



# Resilience in Diaspora Communities

Navigating Ongoing Crisis and Coping Through Connection – A Collective Voice



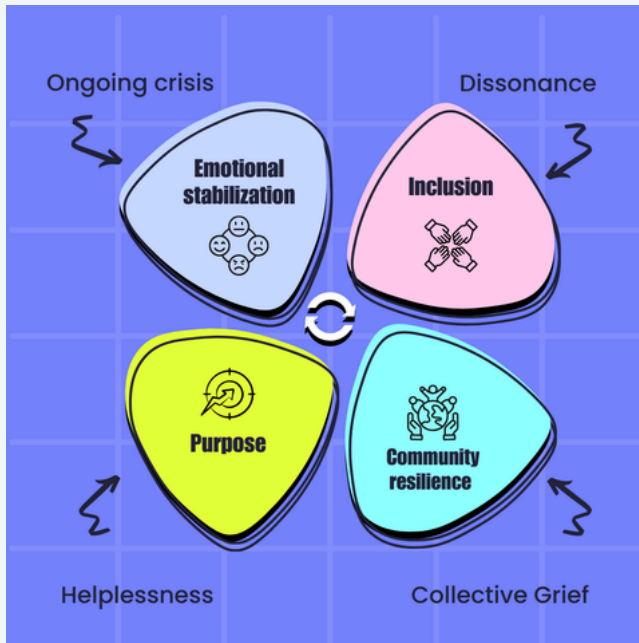
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# Collective Resilience under Ongoing, Global Violence

As diaspora nonprofit professionals, we often find ourselves living in a state of constant tension. We watch crises unfold in our homelands while trying to build stable lives and programmes in a new country. Trauma models we were taught tend to assume a crisis will end and recovery will return us to “normal.” Our lived experience is different: the crisis continues, grief renews itself, and a sense of safety never fully takes hold.

A group of us gathered in an Impact Lab (**hosted by Yamm Services**) to develop a framework that could help us and other community leaders respond more effectively.

This model pairs the key realities we face with the ways we respond. Our insights draw on trauma-informed practice, cross-cultural psychology and community resilience research, but they remain grounded in the lived experiences we share as immigrants and refugees.



*A visualization of resilience strategies and how they connect with our lived realities.*

# Understanding Our Reality

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## Chronic Emotional Overload

We know firsthand that the crises affecting our homelands go on for months or years. News feeds, social media and constant messages from family keep danger in immediate view. Our bodies stay on high alert even when we are physically safe. This prolonged vigilance leads to chronic stress, sleep disturbance, irritability and difficulty concentrating. Recognizing that our nervous systems may remain in fight-or-flight mode despite the absence of local danger is our first step toward compassionate self-care and support of each other.

Our ongoing crisis and the tension of who we are produce a persistent emotional burden. Grief, anger, helplessness, fear and hope cycle repeatedly. We sometimes suppress our feelings because they seem self-indulgent compared with the suffering at home. Over time, these unprocessed emotions can turn into irritability, depression or numbness. We feel it in our bodies too (headaches, digestive issues and muscle tension).

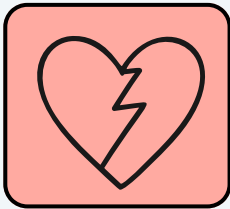
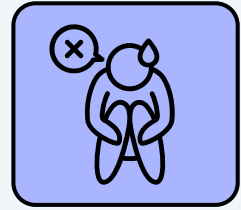
## Identity Tension or Dissonance

Those of us who live across borders often feel pulled toward our country of origin and our adopted home at the same time. Belonging in one place can feel like betrayal of the other. Survivor guilt – thinking that we should be “back there” or that we don’t deserve safety – adds another layer to our load. This dual belonging is not just an intellectual puzzle; it is an emotional and moral dilemma that increases our distress and ambivalence. We have to constantly negotiate who we are and where we belong.



# Helplessness

When we cannot return home to help directly, questions about purpose become urgent. We ask ourselves what role we can play from afar and how we can be useful. Finding meaning is not optional for us; it is a vital way to convert guilt into constructive action and to anchor our identities in service. Purpose fosters our resilience because it frames our suffering within a larger narrative and gives us agency.



