

Learning by doing



series drawing on research and capacity development actions

# DIASPORA ENGAGEMENT AND HUMAN CAPITAL

## Short-term skills transfer schemes

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# Context

This publication on skills transfer schemes falls within the theme of human capital because skills transfer is element of human capital with a long operational history and a bright future. Yet, before digging into skills transfer schemes specifically, it must first be noted that, alongside skills, diaspora human capital comprises the knowledge, expertise, talent, resources and social networks, all of which can be shared with the country of heritage for development advantages. Indeed, we have observed that even though schemes often focus on skills, the transfer of said skills is nearly always accompanied by other elements of human capital, and this is heightened in the context of diaspora whose affinity and commitment to their country of heritage motivates contributions that go beyond a specific assignment. By and large, skills transfer schemes are, therefore, diaspora human capital transfer schemes, though this is less often explicit in the design and mechanisms of a given scheme. This can take place in both short-term and long-term forms; it can be a voluntary (pro-bono) contribution, or paid, as described in the next section.

Originating in the 1970s as sector-specific short-term volunteer schemes, skills transfer schemes have evolved significantly to the point that they are now collaborative partnerships that prioritise mutual learning. This has helped to diversify entry points for diaspora engagement, drive innovation, reverse brain drain and contribute to national and international development goals whilst creating global acknowledgement of the mutual benefits for nations and diaspora to collaborate within the framework of skills transfer schemes. At EU level, the [European Year of Skills 2023](#) gives a fresh impetus to lifelong learning, empowering people and companies to support innovation and contribute to the green and digital transitions, areas with great potential for diaspora skills transfer to foster development in countries of heritage.

## DIASPORA HUMAN CAPITAL

### Human capital =

- ✓ Knowledge
- ✓ Expertise
- ✓ Skills
- ✓ Talents
- ✓ Resources
- ✓ Social networks

### Diaspora extras =

- + Linguistic and cultural knowledge
- + Familiarity with local realities and practices
- + Emotional bond
- + Global mind-set
- + Connections and networks at local and international levels
- + Access to local communities & trust
- + Dual citizenship (at times)

# SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

EUDiF has analysed and promoted diaspora human capital generally, and skills transfer schemes specifically through mapping practices, platforming diaspora voices, dedicating [Future Forum 2022](#) to human capital and implementing several short-term skills transfer schemes through which we have leveraged youth skills within the project, and assisted Moldova to design a scheme for transferring skills from the academic diaspora, and supported Madagascar and Saint Lucia in skills profiling and laying the groundwork for skills transfer schemes.

In this *Learning by doing* dossier, we address trends and challenges in skills transfer schemes that seek to leverage diaspora expertise for sustainable development. We offer practical guidance for both conceptualising and testing such schemes and share our experience in doing so and proposals on scale up and replication. As data collection is a vital first-step for designing a suitable scheme, we recommend reading this publication in complement to the sister publication on skills profiling.



# Global trends

Initially, in the 1970s, skills transfer schemes aimed to bring emigrants back, believing physical return to be the only way to gain human capital and address brain drain with “brain gain”. International support led to trials of temporary returns, with initiatives like the Transfer of Knowledge Through Expatriate Nationals (TOKTEN) and Migration for Development in Africa (MIDA). The options diversified over time, with pioneering programmes for talent attraction from the Governments of the Philippines, China, Morocco etc. These advanced from classic philanthropic, one-sided efforts to embracing collaborative partnerships. In the 2020s, approaches to skills (and broader human capital) transfer embrace the complexities of diaspora identities and movements to move towards “brain circulation”.

Skills transfer mechanisms can be classified initially by timeframe: long-term (talent attraction) and short-term (assignment-based). governments, diaspora and international organisations have proven experience in initiating both types of scheme, and often work in partnership, often with the private sector.

