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12-5-2021

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APRILLIA, BUNGA; Widianingsih, Ida; Rachman, Junita Budi; and Ningrum, Sinta, "The importance of improving literacy skills for Indonesian women migrant workers in the pre departure stage to support safe migration (SDG 10); gender sensitivity approach" (2021). *Library Philosophy and Practice (e-journal)*. 6708.

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# **The importance of improving literacy skills for Indonesian women migrant workers in the pre departure stage to support safe migration (SDG 10); gender sensitivity approach**

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## **Abstract**

Women migrant workers from Indonesia are in great demand by placement countries to work in the domestic sector. West Java province ranks third largest as a contributor to the dominance of women migrant workers in Indonesia after Central Java and East Java. At the pre-placement stage their ability to understand all information about migration is very reliable. Prospective migrant workers must be given access to read, understood, and agree to every article in the employment agreement. Especially women, the dominance of the number of women working as migrant workers in the domestic sector adds to the condition of their vulnerability. The protection of women migrant workers is not only the responsibility of the government and private labour suppliers but also the responsibility of themselves as migrant workers. This study aims to reveal the importance of increasing the literacy of women migrant workers towards work agreements as a form of self-protection, because the state is not at the employer's house. The gender sensitivity approach (OSCE, 2009), the concept of impact literacy (Bayley and Phipps, 2019) and the principle of safe migration in SDG 10.7 serve as a guide in this research. The results of this study state that 1. It is necessary to increase literacy specifically for women migrant workers in the domestic sector 2. In seeking the protection of women migrant workers, the government needs to provide women-friendly work agreements specifically for women migrant workers in the domestic sector to reduce inequality.

**Keywords:** migrant literacy, women migrant workers, safe migration, gender sensitivity approach

## **Introduction**

Sustainable Development Goals 10.7 from Agenda 2030 stated facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well managed migration policies (UN Women, 2017). The Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) is the first negotiated intergovernmental agreement, prepared under the auspices of the United Nations, to cover all dimensions of international migration in a holistic and comprehensive manner. Member States are committed to cooperating internationally to facilitate safe, orderly, and regular migration. According to IOM, the most important indicator of safe migration is the number of countries that have implemented well-managed migration policies. Indonesia issued Law no. 18 of 2017 concerning the Protection of Indonesian Migrant Workers who have ratified the principle of safe migration. Providing safe conditions for migration means that countries sending workers abroad have reduced inequalities that occur in dynamic migration situations. Safe migration is believed to give women migrant workers a sense of security.

The number of Indonesian Migrant Workers (PMI) from West Java Province ranks 3rd, after East Java and Central Java. Most of the migrant workers came from Indramayu (23,360 people), Cirebon Regency (12,188 people), Subang (6,694 people), Karawang (3,749 people) and Majalengka (3,393 people). Based on gender, the majority of PMIs from West Java are women (82%) while based on education, the majority have junior high school education (49%) (SAPA institute, 2021). The number of women migrant workers that always increases every year is accompanied by an increase in case complaints every year. In 2017 and 2018 cases of violence against migrant workers handled by the West Java Province BP3TKI reached 442 and 1,327 cases, which included human trafficking and violence, including sexual violence against women migrant workers (SAPA institute, 2021). This issue has placed Indonesia in the feminization of migration phenomenon. Feminization of migration is not only seen in terms of quantity but quality. The predicate of feminization of migration that has been attached so far is also influenced by the failure of government protection at pre-placement. Some literature states that one of the government's failure factors is influenced by the lack of understanding and ability of prospective female migrant workers in language so that they have problems understanding the contents of work agreements (Aleida Hutagalung & Indrio, 2019; Durotur Robi' ah & Nugroho, 2020; SAPA institute, 2021). Of course, the process of understanding the contents of the contract, language training, and also building a confident character are some of the components that prospective migrant workers must go through at the pre-placement stage.

