

THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND REFLECTIONS ON THE IMPORTANCE OF REINTEGRATION STRATEGIES FOR RETURNEE MIGRANT WORKERS

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 Pandemic and Reflections on the Importance of Reintegration Strategies for Returnee Migrant Workers

This study aims to analyze the reintegration problems faced by Indonesian Migrant Workers (IMWs). This study was conducted using a qualitative design in Indramayu Regency, Indonesia. Data was collected from IMWs who returned during the pandemic, brokers, and the Indonesian Migrant Workers Protection Agency (BP2MI) staff and analyzed descriptively. The results showed that returnee migrants face problems such as the inability to manage remittances, poor investment choices, and the inability to run a business. A comprehensive reintegration policy is needed starting from pre-departure until the migrants return to their country of origin.

KEYWORDS: migrant workers, COVID-19 pandemic, reintegration, Indonesia, return migration

IZVLEČEK

Pandemija bolezni Covid-19 in razmišljanja o pomenu strategij reintegracije vračajočih se delavcev migrantov

Namen študije je analizirati težave z reintegracijo, s katerimi se srečujejo indonezijski delavci migranti. Študija je bila narejena s kvalitativnim pristopom v okrožju Indramayu v Indoneziji. Avtorji so podatke pridobili od delavcev migrantov, ki so se vrnili v času pandemije, posrednikov in uslužbencev indonezijske agencije za zaščito delavcev migrantov (BP2MI) ter jih opisno analizirali. Rezultati so pokazali, da se migranti povratniki srečujejo s težavami, kot so nezmožnost upravljanja z nakazili, slabe odločitve glede investicij ter nezmožnost ukvarjanja s poslom. Potrebna je celovita politika reintegracije migrantov, od obdobja pred njihovim odhodom do njihove vrnitve v državo izvora.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: delavci migranti, pandemija Covid-19, Indonezija, povratne migracije

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INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic, which first appeared in Wuhan, China, at the end of 2019, spread rapidly, becoming a global pandemic. Almost all the countries in the world were affected by policies to minimize the spread of the virus. One of the policies that governments adopted in various countries was the limitation of human mobility.

The employment sector was also affected by access restrictions imposed by almost all countries worldwide (Acharya & Patel, 2021; Puppa & Perocco, 2022). Migrant workers, as part of the global workforce, were vulnerable to employment problems. The International Labour Organization (ILO) stated that migrant workers constitute 4.7 percent, approximately 164 million, of the global workforce and some work in countries that required a shutdown during the COVID-19 pandemic (ILO, 2020).

According to the World Bank (2017), Indonesia is the second-largest sending country for migrant workers in Southeast Asia. The Indonesian Migrant Workers Protection Agency (BP2MI) stated that the placement of Indonesian Migrant Workers (IMWs) experienced a drastic decline, especially in the 2020–2021 period (BP2MI, 2021), in addition to around 169,000 IMWs. They were repatriated due to the pandemic (Kompas, 2021). Social restrictions and declining economic conditions in the country of placement have drastically decreased IMW demand. The pandemic led to an increase in work-contract terminations, leading to a rise in Indonesian returnees.

This study focused on the problem faced by IMWs returning to Indonesia during the pandemic. Many of them were unprepared both economically and socially. Previous studies on migrant workers returning to their country of origin showed that the remittances generated are used to support household life back home (Bachtiar, 2011; Faeamani, 1995; Haller et al., 2018; Huy & Nonneman, 2016; Islam et al., 2012; Li et al., 2013; Mas'udah, 2020; Piras et al., 2018; Qin & Liao, 2016; Redehegn et al., 2019). However, studies that provided in-depth discussions on the problems of returnee migrant workers as well as reintegration efforts in their hometowns, specifically in Indonesia, have not received adequate attention from experts.

In the context of Indonesia, the discussion on reintegration strategies is an important issue, especially when it comes to the pandemic. The low education level of most IMWs is a problem for the returnees because approximately 60 percent possess primary elementary and junior high school education (BP2MI, 2021). Due to this, they find it challenging to compete in and enter the competitive domestic labor market. A reintegration strategy is required to reengage and participate in economic activities and maintain household livelihoods. Reintegration is the process of welcoming migrants back into their hometowns and local communities. It entails migrants returning to their hometown's values, reentering its social systems, and reactivating its social networks (Arowolo, 2000; IOM, 2011). Kuschminder (2017a) added another dimension, namely, access to resources and the labor market in the hometown.

Therefore, this study aims to analyze the reintegration problems faced by IMWs who returned during the pandemic. It aids policymakers in preparing reintegration programs to deal with the impact of the pandemic on migrant workers. A comprehensive policy is needed to mitigate and anticipate the problems of IMWs, specifically to ensure that those who have returned to their hometowns are not trapped in poverty again.

Furthermore, this study consists of several parts. Section two provides an overview of the conditions of IMWs during the pandemic. Section three determines the related to remigration and reintegration. The fourth and fifth sections evaluate the methods and analyze the workers' aspirations and problems. The sixth section reflects the relevance of workers' experiences and provides recommendations for developing an appropriate reintegration strategy.

CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

Indonesian migrant workers in the COVID-19 pandemic period

The COVID-19 pandemic led to global economic crises, with Indonesia experiencing economic recession due to growth contraction for four consecutive quarters, amounting to -2.07 percent in 2020 (BPS, 2021a). Indonesia has undergone three major economic crises in the last 25 years: the monetary crisis from 1997 to 1998 (Tarmidi, 1999), the global financial crisis in 2008 (Green, 2004), and the economic crisis during the COVID-19 pandemic. These crises all led to a loss of jobs and a decline in real incomes and standard of living.

The economic sector, mainly found in urban areas, comprises a larger country's population. Due to the financial crises caused by the pandemic, many migrants were laid off, which forced them to return to the village. However, those who return to the village cannot be fully absorbed in rural economic activities (Bremen & Wiradi, 2002). The financial crisis in 1998 showed that many households overcame the effects of unemployment and poverty by sending their family members to work as non-formal workers in Saudi Arabia and Malaysia (Bremen & Wiradi, 2002). Hugo (2000) reported that in the first year of the 1998 economic crisis, IMWs increased by 75%. This increase shows that remittances of migrant workers abroad can reduce the negative impact of the financial crisis and that migrating is a coping strategy to get out of poverty.

However, the problems faced during the pandemic were more complex, with an increase in the number of poor people due to the rise in the unemployment rate in Indonesia (BPS, 2020a; 2020b). The option to become a migrant worker was unavailable due to the postponement of the placement of migrant workers imposed by the Government of Indonesia and the placement countries.

According to the Indonesian Government, through the Decree of the Minister of Manpower Number 151 of 2020 concerning the Temporary Termination of the

Placement of Indonesian Workers, the termination was carried out by institutions serving the IMW placement process. These include the Indonesian Migrant Workers Protection Agency (BP2MI) through the Circular of the Deputy of Placement Number: SE.04/PEN/III/2020, which explained that the temporary suspension was carried out by putting all domestic management service stages, such as registration, verification, and demand for a letter from the agency on hold from March 20, 2020 (BP2MI, 2020). One of the factors to consider in determining this policy is the anticipation of implementing the lockdown policy imposed by the country of placement (Witono, 2021). However, this policy still allows IMW candidates with complete requirements, such as work visas and transportation tickets, to be dispatched as long as the country does not close the entrance for foreign workers.

As a result of the temporary suspension of IMW placement abroad from March to August 2020, 88,783 candidates had their departure delayed; meanwhile, by May 2020, as many as 126,742 had returned to Indonesia (BBC, 2020), both IMW whose contracts had expired or terminated due to the pandemic. This data shows that many candidates are currently in a situation of uncertainty about their source of livelihood.

On July 29, 2020, the Decree of the Minister of Manpower Number 151/2020 was revoked and replaced by Number 294/2020 concerning the Implementation of IMW Placements in the Adaptation of the New Customs Period. Although IMW registration has reopened, the number of placements has not returned to normal compared to before the pandemic, as shown in Figure 1. This is because many placement countries have not opened entrances to migrant workers from Indonesia.

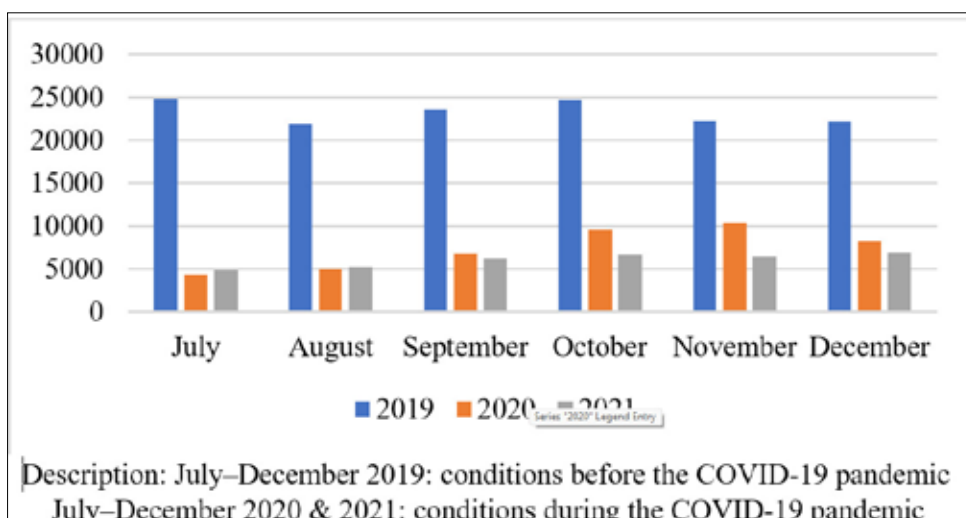


Figure 1: IMW placement data for August–December 2019–2021 (source: BP2MI, 2021).

Several problems occurred along the labor migration chain due to the pandemic, starting from before departure to when the IMW returned to their country of origin, as shown in Table 1. This research focuses on analyzing the problems faced by IMWs

when they return home during the pandemic. Many returnees have difficulty moving back to their countries of origin, specifically those planning to extend their contracts. Uncertainty about the source of income certainly affects the financial household condition.

Before Departure	In Placement Country	After Returning to Hometown
Departure uncertainty	The threat of job loss	The threat of not having a job for retired IMW
	Risk of increased workload (in the household sector, care, caregiving)	The decline in the household economy level.
	Stuck in social restrictions on the way home	

Table 1: Problems faced by IMW during the COVID-19 pandemic. Source: Sahude (2020) and summaries of various news in digital media (2020–2021).

