

REPRESENTATION ACROSS BORDERS

How diaspora councils structure
belonging and participation



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Foreword

This publication was inspired by a Capacity Development Lab project in which the partner institutions discussed different methods of engaging the diaspora and institutionalising their consultation. In response, we commissioned Zeline Dennis to research one such method: the creation of diaspora councils.

This was Zeline's research assignment during her time as a Diaspora Youth Intern with EUDiF. As a young woman in the Basotho diaspora, Zeline brings lived experience and a strong subject sensitivity which is keenly valued by the EUDiF, not least because she knows what it is like to be in the diaspora without a formal consultation structure to turn to or participate in.

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Public Partnerships Lead

About the author

Zeline Dennis is a communications and research professional whose work sits at the intersection of climate justice, gender equity, migration and diaspora engagement. She holds a Master's degree in Journalism and International Affairs co delivered by University College Dublin and CNN Academy.

Zeline's professional portfolio includes work with CNN Academy, where she contributed to documentary-style storytelling and digital reporting, and The Diaspora Institute, where she developed social media content and promotional videos that strengthened the organisation's digital presence. Through collaborations with governmental ministries, she has conducted qualitative fieldwork and interviews with women affected by trafficking and climate related displacement. She also applies cultural schema theory to analyse how shared mental models and cultural narratives shape how governments and societies interpret migration and diaspora.

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Introduction

Diaspora engagement is a central pillar of many countries' foreign policy and development strategies. Since 1995, the number of international migrants has grown from 161 million to an estimated 281 million, now accounting for 3.6% of the global population. This sustained upward trend has prompted governments to invest in formal structures like diaspora councils to better organise dialogue, representation, and engagement with their nationals abroad.

A diaspora council is a consultative or governing body that is made up of or includes representatives of the diaspora. Diaspora councils act as an intermediary between the diaspora and the government of the origin country and may work on integration, economic development, policy, advocacy, cultural preservation or even crisis response. Such councils exist in different institutional types: advisory body association of public benefit, advisory body, representative body and sub-ministry.¹

While numerous countries have established councils, comparative analysis of their institutional design remains limited. Existing literature often focuses on individual councils or national diaspora strategies, leaving a gap in understanding what models exist, how councils differ and what structural choices matter.

As more countries recognize the value of diaspora engagement, the demand for guidance on how to design sustainable diaspora institutions continues to grow. This paper adopts a comparative approach to identify different council models and to give key design considerations for governments creating or reforming councils.

This process involved:

- Desk research of official government legislation, reports, diaspora council websites, and news articles to understand their mandates, structures and activities.
- Comparative analysis of different institutional models and how their structures influence their thematic priorities.

The analysis in this paper does not conclude that there is a single best model but rather aims to offer a foundation for informed institutional design.

1. For more on institution types, see the EUDiF [Typology of diaspora engagement institutions](#) (Tittel-Mosser F., 2023)

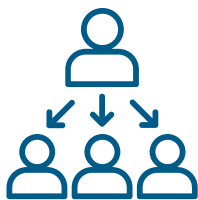
List of councils

Council name	Country	Year	Description
<u>The High Council of Malians Abroad (Le Haut conseil des maliens de l'extérieur, HCME).</u>	Mali	1991	HCME is an official institution linking the Malian public authorities and the diaspora, serving as an integration instrument and consultation framework for the problems faced by the Malian diaspora.
<u>High Council of Senegalese Abroad (Haut Conseil des Sénégalais de l'Extérieur, HCSE).</u>	Senegal	1995	An advisory body supporting the Direction de l'Assistance et de la Promotion des Sénégalais de l'Extérieur (DAPSE's) work. The High Council of Senegalese Abroad is responsible for initiating, coordinating and implementing government policies aimed at ensuring the well-being of Senegalese abroad and represents diaspora associations around the world.
<u>High Council of Beninese Abroad (Haut Conseil des Béninois de l'Extérieur, HCBE).</u>	Benin	1997	The HCBE was established in 1997 and recognised by the state as an "association with public utility" in the year 2000. The HCBE aims to regroup nationals abroad to facilitate their participation in national political life, protect their rights and interests, and promote investment in Benin. It also implements cultural, economic and sports exchanges between Benin and migrants' countries of residence.
<u>High Council of Nigeriens Abroad (Haut Conseil des Nigériens de l'Extérieur, HCNE).</u>	Niger	2003	Under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Cooperation, African Integration and Nigeriens abroad, the HCNE primarily works as a consultative body and its core functions include serving as a channel of communication, promoting dialogue between diaspora associations and the government and advising the government on policies affecting Nigeriens abroad.
<u>The Council of the Moroccan Community Abroad (Conseil de la Communauté Marocaine à l'Étranger CCME).</u>	Morocco	2007	A consultative and forward-looking institution, enshrined in the 2011 Constitution, it contributes to the monitoring and evaluation of public policies relating to Moroccans Living Abroad. CCME issues opinions, conducts studies, and formulates recommendations on matters relating to the rights, interests, and contributions of Moroccans of the World.

