



Migrants' contribution to climate action:

mapping green skills and initiatives among Italy-based diasporas



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Glossary

Climate action: According to the UNDP, climate action means stepped-up efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and strengthen resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-induced impacts, including: climate-related hazards in all countries; integrating climate change measures into national policies, strategies and planning; and improving education, awareness-raising and human and institutional capacity with respect to climate change mitigation, adaptation, impact reduction and early warning.¹

Diaspora: Set of migrants and descendants of migrants whose identity and sense of belonging have been shaped by their migration experience and background (IOM, 2019a).

Diaspora organization (DO): Those organizations, either formally or informally established, that include people with a migratory background who decide to formally come together to pursue common goals, regardless of such goals themselves (IOM, 2022a).

Green skills: According to the International Centre for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (UNEVOC) of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), green skills are about both (i) technical knowledge and skills that enable professionals to effectively use green technologies and processes (i.e. resource efficient technologies or processes that reduce waste and minimise the environmental impact of human action); and (ii) transversal skills, as well as knowledge, values and attitudes that help them take pro-environmental decisions in their work and lives.²

1 See the Sustainable Development Goals Help Desk [related page](#).

2 See the [UNESCO-UNEVOC Glossary](#).

List of abbreviations

COMED	Coordination Office for the Mediterranean of the International Organization for Migration
COP	Conference of Parties
HDPN	Humanitarian–Development–Peace nexus
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
ILO	International Labour Organization
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization



Executive summary



Between 2023 and 2024, the Coordination Office for the Mediterranean (COMED) of the International Organization for Migration conducted a mapping of climate action initiatives and green skills among diaspora organizations (DOs) based in Italy. This initiative was part of IOM's broader efforts to enhance migration and migrants' agency in the response to escalating climate changes. The role of diasporas in development processes has long been recognized and supported by IOM COMED,³ and is becoming increasingly relevant in building resilience and adaptation amidst climate upheavals and environmental degradation. The mapping aimed to gather evidence and insights about the existing contribution of diasporas to climate action, with the scope of informing future IOM initiatives in their support.

The mapping exercise involved 89 diaspora organizations from an IOM COMED database who completed an online survey; 38 of them reported being engaged in climate action initiatives. Subsequently, 14 participants were selected to conduct qualitative semi-structured interviews to further deepen the information collected.

The mapping explored the diversity of climate action initiatives implemented by diaspora organizations, emphasizing their key yet often overlooked role in promoting and localizing transnational action. Most participating diaspora organizations primarily focus on cultural promotion, support to migrants' inclusion or broader international cooperation, and only a minority identifies climate action as their priority mission; nonetheless, environmental protection emerged as a cross-cutting issue of increasing relevance among diaspora initiatives.

With over 80 per cent of respondents active internationally, and mostly in Africa, Latin America and Europe, diasporas are affirmed as critical transnational actors. Findings provide evidence of their role in several key areas: food and water security, environmental education,

3 See IOM COMED's [A.MI.CO.](#) and [Draft!](#) programmes.

sustainable economic development, biodiversity restoration, renewable energy and circular economy. The actions showcased are diverse, innovative and strongly rooted in local needs, generally relying on diaspora common strengths and knowledge (e.g. agroecology, community engagement), with more technical and resource-intensive issues being less but not negligibly addressed (e.g. renewables, sustainable finance, etc.). Green skills and expertise available among diaspora organizations mostly align with the areas of engagement in climate action. Levels of climate literacy can vary across and within the diaspora organizations; on average, awareness is reported to be increasing, also due to direct experiences with extreme events. Available expertise generally depends on diaspora organizations members with technical backgrounds in environmental subjects; however, raising awareness and developing technical expertise remain a major challenge and a priority target according to the interviewees. To overcome these issues, diaspora organizations usually promote both internal and external capacity-building activities, and create ad hoc partnerships for knowledge transfer.

The mapping also investigated challenges, opportunities, existing mechanisms involving diasporas, and priority actions. A key takeaway is the enthusiasm and willingness among diasporas to strengthen their engagement in climate action. Challenges include financial limitations, lack of infrastructures, time constraints, cultural barriers and political conflicts both in countries of origin and destinations; frustration was expressed over unsuccessful attempts to engage with institutions. Opportunities highlighted the key role of diasporas in localizing resource and knowledge transfer, as well as their critical role in climate negotiations; benefits of climate action are mainly identified in its potential to promote well-being and create jobs. Priority issues to be addressed include food security, ecosystem restoration, renewable energy and climate justice.

Based on these insights, the following recommendations are proposed for IOM and other institutional and non-institutional stakeholders interested in bolstering climate action initiatives with diasporas.

A) Policy level

- ▶ Enhance the role of diasporas as advocates for climate justice, particularly with respect to indigenous rights and knowledge, gender inequalities, North–South relations and energy cooperation.
- ▶ Support diaspora participation in international events and forums (i.e. COP on biodiversity, COP on climate change, etc.) and climate negotiations (i.e. background papers, national or cooperation strategies on environment, etc.).
- ▶ Support diaspora efforts to mainstream outcomes of climate action projects at the policy level.
- ▶ Foster coordination among diaspora communities, both in Italy and abroad, to promote dialogue, South–South collaboration and partnerships to access international funds.

- ▶ Provide financial support to diaspora-led development projects and streamline bureaucratic procedures for ease of access and efficiency.
- ▶ Scale up existing diaspora initiatives by broadening the pool of beneficiaries and territories of intervention.
- ▶ Encourage comprehensive data collection and research to further acknowledge diaspora contributions to climate action, in order to highlight trends, identify gaps and measure the impact of diaspora-led initiatives.

B) Operational level

- ▶ Establish a roster of diaspora professionals in the areas of environment and climate change that can facilitate skills circulation among diasporas and promote their engagement in project design and implementation.
- ▶ Conduct seminars and training sessions with diaspora organizations to strengthen awareness, develop knowledge and skills in the areas of environment and climate change, focusing particularly on climate change, climate action and policies, project design and management, with differentiated pathways according to the expertise available.
- ▶ Encourage capacity-building activities on environmental issues targeting local authorities and communities in the framework of diasporas' development projects.
- ▶ Promote meetings and exchange opportunities with diaspora organizations in which presenting data, identifying challenges and co-designing concrete solutions.
- ▶ Encourage initiatives that promote the transfer of diaspora resources (through remittances, investments and business creation) towards green economy and climate action in countries of origin.
- ▶ Disseminate project results and share best practices to improve visibility of successful initiatives.
- ▶ Conduct thorough needs assessments and data collection, also through research partnerships with the academia, to tailor projects to local needs and adapt to the sociocultural specifics of the beneficiary communities.



