

PREVENTING THE EXPLOITATION AND NON-PROCEDURAL PLACEMENT OF INDONESIAN MIGRANT WORKERS THROUGH COMMUNITY-BASED LEGAL EDUCATION AND ASSISTANCE

ABSTRACT - Non-procedural placement and exploitation continue to threaten Indonesian Migrant Workers (PMI) in Malaysia, partly because many rely on informal information and have limited understanding of lawful procedures and protection mechanisms. This community service aimed to improve PMI legal literacy in preventing exploitation and non-procedural placement. Held on 17 July 2026 at the Indonesian Embassy in Kuala Lumpur with 75 PMI, it applied community-based legal education and assistance in six stages: needs identification, material preparation, legal education, interactive discussion, legal consultation, and evaluation. Data were collected through pre-test and post-test, observation, interviews, feedback forms, and a questionnaire, then analyzed descriptively. The average score rose from 68.5 to 87.5 (+19.0 points), with the largest gain in identifying illegal recruitment and exploitation risks. The activity strengthened legal literacy and caution toward unverified job offers. Regular, continuous education supported by digital media, institutional cooperation, and long-term follow-up evaluation is recommended.

ABSTRAK - Penempatan nonprosedural dan eksploitasi masih mengancam Pekerja Migran Indonesia (PMI) di Malaysia, antara lain karena banyak PMI mengandalkan informasi informal dan belum memahami prosedur resmi serta mekanisme perlindungan. Kegiatan pengabdian ini bertujuan meningkatkan literasi hukum PMI dalam mencegah eksploitasi dan penempatan nonprosedural. Kegiatan dilaksanakan pada 17 Juli 2026 di KBRI Kuala Lumpur bersama 75 PMI melalui edukasi dan pendampingan hukum berbasis komunitas dalam enam tahap: identifikasi kebutuhan, penyusunan materi, edukasi hukum, diskusi interaktif, konsultasi hukum, dan evaluasi. Data dikumpulkan melalui pre-test dan post-test, observasi, wawancara, formulir umpan balik, dan kuesioner, lalu dianalisis secara deskriptif. Rata-rata skor meningkat dari 68,5 menjadi 87,5 (+19,0 poin), dengan peningkatan terbesar pada kemampuan mengenali rekrutmen ilegal dan risiko eksploitasi. Kegiatan ini memperkuat literasi hukum dan kehati-hatian peserta terhadap tawaran kerja yang belum terverifikasi. Disarankan edukasi rutin dan berkelanjutan dengan dukungan media digital, kerja sama antarlembaga, dan evaluasi tindak lanjut jangka panjang.

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INTRODUCTION

International labor mobility is part of the dynamics of global employment that opens up better economic and income opportunities. For Indonesia, the presence of Indonesian Migrant Workers (PMI) is strategically important because it is closely tied to improving family welfare, strengthening household economies, and promoting social mobility. However, labor migration also carries legal and social risks when recruitment, placement, and employment are not carried out in accordance with proper procedures. These risks include unclear employment status, unfulfilled workers' rights, exploitation, violence, contract violations, human trafficking, and immigration problems in destination countries. Legal protection must therefore be a fundamental component at every stage of labor migration (Artemov et al., 2025).

Normatively, the protection of PMI is regulated under Law Number 18 of 2017 concerning the Protection of Indonesian Migrant Workers, which establishes that protection is an effort to guarantee the fulfillment and enforcement of PMI rights before, during, and after employment (Madiyya & Kuswara, 2026). This framework is reinforced by Government Regulation Number 59 of 2021, which sets out protection mechanisms in more operational terms (Hossain et al., 2024). The state is thus responsible not only when workers face problems abroad, but also for strengthening preventive measures from the recruitment and preparation stages.

Malaysia is one of the main destination countries for PMI. Procedural placement through official mechanisms provides a basis for verifying identities, employment contracts, employers, and document completeness, and makes it easier for the government to conduct supervision and assistance. The government provides SISKOP2MI as one of the platforms for protection services and official placement information for PMI (Lonita, 2025). Nevertheless, non-procedural placement has not been completely eliminated. It occurs when individuals depart or work without meeting applicable requirements, use inappropriate documents, work without valid permits, or are recruited through irresponsible mechanisms. These conditions leave PMI more vulnerable because access to formal protection becomes limited. When the identity of the employer, employment contract, work permit, or immigration status is unclear, workers find it difficult to demand their rights when disputes or violations occur.

