and worse, and we can say that a civil war is happening. (Ei, translation)*

The fact that the 2021 coup was so unpopular and its impacts so widespread and devastating, **unified and mobilised Myanmar's diverse diaspora communities to work together**. Research participants spoke about how previously, different ethnic communities from Myanmar tended to focus on their own communities in Australia and back home, including in providing

humanitarian assistance. The coup united different groups against the Tatmataw and led to collective efforts to respond.

*I think in a way this coup shed a light on many issues which were once ignored by the people in the cities and also the people in the Bamar community. Since the coup, we've seen a lot of people from different religious backgrounds—Christians, or Muslims or Hindus—come together in the protests and in the fight against the military. (Hein, translation)*





## Diaspora context:

### How did characteristics of the Myanmar diaspora in Australia shape responses?

The **Myanmar diaspora in Australia is significantly diverse and sizeable**<sup>2</sup>. While a majority arrived on refugee and humanitarian visas either over the past 15 years or in the 1990s, having been displaced from protracted conflicts in Karen, Chin, Karenni, Kachin, Mon and Rakhine states or due to their participation in the 1988 uprising against the military regime, there are still others who arrived on skilled visas decades ago or more recently as international students, many from the Bamar ethnic majority. There are also smaller numbers of Rohingya refugees who arrived in Australia by boat and sought asylum, some of whom remain on bridging or temporary visas.

**Length of time since leaving Myanmar and pre-arrival migration experience** both had implications for diaspora responses to this crisis. For example, those who had been in Australia for a longer period or who had spent decades as refugees in neighbouring countries before arriving in Australia, reportedly had weaker connections to people in Myanmar and some were less active in responding. On the other hand, those with close connections to communities who had or were being targeted by the Tatmataw for some time, were able to draw on their experiences and well-established transnational social networks and community infrastructure to respond quickly.

*There are some people who arrived overseas such a long time ago and have no interest in Myanmar. I've met such people who don't have very much interest in these things. Even though they may express that the military coup is not good during conversation with us, they don't do any action together with us. (Htay, translation)*

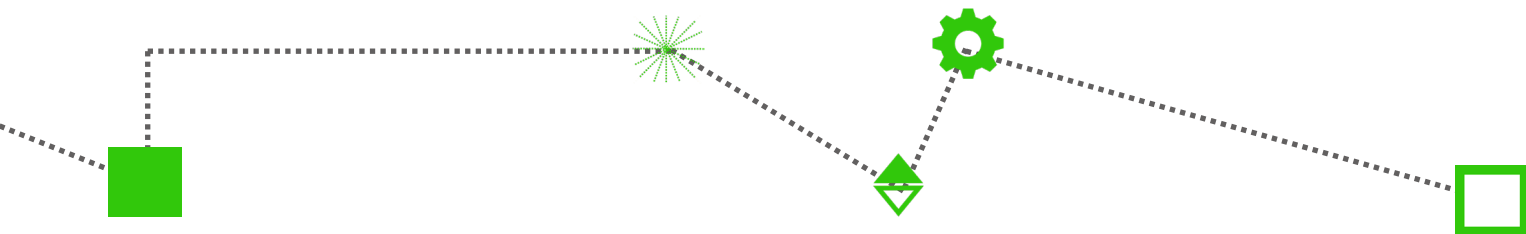
*Some communities, particularly the ethnic communities, they have been supporting some kinds of humanitarian assistance since before the coup [...] but then their support has increased, and also they participated or they try to work with other Burmese diaspora communities in order to have a more collective response. (Kyaw)*

While the crisis and shared opposition to the coup united Myanmar's diverse diasporas, especially at the start, the fact that **the diaspora community had long been organised along ethnic or ethno-religious lines** meant that the response was fragmented. Indeed, many research participants referred to the lack of an umbrella body or coordination across the different diaspora communities, despite having shared objectives and there being an understanding of the potential benefits of collaboration.

---

<sup>2</sup> The [2021 Population Census estimated](#) the Myanmar-born population in Australia in June 2021 at just over 40,000 people. The diaspora population including those born in Australia with family links to Myanmar is therefore likely to be much higher.





*After the coup, the people are really united and working closely. But after the time flies, they began to lose communication or lose cooperation like before. This I noticed. So, their reunification is not really happening because of— It is also based on the history, and also the trust. (Kyaw)*

*I don't think that we are very much united, in my own view. We are still in need to be united. There are, for example, Muslim groups for the Muslims, Christian groups for the Christians, Buddhist groups for the Buddhists. But these groups are not well connected with each other... (Noah, translation)*

As most in the diaspora arrived as refugees over the past 15 years, interviewees described the **community infrastructure and capacity to respond as more limited**. Ei talked about community organisations

being primarily established to help people to settle in Australia and were not prepared for or experienced in advocacy to influence structural or institutional responses to this crisis. Those who were more recently arrived also had fewer resources (both money and time) to contribute to community responses, particularly with the Covid-19 pandemic affecting livelihoods in Australia, particularly for those in less secure jobs.

*Community organisations here are primarily carrying out social services, so they are not very familiar to be involved in this kind of situation. And the organisations here are still very few, and not yet structurally organised... For policy advocacy works, they do not have time to participate as they need to stand by themselves in this country. (Ei, translation)*



## Main activities: What did the Myanmar diaspora do?

Activities undertaken by members of the diaspora in response to the 2021 coup in Myanmar suggest different levels of response. Interviewees described **household-to-household activities**, with individuals in Australia responding to direct requests from family and friends in Myanmar. However, more frequently discussed were actions at a **household-to-community** or **community-to-community level**, with community members contributing either directly or via intermediary organisations to local community organisations in Myanmar providing assistance on the ground. There was also substantial reference made to activities directed at humanitarian actors, government or the international community more broadly, that aimed at influencing **structural or system-level responses** to the unfolding situation in Myanmar.

### Advocacy and influence

Soon after the coup, diaspora members gathered to publicly demonstrate and to advocate with Australian policymakers to stand in opposition to the coup. As Kyaw said: 'That was the first response'. Many interviewees spoke about participating in **protests in major cities** across Australia, with gatherings held in public parks and in front of government offices. Alongside these demonstrations, community members also participated in **online advocacy campaigns**, wrote letters to and **met with Members of Parliament**, and **engaged with parliamentary processes** to draw attention to the situation in Myanmar. They asked: that the Australian government use its diplomatic channels to push for democratic processes in Myanmar, that aid not be channelled through Tatmataw-affiliated agencies, that humanitarian assistance to affected populations be increased, and that refugee visas be granted to CDM members at risk.

*I've done advocacy work through the media in term of political and social measures, I've communicated with the Australian government through submission of letters, arranged the demonstrations and protests, carried out fundraising to support those with difficulties who are fleeing the oppression of the military junta... These are the ways we support, in political and social measures. We also advocate and push the government in this country. (Maung, translation)*

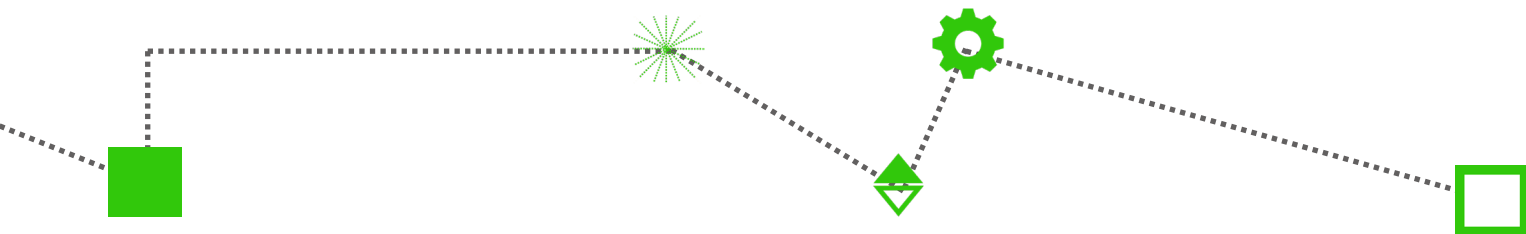
*We demanded the Australian government to help as much as they could, for example in humanitarian assistance or in other areas... As a country which is protecting human rights, we requested the Australian government take action instead of standing aside. (Ei, translation)*

Several participants spoke about **sharing information and raising awareness** about the situation in Myanmar as an important activity undertaken by members of the diaspora. While this was in part about advocacy and influence, it also was discussed as a civic duty in the absence of a free press in Myanmar, to ensure that people could access reliable information about what was happening on the ground.

*I shared the news on Facebook... The news organisations have responsibility for reporting the news, but without the formal channels or television, like MRTV or Myawaddy News, I think they need people like us to share the news so the people will be more exposed to what is happening. (Hein, translation)*

*I've done information sharing... I think it is necessary to share information to know the reality of our country. ... I assume if we could share the correct information from the ground to let everyone know, the situation will somehow change. (Soe, translation)*





### Fundraising and financial transfers

Most research participants spoke about their involvement in **fundraising activities**, either as a donor and/or as an organiser or volunteer. Cooking and selling food at ‘food fairs’ was discussed by several people. This included people cooking specialty regional dishes and selling these through church and community networks, with proceeds going to collective fundraising drives.

*What we are doing regularly is a monthly fundraising sale. We sell Myanmar foods, and get revenue from those who buy from each other, and those who cook contribute by not taking any revenue... As for us, we buy foods from them. And we set the tables and do the cleaning as volunteers. This is how we help as much as we can from each corner. (Zin, translation)*

In terms of where money raised went, this was varied. While some **individual remittances** went directly to affected people, particularly those who had lost their jobs and/or were forced to leave their homes due to their involvement with the CDM, money raised was also sent as **collective remittances** to local community organisations in Myanmar involved in supporting displaced people and those most at risk or vulnerable due to the complex crisis.

