

Research on Diaspora Engagement in Humanitarian Response and Economic Recovery in Selected Areas of Lebanon

Final Report

Version for Dissemination

June 2024

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Acronyms

BDL	Banque Du Liban
CEC	Canadian Experience Class
DEMAC	Diaspora Emergency Action & Coordination
DRC	Danish Refugee Council
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FSTP	Federal Skilled Trades Program
FSWP	Federal Skilled Workers Program
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Countries
GDE	General Directorate of Emigrants
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HRW	Human Rights Watch
KII	Key Informant Interview
MFAE	Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Emigrants
RMM	Respondent Mobilisation Matrix
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

1. Executive Summary

1.1 Research Rationale

This report focuses on diaspora engagement in economic recovery and humanitarian response in North and East Lebanon. It captures perspectives from Lebanese communities and, to a lesser extent, Syrian refugees in the Bekaa Valley and the surroundings of Tripoli, as well as from the Lebanese-Canadian diaspora supporting them. The study complements and enriches findings from a first phase of research (Phase I), outlined in a Danish Refugee Council (DRC) report published in April 2023 and entitled “Mapping and Analysis of Diaspora Business Engagement Models in Five Villages of Lebanon of Lebanon.” Phase I explored how the diaspora contributes to local economies and job creation in communities around Tripoli and the Bekaa Valley. The research revealed that the diaspora frequently serves as a primary response to humanitarian needs through both individual and community support. Phase II, outlined in the present report, has the objective of consolidating the knowledge base developed in Phase I, by examining the findings’ general validity with other communities in the same target areas, and exploring the perspectives of the diaspora end.

1.2 Key Findings

1.2.1 Diaspora Economic Engagement in North and East Lebanon

Type of economic support: The research validated Phase I finding that economic remittances are the primary and most popular form of financial support through which the diaspora engages with their relatives and communities at home.

Main modalities of diaspora engagement in local businesses: The research highlights the existence of two modalities of diaspora engagement in local businesses: within family circles and beyond family circles.

Main motives for diaspora engagement in local businesses within family circles: Phase II confirmed that diaspora support for family businesses mainly aims to assist relatives during financial hardships. For many in the diaspora, this support is seen as a moral obligation linked to sending remittances. Additionally, diaspora members often engage in emotional investment by purchasing property or land in Lebanon, in partnership with family. This investment has the sole scope to maintain homeland ties.

Main motives for diaspora engagement in local businesses beyond family circles: Phase II findings revealed that diaspora engagement in local businesses extends beyond familial support to encompass broader community backing. This involvement is largely motivated by a desire to contribute to business owners in need at home through leveraging one’s business expertise and financial capacity.

1.2.2 Diaspora Humanitarian Engagement in North and East Lebanon

Main motives for diaspora engagement in humanitarian initiatives: Phase II findings reveal that the engagement of the Lebanese-Canadian diaspora in humanitarian initiatives is strongly motivated by a shared sense of responsibility towards struggling communities in Lebanon. This commitment extends beyond supporting individual families and relatives, driven also by the perception that national and international institutions have inadequately addressed these needs. Additionally, charitable endeavours are viewed as a fundamental pillar of Islam, further motivating their involvement.

Main targets for diaspora humanitarian engagement: The study reveals that the diaspora supports individuals beyond their family circles in their home villages and communities through local charity initiatives. It also highlights that several diaspora members and networks are actively involved in leading and contributing to large-scale humanitarian campaigns at national and regional levels, focusing on crisis and conflict-affected communities beyond their area of origin.

Local partnership: Diaspora community organizers collaborate with trusted local partners to implement humanitarian and charitable initiatives. These partners are usually local community organizers who connect the diaspora with informal volunteer groups, typically composed by young and active community members. Occasionally, diaspora members work directly with village municipalities or local institutional actors, especially for infrastructural projects. Collaboration with local NGOs is rare; among respondents interviewed, this occurred only with one diaspora network of Lebanese from Tripoli living in Toronto. In that case, one of the diaspora network organisers involved the group in collaborating with a local NGO founded by his brother.

Mistrust in NGOs: Many respondents expressed a prevalent mistrust and scepticism towards NGOs. Consequently, diaspora supporters tend to favour collaborations with informal, trusted local partners, including local community organisers, municipalities and informal volunteer groups, over traditional non-profit organisations.

Diaspora limited capacity: Reliance on personal time, savings and donations limit the scale and sustainability of diaspora-supported initiatives.

Impact of the ongoing tensions in the region: Numerous respondents in the diaspora highlighted that due to the ongoing tensions in the region, several humanitarian initiatives by the diaspora have been redirected to support affected communities. This support includes aiding those living on Lebanon's southern border as well as those residing in Gaza.

Social media and online platforms: Social media is the primary platform used by diaspora networks for promoting and organising charity and humanitarian initiatives, mobilising donations, and raising awareness on existing causes.

Vetting mechanism: Diaspora members rigorously vet charity causes through trusted local partners to ensure donations aid those in genuine need and prevent scams. They often rely on a charity database compiled by local partners on the ground and listing names and locations of struggling households in their communities.

Monitoring and reporting: Transparent reporting and regular updates on charity initiative progress in the form of posts, videos, photos and expense reports are essential for maintaining diaspora donors' trust and fostering continued support.

1.2.3 Common Practices

Business transaction and capital mobilisation: Business transactions, donations and capital mobilisation destined to business support and humanitarian endeavours have been found to often gravitate towards informal channels over formal avenues. This inclination underscores a deeper reliance on trust-based networks and individuals over formal organisations and financial platforms.

Creation of employment: Phase II of the study confirmed Phase I's finding that diaspora involvement in local businesses and humanitarian support often generate temporary employment opportunities for members of the target community. These roles typically entail operational tasks on the ground, facilitating the diaspora's charitable activities or managing their properties.

Reputation and trust: Reputation and trust are crucial to business and humanitarian support, with well-regarded diaspora members playing a crucial role in mobilising resources and leading operations.

Readiness during crisis: During times of crisis, diaspora members show rapid resource mobilisation, highlighting their adaptability, leadership, and dedication to collective efforts. This is exemplified by their active involvement in events impacting the nation and the region, such as the 2019 economic crisis in Lebanon, the 2024 earthquake in Syria, and ongoing tensions along and beyond Lebanon's southern borders.

2. Approach and Methodology

2.1 Research Background and Objectives

In 2023, the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) completed Phase I of a two-phased research project aimed at understanding existing diaspora business engagement models in North Lebanon and the Bekaa Valley, to better coordinate with them and jointly contribute to durable solutions for vulnerable and crisis-affected populations in the country. In April 2023, Phase I of this study was completed with the publication of a report entitled “Mapping and Analysis of Diaspora Business Engagement Models in Five Villages of Lebanon.” The report sheds light on important understandings of how the diaspora engages in the local economy and job creation in five selected communities in North and East Lebanon.¹ From this report, it became evident that the diaspora often serves as a primary responder in supporting local businesses and humanitarian endeavours. This finding foregrounded the urgency for further documentation and analysis.

In turn, Phase II of the study, which is outlined in this report, has the purpose of complementing the knowledge base already established in Phase I by elaborating on its preliminary findings. Furthermore, the report brings to the fore the perspective of the Lebanese diaspora supporting households and communities in the region and documents diaspora engagement models of humanitarian response, using the case study of the Lebanese-Canadian diaspora living in the Canadian region of Ontario. The objectives for Phase II of the study are as follows:

- **Confirm the findings in Phase I** by verifying their general validity in the North and Bekaa Valley of Lebanon.
- **Document the diaspora’s engagement**, including their motives, financing modalities, organisation, communication and any challenges they may experience when supporting their families, relatives, and communities.
- **Document any humanitarian response** that may be delivered by the diaspora in the targeted communities and more generally in Lebanon, as reported by the diaspora communities, particularly in light of the escalation in the ongoing tensions in the region since October 2023.²

The overall study findings aim to inform subsequent DRC programming in addressing existing challenges to diaspora engagement and to enhance further the positive impact of existing diaspora engagement in the targeted areas of Bekaa Valley and North Lebanon and potentially other areas of Lebanon.³

2.2 Analytical Framework

The analytical framework was designed to capture two levels of analysis. The first level aimed to verify the Phase I findings, pursuing a threefold objective:

- **Verify** if the findings from Phase I have more general validity in other refugee-hosting communities/areas in North Lebanon and Bekaa Valley.

¹ DRC. (April 2023). Mapping and Analysis of Diaspora Business Engagement Models in Five Villages of Lebanon of Lebanon. Available at: [link](#)

² DRC. (April 2023). Mapping and Analysis of Diaspora Business Engagement Models in Five Villages of Lebanon of Lebanon. Available at: [link](#)

³ DRC. (April 2023). Mapping and Analysis of Diaspora Business Engagement Models in Five Villages of Lebanon of Lebanon. Available at: [link](#)

- **Elaborate on** the diaspora business engagement as it looks from the perspective of the diaspora.
- **Complement** the findings with fresh insights derived by changing contextual factors.

The second level of analysis focused on capturing new insights not addressed in Phase I of the study including:

- **Map** general characteristics of the Lebanese and Syrian communities in selected diaspora countries that support communities in North Lebanon and Bekaa Valley.
- **Document** diaspora humanitarian support towards the targeted communities
- **Identify** the main challenges, lessons learned and best practices for each verified engagement model, including humanitarian response

A detailed overview of the analytical framework is provided in [Annex 1](#) of this report.

As outlined in [Section 2.5](#), the research encountered several limitations, particularly in identifying and recruiting participants from the Syrian diaspora. Consequently, the information presented in this study primarily focuses on the engagement and support of the Lebanese diaspora, while also incorporating the perspectives of Syrian refugees living in the targeted areas.

2.3 Data Sources

The study was structured around two stages of rigorous participatory in-person qualitative methodology. It employed three qualitative research methods. These are outlined below.

Desk-based analysis was employed to explore and synthesise existing secondary data and information on the Lebanese diaspora and their involvement in business and humanitarian endeavours at home. This included a review of academic and humanitarian reports, policy documents, national census data, and datasets from international organisations.

Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) - A total of 30 key informant Interviews were conducted with Syrian and Lebanese community members from selected villages in North and East Lebanon, as well as Lebanese diaspora members residing in Canada and supporting these communities. Key Informant Interviews provided a means to understand the dynamics of diaspora engagement in a confidential setting, allowing the study to uncover perspectives from both the diaspora and the recipients of support.

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) - Two focus group discussions were conducted separately in the communities of Wadi Khaled and Britel. These discussions offered an opportunity to further explore and contextualise the findings obtained from the KIIs by engaging community members in a dialogue-oriented setting. Through FGDs, participants were encouraged to share their perspectives, insights, and experiences, enriching the understanding of diaspora engagement and community dynamics in North and East Lebanon.

Data collection took place in March and April 2024 and consisted of:

1. **15 in-person** KIIs with Lebanese and Syrian community members living in the villages of Wadi Khaled, Ghazze, and Britel.
2. **2 in-person FGDs** with Lebanese and Syrian community members living in the villages of Wadi Khaled and Britel.

3. **15 in-person KIIs** with the Canadian-Lebanese diaspora members supporting communities in the surroundings of Tripoli and the Bekaa Valley. These interviews targeted members of the diaspora residing in the Canadian province of Ontario, particularly the Great Toronto Area (GTA), London and Hamilton.

A detailed outline of the data collection process is provided in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Data Collection

Country	Location	Data Collection Tool
Lebanon	Wadi Khaled, North Lebanon	5 KIIs, 1 FGD
Lebanon	GhazzeH, Bekaa Valley	4 KIIs
Lebanon	Britel, Bekaa Valley	6 KIIs, 1 FGD
Canada	GTA, Ontario	11 KIIs
Canada	London, Ontario	2 KIIs
Canada	Hamilton, Ontario	2 KIIs

2.4 Geographical Focus and Respondent Mobilisation Strategy

Phase I of the study targeted the villages of Burj Al Arab, Wadi Al Jamous, Baalbek, Shmustar, Zahle, and Majdal Anjar. Phase II included three new villages in the same regions: Britel, GhazzeH, and Wadi Khaled. Collecting data from these new locations served the purpose of confirming or disconfirming, and integrating the initial findings, enhancing the study's scope and depth. Respondents were identified using a snowball sampling approach, leveraging the professional and personal networks of the national consultant employed for data collection.

