



LEGAL PROTECTION FOR INDONESIAN MIGRANT WORKERS: AN ANALYSIS OF ACCESSIBILITY IN DIVORCE

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Abstract:

The Indonesian government strives to address the surge in unemployment through innovation via the Indonesian Migrant Worker Protection Agency (BP2MI), which directs the placement of Indonesian Migrant Workers. However, the impact of becoming Indonesian Migrant Workers is not always positive, especially for those who are married, as they are susceptible to divorce. This study aims to understand the impact and Indonesia's role in dealing with the consequences of Indonesian Migrant Workers. A socio-legal approach is employed through field interviews and observations. Findings indicate that migrant labor arises from weak economy, low education, and limited job opportunities. The positives include better employment prospects, higher income, new skills, and long-term benefits through remittances. Conversely, negatives involve divorce issues due to distance, infidelity, financial mismanagement, and other relationships. Legal and social protections are necessary, along with awareness of family impacts. While the Law Number 7 of 1989 concerning Religious Courts regulates divorce, complexities persist, necessitating streamlined administration, such as power of attorney legalization without involving embassies, to avoid clandestine divorce and administrative intricacies.

Keywords: Indonesian Migrant Workers; Legal Protection; Divorce

Abstrak:

Pemerintah Indonesia berupaya mengatasi lonjakan pengangguran dengan inovasi melalui Badan Perlindungan Pekerja Migran Indonesia (BP2MI), yang mengarahkan penempatan Pekerja Migran Indonesia. Meski demikian, dampak menjadi Pekerja Migran Indonesia tidak selalu positif, terutama bagi yang sudah menikah, rentan terhadap perceraian. Penelitian ini fokus memahami dampak dan peran Indonesia menghadapi konsekuensi Pekerja Migran. Pendekatan sosiolegal digunakan dengan wawancara dan observasi lapangan. Hasil menunjukkan tenaga kerja migran timbul dari ekonomi lemah, pendidikan rendah, dan lapangan kerja terbatas. Positifnya, pekerja migran dapat pekerjaan lebih baik, penghasilan tinggi, keterampilan baru, serta manfaat jangka panjang melalui remitansi. Namun, negatifnya berupa masalah perceraian akibat jarak, perselingkuhan, penyalahgunaan keuangan, dan hubungan lain. Perlindungan hukum dan sosial diperlukan, serta kesadaran akan dampak keluarga. Meski Undang – Undang nomor 7 tahun 1989 tentang Peradilan Agama mengatur, permasalahan perceraian rumit, perlu kemudahan administrasi, misalnya legalisasi surat kuasa tanpa kedutaan besar, menghindari cerai talak Ghaib dan kerumitan administrasi.

Kata Kunci: Pekerja Migran Indonesia; Perlindungan Hukum; Perceraian

A. Introduction

Indonesia, as a country with the world's largest population characterized by religious, racial, ethnic, linguistic, cultural, and ethnic diversity, faces significant challenges concerning educational issues. Despite this diversity, the educational level of the Indonesian population in non-urban areas still experiences serious problems. The majority of individuals with education up to or even below high school level in Indonesia currently encounter difficulties in accessing job opportunities. Individuals with lower levels of education often struggle to meet daily needs, even if they have secured employment. Meanwhile, the current job market is highly competitive, with stringent employment criteria often going unmet, exacerbating the situation for job seekers. Consequently, the high unemployment rate and job insecurity have led some individuals to resort to illegal activities such as theft, robbery, and drug trafficking as alternative means of livelihood. (Dewita Hia, 2015)

One fundamental issue currently faced by the state of Indonesia is the high unemployment rate. This phenomenon reflects the inability of the job market in Indonesia to absorb the available workforce. As a result, the problem of unemployment becomes a serious issue contributing to a cycle of national problems, namely poverty. On the other hand, these individuals often have limited skills and are only able to engage in domestic work. Consequently, becoming migrant workers becomes their last resort to escape the clutches of poverty. The level of poverty and the difficulty in obtaining sufficient income are the main reasons behind the migration of job seekers from one country to another. This phenomenon not only occurs as a movement from poor countries to wealthy countries but also as a result of migration from developing countries to other developing countries that offer better job opportunities. (Husnah, 2021)

