



Diaspora Humanitarians

How Australia-based migrants help in crises abroad

Indonesia Briefing

- Between June and August of 2021, a wave of the global Covid-19 pandemic resulted in more than 82,800 deaths. The Indonesian diaspora in Australia mobilised to provide material, economic, social and political assistance in response to this crisis.
- Indonesia received US\$13.09 billion in personal remittances in 2021, which constituted 0.99% of the country's GDP. The Indonesian Government maintains strong connections to its diaspora through a variety of institutions.
- The Indonesia-born population in Australia increased by 105% between 2000 and 2023, and is the fourth-largest South East Asian migrant group residing in Australia

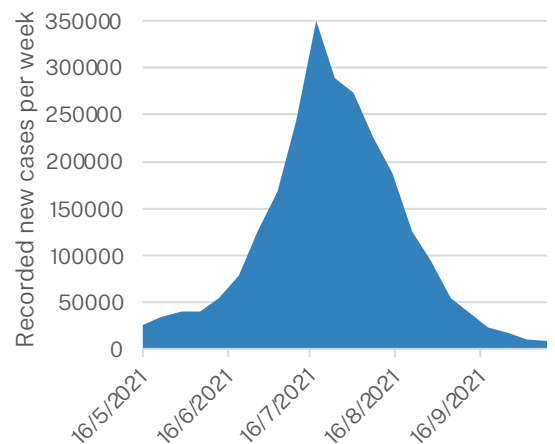
Responding to Crisis

Beginning in June 2021, Indonesia experienced a significant Covid-19 wave. In less than three months, more than 2.28 million Indonesians had been affected by the virus. The wave reached its peak on July 19, when more than 50,000 new daily cases were confirmed. Analysis by Jakarta's Health Department and Universitas Indonesia estimated that there were up to seven times more infections in Jakarta than official figures recorded, suggesting that the wave was significantly larger than estimated.

More than 82,000 people were estimated to have died as a result of the Covid-19 global pandemic during the infection surge, equivalent to approximately 50 excess cumulative deaths per 100,000 people than before the pandemic. Estimates of the actual number of excess deaths per 100,000 people were higher, and ranged from approximately 130 to 320 people (with a central estimate of 177).

Like many other countries facing the pandemic, Indonesia faced challenges regarding increasing the national vaccination rate, enforcing social distancing and supporting an overwhelmed healthcare system. Countries including Australia, Singapore, Japan and China provided medical supplies including vaccines, ventilators and testing kits to support Indonesia's Covid-19 response.

Figure 1: Recorded new Covid-19 cases in Indonesia, May - October 2021



Diaspora Humanitarians

According to the Indonesian Ministry of Law and Human Rights, more than 8 million Indonesians lived outside of the country in 2023. Throughout the pandemic, the Indonesian Government recognised the importance of the diaspora to the country's Covid-19 response. In a 2021 speech, the Minister of Foreign Affairs Retno Marsudi stated that she expected the diaspora to contribute to Indonesia's economic recovery and health resilience.

Dewi et al. (2022) found that the diaspora's pre-existing homeland connections shaped their humanitarian engagement during the pandemic. Digital communication – primarily via WhatsApp – and utilization of pre-existing remittance channels

were popular means of providing support. The authors also emphasized that most the diaspora’s humanitarian efforts were directed towards family members, or people from the same religious and ethnic groups. Specific research on how the diaspora in Australia responded to Indonesia’s Covid-19 crisis is not yet available.

The global Indonesian diaspora is well connected, and can come together via the global Indonesian Diaspora Network. The Network’s Victorian chapter held a series of events during Indonesia’s Covid-19 crisis, including a diaspora get together and a variety of musical and cultural events. While not explicitly related to the crisis, these events encourage communal and homeland connections. The Network’s New South Wales branch frequently engages in activism related to social issues, and explicitly promotes charitable giving among its members. A wide variety of other Indonesian community groups exist in Australia, such as Women’s Groups and the Perhimpunan Pelajar Indonesia Australia (PIIA), the Indonesian Students’ Association of Australia which has 33 university branches.

