



## Diaspora Humanitarians

*How Australia-based migrants help in crises abroad*

### Tonga Briefing

- Following the eruption of the Hunga-Tonga-Hunga-Ha’apai Volcano on January 15, 2022, the Tongan diaspora in Australia mobilised to provide material, economic, social and political assistance. From our survey of Tongan migrants in Australia,
  - › 100% of respondents provided information on migration pathways to Australia.
  - › 95% engaged in advocacy in response to the crisis.
  - › 83% volunteered or were employed as part of aid efforts.
  - › 64% provided financial aid.
- Tonga received more than US\$217 million in remittances in 2021, which constituted 46.2% of the country’s GDP that year. Since 2007, the Tongan government has developed policies to strengthen ties with its diaspora.
- The Tongan-born diaspora in Australia increased by 82% between 2001 and 2021 (from 6,924 people to 12,260 people)

### Responding to Crisis

On January 15, 2022, the Hunga-Tonga-Hunga-Ha’apai Volcano erupted. The largest volcanic eruption in over three decades, Tonga faced approximately US\$182 million in damages. The tsunami triggered by the earthquake intensified the disaster’s impact.

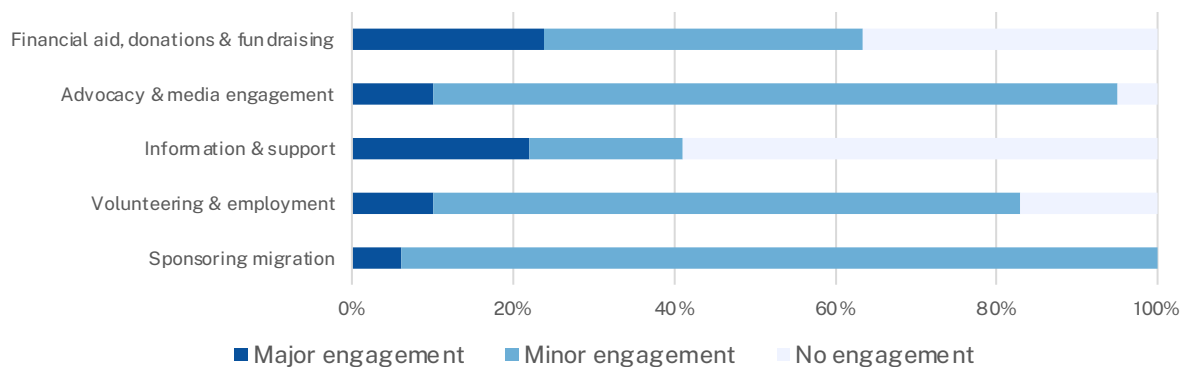
According to the International Federation of the Red Cross, 84% of Tonga’s population (84,176 people) was affected by the eruption and more than 3,000 people were displaced. While Tonga received significant international assistance following the crisis, disrupted communication, damaged infrastructure and a recent series of cyclones made the provision of assistance to remote areas difficult.

### Diaspora Humanitarians Survey

As part of the Diaspora Humanitarians project, members of the Tongan diaspora in Australia were surveyed about their humanitarian engagement following the eruption. 47 members of Australia’s Tongan diaspora (30 women and 17 men) responded to the survey, which asked individuals about their range of responses to the humanitarian crisis.

These actions were grouped into five categories: (1) the provision of financial aid, donations or fundraising, (2) advocacy and media engagement, (3) direct communication with Tonga to provide support and information (4) volunteering and employment in the humanitarian sector and (5) the sponsorship of migration to Australia. Our survey relied on snowball sampling of engaged diaspora members. It provides a multi-level vision of the range of responses by Australia’s Tongan diaspora.

Figure 1: Survey responses by the Tongan diaspora, 2022



The most popular form of humanitarian engagement by the diaspora was the provision of migration assistance. All Tongan respondents to the survey provided information on migration pathways or directly sponsored migration to Australia. Survey respondents were highly mobilised, with 95% reporting that they either advocated or spoke to media following the eruption. Comparatively, 83% of respondents directly engaged with the crisis through either volunteer or paid aid work.

Providing financial aid or fundraising for humanitarian organisations responding to the crisis was carried out by 64% of respondents: 24% of all respondents reported making significant contributions and 40% reported minor contributions. Finally, 41% of respondents indicated that they had provided information or support to directly affected individuals over the phone. Lower level of engagement with phone contact is likely to be at least partially explained by disruption to Tongan communication systems following the eruption.

### Homeland Connections

Pre-existing connections to their homeland shaped the Tongan diaspora's humanitarian response to the 2022 earthquake. These connections included remittance flows and formal diasporic institutions.

