



The South-East Asia Diaspora in the UK

KEY POINTS

- **The UK's South-East Asia Diaspora has probably doubled in size since 2001**, with around 400,000 Southeast Asians now believed to be living here – around a third of them in the London area.
- The UK's education system has played a major role in the influx of Southeast Asians moving to the UK over the last 20 years. **Malaysians in particular are currently one of the largest overseas student ethnic groups in the United Kingdom.**

DETAIL

Size of community

According to the 2011 census there are 230,051 Southeast Asians in England, 9,091 in Scotland and 8,974 in Wales¹. These figures include citizens from Southeast Asian countries that have migrated as well as those born in England, Scotland and Wales:

SE Asia Diaspora	England	Scotland	Wales
Filipino	132,697	4,384	5,808
Vietnamese	28,998	376	473
Thai	34,526	1,999	1,292
Malaysian	19,067	1,731	1,142
Burmese	8,263	149	131
Indonesian	5,571	421	124
Cambodian	929	31	4
Total	230,051	9,091	8,974

These figures do not represent Southeast Asians from Singapore, Brunei, Laos and Timor-Leste. There are a number of anomalies regarding the accuracy of these figures. For example on the census form many citizens of Singapore would have said that they had Chinese ancestry rather than Singaporean and many East Timorese would have said that they had Portuguese nationality² rather than Timorese nationality. There are also many factors why people do not complete census forms such as illiteracy, undocumented migrants, or perhaps fear of the process.

¹ The 2011 Northern Ireland census only records one Southeast Asian community, namely Filipino, of which there are 2,900.

² The majority of East Timorese working in the UK are Portuguese passport holders.

According to the 2012 *Office of National Statistics estimated population of overseas nationals resident in the UK by nationality* there are 68,000 Filipinos, 25,000 Malaysians, 24,000 Thai, 16,000 Vietnamese and 14,000 East Timorese. However these figures do not include members of the Diaspora that were born in the UK.

Regardless of birthplace, the Philippines Embassy in London estimate there are roughly 200,000 Filipinos in the UK, the Thai Embassy estimate 50,000 Thai, and the Vietnamese Embassy estimate 55,000 Vietnamese³. Pinpointing an accurate and reliable figure for the Southeast Asia Diaspora in the UK is unattainable but based on the data available **there may be up to 400,000 Southeast Asians in the UK.**

Growth

Since the 2001 census it is still fairly reasonable to estimate that the Southeast Asia Diaspora has almost doubled. According to the 2001 census there were 220,000 people in the 'Other ethnic group' category in England and Wales. Over half (116,600) were born in the Far East, in particular, the Philippines (40,118), Thailand (16,256) and Vietnam (22,954). Southeast Asia communities have been moving to the UK since the 1970s and 80s but particularly from these three countries:

Vietnamese

A total of 22,577 refugees from Southeast Asia and mainly from Vietnam made their home in the UK from 1975 until 1988⁴. The Vietnam War triggered a mass exodus of Vietnamese mainly to the US, France and Australia with less than a hundred fleeing to the UK. The 1979 border dispute with China and subsequent Vietnamese government persecution of Chinese Vietnamese in the north of the country led to another mass exodus via boats to Hong Kong, Thailand and Malaysia. Over the last 10 years Vietnamese immigration has taken the form of asylum seekers and undocumented guest workers reportedly coming from Eastern Europe, and overseas students. According to the Home Office, between 200-2005 there were 3680 principal applicants for asylum (excluding dependents) from Vietnam⁵. Community organisations have estimated that there may be up to 20,000 undocumented Vietnamese migrants living in the UK, and unsuccessful asylum-seekers may account for some of them. In addition, Vietnamese overseas students, who tend not to remain in the UK after their studies, are estimated to number over 5,000.

Filipino

The Filipino population in the UK is considered the largest outside Asia and the US. Over the past thirty years, Filipinos in UK has increased by more than 800% from 18,000 in the 1980s to roughly 200,000 today⁶. Since 2000 thousands of Filipino nurses have moved to the UK

³ Other Southeast Asian Embassies in London were unable to disclose an estimated diaspora figure.

⁴ Hale, Samantha (1992) 'The Reception and Resettlement of Vietnamese Refugees in Britain.'

⁵ Home Office Statistical Bulletin: Asylum Statistics, United Kingdom 2006. London: The Stationery Office

⁶ Pinoybritcircle.com

following the government's massive recruitment to attract them; English speaking Filipino nurses are generally considered very professional, well educated and have the same high standards of nursing care as British professional nurses.

