



Diaspora engagement mapping ESWATINI

Facts & figures

Terminology: Eswatini refers to its diaspora as 'liSwati (s.) / emaSwati (pl.), a Swazi term for Eswatini citizens abroad/ in the diaspora, although the term diaspora is also used in some contexts.

Political rights



Dual citizenship¹



Right to vote in national elections
for citizens residing abroad²



Remittances



Remittances as a share of GDP: **0.69%**
Remittances inflow (USD million): **33.35**

Data disclaimer

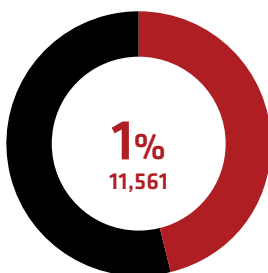
As diaspora definitions vary widely, we have chosen to use comparable data on emigration as a proxy. This does not include all who consider themselves diaspora and is not necessarily aligned with national definitions of diaspora. Emigration data comes from [UNDESA \(2024\)](#) and remittances from the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

Emigration

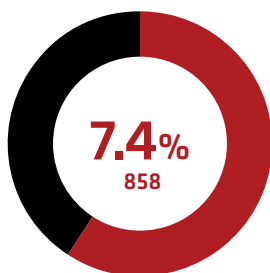
% of emigrants in
total population



% of which
in the EU



♂ 46.3%
♀ 53.7%



♂ 59.2%
♀ 40.8%

Top countries of destination

South Africa	9,302
Portugal	742
Botswana	642
Australia	359
Namibia	216

¹ Dual citizenship is recognised for citizens of birth only; voluntarily accepting citizenship of another state means automatically losing Eswatini citizenship. The 2006 Constitution of the Kingdom of Swaziland Act defines Eswatini citizenship as being born to an Eswatini parent, whether they are born in the country or abroad. [Full text](#).

² Eswatini citizens abroad are permitted to register to vote in the country, although voting from abroad is not enabled. See Voters' registration act 2013, available at: <http://www.elections.org.sz/online/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/VOTERS-REGISTRATION-ACT.pdf>

Overview of the policy and legislative framework



- 2019** ● **National Development Plan (NDP)³ 2019/20 – 2021/22 - Towards Economic Recovery:** While Eswatini currently has no migration policy and its extant Immigration Act (1964) predates independence, its most recent National Development Plan (2019-2022) includes a target to develop a Migration Policy Framework by 2022. The NDP also aims to leverage its relationship with South Africa and work to increase the cross-border mobility of labour and capital.
- 2019** ● **Government Strategic Roadmap 2019-2022** establishes a policy framework that will ensure sustainable economic development, financial stability & growth, improve the quality of life of emaSwati. While the policy does not refer to the diaspora, at its launch the Prime Minister noted that achieving it would require contributions from all citizens, including in the diaspora.⁴
- 2025** ● **2025 The National Labour Migration Policy (NLMP)** was launched by the Government of Eswatini along with an Implementation Plan. The NLMP aims to strengthen labour migration governance and management. The policy promotes safe, orderly and regular migration while improving the protection and welfare of migrant workers and their families. It also seeks to enhance diaspora engagement and strengthen coordination among government institutions and social partners in line with the Southern African Development Community Labour Migration Action Plan (2020-2025).

Practices

Explore 520+ practices by country, SDG or sector of engagement in the interactive database!



Emergency diaspora repatriation

The Kingdom of Eswatini provides emergency repatriation to Eswatini in the diaspora who require assistance. During the recent coronavirus pandemic, the government has helped its citizens caught abroad by travel restrictions to return home.⁵ The King has even deployed his own private jet to bring Eswatini citizens back to the country.⁶

Strengthening the Government of Eswatini's Capacity to Engage the Diaspora for Social and Economic Development 2021

The Eswatini government and the UN International Organisation for Migration (IOM) are partnering on a diaspora initiative which aims to involve diaspora in nation building. Three central themes emerged from the first activity, a diaspora mapping: diaspora's strong sense of identity, optimism for the country's future and the recognition that they can play a role in the country's development. The project's main aim is to promote diaspora engagement in the national development agenda. This is being achieved by promoting two key approaches – one that is focused on developing the capacities of the Government, and the second on finding ways to increase communication between the Government and its diaspora communities, particularly towards development opportunities. The data collected during the mapping will be used to develop a longer-term Diaspora Engagement Strategy. Other activities foreseen are the establishment of an online diaspora engagement platforms, a diaspora unit, a Government database and a Diaspora Forum.

³ A National Development Plan 2023-2027 is currently being developed by the Government of Eswatini. The document spells out Government's plans to achieve economic recovery and sustainable livelihoods for all Emaswati in the next five years. <https://eswatini.un.org/en/192312-minister-economic-planning-development-dr-tambo-gina-hosts-development-partners-seeks>

⁴ <http://www.gov.sz/index.php/latest-news/2245-roadmap2019>

⁵ <http://www.gov.sz/images/CORONA/Foreign-Affairs-press-statement-6-August-2020.pdf>

⁶ <http://www.swazilandnews.co.za/fundza.php?nguyiphi=343>



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.

Diaspora engagement is limited in Eswatini. The vast majority of Eswatini citizens abroad reside in South Africa or the UK, and while workers’ remittances make an important contribution to extended family incomes - especially for seasonal workers - they are modest in terms of GDP,⁷ which has arguably lessened the importance of diaspora engagement (although there is limited reliable data on remittance flows).

The government does not grant dual citizenship to its diaspora, but in practical terms almost all Eswatini diaspora who are citizens of the principal countries of residence have visa-free access to the country, so this is less of a barrier than it might first appear.