Given such circumstances, the Indonesian Government has devised solutions to address the unemployment rate, one of which is sending Indonesian workers abroad, now known as Indonesian Migrant Workers (Pekerja Migran Indonesia), based on the Law Number 18 of 2017 concerning the Protection of Indonesian Migrant Workers. This is done with the aim of reducing unemployment rates and enhancing the well-being of Indonesian Migrant Workers and their families. Many Indonesian citizens seek alternative paths, working as Indonesian Migrant Workers in other countries. (Viviansari, 2019)

The dispatch and placement of Indonesian Migrant Workers are facilitated through the National Agency for Placement and Protection of Indonesian Manpower (BNP2TKI), which has been reformed into the Indonesian Migrant Worker Protection Agency (BP2MI) since 2019. BP2MI is one of the Non-Ministerial Government Institutions (LPNK) in Indonesia with responsibilities and functions in conducting education, training, and the deployment of migrant workers. (Rosida, 2017)

However, the existence of this institution does not imply that the issues concerning Indonesian migrant workers can be entirely resolved. While Indonesian Migrant Workers are employed in foreign countries, numerous conflicts loom over their personal well-being, including threats of violence, sexual harassment, and other predicaments. These threats often jeopardize the integrity and harmony of the families of Indonesian Migrant Workers back in Indonesia, leading to instances of divorce. Currently, the process of obtaining a divorce for migrant workers is extremely challenging, given that the divorce proceedings require the physical presence of the petitioners. This situation contradicts the stipulations outlined in Article 3 of Law

Number 18 of 2017 concerning the Protection of Indonesian Migrant Workers, which states the following: The protection of Indonesian Migrant Workers aims to: a. Guarantee the fulfillment and enforcement of human rights as citizens and Indonesian Migrant Workers; and b. Ensure legal, economic, and social protection for Indonesian Migrant Workers and their families.(Nabila, 2022)

Given these circumstances, researchers strive to examine the aforementioned issues with a research focus on addressing the negative and positive impacts as well as legal issues concerning the presence of migrant workers in Indonesia. Additionally, the study aims to investigate the role of the Indonesian government in ensuring legal protection for migrant workers seeking divorce.

B. Problem Formulation

Based on the aforementioned background, the researcher formulates the research questions as follows:

1. What are the negative impacts, positive impacts, and legal issues concerning the phenomenon of migrant workers in Indonesia?
2. What is the role of the Indonesian government in ensuring legal protection for migrant workers seeking divorce?

C. Research Method

The method employed in this research is the sociolegal method. This approach highlights the significance of qualitative steps involving observation and analysis.(Irianto, 2017) The characteristics of the sociolegal research method can be identified through textual study, wherein legal regulations and policies can be critically analyzed to elucidate their meanings and implications for legal subjects, including marginalized groups.(Diantha, 2018) In this context, the meanings embedded in these regulations, including their benefits or disadvantages for specific societal groups, and the means to address them, can be explored. Thus, sociolegal studies engage with the core issues of legal studies, ranging from constitutional matters to regulations at the grassroots level.(Irianto, 2012) Sociolegal research involves fieldwork (field research), incorporating interviews with respondents as primary data and a review of literature as secondary data, known as library research. Interviews were conducted with Indonesian Migrant Workers and a legal practitioner (Lawyer and Legal Consultant) who had handled cases related to Indonesian Migrant Workers. The obtained data were then analyzed and presented descriptively and analytically by the author.

D. Discussion

1. Negative Impact, Positive Impact, and Legal Issues Regarding the Phenomenon of Migrant Workers in Indonesia

Previously referred to as Indonesian Labor Migrants, commonly known as TKI (Tenaga Kerja Indonesia), Indonesian migrant workers consist of both men and women, including Female Labor Migrants (TKW). Indonesian Labor Migrants, as defined in Article 1(1) of Law Number 39 of 2004 concerning the Placement and Protection of Indonesian Workers Abroad, are Indonesian citizens who fulfill the qualifications to work abroad temporarily under an employment relationship and receive compensation. (Suhartoyo, 2019)

However, over the years, Law Number 39 of 2004 concerning the Placement and Protection of Indonesian Workers Abroad has become outdated and

inadequate in providing protection for Indonesian workers. Consequently, Law Number 18 of 2017 concerning the Protection of Indonesian Migrant Workers was enacted. Indonesian Migrant Workers are defined as Indonesian citizens who are about to, are currently, or have already worked abroad and receive compensation outside the territory of the Republic of Indonesia.(Wahyudi, 2015)

The presence of migrant workers in Indonesia, as aforementioned, can be attributed to several factors. These factors encompass economic conditions, limited educational backgrounds, and high competition in the job market. These circumstances lead both married and unmarried individuals, men and women alike, to seek work abroad as Indonesian Migrant Workers, with the hope of improving their families' well-being.

