

Cross Border Empowerment: Improving the Skills and Independence of Indonesian Migrant Workers in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT Migrant workers are our resources that contribute significantly to the improvement of the economy of the country where they work who are also vulnerable to problems due to lack of understanding and knowledge related to their existence and position. The purpose of the International Community Service (PKM) is to provide strengthening to migrant workers in Malaysia, especially those under the guidance of the Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia (KBRI) Kuala Lumpur so that they can prepare themselves to solve problems and be more independent after they are no longer migrant workers. The approach used in this activity is Cross Border Empowerment as an effort to empower individuals or communities of migrant workers through cross-border cooperation to provide support, training, and resources to migrant workers, both before departure, during the period of working abroad, and after returning to their homeland.

Keywords: *Indonesian Migrant Workers (PMI); Empowerment; Cross Border Empowerment; Independence.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Indonesian Migrant Workers (PMI) are Indonesian citizens as a substitute for the designation of Indonesian Migrant Workers (TKI) who work abroad based on a work agreement with a certain period of time through the PMI placement procedure. The presence of migrant workers in Malaysia in 2023 reached 33,646 people (BP2MI, 2023) and Malaysia is the main destination country for migrant workers. The large number of migrant workers in Malaysia represents a significant contribution to the country's economic development from various sectors (Mahdi Muhammad, 2022). In addition to being employed as domestic assistants, migrant workers also play a role in mobilising the agriculture, forestry and fisheries sectors (32%). Their contribution in these activities

is important to maintain food security and keep the ecosystem in balance. In the accommodation services sector, migrant workers help fulfil the needs of the tourism and accommodation services industry. Meanwhile, in the food and beverage industry, their contribution reached 19.2 percent, supporting the progress of this sector. Migrant workers play a crucial role in the construction and manufacturing sectors with 18.2 percent and 15.7 percent respectively. Their participation helps accelerate development projects and advance the manufacturing industry in Malaysia.

The large presence of migrant workers in placement countries certainly makes it imperative for the government and related parties to pay attention to their welfare and working conditions. This number drives the need for effective empowerment programmes to ensure that migrant workers are not only economic contributors, but also receive proper protection, respect, and support (A. Hamid, 2019).

Malaysia is the country most chosen by Indonesian workers to work in the domestic sector. However, Malaysia's Employment Act excludes them from the definition of workers, categorising them as foreign domestic helpers (Sudarwin & Azizah, 2023). This makes them lose some of the rights and protections afforded to other workers. These women workers may lose the right to reasonable work limits, leave, and other protections afforded to workers in other sectors. Domestic workers often work in private homes, which makes their working conditions difficult to monitor. This can put them at risk of exploitation, abuse, or rights violations that are difficult to monitor and account for. Migrant workers are also vulnerable to exploitation and abuse by employers, especially female workers. Lack of legal protection can exacerbate power inequalities between employers and workers.

Based on this phenomenon, the problem often faced by migrant workers in Malaysia is the lack of understanding about safe migration, so it is not uncommon for non-procedural placements to occur (Saputra et al., 2023), where they can become victims of abuse by placement agents or employers. The lack of competence of the migrant workers who are dispatched is also one of the problems of migrant workers. Some migrant workers may be dispatched without adequate skills training to meet the demands of the labour market in Malaysia. The lack of relevant skills can hinder their chances of securing better jobs and supporting their career sustainability.

Another problem of migrant workers is that they are often subjected to acts of violence committed by their employers. Violence against migrant workers can be triggered by a variety of factors, including power inequality, injustice, cultural mismatch, and ignorance of the law (Putri et al., 2023). Migrant workers who are in a position of vulnerability and have limited access to legal protection can become the main target of violence. In addition, the lack of knowledge about

managing remittances and the care of children left behind by migrant workers is not optimal. Most migrant workers have limited knowledge about financial management, including effective ways to manage remittances (Rizal et al., 2023). Lack of financial education can lead to inefficient spending and inevitable financial risks. Likewise, migrant workers who leave their children back home may experience significant stress and worry (S. I. Hamid, 2018). Lack of psychosocial support can impact the emotional and mental wellbeing of children left behind (Hartati, 2017). From these problems, there are not a few complaints filed by PMI, and not all complaints can be served and resolved.

