

BARGAINING POSITION OF INDONESIAN WOMEN INTERNATIONAL MIGRANT LABORS

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Unemployment rate in Indonesia is recorded 57.93 percents of total productive-age populations, 208.54 millions people, in January 2022 (<https://www.unair.ac.id/2022/06/20>). Out of the unemployment rate existing, 39.52 percent or 57.97 million populations aged 15 and above who are working are women (BPS 2021). Considering the data of unemployment rate aforementioned, job seekers, particularly women, migrate abroad as Indonesian migrant workers, because they are not absorbed by the domestic job opportunities. The objective of research is to analyze the extent to which the Indonesian female migrant workers working abroad have appropriate skill. This research used descriptive method, literature study, and previous studies. The result of research showed that there are three categories of job the women can enter: housemaid, plantation (factory) worker, and nurse or other formal sector still with limited protection.

Keywords: female workers, abroad migration, skill

Background

Indonesia is the state with the fourth largest population number in the world, with 270 million populations, 208.54 millions of total population are at productive age. Out of the productive-age populations 8.40 millions are unemployed. Unemployment problem in Indonesia is due to labor forces unabsorbed by the job opportunity existing; thus unemployment problem will always appear and no appropriate formula has been found to deal with the unemployment in Indonesia until today. This condition is worsened by pandemic situation for about 2 years that increases the unemployment rate in Indonesia. Many businesses are forced to shut down leading to the increased number of people who lose their job due to work relation termination.

The attempt of dealing with unemployment problem by attracting investor to Indonesia, of course, found difficulty amid the bad connection of global economic growth due to COVID-19 and

geopolitical turbulence such as Ukrainian war and political tension in Asian and Pacific region. Amid uncertain and unpredictable condition, we should willy-nilly keep existent and wake up to get out of the crisis. Fortunately, as an agrarian state with fertile land, Indonesia can survive because the performance of agricultural factor supporting it through improving the farming productivity and thereby can suffice their need for food themselves and even export it to Saudi Arabia. This, of course, is fairly enlivening, because the worries about hunger endangering the world due to Covid-19 are not proved.

The improved performance of agricultural sector in short term can be savior of Indonesian nation's life, particularly the absorbed workforces in agricultural sector. But this expectation is too far, recalling that agricultural sector cannot absorb a large quantity of laborers. Although the moment of agricultural sector's performance can sufficiently be reliable to attract the young generation, particularly to occupy with agricultural sector, this condition is expected to create job opportunities into which the workforce can enter and to reduce the unemployment rate existing. The government tried to solve the constraint related to limited farmland by creating new farmland outside Java Island, with "food estate" farming management system.

The farming extensification program implemented has not been able to disentangle the unemployment problem entirely, recalling the imbalance between workforce growth rate and the availability of job opportunity. Moreover, the massive work relation termination due to the economic growth slowdown leads to the shutdown of large-scale companies that employ a large number of workers. The high number of workforces unabsorbed in both formal and informal sectors at home makes most job seekers turn their attention to the jobs abroad and migrate to many foreign countries to get better life, despite mediocre skill.

Being labor or worker in foreign countries with very limited protection and skill is a difficult choice, but many laborers, particularly women, do so. They enter into job sector that does not require adequate skill, and consequently they get menial job, limited protection and relatively low income. The job types like household assistant and plantation factory labor dominate the Indonesian female workers in foreign countries, and only very few of them can enter into administrative professions. The government's attempt of solving the problem related to the poor skill of Indonesian workers is taken through launching pre-employment card program. The "pre-employment" card program is intended to

improve the workers skill and the workers are expected to be more competitive and to enter job market. However, the pre-employment card program becomes less effective to the prospective migrant workers, because the types of job available in the destination states do not require much skill from the prospective workers. The more urgent needs of the migrant workers are guaranteed protection and certainty related to their rights, particularly the wage they receive.

The problem encountered by Indonesian workers, particularly female workers, in foreign countries is how to enable them to enter into job sectors needing skills such as nurse, office administrator, tourism sector, etc.

The types of job requiring skill need long process and time, while most

Indonesian job seekers have low skill currently; therefore, to enter into formal jobs requiring skill, Indonesian migrant job seekers cannot compete with those from other countries like Philippines who enter various job types in tourism sector.

Data cited from Agency of Indonesian Migrant Worker Protection (BP2MI) processed by Kompas' Research and Development Division shows total workers of 277 489 in 2019. Such condition decreases continuously to 72,624 in 2021, with 8 (eight) ranks of destination countries: Hongkong, Taiwan, Korea Selatan, Singapore, Japan, Arab Saudi, Italia and Malaysia. In addition to the limited mobility between states due to COVID-related restriction, the decrease in the number of migrant workers is due to the decreased demand for workers along with the subsiding Covid-19 case and the signs of world economic revival made the demand for migrant workers increases.

