



Diaspora engagement mapping

TONGA

Facts & figures

Political rights



Dual citizenship¹



Right to vote in national elections
for citizens residing abroad²



Remittances



Remittances as a share of GDP: -
Remittances inflow (USD million): 253,80

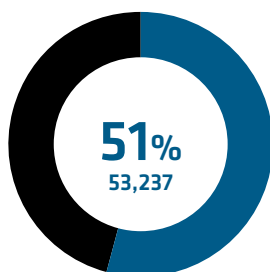
Emigration



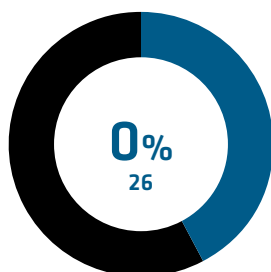
% of emigrants in
total population



% of which
in the EU



♂ 54.2%
♀ 45.8%



♂ 42.3%
♀ 57.7%

Voting from abroad³



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).

Top countries of destination



New Zealand	29,981
Australia	19,464
Fiji	1,389
American Samoa	1,296
Guinea	901

¹ www.ago.gov.to/cms/images/LEGISLATION/PRINCIPAL/1915/1915-0006/NationalityAct_2.pdf

² <https://matangitonga.to/2017/10/16/overseas-tongans-must-be-tonga-vote-november-16>

³ Tongans living overseas must travel to Tonga in order to vote, as there is no procedure for overseas voting. *Reports of the Commonwealth Observer Group: Kingdom of Tonga National Parliamentary Election, 16 November 2017*, Commonwealth Secretariat, 2017

Overview of the policy and legislative framework



- 2007** ● **Nationality (re-admission) regulations⁴** enable any person who ceased to be a Tongan subject prior to the enactment of the Nationality (Amendment) Act 2007 to apply to the Minister of Foreign Affairs for a certificate of re-admission to Tongan Nationality.
- 2015** ● **Tonga Strategic Development Framework (TSDFI) 2015-2025⁵** recognises the role of remittances for domestic development and sets out a number of concrete objectives, including improved collaboration with the Tongan Diaspora. The TSDFI recognises that effective collaboration between the diaspora and population resident in Tonga is important for the quality of life of both groups. It qualifies the understanding of the ways in which people resident in Tonga and overseas interact and the support of this interaction as strategic objectives. Others objectives of the TSDFI include encouraging the development of financial, communications and transport services which facilitate exchange between Tongan residents and the Tongan diaspora.
- 2021** ● **The Migration and Development Policy (MSDP)⁶**, officially launched in 2021, posits diaspora engagement as one of its policy thematic areas. Aligning with the TSDFI-II, the MSDP outlines seven diaspora engagement policy strategies, including: 1) elaborating a diaspora engagement framework to optimise diaspora potential for national development; 2) creating an enabling policy environment for diaspora contribution; 3) mapping the diaspora's demographic and interest profiles; 4) developing diaspora database; 5) empowering consulates' outreach to diaspora networks; 6) providing capacity building for Tongan public institutions in diaspora engagement; and 7) adopting and implementing platforms that promote diaspora contributions.

Practices

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



'Ave Pa'Anga Pau' remittance voucher, 2007, avepaanga.co.nz

Ave Pa'Anga ("Send Money Securely" in Tongan) is a cashless remittance voucher which was developed by the World Bank Group and the Tonga Development Bank (TDB), with support from the governments of Australia and New Zealand. This instrument, which facilitates sending remittances to Tonga at a lower cost, allows recipients in Tonga to access remittances from TDB branches in the country. TDB is also making use of the remittance voucher as part of a loan programme to help Tongan migrant workers engaging in the Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) scheme in New Zealand to pay for local costs of the programme before their departure.

Readmission of former citizens to Tongan nationality 2007

The adoption of the Nationality regulations in 2007 marked an important milestone for former subjects who lost their Tongan nationality by becoming citizens of another country at a time when dual citizenship was not allowed. Through these regulations, any person who ceased to be a Tongan may apply to the Minister of Foreign Affairs for a certificate of re-admission to Tongan Nationality. The Government of Tonga made application forms available on the various websites of its missions abroad, and readmission ceremonies have been organised for successful applicants in several of Tonga's missions abroad since 2007.

