

**BFPG**

British Foreign Policy Group

# Harnessing our Global Footprint

Transforming the UK Government's  
Engagement with the UK Diaspora

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# Report Snapshot

## Understanding the Diaspora

- The UK diaspora is younger and more diverse than is often depicted in the popular imagination, and many of its members are driven to emigrate by work opportunities, family reunion and the search for new spaces of belonging.
- The priorities and concerns of the diaspora vary significantly between host nations, largely based on levels of cultural similarity, as well as the host country's political, economic and social climate.
- The significant economic and political upheaval of recent years has injected an unusual degree of vulnerability into the diaspora experience. In particular, Brexit has borne considerable impacts on the British diaspora in Europe, and has simultaneously increased repatriation levels, and encouraged many diaspora members to assume European citizenship and move further away from their UK identities.
- Across the diaspora as a whole, however, British expatriates overwhelmingly identify as 'British' and remain connected to the UK through social networks and their enduring economic interests. This long-standing connection, however, is not recognised as a significant soft power asset.

## Existing Channels of Connectivity and Engagement

- Globalisation and technological advancement have presented new opportunities to improve the diaspora experience, and for both the diaspora and the UK Government to build closer networks and relationships.
- In practical terms, consular services are the primary formal connectivity point between the diaspora and the UK Government, and their services are important in building goodwill towards the UK. More meaningful, however, to the diaspora experience are the informal associations, clubs and societies that operate to varying degrees of sophistication within host nations.
- The diaspora also maintain links to Britain and their sense of British identity through engagement with the UK's cultural assets, including cuisine, music, film, literature and television.

## Better Harnessing the Potential of the UK Diaspora

- To advance engagement with the UK diaspora, the UK Government first needs to develop a more comprehensive understanding of its evolving composition, through new registration systems and monitoring processes.
- There is potential for the UK diaspora to act as change agents to support the messaging and delivery of the UK's foreign policy objectives, seeding trade and investment opportunities, and establishing new diplomatic and cultural ties.
- Diaspora engagement, however, must be seen as a two-way exchange. The more supported, valued and represented the UK diaspora feel, the more likely they are to lean into their role as ambassadors for Britain's interests.
- The establishment of diaspora councils and parliaments, which are increasingly common amongst our allies, could be a valuable new avenue of formalised engagement.

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# The Nature and Composition of the UK Diaspora

## Demographic Trends and Motivations for Emigration

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The exact size of the UK diaspora is unknown, but it is estimated to range between 4.5 and 5.5 million people.<sup>1</sup> With 407,000 Britons emigrating from the UK in 2019 alone – 60,000 more than those returning to the UK that year – the size of the diaspora continues to grow,<sup>2</sup> although the impact of the inevitable disruption to migration patterns as a result of the coronavirus pandemic is not yet fully understood. Recent years' emigration figures are likely to be an underestimation, as data is primarily extrapolated from registrations made in host countries and at consulates, which are rarely compulsory. The UK Consulate in Spain estimates there are, therefore “tens of thousands [of emigrants] at least, under the radar”.<sup>3</sup>

Since the 19th Century, the first period for which there is reliable data, the main destinations for the British diaspora have remained relatively stable, with Anglosphere nations such as Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United States consistently drawing large numbers of British emigrants.<sup>4</sup> The formation of the European Union (EU) and the access available to the Freedom of Movement principle as a consequence of Britain's EU membership, subsequently rendered the European continent a more appealing and accessible emigration destination. According to the most recent ONS data, 33% of all British-born emigrants in 2017 lived in Australia or New Zealand, 28% lived in the United States or Canada, and 26% in the EU – of which 6% were living in Ireland.<sup>5</sup>

The British diaspora is generally depicted in the popular imagination as a wealthy, older and prosperous demographic, seeking to retire to a life in the sun. Although this holds true for some parts of the diaspora – particularly in warmer nations such as Spain and Portugal, where 41% and 39% respectively of the British diaspora population are over 65<sup>6</sup> – the stereotype fails to capture the diaspora's true diversity. Indeed, the average age of British emigrants is 42 years, only marginally older than the UK population as a whole, and 70% of UK emigrants leave the UK before the age of 25.<sup>7</sup> The youthful nature of the departing diaspora appears to have been accelerated in the aftermath of the financial crisis, which propelled many young Britons to move abroad seeking new opportunities.<sup>8</sup>

It is certainly true that the average UK emigrant comes from a relatively more advantaged socio-economic background than both the average Briton. They are also more likely to be better educated; although it is true that educational attainment can, in part, be attributed to demographic differences, such as gender and parental income.<sup>9</sup> It is also notable that although migration is often depicted as a ‘brain drain’ and UK emigrants are, on average, more skilled than immigrants to the UK,<sup>10</sup> more recent UK immigrants tend to be more skilled than the average native Briton, such that the impact of the inflows and outflows of migration on skill levels have been tending to mitigate one another.<sup>11</sup>

The motivations underpinning emigrants' decision to leave the United Kingdom are varied. The most commonly cited reasons for emigrating from the UK are to pursue more lucrative career opportunities, a lower cost of living, lower crime levels and better weather.<sup>12</sup> Of these, it is the lure of work that provides the primary compulsion – although often these opportunities are also held up against other factors, such as the perceived attractiveness of life overseas,<sup>13</sup> discomfort with the nation's contemporary political direction,<sup>14</sup> or the existence of strong community links and other personal relationships in certain regions.<sup>15</sup>

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### Integration and Belonging

Considering the motivations driving the global diaspora experience, research suggests that individuals primarily pursue emigration to search for community and belonging, and to find a social or economic position that improves upon the one available to them in their home nation. Success, or failure, of emigration, and the subsequent decision on whether to return home, is therefore dependent on whether an individual is able to find the satisfaction, security and belonging that they seek abroad. Long-distance family and romantic relationships challenge the human need for togetherness and belonging, and emigrants must find new communities and modes of connections to manage this dislocation.<sup>16</sup>

Central to the diaspora experience is therefore finding a sense of community and belonging in their host nation. An individual's ability to achieve this is largely contingent on the immigration-related diversity of the neighbourhood in which they settle, their social and demographic profile in regards to race, gender, religion and language, and their previous experiences of migration-related diversity.<sup>17</sup> Emigrants generally seek to build this sense of belonging through the creation of extensive networks of expatriate and community associations.<sup>18</sup> British expatriates are particularly renowned for their volunteering – which, expatriates claim, is instilled within them due to the strong British tradition of charity, combined with the fact that engagement in charity provides migrants, particularly retiree migrants, with a strategy for making social contacts and establishing new routines to help adapt to a foreign environment.<sup>19</sup>

Expatriates may also seek to integrate with local communities; however, for those without regular and meaningful interaction with the native population, it is common for expatriates to end up leading 'parallel lives'. The negative consequence of this phenomenon is the risk that expatriates fail to contribute meaningfully to the local society, economy and sense of community, challenging the social fabric of these areas and undermining their attractiveness and liveability for the local population. In turn, there is potential for the emergence of prejudice and discrimination, which can undermine the ability of migrants to enact their social and economic rights, including access to employment and gaining citizenship.<sup>20</sup> British expatriates in Spain, for example, are concentrated in specific regions,<sup>21</sup> and many have openly questioned whether they need to integrate with the local Spanish community, especially when their British expatriate community is so strong.<sup>22</sup>

The personal social upheaval of migration, combined with the often-dramatic change of living environments, mean that migration can challenge emigrants' intuitive sense of identity – particularly when they are living in countries which are significantly different from the UK in cultural terms.<sup>23</sup> Migration is a complex psycho-social experience, which involves the loss of 'the mother country' and the feeling of safety and connectedness that brings. This sense of loss can lead to an overvaluation of old cultural symbols, such as food and social conventions, and may encourage the flourishing of a sense of nostalgia for their home nation.<sup>24</sup>

In terms of the national identities that British emigrants carry with them, it is clear that British expatriates overwhelmingly identify as 'British' – although their conceptions of what 'Britishness' entails vary; a positive reflection, perhaps, of British diversity. While integration and assimilation can lead to a loss of the sense of power of this British identity over time, expatriates have spoken of how they have become more aware of their 'Britishness' by living abroad because, although their British identity is the status quo in the UK, abroad it stands as a point of differentiation. In particular, British expatriates speak of an emotional attachment to characteristics that they define as distinctly 'British', such as good manners and sense of fair play, and state that living abroad has led them to develop a greater appreciation for what they believe Britain does well, in areas such as education.<sup>25</sup> The enhanced connectivity that many of these expatriates instinctively retain to Britain suggests a considerable potential for the UK diaspora to act as positive ambassadors for 'Brand Britain' in their host nations.

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On a practical level, British expatriates are also tied to the UK on both economic and social levels. Indeed, 70% of British expatriates send remittances back to the UK,<sup>26</sup> amounting to £4.1 billion (0.2% of GDP) of remittances in 2018.<sup>27</sup> Nonetheless, despite strong economic and familial connections, and close identification with 'Britishness', almost two-thirds (62%) of British expatriates claim that they have no intention to ever relocate back to the UK.<sup>28</sup> Little discussion has been made of the implications of this degree of rootedness, alongside the favourable impressions the diaspora continue to hold towards Britain. In effect, it is evident that the UK is in possession of a powerful, relatively fixed overseas community.

### The Diaspora Experience and Key Issues

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The experiences and composition of the British diaspora vary significantly between countries – not least of all due to their distinctive immigration and border control policies. In Australia, for example, the nation's points-based immigration system has meant that since 2015, British emigrants have consistently arrived to move into high-skilled, professional jobs as medical practitioners and in sectors such as advertising, human resources and management.<sup>29</sup> Similarly, a significantly higher proportion of British emigrants to North America have a bachelor's degree than in many other host countries.<sup>30</sup>

These distinctions bear repercussions for the priorities and concerns of the British diaspora in different countries. For example, on average, British expatriates in North America have sizeable annual incomes,<sup>31</sup> and emigrant retirees are protected by reciprocal pension agreements between the US and the UK, reducing concerns about personal finances among the British-American diaspora.<sup>32</sup> The cultural similarity between the two nations also dramatically reduces the 'costs' of emigration,<sup>33</sup> as does the high concentration of British expatriates in certain cities – 20% of British expatriates live in New York, and 9% in Los Angeles<sup>34</sup> – which necessarily smooths the transition and aides community-building.