The selection of Ontario, Canada as the site of data collection was a result of a multi-phased participatory approach. First, location mapping conducted during the context analysis of this report (see [Chapter 3](#)) identified countries with significant Lebanese diaspora populations. These countries include Saudi Arabia, the USA, the UK, Australia, Canada, Germany, Kuwait, Ivory Coast, Brazil, Colombia, and Argentina. Second, this location mapping was supplemented by insights from KIIs in targeted areas of Lebanon. During these interviews, key informants were asked where members of the Lebanese and Syrian diaspora they are connected with reside. The respondents mentioned Canada, Turkey, Germany, the Gulf States, Brazil, and Venezuela as the central countries of residence of their relatives and supporters in the diaspora. Third, in agreement with DRC, the research team began mobilising respondents in two of these mentioned countries: Germany, which was reported as a key Syrian diaspora destination and Canada, which was reported as a key Lebanese diaspora destination. These countries were chosen as they were deemed more feasible for DRC to coordinate future programming and interaction with the identified diaspora members and networks.

Initially, the research team contacted diaspora members in both Germany and Canada using contacts provided by respondents interviewed in Lebanon. However, this approach was largely unsuccessful, as most respondents either declined to be interviewed or did not respond. Consequently, the team began reaching out to potential stakeholders through Facebook groups and diaspora networks. This strategy proved very effective for the Lebanese diaspora in Canada. Initial conversations with Lebanese-Canadian diaspora members contacted via social media allowed the team to connect with individuals from targeted areas in North and East Lebanon, revealing that many resided in Ontario.

However, for Syrian diaspora members in Germany, this strategy was unsuccessful, as no formal or informal networks were identified to facilitate connections with the Syrian diaspora. Despite attempts to leverage personal and professional networks, the team ultimately decided to drop the Germany case study and focus solely on the Lebanese diaspora in Canada. This decision was also influenced by the heightened tensions between Lebanese and Syrian refugees in the targeted areas during the data collection period, making it extremely difficult and sensitive to gather data from both Syrian refugees in Lebanon and the diaspora.

2.5 Limitations

The research encountered two central limitations. The first limitation concerned the scope of the project. The initial scope of the study aimed to target both the Lebanese and Syrian diaspora-supporting communities in North and East Lebanon. However, as noted in the previous section, **mobilising respondents from the Syrian diaspora proved to be extremely challenging due to their unresponsiveness**. Consequently, the representation of the Syrian refugee perspective in Lebanon is limited. This limitation arises from two central contextual factors:

- **Tensions between Syrian refugees and Lebanese communities:** During data collection, tensions between these groups hindered effective communication and engagement, prompting the national consultant to avoid certain previously planned locations for security reasons. Additionally, these strained relations made it challenging to gather comprehensive insights from Syrian refugees residing within Lebanese communities.
- **Unresponsiveness of members of the Syrian diaspora:** Despite efforts to engage the Syrian diaspora in Germany, responses were minimal or non-existent. This lack of participation significantly limited the data pool and the ability to incorporate the perspectives of Syrians in the diaspora into the study.

As a result, the findings predominantly reflect the views of the Lebanese community in North and East Lebanon and only marginally represent those of Syrian refugees. This imbalance underscores the need for a distinct approach to target Syrian refugee communities and their diaspora. In particular, the research highlights that Syrian refugees' livelihoods and statuses differ consistently from those of Lebanese individuals, suggesting that findings exploring their perspectives might significantly diverge from the current results of this report. This is not only true for targeted communities in Lebanon, but also for Syrian and Lebanese living in the diaspora. For example, while most Lebanese respondents in the diaspora were permanent residents or citizens of their host countries, Syrians identified were predominantly refugees. Consequently, their suspicion of the research's scope likely stemmed from fears about potential implications for their precarious and vulnerable status. This limitation points to the necessity of developing tailored engagement strategies to accurately capture the experiences and perspectives of the Syrian refugee population and their diaspora.

A second limitation involved **establishing continuity between findings from respondents in Lebanon and those from the diaspora**. Some Lebanese respondents provided contacts for their relatives and business supporters abroad, but these individuals were often unresponsive and declined interviews. In Canada, the respondents we interviewed, despite being diaspora members from Bekaa and North Lebanon, had no direct ties to the Lebanese respondents. This inevitably affected the consistency of findings, particularly because the socio-economic status, family commitments and financial capabilities of respondents in the two countries were different. As noted, the mobilisation of Lebanese respondents relied on a snowballing approach through social media platforms. Consequently, those who participated were typically active individuals, often with established successful businesses and careers in Canada and highly involved in diaspora networks and charitable endeavours. In turn, during interviews, they tend to bring more emphasis to charitable efforts within

their community in Lebanon over support for their families. In particular, many viewed supporting relatives' local businesses as part of their responsibility to send financial remittances, blurring the distinction between family-business support and general remittances.

3. Mapping the Lebanese Diaspora

3.1 Lebanon Country and Migration Profile

Throughout history, a contentious geopolitical position and a fragmented social and political system have made Lebanon extremely vulnerable to civil and cross-border conflict, political turmoil, economic disruption and migration. Most notably, the country experienced a bitter civil war from 1975 to 1990 and tensions between Hezbollah and Israel have been virtually continuous, particularly on Lebanon's southern borders.⁴

In 2019 Lebanon experienced a massive economic and financial crisis, reported by the World Bank as one of the worst globally since the mid-nineteenth century.⁵ The crisis was triggered by pervasive corruption across political elites and greatly exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the 2020 Beirut explosion. In October 2019 an unprecedented civil protest broke out in the country in response to new tax measures announced by the Lebanese government, which led to the resignation of the cabinet. **Livelihood conditions have deteriorated in the country since 2019**, with electricity blackouts lasting up to 22 hours and hospitals struggling to provide life-saving care.⁶ According to Human Rights Watch (HRW), **as of 2023, nearly 80 per cent of the population lives below the poverty line.**⁷

In October 2023 the country's already fragile situation was further impacted by the backlash of the Hamas-Israeli conflict. The border between Israel and Lebanon remains contentious, with nearly daily exchanges of fire.⁸ As of June 2024, IOM reported that more than 92,600 people have been displaced from their villages in southern Lebanon.⁹

Lebanon has a complex history of migration, making it simultaneously a country of origin for emigrants, a refugee host state and a migrant worker host state.¹⁰ Notwithstanding this, there is no national migration nor diaspora policy in Lebanon and all emigration, diaspora and migration-related matters are administered by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Emigrants (MFAE) and the General Directorate of Emigrants (GDE).¹¹ Lebanon's history of emigration dates back to the Ottoman domination of the 19th century and is the result of multiple push and pull factors. Before the 1975 Civil War emigration was predominantly directed towards Europe, Latin America, the Gulf States, the United States, Canada and Australia. During this period Lebanese migrants came mostly from a skilled/professional background. ¹² Between 1975 and 1989 an estimated 40 percent of the population, approximately 990,000 people, left the country.¹³ These Lebanese migrants came from mixed social backgrounds and headed predominantly to countries where they had existing family links or which they could enter on humanitarian grounds.¹⁴ It is estimated that only a small proportion of those who

⁴ Global Conflict Tracker. (2024) Instability in Lebanon. Available at: [link](#)

⁵ World Bank. (2022). Lebanon Overview: Development, News, Data, Research. Available at: [link](#)

⁶ Human Rights Watch. (n.d.). Lebanon - Country Profile. Website. Available at: [link](#)

⁷ Human Rights Watch. (n.d.). Lebanon - Country Profile. Website. Available at: [link](#)

⁸ Global Conflict Tracker. (2024) Instability in Lebanon. Available at: [link](#)

⁹ Aljazeera. (2024). Israel white phosphorus attacks on Lebanon harming people and ecosystem. Available at: [link](#)

¹⁰ Knudsen, J. and Forster, R.(2022). National and International Migration Policy in Lebanon. EFFECT Background Paper. Available at: [link](#)

¹¹ CMPD (2021), Diaspora Legislation and Engagement Policies in Lebanon, India, Ireland and Italy.

¹² Tabar, P. (2010). Lebanon: A country of Emigration and Immigration. Institute of Migration and Refugee Studies. Available at: [link](#)

¹³ DRC. (April 2023). Mapping and Analysis of Diaspora Business Engagement Models in Five Villages of Lebanon. Available at: [link](#)

¹⁴ Tabar, P. (2010). Lebanon: A country of Emigration and Immigration. Institute of Migration and Refugee Studies. Available at: [link](#)

emigrated returned to Lebanon following the end of the civil war.¹⁵ In the following decades, the country continued to experience emigration flows, predominantly pushed by a lack of economic opportunities. These flows mainly involved skilled workers and highly educated professionals.¹⁶ Emigration flows have markedly increased since 2019 due to the waves of economic crisis and political instability. Between 2019 and 2021 195, 433 people have left the country.¹⁷

According to UNHCR, Lebanon hosts the highest number of refugees per capita in the world. As of 2022, an estimated 1.5 million Syrian refugees and 11,645 refugees from different nationalities, including Iraq and Palestine, were living in the country.¹⁸ As of January 2023, Bekaa hosted 39 per cent of refugees in Lebanon, the highest number in the country.¹⁹ Lebanon's northern border with Syria also experienced an influx of refugees. By December 2023, 121,298 Syrian refugees resided in the cities of Tripoli, Batroun, Bcharre, Koura and Minnieh.²⁰

3.2 The Lebanese Diaspora

The Lebanese diaspora is the result of several waves of migration over the last 150 years and extends across all five continents.²¹ There is no precise data on the number of those of Lebanese origin living outside the country, as the diaspora includes both Lebanese citizens permanently residing abroad as well as Lebanese descendants who do not have Lebanese citizenship.²² In 2022, 844,158 Lebanese citizens were recorded as living in other countries, constituting 15.4 per cent of its total population.²³ Among these, the majority lived in Saudi Arabia (150,183), followed by the United States (127,280), Australia (99,705), Canada (94,516) and Germany (73,746).²⁴ These estimates; however, do not consider second and third-generation migrants residing abroad. When these are included, the Lebanese diaspora is estimated to be much greater, totalling between 14 and 15 million people, almost three times the number residing within the country.²⁵ According to these figures, the majority of the Lebanese population abroad lives in Latin America, with Brazil being the top destination.²⁶

The diaspora is the backbone of the Lebanese economy.²⁷ **Lebanon received an annual average of USD 6.5 billion in remittances, contributing 37.8 percent of Lebanon's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2022.²⁸** According to UNDP, 48 per cent of these remittances come from the Gulf Cooperation Countries (GCC), followed by North America (16 per cent), Africa (14 per cent), Western Europe (14 per cent), Latin America (3 per cent) and Australia (3 per cent).²⁹ The Banque Du Liban (BDL) also estimates that 64 per cent of the country's cash inflow comes from the United States, the United Arab

¹⁵ Tabar, P. (2010). Lebanon: A country of Emigration and Immigration. Institute of Migration and Refugee Studies. Available at: [link](#)

¹⁶ DRC.(April 2023). Mapping and Analysis of Diaspora Business Engagement Models in Five Villages of Lebanon. Available at: [link](#)

¹⁷ Miguel Mendelek (2022). The Lebanese Trend of Emigration: A New Peak Since 2019? Available at: [link](#)

¹⁸ UNHCR. (n.d.). Lebanon at a glance. Available at: [link](#)

¹⁹ UNHCR Lebanon. (n.d.) Bekaa (Zahle). Available at: [link](#)

²⁰ UNHCR Lebanon. (n.d.) North (Tripoli and Gobayat). Available at: [link](#)

²¹ Verdeil, E. and Dewailly, B. (2019) International Migration and the Lebanese Diaspora. In Atlas of Lebanon. Available at: [link](#)

²² Verdeil, E. and Dewailly, B. (2019) International Migration and the Lebanese Diaspora. In Atlas of Lebanon. Available at: [link](#)

²³ EU Diaspora for Development. (2022). Lebanon. Available at: [link](#)

²⁴ EU Diaspora for Development. (2022). Lebanon. Available at: [link](#)

²⁵ DRC.(April 2023). Mapping and Analysis of Diaspora Business Engagement Models in Five Villages of Lebanon. Available at: [link](#)

²⁶ ESCWA (2015). Strengthening the Capacity of Lebanon to Utilise Workers' Remittances for Development Lebanon. Available at: [link](#)

²⁷ DRC.(April 2023). Mapping and Analysis of Diaspora Business Engagement Models in Five Villages of Lebanon. Available at: [link](#)

²⁸ UNDP. (2023). Remittance in Lebanon. Available at: [link](#)

²⁹ UNDP. (2023). Remittance in Lebanon. Available at: [link](#)

Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Australia and Kuwait.³⁰ While the majority of the diaspora sends food items and remittances to support their families' immediate consumption needs, some are also supporting relatives to move away from dependency on these transfers and to become self-reliant by starting up, sustaining, or further expanding a business.³¹

3.3 The Lebanese Diaspora in Canada, Ontario

According to multiple respondents, the bulk of Lebanese migration to Canada began in the 1970s, prompted by the Syrian occupation that led many to seek refuge abroad.³² Subsequently, successive waves of migration have aligned with periods of instability in Lebanon, with a notable surge occurring during the 2019 economic collapse.³³ As a result, the Lebanese-Canadian diaspora is characterised by its multi-generational composition, encompassing second and third-generation Canadians alongside more recent arrivals between 2019 and 2024.