⁴ www.ago.gov.to/cms/images/LEGISLATION/SUBORDINATE/2008/2008-0100/NationalityRe-admissionRegulations2007_1.pdf

⁵ <https://pmo.gov.to/index.php/tonga-sustainable-development-goal/>

⁶ <https://crisisresponse.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbd1481/files/appeal/documents/Tonga%20Migration%20and%20Sustainable%20Development%20Policy.pdf>

Tonga Day celebrations across the world

The Government of Tonga celebrates Tonga National Day (or Tonga Constitution Day) on 4 November each year to commemorate the adoption of its first constitution in 1875. Over the years, this event has become an opportunity to celebrate and promote Tongan culture and identity around the world, with a number of major celebrations and events being organised by the Tongan diaspora each year in cities such as Sydney,⁷ Portland,⁸ and Honolulu,⁹ sometimes with support from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' consular missions abroad.

RemitResilience project 2022 - 2023

In 2022, BASE and Oxfam in the Pacific designed a market-based mechanism, which enables remittance senders to purchase selected climate resilience infrastructure for their families and communities in Fiji, Tonga, and Vanuatu as part of the RemitResilience project.

ACP-EU Migration Action Programme technical intervention on strengthening diaspora engagement and remittances in Tonga 2017

Following a request submitted by the Tongan Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) through its ACP-EU Migration Action Programme, a technical assistance intervention was carried out in 2017 on the topic of diaspora engagement and remittances in Tonga. The intervention led to the publication of a baseline assessment on remittances in Tonga, and it resulted in the formulation of a series of operational recommendations on the following three topics:¹⁰

- Encouraging the flow of remittances, including options for lowering the cost of sending remittances;
- Facilitating opportunities for the investment of remittances in local development initiatives;
- Strengthening engagement with the Tongan diaspora.

>> 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.

With well over half of all Tongans living and working abroad,¹¹ notably through seasonal working programmes such as the Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) scheme¹² in New Zealand, Tonga's economy is highly dependent on remittances from its diaspora. In 2019,

7 www.abc.net.au/radio-australia/programs/pacificmornings/tonga-day-sydney/11685256

8 www.oregonmetro.gov/news/tonga-day-creates-welcoming-place-share-culture

9 www.staradvertiser.com/2016/11/15/food/experience-a-taste-of-tonga-at-national-day-fete/

10 *Strengthening diaspora engagement and remittances in the Kingdom of Tonga, Dissemination report for the Technical Assistance Intervention in Tonga*, IOM, 2017 https://acpeumigrationaction.iom.int/sites/default/files/tonga_dissemination-pages.pdf

11 United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Population Division (2019). Trends in International Migrant Stock

12 The RSE is a labour market arrangement between New Zealand and several Pacific countries which allows the horticulture and viticulture industries to recruit workers from overseas for seasonal work. Tonga has been involved in the scheme since it was launched 13 years ago, and more than 16,000 Tongans participated in the RSE since 2007. www.immigration.govt.nz/about-us/research-and-statistics/research-reports/recognised-seasonal-employer-rse-scheme

Tonga counted its highest share of remittances as a percentage of its gross domestic product worldwide, 38.5%.¹³

As a result, the Government of Tonga has made it a priority to improve collaboration with the Tongan diaspora, as reflected in TSFDII. The government is deploying targeted efforts to encourage the flow of remittances into the country's economy,¹⁴ notably through initiatives such as the 'Ave Pa'Anga Pau' remittance voucher (see Spotlight section).

In addition, the Tongan diaspora is becoming increasingly important for the country's tourism and trade industries, as well as for the development of the local economy, as the majority of visitors to the country is made up of diaspora Tongans visiting friends or relatives.¹⁵ Therefore, the Government is also working to increase trade in services channelled through Tongan visitors and investors in the country, and several key ministries such as the Ministry of Tourism and the Ministry of Trade and Economic Development have been mandated to strengthen their engagement with the Tongan diaspora in the years to come.¹⁶

Early 2022, the diaspora - including VIPs in the diaspora - played a key role to respond to the triple disaster - the devastating volcanic eruption, tsunami and covid-19 outbreak - by raising funds, providing in-kind assistance, volunteering and advocating to drive further support.¹⁷

Though Tonga does not currently allow overseas voting, the 2025 elections saw renewed public debate on extending voting rights to the Tongan diaspora. Civil society representatives raised concerns about the exclusion of thousands of Tongan workers abroad, while policymakers highlighted the legal, financial and technical challenges associated with implementing external voting.¹⁸



Achievements

Tonga has succeeded in strengthening its collaboration with the Tongan diaspora by implementing several favourable policies and initiatives since the last decade. The government allowed Tongans overseas to retain their Tongan citizenship when becoming citizens of another country,¹⁹ which helped preserve diaspora Tongans' land rights in Tonga²⁰ and allowed them to take part in national elections.

