

HOW DO AUSTRALIA-BASED MIGRANTS HELP IN TIMES OF CRISIS?

*A case study of Afghan diaspora responses to the
2021 Taliban return to power in Afghanistan*



June 2024



The research team is very grateful to members of the Afghan community in Australia who participated in this study for their generous contribution of time and valuable insights.

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About the research

In 2022, researchers from the University of Melbourne undertook a project exploring how Australia-based migrants (diasporas) help in times of humanitarian crises overseas. The project involved community researchers from eight diaspora communities (Afghanistan, Indonesia, Lebanon, Myanmar, Nepal, Pacific Islands, South Sudan and Syria) to co-design methodology, engage communities and collect data to find out *how*, *why* and *what* was done by communities in Australia in response to specific crises or events. The project aims to better understand the strengths and challenges faced by Australia-based migrants responding to different kinds of crises (disasters, conflicts and complex crises), and to identify potential tools that can support diaspora communities in their responses in the future. More information about this project can be found at <https://diasporahumanitarians.com/>.

About this report

This report is a summary of findings for the case study on Afghan **diaspora responses to the 2021 Taliban return to power in Afghanistan**. Shukufa Tahiri was the community researcher leading the research for this case study, in collaboration with Professor Bina Fernandez (Chief Investigator), Dr Louise Olliff (Research Associate), Lorenza Lazzati (Project Officer) and Dr René Rejón (Research Associate). Data was gathered using the following mixed methods:

- **Interviews:** In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 participants from diverse backgrounds (age, gender, ethnicity, city of residence, and years living in Australia). Interviews were held by Zoom or in person (in Sydney) between July and October 2022. Interviews were conducted in Dari and English and were audio recorded and then translated and transcribed. Transcripts were thematically coded using Nvivo.
- **Focus groups:** Between September and October 2022, two in-person focus group discussions were held in Sydney involving 13 participants. Focus group discussions were held in Dari and were audio recorded, translated and transcribed. Transcripts were thematically coded using Nvivo.
- **Survey:** 17 community members completed an online survey in either Dari or English (see appendix for survey sample). Data was analysed using Qualtrics.

The names of participants quoted in this report have been changed.



CONTEXT:

Crisis context:

How did the nature of the crisis shape diaspora responses?

This research focused on diaspora responses to the Taliban re-taking control of Afghanistan in August 2021. The nature of the crisis had many and complex dimensions and implications — it was a **conflict situation** that quickly became a **mass displacement crisis**, with Afghans who faced or feared retribution by the Taliban displaced both within Afghanistan and to neighbouring countries. The UN Refugee Agency reported 1.6 million people newly displaced between August 2021 and the end of 2022¹. The crisis also had strong **economic dimensions** as both investment and international aid were disrupted and the population of Afghanistan faced widespread poverty and acute food insecurity². Some regions of Afghanistan also experienced significant **natural hazard disasters** in the months leading up to and following the Taliban takeover, including flooding, drought and a major earthquake in June 2022³.

The **complexity and scale of this crisis**, and the fact that these events came after four decades of conflict and instability, influenced how the diaspora in Australia responded in many ways. Of note, participants who themselves had been displaced and had previously suffered at the hands of the Taliban talked about the **enormous and deep psychological toll** these events

had on them as individuals and as a community. Many interviewees described feeling ‘lost’, ‘retraumatised’, ‘hopeless’ and ‘in shock’, particularly due to the rapid speed at which events took place.

I couldn't believe it that the Taliban were coming back to Kabul and they were taking over the whole country and in a very rapid way. And so, that was like on the emotional level. And I could see people in the community, and they were very lost. They were very hopeless and they didn't know how to respond, to be honest, in any other capacity. So, people were very emotional. (Habibullah, translation)

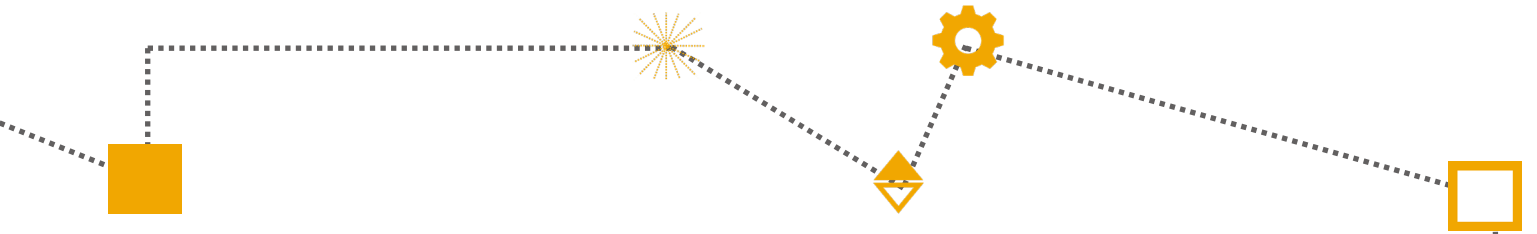
Everyone was shocked. For three days, I was shocked. I received a large number of contacts from Afghanistan, from my friends, family, from my area that we had been living. They're asking for rescue, for us to help them. So, it was quite shocking for everyone. They were shocked, we were shocked, everyone was shocked. (Maimoona, translation)

The fact that it was the Taliban coming back into power—a predominantly Pashtun, fundamentalist Islamic group with a past track record of imposing extremely harsh interpretations of Islamic law on the population, gender segregation, and engaging in violent insurgency against the US-backed Afghan Republic for most of the past two decades—had significance for a large segment of the Australia-based diaspora, who **felt their family and friends in Afghanistan were at heightened risk** due to their connections to the West (i.e., to people in Australia), gender, and sectarian or ethnic minority status. After the initial shock at the rapid turn of events,

1 The forcibly displaced population from Afghanistan reached 8.4 million people by the end of 2022, including 6.4 million refugees, people in refugee-like situations or seeking asylum outside of Afghanistan and 2.0 million internally displaced. See: <https://reporting.unhcr.org/operational/situations/afghanistan-situation>

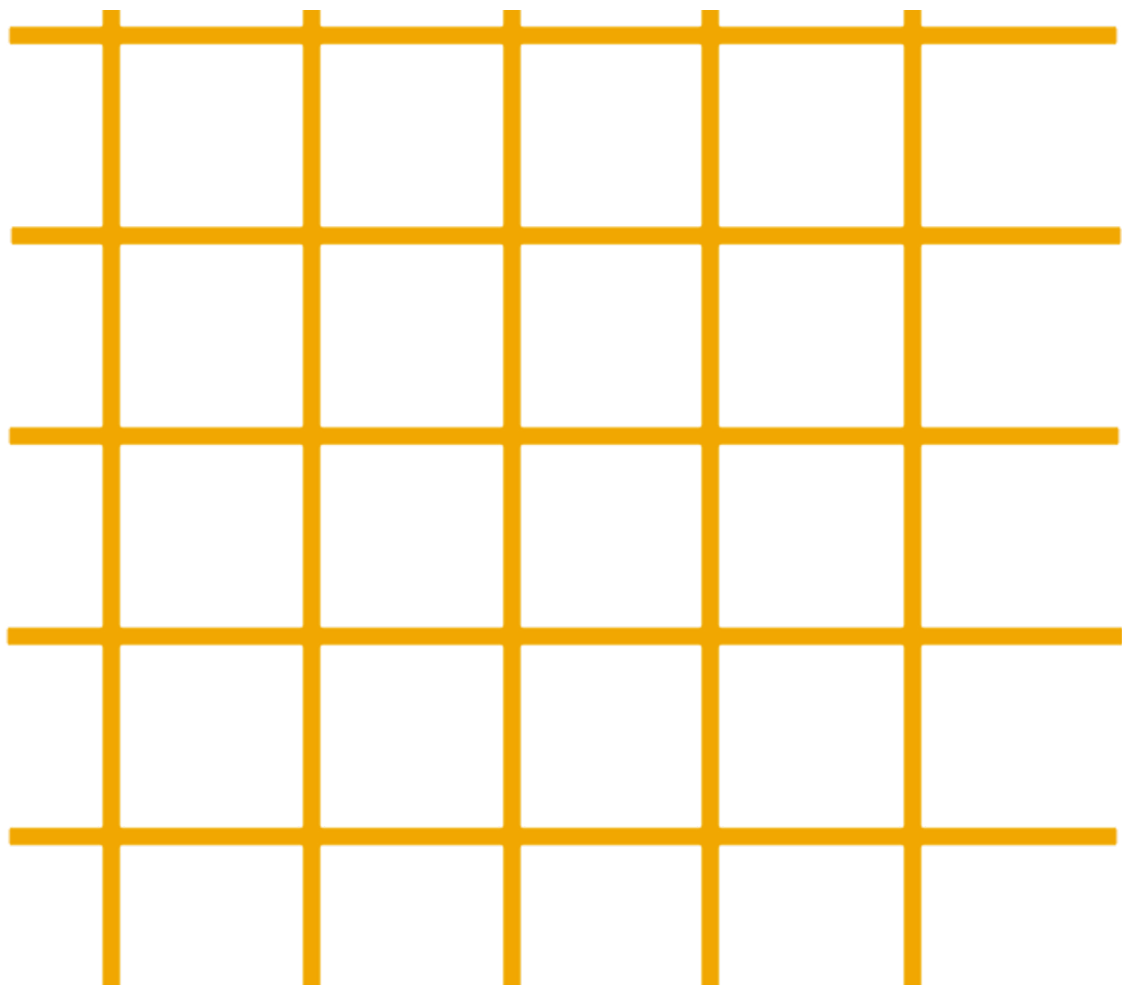
2 Human Rights Watch. (2022, March 1). Afghanistan: Economic roots of the humanitarian crisis. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/03/01/afghanistan-economic-roots-humanitarian-crisis>

3 Yawar, M. Y. & Ahmed, J. (2022, June 23). Afghanistan earthquake kills at least 1,000, toll expected to rise. Reuters, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/earthquake-magnitude-61-shakes-afghanistan-pakistan-usgs-2022-06-21/>



the **profound emotional impact that this crisis had on community members in Australia also led to a significant mobilisation in response**, with extensive activities at an individual, community and institutional level described in more detail in this report.

I think the community's response for the first month, I didn't see any community response from my community because it was very sudden incident. So, everyone was shocked... We didn't have any collective response then. Everyone was in pain ... so after a month people could reach each other. So, then they actually started... (Hafez, translation)





Diaspora context:

How did characteristics of the Afghan diaspora communities in Australia shape responses?

The Afghan diaspora in Australia is sizeable⁴ and reasonably diverse in terms of recency and mode of arrival, social class, faith and ethnicity. While some of the participants in this research had been living in Australia for decades or had grown up here, the majority were more recently arrived and had personally experienced conflict, persecution and displacement, including at the hands of the Taliban. **Responses were informed by these personal experiences and strong and active transnational social networks.** That so many in the diaspora had close family, friends and social networks in Afghanistan and neighbouring countries impacted, pushed community members in Australia to their limits as they sought to respond to a multitude of requests for help.

