



## **MIGRANTS IN NUSANTARA: INDONESIAN AND MALAYSIAN PERSPECTIVES**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The process of human migration between Indonesia and Malaysia has been running for hundreds of years. Only in modern times have the problem becomes more complex. Migration not only provides benefits for both countries, as remittance and development, but it also has a negative impact and creates problems such as the abuse of migrant workers or increase of irregular migrants. This paper attempts to identify the driving forces of migration and explore different types of migration from Indonesia to Malaysia. It is found that there are five pull-push factors of migration, namely; economic, demographical, social, environmental and political factors. The economic and demographical factors become the main causes of migration in the form of workers. The social factor of migration encourages Indonesians to study in Malaysian universities. The political and environmental factors, which are obvious among the Acehnese, include migrating to Malaysia in the form of refugees and asylum seekers. By exploring all factors of migration, this paper attempts to mapping out the human migration process for Indonesia to Malaysia.*

**Keywords:** Human migration, Indonesian worker, immigrant worker, immigrant factor, Malaysia

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

President Joko Widodo (Jokowi) wants to stop the Indonesian workers who become domestic workers (PRT) abroad immediately because it is related to self-esteem and dignity of the nation. This is the current development in Indonesian immigrant workers issues in Malaysia which has been undergoing a process of human migration for a long times. This indicates that the migration problem is the top priority for discussion among the two countries. Migration from Indonesia to Malaysia is not only a classical problem but also a current phenomenon which has a big implication and influences many sectors of life. One of the problems of migration is the migrant worker.

The fundamental reason is the huge number of migrants, in particular illegal migrants. Perhaps the world's second-largest, long-term undocumented migration flow, overshadowed only by the traffic between Mexico and the United States, is that between Indonesia and Malaysia. It is a movement whose history goes back to pre-colonial times and one that has reached very substantial levels over the last two decades (Hugo, 2007). Malaysia is the main

destination country for Indonesian migrants, in particular migrant workers, both for regular migrants and for irregular workers. Similarities in ethnicity, culture and language with Indonesia enable Indonesian workers to easily blend into Malaysian society. In June 2009, following a series of cases of abuse of Indonesian domestic workers in Malaysia, the Indonesian Government banned Indonesian nationals from migrating to Malaysia as domestic workers. Nevertheless, despite the ban, Malaysia continues to be a major destination for Indonesian labour migrants, and many migrate illegally as an unfortunate consequence of the ban. The ban is expected to be lifted in the near future when a new Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) is signed between the Indonesian and Malaysian Governments (IOM, 2010).

In addition to migration for work there is also another kind of migrant. These other migrants do so for factors of socio-cultural, environmental or political factors that also influence the two countries. But since the number of migrant workers is very large, it is natural that labour migration dominates the news. To explore factors of migration it is very interesting to understand the pattern of migration in Indonesia-Malaysia. Historically, the root of migration between the two countries has been going on for a long time period. This is the reason why discussions about migration between the two countries should include all of the factors of migration in order to get a complete picture of migration (Wekke, 2014).

This article aims to explain how it is important to explore the factors of migration as the main reason why migration occurs. Understanding the factors can help trace the root of the problem. It can also trace the expectation of migration as migration not only gives problems but also builds opportunities for both countries. In particular, in the global era, human mobility is made easier due to the cheapness of transportation connecting the world. The pattern of migration, however, has complex implications.

## **2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW**

The sections below discuss further the factors and effects of migration in Indonesia and Malaysia.

### **2.1 The factors of migration**

The phenomenon of migration is as old as humans. People move from one place to another following the necessities of life. Throughout history, as remains the case today, people have moved under conditions that were not typically of their own choosing. Even those under the most restrained and difficult circumstances, humans have navigated new social and cultural settings with determination and ingenuity. By adapting, innovating, and combining knowledge across cultural barriers, migrants have advanced the frontier of development since humans departed from Africa, some 50,000-60,000 years ago.

In earlier times, people moved without limitation as there were few national boundaries. The terms clan and tribe became a flexible pointer frontier of human migration. Now, in most parts of the world, the old distinction between clans and tribes is less significant than national boundaries. Migration now generally refers to moving across a national border, often with the purpose of settling for a period of time. Currently, migration is defined as ‘cross-border movement, and it has come to be seen as something to be managed – a cost to be minimised rather than an opportunity to be embraced’ (Goldin et al., 2011, p. 2).

