

Diaspora Policies within the Organization of Turkic States: Opportunities for Strategic Engagement

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This study evaluates the diaspora engagement policies of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Türkiye, and Uzbekistan using F. Ragazzi's multiple correspondence analysis (MCA) to compare legislative frameworks, institutions, and the intensity of engagement. The analysis identifies distinct policy profiles aligned with five ideal types (expatriate state, closed state, global-nation state, managed labour state, indifferent state) and maps each Organization of Turkic States (OTS) member to the nearest cluster. Türkiye and Azerbaijan exhibit global-nation features, with strong cultural and lobbying toolkits; Uzbekistan aligns with managed labour, prioritising economic integration and skills transfer; Kyrgyzstan approximates the indifferent type, given weak extra-territorial infrastructure; and Kazakhstan blends features of global-nation, expatriate, and indifferent profiles, reflecting institutional gaps alongside active symbolic politics. We highlight practical "windows of opportunity" for OTS-level coordination: a shared "Turkic diaspora" label, joint cultural and education programmes, and an annual OTS Diaspora Policy Summit evolving into a World Turkic Congress. These measures would enhance soft-power reach, reduce duplication, and convert dispersed initiatives into a coherent, outcome-oriented agenda.

Keywords: OTS, Turkic Diaspora, diaspora engagement policy, diaspora institutions, diaspora typology.



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Introduction

Engaging the diaspora has become a significant component of the foreign and domestic policy instruments of many nations. Reflecting this trend, nations worldwide are instituting frameworks for diaspora engagement policies. This development reflects not only the growing demographic weight of migrant communities but also the recognition of their role as political, cultural, and economic actors across borders. Diaspora groups today influence bilateral relations, shape public diplomacy, and contribute to knowledge and financial flows between home and host countries. Consequently, the design and effectiveness of diaspora policies have become an important subject of comparative research and international cooperation. As noted by A. Gamlen,¹ by 2014, nearly 60 percent of UN member states had established diaspora institutions.

This trend has attracted scholarly interest, predominantly focused on individual country cases. Interestingly, within the Organization of Turkic States (OTS), Türkiye's diaspora policy has been the primary focus of comprehensive research, while other members, including Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan, tend to be neglected.²

This study aims to fill in this gap by explaining the dynamics surrounding the implementation, primary objectives, and strategies of diaspora engagement policies within five member states of the OTS. Furthermore, this study endeavours to categorize the OTS countries by employing F. Ragazzi's classification of state diaspora engagement policies and his methodological framework.³ This enables the definition of possible points of cooperation in the field as well as offering new opportunities from uniting diaspora resources.

The article is structured as follows. It begins with an examination of the methodologies used for analysis. Case studies on Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Türkiye, and Uzbekistan provide comparisons of legislative frameworks, institutional mechanisms, and policy instruments, culminating in a synthesis of findings and strategic implications.

1 Gamlen, A. Cummings, M.E. and Vaaler, P.M. "Explaining the Rise of Diaspora Institutions", *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, Vol. 45, No. 4, 2019, pp. 492-516.

2 Gamlen, A. "Diaspora Institutions and Diaspora Governance", *International Migration Review*, Vol. 48, No. 1, 2014, pp. 180-217.

3 Ragazzi, F. "A Comparative Analysis of Diaspora Policies", *Political Geography*, 41, 2014, pp. 74-89.

Methodology

The methodology employed in this study draws from F. Ragazzi's framework,⁴ which involves utilizing Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA) to examine categorical variables within a dataset pertaining to diaspora policies; in simple terms, MCA helps to reveal similarities and differences across countries by grouping them according to shared policy features. To do so, we collected information on the diaspora policies of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Azerbaijan, and Türkiye from both primary and secondary sources to code and distribute within 18 active variables categorized into five headings.