The increase in the demand for workers occurs in Malaysia today because this country encounters migrant worker scarcity in strategic sector and highly needs migrant workers from other countries, particularly Indonesia. Indonesian's bargaining position is so strong that Indonesian government can ask for the improvement of protection and certainty of working and wage received by the worker at least 1500 ringgit per month in addition to other facilities like passport for Indonesian migrant workers (Kompas: August 1, 2022, p. 15).

Viewed from the pay, the migrant workers receive pay higher than their counterparts at home. It can be seen from the Minimum Regional Pay of workers at home ranging between 1.8 millions in Regencies/Municipals to 3.9 millions Rupiah in Jabodetabek (Jakarta, Bogor, Depok, Tangerang, and Bekasi) region. Meanwhile, the pay received in neighbor state, Malaysia, is 1500 ringgit or around 5 million rupiah per month excluding other facilities. Such pay condition

of workers has occurred since 30 years ago, when the workers at home received only IDR 1350 per day or around 56 thousand Rupiah per month (Ken Suratiyah: 1991).

The stronger bargaining position of Indonesian migrant workers in Malaysia is a good and strategic beginning. This moment should be utilized to improve the bargaining position of Indonesian migrant workers touching skill aspects, either technical or foreign language ability, and to strengthen the migrant workers organization, in the attempt of internal consolidation. Crucial program pertains to security, health, and certainty aspects getting inadequate protection formally so far. The substantial meaning of migrant workers' bargaining position, in addition to maintaining dignity, can be winning the global competition for the job opportunities with the migrant workers coming from other countries. It is the job that cannot be done easily and needs a long process, and the most important point is the commitment from stakeholders including government, organization and migrant worker.

From the background, we formulate the research question as follows. With the large number of populations, Indonesia has not been able to get out of poverty problem, as characterized with the unemployment rate of 8.40 millions (BPS: February 22). Out of the figure, 39.52 percent are female workers. The factors causing unemployment in Indonesia is imbalanced population growth with the availability of job opportunities in Indonesia. Meanwhile, in other countries, particularly Malaysia, there is an increase in the number of migrant workers in formal and informal sectors, therefore, many Indonesian workers, particularly female workers that become migrant workers. Migrant workers are not equipped with adequate skill, leading to their low bargaining position. It results in minimum protection for the migrant workers. What attempt can be taken to improve bargaining position of Indonesian migrant workers?

Method

This research method employed qualitative approach. This research attempted to describe, to analyze, and to interpret how can the Indonesian female migrant workers not have good bargaining position leading to their weak protection and to the wage they received often

inconsistent with the contract. This research used literature study and finding of previous studies and did interview with International migrants who have gone back to Indonesia and those still in foreign countries like Mecca, Saudi Arabia.

Result and Discussion

This research builds on the findings of a previous study conducted by Sutoat (2005), entitled “Masalah sosial tenaga kerja wanita Indonesia di shelter KBRI Kuala Lumpur (Social problem of Indonesian female workers in shelter of RI’s Ambassador in Kuala Lumpur)”. The study found that the sources of problem encountered by female workers due to both internal and external factors are, among others: (a) limited briefing (technical skill); (b) skill quality and communication ability of female workers still below the average workers coming from other countries; and (c) female workers encounter big problem in adapting to work environment (culture shock). The effect of such condition generates various problems, including among others: violence, exploitation, employer’s cultural compulsion over female workers and the feeling of being stressed. This study recommended, among others: (1) the government should improve coordination with various elements, either public or private institution, in female worker dispatch, (2) female workers should be equipped with skill, particularly foreign language and technical skill before they go abroad, and (3) Social Department can do preventive, rehabilitative, and developmental functions. In this current research, the author focuses more on the weak protection over female migrant workers leading to the weak bargaining position of Indonesian migrant workers. This research, in addition to finding the solution to the problem encountered by Indonesian female workers, is expected to improve the bargaining position of Indonesian migrant workers.

Data shows that Indonesian workers’ migration to destination state departed from their economic interest and motivation to get job with tempting pay, just like the workers of Sawit (oil palm) Plantation in Malaysia who get 1500 ringgit per month or equivalent to IDR 5 million. Meanwhile, those working as household assistant, cleaning service officer, or library guard in Masjidil Haram in Saudi Arabia get IDR 5-7 million, compared with the construction workers coming from Bangladesh getting about IDR 7 million. The pay received by Indonesian migrant workers in foreign countries belongs to high category compared with that received by the workers at home, because migrant workers should unnecessary pay operational costs

like meal, transportation, and house rent cost, because they stay in their employer’s house or mosque. The problems arising when the migrant workers get bad employer are related to physical abuse. For that reason, the protection

of migrant workers should get serious attention from the government. The mechanism of preventive supervision is difficult to do and thereby it is done very minimally.