1.

Introduction

Between 2023 and 2024, the Coordination Office for the Mediterranean (COMED) of the International Organization for Migration conducted a mapping of climate action initiatives⁴ and green skills⁵ among diaspora organizations⁶ (DOs) based in Italy. This initiative was part of IOM's broader efforts to enhance migration and migrants' agency in responding to escalating climate changes, building resilience and adaptation. The role of diasporas in fostering and activating development processes, in fact, has long been recognized, including in Italy by Law 125/2014 regulating development cooperation. Their capacity to quickly mobilize, deliver and localize resources on the ground helps operationalize the Humanitarian–Development–Peace nexus (HDPN)⁷ and the aid agenda. IOM COMED has consistently valued this role, namely empowering more than 300 diaspora organizations over the last decade through the A.MI.CO. programme⁸ and supporting the formalization of diaspora engagement within Italy's Development Cooperation through the Draft! programme.⁹ While several IOM-supported diaspora projects have addressed environmental and climate issues, a specific focus for diaspora engagement on climate action reflects IOM's newly declared objectives and strategies, such as the IOM Strategic Plan (IOM, 2024) and the IOM Institutional Strategy on Migration, Environment and Climate Change 2021–2030 (IOM, 2021); moreover, it builds on other IOM missions' initiatives, such as the Diaspora4Climate project by IOM UK.¹⁰

Given this context, the main objective of this mapping exercise was to gather evidence and insights about existing engagement in climate action of Italy-based diaspora organizations, in order to inform future IOM initiatives in support of diasporas as key promoters of climate solutions. This included identifying champion diaspora organizations, challenges and priorities to design tailored and evidence-driven actions.

4 See [glossary](#).

5 [Ibid.](#)

6 [Ibid.](#)

7 See also: <https://emergencymanual.iom.int/humanitarian-development-peace-nexus-hdpn>.

8 See IOM COMED's [initiatives supporting the Civil Society](#).

9 See also: <https://summitdiaspore.org>.

10 See the IOM UK [Diaspora4Climate](#) project.

The initiative was carried out in two phases. An initial survey provided insights about the diaspora organizations currently engaged in climate initiatives, their geographical coverage, the sectors of climate action and expertise, and a first glance at the efforts needed to enhance diaspora engagement; it also allowed to identify a smaller sample of respondents with a relevant level of engagement and expertise. These respondents were successively involved in qualitative interviews which presented more extensively the existing work of diasporas to promote food and water security, protect and regenerate biodiversity, encourage environmental education and research, and foster renewable energies and circular economy. It emerged from the analysis that green skills are available among diaspora members and, when this is not the case, diaspora organizations build partnerships with research institutes and local counterparts to fill knowledge gaps; overall, climate literacy is growing among diasporas, despite being still insufficient to guarantee high levels of engagement and impact, according to some interviewees. Interviews also discussed the existing obstacles that prevent diasporas from increasing the scope and beneficiaries of their action: in addition to the lack of resources (time, financial capacity and infrastructure), cultural prejudices and little institutional involvement were pointed out. However, there is a general consensus on the need to improve diaspora engagement and enhance their added value in climate action, and therefore, priority issues to be addressed were identified.

The present report illustrates the main findings of the mapping exercise and is organized as follows. A brief methodological note is introduced right after this presentation, including sampling and the formal aspects of the interviews. The third chapter presents the main data collected, divided into six sections: description of respondents; climate action activities; green skills and expertise; challenges; opportunities; and priority interests. Finally, the fourth chapter draws the conclusions and provides a summary of policy and operational recommendations.



2. Methodology

The methodology underlying this mapping exercise aimed to answer the following research question:

What expertise is available among diaspora organizations in Italy to contribute to climate action and promote the green transition?

To address this question, the investigation employed a mixed-methods approach comprising two phases. From July to September 2023, an initial quantitative exploration was carried out by distributing an online survey to a sample of approximately 500 diaspora organizations listed in an IOM database. This database was compiled from prior contacts or collaborations with diaspora organizations, particularly within the context of two diaspora engagement programmes:

- ▶ The A.MI.CO. programme, which supports diaspora organizations in international cooperation activities and is structured into various levels, including capacity-building (A.MI.CO. Training and Webinars), financial grants (A.MI.CO. Award and A.MI.CO. Grants) and organizational support (A.MI.CO. Plus);
- ▶ The Draft the future! project, which aims to organize and formalize diaspora organizations' engagement in the Italian development system through the creation of a national coordination mechanism.

The survey also asked organizations to provide any additional contacts that could be relevant to the investigation (snowball sampling); however, no significant contacts were identified beyond those already included in the database.¹¹

The online survey aimed at providing a general overview of the following topics:

- ▶ relevant past, ongoing and future projects related to climate action;
- ▶ green skills and expertise available among their members;

¹¹ A "snowball sampling" is a sampling technique where existing study subjects recruit future subjects from among their acquaintances.

- ▶ initiatives of capacity-building with respect to environmental and climate change issues they have carried out;
- ▶ and perceived opportunities and challenges for diaspora organizations to engage in climate action.

The online survey had 89 respondents, out of which 38 (43%) declared to carry out climate action initiatives. Diaspora organizations were then asked to indicate their areas of climate action and expertise by choosing from a list of options.¹²

As part of the data analysis, the 22 sectors identified were grouped into five thematic categories:

- ▶ “community engagement and knowledge transfer”;
- ▶ “sustainable economic development”;
- ▶ “ecosystem restoration”;
- ▶ “food security”;
- ▶ “energy and circular economy”.

In the second phase of the mapping, a smaller sample of respondents was selected based on the relevance of their engagement and expertise in climate action emerging from survey results, to conduct qualitative semi-structured interviews. This purposive sampling¹³ was based on quantitative, geographical and thematic criteria and allowed to identify 18 organizations. The selection criteria privileged diaspora organizations with the highest number of climate initiatives and members with green expertise; the balance in the geographical coverage; and priority topics according to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, 2022a, p. 40; IPCC, 2022b, pp.22–25; IPCC, 2023, p. 27) such as food security, renewable energies, circular economy and ecosystem restoration. Fourteen interviews were conducted online, for a duration of 40–75 minutes. Interviews were not recorded but transcribed integrally and then validated via email by the interviewees. At the beginning of each call, respondents were informed about the objectives of the interview and data anonymization.