*As an individual, as much as I can, I make donations to the other side, one to those known and the other to those unknown. We are donating as much as we can. (Zin, translation)*

*People living here are not very well-off, so we collect some amount from each and held fundraising sales events. And there were contributions made from people who were better-off. So we raised funds in this way*

*and provide support to places in need, to the places of clashes and the people in difficulties. (Tun, translation)*

*Currently, there are many people who are in difficulty. When military troops set villages on fire, people from these villages become displaced persons. And we now have assistance set up for those kinds of people. We are not supporting the same place every time, we are rotating our support to different places in need. (Wai, translation)*

### Psychosocial support

In interviews, several participants talked about providing **moral or emotional support** to people in Myanmar to ‘make them feel secure’ and ‘encourage them’.

*I’ve also provided moral support to some of my friends who were depressed. They were in the country and their houses were searched several times. So, I talk with them to encourage them and provide moral support. I’ve done this in many different ways to make them feel secure, and I send them funds to buy medicine, and such like that. (Noah, translation)*

*I have provided emotional support to the people in need. Mental support is important, I’ve provided firstly to my friend joining CDM. There were many of my acquaintances who joined the CDM. I’ve talked with them, encouraged them and congratulated their brave decision. (Hla, translation)*

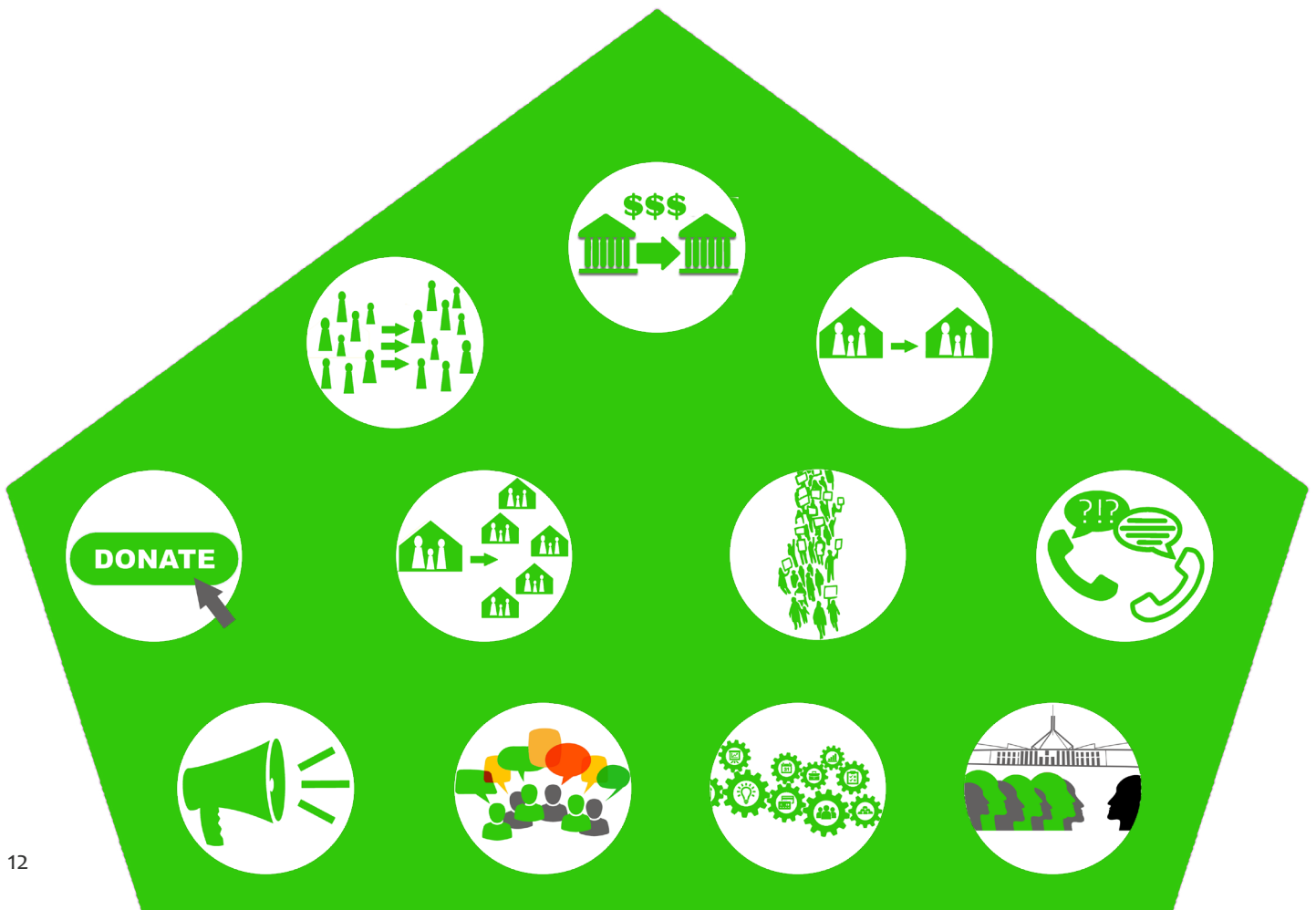
## Coordination and organisational capacity building

There were some interviewees who spoke about the volunteer work they did to help **coordinate and connect** people affected by the coup in Myanmar with groups that could support them. This volunteer work included helping with the development of community organisations and networks, and brokering relationships.

*At that time, they are not armed groups, they are just protesting groups. While we were advising the protesting groups, the oppression got stronger. There*

*were more killings, so they transform into armed groups. First, it's defence. They used sandbags, they don't have any weapons. They just throw lighted bottles, Molotov's. ... We helped them join the armed groups and sought connections for them in Karen. ... I have many acquaintances, so I find shelters for them. If they want to get out, I help them. (Win Lin, translation)*

*I provided my support to the community groups formed between Myanmar, Australia and Singapore for their organisational structure and their constitutions. (Thu, translation)*



## Shifting focus and blurred lines

Diaspora activities undertaken in response to the military coup in Myanmar **changed over time**. At the onset on the crisis, people were more actively involved in trying to influence a different political outcome; mobilising to put international pressure on the military junta and providing practical support to the CDM. As time went on and the Tatmataw consolidated its control in Myanmar, the diaspora focus shifted to supporting formal political opposition to the military junta, including armed resistance groups, and providing financial assistance to the increasing numbers of displaced people. The actions of those in the diaspora, therefore, **do not easily fit into separate streams of humanitarian assistance and supporting parties to a conflict**, although the intention of both were framed by participants as alleviating suffering.

*I've also contributed to funding campaigns by newly founded governments of [National Unity Government] NUG and [National Unity Consultative Council] NUCC. And then I've also contributed funding to fundraising campaigns by PDF, People's Defence Forces, as I get contacted by these groups and some of my friends are also members who ask for support. (Aung, translation)*

*The NUG-CRPH<sup>2</sup> can exist because of the Myanmar community abroad. In 2021, the support of the Myanmar diaspora is significantly important. There are many things we can do. (Win Lin, translation)*

*Another kind of people in difficulties are CDMers, and we are supporting CDMers from here via some groups which are providing assistance for their basic needs with our contribution. And we are also supporting youth groups like PDF with food and rations and such. (Wai, translation)*

<sup>2</sup> <https://crph-nugsupportaustralia.org/>



## Welcome to CRPH / NUG Support Groups in Australia

### Our Purpose

In accordance with the four political visions of CRPH/NUG and four objectives in the Federal Democracy Charter – the purpose of the CRPH/NUG support groups in Australia shall be:

1. To assist upon request from CRPH/NUG and its International Relations Department in the areas of fundraising, lobbying the Australian Government and Parliament, liaising with and between Australian government bodies, Myanmar ethnic communities and CRPH/NUG.
2. To provide updates upon request from CRPH/NUG and its International Relations Department, on Australian Government's policy and political views on Myanmar and Asia-Pacific geopolitics impacting Myanmar; and
3. To take actions in Australia based on special requests on an ad-hoc basis from CRPH/NUG and its International Relations Department.

## Emergency Appeals for Humanitarian assistance to Mocha Storm victims in Myanmar



## Survey responses

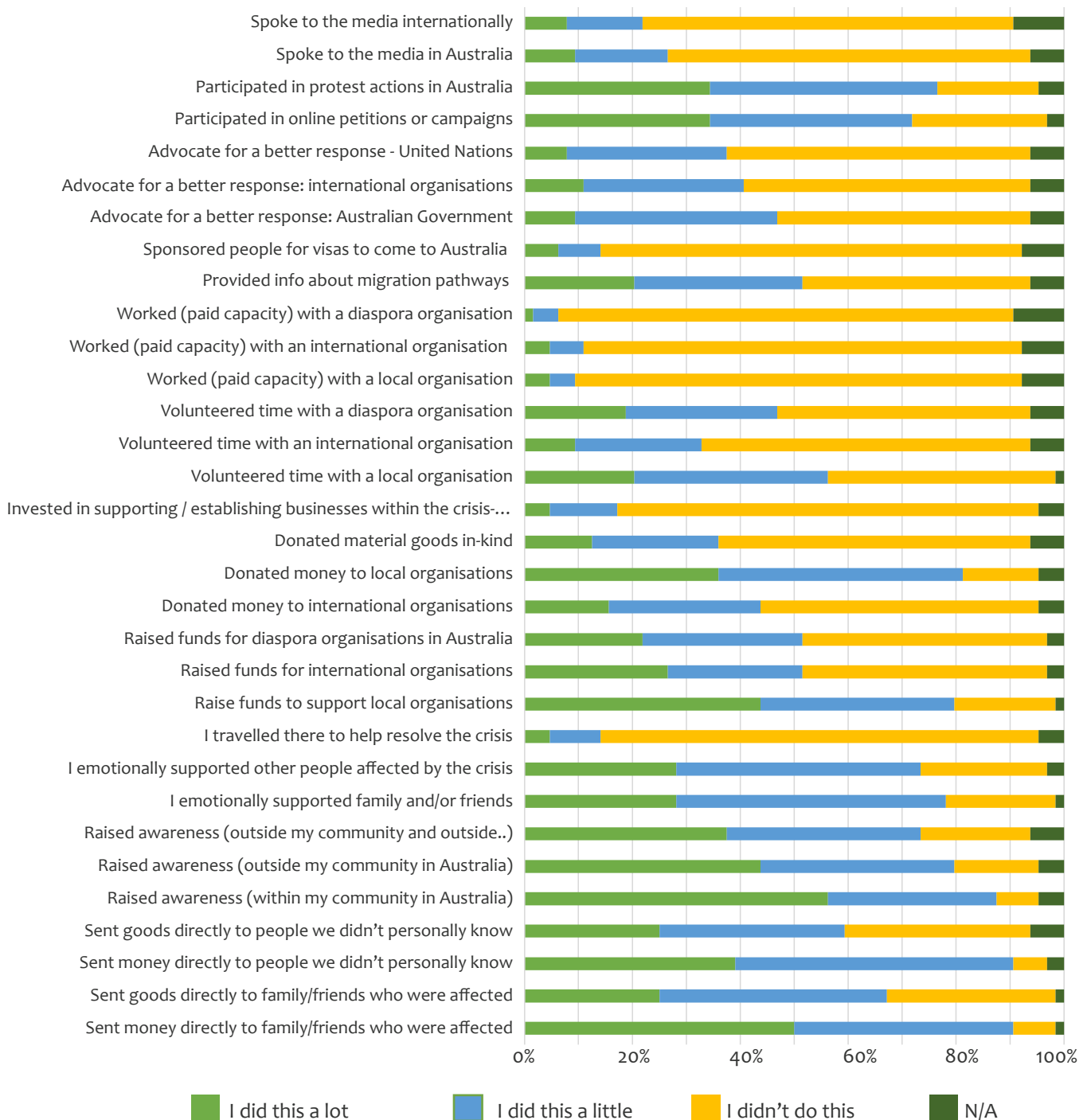
Activities described in interviews were generally reflected in **survey responses**, with respondents indicating the most common response to the crisis was to send money directly to family and friends. 50% of our respondents did this 'a lot' and 40.6% 'a little'. Interestingly, the same number of survey participants sent money directly to people they didn't know, although they were more likely to do this 'a little' (51.6%) rather than 'a lot' (39%). 87.5% of respondents

