

Learning by doing



series drawing on research and  
capacity development actions

# YOUTH DIASPORA ENGAGEMENT

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# Table of contents

- 03  
Context
- 04  
A note from the author
- 05  
Policy shapers
- 07  
Implementers & practitioners
- 10  
Innovators & creators
- 12  
Read more

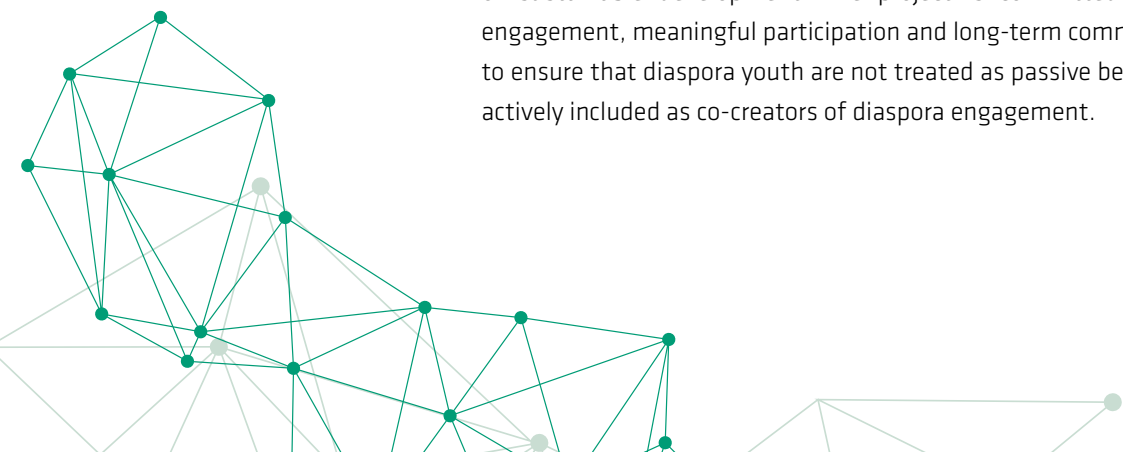


# Context

Diaspora youth are powerful actors in migration and development. Bridging cultures, generations and geographies, they bring lived experience, transnational perspectives and modern skills that are essential for shaping inclusive and forward-looking policies.

As a group, diaspora youth is the opposite of homogenous: The intersecting identities of diaspora and youth make this as hyper-diverse group as can be imagined and results in an almost unparalleled dynamism and creativity. Whether influencing decision-making spaces, implementing projects on the ground, piloting new ideas, or shaping narratives through storytelling, diaspora youth bring energy, innovation and critical perspectives that enrich the diaspora-development ecosystem.

At EUDiF, we work *with diaspora youth* – by creating professional and leadership opportunities and embedding their voices, ideas and expertise across our research, dialogue and project implementation activities, and *for diaspora youth* – by advocating for their expertise to be valued and systematically included in countries of heritage and home across all sectors of sustainable development. The project is committed to structured engagement, meaningful participation and long-term community building to ensure that diaspora youth are not treated as passive beneficiaries, but actively included as co-creators of diaspora engagement.



# A note from the author

*When we talk about EUDiF's work with youth, this can be understood in two complementary streams. First, our work targeting youth in countries of heritage, such as projects that support education. Second, our work involving diaspora youth directly – as partners, innovators and leaders in diaspora engagement processes. This publication focuses on the latter.*

*The topic is particularly close to my heart. I was EUDiF's first Diaspora Youth Intern, and since then I have had the opportunity to coordinate and support different youth-related aspects of the project. Over the years, I have worked with, learned from and been continuously impressed by young diasporans who bring not only skills and ideas, but also creativity and a deep commitment to the communities they connect with.*

*Across EUDiF, diaspora youth have been engaged through interconnected workstreams: our **Diaspora Youth Internship Programme**, which offers young diasporans hands-on professional experience within the project; our **knowledge and research activities**, which document youth-led practices and explore youth-related themes; our **dialogue activities**, where young diasporans contribute to discussions and recommendations; and our **capacity development work**, where diaspora youth and youth-led organisations support or benefit from concrete actions.*

*One thing that has become very clear to me is that diaspora youth wear many “hats”. They are young professionals, community members, researchers, activists, students, volunteers – to name just a few! – in transnational, evolving contexts. This combination gives them a unique perspective and many of them are active in policy debates, implementing projects, creating new solutions and telling powerful stories.*

