



Diaspora engagement mapping VANUATU

Facts & figures

Terminology: The government and civil society use the concept of diaspora. The term 'Ol man Vanuatu' is used to describe diaspora amongst Ni-Vans (an abbreviated form of Ni-Vanuatus, meaning Vanuatuans). The broader Melanesian term (including Papua New Guinea, New Caledonia and Solomon Islands) 'Wantok' is sometimes used.

Political rights



Dual citizenship¹²



Right to vote in national elections
for citizens residing abroad³

Only in legislative elections



Remittances



Remittances as a share of GDP: **12.87%**
Remittances inflow (USD million): **144.97**

Voting from abroad:⁴

By proxy



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).

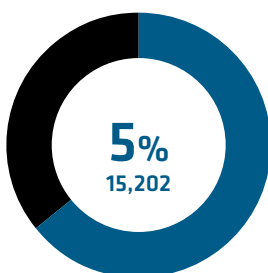
Emigration



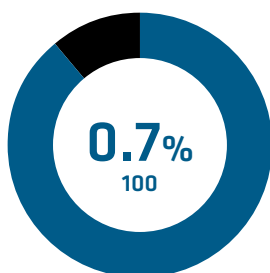
% of emigrants in
total population



% of which
in the EU



♂ 64.2%
♀ 35.8%



♂ 89%
♀ 11%

Top countries of destination



Australia	10,208
New Caledonia	4,021
South Africa	230
French Polynesia	210
Fiji	190

1 Vanuatu Government: [Citizenship's Office and Commission](#).

2 Amendments in 2013 and 2014 have ensured that dual citizenship is available for Vanuatu citizens. Any application for regaining citizenship by Vanuatu nationals, is pursuant to Section 18 of the Citizenship Act (CAP 112).

3 Citizens residing abroad can only vote for legislative and sub-national legislation.

4 Voting from abroad is only via proxy. It was first implemented was 1982, following Vanuatu's independence in 1980. [Representation of the People Commencement 1982](#)

Overview of the policy and legislative framework



- 2013** ● **Immigration Act 2010** was **amended in 2013** to grant long-term visa 'Part A, subclass 131' to anyone whose parents are Ni Vanuatu or of Ni Vanuatu descent or anyone who has been residing in Vanuatu for the last 12 months as of 2013.⁵
- 2019** ● The **National Labour Mobility Policy** has the key aim of coordinating actions in order to arrive at a labour mobility industry in Vanuatu that complies with international standards and produces economic returns and social benefits for the people of Vanuatu. The intent is to achieve this through strengthening Vanuatu's governance structure, enhancing the agricultural sector, increasing job opportunities and encouraging skills development for Ni-Vans.⁶
- 2025** ● **The Vanuatu Labour Mobility Reintegration Strategy and Action Plan.** Seeks to maximise labour mobility benefits by supporting returning Ni-Vanuatu workers' economic, social and psychosocial reintegration for sustainable livelihoods and national development. Strategic priorities include skills transfer, business opportunities, and savings reinvestment; social integration for families and communities with child protections; and psychosocial care addressing mental health and challenges such as underemployment.

Practices

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



[ACP-EU Migration Action June 2014 – August 2019](#)

In Vanuatu, technical assistance through the ACP-EU migration action (implemented by the IOM) focused on visas, remittances, trafficking and smuggling. The initiative supported writing a Melanesian remittances policy for the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG, see annex) in 2019. Although it has not yet been formally validated due to a refocus of priorities for the MSG related to COVID-19.

[Building the capacity of migrant workers and government to harness the potential of remittances](#)

Implemented by IOM, this project aims to increase understanding of remittances flows and practices in Vanuatu 2020–2021. Planned activities include developing training for migrants on remittances and financial literacy.

[Vodafone and Digicel to extend Mobile Money services to international remittances 2021](#)

Vanuatu's two mobile network providers, Vodafone (M-Vatu⁷) and Digicel Mobile Money, should, in 2021, make their mobile wallets available for international money transfer. This will provide seasonal workers with the ability to easily send small amounts of money home, at low cost, to rural locations where their families are often based.

