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

*A case study of diaspora responses to political and
economic crisis in Lebanon*



April 2024



The research team is very grateful to members of the Lebanese 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 and Australian National University undertook a project exploring how Australia-based migrant 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 (disaster, conflict and complex crisis), 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 diaspora responses to the political and economic crisis in Lebanon since 2019. This case study also sought to compare recent responses to political and economic collapse in Lebanon with past responses to the Lebanese civil war.

Omar Zreika was the community researcher leading the research for the Lebanese diaspora 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 23 Lebanese participants in Australia from diverse backgrounds (age, gender, religion, professional backgrounds, community involvement, and years living in Australia). Interviews were held by Zoom or in person in Sydney between July and October 2022. Interviews were conducted in Arabic and English and were audio recorded and then translated and/or transcribed. Transcripts were thematically coded using Nvivo
- **Survey:** 16 community members completed an online survey in either English or Arabic (see appendix for survey sample). Survey data was analysed using Qualtrics.

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



Crisis context:

How did the nature of the crisis shape diaspora responses?

The crisis context in Lebanon since 2019 was described by participants as **complex, multidimensional, and situated in a country that has long experienced a “chain of crises”** (Elie). Participants named and framed specific events within this chain of crises—from civil war in the 1970s, through to rapid political and economic collapse starting in October 2019¹, the Covid-19 pandemic, and the man-made disaster on 4 December 2020 when a large quantity of ammonium nitrate stored at the Port of Beirut exploded, causing hundreds of deaths, thousands of injuries, an estimated USD 15 billion in property damage and left 300,000 people homeless². As Michel described: “There have been numerous crises in Lebanon... [and] the Lebanese diaspora in Australia contributed to every crisis and performed their duty to the best of their abilities” (translation).

What appeared to set the post-2019 context apart for those in the diaspora who had experienced or engaged with previous crises, was the **widespread and devastating impact on the entire Lebanese population**. For instance, even though the Civil War in the 1970s caused significant destruction and harm, it was felt that people in different parts of Lebanon were impacted to differing degrees, whereas the current crisis impacted everyone and was a matter of day-to-day survival for the estimated two-thirds of the population that were pushed into poverty³. As Michel explained: “The salary of an office worker or employee who used to earn 1000 dollars a month doesn’t reach 100 dollars today, and they have become in need today as any widow or orphan in need was before” (translation).

So, the base of people who need support or response are getting bigger and wider and covering other people. Just before, it used to be for the disabled or poor people. Now, the pyramid of the people who need those support is getting bigger and bigger. (Elie)

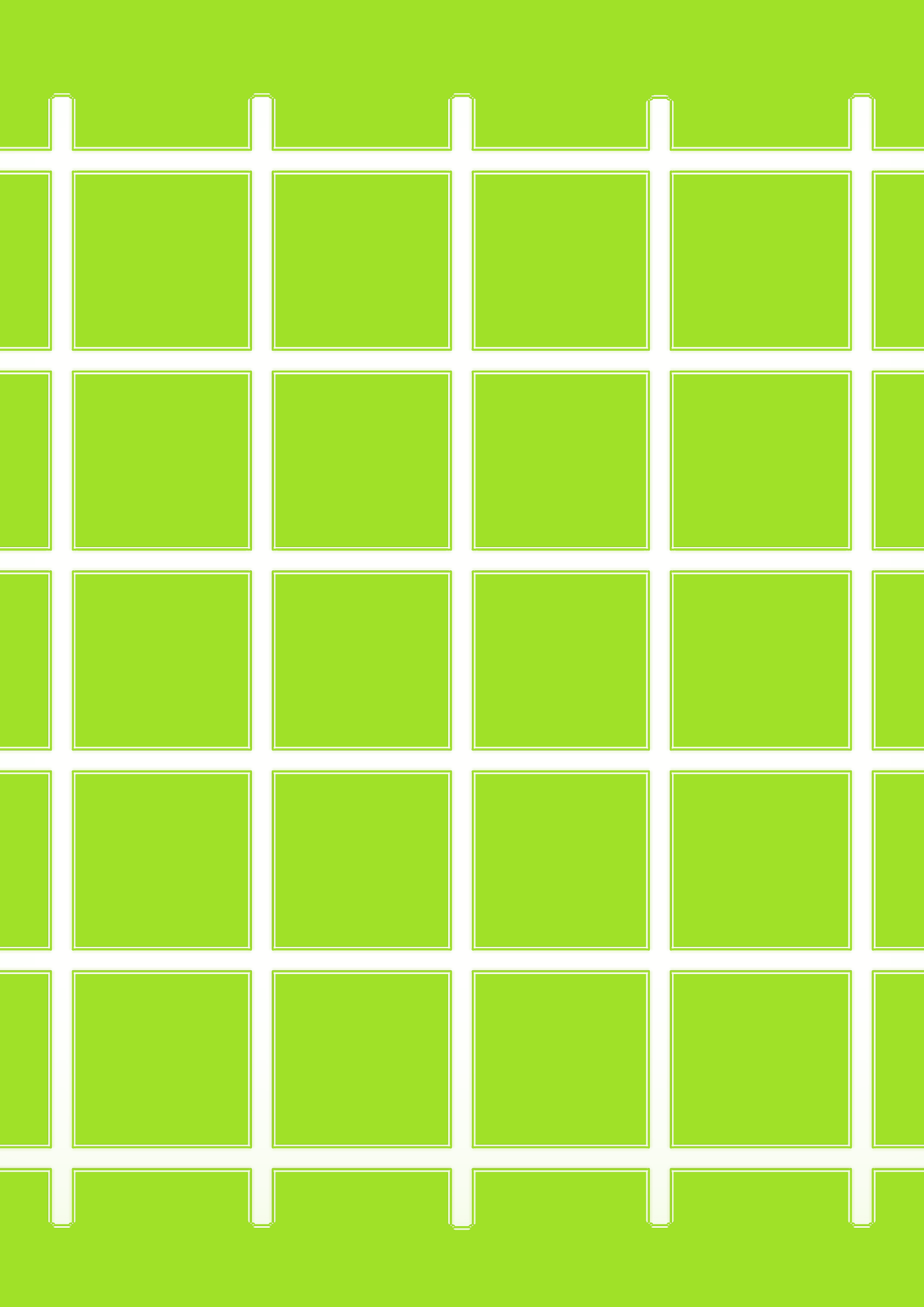
Participants in this research described a tension and challenge in how to effectively respond to the situation in Lebanon where the drivers are complex and interconnected and humanitarian needs are so great. With one crisis after another to respond to – economic, political, public health and man-made disaster – the waxing and waning of diaspora responses was noted, as were questions about long-term sustainability. For some, the diaspora response to the Beirut blast was significant because it was easier to mobilise, whereas the response to political instability, corruption, the collapse of financial and social systems, all require system-change. As one participant described, there’s a dilemma for those in the diaspora between the obligation to help their family, friends and community simply survive, and their role in putting “Band-Aids” on a broken system.

I think the climax was the election. I don’t know how I think. It’s just, where do we go from now? Because we know that it’s not like, “Oh, we have this solution”... I think it’s broad attention to issues that we still need to fight for. So, I know the explosion, you know, people really want a proper investigation. That’s a big talking point. But in terms of right now, the engagement I think it’s lower than it was. Yeah, because people are just tired. (Christelle)

1 Dagher, L., & Altug, S. (2023). [The End Game to Lebanon’s Woes: IMF Reform and Political Willingness](#). Georgetown Journal of International Affairs

2 Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. [Beirut port explosions 2020](#)

3 Dagher, L., & Altug, S. (2023). [The End Game to Lebanon’s Woes: IMF Reform and Political Willingness](#). Georgetown Journal of International Affairs





Diaspora context:

How did characteristics of the Lebanese diaspora in Australia shape responses?

The Lebanese diaspora in Australia is **sizeable and reasonably diverse** in terms of class, faith and region of origin⁴. While migration from Lebanon to Australia has spanned several waves, the most significant increase in the diaspora took place immediately following the civil war of the 1970s, with thousands arriving on humanitarian visas in the late 1970s and 1980s, many from rural and working-class backgrounds. In the 2021 Population Census, 87,340 people were Lebanon-born, while over 248,000 Australians reported Lebanese ancestry, reflecting an established diaspora with the greater proportion now born in Australia rather than in Lebanon.

As a large and well-established community, the Lebanese diaspora in Australia was able to **draw on established community structures and networks** to respond to escalating humanitarian needs overseas. Not only did associational structures facilitate support, but also the expertise and experience of long-term helping practices meant the diaspora was well-placed to mobilise quickly and efficiently to both rapid onset disasters, like the Beirut blast, as well as to growing community needs emerging from financial collapse.

For the Lebanese community itself, there are probably 300-400 community groups, and they're all active, trying to send back money, and assist to build a mosque or church or school or whatever. They assist the villages back home. So, that's become a lot more active than it was in 1975-1977 because community groups have established themselves. (Salim)

⁴ In the [2021 Population Census](#), over 248,000 Australians reported Lebanese ancestry.

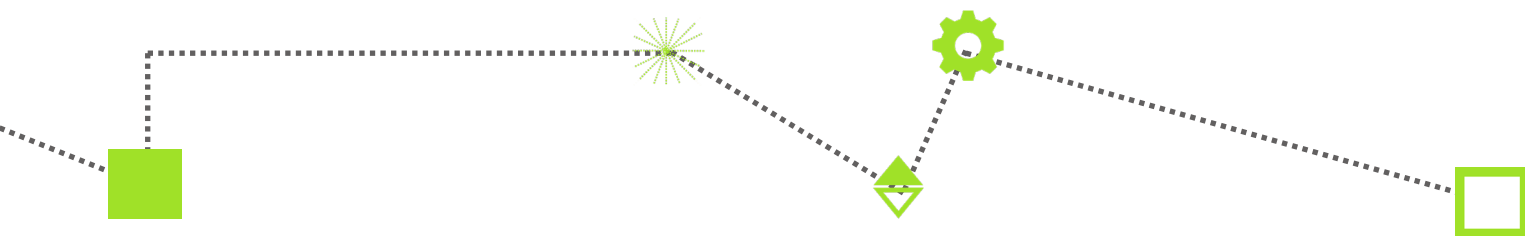
It's worth mentioning that we've been doing charity work since we migrated. But the whole Lebanese diaspora community has entered an emergency state due to this crisis. (Eessa, translation)

While many in the Lebanese diaspora are born in Australia, they maintain **active and close connections with people and places in Lebanon**. For example, participants talked about owning property in Lebanon, travelling regularly to and from Lebanon, and maintaining active communication and support with family, friends and community networks such as village associations that span the diaspora in Australia and beyond.

Some people were born here and have never been to Lebanon, yet when we tell them we are securing food boxes for children, they donate without asking for details. We are really grateful for having such a close connection to Lebanon. (Samer, translation)

While the diaspora in Australia is large and diverse, this diversity was mentioned by some as **fragmenting community responses along long-held sectarian, political and religious lines**. While these divisions did not necessarily disrupt more localised responses to the crisis – such as assistance given to local villages or faith groups based on diaspora affiliations – it did hinder the furtherance of more systemic or coordinated advocacy on the underlying drivers of the crisis in Lebanon.