Private and government training centers provide these services and prospective female migrant workers are required to attend.

Safe migration is not without support. Safe conditions must be supported by the government, private labour suppliers, employment agencies overseas, as well as migrant workers themselves. One thing that is important in working is the work agreement contained in the work agreement. Access to information on the situation and working conditions, the salary system, the appropriateness of the place to work and the scope of work is explained in the work agreement. Of course, migrant workers need to access this information clearly, clearly, and correctly according to facts. The reliability of prospective migrant workers in accessing information is highly relied upon, several factors such as proficiency in foreign languages, understanding of the contents of the contract and the confidence to express misunderstandings and the courage to express disagreements are highly expected. However, the understanding of information regarding the protection of women migrant workers, one of which is that the contents of the contract have not been fully understood by women migrant workers.

Beyond its conventional concept as a set of reading, writing, and counting skills, literacy is now understood as a means of identification, understanding, interpretation, creation, and communication in an increasingly digital, text-mediated, information-rich, and fast-changing world (UNESCO). Impact literacy concept (Bayley & Phipps, 2019a) showed that Impact literacy thus reflects the understanding necessary to develop and execute meaningful, appropriate, and realistic impact pathways to generate benefit in the 'real world'. There are three key areas of reflection including 1. Three levels of literacy along both individual and institutional poles, 2. Institutional literacy, focused on building organizational capacity/literacy (in parallel to the development of personal literacy/capacity) and 3. A baseline understanding of 'why' impact is being pursued (mission vs. assessment driven), reflecting fundamental inceptive questions around ethics, values and power relationships and the overall purpose of the impact (Bayley & Phipps, 2019a).

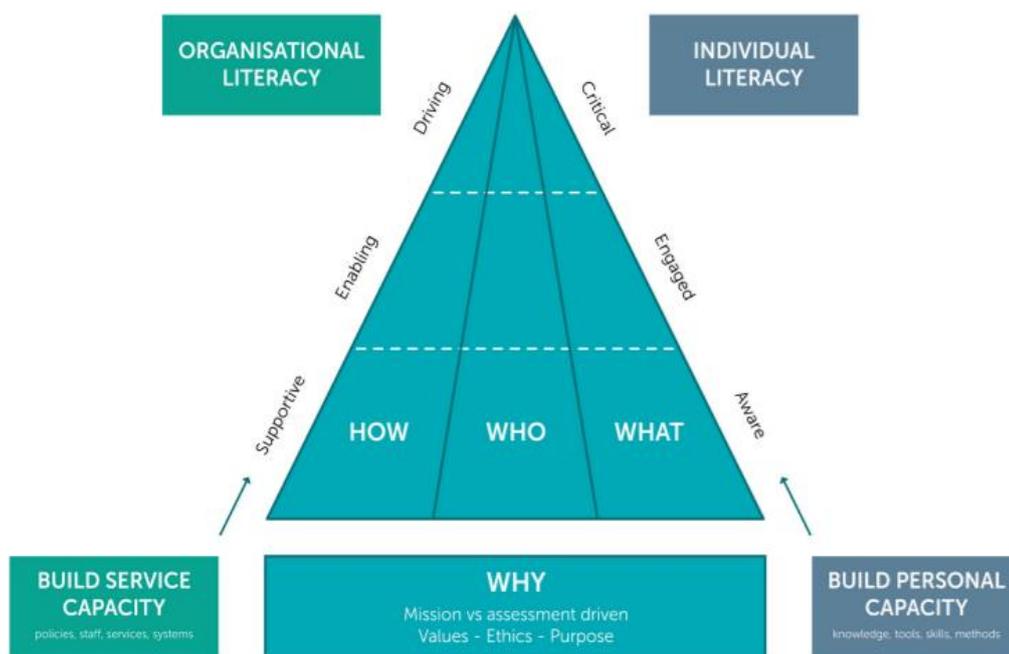


Figure 1. Revised model of impact literacy (Bayley and Phipps, 2019)

The importance of increasing individual literacy skills for women migrant workers at the pre-placement stage is not only about reading and writing but understanding, identifying and being able to re-communicate the meaning of the text read so that it is useful for self-protection. Likewise with institutional literacy, which is expected to be understood by private and government labour suppliers.