Council name	Country	Year	Description
<u>Consultative Councils (Consejos Consultivos)</u>	Uruguay	2008	The central mission is to strengthen ties with Uruguay through cultural, social, scientific and development-related activities. This is facilitated through citizen participation, including regional and global meetings and initiatives engaging young people and skilled Uruguayans abroad.
<u>Consultative Council for the National Community Abroad (Conseil consultatif de la communauté nationale à l'étranger, CCNE)</u>	Algeria	2010	The Consultative Council for the National Community Abroad works to “establish bridges between Algerians and create a sustainable partnership between Algerian competences inside and outside the country. The Consultative Council is responsible for the permanent improvement of services for nationals abroad, particularly in the context of consular protection, but also for promoting the participation of national expertise established abroad in Algeria’s development in scientific, economic and other fields.
<u>Council of Representatives of Brazilians Abroad (Conselho de Representantes de Brasileiros no Exterior, CRBE)</u>	Brazil	2010	CRBE is mandated by the Brazilian State Department to serve as liaison between the Brazilian Government and the diaspora around the world. It monitors the implementation of commitments made during diaspora conferences and contributes to the organization of the “Conferências Brasileiros no Mundo” (CBM) (Brazilians in the world conferences).
<u>The Coordinating Council on Cooperation with Tajik Diaspora (Tajik Communities) and Compatriots Abroad</u>	Tajikistan	2011	Established under the Ministry of Labour, Migration and Employment of Population, the Council is responsible for coordinating diaspora affairs across ministries and cooperating with the Tajik diaspora, labour migrants, compatriots, and Tajiks abroad.
<u>The Advisory Council of Mozambican Communities Abroad (Conselho Consultivo das Comunidades Moçambicanas no Exterior, CCCM)</u>	Mozambique	2015	The Advisory Council of Mozambican Communities Abroad is a consultative body within the National Institute for Mozambican Communities Abroad (INACE) responsible for strengthening existing ties between the diaspora and the country, as well as actively promoting the diaspora’s participation in defining and monitoring policies related to emigration.

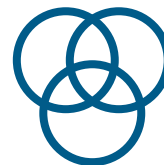
Council name	Country	Year	Description
<u>The Higher Council for Tunisians Abroad</u> (<u>Conseil Supérieur des Tunisiens à l'Étranger</u>).	Tunisia	2016	The Council is a consultative body of the Office of Tunisians that arose from diaspora proposals from 2011 onwards, although legal provisions for such a body were made in 1990. The council provides opinions on national policies concerning Tunisians residing abroad, including their welfare, rights, and integration into both their host countries and Tunisian society.
<u>The High Representative Council of Congolese Abroad</u> (<u>Haut Conseil Représentatif des Congolais de l'Étranger</u> , HCRCE).	Republic of Congo	2019	The HCRCE is the interface between the Congolese diaspora and the government on all issues of common interest. The platform is responsible for monitoring and coordinating the development actions of the Congolese diaspora.
<u>The High Council of Guineans Abroad</u> (<u>Haut Conseil des Guinéens Établis à l'Étranger</u> , HCGE).	Guinea	2021	The HCGE is a body for consultation, dialogue, advice and monitoring of the implementation of government policy on the management of the diaspora at sub-ministerial level

