

Evaluating Indonesia's Policy Framework for Protecting Migrant Workers: A Human Rights-Based Diplomatic Approach

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Abstract

This study evaluates the policy framework adopted by Indonesia in safeguarding the rights and welfare of its migrant workers through the lens of human rights-based diplomacy. The inquiry is motivated by the persistent vulnerability of Indonesian migrant workers to various forms of exploitation, including labor abuse, wage theft, contract violations, and human trafficking, despite the considerable economic contributions these workers make through remittance flows to national development. Employing a descriptive-analytical literature review methodology, this research draws on peer-reviewed academic journals, official documents from international organizations, national legislation, and relevant studies in the fields of migration governance and protective diplomacy. The analytical framework integrates three theoretical pillars: the rights-based approach, consular and protective diplomacy theory, and the concept of human security. Findings reveal that Indonesia has undergone a significant paradigm shift in its migration governance, most notably through the enactment of Law Number 18 of 2017, which repositions migrant workers as rights-bearing subjects entitled to comprehensive state protection across all phases of the migration cycle. Additionally, Indonesia has engaged in progressively active bilateral, regional, and multilateral diplomacy to elevate the standards of migrant worker protection in destination countries. Nevertheless, structural challenges persist, including interagency coordination deficits, high rates of non-procedural placement, limited protective capacity in overseas diplomatic missions, and an imbalanced bargaining position relative to receiving states. At the regional and global levels, Indonesian diplomacy continues to encounter constraints arising from the predominantly non-binding character of most international instruments. The study concludes that effective migrant worker protection necessitates deeper integration between domestic policy and multi-level, rights-based diplomacy. Strengthening institutional capacity, harmonizing regulatory frameworks, and optimizing coalition-based diplomacy represent the most strategic pathways toward enhancing the effectiveness of Indonesia's international migrant protection regime.

Keywords: Indonesian Migrant Workers, Human Rights Diplomacy, Migrant Worker Protection, Human Security, Migration Policy, International Relations, Multilateral Diplomacy, Migration Governance

1. INTRODUCTION

The international mobility of Indonesian migrant workers has emerged as one of the most consequential social, economic, and political phenomena in the country's contemporary history. Since the 1980s, Indonesia has established itself as one of the largest labor-sending nations in Southeast Asia, with millions of its citizens seeking employment across a diverse array of sectors in Malaysia, Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and across the Middle Eastern region. The macroeconomic significance of remittance flows generated by this labor diaspora is well-documented, contributing meaningfully to household welfare in communities of origin and supporting national economic stability (ILO, 2015; Piper, 2013). Yet, the economic gains associated with labor migration are frequently counterbalanced by profound and multi-dimensional vulnerabilities experienced by migrant workers themselves, ranging from physical violence and labor exploitation to wage theft, contract violations, and trafficking in persons. These vulnerabilities are not merely products of ineffective domestic migration management but reflect deeper complexities embedded in the asymmetric power dynamics of international labor relations between sending and receiving states. In this context, Indonesian diplomacy assumes a strategic role, particularly in advancing adequate protection through its foreign policy architecture, bilateral treaty negotiations, and engagement in multilateral governance frameworks. Simultaneously, the effectiveness of Indonesian diplomacy has faced sustained scrutiny regarding policy coherence, institutional coordination, and the state's capacity to uphold human rights principles throughout diplomatic processes (Ford, Lyons, & Van Schendel, 2012).