This vulnerability can develop into various forms of exploitation, such as unpaid wages or wages below the agreed amount, excessive working hours, restrictions on freedom, document confiscation, threats and violence, and forced job transfers. In certain situations, recruitment involving deception and abuse of vulnerable positions is also associated with human trafficking. Women require particular attention because of their vulnerability to gender-based violence (John et al., 2020). Protection of PMI therefore cannot rely solely on law enforcement after violations occur. Prevention must be strengthened through the understanding of PMI, their families, and their communities regarding legal procedures, the risks of non-procedural placement, and official channels for obtaining information and assistance.

One important factor in such prevention is community legal literacy. Legal literacy is not limited to knowledge of regulations; it also includes the ability to understand rights, obligations, procedures, risks, and the steps available when facing legal problems. For PMI, this ability includes recognizing legitimate recruitment, verifying the legality of employment providers, understanding employment contracts, ensuring document completeness, and knowing the appropriate complaint channels. This view is consistent with the principle that labor law must realize justice and protection for workers (Golovina & Tomashevski, 2023).



Prevention also cannot be placed entirely on the government. Families, communities, and local institutions can serve as the first environment for providing information, warnings, and assistance.

Previous studies on PMI protection have largely focused on normative and policy aspects, such as the legal politics of protecting women migrant workers (Peroni, 2025) and the protection of the rights of women migrant workers who are survivors of gender-based violence under CEDAW. These studies are important as a foundation, but they do not yet address how legal knowledge reaches PMI and can be used directly in their everyday decisions. This is where community service plays a role, namely bridging legal norms with the practical needs of the community.

Based on these conditions, the community service team carried out the activity “Strengthening Community Legal Literacy in Preventing Exploitation and Non-Procedural Placement of Indonesian Migrant Workers in Malaysia” on 17 July 2026, in collaboration with the Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia (KBRI) in Kuala Lumpur as a strategic partner. The Embassy was selected because of its role as the government’s representative in providing protection, assistance, and services for Indonesian citizens, including PMI. The approach used was community-based legal education and assistance, consisting of needs identification, material development, legal education, interactive discussion, legal consultation, and evaluation. The added value of this activity lies in three aspects. First, the materials were developed contextually based on participants’ needs and delivered with language and case examples that are easy to understand. Second, the activity was held directly at the Embassy, so that legal knowledge was connected to protection mechanisms accessible to PMI. Third, participants were positioned as active subjects of protection, not merely recipients of information.

The objective of this activity was to improve the understanding of PMI in Malaysia regarding the legal basis of PMI protection, lawful placement procedures, migrant workers’ rights and obligations, the risks of non-procedural placement, forms of exploitation, and complaint and protection mechanisms, so that participants are able to verify information and make decisions based on accurate legal knowledge.

RESEARCH METHODS

Activity Design

This community service program used a community-based legal education and assistance approach to strengthen legal literacy in preventing the exploitation and non-procedural placement of Indonesian Migrant Workers (PMI). This approach was chosen because migrant worker protection depends not only on the availability of regulations but also on the capacity of individuals and communities to understand, apply, and use legal information in migration-related decisions.

The activity was held on 17 July 2026 at the Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia (KBRI) in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, in a single face-to-face meeting. It was carried out in six stages: needs identification, preparation of educational materials, legal education, interactive discussion, legal consultation, and evaluation.

In the needs identification stage, the team identified participants’ initial understanding of lawful PMI placement procedures, required documents, employment contracts, workers’ rights and obligations, recruitment risks, and legal protection mechanisms. Participants also completed a simple questionnaire on



the sources of information they used when seeking overseas employment. The results of this stage informed the development of materials suited to participants' conditions and needs.

