



# Diaspora engagement mapping BELIZE

## Facts & figures

Terminology: The Statistical Institute of Belize in the 2010 Population Census also refers to the foreign-born population.<sup>4</sup>

### Political rights



Dual citizenship<sup>1,2</sup>



Right to vote in national elections for citizens residing abroad<sup>3</sup>



### Remittances



Remittances as a share of GDP: **4.63%**  
Remittances inflow (USD million): **149.57**

### 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).

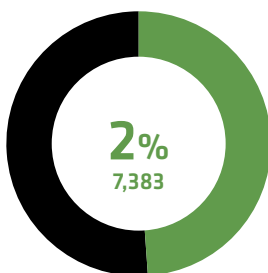
### Emigration



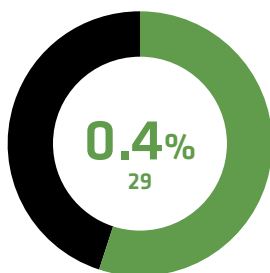
% of emigrants in total population



% of which in the EU



♂ 49%  
♀ 51%



♂ 55.2%  
♀ 44.8%

### Top countries of destination



Mexico	3,170
Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	1,124
Guatemala	1,082
Cayman Islands	428
Honduras	379

1 Belizean Nationality Act 1981, 28 November 1981 (accessed 7 January 2024). The Act, No.1 of 1981 dated 23 November 1981 was published in the Gazette on 28 November 1981 and "makes provision for the citizenship of Belize and for matters connected therewith."

2 PART IV, Art. 18 "Restrictions against dual citizenship of citizens by descent", Art. 19 "Restrictions against dual citizenship of persons who are citizens by registrations", Art. 20 "Cases of Invalid or Ineffective renunciations of foreign citizenship".

3 There are no provisions in national laws for voting overseas, however, the Belizean embassy, high commission, consular and diplomatic mission staff, including spouses, and dependents are allowed to vote by proxy. Ministry of Elections and Boundaries.

## Overview of the policy and legislative framework



- 2009** ● **The Belize Diaspora Initiative** provides a general framework for the engagement of the Belizean diaspora comprising several programmes coordinated by various government units. As for background context, the “[Belize] Cabinet approved the establishment of the Diaspora programme at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on September 3rd, 2009 (Cabinet paper 201 of 2009 – Engaging the Belizean Diaspora). This programme was designed to send a robust message of welcome from the homeland to the Diaspora and to mobilize goodwill for their engagement and cooperation for Belize’s development. (...) The Ministry of Tourism and Diaspora Relations has taken full responsibility for the **The Diaspora Returnee Incentive Programme** proposal that was accepted and approved on May 11th, 2010. The proposal reaffirms the Government’s policy of embracing high-value diaspora skills and facilitating access to the Belizean Diaspora, for repatriation and development of our country.”
- 2023** ● **The Belize Retired Persons Act** (revised from the 2011 act) facilitates eligible diaspora members to return and retire in Belize (return migration). The 2023 amendment expands on initial provisions to allow investment and business creation by foreign retirees.
- 2023** ● **The Fiscal Incentives Act** 2023 revisions provide income tax exemption for foreign retirees.

### >> Trends

The main focus of the Belize Diaspora Programme launched in 2010 under the remit of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was the registration of skilled Belizeans residing abroad. The engagement framework for the Belizean diaspora is provided through the “Belizean Diaspora Initiative”, a government effort comprising several programmes within the purview of various ministries and departments. The government thereby recognises “that the Belizean nationals living abroad constitute an important and strategic part of the nation of Belize and seeks their participation in a mutually beneficial partnership that leads to development and growth.”

Diaspora engagement in Belize primarily targets repatriation (return migration) aimed at boosting economic growth and sustainable development through an array of incentive programmes at local and national levels. Although it lacks an overarching diaspora engagement policy, the government enables sectoral engagement for skilled and/or self-sufficient diaspora groups (conditional upon proof of a stable income above a certain threshold), with certain repatriation benefits, but as such it does not provide reintegration assistance for returning migrants. In terms of remittances, there is no formal scheme, although the government regulates service providers through the National Payment Systems Act.

The diaspora incentive programmes are, in varying degrees, aligned with regional forums/ initiatives, and bilateral and multilateral agreements, such as the Caribbean Forum on Population and Development, the Montevideo Consensus, CARICOM (The Caribbean Community), the Organization of American States (OAS) and others. Against the backdrop of a global pandemic and the contraction of vital economic sectors (i.e.: tourism), the government is gradually expanding its diasporic outreach. In addition to national units overseeing the relationship with the diaspora, the diplomatic missions are actively engaging the Belizean community and cultural organisations, academia and businesses abroad through a variety of forums and events, as well as monthly newsletters. Additionally, in 2018, Belize signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the IOM (International Organisation for Migration) to develop a comprehensive migration governance policy.

Throughout 2024, and in anticipation of the 2025 election, the Belizean diaspora actively advocated for their right to vote. For instance, they closely observed the 2024 Salvadoran election and raised a question towards the government of Belize about whether it was time for the Belizean diaspora to vote from abroad. This was also a key discussion at the inaugural

Belize Diaspora Summit held in June 2024 (see Spotlight Initiative). Feedback from Belizean government representatives was positive, agreeing to consider diaspora's right to vote in national elections.<sup>1</sup> However, no concrete plan was outlined.