The legislative reform represented by Law Number 18 of 2017 on the Protection of Indonesian Migrant Workers warrants particular attention, as it normatively marks a transition from a market-driven placement paradigm to one centered on rights fulfillment and comprehensive state responsibility across the full migration cycle encompassing pre-departure, active employment, and post-return phases. This legislative evolution reflects a broader alignment with the human security paradigm and the rights-based approach increasingly advocated within international migration governance, which reconceptualizes migrant workers as bearers of rights rather than mere economic commodities (Kneebone, 2020). Implementation, however, remains constrained by intersecting structural barriers. Indonesia's bilateral diplomacy with destination countries is frequently impeded by divergent labor norms, varying legal statuses of migrant workers, and the domestic political interests of receiving states. Countries in the Middle East employing the kafala system, for instance, institutionalize a form of worker-employer dependency that is structurally incompatible with international human rights standards (Ball & Piper, 2017). At the regional level, while ASEAN's Consensus on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers represents a normative advance, its non-binding character and dependence on voluntary political commitment significantly limit its enforcement potential (Renshaw, 2015). Within the domestic policy landscape, reform measures have often been characterized as reactive, fragmented, or insufficiently supported by institutional capacity-building (Lindquist, Xiang, & Yeoh, 2012).

Against this backdrop, a rigorous evaluation of Indonesia's policy framework for migrant worker protection is both timely and analytically necessary. Such an evaluation serves three interrelated purposes: it assesses the degree to which human rights principles have been meaningfully integrated into diplomatic practice; it identifies structural implementation gaps that undermine policy effectiveness; and it contributes to the comparatively underdeveloped scholarly literature that examines labor migration through the analytical lens of human rights diplomacy. The urgency of this inquiry is further amplified by transformative global dynamics including the intensification of labor globalization, digital platforms reshaping recruitment, and the emergence of normative instruments such as the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) all of which demand a recalibration of Indonesia's protective strategy. Moreover, public expectations regarding governmental accountability have risen considerably, driven by high-profile cases of migrant worker abuse amplified

through social media, increased civil society advocacy, and growing transnational solidarity networks. These pressures have rendered migrant protection diplomacy increasingly politicized, no longer a purely technocratic exercise but a domain saturated with domestic demands that shape the orientation of foreign policy. In consequence, a comprehensive analytical mapping of Indonesia's policy trajectory its achievements, persistent gaps, and future opportunities becomes indispensable for informing more effective, rights-affirming, and internationally aligned migration governance.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a descriptive-analytical approach integrated with a systematic literature review as the primary methodology for evaluating Indonesia's policy mechanisms in protecting migrant workers through the lens of human rights-based diplomacy. This methodological choice reflects the nature of the inquiry, which necessitates engagement with a broad and evolving regulatory landscape, complex policy dynamics, and an intersecting web of international legal instruments and diplomatic practices involving both state and non-state actors. The descriptive-analytical method enables the systematic identification, in-depth elaboration, and critical synthesis of patterns emerging across policy frameworks, legal architectures, and diplomatic practices as documented in existing scholarly literature.

A. Data Sources and Literature Criteria

Data for this study are drawn exclusively from reputable secondary sources, including internationally and nationally peer-reviewed academic journals, credible academic monographs, reports produced by major international organizations notably the International Labour Organization (ILO), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and the United Nations as well as official Indonesian government documents encompassing Law Number 18 of 2017 and its implementing regulations, and institutional documents from the Ministry of Manpower and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Empirical studies pertaining to migration and diplomatic practice are also considered where relevant. Sources are selected based on three rigorous criteria: thematic relevance, whereby sources must directly address migrant worker protection, consular or human rights diplomacy, migration policy, or international migration governance; academic credibility, privileging peer-reviewed publications and recognized institutional reports; and temporal currency, with preference given to literature published within the preceding ten to fifteen years to ensure analytical contemporaneity, while acknowledging landmark theoretical works of enduring significance.

B. Data Collection and Analysis Techniques

Literature was retrieved systematically through established academic databases including Google Scholar, JSTOR, ScienceDirect, the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), and official Indonesian governmental repositories. Each source was critically analyzed to identify key variables including adopted protection paradigms, applicable legal instruments, diplomatic practices, implementation effectiveness, and structural challenges. Data analysis was conducted through descriptive content analysis, with findings organized thematically around the central axes of policy and diplomatic practice. This approach enables a comprehensive portrayal of how migrant worker protection policy in Indonesia is constructed, how diplomatic instruments are operationalized, and how human rights values are integrated across different governance levels. Findings across sources were then comparatively synthesized to yield academically grounded evaluative insights.

