



Foreign &  
Commonwealth  
Office

## **BIOT Resettlement Policy Review: Summary of Responses to Public Consultation**

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### **Background**

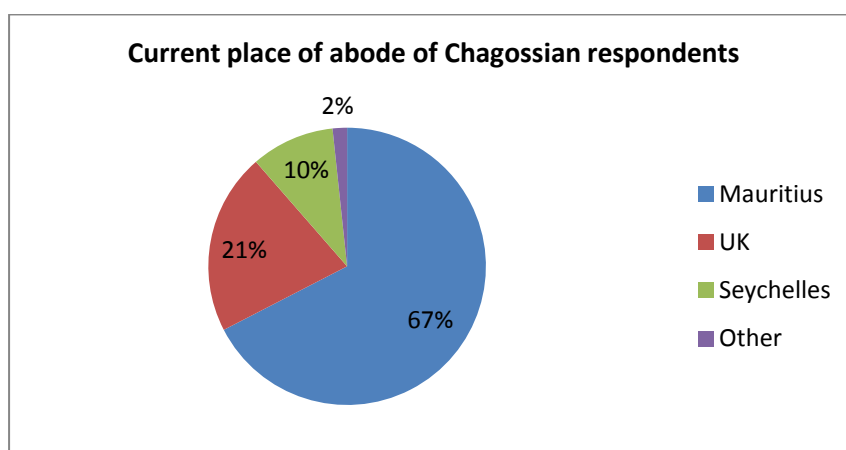
The Foreign and Commonwealth Office conducted a public consultation about a potential resettlement of the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT) between 4 August 2015 and 27 October 2015. The consultation sought the views of Chagossians and others on three questions: the likely demand for resettlement; the UK Government's assessment of the likely costs and liabilities to the UK taxpayer; and alternative options not involving resettlement that could respond to Chagossian aspirations. A direct questionnaire was also used to obtain further information on these issues. The consultation emphasised that the description of resettlement was not a statement of UK Government policy but represented the most realistic scenario in which resettlement might take place. This document summarises the responses received as Ministers prepare to take a decision on whether to permit some form of resettlement.

## Types of responses

During the consultation period, we received 844 individual responses from Australia, Belgium, Canada, France, Mauritius, Reunion Island, Seychelles, Switzerland, Thailand, the USA and the UK. 832 (98%) of the individual respondents described themselves as Chagossians, with 11 other responses from other individuals. In addition to these 844 returns from individuals, 6 replies were received from organisations including the UK Foreign Affairs Committee, and 1 from a foreign Government – the Government of Mauritius. Government Officials held 5 meetings with Chagossians in group settings in Mauritius, Seychelles, Manchester and London.

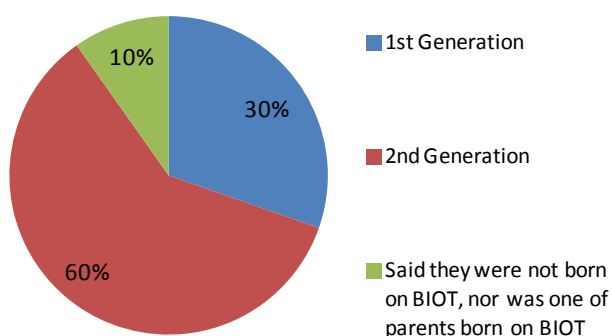
## Individual responses from Chagossians

The majority of Chagossians who responded are currently living in Mauritius.

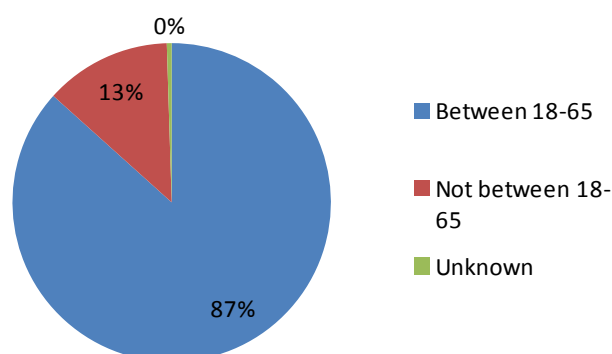


Most Chagossian respondents are of working age and have a connection to BIOT through their parents (what we define as “2nd Generation” in the table below) rather than having been born there themselves.

