



European Union
Global Diaspora Facility

REACHING OUT: HOW EU MEMBER STATES ENGAGE THEIR DIASPORAS

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FOREWORD

In 2019 we started the EUDiF project by mapping policies, practices and institutions involved in diaspora engagement in over 100 partner countries of the European Union. This global-level research has served as the foundation for the EUDiF project and a resource for many in the diaspora-development ecosystem.

The EUDiF team returns regularly to this foundational research: Not only do we update it each year, but we also use it on a daily basis as a resource with which we identify interesting practices, potential partners and emerging trends that feed into our research, dialogue and capacity development activities.

In the latter, peer-learning is hugely important and the global mapping has helped us facilitate a lot of learning intra- and inter-regionally. With this new publication, I am thrilled that we expand our knowledge on national initiatives to cover EU Member States, ergo bringing more opportunities for peer learning and knowledge sharing between the regions in which our project operates.

“Reaching out: How EU Member States engage their diasporas” is the mirror to the research focused on our partner regions beyond Europe, completing the global picture of diaspora-engagement approaches. I recommend reading it in combination with the regional overviews on Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe and Central Asia, the Middle East and the Pacific, as well as the Typology of diaspora engagement institutions. I hope readers will find it enlightening, useful and perhaps thought provoking on how EU Member States do – and do not – engage their diasporas by contrast with other parts of the world.

Charlotte Griffiths

Public Partnerships Lead



INSTITUTION TYPES

EU Member States (EU MS) have a wide variety of institutions responsible for providing services to the diaspora. These institutions may either be diaspora-dedicated, or diaspora-related.

Diaspora-dedicated institutions

A diaspora-dedicated institution is a public or semi-public body which is exclusively or partly mandated to provide services to the diaspora and/or to create an enabling environment for diaspora engagement (EUDiF, 2023). For example, the [Central State Office for Croats Abroad](#) is a diaspora-dedicated institution as it was established specifically to protect the rights and interests of the Croatian diaspora and promote the country's relations with them.

Across the EU, there are various types of diaspora-dedicated institutions. Institutions found within central government include ministries and their sub-units, sub-ministries, advisory bodies and executive bodies, which are often tasked with protecting the rights of citizens abroad, offering consular services, and providing assistance in times of crisis. These institutions are also responsible for developing diaspora policies and support measures, including in consultation with diaspora groups. In addition to these, hybrid or unconventional diaspora institution types such as quangos and associations of public benefit also form part of EU MS' diaspora governance frameworks.

Diaspora-related institutions

Not all diaspora institutions are diaspora-dedicated. In some cases, they may simply be diaspora-related, in that they offer public services that are useful to the diaspora (e.g. provision of information, administrative and consular support) but perform other primary functions that are not solely for the benefit of the diaspora specifically.

Diaspora-related institutions identified in EU MS include representative bodies in host countries, which are often tasked with conducting consultations and dialogue activities with diaspora groups and transmitting insights to policymaking bodies in the country of origin (EU MS). Many EU Member States also have cultural and educational institutes (e.g. [Sweden's Swedish Institute \[Svenska institutet\]](#)) that organise cultural exhibitions; such institutions serve as spaces for diaspora members abroad to gather and participate in the promotion of their cultures and languages.

- ➔ Within these two clusters, EUDiF has identified nine different institution types ranging from ministries to associations with public benefit purpose. For more information on the different types of institutions in the world of diaspora engagement, consult the publication [A typology of diaspora engagement institutions](#).

Institutions in EU Member States

In 2024, across the 27 EU MS, a total of 97 diaspora public institutions were identified. **A strong majority (21 countries, 78%) of EU MS have at least one public institution fully *dedicated* to their diaspora**, and 16 countries (59%) have multiple diaspora-dedicated institutions at the central level with a mandate specifically for diaspora affairs and engagement.