This research was conducted in Indramayu Regency, the biggest “migrant area” in Indonesia, with an average annual migration rate of 7 percent (BP2MI, 2021). In summary, the agricultural sector is the primary sector of the economy in the Indramayu Regency. This regency is the highest rice-producing area, producing 25 percent of the national rice production in 2020 (BPS, 2021a). However, the “rice barn” title attached to this regency is not in line with the welfare level of its population, with approximately 13.04 percent living in poverty. It also has one of the highest percentages of poor people in West Java Province, even higher than the average percentage of poor people in Indonesia in 2021 (BPS, 2021b). Economic factors are the main driving force for working abroad. According to the Indramayu Regency Manpower Office, approximately one thousand migrant workers returned to Indramayu every month in 2020 because their contracts had expired (Ashri, 2020). The data also showed that a person experiences uncertainty and is also prone to be trapped in poverty.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Return migration theories

The term “return migration” describes the process of a person returning after migrating out of their country or region of origin (Bovenkerk, 1974; Cassarino, 2004). In line with the increasing flow of international migration, the discussion of return migration has been conducted in various studies, resulting in different theoretical approaches (Cassarino, 2004; Farrell et al., 2012).

The neoclassical economy (NE) theory explains that migration occurrence is not only driven by differences in wage levels between countries of origin and destination but by opportunities to obtain better jobs abroad (Todaro, 1969). Therefore, the NE theory views that return migration occurs due to migrants' inability to meet their expectations regarding obtaining a job and the expected income (Cassarino, 2004). In contrast, the theory of new economics of labor migration (NELM) views that migrants go abroad for a certain period and will return once they achieve these goals, such as earning a better income and successfully accumulating assets and savings (Cassarino, 2004; Stark & Bloom, 1985). Furthermore, King & Kuschminder (2020) reported that the NELM paradigm envisions migrants escaping poverty and establishing a profile of savings and remittances abroad. Upon return, this shift later contributes to the family's economic and social well-being. NE and NELM theories can explain migration from the perspective of migrants and their families without adequate analysis of the wider social context.

Cassarino (2004) stated that a structural approach could be used to analyze return migration based on social, institutional, and contextual factors in the area of origin. Like NELM, the structural approach views the financial factor and the economic resources brought to the area of origin as the critical point of migrants when deciding to return. On the other hand, the structural approach analyzes the successes and failures of returning migrants against the expectations of the surrounding communities (Hunter, 2011).

Hunter (2011) stated that the structural approach focuses on structural conditions in the country of origin and pays less attention to conditions associated with the migration destination. Furthermore, Cassarino (2004) also stated that the structural approach does not describe the interaction between the region and the destination area, despite promoting a transnational approach. The transnational approach can be seen as a form of social contact across national borders carried out by permanent and continuous migration (Hunter, 2011). This approach describes the social nature of migrants toward their hometowns (Farrell et al., 2012). Furthermore, migrants have a dual identity obtained from their original country of origin and destination. This duality means that returnees do not experience many difficulties when reintegrating into their countries of origin (Cassarino, 2004; Farrell et al., 2012).

To round out the discussion of the transnational approach, the social network theory is used with the assumption that returnees are actors who mobilize tangible and intangible resources to the country of origin. In the social network approach, social and institutional opportunities in the home country shape the motivation to return before deciding to return. Returnees use social and economic networks to help organize successful returns (Bilgili et al., 2018; Cassarino, 2004; Kuschminder, 2017b). Furthermore, Bilgili et al. (2018) stated that sending remittances has a significant social component in helping to uphold a favorable and stronger relationship with the social network in migrants' countries of origin for contractual and altruistic reasons. This finding means that returnees who stay in touch with their home

country while away and can remit money are likely to have better living conditions once they return (Bilgili et al., 2018).

Several typologies of return migrants on readiness to return have been described by Haase & Honerath (2016) while adopting the explanation by De Haas (2016). These include 1) Involuntary return migrants, usually associated with those without legal status who experience failure of social or economic integration in the country of destination or are deported to the country of origin. Most in this group cannot mobilize resources such as social capital, networks, or knowledge after returning to their hometown. 2) Voluntary but unavoidable, namely migrants whose return appears voluntary but is a consequence of the end of their residence status or expired contract in the destination country. Migrants in this group are usually able to take advantage of the resources obtained from the destination country. However, they are also vulnerable to personal and psychological problems and a lack of motivation to reintegrate. 3) Voluntary return migrants have clear goals to return and have achieved goals, such as savings, skills, education, and business networks during migration. Their reintegration can encourage business development and create job opportunities. From the three typologies above, individual factors for return and reintegration, such as personalized networks in the country of origin, motivation, and successful labor market integration, are central to their willingness and readiness to return.

Return migration, reintegration, and sustainable return

According to Cassarino (2004) and Liao (2019), returnee migrants have the capacity to influence society by leveraging the knowledge and experience they gathered while living overseas. However, this potential can only be realized if the reintegration process goes smoothly. Reintegration issues have become increasingly complex in recent years due to increased international migration, necessitating government intervention (Arowolo, 2000; Preston, 1993).