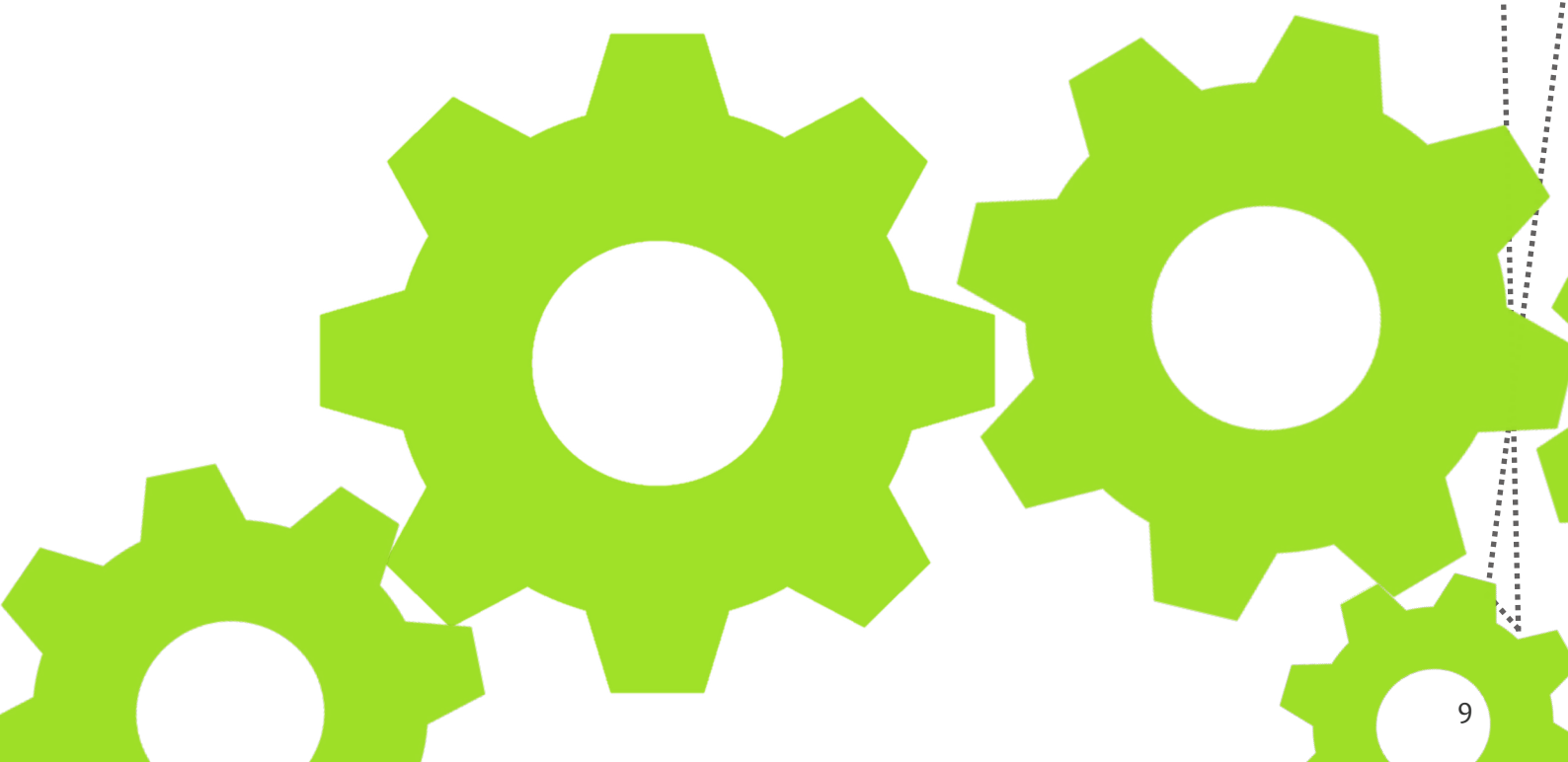
[Many in Australia are] still living as if they were living there 40 years ago. A lot of people in Lebanon have actually moved on further than the Lebanese community in Australia have, and that's very unfortunate... Don't get me wrong, there are a lot of people who are working positively in making a huge influence in Lebanon, but as a community at large... we [have] become a drag on Lebanon rather than Lebanon a drag on us. (Salim)



Intergenerational differences within the diaspora community in Australia were noted as significant to the crisis response, with some from the older Lebanon-born generation lamenting or simply acknowledging a disconnect and different level of engagement between second or third generation Lebanese Australians and the situation in Lebanon.

Because they were born here, raised here, fed here. So, they live like they want. 90% of young people here want to work, want to be educated. They get busy with their lives. They don't want to be involved with politics in Lebanon, because they see it as none of their business. (Michel, translation)

[Q. Are younger people involved in your response?] Not much, the younger generation has so much on their plate; that's why. But it's because we are living in a world, especially our kids here in Australia, they don't have time, and they want everything. So, they don't appreciate what they have. That's why I say they should go and spend time and live with a few families to see how they are struggling and then they come back and see the electricity. We have electricity we don't have to worry about; the water is running 24 hours. This doesn't happen in Lebanon; there is no bread, there is no food, no medication, you go to the hospital, you die, and you pay money. (Aida)





Main activities: What did Pacific Island diasporas do?

Activities undertaken by members of the diaspora in response to the economic and political crisis in Lebanon since 2019 suggest different levels of response. Interviewees described **household-to-household activities**, with individuals in Australia responding to direct requests from family and friends in Lebanon. However, just as frequently discussed were actions at a household-to-community or community-to-community level, with those in Australia contributing either directly or via intermediary organisations to local associations or locally coordinated initiatives in Lebanon that provided practical assistance on the ground. There was also reference made by some participants to activities directed at **structural or system-level responses** to the deteriorating situation in Lebanon through advocacy, influence and awareness-raising.

While everybody sends assistance to his own family, the association deals with the crisis as a whole. (Sally, translation)

Fundraising and financial transfers

An activity that many in the diaspora engaged in was fundraising. This included organising and holding fundraising events, collecting money through faith networks, and creating online crowdfunding campaigns.

In Australia, for example, we launched donation campaigns through My Cause and GoFundMe and distributed them to advocates, companions, and family members. (Samer, translation)

Our association at that time initiated a fundraising campaign to support the victims of the Beirut port explosion. At the same time, fires broke out in the hills of the Akkar, so the fundraising covered them as well. The fundraising was done online, and the amounts collected

went to support the victims of the explosion and the fires. (Charbel, translation)

Whenever I attended religious associations, mosques, or churches for Friday prayers, gatherings, or events, there was always a call for donations to Lebanon, and I always observed good responses and enthusiasm for helping. (Eessa, translation)

Many participants in this study spoke about remittance-sending practices of the Lebanese diaspora, referencing both **household-level remittances to family and friends in Lebanon as well as collective remittances**, most frequently channelled through diaspora community associations with affiliations to local organisations, faith networks, businesses and village associations. For example, Fatmeh described a collective initiative of the diaspora community from a particular region who, over a seven-year period, transferred funds to three pharmacies in a town with an agreement that the pharmacists could use these funds to pay for the medication of residents who could not afford it.

Look, what we are helping is just to keep the people surviv[ing], like, just to eat. What we are sending is not a huge amount... So, all they do is just they are feeding their family. (Aida)

We respond by communicating with our families and sending financial assistance as quickly as possible, both on an individual basis and through charity institutions. I'm sure there is a very high percentage of people who send financial aid, especially from the Lebanese community, who send money directly to their own families and friends. (Eessa, translation)



Material aid

Some people in the diaspora also sent material goods to Lebanon. As with remittances, goods were sent to both known individuals as well as to communities through collective initiatives. The most frequently described **goods sent were medicine and medical equipment, food and clothing. Material aid was collected or sourced new and second hand** from individuals and businesses in Australia as well as from countries neighbouring Lebanon.

In the past, I used to send my family luxury items, not necessities. Now it's all about food items and medicines such as Panadol, and Neurovit, and we're trying to send pills to people suffering from diabetes. In addition to the type of aid we send, the frequency has changed as well. For example, we used to send luxury items twice a year, but now we send aid containers every one or two months. Once a container has been delivered, we move forward with sending another. (Jessica, translation)

I have been also involved in the church and the village association where we have sent clothing, children's milk, and nappies. We also dropped off blanket covers and coverlets for the church to send overseas. The association collected money during Christmas and agreed with the village associations to distribute toys to the village's children. (Samer, translation)

Diaspora projects

There were examples given in interviews of projects initiated and delivered for the most part by diaspora associations. While these often involved financial or material goods transfer such as those described above, they also involved considerable project management, knowledge transfer and worker hours (both volunteer and paid). For example, diaspora associations were involved in the reconstruction of schools and hospitals, large-scale sourcing and provision of medical supplies to hospitals, and the construction and ongoing funding of infrastructure projects such as digging water wells and purchasing village water pumps, sourcing and sustaining the running of village electricity generators and solar power projects.

A total of 340 wheelchairs were sent to medical centres and hospitals in need. We also helped with the reconstruction of some schools and hospitals. (Michel, translation)

People who had empty houses overseas at the time of the explosion opened them up to homeless people so they could stay in them. The engineers, builders, or glass workers of our relatives in Lebanon either volunteered to help, or we paid them to reconstruct buildings. (Samer, translation)

I was in charge of collecting donations to solve the electricity issue in my village, which has ten thousand residents. There was no electricity while three butcheries, two pharmacies, and institutions all require constant electricity to run... We raised about \$100,000 from the villagers [in Australia] and benefactors, and we purchased an electric generator... (Eessa, translation)



Advocacy and influence

In the immediate aftermath of the October 2019 financial and political collapse, the diaspora in Australia mobilised to protest, lobby and raise awareness about the situation in Lebanon. Many interviewees spoke about participating in snap rallies in major cities, meeting with policymakers to advocate for the Australian government to step up its response to the unfolding crisis, or sharing news and opinion about the situation through the media.

Our first reaction was to raise our voices to meet the Lebanese people's demands on the ground. (Charbel, translation)

In that initial response, my personal response was to document what was happening through photographs, voice recordings, audio recordings, and visual artifacts... I also spoke about it on some local radio, just because I had access to that at the time. (Christelle)

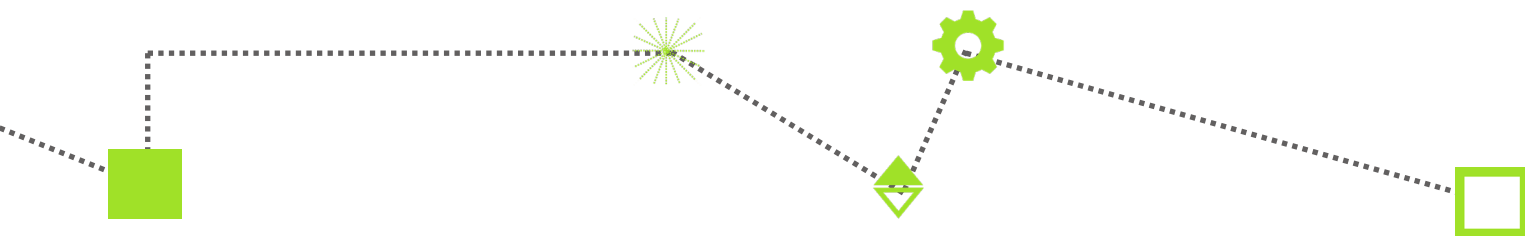
One interviewee also mentioned the important role of Australian politicians with Lebanese heritage using their influence in parliament to speak out.

