



DEMAC

DIASPORA
EMERGENCY ACTION
& COORDINATION

THE ROLE OF THE AFGHAN DIASPORA IN MOBILISING SUPPORT TO EMERGENCY AND RECOVERY EFFORTS

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

ADO	Afghan Diaspora Organisation
AFAF	The Association of Doctors for Afghan Refugees (Ärzteverein für Afghanische Flüchtlinge e.V)
AIL	Afghan Institute of Learning
ALAD	Afghan Lawyers Association in Denmark
ALO	Afghan LGBTIQ Organisation
AYAD	Afghan Youth Association in Denmark
BMF	Baba Mazari Foundation
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
CTI	Code to Inspire
DAB	Da Afghanistan Bank
DEMAC	Diaspora Emergency Action & Coordination
DfA	De Facto Authorities
DO	Diaspora Organisation
DRC	Danish Refugee Council
EU	European Union
EWSSO	Ehsas Social Services Charity Organisation
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
HASCO	Help Afghan School Children Association
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IGA	Income Generating Activity
IGO	Intergovernmental Organisation
IOM	International Organization for Migration
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OFAC	Office of Foreign Assets Control (US)
SDN	Specially Designated National
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNDESA	UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs
US	United States of America
WASH	Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene
WFP	World Food Programme

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Afghan diaspora counts among the world's largest. By mid-year 2024, the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) estimated that just over 7.5 million Afghans lived outside Afghanistan.¹ Nearly three quarters of these migrants were found in neighbouring Iran and Pakistan.² These numbers, however, were likely to have shifted significantly by mid 2025, mainly due to deportations targeting Afghan nationals residing in Iran and Pakistan from October 2023. The European Union (EU) hosted over 650,000 Afghans by 2023, with the largest population found in Germany, estimated to comprise 419,000 individuals.³ Looking beyond, other host countries included Sweden, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Austria, Turkey, as well as the United States, United Arab Emirates, Canada and Australia.⁴

“We have donors both inside and outside the country, who deliver effective assistance to affected populations.”
– FGD participant, male village elder, Herat

¹ UNDESA (2024), International Migrant Stock – by Sex and Origin.

² DEMAC (2022), Diaspora Humanitarian Engagement: Afghanistan Real-Time-Review.

³ Safi, A. A., & Czaika, M. (2025). The transnational engagement of Afghan diaspora organisations: Drivers of diaspora specialization. Global Networks, No. 25; Sachverständigenrat für Integration und Migration gGmbH, Zugewanderte aus Afghanistan: Deutschland verbunden, aber Kontakte in Deutschland noch im Entstehen

⁴ DEMAC (2022), Diaspora Humanitarian Engagement: Afghanistan Real-Time-Review.

Interviews with diaspora members show a willingness to send more funds at a time when humanitarian aid is decreasing. However, regulations in Afghanistan and abroad must allow them for more flexibility to respond to the repeated crises affecting their homeland. At the time of the research, another deadly earthquake hit Afghanistan's eastern province of Kunar. Further deportation measures from Iran have led to 700,000 returnees in 2025 alone at the border with Herat and Nimroz, across the western border with Iran.⁵ The diaspora is seeing from afar the reality of lives on the ground, through social media. These images are motivating them to be more present. Younger Afghan generations, studying decolonisation and localisation in universities abroad, are recognising that the country's past was not always self-determined. They can support greater awareness of the injustices affecting Afghanistan and mobilise more resources. The administration run by the De facto Authorities (DfA) since 2021 also recognises the value of remittances for the Afghan economy, stating to our research team that:

“Diaspora contributions are vital, not just during disasters but also through regular remittances, which stabilise families and support Afghanistan's economy. In fact, one reason the Afghani currency has remained relatively stable is due to the consistent inflow of funds from abroad” (representative of the Afghanistan National Disaster Management Authority).

⁵ IOM, “Record 256,000 Afghan Migrants Return from Iran as IOM Warns of Dire Funding Shortfall,” IOM, June 30, 2025

This research study examines the role of the Afghan diaspora in funding emergency, recovery, and reconstruction responses, through the case study of the 2023 Herat earthquake response.

In October 2023, a series of powerful earthquakes struck Herat province in western Afghanistan, flattening villages and affecting over 275,000 people. In a country already facing one of the world's worst humanitarian crises, the disaster created urgent needs for shelter, food, medical care, and reconstruction. The aid system was constrained by a USD 1.3 billion funding gap and operational challenges under Afghanistan's new regime.⁶ In this context, the "far Afghan diaspora", referring to diaspora actors across the United States, Europe, and other Western countries, mobilised to support relief efforts in Herat. They leveraged their transnational ties to channel funds and resources to local responders. The research also explores ways of raising and sending money to partners in Afghanistan.

Diaspora actors are multi-sectoral responders who operate across borders, particularly in crisis-affected contexts where formal systems are limited or may be slower to respond. They maintain direct links to communities, allowing them to mobilise and channel resources quickly and effectively.⁷ Their support unfolds through transnational collaboration, digital platforms, hometown associations, religious networks, and remittance channels. Existing research highlights the breadth of diaspora engagement but leaves gaps in understanding how funding is mobilised, through which actors, and what effects it produces.

While the contributions of diaspora are widely recognised as crucial elements of the humanitarian ecosystem of Afghanistan, several gaps remain when it comes to (1) mapping and delineating specific actor categories and funding modalities, (2) understanding the motivations, incentives, challenges and opportunities shaping diaspora engagement, and (3) in-depth analysis of diasporic interactions with, and support for, local actors and institutions responding to multiple crises in the Afghan context.

⁶ DEMAC (2022), Diaspora Humanitarian Engagement: Afghanistan Real-Time-Review.

⁷ Safi, A. A., & Czaika, M. (2025). The transnational engagement of Afghan diaspora organizations: Drivers of diaspora specialization. *Global Networks*, No. 25

1.1 Objectives & Methodology

This research aims to inform humanitarian response at a time of decreasing funding. It takes place four years after the arrival of the Taliban to power in August 2021 and in a context of interconnected crises: climate change, disaster events, and massive forced returns from Pakistan and Iran since 2023. Combined, these have compounded pre-existing challenges tied to poverty and food insecurity. This research pursues three objectives, with corresponding research questions:

1. The mapping of diaspora actors asks what types of diaspora actors and funding modalities mobilise resources to local efforts in Herat, and which types of funding mechanisms are mobilised across the different phases of the response – from relief, to recovery and reconstruction.
2. The analysis of diaspora-funded action delves into key enabling factors and barriers for providing financial support across diaspora actors. It also presents strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats influencing diaspora-led initiatives.
3. The examination of how support reaches local actors reveals not just what diaspora actors fund, but how the support reaches the most vulnerable populations and to what extent diaspora funded local initiatives also coordinate with the rest of the coordination system and platforms.

For the purpose of the study, research was conducted in three districts of Herat province: Zinda Jan, Injil and Herat city – hosting the highest number of earthquake survivors and returnees from Iran. The research team spoke to over 60 participants, from local actors to diaspora actors and tech innovators, working across a range of geographies and fields. Local actors in Herat included civil society representatives of charities; DfA officers in relevant ministries; and local community members – all impacted by one or both crises.

Diaspora actors included organisational founders, directors, members from Europe, the Americas, and Oceania who mobilised aid to Herat in 2023. Innovators included experts in cryptocurrency, fintech, and new platforms for money transfer in the Afghan context.

The present study is, however, limited by its sample size. Many diaspora actors present in the Herat 2023 earthquake support effort – especially, informal, loose networks of volunteers – were not reached. Most personal initiatives were not made public, due to security concerns. Despite this, the research team heard from a few diaspora participants privy to such efforts, but this data could not be triangulated beyond oral reports. The sample does not claim to be exhaustive. It is hoped that further research continues to engage with diaspora actors of all profiles to build upon present findings.

1.2 Setting the Context: Diaspora Humanitarianism

“We see ourselves as a vehicle of information, and a vehicle of transformation” – Founder, Aseel

The Afghan diaspora is diverse and heterogeneous, ranging from individuals acting in a private capacity to formal organisations.⁸ Funding modalities and channels comprise a mix of formal and informal, adapted to what is available and trusted in a crisis. Personal remittances are the most traditional form of donation, with person-to-person funds sent via transfer or informal hawala transfer brokers – operating on a trust-based system. Crowdfunding and online campaigns have become a more popular means of generating funds in recent years. The Afghan diaspora frames their giving as part of Islamic philanthropy, especially during crises. Zakat, obligatory alms for Muslims, and Sadaqat (charitable gifts) are often channelled to help disaster victims during Ramadan and other religious holidays.

⁸ Danish Refugee Council (DRC). (2019). Afghan diaspora in Europe: Mapping engagement in Denmark. Maastricht University—United Nations University.



2. MAPPING OF DIASPORA ACTORS AND FUNDING MODALITIES

2.1 Afghan Diaspora Landscape

By 2019, DEMAC had identified over 600 Afghan diaspora organisations (ADOs) across EU member states.⁹ Diaspora organisations contributed an estimated USD 3.4 million¹⁰ to the Herat earthquake response. Of this amount, USD 2.8 million had been crowdfunded during the first seven days in response to immediate emergency needs and gaps identified at local level.¹¹ According to the 2023 DEMAC mapping, an estimated 33-38 diaspora organisations (DOs) participated in the Herat earthquake response in the first ten days, active in the US, UK, Canada, Germany, the Netherlands, Australia and Iran.

The present research seeks to build upon this mapping by widening the sample to include a longer time frame than the first ten days. It identified about 200 diaspora organisations; most of which contributed to Herat relief through informal means. Some contribute either periodically or continuously to humanitarian action in Afghanistan. Many have limited time to engage. Many of these organisations do not have formal links to each other.

⁹ DRC (2019). Afghan diaspora in Europe: Mapping engagement in Denmark. Maastricht University—United Nations University.

¹⁰ DRC (2024), Afghan Diaspora Response to Natural Disasters: the Herat Earthquakes – Webinar Report.

¹¹ DRC (2024), Afghan Diaspora Engagement Project – 2 pager.

