



DEMAC

DIASPORA  
EMERGENCY ACTION  
& COORDINATION

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DIASPORA  
HUMANITARIAN  
ENGAGEMENT IN  
AFGHANISTAN  
REAL-TIME REVIEW

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DRC DANISH  
REFUGEE  
COUNCIL



MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS  
OF DENMARK  
*Danida*



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# ABOUT DEMAC

Diaspora Emergency Action and Coordination (DEMAC) is a global initiative working for a deeper understanding of diasporas as humanitarian actors and striving for better coordination between diaspora organizations and the institutional humanitarian ecosystem.

The mission of DEMAC is two-fold:

- 1) to enable inclusive coordination and collaboration among diaspora organizations providing humanitarian assistance, and across diaspora organizations and institutional humanitarian actors, and
- 2) to facilitate higher levels of engagement and visibility for diaspora organizations in the humanitarian system.

# DEMAC AIMS AT

01

Enhancing knowledge

between diasporas  
and humanitarian  
institutions

02

Increasing awareness

on diasporas'  
humanitarian  
interventions

03

Improving coordination

communication and  
coherence of  
humanitarian response

# WHY DIASPORA?

Work with diasporas has shown that diaspora organizations are multi-sectoral, fast responding actors who work transnationally, including in countries facing humanitarian crises. Having a connection with and understanding of their country of origin or heritage plays a vital role in humanitarian assistance where diaspora organizations often are part of the first response in the aftermath of a disaster.

Diaspora are also key actors when it comes to raising the alarm in times of crisis. The ease and frequency of communication between local communities and diaspora organizations means that they can be alerted in real-time, and their capacity to collect and disperse funds rapidly ensures that they are a key factor in unlocking the first responses in crisis settings. In hard-to-reach places where access may be an issue, diaspora organizations have a unique advantage due to their local connections and ties. They use their transnational position to respond to the growing demands for remote management and cross-border response in countries where international actors have a limited presence, and to advocate on behalf of crisis affected populations in the policy arenas of their countries and regions of residence.

Supporting diaspora as part of a broader humanitarian ecosystem to play a key role in humanitarian responses and provide vital support to communities in countries of origin contributes to the relevance, effectiveness, and sustainability of humanitarian responses. Considering their transnational identity and close local ties, it is also strongly linked to the localization agenda, one of the main commitments under the Grand Bargain. Localization aims to strengthen the resilience of local communities and to support local and national responders on the front line. UNOCHA has called furthermore, for an indispensable opening of the resource base of humanitarian action by integrating 'non-traditional actors' - such as diasporas - to enhance the effectiveness of the humanitarian response and render it interoperable.

Diaspora organizations are part of and play a central role in localization. Many can be considered front-line responders themselves, making direct and concrete contributions to emergency responses in their home countries. Others work closely with local authorities, local organizations and community groups, providing technical and financial support, playing a role in advocacy and linking local actors with additional sources of support.

Diaspora organizations are heterogeneous - they have different capacities, values and approaches and as part of a broader humanitarian community can play a valuable and agile role in humanitarian responses. However, assistance provided by diaspora organizations and the formal humanitarian actors often follow parallel tracks, resulting in a lack of mutual understanding and recognition, and thus a lack of coordination and collaboration that would be of benefit to the overall response.

## Acronyms and abbreviations

ACBAR	Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief & Development
AKS	Afghan Knowledge Services
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DEMAC	Diaspora Emergency Action & Coordination
DFID	Department for International Development (UK)
DO	Diaspora Organization
DRC	Danish Refugee Council
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FSC	Food Security Cluster
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HRP	Humanitarian Response Plan
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
INCAS	International Conflict and Security Ltd.
KIIs	Key Informant Interviews
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization
MoE	Ministry of Economy
MoPH	Ministry of Public Health
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
RTR	Real-Time Review
UN	United Nations
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USD	United States Dollar
WFP	World Food Program

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

When the Taliban took control of Kabul in August 2021, the already challenging humanitarian context in Afghanistan was only further complicated. Even before, the country's humanitarian situation was one of the worst in the world due to conflict, recurrent natural disasters, chronic poverty, drought and the COVID-19 pandemic. New challenges to human rights and basic freedoms, especially those of women, have arisen.

Afghan diaspora organizations have supported their community at large and have continued to do so after August 2021. To better understand the scope and priorities of the support of diaspora organizations, the Diaspora Emergency Action and Coordination Initiative (DEMAC) conducted an initial Real-Time Review (RTR) of Diaspora Humanitarian Engagement in Afghanistan between August and October 2021 to provide a rapid analysis of diaspora response to the new situation in Afghanistan. That RTR identified a responsive and rapid self-mobilization of Afghan diaspora and DOs together with a sudden rise in advocacy and fundraising campaigns from August 2021 onward.

A follow-up Real-Time Review was commissioned by DEMAC in Spring 2022 to explore possible changes and developments in diaspora humanitarian engagement in Afghanistan. This current RTR aims to capture the impact, outreach, and organization of diaspora emergency responses within Afghanistan and to assess if and how the recently arrived diaspora is strengthening the humanitarian response. In addition, a gender lens has been used to assess the response from Afghan diaspora women organizations and networks.

The review was conducted from April to June with the main data collected in May 2022 through review of secondary literature, ten key informant interviews and nine focus group discussions with diaspora organizations and their representatives in country, beneficiaries of diaspora assistance and international organizations operational in Afghanistan. Twenty-two diaspora organizations participated directly in the Real-Time Review and sixty diaspora organizations were included in an online media monitoring. Data was collected with staff and beneficiaries located in Kabul, Baghlan and Uruzgan in addition to remote interviews and discussions with participants from Europe, North America and Australia.

The RTR identified two recurring horizontal themes driving the diaspora humanitarian engagement. First, the absence of women and girls' fundamental rights informs and frames diaspora organization response in manifold ways and cuts across all emerging themes of diaspora response in Afghanistan. Second, the topic of food insecurity is compounded by diaspora organizations' perceptions of skewed beneficiary selection and inequality in food distribution by the World Food Program (WFP) and their implementing partners.

In addition, the RTR provides an overview of the current situation in Afghanistan experienced by Afghan diaspora organizations, elaborates on the operation and organization of diaspora support, summarizes challenges to fund humanitarian assistance by diaspora and explores the subject of coordination between diaspora organizations and with other more traditional humanitarian actors.

This RTR of diaspora humanitarian engagement concludes that changes have taken place since 2021. Diaspora are not only encountering new difficulties to deliver humanitarian activities, but they are also in the process of adapting to these challenges. The RTR highlights how newer organizations are complementing existing DOs and providing additionality. While there remain many hurdles for diaspora humanitarian engagement, particularly in terms of transfer of funding and operations in the altered country context, there are also growing opportunities in terms of coordinating with more institutional humanitarian actors.

# 1. INTRODUCTION

**The 15th of August marks one year since the Taliban took over Afghanistan as coalition troops withdrew. The rapid change in context has further complicated an already challenging situation with profound effects. As the de-facto ruling authorities slowly establish governance arrangements, old challenges have quickly been replaced with new ones.**

Even before the Taliban took over power, Afghanistan's humanitarian situation was one of the worst in the world. Over forty years of conflict and contestation, recurrent natural disasters, chronic poverty, drought and the COVID-19 pandemic had already devastated its people.<sup>1</sup> Now, the de-facto ruling authorities govern over a precarious humanitarian situation where it is reported that 95 percent of households do not have enough to eat.<sup>2</sup> Half of all children under five — around 3.2 million — were expected to suffer from acute malnutrition by the end of 2021 and about one million are on the brink of starvation.<sup>3</sup> The Taliban has quickly rolled back women's rights advances and media freedom and reports of revenge killings and human rights violations proliferate. The United Nations (UN) identifies that Taliban forces were responsible for nearly 40 percent of civilian deaths and injuries in the first six months of 2021.<sup>4</sup> While levels of conflict have reduced greatly, several new challenges to human rights and basic freedoms have arisen. Cessation of aid, frozen assets, sanctions and financial restrictions fuel a growing and complex economic crisis. It is suggested that Afghanistan is on the verge of yet another catastrophe, civil war or geographical disintegration.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> OCHA (2021). Afghanistan: Humanitarian Snapshot (As of 24 September 2021). Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/afghanistan/afghanistan-humanitarian-snapshot-24-september-2021>

<sup>2</sup> World Food Program (2021). Afghanistan Food Security Update #2 (22 September 2021). Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/afghanistan/afghanistan-food-security-update-2-22-september-2021>

<sup>3</sup> Omer, S. (2022). Afghanistan Crisis: Hunger in the Land. World Vision. Available at: <https://www.worldvision.org/disaster-relief-news-stories/afghanistan-hunger> Accessed 07 June 2022.