The protection of migrant workers, particularly female workers, becomes a serious problem often encountered by Indonesian migrant worker. The weak protection is characterized by the Indonesian migrant workers often not receiving the pay as agreed or experiencing sexual abuse or violence (particularly to female workers in foreign countries). To prevent negative excess on Indonesian female workers just like what has occurred in Malaysia, Indonesian government establishes joint working group to evaluate the implementation of MOU of the protection of Indonesian domestic sector-migrant workers in Malaysia routinely and periodically. The implementation of MOU is monitored and evaluated once in three months, and if any infringement of agreement occurs, moratorium will be enacted, just like what has been done in April to July 2022. Moratorium policy was implemented by Indonesian government over Indonesian domestic sector-migrant workers in Malaysia (Kompas, August 1, 2022, pp. 1 and 15). It indicates that the protection of Indonesian migrant workers is a means of improving the bargaining position of Indonesian migrant workers in foreign countries, through G to G approach and it is sufficiently effective to protect their interest.

Viewed from their income, the Indonesian migrant workers have higher income than domestic (non-migrant) workers, in both formal and non-formal sectors. The mean net income they can save and send to their family at home is about 5 millions per month and it becomes magnet to domestic (non-migrant) workers. It encourages the Indonesian workers to be migrant workers in many destination states, despite ignoring safety risk factor. The worker recruiter (calo) exploits this condition to make the workers illegal migrants, often harming the migrant workers. The portrait of migrant workers' success, viewed from income aspect, underlies the Indonesian workers' high enthusiasm with being migrant workers. From the result of interviews with migrant workers and migrant family, it can be summarized that "...I have made friends with many Indonesian female workers who work in other foreign countries than Saudi Arabia... they successfully improve their standard of life, their children's education level, this women works in (South) Korea, her two daughters were graduated from Brawijaya University, the elder one went to Australia to attend postgraduate education through scholarship, the little one is fighting for getting scholarship

to go to South Korea in order to see her parent (mother)”, said Unik Hg, via WA group on September 2022.

Discussion themed “The success of Indonesian Female Workers in foreign countries” reveals that the being migrant workers can improve their family welfare and life standard amid economic slowdown today.

Meanwhile, the states becoming the destinations of Indonesian migrant workers are Malaysia, Asia, Middle East, and European countries. Cited from Agency for the Protection of Indonesian Migrant Workers (BP2MI) processed by Research and Development Division of Kompas, there are eight state destinations of Indonesian Migrant Workers. The first is Saudi Arabia where 80 thousands migrant workers went in 2019; this condition decreased to 15,000 workers only in 2020 and then decreased again to about 10000 workers in 2021. The second is Hong Kong where 70 migrant workers went in 2019, decreasing to 53 thousands in 2020 and decreasing again to 52 thousands in 2021 and to 25 thousands in 2022. The third is Taiwan, where about 80 thousands workers went in 2019, decreasing to 35 thousands in 2020 and decreasing again to 8 thousands in 2021, and increasing to 19 thousands in June 2022. For the destination states like Japan, South Korea, Singapore, Italia, and Malaysia, the figure also decrease to less than 5 thousands up to June 2022. The very dramatic decrease in the number of Indonesian migrant workers is due to pandemic preventing the workers from entering into the destination states because of migrant flow shutdown. There is a trend of increase in the number of Indonesian migrant workers that make Taiwan and Singapore their destination. It is interesting to analyze the two destination states of Indonesian migrants, Saudi Arabian and Hong Kong that has not indicated the increase in the number of Indonesian migrant workers up to June 2022, meanwhile the two destination states have contributed most considerably to Indonesian migrant workers for many years. This condition of course reduces the amount of foreign exchange received and the contribution of migrant workers leading to the increased number of unemployment, although there is no parallelism between the return of migrant workers to home and the increased number of unemployment. It is because the most of migrant workers going back home become entrepreneurs, by utilizing their saving when they worked abroad. The author interviewed two workers who returned to Indonesian, becoming entrepreneurs by opening construction material shop in two areas of Sragen, Central Java and cellular phone service and counter in Boyolali Central

Java, both of which are not unemployed and no longer intend to go abroad again as the migrant worker.