Reintegration is defined as the process of welcoming migrants back into their hometowns and local communities. This process entails returning to their hometown's values, reentering its social systems, and reactivating its social networks (Arowolo, 2000; Lietaert & Kuschminder, 2021). Haase & Honerath (2016) and Liao (2019) reported several factors that influence the success of reintegration, including the readiness and desire of migrants to return, economic stability, and social ties and networks in the area of origin, as well as motivation to integrate into the local labor market. Successful reintegration in the country of origin, including economic, social, and psychosocial aspects, and the individual's capacity to cope with push factors contribute to a sustainable return (IOM, 2006). Therefore, it is not surprising that a person's socioeconomic situation, as well as the reasons for and aspirations behind their initial departure, have a significant impact on their reintegration processes (Lietaert & Kuschminder, 2021).

Reintegration and sustainable return are two concepts that are frequently discussed together or used interchangeably in the literature. Reintegration is necessary for a significant, sustainable return because it offers a comprehensive strategy that considers the dynamics of the economy, society, and security (Koser & Kuschminder, 2017). Similarly, Kuschminder (2017a) reported that reintegration is a process, not just an “insertion” back into one’s previous culture and life.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

This study used a qualitative approach design to emphasize the social context needed to understand the meaning of social actions, events, or statements (Neuman, 2014). Furthermore, it sought to explore the experiences of migrants who returned during the pandemic to understand the realities and problems faced. To achieve this goal, a case study technique was used to explain how the object under study exists and why the case can occur (Yin, 2014).

The study was conducted in Kroya and Juntinyuat subdistricts, Indramayu Regency, West Java Province, Indonesia, one of the largest migrant worker enclaves (BP2MI, 2021). Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and informal discussions with 14 migrant workers (Table 2). Informants were selected from migrants who returned during the COVID-19 pandemic from March 2020 to July 2021, as well as those who could describe the conditions in their surrounding environment. The data collected from these 14 informants were able to represent the problems of migrants who returned during the pandemic. The collection process was stopped because the category was saturated or because gathering new data did not generate new insights and properties (Charmaz, 2006; Creswell, 2014).

No	Gender	Age (Years)	Last Education Level	Length of Migration (Years)	Placement Country
1	Female	38	Elementary school graduate	4	Malaysia
2	Female	26	Senior high school graduate	6	Malaysia
3	Female	29	Senior high school graduate	4	Taiwan
4	Female	22	Senior high school graduate	3	Japan
5	Female	46	Junior high school graduate	6	Hong Kong

No	Gender	Age (Years)	Last Education Level	Length of Migration (Years)	Placement Country
6	Female	30	Junior high school graduate	3	Taiwan
7	Female	37	Elementary school graduate	6	Saudi Arabia
8	Female	25	College	3	Singapore
9	Male	40	Senior high school graduate	12	Taiwan
10	Female	38	Junior high school graduate	10	Taiwan
11	Male	36	Elementary school graduate	6	Qatar
12	Male	38	Elementary school graduate	6	Kuwait
13	Female	28	Elementary school graduate	4	Saudi Arabia
14	Female	46	Elementary school graduate	8	Malaysia

Table 2: Informant identity—returnee migrants during the pandemic.

In-depth interviews were also conducted with the Indramayu District BP2MI Staff, Kroya and Juntinyuat subdistrict officials, brokers, or sponsors in Indramayu Regency, and three prospective migrants whose departures were delayed. Moreover, this study also uses secondary data sourced from various government agencies, such as the Central Statistics Agency (BPS), BP2MI, newspapers, as well as literature related to migration and reintegration. Research into secondary sources was carried out to validate the data obtained from interviews and enrich the information on their conditions during the pandemic.

The collected data were transcribed into Indonesian and analyzed using Nvivo 12 Plus software. In the coding process, the informants' answers were classified regarding "reasons for being a migrant worker," "desire to return," "plans when returning to their hometown," "use of remittances," "how do you live your current life," "satisfaction with your current life," and "are you interested in returning to being a migrant worker." After the coding process, the data was analyzed through a "project map" as a guide to explain the results.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Typology of IMWs who returned during the COVID-19 pandemic

The typology of returnee migrants is grouped through two simple questions, namely “individual desire to return” and “readiness and ability to return” (De Haas, 2016; Haase & Honerath, 2016). Therefore, the analysis results showed that IMWs who returned to Indramayu Regency during the pandemic can be grouped into two categories. The first group is migrants who want to return and have no intention of returning to work abroad by not extending their work contracts which ended during the pandemic. Some of the various reasons are the desire to focus on taking care of their family, trying to find a job in their hometown, running a business, and the contract period has reached its maximum limit. The following is an excerpt from an interview with one of the informants:

I returned to the village in March 2021 after working in a food packaging factory in Taiwan for 12 years. My work contract can no longer be extended due to the country's regulations, which allow foreigners to work up to four times. I have no plans to work abroad again while waiting for my wife to come home after her employer extended her contract by one year due to the pandemic. It is a pity that my daughters, from babies to 4th grade of elementary school, are being cared for by their grandmothers because their parents are migrants in another country trying to make money. ... Alhamdulillah, my dream has come true from working abroad. I have managed to renovate a house, have savings, and also bought a plot of rice fields. My current source of income is from the snack business as well as working in the rice fields. Indeed, the results are not as big as when I worked in Taiwan, but the important thing is that I have savings for the future of my children, and my daily life is sufficient from the results of my efforts here (Informant 9, Y, male, 40 years old).