Figure 1. EU Member States with a dedicated diaspora institution and law and/or strategy



LEGAL AND POLICY FRAMEWORKS

A total of 57 diaspora-related laws and strategies were mapped across the EU; **13 (48%) EU MS have a dedicated diaspora law, strategy or policy.**

Many of these define the national diaspora in a way closely tied to the history of the country, for instance, diaspora communities created from populations that fled from European wars (e.g. Croatia) or due to border changes (e.g. Hungary). These definitions have significant implications on access to citizenship among individuals with heritage from a given EU Member State, as well as access to diaspora initiatives, for example those for people of certain ethnic origins.

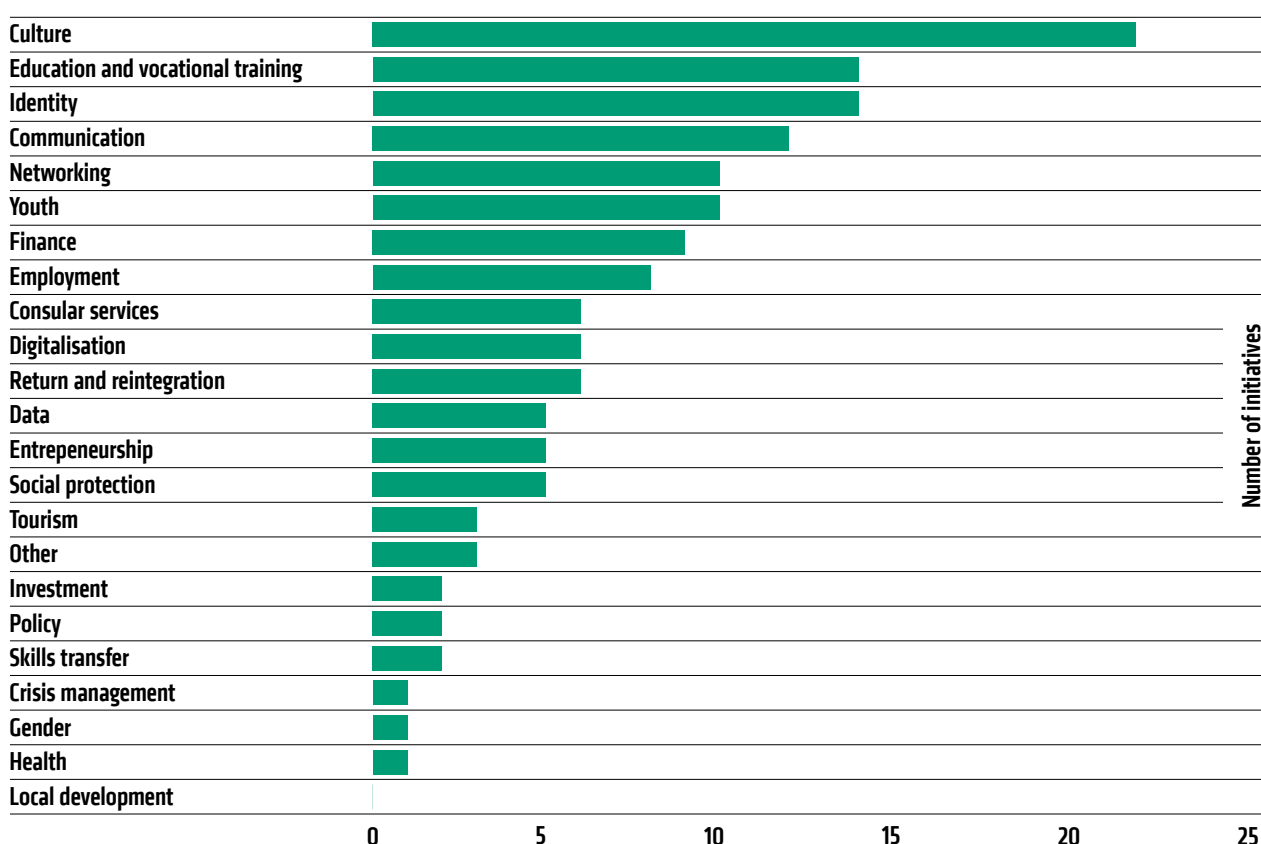
In addition to diaspora laws, several countries also have diaspora-dedicated strategies that are actively in place as of 2024, namely [Cyprus](#), [Estonia](#), [Finland](#), [Greece](#), [Ireland](#), and [Romania](#). These strategies outline objectives for engaging with their diaspora and provide a framework for developing and implementing policies that span a wide variety of topics. Common objectives of these diaspora strategies include strengthening relationships with diaspora communities abroad, preserving their cultural identity and national awareness, promoting their continued civic and political participation in their home countries, facilitating their integration in host societies, providing support (e.g. financial resources, capacity development) to diaspora organisations, and fostering return and reintegration.

