



Diaspora engagement mapping ETHIOPIA

Facts & figures

Terminology: Ethiopia refers to its diaspora using the term *diyaspora* (Amharic ዲያስፖራ), which is an adoption of the English term.

Political rights



Dual citizenship¹



Right to vote in national elections
for citizens residing abroad²



Voting from abroad³



Remittances



Remittances as a share of GDP: 4.77%

Remittances inflow (USD million): 7137.69

Data disclaimer

As diaspora definitions vary widely, we have chosen to use comparable data on emigration as a proxy. This does not include all who consider themselves diaspora and is not necessarily aligned with national definitions of diaspora. Emigration data comes from UNDESA (2024) and remittances from the World Bank (2024).

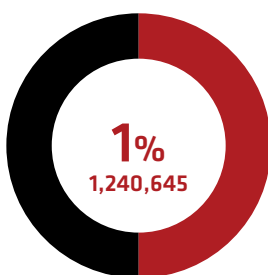
Emigration



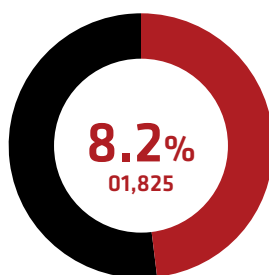
% of emigrants in
total population



% of which
in the EU



♂ 50%
♀ 50%



♂ 48.8%
♀ 51.2%

Top countries of destination



United States	363,811
Saudi Arabia	180,746
Sudan	121,969
South Africa	104,402
Israel	101,417

¹ Ethiopian Nationality Law of 1930. English version available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b52ac.html>

² Alebachew, T. (2020). *Extending Voting Rights to the Ethiopian Diaspora: Towards Institutionalising Diaspora Political Participation in Ethiopia*, Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill. Even though Ethiopians have the right to vote based on their citizenship, there are no formal institutions enabling voting from abroad, and diaspora members must be based in Ethiopia for at least 6 months to register and exercise their voting rights. According to Alebachew, "the requirement of residency, thus, automatically excludes Ethiopian citizens abroad from participating in elections in Ethiopia."

³ Ibid.

Overview of policy and legislative framework



- 2002** ● **Proclamation No. 270/2002:** This proclamation provides for the issuance of a special identification card, the Yellow Card, for diaspora members of Ethiopian origin and their immediate family members.⁴ The adoption of the proclamation in 2002 marked a major shift in the Ethiopian government's engagement in diaspora affairs; prior to this, Ethiopian diaspora members were subjected to prohibitive procedures that included, among others, meeting rigorous criteria to obtain visas and work permits, access to investment land and credit, and renewal of residence licenses.⁵
- 2002** ● **Investment Proclamation No. 280/2002:**⁶ One of the first initiatives of the government was to make investment in Ethiopia more attractive to the diaspora. In 2002, the Investment Proclamation No. 280/2002 defined a Domestic Investor to be inclusive of foreign nationals who are Ethiopian by birth.⁷ This allowed members of the diaspora to be treated as domestic investors, who have significantly different rights than foreign investors in Ethiopia, such as rights to own businesses and land/property.
- 2006** ● **Directive No. FXD/31/2006 - Foreign currency bank accounts directed at the diaspora:** The objective of this directive is to encourage investment from the diaspora and to "support the international foreign exchange reserve and ease the country's balance of payments problem."⁸

Diaspora Policy. Ethiopia launched its first draft Diaspora Policy in 2011.⁹ This was built on through a process of consultations, including with diaspora members.¹⁰ The Diaspora Policy ratified in 2013 stated that the diaspora could play an important role in carrying out research and investment at home. In addition, it noted that diaspora members could win allies for Ethiopia and try to influence their country of residence to improve cooperation with Ethiopia.