were involved in awareness-raising to varying degrees, and 76.6% were involved in protests in Australia. Other common responses were to raise funds or donate to local organisations. More than 80% said they never worked in a paid capacity for diaspora, local or international organisations.



Photograph shared by Saw ChitThet Tun - Myanmar Humanitarian Aidfundraising event, Melbourne

## Q. What did you do to respond to this crisis?





## Needs addressed:

What needs within crisis-affected communities were addressed?



**Protection and human rights** – evacuation of high-profile human rights defenders in neighbouring countries; safe houses in Thailand for CDM members; documenting and raising awareness of human rights violations.



**Livelihoods** – financial assistance for those who had lost their jobs, businesses or capacity to earn due to displacement, conflict and/or persecution.



**Food and basic household goods** – provision of food and water, particularly to internally displaced people.

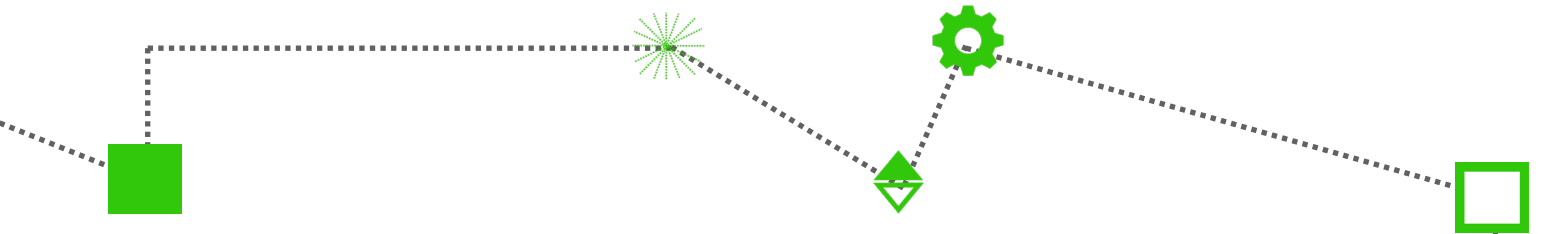


**Infrastructure** – digging of wells for water supply.



**Education and healthcare** – funding of schools and healthcare services, particularly for people displaced.





Photograph shared by Saw ChitThet Tun - Myanmar Humanitarian Aidfundraising event, Melbourne

## Modalities:

### What tools helped to facilitate diaspora responses?

#### Working through trusted social networks

**Social networks** were central to diaspora responses, with family, friends, professional, faith-based, community and social groups key to receiving and sharing information, fundraising and transferring money, sharing knowledge and skills, and generally getting things done. When describing how social networks helped to facilitate actions, trust was a recurring theme. Being able to transparently account for the funding sent from Australia, for example, was key to how diaspora members came to trust local community support organisations (CSOs) tasked with overseeing support provided on the ground.

*I do my contribution in particular cases, like a friend ask me on messenger for support. Otherwise, I provide my support mainly for the big projects, like the NUG bonds, and those run by Pencilo4. (Htay, translation)*

*We could only provide our support via the local CSOs. But from the groups working in Kachin, we receive acknowledgment letters from the recipients and records of how funding is spent. We do not have such arrangement with other groups which are outside of the Kachin area. (Kav, translation)*

#### Fundraising tools

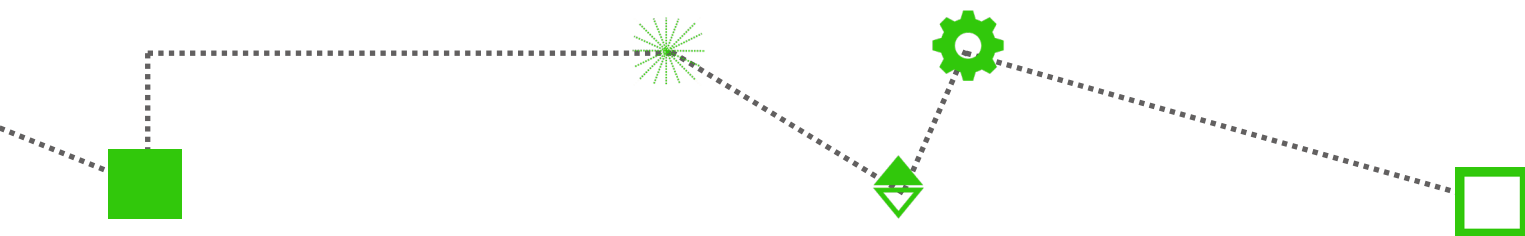
Tools that helped facilitate diaspora fundraising included **online and remote channels and platforms**. For example, participants spoke about investing in those driving the pursuit of democratic change in Myanmar by purchasing National Unity Government (NUG) bonds. Others contributed to crowdfunding campaigns initiated by diaspora organisations on platforms such as Facebook, or simply donated to CSOs or individuals by direct transfer to bank

accounts held in Australia or overseas. Face-to-face fundraising initiatives in Australia included **food fairs** and **community events** where souvenir items could be purchased. During Covid-19 lockdowns, food cooked by community volunteers in Melbourne could be ordered online and volunteer drivers delivered food to drop-off locations around the city. As Aye reported, we ‘drove as much as 300 km in a day to be able to raise funds’.

*There are fundraising food fairs, sales of souvenir items and global campaigns. Moreover, there are also many ad hoc campaigns, like NUG bonds, that we’ve supported. (Aye, translation)*

*When the COVID situation [began, we] organised community events or community fundraising activities. [...] Some organisations, they are doing this maybe fortnightly, some... are doing it monthly, and some organisations are one off... (Kyaw)*





### Social and mainstream media

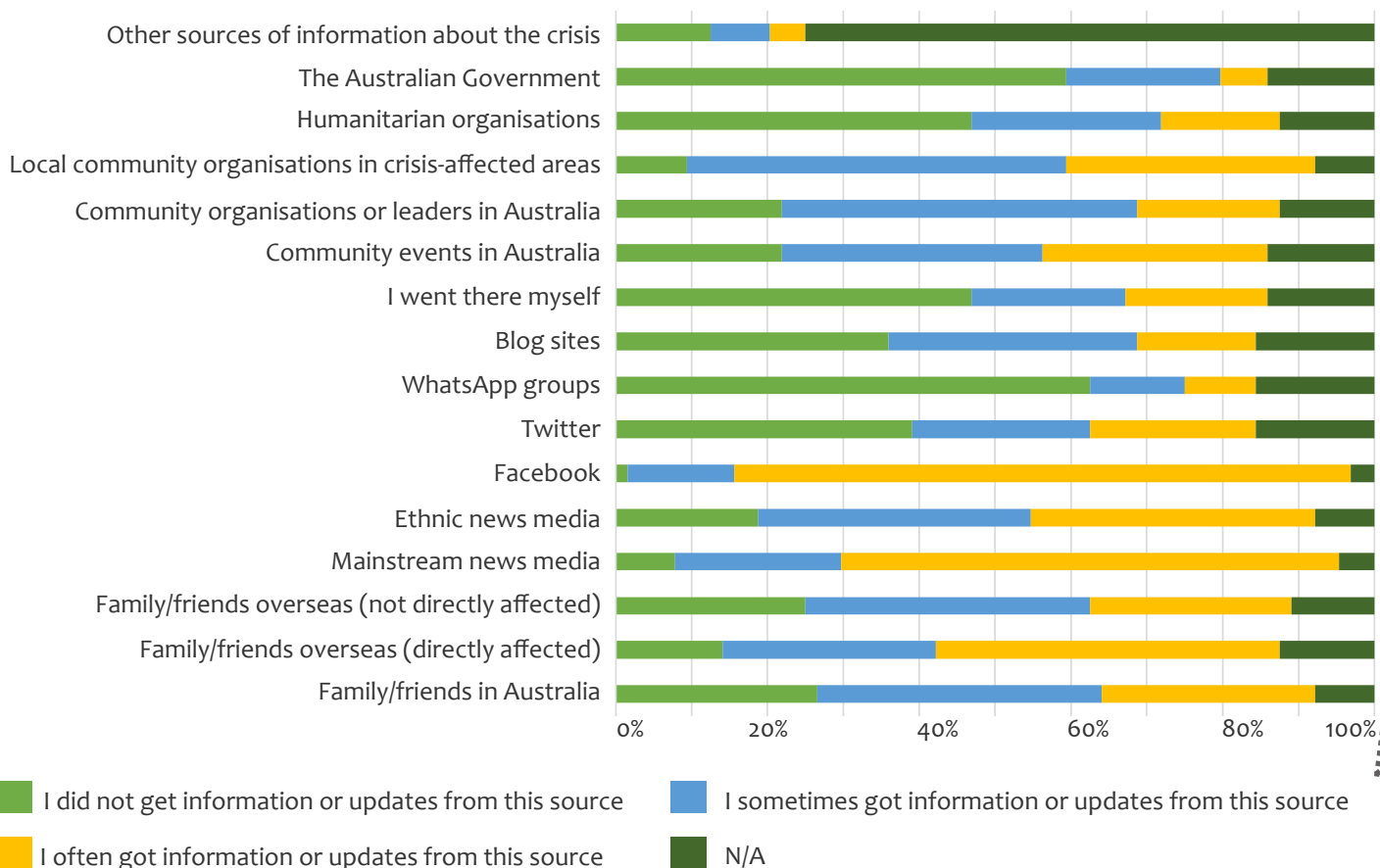
Social media was heavily used for information-sharing, fundraising and coordination purposes. Interviewees reported using platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp groups, Instagram and Zoom meetings. This was reflected in survey responses, which indicated that the main source of information for the Myanmar community was Facebook, with 81.25% of people getting updates from this source often, and 14% doing so sometimes. Mainstream media was the second