In addition to national laws and strategies, the EU has also adopted policies that are applicable to all EU Member States. These include the [Consular Protection Directive of 20 April 2015](#), which states that EU citizens may draw on the consular services of any other EU country in the absence of diplomatic representation of their home country. Furthermore, [Regulation \(EC\) No. 883/2004](#) on the coordination of social security systems aims to strengthen cooperation among Member States' social security institutions, as well as facilitate the movement of EU citizens for study, leisure and professional opportunities by guaranteeing access to social security.

DIASPORA PRACTICES

A total of 107 diaspora practices were mapped across 27 EU Member States. A great majority of these initiatives have a global focus, with only a few initiatives being limited to a target region or set of countries. Most diaspora initiatives are also implemented at the ministry or central agency level, and in some cases in partnership with other public institutions, diaspora organisations, or other types of actors who are active in the diaspora engagement space. Across all initiatives mapped, the most common sectors of interventions are summarised in Figure 1 below.

Figure 2. Sectors of diaspora initiatives implemented by EU Member States



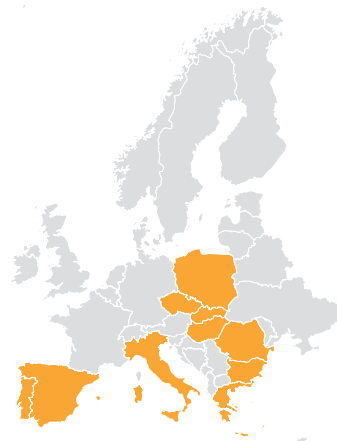
The most common sector of intervention is culture, with 22 initiatives mapped. Most of these initiatives are implemented by EU Member States in Eastern and Southern Europe, with some from the Baltic states (Latvia, Lithuania). These initiatives in the cultural sector come in the form of language programmes among the diaspora and their descendants; art, music, dance and literary competitions; summer camps for the youth to promote learning of the country's culture and history; preservation of cultural heritage (e.g., Estonia's [Compatriots' Programme](#)); the provision of financial support for cultural projects; and more.

Other common sectors of government-run diaspora initiatives include education and vocational training and identity with 14 mapped initiatives for each, followed by communication with 12 initiatives mapped across EU Member States. Additionally, diaspora engagement initiatives in the sectors of networking and youth (10 initiatives each) and finance (9 initiatives) are also fairly common across the EU.

TRENDS BY SUB-REGION

Eastern and Southern EU Member States

EU Member States located in eastern Europe (**Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia**) and in southern Europe (**Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Malta, Portugal, Spain**) have the highest levels of engagement with their diaspora. All countries in the region have a dedicated diaspora institution, with a great majority of them having multiple governance bodies that work on various aspects of diaspora affairs. Only five EU MS allow non-resident citizens to elect their own representatives in parliament (albeit only providing a limited number of seats); four out of these (Croatia, Italy, Portugal, and Romania) are found in eastern and southern Europe, demonstrating a significant trend in the sub-region has in terms of engaging the diaspora in the political sphere (Lafleur & Vintila, 2020).



The initiatives from countries in these regions have a very strong focus on promoting identity and maintaining ties to the homeland, as well as strengthening education and culture among later generations of the diaspora. For instance, youth summer camps and language programmes are very common diaspora initiatives. It is also more common for EU MS in these regions to promote return and reintegration initiatives.

Baltic EU Member States

All **Baltic EU Member States (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania)** have a dedicated diaspora strategy or policy, and at least one diaspora-dedicated institution (with the exception of Estonia).

