

# Post-Pandemic COVID-19 Migration Policy: Adaptation and Resilience in Developing Countries (Case Study: Indonesian Migrant Worker Policy)

Siti Nurtina

University of Bina Mandiri Gorontalo

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## Article Info

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## ABSTRACT

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The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on international migration patterns and policies, especially in developing countries that have a high dependence on migrant workers. This study aims to examine how migration policies in developing countries such as Indonesia adapt and demonstrate resilience post-COVID-19 pandemic. This research method uses a qualitative study with a case study approach from one developing country, using a textual study method by analyzing secondary data from various related literature. The results of the study show that the pandemic has driven policy changes that are more responsive to health and economic emergencies, as well as strengthening migrant protection mechanisms. However, there are still challenges in implementing policies, especially related to cross-sector coordination and resource constraints. This study concludes that post-pandemic migration policy adaptation requires a more flexible and inclusive approach to increase the resilience of migration systems in developing countries. The implications of this study are expected to be a reference for policy makers in formulating more effective and sustainable migration strategies in the future.

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## Corresponding Author:

Name: Siti Nurtina

Institution: University of Bina Mandiri Gorontalo

Email: [sittinurtina92@ubmg.ac.id](mailto:sittinurtina92@ubmg.ac.id)

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

International migration is a socio-economic phenomenon that continues to develop and makes an important contribution to development in many countries, especially developing countries. International migration occurs because population growth is not balanced by growth in opportunities and availability of jobs. Limited domestic jobs, followed by an increase in the workforce and increasing demand for labor in developed countries, and the availability of labor in developing countries make the flow of labor

migration abroad a factor that causes international migration activities to experience a significant increase [1].

In response to the sudden and rapid spread of the pandemic, the World Health Organization (WHO) issued guidelines to curb the spread of the virus and prevent human-to-human transmission. Meanwhile, migration and border security policies in Indonesia have been adjusted to the global situation as governments in major countries have implemented initiatives to lock down and close their international borders. The

Indonesian Immigration Agency or the Directorate General of Immigration (Direktorat Jenderal Imigrasi) launched new immigration policies in response to the crisis such as movement of people and travel restrictions for Indonesian citizens and foreign visitors. From March to May 2020, the Directorate General of Civil Aviation issued a series of regulations on visa policies, stay permit policies, immigration controls at the border, passport services, then revised several times, revoked and discontinued the previous ones, and announced new revisions to the regulations.

[2] In this case, the government migrant workers are often the main source of foreign exchange and support family welfare and the national economy. [1] However, the COVID-19 pandemic that has hit the world since the end of 2019 has had a very significant impact on migration patterns and policies, especially for countries sending migrant workers. This pandemic has brought unprecedented disruption to migration patterns, and Indonesia is no exception. This includes: severely restricted international travel, closed borders, mobility restrictions, and economic crises, which have caused major disruptions in the mobility of migration flows, as well as posing various challenges for migrants and governments. Many migrant workers face immediate challenges, including job loss, repatriation issues, and health issues [3].

Early in the pandemic, the response focused on containment and ensuring the safety of citizens, both at home and abroad. This period highlighted vulnerabilities in the existing migration framework and the urgent need for more effective and adaptive policies. The sudden halt in mobility exposed the dependence of various sectors on migrant labor and the economic impact of disrupted remittances. [4] In this situation, developing countries must immediately adjust their

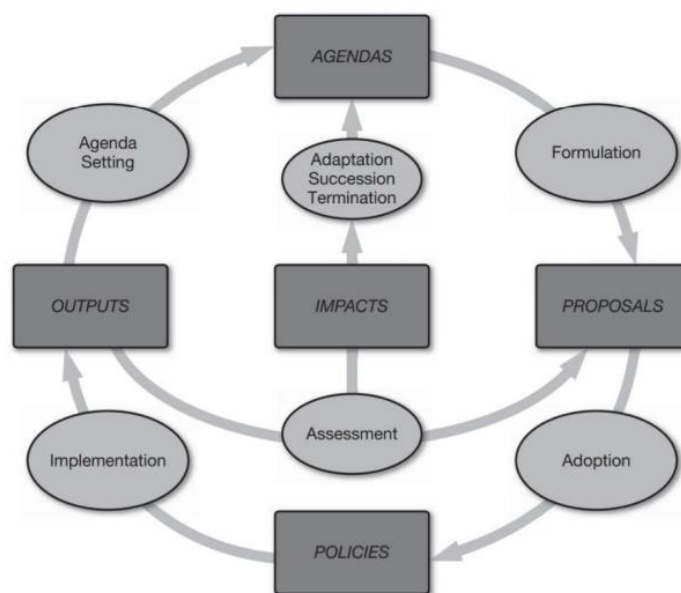
migration policies to respond to rapid and unexpected changes. Effective policy adaptation is key to maintaining the sustainability of migration, while still protecting the rights and welfare of migrant workers. In addition, policy resilience, namely the ability to adapt, survive, and recover from a crisis, is an important aspect that needs to be studied in depth [5].

