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Bundesamt  
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**ICMPD**  
International Centre for  
Migration Policy Development



# Diaspora Engagement Report

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## Case Studies and Best Practices for Ukraine

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Migration Policy Development

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# 1. Background

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The project **Comprehensive Resilience Support for Displaced Persons from Ukraine (CORE UA)** is implemented by the International Centre for Migration Policy Development with the overall objective to serve as a support measure in several areas of migration management in Ukraine, as well as support for Ukrainian temporarily displaced persons. In particular, the project aims to stimulate the exchange of experts between selected Member States of the European Union (EU Member States) on the implementation of temporary protection and strategies after the expiry of temporary protection (project measure 1), to expand the consultation services for the displaced Ukrainians (project measure 2), to engage the Ukrainian diaspora (project measure 3) and to support migration institutions in Ukraine in improving the migration management of the state (project measure 4).

**Specific Objectives are as follows:**

**Project Measure 1.** Exchange of experts between selected Member States of the European Union on the topic of temporary protection directive.

**Project Measure 2.** Counselling for temporarily displaced Ukrainians in three Consultation Centres.

**Project Measure 3.** Bottom-up engagement of the Ukrainian diaspora in the areas of integration and promotion of social acceptance.

**Project Measure 4.** Support for state institutions for migration management in Ukraine.

As part of the **Project Measure 3**, this case study report has been developed to examine and analyse successful diaspora engagement strategies from other countries in order to provide a solid basis for Ukraine's strategy toward its diaspora engagement and related policies. The Ukrainian diaspora, with its vast networks and deep-rooted connections to the homeland, has played an enormous role in responding and supporting displaced Ukrainians, mobilising resources and fostering international advocacy.

This report analyses the policies and practices of countries that have successfully engaged their diaspora communities and aims to provide valuable insights and policy recommendations. A well-defined and comprehensive diaspora engagement strategy will not only strengthen collaboration between Ukrainian diaspora organisations and government institutions but also facilitate long-term and sustainable support mechanisms. Through this research, the aim was to provide a knowledge base that will guide the development and then implementation of targeted policies and programmes, leading to a more impactful approach to diaspora engagement in Ukraine.

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## 2. Introduction

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In recent decades, many countries have made substantial efforts to engage their diaspora communities as an integral part of national development and resilience. Since the 1980s, diaspora engagement policies have become a key feature of migration strategies, with countries adopting diverse legislative frameworks, institutions, and programmes to support their citizens abroad. These initiatives range from granting political rights and flexible citizenship laws to offering incentives for investment and participation in national projects. While the specifics of such policies vary widely, they often serve as essential tools for strengthening connections between governments and their diaspora, leveraging these ties for mutual benefit (Gamlen, 2018). Diaspora engagement policies are rarely isolated efforts; instead, they usually intersect with broader state strategies and operate across various levels of governance. They can be embedded in constitutional law, articulated through policy documents or implemented through specific programmes. The diversity of these approaches reflects the unique histories, priorities, and aspirations of individual states and their diasporas (Cohen, 2017).

**Ukraine's** diaspora is marked by a complex migration history, driven by political, economic and social factors. According to the Ministry of National Unity of Ukraine, an estimated 20–25 million Ukrainians—a number almost equal to the country's current population—live abroad<sup>1</sup>. The Ukrainian diaspora is mainly concentrated in Russia, North America, Europe (especially Poland, Germany, and Italy), and Australia. Historically, different waves of emigration have been tied to periods of political upheaval, such as the Soviet era, Ukraine's independence, and, more recently, the ongoing war with Russia. During the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the Russian invasion in 2022, the Ukrainian diaspora played a crucial role in supporting Ukraine both financially and politically, raising funds, advocating against territorial losses, and mobilising resources for affected regions. Recent initiatives have begun to recognise the diaspora's role in economic development and promoting Ukraine's image abroad; however, the country does not yet have a formal diaspora engagement policy (DEMAC, 2022; EUDiF, 2023a; Lazarenko, 2024).

This report provides insights and lessons learned from countries with successful diaspora engagement practices that can potentially inspire Ukraine as it seeks to strengthen ties with its diaspora and in its rebuilding efforts after conflict. Three case studies were selected – **Albania**, **Serbia**, and **Lithuania** ([Section 2](#); [Section 3](#); [Section 4](#)) – based on their relevance to Ukraine in terms of migration history, geopolitical context, and the size and influence of their diasporas. These countries were chosen for their experiences in engaging large and diverse diaspora populations, their efforts in addressing post-crisis recovery, and their success in designing institutional and policy frameworks to connect with their diaspora communities. Albania and Serbia, for example, demonstrate how nations with histories of large-scale emigration during periods of political and economic instability can mobilise their diaspora for economic development and social recovery. Lithuania offers an interesting model for leveraging its diaspora to address demographic challenges, promote economic growth, and preserve cultural identity. Additionally, these countries share certain similarities with Ukraine, such as a legacy of transition from socialist systems, a need for national recovery following crises, and a

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1 The Government of Ukraine views this as encompassing both citizens residing abroad and individuals of Ukrainian descent who continue to regard Ukraine as their homeland.

decentralised governance structure that emphasises local-level engagement. Each case study offers a brief overview of the country's migration patterns and history, an overview of their legal framework concerning diaspora engagement, and the policies and programmes designed to engage their diasporas. Finally, it highlights best practices and lessons learned that can inform Ukraine's strategy.

In addition, this report includes a section on **global best practices** that may be relevant to Ukraine's diaspora engagement efforts ([Section 5](#)). Drawing on successful international models, this section is divided into four key areas: institutional frameworks, economic engagement, technology and digital platforms, and cultural preservation and identity. It explores how diaspora-driven initiatives in these areas can promote civic and economic development, cultural preservation, and support long-term relationships between states and their diasporas.

This report also includes a dedicated section on the **role of diasporas in peacebuilding and post-war recovery** ([Section 6](#)), recognising the significant contributions that dispersed populations can make in promoting stability, rebuilding economies, and supporting reconciliation. Drawing on different case studies and examples, this section outlines possible strategies for Ukraine to engage its diaspora effectively in rebuilding a resilient and inclusive society.

Finally, this report presents **conclusions and recommendations** ([Section 7](#)) aimed at supporting Ukraine in developing a comprehensive, context-specific diaspora engagement strategy that aligns with its national priorities and the unique characteristics of its diaspora.

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## 3. Albania



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### 3.1 Brief overview of migration patterns and history

Albania's migration history is deeply intertwined with its political and socio-economic transformations, particularly its communist past and the subsequent shift to a multi-party system in the early 1990s. Migration patterns are typically categorised into three major phases: pre-1945, the communist era (1945–1990), and the mass emigration wave following the fall of communism in the 1990s. Each phase reveals distinct migration patterns, destinations, and motivations, shaping the composition and significance of the Albanian diaspora (J. Barjaba, 2019).

- **Early Albanian migration (pre-1945).** Migration before 1945 was characterised by a mix of voluntary and forced movements, often driven by political instability, economic hardship and global shifts. One of the earliest documented migration waves followed the death of Albania's national hero, Skanderbeg, in 1468, during the Ottoman conquest of the Balkans. Around 200,000 Albanians – roughly one-quarter of the population – fled to neighbouring regions such as Greece, Italy, and the Dalmatian Coast (K. Barjaba & Barjaba, 2015). Notable among these communities were the Arbëreshë in southern Italy, who preserved Albanian language and traditions for over five centuries (Vullnetari, 2007). During the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, migration intensified due to industrialisation and political turbulence. Albanian migrants established vibrant communities in Athens, Bucharest, and Istanbul, as well as further afield in the Americas and Australia. By the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, an estimated 60,000 Albanians resided in the United States, predominantly from southern Albania. These diaspora communities not only contributed economically to their host countries but also retained strong cultural and political connections to their homeland (K. Barjaba & Barjaba, 2015).
- **Migration during the communist era (1945-1990).** Under the communist regime, Albania adopted an isolationist stance, implementing drastic restrictions on emigration. The regime branded leaving the country as treasonous, punishable by imprisonment or worse. Despite these barriers, some Albanians managed to flee during the regime's early years, particularly anti-communist opponents seeking refuge in neighbouring Yugoslavia or Italy (Vullnetari, 2007). These movements, however, were small in scale compared to other periods. The closed borders of communist Albania contrasted sharply with earlier and later migration trends. Migration during this era was largely limited to political dissidents and their families, who sought safety abroad. The few who succeeded in emigrating formed a distinct subset of the Albanian diaspora, maintaining a strong anti-communist stance and often advocating for democratic reforms in Albania (J. Barjaba, 2019; Vullnetari, 2007).
- **Post-communist emigration (1990-present).** The fall of communism in 1990 fuelled unprecedented migration flows, marking the most significant phase of Albanian emigration. The initial wave was chaotic and massive, driven by economic collapse, political instability, and the sudden opening of borders. Iconic moments include the 1990 "embassy migrants" when thousands sought asylum in Western embassies, and the dramatic boat migrations to Italy and Greece in 1991 (Vullnetari, 2007). Subsequent waves were fuelled by crises such as the 1997 collapse of pyramid schemes and the Kosovo war in 1999. According

to the Albanian Institute of Statistics (INSTAT), more than 600,000 Albanians emigrated between 1990 and 2001, followed by an additional 481,000 over the next decade (INSTAT, 2020). Greece and Italy became the primary destinations, hosting approximately 600,000 and 500,000 Albanians, respectively, by the 2010s. Smaller communities formed in Western Europe, North America, and Australia (K. Barjaba & Barjaba, 2015). The motivations for migration shifted over time: while early migrants sought refuge from economic and political instability, more recent emigrants are increasingly drawn by education and professional opportunities abroad (Arifagić & Mitrović, 2022).

Albania's diaspora is estimated at 1.44 to 1.68 million individuals, representing approximately 37% of the total population (INSTAT, 2020). It is often categorised into two subsets: the "old diaspora", which migrated during historical periods, and the "new diaspora" emerging after the fall of the communist regime in 1990. The old diaspora is dispersed across Western Europe, North and South America, and parts of the Middle East, while the new diaspora is mainly concentrated in Italy, Greece, Germany, and other EU countries (J. Barjaba, 2019). The Albanian diaspora comprises diverse groups, including economic migrants, students, asylum seekers and unaccompanied minors. It plays a vital role in Albania's development, contributing to economic growth through remittances, preserving Albanian identity abroad, and serving as a cultural and political bridge. Despite the decline in migration rates in recent years, Albania continues to exhibit one of the highest emigration rates globally, with ongoing out-migration far exceeding return migration or immigration (Arifagić & Mitrović, 2022; J. Barjaba, 2019).

### 3.2 Overview of the legal framework concerning diaspora engagement

Albania has progressively developed a comprehensive legal and institutional framework to strengthen its relationship with the diaspora. The country's efforts are codified in various laws, strategies, and initiatives aimed at preserving the identity, rights, and contributions of Albanian communities abroad while promoting their active engagement in national development.



#### **ACTORS AND INSTITUTIONS** (REPUBLIKA E SHQIPËRISE - COUNCIL OF MINISTERS, 2020)

##### **Government Authorities and Representative Bodies:**

- **Diaspora Coordination Council:** Established under Law No. 16/2018 "On Diaspora", the *Diaspora Coordination Council* serves as a central advisory and representational body. It is tasked with orienting cooperation between state institutions and the Albanian diaspora. The Council comprises 15 representatives from key diaspora regions, including six from the European Union, three from the United States, two from Canada, two from the United Kingdom, one from Australia, and one from Turkey. Its functions include fostering an organised network of Albanian communities in host and home countries and holding consultative meetings with national authorities. The Council's inaugural meeting occurred on December 18, 2019, coinciding with National Diaspora Day.
- **Parliamentary Subcommittee on Diaspora and Migration:** Established in 2017 under Decision No. 98 of the Albanian Parliament, this subcommittee monitors diaspora-related legislation and policies. It also ensures political cohesion and provides oversight for Albania's engagement with its diaspora communities.



- **Diaspora State Committee:** As a consultative body under the Council of Ministers, the Diaspora State Committee includes key government figures such as the Prime Minister, relevant ministers, and representatives from institutions like the Bank of Albania and the Academy of Sciences. Operating under DCM No. 690/2017, the Committee drafts and implements diaspora policies, coordinates national activities related to diaspora issues, and monitors the National Diaspora Strategy's implementation.
- **National Diaspora Agency:** This agency focuses on institutional cooperation with the diaspora to protect its rights and promote cultural, linguistic, and economic ties. Established under Law No. 115/2017, it operates through supporting structures such as the Diaspora Publishing Centre and Albanian Cultural Centres.

#### Cultural Promotion and Preservation Bodies:

- **Diaspora Publishing Centre:** The Diaspora Publishing Centre is dedicated to preserving the Albanian diaspora's national identity through educational materials. It publishes and distributes textbooks and other resources that promote language learning and cultural heritage among diaspora communities. The Centre reports annually in writing to the Parliamentary Subcommittee on Diaspora and Migration.
- **Centre for the Study and Publications on Arbëresh (CSPA):** The CSPA is a scientific research institution focused on the history, literature and culture of the Arbëresh community (Albanians who settled in Italy centuries ago). It promotes collaboration among scholars, both in the diaspora and Albania, to support Arbëresh studies.
- **Albanian Cultural Centres:** These centres are created in collaboration with Kosovo to preserve national identity, promote Albania's image abroad, and provide services to diaspora communities.

#### Economic and Development Agencies:

- **Albanian Diaspora Development Fund:** Established by Law No. 32/2018, this fund promotes investments, philanthropy and development projects led by the diaspora. It aims to create economic opportunities that benefit both diaspora communities and Albania.
- **Albanian Diaspora Trade and Business Chambers:** *Still not operating.* The government has initiated steps to formalise diaspora participation in economic development through these specialised trade chambers and business networks designed to connect diaspora entrepreneurs with domestic opportunities.

**Consular services and diplomacy:** The role of Albanian consulates and embassies has been redefined to better serve the diaspora. They provide essential services such as issuing legal documents, facilitating economic and cultural initiatives, and acting as key points of contact for Albanian nationals abroad. By emphasising accessible and efficient services, consular offices aim to strengthen the diaspora's connection to their homeland.