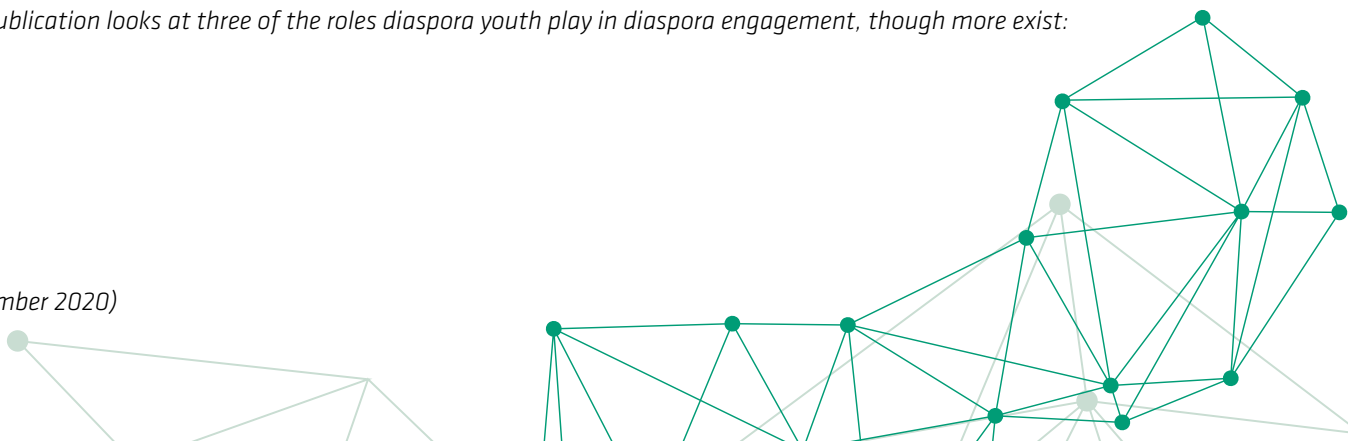
*Building on these experiences, this publication looks at three of the roles diaspora youth play in diaspora engagement, though more exist:*

- ✓ Policy shapers
- ✓ Implementers and practitioners
- ✓ Innovators and creators

**Agustín Searle-Vial**

Project Officer

Diaspora Youth Intern (March-September 2020)



# Policy shapers

Diaspora youth are not only future leaders – they are already shaping policy conversations today. Their lived experience, transnational awareness and forward-looking perspectives bring valuable insights to migration and development debates, as well as to wider policy areas connected to education, employment, climate action, digitalisation, democracy and social inclusion. Whilst they do participate in formal policymaking spaces, the role goes further. Diaspora youth shape policy by producing knowledge, telling stories, raising awareness, advocating for their communities, and translating lived realities into concrete recommendations. These actions help make policy discussions more grounded, inclusive and connected to the people and communities they aim to serve.

Despite proving their value, youth struggle to gain consistent access to structured policy spaces and there is a need to better recognise diaspora youth as meaningful contributors across policy processes. Although EUDiF has observed instances when countries of heritage, EU countries and institutions, international organisations and civil society have each sought policy inputs from youth diaspora, it is often ad-hoc and with limited sustainability. This demonstrates an awareness of the potential but risks creating friction.

## HOW TO: MEANINGFUL YOUTH ROLES IN DIALOGUE SPACES

Youth participation in dialogue should go beyond attendance. Young diasporans can be invited as **speakers**, bringing their lived experience, technical knowledge and community perspectives directly into the discussion.

They can also act as **rapporteurs**, as in the [Future Forum 2022](#), where diaspora youth helped capture, synthesise and communicate key messages from the sessions, shaping how the discussions were shared afterwards.

Youth can also be involved as **agenda-setters** and **conveners**: for example, during [Future Forum 2021](#), a dedicated day, “Youth Drive”, created space for youth inputs on innovation, trust-building and heritage, with diaspora youth designing and moderating sessions and bringing fresh perspectives to long-standing diaspora engagement debates. Additionally, the [Migration Youth and Children Platform \(MYCP\)](#)’s role at the [Global Forum on Migration and Development \(GFMD\)](#) in [Riohacha](#) shows how youth-led spaces can define priorities, create platforms for exchange, and enable young people to take on multiple roles – from speakers and moderators to organisers and advocates.

As a dialogue facilitator, assigning clear and visible roles helps recognise youth expertise, avoid tokenism, and ensures youth perspectives actively influence the conversation and its outcomes.



## Case study: Diaspora youth focus group

In 2024, EUDiF convened a diaspora youth focus group to explore how youth perspectives can be better integrated in migration policy design and programme implementation.