Out of the 18 diaspora organizations identified, 14 agreed to be interviewed. Among them, most had participated to more than one IOM programme, namely:

- ▶ 11 attended A.MI.CO. training;
- ▶ 2 attended A.MI.CO. webinars on climate change held in 2023;

12 The listed options were the following: environmental education and capacity-building in green sectors; research and innovation in green sectors; disaster risk reduction; community engagement; migration, environment and climate change; agroecology, sustainable agriculture and farming; water resources management; fisheries and aquaculture; fair trade; green and blue economy; climate inequalities; sustainable tourism; sustainable finance; biodiversity protection; land management and soil regeneration; nature restoration and nature-based solutions; urban regeneration; coastal resilience; clean and renewable energy; waste management and circular economy; sustainable infrastructure and buildings; sustainable transport (inland, maritime, air).

13 A “purposive sampling” is a technique for the identification and selection of sample units according to specific characteristics, e.g., knowledge, experiences or other criteria.

2. Methodology

- ▶ 7 received a EUR 10,000 grant in the framework of A.MI.CO. Award;
- ▶ 4 received a EUR 30,000 funding in the framework of A.MI.CO. Grants;
- ▶ 1 was involved in A.MI.CO. Plus;
- ▶ 2 participated in regional meetings organized by Draft the future!;
- ▶ 2 benefited from study grants provided by Draft the future!.

The data were then analysed using a coding methodology to identify patterns, themes and recurring categories.

2.1. Research limitations

Diaspora mappings (IOM, 2022b) can be useful to portray the status of diasporas in a specific field and at a given moment in time, however diaspora organizations remain highly sensitive to changes in their member composition. A major limit of the analysis is that this provides a static image of diasporas between 2023 and 2024 that might have evolved in the meantime. To bypass this limitation, IOM strives to update mappings and data regularly to ensure that available information is up-to-date.

With respect to sampling issues, it is important to mention that this investigation is not representative of all the diaspora organizations active or based in Italy, as it was extended only to the IOM COMED database.



3.

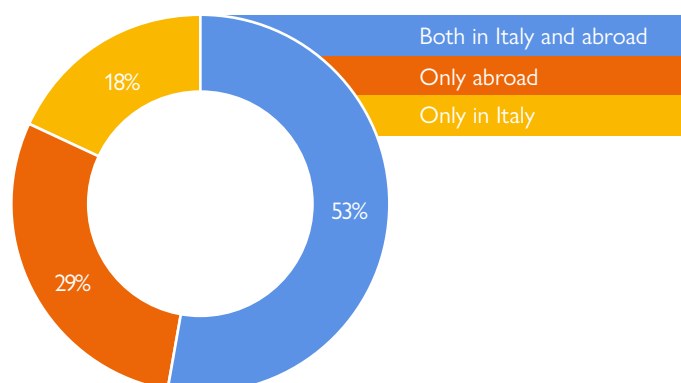
Results and analysis

3.1. General overview on participants

The online questionnaire provided an initial overview of the diaspora organizations participating, highlighting the percentages of diaspora organizations active in climate action and the specific areas they cover. The areas of intervention most frequently indicated by the overall sample were cultural promotion, language mediation and citizenship. Among the 89 respondents, 38 diaspora organizations (43%) reported involvement in climate action activities. Qualitative interviews also confirmed that most organizations focus on broader international cooperation, which includes education for global citizenship and mobilizing the diaspora for resource transfer, as well as supporting migrants' inclusion, and cultural promotion. Out of the 14 diaspora organizations interviewed, four declared climate action to be their priority mission. All the others consider environmental protection as a cross-cutting and increasingly relevant issue among their activities, though not their main focus. Combating irregular migration and sport activities were also mentioned.

Survey findings indicate that climate action activities are largely implemented at a transnational level: 53 per cent of the diaspora organizations operate both in Italy and their countries of affiliation, and 29 per cent only abroad, which makes that over 80 per cent of them are engaged in climate action internationally (Figure 1). Africa is the most represented continent,

Figure 1 Where do DOs implement climate action initiatives?



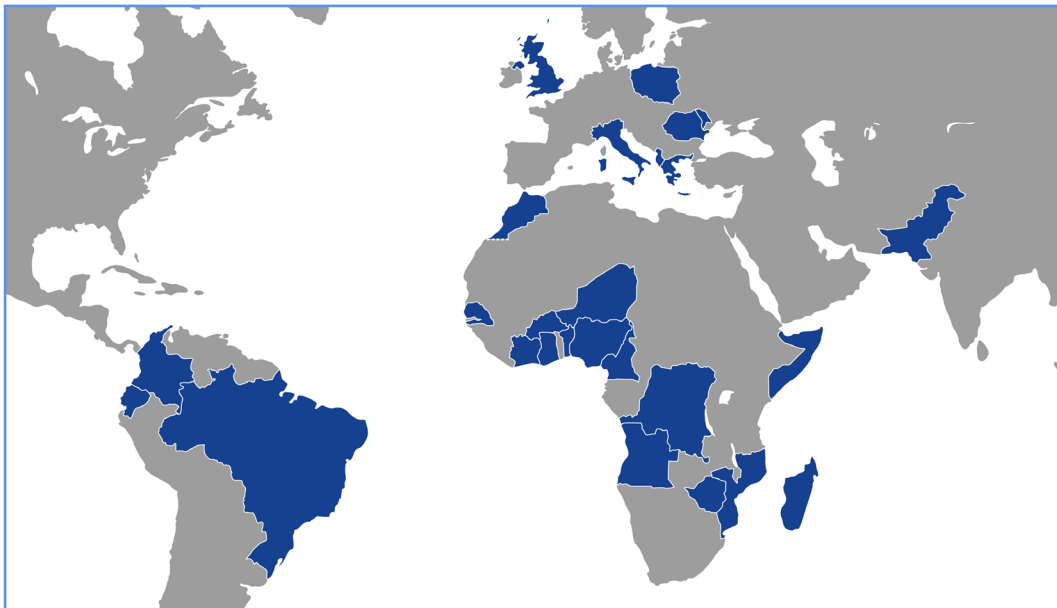
3. Results and analysis

with Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire leading the ranking (Table 1), followed by Latin America and Europe; countries from Asia and the Pacific are underrepresented, and no diaspora from North America participated in the mapping (Figure 2).