largest source of information, followed by family/friends overseas and ethnic news media outlets.

*I tried to raise awareness of the issues on the news on my social media regularly. (Hein, translation)*

*We [donate] after sending messages in private groups and share how much we donated and the PDF institutions we donated to. (Zin, translation)*

### Q. How Often did you get information or updates about the crisis from this source?







## Motivations:

### Why did the diaspora in Australia respond as they did?

#### Political views

When talking about why they responded to the coup in the ways that they did, many interviewees expressed a very **strong desire to see democratic change in Myanmar**. Political views were underpinned by personal experience; that Myanmar had been under a dictatorship previously and people had suffered. As Kyaw said of the diaspora in Australia: 'They know how the brutality and the oppression of the military is'. Wai said: 'I felt like the military coup is something that has broken down our future' (translation).

*I think we have to do our part to fight against the military regime. For those who can't physically be there in Myanmar, we can donate, we can gather news, we can participate in the fundraising activities or protests. Yeah, I think if each of us do our part, we might have victory much sooner. (Hein, translation)*

*We simply cannot accept military dictatorship in Myanmar. What they are doing is inhumane... And in this modern era, we are seeing their atrocities on the news and social media. So, we will continue to show that we are against such kind of atrocities. (Thant, translation)*

#### Social responsibility

Many interviewees expressed a strong sense of **social responsibility to alleviate the suffering of people in Myanmar** who were 'very tired of trying' and were facing significant risks and difficulties that those in the diaspora were not. It was described as the 'duty' of people living outside Myanmar and who could not participate in opposing the military junta on the ground to contribute in 'whatever way we can'.

*As a people of Myanmar who were born and raised in Myanmar, we have the responsibility to act, and it is also very important. ... I've seen that the communities here are also regarding this as an important matter, no matter if it is rain or shine. (Khaing, translation)*

*Now in the home country, there are a lack of jobs and income earning opportunities, but Myanmar peoples outside of the country can still work and earn. That's why we need to provide support. (Aung, translation)*

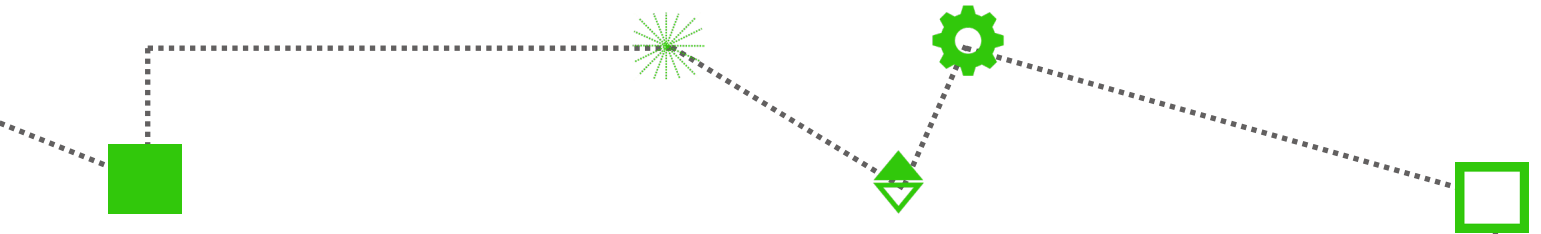
#### Sorrow and fear

There were also more affective (emotional) drivers motivating those in the diaspora to respond as they did. Interviewees described **feeling sorrow, fear and suffering emotionally**. It is important to note that some emotions led to inaction, with interviewees describing how the fear people felt for their family still in Myanmar limited their involvement, particularly in public demonstrations.

*... all Myanmar people all around the world suffered mentally. Just yesterday, my wife cried all day... Even the men are sad and in tears. So, the impact is enormous. (Aye, translation)*

*The first impact on the society is that everyone has suffered emotionally. This is the first feeling that everyone had. And after that, some people responded based on their emotion. (Khaing, translation)*

*They are afraid that something will happen to the family members left in Myanmar if they do something here. Some of them help from behind. They just donate money from behind, but they don't dare to come in person... Yes, they have fear. (Zin, translation)*



Photograph shared by Saw ChitThet Tun  
Myanmar Humanitarian Aidfundraising event, Melbourne



## Collaboration:

### How did the Myanmar diaspora connect with other actors?

Survey respondents reported working and collaborating mainly with **local community organisations in Myanmar**. Almost 80% of respondents answered they interacted with these at least in a limited manner. There was also notable interaction with diaspora organisations. Survey respondents reported little interaction with government authorities in Myanmar, UN agencies or international organisations. A relatively high number of people reported to have interacted extensively (9.3%) or in a limited way (21.9%) with non-state actors (militia).

These survey findings were generally reflective of what was discussed in interviews. Most of the actors referred to in interviews as collaborators were **local CSOs in Myanmar, national opposition groups** (particularly the NUG), and **other diaspora organisations** in Australia and internationally. Reference was made to Australian NGOs involved in the Myanmar Campaign Network as providing ‘moral support, but no material support’.


**A lack of collaboration or connection with bigger humanitarian organisations** was noted by many. This was considered difficult partly because some international organisations were working through the military junta in Myanmar which the diaspora fundamentally disagreed with, and partly because of a lack of established relationships and trust between diaspora groups and institutional humanitarian actors.

**Interviewer:** *There are Australian based humanitarian organisations—INGOs, NGOs, UN agencies and government agencies—is there any cooperation with them in our actions?*

**Maung:** *There isn't any cooperation between us and these groups.*

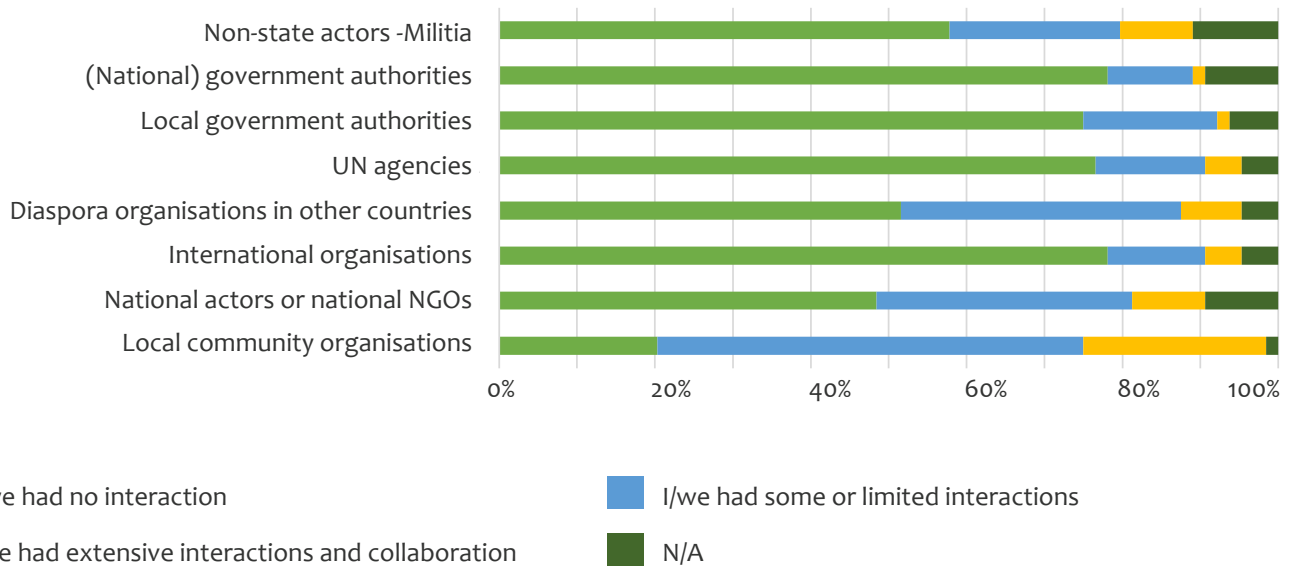
**Interviewer:** *Why is that?*

**Maung:** *It is our side to initiate that, since we are the one who are in need. But I do not know how to initiate that. This is out of my knowledge.*





**Q. How would you assess the level of interaction you or your community had with other actors responding to the crisis?**



