



India's Global Reach Through Its Diaspora

This editorial is based on “[How Indian diaspora can contribute to Viksit Bharat](#)” which was published in Hindustan Times on 08/01/2025. The article highlights that Odisha hosts the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas 2025, a key event for the Indian diaspora. The event has grown over the years, fostering a strong sense of community and pride among overseas Indians.

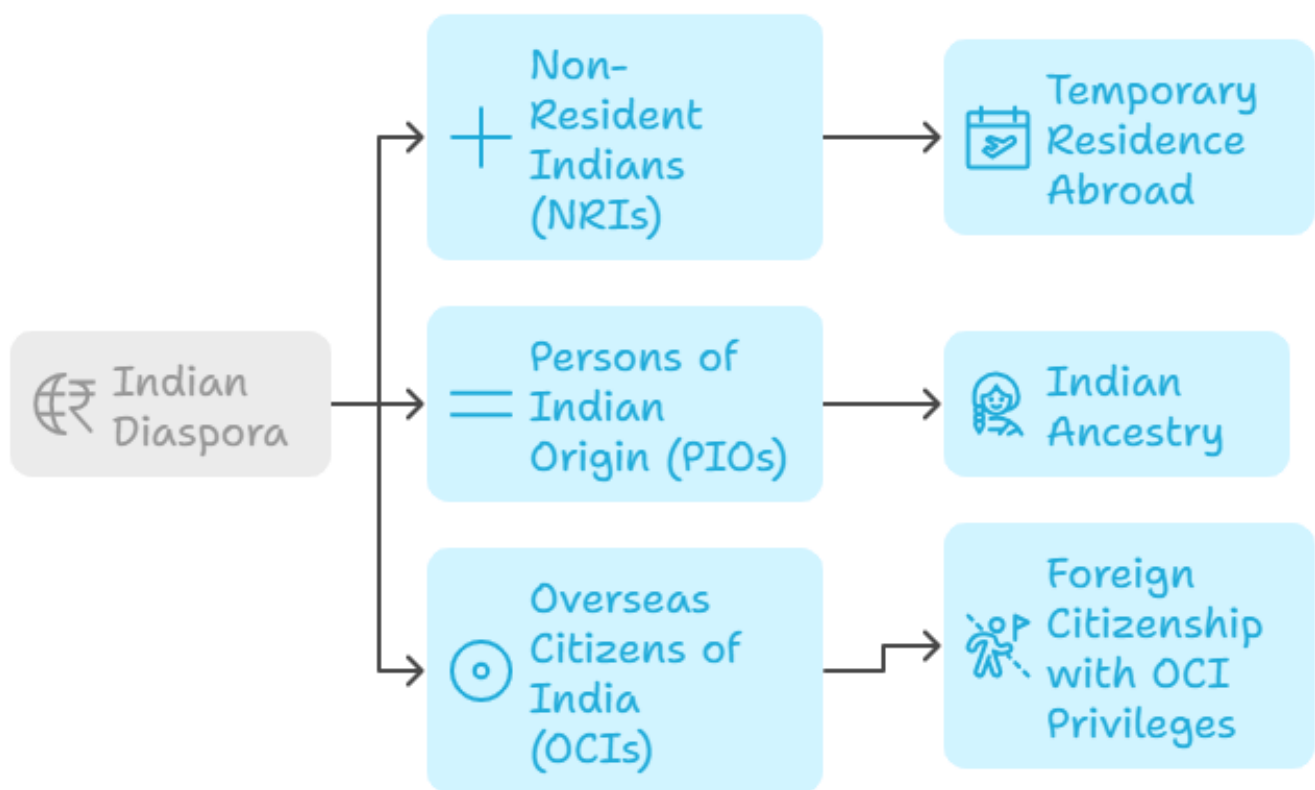
For Prelims: [Non-Resident Indians \(NRIs\)](#), [Persons of Indian Origin \(PIOs\)](#), [OCI card](#), [India's GDP](#), [Consumption Expenditure](#), [India-Uk Free Trade Agreement](#), [Gulf Nations](#), [Madad \(Help\)](#), [Emigration Check Required \(ECR\)](#), [Operation Ganga \(2022\)](#), [Operation Kaveri \(2023\)](#), [Operation Rahat \(2015\)](#), [Operation Devi Shakti \(2021\)](#), [Council of Scientific and Industrial Research \(CSIR\)](#), [Gulf Cooperation Council \(GCC\)](#).

For Mains: Significance of Indian Diaspora in Indian Diplomacy, [Indian Diaspora](#), [India's Soft Power](#).

The [Indian diaspora](#), encompassing over **35 million people** globally in 2024, symbolizes India's vast reach and influence. Representing the **largest diaspora worldwide**, these individuals serve as economic drivers, cultural ambassadors, and strategic allies for India. Their contributions, including **\$129.1 billion** in [remittances](#) in 2024, are celebrated during the [Pravasi Bharatiya Divas \(PBD\)](#), held biennially on **9th January** to honor their role in shaping India's global identity. With a strong presence in over 200 countries, the diaspora bridges India with the world, fostering innovation, strengthening diplomatic ties, and enhancing India's global stature in the **21st century**.