### Achievements

2021 saw the creation of a Diaspora Engagement Platform under the auspices of the Diaspora Relations Unit (DRU) with the aim to foster a structured exchange of resources and ideas, harnessing diaspora contributions more firmly, whether cultural (with a focus on identity) and/or economic, by attracting investment in the home country. This in part indicates that the government is gradually adopting a strategic and networked approach towards the engagement of its professional/skilled diaspora, complemented by legislative frameworks that allow for more permissible investment and business milieus. Similarly, these incentives act to bolster Belize's profile abroad, while maintaining a focus on economic growth, sustainable development and tourism (the DRU functioning under the Ministry of Tourism).

### Obstacles



- **Lack of data:** There is almost no publicly available data on how these policies have impacted return migration, diaspora-led investments, economic growth and/or development in Belize. Such data are key to informing policy-making and the development of targeted services for the diaspora.
- **Exclusionary design:** The existing incentive programs almost exclusively target skilled and self-sufficient potential returnees, able to demonstrate a stable income and capacity to invest in business and/or housing in the home country, whilst failing to account for other groups in the diaspora. In effect, there is no reintegration assistance scheme for other cohorts, nor specific social protections in place.
- **Corruption and security:** Though its impact is not fully appraised, the high criminality rates and associated corruption may disincentivise return migration, dissuading potential returnees from investing in the home country. In turn and if left unaddressed, such factors limit the effectiveness of repatriation programmes, which remain the primary anchor for diaspora engagement.

<sup>1</sup> See full response addressed by the Minister of Home Affairs at the Belizean Diaspora Summit in: <https://lovefm.com/belize-diaspora-summit-in-la-addresses-immigration-and-voting-rights/>

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### INFORMATION, DIGITALISATION

#### [The Diaspora Engagement Platform \(2021\)](#)

The DEP provides a medium “to raise Belize’s profile on the international stage; grow the economy by increasing exports and attracting inward investment; promote trade; provide information and support to Belizeans abroad; encourage expertise exchange; and identify opportunities for philanthropy.”

### RETURN MIGRATION

#### [The Qualified Retirement Incentive Programme \(2022\)](#)

The program targets individuals over the age of 45 who meet the income eligibility criteria and demonstrate self-sustenance. The QRP also exempts beneficiaries from all income taxes derived from abroad.

### SKILLS TRANSFER

#### [Belize Diaspora Academic Forum](#)

The forum serves as a platform for Belizean academics to communicate and network. It functions as a think tank for intellectual collaboration.

### HUMANITARIAN AID

#### [Diaspora humanitarian relief provision during Hurricane Lisa \(2022\)](#)

The Belizean diaspora and organisations consolidated efforts for relief provision in Belize. Through DRU, the Ministry of Tourism and Diaspora Relations together with Build Belize Inc. and the Ministry of Human Development coordinated to distribute supplies sent from abroad to populations in need.

### COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION

#### [The Hubert Pipersburgh Diaspora Helpdesk](#)

Under the remit of Belize City Council, the local initiative offers 24/7 assistance and support to Belizeans residing abroad, with an array of information provision services including property, investment opportunities, business and sister city/twinning schemes.

### NETWORKING

#### [The Belize Diaspora Summit \(2024 - ongoing\)](#)

The Belize Diaspora Summit provides the Belizean diaspora with a networking platform to connect with like-minded professionals as well as government representatives. The event aims to foster a community that establishes valuable partnerships and supports the development of Belize. The inaugural summit was held in June 2024 under the theme “Power in Unity”, featuring informative session on diaspora-related services and panel discussions on voting and political rights, diaspora investment as well as challenges faced by the returning diaspora.

## Annex:

# List of Actors

### Diaspora related institutions

- **National institutions**

- At ministerial level

#### **Ministry of Tourism and Diaspora Relations, MTDR**

According to the official website, the MTDR is a government entity providing leadership, strategic direction, good governance and oversight on all matters related to the development of tourism for and on behalf of the Belize government.

- At sub-ministerial level

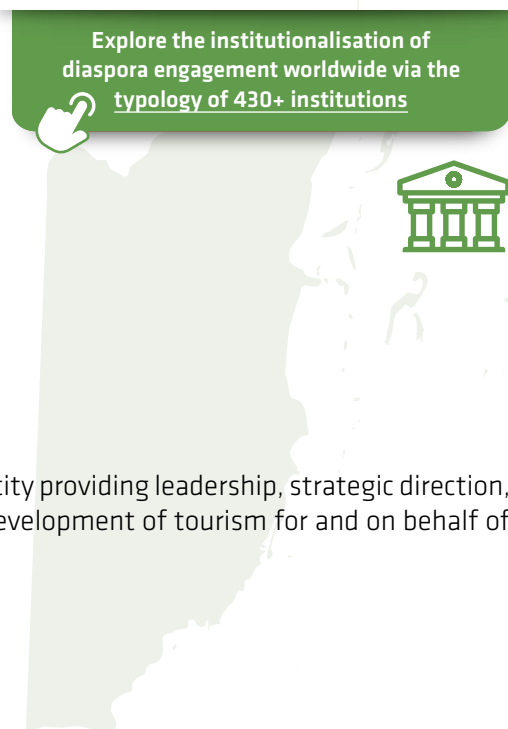
#### **The Diaspora Relations Unit, DRU 2021**

The recently created Diaspora Relations Unit also functions as an engagement platform by providing a medium: “To raise Belize’s profile on the international stage; grow the economy by increasing exports and attracting inward investment; promote trade; provide information and support to Belizeans abroad; encourage expertise exchange; and identify opportunities for philanthropy.”

- At local level

#### **Belize City Council** N/A

The Hubert Pipersburgh Diaspora Helpdesk offers 24/7 assistance and support to Belizeans residing abroad, with an array of information provision services including property, investment opportunities, business, sister city relations/twinning etc.



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