



# Diaspora engagement mapping SAMOA

## Facts & figures

Terminology: the term 'Samoans overseas' has been commonly used in official government communications in recent years, although the term 'diaspora' has also been in use since 2019 since the creation of the Samoa Diaspora Relations Unit.

### Political rights



Dual citizenship<sup>1</sup>



Right to vote in national elections for citizens residing abroad<sup>2</sup>



Samoa's Parliament in Apia has passed amendments to the Electoral Amendment Bill 2024, granting citizens the right to register to vote from overseas.

### Remittances



Remittances as a share of GDP: **28.36%**  
Remittances inflow (USD million): **264.93**

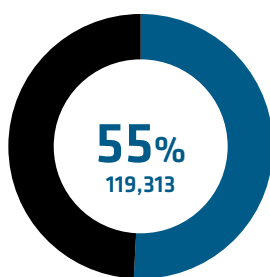
### Emigration



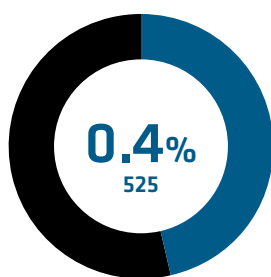
% of emigrants in total population



% of which in the EU



♂ 50.2%  
♀ 49.8%



♂ 46.5%  
♀ 53.5%

### 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



New Zealand	63,075
Australia	38,964
American Samoa	15,931
Greece	483
Fiji	308

<sup>1</sup> Following the 2016 Amendment, the Citizenship Act states that a person born outside of Samoa will now be considered a citizen by descent if, at the time of their birth, the individual has at least one parent or grandparent that is a Samoan citizen. <https://www.loc.gov/law/foreign-news/article/samoa-citizenship-act-amended-to-allow-second-generation-samoans-overseas-to-claim-citizenship/>; Part 3, Renunciation or Loss of Citizen, <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/4211de254.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.rnz.co.nz/international/programmes/datelinepacific/audio/2018929341/samoa-s-electoral-laws-amended>

## Overview of the policy and legislative framework



- 2016** ● The **Samoa Labour Migration Policy** establishes a link between the movement of Samoan nationals abroad and remittances sent to the country, and recognizes the value of remittances sent by Samoans overseas during past crises. The policy also acknowledges the role played by remittances flows in the Samoan economy, and in particular in addressing poverty in the country and helping households to provide schooling for their children.
- 2016**  
▼  
**2020** ● The **Strategy for the Development of Samoa (SDS)** includes increasing labour mobility as one of its strategic outcomes.
- 2021/22**  
▼  
**2025/26** ● **Samoa National Employment Policy (SNEP-2)**. The SNEP-2 was approved by Cabinet in early September 2022, after two years of consultations, debates, reviews, and validation by constituents and the Cabinet Policy Committee; and were finalized by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Labour before ILO made a final review. The SNEP-2 was developed based on national consultation, as it needed to assist the constituents in the socio-economic recovery from COVID-19 impacts, and addresses challenges to ensure readiness to support the labour market from disruptions affecting employment and incomes.

### » Trends and achievements

E lele le toloa ae ma'au i le vai" is a Samoan proverb meaning it doesn't matter where Samoans reside in this world, they will always return to their country of heritage.

Samoa has one of the largest overseas diaspora in the Pacific, and the government has intensified its efforts in the area of diaspora engagement in recent years. In 2016, it amended the Citizenship Law to ease the conditions of citizenship in favour of descendants of Samoans born abroad. The government created the Samoa Diaspora Relations Unit, which started communicating with Samoan communities abroad and called on Samoan diaspora celebrities and professional athletes [via Twitter](#) to support the country in December 2019, when Samoa was grappling with a severe measles outbreak.