I think the crisis in Afghanistan and, in particular, I think with the rise of social media and the level of connection that people have daily with community members back home... it showed that diaspora is not the physical distance that we think it is, it's actually much closer... It's actually inside your home in many ways. So, I felt when this happened, a lot of Afghans who were in Australia, they thought that they were part of this conflict; that they were impacted like everyone else. (Reza, translation)

There was a lot of demand and need for the community to find out... what can be done. So, for example, I was getting on average more than 100 calls per day from community members here that were worried about their families and about what should they do, and they were seeking support. (Ibrahim, translation)

Community associations and leaders were discussed by participants as key sources of information, coordination and advocacy, but were quickly overwhelmed in the immediate aftermath of the Taliban takeover due to the volume of need and demands from social networks to respond. The existence of numerous Afghan community organisations, as well as a significant number of highly educated, well-connected and experienced advocates, meant coalitions representing the diverse diaspora quickly formed to coordinate and respond.

For the first two weeks I think our farm had converted into like an emergency world of a hospital, because we had a roster of people being available on the phone 24/7. And so we took turns and slept for, for five hours and then the next group would step in. (Masooma, translation)

There were notable **intergenerational differences** in how the diaspora mobilised, with young people who had been educated in English called upon to a greater extent to help with filling out forms for humanitarian visas and advocating for urgent evacuation of at-risk individuals; a key activity undertaken by people in Australia. At the same time, older people provided financial support to family members affected.

For me, because obviously I've been to university and stuff, whereas some family members don't know English that well, they can't fill out forms and that kind of thing. So, I think straight away we jumped into this kind of role... you know, looking at visa applications and how to bring people to safety here in Australia. So yeah, that was, it was, it was all a lot. (Abdullah, translation)

⁴ The [2021 Population Census estimated](#) the Afghanistan-born population in Australia in June 2021 at just under 70,000 people. The diaspora population including those born in Australia with family links to Afghanistan is therefore likely to be much higher.





Main activities: What did the Afghan diaspora do?

Actions taken by the diaspora in response to the Taliban takeover were many and varied and suggested different levels of response. Many participants described **household-to-household activities**, with individuals and families in Australia responding to direct requests for support from individuals and families in Afghanistan or neighbouring countries. There was also significant **community-to-community** mobilisation, with diaspora organisations or small groups in Australia connecting with community groups in Afghanistan and the wider diaspora to provide financial assistance and other forms of support. There was also substantial reference made to diaspora activities directed at humanitarian actors, governments or the international community aimed at influencing **structural or system-level responses** to the unfolding situation in Afghanistan.

Psychosocial support

In the immediate aftermath of the Taliban takeover, participants described spending countless hours on the phone or social media communicating directly with family and friends in Afghanistan and in neighbouring countries. While much of this involved sharing information and providing practical support and advice to people making decisions about whether and how to leave Afghanistan for somewhere safer, many also described these calls as providing emotional support to people they knew who were distressed, afraid, uncertain or in shock; of **letting people in Afghanistan know they were not alone or forgotten**.

My mother on average in those first few months would spend over seven hours on the telephone pacing around the house talking to various people... to make sure that they're safe or to see ... how she could help them move. (Maryam, translation)

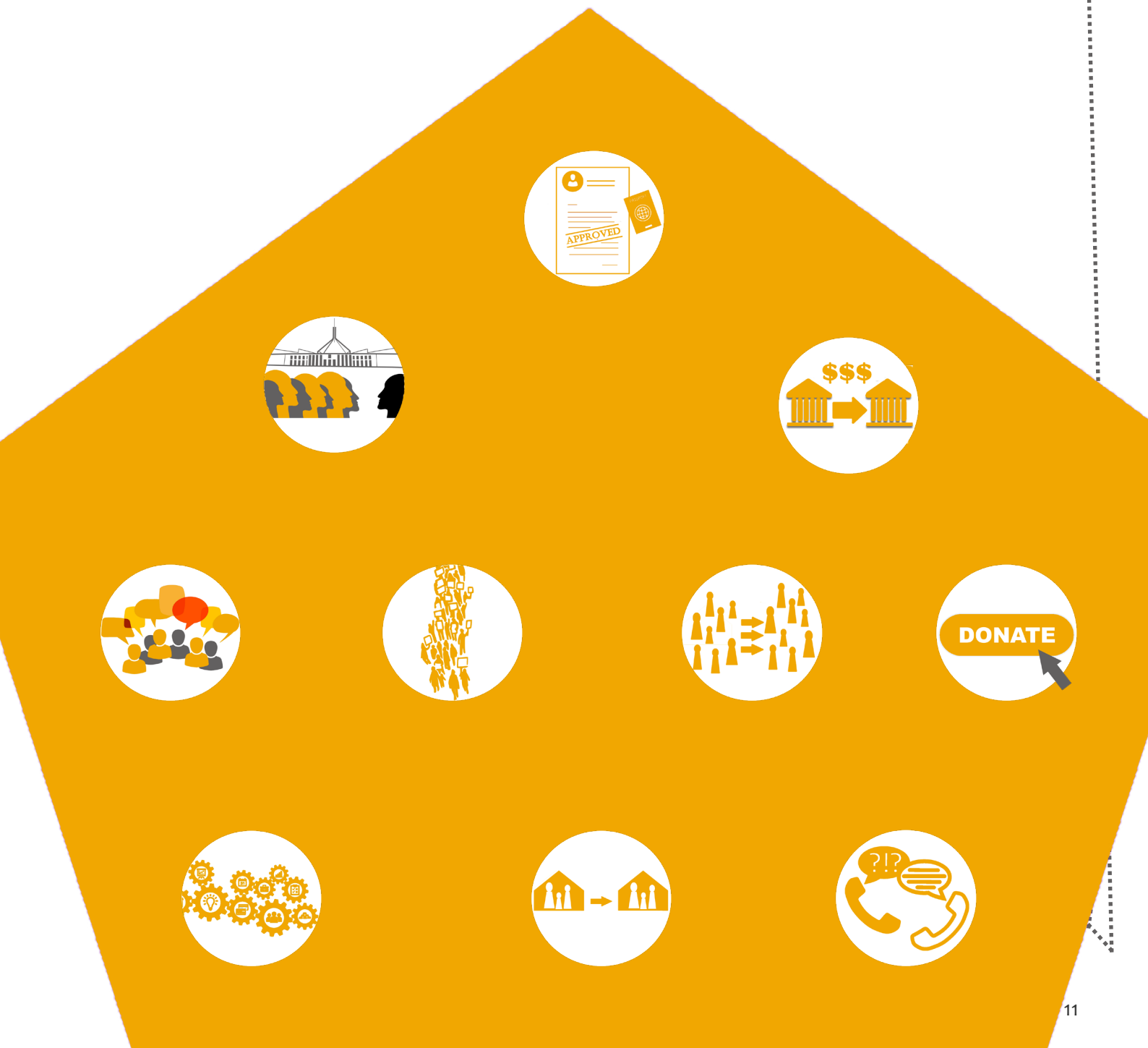
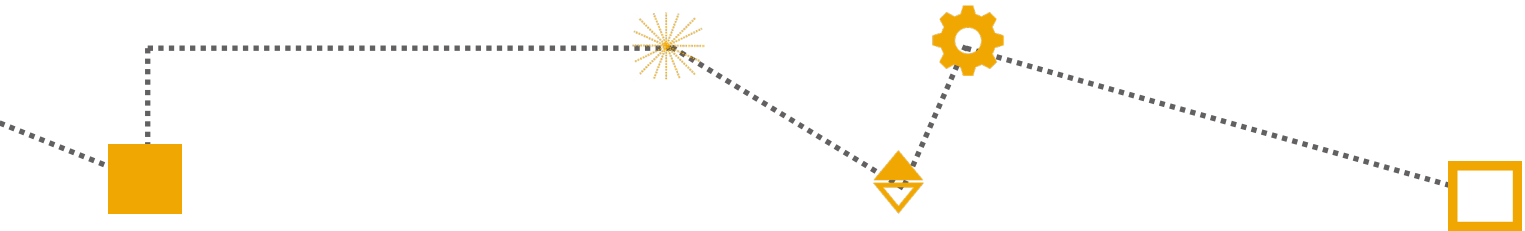
All of us had friends, cousins, families, extended families affected by this crisis and all of us were working round the clock to field calls, to discuss with them, to sort of give them a little bit of a ray of hope, to say that look, we're working with the government to see what we can do. (Ghulam, translation)

Safe migration pathways

An activity that occupied a great deal of time and focus was providing support for people at risk in Afghanistan to find safe ways to migrate. People in Australia spent the first few weeks to months intensively advocating for and supporting family, friends, and Afghans at risk to be granted **temporary (449 subclass)** visas, to get onto **evacuation flights**, to submit humanitarian visa applications, or to **advocate for the faster processing of pending applications**.

I think the other element that we did was evacuation of individuals that we felt were at risk. And on that front, we did two things. One is we approached government agencies to make sure we've got a few lists of people who would be evacuated... and, yes, some of them did come. And, of the 200,000 or so [humanitarian] applications that have been [received by the Australian government from Afghans], I would say that more than 100,000 of them were probably lodged in the first six months of the crisis⁵. Every family [in Australia], every individual, I would say, they gave their time to filling application forms to try to assist their family members. (Reza, translation)

⁵ The Australian Department of Home Affairs reported that, in the 10 months after the Taliban took control, humanitarian visa applications were lodged for nearly 109,489 Afghans. See: Department of Home Affairs (2022) [Australia's Offshore Humanitarian Program 2021-22](#), Table 3.





Fundraising and financial transfers

Participants referred to many and varied organisations, initiatives and networks involved in **fundraising**. Activities included online fundraising as well as in-person events, although these were somewhat limited by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic restrictions. Significant amounts of money were raised not only by the community in Australia, but by the global Afghan diaspora, with one participant describing an organisation that raised over \$250,000.

Financial support... was the highlight of what diaspora does. [We] know how to do it. Say, using Facebook fundraiser for charity organisations who have the charity status. And then you have the traditional way of fundraising, where people gather in community halls or mosques, and they go round and contribute an amount to help... That's always effective. It's always needed. (Muzhgan)

In terms of financial transfers to people affected by this crisis, these included both **individual and collective remittances**, with money sent to purchase essential goods (food, water, shelter) and to provide financial support to those who had left their homes, jobs and support networks.