<sup>4</sup> [https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/unama\\_poc\\_midyear\\_report\\_2021\\_26\\_july.pdf](https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/unama_poc_midyear_report_2021_26_july.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Malikzada, N. (2021). Afghanistan's future after the Taliban takeover: Civil war or disintegration? Available at: <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/southasiasource/afghanistans-future-after-the-taliban-takeover/>

Faced with this exigency, Afghan diaspora organizations (DOs) continue to support their community at large. The Diaspora Emergency Action and Coordination Initiative (DEMAC) conducted an initial Real-Time Review (RTR) in Afghanistan between August and October 2021 to provide a rapid analysis of diaspora response to the Taliban taking control of Kabul and Afghanistan. That RTR identified a responsive and rapid self-mobilization of 60 Afghan DOs together with a sudden rise in fundraising campaigns from August 2021 onward. Early successes from DOs were observed in awareness-raising and advocacy.

This follow-up RTR explores the evolution of diaspora response since August 2021. It contributes to continued efforts to enhance knowledge and awareness within the international humanitarian system about the significance and role played by diaspora within the specific context of Afghanistan. It assesses if and how the recently arrived diaspora is strengthening the humanitarian response of older, existing DOs. Specifically, this RTR aims:

- To capture the impact, outreach, and organization of diaspora emergency responses within Afghanistan;
- To assess if and how the recently arrived diaspora is strengthening the humanitarian response; and
- To use a gender lens to assess the response from Afghan diaspora women organizations and networks, especially when assessing perceived and actual impacts of the humanitarian response from the perspectives of diaspora organizations and recipient communities.



## 2. METHODOLOGY

A mixed methods design with a meaningful participatory approach was used to explore the impact, outreach, and organization of diaspora emergency responses within Afghanistan. A gender lens was incorporated into all stages of the RTR process with purposeful sampling of existing and emerging women's organizations and networks, and direct questions posed to explore how all DOs are responding to gender needs in their activities.

### **Desk Review and Online Media Monitoring**

The RTR began with a desk review, online media monitoring and a mapping phase to collect existing information about Afghan diaspora humanitarian engagement. The desk review assessed the scale of the current Afghan diaspora and ensured representation of DOs within key informant interviews.

A mapping exercise was completed to establish an overview of the number and location of active DOs engaged in the humanitarian response and explore their specific areas of activity. Over 100 websites were initially accessed and narrowed down to 60 based on recent activity. Online media monitoring included the daily review of online diaspora organization relevant communications and activities, such as crowdfunding platforms, fundraising pages linked to networks, social media activity including Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn together with accessible WhatsApp groups and other direct contacts within the selected diaspora organizations and networks. In total, 60 DOs were included in the RTR's online media monitoring. Just under 30 were selected from the previous RTR to provide a longitudinal overview and the remainder were new to the RTR process. The content of websites and posts were translated from Dari and Pashto and reported in English.

### **Fieldwork**

Fieldwork consisted of continued online media monitoring, key informant interviews and a brief survey. Almost all focus group discussions (FGD) and several Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) were conducted in Dari and Pashto. The RTR included as wide a range of ethnicities as the sampling methods and RTR timescales permitted.

Key informant interviews were held with relevant stakeholders, including 19 of the 60 DOs that were part of the mapping process. These organizations were selected based on their knowledge and area of expertise as:

- individuals or group representatives of the Afghan diaspora at international level involved in ongoing humanitarian and development activities;
- international humanitarian partners working in-country on policy and program-related interventions;
- DO representatives based in-country, working closely with other DOs, liaising with the Taliban and directly with beneficiary groups.

Focus group discussions were selected to provide as broad a perspective as possible ranging from male and female staff of DOs located internationally (undertaken on Zoom) and nationally (a mixture of in-person and remote). Out of seven locations selected in Afghanistan, three FGDs were carried out with available beneficiary groups in Kabul (urban), Baghlan (peri-urban) and Uruzgan (rural) provinces, involving a total of 18 beneficiary participants. Beneficiaries in other locations were either unable to meet within RTR timescales or faced mobility or technical issues and were unable to participate. One beneficiary FGD was conducted with men and women in person, a women-only beneficiary FGD was carried out remotely due to mobility restrictions and a final beneficiary FGD convened with disabled men was also carried out in person. The remaining FGDs involved DO participants from Europe (Belgium, Germany, Netherlands and the UK), North America (USA and Canada) and Australia.

**A total of 22 DOs participated in the RTR.**

Table 1: Means of collecting data from the 22 DO

KIIs	6
FGDs	16

Table 2: KII participants (DO and others)

DOs	6
International humanitarian organizations	4
Total KIIs	10

Table 3: FGD participants

DOs	16
Beneficiaries	18
Total FGDs	9

**Limitations**

The scope and timing of the RTR necessarily limited the number of organizations and stakeholders who could be engaged. Despite these limitations, and in order to mitigate challenges and avoid a ‘wrong’ time review, the RTR included a participatory approach to maximize the voices of the diaspora within our findings. Care was taken to include a variety of engagement methods, including the importance of picking up the phone and making direct contact with organizations rather than relying on email alone. Whilst the unique benefits of a RTR provide in-depth understanding of the situation on the ground in Afghanistan at a time of crisis, despite our active mitigation steps, the necessary RTR parameters do limit representativeness with some organizations unavailable to participate within its timescales. Two organizations who were invited to contribute did not respond for example.

The complex situation in Afghanistan poses numerous risks and challenges to DOs and there were particular sensitivities regarding information disclosure. There was a reluctance to give specifics on fundraising and exact sums of monies raised. DOs were also often understandably reluctant to discuss operational details. Care was taken to ensure the report’s approach was mindful of ethics and sensitivity and maintains the dignity of all its stakeholders in exploring their very recent lived experience. As a result, the RTR report assures confidentiality, and some participating organizations are not identified.

Diaspora organizations are, by definition, located outside of their country of origin. However, it has been challenging in this RTR to make a clear separation between diaspora organizations, their representatives in Afghanistan and local organizations due to a lack of clear boundaries and definitions of each of these categories. DOs may not be officially registered, and some originate from informal networks. The research team has attempted to make clear references throughout the report to what has been said by Afghan diaspora living outside the country and their Afghan connections inside the country. However, at times, it was not possible to make a clear and strict differentiation. For the purpose of reporting, a “DO in Afghanistan”, means representatives of a DO in Afghanistan. Even though this terminology seems contradictory, it should enable the reader to differentiate data originating from Afghan diaspora outside of their country of origin and their contacts supporting diaspora activities inside Afghanistan.



# 3. THE AFGHAN DIASPORA

Even prior to the Taliban taking control of Kabul in August 2021 in Afghanistan, DOs faced an evolving set of challenges in their engagement with the humanitarian and development sectors under the former government of Afghanistan. The figures are stark:

- As of the end of 2020, an estimated total of 4.6 million Afghans were living in internal displacement.<sup>6</sup> Among the population of internally displaced persons (IDPs) globally, Afghanistan hosted the highest number of IDPs due to disasters and the fifth highest number of IDPs due to conflict and violence.<sup>7</sup>
- Globally, an estimated 5.85 million Afghans lived outside their home country as of mid-year 2020. Female migrants accounted for nearly 45 per cent of all Afghan migrants, and this share is lower than the global average of 48 per cent of female international migrants.<sup>8</sup>
- Nearly 74 per cent of the estimated 5.85 million Afghan migrants worldwide reside in neighboring countries in Southern Asia -more than 46 per cent and 27 per cent reside in the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan respectively.<sup>9</sup> Outside the immediate region of Afghanistan, the largest and oldest communities of Afghans exist in Germany; large communities also exist in the United States, the United Arab Emirates, Russia, Turkey, Canada, United Kingdom, Sweden, Netherlands, Australia and Austria.<sup>10</sup> Additional diaspora numbers facilitated directly by the international community in and around the August 2021 period have not yet been finalized. Many hundreds are still in a processing stage prior to integration. As a result, the recent diaspora is finding a foothold in new countries such as Hungary, Mexico and New Zealand.