Typology



Federated representation

Description: Umbrella structure of diaspora associations which elect/nominate representatives; national chapters
Funding: Mostly state-funded; some hybrid
Examples: Mali, Niger, Guinea, Benin



Hybrid representation

Description: Mix of elected diaspora members and appointed experts
Funding: State-funded via MFA
Examples: Senegal, Algeria, Tunisia



Geographic representation

Description: Diaspora individuals elected/selected as representatives by territorial constituencies
Funding: State-funded
Examples: Brazil, Mozambique, Republic of Congo



Autonomous civil society

Description: Independent diaspora organizations; voluntary membership
Funding: Fundraising & voluntary contributions
Examples: Uruguay



State-led representation

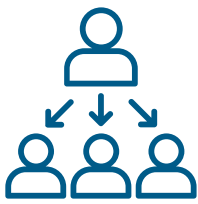
Description: Sub-ministerial bodies chaired by government officials; no elected or appointed diaspora members
Funding: State-funded
Examples: Tajikistan, Morocco

During the comparative analysis of different councils, a distinct cluster emerged that did not align with the definition of a 'diaspora council' established in this paper. The state-led representation model is chaired by state-appointed representatives, not democratically elected diaspora representatives. In these models, the council functions as an administrative extension of state policy rather than a platform for diaspora voice or deliberation. Yet, despite not meeting the criteria of a representative diaspora council, they offer an important perspective on the spectrum of diaspora governance. State-led councils reveal how some governments conceptualise diaspora engagement governance primarily as a matter of policy coordination, consular protection, or strategic mobilisation of expertise, rather than participatory representation.



Membership

Diaspora councils are made up of individuals and/or entities such as diaspora associations. In some cases, members include members of parliament. Each model reflects different political contexts, administrative capacities, and philosophies of diaspora engagement. Their differences reveal how governments conceptualize diaspora voice, legitimacy, and participation.



Federated representation

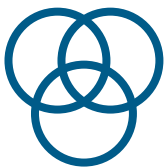
Members are recognized diaspora associations or country-level councils. These councils resemble a federative association model, meaning many different diaspora associations or entities are organized into one central body. For example, Malian expatriates in different countries elect local/national councils, which then elect representatives to the HCME.

Strengths

This model is designed to be the aggregating representative institution of the diaspora, which can be very useful for large and dispersed diasporas.

Trade-off

The bottom-up structure of the model may result in slower decision making as decisions move from diaspora associations to national/local councils before the higher council. Furthermore, association-based representation excludes those that are not under any affiliation.



Hybrid representation

Seats for such councils are allocated in several ways. Councils may be made up of both elected representatives and appointed members. The idea is to offer a democratic system whilst ensuring that there is expertise or public institution representation.

For the High Council of Senegalese Abroad, members are elected by Senegalese living abroad who are registered with Senegalese embassies, as well as by state-recognized Senegalese diaspora associations. In addition, several members are appointed directly by the President of Senegal.

The Algeria Consultative Council is an advisory body linked to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and operates primarily as a policy consultation mechanism. Its membership consists of representatives from government agencies and public institutions as well as prominent figures known for their dedication and engagement with issues concerning the Algerian community abroad. These figures are appointed by the head of state.

Strengths	Trade-off
These models sit close to government policymaking thanks to the presence of experts appointed by the government. Ideally, the combination of diaspora and public institution representation ensures that the needs of the government and the diaspora are equally met.	There is a risk of politicization of appointments.



Geographic representation

These councils are linked to the Ministry of foreign Affairs, and all have members that represent geographic constituencies of the diaspora. They simulate an individual territorial representation model where nationals abroad elect individuals who speak for their interests in their respective regions of residence. For example, Brazil has a

worldwide group of 32 elected representatives, 16 principal members and 16 alternates, distributed equally among four regions: South and Central America, North America and the Caribbeans, Europe, Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and Oceania. Individuals are not necessarily delegates of associations. They represent the nationals in the country/region that they're in.

Strengths	Trade-off
The direct representation of individuals rather than associations can bring more opportunity to different voices.	Requires comprehensive electoral mechanisms to ensure representation.



