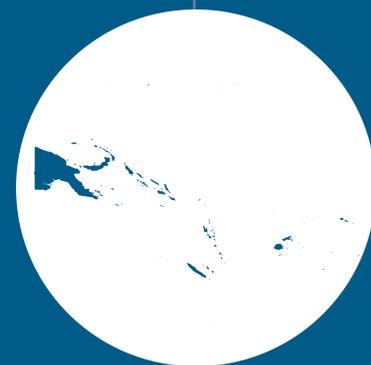




European Union
Global Diaspora Facility

DIASPORA ENGAGEMENT



PACIFIC

REGIONAL
SERIES

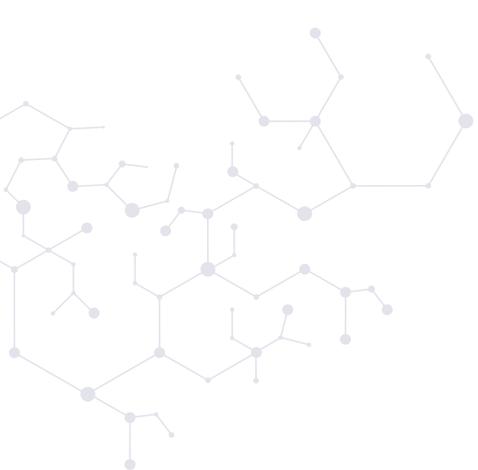
The European Union Global Diaspora Facility (EUDiF) is the first European Union-funded project to take a global approach to diaspora engagement. Implemented by the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD), the project seeks to build an informed, inclusive and impactful diaspora-development ecosystem through research, dialogue, and capacity development. EUDiF runs from June 2019 to December 2022.

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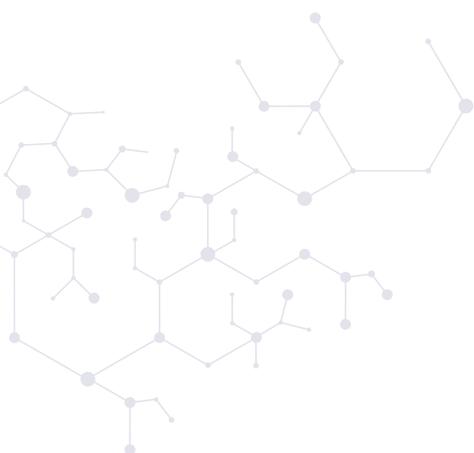


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1. BACKGROUND

In 2020, EUDiF worked with a team of regional experts to conduct a [global mapping](#) exercise focused on assessing diaspora engagement across six regions. The aim was to address the fragmentation of evidence on diaspora engagement policies, institutions, and practices by collating the information in an open-access knowledge hub.

The global mapping has generated 107 individual country fact sheets, which are available via an interactive map on the EUDiF website, where findings can also be compared between individual countries.

Through the research exercise, EUDiF has sought to identify the interests and challenges of countries of heritage when it comes to diaspora engagement. This publication is one of a six-part series reviewing the research results for each partner region.

EUDiF regions:

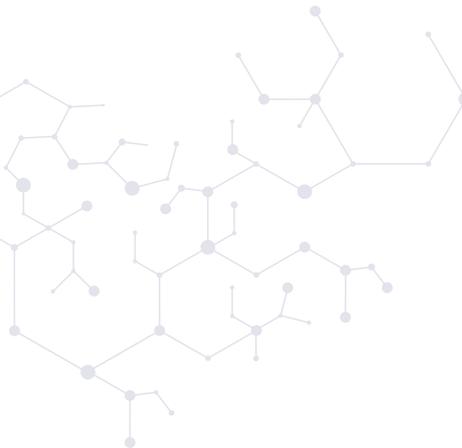
- Africa
- Asia
- Eastern Europe and Central Asia
- Latin America & the Caribbean
- Middle East
- The Pacific**

THE PACIFIC

If you are interested in the specifics of the country selection methodology, email us at eu-diaspora@icmpd.org.