A combination of contextual challenges fuels an increased reliance on contributions and remittances from the diaspora. Remittances total an estimated USD 788 million in 2020, the importance of remittances has only grown post August 2021.¹² The departures driven by the Taliban's return to power have also driven a shift in the makeup of the Afghan diaspora, with the arrival of financially better off – individuals and households.¹³ Restrictions since 2021 have led to a diversification and re-framing of focus areas among DOs. DOs are likely to have gained more resources – both human and financial. Many diaspora organisations introduced a humanitarian component by 2022.¹⁴ Greater emphasis is now placed on safety, remote education, and advocacy. This underscores a shift from family and community ties, to generating public attention to expand support.

A Typology of Afghan Diaspora Actors

Category 1	Formal structure, officially registered in the country of residence, with volunteers, staff and governance structure
Category 2	Less formal governance structure, sometimes registered, volunteers
Category 3	Officially registered in Afghanistan with affiliate offices or representatives in countries of residence
Category 4	Loose networks of volunteers coming together to respond to crises in Afghanistan with no formal structure and governance
Category 5	Individuals mobilising support for affected areas

¹² Ross and Barratt (2022), Remittances to Afghanistan are lifelines: they are needed more than ever in a time of crisis. Migration Data Portal

¹³ Giuliano Battiston for IOM (2022), The Afghan Diaspora: Partners in the Crisis Response - Mapping of Afghan diaspora organizations in Italy and the prospects for their involvement in the humanitarian response in Afghanistan.

¹⁴ DEMAC (2022), Diaspora Humanitarian Engagement: Afghanistan Real-Time-Review.

The added value of working with DOs in fragile, conflict-affected settings boils down to five characteristics:¹⁵

1. **Agility and versatility:** due to their small size and lighter bureaucratic processes
2. **Familiarity and understanding:** built on personal relationships with the areas and communities in which they implement
3. **Advocacy and awareness:** direct communication channels means that they often receive alerts and updates in ‘real-time’
4. **Access:** DOs often know whom to speak to and when, and how to present information.
5. **Relevance:** the above enhance the relevance of interventions and initiatives provided by DOs. However, learning opportunities involving DOs and diaspora-led interventions are not harnessed by actors in the humanitarian space

Diaspora members and DOs mostly operate at individual, community and local levels. Remittances are the best illustration of this focus, sent by one individual or household to another.¹⁶ DOs work with local partners – including local civil society organisations, local authorities, community leaders, formal and informal community-based groups, and traditional leadership bodies like shuras – to implement activities such as distributing food and assistance to vulnerable, displaced, and hard-to-reach populations.¹⁷ To clarify the level of formality and coordination, a typology of diaspora actors can be applied.

¹⁵ DEMAC (2018), Creating Opportunities to Work with Diasporas in Humanitarian Settings.

¹⁶ Safi, A. A., & Czaika, M. (2025). The transnational engagement of Afghan diaspora organizations: Drivers of diaspora specialization. Global Networks, No. 25

¹⁷ Ibid; Muslim Aid, Your donations saved earthquake-struck Afghanistan last winter. Blog - Muslim Aid's Media Insights, 2025.



Among the 200 diaspora organisations identified and contacted, 15 were interviewed.

Nine were classified as Category 1 (Australia, Belgium, Canada, Czech Republic, Germany, the Netherlands, UK, US); three as Category 2 (Germany, France); none as Category 3, and three as Category 4 (Austria, Canada, the Netherlands). Their specialties in Afghanistan range from sustainable development, to humanitarian relief, women's organising, education, and children's rights. Domestically, these actors engage in research, advocacy, community-building, cultural and religious activities.

Category 1 – Diaspora organisations registered outside of Afghanistan

These diaspora organisations provide both emergency action and long-term support, mobilising a network of staff and volunteers in Afghanistan. Their activities are strategically coordinated in the country of residence but executed by local organisational leadership and employees in the country of origin. Examples from this research include:

- **The Kalaam Project** provided food packages for the earthquake (KII11-D).
- **The Baba Mazari Foundation** provided essential supplies and food to earthquake 2023; hygiene products at return sites (KII8-D).
- **Ansar Relief** focused on children through education, mobile clinics, and family sponsorship (KII14-D).

Category 2 – Diaspora networks or associations, engaged more informally

Category 2 DOs engage, but they may not represent their actions in formal terms – in planned expenditures or reporting. For example, they may contribute to humanitarian relief through social media or in-person events, such as galas or informal gatherings in public spaces, to raise pool funds. Pooled funds are then sent directly to local civil society organisations, or trusted contacts in Afghanistan. Examples include:

- **European diaspora organisation members** informally gathered funds to send to a trusted person on ground (KII4-D).
- **Afghans with business connections abroad, or access to Hawala dealers**, sent money from their relatives through their companies to local CSOs (KII7-L).
- **Mosque community members** mobilised by Afghans abroad sent funds to a local CSO for pre-packaged food supplies (KII3-L).

Category 3 – Organisations registered in Afghanistan

Coordination between Afghanistan and the country of residence is also based on the specific skills of diaspora organisations. They hold themselves accountable to their donors and engage in formal reporting practices. Examples include:

- **ArtLords** serves as a platform to connect diaspora members to local communities through activism (KII9-D).
- **Imam Jawad Charity Organisation**, based in Herat and Europe, funded tents and dispatched medical teams (FGD2-F-R1).

Category 4 – Diaspora networks of volunteers

These diaspora representatives are individuals, informally engaging in humanitarian action relief and supporting fundraisers organised by other groups, sending collected funds to personal contacts, and raising awareness. Examples include:

- **Informal WhatsApp groups**, organised fundraising appeals, raised money, and provided videos, photos (KII5-D).
- **Contributors** abroad supported **Khaneh Mehr**, a local CSO, to transport returnees from the border to other provinces (KII1-L).

Category 5 – Individuals and Influencers

Independent actors include influential figures, philanthropists and celebrities providing emergency and reconstruction assistance. Social media personalities, religious figures, athletes, and artists were frequently mentioned as key actors in emergency relief.

- **Philanthropists such as the Azizi Foundation** distributed food relief and built 300+ homes, a school, and a clinic (KII13-L).¹⁸

¹⁸ Sulaiman Hakemy and Shireena Al Nowais, "A Dubai Property Tycoon's \$10 Billion Plan to Save Afghanistan," The National, February 2025

2.2 Fundraising Methods and Financing Models

Diaspora relief efforts for both the earthquake and returnee crisis were funded through a combination of formal and informal channels. The Hawala system and formal money transfer platforms are preferred over the use of banks, due to their ability to get funds faster on the ground. Diaspora actors tend to assess the pros and cons of both methods, determining which one to opt for, on a case-by-case basis.

Applying a DO typology to the Herat 2023 earthquake response reveals two constant points:

- 1. A large percentage of diaspora members work individually or come together on a needs or response basis.** Loose networks of diaspora members tend to collect funds and send them via Hawala.
- 2. Diaspora members are ready for collective action in times of crisis but face regulatory difficulties.** They cannot find ways to safely and easily send their funds or assistance collectively. The Afghan diaspora navigates a complex landscape of remittance channels. While formal options exist, the Hawala system often remains a vital method due to its accessibility, cost-effectiveness, and speed, particularly given the fragile financial infrastructure affecting the public's interest and trust in the formal banking sector within Afghanistan.¹⁹

¹⁹ Disli et al., 2023; Sørensen et al., 2018; Vammen & Kleist, 2012

The Hawala System

Afghanistan, as a post-conflict country, suffers from severely constrained or non-existent access to formal financial services. Basic infrastructure, rule of law, and a stable monetary policy framework are limited in operationalisation. This has affected public interest in the Afghan banking sector, which has historically been low. Cash liquidity issues with banking in 2010 attributed to “corruption, fraud, embezzlement of public funds, impunity of political elites, and collusion and/or incompetence of regulators,” dealt a severe blow to public confidence in formal financial institutions²⁰. Even with efforts towards Islamic banking, this distrust persists²¹.

In light of these challenges, the Hawala system remains the main funding channel for the Afghan diaspora. It is the most traditional method of remittance in Afghanistan and continues to play a vital role²². Hawala is a trust-based network that facilitates money transfers outside of the formal banking system, particularly in contexts where formal financial institutions are limited, unreliable, or inaccessible. Funds are moved through personal relationships rather than formal contracts. While it plays a vital role in Afghanistan’s financial ecosystem, it faces scrutiny for potential links to money laundering and illicit financing due to limited oversight and transparency. Notably, the system has shown strong resilience, continuing to operate during crises when formal banking systems have failed or been disrupted.

Most diaspora organisations rely on the Hawala system, as infrastructure in Afghanistan that supports people’s access to liquidity, particularly in remote areas of the country. The ongoing restrictions on Hawalas, and an effort by the De Facto Authorities to formalise these mean that they could become more expensive, going forward.

²⁰ Theros, 2024

²¹ Disli et al., 2023

²² Rahimi (2021) How to create better Hawala regulations: a case study of Hawala regulations in Afghanistan

Money Transfer Services & Wire Transfer

Despite the prevalence of non-institutionalised systems, formal money transfer operators are utilized by the Afghan diaspora in a context where regulators, in Afghanistan and abroad, are asking for greater transparency and a move away from cash-based systems. However, bank-to-bank transfers have remained difficult since 2021.

- **Examples:** Money transfer companies like MoneyGram and Western Union are the most common channels.²³
- **Challenges with formal channels:** A significant hurdle for recipients in Afghanistan can be the requirement for valid identification documents to withdraw money²⁴. Many Afghans, particularly those in precarious situations, may not possess such documents, necessitating the involvement of contact persons or intermediaries to collect funds on their behalf. Or they may have simply lost access to documentation in a crisis like the earthquake. In addition, diaspora organisations based in Europe explain limitations on amounts. One key informant explained that MoneyGram does not allow a transfer of more than EUR 3,000. Certain associations were also blocked in Germany for channelling too much funds, or others were called upon for checks given the linkages with organisations in countries of the Middle East and Central Asia.
- **Limited access and trust:** Public trust in Afghanistan's banking sector has historically been low, with a small percentage of Afghans having access to banking services, though this number has been slowly increasing.²⁵

²³ Sørensen et al., 2018; Themann & Etzold, 2023

²⁴ Themann & Etzold, 2023

²⁵ Disli et al., 2023

Workarounds exist and ensure that the formal system can be more routinely utilised. A number of respondents for our research have taken steps to open bank accounts in Turkey and the United Arab Emirates, or with gradual utilisation upon banking stability, to diversify their banking partner options. Others have requested local CSOs to open a bank account dedicated to the money that the diaspora would transfer to them. Going through accounts of associations, companies and friends seems to be a common strategy – while this does not provide a direct tracing system for diaspora funding to Afghanistan, it still utilises the formal system. Some of these workarounds shift more of the control and power to local organisations as diaspora organisations

“Give money indirectly to a trusted person, and we local CSOs will coordinate how the help is used” (KII11-L).