## DIASPORA DEFINITION AND RIGHTS

- **Definition of diaspora.** The Albanian government defines its diaspora as “a community of migrants, who maintain strong sentimental and material links with the homeland, being integrated into the environment and institutions of the host society” (Republika e Shqipërisë - Council of Ministers, 2020, p. 7). In the words of the Minister of State for the Diaspora Pandeli Majko, *“The diaspora is not just a group of people living outside Albania. It is a living and dynamic extension of the nation itself, a bridge of connections and opportunities for our country to engage globally”* (ibidem).
- **Citizenship and voting rights.** Amendments to the Electoral Code (Law No. 101/2020) enable voting from abroad. However, implementation has been delayed due to the lack of detailed regulations by the Central Election Committee. Efforts are underway to develop the necessary mechanisms, including the self-declaration of addresses by diaspora members as per Decision No. 405/2018. The National Diaspora Strategy 2021-2025 emphasises political participation, stating that engagement in public life will integrate diaspora representatives into Albania’s political system, enhancing their influence on national policies (EUDiF, 2022a; Republika e Shqipërisë - Council of Ministers, 2020).



## LEGAL FRAMEWORK

### ➤ Key legal instruments

- **Law No. 16/2018 “On Diaspora”:** This foundational law outlines the roles and responsibilities of the Albanian government and institutions regarding the diaspora. It established the *National Diaspora Agency*, which serves as the primary governmental body for diaspora relations, and the *Diaspora Coordination Council*. The law aims to strengthen cultural, educational and economic links between Albania and its diaspora and includes provisions for the establishment of *Cultural Centres for the Diaspora*. Additionally, the law ensures the promotion of the Albanian language abroad through educational support, particularly for the development of curricula and teaching materials (Arifagić & Mitrović, 2022; EUDiF, 2022a).
- **Law No. 115/2017 “On the Establishment of the National Diaspora Agency”:** This law formally establishes the *National Diaspora Agency*, responsible for coordinating all activities related to diaspora engagement. The law also underpins the creation of the *Albanian Diaspora Development Fund*, which focuses on supporting investments and philanthropic contributions from the diaspora (Republika e Shqipërisë - Council of Ministers, 2020).
- **Law No. 32/2018 “On Albanian Diaspora Development Fund”:** This law establishes a fund to support the development of diaspora-driven initiatives, including investments in infrastructure, business ventures, and community development projects (Republika e Shqipërisë - Council of Ministers, 2020).
- **Decision No. 469/2018 “On the Establishment of the Diaspora Publishing Centre”:** This regulation mandates the establishment of the *Diaspora Publishing Centre*, which focuses on publishing and distributing materials that promote the preservation of the Albanian language, culture, and educational heritage among diaspora communities (Republika e Shqipërisë - Council of Ministers, 2020).
- **Council of Ministers Decision No. 195/2019:** This decision outlines the criteria for creating the State Register of Albanian Language and Albanian Culture Teachers in the diaspora. This register is intended to support the teaching of Albanian language and culture abroad, ensuring that qualified teachers are available to support Albanian educational programmes in diaspora communities (EUDiF, 2022a).

- **Council of Ministers Decision No. 2019-2021 Agreements:** These agreements focus on promoting cooperation with neighbouring countries, including Montenegro and North Macedonia, to exchange best practices in diaspora policy, enhance bilateral ties, and facilitate the exchange of educational and cultural programmes (EUDiF, 2022a).

➤ **Strategies and policies:** The *National Diaspora Strategy 2021-2025* is the core strategic document guiding Albania's engagement with its diaspora. It builds upon the previous strategy (2018-2024) while introducing new goals and a dynamic framework designed to adapt to evolving needs. It is a comprehensive plan that integrates various aspects of diaspora engagement, including economic cooperation, cultural preservation and educational initiatives. Key objectives and focus areas include:

- **Strengthening diaspora networks** and expanding the existing networks of diaspora members. The aim is to enhance economic ties, facilitate knowledge transfer and encourage professional collaboration across borders (Arifagić & Mitrović, 2022; Republika e Shqipërisë - Council of Ministers, 2020).
- **Increasing the economic involvement of Albanians abroad** by encouraging investments and the transfer of knowledge and technology. This includes the creation of an *Albanian Diaspora Business Chambers*, which will focus on promoting partnerships between local businesses in Albania and the diaspora. Additionally, the government will continue to issue open invitations to diaspora professionals, encouraging them to invest in or return to Albania, contributing their expertise to national development. The overall objective is to create an environment that attracts skilled individuals back to Albania or encourage them to engage in the country's development from abroad (Arifagić & Mitrović, 2022; Republika e Shqipërisë - Council of Ministers, 2020).
- **Preserving and promoting Albanian identity** among diaspora communities, including the protection and cultivation of the Albanian language, cultural practices and national heritage. In collaboration with Kosovo, Albania is committed to developing curricula and teaching materials that reflect Albanian culture and history, making them available to Albanian schools and cultural institutions abroad. The development of *Cultural Centres for the Diaspora* is another strategic initiative aimed at providing spaces where Albanians abroad can engage with their cultural heritage and pass it down to future generations (Republika e Shqipërisë - Council of Ministers, 2020).
- **Facilitating the integration of the diaspora into public life in Albania** by involving them in decision-making processes. This includes the continued role of the *Diaspora Coordination Council* and encouraging diaspora members to engage with local governance and public institutions in Albania (Republika e Shqipërisë - Council of Ministers, 2020).
- **Creating a comprehensive database of diaspora organisations**, associations and individuals. This database will allow the government to monitor and assess the engagement of the diaspora, track the effectiveness of diaspora policies, and ensure that resources are being allocated efficiently. Additionally, the strategy outlines mechanisms for continuous monitoring and adaptation, ensuring that the policies are responsive to the evolving needs of the diaspora (Arifagić & Mitrović, 2022; Republika e Shqipërisë - Council of Ministers, 2020).
- **Collaborating with international partners**, particularly with neighbouring countries such as Kosovo (EUDiF, 2022a; Republika e Shqipërisë - Council of Ministers, 2020).

### 3.3 Overview of diaspora engagement policies and programmes

Albania's diaspora engagement initiatives have increasingly become a critical component of its socio-economic development strategy. Below is an overview of key best practices in diaspora engagement that have been implemented through various programmes.

- **Connect Albania (2017 - ongoing)** *Connect Albania* is an innovative online platform designed to engage the Albanian diaspora as development agents who can facilitate foreign direct investment (FDI) into Albania. The programme's core objective is to tap into the entrepreneurial potential of Albanians abroad by encouraging them to act as intermediaries for FDI. This platform is the first of its kind, directly aimed at promoting investments via diaspora networks. The project is spearheaded by IOM Albania with funding from the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation and in cooperation with the Albanian government. The involvement of diaspora members ensures that investments align with the needs of both Albania and its diaspora communities. The initiative has successfully transitioned many engagement activities online, reaching over 300,000 members of the diaspora (Arifagić & Mitrović, 2022; EUDiF, 2022a).
- **Code for Albania (2019 - ongoing)** *Code for Albania* is a professional development programme that aims to create a new generation of Albanian programmers by offering high-level technical training, with a particular focus on high school students. This initiative, a partnership with Stanford University's CodeX NGO, has already reached over 1,000 students. More specifically, the programme connects Albanian high school students with experienced Albanian diaspora professionals in the tech industry. As of now, Code for Albania has graduated three cohorts, each consisting of over 50 students. The programme's focus on diaspora professionals as mentors helps bridge the gap between Albania and the global tech ecosystem, contributing to both local innovation and global competitiveness (EUDiF, 2022a).
- **Diaspora Summits (2016-ongoing)** Albania has hosted three Diaspora Summits – held in 2016, 2019, and 2023 – aiming at strengthening ties between the country and its citizens abroad. These summits have provided a platform for Albanians worldwide to collaborate with the Albanian government on various issues, including economic cooperation, cultural exchange and political engagement (Republika e Shqipërisë - Council of Ministers, 2020).
- **Albanian Diaspora Contributing to the Agriculture of the Home Country (2021).** This programme focuses on enhancing the socio-economic development of Albania's rural areas, particularly through the lens of agricultural development. It seeks to involve the Albanian diaspora in Italy by facilitating the transfer of expertise and knowledge to local agricultural small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Albania. The initiative includes online training sessions, field demonstrations, and practical knowledge-sharing to help farmers improve production processes and market their products more effectively. It is implemented through partnerships with the Albanian Diaspora Business Chamber and the Italian Association of Producers (IAP), with support from IOM Albania and the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The programme has not only facilitated the exchange of technical knowledge but has also empowered Albanian farmers to adopt modern agricultural practices, thereby increasing local production, market orientation and economic opportunities for rural communities. The initiative has involved over 12 farmers and exporters who have participated in training programmes aimed at enhancing agricultural practices (EUDiF, 2022a; IOM Albania, 2021).

➤ **Engaging the Albanian Diaspora to the Social and Economic Development of Albania (2017-2021)** The “Engaging the Albanian Diaspora” programme, implemented by IOM from 2017 to 2021, aimed to create an environment conducive to structured diaspora engagement in Albania’s social and economic development. The programme, focusing on the Albanian diaspora in Italy, was funded by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and implemented with support from several Albanian ministries, including the Ministry for Diaspora<sup>2</sup>. The initiative has involved 16 representatives from various governmental and diaspora engagement institutions, including the Albanian State Minister for Diaspora, Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, and others like the Albanian Investment Development Agency (AIDA) and the National Fund for Diaspora. The programme had three main components: supporting government engagement strategies, facilitating skills transfer and promoting diaspora investment. The programme included a Training of Trainers (ToT) initiative that facilitated online training sessions, mentoring and coaching from March to October 2020. A key component was mapping the skills of Albanian diaspora members across Italy, which allowed for more targeted policy development and facilitated the creation of a repository of diaspora knowledge. The programme also supported the development of the *Connect Albania* platform (Arifagić & Mitrović, 2022; IOM Albania, 2020).

### 3.4 Conclusions and lessons learned

Similar to Ukraine, Albania’s emigration history has been shaped by different waves of emigration, often prompted by political and socio-economic transformations, particularly during and after its communist regime. The first wave of migration, pre-1945, saw Albanians fleeing Ottoman rule and settling in neighbouring countries like Greece and Italy. The communist era (1945-1990) imposed severe restrictions on emigration, with only political dissidents managing to escape. Similar to Ukraine, Albania experienced significant emigration in the 1990s following the collapse of communism, primarily to neighbouring countries like Italy and Greece, but also to the wider European Union and beyond. By the 2000s, the diaspora had grown substantially, with migration flows continuing due to economic opportunities abroad, particularly in Western Europe (K. Barjaba & Barjaba, 2015; Vullnetari, 2007). The Albanian diaspora now numbers around 1.44 to 1.68 million, representing approximately 40% of the country’s population (INSTAT, 2020). The Albanian diaspora is diverse, comprising both long-established and more recent emigrants, with significant populations in Greece, Italy, Germany and other EU countries (J. Barjaba, 2019).

The Albanian government has increasingly recognised the value of its diaspora, particularly in economic development through remittances, investment and knowledge transfer. Central to these efforts is the *National Diaspora Strategy (2021–2025)*, which builds upon previous initiatives to strengthen economic ties, cultural preservation and professional collaboration (Arifagić & Mitrović, 2022). Key institutions like the *National Diaspora Agency* and the *Diaspora Coordination Council* have been instrumental in creating platforms for dialogue and cooperation. Innovative initiatives such as the *Connect Albania* platform, which promotes foreign direct investment through diaspora networks represent valuable strategies for leveraging Albania’s diaspora for national development (EUDiF, 2022a).

For Ukraine, these strategies can offer helpful insights. As seen with Albania, **building institutional frameworks dedicated to diaspora engagement** can help sustain long-term connections with the global diaspora. Programmes that target economic engagement, such as *Connect Albania*, and initiatives like Albania’s mapping of qualified diaspora members for skill-sharing can be adapted to Ukraine’s needs.

2 No longer existing.

Nonetheless, Albania's experience highlights challenges that Ukraine must anticipate. Frequent restructuring of diaspora-focused institutions in Albania has diminished trust among diaspora communities, demonstrating the importance of institutional stability. Ukraine, like Albania, faces the task of **ensuring that its diaspora policies are resilient to political changes**, avoiding disruptions caused by shifting administrative priorities (EUDiF, 2022a).

Moreover, Albania's efforts to promote regular and transparent communication with its diaspora have faced obstacles. While initiatives like Diaspora Summits have provided opportunities for engagement, gaps in sustained dialogue and the development of concrete partnerships remain significant barriers (CESPI, 2021; EUDiF, 2022a). Ukraine should **prioritise creating robust communication channels**, for instance by leveraging digital platforms to maintain connections with its diaspora during periods of displacement and crisis.

Political and economic barriers, such as perceived corruption and political instability, have also limited Albania's ability to attract diaspora investments (CESPI, 2021). For Ukraine, addressing similar concerns will require **transparent governance, accountability in the use of diaspora contributions and efforts to reduce bureaucratic hurdles**. The lack of comprehensive data on Albania's diaspora further complicates policy design, a challenge that Ukraine can overcome by **investing in detailed mapping and profiling of its diaspora communities** (Arifagić & Mitrović, 2022; CESPI, 2021). Efforts to address this challenge are already underway in Ukraine, with organisations such as ICMPD, and joint projects led by the European Commission Joint Research Centre (JRC) and the Knowledge Centre on Migration and Demography (KCMD) working to collect and analyse data on the Ukrainian diaspora's characteristics and distribution. For instance, ICMPD has been conducting research in some EU host countries to analyse the socio-economic characteristics of the Ukrainian diaspora and assess its potential for involvement in Ukraine's development (Lazarenko, 2024); while the JRC together with the KCMD have been mapping the regional distribution of the Ukrainian diaspora within EU Member States, indicating where displaced Ukrainians are most likely to seek refuge based on the size of existing communities (European Commission, 2022). Further investing in diaspora mapping could be instrumental to elaborate and implement more effective diaspora policies. Albania's experience shows that **diaspora engagement strategies must be tailored to the diverse interests and capacities of diaspora groups**. While some members of Albania's diaspora express interest in philanthropy or virtual transfers, others – particularly those deeply integrated into host countries – are less inclined toward direct investment or permanent return (CESPI, 2021). Ukraine must similarly **recognise the varying levels of engagement within its diaspora**, creating flexible opportunities for participation that align with the specific needs of each segment.