Table 1 Top 10 countries where participating DOs implement climate action initiatives

Senegal	7
Italy	5
Côte d'Ivoire	4
Albania	2
Benin	2
Brazil	2
Burkina Faso	2
Cabo Verde	2
Mozambique	2
Nigeria	2
Zimbabwe	2

Figure 2 Countries where climate action initiatives are implemented by participating DOs



Source: Authors' analysis of survey data and illustrated through PowerBI software.

Note: This map is for illustration purposes only. The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the International Organization for Migration.

This geographical coverage was reflected also in the qualitative interviews, with the diaspora organizations interviewed indicating a focus on Africa, Latin America and Europe. Diaspora organizations generally target one country of heritage, but some of them (23% as per the quantitative data) are active in multiple countries. Interviews highlighted that the multinational activity can sometimes be related to common features among the countries targeted, e.g. the geographical region (e.g. sub-Saharan Africa) or postcolonial relations (e.g. Senegal and France),

but in general is due to the multiple origins or transnational attachments of their members (IOM, 2019b). Among the diaspora organizations interviewed, six included members from a single country of origin; four included members of various nationalities; two included also non-diasporic members; and one revealed not being strictly a diaspora-led organization, but having members with migratory backgrounds, and having participated in regional diaspora meetings. Most of them are based in northern Italy (five in Piedmont, two in Lombardy, one in Trentino and one in Veneto); three are based in the central north part of Italy (Emilia Romagna, Tuscany), one in Puglia, and one in Sardinia. However, some interviewees claimed national coverage through contacts and meetings with diaspora members all over the country.

Diaspora organizations membership numbers change frequently. Consequently, most diaspora organizations rely on a core group of more active members (ranging from 6 to 20 individuals) and are then supported by a larger population of sympathizers. These sympathizers support the initiatives, follow the organization's WhatsApp chat, or are affiliated members, with numbers ranging from 30 to hundreds in some cases. One interviewed diaspora organization is a second-level federation of organizations, while another is a federation of villages in the country of origin. Regarding the year of foundation, among the fourteen interviewed diaspora organizations, five were founded in the last ten years, six between 2004 and 2013, and three before 2003.

3.2. Climate action areas and initiatives

The areas of climate action were a major focus of the investigation. In the online questionnaire, respondents could indicate the areas on which their initiatives are focused from a list of 22 options. Sixty per cent of the respondents selected “environmental education” and “community engagement,” making these the two most indicated responses, with 23 and 22 selections respectively. These were followed by “agroecology, sustainable agriculture and livestock farming” and “migration, environment and climate change,” with 18 and 16 responses, respectively (Table 2). This initial data suggests that diaspora organizations engage in climate action by leveraging their existing strengths, such as social engagement and capacity-building, or by focusing on primary needs and experiences like food security and migration. Understandably, topics requiring more technical expertise or financial resources were less frequently indicated.

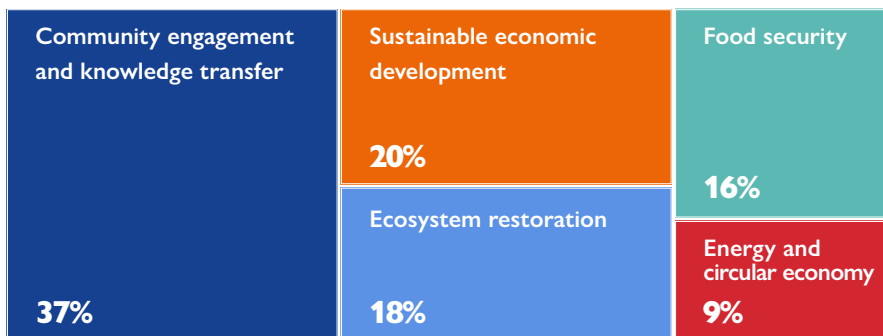
To streamline the data analysis, the climate action areas were categorized into five thematic groups (Figure 3):

- ▶ “community engagement and knowledge transfer”;
- ▶ “sustainable economic development”;
- ▶ “ecosystem restoration”;
- ▶ “food security”;
- ▶ “energy and circular economy”.

Table 2 Climate action areas



Figure 3 Climate action thematic groups



The group “Community engagement and knowledge transfer” collected the highest number of responses overall, although “Disaster risk reduction,” which is also included in this group, was among the least selected with only two responses. Areas within the “Sustainable economic development” group were also frequently indicated, with “Fair trade” receiving ten responses, “Sustainable tourism” eight responses, and “Climate inequalities” eight responses; however, only three organizations mentioned “Sustainable finance”. The “Ecosystem restoration” group followed, with “Biodiversity protection” receiving nine responses, “Land management” seven

responses, and “Nature restoration” seven responses. “Water resources management” received ten responses, just after “Agroecology” as part of the “Food security” category. Lastly, areas pertaining to the “Energy and circular economy” group were also highlighted, with “Waste management” selected eight times and “Renewable energy” six times.

This ranking provides a general overview of the areas most familiar to diaspora organizations’ engagement in climate action. It is worth to recall that the breakdown into groups, conducted ex post as part of the data analysis, is not intended to induce a strict quantitative comparison but rather to highlight the distribution of responses. Additionally, the areas listed can easily overlap, not only as thematic focuses. For instance, mid-ranking areas might result in generally overlooked spillovers: it is now widely demonstrated that ecosystem restoration initiatives, while often perceived as less cost-effective in the short term, can yield multiple ecological and socioeconomic returns (UNEP, 2023); similarly, clean energy initiatives can foster unexpected community engagement.¹⁴ As these spillover effects might be underestimated by the public opinion, it would be relevant to further emphasize them in future activities. However, as findings show, some highly technical and resource-intensive topics such as “sustainable infrastructure”, “transport”, “finance” and “disaster risk reduction”, are at the bottom of the ranking. Initiatives in these areas can be considered more challenging due to the significant upfront investments needed, which makes them less viable targets.