In contrast, the British diaspora in the European Union – estimated to number between 750,000 and 1 million<sup>35</sup> – is generally less-skilled and younger than the diaspora population in North America.<sup>36</sup> It has also experienced a turbulent recent period, facing a significant degree of instability as a result of Brexit and other forms of social and political upheaval in the European Union. These factors present vastly different community profiles and needs, and will consequently impact on their relationship to the British state and local consular services. Moreover, these diaspora groups are also more likely to be moving through a period of transition and evolution, considerably more changeable than the UK diaspora populations in other parts of the world.

An epicentre of this dynamism is Spain, which has long been a powerful magnet for older Britons in the age of retirement – in particular, Costa Blanca and the Costa del Sol, where almost 50% of British expatriates in Spain live.<sup>37</sup> Britons own a large number of businesses in Spain and English radio and print media is widespread, as are British voluntary associations. Many expatriates are also members of social clubs, which not only act as sources of friendship and community, but also provide crucial practical information, such as on local taxes.<sup>38</sup> However, the number of British expatriates in Spain fell from 400,000 in 2012 to 250,000 in 2019, a decline of approximately 37%.<sup>39</sup> In part, this appears to be due to financial concerns, as the cost of living in Spain has risen. It is also, to a significant degree, due to issues with access to the provision of quality healthcare – a particular concern due to the older nature of the UK diaspora in Spain.<sup>40</sup>

While Spanish healthcare is broadly regarded in a positive light, domiciliary care is almost non-existent,<sup>41</sup> and the 2012 Royal Decree Law entitled 'Urgent measures to guarantee the sustainability of the National Health System and improve the quality and safety of services', denies foreigners who are neither registered nor authorised as residents of Spain the right to health care.<sup>42</sup> Support that is available, such as dementia support groups, are largely available in Spanish, requiring British expatriates, the majority of whom speak very little Spanish, to

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rely on support from friends or voluntary expatriate organisations.<sup>43</sup> This also highlights the importance of local language-learning, and the additional barriers faced by members of the diaspora living in non-Anglophone countries, who have failed to integrate sufficiently into their host communities.<sup>44</sup>

Some of these challenges are shared by British expatriates in a number of other nations. As the UK's economic performance fluctuates, so does the financial security of expatriates – particularly those reliant on state pensions. As mentioned regarding Spain, accessing quality healthcare also remains a primary concern, particularly for those expatriates exposed in their new countries to communicable diseases, viruses and other health risks associated with their demographics or lifestyles.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, the emotional impacts of the experience of emigration can necessitate the provision of mental health support;<sup>46</sup> unfortunately, however, knowledge and support for migration-related health issues have not kept pace with the increased size and diversity of current global migration patterns.<sup>47</sup>

The diaspora experience also varies significantly between individuals. Beyond individual disposition and the ability to adapt to the migration experience, individuals' social and economic circumstances shape their capacity to live fulsome lives in their host nations. While British expatriates are often depicted as privileged workers living abroad, supported by generous company packages and relocation allowances, many emigrant workers are from lower socio-economic backgrounds, or working in low-paid jobs, which do not confer the same privileges.<sup>48</sup> It is also true that many expatriates with minority backgrounds, particularly those from LGBT+ or ethnic minority communities, may well experience discrimination and struggle to effectively integrate in less liberal host countries.<sup>49</sup>

The diaspora experience and the composition of the UK's diaspora is significantly more diverse than is often understood. Any attempt to understand the experiences of the British diaspora must, therefore, take account of the nuances in experience which emerge from both differences in host countries and individual disposition. While some settle comfortably into their new lives, for others emigration can be a complex and difficult process which challenges expatriates sense of identity and belonging, but with the support of the diasporic community abroad and the international connectedness facilitated by technological advancement, these difficulties can be eased.

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# Global Trends Affecting the Diaspora

## Globalisation and Technological Advancement

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The dramatic acceleration of globalisation and technological advancement in the 21st Century has created new challenges and opportunities for the diaspora experience. Positive dividends include the relative ease of access to international travel, the roll-out of similar companies and brands and institutions on a global scale, and the obvious benefits of technology in enabling diasporas to maintain much closer links with their native countries. However, it is also true that globalisation and technological advancement have, to some degree, been responsible for a number of events that have disrupted and even complicated the diaspora experience – such as the 2007/8 economic crisis, Brexit and the Covid-19 pandemic. These events, and the UK Government's response to them, have not only reshaped the composition of the UK diaspora, but also the quality of life and everyday experiences of British expatriates. In turn, these events have forced British expatriates to re-examine their values, personal identities and what their 'Britishness' means to them within this complex, globalised context.

Globalisation has facilitated the reductions in travel costs and technological connectivity that has rendered the process of migration significantly easier for individuals and communities, and enabled the creation of larger and more diverse diaspora communities abroad.<sup>50</sup> However, globalisation has also hastened other forms of global connectivity, which may run counter to increases in migration flows – such as increased transactions of foreign direct investment (FDI), which may create the jobs that dis-incentivise against migration. Equally, FDI and other globalised forms of finance may also crowd out non-competitive and previously sheltered domestic firms, which may in turn cost jobs and stimulate migration.<sup>51</sup> The breadth of interconnected effects and trends stimulated by globalisation can make it difficult to pinpoint the specific net impacts it has had on the British diaspora community, although it is important to underscore its influence on the dynamics shaping the contemporary nature of the diaspora population.

Technological advancement has also carried a complex but more clear-cut impact for the diaspora experience. Digitalisation has made the process of emigration itself more accessible, through improving information provision from both formal channels and peer-to-peer communities. These informal channels can prove particularly helpful in providing evaluations of service providers and through offering 'on the ground' advice to enable migrants to make more informed choices.<sup>52</sup> However, there are arguments to be made that technology both supports and challenges diaspora integration. It is certainly true that technology has facilitated a dramatic improvement in the options available to emigrants in terms of engaging with their families and networks at home, which can generate a closer sense of attachment to their homeland.<sup>53</sup> Vast online diaspora networks can also strengthen diasporic communities and provide individuals with an increased sense of belonging.

Nonetheless, it can also strengthen the cohesion and functioning of diaspora communities in ways that both encourages and impedes their integration.<sup>54</sup> For example, there are concerns that such advanced diaspora networks and the retention of links to emigrants' homelands may create 'plural mono-culturalism' and discourage their transition to a new life.<sup>55</sup> Equally, globalisation and technological innovation have led to the development of digital language learning and translation tools, which can help engagement and relations with host countries.

The greater inter-connectedness between the diaspora and their home nation made possible by technology is not only confined to engagement with family and friends back home. Globalisation has also made it easier for the diaspora to engage with British culture and activities, such as



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watching the English Premier League, accessing British television through streaming services, and keeping up-to-date with UK news and politics. Furthermore, as globalisation facilitates growing diasporic hubs in areas such as Malaga, traditional British businesses such as fish and chip shops and pubs have become common place abroad, further reconnecting the diaspora to their British roots.<sup>56</sup>

The broad effects of globalisation on the diaspora have therefore been largely positive in terms of facilitating diaspora and homeland networks and engagement, helping to tackle some of the persistent challenges of isolation and disconnection that have always plagued the diaspora experience. However, there is a danger that this will come at the cost of integration with the local community, as the British diaspora increasingly find a sense of community among their fellow diaspora members and through strong social and cultural connections to the UK instead.

### Economic Insecurity

The British diaspora remain closely tied to the UK on a financial level, with many British expatriates earning their income in Pound Sterling, and many others sending remittances from income earned in their host nation's currency back to family and friends in the UK – leaving them vulnerable to two-way fluctuations in the value of the currency.<sup>57</sup> Furthermore, periods of severe economic crisis are felt particularly severely by the diaspora, who are often not entitled to adequate financial protection from either the UK or their host nation's government.

The 2008 global financial crisis, and its profound economic and social ramifications, highlight the significant vulnerability of the UK diaspora to economic shocks. In the first instance, the collapsing value of the Pound Sterling threatened their financial security and quality of life,<sup>58</sup> particularly for pensioners who receive their pensions in the British Pound Sterling. The subsequent turmoil in host nations' financial markets<sup>59</sup> encouraged the large-scale repatriation of many Britons living abroad – including many retirees, and those motivated to return to support families suffering from the consequences of the crisis in the UK.<sup>60</sup>

At the same time, many ambitious young Britons unable to find jobs or move up the housing ladder in the recession-hit United Kingdom moved abroad in this period, in search of new opportunities. As such, while emigration fell by 19% in the years following the economic crisis, it actually increased by 8% among 15-24 year olds. Combined with the trend of retirees returning home, this has caused a significant demographic shift towards a younger generation of emigrants. The financial crisis also precipitated an evolution in the geographic distribution of the UK diaspora, as they became increasingly attracted to Asian nations at the centre of economic activity – fuelled by the expansion of the English language and the high esteem conferred towards British higher education qualifications.<sup>61</sup>

Notably, British expatriates are often poorly protected against economic shocks due to the limited protections they are able to be offered by both the UK and their host countries' financial and welfare systems. After the 2008 failure of Icelandic banks, for example, HM Treasury successfully negotiated for UK customers to receive their deposits in full. This protection however, did not extend to those individuals who had money in the subsidiaries of the Icelandic banks in the Isle of Man and Guernsey, who were predominantly British expatriates. Many expatriates claimed they had been forced to deposit their sterling reserves in bank accounts in the Isle of Man or Guernsey because, although there is no legal obstacle to expatriates opening bank accounts in the UK, stringent anti-money laundering guidelines meant that very few banks were willing to accept expatriate account-holders.<sup>62</sup>

Furthermore, the transportable UK benefits that permanent expatriates are entitled to are limited, and where host nations' welfare systems are small or not available to expatriates, they are particularly vulnerable during periods of unemployment and financial insecurity.<sup>63</sup> Periods of economic insecurity can therefore leave the British diaspora in a particularly precarious economic position, forcing changes to migration patterns and altering the composition of the British diaspora.