	TALENT ATTRACTION PROGRAMMES	SHORT-TERM SCHEMES
<b>Key characteristics</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Inspire return</li> <li>▶ In-person participation</li> <li>▶ Salaried work (+ package of relocation incentives)</li> <li>▶ Respond to market and labour needs</li> <li>▶ Coordinated recruitment and accompaniment</li> <li>▶ Target individuals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Short-term deployments (2 weeks - 3 months)</li> <li>▶ In-person, virtual and hybrid methods.</li> <li>▶ Often volunteer-based</li> <li>▶ Sector/group-specific (e.g. science, tech, health, youth)</li> <li>▶ Knowledge sharing</li> <li>▶ Brain circularity</li> <li>▶ Target individuals, organisations &amp; networks</li> </ul>
<b>Good practices</b>	<p>Led by diaspora: <a href="#">Science Hub in Egypt</a></p> <p>Led by government:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• [EUDiF publication] <a href="#">Work in Lithuania</a></li> </ul>	<p>Led by government:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Pakistan Yaran-Watan</a></li> </ul> <p>Led by international organisations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">TOKTEN Lebanon</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">CD4D IOM</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Diaspora Professionals 4 Development</a> ▶ <a href="#">Page 9</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Diaspora Youth Internship</a> ▶ <a href="#">Page 11</a></li> </ul> <p>Led by diaspora: <a href="#">Red Global MX UK</a> → <a href="#">Learn about our action with RGMX-UK to transfer skills and knowledge of climate change and circular economy.</a></p>

### Top tip: Mix & match schemes

Many countries have a mixed portfolio of skills transfer schemes, adjusted to labour market needs and priorities and the diversity of returning migrants.

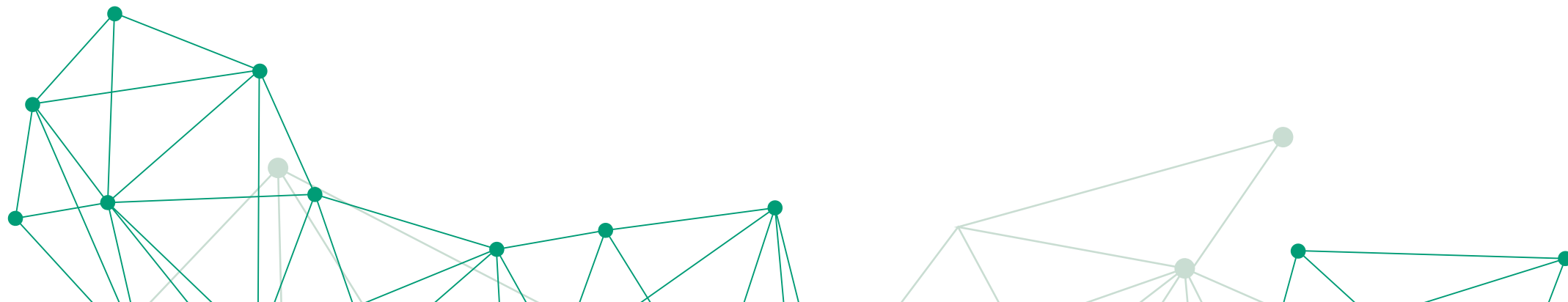
The **Philippines** is a good example with a wide variety of programmes open to the diaspora, including:

- ✔ The Build Build Build Programme seeks to address the country's need for workers with technical skills in the construction sector with skills of Filipino returnees.
- ✔ The SPIMs programme encourages Filipinos working in low-skilled sectors to return and work within the Ministry of Education
- ✔ The Balik programme encourages Filipino scientists, technologists, and experts to return to the Philippines and share their expertise for the country's scientific, agro-industrial and economic development. It is an example of a mixed-approach scheme with different tracks for short-term transfer and long-term talent attraction.

Similarly, **Armenia** has multiple talent attraction programmes, including the Repatriation Programme in Armenia and Diaspora - iGorts ("Let's do it together" in Armenian) which brings diaspora back to work in the public sector. For more information, see the country factsheet on Armenia.



Practice collection: Skills transfer



# Common challenges

Both talent attraction and short-term skills transfer schemes can face a number of challenges depending on the national and diaspora context. When designing a new scheme, it is important to consider the potential challenges and conduct a risk assessment.

## Policy and regulatory framework

- ▶ Lack of robust policies and regulatory norms impedes skill transfers schemes

## Communication and awareness

- ▶ Insufficient promotion of programmes hampers awareness of skills transfer opportunities
- ▶ Limited or misleading information among the diaspora community creates trust issues

## Data

- ▶ Scarce or outdated data on the labour market, sectoral needs and skills gaps results in poorly designed programmes based on assumptions.
- ▶ Limited diaspora data restricts recruitment potential.
- ▶ Low data quality and insufficient sharing between relevant actors make skills matching inefficient.

