



Diaspora engagement mapping TIMOR-LESTE

Facts & figures

Terminology: Official government communications most often use the terms “Timorese diaspora” or “compatriots in the diaspora”.^{1,2}

Political rights



Dual citizenship³



Right to vote in national elections
for citizens residing abroad⁴



Remittances



Remittances as a share of GDP: **11.77%**
Remittances inflow (USD million): **219.57**

Voting from abroad:⁵

At embassies/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 \(2024\)](#).

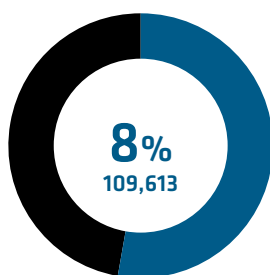
Emigration



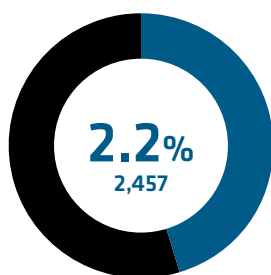
% of emigrants in
total population



% of which
in the EU



♂ 52.9%
♀ 47.1%



♂ 45.3%
♀ 54.7%

Top countries of destination



Indonesia	95,603
Australia	11,546
Portugal	2,215
Greece	231
Norway	9

¹ Timor-Leste and Portugal solidify close relations through investment opportunities (Government of Timor-Leste, 2011)

² Program of the Eighth Constitutional Government

³ Article 29 of the Nationality Act

⁴ Election Experts Mission to Timor Leste (European Commission, 2018)

⁵ Eight polling stations were established across four countries in the 2018 election to allow overseas voting – Porto, Portugal; Seoul, South Korea; Darwin, Melbourne and Sydney, Australia; London, Oxford and Dungannon, UK - [Election Experts Mission to Timor-Leste](#)

Overview of the policy and legislative framework



- 2011** ● The **Program of the Eighth Constitutional Government** states that the Timor-Leste Government is especially committed to strengthening ties with Timorese diaspora, and that legislation is to be adopted to ensure the provision of public services to the diaspora through the embassies and consulates of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste. It will introduce support mechanisms and consular protection to Timorese citizens residing abroad and improve the mechanisms for the dissemination of information.
- 2017** ● The **Timor-Leste National Employment Strategy 2017 – 2030** aims at increasing employment from labour migration schemes to Australia and South Korea. Recommendations include expanding destination countries and working schemes for Timorese workers abroad including in New Zealand, South East Asian countries, other Portuguese speaking countries and the Middle East, and making better use of the skills and expertise brought back by overseas workers to Timor-Leste. Reference is also made to the 50,000 workers based in countries such as Indonesia and the UK, (not part of government labour schemes) who represent a potentially important source of skills and knowledge if they have incentives to return.
- 2018** ● The **Workforce Development Strategy (WDSTL)** supports the objectives of promoting prosperity, reducing poverty and enhancing stability through improved access to quality assured technical education and training, which matches the needs of the private sector. The goals of WDSTL are to improve human resource capacity in targeted areas; and to foster linkages between Australia and Timor-Leste at the individual, organisational and country levels.
- 2022** ● **Timor-Leste Remittance Mobilisation Strategy** was developed to incubate and scale strategic approaches to leverage remittances from the diaspora, in order to diversify the country's economy and contribute to its socio-economic development. The strategy complements the National Diaspora Engagement Policy and signals the governments' growing recognition of the Timorese diaspora's contributions to the country and its communities abroad.
- 2023** ● **Timor-Leste National Diaspora Engagement Policy.** Reflects the government's growing appreciation of the impacts that Timorese communities abroad play in the country's well-being. The policy positions the Timorese diaspora as critical agents of socio-economic development, as well as key allies in the country's advancement in the global sphere. The policy has five pillars: (1) institutional and leadership development within Timor Leste's government; (2) diaspora diplomacy; (3) human capital; (4) economic capital; (5) monitoring and evaluation.

