



Diaspora engagement mapping GUYANA

Facts & figures

Terminology: The government uses the term “Guyanese Diaspora” and “overseas Guyanese”¹ and the National Development Strategy refers to “overseas Guyanese”, “expatriate Guyanese” and “Guyanese living overseas.”²

Political rights



Dual citizenship³



Right to vote in national elections for citizens residing abroad⁴



Remittances



Remittances as a share of GDP: **3.13%**
Remittances inflow (USD million): **525**

Voting from abroad:⁵

Available only to diplomatic staff and their families



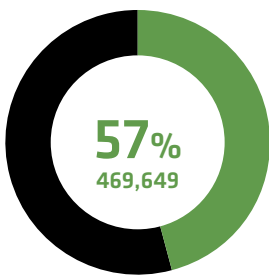
Emigration



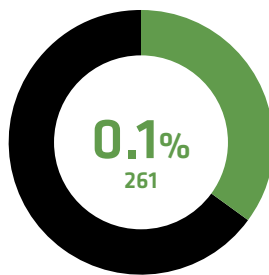
% of emigrants in total population



% of which in the EU



♂ 45.6%
♀ 54.4%



♂ 35.2%
♀ 64.8%

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 (2023).

Top countries of destination



United States of America	314,783
Canada	81,615
Trinidad and Tobago	15,720
Suriname	14,720
Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	8,227

1 Diaspora Unit. Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Accessed July 2020.

2 “National Development Strategy”, <https://finance.gov.gy/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/nds.pdf> Accessed July 2020.

3 Constitution of the Co-Operative Republic of Guyana, 1980. Article 44 refers to dual citizenship. According to article 46, the President has the faculty to deprive a citizen of Guyana (who has dual citizenship) of his or her citizenship acquired by registration, naturalization or any other voluntary and formal act (other than marriage). Also, the President has the permission to deprive citizenship if any citizen claimed and exercised any rights exclusively to its citizens in a country other than Guyana. Dual citizens cannot run for office for the Guyanese parliament.

4 Representation of the People Act, 1964. Article 44 (2A) provides that the preliminary list of electors not resident in Guyana shall consist of the names of every elector not resident in Guyana who is – (i) an Ambassador or a High Commissioner; (ii) the wife or husband or child of an Ambassador or a High Commissioner; (iii) a member of the staff of an Embassy or High Commission; (iv) the wife or husband or child of a member of the staff of an Embassy or High Commission.

5 https://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/news/peace_publications/election_reports/guyana/guyana-2020-election-final-report.pdf.

Guyana does not have a diaspora engagement policy.

In 2017, at the initiative of the IOM, the government worked to draft a Diaspora Engagement Strategy and Action Plan.⁷ In 2018 it was presented to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The policy is designed to formally guide the administration's relationship with the diaspora with focus on three main operational areas: Diaspora Communities, Home Country and IT Social Media⁸. The strategy aims at strengthening and expanding of the Diaspora Unit, boosting short and long-term youth programmes, and boosting remittances, in the form of philanthropy. The Diaspora Engagement Strategy and Action Plan was still being finalised in December 2022.

Overview of the policy and legislative framework



- 1980 ● **Constitution of the Co-Operative Republic of Guyana:** According to Article 31 of the Constitution, it is the duty of the state to protect the rights and interests of citizens living abroad.
- 1999 ● The **National Development Strategy 2000-2010** mentions the encouragement of expatriate Guyanese either to remigrate permanently, or to return home for specific periods to perform specific tasks, as a potential strategy to address the shortage of human capital in the country.

» Trends

Before the creation of the Diaspora Unit in 2011, most of the initiatives in the area of diaspora engagement in Guyana were developed with the support of international organisations such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Their approach has been that bringing skills through the diaspora is a relevant capital to be gained.

In 2011, as a result of the recognition by the Guyanese government of the important role the diaspora can play as a contributor to Guyana's development, a Diaspora Unit was created within the Foreign Affairs Ministry, with the purposes of allowing a structured engagement and strengthening relations and dialogue with the diaspora. The Unit is designed to serve as liaison between the diaspora and the government and some of its main functions are to collect information about the diaspora and maintain relations with its leaders.

The government has adopted an ongoing rhetoric through official communications, projects and meetings with Guyanese abroad,⁹ in which it recognises that the diaspora is helping to fill the human capital gap in Guyana and that it is in a position to contribute to the implementation of its National Development Strategy (NDS).