**Heritage of Chagossian respondents who wish to resettle (this distribution is broadly the same across total Chagossian respondents)**

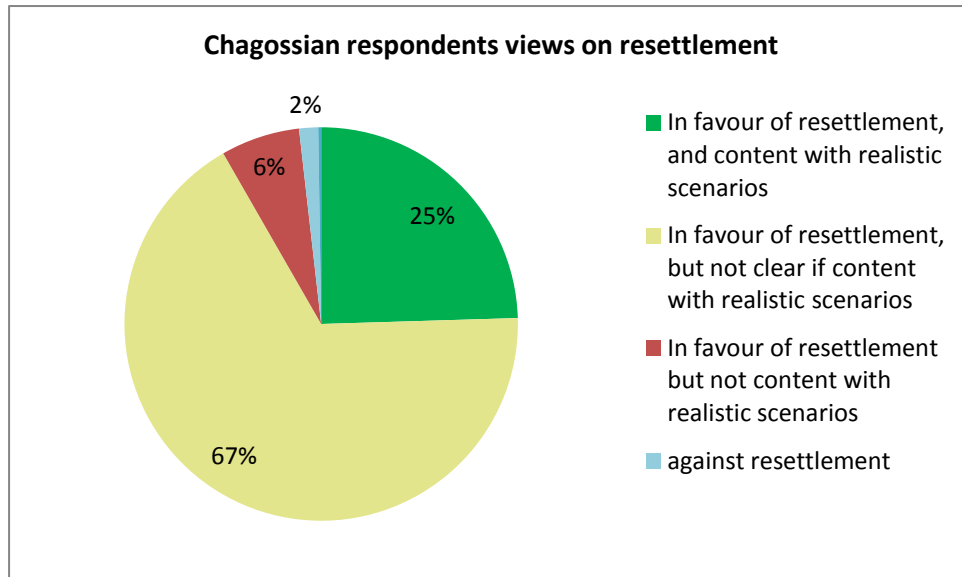


**Age of Chagossian respondents who wish to resettle (this distribution is broadly the same across total Chagossian respondents)**



### Views on resettlement

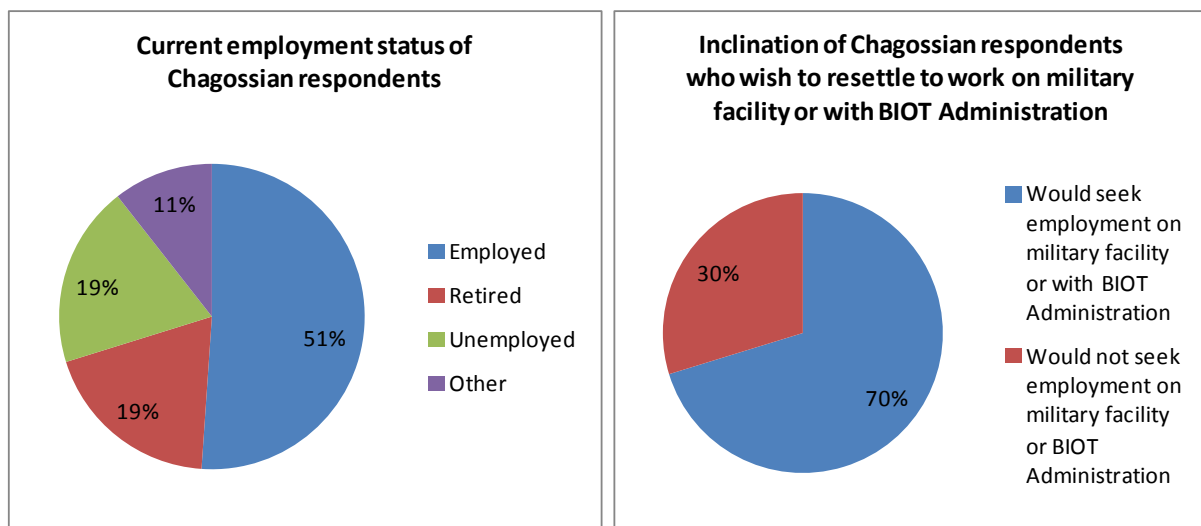
Though the vast majority of Chagossians were in favour of resettlement in principle, there were more nuanced views about the scenarios that were presented in the consultation document as the most realistic description of how it might work.