## Absorption capacities of host institutions

- ▶ Ineffective leadership and limited management capacities lead to resource management issues.
- ▶ Limited internal capacity can generate unfair demands on those on short-term assignments as “stopgap” solution.
- ▶ Lack of effective monitoring and evaluation limits the potential for learning and scale-up.
- ▶ In multi-institution schemes, unclear ownership can lead to misalignment with national priorities

### Financial resources

- ▶ Securing long-term funds for resource-constrained governments or organisations poses a difficulty for scheme longevity.
- ▶ For talent attraction, wage standards may be lower than those in the country of residence, creating a competition challenge for recruitment from abroad.
- ▶ In public sector schemes, salaries are often not competitive with private sector offerings.

### Integration and mobility

- ▶ Visa issues, travel restrictions, and immigration policies can affect the mobility of diaspora experts.
- ▶ Inefficient infrastructure and/or mentorship support provided to the expert on-site limits potential impact.

### Perception of diaspora

- ▶ Public opinion of returnee diaspora can pose a challenge for participants and scheme organisers, with negative perception of returnees for “taking” jobs from residents, or resentment for perceived privileged treatment (real or not).

### Trust

- ▶ The historic dynamics of diaspora engagement between government and diaspora can generate fear exploitation of goodwill and desire greater recognition for work done.





# Short-term skills transfer in action

## Diaspora sectoral expertise

Within EUDiF, we run two mechanisms: Diaspora Professionals for Development (DP4D) and the Capacity Development Lab (CDL). Both leverage diaspora human capital through short-term skills transfer assignments to countries of heritage.

Between 2021-2023, over 60 diaspora professionals shared their skills across 10 micro-projects, in actions ranging from education to entrepreneurship, digitalisation to environment.

Whilst the individuals were recruited for their skills and expertise in specific sectors, each assignment demonstrated the added value of working with diaspora thanks to the other forms of human capital they offered alongside the specific skills the assignments called for.

In their official role, diaspora professionals shared their skills through:

- ▶ Knowledge transfer events
- ▶ Assessments, research and/or evaluations
- ▶ Strategic documents and/or training materials
- ▶ Know-how for visibility and communication activities

**95%** of beneficiaries agree they will be able to apply the knowledge acquired

**80%** of the experts deployed by EUDiF identify as diaspora (60% are women)

Across the board, the diaspora professionals in EUDiF actions went above and beyond their assignment because of their innate connection to their country of heritage. Not only did this affinity grant them the cultural sensitivity, communication ability and understanding of local context to deliver their assignment at a consistently high quality, it also meant that the collaboration brought something more – from Kristy's civil society contacts in Mexico to the team of Ethiopian diasporans and Wollo University creating a fresh partnership with a German university.

What the diaspora professionals say:

**PILOTING DIASPORA MOBILISATION SCHEMES  
IN THE EDUCATION & RESEARCH SECTORS  
IN MOLDOVA**



*“ I strongly believe that if you want change and a better well-being of your country, then you might as well be part of that change!*

*Many diaspora members are knowledge migrants and for a country whose economy is struggling and one third of the population is abroad, its biggest resource become its people. ”*

**Dr. Dorina Baltag**

Moldova <>> Netherlands

**KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER ON ENVIRONMENTAL  
SUSTAINABILITY AND CLIMATE ADAPTATION  
FROM THE FILIPINO DIASPORA**



*“ Local expertise can be supplemented by diaspora expertise and often it only requires reaching out. I am lucky to be living in the EU where programmes such as EUDiF exist, which make it easier for diaspora professionals like myself to engage. ”*

**Prof Dr. Denise S. Matis**

Philippines <>> Germany

**DEVELOPING LEBANON’S TECH SECTOR  
THROUGH THE LEBANESE DIASPORA**



*“ While a consultant is expected to be objective and provide the same quality of service to any client, as a diaspora professional, the heartstrings are pulled, and passion becomes a key ingredient: wanting to genuinely support because you know what’s really at stake. However, this can also play against you, because you so desperately want to support and help, but you know things may simply be out of your hands. ”*

**Reina Angoujard**

Lebanon <>> France

Read more



**Our actions**

## Promoting diaspora youth

With firm belief in the value of involving young people in diaspora engagement and great appreciation for the rich capital and diverse skills they offer for sustainable development, we have integrated youth skills in EUDiF via a short-term skills transfer scheme in the form of an internship. In addition, we have undertaken research on how to leverage youth skills in the specific context of heritage tourism and entrepreneurship, and hosted discussion on youth-programmes many of which include skills transfer, as well as on mentorship. In addition, the Future Forum 2023 saw a competition to platform youth skills and innovation for SDG4 Quality Education and SDG 13 Climate Action.