We have four or five diaspora members in the Australian parliament [who have] expressed concern about the crisis in Lebanon in previous Parliament sittings, through which they tried to assist and made the Australian government aware of the economic and humanitarian crisis in Lebanon and its need for assistance... I think politicians with Lebanese roots have played a very important role... and we should appreciate their efforts. (Jessica, translation)

There were a range of systemic changes or responses that those in the diaspora were calling on in their advocacy and influence work. Some of this related to the provision of humanitarian assistance to Lebanon. However, most frequently mentioned were efforts to bring about political change in Lebanon, to hold politicians and powerbrokers to account for the collapse of the Lebanese economy and social system, and to raise the profile and influence of the Lebanese diaspora as people with voting power. In this, groups in Australia were involved in initiatives to educate voters and encourage voter registration.

Some people didn't even know they could vote in the diaspora. So, this was a very big project. Diaspora didn't even know that they have voting rights, or how to check if they have voting rights. (Christelle)

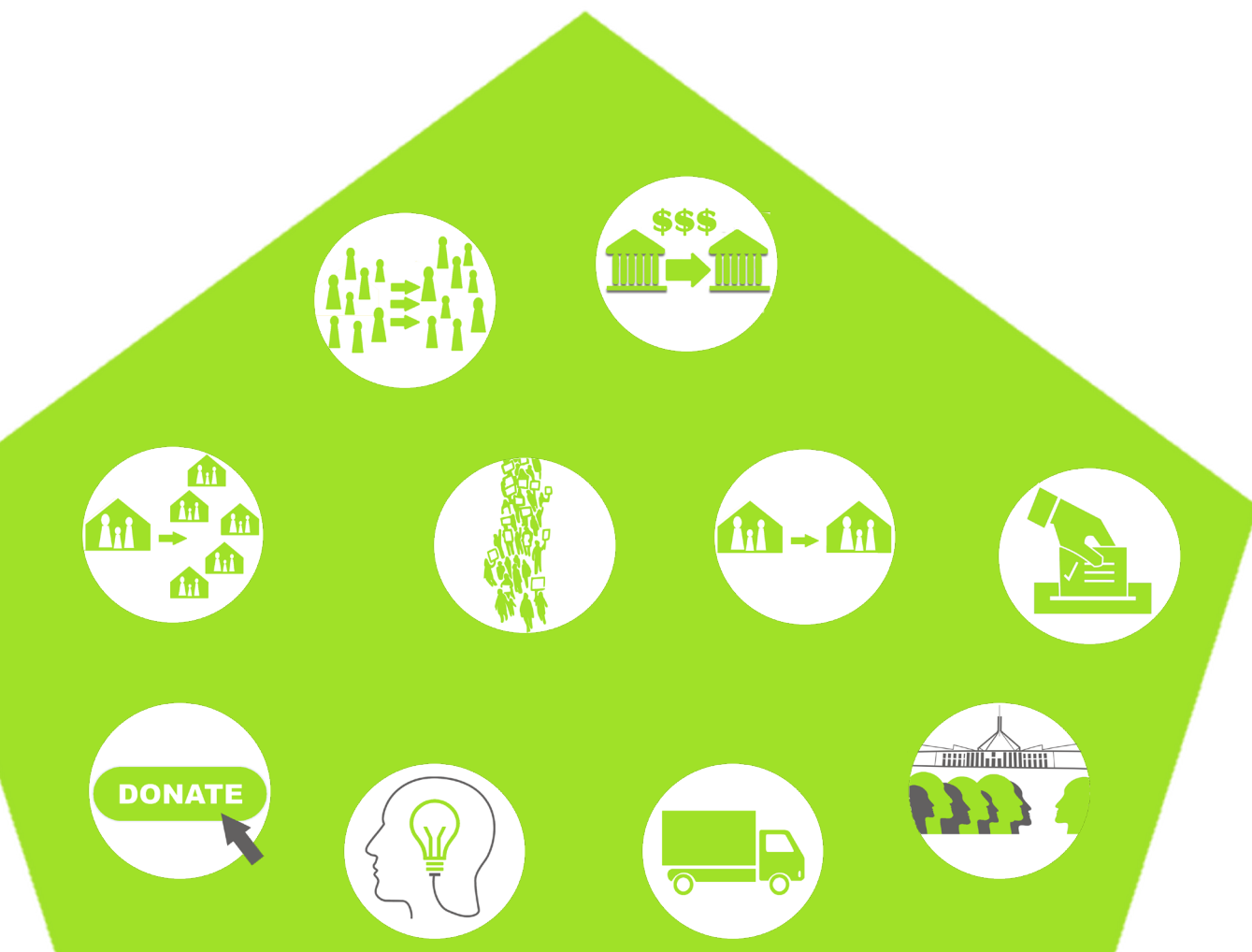
While the diaspora community generously helps, it also needs to contribute to reform and actual political change in Lebanon; otherwise, we will continue moving from crisis to crisis, as we have always been. (Charbel, translation)



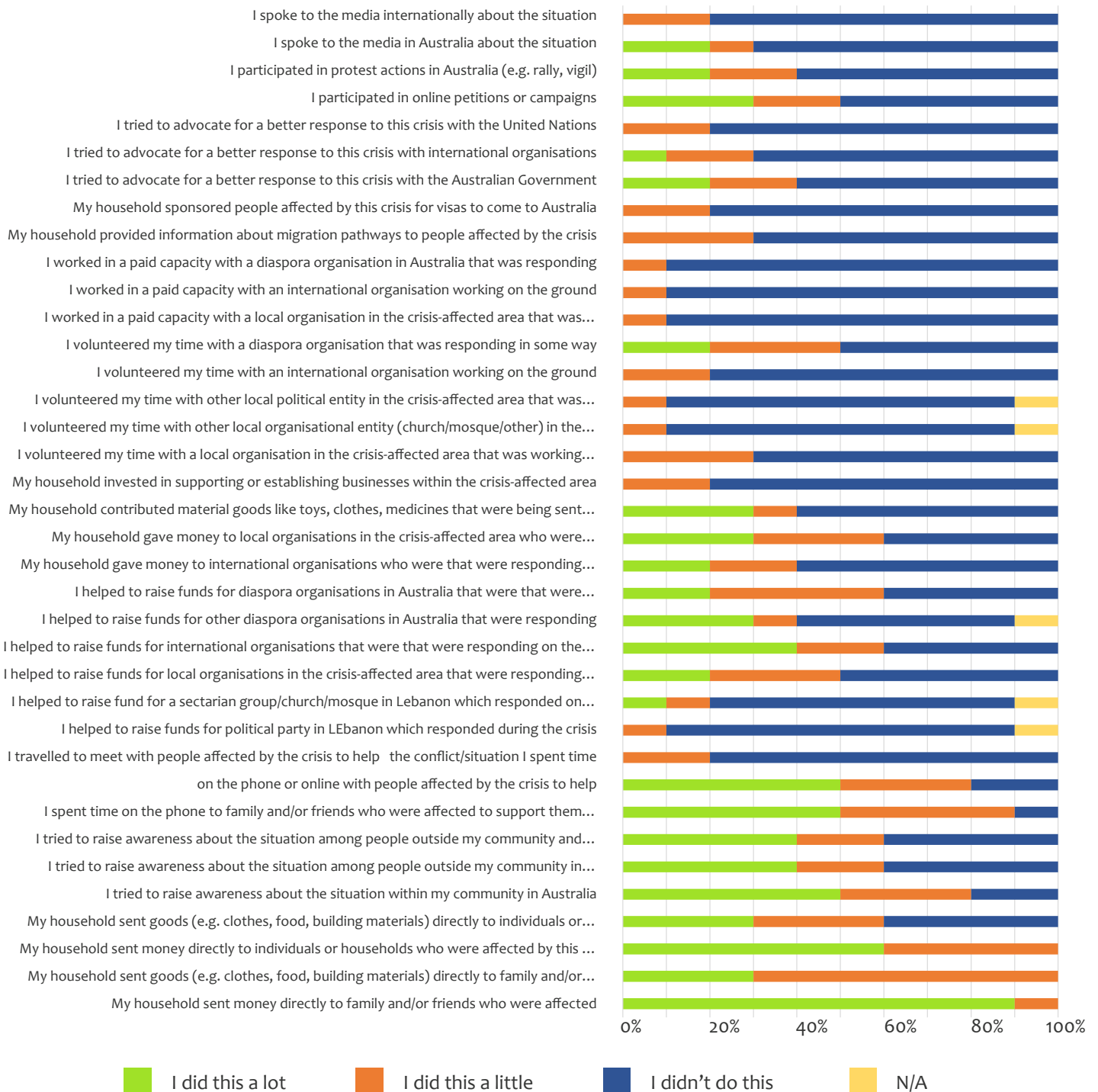
Survey responses

Activities described in interviews were generally reflected in survey responses. By far, the most common response to the political and economic crisis was to send money or goods directly to family and friends and to people affected in general. All the respondents claimed to have sent money at least a little, with 90% sending money to family and friends ‘a lot’. Emotionally supporting people in Lebanon was another common response that came through more so

in surveys than in interviews, with 90% indicating they were emotionally supporting family and friends ‘a little’ or ‘a lot’. In terms of advocacy, 50% of people said they participated in online petitions ‘a little’ or ‘a lot’, while 40% participated in protests and 30% spoke to the media in Australia at least a little. The least common responses to this crisis were working in a paid capacity, for local, international or diaspora organisations.



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





Needs addressed:

What needs within crisis-affected communities were addressed?



Livelihoods and income support – supplemental income for families and businesses in context of rampant inflation and cost-of-living crisis



Health care – sourcing and supply of medicine (e.g., for chronic conditions, such as for the treatment of diabetes, high blood pressure and heart conditions) and medical equipment (e.g., oxygen tanks, wheelchairs); subsidising or covering cost of medical treatment (e.g. paying for surgical procedures, funding medical centre staff, covering cost of ambulances).



Food and essential items – provision of clothing, food boxes, baby formula, soup kitchens.



Infrastructure – supply of solar panels and diesel generators to reduce cost and disruption to electricity supply; funding construction or reconstruction of schools, hospitals and houses; temporary shelter for people affected by Beirut blast by providing access to vacant properties owned by diaspora; digging of village wells..



Education – paying school fees; funding for operational costs of schools; construction and reconstruction of school infrastructure.



Political/system change – advocacy and awareness-raising on constituent rights and principles of good governance.



Support for vulnerable and displaced people – Support for Palestinian and Syrian refugee families (food aid, inclusion in health responses to COVID-19 pandemic), food and medical care for seniors and people with a disability.



