



Diaspora engagement mapping MALAWI

Facts & figures

Terminology: The term diaspora is used to refer to Malawi citizens residing outside the country temporarily or for an indefinite period, whether for employment, business, education or any other purpose; and persons of Malawian origin residing outside the country, holding citizenship of other country(s) but still having interests in the development of Malawi.

Political rights



Dual citizenship^{1,2}



Right to vote in national elections for citizens residing abroad³



Remittances



Remittances as a share of GDP: **1.28%**
Remittances inflow (USD million): **179.75**

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).

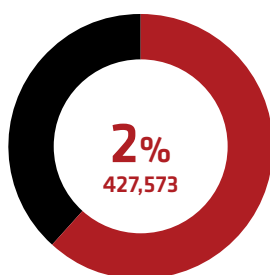
Emigration



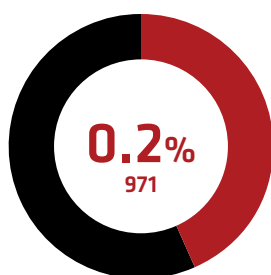
% of emigrants in total population



% of which in the EU



♂ 60.6%
♀ 39.4%



♂ 43.4%
♀ 56.6%

Top countries of destination



South Africa	220,437
Zimbabwe	111,872
Mozambique	65,284
Zambia	17,796
United Republic of Tanzania	6,678

1 The Government of Malawi amended the 1966 Citizenship Act in December 2019 to allow for dual citizenship. However, the law specifies that only Malawians by birth or descent are eligible for dual citizenship, unlike those who are naturalised, registered or conferred citizenship. Available online on the Department of Immigration and Citizenship Services of the Republic of Malawi portal.

2 Malawi's 2018 Population and Housing Census included questions on emigration, destination countries, year of departure and activity abroad. The main report presented data on emigrants who left Malawi between 2008 and 2018, including reason for leaving, country of destination etc.

3 Malawian citizens living abroad are not able to vote in national elections as there are no legal provisions for voting from abroad. Malawi Electoral Commission.

Malawi Diaspora Engagement Policy



The 2017 Malawi Diaspora Engagement Policy guides the government's interactions with Malawian communities residing abroad, in line with Malawi's commitment to the Global Compact for Orderly and Safe Migration (GCM), the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the African Union Agenda 2063. The policy "seeks to harness the potential of Malawians living abroad to maintain links with their home country with the ultimate aim of contributing to Malawi's socio-economic development." Its main objectives focus on leveraging diaspora contributions through skills transfer and investment opportunities for development and economic growth. The Policy also provides a structured and systematic framework for engagement, with incentives for diaspora participation in civic matters, national consultations, and philanthropic initiatives.

Overview of the policy and legislative framework



- 2023** ● **The Social Security Agreement with Zambia** makes provisions for the portability of social security entitlements between the two countries due to legacy patterns in labour mobility.
- 2019** ● **The draft National Migration Policy** aims "to harness the benefits of labour migration for socio-economic development in Malawi" and integrate the "country's major migration procedures and actions into a cohesive whole within the context of migratory flows." A relevant addition for the diaspora, the document also stipulates the portability of social security benefits.
- 2021** ● **The Malawi Payment Systems Act** (established in 2017, revised in 2021) ensures the safety, integrity and efficiency of payment systems, thereby regulating payment instruments, remittance service providers, electronic money transfers, and card transactions.
- 2021** ● **The National Council for Higher Education 2021-2026 Strategic Plan** makes provisions for the recognition of foreign-acquired qualifications and higher-education diplomas with formalised criteria. The NCHHE is therefore mandated to "assess, evaluate and recognise qualifications attained at foreign higher education institutions."

>> Trends

The Government of Malawi has recognised the importance of diaspora contributions for development and economic growth and therefore made tangible steps towards operationalising a diaspora engagement framework, a process that commenced as early as 2012 with the establishment of a Diaspora Affairs Unit (under the remit of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs).

To maintain an updated knowledge base, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs conducts an ongoing registration of the Malawi diaspora abroad through its diplomatic missions. Some embassies also publish surveys on diaspora-led investment opportunities in Malawi, mapping remittance behaviours and investment preferences. In the absence of published data, the diaspora's responsiveness to such efforts cannot be fully documented.

The main areas for diaspora engagement target skill transfers, investment opportunities, country branding, tourism promotion, advocacy, and active participation in political processes. The recognition of foreign-acquired diplomas could potentially encourage brain gain/circulation, should the government provide sufficient incentives for return migration, including but not limited to the portability of social security benefits, access to housing and land ownership.