Conceptually, migration is a spatial issue involving movements of people from their residential place to a new destination by crossing administrative borders for a certain period of time. Based on the coverage area, migration can be classified into internal (domestic) and international, and based on the time span, it can be categorised into life-time migration, current migration, and frequent (or circular) migration. Lifetime migrants are those born in a different place than their current place of residence. Current migrants are those who have migrated to a different place in the last five years or similar period. Frequent or circular migrants are those who move many times over a certain period of time. Moreover, based on the intention to stay, migration can also be grouped into temporary and permanent migration. These different time spans and intents are not strictly or uniformly imposed in the categorisation of migration in this paper, as official data are typically very unclear about definitions and criteria. This lack of clarity is unfortunate, since the economic and policy implications for each type and motivation for migration are very different. More interestingly, analyses or concerns on migration from the host country perspective often perceive migration as permanent, and as such to be a source of problems (in addition to potential benefits). On the other hand, from the perspective of migrants, migration is often seen as temporary, incorporating the expectation that migrants will return home to bring also the social, political and other remittances (i.e. better knowledge, skill, wider exposure, more experience etc.) in addition to financial flows remitted during the migration period (Guntur Sugiyarto, 2014; Wekke, 2013).

Moreover, migration needs to be understood as one part of a broader set of processes of social transformation, arising from major changes in global, political, economic, and social relationships (Cohen & Lemma, 2011). The Government Office for Science London (GOSL), has built on these previous frameworks by presenting a conceptual model to understand and assess the contextual effects of the environment and environmental change on human migration. Figure 1 is the original conceptual model from the GOSL (2011). The focus of the model resides with a set of “factors of migration,” and how these contextual characteristics may be influenced by climate change (See Fig. 1).

Furthermore to understand this model or this framework, a distinction is to be made between mobility and displacement. Displacement is defined as the movement that occurs in association with discrete events that challenge a household’s safety, security, or livelihoods. Displacement is involuntary or forced, often as a result of rapid onset of hazards. Mobility on the other hand is explicated as a proactive move to improve livelihoods and opportunities, is seen as an adaptation, and is typically voluntary and planned (GOSL, 2011). In this framework, the focus is on mobility, the decision of when to move and the motivation for that movement—the factors that drive migration.

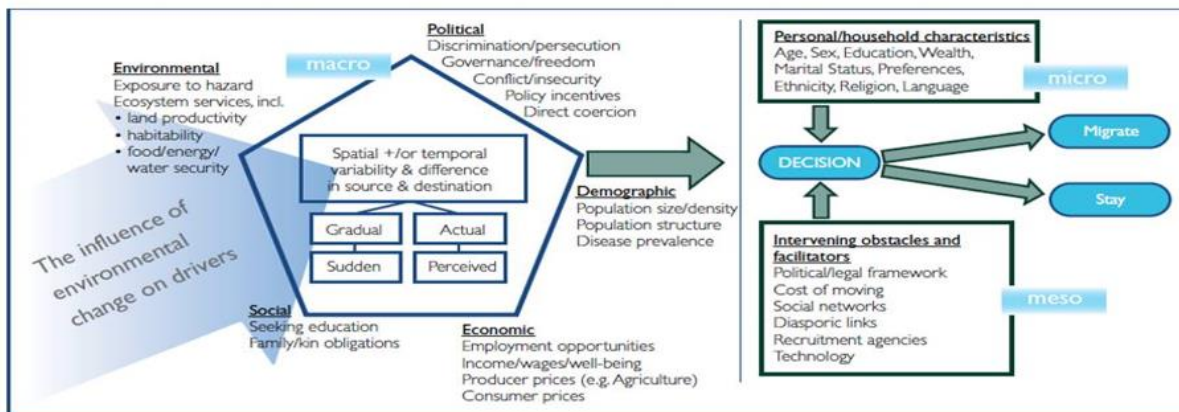


Figure 1: The factors of migration

(Source: Government Office for Science London (GOSL), 2011).