What Defines the Indian Diaspora?

- **Indian Diaspora:** The **Indian diaspora** refers to individuals of Indian origin who reside outside India, including both [Non-Resident Indians \(NRIs\)](#) and [Persons of Indian Origin \(PIOs\)](#).
 - According to the [Ministry of External Affairs \(MEA\)](#), as of November 2024, the total population of Overseas Indians was 35,421,987.
 - The top three countries with the largest Indian overseas populations are the **United States** (5.4 million), the **United Arab Emirates** (3.6 million), and **Malaysia** (2.9 million).
- **Categories of the Diaspora:**
 - **Non-Resident Indians (NRIs):** These are Indian citizens residing abroad **temporarily** for work, education, or other purposes.
 - **Persons of Indian Origin (PIOs):** These are foreign citizens of Indian ancestry, who may have been **born or settled abroad** for generations but retain a strong cultural connection to India.
 - **Overseas Citizens of India (OCIs):** This category includes individuals of Indian origin who **hold foreign citizenship** but are granted specific privileges by the Indian government through the [OCI card](#).



What is the Significance and Contribution of the Indian Diaspora ?

- **Economic Significance:** In 2024, India received an astounding **\$129.1 billion** in remittances, the highest for any country in a single year.
 - This represented **14.3% of global remittances**, a remarkable feat that underlines India's dominance in this sector.
 - Remittances accounted for **3.3% of India's GDP**, providing critical support to families and supporting **consumption expenditure and investment** in local economies.
 - By bridging Indian enterprises with global markets and fostering collaborations, the **diaspora enriches India's business landscape**, supports underserved regions, and propels the country toward its **goal of becoming a developed economy**.
- **Role in Administration and Soft Power:** The Indian diaspora plays a crucial role in influencing **administrative frameworks** and strengthening bilateral relations with key global powers.
 - **Indian-origin professionals and lawmakers** in the US and UK promote **India-US collaborations** in trade, defense, and technology.
 - For example, Indian-origin officials have contributed significantly to the discussions around the **India-UK Free Trade Agreement**, showcasing their pivotal role in enhancing strategic partnerships.
- **Enhancing Cultural Connectivity:** Acting as cultural ambassadors, the diaspora strengthens India's soft power by promoting its traditions, art, and heritage in host countries.
 - Initiatives like **declaring Diwali as a holiday** in several US states highlight the successful integration of Indian culture abroad, fostering greater acceptance and appreciation.
 - Indian festivals, **yoga**, Bollywood, and cuisine have gained global popularity, enhancing **India's soft power**.
- **Knowledge Economy:** Indians have a significant presence in global tech hubs, for instance, CEOs of major tech firms like **Google, Microsoft, and Adobe** are of Indian origin.
 - Many diaspora members are returning to India, bringing their expertise and fostering

innovation, particularly in sectors like **IT and healthcare**.

- **Philanthropic Contributions:** Indian-origin philanthropists contribute generously to causes in India, supporting education, healthcare, and rural development.
 - For example, initiatives like the **India Development Foundation of Overseas Indians (IDF-OI)** facilitate such contributions.

What are Government Initiatives to Engage with the Indian Diaspora?

▪ Employment and Welfare Support:

- **E-Migrate:** This online platform regulates recruitment and provides safe avenues for Indian workers seeking overseas employment.
 - It ensures transparency, protects workers from exploitation, and simplifies the recruitment process for both employers and employees.
- **Madad Portal:** The [Madad \(Help\)](#) portal provides a grievance redressal mechanism for Indians abroad.
 - It addresses issues ranging from legal assistance to repatriation in emergencies, ensuring timely support to distressed Indians.
- **Pravasi Bharatiya Bima Yojana (PBBY):** Introduced in 2003, it is a mandatory insurance scheme for **Indian emigrant** workers in the [Emigration Check Required \(ECR\)](#) category.
 - It offers insurance coverage of **Rs. 10 lakhs** for accidental death or permanent disability, with premiums of **Rs. 275** for two years and **Rs. 375** for three years.

▪ Cultural and Heritage Engagement:

- **Overseas Citizenship of India (OCI) Scheme:** Grants lifelong visa-free travel and other privileges to PIOs, fostering stronger ties with India.
 - Benefits include **property ownership, financial investments, and access to educational institutions** in India.
- **Chalo India Programme:** Encourages Indian-origin youth worldwide to visit India and reconnect with their heritage.
 - This program includes cultural tours, heritage site visits, and interactions with local communities.
 - **Bharat Ko Jaaniye Quiz (BKJ):** An online quiz designed to connect diaspora youth with India's history, culture, and contemporary developments, fostering a sense of pride and belonging.