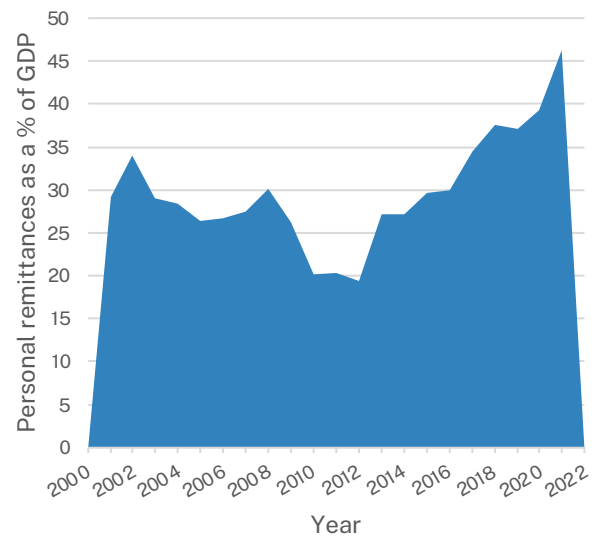
#### Remittances

Personal remittances are an important component of the Tongan economy. Since 1975, remittances have formed substantial yet varying proportions of the Tongan GDP. As of 2021, the value of personal remittances sent to Tonga was US\$217 million (approximately a 300% increase since 2001). That year, remittances accounted for 46% of the nation's GDP. Over the last 20 years, personal remittances were least important to the Tongan economy in 2012, when they accounted for 19% GDP.

In 2021, US\$43 million was sent from Australia to Tonga in personal remittances. This made Australia the third-largest remittance-sending country, behind the United States (US\$85 million) and New Zealand (US\$75 million). Notably, the fourth-largest remittance-sending country – Fiji – contributed just US\$3 million in personal remittances that year.

In the Tongan national census, households are asked about receiving remittances. In the 2021 Tongan Census, a similar number of individuals reported relying on personal remittances as their primary source of income compared to those who earn a regular salary (7,173 people compared to 7,196 people). Most Tongan households receive remittances, with 78% of the population reported at receiving at least some. 6% of the population receives only domestic remittances, 18% receive remittances domestic and international sources, and 54% of individuals receive only international remittances.

Figure 2: Personal remittances as a percentage of Tonga's total GDP, 2000-2022



### Diaspora Institutions

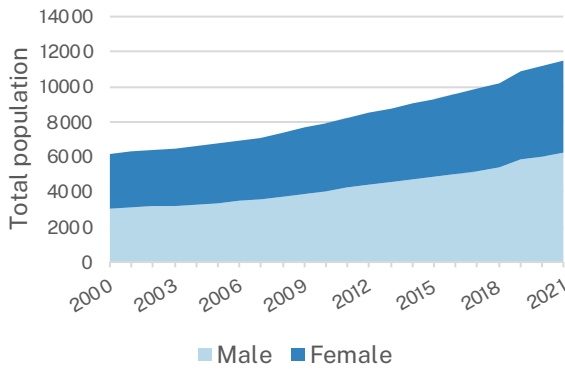
Despite its economic dependence on remittances, there is relatively little government infrastructure focussed on Tongans overseas. The country manages travel documentation through its Passports Act and has encouraged dual citizenship since 2007 as a way of strengthening ties with the Tongan diaspora.

With encouragement and assistance from the International Organization for Migration (IOM), under the framework of the Global Compact for Migration (which recommends that states 'create conditions for migrants and diasporas to fully contribute to sustainable development in all countries'), Tonga has made efforts to integrate diaspora contributions into its sustainable development strategies. It aims to enhance national social and economic conditions by fostering collaboration between local Tongans and those living abroad. The country is currently exploring formal methods to involve the diaspora more effectively in development and investment efforts.

### The Australia-Based Diaspora

Humanitarian responses to the 2022 Earthquake were shaped by migrants continuing connections to their homeland, by their dynamics of migration, and by their experiences of settlement in Australia. This section primarily uses data from the August 10, 2021 Australian Census to analyse the Tongan diaspora's experiences in Australia.

Figure 3: Total Tonga-born population in Australia, 2000-2021

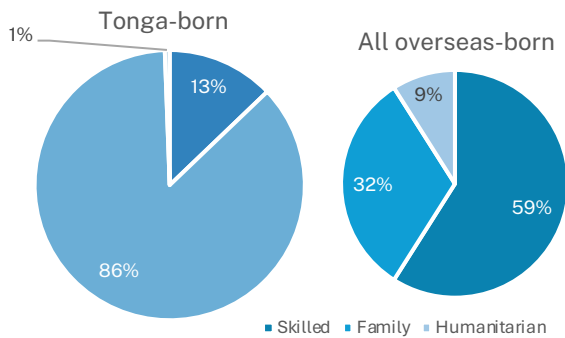


### Dynamics of Migration

As of the 2021 census, 12,260 Tongan-born migrants lived in Australia. Of this population, 54.9% of were male and 45.1% were female. Migration from Tonga to Australia has experienced several periods of growth since the 1970s. Most notably, 6% of the Tongan population residing in Australia in 2021 arrived in 2019. Since 2002, more Tongan men than women have migrated to Australia.