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### Social Upheaval

The social position of the British diaspora is also vulnerable to shocks. For example, those Britons who chose to emigrate during the 2008 financial crisis faced difficult experiences, with jobs in short supply across the West and migrants facing increased tensions with local populations at a time of resource scarcity. In the most extreme cases, a series of violent clashes played out in many communities around the world, particularly those where pressures on the local population's employment prospects were especially profound.<sup>64</sup> This is a common trend during periods of economic instability, which can lead to the flourishing of nationalist sentiments, fuelled by a narrative that migrants are competing for much-needed local jobs.

This narrative has re-emerged during the Covid-19 pandemic, with United Nations' Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres, declaring that the pandemic had "unleash(ed) a tsunami of hate and xenophobia, scapegoating and scare-mongering", urging governments to "act now to strengthen the immunity of our societies against the virus of hate." Much of this intolerance has been directed towards people of Asian descent, who have reported significant increases in experiences of discrimination and violence. Discrimination has also been experienced by migrant communities more broadly, based on the claim that they have brought coronavirus to their host country. In China, authorities forcibly tested African migrants for the virus, and landlords ruthlessly evicted African residents.<sup>65</sup> Meanwhile in Italy, citizens protested the arrival of new migrants during the pandemic, on the basis that it would increase the risk of a new outbreak of Covid-19 and affect tourism.<sup>66</sup>

The emerging hostility towards migrants in a number of regions during the pandemic has also begun to adopt an economic tone, as the financial impacts of the measures needed to contain the spread of coronavirus place immense pressures on state funds, and the pressures to protect the native population intensify. For example, the Singaporean Minister for Foreign Affairs, Vivian Balakrishnan, declared that "the only reason we have foreigners here is to give an extra wind in our sails when the opportunity is there...now we are in a storm, and we need to shed ballast".<sup>67</sup> Such narratives serve to undermine the security of expatriates and the extent to which they feel settled and integrated into their communities.

Undoubtedly, these kinds of flare-ups tend to persecute groups seen to be made 'distinctive' by their ethnicity and cultural background, and White Britons hold the privileged position of being one of the least likely groups to find themselves disadvantaged by such social instability – especially given Anglosphere nations culturally similar to the UK are the primary destinations of the UK diaspora.<sup>68</sup> It is notable, for example, that there has been no reported uptick in discrimination against British expatriates because of their nationality since a new strain of Covid-19 was identified in Kent, in contrast to the sharp discrimination felt by Asian expatriates.

British migrants, however, do still experience discrimination, particularly in times of social uncertainty, and British migrants have reported experiencing a wider anti-migrant sentiment that has emerged as a result of the pandemic.<sup>69</sup> Furthermore, BAME British nationals and other minority groups may be more likely to experience discrimination resulting from social upheavals,<sup>70</sup> such that while as a collective, Britons may be less socially vulnerable than other migrant groups, it still has a tangible impact on their experiences.

It is also certainly the case that 'wealthy Westerners' can be the specific target of a number of forms of criminal activity and violence in their host nations, largely as a result of their visible (or perceived) privilege, and the immense symbolic value in targeting such citizens. More relaxed fiscal regulations abroad, combined with the difficulties expatriates face in assessing whether services are indeed properly regulated, has meant British retirees have become a prime target for pension scams.<sup>71</sup> Furthermore, in 2019, British expatriates began patrolling their own streets after a rise in violent muggings targeting elderly and vulnerable expatriates in Costa Blanca. Language barriers also make reporting crimes and finding justice more difficult for expatriates.<sup>72</sup>

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Global health crises of the kind experienced during the Covid-19 pandemic, can also induce a feeling of precariousness amongst diaspora populations, leading to above-average levels of movement.<sup>73</sup> Governments across the world, including the UK, have at various points recommended expatriates return from then coronavirus-hotspots, such as China, to their homeland,<sup>74</sup> and many expatriates have faced difficult decisions about their futures as stringent border control restrictions have impeded family reunions and compelled choices about their place of residence.<sup>75</sup> However, although some exemptions to the Statutory Residence Test (SRT) exist, only 60 days can be discounted from counting towards the SRT, making it difficult for expatriates to stay in the UK with loved ones during the pandemic for any extended period of time.<sup>76</sup> The pandemic has ultimately focused minds on the conception of the nation-state, strengthening border controls and restricting the kind of movement that had been undertaken with ease for decades. It is too early to discern the lasting impacts on the size and nature of the British diaspora, but we can anticipate that these may well be significant.

### Political Volatility

British expatriates claim that Britain's politics is one of the things they miss the least;<sup>77</sup> however UK foreign policy continues to have a profound impact on their lives. For Britons who have emigrated to the European Union, Brexit has wrought consequences not only in practical terms, but has also challenged and highlighted the emotional realities of the expatriate experience. In particular, the precariousness of diaspora communities during periods of political volatility. Brexit has led to a restructuring of the size and shape of the UK diaspora in Europe. Following the UK's Referendum on EU membership, emigration from the UK to the European Union increased by 17,000 in a year – around a 30% increase on pre-2016 levels.<sup>78</sup> The scale of this repatriation is in an order of magnitude normally only experienced when a nation experiences a significant political or economic crisis.

Brexit has been the predominant driver of migration decisions back to the United Kingdom since the Referendum, and many of those who have returned have done so in a hurry or in an environment of 'collective uncertainty'.<sup>79</sup> Similarly to the impact of the financial crisis, large numbers of those who have returned as a result of Brexit have been retired British expatriates – particularly those who had been living in Spain, with more than 1500 retirees leaving between 2018 and 2019.<sup>80</sup> This trend likely reflects the significant concern for expatriate retirees throughout the Brexit process, about the potential impact Brexit would have on their ability to access healthcare or the more general security of their position in their host nation.<sup>81</sup>

British expatriates are also facing a number of other practical issues as a result of Brexit, such as burdensome and confusing paperwork,<sup>82</sup> tense family relations, and significant financial difficulties. Retirees receiving UK pensions have raised concerns that their pensions may no longer be uprated,<sup>83</sup> and about their vulnerability to exchange rate turbulence. Banking has been a significant concern, with institutions including Barclays and Coutts writing to their customers to give notice that their bank accounts will be closed, as financial services firms lose their passporting rights due to Brexit.<sup>84</sup> This poses particular difficulties for pensioners, as many pension providers in the UK will not pay retirement income into overseas bank accounts, or charge administration fees to do so.<sup>85</sup>

Those Britons who have chosen to remain in their EU host nations as a diaspora community have also found their own capacity to integrate into their communities diminished on some levels. For example, the diaspora have lost their right to vote and stand for election in EU municipal elections, a right that was previously guaranteed by being EU nationals.<sup>86</sup> Anecdotal evidence highlights how important these voting rights were to the British diaspora, with diaspora members forced to retire from seats on local councils; positions which, they argue, were invaluable for their personal integration into the local community and in ensuring the needs of the diaspora community were reflected in governance decisions.<sup>87</sup>

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One obvious consequence of this disenfranchisement has been a 500% increase in the number of expatriates taking up citizenship in an EU state,<sup>88</sup> and beginning to forge closer identification with their European identity.<sup>89</sup> Previously, large numbers of British nationals had not bothered to undertake this process,<sup>90</sup> which, to some degree, places an additional barrier between these expatriates and the United Kingdom, perhaps diminishing the likelihood that they may one day return. Early evidence during the past few years of fractious debate has suggested that many British expatriates have adopted an increasingly negative view of Britain, and their identification with their home nation has weakened,<sup>91</sup> with their host nations being the primary beneficiaries of this compulsion to redirect their loyalties.<sup>92</sup> Moreover, as some expatriates have expressed an increasing sense of disassociation with the Britain that voted for Brexit, an increasing number of the British diaspora have adopted regional identities, choosing to identify as Scottish or Northern for example, rather than British.

The sense of dislocation of moving from the status of being an expatriate within the European Union to one outside of it, has been aggravated by the spread of misinformation and the confusion spreading within diaspora communities surrounding some of the most fundamental elements of the migrant experience – such as the capacity to purchase property. British expatriates in France, for example, reported feeling simultaneously overwhelmed by information on Brexit, yet uninformed and unsure where to seek guidance and advice. There is a question to be asked here about the role that the FCDO could and should be playing in stewarding such transitions, and whether intermediaries – such as those discussed in the next chapter – could be more effective vessels for supporting this.

Furthermore, one of the most significant concerns held by the British diaspora in relation to political volatility is their perceived lack of political representation and voice. UK nationals have the right to vote in UK elections, but lose this right after 15 years. Although voter turnout is historically low among the British diaspora, some more civically minded members of the diaspora express frustration at not being able to vote and engage on issues which they believe remain pertinent to their lives, regardless of how long they have lived abroad. This discontent is particularly acute in countries such as France, whose own citizens never lose their voting rights.<sup>93</sup>

To conclude, the forces of globalisation and technological advancement have wrought profound consequences for the diaspora experience, and for the wellbeing and happiness of those family members they have left behind in Britain. However, the forces of globalisation – which have enabled global pandemics and social and political upheaval to propagate – have equally constrained and imperilled the ease with which British expatriates have been able to move about the world and make new lives for themselves. The particularly significant disruption posed to those living in the European Union cannot be underestimated, and it is worth considering the longer-term impacts of the tendency for this sizeable portion of the UK diaspora as a whole to now feel more connected and integrated in their local communities – even if this comes at the expense of some attachment to their home nation.

