



Diaspora engagement mapping LEBANON

Facts & figures

Terminology: Lebanon refers to its diaspora as 'the Lebanese Expansion' (Arabic, الانتشار اللبناني *al-intishar al-lubnani*; also الجالية اللبنانية *al-jāliyyah al-lubnaniyyah*).

Political rights



Dual citizenship¹



Right to vote in national elections
for citizens residing abroad³



Remittances



Remittances as a share of GDP: -
Remittances inflow (USD billion): 6,696

Voting from abroad:

Online/at embassies or consulates



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).

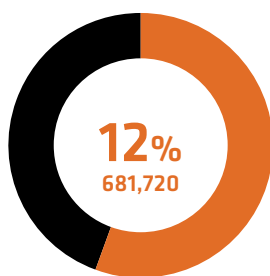
Emigration



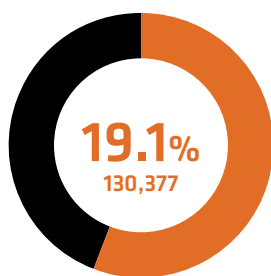
% of emigrants in
total population²



% of which
in the EU



♂ 55.8%
♀ 44.2%



♂ 55.9%
♀ 44.1%

Top countries of destination



| | |
|--------------------------|---------|
| United States of America | 150,380 |
| Canada | 97,179 |
| Australia | 93,967 |
| Saudi Arabia | 52,864 |
| France | 51,485 |

¹ Law of 1946, as amended by Decree No. 10828 of 1962. Legal text unavailable in English. www.gfmd.org/files/pfp/Lebanon_EN

² Although statistics conducted by the United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs indicate that the total number of Lebanese emigrants does not exceed the 1 million mark, other data highlighted in the Economic Vision report (2018) namely, estimate the Lebanese Diaspora at around 10 million emigrants, of which 68% are residing in North America. This largely being a function of the specific definition of what constitutes a member of the "diaspora".

³ Lebanese electoral law (2017) (Chapter Eleven: Voting for Lebanese Diaspora). <https://www.mfa.gov.lb/Library/Files/Uploaded%20Files/Lebanese%20electoral%20law%202017.pdf>

Overview of the policy and legislative framework



- 2015** ● **Lebanese Citizenship Reacquisition Law: Law no. 41⁴** enables emigrants of Lebanese descent to reclaim their citizenship. Although lauded by some, it was deemed controversial and discriminatory against women by others, as it is applicable only to individuals of patrilineal Lebanese descent.
- 2017** ● **Voting for Lebanese Diaspora, Lebanese electoral law:⁵** In an attempt to bolster an ever-absent representation of Lebanese immigrants in the country's democratic life, the Lebanese electoral law of 2017 was adopted and governed the parliamentary elections of May 2018. The unprecedented law highlighted the right of Lebanese expatriates to register and vote. It additionally allocated six parliamentary seats (of 128 total) to the diaspora. According to the National Democratic Institute,⁶ the MFA successfully registered 82,970 voters in 40 countries.

» Trends

Driven by high unemployment rates, inflation, and political instability, amongst a plethora of other push factors, emigration has long been a recurring theme – sometimes an aspiration – for Lebanese nationals.

Diaspora support to Lebanon is often seen as a reaction to crises because government efforts are seen as sporadic and un-sustainable. For example, the civil unrest that began in October 2019, commonly referred to in Arabic as 'Thawra', witnessed significant diasporic engagement and support. In an unprecedented display of unity with their country of origin and the social and political challenges it faces, Lebanese emigrants organised peaceful protests, fund-raising events, lobbying campaigns, and created online platforms to facilitate coordination and news sharing across the globe. Their participation and support to the movement have been crucial in it gaining traction.

In March 2020, the diaspora supported Lebanon in its fight against Covid-19 by donating PPE and testing kits⁷ and to support an aggravated economic crisis that had left the country financially crippled.⁸ Numerous initiatives, like the Lebanon Diaspora 2020 Crisis Relief Effort⁹ proved that Lebanese abroad, 'may be far in distance, but close at heart'. The diaspora also showed their support through different initiatives following the explosion in the port of Beirut¹⁰.