⁵ Vanuatu Government: Department of Vanuatu Immigration and Passport Service: [Permanent Residency Visa](#).

⁶ Horticulture New Zealand. Ministry of Foreign Affairs, International Cooperation and External Trade: [RSE Conference: Vanuatu's Labour Mobility Policy Presentation](#).

⁷ Newsroom (1 November 2019) Pacific Financial Inclusion Programme. [Mobile Money Service now available in Vanuatu](#).

National Labour Mobility Summit⁸ 2018

The meeting in March 2018 provided an opportunity to take stock of the Vanuatu government's successful efforts to export labour services to horticulture industries in Australia and New Zealand. Recommendations included developing a National Labour Mobility Policy for the country. The summit also highlighted the need for the development of a programme for integration of returning workers.

Maua, a new e-commerce platform for the diaspora 2022

Maua, the popular e-commerce platform widely used in Samoa since 2018, was officially launched in Vanuatu. Through digital trade, it aims to forge stronger linkages between the country's informal and formal sectors and strengthen bonds between local and diaspora communities, including by contributing to preserve traditional handicrafts and food items sold via the platform.

>> 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.

The Government of Vanuatu has made a push for greater diaspora engagement in recent years, notably by involving the country in seasonal worker programs with Australia and New Zealand, and by trying to collect more data on the Ni-Vanuatu diaspora. Facilitating and driving down the costs of remittances has also been a key priority for the government, as illustrated by the country joining the Global Call-To-Action on Remittances during COVID-19.⁹ Vanuatu has put in motion a pathway for online remittance services to help significantly lower costs over the next few years (see Spotlight section), and it participated in the process for developing a regional Melanesian remittances policy for the Melanesian Spearhead Group (with support from the IOM ACP-EU migration action). Furthermore, the government of Vanuatu strengthened the rights of the Ni-Vanuatu diaspora by allowing dual citizenship in 2013.

The National Labour Mobility Policy was developed to improve governance and operation of labour mobility schemes. Its focus is on better recruitment processes and worker protection.¹⁰ By 2019, Ni-Vans were the largest group working in New Zealand under the Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) scheme - with 5,130 workers - and in Australia under the Seasonal Worker Program (SWP). Between 2007 and 2019, 37,347 RSE visas had been processed under the scheme.¹¹ Vanuatu has been the most successful Pacific country in terms of developing and expanding a strong base of workers. Moreover, Vanuatu is also a member of the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) Skills Movement Scheme, which aims to facilitate the temporary movement of nationals among the member states for the purpose of employment.

⁸ Matthew Dorman: Devpolicy Blog. [Vanuatu Grapples with Seasonal Worker Success.](#)

⁹ Knomad: [Remittances in Crisis – How to keep them Flowing.](#)

¹⁰ Workers are hired through licensed labour recruitment agents across Vanuatu and pre-departure training and subsequent support is provided through labour sending units and the Vanuatu Department of Labour.

¹¹ It is common for workers to return for five or more seasons in a row.

Data collection is a priority for the government. The Vanuatu National Statistics Office uses visitor details sourced from port and airport arrivals/departures. These are published monthly and the government is planning to include more diaspora questions in the next mini-census.

Obstacles



- **Lack of a dedicated policy and institutional framework:** Vanuatu has not yet established a policy on diaspora engagement, or an institution tasked with coordinating efforts to engage with its diaspora population.
- **Lack of data collection:** The government collects limited data, which hinders the development of evidence-based diaspora engagement policies. Vanuatu has no border management information system, nor does it publish data on migration regularly outside of the census (approximately every 10 years). The 2009 Vanuatu census included questions on internal migration. The 2020 census will include a question focused on whether the census respondent has received any remittance income within the previous twelve months.
- **High cost of remittances:** Remittance transfers via banks are expensive. Money Transfer Operator remittances are more popular among those who remit, but there are limits on transaction value. This leads to large informal remittance flows, with many Ni-Van seasonal workers flying home with cash and exchanging it for local currency, Vatu, with legal or informal foreign exchange providers in Port Vila. The government is addressing this issue by supporting initiatives like Vodafone Vanuatu's M-Vatu initiative (see Spotlight section).
- **Lack of funding:** The government faces financial constraints that limit the support of diaspora engagement activities.