In the material preparation stage, the team developed educational materials based on Law Number 18 of 2017 concerning the Protection of Indonesian Migrant Workers (Suarno & Suryono, 2021) and Government Regulation Number 59 of 2021 concerning the Implementation of the Protection of Indonesian Migrant Workers (Prianto et al., 2023). The materials covered lawful placement procedures, legal requirements before working abroad, PMI rights and obligations, indicators of illegal recruitment, risks and forms of exploitation, employment contract awareness, and mechanisms for obtaining legal protection and assistance.

The legal education stage was conducted through participatory presentations using slides, legal materials, and case-based examples. Participants received explanations of the differences between procedural and non-procedural placement, the importance of official documents, employment agreements, legal status, and available protection institutions. This was followed by an interactive discussion in which participants shared experiences, asked questions, and discussed practical problems of migrant employment in Malaysia. A legal consultation session then allowed participants to raise specific concerns about working conditions, documentation, recruitment processes, and access to protection services. The final stage was evaluation.

Partners and Target Group

The activity partner was the Indonesian Embassy in Kuala Lumpur, which serves as the government's representative in providing protection, assistance, and services for Indonesian citizens, including PMI. The target group was the PMI community in Malaysia, with 75 participants who were active PMI with direct experience of and interest in recruitment issues, employment rights, and migrant worker protection. Participants were aged 19-35 years, with the majority in the 26-35 age group, and most had completed senior or vocational high school (SMA/SMK). Women made up 70% of participants and men 30%.

The PMI community was selected because Malaysia is one of the main destination countries for PMI, offering broad employment opportunities but also posing legal risks such as non-procedural placement, employment disputes, contract violations, and exploitation. Participants are directly connected to PMI protection mechanisms and need adequate legal knowledge to prevent rights violations.

Data Collection and Evaluation Techniques

Data were collected through five techniques: (1) a pre-test before the educational session and a post-test after the activity; (2) observation of participant engagement and responses during the activity; (3) interviews and feedback forms to obtain participants' opinions on the relevance, clarity, and usefulness of the materials; (4) a simple questionnaire on information sources during needs identification; and (5) evaluation of the educational media.

Instruments

The instruments were (1) pre-test and post-test sets of 20 questions each, measuring knowledge of lawful placement procedures, PMI rights and obligations, recruitment risks, exploitation indicators, protection institutions, complaint mechanisms, and use of official PMI information channels; (2) a structured observation



guideline assessing engagement, participation in discussions, responses to case studies, and understanding; (3) an interview guideline and feedback form; and (4) the information-source questionnaire. The educational media comprised presentation slides, legal information materials, case examples, and official information resources on PMI protection services.

Data Analysis

Evaluation results were analyzed descriptively by comparing participants' knowledge before and after the intervention. Changes in pre-test and post-test scores, participant engagement, and feedback responses served as indicators of the effectiveness of community-based legal education in strengthening preventive capacity against exploitation and non-procedural placement of PMI in Malaysia.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Implementation Overview and Participant Characteristics

The activity "Strengthening Community Legal Literacy in Preventing Exploitation and Non-Procedural Placement of Indonesian Migrant Workers in Malaysia" was held on 17 July 2026 at the Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia in Kuala Lumpur with 75 Indonesian Migrant Workers (PMI) as participants. All stages, from needs identification, legal education, interactive discussion, and legal consultation to evaluation, were completed as planned. The materials were developed from participants' needs and focused on practical issues: lawful placement procedures, required documents, PMI rights and obligations, characteristics of illegal recruitment, exploitation risks, and protection and complaint mechanisms (Utami, 2024).

Participants were predominantly women (70%), with men making up 30%. Most were aged 26–35 years and had completed senior or vocational high school (SMA/SMK). This composition shaped the learning approach: because of participants' educational background, the materials used communicative language, case examples, and step-by-step procedural explanations rather than complex legal terminology. The predominance of women also underscores the importance of understanding procedures, labor rights, and protection mechanisms for a group vulnerable to gender-based violence (Chadambuka et al., 2025).

2. Participants' Sources of Employment Information

During the needs identification stage, participants were asked about the sources of information they used when seeking overseas work. The results are presented in Table 1.