Needs analysis

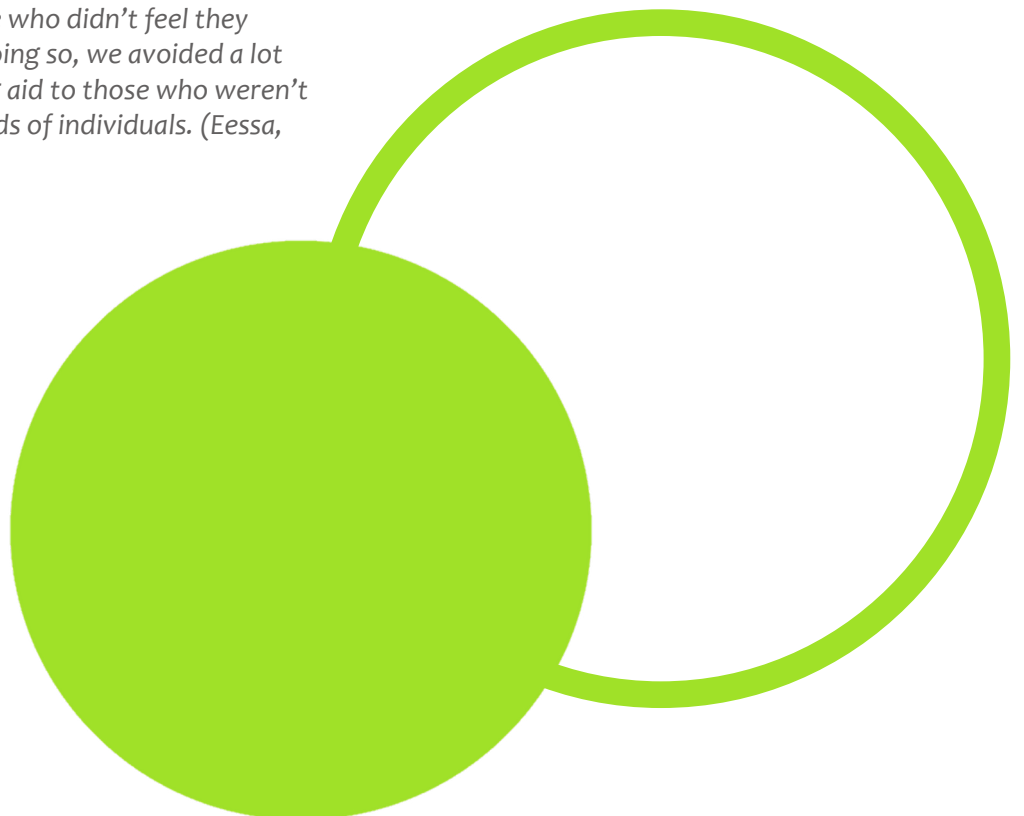
When asked **how those in the diaspora made decisions about what or whose needs to prioritise** in their support to people in Lebanon, there were a range of responses. For some, **decisions were made based more intuitively** on their own knowledge of the local context and community, or from knowledge passed through social networks. For example, those involved in the distribution of material and financial aid at a community level drew heavily on their own understanding of needs in the local community or asked trusted local contacts and organisations to verify needs and to prioritise. As one interviewee explained, those in the diaspora made decisions ‘from our knowledge and what we see around us’, because ‘you know these things are required and needed’ (Fatmeh). In one case, a diaspora association made the decision to distribute aid to all 1,500 households in a village equally, with an understanding that the community have their own understanding and ways of redistributing resources.

We came up with a solution by distributing food aid to all people equally, and those who didn't feel they needed it could return it. By doing so, we avoided a lot of problems, such as delivering aid to those who weren't deserving or assessing the needs of individuals. (Eessa, translation)

In other cases, diaspora organisations asked for **local organisations in Lebanon to more formally document and assess needs** and assist them to prioritise accordingly. These were done through checklists and databases, but also with asking trusted local contacts to verify and gather information.

I once sent someone to a neighbourhood and was told there was an old man living alone who didn't have a candle to light at night, so we prioritised him over other things and purchased him a battery to light up the house. Most of the tasks are performed by our team on the ground. (Omar, translation)

Checklists are important so that we are familiar with the people of the village and whether or not they have family members in the diaspora. After that, we take into account the age, health condition, and financial status of the family, since almost everyone in the village knows each other and their financial situation quite well. (Jessica, translation)





Modalities:

What tools helped to facilitate diaspora responses?

Working through trusted social networks

Social networks were central to diaspora responses, with family, friends, professional, faith-based, community and social groups key to receiving and sharing information, fundraising and transferring money, and generally getting things done.

Individuals must reduce the circle of people who need support to include family, maybe some village residents based on our abilities. As an example, I can extend my support to my village. Some people are only capable of supporting their families, while others collaborate on a larger scale through associations. (Georges, translation)

When describing how social networks helped to facilitate actions, **trust** was a strongly recurring theme. When asked how their group determined who should receive support overseas, Samer said:

The first thing is trust since, without trust, we wouldn't give these amounts of money, medicines, or even material products. The second thing is experience; we work with people we've known for a long time, and we receive receipts, photographs, and videos from them. (translation)

Trust itself was earned through working together over time and/or through constant checking, such as asking for verification from independent sources, or members of the diaspora travelling and seeing for themselves.

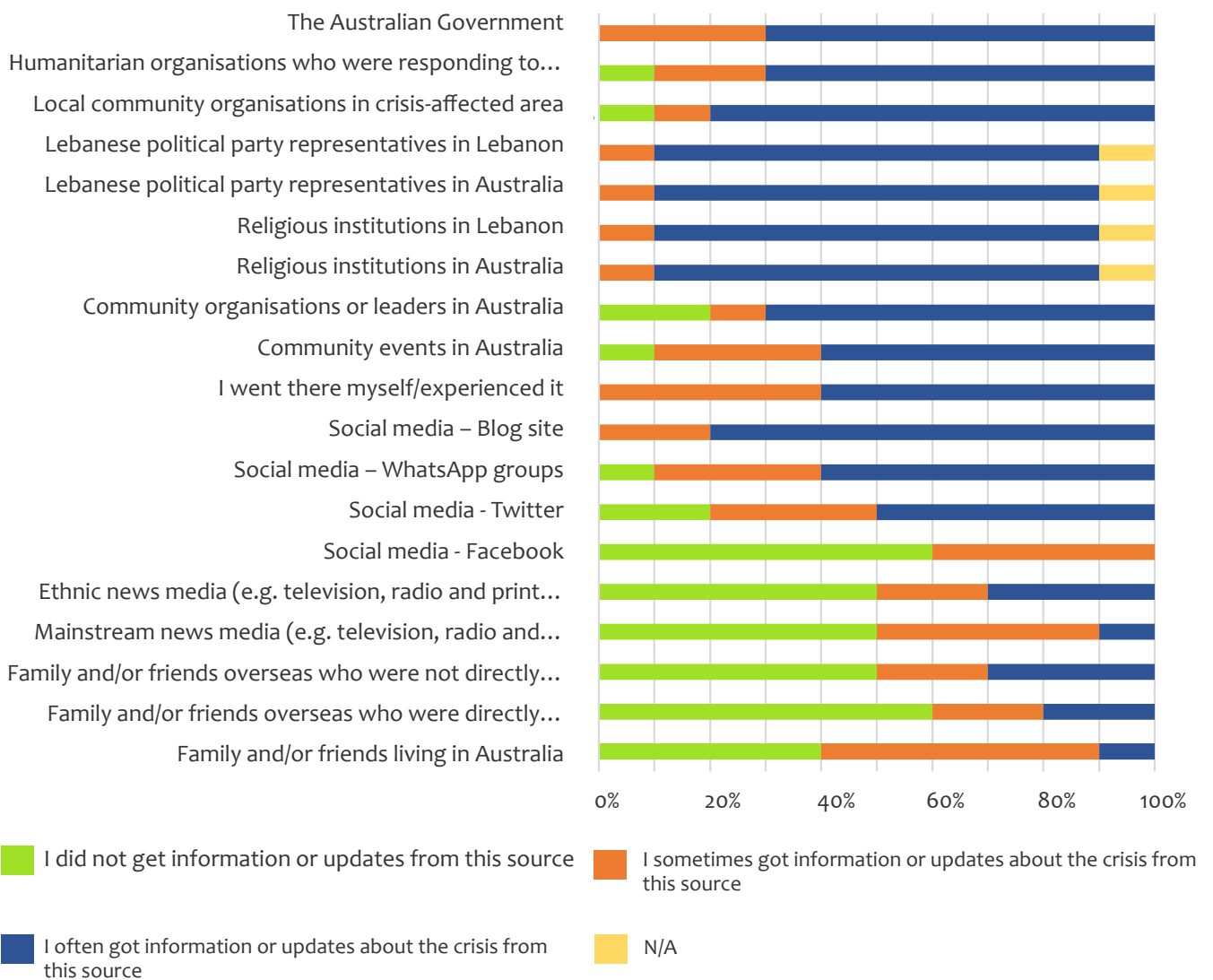
That so many interviewees talked about the central importance of trust is unsurprising, considering the **concerns about wide-spread corruption in Lebanon**. As Michel said: 'When there is corruption, it spreads throughout the whole society. We know there are fictitious associations... so we make sure we work with the most active and trustworthy associations' (translation).

Because if you trust me, you will trust anyone I trust. These aren't people I personally know, but rather people recommended to me by someone trusting them. Trusting the main person is the most important thing so your money is safe. It's important when contributing your own money to not make it go to people who aren't worthy. (Alia, translation)

We deal with some trustworthy institutions overseas, and we sometimes go down to Lebanon to investigate and follow up on things. (Sally, translation)



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





Travel to Lebanon

Interviewees spoke about the importance of people travelling regularly between Lebanon and Australia to facilitate and enable diaspora responses to crisis. Travel allowed the **maintenance of social connections and relationships with local actors** who could facilitate responses, **needs assessment and verification** of the outcomes of diaspora responses, **distribution of money or goods** directly to beneficiaries, as well as the **implementation of projects** through Lebanese-Australians working or volunteering their time in, for example, infrastructure or healthcare initiatives.

The best way to send money is by giving them to someone who is traveling to deliver them to that person's relatives. This is the way that I like for aid and assistance to go to Lebanon. (Abdel, translation)

[Our] association used to send two members there every year to check on the situation, to ensure that the assistance reached its beneficiaries and was distributed properly, and to find out what was going wrong so that we could address it and improve it. (Sally, translation)

Digital and communication tools

A range of digital and communication tools were mentioned as key to fundraising, information sharing and coordination. Specifically, crowdfunding platforms such as My Cause and GoFundMe were mentioned as useful in fundraising. In terms of social media platforms, Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube live were mentioned as tools used for identifying needs (i.e., people or organisations in Lebanon reaching out to those in the diaspora), mobilising awareness of needs and a response from diaspora community members, as well as for generally sharing ideas and information.