According to the 2016 Canada census, there were 219,555 Canadians who claimed Lebanese ancestry, with 80,345 residing in the province of Ontario.³⁴ Respondents in the Canadian-Lebanese diaspora highlighted that **Ontario is a preferred destination for Lebanese from Bekaa Valley, Tripoli and southern Lebanon**, while French-speaking Lebanese tend to settle in Quebec. A majority of the Lebanese in Ontario live in the Great Toronto Area (GTR), in the suburbs of Mississauga and Scarborough; and in the cities of Hamilton and London, Ontario. In particular, there's a notable community of Tripolitans scattered throughout the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), and a substantial population of Lebanese from the Bekaa Valley residing in London, Ontario.

According to the majority of our informants, **the Lebanese diaspora in Ontario predominantly consists of individuals from middle-income backgrounds, with a significant portion being highly skilled and educated professionals or business owners**. Canada's favourable migration policies, such as the Federal Skilled Workers Program (FSWP), the Federal Skilled Trades Program (FSTP), and the Canadian Experience Class (CEC), cater specifically to this demographic, providing a direct pathway to permanent residency.³⁵ Additionally, Lebanese residents who can demonstrate financial stability have the option to apply for family sponsorship, facilitating the immigration of their family members to Canada.³⁶

One informant pointed out that Lebanese nationals are known for their entrepreneurial spirit, bilingualism, and high educational attainment and have found Canada to be an ideal environment for establishing successful businesses while continuing to support their families back home.³⁷ This sentiment was corroborated by data collection. A significant proportion of second and third-generation respondents we interviewed were professionals with diverse expertise, spanning academia, marketing, finance, sales, and real estate. Similarly, many first-generation Lebanese migrants, who received their education in Lebanon, reported having successfully established sustainable businesses and professional careers. Overall, when discussing their motives for choosing Canada as a destination, respondents cited four key factors:

³⁰ UNDP. (2023). Remittance in Lebanon. Available at: [link](#)

³¹ DRC. (April 2023). Mapping and Analysis of Diaspora Business Engagement Models in Five Villages of Lebanon. Available at: [link](#)

³² KIIs (15, 18, 19, 21, 22, 26)

³³ KIIs (15, 18, 19, 21, 22, 28)

³⁴ Statistics Canada. (2016). The 2016 Census. Available at: [link](#)

³⁵ CANADIM. (n.d.). How to Immigrate to Canada from Lebanon. Available at: [link](#)

³⁶ CANADIM. (n.d.). How to Immigrate to Canada from Lebanon. Available at: [link](#)

³⁷ KII 21

1. **Positive experiences of family and friends:** Several respondents, particularly those who arrived in Canada more recently, emphasised that their decision was influenced by having close friends or family members already living in Canada. Notably, three respondents highlighted that while the expectation of economic support from established diaspora members was important, it was the success stories of these individuals that played a crucial role in encouraging others to follow the same path.³⁸
2. **Favourable visa regulations:** Many respondents noted that migrating to Canada was relatively easy due to the favourable visa regulations for highly skilled and educated professionals.
3. **Quality education:** Numerous respondents mentioned that their primary reason for migrating to Canada was to offer a better future for their children. Particularly those who came after 2019 expressed a loss of hope in their home country and wanted to ensure their children received a good education and had promising futures.
4. **Canada's reputation for freedom and human rights:** Several respondents were drawn to Canada because of its strong reputation for freedom, human rights, and a welcoming, multicultural society. This reputation made Canada an attractive destination for those seeking a better quality of life and personal security.

Data collection in Ontario unveiled that the Canadian-Lebanese diaspora in the province is remarkably well-coordinated. While most of these communities operate informally and are not formally registered as organisations, they exhibit high levels of activity on online and social media platforms like WhatsApp, Instagram, and Facebook. A detailed list of Lebanese diaspora networks in Canada is provided in [Annex 2](#).

³⁸ KIIIs (15, 19, 20)

4. Lebanese and Syrian Diaspora Economic Engagement in North and East Lebanon

This section offers an overview of the economic engagement of the diaspora in northern and eastern Lebanon, specifically emphasising their participation in supporting local businesses. The findings are presented in connection with Phase I of the study, aiming to validate or challenge previous research conclusions. Furthermore, insights from the Canadian-Lebanese diaspora are incorporated to enhance the conclusions.

4.1 Financial Support Through Cash Remittances

Phase I of the study highlighted that financial support through cash remittances represents the central means through which the diaspora supports the targeted communities in North Lebanon and the Bekaa Valley. This finding was confirmed unanimously by respondents in the diaspora and on the recipient end. **All respondents emphasised that economic remittances remain the primary and most popular form of economic support.** Lebanese informants in Lebanon highlighted that most support on behalf of their diaspora relatives is primarily directed towards covering daily expenses and stressed that **cash remittances remain the most prevalent avenues of providing such support.** As noted by one participant in the FGD in Britel “Lebanon has a significant number of expats living abroad who regularly transfer money back to their home country. This practice not only helps the expats' families in Lebanon, but it also indirectly assists the country's overall economy.”³⁹

A similar view was also encountered with respondents in the Canadian-Lebanese diaspora. There was a consensus among exponents of different generations and socio-economic segments of the Canadian-Lebanese diaspora that **providing financial support to relatives in Lebanon is a responsibility, particularly in light of the increasing economic difficulties that their family members are experiencing at home.** All respondents from the Lebanese diaspora in Ontario highlighted their active engagement in sending remittances to their families. As one key informant noted, there is a “strong expectation and moral obligation for each member of the diaspora to support families back home through financial remittances.”⁴⁰ Several respondents noted that without their support, their parents and relatives would not have been able to access necessities, including medical treatment and surgery.

Syrian respondents further emphasised the pressing need for financial support to cover basic life expenses due to the challenging situation faced by refugees. The ongoing economic and political instability in Lebanon exacerbates the challenges for individuals to open businesses, leading to a reliance on remittances for everyday consumption. As noted by one respondent, “The priority for many people is to cover their basic life expenses.”⁴¹ Another respondent echoed this sentiment, stating, “The ongoing conflict and economic instability in the region have made it challenging for individuals and families to earn a reliable income and ensure their basic needs are met.”⁴² This perspective is reflected in the experiences of those who rely solely on the support of expatriate relatives for necessities: “As a refugee living in Lebanon” one of them argued “I rely solely on the support of my expatriate relatives to help me make ends meet.”⁴³

Financial remittances are typically sent through informal channels and often facilitated through personal relationships. This is mainly because both diaspora members and recipients at home tend to mistrust Lebanese banks and prefer avoiding the fees implied by standard money transfer services.

³⁹ FGD1

⁴⁰ KII 26

⁴¹ KII 14

⁴² KII 15

⁴³ KII 5

Several respondents in Canada mentioned that it is a common practice to collect cash and bring it directly to Lebanon, either in person or via a close friend, or relative who has a planned trip to their area or village. This finding amplifies the importance of familiarity and trust as members of the community are entrusted to travel with large sums of cash and deliver them to family members.

Syrian respondents cited practicality, including cost-effectiveness and convenience, as reasons for preferring informal transactions. As noted by one key informant: “Informal transactions typically involve family members or close friends providing financial support without any formality or contractual agreement. This helps avoid extra charges on money transfers and paying taxes.”⁴⁴ Similarly, another respondent highlighted that informal transactions are simply more convenient for all involved parties: “The amount of financial support required is relatively small, making it unnecessary to go through any complicated formalities.”⁴⁵ Additionally, it was also highlighted that informal transactions are often the only avenue for engagement with the Syrian diaspora due to the lack of institutional frameworks which allow for non-Lebanese (and refugees in particular) to engage in easy cross-border transactions.⁴⁶

4.2 Models of Diaspora Engagement in Supporting Local Businesses

4.2.1 For Charity vs For Profit Diaspora Engagement in Local Businesses

Phase I of the study identified two primary business engagement models through which members of the Lebanese and Syrian diaspora interact with communities in North Lebanon and the Bekaa Valley: for-profit and for-charity. The **for-profit model** involves profitable business partnerships between diaspora members and local businesspersons, often entailing substantial investments (ranging from USD 10,000 to 4,000,000) by the diaspora into local businesses. Conversely, the **for-charity model** sees diaspora members providing financial support without expecting direct financial returns, typically aimed at assisting relatives or community members in need.

During Phases I and II of the study, Lebanese and Syrian respondents in Lebanon recognized both business engagement models, with the for-charity model being particularly prominent. In Lebanon, several informants highlighted the for-charity model, suggesting a strong inclination towards altruistic support among the Lebanese diaspora.⁴⁷ This sentiment was echoed in both FGDs conducted, where participants noted that the majority of diaspora engagement is devoted to supporting communities. As one participant noted, “The support from the diaspora is primarily focused on providing aid and not on generating profits.”⁴⁸ This view underscores the widespread support for non-profit endeavours driven by a sense of duty, with many diaspora members assisting without expecting anything in return.

Syrian key informants provided a different perspective, reflecting the unique challenges faced by Syrian refugees in North Lebanon and Bekaa Valley. Most Syrian respondents disagreed with the notion that the primary motive of diaspora support is to support family businesses. They highlighted that while Lebanese individuals often receive support for their businesses, **Syrian refugees face significant legal and cultural limitations in registering and setting up their own businesses, and thus, the focus tends to be on covering basic needs.** As one respondent mentioned, “Syrian refugees in

⁴⁴ KII 9

⁴⁵ KII 15

⁴⁶ KII 2

⁴⁷ KIIs (1, 12, 13)

⁴⁸ FGD 2

Lebanon do not receive the same level of support. They face limitations in terms of rights and opportunities to grow their businesses.”⁴⁹

The prevalence of the for-charity model was also observed within the Lebanese-Canadian diaspora. In particular, many respondents in Ontario were quite surprised to hear about the existence of a for-profit model, arguing that making a profit from supporting a business in Lebanon with the current economic situation was extremely unlikely.⁵⁰ Indeed, the absence of a for-profit model in Canada must be contextualised with the specific socioeconomic profile of the respondents, who are mainly middle-class high-skill professionals. Respondents highlighted that, while earning money in Canadian dollars gave them a higher purchasing power in Lebanon, the country did not offer the financial security to provide a return on investment on any business. However, some of them argued that **before the economic crisis, it was more common for Lebanese abroad to use their savings to create small businesses in Lebanon and capital for retirement.**⁵¹ For example, one respondent mentioned that when she came to Canada in 2005, she started saving to buy a property in her village near Tripoli, to rent it out to tourists and eventually move there during retirement. However, she highlighted that her plans have now changed as she no longer believes she will be able to retire in Lebanon due to the economic and security situation.⁵²

While the for-charity model was identified as the most prevalent, it exhibits varying characteristics depending on its targets. Specifically, the study identifies two primary engagement models: one aimed at **supporting families** and another focused on assisting community members **beyond immediate family circles**. These distinctions are detailed in the following sections and summarised in [Annex 3](#) and [Annex 4](#).