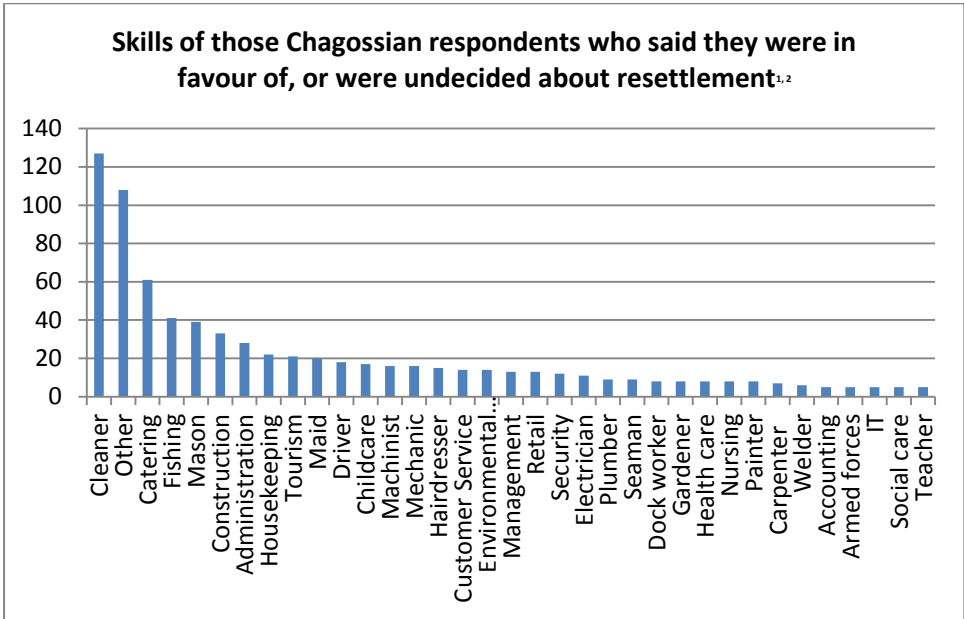
### Employment opportunities in any resettlement

Around half of Chagossians who wanted to return are currently in employment (see chart overleaf). Of those who responded to the questionnaire, over 1,000 additional dependents were indicated, though it is impossible to determine whether some of these dependents are also respondents themselves.

Most respondents who were in favour of resettling said they would be inclined to seek jobs either on the military facility or with the BIOT Administration.