Mostly, you know, the community members they have their siblings, their very close relatives, their friends, their childhood friends back home in Afghanistan. So, they have that direct contact and they can directly send money to them to support them. (Ahmad, translation)

Last winter [our organisation] provided humanitarian assistance to about 600 families, including, you know, 250 who had no salary for about six months. (Reza, translation)

Advocacy and influence

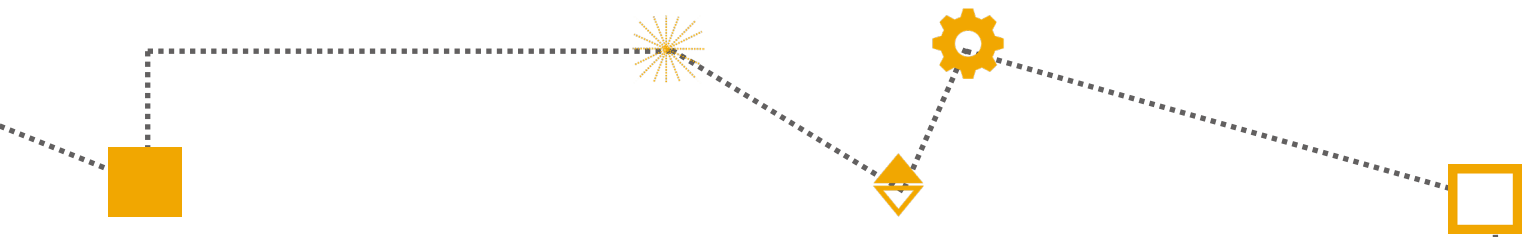
Many participants referred to the active involvement of the diaspora in advocacy for and influencing of Australian government policies. Activities included: participating in **protests**, creating and signing **petitions**, the formation of the **Afghanistan-Australian Advocacy Network** to coordinate and amplify messaging, the engagement of members of the diaspora in the **Ministerial Advisory Panel on Australia's Resettlement of Afghan Nationals**⁶ and the humanitarian and refugee sector (e.g., Australian Council for International Development (ACFID) and Australian Refugee Council), and **making submissions** to government inquiries. Community members across Australia also met with local members of parliament and **lobbied** for the Australian Government to increase the humanitarian intake from Afghanistan and to grant visas for family, friends and Afghans at risk.

What [our student organisation] did was, we managed to organise a huge protest in response to the takeover. I think about 1000 people in South Australia came out to Victoria Square and we marched to Parliament House. We actually had a few politicians come and speak there as well. (Mohammad, translation)

I think the advisory panel was really important because, you know, what we were trying to do is to influence government policy. So, part of our policy [ask] was to make sure that we get increased humanitarian intake. (Reza, translation)

Advocacy was one area I got very much engaged. I made a submission to the Australian Senate, Senate Committee on Afghanistan, and also they invited me for a discussion. (Saif, translation)

⁶ The Advisory Panel was appointed by the Australian Government to provide high-level advice and included a diverse group of highly regarded Australian-Afghan community leaders as well as refugee and settlement experts.



Coordination and collaboration

Finally, countless hours were spent by members of the diaspora on coordination activities. This included **organising and participating in planning meetings and online discussions, and sharing information** across individual, organisational and community networks. While some of this coordination work was done by individuals in a paid capacity as part of their jobs, the vast majority was **volunteer time**, with research participants describing how this coordination took place after hours and on weekends, on top of regular work or studies and their individual efforts to help family and friends.

I think... there was some collective work... For example, what we did that was part of the Victorian Afghan network, we put a lot of information on Facebook. Usually about what was happening and where they could seek help. And information especially about the evacuation and also about the visa processes where they could get assistance. There were several meetings with ... the Department of Immigration and with the local MP and other stakeholders... (Mansur, translation)



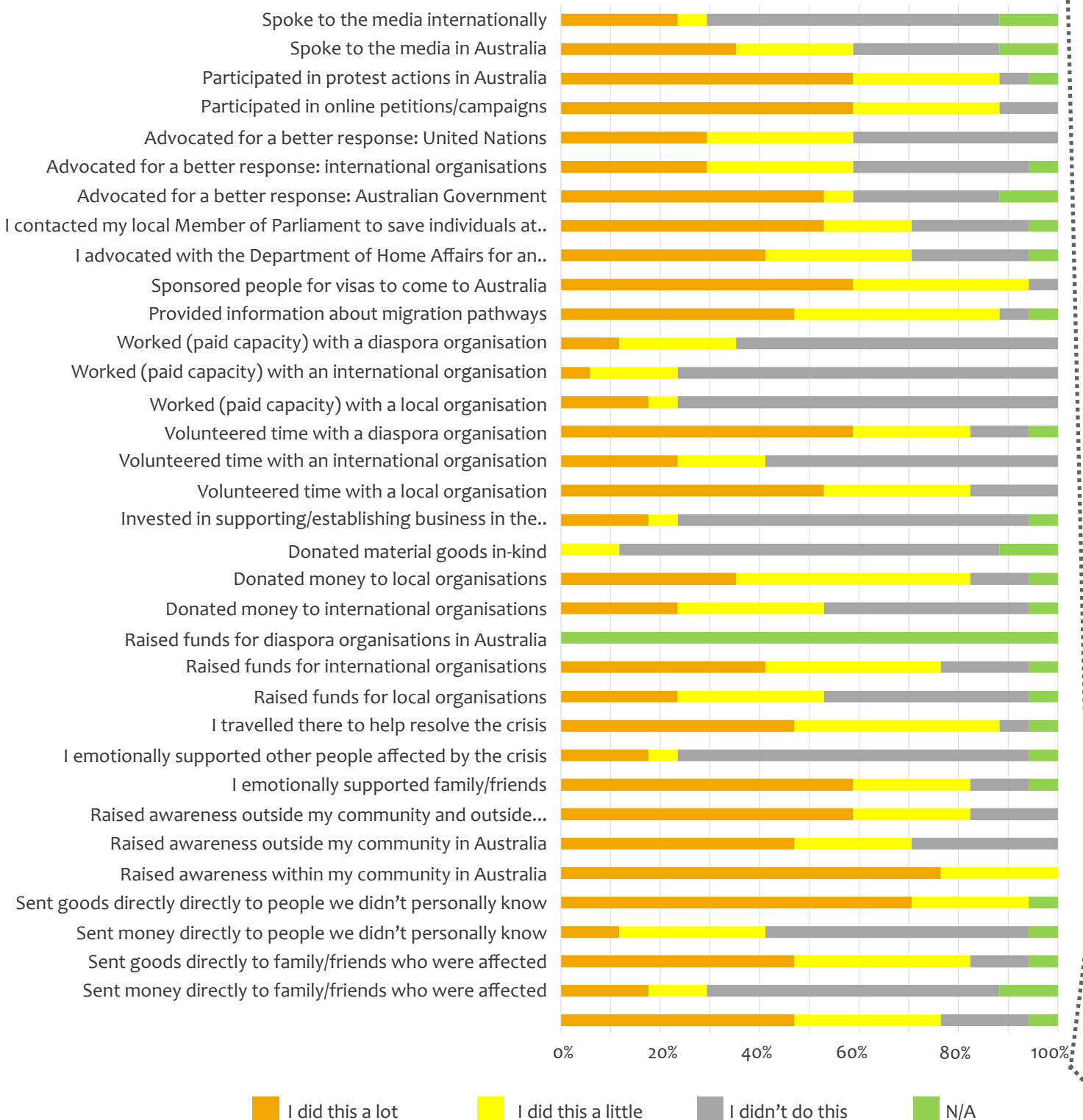


Survey responses

Activities described in interviews and focus group discussions were generally reflected in **survey responses**, with respondents involved in a wide array of activities. The areas where survey respondents were most heavily involved included: raising awareness about the crisis (100% of respondents did this a lot or a little), sponsoring people for visas (94% did this), participating in protests (89% did this), and raising funds to support local organisations in Afghanistan (89% did this).

Surveys also tell us **what people didn't do**, namely: work in a paid capacity for an organisation responding to the crisis, travel to Afghanistan to help, donate or send material goods, or invest in supporting/establishing businesses.

Q. What did you do to respond to this crisis?





Needs addressed:

What needs within crisis-affected communities were addressed?



Protection – sponsoring, advocating for and supporting people at risk to be granted visas and safe migration pathways out of Afghanistan.



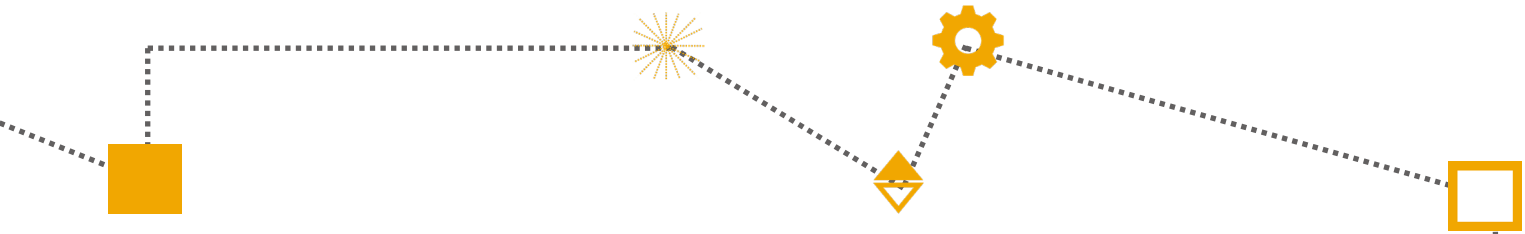
Livelihoods – providing income support to those who had lost their jobs, businesses, or capacity to earn due to displacement, conflict and/or persecution.



Food and basic household goods – sourcing, purchasing and distributing food and basic household goods (e.g., bedding, materials for shelter) for those displaced and impacted by natural hazard disasters.



Healthcare and education – supporting local organisations to continue to provide healthcare and education in context of significant disruption in funding.



Photograph courtesy of UNHCR

Modalities:

What tools helped to facilitate diaspora responses?

Social networks were central to diaspora responses, with family, friends, professional, religious, community and social groups key to receiving and sharing information, fundraising and transferring money, sharing knowledge and skills, and generally getting things done. When describing how social networks helped to facilitate actions, **trust** was a strongly recurring theme.

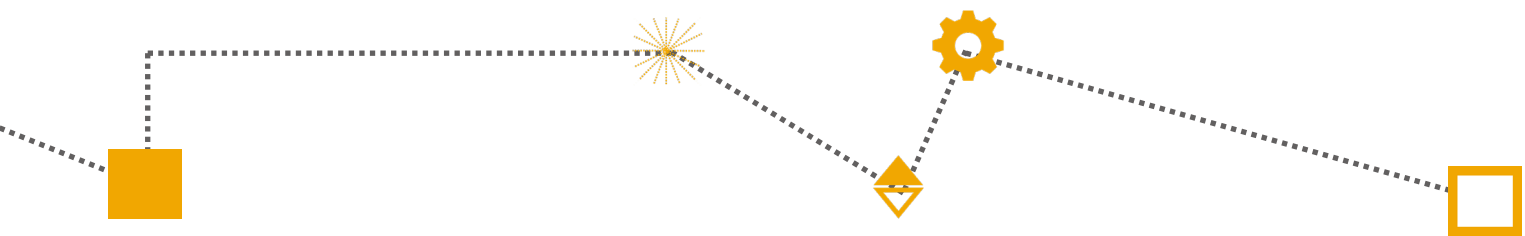
Both an activity and a modality, **coordination networks** within the diaspora in Australia and globally were key to the effectiveness of community responses, with a number of interviewees talking about how WhatsApp and Zoom provided platforms for people to connect online and work collaboratively. The coming together of groups like the Afghanistan-Australian Advocacy Network (AAAN) as a focal point for information-sharing, advocacy and influence was seen as instrumental in the response. For example, advocacy groups like AAAN made public statements, facilitated connections and provided clear messaging that was shared through the AAAN “Action for Afghanistan” website and social media account.