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## 4. Serbia



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### 4.1 Brief overview of emigration patterns and history

Serbia has a long-standing history as an emigration country, shaped by a combination of socio-economic and political factors. Over the past 150 years, the country has experienced several waves of emigration, each influenced by distinct historical and geopolitical contexts.

- **Early emigration trends (late 19th century-interwar period).** The first major wave of emigration began in the late 19th century and was predominantly economically motivated. Many Serbians sought opportunities in the United States, which was experiencing a labour shortage, while smaller groups relocated temporarily to European countries for education and professional purposes. By the early 20th century, this trend began to decrease, particularly during the interwar period, when emigration pressures lessened (Đukić & Bodroža, 2022).
- **Post-World War II and communist era emigration.** A second wave occurred during and shortly after World War II, driven by war-related displacement and political upheaval under the emerging communist regime. Emigrants during this period were often labelled as political dissidents by the authorities. However, by the mid-1960s, emigration resumed due to economic agreements between the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) and Western European countries. These agreements facilitated labour migration, addressing unemployment in Serbia by exporting low-skilled workers to nations such as Germany, Austria and France. Remittances from these workers became a crucial component of Serbia's economy, helping to stabilise external imbalances and improve living standards (Đukić & Bodroža, 2022; Popic, 2020). During the 1970s, a significant wave of Yugoslav workers, including many Serbs, migrated to Western Europe, particularly to Germany, Austria and Switzerland, often taking on menial jobs. Unlike earlier trends, many of these workers chose not to return to Serbia, leading to a departure from past patterns of circular migration (Koyama, 2022).
- **Post-communist emigration: conflict, sanctions and the migration of the highly skilled.** The 1990s marked a critical period in Serbia's emigration history, characterised by the breakup of Yugoslavia, civil wars (1991–1995) and economic sanctions. This era saw a shift in the profile of emigrants, with a growing number of highly educated individuals leaving for political and economic reasons. The migration of the highly skilled during this time significantly hindered Serbia's development prospects (Đukić & Bodroža, 2022; Popic, 2020). By the 2002 Census, approximately 415,000 Serbian citizens (5% of the population) were living abroad, although this figure likely underestimated the true scale of emigration due to underreporting (Lukić, 2022).
- **Contemporary emigration trends.** Following democratic changes in 2000, initial optimism led to a brief decline in emigration, but economic stagnation and the 2008 global financial crisis reignited emigration pressures. Recent estimates suggest that approximately 30,000 people emigrate annually, with the majority heading to Europe and North America (Đukić & Bodroža, 2022; Lukić, 2022). The emigration of skilled

professionals and youth continues to pose challenges, as these groups represent critical human capital losses for Serbia (Lukić, 2022). Emigration rates vary by region. Southeastern Serbia, particularly its rural areas, records the highest percentages of emigrants relative to total inhabitants. Rural-origin emigrants also tend to have longer stays abroad compared to their urban counterparts (Koyama, 2022). Gender and age dynamics show men predominating among labour migrants, while younger individuals (aged 15-29) constitute a significant portion of emigrants, exacerbating demographic and economic challenges (Lukić, 2022). Estimates of Serbia's diaspora population vary widely due to inconsistent data and definitions. According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Serbia's diaspora, including both Serbian nationals abroad and ethnic Serbs in neighbouring regions, comprised approximately 4.5 to 5 million individuals in 2018. This is notable given Serbia's resident population of around 7 million. While the largest diaspora communities are in neighbouring ex-Yugoslav states, significant numbers also reside in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, North America and Australia. Many Serbian emigrants hold dual citizenship, reflecting their integration into host countries (Đukić & Bodroža, 2022; Popic, 2020).

## 4.2 Overview of the legal framework concerning diaspora engagement



### ACTORS AND INSTITUTIONS

Serbia has established a complex institutional framework to strengthen ties with its diaspora and involve them in national development. The framework encompasses legislative bodies, government offices and local institutions, focused on promoting both cultural connections and economic engagement.

#### ► Government authorities and representative bodies:

- **Office for Cooperation with the Diaspora and Serbs in the Region:** This office, operating under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), is tasked with administrative duties related to Serbian citizens abroad and promoting economic and cultural cooperation. It also supports diaspora investments by coordinating with local diaspora offices (Đukić & Bodroža, 2022; Popic, 2020).
- **Assembly of the Diaspora and Serbs in the Region:** Established by the 2009 *Law on Diaspora and Serbs in the Region*, this is the highest representative body for the diaspora. Composed of 45 elected delegates, it identifies diaspora challenges, proposes solutions, and oversees various councils related to economic and cultural matters. However, the Assembly has limited decision-making power, making its role largely symbolic (Popic, 2020; Tomić, 2016).
- **Diaspora Board of the National Assembly of Serbia:** Responsible for developing and monitoring legislation concerning diaspora relations, this board acts as a bridge between Serbian institutions and diaspora communities (Đukić & Bodroža, 2022).

#### ► Economic and development agencies:

- **Serbian Development Agency:** Facilitates investments and entrepreneurship, serving as a key contact point for diaspora investors (Đukić & Bodroža, 2022).
- **Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Serbia (CCIS):** Oversees initiatives like the Diaspora Business Council, the virtual Diaspora Club and the *Diaspora Info* newsletter. It has also set up diaspora offices within local chambers of commerce to strengthen business ties (Đukić & Bodroža, 2022; EUDiF, 2022b).



### ➤ Local institutions:

- **Local municipalities:** Many municipalities have established councils for cooperation with the diaspora to foster collaboration on local development projects. These councils provide advisory support to local policymakers regarding diaspora contributions (Đukić & Bodroža, 2022).

### ➤ Innovation and financial support bodies:

- **Serbian Development Fund:** Offers financial backing to small and medium enterprises, including those supported by diaspora members (Đukić & Bodroža, 2022).
- **Innovation Fund:** Central to promoting innovation, the fund also supports diaspora-driven entrepreneurship (Đukić & Bodroža, 2022).

### ➤ Diplomatic missions and consulates:

The MFA's diplomatic and consular network plays a crucial role in engaging with the diaspora, particularly through economic diplomacy initiatives and cultural promotion (Popic, 2020).



## DIASPORA DEFINITION AND RIGHTS

### ➤ Definition of diaspora:

The 2009 *Law on Diaspora and Serbs in the Region* defines the diaspora as comprising Serbian citizens abroad and ethnic Serbs who emigrated from Serbia or neighbouring countries, along with their descendants. This expansive definition includes Serbian nationals and ethnic Serbs in countries such as Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Hungary (Law on Diaspora and Serbs in the Region, 2009; Popic, 2020).

### ➤ Citizenship and voting rights:

The 2004 *Law on Citizenship*, amended in 2007, introduced ethnic preferential citizenship, allowing ethnic Serbs without residence in Serbia to acquire Serbian citizenship (Popic, 2020; Radosavljević, 2018). Serbian citizens living abroad have the right to vote in national elections. However, practical challenges, such as access to polling stations, can limit participation. The organisation of electronic voting or better access to voting facilities abroad remains an ongoing discussion (Popic, 2020).

Many members of the diaspora hold dual citizenship, particularly in countries with significant Serbian communities like Germany, Austria and the United States. This status facilitates their integration into host countries while maintaining ties with Serbia (Đukić & Bodroža, 2022).



## LAWS, LEGISLATION, REGULATIONS AND MEASURES

### ➤ Key legal instruments:

- **Law on Diaspora and Serbs in the Region ("Official Gazette of RS", no. 88/09) (2009):** Serves as the cornerstone of diaspora engagement policy, focusing on cultural preservation and economic cooperation. It also established key bodies like the *Assembly of the Diaspora and Serbs in the Region* (EUDiF, 2022b; Popic, 2020).
- **Law on Migration Management ("Official Gazette of RS", no. 107/12) (2012):** Addresses emigration exceeding 12 months and mandates a unified data collection system for managing migration at the municipal level (EUDiF, 2022b).

- **Law on Citizenship (2004, amended in 2007):** Facilitates the acquisition of Serbian citizenship by ethnic Serbs without residence in Serbia, strengthening ties with diaspora communities (Popic, 2020; Radosavljević, 2018).
- **Law on Investments (2015):** Simplifies procedures for diaspora investors, offering tax incentives and streamlined processes (Đukić & Bodroža, 2022).

### ➤ Strategies and policies:

- **Economic Migration Strategy of the Republic of Serbia for the Period 2021-2027:** It is the first document recognising the nexus between diaspora and local development and systematically tackling economic migration. It focuses on deterring emigration, encouraging return migration and promoting transnational entrepreneurship. The Strategy outlines six specific objectives, including two focused on enhancing collaboration between the diaspora and the country of origin to encourage transnational entrepreneurship (*Objective 4*) and establishing mechanisms to monitor, support and promote circular and return migration (*Objective 5*) (Đukić & Bodroža, 2022; EUDiF, 2022b).
- **Strategy of Maintaining and Strengthening the Relationship of the Mother Country and the Diaspora, and the Homeland and Serbs in the Region (2011):** Aims to enhance cultural ties and encourage economic collaboration between Serbia and its diaspora (Popic, 2020).

## 4.3 Overview of best practices in diaspora engagement

This section highlights a series of initiatives that demonstrate effective diaspora engagement practices in Serbia. These examples reflect diverse approaches to engaging diasporas in economic, social and cultural development.

➤ **Returning Point Platform (Tačka Povratka) (2020-ongoing).** The *Returning Point Platform* has operated since 2020 to support potential repatriates returning to Serbia. This initiative includes comprehensive assistance such as investment facilitation, academic collaboration and addressing legislative obstacles. Developed as a public-private partnership, it collaborates with diaspora organisations like the Serbian City Club and Science Technology Park Belgrade. The platform's support covers employment, education, investment opportunities and retirement planning (EUDiF, 2022b). As part of the broader Returning Point Programme initiated in 2019, this platform focuses on the return of highly skilled individuals and promotes circular migration. Achievements include:

- Direct assistance to over 7,000 potential returnees, including administrative and logistical guidance.
- Launching targeted outreach campaigns, such as a diaspora vaccination drive.
- Advocacy for policy changes, such as tax incentives and customs benefits for returnees (Arifagić & Mitrović, 2022).

➤ **Link Up! Serbia II (2019-2022).** The *Link Up! Serbia II* was implemented by the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD). This project represents the second phase of the "Link Up! Serbia" initiative. It was launched based on previous research and collaboration with the Serbian diaspora, particularly in Austria, and is funded by the Austrian Development Cooperation with a budget of approximately 1.67 million euros. The programme focuses on promoting transnational entrepreneurship by connecting Serbian diaspora members in Austria and other DACH countries (Germany, Austria and

Switzerland) with local stakeholders. Its two main components include mentoring and technical support for local governments and an online collaboration platform. Key outputs include:

- Development of 80 diaspora-targeted investment opportunities, particularly in tourism, agriculture, and industry.
- Creation of the Business Atlas of Serbia and Diaspora, a platform facilitating connections between diaspora investors and local partners.
- Establishment of a Diaspora Business Hub, ensuring sustainability through partnerships with local institutions (Arifagić & Mitrović, 2022; EUDiF, 2022b; ICMPD, n.d., 2021).

➤ **Diaspora Research Programme (2019).** Implemented in 2019, this initiative provided financial support for collaborative research projects between Serbian academics and diaspora peers. Activities included scientific visits and joint research, strengthening academic ties and promoting innovation. The programme has approved 92 projects involving partnerships between Serbian research institutions and Scientific and Research Organisations from 22 countries (EUDiF, 2022b; Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia, n.d.).

➤ **Tesla Nation (2019-ongoing).** This ongoing project is an international network uniting Serbian diaspora entrepreneurs in the ICT sector. Through partnerships and innovation-focused projects, Tesla Nation aims to elevate Serbia's tech industry on the global stage. The network functions as a system of ambassadors promoting collaboration between Serbian and international start-ups and enterprises (EUDiF, 2022b).

➤ **Carta Serbica (2022-ongoing).** Introduced in 2022, *Carta Serbica* facilitates the return of diaspora members who have relinquished Serbian citizenship or were born abroad. The programme provides temporary residency and work permits, tax and customs benefits and housing loan options. It encourages diaspora members to return either for work or retirement by offering comprehensive incentives (EUDiF, 2022b).

➤ **Global Programme Migration & Diaspora (PMD) (2019-2022).** Funded by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), the PMD programme supports economic migration and diaspora cooperation. Its components include:

- Career support for returning experts.
- Short-term expert assignments to enhance local development.
- Assistance for diaspora members in setting up businesses in Serbia.
- Policy guidance, such as the development of Serbia's Economic Migration Strategy (Arifagić & Mitrović, 2022).

➤ **Sunčev Zrak Start-Up (2020-ongoing).** This start-up was developed under the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ) Business Development Ideas programme. It was initiated by a Serbian woman employed as a paediatric nurse in Germany; it began with a focus on supporting breastfeeding mothers and later expanded to broader psychosocial support for families (EUDiF, 2022b).

## 4.4 Conclusions and lessons learned

Serbia's history as an emigration country is defined by distinct waves of migration – a pattern that resonates with Ukraine's own experience of emigration – shaped by evolving socio-economic and political contexts. Beginning in the late 19th century, economically motivated migration saw many Serbians seek opportunities abroad, particularly in the United States. Subsequent waves during and after World War II, as well as under the communist regime, were influenced by political upheaval, displacement and labour migration agreements with Western Europe. The breakup of Yugoslavia in the 1990s, coupled with economic sanctions and conflict, further altered emigration dynamics, leading to a significant migration of the highly skilled. More recent trends show continued outflows, particularly among skilled professionals and youth, posing long-term demographic and economic challenges (Đukić & Bodroža, 2022; Popic, 2020; Lukić, 2022).

Serbia's diaspora initiatives, such as the *Tačka Povratka* (Returning Point Platform), have emerged as essential means of facilitating the return of skilled professionals, providing support for investments and enhancing diaspora involvement in local development. Similarly, initiatives like *Link Up! Serbia II* have focused on connecting the diaspora with local businesses, offering platforms for investment and entrepreneurial engagement. These projects have demonstrated that with strategic planning and the right institutional support, diaspora engagement can have a transformative impact on economic recovery and development.