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## Connectivity and Engagement Points

The British diaspora maintain a strong sense of British identity, which is bolstered and maintained by both formal and informal links to the UK, such as social networks and consumption of British culture and media, as well as consular services, voting and diaspora associations. The British diaspora also show a clear willingness to engage in promoting an open global agenda.<sup>94</sup> Successfully utilised, these existing mechanisms, alongside new hubs of engagement, demonstrate the capacity of the UK's diaspora to help achieve the UK's foreign policy goals.

### Formal Connectivity Points

The most common formal point of contact between the UK diaspora, their homeland and British identity, and the UK Government, is through local embassies and consular services. Before the coronavirus pandemic in 2019-20, UK consular services dealt with over 350,000 enquiries, and the number of consular enquiries have increased steadily over recent years.<sup>95</sup> However, no differentiation is made in official records between diaspora enquiries and those made by UK residents temporarily abroad, so it is difficult to distinguish the exact level of usage by the diaspora. The inability to distinguish between usage by the two distinct groups also reflects a wider prioritisation within many embassies of their nationals temporarily living abroad. This is reflected in the fact many members of the UK diaspora, particularly older emigrants, report having had no engagement with consular services for many years.<sup>96</sup>

Following criticism of the UK's consular response to the Asian Tsunami in 2006, and reports by the National Audit Office and Public Accounts Committee in 2005 and 2006, the UK made a 'strategic shift' in its consular provision, which has led to a more standardised and professional service, with a sharp focus on prioritising the most vulnerable. The FCDO's 2013-14 innovation, creating consular contact centres to provide an initial point of contact, has resolved many standard questions and allowed only the most complex enquiries to be escalated to the local consular team.<sup>97</sup> This has served to relieve the pressure on local consular services to deal with the more acute 'on-the-ground' issues, which extend beyond travellers to encompass the experiences of the British diaspora. The FCDO's work with NGOs around repatriation, supporting victims of sexual assault, and servicing families of those incarcerated abroad, are seen to be exemplary compared to many other European nations, and the support provided to British citizens in times of crisis is important in building goodwill towards the UK among the diaspora.<sup>98</sup>

As a result of the advancement of digital and communications technology, embassy websites and social media have become an increasingly important method through which the UK Government can keep the diaspora informed of relevant British news, developments in bilateral relations and also to provide broader support to the diaspora. The use of social and online media has become particularly important since the UK Government's 'LOCATE' registration system was discontinued in 2013, which has meant that, for many issues, social and online media are the only methods by which the diaspora is able to proactively engage with the Government and consular services.

The FCDO website includes country pages, which provide essential information for expatriates,<sup>99</sup> while embassies' use of social media has grown significantly in recent years, and the majority of embassies have Facebook and Twitter pages, while others also have Instagram and YouTube pages.<sup>100</sup> The effectiveness of these pages in engaging with the diaspora varies significantly, and while the 'Brits in Spain' Facebook page, run by the British

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Embassy in Madrid, has over 55,000 'likes' on Facebook,<sup>101</sup> the equivalent page for the British High Commission in Canberra has less than 11,000,<sup>102</sup> despite the significantly larger British diaspora population Australia.<sup>103</sup> This, however, may reflect the relative cultural distinction between the two locations; it is reasonable to assume that Britons living in nations where the language, culture and way of life is substantially different from the United Kingdom require greater support in their integration.

#### Informal Connectivity Points

Regardless of the important role played by formal interactions between the diaspora and the UK Government, particularly during crisis situations, a large proportion of the diaspora rarely engage with UK Government services.<sup>104</sup> And although UK embassies organise events and activities for members of the diaspora, much of the diaspora's engagement with their compatriots occurs through voluntary, campaign and social associations. These associations provide a sense of belonging and community as well as information provision.<sup>105</sup> British expatriates' sense of British identity and connectivity to their homeland is therefore maintained primarily outside governmental oversight, through social interactions with both fellow members of the diaspora and those living in the UK, as well as through consumption of UK culture and traditions via globalised media services.

Campaigning associations such as 'British in Europe', a coalition of grassroots citizens' organisations and the largest grouping of UK citizens in the EU, actively campaign on foreign policy issues and seek to engage with the UK Government to promote the interests of the diaspora. The FCDO, as well as a number of ambassadors and the EU commission, have begun to recognise the value of engagement with the organisation, and over recent months, its leaders have met with a number of UK and European government actors.<sup>106</sup> However, there is scope for continued and deeper engagement with both this forum and other campaigning associations in the future, and a more formalised relationship may serve to ensure greater depth and longevity of partnership to maximise the effectiveness of the engagement.

Social and voluntary associations, which serve a less distinctly political purpose, are also widespread among the diaspora. Associations such as the 'British and Commonwealth Association', based in Paris, prioritise organising social events such as bridge games, book groups and themed lunches.<sup>107</sup> Others, such as the 'Association of British Expats in Italy' combine socialising with attempts to embrace British culture, by celebrating traditional customs and events such as Remembrance Day, Royal Weddings and Christmas carolling.<sup>108</sup> British expatriates also have a strong culture of volunteering, with voluntary associations providing an opportunity to build social networks, establish structures and routines, while also supporting, and building connections with, the local community.<sup>109</sup>

The diaspora community also organises itself independently through online communities. Websites such as 'britishexpats.com' have thousands of members who regularly post, providing informal channels of discussion and peer-to-peer advice unavailable through formal Government websites.<sup>110</sup> Others have more specific purposes: the 'British Expat Networking Group' on LinkedIn,<sup>111</sup> for example, is used to share employment vacancies and provide support for interviews abroad, while country specific forums such as the colloquially named 'Poms in Oz',<sup>112</sup> provide opportunities for expatriates to discuss country-specific questions on issues ranging from childcare to household maintenance. Other global forums such as 'Meetup',<sup>113</sup> although not specifically designed for expatriates, are also popular among expatriate communities, particularly in Australia, for British nationals to find fellow Britons, and others in the community, to meet and engage in social activities with.

Finally, British expatriates' identification with Britain is reinforced by engagement with the UK's cultural and soft power assets. For example, in 2019, the Premier League was shown in 188 countries across the world,<sup>114</sup> and a cross-national survey of expatriates found that 79% of expatriates have an interest in football,<sup>115</sup> providing a route through which to remain

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connected with the UK, and particular cities and regions connected to expatriates' former life. Technological innovations have also made it easier for Britons to engage with UK cultural assets. English-language radio stations such as 'Expat Radio'<sup>116</sup> provide access to British and English-language music, as well as commentary and advice to expatriates on events in Britain. Similarly, online retailers, including sites such as British Corner Shop, which are tailored specifically to expatriates, make it easier for Britons to enjoy quintessentially British food<sup>117</sup> – an important connectivity point given the established significance of food and culinary memories in the construction of identity and homeland nostalgia.<sup>118</sup>

#### Improving Connectivity between the UK Government and the UK Diaspora

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When considered in the round, the existing infrastructure which can be mobilised to engage with the UK diaspora is extensive. However, the most significant issue facing the Government in reaching and engaging with the diaspora is the incomplete records being kept of the UK diaspora and their movements. Until 2013, the UK Government's LOCATE system allowed expatriates and tourists to register with the embassy in order to receive updates in a crisis. However, difficulties keeping the registry up-to-date and incentivising registrations meant that in times of crisis, including the Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami, and the Arab Spring, the system was regarded as a burden.<sup>119</sup>

Although it is clear that the LOCATE system was ineffective in its former state, and required a significant amount of resourcing, the shift from a 'just in case' system of engagement with the diaspora to a 'just in time' one<sup>120</sup> significantly limits the ability of the Government to proactively engage the diaspora as a foreign policy instrument. It also makes it particularly difficult to engage expatriates who do not use social media sites, who are often among the most vulnerable to changing conditions and circumstances.<sup>121</sup> Furthermore, without a full understanding of the composition of the diaspora, any diaspora engagement policy will be insufficiently targeted and less effective than it could otherwise be.

The Government has a number of options, including conducting an international census or incentivising an embassy-led registration drive, to gather a more complete picture of the UK diaspora and strengthen channels of engagement. Keeping track of expatriates who enter or leave the diaspora may be too resource-heavy, but a reoriented registration system which moves away from crisis support, and is utilised as a secondary channel of communication with the UK diaspora, will be an essential first step in harnessing the significant potential offered by improved, two-way ties. While it is certainly true that digitalisation has made it significantly easier for the diaspora to co-ordinate, share knowledge and socialise outside of formal government structures, it is certainly the case that the greater degree of leadership offered by the Government in community-building and community tracking of the UK diaspora will enhance its capacity to lead the narrative about UK perspectives on relevant issues, and be the 'first port of call' to absorb the benefits of the diaspora's role as an economic and cultural liaison.

In short, the UK Government would be wise to shift the basis of its diaspora relations from a framework of regarding its expatriates as simply a group characterised by its potential vulnerability, to a group also offering significant strategic opportunities to advance the UK's foreign policy mission.

Following a diaspora audit, UK embassies should work to maximise and improve their online offering. In part, this can be achieved through improved sharing of best practice examples already being put in place across the UK's diplomatic network. The use of video media, for example, by the British embassy in Madrid's Facebook page, has been particularly effective in providing updates on residency requirements.<sup>122</sup> Yet, only 19 UK embassies overall have YouTube accounts, suggesting that video remains an underutilised communication medium.<sup>123</sup> Meanwhile, Facebook virtual drop-in sessions run by the British embassy in Berlin have also proved popular, and could be valuably replicated by other embassies.<sup>124</sup> Furthermore, UK

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embassy webpages are often confined to providing only core information to the diaspora, while social media content, particularly that which is shared via Twitter accounts, tends to focus heavily on the dissemination of much less targeted information, which may not be direct relevance or interest to expatriates.<sup>125</sup> Therefore, it is important that social media's enormous capabilities as a community and engagement tool is adequately harnessed, by streamlining and localising the use of such networks across the diaspora as a whole.

