



Harnessing the power of diaspora for climate action

A policy brief outlining the importance of diaspora engagement.

The increasing impact of climate change on development progress, natural environment and communities, requires the mobilization of entire societies. The role of diaspora communities in mitigating and adapting to climate change and climate degradation's effects is of paramount importance. Several measures need to be taken to actively engage diaspora as climate actors in their countries of origin and residence.

On the 24th of October 2023, the International Organization for Migration in Belgium and Luxembourg held a consultative meeting on *Diaspora and migrants as climate actors*. The meeting featured Diaspora Advisory Board members, diaspora climate activists, professionals, academia and civil society in Belgium contributing to climate action and sustainable development in their countries of origin and residence. The meeting explored how these often-overlooked groups can become active agents for climate action and discuss current climate initiatives, potential areas for expansion, and ways in which diaspora can contribute to global climate resilience and sustainability.

This policy brief outlines the importance of engaging diaspora communities in climate action initiatives, recognizing the pivotal role of diasporas and migrants and the valuable resources, unique skills, experiences and networks within diasporas and migrants' communities. This document provides key takeaways from the discussion and recommendations for policymakers drawn from the discussion on how to leverage these assets to enhance global efforts in addressing climate change, advancing climate solutions and fostering resilience in both their host and home countries.

Objectives

- Identifying gaps, challenges for diasporas to engage in climate action in both Belgium and country of origin.
- Identifying opportunities, climate-related priorities of diasporas in both Belgium and country of origin.

International Organization for Migration (IOM)

Country Office for Belgium and Luxembourg

Rue Montoyer 40 • 1000 Brussels – Belgium • +32 (0)2 287 7000 • iombrussels@iom.int • www.belgium.iom.int

- Discussion on initiatives launched by diaspora and migrants in engaging with climate action (including humanitarian aid following disasters and activities by DAB-members and examination of potential opportunities for collaboration)

Key Challenges

Inclusivity and representation

During the session, diaspora mentioned the lack of inclusivity of climate action initiatives, especially for youth and persons of colour (POC). Diasporas when engaging in climate action initiatives, tend to experience a set of challenges, such as not being recognized for their expertise due to narrow view of what diaspora, youth and or women can bring to the table, which contributes to perpetuating stereotypes and hindering diverse perspectives. Language barrier is also another factor which contributes to limited participation of diverse communities in climate discussions. Providing multilingual resources and translating key information can ensure accessibility and a diverse participation in climate action initiatives. It is also of paramount importance that decision-making bodies and leadership positions are diverse, actively involving youth and POC in planning and executing climate initiatives, also to avoid stereotyping and encourage a nuanced understanding of diverse communities.

Persons of colour are often seen as receivers of aid and education, not as the givers. You constantly have to fight for that little space and to be recognised for your expertise.

Funding sources

Despite availability of financial resources, diasporas communities have limited access to it. The bureaucracy behind the process to get funding and lack of support or network knowledgeable about the process tend to discourage organisations from applying and therefore also limits access of diaspora communities to such funding, often resulting in exclusion. Diasporas present at the meeting highlighted the need to establish transparent communication channels to share information on funding opportunities for climate projects within diasporas and on the process to get it, as well as to receive support with the administration.

The real change needs to happen on policy-level. People are already struggling to have some kind of material comfort so when we ask people to isolate their house, who's going to pay for that ?

Collective Responsibility Over Individual Blame

The shifting of climate responsibilities to individuals rather than addressing systemic issues contributes to a toxic narrative and lack of trust hindering collaboration and effective climate action. As diaspora communities face unique climate vulnerabilities, the lack of systemic solutions and support structures exacerbates the challenges they already face. Climate adaptation and mitigation strategies need to become

more inclusive and consider the unique challenges of diaspora. To foster trust, we need to promote open communication and remind that people are the victims of systemic shortcomings, as well as highlight successful initiatives and partnerships to build trust, encourage sustainable practices, promote collective responsibility and community-based solutions.