However, these initiatives have not been without **obstacles**. For example, while *Tačka Povratka* succeeded in overcoming initial resistance from some diaspora organisations, the programme also faced challenges with fragmented diaspora networks and difficulties in securing consistent political buy-in. Similarly, *Link Up! Serbia II* encountered issues related to administrative capacity and the lack of trust in institutions, a common challenge for diaspora engagement strategies across the region. These challenges were further exacerbated by the crisis setting of the COVID-19 pandemic, which affected both outreach efforts and in-person networking opportunities (Arifagić & Mitrović, 2022; Qaisrani et al., 2023).

From the Serbian experience, Ukraine can draw several lessons. Firstly, **a clear institutional structure** that supports long-term diaspora engagement is critical. Serbia's efforts to institutionalise diaspora cooperation, through both public and private sector partnerships, have been essential to the success of programmes like *Link Up! Serbia II* (EUDiF, 2022b). Ukraine should look at replicating such structures, particularly focusing on stable institutions that remain functional even during periods of political change. It is important that diaspora agencies or business units are established outside the government ministries to avoid the disruptions caused by frequent political transitions (Qaisrani et al., 2023).

Secondly, while Serbia has seen success in using its diaspora for economic recovery, challenges related to administrative capacity and data collection still persist. For Ukraine, this means that **a clear mapping of its diaspora**, including information on their businesses, professional expertise and potential for investment, will be crucial. Moreover, the historical waves of emigration mean that different segments of the diaspora may have varying levels of inclination to engage with their country of origin. Some groups, particularly those more distantly removed or integrated into host countries, might be less inclined to participate compared to more recent emigrants. Building databases or registers of the diaspora could help identify the most relevant groups to target for engagement (Qaisrani et al., 2023).

Additionally, **establishing robust communication channels** with the diaspora is essential for success. Serbia's reliance on online platforms and social media for outreach during the COVID-19 pandemic is a useful example

of how digital tools can help maintain engagement when in-person events are not feasible (Arifagić & Mitrović, 2022). Ukraine, too, can benefit from expanding its online presence and using digital platforms to connect with its diaspora globally, especially in a conflict (and post-conflict) setting.

Another lesson for Ukraine is the need to **focus on local engagement through municipal and regional governments**. In Serbia, local governments have been more effective at forging personal connections with the diaspora and facilitating investment (Qaisrani et al., 2023). Ukraine could build on this by enhancing regional and local efforts to engage with its diaspora, potentially encouraging investments in areas that have been significantly impacted by the conflict. Supporting trans-local initiatives could help bridge gaps between the diaspora and local municipalities, ensuring that investments are more effectively channelled into areas with the greatest need.

Lastly, while Serbia has worked hard to enhance its diaspora's participation in local development, trust remains a significant barrier. Many members of the diaspora continue to perceive local institutions as unreliable and corrupt, which makes engagement difficult (EUDiF, 2022b). For Ukraine, **fostering trust** will be a crucial challenge. Strengthening transparency, accountability and clear communication from the government, especially concerning the use of diaspora investments, is essential to gaining the diaspora's trust. Implementing measures to ensure that diaspora businesses and individuals are not subjected to administrative hurdles will also be key. This includes **improving local governance, reducing bureaucracy** and **making investment opportunities more accessible**.

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## 5. Lithuania

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### 5.1 Brief overview of migration patterns and history

Lithuania has historically experienced a decline in its population since the early 90s due to the natural population decline and the changing residential mobility patterns (Burneika et al., 2015; Ubarevičienė & Van Ham, 2017). Research suggests that emigration alone is responsible for around 80% of the country's population reduction (Ubarevičienė & Van Ham, 2017). In addition to international migration patterns, Lithuania has also experienced significant internal migration. Urbanisation has led to the steady depopulation of rural areas, a trend that is not unique to Lithuania but is prominent in its demographic shifts (Ubarevičienė & Van Ham, 2017). As a country in the eastern part of Europe, it has been traditionally marked by high emigration rates, and a strong diaspora, correlated to different events: the USSR rule and dissolution, Lithuania's accession to the EU and the global economic crisis of 2008.

- **Soviet Era:** During the time Lithuania was under Soviet rule, migration was limited to the territory of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). Marked by the regained independence in 1990, 18% of the country's total population was living abroad and 20% were highly skilled migrants (Labanauskas, 2019). However, most emigrants were ethnic Russians or affiliates of Soviet institutions, as emigration to the West did not increase due to the restrictive labour migration policies in most Western European countries (Klüsener et al., 2015).
- **Accession to EU and financial crisis:** Emigration from Lithuania began to rise in 2004, following the country's accession to the European Union (EU). This increase was driven largely by the newfound freedom of movement within the EU, which facilitated labour migration (Klüsener et al., 2015; Labanauskas, 2019). By 2014, it was estimated that 10% of Lithuania's population had emigrated since the country joined the EU in 2004. Most emigrants moved to Western countries, with the United Kingdom, Ireland, Germany and Norway emerging as popular destinations (IOM & EMN, 2024; Klüsener et al., 2015). The diaspora from Western Europe and the United States particularly maintained cultural and political ties with their homeland (Burneika et al., 2015). The 2009 financial crisis triggered another surge in labour migration from Lithuania, with international emigration reaching its peak in 2010 (Burneika et al., 2015; Labanauskas, 2019).
- **Contemporary migration trends:** Currently, Lithuania's population has decreased by 22% since 1990, mostly due to emigration (IOM & EMN, 2024). However, immigration trends have also evolved, playing a relevant role in Lithuania's demographic landscape. For several years, the majority of immigrants were returning Lithuanians, and the Lithuanian government has indeed emphasised return migration programmes (Labanauskas, 2019). However, this trend shifted around 2017 and 2019, with most immigrants being foreigners, leading to the conceptualisation of diaspora networks as opportunities to mitigate the decreasing population through programmes aimed at maintaining ties with emigrants (Ubarevičienė & Van Ham, 2017). In 2023, only 25% of immigrants were returnees, as immigrants were

mostly non-EU citizens, particularly from Ukraine (IOM & EMN, 2024). This change in migration patterns became evident in 2022 when Lithuania recorded its highest positive net migration since independence (IOM & EMN, 2024).

## 5.2 Overview of the legal framework concerning diaspora engagement



### ACTORS AND INSTITUTIONS

The Lithuanian diaspora infrastructure encompasses a wide variety of actors and institutions, including governmental authorities, consulate networks, and specialised migration institutions that address the diverse needs of Lithuanians abroad and contribute to the implementation of governmental diaspora engagement programmes.

#### ➤ Government authorities and representative bodies:

- The **Ministry for Foreign Affairs (MFA)** is the primary national institution tasked with the responsibility of strengthening ties with Lithuanians abroad and managing consular services. Accordingly, it is the main coordinating body of diaspora engagement initiatives, among which the *Strategic Guidelines for the Lithuanian Diaspora Policy: Global Lithuania 2022–2030* is the most prominent and from where the **Global Lithuania Department** operates (EUDiF, 2023b).
- The **Ministry of Social Security and Labour** coordinates social protection and support measures for returnees and displaced diaspora members while focusing on their integration and labour migration policies, including benefits and financial support (Ministry of Social Security and Labour, 2024).
- The **Ministry of Education, Science and Sports** oversees programmes aimed at fostering educational opportunities and skill enhancement for Lithuanians residing abroad (EUDiF, 2023b).
- The **Ministry of the Economy and Innovation** focuses on attracting skilled professionals from the diaspora by designing initiatives that support their recruitment, encourage their integration into regional communities, identify key professional fields and simplify the process of validating foreign qualifications (EUDiF, 2023b; Permanent Representation of Lithuania to the European Union, 2010).
- The **Commission for Coordination of Affairs of Lithuanians Abroad** is a consultative body made up of representative authorities, such as the Prime Minister, the Chancellor and several ministers. The Commission was established in 2009 and the tasks are to provide strategic directions for the country's relations with the Lithuanian diaspora, coordinate the state institutions in strengthening relations with diaspora members to further involve them in the socio-cultural life of Lithuania and to address the legislation on Lithuanian affairs abroad while administering the Global Lithuania strategy (Kurowska-Pysz & Puksas, 2021).
- The **Commission of the Parliament of the Republic of Lithuania and the World Lithuanian Community (WLC)** serves as a consultative body comprising both members of the Parliament and representatives from the WLC. It convenes twice a year to address the relevant matters of Lithuanians living abroad (EUDiF, 2023b).



### ►► Specialised institutions:

- The **Migration Department** – within the Ministry of the Interior – is the agency in charge of issuing all the documentation that might be required for diaspora members, especially upon return (Migration Department, 2023).
- The **Migration Information Centre (MIC) “Renkuosi Lietuva” (“I Choose Lithuania”)**, established in 2015 and funded by the MFA, is managed by IOM Lithuania. It provides consultations and support to Lithuanian migrants considering returning or relocating to Lithuania (IOM Lithuania, 2024). The centre focuses on facilitating migration and reintegration.
- The **Refugee Reception Centre** that will become the Reception and Integration Agency next year will be subordinate to the Social Security and Labour Ministry. This institution facilitates the integration of diaspora members returning to Lithuania by implementing measures and providing temporary support to individuals of Lithuanian ethnicity who repatriate due to crises (Ministry of Social Security and Labour, 2024).
- **Enterprise Lithuania and Invest Lithuania.** In 2010 the Lithuanian Development Agency (LDA) was restructured into two different public organisations: **Enterprise Lithuania** and **Invest Lithuania**, under the Ministry of Economy, to enhance the effectiveness of LDA’s main functions.
  1. Currently, **Invest Lithuania** specialises in attracting Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and shaping Lithuania’s global economic image.
  2. In parallel, **Enterprise Lithuania** focuses on supporting the export activities of Lithuanian producers. Both agencies, as state-funded institutions also implement targeted initiatives to engage the Lithuanian diaspora, encourage investment and facilitate the establishment of economic activities within the country (EUDiF, 2023b).
- Consular services are central to diaspora engagement as they are the actors providing direct support to the diaspora by offering information, documentation and assistance, hence acting as intermediaries or representative bodies (IOM et al., 2023).



### DIASPORA DEFINITION AND RIGHTS

- **Definition of diaspora:** There is no single legal framework that explicitly defines the diaspora, but rather, its scope is reflected in policies. The enacted governmental programmes take a distinct approach that emphasises certifying Lithuanian descent and restoring citizenship as mechanisms to strengthen ties with its historical diaspora (Lafleur, 2020). Therefore, it is generally acknowledged as **diaspora: Lithuanian citizens living abroad, ethnic Lithuanians who emigrated and their descendants.**

### ►► Citizenship and voting rights:

- Related to citizenship, the Lithuanian diaspora played a significant role in shaping discussions about national belonging, particularly in the context of the **1991 Law on Citizenship** (Daukšas, 2019). Through their active involvement, the diaspora advocated for an understanding of identity that emphasised Lithuanian descent, thereby reinforcing their inclusion as part of the nation. Nevertheless, **Lithuania’s dual citizenship laws are highly restrictive**, granting eligibility only to narrowly defined groups that meet strict criteria. In response, diaspora leaders are advocating for an expansion of political rights to address these limitations, particularly after two failed referendums aimed at broadening access (Gudelis & Klimavičiūtė, 2016; Žemaitienė, 2024).



- **Lithuanian citizens abroad can vote in Seimas (the parliament) and Presidential elections through mail or consulates.** However, diaspora participation has traditionally been low, despite a numerous eligible population. This low engagement is attributed to disinterest, limited information or voting inaccessibility (Gudelis & Klimavičiūtė, 2016). Nonetheless, the trend seemed to revert in 2020 when a **single-member constituency for global Lithuanians was established** to directly represent the Lithuanian diaspora in the Seimas (Voters Without Borders, 2020). This development followed the significant turnout of expatriate voters in the 2019 presidential elections. However, concerns arose after the 2024 elections regarding the sustainability of this constituency due to lower voter turnout abroad, prompting discussions on how to ensure continued representation for the diaspora (BNS, LRT. It, 2024; Voters Without Borders, 2020). **Online voting** has been advocated by diaspora leaders and incorporated as an objective in the governmental strategic guidelines after seeing successful results in Estonia (Gudelis & Klimavičiūtė, 2016). Nevertheless, Lithuania's attempts to adopt online voting have **stalled** after studies failed to guarantee E-voting security and public trust issues (Cenys, 2024; Skėrytė, 2024).



## LAWS, LEGISLATION, REGULATIONS AND MEASURES

### ➤ Key legal instruments

- **Citizenship Law**, also known as Law No. XI-1196 2010 regulates the possibility of having dual citizenship, which is limited to a few groups of people that meet certain criteria, as mentioned above (XI-1196 Citizenship Law of the Republic of Lithuania, 2010).
- **Law on Elections to the Seimas**, which was amended to establish a dedicated single-member constituency for Lithuanian citizens despite its uncertain future. This law regulates voting rights, affecting the political rights of diasporas.
- The **Law on the Legal Status of Foreigners** aims to regulate labour migration flows. Since July 2024, new regulations have been in place that affect foreign nationals searching for a job. They can no longer work in Lithuania under visa-free regimes, national or Schengen visas, or residence permits issued by other countries but rather need to obtain Lithuanian temporary residence permit to engage in employment (Migration Department, 2024).

### ➤ Strategies and policies

- **Lithuanian Migration Policy Guidelines:** outline key objectives for managing migration flows to address national economic and structural needs. Focused on the integration of foreigners, the need for a clear legal framework, effective institutional coordination, and public initiatives to foster tolerance, reduce discrimination, and ensure equal opportunities in all aspects of life, they are guidelines that seek to promote social and economic development (Government of the Republic of Lithuania, 2015).
- The **Global Lithuania 2022-2030 programme** is the overarching diaspora engagement policy that has a set of strategic guidelines presented in the following section to strengthen ties with Lithuanians abroad (Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania, 2021).
- The **New Action Plan 2025-2027** is a three year-action plan on diaspora policy focused on Lithuanian education, culture and national security (Venckūnas, 2024).