Diaspora initiatives in this region tend to focus on identity and culture, for instance through summer camps and language programmes for children of the diaspora. These countries also implement several initiatives that harness the economic and human capital of the diaspora, such as local employment programmes and skills transfer initiatives. Latvia and Lithuania put a significant emphasis on fostering return and reintegration among citizens residing abroad.



Western EU Member States

EU Member States located in **western Europe (Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Ireland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands)** are varied in terms of their level of diaspora engagement, although in general, efforts remain limited in this region. While most EU Member States in western Europe have a diaspora-dedicated institution, only one (Ireland) has a dedicated diaspora strategy, and only France has dedicated diaspora representatives in parliament. In general, diaspora engagement is not at the top of the political agenda of governments in this region, and most diaspora initiatives are focused on facilitating access to consular services (e.g. through digitalisation) and providing information to nationals abroad, including in times of emergency.



It is rare for EU MS in western Europe to recognise the value added by the diaspora to national development. The notable exception is Ireland, which has the “intention to maximise the usefulness of the diaspora for Irish national interests” ([Hickman, 2020](#)) and thus has initiatives to tap into their economic capital and foster return migration. France is also an outlier in that it has a relatively strong level of engagement with nationals abroad, including allowing them to elect representatives in parliament and putting in place social security structures specifically for its diaspora. France also has numerous initiatives in the cultural sector, though the target audience goes far beyond the diaspora.

Nordic EU Member States

Among all regions, EU Member States in the **Nordic region (Denmark, Finland, Sweden)** have the lowest level of diaspora engagement and have significantly fewer diaspora-dedicated policies and institutions than the rest of the EU. None of the Member States in this region have a dedicated diaspora institution, and only one (Finland) has a dedicated diaspora strategy or policy.

While there are a few diaspora engagement projects in the field of education or culture, these are very limited, and non-existent in some countries. Nordic governments tend to focus on providing welfare to citizens and residents residing within their borders, and access to social security is virtually cut once individuals leave the territory. There is little incentive for these countries to develop diaspora-specific policies, as they rely heavily on multilateral agreements (e.g., Nordic, EU) which already provide access to social services among citizens abroad, especially in neighbouring Nordic countries, where their citizens have virtually the same rights as nationals.



INSIGHTS BY COUNTRY

EU Member State



Austria

Austria has undertaken a range of steps to make it easier for Austrians abroad to interact with Austrian authorities and to receive documents abroad. Most initiatives for the diaspora aim to digitalise government services, or make it easier for authorities to reach citizens abroad. To some extent, Austria also focuses on promoting Austrian culture among its citizens abroad and keeping them informed about events back home, although the promotion of a common sense of identity is not as strong as for other EU Member States.



Belgium

Diaspora is not at the top of the political agenda at the central level in Belgium, which is characterised by the absence of dedicated public institutions to protect the interests of the Belgian diaspora. Both the Flemish and Walloon communities have developed regional-level institutions to organise some diaspora initiatives, with Flemish institutions being more active in building socio-cultural ties with the diaspora ([Mandin, 2020](#)).



Bulgaria

Bulgaria has a strong focus on engaging with overseas communities or non-citizens of Bulgarian descent and preserving their cultural heritage through various initiatives. These initiatives include cultural competitions (singing, art, literature), as well as the provision of Bulgarian language classes. Bulgaria also has a well-developed diaspora engagement infrastructure with multiple institutions dedicated to strengthening ties with the diaspora.



Croatia

While opposition parties in Croatia aim to mitigate the influence of the diaspora on local affairs, the significant size of the diaspora, continued emigration, and the need for diaspora investment contribute to the motivation of the state to engage with Croats abroad ([Winland, 2020](#)). While Croatia has multiple dedicated diaspora institutions, it does not have a dedicated diaspora law or strategy, and initiatives remain limited to the objective of maintaining connections through cultural exchanges and educational programmes.