<sup>6</sup> Migration Data Portal (2020). Total Internally Displaced Afghans as of December 2020. Available at: <https://www.migrationdataportal.org/infographic/total-internally-displaced-afghans-december-2020> Accessed 20 June 2022.

<sup>7</sup> Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (2021). Internal Displacement. Available at: <https://www.internal-displacement.org/database/displacement-data> Accessed 20 June 2022.

<sup>8</sup> Migration Data Portal (2020). Afghan migrants by sex, mid-2020. Available at: <https://www.migrationdataportal.org/infographic/afghan-migrants-sex-mid-2020> Accessed 20 June 2022.

<sup>9</sup> UN DEAS (2020). International migrant Stock. Available at: <https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/content/international-migrant-stock> Accessed 20 June 2022.

<sup>10</sup> Wikipedia (2022). Afghan diaspora. Available at: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Afghan\\_diaspora](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Afghan_diaspora) Accessed 20 June 2022.

- In 2020<sup>11</sup>, an estimated USD 788.9 million in remittances were received in Afghanistan. Remittances accounted for nearly 4.1 per cent of Afghanistan's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), making it the fifth highest recipient country in Southern Asia in terms of share of national GDP. However, the security developments in 2021 were expected to cause a drop in annual remittances to 0.6 billion, but this figure is not yet available.

The collapse of the former government and the de-facto authorities have compounded already insuperable obstacles with a new set of regulations and restrictions that are profoundly impacting civil society organizations. External restrictions have vastly reduced DO access to domestic and external funds. Physical restrictions have been placed on women's mobility, their ability to attend offices and to work in the field. All civil society organizations (CSOs) including non-government organizations (NGOs) and DOs have had to re-register and are subject to direct monitoring and engagement with the Taliban.

Accompanying exponential increases in levels of poverty, food insecurity and human rights challenges in Afghanistan have contributed to a shifting set of priorities for existing and active DOs. New DOs wanting to support the Afghan population at a time of dire need have been established. Almost all DOs now have an element of humanitarian activity in their portfolio, as will be elaborated upon in this report. For most, this is now their main objective and activity. Former advocacy-focused and women-led DOs have diversified their activities to include basic food and non-food distributions alongside their human rights activities.

<sup>11</sup> Migration Data Portal (2021). Remittances to and from Afghanistan. Available at: <https://www.migrationdataportal.org/infographic/remittances-and-afghanistan> Accessed 20 June 2022.

The following tables provide descriptive information about the DOs who participated in this RTR. Nine percent of participant DOs were newly formed, and all have been delivering elements of humanitarian activities since August 2021:

Table 4: Year of establishment of the 22 Interviewed DOs:

Year of formation	Number of interviewed ADOs
Prior to August 2021	20
Post August 2021	2

DOs operate in multiple countries and locations. Some have activities only in their country of residence, whereas others work both in country of origin, country of residence and transit countries for Afghan migrants and refugees. From the DOs involved in this RTR, the majority were operating inside Afghanistan and Pakistan in addition to offering activities to diaspora communities in their countries of residence, as demonstrated in figure 1.

Table 5: Country of Operation of the 22 Interviewed DOs:

Country of operation	Number
Afghanistan	10
Germany	2
UK	3
Netherlands	3
USA	2
Pakistan	6
Belgium	2
Italy	1

There is not a standard type or legal format for DOs, including for Afghan DOs. Whereas previous DEMAC research has already indicated that DOs usually originate from informal networks, DOs will normally go through a development of becoming more formalized in an effort to increase their professionalization and access. Yet, differences continue to exist, as is shown in the table on the following page referring to the 22 DOs involved in this RTR. Whereas it remains unclear how many DOs are properly registered in Afghanistan to conduct humanitarian operations, various data from the research indicates that most DOs are not. This assumption originates from anecdotal evidence as shared by individual DOs, but also based on the fact that local registration is a requirement to become a cluster member and this is the main impediment for DOs when applying for membership.



**Figure 1: Type of Diaspora Organization Nature of Organization & Number of Afghan DOs**



## 4. FINDINGS

Analysis of data gathered during the RTR yielded two horizontal themes - gender and food insecurity.

### **Horizontal Theme One: Gender roles and Equality**

DOs emphasized the challenges faced today by women and girls in Afghanistan. After taking control, the Taliban gave initial assurances that women would be afforded their rights, whether in work, education, or society at large.<sup>12</sup> An onward curb has ensued with the de-facto ruling authorities imposing rights-violating policies that have created barriers to women and girls' health and education, curtailed freedom of movement, expression, and association, and deprived many of earned income.<sup>13</sup> The latest and harshest curb since 2021 was made in an announcement by the de-facto ruling authorities during the course of the RTR saying that women should only leave their homes in cases of necessity and then, with their faces covered in public. This is a formal directive rather than a recommendation, any violations of which will lead to the punishment of male relatives.<sup>14</sup>

The absence of women and girls' fundamental rights informs and frames diaspora organizations' response in manifold ways and cuts across all emerging themes of diaspora response in Afghanistan. Initially, basic assessment for women's demands for different or additional humanitarian support has been harder to assess, requiring additional male accompaniment and careful planning of community visits without drawing local authority attention to certain minority communities. In terms of changing activities, six DOs modified supporting formal girl child education into providing teaching materials for informal, home-based classes. At least six DOs replaced women's entrepreneurial support with humanitarian assistance for the same women's groups.

<sup>12</sup> Omer, S. (2022). Afghanistan Crisis: Hunger in the Land. World Vision. Available at: <https://www.worldvision.org/disaster-relief-news-stories/afghanistan-hunger> Accessed 07 June 2022.

<sup>13</sup> Human Rights Watch (2022). Afghanistan: Taliban Deprive Women of Livelihoods, Identity. Available at: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/01/18/afghanistan-taliban-deprive-women-livelihoods-identity> Accessed 22 May 2022.

<sup>14</sup> UN (2022). Afghanistan: Taliban orders women to stay home; cover up in public. Available at: <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/05/1117762> Accessed 06 June 2022

## Horizontal Theme Two: Food insecurity and Parity of Distribution

An estimated 22.8 million Afghan people, more than half the country's population, are facing potentially life-threatening levels of food insecurity and malnutrition in 2022.<sup>15</sup> These bleak figures were foremost in the minds of all DOs and permeated throughout the RTR. The situation is compounded by DOs' perception of skewed beneficiary selection and inequality in food distribution within Afghanistan by the WFP and their implementing partners. Ten DOs described observing a dominance of international organizations with limited contextual knowledge in food aid decision making and distribution. In addition, the eighteen beneficiaries interviewed for this RTR and 48 percent of interviewed DOs described the new de-facto ruling authorities as unfairly distributing aid based on preferences of the senior leadership. Discrimination against minority groups was noted by 92 percent of DOs. It was also observed that distribution disparity was particularly challenging for women. One DO described how:

“We have to de-gender and get rid of this male dominant aid distribution in Afghanistan to ensure that women are represented in all aspects of aid and humanitarian support in Afghanistan.”

<sup>15</sup> Omer, S. (2022). Afghanistan Crisis: Hunger in the Land. World Vision. Available at: <https://www.worldvision.org/disaster-relief-news-stories/afghanistan-hunger> Accessed 07 June 2022.

These observations were supported by all participating beneficiaries who described experiencing limited international support and an unequal distribution of humanitarian assistance. As a result, the beneficiaries considered DOs' support to have a much greater impact in terms of reach, geography and relevance than that of other international organizations. One beneficiary of a DO working in the center of Afghanistan stated

“Except from this DO [name removed to retain anonymity] which have responded to all our needs on time with good behavior and quality has gone further because we didn't see any support or humanitarian aid from anybody else... if they came, they just surveyed and registered some people's names and gone. Until now no one see their support in my district.”

Another DO confirmed a recent report from their staff on the ground that humanitarian packages delivered to families were being re-divided into smaller packages by the community itself to cover more households in the absence of any other assistance.



