

Diaspora Humanitarians:

How Australia-based migrants help in crises abroad

Context

The *Diaspora Humanitarians* project aims to map the extensive humanitarian activities and contributions of Australia-based migrants to crises abroad. Australia is home to large diasporas who are connected to communities in many humanitarian crisis hotspots, including the project's focus areas: **Afghanistan, Syria, South Sudan, Myanmar, Indonesia, Nepal, Lebanon, and the Pacific Islands**. By generating much-needed knowledge on how and why migrants engage in humanitarian responses, the project expects to support and improve the work of diasporas themselves, the Australian Civil-Military Centre and other humanitarian organisations, who are partners in the project. This will benefit Australia by highlighting our innovative leadership role in humanitarian and migration issues.

The project develops an innovative conceptual framework for diaspora humanitarianism which is part of 'transnational humanitarianism': the involvement of cross-border actors in humanitarian action (Ticktin 2014). As we conceptualize it, diaspora humanitarianism, unlike conventionally conceived humanitarian assistance, is not strictly separable from diaspora-led development.

This 3-year interdisciplinary project aims to both *understand* and *enhance* diaspora humanitarianism by using new and established methods including participatory consultations, surveys, and immersive social media analytics. New knowledge is used to produce innovative outputs that support more effective diaspora humanitarianism, such as digital tools to help diaspora humanitarians; briefings and infographics to inform stakeholders about what diaspora humanitarians do; FutureLearn education technologies to teach how diaspora humanitarianism works; and high-impact scholarly publications to establish a strong long-term evidence base in this area. By enhancing the contributions of diaspora humanitarians, this project will assist in strengthening Australia's responses to disasters, conflicts, pandemics, and other crises abroad.

To examine how diaspora humanitarians are responding to some of the world's worst crises we are employing a comparative case study design. We have selected cases that allow us to compare and contrast a range of factors associated with the success or failure of diaspora humanitarian efforts. Between cases, we compare different geographical contexts and different types of crises (violent conflicts, natural disasters, and complex crises that combine these and other factors, such as epidemics). Within each case, we compare diaspora engagement in different crisis phases (crisis-response, post-crisis stabilization, and risk reduction), and in different spheres of life (households, communities, and wider socio-political institutions). Within each case we also consider the different perspectives of the main stakeholder groups: the Australia-based diaspora humanitarians, the mainstream humanitarian organisations involved in the same crises, and the crisis-affected local communities themselves.

To enable these comparisons and contrasts, the research is organized into 4 interconnected sub-projects.

Sub-project 1 – Australian-based diaspora

Led by CI: Bina Fernandez, Associate Professor in Development Studies at University of Melbourne

Sub-project 1 aim is to describe and explain where, how and why Australia-based diasporas are engaging in humanitarian responses. A large body of research addresses how and why diasporas engage in transnational socio-economic and political activities (Chikanda et al 2016), but most of this work shows diasporas contributing financial, human and social capital to homeland development because they seek recognition and social status among homeland peers (Cummings & Gamlen 2019). Much less is known about how and why diasporas engage in humanitarian settings, where most researchers focus on the disruptive role of a few 'refugee warriors' (McConnachie 2012).

In our conceptual framework diaspora humanitarianism includes not just financial remittances and investments, but also volunteering activities; the provision of critical knowledge, skills, and connections; and assistance with community-based protection schemes and social networks of care (Olliff 2018b). Diaspora contributions are often countercyclical: they go up when the homeland's fortunes go down, thus becoming crucial in times of crisis (Ratha 2020). Their engagements occur in different spheres, from the household to the wider community, to the sphere of national and international institutions (Van Hear & Cohen 2017). They take place during different phases of humanitarian action, from crisis response, through post-crisis stabilization and reconstruction, to long-term risk reduction and resilience.

Our team members point to extensive unmapped humanitarian contributions from diasporas in this country (Vivekenanthan & Connors 2019; Olliff 2018a,b). Thus, we address an important research gap by focusing on diaspora humanitarianism in one of the world's most multicultural nations: Australia.

Sub-project 1 employs multi-method diaspora consultations with 8 Australia-based diasporas, to explore their engagement in crisis responses abroad. The innovative methodology will seek to identify the conditions for effective diaspora engagement within humanitarian response systems and deliver tools to support and enhance diaspora effectiveness as well as mainstream humanitarian organisations. The development of such tools will be co-designed with diaspora participants, and they will respond to practical needs.

PDRA Olliff will implement Sub-project 1, under CI Bina Fernandez supervision, the multi-method consultations with 8 Australian-based diasporas. She will assist PI Goldfinch to recruit casual research assistants (CRAs) with diaspora-specific knowledge and languages.