C. Validity and Methodological Limitations

To safeguard research validity, data source triangulation was employed by combining academic literature with official institutional documents. While a literature review methodology does not generate direct empirical field data, it provides robust analytical leverage for

evaluating policy development and diplomatic practice from both theoretical and normative vantage points. A primary limitation inheres in the study's reliance on secondary data, making interpretive conclusions contingent on the completeness, quality, and accuracy of available publications. Findings should accordingly be contextualized within this methodological boundary.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical architecture of this study rests on three complementary pillars: the rights-based approach to human rights, consular and protective diplomacy theory, and the concept of human security. These frameworks are neither mutually exclusive nor hierarchically arranged; rather, they function as an integrated analytical system that allows for the simultaneous evaluation of normative commitments, operational mechanisms, and structural vulnerability dimensions in Indonesia's migrant worker protection regime.

A. Rights-Based Approach

The rights-based approach repositions migrant workers from objects of administrative management to active subjects of rights, entitled to the same dignity, legal protections, and non-discriminatory treatment as citizens (Kneebone, 2020). This framework evaluates policy not merely in terms of procedural efficiency but against substantive benchmarks of access to justice, freedom from violence and exploitation, and the fulfillment of state obligations. Applied to the Indonesian context, the rights-based approach is operationalized through Law Number 18 of 2017 and bilateral agreements, and serves as the primary standard against which Indonesia's policy alignment with international human rights norms including the 1990 Migrant Workers Convention and ILO Core Conventions is measured.

B. Consular and Protective Diplomacy Theory

Consular diplomacy theory addresses the mechanisms through which diplomatic representatives of a state serve and protect its nationals abroad (Melissen, 2011). Its contemporary extension into protective diplomacy encompasses the full spectrum of interventions rescue operations, legal advocacy, complaint resolution, repatriation conducted through inter-state negotiations (Piper & Foley, 2020). This theoretical lens assesses the effectiveness of Indonesian embassies and consulates, examines case resolution mechanisms, evaluates the negotiation of labor standards, and interrogates Indonesia's diplomatic capacity to engage restrictive foreign legal systems on behalf of migrant workers.

C. Human Security

Introduced by the UNDP in 1994, the human security concept refocuses analytical attention from the security of states to the security of individuals, encompassing economic, health, personal, and occupational dimensions. Migrant workers are particularly exposed to non-military threats such as violence, exploitation, and socioeconomic precarity (Newman, 2016). This conceptual lens emphasizes the imperative of comprehensive, transnational protection bridging domestic policy and diplomatic engagement in a manner that centers on the lived security of individual workers.

D. Integrative Relationship Among the Three Frameworks

The three theoretical frameworks are mutually reinforcing: the rights-based approach furnishes the normative scaffolding, consular and protective diplomacy theory provides the operational mechanism, and human security supplies the holistic perspective on migrant vulnerability. Their integration enables a multi-dimensional evaluation of Indonesia's protective

policies normatively, operationally, and structurally yielding a more comprehensive and analytically sophisticated assessment than any single framework would permit.

4. DISCUSSION

A. Effectiveness of National Legal Instruments in Protecting Indonesian Migrant Workers

Indonesia's efforts to protect its migrant workers have undergone considerable regulatory transformation, most significantly marked by the enactment of Law Number 18 of 2017 on the Protection of Indonesian Migrant Workers (PPMI Law). This legislation superseded the earlier Law Number 39 of 2004, representing a paradigmatic shift from a placement-oriented framework toward one explicitly grounded in rights protection and vulnerability mitigation. Whereas its predecessor prioritized labor export as an economic policy instrument, the PPMI Law articulates comprehensive state responsibility across the full migration lifecycle, encompassing pre-departure, active employment, and post-return phases. This transition aligns Indonesia's domestic legal architecture with international standards embodied in ILO Conventions 97 and 143 and the 1990 UN Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families. Lindquist (2020) observes that this legislative reform reflects a meaningful state commitment to closing the exploitation loopholes frequently perpetuated by opaque recruitment intermediaries.