In 2021, 42% of Australia’s Tongan diaspora were citizens, and 2,266 people were on permanent migration pathways. Of migrants on permanent visas, 13% were in Australia’s skilled visa stream, 86% were in the family visa stream and 0.6% were in the humanitarian stream.

Figure 4: Tongan and all overseas-born permanent residents in Australia, 2021



Additionally, 3,068 migrants held temporary Australian visas. Of this group, only 1% were on temporary skilled visas, 2% were on student visas, and 97% were on other temporary visas.

Tonga had a total population of 106,017 people in 2021. While the size of the Tongan diaspora in Australia is small compared to other migrant groups, the diaspora’s size relative to the population of their homeland is significant.

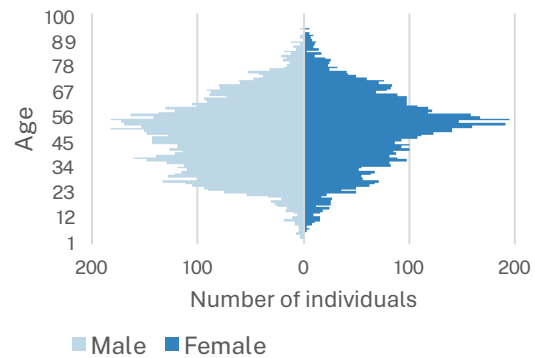
### Population Dynamics

Australia’s Tongan diaspora is diverse. Various migration flows have resulted in a range of experiences. The diaspora is concentrated in Greater Sydney, has typically completed secondary education, and is primarily employed in the healthcare, manufacturing and agricultural industries.

### Demography

In 2021, the median age of Tongan-born migrants residing in Australia was 49. Comparatively, the median age of the whole Australian population was 38 and the median age of all overseas-born migrants was 45. Most of the diaspora was middle aged, with 46% of the population being between 40 and 60 years old in 2021. Particularly in younger adult cohorts, there were more male than female Tongan-born migrants residing in Australia: 66% of those between the ages of 20 and 29 were male.

Figure 5: Population pyramid for the Tonga-born population in Australia, 2021

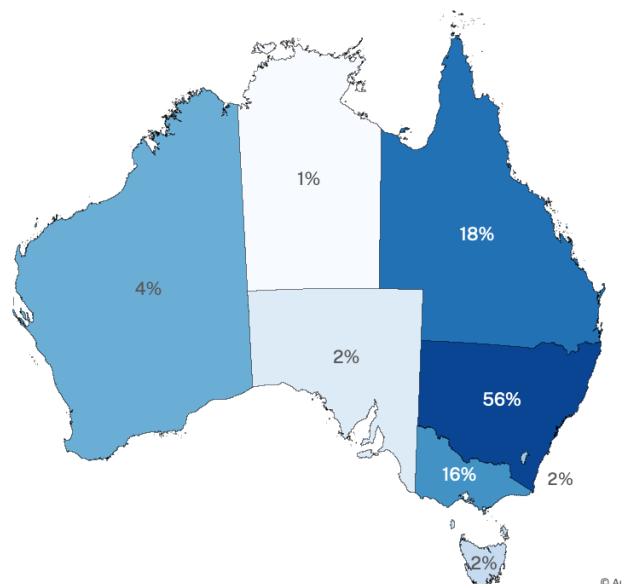


A relatively large number of Australians have Tongan ancestry. In 2021, 17,335 people born in Australia had at least one Tonga-born parent. Additionally, 43,469 people identified as having Tongan ancestry in the 2021 census.

### Geography

The Tongan diaspora in Australia is concentrated in Greater Sydney, with 49% of the total Tongan-born population residing there in 2021. An additional 12% of the population resided in both Greater Melbourne and in Greater Brisbane. In total, New South Wales had 56% of the Tongan-born diaspora, Queensland had 18% and Victoria had 16%.