Sub-project 1 is 2-year project due to start in January 2022.

Sub-project 2 – Diaspora social media

Led by CI: Alan Gamlen, Associate Professor at Monash University

Sub-project 2, is a diaspora social media analysis, which asks how diaspora groups use digital tools such as crowd-funding and social networking sites to organize and respond to overseas crises. We will identify and scrape the main public social media sites used by diaspora humanitarians, to generate a reservoir of structured data on diaspora behaviour, experiences, preferences, and choices concerning diaspora

engagement in crisis response. This will complement and build on the qualitative studies in other sub-projects.

We will apply various social media data analytics (e.g., topic modelling, community detection, time-series analysis and classification by deep learning) to explore the content of social media posts, and we will develop interactive and intuitive visualization tools to communicate granular insights from multiple perspectives. PhD 1 will collect, analyse and visualize all social media data as part of their own PhD, supervised by CI Gamlen, who will be responsible for coordination and delivery.

Sub-project 2 is 3-year project due to start in April 2022.

Sub-project 3

Led by CI: Alan Gamlen, Associate Professor at Monash University

Sub-project 3, led by CI Gamlen, undertakes 50 semi-structured humanitarian-sector interviews, to understand their experiences of diaspora humanitarianism. We will conduct phone and video interviews with senior staff in mainstream humanitarian organizations with experience of the case-study crises. Interviewees will be selected by 'snowball' referral, starting with senior staff referred by our CIs, Staff, Collaborators, Partners and Advisory Board Members. After completion of the interviews, we will also conduct two multi-stakeholder focus groups with both diaspora and mainstream humanitarian actors. Here we will present preliminary findings from all sub-projects and identify areas of agreement and disagreement across the humanitarian sector. PDRA Olliff will conduct, record, transcribe, and analyse all these data. She will be supervised by CI Gamlen, who will coordinate and deliver this sub-project.

Sub-project 4

Led by CI: Phil Connor, Director of the Centre for Humanitarian Leadership

Sub-project 4 is a multi-method study of crisis-affected communities, to understand how they are impacted by diaspora humanitarianism. The study combines a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews of self-selected people in each relevant crisis region. The project will disseminate 800 questionnaires in total (100 to each region), via trained local casual research assistants. Sampling frames will be drawn from diaspora organisations, and Centre for Humanitarian Leadership's alumni database. PhD 2 will design and pilot the survey instrument, train the CRAs, and coordinate data collection and analysis using mixed methods – supervised by CI Connors, who will coordinate and deliver this sub-project.

Project output packages

The Project will produce 4 output packages, each integrating insights from the Sub-projects above:

An **Engagement Package** consisting of culturally contextualized consultations and tools designed to support diasporas in contributing to humanitarian responses. Specifically, we will design an innovative diaspora social media toolkit, building on existing human-centred computing methods for supporting NGOs in digital community engagements.

This will consist of a set of culturally sensitive audio-visual prompts and usage guidelines that will enable diaspora networks and humanitarian organizations to create and maintain collaborative engagements in humanitarian responses. The toolkit will support them to share their collective experiences, stories, lessons and best practices for crisis response.

An **Information Package** based on our research insights, in the form of a series of infographics, data visualizations, short videos, briefings, and a social media campaign to reach and benefit stakeholders across diasporas, government, practitioners and academia. The Investigators will produce a series of short (2-page) policy and practitioner briefings, with the support of their respective teams.

An **Education Package** consisting of e-training modules on diaspora humanitarianism, is aimed at diasporas and mainstream humanitarian organisations, other partners, and governments. The modules will consist of flexible, blended and 'flipped classroom' designs to facilitate active learning and engagement, with intended learning outcomes based on competency with tools and products produced in our engagement, information, and knowledge repository output packages. The training modules will form units that can be assembled in various combinations to suit multiple stakeholders in diaspora organizations, humanitarian NGOs, international organizations, and government agencies wishing to learn about the promises and pitfalls of diaspora engagement and how to promote its effectiveness.

A **Knowledge Repository Package** consisting of 8 scholarly articles (2 per Sub-project) targeted at Q1 peer-reviewed journals, and presented at relevant conferences. The peak output will be a book for Oxford University Press on diaspora humanitarianism, authored by the Investigators. Also included in this output package is a website to act as a permanent online repository for all the project insights and outputs. These outputs will be discussed in the Third Diasporas in Action Conference in Melbourne, which will ensure their wider dissemination, which will also enable the new knowledge generated from this project to be carried into future scholarly and practical programs by the participation of local, national and international decision-makers and opinion-shapers on diaspora and humanitarianism.

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