



Spatial Economics Research Centre

Wednesday, 30 May 2012

How many French people live in London?

According to the BBC [London is now France's sixth biggest city](#): "The French consulate in London estimates between 300,000 and 400,000 French citizens live in the British capital" which compares to city populations as follows:

- Paris - 2.3m
- Marseille - 859,000
- Lyon - 488,000
- Toulouse - 447,000
- Nice - 344,000

I've heard this kind of thing before and for some reason I've always liked this story (partly because as an urban economist I am interested in whether 'diversity' is one of the things that make cities work). But this morning I started to wonder if it is true.

The French consulate has 120,000 people registered with it but assess the real number living in the UK as 300,000-400,000 (this is the figure above). But according to the ONS there are 133,000 French nationals resident in the UK (for Oct 2010 - Sept 2011, see [table 2.3](#)). We are told that the ONS numbers are 'reasonably precise' (they have a standard error of about 8,000 giving a 95% confidence interval of plus or minus 16,000). Personally, I prefer the ONS numbers because at least we are told how they arrived at them.

So let's assume that *all* 133,000 are living in London (which is clearly a big assumption). Comparing this figure to the population of French [metro-areas](#) makes London the 43rd biggest city in France. Even taking the French consulates estimates and comparing it to metro-areas puts London somewhere around 20th. Interesting, I suppose, but a little disappointing and certainly not as interesting as the BBC make out ...

*[Most urban economists (and the US census bureau) prefer the 'metro' to administrative numbers because they are more reasonably based on the 'functional' city - so Paris population is around 11m making it roughly the same size as London].

Posted by [Prof Henry G. Overman](#) on [Wednesday, May 30, 2012](#)

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6 comments:

Anonymous said...

Do we know how many French citizens voted in London during the recent Presidential elections ?

1 June 2012 at 07:31



Prof Henry G. Overman said...

77,500 registered to vote with the London consulate according to Reuters <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/04/20/us-france-election-london-idUSBRE83J14A20120420>

1 June 2012 at 07:56

Xavier said...

I am Catalan (unfortunately I am still spanish too) and I live in Paris since 7 years. Just 2 months ago I registered to the consulate. I know plenty of UE expatriates who are not registered in their consulates. So, I don't know if the people registered in the consulate (to vote) is useful to estimate how many french people is living in London.

13 June 2012 at 17:33

Andy said...

For my part, I'm a UK national living in France; I've been here for the past 40 years, but have never registered with the British consulate, and don't know anyone who has.

Registering with a consulate - unless you happen to be living in a risky country - is just one bit of extra administrative hassle that most expats are happy to do without, specially if you need to travel fifty miles or more to do so. So the BBC's figures are quite feasible.

They might even underestimate, since expat French are frequently more than happy to disappear off the radar of their own bureaucracy.

11 October 2012 at 16:57

LSE Geography undergraduate said...

It would be interesting to see if this would be the case for any other ethnic groups in London. I myself from an Indian background would be intrigued to find if the number of Indians in London (around 500,000 from most estimates) might make London one of the biggest Indian cities too! Ofcourse we have to remember that many cities in India too are quite populous.

One question I would have, is recently in a GY103 lecture at the LSE, we were shown an astonishing geographical representation of the spatial variations in where these ethnic groups actually live in London. Although I think diversity is great, could this spatial segregation of groups actually hinder diversity in the future as we find certain areas are dominated by one ethnic group? We talk about diversity in London but surely if groups are segregated it means London itself has a lot of different people from different backgrounds, but can it really be labelled as diverse?

[18 February 2016 at 11:19](#)



Prof Henry G. Overman said...

Hi,

Re your question on whether this would hold for other groups - you should be able to figure that out from the census.

[22 February 2016 at 08:00](#)

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