I think that the way that we came together was very organic, but also through connections that we have as professionals in Australia who have families back home in Afghanistan or who are affected by this crisis. We created a WhatsApp group and then we slowly and organically started talking about who is responsible and what we can do for immediate response to the humanitarian needs. (Ghulam, translation)

Online platforms or tools featured heavily in discussions about tools that helped facilitate diaspora responses. WhatsApp groups were described as key for coordination, fundraising and information sharing. For example, some interviewees talked about private WhatsApp groups being used to raise substantial amounts of money, as requests were forwarded through social networks. Facebook, Twitter, Viber and Clubhouse were utilised for fundraising, information-sharing and for advocacy, influence and awareness-raising purposes. GoFundMe was also mentioned as a useful platform for fundraising.

There was a lot of online engagement.... I suppose everyone in the community that was affected was going online, whether that was on, you know, Twitter or other social media platforms. (Abdullah, translation)

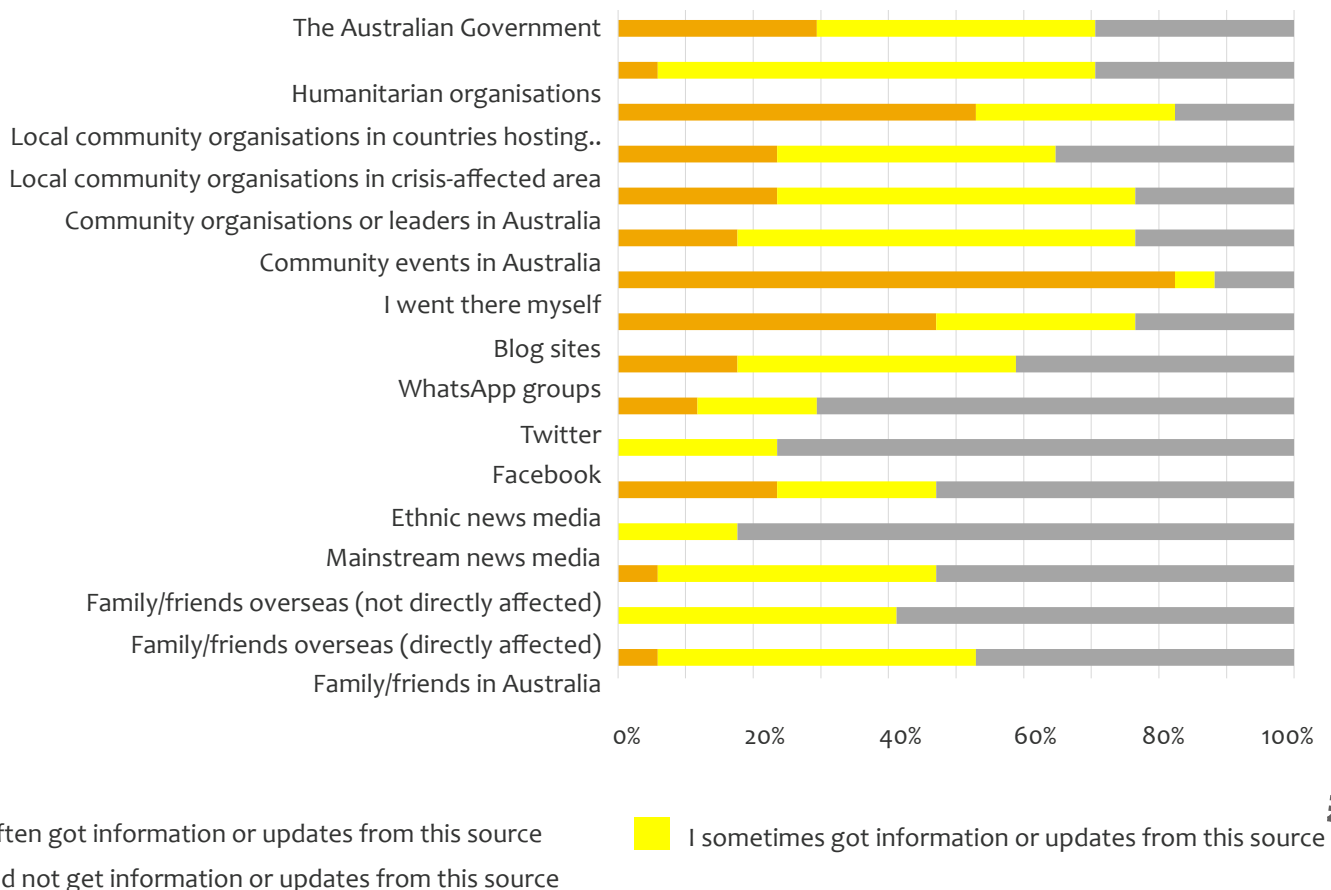




All of the organisations [and] organisers in South Australia are actually in one group chat. And whenever we want to hold a demonstration, a protest or a candle vigil, we actually discussed it there and we've got ... members from each organisation in that group chat and we basically, you know, give roles to different people to take responsibility for some parts of the demonstration. ... That's how we work together. (Mohammad, translation)

Diaspora members referred to **mainstream and social media** as a key source of information but also for advocacy and influence. This was also reflected in survey responses, which showed the most significant sources of information for those in the diaspora was mainstream media and social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter.

Q. How often did you get information or updates about the crisis from this source?





Motivations:

Why did Afghanistan's diaspora in Australia respond as they did?

There were several reoccurring themes regarding what compelled the diaspora in Australia to respond as they did. Some framed their motivations in moral terms, as a **social responsibility or obligation to family and community**. Others used wider moral framings of responding 'as a human being' to humanitarian need. As Ibrahim put it: 'I think it's a human humanitarian crisis. And so we, as human beings, have this obligation or responsibility to show somebody'.

I think obligation might seem heavy, but that's how diasporas feel. I think across the board, we felt compelled to act. That feeling of compulsion... sort of ran into the generation that grew up detached in the geographical sense, or memory- or experience-wise detached, from Afghanistan. So, I'm talking about 20-year-olds who came here at [a young age] and don't have much memory from Afghanistan themselves. The sense of obligation runs from the parents. It fills their home and family dynamic. It's a conversation that dominates people at the dinner table. It's a conversation that really circulates everywhere that the diaspora of Afghanistan is. (Muzhgan)

We have this social responsibility. (Saif, translation)

There were also more affective (emotional) drivers that were discussed in how people responded, with many referring to **fear, shock and sadness as emotions that compelled action**. Others described how the events of August 2021 triggered trauma responses, as people remembered their own past suffering at the hands of the Taliban.

Oh well, like it's been, it was a mixture of probably, shock and fear. I think for myself, my family and all the people that surrounded me, all of us were really worried and we had this fear of everything that could happen... just imagining genocide happening at any moment, or

any type of persecution that would happen, especially considering the past trauma that we have. (Ahmad, translation)

To be honest, it was a disaster. When in the morning I got up and they said the Taliban is taking over, I got mute for a couple of hours. I couldn't figure it out. What would be my reaction? What would be my response? What am I going to say? ... I was really traumatised because ... I came when the Taliban first took, you know, when they were in power many, many years ago. I was there and I left, and I know... the things that were lost at that time. It really came back as a nightmare. (Juma, translation)

Linked to these re-traumatising emotions were also **feelings of guilt** for the safety that people in Australia had compared with their family, friends and community members in Afghanistan. At the same time, some interviewees spoke about the **lack of safety they felt in Australia** following these events; that the Taliban regaining power was an **extremely destabilising experience** that compelled them to try to do something to help. Implied in discussions was that helping was also an attempt to regain some sense of control in a situation where people felt powerless.

I think it's also that sense of guilt as well, that we have relative safety here and that the people who could have just been us would have been in that situation. (Muzhgan)

And it's not even goodwill that people do these things. I know people who try to detach themselves by signing off all social media accounts not to get the trigger. But they still fell into depression and all types of psychological health issues, because the overwhelming sense of guilt is so much that it both re-triggers your own trauma, but also your inability or feeling of uselessness is also overwhelming for a lot of people. (Tahlia)





Collaboration:

How did the Afghan diaspora connect with other actors?

The Afghan diaspora collaborated with a range of different actors. **Survey respondents** reported working and collaborating mainly with local community organisations in Afghanistan and Australia-based organisations, including civil society organisations and faith groups. There was also notable interaction with other diaspora organisations. Survey respondents reported little interaction with the Taliban-led de facto government authorities in Afghanistan, UN agencies and international organisations.

These survey findings were generally reflected in what was discussed in interviews and focus groups, with many participants speaking about their engagement with **different organisations and networks in Australia**, for advocacy purposes in particular.

We had stakeholders, like organisations that are working in that space, for example, [Australian] Human Rights Commission, and organisations that they are helping refugees or resettlement program in Australia, and also think tank organisations in Australia, research organisations in Australia, and Members of Parliament who are in the policy-making space. We spoke to all of them. (Habibullah, translation)

I think the sense that we, all of us, as leaders or as professionals, [were] sick of people talking on our behalf. We are competent enough to be able to talk on our own issues, and we [asked] every organisation if they want to be guided. If they want us to lead the campaign, then we will work with them. (Ghulam, translation)

Activities aimed at helping crisis-affected populations were largely channelled through **individuals and local community-based organisations in Afghanistan**. These **local actors** could circumvent some of the limitations that international humanitarian actors faced, that were

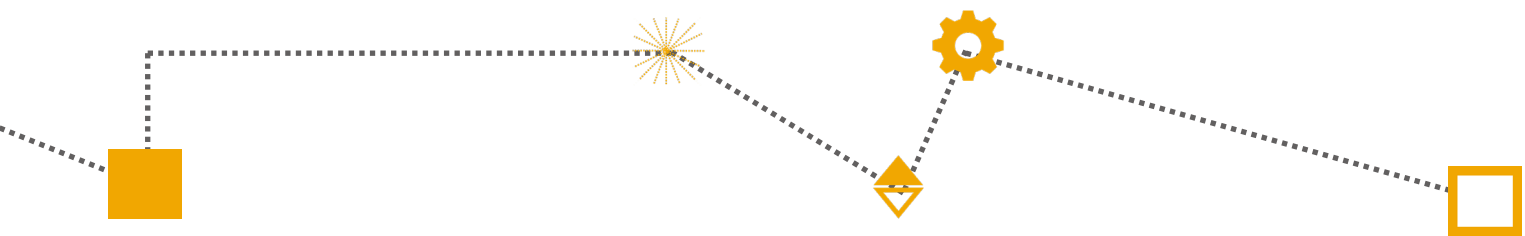
constrained by an operational context in which they would have to engage with de facto government of the Taliban whose leaders were still listed as terrorists and subject to UN sanctions.