In addition, the Government effectively encouraged the flow of remittances into Tonga's economy by working to reduce remittance costs, notably through its collaboration with the World Bank Group and the government of New Zealand.

The Government of Tonga has also succeeded in placing a strong emphasis on the preservation of Tongan culture and heritage in its relations with the Tongan diaspora. This issue was at the heart of community dialogue activities organised in Tonga's consular missions, and is also reflected by the involvement of Tonga's missions abroad in celebrations organised by Tongan diaspora communities on the occasion of Tonga Day.

13 Knomad, www.knomad.org/data/remittances

14 *Corporate Plan & Budget 2019/2020 - 2021/2022*, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

15 *Touring Pacific Cultures*, Australian National University Press 2016

16 *Corporate Plan & Budget Summary 2019/20 - 2021/22*, Ministry of Tourism, and Corporate plan for 2019/2020 - 2021/2022, Ministry of Trade and Economic Development

17 <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/28/world/australia/tonga-diaspora-recovery.html>

18 <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/pacific/575893/advocate-calls-for-voting-access-for-tongans-working-overseas-ahead-of-november-polls>

19 www.ago.gov.to/cms/images/LEGISLATION/PRINCIPAL/1915/1915-0006/NationalityAct_2.pdf

20 *Migration, remittance and development Tonga*, FAO, 2011

Obstacles



- **Corruption and lack of opportunities:** Perceived corruption in Tonga is one of the main sources of concern been expressed by the Tongan diaspora during dialogue activities organised with the government. A lack of economic opportunities in the country and low wages, especially compared to the main countries of residence of the Tongan diaspora, are also barriers to diaspora engagement.²¹
- **High cost of remittances:** The cost for sending remittances to Tonga is relatively high, in particular for the New Zealand-Tonga and Australia-Tonga corridors.²² In addition, only a limited number of remittance service providers are active in Tonga.²³ Government initiatives such as the 'Ave Pa'Anga Pau' remittance voucher could contribute to addressing this challenge.

21 *The Tongan Diaspora in Australia: Current and Potential Links With the Homeland*, Australian Research Council Linkage Project, 2012

22 The World Bank, Remittance prices worldwide

23 *Strengthening diaspora engagement and remittances in the Kingdom of Tonga*, IOM, 2017

Annex:

List of Actors

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



Diaspora related institutions

- **At regional level**

Pacific Community (SPC)

Tonga is a member of the Pacific Community, an international development organisation which focuses on scientific and technical expertise. SPC's Social Development Programme is involved in managing the Festival of Pacific Arts (FESTPAC), which was created in 1972 as a tool for preserving Pacific culture.

Pacific Islands Forum

Tonga is a member of the Pacific Islands Forum, an inter-governmental organisation which seeks to foster cooperation between countries and territories of the Pacific Ocean. Its work covers migration issues and the forum has organised regional meetings on climate change and migration, as well as workshops between immigration officials from the region.

Pacific Immigration Development Community (PIDC)

Tonga is a member of Pacific Immigration Development Community (PIDC – which was known as the Pacific Immigration Director's Conference until 2018). PIDC is a regional consultative process which aims at gathering official immigration agencies of the Pacific region and enabling the heads of the participating states' immigration agencies to discuss issues of mutual interest and foster cooperation. Others objectives of PIDC include modernising national immigration legal frameworks in the region.

- **National institutions**

- At ministerial level

Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA)

The MFA is responsible for promoting and protecting the interests of the country and its citizens abroad. The MFA manages migration issues through its Immigration Division (MFAID), and oversees Tonga's consular missions abroad.