Finally, a third group prefers to work as a social enterprise, with a private sector arm – for instance a tourism company – enabling ad-hoc charity support and response. Working through local businessmen also gives diaspora organisations the possibility to pay in instalments or ensure that the larger sums can be split in smaller sums. The current challenges many diaspora face are on the amounts that they can send:

“Our problem is also the banking system, we cannot send all the money at once, we have to send it in parts. The limit is USD 9,000, after that the account is blocked for 1 month. We have some businessmen friends who have financial transactions going on between Afghanistan and Europe. So we can transfer that, when there is no other way” (FGD1-M-R6).

Innovative funding models

Innovative funding models have potential to alleviate money transfer challenges faced by diaspora organisations in Afghanistan.

Mobile wallets are a form of innovative financing with the potential to facilitate larger-scale cross-border transactions. HesabPay, an Afghan diaspora-founded company, is the leading provider of mobile money services in Afghanistan. It is most often used to ease in-person constraints of cash payments. For example, HesabPay is used most for recurring or inconvenient payments, such as cross-province transfers or regular utility bills. HesabPay in particular was designed to widen access to capital for vulnerable populations. In a context where less than seven percent of women have a bank account or mobile money service,²⁶ Mobile money can enable women to exercise financial autonomy. It eliminates the need for in-person transactions, which require a male companion. It can also support humanitarian cash transfers free of queues. In 2024, HesabPay collaborated with WFP to provide 26,000 people with mobile banking accounts. The diaspora-led organisation Uplift Afghanistan uses the platform to provide salaries (KII2-I, KII10-D). Uplift Afghanistan also uses HesabPay, a digital payment platform, to transfer salaries and local payments.²⁷

Blockchain technology and digital wallets offer a way to remove multiple layers of intermediaries both for aid and remittances, driving down costs and increasing both efficiency and transparency. The main issue at the moment is the regulatory environment: if unlocked this could allow to see more direct giving models for the diaspora. HesabPay has emerged as a trusted, reliable and effective platform that different aid and diaspora organisations use for cash transfers to the country. It is to date the most successful mobile effort in Afghanistan that is regulated by Da Afghanistan Bank (DAB), with 34 branches as well as thousands of agents across the country providing similar services. They estimate their reach to be through 600,000 wallets in Afghanistan, of which perhaps 30-40,000 wallets are located in Herat (KII2-I). This technology, which uses blockchain infrastructure supported by the Algorand Foundation, can facilitate domestic remittances at a reduced cost. This is a timely conversation as regulators are thinking about allowing HesabPay to facilitate mobile money internationally.

²⁶ UN Women, FAQs: Afghan women three years after the Taliban takeover, August 2024

²⁷ DRC (2024), Afghan Diaspora Response to Natural Disasters: the Herat Earthquakes – Webinar Report.

HesabPay supports United Nations agencies to direct money to lawyers across Afghanistan or to returnee families by setting up specific blockchain wallets for them. To date, about 100,000 returnees have received support through HesabPay. Similarly they work with the World Bank and the World Food Programme (WFP) on emergency funding, notably on a social protection programme to send cash payments for pregnant and lactating women and mothers of newborns. For this purpose, they have opened wallets for those target groups in specific provinces to be able to extend the use of cash on the humanitarian and protection response. They are equally being used to pay for routine costs of running businesses and civil society organisations in Afghanistan – such as paying electricity bills every month, providing airtime purchases that can facilitate domestic remittances as well through mobile money. Finally, they also are used by diaspora organisations to transfer money into the country.

“Blockchain tech offers a way to remove multiple layers of intermediaries both for aid and remittances and dramatically drive down costs and increase efficiency and transparency.” – Expert, HesabPay

Despite its potential, HesabPay cannot be used yet for international transfers (i.e. diaspora remittances). Its role in humanitarian cash transfer was strictly domestic; the funds were first introduced to the country by intergovernmental organisations (IGOs) via their own secure channels, then distributed via HesabPay throughout the country. At the time of writing, HesabPay lacks the licensing by DAB to permit international movement of mobile money – it is strictly to be used to and from Afghanistan. Though all the tech is in place, the regulators are not moving forward. Hesitation can be attributed to the novelty of the technology, which results in an unclear stance from a Sharia law perspective. As more Muslim-majority countries embrace mobile money as a mode of international transfer, such as the use of the Kenya-developed platform M-Pesa, it is hoped the DfA might follow suit.

DOs have identified various solutions to overcome challenges around international transfers presented above. Aseel – an e-commerce platform turned humanitarian aid donation platform – has established a system of humanitarian aid delivery to expedite operating in fragile settings. Participants and beneficiaries are given an *Omid* identifier, including information about the individual and household. These participants are then mapped against a network of facilitators – titled *Atalan* (or ‘heroes’) – who receive cash directly from Aseel,²⁸ which is then handed directly to the households registered through *Omid*. This method was notably employed during the Herat earthquake emergency response, from October 2023.²⁹ In October 2025, Aseel and HesabPay signed an MoU to bring digital transfer to the Afghan economy.³⁰

Cryptocurrency has transformed the relationship between consumers and financial institutions. By offering an alternative to currencies controlled by national financial institutions, it can insulate funds from political ensnarement, such as bank freezes, regulatory friction, and sanctions. It behaves like any other currency, which underscores its potential as a donation medium in Afghanistan. However, it has not yet become widespread in Afghanistan due to limited access to mobile phones, telecommunications infrastructure, financial literacy, numerical literacy, and awareness (KII3-I). Addressing these fundamental challenges would involve long-term, concerted efforts, by multiple actors: the DfA, UN agencies, telecommunications companies, the private sector, and multi-sectoral development initiatives. Experts see such a cross-sector transformation to fintech as unlikely in the near future. However, smaller initiatives are exploring these innovations with promising results.

²⁸ Aseel faced challenges withdrawing cash in the fall of 2021, but since then, it reports smooth cash transfers.

²⁹ DRC (2024), Afghan Diaspora Response to Natural Disasters: the Herat Earthquakes – Webinar Report.

³⁰ Ruhila Mateen, “Aseel and Hesabpay Partner to Reshape Afghanistan’s Economy Through Seamless Digital Payments,” Aseel, October 8, 2025

Code to Inspire (CTI), a non-profit registered in the US and based in Herat, offers a model for the use of cryptocurrency for humanitarian aid to Afghanistan. It is a donation-powered coding school for girls and women. The non-profit was an early adopter of cryptocurrency, and credits its current success to cryptocurrency's ease, safety, and transparency. Starting in 2018, in response to high money transfer fees and lack of online payment service coverage in Afghanistan, the CTI team experimented with collecting online donations through cryptocurrency. However, few known pathways in Afghanistan existed to convert these to US Dollars or Afghanis. The CTI team found a money exchange agent in the financial district able to convert, then slowly built a client relationship. Since then, this agent's operation has now also expanded, thanks to CTI's engagement. In August of 2021, Fereshteh Forough, CTI founder, reflected:

“It’s unbelievable how this technology can help in such a critical moment where the banks are closed, Western Union has limited services, and nothing is working in Afghanistan.”³¹

She noted increased interest by humanitarian actors– in learning more about cryptocurrency as a means of empowering those with limited access to banks. The feasibility of this potential remains a debate among the actors involved, as certain prerequisites are required.

³¹ Unchained, Crypto Actually Fixes This: How Code to Inspire Uses Crypto in Afghanistan, September 28, 2021

Table 2. Summary of Channels : Informal to formal channels, and channels to explore

Channel Type	Description	Advantages	Disadvantages
Hawala System	Informal, trust-based network of brokers (“hawaladars”)	User-friendly, inexpensive, fast, crucial in areas with limited formal banking	Opaque, difficult to track, concerns about illicit financing, regulatory challenges
Formal Money Transfer Operators	Services like MoneyGram and Western Union	Official, generally perceived as more secure for senders	Requires valid ID for recipients (excluding those without), limited accessibility, lower public trust
Workarounds	The formal system can be utilised through other actors, such as individuals or companies	Local CSOs and local businesses provide funding mechanisms	Less direct control; stronger reporting and oversight systems are necessary
Mobile Money (HesabPay)	A mobile system for domestic remittances, aid, utility bill payments	Available technology used in Afghanistan with 600,000 wallets for emergency and protection	HesabPay not used for international transfers due to a lack of international licensing; lack of mobile phone access; telecommunications infrastructure
Cryptocurrency	Collecting online donations through cryptocurrency	Early users (like CTI) provide a model to build upon	Lack of accessible to convert cryptocurrency into US dollars or Afghanis; lack of awareness

Current Fundraising Methods

The Afghan diaspora employs diverse strategies to raise funds often leveraging strong community ties and communication technologies to support various causes in their homeland. These fundraising methods go beyond individual remittances and often involve collective action for humanitarian aid, development projects, or to support specific groups. Among more recent organisations, a range of mechanisms, many of them informal and/or temporary, serve to mobilise funds. A few patterns and key mechanisms emerge from past research compiling insights from DOs across several EU Member States hosting important Afghan communities, including Germany, Austria, Denmark, the Netherlands and the UK^{32,33}:

1. New modalities : Diaspora-led grant making

In recent years, diaspora organisations have been set up to facilitate a safe and transparent space for donations to Afghanistan. Organisations like Uplift Afghanistan ensure a transparent funding line from donors to grantees, including during the earthquake response. Uplift Afghanistan, a participatory grant-making entity, supports organisations on the ground with budget, reporting, capacity building. Afghan and women-led, Uplift brings a gender lens to understand how to support various crises, in real time, in Herat (2023) or Kunar (2025). Recognising a combination of crises and climate change, DOs are re-organising their ways of working through trust building and donations that have spanned several decades. Organisations like Aseel also enable “popups” for fundraising to respond to specific situations. These organisations aim to provide transparency given certain regulations, especially put forth by governments. The US government has a list of specially designated nationals (SDNs), and any money that would reach any such people would endanger the rest of the operations of the diaspora. As a result, transparency has become a priority to ensure proper vetting and SND checks, to ensure compliance. For transparency purposes, the diaspora’s networks in the country of residence matter as much as those back home: they have to show they understand and have the trust of actors on both sides – from the Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) in the US, to the community development councils in Afghanistan.