Four additional themes emerged from the RTR which are described individually:

#### 4.1. Current Situation Experienced by Afghan Diaspora Organizations

##### Needs identified by DOs

Actors at all levels and also beneficiaries provided salient accounts of a complex and chaotic situation faced by DOs in Afghanistan with primary needs of food insecurity and violations of the rights of women and girls paramount. Afghanistan's economic situation is in crisis and seventeen DOs considered this to be the main barrier to transitioning beyond humanitarian assistance to development. Humanitarian aid is seen as a current necessity. However, safety and security concerns demand vigilance, continual monitoring and contingency planning by DOs with and without a representation in Afghanistan. Examples included close communication between staff in the field, intelligence sharing between DOs and careful planning to avoid known Taliban locations. The absence of formal rule of law structures and the threat of monies and goods being misappropriated by the Taliban have demanded routine DO risk assessment.

All beneficiaries and seven DOs described taking active steps in their logistical arrangements to avoid Taliban involvement or encounters in food and aid distribution, beneficiary identification and money transfer. DOs routinely change or delay planned routes, avoid sharing donor information and also beneficiary identification methods.

In addition, DOs are mindful and responsive to the displacement situation in Afghanistan and its neighboring countries. DOs described how refugees and migrants face specific challenges. One DO gave accounts of human rights violations in neighboring countries. Internationally, the resettlement challenges presenting to all DOs working with refugees and migrants include poverty, health and mental health, education, accommodation security and other fundamental needs.

##### Groups considered particularly vulnerable by DOs

DOs consider specific groups to be especially vulnerable within Afghanistan. Firstly, there are women and girls who are perceived to experience distinct challenges, as described earlier in this report. Secondly, eleven DOs identified youths as especially vulnerable because of severe restrictions placed on access to education and social media by the de-facto authorities. These DOs also described pressure on youth to visibly participate in supporting the current de-facto governing authorities, specifically physical appearance, attending rallies and meetings and being recruited as informers and to join or support local administrative posts and tasks. As a result, education becomes an emergency priority. Information and learning resources such as books and periodicals have been closed off or removed and replaced with a limited quantity and quality of Taliban approved publications (many of which are not even written and published in Afghanistan). Thirdly, those with links to the military/security sector under the previous government are said to be actively targeted for reprisals. Finally, 84 percent of DOs were concerned about continual discrimination against particular ethnic groups and geographical areas of their greatest concentration. Three DOs described incidents of propaganda and assaults not being acknowledged or acted upon by the Taliban central authorities.

##### Building trust

DOs frequently wanted to build and restore trust with non-DO agencies and actors, including larger and well-established Afghan NGOs, INGOs and the UN. There were several causes identified. Six DOs discussed contributing historical, cultural and geographically informed grievances including historical events during the reign of Abdul Rahman, more recent political "betrayals" in the reversal of agreements, the promotion of foreign interference and an experienced lack of context-relevant support through Kabul-centric decision-making. Around 50 percent of participating DOs indicated low expectations of contextual support from the international community, who were seen as politically driven and myopic in vision.

Access and competition to secure funds has also affected trust between DOs. Five participating DOs recounted competition between DOs over funds. Yet, beneficiaries participating in the RTR noted higher levels of trust in DOs in comparison to international humanitarian organizations.

## 4.2. Operations of Diaspora Organizations

DOS residing outside of Afghanistan are in need of an operational structure and access to implement their activities inside the country. Some DOs work directly through representatives or through partners inside Afghanistan, depending on the resources available to the DO. Some DO founders and leaders have, or had, businesses and old project offices located in Afghanistan that are still fully furnished but not currently operational. Others have access to similar facilities currently in the hands of extended family or friends. Often the representatives of these DOs are under the employ or were previously employed by these same DO founders or leaders and continue to be paid from either funds raised for their current activities or from private funds. In some cases, staff are also volunteers. This includes female staff who now work from home and have taken the required office equipment with them to enable this.

DOs without these resources tend to be newer, exemplified by the RTR DO participants, resulting in the two following formats of operations:

- A new DO will search for ways to access existing DO networks on the ground and through a series of mutual introductions eventually gain access to parts of older DO networks either on the administration side (e.g. the use of existing facilities and contacts in major cities) or on the ground (e.g. sharing transportation access and costs, using baseline information on geographical areas of need, where to purchase food and non-food items, distribution to neighboring communities or contiguous areas where older DOs are working) .
- A new DO will develop their own contacts and networks based on contact they can make through mutual friends in Afghanistan or visiting and meeting people in person to establish a conduit for assistance.

Indeed, DOs and representatives of DOs in Afghanistan continue to be heterogeneous, including how they operate. In response to Afghanistan's new reality, DOs had to adapt their ways of working. Many creative examples were evident, with a repurpose of existing diaspora organization platforms and functions. This RTR confirms that DOs are flexible and adaptive, responding to the dynamic needs of their beneficiaries. One Kabul-based DO saw its tailoring training fund dry up in August 2021:

*"...when the project ended, we raised more money from 50% private donations and 50% from our own funds to help most students finish their course and we went further by providing them a little money and advice on starting up their own tailoring businesses from home which was of great help for our mainly female students."*

Two other DOs gave examples of adapting their existing media platforms towards targeted fundraising for humanitarian relief and used their representatives in Afghanistan to distribute humanitarian aid.

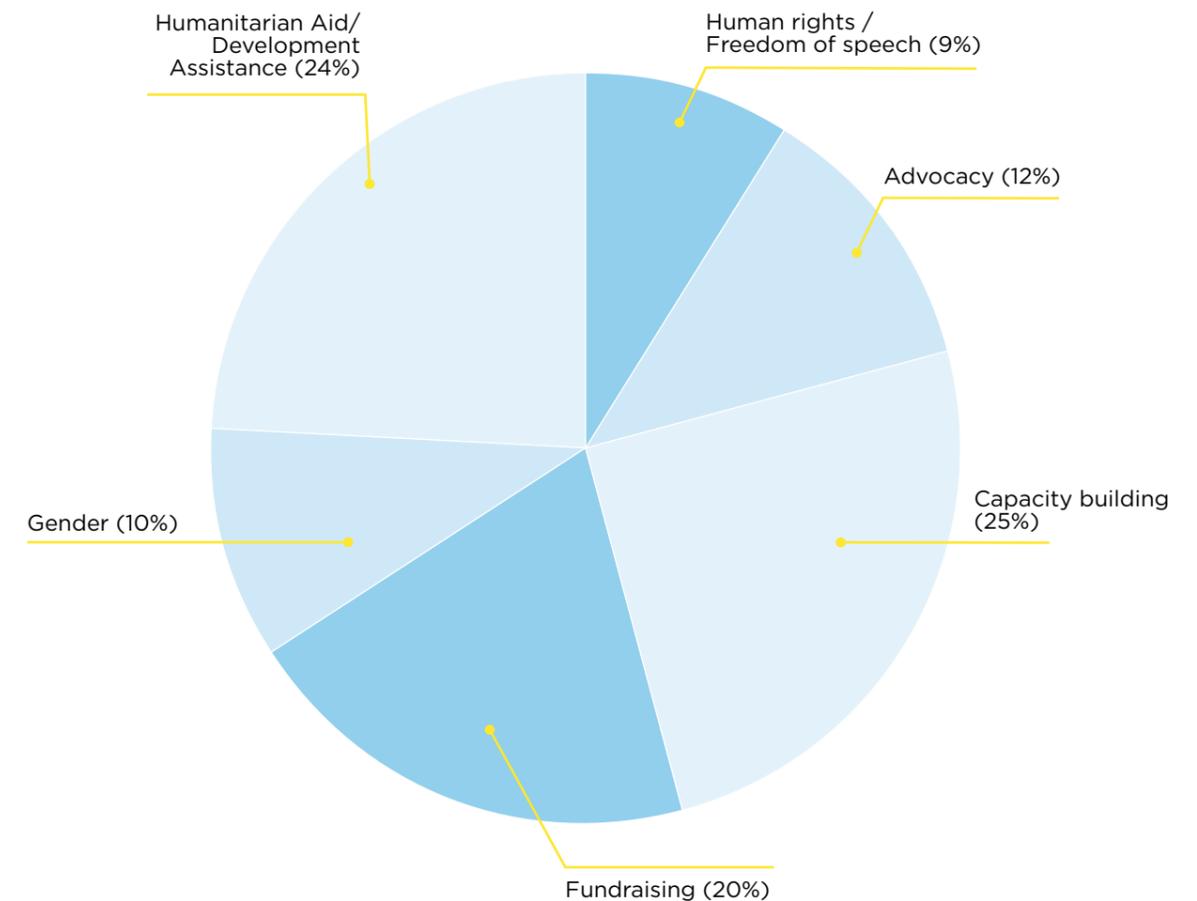
There also seems to be a particular divide between DOs and local Afghan organizations in how to respond to the current developments. One key informant in this RTR noted that DOs are more activist in approach and focus mainly on raising awareness of the human rights situations whereas Afghans in the country are more pragmatic and their focus is on responding to the needs of the population.