## Impact and effectiveness: What made a difference?

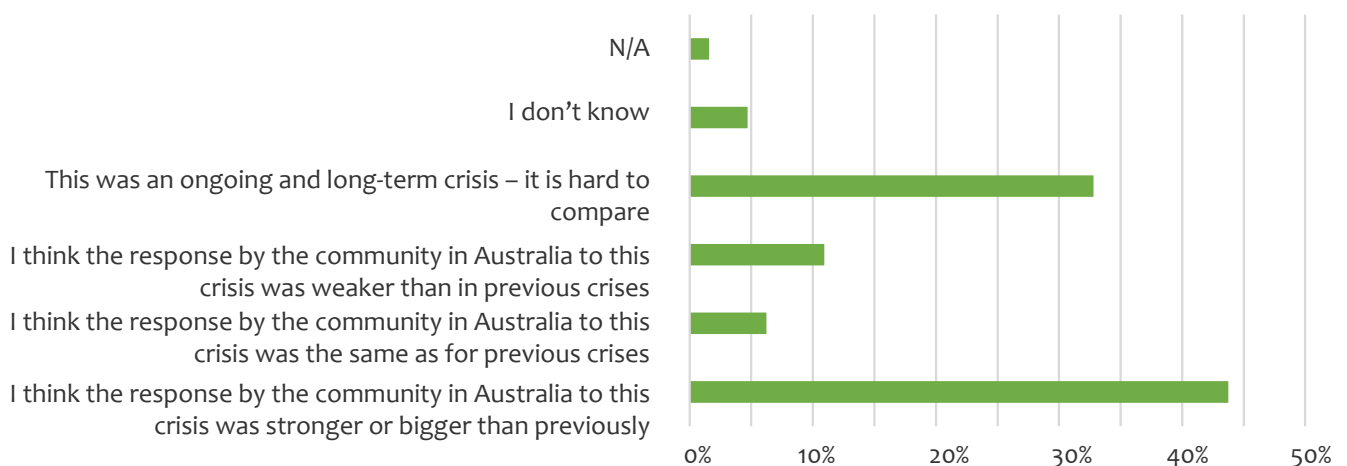
More than a year after the military coup in Myanmar, the assessment of the diaspora's response by research participants was generally favourable. 43.75% of survey respondents thought that the response by the community to the 2021 coup was stronger than in previous crises. Only 11% considered it to be weaker.

Drilling down further, survey respondents felt that **financial support provided by the diaspora community to those affected by the crisis was a highlight / made a positive difference**. Only 7.8% of people did not think that providing financial support was a highlight of the diaspora response. According to respondents, another

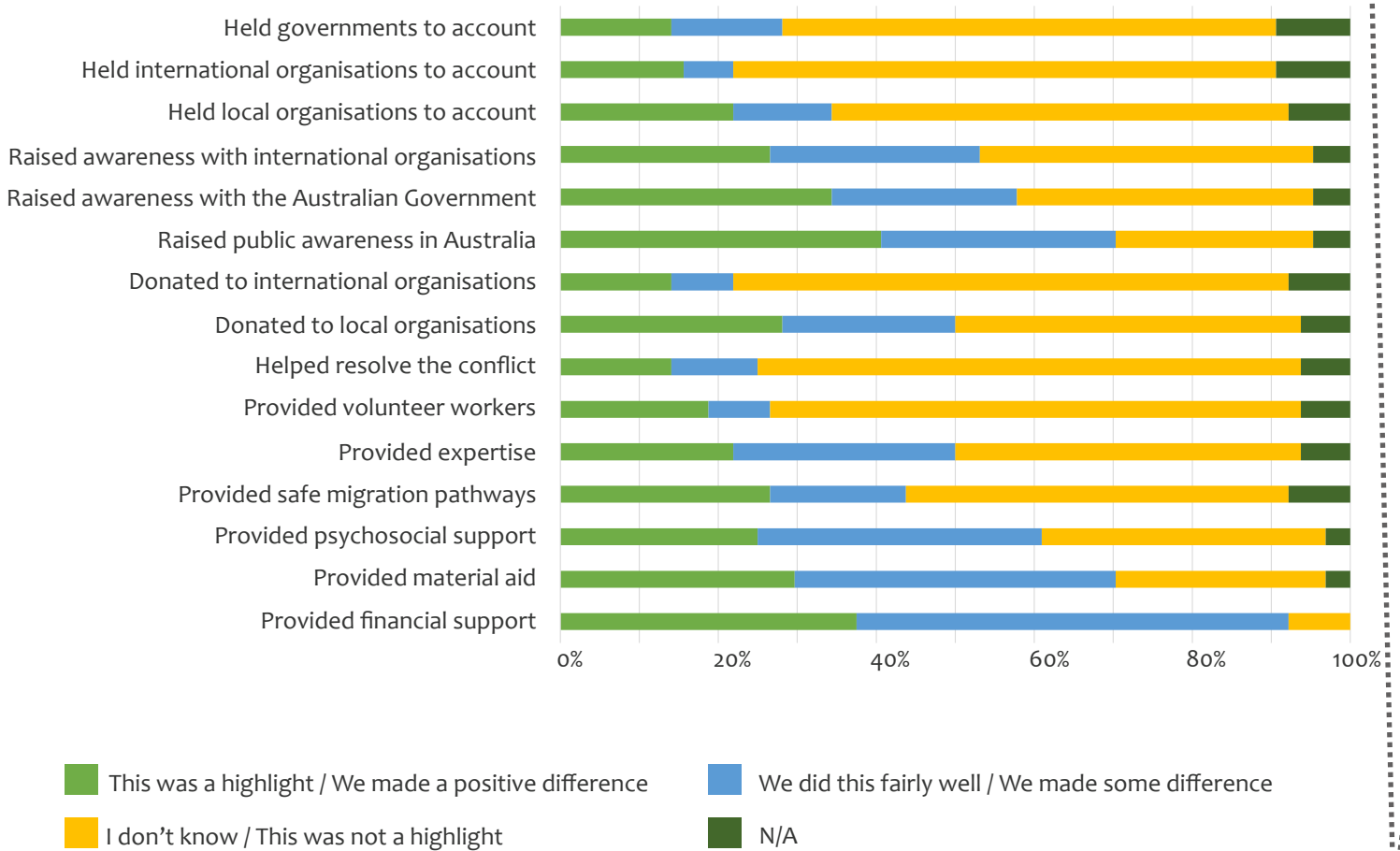
big success of the community response was in **raising awareness with the Australian public** (70.3% rated this as making a positive or some difference) and the Australian government (57.8% thought the community made a difference).

The actions that people considered to be **less impactful** in the community response were: donating to international organisations and holding them to account (70.3% felt this with not a highlight), and actions to 'help resolve the conflict' (68.75% felt this with not a highlight).

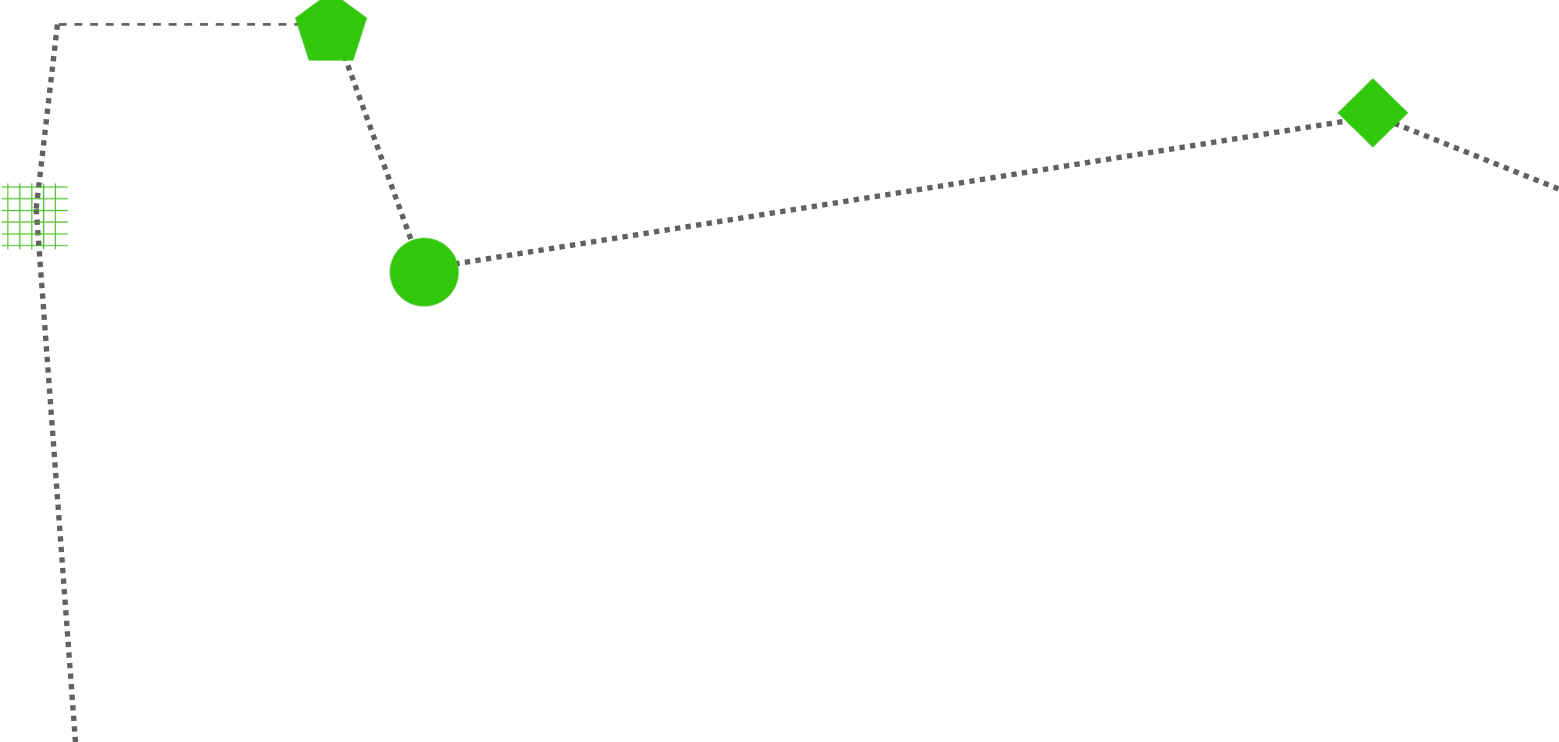
### Q. As compared to previous crises, do you think the community in Australia's response to this crisis was..?