The healthcare staffing crisis of the early 2000s prompted the government to focus on human resources programming to stem the outflow of healthcare professionals abroad. Nonetheless, systemic challenges persist, and the healthcare system remains one of the main areas for intervention and diaspora contributions. Such activities have spanned short-term medical and/or relief missions (i.e. Malawian diaspora and foreign doctors performing reconstructive surgeries), COVID-19 response, sourcing medical equipment and supplies based on ongoing requests from local hospitals and clinics, fundraising for healthcare workers in Malawi, disaster relief etc. In 2020, Malawi facilitated return migration and the reception of nationals impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic, but as such there are no legal provisions or reintegration schemes for returnees (i.e. inclusion in social security programmes).

The Malawi government has demonstrated some progress in connecting with its diaspora through the innovative use of ICT platforms. To this end, launched in 2019, the Umodzi Diaspora Network Portal seeks to facilitate exchanges as well as access to public services and relevant information for the diaspora. However, the online portal was not accessible at the time of writing in January 2024, demonstrating that despite some commendable efforts towards digitalisation, issues related to effective implementation and institutional continuity seem to persist. This, compounded by public mistrust in the state apparatus, may disincentivise the Malawi diaspora from engaging with government-led initiatives.

Although there is no formalised scheme for remittance flows, the Reserve Bank enables the opening of non-resident foreign currency accounts, and access to short and long-term diaspora bonds, or local stock exchanges. Additionally, the Malawi Investment and Trade Centre disseminates targeted investment opportunities in priority sectors such as mining, tourism, agriculture, manufacturing, infrastructure, ICT, energy, and forestry (to some extent, as well as education and healthcare).



Achievements

Over the years, the Malawian government has made significant strides in implementing a diaspora engagement framework, opening pathways for targeted contributions and structured interactions with the Malawian diaspora, focused on socio-economic development. While institutional efforts also respond to an increased recognition of the diaspora across the migration-development nexus, specific measures such as dual citizenship, the recognition of foreign-acquired higher education diplomas, access to portfolio investments in Malawi, or the provision of consular services abroad act to incentivise a deeper engagement. The Malawian diaspora, particularly in the United States and the United Kingdom, has demonstrated high levels of organisation and networked mobilisation in the wake of natural disasters, but also in support of healthcare needs and/or national development projects. With a diaspora engagement framework in place and diaspora organisations actively contributing to the country's welfare, Malawi is favourably positioned to continue building on this diverse social capital, which could ultimately translate into tangible reforms, more effective development planning, brain gain and return migration.

Obstacles



- **Trust:** Corruption and the slow pace of internal reforms may dissuade the diaspora from investing or engaging with government-led initiatives. In delivering humanitarian relief, some Malawian diaspora organisations prefer working directly with local partners.
- **Politicisation of diaspora issues:** As the diaspora enters mainstream political discourse engagement, there is a risk of fragmentation across party lines.

- **Immature remittance infrastructure:** The high preference for informal channels compounded by costly transactions and red tape are obstacles to channelling remittances into productive investment.
- **Portability of social security benefits:** Although the national migration policy is yet to be adopted, Malawi has provisions only with Zambia for the portability of social benefits. The lack of bilateral frameworks enabling cross-border access to social security acts as a barrier to labour and return migration.
- **Reintegration schemes:** Malawi does not yet provide reintegration assistance, and there is no framework in place for the long-term welfare of (potential) returnees.

SPOTLIGHT: effective practices

Explore 400+ practices by country, SDG or sector of engagement in the [interactive database!](#)



TRADE, INVESTMENT

The UK-Malawi Business Group (2017)

Established by the Malawi High Commissioner in the UK and led by a working group of members, the group “brings together key organisations and individuals in the UK involved in business and trade with Malawi,” highlighting the diaspora’s economic contributions.

DIGITALISATION, NETWORKING

The Diaspora Portal (2019)

Under the auspices of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, the platform was developed with technical support from the National Commission for Science and Technology (NCST) and the Reserve Bank of Malawi. The portal aims to provide an interactive engagement interface for the diaspora, that includes government services and access to relevant information. As such, Diaspora Desk Officers have been appointed at ministerial, sub-ministerial and agency levels.⁴

HUMANITARIAN AID, RESILIENCE

Diaspora Mobilisation after tropical cyclone Freddy (2023)

According to the diplomatic mission website, in 2023 Malawi organisations based in the US and Canada jointly raised funds for victims and households affected by flooding in the wake of tropical cyclone Freddy. The Malawi Diaspora Network (MDN), a private non-profit comprising a number of diaspora organisations based in North America, was also involved in relief efforts.⁵ The Embassy supported the fundraising initiatives, helped establish priorities, and provided updated information with regard to needs on the ground.


DATA, INVESTMENT

The Malawian Diaspora Investment Demand Survey (2023)

Published on the Malawi Embassy in the US webpage, the survey supported the government’s efforts to engage and incentivise the diaspora to invest in Malawi. “The goal of the survey is to gauge the diaspora’s demand for different investment products and vehicles”, tackling “the current remittance and investment behaviours, as well as future demand for investments and other diaspora-focused products.” Forums and webinars on investment opportunities bringing together various stakeholders, also complemented the data collection process.