- **Diaspora youth internship programme.** *Nothing about, without.*

From 2020-2023 a youth-specific short-term scheme has been at the heart of EUDiF operations. To embed diaspora youth voices in project implementation 12 young diasporans have worked as part of the EUDiF team at ICMPD on five-month internships. Following completion, the interns created an informal alumni network, the *Diaspora Youth Community*.

The programme includes mentoring, accompanied and independent projects, networking, participation in youth events and much more. As every intern is different and EUDiF keeps evolving, so does each internship.

- ✔ **100% of interns moved straight on to an exciting new professional or academic challenge upon completion!**



### Diaspora Youth Rapporteurs at Future Forum 2022

**Oumou Diallo on the potential of diaspora youth mentoring to catalyse the European Year of Youth Asset framing: Diaspora youth at the European Migration Forum**



## Moldova: piloting diaspora mobilisation schemes in education

In partnership with the [Bureau for Relations with Diaspora in Moldova](#)

### Summary:

The action aimed to enhance the capacities of the Moldovan Bureau for Relations with Diaspora (BRD) to run a diaspora knowledge and skills transfer scheme by piloting a methodology for the education and research sector.

### Strands of work:

1. Mapping sectoral needs and opportunities in terms of Moldovan academic diaspora expertise;
2. Practical guidelines for BRD and Moldovan stakeholders about setting up a diaspora skills transfer scheme;
3. Piloting a co-working hub of diaspora professionals to uphold country reforms in higher education.

### A sustainable model of diaspora skill transfer

To channel Moldovan diaspora human capital effectively, BRD required a roadmap which determines in which sectors and areas it needs diaspora input, how it can create a mutually beneficial partnership with diaspora, and the steps to incubate and encourage those human capital transfer initiatives. The roadmap helped BRD to pilot and create a **Diaspora co-working hub** – a long-term oriented model of diaspora skills transfer. The added value of this mechanism is to go beyond the sporadic engagements of diaspora existing in the country and to create a pool of diaspora talent ready for assignments.

### Read more about



The action



Moldova



Piloting diaspora mobilisation schemes in the education and research sectors in Moldova



## What comes next?

### Replicability and scalability

The *EUDiF short-term mechanisms* have demonstrated a great success rate and high satisfaction (90 % and more) among their beneficiaries. The key criteria and operationalisation principles such as ownership, impact, and coherence can be readily adopted by governments and other international partners. EUDiF has fostered peer learning and shared valuable insights on success factors and pitfalls in piloting such mechanisms. For example, in the exchange with [Guyana Diaspora Unit](#), EUDiF shared its learnings from the mapping of practices and experience from the Actions with Moldova and Madagascar.

Additionally, the methods used for the selection, identification and preparation of diaspora professionals in EUDiF may be transferable to interested diaspora actors. For more details explore "[Learning by doing: Success factors for capacity development in diaspora engagement.](#)"

The methods used in the programmes of EUDiF dedicated to diaspora youth by offering internship and professionalisation tools can be further expanded to other sectors and contexts.

The Action with *Moldova* included elements of piloting and methodological work. These methodologies have a step-by-step approach and are adaptable to various national contexts and can be used by other countries to enhance their skills transfer initiatives in different sectors, including the enablers and barriers of such schemes. More about this experience could be found in the Action [Lessons learnt fiche](#).

### Sustainability

The [practical roadmap](#) created for the Moldovan Action can be utilised to cascade knowledge within governments with an interest in designing skills transfer schemes. Through the development process, EUDiF offered guiding templates so that the BRD can continue their work autonomously in the future and use this roadmap for other sectors. EUDiF's paid a special attention to the conceptualisation of this document, taking all the necessary assessment steps, feedback collection for the co-creation (proposed to organise a fact-finding mission to evaluate the needs, offered space to diaspora to provide input through surveys, consulted the roadmap with all the relevant institutions involved in the diaspora mobilisation etc). Capitalising on the EUDiF mechanisms and Action in Moldova, a quick practical roadmap is outlined below.

# Practical roadmap for sustainable skills transfer models

EUDiF recommends a systematic approach for conceptualising and designing short-term schemes, consisting of four distinct phases, each of which involves ongoing monitoring to ensure effectiveness. These phases are detailed below.