Practices

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



Migration Profile 2023

East Timor launched the Migration Profile, a country-owned tool that centralises data on migration to support the government in developing evidence-based policies. The tool provides a comprehensive overview of internal and international migration in East Timor, as well as of migrants' socio-economic contributions to the country. It was developed by the Ministry of Justice and Ministry of Interior and funded by the IOM Development Fund.⁶

⁶ IOM and Timor-Leste Partner to Develop Migration Profile for Evidence-Based Policymaking

Seasonal Worker Programs (SWP)

Timor-Leste has entered into agreements with the Australian and South Korean seasonal worker programs. Under the [South Korean Employment Permit Scheme](#) (2009), Timor-Leste workers sent to South Korea are eligible to work in three areas: agriculture, manufacturing related industries, and fisheries. Timor-Leste, in partnership with Australia, is also part of the [Seasonal Worker Programme](#) (2012) and [Pacific Labour Scheme](#) (2019). Since joining the programme in 2012, almost 3,000 Timor-Leste workers have helped to fill labour shortages in rural and regional Australia while gaining skills and supporting their families back home.⁷

Pacific Engagement Visa

In 2023, East Timor participated in consultations to design Australia's Pacific Engagement Visa (PEV). The PEV aims to increase permanent migration from East Timor and the Pacific, growing the diaspora in Australia, strengthening people-to-people links and encouraging greater cultural business and educational exchange. Starting in 2024, up to 3,000 visas will be allocated annually through a ballot process to eligible individuals, who would then be able to apply for permanent residence in Australia.



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 Timor-Leste has deployed efforts over the past years to strengthen the political rights of the Timorese diaspora. The Programme of the Eighth Constitutional Government states that the National Parliament passed legislation that allowed the Timorese diaspora to register in the electoral registry in 2017 and 2018. Political participation, in addition to being a fundamental right recognised for all Timorese citizens, is also an important instrument for strengthening the ties of the Timorese abroad to the national community. On 21 June 2022, the Timor-Leste National Diaspora Engagement Policy 2023-2027 was launched by the Minister of Finance, with implementation support from IOM, UNDP, and WHO. The policy responds to the growing appreciation from the Timor-Leste government of the impacts that Timorese communities abroad have played in the country's wellbeing, as well as their critical role in socio-economic development and the advancement of Timor-Leste as a global, outwardly connected nation.

Timorese workers have been going abroad since independence in May 2002.⁸ The diaspora in UK is allegedly to be as high as 20,000.⁹ Their importance to the Timorese economy is indicated by the fact that the Prime Minister personally visited Timorese workers in Northern Ireland and made official communication on the issue with the British and Portuguese governments

⁷ Timor-Leste joins the Pacific Labour Scheme (Minister for Foreign Affairs Australia, 29.03.2019)

⁸ DevPolicyBlog, 'Timor-Leste remittances update'

⁹ DevPolicyBlog, 'Remittances and diversification in Timor-Leste', <https://devpolicy.org/remittances-and-diversification-in-timor-les-te-20191106/>

the week following the Brexit vote.^{10,11} The Timorese in Portugal generally have Portuguese passports and are therefore harder to identify as Timorese. The data on UK-based Timorese diaspora also suggests that most Timorese who use their Portuguese passports to enter Europe, do not settle in Portugal. With a majority leaving Timor-Leste to earn money and find work, Timor-Leste benefits from a large remittance inflow from the diaspora population.

There are two types of labour mobility pathways available to Timorese workers. One pathway is completely unmanaged with no government support at either end of the pathway. The other, through the Australian and South Korean seasonal worker schemes, is highly managed with strict government controls imposed by both the sending and receiving countries. Timor-Leste is now the third-largest labour-sending country for the SWP and sends the highest percentage of female workers.^{12,13}

Recently, the East Timorese diaspora has started contributing to disaster response, as documented by the DEMAC real-time review in the context of the March 2021 floods.¹⁴

Obstacles



- **Lack of a dedicated policy and institutional framework:** The lack of a dedicated diaspora-engagement policy and institutional framework is a major obstacle to diaspora engagement for Timor-Leste.
- **Lack of opportunities:** The lack of employment options in Timor-Leste deters Timorese diaspora members from returning. Labour opportunities in Australia, Indonesia, South Korea, Portugal and the UK provide scope for Timorese to earn a higher income and gain valuable work experience. Many of Timor-Leste's young educated population move overseas for career development, further limiting the potential to grow the national Timorese economy.
- **Lack of information:** East Timorese individuals living throughout the United Kingdom on Portuguese passports, who are sources of large remittance flows and play an important role in the Timorese economy, are set to be affected by Brexit. While many of them have Portuguese passports, they maintain a strong East Timorese sense of identity and do not fully understand the implications of an EU citizenship on their rights to work within the United Kingdom after Brexit.¹⁵