The government launched the most recent version of its diaspora policy in 2015.¹¹ The emphasis on diaspora's role in advocacy for Ethiopia is not as present in this version. Its aim is to strengthen the relationship between Ethiopian citizens abroad and Ethiopians in Ethiopia to encourage national development, strengthen participation in the democratisation and peace building process for individual and national gains, create a conducive environment for joint development, and uphold their rights and interests abroad.¹² The policy confirms that the diaspora do not enjoy the same rights as full citizens with regard to political participation and voting, but it extends other entitlements to them in addition to the diaspora 'yellow card' ID scheme, such as access to local fares on public transport and local prices, and other benefits such as rights to purchase land or property.¹³

The Ethiopian Diaspora Service (EDS), with support from GIZ's Shaping Development-Oriented Migration (MEG) programme, launched a policy revision process to improve implementation of the current diaspora engagement practice in 2024.¹⁴ As part of this process, EDS, in collaboration with major public universities, conducted research evaluating the impact and challenges of the 2013 diaspora policy, exploring ways to enhance mutual benefits between the diaspora and Ethiopia, and highlighting the need for alternative strategies.¹⁵ The research was concluded at a research validation workshop held in November 2024.

4 <https://www.ethioembassy.org.uk/consular-services/ethiopian-origin-id-cards/>

5 K K Berhanu (2019), The Political Economy of Diaspora Remittances in the Ethiopian Somali Region: DIIS Working Paper 2019:9 https://pure.dii.dk/ws/files/2985083/DIIS_Working_Paper_2019_9_final.pdf

6 <https://www.wipo.int/edocs/lexdocs/laws/en/et/et013en.pdf>

7 Available at: <https://chilot.files.wordpress.com/2012/04/consolidated-foreign-exchange-directives.pdf>

8 Available at: <https://www.wipo.int/edocs/lexdocs/laws/en/et/et013en.pdf>

9 Available at: https://chilot.me/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/diaspora_policy_draft-1.pdf (Amharic only)

10 See, for example, EthioTV diaspora policy debate from June 2013, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QNskAkHCg-gE&list=ULOnsJHcx5vpQG&index=594> (Amharic only)

11 Full text in Amharic: available at: https://ethiopiagranddam.files.wordpress.com/2015/07/diaspora_policy_final-amharic.pdf

For the full text in English, please see: <http://aigaforum.com/documents/Diaspora-policy-final-English.pdf>

12 *ibid.*

13 *ibid.*

14 <https://www.facebook.com/diaspora2030/posts/there-is-an-active-ethiopian-diaspora-in-germany-which-has-been-making-a-valuable/603429155544805/>

15 <https://www.fanamc.com/english/ethiopian-diaspora-service-reviewing-decade-old-diaspora-policy/>

- **2nd Growth and Transformation Plan:**¹⁶ The government's national development plan seeks to increase diaspora investment to the country, especially at the regional levels. It also recognises the education and health sectors as core priority sectors that need to be further developed with diaspora contributions.

Practices

Explore 520+ practices by country, SDG or sector of engagement in the [interactive database!](#)



Diaspora bonds

Ethiopia launched bonds to support the construction of the Grand Renaissance High Dam on the Nile in 2008 and 2011. These were open to and marketed at the diaspora, although they were not as successful as hoped in raising investment capital.

Connecting Diaspora for Development (CD4D) 2016-2019 / Entrepreneurship by Diaspora 4 Development (ED4D) 2018 - 2020

CD4D has supported the short-term return of high-skilled diaspora on assignments from the Netherlands to their countries of origin to promote skills transfer and diaspora enterprise. The first phase sent Ethiopian diaspora experts in agri-technology, enterprise and job creation, and fair-trade coffee imports.¹⁷ The programme was implemented by IOM in collaboration with PUM (Programma Uitzending Managers – a network of Dutch senior experts and professionals). The related ED4D project aims to encourage Ethiopian diaspora in the Netherlands, or Dutch entrepreneurs in partnership with the diaspora, to engage themselves as entrepreneurs for the development of the private sector in their country of origin.¹⁸

Diaspora Engagement for City Development: Institutionalising the Concept of Migration and Development into Plans and Actions of Jigjiga City 2019-2021

This project is working to help the Ethiopian Somali regional and local governments to mainstream diaspora engagement in policies, development plans and approaches to better leverage the important role the diaspora plays in local development. The project aims to produce a comprehensive profile of the Ethiopian Somali diaspora, strategies for engagement, and capacity building for local governments to implement these strategies.