I remember one of the challenges that the larger organisations had was around sanctions, especially around the transfer of funds, which they had to transfer through a formal bank. This was a challenge because they had large amounts and in Afghanistan there was no cash to get that amount of money... We didn't have that issue [because] it was a small grant or funds that we were sending. We were using the hawala system, which is a traditional way to transfer money. (Reza, translation)

One type of collaboration that came out strongly in interviews and focus groups was how the **diaspora engaged Australian policymakers** through lobbying members of parliament and participating in government advisory groups. There was a sense among participants that, at the very least, the Australian government was well-informed of the concerns of the diaspora about the situation in Afghanistan because people were given space to meet and share information.

The good thing was that [the Australian government] had direct contact with the community through very good, good members of the community. I think the message was going through... I think they had a very good clear understanding of the situation because they were in direct contact with community members. (Ahmad, translation)

I think, one of the huge advantage or outcome of [the Action for Afghanistan] campaign was that we got a seat at the table in terms of discussing policy. And the



government throughout that evacuation period were willing to listen. Even if they were not at the time willing to act, they were willing to listen. (Ghulam, translation)

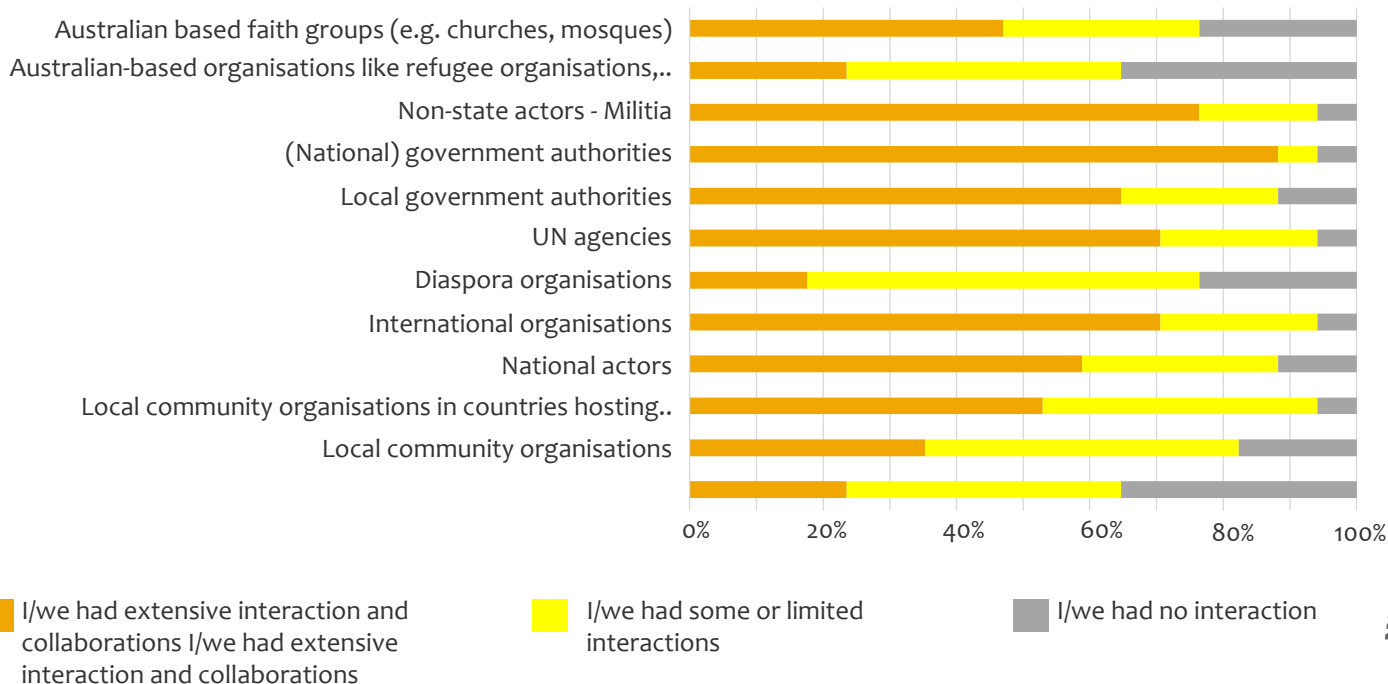
I could claim that there is substantial level of goodwill among some political circles now in Australia, which is fantastic. (Gul, translation)

There were also references made to **partnerships with mainstream Australian lobby groups** as well as **media engagement** and the willingness of media to seek out members of the diaspora as spokespeople.

I gave 19 media interviews in a matter of two weeks... (Juma, translation)

If the diaspora did it [only] themselves, we wouldn't have achieved [what we did]. But because we partnered with Christians for Afghanistan, all these other lobby groups, all these mainstream lobby groups and we used our, the media to our advantage... I think we could... say we helped achieve this because it was done in partnership. (Zainab, translation)

Q. How would you assess the level of interaction you or your community had with other actors responding to the crisis?





Impact and effectiveness:

What made a difference?

The highlights reported by the Afghanistan diaspora through survey responses have to do, mainly, with **the provision of financial and material resources**, and to a lesser extent, providing **psychosocial support** and **safer migration pathways**. 9 out of 10 respondents thought the diaspora made a positive difference in **raising awareness with the Australian public** and with the government to a lesser degree. The less successful aspects of the responses to the crisis, according to the respondents, had to do with holding actors accountable, whether governments, international or local organisations.

In interviews and focus groups, there were varying but mostly positive views on the **effectiveness and impact of diaspora advocacy and influence**, most frequently discussed with reference to the Action for Afghanistan campaign⁷. The effective use of digital and traditional media, and the constructive engagement with policymakers, were highlighted. One participant pointed to the impact that the Ministerial Advisory Panel had, which advocated for and secured \$28 million from the Australian Government to provide legal support for visa applicants and improve capacity of diaspora-led organisations. Critical perspectives expressed were directed more at other actors (i.e., the Australian government and humanitarian sector more broadly), with participants expressing disappointment in the practical and policy-level outcomes.

I think [Action for Afghanistan] was probably one of the most successful diaspora-led campaigns. (Ghulam, translation)

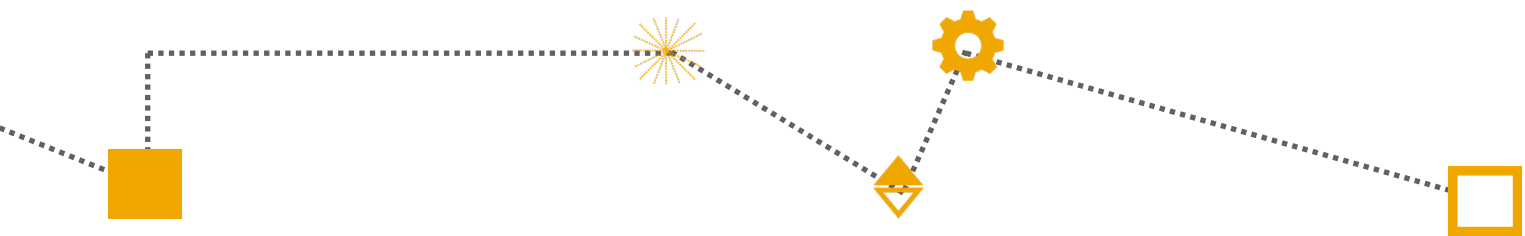
It was a Liberal-National government that did provide additional [visas] for Afghan nationals. It's not enough, but at least it showed that there was enough support from communities. We had Christians United for Afghanistan supporting Action for Afghanistan, we had the whole refugee sector supporting Action for Afghanistan, we had the diaspora community supporting Action for Afghanistan. We had Australians, you know, taking photos with 'I support Action for Afghanistan'. We had school kids making short videos and meeting with politicians saying this community needs support and this is their ask. (Abdullah, translation)

As a result of this campaign, with over 12 million tweets from all corners of the world by diaspora as well as our friends, what we achieved was we were able to get attention at bigger tables, you know, in places of power. In parliaments it was discussed. So, I think the diaspora community really learned to use digital tools in pursuing more modern activism [and] running a very successful campaign. (Maryam, translation)

Another theme about what was effective in the diaspora response was a general feeling that **the Afghan diaspora is and was more impactful at times of crisis, and is perhaps more consistent than the international community** in supporting the people of Afghanistan.

Because of the war in Ukraine and the resulting humanitarian disaster there, the attention has been unfortunately diverted from Afghanistan. So, I think the diaspora community here plays a big role in that our attachment, our concern, remains constant and we continue to advocate. (Maryam, translation)

⁷ <https://www.actionforafghanistan.com.au/>

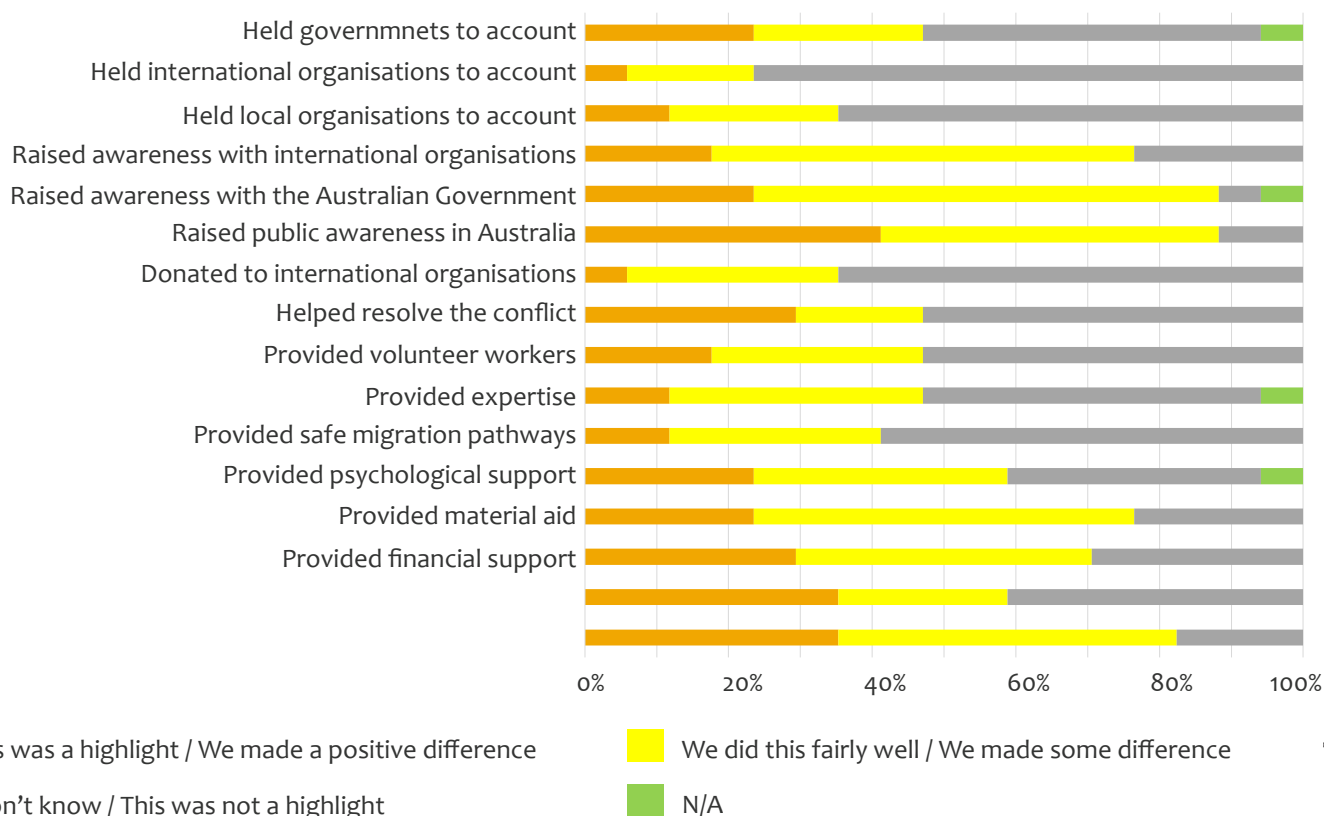


I think the diaspora communities have a huge role to play and we send quite significant amounts of money and resources back in Afghanistan that is saving lives; [we're] building the communities and maintaining the social resources back in Afghanistan. (Khan, translation)