There are estimated to be more speakers of siSwati (one of the traditional languages of the people of Eswatini) in South Africa and other countries of residence than there are in Eswatini itself.⁸ There are also British-Swazi diaspora, mostly based in South Africa and the UK, whose families lived in Eswatini during the colonial period, many of whom retain connections with the country.

The Eswatini diaspora (in the legal and also wider sense) is quite polarised politically, and some Eswatini diaspora outside the country have conducted advocacy and media campaigns against alleged human rights abuses in the country.⁹

Obstacles



- **Brain drain:** Emigrants of Eswatini tend to not come back to their country of origin.¹⁰ This results in major brain drain and hinders the country’s development. According to the African Development Bank in 2010, 56% of Eswatini emigrants were skilled, while only 4% of the country’s residents are skilled.¹¹
- **Lack of communication:** Diaspora who are willing to support the development of Eswatini in different humanitarian or philanthropic activities do not have enough information on when, where, or how to do so.¹²
- **Fears of diaspora return:** There are also some fears and resentments from the local population about diaspora return, especially during the current coronavirus pandemic.¹³

7 <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/migrationremittancesdiasporaissues/brief/migration-remittances-data>

8 ‘Swazi’ at Ethnologue (18th ed., 2015)

9 <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/depeches/54641/politique/swaziland-lopposition-appelle-a-lisolement-international-du-roi-mswati/>

10 <https://www.slideshare.net/RolandHolouPhD/swazi-global-diaspora-immigrants-and-refugees-platform-for-the-diaspora-associations-of-swaziland>

11 African Development Bank report: The Role of the Diaspora in Nation Building: Lessons for Fragile and Post-Conflict Countries in Africa

12 <https://www.slideshare.net/RolandHolouPhD/swazi-global-diaspora-immigrants-and-refugees-platform-for-the-diaspora-associations-of-swaziland>

13 <http://new.observer.org.sz/details.php?id=12659>

- 
- **Lack of capacity:** Eswatini lacks adequate structures and capacity to drive forward a diaspora engagement agenda.
 - **Lack of policy focus:** Eswatini has no policy frameworks for diaspora engagement. However, in the NLMP there is mention of a plan to a diaspora engagement policy. Its investment policies do not distinguish diaspora from other foreign investors, and they are not allowed to purchase land in the country except under certain circumstances.¹⁴

¹⁴ https://www.satradehub.org/images/stories/downloads/pdf/technical_reports/Technical%20Report%20-%20Swaziland%20Investment%20Policy.pdf

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) 2008

AU-CIDO is responsible for implementing the AU's engagement with non-state actors through the involvement of the diaspora and civil society. Eswatini nominates a diaspora focal point to represent the country at AU-CIDO Continental Meetings.

Southern African Development Community (SADC) 1992

Eswatini is a member of SADC, whose goal is to further socio-economic cooperation and integration as well as political and security cooperation among 16 southern African countries.

- **National institutions**

- At ministerial level

Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation 1996

This ministry works to advance the interest of eSwatini and eMaswati internationally, through enhancing national security, contributing to growth in the economy, employment and standard of living, assisting eSwatini Nationals abroad, strengthening global cooperation in ways that advance eSwatini's interests.

Ministry of Home Affairs 1968

The Ministry of Home Affairs has responsibility for immigration and migration policy development.

- At sub-ministerial level

Swaziland High Commission to London 1968¹⁵

The Swaziland High Commission in London safeguards and promotes Eswatini's political and socio-economic interests in the United Kingdom. It also provides services to the sizeable Eswatini diaspora in the country, as well as the diaspora in several other countries to which it is accredited.

Diaspora Unit within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation 2022

The unit aims to advocate for policy development and diaspora engagement to promote better understanding of Eswatini's development goals and priority areas of focus within diaspora communities.

¹⁵ More properly, the Eswatini High Commission to the United Kingdom, but the former name is retained as it is more recognisable to UK and international bodies.

Diaspora organisations in Europe

Phumelela Project UK 2018 UK

☑ Development activities

Phumelela Project UK acts as a resource for young Swazi men and women aged 18 to 25 living in Swaziland by providing advice and assistance and organising programmes of physical, educational and other activities as a means of advancing in life and helping young people by developing their skills, capacities and enabling them to participate in society.

Shamba Trust 2011 UK

☑ Development activities

Shamba Trust works to develop the capacity of communities to provide disadvantaged children from AIDS-affected households with an equitable foundation to lifelong development through the provision of high quality early childhood care and education.

Swaziland Human Rights Network UK (SHRNUK) 2019 UK

☑ Integration activities

SHRNUK works in partnership with the NGO Action for South Africa (ACTSA) to strengthen human rights in Eswatini through lobbying and advocacy in the UK, Europe, and at the UN-level.

Swaziland Charitable Trust (SCT) 1910 UK

☑ Development activities

SCT works for the people of The Kingdom of eSwatini, helping to develop a healthy and well-educated community. It operates an orphan support scheme and oversees the twinning of a British secondary school with a Swazi one, as well as acting as a conduit for other charities assisting eSwatini.

Swaziland Society 1991 UK

☑ Development activities

☑ Integration activities

The Swaziland Society was founded with the objective of developing and strengthening educational, cultural, economic, and social ties between Great Britain and Swaziland. The society aims to foster friendship and understanding between the peoples of the two countries. Its activities include the publication of *Focus on Swaziland Magazine* (now *Focus on eSwatini*); meetings, talks and social gatherings; and financial assistance to development projects in eSwatini.

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



Swaziland Vigil UK 2012 UK

Integration activities

Swaziland Vigil UK works to raise awareness about development needs in Eswatini and conducts lobbying and advocacy work to campaign for greater political rights in the country.

Original research:
AFFORD (2020)
Editing & update:
EUDiF (2026)