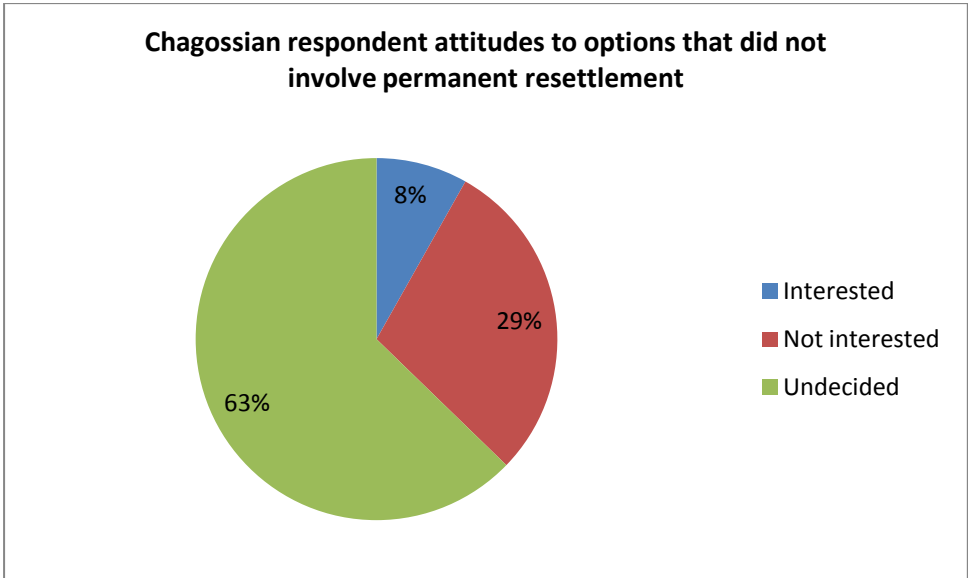


A range of practical skills were declared by Chagossians in their responses, though many indicated they would seek training in other areas including tourism, environmental management, and Territory administration.



### Alternatives to resettlement

Responses from Chagossians indicated a degree of uncertainty about alternatives to resettlement while around a third were clear they would not wish to participate in such options.



<sup>1</sup> Note that some Chagossian respondents declared multiple skills, so total skill responses do not sum to total Chagossian responses; Officials have consolidated skill descriptions used by Chagossians into broad subjects to provide meaningful statistical analysis

<sup>2</sup> Skills recorded as "Other" are: Agriculture, Cashier, Community support, Secretarial skills, Student, Tailor, Copra Industry, Dressmaker, Languages, Maintenance, Police, Textile, Training, Beauty, Cabin Crew, Communications skills, Crane operator, Decorator, Forklift Driver, Handicraft, HR, Nursing, Receptionist, Sewing, Shipping, Social work, Solderer, Air freight, Blacksmith, Building draughtsman and Quantity Surveyor, Caretaker, Childcare, Commercial, Containering, Counselling, Draftman, Factory worker, Fish processing, Fishing, Good communication skills, Health & Safety, Housekeeping, Lawyer, Licence, Loader, Meteorologist, Musician, Planning and Development Surveyor, Port worker, Printing agent, Professional Sega Dancer, "Ratbun" maker, Skill worker, "Supenser", "Caussten", Supervisor, Taxi Driver, Technician, Telephonist, Textile, Transport, Waitress

## **Responses from non-Chagossian individuals**

All non-Chagossian responses from individuals came from yachters who had some experience of passing through BIOT's outer islands for the purposes of safe passage (tourism is not permitted). Overwhelmingly, they said they supported resettlement but also the idea of some form of Chagossian engagement in limited tourism of the outer islands and restoration of historic structures on these islands.

## **Organisational Responses and Meetings**

### **Government of Mauritius**

The Government of Mauritius told the UK Government that it rejected the consultation exercise on the basis that it felt it was the only party which had the lawful authority to determine and discuss issues relating to the Chagos Archipelago, including resettlement.

### **UK Parliament Foreign Affairs Committee**

The Foreign Affairs Committee confirmed that it did not intend to provide a response to the public consultation.

### **UK Chagos Support Association (UKChSA)**

UKChSA said that the consultation document failed to provide enough information for Chagossians to make a fully informed choice on return. And that the consultation document did not offer a 'meaningful choice' due to the closed questions in the questionnaire.

As follow-up, officials met with six UKChSA representatives to explain, as they had in other meetings, and subsequently by letter circulated to all stakeholders, that the consultation document and the questionnaire sought qualitative views on all aspects of the scenarios, and responses need not be limited to binary responses. Further feedback was received from the representatives:

- UKChSA criticised what they perceived to be a sense of the resettlement options being developed as a "business model" where Chagossians were viewed according to their ability to support an economy.
- Representatives of UKChSA said there was anxiety about what will happen next - the UKChSA representatives were likely to recommend that people in their community should not fill out the questionnaire for fear of being committed to a course of action.
- UKChSA representatives said that they wanted a timeline for decisions on connected matters such as citizenship and their immigration status under resettlement.

