

Original Research Paper

Promoting Citizenship Awareness Among Stateless Children: Advancing Global Goals for SDGs 1 and 5

Mega Nisfa Makhroja¹, Lalu Puttrawandi Karjaya¹, Nor Suzylan Suhaimi¹, Mohd. Naem Ajis¹, Gesta Tri Anjani¹, Diana Eka Putri²

¹ Department of International Relations, University of Mataram, Mataram, Indonesia School Of Government, University Utara Malaysia

² Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences, University of Mataram, Mataram

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*Corresponding Author:

Mega Nisfa Makhroja,

University of Mataram,

Mataram, Indonesia;

Email:

mn.makhroja@unram.ac.id

Abstract: This community project highlights the socio-legal challenges faced by Indonesian female workers in Malaysia, particularly those engaged in mixed status marriages with refugees or undocumented individuals such as the Rohingya. These women and their children often experience vulnerabilities due to the absence of legal recognition, which hinders their access to education, healthcare, and citizenship rights. Malaysia's non-signatory position to the UN Refugee Convention, coupled with restrictive national laws, further complicates their situation, while Indonesia also lacks legal provisions to accommodate such cases. In response, this project seeks to raise citizenship awareness, emphasizing the risks of marrying non-state actors and the implications of statelessness. Implemented in collaboration with Universiti Sains Malaysia, Universiti Utara Malaysia, and the Rohingya Learning Center, the initiative combines socialization, training, and mentorship to empower women with essential knowledge. By integrating social media campaigns and academic outputs, the program aims to promote the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 1 (No Poverty) and 5 (Gender Equality), while also advocating for policy reforms. Through this approach, the project aspires to reduce vulnerabilities, strengthen community resilience, and contribute to broader discussions on migration and refugee rights in Malaysia.

Keywords: Citizenship Awareness, Indonesian Female Migrant Worker, Malaysia, Rohingya, Stateless Children.

Introduction

The primary issue addressed by this project stems from findings in last year's program. Many Indonesian women working in Malaysia have entered into marriages, often with individuals from the Rohingya community or other migrant groups. These unions, frequently conducted without legal formalities, have far-reaching consequences, not only for the women but also for their children. Marriages involving individuals with refugee status

significantly restrict women's access to social, healthcare, and economic rights. Moreover, these circumstances adversely affect their children, compounding their vulnerability (Azizah Kassim, 2020). At the core of this issue is the limited awareness of citizenship rights and legal protections, which hinders these women from safeguarding their well-being and that of their families. On the other side, women migrant workers play a significant role in the national and global economy since the number of women workers

almost similar to men is about 48% women and 52% men (UNDP 2023). Unfortunately, they are more vulnerable than men. On the other side, Indonesia promoted female migrant labor as a temporary solution to poverty and unemployment (Missbach 2018). It was unsustainable and also highly risky.



Figure 1. Previous Project: Stateless children in Rohingya Learning Center Kedah (2024)

The main partners in this program are Universiti Utara Malaysia, Permai Learning Center and Rohingya Learning Center all located in Malaysia. These institutions are situated in areas that serve as hubs for undocumented children born from marriages between migrant workers and non-Malaysian citizens or members of the Rohingya community. The primary issue faced by these communities is the lack of understanding regarding citizenship. This lack of awareness has led to the prevalence of illegal marriages, which directly impacts the citizenship status of their children. The limited national awareness among parents has become a critical root problem that needs to be addressed.



Figure 2. Previous Project with Stateless children in PERMAI Penang, Malaysia. Collaboration with

International MBKM Project from IR Student University of Mataram (2023)

Based on last year's activities at the Rohingya Learning Center in Kedah, the primary focus was on empowering stateless children through integrative education. However, evaluations revealed that a more fundamental issue stems from the parents' limited understanding of the importance of citizenship literacy. Many children of migrant workers cannot attend formal schools due to their undocumented status. Additionally, these stateless children face significant challenges in accessing healthcare services. Most of their parents work as domestic workers and struggle to comprehend and support formal initiatives aimed at improving their children's education and welfare.

The primary objective of this initiative is to foster global collaboration between Universitas Mataram and its partners in Malaysia, including Universiti Utara Malaysia, PERMAI Learning Center and the Rohingya Learning Center. This program is designed to provide parents with citizenship literacy to enhance their understanding of national awareness. It directly supports the Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) initiative, particularly in expanding international experiences for students and faculty through cross-border community engagement activities.

This activity will be integrated with the International Student Mobility program that Universitas Mataram conducts annually. For example, last year, 25 students from Universitas Mataram participated in the student mobility program and were also involved in this community service initiative. The program contributes directly to achieving IKU 2 (students participating in off-campus activities) and IKU 3 (faculty engaged in off-campus activities), with international activities earning significantly higher points than national-level activities.

Additionally, students earn up to 20 credits (SKS) from this program, with outcomes including community service journals. The integration of faculty community service and student mobility programs has resulted in several Implementation Arrangement (IAs), such as IAs for student exchange, community service, and faculty exchange. Other outcomes include academic publications by students and faculty, which enhance

Universitas Mataram's academic reputation on a global scale.