Table 1. Active variables (with possible modalities)

Symbolic policies	Religious and cultural policies
Inclusion of the diaspora in the national calendar of celebrations (Yes/No)	Religious institutions or personnel abroad (Yes/No)
Diaspora conferences (Yes/No)	Cultural centres abroad (No/Co-financed/Fully financed)
Highest administrative unit (Directorate/Agency/Ministry)	Schools abroad (No/Language and cultural programmes abroad/Affiliated schools/Controlled schools)
Social and economic policies	Citizenship policies
Scientific networks (No/Not orientated toward return/Orientated toward return)	Access to citizenship through ethnic or religious belonging (No/With residency provisions/Without residency provisions)
Investment schemes for populations abroad (No/Only for returnees/For returnees and for the diaspora)	Loss of citizenship through residence abroad (Yes/No)
Welfare provisions for the diaspora (Yes/No)	Loss of citizenship if other citizenship is adopted – acceptance of dual citizenship (Yes/No)
Welfare provisions for returnees (Yes/No)	External vote (No/Vote from abroad/Vote from abroad and representation)

4 Ibid.

State and bureaucratic control
Origin identification document for non-citizen (Yes/No)
Lobbying officially encouraged by the state (Yes/No)
Policing of populations abroad is suspected (Yes/No)
Mobility restrictions for citizens who want to go abroad (Yes/No)

Based on the analysis, the present authors were able to classify the OTS countries into five types of states depending on the nature of their diaspora policies. However, the sample of countries was not determined by indirect statistical data (*passive variables*). F. Ragazzi used this methodology due to the large number of countries, dividing them into subgroups based on statistical indicators. Consequently, the interpretation of the results in multiple correspondence analysis did not consider passive variables.

It should be noted that the analysis was carried out based on the official sources of each country. Thus, data from international organizations and other studies were not included in this article.

Defining Clusters of States

According to F. Ragazzi’s typology, five types of countries are distinguished depending on the nature of their diaspora policies: expatriate state, closed state, global-nation state, managed labour state, and indifferent state.

The first cluster – *expatriate states* – includes those which place special emphasis on issues related to culture, education, and political activity in their diaspora policies. Such states demonstrate this by providing opportunities for political participation, specifically by enabling overseas voting for the diaspora. The research findings show that none of the diaspora policies of the five selected countries belong to the first cluster. It is noteworthy that countries such as Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Türkiye, and Uzbekistan focus on operating cultural centres abroad, ensuring their full funding and offering courses teaching the native language and cultural reproduction.

The second cluster – *closed states* – includes those states that maintain a strict policy regarding diasporas. In these countries, internal policy is aimed at regulating or restricting the mobility of their populations, while external policy is directed at reducing the level of political influence of compatriots abroad. Multiple correspondence analysis of the selected countries suggests that they do not belong to the second cluster.

Global-nation states in the third cluster interact with their diasporas in various ways: holding diaspora conferences, establishing cultural programmes and supporting lobbying efforts. The primary goal of these states is to extract economic and political resources, either by attracting the most talented representatives of the diaspora to return to their homeland or by utilizing their expertise and knowledge. According to the data, Azerbaijan and Türkiye fall into the third cluster category.⁵

In the fourth cluster – *managed labour state* – countries provide economic support to their populations abroad. These countries have specific investment programmes for repatriates and diasporas. This category also includes those states that have large numbers of emigrants. The findings indicate that Uzbekistan belongs to this cluster, as the country has a large number of emigrants (including Uzbek citizens) who are supported both institutionally and socio-economically, as well as having investment and knowledge transfer projects.⁶

The fifth cluster – *indifferent states* – comprises states characterized by a generalized lack of interest in their populations abroad. The research results show that Kyrgyzstan falls into this category of countries.⁷

5 President.az, *Azerbaijani President, German Federal Chancellor held joint press conference*, Press Conferences, August 25, 2018, Available at: <https://en.president.az/articles/29744> (Accessed: 24 September 2018)

6 Otanazarova, Y. “Statistics and Government Policies on Uzbek Diaspora in Foreign Countries”, *Texas Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies*, 5, 2022, pp. 37–39; Irina, N. “Why Is Tashkent Reluctant to Reconnect with Ethnic Uzbeks Abroad?”, *The Diplomat*, February 9, 2024, Available at: <https://thediplomat.com/2024/02/why-is-tashkent-reluctant-to-reconnect-with-ethnic-uzbeks-abroad> (Accessed: 30 September 2025).

