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Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

### Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Muhidin, S., & Utomo, A. (2015). Global Indonesian Diaspora: how many are there and where are they? *Journal of ASEAN Studies*, 3(2), 93-101. <https://doi.org/10.21512/jas.v3i2.847>

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<https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-461366>

# Global Indonesian Diaspora: How many are there and where are they?

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## Abstract

*In the last few years, there is an increasing interest in connecting Indonesian diaspora around the world in order to assist in the national development. A recent event called "Congress of Indonesian Diaspora" held by Indonesian Diaspora Network (IDN) in Jakarta was conducted to focus on this issue. To date, not much is known about the size and composition of the global Indonesian diaspora. This paper attempts to address this gap by analysing the migration patterns and several specific demographic factors related to the global Indonesian diaspora. The paper will also explore the potential impacts of Indonesian diaspora could play in Indonesian development.*

Key words: Indonesian Diaspora, migration, development.

*"Population dynamics and the restructuring of economies have contributed to increasing awareness among policy makers about the key role that international migrants play in satisfying labour demand in particular sectors and in maintaining the international networks necessary for the operation of the global economy...international migration is an integral part of the development process and the functioning of modern economies."*

(UN Secretary General 2010: 3).

## Introduction

In August 2015, many overseas Indonesians from around the world arrived in Jakarta to attend the Congress of Indonesian Diaspora (CID). This is the third CID since its first Congress in Los

Angeles in July 2012 and the second Congress in Jakarta in August 2013. The 2nd CID had a theme of "*Pulang Kampung*" which means "Coming back home" in an attempt to bring together Indonesian diaspora in one network community (so-called Indonesian Diaspora Network or IDN) and to build a new emerging power of the millions of overseas Indonesians. Many ideas and lessons have been learned and exchanged from the events that have been carried forward into actions. The theme of the third CID was 'Diaspora Bakti Bangsa,' which means 'Diaspora Devotion to the Nation.' It emphasizes the spirit of global Indonesian diaspora in their attempts to promote shared prosperity for Indonesia. The Congress highlighted several main issues, including sustainable cities (with the case studies in Jakarta and Bandung), healthcare, higher learning education, the

economy, culinary, creative economy, dual citizenship, and maritime development.

In recent years, the government of Indonesia has started to pay more attention to the existence of its diaspora and to appreciate them as a national resource. The Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, for example, established the Indonesian Diaspora Desk that is headed at ambassadorial level. The former president Yudhoyono in his message at the 2nd CID also stated that the "Diaspora" approach should become the new strategy of Indonesia. The current vice president Kalla in his message at the 3rd CID said that the support of Indonesian diaspora could take the form of experiences, networks, capital and access to foreign markets.

While the CID had showcased a number of contributions from Indonesian diaspora, there are still many more potentials that have been untapped. One fundamental question that keeps on coming up in the ensuing discussions on the Indonesian diaspora relates to its size and distribution.

Drawing from an earlier working paper from Muhidin and Utomo (2013), this paper aims to update and stimulate further discussions on the estimated size and distribution of the Indonesian diaspora in the global world.

This paper is structured as follows. First, we outline two problems associated with the great variability with current estimates of the size of the diaspora: its definition and data source. After outlining these various estimates, we explore results from two different databases on international migrant stock to look at the distribution and the growth of Indonesian-born migrants in recent

years. Since these databases primarily target Indonesian-born international migrants only, we then use an example of detailed tabulations from the 2011 Australian Population Census using data on ancestry, country of birth, and language spoken at home to illustrate how the size of the diaspora may be potentially different to the one estimated using the international migrant stock data. To conclude, we discuss potential positive impacts of Indonesian diaspora on development in Indonesia.

### **Estimating Indonesian Diaspora: Definition and data sources**

The first step in estimating the total number of Indonesian diaspora is to define the diaspora itself. Broadly speaking, diaspora is defined as "a group of people who live outside the area which they had lived for a long time or in which their ancestors lived," (Merriam-Webster, retrieved 23/04/2015). This is the result of the 'dispersion of a people from its original homeland' (Butler, 2001:189). Despite the clarity of this explanation, diaspora is a word that has evolved in meaning overtime and to this day doesn't have a precise definition. This is because there are several paradigms as to what the term truly means and as to how it can be applied to certain populations.