Research on the empowerment of Indonesian migrant workers has been conducted by Verawati Skaut on the prevention of illegal Indonesian migrant workers (Skaut & Triputro, 2022). This study found that the Kupang District Labour and Transmigration Office has made various efforts to prevent the illegal sending of migrant workers. Checking the documents required as a migrant worker, monitoring the companies that provide migrant workers, training and improving human resources are efforts that have been made both before and during the departure process as well as after the departure of migrant workers.

Another research was conducted by Ria Wierma Putri who studied the Dynamics of Indonesian Migrant Workers Problems. The results of his research found that after the enactment of the Job Creation Law, the protection of PMI, especially in the field of licensing, has undergone many changes. The licensing process for PMI has become shorter than before, the protection of PMI is also strengthened by the existence of technical assistance arrangements so that in the event of civil problems, PMI will be protected (Regulation and Protection Based on Labour Law and International Civil Law) (Putri et al., 2023). The next is research conducted by Hery Sudarmanto on the Role of Local Government in Improving the Competence of Indonesian Migrant Workers (PMI) (Sudarmanto, 2022) which shows that the commitment of local governments to allocate APBD in terms of improving the competence of PMI has been implemented even though the amount is still limited.

The empowerment carried out in this international community service activity is to provide strengthening to migrant workers in Malaysia, especially those under the guidance of the Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia (KBRI) Kuala Lumpur. This strengthening is carried out as an approach or strategy that can be adopted by various stakeholders to improve the conditions and welfare of migrant workers as well as the need to address issues involving cross-border cooperation such as empowering migrant workers.

Some of the previous research that has been presented as well as the problems faced by PMI in the guidance of the Indonesian Embassy in Kuala Lumpur are the differences between this research and previous research as well as the novelty of this research. The novelty of this research lies in the approach used in providing strengthening in the aspects of skills, aspects of micro business networks, educational aspects, aspects of legal assistance, information forums, access to health and participation in policy making. The approach in question is Cross Border Empowerment. Cross Border Empowerment is a concept of approach or strategy that the author designed to provide a holistic approach in improving the conditions and welfare of certain groups involved in cross-border cooperation such as academics as a scientific group, the Indonesian Embassy as a government representative in the placement country and non-governmental organisations or NGOs.

2. METHOD

Empowerment is aimed at community groups that are considered weak in fulfilling their basic needs (Habib, 2021). In this context, the empowerment activities are aimed at migrant workers who are under the supervision of the Indonesian Embassy in Kuala Lumpur because they are considered weak and unable to solve their problems while working in Malaysia.