## Q. Would you assess this as a highlight of your community's response to the crisis?







Interviewees elaborated more on these findings, offering nuances as to what they saw as effective and ineffective in community responses. With regards to financial contributions, some thought that these were **effective and impactful for those who were direct beneficiaries** and were instrumental in keeping people going through conflict, inflation and rising unemployment.

*Even it is a small amount here, in Myanmar 50 AUD would surely make a 50kg bag of rice, and a bag of rice may fill the necessary staple for like 10 people for 2 to 3 days. ... So, supports for getting food and drinking water is very effective, even if it is a very small amount of 50 or a 100 AUD. (Ei, translation)*

*We are doing right now as much as we can, but it is like building a termite mound with the effort of every small termite in it. So, for instance, if there are about ten countries with Myanmar community, then with contributions from each country ... our works could fill up a quarter of all the needs. (Zin, translation)*

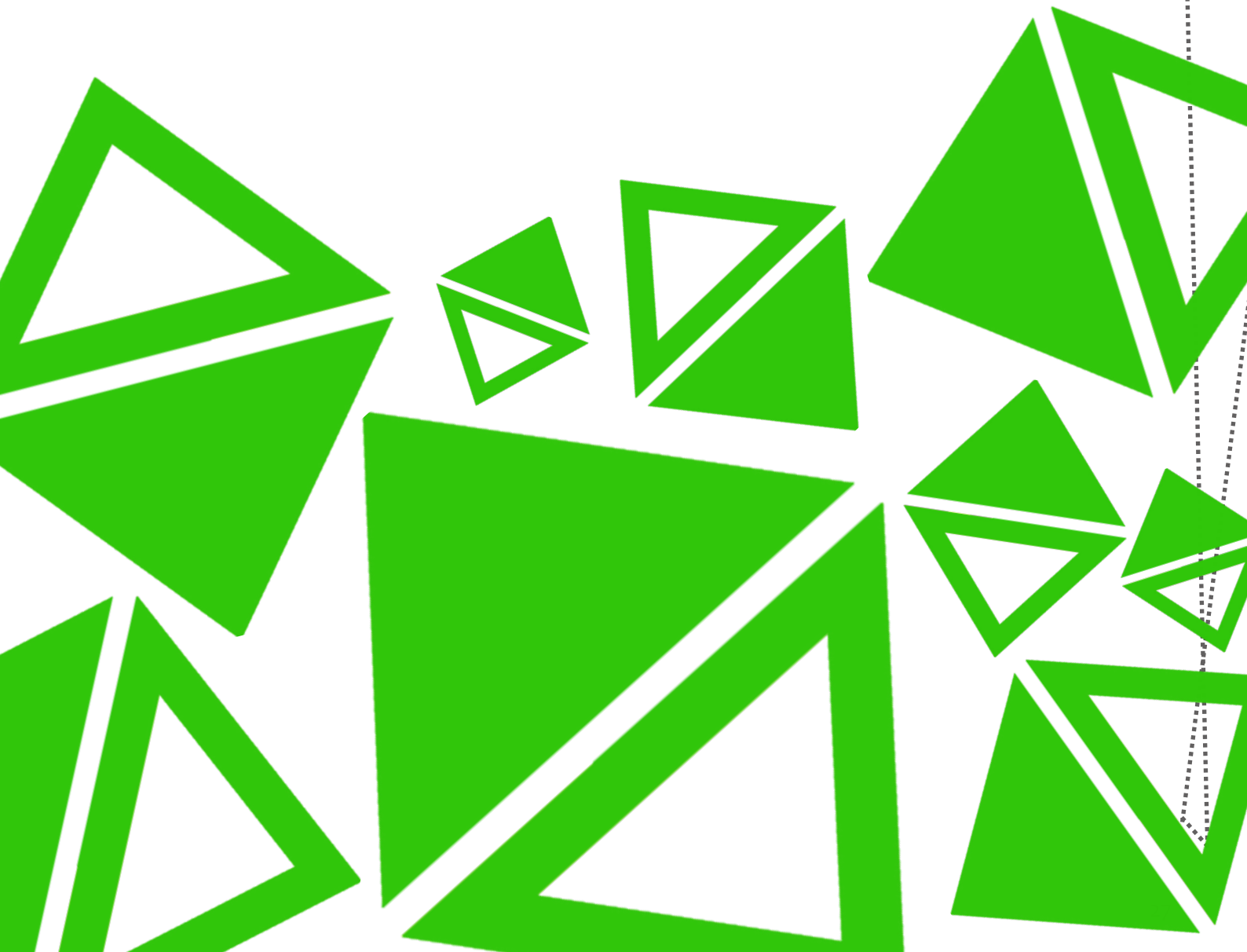
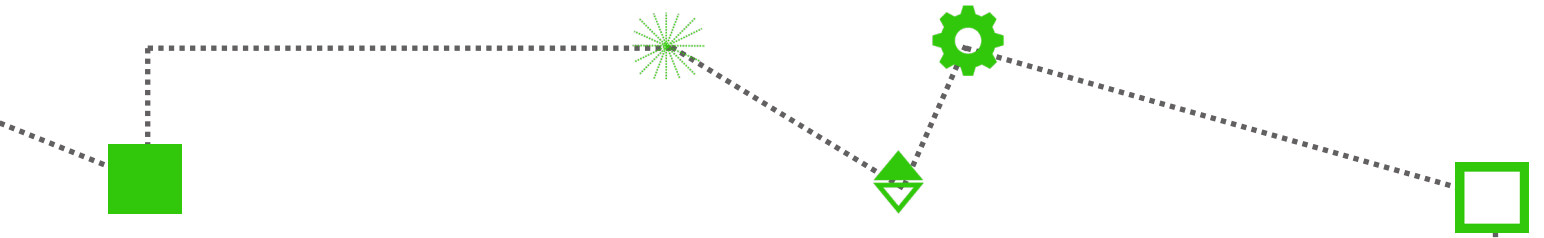
However, others also considered **the funding from the diaspora as insufficient to meet overall needs**. There was also frustration expressed at inadequate or **insufficient coordination** and **effective diaspora-led advocacy**.

*In my personal view, our objectives are the objective of Myanmar, so I wonder if it would be more effective in our advocacy if all the ethnic groups came together in this. We need to avoid demanding by individual groups, like Karen by itself, Karenni by itself, Bamar by itself and Chin by itself. And I think it would be better to make a single demand, by organising a committee or something like that. (Myat, translation)*

*We are satisfied with what we've done and what we've presented to them, but there has so far been no significant action from the Australian government. (Kav, translation)*

In contrast to the views of participants like Myat, who felt there was too much fragmentation along ethnic lines, there were others who said that **the diaspora response was 'revolutionary' for uniting Myanmar's ethnic groups**, and that the support and connections made between ethnic groups would have a long-term impact on the community in Australia and in Myanmar. Aye, a member of the Bamar ethnic majority in Myanmar, described it this way:

*During the Covid pandemic crisis happening all over the country, we crowdfunded and sent funding to Myanmar, and we collaborated with leaders of ethnic groups here and sent funding in priority to [the] regions suffering more seriously from the crisis. So, as I contacted them and we sent funding to Karen, Chin, Kayah and Shan states, they felt very glad. Because, among those who have suffered from the difficulties in border areas before their arrival to Australia, there are misunderstandings toward ethnic Bamar peoples, which is because of the Myanmar army's treatment toward them. So, as we approached them first to help their regions without expecting anything in return, they were very surprised by that. [...] I think this an actual revolution, to get to the point. This is an enormous change that presents a challenge for the improved values, ideology and paradigm of all our ethnic peoples. (translation)*





## Challenges:

### What was difficult or didn't work?

The challenges or difficulties most frequently discussed were about **capacities within the diaspora community**. This included a lack of resources and time for community members still establishing themselves in Australia, many of whom were described as 'not well-off'. There were also challenges associated with fundraising strategies that tended to be fragmented and raise money only from within the diaspora community itself and not from wider social networks. A future challenge was identified in terms of the long-term sustainability of diaspora financial support for people in Myanmar.

*But there may be many difficulties, because as far as I see people who arrive here are striving for themselves under the system of this country. They do not have time. So only by this fact of having no spare time, it is very hard to organise. (Ei, translation)*

*Everyone has become exhausted by doing these actions. (Htay, translation)*

*[When we fundraise], there is only support from each other in the Myanmar community... We sell Burmese foods and people from the Myanmar community buy it, so it is the same people from this community participating frequently. And, when we look at the amount of funds raised, it is not that much. (Tun, translation)*

*What we are doing right now is not a durable solution, either for the displaced person or for the country of Myanmar. It is just an emergency solution, for example sending foods and rations to the IDPs who are starving, this is just to solve the emergency problems. But for long term in order to make changes to the government, I think there are still many things to do to put pressure on the Myanmar government. (Myat, translation)*

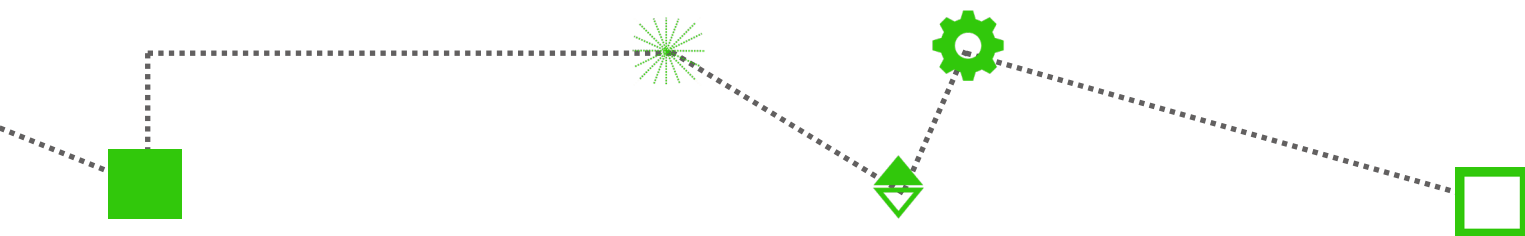
Another challenge described by interviewees was in **overcoming divisions and lack of trust between Myanmar's ethnic groups** to have a bigger collective impact. Even so, several participants expressed concern that they were unlikely to have an impact on Australia's foreign policy towards Myanmar regardless of how united a front they presented, because there was little interest by the Australian government in shifting its approach.