The term 'diaspora' originally comes from the Greek word '*diaspeirein*' which is '*dia*' for across and '*speirein*' for scatter. In the past, this term carried negative connotations as it was associated with the forced dispersal of Jews population from their homeland. In today's globalised world, the term diaspora becomes universal phenomenon and has replaced a variety of flows of migration like labour migrants, refugees, and marriage migrants. This is because

more migrants today are due to moving voluntarily rather than due to forced or involuntarily migration such as slavery, persecution or convictions. In addition, many diaspora populations have been established for the centuries. Despite the sufferings experienced by diaspora populations during colonisation centuries ago, its significance in history has in some respects been forgotten by members of the present generation (Safran, 1991). This is because of their tendency to forge their identity with the "host land", as well as their entitled legal status as citizens of the country. In short, this modern migration allows for a triangular relationship, where diaspora are able to review, reformulate and re-define their terms of engagement vis-à-vis both the home and the country of residence.

Following this simplest definition, one may consider the Indonesian diaspora as consisting of Indonesians by birth and ancestry who live outside of Indonesia. In many cases, this definition of the diaspora is used interchangeably with 'overseas Indonesians'.

While the above definition seems simple, in practice, any attempt to trace the patterns and the scale of the dispersion of a large number of people from any particular point of origin is far from being straightforward. The first problem relates to the aforementioned definition. The Indonesian diaspora/overseas Indonesians, by and large, is a socially constructed population (Muhidin, 2013). Brubaker (2005) highlights the three general criteria to define what constitutes a diaspora: dispersement, homeland orientation, and boundary-maintenance. The last criterion refers to a set of homeland-anchored collective identities shared by the

transnational members of the diaspora over an extended period of time.

Following these criteria, identifying members of the Indonesian diaspora in a statistical manner becomes harder. It is not clear through how many migrant generations, on average, the boundary-maintenance characteristics of the diaspora would last. In this case, should we then limit statistical estimates of the Indonesian diaspora to first generation migrants only? Alternatively, should we include anyone with any ancestry of Indonesians, no matter how small, including an Australian whose great-great-great grandfather was a seafarer from Makassar? Having such a comprehensive picture of anyone with Indonesian ancestry living abroad would be ideal. Unfortunately, we are faced with a second problem in our exercise, that of data source.

Table 1 illustrates the varying estimates of the number of the Indonesian diaspora depending on both the definition and data source. These estimates ranged between 2 to 8 million. The conservative estimates of the Indonesian diaspora are mainly drawn from international migrant stock datasets. These estimates are mostly based on statistics of foreign-born population obtained from national population censuses. International migrant stock datasets provide estimates of the number of Indonesian-born population living abroad, and exclude second and later generations as well as other overseas Indonesians who were not born in Indonesia.

The first data source of this kind, the Global Migrant Origin Database, is compiled by the Development Research Centre on Migration, Globalisation and Poverty of the University of Sussex

(Migration DRC., 2007). The dataset records stocks (not flows) of lifetime migration by looking at data of overseas born population in each host country with year 2000 as a reference period. The estimated total number of Indonesian-born migrants from this dataset is 1.8 million. A more recent dataset on stocks of Indonesian-born migrant is available from the Population Division of the United Nations Department of Social and Economic Affairs (UN DESA., 2013). This dataset estimated that there are almost 3 million Indonesian-born migrants globally in 2013.

In contrast to the estimates based on international migrant stock datasets, publicly circulating estimates of the global size of the Indonesian diaspora tend to be much larger. For example, the Wikipedia site on overseas Indonesians proposed that there are about 5.3 million overseas Indonesian abroad. Such estimates are based on a range of host country-specific data which often include second and later generations overseas Indonesians. The

estimates from the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs based on official reports from 167 diplomatic offices, as cited by the Indonesian Ambassador for the United States is 4.7 million (Satrio, 2013). In a later occasion, the number cited increased to 6 million (Rahadi, 2013). Furthermore, the Bureau of Overseas General Election (Badan Pemilihan Luar Negeri, or BPLN) reports that about 2,040,368 Indonesian overseas have currently registered as potential voters in the 2014 election. The largest number of these overseas voters is recorded in Malaysia and Saudi Arabia where most Indonesian workers are located. This last figure only refers to those who are eligible to vote in the election (i.e. at least 17 years old or ever married). In other words, there are still more overseas Indonesians who are not registered such as children aged less than 17 years old and undocumented migrants. Last figure from Indonesian Diaspora Network (IDN) website indicates that there is an estimated eight million Indonesian diaspora currently living in over 120 countries.

