

# DIASPORA FOR RESEARCH (D4R): LEBANON

*Convening and collaborating for humanitarian impact*

***Establishment of the Diaspora for Research (D4R): Lebanon network will be a world-first initiative, providing a novel and innovative approach to collaboration, convening, and new ways of working. D4R: Lebanon will facilitate engagement of diaspora research expertise to support during and in the aftermath of humanitarian crises, with diaspora equally benefiting from engagement with and the expertise and lived experience of colleagues in the crisis-affected setting.***

***The first of several emerging diaspora research networks, lessons gleaned from establishment of this Lebanon initiative will inform development of D4R networks for other diaspora communities and in response to other crises in future.***

***D4R: Lebanon is an initiative of the Centre for Humanitarian Leadership, Deakin University in partnership with the Office of Research, American University of Beirut.***

## BACKGROUND

### Why a diaspora research network for the humanitarian space?

The role of diaspora during crises, from supporting service delivery and aid distribution to provision of remittances, is well established and widely acknowledged, and diaspora humanitarianism is the focus of a growing body of work<sup>1</sup>.

Lebanon has a large and engaged diaspora that has played a key support role through the country's tumultuous history. In recent years, Lebanon has experienced a series of cascading events including the Syrian refugee crisis, the August 2020 Beirut Port explosion, COVID-19, and massive socio-economic collapse, that have generated profound humanitarian needs, with estimates in 2021 that around 82% of the total population were living in multidimensional poverty<sup>2</sup>. The 2024 war in Lebanon exacerbated an already dire situation. Thousands were killed or injured, almost one million people were forcibly displaced, and essential infrastructure was damaged or destroyed.<sup>3</sup> The sheer level of need and impact of the conflict resulted in many critical services being completely overwhelmed. Following the ceasefire, humanitarian need persists and the multifaceted impacts of and recovery from this war will be protracted.

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\* *D4R: Lebanon* is co-led by the Centre for Humanitarian Leadership (CHL), Deakin University and the Office of Research, American University of Beirut. CHL manages and administers the network, as part of its broader D4R initiative. Seed funding from the UK Humanitarian Innovation Hub to establish *D4R:Lebanon* is gratefully acknowledged.

Research can play important roles during and in the aftermath of humanitarian emergencies. There are many challenges of conducting research in crisis-affected settings<sup>4</sup>; the capacity for research also varies by context and may be influenced by the nature, magnitude, acuity and duration of the crisis event and its impact on local workforces and infrastructures. The role of diaspora researchers in supporting research and the local research community during crises warrants further attention. Diaspora researchers, who often bring contextual knowledge, cultural awareness and sensitivity, language skills and the networks required to gain trust and rapidly mobilise, are strategically placed to provide substantial support and contribute efficiently and effectively. Through their ties and linkages, diaspora also understand the challenges, contextual constraints and opportunities that may emerge during an evolving crisis. While individual diaspora researchers may engage with each other and with colleagues in crisis-affected settings, a coordinated approach can help streamline, avoid duplication, optimize support and resources, and minimize the burden and engagement load on colleagues in the humanitarian setting.

Against this background, *D4R: Lebanon* emerged. This innovative collaborative platform will bring together Lebanese diaspora research experts from across the globe who work on issues relevant to humanitarian crises and also connect them with researchers in Lebanon to provide surge support during and in the aftermath of crises. Equally, diaspora will benefit from the expertise, engagement and lived experience of colleagues in crisis settings, and the opportunity to contribute to initiatives in their country of origin. This network is a novel approach to collaboration, convening and presents new ways of working.

*D4R: Lebanon* is the first of a series of diaspora humanitarian research networks being convened for a range of crisis settings.

This document provides an overview of the initiative and outlines the one year post-launch activity plan for *D4R: Lebanon*.

## VISION, MISSION AND VALUES

### Vision

D4R envisages a world in which knowledge production ecosystems challenged with crises are resilient, responsive, inclusive and agile, able to generate locally-led and contextually relevant research and drive innovations and creativity, towards enhanced humanitarian impact.

### Mission

D4R works to support a system that delivers timely, impactful research that can inform improved humanitarian response and recovery efforts in crisis-affected settings. Mobilising expertise and empowering leadership in-country and within the diaspora, D4R drives connections and encourages collaborations, helping amplify voices and facilitating surge support to the local research community whilst enabling an avenue for diaspora to support initiatives in their country of origin.

### Values

- **Collaboration:** Fostering partnerships and inclusive engagement with diverse stakeholders.
- **Courage:** Promoting a culture of courage, where difficult issues are discussed respectfully, diverse perspectives are encouraged, and injustices bravely challenged.
- **Innovation:** Encouraging innovative approaches and solutions to address complex systems challenges.

- **Integrity:** Upholding ethical approaches, accountability and transparency in all activities.
- **Inclusivity:** Ensuring that all activities are culturally sensitive, contextually appropriate and inclusive.