7 International Organization for Migration, “Mapping Kyrgyz Diasporas, Compatriots and Migrants Abroad”, 2021, Available at: <https://kyrgyzstan.iom.int/resources/report-mapping-kyrgyz-diaspora-compatriots-and-migrants-abroad-0> (Accessed: 30 September 2025).

Figure 2. Dendrogram of Clusters



It is crucial to highlight that Kazakhstan stands apart from the mentioned state types, as it embodies distinct features of three: the global-nation state, the expatriate state, and the indifferent state.⁸

On the one hand, in terms of symbolic politics, the country engages in sustainable and mutually beneficial interactions with the diaspora, periodically conducting the World Kurultai of Kazakhs and organizing various events (such as small *kurultai* and business forums). The cultural policy is aimed at preserving linguistic and cultural identity.

On the other hand, Kazakhstan currently has no governmental body (ministry, committee, or department) responsible for working with the Kazakh diaspora but has a state-affiliated non-profit joint stock company, Otandastar Foundation, under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

Highlights of Diaspora Policies

Azerbaijan

Azerbaijan’s extensive diaspora, officially estimated to number around 50 million, is primarily managed through the State Committee of the

8 Official Website of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, “Meeting of Kazakhstan’s State Secretary with Kazakh diaspora youth in Türkiye”, February 16, 2018, Available at: https://www.akorda.kz/en/secretary_of_state/secretary_of_state_news/meeting-of-kazakhstans-state-secretary-with-kazakh-diaspora-youth-in-turkey-1? (Accessed: 30 September 2025).

Republic of Azerbaijan for Work with Diaspora and the Support Fund for the Azerbaijani Diaspora (SFAD).⁹ These institutions are pivotal in executing the government's diaspora policy, which includes cultural promotion, educational support, and promotion of Azerbaijan's soft power.

The State Committee actively organizes cultural events globally, in conjunction with the Heydar Aliyev Azerbaijani Cultural Center, to strengthen cultural ties and promote Azerbaijani heritage.¹⁰ Moreover, the Azerbaijani government supports educational initiatives abroad, notably operating over 60 Sunday schools worldwide that offer education in the Azerbaijani language and history. Within the framework of the State Program for Educating Youth in Prestigious Higher Education Institutions of Foreign Countries (2022–2026), the Ministry of Education annually allocates 400 scholarships for bachelor's and master's degree programmes to further support the academic advancement of Azerbaijani youth abroad.^{11 12}

Legislatively, Azerbaijani law does not permit dual citizenship.¹³ However, it acknowledges the Azerbaijani diaspora as an official overseas lobbying entity.¹⁴ This recognition is evident in the governmental strategies¹⁵ that involve diaspora communities in

9 Azerbaijan.az, *Number of Azerbaijanis Living Outside of Azerbaijan*, May 5, 2024, Available at: <https://azerbaijan.az/en/related-information/207> (Accessed: 30 September 2025).

10 Azerbaijani Diaspora Support Fund, “Republic immigrants”, May 28, 2020, Available at: <https://diaspora.foundation/project/8-cumhuriyyet-muhacirleri> (Accessed: September 30, 2025)

11 Azertag, *As part of the state program, the acceptance of documents for the 2024-2025 academic year has begun*, March 1, 2024, Available at: https://azertag.az/ru/xeber/v_ramkah_gosudarstvennoi_programmy_nachalsya_priem_dokumentov_na_2024_2025_uchebnyi_god-2937987 (Accessed: September 30, 2025)

12 State Committee on Work with Diaspora of the Republic of Azerbaijan, “History and purpose of establishment of the committee”, May 3, 2024, Available at: <https://diaspor.gov.az/ru/page/istoriya-i-cel-sozdaniya-14> (Accessed: September 30, 2025)

13 Embassy of the Republic of Azerbaijan in the Republic of Moldova, “Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan on citizenship. Embassy of the Republic of Azerbaijan in the Republic of Moldova”, May 16, 2024, Available at: <https://chisinau.mfa.gov.az/ru/content/132/zakon-azerbaydzhanskoy-respubliki-quoto-grazhdanstve-azerbaydzhanskoy-respublikiquot> (Accessed: September 30, 2025)

