



DEM MAC

DIASPORA
EMERGENCY ACTION
& COORDINATION

DIASPORA
ENGAGEMENT
EFFORTS IN
AFGHANISTAN
REAL-TIME REVIEW



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FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

DRC DANISH
REFUGEE
COUNCIL



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Meraki Labs is a displacement and migration-focused consulting firm. They work at a grassroots level with people on the move; they aim to ensure that the realities facing migrants and displaced people are reflected in improved policy and programs. Incorporated in Canada in 2018, Meraki Labs is working with NGOs, International agencies and research institutions.

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Real-time review conducted between 15 August and 30 September 2021

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On 16 August, 2021 the Taliban announced that they had gained control of Afghanistan. The takeover resulted in heated public debate about the two-decade war, the humanitarian implications of the withdrawal, and the future of women and civil society in Afghanistan.

The role of the Afghan diaspora is now in flux; diaspora organizations have been called on by the media to comment on the political and human rights situation, while simultaneously navigating the personal and professional effects of the new political reality. In light of the evolving situation in Afghanistan, DEMAC and DRC's Diaspora Program commissioned a real-time review (RTR) to capture the evolution of diaspora engagement in the immediate aftermath of the Taliban gaining control over Afghanistan. The purpose of the RTR is three-fold: (1) to assess what actions the Afghan diaspora organizations have been engaging in in terms of advocacy, coalition building, and direct engagement; (2) to assess changes in diaspora dynamics since the Taliban takeover and the nature of these changes; and, (3) to record how any relevant changes in dynamics have resulted in tangible outcomes and actions.

To capture Afghan Diaspora Organization (ADO) engagement in the current political crisis, the RTR consisted of two main approaches to data collection. First, online media monitoring was conducted from 15 August 2021 to 31 September 2021 of 60 ADOs from Europe (26), North America (21), Afghanistan's neighboring countries (9), Australia (5), and one global organization. It consisted of a daily review of online diaspora statements, events, and fundraising pages through 100 social media accounts. To provide additional context, key informant interviews were also conducted with representatives of ten ADOs, as well as DRC Diaspora Program staff.

What actions have ADOs been engaging in?

Before the takeover of Kabul by the Taliban, most of the ADOs included in this study were working in the fields of integration, culture, advocacy, legal aid, resettlement support, and education, primarily focusing on the diaspora communities in their countries of residence. Afghan diaspora organizations are also active in various areas of humanitarian aid and development support in Afghanistan.

The reviewed organizations were also varied in their dates of establishment, ranging from more than 25 years of active service delivery to being founded due to the recent political crisis.

Overall, the diaspora organizations in the US and Canada had a stronger online presence compared to the European organizations despite the slightly lower number of organizations from North America covered in this report. For ADOs in the countries neighboring Afghanistan, however, reports and updates of activities were almost non-existent considering the limited operational space and political sensitivities within their countries of residence.

What have been the changes in diaspora dynamics since the Taliban takeover and the nature of these changes? What have been the tangible results of these changes, including the results of advocacy, coalition building, and direct assistance?

All the interviewed diaspora organizations had gone through a change in their areas of focus or approach since the Taliban takeover. For the already active and well-established organizations, the main changes included new focus areas or an escalation of efforts in their activities. Organizations that were largely inactive before the recent events in Afghanistan quickly began to mobilize their resources for making meaningful contributions to their cause. The change in focus and approach was also influenced by some of the practical and logistical challenges resulting from the evolving political situation.

Advocacy and Awareness Raising

- The online monitoring revealed that 48% of the organizations posted most frequently about ongoing advocacy and awareness-raising campaigns.
- ADOs organized protests in various cities around the globe, often with unified messaging, including the international solidarity protests held by the diaspora community on 28 August 2021. Collaboration was evident between ADOs which previously did not work together.
- Prominent individuals from the Afghan diaspora and ADOs gave multiple accounts of the situation in Afghanistan to voice the concerns of their communities in countries of residence.
- Official statements and open letters were sent to political leaders and the UN to advocate for the rights of the people of Afghanistan, resettlement, humanitarian aid, diplomacy and human rights were published.
- ADOs in North America, Europe, and Australia reported engaging directly with their representatives and policymakers in their countries of residence. They have also used online campaigning techniques like hashtags, such as the #ActionForAfghanistan campaign.
- Online and in-person panel discussions involving Afghan and non-Afghan actors and subject matter experts were held on a range of topics covering the current situation in Afghanistan and possible outcomes of the Taliban takeover.