This document is a regional analysis of diaspora engagement in the Pacific. It draws on knowledge gathered during the mapping of 12 countries to study relevant policy and institutional frameworks, trends, good practices, and recommendations at regional level. The resulting document offers a consolidated source of information to:

- ▶ Promote the contribution of the Pacific diaspora to development;
- ▶ Guide action at regional level;
- ▶ Identify opportunities for peer exchange

- 
- | | | | |
|---|--------------------------------|---|------------------|
|  | Federated States of Micronesia |  | Papua New Guinea |
|  | Fiji |  | Samoa |
|  | Kiribati |  | Timor-Leste |
|  | Marshall Islands |  | Tonga |
|  | Nauru |  | Tuvalu |
|  | Niue |  | Vanuatu |

2. POLICY AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORKS RELATED TO DIASPORA ENGAGEMENT

AT REGIONAL LEVEL

Regional legislative and policy frameworks on diaspora engagement issues in the Pacific have started developing very recently. The only regional organisation addressing diaspora engagement in the Pacific is the [Melanesian Spearhead Group](#) (MSG), an intergovernmental organisation composed of the four Melanesian countries of Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. The MSG sent a request for a technical intervention to the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) through its African, Caribbean and Pacific – European Union (ACP-EU) Migration Action Programme to develop a study on remittances in MSG countries and propose recommendations to increase remittance flows and diaspora investments. In addition, the MSG is currently working on the development of a [Remittances Policy report](#) which has yet to be finalised.

The majority of Pacific countries are members of both the [Pacific Islands Forum](#), an intergovernmental organisation which seeks to foster cooperation between countries and territories of the Pacific Ocean, and the [Pacific Immigration Development Community](#) (PIDC), a forum for official immigration agencies of the Pacific region. Although the two organisations cover migration issues, they have not yet worked on the topic of diaspora engagement.

AT NATIONAL LEVEL

Despite the relatively small population of the region, several Pacific countries have very significant diasporas abroad. Recent estimates indicate, for example, that well over half of Tongans and Samoans, and almost a quarter of Fijians, live and work overseas. In addition, the Pacific region is characterised by the presence of several remittance-dependent national economies, such as Tonga, Samoa, and Kiribati.

Nevertheless, policy and institutional frameworks on diaspora engagement are lacking in the majority of Pacific countries.

None of the twelve countries mapped have developed an official policy or strategy for diaspora engagement.

In addition, out of the twelve Pacific countries included in the mapping, only Samoa has put in place an institution dedicated to diaspora issues – the Samoa Diaspora Relations Unit, which started communicating with Samoan communities abroad in 2019.

Nine of the countries mapped allow their citizens to hold dual citizenship. Moreover, five out of the twelve countries allow their diaspora to vote from abroad during presidential elections. However, none of the diaspora communities mapped are represented in the parliament of their country of origin (with the notable exception of the I-Kiribati diaspora established on the island of Banaba in Fiji).

Several developments aimed at strengthening diaspora engagement have emerged in the region over the past few years, as illustrated for instance by the institutional steps taken in Samoa in 2019, or the ongoing collaboration between the government of Fiji and the IOM for mapping and strengthening relations with the Fijian diaspora (see below).

3. REGIONAL PIONEERS

EUDI's regional pioneers are countries that have shown significant interest and progress in the field of diaspora engagement over time. Countries are usually identified as regional pioneers because:

- The national institutional framework and enabling environment has been developed with the explicit recognition of the key role of migrants and/or the diaspora in the development of the country of origin; the importance of optimising diaspora development contributions has been highlighted.
- And/or the country has implemented notable diaspora-relevant initiatives in a given development sector.

There is no ranking of pioneers. More details on each of the regional pioneers are available in the relevant country fact sheet.

Fiji: The Government of Fiji has made a priority of **improving the attractiveness of the country as an investment destination for the Fijian diaspora**. As part of this effort, in recent years, the Fijian government has reached out to several of the main Fijian diaspora communities abroad and encouraged them to invest in Fiji. In addition, in 2019, the government launched a national digital transformation programme – which includes tools such as the [BizFiji](#) information portal – to stimulate investments from the diaspora. The country has successfully reached out to its diaspora to assist with **relief and rehabilitation efforts when affected by natural disasters**, and it is also committed to preserving Fiji's **language and culture in its diaspora**. Finally, the government is currently collaborating with the IOM to map and strengthen relations with the Fijian diaspora in Australia.

Samoa: This is the only country mapped in the region to have set up an institution dedicated to diaspora issues: the [Samoa Diaspora Relations Unit](#). The Samoan government also supports and encourages its citizens to **work overseas**, especially through **seasonal work programmes**

in New Zealand and Australia. The Samoan diaspora gets actively involved in **relief and rehabilitation efforts during natural disasters** in the country, and Samoan diaspora communities abroad are actively engaged in **cultural preservation activities**.