During the pre-departure phase, the PPMI Law mandates that the state assume governance functions previously delegated to private sector actors and informal intermediaries. The state is required to ensure access to skills training, verify documentation integrity, disseminate information about workers' rights and obligations, and facilitate equitable financing arrangements for the placement process. This phase is particularly critical because a substantial proportion of the difficulties encountered by Indonesian migrant workers in destination countries originate in informational deficits and legal illiteracy at the point of origin. The International Organization for Migration (IOM, 2022) has documented that many Indonesian migrant workers do not fully understand the terms of their employment contracts including salary structures, entitlements to leave, and the procedures for filing complaints. Compounding this, bureaucratic processes remain insufficiently integrated, creating structural conditions in which informal brokers continue to capture significant portions of the placement market. Palmer, Missbach, and Rudge (2020) corroborate these findings by demonstrating that non-procedural migration pathways remain prevalent in high-migration districts such as Lombok, Indramayu, and Cilacap, precisely because official information channels do not effectively penetrate these communities. Consequently, regulatory strengthening at the national level has not produced commensurate changes in local practice.

Protection during the active employment phase presents distinct challenges. National legal instruments mandate that bilateral agreements, the protective functions of diplomatic representations, and contract monitoring mechanisms serve as the primary tools for safeguarding migrant workers in destination countries. However, effectiveness is profoundly shaped by the institutional character of labor governance systems in those countries. Migrant domestic workers in the Middle East, for example, are frequently bound by the kafala system, which vests employers with expansive authority over workers' mobility and legal status, effectively excluding them from mainstream labor law protections. Ford, Lyons, and Van Schendel (2019) document that this system generates acute vulnerabilities to physical abuse, withheld wages, and passport confiscation. While Indonesian diplomatic missions KBRI and KJRI operate with a mandate to protect Indonesian nationals, the jurisdictional sovereignty of destination states consistently imposes limits on the remedies available. Human rights-based diplomacy has thus emerged as an increasingly central strategy, even as its success remains

contingent on the political disposition of receiving states and the prevailing dynamics of bilateral relations.

The post-return phase, as structured under the PPMI Law, introduces reintegration mechanisms encompassing legal case assistance, social security access, vocational retraining, and economic reintegration support. Research by UN Women (2021), however, indicates that Indonesia's reintegration services remain episodic and have not been designed with long-term sustainability in mind. A significant proportion of returning female migrant workers re-enter their communities without adequate economic support, heightening the risk of re-migration through irregular channels. Institutional fragmentation among agencies particularly BP2MI, regional governments, and social welfare departments results in service delivery inefficiencies. Ford and Lyons (2019) attribute these shortcomings primarily to insufficient human resources and weak administrative infrastructure. Multiple structural obstacles continue to impede the realization of the PPMI Law's protective ambitions. Uneven institutional capacity across regions produces disparate quality of protection services. A persistent volume of non-procedural migration estimated by IOM (2022) at more than 30 percent of total outflows deprives workers of access to formal contracts and social protection. The enforcement of sanctions against non-compliant recruitment agencies is further hampered by the complexity of intermediary networks. Cross-border complaint mechanisms remain underdeveloped, particularly in countries that lack human rights-oriented labor governance frameworks. And diplomatic protection, while normatively robust on paper, struggles to penetrate the political and legal barriers erected by destination state sovereignty.

