



Global Diaspora Summit Background Note

Session 2 – Diaspora Humanitarianism: COVID-19 as a Breakthrough Moment

Overview

At its core, diaspora engagement is based on a principle of care between diaspora, countries of origin, and countries of residence. This is often most seen in the humanitarian actions of diaspora communities in moments of needs in both contexts. Whether it be the remarkable role of diaspora communities on the front-line of many services and supports during the COVID-19 pandemic or the response of diasporas to peacebuilding, diaspora humanitarianism is often the first-stop engagement for diasporas to begin to think strategically about ways in which they can influence positive change at home and abroad.

The growing prominence of systems and systemic change in the humanitarian-development nexus, as well as the importance of opening towards non-traditional humanitarian actors, means that diaspora humanitarianism today is beginning to embed diaspora communities as an active influence in advancing such change. Over the past few years, there have been concerted efforts to advance a long-term diaspora engagement agenda within humanitarian systems¹.

Diaspora Humanitarianism: A Pathway Engagement to Sustainable Diaspora Engagement

Quite often, diaspora humanitarianism begins as a reactive engagement where diaspora communities respond to a prevailing crisis at home or abroad. This role for diasporas is not new. Diasporas have historically become early actors in response to climate crisis, conflict, epidemiological and natural disasters, and other forms of devastating impact in our world.

Diaspora humanitarianism is often the first opportunity where diaspora communities begin to think about their collective action in a collaborative way. This means it is a point when diasporas understand the capacities that they can bring to formalized systems in the different phases of humanitarian assistance and across the humanitarian-development nexus. It becomes the case statement for why and how diaspora communities can or should work together.

However, diaspora communities often find challenges and struggles in coalescing this collective action into the formal humanitarian system. As key elements of local and global networks, repositories of financial and non-financial capitals that can contribute to the sustainability of the humanitarian ecosystem, and as actors of renowned resilience and continued engagement, diasporas are emerging as central conduits for systems of developmental impact. Of course, there must also be commitments and capacities from diaspora to adhere to humanitarian principles and standards in how they engage in humanitarian assistance.

Another important context to this discussion will be exploring how governments can act and facilitate the long-term inclusion of diaspora humanitarianism. The added value of diaspora humanitarianism to governments is that they can move more nimbly than government, have

¹ For more information, please see <https://www.iom.int/news/migrants-play-key-role-disaster-response-iom-explores-diasporas-engagement-humanitarian-assistance>.

strong local ties, and act in places that government cannot or will not go. This contribution is increasing as inter-generational approaches to diaspora engagement are shaping new ways of advocating and contributing through diaspora humanitarianism.

The opportunity to explore and promote collective endeavours to position diaspora humanitarianism as a contributor to systemic change in the humanitarian-development nexus is to transform the reactive entry point of diaspora humanitarianism to create proactive, more effective, inclusive, and sustainable systems of diaspora engagement that can take this momentum forward in a coherent framework. The role of diaspora humanitarian leadership during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, from discovery of vaccines to significant campaigns of humanitarian support, shows that diaspora humanitarianism has earned the right to be part of this discussion. They have also been integral actors in various humanitarian endeavours on many fronts in countries such as Haiti, Somalia, and Syria.

Scope of Session

This session will reflect on the key systemic challenges and opportunities facing diaspora humanitarianism and its actors with a view to establishing a forward-looking, solution-oriented vision for the future of diaspora humanitarianism. It will highlight some of the global impacts of diaspora humanitarianism and explore key trends and opportunities to mainstream diaspora humanitarianism into the humanitarian ecosystem.

It will particularly focus on the varying roles that diaspora humanitarian actors can play. The session will also explore the impact of a growing technological and communication infrastructure in supporting diaspora humanitarianism. To achieve these outcomes, certain guiding questions will be threaded through the session. These include:

- What are the main roles and responsibilities of diaspora networks in humanitarian action?
- Why, and in what manner, should diaspora communities be recognized and included in the humanitarian ecosystem?
- What are the impacts of an improved technological and communication infrastructure to diaspora humanitarianism? Are there new ways in which the next generation are leveraging this infrastructure to advance diaspora humanitarianism?
- What are the key on-line and off-line tools that governments and stakeholders can use to mainstream diaspora humanitarianism into their preparedness, response, and recovery plans?
- How can diaspora organizations ensure sustainability in their humanitarian actions and systems beyond initial respond to a need or event?
- What role should diaspora humanitarianism have in designing a long-term vision and programme of action for the wider diaspora engagement sector?

Methodology of Session

The session will open with an input from the governmental host to share their diaspora engagement story, followed by an inspirational address from a global leader on the topic.

The session will conclude with a showcasing of a diaspora organization exemplar and an interactive discussion with participants to help develop recommendations for the enhancement of diaspora humanitarianism within international development. In line with aims of the summit

to provide peer-to-peer exchange and knowledge sharing, the digital platform also provides networking capacity throughout the session for participants to engage with each other. The final outcomes generated through the panellist and participant interventions will be reflected in the summit report and provide insight for the final 'Outcome Document' of the GDS.

We look forward to welcoming you to this session to learn about your ideas and views on diaspora humanitarianism and how to ensure it is more effectively and systematically included into formal humanitarian ecosystems!



Rialtas na hÉireann
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