⁴ In January 2024, the website did not seem to be operational or cannot be accessed for maintenance reasons.

⁵ The MDN comprises the Malawians in Diaspora Association of Canada (MiDAC), Malawians In Texas Organization (MITO 501c3), Malawi Association in Washington (MAWA 501c3), Malawi Washington Foundation (MWF), New England Malawi Association (NEMA 501c3), Malawi Seattle Association (MSA, 501c3), Association of Malawians in Houston, Malawi Dallas Ft Worth Association (MADFA), BETAMW, NAMFRE and US Malawians-Relief Funds.



Opportunities for the diaspora in the financial sector

The Reserve Bank of Malawi has a dedicated section for investment opportunities as well as certain facilities that enable the diaspora to open non-resident foreign-denominated accounts (FCDAs) with any commercial bank in Malawi. Investment opportunities target Treasury Bills (as short-term debt obligations to the Government with maturity of less than one year), and Treasury Notes (long-term obligations with maturity periods of 2, 3, 4, and 5 years). Additionally, the Export Development Fund aims to engage diaspora entities capable “of dealing in commodity trade and other products to create demand for Malawian products” abroad.

INVESTMENT,
DEVELOPMENT

Virtual Mining Investment Forum (2024)

Over 200 Malawians in the diaspora participated in the first-ever virtual Malawi Mining Investment Forum. The event aimed at providing information on the country’s mineral resources, showcasing investment opportunities in Malawi’s mining sector and fostering collaboration between the government and diaspora investors.

INVESTMENTS,
NETWORKING,
SKILLS TRANSFER

Annex:

List of Actors

Diaspora related institutions

- **National institutions**
 - At ministerial level

Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation

According to the official website, the Ministry is responsible with formulating, implementing, and monitoring the Malawi Foreign Policy and the Diaspora Engagement Policy. The Ministry has six directorates comprising Africa and the Middle East, the Americas, Asia, Australia and the Pacific, Europe, Protocol and Management. The Malawi missions include the embassies, high commissions, consul general, permanent representations and honorary consuls (in total 21).

- At sub-ministerial level

Diaspora Affairs Unit 2012

The Diaspora Affairs Unit is the main institutional body responsible for engaging, protecting, and assisting the Malawi diaspora abroad. It also maintains a database of diaspora members upon registration. As part of this ongoing effort, the diplomatic missions have dedicated registration pages on their websites.

Diaspora organisations in Europe

Association of Malawians in Scotland United Kingdom (Scotland)

Integration activities

Amongst other objectives, the organisation seeks “to provide the means by which Malawians in Scotland can integrate into and engage with Scottish society”, acting as social support, providing advisory services, and organising social/community events.

Friends of Mulanje Orphans, FOMO 2000 United Kingdom/Malawi

Development activities

The organisation commits to aiding orphans in the Mulanje district of Malawi operating a network of 14 centres and covering over 90 villages.

Malawi Association United Kingdom, MAUK United Kingdom

Integration activities

The non-profit community organisation provides social and advisory services to Malawians in the UK, fostering connectivity and unity among the diaspora, and organises various community-focused activities (including national celebrations).

Explore the institutionalisation of diaspora engagement worldwide via the [typology of 430+ institutions](#)



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



Malawi Initiative for National Development, MIND 2007 United Kingdom

Development activities

Founded by Malawians in Aberdeen, the organisation's mission is to formalise and coordinate the volunteering efforts of the UK-based Malawian diaspora for the socio-economic development of Malawi, through skill transfers, awareness, and other volunteering initiatives.

Malawian-UK Nurses Association for Advancement, MUNAA United Kingdom

Development activities

The professional association for Malawi nurses, midwives and health visitors in the UK came into being during the Covid-19 pandemic addressing the vulnerability of frontline healthcare workers. The organisation also engages in fundraising activities to support the healthcare system in Malawi by sending medical equipment, supplies and in-kind donations.

Malawi Tomorrow 2002 United Kingdom (Scotland)

Development activities

The Malawi Tomorrow Charitable Trust aims “to promote and advance the education, health and welfare of young people, and the public in general, in Malawi.”

Mamie Martin Fund, MMF 1993 United Kingdom (Scotland)

Development activities

An education-focused charity supporting the education of girls in secondary schools in Northern Malawi. In 2023-2024 the organisation is assisting 120 girls enrolled in secondary education by paying fees and associated expenses.

The Malawi Healthcare Support UK, MAHECAS UK 1995 United Kingdom

Development activities

A healthcare charity focused on “the relief of sickness and the preservation of good health amongst patient hospitals, health clinics, and other primary healthcare locations in Malawi”, through the provision of medical equipment and supplies.

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