



DEMAC

DIASPORA  
EMERGENCY ACTION  
& COORDINATION

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DIASPORA  
ORGANIZATIONS  
AND THEIR  
HUMANITARIAN  
RESPONSE IN  
MYANMAR

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**USAID**  
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REFUGEE  
COUNCIL

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# ABOUT DEMAC

The mission of DEMAC is two-fold:

- 1) to enable inclusive coordination and collaboration among diaspora organizations providing humanitarian assistance, and across diaspora organizations and institutional humanitarian actors, and
- 2) to facilitate higher levels of engagement and visibility for diaspora organizations in the humanitarian system.

The objective is to contribute to transforming the humanitarian eco-system by laying the groundwork for a deeper understanding of diasporas as humanitarian actor groups with different modus operandi for the implementation of aid in practice, identifying and opening potential spaces for engagement and cross-fertilization, and improving coordination between diaspora and institutional relief providers.

# DEMAC AIMS AT

01

Enhancing knowledge

between diasporas  
and humanitarian  
institutions

02

Increasing awareness

on diasporas'  
humanitarian  
interventions

03

Improving coordination

communication and  
coherence of  
humanitarian response

# WHY DIASPORA?

Work with diasporas has shown that diaspora organizations are multi-sectoral, fast responding actors who work transnationally, including in countries facing humanitarian crises. Having a connection with and understanding of their country of origin or heritage plays a vital role in humanitarian assistance where diaspora organizations often are part of the first response in the aftermath of a disaster.

Diaspora are also key actors when it comes to raising the alarm in times of crisis. The ease and frequency of communication between local communities and diaspora organizations means that they can be alerted in real-time, and their capacity to collect and disperse funds rapidly ensures that they are a key factor in unlocking the first responses in crisis settings. In hard-to-reach places where access may be an issue, diaspora organizations have a unique advantage due to their local connections and ties. They use their transnational position to respond to the growing demands for remote management and cross-border response in countries where international actors have a limited presence, and to advocate on behalf of crisis affected populations in the policy arenas of their countries and regions of residence.

Supporting diaspora as part of a broader humanitarian ecosystem to play a key role in humanitarian responses and provide vital support to communities in countries of origin contributes to the relevance, effectiveness, and sustainability of humanitarian responses. In light of their transnational identity and close local ties, it is also strongly linked to the localization agenda, one of the main commitments under the Grand Bargain. Localization aims to strengthen the resilience of local communities and to support local and national responders on the front line. UNOCHA has called furthermore, for an indispensable opening of the resource base of humanitarian action by integrating 'non-traditional actors' - such as diasporas - to enhance the effectiveness of the humanitarian response and render it interoperable.

Diaspora organizations are part of and play a central role in localization. Many can be considered front-line responders themselves, making direct and concrete contributions to emergency responses in their home countries. Others work closely with local authorities, local organizations and community groups, providing technical and financial support, playing a role in advocacy and linking local actors with additional sources of support.

Diaspora organizations are heterogeneous - they have different capacities, values and approaches and as part of a broader humanitarian community can play a valuable and agile role in humanitarian responses. However, assistance provided by diaspora organizations and the formal humanitarian actors often follow parallel tracks, resulting in a lack of mutual understanding and recognition, and thus a lack of coordination and collaboration that would be of benefit to the overall response.

# WHAT NOW?

Building on expertise gained since its inception in 2015, DEMAC is further consolidating itself as a permanent platform - a one-stop-shop - for enhancing mutual knowledge and coordination between diaspora humanitarian actors and the international humanitarian system.

DEMAC's work has been a key factor behind stronger representation and visibility of diaspora organizations in the humanitarian eco-system - a first and core example hereof being the coordination of joint messaging and participation of diasporas as a stakeholder group to the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul in 2016, which was a key factor to putting diaspora humanitarianism on the map.

DEMAC has also piloted concrete liaison structures between diaspora and institutional humanitarian actors towards improving operational coordination in specific crisis settings. Another core contribution to the role of diaspora humanitarianism has been continuous knowledge development: DEMAC has conducted a number of studies aiming to increase understanding of motivations and modus operandi of diaspora humanitarian engagement, replacing assumptions with evidence on diaspora contribution.

Building on these experiences and the past and present research, DEMAC will develop an operational framework for diaspora and humanitarian actors, to improve future responses to humanitarian emergencies. Through the development of a standardized approach for the international humanitarian system to assess and document the role and impact of diaspora in selected emergency responses, DEMAC will enhance the knowledge and awareness of the nature and significance of the diaspora followed by the facilitation of internal discussions on how the system could and should relate to and coordinate with diaspora emergency actors. Furthermore, DEMAC will use the documentation from selected diaspora emergency responses to engage with diaspora humanitarian actors to enhance the generation of lessons learned and self-reflections from diaspora-led emergency responses with a view to adjust their approach and discuss how to engage with the international humanitarian system.

DEMAC will develop guidelines, tools and resources in support of diaspora emergency engagement, with a view to remain prepared to support diaspora organizations' engagement in new emergency responses and facilitate coordination among responding diaspora organizations and between diaspora organizations and the humanitarian system.

Finally, DEMAC will enhance the knowledge among diaspora organizations about the humanitarian system to enhance probabilities of coordination between the two.

DEMAC is currently working with multiple emergency-prone focus countries, while at the same time remaining prepared to engage with and support diaspora from additional countries should a humanitarian crisis unfold in their country of origin.

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## Acronyms and abbreviations

DEMAC	Diaspora Emergency Action & Coordination
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
INGO	International Non-Government Organization
NGO	Non-Government Organization
NUG	National Unity Government
SAC	State Administrative Council (of Myanmar)
UN	United Nations

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**This real-time review is part of the Diaspora Emergency Action & Coordination initiative (DEMAC) “Research study on diaspora humanitarian response and engagement”.**

The review focuses on the period from November 2021 until January 2022, providing a snapshot of the humanitarian response of Myanmar diaspora organizations to the current crisis. The purpose of this real-time-review is to better understand diaspora activities supporting the humanitarian response to the crisis in Myanmar and border regions.

The real-time review was undertaken by a team of consultants from Alinea International, an international humanitarian consultancy, supported by a field researcher from Myanmar based on the border of Myanmar and Thailand. This study applies a mixed methods approach, analyzing quantitative and qualitative data from social media accounts, interviews and academic and grey literature.

The research team undertook an initial rapid review to map the structures and activities of 30 diaspora organizations involved in the response. The research team then conducted semi-structured interviews with 21 people representing diaspora organizations, international humanitarian organizations and people affected by the crisis. Social media posts from the Facebook accounts of 30 diaspora organizations were also monitored over the six-week period of the review.

Across the period of the real-time review, Myanmar diaspora organizations were actively engaged in the humanitarian response. They were fundraising, providing assistance and advocating to their country of residence governments. Their activities did not intersect with the broader international humanitarian response. While international humanitarian organizations were aware that diaspora organizations were engaged in the response, they were not aware of how the diaspora was organized, nor their activities in response to the crisis.<sup>1</sup>

In Myanmar and border areas, diaspora organizations coordinate with local operational partners such as community-based organizations and churches, identifying needs and channelling financial and other humanitarian assistance through them. There was almost no coordination between diaspora organizations and the international humanitarian response in Myanmar. Just one diaspora organization reported indirectly coordinating with an INGO.<sup>2</sup> International humanitarian actors have not mapped diaspora communities supporting the humanitarian response, a key entry point to establish coordination.

Most diaspora organizations have very informal accountability systems as compared to international humanitarian organizations. This is reflected in the size and nature of the diaspora organization. For smaller organizations, often a verbal or brief written confirmation that funds have been received by the local partner is considered sufficient, with reporting then given to the diaspora organization membership and donors at the next networking event.<sup>3</sup>

Myanmar has an extensive, active and committed diaspora. The type of support prioritized is independent of international aid categories of humanitarian assistance, human rights, protection or direct support for politics and civil disobedience. Some organizations interviewed for example have a particular focus on reporting human rights violations<sup>4</sup>, while also providing life-saving assistance and support to the civil disobedience movement. Diaspora organizations are keen to explore any additional opportunities, including humanitarian ones, to provide the necessary support to people in need. They are exhausted and depleted following years of attempting to meet critical needs for assistance.<sup>5</sup>

The international humanitarian community recognizes the unique value offered by diaspora organizations—their reach in areas inaccessible to international actors, access to real-time information and people, some of whom may move regularly<sup>6</sup>, and capacity to act informally and relatively quickly, unrestrained by formal bureaucracy. They have an ability to meet needs that are impossible for the international community to address.

Unsurprisingly, the key challenges for diaspora organizations are funding and resources. Many organizations operate on a voluntary basis<sup>7</sup>, necessarily limiting the time available from their members. Like international humanitarian organizations, diaspora organizations are also challenged by access. For diaspora organizations supporting the civil disobedience movement, providing support can be particularly dangerous, especially when using Hundi and communicating through underground networks.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Humanitarian Organization Interviews 1, 4, 5.

<sup>2</sup> Diaspora Organization Interview 8.

<sup>3</sup> Diaspora Organization Interview 6, 8, 10.

<sup>4</sup> Diaspora Organizations Interview 7 and 8.

<sup>5</sup> Diaspora Organization Interview 8, 9, 10.

<sup>6</sup> Humanitarian Organization Interview 2, 4, 5.

<sup>7</sup> Diaspora Organization Interview 7.

<sup>8</sup> New York Times (2021) *They Wait Hours to Withdraw Cash, but Most A.T.M.s Are Empty*. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/08/07/world/asia/myanmar-cash-coup.html>



## Recommendations

- 1. Protect the unique value of diaspora organizations.** Diaspora organizations have information, access and capabilities that international humanitarian organizations do not, often due to their existence outside of the formal international humanitarian system. Diaspora organizations can address important gaps in the humanitarian response. In order to protect this value, do not formalize broad diaspora organization engagement as part of the international humanitarian system.
- 2. Informally connect to progress mutual objectives of information, advocacy, access and inclusive assistance.** Build on the mutual desire for diaspora and international humanitarian organizations to strengthen engagement with each other, beginning with awareness of priorities, messaging and activities. This may help to strengthen the response through addressing gaps and duplication, and providing a cross-check on perspectives of the situation and needs.
- 3. Formally connect where it is safe to do so:**
  - a. Connecting the international with the local. Diaspora organizations are well connected with various communities and community organizations within Myanmar. They may be able to assist international organizations to identify which community organizations are increasingly capable of receiving international assistance, and which the international community may be interested in connecting with formally.
  - b. Draw on the UN's successful engagement and coordination with the private sector for disaster preparedness, response and recovery.<sup>9</sup> There are many similarities between the private sector and diaspora, in that they are keen to engage and will do so regardless of the international humanitarian system; they both offer unique value to the response and do not necessarily adhere to humanitarian principles.
  - c. Connecting the diaspora with the private sector: the private sector is increasingly engaged in international humanitarian assistance. It often has resources but may lack local connections and information.
- 4. Engage in mutually beneficial ways.** An important caveat for international humanitarian organizations when connecting with diaspora organizations. Diaspora organizations are often over-worked and under-resourced, usually seeking connections to raise funds and progress advocacy. It is important to respect expectations that any engagement will be mutually beneficial.
- 5. Be explicit about the impact of humanitarian principles.** International humanitarian organizations who aim to adhere to humanitarian principles may need to explain what this means for their ability to engage with diaspora organizations upfront. This will make it easier for international humanitarian organizations to determine how they might be able to engage.