14 President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, “Ilham Aliyev attended the Third Congress of World Azerbaijanis”, July 5, 2011, Available at: <https://president.az/ru/articles/view/2709> (Accessed: September 30, 2025)

15 State Committee on Work with Diaspora of the Republic of Azerbaijan, “Regulations on the State Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan for Work with Diaspora”, May 19, 2024, Available at: <https://diaspor.gov.az/ru/page/regulation-15> (Accessed: September 30, 2025)

promoting Azerbaijan’s geopolitical and economic interests on the global stage.¹⁶

Further substantiating this role, Azerbaijan has implemented specific initiatives aimed at cultivating young Azerbaijani leaders abroad through educational and professional development programmes. These programmes are designed not only to help individuals succeed but also to create a network of professionals aligned with Azerbaijan’s national interests. Moreover, the Azerbaijani government frequently sponsors cultural festivals and business forums in foreign countries, which serve as platforms for networking among Azerbaijani expatriates and promote Azerbaijan’s cultural heritage and investment opportunities.¹⁷

These coordinated efforts by various Azerbaijani institutions exemplify a multifaceted approach to diaspora engagement that integrates cultural promotion, educational support, legislative measures, and strategic diplomacy to enhance the nation’s global standing and maintain robust ties with its extensive diaspora.^{18 19}

Kazakhstan

Although Kazakhstan’s diaspora exceeds 5 million people globally,²⁰ specific legislation governing diaspora relations is lacking, as the law “On state support of the Kazakh diaspora” drafted in 2018–2019 was not submitted for consideration and adoption. The country’s diaspora engagement policy has been mostly focused on repatriation programmes

16 Azerbaijan State News Agency, *Speech of President Ilham Aliyev at the 2nd Congress of World Azerbaijanis*, March 10, 2006, Available at: https://azertag.az/en/xeber/speech_of_president_ilham_aliyev_at_the_2nd_congress_of_world_azerbaijanis-560116 (Accessed: 30 September 2025).

17 Azerbaijan State News Agency, *Budapest hosts Azerbaijan-Hungary Business Forum*, June 30, 2023, Available at: https://azertag.az/en/xeber/budapest_hosts_azerbaijan_hungary_business_forum-3730787 (Accessed: 30 September 2025).

18 President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, “Ilham Aliyev Attended the Third Congress of World Azerbaijanis,” July 5, 2011, Available at: <https://president.az/en/articles/view/2709> (Accessed: September 30, 2025).

19 State Committee on Work with Diaspora of the Republic of Azerbaijan, “Regulations on the State Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan for Work with Diaspora”, May 19, 2024. Available at: <https://diaspor.gov.az/en/page/regulation-15> (Accessed: September 30, 2025).

20 Official Website of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, “Meeting of Kazakhstan’s State Secretary with Kazakh diaspora youth in Türkiye”, May 7, 2024, Available at: https://www.akorda.kz/ru/secretary_of_state/secretary_of_state_news/vstrecha-gosudarstvennogo-sekretarya-gabdykalikovoi-s-molodezhyu-kazahskoi-diaspory-prozhivayushchei-v-turcii-1 (Accessed: September 30, 2025)

and cultural preservation, resulting in the establishment of Kazakh cultural centres overseas by the late 1990s to 2005. However, after the state programme for support of compatriots living abroad ended, diaspora engagement waned until a revival in 2016–2017.

Currently, the primary responsibility for engaging with the Kazakh diaspora and maintaining ties lies with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which oversees the Otandastar Foundation, the primary operator of state diaspora engagement policies. However, there is no specific department within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs dedicated to diaspora issues.

In practice, state support measures and mechanisms for engaging with the diaspora are implemented through public associations, such as the World Kazakh Association, which aims to unite the Kazakh diaspora worldwide through membership and fostering connections with ethnic Kazakhs.