Governmental efforts to strengthen relationships with the diaspora have been mainly focussed on attracting foreign investments, namely through the Investment Development Authority of Lebanon (IDAL). A plan developed in 2006, envisaged the establishment of 'special economic zones, tax-free and specialised in high potential sectors like medical tourism, media, high-tech and food processing'.¹¹

4 A translation of the law into English can be found here https://web.archive.org/web/20160304024817/http://eudo-citizenship.eu/docs/Translation_Draft%20Law%20_Lebanon.pdf

5 'Bassil announces implementation of citizenship law for Lebanese diaspora', *The Daily Star*, May 05, 2016 <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2016/May-05/350667-bassil-announces-citizenship-law-for-lebanese-diaspora-in-effect.ashx>

6 Refer to footnote 3.

7 'Lebanon 2018 Parliamentary Elections Final Report', *National Democratic Institute*, accessed June 29, 2020, https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/Lebanon%202018%20Parliamentary%20Elections_Final%20Report%20%28v.3%29.pdf

8 'COVID-19 Analytical Snapshot #31: Diaspora engagement', *IOM UN Migration (IOM Research)*, 6 May 2020, https://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/documents/covid-19_analytical_snapshot_31_-_diaspora_engagement.pdf

9 ASSAF Claude, 'One million dollars raised in one hour: the Lebanese Diaspora in the US join hands to help the most disadvantaged', *L'Orient-Le Jour*, 8 April 2020, <https://www.lorientlejour.com/article/1213746/one-million-dollars-raised-in-one-hour-the-lebanese-diaspora-in-the-us-join-hands-to-help-the-most-disadvantaged.html>

10 <https://www.givingloop.org/liveloop>

11 <https://english.alaraby.co.uk/english/indepth/2020/8/25/after-beirut-blast-grief-and-guilt-in-lebanons-diaspora#:~:text=On%20a%20balmy%20August%20evening,homeless%2C%20in%20a%20matter%20of>

12 <https://www.nordeatrade.com/en/explore-new-market/lebanon/investment#:~:text=The%20Lebanese%20government%20has%20just,high%2Dtech%20and%20food%20processing.>

When it comes to future priorities in terms of diaspora engagement, the Economic Vision Report (2018),¹² highlights that the adoption of an emigration policy remains a priority. This goes hand in hand with the enhancement of ties with the diaspora in a way that drives the Lebanese economy through remittances, knowledge sharing and market access. Efficient lobbying and advocacy channels and mechanisms also need to be put in place.



Achievements

Policy of 'Concord'¹³ and international success

Generally, the Lebanese government adopted a policy of 'concord' (as depicted by the MFAE) vis-à-vis the diaspora. Although proper legislative support is still lacking, the 'concord' approach can be translated as the government's support to diasporic networks and organisations. It encourages the transfer of remittances, facilitates returns, promotes dialogue with international organisations dealing with emigrants' issues (see UNDP, TOKTEN), and motivates its expatriates to exercise their democratic rights. The adoption of the *Voting for Lebanese Diaspora* law, as part of the Lebanese electoral law and the *Lebanese Citizenship Reacquisition Law*, remain two of the main achievements on this front, given their importance. Generally, the unwavering success and influence of the diaspora have led to better support to Lebanon, through the establishment of diasporic networks, organisations and fora.

Obstacles



- **Lack of unity and political polarization:** Abroad, just as in the homeland, the Lebanese political landscape has always been shaped by sectarianism. This segmentation is mirrored within the diaspora and has led to tensions amongst different Lebanese communities abroad and it remains a challenge for the disparate groups to express their demands vis-à-vis the Lebanese government in unison.¹⁴
- **Absence of adequate legal framework:** Despite its recent efforts to engage with Lebanese abroad whilst attempting to reinforce the Lebanese identity, Lebanon still lacks a migration policy. This has provoked a deterioration of quality of connection with the second and third generation diaspora.¹⁵
- **Poor coordination and unreliable support:** There is a lack of coordination between Lebanese ministerial institutions dealing with the diaspora. This is exacerbated by cumbersome bureaucratic processes that make it difficult for Lebanese generally – in-country or abroad – to access said institutions and benefit from their services.¹⁶
- **Priority dissonance:** The Lebanese government has always given priority to attracting diasporic investment,¹⁷ rather than focussing on what they, as a government, could offer in return.