To explain the importance of migration literacy for women migrant workers, this study uses a gender sensitive approach from the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) about considering engendering bilateral agreements, certain measures and aspects could be considered according to stages, at the pre-placement stage. Among the aspects that need to be considered are 1. Provide gender training to those selecting migrant workers in order to ensure a fair and transparent selection process that gives potential female migrants equal access to employment abroad, 2. Disseminate information on legal migration opportunities and migrants' rights and obligations to minimize the risk of female migrant workers being exploited or trafficked, 3. Provide information on arrival on national immigration and labour laws, the social welfare system, information on complaints mechanism and contact details of counselling organizations, professional organizations and trade unions, etc(OSCE, 2009).

## **Methods**

Subjects or informants in this study were selected purposively with sampling techniques based on their activities and willingness to consciously explore and articulate their experiences in the Final Departure Process (PAP) at the One-Stop Integrated Service (LTSA). There were 10 prospective female migrant workers who took part in the PAP in Indramayu, who were interviewed in depth from 2019 to 2020. The data analysis process is carried out to describe the whole interview data interpretation activity. data analysis is an ongoing process that requires continuous reflection on data, asking analytical questions, and writing short notes throughout the study (Creswell, 2010). That is, the analysis of qualitative data may involve the process of collecting data, interpreting and reporting the results together and together. In conducting data analysis, we are guided by research questions so that a process can be carried out by coding the data. All interview results are through transcribing data by narrating sound recordings and images into writing without being added or subtracted further in (non-verbatim).

## **Research result and discussion**

### **Cilacap District, Desbumi Case Study**

The term migration literacy is the term chosen to show the understanding of migrant workers in identifying, interpreting, and understanding all information regarding the concept of safe migration. Based on a literature study of field facts, the concept of safe migration has been adopted by a non-governmental organization called Migrant Care and implemented through the Desbumi program (Village care for Migrant Workers) (Aleida Hutagalung & Indrio, 2019). This program provides a roadmap for the protection of migrant workers starting from their hometowns and several important services from Desbumi, namely data collection, information dissemination, case complaints, population administration documents, and economic empowerment. The lack of understanding of prospective migrant workers about safe migration procedures is the main factor that drives exploitation. Desbumi provides information and socialization services about safe migrants as an effort to prevent the emergence of exploitation and discrimination against women migrant workers. This program can inspire actors involved in the pre-placement stage where this program seeks to increase the literacy of migrant workers to important information needed in the context of protecting migrant workers at the pre-placement stage.

Cilacap District is where the Desbumi program is implemented, its benefits are felt in increasing the understanding of village communities to choose safe migration by procedural

paths, as well as the emergence of a commitment from the village government to protect women migrant workers through village regulations and integrated service centers (PPT). The Integrated Service Center in one of the villages in Cilacap implements the program in three stages, namely at the pre-placement stage for PMI candidates, during the placement phase for PMI, and at the post-placement stage for Retired PMI.