We can say that those in this first group have personally reengaged in economic and social life in their country of origin because they feel that their goal at the time of migrating had been achieved. In addition, they also have plans to continue their livelihood activities in their area of origin. Migrants of this group can be categorized as voluntary return migrants.

Meanwhile, other groups of returnee migrants have not yet fully returned to their place of origin because they desire to migrate again after the pandemic. This group comprises involuntary return migrants, those whose work has been affected by the pandemic, such as construction workers, who were forced to temporarily return home. However, the social restriction policy in the country of placement has prevented them from operating. Additionally, there is a group of returning migrants who are included in the typology of voluntary but unavoidable, namely, those who returned voluntarily because their contacts ran out and wanted to “rest for a while”

while preparing for the remigration process but got “stuck” by the social restrictions policy. The following excerpt by one of the informants illustrates this situation:

In May 2021, I went home for Eid as well as to rest and take care of my children, who wanted to go to school. However, when I tried booking my flight back to Taiwan, I could not because the country was still closed. I can only wait and hope that things will return to normal by the end of the year or the beginning of 2022. I am pained that I cannot make money over time in the village. My husband here does not have a permanent job, and he only works as a laborer in people’s fields (Informant 7, M, female, 37 years).

This study showed that those who return voluntarily are more prepared because their goals have been achieved. Conversely, groups of migrants who are not ready to return generally have goals that have not been achieved. Hence, they desire to return to work abroad, as shown in Table 3. The results of migration will always be favorable. Many returnee migrants are still dissatisfied with their experience moving since they were unable to use their savings to better their family’s standard of living or, worse yet, became indebted to lenders. This situation is especially true for the group of involuntary return migrants. They do not plan to return before their work contract expires but are forced to return due to various conditions. This involuntary return happens not only to IMWs but also to migrant workers from other countries. During the pandemic, many migrant workers were not fully prepared to return to their home countries, as described in the study of Morad et al. (2022) in Bangladesh, Ranjan (2021) in India and China, also Weeratne (2022) in Sri Lanka.

The explanation above is in line with the NELM theory, which explains the relationship between goal achievement and readiness to return (Cassarino, 2004; Stark & Bloom, 1985). In general, the goals that migrants want to achieve are related to improving economic and social status, such as building a house, having savings, having business capital, owning rice fields, being able to pay debts, and having fees for children’s schooling. After these goals are achieved, they voluntarily return. With the resources obtained during working abroad, ideally, they can be used as a provision to carry out livelihood activities in the area of origin.

Typology of Returnee Migrants	The Desire to Return	Readiness to Return	Desire for Remigration	Achieving Goals When Migrating
Voluntary return migrant	√	√	X	√
Voluntary but unavoidable	√	X	√	X
Involuntary return migrant	X	X	√	X

Table 3: Characteristics of returnee migrants by a readiness to return.

The pandemic and reintegration problems of returnee migrant workers

The large number of residents in Indramayu who work as migrants created a real impact on people's lives with a shift in the social structure based on materialism. Furthermore, migrant workers generally come from the lower and middle classes with limited economic access. The remittances generated place them in a higher social class, and as a form of the legitimacy of their new social class, they "show" success in the form of ownership of assets such as houses, vehicles, jewelry, and farmland (Setiadi, 2001).

The structural approach presented by Cerase in Cassarino (2004) and Hunter (2011) explains that migrants return when they have met the expectations of their social environment. This situation is reflected in the use of remittances made by migrant workers and their families to meet the "indicators" of success established by the social environment. More remittances are allocated to fulfill consumptive needs, renovate houses, buy vehicles, etc. The use of remittances for investment purposes, such as savings or children's education, is a common pattern. However, it is also used to pay debts, including those covering departure costs, housing repairs, etc. A house is important for IMWs and their families because it symbolizes success from working abroad and the legitimacy of a new social status. Allocation for savings or investment in the form of productive assets, such as buying land or business capital, is the last order. Mas'udah (2020) stated that there is a shift in the lifestyle of the migrant family after one of the family members works as a migrant worker. They spend more money on consumptive things to show changes in social status.

The pattern of using remittances can potentially become a problem in economic reintegration carried out by returnee migrants, as shown in Table 4. The results of using Nvivo software showed that migrants who are ready to return to economic life in their country of origin are those with productive assets and able to continue their livelihood in their country of origin (Figure 2).

Meanwhile, returnee migrants who do not have productive assets experience greater difficulties surviving in the village because they currently have no source of income. To survive, some use existing savings and work odd jobs in the village. The following is an excerpt from an interview with one of the informants:

I have worked in Taiwan for three years, and my salary is around 6 million IDR a month. Every month, I send an average of 3 or 4 million IDR home. My husband in the village helps out in *Pak Haji's* rice fields with uncertain income, which is sometimes not enough for daily needs. My husband's salary is used to pay debts, cover daily needs, and pay for the motorbike with little savings. Currently, I cannot work my income has drastically reduced. Working here is difficult. Hence, I was forced to use my savings to cover my daily needs. Hopefully, I can go again because the savings are also only a little, and when finished, I will go into debt (Informant 6, F, female, 30 years old).