*I would like to suggest every one of us tries to become more united in our actions, by reducing the difference to work under the same objective. As you know, there are many different groups in the country right now, and if those who are doing support are also divided, the result would not be good. This is my opinion. (Hla, translation)*

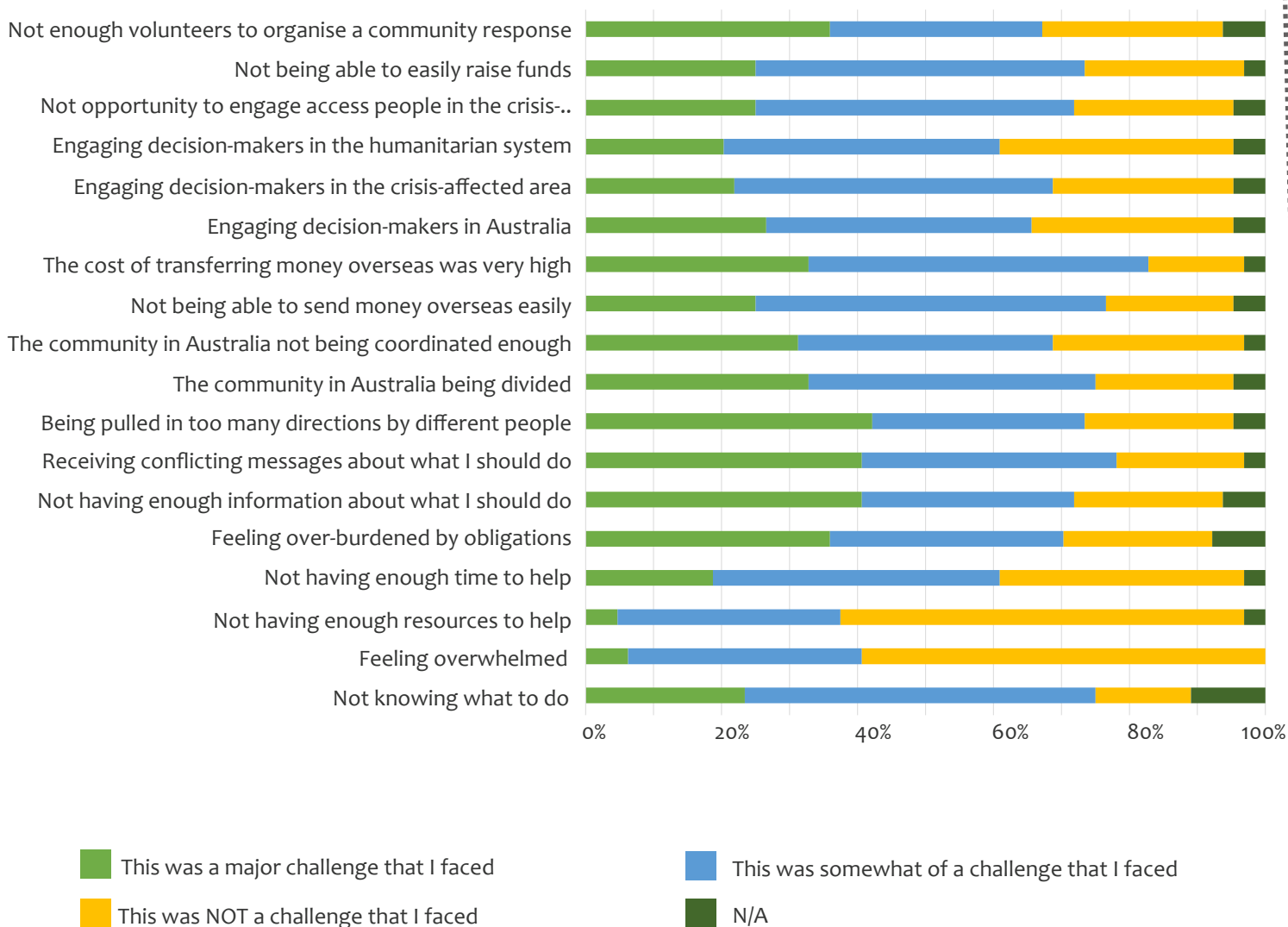
*Although it is important to lobby the government here, but... they know more about what is happening in our country in foreign policy than what we've known. It is like we are trying to educate those who already know. There is a saying that 'It is difficult to wake someone who is pretending to be asleep'. They are pretending to be asleep. If we are trying to wake them, we feel like we are wasting our energy... (Aye, translation)*

Many of these **challenges were reflected in survey responses**. According to the respondents, 'feeling overwhelmed' and 'not having enough resources to help' were the two major challenges that the diaspora community faced when responding to this crisis. People also reported not having enough time to help (36%) and difficulties with engaging decision-makers in Australia (27%), the crisis-affected area (27%) and the humanitarian system (34.4%), as challenges they faced. In general, people did not consider that the lack of information about what to do was a challenge for them.





## Q. Was this a challenge you faced in making a positive difference to the lives of people affected by the crisis?





## Recommendations:

### What could help diasporas respond to humanitarian crises in future?

Three overarching themes emerged from participants when asked what would help Pacific diasporas in Australia respond to future humanitarian crises. This included:

**1. Stronger connections, dialogue and funding support from the Australian government.**

Participants called for much stronger connections between the Myanmar diaspora and the Australian government to inform the government's humanitarian and aid program, refugee resettlement program, and its foreign policy position on post-coup Myanmar.

Participants called for the opening of 'some channels for us to meet and discuss'. As Ei said: 'We can engage in dialogue, share different views, talk and create ideas and solutions that are suitable for Myanmar'. Several participants thought the government could play a useful role in bringing together the different diaspora communities in Australia, ensuring dialogue was coordinated and informed by diverse perspectives. Finally, several participants called for government funding support for the Myanmar diaspora community to build its capacity to respond in future in a more coordinated way.

**2. Capacity building of diaspora organisations to respond to future crises.**

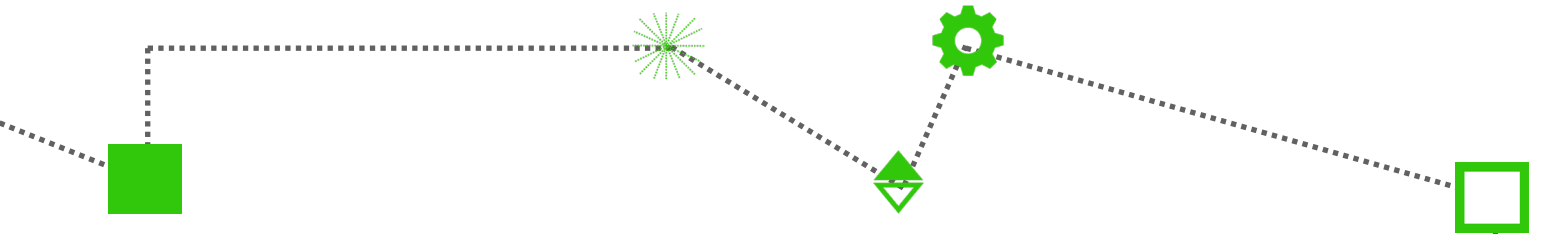
Participants recommend two main avenues to build the capacity of the diaspora community in Australia to strengthen their response to future crisis, including: support to develop

more **effective fundraising strategies** and a stronger **platform for coordination and collaboration** across ethnic groups. With regards to the latter, participants considered the need for an intermediary to bring groups together to discuss how coordination and collaboration can be strengthened going forwards.

*The main thing is the money. The money is the most important thing. (Kyaw)*

*The leaders need to meet and discuss. ... It would be best if there is someone who could initiate that. Now the groups are doing things individually, so it is like there is no connection between them. ... we need someone to liaise in between. (Myat, translation)*

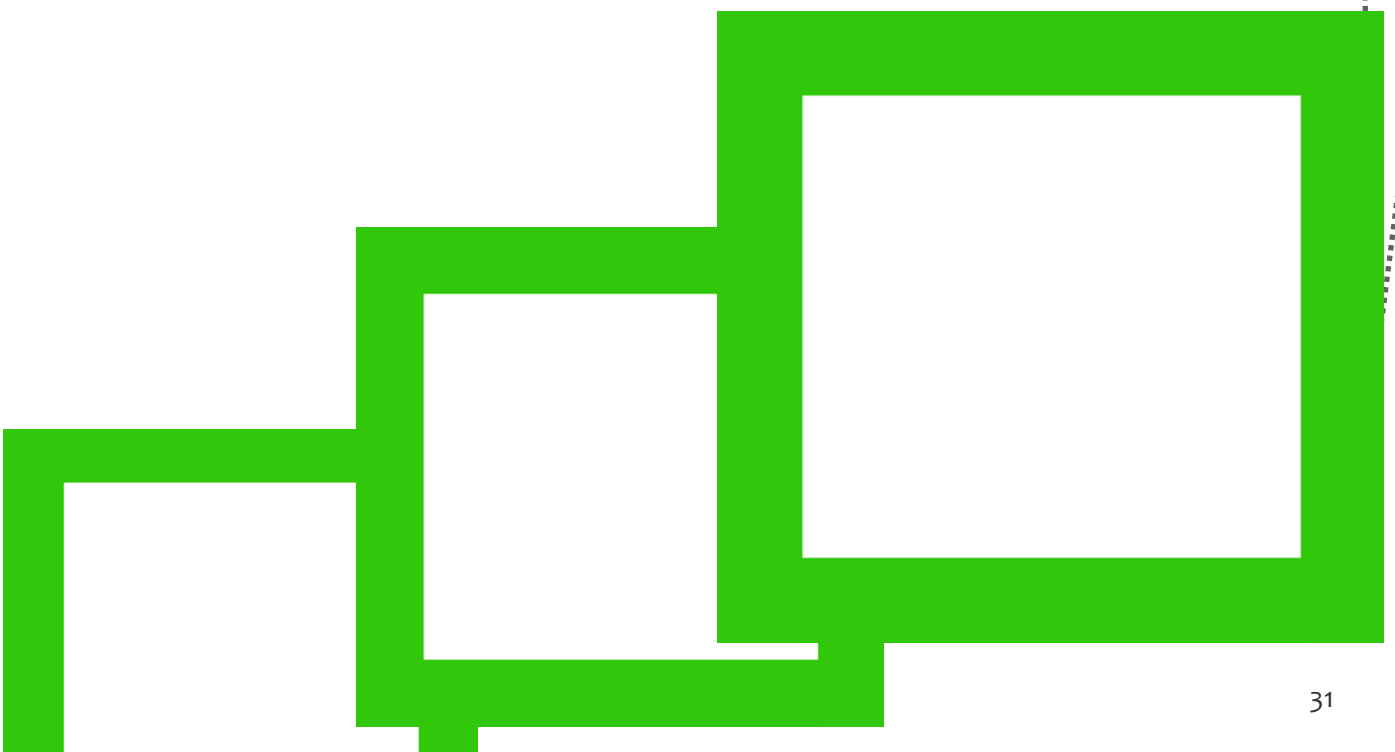
*Currently, people have very low trust on each other. And now the crisis is happening all around Myanmar, so some people would tend to provide support to their respective town, region or ethnic groups in Myanmar. I think if there was a good leadership to unite everyone's effort, then the response would be more effective. (Aung, translation)*