However, beyond broad statements, the diaspora often requests that the government offer concrete policies or guidelines in order to participate in the country's development.¹⁰

Since the 2020 elections, the Diaspora Unit has been reinvigorated with a new and growing team and resources. The unit has begun its work consolidating its understanding of diaspora

6 The Guyana Diaspora Engagement Strategy & Action Plan. (21 August 2017) Ministry of Foreign Affairs Co-operative Republic of Guyana. Accessed July 2020.

7 <https://www.minfor.gov.gy/featured/draft-diaspora-engagement-strategy-completed/>

8 <https://dpi.gov.gy/government-recognises-need-for-improved-structure-to-engage-diaspora/>

9 As documented on the Diaspora Unit Guyana's Facebook page.

10 Wayne Forde, The diaspora human capital could play a critical role in the oil and gas sector. Accessed May 2020

and government needs and undertaking outreach activities to strengthen ties with the diaspora in advance of developing targeted programmes which are aspired for from 2023.



Achievements

Exclusive desks for diaspora: The government organises a reception desk for diaspora during peak visiting times, such as Christmas and Easter, or in association with events like the Cricket Carnival of 2022.

Mutual collaboration. The Diaspora Unit has sought joint collaboration with the diaspora, including donations and participation in conferences. The donation of medical equipment from the diaspora in Canada to hospitals in Guyana in 2018 is an example of the Unit's achievements.¹¹



Obstacles

- **Lack of confidence in the government:** The diaspora has stressed that its willingness to engage and return is limited by a lack of trust in the state's legitimate commitment towards them.¹²
- **Government priorities:** Guyana is going through seismic changes, which means all government departments are under pressure. While the diaspora engagement activities are led by a small but motivated Diaspora Unit, increasing resources for the medium- to long-term plan and enhancing capacity across government services will help maximise the potential for national development.
- **Public perception:** The diaspora is seen as a strong resource for the country. Nevertheless, there is some negative perception of diaspora returnees which can be a barrier to social cohesion and presents a challenge for diaspora engagement initiatives which can be seen as prioritising those who left the country during difficult times.

SPOTLIGHT: effective practices

Explore 400+ practices by country, SDG or sector of engagement in the [interactive database!](#)



"Diaspora highlights" 2022

The Diaspora Unit began a series of videos to promote the work of Guyanese diaspora and, on occasion, the diaspora unit. The weekly videos introduce interesting profiles and projects from the Diaspora and demonstrate the Diaspora Unit's work to promote the potential of diaspora engagement for Guyana across all sectors.¹³

COMMUNICATION

11 Ministry of Foreign Affairs. [Guyanese diaspora donates ultrasound machines to Ministry of Public Health](#), 2018. Accessed July 2020.

12 Guyanese Migration and Remittances to Guyana. Hisakhana Pahoona. (2012)

<http://www.ppgdstu.propesp.ufpa.br/ARQUIVOS/teses/TESES/2012/HISAKHANA%20PAHOONA%20CORBIN.pdf> (Page 113)

13 <https://www.facebook.com/DiasporaUnitGuyana/videos>

COMMUNICATION

Online magazine “Diaspora Digest” 2019

Produced by the Department of Public Information, this magazine provides news about Guyana (in areas such as politics, trade and cultural activities). The first edition came out in October 2019.¹⁴

ENTREPRENEURSHIP

“Go See Visit” 2017

As a result of a collaborative effort between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the IOM, a pilot project titled “Go See Visit” brought ten Guyanese entrepreneurs from Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States to explore the possibility to develop local businesses and increase employment opportunities in low-income communities in Guyana.¹⁵

COMMUNICATION

Communicating about the Guyana-Venezuela border controversy 2023

The Diaspora Unit used its Facebook page to share timely information as well as organising many online events for different Guyanese diaspora communities about the Guyana-Venezuela border controversy. The online events were attended by several ministers and allowed the diaspora to ask questions and raise concerns. Recordings of online events were subsequently made available to the public via Facebook.

CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

Inter-agency coordination 2023

The Diaspora Unit drives structured dialogue within the government by coordinating inter-agency coordination meetings to discuss subjects of relevance with all diaspora-facing agencies. These coordination meetings have permitted sharing of practices, coordination of resources and identification of information gaps. Following capacity development support from an EUDiF action, the Diaspora Unit will continue to organise such meetings and leverage them to improve government service delivery to the diaspora.