Ethiopian Diaspora Fellowship Leadership and Public Service Programme

The Ethiopian Diaspora Fellowship (EDF) program is designed to promote leadership development, public service and creative storytelling. Through training, service in an organization in Ethiopia, peer-to-peer mentorship, and storytelling, fellows will have an opportunity to increase their own cultural identity and be a catalyst for growth and change in Ethiopia. Once in Ethiopia, fellows participate in peer-to-peer mentorship to increase cultural identity and promote a knowledge sharing opportunity. Fellows are also encouraged to document their experience thoroughly through different mediums, in order to define and redefine what it means for them to be an Ethiopian.

¹⁶ Available at: <https://www.greengrowthknowledge.org/sites/default/files/downloads/policy-database/ETHIOPIA%29%20Growth%20and%20Transformation%20Plan%20II%2C%20Vol%20I.%20%20%282015%2C16-2019%2C20%29.pdf>

¹⁷ <https://www.connectingdiaspora.org/ethiopia/>

¹⁸ <https://www.connectingdiaspora.org/ed4d/about-ed4d/>

Piloting digital learning on agri-food business and environmental informatics in Ethiopia 2021-2023

EUDiF DP4D mechanism has supported Ethiopia with a short-term scheme for diaspora transfer of skills in the education and agri-food business sectors between 2021-2023. Diaspora professionals based in Europe helped a local university (Wollo University) to craft their first digital interdisciplinary curriculum on agri-food business that is locally embedded. The scheme also helped the university to initiate new collaboration and research projects with other universities in Europe and advance their digitalisation reform in higher education.

Back To Your Origin - Homecoming Programme 2023 - 2024

Back To Your Origin is a homecoming programme designed to enable second-generation Ethiopians in the diaspora to return to the country and learn about their roots, culture and history, while sharing their knowledge and experiences with the local communities. Launched by the Ministry of Tourism, the programme aims to strengthen ties with the diaspora while boosting the national economy. It took place in three rounds from the end of December 2023 to the end of September 2024, to reconnect with diverse Ethiopian cultures, to discover the history of their homeland, and to engage in national volunteer activities respectively. To incentivise the diaspora, the programme provided not only immigration service information, but also discounts for flights and hotels.

Oromia Initiative 2024 - 2025

Oromia Initiative is a medical relief initiative, implemented by Project C.U.R.E and the Ethiopian diaspora residing in the US and Canada. With support from Haramaya University, the initiative plans to deliver donated medical supplies in order to enhance the services of multiple healthcare facilities across the region. The diaspora communities play a key role in fundraising and supporting the procurement and delivery at the warehouses.

High Level Diaspora Diplomacy Consultative Forum

Organised under the collaboration between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and its affiliated Institute of Foreign Affairs (IFA), the High Level Diaspora Diplomacy Consultative Forum was established in January 2024. This Consultative Forum comprises 300 members from 25 countries and is expected to engage the diaspora in diplomatic efforts and strengthen their active participation in the overall development efforts of the country.

Diaspora investment loan package

The Commercial Bank of Ethiopia launched a 50-billion-Ethiopian Birr loan programme for diaspora members to support investment, housing and vehicle purchases. The initiative aims to ease long-standing barriers to financial access and to channel remittances into productive sectors. It complements a national initiative that encourages diaspora engagement through improved exchange rates and incentives to use formal banking services.



Observations

The “Observations” and “Obstacles” sections contain additional information on the context of diaspora engagement that does not fit directly into the other sections. They are based on a combination of literature review and comments from the authors. New information is incorporated during the annual updates. Readers are invited to verify the relevance of the information at the time of reading, as the context may have evolved.