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)

Vanuatu 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. Vanuatu became a member in 1983.

Pacific Immigration Development Community (PIDC)

Vanuatu is a member of the Pacific Immigration Development Community (known as the Pacific Immigration Director's Conference until 2018). PIDC is a regional consultative process that gathers official immigration agencies of the Pacific region and enables 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.

Melanesian Spearhead Group Skills Movement Scheme (SMS)

The MSG, established in 1986, is a regional organization comprising the four Melanesian states: Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and Fiji.

The SMS was launched on 30 March 2012 to facilitate the temporary movement of skilled MSG nationals within the MSG countries for the purposes of taking up employment without compromising national laws and policies on health and safety, minimum working conditions and border requirements.

Pacific Financial Inclusion Programme (PFIP) 2008

Since its establishment, PFIP has helped over two million low-income Pacific Islanders access formal financial services and financial education. It is jointly administered by the UN Capital Development Fund (UNCDF) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and receives funding from the Australian Government, the European Union and the New Zealand Government. The Programme operates in several Pacific countries, including Vanuatu. In Vanuatu, its work includes support for the [National Financial Inclusion Strategy 2018-2023](#), and support for increasing access to digital finance in Vanuatu. Recently, PFIP has been supporting Vodafone Vanuatu with the development of its M-Vatu mobile money product.¹²

- **At national level:**

V-Lab Business Development Programme 2020

Launched in June 2020, V-Lab is a Joint program with the Department of Labour to promote entrepreneurship and innovation amongst seasonal workers (with the support of Australian Aid).

¹² Pacific Financial Inclusion Programme: [Mobile Money in Vanuatu](#).

Department of External Trade

Vanuatu's Department of External Trade has played a key role in the development of the National Labour Mobility Policy.¹³ The Department has been a critical focal point for regional stakeholders understanding of Vanuatu labour mobility policy as it adapts to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the impact on labour mobility movement.

National Bank of Vanuatu (NBV)

NBV has been keen to make remittances cheaper for Ni-Vans,¹⁴ through the use of online and mobile banking platforms specifically including features for seasonal workers.¹⁵ These include a foreign exchange calculator and preferential foreign exchange rates that help seasonal workers when they are trying to calculate what their remittance recipient may receive in Vatu.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs, International Corporation and External Trade (MOFAICET)

MOFAICET co-developed the National Labour Mobility Policy, which enhanced the agricultural sector, provided better governance structure, increase job opportunities and encouraged skills development for Ni-Vans.

- **At sub-ministerial level:**

Department of Labour and Employment Services

The Employment Service Unit (ESU) was established in the Vanuatu Department of Labour (DoL) within the Ministry of Internal Affairs in 2006. It manages the labour mobility programmes which include the Recognised Seasonal Employers (RSE, New Zealand) and Seasonal Workers Program (SWP, Australia) and also the Pacific Labour Mobility Scheme (PLS, Australia). It also co-developed the National Labour Mobility Policy with the Department of External Trade.

Vanuatu embassies, consulates, High Commissions and Trade Commissions abroad

These bodies engage with Vanuatu diaspora communities on issues such as passport issuance.

13 Anita Roberts: Daily Post. [National Labour Mobility Policy Launched](#). (21 December 2019)

14 Ajay Jagannath: Devpolicy Blog. [Remittances: Moving People Move Money](#). (10 February 2020)

15 National Bank of Vanuatu: [IsiNet and Mobile Banking](#).

Diaspora organisations in Europe

Association des Etudiants Vanuatais en Nouvelle-Calédonie (AEV-NC)

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



☑ Integration activities

AEV-NC is a community organisation focused on Vanuatu students living and studying in New Caledonia. [f]

Comité des 40 ans de Vanuatu en Nouvelle Calédonie

☑ Integration activities

Comité des 40 ans de Vanuatu en Nouvelle Calédonie is a Facebook page focused on celebrating Vanuatu's 40th anniversary amongst the Ni-Vanuatu diaspora in New Caledonia. The Facebook page has remained active since the July 2020 celebrations. [f]

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Editing & update:
EUDiF (2026)



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Funded by
the European Union



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