The Covid-19 pandemic has further emphasised the need to engage with the diaspora across a variety of platforms, and there is clear appetite within the diaspora community for this adaptive, digital form of engagement.<sup>126</sup> For example, by co-hosting 'Q and A' sessions with online diaspora forums or associations, or encouraging embassy guidance to be included on online forums, engagement can be widened beyond expatriates who more proactively engage with embassies to those otherwise contained to more informal channels. Working with diaspora influencers, a technique used effectively by the Russian Embassy in the UK,<sup>127</sup> can also help to extend reach. Finally, expatriates are more likely to engage with interfaces and online platforms they already know and understand, such as Whatsapp and Facebook, and delivering content through forums where diaspora communities are concentrated is therefore key.<sup>128</sup> As such, it is important to consider both the opportunities to establish UK Government-led initiatives and also how best to integrate UK Government messages and modes of interaction within existing communities, where legitimacy has already been conferred and participation is secured.

In particular, local social and voluntary associations are an important, and under-utilised, connectivity point through which the diaspora can be engaged. Although their primary purpose is to provide social networks for British expatriates, many social associations show a willingness to engage with and promote British values and work with the UK Government. For example, the 'Association of British Expats in Italy' states that it "is sensitive to British issues and participates in events that recognise the importance that Britain has, and continues to play in the world".<sup>129</sup> There is clearly scope to be harnessing these associations as partners in a shared project of facilitating a flourishing diaspora culture, which will reap mutual benefits for expatriates, their host communities, and the UK Government in advancing its Global Britain agenda.

It is also true that, beyond their capacity to forge links and provide new international opportunities, these local associations and voluntary organisations should be understood as an important source of insights into the nature and attitudes of the UK diaspora. For example, the Royal British Legion and the International Lions have been able to provide information about the evolving needs of the UK diaspora in Spain, based on the increasing number of Britons that have approached them with concerns about healthcare issues.<sup>130</sup>

Finally, the UK Government should consider how best to maximise the effectiveness of its substantial cultural and soft power assets, which the diaspora engages with on a daily basis, and continue to provide the connective tissue through which they maintain their British identity. For example, British expatriates often cite missing British television,<sup>131</sup> and as a result, VPNs are used to gain illegal access to UK TV, particularly to the BBC.<sup>132</sup> It would be worth exploring where it would be possible to strike deals in local markets to provide legal, paid-for access to British television, including BritBox, to the diaspora community, which could provide direct revenue to the national broadcaster and ensure Britons abroad are able to uphold this important relationship with their British cultural identity.

### **New Engagement Hubs**

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There are also possibilities to forge new, innovative ways through which the UK Government can engage with the British diaspora. One especially compelling new frontier is the proliferation of diaspora assemblies, parliaments or councils, which have become increasingly popular globally, and especially within the European Union. These forums provide an opportunity for representatives of the diaspora to communicate their concerns with their homeland, strengthening their sense of inclusion in the UK's global mission, and fostering goodwill and common understanding.



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The precise function and composition of a diaspora forum could take on a multitude of forms. The 'Finnish Expatriate Parliament', for example, is designed as a cooperative forum, where collective decisions are made on issues of importance to expatriates, and as a lobbying body to ensure expatriates are represented in policy-making. Any Finnish organisation can ratify the by-laws of the parliament and work with the expatriate parliament, although plenary sessions are only held every two to three years. By contrast, Latvia has a 'Diaspora Advisory Council' comprised of relevant ministries and a large number of diaspora organisations who convene to discuss diaspora issues,<sup>133</sup> while Italy has a vast representational infrastructure with 'Committees of Italians Abroad' which are organised at the consular level.<sup>134</sup> The Italian approach enables a more nuanced, destination-specific understanding of diaspora concerns, while the Latvian approach has the benefit of more direct engagement with senior officials with greater power to enact change.

There is value in the UK Government conducting a formal audit of these existing structures, reviewing their performance and effectiveness, and considering whether these – or a new system – could provide the right forum through which to achieve its objectives, whether they be to improve the efficiency of consular services and/or the role that the British diaspora can play in the UK's international influence.

Overall, there are evidently a significant number of deeper, more effective connectivity points through which the British diaspora could be engaged. The first step is to conduct a substantial audit project of the diaspora as it currently stands, and consider how it is likely to evolve in the future. The second is to better activate and extend the existing touchpoints the UK Government already holds, partly through improving knowledge exchange between embassies. And thirdly, to look seriously at the initiatives allies around the world have put in place to enhance connectivity and afford their diaspora a greater stake in the future of their home nation.

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# The UK Diaspora as a Foreign Policy Asset

## Social and Political Activism

The British diaspora should be understood not only as a group of citizens abroad for which the UK Government carries a responsibility to serve and protect, but also a community of British advocates and soft power assets, possessing substantial social, political and economic capital and relationships, which could be utilised to achieve the UK's foreign policy goals and to support the Global Britain agenda.<sup>135</sup>

By its very nature, the UK diaspora community abroad tends to lean towards supporting an internationalist foreign policy. In starting a new life abroad, many British expatriates conceptualise themselves as enterprising pioneers and express a desire to utilise the privilege garnered by having a foothold in two nations, to progress forward-thinking ideas and improve the societies of their new host nations.<sup>136</sup> Although in practice, transnational political action is often undertaken by a small minority,<sup>137</sup> and as has previously been noted, many émigrés live in relatively prosperous parts of the world, it is certainly true that British expatriates living in less developed economies, such as India and Bulgaria, have demonstrated a particular interest in engaging in issues around democratic and social advancement.<sup>138</sup> The tendency to undertake such a role in their host nations is highly dependent on the environment,<sup>139</sup> and on how integrated the diaspora have made themselves within social networks and activist communities.<sup>140</sup> Undoubtedly, British expatriates with more secure socio-economic backgrounds are more likely to have the economic resources, time and networks to devote towards social and political engagement.

Britons are also more interested in supporting the Government on specific agenda areas, particularly environmental protection, human rights and democracy. These are issues that the diaspora already engages extensively on through civil society organisations, and supporting the UK Government in these objectives is therefore seen as a logical continuation of this and in line with the values the diaspora already hold.<sup>141</sup>

## Trade and Investment

The British diaspora abroad can also be regarded as a potential source of economic and investment relationships – both facilitating British businesses to identify and seize upon new export markets, and to bid for competitive tenders in international contexts, and to encourage local companies and even governments to support inward investment and financing into the United Kingdom.

The link between migration and trade is well established, with increased migration between countries leading to higher levels of trade between them. This correlation is strong, and research based on OECD nations has found that a 1% increase in migration leads to an increase in bilateral trade equivalent to lowering import tariffs by 3.7%. Where migrants are highly qualified, as is the case with a large proportion of British expatriates, and products are strongly differentiated, the impact of increased migration on trade levels can be particularly profound, increasing trade levels even further.<sup>142</sup>

Research makes clear that emigrants tend to engage in what can be termed 'nostalgic trade', remaining committed to their home country's goods and products even decades after having left.<sup>143</sup> Moreover, they are also inclined to introduce these products to their social networks within their host nations, which can create new markets for home-grown businesses. This

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phenomenon has been readily observed in the United Kingdom through the progressive introduction of a range of different culinary ingredients and styles of cooking, which has translated into tremendously profitable import opportunities for international businesses as major British supermarkets.<sup>144</sup> However, the reverse phenomenon, of British expatriates shaping demands for UK-originated products or lifestyle choices has been less keenly observed in the post-colonial era.

Diaspora members are more likely to do business in their home countries than other foreign nationals, because they possess a greater understanding of the business environment and already carry a degree of implicit trust.<sup>145</sup> This familiarity helps them to identify investment opportunities and understand regulatory requirements and ultimately translates into reduced transaction costs.<sup>146</sup> Expatriates' knowledge of their fellow diaspora members can also serve as a bridge to enable other individuals and organisations in host countries to invest and do business in the UK, through matching and referral services and by building confidence, trust and familiarity.<sup>147</sup> Moreover, the diaspora's personal relationships can also be valuable in securing trade and investment. The decision by Bombardier of Canada to produce aircraft parts in Morocco, for example, was said to be, in large part driven by to an expatriate Moroccan who held a senior position in Boeing, and successfully brokered an arrangement using his existing contacts from his native country.<sup>148</sup>

These trading and investment opportunities primarily germinate on an ad hoc level, but there are undoubtedly ways in which Government involvement could help to streamline, codify and amplify the number of opportunities and connections made in a more formalised end-to-end process. We know, for example, that the proportion of British diaspora members who trade with their country of origin is often significantly lower than the proportion who express a desire to do so.<sup>149</sup>

There are a number of routes through which trade and investment can be facilitated. The UK Government can seek to directly facilitate diaspora trading relations, through the establishment of trade councils, the organisation of trade missions, and the facilitation of business networks. The Australian Government has emphasised the importance of engagement through formal bodies, in particular bilateral trade councils, in facilitating diaspora trade.<sup>150</sup> Formal mechanisms are important in both reassuring the diaspora that they will have the full support of the UK Government in their endeavours, and in embedding and ensuring longevity of diaspora trading relationships. In Poland, this is facilitated through Polish Chambers of Commerce abroad and the Trade and Investment Promotion Sections in Polish embassies.<sup>151</sup> In federalised nations such as Australia, individual states oversee diaspora relations as part of their international engagement strategies, considered alongside language provision and diplomatic relations as a cohesive package of economic, cultural and strategic ties.<sup>152</sup>

As well as formally engaging diaspora members in Government-run diaspora trade initiatives, the UK Government should seek to build strong interpersonal relationships with leading members of the diaspora abroad.<sup>153</sup> These relationships can also take on a more formal role with appointed Diaspora Trade Ambassadors, to increase public transparency and generate greater buy-in from those involved in these relationships.