## 5.3 Overview of best practices in diaspora engagement

This section provides an overview of key initiatives that exemplify Lithuania's strategic approach to diaspora engagement. The overarching policy framework for Lithuania's diaspora engagement is the **Global Lithuania 2022–2030** programme, a continuation of the earlier **Global Lithuania** strategy initiated in 2012 and coordinated by the MFA alongside several public agencies. This strategy stems from the *Strategic Guidelines for the Lithuanian Diaspora Policy: Global Lithuania 2022–2030*, approved in December 2021, and outlines a comprehensive, government-led framework to strengthen ties between Lithuania and its diaspora. The programme focuses on fostering national identity, encouraging diaspora involvement in Lithuania's development, and supporting return migration (Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania, 2021). Therefore, the main goal of the strategy is to strengthen Lithuania's connection with its diaspora, recognising this community of approximately 1.3 million individuals as an integral part of the nation that is vital for the cultural, social and economic future (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania, n.d.).

The strategic directions are embedded in the following pillars: 1) Fostering National Identity and Cultural Connection, 2) Encouraging Diaspora Engagement in National Development, 3) Civic Engagement and 4) Promoting Return Migration (Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania, 2021).

- The **national identity** aims to be preserved through **education, cultural preservation and historical memory**. Initiatives include expanding government-funded formal and informal Lithuanian-language schools abroad, developing digital learning tools to cater to the diaspora needs, expanding cultural exchange programmes and Lithuanian-language camps, supporting diaspora organisations in organising cultural and historical activities, preserving diaspora archives as well as developing resources on Lithuanian history on different languages, and fostering ties through events and programmes that promote a sense of community.
- The **economic dimension** of the strategy focuses on encouraging diaspora investment, supporting entrepreneurship in Lithuania, boosting Lithuanian exports and tourism using diaspora networks, developing specific professional networks of diaspora members from different fields, and fostering professional collaboration through mentorships and joint initiatives between diaspora professionals and Lithuanian institutions.
  - For instance, the Global Lithuania programme supports the **Global Lithuanian Leaders initiative**, which is an online professional network of diaspora members that allows participants to search and connect based on their interests or location. This initiative created a network of more than 10,000 global Lithuanian professionals from more than 60 countries (GLL, 2024; Gudelis & Klimavičiūtė, 2016). Other examples include the **World Lithuanian Economic Forum** and the **World Lithuanian Symposium on Arts and Sciences**, which stand out as effective initiatives (Gudelis & Klimavičiūtė, 2016). They are both conferences that aim to attract diaspora speakers worldwide who are professionals in their field.
- **Civic engagement** is addressed through improved access to voting worldwide, including potential online voting systems, and by celebrating the contributions of diaspora members to Lithuania's development annually. Youth engagement is prioritised through scholarships, internships and opportunities as well as through the creation of networks for alumni of educational programmes abroad in order to explore Lithuanian heritage, aiming to inspire and maintain connections with Lithuanian roots.

- The strategy also emphasises **return migration**, providing financial aid, reintegration programmes for returnees, including – but not limited to – housing assistance and educational integration, and offering comprehensive resources to help individuals and families resettle successfully in a centralised way to facilitate the process.
  - With regards to return migration, the Employment Service has an **initiative** named ‘*Gal į Lietuvą?*’, which translates to ‘Maybe to Lithuania?’, and aims to encourage Lithuanians living abroad to return by providing comprehensive information on employment opportunities and reintegration services (Gudelis & Klimavičiūtė, 2016).
  - Several Global Lithuania projects are also designed to support return migration, offering practical support such as financial incentives and employment services to facilitate the reintegration of skilled diaspora members.
- Finally, **effective communication** underpins the strategy, with tailored outreach to different diaspora groups based on age, profession or emigration wave, using both traditional and digital platforms as well as making use of the diaspora social networks. Additionally, this is complemented by public awareness campaigns in Lithuania highlighting the diaspora’s contributions while fostering resilience against disinformation through media training and public relations campaigns.

**How is the plan implemented?** Although the plan is coordinated by the MFA and supported by the aforementioned ministries, it is the Commission for Coordination of Affairs of Lithuanians Abroad that oversees, administers and guides the initiatives. Nevertheless, to decentralise, local governments are also welcome to implement diaspora engagement initiatives that align with the overarching framework, the national strategy. Accordingly, the programmes are state-funded and count with municipal contributions, supplemented by other legal sources.

Recently, the Lithuanian government approved a **new action plan for diaspora policy covering the period from 2025 to 2027, as part of the broader *Global Lithuania* initiative**. This plan aims to enhance the coordination and implementation of Lithuanian diaspora policies through several key actions, including the development of a global census of people of Lithuanian descent to gather comprehensive statistical data on the diaspora (Venckūnas, 2024). Additionally, the plan emphasises the strengthening of national identity – a central component of the *Global Lithuania* strategy – by promoting diaspora engagement in Lithuania’s social, cultural and political life. It also focuses on facilitating return migration and improving communication between Lithuania and its diaspora. Moreover, aligned with the overarching strategic guidelines of the diaspora engagement programme, the newly approved plan seeks to increase the number of individuals studying in Lithuania by providing financial support to educational institutions and organising targeted campaigns and events to encourage participation (Venckūnas, 2024).

Aside from large-scale governmental plans, there are other interesting initiatives in place to engage the Lithuanian diaspora.

- An example is the **Work in Lithuania 2024 initiative**, a government initiative designed to attract skilled professionals by connecting them with job opportunities and providing comprehensive relocation and reintegration support. It plays a key role in addressing labour market needs, fostering economic growth and aligning talent acquisition with Lithuania’s strategic development goals (Work in Lithuania, 2024).
- Another initiative being carried out by the Ministry of the Economy and Innovation in collaboration with the Ministry of Social Security and Labour, the Employment Service, Global Lithuanian Leaders, the

Lithuanian World Community, as well as diaspora representatives and businesses, is the **Diaspora-Friendly Employer**. This strategic programme is designed to encourage the repatriation of skilled professionals to Lithuania by promoting favourable employment conditions and enhancing international recruitment practices. The overarching goals of the initiative include strengthening Lithuania's innovation capacity, enhancing its economic competitiveness and creating improved conditions for return migration. To participate in the initiative, companies must meet a set of defined criteria: 1) offer remote hiring options, 2) ensure a smooth relocation process, and 3) foster a multicultural inclusive work environment (Ministry of the Economy and Innovation of the Republic of Lithuania, 2024a, 2024b).

- The **Create Lithuania** initiative and the **Bring Together Lithuania** programmes are complementary efforts aimed at strengthening Lithuania's ties with its diaspora while promoting professional growth and development. **Create Lithuania**, supported by private entities such as the Ministry of Economy and NGOs, enables professionals with international expertise to consult for Lithuania's public sector (EUDiF, 2023b). Meanwhile, **Bring Together Lithuania**, launched in 2014 by the Kazickas Family Foundation with support from the Lithuanian MFA and other stakeholders, provides Lithuanian diaspora youth with opportunities to develop professional skills, connect with global Lithuanians and engage with their heritage (EUDiF, 2023b).
- The **GLL Talent Reach** programme and the **Renkuosi mokyti! – Teach for Lithuania** initiative focus on education and skill development while mobilising global Lithuanian talent. The **GLL Talent Reach programme**, implemented by Global Lithuanian Leaders, builds a network of mid to senior-level Lithuanian professionals worldwide through projects emphasising soft skills and vocational education (EUDiF, 2023b). Similarly, **Teach for Lithuania**, unites public and private entities to promote digital education in Lithuania, with a global recruitment system that invites members of the diaspora to contribute to this mission (EUDiF, 2023b).

## 5.4 Conclusions and lessons learned

Lithuania's history as a country of high emigration rates is shaped by successive waves of migration driven by socio-economic, political and historical contexts. Starting under Soviet rule, migration patterns were largely internal within the USSR. Following independence in 1990, emigration expanded to Western countries, particularly after Lithuania's EU accession in 2004, which enabled freedom of movement. These trends were exacerbated by the 2008 global economic crisis, leading to a loss of human capital, with many skilled professionals and youth seeking opportunities abroad. Although emigration has been the dominant trend, positive net migration since 2022 reflects evolving dynamics, with increased immigration and targeted return migration policies aimed at reversing the demographic decline. It is in this context that Lithuania has successfully implemented diaspora engagement strategies that offer valuable insights for Ukraine.

A central feature of the **Global Lithuania** strategy is its holistic approach, which positions the diaspora as an integral part of the nation's identity and development. This has been effectively institutionalised through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, ensuring consistent coordination and long-term policy continuity. For Ukraine, adopting a similarly comprehensive and institutionalised approach through a **dedicated governmental body or department to oversee diaspora engagement initiatives** could enable Ukraine to effectively harness the potential of its diaspora for development and national recovery.

Lithuania's diaspora engagement initiatives, mainly the **Global Lithuania** programme, provide a structured framework for promoting cultural identity, encouraging return migration, and leveraging the economic potential of its diaspora. Programmes such as the **Diaspora-Friendly Employer Initiative** or the **Work in Lithuania programme** demonstrate the importance of **targeted approaches** to attract skilled professionals back to the country. For Ukraine, these aspects are particularly relevant as the country seeks to mobilise its diaspora to support reconstruction, innovation and economic recovery. One of the relevant aspects for Ukraine is Lithuania's focus on **economic engagement by directly facilitating the return of skilled professionals by matching them with job opportunities and providing reintegration support**. This is complemented by efforts to promote diaspora investment, attract businesses and involve diaspora members in export promotion and tourism campaigns. Such economic strategies are **integral to post-crisis recovery and could help Ukraine leverage its diaspora's economic potential in reconstruction efforts**. It is important to note that Ukraine has already implemented a similar project, Create Ukraine, which was inspired by Lithuania's example, thereby demonstrating an existing commitment to reintegration and professional development. At a later stage, Ukraine could also consider adopting approaches similar to those implemented by Lithuania, focusing on the development of **comprehensive reintegration and return migration programmes**. Beyond the Create Ukraine programme, Ukraine could further expand its efforts by integrating digital innovations, establishing continuous professional networks and creating centralised support systems that more effectively address logistical, administrative and financial challenges.

Another feature of Lithuania's approach is **its proactive engagement with diaspora professionals and scientists**. By building professional networks, developing collaborations on research projects and supporting mentorship programmes, the government creates pathways for diaspora members to contribute to national innovation.

Lithuania's **communication strategies** reflect the importance of **tailored outreach** to diverse diaspora groups. Even though an interactive *Global Lithuania* website is lacking, digital platforms such as **Global Lithuanian Leaders** have facilitated professional networking, though gaps in interactivity and outreach remain. Ukraine could improve on this model by developing **centralised, interactive platforms** to connect diaspora members with opportunities to contribute to national recovery while also providing access to personalised resources and support.

Another relevant aspect for Ukraine is **Lithuania's structured support for cultural preservation**. This includes **government-backed Lithuanian schools abroad**, where formal and non-formal education strengthens ties with younger generations. Lithuania also invests in developing digital learning tools and language camps, which **could serve as models for Ukraine to maintain connections with displaced youth**.

Finally, **civic engagement** is an important element of Lithuania's strategy, demonstrated by its commitment to **maintaining voting rights for citizens abroad** and its **exploration of online voting systems**. Nevertheless, diaspora leaders advocate for further extension of political rights due to the need to address the Lithuanian laws on dual citizenship, which is only available for definite groups of individuals who meet strict criteria after two failed referendums to further expand it (Gudelis & Klimavičiūtė, 2016; Žemaitienė, 2024). The Lithuanian government also celebrates diaspora achievements through **national awards and events**, reinforcing the value of their contributions. Ukraine could adopt these practices to enhance the civic engagement of its diaspora, fostering stronger ties to the homeland.

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## 6. Global best practices in diaspora engagement

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### 6.1 Institutional frameworks

Institutional frameworks form the foundation of effective diaspora engagement by providing clear governance structures, sustainable coordination and representation mechanisms. Countries with successful diaspora strategies often establish dedicated ministries, divisions or agencies to maintain relationships with their diaspora and ensure policy coherence (Tittel-Mosser, 2023).



**Lebanon's** Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Emigrants (MoFAE) exemplifies this approach, with its General Directorate of Emigrants focused on fostering ties and incentivising contributions from Lebanese abroad. Representative organisations, such as the World Lebanese Cultural Union (WLCU), complement government efforts by acting as platforms for cultural preservation and collaboration. However, Lebanon faces challenges, including fragmented coordination, reflecting the need for an overarching strategy – a lesson Ukraine could integrate into its plans to avoid similar pitfalls (Ragab & Diker, 2021).



**India's** Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs, later merged into the Ministry of External Affairs, demonstrates the benefits of centralising diaspora engagement within a dedicated institutional framework. Initiatives like the *Pravasi Bharatiya Divas* celebrations and *Overseas Citizenship of India* (OCI) scheme have formalised connections, while regional institutions such as Kerala's Non-Resident Keralites Affairs (NORKA) highlight the importance of subnational governance in addressing specific diaspora needs (ibidem).



**Italy** provides an exemplary model of institutionalised engagement through its General Council of Italians Abroad (CGIE). This body enables Italians living abroad to participate in policy discussions, enhancing representation and creating direct channels of influence. Additionally, Italy's AIRE (Register of Italians Residing Abroad) ensures accurate data collection, a crucial step for designing effective programmes (ibidem).

For Ukraine, integrating a dedicated agency for diaspora engagement within the framework of the newly established **Ministry of National Unity** – and supporting it with regional offices – would complement its decentralised governance model. Establishing consultative bodies similar to Italy's CGIE would further empower Ukrainian diaspora members to participate actively in policymaking, thereby enhancing trust, transparency, and collaboration between diaspora communities and national authorities.



## 6.2 Economic engagement

Diaspora communities can be powerful drivers of economic development through remittances, investments, trade and knowledge transfer (Gamlen, 2018). Countries that leverage these contributions through targeted policies can support national development goals and, in Ukraine's case, post-conflict recovery.



**Lebanon** offers valuable insights, particularly through its *Targeting Lebanese Expatriates* (TLE) programme under the Investment Development Authority of Lebanon (IDAL). This initiative encourages diaspora investments in priority sectors like technology and tourism. The Lebanese Diaspora Energy (LDE) conference further strengthens economic ties by creating opportunities for collaboration between expatriates and local businesses (Ragab & Diker, 2021).