³² Safi, A. A., & Czaika, M. (2025). The transnational engagement of Afghan diaspora organizations: Drivers of diaspora specialization. *Global Networks*, No. 25

³³ Ali Ahmad for VIDC (2020), A Guide to Afghan Diaspora Engagement in Europe: Examples of good practice and recommendations from the Vienna Networking Conference “Knowledge Transfer and Support”.

Afghan diaspora organisations may apply for co-funding schemes from larger NGOs or umbrella organisations for development and reconstruction activities, sometimes with requirements for self-funding³⁴. However, such instances were not present in the data collected for this brief's focus on the Herat earthquake response.

- **Many DOs also charge annual membership fees**, which then serve to support operations. Specific examples include the Afghan Lawyers Association (ALAD) in Denmark, as well as the Afghan-German Association for Education, Health and Crafts (Afghanisch-Deutscher Förderverein für Bildung, Gesundheit und Handwerk – AFGHAN e.V.).
- **Project-based institutional grants** are an option available to DOs, which can apply for targeted project funding from international donors, governments and NGOs. For instance, the Afghan Youth Association in Denmark (AYAD) received EUR 25,000 from the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) to fund a project entitled 'The World in Pictures', through which 250 folk tales were printed, illustrated and included in a mobile library for children.
- **Government-funded projects, implemented by established DOs, respond to needs in the health, education and child protection sectors.** For instance, Ärzteverein für Afghanische Flüchtlinge (AFAF) project *First Aid for Gunshot and Blast Injuries & Basic Life Support* targets health and education practitioners. The Help Afghan School Children Association (HASCO), a Vienna-based DO founded in 2002, funded by the Austrian Ministry of Education, Science and Research, and notably implements community-based education programmes targeting returnee children in Kabul and Herat.
- **Grants for diaspora programming** tend to support more structured development projects. These often require the submission of formal proposal documents, rely on more institutionalised reporting mechanisms, and are implemented through partnerships with local actors and partners.

³⁴ Vammen & Kleist, 2012

2. Digital Platforms and Crowdfunding

Social media in Afghanistan – whether through Facebook, WhatsApp, TikTok – is gaining grounds and has been a key source of information to mobilise the diaspora in the 2023 Herat earthquake response. Two years later, the October 2025 blackout of communications and access to technology in Afghanistan was a sounding alert and risk to diaspora mobilisation should communications such as social media be restricted.

Platforms like Facebook, and mobile payment applications were widely used in the 2023 response to mobilise members and facilitate donations. Fundraising campaigns often feature short, emotionally compelling videos that highlight the urgency and importance of individual contributions³⁵. Digital social networks also served as resources for these communities. Key informant interviews confirmed that WhatsApp groups are where people collect money and mobilise on a need basis. These channels allow individuals from the diaspora to ask what can be done and donate immediately, without a need for fundraising activities or events.

WhatsApp group membership has since the 2023 Herat earthquake response expanded, notably in a context of rising needs following deportation drives from Iran in July 2025. As a result, new Herat-based focal points were added to diaspora organisation's networks and actively shared updates on their back-and-forth movements to the border to greet returnees. Diaspora members were able to follow the situation on the ground, and people's movements, "in real time". Through donations, they managed to transfer money for their trusted individual contact to provide water and food at the border, given especially the very hot summer months. The process first started on WhatsApp through photos and voice notes, and led to the meeting of diaspora group members to mobilise and send their money together through the Hawala system to that person.

³⁵ Sørensen et al., 2018

Crowdfunding of diaspora initiatives were also active in the 2023 Herat earthquake response – primarily through online platforms such as GoFundMe and GiveBetter. Since then, new players specific to Afghanistan have entered the market with success. Aseel began as an e-commerce platform, but it repurposed its software to be used as a humanitarian aid donation and distribution platform. Customers may purchase aid packages at set prices, such as meals for a family, or baby formula and diaper kits. Participants and beneficiaries are given an *Omid* identifier, including information about the individual and household. These participants are then mapped against a network of facilitators – titled *Atalan* (or ‘heroes’). These helpers receive cash or the appropriate supplies directly from Aseel, then deliver the assistance directly to registered households. This method was notably employed during the Herat earthquake emergency response, from October 2023.³⁶ Aseel provided medical checks, food, water, shelter, and cash. Crowdfunding on GoFundMe, GiveBetter, and AseelApp is often enhanced by displaying visual content taken in the field. Media appearances, such as podcasts, interviews, and art-based activism garner positive response. Organisations with a strong institutional presence enjoy grants and institutional donors, while newer organisations expressed difficulty in securing them.

- **Online, Diaspora members** use GoFundMe; JustGiving; GiveBetter which are trusted mechanisms, with a high fee
- **Local CSO also use crowdfunding** with announcements made through Facebook and videos circulating to contacts

³⁶ DRC (2024), Afghan Diaspora Response to Natural Disasters: the Herat Earthquakes – Webinar Report.

3. Cultural and Religious Events

Support events featuring musicians, artists, and poets were also organised to collect funds in and after 2023. Additionally, religious prescriptions for assisting those in need, such as Zakat collections, are commonly utilised by Afghan associations to raise money. For instance, after a severe earthquake in 2015, Afghan youth organisations like From Street to School and Afghan Youth Association in Denmark (AYAD) collaboratively raised over USD 15,500 for earthquake victims through such events and other means³⁷. In most diaspora settings, the mosque and Friday prayers continue to be a rallying point and moment in the week where the Imam can call on people to support Afghans at home, as a religious responsibility. Mosque attendees can pay cash or send to the mosque's account number to transfer the money on their behalf to Afghanistan, with a percentage taken by the provider as fees, like other platforms. Afghan shops and supermarkets are also gaining ground as places to contribute additional funds. In Germany, the UK and the Netherlands they are an outlet where people gather and can, in addition to their purchases, send money to Afghanistan.

“These supermarkets act as intermediaries: they collect from Afghans and then send it to Afghanistan. The shop and supermarket owners usually take a percentage of the money before sending it. We do not know the exact financial arrangement between the supermarket owner in Germany and the counterpart in Afghanistan” (KII2-D).

³⁷ Sørensen et al., 2018

4. Humanitarian and Development Initiatives

The Afghan diaspora is actively involved in diaspora humanitarianism, offering aid during crises, tackling poverty, and promoting education and infrastructure development in Afghanistan³⁸. More established DOs, with core activities including humanitarian aid, infrastructural support and technical assistance across basic services sectors (mainly health and education) tend to rely on more formalised funding streams. For instance, the Doctors' Associations for Afghan Refugees (AFAF), founded by Afghan migrants in Germany over four decades ago, is directly funded by the German government, alongside private donors and other formally recognised institutions. Following emergencies, these organisations provide longer-term relief infrastructure.

- **Private donations often contribute to small-scale, flexible and community-oriented projects.** Among key characteristics, these projects tend to be driven by diaspora organisations whose founders bear strong personal connections to Afghanistan, with a focus on direct, humanitarian aid, education, and community services. Thematically speaking, past interventions relying on this type of funding have focused on educational support to street children and orphans, provision of basic healthcare and medicine, tailored technical and vocational education and training (TVET) targeting women, as well as water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) infrastructure construction and rehabilitation.
- **Finally, in-kind donations – including medical supplies, equipment, books, learning and school materials – are also provided,** mainly by individual donors and associations. Specific DO interventions tend to rely on personal networks, including professional contacts such as healthcare providers. Thematically, these interventions tend to focus on primary healthcare and emergency response, including the provision of mental health and basic food items.

³⁸ Gamlen & Chakma, 2025

5. Diaspora members contribute to their homelands not only through individual remittances to family and friends.

Individual donors are the most ready to mobilise and donate money, mobilising on a need basis.

“Most Afghans living abroad who send aid usually know someone personally. Since this is private, community-based assistance, they send help through individuals they trust, rather than involving municipalities or government institutions. The majority of the aid is sent based on these personal connections – through friends, relatives, or colleagues” (KII15-L).

Diaspora members also contribute through collective remittances for broader community benefit³⁹. There is a shared concern about Afghanistan that motivates self-identification and collective efforts among Afghan diaspora groups⁴⁰.

“All the assistance that has been provided was done at the request of our friends living abroad. I myself did not contact anyone, nor did I post anything on Facebook or any other platform” (KII12-L).

³⁹ Safi & Czaika, 2024

⁴⁰ Fischer, 2017

Case study 1: The Most Lasting Support Came from Our Own People Abroad – A Local Leader Reflects on Diaspora Aid in Injil Post October 2023 Earthquake

Khwaja Sarbur, a village in Injil district with around 80 households, was badly hit by the October 2023 earthquake and subsequent floods, which destroyed homes and water channels in an already water-scarce area. Among the many who responded, the Afghan diaspora stood out. What began as a volunteer network became a more structured effort, coordinated locally. Ali, a long-time resident and community leader, shares his earthquake recovery experience shaped by diaspora ties:

“The diaspora’s help went beyond housing. Afghans in Europe provided six months of food for women, hygiene kits, and therapy sessions for those most affected, while private clinics offered free treatment. Though support from the Pakistan and Iran diaspora was limited, the European diaspora gave generously and effectively. Still, many needs remain – especially for returnees and IDPs who have received no help. If I could send one message to our brothers and sisters abroad, it would be this: thank you for giving us homes, dignity, and hope. Now, please help us again, with water, so we can secure our future.”