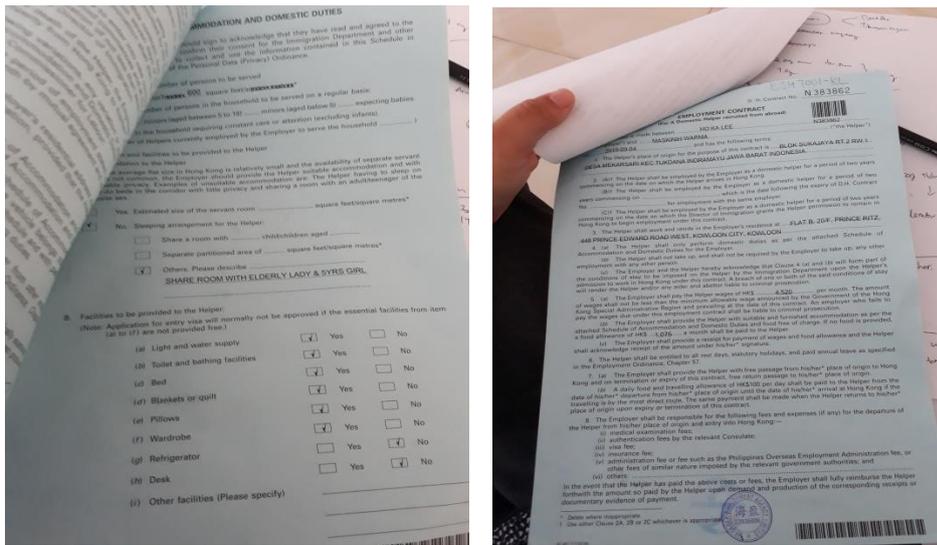
Services provided for PMI candidates include information services, document creation services, data collection, socialization, assistance to understand rights and obligations in work agreements and legal protection. For PMI during the placement period, the services provided include information services, case complaints, hotline provision for assistance or legal protection assistance, while at post-placement for PMI retirees are monthly meetings and training.

PPT Desbumi also plays a role in economic empowerment for post-PMI, such as providing courses to have the skills and abilities to become entrepreneurs. PPT Desbumi also plays a role in increasing the knowledge of migrant workers about the law and plays a role in increasing the knowledge of migrant workers about managing remittances. Through this training, migrant workers are informed about the rights that must be obtained such as the full salary is given in what month, how much is the deduction, the right to rest time, the address of the protection office in the country of destination, and so on.

### **Case Studies in Indramayu**

During the field research in Indramayu, the researcher followed the PAP directly for 3 days and all PMP candidates were not proficient in English or the language of the country of placement. There was 1 (one) candidate for PMP to be placed in Hong Kong who questioned the contents of his work agreement and it turned out that the results of the interview with the employer were not in sync with the contents of the work agreement. One of them was in a video call interview with the employer, who was told that he only took care of 1 grandmother and 1 child. It turns out that in the work agreement, the prospective PMP must take care of 1 grandmother, 1 father, 1 mother, 2 children under five (Indramayu C. P., 2019). In addition, PMP candidates are not provided with their own room facilities, share bedroom with elderly lady and 5 years girl. The following is proof of the relevant work agreement:

Figure 2; The CPMP employment agreement for Hong Kong is written in English



Source: Field data (Indramayu C. P., 2019)

The PAP instructor at that time emphasized the worst risk for female PMI candidates to prepare to sleep on the floor, in the living room and even in the bathroom, because that usually happens if there are no room facilities for domestic assistants (Indramayu IP, Knowledge of CPMP work agreements, 2019). This statement immediately made PMI Women candidates feel worried and could not do more because they had signed a work agreement that they did not understand. The results of the interview in the Indramayu area with PPMI A that he felt trapped because what was discussed in the online interview with the employer was different from the contract that had been signed. The ability of women migrant workers to receive, manage, and approve the information needed is included in the literacy component that is important and needed by women migrant workers. Not only one person, but prospective female migrant workers also who will be dispatched to Singapore do not even understand the contents of their contracts because they do not know the language used. The work agreements made for PMI, especially between Indonesia and countries in Asia, are indeed considered detrimental to Indonesia. Based on field data in the city of Indramayu, researchers saw first-hand the different work agreements in each country, some already use 3 languages (the language of the placement country, Indonesian and English) but some only use the language of the country of placement and English, including Hong Kong. and Taiwan (Indramayu CP, 2019). The process of signing a work agreement is indeed very short, PMI candidates can understand the work agreement but in reality, they do not understand the content of the work agreement when they sign it. Moreover, PPTKIS did not provide clear and clear information.