Taken together, the evidence suggests that while Indonesia's national legal framework represents a substantive and progressive normative achievement, its implementation continues to be undermined by structural deficits. Formal protections have expanded, yet informal workers remain the most exposed to exploitation. State involvement in migration governance has grown, yet technical capacity and interagency coordination remain insufficient. Human rights-based diplomacy has become a necessary strategic complement, yet its efficacy is contingent on the political receptivity of partner states. Finally, reintegration mechanisms require fundamental redesign to provide durable, long-term support that enables returning workers to achieve sustainable socioeconomic stability.

B. Human Rights-Based Diplomacy in Protecting Migrant Workers in Destination Countries

Indonesia's diplomatic engagement on behalf of migrant workers has evolved considerably over the past two decades, driven by the growing complexity of international labor mobility, the mainstreaming of human rights norms in global governance, and recurring cases of serious rights violations experienced by Indonesian Migrant Workers (PMI) in destination countries. What once constituted a largely administrative function of the foreign service has increasingly become an integral dimension of Indonesian foreign policy. This transformation is visible in the expansion of diplomatic mission mandates, the proliferation of labor attaché positions, the negotiation of bilateral Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs), and the growing deployment of human rights and economic diplomacy instruments to extend the reach of protection. Melissen (2011) characterizes this evolution as reflective of modern consular diplomacy a form of diplomacy that is no longer confined to inter-state relations but directly engages in protective service provision to citizens abroad.

The negotiation and periodic renegotiation of bilateral agreements with destination countries constitutes a central axis of Indonesia's protective diplomacy. Since 2006, Indonesia has concluded MoUs with various labor-receiving states including Malaysia, Japan, South Korea, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar. These instruments are designed to establish minimum labor standards, dispute resolution mechanisms, and access to legal aid for Indonesian workers. However, the effectiveness of MoUs varies significantly across bilateral

partnerships. Palmer and Missbach (2019) document that the Indonesia-Malaysia MoU has encountered persistent implementation obstacles due to weak local enforcement and discrepancies in labor regulatory frameworks. In contrast, the Indonesia-Japan MoU under the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) framework has demonstrated considerably greater effectiveness, attributable to Japan's robust domestic legal system and stringent oversight of recruitment agencies. These contrasting outcomes indicate that the success of protective diplomacy is not solely a function of agreement content but is equally shaped by the institutional environment of the destination country.

Beyond bilateral frameworks, multilateral diplomacy serves as a significant complementary channel. Indonesia has been an active participant in ASEAN, the International Labour Organization, and the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD), consistently advocating for stronger regional and global migrant protection norms. The ASEAN Consensus on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers, adopted in 2017, represents a notable diplomatic achievement in establishing a regional normative reference. Yet, as Piper and Foley (2020) observe, the consensus is non-binding and lacks robust monitoring mechanisms, which means that compliance depends almost entirely on the voluntary political will of member states. This structural limitation compels Indonesia to continue relying primarily on bilateral channels for resolving individual migrant worker cases.

At the operational level, Indonesia's overseas diplomatic missions play a pivotal role through what may be termed protective diplomacy a range of services encompassing legal assistance, wage dispute mediation, crisis rescue operations, temporary shelter provision, and emergency repatriation. Ford and Lyons (2018) find that enhanced protective capacity within KBRI and KJRI missions has contributed meaningfully to the resolution of cases involving withheld wages, particularly in the domestic work sector. They caution, however, that effectiveness is circumscribed by staffing constraints, budgetary limitations, and uneven access to local law enforcement and judicial institutions. In countries operating under the kafala system, such as Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, Indonesian diplomats encounter fundamental structural barriers: domestic workers are formally excluded from labor law protections, making advocacy through conventional channels largely ineffective.