The people of Afghanistan, they completely lost hope in the international community and their support when they withdrew from Afghanistan. They felt betrayed

that they were just handed over to a terrorist group and they were left behind. So, for us [in the diaspora] to reach out to the people back in Afghanistan and tell them, you know, we can support you with education, we can support you financially, somehow that still gives them some hope that the people or the diaspora from other countries are still helping... So that is a significant support in that it keeps people alive and moving. (Habibullah, translation)

Q. Would you assess this as a highlight of your community's response to the crisis?





Challenges:

What was difficult or didn't work?

The challenge or difficulty most frequently discussed in interviews and focus groups related to the **health and wellbeing** of people involved in responding to this crisis. The emotional toll—described in terms of survival guilt, shock, and re-traumatisation—while in many ways enabled or mobilised the above-mentioned actions, also led to significant burn-out and psychological distress.

So, it took a toll on my parents, and it took a toll on our family collectively to go through all of that and have the survival guilt as well. [...] So, it has I think a lot of impact on diaspora here in the mental health as well as the sheer lack of control we feel in helping outside of family members and loved ones back home, because we feel like we're not empowered enough. (Maryam, translation)

I mean, even last year—actually during the first week of Kabul takeover—a young person committed suicide in Brisbane because that survival guilt became too much and his inability to raise help that was meaningful, or change the situation, was too overwhelming. (Saif, translation)

Many participants spoke about community members in Australia **being or feeling overwhelmed**. For those in leadership positions or with particular skills (i.e., legal, English language) or connections, the demands were particularly heightened.

For me it was like a nonstop cycle. I would go to work. The work was related to working with, you know, towards whatever was happening with Afghanistan. And I'll come home to fill forms for family members and, you know, getting calls from family members, and even other community members that we know. And I would

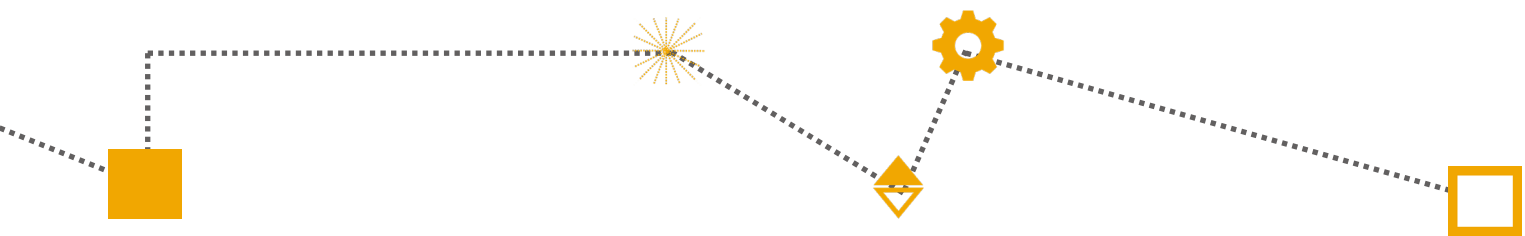
go to sleep, I'll have nightmares about everything that's happened. So it was like a nonstop cycle; like, there's no stopping. (Aaela, translation)

So, the first point of contact is usually the community representatives or those who are usually acting as community leaders or acting on behalf of the community. So, we were overwhelmed, because of also working in the community sector. There was also working with other services, who also wanted information from us. (Ibrahim, translation)

Unsurprisingly considering the acute psychological and practical demands community members were facing, research participants spoke about a difficulty of overcoming **intra-community sensitivities and divisions between and within various cultural, social and linguistic groups**. There were sensitive issues about which social group(s) benefitted the most from Australian temporary 449 visas and evacuation flights. There were fierce community divisions about whether to call for extended or limited 'international engagement' with the Taliban de facto government in Afghanistan and on the question of sanctions. Also, social divisions were sown due to the heightened fear among some groups about increased ethno-religious persecution.

Politics within diaspora: I don't think I've navigated all the politics, but I certainly learned a lot trying to be inclusive and as part of the organising, trying to bring people together. (Zainab, translation)

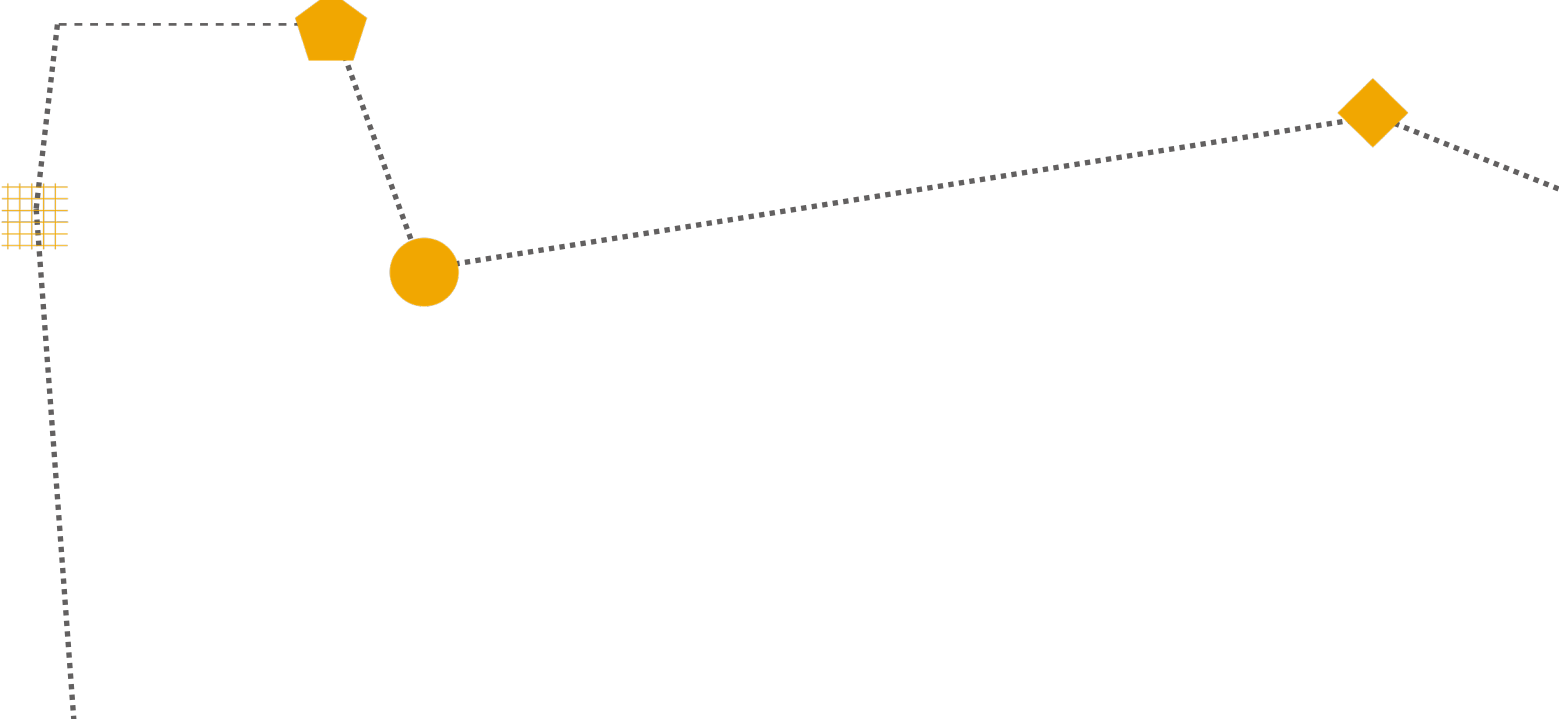
The division [was there] and there were too many Zoom meetings. If you were not going to the Zoom meetings, they thought that you were not, you were not there for your community. So, you were just like pulled and pushed from every angle... (Juma, translation)



Q. Was this a challenge you faced in making a positive difference to the lives of people affected by the crisis?



- This was a major challenge that I faced
- This was somewhat of a challenge that I faced
- This was NOT a challenge that I faced
- N/A



Other challenges discussed were around **lack of capacity within the Afghan diaspora to respond**, including insufficient financial resources, time, skills and connections/influence. This was particularly discussed in relation to the varying capacities of people to influence the issuing of visas by the Australian Government – both evacuation visas and the granting of humanitarian visas for family members.