Meanwhile, the Otandastar Foundation has been actively collaborating with government departments and implementing diaspora projects and programmes. Its responsibilities include international cooperation with Kazakh diaspora associations, projects to maintain and promote Kazakh culture and language, and organizing events such as the World Kurultai of Kazakhs and business meetings. Additionally, the Foundation assists ethnic returnees with adaptation and integration.²¹ Primary methods of engaging with the Kazakh diaspora include organizing small gatherings known as *kurultai* (meetings), hosting business forums, and managing cultural centres such as the Kazakh House and Abai House.²²

A novel initiative is the introduction of diaspora member cards known as *Ata zhol*, which provide Kazakh diaspora members with a 10-year visa for Kazakhstan, access to the country's social and healthcare systems, assistance in business projects, and opportunities for investment in Kazakhstan's economy.²³

Kazakhstan's engagement with its diaspora has been characterized by fluctuating levels of attention and activity over the past three decades.

21 Otandastar Qory, *Goals and objectives of Otandastar Qory*, March 20, 2024, Available at: <https://oq.gov.kz/statutory-tasks> (Accessed: September 30, 2025)

22 Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of Population of the Republic of Kazakhstan, "The Ata Zholy Card Will Become Available from July 2023", June 6, 2023, Available at: https://www.gov.kz/uploads/2023/8/17/c5c33397402ac7b15d2a0acd449e49b9_original.5129437.pdf (Accessed: September 30, 2025).

23 Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of Population of the Republic of Kazakhstan, "The Ata Zholy card will become available from July 2023", June 6, 2023, Available at: <https://www.gov.kz/memleket/entities/enbek/press/news/details/568500?lang=ru> Uzbekistan News. (Accessed: September 30, 2025)

Initially driven by the need to bolster statehood through repatriation, the government's approach has evolved to recognize the diaspora's potential across various domains. However, a lack of specific legislation governing homeland–diaspora relations and the absence of a systematic approach to policy implementation have remained persistent challenges.

Kyrgyzstan

Kyrgyzstan's diaspora estimates suggest that there are over 764,000 ethnic Kyrgyz living abroad, as well as 740,500 Kyrgyz migrants.²⁴ The Council on Relations with Compatriots Abroad, operating under the auspices of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic, serves as the principal advisory and consultative body addressing diaspora issues.²⁵

The Council serves as a permanent consultative and advisory body. Its primary role is to facilitate the preparation of coordinated decisions regarding the development and execution of strategies that strengthen the ties of the Kyrgyz diaspora with the homeland. Additionally, the Council plays a role in ensuring the maintenance and preservation of the Kyrgyz people's language and spiritual and cultural heritage.²⁶

Although Kyrgyzstan has established an institution for diaspora policy within its borders, it lacks a network of organizations outside its territory to effectively implement its policies. Interaction with the diaspora beyond the country depends partly on the activity of diaspora communities and organizations.²⁷

Kyrgyzstan's diaspora engagement strategy emphasizes educational initiatives to preserve cultural heritage. The Kyrgyz diaspora, supported by entities like the European–Kyrgyz Union, has launched language

24 Joshua Project, "Kyrgyz in China", May 18, 2024, Available at: https://joshuaproject.net/people_groups/12933/CH (Accessed: September 30, 2025)

25 Federal State Statistics Service of the Russian Federation, "National composition of the population of the Russian Federation. Federal State Statistics Service, May 15, 2024, Available at: https://rosstat.gov.ru/storage/mediabank/Tom5_tab1_VPN-2020.xlsx (Accessed: September 30, 2025)

26 Ministry of Justice of the Kyrgyz Republic, "Regulations on the Council for Relations with Compatriots Abroad under the President of the Kyrgyz Republic", May 17, 2024, Available at: <https://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/46-3656/edition/1241/ru> (Accessed: September 30, 2025)

27 International Organization for Migration, "Mapping Kyrgyz diasporas, compatriots and migrants abroad. International Organization for Migration", 2011, Available at: https://kyrgyzstan.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbdl1321/files/documents/Report_Kyrgyz_diaspora_compatriots_migrants_abroad_2021_RUS.pdf (Accessed: September 30, 2025)

schools worldwide, including a significant initiative in 2015 to open language courses abroad.²⁸

The country also implements a repatriation policy to facilitate the return of ethnic Kyrgyz (referred to as *kayrylman*) to their historical homeland. The state also supports their professional development through training and retraining programmes aimed at enhancing employability and integration into the labour market.