### **Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB)**

RSPB said that they took no view on the policy question of potential resettlement but expressed the need for comprehensive Environmental Impact Assessments, and a Strategic Environmental Assessment as appropriate, to be undertaken prior to any detailed planning of a resettlement. They stated that the costs of carrying out such assessments and funding any mitigation that they identify must be properly built into the cost projections for all infrastructure development.

### **Chagos Refugees Group (CRG)**

CRG believed that there is a lack of clarity in the consultation about most of the basic requirements of a settled community, including jobs, employment conditions, salaries, housing, pensions, education, visits from wider family members, and transport.

CRG suggested that current and expected returnees exceeds the Medium Option of 500 people, and therefore more land will be required than is provided for in that option. CRG suggests that further planning must include Diego Garcia and Peros Banhos/Salomon Groups.

CRG state that the capital costings in the consultation document ignore the availability of alternative funding from sources such as the European Development Fund, the USA, sovereign wealth funds and partnership funding from commercial enterprises.

### **Chagos Conservation Trust (CCT)**

CCT commented on the need to conduct environmental assessments of all construction work that might be done before construction commenced. They said that neglect of these and of the ability of such assessments to direct impact-free constructions is the main cause of tropical coastal environmental degradation worldwide, to the detriment of people.

CCT pointed out that even low level reef fishing causes damage to coral reef fish biomass and reef health and that climate change consequences must be taken into account if substantial cost later on is to be avoided. They recommend that well-documented scientific findings regarding climate change and sea level rising in BIOT, food sustainability and potential damage from construction are used for decision making.

### **The Linnean Society of London**

The Society response was to endorse the comments from the Chagos Conservation Trust.

### **United Micronations Multi-Oceanic Archipelago (UMMOA)**

UMMOA urged the United Kingdom to try to make right the wrongs that were done against the Chagossians, and allow them to return. They also hoped that sustainable fishing by Chagossians would be allowed as part of managing the Marine Protected Area in the future.

### **BIOT Deputy Commissioner meeting with Chagossians in Mauritius**

Chagossians at the meeting expressed unhappiness with the consultation document and the options outlined. However, the Deputy Commissioner assessed that Chagossians wanted to engage in the consultation.

First generation Chagossians expressed a desire to spend time on the islands they were born on and conclude their lives there. The potential security restrictions on visits by friends and family to Diego Garcia were deemed unacceptable by the Chagossians.

There was a low degree of interest in employment opportunities on the military facility because wages might be lower than on Mauritius and there was a high likelihood they could have to leave family and friends behind.

**BIOT Deputy Commissioner meeting with Chagossians in Seychelles**

Chagossians suggested developing a tourist industry on the outer islands and that heritage visits are crucial.

**BIOT Administrator meeting with Chagossians in Crawley**

Chagossians expressed anxiety about the length of time that resettlement could take. Those who want to go back did not want to wait several years without any change to their situations in the UK, which they consider to be unacceptable.

Chagossians were keen to know more about employment on BIOT, including the training that would be made available. They were also keen to know how issues like citizenship would be addressed, though as the consultation document says, this was not possible before a decision in principle on resettlement by Ministers.

**BIOT Administrator meeting with Chagossians in Manchester**

The Chagossians were keen that a decision account for the fact that there was no “one size fits all” for the community. Some would want to return and some would not, and they wanted a decision that was not one or the other.

There was some anxiety about the need to leave families behind in any model, particularly a pilot. Many Chagossians were interested in training, both for resettlement or in the UK as an alternative to it. Chagossians were keen to create a sustainable economy and not remain dependent on UK taxpayers.

Chagossians were very keen to conserve the culture of the Chagossians, and protecting the “relics” in the Territory so they were not lost to time. They thought this was important as part of any heritage activity even if a resettlement did not take place.

The Chagossians were worried about the prospect of Mauritius taking on the islands in the future, after they had resettled. Several criticised Mauritius for their current situation.

There was determination that resettlement should not be focussed entirely on those who were born in the Territory, but other generations should have the chance to return.