Women migrant workers from Indonesia are the favourite destination countries for placement. Sonya Michel and Ito Peng in 2017 in their book entitled *Gender, Migration and the Work of care* stated that “Indonesian women, who do not speak English and are seen as being more “moderate” and subservient, have become favourite employees for Taiwanese” (Michel & Peng, 2017). PPTKIS are sometimes overwhelmed by job orders from overseas agents, so language training that should be 6 months can be cut short to meet the demands of the overseas labour market. Although women migrant workers from Indonesia are the favourites of several destination countries, this does not mean that the government is negligent in improving their literacy regarding safe migration.

The information provided by the government is very complete and the Final Departure Process (PAP) held by BP3MI at the One-Stop Integrated Service (LTSA) is also very informative. I really appreciate this activity because this activity cares for women, there is information that leads to women's sexuality, specializes in information that contains concern for women. In the discussion stage of the work agreement at the PAP, all prospective female migrant workers are asked to understand the contents of the contract and if they do not agree with the contents of the contract and choose to resign, it means that the PPMI candidate must return the money to the private labour supplier, this will again harm the PPMI candidate. Understanding the contents of the contract and agreeing to it is not trivial, in fact this is the beginning of the protection process in the country of placement. If the signed contract is female-friendly, of course there will be a lot of convenience in the protection process starting from control, access, and reporting.

The results of the field show that all efforts to provide information by the government are not related to the habits of migrant workers who do not like to read contracts and are accustomed to believing and agreeing to sign the contract. This shows the weak literacy ability of women migrant workers.

### **The importance of Indonesia's bargaining position against other countries**

Access to information obtained by women migrant workers is very low and this gives the position of the Indonesian state to have no bargaining power. The bargaining power of prospective Indonesian migrant workers, especially women, does not exist because the contract freely reads articles that are not friendly to women. The inequality of power relations between employers and women migrant workers is very strong, the employer is a strong subject in determining the contents of the contract, while women migrant workers are weak objects

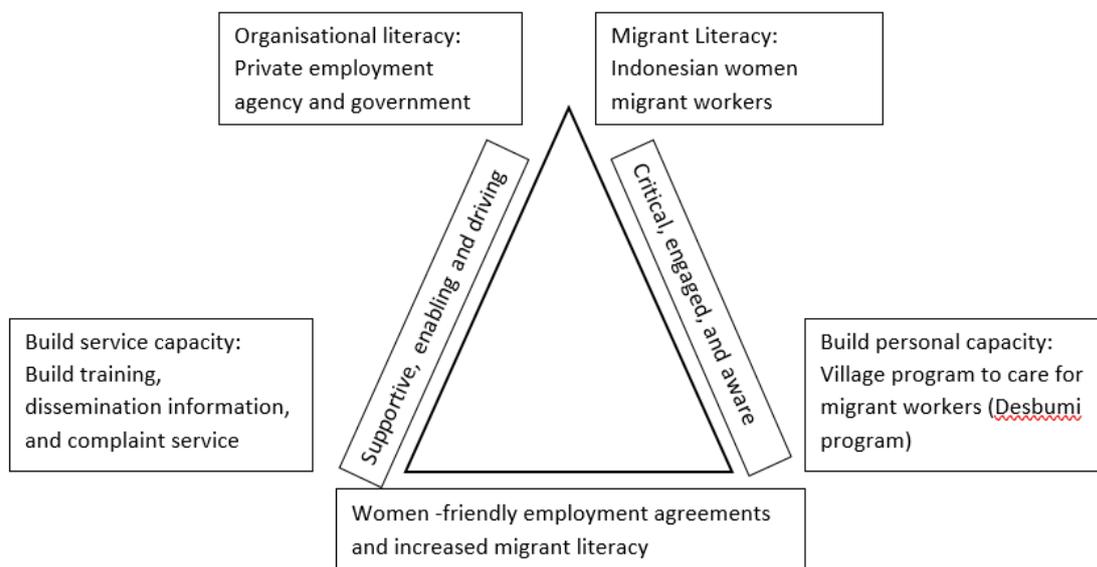
(Durotur Robi' ah & Nugroho, 2020). In this position, PMI tends to have no understanding of the contents of the agreement. One of the information that the government and PPTKIS does not pay attention to is the bed/private space while at the employer's house. Employers are free to place women migrant workers without private space to rest or sleep. The feasibility of living space should have standards, referring to the principle of safe migration, safe migration of course sees the different needs of women and men. If women are placed in the kitchen or public area to sleep and rest, it means that they do not provide a safe space for women and of course there is no comfort. The strength of the work agreement approved by the prospective female migrant worker will be the basis for whether Indonesian women will be protected at the employer's house. Domestic work is one of the types of work that dominates women migrant workers from Indonesia, especially research (Michel & Peng, 2017) which states that placement countries favour women from Indonesia as household assistants because they are considered very obedient. However, this does not mean that Indonesia does not have specific regulations for this type of work.