Although not the focus of this paper, it is certainly the case that the United Kingdom could also be doing significantly more to create points of interaction and engagement between its Government and the diaspora groups which now call Britain home. The UK in Japan 2019-20 initiative, for example, developed an excellent series of events to promote UK excellence and encourage closer working between the UK and Japan. However, the events did not focus on the role of the British diaspora abroad in supporting UK-Japan relations, nor focus on engaging the diaspora in events, thereby underutilising the economic and knowledge capital possessed by the diaspora as part of a holistic, two-way exchange.<sup>154</sup>

Internationally, a number of private organisations and charities globally already facilitate investment and trade opportunities for UK diaspora members. Partnerships with such organisations could be an efficient way to support diaspora trade and investment, without

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extensive resourcing. These partnerships could facilitate networking opportunities between the UK private sector and the diaspora, or be used to provide advice sessions on financial investment.<sup>155</sup> The shift to virtual events and engagement as a result of the coronavirus pandemic also presents opportunities to facilitate and support a more significant number of relationships between the diaspora and home nations. The Chicago MBDA Export Centre, for example, which usually facilitates diaspora trade relationships through trade missions with a limited number of places, ran a five-day virtual Diaspora Trade and Investment Deal Event instead, through which it was able to facilitate more trading relationships.<sup>156</sup>

Beyond engagement, the UK Government may also wish to consider diaspora relations as part of its approach to ensuring the UK's business environment remains appealing, including the provision of incentives to encourage investment.<sup>157</sup> It is also important to consider this process as a symbiotic exchange with diaspora communities abroad and at home. Expatriates living in Mexico, for example, are framed as potential business partners with the Mexican Government, who offer matching investment funds, training for entrepreneurs, and favourable loans to start businesses in Mexico, to establish relationships and make the most of the resources and knowledge gained by the Mexican diaspora abroad.<sup>158</sup>

Another means of creating a favourable investment environment is through enhancing the UK Government's online offering. An online diaspora engagement hub, providing regularly updated resources for policy-makers, NGOs and businesses would enable both individuals and local diaspora associations and other relevant organisations in the UK and beyond to identify opportunities for partnerships in which the diaspora will act as the linchpin.<sup>159</sup>

### Political Influence

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For those members of the British diaspora holding voting rights in their new host nations, there is the capacity to extend their identity and role as a British citizen towards shaping the future of other nations. This is a sensitive and under-researched area of potential political and foreign policy influence, which should be considered by the UK Government as a constructive tool, but also addressed with great delicacy. As the scale of international migration grows, the size of diaspora communities, concentrated in nations with advanced economies, may allow them to wield significant influence if their voting behaviour is mediated into a relatively cohesive bloc. An example is provided by the role of the Irish-American diaspora in influencing the United States' position on the Troubles in Northern Ireland. The 'four horsemen', four Irish-American politicians, were successfully lobbied by components of the Irish-American diaspora to advocate against the British position in Northern Ireland. In turn, the politicians utilised their knowledge, skills and networks, and drew attention to the size of the Irish-American voting bloc, to reshape the approach of President Nixon, and subsequent administrations, towards Northern Ireland.<sup>160</sup>

At its most extreme, this can present challenges to host nations and exacerbate diplomatic tensions. For example, in Germany, the sizeable Turkish community defied the foreign policy interests of their host nation to support authoritarian leader Erdogan in the 2018 elections,<sup>161</sup> and visits from high-profile Turkish politicians have been met with discomfort by the Bundestag.<sup>162</sup> Analysis of the voting behaviour of the Polish diaspora in the UK around the 2015 Polish elections also suggests the nation's expatriates in Britain tended to support the right-wing populist PiS party and the anti-establishment Kukiz'15 over other alternatives.<sup>163</sup> In response, some groups of Polish emigrants in the UK sought to increase voter participation among the diaspora in the more recent elections in 2019, in a bid to uphold values of democracy and equality – strongly held in the UK – and in opposition to the direction the diaspora perceive the Polish Government to be taking.<sup>164</sup>

Moreover, expatriates may also enact political influence as elected representatives themselves, particularly within local government. A relatively significant proportion of the UK diaspora have been inclined to involve themselves in local government in their host nations, in an

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effort to support integration and heighten the recognition of the diaspora community on a local level.<sup>165</sup> The diaspora may also engage themselves in other forms of democratic life in their host nations, including organising or taking part in protests or campaigning. Although ultimately unsuccessful in their objectives, demonstrations by members of the Turkish diaspora outside the French National Assembly in 2011 were a powerful visual opposition to the French Parliament's proposal to make the denial of claims of genocide against Ottoman Armenians during the First World War a criminal act.<sup>166</sup> These developments have raised important questions about the constitution of 'integration' within a nation, including whether a degree of *political integration* should be considered as vitally alongside an individual's economic, social and civic integration.

On a more cultural level, here in the UK, the mass turnout of Polish voters to select the RAF's World War II symbol enabled Polish aviator Colonel Franciszek Kornicki to be chosen, a small action which will serve to cement Poland's involvement in the war and reassert the longstanding relationship between the UK and Poland.<sup>167</sup>

The political and collective mobilisation of any diaspora is not always straightforward, as they are necessarily a diverse group of individuals with heterogeneous priorities and concerns. Over time, however, through conscious efforts by states and/or vibrant local associations to build a collective consciousness and identify overlapping concerns, they can be made increasingly cohesive. A significant amount of this work is currently undertaken by diaspora associations, particularly those with a political or campaigning focus. However, even social associations help to build a collective consciousness through striving to build a collective cultural identity and by bringing the diaspora community together socially.<sup>168</sup> Through supporting and partnering with these associations, including through providing advice and training on how the diaspora can utilise their political voice, the UK can encourage these associations to take on a more active political role. This is particularly important because expatriates approached to take greater leadership and business facilitation roles often express a desire for greater training and support.<sup>169</sup> Furthermore, diaspora representation bodies, particularly diaspora parliaments, can also help in maintaining a degree of political consciousness, which can be harnessed to utilise the diaspora as a political influencing source abroad.<sup>170</sup>

It is also important that the diaspora has the influencing power to impact local politics. In part, this is reliant on the electoral and voting power of the diaspora, which the UK Government can support by encouraging, and providing information on, voter registrations. It also requires the diaspora to have strong networks and relationships – many of which may be able to be facilitated by the UK and its various international cultural agencies, such as the British Council. The UK Government can also seek to ensure significant political events prove valuable springboards for mobilisation. The Indian diaspora in the United States, for example, mobilised on mass for the first time in support of the US-India nuclear deal, leveraging previous campaign donations to lobby Congressmen, as well as holding seminars to educate the public at large about the importance of Indian stability to the United States, to help build public support for the agreement. The memory of this mobilisation lives on in the minds of both politicians and the diaspora, thereby continuing to shape policy and actions in the present day.<sup>171</sup>

There is a need for the UK Government to reflect upon the implications of its diaspora's political influence, and particularly to consider the consequences of the fact the diaspora has, historically, been rather concentrated in particular locations and therefore carrying a particular weight in a select number of regions. The Global Britain project will set out the UK's foreign policy ambitions, including the nature and tone of its global relationships, and the role of the diaspora in achieving these – whether through voting, campaigning or protest mobilisation, or more traditional diplomatic forms of influence – should also be recognised as part of this process. After all, the very existence of a large proportion of emigrants can prove valuable in asserting the importance of ongoing bilateral and multilateral relations.<sup>172</sup>

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## 'Best Practice' Global Examples

### Learning from Others

The tone and nature of diaspora engagement varies dramatically between nations, with some governments seeking to minimise the administrative burden,<sup>173</sup> while others actively encourage emigrants to return, to contribute to their nation's human capital.<sup>174</sup> However, approaches to diaspora engagement are evolving rapidly. In recent years, there has been a marked shift in nations' approaches to diaspora policy, and indeed, the very labelling of emigrant communities as 'diasporas' marks a significant shift towards recognising them as actors that must balance integration in their host country with retention of the identity of the country of their birth. And in doing so, present influencing opportunities for home nations, particularly with regards to foreign policy.<sup>175</sup> As such, by 2014, 110 countries had established formal programmes designed to develop links with their citizens abroad.<sup>176</sup>

However, many diaspora engagement programmes remain in their infancy, with engagement identified as a foreign policy priority, but with no clear strategy on how to achieve this vision.<sup>177</sup> Moreover, the structure of these programmes must necessarily be aligned with the particular needs and objectives of the home nation. Nonetheless, there are some 'best practice' examples that provide alternative approaches for the UK Government to consider, which we set out below.

### Connectivity and Visibility

One of the primary difficulties for the UK Government at the moment in the effective management and service of the UK diaspora is the challenges of maintaining comprehensive records about the evolving nature of the diaspora. Other UK allies have also faced this same problem, including the United States<sup>178</sup> and France. To tackle this visibility gap, many nations, including Belgium, Bulgaria and Finland, have chosen to adopt voluntary registration systems; however, these tend to fail to fully capture the size and composition of the diaspora.<sup>179</sup> Similarly, in the United States, a voluntary registration system was introduced after the US Census Bureau concluded it was not cost effective to count overseas Americans.<sup>180</sup> However, a census of expatriates has remained high on the American diaspora's agenda, and one of the primary asks of the Americans Abroad Caucus, which views a comprehensive understanding of the diaspora as integral to effective policy-making on the diaspora.<sup>181</sup>

By contrast, Germany is one of the few countries which has established an effective mechanism for diaspora registration, and provides a useful model for the UK to consider. The German Government requires all residents to register with their local authorities within 1-2 weeks of moving residence within Germany, and when leaving Germany, emigrants are then required to deregister with local authorities within the same period, or be subject to fines for non-compliance. A landlord's signature is required for both registration and deregistration, to prevent emigrants claiming to still reside at a friend's address, and the de-registration system is used to calculate and comprehend the composition of the German diaspora. A separate opt-in system, the 'Electronic Recording of Germans Abroad' is offered for those who wish to receive notifications from embassies during emergencies.<sup>182</sup> The separation of the two activities – departure from Germany and engagement in host nations – is effective in overcoming many of the challenges the UK's former LOCATE system faced.