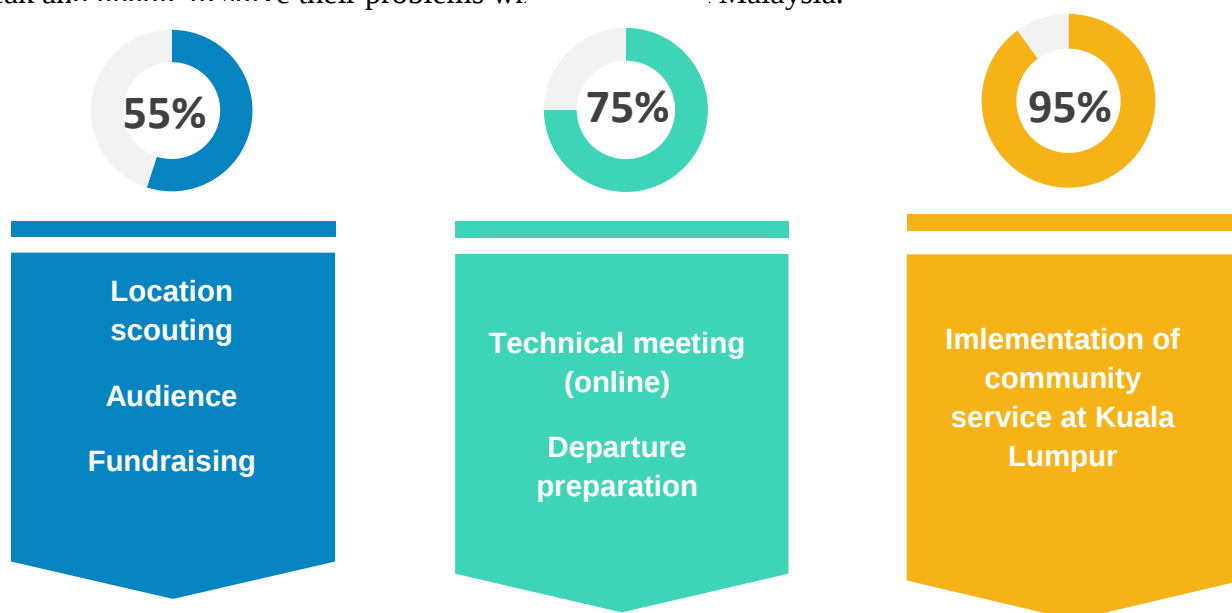


Figure 1. Flow of Community Service Implementation

The implementation of community service activities for PMI in the Malaysian placement country began from August to December 2023. This activity was carried out online and offline, the peak of which was carried out offline on 8 - 12 December 2023 by collaborating with LSM SHARING as NGO, UPSI Malaysia Indonesian Student Association and lecturers as community

servants. This activity took place at the Hasanuddin Hall of the Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia in Kuala Lumpur Malaysia. The stages of implementation are presented in Figure 1.

In the initial stage, a location assessment was carried out by Sharing-Indonesian Academic Community NGO as the organiser of the activity. Next is to set the target, which in this case is Indonesian Migrant Workers (PMI) who are assisted by the Indonesian Embassy in Kuala Lumpur as many as 55 people. These fostered PMIs are those who have several problems, including problems with employers, getting violence, the rights received are not in accordance with the agreement / contract, and some work as commercial sex workers (PSK). Then an audience was held with the Indonesian Embassy in Kuala Lumpur to ask for permission and get certainty of the time of implementation of the activity. After obtaining certainty of implementation, registration information was distributed to lecturers who would participate both as participants and presenters.

The next stage is a technical meeting which is held with the International PKM participants online through a zoom meeting to discuss everything related to the implementation of technical activities. The next stage is the implementation of PKM International activities at the Hasanuddin Hall of the Indonesian Embassy in Kuala Lumpur. This activity was attended by 75 lecturers from universities from Sabang to Merauke consisting of 38 presenters, 26 participants, 6 committee members and 5 observers.



Figure 2. Activities of Community (PKM) service at Room A



Figure 3. Representative of Faculty of Social Sciences, Universitas Indonesia Timur

The methods used in this PKM activity are training with experiential learning methods, lectures, discussions, games/ice breaking, action plans, role plays and follow-up plans. This method was implemented at the suggestion of Prof. D. Muhammad Firdaus, SP, M.Si as the Education and Culture Attaché (Atdikbud) at the Indonesian Embassy in Kuala Lumpur who was appointed on 17 October 2022. The suggested method aims to make the activity not boring and participants can follow it casually and cheerfully.



The closing took place after the entire series of events had been completed, which was followed by the giving of mementos from several universities and the symbolic presentation of certificates as presenters / speakers by Atdikbud as shown in Figure 4. The entirety of this activity can be accessed at the news <https://tegasnews.id/dekan-fisip-uit-pengabdian-kepada-masyarakat-internasional-di-malaysia/>

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Through the Cross Border Empowerment approach, it is very important to listen to and directly involve the groups to be empowered (such as PMI) in the planning and implementation process of the established programme so as to increase the effectiveness and sustainability of the programme. In addition, it is important to consider cooperation with various stakeholders, including governments, non-governmental organisations, educational institutions, and the private sector in

both countries involved. The results show that Malaysia is the main destination for Indonesian migrant workers as presented in Figure 5 below:

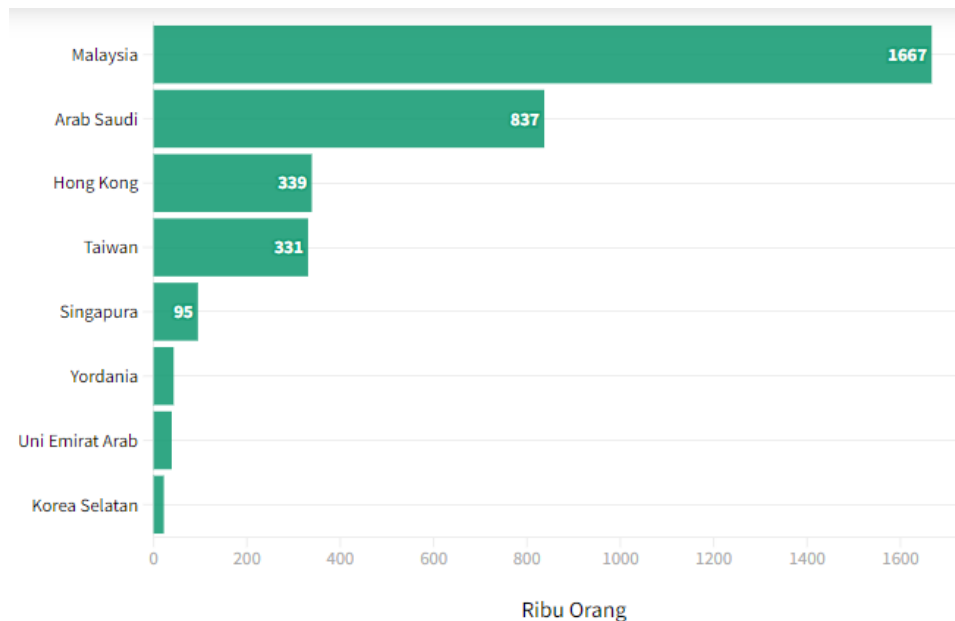


Figure 5. Destination countries for Indonesian Migrant Workers (PMI)

The high interest of migrant workers to work in Malaysia is also supported by the Indonesian government's commitment to improve the quality of Indonesian migrant workers and increase the number of workers sent to the formal sector. In general, the grouping of PMI jobs consists of the formal and informal sectors as shown in Table 1:

Table 1. Employment Composition of PMI in the Formal and Informal Sectors

No	Formal Sectors	Informal Sectors
1	Work in an incorporated company	Work for individuals without a legal entity
2	Have a clear and strong labour contract	Not bound by a clear labour contract (depending on the employer)
3	Protected by labour laws in the country of placement	Not necessarily covered by labour laws in the country of placemen
4	Minimal work risks and low conflicts	High labour risk and prone to conflict

Sumber; Author's data processing results 2023

Table 1 shows that the formal sector is dominated by G to G (Government to Government) partnerships and is covered by companies with legal entities. Meanwhile, the informal sector is individual employment such as household assistants (ART). These two sectors form the basis of the quality of human resources required. The position of PMI is currently dominated by informal sector workers, which will gradually be improved towards the formal sector in accordance with government commitments.