Table 1. Participants' Sources of Information When Seeking Overseas Employment

Source of Information	Percentage
Friends or relatives	46%
Social media	28%
Official recruitment agencies	18%
Village government or labor offices	8%

Table 1 shows that informal networks (friends, relatives, and social media) were the main sources of information, at 74% in total. Official sources, namely official recruitment agencies and village government or labor offices, accounted for only 26%. This pattern matters because dependence on informal information is risky when the legality of recruitment, procedures, and worker protection cannot be verified. The finding became the basis for ensuring that the materials did not only cover legal provisions but also trained participants to verify information through official channels such as SISKOP2MI (Candra et al., 2026).

3. Improvement in Legal Knowledge Based on Pre-Test and Post-Test Results

The effectiveness of the education was measured with a 20-item pre-test and post-test, consisting of four questions for each of five legal literacy indicators. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Pre-Test and Post-Test Correct Responses by Legal Literacy Indicator (n = 75)

No	Legal Literacy Indicator	Questions	Pre-Test (%)	Post-Test (%)	Improvement (points)
1	Lawful PMI placement procedures	4	70.0	90.0	+20.0
2	Required documents and employment contracts	4	65.0	87.5	+22.5
3	PMI rights and obligations	4	72.5	90.0	+17.5
4	Identification of illegal recruitment and exploitation risks	4	62.5	86.0	+23.5
5	Protection institutions and complaint mechanisms	4	72.5	84.0	+11.5
Total average		20	68.5	87.5	+19.0



Overall, the average score rose from 68.5 to 87.5, an increase of 19 points (about 27.7% of the initial score). The fairly high initial score shows that participants had basic knowledge from their work experience, but some aspects of procedures and protection mechanisms were not fully understood. The increase after the intervention indicates that contextual and participatory education contributed positively to participants' understanding.

Improvement occurred in all five indicators (Table 2). The largest gain was in identifying illegal recruitment and exploitation risks, which rose from 62.5% to 86.0% (+23.5 points) and was also the indicator with the lowest initial knowledge. It was followed by required documents and employment contracts (+22.5 points), lawful placement procedures (+20.0 points), and PMI rights and obligations (+17.5 points). The smallest gain was in knowledge of protection institutions and complaint mechanisms (+11.5 points), which also had the lowest post-test result (84.0%).

4. Findings from Observation, Interviews, and Feedback

Observation showed high participant engagement. Participants actively responded to examples of illegal recruitment, employment contracts, document verification, and exploitation cases. The discussion revealed that some participants had previously received job offers through informal networks without verifying the legality of the recruitment. Observation identified three main findings. First, understanding of procedural migration mechanisms remained limited, particularly regarding official recruitment channels, required documents, and the consequences of non-procedural placement. Second, participants showed strong interest in labor rights and protection mechanisms, including unpaid wages, contract violations, employer disputes, document retention, and access to assistance from Indonesian representatives in Malaysia. Third, participants felt that legal assistance should be continuous, through regular information sessions, digital platforms, and community-based assistance.

Based on interviews and feedback, most participants stated that the activity increased their awareness of the importance of checking employment information before accepting job offers. They also recognized that some recruitment practices they had considered normal could carry legal risks. The materials rated most useful were how to identify illegal recruitment, understanding employment contracts, knowing which institutions can provide assistance, and recognizing signs of exploitation.



Documentation of the legal education session is presented in Figure 1.



Figure 1. Documentation of the Legal Education Session for Indonesian Migrant Workers in Kuala Lumpur

Discussion

The results show that strengthening legal literacy is an important preventive strategy in PMI protection. The availability of regulations such as Law No. 18 of 2017 and Government Regulation No. 59 of 2021 (Farida, 2025) does not automatically produce effective protection if workers cannot understand and use that legal framework in their daily decisions. The rise in scores from 68.5 to 87.5 supports this idea: work experience abroad does not always match an adequate understanding of rights, obligations, and protection mechanisms. This finding is in line with Barid et al. (Barid et al., 2022), who identified legal literacy as a critical competency for Indonesian migrant workers and pointed to a lack of practical legal knowledge and skills as a significant factor behind the legal problems they face abroad. It is also consistent with the principle that labor law must realize justice and protection for workers in practice, not only in written norms (Fudge, 2007).