4.2.1 Diaspora Engagement in Supporting Local Business Within Family Circles

The Lebanese diaspora actively supports family-owned businesses in Lebanon, supplementing the obligation of financial remittances. This support usually comes from wealthier members of the diaspora who can supplement their remittances with contributions aimed at developing a business owned by or in partnership with family members. Affluent diaspora members leverage resources earned in wealthier countries to make substantial contributions, providing crucial capital for growth and sustainability. This support is driven by a desire to assist family members and maintain a strong connection with their homeland and relatives.

4.2.1.1 Diaspora Standard Practices in Supporting Local Business Within Family Circles

During interviews with representatives of the Lebanese-Canadian diaspora, a clear distinction emerged between family obligations and charitable endeavours. Respondents considered any financial support directed toward their family-owned businesses as part of their responsibility to send remittances, including support for family businesses. Frequently, when asked about their business engagements with family-owned enterprises, respondents emphasized their moral duty as sons, daughters, brothers, and sisters to support their families back home. As such, they often blurred the line between financial remittances and assistance to family businesses.

Most diaspora initiatives aimed at supporting local family members economically primarily consist of recurring money transfers sourced from personal savings. Typically, there is no formal agreement on the amount to be sent or the timeframe for sending it. The support depends heavily on

⁴⁹ KII 9

⁵⁰ KIIs (17, 19, 20, 23)

⁵¹ KII (25, 23)

⁵² KII 17

the availability of funds from the supporter, leading to variations in the level of assistance from month to month. This informality is reinforced by the absence of formal agreements.

Because transactions occur between individuals with family ties, diaspora engagement is largely based on familiarity and trust, eliminating the need for formal contracts and transactions.

It was noted that it is often deemed unacceptable to have written business agreements with family members due to cultural and traditional factors.⁵³ In turn, the majority of financial transactions supporting family businesses occur informally. One Lebanese business owner, whose business is supported by a family member in the diaspora noted a personal preference for informal transfers, explaining that “It is not a common practice in our area to have official contracts made. Therefore, most business transactions are often carried out informally.”⁵⁴

Unless the business is managed in partnership with the diaspora member, recipients of diaspora support within family circles have the autonomy to decide how to use the funds received and manage their operations.

This independence allows them to tailor financial strategies to meet their specific needs and goals, fostering innovation and efficiency in their businesses. This was also mentioned to be a matter of respect. Several respondents noted that people at home might consider their business operations a private matter and prefer not to share if they are facing difficulties.⁵⁵ As a common practice, there is what several respondents described as a “no ask, no tell” approach within family circles.⁵⁶ In turn, recipients of these remittances have autonomy in deciding how to utilize the funds, with the diaspora generally not monitoring their use.

On some occasions, diaspora members make their own business investments in Lebanon in partnership with family members at home.

In the majority of cases, these investments consist of purchasing property or land, with the purpose of maintaining a tangible connection and presence with their families and communities at home. This was often referred to as an **emotional investment**. Through this concept, the diaspora describes the practice of initiating and supporting family real-estate businesses in Lebanon solely to stay connected to their homeland and heritage. This practice is particularly prevalent among affluent Lebanese diaspora members and typically involves purchasing or leasing land and properties in their hometowns, often in partnership with local family members who manage operations on the ground. As one informant explained, “People continue to buy and sell land, although less frequently now. Generally, Lebanese individuals like to own property or land where they can build. However, it's not just a rational decision; it's an emotional one.”⁵⁷

Although they may not reside on these properties, members of the Lebanese diaspora envision them as a means of maintaining ties with their roots and as opportunities to generate local employment.

⁵⁸ Three key informants expressed that purchasing land in their village was a sentimental way to preserve their connection to their origins.⁵⁹ Two others highlighted that owning property in their village served as insurance to ensure their children continued to visit and remain connected to their heritage.⁶⁰ Additionally, one informant mentioned that part of his intention in owning property was to establish a small-scale business to boost the village economy and create job opportunities. While residing in Canada, he employs temporary staff to oversee the property and manage the land.⁶¹

⁵³ KII 11

⁵⁴ KII 11

⁵⁵ KIIs (21, 25)

⁵⁶ KIIs (18, 22, 26)

⁵⁷ KII 24

⁵⁸ KII 17

⁵⁹ KII 17

⁶⁰ KIIs (23, 30)

⁶¹ KII 26

4.2.2 Diaspora Engagement in Supporting Local Business Beyond Family Circles

Several respondents in the Lebanese-Canadian diaspora mentioned their involvement in charity initiatives aimed at supporting local businesses in their villages. This type of support is typically directed towards community members personally known to the diaspora member or recommended by a trusted partner on the ground (usually a family friend, or a local community organiser). For respondents in the Canadian-Lebanese diaspora, the central motive for this type of local business support was a **desire to actively contribute to the economic and social development of their communities at home**. This charity endeavour adds to the moral obligation to support one's family's personal expenses and businesses through financial remittances. This highlights the genuine commitment of the diaspora to play a crucial role not solely in their families, but also in their communities.

4.2.2.1 Diaspora Standard Practices in Supporting Local Business Beyond Family Circles

Diaspora members support struggling businesses in their home villages with a combination of financial aid, business know-how and technical support. Cases mentioned included supporting a local tailor in keeping her shop open, providing financial resources to a local artisan to buy new equipment, and supporting a local restaurant by offering technical advice and financial assistance to improve their marketing strategy.⁶² Notably, respondents highlighted the targeted nature of their intervention. Unlike the support they provide to their families, the financial aid in these cases is directed towards specific objectives, such as purchasing tools and equipment essential for starting or sustaining businesses for those in need. For instance, three members of the Tripolitans in Toronto community recalled an occasion when the group came together to collect donations to buy a sewing machine for a widowed woman in Tripoli who had no source of income. The purchase of the machine was aimed at enabling her to start a sewing business and achieve economic independence.⁶³

This type of targeted charitable business support generally entails one-time assistance and is often accompanied by technical advice.⁶⁴ Many of the diaspora supporters involved are themselves business owners. Highlighting the recurring issue of a lack of cost-effective long-term planning among many Lebanese small businesses, some respondents emphasised that technical assistance is as crucial as financial aid.⁶⁵ With a focus on sustainability, the diaspora supporters aim to ensure the recipient has the technical knowledge, adequate equipment and financial resources to establish their businesses without needing further assistance in the future. This approach was described by one respondent as: "I help you once but won't help you twice."⁶⁶ As noted by another respondent, "Instead of expecting a monetary return on investment, what matters most is the positive impact the investment has on the individual. If the recipient of financial, technical, or logistical support can utilise it to sustain and grow their business, thus supporting their own family, then the investment is deemed worthwhile."⁶⁷

Also when business support is not directed to family members, trust remains extremely important in motivating diaspora engagement. Before accepting to provide support, the diaspora member would ensure the person is truly in need and that the business has a chance of succeeding. In turn, once the financial transaction is completed, the progress of the business is always vetted through continuous spot-checks by trusted partners on the ground who are responsible for reporting back how the recipient's business is doing and whether he or she is trying to develop it. This trusted partner is usually a relative or a friend, who is highly involved in community organising and charitable work at local level. They identify cases of struggling businesses and mobilise the diaspora to support them. Once the

⁶² KIIs (19, 26, 23)

⁶³ KIIs (19, 28, 29)

⁶⁴ KIIs (22, 26, 27)

⁶⁵ KIIs (23, 26, 30)

⁶⁶ KII 22

⁶⁷ KII 24

struggling business is identified, both the recipient and the trusted partner are responsible for reporting on their performance. This often happens through informal channels, through sending videos, pictures, or messages to the diaspora supporter. As noted by three key informants, this vetting system ensures the person will not ask for help again and supports the objective of making the receiver self-sustained through his/her business.⁶⁸ It also highlights the strong relevance of charitable work as the main motive to engage in local businesses.

Similar to sending remittances and supporting family-owned businesses, informal transactions are also preferred when supporting businesses beyond family circles. However, while agreeing that financial transactions remain highly informal, respondents from the diaspora also highlighted that, **when supporting a business outside of their family circles, they expect the recipient to provide receipts and evidence of spending.** For example, one respondent shared that on one occasion he found out that a business owner he was supporting in his village had lied about his expenses. While he had requested financial support to purchase updated machinery, the receipt he presented showed he had used only part of the money to fix the old machine he already owned, keeping a portion for himself. Although the lack of a contract prevented the supporter from reclaiming the money, the recipient's reputation suffered significantly, as he was labelled untrustworthy within his community.⁶⁹

4.3 Creation of Employment

Phase I of the study found that most of the employment created from diaspora engagement was self-employment. There was general agreement among Phase II respondents that this finding is valid. Phase II findings also highlights that the engagement of the Lebanese and Syrian diaspora has a contained, yet notable impact on local job creation, but the nature and effectiveness of this impact varies, with notable differences in views between Lebanese and Syrian respondents.

Overall, there was consensus among Lebanese informants that employment created by the diaspora is often “random” and limited in scale. As stated by a village mayor: “Job opportunities are random because they come from individuals to individuals, especially in our village and its surroundings.”⁷⁰ Another key informant echoed this sentiment, highlighting that “diaspora is creating a very limited number of jobs as they support self-employed businesses.”⁷¹

In the case of diaspora support of local businesses within family circles, Lebanese key informants largely agreed that the creation of employment is usually limited to members of the family or close family friends. This indicates that while small businesses are vital, they may not sufficiently address larger unemployment issues in the recipient communities.

Among respondents within the Lebanese-Canadian diaspora, the generation of employment was frequently correlated with emotional business investments. For instance, several respondents mentioned hiring staff to oversee the rental of their properties or cultivate their owned lands. As noted by one respondent, job creation can also emerge as a by-product of charitable activities: “For example, if the diaspora community collaborates to establish a charity canteen, they would need to employ a cook to provide the service.”⁷²

There were; however, a few notable examples of diaspora engagement in supporting local businesses beyond their family circles, leading to more impactful, widespread job creation cited by respondents in Lebanon. For instance, the establishment of medical centres and businesses with

⁶⁸ KIIs (20, 21, 24)

⁶⁹ KII 27

⁷⁰ KII 10

⁷¹ KII 8

⁷² KII 13

diaspora support in Britel was said to have provided crucial job opportunities for local communities and boosted the local economy.⁷³ Similarly, a key informant highlighted that the establishment of a charitable medical centre in Baalbek by an expatriate led to the employment of over 300 people from the local community.⁷⁴

Citing this positive impact that diaspora support can have on job creation, Lebanese respondents expressed hope for more substantial diaspora engagement. One key informant envisioned the establishment of an “industrial factory” by the diaspora, which could provide stable employment for the youth in the community and promote sustainable development: “I am hopeful to witness the collective efforts of diaspora communities in establishing an industrial factory that would not only boost the local economy but also create employment opportunities for young people in the region.”⁷⁵ This sentiment was echoed by another key informant - a village mayor - who stressed the need for more large-scale economic and business development: “To address the issue of unemployment and create more job opportunities, it may be necessary to explore additional avenues of job creation such as large-scale corporations.”⁷⁶

Syrian key informants, who face distinct socio-economic challenges, tended to place a greater focus on the immediate necessity of financial support to cover daily expenses over job creation. As such, the nature of Syrian diaspora engagement was found to be more at an individual level, rather than through the creation of businesses large enough to drive large-scale employment. One key informant explained that the diaspora community often provides financial assistance to family members running small businesses, such as supermarkets and second-hand clothing stores, which indicates that for this group, the Phase I finding of self-employment being the most prevalent form of employment creation holds true. It is, however, important to note that Syrian respondents also widely expressed their hope for larger investments from the diaspora that lead to more concrete and sustainable employment opportunities for their communities.

4.4 Readiness During Crisis

The Phase I study found that diaspora business engagement increased since 2019, particularly so that the diaspora can support their families in maintaining a decent income in the context of the collapse of public and financial institutions. Furthermore, it was highlighted that communities and businesses in North Lebanon and Bekaa Valley remain vulnerable to a challenging business environment and that they need more financial and technical support to survive and scale up.