Communication Tools and Platforms

In Belgium, there is a lack of platforms for diaspora communities to share knowledge, initiatives and collaborate on climate action. More tools and platforms could contribute to engaging a wider and more diverse audience. Therefore, it's important to develop accessible and user-friendly platforms that facilitate information sharing, collaboration, and networking.

Education and Awareness

The narrative of the climate issue being a rich person's issue is one that's often too present within diaspora communities. The lack of awareness about the impacts of climate change and the role of diasporas can prevent engagement of a wider diaspora audience. If educational campaigns to raise awareness (not only targeting youth) about climate change are to be implemented within diaspora communities, these should also take into account diaspora realities and proactively engage diaspora. Some of the participants also highlighted that many within the communities implement actions that contributes to the fight against climate change but are not necessarily knowledgeable of the terms or aware they contribute to climate mitigation and/or adaptation in both countries of origin and residence.

Key Opportunities

Diaspora as a bridge

- National stakeholders in both countries of origin and residence should leverage the unique strengths and contributions of their diaspora communities in climate action.
- In order to improve cooperation between national stakeholders and diasporas, they should be equal and establish frameworks including the needs and priorities of diasporas.

Facilitating Knowledge Transfer and Capacity Building

- Establish programs that facilitate the transfer of knowledge and skills from diaspora experts to local communities in climate-vulnerable regions, and vice versa. Make sure that the diaspora's priorities are also the priorities of the local population, which is only possible when there is an exchange.
- Support initiatives that provide training and capacity building for local stakeholders in areas such as nature-based solutions, renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, and climate adaptation strategies.

Integrating Diaspora Voices in Policy Development

- Recognize and support diaspora engagement in climate action, meaning also through financial support.
- Recognize diaspora's expertise.
- Consult and include diaspora representatives in climate policy discussions and decision-making processes at national and international levels (as well as joint actions).
- Create coalitions that specifically represent diaspora perspectives on climate-related issues.

Diaspora Initiatives in Belgium

1.2 Diaries – Diaspora Climate Platform

1.2 Diaries is an African diaspora-led climate platform in Belgium that amplifies the ideas, expertise and lived experiences of those impacted by a world at +1.2°C warming in the Global South. With these insights, it aims to improve representations of marginalised groups in climate discourse and EU climate policymaking.

Diaspora Vote!

DiasporaVote! ensures more representation and inclusion of European citizens from racialized communities. By serving as an anchor for racialized communities willing to know more about EU policies and how they impact our daily lives, through a set of programs, they aim to provide more opportunities in the area of policy making for racialized youth.

COLECO

COLECO (Colour in Ecology) is a grassroots collective of people with migration background that provides a safe place to learn and grow in ecologism, a network to reinforce climate justice fighters and a group to coordinate actions to influence policy at local level.

Brussels youth coalition

The Youth Coalition is made up of 100 young people from Brussels who represent 1,000 demands pooled together in the Brussels Parliament as part of the “Co-creation” project of Brussels2030, Brussels’ candidacy to the title of European Capital of Culture in 2030, and more specifically of the Speak Up Brussels! project, which aims to pool together the demands of young people in Brussels so that they can be discussed in the Brussels Parliament. These demands have been collected through a platform and workshop discussions that have brought out the concerns of youngsters, which include police violence, climate, security in public spaces, access to housing, education, rising prices, etc.

Conclusion

Diaspora engagement is often overlooked in the fight against climate change in both country of origin and in Belgium. They represent a bridge and powerful resource in their countries of residence and origin, therefore we encourage policymakers to tap proactively into the knowledge, resources, and networks within diaspora communities.

At IOM, we have been working on initiatives that capitalize on the dynamic link between diaspora communities and their home countries to enhance responses to climate change, with a focus on forging collaborative partnerships with home country governments and diaspora organizations to devise tailored initiatives, innovative tools, and refined coordination mechanisms to trigger impactful climate action.