Since the 2000s, Ethiopia has had to develop a two-pronged approach to diaspora engagement: seeking to attract remittances, investment, and skills transfer from its diaspora in Europe and North America, on the one hand; whilst also ensuring the protection and reintegration of low-skilled labour migrants in the Middle East.

The government has established an impressive array of structures to facilitate diaspora engagement at the State and Federal levels between 2010 and 2020. These include diaspora officers in all of its major embassies and consulates in Europe, North America, the Middle East, and Australia; diaspora focal points in every ministry to help resolve issues relating to diaspora engagement; and state-level diaspora offices working to promote diaspora engagement at the Federal State level. Ethiopia has also invested in building the professional capacities of their consular and other staff working on diaspora engagement, with support from international partners such as AFFORD, ICMPD and IOM.

Combined with incentives for diaspora investment and return, these structures have aimed to engage and harness diaspora contributions from around the world, although arguably these schemes are targeted more at the diaspora based in Australia, Europe, North America, and Israel.

Diaspora investment flows to Ethiopia are difficult to track with accuracy. However, there have been some successes in this regard, even if uptake of large-scale investment products such as diaspora bonds has proved disappointing.¹⁹

At the same time, the government has sought to support the Ethiopian diaspora in the Middle East, who are mostly migrant labourers. After an initial ban on Ethiopian migration to Gulf States in 2013, following large-scale deportations of undocumented Ethiopian migrants from Saudi Arabia, the government introduced the Ethiopian Overseas Employment Proclamation No.923/2016 which specifies that migrants may only travel to work in countries where Ethiopia has concluded a bilateral labour agreement, such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Jordan.²⁰ The government has also worked to advise and upskill Ethiopian emigrants, especially young women, in rural regions such as Tigray before departure via diaspora officers within State-level authorities.

19 See AFFORD African Diaspora Direct investment Index

20 <https://freedomfund.org/wp-content/uploads/Ethiopia-Hotspot-Annual-Report-2018.pdf>

Obstacles



- **Lack of trust:** the Ethiopian Diaspora is not a cohesive group and is very politically divided. Many diaspora members may not want to support the current government and there is a legacy of mistrust on both sides. Ethnic and regional tensions feed into this lack of trust.
- **Limited awareness** among the diaspora of the Ethiopian government's diaspora engagement policies and programmes is a barrier that the government has sought to address through promotional activities and the creation of the Ethiopian Diaspora Agency.
- **Government bureaucracy:** Many diaspora members seek to avoid government bureaucracy. In some cases, diaspora actors have had their organisational and development activities restricted by government, especially if such activities are seen as political.²¹
- **Lack of support for the diaspora in countries of residence:** The Ethiopian diaspora often lacks visibility in their countries of residence compared to other diaspora communities, either due to their comparatively small diaspora population size (as is the case in European states) or due to the diaspora having a limited voice (as is the case in Gulf states where diaspora labour migrants have limited rights). Moreover, Ethiopia is a beneficiary of significant aid funding and this can make it hard for Ethiopian diaspora groups to compete for access to funding and investment capital, or to advocate for improved conditions.

Annex:

List of Actors

Explore the institutionalisation of diaspora engagement worldwide via the [typology of 520+ institutions](#)

Diaspora related institutions

- **At regional level**

African Union Citizens and Diaspora Directorate (AU CIDO)

Ethiopia nominates a diaspora focal point to the African Union Citizens and Diaspora Directorate (AU CIDO) Continental Meetings, which works to coordinate diaspora policy across AU MS.

East African Community

The mission of the Community is to widen and deepen economic, political, social and cultural integration in order to improve the quality of life of the people of East Africa through increased competitiveness, value added production, trade and investments.

Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD)

The Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) is an eight-country trade bloc in Africa. It includes governments from the Horn of Africa, Nile Valley and the African Great Lakes. Its headquarters are in Djibouti City.

- **National institutions**

- At ministerial level

Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA)

This ministry is responsible for Ethiopia's foreign relations and is the lead ministry for diaspora engagement.