All respondents on the diaspora and recipient side uniformly agree with the findings of Phase I, highlighting that there has been an increase in diaspora economic engagement with local communities since 2019. This was encountered across all types of diaspora support, including sending remittances, supporting family-owned businesses, and supporting local businesses beyond family circles. The consensus is that diaspora support has become increasingly crucial for the survival of families and communities who are living in a difficult context of economic turmoil. As one key respondent summarises: “People have had to rely on the money coming from the diaspora to meet their daily needs.”⁷⁷ In turn, while the economic crisis increasingly discouraged members of the diaspora from investing in profitable business endeavours in Lebanon, it boosted their efforts to support local businesses within their families and wider communities.

⁷³ KII 3

⁷⁴ KII 2

⁷⁵ KII 3

⁷⁶ KII 5

⁷⁷ KII 1

A further contributing factor to the rise in Lebanese diaspora engagement is the increased need for support towards middle-class families who previously did not require assistance. Multiple respondents in Lebanon highlighted that these families have become increasingly dependent on diaspora support due to the severe depreciation of their salaries and pensions since the onset of the economic crisis.⁷⁸ This was also underscored by members of the Lebanese-Canadian diaspora. Several diaspora respondents emphasised that a significant portion of the diaspora originates from middle-class backgrounds and has witnessed substantial shifts in their families' quality of life since the onset of the economic crisis. For instance, one respondent highlighted that the impact of banking restrictions on cash withdrawals in Lebanon made it increasingly difficult for her relatives, particularly the elderly with additional health-related expenses, to make ends meet towards the end of each month.⁷⁹

Overall, the finding emerged that the government's decreased ability to support communities in the context of the national crisis has made the diaspora's contributions even more critical for the survival of local communities. As one key informant explains: "The only hope for the salvation of these communities has been the support of their diaspora."⁸⁰ With people in Lebanon facing significant difficulties accessing cash each month due to government-imposed limits on withdrawals, the diaspora played a fundamental role in supporting cash flows. A common practice identified among the Lebanese-Canadian diaspora was that of allowing family members in Lebanon to withdraw money from diaspora members' Lebanese-based bank accounts to increase their monthly cash availability.

Syrian respondents also agree that diaspora engagement has increased since the 2019 crisis, but they emphasise different aspects of this support. As was found for Lebanese respondents, Syrian refugees in targeted communities have become increasingly reliant on the Syrian diaspora due to the economic challenges presented by the crisis. In addition to these, however, several Syrian respondents shifted the focus to the changing international aid landscape and how it has influenced diaspora engagement. These key informants highlighted that since 2019, international aid coming in to support Syrian refugees has reduced and that the diaspora has increased their support to fill this gap.⁸¹

All respondents in Lebanon and Canada unanimously stressed that **there is a crucial need for more diaspora support**, particularly considering the social, political, and economic challenges that communities across Lebanon are currently faced with. This instability has manifested in various ways, from fluctuating exchange rates to unpredictable regulatory changes, all of which have severely impacted business operations. Furthermore, as stated by one informant, access to capital has also become increasingly difficult due to the collapse of local banks leaving many businesspeople without access to their deposited funds.⁸² As such, the multiple crises in Lebanon have left many businesses struggling to access the capital they need, making them increasingly dependent on external financial sources, including diaspora contributions.

Several respondents in Lebanon pointed to the significant impact of the political and economic instability on local businesses, particularly since most businesses that are supported by the diaspora are small-scale businesses which rely on a continuous flow of financial resources to continue operations. As one key informant noted, many companies are "finding themselves in need of substantial financial support to maintain operations and stay afloat."⁸³ Similarly, another key informant highlighted that the current situation has forced many companies to cut back on expenses, reduce staff, or completely shut down operations.⁸⁴

⁷⁸ KII 5, 6

⁷⁹ KII 30

⁸⁰ KII 13

⁸¹ KII 14, 15

⁸² KII 12

⁸³ KII 11

⁸⁴ KII 6

5. The Canadian-Lebanese Diaspora Humanitarian Engagement in North and East Lebanon

The Canadian-Lebanese diaspora is significantly involved in humanitarian and charity efforts, encompassing both large-scale initiatives and smaller charity projects. Data collected in Canada indicates that the support provided by the diaspora is **highly organised, flowing through trusted channels of activists, volunteers, and community organisers active in both Lebanese and Canadian contexts** (see [Annex 2](#)).

Particularly, data collection reveals the existence of two main models of engagement. The first involves diaspora networks and individuals supporting **local charity initiatives** in their areas or villages of origin. The second occurs when they unite for **larger-scale humanitarian endeavours**, often prompted by a crisis. While these two models share similar characteristics in terms of standard practices and motives, their targets differ. Local charity initiatives are typically directly linked to the communities from which the diaspora supporters originate. Conversely, for larger-scale humanitarian initiatives, the diaspora comes together in a spirit of solidarity to support vulnerable communities beyond their immediate circles.

The two models of diaspora engagement are described below. In addition, two tables summarising the general characteristics of each model can be found in [Annex 5](#) and [Annex 6](#) of this report.

5.1 Models of Diaspora Humanitarian Engagement

5.1.1 Local Charity Initiatives

Local charity initiatives are a primary way the diaspora supports their communities. These efforts usually target the specific areas where the diaspora originated and have a small to medium-scale impact at the household, village, or town level. This type of support comes in a variety of ways.

A majority of respondents reported their recurrent involvement in **donating money to assist individuals facing urgent financial challenges in their communities**. Notably, these types of initiatives are often related to medical expenses such as surgeries, cancer treatments, or purchasing mobility assistance devices, such as wheelchairs. This support usually comes as a one-off donation, directed to a singular individual or household. As noted by one respondent, there is a crucial distinction between this type of support and the sending of remittances. “As a rule” she noted, “when we do charity, we do not accept cases of people who have relatives in Canada as those are the ones for whom it won’t be a challenge to obtain support from their relatives.”⁸⁵ This finding underscores the importance of family remittances and highlights how they are viewed as a mandatory responsibility, separate from charitable endeavours.

Several respondents reported being actively involved in donating money for infrastructure projects in their hometowns and villages. Typically, these projects are led and advertised by affluent members of the diaspora, who first invest their savings and successively mobilise funds from fellow diaspora members to undertake projects. Examples mentioned by respondents included projects of road repairs, school construction, or community events like marathons or science fairs.⁸⁶ These initiatives are directed at the economic and social development of their communities. For instance, one respondent mentioned financially supporting the construction of a medical facility in Tripoli, while another mentioned collaborating with the municipality of their village in Bekaa to design and construct

⁸⁵ KII 23

⁸⁶ KIIs (18,20,23,26,29)

a playground.⁸⁷ Additionally, several respondents mentioned engaging in other types of infrastructure work, such as repairing street pavements and lighting.⁸⁸ According to three informants, village municipalities heavily rely on diaspora members abroad to provide technical guidance on cost-effective and long-term efficient investments to foster the development of their communities.⁸⁹ As noted by one of them “highly reputed diaspora members often become informal advisors for the municipalities. They ask for our advice on how to improve the towns and villages and not only for our financial support.”⁹⁰

Diaspora members who frequently contribute to recurring charity efforts are often connected with local formal and informal organisations on the ground. In London Ontario, the **Canadian Cedars of Hope** organisation collaborates with a trusted group of volunteers implementing projects in the Bekaa Valley and elsewhere in Lebanon and has coordinated a variety of projects. In particular, members of the organisations have consistently supported various orphanages in Bekaa by collecting donations to provide them with clothes and food. Their efforts have also focused on more sustainable endeavours. For example, in one of the orphanages, they collected money to establish a farm so that the orphans could have access to good-quality local dairy and animal products. They also supported a project to install solar panels in deprived communities to ensure they had the energy to continue their income-creating activities during power cuts.⁹¹

In addition, the diaspora community from Bekaa residing in London Ontario is also active across informal networks organising charity events to fund projects in their villages and hometowns. As noted by one respondent, “It is a group of friends, active people, we always have an eye on Bekaa and we work within the University and with Canadian Cedars of Hope.”⁹² These are involved in organising charity events such as soccer games or bakeouts aimed at collecting donations to support people in Bekaa and across all of Lebanon.

The Community of Tripolitans in Toronto is also strongly active in this type of humanitarian endeavour. There is a direct link between this group and a local charity organisation based in Tripoli named **Kheer Wajiba**. The organisation is involved in multiple endeavours supporting poor and marginalised households in Tripoli and its surroundings, including Syrian and Palestinian refugees. They provide a canteen service open every day and distribute food packages to households in need. The Tripolitans in Toronto are active supporters of this local organisation which is trusted also because it belongs to the brother of one of the diaspora community organisers. Thanks to the trust between the Tripoli-based and Toronto-based networks, the Canadian diaspora has been able to provide consistent support to the local organisation’s activities, including supporting initiatives such as the distribution of medical supplies, toys and formula to vulnerable Lebanese and Syrians in the area.

5.1.2 Large-Scale Humanitarian Campaigns

In addition to supporting local charity initiatives, members of the Lebanese-Canadian Diaspora are actively involved in large-scale humanitarian campaigns. These campaigns typically coincide with local, national, and regional shocks that profoundly impact the community, such as high and unexpected influxes of refugees, conflict-generated crises on Lebanon’s borders and sudden events, such as the Beirut 2019 explosion. Unlike local charity initiatives, these campaigns are not necessarily sponsored and funded by members of the diaspora directly connected with the targeted community. Instead, they

⁸⁷ KII 26

⁸⁸ KII 21

⁸⁹ KII (21, 26, 27)

⁹⁰ KII 21

⁹¹ KIIs (24, 25)

⁹² KII 23

represent instances where **the Lebanese community in Canada collectively focuses on aiding those facing greater challenges, regardless of their direct connection with the specific targets.**

This finding reflects the observation from Phase I of this study that the diaspora increases its support during times of crisis. As noted by one respondent, "When there is a crisis, people come together; they stop thinking just about their families and their villages because they understand that there is an emergency."⁹³ **In Lebanon, the frequency of such initiatives increased significantly following the multiple shocks that hit the country in 2019.** Several respondents mentioned being involved in informal campaigns aimed at purchasing essential goods and toys for communities displaced by the blast. Others highlighted their engagement in supporting individuals who have become impoverished due to the economic crisis. Additionally, some mentioned their involvement in supporting Syrian refugees, who are considered additionally vulnerable.

These types of campaigns are typically organised nationwide, relying on the availability and reliability of local partners and networks and with the total involvement of diaspora organisers across all phases of intervention. For instance, one respondent who spearheaded a campaign to purchase baby formula for underprivileged children mentioned that, through the support of partners on the ground, he replicated the same delivery and distribution model across multiple villages and towns.⁹⁴ This respondent also recalled an instance in 2020 when the diaspora members united to support Syrian refugee children, hosted in refugee camps in Lebanon. The campaign, which he coordinated in person, aimed to "plant smiles" on the faces of refugee children by providing entertainment, toys, and essential goods and was received with immense engagement on behalf of the diaspora community.⁹⁵

All respondents agreed that, when the explosion happened, there was a drastic change in people's mindset, with many diaspora members actively requesting their group leaders to redirect donations to affected communities. As noted by one organiser of the Tripolitans in Lebanon group: "The bomb that happened in Beirut activated something in people's hearts. Our WhatsApp group was exploding, with people asking us to direct their donations to affected communities, rather than to Tripoli."⁹⁶

In turn, the 2019 explosion served as a catalyst for multiple diaspora-led initiatives, including the development of the Lebanon Strong Campaign. The latter stands out as one of the most successful and expansive campaigns spearheaded by the Lebanese-Canadian diaspora. In 2020, through the concerted efforts of organisers and volunteers in both Canada and Lebanon, the campaign gathered donations from across and beyond the diaspora, supporting communities nationwide by distributing winter jackets, lunch boxes, water bottles, notebooks, stationery, and art supplies, among other essential back-to-school items, to households affected by the explosion.⁹⁷ Notably, Lebanon Strong was not a one-off emergency relief effort. On the contrary, the organisers and volunteer team leveraged the momentum of diaspora engagement to sustain other initiatives. In the months that followed the explosion, the team continued to assist multiple beneficiaries, preparing gift donations for children facing immense challenges due to school closures, economic collapse, and the pandemic. Additionally, the campaign led to the establishment of a registered Canadian organisation named the Strong Foundation, (see [Annex 2](#)).⁹⁸

In various instances, large-scale humanitarian initiatives driven by the Canadian-Lebanese diaspora have **extended support to vulnerable communities facing emergencies beyond Lebanon's**

⁹³ KII 30

⁹⁴ KII 20

⁹⁵ KII 20

⁹⁶ KII 28

⁹⁷ Canadian Arab Institute. (2023). Lebanon Strong: How Two Lebanese-Canadian Entrepreneurs supported a Home Country in Crisis. Available at: [link](#)

⁹⁸ KII 17

borders. As noted by one respondent, "Each time a significant incident occurs in the region, we allocate a portion of the contributions to aid the affected community. We did the same during the earthquake in Syria, and now we are assisting Palestine. We recently sent food to Gaza."⁹⁹ In general, participants engaged in humanitarian endeavours expressed **a shared sense of solidarity with their Palestinian counterparts and emphasised the pressing need for the diaspora community to shift its charitable efforts towards Gaza.** For example, a member of the Bekaa diaspora community in London, Ontario, highlighted the significant solidarity shown by the Palestinian diaspora towards Lebanon in 2019.¹⁰⁰ They emphasised the importance of reciprocating this support to honour the strong Palestinian-Lebanese solidarity. Presently, the Strong Foundation is actively exploring avenues to extend its assistance beyond Lebanon. In particular, one of the founders expressed a readiness to broaden connections with local partners on Lebanese southern borders, to provide aid to vulnerable communities in both Lebanon and Palestine.