Given the existing phenomenon, this study aims to analyze how developing countries, especially Indonesia, manage their migration policies post-COVID-19 pandemic, with a focus on the adaptation and resilience strategies implemented. This study has relevance. First, it will provide insight for policy makers in formulating migration policies that are in accordance with actual conditions and community needs. Thus, it is expected to produce policies that are more resilient and responsive to global dynamics in the future. Second, it will help in understanding the contribution of migrants to economic recovery, paying attention to the social and economic impacts of the resilience policies implemented.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 *Public Policy Theory and Adaptation*

Public policy is a response of a political system through government power to the problems of society. In other words, public policy is a government decision to solve public problems. [6] Public policy is a series of government decisions and actions designed to address public concerns. [7] In a crisis context, such as a pandemic, policy adaptation becomes important to ensure that policies remain relevant and effective. According to Lindblim (1959), the policy-making process under conditions of uncertainty tends to be incremental, where changes are made gradually and reactively [8].



Sumber: Dunn, (2015)

Figure 1. Stages in the Policy Cycle

Meanwhile, the theory of policy adaptation emphasizes the need for rapid adjustment to changing conditions. [9] Policy adoption is an activity aimed at ensuring that the chosen policy gains support from stakeholders so that they agree and are willing to adopt the chosen policy. Policy adaptation is an activity carried out as a recommendation for policy assessment.

## 2.2 *International Migration and Policy in Developing Countries*

International migration has a significant contribution to the economy of developing countries, especially through remittances. International labor migration is those who leave their homeland to fill jobs in other countries. This migration certainly provides many benefits, especially in economic terms. According to data from [5], remittances to developing countries reach hundreds of billions of dollars per year and this is an important source of national income. Migration policies in developing countries usually include placement systems, legal protection for migrants and bilateral cooperation with destination countries. However, this policy framework is often not responsive enough to global crises such as pandemics [10].

## 2.3 *The Concept of Resilience in Migration Policy*

Resilience in policy refers to the capacity of a system to adapt, survive, and change positively in response to disruptions or stresses. In the context of migration, resilience encompasses not only a country's response to a crisis, but also how policies protect migrants, strengthen institutional systems, and maintain economic sustainability. Countries with strong institutions and inclusive migration systems tend to be more resilient to global crises [11].

## 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach to describe in depth how developing countries adjust their migration policies post-COVID-19 pandemic. This approach was chosen because it is able to capture complex social, political, and economic dynamics and provides space for contextual analysis of public policies. [12] This research focuses on one developing country, namely Indonesia, which has a significant dependence on labor migration. The selection of countries is based on criteria such as the volume of international migrants, the impact of the pandemic on migration, and the availability of policy data. Sources of data

collection use secondary data in the form of academic journal articles, policy documents, official government and international agency reports (ILO, IOM) and trusted media reports.

#### 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The COVID-19 pandemic has drastically changed the dynamics of global migration. Strict travel restrictions, border closures, and economic crises in destination countries have led to a sharp decline in international migration flows. Many migrant workers are stranded abroad, facing limited access to healthcare, financial hardship, and job losses. Developing countries, which are sending countries of migrant workers, have been particularly affected by the pandemic. Remittances, an important source of income for many families and even countries, have fallen significantly. In addition, the mass repatriation of their nationals poses major logistical and socio-economic challenges, including the provision of accommodation, healthcare, and reintegration into the domestic labour market [13].

In response to the challenges of the pandemic, Indonesia immediately implemented significant policy changes to manage migration flows and protect its citizens both at home and abroad. These adaptations include stricter entry and exit protocols, mandatory quarantine measures, regional lockdowns, and stricter health screening for all arrivals. Meanwhile, for Indonesian Migrant Workers (PMI), the government focuses on facilitating safe repatriation, a temporary moratorium, establishing new protocols for the return of PMI working abroad, and providing social assistance for them. The government also initiated digital solutions for migration management, simplifying the visa application process, work permits, monitoring migrant welfare, and international cooperation. [3] These changes aim to balance public health needs with economic needs and human rights considerations.