The indicator-level results show where the education worked best. The weakest initial area, recognizing illegal recruitment and exploitation risks, showed the largest gain, which is consistent with participants' feedback that this material was the most useful. In contrast, knowledge of protection institutions and complaint mechanisms improved the least and had the lowest post-test result. This is consistent with studies reporting that complaint mechanisms remain a weak point of the PMI protection system, both in terms of limited access to complaint mechanisms (Adawi, 2021) and suboptimal legal complaint services. It suggests that this area is harder to strengthen in a single session because it depends on services that participants can actually reach, and therefore needs reinforcement through continuous assistance and a more direct link to the services of the Embassy and other authorized institutions (Rana, 2016).

The observation and interview findings show that PMI vulnerability stems not only from the absence of regulations but also from limited access to understandable legal information. The data in Table 1 reinforce this, as three of every four participants relied on informal networks. This reflects problems reported in the



literature, namely the prevalence of non-procedural placement by illegal agents combined with low digital literacy regarding the government's online reporting system (Kharissa et al., 2025), and the fact that irregular workers outside the official placement system fall beyond the reach of state protection. Education therefore needs to go beyond conveying regulations and build the ability to verify information through official channels, such as SISKOP2MI and authorized protection institutions (Safitri et al., 2026). Participants' need for continuous assistance is consistent with the view that protection requires a holistic, participatory, and sustainable approach (Yuniarto, 2019), and with calls to strengthen education for migrant workers, including before departure.

The collaboration with the Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia in Kuala Lumpur provided an important institutional context, as participants could directly connect legal knowledge with available protection mechanisms. The community approach also positioned participants as active subjects of protection, not just recipients of information. This matters because migration decisions are influenced by family, economic conditions, and social networks, and it echoes the finding that community-based approaches, through the empowerment of migrant workers and their families, strengthen the effectiveness of legal protection by improving legal awareness, social resilience, and access to social protection (Septian & Wulandari, 2024). Knowledge shared within a community can extend the activity's impact to others around participants, particularly women, who are more vulnerable to gender-based violence.

Compared with studies that mainly analyze regulations and policy (Supriyono et al., 2026), this activity contributes empirical evidence of a measurable gain in legal knowledge from an education intervention delivered directly to PMI in a destination country, in partnership with the Indonesian Embassy. In terms of implications, the activity benefited participants through improved knowledge, greater caution toward job offers of unclear legality, and a tendency to seek information through official channels. For the partner, it strengthened the link between legal education and existing protection services. The evaluation was based on a single session using a pre-test and post-test without a control group, so retention of knowledge and changes in behavior were not measured. Based on these results and the evaluation, it is recommended that (1) legal education be held regularly and continuously, (2) materials be updated as regulations change, with additional emphasis on complaint mechanisms and protection institutions, (3) digital media be used to widen reach (Dibley et al., 2020), (4) cooperation among universities, Indonesian representatives abroad, and community organizations be strengthened, and (5) evaluation be conducted systematically, including long-term follow-up to assess changes in participants' behavior.

CONCLUSION

The community service activity "Strengthening Community Legal Literacy in Preventing Exploitation and Non-Procedural Placement of Indonesian Migrant Workers in Malaysia" achieved its objective of improving participants' understanding of lawful placement procedures, PMI rights and obligations, the risks of non-procedural placement, forms of exploitation, and protection and complaint mechanisms. All six stages were carried out as planned with 75 PMI at the Indonesian Embassy in Kuala Lumpur. The average pre-test score rose from 68.5 to 87.5, an increase of 19.0 points, with gains across all five legal literacy indicators. The largest gain was in identifying illegal recruitment and exploitation risks, while knowledge of protection institutions and complaint mechanisms improved the least. Observation, interviews, and feedback also



showed high engagement and greater awareness of the need to verify job offers through official channels.

These results indicate that community-based legal education and assistance, delivered contextually and in partnership with the Embassy, is a relevant preventive strategy for strengthening the capacity of PMI to avoid exploitation and non-procedural placement. The activity benefited participants and strengthened the link between legal education and existing protection services. Because the evaluation was based on a single session without a control group, the retention of knowledge and its effect on participants' behavior remain to be established. Continuous education, stronger emphasis on complaint mechanisms, the use of digital media, and long-term follow-up evaluation are therefore needed.

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