5.1 Standard Practices of Diaspora Humanitarian Engagement

While diaspora humanitarian engagement present different characteristics with regard to the scale, nature and targets of humanitarian support, there are consistent practices observed across all respondents. Particularly, a systematic mechanism for mobilising engagement, collecting donations, overseeing action and reporting was observed during data collection. The standard practices identified are outlined below.

In a majority of cases, the mobilisation of funds and resources for humanitarian initiatives are led by proactive and highly respected individuals, who have a reputation as diaspora community organisers, and charitable persons. These individuals maintain direct contact with activists, volunteers and community organisers in Lebanon who get in touch with them when support is needed. They are often very active on social media, with some being digital influencers or administrators of social media pages sharing content about Lebanese-Canadian culture. This is for example the case of "Lebanese in Canada" and "Lebanese in Toronto." Others are less active on social media yet organise the diaspora through WhatsApp groups. This is the case of "Tripolitans in Toronto" (See [Annex 2](#)).

Diaspora community organizers collaborate with trusted local partners on the ground to implement humanitarian and charitable initiatives. In most cases, these local partners are local community organizers who bridge the diaspora with informal volunteer groups, typically consisting of young people and active members of the community or village. Occasionally, diaspora members work directly with village municipalities or local institutional actors, which is particularly useful when funds are directed toward infrastructural projects. Rarely does the diaspora collaborate with local or international NGOs. Among respondents interviewed, this occurred only in one case, with the Tripolitans in Toronto network. In that instance, the collaboration between the diaspora and a local NGO in Tripoli was justified because the diaspora organizer was the brother of the local NGO founder. The trust between the two entities was established through family ties.

A careful vetting phase precedes the identification and sponsorship of a charity cause. Before a charity cause is shared with large diaspora networks, the diaspora community leader, in collaboration with their local network in Lebanon carefully works to assess the actual needs, identify who requires assistance, and determine what specific support is needed.

Interestingly, **several respondents mentioned that, for local-level initiatives, local networks often provide diaspora members with charity databases, which list households and families in need of assistance within their village and its surroundings.** As noted by one respondent, these charity databases are comprehensive of everyone in need, without discrimination and include refugee

⁹⁹ KII 29

¹⁰⁰ KII 25

households and families.¹⁰¹ These databases help diaspora community leaders determine the required budget to achieve with donations and the type of intervention needed. As noted by one of the organisers of the Tripolitans in Toronto community: “We started identifying family in need through friends of friends and then ended up developing a database of families and individuals in need to provide support to.”¹⁰² Another respondent, originally from Bekaa Valley also identified a similar mechanism: “We select who is in need by asking the people there. The people on the ground tell us and send us lists with names, ages, genders and specific needs. The people in the village will know and they prioritise and we trust them.”¹⁰³ As noted by another informant: “We get names of people in need from friends who work in hospitals, mosques, churches, and town counsellors. We always check for transparency to avoid people squeezing the names of relatives and friends.”¹⁰⁴ The same respondent also noted that these databases are essential because they help reach individuals who are in need but may not seek assistance due to shame.¹⁰⁵

Humanitarian support mobilisation largely occurs across social media and WhatsApp groups.

Diaspora community leaders leverage their reputations as charitable and trustworthy individuals to promote charity causes on WhatsApp groups, Facebook pages, or Instagram accounts. The shared posts are always highly informative, detailing the type of support needed, the beneficiaries, how the support will be delivered, and how to send donations. When campaigns are larger than the local level, ad hoc social media pages or websites are created to boost engagement. These pages are usually associated with and sponsored through social media influencers and connected to donation platforms such as Change.org or GoFundMe or personal accounts of individual fundraisers.¹⁰⁶

Depending on the scale of the humanitarian initiatives, donations are collected either through online platforms or directly transferred to the personal accounts of diaspora organisers sponsoring the efforts.

Most respondents reported a preference for sending money directly to the organisers' accounts. This preference stems from a general mistrust of donation platforms, particularly regarding their fees. In contrast, individuals sponsoring a charity cause or humanitarian campaign are always known, either personally or by reputation. These informal methods of money transfer are generally favoured, similar to the practices observed for sending remittances. However, for large-scale humanitarian campaigns, the use of donation platforms may be necessary. In such cases, diaspora organisers typically use platforms like GoFundMe or Change.org to gather donations and successively transfer funds to local partners via Western Union.

Once donations are collected and transferred to local partners, the diaspora community member leading the effort directly coordinates the logistics of the humanitarian endeavour.

For local charity causes, it is their responsibility to ensure that the requested support reaches the beneficiaries. Most diaspora members take on active project management roles, voluntarily compiling budgets, purchasing resources, and arranging deliveries, with local partners on the ground providing necessary support in leading operations. For this reason, respondents highlighted that having a trusted local partner on the ground is pivotal for their work. These partners help ensure the efficient and effective distribution of aid.

For larger-scale humanitarian endeavours, like food distribution and humanitarian relief campaigns, significant coordination and effort is needed.

For example, during the Lebanon Strong campaign, organisers, with the support of volunteers across Ontario, coordinated aid donations at drop-off zones in Woodbridge, London, Windsor, and Toronto. They then oversaw the distribution of these

¹⁰¹ KII 26

¹⁰² KII 19

¹⁰³ KII 23

¹⁰⁴ KII 20

¹⁰⁵ KII 20

¹⁰⁶ KIIs (17, 20, 23)

donations throughout Lebanon, including in villages such as Chouf, Jnoub, Zahle, Kfar Shouba, and Tripoli.¹⁰⁷ This extensive effort involved not only the collection and transportation of aid but also ensuring that the supplies reached those in need efficiently and effectively. The success of such large-scale initiatives highlights the critical role of well-organised volunteer networks and the dedication of diaspora members to humanitarian efforts.

Similar to the business engagement practices reported in the previous section, every humanitarian engagement is also accompanied by a detailed mechanism of monitoring and reporting. Respondents emphasised that this phase is crucial to maintain the trust of donors and ensure continued support for work in Lebanon. Monitoring and reporting are conducted through social media and WhatsApp groups. Local partners and diaspora organisers regularly post videos and photos documenting all phases of the initiative, including the transport and delivery of goods and services. These posts often include thank you messages from beneficiaries, providing transparency and demonstrating the impact of the donations. This transparent reporting process reassures donors that their contributions are being used effectively and motivates them to continue supporting these humanitarian efforts.

5.2 Main Motives for Diaspora Humanitarian Engagement

Respondents within the Lebanese-Canadian diaspora expressed a variety of reasons for their involvement in humanitarian efforts. These motivations encompass a broad range of perspectives and values within the community. Overall, their motives reflect a complex interplay of identity, empathy, altruism, and self-actualisation that drive members of the Lebanese-Canadian diaspora to engage in humanitarian endeavours. Specifically, motives identified during data collection include:

Shared sense of responsibility - A majority of respondents emphasised their shared sense of responsibility towards their communities back home. Many diaspora members highlighted that they had observed the country's economic collapse from a position of relative privilege. This has motivated them to supplement their mandatory remittances to their families with active engagement in supporting struggling communities. As noted by one of the founders of Lebanon Strong, "While the amount of work was immense, at the time of the explosion, doing anything else seemed wrong".¹⁰⁸ While their families remain a primary focus, many Lebanese in the diaspora also feel a strong sense of duty towards their country. One respondent noted: "We have been blessed to live a comfortable life, but we cannot forget those at home."¹⁰⁹ This shared sense of responsibility is evident in the collective nature of many charity initiatives, which are often organised under the guidance of reputable leaders involving large community networks. Furthermore, these initiatives are frequently associated with cultural events or social gatherings, providing opportunities for the diaspora to unite in solidarity.

Mistrust in local, national, and international institutions - Linked to their shared sense of responsibility towards their community, there is a widespread belief that the diaspora is the primary actor interested in actively supporting struggling Lebanese communities. Many respondents highlighted the failure of national and local institutions to meet the basic needs of the Lebanese people, ranging from electricity and water to education, employment and healthcare. Some also criticise the ineffectiveness of international institutions in supporting them, citing the inefficient management of Syrian refugees and the national economic collapse as examples. As noted by one respondent: "If we don't do this, who will?".¹¹⁰ This sentiment underscores the diaspora's profound conviction in their pivotal role as champions of their community's well-being, motivating them to take proactive action where institutional support falls short.

¹⁰⁷ KII 17, 20

¹⁰⁸ KII 17

¹⁰⁹ KII 25

¹¹⁰ KII 21

Scepticism towards NGOs - All respondents shared that their active engagement is strongly motivated by scepticism towards the work of NGOs in Lebanon. Many noted that NGOs began developing a bad reputation in 2019, with numerous reporting rumours of organisations exploiting the crisis to retain donation funds. One respondent mentioned, “Since 2019, the diaspora has become extra careful when deciding who to give money to.”¹¹¹ Furthermore, the general view is that NGOs act as profit-driven agents, whereas, for the Lebanese diaspora, the charitable aspect is paramount. As another respondent stated, “Lebanese don’t trust NGOs because they have eaten all the money, they overpay their employees, and they take too big of a cut. Also, they don’t know what they are doing. People like to work on their own.”¹¹² Emphasising this sentiment, another respondent added; “When we engage in charity and humanitarian work, our message to our brothers and sisters in Lebanon is: from your family in Canada, with love. We don’t want even one cent to go towards paying someone’s salary. That’s not how we do charity.”¹¹³ These statements emphasise that the diaspora holds a notion of charity and support devoid of personal gain. This is why they prefer to handle it independently, ensuring that all their funds are directed solely towards the causes they wish to support.

Charity as a fundamental pillar of Islam - Many respondents emphasised the significance of charity as a fundamental pillar of Islam, thus considering it a moral obligation for Muslims. In turn, they are actively engaged not only in charitable work in Lebanon but also in their communities at home. For instance, the Bekaa community in London, Ontario, is deeply involved in charitable activities aimed at addressing homelessness in their city and supporting initiatives benefiting the indigenous community in the nearby Oneida reserve.¹¹⁴ The importance of religion is further highlighted by the occurrence of numerous charitable initiatives during Muslim festivities, such as Eid and Ramadan. For example, several respondents from the Tripolitan community in Toronto recall an occasion during Ramadan when they gathered for iftar at a restaurant. During the event, organisers requested additional donations from community members along with the dinner fee, which was then directed to an orphanage in Tripoli. During the dinner, a video was presented, depicting children at the orphanage in Tripoli enjoying their iftar, provided by the Tripolitans in Toronto. This heart-warming moment brought immense joy to the participants, highlighting the strong connection between the charitable principles of Islam and the unwavering dedication of the diaspora community.