3. MOTIVATIONS, CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN DIASPORA ENGAGEMENT DURING EMERGENCIES

“Most of the victims were women. Assistance included a full sanitation package and food assistance for mothers and children, including formula, baby bottles, creams and blankets. Days after the incident, we organised toys, to make children feel better.” -
Diaspora Organization, Sweden

3.1 Diaspora action: from emergency to reconstruction

The following sections provide an overview of the different mechanisms and platforms utilised by diaspora members and DOs, and their alignment with different phases – whether emergency, recovery and relief or reconstruction phases. The responses to the October 2023 Herat earthquakes and ongoing returnee crisis serve as case studies to discuss concrete interventions implemented by the Afghan diaspora.

The overall trends within diaspora humanitarian response and local counterparts include weak collaboration and a focus on short-term emergency relief and rehabilitation. In the 2023 Herat earthquake case study, community members noted an immediate, uncoordinated response by local and diaspora actors, followed by a slow withdrawal as funding decreased or conditions stabilised. A few actors engaged in long-term recovery. In the returnee crisis, similarly, local, self-funded volunteer and CSO actors began the response, some endorsed by diaspora funding, some independently. As the crisis multiplied in scale, UN agencies took the lead, and local actors sustained support, despite their own limited resources. Diaspora organisations' role in rehabilitation was small-scale and scattered, mostly limited to setting up small-scale sustainable livelihood interventions.

Respondents noted the complex nature of the ongoing returnee emergency, which they suggest is not as clear-cut or visible as the earthquake. The sheer number of people, the diversity of their needs, and the implication of all other provinces require huge logistical capacity. In the absence of centralised management, this continues to fall on ordinary community members. Local representatives urged diaspora organisations to continue contributing, emphasising the high value of other currencies in the Afghan economy. The returnee crisis response prioritises immediate relief (KII1-I).

Box 1. Overview of the October 2023 Herat Earthquakes

Between 7 and 15 October 2023, four earthquakes hit Western Afghanistan, affecting the provinces of Herat, Badghis, Farah and Ghor, claiming the lives of over 2,000 people, and leaving 9,000 injured.⁴¹ The epicentre was in Zinda Jan district, situated about 40 km northwest of the city of Herat. A total of 362 villages, spread across 10 districts, were directly impacted by this series of seismic events, which By certain estimates, over 90% of fatalities were women and children.⁴² This reflects the fact that these groups spend most of their time indoors, with housing structures – often made of mud – increased levels of vulnerability. As a result, an estimated 48,000 houses were either damaged or destroyed by the earthquakes.

The color coding in this box shows the higher ratings given to different phases of the response – green reflecting where most diaspora activities took place; orange reflecting existing activities and red reflecting the lower levels of engagement.

Box 2. Overview of the Three Phases of the Earthquake Emergency

1. Emergency	2. Recovery	3. Reconstruction
The emergency phase of the earthquake can be described as the first 72 hours to 6 months. In the earthquake, this phase included search and rescue missions, immediate trauma care, hot food, water, fuel, cash assistance, infant kits, and tents.	The recovery phase can be seen as a bridge between the emergency and reconstruction phases, from several months to two years. For the earthquake, this phase includes the continued provision of temporary shelter, winterisation, fuel, dry food goods, and temporary safety measures.	The reconstruction phase can also be several months to two years, depending on context. This phase encompasses the efforts to return to sustainable normalcy – rebuilding infrastructure, resuming livelihoods.

⁴¹ IFRC (2024), Afghanistan | Herat Earthquake - Emergency Appeal Operation Update #2, Appeal No MDRAF007.

⁴² UNICEF, One year after the earthquakes in western Afghanistan, UNICEF calls for greater support to children's basic needs and community resilience. Press release, 7 October 2024.

Emergency Phase

In the week following the Herat earthquakes, a multitude of DOs had begun mobilising resources, raising funds, and delivering emergency assistance to affected communities. From October to November 2023, at least 38 organisations, most of which were based in the US, were engaged in these efforts. By December of the same year, they had raised an estimated USD 3.4 million according to public records.⁴³ Of this amount, USD 2.8 million had been crowdfunded during the first seven days in response to immediate emergency needs and gaps identified at local level.⁴⁴ While broadly positive, these figures underscore the uneven temporal distribution of fundraising activities undertaken by DOs, concentrated in the early phases of the emergency response.

During the emergency phase of the response, participating DO funds were mostly allocated to provide temporary – or transitional – shelter, and to purchasing essential food packages. However, by December 2023, several of these organisations had begun planning for longer-term recovery initiatives, focused on economic recovery and sustainable reconstruction projects seeking to expand access to healthcare, water and sanitation. Activities overseen by DOs were implemented through local staff and volunteer networks, with one third of diasporic entities working hand-in-hand with local partner organisations. Specific DO-coordinated approaches to the Herat earthquake emergency response include the following:

- **Vision for Children e.V.** provided transitional shelter after a rapid needs assessment.
- **The Afghan LGBTIQ Organisation (ALO)** provided cash assistance for LGBTIQ+ individuals.
- **The Baba Mazari Foundation (BMF)** provided emergency food assistance.
- Many other diaspora actors organised smaller-scale volunteer interventions.

⁴³ DRC (2024), Afghan Diaspora Response to Natural Disasters: the Herat Earthquakes – Webinar Report.

⁴⁴ DRC (2024), Afghan Diaspora Engagement Project – 2 pager.

Recovery Phase

“We paused for a second, to assess the gaps after the big response: they needed homes.” – delete and instead: Diaspora organization representative, USA

Diaspora members – mostly by donating to local organisations – supported CSOs in the earthquake recovery process.

- **The Afghan Institute of Learning (AIL) built** wells in affected villages that lacked potable water.
- **Compassion in the Right Place** provided about 17 families with winter tools like coal, heater, blankets and more.
- A local CSO channelled diaspora funds to cash assistance and temporary shelters for the first 2-3 months.
- A local CSO provided women’s Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Services (MHPSS)
- A local CSO in Injil district mobilised European diaspora funds to provide 6 months of food aid.

Reconstruction Phase

Reconstruction projects funded by the diaspora are usually small-scale infrastructure projects. While their impact may only touch a handful of people, or a single village, it can be life changing. Some local CSOs shared that they receive money with specific amounts allocated for reconstruction purposes, and the rest for emergency relief. Major gaps continue in essential infrastructure: agriculture remains behind due to water supply and canal damage. Social infrastructure, such as schools and hospitals, are in need of repair, with children experiencing education gaps. Solar panels have been identified as a welcome alternative to electricity. One diaspora organisation representative in Europe flagged a critique: in contrast with emergency support, which brings communities together (KII6-L), reconstruction work can take place along ethnic or geographic lines (KII2-D). However, few other diaspora and local participants shared this concern.

- **The Kalaam Project** sponsored an earthquake-affected orphanage and built kitchens and ten bathrooms.
- **Multiple local CSOs** used diaspora funds to re-build houses.
- **One local CSO** built a mosque; another built water wells; another still runs health clinics in Zinda Jan.
- **Ansar Relief Foundation** provided solar panels to illuminate homes without electricity and micro-business support (KII14-D).
- **Muslim Aid** provided direct shelter and winterisation assistance to 1,974 individuals in Zinda Jan and Injil (KII4-D).
- **Uplift Afghanistan Fund** built eco-friendly and earthquake resistant homes, and repaired a water reservoir, with the help of Afghan diaspora engineers (KII10-D).

CASE STUDY 2: A Village Leader on Diaspora Home Reconstruction in Nowabad, Zinda Jan

Nowabad, one of the smallest villages in Zinda Jan with just 15 families, was badly damaged in the October 2023 earthquake. No lives were lost, but every house cracked, and families spent over a week outside before aid finally arrived. Diaspora support through the local charity Ehsas Social Services Charity Organisation (EWSSO), transformed the recovery. Villagers were consulted, hired as paid labourers, and even had their design requests accepted by engineers. Within months, strong concrete houses stood – sturdier than those in neighbouring villages. A plaque in the village now honours the Afghan diaspora whose cash-for-work, co-design, and commitment to quality turned disaster into lasting change.

“These new houses are strong and well-built – the engineers said they could bear ten floors. No other village nearby has such homes. Although assistance has now stopped and our well has dried up, we remain deeply grateful. Drought has left us without livestock or food, but we have something our ancestors never had: safe, permanent homes. Thanks to the Afghan diaspora and Ehsas, our families live with dignity, and our children sleep safely, no longer exposed to cold and dust.”

3.2 Motivations , Challenges and Opportunities

“The diaspora is a reactive entity.” – Diaspora organisation representative, The Netherlands

Respondents expressed a range of motivations for supporting the 2023 Herat earthquake response. Many cited patriotic solidarity, human empathy, cultural and religious values of giving, and a sense of duty. Diaspora members hold a wide range of political beliefs, often tied to time and circumstances of migration, and country of residence. Generational differences were highlighted; tech-savvy diasporic youth are beginning to explore questions of identity through activism. Though a few respondents critiqued some donations as being “performative,” one diaspora organisation founder noted the importance of visibility for raising funds, no matter the motivation. With growing migration flows to Europe since 2021, there has been an increase in support from diaspora actors. The motivations are as diverse as diaspora itself – from a culture of giving, to global movement of solidarity across borders, to instances of survivors’ guilt and performative giving. Diaspora actors have potential as agile, trusted, efficient actors. However, limitations of financial and operational capacity make it difficult for them to engage in emergency response directly.

“Since the Herat earthquake occurred at the same time as the Israel-Palestine war, global news focused on the latter. In this context, our reporting on the Herat earthquake was necessary and impactful, drawing the attention of the international community. A significant part of our work was focused on information dissemination” – Diaspora Representative, Sweden

Diaspora Motivations for Mobilising

1. Moral and Religious Obligations

The desire to charitable giving is deeply embedded in social relations and moral obligations, especially in times of emergency or crisis. The sense of Afghan solidarity and identity strongly motivates the diaspora actors interviewed for this study. Similarly, a failure to give can be perceived as morally wrong, both in cultural and religious terms. What drives people to help is their humanity and their love for the homeland; and knowing that their country and its people need to be defended. Hospitality is deeply rooted in Afghan culture; it is common that people contribute from their salaries and personal resources to support those in need. Special occasion giving (for Eid, Zakat, weddings and funerals) is accompanied by giving around other occasions. One important aspect is the Islamic spirit and the sense of humanitarian duty toward fellow countrymen.