Türkiye

Among OTS countries, Türkiye has the most advanced policy directed at its compatriots abroad. Türkiye's diaspora, estimated at seven million individuals primarily residing in continental Europe, is governed by robust legislative and institutional frameworks. The main legislative instruments include a Presidential Decree, the 'Law on the Organization and Duties of the Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities', and the 'Organization of Ministries, Relevant Related Institutions and Organizations, and Other Institutions and Organizations'.²⁹

The key institution facilitating continuous dialogue with the diaspora is the Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities (YTB), which implements its policies along three principal directions.

The first is the preservation of diaspora identity and culture, particularly the native language, and more broadly, strengthening ties to the homeland and supporting their economic, social, cultural, and legal positions. The second direction involves research into kinship and related communities – referred to as *kardeş* – with whom Türkiye shares common historical and cultural ties. The third direction focuses on international student mobility. Such initiatives not only facilitate the exchange of knowledge but also foster a deeper cultural and academic connection between Türkiye and the global Turkish diaspora.

Türkiye, in its diaspora policy, has established external institutes dedicated to providing Turkish education and popularizing the Turkish language and cultural heritage. Türkiye supports cultural centres

28 Radio Azattyk, *Kyrgyz children learn their native language in Austria*, December 16, 2015, Available at: <https://rus.azattyk.org/a/27431083.html> (Accessed: September 30, 2025)

29 Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities, "Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities", May 2, 2024, Available at: <https://ytb.gov.tr/kurumsal/baskanlik> (Accessed: September 30, 2025)

named after Yunus Emre,³⁰ located in over 60 countries. These centres offer Turkish language education and organize cultural and artistic events. The funding of these centres is fully provided by the Turkish government and is supported by the foreign policy department. Centres also contribute to the development of Turkology departments and the teaching of the Turkish language abroad.

In addition to its cultural and educational initiatives, Türkiye supports a network of affiliated schools abroad, operated through the Turkish Maarif Foundation.³¹ Furthermore, there is a postgraduate scholarship programme for studies abroad, implemented by the Ministry of National Education of Türkiye through the YLSY programme, aimed at educating Turkish citizens, including those with dual citizenship.³²

Representatives of the Turkish diaspora are also eligible to participate in elections on an equal basis with Turkish citizens.³³ In August 2014, Turkish expatriates participated in a Turkish national election for the first time, during the presidential elections. According to the legislation, the right to vote is granted to every emigrant over the age of 18 who is registered on the electoral roll at a population registration institution or a Turkish diplomatic mission abroad. The largest number of registered voters was observed in Germany, with 1.4 million people, followed by countries such as France, the Netherlands, and Belgium.³⁴

Uzbekistan

Uzbekistan recognizes a significant population of ethnic Uzbeks, estimated at between 6 and 8 million globally, with 3 million in Central Asia, 2–4 million in Afghanistan, 1 million in Russia,³⁵ and

30 Yunus Emre Institute, “President’s message”, May 4, 2024, Available at: <https://www.yee.org.tr/en/corporate/presidents-message> (Accessed: September 30, 2025)

31 Turkish Maarif Foundation, “About us”, May 4, 2024, Available at: <https://www.afganturkmaarif.org/Home/en> (Accessed: September 30, 2025)

32 Ministry of National Education of Turkey, “YLSY Selection and placement of candidates to be sent abroad for postgraduate education” (translation from Turkish), May 7, 2024, Available at: <https://yyegm.meb.gov.tr/www/sss.php> (Accessed: September 30, 2025)

33 Resmî Gazete, *Turkish citizenship law*, June 12, 2009, Available at: <https://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2009/06/20090612-1.htm> (Accessed: September 30, 2025)

34 TRT Russian. *How will the Turkish diaspora vote in the upcoming elections?*, April 10, 2023, Available at: <https://www.trtrussian.com/novosti-turciya/kak-tureckaya-diaspora-budet-golosovat-na-predstoyashih-vyborah-12679899> (Accessed: September 30, 2025)