## Phase 1. Initiation

A well-defined concept or strategy is crucial. It should outline the objectives, target sectors, practical modalities and specific outcomes of the knowledge transfer schemes. The strategy should also identify the diaspora communities of interest and the mechanisms to reach out to them. The following steps can be taken in this regard – each step includes sub-steps and represents a specific work process in itself:

- Assess priorities and sectoral needs (e.g. questionnaires, fact-finding missions, consultations)
- Conduct a profiling of diaspora's skills (e.g. interviews, focus-groups, surveys)
  - ➔ *EUDiF elaborated and piloted a methodology of skills profiling with Madagascar and replicated it with Saint Lucia. This guiding methodology can be adapted to various contexts. For more details, see the Learning by doing publication on diaspora skills profiling and the action pages for [Madagascar](#) and [St Lucia](#).*
- Map the stakeholders and their respective skills, capacities and resources (e.g. survey, skills auditing tools)
- Study experiences and gather insights from good practices, seeking inspiration (e.g. through peer learning, desk research, study visits)
  - ➔ *EUDiF helped the Guyana Diaspora Unit to understand the challenges and learning journeys of other countries setting up such schemes, by creating in-depth profiles of skills transfer initiatives from [Moldova](#), [Romania](#) and [Lithuania](#). As well, the Guyanese stakeholders joined a peer exchange with Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago on skills registries and transfer programmes in the Caribbean context. See more details [here](#)*
- Sketch a roadmap and action plan – including a monitoring framework – in collaboration with diaspora
- Identify and lock-in any required funding (**Tip:** Providing financial incentives, such as grants, funding opportunities and tax benefits, can encourage diaspora members to actively participate in knowledge transfer initiatives.)
- Set clear indicators and evaluation tools (e.g. interviews, evaluation forms)
- Design a communication strategy (awareness campaigns, targeted approach)

### Tip:

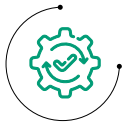
A neutral broker can be helpful to catalyse collaboration and provide technical and financial assistance – just like EUDiF supporting BRD in Moldova.



## Phase 2. Planning

Establishing an institutional framework to oversee and coordinate diaspora knowledge transfers is essential. This may involve creating a dedicated team or service within a ministry or agency, such as the MFA or a diaspora unit etc. The main steps below should be considered:

- ▶ Set up a coordination system (e.g. working hub, network) and clarify the roles
- ▶ Plan a recruitment strategy (e.g. open or targeted calls)
- ▶ Establish a transparent selection process
- ▶ Build an expert roster/database (e.g. EUDiF roster, [Diaspora Connect in Moldova](#))
- ▶ Perform a proper match-making process
- ▶ Create standard terms of reference, which can be adapted for specific assignment requirements.



## Phase 3. Execution

Operationalising diaspora knowledge transfer schemes involves turning the strategic vision into practical actions and initiatives that facilitate effective collaboration. It consists of a number of important elements and steps:

- ▶ Brief the experts for pre-departure (e.g. social-cultural preparatory courses, information about the country ecosystem, regulatory frameworks)
- ▶ Equip the beneficiary institution for effective knowledge transfer (e.g. adult learning methodologies, handover strategies, trainings on proficient feedback mechanisms)
- ▶ Provide mentoring, guidance and capacity development activities alongside assignments
- ▶ Create a participatory working culture
- ▶ Pilot the transfer scheme, incorporate improvements and progressively scale up
- ▶ Publicise and celebrate each milestone of the scheme to increase awareness, ownership and build trust between all involved.



## Phase 4. Monitoring and evaluation


Establishing a robust monitoring and evaluation system helps assess the impact and effectiveness of knowledge transfer schemes. It allows for continuous improvement and ensures that the initiatives align with the set objectives. For this purpose, there is a need to:

- ▶ Ensure continuous feedback loops (e.g. baseline/mid/endline interviews)
- ▶ Celebrate achievements and make them visible (e.g. awards, ambassadors, alumni)
- ▶ Monitor and evaluate the indicators established in the planning phase (e.g. number of assignments, satisfaction rate of beneficiary institution/organisation, satisfaction of diaspora professional, return rate)
- ▶ Evaluate the lessons learnt and results (e.g. collect testimonies, diaspora voices)
  - ▶ *EUDiF encouraged feedback from all involved in its skills transfer mechanisms, including in the post-implementation phase 80% of participants strongly agree that they can use the knowledge gained from the transfer 80 % of diaspora professionals agree that the exchange was mutual beneficial.*