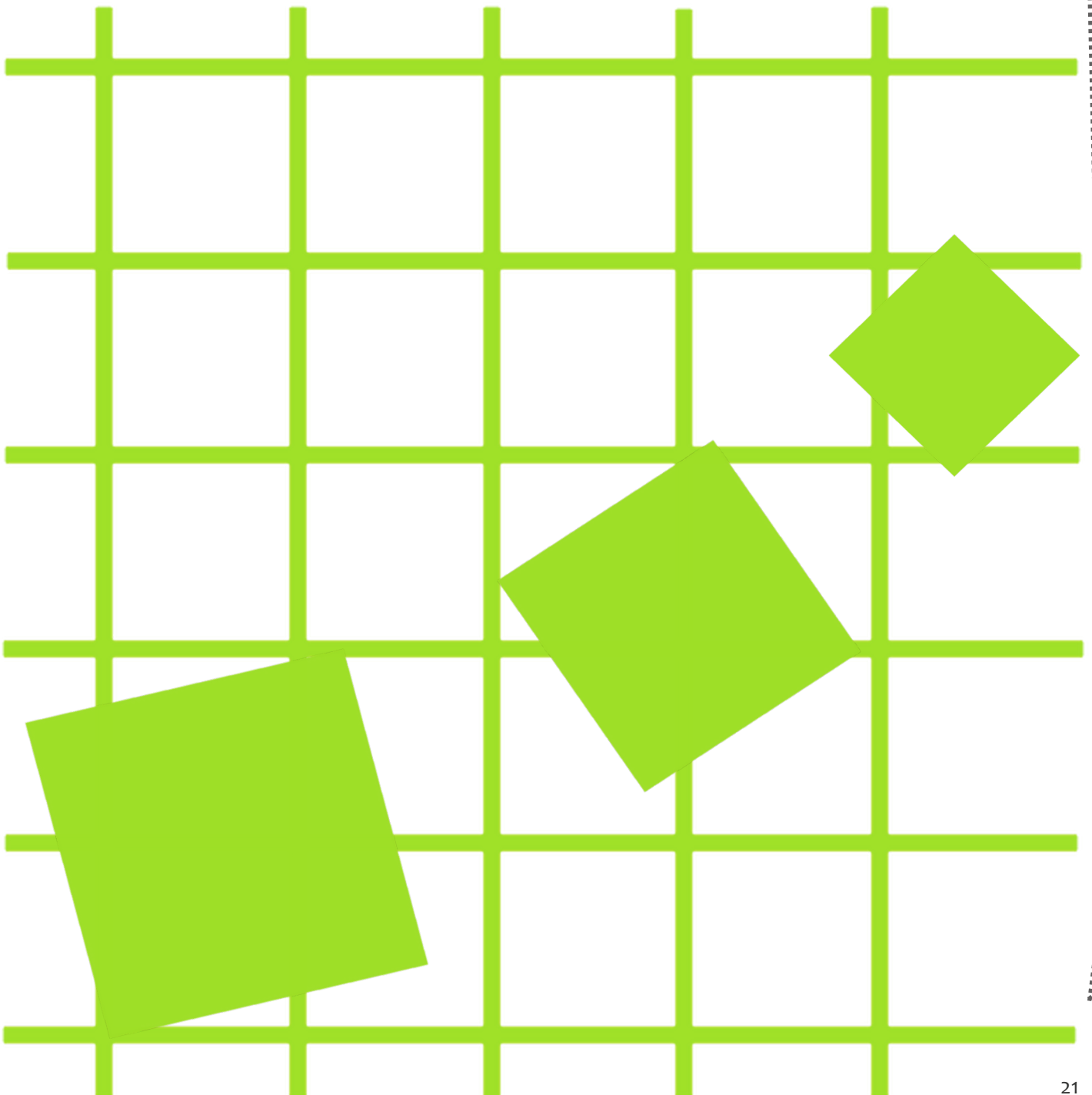
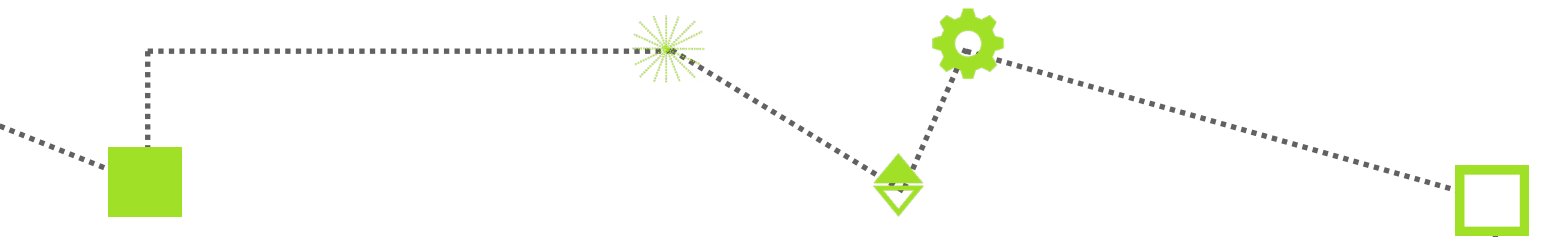
We launched donation campaigns through My Cause and Go Fund Me and distributed them to advocates, companions, and family members. Money was collected and sent to Lebanon, where the diaspora committee received it and distributed it to specific associations. (Samer, translation)

We began posting several activities on Facebook and sent messages on WhatsApp. Our association has a database of between 3000 and 4000 WhatsApp users and more than 10,000 Facebook followers with whom we share ideas. The crisis intensified over the past decade, and communication has become easier. We were able to reach more people, and the response was great. (Sally, translation)

We follow Lebanese social media, get updates about what is happening on the ground from family and friends and contact [groups in Lebanon]. We receive information through multiple sources as a way of cross-referencing on which we make decisions... (Charbel, translation)

These ideas were also **reflected in survey responses**. When asked what the main sources of information were about the crisis, all respondents said they used Facebook as a source of information about the crisis: 60% a lot and 40% a little. News media (mainstream and ethnic) and family overseas affected by the crisis were also key sources of information.

The world has become a small village with media spread, especially through mobile phones, where we are in constant contact with one another through social media which has facilitated communication with Lebanon more than ever before. Now, everyone has access to such platforms and communication has become easier. There is no hiding from crises. They are reported in the news and via the media, as well as through our daily interactions with Lebanese associations and our families. We have updates from overseas every day. (Sally, translation)





Motivations:

Why did the diaspora in Australia respond as they did?

When asked or referring to why people in Australia responded to the different crises in Lebanon, there were four main themes: identity and belonging, morality, affect and power.

Identity and belonging

There was a sentiment that was echoed in many interviews about responding to the crisis in Lebanon being about 'being Lebanese'; that there was a sense of identity and belonging that came from active connections with people in Lebanon. People spoke of 'the Lebanese community', whether in Lebanon or Australia, as one community regardless of geography. While there was an appreciation or acknowledgement that those in Australia had different understanding, privileges, and experiences, being Lebanese meant offering what they could for the community and as a pillar of culture and identity.

Our bodies might be in Australia, but our hearts and minds are with our people in Lebanon, and we try to help them in any way we can. (Khalil, translation)

But the links with Lebanon have never ceased. It's been strong from that time until now, and it's getting stronger because people are enmeshed in the politics of Lebanon... So, something happens to Lebanon; it has an impact here. (Salim)

Values such as togetherness and brotherhood are wonderful and help to link the diaspora with Lebanon. I hope this spirit continues. (Jessica, translation)

Morality: duty and obligation

Acts of giving were framed by many participants as a moral duty or obligation. However, the moral code that individuals referenced varied. For some, giving assistance was something that was an **act of humanity**

and, very pointedly, 'not political', referencing more conventional humanitarian principles.

We must provide humanitarian assistance whenever we can, especially when it comes to medications and food, regardless of people's political affiliation. I believe there is no room for politics when it comes to humanity. (Samer, translation)

... a politician in Lebanon said: 'Do you want to run for politics in Lebanon?' I said: 'Look, brother, ... as far as possible, I want to stay away from Lebanese politics.' It's purely humanitarian, and, you know, that's the long and the short of it. (Ali)

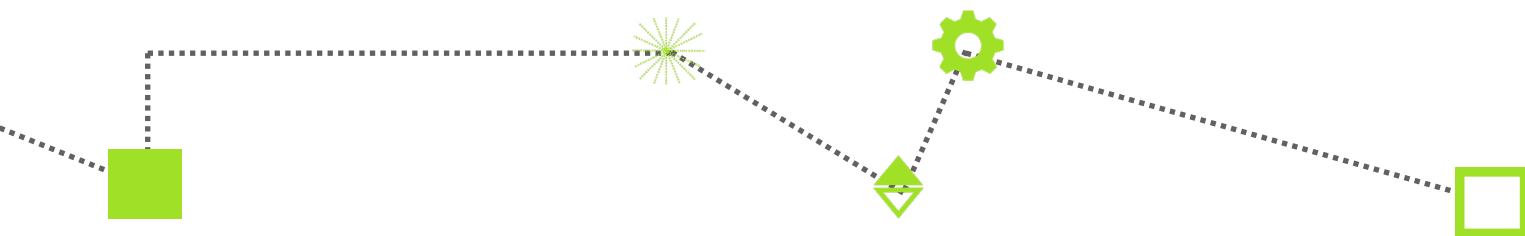
One should reach out to anyone who has morals, not based on religious, sectarian, or regional considerations, since goodness and humanity are not influenced by religion or identity. Any ill person needs to have everyone's support since humanitarian work has no identity; it belongs to everyone. (Michel, translation)

Others spoke more of moral duty or obligation based on **religious beliefs**, such as practices of giving (Zakat) during Ramadan for Muslims, or of **duty or obligation to family, community and country**.

We work for God's sake, not for political gain, fame, or position. (Khalil, translation)

I send aid to my family on a personal basis out of my duty, and I would be a failure if I didn't assist them. (Samer, translation)

We have to respond. It's like obligation for us to keep those people alive. (Elie)



Affect: guilt and sentimentality

To a lesser extent, interviewees spoke about the emotions that animated their response to the crisis in Lebanon. They spoke about people feeling guilty or sentimental, or of requests for assistance from family triggering difficult memories of their own hardships in Lebanon.

People feel guilty; if they're earning one dollar here, they want to send half of it to assist their families in Lebanon because they know they're not able to survive without it. (Salim)

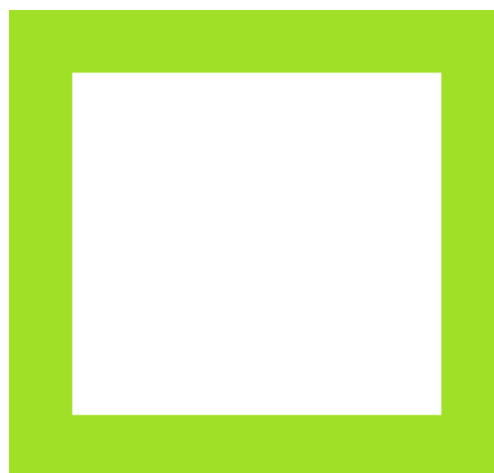
Our people are very sentimental; very emotionally connected. They can't leave those emotions behind. So, something happens to Lebanon; it has an impact here. (Salim)

Back then, when I was young, I remember my family would bring a bag of flour or rice during wartime. Having heard my family talking about going back to such bags of flour, rice, and lentils and baking bread at home, I thought of the long-ago war. (Samer, translation)

Power and politics

For some participants, power and politics were central to their response to the crisis in Lebanon. This was particularly so for those involved in activities to promote system change. For them, weak governance and accountability by powerbrokers in Lebanon were central drivers of the humanitarian crisis, and their involvement in collective advocacy work was very much motivated by a desire to see political change and for the Lebanese diaspora to play a greater role in shaping the future of the country.

