

Executive Summary

A Polynesian archipelago with a population of 107,542 people, the Kingdom of Tonga is a lower middle-income country that has a small, open island economy. Overseas remittances and tourism are some of the significant sources of income, alongside overseas development cooperation from its development partners. The Kingdom of Tonga lies on the Pacific Ring of Fire, an area of dynamic geological activity and is ranked the second most vulnerable country to natural hazards. Despite our small size and geographical isolation, the Kingdom of Tonga is among the top four countries of migration compared to the size of its population. Subsequently, the government has adopted measures to ensure safe, orderly and regular migration to and from the Kingdom of Tonga.

Like countries around the world, the Kingdom of Tonga has faced immediate impacts of COVID-19 including lockdowns, travel bans and physical distancing measures that have disproportionately affected migrant workers, who have found themselves stranded and unable to return to their place of work or their communities of origin.

The Hunga-Tonga-Hunga-Ha'apai volcano eruption and ensuing tsunami waves on January 15, 2022, came as the Kingdom of Tonga struggled to overcome the devastation caused by a series of severe cyclones in recent years and the global economic impact of COVID-19. The volcanic eruption proved to be an unprecedented disaster triggering mass evacuation from low level waterfront areas and impacting the country's infrastructure, agriculture, fisheries and tourism sector. The Government and humanitarian partners provided emergency assistance to affected communities since the very beginning of the disaster. However, the severity of damage also highlighted the need to mobilise resources and enhance The Kingdom of Tonga's preparedness and response for future natural and man-made disasters.

The Kingdom of Tonga signed the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) with enthusiasm and commitment. Following its adaptation, the Government of The Kingdom of Tonga has engaged in various efforts in the implementation of the GCM. The national voluntary review has assessed that The Kingdom of Tonga contributed towards the 23 objectives through various policies and programmes.

The Government has:

- Developed a **migration and sustainable development policy (MSDP)** in 2021 to harness the positive elements and impacts of migration flows and mitigate any negative aspects. The MSDP unit is still in its preliminary stages and requires robust support from the international community in terms of financial and human resources.
- Developed a **National Strategy for the Development of Statistics** to mainstream the use of data into national policy and planning process as well as a **multidimensional poverty index**.
- Launched the the second version of the **Joint National Action Plan on Climate Change and Disaster Risk Management** and the **Kingdom of Tonga Strategic Roadmap for Emergency and Disaster Risk Management** to respond to the impacts of climate change including disaster preparedness and displacement risks.
- implemented **labour mobility agreements** with Australia and New Zealand to enhance employment opportunities for the people and to maximize migration benefits for The Kingdom of Tonga's sustainable development. There is also an **Employment Bill 2020** (yet to be passed by the Legislative Assembly) that will establish a legal framework governing employment.

- In partnership with PIDC and ACP EU, The Kingdom of Tonga is also in the process of **modernising its immigration legislation** to improve the functionality and accessibility of the Tongan visa system.
- The Government also aims to **maximise efforts to integrate diaspora** in The Kingdom of Tonga's development and has provisions of engaging with diasporas in the **MSDP and The Kingdom of Tonga Sustainable Development Framework TSDF II**.
- Remittances make a very large contribution to the economy with The Kingdom of Tonga receiving the highest remittances (35.2%) in the world when viewed as a percentage of the gross domestic product. The government is taking steps to promote the faster, safer and cheaper transfer of remittances possible through the **Pacific Financial Inclusion Programme** that promotes the use of financial institutions for remittance transfer, **The Tonga Development Bank's (TDB) Ave Paánga Pau** that provides low transfer costs and **KickEx Remittance**, a public-led initiative that promotes migrant families' financial literacy and financial inclusion, are two initiatives aimed at improving the efficiency of this financial service.
- Government of The Kingdom of Tonga promotes international and regional cooperation and has close engagements with regional fora and organizations which relate to immigration issues including PIFS, PIDC, Bali process, IOM, UNODC, UNHCR, ACP EU help to strengthen its effectiveness in managing inward migration issues and processes.

The primary areas that require policy attention in the future include – improving data collection, use and management to inform decisions and policies; Greater climate resilience including awareness, improved transport and infrastructure especially for remote communities; assessing the labour market to determine demand for migrant labours; developing strategies to tackle youth unemployment; reducing costs of remittance transfer and improving financial knowledge amongst migrants; and assessing the impact of emigration on domestic labour markets.

Based on the demonstrated commitment to the effective implementation of the GCM so far, the Kingdom of Tonga emphasises **the need of assistance from development partners** especially the IOM in future actions as it proactively takes action to strengthen migration governance in the country.

There is a pertinent need for **human and financial resources to fund the MSDP unit** as it is the central unit for the implementation of migration related projects in the Kingdom of Tonga. Implementing the objectives of the MSDP will in turn strengthen the implementation of the GCM in the country and enhance the safe, orderly and regular migration.

The Kingdom of Tonga will also continue to actively participate in relevant activities as they relate to the implementation of the GCM.

Thank you!