**Table 1. Various estimates on the size of the Indonesian Diaspora**

Source	Date	Estimates	Link
Global migrant origin database - version 4	2007	1,832,945	<a href="http://www.migrationdrc.org/research/typesofmigration/global_migrant_origin_database.html">http://www.migrationdrc.org/research/typesofmigration/global_migrant_origin_database.html</a>
UN DESA International migrant stock by destination and origin	2013	2,992,550	<a href="http://esa.un.org/unmigration/migrantstocks2013.htm?msdo">http://esa.un.org/unmigration/migrantstocks2013.htm?msdo</a>
Dino Patti Djalal (estimates from 167 Indonesian Diplomatic Office overseas)	3/01/2013	4,700,000	<a href="http://idn.kbrikualalumpur.org/index.php/80-template-details/general/111-idn">http://idn.kbrikualalumpur.org/index.php/80-template-details/general/111-idn</a>

Wikipedia (various sources - data for certain countries include second generations Indonesians abroad)	26/11/2013	5,313,000	<a href="http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Overseas_Indonesian">http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Overseas_Indonesian</a>
Dino Patti Djalal	11/06/2013	6,000,000	<a href="http://www.republika.co.id/berita/nasional/umum/13/11/06/mvu01i-dino-patti-djalal-dukung-kewarganegaraan-ganda-diaspora-indonesia">http://www.republika.co.id/berita/nasional/umum/13/11/06/mvu01i-dino-patti-djalal-dukung-kewarganegaraan-ganda-diaspora-indonesia</a>
Indonesian Diaspora Network	2015	8,000,000	<a href="http://www.diasporaindonesia.org">www.diasporaindonesia.org</a>

In summary, these estimated figures indicate that there is no single and detailed record of the composition of Indonesian diaspora globally. Whether one would lean towards using the estimates of Indonesian-born global migrant stock or other available estimates as listed above, would depend on which definition of overseas Indonesians/ Indonesian diaspora is being discussed. At this point, the UN-DESA international migrant stock data is readily available, and relatively most accessible, to further look into the pattern of distribution and the growth of overseas Indonesians overtime.

#### **Size and Distribution of Indonesian-born migrants**

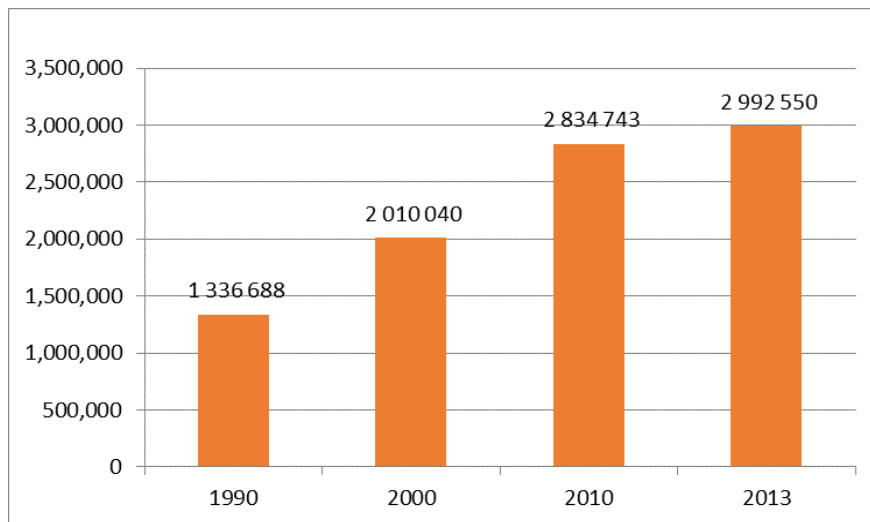
Irrespective of the varying definitions and resulting estimates of the size of the Indonesian diaspora, one thing that we could assert is the fact that it is growing. Figure 1 outlines the rise of the estimated size of Indonesian-born migrants globally from 1990 to 2013 (UN DESA., 2013). There is an estimated growth of 50 per cent in the stock of Indonesian-born migrant between 1990-

2000. In the last two decades, the estimated size had more than doubled.

Figure 2 depicts the estimated distribution of Indonesian-born migrants by the top ten country of destinations in 2013 (UN DESA., 2013). Malaysia remains the top destination country, hosting about 35 per cent of Indonesian-born migrants or 1,051,227. Together, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab emirates host almost a quarter of Indonesian-born migrants.