**3. Stronger collaboration and connections between diaspora organisations and the humanitarian sector.**

Participants felt there were opportunities for institutional humanitarian actors, including NGOs, UN and government agencies, to better connect and collaborate with diaspora organisations involved in responding to humanitarian needs in Myanmar. This could include creating channels for information-sharing, for partnering on projects, and for drawing on respective strengths of different types of organisations to deliver assistance to people in greatest need.

*We haven't received the opportunity to [collaborate with humanitarian organisations]. We are now in pursuit of this opportunity. If we have such an opportunity for cooperation, all of the communities from our side will be ready to make actions together. We want that very much. We could be more effective if we could do so. [We] know the actual situation very well, as we've connection with the people on the ground. And we know how we could become more effective. But we cannot achieve this by our capacity only... So, if these organisations are willing to work in cooperation with us, we more than welcome this. (Khaing, translation)*



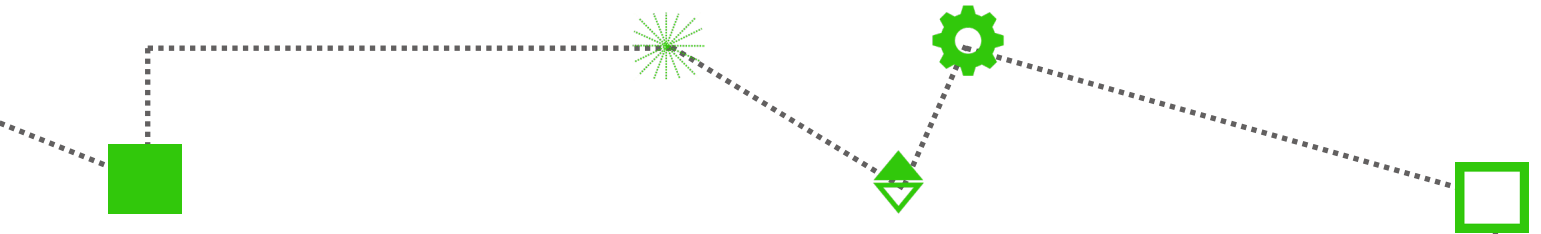




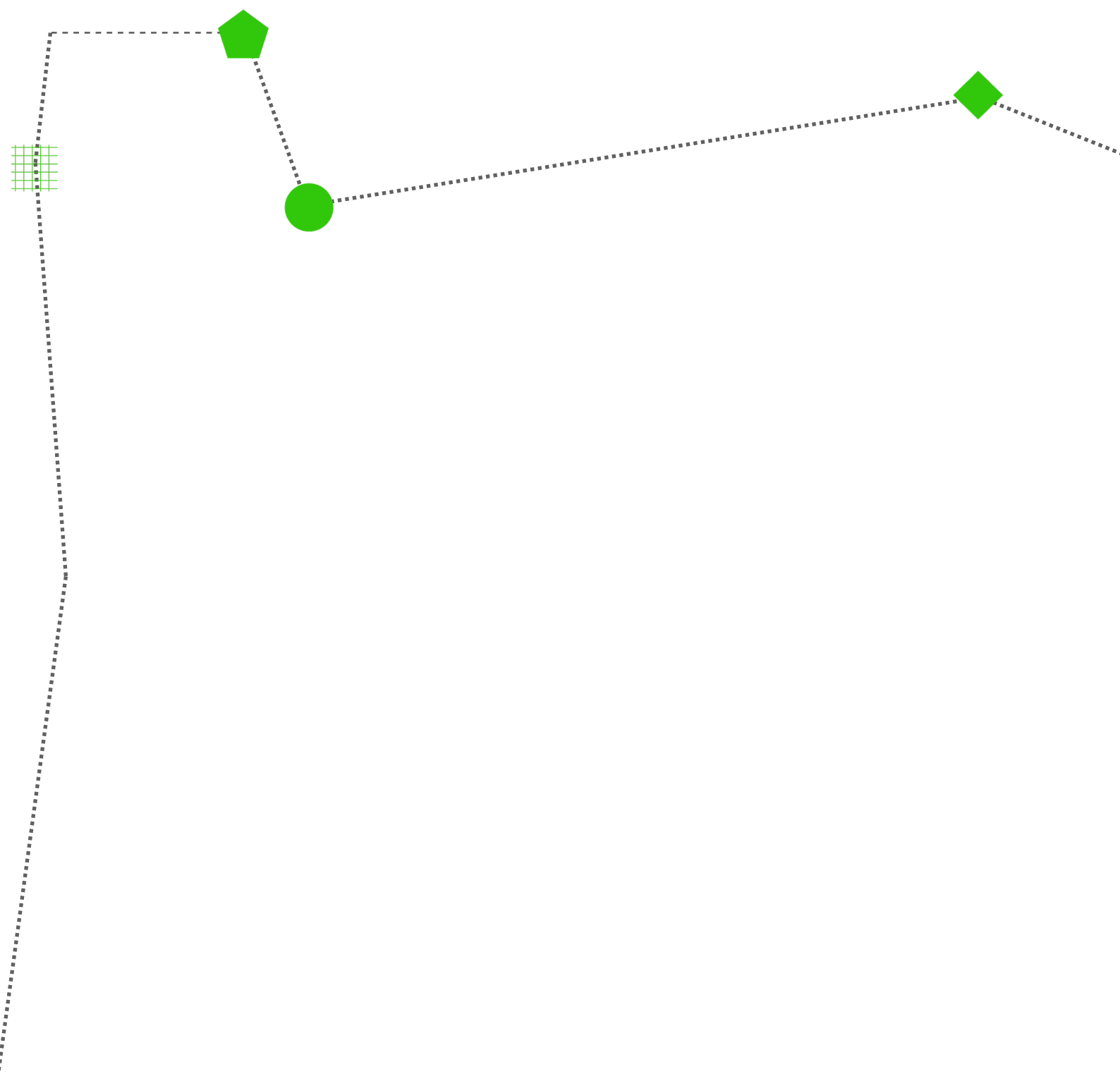
## Appendix | Quantitative data report

**Data:** The Myanmar data had three versions. Two online versions (English and Burmese) and one paper version, conducted by a research assistant. The surveys administered in person were later entered into an online survey, to analyse the data along the other two versions of the survey. The English version got 51 responses between July 28 and October 9. The Burmese version had two responses between September 4 and October 6, 2022. Finally, the paper-based version had 16 responses between July 20 and September 10, 2022. Some of these responses were discarded for not meeting eligibility criteria (i.e., substantially incomplete, consent, not living in Australia), bringing the total sample to 64.

**Demographics:** 93.8% of our sample was born in Myanmar, and 6.2% were born in a country other than Myanmar and Australia. The split between male and female respondents was 51.5% and 48.4% respectively. The sample was young, 73.4% of respondents being maximum 44 years old. Only 14.1% were older than 54. Many people in our sample (26.6%) were new in Australia, having arrived less than one year before they were surveyed. 20.3% had lived in Australia 3-5 years, and 23.4% between 11-20 years. Only 7.8% had more than 20 years living in Australia. Almost half (43.8%) of the sample came to Australia on a humanitarian visa, and 26.6% came to study. 12.5% were skilled migrants.



<b>Myanmar</b>		
Country of birth	Myanmar	60 (93.8%)
	Other	4 (6.2%)
	Total	64 (100.0%)
Gender	Male	33 (51.6%)
	Female	31 (48.4%)
	Total	64 (100.0%)
Age	35-44	20 (31.2%)
	25-34	17 (26.6%)
	18-24	10 (15.6%)
	45-54	8 (12.5%)
	55-64	8 (12.5%)
	75+	1 (1.6%)
	Total	64 (100.0%)
Years living in Australia	< 1 year	17 (26.6%)
	11-20 years	15 (23.4%)
	3-5 years	13 (20.3%)
	6-10 years	7 (10.9%)
	1-2 years	6 (9.4%)
	20 + years	5 (7.8%)
	I have always lived in Australia	1 (1.6%)
	Total	64 (100.0%)
In which visa did you first come to Australia?	Refugee or humanitarian	28 (43.8%)
	Student	17 (26.6%)
	Permanent skilled migrant	7 (10.9%)
	Family reunion	5 (7.8%)
	Prefer not to say	3 (4.7%)
	I sought asylum in Australia	1 (1.6%)
	Not sure	1 (1.6%)
	Temporary skilled migrant	1 (1.6%)
	Visitor	1 (1.6%)
	Total	64 (100.0%)









School of Social and Political Sciences