**India's Overseas Indian Facilitation Centre** (OIFC) exemplifies the role of public-private partnerships in diaspora engagement. By linking Indian diaspora investors with opportunities in India, the OIFC helps streamline investment processes. The Global Indian Network of Knowledge (INK) enables knowledge transfer by connecting skilled professionals abroad with Indian development projects (ibidem).



**Ireland's Global Irish Network** (GIN), launched in 2010, connects over 350 of Ireland's most influential diaspora members, including leaders in business, culture and politics. This network serves as a platform for promoting trade, investment and innovation while strengthening Ireland's global presence. Events such as the Global Irish Economic Forum, organised under the GIN framework, have resulted in actionable policy recommendations, including support for Irish startups and job creation initiatives (ibidem). For Ukraine, establishing a similar high-level network could be a game-changer in leveraging its diaspora's expertise and connections.



**The Philippines** has effectively harnessed the power of its diaspora through programmes like *Balikbayan* initiatives, which incentivise overseas Filipino workers to return and invest in local enterprises. The Land Bank of the Philippines offers diaspora-specific financial products, encouraging productive remittance use (Nicolas & Rodriguez, 2019).



**South Africa's Global South Africans Network** is aimed at engaging South Africans living abroad as "brand ambassadors". This programme seeks to harness the collective influence of South Africans worldwide to promote the country's image and competitiveness on a global scale, and possibly attract investments (Brand South Africa, 2023; *Global South Africans Network*, n.d.).

Ukraine could benefit from a multi-branched approach, combining **investment facilitation**, **remittance optimisation** and **knowledge transfer**. A dedicated platform to connect diaspora professionals with reconstruction projects could potentially harness their skills for post-conflict recovery. Organising investment forums akin to Lebanon's LDE and leveraging diaspora networks like Ireland's GIN would create avenues for long-term economic partnerships. Financial incentives, such as diaspora bonds or tax breaks for returning investors, could further incentivise the diaspora's economic engagement.

## 6.3 Technology and digital platforms

Technology and digital platforms are essential tools for engaging with dispersed diaspora communities, offering cost-effective means to connect, inform and mobilise members. Countries with successful digital strategies have used these platforms to provide services, foster networking and facilitate economic and cultural exchange (Kang, 2017).



**Lebanon's** digital initiatives include the *Lebanon Connect* app and *DiasporaID*, aiming to connect Lebanese professionals globally while facilitating cultural and economic ties. Though technical challenges have hindered these efforts, they demonstrate the potential of digital tools in promoting engagement (Ragab & Diker, 2021).



**Ireland's** *Global Irish Hub* leverages online platforms to disseminate information and resources, making it easier for diaspora members to access services and opportunities (ibidem).



**Italy's** digital services for AIRE registrants similarly enhance connectivity, ensuring that Italians abroad can remain involved in their homeland's social and economic life (ibidem).



**The Philippines** has embraced digital innovation with its *Overseas Filipino Bank*, which offers online financial services tailored to its diaspora. This digital-first approach facilitates remittances, savings, and investments, empowering overseas workers to contribute to national development (Overseas Filipino Bank, n.d.).



**Estonia's** *e-Residency* programme offers a particularly innovative model. While not strictly a diaspora initiative, it allows non-residents to establish and manage businesses within Estonia's digital ecosystem (Kotka et al., 2015).

For Ukraine, a **unified digital platform** could combine these elements into a comprehensive tool for engagement. Building on the success of Diia – the country's existing digital identity platform – this tool could integrate a wide range of services already available and under development. Diia provides a secure foundation for digital interactions, enabling citizens to access government services, and similar capabilities could be extended to diaspora engagement. Features could include **virtual volunteering opportunities**, **crowdfunding** for reconstruction projects, and **centralised access to diaspora resources**. Moreover, by leveraging Diia's infrastructure, Ukraine could develop a "digital Ukrainian citizenship" programme – akin to Estonia's e-Residency – to incentivise participation by allowing diaspora members to establish and manage businesses remotely and access tailored public services.

## 6.4 Cultural preservation and identity

Cultural preservation is vital for maintaining a cohesive diaspora identity, ensuring that future generations remain connected to their heritage (Utomo, 2020). For Ukraine, cultural initiatives can also play a strategic role in countering narratives of cultural erasure and reinforcing national pride in the context of conflict.



**Lebanon's** *Lebanese Diaspora Energy* conferences celebrate cultural heritage and promote the idea of a global Lebanese identity. Campaigns like *Libanity* encourage descendants of emigrants to reclaim their nationality and engage with Lebanese traditions (Ragab & Diker, 2021).





**Italy** prioritises cultural preservation through initiatives such as the *Week of the Italian Language in the World*, which promotes the Italian language and culture among expatriates. Italian schools abroad and cultural institutes, such as Dante Alighieri Societies, play an important role in sustaining national identity (ibidem).



In **the Philippines**, programmes like *Schools of Living Traditions* teach younger generations about Filipino heritage, fostering a sense of belonging (Policy Group of the Global Diaspora Summit, 2022).



**Ireland** offers a unique example of connecting diaspora members to their roots through its *Ireland Reaching Out* (Ireland XO) initiative. This volunteer-based, non-profit programme uses the concept of reverse genealogy to connect people of Irish descent with their ancestral communities in Ireland. By reaching out proactively, Ireland XO has built a global membership of over 140,000 and created over 20,000 chronicles documenting Irish heritage. The programme's innovative approach promotes lasting relationships between the global diaspora and local communities in Ireland, demonstrating the power of grassroots engagement in cultural preservation (ibidem).

Ukraine could adopt similar strategies by **establishing cultural centres worldwide** to teach Ukrainian language, history and traditions. Partnering with diaspora organisations to **host festivals, exhibitions and language courses** would enhance cross-generational engagement, while initiatives inspired by Ireland XO could **proactively engage Ukrainian descendants** globally, reconnecting them with their ancestral roots and home communities. An important development in this regard is the Ukrainian Ministry of Unity's plan to establish **Unity Hubs** in key countries with significant Ukrainian populations (i.e., Germany, Poland and the Czech Republic). These Hubs will provide essential services, including language courses consular services, and support for return migration. Unity hubs can also function as cultural centers for the diaspora, strengthening ties between Ukraine and its citizens abroad. These efforts would reinforce a collective Ukrainian identity and create lasting bonds between the diaspora and the homeland.

## 6.5 Conclusions and lessons learned

Global best practices in diaspora engagement demonstrate the potential of effectively mobilising diasporas for national development, cultural preservation and international influence. For Ukraine, these lessons provide a roadmap for crafting a strategy tailored to its unique diaspora, leveraging its capacities for post-conflict recovery, economic revitalisation and cultural continuity.

The importance of robust **institutional frameworks** is a recurring theme across successful diaspora engagement models. Countries such as India, Italy and Lebanon have demonstrated the value of establishing dedicated governmental entities to coordinate diaspora policies and maintain consistent communication. For Ukraine, a central agency dedicated to diaspora engagement, supported by consultative bodies like Italy's CGIE and regional offices akin to NORKA, could ensure a cohesive and inclusive approach. Such frameworks would institutionalise diaspora contributions and foster trust through representation and accountability.

Diasporas are powerful drivers of **economic development**, as seen in the cases of India, Ireland and the Philippines. For Ukraine, economic engagement strategies should include tailored financial incentives such as diaspora bonds, tax breaks for investors, and dedicated platforms to connect skilled diaspora professionals with reconstruction projects. Organising high-profile investment forums and creating networks similar to Ireland's

GIN could amplify long-term economic partnerships and accelerate Ukraine's recovery and development. Offering financial incentives like diaspora bonds or tax breaks for returning investors could further boost long-term economic partnerships. Moreover, programmes like the Philippines' Balikbayan initiatives, which incentivise return migration, could inspire similar efforts for skilled Ukrainian professionals. Additionally, Ukraine could establish tailored financial instruments, such as "**Reconstruction Bonds**", to channel diaspora investments into infrastructure and recovery projects.

**Technology and digital platforms** are indispensable tools for engaging dispersed diaspora communities. Ireland's Global Irish Hub and Italy's digital services for AIRE registrants show how online platforms can streamline access to resources and foster connectivity. Ukraine could create a unified digital platform integrating virtual volunteering, e-governance services, crowdfunding for reconstruction and diaspora networking tools. Building on the success of **Diia**, Ukraine's existing digital identity platform, this initiative could offer a "digital Ukrainian citizenship" programme, granting privileges such as business registration, property ownership and participation in select national programmes.

**Cultural preservation** initiatives are critical for maintaining a cohesive diaspora identity and ensuring intergenerational connections. Ukraine could establish cultural centres worldwide, host diaspora-led festivals and exhibitions, and develop digital initiatives for virtual cultural events and educational programmes. The planned **Unity Hubs** in key countries such as Germany, Poland and the Czech Republic could serve as multipurpose centres, offering cultural engagement alongside practical services for the diaspora.

For Ukraine, these lessons learned highlight the importance of adopting a comprehensive and inclusive approach to diaspora engagement. The Ukrainian diaspora, with its size, diversity and strong connection to the homeland, represents a significant asset in rebuilding the country post-conflict. Building a dedicated institutional framework, incentivising economic engagement, leveraging digital innovation, and investing in cultural preservation will potentially create a sustainable model for diaspora engagement. More importantly, such a strategy will position the Ukrainian diaspora as an integral partner in shaping the nation's future.

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## 7. Diasporas in peacebuilding and post-war recovery

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### 7.1 Introduction: Diasporas, conflict and peace

The ongoing conflicts and peacebuilding initiatives are increasingly shaped by the mobility and long-distance participation of diaspora communities in homeland affairs (Sinatti, 2010; Toivanen & Baser, 2020). Diasporas are neither homogenous nor monolithic in their interests, capacities or objectives. The roles they play – whether as mediators in peace-building, perpetrators of conflict or a mix of both – are influenced by diverse factors such as political affiliations, generational differences and their socio-political environment (Smith, 2007; Toivanen & Baser, 2020). Their complex, contradictory and diffuse impacts on peace and security should be integrated into policy and programme designs for stability and post-conflict reconstruction (Brinkerhoff, 2011).

Usually, different stages of a conflict correspond to different ways in which diasporas can engage with their home country. During **ongoing conflicts**, diasporas may engage in activities such as advocacy, lobbying, petitions, sending financial support to armed groups, joining insurgent groups as fighters or participating in extra-territorial voting. In **peace processes**, diasporas may either support or spoil negotiations, act as third-party facilitators, or help host countries engage in peacebuilding efforts. In **post-conflict reconstruction**, diasporas contribute through investments, entrepreneurship, return migration, development projects and support for foreign donors. Lastly, in the context of **transitional justice**, diasporas may lobby for the recognition of genocide or contribute to truth commissions, healing, reconciliation and justice-seeking efforts (Toivanen & Baser, 2020).

Although diaspora individuals and organisations are often engaged in development and peacebuilding independently of formal initiatives, their contributions are frequently overlooked or undervalued. These efforts are typically framed as external resources or tools for homeland development, rather than as integral civic contributions shaped by their roles as citizens in host countries. Genuine partnerships with diasporas in development cooperation and peacebuilding remain limited, particularly in areas such as collaboration with civil society organisations (CSOs) or NGOs and the inclusion of diaspora perspectives in recruitment and consultation processes. This lack of integration into mainstream frameworks reduces the potential impact of diaspora engagement and underscores the need for a more inclusive approach (Sinatti & Horst, 2010).

Though examples of diaspora engagement in peacebuilding in the context of inter-state conflicts are scarce, many documented cases from intra-state conflicts may offer interesting lessons for Ukraine. Diasporas have played significant roles in facilitating dialogue, promoting reconciliation and transitional justice, and supporting recovery efforts (Baser & Toivanen, 2018; Cavallaro, 2022). These lessons and best practices, while context-specific, provide insights that may be relevant to Ukraine as it develops its own diaspora engagement strategy. This section explores these practices and examines their applicability in the Ukrainian context.

## 7.2 Case studies and examples of Diasporas in peacebuilding and post-war recovery

### 7.2.1 Bosnia and Herzegovina: diaspora roles in reconstruction and reconciliation



The Bosnian diaspora has played a significant role in promoting peacebuilding and post-war recovery in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), though its efforts have encountered both successes and challenges. The *Bosnian World Diaspora Network* (BiH Network) exemplifies organised diaspora initiatives, focusing on homeland development projects such as the reconstruction of religious buildings, symbolising cultural revival and reconciliation. However, the network's broader impact has been mixed. While its efforts to attract foreign investment and advocate for policy reforms have been significant, many initiatives have struggled to overcome inefficiencies within homeland governance structures, limiting their overall effectiveness (Kent, 2006).

Diaspora engagement in transitional justice has also been a key feature of peacebuilding in BiH. Projects such as *Što Te Nema?*, an art installation by Bosnian-American artist Aida Šehović, serve as platforms for collective mourning and cultural expression. This initiative, which commemorates victims of the Srebrenica genocide, unites diaspora communities around shared experiences of loss while steering away from divisive ethnic narratives. Such contributions promote healing and reconciliation, both within the diaspora and in BiH itself, by providing inclusive spaces for remembrance and dialogue (Cavallaro, 2022).

Despite these efforts, local perceptions of the diaspora's role in BiH remain mixed. Local elites often view diaspora-led initiatives as externally driven interventions that undermine local authority and raise ethnic divisions. This scepticism has hindered collaboration between diaspora actors and local institutions, highlighting the need for greater trust-building and mutual understanding to enhance the diaspora's contributions to peacebuilding (Hasić, 2018).

For Ukraine, the Bosnian case underlines the importance of aligning diaspora efforts with local priorities while addressing governance challenges and promoting mutual collaboration. Effective diaspora engagement requires careful navigation of local sensitivities and the promotion of inclusive, community-focused initiatives that can unite diverse groups in post-conflict recovery.

### 7.2.2 Somalia: diaspora-led peacebuilding through NGO partnerships



The reconstruction of Hargeisa, the capital of Somaliland, is a powerful example of how a diaspora community can drive post-conflict recovery. Since the end of Somalia's civil war in 1991, Somali expatriates have played a central role in rebuilding the city's infrastructure, strengthening governance, and fostering economic resilience. Their sustained engagement has transformed Hargeisa from a war-torn city into a hub of stability and growth. One of the most visible impacts of the diaspora has been in infrastructure development. Exiled Somalis channelled significant financial resources into rebuilding essential services, such as roads, schools and healthcare facilities. A key example is the reconstruction of Hargeisa General Hospital, which became a cornerstone of the city's healthcare system. These projects were often coordinated through grassroots networks, ensuring that funds reached high-priority areas and directly benefited local communities (Galipo, 2011; London School of Economics and Political, n.d.).