Thai

Over 800,000 British nationals visit Thailand every year and as a consequence many Thai nationals, particularly women, have immigrated to the UK over the last 25 years as marriage migrants. During the years between 2001 and 2006, the majority of Thai nationals naturalised as UK citizens were marriage migrants, whereas only one-third of citizenship grants occurred through residence⁷. Additionally, from 2003 to 2006 roughly 64 per cent of total grants of settlement for Thai nationals were given to wives, as compared to 3 per cent granted to husbands, and 14 per cent to children⁸.

Education

The UK's education system has been particularly attractive to Southeast Asian citizens and has played a role in the influx of Southeast Asians moving to the UK over the last 20 years. English classes have been in high demand from those citizens from non-English countries such as Thailand and Vietnam, whilst a UK university education is in high demand from English speaking countries such as Singapore, Brunei and Malaysia. **In 2013, there were 14,500 Malaysians studying in the tertiary level in the UK, making Malaysians one of the largest overseas student ethnic groups in the United Kingdom.**

Location

Around 36 percent of the Southeast Asia Diaspora is located in London. The census shows a mix of 46,490 in Inner London and 50,159 in Outer London. This recorded figure of 96,649 dwarfs other regional communities elsewhere in the UK.

- a. In Outer London, the Filipino community is the largest living mainly in Brent (4,055) and Hounslow (2,607). The second largest is the Vietnamese in Greenwich (1,885), then the Burmese in Hounslow (528), Thai in Ealing (427), Malaysian and Indonesian in Barnet (335 and 220 respectively).
- b. In Inner London, the Filipino community is the largest living mainly in Newham (5,176) and Kensington and Chelsea (2,750). The second largest is the Vietnamese in Newham (2,004), then Malaysian and Thai in Westminster (646 and 631 respectively), the Burmese in Lewisham (284) and Indonesian in Westminster (118).

⁷ Dudley, J. & Woollacott, S. (2006) Persons Granted British Citizenship United Kingdom, 2003. London: Home Office

⁸ Home Office (2004); Home Office (2005); Home Office (2006)

Outside London, the largest regional grouping is in the South East. The overall regional pattern is:

- a. South East – Filipino (24,471), Thai (6,762), Malaysian (2,799), Vietnamese (2,420), Indonesia (1,010), Burmese (774), Cambodia (280). Mainly in Slough.
- b. East - Filipino (14,786), Thai (3,744), Malaysian (1,612), Vietnamese (1,474), Burmese (494), Indonesian (415), Cambodian (50). Primarily Luton.
- c. West Midlands – Filipino (8,771), Vietnamese (2,687), Thai (2,488), Malaysian (1,402), Indonesian (396), Burmese (340), Cambodian (38). Primarily in Birmingham.
- d. South West – Filipino (8,593), Thai (3,083), Malaysian (1,046), Vietnamese (843), Indonesian (453), Burmese (320), Cambodian (59). Mainly in Bristol.
- e. North West - Filipino (8,169), Thai (3,260), Vietnamese (2,128), Malaysian (1,965), Burmese (826), Indonesian (505), Cambodian (20). Mainly in Manchester.
- f. Yorkshire & Humber - Filipino (6,584), Thai (2,419), Malaysian (1,904), Burmese (826), Vietnamese (821), Indonesian (284) Cambodian (20). Mainly in Leeds.
- g. East Midlands - Filipino (5,427), Thai (2,114), Malaysian (1,747), Vietnamese (1,282), Indonesian (345), Burmese (177), Cambodian (16). Mainly in Leicester and Nottingham.
- h. North East - Filipino (3,680), Thai (1,181), Malaysian (905), Vietnamese (371), Indonesian (345), Burmese (182), Cambodian (14). Primarily in County Durham.

Employment

According to the 2001 and 2011 census **people born in Southeast Asia were most likely to be working in industries such as hotels and restaurants, health and beauty⁹, food processing, wholesale and retail trade and real estate and renting.** During the 1970s and 80s Southeast Asian migrant businesses were generally family-run and created to service the needs of the local community. The second generation born in the UK have moved away from this tradition to seek opportunities in information technology, catering, the arts, sales, education and the voluntary sector.

⁹ Over the last 5 years the nail industry has become the fastest growing UK Vietnamese business sector, accounting for over half of all Vietnamese businesses in London.