The most systemic challenge confronting protective diplomacy is the power asymmetry between Indonesia, a labor-sending state, and the destination countries that control their labor markets and derive economic benefits from migrant labor flows. Receiving states possess a structurally superior bargaining position, which affords them considerable leverage in resisting external demands for higher protection standards. This dynamic is particularly evident in negotiations with Gulf states that have demonstrated reluctance to adopt human rights-based labor standards. Kneebone (2020) describes this relational structure as a form of 'structural dependency,' wherein a labor-sending state like Indonesia faces an inherent tension between maximizing the scope of worker protection and maintaining the volume of employment opportunities available to its citizens. The consequence is a diplomatic posture characterized by incremental negotiation and strategic compromise rather than assertive standard-setting.

Domestic coordination failures further constrain the effectiveness of diplomatic efforts. Indonesia's overseas protective diplomacy depends critically on the quality of migration data, the administrative readiness of placement documentation, and the integrity of the placement system managed jointly by central and regional governments. ILO (2021) notes that persistent coordination breakdowns between BP2MI, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and subnational government entities frequently delay case resolution abroad due to data inconsistencies or incomplete documentation. These failures extend case processing timelines and generate jurisdictional conflicts among agencies. Effective diplomacy, in this context, is fundamentally contingent on accurate migration records, transparent placement pathways, and robust administrative protection from the inception of the migration process.

Despite these structural impediments, several measurable achievements in protective diplomacy merit acknowledgment. The growing number of migrant workers successfully repatriated or freed from exploitation situations reflects strengthened responsiveness within Indonesian diplomatic missions. The deployment of digital tools including the Safe Travel platform, the Peduli WNI application, and the Integrated Migrant Worker System (IMWS) has accelerated data processing and broadened access to complaint and assistance mechanisms. Indonesia's increasing engagement in global human rights diplomacy has reinforced its moral authority in advocating for improved protection standards in destination countries. Additionally, through maritime diplomacy, Indonesia has successfully advanced regulatory reforms in the international fisheries sector, historically characterized by high rates of labor exploitation.

Nonetheless, a critical evaluation of Indonesia's protective diplomacy reveals persistent gaps. The diplomatic posture has tended toward reactivity responding to cases as they arise rather than deploying proactive standard-setting strategies that establish non-negotiable protections, particularly for domestic workers who remain disproportionately vulnerable. Furthermore, economic diplomacy has not been sufficiently integrated with labor protection objectives. Conditioning trade or investment cooperation on labor rights compliance, for example, could represent a meaningful mechanism for enhancing Indonesia's bargaining leverage. Protective diplomacy must therefore be reimagined not as a discrete consular function but as a strategic dimension of Indonesia's comprehensive foreign policy framework.

C. Indonesia's Engagement in Regional and Multilateral Forums for Migrant Worker Protection

Indonesia's diplomatic strategy for migrant worker protection extends well beyond bilateral agreements to encompass active participation in regional and global multilateral governance mechanisms. This multi-level diplomatic engagement is strategically important given the transboundary nature of labor migration, the multiplicity of actors involved, and the need for harmonized protection standards that cannot be achieved through domestic policy alone. Across ASEAN, the Asia-Pacific consultation processes, and global institutions such as the United Nations and the ILO, Indonesia has positioned itself as an advocate for rights-based migrant protection. This stance simultaneously reinforces Indonesia's normative legitimacy and expands its capacity to influence international policy discourse (Riggiozzi & Grugel, 2015).

Within ASEAN, Indonesia's role has been particularly pronounced in advancing the ASEAN Consensus on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers, adopted in 2017. While this instrument is non-binding and functions primarily as a normative reference point, it carries considerable regional significance by establishing minimum protection benchmarks for both documented and undocumented migrant workers (Hernández, 2019). Indonesia has been among the most vocal member states in emphasizing receiving countries' responsibility to guarantee access to justice, healthcare, and decent working conditions. Through Senior Labour Officials Meetings (SLOM) and ASEAN Labour Ministers Meetings (ALMM), Indonesian delegations have persistently pressed labor-receiving members including Malaysia, Singapore, and Brunei to operationalize the Consensus in substantive ways.