From the perspective of migrant workers in Indonesia, the positive impacts obtained by an Indonesian Migrant Worker employed abroad are as follows:(Lumbantoruan et al., 2017)

a. Paid Employment

Many Indonesian Migrant Workers who were previously unemployed secure jobs abroad, often making it their first employment opportunity. Prior to migration, around 56% of migrant workers were primarily engaged in unpaid household work or family-related duties; only 44% held paid jobs before working abroad.

b. Higher Income

Indonesian Migrant Workers who have worked previously tend to earn four to six times more abroad. Recent survey data indicates that migrant workers can earn an average monthly wage of Rp 3,700,000 (US\$281), which is approximately four times their average wage prior to migration. Meanwhile, female migrant workers heading to more developed Asian countries (such as Taiwan, Hong Kong SAR, Singapore, etc.) can earn up to six times what they earned in Indonesia.

c. Skill Acquisition and Experience

Low-skilled workers acquire new skills and experiences while working abroad, often leading to better job opportunities upon their return to their home country. The majority of returning migrant workers (77%) state that they gained new skills during their migration period. Furthermore, among workers who were previously unpaid, more than half secure paid employment upon returning to Indonesia.

d. Alleviating Household Financial Burdens

Remittances from Indonesian Migrant Workers play a crucial role in reducing poverty. Research findings reveal that remittances decrease the likelihood of Indonesian households falling into poverty by 28%. Families of migrant workers experience financial benefits from migration as remittances help cover essential needs including food, housing, education, and healthcare. More than 80% of surveyed migrant worker households identify "daily necessities" as one of the primary uses of remittances, thus alleviating financial burdens, especially for economically disadvantaged families. In the case of female migrant workers, remittances reduce child labor participation rates by 17 to 32 percentage points without affecting the labor force participation rates of other household members.(Trang & Rinin, 2011)

e. Long-Term Benefits

Lastly, remittances also contribute to the improvement of long-term livelihoods for migrant workers and their families. Approximately 40% of migrant worker households utilize their remittance earnings for education, 15% invest in business capital, and over 20% store it in savings accounts. In addition to the positive impacts, Indonesian Migrant Workers also face risks. Simultaneously, working abroad comes with its own set of risks. Migrant workers encounter various risks throughout the migration process, ranging from persecution, physical and sexual violence, extortion, to mistreatment such as violations of basic freedoms and substandard working conditions. Despite employment contracts serving as the legal foundation governing the rights and responsibilities of migrant workers and their employers, only about 1/3 (one-third) of Indonesian Migrant Workers sign employment contracts prior to departure. Approximately 56% of all new migrant workers only learn about their wages after arriving in the destination country.

Although Indonesian Migrant Workers receive positive impacts as mentioned above, not all of them experience positive outcomes from their work abroad. In other words, there are negative consequences associated with working overseas. The phenomenon of Indonesian migrant workers has negative impacts, one of which is related to marital issues. This impact manifests in the form of divorce between Indonesian migrant workers and their spouses for various reasons. The results of research conducted through interviews with Mr. Dr. Nasokha, S.H., M.H., an advocate, legal consultant, and mediator at the Law Office of Dr. Nasokha, S.H., M.H. & Partners, show that the causes of divorce among Indonesian migrant workers are as follows:

a. Distance

Differences in countries lead Indonesian Migrant Workers and their partners to rarely have the opportunity to meet and gather with their families. As a result, their relationship cannot be maintained as it should be in a marital relationship, including emotional support within the household. The geographical distance has an impact on the stress and discomfort experienced by the left-behind spouse, especially if one party struggles to cope with the physical separation.

b. Infidelity

The causes of infidelity in Indonesian Migrant Worker households can be attributed to various factors. Firstly, the entry of a third party into the household environment is a contributing factor. Additionally, significant geographical distance between the working spouse abroad and the partner left behind creates ambiguity and a lack of understanding about the activities of the partner in the home country. This situation often creates opportunities for infidelity, particularly due to unmet emotional needs and a sense of freedom due to minimal supervision. Emotional instability within Indonesian Migrant Worker households is exacerbated by prolonged separation from family and extended work contracts without leave. Signs of infidelity often manifest as minimal communication with the partner, decreased attention, and information from peers or the local environment of the partner in the home village. For Indonesian Migrant Workers who feel

betrayed by infidelity, the initial step is usually not an immediate divorce, but rather an attempt to provide advice to the cheating partner, either directly or through family intermediaries in Indonesia. However, when efforts to preserve the marital unity fail, the decision to divorce becomes a last resort. This situation is further complicated if the spouse of an Indonesian migrant worker is involved in marriage or pregnancy with another party.