Autonomous civil society

These are independent, self-governing bodies with members from community groups and other associations representing diaspora interests. These councils rely on volunteer members and self-governance. They foster community participation but have limited formal influence.

Uruguayans living abroad, form consultative councils, choosing representatives who communicate with the government, particularly through the ministry of foreign affairs. Each council must have at least five representatives, who are elected by universal, direct and secret vote.

Strengths	Trade-off
When membership and leadership emerge more organically from the diaspora communities, these councils can have more claims to representing these communities.	Uneven capacity; some councils may have limited international networks



State-led representation

These councils resemble a sub-ministerial body chaired by state-appointed [diaspora] members alongside government officials. They do not have local representations abroad or a decentralized format and are tied to national-level structures.

The Conseil de la Communauté Marocaine à l'Étranger (CCME) is a national consultative and forward-looking institution established by Dahir (royal decree) in December 2007. A statement from the Royal Cabinet on 21 December 2007 clarified that its members are appointed by the King to reflect the geographic diversity, professional expertise, and varied diaspora backgrounds of Moroccans abroad. The council follows a multi-sectoral strategic model in which members are organised into six thematic working groups, ensuring a modern, strategy-driven body composed of thought leaders rather than traditional community representatives. In addition, observer members are drawn from key Moroccan ministries and state institutions.

For the Coordinating Council on Cooperation with the Tajik Diaspora (Tajik Communities and Compatriots Abroad), membership is determined through administrative procedures overseen by the Ministry of Labour, Migration and Employment of the Population, within which the council is institutionally embedded. The council is composed of appointed institutional representatives, including senior officials from key government ministries, as well as designated leaders of Tajik community organisations abroad.

Strengths	Trade-off
Formal access to government	Opposition groups, youth, minorities and less-connected communities may be underrepresented.



Funding

When establishing or reforming a diaspora council, it is important to consider how the council will be funded as this directly affects the sustainability and autonomy of the council. Funding can determine how closely a council operates with the state versus how independently it can act.

Across the councils analysed, four of the five models rely primarily on state funding. Many are intrinsically linked to their ministry of foreign affairs, such as the Algerian Consultative Council for the National Community Abroad and the High Council of Senegalese abroad. These councils typically do not have an independent publicly disclosed budget; costs are covered by the ministry's budget for diaspora affairs or management of consular affairs. Councils with this funding structure may struggle to pursue long-term initiatives if political priorities shift or if ministerial support fluctuates.

A contrasting example is the High Council of Malians Abroad (HCME) which, although linked to the ministry of foreign affairs, has a hybrid funding model in that its budget is made up of both membership contributions and government funding. Membership fees fund day-to-day activities and allow the council to maintain a degree of autonomy, while government contributions support national congresses and diaspora conferences. The HCME encourages local associations to contribute to the funding of structural and productive projects, see [HCME 2019 Annual Activities Press Conference](#) for more information. In the past, the HCME has also received project funding from international organizations such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM).² This hybrid model offers greater flexibility and independence, but it requires strong internal governance and financial transparency.

Uruguay's Consultative Councils are autonomous grassroots civil society organizations financed through voluntary membership contributions and fundraising. Government support is typically non-financial and there is no law that establishes direct funding for the councils. Nevertheless, according to [Law No. 18,250 of January 6, 2008, Article 74](#), the Uruguayan government is legally obliged to recognise the Consultative Councils of Uruguayans Abroad and provide them with logistical and administrative support. This includes facilitating communication between the councils and state institutions, as well as offering administrative assistance for their activities, events, and consultation processes. A grassroots council like this offers flexibility, but its sustainability raises cause for concern; with no government funding, its operational reach is limited, and operational consistency is not guaranteed.

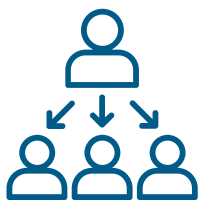


Thematic priorities

Across the councils compared, there are core thematic priorities that are seen across the board:

1. Rights, governance and protection
2. Social inclusion and identity
3. Human capital, empowerment, skills and knowledge transfer
4. Economic development and investment

The question is, does the type of representation model influence the thematic a council engages in? In short, yes. Through the different models that have been presented in this paper, one can note that the structure of the council influences whose voices get heard, how authority is distributed and how decisions are made. The sectoral focus of councils with a more bottom-up/decentralized representation try to reflect the range of interests from different constituencies. In contrast, more state-centred structures cover thematic that align to government priorities.