Indonesia has also been actively involved in developing the ASEAN Plan of Action for the Implementation of the ASEAN Consensus, contributing to the elaboration of measurable performance indicators and monitoring mechanisms to prevent the Consensus from remaining a purely declaratory instrument (Ismail & Dumanig, 2020). This commitment reflects a deliberate effort to harmonize Indonesia's domestic policy architecture as articulated in Law Number 18 of 2017 with its regional diplomatic obligations, thereby creating coherent alignment between national and multilateral protection agendas.

Beyond ASEAN, Indonesia has engaged productively in Asia-Pacific consultative forums such as the Abu Dhabi Dialogue (ADD) and the Colombo Process. Within the ADD, Indonesia has consistently advocated for enhanced cooperation between sending and receiving states, particularly regarding ethical recruitment reform and transparent placement procedures. Rahman (2020) identifies the ADD as a critical platform through which Asian labor-sending countries have collectively raised issues of domestic worker exploitation, restricted access to legal assistance, and the need for innovative social protection schemes. Indonesia has leveraged this forum to advocate for Gulf destination countries to modernize their labor regulatory frameworks. Indonesia was also instrumental in facilitating the development of enhanced information-sharing mechanisms among participating states as a strategy to suppress irregular recruitment.

Through the Colombo Process, Indonesia has contributed to the development of regional standard employment contracts that are more accountable and reflective of fair recruitment principles as promoted by the ILO. Within this forum, Indonesia has consistently collaborated with the Philippines as a co-leading labor-sending nation to strengthen the collective bargaining position of origin countries relative to destination states. Ball and Piper (2017) characterize this as an effective instance of coalition diplomacy, in which shared interests amplify individual states' capacity to influence migration policy negotiations. This coalition approach holds particular strategic value by enhancing the bargaining leverage of labor-sending states that individually occupy structurally weaker positions in the political economy of international migration.

At the global level, Indonesia's participation in the negotiations for the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM), adopted in 2018, represents a significant diplomatic investment. Indonesia was an active party to the GCM negotiations, with a particular emphasis on the protection of migrant domestic workers, who remain among the most vulnerable and least protected categories of international labor migrants. Koser (2019) notes that Indonesia utilized the GCM framework as a normative platform to reassert the urgency of human rights protection for migrant workers and to embed this concern within the architecture of global migration governance. Within other UN forums including the Human Rights Council and the ILO's annual Conference Indonesian delegations have consistently advanced agendas centered on social protection, improved working conditions, and the elimination of exploitative recruitment practices.

Beyond normative engagement, Indonesia has pursued technical cooperation through collaborative programs with international organizations including the ILO, IOM, and UN Women. Through its partnership with the ILO's Safe and Fair Program, Indonesia has worked to enhance protection specifically for female migrant workers across ASEAN. Miles (2021) demonstrates that this form of technical diplomacy has generated direct benefits for domestic policy, including improvements to placement monitoring systems and enhanced capacity building for Indonesian diplomatic personnel in destination countries. These outcomes illustrate the synergistic potential of combining normative advocacy with technical implementation cooperation.

Indonesia's multilateral engagement also reflects a broader normative orientation grounded in human rights principles one that Piper and Iredale (2021) argue positions a state to exert disproportionate normative influence relative to its material power, by cultivating political solidarity with other sending states and shaping international standard-setting processes. Indonesia has pursued this role explicitly, presenting itself as a norm entrepreneur in the field of migrant protection through national reports, recommendations, and participation in the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process.