The MFA's Corporate Plan & Budget for the years 2019-2022 specifies that the Ministry actively engages to improve collaboration with the Tongan diaspora, with the objective of encouraging remittances and increasing trade in services channelled through Tongan visitors and investors in the country.²⁴ In addition, the MFA commissioned a technical assistance to IOM's ACP-EU Migration Action, which resulted in the publication of a report on the development potential of diaspora engagement and remittances in Tonga in 2017.

²⁴ Corporate Plan & Budget 2019/2020 – 2021/2022, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

National Reserve Bank of Tonga

The National Reserve Bank of Tonga is the central bank of Tonga. It is responsible for regulating the issue and supply of domestic and international currency, as well as promoting monetary stability and economic development in the country. The National Reserve Bank monitors remittances sent to Tonga and it publishes economic releases on this issue on a regular basis.²⁵

Tonga Development Bank (TDB)

Tonga Development Bank's mission is to promote the economic and social advancement of Tonga through banking products and professional services. With support from the World Bank Group's International Finance Corporation and the governments of Australia and New Zealand, TDB developed the 'Ave Pa'Anga Pau' remittance voucher, which allows the Tongan diaspora to send remittances to Tonga at a lower cost.

Ministry of Trade and Economic Development (MTED)

Previously known as the Ministry of Labour, Commerce and Industries (MLCI), the MTED manages the Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) scheme on behalf of the Government of Tonga. As part of this scheme, the MTED is supporting the selection of Tongan workers and their preparation, as well as the monitoring and evaluation of the programme.²⁶ In its Corporate plan for 2019/2020 – 2021/2022, the MTED has been tasked of conducting market researches on the Tongan diaspora in Australia and New Zealand, as well as to develop a strategy to harness diaspora investments and remittances for inclusive economic development.²⁷

Ministry of Tourism

The Ministry of Tourism is responsible for developing tourism in Tonga. It developed the website 'Tonga-Holiday.com', which promotes Tonga as a holiday destination. Considering the role played by the Tongan diaspora in the country's tourism industry, the work of the Ministry of Tourism is becoming increasingly relevant to diaspora engagement in Tonga. The Ministry of Tourism's Corporate Plan & Budget for the years 2019-2022 specifies that the Ministry must contribute to the TSDFII's objective of improving collaboration with the Tongan diaspora.²⁸

- At sub-ministerial level

Tonga Embassies and High Commissions

Embassies and High Commissions abroad are engaging with the Tongan diaspora through community dialogue activities.²⁹ Tonga's consular missions abroad organise readmission ceremonies for successful applicants to the 2007 re-admission regulations, and they take part in the Tonga Day celebrations which are organised each year by the Tongan diaspora in various cities around the world.

²⁵ *Remittances for September 2019*, National Reserve Bank of Tonga, 2019

²⁶ *Migration, remittance and development Tonga*, FAO, 2011

²⁷ *Corporate plan for 2019/2020 – 2021/2022*, Ministry of Trade and Economic Development

²⁸ *Corporate Plan & Budget Summary 2019/20 – 2021/22*, Ministry of Tourism

²⁹ www.mic.gov.to/news-today/press-releases/6408-completion-of-a-successful-community-dialogues-and-consular-visit-by-the-high-commissioner-of-tonga-to-australia

Tonga Statistics Department

The Tonga Statistics Department aims at supporting government efficiency, effectiveness and organisational decisionmaking by providing high quality statistics. The Statistics Department collects data on visitors to the country, including the Tongan diaspora visiting friends or relatives under the designation of “VFR tourists”.

Diaspora organisations in Europe

Deutsch-Pazifische Gesellschaft (German Pacific Society)

Germany 2004

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



The German Pacific Society association organises conferences, meetings, exhibitions, cultural events and gatherings with Pacific Islanders in Germany and Europe. An estimated 30 Tongans living in Germany are participating in the society’s activities.³⁰

Pacific Rugby Players Welfare (PRPW) United Kingdom 2016

Integration activities

PRPW was established by Samoan, Tongan and Fijian professional rugby players living in Europe to support players and their families in integrating to life in Europe. The association provides its members with family support, training and education opportunities, as well as social events.

³⁰ *The German-Tongan Diaspora Since 1932*, Kasia Renae Cook, University of Auckland, 2017

Original research:
Alexandre Porteret
Editing & update:
EUDiF (2026)

Implemented by
 **ICMPD**
International Centre for
Migration Policy Development

Funded by
the European Union



Find out more at www.diasporafordevelopment.eu