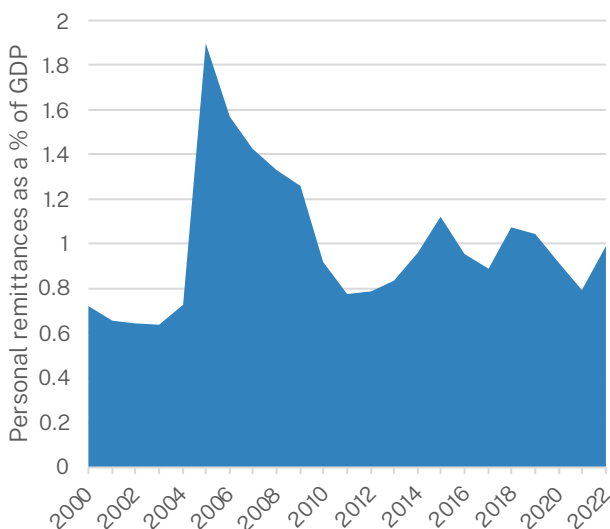
Homeland Connections

The contours of the diaspora’s humanitarian responses to Indonesia’s 2021 Covid-19 crisis was influenced by their pre-existing connections to their homeland. These connections include remittance flows and formal diasporic institutions.

Remittances

Since 2000, the value of personal remittances sent to Indonesia has increased substantially. While US\$1.19 billion was sent to Indonesia in 2000, US\$13.09 billion was sent to the country in 2022. However, reflecting Indonesia’s economic growth, the proportion of the country’s GDP comprised of remittances only increased from 0.65% to 0.99% during this period.

Figure 2: Personal remittances as a percentage of Indonesia’s total GDP, 2000-2022



In 2021, Australia sent US\$196 million in personal remittances to Indonesia, making it the 10th largest sending country that year. Remittance flows to the country were dominated by Saudi Arabia and Malaysia, who sent US\$3.53 billion and US\$2.37 billion that year. Countries which sent remittances of similar value to Indonesia included Bangladesh (US\$257 million), the Netherlands (US\$237 million), the United States (US\$235 million) and Kuwait (US\$232 million).

Diaspora Institutions

Since 1974, the Indonesian Government has maintained a variety of diaspora-focussed institutions. Currently, the Ministry of Manpower manages diaspora affairs. Working with the World Bank, the Ministry has pursued policy reform designed to facilitate safer migration that supports Indonesia’s economic growth.

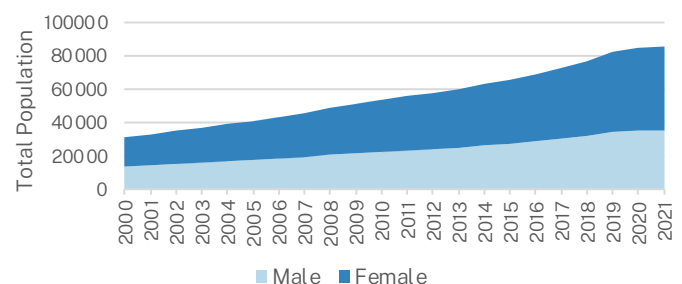
In 2019, the Indonesian Migrant Workers Protection Board was established. This Board is responsible for the placement, protection and welfare of Indonesian migrant workers and their families, and seeks to ensure more efficient and accountable governance over diaspora affairs. Since 2013, the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has maintained a Diaspora Desk, which provides assistance and protection to the diaspora. It created a diaspora registration portal in 2018, allowing the Indonesian diaspora to have easier access to consular, civil registration, immigration and employment services.

The Australia-Based Diaspora

The diaspora’s humanitarian responses to the Covid-19 spike were shaped by migrants’ continuing connections to Indonesia, by their dynamics of migration and by their experiences of settlement in Australia.

The following sections primarily rely on data from the 2021 census to analyse the Indonesian diaspora’s experiences in Australia. Data from this census, taken during the peak of the Covid-19 pandemic in Australia, was influenced by border closures and disrupted migration flows. At the time of the census, an unusually low number of Indonesian-born migrants were in Australia: while 87,075 Indonesian-born individuals were in Australia on census night, the ABS estimates that 92,720 Indonesian-born individuals resided in Australia that year.

Figure 3: Total Indonesia-born population in Australia, 2000-2021

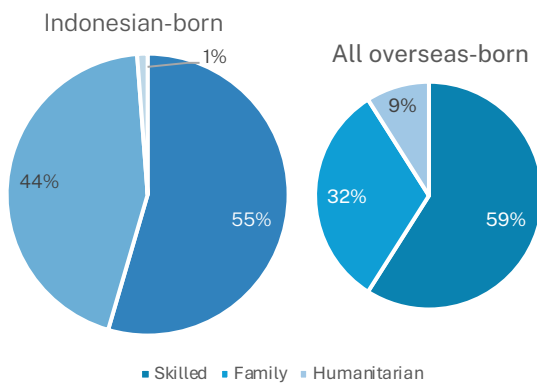


Dynamics of Migration

As of the 2021 census, 87,075 Indonesian-born migrants lived in Australia. Of this population, 41.3% were male and 58.7% were female. Since 1995, migration flows from Indonesia to Australia have been relatively consistent. Until 1980, more men migrated to Australia than women. However, this trend has since steadily reversed.