“When people see that assistance has reached someone in need, they feel very happy- sometimes so happy that they cry from joy” (KII3-L).

2. Ensuring Afghanistan is Not Forgotten

In the post August 2021 context, a second motivation is to protect the homeland from disappearing from international priorities: the perceived failure of international and national state actors to be present and provide a platform to support Afghans has been a wakeup call for the Afghan diaspora, deeply concerned over the shortcomings of governance and aid systems. This collective action is part of a shared concern for their homeland. Keeping the homeland from being forgotten is of critical importance, at a time where economic instability, climate change and lack of governance are a greater risk for many than conflict ever was.

“Witnessing crises in Afghanistan makes them feel a deep sense of responsibility, which compels them to act” (KII10-L).

3. Sustaining Transnational and Intergenerational Ties

The return of the Taliban in 2021 has prepared the diaspora for another period of uncertainty. Diaspora actors continue to mobilise, using modern technology so that Afghans do not forget their own homeland, regardless of time and distance. Young Afghans are asking questions; as they learn about atrocities around the world such as Gaza, they reflect on their own history and homeland. Diaspora members participate to ensure Afghan-American youth can build confidence in staying active and showing their leadership. In emergencies, much of this passion is galvanised by social media. For example, the Kalaam Project's team shared that documenting their live earthquake relief distribution on social media allowed them to reach younger generations (KII11-D). Allies of Afghan communities abroad are mobilised by online content; diaspora organisations reported that donations to the earthquake response increased after discussing their efforts in interviews or podcast appearances (KII14-D, KII1-I).

Challenges

Limited levels of communication among DOs and with other formal actors populating the Afghan humanitarian ecosystem increase the risk of duplication. Many respondents wished to see fragmented, scattered interventions, both local and diaspora-led, aligned through one communication platform. Local and diaspora actors on the ground mentioned that coordination was often informally conducted through WhatsApp group chats, which brought the strength of immediacy, but the challenge of excluding those outside personal or professional networks.

1. Barriers And Gaps in Coordination and Scalability

Resource shortages result in weakened accountability of interventions. For example, in the earthquake and returnee crisis, organisations adhered to widely different needs assessment criteria, if using a formal assessment at all. Some diaspora interventions bypassed formal surveys or procedures in favour of prescribing a certain type of assistance, location, or beneficiary profile (KII6-L, KII15-L). Others relied extensively on in-person needs assessments, but lacked the resources to follow up with monitoring or evaluation. Organisations without a formal presence in Afghanistan, or in the province of need, were seen by local CSO representatives as lacking contextual awareness.

2. Financial and Contextual Restrictions

Afghan diaspora actors must navigate financial friction and contextual restrictions. Financial difficulties hinder most aspects of raising and transferring money to Afghanistan. Across Western countries of residence, sanctions against Afghanistan have resulted in the freezing of assets, and additional scrutiny for actors involved in cross-border engagement. In such an environment, reporting requirements are extensive. Contributing to any activity in Afghanistan is seen by small diaspora organisations – and donors – as high risk, without the proper space to apply procedural steps. As such, smaller, volunteer-organised diaspora initiatives cited management protocols as a barrier for engagement. For example, a media personality crowdfunded USD 130,000 for earthquake relief, but the funds were locked by the US government, requiring the assistance of a more experienced diaspora humanitarian organisation to manage the funds smoothly (KII10-D).

Each organisation's scope largely determines its ability to contribute to emergency and rehabilitation efforts. Larger organisations shared that, even with country-of-residence registration in place, transferring funds into Afghanistan was outside their scope. For example, as an advocacy group or cultural association, limitations in scope dictate how much money can be sent abroad. Furthermore, local CSOs working on behalf of diaspora actors described a complex operational environment in Afghanistan. Local partners addressed concerns over gatekeeping by community leaders and diversion of aid by conducting extensive needs assessments. For example, in addition to consulting with community leaders, district-level authorities, and religious leaders, they surveyed community members directly. Other local partners relied on informal needs assessments.

Telecommunications challenges in Afghanistan may also interrupt diaspora organisations' emergency relief work. For example, in October 2025, the country-wide internet and telephone outage prevented online contact between an estimated 41 million people within Afghanistan and beyond.⁴⁵ This overlapped with the second month of the Kunar earthquake response, leaving international concern for the wellbeing of those displaced by the earthquake, whose access to humanitarian aid and medical services was interrupted. Vital remittance and emergency support pathways described previously, money transfer and hawala, have been disrupted.⁴⁶ So too, were online livelihoods and needs, such as social services, women's education, and remote employment. Diaspora members could not reach families and friends, causing uncertainty and fear.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ UN News, "Global report: Food insecurity in Afghanistan reaches dire levels," September 2025

⁴⁶ Humayoon Babur, "When the Taliban switches off the internet, Afghanistan disappears," The Interpreter, 1 Oct, 2025

⁴⁷ Al Jazeera, "Afghanistan imposes internet blackout: What has the effect been so far," September 30, 2025

3. Gaps in Procedures and Capacity

Gaps in evidence and accountability can impact diaspora-led work. Charities and diaspora organisations often operate with limited financial and human resources, relying heavily on volunteers. They often use needs assessments but rarely monitor the impact of their work after the fact, sometimes, unable to report back on how their money has helped. There is no formal monitoring of the financial support or of the assistance coordinated by volunteers.

“If such systems were transparent - if they defined clear objectives, identified beneficiaries, and shared their activities with donors – then people would contribute more confidently. If a mechanism were created that provided full transparency and detailed reporting on activities, then perhaps Afghans abroad would be more willing to cooperate and work jointly with organisations” (KII13-L).

Diaspora organisations noted a lack of technical capacity to respond, especially beyond the emergency phase. Diaspora members spoke about a lack of know-how, taking as an example the experience of returnees from Iran. They recognise that the reintegration process is multi-dimensional, but that the diaspora do not have enough experience to know what should be done. This is also due to the fact that the volunteer power faces limitations and risks of burnout if the efforts have to be sustained over a period of time, or if they have to fully integrate the humanitarian coordination and their ways of working.

Opportunities

Despite operational challenges, diaspora actors have unique strengths: trust, timeliness, cost-effectiveness, reach, and visibility. Looking forward, opportunities are present to collaborate more with the private sector, local actors, and using innovative tools.

1. Credibility and Trust

Diaspora-led initiatives often enjoy community-wide credibility, often where formal institutions do not. Local and diaspora participants emphasised the relational, trust-based customs of Afghanistan. When trust is earned, it lasts. Individual donors were eager to come forward in emergencies to support groups they trust. Though some respondents doubted the transparency of diaspora-powered aid, most expressed confidence in it, especially when contrasted with humanitarian agencies perceived as inefficient or corrupt (KII9-D).

“That individual is much more trusted among that smaller community than an organisation”(KII12-D).

2. Timeliness and Cost Effectiveness

Timeliness of diaspora interventions was cited as another key strength. While bureaucratic procedures delay larger institutions, diaspora actors can immediately communicate through group chats and informal gatherings. One of the key strengths and unique initiatives of the diaspora has been their speed of response. Whenever a crisis or incident occurred, they immediately announced to local actors their willingness to assist and mobilised resources quickly.

“We were the first people to go there – before the government would arrive – to provide this basic help, shelter, any needs that we could do” (KII9-D).

Diaspora organisations were also praised for their cost effectiveness. Local CSOs and community members, equipped with diaspora funds, are a cost effective alternative to formal humanitarian actors, whose capacity to transfer funds to people has recently diminished due to access concerns. This leads many diaspora actors to conclude that

“Diaspora organisations do more with less” (KII5-D).

3. Working as Part of Faith Communities

Another realm of opportunity for diaspora work is faith communities. Both diaspora and local organisations reported a sharp uptick in faith-based donations on holidays like Eid, Muharram, and Ramadan. Islamic values of generosity were frequently tied to the Afghan diaspora's motivations. Faith-based organisations can serve as a key link to diaspora support. For example, a CSO in Afghanistan mentioned support from a mosque abroad, where diverse migrants collected funds on behalf of one Afghan member of the community. The coalition of faith and non-faith actors is critical in this work. Diaspora actors see that they can address specific niche themes, including premature births, nervous breakdowns, and irregular menstrual cycles. These issues must be taken into account in aid programmes as well as targeting less-publicised affected areas, such as Naqra Jat village in Injil district, where many houses had been destroyed.

CASE STUDY 3: “They Acted Quickly, Without Bureaucracy” – A Volunteer Reflects on Diaspora and Community-Led Support for Returnees in Herat

Herat province faced two crises within two years: the October 2023 earthquake and the returns from Iran in 2025.. Local volunteers filled gaps in registration, transport, and basic aid, while diaspora groups funded transport, medical cases, and daily needs. Yet women and children remained underserved. In this context, Mohammad (name changed), a volunteer and humanitarian worker, reflects on his experience receiving aid from Baba Mazari Foundation and the Global Hazara Fund.

“My name is Mohammad. During the earthquake and returnee crisis, I volunteered with community-based teams in Injil and Zinda Jan districts. The people of Herat showed remarkable solidarity, organising transport, shelter, and food for returnees using their own resources. Many displaced families stayed in mosques, stadiums, and religious centres, where we provided meals and hygiene items, especially for women and children

We worked closely with the Afghan diaspora, who provided essential financial and material support. Most coordination happened informally through WhatsApp, where different community teams shared updates and divided responsibilities. They sent funds through Western Union or trusted intermediaries, and we ensured transparency through detailed reports. I will never forget two women who urgently needed surgery – one for her eyes and one for her kidneys. Local resources couldn't cover the costs, but with diaspora funding, both were treated and spared lifelong disability.”



4.

