



IOM's Labour Migration and Human Development Programme

IOM's Diaspora Engagement

## IOM'S DIASPORA ENGAGEMENT

IOM defines diasporas broadly as individuals and members of networks, associations and communities, who have left their country of origin, but maintain links with their homelands. This concept covers migrant workers based abroad temporarily, more settled expatriate communities, expatriates with nationality of the host country, dual nationals, and second/third generation descendants of migrants. Diaspora members can play significant roles in the development of their country of origin, including through financial, human and social resources as well as political influence, and they have been doing so long before the international community took notice. Skills accumulated by diaspora members are invaluable in terms of the development of a variety of sectors such as health, education and technology. This has been increasingly recognized by policy makers and practitioners in countries of origin and diaspora hosting countries. To build and strengthen partnerships between diaspora members and their countries of origin, governments have to acquire knowledge about their countries' diaspora, not only how many and where, but what they have to offer in skills and experience. It is also important to establish mutual trust to fully engage diaspora members as true partners in the development of their countries of origin. Diaspora engagement programmes devote attention to strengthening the capacity of both government institutions and diaspora communities to work with one another and with other stakeholders. Once these partnerships are established different methods can be used to mobilise diaspora in supporting development.

As the lead international migration agency, IOM can play a significant role in facilitating engagement between diasporas and their countries of origin. IOM implements a wide-range of diaspora engagement programmes, many of which are funded through the IOM Development Fund (IDF) at the request of Member States that have large diaspora communities abroad. From diaspora surveys to skills transfer programmes, through facilitating outreach and institutional capacity building, IOM contributes to improving the productive links between diasporas and their home country. Trust-building and constructive dialogue between diaspora communities and their countries of origin bring opportunities through skills transfer and financial investment, promoting development of their home country.

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International Organization for Migration (IOM)



### Diaspora Surveys

Often one of the main activities that IOM carries out is a diaspora mapping survey. These surveys look at the size, composition, attitudes, educational attainments, professional interests and needs of diaspora communities in one or several main destination countries. Survey and focus group discussion results are captured in a database that remains open for additional data if further studies are conducted. The results help governments strengthen their linkages with the diaspora, build trust, devise outreach strategies according to the specific needs, interests and capabilities of diaspora communities. At the same time the mapping can help develop skills and knowledge transfer programmes.

### Policy and Institutional Capacity Building

In recent years, many governments have developed specific policies to better engage with their diaspora abroad and mobilize diaspora contributions to the development process back home. IOM can facilitate this process by providing expert input and comparative examples, facilitate networking and the exchange of experience with other governments. The aim is to build the capacity of governmental institutions whose specific functions are to engage with diaspora. Strengthening the links between diaspora and their home country is an area of growing importance to many governments as is demonstrated by the fact that many governments worldwide have established specific ministries or agencies dealing exclusively with diaspora matters.

### Outreach

As part of this capacity building and facilitation role, IOM supports governments in their outreach to diaspora associations, groups and individual members through the establishment of websites and sensitization sessions. This is done in close collaboration with diaspora associations and embassies of the countries of origin in destination countries. Embassies are mandated to conduct outreach to diaspora communities and individual members, but often lack the capacity to do so effectively. Similarly, diaspora associations can play a pivotal role in unifying and representing the various diaspora communities in a given country, but struggle because they lack capacity. IOM can help address this capacity gap, thereby

creating valuable linkages between governmental and non-governmental actors. Outreach activities serve the purpose of building trust among diaspora groups, and creating open and transparent communication channels that foster dialogue between governments and diaspora communities. Outreach is also an essential element in the establishment of skills transfer programmes.

### Skills and Knowledge Transfer Programmes

Since the 1970s, IOM has been implementing return programmes for qualified nationals that serve to transfer skills and knowledge acquired abroad back to the country of origin. Since 2000, these programmes have diversified in their scope and methods of implementation with more emphasis placed on temporary and virtual (rather than permanent) returns. Since their inception in 2001, IOM's Migration for Development in Africa (MIDA) and Temporary Return of Qualified Nationals (TRQN) programmes have evolved into multifaceted models that enable diaspora members to invest their skills and resources into their home countries. These programmes have largely targeted highly qualified diaspora members, often in the sectors of health, education or other specific technical professions. Through these programmes IOM has developed a full range of services, including outreach, selection, matching, placement, compensation, reintegration, monitoring and evaluation activities in close cooperation with countries of origin and destination.

For further information, please contact:

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