A second engagement area which the UK could seek to improve is providing more opportunities and systematic forums for diaspora consultation. In this regard, much can be learned from France, which engages with its diaspora through the *Assemblée des Français de l'Étranger*, an elected body comprised of 90 councillors, elected by 443 consular advisers, which provides guidance to the French Government on matters such as employment, French

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education abroad and social protection. The body adopts opinions, resolutions and motions, and once a year, the French Government submits a report to the Assembly on its diaspora policies, and the assembly votes on whether to endorse them.<sup>183</sup> France also operates 'Conseil Consulaire' – elected bodies responsible for defending the interests of French expatriates in their specific country of residence. This two-pronged consultation system ensures the French diaspora has an opportunity to express both host country-specific and broader diasporic concerns.

Experiences in other nations also highlight that there is a danger that diaspora engagement policy is subject to the whims of government changes, while in practice – like diplomacy – consistency is crucial. In particular, ministerial departments for expatriates are often created, and then subsequently disbanded when governments change, as has been the case in both France and Italy.<sup>184</sup> As such, nations have increasingly realised the importance of institutionalising and permanently embedding diaspora engagement in statutes and laws.<sup>185</sup> For example, Latvia's 2019 Diaspora Law creates a systemic framework for the implementation of diaspora policy, ensures stable future funding from the state budget, and outlines clear objectives for diaspora policy. The UK Government should consider how to ensure that any efforts to improve diaspora engagement are firmly institutionalised and embedded, so that their benefits are able to be realised over time and to create certainty for the diaspora population.

### Culture and Soft Power

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Although nations such as Lithuania<sup>186</sup> have recognised that cultural engagement alone is insufficient for effective diaspora diplomacy, it is also true that the human capital of the diaspora remains a powerful tool for communicating and projecting UK soft power. Engagement on a cultural level, moreover, provides an attractive entry point for the UK diaspora to engage with the UK Government and Britain more generally, on a range of other potential strategic areas. In the BFPG's 2020 report on the future of UK-China relations, the robust level of support and interest in British culture amongst both the Chinese people and Chinese elites highlights the fertile ground for further investment in cultural exchange, as a springboard for other forms of influence – a subject that warrants further investigation.<sup>187</sup>

The widespread celebration of St Patrick's day in the United States, for example, provides an opportunity for the Irish-American diaspora to uphold their connection with Irish culture, and to introduce other Americans to its goodwill, joviality and endurance. Italy's Italian Cuisine Week in the World, which runs simultaneously across over 100 countries annually, has gained traction beyond the diaspora community and acts as a valuable soft power asset in promoting Italian culinary excellence.<sup>188</sup> Pravati Bharatiya Divas (Non-resident Indian Day) serves a similar purpose of galvanisation among the Indian diaspora, although its celebration is largely confined to Indian nationals.<sup>189</sup>

The value of cultural activities is such that nations have increasingly embedded cultural events overseas as a standard function of their embassies' activities. Ireland has introduced a new national agency called 'Culture Ireland', to strategically promote Irish arts and improve Ireland's international reputation. In France, embassies are additionally tasked with managing scholarship programmes for French diaspora members studying at French institutions abroad.<sup>190</sup> These activities are often regarded as essential soft power exercises, but their importance in forging and upholding links to the diaspora should also be recognised.

For example, New Zealand's Government sponsors and supports Kea's 'World Class New Zealand' awards for New Zealanders' abroad, working in strategically important industries. In doing so, they are able to identify individual New Zealanders with high levels of social capital who could help to improve the Government's connections across different industries. As a partnership, the Government is able to reap the benefits of this engagement and scoping exercise, without having to devote the time and energy required to organise the awards.<sup>191</sup> In a similar vein, the Lithuanian Government helps to fund the NGO Global Lithuanian Leaders

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programme, which hosts the annual Global Lithuanian Leaders awards.<sup>192</sup> These collaborative opportunities also extend into interest representation as well, with Finland designating the Finland Society as Secretariat of the Finnish Expatriate Parliament.<sup>193</sup>

There are clear benefits to be realised, in a cost-effective manner, through better harnessing existing societies, associations and initiatives as designated vehicles for UK diaspora engagement. Moreover, there is much to learn for Britain in the initiatives of other non-Anglosphere cultures about the tangible impact of cultural events and activities in a range of target nations of strategic importance to the United Kingdom's global interests and relationships. Although the international dominance of British culture in historical terms has minimised the sense of necessity in the past around such programmes, the heightened nature of global migration flows and more contested nature of the diplomatic and cultural arena necessitates a shift in gears, as the United Kingdom can no longer afford to rest on its laurels.

### Strategic Links and Influence

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There has been an increasing recognition of the potential provided by diaspora communities – both among home and host nations – to seed, accelerate and advance trade and investment opportunities. In Australia, for example, fourteen Australian consulates are run by Austrade, the country's trade and investment authority, rather than the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. This enables the government to provide consular services in locations in which it has major business interests, at a fraction of the cost.<sup>194</sup>

Lithuania has particularly advanced thinking on the diaspora's role in trade and investment, and through its Global Lithuania Programme, the Lithuanian Government has worked with the NGO Global Lithuanian Leaders to develop a network of 17,000 Lithuanian professionals across 49 countries, with a specified remit to advance Lithuania's prosperity. The programme includes training and support, to enable young people and professionals to utilise and share their knowledge and expertise with Lithuania. In a particularly novel proposal, Lithuania is also establishing guidelines for how diaspora members could serve as Diaspora Advisors to Ministers, particularly in target export markets, supporting diaspora interests and aiding the government in its relations with other nations.<sup>195</sup>

A crucial tenet of successful attempts to increase diaspora trade and investment is that these approaches are multi-pronged, recognising the need to simultaneously increase awareness and understanding of opportunities for diaspora business links, while also making these opportunities both accessible and desirable. Mexico has established a particularly vast array of routes through which to encourage diaspora business and investment. The Mexican Talent Network is used to promote ties between Mexico and highly qualified Mexicans abroad, and the Padrino Program is used to facilitate investment in over 1000 projects identified by the Presidential Office for Mexicans abroad. These are supplemented by extensive financial incentives designed to make investment more appealing, such as the '1 x 1' programme, which matches individual migrants' investment funds for business projects with government money. The complementary, but different, nature of these initiatives helps to more comprehensively tackle the barriers to diaspora trade and investment.<sup>196</sup>

Mexico also organises geographically targeted diaspora engagement initiatives, particularly targeting its diaspora in North America. The Mexican Migrant Advisory Council, which is elected by migrants in the United States and Canada, directly advises the Institute of Mexicans Abroad (IME), and three-day migrant focused conferences are held to generate feedback on IME programmes.<sup>197</sup> Although Mexico has asserted that its engagement efforts with its diaspora community residing in the United States are not an attempt to influence politics in the United States, it has organised targeted programmes run by the IME to encourage Mexican immigrants to participate in American elections, with a key focus on civic engagement and leadership. In the mid-2000s, as Mexico was beginning to establish its diaspora engagement policies, it also collaborated closely with the Jewish diaspora in the United States, particularly through the



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American Jewish Committee, in training Mexican-Americans in leadership skills and creating the Anti-Discrimination Group, modelled on the Anti-Defamation League. The UK Government should be willing to seek support from other politically influential diasporas in building the political influence of the UK abroad.<sup>198</sup>

The existence of the diaspora alone, can also be utilised politically to emphasise the importance of positive international relations. The Turkish government, for example, have sought to use the existence of a large Turkish diaspora in Europe as a strong reasoning in support of Turkish membership of the EU.<sup>199</sup> Furthermore, while attempts to encourage the Turkish diaspora to vote in a certain way have been controversial, it is true that programmes designed to increase both electoral understanding and sense of collective identity demonstrate the valuable springboard to political influence that can be fostered.<sup>200</sup>

A few nations have also begun to think more holistically about how the political, social and economic influence of their diaspora can be collectively and formally harnessed. A proposal that has received some traction in America, among both scholars and members of the diaspora, is for an informal ambassador programme. Such an initiative would enable the diaspora to share knowledge and insights with the United States Government across a range of issues, through a more cohesive and coordinated channel. The programme would also ensure that expatriates are equipped with the resources and capabilities to successfully advocate on their home country's behalf.<sup>201</sup> It will be valuable for the UK to consider how we could be better leveraging our existing cultural and higher education institutions to pilot such a scheme.

### Emerging Trends in the Global Diaspora

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The clearest trend that emerges across research into different national diasporas is that diasporas maintain a clear sense of national identity, and express a clear desire and willingness to promote the culture and values of their home country. Indeed, 90% of the American diaspora identify to some degree as American.<sup>202</sup> It is, however, not clear the extent to which these identities are also strengthened by the distinctiveness of particular national cultures, the tendency to live within culturally similar communities and large family households, and the compound effect between nationality and religion. For example, 72% of Turkish expatriates identify primarily as Turkish, and they place a high prioritisation on Turkish culture, religion and the generational transfer of Turkish traditions. They also strongly endorse President Erdogan's message that emigrants should integrate, but not assimilate, into local communities.<sup>203</sup>

However, there is also a visible appetite amongst diaspora populations to engage with their Governments directly. Research by Danes Worldwide, for example, makes clear the desire of the diaspora for a strategic initiative focused on their engagement led by the Danish Government and for the diaspora to be trained and equipped with materials to recruit and lobby on behalf of Denmark.<sup>204</sup> There is some evidence, however, that younger diaspora members may not be as willing to undertake these forms of engagement;<sup>205</sup> hence why the establishment of youth-led programmes are a sound investment as a first foothold into diaspora relations.