12 <https://www.economy.gov.lb/media/11893/20181022-1228full-report-en.pdf>

13 Migration Policy Centre- *Migration Profile, Lebanon*, June 2013 https://migrationpolicycentre.eu/docs/migration_profiles/Lebanon.pdf

14 Fakhoury Tamirace, 'Lebanese Communities Abroad: Feeding and Fuelling Conflicts', *Arab Reform Initiative*, 5 December 2018, <https://www.arab-reform.net/publication/lebanese-communities-abroad-feeding-and-fuelling-conflicts/>

15 'SUMMARY OF LEBANON ECONOMIC VISION', *Consultation and Research Institute*, March 7 2019, https://www.fes-lebanon.org/fileadmin/user_upload/documents/Mckinsey_Plan/Summary_of_the_Economic_Vision.pdf

16 This was experienced first-hand during the process of working on the fiche for Lebanon. Most ministerial institutions contacted were extremely difficult to reach; some of their websites were out-dated/inaccessible.

17 Labaki Boutros, 'THE ROLE OF TRANSNATIONAL COMMUNITIES IN FOSTERING DEVELOPMENT IN COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN*', UNITED NATIONS EXPERT GROUP MEETING ON INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE ARAB REGION, UN/POP/EGM/2006/13, 12 May 2006, https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/events/pdf/expert/11/Paper13_Labaki.pdf

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Lebanese Diaspora Village

NETWORKS & CULTURE

Diaspora Village شبكات وثقافة (DV) is a project initiated by Lebanese Diaspora Energy with the aim to create a hub for the Lebanese Diaspora in their homeland in order to build and support a cohesive and dynamic community. Diaspora Village's members will interact culturally, socially, educationally and economically. It will be a point of reference for any information and research on the respective Diaspora and a unique place, combining activities of a museum and its library, a guest house, an indoor multipurpose hall, an outdoor square for special events, a café, a gift shop, a bakery, a studio and several houses for Diaspora of Lebanese origin around the world.

Lebanese Nationality Program 2017 – ongoing

DIGITAL

Initiated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Emigrants, the program aims at re-establishing ties with Lebanese expatriates by offering an online platform through which emigrants of Lebanese descent can apply for nationality. Available in four different languages, the website highlights the various benefits of reclaiming the Lebanese nationality such as voting rights and residency.

The Lebanese Expatriate Project: Live Lebanon 2009 – 2020¹⁸

FUNDING

Live Lebanon is a programme implemented by UNDP that engages with the Lebanese diaspora, amongst other stakeholders, to fund development projects. Their work supports the most vulnerable, underprivileged communities of Lebanon through activities ranging from donation of medical equipment to the renovation of local schools.

Transfer of Knowledge Through Expatriate Nationals (TOKTEN) 2005-2018

HUMAN CAPITAL

In partnership with the Council for Development and Reconstruction, TOKTEN is a UNDP mechanism that allows the utilisation of expatriates' expertise by facilitating short-term consultancies in Lebanon. According to the final report of TOKTEN (2010-2012), the project benefitted 16 Lebanese institutions, trained 600 nationals, and deployed 19 experts from around the world.¹⁹ No figures on more recent deployments are available.

2021-2022 Developing Lebanon's tech sector through the Lebanese diaspora

TRADE

In response to Lebanon's economic crises, the Lebanese diaspora in France, with EUDiF support, collaborated to aid the Lebanese tech market. AFPI (Association Franco-Libanaise des Professionnels de l'Informatique) and Berytech, in partnership, developed a training manual for SMEs on exporting tech services, a communication plan to expand AFPI's network, and Cedars Tech label guidelines to position AFPI as tech ambassadors in foreign markets.

¹⁸ Official website inaccessible as the project is ending in July 2020

¹⁹ <https://www.lb.undp.org/content/dam/lebanon/docs/Governance/Projects/Project%20document.pdf>



Lebanon Innovate

Lebanon Innovate is a programme funded by the European Union and co-ordinated by Berytech, aiming to boost innovation and competitiveness in key sectors such as agrifood, healthcare, and ICT. By supporting intellectual property development and knowledge transfer, the programme facilitates the transformation of academic research into market-ready products, while also fostering partnerships with European countries and engaging diaspora networks to access international markets. Lebanon Innovate builds on EUDiF's earlier initiative with AFPI and Berytech, which was Berytech's first project to actively engage the Lebanese diaspora.