This research focuses on improving the bargaining position of Indonesian migrant workers. The weakness they have is related to the limited skill they have; thus, they can enter into only the types of job not requiring skill, such as plantation worker (labor), household assistant and light administration. Consequently, they get relatively pay and very low protection, because they work in the work area with limited supervision that cannot be detected directly by the representative of Indonesian ambassador. The attempt taken by Indonesian government by obliging the employers to give cellular phone (handphone) as a communication tool to Indonesian migrant workers in Malaysia is intended to protect Indonesian Migrant workers in unexpected condition or situation.

The protection is also given through determining the minimum standard pay or wage of 1500 ringgit for Indonesian migrant workers in Malaysia. It is intended to make the workers not receiving any pays (haphazardly). Therefore, the expectation to improve the migrant workers' standard of life can be achieved. Furthermore, viewed from skill aspect, to fulfill the standard required by the destination state and to win the global competition with the workers coming from other countries such as Philippines and Bangladesh, Indonesian Government prepares prospective Indonesian migrant workers by giving them education and training through issuing pre-employment card program. This program is expected to equip the Indonesian migrant workers with various skills needed by the market before they are dispatched to foreign countries.

The protection for Indonesian migrant workers becomes a serious problem amid the improved global economic growth. After pandemic era, the demand for migrant workers increases. This moment should be used to improve the bargaining position of migrant workers, from administration system, wage increase, work system, and protection aspects. Director of Aceh Transparency House, Chrisna Akbar, stated on Kompas daily on September 23, 2022 that the case occurring in a migrant worker coming from Aceh indicates weakly the slavery practice in which they were forced to work out of the agreement, and even some of them died and their corpse were disposed to the sea.

Furthermore, in relation the protection, the female migrant workers are more vulnerable because they often encounter physical and sexual abuses.

CONCLUSION

1. An alternative taken by some Indonesian people to reduce the unemployment rate due to limited availability of job opportunities at home is to be migrant workers with the top 8 (eight) destination states: Saudi Arabia, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Korea Selatan, Japan, Singapore, and Malaysia.
2. The wage or the pay received by Indonesian migrant workers is 5-7 millions without spending money for local transportation, meal and house rent costs. Indonesian migrant workers can send about IDR 5 millions per month to their family in Indonesia. It is a substantial figure compared with what they will get when they work at home.
3. The types of job done by Indonesian migrant workers do not require high skill. They work as assistant, plantation labor, ship attendant, and light administration like library guard in the mosques in Saudi Arabia.
4. The weakness the Indonesian migrant workers have is related to poor technical skill, poor language ability, and difficulty of adapting to the destination state's culture, and inadequate protection pertaining to work system, payroll system, and physical and sexual abuses, particularly in female migrant workers.
5. The present of government is desirable either to protect the Indonesian migrant workers or to improve their skills in order to improve their bargaining position.

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Newspaper

Kompas, August 1, 2022

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Authors' Biography

Budiman Widodo was born on January 16, 1960. He was graduated from SD Negeri VI Boyolali (Elementary School) in 1972, SMPK Slamet Riyadi Boyolali (Junior High School) in 1979, and SMA Negeri 1 Boyolali (Senior High School) in 1979. He was admitted in Department of State Administration of FISIPOL-UGM and then graduated in 1985, with a graduate thesis entitled "Faktor-faktor yang mempengaruhi Adopsi Inovasi Pertanian (Factors Affecting Agricultural Innovation Adoption)". Then, he continued his education in Demographic Postgraduate Program – UGM and was graduated in 1999 with a thesis entitled "Pendapatan dan Kesempatan Kerja Industri Rumah Tangga di Pedesaan (Income and Job Opportunity of Home Industries in Rural Areas)". In 2005-2006, he enrolled in Master of Public Administration Program of UNDIP and graduated with a thesis entitled "Implementasi RUTRK-RDTRK Kecamatan Colomadu Kabupaten Karanganyar (The implementation of RUTRK-RDTRK in Colomadu Sub District, Karanganyar Regency)". In 2008-2012 he took Doctorate (S3) Program in FIA-UNIBRAW and graduated with dissertation entitled "Liberalisasi Kebijakan Tata Ruang Wilayah (Liberalization of Spatial and Regional Planning)". The author has dedicated his time as a lecturer of the Coordinating Body for Private Colleges Region VI Central Java DPK ASMI-Solo up to 2015, Postgraduate Program of Universitas Surakarta in 2015 until today with position of Assistant Professor (Indonesian: Lektor Kepala). The author participates actively in a variety of national seminar as both a participant and a presenter, in addition writes some articles in newspaper. The author's email address: budimanwidodo5@gmail.com.