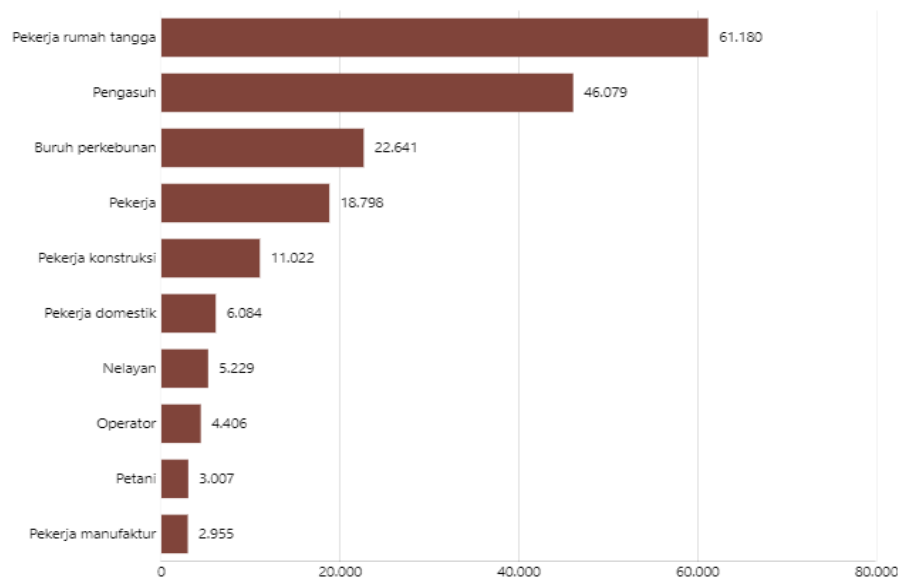


Figure 6. PMI in Malaysia are predominantly informal sector workers

As Figure 6 shows, employment as a household assistant (ART) is the highest in the informal sector at 61,180 people, followed by caregivers at 46,079 people, plantation labourers at 22,641 people, workers at 18,798 people, construction workers at 11,022 people, domestic workers at 6,084 people, fishermen at 5,229 people, operators at 4,406 people, farmers at 3,007 people and manufacturing workers at 2,955 people.

The predominance of migrant workers in the informal sector may be due to their limited knowledge of labour rights or the conditions of the work offered, making them more likely to work without a clear contract. The non-formal sector also offers faster and more accessible employment opportunities, albeit with the consequent uncertainty of contracts and labour rights. In addition, the perception of legal protection for migrant workers in the non-formal sector is less clear than in the formal sector. This can be a consideration for migrant workers who do not have a thorough understanding of their rights. This has led to a high level of complaints from migrant workers in Malaysia as shown in Figure 7:

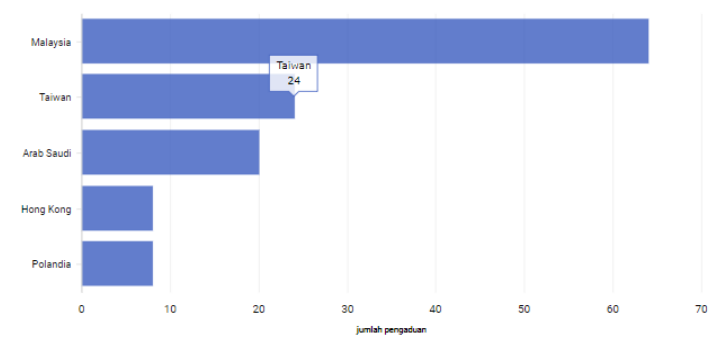


Figure 7. Migrant worker complaint rate per placement country

Malaysia has the highest number of complaints with 64, followed by Taiwan with 24, Saudi Arabia with 20, Hong Kong and Poland with 9 each. However, only 86 per cent of the complaints are in process, while the rest are new complaints and the process has been completed.

1. Cross Border Empwerment Addresses the Dominance of PMI in the Informal Sector in Malaysia

Migrant workers' limited knowledge of labour rights and legal protections can be a focus of cross-border empowerment strategies. Strong education and information programmes can provide migrant workers with a better understanding of their rights and obligations in the formal and informal sectors.

Cross-border empowerment can include skills training that is more in-depth and relevant to the needs of the formal sector. This can improve the competitiveness of migrant workers in the formal labour market and provide more promising alternatives. Cooperation between the governments of Indonesia and Malaysia in strengthening labour policies and regulations can be an important element of cross-border empowerment. This includes ensuring the protection of migrant workers' rights in the formal sector and addressing contractual uncertainties (Adha et al., 2020).

Cross-border empowerment programmes can involve efforts to raise migrant workers' awareness of legal protections in the formal sector. Legal counselling services and clear information on their rights can help reduce uncertainty and risk. The establishment of a mentoring organisation or advocacy group for migrant workers in the formal sector can be a significant step. These organisations can provide support in enforcing labour rights, assist in dispute resolution, and provide career-related guidance (Simamora, 2021).

Cross-border empowerment can include innovations in the provision of migration services, including online platforms for formal job registration, direct provision of information on workers' rights, and easily accessible grievance mechanisms. Cooperation between the government, labour agencies, and industrial employers in Malaysia can promote the creation of a fairer working environment. This involves open dialogue, employers' participation in training programmes, and their involvement in promoting good labour norms.

By applying a comprehensive cross-border empowerment approach, the involvement of the government, labour agencies, and advocacy groups can improve the welfare and rights of Indonesian migrant workers in Malaysia, including those working in the formal sector.