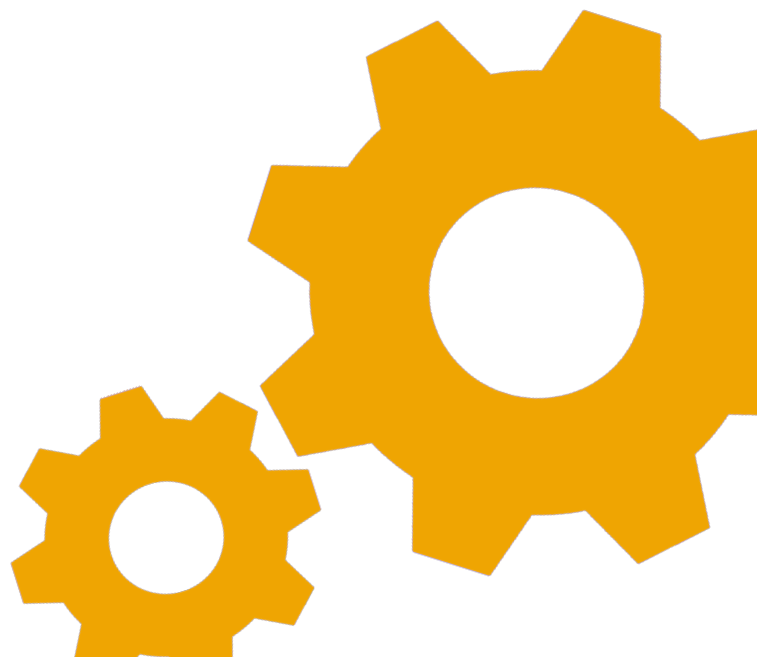
I know my friends, they have a very tough time, not only because of problems here, but also problems back home. Because the demand [for Australian visa] is huge and also the perception is different [here and in Afghanistan], ...some people are working really hard here, but it's not easy [to get visas]. (Saif, translation)

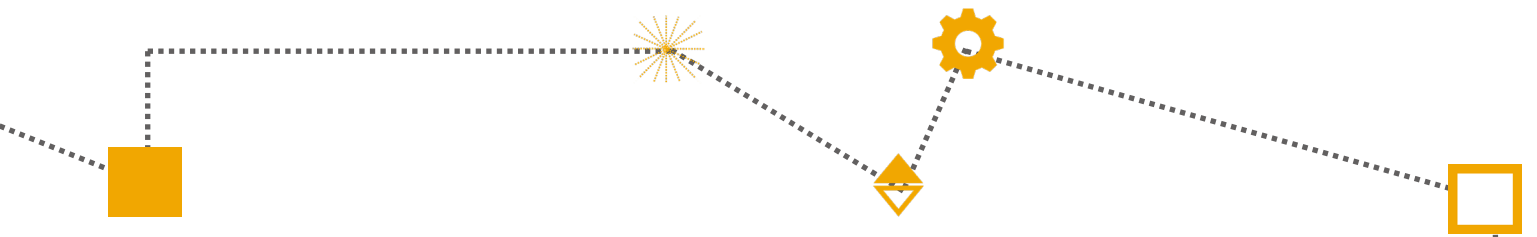
The difficulty of **sustaining diaspora responses** was also mentioned by participants, particularly after emotions have 'cooled off' and as those in the diaspora have competing responsibilities and obligations to

attend to. Sustaining diaspora responses was also seen as a challenge in the context of the widespread and ongoing needs of people in Afghanistan.

A lot of women want to support women there and they are doing it practically. For instance, I did hear of initiatives where they... have launched online classes for women to access. But the question is, how sustainable is that? ... These members of diaspora have their own life and their own commitments, their own sort of dilemmas of fulfilling expenses and living situation in the midst of inflation in Australia. (Muzhgan)

We still receive reports from our partner organizations on the ground for help and assistance. But the problem is that, you know, after a certain [amount of time] when this collective emotion, it's to an extent cooled off. And then people ... feel they have done their bit and they can't, you know, continuously and forever be able to assist. (Masooma, translation)

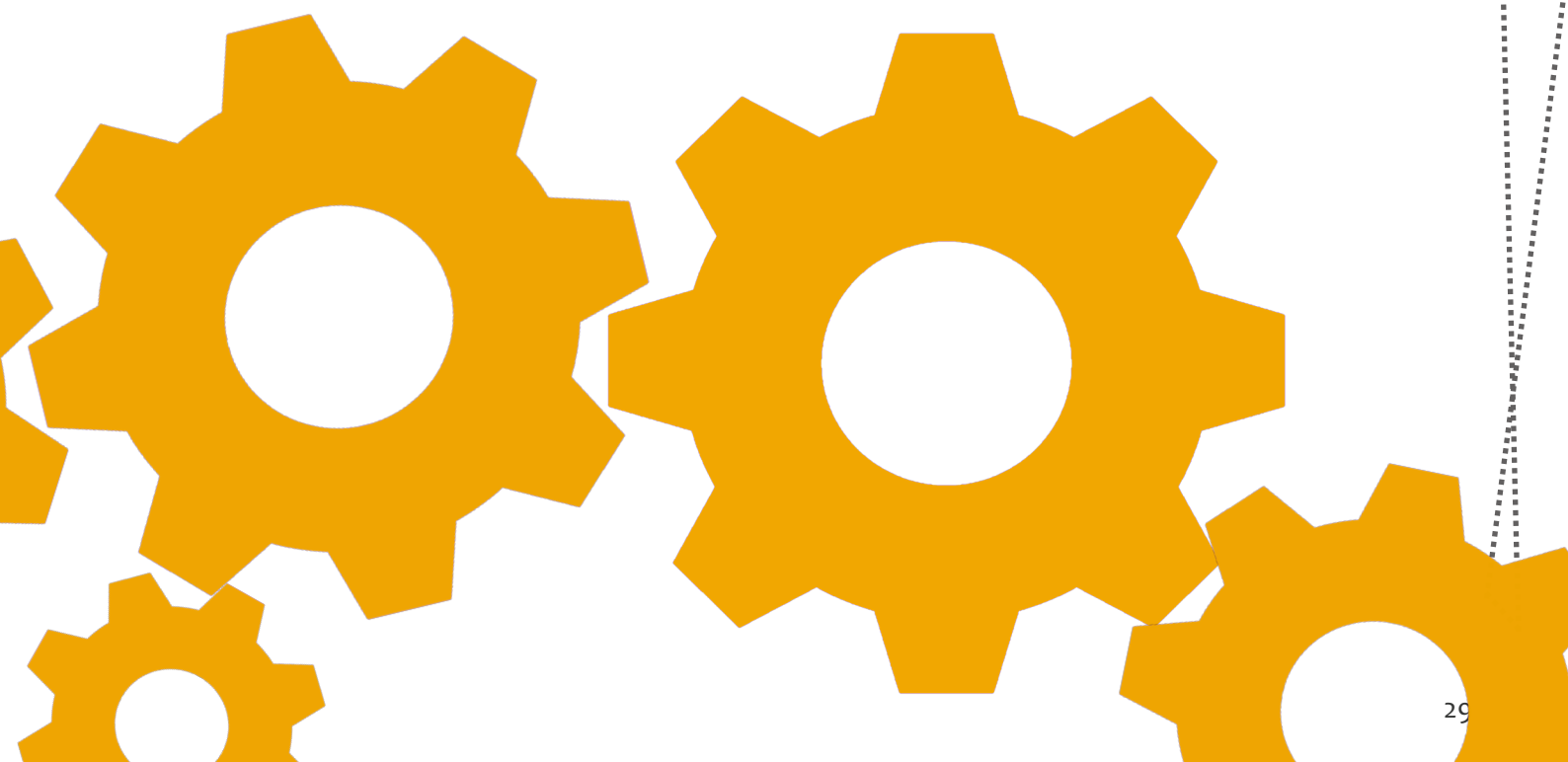




At an in-country operational level, diaspora efforts were hampered when **staff from local organisations fled the country or could no longer work due to safety concerns**. As diaspora organisations rely heavily on working relationships with trusted local partners, the disruption to local organisations and populations in the first few months after the Taliban took power significantly slowed responses.

Our ability to operate in Afghanistan flows on from the ability of those individuals or organisations to operate. If they cannot operate in the country, we cannot [do] anything. We can't convince or force or persuade people to do that unless they want to.... [If they] tell us that they cannot do it, we'll have to cease our operation. This is a kind of reality that will have to operate with going forward, so there's a multitude of challenges. (Gul, translation)

Many of these **challenges were reflected in survey responses**. According to the survey respondents, the lack of responsiveness by the Australian government to processing visas was the second largest challenge the community faced in responding to the crisis, just behind not having enough resources to help. People felt overwhelmed and over-burdened by their obligations, not having enough time or resources to help, but also receiving conflicting messages in what was the best way to help the people affected by the crisis.





Recommendations:

What could help diasporas respond to humanitarian crises in future?

Four overarching themes emerged from participants when asked what would help the Afghan diaspora in Australia respond to future humanitarian needs. This included:

1. Capacity building of diaspora organisations to respond to future crises

Participants talked about the need to build capacity within diaspora organisations in Australia to be able to respond more effectively in future. This was discussed in terms of developing technical expertise through training or connection to mentors, but more generally by establishing systems and processes within organisations, such as ensuring that registered charities are ready to mobilise quickly and harness the ‘capital’ from within communities. Survey respondents also saw value in a forum for diaspora cross-community peer learning.

They could provide us with technical skills, technical expertise, on how to better deliver our projects; how to better engage with other organisations on a national and international level and help us garner support. From as many areas and sources as possible to help us provide training to our volunteers, for example. (Gul, translation)

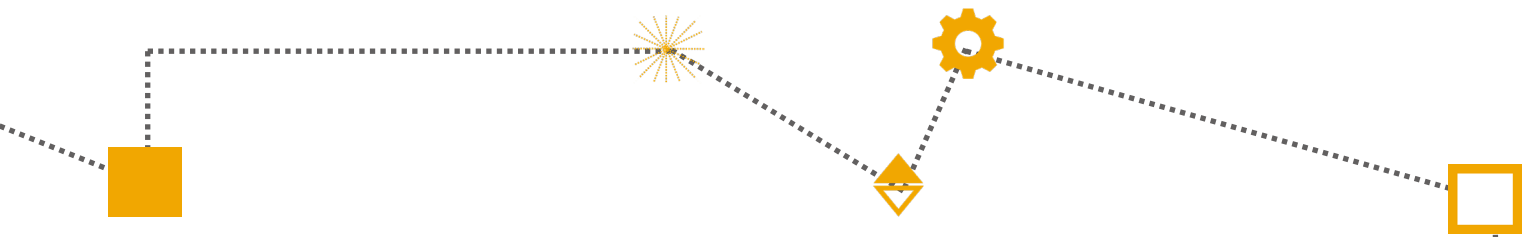
I think we should utilise the resources here and establish systems and tools that [diasporas] can use at times of crisis.... [Because] the biggest capital that communities have is that feeling of obligation and to give back. I think that [maintaining and sustaining] that capital ... is largely dependent on establishing trust, establishing reliable tools and systems that can assist, that can utilise that capital in times of need... That can only happen if diaspora communities are well equipped in terms of knowledge, resources, and the tools that are available here... (Masooma, translation)

2. Greater collaboration and connections between diaspora organisations and the humanitarian sector.

In general, people thought that finding ways for diaspora organisations to work in partnership or collaboratively with other humanitarian actors—both government and NGOs—would improve responses in future. These collaborative relationships needed to recognise the different strengths and modalities of diaspora and institutional actors. This could be done by creating forums for dialogue, developing relationships or working on joint projects.

I think it's about mutual working, accommodating that mutual method to work on, and finding and agreeing on that. And what does that look like? [...] It really hasn't happened. So firstly, I think creating that platform where you can actually have these discussions, with the roles of diaspora defined as important to begin with as a prerequisite... (Muzhgan)

To build a relationship, a working relationship would be really good, to pull up resources that could potentially be available here in Australia, or help us engage with international organisations such as the UN, for example. There are so many different ways in which support from the Australian government or larger Australian organisations could come in and be very handy. (Gul, translation)



3. Stronger connections and funding support from the Australian government

There were several strong recommendations for the Australian government to better fund diaspora organisations as well as connect with diaspora communities on its foreign policy, and particularly in terms of its aid program. Participants felt that the expertise and transnational connections of diaspora communities were valuable and under-utilised, and that establishing better connections to and funding for diaspora communities would amplify Australia's humanitarian efforts.