Since the political is the umbrella of our life. If it keeps raining and keeps dripping, if we don't change our whole umbrella, we will never stop it. (Peter)





Collaboration:

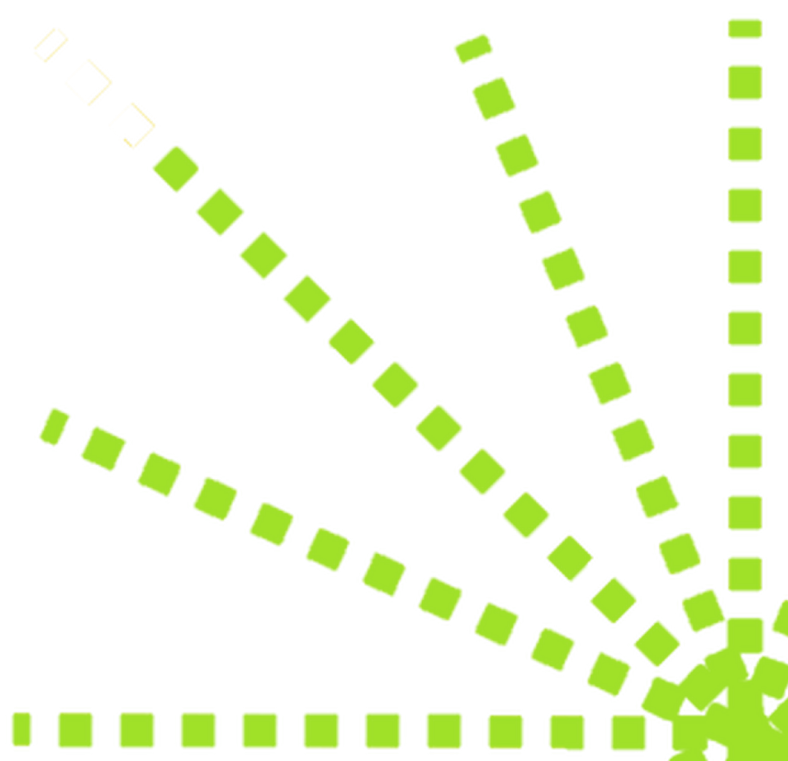
How did the Lebanese diaspora connect with other actors?

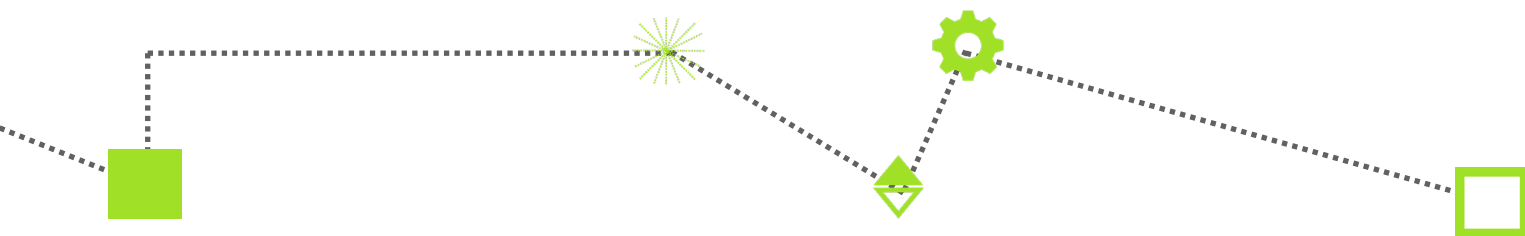
Collaboration between the Lebanese diaspora in Australia and other actors responding to humanitarian needs in Lebanon was overwhelmingly through civil society and the private sector at a local level, including with **local charities** and **businesses**, and **faith-based networks**, but also with more **informal groups of volunteers**. For example, one interviewee spoke about a small group that mobilised two weeks after the 2020 Beirut port explosion, with a diaspora association agreeing to fund work to install aluminium windows and doors in homes that were impacted by the blast.

During the Beirut explosion, we started a fundraising campaign and sent money, and we also agreed to make food boxes and distribute them to needy families in cooperation with a specific supermarket or association. (Samer, translation)

We have provided financial assistance to associations... Part of the assistance went directly to a couple of hospitals in Tripoli, especially during the fire in Akkar, where hospitals specialising in handling burns were in need of assistance. (Charbel, translation)

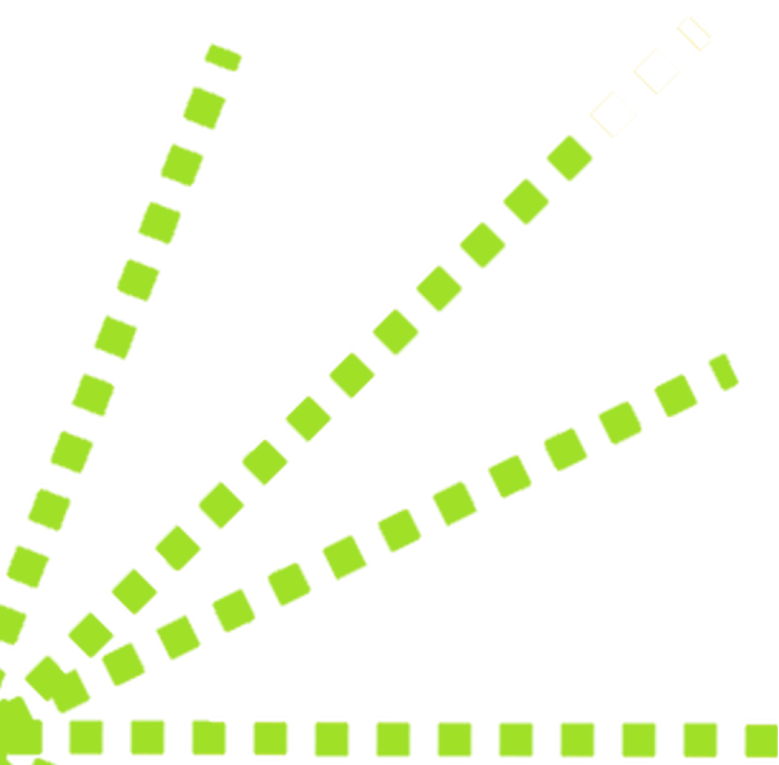
To a lesser extent, participants spoke about collaborating with **government authorities** in Lebanon and in Australia. **Mayors and village associations in Lebanon**, for example, were mentioned by several people as instrumental to needs identification, distribution of assistance and sharing of information. Relationships between diaspora organisations and **the Australian government**, including Australian politicians with Lebanese heritage, were also mentioned as collaborative in terms of mobilising institutional humanitarian actors to respond in Lebanon. How strongly the Australian government's response reflected either collaboration or relationships with the diaspora was less apparent.





With regards to institutional humanitarian actors, such as international NGOs or multilateral institutions, there was very little evidence of any cooperation or collaboration. Some mentioned **a reluctance to engage with institutional humanitarian organisations** because, simply, they didn't have to. Speaking of why diaspora communities decided not to provide support through humanitarian agencies, Elie said: 'They know how to do it. They can just jump on and do the response. They don't have to go through channels that they are not familiar with and they don't trust.' An exception to this was the engagement of diaspora community members with the NGO AusRelief. As Elie went on to say: 'The only organisation that was responding very well was AusRelief, because, again, the majority of their members are Lebanese in Australia.'

Finally, some people spoke about collaboration and coordination with the **wider Lebanese diaspora**. In response to the explosion in Beirut, for example, Samer described how extensive meetings were held 'with all countries of the world to establish contacts with Lebanon and see how aid could be sent from each one' (translation).





Impact and effectiveness: What made a difference?

When asked about the impact and effectiveness of diaspora responses, both interviewees and survey respondents had **mixed but mainly positive assessments** about the significant role that the diaspora community played in supporting the Lebanon people to simply survive in the context of weak governance, financial collapse, and multiple crises and disasters, including the COVID-19 pandemic and Beirut port explosion.

Without the diaspora community in Australia and elsewhere around the world, the people in Lebanon would likely have faced starvation and severe conditions, and the situation there would have been far more dire. It is the diaspora that keeps Lebanon alive to this day. (Georges, translation)

Lebanon survives on foreign aid, including from the Lebanese living in Australia... (Michel, translation)

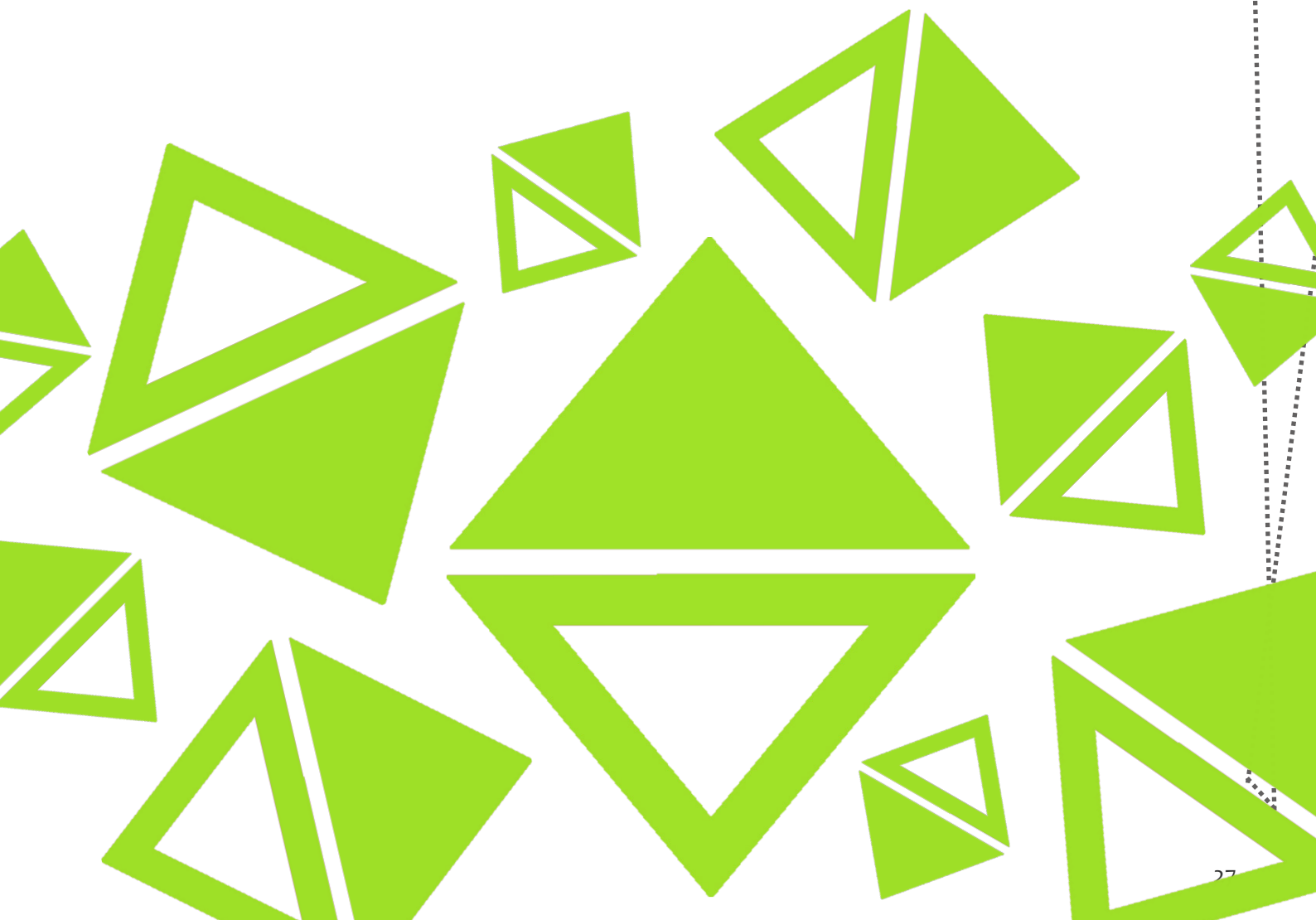
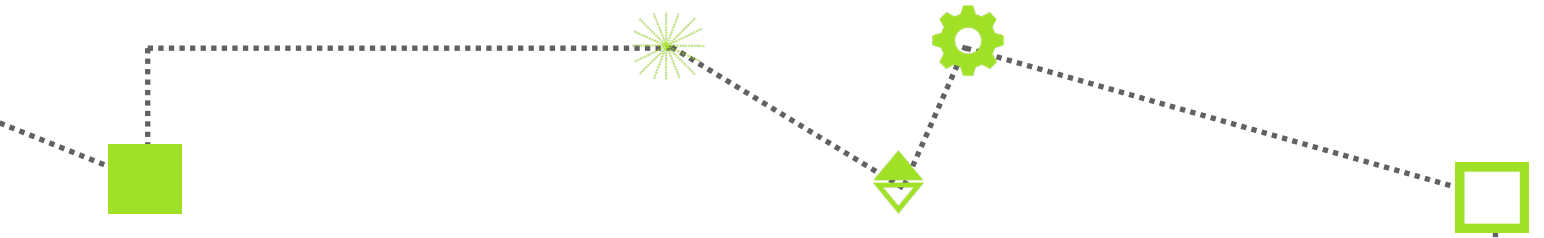
Definitely, help is always positive... It's not like we're sending money for people to go party. No, it's helping people to feed their families. (Aida)

At the same time, there were mixed feelings for some about **diaspora responses not addressing the root causes of crisis and, in some ways, enabling the systems that were failing people to continue**. In this way, the resources and effort being mobilised by the diaspora was 'going to waste' or was only helping people from day to day to survive and not to sustain themselves or thrive in the future.