In response to the unprecedented challenges, developing countries have adapted their migration policies. The main

focus is on protecting citizens abroad and managing safe and orderly repatriation. Several countries have set up special task forces to facilitate the repatriation of their citizens, provide consular assistance, and negotiate with destination countries. [14] At the domestic level, adaptive policies include providing support for returning migrant workers, such as retraining programs, financial assistance, and quarantine facilities. Some countries are also exploring diversification of migration destinations and development of domestic labor markets to reduce dependence on international migration [15].

##### *4.1 Migration Policy Changes During and After the Pandemic*

Government policy is essentially a policy aimed at the public in the broadest sense (the state, society in various statuses and for the public interest), whether it is carried out directly or indirectly which is reflected in various dimensions of public life. Therefore, public policy is often referred to as public policy. One of the public policies of the Indonesian government is regarding the migration policy of migrant workers. [16] Developing countries experienced significant changes in migration policies during and after the COVID-19 pandemic due to a combination of economic, social, political and health factors.

##### **A. During the COVID-19 Pandemic**

##### **1. Moratorium on Manpower Dispatch**

The Indonesian government, at the beginning of the pandemic, imposed a moratorium on sending workers in response to the global health crisis. A moratorium means a temporary cessation of the placement or sending of Indonesian Migrant Workers (PMI) to other countries. This policy was issued by the government through the Ministry of Manpower or the Indonesian Migrant Workers Protection Agency (BP2MI). This

moratorium aims to: First, protect the rights and safety of workers from exploitation, violence, or human rights violations; Second, suppress illegal sending and encourage legal and more controlled placement; Third, improve the governance of labor migration, including negotiating bilateral agreements with destination countries; finally, provide time to evaluate the migrant worker placement and protection system [17].

However, post-pandemic, this policy was gradually revoked and replaced by a new policy that emphasizes occupational health and safety (K3) standards, as well as improving document inspection and quarantine procedures for incoming and outgoing migrants. This policy shows a form of rapid adaptation to new conditions, although there were initial implementation obstacles, such

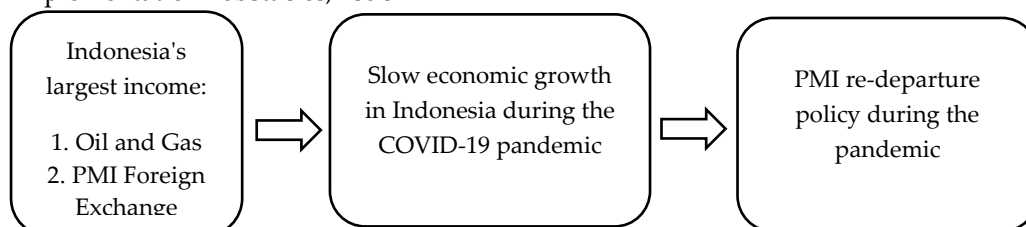


Figure 2. Flowchart of Policy Formulation Process During Pandemic

In the scheme above, it can be seen that PMI remittances are the second largest contributor to income in Indonesia. During the pandemic, PMI in the host country were still able to contribute quite large remittances. The problem that arises and must be resolved immediately is regarding the rate of the economy during the pandemic. The government in resolving this problem has reopened the PMI departure route with the hope that the remittances generated will

as lack of infrastructure and delays in coordination between institutions [18].

## 2. Return of Labor

The supporting factors that are the reason why the government finally re-departed PMI during the pandemic were due to the large amount of PMI remittances and also came from several problems currently being faced by the Indonesian government. PMI are the second largest contributor of income for Indonesia after oil and gas, the remittances generated if calculated as a whole can reach a value of 159.6 trillion per year. However, when the pandemic hit, the amount of remittances generated decreased, previously in 2019 PMI was still able to contribute income of US\$ 11.43 billion and decreased in 2020 which was only able to generate US\$ 9.4 billion [3].

increase and be able to overcome economic problems during the pandemic and reduce the number of unemployed. If viewed rationally, the PMI's foreign exchange source is more profitable than relying on the oil and gas sector, why is that because people's purchasing power and demand are still weakening so that the oil and gas sector will also be affected by the decline, while from the PMI sector there is an increase in demand for departures from people affected by layoffs.