10 DevPolicyBlog, 'Identity and opportunity for Timorese migrant workers in the UK'

11 Institute of Development Studies, 'Brexit and Timorese workers in the UK'

12 Timor-Leste joins the Pacific Labour Scheme (Minister for Foreign Affairs Australia, 29.03.2019)

13 DevPolicyBlog, 'Another bumper year for the Seasonal Worker Programme'

14 https://demac.euwest01.umbraco.io/media/4atlw02/demac_east_timor_digital.pdf

15 UK's East Timorese population faces loss of rights after Brexit

Annex: List of Actors

Diaspora related institutions

- **At regional Level**

International Organization for Migration

IOM Timor-Leste supports the Government in attaining its longer-term development goals outlined in Timor-Leste's Strategic Development, and in accordance with the [2030 Agenda](#) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), through the provision of technical assistance and advice to further strengthen institutional capacity. Since 1999, IOM has been working closely with Timor-Leste to develop coherent and well-coordinated migration governance and border management systems to ensure efficient migration management for Timorese citizens, visitors, immigrants, irregular migrants, and asylum seekers.

- **National institutions**

Timor-Leste embassies, consulates, and High Commissions overseas

These bodies engage with Timor-Leste diaspora communities on issues such as passport issuance and registering to vote.

Centro Treino Integral e Desenvolvimento, Baucau

The Integral Training and Development Centre is the government branch from which Timorese workers can receive training that may assist with future work opportunities overseas.¹⁶

Secretariat of State for Vocational Training and Employment Policy (SEPFOP)

Under the coordinating Minister for Economic Affairs, aims at promoting job creation and vocational training. It processes Timorese candidates, and has placed a Labour Attaché in the Embassy in Canberra to facilitate the Timor-Leste engagement in the Australian Seasonal Worker Program.¹⁷

Diaspora organisations in Europe

Associação de Amizade Timor-Leste Portugal

- ☒ **Integration activities**
- ☒ **Development activities**

The organisation aims to strengthen the presence of several Portuguese institutions in Timor, meeting the expectations of the new generations of Timorese and contributing to the perpetuation of the cultural and affective links that have united generations. They carry out a set of activities in diverse areas, from culture to sports, in East Timor.

¹⁶ Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, [Timor-Leste Workforce Development Strategic Review](#)

¹⁷ Government of Timor-Leste, ['Government facilitated Seasonal Worker Program with Australia a success'](#)

Explore the institutionalisation of diaspora engagement worldwide via the [typology of 520+ institutions](#)



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



East Timor Community in England and Northern Island UK

☑ Integration activities

The significant Timorese diaspora community in the UK is supported through a Facebook page with over 500 followers. The community group is a communication hub for the community, sharing information about Timor-Leste, their community within the UK and other information such as job opportunities for Timorese people in the UK. [f]

Académicos Timorenses de Coimbra 1998 Portugal

☑ Integration activities

A student organisation that aims to support Timorese students in their integration in Coimbra.

ETAP - East Timorese Association in Peterborough UK

☑ Integration activities

ETAP is a not-for-profit organization with the objective of supporting the Timorese people in Peterborough. The organisation is involved with helping settlement of new Timorese migrants, and its support role to the diaspora community includes promotion of cultural and sporting activities. [f]

Oxford Timorese Community Association (OTCA) UK

☑ Integration activities

The aim of the group is to identify and address community needs and work together with individuals and groups in the community to provide help to Timorese in Oxford and promote East Timor's culture and values. [f]

TIMOR-DIÁSPORA 1985 Portugal

☑ Integration activities

Timor-Diaspora is member of the World Diaspora Organization (WOD) Network. It is a platform that provides a space for each Timorese citizen to contribute to the memory and history of the island through all kinds of publications, including articles, books, images and videos.

Uma Timor – Salurik Portugal

☑ Integration activities ☑ Development activities

The association promotes Timorese culture as well as providing support to Timorese communities abroad, independently of any political and religious doctrine. Members of the organisation want to show their integration in Portugal and that they are valuable to society. At the same time, they want to pass on their experiences and skills to Timor-Leste, as they continue to be proudly Timorese. [f]

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