c. Financial Misuse

Earnings obtained by Indonesian Migrant Workers are not always enjoyed solely by the workers themselves. Instead, these earnings are often remitted to their families in Indonesia by transferring the money to the account of their spouse or family. However, these funds are sometimes misused by the spouse in Indonesia for extravagant spending and extramarital affairs. Despite the intention for these funds to fulfill the needs of the children and/or parents of the migrant worker while they are working abroad, this financial misuse often leads to frustration and resentment for the migrant worker. This may result in Indonesian Migrant Workers choosing divorce over allowing their children and/or families to be neglected by their spouses.

d. Pregnant Female Indonesian Migrant Workers

In addition to the above-mentioned causes, there are cases where the husband of a female Indonesian Migrant Worker objects upon learning that his wife, who works abroad, has become pregnant by another individual. As a result of this situation, husbands who are left behind by their wives working as Indonesian Migrant Workers often choose to divorce them.

Based on the aforementioned negative impacts, legal issues emerge, specifically the notable increase in divorce rates. For instance, in the research location, the divorce rate among Indonesian Migrant Workers within the jurisdiction of the Kajen Religious Court, Pekalongan Regency, Central Java, between the years 2016 to 2021, Dr. Nasokha, S.H., M.H., an advocate, legal consultant, and mediator in Pekalongan, stated that almost every year he handles at least one case in which one of the parties is an Indonesian Migrant Worker still working under an employment contract abroad. This indicates that being an Indonesian Migrant Worker does not exclusively result in positive outcomes, but also entails negative consequences, particularly affecting the integrity and harmony of households, leading to divorce.

The process of managing divorce is currently highly intricate for migrant workers; it's not uncommon for many migrant workers to take leave or temporarily leave their jobs only to handle divorce paperwork. For male migrant workers, the effective legal avenue for settling divorce cases is often through the female side. However, the ease that females obtain in this litigation process is sometimes exploited by pursuing a "Ghaib" (invisible) divorce route. A "Ghaib" divorce lawsuit, also known as "Cerai Ghoib" or "cerai talak Ghaib," is a lawsuit filed with the Religious Court by a petitioner to divorce the respondent, where the address or whereabouts of the respondent is unclear (unknown) until the lawsuit is filed. Such situations need to be noted and the government needs to play a role in ensuring legal protection.(Ula et al., 2020)

2. The Role of the Indonesian Government in Ensuring Legal Protection for Migrant Workers Seeking Divorce

a. Government Role Through Legal Policy

Legal policy or the configuration of democratic politics is highly anticipated within Indonesia's political framework, as it is expected to yield responsive legal products. (Imawanto et al., 2021) There exist various definitions of legal policy provided by experts in numerous literature sources. According to Prof. Dr. Moh Mahfud MD, legal policy is the official policy or line concerning the law that will be enforced, whether through new legal enactments or the replacement of existing laws, in order to achieve national objectives. Thus, legal policy represents a selection of laws to be enacted as well as those to be repealed or not enforced, all of which are aimed at achieving the state's goals as outlined in the Preamble of the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia. (Mahfud MD, 2014)

In Indonesia, the separation of powers consists of the legislative, executive, and judicial branches. (Mariyam et al., 2020) The legislative power is vested in the People's Consultative Assembly, which is directly elected by the people through political parties during legislative elections conducted by the government, overseen by the General Election Commission (at both central and regional levels). The legislative body embodies one of its essential functions, which is the creation of laws.

The selection of the People's Consultative Assembly is carried out through political parties, serving as the vessel or intermediary in the democratic process. Sovereignty lies with the people, and these sovereign individuals possess a collective will (referred to by Rousseau as *Volonté générale* or General Will) - the decisions taken by the legislative body represent an authentic reflection of the general will. Consequently, these decisions, whether policy or laws, are binding on the entire society. (Becker et al., 2015)

Indonesia's role in legal policy, as a means of safeguarding the rights, obligations, and well-being of Indonesian Migrant Workers, whether aspiring to, currently, or already engaged in work abroad, is evident through the enactment of Law No. 18 of 2017 concerning the Protection of Indonesian Migrant Workers.