[3] Thus, a policy was formed for the re-departure of migrant workers during the pandemic by implementing new habit adaptations.

## B. Post Pandemic

Several key policy areas have been central to Indonesia's adaptation efforts in managing migration.

### 1. Health and Safety Protocols

There are several Indonesian government policies related to health and safety protocols for Indonesian Migrant Workers in the post-COVID-19 pandemic phase. These policies include implementing vaccination requirements, strict health checks, quarantine procedures for migrant workers entering and leaving the country. Here are some policies issued by the government [16].

First, the issuance of a circular and official regulation of BP2MI and the Ministry of Manpower, namely BP2MI Circular Letter No. 14/2020 (August) stipulates that all stages of PMI placement must comply with strict health protocols, including CPR tests before departure and upon arrival in the destination country, and does not charge PMI for the test. Furthermore, this policy is derived from the Minister of Manpower Decree No. 294/2020 which reopens PMI placement selectively with the following conditions: departure only to countries that are ready to accept foreign workers with good health protocols [19].

Second, there is a Cleanliness Package & Hygiene Kits. BP2MI and IOM work together to distribute hygiene kits such as masks and sanitizers to prospective returning PMI, this is

to support safe migration and prevent the transmission of COVID-19. Third, it is ensured that all BP2MI officers including regional BP3MI employees receive COVID-19 booster vaccinations as a measure to protect officers who serve PMI directly. Fourth, New Normal, the placement of PMI is again carried out with adjustments in the era of adapting to new habits following the Circular of the Minister of Health No. 332/2020, including quarantine at Wisma Atlet with the KKP protocol and BP2MI services during quarantine [20].

### 2. Digitalization of Services

The pandemic accelerated the adoption of technology in migration management and accelerated the development of migration-related services, training, consular assistance, and including recruitment. For example, Digital Platforms for repatriation registration, health information dissemination. Digital Remittance to facilitate digital remittance delivery. Then, Tele-Consultation applications and online services are also important to support stranded migrants. The use of Big Data and artificial intelligence is also being explored to predict post-pandemic migration patterns and identify urgent needs. However, challenges related to technology accessibility and data privacy remain concerns that need to be addressed [21].

There are several policies that have been issued by the government regarding the digitalization of services for all PMI. These policies can be seen briefly in the table.

Table 1. Indonesian Government Service Digitalization Policy for PMI

No.	Policy	Short Description	Objective
1.	Digitalization of PMI Placement Management	Integrated digital system between Indonesia and the destination country.	Safe, secure and targeted placement.
2.	Cyber Surveillance of Illegal Recruitment	Closing illegal accounts and sites, digital fraud education.	Prevent non-procedural PMI & online fraud.
3.	Digitalization of Immigration Services	Immigration applications (ITOL, DASHKIM, APITEL, etc.) for digital verification and licensing.	Ease of service, preventing passport misuse.
4.	Digital Literacy & Cyber Security Training	Education on the use of official applications and fraud prevention.	Enhancing PMI's digital capabilities.
5.	National Digital Transformation	Development of digital infrastructure & internet networks.	Their access to public digital services.

3. International Cooperation

The pandemic has highlighted the importance of regional and international cooperation in managing migration. Developing countries are actively participating in global forums to share experiences and develop common responses. This can be strengthened through bilateral and multilateral agreements with destination countries. This cooperation is to guarantee protection in the destination country, such as by facilitating repatriation, providing humanitarian assistance, and ensuring the protection and rights of migrant workers [22].

International

organizations such as the IOM and ILO are also increasing their support to developing countries, providing technical expertise, financial assistance, and facilitating dialogue between countries. Strengthening these frameworks of cooperation will be key to building a more resilient migration system in the future [23].

Indonesia's international cooperation regarding the protection and placement of Indonesian migrant workers after the COVID-19 pandemic can be seen in the table.

Table 2. PMI International Cooperation

No.	International Partners	Form of Cooperation and Year	Focus
1.	IOM & ILO (Tripartite) [24]	P3MI accreditation system workshop (2025)	Ethical & transparent recruitment, gender protection and improved governance.
2.	JWG Malaysia	JWG 4 Meeting in Johor Baru (2024)	Integration of digital systems, protection of domestic migrant workers, contract extensions, and social security
3.	Ministry of Manpower - MOHRE UAE	Preparation of the OCS Interim Agreement (2024)	One-channel system: visa conversion & PMI protection in UAE
4.	IOM – KOICA	COVID-19 Impacted Migrant Workers Household Support Program (2022)	Economic empowerment of migrant families through training and local partners.