This type of domestic work is very vulnerable because the state is difficult to control the presence of women migrant workers when they are already in the employer's house. This is where the importance of women-friendly work agreements with the principle of caring for women's gender. I believe that if the information provided is accompanied by serious implementation of access to employment agreement information for women migrant workers, it may reduce the level of problems at the post-placement stage at the Indonesian migrant workers (PMI) such as sexual violence, PMI died, PMI was sick, PMI was not given the appropriate salary, PMI was sent home. no reason etc. Improving the literacy of women migrant workers is not only in the outside-in stage (provided by government or private services to PMI) but builds PMI's character by starting to build confidence from PMI, where they are confident to ask if something doesn't suit them or there is something wrong with them. understand himself. Increasing access to information is not only from the outside but also how to receive it and how to respond to it. This needs to be a concern for trainers in training and competency-building service institutions for prospective migrant workers.

OSCE recommends that in making bilateral employment agreements it is necessary to pay attention to 3 aspects including providing gender training to select migrant workers, disseminating information on migration opportunities, and providing information on arrival and complaint services. Adopting these 3 (three) aspects cannot be implemented if migrant workers do not have individual literacy and the government does not have institutional literacy.

As presented in the diagram adopted from the concept of impact literacy (Bayley & Phipps, 2019b):

Figure 3: Model impact literacy for migrant literacy



In the study of migration literacy, I would like to invite other researchers to discuss the appropriate model in building collaboration between all actors to seriously fix the importance of protection through increasing the capacity of prospective migrant workers in realizing safe migration efforts. It should be noted that information about PMI has indeed been widely disseminated through the SIPMI application, through social media, through the support of NGOs, and government agencies. It's just that of the many actors involved, none of them can seek employment agreements to be female-friendly, access to information on contracts given to prospective female migrant workers is very limited and tends to trap. Increased literacy may be needed not only by women migrant workers but also by all actors involved in the pre-placement stages.

## Conclusion

Improving the literacy of women migrant workers must be taken seriously starting from the process in the village to the final stage in the PAP. If it is known that the work agreement was not understood during the PAP process and tends to be detrimental, there needs to be a mechanism so that the work agreement can be changed, or tolerance can be cancelled. The information needed by women will be different from the information needed by men. Of

course, in designing the contents of the contract, government intervention is necessary because there is a need for the strength of work agreements, especially for female domestic workers. Female domestic workers who do not have female-friendly contracts will worsen their working conditions as women. Moreover, if contracts that are not female-friendly are then agreed to without understanding the contents, women migrant workers will face multiple vulnerability conditions. All depend on good fortune, not on government protection promised in Law no. 18 years 2017.

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