In this political context, the Indonesian government, through the legislative body known as the People's Consultative Assembly, designs, creates, ratifies, and revises provisions for the divorce process for migrant workers, as stated in Law No. 7 of 1989 concerning Religious Courts. It is expected that this legislation will soften the requirements of divorce application or litigation procedures. This might involve acknowledging electronic documents and the like. Consequently, Indonesian Migrant Workers involved in divorce cases or divorce applications can engage in legal proceedings without physically appearing in the respective Religious Court, particularly during mediation sessions, as both parties are required to be present and can be represented by legal counsel or attorneys.

Thus, it can be concluded that the role of legal policy in this research serves as a framework to achieve the objectives of Indonesian Migrant Workers involved in divorce cases within the Religious Courts, achieved

through the establishment of Law No. 7 of 1989 concerning Religious Courts. This law is enacted to support the needs of Indonesian citizens, especially for Muslims, engaged in divorce cases within the Religious Courts, in alignment with the objectives of legal policy.

The role of legal policy in this context is aimed at assisting Indonesian Migrant Workers engaged in divorce cases within the Religious Courts to attain their objectives during legal proceedings. Through the legislative body, legal policy, in the form of Law No. 7 of 1989 concerning Religious Courts, is enacted. Furthermore, through international relations, the role of legal policy encompasses aiding the completion of documents required by Indonesian Migrant Workers engaged in divorce cases within the Religious Courts. This assistance involves the legalization of special power of attorney documents prepared by a Notary within the jurisdiction of the respective Religious Court.

b. Indonesia's Role in International Relations

One of Indonesia's roles in the pursuit of the welfare of Indonesian Migrant Workers engaged in overseas employment contracts is the ratification of several conventions concerning Migrant Workers. The ratification of these conventions stems from international labor organizations (ILO Conventions). International organizations are institutions formed through international agreements among two or more countries, outlining their functions, purposes, authorities, principles, and organizational structure. (Siahaan, 2021) Examples of international conventions concerning Migrant Workers are the International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention No. 97 of 1949 and ILO Convention No. 43 of 1975, along with the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, adopted by the General Assembly Resolution 45/158 of 18 December 1990.

Ratification is a process requiring approval by the country willing to participate. (Juwana, 2019) The establishment and endorsement of international agreements between the Government of Indonesia and other countries, international organizations, and other international legal subjects constitute a crucial legal act, as it binds the country to other international legal subjects. (Angela Riry, 2021)

The researcher posits that the ratification of international conventions related to Migrant Workers aims to uphold and safeguard the rights and obligations of Indonesian Migrant Workers on the international stage. Another role of the Indonesian Government in international relations, aiding the facilitation of administrative processes in divorce cases for Indonesian Migrant Workers still engaged in overseas employment contracts, is through the offices of the Republic of Indonesia's representatives (such as Consulates General and Embassies of the Republic of Indonesia) to legalize documents relevant to the proceedings, such as special power of attorney and extraordinary power of attorney documents.

Furthermore, these Indonesian representative offices (such as Consulates General and Embassies of the Republic of Indonesia) will also inform the Migrant Workers in the host countries about their divorce cases, while also offering solutions should any of the Indonesian Migrant Workers wish to consult about their encountered issues. However, even with established legal

protections as previously elucidated, further ease could be achieved in the future, particularly in terms of legalizing power of attorney documents which could potentially involve only family endorsement without the requirement of embassy involvement.

E. Conclusion

The phenomenon of migrant labor arises due to economic factors, low education, and limited job opportunities in Indonesia. The positive impacts of migrant labor include improved paid job opportunities abroad, higher earnings, the acquisition of new skills, and long-term benefits through remittances to alleviate household financial burdens, as well as investments and education. However, this phenomenon also brings negative impacts in the form of marital issues, especially divorce triggered by distance, infidelity, financial mismanagement, and complex situations when the migrant worker's spouse is involved with another party. Enhanced legal and social protections are required to address these negative effects, along with an awareness of the implications of the migrant labor phenomenon on family integrity. Although regulated in Law No. 7 of 1989 concerning Religious Courts, divorce issues remain intricate, necessitating further efforts to simplify administrative processes, such as legalizing power of attorney documents without embassy involvement, to avoid "cerai talak Ghaib" and administrative complexities.

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