<sup>9</sup> See for example the Connecting Business Initiative: <https://www.connectingbusiness.org/>

# 1. INTRODUCTION

Following the February 2021 military coup, Myanmar continues to be in a state of crisis. Insecurity has resulted in death, the destruction of property and forced the displacement of hundreds of thousands of people.<sup>10</sup> This is in addition to the 340,000 people who were already living in protracted displacement within Myanmar before February 2021<sup>11</sup>—a result of the insecurity faced by many people of Myanmar over decades. Covid-19 and an economic crisis have further exacerbated the impact of the insecurity.

The diaspora from Myanmar is actively supporting people inside Myanmar and in border areas who are in need of assistance. Their activities are largely in parallel and separate to the existing humanitarian architecture.

The purpose of this real-time-review is to better understand diaspora activities supporting the humanitarian response to the crisis in Myanmar and border regions. The research will be used to enhance the knowledge and awareness within the international humanitarian system in Myanmar about the significance and role played by the diaspora in order to learn where there are potential synergies between diaspora and the humanitarian response system.

It focuses on the period from November 2021 to January 2022, providing a snapshot of the humanitarian response of Myanmar diaspora organizations to the current crisis. The real-time review focused on the following:

- Profile of diaspora organizations supporting the response;
- Ways in which diaspora organizations are responding;
- Coordination amongst diaspora organizations, and with the international humanitarian response;
- Accountability to donors and recipients of assistance; and
- Gender considerations.

The findings of the real time review will be shared by DEMAC with humanitarian actors engaged in Myanmar, including diaspora organizations and local partners.

<sup>10</sup> Relief Web (2022) Myanmar Humanitarian Update 17 January 2022. Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/myanmar/myanmar-humanitarian-update-no-14-17-january-2022>

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

# 2. METHODOLOGY

The real time review was undertaken by a team of consultants from Alinea International, an international humanitarian consultancy, supported by a field researcher from Myanmar based on the border of Myanmar and Thailand.

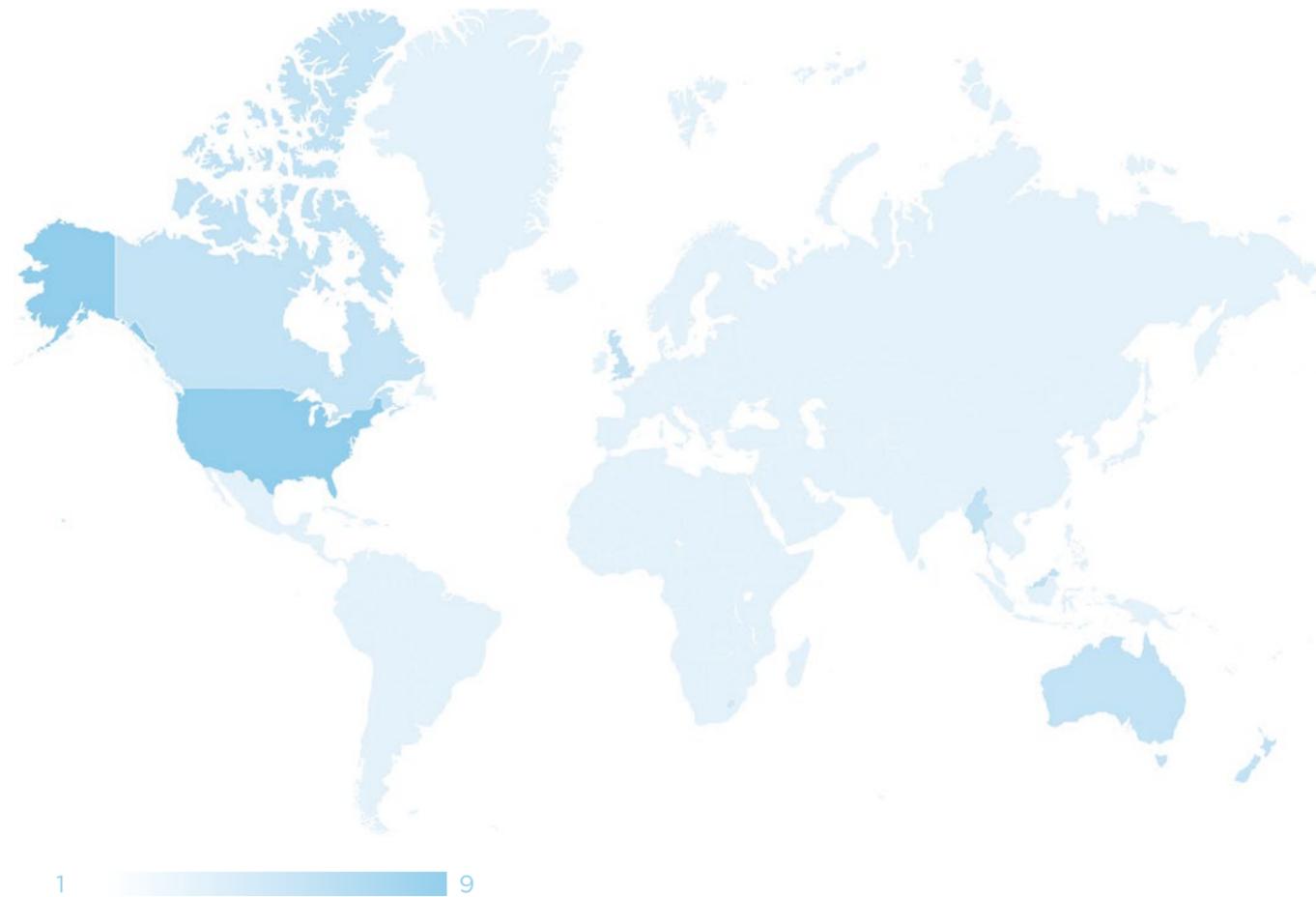
This study applies a mixed methods approach, analyzing quantitative and qualitative data from social media accounts, interviews and academic and grey literature. Due to the rapid nature of the review, a convenience sampling approach was used together with snowball sampling.

The research team interviewed 21 people representing diaspora organizations, international humanitarian organizations and people affected by the crisis. 25 diaspora organizations from 8 countries were invited to interview. Of those invited, 13 were able to participate, based in Australia, Thailand and the United States.

An additional 6 interviews were conducted with prominent international humanitarian organizations responding to the crisis in Myanmar, including 2 non-government organizations, 3 United Nations agencies and a donor. 2 community organizations in Myanmar or border areas were also interviewed.

Social media posts from the Facebook accounts of 30 diaspora organizations were monitored over the six-week period. Facebook was selected due to its popularity with individuals in Myanmar and diaspora communities; 94% of social media usage in Myanmar is via Facebook.<sup>12</sup> The posts were analyzed by themes of advocacy, fundraising, coordination and gender considerations. Figure 1 below displays the geographic spread of the social media accounts monitored, and Table 1 below displays the number of interviews conducted and the location of interviewees.

<sup>12</sup> StatCounter Global Stats (2022) Social Media Stats Myanmar | Statcounter Global Stats. Available at: <https://gs.statcounter.com/social-media-stats/all/myanmar> and Diaspora Organization Interview 7, 10.



**Figure 1: Location of social media accounts monitored**

Country	Diaspora Organization Social Media Accounts Monitored	Diaspora Organizations Interviewed	Community Organizations Interviewed
USA	9	1	
Canada	3		
UK	2		
New Zealand	2		
Singapore	3		
Thailand	3	8	
Malaysia	2		
South Korea	1		
Switzerland	1		
Australia	3	4	
Netherlands	1		
Myanmar or border areas			2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>2</b>

**Table 1: Interviewees and locations**

### Limitations

The scope and timing of the real time review necessarily limited the number of organizations and stakeholders who could be engaged. For example, 11 of the diaspora organizations invited to interview by the research team indicated that they were busy responding to the crisis and therefore unable to participate in the study.

The review was also limited by sensitivities and risks implicit in involvement in the ongoing response, and interviewees were understandably careful to avoid identifying details of their networks and operational abilities. Given this sensitivity, the team was conscientious about confidentiality and anonymizing of responses and the report does not identify the organizations interviewed.

Travel restrictions due to COVID-19 and security considerations meant the research team was unable to conduct face-to-face interviews in Myanmar, US and Australia. Some face-to-face interviews with diaspora organizations, their partners and the affected population in Thailand and in border areas within Myanmar were conducted.



# 3. MYANMAR CONTEXT

**In February 2021, the Myanmar military, the Tatmadaw, seized power through brutally repressing the population<sup>13</sup>, resulting in a “deep human rights, humanitarian, and economic crisis”<sup>14</sup>.** The crisis is compounded by deepening economic recession, the global pandemic, health system collapse, and surging poverty and food insecurity.

As of 6 December 2021, this crisis had already displaced 284,700 people across Myanmar. A further 25,000<sup>15</sup> refugees have been displaced to neighboring countries. The UN has documented over 1,000 civilians killed and 8,000 arbitrarily detained. Many have been tortured—including children.<sup>16</sup>

**The current crisis occurs in the context of a country which has long endured intercommunal violence<sup>17</sup> and decades of repressive military rule<sup>18</sup>** before the brief period of democratic transition from 2015. The previous military government defined eight major ethnic groups and 135 national races, declaring who belongs in Myanmar, and who does not (excluding the Rohingya group, and other groups such as Tamils and Gurkhas, as citizens).<sup>19</sup> In 2017, the UN reported that Myanmar security forces conducted “clearance operations”, terrorizing the Rohingya population through mass killings, rape and other forms of sexual violence, including children.<sup>20</sup> Before the 2021 crisis even began, 980,000 refugees and asylum seekers from Myanmar, predominately Rohingya, had fled to neighboring countries.<sup>21</sup>

**A militarized Myanmar is a threat for everyone, but it is a particular threat to women’s rights, empowerment, and safety.<sup>22</sup>** Before the military seizure of power, advocates were beginning to embed women’s rights and empowerment into the political, economic, and cultural discourse. Women accounted for 17 percent of elected parliamentarians in the November 2020 elections and Myanmar had a female head of state.<sup>23</sup> Now almost every official appointed to replace the deposed government is male. Women protesters have faced targeted violence by security forces, and are “acutely vulnerable to sexual and gender-based violence in militarized and conflict-prone areas of northern Myanmar”.<sup>24</sup>

In response to the military seizure of power, Myanmar’s civil servants have engaged in a resistance movement that is “globally unprecedented in intensity and scale”.<sup>25</sup> The movement is referred to as the civil disobedience movement, whereby civil servants are risking their lives by refusing to work.<sup>26</sup> The movement is spearheaded by the civil and public service, including railroad and harbor workers, plus health workers, academics and teachers.<sup>27</sup> As of April 2021, it was estimated that 50% of teachers were already participating in the civil disobedience movement.<sup>28</sup>