The qualitative interviews offered a much closer look at examples of climate action activities conducted by the fourteen diaspora organizations selected for phase 2. Initiatives reported encompass scopes such as food security, environmental education, green economy, ecosystem restoration, renewable energy and waste management, in most cases tackling more than one single issue at once. When asked about the actions’ objectives, respondents indicated three main topics: awareness-raising and environmental education to increase understanding of climate change; promoting agroecology as a means of climate change adaptation; fostering a sustainable, inclusive and climate-friendly economic development. A review of the action showcased in the interviews follows, organized per area.

“Water security” was addressed by a respondent as a “cross-cutting issue linked to food security, the natural cycle, climate change adaptation, and biodiversity”. Related initiatives mostly focus on water supply, e.g. through rainwater harvesting; increasing wells and improving their management; adapting drilling practices to climate changes (e.g. in Benin); and advocating for water provision in remote villages. Efforts also include improved water management through septic tanks; water recycling; and educating communities on good practices for water conservation, for example by encouraging households to limit livestock farming (in Brazil) and the use of soap for laundry (in Côte d’Ivoire).

Agroecology and sustainable farming were a second major topic. Initiatives include establishing community organic gardens (in Senegal and Ecuador); reducing pesticide use (in Burkina Faso); creating farming cooperatives in poor industrial neighbourhoods (in Ecuador); and supporting farmers’ efforts to regenerate soils. In this respect, an interviewee explained that according to Brazilian regulations, regenerating the soil is an essential step to obtain an “organic certificate”

¹⁴ See the European Commission web page on [Energy communities](#).

that subsequently allows farmers to sell food to education and public bodies, and is therefore a strategic investment for sustainable economic growth. Another ongoing initiative to be included among food security actions aims at fostering the cultivation and production of typical Chinese food in Italy, in order to meet the growing demand from Chinese migrants; in this way, it seeks to reduce the economic and environmental impacts associated with international transport.

Some diaspora organizations mentioned environmental education activities in schools in Italy, including classes on various topics (e.g. the nexus between migration and climate change; healthy and sustainable nutrition; recycling), as well as on adaptation practices (e.g. workshops on climate-resistant crops in a school of catering and cooking). Training programmes in countries of origin were also showcased, particularly emphasizing agroecology (in Burkina Faso, Senegal, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire); climate change adaptation and best practices transfer (e.g. between Global South countries such as Brazil and Mali, or across European countries like Greece, Poland and Italy); awareness-raising, recycling and implementing renewable energy systems (in Colombia). Two organizations cited initiatives aimed at involving artists in awareness-raising campaigns, e.g. the realization of a documentary on waste management in Nigeria, by a Nigerian film director, then presented at a multicultural festival in Turin.

Sustainable economic development was also emphasized as a key enabler of environmental protection. The need for creating opportunities to tackle internal migration was stressed several times across the interviews. In Colombia, a diaspora organization promoted the restitution of 20 hectares of land to a community affected by civil war, to use it for beekeeping, organic farming and reforestation, with the objectives of encouraging return migration and preventing internal displacement. The role of remittances from the Senegalese diaspora in combating drought-driven migration was also highlighted, as well as that of sustainable tourism in Mozambique to contain rural depopulation and the subsequent urban growth. Moreover, other initiatives not immediately related to climate action were included since they had to integrate environmental concerns: a project on microcredit to support female entrepreneurship in Benin had to focus on adapting shea butter production to climate changes; in Albania, an initiative on sustainable fashion was described as an inclusive and climate-friendly alternative to fast fashion.

Ecosystem restoration initiatives include planting trees (in Somalia, and through distance “tree adoption” in Senegal); creating coastal parks to face flash floods and hurricanes (in Mozambique); and collaborating with botanical gardens on planting climate-adapted crops (in Puglia Region, in Italy). Other efforts focus on regenerating urban spaces (in Turin, Milan and Asti, in Italy and Cabo Verde) and regenerating harvests in collaboration with the private sector (in Brazil).

Lastly, initiatives on energy and waste management include promoting renewable energy in the agricultural sector; solar-powered wells and homes (in Senegal); providing displaced populations with high-calorific wood-burning cookers (in Mozambique); reducing methane emissions through biomass (in Brazil); reducing the use of phytosanitary products; recycling in the tanning sector; and improving composting and waste management.

For all these initiatives to be implemented, partnerships are critical. The interviewed diaspora organizations generally link with other organizations, such as local counterparts specialized in targeted

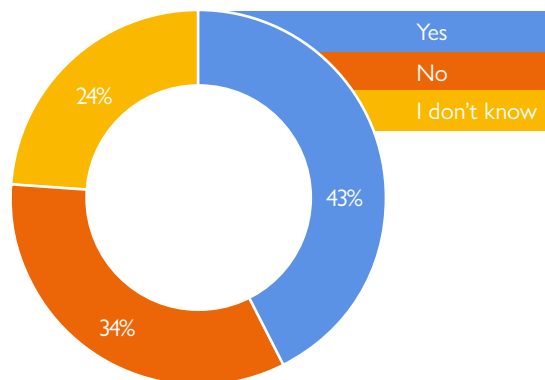
sectors (e.g. environmental issues, as indicated for Mozambique, Burkina Faso and Albania); women’s cooperatives (Albania, Benin); as well as other diaspora or third-sector entities in Italy and Europe. Local and regional administrations were also frequently referred to, namely including municipalities and regions in Italy (Milan, Parma, Turin, Tuscany Region), in Albania, in Mozambique (Maxixe), and other forms of local authorities such as village chiefs, religious authorities and public cultural entities. Diaspora organizations also collaborate with schools, universities and research centres (e.g. Centro Studi di Politica Internazionale, in Italy; Centro de Agricultura Alternativa Vicente Nica in Brazil), not only for environmental education activities and international research agreements (such as one mentioned between the University of Turin and the University of Agricultural Sciences in Thiès, Senegal) but also in relation to research projects focusing on diaspora engagement, investment and migration. Private entities (banks, foundations, multinational companies) and international institutions (United Nations agencies like IOM, the European Commission) were included among partners and donors.

As suggested both by the survey findings and the interviews, most of these initiatives are underway. Among the initiatives concluded, some interviews indicated European Union and IOM-funded projects; a few planned projects and future ideas were also addressed, but not systematically by each interviewee. However, it is important to report that several interviewees argued that their projects have led to spin-off or long-term sustainable practices, namely referring to water supply infrastructures and organic farming. How sustainability and effectiveness can be considered peculiar aspects of diaspora action, as some representatives claimed, might deserve further investigation and evidence collection.