Samoa is highly dependent on remittances, which are the country's largest form of foreign exchange earner.<sup>3</sup> Remittances account for roughly 20 percent of Samoa's GDP annually, making Samoa the sixth largest remittance receiver worldwide.<sup>4</sup> The Government recognizes the significance of remittance income to Samoa's economy and seeks to develop strategies for leveraging remittances for development, notably by establishing products and services for migrant workers to encourage savings, investments and business creation.<sup>5</sup> The diaspora has demonstrated a strong capacity to support both the Samoan government and relatives living in the country during times of crisis. After the 2009 Samoa earthquake and tsunami, 90% of disaster-affected households in the country received international remittances, 72% of these were sent within a week after the event.<sup>6</sup> During the measles outbreak that hit Samoa in 2019, Samoan diaspora communities liaised with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs & Trade through its diplomatic missions abroad in order to present financial donations that were later transferred to the Government Accounts for Measles.<sup>7</sup>

The Samoan government places great attention on encouraging its citizens to work overseas, especially through seasonal labour migration programmes.<sup>8</sup> Samoa is now a signatory to five

<sup>3</sup> Samoa Observer, 'Proposed drop in cost of money transfers spells savings for Samoans'

<sup>4</sup> IOM, [Remittances and disaster: Policy implications for disaster risk management](#)

<sup>5</sup> Government of Samoa, [Samoa Labour Migration Policy](#)

<sup>6</sup> IOM, [Remittances and disaster: Policy implications for disaster risk management](#)

<sup>7</sup> Press Release: Ministry of Foreign Affairs & Trade - [Donations from our Auckland Diaspora for the Measles Outbreak](#)

<sup>8</sup> Samoa's National Employment Policy 2016-2020

labour mobility schemes (two with Australia and three with New Zealand)<sup>9</sup> and has been one of the most represented nationalities among the workers taking part in these programmes in recent years.

Samoa diaspora communities are also actively engaged for the preservation of their cultural heritage in their host countries. In New Zealand, the Samoan diaspora works with government authorities in the framework of an annual Language Week that aims to promote the Samoan language, which is the third most spoken language in the country (behind English and Māori).<sup>10 11</sup>

## Obstacles



- **High cost of remittances:** The cost for sending remittances to Samoa from the main OECD countries where the Samoan diaspora resides is relatively high, and cost variations between different money transfer operators for the same remittance corridors remain significant.<sup>12</sup>
- **Lack of economic opportunities:** Poverty and unemployment (especially among youth) are major development issues in Samoa. This is an obstacle to diaspora engagement, in particular with regard to the return of Samoan diasporans who mainly live in OECD countries where wages are higher and unemployment remains low.
- **Lack of policy and institutional framework:** The absence of a dedicated policy and institutional framework constitutes a major obstacle to diaspora engagement in Samoa. The government is currently addressing this challenge through the establishment of the Samoa Diaspora Relations Unit.

## SPOTLIGHT: effective practices

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



### Government of Samoa's Work Ready Pool (WRP)<sup>13</sup>

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Labour has developed a Seasonal Employment Unit (SEU) which is responsible for supporting the various seasonal employment schemes to which Samoa is a signatory. To this end, the SEU has set up a Work Ready Pool (WRP) of workers to manage all recruitments of Samoan workers for seasonal labour migration programmes abroad.

LABOUR MIGRATION

9 Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Labour, Annual report for period ending 30 June 2019

10 New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs & Trade, [Twitter](#)

11 Samoa Language Week 2020 Calendar of Events

12 See <https://devpolicy.org/the-persistently-high-cost-of-pacific-remittances-20151117/> and <https://www.samoaoobserver.ws/category/article/49192>

13 Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Labour, 'Seasonal Employment Schemes';

## Diaspora celebrities and international athletes

### COMMUNICATION; HUMAN CAPITAL

The government of Samoa has taken to targeting celebrity diaspora in its communications on social networks, notably through the Samoa Diaspora Relations Unit's Twitter and Facebook accounts. Several celebrities from the Samoan diaspora were called upon to send videos of encouragement when the country was hit by a measles outbreak in 2019; some were received and the senders were thanked personally by Prime Minister Tuilaepa Sailele Malielegaoi for the support they provided during the crisis.<sup>14</sup> Celebrities from the diaspora also occupy an important place in the video developed in 2020 by the Samoa Diaspora Relations Unit for the Samoan diaspora around the world.<sup>15</sup>

## Temporary return agreement for crisis-response

### HUMANITARIAN AID; RETURN

After the 2009 earthquake and tsunami, the Samoan and New Zealand Governments concluded an agreement that permitted Samoan migrants in New Zealand to return temporarily to Samoa and stay in the country for one month to support relief and recovery efforts, without losing their jobs in New Zealand.