The primary way in which the government and larger organisations can help support organisations like ours or projects, is through financial support... Where our funding or lack of funding limits us to supporting 20 students, support from a larger organisation or from the government can help us support 200 or 2000 students. (Gul, translation)

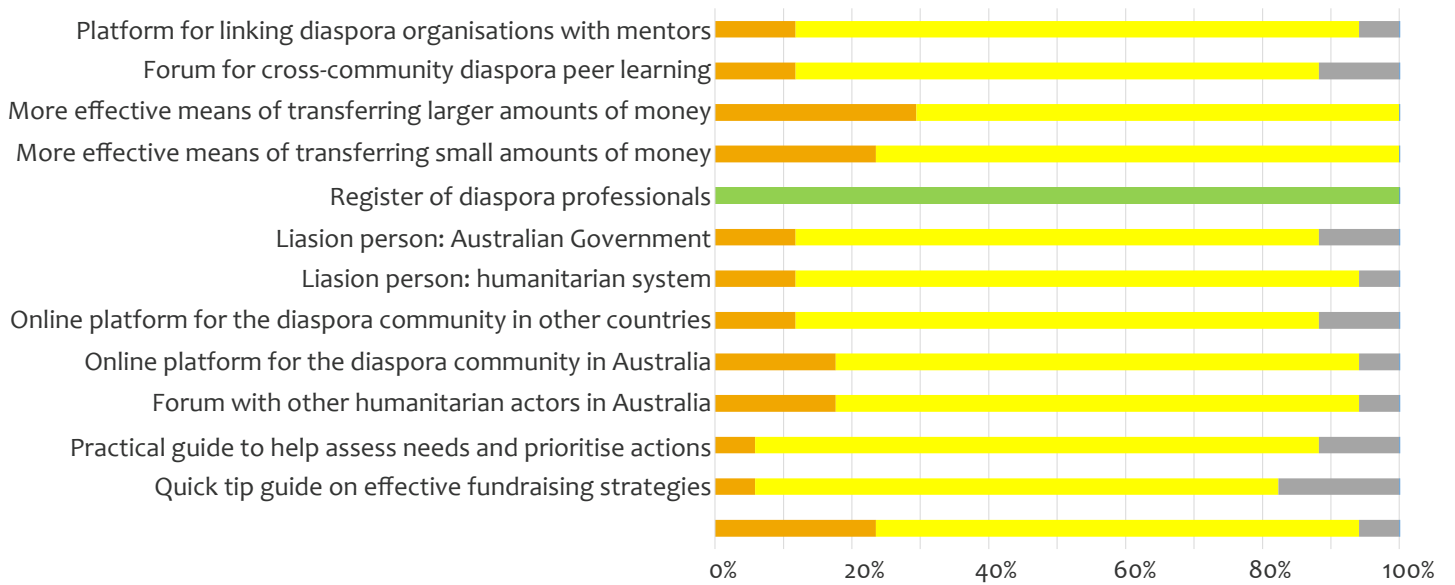
I think if the government supports communities, that will add value in the long run. (Saif, translation)

Diaspora communities can be a very effective resource for Australia's foreign aid, and there is very little consultation or use of this expertise or this resource by the Australian agencies dealing with foreign aid. [...] If Australia has foreign aid in those countries and is using this resource, it will help with the equitable distribution of aid, but also with effective channelling of the aid to the right places. (Masooma, translation)

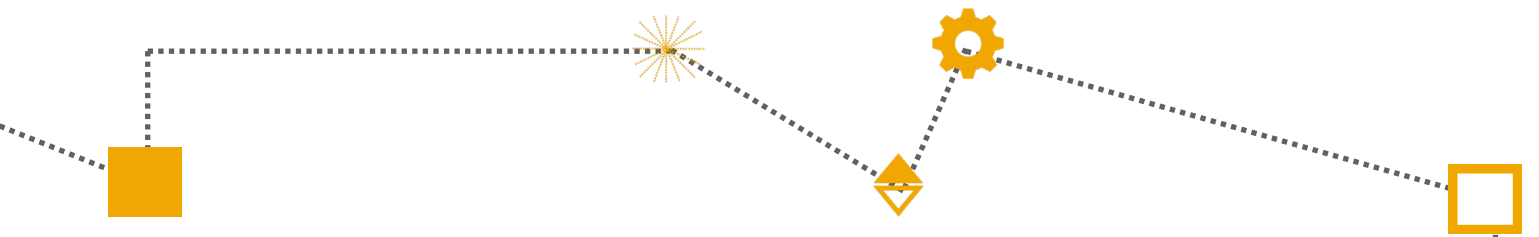
4. More effective means of transferring money

Survey responses to the question of what tools would help in future responses suggested that, while people seem to be aware of accessible and cost-effective means to transfer money to Afghanistan, almost 70% of survey respondents thought it would be useful to have access to more effective means of transferring smaller and larger amounts of money.

Q.Do you think this tool would help your community to make positive difference if there is another crisis in the future?



■ This already exists ■ I think this would be useful
■ I don't think this would be useful ■ N/A



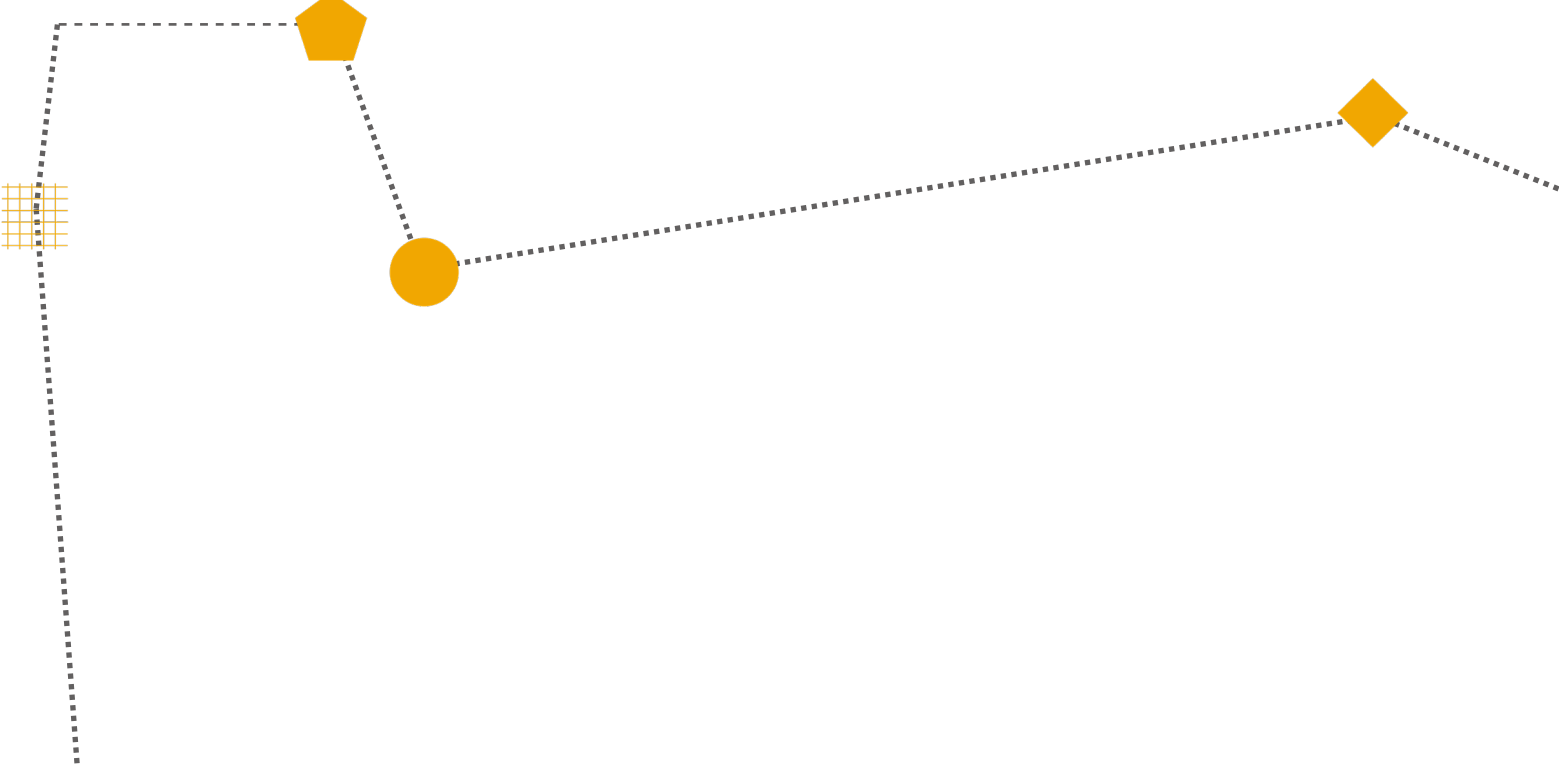
Quantitative data report

Data:

- The Afghanistan survey was created in English and Dari. The former was answered 18 times between September 21 and October 31, 2022. The Dari version got 23 responses, in the same time period.
- Some of these responses were discarded for not meeting eligibility criteria (i.e., substantially incomplete, consent, awareness of the crisis, living in Australia), bringing the total sample to 17.

Demographics:

- Most of our sample (77%) was born in Afghanistan, with 18% born in a third country and 5% in Australia.
- 59% of our respondent were male, and 41% female.
- Our sample is relatively young, with 94% of respondents being younger than 44. Despite their young age, most of our respondents are well-established in Australia, with 71% having lived in the country for more than 10 years.
- 82% of people came to Australia seeking asylum, or on a refugee or family reunification visa.w



Afghanistan		
Country of birth	Afghanistan	13 (76.5%)
	Third country	3 (17.6%)
	Australia	1 (5.9%)
	Total	17 (100.0%)
Gender	Male	10 (58.8%)
	Female	7 (41.2%)
	Total	17 (100.0%)
	25-34	11 (64.7%)
	35-44	5 (29.4%)
	45-54	1 (5.9%)
	Total	17 (100.0%)
Years living in Australia	More than 20 years	6 (35.3%)
	11-20 years	5 (29.4%)
	6-10 years	3 (17.6%)
	I have always lived in Australia	1 (5.9%)
	Less than 1 year	1 (5.9%)
	1-2 years	1 (5.9%)
	Total	17 (100.0%)
In which visa did you first come to Australia?	Refugee or humanitarian visa	8 (47.1%)
	Family reunion visa	4 (23.5%)
	Sought asylum in Australia	2 (11.8%)
	Student visa	1 (5.9%)
	Visitor Visa	1 (5.9%)
	Born In Australia	1 (5.9%)
	Total	17 (100.0%)





School of Social and Political Sciences