Cyprus

Cyprus' diaspora policies have two main objectives: to attract return and investment, as well as raise awareness about the Cypriot identity and history. While economic initiatives are still limited, Cyprus is very active in the field of education and culture, where it provides language classes and youth summer camps (up to the fourth generation). While the government underlines the political and economic importance of diaspora, the main policy areas are of socio-cultural nature, as demonstrated by the extensive support provided to schools and language classes ([Konsantinidou, 2020](#)).



Czech Republic

The Czech Republic's engagement with its diaspora is focused on cultural and educational policies, while consular services remain basic. Authorities are very supportive of the promotion of culture and Czech identity among diaspora communities and the transmission of knowledge of the Czech language among later generations, in the hopes that this could foster return and reintegration. Teaching of the Czech language, history and geography is one of the key activities supported by Czech diaspora institutions, through financial support to diaspora organisations or support for teachers' postings abroad ([Janská & Janurová, 2020](#)).



Denmark

There has been limited effort to develop policies that directly target the Danish diaspora, nor is there an official public institution that deals with Danish citizens residing abroad. Consular services (in the form of direct help or advice) may be provided, but it comes with a financial cost. Danish citizens also lose access to most social benefits once they leave the territory (Careja, 2020). Diaspora engagement initiatives in the field of culture and education are scarce.



Estonia

Estonia's diaspora policy is more oriented towards the promotion of language and culture abroad, and rarely focuses on social protection. Some support is provided by local diaspora organisations, but they are rarely financed by the state and are highly dependent on project funding (Saar, 2020). Estonia does not have a special ministry or unit that is dedicated to Estonians abroad, but it has developed its own [Estonian Diaspora Action Plan for 2022-2025](#).

ZOOM IN:

Estonia's effort to become among the world's leading digital societies is increasingly evident in the diaspora space. The country's [e-Residency initiative](#) is a government-issued digital identity that provides non-Estonian entrepreneurs remote access to business opportunities in Estonia and take part in the country's development. The initiative has led to Estonia adding a new meaning for the term "diaspora" by going beyond conventional notions of citizenship or heritage-based ties to the country. In 2023, Lauri Haav, the Managing Director of e-Residency shared, "We are very proud that 100,000 e-residents make up [the] unique global diaspora of Estonia, the only digital society in the world... We consider all our e-residents, wherever they are in the world, to be our ambassadors." (Brown, 2023).



Finland

Finland does not have a specific global-level policy of supporting Finns abroad, but rather a regional one meaning that Finns living in Nordic countries have broadly the same rights as nationals in those countries. A key feature of Finland's diaspora infrastructure is the reliance on the Nordic cooperation that allows its citizens abroad to benefit from a favourable treatment from consular and social protection of other states. Diasporic affairs in Finland are managed more closely by the [Ministry of Interior](#) (rather than the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as is more common), and links between expatriate Finns and the central government are mediated by a third (non-governmental) entity, the [Finnish Expatriate Parliament](#).



France

France has a comparatively strong level of engagement with its expatriates by western European standards and has multiple diaspora-dedicated institutions that span the cultural (see below) and political (e.g. diaspora members of parliament) spheres. Despite this, France does not have an integrated and dedicated diaspora engagement strategy.

In terms of engaging with citizens abroad, France is particularly active in the area of culture and has a network of both public and private cultural centres such as the [Institut Français](#), the [Alliance Française](#), and the [Agence pour l'enseignement français à l'étranger](#). These centres are not diaspora-dedicated institutions but nonetheless function as hubs for French nationals abroad to gather and stay connected with their culture. Though focused on culture, they do not share the same characteristics as culture projects implemented by eastern European countries: France's initiatives promote French culture to a more global audience, not just its diaspora.

ZOOM IN:

While France is most active in the cultural sector on the global stage, initiatives are available for French nationals abroad to ensure they have access to social security. The [Fund for the French Abroad](#) (*Caisse des Français de l'étranger*) is a unique diaspora-dedicated institution, in that it is a social security organisation that offers social protection schemes (health, maternity, invalidity and work-related accidents) specifically to French nationals abroad. It was established in 1978 and is managed by the Ministry of Social Security and Ministry of Budget, and is regulated by the French social security code. It is open to all French expatriates, as well as EU, EEA and Swiss nationals.