**During 2021 Myanmar also experienced a third-wave of COVID-19 and is at significant risk of a fourth wave in 2022.<sup>29</sup>** Almost half the Myanmar population now lives in poverty, “wiping out gains made since 2005”.<sup>30</sup> More than 3.2 million people (15 per cent) of the formal work force have lost their jobs between the end of 2019 and July 2021, while millions of others have seen their working hours reduced.<sup>31</sup> Women have been disproportionately impacted due in particular to the impact on the garment industry, which employs mostly young women.<sup>32</sup>

Monsoon floods in July and August 2021 hit communities already in need of humanitarian assistance in various parts of the country, resulting in loss of crops and increased food insecurity. This multidimensional humanitarian crisis is now affecting the whole country, posing grave protection risks for civilians, limiting access to services and deepening food insecurity.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>13</sup> International Crisis Group (2021) ‘The Deadly Stalemate in Post-coup Myanmar’. Available at: <https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-east-asia/myanmar/b170-deadly-stalemate-post-coup-myanmar>

<sup>14</sup> Andrews, T (2021) UN Special Rapporteur on human rights in Myanmar. Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=27696&LangID=E>

<sup>15</sup> UNHCR (2021) Myanmar Emergency Update as of 1 December 2021. Available at: <https://reporting.unhcr.org/document/1016>

<sup>16</sup> Andrews, T (2021) UN Special Rapporteur on human rights in Myanmar. Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=27696&LangID=E>

<sup>17</sup> UN HRC (2018) Report of the Independent International Fact-Finding mission on Myanmar. Available at: [https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/FFM-Myanmar/A\\_HRC\\_39\\_64.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/FFM-Myanmar/A_HRC_39_64.pdf)

<sup>18</sup> Council on Foreign Relations (2021) Myanmar’s Troubled History: Coups, Military Rule, and Ethnic Conflict. Available at: <https://www.cfr.org/background/myanmar-history-coup-military-rule-ethnic-conflict-rohingya>

<sup>19</sup> UN HRC (2018) Report of the Independent International Fact-Finding mission on Myanmar. Available at: [https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/FFM-Myanmar/A\\_HRC\\_39\\_64.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/FFM-Myanmar/A_HRC_39_64.pdf)

<sup>20</sup> UN Special Rapporteur on human rights in Myanmar, Thomas Andrews, October 2021, available: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=27696&LangID=E>

<sup>21</sup> UNHCR (2021) Myanmar Emergency Update as of 1 December 2021. Available at: <https://reporting.unhcr.org/document/1016>

<sup>22</sup> Foreign Policy (2021) ‘Myanmar’s Coup is Devastating for Women’. Available at: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/03/23/myanmar-coup-women-human-rights-violence-military/>

<sup>23</sup> The Diplomat (2021) ‘Myanmar’s Coup Has Put Women in Harm’s Way’. Available at: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/03/23/myanmar-coup-women-human-rights-violence-military/>

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Dreschler, W (2021) New development: Myanmar’s civil service-Responsible disobedience during the 2021 military coup, Public Money & Management, 41(1), pp.1-4.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> UN OCHA (2022) Global Humanitarian Overview 2022 Myanmar Available at: <https://gho.unocha.org/myanmar>

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

**During the 6-week period of this review, at least 38 people<sup>34</sup> were killed in what was described by the UN as a massacre by the Tatmadaw. The UN is expecting the situation to worsen substantially in 2022, due to ongoing violence, COVID-19 and the economic crisis.** It has estimated 14.4 million people will be in need of assistance in Myanmar, a 14-fold increase on the 1 million people estimated to require assistance before the coup.<sup>35</sup> Despite this likely deterioration, experts report international attention is insufficient, and waning.<sup>36</sup>

“Many, I dare say most in Myanmar, have come to believe that the world and this body, do not care. Over the last several months they have experienced a steep downward trajectory of conditions, including increased human rights violations, and attacks by the military junta while, at the same time, they have witnessed a grossly disproportionate response by the international community.”<sup>37</sup>

<sup>34</sup> ABC News (2021) ‘Women and Children among dozens reported killed in Myanmar Christmas Eve massacre’ Available at: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-12-26/report-women-children-among-dozens-killed-in-myanmar/100725862>

<sup>35</sup> UN OCHA (2022) Global Humanitarian Overview 2022 Myanmar. Available at: <https://gho.unocha.org/myanmar>

<sup>36</sup> International Crisis Group (2021) ‘The Deadly Stalemate in Post-coup Myanmar’. Available at: <https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-east-asia/myanmar/b170-deadly-stalemate-post-coup-myanmar>

<sup>37</sup> Andrews, T (2021) UN Special Rapporteur on human rights in Myanmar. Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=27696&LangID=E>



# 4. THE MYANMAR DIASPORA

From the time of Myanmar's independence in 1948 and the resulting postcolonial civil war, the country has experienced significant waves of population displacements.<sup>38</sup> Crackdowns on pro-democracy movements in the post-1988 period forced many dissenters into exile, and increased levels of poverty throughout the country in the last thirty years have forced hundreds of thousands of people to seek economic opportunities in neighboring countries and further abroad.<sup>39</sup>

Broadly, there are three key types of migration from Myanmar: (1) forced displacements of uprooted religious minorities and ethnic groups escaping conflict areas, (2) Burmese elites seeking more secure political environments abroad and (3) forced or voluntary migration of Burmese people seeking educational and economic opportunities overseas.<sup>40</sup> As of 2021, over 2 million Myanmar nationals have migrated internationally, primarily to Thailand, Malaysia, the United Kingdom, and Japan.<sup>41</sup> Close to 2 million Myanmar nationals live in neighboring Thailand, the largest destination for Burmese migrants.<sup>42</sup> The top five countries hosting Myanmar diaspora are displayed in Table 2.

Country	Total Diaspora (approximate)
Thailand	2,000,000
Malaysia	500,000
Singapore	200,000
Bangladesh	200,000
Saudi Arabia	200,000

**Table 2: Top 5 countries for Myanmar diaspora**

Generally, diaspora in neighboring countries such as Thailand and Singapore are concentrated in unskilled labor sectors such as agriculture, fishing, manufacturing, and domestic work.<sup>43</sup> In recent years however, increasing numbers of Myanmar diaspora have settled into professional roles in Australia, the United States, and the UK. Over the last two decades, the number of Myanmar nationals in the US has grown exponentially from 17,000 in 2000 to approximately 189,000 in 2019.<sup>44</sup> As of the 2016 Australian government Census, there are 32,655 Myanmar-born people living in Australia, which represents an increase of 50.1% over the past five years.<sup>45</sup>

Some Myanmar diaspora communities have organized into groups, the more formal of which this report refers to as diaspora organizations. The size of diaspora organizations range from tiny, church-based groups of less than thirty members, to larger groups with more than three thousand members, who are part of wider diaspora networks and federations.<sup>46</sup> Membership is usually organized by ethnicity, however the review engaged with pan-ethnic groups and those with a broader membership base.<sup>47</sup> Of the organizations interviewed, men and women were evenly represented in membership.<sup>48</sup> Most diaspora organizations are led by volunteers, meaning time and resources are limited.

<sup>38</sup>Egretau, R (2012). Burma in Diaspora: A Preliminary Research Note on the Politics of Burmese Diasporic Communities in Asia, Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs, 31(2).

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Myanmar Department of Population (2016). The 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census: Thematic Report on Migration and Urbanization, Census Report Volume 4-D. Available at: [https://lac.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Migration\\_insidepages\\_A4\\_preview\\_18May.pdf](https://lac.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Migration_insidepages_A4_preview_18May.pdf)

<sup>42</sup> Chantavanich, S and Vungsiriphisal, P (2018) Myanmar Migrants to Thailand: Economic Analysis and Implications for the Development of Myanmar. Available at: [https://www.ide.go.jp/library/English/Publish/Reports/Brc/pdf/10\\_06.pdf](https://www.ide.go.jp/library/English/Publish/Reports/Brc/pdf/10_06.pdf)

<sup>43</sup> Ma, A (2017) Labor Migration from Myanmar: Remittances, Reforms, and Challenges. Available at: <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/labor-migration-myanmar-remittances-reforms-and-challenges>

<sup>44</sup> Pew Research Centre (2021) Burmese in the U.S. Fact Sheet. Available at: <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/fact-sheet/asian-americans-burmese-in-the-u-s/>

<sup>45</sup> Department of Home Affairs (2016) Myanmar-born Community Information Summary. Available at: <https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/mca/files/2016-cis-myanmar.PDF>

<sup>46</sup> Diaspora Organization Interviews 1-10.

<sup>47</sup> Diaspora Organization Interviews 1-10.

<sup>48</sup> Diaspora Organization Interview 9, 10.

Some diaspora organizations focus on a particular purpose, such as the promotion and realization of democracy in Myanmar; increasing women's participation in Myanmar society; and shared religious affiliation.

Examples of the types of activities that diaspora organizations engage in include:

- Fundraising for emergency response activities, such as purchasing and distributing food, cooking utensils, medical supplies, or hygiene kits.<sup>49</sup>
- Education projects, such as building schools, particularly in displacement and refugee camps.<sup>50</sup>
- Advocating for democracy in Myanmar.<sup>51</sup>
- Documentation and reporting of human rights abuses.<sup>52</sup>
- Settlement assistance in the country of residence and community development projects for those who have newly arrived from Myanmar, such as English classes, homework classes, or aged care.<sup>53</sup>

The types and percentages of core activities performed by the 13 diaspora organizations interviewed through this rapid review is given in Figure 2.

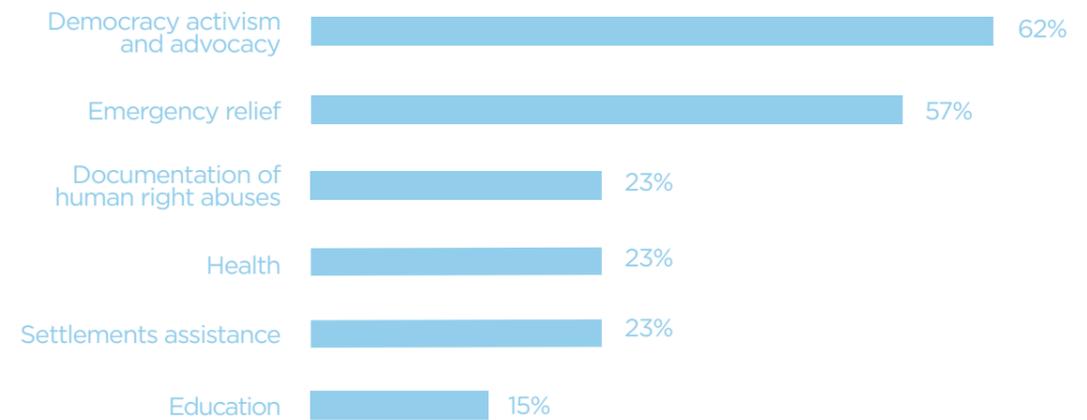
<sup>49</sup> Diaspora Organization Interview 6, 7, 8, 10.