Federated representation

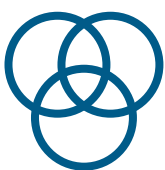
The federated representation follows an umbrella structure where different diaspora representatives fall under one high council. Thus, the broad constituency of federated representative councils empower them to address multiple sectors. The geographic network of these council models has greater access to different types of diaspora communities, which means more skills, expertise and resources.

High Council of Beninese Abroad (HCBE)

The federated representation follows an umbrella structure where different diaspora representatives fall under one high council. Thus, the broad constituency of federated representative councils empower them to address multiple sectors. The geographic network of these council models has greater access to different types of diaspora communities, which means more skills, expertise and resources.

High Council of Malians Abroad (HCME)

In countries where Malians have faced difficulties e.g. in Angolan mines, the council has tried to play an essential role in monitoring the situation and ensuring the safety of its people.



Hybrid representation

Hybrid councils sit close to government decision-making. They often act as policy intermediaries rather than purely representative bodies. This model shapes its priorities differently to other models due to the combination of both appointed members (technical expertise) and elected representatives. This structure produces priorities that leverage diaspora expertise and are government, policy aligned or adjacent. It is expected that elected members bring concerns from the diaspora and appointed members ensure institutional follow-through.



Geographic representation

In general, the sectoral priorities of geographic representation councils centre on identity, participation and regional equity. Due to representatives speaking for territorial constituencies rather than associations, geographic councils often emphasise cultural identity, community cohesion, and participatory governance.

Council of representatives of Brazilians Abroad (CRBE)

The CRBE monitors implementation of commitments made during diaspora conferences contributing to the organization of the Conferências Brasileiros no Mundo (CBM) (“Brazilians in the World Conferences”). Read more: [Milestones for the Brazilians in the World Conferences](#).



State-led representation

State led councils focus on administrative coordination; their sectoral engagement is shaped by the government’s agenda. Aside from national agendas, many state-led councils determine their thematic priorities based on diaspora recommendations that they obtain through their different activities with diaspora individuals and organisations (e.g. through summer schools, consultations and research)

The thematic priorities of autonomous councils are entirely determined by the members on behalf of their communities. Autonomous councils may nevertheless choose to align their priority themes with those of their governments to ensure strategic alignment. In general, they centre their work on cultural and civic engagement, helping diaspora maintain cultural identity and connection with the home country, creating community networks and – in some cases – offering assistance for diaspora experiencing difficulties abroad and bringing concerns to the government.



Legal status

When establishing or reforming a diaspora council, governments and diaspora stakeholders must consider how legal status will shape the council's autonomy, legitimacy, and ability to influence policy. Legal status is not merely an administrative detail, it determines whether a council functions primarily as a policy instrument, a representative body, a community platform, or an administrative mechanism.

The councils discussed in this paper were formally established or have been recognized by the state through either legislation, ministerial regulations or presidential decrees. They serve as advisory bodies that are tasked with strengthening the connection between the diaspora and the state. These councils can propose policies or frameworks but do not have the legal power to implement them, which remains the purview of the government institution that the council is embedded within, often the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Why legal status matters

Legal status determines the council's capacity to represent diaspora interests, mobilise expertise, and contribute to national development. A council embedded within a ministry may offer strong policy access but limited independence, while an autonomous civil society council may foster community participation but struggle to influence national strategies. Federated councils amplify organised diaspora associations, whereas state-led councils prioritise administrative coordination over democratic participation.

High Council of Malians Abroad

The High Council of Malians Abroad was recognized through decree as an organization of public utility. This distinguishes its legal status from other associations or councils in the country, and strengthens its institutional standing with the Malian state, allowing it to perform its consultative functions with stronger official recognition. Furthermore, the HCME possesses the legal role to designate diaspora representatives within national institutions.