In 2021, 41.1% of the diaspora were citizens. Dynamics of migration to Australia vary, with a roughly equal number of Indonesian-born individuals on temporary versus permanent migration pathways. In 2021, 47,534 individuals were in Australia's permanent migration program. Of this population, 54.5% were in the skilled stream, 44.3% were in the family stream and 1.2% were in the humanitarian stream. This differs to the overseas-born average – where 59% of permanent migrants were in the skilled stream, 32% were in the family stream and 9% were in the humanitarian stream.

Figure 4: Indonesia and all overseas-born permanent residents in Australia, 2021



As of February 2024, 37,384 Indonesian-born individuals held temporary Australian residential visas. 55% held student visas, 5% held temporary skilled visas and 60% held 'other' temporary visas. Of these, 22% held Working Holiday Maker visas, 11% held temporary graduate, and 6% held other temporary visas (including bridging, temporary protection and temporary resident-other employment visas)

Population Dynamics

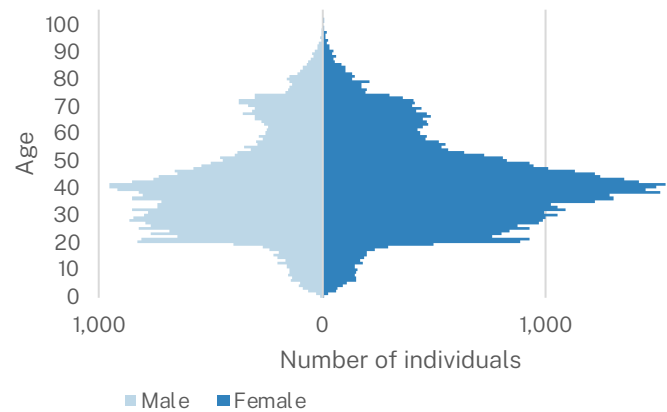
The Indonesian diaspora's population dynamics shape their homeland connections. In Australia, the diaspora is predominantly female, of working age and residents of Greater Sydney. The diaspora is highly educated, and works across a broad range of Australia's industries.

Demography

In 2021, the median age of the Indonesian diaspora in Australia was 40. This was older than the nationwide median age of 38, yet younger than the overseas median age of 45. The population is overwhelmingly of working

age and female. The extent of this gender difference is lower for those under 35 and over 70. As of 2021, 42% of the population was aged 20 to 39, and 33% was aged 40-59. Comparatively, a relatively low proportion of the population was below 20 (7%) and a moderate proportion of the population was 60 or above (17%).

Figure 5: Population pyramid for the Indonesia-born population in Australia, 2021



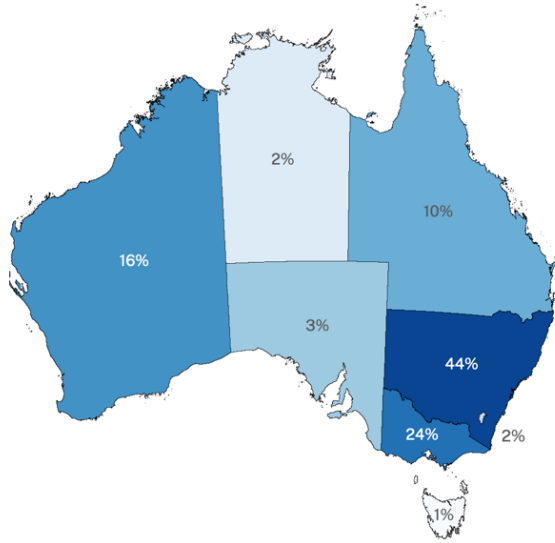
A significant number of Australians have Indonesian heritage. As of 2021, 67,618 Australian-born individuals had at least one parent born in Indonesia. Of this population, 25% had two Indonesian-born parents, 27% had one Indonesian and one Australian-born parent and 48% had one Indonesian and one other overseas-born parent. Third-generation members of the diaspora, whose parents were also born in Australia, also exist. In the 2021 census, 3007 people with two Australian-born parents identified Indonesian ancestry, 201 people identified Javanese ancestry and 37 identified Balinese ancestry.