<sup>50</sup> Diaspora Organization Interview 6.

<sup>51</sup> Diaspora Organization Interview 9.

<sup>52</sup> Diaspora Organization Interview 7, 12, 13.

<sup>53</sup> Diaspora Organization Interview 10.



**Figure 2: Core activities of 13 diaspora organizations interviewed by percentage**

One diaspora organization interviewed, for example, has conducted the following activities in Karen State<sup>54</sup>:

- Provision of emergency supplies such as food and medicine to IDPs
- Financial support for individuals participating in the CDM
- Provision of shelter and safehouses for democracy activists

<sup>54</sup> Diaspora Organization Interview 14.



# 5. DIASPORA RESPONSE TO THE MYANMAR CRISIS

Across the period of the real-time review, Myanmar diaspora organizations were actively engaged in the humanitarian response. They were fundraising, providing assistance and advocating to their host governments. Their activities did not intersect with the broader international humanitarian response.

While the international humanitarian organizations consulted for this review were aware that diaspora organizations were engaged in the response, their understanding did not extend to specific details of how the diaspora was organized, nor its activities in response to the crisis.<sup>55</sup> Tables 3, 4, and 5 below provide the typology of the 13 diaspora organizations interviewed for this real-time review.

Year of formation	% of Diaspora Organizations Interviewed	Number of Members	% of Diaspora Organizations Interviewed	Nature of Organization	% of Diaspora Organizations Interviewed
Prior to 2000	23%	0-100	62%	Informal, volunteer-run	38%
2000-2020	62%	100-500	23%	Formal, with limited paid staff	23%
Post-military seizure of power	15%	500+	15%	Registered charitable organization	38%

Tables 3, 4, and 5: Typology of the 13 diaspora organizations interviewed

<sup>55</sup> Humanitarian Organization Interviews 1, 4, 5.

## 5.1. Fundraising

All diaspora organizations interviewed were actively fundraising. The primary mechanisms for fundraising were community events and social media. Community events included dinners and religious services, where church collection plate takings were donated to the response.<sup>56</sup> Many of the diaspora organizations monitored had promoted online fundraising campaigns through Facebook. Across the 30 organizations monitored on social media, a total of 16 fundraising campaigns were being promoted through Facebook.

Fundraising campaigns were linked to specific incidents or causes. For example, many diaspora groups organized fundraising campaigns to support those affected by the Kayah State massacre on Christmas eve in the aftermath of the attack. These fundraising campaigns often used the GlobalGiving and DonorBox platforms.<sup>57</sup> Based on the interviews, it is estimated that diaspora organizations have fundraised over 3 million USD for the crisis. Diaspora organizations expressed an interest in institutional donor grants, however none had reported being successful in attaining funding so far.

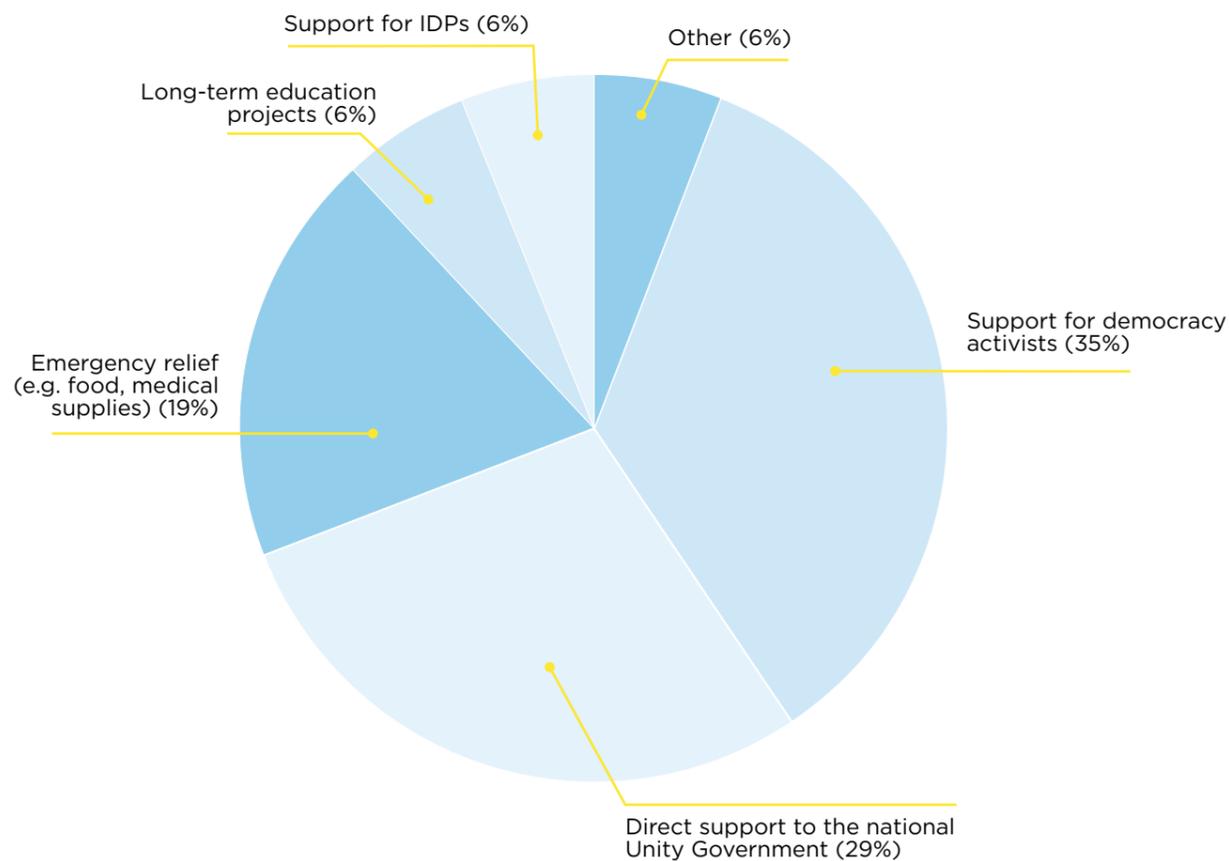
“Lack of consistent support is the main challenge due to insufficient funds. We tried to reach out to the UN and INGOs for funding opportunities, but it is hard to comply with INGO and UN requirements, and we are not eligible since we are not a registered organization.”<sup>58</sup>

<sup>56</sup> Diaspora Organization Interview 6, 10.

<sup>57</sup> Social Media Monitoring Organization 4, 6.

<sup>58</sup> Diaspora Organization Interview 14.

Examples of the purpose of fundraising campaigns include funds for emergency relief for people displaced by the crisis, online learning for Myanmar youth, financial support for women activists, and funding for specific activist movements such as the civil disobedience movement. The types of fundraising campaigns promoted on Facebook through social media monitoring of 30 diaspora organizations are displayed below in Figure 3. For example, one organization, the Burmese American Community Institute, launched a fundraising campaign via Facebook to provide internet access to students in Myanmar to support online learning. The campaign raised funds for internet fees for 400 students through the GlobalGiving platform.<sup>59</sup>



**Figure 3: Fundraising on Social Media**

<sup>59</sup> [https://www.globalgiving.org/projects/internetformyanmar/?fbclid=IwAR05iIFbVYOJLFntMnnlh3xYOTMIOINVEeB-v3sYZz2W3p0xuYGHINP8SU\\_o](https://www.globalgiving.org/projects/internetformyanmar/?fbclid=IwAR05iIFbVYOJLFntMnnlh3xYOTMIOINVEeB-v3sYZz2W3p0xuYGHINP8SU_o)

## 5.2. Determining need and allocating resources

The process for selecting who would receive assistance varied according to the size and capacity of the diaspora organization. Smaller organizations tended to directly support their family groups.<sup>60</sup> Larger organizations responded to needs identified by local partners<sup>61</sup>, although these also often had ethnic or geographic ties. For pan-ethnic diaspora organizations with membership of broader networks or federations, a coordinated process was often held to prioritize assistance.<sup>62</sup> Areas of need were discussed amongst network or federation members at regular coordination meetings, and funds were then pooled collectively and directed to the people or groups identified in the meetings.<sup>63</sup> Diaspora organizations rarely used formal INGO and UN reports to determine needs. Some diaspora working in the cross-border areas of Myanmar reported communication with UNHCR in a limited capacity.

## 5.3. Transferring funds and distributing assistance

The diaspora organizations consulted and monitored online are supporting people inside Myanmar who have fled to jungle areas, as well as border regions in Thailand and India. Once funds are raised, diaspora organizations tended to transfer funds to Myanmar and border regions to purchase food, medical supplies and essential non-food items. One larger diaspora organization for example, has been able to:

- Establish and maintain 25 health clinics, mobile when necessary
- Employ 50 health care experts
- Provide medical supplies to the health clinics
- Employ 100 teachers to provide informal education
- Establish safe houses to protect network members.

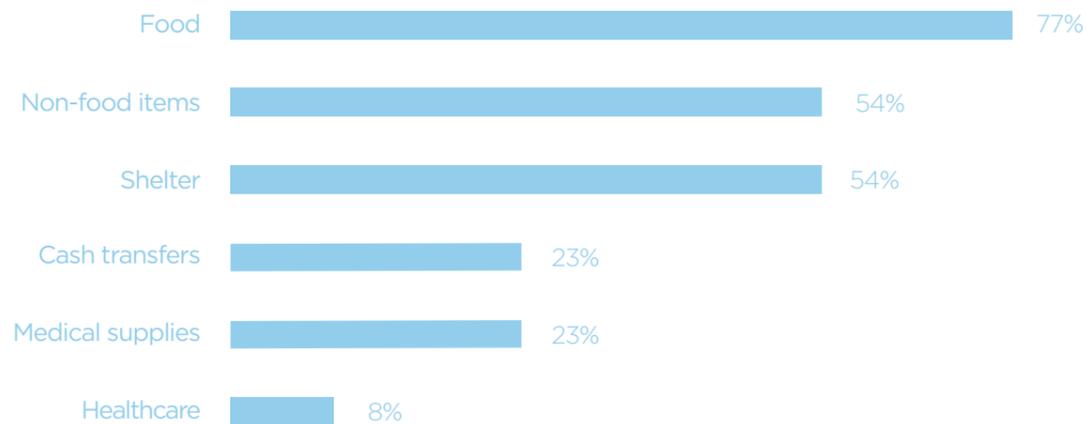
Figure 5 on the other page displays the percentage of diaspora organizations interviewed providing types of humanitarian assistance.

<sup>60</sup> Diaspora Organization Interview 6, 8, 10.

<sup>61</sup> Diaspora Organization Interview 10.

<sup>62</sup> Diaspora Organization Interview 7, 9.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.



**Figure 5: Percentage of 13 diaspora organizations interviewed by type of humanitarian activities**

Funds were generally transferred to local partners, connections and family members. Goods were purchased through the local markets and distributed by partners to communities in need.<sup>64</sup> There was no evidence of goods being sourced through humanitarian organizations.