¹¹¹ KII 19

¹¹² KII 24

¹¹³ KII 20

¹¹⁴ KIIs (24,25)

6. Conclusion

This chapter concludes the report by highlighting lessons learned, challenges and potential recommendations for DRC and partners on the ground.

6.1 Lessons Learned

Prevalence of a for-charity model of diaspora engagement with local businesses: In most cases, diaspora members who engage with local businesses do so without expecting a return on investment, acting primarily with charitable intentions.

Blurred distinction between diaspora family business support and financial remittance: Across the diaspora, support for family businesses is often seen as part of their moral obligation to send financial remittances. Additionally, many members of the diaspora are involved in supporting business owners in their communities as a charitable endeavour. This highlights that, for the diaspora, the line between remittances and family business support is blurred. On the other hand, there is a clear distinction made between supporting one's family, which is considered an obligation, and supporting one's community, which is seen as a voluntary charitable effort.

Importance of reputation: Members of the diaspora who are well-regarded and respected within their communities play a significant role in facilitating charitable business support and humanitarian activities. Their strong connections and established reputation both in Lebanon and in the diaspora enable them to effectively mobilise resources and support for various initiatives. In turn, reputation and trust serve as a foundation for successful engagement and collaboration within the diaspora network.

Importance of local partnership: For the Lebanese diaspora, collaborating with local partners on the ground not only ensures that initiatives are tailored to the specific needs of the community but also fosters a sense of ownership and sustainability. By working closely with volunteers and community organisations, the diaspora can maximise the impact of their contributions and create meaningful change at the local level. In turn, strong partnerships between diaspora and local actors are essential for building trust, fostering community engagement, and achieving long-term success in economic support and humanitarian endeavours.

Crucial role of social media and online platforms: Social media platforms provide a dynamic space for sharing information, mobilising support, and raising awareness about various causes. The widespread use of social media enables diaspora members to connect, coordinate efforts, and amplify their impact on a larger scale. It follows that leveraging online platforms effectively can enhance visibility, mobilise resources, and strengthen community ties in charitable and humanitarian initiatives.

Vetting mechanism: Diaspora members are actively engaged in vetting charity causes before providing support. This vetting process is facilitated by trusted partners on the ground, tasked with verifying the legitimacy of candidate beneficiaries and evaluating their genuine need for assistance. Such meticulous oversight highlights the diaspora's dedication to ensuring that their financial contributions directly aid those in need, while also safeguarding against potential scams and fraudulent requests.

Monitoring and reporting: Diaspora members are deeply invested in ensuring that their contributions are utilised effectively and ethically. Therefore, providing regular updates and feedback on the progress and outcomes of charitable initiatives is essential for maintaining trust and confidence among donors.

By promoting transparency and sharing impact stories on social media, those leading charity and humanitarian activities inspire continued support and engagement from its members. In other words, transparent reporting builds credibility, fosters donor satisfaction, and reinforces the commitment to making a positive difference in the community.

Readiness during crisis: When faced with challenges or emergencies, diaspora members are quick to mobilise resources and support to address immediate needs. Moreover, the shift in focus from local to larger-scale causes during crises reflects a broader commitment to solidarity and collective action. By rallying together during difficult times, the diaspora demonstrates its capacity for adaptation, collaboration, and leadership in humanitarian response efforts. This underscores the resilience and responsiveness of the diaspora community in times of crisis.

Familiarity and trust: Familiarity and trust are pivotal in both economic support and humanitarian endeavours. However, research findings indicate that diaspora communities draw a clear distinction between sending remittances to their families, which is viewed as a non-negotiable obligation, and supporting businesses or charitable causes. In such cases, support is seldom directed to family members. Instead, respondents emphasise that, as a customary practice, each diaspora household is accountable for its family members, while collective charity efforts are consistently aimed at more marginalised groups that lack direct familial ties in the diaspora.

6.2 Challenges

Capacity: As diaspora members tend to operate independently from humanitarian organisations, the majority of funding for their humanitarian and business support initiatives typically originates from personal savings and donations. Similarly, they approach their charitable endeavours with dedication akin to a second job. However, the time they can allocate to such efforts is constrained by their personal and professional commitments. While these contributions are commendable, the absence of institutional funding and strategic partnerships often constrain initiatives, limiting their scale and jeopardising their long-term sustainability.

More support is needed: Respondents from Lebanon and the diaspora share a consensus on the critical need for heightened support, emphasising the importance of empowering local businesses and advancing broader charity and humanitarian endeavours. Notably, many underscore the urgency of capacity building and skill enhancement, stressing the significance of providing technical support in addition to financial assistance. They emphasise that simply providing funds may not suffice; instead, targeted technical assistance is essential for sustainable growth and development in both business and humanitarian sectors.

Impact of the ongoing conflict in the region: Many members of the diaspora expressed concerns regarding the persistent conflict in the region. Recent events and the escalation of violence on Lebanon's southern borders further accentuate the urgency for collective action and attention to the larger geopolitical dynamics at play. Respondents highlighted the delicate political sensitivity of the situation, noting that Lebanon's stability is intricately linked to regional peace and security. They highlighted that the international community and local actors must collaborate on comprehensive strategies that not only provide immediate relief but also foster long-term stability and peace in the region.

6.3 Recommendations for DRC and Partners.

Establish a Diaspora Engagement Board: Building on the networks and trusted stakeholders identified in this research, DRC should establish a Diaspora Engagement Board. This avenue will enable effective two-way participatory action wherein representatives of the diaspora can provide

experience-based technical advice to support DRC activities, and the DRC can build familiarity and trust with members of the diaspora to further provide technical and humanitarian support to existing diaspora initiatives.

Conduct workshops to present DRC programming to the Diaspora Engagement Board and informal diaspora networks: These workshops will serve as a platform for DRC to showcase its programming and objectives within targeted communities and nationwide. It aims to engage the diaspora in decision-making processes, fostering inclusivity and trust. Moreover, the workshop will encourage the exchange of ideas, ensuring alignment between diaspora insights and DRC's strategic goals.

Raise social media awareness of DRC work in Lebanon: A key finding in this study was the widespread use of social media and online community spaces as places of diaspora engagement and collaboration. This presents an opportunity for the DRC to engage with diaspora in an effective, efficient, and cost-friendly manner. Online presentations of DRC programmes, increased awareness-raising of DRC work, and overall, increased visibility of the organisation can foster interest and trust from the diaspora in working with DRC, and accepting DRC's technical and other support.

Support diaspora-led initiatives in coordination with local municipalities: As highlighted in this study, a majority of diaspora supporting local business are business owners themselves, and hence provide both technical and financial assistance to the local communities they support in coordination with municipalities. However, this technical assistance is not formalised or professionally delivered, which is a key area where DRC can provide support. Through diaspora-focused activities and programmes offering professional training and business development courses, DRC can improve the delivery of technical assistance in coordination with local institutions, and generate a set of knowledge products that can be used by target local entrepreneurs to enhance their business know-how and economic resilience.

Conduct Phase III of this study focused on Syrian refugees: A key limitation in this report is the limited access to Syrian refugees. It is recommended that an additional Phase of this study is conducted to exclusively research the needs and experiences of Syrian refugees and their diaspora. This phase will provide a deeper understanding and enable more targeted interventions for this vulnerable population group.

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8. Annexes

8.1 Annex 1: Analytical Matrix

8.1.1 First Level of Analysis: Verification, Elaboration and Complementing of Phase I Findings

Dimension	Phase I Finding	Analysis Action	Target Information Source	
			Recipient End	Diaspora End
1. Business Engagement Model	Instead of sending regular remittances, diaspora members support relatives to start a business for-profit or for-charity business models.	Verify if the adoption of these two models has a more general validity across North Lebanon and Bekaa in previously and newly targeted communities.		
		Complement the findings from Phase I by identifying existing alternative business models across North Lebanon and Bekaa in previously and newly targeted communities.		
		Verify the two main typologies of diaspora business engagement are also identified among diaspora communities.		
		Elaborate on the extent to which the diaspora sends remittances to relatives in the targeted communities and/or other parts of Lebanon.		
		Elaborate on the extent to which the diaspora wishes to replace ongoing remittances, with support to relatives' self-reliance.		
2. Main motives	The main motive behind both models is to support family and relatives. In a few cases, diaspora business support went to individuals outside their families and in support of initiatives at the community level.	Verify the general motives for diaspora business engagement as well as the centrality of trust in the collaboration and what it has meant for the formality/informality of collaboration and coordination.		
		Verify that supporting families and relatives is the main motive for diaspora members to support businesses in North Lebanon and Bekaa.		
		Elaborate on the extent to which diaspora collaborate and exchange on how to support relatives' self-reliance.		
		Complement the findings from Phase I by identifying existing alternative motives for diaspora business engagement (for example supporting community initiatives or humanitarian relief).		
3. Familiarity and trust	Familiarity and trust are the main prerequisites for the diaspora to contribute financially to business in Lebanon.	Verify if familiarity and trust are considered the central prerequisites for diaspora members to support businesses in North Lebanon and Bekaa.		
		Complement the findings from Phase I by identifying existing alternative and/or concomitant prerequisites for diaspora business engagement (for example business reputation).		
4. Business Transactions	Financial transactions are made through informal channels and business partners do not have contracts defining the relationship between the diaspora and the local partner.	Verify if business transactions between diaspora and local partners are done predominantly through informal and non-contractual channels.		
		Elaborate on the centrality of trust meant for the formality/informality of collaboration and coordination.		
		Complement the findings from Phase I by identifying existing alternative and/or concomitant channels and instruments supporting business transactions.		

5. Source of Capital Mobilization	Businesses are financed through diaspora personal savings in the form of equity or personal loans.	Elaborate on the financing of diaspora business engagement (savings, group savings, credits, etc.).		
		Verify if diaspora members use personal savings (equity and loans) as the main source of capital mobilisation for diaspora members supporting businesses in North Lebanon and Bekaa.		
		Complement the findings from Phase I by identifying existing alternative and/or concomitant sources of capital mobilisation.		
6. Limited awareness about for-profit models and practices	Diaspora members engaging in for-charity models had limited awareness of how the for-profit investments worked.	Verify the level of awareness of the for-profit model with key informants using the for-charity business engagement model.		
7. Readiness during crises	Business engagement picked after the beginning of the crisis in Lebanon in 2019. This pick is seen as an expression of the diaspora's commitment to support their families in maintaining a decent income during emergencies	Verify the diaspora's engagement in local businesses in North Lebanon and Bekaa is predominantly linked to their commitment to supporting their families in maintaining a decent income during crises.		
		Verify that the 2019 crisis boosted diaspora business engagement in North Lebanon and Bekaa.		
		Complement the findings from Phase I by assessing the extent to which the current crisis on Lebanon's Southern border had an effect in boosting diaspora business engagement.		
8. Financial support First	Financial support was the main and most valued business engagement contribution from the diaspora.	Verify that informants in Bekaa and North Lebanon consider financial support as the main and most valued business engagement contribution from the diaspora.		
		Complement the findings from Phase I by identifying existing alternative and accompanying sources of support e.g. strategic advice; sourcing production material, paying for education) on both the receiving and the diaspora end.		
9. Creation of Employment	Most of the employment created from diaspora engagement was self-employment.	Verify that most of the employment created from diaspora engagement in Bekaa and North Lebanon is self-employment.		
		Complement the findings from Phase I by identifying other existing forms of employment created from diaspora business engagement.		
10. More support is still needed	Companies remain vulnerable to the challenging business environment.	Verify that informants in Bekaa and North Lebanon believe more support is needed from the diaspora.		
		Verify that the challenging business environment brings business owners in Bekaa and North Lebanon to look for financial and technical inputs from the diaspora. and opportunities to scale-up.		