Uruguayan Consultative Councils

The Uruguayan Consultative Councils operate with complete autonomy whereby each council is established as an independent diaspora organization or civil society body. This model of councils typically has its own internal governance structures and determines its own priorities. The relationship with the state is one of collaboration, rather than operating under direct government instruction.



Inclusion & representation

Whilst many councils have measures in place to ensure geographic diversity, very few studied have inclusionary measures related to demographics such as youth, gender and disability. Measures taken by each council can vary widely, often reflecting the model's structure.

Autonomous civil society councils are based on voluntary participation, producing informal and culturally-oriented inclusion. Inclusion measures arise more organically rather than through any formal mandate and rely on the willing participation of diverse representatives. Geographic representation structures tend to have a community-based inclusion with representatives speaking for nationals therefore inspiring community mobilization. Hybrid models on the other hand are best positioned to adopt formal inclusion measures because their proximity to government allows them to integrate gender, youth, and expertise priorities aligned with national priorities. Examining these differences reveals how institutional design shapes who is actively represented, whose voice is amplified and who is a bystander, or even left behind.

Hybrid councils such as the High Council of Senegalese Abroad and Algeria's Consultative Council for the National Community Abroad seem to have a structure that enables it to integrate inclusion measures directly into the national policy frameworks.

The HCSE sits within an institutional ecosystem in which diaspora representation, expertise mobilisation and government policy are closely connected. The FAISE fund (Fonds d'Appui à l'Investissement des Sénégalais de l'Extérieur) includes a specific fund for women of the diaspora, called Femmes de la diaspora. Although the HCSE doesn't directly implement this mechanism, the council being in place helps provide a consultative and representative interface that has led to operational mechanisms such as FAISE.

Challenges

Despite their role in connecting governments with diaspora communities, councils face a range of challenges. This list illustrates the most common challenges:

- **Dependence on government engagement:** Most councils operate as advisory bodies without executive authority; therefore, they do not have the power to pass any legislation. Their influence relies heavily on the willingness of government institutions to listen, respond, and act. When political priorities shift or ministerial leadership changes, councils can find themselves sidelined, even if their mandates remain formally intact. Constant changes at the institutional level, e.g. change in cabinets, can affect the relationship and trust between the diaspora and the government.
- **Under-representation:** There is limited evidence of measures to ensure demographic diversity in councils, risking under-representation of marginalised diaspora groups. Councils with association-based membership may inadvertently exclude individuals who are not affiliated with formal organisations, while councils with appointed members risk politicisation or elite capture. Geographic representation models can mitigate some of these gaps, but they require robust electoral mechanisms that many councils struggle to maintain. As a result, councils often reflect only a portion of the diaspora's demographic, professional, or regional diversity, limiting their legitimacy and reach.
- **Resource limitations:** Councils that rely on voluntary participation or limited state funding often lack the capacity to sustain long-term programmes, organise regular consultations, or respond effectively to crises. Autonomous councils, such as those in Uruguay, face difficulties in maintaining continuity when funding depends on voluntary contributions.

Conclusion

Diaspora councils represent efforts by governments to institutionalise relationships with the diaspora. This paper shows that while councils differ in structure, legal authority and funding, they share a common ambition: to create a stable interface through which diaspora voices can be heard, coordinated, and channelled into national development and foreign policy. Furthermore, the variation in models helps us underscore the importance of examining diaspora councils not only as institutional forms but also as political expressions of how states negotiate influence, legitimacy, and belonging with their populations abroad. Understanding these dynamics provides a foundation for assessing how councils function, how they evolve, and how they might be strengthened to better serve both states and diaspora communities.

Building on these findings, it becomes clear that diaspora councils deserve more nuanced exploration. To deepen and extend this analysis it would be valuable to explore:

- Indicators to measure council effectiveness across sectors
- The impact of inclusion measures in different council models
- The perception of the councils in the diaspora and country of origin
- How the councils are run based on political contexts and national priorities
- Whether councils contribute to national narratives about belonging and citizenship.

Further such research would provide a better understanding of diaspora governance and the role of diaspora councils in a world that is continuously changing, where two-way diaspora engagement with solid consultation and coordination is increasingly important.



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