Diaspora organizations faced significant challenges in transferring money to Myanmar. Banks have been shuttered due to striking workers participating in the civil disobedience movement.<sup>65</sup> Diaspora organizations reported using innovative methods, such as the Hundi system to transfer money to Myanmar.<sup>66</sup> This is a funds transfer system using promissory notes or a bill of exchange which is commonly used in South Asia.<sup>67</sup> Figure 6 shows indicative areas within Myanmar receiving humanitarian assistance from diaspora organizations based on interviews and groups monitored on social media through this real-time review. Areas receiving 'high' or 'low' levels of assistance reflect the nature and structure of the organizations engaged through this real-time review. For example, as many organizations interviewed were Chin diaspora groups, Chin State received higher levels of assistance than other regions.

<sup>64</sup> Diaspora Organization Interview 7, 8.

<sup>65</sup> The Diplomat (2021) Life in Hiding: Myanmar's Civil Disobedience Movement. Available at: <https://thediplomat.com/2021/06/life-in-hiding-myanmars-civil-disobedience-movement/>

<sup>66</sup> Diaspora Organization Interview 6, 7, 9, 10.

<sup>67</sup> Thompson, R (2019). "Underground banking" and Myanmar's changing hundi system, Journal of Money Laundering Control, 22(2).



Low High

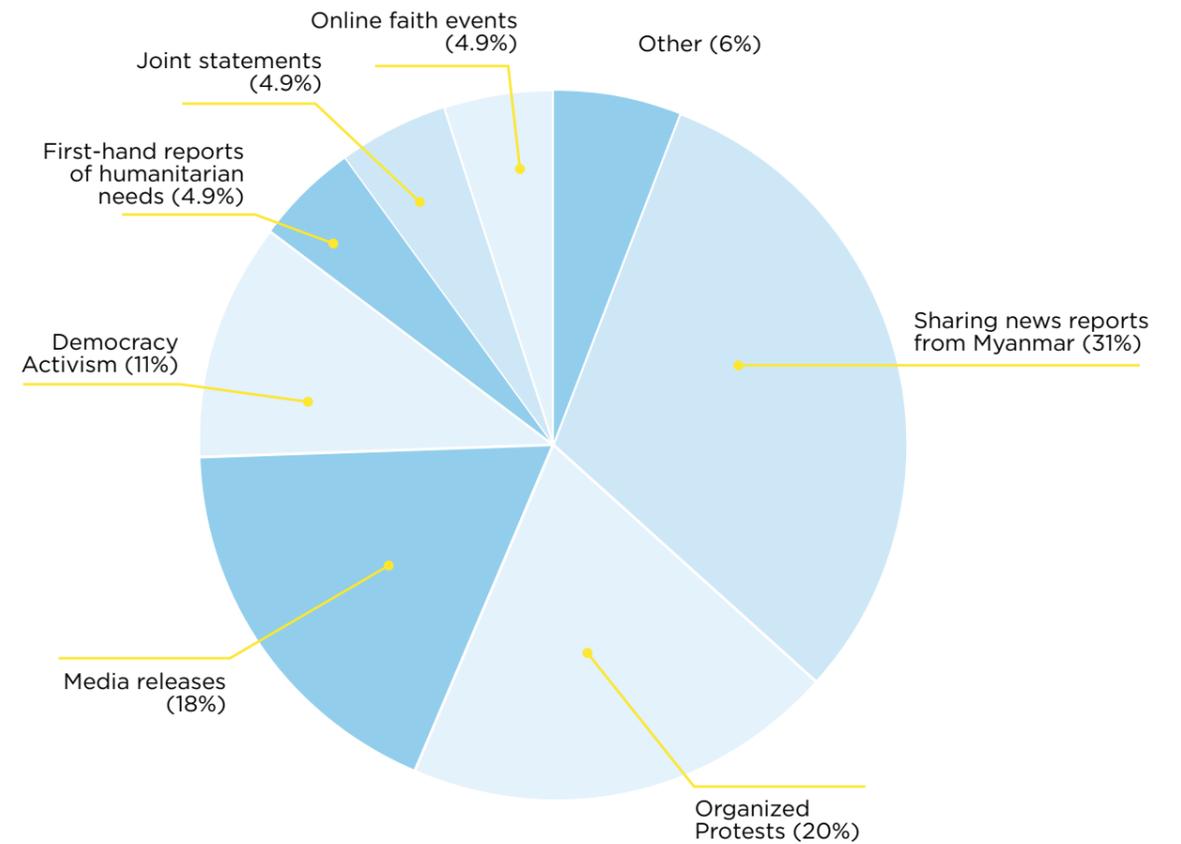
**Figure 6: Indicative areas within Myanmar receiving assistance from diaspora organizations engaged through this Real-Time Review**

#### 5.4. Advocacy

Diaspora organizations have advocated for adherence to human rights, increased international attention, and raised awareness of atrocities both in person and online. They have engaged various levels of their country of residence governments. For example, US-based diaspora organizations have lobbied the United States Congress to take action through penning an open letter.<sup>68</sup> Australian-based diaspora have similarly written letters to and sought opportunities to meet with members of parliament to advocate in person.<sup>69</sup> At least one government official reported the value of this advocacy and information.<sup>70</sup>

Social media, specifically Facebook, was another key avenue for advocacy. Online social media monitoring found that the majority of diaspora organizations were using Facebook for advocacy efforts. Forms of advocacy through Facebook include fortnightly video newsletters<sup>71</sup>, sharing first-person accounts of attacks on local communities and villages, media reports of human rights abuses in Myanmar, and relaying reports of human rights violations from diaspora organization connections in-country. The types of advocacy found through social media monitoring are displayed in Figure 7.

Online advocacy was largely along ethnic and geographic lines, where diaspora organizations advocated for communities where they have ethnic or familial ties. A notable exception was advocacy in the aftermath of the massacre in December. Findings from social media monitoring indicated that many diaspora organizations monitored were sharing and amplifying media reports of the attack, regardless of ethnic or familial connection to Kayah State where the massacre occurred. As many diaspora organizations on Facebook regularly shared media reports from Myanmar, it seems that the high-profile nature of the massacre, and its wide coverage in the media had contributed to diaspora groups sharing those reports. As displayed below in Figure 8, social media posts increased in the weeks leading up to and after the massacre. News reports refer to those shared by media organizations, whereas media releases refer to those produced by diaspora organizations in response to specific incidents or events in Myanmar.



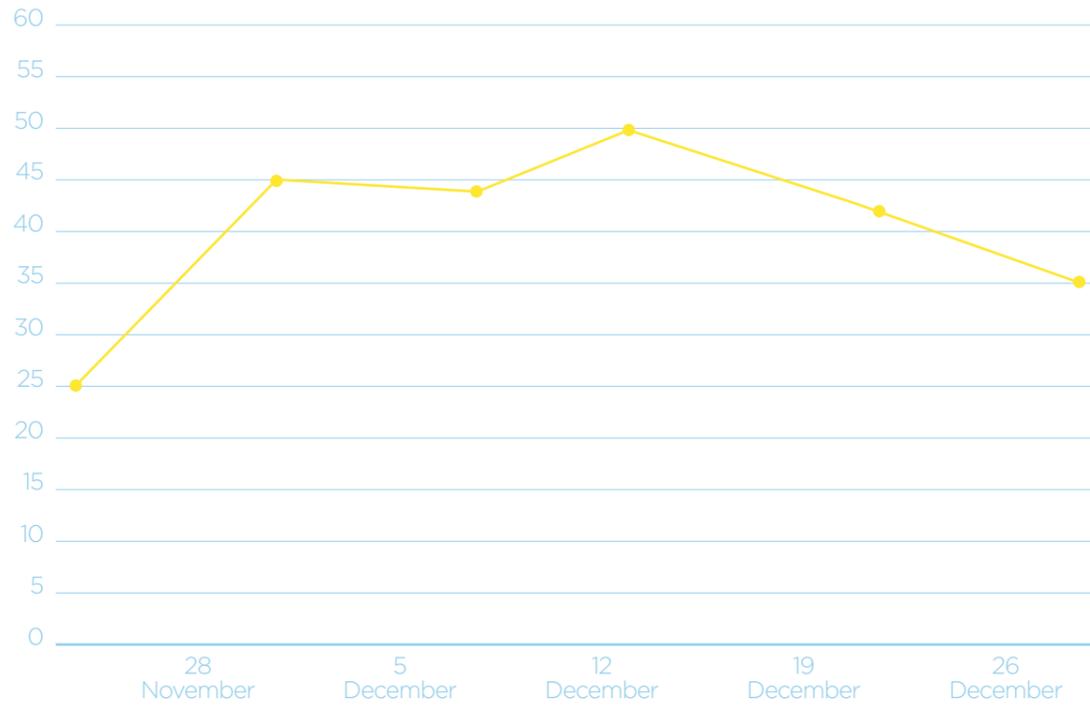
**Figure 7: Advocacy on Social Media - Percentage of Posts by Theme**

<sup>68</sup> Humanitarian Organization Interview 5.

<sup>69</sup> Diaspora Organization Interview 8, 10.

<sup>70</sup> Humanitarian Organization Interview 5.

<sup>71</sup> Diaspora Organization Interview 8.



**Figure 8: Number of Facebook Posts Per Week – From 25/11/2021 to 06/01/2022**

### 5.5 Communications

Diaspora organizations also faced challenges communicating with people in Myanmar to determine need. Facebook Messenger has been the most popular form of communication with communities and community-based organizations inside Myanmar. However, given communications are monitored, and communicating the location and identities of some people can place them in danger, some diaspora organizations have switched to communicating via platforms considered to be more secure such as Signal and Telegram.<sup>72</sup>

<sup>72</sup> Diaspora Organization Interview 9.



# 6. COORDINATION

## 6.1. Coordination with local partners

In Myanmar and border areas, diaspora organizations coordinate with local operational partners such as registered and unregistered community-based organizations and churches, identifying needs and channeling financial and other humanitarian assistance through them. Often these partnerships are formed through personal connections, previous visits to Myanmar, word of mouth or mutual contacts on social media<sup>73</sup>, and have been in place prior to the military seizure of power. Local partners were identified as critical to reaching affected communities in Myanmar.

## 6.2. Coordination between diaspora organizations

Coordination between diaspora organizations is primarily along ethnic lines.<sup>74</sup> Even significant global coordination to advocate for common causes through social media tended to be along ethnic lines.<sup>75</sup>

While smaller diaspora organizations had limited global networks, all expressed a desire to coordinate, including with diaspora groups with different ethnic and geographical ties to Myanmar.<sup>76</sup> Some of the larger groups were highly coordinated globally. One of the organizations interviewed functions as a formal research institution and provides common messaging and information across its network.<sup>77</sup>

Diaspora organizations, both small and large, have coordinated across ethnicities where large crises have occurred or where crises impacted a number of ethnic groups.<sup>78</sup> For example, one diaspora organization reported coordinating in recent years with diaspora groups with familial ties to Thantlang in the aftermath of a natural disaster.<sup>79</sup> This included raising and channeling funds to diaspora groups providing direct humanitarian assistance.