### Areas of intervention

The substance of DOs' approach adapted after August 2021 with a refocus towards humanitarian relief efforts. All participating DOs in the RTR now deliver elements of humanitarian activity. Additional thematic areas of function include fundraising, women specific services, health and mental health intervention, public health services, resettlement and integration support, informal literacy and formal education support, psychosocial support and business start-up and support, equipment supply and training, market links and exchange visits. Most DOs have been established for some time and already have a strong beneficiary base and active networks to capitalize upon when it comes to new interventions. In contrast, the two DOs interviewed that were set up after August 2021 did not have the advantages of established activities and networks and focused solely on humanitarian assistance and refugee issues. Over 75% of interviewed DOs engage also in other activities in addition to humanitarian services.

The pie chart on the next page provides a visual summary of all the various areas of focus of the DOs monitored on social media (crowdfunding platforms, fundraising pages linked to networks, social media activity including Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn together with accessible WhatsApp groups and other direct contacts with the selected diaspora organizations and networks). Each organization had an average of 2.5 key identified areas of intervention. Evident across all DOs was a post-August 2021 pivot towards humanitarian aid. In most cases, DOs maintained some levels of previous operations, or else repurposed their operations in support of humanitarian aid. There were numerous examples of DOs utilizing existing logistical networks in Afghanistan to distribute aid, particularly food.

**Figure 2: Monitored Diaspora Organization's Areas of intervention**



Of the 24% of DOs participating in humanitarian/development aid, social media monitoring identified the following principle categories of intervention: refugee support, economic development, child labor, emergency medical support, health services, education, refugee settlement and sponsorship and WASH. Other, less common interventions ranged from relief and emergency assistance to livelihoods to sustainable social development.

The following table provides some examples of the above themes, as illustrated by the social media monitoring:

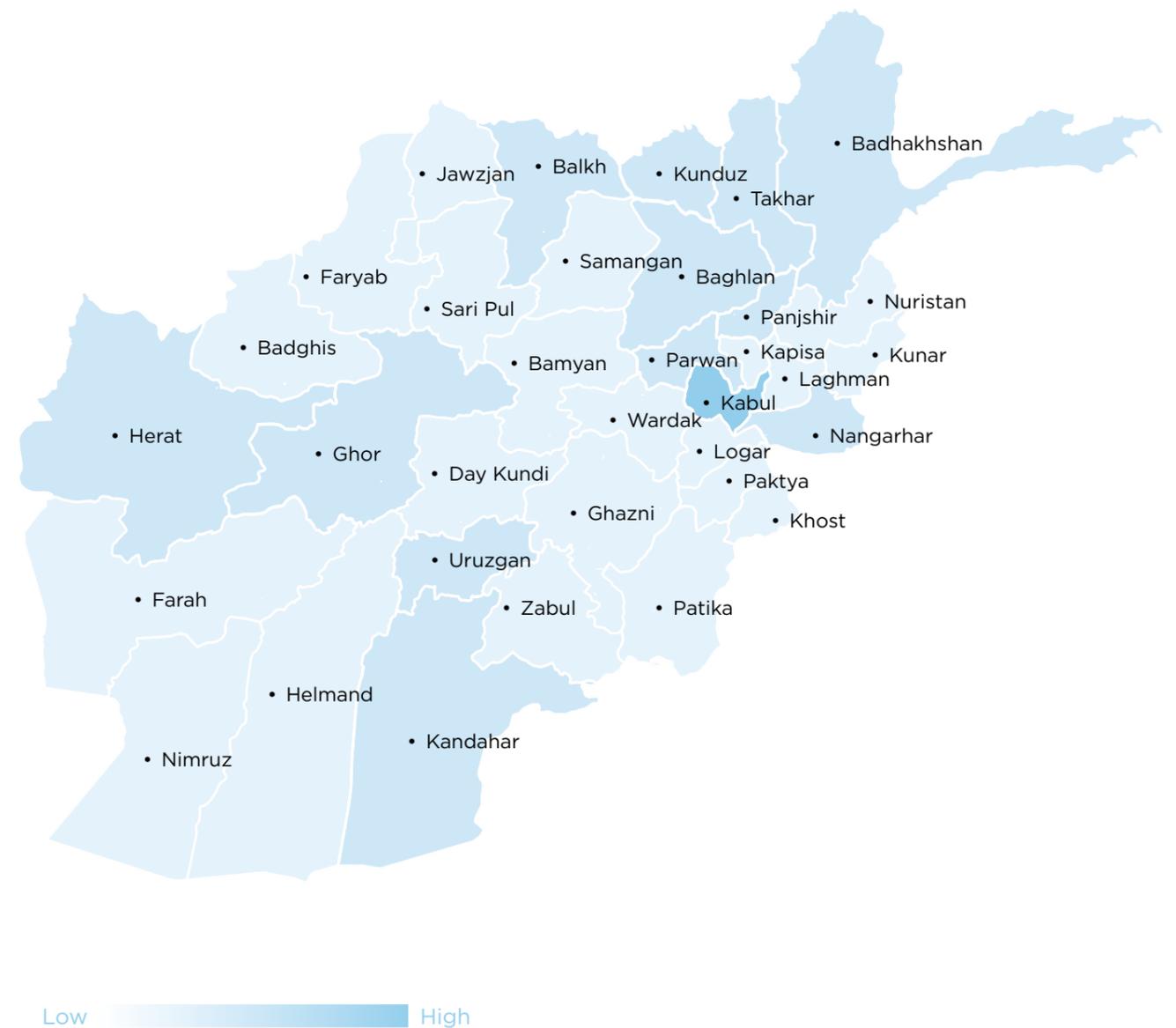
Table 7: Examples of Areas of Interventions

Theme	Examples of activities
Advocacy	Cultural Connectivity, community and institutional development
Capacity building	Skills-based training, empowerment (including women and youth), education
Fundraising	Crowdfunding, philanthropic donations, bequeaths from diaspora estates, grants from institutions (publishing houses for textbooks)
Human rights / Freedom of speech	Social justice, promotion of gender equality, human rights support.
Humanitarian Aid	Emergency medical support, WASH.
Gender	Women's empowerment, women's rights

**Reach**

DOs have an extended reach in Afghanistan to all provinces which includes minority groups, ethnic groups, internally displaced people and other vulnerable groups and physically remote rural communities. The reach of DOs is supported by their representatives in country with enduring links to Afghanistan that support DO responses. In addition, DOs benefit from personal networks with Afghan communities in neighboring countries to expand their activities in countries including Pakistan and Iran.

**Figure 3: Indicative areas within Afghanistan receiving assistance from diaspora organizations engaged through this Real-Time Review**



A shift in focus towards humanitarian relief is supported by efforts to provide sustainable employment, development aid and a focus on the support and empowerment of women and girls in Afghanistan. Many DOs base their interventions on their area of specialization (e.g., health, education, food distribution, etc.), ethnicity or a given geographical area. In many cases, DO methods are simple and culturally appropriate in their effectiveness with examples including engaging refugees in new countries over tea and cooked food, cultural events and performances, debates and discussions on shared emotive issues. One DO volunteer said the following about engagement methods in a country of residence:

“We invite them and have tea with them to listen to their questions and concerns... I met them individually during the month of Ramadan and cooked them Afghan food”