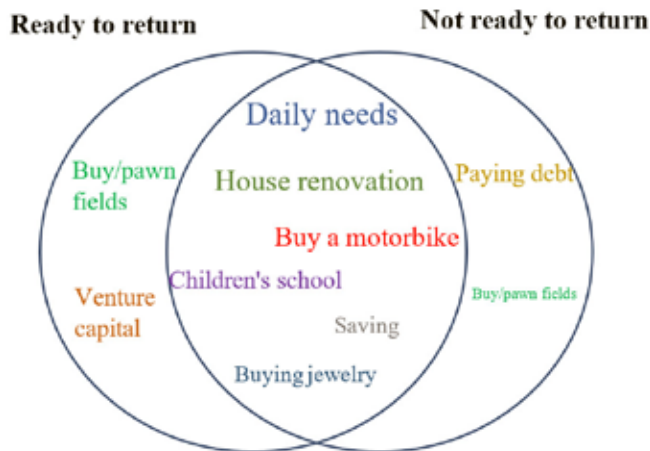


Figure 2: The linkage between migrant readiness to return and use of remittances (source: data analysis using Nvivo 12 software).

The explanation above showed that returnee migrants who are not ready to return still have a fairly large dependence on remittances. The low education level and limited skills also make it difficult for them to work in the formal sector. Moreover, many business sectors were affected during the pandemic, so the opportunity to get a job is also increasingly difficult. Therefore, returnee migrants need to have productive assets, such as land and financial capital, to run informal businesses to support their lives in their country of origin.

Ranjan (2021) showed the importance of owning land for farming households in India and China. According to the study, migrants who own agricultural land feel the impact of the pandemic is lighter because it provides a stable income. Thus, the agricultural sector has become a “mainstay” for returnee migrants. Arifin (2021) stated that based on data from the 2020 National Manpower Survey (Sakernas), there was an increase in the share of the agricultural workforce during the pandemic. However, this also adds to the burden on the agricultural sector, which has been bearing the burden of low labor productivity. Chowdhury & Chakraborty (2021) also Morad et al. (2022) in Bangladesh reported the same thing by stating that migrant workers returned to villages during the pandemic and causing pressure on the rural economy with the tendency to increase the number of poor people. Therefore, a strategy is needed for returning migrant workers to create added value from the agricultural sector.

In addition, the remittances generated can also be used as an opportunity to raise capital to run a business in their hometown. Therefore, these workers no longer need to go abroad. Studies by Yuniarto (2016; 2019) in Malang, East Java and Zid et al. (2020) in Indramayu, West Java, Indonesia; Huy & Nonneman (2016) in Vietnam; and Démurger & Xu (2011) in China showed the success of returnee migrants in running businesses in their hometowns. Furthermore, Adams (2006); Collier et

al. (2018); Démurger & Xu (2011); Piracha & Vadean (2010) explained that migrants tend to invest more in entrepreneurial activities than non-migrants. However, many things pose challenges to those running a business. Some returnee migrants feel the businesses are less promising and underdeveloped. One of the obstacles in running a business is limited knowledge and skills. These conditions ultimately shape the view of life in the village, as some do not feel satisfied with their current livelihood, even though they returned voluntarily during the pandemic (Table 4). It is, of course, a concern that although migrants currently feel ready to return, if they cannot overcome the obstacles faced in carrying out their livelihoods in their area of origin, then a sustainable return will not be realized. This thinking is in line with the explanation given by Kuschminder (2017a) that sustainable returns will occur when migrants are contended with their livelihood and are not in an economically vulnerable situation. In this context, the uncertainty of income from farming and other businesses run in the village are vulnerability factors.

Typology of Returnee Migrants	Readiness to Return	Problems Faced
Voluntary return migrant	Ready	Current business development
Voluntary but unavoidable	Not ready	The pattern of using remittances is oriented toward consumptive needs. Presently, many returnee migrants do not have the productive resources to start their livelihoods. Dependence on remittances as a source of household income. Difficult to be employed in the formal sector. Limited knowledge and skills to start a business. Changes in the conception of the life in the village, visible by the younger generation's declining interest to work in the agricultural sector.
Involuntary return migrant		

Table 4: Reintegration problems experienced by returnee migrants.

Returnee migrants consciously or unconsciously bring new attitudes, behaviors, and ideas when returning, which for some returnee migrants, does not cause many problems. In general, the social environment does not show resistance to returning migrants as they are also involved in community social activities. During migration, the social ties of the migrants to the area of origin are also reflected in their remittances. However, for some returnee migrants, their departure to other countries has given them a new identity, which makes it difficult for them to reintegrate and reengage in social life. Thus, we see that migrants seeing themselves as part of the social environment in their country of origin is the key to successful social reintegration (Cassarino, 2004; Farrell et al., 2012).

The erosion of identity in the country of origin occurs mostly in young and unmarried migrants, reflected in one of the changes in their conception of agricultural work, as shown in Table 4. The agricultural sector, which has been part of the lives of agrarian communities, is the economic base in rural areas. It lacks attractiveness and is displaced by the desire to work abroad, which is considered faster for improving social status. Although agricultural land is one of the goals to be achieved when migrating, only some migrant households work on the land as a source of livelihood.

This discrepancy can be seen from the results of the analysis in Figure 2 that land ownership does not necessarily indicate the desire of migrants to return and be involved in agricultural activities. Outside of the pandemic conditions, many IMWs, after returning home, choose to be unemployed while waiting to leave instead of working in the agricultural sector. Many IMW candidates have left their livelihoods in the agricultural sector by mortgaging or selling their land for departure costs. The following is an excerpt from an interview with one of the informants:

I was supposed to go to Poland in April 2021, but I kept procrastinating due to the pandemic. For the cost of leaving, I have paid 60 million IDR to the agent and the capital to go was obtained from the proceeds of pawning my father's rice field. I want to work abroad because the salary is significant. In Poland, I can earn around 12 million IDR a month. If you farm here, getting such an amount is problematic (Informant S, Male, 24 years old).