Tonga: The Government of Tonga is deploying targeted efforts to **encourage the flow of remittances into the country's economy**, notably by working to **reduce the costs of remittances** sent by the diaspora. Tonga has succeeded in strengthening its collaboration with the diaspora by implementing several favourable policies over the past decade: Tongans overseas are allowed to **take part in national elections and to retain their Tongan citizenship** if they become citizens of another country (which has helped preserve diaspora Tongans' land rights in Tonga). Finally, the government is also working to increase trade in services channelled through Tongan visitors to the country, as the Tongan diaspora is becoming increasingly important for the country's **tourism industry**.

4. TERMINOLOGY

With the exception of Timor-Leste, all twelve countries mapped have English as one of their official languages. As a result, certain common trends emerge in the terminology used by respective governments, with terms such as *overseas citizens* and *citizens living abroad* being regularly employed in official communications. The term 'diaspora' is also used in official policies (such as labour migration policies or national development plans) and government communications in seven out of the twelve countries mapped.

5. KEY TRENDS AND PRACTICES

At the global level, EUDiF's mapping of diaspora engagement showed that even though some common trends can be found across all regions, each region also has its own specific trends and distinct practices. In the twelve countries mapped in the Pacific, the main focus is on seasonal migration programmes, channelling remittances and attracting diaspora investment and visitors, as well as humanitarian aid and cultural preservation.

The following regional trends and practices were highlighted in the diaspora engagement mapping:

SEASONAL LABOUR MIGRATION

Seasonal labour migration is an important phenomenon in the Pacific region. Nine out of the twelve countries mapped are actively involved in seasonal labour schemes with neighbouring OECD countries, such as the Seasonal Worker Programme (SWP) and Pacific Labour Scheme (PLS) in Australia or the Recognised Seasonal Employer scheme (RSE) in New Zealand. In recent years, Vanuatu, Papua New Guinea, Tonga, Samoa, and Fiji have been the most represented nationalities among workers taking part in the schemes, and strengthening participation in these mechanisms has been a key priority for their respective governments.

As a result, these countries have been encouraging labour migration and supporting migrant workers abroad as part of their diaspora engagement efforts. For instance, the Government of Samoa created a [Seasonal Employment Unit](#) to help Samoan citizens find seasonal employment opportunities abroad, while the government of Kiribati has been providing information and legal assistance to I-Kiribati overseas workers in their countries of destination, since at least 2015. In 2019, the Government of Papua New Guinea established a [PNG Labour Mobility Unit](#) (LMU) with the objective of increasing the number of workers sent to Australia and New Zealand each year. These efforts have led to the development of significant circular migration flows in the Pacific, consisting of workers employed for periods of several months in neighbouring OECD countries and often rehired by their employers successively over the years.

The only three countries mapped that do not participate in seasonal employment schemes (the Federated States of Micronesia, the Marshall Islands, and Niue) all benefit from free association agreements with OECD countries. For instance, the Federated States of Micronesia has seen a significant number of its citizens moving to the United States under a special 'Compact of Free Association' law authorising them to work in the country without a visa.

CHANNELLING REMITTANCES FROM THE DIASPORA

Due to the importance of labour migration as well as the fact that several Pacific countries have significant diasporas abroad, remittances have made an essential contribution to national economies in the Pacific region for decades.

This regional trend gave rise to the concept of MIRAB¹ economies in the mid-1980s and this model is still observable today. In 2019, Tonga remained the country with the highest share of remittances as a percentage of its GDP worldwide, at 38.5%. Other countries such as Fiji,² Samoa, and Kiribati rely heavily on diaspora remittances. On average, remittances account for 10.5% of GDP in the twelve Pacific countries covered by the mapping, compared to a world average of 5.2%.

A significant number of Pacific countries are deploying targeted efforts to encourage the flow of remittances into their economies. Kiribati and the Federated States of Micronesia have acknowledged the importance of channelling remittances in their respective national development plans. Tonga submitted a request for a technical intervention to the IOM through its ACP-EU Migration Action Programme, which resulted in the formulation of a series of operational recommendations to encourage the flow of remittances to the country. Moreover, the Government of Tonga effectively encouraged the flow of remittances into the national economy by working to reduce remittance costs, notably through its collaboration with

1 MIRAB (Migration, Remittances, Aid and Bureaucracy) is a model of Pacific island micro-economies developed by Bertram and Watters. See also: <https://ideas.repec.org/p/ags/uqses/165087.html>.
2 Remittances have been the second largest foreign exchange earner for Fiji since 2004.

the World Bank Group and the New Zealand Government to develop the 'Ave Pa'Anga Pau' remittance voucher.