The five factors of migration, the push-pull factors<sup>1</sup>, as defined in this model include: economic factors, political factors, demographic factors, environmental factors, and social factors. It is the actual or perceived spatial and temporal differences in these dimensions that influence an individual or household's decision to migrate or to stay. Incorporating the spatial and temporal aspects of these dimensions, promotes the idea that a unique set of qualities can exist at any one time in any one context to affect each individual's decision on whether or not to migrate.

The first factor is *economic factors* including employment opportunities, income and wages, producer prices, and consumer prices. These factors have direct effects on migration, as described in the literature. For example, Ethiopian dependence on agriculture can impact the decision on whether or not to migrate as a result of changes in the price of farming-inputs such as fertiliser and seed. As input-prices increase, the return on investment will be influenced by environmental changes—changes in rainfall, drought, floods, even temperature and soil composition. Price volatility may therefore require households or individuals to seek employment opportunities in non-agricultural sectors, diversifying income and wages, thereby motivating a decision to migrate. The length of time, direction, and place of movement is linked to the personal circumstances of each migrant and may include social connections with people in the planned destinations, information derived from return-migrants, or assumptions created by individuals who perceive few options other than migration (Dana, 2012; Wekke, 2016).

The second factor is the *political factors* affecting the decision to migrate via a number of policy schemes including land tenure laws, taxation, and governance structures. Land tenure laws are such that each successive generation obtains parcels of land from their parents thereby decreasing overall land size for each family. Less land provides less ability to grow adequate food or to derive an adequate income to pay the government land-tax. Although individual families do not own their land—it is state owned—they must nonetheless pay tax

<sup>1</sup> *Push factors*: concepts that make people migrate out of a country. These include but are not limited to: overpopulation, religious persecution, lack of job opportunities, agricultural decline, conflict, political persecution, natural hazards (e.g., droughts, floods, famines, volcanic eruptions), limits of personal freedom, and environmental degradation. *Pull factors*: concepts that make people want to migrate to a particular country. These include but are not limited to: religion, economic opportunity, land availability, political freedom, ethnic and family ties, and arable land.

on the land every year. Poverty, including land poverty, as a result of rural-land laws, alone may be a significant, if not one of the most significant factors to push migration.

The third factor: *demographic factors* of migration affect an individual's decision to migrate as a function of how it interacts with other factors, specifically economic factors. Black et al. (2011) argue that it is not the presence of a large number of people in a region that triggers outmigration, but rather it is the presence of a large number without access to employment, to land, or to livelihood opportunities; often a problem encountered by the young. Thus, the demographic characteristics of a region will influence who moves in response to economic factors, but may also be affected by the burden of disease or ill-health within a community. In communities with few health and medical resources, out-migration may be influenced by a prevalence of disease such that individuals must migrate to cities for treatment. Similarly, the demographics of a receiving area, such as a city, may affect the demand for jobs and employment opportunities such as labour-work, which increase the perceived attractiveness of that area, as compared to the region of origin.

The fourth factor: *social factors* of migration include family and cultural expectations or practices regarding inheritance, and according to Black et al. (2011), it is the search for educational opportunities. Social factors are influenced by political factors as inheritance of land, cattle, and other assets while often based on social norms, is also affected by political schema, particularly for land. While historically, students migrate internationally for educational purposes, internal migration in Ethiopia for students of primary and secondary school age does not appear to result from the desire for education, as most students prefer to learn in their village of origin. In some specific cultures, migration is seen as a key part of social and cultural development, and to elucidate that cultural norm from some of the other factors may in fact be a difficult task (Tacoli, 2009).

This model asserts that the largest effect of social factors is on the destination migrants choose. "Gravity models" of migration indicate that there exists an interaction between economic and social factors as push and pull factors in the decision to migrate (GOSL, 2011). Migration networks—a form of social network, can be formal through agencies, or information through kin networks. Past migration and migration of family members or friends can be a good predictor of future migration. Similarly, remittance flows can aid in the maintenance of family connections as well as provide resources that sustain livelihoods for those staying behind. According to these models, social factors can provide a backdrop to understand how and why opportunities to migrate are not evenly distributed.