Ministry of Civil Service

This ministry is responsible for the Ethiopian civil service, and oversees the Diaspora Coordination Office and its branches at the state level.²² These offices have been central in promoting privileges established specifically for the diaspora and passing new legislation specific to the diaspora.²³

- At sub-ministerial level

Diaspora Engagement Affairs Directorate

There is a Diaspora Engagement Affairs Directorate-General under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates (MoFA) solely dealing with issues of diaspora engagement. Originally founded as the General Directorate for Ethiopian Expatriates in 2002, it became the Diaspora Engagement Affairs Directorate-General in 2012.

²² Formerly known as the Ministry of Capacity Building. See Mulugeta bezabih Mekonnen (2018), *Transnational Migration-Development Nexus: The Engagement of Ethiopian Associations in Germany*, Lit Verlag.

²³ Katie Kuschminder and Melissa Siegel (2011), *Understanding Ethiopian diaspora engagement policy*, available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/254405572_Understanding_Ethiopian_diaspora_engagement_policy

Ethiopian Diaspora Service

Created in 2018, the Ethiopian Diaspora Service (EDS) falls under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and works to engage, mobilise and facilitate Ethiopians and foreign nationals of Ethiopian origin in the development of their country. It was established as the point of contact/one-stop-shop for the diaspora. Thirteen embassies and consulates have diaspora units with dedicated staff.

Federal and Regional Diaspora Affairs Coordination Offices

The Diaspora Coordination Office of the Ministry of the Interior oversees a network of 11 diaspora coordination offices at the nine regional states and two administrative cities of Ethiopia. These engage directly with their diaspora when they are in their home regions of Ethiopia.

Diaspora focal persons/desks

Diaspora focal persons/desks have been established in at least 15 relevant federal offices/ministries, including the Ministries of Health and Education.²⁴ They work to ensure diaspora engagement issues are dealt with appropriately across all areas of government and resolve problems encountered by the diaspora (for example, customs, or criminal justice issues).

Diaspora Consultative Forum

This is a consultative forum led by MFA consisting of relevant institutional actors, which gathers every quarter to discuss the challenges and opportunities with regard to enhancing diaspora engagement.²⁵

Diaspora organisations in Europe

Association of Ethiopians educated in Germany 1997

☑ Development activities

AEEG was established in 1997 by a group of Ethiopians who had returned home after studying in Germany. It has organised and conducted numerous workshops and training seminars over the years on timely and priority crosscutting issues, thereby facilitating knowledge transfer and cultural exchange and networking among members on the development agenda of Ethiopia.

#Ethionextgen UK

☑ Development activities

#EthioNxtGen is a UK Ethiopian Diaspora youth-lead initiative that aims to bridge the gap between young and professional Ethiopians in the UK with leaders, businesses and organisations in Ethiopia.

Read more about diaspora organisations in [“Starting guide: What is a diaspora organisation”](#)



²⁴ Personal communication, MFA 2019

²⁵ <https://www.connectingdiaspora.org/countries/ethiopia/>

Fédération Internationale de la Diaspora Afar (FIDA)

Development activities

The International Federation of the Afar Diaspora (FIDA) gathers about ten international associations of the Afar diaspora in Europe and Canada. Created in Brussels in 2015, the federation is active in the fields of development cooperation, international solidarity, humanitarian aid and poverty reduction in the Horn of Africa.

Heart for Ethiopia Germany 2001

Development activities

Heart for Ethiopia was established by two Ethiopian doctors in Germany in 2001. Their team from the Braunschweig City Hospital in Germany performs medical missions to perform open-heart surgery on children and young adults in the Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa.

ZAF Ethiopia

Development activities

Integration activities

ZAF Ethiopia is a non-profit organisation created by members of the Ethiopian diaspora in Sweden alongside the owner of Sozo Consulting. The project aims to inspire the diaspora in Sweden and strengthen relations, collaborations and exchanges between Sweden and Ethiopia and ultimately, contribute to Ethiopia's development.

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