It is also true that many members of diaspora communities view their relationship with their home countries in a relatively transactional manner, expecting returns for their support of government objectives. Members of the American diaspora have, for example, believe that "the country that values them actively is the country which will earn their loyalty and service", and also affirm that "Americans living abroad play a much more important role in building cultural bridges than (they) are given credit for". The United States has no explicit or official policy on diaspora engagement, and this has had a tangible impact not only on willingness to engage in attempts at diaspora diplomacy but also more fundamentally on citizenship – with high levels of citizenship renunciations in recent years, with a 2015 survey finding that 31% of the diaspora was actively considering citizenship renunciation.<sup>206</sup>

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This trend has been motivated by a perceived lack of focus on the diaspora's needs, the Foreign Account Tax Compliance Act (FACTA), which the diaspora believes unfairly targets them under an insinuation of criminality, the absence of formal political representation in the United States, and lack of access to Medicare and other health services abroad.<sup>207</sup> The Danish diaspora have in turn urged the simplification of procedures to allow them to take part in Danish life and to reduce regulations around returning to Denmark in return for their support.<sup>208</sup> The discontent registered amongst other diaspora communities makes clear that successful attempts to encourage the diaspora to advance the UK Government's ambitions should be complemented by increased support, representation agency, and considered a two-way exchange.

While the UK allows our diaspora to vote for a limited period of time after emigration, many other nations go significantly further. France and Italy both have designated special representation of emigrants in the national legislative, rather than subsuming votes into the districts they formerly lived in. This ensures proper representation of the diaspora in the home country legislature, and has led political parties to create 'federations' or 'sections' abroad, and to the formation of an emerging class of 'extra-territorial' political entrepreneurs who prioritise the interests of the diaspora.<sup>209</sup> The UK Government should consider the role of electoral agency and political representation as an opening offer to unlock the diaspora's potential as a social, economic and diplomatic force in the future.

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# Conclusion

Despite significant dynamism over recent years, the United Kingdom is in possession of a large, active and diverse diaspora population around the world – many of whom are concentrated in regions of strategic importance to British economic and diplomatic interests. Should the UK Government be able to invest resources in conducting a sweeping audit of the diaspora, to better understand its true nature, there will be considerable rewards in improving visibility of, and connectivity with, expatriate communities.

Underpinning such a project will need to be a shift in thinking from regarding the diaspora as a large group with unpredictable points of emergent vulnerability, to a more nuanced and complex group of individuals and collective points of mobilisation – with the possibility to forge important new links, to change perceptions and wield influence as a foreign policy asset. Several 'best practice' examples from around the world provide frameworks around which the United Kingdom's diaspora relations could be reinvigorated; however, there is also an argument to be made that a more comprehensive strategic roadmap – directly linked to the Global Britain agenda and tailored to the UK's specific needs and objectives – should be developed.

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# Actioning the Research: Key Recommendations

## **1. Establish two databases to monitor the UK's diaspora abroad: one compulsory registration system for monitoring the size and composition of the UK's diaspora abroad, and a second opt-in database to manage communication with diaspora members.**

- The UK's shift to a 'just in time' over a 'just in case' model of engagement with the diaspora limits the UK's ability to not only engage with the diaspora, but also to understand its composition and needs. Separating diaspora population monitoring from emergency diaspora engagement will enable the UK to overcome many of the challenges posed by the previous LOCATE system, and provide both understanding of and opportunities to engage with the UK's diaspora.
- Germany has developed a compulsory registration system for residents moving both within and emigrating from Germany, with fines associated with non-compliance. Through this system, the German Government is able to gather a comprehensive understanding of the composition of the German diaspora. It also simultaneously runs an opt-in system - 'Electronic Recording of Germans Abroad' - through which emigrants can receive notifications from embassies during emergencies.

## **2. Conduct a formal audit of diaspora assemblies, parliaments or councils, to review their performance and effectiveness as a potential model.**

- Diaspora assemblies, parliaments and councils have become increasingly popular across Europe, and provide opportunities for the diaspora to communicate their concerns, needs and opportunities with their homeland. This helps to build goodwill between the diaspora and home nations, as well as maintaining a sense of inclusion in the homeland's international activities.
- These representative bodies can take a variety of forms and a formal audit would provide an opportunity for the UK to think critically about which forms of representative engagement will be most effective in engaging with its diaspora.
- France's Assemblée des Français de l'Étranger, an elected body of 90 councillors, elected by 443 consular advisers, is one such body, adopting stances and resolutions on diaspora issues. France also runs 'Conseil Consulaire' which operate in specific countries of residence to ensure host country-specific concerns are also addressed.

## **3. Extend the right to vote for UK citizens who have lived abroad for more than 15 years.**

- Political decision-making in the UK has a profound impact on the diaspora, and the inability to vote in decisions perceived to affect them has been a source of contention within the diaspora community. Extending the franchise to all British citizens abroad would help to uphold their ties to the UK, and help them to develop a more robust political consciousness as a diaspora community.
- These citizens may have left the United Kingdom as a place of residence, but the UK has invested in their education and social relationships, and they remain important strategic assets for the UK Government to leverage in achieving its Global Britain ambitions.
- The Budget announced in March 2021 set aside £2.5 million to remove the limit preventing British citizens who live overseas from voting after 15 years of living abroad, but the legislative change required to accompany this has yet to be passed.
- French citizens living abroad never lose their voting rights, and have designated special representatives of emigrants within the national legislative, providing proper representation of the diaspora's interests in the home country legislature, and encouraging French citizens abroad to develop a political consciousness.

### **4. Establish formalised relationships with civil society organisations connected to the UK diaspora.**

- Many UK nationals rarely engage with UK embassies, but proactively engage with social and voluntary associations and forums. Deepening and formalising ties with these organisations will ensure that the UK Government is at the forefront of agenda-setting and information dissemination within the diaspora community, and help build connections between citizens and their homeland. This direct access through trusted conduits is especially significant during times of economic and political upheaval, and will help to challenge misinformation during times of crisis.
- Through the Civil Society and Diaspora Directorate, the African Union has created a space which recognises the importance of partnerships between governments, civil society and diasporas and has recognised how utilising these interconnected relationships is integral to ensuring participation of the African diaspora in the continent's geopolitical objectives.

### **5. Conduct a strategic review of UK embassies' use of social media, to ensure they are being harnessed as effectively as possible.**

- Following the discontinuation of the LOCATE system, social media has become an increasingly important method of communication between the UK and the diaspora. However, levels of engagement with UK embassy social media channels vary significantly across embassies. A strategic review that identifies the strengths and weaknesses in embassies and consulates' existing use of social media and identifies best practice guidance, will be valuable in ensuring they are making the most of opportunities to engage with the UK diaspora.
- Digital diplomacy has become an increasing priority for Global Affairs Canada (the Canadian Government department responsible for all consular activities) and as a result, despite having a limited digital presence just a few years ago, they now have a strong online presence with 2.5 million likes across all their Facebook groups, enabling them to engage with a sizeable proportion of the Canadian diaspora.

### **6. Invest in providing low-cost language-learning opportunities for British nationals abroad.**

- In non-Anglophone countries, language barriers impede access to basic services and integration in host countries for many British expatriates. By providing low-cost language-learning opportunities UK embassies can open up opportunities for the diaspora to engage more proactively with their local communities, building networks which can be utilised by UK embassies as well as building goodwill with the diaspora.
- This is an issue across expatriate communities, with only one in four British expatriates speaking the local language fluently. Relatively few countries provide targeted language learning opportunities for their diaspora in host countries, however this is an area in which the UK could seek to lead – alongside its own investments in English language provision abroad. The closest existing example is perhaps Morocco's recent agreement with France to increase French language opportunities for Moroccans both in France and Morocco, in a bid to encourage cultural exchange.

### **7. Strike deals in local markets to provide legal, paid-for access to British television.**

- British citizens abroad cite missing British television as a means of connecting to their British cultural identity, and utilise illegal VPNs in order to do so. By creating deals with local providers to provide privileged access to British TV for the diaspora community, the UK can provide revenue for the national broadcaster and enhance this link between the diaspora and their home nation.
- There are currently no comparable policies among other countries, although a number of countries do provide targeted media for their diaspora. Belgium, for example, runs a weekly radio broadcast 'Belgians from the Other Side of the World' (Les Belges du Bout du Monde) programmed on French-speaking Belgian public radio. The international success of the BBC World Service, however, means the UK would approach this task from a unique position of strength.

### **8. Invest in improving the financial literacy of the British diaspora.**

- Financial disinformation is prevalent among the diaspora, and their lack of language expertise and perceived economic privilege mean British expatriates are often vulnerable to financial scams and economic precariousness. Fostering financial literacy amongst the diaspora is a sound investment for the UK Government, helping them to better ride the storm of financial shocks and reducing the prospect of them needing urgent consular assistance.
- The Institute for Mexicans Abroad (IME) runs an extensive programme of digital literacy and financial management training for its emigrants in the United States, and financial advice is displayed in every consulate.

### **9. Establish a network of diaspora trade ambassadors and a diaspora trade council.**

- The British diaspora express a clear desire to engage more closely with the UK Government and support its global initiatives, and can serve as the people-to-people links that forge meaningful trade and investment avenues for the UK. By establishing a system of diaspora trade ambassadors and a diaspora trade council, the UK Government can formally harness both the knowledge and the personal networks of the diaspora to help develop its trading relationships.
- Lithuania's Global Lithuania Programme has developed a network of 17,000 Lithuanian professionals across 49 countries, whose role is to advance Lithuania's prosperity. These individuals serve as a gateway and central contact point for other members of the diaspora. Lithuania is also researching how diaspora members could serve as Diaspora Advisors to Ministers, to support the government in its trading relations with other nations.

### **10. Develop an online diaspora engagement hub.**

- An online diaspora engagement hub would bring together policy-makers, NGOs, businesses and individuals and provide the resources and information required to facilitate cross-national partnerships between the diaspora and the UK, strengthening relationships between the diaspora and UK businesses, and other third sector partners in the UK and host nations.
- The Diaspora Relations Bureau of the State Chancellery of Moldova, in partnership with the International Organisation for Migration and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, launched a Diaspora Engagement Hub in 2016. This programme supported Moldovan citizens abroad through grants to encourage the transfer of knowledge, experience and best practices, as well as two thematic grants relating to diaspora women's empowerment and educational centres.

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