The Somali diaspora in Finland has played a pivotal role in initiating and implementing peacebuilding projects in Somalia. One notable example is the peacebuilding project led by Finn Church Aid (FCA). The project began in 2008 after Somali diaspora members in Finland approached FCA, due to the dire humanitarian situation in Somalia. This proactive diaspora outreach led to collaboration between FCA and Somali professionals, leveraging their cultural knowledge and expertise to support peace processes in their homeland. Key features of the project include the recruitment of Finnish-Somali staff to work with traditional and religious leaders in Somalia. These professionals, while not formally trained in peacemaking, utilised their understanding of Somali customary law and local dynamics to develop effective peacebuilding strategies. Despite its success in engaging local institutions and addressing conflict drivers, the project faced criticism and scepticism from some diaspora members in Finland, primarily due to concerns over the involvement of diaspora professionals in the project. Despite their qualifications and expertise, many of these professionals lacked formal training in peacebuilding techniques, which led to doubts about their ability to effectively engage in the sensitive work of peacebuilding in Somalia (Sinatti & Horst, 2010).

In addition to individual initiatives like the FCA project, non-governmental organised networks such as the UK-based *Global Somali Diaspora* (GSD) and the Somalia-based *Heritage Institute for Policy Studies* (HIPS) have significantly contributed to peacebuilding efforts. GSD fosters transnational connections among Somali communities, mobilising financial, intellectual, and social capital to support development and stability. Additionally, GSD coordinates humanitarian aid efforts, addressing urgent needs such as food security and healthcare, which create the stability necessary for peace initiatives. HIPS has been instrumental in promoting peace, accountability and good governance in Somalia through evidence-based research and policy dialogues. Its work informs national and international efforts in peacebuilding and state-building (Heritage Institute for Policy Studies, n.d.; Omar, 2020).

The Somali case highlights the importance of diaspora-led infrastructure projects and civic engagement in post-conflict recovery. Moreover, the Somali experience demonstrates the transformative potential of diaspora-led peacebuilding when underpinned by organised networks and strategic partnerships. Ukraine could draw valuable lessons from Somalia's example by encouraging its diaspora to establish and participate in transnational networks that channel remittances, humanitarian aid and investments into impactful projects. Initiatives akin to those of HIPS, which use evidence-based research and policy dialogues to inform governance and peacebuilding efforts, could help Ukraine address systemic challenges. Despite the challenges, the Somali case shows how diaspora contributions – from grassroots initiatives to strategic advocacy – can collectively support a comprehensive approach to post-conflict recovery and long-term peacebuilding.

### 7.2.3 South Africa: TransAfrica and diaspora advocacy against apartheid



The South African diaspora in the United States played a significant role in mobilising international support against apartheid. Organisations such as *TransAfrica* organised advocacy campaigns to raise awareness of apartheid's injustices and influence U.S. foreign policy. *TransAfrica* was instrumental in launching the *Free South Africa Movement* in 1984, which attracted global attention to the injustices of apartheid. Through peaceful protests, strategic lobbying for sanctions, and widespread advocacy, the movement successfully mobilised over 5,000 arrests, demonstrating its capacity to apply sustained pressure on the apartheid regime. These efforts contributed to the imposition of economic sanctions and increased political pressure, ultimately playing a crucial role in Nelson Mandela's release and the dismantling of apartheid (Zulu, 2020).

The case illustrates the power of diaspora advocacy in shaping international policy and garnering global support for transformative change. For Ukraine, the South African experience highlights the potential of

diaspora communities to act as advocates for peace and justice, leveraging their presence in host countries to influence international decision-making.

### 7.2.4 Afghanistan: mobilising diaspora expertise for reconstruction



The former *Afghanistan Expatriate Programme* (AEP) serves as an exemplary model of leveraging diaspora expertise for post-conflict recovery. Initiated by the Interim Administrative Reform Civil Service Commission (IARCSC), the AEP recruited Afghan expatriates to address skill shortages in public institutions. These professionals were embedded as advisors in Afghan government ministries, helping to build institutional capacity and support development programmes. Key aspects of the programme included a transparent recruitment process, competitive compensation and clearly defined roles based on ministry needs. The programme was supported by a multi-layered governance structure, including a ministerial steering committee and an executive committee to ensure oversight. Expatriates participated in short-term assignments, enabling knowledge transfer while minimising long-term dependence on external expertise (World Bank, 2006).

For Ukraine, the *Afghanistan Expatriate Programme* (AEP) represents an interesting example of how diaspora expertise can be harnessed to address skill gaps and support post-conflict recovery. Establishing a similar programme could allow Ukraine to leverage the expertise of its highly skilled diaspora, embedding professionals in key government institutions to build capacity, enhance governance and implement development initiatives. Such a programme could facilitate the transfer of knowledge and promote stronger ties between the Ukrainian diaspora and the homeland, ultimately contributing to sustainable reconstruction and development.

### 7.2.5 Sri Lankan Tamils: diaspora contributions to housing and business reconstruction



In the aftermath of Sri Lanka's civil war, which ended with the defeat of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in 2009, the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora emerged as a key player in the country's reconstruction efforts. Many communities in the north and east of the country had been devastated by years of conflict, leaving thousands displaced and without stable livelihoods. Against this backdrop, diaspora networks mobilised resources to rebuild homes and revive local economies.

One of the most direct ways in which the diaspora contributed was through housing reconstruction. Many Tamil families living abroad provided financial support to relatives and communities, ensuring that homes destroyed during the war could be rebuilt. This assistance was often channelled through informal family networks and community organisations, allowing funds to reach those in need efficiently (Van Hear & Cohen, 2015).

Beyond housing, the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora also contributed to revitalising local businesses, particularly in agriculture and small-scale trade. Many diaspora members invested in small enterprises such as shops, farms and cooperative ventures, creating employment opportunities and injecting much-needed capital into war-affected regions. For example, diaspora-funded agricultural cooperatives helped restore livelihoods in rural areas, laying the foundation for long-term economic recovery (ibidem).

For Ukraine, there are valuable lessons to be drawn from this experience. **Encouraging its own diaspora to participate in housing reconstruction and small business development** could be particularly impactful in heavily damaged regions. **Establishing diaspora-led cooperatives or investment funds** could provide a



structured way for Ukrainians abroad to contribute to rebuilding local economies, offering sustainable livelihoods and fostering resilience in post-war recovery efforts.

### 7.2.6 Liberia: diaspora engagement in governance and community rebuilding



Liberia's experience following its prolonged civil wars offers another compelling example of how a diaspora can actively participate in post-conflict reconstruction, particularly in the contexts of governance and community development. Following years of instability, many Liberians who had fled the country during the conflict returned to take up roles in government, civil society and the private sector, bringing with them valuable expertise that helped strengthen institutional capacity and service delivery (Van Hear & Cohen, 2015)

In addition to governance, diaspora members also spearheaded community-driven reconstruction efforts. Many contributed financially to the rebuilding of essential public infrastructure, such as schools, health clinics and community centres. These initiatives not only addressed immediate service gaps but also played a significant role in fostering social cohesion in post-conflict Liberia (ibidem). One of the most significant ways the diaspora contributed was through remittances. These financial transfers were a lifeline for many families, sustaining livelihoods and fostering local economic activity. Between 2013 and 2015, remittance flows to Liberia ranged from \$414 million to \$645 million, demonstrating the scale of diaspora financial support. Even in 2021, despite the global economic slowdown caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, remittances still totalled \$338.07 million. This steady flow of funds helped households meet basic needs while also supporting small businesses and local development initiatives (Dipeolu, 2023).

For Ukraine, Liberia's example highlights the potential of a well-structured Diaspora Return Programme. Such an initiative could attract skilled professionals from the Ukrainian diaspora to contribute to rebuilding government institutions and strengthening civil society. Investing in these efforts could ensure that Ukraine's post-war reconstruction is not only focused on physical rebuilding but also on strengthening institutions for long-term resilience and stability.

## 7.3 Conclusions and lessons learned

Diasporas can play a transformative role in post-conflict settings, not only by mobilising financial resources but also by actively contributing to governance, economic reconstruction and social cohesion. However, the lessons learned from these cases also highlight challenges that need to be addressed to ensure the effective integration of diaspora efforts into broader peacebuilding strategies.

One important lesson is the need to **establish institutional mechanisms for ongoing dialogue with diaspora groups**. As seen in the examples of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Somalia, effective diaspora engagement requires clear channels for communication between diaspora organisations and local institutions. Transparency and clear organisational structures within diaspora groups are essential for fostering effective collaboration with diasporas in peacebuilding initiatives (Sinatti, 2010). In Ukraine's case, this could involve creating a dedicated agency or platform to facilitate ongoing dialogue, ensuring that diaspora contributions align with national priorities. This mechanism would help to bridge any gaps between the needs of the homeland and the resources available through the diaspora, fostering trust and cooperation between these groups. The Liberian case further underscores the value of sustained engagement through government participation, as members of the diaspora took on influential roles in shaping policy and institutional reform. For Ukraine,

ensuring pathways for skilled diaspora professionals to integrate into governance structures could enhance policy coherence and long-term state-building efforts.

**Targeted programmes that direct diaspora contributions toward critical sectors** – such as infrastructure, governance and economic development – are also essential. In Somaliland, Somali expatriates played a key role in rebuilding Hargeisa, financing roads, hospitals and businesses that revitalised the local economy. Similarly, in Sri Lanka, diaspora-led reconstruction efforts played a crucial role in rebuilding war-affected areas, particularly in the Northern and Eastern provinces, demonstrating the importance of long-term investments in local economies. These cases show that diaspora engagement is most effective when it is strategically channelled into structured programmes that leverage their financial and human capital. For Ukraine, this could mean **establishing dedicated investment funds**, incentivising return migration for skilled professionals and promoting diaspora-led development projects in key sectors.

At the same time, it is important to **recognise and mitigate the risks associated with competing diaspora agendas or the politicisation of engagement**. The experiences of Somalia and Bosnia and Herzegovina highlight how internal divisions – whether along political, ethnic or generational lines – can hinder cohesive diaspora contributions to peacebuilding. In Sri Lanka, while the Tamil diaspora played a significant role in advocacy and financial support, competing political narratives sometimes complicated post-war reconciliation efforts. Similarly, Liberia’s experience highlights the need for balancing diaspora engagement to avoid exacerbating political divisions, as different factions within the diaspora supported competing political actors. Ensuring neutrality and fostering an inclusive approach can help Ukraine prevent similar fragmentation. To avoid such pitfalls, Ukraine can **promote inclusive and transparent engagement with its diaspora, ensuring that diverse voices are represented and that efforts remain focused on national recovery rather than factional interests**.

The experience of the *Afghanistan Expatriate Programme* (AEP) is one example of **harnessing diaspora expertise in post-conflict recovery**. Similarly, Lithuania’s ‘*Create Lithuania*’ programme provides a valuable model of how governments can actively integrate their diaspora expertise into state institutions. This initiative has facilitated the return of highly skilled professionals to contribute to governance and policy development. Inspired by this model, Ukraine launched ‘**Create Ukraine**’, demonstrating its commitment to reintegrating professionals and leveraging diaspora talent for national development. Additionally, Germany’s GIZ has also engaged diaspora experts in ministries and development projects, offering another approach Ukraine could further explore. Building on these existing efforts, **Ukraine could expand and institutionalise such programmes by establishing clear recruitment processes, offering competitive compensation and ensuring oversight and transparency**.

Lastly, the South African experience demonstrates the significant power of **diaspora advocacy for global support**. The advocacy efforts of South African diaspora groups were instrumental in influencing international policy and influencing global support against apartheid. Ukraine’s diaspora could similarly play a key role in raising awareness, lobbying for international sanctions, and mobilising global resources for Ukraine’s recovery. By leveraging the political influence of its diaspora in key host countries, Ukraine can strengthen its efforts to secure international aid and support for peacebuilding and reconstruction.

By integrating these lessons learned into its post-conflict recovery strategy, Ukraine can harness the full potential of its diaspora as a critical partner in rebuilding the nation. Establishing robust institutional mechanisms, promoting targeted programmes, managing internal divisions, and encouraging transnational collaboration will be key to ensuring that the diaspora’s contributions are aligned with the national goals of peace, reconciliation and sustainable development.



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## 8. Conclusions and recommendations

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Diasporas have the potential to contribute to national development, as well as to be transformative agents in post-conflict recovery and peacebuilding. Through their economic contributions, advocacy efforts and access to global networks, diaspora communities can serve as powerful resources to support a country's rebuilding efforts, especially in the aftermath of conflict. For Ukraine, leveraging its diaspora's capacity for financial investment, knowledge transfer and cultural preservation is essential. The case studies and global best practices explored in this report provide useful lessons on how diasporas can contribute meaningfully to national development and recovery. Ukraine can build on these insights to create an inclusive, transparent and well-coordinated framework for diaspora engagement that aligns with the country's strategic goals and priorities for development and recovery.

**Albania.** Albania's experience offers clear lessons in how institutional frameworks can promote effective diaspora engagement. Albania has systematically developed a comprehensive diaspora strategy, incorporating the diaspora into its development plans through the National Diaspora Strategy (2021-2025). Key initiatives such as the *Connect Albania* platform, which encourages diaspora investments, and the *Albanian Diaspora Development Fund* have proven successful in attracting financial support and encouraging return migration from the diaspora (Arifagić & Mitrović, 2022). Ukraine can learn from Albania's institutional approach by **establishing a dedicated diaspora coordination body under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs** to provide a central point of contact for diaspora organisations and ensure that their contributions are integrated into national development plans. Additionally, Albania's ability to manage diaspora relations through transparent governance and the creation of cultural centres for diaspora communities abroad can offer a model for Ukraine to strengthen its economic and cultural ties with its diaspora.