The fifth factor: *environmental factors* of migration affect a population's exposure to hazards that may influence the decision to migrate as well as affect the availability of ecosystem services and the ability of the environment and ecosystem to absorb, regulate, or provide for human well-being. Rapid-onset environmental events such as floods, tsunamis, landslides, earthquakes, wildfires, and volcanic eruptions prompt migration or displacement. Displacement tends to be short distance, are short-lived, and return often occurs after the event has passed given a sufficient level of environmental and political stability. In some cases, when the severity of the damage is too great, displaced people may never return, usually because their home or livelihood has been destroyed or because of a fear of repeat events. Availability, stability, and access to ecosystem services are ways in which livelihoods and well-being are directly affected by environmental changes. Accordingly, changes in ecosystem service access affect the decision to migrate and can be threatened by rapid onset events, but is typically affected by slow onset environmental conditions such as droughts, soil

erosion, salinisation, and other land/climate degradation which reduce productivity and instigate short-term mobility for an alternative source of income (GOSL, 2011).

As noted earlier, mobility can be seen as part of an adaptive response strategy to maintain household well-being by diversifying a household's livelihood portfolio. While both rapid and slow-onset environmental changes may trigger displacement and mobility, for whom, where, and when migration occurs is often determined by the socio-economic context of these individuals or households (Eriksen et al., 2005; Henry et al., 2004).

## 2.2 Indonesian migrants in Malaysia

Actually when discussing human migration from Indonesia to Malaysia, history will be the key witness that the migration process has lasted a long time between these nations. The concept of "Nusantara" (see Anwar, 2016) could perhaps be a measure of human migration due to various factors such as economics and similarities of social measures such as language, culture, and ethnicity. Human migration has increased exponentially in modern times, encouragement by the Information, Communication and Technology (ICT) revolution.

According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the flow of Indonesian domestic workers into Malaysia can be seen as a structural phenomenon driven by *economic and demographic* disparities within the region. Malaysia is the top destination in South-East Asia for Indonesian migrants, the majority of whom are women employed as domestic workers, nannies, and elderly care workers (IOM 2010). Qualitative studies have shown that the main driving factors behind this type of migration are often economic (Ford, 2001; Human Rights Watch, 2005; Anggraeni, 2006; IOM, 2010). Pay differentials provide a strong incentive for these women to migrate abroad in order to improve their livelihoods and social status.

As illustrated in Table 1, high levels of unemployment and underemployment in Indonesia also make it difficult for individuals (particularly women) to seek job opportunities locally.

Table 1: Economic indicators for Indonesian and Malaysian migrants

Indicator	Year	Indonesia	Malaysia
Population (millions)	2010	232.5	27.9
GDP per capita (USD)	2008	2,246	8,209
Unemployment rate (% of labour force)	2009	7.7	5.0
Female population with at least secondary education (% ages 25 & older)	2010	24.2	46.7
Human Poverty Index (HPI) rank	2007	69	25

(Source: UNDP Human Development Report, 2010)

Malaysia has experienced significant labour shortages in the low-wage sector since the late 1970s, owing to its state-led industrialisation programme – namely, the New Economic Policy (NEP) between 1971 and 1990, and the National Development Policy (NDP) between 1991 and 2000 – which sought to diversify the nation's economy through export promotion and the establishment of an educated workforce (Chin, 2002; Kaur, 2010). In these destination areas, rapid industrialisation and an increase in women's participation in the

workforce resulted in a steady rise in the number of dual-income families, which was accompanied by a strong demand for migrant domestic workers who served as paid substitutes for the social reproductive labour needed within these middle-class households (Huang & Yeoh, 1996).

Meanwhile, Indonesia is the biggest country in the region in terms of area, population and labour force. It is also the biggest economy based on GDP. Yet per capita income in Indonesia is considerably lower than in its faster-growing neighbours, Malaysia and Singapore, and this has induced substantial migration from Indonesia to its neighbours. Indonesia is a quintessential labour-surplus nation. At the end of 2006, an estimated 11 per cent of Indonesian workers (11.6 million) were unemployed, and underemployment was over 20 per cent (45 million workers) (Hugo, 2007). This is the reason why human migration to Malaysia cannot be avoided since the economic and demographic factors act as a trigger.

