

THE INDIAN DIASPORA

The Indian diaspora is one of the world's largest, numbering 28 million in 2016. People of Indian citizenship or descent live in almost every part of the world. Important features of the pattern are as follows:

- It numbers more than 1 million in each of 8 countries. The largest concentrations are in the USA, UK, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, South Africa and the Middle East.
- Some 22 countries have concentrations of at least 100,000 ethnic Indians.

An important distinction exists between non-resident Indians (NRIs) and persons of Indian origin (PIOs). This is shown in Table 5.7.

Table 5.7 Comparing non-resident Indians (NRIs) and persons of Indian origin (PIOs)

NRI facts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Around 16 million members of the diaspora are NRIs (India has more of its actual citizens living abroad than any other country). ● They are mostly economic migrants; many are highly skilled and young, reflecting India's current demographic characteristics. The country's median age is just 26 and it has the second largest population in the world: it is therefore unsurprising that many of the world's young economic migrants have travelled from India. ● Many have travelled to work in elite occupations such as technology and medicine. Many skilled Indian migrants have travelled to the USA since the 1990s; the NRI population in the USA is more skilled and highly paid than any other migrant community living there. ● In contrast, many Indians working in the Gulf States are low-skilled and poorly paid (see Unit 4.2, page 16).
PIO facts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The remaining 12 million members of the diaspora are PIOs. ● The exact number is hard to estimate as many fourth- or fifth-generation descendants of Indian migrants may no longer identify themselves as being ethnically Indian. Many have a multiple identity – this could be someone with an Indian grandmother and three Irish grandparents, for instance! ● Different state governments collect information about their citizens' ethnicity in varying ways and may not even ask questions about people's cultural backgrounds as part of their national census. ● There are many good reasons why we should question the validity and reliability of PIO diaspora data (and the same is true for any other diaspora you might decide to research).

In the context of your course, there are several interesting points to consider when studying the Indian diaspora:

- The diaspora contributes to India's growing global power and influence (Unit 4.1). India's government views its diaspora as an important human resource helping to build Indian soft power overseas. In 2015, India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi found time to visit UK Indian diaspora communities while making a state visit to London. The diaspora population plays an important role in supporting the enduring friendship between UK and India – a relationship that both countries arguably benefit from.

- The remittance flows that return to India are the world's largest. They were valued at US\$70 billion in 2015: this is a highly significant global financial flow (Unit 4.2).

The diaspora's characteristics vary from country to country: many different hybrid cultures have been created. The degree to which PIOs have preserved their traditional culture and have partly assimilated into the society they live in varies according to context and for many reasons:

- Local attitudes towards mixing may create constraints on integration.
- More recently established diaspora communities have had less time to become modified.
- Indian NRIs and PIOs belong to different Hindu, Muslim and Sikh communities: each of these religious groups may interact with other local communities in different ways, giving rise to an even greater range of hybrid cultures. One example of a hybrid culture is the British Indian Sikh community (now the largest Sikh community outside India). Each wave of Sikh migrants to the UK has brought its own cultural beliefs with it and yet managed to integrate itself within British society while retaining its distinct identity; this has led to the formation of a unique British Sikh identity.