3.3. Climate literacy and expertise

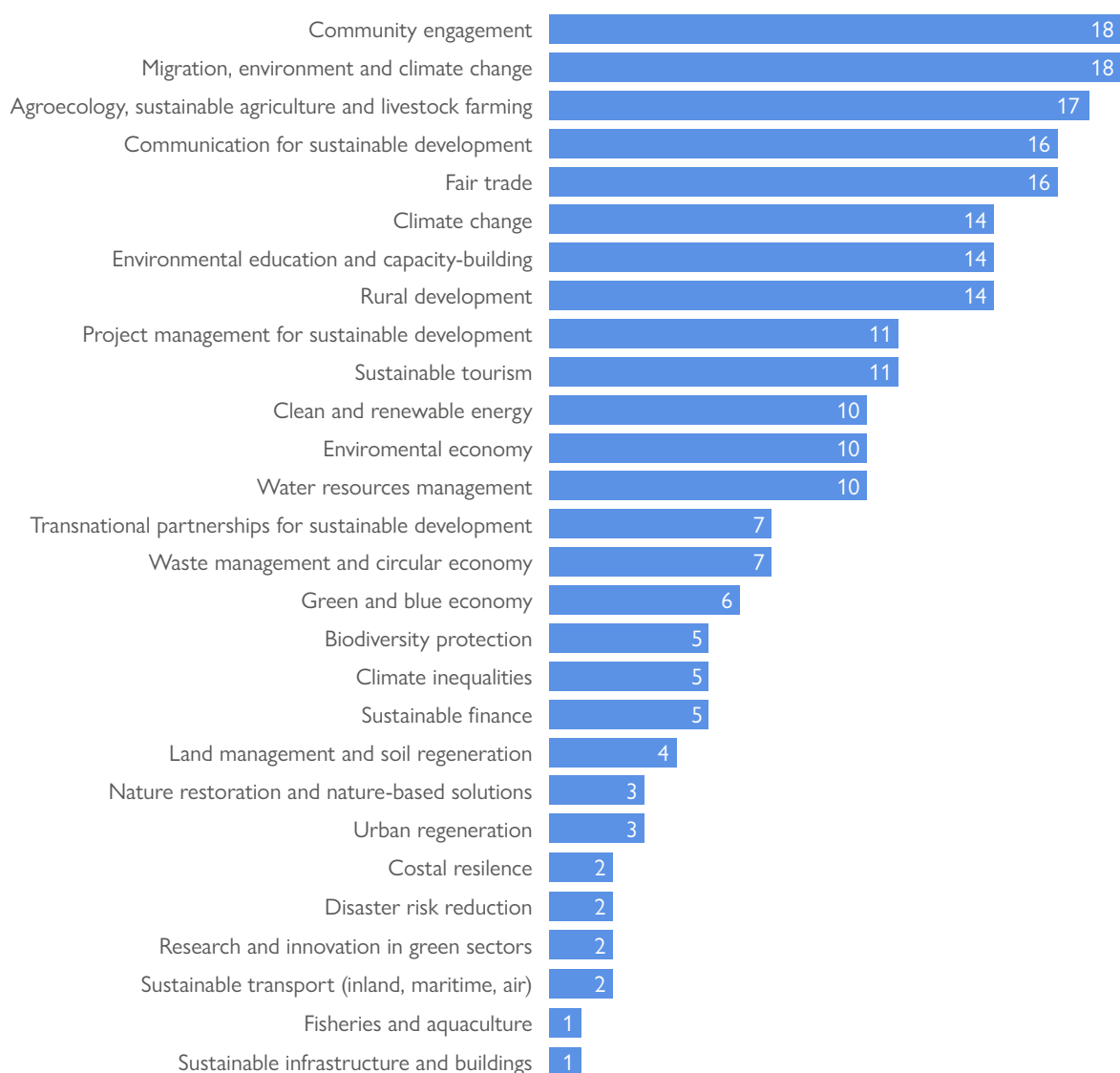
A second major focus of the mapping was the expertise available among the diaspora organizations to support such a wide range of environmental actions. According to quantitative findings, about 43 per cent of the 89 surveyed diaspora organizations reported having members with green skills (Figure 4).

Figure 4 Percentage of DOs including members with green skills



Respondents could specify the areas of expertise from a similar list of options as that provided for climate initiatives, with a few new areas subsequently grouped under the category “Project Cycle Management”. The data provided largely align with climate interventions, with most knowledge and skills concentrated in areas such as “community engagement”, “migration, environment and climate change”, “agroecology, sustainable agriculture and livestock farming”, “communication for sustainable development”, “fair trade”, “climate change”, “environmental education and capacity-building”, “rural development”, “project management for sustainable development”, “sustainable tourism”, “clean and renewable energy”, “environmental economy”, “water resources management”, “transnational partnerships for sustainable development”, “waste management and circular economy”, “green and blue economy”, “biodiversity protection”, “climate inequalities”, “sustainable finance”, “land management and soil regeneration”, “nature restoration and nature-based solutions”, “urban regeneration”, “costal resilience”, “disaster risk reduction”, “research and innovation in green sectors”, “sustainable transport (inland, maritime, air)”, “fisheries and aquaculture”, and “sustainable infrastructure and buildings” (Table 3).

Table 3 Green skills sectors



Qualitative interviews allowed to deepen this aspect and to distinguish levels of climate literacy and expertise among the diaspora organizations. Some organizations reported good understanding of climate issues within the organization, attributing it to high levels of awareness, personal experiences, or to the scientific backgrounds of some members. Other respondents,

instead, deplored insufficient knowledge, arguing that while the reality of climate change is under everyone's eyes, the ability to understand and explain its dynamics is limited. However, there is a widespread feeling that climate awareness is rapidly growing, which is also due to direct experience of climate disasters. In some cases, understanding climate changes brought people to acknowledge the environmental roots of their personal migration choice. With respect to national and international climate policy initiatives (e.g. the Mattei Plan, the Italian Climate Fund, the Loss and Damage fund), most respondents admitted little familiarity, partly due to the highly technical language of the policies. Some others instead confirmed to be aware and vigilant about next developments. Particularly with regard to the Mattei Plan, mixed opinions were expressed, both strongly negative and potentially positive. These reflections also led interviewees to share personal views about the Global South and its resources, both natural (e.g. the Amazon, a "world's lung" to be protected) and human (e.g. indigenous knowledge and closer cultural bonds with the environment); it is widely believed that human-made climate changes are rooted in the extractive approach of the Global North towards Global South, as well as in unsustainable practices like wood-burning and low awareness. The impact of desertification, deforestation and biodiversity loss on poverty and inequalities was also pointed out.