No.	International Partners	Form of Cooperation and Year	Focus
5.	ASEAN (ASCC Post, - 2025)	Strategic consulting (2024)	Integrating migrant worker welfare issues into the ASEAN agenda.

4. Social Protection

The pandemic has also driven a shift in government attention to migrant protection. Before the pandemic, migration policies were more focused on placement and remittances. However, during the pandemic in a crisis situation, more attention was paid to the vulnerability of migrants, both in terms of social, health, and economic aspects. Thus, the government began to adopt a more comprehensive and inclusive approach. There are

several things that the government has done, namely facilitating the mass repatriation of migrants with safe procedures, providing social assistance and psychosocial support for affected migrants, and expanding the scope of social security and access to health services for migrant workers and their families both at home and abroad. [16] Various forms of government policies have been issued to protect PMI social issues. This can be seen in the table below.

Table 3. PMI Social Protection Policy

No.	Policy	Main Focus
1.	Minister of Manpower Regulation No. 4/2023	21 social protection benefits, violence, contractual non-compliance, and additional protection for victims of layoffs.
2.	Digitization of BPJS Employment	Online registration, JMO application, airport services, e-claims, and pre-departure education.
3.	Synergy between the Ministry of Social Affairs and BP2MI	Social rehabilitation, health and training for troubled former migrant workers (PMIB).
4.	Pre-Employment Card & Vocational Training	Upskilling/reskilling CP-MI & Purna PMI at 90+ service points.
5.	G to G Scheme & PMI KUR	Safe, free recruitment, financing up to IDR 100 million.
6.	Expansion of Social Security Membership	FGD & cross-institutional initiatives to increase PMI social security participation.

4.2 Migration Policy Resilience: Towards Long-Term Resilience

Migration policy resilience refers to the ability of migration systems, both at the national and global levels, to absorb shocks, adapt to change, and recover from migration-related crises. It involves efforts to build long-term resilience through a variety of approaches including careful planning, investment in infrastructure, capacity building and collaboration among stakeholders. Migration policy resilience is not just about protecting migrant workers from

immediate risks, but building a just, inclusive and sustainable migration system. This is a strategic investment for Indonesia's future socio-economic resilience. Although, migrant communities and their families face great hardships, they have shown remarkable resilience [25].

Many migrants are adapting to new conditions, seeking alternative employment, or even returning to their home countries in the hope of starting anew. Families in their home countries are also showing resilience, finding



alternative sources of income and managing the decline in remittances. Social networks and civil society organizations play a crucial role in supporting migrants and their families, providing information, psychosocial support, and emergency assistance [26].

The pandemic has become an important momentum to reorganize migration policies with a more resilient approach. This study found that policy resilience is not only measured by short-term responses, but also by the country's ability to develop an integrated digital migration system, increase diplomatic capacity in negotiating migrant protection, and align migration policies with national resilience and sustainable development frameworks.

The steps and policies that have been issued show efforts to build policy resilience, although they are still limited in scope and implementation. Thus, the COVID-19 pandemic forces developing countries to not only react to the crisis, but also build a foundation for migration policies that are more adaptive, inclusive, and resilient to potential future problems.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a catalyst for significant changes in international migration in developing countries. Governments and migrant

institutions have been quick to adapt and resilient in policy making, demonstrating their ability to deal with a global crisis. However, there is still a long way to go to recover and build a more resilient migration system.

The COVID-19 pandemic has become a major turning point in migration policy in Indonesia, especially in terms of protecting Indonesian Migrant Workers, especially women. The Indonesian government responded to the crisis by issuing various adaptive policies such as implementing strict health protocols, a temporary moratorium on placement, digitizing migration services, and strengthening bilateral cooperation.

Indonesia's resilience in dealing with the complexities of post-pandemic migration has been demonstrated through proactive policy adjustments and international collaboration. The crisis has driven innovation in digital governance and strengthened partnerships with destination countries to ensure better protection and welfare for Indonesian migrant workers.

In terms of resilience, Indonesia's migration policy shows progress in building a more resilient system, but still requires increased institutional capacity, broader participation of civil society organizations, and so on. Thus, a resilient post-pandemic migration policy is not only reactive to the crisis, but also fair, preventive, and inclusive of all vulnerable groups.

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