To do this we:

- ✓ Celebrated the intersecting identities in the room
- ✓ Paid participants for their time and expertise
- ✓ Made it win-win: The agenda had structured and informal opportunities for participants to promote their own work to the group whilst also generating inputs for EUDiF.
- ✓ Generated recommendations at three levels:
- ✓ Provided participants with a progress update, outlining which recommendations had been incorporated into the project, which were still under discussion, and how broader recommendations were being promoted in relevant policy spaces. This follow-up was an important part of closing the consultation loop and showing participants how their contributions were being used.

Rather than treating youth engagement as symbolic, the focus group created a structured space for young voices to articulate their priorities, highlighting the need for inclusive policy cycles, genuine participation and recognition of diaspora youth expertise.

- 1. Diaspora Youth Internship and Alumni Community:** Participants recommended strengthening the internship and alumni experience by maintaining remote access, improving remuneration, facilitating Brussels visits, and involving alumni more systematically in onboarding, recruitment and knowledge-sharing.
- 2. Capacity development and support opportunities at EUDiF:** Participants reflected on how EUDiF's support mechanisms could become more accessible to youth-led and smaller diaspora organisations. Recommendations included keeping application processes simple, providing clearer guidance on eligible costs and activities, considering sample applications, and avoiding overly strict eligibility requirements.
- 3. Integrating youth perspectives in migration policy processes:** This working group developed broader recommendations on how youth perspectives can be meaningfully integrated into migration policy and programming. They called for youth expertise to be recognised and fairly compensated, for funding to be more flexible and accessible to youth-diaspora-led organisations, and for youth to be structurally included in governance, consultation, project design, implementation and evaluation processes. These inputs were published in "[Integrating Youth Perspectives in Migration Policy Processes – Diaspora Youth Recommendations](#)".



# Implementers & practitioners

Diaspora youth are also active implementers of projects, initiatives and community-based action. With their professional skills and strong community ties, young diasporans are uniquely positioned to translate ideas into practice in multiple geographies. They do so in professional and voluntary capacities, sometimes under the umbrellas of youth action and/or diaspora engagement.

As implementers and practitioners, diaspora youth bring qualities that are essential to project delivery: curiosity, determination and tenacity. They are often “learning while doing”, navigating several contexts at once and finding practical ways to connect ideas with action. This combination of adaptability, commitment and willingness to experiment makes them valuable contributors to migration and development initiatives.

At EUDiF, we see diaspora youth as practitioners who design, deliver and contribute to concrete actions in migration and development. We work with youth diaspora most notably through our dedicated Diaspora Youth Internship, but also in selected capacity development and grants projects.

## Youth in the EUDiF team

The Diaspora Youth Internship is EUDiF’s flagship initiative to empower young professionals of diaspora background and integrate youth perspectives in project implementation. Over a five-month remote internship, participants contribute to all workstreams (research, dialogue, capacity development and grants management) while receiving one-to-one mentoring, a tailored task portfolio, and opportunities to participate in high-level events.

Between 2020 and 2025, 14 interns completed the programme. Their contributions shaped EUDiF’s work and led to the creation of an alumni network, the Diaspora Youth Community.

Each internship includes a personal project, such as a think piece, workshop, or creative output; structured induction and onboarding; regular career-development discussions; and the chance to build connections across the global diaspora-development landscape.



**Nothing About Without: Celebrating the diaspora youth at the heart of EUDiF**



## Kurak Voices

In Kyrgyzstan, [Danaker Association](#), a youth-led diaspora women's organisation brought a project idea to the [Migration and Human Trafficking Council](#) to introduce the “Inclusive Public Dialogue” method to women in rural communities, as a method of community empowerment in a context with significant gender inequality high rates of violence against women.

Danaker Association instigated the project and later provided experts to deliver the workshops and coach the participants to use the IPD method independently.

The organisation's involvement illustrates how diaspora youth organisations can act as implementers of change who bridge perspectives, promote gender inclusion and support sustainable civic engagement.



[Read more](#)  
[Kyrgyzstan](#)  
[The project](#)  
[Kurak Voices Toolkit](#)



## Inclusive and circular urban ecosystem in Porto-Novo Benin

EUDiF's [Diaspora 4 Development \(D4D\) Grants project](#) led by [Gbobètô France](#), a Beninese diaspora organisation based in France, supports the development of a sustainable, inclusive and circular urban ecosystem in Porto-Novo, Benin. The project aims to strengthen local waste sorting and plastic recycling systems while raising awareness among school communities and supporting informal waste collectors and women recyclers.