As mentioned, some organizations reported technical expertise on climate issues thanks to environmental studies of their members (e.g. engineering, geography, agroecology, nutrition). Examples include a Senegalese university lecturer in agriculture and a Cuban engineer with expertise in renewable energies; knowledge of environmental law and international relations with a focus on the SDGs was also mentioned. Such competencies were acquired through formal education (diplomas, master's and university training in countries of origin), but informal education was also discussed (courses, events and diaspora organizations cooperation activities). Diaspora organizations' projects often include trainings and dissemination materials: examples include trainings for environmental education and knowledge transfer among young people (Europe); trainings on agroecology techniques (e.g. Brazil, Burkina Faso); or ad hoc events and workshops, e.g. a meeting with an indigenous activist from Brazil on traditional environmental knowledge. Some diaspora organizations also promote yearly internal opportunities for capacity-building, namely on general issues encompassing law, environment, economy, sustainability and democracy. Trainings in the framework of European Union and IOM projects were also mentioned.

When they are lacking specific skills, organizations seek outside experts to create partnerships for knowledge transfer. This is claimed to be a peculiar aspect as diasporas are generally open to cross-contamination, peer-to-peer exchange and networking. Examples include local counterparts (cases mentioned in Côte d'Ivoire, Ecuador, Burkina Faso); public and private entities in Italy (NGOs, architects' office, municipal waste management services), educational bodies and United Nations officials to provide ad hoc consultations (cases mentioned from ILO, UNESCO, IFAD). However, competition issues among organizations were reported, which make some diaspora organizations more open to knowledge exchange than others.

3.4. Challenges

In the survey section on obstacles and challenges, the most selected answers were insufficient funding; lack of awareness; limited institutional support; and lack of effective partnerships. Through the option “other”, two diaspora organizations also specified “poverty” and “limited qualified personnel and financial means” (Table 4).

Table 4 Perceived challenges



Similar arguments were provided in the qualitative interviews. Interviewees firstly emphasized the need for increasing awareness, knowledge and skills within their organizations and beneficiary communities: while the lack of experts and qualified personnel within the organizations represents a significant constraint, the fact that beneficiary communities do not often consider environmental protection as a priority also reduces margins for action. Possible trainings for skills development should particularly focus on improving capacity of designing initiatives that are relevant and tailored to the needs. Financial limitations, including low capacity in spending management, were also mentioned as a factor undermining the effectiveness, replication and dissemination of the activities; the lack of infrastructure such as lands and workplaces was included among the challenges. Time constraints were also mentioned as critical in preventing durable networks, since activities are mostly based on volunteering; this is particularly challenging for women who generally shoulder additional care work. Cultural barriers include little openness to diversity in Italian local decision-making; multilingualism in countries of origin; and a gap between indigenous, non-formal knowledge, sometimes overlooked, and the hyperspecialized but siloed mainstream science. Political conflicts in countries of origin were also reported among the main obstacles.

Particular attention was given to existing institutional mechanisms involving diasporas. In this respect, interviewees mostly expressed frustration over the unsuccessful attempts to engage with institutions on climate action, pointing out their reluctance to collaborate with civil society and a lack of competence and understanding of environmental issues. Excessive bureaucracy

was also mentioned as a major factor draining resources and slowing down processes, and potentially leaving room to corruption. Criticisms were also raised about the little involvement of diasporas and local communities into international cooperation strategies, which is paramount to include voices and assess needs, in comparison with a much more permissive attitude of national institutions towards private companies, which often leads to land expropriation, resource exploitation and conflicts.

3.5. Opportunities

The survey section on potential benefits and opportunities registered “sustainable economic development” and “improved well-being” as most selected answers; supporting climate justice and the green transition, instead, collected less preferences in percentage. Through the option “other benefits”, one participant indicated “immediate impacts on people” (Table 5).

Table 5 Perceived opportunities



Qualitative interviews brought out further opportunities on diasporas' potential in influencing climate action. Advocacy for policy change, especially in relation to the Mattei Plan, emerged as a key opportunity, provided there is sufficient information and clarity of ideas to support public positions. The capacity for advocacy is seen as a major advantage of diaspora engagement, bridging diverse perspectives in climate negotiations. As stated by a respondent:

“climate negotiations are spaces of convergence and diasporas are the key to bridging this space of convergence, because they are on both sides. There is a part of the world that is holding back for the principle of just transition to be applied.”

With respect to existing diaspora involvement in institutional mechanisms, a few initiatives were also mentioned, including the “Florence for Climate” initiative in Florence; the Brazilian “National Forum on Circular Economy”); government initiatives in support to diasporas (cases mentioned in Benin, Burkina Faso, Mali and Senegal); and relations with embassies.

Additionally, diasporas can transnationally transfer economic resources and knowledge, enhancing indigenous knowledge crucial for ecosystem management. This can potentially also shift perceptions of migration. Diasporas contribute to sustainable rural development through remittances, investments and businesses, such as financing solar energy wells. Moreover, diasporas are able to localize the circulation and dissemination of knowledge and the transfer of technological know-how towards the countries of origin. With respect to awareness and sensitization, diasporas could play a major role in conveying climate literacy, particularly through organizations that collaborate with artists and film-makers on environmental issues. Their connections with communities makes them as privileged intermediaries between institutions and local governments, facilitating bilateral treaties and cooperation. Finally, the demographic transition, particularly in the Global North, underscores the importance of valuing migration to ensure social balance and sustainable development.

3.6. Priority interests

A strong consensus emerged among the interviewees on the need to enhance diaspora involvement in climate action. Most of them expressed commitment to either scale up ongoing actions or increase efforts in these areas. Only a few hesitating respondents expressed concern about their capacity to prioritize and formulate impactful climate action ideas.

With respect to priority actions, a key area of interest is food security, with a special accent on agroecology, water resource management, soil resilience and conservation. Interviewees particularly emphasized the need for addressing the effects of desertification on agropastoral economies, and for upskilling farmers on new agricultural technologies in order to reduce the sector's environmental footprint. Waste management is also critical, with several respondents emphasizing this issue in the urban outskirts of sub-Saharan Africa due to waste originating in the Global North, and leading to air pollution and health hazards.