Although the COVID-19 pandemic caused a drop in remittances sent to Pacific countries in the first few months of the health crisis, the amounts sent by the Pacific diaspora returned to normal levels by the spring of 2020.³ Three of the countries mapped (Fiji, Tonga, and Vanuatu) joined the global call to action 'Remittances in Crisis: How to Keep them Flowing' launched by the World Bank, reflecting their concern about the impact of the pandemic on remittance flows in the Pacific.

Average share of remittances as a percentage of GDP

10.5%

In the Pacific countries mapped

5.2%

Globally

HUMANITARIAN AID

Over the past few years, the Pacific diaspora has also emerged as a powerful humanitarian actor, and it is able to support disaster relief and recovery when Pacific countries are hit by natural disasters, such as the tropical cyclones that are becoming increasingly frequent in the region as a result of climate change.

After the earthquake and tsunami that hit Samoa in 2009, as much as 90% of disaster-affected households received international remittances from the Samoan diaspora, and 72% of these were sent within a week after the event. Such support lasted for an extended period of time, with remittance flows remaining high six to seven months after the tsunami. In addition, 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. In Fiji, the government successfully reached out to its diaspora to assist with relief and rehabilitation ef-

³ See Stephen Howes and Sherman Surandiran: 'Pacific remittances: holding up despite COVID-19', Devpolicyblog, November 2020, <https://devpolicy.org/pacific-remittances-covid-19-20201116/>.

forts in the aftermath of Tropical Cyclone Winston, which destroyed over 40,000 homes in the country in 2016. Through its embassies and high commissions abroad, the government received donations from various Fijian diaspora communities throughout the world.

SUPPORTING CULTURAL PRESERVATION

Cultural preservation is an important aspect of diaspora engagement in the region, as Pacific diasporas actively engage in the promotion and preservation of their cultural heritage and identity in the host countries in which they live. In New Zealand, diaspora communities from Fiji, Kiribati, Niue, Samoa, Tonga, and Tuvalu collaborate with the New Zealand Ministry for Pacific Peoples in the framework of [Pacific Language Weeks](#). The Language Weeks include the organisation of various cultural events, as well as the publication of Pacific language cards, animated videos, and bilingual children's books. Pacific diaspora communities also use digital platforms and social networks to help preserve cultural identity. In the United Kingdom in 2019, the Fijian diaspora launched the [Learning my roots](#) campaign on social media to promote the Fijian language. Then in Australia, Pacific cultural centres started to offer [online classes](#) in order to enable students to learn traditional dances in response to the restrictions of movement imposed during COVID-19.

The significant interest shown by the Pacific diaspora in maintaining their cultural heritage is also seen as an asset that may contribute to the continuation of diaspora engagement in the future, and is therefore supported by certain Pacific countries of origin which provide tools to help their diasporas maintain cultural connections.

A good case in point is the iVolavosa App, a mobile dictionary for iTaukei (one of Fiji's official languages) developed by the Government of Fiji to encourage the diaspora to learn from abroad.

ATTRACTING DIASPORA INVESTMENTS AND VISITORS

Four of the mapped countries are actively engaged in attracting diaspora investments and visitors. For instance, as mentioned in section 3, the Government of Fiji has made it a priority to improve the attractiveness



of the country as an investment destination for Fijians overseas. The Fijian diaspora constitutes one of the largest pools of highly educated migrants working in OECD countries, and the government referred explicitly to the growing diaspora of Fijians working abroad to justify the need to modernise the national financial system and to make innovation and technology fundamental pillars for achieving its new economic development objectives. As previously mentioned, the Tongan government is also working to increase trade in services channelled through Tongan visitors and investors in the country, and several institutions such as the Tongan Ministry of Trade and Economic Development (MTED) have been tasked to develop a strategy to harness diaspora investment for inclusive economic development. The Government of Papua New Guinea has included potential investors from the diaspora in Australia in its efforts to promote the country as an investment destination for Australian companies.

Attracting diaspora visitors is also a priority for Tonga and Niue. In Tonga, the majority of visitors to the country today is made up of diaspora Tongans visiting friends or relatives. As a result of this, the Ministry of Tourism of Tonga has been officially mandated to strengthen its engagement with the Tongan diaspora abroad in the years to come. In Niue, the government launched the NEVAT (Niue experience of Vaka Atu Toa) programme to give young New Zealand-born Niueans the opportunity to explore the Niuean culture and lifestyle for three months.