The project's programme manager is a young member of the Beninese diaspora, playing a crucial bridging role between the diaspora organisation and local implementation realities. Her position allows her to combine an understanding of local needs, challenges and actors with the skills, knowledge and perspective brought by the diaspora. This dual role shows how diaspora youth can be effective project practitioners, not only contributing ideas from afar but actively coordinating and implementing development initiatives on the ground.



[Read more](#)  
[Benin](#)  
[The project](#)



# Innovators & creators

Diaspora youth are natural innovators. Growing up and operating across borders, cultures and systems, they are uniquely positioned to identify gaps, propose new solutions and experiment with creative approaches. Their familiarity with digital tools, and entrepreneurial mindsets enables them to respond to development challenges in fresh and adaptable ways.

At EUDiF, we actively create and support platforms where diaspora youth can test ideas, pitch initiatives, and lead innovation processes, recognising that youth innovation is not a side activity, but a core driver of sustainable diaspora engagement.



## Case study: Supporting youth innovation through pitch competitions

One way of stimulating youth innovation is through pitch competitions. When designed carefully, they can do more than showcase good ideas: they can help young people clarify their proposals, receive feedback, build confidence and gain visibility in spaces where youth-led initiatives are often underrepresented.

At the Future Forum in 2023, EUDiF launched the **Diaspora Youth Pitch Competition**, providing a stage for young diasporans to present innovative ideas and initiatives related to diaspora engagement and development. The three finalist projects each addressed a specific development challenge through a youth diaspora lens:

- **MentorAiyim**, presented by Aitolgon Boronbaeva from [Danaker Association](#), proposed a digital mentorship programme for young migrant women from the Kyrgyz Republic in Poland and across the EU, supporting their educational and professional journeys while building soft skills, networks and a stronger diaspora community.
- **African Loop**, presented by Taman Mhoumadi from [#DiasporaVote!](#), focused on creating sustainable jobs in Africa through locally-driven climate solutions, connecting climate entrepreneurs with technical expertise and using artistic approaches to make climate action more visible and relatable across Africa and Europe.



- **Frontline Speaks**, presented by Jennifer Kwao from [1.2 Diaries](#), aimed to amplify the voices of communities at the frontline of the climate crisis through exhibitions, media campaigns and partnerships between diaspora communities and civil society networks in Europe and Africa.

By integrating the pitch competition into the Future Forum, EUDiF created visibility, validation and professional exposure for youth-led ideas within a high-level diaspora policy space. The winners received financial prizes to support the implementation of selected projects. These prizes were given as seed-funding free of obligation, allowing the winners to move their ideas closer to action in full autonomy.

EUDiF's partner the [Migration Youth and Children Platform \(MYCP\)](#) runs its own **Youth Leadership and Innovation Award (YLIA)** in the margins of the Global Framework on Migration and Development. In 2023 and 2024, EUDiF team members acted as mentors and judges respectively, accompanying young leaders in refining and presenting their projects. This role allowed EUDiF to support a broader youth innovation ecosystem through partnership and knowledge-sharing, while helping participants strengthen the quality, clarity and feasibility of their proposals.

From these experiences, several lessons emerge:

- **Keep the entry barrier low:** Pitch competitions should have clear instructions, accessible formats and realistic expectations, so that young people without extensive institutional experience can still participate.
- **Provide mentoring before the pitch:** The process matters as much as the final presentation. Mentoring helps participants sharpen their ideas, improve their delivery, and think through feasibility, sustainability and impact.
- **Link visibility with practical support:** Financial prizes or other forms of support can make a real difference by helping youth move from ideas to implementation.
- **Create exposure in meaningful spaces:** Presenting in international fora such as the Future Forum or the GFMD gives youth-led initiatives credibility, visibility and access to networks that can open future opportunities.
- **Diversify the judging panel:** Judging panels should bring together different backgrounds, ages, sectors and perspectives to ensure projects are assessed fairly, constructively and from multiple angles.



A strong pitch competition is not only about selecting winners; it is about helping young people develop stronger, more actionable initiatives and recognising them as credible actors in migration and development.

# Read more

## Youth-focused diaspora initiatives

A collection of youth-focused initiatives identified via EUDiF's global mapping of diaspora engagement policies, practices and priorities in over 120 countries and further research. The collection was created in advance of the Roundtable Consultation titled "Children and Youth on the Move: Innovators for Tomorrow's Development" during the second round of GFMD consultations held from 19 to 20 February 2025 in Geneva, Switzerland.