While you can help a little bit, but how much can we help? Like, you got so many people who are needy because, even if they work day and night... it's not enough to bring to feed the family... It's a very, very sad situation. (Aida)

I think the biggest challenge is we don't have any faith in the system in Lebanon. Even when we send it to our relatives and our families and our community, this is not translated into reviving the Lebanese economy. It's all a band-aid solution. Okay. So [we're] part of the problem. (Salim)

The Lebanese diaspora community has good intentions in terms of trying to solve the crisis, but no serious steps are being taken on the ground to do so. In a sense, we are healing the wound without fixing the cause of this wound that hurts us every five or ten years. (Charbel, translation)





Challenges:

What was difficult or didn't work?

The main challenges that research participants spoke about in interviewees concerned the **sustainability of diaspora responses**, with a reliance on volunteers and donations from the diaspora community itself to respond to what is a complex, widespread and protracted situation leading to **burn-out**.

I think they have sort of been a bit more realistic now, and just saying how much volunteer power do we have, and... I think it's fair to say we might have tried to take on too much. ... Yeah, it's just a matter of people power and resources... (Christelle)

The prolonged crisis has exhausted us, and the longer the crisis stays, the more difficult it becomes for us to collect the funds we need. (Sally, translation)

Closely related to the question of sustainability was the challenge of **rising cost-of-living pressures** for those in the diaspora in Australia, but also rampant inflation in Lebanon meaning money raised here was not having the same impact in Lebanon.

We have been stressed by the bad economic situation in Australia. People who used to give you ten dollars are now giving you seven or six dollars due to their bad economic situation. This is the biggest challenge we face, where everyone is facing economic hardships. (Sally, translation)

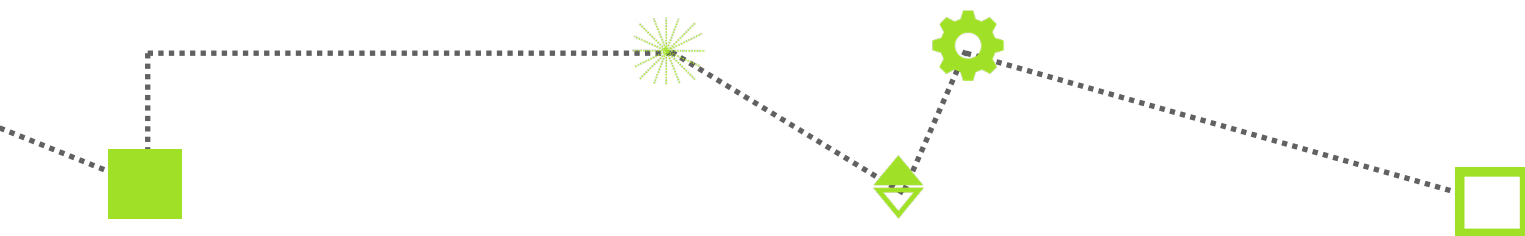
The pressure of living here as well puts an extra cap on how much you can ask for donations. We used to run about three or four charity events a month or so, and now we just think about whether we should do that. (Fatmeh)

Interviewees spoke about a **general decline in fundraising capacity and a shift in practices of giving**, as more households in Australia were being asked to give to their families overseas on a regular basis and shift their focus from collective to individual remittances. Those in the diaspora were also impacted by the financial collapse in Lebanon directly, with people with businesses, property or bank accounts in Lebanon losing their own wealth.

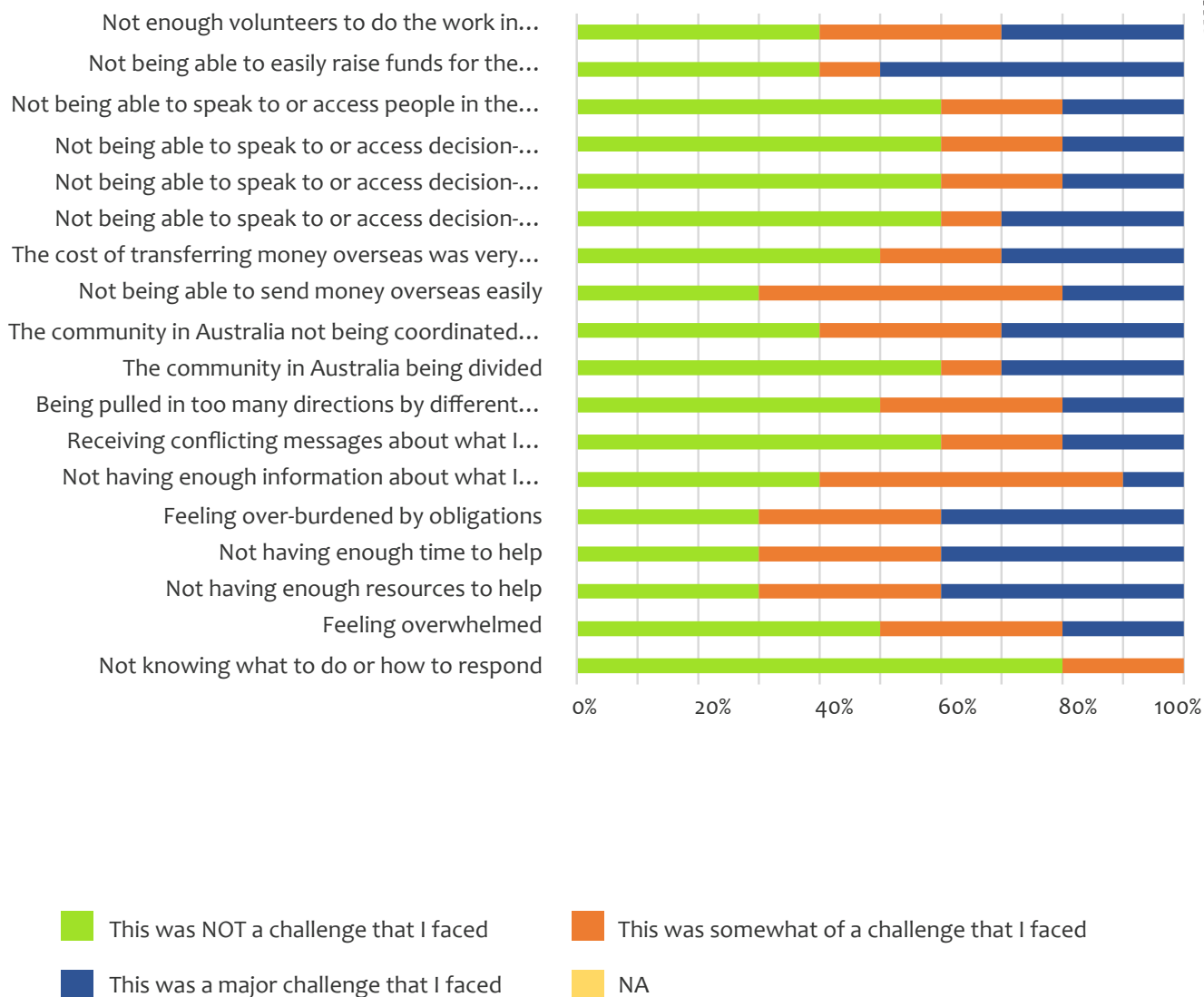
In my opinion, most diaspora families have added a new item to their budgets, which is supporting their families and friends back home. ... it has become harder to involve people in economic projects that benefit Lebanon. This is a major challenge we face. It is important to remember that many people in the diaspora who had revenue, investments, or had accounts in Lebanon, lost them. (Joseph, translation)

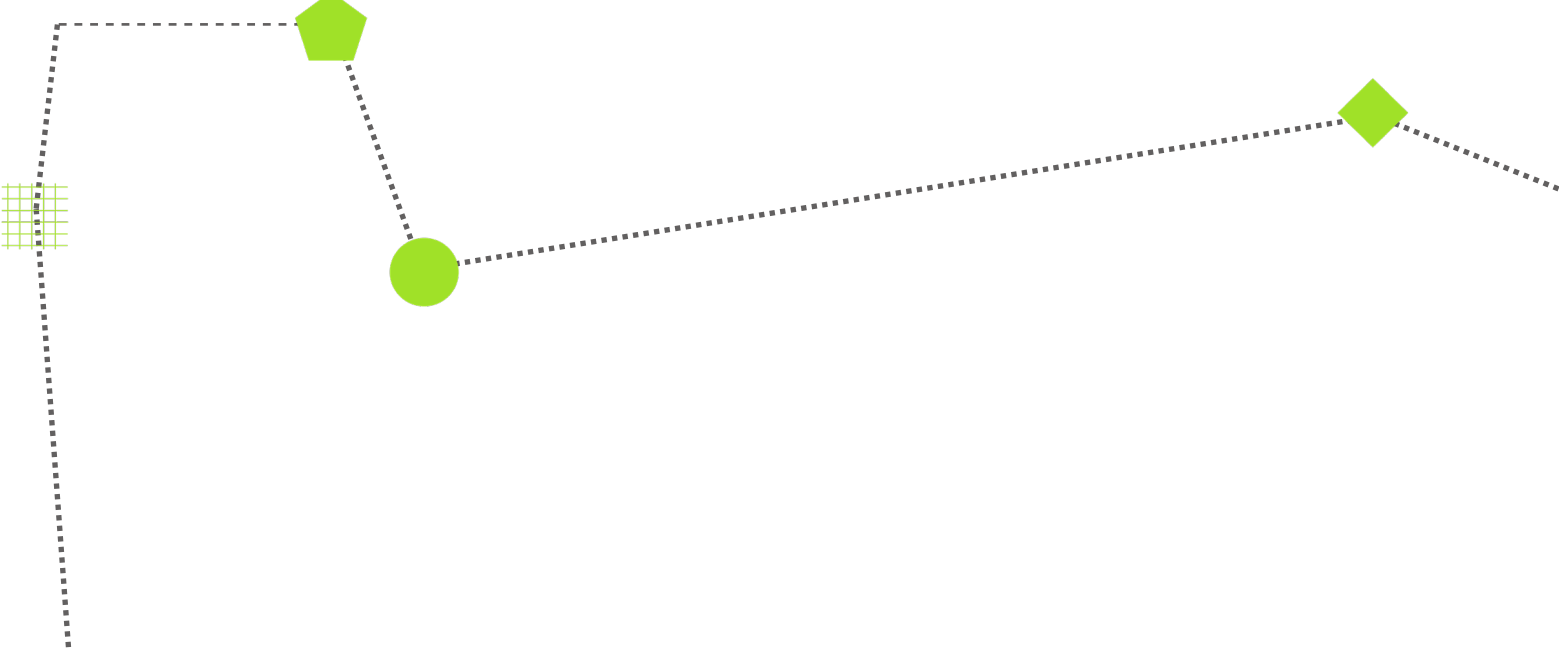
Assistance to people other than family members has declined. Everyone wants to provide for his family, but there remains a small percentage for supporting others. Everyone is in need, whether they are family members or not. (Alia)

A second major area of challenge for diaspora responses related to the **cost and restrictions of transferring money and goods from Australia to Lebanon**. With regards to financial transfers, established remittance channels were seen as costly and restrictive. The alternatives – such as direct bank transfers or people travelling from Australia to Lebanon bringing money with them – were hampered when people were unable to withdraw money from banks in Lebanon, and during the Covid-19 pandemic when borders were closed. Similar issues relating to the high cost and restrictions on sending material goods were also discussed.