This reality is also reflected in several studies by Breman & Wiradi (2002) and Setiadi (2001) in Subang, Cirebon, and Yogyakarta Regencies. These studies showed that land ownership is merely another measure of success for migrants and their social status. Still, economically and socially, many migrants are not ready to reintegrate into the village economy.

From the explanation above, reintegration is seen as successful when an individual has reintegrated into the socioeconomic process of rural communities and believes that they will be able to secure their livelihoods and achieve worthwhile goals once they return and feel part of the local community again. The results of this study also show that individual migrants' capacity to desire and readiness to return also determines the success of reintegration. Most forcibly returned migrants also find it challenging to participate in the labor market either as workers in the formal sector or as independent workers because they have not been able to find alternative livelihoods other than re-migrating. Therefore, the reintegration strategy must assist IMWs in preparing for the reintegration process to maximize migration's economic and social potential.

CONCLUSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The COVID-19 pandemic should be a lesson learned about the need to reduce dependence on remittances as a path out of poverty. The remittances are hoped to encourage returnee IMWs to live a sustainable life in their hometown and improve the living standard of migrants. Ellis & Mdoe (2003) stated that moving out of poverty is a cumulative process often achieved with little progress. Therefore, the ability to manage remittances is essential to initiate and maintain this process.

Several challenges are faced in the reintegration process, such as low skill levels and limited availability of jobs. Retired IMWs hope to be able to run informal businesses as a livelihood source. The results showed that IMWs who returned during the COVID-19 pandemic had several problems related to their reintegration. Some of the issues faced included 1) lack of ability to manage remittances, several cases showed these monies were used to meet consumptive needs and are less allocated in the form of investment; 2) inability to run a business; 3) feeling no longer part of the community in the area of origin.

The success of the reintegration process also needs to be supported by appropriate policies developed to increase individual capacity and create conditions that support the success of the reintegration process. Many programs have been implemented to support reintegration, and most of them are provided in the form of various skills training to run entrepreneurship. However, reflecting on the problems that have occurred, a more comprehensive policy is needed to increase the human resource capacity, especially in the central area of migrant workers.

To ensure that migrants are prepared and have had enough time to consider their future following migration, it is crucial to underline that all reintegration procedures should be in place before they ever leave their home country. By utilizing their social, financial, and human resources before, during, and after migration, migrants can benefit from this prerequisite. Planning for development must incorporate this comprehensive reintegration strategy, especially in migrant source areas.

Prospective migrant workers and their families must be motivated to raise awareness of future livelihoods to ensure they have clear goals and plans to maximize the economic and social remittances. Furthermore, financial literacy for IMWs and remittance recipient communities is essential to ensure proper allocation upon request (Figure 3). Pan et al. (2020) stated that the literacy level of the recipient households determines the ability of households to manage remittances.

The successful reintegration of returnees also requires the involvement of various actors, such as the government, migrant workers and their families, the private sector, and universities, to collaborate to create an ecosystem that promotes sustainable reintegration. It is also important to encourage retired IMWs to be able to run productive businesses, including farming. Apart from technical training activities to improve knowledge and skills, mentoring is also needed for them to live independently. The retired ones also need to be promoted and assisted in

creating networks with various parties to strengthen social capital in running a business (Figure 3).

This study does not explicitly discuss returnee migrants who experience physical and psychological problems when working as migrant workers. However, it is crucial to develop a strategy for rehabilitating return migrants with physical and psychological issues, assisting them with economic and sociocultural issues and ensuring prospective migrant workers also know how to migrate safely to guarantee their rights.