NETWORKING

Diaspora Conference 2023

The University of Guyana hosted its second conference on diaspora engagement, with the theme “Calling 592: Honouring, researching, reigniting diaspora”. The conference sought to celebrate the diaspora for its “resilience, social and spatial reorganisation, innovativeness, cultural diffusion, trans-national agency and transformation”. Simultaneously, the conference called for reflection on the challenges to be brought by a predicted influx of returnees (and other emigrants) to Guyana in light of its expanding oil and gas sector. The conference was positioned as complementary to the expanding work of the government’s Diaspora Unit, which allows the University of Guyana to feed in from academic research and dialogue and policy analysis.

INVESTMENT + NETWORKING

Inaugural Guyana Diaspora Sustainability & Investment Conference 2023

The MFA and Henley Caribbean, a Caribbean-led UK-based environmental consultancy, hosted the first diaspora investment conference with the objective of driving partnerships for investment in Guyana. The conference discussed the growth of the oil and gas sector and implications for non-oil sectors including natural resources, energy, tourism, agriculture and healthcare.

¹⁴ Department of Public Information. “Hot off to the press diaspora digest”, 2019. <https://dpi.gov.gy/hot-off-the-press-diaspora-digest/#gsc.tab=0> Accessed July 2020

¹⁵ Engaging Guyana’s Diaspora. (21 August 2017) MFA. Accessed July 2020.



Jessie (the AI Agent) 2024

Jessie is an innovative AI platform developed to provide the Guyanese diaspora easy and round-the-clock access to government information and services. It was launched by Guyana's Diaspora Unit, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, with V75 Inc. as the platform developer. The platform can be accessed via WhatsApp and communicates in a total of 17 languages, including English and Creolese. In its first phase, Jessie covers general information frequently requested by the diaspora, including remigration, housing, investments, the National Insurance Scheme (NIS) and other document support, connecting with the banking sector, the Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM) or the Guyana Revenue Authority (GRA). For the next phase, there is a plan to incorporate more agencies and develop a more advanced system for Jessie to be able to create tailored responses for specific issues, such as personalised investment opportunities.

DIGITALISATION,
COMMUNICATION &
INFORMATION

Diaspora Job Fair 2024

The Government of Guyana, in collaboration with the Private Sector Commission (PSC), held the first Diaspora Job Fair in New York. The event featured key private sector leaders, offering the Guyanese diaspora insights into the diverse opportunities available across various sectors in Guyana.

COMMUNICATION
& INFORMATION

Annex: List of Actors

Explore the institutionalisation of diaspora engagement worldwide via the [typology of 430+ institutions](#)

Diaspora related institutions

- **At regional level**

Caribbean Community (CARICOM) 1973

CARICOM promotes regional integration through economic and trade union; coordination of the foreign policy and cooperation in areas such as health, education and culture, communications, and industrial relations.

- **National institutions**

- At ministerial level

Ministry of Foreign Affairs

The MFA is responsible for promoting the interests of Guyana within the international community and for contributing to the economic and social development of the Guyanese people.¹⁶ It also executes the Guyana Diaspora Project in partnership with the IOM.

- At sub-ministerial level

Diaspora Unit 2011

The Diaspora Unit promotes relations between the government and the Guyanese diaspora, seeking to engage the diaspora to contribute toward Guyana's national development. The draft Diaspora Engagement Strategy and Actin Plan foresees the expansion of its workforce.

Remigration Unit

The Diaspora & Remigration Unit is the department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation that handles applications the "re-migrant scheme" in cooperation with the Guyana Revenue Authority. The unit is focused on processing applications - including eligibility checks and tax exemptions - whilst the Diaspora Unit is the outwards-facing branch of the MFA.

Diaspora organizations in Europe

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

Association of Guyanese Nurses and Allied Professionals in the United Kingdom 1988

- ☑ **Development activities**

The association provides aid and support for Guyanese healthcare professionals. They also arrange exchanges with institutions and other charitable organisations in Guyana and the UK.

¹⁶ Mission statement. Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Guyana. Accessed May 2020.

Guyana Diocesan Association in London UK 1994

- ✓ **Integration activities**
- ✓ **Development activities**

The Guyana Diocesan Association in London links the Church of England and the Diocese of Guyana for charitable purposes, especially in education, relief of poverty, and community development.

Guyanese Federation of Nationals UK

- ✓ **Integration activities**

This umbrella body for many organisations works to improve relationships between overseas Guyanese and promotes events where they socialize with friends from home.

Guyana UK Social Development Association (GUSDA) UK 1995

- ✓ **Integration activities**
- ✓ **Development activities**

GUSDA contributes to the social development of Guyanese in Guyana and in the United Kingdom in areas such as health, education, culture, community development and general well-being.

Leeds UK Guyanese Association UK 2009

- ✓ **Integration activities**

A hometown association of Guyanese diasporans from Leeds.

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