PARTNERSHIP MODALITIES AND EVOLUTIONS: LESSONS LEARNED

4.1 Partnership Modalities

Partnerships between diaspora actors and local actors are most often informal. All local CSO representatives shared that diaspora support is primarily financial. In other words, diaspora actors support local actors by sending funds. When prompted to compare diaspora-led and local emergency funding efforts, CSOs in Afghanistan unanimously praised domestic efforts. This rang especially true for the early returnee response, in which individuals travelled from Herat and other provinces to offer help in the form of transport. Despite restrictions, women's leadership could be seen. They gathered and sewed clothes and tents in both emergencies (KII2-L), volunteered returnees at checkpoints, and offered mental health and psychosocial support for families.

- **Category 1 organisations employ a formal approach to partnerships with other diaspora organisations.** For example, an official MoU between Baba Mazari Foundation and Bamyar Foundation links Australia and the US. Alongside community leaders and mosques in Zinda Jan, Baba Mazari Foundation (BMF) provided earthquake relief in the form of food and cash (KII16-L).
- **Category 2 and 4 organisations work informally with local partners.** They reported raising earthquake and returnee funds to send to a local charity, or to a trusted contact, who promised to distribute aid.
- **Category 3 organisations** were less represented in the present sample, so further secondary research is required to present the nature of their partnerships with local actors.

1. Local Actors as Donors: Transforming Power Dynamics

While this research centres on diaspora communities, it has become clear that local communities are the backbone of diaspora action. In addition to providing and distributing aid, CSOs and individuals offered their tireless presence in the field and unique contextual knowledge. Across the country, citizens of all socioeconomic backgrounds donated money and time, calling into question expectations of ‘donor’ and ‘recipient.’ The following examples show small local support in cash and in kind:

- **A local CSO leader** reported that middle-level income in Afghanistan contributed more than the wealthy elite.
- **A local CSO** hosted a donation drive at mosques for food and clothing, amounting to two trucks of relief for Zinda Jan.
- **A local CSO** leader received hundreds of calls from people of Herat, offering to lend their time and vehicles (KII8-L).
- **Many local CSOs** reported religious donations from across the country. One man pledged an USD 800 *Nazar* after a successful heart surgery, which was used to feed 350+ families (KII3-L).

“The people of Herat created a true humanitarian legacy.” – Local Civil Society Organisation Representative (KII8-L)

2. A Trust-Based Partnership: Building on The Power of Networks

Diaspora actors and local actors currently engage in trust-based partnerships. These ties have usually formed organically after years of addressing diverse needs, or family and community ties. Nearly all local CSO leaders interviewed operate with support from Afghans abroad. According to a DO leader in Europe:

“We only work with a few organisations that we really trust and we work very closely with” (KII4-D).

These partnerships are strong, yet informal. Another diaspora representative in Europe shared:

“If we do it through charities, we don’t need any memorandum of understanding or agreement or something” (KII5-D).

Diaspora organisers shared insightful advice on innovative partnership models. Projects are most effective when co-designed, or designed entirely, by affected community members. For example, Uplift Afghanistan is a participatory grant-making entity. This structure ensures local actors provide the ideas and lead execution, while the diaspora helps with managing the budget, reporting, mental health, and capacity building (KII10-D). Diaspora organisations are creating platforms to expand networks.

- **Afghan American Community Organisation (AACO)** hosts an annual conference in North America to facilitate actionable dialogue through resource sharing, coalition-building, and professional development.⁴⁸
- **Hamrah** is a consortium of former Afghan civil society organisations, recently united in exile, to apply for joint grants (KII15-D).

⁴⁸ Afghan-American Community Organization, The Conference, “AAC,” accessed October 10, 2025, <https://aa-co.org/aac>

3. Supporting Institutions: Both Public and Private

Operational partnerships have been established by IGOs and INGOs to address some of the challenges and build on the opportunities presented through the diaspora's work.

Currently, diaspora organisations are not strongly engaged with public institutions in Afghanistan, beyond compliance. For example, local CSOs worked with officials at the border to provide diaspora-funded relief and secured ministerial paperwork to build homes (KII6-L). A reported increased likelihood of aid diversion underscored the need for negotiation, necessitating a principled work approach or stronger advocacy efforts. For example, local CSO brought ambulances and several cartons of medicine, which they had to hand over to the DfA-affiliated Ministry of Public Health. Currently, due to restrictions of certain sectors of civil society activity – excluding non-profit charity work – the DfA do not appear ready to collaborate with diaspora organisations. Official representatives instead encouraged diaspora organisations to donate to the DfA directly by channeling contributions through certain ministries to “prevent misuse” (KII3-DFA, KIII-DFA).

Alternatively, the private sector in Afghanistan offers promise for collaboration with the diaspora. One CSO has signed an agreement with a private health centre to refer patients (KIII-L); others collaborated by buying equipment. Investing in Afghan businesses was mentioned as an area of sustainable recovery needed.

4.2 Lessons Learned

Partnerships between diaspora organisations are gaining momentum, with a need for more diaspora organisations to be included in these networks. Key channels include face-to-face interactions and social media, which have recently facilitated network-building. However, a lack of trust among DOs and local CSOs has been identified as a key barrier to such partnerships. A diaspora organisation leader shared,

“I think it’s very important that diaspora organisations build trust among themselves” (KII8-D).

Another diaspora representative stated:

“There are sometimes disagreements and tensions between Afghan CSOs. Because of that, there is a lot of duplication...Ten organisations shouldn’t be working on the same topic and not collaborate” (KII15-D).

Many diaspora actors are civil society organisations formed in exile following the political transition of 2021. As such, they occupy similar niches – women’s empowerment, democracy, and peace – often, themes that are no longer seen as ‘relevant’ in conservative countries of arrival. They compete for ever-shrinking funds. A diaspora leader advised that these organisations must critically assess what is possible within their scope, collaboration, or cater to a new niche.

Another challenge is the lack of coordination between all actors involved in all three phases of disaster response. Different initiatives were executed in silos, and frequent duplication occurred. For example, during the earthquake response, participants reported that surplus food supplies rotted on the street and in a warehouse (KII7-L, KII14-L, KII14-D). One village received a surplus of blankets, which they resorted to selling in markets (FGD2-F-R4). Local and diaspora interlocutors agreed that diaspora groups should come together as a group to support, from a single source, major programmes and projects – beyond the emergency response phase. In an increasingly difficult organising and funding context, they must learn from each other and share resources.

With stronger communication amongst DOs and actors and the Afghan humanitarian ecosystem, complementary interventions can take place. For instance, DOs tend to distribute hot meals or ready-made food, while actors operating under the Food Security and Agriculture Cluster - FSAC in Afghanistan often provide dry food packages. Even without formal integration into cluster systems, DOs can plan around the activities of formal humanitarian actors, and vice versa. Formal actors can also provide guidance to DOs when it comes to fundraising. Newer organisations are seeking entry points into established networks.

Diaspora actors must strengthen partnerships with each other, and with organisations on the ground that already provide effective humanitarian action. To overcome these gaps, diaspora organisations can begin on a small scale and build trust with more actors. As one DO leader put it:

“Find a good organisation; partner up” (KII10-D).

Even a small-scale partnership can yield synergy. The Baba Mazari Foundation reported great results in securing funding after partnering with the Bamyan Foundation. Formal partnerships can lead to consortia. For example, the Network of Afghan Diaspora Organisations in Europe (NADOE) was recently founded to unify the many Afghanistan diaspora groups in Europe. Conferences and networking events were often mentioned as facilitators of collaborative action.



5.

CONCLUSION

This research concludes that diaspora actors effectively mobilised to provide support with varying degrees of involvement across the three stages of emergency relief, recovery, and reconstruction following the 2023 Herat earthquake. From providing immediate safety needs, to long-term infrastructure, diaspora organisations and informal volunteers were present, documenting their work online for the world to see. This research explored innovative funding models, such as crowdfunding, blockchain technology, and cryptocurrency. These modes of transfer can be seen with cautious optimism, as long as telecommunications infrastructure remains stable. Coordination of diaspora-led interventions in the immediate earthquake aftermath was weak, with frequent duplication. In the medium-term recovery, diaspora support found clearer stock-taking activities, aiming to fill gaps left behind by larger humanitarian actors. In the reconstruction phase, a few, more established diaspora actors contributed to long-term infrastructure reconstruction projects. The most notable finding is the power and potential of local actors, whose work facilitates diaspora-led interventions. It is up to the humanitarian ecosystem to activate that potential, and that of diaspora actors, by connecting the two through upgraded partnerships and capacity building mechanisms.

6.

RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 For Local Actors

- Establish formal partnership frameworks with diaspora organisations to ensure continuity, transparency, and shared accountability in joint initiatives.
- Standardise Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL) procedures to strengthen internal accountability and build trust across local, diasporic, and humanitarian spaces.
- Follow ethical and contextually sensitive reporting practices when capturing content to be distributed online, especially in emergency contexts.

Formal partnerships between local and diaspora organisations can enhance the speed of emergency fundraising and delivery by embedding communication infrastructure *before* a disaster. Formally assigning roles like diaspora-local liaison, or an emergency committee on stand-by, can help local organisations mobilise (KII11-L, KII13-L). The dedicated diaspora liaison focal point can maintain regular dialogue, coordination, and relationship management with diaspora counterparts. Furthermore, local actors also reported success when internally organising into sub-committees specific to the emergency, such as communications and logistics, legal services, counselling and psychotherapy, and dispute resolution.

Improving monitoring and evaluation was cited as a way for local actors to build trust within local, diasporic, and humanitarian spaces. Diaspora representatives shared that reputations in this field can be fragile, and that rumours of aid misuse – real or perceived – can jeopardise community trust in all local organisations. As such, local CSOs, and diaspora organisations, should work together to adhere to formal monitoring and evaluation protocols, which can also help secure funding. Diverse accountability suggestions were proposed (KII8-D). For example, one local actor suggested the use of a single, universal needs-assessment to be shared by diaspora actors and humanitarian actors alike. Each could share human resources, information, etc. A member of the authorities recommended the formation of a “multi-stakeholder monitoring committee, including representatives from donors, beneficiaries, and implementing partners” (KII3-DFA).