Germany

There does not appear to be any concerted coordination between German ministries addressing German nationals living abroad ([Klekowski von Koppenfels, 2020](#)). Some states such as Bavaria offer return programmes (particularly for high-skilled Germans), but other examples are limited. Initiatives for the diaspora largely concern consular services and digitalisation, and there is limited focus on culture and identity. Germany follows a Nordic approach in that access to social security is based on residency in the country and not citizenship.



Greece

Greece has a well-developed diaspora engagement structure consisting of multiple diaspora-dedicated institutions and a dedicated diaspora strategy. Greek consular authorities can offer support to facilitate moving one's residence and economic activity back to Greece, including for non-citizens in some cases.

Greece has a multifaceted approach in terms of language, culture and education policy, reflecting the strong belief that Greek language acquisition is one of the best ways to retrain ties with Greece. Like many countries in Southern and Eastern Europe, Greece holds immersive cultural programmes for young members of the diaspora. Greek institutions do not distinguish clearly between diaspora and Greek nationals, indicating a strong emphasis on "blood ties" rather than citizenship when approaching the diaspora ([Moutselos & Mavrodi, 2020](#)).



Hungary

Hungary has a very developed and institutionalised diaspora engagement structure. It has extensive legal coverage for Hungarians living abroad, with the commitment to supporting the diaspora ("Hungarians living beyond its borders") enshrined in the Constitution. Hungary has dedicated strategies for the diaspora as well as government programmes/projects, where particular attention is provided to Hungarians in neighbouring countries (given that a significant proportion of the diaspora is found in these areas due to border changes following WWI). Hungary also ensures financing for diaspora engagement activities through a dedicated fund. Like many countries in eastern Europe, diaspora initiatives focus heavily on identity and preservation of culture, and aim to facilitate the return and reintegration of diaspora members. In most cases, social benefits in Hungary require residency in the country.

ZOOM IN:

Hungary's [Research Institute for Hungarian Communities Abroad](#) is a one-of-a-kind diaspora-dedicated institution, and it is the only EU Member State with a research institute focused on diaspora-related topics. Founded in 2011, the Institute aims to conduct scientific research on Hungarian communities abroad and inform national policies. Its scope of activities can be divided into three major spheres: the generation of knowledge through research and analysis; the presentation and dissemination of knowledge (e.g. through publications and events); and the transfer of knowledge through educational opportunities.



Ireland

Ireland recognises the diaspora as a valuable asset and aims to maximise the human and economic capital for Irish national interests ([Hickman, 2020](#)). The government has a host of initiatives targeted towards the diaspora, many of them aiming to strengthen links with diaspora communities, attract Irish citizens abroad back into the country, recognise diaspora achievements, and tap into their economic capital. There are not as many cultural or educational projects in Ireland as other EU Member States.



Italy

Instruments to consult and politically represent Italian citizens abroad are a core feature of Italy's diaspora engagement policies ([Caldarini, 2020](#)). While Italy has dedicated cultural institutions abroad, the government does not seem to have as many cultural projects as neighbouring cultural powers such as France. Furthermore, Italy relies heavily on the *Patronati*, which are welfare advice centres that provide access to social protection and social services, to reach out to Italian citizens abroad and provide them with social security services.



Latvia

Latvia formulated its diaspora policy in the 2010s with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as the leading institution. Its main areas of work include the civic and political engagement of the diaspora; cooperation in the fields of business, science and education and culture; and the promotion of return to Latvia; and emergency support ([Lulle, 2020](#)). Latvia's initiatives for the diaspora tend to focus on identity and culture, but most importantly return and reintegration.



Lithuania

Lithuania has a developed set of diaspora institutions, as well as diaspora initiatives that span a wide variety of sectors. The country has not only cultural and identity projects, but also projects that aim to harness diaspora human and economic capital. A significant number of initiatives are aimed towards employment in Lithuania and return and reintegration.