# Top 10 ingredients for successful schemes

- 
- ✓ Design initiatives in a collaborative way - co-ownership is essential!
  - ✓ Design diverse skills transfer schemes based on market needs, combined with diaspora profile, including diaspora youth and other specific segments.
  - ✓ Factor in context-specific parameters such as possible resentment towards diaspora.
  - ✓ Consider and map the soft skills which are crucial for efficient skills transfer.
  - ✓ Create a user-friendly and agile scheme.
  - ✓ Understand and respect the possible cultural differences between the diaspora and the country of origin.
  - ✓ Ensure that the contributions of diaspora members are recognised and acknowledged.
  - ✓ Involve the destination country in diaspora skills transfer.
  - ✓ Communicate extensively about skills transfer opportunities
  - ✓ Leverage technology such as virtual knowledge transfer platforms, online courses, webinars etc.

# Learn more



## **Practice collection: Skill transfer initiatives.** (2021) EUDiF.

The collection is a compilation of spotlight initiatives on skills transfer identified through the global mapping of 110 countries' policies, practices and trends in diaspora engagement.

## **Implementation of the Talent Partnerships: what potential role for the diaspora?** (2021) ECDPM, EUDiF & MPF case study.

This study examines the roles that the various segments that the diaspora can play in facilitating labour mobility between countries of origin/heritage and destination countries. It analyses the engagement of the diaspora along the migration cycle and maps specific activities that the diaspora engages in which may contribute to the objectives of the Talent Partnerships. The case study focuses on four countries, namely Ethiopia, Georgia, Morocco and Nigeria, but it also looks at existing labour mobility schemes and diaspora engagement initiatives.

## **Diaspora youth and sustainable development** (October 2023) EUDiF.

EUDiF champions the impactful role of young diaspora individuals in global sustainable development. Aligned with the European Union's Youth Action Plan, the text emphasises the diversity and potential of diaspora youth, noting their advocacy for inclusive, fair, and green development. Insights highlight the need for holistic integration of youth engagement in policies, recognizing them as a valuable knowledge source.

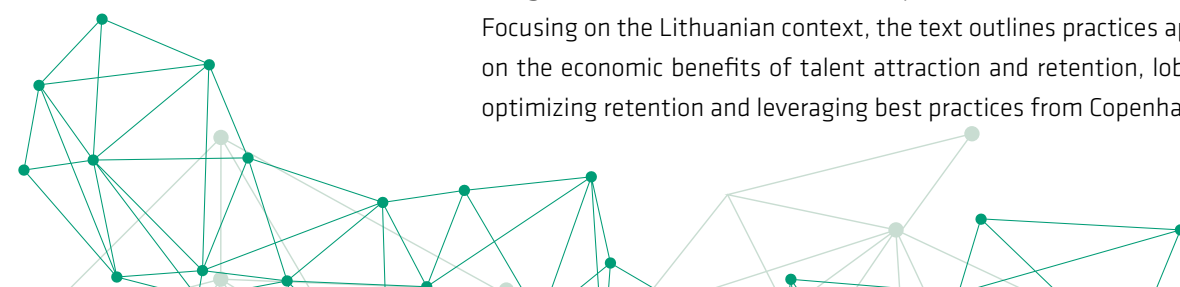
## **Practice collection: Youth-focused initiatives** (2021) EUDiF.

The collection of spotlight initiatives related to youth diaspora engagement around the world gathered through our mapping exercise and further research includes examples with youth skills and knowledge transfer.



## **Attracting international talent to Lithuania. International Best Practices and Approaches.** (2021) International Centre for Migration Policy Development.

The guide, based on over a decade of expertise in talent attraction and retention, explores key lessons for the talent attraction management initiatives. Focusing on the Lithuanian context, the text outlines practices applicable to countries, regions, or cities, and emphasizes the importance of solid data on the economic benefits of talent attraction and retention, lobbying efforts, and initiatives like International House Vilnius. The article advocates optimizing retention and leveraging best practices from Copenhagen for effective talent attraction.





**Diaspora Networks and the International Migration of Skills: How Countries Can Draw on their Talent Abroad**, (2006), Kuznetsov, Yevgeny, WBI Development Studies, World Bank, 2006.