According to the affected households, this initiative provided great emotional support and contributed in facilitating 'informal' remittance and in-kind transfers to Samoa.<sup>16</sup>

## Remittance-fee waive in crisis response

### HUMANITARIAN AID; REMITTANCES

After the 2009 tsunami in Samoa, Western Union adopted a 'no fees policy' on remittance transfers to the country. This initiative contributed to encourage the Samoan diaspora to remit more in order to support the recovery process, as well as to utilise more formal channels on the long term.<sup>17</sup>

## [Beautiful is Back](#)

### TOURISM

"Beautiful is Back" campaign by the Ministry of Tourism that specifically targets diaspora to attract back tourists after the covid-19 pandemic.

14 Samoa Diaspora Relations Unit, [Twitter](#)

15 Samoa Diaspora Relations Unit, [Twitter](#)

16 IOM, [Remittances and disaster: Policy implications for disaster risk management](#)

17 Jenna Pairama, Loic Le De, [Remittances for Disaster Risk Management: Perspectives from Pacific Island Migrants Living in New Zealand](#)

## Annex:

# List of Actors

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

### Diaspora related institutions

- **At regional level**

#### Pacific Community (SPC)

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

#### Pacific Islands Forum

Samoa is a member of the Pacific Islands Forum, an inter-governmental organisation that seeks to foster cooperation between countries and territories of the Pacific Ocean. Its work covers migration issues, as 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)

Samoa is a member of the 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. Other objectives of PIDC include modernising national immigration legal frameworks in the region.

- **National institutions**
  - At ministerial level

#### Ministry of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (MPMC)

The MPMC is responsible for strengthening policy and programme coordination across the different government ministries and agencies. It maintains close relationships with the Prime Minister's office and cabinet ministerial offices, and it oversees the Samoa Diaspora Relations Unit.

#### Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Labour (MCIL) 2003

The MCIL promotes labour and employment relations, including foreign employment. It oversees the Seasonal Employment Unit.

- At sub-ministerial level

### **Samoa Diaspora Relations Unit 2019**

Created under the MPMC, the Samoa Diaspora Relations Unit's mandate is to "strengthen the connection, partnership and fellowship among the Samoa Diaspora and Samoans residing in Samoa".<sup>18</sup> The Unit started communicating on social media in December 2019, while Samoa was grappling with a severe measles outbreak. Since its creation, the Samoa Diaspora Relations Unit has been visited and supported by several diaspora celebrities, including international athletes from the diaspora.<sup>19</sup>

### **Seasonal Employment Unit (SEU)<sup>20</sup>**

Operating within the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Labour (MCIL), the Seasonal Employment Unit (SEU) is responsible for providing administrative support for the seasonal employment schemes that Samoa has been executing in partnership with the governments of New Zealand and Australia.<sup>21</sup> The SEU manages Samoa's Work Ready Pool (WRP), which is the only source of recruitment of Samoan workers for seasonal employment schemes abroad.

### **Embassies and honorary consulates abroad**

Samoa's diplomatic missions abroad have played an important role in mobilising the diaspora during times of crisis, particularly during the measles outbreak that hit the country in 2019.<sup>22</sup>

## **Diaspora organisations in Europe**

### **Pacific Rugby Players Welfare (PRPW) 2016 UK**

#### **Integration activities**

PRPW was established in 2016 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.

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



18 Government of Samoa, 'Samoa Diaspora Relations Unit'

19 Samoa Diaspora Relations Unit, Twitter, [https://twitter.com/Samoas\\_Diaspora](https://twitter.com/Samoas_Diaspora)

20 Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Labour, 'Seasonal Employment Schemes'

21 Ministry of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, Annual report, 1 July 2016- 30 June 2017

22 Press Release: [Ministry of Foreign Affairs & Trade - Donations from our Auckland Diaspora for the Measles Outbreak](#)

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