8.1.2 Second Level of Analysis: Mapping and Documentation of Diaspora Engagement

MAPPING AND DOCUMENTATION OF DIASPORA ENGAGEMENT				
Dimension	Analysis Action	Targeted Information source		
		Recipient End	Diaspora End	Desk Review
Mapping of the diaspora supporting communities in North Lebanon and Bekaa Valley	Map the most common location for settlement of Lebanese and Syrian diaspora from the targeted communities in North Lebanon and Bekaa Valley.			
	Document two countries hosting Lebanese and (if possible) Syrian diaspora connected with the communities in Bekaa Valley and North Lebanon.			
	Document the historical development of the Lebanese and (if possible) Syrian diaspora in each of the two selected countries.			
	Document socio-economic characteristics of the diaspora.			
	Document any organisation and coordination among the diaspora from the target area (informal networks, hometown associations, virtual groups on social media, religious communities, etc.) and how they relate to, and engage with communities back home.			
Diaspora Humanitarian Response towards the targeted communities	Document the extent to which the diaspora is engaged in the provision of humanitarian support to displaced people from South Lebanon.			
	Map the socio-economic profile of the diaspora that supports the displaced from South Lebanon and their relationship with the displaced.			
	Document central targets of humanitarian support and those who are left behind.			
	Document modalities of the humanitarian support (e.g. cash, in-kind).			
	Document mobilisation, organisation at sending and receiving ends, and internal and external coordination of diaspora humanitarian support.			
	Document the relationship and division of roles/responsibilities between the diaspora and their local partners.			
	Document the size and coverage of the humanitarian support from the diaspora and existing gaps.			
	Document how the receiving communities report back to the diaspora.			
Challenges, Lessons Learned and Best Practices for diaspora business and Humanitarian Engagement	Identify and describe the main common challenges faced by diaspora while engaging in humanitarian response and local businesses (e.g. relating to coordination, transactions, access, finance, regulatory restrictions/red tape, availability of information on local conditions, engagement with local non-governmental organisations, local authorities but also local business partners, or relatives around business start-up).			
	Document lessons learned and best practices that were applied by diaspora actors and local companies to overcome the challenges.			
	Capture diaspora actors' recommendations for the type of support needed to expand existing activities and to boost the level of diaspora engagement for			

	humanitarian response and job creation in the area.			
	Identify prominent diaspora communities that could be potential partners in expanding or starting up activities in the area.			

8.2 Annex 2: List of Diaspora Networks in the Canadian-Lebanese Diaspora

Network Name	Location	Description
Lebanese in Canada	Online	Online community hosting over 45 K+ members and active on both Facebook and Instagram. The platform shares cultural content, involves members in community events, and actively promotes charity campaigns. Members and administrators use the platform to celebrate Canadian-Lebanese culture, raise awareness to promote solidarity in Lebanon and the broader Middle East region, and assertively advertise humanitarian causes. ¹¹⁵
Lebanese in Toronto	GTA, Online	Online community hosting more than 4K + members, localised in the GTA. It is used to share events and initiatives with a focus on supporting Lebanese businesses and providing advice to newcomers. The platform is also used to advertise charity and humanitarian campaigns. ¹¹⁶
Tripolitans in Toronto	GTA, Online	The large community of Tripolitans in the GTA organises social gatherings and charity initiatives both online and offline. Online, the community is organised around four Whatsapp groups: one group gathers the four organisers; the second gathers an advice committee of highly educated members, and the third hosts a large number of community members. The community come together in person during religious festivities and spontaneous gatherings including hikes, picnics and barbecues. The WhatsApp groups are also used to advertise charity projects destined for communities in Tripoli and elsewhere. ¹¹⁷
Canadian Cedars of Hope	London, Ontario	Established in August 2020 by a group of Lebanese-Canadians originally hailing from the Bekaa Valley and currently residing in London, Ontario in the aftermath of the devastating Beirut blast in 2019. During this period, individuals within the community who had long been engaged in charitable activities in the Bekaa Valley independently decided to formalise their efforts by establishing a registered organisation. Thus, from this shared experience, Canadian Cedars of Hope emerged as a volunteer-based organisation actively involved in multiple charitable projects both in the Bekaa Valley and London, Ontario. Collaborating with a dedicated group of volunteers in the Bekaa Valley, the organisation undertakes monetary projects, including collecting donations to purchase goods, as well as environmental initiatives such as tree planting and implementing solar panels. ¹¹⁸
The Strong Foundation	Toronto, Ontario	This is a Canadian Relief Campaign initiated in response to the devastating Beirut explosion. This foundation emerged from the experience of the Lebanon Strong humanitarian campaign of 2020, which was led by two Lebanese-Canadian activists seeking to aid communities impacted by the explosion. The success of this initial campaign led to the establishment of the Strong Foundation, dedicated to providing humanitarian assistance in crisis-affected regions. Presently, they have launched the Palestine Strong campaign, aiming at supporting struggling communities in Gaza. ¹¹⁹
LebNet	Canada, USA, Lebanon	a formal organisation that aims to promote Lebanon as a hub for innovation and development by supporting startups and entrepreneurs through international initiatives. The organisation also partners with academic and tech institutions in Lebanon, provides fundraising assistance, and helps to create demand for Lebanese technical expertise. ¹²⁰

¹¹⁵ KII 20

¹¹⁶ KII21

¹¹⁷ KII19

¹¹⁸ KIIs (24, 25)

¹¹⁹ KII 17

¹²⁰ KII 22

8.3 Annex 3: General Characteristics of Diaspora Engagement in Local Businesses Within Family Circles

8.3.1 Support of Family-Owned Local Businesses

Main Motives	Standard Practices	Success Factors	Risk Factors
<p>Support their immediate and wider families.</p> <p>Keep a connection with home/village.</p>	<p>Integrated Remittance: Business support is seen a regular part of remittances sent by diaspora members to family in Lebanon.</p> <p>Independent Decision-making: Recipients within family circles have autonomy in how they use the funds received and manage operations.</p> <p>Primarily Financial Contribution: Assistance typically involves financial aid for immediate needs or investments in education and small businesses.</p>	<p>Diaspora Availability of Capital: The financial resources accessible to the Lebanese diaspora in Canada enable substantial contribution into local businesses, providing crucial capital for growth and sustainability.</p>	<p>Operational Challenges: Differences in business practices, regulatory environments, and logistical challenges between diaspora members and family members may lead to operational inefficiencies or misunderstandings, impacting business sustainability.</p> <p>Political and Economic Instability: Fluctuations in Lebanon's political landscape or economic conditions can affect the stability of businesses supported by diaspora investments, posing risks to returns on investments.</p>

8.3.2 Emotional Investments in Real Estate Properties and Land

Main Motives	Standard Practices	Success Factors	Risk Factors
<p>Keep a tangible presence within home/village</p> <p>Establish a legacy for their kids</p> <p>Retirement plan</p> <p>establish small-scale tourism businesses</p>	<p>Partnership with family members: Partners at home contribute either financially or by managing within family circles received and manage operations</p> <p>Job Creation: family members or trusted third parties are often hired to take care of properties and land (e.g. cleaning, harvesting, costumer management)</p>	<p>Diaspora Availability of Capital: The financial resources accessible to the Lebanese diaspora in Canada enable substantial purchasing power in Lebanon.</p>	<p>Operational Challenges: Differences in business practices, regulatory environments, and logistical challenges between diaspora members and family members may lead to operational inefficiencies or misunderstandings, impacting business sustainability.</p> <p>Political and Economic Instability: Fluctuations in Lebanon's political landscape or economic conditions can affect the decision of buying properties and land.</p>

8.4 Annex 4: General Characteristics of Diaspora Support of Local Businesses Beyond Family Circles

Main Motives	Standard Practices	Success Factors	Risk Factors
<p>Support struggling business-owners or aspirant business-owners in their communities</p>	<p>Accompanied by technical advice: Diaspora members offer technical advice and mentorship to optimize business outcomes.</p> <p>Targeted support: Funds are directed towards tools, machinery, or business essentials to kick-start or expand enterprises.</p> <p>Local Partners: Mediation through family members, community organisers and close friends</p> <p>Accountability Expectations: Recipients are expected to report on fund usage and business progress, ensuring transparency and effective utilization.</p> <p>Improvement in Livelihoods: Support aims to visibly enhance living standards and economic stability over time.</p> <p>One-time Support: While recurrent, support is geared towards fostering self-sufficiency and economic independence.</p>	<p>Diaspora Availability of Capital: The financial resources accessible to the Lebanese diaspora in Canada enable substantial contribution into local businesses, providing crucial capital for growth and sustainability.</p> <p>Diaspora Business Know-how: Leveraging their diverse expertise and experience, diaspora members support Lebanese at home through targeted advice to grow successful business including strategic planning, and operational efficiencies and long-term planning</p>	<p>Operational Challenges: Differences in business practices, regulatory environments, and logistical challenges between diaspora members and local businesses may lead to operational inefficiencies or misunderstandings, impacting business sustainability.</p> <p>Political and Economic Instability: Fluctuations in Lebanon's political landscape or economic conditions can affect the stability of businesses supported by diaspora investments, posing risks to returns on investments.</p>

8.5 Annex 5: General Characteristics of Diaspora-Support of Small-Scale Charity Initiatives

Main Motives	Standard Practices	Success Factors	Risk Factors
<p>Shared sense of Responsibility</p> <p>Mistrust in local, national and international institutions</p> <p>Scepticism towards local institutions and NGOs</p> <p>Charity as a fundamental pillar of Islam</p>	<p>Small-Scale Impact: Charitable efforts are usually focused at the village, neighbourhood, or town level.</p> <p>Direct Link to Community: There is a direct connection between the diaspora members involved and the targeted community, such as their home village or town.</p> <p>Charity Databases: Diaspora groups collaborate with local community organisers who act as local partners to identify households in need and ensure they receive support.</p> <p>Local Partners: Community organisers, volunteer groups, municipalities.</p> <p>Mobilisation: Initiatives are led by local community organisers who have direct links with local volunteer groups on the ground.</p> <p>Social Media Mobilisation: Mobilisation is conducted through WhatsApp, Instagram, and Facebook Groups. For large projects or campaigns, dedicated Facebook or Instagram apps are created.</p> <p>Donations: Donations are primarily made by individuals using personal accounts.</p> <p>Implementation: Local partners, who are mostly community organisers, mobilise the diaspora to support projects at local level. NGOs are typically avoided due to a lack of trust.</p>	<p>Reputation and Trust: Initiatives are often mobilised by leaders or trusted community members, with donations collected online across the group.</p> <p>Constant Reporting from Local Partners: Local partners regularly post and share pictures and videos to show how donations have been spent.</p>	<p>Reach: Difficulty arises in reaching people in need who may not actively seek assistance or who might be excluded from local partner networks.</p> <p>Scams: There is a risk of individuals taking advantage or exploiting the support provided, leading to concerns about fraudulent activities.</p> <p>Capacity: While most initiatives rely on funding from the diaspora's savings and are coordinated by leaders within diaspora networks across all stages, this highlights a challenge in scaling up interventions due to limited capacity.</p>

8.6 Annex 6: General Characteristics of Diaspora-supported Humanitarian Campaigns

Main Motives	Standard Practices	Success Factors	Risk Factors
<p>Shared sense of Responsibility</p> <p>Mistrust in local, national and international institutions</p> <p>Scepticism towards national institutions and NGOs</p> <p>Charity as a fundamental pillar of Islam</p>	<p>Large-Scale Impact: Charitable efforts are usually focused at national or regional level.</p> <p>No Direct Link to Community: There is no direct connection between the diaspora members involved and the targeted community.</p> <p>Charity Databases: Diaspora groups collaborate with local community organisers who act as local partners to identify households in need and ensure they receive support.</p> <p>Local Partners: Community organisers, volunteer groups, municipalities.</p> <p>Mobilisation: Initiatives are led by community organisers across the country who have direct links with local volunteer groups on the ground.</p> <p>Social Media Mobilisation: Mobilisation is conducted through WhatsApp, Instagram, and Facebook Groups. For large projects or campaigns, dedicated Facebook or Instagram apps are created.</p> <p>Donations: Donations are primarily made by individuals using personal accounts.</p> <p>Implementation: The diaspora mobilises volunteers in their host-country (for collections and donations) and at home (for leading operations).</p>	<p>Reputation and Trust: Initiatives are often mobilised by leaders or trusted community members, with donations collected online across the group.</p> <p>Constant Reporting from Local Partners: Local partners regularly post and share pictures and videos to show how donations have been spent.</p>	<p>Capacity Building: While most initiatives rely on funding from the diaspora's savings and are coordinated by leaders within diaspora networks across all stages, this highlights a challenge in scaling up interventions due to limited capacity.</p>