Indeed, such a committee could help increase transparency by mitigating the risk of imbalanced decision-making by fostering dialogue. In terms of evaluation, it is advised that local organisations and their diaspora counterparts embrace a monitoring and evaluation framework of industry standard. For example, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Evaluation Criteria,⁴⁹ offer tools to assess projects. If diaspora organisations work together, they can more easily acquire the resources required to embed monitoring, evaluation, accountability, and learning into their programming.

⁴⁹ OECD, Evaluation Criteria, OECD, <https://www.oecd.org/en/topics/sub-issues/development-co-operation-evaluation-and-effectiveness/evaluation-criteria.html>

Social media channels were repeatedly mentioned as catalysts for diaspora action. However, unintentional harm may be caused by filming sensitive contexts. While interlocutors noted they exercised caution in selecting footage to be distributed, a secondary engagement on social media revealed that other crowdfunding initiatives did not – instead, highlighting particularly graphic or unflattering images. Locals shared the unique dilemma of online outreach: on one hand, shocking, attention-grabbing footage often spurs the most action. On the other hand, publicising such footage without affected persons’ consent, especially in traumatic settings, lacks dignity and respect. Furthermore, local communities expressed concern that critiquing formal emergency management pathways on an international stage might lead to more cuts in funding. Therefore, it is advised that those providing on-the-ground updates secure informed consent from communities, and use diverse storytelling tools – such as first-person testimonies, or images protecting people’s likeness – to boost crowdfunding engagement.

Box 3. Advocacy with Dignity

When framing messages to mobilise solidarity and resources, ensure they:

- Highlight agency: Emphasise what communities are already doing (e.g., rebuilding, organising, leading initiatives) and how support can strengthen these efforts.
- Protect dignity: Avoid graphic or sensational imagery. Use anonymised or symbolic visuals when needed.
- Secure consent: Always ask before sharing someone’s image, testimony, or experience, especially in sensitive or traumatic contexts. Avoid sharing photos of children without explicit consent of their guardian.
- Balance urgency with respect: Convey the seriousness of the situation without resorting to shock tactics that may retraumatise or stigmatise affected people.
- Offer clear pathways for support: Pair respectful storytelling with evidence from the ground and forward looking, practical, actionable steps for how audiences can help (donations, advocacy, sharing trusted resources).

6.2 For Diaspora Actors

- Pool funds to create a collective crisis fund for emergency response, and a long-term development fund for sustainable impact.
- Improve collaboration with other diaspora and local actors to share resources, knowledge, and expertise, and to jointly apply for grants that enable faster, more coordinated emergency response.
- Explore the private sector to engage businesses and CSR partners in generating alternative, sustainable funding streams amid declining donor contributions.

Pool funding was the most frequently mentioned recommendation by diaspora and local civil society leaders alike. They specifically endorsed a “crisis fund,” to be deployed in emergencies to flexibly reach those most in need, with contributions from private actors and diaspora organisations.

“If these 150 Afghan associations in Germany each collected around EUR 200 and created a transparent mechanism, they could coordinate through an umbrella association. That umbrella association could then contact other Afghans, send out a call for contributions, and multiply the impact” (KII2-D).

The Afghan-American Foundation (AAF) is building a coalition of DOs directly and indirectly involved in relief to pool funds, as of October 2025 (KII16-D).

With pooled diaspora funds, larger-scale projects can be implemented by local actors. Interviewees encouraged DOs to collectively donate to transparent, well-organised local organisations who were already implementing programming (KII11-L). Pooled funds – especially, when framed as an ongoing ‘saving box,’ or crisis response fund – can enable aid to be quickly deployed (KII6-L). For example, a German umbrella association of diaspora organisations collected aid and sent it to home reconstruction. In addition to a crisis fund, local CSOs envisioned a long-term development fund (KII13-D). Uplift Afghanistan already plays this role, with a strong local leadership component. For other diaspora organisations seeking to engage this model, it is a matter of slowly building relationships and trust with both local actors and donors. The key is to grow, but not too quickly.

Community-led initiatives are a cornerstone of emergency recovery, that can be amplified by the diaspora. The diaspora can best amplify these existing initiatives by fundraising and offering advocacy support. Throughout the research, local CSO representatives expressed their gratitude for continued support from Afghans abroad. However, local organisations occasionally noted that diaspora funds, when sent with a pre-specified purpose, caused duplication or left gaps in need. So, local CSOs encouraged individuals and groups abroad to simply send funds, and allow those on the ground to determine their use through formal needs assessments. Collaboration across diaspora and local organisations can be strengthened and clarified with Memorandum of Understanding (MoUs), to build trust in local transparency mechanisms.

The private sector is increasingly seen as an alternative to traditional funding pathways. By aligning with businesses interested in social impact, sustainability, or market presence in the region, diaspora organisations can access funding, logistical support, and technical expertise that enhance the reach and efficiency of aid initiatives. Collaborations might include co-branded relief campaigns, employee giving programmes, or investment in community resilience projects – allowing companies to demonstrate ethical leadership while diaspora groups gain the resources needed to deliver timely and transparent humanitarian assistance.

6.3 For Institutional Humanitarian Actors

- Provide capacity-building for diaspora organisations (DOs) to strengthen financial, technical, and operational skills through targeted training on budget management, recordkeeping, legal compliance, and MEAL systems.
- Facilitate formal partnerships between diaspora organisations to connect newly formed groups with established ones, providing platforms, spaces, and resources to exchange experience and build networks.
- Create dedicated diaspora partnership windows in funding mechanisms to support co-implemented or co-funded projects between DOs and local CSOs.

Collaboration between newer DOs and well-established NGOs, INGOs or IGOs can create two-way learning pathways and mutual benefits. Capacity-building can be re-imagined; “donors” can be reframed as “partners.” In exchange for financial or technical resources, diaspora organisations can help partners better understand the local context, thanks to their unique understanding of country-of-origin and country-of-arrival dynamics. DOs with extensive experience securing grants shared that exchange between diaspora organisations and local actors are most effective – and long-lasting – when knowledge is transferred both ways. Representatives of international stakeholder institutions can participate in DO-led events to offer capacity-building workshops to multiple DOs at a time.

However, some diaspora organisations noted that capacity-building workshops from NGOs were not always relevant to their circumstances. To amend this, it was recommended that NGOs provide training on highly technical – not general – subjects and procedures. NGOs hoping to enhance DO capacity can extensively communicate with partners to better identify and target needs. Continued investment in research, in the long run, can improve broader understanding of gaps and needs.

Institutional humanitarian actors can also provide the platform, spaces, and resources to build partnerships among DOs. INGO-led conferences efforts to convene diaspora actors were praised by diaspora representatives. These must be continued, especially to address challenges unique to the 2025 humanitarian reset. Specifically, these spaces must be used to collaboratively plan long-term action, which one diaspora organisation leader noted was absent from the discussions at hand (KII12-D). For example, conference organisers may create a DO emergency relief coordination group, to help integrate diaspora actors, under a unified banner, into crisis early response systems. Diaspora expertise is an area of immense potential to be tapped into. For example, one local CSO maintained strong ties with their founder, a university professor abroad, who provided strong strategic guidance. In technical and scientific fields, diaspora members are conducting relevant research – from seismic geographical studies informing earthquake-resistant housing architecture; to the potential of cryptocurrency to transform the Afghan economy. Institutional partners can help diaspora organisations connect with experts abroad and learn from each other.

Institutional humanitarian actors can provide grant opportunities with eased requirements or provide the training to meet current requirements. Document packages can be distributed to diaspora organisations with guidance on securing increasingly scarce funding. For example, resource sheets or templates on how to write MoUs, or joint project proposals, can better equip both diaspora and local organisations to better demonstrate the efficacy, transparency, and planning of their interventions. Collaboration with diaspora and local organisations can be incentivised by joint project grants.

ANNEX I

DIASPORA ORGANIZATIONS INTERVIEWED

Country of Residence	Organisation	Website
Germany	Centre for Afghanistan Policy Studies (CAPS)	https://caps-afg.org
Germany	Afghan Diaspora Initiative (ADI)	https://www.afghan-diaspora.eu
France	Women Beyond Borders	Still establishing social media presence
Belgium	Network of Afghanistan Diasporas in Europe	https://nadoe.eu
Netherlands	Advocate, informal diaspora organiser	Website not available
Austria	Journalist, Academic specialising in the Afghan Diaspora	https://www.theigc.org/people/sayed-nasrat
Australia	Baba Mazari Foundation	https://bmfoundation.org.au
US	ArtLords	https://artlords.co
US	Uplift Afghanistan Fund	https://www.upliftafghanistan.org
US	The Kalaam Project	https://www.kalaamproject.com
Germany	Afghanistan Migrants Advice & Support Organisation	https://amasosite.wordpress.com/
Canada	Independent diaspora organiser through football networks	No website
US	Ansar Relief Foundation	https://www.instagram.com/ansarrelieffoundation/
Czech Republic	Afghan LGBTIQ Organization (ALO)	https://www.afghanlgbt.com/

ANNEX II

LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS INTERVIEWED

Organisation	Website
Khaneh Mehr Social Foundation	https://khanemehr.org_
Educational Centers of the Afghan Institute of Learning (AIL)	https://www.scf.af/
Sediqi Social Foundation, Dast ba Dast	Website not available
Solidarity and Mutual Support	Website not available
Informal group of women-led volunteers	No website
Voice of Afghans Mechanism	https://vap.org.af/eng/
Shafaf Social and Learning Organization	https://shaffaftrust.org/
Eesar and Mehrabani (Sacrifice and Kindness) Relief Team	https://mehrabani.org.uk/
Afghan Women Education Center	https://awec.info/
Informal group of volunteers, earthquake-affected district	No website
Baba Mazari Foundation, Herat Office	https://bmfoundation.org.au
Women's Activities and Social Services Association (WASSA)	https://wassa.org.af/
Rural Rehabilitation Association for Afghanistan (RRAA)	https://www.rraa.org.af/



DEMAC is a global initiative aiming at enhancing mutual knowledge and coordination, communication and coherence between diaspora humanitarian actors, local networks and the institutional humanitarian system.

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