The successful implementation of this program requires close collaboration among all stakeholders to ensure sustainability and impact. Support from Malaysian partners is critical, both in facilitating on-site activities and providing relevant data to strengthen citizenship literacy in the target communities. Continuous evaluation of the program's impact is also necessary to measure its effectiveness in empowering the community and improving the condition of undocumented children. It is essential to ensure that all activities align with Universitas Mataram's vision for community engagement and strengthening international collaboration. With a comprehensive approach, this program is expected to not only deliver direct benefits to the target communities but also enrich the experiences of Universitas Mataram's students and faculty as part of a global society.

The targeted group of Indonesian women migrant workers in Malaysia faces significant challenges, particularly due to a lack of literacy regarding their citizenship rights and the implications of their legal status. This issue becomes especially urgent for those married to foreign nationals or raising children at risk of statelessness, as the absence of legal awareness not only limits individual rights but also threatens the social and economic security of entire families. First, the lack of citizenship literacy makes many Indonesian women migrant workers unaware of their rights, both for themselves and their children, often leading to neglect of legal processes that could help secure their status (Asmaroini et al., 2023). Second, this lack of awareness contributes to economic dependency on spouses or employers, as women with limited legal knowledge are less likely to advocate for fair working conditions or pursue opportunities to enhance their independence. Third, the consequences of statelessness are particularly severe for children, who often face barriers to accessing education (Qomariyah et al., 2024) and healthcare (Aimin et al., 2024), perpetuating cycles of poverty and marginalization. In light of these conditions, this year's program prioritizes the promotion of citizenship awareness as a strategic step to reduce the domino effect of socio-economic insecurity among Indonesian female migrant workers in Malaysia, while reinforcing the program's broader commitment to sustainable

community empowerment and international academic collaboration.

Methodhs

The implementation of this project is carried out through several structured steps designed to ensure effectiveness and sustainability. The first step is socialization, which is conducted via social media platforms and official invitation letters to disseminate information broadly. This stage aims to build awareness not only among the target community but also within the wider public. The second step is training, which focuses on increasing literacy about citizenship rights and responsibilities, particularly for Indonesian female migrants workers in Malaysia who have stateless children. The training emphasizes two key areas, understanding the rights and responsibilities of citizenship in a foreign country, and recognizing the laws and regulations of the host country regarding stateless children. Following the training, mentorship and evaluation are implemented for three months through both online and offline platforms. This stage serves as a quality control mechanism to monitor progress and assess the effectiveness of the program. The final step emphasizes the sustainability of the project, which remains a major challenge and requires strategic planning. Efforts include building strong communication with governmental and non-governmental partners, empowering cooperative managers to maintain grassroots-level initiatives, collaborating with district cooperative agencies for ongoing support, and securing additional funding from donor partners. Furthermore, student involvement plays a crucial role in sustaining the program, as the initiative can be extended through village development projects and integrated into the MBKM (Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka) scheme, with the possibility of earning up to 20 credit in one semester. This integration also allows the project to connect with the International Student Exchange Program and develop into an international collaboration with journal publication outputs, thereby providing benefits not only for lecturers but also for students.

Results And Discussion

This community service program was carried out in Malaysia from June 10–26, 2025,

across two main locations: the Baitul Rohmah Rohingya Learning Center in Kedah and the Pertubuhan Masyarakat Indonesia (PERMAI) in Penang. The participants at Baitul Rohmah included 56 students, 5 teachers, the Chairman of the Foundation who also serves as the President of Kedah Football Club, Mr. Zulkifli, as well as a four-member service team consisting of both Indonesian and Malaysian representatives. Meanwhile, the activities at PERMAI Penang involved 15 Indonesian women along with their stateless children. During the program, several important findings emerged. First, most children demonstrated very limited understanding of Indonesian identity, indicating that their sense of national consciousness had not yet been fully formed. Second, the majority of children preferred to remain in Malaysia because they felt a stronger connection to their current social environment. Third, a dilemma was observed between parents and children: while the parents generally expressed a strong desire to return to Indonesia, the children felt more attached to Malaysia, the place where they grew up and socialized. Moreover, administrative barriers stemming from the absence of clear citizenship documentation further complicated the situation and weakened the willingness of these migrant women to return to Indonesia.



Figure 3. Final activity documentation



Figure 4. Group documentation

The findings particularly the children's reluctance to return to their country of origin indicate that national identity is shaped not only by family background but also by the social environment in which individuals grow. Henri Tajfel offers a significant framework for understanding identity formation within groups. His Social Identity Theory provides insights into how social categories emerge from one's surroundings. The process of social identity comprises three stages, such as social categorization, social identification, and social comparison (Tajfel & Turner, 2004). First, in social categorization, individuals or groups tend to classify themselves based on inherent attributes such as ethnicity, religion, or other social affiliations. Second, through social identification, individuals or groups internalize the categories they perceive, which in turn strengthens solidarity with the group they consider as their own. Third, the distinction between in-groups and out-groups leads to social comparison, where individuals believe that the in-group's social identity is correct, while the out-group's identity is incompatible with their own perceptions (Hornsey, 2008).