Yet Indonesia's multilateral strategy is not without limitations. The non-binding nature of key instruments from the ASEAN Consensus to the GCM means that implementation remains hostage to the political will and economic interests of individual states. Some

destination countries continue to prioritize economic considerations in ways that directly conflict with the protective agenda that Indonesia promotes. Gaddis and Alter (2022) identify this as a fundamental structural tension in global migration diplomacy, one that limits the transformative potential of even the most energetically pursued multilateral engagement. Ultimately, the effectiveness of Indonesia's diplomacy depends on its capacity to sustain coalitions, manage competing interests, and translate multilateral achievements into binding domestic reforms in key destination states.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has demonstrated that Indonesia has undergone a substantive and consequential transformation in its approach to migrant worker governance transitioning from an economically oriented, placement-centric paradigm to one anchored in human rights protection and comprehensive state responsibility. This transformation is most tangibly evidenced in the enactment of Law Number 18 of 2017, which establishes a progressive legal standard for migrant protection across the entire migration cycle. In the diplomatic domain, Indonesia has pursued this rights-based agenda through bilateral, regional, and multilateral channels, successfully advancing normative agendas within ASEAN contributing to the adoption of the ASEAN Consensus on Migrant Workers while also positioning itself as a norm entrepreneur within global governance forums including the GCM, ILO, and the UN Human Rights Council.

Despite these achievements, significant implementation gaps and structural challenges persist. Non-procedural migration, exploitation of domestic workers, dependence on informal intermediaries, weak contract enforcement, and limited protective capacity in overseas missions continue to undermine the protective promise of the legislative framework. At the diplomatic level, the power asymmetry between Indonesia and its key destination states imposes persistent constraints, while the non-binding nature of most multilateral instruments limits the enforceability of protection commitments. These structural realities demand a more integrated, proactive, and strategically coherent approach to both domestic policy and diplomatic engagement.

On the basis of this analysis, six strategic recommendations are advanced. First, the domestic implementation of Law Number 18 of 2017 should be systematically strengthened, with priority given to improving recruitment oversight, data integrity, and the accessibility of integrated complaint mechanisms. Regulatory implementing instruments require revision to establish clearer role delineation for regional governments and to institutionalize cross-agency coordination protocols.

Second, bilateral diplomacy should be oriented toward greater legal certainty and enhanced accountability of receiving states, with MoU clauses upgraded to include operational implementation details encompassing contract standards, dispute resolution pathways, and explicit protections for domestic workers alongside periodic evaluation frameworks anchored in protection performance indices.

Third, Indonesia should consolidate its regional leadership within ASEAN by championing the establishment of a dedicated ASEAN Monitoring Body for the ASEAN Consensus, while advocating for the harmonization of regional employment contract standards and recruitment procedures to eliminate the most severe protection disparities across member states.

Fourth, at the global level, Indonesia should deepen coalition diplomacy with other major labor-sending countries including the Philippines, Nepal, and Bangladesh to collectively strengthen pressure on destination states to align their regulatory environments with GCM principles and relevant ILO Conventions. Coordinated advocacy through multilateral platforms

will amplify the individual bargaining leverage of sending states that are structurally disadvantaged in bilateral negotiations.

Fifth, the protective capacity of Indonesian diplomatic missions in key destination countries must be substantially expanded, including the deployment of additional specialized protection officers, the provision of accessible legal assistance services, and the deepening of partnerships with local civil society organizations and diaspora communities to extend the geographic reach of state protection.

Sixth, Indonesia should intensify technical cooperation with international organizations, particularly the ILO, IOM, and UN Women, to strengthen monitoring systems, enhance migration data quality, and develop evidence-based policy responses to persistent structural challenges including irregular recruitment, female migrant exploitation, and legal illiteracy.

Collectively, these recommendations chart a course toward a more coherent, proactive, and rights-affirming migration governance regime. If realized, they would position Indonesia not only as a leading advocate for migrant rights within Southeast Asia but as a model of principled migration governance for labor-sending states worldwide. More fundamentally, they would translate Indonesia's normative commitments into substantive improvements in the lives of millions of migrant workers who continue to navigate the intersection of opportunity and vulnerability in the global labor economy.

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