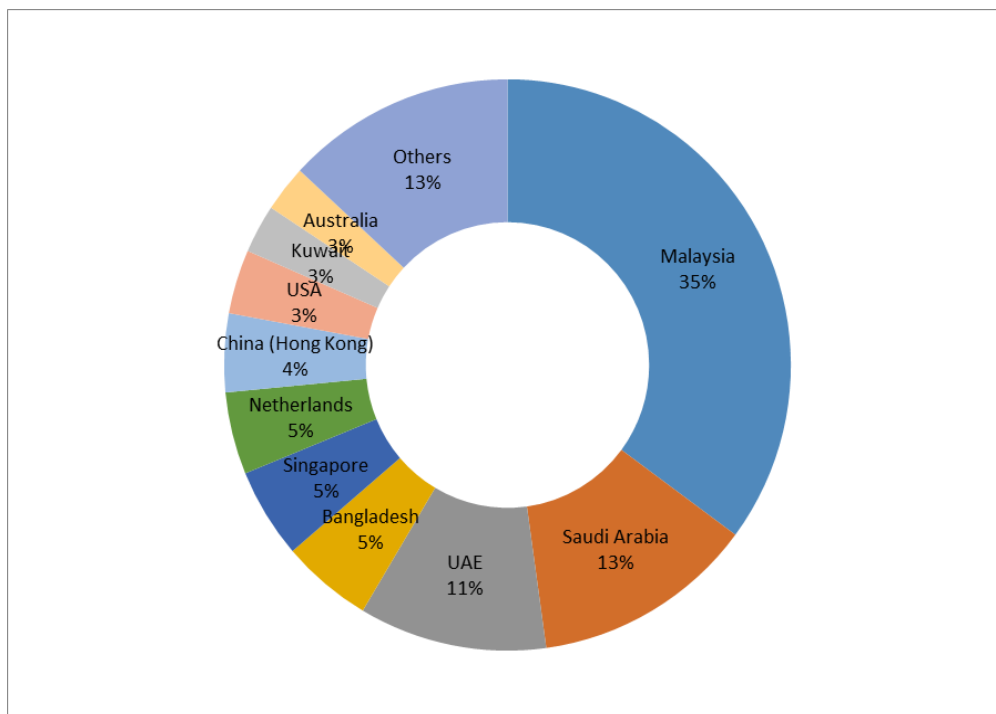
Please note that the figure here, however, has limitation in terms of its data coverage. The data are mainly derived from censuses which are often systematically exclude migrant groups. Moreover, the data do not yet include all countries in which Indonesians are living. It does not include second and later generations born to expatriate Indonesian-born parents and grand-parents. It does not include many Indonesians who are temporary residents (foreign workers, students etc.) It is also questionable whether undocumented migration is fully captured in census data. Despite those limitation, the figure has been able to indicate the general distribution of Indonesian diaspora around the globe.

**Figure 1. Estimates of Indonesian-born populations overseas 1990-2013**



Source: United Nations DESA (2013)

**Figure 2. Selected Countries with the highest stock of Indonesian-born populations 2013**



Source: United Nations DESA (2013)

**Case Study: Estimating the Indonesian diaspora in Australia**

Using Australia as an example, different estimates on the size of Indonesian diaspora owing to the

different data sources and the variables used for the analysis. To begin with, estimates from the UN DESA international migrant stock data suggest that there were 72,967 and 78,744

Indonesian-born persons in Australia in 2010 and 2013 respectively. As expected, because the international migrant stock data is primarily based on the stock of first generation migrants, these estimates are lower than the estimates of Indonesian diaspora directly generated from the 2011 Australian Population Census by Muhidin and Pardosi (2012).