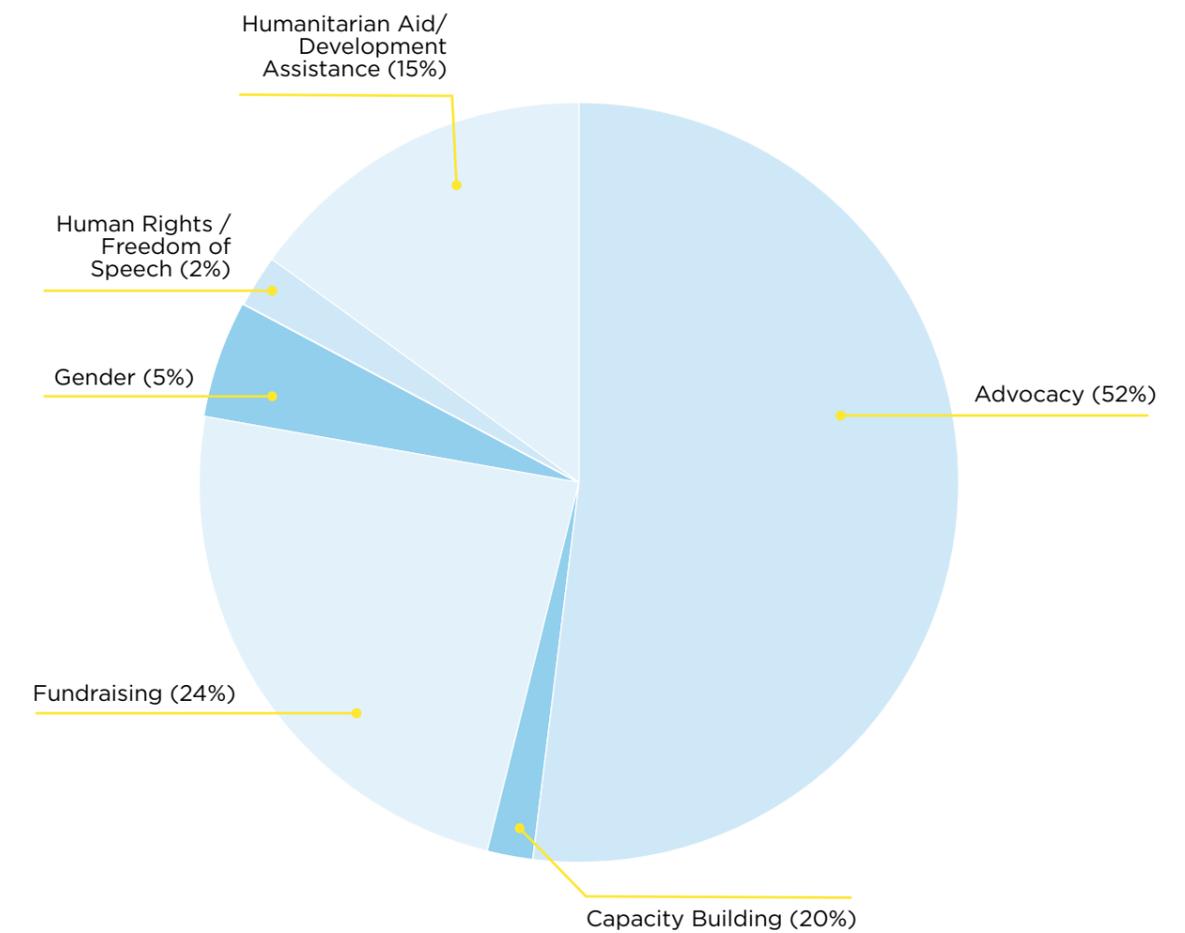
### **Beneficiary Identification**

DOs utilize a broad range of methods to identify the most vulnerable beneficiaries. DOs undertake formal and informal contextual and gender-responsive analyses. More formal methods described by eight DOs include liaisons with international organizations, NGOs, government ministries, access to cluster meeting lists and contemporary information shared between DOs. Other, less formal methods included information gathering from personal relationships and ethno-geographical networks, all of which rely on principle actors such as family members, local elders, clerics, community leaders and activists. These datasets include changing numbers of IDPs and new causes and locations of vulnerability, to available skills and resources within a given area and new inputs of assistance from non-DO sources. Information about beneficiaries, locations and delivered activities is at times informally shared between DOs to reduce duplication and promote resource sharing, even though there remains room for improvement to strengthen cooperation and information exchange between DOs. Newer DOs (after August 2021) are coordinating well, and it is observed that they have good information and statistics, where older organizations have established networks, outreach and local influence.

### Communication by DOs

Online social media monitoring identified a range of platforms used by DOs to communicate with beneficiaries including Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram. The most frequent form of online presence was a website (41 percent of monitored DOs). It was observed that websites were used only slightly more frequently than Facebook for communicating with beneficiaries and donors because more DOs had websites than Facebook accounts. Twitter was favored more by DOs that did not have a website or had a poorly maintained/limited website. Each DO had an average of two tools, frequently a webpage and a social media platform, with a range of one to five pages and platforms. Direct communication tools, such as WhatsApp, Telegram and Signal are commonly used by DOs to communicate with beneficiaries, however these could not be substantially monitored during the RTR. The following graph summarizes the nature of social media posts made by the monitored diaspora organizations during the RTR.

**Figure 4: Category of social media posts of DOs**



Amongst advocacy communications, there were many examples of charity events, celebrations, highlighted social and resettlement issues, and reports of activities and the situation of Afghanistan. Fundraising examples included donation and fundraising requests, news and plans. Humanitarian aid and development assistance examples included information on health, social and community needs, reporting of DO activities and information about humanitarian activities. Human rights/freedom of speech posts included refugee matters.

## DO Strengths

Several examples of the strength and creativity of DOs were observed during the RTR:

<p><b>Challenging authority on an equal footing</b></p>	<p>Starting with the symbolic closing down of the Ministry of Women's Affairs in Kabul, the Taliban began targeting many women-led or women-focused CSOs (including DOs) to prevent them from operating. Direct dialogue and perseverance with senior Ministry of Economy staff by prominent female DO leaders has provided the political space for several women-headed DOs to continue operations.</p>
<p><b>Cascading support to access geographically remote communities:</b></p>	<p>Two Afghanistan-based DOs have begun to use their current beneficiary network in peri-urban areas to assist in essential item distribution to rural areas.</p>
<p><b>Supporting women entrepreneurs:</b></p>	<p>While some DOs have focused on humanitarian inputs, established DOs played to their own comparative advantages by using their financial resources and field staff to set up accessible microcredit packages for women's micro and small enterprises.</p>
<p><b>Demand-driven response on specific issues:</b></p>	<p>DOs and representatives of DOs in Afghanistan continue to change and broaden their actions to meet specific needs of marginalized groups including women-headed households. In some cases, this meant replacing training business support activities with food and medicine distribution, and for other DOs it was drawing on extended networks and acquaintances to find qualified people to deliver materials to repair prosthetic limbs and glasses for the partially sighted. Other DOs provided specialized textbooks to higher education facilities to ensure a better quality of information accessible to whichever part of the education system remains open to boys and girls.</p>

<p><b>Facilitating and Informing advocacy:</b></p>	<p>Many DOs approached this in a structured manner by providing informal education/vocational training and advocacy around violence against children and women. Other DOs were involved in a more ad-hoc manner based on one-off requests from within the country, supporting demonstrations and media events highlighting the human rights abuses by the Taliban.</p>
<p><b>Looking beyond physical needs of refugees:</b></p>	<p>As many staff of DOs pointed out, their own experiences of becoming a refugee and finding another country to call home allows them a better insight into the challenges being faced during resettlement. A large number of activities DOs undertake in their country of residence are around refugee integration. However, psycho-social support, social services and overcoming the bureaucracy of local services continue to be experienced as challenging</p>
<p><b>Increasing volunteer outreach:</b></p>	<p>Three internationally based DOs used their membership and supporters to draw in Afghan and non-Afghan professionals to provide pro bono services for facilitating refugee access. Legal professionals and medical professionals were notably prominent in the choice and willingness to support DOs and harness of various professions within networks to support humanitarian response including food security, maternal and child health within the country.</p>



### 4.3. Funding

There were reflections that DO budgets are cost effective with regard to staffing and limited physical presence and organizational costs such as office space are less than other organizations. However, funds to DOs are also considered to be insufficient and based on their donors rather than via institutional donors. The main challenge for DOs (and other humanitarian actors currently operating in Afghanistan) is found however in the transfer of finances.