**Serbia.** Serbia's experience demonstrates the importance of creating institutional support for diaspora engagement, particularly through targeted programmes such as the *Returning Point Platform*, which focuses on return migration and reintegration of skilled professionals. These initiatives, combined with partnerships between the diaspora and local businesses, have been successful in addressing skill shortages and promoting investment in key sectors. However, Serbia has also faced challenges in fostering trust between diaspora organisations and local institutions, which has hindered some initiatives (EUDiF, 2022b). For Ukraine, the Serbian example highlights the need for **a stable and consistent diaspora engagement infrastructure** that is independent of political transitions and capable of building trust and promoting collaboration between diaspora groups and local authorities. Additionally, Ukraine could adapt Serbia's approach by developing return migration programmes, providing financial incentives, job placement services and reintegration support for Ukrainian diaspora members looking to return and contribute to the country's reconstruction.

**Lithuania.** Lithuania's approach to diaspora engagement, especially through its *Global Lithuania* strategy, provides a comprehensive framework for leveraging diaspora contributions in national recovery. Programmes such as Diaspora-Friendly Employer and Work in Lithuania have been successful in attracting

skilled professionals back to the country, supporting sectors like healthcare, infrastructure and education. These programmes focus on offering job opportunities, providing financial incentives and ensuring smooth reintegration for diaspora members (Venckūnas, 2024). For Ukraine, Lithuania's experience highlights the importance of **developing targeted engagement with skilled professionals from the diaspora**, creating job opportunities in key sectors, and offering practical support for reintegration. Additionally, the promotion of cultural identity through diaspora schools, language programmes, and cultural events has helped Lithuania maintain strong ties with its diaspora. Ukraine can replicate these efforts by establishing cultural centres and language programmes abroad, particularly in countries with large Ukrainian populations, to strengthen the cultural connection between the diaspora and the homeland.

**Global best practices.** Global best practices in diaspora engagement offer valuable lessons for Ukraine's strategy. **Institutional frameworks** are crucial for effective diaspora engagement. India's Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs, now part of the Ministry of External Affairs, established initiatives like the *Pravasi Bharatiya Divas* and *Overseas Citizenship of India* (OCI) to formalise connections and enhance diaspora representation. Similarly, Italy's General Council of Italians Abroad (CGIE) and Lebanon's World Lebanese Cultural Union (WLCU) have institutionalised diaspora relations through government bodies and representative organisations (Ragab & Diker, 2021). For Ukraine, **adopting a centralised diaspora coordination platform** could streamline communication, align efforts with national priorities, and ensure effective resource mobilisation. **Economic engagement** plays a key role in leveraging diaspora contributions to national development. Lebanon's *Targeting Lebanese Expatriates* (TLE) programme and India's *Overseas Indian Facilitation Centre* (OIFC) facilitate diaspora investments, while Ireland's *Global Irish Network* (GIN) connects influential members to promote trade and innovation (Ragab & Diker, 2021). Ukraine could benefit from creating similar high-level networks, investment forums and offering financial incentives like diaspora bonds or tax breaks for returning investors to boost long-term economic partnerships. Moreover, programmes like the Philippines' *Balikbayan* initiatives, which incentivise return migration, could inspire similar efforts for skilled Ukrainian professionals (Nicolas & Rodriguez, 2019). **Technology and digital platforms** are essential for modern diaspora engagement. Ireland's *Global Irish Hub* and Estonia's *e-Residency* programme, which enables non-residents to establish businesses remotely, show how digital tools can connect diaspora members with their homeland (Kotka et al., 2015; Ragab & Diker, 2021). In this context, Ukraine could benefit from developing a unified digital platform that offers centralised resources, facilitates crowdfunding for reconstruction and supports virtual volunteering. Moreover, a "digital Ukrainian citizenship" programme could be introduced to enable diaspora members to manage businesses and access public services remotely, building on the foundations of Ukraine's existing *Diia* platform. Lastly, **cultural preservation and identity** are key to strengthening diaspora ties. Programmes like *Ireland XO*, which connects Irish diaspora members through reverse genealogy, and Lebanon's *Lebanese Diaspora Energy* (LDE) conferences, promote cultural identity and pride (Ragab & Diker, 2021). For Ukraine, establishing cultural centres and virtual initiatives to preserve the Ukrainian language, history and traditions could reinforce connections with the diaspora and counter-narratives of cultural erasure. Partnering with diaspora organisations to host cultural events and educational programmes would further enhance intergenerational engagement. The planned Unity Hubs in key countries such as Germany, Poland and the Czech Republic could serve as multipurpose centres, offering cultural engagement alongside practical services for the diaspora.

**Diasporas in peacebuilding and post-war recovery.** The case studies of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Somalia, South Africa, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka and Liberia show how diaspora communities can play a significant role in peacebuilding, post-conflict reconstruction and transitional justice. In **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, diaspora-led initiatives such as the Bosnian World Diaspora Network have supported efforts in reconstruction and

reconciliation. However, challenges persist regarding local governance structures and the perception of diaspora involvement, as some local elites view these efforts as externally driven and divisive (Hasić, 2018). Similarly, the **Somali** diaspora in Finland has been instrumental in peacebuilding by collaborating with organisations like Finn Church Aid (FCA) to address conflict drivers and promote stability, though there was some initial scepticism among diaspora members (Sinatti & Horst, 2010). In **South Africa**, the diaspora mobilised international support to end apartheid, with groups like TransAfrica leading advocacy campaigns that pressured foreign governments into imposing sanctions and supporting global anti-apartheid movements (Zulu, 2020). **Afghanistan's** Expatriate Programme (AEP), where Afghan expatriates were embedded in government ministries to help address skill shortages and build institutional capacity, shows how diaspora expertise can be leveraged for state-building (World Bank, 2006). Moreover, in Sri Lanka and Liberia, diaspora communities have contributed significantly by funding housing reconstruction, revitalising local businesses and engaging in governance reforms to foster community rebuilding. For Ukraine, these examples highlight several important lessons. Targeted programmes that direct diaspora contributions toward critical sectors – such as infrastructure, governance and economic development – are also essential. In Somaliland, Somali expatriates played a key role in rebuilding Hargeisa, financing roads, hospitals and businesses that revitalised the local economy. Similarly, in Sri Lanka, diaspora-led reconstruction efforts played a crucial role in rebuilding war-affected areas, particularly in the Northern and Eastern provinces, demonstrating the importance of long-term investments in local economies. Furthermore, Liberia's experience in community rebuilding through remittances and local development projects offers additional insights into leveraging diaspora resources for sustained recovery. These cases show that diaspora engagement is most effective when it is strategically channelled into structured programmes that leverage both financial and human capital. For Ukraine, this could mean establishing dedicated investment funds, incentivising return migration for skilled professionals, and promoting diaspora-led development projects in key sectors. Diasporas can significantly contribute to peacebuilding by facilitating dialogue, promoting justice and reconciliation, and advocating for accountability during post-conflict recovery. Additionally, they can play a critical role in transitional justice processes by lobbying for international recognition of human rights violations and contributing to the reconstruction of vital infrastructure (Baser & Toivanen, 2018; Sinatti, 2010). Engaging the Ukrainian diaspora in similar ways – through **formalised partnerships**, **targeted advocacy**, and **knowledge transfer** – could help ensure that Ukraine's post-conflict recovery strategy is both comprehensive and inclusive.

Based on the case studies and different examples described in this report, several recommendations can be made regarding institutional frameworks, economic and cultural engagement, transparency and accountability and technology and communication.

## 8.1 Recommendations regarding institutions and coordination

- **Create a centralised diaspora coordination mechanism:** Ukraine already has some institutions which are already working on diaspora engagement, such as the *Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, the *National Commission for Matters Concerning Ukrainians Worldwide*, and the *Department for Ukrainians Worldwide and Humanitarian Cooperation* (EUDiF, 2023a). In light of the establishment of the new Ministry of Unity, it is recommended that Ukraine create a dedicated diaspora coordination body. This body would centralise all diaspora-related activities, ensuring that efforts are aligned with the country's strategic goals, and facilitate communication between diaspora groups, local governments and national ministries while tracking diaspora contributions. Moreover, the coordination mechanism should include a dedicated *financial component*, with earmarked state budget funds for diaspora engagement programmes. For example,

countries like Italy and Ireland have successfully allocated specific budget lines or utilised diaspora bonds to fund such initiatives, ensuring sustainable resource mobilisation. A registry of diaspora organisations and professionals could be integrated into this mechanism to streamline engagement and ensure effective collaboration. Ongoing efforts, such as those led by ICMPD and the European Commission Joint Research Centre (JRC) together with the Knowledge Centre on Migration and Demography (KCMD), have begun mapping and profiling Ukrainian diaspora communities, which could inform the creation of such a registry. This centralised body would enhance transparency, resource management, and cooperation, further strengthening trust between Ukraine's government and its diaspora.

- **Create consultative bodies for diaspora engagement:** Ukraine could build on the existing structures and consultative bodies such as the already established position of *Ambassador at large for Global Ukrainian Community* and establish a formal platform akin to Italy's CGIE. This consultative body would provide diaspora members with a direct voice in shaping policies related to development, reconstruction and peacebuilding. To enhance effectiveness, this platform should be linked to a dedicated financial mechanism, with earmarked state budget funding to support diaspora-led initiatives. For instance, Italy and Ireland have successfully used designated funds and diaspora bonds to finance such engagement programmes. Such integration would ensure that the diaspora's contributions are systematically incorporated into national decision-making processes, fostering trust and cooperation between diaspora groups and local authorities. Given the establishment of the new Ministry of Unity, prioritising the expansion of these consultative structures is essential to close existing institutional gaps and ensure a cohesive approach to diaspora engagement.
- **Establish local-level diaspora bodies:** Given Ukraine's decentralised governance structure, it is important to create local-level diaspora bodies. These bodies would facilitate grassroots-level engagement, ensuring that diaspora communities can directly contribute to local recovery efforts and have a say in regional governance reforms. These local bodies would also help to ensure that diaspora contributions are aligned with the specific needs and priorities of individual regions, supporting more tailored, context-sensitive engagement and ensuring effective resource distribution at the local level.
- **Formalise partnerships with diaspora organisations:** Ukraine already collaborates with key diaspora organisations such as the *Ukrainian World Congress (UWC)* and the *Global Ukrainians Forum (EUDiF, 2023a)*. It is important to formalise these partnerships through instruments such as Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) to clearly define roles and responsibilities. Such formalised partnerships would create a framework for collaboration, resource-sharing, and mutual accountability, ensuring more structured engagement with diaspora organisations.

## 8.2 Recommendations regarding economic engagement

- **Facilitate diaspora investment:** Ukraine should build on existing initiatives like the *Global Ukraine Business Hub (EUDiF, 2023a)* to design a targeted strategy to attract diaspora investment in key sectors such as infrastructure, healthcare and technology. This could include offering tax incentives, diaspora bonds and financial guarantees for diaspora investments. A transparent framework for diaspora investments should be established to ensure resources are allocated efficiently and address gaps in the economy.

- **Leverage diaspora expertise:** The *Global Ukrainians Forum* and *Ukrainian Hub 2022* already serve as platforms for diaspora professionals and entrepreneurs (EUDiF, 2023a). Ukraine could further capitalise on these networks by establishing a Diaspora Expert Programme, linking skilled professionals to key national projects in urban reconstruction, education reform and governance. This programme could offer advisory roles or short-term assignments for diaspora professionals, allowing them to contribute remotely or through in-country visits.
- **Support return migration:** Ukraine should implement a return migration programme similar to Lithuania's "Gal j Lietuvą?" initiative, offering financial incentives, job placement assistance and reintegration support to encourage diaspora members to return to Ukraine. This programme should target skilled professionals and entrepreneurs, providing them with the resources and support they need to reintegrate into Ukraine's economy and society.

### 8.3 Recommendations regarding cultural, civic and social engagement

- **Promote cultural preservation:** Ukraine can build upon existing initiatives like *Step to Ukraine* and *Global Ukraine Business Hub* (EUDiF, 2023a) by investing in diaspora schools, cultural centres and language programmes abroad. These initiatives will help preserve Ukrainian heritage, promote language learning and maintain strong cultural ties with younger generations of the diaspora. Virtual platforms could also be developed to reach diaspora members in regions without physical cultural centres.
- **Enhance civic engagement:** Ukraine should encourage diaspora participation in national governance by providing expanded voting rights and facilitating online voting systems. Building on Lithuania's example, Ukraine could establish a dedicated constituency for diaspora members, ensuring that their interests are represented in the Ukrainian parliament. Additionally, Ukraine should celebrate diaspora contributions through national awards and events, reinforcing the value of their involvement in the country's recovery.

### 8.4 Recommendations regarding transparency and accountability

- **Establish transparent mechanisms for monitoring diaspora contributions:** Ukraine should implement robust mechanisms to monitor and report on diaspora contributions to ensure effective and efficient resource allocation. These mechanisms could include independent audits, public reports on the use of diaspora funds, and a transparent tracking system for diaspora donations and investments. This would help build trust among diaspora communities, ensuring that their contributions are being used appropriately and aligned with national recovery goals.
- **Promote inclusivity and manage political divisions:** Ukraine should be mindful of the internal divisions within its diaspora, particularly those related to politics, ethnicity or generational differences. To ensure that diaspora contributions are cohesive and aligned with national priorities, Ukraine must promote dialogue both within the diaspora and between the diaspora and local institutions. Inclusivity should be a central tenet of diaspora engagement strategies to avoid fragmentation and politicisation that could undermine post-conflict recovery efforts.

## 8.5 Recommendations regarding technology and communication

- **Develop a unified digital platform:** Ukraine should create a comprehensive digital platform that offers resources for diaspora engagement, including virtual volunteering opportunities, crowdfunding for reconstruction and access to investment platforms. This digital platform could provide a one-stop shop for diaspora members, enabling them to contribute remotely to Ukraine's recovery while maintaining direct connections with key projects. A "digital Ukrainian citizenship" programme could provide diaspora members with business registration opportunities and other privileges, incentivising them to participate in Ukraine's economic and social recovery.
- **Utilise digital tools for advocacy and communication:** Building on existing tools like the *Promote Ukraine Hub* (EUDiF, 2023a), Ukraine should expand its digital presence through social media and dedicated online platforms to engage its diaspora in advocacy efforts. These tools could be used to raise awareness of Ukraine's recovery needs, promote international support and mobilise resources. A unified digital platform could also serve as a central point of contact for government-led diaspora initiatives.



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