2. The importance of empowering Indonesian migrant workers (PMI)

Empowering migrant workers can have a direct impact on improving their welfare. By giving them access to training, education, and other resources, migrant workers can develop the skills and

knowledge necessary to improve their quality of life (Amini & Permata, 2022). Training provided as part of empowerment can help migrant workers develop skills that are more relevant to the needs of the labour market in Malaysia. Improved skills can increase their productivity, open up better job opportunities, and make a positive contribution to their economy.

Empowering migrant workers through access to education can open the door to qualification development and improved literacy. Education can help them understand their rights, facilitate interaction with the community, and increase their bargaining power in the labour market. Empowerment also includes providing resources and knowledge that support migrant workers' self-reliance (Soloraya, 2018). As such, they can better manage their finances, make wise decisions, and plan for a better future for their families.

Empowering migrant workers can reduce the level of uncertainty and risk often associated with informal sector employment. By having relevant skills and a better understanding of their rights, migrant workers can be better protected from exploitation and conflict in the workplace. Empowerment programmes can help migrant workers build networks and gain necessary social support. This can include exchanging experiences with fellow migrant workers, getting guidance from mentors, and feeling more connected to the local community.

The empowerment of Indonesian migrant workers (PMI) in Malaysia has a significant impact by strengthening their position in negotiating with employers and related parties. Firstly, through access to training and education, migrant workers can improve their skills and knowledge, creating a strong basis for negotiation. Improved skills give migrant workers the confidence to define their values and rights in the workplace, while providing a strong foundation for negotiating over wages and working conditions.

Secondly, empowerment also includes providing information on migrant workers' rights, labour laws, and dispute resolution procedures. With this improved knowledge, migrant workers can approach the negotiation process with legal clarity, ensuring that their rights are recognised and respected. Thirdly, empowerment can also include the formation of advocacy groups or trade unions that support migrant workers in collective bargaining, providing greater bargaining power in reaching a fair agreement. Thus, empowerment not only improves the individual well-being of migrant workers but also provides a strong foundation for them to undergo balanced and fair negotiations in the work environment in Malaysia.

The empowerment of Indonesian migrant workers (PMI) in Malaysia not only provides direct positive benefits, but also acts as an effective preventive measure to reduce the risk of exploitation and human rights violations against them. Firstly, through skills training and education, migrant

workers are able to recognise their human rights and understand the boundaries that must be respected by employers and related parties in Malaysia. This better knowledge gives migrant workers the power to resist or report situations that may lead to human rights violations.

Empowerment includes providing information on grievance procedures and legal protection in the placement country. Empowered migrant workers have the knowledge to report exploitation or human rights violations to the authorities, creating a preventive measure that can prevent abuse by employers or agencies. Empowerment can also include the establishment of forums or support groups among migrant workers, giving them a platform to share experiences and discuss issues related to human rights.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the problems, findings and discussion, it can be concluded that empowerment not only improves the welfare of migrant workers through access to training, education, and other resources, but also strengthens their position in negotiating with employers and related parties. In addition, empowerment serves as a preventive measure to reduce the risk of exploitation and human rights violations against migrant workers.

Empowerment contributes to the improvement of migrant workers' skills, productivity, and independence, helping them face challenges in the work environment with more confidence. Through education, migrant workers gain better knowledge of their rights, so they can more effectively negotiate and protect themselves from exploitation. Empowerment programmes also create support networks and advocacy groups, which can provide social support and guidance.

Empowerment not only benefits migrant workers individually, but also has a positive impact on a social and economic level, creating better conditions for migrant workers and their surrounding communities. Through cross-border cooperation and the active role of governments, labour agencies, and advocacy groups, empowerment can be a solid foundation for realising fairer and more sustainable working conditions for migrant workers in Malaysia.

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CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

We as the Community Service Team declare that we have no affiliation or involvement in any organisation or entity with any financial interests (such as honoraria, educational grants, participation in speaker's bureaus, memberships, employment, consultancy, shareholding, or other equity interests and expert testimony or patent licensing arrangements), or non-financial interests such as personal or professional relationships, affiliations, knowledge or beliefs in the subject matter or material discussed in this manuscript.

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