#### Financial Challenges

DOs described their inability to access monies in bank accounts or transfer money to and from other countries as a major constraint. For new DOs, opening a new account for a project or organization is currently prohibited. The collapse of the Afghan banking system due to the freezing of assets overseas and sanctions has forced DOs to either physically transfer funds in person or use the Hawala system, an informal money transfer system. However, DOs are not necessarily comfortable with using these systems for a variety of reasons, including the fact that staff in these systems are new and not yet known (or trusted) by DOs. Also, the fact that international organizations are critical of the Hawala system, makes the DOs concerned about possible limitations for receiving international funding.

In addition, there are practical challenges resulting from the current banking systems. Many DO staff in Afghanistan confirmed that it can take weeks to withdraw enough to pay suppliers and transporters or to cover office rental costs and staff salaries. In one example, a DO described how one person is unable to withdraw more than 20,000 Afghani (approximately USD 200) per week. To withdraw more than this sum, requires multiple visits and queuing for most of the day with no guarantee of entry to the bank. There is a reliance on “family and senior male staff to manage financial activities” which has particular bearing for women-led diaspora organizations. Concretely, this means that men are asked to visit financial institutions since they will not experience any harassments or difficulties to enter.

After the Taliban took control in August 2021, in Kabul, two of the private taxi services (privately owned vehicles charging for passenger transportation) had started a service collecting money from houses (from women account holders) to deposit in banks or collecting ATM cards to withdraw money for them based on a commission. But this has now stopped due to slightly improved access to many local bank branches for women.

Indeed, over the final two weeks of the RTR anecdotal evidence indicates that bank branches now have separate entrances for men and women. As there are fewer female account holders, women are reportedly able to enter banks more quickly than men. Account withdrawals have now been increased to Af 12,500/USD 140/per day from ATMs and Af 86,200/USD 970/per day over the counter. Women still require Mahrams to take them to the bank entrance and return home but have faced no reported issues at the bank itself. Some of the larger city branches do have Taliban standing outside who monitor clients going in and out, keeping the cars from double parking and making sure the queues are orderly.

There remains significant concern over the Taliban's claim that all banking will become 'Islamic' - there does not appear to be a definition or clarity as to what these institutions will look like and may result in a continued dependence of DOs on informal exchange transfer and intermittent remittances to private banks and ongoing difficulties faced in withdrawing funds. New and more established DOs are in the same position. DOs try to look for alternative approaches to transfer cash, including considering the possibility of moving cash personally. However, DOs lacked knowledge as to whether this would be legally allowed and were afraid to engage in any potentially criminal activities. Barriers to moving around funds, in turn, is expected to reduce the scope and scale of support and engagement with communities.

## Budgets of DOs

There were two main observed reasons for a general reluctance by DOs to discuss their funds and even in some cases quantities of food and non-food items delivered:

- Often, declaring funding amounts is expected to create false expectations and misunderstanding amongst beneficiaries. Most beneficiaries are not aware that some of the funding will cover purchasing costs, transport, salaries, and other overheads, which makes it difficult for beneficiaries to reconcile the actual funds received with the packages that are finally delivered. This misunderstanding can create mistrust between both parties and this concern limits transparency. Although this challenge is experienced by other humanitarian actors too, the hesitation to share financial information does indicate that DOs have not yet found an appropriate way in dealing with accountability to affected populations and transparency overall.
- With publicly declared funding figures, the Taliban usually approach the DO's office wanting to know why foreigners are sending money to the organization. Examples were given of how DOs were accused of being paid to "spy for the foreigners" and "use the money for activities to undermine the Taliban's official authority". In addition, the Taliban were considered to expect a percentage of those funds to spend in areas, communities and interventions of their choice and recruit their own people. The Taliban were also observed to have attempted to appropriate a percentage for themselves in different ways, for example claiming a religious contribution, or contribution to the upkeep of local Taliban soldiers.

## Case-study

Afghanic e.V. was established in the early nineties to support Afghan refugees in Germany. Since the early 2000s, it started to provide science textbooks for provincial universities, some of whom were still reliant on Russian books from the Soviet occupation of the 1980s. With a grant from DAAD (German Academic Exchange Service<sup>16</sup>), Afghanic e.V. has been able to commission, edit, print and distribute over 360 textbooks across 21 provincial universities with an aim to expand to all 34 provinces.

In 2013, Afghanic e.V. piloted a private clinic primarily for maternal and childcare that aimed to be financially self-sustaining through a nominal service charge in line with local incomes. The idea was presented at several diaspora conferences and larger meetings in Germany, which raised between EUR 2,000 -3,000. Financial support of EUR 80,000 from GIZ and CIM (Centre for International Migration) was received. This covered the cost of constructing and equipping the clinic with the collaboration of the Afghan Physician Organization, a local NGO. Aside from medical services, the clinic also brought in diaspora Afghan and international doctors on short exchange visits to support Afghan doctors to improve their bedside medical training.

The clinic was 80 percent self-sustainable before August 2021, but after this, numbers of patients decreased, often attending the clinic only in cases of emergency. In the hope to increase visits, the clinic has reduced its rates to less than Euro 1.50 per consultation but continues to struggle without further funding to pay for salaries of the ten (female) medical staff and two doctors. The clinic hopes to attract additional funding to be able to maintain its operations.

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.daad.de> - the world's largest funding organization for international exchange of students and researchers



#### 4.4. Coordination

##### Coordination on the ground

DOs and representatives of DOs in Afghanistan are coordinating with local operational partners such as registered and unregistered community-based organizations and more traditional decision-making entities such as shuras to deliver interventions ranging from food and aid distributions to vulnerable, displaced and geographically remote communities. Other partnerships are established more formally with registered or locally reputable CSOs. Coordination partnerships are also established informally through personal and family connections. In addition, beneficiary groups organize themselves casually at community and neighborhood level to receive direct assistance from DOs. The groups organized for this review confirmed a continuing partnership with the same DOs despite challenges and shortfalls in support and changing of activities to meet needs such as increased humanitarian support.

### Coordination between DOs

Partnership working between DOs is evident, sometimes on an ad-hoc basis such as joint purchasing and transport of food items into Afghanistan or pooling information and resources to approach a local authority on refugee-related issues. More frequently outside of Afghanistan, DOs are coordinating on a formal and routine basis with regular meetings and conferences for information sharing and awareness raising. Personal and professional networks are used to advertise or promote these meetings and invite DOs to contribute with agenda points and speakers. They use their respective networks to raise the profile of these meetings in order to attract increased diaspora and non-diaspora participation. The most current issues appear to be around building a consensus on how to address the growing human rights challenges in Afghanistan and poverty reduction.

DOs with representatives in-country that are members of an umbrella organization tend to share information regularly and meet on a needs basis e.g., when an announcement was made by the de-facto authorities on changes to women-led NGOs (this would also impact DOs). In addition, one DO described how there is regular coordination between DOs for safety and security reasons: “DOs share information many times .... We know what colleagues are doing and where and most importantly about Taliban movements, threats and changes in leadership locally because sometime new appointments have made it more a problem for us to work. “

There is mutually beneficial cooperation between newer and more established DOs. Newer DOs are keen to coordinate with other established DOs. They are bringing contemporary information and are quickly linking into existing DO networks, as already noted above. Older DOs are opening their established networks in cooperation with other DOs and share their on-the ground experience.

### Coordination with Clusters

Institutional humanitarian actors operate under the Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) and abide by relevant cluster guidelines. DOs operate differently and do not necessarily fall under the HRP. A given example was the Food Security Cluster (FSC) of which four DOs recently applied for membership. The differences in delivery became clear: DOs distribute ready to eat food, whereas the FSC distributes dry food. The modality used by the DOs is however not in accordance with the pre-set standards of the cluster. FSC commodities are namely prepacked from the international market with an overall target of people in need. DOs are described as targeting IDPs and poor families to address the immediate nutritional gap. As a result, DO support is seen as complimenting cluster assistance, since diaspora can be more flexible and are able to provide additionality at times.

In general, DOs continue to experience difficulties in meeting the entry requirements for cluster membership, in particular in terms of the required registration in the country. For cluster leads, it is also not clear which organization is a diaspora organization since that information is not always shared (or requested). However, at a minimum, enhanced coordination would benefit both institutional actors and DOs. For the first, it would be important to be informed about the locations and beneficiaries of DOs' assistance whereas the latter would benefit from information on the needs and general challenges to deliver humanitarian assistance. The clusters interviewed for the RTR made a strong call for DOs to reach out to them. However, there seems to be a continued disconnect between the cluster system and the DOs, suggesting the need for increased awareness and communication between both sides.

