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DIASPORA HUMANITARIAN ENGAGEMENT IN LEBANON REAL-TIME REVIEW



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This Real-Time Review was conducted between September 2024 and February 2025 by a team from ITAR Consultants, including Charles Teffo, Fanny Tittel, Joelle Saliba, and Victoria Jordan.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Lebanese diaspora, estimated at 15.4 million, is among the largest globally and plays a vital economic and humanitarian role.

Its support spans financial aid, advocacy, and involvement in humanitarian and development efforts, particularly during major crises. This Real-Time Review commissioned by the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) and the Diaspora Emergency Action & Coordination initiative (DEMAC), examined diaspora's humanitarian and recovery responses to the escalation of the Israel-Hezbollah conflict between September 2024 and February 2025.

The study relied on a two-step approach:

Step 1: map existing diaspora initiatives (both humanitarian and recovery projects) through a systematic online review of publications globally. This mapping resulted in a database of 140 initiatives from organisations, along with hundreds of individual fundraising initiatives online.

Step 2: complement the mapping through Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with 21 organisations to explore diaspora engagement modalities and understand diaspora's role in responding to the humanitarian crisis in Lebanon. Interviews targeted both Lebanese diaspora organisations and Lebanese Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) collaborating with them.

Key takeaways from the Real-Time-Review

Dynamic but fragmented diaspora landscape

Most of the diaspora initiatives identified were created post-2019 in response to recent and current crises in Lebanon.¹ Initiatives focused on emergency relief, primarily through fundraising and in-kind donations for essentials like food, shelter, and medical supplies. These are led mostly by informal volunteer networks based primarily in Europe and North America. They are characterised by a high level of fragmentation and a lack of coordination, with many individual, short-term initiatives relying on close circles of relatives and launched with limited awareness of other actors.

Evolving organisational structures

Findings distinguish between two types of diaspora organisations: volunteer-led networks formed post- 2019 in response to Lebanon's recent crises, and older, more structured organisations established during earlier waves of emigration. While newer groups are still developing their internal systems and mainly focus on emergency relief, older organisations often function as formal NGOs or professional networks, with established fundraising mechanisms and broader mandates including both emergency and long-term development.

Collaboration with Lebanese CSOs on the ground

Findings also distinguish between two types of Lebanese CSOs. Lebanese CSOs created after the 2007 war are well-structured and integrated into national coordination mechanisms but have limited structured engagement with the diaspora. Older Lebanese CSOs, on the other hand, benefit from long-standing diaspora ties but face challenges in visibility and outreach within the diaspora and in adapting their programmes to address more recent humanitarian needs in Lebanon.

Untapped potential for coordination

The study highlights a significant potential for enhanced coordination among diaspora organisations and between diaspora organisations and Lebanese CSOs to optimise future recovery efforts and leverage diverse expertise and resources.

¹ These include multiple challenges in recent years linked to and resulting from the economic crisis, the Beirut port explosions, and currently the conflict between Israel and Hezbollah.

Recommendations

To Diaspora Organisations

- **Replicate positive engagement models:** Design initiatives that go beyond fundraising to reinforce identity, belonging, and solidarity with Lebanon. Cultural events, heritage-based campaigns, and Lebanon-focused storytelling have shown strong potential to re-engage communities, especially in periods of donor fatigue.
- **Expand targets beyond first generation diaspora:** Develop programming that connects with second and third generation Lebanese abroad, many of whom feel distant from traditional community structures. Engagement through education, the arts, digital platforms, and innovation can resonate more deeply with younger generations.
- **Target companies:** Focus outreach on Lebanese-owned businesses and companies with significant Lebanese staff. These actors are well positioned to direct corporate responsibility funds toward diaspora initiatives and can serve as multipliers when individual giving slows.
- **Strengthen visibility and reporting practices:** Standardise the documentation of activities, financial flows, and impact. Clear reporting and communications help build trust with donors, partners, and coordination mechanisms, while also positioning diaspora organisations as credible humanitarian actors.

To Lebanon-based CSOs

- **Reach out to existing initiatives fostering diaspora engagement:** Proactively connect with platforms and networks that facilitate engagement with the Lebanese diaspora. These structures can offer visibility, access to resources, and the trust-based pathways needed to develop sustainable partnerships beyond personal or ad hoc connections.

To International Humanitarian Actors and Donors

- **Develop specific funding mechanisms involving the diaspora:** Establish funding streams that reflect the operational models of Lebanese diaspora organisations. These mechanisms should reduce administrative barriers, offer flexible or core support, and enable equitable collaboration with local actors in Lebanon.
- **Proactively engage diaspora in coordination platforms:** Ensure Lebanese diaspora organisations have a consistent role within national and international coordination structures. Participation should not be limited to crisis moments, but integrated into preparedness, response, and recovery processes.
- **Actively facilitate long-term partnerships:** Support structured, sustained collaboration between diaspora organisations and Lebanese CSOs. This includes co-creation of proposals, formal agreements, and opportunities for mutual learning, especially in sectors where diaspora actors offer technical expertise or external networks.

To Non-Governmental Organizations

- **Provide capacity development to diaspora organisations:** Offer tailored support to help diaspora organisations strengthen their internal systems, particularly around grant management, compliance, financial accountability, and strategic planning. This is critical for organisations aiming to scale or engage with institutional donors.
- **Support specific networking opportunities between diaspora organisations:** Enable peer-to-peer connections between Lebanese diaspora organisations across countries and sectors. Targeted networking support is especially valuable in contexts where organisational ecosystems are still emerging or fragmented.
- **Supporting diaspora organisations and Lebanese CSOs in their outreach and engagement strategies for funding:** Many diaspora and local organisations face challenges in mobilising support beyond immediate personal networks or moments of crisis. Targeted support is needed to design long-term outreach strategies that appeal to individuals and companies across the diaspora. This includes helping organisations develop clear messaging, identify effective engagement models, and build on approaches that have already proven successful.
- **Develop a trusted Label for Lebanese CSOs to engage with the diaspora:** Trust remains a significant barrier for diaspora organisations seeking to expand their partnerships with local actors. Introducing a recognised certification system for Lebanese CSOs could help address concerns around transparency, accountability, and neutrality. A Label grounded in clear principles and operational standards would serve as a practical tool to facilitate engagement. Building such a system could draw on existing capacity-building efforts and be developed in collaboration with national and international stakeholders already active in the space.

DEMAC is a global initiative of the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) aiming at enhancing mutual knowledge and coordination, communication and coherence between diaspora humanitarian actors and the institutional humanitarian system.

Responsible for content:

DEMAC – Diaspora Emergency Action & Coordination
At Danish Refugee Council
Borgergade 10
1300 Copenhagen
Denmark

Email: info@demac.org
Phone: +45 6026 8116
Website: www.demac.org

Danish Refugee Council (Lebanon)
4th Floor, Al Boustany Building
Peres Street, Beirut
Lebanon
Email: sabrina.derham@drc.ngo
maya.hamzeh@drc.ngo
Phone: +961 79 100 377
Website: www.drc.ngo/lebanon

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