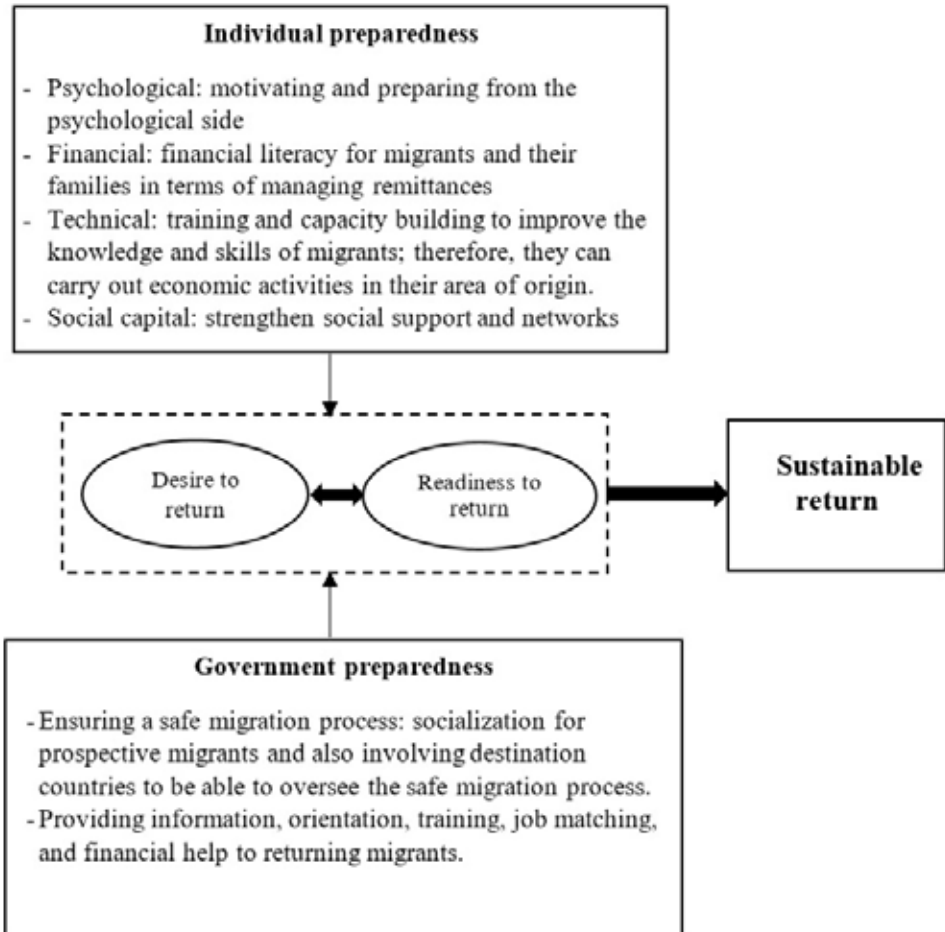


Figure 3: Recommendation of reintegration strategy for returnee migrant workers.

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POVZETEK

PANDEMIJA BOLEZNI COVID-19 IN RAZMIŠLJANJA O POMENU STRATEGIJ REINTEGRACIJE VRAČAJOČIH SE DELAVCEV MIGRANTOV

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Riwanto Tirtosudarmo

Pandemija bolezni Covid-19 je različno vplivala na življenja ljudi skoraj po vsem svetu, vključno s področjem zaposlovanja. Delavci migranti kot del globalne delovne sile so se soočali s težavami pri zaposlovanju. Indonezija je druga največja država izvoznica delavcev migrantov v jugovzhodni Aziji. Zaradi družbenih omejitev in vse slabših gospodarskih razmer v ciljnih državah se je povečalo število odpovedi pogodb o zaposlitvi, kar je povzročilo rast števila indonezijskih povratnikov. Številni delavci migranti, ki so se med pandemijo vrnili v svoje vasi, so bili tako v ekonomskem kot v socialnem smislu nepripravljeni. Razprava o strategijah reintegracije je pomembno vprašanje. Nepripravljenost migrantov na vrnitev na svoja izvorna območja lahko povzroči pritisk na podeželsko gospodarstvo ter s tem povečanje števila revnih. Na individualni ravni je uspešnost ekonomske reintegracije odvisna od volje in pripravljenosti migrantov za vrnitev. Namen te študije je analizirati težave, s katerimi se soočajo indonezijski delavci migranti, ki so se med pandemijo vrnili domov.

V študiji sta bila uporabljena kvalitativni pristop in tehnika študije primera. Izvedena je bila v indonezijskem okrožju Indramayu, eni največjih enklav delavcev migrantov. Podatki so bili zbrani s pomočjo poglobljenih intervjujev s 14 delavci migranti, ki so se vrnili med pandemijo bolezni Covid-19, z uslužbenci agencije BP2MI, z uradniki podokrožij Kroya in Juntinyuat, s posredniki oziroma sponzorji ter s tremi potencialnimi migranti, ki so preložili svoj odhod iz države. Zbrani podatki so bili nato transkribirani v indonezijsščino in analizirani s programsko opremo Nvivo 12 Plus.

Rezultati so pokazali, da so se indonezijski delavci migranti, ki so se vrnili v državo med pandemijo bolezni Covid-19, soočali s številnimi težavami, povezanimi z njihovo željo in pripravljenostjo na ponovno vključitev v gospodarske dejavnosti v vasi, vključno z 1) nezmožnostjo upravljanja z nakazili; 2) pomanjkanjem želje oziroma motivacije za ponovno življenje v vasi ter 3) nezmožnostjo poslovnega udejstvovanja. Glede na opisane težave je potrebna celovitejša politika za povečanje zmogljivosti na področju človeških virov, zlasti na osrednjem območju delavcev migrantov.

Potencialni delavci migranti in njihove družine morajo biti motivirani za ozaveščanje o zagotavljanju preživetja v prihodnosti, da imajo jasne cilje in načrte za maksimiranje svojih ekonomskih in socialnih nakazil. Za zagotovitev ustreznega dodeljevanja nakazil po potrebi je pomembna finančna pismenost delavcev migrantov in skupnosti, ki prejema nakazila. Za uspešno reintegracijo povratnikov je

potrebno tudi sodelovanje različnih akterjev pri vzpostavljanju ekosistema, ki lahko spodbuja trajnostno reintegracijo. Prav tako je pomembno spodbujati upokojene delavce migrante k vodenju produktivnih poslovnih dejavnosti, vključno s kmetijstvom. Poleg aktivnosti za tehnično usposabljanje za izboljševanje znanja in veščin je za njihovo samostojno življenje potrebno tudi mentorstvo. Upokojeni delavci migranti pa potrebujejo tudi pomoč pri vzpostavljanju mrež za krepitev socialnega kapitala pri poslovnih dejavnostih.