Luxembourg

Luxembourg's diaspora resides mainly within the EU. Authorities have not developed any specific policies that target the diaspora, nor is there a dedicated diaspora institution. Diaspora initiatives in Luxembourg are mostly catered to easing the process of registration and informing emigrating citizens about public services available abroad (these are mostly offered through Belgian missions, given that Luxembourg's network of consuls is very limited).



Malta

While Malta has a dedicated diaspora institution and some diaspora engagement initiatives, they are mostly related to easing access to consular services. At the time of writing, there were no policies or programmes to incentivise Maltese nationals to return.



Netherlands

In general, Dutch socio-economic diaspora policies seem to be limited. The Netherlands has one diaspora-dedicated institution: the [Foundation for Dutch Education Worldwide](#), an association of public benefit commissioned by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science to promote the Dutch language and culture to diaspora members and their children. Diaspora initiatives from the Netherlands are largely focused on providing information to nationals who are travelling or moving abroad, as well as facilitating access to consular services.



Poland

Poland has a well-developed network of institutions dedicated to its diaspora. Its initiatives focus heavily on the promotion of culture and strengthening of identity among Polish communities abroad. The most developed sector of intervention is the education of Polish children abroad, which recently became a priority of Polish diaspora policy. These more recent activities are consistent with the government's priorities of promoting the Polish language and culture, and maintaining and strengthening the national identity of Polish nationals living abroad ([Lesińska & Wróbel, 2020](#)).



Portugal

Portugal has a well-developed diaspora infrastructure and a range of initiatives that not only focus on culture and identity, but also diaspora investment. It also has policies that allow citizens abroad to vote but has more limited policies in the areas of social protection (Marques & Góis, 2020). Despite being a country of emigration for much of its history, Portugal has fewer visible initiatives for its diaspora in comparison to other countries in southern and eastern Europe and does not have a dedicated diaspora engagement strategy.



Romania

Romania has greatly expanded its network of consulates in order to maintain and promote national identity among its diaspora, promote the work of diaspora organisations, and facilitate the integration of Romanians in their host societies. Romania has also made efforts to attract citizens to return, including by offering financial assistance to start businesses and reintegration support through InvestRomania (Nica & Moraru, 2020). Romania also has initiatives to preserve Romanian identity among its diaspora, such as the Romanian Abroad Day. Compared to other countries in Eastern Europe, Romania places a greater focus on the role of diaspora in economic development.



Slovakia

Slovakia's diaspora efforts prioritise educational and cultural engagement with ethnic Slovaks residing abroad. The country focuses heavily on improving its diaspora's knowledge of Slovakian culture and language, as well as fostering ties between diaspora and homeland (Vašečka & Žuborová, 2020). Slovakia has a strong focus on identity, with initiatives to preserve the history of ethnic Slovaks and provide ethnic Slovaks with access to a wide variety of benefits in Slovakia (living, working, studying without a visa).



Slovenia

Slovenia's engagement with its diaspora is mostly political and cultural in nature and primarily aims to preserve Slovenian identity, heritage, language and culture (Vah Jevšnik & Cukut Krilić, 2020). Slovenia has a significant focus on diaspora in neighbouring countries and has specific bodies dedicated to Slovak nationals residing in these areas. While Slovenia's diaspora initiatives have focused on culture and identity, in 2022 the country started to expand into economic projects, primarily with the establishment of the Economic Coordinating Body of Slovenians in neighbouring countries.



Spain

Spain's diaspora engagement policies tend to focus on emigrant return and reintegration, which is identified as a priority in the Constitution. This is reflected in the provision of various social benefits for returnees. Spain also dedicates significant resources to implementing educational and cultural programmes for Spanish youth abroad, which are delivered through Spanish schools. Remittances and diaspora economic activities are not as common in Spain (Palop-García, 2020).