Figure 6: Geographies of residence of the Tonga-born population in Australia, 2021



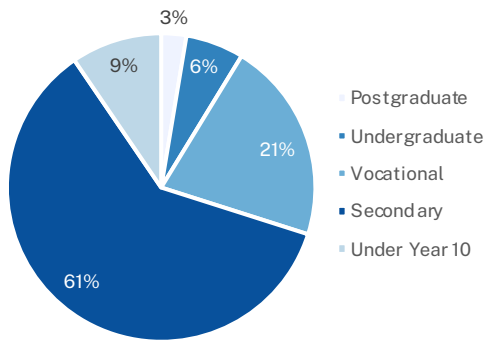


### Education

The majority of the Tongan diaspora in Australia has completed secondary education, with 61% of Tongan adults having done so. Of the adult diaspora, 9% have tertiary education (6% undergraduate, 3% postgraduate) and 21% have vocational qualifications (certificate III or IV, advanced diplomas). Of Australia's adult population, 30% are tertiary educated and 29% have vocational qualifications.

Compared to the national population of Tonga, the diaspora is highly educated. As of the 2021 Tongan census, 19% of the adult Tongan population had completed secondary education while 71% had completed up to a year-10 level of education. Only 5% of the population had completed tertiary education (3% undergraduate, 2% postgraduate) and 8% had vocational qualifications.

Figure 7: Highest level of educational achievement of the Tonga-born population in Australia, 2021



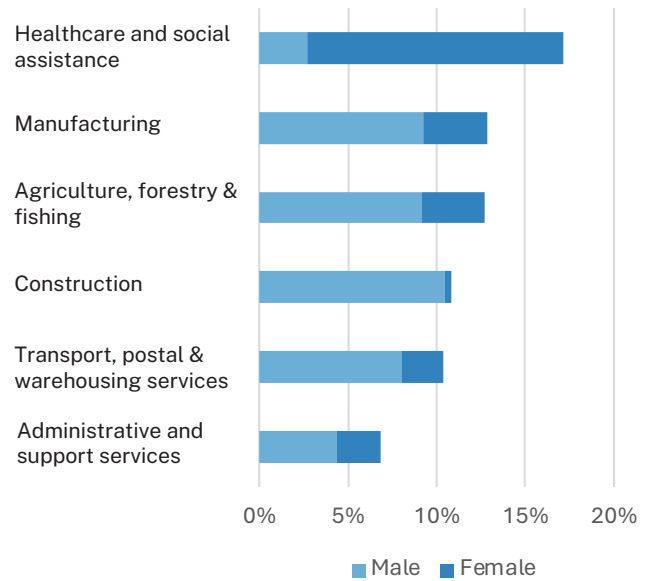
### Economic Activity

The most popular sector of employment for the Tongan diaspora in Australia is healthcare, which employed 17% of the working Tonga-born population in 2021. This is relatively proportionate to the Australian-wide average of 15%. A higher proportion of the working Tonga-born diaspora is employed in construction compared to the nation-wide average (11% compared to 9%).

Otherwise, the diaspora is primarily employed in smaller industries. Australia's manufacturing industry employs 6% of the total workforce and 13% of the Tongan-born workforce. Similarly, the agricultural industry employs 2% of the total workforce and 13% of the Tongan-born workforce. The transport, postal and warehousing industry employs 5% of the total workforce and 11% of the Tongan-born workforce.

The employment dynamics of Australia's Tongan diaspora are gendered, and 61% of those in the workforce are male. Key sectors of employment for male and female migrants differ. While 37% of female migrants were employed in the healthcare sector in 2021, just 5% of men were. Additionally, 17% of Tongan-born men and 1% of Tongan-born women in Australia's workforce worked in construction and roughly double the percentage of men were employed in agriculture and manufacturing in comparison to women (15% of men compared to 9% of women in both industries).

Figure 8: Leading sectors of employment for the Tonga-born population in Australia, 2021



#### Sources:

Australian Bureau of Statistics (2022a), Census of Population and Housing, 2021; Australian Bureau of Statistics (2022b), Permanent Migrants in Australia; Australian Department of Home Affairs (2024a), Permanent Migration Program (Skilled & Family) Outcomes Snapshot – Annual Statistics; Australian Department of Home Affairs (2024b), Temporary visa holders in Australia; IFRC, *Operation Update #3 (six-month report): Tonga - Volcano and Tsunami*, Geneva: IFRC, (August 2, 2022); The World Bank (2022a), Global Knowledge Partnership on Migration and Development (KNOMAD) Remittances Data; The World Bank (2022b), Personal remittances, received (% of GDP); Tonga Statistics Department (2022), *Tonga 2021 Census of Population and Housing*, Nuku'alofa: Tonga Statistics Department.

**Author:** Cecily Reid **Editors:** Alan Gamlen, Anurug Chakma & Laurence Brown

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*The Diaspora Humanitarians project aims to map the extensive humanitarian activities and contributions of Australia-based migrants to crises abroad. For more information see [www.diasporahumanitarians.com](http://www.diasporahumanitarians.com)*