35 TASS. *There are about 1 million migrants from Uzbekistan in Russia*, February 20, 2024, Available at: <https://tass.ru/obschestvo/20032639> (Accessed: September 30, 2025)

approximately 68,000 in the United States,³⁶ along with almost 2.4 million Uzbek citizens living abroad. The governance of diaspora relations in Uzbekistan is underpinned by two principal documents: the ‘Concept on cooperation with compatriots working and living abroad’ and the ‘Programme on further developing cooperation with compatriots living abroad’. These frameworks delineate the state’s policy directives and affirm the government’s dedication to nurturing and sustaining connections with its diaspora.^{37 38}

The organizational architecture for engaging with the Uzbek diaspora is structured around several key governmental bodies. The President of Uzbekistan sets the overarching policies for diaspora engagement, while the Cabinet of Ministers oversees their implementation. The Committee on Interethnic and Friendly Relations with Foreign Countries provides essential support for diaspora relations, complemented by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which ensures the timely execution of these policies. Additionally, the Ministry of Higher and Secondary Special Education, the Ministry of Employment and Labor Relations, and the Agency for External Labor Migration each play critical roles within their specific competencies in diaspora engagement.

State-affiliated organizations such as the Vatandoshlar Foundation and the El-Yurt Umidi Foundation are instrumental in policy execution. The Vatandoshlar Foundation focuses on safeguarding the rights and well-being of Uzbek nationals abroad, providing essential support and legal aid, and fostering entrepreneurial connections with Uzbekistan. Meanwhile, the El-Yurt Umidi Foundation is engaged in training specialists abroad, enhancing diaspora connections, and recruiting skilled professionals to return to influential positions within Uzbekistan, thus boosting the nation’s international reputation.

Uzbekistan is committed to forming diverse organizations and communities that integrate Uzbeks and Uzbekistani immigrants across various sectors to attract investment and expertise to the country. Initiatives include hosting forums for compatriots and establishing associations such as the Uzbekistan’s Club and the World Youth

36 UPG North America, “Uzbeks in North America”, May 15, 2024, Available at: <https://upgnorthamerica.com/project/uzbeks-in-north-america/> (Accessed: September 30, 2025)

37 Irina, N. “Why is Tashkent reluctant to reconnect with ethnic Uzbeks abroad?”, *The Diplomat*, February 9, 2024, Available at: <https://thediplomat.com/2024/02/why-is-tashkent-reluctant-to-reconnect-with-ethnic-uzbeks-abroad/> (Accessed: September 30, 2025)

38 Uzbekistan News, *Data on the ethnic composition of the population of Uzbekistan has been published*, August 20, 2021, Available at: <https://www.gazeta.uz/ru/2021/08/20/ethnic-groups/> (Accessed: September 30, 2025)

Association of Uzbekistan. Recognizing its citizens abroad as key assets in these endeavours, Uzbekistan aims to leverage its soft power to enhance international cooperation and its national image.

Since gaining independence, Uzbekistan's approach to diaspora engagement has evolved significantly, marked by policies introduced in 2018 that emphasize the strategic importance of collaborating with its diaspora. These initiatives are designed to harness diaspora resources for national development, highlighting the critical need for effective implementation and coordinated action to optimize the impact of these international communities on Uzbekistan's development trajectory.

Potential routes to joint action

For united efforts to be fully effective, Turkic nations need to make concerted efforts to activate and enhance their diaspora policies. In this vein, the study particularly highlights a 'window of opportunity' for enhanced cooperation and coordination across the OTS, which could lead to more streamlined and effective diaspora engagement strategies.

First, to further consolidate the efforts of OTS countries in promoting their interests abroad, Turkic countries could officially adopt and promote the term 'Turkic Diaspora.' This would involve fostering collective identity and visibility of their diaspora members, thereby enhancing their influence in host countries. Such efforts would not only unite the diaspora under a common banner but also elevate the profile of Turkic cultures and interests on the global stage, creating a stronger, unified voice in international affairs.

Second, given the shared cultural heritage and significant diaspora populations in similar regions (particularly in Europe and Central Asia), OTS countries could benefit from collaborative cultural events, joint educational programmes, and language promotion initiatives. These could take the form of Turkic cultural festivals, joint degree programmes among universities in the OTS countries, and summer schools focusing on Turkic languages and cultures, enhancing the cultural connection and educational opportunities for the diaspora youth.