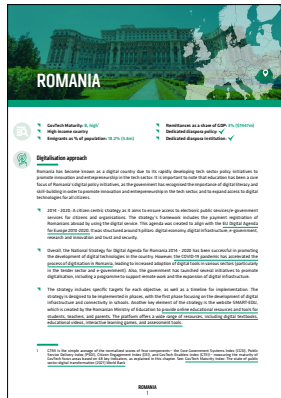
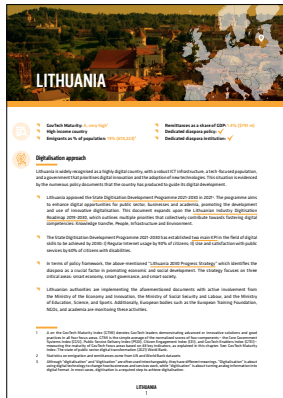
Sweden

Sweden has neither a dedicated diaspora institution, nor a dedicated strategy or policy (Nyhammar & Olsson, 2020). In fact, Swedish authorities have limited engagement with nationals abroad, except in the field of education. Sweden funds Swedish-language schools in 11 countries, and the National Agency for Education offers supplementary Swedish courses for children abroad. In practice, bilateral agreements between Nordic countries make it easier for Swedish nationals in Denmark and Finland to access their host countries' welfare system, providing little incentive for Sweden to develop its own diaspora policies.

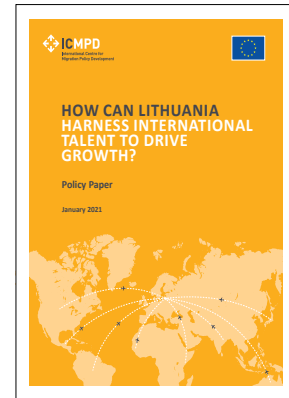
RELATED PUBLICATIONS

For more information on some diaspora engagement initiatives, consult EUDiF's [practice database](#), [diaspora engagement map](#), and various publications:

Peer profiles

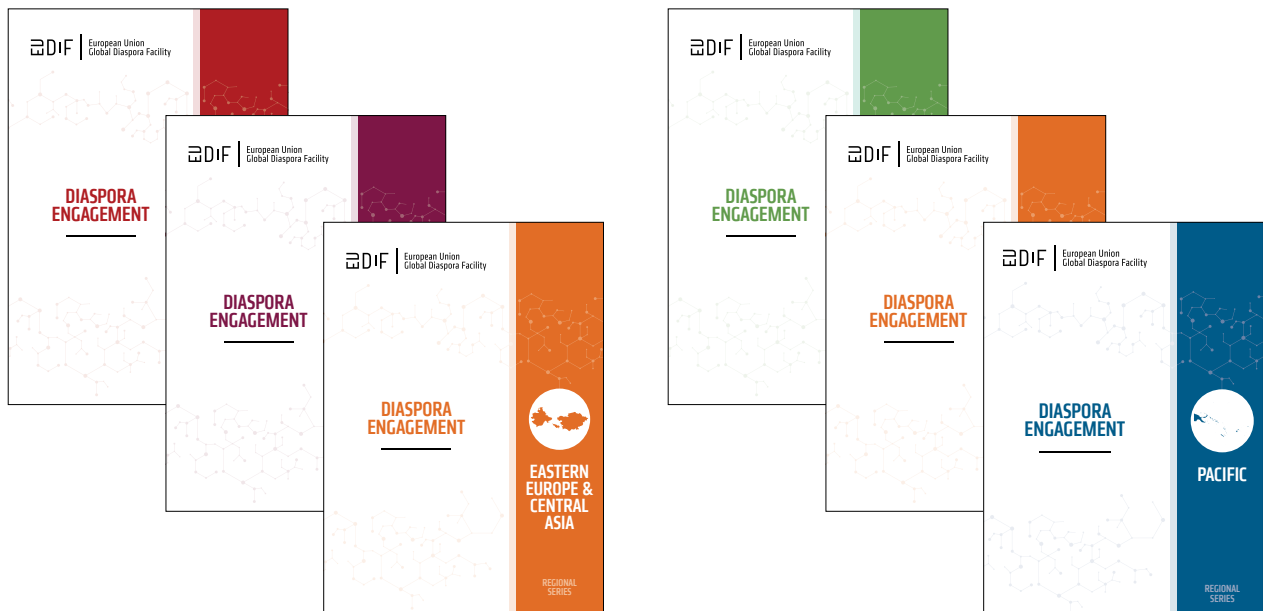


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