Table 2: Placement of Indonesian labour migrants in year 2009

No.	Destination Country	Total
1.	Malaysia	222,198
2.	Singapore	37,496
3.	Brunei Darussalam	5,852
4.	Hong Kong SAR	29,973
5.	Republic of Korea	3,830
6.	Japan	96
7.	Taiwan Province of China	50,810
8.	Saudi Arabia	257,217
9.	Kuwait	25,756
10.	UAE	28,184
11.	Bahrain	2,267
12.	Qatar	10,449
13.	Jordan	12,062
14.	Oman	7,150

(Source: *The National Authority for the Placement and Protection of Indonesian Overseas Workers, 2009*).

Economic reasons drive the majority of Indonesian labour migrants to migrate abroad, to improve the economic status of themselves and their families. High levels of unemployment and underemployment in Indonesia push many individuals to look for jobs outside their area of origin and many may decide to go abroad after hearing about the availability of jobs from recruitment agents and social networks and the higher salaries on offer abroad in countries such as Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, Hong Kong SAR, Kuwait, Singapore and the United Arab Emirates (see Table 2). Many individuals, especially women, see migration abroad as the only way out of poverty for them and their families. Most workers therefore migrate with the intention of working abroad for only a limited period of time in order to save enough money to purchase a house, open a business or send their children or relatives to school. Although

labour migration from Indonesia is characterised as temporary because few migrants leave with the intention of settling in the destination country, they generally do not have the opportunity to stay even if they change their mind. Nevertheless, due to the high costs often associated with securing overseas employment, temporary labour migration often turns into a stay that is longer than expected and may last several years.

### 2.3 Illegal migration in Malaysia

Another major challenge facing Indonesia and Malaysia is irregular migration. There are several categories of foreigners who can be considered irregular status, and not all of them are migrant workers. Generally, foreign nationals who fall under any of the following categories are classified as “irregular” or “undocumented migrants”: (1) unauthorised entry and employment; (2) authorised entry but unauthorised employment; (3) authorised entry and employment but work permits invalidated; (4) refugees; and (5) children of undocumented migrants or refugees born in Malaysia but whose births were not registered with the relevant authorities (Kanapathy, 2008).

Estimating the size of the migrant population in the country is a rather slippery task as the number in irregular status varies drastically. Moreover, defining the term “irregular” or “unlawful” migration itself is fraught with difficulties, especially in the case of Sabah which has a unique migration experience. Official estimates of undocumented migrants in the Peninsula has sunk to as low as 400,000 immediately following an amnesty and subsequent crackdown by the authorities and has peaked to over a million when there is a lapse in enforcement. In a comparative recent period, the estimate of the total number of irregular migrants in Malaysia (mostly from Indonesia and the Philippines) ranges from 600,000 to 1.9 million (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2012). There are 300,000-350,000 Indonesian migrant workers in Sabah, 70% of which are working in plantations and are undocumented. In the first quarters of this decade, Malaysia has some 2.2 million documented foreign workers, almost 20 per cent of Malaysia’s workforce. Approximately the same number is undocumented (*Trapped the Exploitation of Migrant Workers in Malaysia*, 2010). More than 70 per cent of the undocumented workers are from Indonesia. In other words, the incidence of irregular migration in Malaysia is relatively high compare to its neighbours.

In the initial years, illegal entry and employment was more common, especially among the Indonesians and the Filipinos entering Sabah. However, with the increase in border surveillance, irregular migrants are predominantly those who enter the country lawfully under different visa conditions but overstay. About half of the Indonesians who entered Sabah under a tourist visa between 1996 and February 2003 failed to return home upon the expiry of their visa (Azizah Kassim, 2004). The Malaysian Home Minister estimated that in late 2006 there were around 600,000 unauthorised migrant workers in Malaysia (most of them Indonesians) despite periodic sweeps, deportations, and amnesties. Prospective labour migrants enter Malaysia via ferries leaving Batam in the Riau Archipelago. They gain entry as tourists through Plunggur in the southwest of the Malay Peninsula by showing they have RM1000 (US\$320). There are other points of entry in West and East Malaysia where a similar process applies (Hugo, 2007).