Third, an annual OTS Diaspora Engagement Policy Summit could be established, providing a regular platform for policymakers, diaspora members, and stakeholders to exchange best practices, coordinate policy

measures, and launch joint initiatives. This summit could also serve as a mechanism for assessing policy execution and adjusting strategies as necessary to fit the evolving dynamics of the Turkic diaspora.

Over time, this summit could evolve into a World Turkic Congress, aiming to promote Turkic interests abroad. This Congress would not only bolster the collective efforts of the OTS countries but also serve as a global forum for advancing the economic, cultural, and political influence of the Turkic peoples worldwide.

By implementing these recommendations, OTS countries could not only promote their interests through a united diaspora but also enhance the sense of a shared Turkic identity and solidarity among their diaspora populations, which are increasingly influential on the global stage.

Conclusion

This study aimed to compare diaspora engagement policies across OTS member states, and the results show distinct national approaches ranging from Türkiye's advanced institutional model to Azerbaijan mobilizing its diaspora as a lobbying force, Uzbekistan's labour orientation, Kazakhstan's mixed framework, and Kyrgyzstan's limited cultural outreach.

The member states of the OTS demonstrate a broad spectrum of strategies ranging from integrative and cultural initiatives to politico-economic programmes and restrictive measures. Despite shared goals, such as preserving cultural heritage and strengthening national identity, each state employs a unique set of tools shaped by its historical, political, and socio-economic realities.

Türkiye, possessing the most advanced system of diaspora policy among OTS countries, effectively utilizes institutional and legislative mechanisms to forge strong ties with the Turkish diaspora. Institutions such as the Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities (YTB) actively promote cultural and educational initiatives, serving as instruments of soft power. Additionally, the ability to participate in elections makes the diaspora a significant political actor. This engagement comes with a trade-off, however. It enhances Türkiye's international influence at the cost of risking domestic political stability, particularly when diaspora interests conflict with the country's official policies.

Azerbaijan, home to one of the largest diasporas among OTS countries, stands out with its integrative model focused on cultural engagement

and support for educational initiatives. Programmes such as weekend schools and cultural festivals strengthen connections with Azerbaijanis abroad. Azerbaijan openly recognizes its diaspora as a lobbying force and actively involves it in promoting the country's interests internationally. In recent years, following the heightened relevance of the [now former] conflict with neighbouring Armenia, Azerbaijan has shifted its perception of the diaspora, emphasizing its role as the 'voice of Azerbaijan' in host countries.

Uzbekistan, by contrast, prioritizes economic integration and support for its citizens abroad, reflecting the large number of Uzbek labour migrants. A clear emphasis is placed on the transfer of financial resources, knowledge, and expertise. Through organizations such as the Vatan Foundation and the El-Yurt Umidi Foundation, the government facilitates investment and professional qualification opportunities for its compatriots, underscoring Uzbekistan's pragmatic approach. However, the political role of the diaspora remains minimal.

Kazakhstan demonstrates a complex yet equally noteworthy approach. Its policy combines elements of multiple frameworks, including those of a globally oriented national state and an emigrant state. Initiatives such as hosting the World Kurultai of Kazakhs and operating the Otandastar Foundation reflect efforts to preserve cultural identity and create platforms for engagement. However, the lack of comprehensive legislative regulation and a specialized governmental body reduces the effectiveness of these efforts, rendering the policy inconsistent.

Kyrgyzstan, despite having consultative bodies such as the Council for Relations with Compatriots, exhibits a weak institutional framework for engaging with its diaspora. Its policy is more focused on preserving cultural heritage than on systematic involvement in economic or political processes.

Despite differences in approaches, significant potential exists for coordination and joint efforts. Collaborative initiatives such as organizing cultural events, developing educational programmes, and creating a unified platform for diasporas would not only enhance their influence abroad but also contribute to the consolidation of Turkic identity. However, achieving these goals requires a cohesive strategy aimed at addressing institutional and legislative gaps, which will be key to maximizing the diaspora's contribution to national development and international cooperation.