## Youth entrepreneurship and heritage tourism: long-term thinking for diaspora engagement

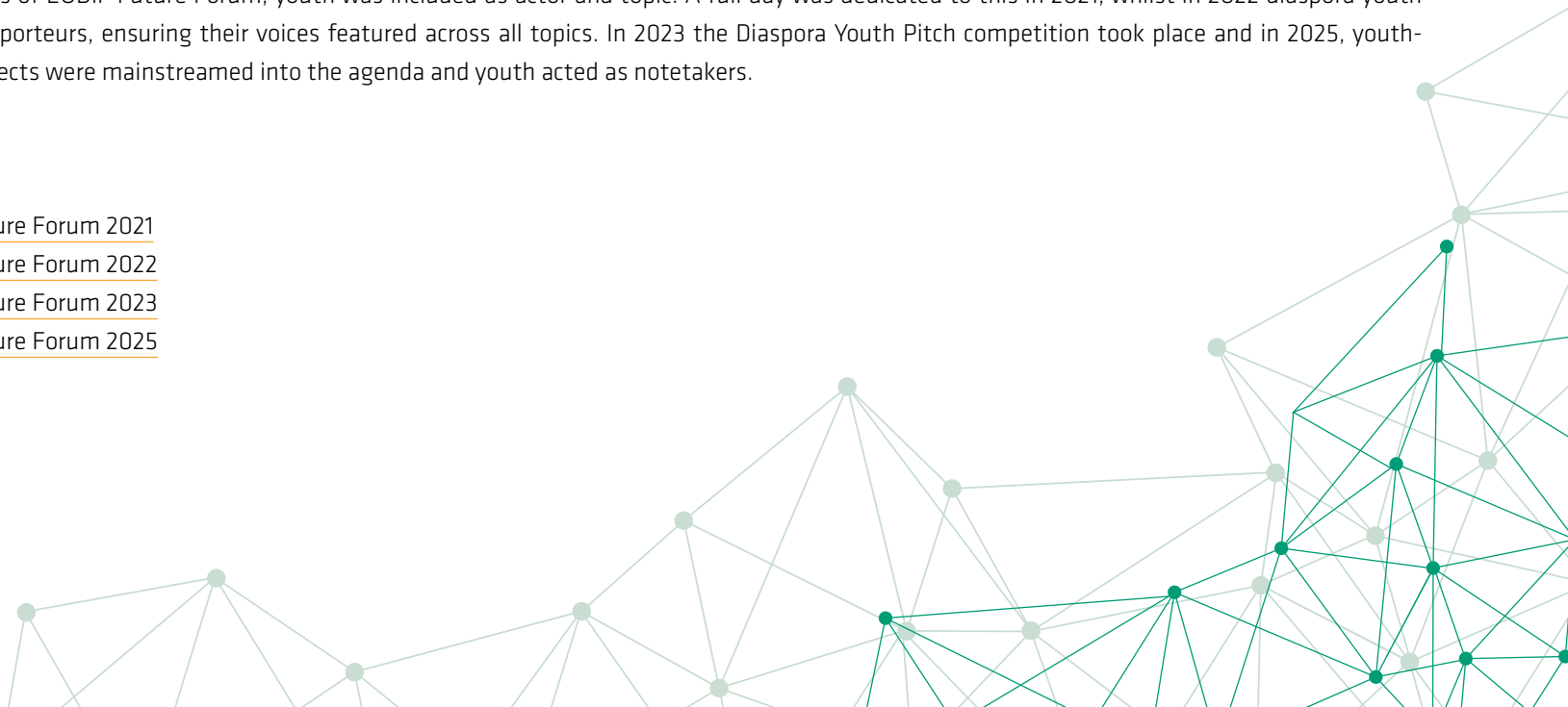
A case study examining how young diasporans contribute to cultural heritage revitalisation and economic development through tourism entrepreneurship. The research included consultations with diaspora youth and analyses examples from Rwanda, Brazil and Barbados, highlighting the potential of youth-led initiatives to bridge heritage, innovation and sustainable development.

## Future Forum and diaspora youth engagement

In all editions of EUDiF Future Forum, youth was included as actor and topic. A full day was dedicated to this in 2021, whilst in 2022 diaspora youth acted as rapporteurs, ensuring their voices featured across all topics. In 2023 the Diaspora Youth Pitch competition took place and in 2025, youth-focused projects were mainstreamed into the agenda and youth acted as notetakers.

Read more:

- ▶ [Future Forum 2021](#)
- ▶ [Future Forum 2022](#)
- ▶ [Future Forum 2023](#)
- ▶ [Future Forum 2025](#)



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