There was limited evidence of coordinated fundraising, with the exception of 122 diaspora organizations which ran coordinated fundraisers on Facebook to support the democratically elected government, the Committee Representing Pyidaungu Hlutta.<sup>80</sup> Larger diaspora organizations have coordinated across ethnicities where they are part of established pan-ethnic networks. Perhaps surprisingly, social media posts indicate that one diaspora organization from Myanmar coordinated with diaspora organizations from Afghanistan—learning from each other’s approaches to advocacy and fundraising.<sup>81</sup>

<sup>73</sup> Diaspora Organization Interview 6, 8, 11.

<sup>74</sup> Diaspora Organization Interview 6, 7, 9.

<sup>75</sup> Social Media Monitoring Organizations 1-30.

<sup>76</sup> Diaspora Organization Interview 10.

<sup>77</sup> Diaspora Organization Interview 7, 8.

<sup>78</sup> Diaspora Organization Interview 8.

<sup>79</sup> Diaspora Organization Interview 8.

<sup>80</sup> See reference to the fundraisers here: [https://ofp.crphmyanmar.org/?fbclid=IwAR3RzWzWdJoFnoTf\\_718hlaG5\\_rQkvySIs-v6C9c4nF6w1X5Bzx0sQfJS6Po](https://ofp.crphmyanmar.org/?fbclid=IwAR3RzWzWdJoFnoTf_718hlaG5_rQkvySIs-v6C9c4nF6w1X5Bzx0sQfJS6Po)

<sup>81</sup> Social Media Monitoring Organization 1.

### 6.3. Coordination with the international humanitarian response and potential benefits

There was almost no coordination between diaspora organizations and the international humanitarian response in Myanmar. Just one diaspora organization reported indirectly coordinating with an INGO.<sup>82</sup> International humanitarian actors have not mapped diaspora communities supporting the humanitarian response, a key entry point to establish coordination.

Diaspora groups expressed a clear desire to work more formally with the international humanitarian system. They identified potential benefits of greater coordination for international actors, including connections to individuals and communities on the ground in Myanmar<sup>83</sup>, and information sharing for access to real-time knowledge of the situation on the ground in Myanmar, helping to ensure that assistance reaches the most vulnerable. None of the diaspora organizations located internationally reported using needs assessments or security reports from humanitarian organizations.

However, a couple of the diaspora groups working in the border areas mentioned infrequent communication with UNHCR for information sharing purposes. Diaspora organizations identified a desire to coordinate to improve their access to larger scale logistics and resources, and to strengthen advocacy – diaspora organizations were concerned about a lack of news coverage of the crisis in Myanmar, and believed that humanitarian actors could assist in raising the profile of the situation.<sup>84</sup> The interviews found that humanitarian organizations are interested in increased coordination with diaspora, however concerns around diaspora organizations' accountability mechanisms and adherence to humanitarian principles remained as barriers to coordination.

<sup>82</sup> Diaspora Organization Interview 8.

<sup>83</sup> Diaspora Organization Interview 7, 10.

<sup>84</sup> Diaspora Organization Interview 10.

### 6.4. Challenges to coordination

Four key challenges to increased coordination were identified:

1. Diaspora organizations in countries bordering Myanmar were required to keep a low profile to maintain greater freedom of operations through compliance with host government regulations.<sup>85</sup> This restricts their ability to formally communicate and coordinate.
2. Diaspora organizations often have access to sensitive information which could lead to harm if shared with the wrong people.<sup>86</sup> Sharing this type of information is only possible with great trust.
3. Diaspora organizations do not classify their assistance in terms of international humanitarian principles.<sup>87</sup> While this allows diaspora organizations to determine need directly with in-country partners, it means that at least some diaspora activities are unlikely to be classified as 'humanitarian' by international actors, potentially creating a barrier to coordination.<sup>88</sup> Under existing MOUs or other forms of operational approvals, humanitarian organizations operating in Myanmar can only coordinate with organizations providing 'lifesaving' assistance.<sup>89</sup> What has emerged is an already complex and restrictive operating context for the humanitarian community in Myanmar and concerns about further loss of access if there is perceived coordination with organizations supporting the civil disobedience movements.<sup>90</sup>
4. Diaspora organizations are themselves not well coordinated, and have different priorities for advocacy and assistance. This creates a high administrative burden for international humanitarian actors to coordinate.<sup>91</sup>

<sup>85</sup> Diaspora Organization Interview 13.

<sup>86</sup> Diaspora Organization Interview 15.

<sup>87</sup> Humanitarian Organization Interview 3, 4.

<sup>88</sup> Humanitarian Organization Interview 4, 5.

<sup>89</sup> Humanitarian Organization Interview 1, 4.

<sup>90</sup> Humanitarian Organization Interview 4, 5.

<sup>91</sup> Humanitarian Organization Interview 4.



# 7. ACCOUNTABILITY

## 7.1. Accountability to donors and contributors

Most diaspora organizations have very informal accountability systems as compared to international humanitarian organizations. This is reflected in the size and nature of the diaspora organization. For smaller organizations, often a verbal or brief written confirmation that funds have been received by the local partner is considered sufficient, with reporting then given to the diaspora organization membership and donors at the next networking event.<sup>92</sup> Sometimes receipts are provided for more substantive amounts, however this was mostly found with larger organizations. Larger organizations also had monitoring systems in place requiring regular reporting from local partners.<sup>93</sup> Facebook was identified through the interviews and social media monitoring as a key platform for diaspora organizations to share reports on funding and the progress of their responses.

“We get reports from the people we sent goods to. Our local partner is monitoring how much has been sent. Very good data has been collected so far i.e. number of men, women, displaced people.”<sup>94</sup>

Security concerns have restricted the ability of people receiving assistance to report photos or locations, and to implement more formal accountability systems.<sup>95</sup>

International humanitarian organizations perceive that diaspora organizations don't have formal accountability mechanisms, and are concerned about their ability to ensure that in-country partners facilitate delivery of the assistance to intended recipients.<sup>96</sup>

<sup>92</sup> Diaspora Organization Interview 6, 8, 10.

<sup>93</sup> Diaspora Organization Interview 7, 10.

<sup>94</sup> Diaspora Organization Interview 10.

<sup>95</sup> Diaspora Organization Interview 11, 12, 13.

<sup>96</sup> Humanitarian Organization 3

## 7.2. Accountability to recipients of assistance

Diaspora organizations believed their direct understanding of local needs meant responses were relevant and in line with the priorities of people in need. However, diaspora organizations perceive that they struggled to provide assistance quickly as they do not maintain funds to draw on for rapid emergency activities, meaning new fundraising activities were required in advance of each response.<sup>97</sup> Difficulties in transferring funds and delivering goods also impacted timeliness.

The research team conducted interviews with recipients of humanitarian assistance living in IDP camps in the cross-border areas of Thailand. Generally, the recipients interviewed were unaware that the support they had received had come directly from diaspora organizations. However, it was noted that the assistance provided by diaspora groups was the only form of assistance they were receiving, and interviewees expressed gratitude for the support.

## 7.3. Gender considerations

While no diaspora organizations based in Australia or the US considered the differing needs of women and men when providing humanitarian assistance to affected communities in Myanmar, there are women-led and women-focused diaspora organizations that do, with operations both inside Myanmar and in border areas.

Smaller diaspora organizations explained that assistance is largely provided to family members or local communities<sup>98</sup>, who directly communicate their needs and do not themselves differentiate between the needs of men, women, boys and girls. This aligns with social media activity, which indicated that advocacy efforts by smaller diaspora organizations centered around raising awareness of increasing violence and indiscriminate attacks, with little mention of the different needs or impacts on women.<sup>99</sup>

<sup>97</sup> Diaspora Organization Interview 10.

<sup>98</sup> Humanitarian Organization Interview 1, 4.

<sup>99</sup> Social Media Monitoring Organizations 1-30.

Six of the diaspora organizations interviewed who were working within border communities and cross-border in countries such as Thailand identified gender as a clear consideration in the response.<sup>100</sup> These women-focused organizations prioritized the needs of women and children, with support to the wider population a secondary priority<sup>101</sup>, noting that women and children “are more vulnerable and therefore at higher risk”.<sup>102</sup> Safety was identified as the main concern for women.<sup>103</sup> While most of these organizations were women-led, there was also evidence of men playing leadership roles and being actively involved in supporting responses.

Where diaspora organizations are supporting women and children directly, assistance provided has been in the form of education (schooling, access to leadership programs)<sup>104</sup>, critical non-food items (sanitary pads, underwear, longyi, tents), health services (medical clinics)<sup>105</sup>, and protection (advocacy for the elimination of violence against women and children, information and support for women who are fleeing or who have experienced violence including sexual assault).<sup>106</sup>

On social media, women-focused organizations used Facebook to advocate for the specific needs of vulnerable women living in Myanmar. This included issues such as the prevention of violence against women and girls; increasing women’s participation in Myanmar society; and increasing education of women and girls in Myanmar.<sup>107</sup> These diaspora organizations also used Facebook to promote fundraising campaigns to specifically support women-focused causes, such as providing ongoing support to female democracy activists and members of the civil disobedience movement.<sup>108</sup>

<sup>100</sup> Diaspora Organization Interview 11.

<sup>101</sup> Diaspora Organization Interview 12.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Diaspora Organization Interview 14.

<sup>104</sup> Humanitarian Organization Interview 2, Diaspora Organization Interview 11.

<sup>105</sup> Diaspora Organization Interview 11.

<sup>106</sup> Humanitarian Organization Interview 2, Diaspora Organization Interview 14.

<sup>107</sup> Social Media Monitoring Organizations 5, 10, 12.

<sup>108</sup> Social Media Monitoring Organization 10.



## 8. FINDINGS

Even upon rapid review, it is evident that Myanmar has an extensive, active and committed diaspora. The type of support prioritized is independent of international aid categories of humanitarian assistance, human rights, protection or direct support for politics and civil disobedience. Some organizations interviewed for example have a particular focus on reporting human rights violations<sup>109</sup>, while also providing life-saving assistance and support to the civil disobedience movement. Diaspora organizations are keen to explore any additional opportunities, including humanitarian ones, to provide the necessary support to people in need. They are exhausted and depleted following years of attempting to meet critical needs for assistance.<sup>110</sup>

The international humanitarian community recognizes the unique value offered by diaspora organizations—their reach in areas inaccessible to international actors, access to real-time information and people, some of whom may move regularly<sup>111</sup>, and ability to act informally and relatively quickly, unrestrained by formal bureaucracy. They have an ability to meet needs that are impossible for the international community to address.

Unsurprisingly, the key challenges for diaspora organizations are funding and resources. Many organizations operate on a voluntary basis<sup>112</sup>, necessarily limiting the time available from their members. Funds within the community from which to raise funds are limited, particularly after so many years of supporting vulnerable people. Diaspora organizations have faced challenges meeting the requirements to raise funds from international organizations—with demands for due diligence, governance and transparency requirements sometimes far beyond the capacities of the diaspora organizations and the communities that they fund, and often complicated by security concerns.<sup>113</sup>

Like international humanitarian organizations, diaspora organizations are also challenged by access. For diaspora organizations supporting the civil disobedience movement, providing support can be particularly dangerous, especially when using Hundi and communicating through underground networks.<sup>114</sup>

<sup>109</sup> Diaspora Organization Interview 7, 8.