## SCOPE AND DEFINITIONS

### Scope: Who will the network convene?

*D4R: Lebanon* will convene those who work in **research relevant to humanitarian crises, their impact, or research humanitarian responses more broadly**. This captures a diverse range of disciplines. Notably, the primary focus is humanitarian impact, humanitarian need and humanitarian action, not the underlying political aetiology of a crisis. Similarly, among researchers in the crisis setting, the network is open to those whose work is relevant to the humanitarian space and context, and not to all researchers based in country.

Any individual in the diaspora or in Lebanon who self-identifies that the network might be relevant to them is encouraged to register. **Researchers and knowledge producers** are the primary target audience. The network also **welcomes all those who engage with the humanitarian research ecosystem, including those in knowledge translation**, and all who **use, disseminate or have an interest in research relevant to humanitarian crises** and contexts. This includes those engaged with such functions regardless of institutional setting (e.g. researchers at universities, thinktanks, NGOs, etc.).

Whilst many non-diaspora researchers based outside crisis settings also make substantial contributions, the D4R networks will engage **diaspora, and those living and working in the crisis-affected setting (regardless of national origin)**, but will not convene non-diaspora researchers focussed on Lebanon who live and work outside the country. Given cultural and community ties, contextual knowledge, relationships and trust, diaspora are uniquely placed to rapidly mobilise and contribute. Additionally, through the simple act of facilitating connections between diaspora communities who are living the shared experience of watching a crisis unfold in their country of origin, it is anticipated that the networks may also informally and indirectly facilitate peer support functions for diaspora.

### Definitions

**Diaspora:** Acknowledging the lack of a universally applied definition of ‘diaspora’, the D4R networks adopt the International Organization of Migration definition and consider diaspora to be “*Migrants or descendants of migrants whose identity and sense of belonging, either real or symbolic, have been shaped by their migration experience and background. They maintain links with their homelands, and to each other, based on a shared sense of history, identity, or mutual experiences in the destination country*”<sup>5</sup>. Central to this definition is a **community of migrants (or their descendants) who live outside their country of origin**.

**Research relevant to humanitarian crises and their impact:** Drawing on the OCHA Humanitarian Data Exchange (HDx) definition of humanitarian data<sup>6</sup>, D4R networks define research relevant to humanitarian crises and their impact as research that examines

1. the **context** in which a humanitarian crisis is / has occurred

2. the **people** affected by the crisis and their needs
3. the **response** by organisations and people seeking to help those who need assistance.

## GOVERNANCE

*D4R: Lebanon* is co-led by the Centre for Humanitarian Leadership (CHL), Deakin University, and the Office of Research, American University of Beirut (AUB), with Co-Chairs from each organisation and a joint CHL-AUB Secretariat. CHL manages and administers the network, as part of its broader D4R initiative.

A panel of high-profile Ambassadors will be engaged to champion the network and support its dissemination and engagement activities. General parameters have been established to help inform selection of potential Ambassadors and ensure inclusivity and broad representation, including geographic, sectoral and disciplinary diversity. Ambassadors will bring diverse sectoral and disciplinary expertise from within and outside the research and humanitarian communities, a range of skill sets, and be based both within the diaspora and in Lebanon. Ambassadors are senior personnel and recognised experts within their fields who bring expansive collaborative networks and influence. Their key functions are to help promote the initiative in a range of fora and settings, facilitate outreach, and provide ad hoc advice and technical support as appropriate on an individual basis.

The network is a member-based platform.

## ACTIVITY PROFILE

What will the network do?

*D4R: Lebanon* will work across five key pillars (Fig 1):



Figure 1: *D4R: Lebanon* proposed activity pillars

Specific activities to be undertaken in the first year post-launch are outlined below:

### **PILLAR 1: Convening and Connecting**

- Targeted outreach and promotion of the initiative, to encourage membership and awareness of the network
- Establish an online platform that may include a dialogue space for connection and engagement

- Issue a periodic newsletter and ad hoc communications as required during times of crisis, for updates, requests, dissemination of engagement opportunities, calls for support etc.
- Host networking events, either online or in person
- Conduct an informal member survey to help shape network activities
- Promote active partnerships with other relevant diaspora networks and groups
- Demonstrate impact through communication products including testimonials
- Bibliometric mapping of recent published academic research focussed on the humanitarian crisis and Lebanon

#### **PILLAR 2: Empowering Leadership**

- Develop and deliver bespoke leadership training workshops for mid-senior researchers
- Deliver mentorship training workshops
- Facilitate mentoring and bi-directional capacity exchange
- Disseminate other relevant capacity strengthening opportunities

#### **PILLAR 3: Policy Advocacy**

- Publish evidence-informed commentary pieces and evidence summaries relevant to the humanitarian crisis and context
- Host a webinar series focussed on the humanitarian crisis
- Engage in information campaigns (humanitarian updates, knowledge translation etc.) through social media and/or other platforms (e.g. podcasts)
- Engage in media outreach and provide expert comment
- Engage with a diverse range of stakeholders including policymakers, humanitarian actors and advocacy groups

#### **PILLAR 4: Amplifying Voices**

- Publish English and / or Arabic language blogs authored by members. These may cover issues selected by members themselves (with D4R providing a publication outlet), or be in response to D4R calls for blogs on specific issues or thematic areas (e.g. on the role of diaspora in crises, etc.)