From the above figures it is clear that migrant workers and irregular migrants, as a result of migrant workers problems, are a result of economical and demographical factors. The amount is so large that it becomes a serious burden for the government of Indonesia and Malaysia. Based on the explanations above, migration to Malaysia is influenced by

economics and demographics. To solve this problem, both countries have to involve all stakeholders and society. Sending unprepared workers would create a big problem in the future. On the other hand, Malaysia as a destination country should ban cheap and illegal workers that will increase irregular migrants. Pull and push factors can be used as an effective analysis to capture the problem.

## **2.4 Social factors and education sector**

This sector is interesting to be discussed as many Indonesians want to migrate to Malaysia not only for studying but also for teaching. Indonesian lecturers<sup>2</sup> also seek their fortune in Malaysia. Based on the personal communication with the Education Attaché of the Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia in Kuala Lumpur, Rusdi MA, there are about 4,000 citizens of Indonesia who are lecturers and researchers at universities in Malaysia. They are spread throughout the entire country in places, such as Selangor, Johor, Kedah or Melaka with varying amounts. The involvement of the Indonesian lecturers in universities covers the areas of research and teaching, but the strategic positions in campus are still held by Malaysian citizens (Kremer, 2011).

Meanwhile, the Indonesian students<sup>3</sup> studying at universities in this country, both public and private universities, is quite a lot and includes students at the undergraduate and postgraduate level. Based on data from the Indonesian Embassy in Kuala Lumpur, the number of Indonesian students in Malaysia in the first quarters of this decade is still quite numerous, especially in 2008 when it reached 14,359. In 2009, the number of students dropped to 10,392, but by 2010 (to May) it rose again to 13,627 students. There are several reasons Indonesian students study in Malaysia as it is cheaper in cost compared to Europe and the United States, language and culture are similar and the ease of public transportation that facilitates their learning activities (Kremer, 2011).

## **2.5 Environmental and political factors**

Human migration is also caused by political factors known as political refugees. The number of refugees from Indonesia to Malaysia is dominated by the Acehnese who fled from conflict areas. Data held by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) show at least 20,000 people entered Malaysia as political refugees. They were given the IMM 13 Card by the Government of Malaysia. IMM 13 Card is issued under the Malaysian Immigration Regulations 1963. Children under 18 years old are listed as a dependent under their parents. The goal is that they can live in Malaysia. The card is only valid for two years and ended in June, 2007. The approach of the Acehnese leaders to the Government of Malaysia has been done to clarify the status of their stay and also certainty to extend the IMM 13 documents that will soon expire (Gatra, 2007; Lesser et al., 2012).

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<sup>2</sup> According to Kanapathy (2008), lecturer profession can be categorised as expatriate. This group includes all professional and technical migrant workers who earn a monthly salary of not less than RM3,000. Expatriates are allowed to bring in their dependents. The spouse and children of expatriates are issued the Dependents Pass, while the others accompanying the expatriate such as parents or in-laws are issued the Social Visit Pass.

<sup>3</sup> They are mostly enrolled in tertiary institutions. In 2006, there were 55,912 foreign students. The top three sending countries included (17.4 percent), China (14.5 percent) and Bangladesh (14.0 percent). See <http://www.imi.gov.eng/perkhidmatan/>, in Kanapathy (2008).

The Tsunami which killed 200,000 people in Aceh province encouraged the migration of humans in the form of refugees to Malaysia. As many as 25,000 people were placed in Malaysia as refugees and given a Tsunami card as their identity card. However, after a peace agreement between the Indonesian government and the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) in Helsinki in 2005, the Malaysian government asked them to return to Aceh. The reason for incomplete reconstruction in Aceh cannot be accepted as a concrete reason (Wekke, Gunaisah, & Suyatno, 2015).

### 3.0 CONCLUSION

Understanding human migration between Indonesia and Malaysia has been going on for hundreds of years involves being aware of the root causes that drive the migration process. Migration pressure faced by the two countries is complex. Exploring the factors of migration can help a thorough understanding of the process and the problem of human migration.

The factors of migration, such as political, economic, demographical, environmental and social factors, are important to be shown as a holistic explanation in migration. This overview will help to underline the problems that exist. As explained above, economic and demographical factors are the main factors of migration which encourage migration between Indonesia and Malaysia. This requires consistent cooperation between the two countries, in particular between both governments. If they want to resolve the problems that arise, in particular, the issue of irregular migration or violence toward migrant workers, strong cooperation with the involvement of NGOs is required.

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