<sup>110</sup> Diaspora Organization Interview 8, 9, 10.

<sup>111</sup> Humanitarian Organization Interview 2, 4, 5.

<sup>112</sup> Diaspora Organization Interview 7.

<sup>113</sup> Diaspora Organization Interview 9, 10, 11.

<sup>114</sup> New York Times (2021) They Wait Hours to Withdraw Cash, but Most A.T.M.s Are Empty. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/08/07/world/asia/myanmar-cash-coup.html>

“We have to send money very dangerously. Sometimes the people we use to send money are very scared. It’s very dangerous.”<sup>115</sup>

Insecurity and SAC restrictions are however only part of the problem. Internet restrictions and electricity outages make it difficult to communicate with those in need, to identify what is most needed where, and arrange logistics and payment. Communications themselves may be monitored and unsafe. Transportation is becoming more expensive and less reliable due to both conflict concerns and COVID-19 interruptions.<sup>116</sup>

Diaspora organizations do not tend to identify the differing needs of vulnerable groups, unless that is their purpose, for example, the women-focused organizations in border areas. There are perceptions from the humanitarian community that there are gaps in coverage of the needs of vulnerable groups.

Moving forward, many diaspora organizations are keen to better connect with others, including other diaspora organizations and the international humanitarian system, to strengthen support for people in need.<sup>117</sup>

“We need to centralize our approach, have a more collective approach. Many have different views, but we need to restructure and re-organize. We also want more financial support. Burmese overseas are very alarmed, we’ve tried very hard to organize fundraising activities.”<sup>118</sup>

<sup>115</sup> Diaspora organization Interview 9.

<sup>116</sup> Diaspora organization Interview 12

<sup>117</sup> Diaspora Organizations Interview 7, 8, 9.

<sup>118</sup> Diaspora Organizations Interview 7, 8, 9.

In particular, diaspora organizations seek to:

- strengthen advocacy and international attention on the suffering and needs of the people of Myanmar;
- secure support for improved access;
- raise more funds collectively to meet lifesaving and protection needs; and
- improve access to data and data security to support understanding of needs, how to operate, and support fundraising.

Further, diaspora organizations are interested in empowering local partners operating inside Myanmar—including very small but effective operators, and improving accountability to their own donors and contributors.

There are however good reasons why some of these goals have not yet been achieved. Stronger connections can be highly dangerous for some diaspora organizations and the vulnerable people they are trying to assist, as well as those engaging in activities that are not looked upon favorably by the SAC. The distribution of money and other activities to assist vulnerable people are being tracked.<sup>119</sup>

And, while the international community reciprocates an interest in strengthening engagement with diaspora organizations, beginning with increased awareness, they have limited administrative capacity to manage connections with dispersed diaspora organizations.<sup>120</sup> This is further complicated by the range of activities that diaspora organizations engage in. Humanitarian organizations are committed to abiding by humanitarian principles for SAC permission to operate.<sup>121</sup> Their operations may be put at risk when engaging with, or being perceived to be supporting, organizations that are politically active or supporting the civil disobedience movement.

<sup>119</sup> Humanitarian Organization 2, 3, and 4.

<sup>120</sup> Humanitarian Organization 4.

<sup>121</sup> Humanitarian Organization 4.



## 9. RECOMMENDATIONS

The insecurity in Myanmar, and its impact on the people of Myanmar, is far from ending. Diaspora organizations are urgently seeking international attention and additional assistance to help meet the needs of people whose resources, if they still have any, are quickly running out. The following recommendations draw on the findings from this research and are applicable now in the Myanmar context.

- 1. Protect the unique value of diaspora organizations.** Diaspora organizations have information, access and capabilities that international humanitarian organizations do not, often due to their existence outside of the formal international humanitarian system. This includes an ability to define need and assistance more broadly and comprehensively than international organizations are able to. Diaspora organizations can address important gaps in the humanitarian response, and undertake this work with great risk for those involved inside Myanmar.

In order to protect this value, this review recommends not to formalize broad diaspora organization engagement as part of the international humanitarian system.

- 2. Informally connect to progress mutual objectives of information, advocacy, access and inclusive assistance.** Build on the mutual desire for diaspora and international humanitarian organizations to strengthen engagement with each other, beginning with awareness of priorities, messaging and activities. This may help to strengthen the response through addressing gaps and duplication, and providing a cross-check on perspectives of the situation and needs.

- a) Research with the objective of raising awareness and connecting diaspora organizations (such as this review) may be one way of supporting this efficiently. Larger, well connected diaspora organizations could seek to lead this engagement directly with the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.
- b) Find ways to **connect generalist diaspora organizations with diaspora organizations focused on meeting the needs of women and girls**, to share their information on differing needs and opportunities to meet these needs. Consider funding women-focused diaspora organizations to conduct needs assessments and share them with both the broader diaspora community and international humanitarian actors.
- c) Some diaspora organizations would like to seek engagement with the international community to be able to utilize their predications on the impact of the crisis and what will be needed in order to **plan for the next six months**.
- d) Humanitarian Organizations should prioritize mapping diaspora organizations responding to the crisis in Myanmar.

### 3. Formally connect where it is safe to do so:

- a) **Connecting the international with the local.** Diaspora organizations are well connected with various communities and community organizations within Myanmar. They may be able to assist international organizations to identify which community organizations are increasingly capable of receiving international assistance, and which the international community may be interested in connecting with formally. They may also be able to provide additional perspectives on where aid may be not used in the way it is intended.
- b) **Draw on the UN's successful engagement and coordination with the private sector** for disaster preparedness, response and recovery.<sup>122</sup> There are many similarities between the private sector and diaspora, in that they are keen to engage and will do so regardless of the international humanitarian system; they both offer unique value to the response and do not necessarily adhere to humanitarian principles. The UN's Connecting Business Initiative could be replicated for diaspora organizations, or expanded to include them in existing activities.
- c) **Connecting the diaspora with the private sector:** the private sector is increasingly engaged in international humanitarian assistance. It often has resources, but may lack local connections and information. The private sector and diaspora organizations may find it easier to work together directly, outside the formal humanitarian system.

It offers the added value of potentially connecting diaspora organizations with private sector organizations, which may face less challenges in sharing resources with organizations who do not adhere to humanitarian principles.

**Example:** the UN has previously offered public, web-based briefings for the private sector on the state of a crisis and how the private sector could engage. Organizers of these briefings could also invite diaspora organizations. While this requires additional research to identify diaspora organizations, the benefits could include greater shared awareness, improved coordination, and opportunities for the private sector and diaspora organizations to connect.

4. **Engage in mutually beneficial ways.** An important caveat for international humanitarian organizations when connecting with diaspora organizations. Diaspora organizations are often over-worked and under-resourced, usually seeking connections to raise funds and progress advocacy. It is important to respect expectations that any engagement will be mutually beneficial. International organizations who are looking to engage should come prepared to offer funding opportunities, connections or information when seeking time and engagement with diaspora organizations.
5. **Be explicit about the impact of humanitarian principles.** International humanitarian organizations who aim to adhere to humanitarian principles may need to explain what this means for their ability to engage with diaspora organizations upfront. Diaspora organizations who are not already across this may need support to understand humanitarian principles, and clarify for humanitarian organizations whether or not their advocacy and assistance aim to adhere to humanitarian principles. This will make it easier for international humanitarian organizations to determine how they might be able to engage.

**Example:** recently updated UN engagement principles for operations in the country need a clear and proactive communication strategy to be led by OCHA which shall target diaspora organizations as one of the important stakeholders.

<sup>122</sup> See for example the Connecting Business Initiative: <https://www.connectingbusiness.org/>



# ANNEX A

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# ANNEX B

## INTERVIEW QUESTION GUIDE

Focus Area	Diaspora Organisations (DO)	Partner Organisations (formal or informal organizations which DOs partner with to channel assistance)	Humanitarian Partners (established local/international organizations supporting humanitarian response)	Affected communities/ Beneficiaries
<b>Profile</b>	How and why was your group organized?	What is the nature of your organization?	What is the nature of your organization?	
	How many members in your group?	Are you registered in Myanmar as an entity?	Are you registered in Myanmar as an entity?	
	What is the composition of the members of the organization?	Where is your main office located? Are there sub-offices?	Where is your main office located? Are there sub-offices?	
	What are some of your organization's activities?	What are some of your organisation's activities?	What are some of your organisation's activities?	
<b>Engagement with the current crisis</b>	How is your organization involved in the recent crisis in Myanmar?	What is your organisation's involvement with the current crisis? How has the current crisis affected your operations?	What is your organisation's involvement with the current crisis? How has the current crisis affected your operations?	How has the current crisis impacted you and your community?
	What assistance (if any) did you offer? How did you offer your assistance?	What was the assistance provided by the DO? How was the assistance channeled to the affected communities?	How are you sharing information about the needs/gaps in the response?	
	How did you select the beneficiaries for your assistance? What were the considerations? Did you consider gender in your discussions?	What information did the DO need to help them decide on the type of assistance? Did you provide information specifically on the needs of women and children?	Any insights on the involvement of DOs with the response? If so, what were the main activities carried out by DOs?	Are you aware if DOs are providing assistance to you or your community? If so, how are they supporting?
	How did you mobilise funding/resources to support your efforts?	What were the sources of your information about the crisis?	Are you aware of how the DO-supported response was funded and planned? How did you become aware of this?	From the DO assistance, which item or service was the most useful for you?
<b>Coordination</b>	What organization did you partner with to channel your assistance? / How did you learn about this organization?	How did the DO partner with your organization? How did they reach out to you?	Do you think the support from DOs are coordinated with the efforts of the broader humanitarian community?	How well do think the DO know your needs?
	Are you aware if there are other organisations in your county offering assistance? Was there any coordination with other organisations?	Did you partner with other organisations to support the response? In what ways did you partner with other actors?	What, if any, changes could be made to improve coordination between DOs and the formal humanitarian ecosystem?	What factors do you think led the DO to provide that assistance?