ENTREPRENEURSHIP,
SKILLS TRANSFER

Annex:

List of Actors

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

Diaspora related institutions

- **At regional level**

The Arab League 1945

Lebanon is a member of the Arab League, a regional organisation that aims at enhancing ties between Arab countries in Africa and Western Asia while promoting better coordination and cooperation.

- At ministerial level

Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Emigrants (MFAE) 1943

The MFAE is responsible for diplomatic and consular missions in addition to the general management of the Lebanese diaspora. It is supported by the General Directorate of Emigrants.

General Directorate of Emigrants (GDoE) 1993²⁰

GDoE operates under the MFAE and is dedicated to maintaining the ties with Lebanese expatriates by facilitating the relations between the diaspora and Lebanon in the field of registration, inheritance and property transactions amongst others.²¹

- At sub-ministerial level
- At local level

World Lebanese Cultural Union (WLCA) 1959

The WLCU is an international, non-governmental, ECOSOC-accredited organisation with offices around the world. Supported by the Lebanese government, 'but working independently'. It defines itself as 'secular, non-denominational, and non-profit' and is considered one of the biggest channels working on diaspora engagement in Lebanon and abroad.

Investment Development Authority of Lebanon (IDAL) 1994

Under the tutelage of the President of the Council of Ministers, IDAL is a national investment promotion agency working across a range of sectors (agriculture, industry and tourism). In addition to attracting, facilitating, and retaining foreign investments, IDAL is also responsible for the promotion of Lebanese exports.

Lebanese International Finance Executives (LIFE Lebanon) 2009

LIFE is a global, non-religious, apolitical support network of Lebanese professionals taking its roots in the diaspora, with a global reach encompassing more than 10 countries worldwide, including Lebanon. LIFE deploys the expertise of highly-skilled expatriates around three main pillars: 'Connect' (creating ties among Lebanese professionals), 'Nurture' (focused on the development of younger generations) and 'Promote' (targeting the Lebanese economy). LIFE organises business networking events, offers scholarships and mentoring programmes, and promotes job creation whilst encouraging the development of economic and financial policies in Lebanon.

²⁰ Official website inaccessible.

²¹ Refer to footnote no. 17/p.18.

Diaspora organisations in Europe

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



Amis du Liban en Suisse (Friends of Lebanon in Switzerland)

- ✓ Development activities
- ✓ Integration activities

Amis du Liban is a Lausanne-based, secular, apolitical association promoting peace in Lebanon and supporting under-privileged communities.

Association Culturelle Franco Libanaise (ACFL) (Franco-Lebanese Cultural Association) 1949 France

- ✓ Integration activities

ACFL is a Paris-based association that aims to reinforce cultural ties between Lebanon and France. The association manages the *Maison du Liban* (House of Lebanon) that hosts Lebanese students on its premises, part of the *Cité Universitaire of Paris*.

Association Franco-Libanaise des Professionnels de l'Informatique (AFPI) France

- ✓ Development activities
- ✓ Integration activities

AFPI is a professional network of Lebanese diaspora in France involved in the IT sector. It strives to both strengthen the network and employ the skills and connection of network members to support social and economic development in Lebanon.

Association pour un Liban Laïque (ApLL) (Association for a Secular Lebanon) 2005 Belgium

- ✓ Integration activities

ApLL is a Brussels-based independent association promoting the establishment of a secular state in Lebanon while protecting religious freedoms and minorities in the private sphere.

Cedars Tech

- ✓ Development activities

Cedars Tech is a non-profit organisation based in France and co-founded by the Association Franco-Libanaise des Professionnels de l'Informatique (AFPI), the Chambre de Commerce Franco-Libanaise (CCFL), and Berytech. Cedars Tech aims to mobilise the Lebanese diaspora in the tech sector to create strong connections to the world and boost the growth of Lebanese Tech Start-ups and SMEs.

Association pour Liban Social et Solidaire Acteur de sa Reconstruction (Alissar), France

Driven by a strong commitment to Lebanon, Alissar mobilises members of the Lebanese diaspora in France from diverse fields such as education, technology, and social innovation. The organisation leverages their expertise and resources to implement impactful projects across Lebanon, focusing on education, employability, and sustainable development for vulnerable youth and women.

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