▪ Research and Academic Initiatives:

- **Visiting Advanced Joint Research (VAJRA) Faculty Scheme:** Attracts overseas scientists to work in Indian institutions, fostering high-quality **collaborative research** in cutting-edge areas.
- **Ramanujan Fellowship:** Provides opportunities for Indian researchers abroad to work in Indian institutions in science, engineering, and medicine.
- **Ramalingaswami Re-entry Fellowship:** Supports scientists returning to India to pursue research in life **sciences and biotechnology**.
- **Biomedical Research Career Programme (BRCP):** Facilitates career development for researchers in biomedical and public health sectors in India.
 - For instance, **DBT/Wellcome Trust India Alliance** is a collaborative partnership between the **Department of Biotechnology (DBT)**, Government of India, and **The Wellcome Trust, UK**, aimed at supporting the **Biomedical Research Career Program (BRCP)**.
- **Scholarship Programmes for Diaspora Children:** Offers financial assistance for higher education in India to children of NRIs and PIOs.

▪ Community Support and Welfare:

- **Indian Community Welfare Fund (ICWF):** Provides emergency assistance to Indians citizens abroad, including repatriation during crises, **legal aid**, and **financial support** in emergencies.
- **Pravasi Bharatiya Kendra:** A hub for diaspora-related activities and a resource center in New Delhi, offering facilities for conferences and events.
- **Senior Research Associateship (SRA) - Scientist's Pool Scheme:** Administered by the [Council of Scientific and Industrial Research \(CSIR\)](#), the scheme offers temporary placement to highly qualified **Indian scientists, engineers, technologists, and**

medical personnel returning from abroad without employment in India.

- **Crisis Management and Evacuations:**

- The government has conducted several large-scale evacuation operations to protect its citizens during crises, demonstrating robust crisis management capabilities.
- [Operation Ganga \(2022\)](#), [Operation Kaveri \(2023\)](#), [Operation Rahat \(2015\)](#), and [Operation Devi Shakti \(2021\)](#) were all successful Indian government-led evacuation missions that rescued thousands of nationals and foreign allies from conflict zones.

What are the Challenges Associated with the Indian Diaspora?

- **Economic Challenges:**

- Indian workers in [Gulf Cooperation Council \(GCC\)](#) nations often face **job insecurity** due to volatile oil prices and changing labor laws.
 - This exposes them to **financial instability** and uncertain futures.
- Many diaspora members, especially in [low-skilled jobs](#), are unable to fully utilize their potential, leading to **underemployment and income disparity**.

- **Social and Cultural Challenges:**

- Second and third-generation Indians face challenges in maintaining their **cultural identity**, balancing integration with host cultures while preserving their heritage.
- Instances of [racism and xenophobia](#) remain significant concerns in many host countries, affecting the well-being of diaspora members.

- **Political and Legal Issues:**

- Stricter [immigration policies](#) in countries like the **US and UK** create challenges for NRIs and their families, limiting their opportunities for settlement and growth.
- **Marital and property disputes** often complicate the lives of overseas Indians, requiring diplomatic and legal interventions.

- **Engagement Barriers:**

- Many diaspora members are unaware of [government schemes](#) aimed at engaging them, resulting in underutilization of these initiatives.
- Complex processes and red tape can deter effective participation in **diaspora-focused** programs.

What Should be Way Forward to Tap the Potential of Indian Diaspora?

- **Economic Strategies:** Enhance **skill-building initiatives** to prepare workers for global markets, focusing on high-demand sectors such as **IT, healthcare, and engineering**.
 - Streamline processes to encourage diaspora investments in India, including [simplified taxation](#) and [regulatory frameworks](#).
- **Cultural Integration:** Develop programs to teach Indian languages to diaspora children, **ensuring cultural continuity**.
 - Organize Indian festivals abroad to strengthen **cultural ties** and **foster community spirit**.
- **Policy Reforms:** Simplify voting mechanisms for **NRIs** to encourage political participation and representation.
 - Offer more **privileges** to **OCIs**, such as participation in local governance and access to more **public services**.
- **Strengthening Community Support:** Strengthen the **ICWF** to provide better crisis support, including mental health services and repatriation assistance.
 - Develop apps and portals for real-time engagement with the **diaspora, ensuring accessibility and ease of use**.
- **Strategic Partnerships:** Leverage the diaspora for stronger [bilateral relations](#) and global influence, emphasizing mutual benefits.
 - Focus on **youth-centric initiatives**, such as **cultural exchange programs** and **scholarships**, to ensure sustained connections with **future generations**.

Conclusion

The **Indian diaspora** stands as a pillar of India's global identity, significantly contributing to its **economy, culture, and soft power**. With proactive engagement and robust policies, India can further strengthen these ties, ensuring **mutual growth** and prosperity.

Drishti Mains Question:

How does the Indian diaspora act as a bridge for strengthening India's bilateral relations with key global powers?

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions (PYQs)

Mains:

Q. The Indian Diaspora has an important role to play in South East Asian countries economy and society. Appraise the role of Indian Diaspora in South-East Asia in this context. (2017)

Q. 'Indian diaspora has a decisive role to play in the politics and economy of America and European Countries'. Comment with examples. (2020)

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