<b>Accountability</b>	How did you monitor if your assistance reached/supported the community/affected population?	How did you make sure that the assistance goes to the intended beneficiaries? Why and how were response locations selected?	What practices of DOs supported/challenged humanitarian principles? (E.g. Did the assistance from the DO favor a particular group/gender/ethnicity more than other people?) What do you think motivated this?	Do you think the assistance was given based on needs?
	Do you think your response was relevant and timely?	Do you think the assistance from the DOs was relevant and timely? What criteria were used to help identify/select recipients/communities?	Do you think the assistance from the DOs is relevant and timely? What criteria were used to help identify/select recipients/communities?	Given what you know now, could the assistance have been provided in a different way? How?
	How do you know that your assistance went to the intended beneficiaries?	Did you provide feedback/report to the DOs (usefulness of the assistance, reached intended beneficiaries)?	What are your insights to ensure downward accountability of DO support/assistance?	How do you provide feedback about the usefulness, relevance, timeliness of the assistance?
<b>Gaps and Challenges</b>	What were the main gaps or challenges you encountered with providing the assistance?	What were the main gaps and challenges encountered with partnering with the DO?	What were the challenges experienced by DOs from your perspective?	
	How do you think these challenges/gaps can be addressed?	How do you think these challenges/gaps can be addressed?	How do you think these challenges/gaps can be addressed?	
<b>Learning</b>	What are the future plans of your organization related to the current situation in Myanmar?	What do you think is/are the advantage/s of DO's involvement with the response? How can the DOs response be maximized/strengthened?	What do you think is/are the advantage/s of DO's involvement with the response? How can the DOs response be maximized/strengthened?	How do you think the involvement of DOs can be strengthened/maximized?
	What lessons (if any) did you learn from your recent experience?	Is there a need to strengthen DO response to humanitarian emergencies? If so, in what ways can this be done?	What are the questions that you were surprised I did not ask?	

## ANNEX C

# MAPPING OF DIASPORA ORGANIZATIONS

Nr.	Classification	Name of diaspora organization, website, set-up, country	Response description & financing
1	DO	Burmese American Community Institute US Non-profit organization founded in 2011 www.thebaci.org	Gathering donations via GlobalGiving for those who have been affected by conflict and will support them with their emergency medical care, food, shelter, and other basic needs as well as their longer-term livelihood and community resiliency.
2	Partner	Alin Thit Social Development Group Myanmar Local NGO	Founded by volunteers and workers who share common interest in building peaceful relationships among and between people from various ethnic and religious traditions, faiths and environments. Activities: peace building (training, advocacy, technical support, workshop), community development (WASH, Livelihood, Health program, capacity building), Rehabilitation program (MRE, DRR, Relief), Networking, Community mobilizing, Youth and Women empowerment programs. Partner: The Border Consortium (TBC)
3	Partner	PACT Myanmar Pact is one of the longest-serving international NGOs in Myanmar and has been helping people to improve their lives since 1997.	Pact designs and implements projects that maximize local ownership and leverage existing systems and networks. Their work covers health, livelihoods, local governance, civil society strengthening and renewable energy
4	DO	Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (Burma) Mae Sot, Thailand Non-profit human rights organization founded in 2000 by former political prisoners living in exile on the Thai/Burma border based in	The programs aimed at former political prisoners providing academic education, vocational training, driving lessons and language courses. The reach has grown over the last year, reaching larger areas of Burma and the country.
5	Partner	The Border Consortium Thailand INGO working with refugees who fled conflict in Burma/Myanmar since 1984	Main provider of food, shelter and other forms of support to the refugees in camps in western Thailand  In 2018, approximately 95% percent of its funding came from the government donors from US, UK, Australia, Canada and Taiwan. Although most of TBC's funds are now institutional, it still continues to receive funds from individuals, private foundations and organisations and churches.
6	Academe	Yusof Ishak Institute - Myanmar Studies Singapore Institute that runs the Myanmar Studies Programme (MmSP)	The Myanmar Studies Programme (MmSP) seeks to give a critical analysis and policy-relevant recommendations on issues and events in Myanmar.
7	DO	Burmese Association of Western Australia (BAWA) Australia BAWA is the oldest and largest (300 members) Burmese community organisation in Western Australia. It was formed in 1965 and incorporated in 1969 to assist new migrants and refugees who had arrived from Burma	Charitable collection license - provide Charitable Support and Funds for needy Orphanages in Burma, with the objectives of meeting their Basic Essential Needs, and supporting them to grow and develop as Self-Sustaining groups.
8	DO	Burmese Student Association - University of California US Student association	The association also fundraises for Burmese and Southeast Asian charities, as well as host community service events to help those in Myanmar

9	DO	Burmese Community Development Collaboration Australia Registered Not for profit organisation	Funding sources - list in order of proportion of funds received <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BCDC members' donations &amp; In-kind donations from businesses</li> <li>Sydney based Burmese community fundraising activities</li> <li>Federal / local government grants (Volunteer Grants from Federal government \$5000 x 2 - 2016 &amp; 2018) + Cumberland Council grants \$20000 (2017) &amp; \$8500 (2019)</li> <li>Membership fees (\$20 p.a. per member) approximately 70-80 members at every AGM</li> </ul>
10	DO	Mission2Myanmar Australia Organization endorsed by the Australian Taxation Office (ATO) as a Deductible Gift Recipient (DGR). Their major recipient in Myanmar is Pastor David who is the founder of the Myanmar Institute of Mission and Research (MIMR).	Money from donations can be put towards: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Better quality food</li> <li>Clean water</li> <li>Clothing</li> <li>Medicines</li> <li>Toiletries &amp; hygiene products</li> <li>Educational materials</li> <li>Reliable power</li> <li>Building projects for housing</li> <li>Sewing machines for trade</li> </ul>
11	DO	Sydney Burmese Buddhist Vihara Australia Religious organization	
12	DO	Australia Burmese Rohingya Organisation Australia	Donations Main activities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Distribution of Aid for displaced Rohingyans and Kamans who are trapped in 42 concentration camps across Arakan state.</li> <li>Distribution of Aid and support of vulnerable Rohingyans in Malaysia, Thailand and Bangladesh.</li> <li>The welfare of Rohingya asylum seekers and refugees here in Australia targets for only vulnerable</li> </ul>
13	DO	Australia Chin community Australia Informal Social Group	Online fundraising for people in Thantlang Division who are IDPs due to military junta
14	Partner	Refugee Council of Australia INGO	As a national peak body, the Refugee Council of Australia plays a key role in connecting people: refugees and people seeking asylum, members who work with and support refugees.
15	DO/ Partner	Burma Campaign UK INGO - works for human rights, democracy and development in Burma	Generating donations to provide life saving
16	DO	Britain-Burma Society UK Informal Social group	Fund raising to support humanitarian response
17	DO	Burma Canadian Association of Ontario Canada	Fund raising to support flooding in 2018

18	DO	Coalition of Burma Ethnic in Malaysia Malaysia  Coalition of different DOs in Malaysia	Dos from the coalition: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Arakan Refugee Relief Committee (ARRC)</li> <li>• Chin Refugee Committee (CRC)</li> <li>• Alliance of Chin Refugees (ACR)</li> <li>• Kachin Refugee Committee (KRC)</li> <li>• Malaysia Karen Organization (MKO)</li> <li>• Organization for Karenni Development (OKD)</li> <li>• Mon Refugee Organization (MRO)</li> <li>• Shan Refugee Organization (SRO)</li> </ul>
19	Partner	We Women Foundation Myanmar  In 2009, the foundation was founded in the service of assisting unrecognized refugee women from Myanmar	Fund raising to support CDM through GLocal Giving
20	DO	Karen Community of Canada  Umbrella organization comprised of Karen communities across Canada which was founded in 1998 to represent Karen in CA  <a href="http://www.karencommunity.ca/">http://www.karencommunity.ca/</a>	Creating a forum to promote better relationship among Karen families who came to Canada from different backgrounds and different reasons. To promote and maintain Karen culture and customs by celebrating national heritage days on special occasions.
21	DO	Western Australia Myanmar Community Australia  NGO/Community forum for Burmese people living in Western Australia	Official fundraiser of CRPH-OFP
22	DO	Karenni-American Catholic Association US  Association	Hosting an online forum for Catholic Karenni-Americans; to promote culture and tradition; and to serve as a bridge to promote fellowship among members
23	DO	Save Myanmar San Francisco US  NGO: San Francisco Myanmar activists group to save Myanmar	Funds are raised through the sale of merchandise at activist events
24	DO	International Association Myanmar Switzerland  NGO that aims to support all people of Myanmar inside and outside the country's borders.	The International Association, Myanmar-Switzerland is now the Official Fundraiser for CRPH - OFP in Switzerland. The association is fundraising and collaborating with other organizations to deliver assistance to Burmese people inside and outside of Myanmar
25	DO	Chin American Association US  Association supports people of Chin descent living in the US and raises awareness of issues in Myanmar.	Community events, advocacy.

26	DO	Women's League of Burma (WLB) Thailand  WLB was established on December 9, 1999 with the aim of promoting women's participation in the national peace and reconciliation process, and enhancing the role of the women of Burma at the national and international level  <a href="https://www.womenofburma.org/welcome">https://www.womenofburma.org/welcome</a>	Burmese Women's Union (BWU) Kachin Women's Association-Thailand (KWAT) Karen Women's Organization (KWO) Karenni National Women's Organization (KNWO) Kayan Women's Organization (KyWO) Kuki Women's Human Rights Organization (KWHRO) Lahu Women's Organization (LWO) Ta'aang Women's Organization (TWO) Pa-O Women's Union (PWU) Rakhaing Women's Union (RWU) Shan Women's Action Network (SWAN) Tavoy Women's Union (TWU) Women for Justice (WJ)
27	DO	Kachin Women's Association Thailand  Non-profit organization was formed by five far-sighted women in Chiang Mai on 09/09/1999.  <a href="https://kachinwomen.com/">https://kachinwomen.com/</a>	KWAT funding sources include grants received through the Durable Peace Programme.  Its aim is to address the suffering and hardship of Kachin people in Thailand, and empower women, raise awareness on human rights and political issues, and provide humanitarian support to Kachin communities in Burma  Main activities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organizational Capacity Building Program</li> <li>• Documentation and Research Program</li> <li>• Anti-Trafficking Program</li> <li>• Health Program</li> <li>• Income Generation Program</li> <li>• Political Empowerment Program</li> <li>• Advocacy</li> </ul>
28	DO	Chin Community Victoria Inc. Australia  The aim is to support the successful settlement of Chin migrants from Myanmar; Offering guidance, support and helps to participate fully in Australian society and life, while taking pride in Chin cultural heritage <a href="http://www.ccv.org.au/">http://www.ccv.org.au/</a>	Hosts public fundraising activities to support communities including IDPs in Myanmar. Funding through grants.
29	DO	Coalition of Burma Ethnic Malaysia  COBEM is founded in 2007 and is a group of eight refugee community-based organizations serving the needs of refugees.	Cobem was formed to improve coordination and communication among the refugee community-based organizations as well as with UNHCR and other NGOs working with refugees.  COBEM comprises the Alliance of Chin Refugees, Arakan Refugee Relief Committee, Chin Refugee Committee, Kachin Refugee Committee, Malaysia Karen Organization, Mon Refugee Organization, Organization of Karenni Development, and the Shan Refugee Organization
30	DO	Dallas Fort Worth Myanmar Ethnic Community US  Group of Myanmar Ethnic Community members	Official fundraiser of CRPH-OFP  The aim of the group is to raise awareness about Myanmar and the Burmese community in DFW whilst also serving as a platform to engage the DFW Myanmar Ethnic Community members

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Responsible for content:

DEMAC – Diaspora Emergency Action & Coordination  
At Danish Refugee Council  
Borgergade 10  
1300 Copenhagen  
Denmark

Email: [info@demac.org](mailto:info@demac.org)  
Phone: +45 6026 8116

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