### Coordination with and between international organizations

A perceived lack of coordination between international actors (including donors) was described by fourteen DOs. One DO described how “donors don’t have good coordination and should be linked together and work with cooperation”. Four DOs suggested that dialogue is needed between CSO, DOs, NGOs and the Taliban to raise the Taliban’s knowledge of the usefulness of these organizations and perceive that the UN and other international agencies have the capacity to facilitate these talks.

International organizations observed that coordination could be improved between DOs and specific partners, particularly with WFP which is viewed as the largest of the international humanitarian organizations. However, in general the UN is frequently perceived by DOs as slow and unable to manage in remote and vulnerable areas because “they always target the same people”. Seven DOs confirmed reaching out to international NGOs to explore potential collaboration. The aims of these meetings were to discuss collaboration around information sharing of beneficiary communities, explore ways to get involved in distributing assistance and possibly expand outreach to remote communities. Yet, there was limited to no response to DOs on this request.



## 5. CONCLUSIONS

This RTR assesses the role and engagement of diaspora organizations in the humanitarian response. The RTR has highlighted how newer organizations are complementing existing DOs and providing additionality. Co-operations are developing between established and newer DOs with shared benefits and both have important attributes that contribute to a collective DO response by enriching existing networks and introducing either new activities or new approaches to existing activities.

No matter when their inception, DOs have responded to changes in circumstances by functioning in new ways and have galvanized a vast range of responsive services to try and meet the critical needs of people in Afghanistan. Since 2021, established DOs have pivoted their responses towards humanitarian support and relief and newer DOs are quickly linking into existing DO networks to contribute to a priority humanitarian response.

With the rolling back of human rights in Afghanistan, women-led and women-focused DOs have received more attention within the broader diaspora community as well as within the Afghan diaspora. DOs are responding to gender needs in their activities using targeted and responsive methods, but the increasing restrictions on the rights of women and girls remain considerable and, at times, very challenging for DOs to both operate and meet the needs of their female beneficiaries. A majority of the consulted DOs (eighteen out of twenty-two) have gender-specific activities ranging from specifically targeting women-headed households for health and food security packages to one DO continuing to fund microgrants for female entrepreneurs.

This Real-Time Review of diaspora humanitarian engagement in Afghanistan concludes that changes have taken place since the initial Real-Time Review in fall 2021. Diaspora are not only encountering new difficulties to deliver humanitarian activities, but they are also in the process of adapting to these challenges. There remain many hurdles for diaspora humanitarian engagement, particularly in terms of transfer of funding and operations in the altered country context, but there are also growing opportunities in terms of coordinating with more institutional humanitarian actors. The importance of diaspora humanitarian assistance is growingly recognized by international actors, and, especially in an operational context with many needs but limited access, like Afghanistan, it becomes clear that diaspora organizations are in a good position to take on a complementary role in terms of providing assistance to the affected populations.



## 6. SUGGESTED NEXT STEPS

**The following recommendations are drawn from the perspectives of DOs and all other participants of the RTRs.** The recommendations made by DOs very much reflect the diversity of DOs and their individual purview. In general, DOs based and operating outside of Afghanistan focus more on rights-based issues for those leaving the country and vulnerable groups within Afghanistan. The DOs with representation and activities entirely within Afghanistan have prioritized operational space which will allow them to expand outreach and further sensitize their services to the ever-changing needs of the Afghan population.

**Views and recommendations which were shared by all participants are the following:**

- **Enhance human-rights advocacy:** Several DOs, especially those who are predominantly advocacy-focused, are exploring ways to increase their efforts on the recognition of women's rights and press freedom. These DOs are approaching international institutions ranging from Amnesty International to UN Agencies. It is deemed unlikely that their additional activities on humanitarian issues would be adversely affected because of this enhanced focus. They are of the opinion that their allies, especially internationally based DOs, must continue to press for recognition of women's rights, freedom for the media, and push for greater inclusion of and consultation with minorities in decision-making on all issues of governance.
- **Ease fund transfers for humanitarian efforts:** With the collapse of the Afghan banking system, DOs have been forced to use informal exchange systems as a last resort. Therefore, DOs recommend that financial services and banking must be restored as soon as possible to allow access to existing funds. Failing this, internationally based DOs are approaching potential international donors to find out if the continued use of the Hawala system could jeopardize future funding when they submit project proposals.

**Afghan DOs provided the following additional recommendations:**

- **Ensure that support to Afghanistan and Afghan refugees and migrants remain a priority:** Fundraising for the Afghan crisis has been negatively impacted as it competes for public attention with other ongoing crises in the world. As a result, DOs will channel more resources to raise their campaign and fundraising efforts to gain more attention. Two DOs commented that this means shifting efforts and funds away from other activities linked to refugee support with a well-publicized and highly prominent conflict in Ukraine. DOs have found it difficult to meet with government officials in refugee-hosting countries on the topic of Afghan refugees and assistance issues and are going to spend more time and resources on fundraising to raise the profile. There is a perception that funds and local resources are being diverted away from Afghanistan and other countries to meet the needs of the Ukraine conflict.
- **Develop policies to legitimize DOs:** The two DOs established as a result of the Taliban takeover stated the ease with which they were able to contact existing DOs, but there was little coordination beyond national boundaries. It was suggested that regional DO coordination bodies be established as hubs for information sharing on broader fund availability, current DO activities and events and updates on advocacy work and refugee resettlement issues.

**Representatives of DOs within Afghanistan provided the following additional recommendations:**

- **Establish a recognized DO coordination body in Kabul:** Representatives of sixteen DOs expressed a strong desire for DOs to be recognized as a key stakeholder in the humanitarian and development sectors. Five DOs are actively exploring the establishment of a recognized DO coordination body. This entity could play a role similar to that of Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief & Development (ACBAR), providing coordination of policy, approach action and resource sharing amongst DOs and connecting them as a group to the UN Agencies and INGOs. Another version being discussed could focus solely on advising and facilitating the registration of existing and new DOs with relevant authorities within the country.
- **Engage formally with all stakeholders:** A majority of Afghan DOs do not exclusively work on humanitarian activities. Therefore, they want to capitalize on existing knowledge and activities in education, health, agriculture and infrastructure by liaising directly with other implementing organizations such as INGOs, specific technical UN agencies (such as FAO, UNDP, UNICEF, UNWOMEN, WFP and WHO), but also with technical departments of the de-facto authorities. The motivation of DOs regarding this issue was to ensure the avoidance of duplication, increase complementarities where possible and identify further gaps in activities that DOs may be able to partially fill.

**In closing:**

As the current de-facto authorities continue to roll back basic rights and freedoms, especially for women's rights, DOs appear to be more of a cohesive force, sharing information, activities and a common objective within Afghanistan. The diaspora remains a diverse but flourishing group that is gradually combining traditional ways of outreach and influence with more systemic and corporate experience gained from their countries of residence. This combined understanding and experience will allow the diaspora to forge new pathways in assistance and development delivery that will make them more visible to the international assistance and development community, acknowledging their contribution to the betterment of the Afghan population with an opportunity to be a formal participant in Afghanistan's future.

# ANNEX A

## DIASPORA ORGANIZATION MAPPING

The following DOs have contributed to this real-time review<sup>17</sup>.

Nr.	Name of DO	Country of Residence	Website
1	Aseelapp	Germany	<a href="https://aseelapp.com">https://aseelapp.com</a>
2	Afghan Refugee Association in Italy	Italy	No Website
3	Afghan Refugee Committee in Belgium	Belgium	No Website
4	Afghan Action	UK	<a href="http://www.afghanaction.org/">http://www.afghanaction.org/</a>
5	Afghanic e.V	Germany	<a href="https://afghanic.de">https://afghanic.de</a>
6	Association of Afghans in Netherlands	Netherland	No Website
7	Association of Afghan Healthcare Professionals-UK	UK	<a href="http://www.aahpuk.org">http://www.aahpuk.org</a>
8	Federation of Afghan Association in Europe	EU	<a href="https://www.faroe.info/about/">https://www.faroe.info/about/</a>
9	Hazara Committee in UK	UK	<a href="https://www.hazaracommittee.co.uk/">https://www.hazaracommittee.co.uk/</a>

<sup>17</sup> This table only includes the diaspora organizations who have agreed to have their name included in the report.



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