Emergency Fundraising

- Emergency fundraising campaigns accounted for 15% of online engagement.
- In the weeks leading up to the takeover of Kabul by the Taliban, Afghan diaspora organizations started to put a stronger focus on their fundraising activities. Close to 200 GoFundMe campaigns related to Afghanistan - but only 14 were recorded as ADO-run fundraising campaigns.
- During the online monitoring phase of this study, fundraising activities of 26 distinct organizations were recorded, with more than half of them using online crowdfunding services.
- The more successful campaigns also had a strong promotional strategy and a broad focus as to where the funds will be spent, with a high degree of follow-up information and updates provided by the campaigning ADOs.

Community Engagement

- Community engagement campaigns accounted for 14% of online engagement.
- ADOs requested their communities' support for a diverse range of volunteer activities, including sorting donated items, organizing protests, providing medical and interpretation services for the recently relocated individuals, and joining the welcoming committees of newly arrived Afghans.
- Volunteers were usually asked to come forward by calling a phone number or filling out an online form. Afghan diaspora organizations also shared some good practices and innovative approaches they had taken with regards to community engagement and mobilization.
- ADOs also engaged with Afghan and non-Afghan social media 'influencers' to support messaging, and with non-Afghan communities and organizations to support activities which supported their overall aim of integration as well as a more resultful community mobilization strategy.

Direct Assistance

- Activity reports focusing on direct services provided to the people in Afghanistan, welcoming newly relocated Afghans, and holding information sessions for asylum seekers and donors accounted for 24% of social media engagement.
- ADOs continued to provide direct assistance to thousands of vulnerable individuals despite the serious challenges, although many ADOs considered information-sharing regarding services delivered in Afghanistan to potentially put the volunteers or the people affected by conflict and displacement they serve at risk and as a result, refrained from publishing public updates.
- The loss of access to their volunteers and bank accounts in-country significantly hampered their ability to deliver services. Despite these hindrances, several diaspora organizations found alternative methods to continue their services in multiple provinces across Afghanistan.
- ADOs invested significant effort in facilitating the resettlement and welcoming of the newly relocated Afghans in their countries of residence.

Accountability

- Given that many diaspora organizations run on membership contributions, the reporting line between donors, and recipients of their services is not always clear.
- ADOs tried to address accountability gaps by organizing Q&A sessions and publishing updates, sometimes accompanied by location information, images and videos of their activities.
- The level of care taken by different ADOs was also varied when it came to protecting the identity of the people affected by conflict and displacement they serve.

Coordination

- ADOs actively tried to form new coalitions with other ADOs with similar objectives.
- For organizations who were already working in partnerships, coordination calls and meetings became more regular and frequent. However, not all the ADOs were able to keep the momentum going; some are already facing difficulties in keeping the coalitions active.
- ADOs have vastly different experiences regarding coordination. Less established organizations may have difficulty locating other like-minded ADOs.
- Forming new coalitions seemed to occur through individual connections of ADO members.

Recommendations

- Conduct organizational self-assessment training. To facilitate mutually beneficial engagement among ADOs, it is important to clearly outline strengths and improvement areas.
- Organize events with clear objectives. Networking events are often valued for younger organizations looking to introduce themselves and discover allies.
- Support host coalitions in countries of residence by involving relevant donors. By focusing on country-level coalitions as opposed to regional or global ones, the shared context and operational space will contribute to a shared experience with regards to some of the challenges and opportunities.
- Develop short and targeted e-learning courses to increase their online profile. ADOs without dedicated or in-house resources can also benefit from the general guidelines.
- Translate key DEMAC documents to Farsi/Pashto. Translation of documents could be limited to training material, and summary reports.