#### **PILLAR 5: Reflection and Learning**

- Document lessons gleaned, challenges and successes of establishing *D4R: Lebanon*, and share learnings with other D4R networks
- Participate in the 'network of diaspora networks' group
- Facilitate member reflections and learning sessions on the experience of research during a crisis
- Rapid literature review on Lebanese diaspora and humanitarian crises

Whilst the five pillars describe the anticipated activity profile, the network is intended to be agile and responsive to emerging crises and emerging needs. Specific activities under each pillar may also be added or modified in response to member input and resourcing capacity.

Notably, D4R will convene and encourage connection between diaspora researchers and those in-country. With the exception of the reviews outlined above, the network itself will not conduct research, nor will it determine the research to be undertaken by those who engage with the network. The topic areas of any research conducted by network members in future will be determined by individual members themselves. This is to ensure that D4R promotes and facilitates needs-driven research and bottom-up, locally-led approaches to research planning and research partnerships, and

that the research that diaspora collaborate on fills a human resourcing need as identified by colleagues in country.

Similarly, the focus of policy advocacy outputs and evidence summaries produced by the network Secretariat will be determined by the issues and needs of the day. D4R is intended to be agile and responsive – such materials will be produced in direct response to need and the evolving humanitarian context.

## YEAR ONE OUTPUTS

### *Convening and Connecting*

- One online platform launched
- Four (quarterly) newsletter issues published
- One Informal member survey conducted to gauge views on network activities
- Two networking events held, including at least one in-person event
- One bibliometric mapping database assembled

### *Empowering Leadership*

- Two bespoke leadership training workshops for mid-senior researchers delivered, including one online offering and one in-country program
- Two mentorship training workshops delivered

### *Policy Advocacy*

- Three evidence-informed commentaries relevant to the humanitarian crisis and context and tailored to emerging issues published (either as online/ self-published position statements or submitted to peer-reviewed journals, as appropriate)
- One two-three part webinar series held, covering topical humanitarian issues immediately relevant at the time of each event
- One communications and dissemination plan developed and implemented

### *Amplifying Voices*

- At least five member-authored blogs published on the network website

### *Reflection and Learning*

- One reflection / lessons gleaned commentary submitted to a peer-reviewed journal
- One literature review on the roles of Lebanese diaspora during humanitarian crises drafted

## NETWORK OUTCOMES

By facilitating connections and collaborations, the D4R networks are envisaged to help support in-country colleagues during and in the aftermath of humanitarian crises, and diaspora will benefit from the expertise, engagement and lived experience of colleagues in crisis settings. The networks will help build capacity, facilitate connections and collaborations, support surge capacity as required, amplify voices, encourage strong leadership among both diaspora and in-country colleagues, and ultimately

help contribute to and build a solid evidence base that can help inform and improve humanitarian action.

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<sup>1</sup> Shabaka (2021). Diaspora Engagement in Times of Crisis. EUDiF, International Centre Migration Policy Development (ICMPD): Brussels, Belgium. Retrieved from: [https://diasporafordevelopment.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Diaspora-Case-Study-Crisis\\_Short-Version\\_EN.pdf](https://diasporafordevelopment.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Diaspora-Case-Study-Crisis_Short-Version_EN.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> ESCWA (2021): Multidimensional poverty in Lebanon (2019-2021). Painful reality and uncertain prospects. E/ESCWA/CL3.SEP/2021/POLICY BRIEF.2 Retrieved from: [https://www.unescwa.org/sites/default/files/news/docs/21-00634-multidimensional\\_poverty\\_in\\_lebanon\\_policy\\_brief\\_-\\_en.pdf](https://www.unescwa.org/sites/default/files/news/docs/21-00634-multidimensional_poverty_in_lebanon_policy_brief_-_en.pdf) (accessed 17 Feb 2025)

<sup>3</sup> Abiad F, Herrgard M, Hilal N, Khan W, Abubakar A. The ceasefire is essential to restore Lebanon's vital health-care services. *The Lancet* 2025; **405**(10478): 539-40.

<sup>4</sup> Elbejjani, M., Zeki Al Hazzouri, A., Moropoulos, K. *et al.* Challenges for aging research in Lebanon in times of crisis and conflict. *Nat Aging* **5**, 1–2 (2025). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s43587-024-00787-w> (accessed 13 February 2025)

<sup>5</sup> International Organization for Migration (2019): Glossary on Migration. Retrieved from: [https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/iml\\_34\\_glossary.pdf](https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/iml_34_glossary.pdf) (accessed 11 Feb 2025)

<sup>6</sup> OCHA (2025). Humanitarian Data Exchange. Frequently Asked Questions. Retrieved from: <https://data.humdata.org/faq> (accessed 17 Feb 2025)