# Collective Grief

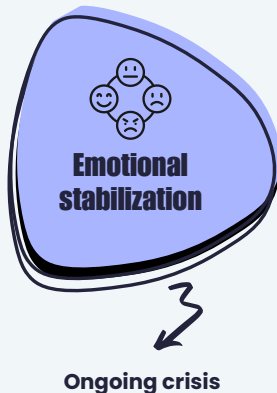
In our cultures, personal wellbeing is inseparable from community wellbeing. We draw strength from shared traditions, mutual aid and community ties. Individualised coping strategies—like an app or a self-care routine—often feel inadequate or alien if they exclude the social dimension of healing. Community provides us with more than social support; it embodies collective memory, cultural continuity and a sense of belonging that protects us from loneliness and despair. That is why we so often say, “We cannot be okay if our community is not okay.”

# Resilience in Action: Coping Strategies

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## Ongoing Crisis → Stabilise the Nervous System

When we live through an ongoing crisis, we often shift between focusing on the present and imagining a hopeful future to steady ourselves. In the moment, we picture our lives five or ten years ahead, recalling previous hardships we and our communities have survived and the strengths that emerged. To calm our bodies, we use mindfulness techniques such as engaging our senses to remind ourselves that we are safe. We lean on rituals that structure our days (morning tea or prayer, cooking traditional meals and coming together for celebration or mourning) because they give us predictability and continuity. Most of our emotional stabilization strategies are rooted in community actions. We also check in with each other and help each other; knowing someone will call during periods of intense news coverage prevents isolation and reminds us that support is available.



## Dissonance → Integrate Dual Belonging



When we feel torn between two places, the guilt of leaving loved ones behind can be overwhelming. To cope, we name these emotions openly, sharing feelings of unease or shame with trusted friends, family or colleagues. Saying aloud that we feel guilty for being safe helps release that heaviness. Being in spaces where we can showcase our dual identity to the fullest is crucial to keep us going.

## Helplessness → Find and Sustain Purpose

Feelings of helplessness can quickly turn paralyzing if we don't address them. There are so many things beyond our control and we need to start by accepting this reality; accepting the things we are not able to change at the moment. One way we counteract feelings of helplessness is by taking small but meaningful steps, things we can actually do: making a phone call to an elected official, sending small donations, sharing news or attending a demonstration. These actions, though modest, restore our sense of agency and momentum. We also look inward, taking stock of our skills and interests to identify where we can contribute most effectively. Mapping out what we're good at makes it easier to see potential paths to meaningful engagement. Finding some sense of purpose is an integral part of our coping.



## Collective Grief → Build Community Resilience



When everyone is hurting at once, the grief can feel heavy. To cope, we organise regular gatherings—weekly or bi-weekly dinners, prayer circles or virtual check-ins—where we share updates, cook together and simply sit in each other's company. These consistent touchpoints foster trust and make it clear that none of us has to bear our sorrow alone. We form mutual-aid networks, offering help with rides, childcare, food deliveries or translation. This reciprocal support reduces isolation and helps us see ourselves as part of a resilient whole.

# Coping over the Long Term

Because today's crises don't end quickly, maintaining a sense of horizon becomes essential; connecting our current suffering to a longer story of survival and imagining a future beyond this trauma helps us remember that this chapter is not the whole story. Our journey is long and continuous, and thinking beyond the moment is necessary to sustain our resilience and continue helping our communities. We understand that rebuilding or creating new institutions and realities will be our role in the future, and we will be able to play that role if we have resources and skills to share. Creating safe havens, community groups where we can rest, connect and grieve together, is part of this work. Collective support needs to be institutionalised and structured through community centres, cultural spaces and programmes where we make sense of our experiences, contribute to identity discussions and support each other's growth. By looking at the bigger picture and staying strong together, we can continue to serve our communities for the long haul.

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# Making the Model Practical

For those of us living in diaspora under continuous threat, resilience is not about bouncing back to a previous state. It is about learning to live fully while navigating an ongoing crisis, integrating divided identities, processing continuous grief, finding meaning, leaning into community and sustaining vision. This model, which we developed collectively, offers a roadmap that is both simple and flexible. It acknowledges the specific realities of our lives and pairs them with coping actions that address both immediate needs and long-term orientation. By grounding interventions in community wisdom, cultural practices and trauma-informed care, we can support each other and build durable resilience; resilience that honours our pain, fosters our purpose and cultivates hope for a more just and peaceful future.

For consultants and nonprofit leaders among us, the value of this model lies in its flexibility and relational approach. Rather than prescribing rigid phases of recovery, it encourages us to assess which realities are most salient at any moment and to choose appropriate interventions. A community experiencing acute news-induced anxiety may need stabilisation workshops, while a group feeling disillusioned may benefit from meaning-seeking and long-term visioning sessions. The model is cyclical rather than linear; we may move back and forth among realities as the political situation evolves. Our shared understanding of this journey enables us to respond to our communities with compassion, creativity and collective strength.