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





The first challenge is that money transfers require a commission. The more money you send, the higher the commission. Also, there is a monthly limit on the amount you can transfer via Western Union. To overcome this challenge, we divided the money among each other, and each transferred a certain amount so no one could be blocked. (Jessica, translation)

A challenge was finding reasonable-priced containers to allow us to spend the remainder on food and aid rather than container costs. We decided to ship our goods by sea instead of air since air transport is considerably more expensive. However, this process takes two to three months, during which you have to send money and meet people's needs. (Jessica, translation)

Closely related to the cost and restrictiveness of transferring money and goods were challenges with **compliance in the context of counter-terrorism measures**. As with other country contexts where Australian and other governments have identified terrorist groups operating and imposed sanctions or counter-terrorism measures, measures intended to limit funds and support to terrorist groups can have a negative impact and hamper life-saving remittances and diaspora philanthropy⁵.

With the political issues that Lebanon's experiencing, sanctions that have been applied by Europe. So that's a big problem because a lot of the equipment that we buy is actually from Europe or Turkey. (Ali)

Another difficulty described by diaspora was challenges with **corruption and misappropriation of funds in Lebanon**, which required significant efforts and vigilance to mitigate.

There are certain challenges where you send things overseas and then they're no longer there. They just disappear. The destination, your contact with this person and your trusted source and they get there and deliver it, and then the people or the organization that you had promised to get their portion of that thing come through. It's never been received. (Fatmeh)

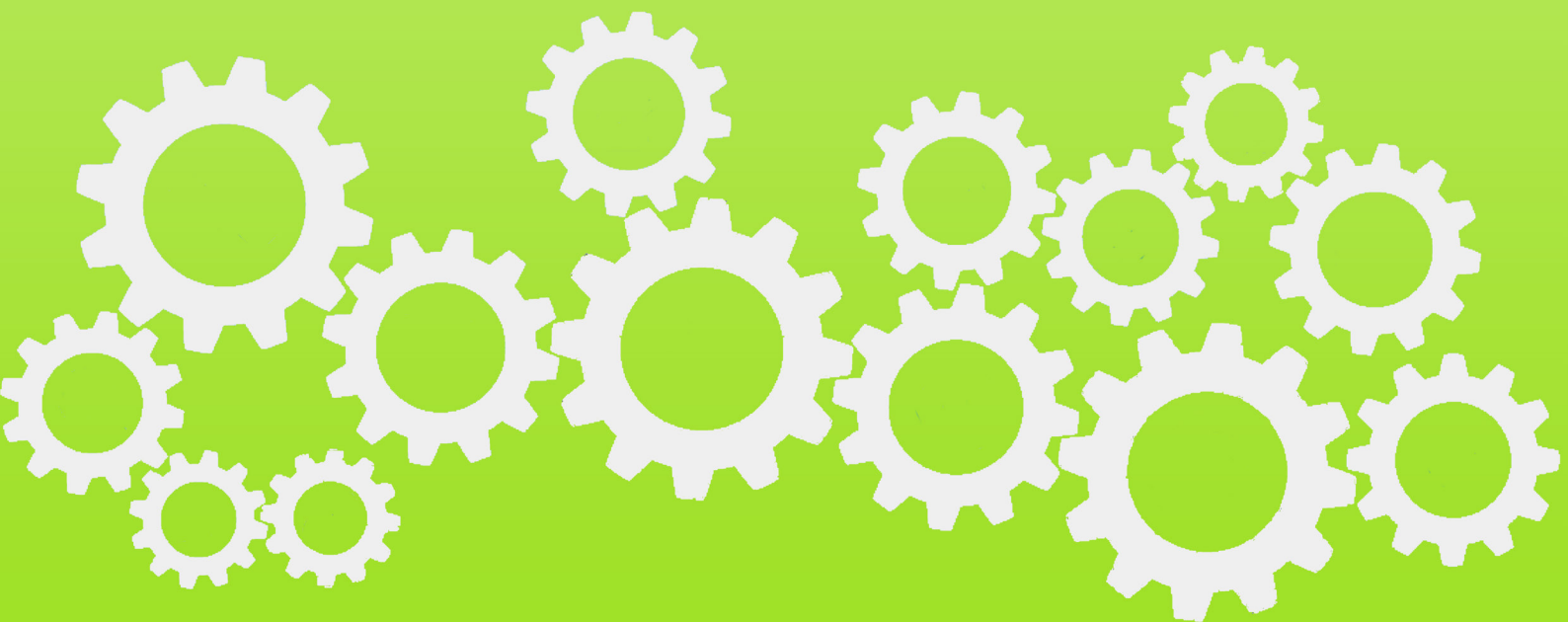
Well, I believe the changes are not happening because we're facing really a big mafia. (Peter)

Finally, participants spoke about **divisions or lack of unity within the diaspora** as creating difficulties for an effective response.

The ... challenge is getting people to work together. People getting to work together is not an easy thing, and people have different priorities. There is also a lot of political selfishness among a lot of people who want to really earn a reputation out of the work rather than ... genuinely wanting to help. And that's part of the problem as well. (Salim)

Many of these **challenges were reflected in survey responses**. According to the respondents, the biggest challenges were not being able to easily raise funds (50%), feeling over-burdened by obligations (40%), not having enough time to help (40%) and not having enough resources to help (40%).

5 UN Office of the Human Rights Commissioner (2016). [Counter-terrorism measures threaten money sent home by Somali diaspora, UN rights experts warn](#)





Recommendations:

What could help diasporas respond to humanitarian crises in future?

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

1. Mechanisms to strengthen diaspora coordination and communication

Some participants felt that a more effective response to humanitarian crises in the future required stronger coordination and communication within the diaspora community in Australia, through mechanisms such as an umbrella body or a centralised platform. One participant felt that an umbrella or central contact point for the diaspora would allow for better information sharing about needs and who and how to respond, to avoid replication and ensure resources reached those in greatest need. As Michel said: ‘To ensure that our funds are spent in the right direction, we must gather and unite our sources and inputs’ (translation)..

2. Stronger connections between the Lebanese diaspora and Australian government

Participants recommended stronger connections between the Lebanese diaspora and Australian government to inform foreign policy and Australia’s engagement with Lebanon, including its diplomatic relations and in the provision of aid. As Abdel said:

‘I want the Australian government to push the Lebanese government to work better’ (translation). Participants also felt more could be done by the Australian government to better facilitate diaspora-led humanitarian efforts. Examples of how this could be done was the Australian embassy in Lebanon providing small grants or assisting diaspora groups or to navigate red tape (e.g. groups being taxed when sending material aid could be exempt as charities). As Sally said: ‘We are ready to present projects to the embassy to assess them, and we will contribute as much as the embassy will. If the embassy put in a dollar, we will put in a dollar’ (translation).

3. A forum for strategic dialogue on the role of diaspora in responding to humanitarian crises

Finally, some participants felt that a forum was needed to promote a deeper dialogue within the diaspora about the most effective ways to address humanitarian crises overseas, whether this be through philanthropy or advocating for system change. As Joseph said: ‘Dialogue within the diaspora is important’ (translation).





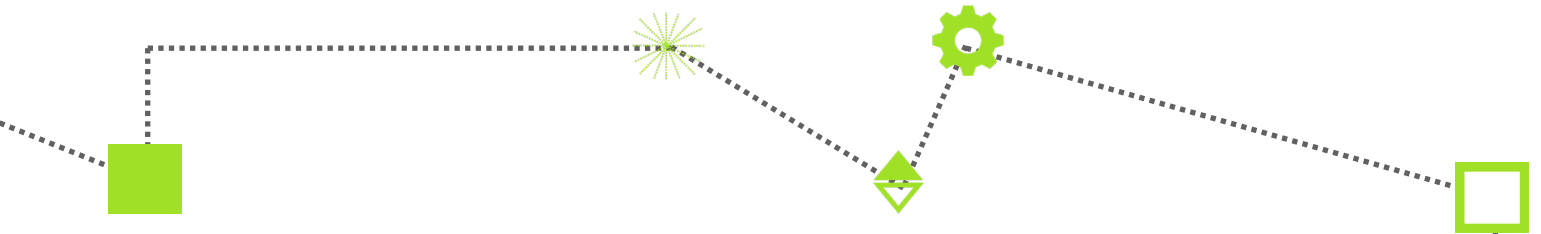
Quantitative data report

Data:

- The Lebanon survey was created in English and Arabic. The English version got 11 responses between June 23 and August 14, 2022. The Arabic version was responded 4 times between July 25 and August 3. The community RA decided to ask about different crises in the same survey (i.e., the civil war, the political and economic crisis, and “other”). For this reason, while we group all these responses in the international comparative analysis, we treat the responses to the survey as three distinct datasets for this national analysis, according to the crisis the respondents claimed to have responded to. Some of the responses were discarded for not meeting eligibility criteria (i.e., substantially incomplete, consent, aware of the crisis, living in Australia). Therefore, the final sample consists of 10 respondents for the political and economic crises, four for the civil war, and two for other. Given the small sample of the dataset, only the results for the political and economic crisis are presented in graphs in this report.

Demographics:

- 62.5% of our sample were born in Lebanon, 31.2% were born in Australia and 6.2% were born in a third country. Half of our sample is female, 25% is male; 6.2% self-identified as non-binary and the rest preferred not to disclose this information. Our sample is evenly distributed in terms of age, except for the age bracket 65-74, with only 6.2%. 56.2% of respondents are younger than 44. In this survey, we did not gather data on how many years people had been living in Australia or in which visa they first came to the country.



Lebanon		
Country of birth	Lebanon	10 (62.5%)
	Australia	5 (31.2%)
	Other country	1 (6.2%)
	Total	16 (100.0%)
Gender	Female	8 (50.0%)
	Male	4 (25.0%)
	Non-Binary	1 (6.2%)
	Prefer not to say	3 (18.8%)
	Total	16 (100.0%)
Age	35-44	5 (31.2%)
	25-34	4 (25.0%)
	45-54	3 (18.8%)
	55-64	3 (18.8%)
	65-74	1 (6.2%)
	Total	16 (100.0%)



School of Social and Political Sciences