In this context, stateless children involved in the program demonstrated a more complex and fragmented pattern of identity formation compared to their mothers. Their understanding of Indonesia remained partial and limited, confined mainly to geographical knowledge and narratives provided by their parents about their former homeland. However, this partial knowledge did not evolve into a strong collective identity. Furthermore, emotional attachment to Indonesian nationalism had not yet developed, as they had never directly experienced

the symbols or practices associated with Indonesian nationhood, such as flag ceremonies, the national anthem, or the implementation of Pancasila values. In contrast, the multicultural environment of Malaysia played a dominant role in shaping their social identity, fostering a stronger sense of belonging. In this regard, Malaysia functioned as the tangible in-group within the children's everyday social sphere, while Indonesia remained an abstract out-group perceived only through narratives.



Figure 5. Material delivery activity

The case of Rohingya children at the PERMAI learning center illustrates how the absence of formal citizenship creates a profound legal identity vacuum. These children lacked any recognized affiliation as citizens of Myanmar, Indonesia, or Malaysia. For them, Indonesia existed only as an abstract memory passed down by their parents, with no lived experiences to strengthen emotional bonds. Conversely, Malaysia provided the social environment that shaped their daily realities.

Another critical issue is the limited access to formal education among Indonesian migrant children in Malaysia, which poses significant challenges in shaping their national identity. Restricted learning opportunities particularly in subjects that cultivate historical, ideological, and national character values have resulted in weak comprehension of national consciousness. Yet, such understanding is crucial for the younger generation as the future of the nation. In essence, national consciousness represents Indonesia's perspective in recognizing its identity and environment as integral to statehood. Rooted in Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution, it emphasizes the nation's unity within diversity. This perspective is not merely normative but demands practical implementation

throughout the nation's historical development (Putri et al., 2023).

Furthermore, Pancasila values must be instilled from an early age as part of character formation for future generations, including children of Indonesian migrant workers, so that they are equipped to face future challenges. Pancasila is not only the state's ideological foundation but also a moral compass that should be internalized through education. A particularly relevant aspect is tolerance, which emphasizes recognition of the nation's diversity. This diversity includes ethnic, religious, linguistic, and customary differences that have long characterized Indonesian society. Practicing these values can foster a deeper love for the homeland (Muryati et al., 2024).

From the perspective of national consciousness, Indonesian migrant children in Malaysia exhibit a complex phenomenon in which their sense of nationality appears weak and underdeveloped. In general, national consciousness consists of three dimensions: knowledge, emotion, and identity. However, findings from the field reveal that none of these dimensions developed optimally among migrant children. The lack of access to formal education, which serves as the primary medium for instilling national values, was identified as the main factor.

In the knowledge dimension, national consciousness requires a deep understanding of historical struggles, territorial boundaries, and fundamental values. Such knowledge is not merely memorization but serves as the basis for cultivating awareness of national identity. Field observations showed that the migrant children's understanding of Indonesia was limited to geographical aspects, without deeper recognition of their nationality. Similarly, the emotional dimension of national consciousness was significantly underdeveloped. Ideally, nationalism is built through emotional bonds between individuals and their homeland, fostering love, pride, and attachment. Yet, the findings revealed that these children lacked emotional ties to Indonesia altogether. They felt more connected to Malaysia, which provided them with daily social interactions and a sense of safety and comfort. Nonetheless, their legal status in Malaysia remained precarious, as they were not fully recognized by the state. If this issue is not adequately addressed by Indonesia, their vulnerable identities will be increasingly difficult to restore.



Figure 6. Material delivery activity

A deeper dilemma also emerged concerning legal and socio-cultural identities. Migrant parents generally retained socio-cultural ties to Indonesia, shaped by ethnicity, history, and collective memory, and often expressed a desire to return. However, this aspiration was hindered by the absence of clear citizenship documents and their uncertain legal status. On the other hand, their children did not share the same cultural attachment to Indonesia. Having grown up in Malaysia, they felt more comfortable identifying with the local community. This divergence in socio-cultural attachment indicates an intergenerational conflict over national identity, as parental values were not effectively transmitted to their children. This highlights that social identity and national consciousness are not naturally inherited but instead require deliberate processes of education, lived experience, and consistent policies from the country of origin.

Conclusions

Based on the community service activities carried out, it can be concluded that Rohingya children at Baitul Rohmah experience a multidimensional identity crisis. They do not possess a clear legal identity, their cultural sense of Indonesian identity is very weak due to the lack of reinforcement from their environment, and pragmatically they tend to identify themselves more with their immediate social surroundings, namely Malaysia. The distance and limited access to information about Indonesia as their maternal homeland have resulted in minimal curiosity or willingness to learn about Indonesia. The absence of Indonesian national awareness is therefore a logical consequence of the lack of exposure and internalization of national values in their daily lives.

One of the main challenges in the implementation of this community service was the limitation of funding, considering that the activities were conducted abroad. Therefore, it is expected that greater financial support can be provided. Most of the funding is required for the implementation of on-site workshops, which involve significant expenses, particularly in terms of transportation costs.

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