Geography

The vast majority of the diaspora resides in Australia's capital cities, with 90% of Indonesian-born individuals doing so. The diaspora is concentrated in Greater Sydney. In 2021, 41% of Indonesian-born individuals resided in the city. 26% of this population resides in either the CBD or Inner South of Sydney, and 20% lives in the Inner South West. The population is dispersed relatively evenly across the rest of the city.

Other key cities of residence include Greater Melbourne (22% of the Indonesian-born population in 2021), Greater Perth (15%) and Greater Brisbane (6%). Comparatively, 21% of Australia's population resided in Greater Sydney, 19% resided in Greater Melbourne, 10% resided in Greater Brisbane and 8% resided in Greater Perth.

Figure 6: Geographies of residence of the Indonesia-born population in Australia, 2021

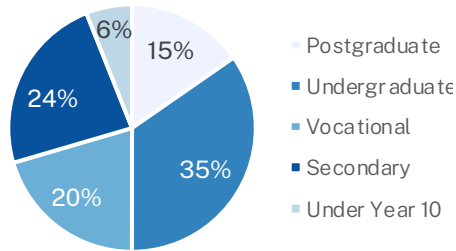


Education

The Indonesian population in Australia is highly educated. 50% of adults have tertiary qualifications (35% undergraduate, 15% postgraduate), a significantly higher rate than the 30% of all adults in Australia who do so. Additionally, 20% of the population have vocational qualifications.

In Indonesia, 9.5% of the adult population were tertiary qualified as of 2020. 50.9% of the population had completed high school and 39.6% had not completed education beyond a year 10 level.

Figure 7: Highest level of educational achievement of the Indonesia-born population in Australia, 2021

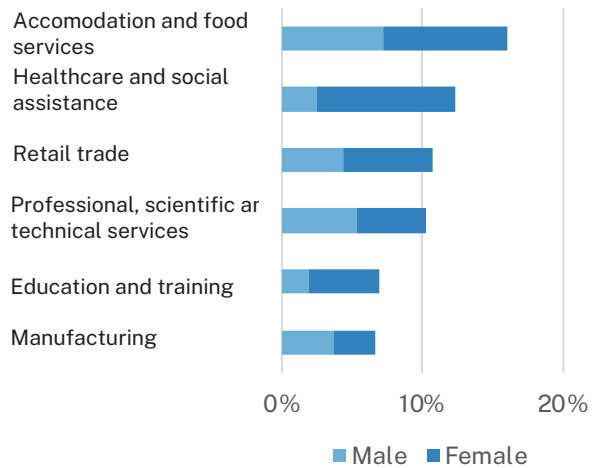


Employment

In 2021, 16% of the working Indonesian-born population was employed in Australia’s accommodation and food service industry. Other important sectors included healthcare (12%), retail (11%) and professional, scientific and technical services (10%).

The diaspora’s dynamics of employment are gendered. In 2021, 18% of employed Indonesian-born women worked in healthcare. 16% worked in accommodation and food services, 12% worked in retail trade, 9% worked in education and training and 9% worked in professional, scientific and technical services. Comparatively, 18% of employed Indonesian-born men worked in accommodation and food services, 12% worked in professional, scientific and technical services, 10% worked in retail trade, 9% worked in transport, postal and warehousing and 8% worked in manufacturing.

Figure 8: Leading sectors of employment for the Indonesia-born population in Australia, 2021



Sources:

Australian Bureau of Statistics (2022a), Census of Population and Housing, 2021; Australian Bureau of Statistics (2022b), Permanent Migrants in Australia; Australian Department of Home Affairs (2024a), Permanent Migration Program (Skilled & Family) Outcomes Snapshot – Annual Statistics; Australian Department of Home Affairs (2024b), Temporary visa holders in Australia; E. Dewi et al. (2022), “Tying the Knots”: the Socio-Political Engagement, Digital Networking, and the Contribution of the Indonesian Diaspora during Covid-19; The World Bank (2022a), Global Knowledge Partnership on Migration and Development (KNOMAD) Remittances Data; The World Bank (2022b), Personal remittances, received (% of GDP).

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The Diaspora Humanitarians project aims to map the extensive humanitarian activities and contributions of Australia-based migrants to crises abroad. For more information see www.diasporahumanitarians.com