Ecosystem restoration and biodiversity conservation were also included among priority actions. Efforts might start by focusing on coastal botanical parks against hurricanes and urban greenery. Moreover, a diaspora organization expressed interest in participating in the 2024 United Nations Biodiversity Conference in Colombia. Confidence was expressed in relation to promoting renewable energy and sustainable heating practices, and particularly photovoltaic-powered energy systems in the agricultural sector. Finally, the need for improving efforts on climate justice was recalled: in particular, the disproportionate vulnerability of women to climate change was emphasized, as well as their significant potential contribution to climate action. Moreover, the risk for current North–South cooperation agreements on energy resources to perpetuate colonial relationships was highlighted, and contextually, the need for advocating towards a fair distribution of mitigation and adaptation efforts at the global level.



4.

Conclusions and recommendations

The mapping exercise presented so far has shed light on some existing modalities of diaspora engagement in climate action and their potential developments. The investigation included 89 Italy-based diaspora organizations from an IOM COMED database, which completed an online survey. Subsequently, 14 of these diaspora organizations participated in qualitative semi-structured interviews for further insights. The question this research sought to respond, in particular, was the following:

What expertise is available among diaspora organizations in Italy to contribute to climate action and promote the green transition?

With that in mind, the findings previously described allow us to draw a few concluding remarks.

The mapping explored the diverse climate action initiatives undertaken by diaspora organizations, emphasizing their key role in promoting and localizing transnational action, a role that is often underappreciated. While only a minority of diaspora organizations identified climate action as their primary mission, most participating diaspora organizations privilege cultural promotion, support to migrants' inclusion or broader international cooperation; nonetheless, environmental protection emerged as a cross-cutting and increasingly relevant issue within diaspora engagement activities.

With over 80 per cent of respondents active internationally, diasporas are affirmed as critical transnational actors. The mapping sample, which includes only Italy-based diaspora organizations, primarily targets countries are mainly located in Africa, Latin America and Europe. Given the extensive information from the 14 interviews, it is reasonable to assume that the range of climate action initiatives conducted by Italy-based diaspora organizations is even broader. Nevertheless, the data collected provides ample evidence of the active role of diasporas in several key areas: food and water security, environmental education, sustainable economic development, biodiversity restoration, renewable energy and circular economy. It can be inferred that organizations primarily leverage their strengths and knowledge (community engagement, agroecology and sustainable farming, etc.), while more technical and resource-intensive issues (renewables, sustainable finance, etc.) are less frequently addressed; yet the actions showcased

are diverse, innovative and strongly rooted in local needs. Moreover, their long-term sustainability might warrant further investigation.

With respect to green skills and expertise available within the diaspora organizations, survey data suggest that these mostly reflect the areas of diaspora organizations' climate action. Levels of climate literacy can vary across and within the diaspora organizations, but in general awareness is reported to be increasing on average, also due to direct experiences with extreme events. In some cases, expertise is available thanks to members with specific technical backgrounds. However, raising awareness and developing technical expertise remain a major challenge and a priority target according to the interviewees. Contextually, it is worth recalling that, to overcome such obstacles, diaspora organizations already resort to promote capacity-building activities both internally and externally, and to form ad hoc partnerships for knowledge transfer.

The mapping then aimed to explore more operational developments of diasporas' climate action by investigating challenges, opportunities, existing involvement mechanisms and priority actions. A key takeaway is the enthusiasm and willingness among diasporas to increase their engagement in climate action in the short term. Regarding the identified challenges, some issues could be addressed by financially supporting diaspora initiatives, assessing needs in countries of origin, encouraging participation in international negotiations and forums, and organizing capacity-building activities for diaspora organizations, beneficiaries and local administrations. However, other obstacles, such as the lack of infrastructure, time constraints, and cultural and political conflicts in countries of origin, might be more difficult to tackle. Advocacy support might also be needed to address the issue of limited institutional involvement. The opportunities for diaspora engagement in climate action particularly highlight the localized transfer of resources and the circulation of knowledge and expertise. Additionally, diasporas can serve as a transnational voice for climate justice and as mediators with local communities. Regarding climate action, priority issues to be addressed include food security, ecosystem restoration, renewable energy and climate justice.

Based on these insights, the following recommendations are proposed for IOM and other institutional and non-institutional stakeholders interested in bolstering climate action initiatives with diasporas.

A) Policy level

- ▶ Enhance the role of diasporas as advocates for climate justice, particularly with respect to indigenous rights and knowledge, gender inequalities, North–South relations and energy cooperation.
- ▶ Support diaspora participation in international events and forums (i.e. COP on biodiversity, COP on climate change, etc.) and climate negotiations (i.e. background papers, national or cooperation strategies on environment, etc.).
- ▶ Support diaspora efforts to mainstream outcomes of climate action projects at the policy level.

- ▶ Foster coordination among diaspora communities, both in Italy and abroad, to promote dialogue, South–South collaboration and partnerships to access international funds.
- ▶ Provide financial support to diaspora-led development projects and streamline bureaucratic procedures for ease of access and efficiency.
- ▶ Scale up existing diaspora initiatives by broadening the pool of beneficiaries and territories of intervention.
- ▶ Encourage comprehensive data collection and research to further acknowledge diaspora contributions to climate action, in order to highlight trends, identify gaps and measure the impact of diaspora-led initiatives.

B) Operational level

- ▶ Establish a roster of diaspora professionals in the areas of environment and climate change that can facilitate skills circulation among diasporas and promote their engagement in project design and implementation.
- ▶ Conduct seminars and training sessions with diaspora organizations to strengthen awareness, develop knowledge and skills in the areas of environment and climate change, focusing particularly on climate change, climate action and policies, project design and management, with differentiated pathways based on the expertise.
- ▶ Encourage capacity-building activities on environmental issues targeting local authorities and communities in the framework of diasporas' development projects.
- ▶ Promote meetings and exchange opportunities with diaspora organizations in which presenting data, identifying challenges and co-designing concrete solutions.
- ▶ Encourage initiatives that promote the transfer of diaspora resources (through remittances, investments and business creation) towards green economy and climate action in countries of origin.
- ▶ Disseminate project results and share best practices to improve visibility of successful initiatives.
- ▶ Conduct thorough needs assessments and data collection, also through research partnerships with the Academia, to tailor projects to local needs and adapt to the sociocultural specifics of the beneficiary communities.



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