To estimate the size of the Indonesian diaspora, Muhidin and Pardosi (2012) used three variables from the 2011 Australian Population Census: persons speaking Bahasa Indonesian at home, persons nominating Indonesia as an ancestry, and persons born in Indonesia. All three variables yield different estimates ranging between 50,688 to 63,159 individuals. Combining these three individual identifiers, Muhidin and Pardosi (2012) estimated that the Indonesian diaspora in Australia is about 87,807 persons. This case study shows that even when researchers used the same data source, the estimated size of the Indonesian diaspora would be contingent upon the choice of variables used in the analysis.

### **Potential Positive Impacts of Diaspora on Development in Indonesia**

Indonesian diaspora today consist of Indonesian who live overseas, or foreigners who have Indonesian origin, as well as individuals who have Indonesian linkage personally or socially. Using such definition provided by IDN, it is estimated about 8-10 million Indonesians diaspora (both WNI and WNA) all over the world. In short, the diasporas are not only contribute in terms of their number but also their potential impacts. Following Hugo (2013), here are five main potential

impacts of diaspora to the development on their home country:

Firstly, remittances from expatriates have been demonstrated to be a larger and more reliable source of development funds than the official development assistance from donor agencies such as the World Bank (Mohapatra, Ratha and Silwal 2011). For Indonesian diaspora, data from the Agency for the Placement and Protection of Indonesian Migrant Workers (BNP2TKI) revealed that Indonesia received over Rp 97 trillion (US\$7.18 billion) in remittance in 2014 alone from migrant workers. This remittance would be much more if it is combined with other types of diaspora that is currently estimated about 8 million. Yet, this is a relatively smaller compared to Vietnamese, who have just started to mobilise their diaspora network and have been earning \$10 billion in remittances a year. Secondly, the diaspora can be both a direct source of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and an effective 'middleman' to channel FDI towards the home economy. Lucas (2003) in his study shows how Chinese diaspora has contributed about 60-70% of FDI, as the biggest in the world. There has been considerable discussion of how Chinese business and social networks have overcome barriers to international trade. Thirdly, the diaspora can be a bridgehead into expansion of the economic linkages of the home nation. Korean Americans were the bridgeheads for the successful penetration of the United States market by Korean car, electronics and white good manufacturers. Canadian based studies have shown that a doubling of skilled migration from Asia saw a 74 percent increase in Asian imports to Canada (Head and Reis, 1998; Lucas, 2001). Fourthly, diaspora networks have become important in transmitting



information both formally and informally. This dimension is largely confined to skilled migrants. Lucas (2001, 22) has shown how professionals in origin and destination economies have maintained strong linkages so that ideas flow freely in both directions. Fifthly, many expatriates return to their homeland country and contribute to development (Conway and Potter, 2009).

As a matter of fact, Indonesian diaspora network has started those paths by establishing several task forces (i.e. liveable cities, health, culinary as well as immigration policy and dual citizenship) and special programmatic function (i.e. Indonesian diaspora foundation, business council, brain-bank and women forum). It has been expected that those activities can direct more partnerships between foreign hosts and home countries with the supports from Indonesian diaspora. At the same time, diaspora can transfer the invaluable skills and experience they gained abroad.

### **Conclusion**

Estimating the size of the Indonesian diaspora is not a straightforward exercise. Available estimates on the size and distribution of the diaspora vary greatly depending on the definitions, the data source, and the choice of the variables used to derive the estimates.

Up to 2015, the estimated size of diaspora ranged from between 2.9 to 8 million, with the lowest estimate bounded to the global numbers of Indonesian-born population residing abroad. While the available estimates of the size of diaspora are subject to high variations, data from the UN International Migrant stock

suggest that the size of the diaspora is growing, and has more than doubled in the period between 1990 and 2013. Further estimates from the UN International Migrant Stock database suggest that close to 60 per cent of Indonesian-born migrants in 2013 are in Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates.

As shown by the Australian case study presented briefly in this paper, future efforts on estimating the size, the changing nature, and the composition of the Indonesian diaspora would benefit from detailed tabulation and in-depth country studies in top destination areas

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The earlier draft of this study was presented at the 4th ICOBIRD-International Conference on Business, International Relations, and Diplomacy, at BINUS Campus, Jakarta, on 3-4 November 2015.

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