The book describes emerging best practice of how actors in diaspora networks can be crucial bridges between global policy, technological, and managerial expertise and local conditions in their home countries. It provides analysis of both mature diaspora networks (India, Mexico and Armenia) and emerging diaspora networks (Argentina, South Africa and Colombia).



ASIAN DEVELOPMENT BANK

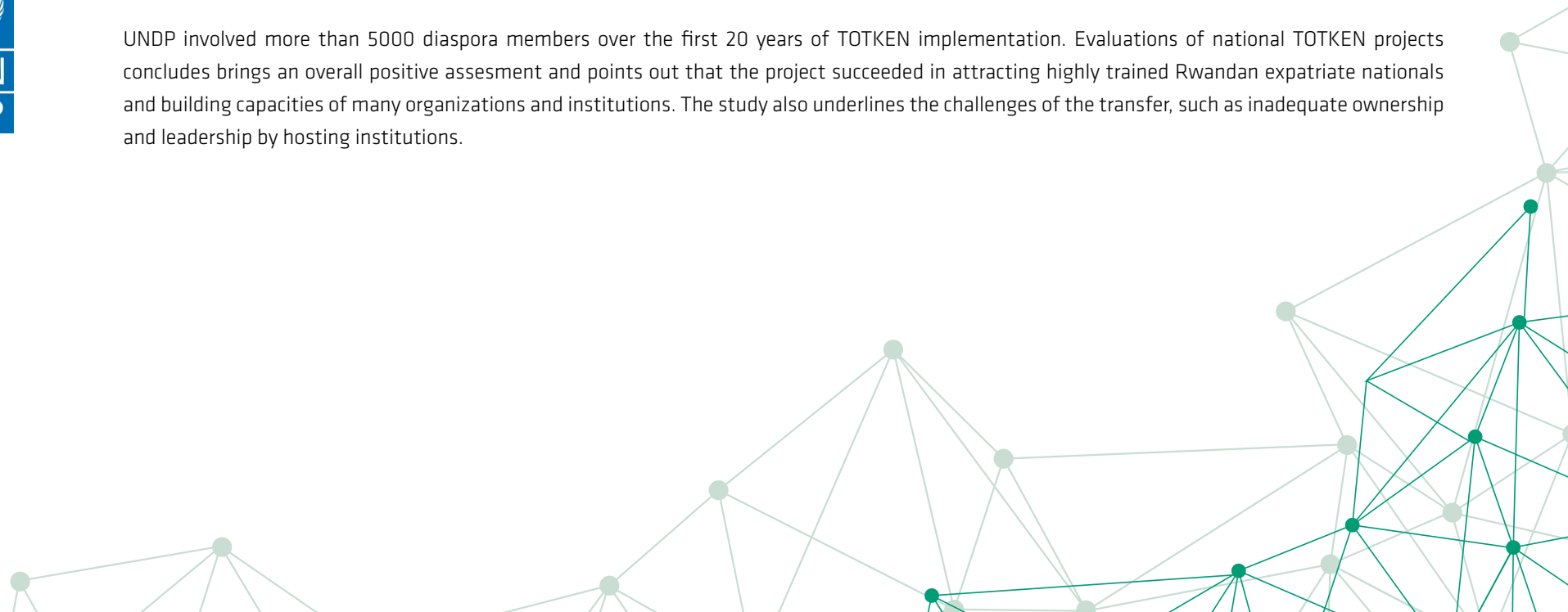
**Diaspora Mobilization Factors and Policy Options**, Jennifer M. Brinkerhoff, Asian Development Bank (2006), Chapter 'Converting Migration Drains into Gains: Harnessing the Potential of Overseas Professionals' pp.127-153;

This paper focuses on the role of diaspora members for knowledge exchange and technology, outlining the advantages of diaspora-specific contributions, bringing illustrative examples from the Philippines and China.



**Final Evaluation of the Support Project to the Implementation of the Rwanda TOTKEN Volunteer Program**, UNDP, (2008), Katim S. Touray

UNDP involved more than 5000 diaspora members over the first 20 years of TOTKEN implementation. Evaluations of national TOTKEN projects concludes brings an overall positive assesment and points out that the project succeeded in attracting highly trained Rwandan expatriate nationals and building capacities of many organizations and institutions. The study also underlines the challenges of the transfer, such as inadequate ownership and leadership by hosting institutions.





# European Union Global Diaspora Facility

## European Union Global Diaspora Facility

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