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The New Largest: India-Born Australians and Soft Power

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THE LIFT LINE

A **diaspora** (<https://ujyari.com/vocab/diaspora/>) is a country's living embassy, and when India-born residents become the single largest overseas-born group in Australia, India gains not just numbers abroad but a new instrument of influence.

WHY THIS EDITORIAL MATTERS FOR YOUR EXAM

India-born residents have overtaken the England-born to become Australia's largest overseas-born community, a **demographic** (<https://ujyari.com/vocab/demographic/>) milestone with real foreign-policy weight. For **GS2** it is a study in diaspora diplomacy and soft power: how a migrant population reshapes a host society, strengthens a bilateral relationship, and carries both opportunity and the risk of backlash.

GS Paper 2: India and its neighbourhood and **bilateral** (<https://ujyari.com/vocab/bilateral/>) relations; effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests; the Indian diaspora.

For **Prelims**, hold the specifics: the India-Australia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership; the framework of trade and migration mobility between the two countries; and the concept of soft power as influence through attraction rather than **coercion** (<https://ujyari.com/vocab/coercion/>). For **Mains**, argue that the diaspora is a strategic asset only if India engages it deliberately and if the host society's integration holds, and that backlash is the standing risk to be managed.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Migration slowly rewrites the composition of nations. For decades the England-born formed the largest overseas-born community in Australia, a legacy of its colonial and Commonwealth history. That has now changed: India-born residents have become the single largest such group, the product of years of skilled

migration, international students who settled, and family reunification. The shift is not merely statistical. It changes who is visible in Australian workplaces, campuses, suburbs and public life, and it deepens the human foundation of the India-Australia relationship.

The two countries have moved closer at the official level too, through a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership spanning trade, education, technology and security, and through arrangements easing the mobility of students and skilled workers. A large, settled, largely successful Indian-origin population gives that partnership ballast. Diplomacy conducted between governments is reinforced by connections between families, alumni networks and businesses that span the Indian Ocean.

THE CORE ARGUMENT / ISSUE

Diaspora as soft power

A diaspora projects the home country's culture, values and competence into the host society without any government having to spend a rupee on propaganda. Festivals, food, film, professional excellence and everyday decency become a continuous, credible advertisement for India. This is soft power in its purest form, influence earned through attraction, and Australia's largest overseas-born community is now Indian.

The relationship, humanised

People-to-people ties are the most durable layer of any bilateral relationship because they survive changes of government. Students who studied in Australia, professionals who built careers there, and families straddling both countries create a dense web of interests in keeping ties warm. Remittances flow home; skills and capital flow both ways; and each community becomes a constituency for cooperation rather than friction.

DIMENSION	OPPORTUNITY FOR INDIA	ATTENDANT RISK
Soft power	Culture and competence on display	Stereotyping, othering
Bilateral ties	People-to-people ballast	Diaspora politics spilling over
Economy	Remittances, skills, investment	Brain drain of talent
Integration	A confident, settled community	Backlash amid migration debates

The backlash risk

Rapid demographic change can provoke resentment, especially where migration becomes a charged political issue and where housing, wages or public services feel stretched. A visible, fast-growing community can be scapegoated. Managing this is partly the host society's task of integration and fair debate, and partly a matter of the community itself building broad belonging rather than living apart. India's interest lies in a diaspora that is both proudly Indian and fully Australian.

HOW TO THINK ABOUT THIS (ANALYTICAL FRAME)

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Treat the diaspora as a strategic resource that yields returns only with cultivation and carries liabilities if neglected. The transferable rule: demographic weight abroad converts into influence only when the home state engages its diaspora deliberately and the host society integrates it fairly; left to chance, the same numbers can breed backlash instead of goodwill. Soft power is earned and can be squandered.

THE DIAGRAM IN WORDS

Skilled migration + students + family reunion -> India-born become Australia's largest overseas-born group -> soft power + people-to-people ties strengthen Comprehensive Strategic Partnership -> remittances, skills, investment flow -> risk: backlash amid migration debates -> fix: deliberate diaspora engagement + fair integration -> durable India-Australia relationship

WAY FORWARD

- ① **Engage the diaspora deliberately.** Treat the community as a strategic partner through consular support, alumni and professional networks, and cultural programming, converting numbers into sustained influence.
- ② **Deepen mobility with safeguards.** Build on migration and mobility arrangements while protecting migrant workers and students from exploitation, so growth strengthens rather than strains the relationship.
- ③ **Invest in integration and belonging.** Encourage a diaspora that participates fully in Australian civic life, which is the surest defence against backlash and the best carrier of goodwill.
- ④ **Guard against reverse harms.** Manage brain drain by keeping ties two-way, drawing skills, capital and knowledge back to India through returnee and collaboration schemes.

PYQ LINKAGE AND PRACTICE

UPSC has asked about the role of the Indian diaspora in foreign policy and about India's relations with major partners. This editorial links those themes to a specific 2026 demographic milestone in Australia.

Practice question: "The Indian diaspora is a strategic asset only when engaged deliberately, and a liability when neglected." Discuss with reference to India-Australia relations. (250 words, 15 marks)

Sources: *The Hindu* (<https://www.thehindu.com/>)

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