6. RECURRENT CHALLENGES

The following recurrent challenges were identified through EUDiF's mapping of diaspora engagement across several of the 12 countries mapped in the Pacific. These are challenges faced by governments in the Pacific in their attempt to engage with their diaspora. In many cases, the same challenges are also faced by diaspora organisations and individuals who find their involvement in the development of their country of origin impeded due to a weak enabling environment. There is no specific ranking of the challenges listed below and most can also be observed in other regions.

Lack of policy and institutional frameworks: As illustrated by the fact that none of the twelve countries mapped have developed a policy for diaspora engagement and only one has a dedicated diaspora institution in place, the lack of appropriate policy and institutional frameworks is a major obstacle to further diaspora engagement in the Pacific region.

Low prioritisation and lack of information and rights: As a direct consequence of the lack of policy frameworks on diaspora engagement in the region, there are relatively few concrete initiatives being implemented by Pacific countries today in the area of diaspora engagement. Diaspora communities experience difficulties in accessing relevant information, which in turn impedes further diaspora engagement, particularly in the areas of political rights and investment. The lack of political rights of the Pacific diaspora is also an obstacle to diaspora engagement, as illustrated by the fact that only five out of the twelve countries mapped allow citizens overseas to vote from abroad during presidential elections.

Unemployment and limited economic prospects: Limited economic opportunities and low wages in some of the countries mapped, especially compared to the main OECD countries of residence of the Pacific diaspora, are also barriers to diaspora engagement, in particular concerning the return of highly qualified diaspora professionals to their countries of origin. High rates of unemployment and underemployment in the Pacific are other obstacles to return.

High cost of remittances: The cost of sending remittances to some of the Pacific countries mapped is relatively high, including important remittance corridors such as New Zealand-Tonga and Australia-Samoa. In addition, only a limited number of remittance service providers are active in the countries in question.

Lack of data: The lack of data on migration and remittances in several of the countries mapped (notably the Federated States of Micronesia, Niue, and Vanuatu) is an important obstacle to further diaspora engagement, as it impedes the formulation of appropriate and evidence-based policies in this area.

Political instability: Perceived corruption is often cited by diaspora members of some of the countries mapped as a major obstacle to further engaging with their country of origin. Fear of political instability is also frequently expressed as a source of concern for potential investors from the diaspora.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations to strengthen diaspora engagement in the Pacific include the following:

To countries of origin:

- **Strengthen institutional and policy frameworks:** The lack of appropriate policy and institutional frameworks is a major obstacle to further diaspora engagement in the Pacific region. Governments should make a priority of strengthening legislative and policy frameworks in this area, as well as establishing institutions dedicated to diaspora engagement issues. In this respect, initiatives such as the Diaspora Relations Unit set up by the Samoan Government should be encouraged.
- **Improve access to information and services for diaspora communities:** In order to enable greater engagement of the diaspora, in particular in the domains of investment and tourism, authorities must ensure that access to information for diaspora communities abroad is improved. Digital transformation programmes and online information portals are good practices to build on.
- **Support cultural preservation:** As Pacific diasporas actively engage in the promotion and preservation of their cultural heritage and identity in the host countries in which they live, Pacific countries of origin should support their diasporas in maintaining cultural connections. Traditions and culture remain intrinsically linked to the perpetuation of diasporic identities. Activities that enable diaspora communities to maintain their cultural heritage over time and pass it on to new generations are therefore real assets for the sustainability of diaspora engagement in the Pacific.

To donors and implementing agencies

- **Know the diaspora:** Improving data collection on diaspora communities abroad and establishing permanent dialogue with them are key areas that donors and implementing agencies should explore. This could enable governments to better understand and respond to the needs of their diaspora communities, thereby creating favourable conditions for sustainable and balanced engagement. In this context, initiatives such as the collaboration between the Government of Fiji and IOM in the framework of the project 'Engaging with Diaspora for Fiji's Development' could be replicated in other countries in the region.

To diaspora organisations:

- **Enhance coordination in disaster relief and recovery:** In order to consolidate the role of Pacific diasporas as humanitarian actors in the region, in particular when countries of origin are affected by natural disasters, it is necessary to ensure effective coordination and communication between Pacific governments and diaspora communities involved in relief activities.