



STRENGTHENING VILLAGES CAPACITY
IN THE PROTECTION AND EMPOWERMENT OF
INDONESIAN MIGRANT WORKERS:
**BEST PRACTICES AND SERVICE INCLUSION
DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**



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Strengthening Villages Capacity in the Protection and Empowerment of Migrant Workers: Best Practices and Services Inclusion during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

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Foreword

The global COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the vulnerability of all elements of society. Indonesian migrant workers, without exception, were also impacted by the global economic slowdown, lockdowns, and restrictions due to the pandemic. As borders were closed and lockdowns enforced, businesses worldwide were pushed to take measures to sustain their operations by reducing their working hours and employees. Consequently, overseas migrant workers have faced some of their most challenging times, having been forced in many cases to take unpaid leave, to work outside their regular working hours, and to face contract termination.

The combined impacts of the Pandemic have affected migrant workers not only economically but also in terms of mental health. The stigmatization that can occur as 'foreigners' in their country of destination, along with marginalization or exclusion from essential services such as healthcare, has often led to compounded stress and anxiety for migrant workers. Despite the benefits that overseas employment often brings, the conditions of the Pandemic have often made repatriation an appealing option if not a requirement for many migrant workers.

In its policy response to mitigating the impacts of the COVID-19 outbreak in the country, the Government of Indonesia has incorporated the spirit of 'Leaving No One Behind' by integrating migrant workers as one of the most affected groups. Enacting a national plan that would facilitate the return and reintegration of more than 180,000 Indonesian migrant workers between 2020 and 2021, the Government of Indonesia also demonstrated leadership in the implementation of key provisions of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM). With innovative financial schemes, the Government's plan focused on reintegration of workers, as well as the mitigation of social exclusion pressures in both the upstream (return from abroad) and downstream (return to their respective villages) phases for returning migrants. These actions boosted implementation of Law No. 18 Year 2017 on the Protection of Indonesian Migrant Workers, enhancing the role of local governments, villages, and communities in their respective migration management roles. This made migration-related services more effective, and brought delivery of benefits closer to returned migrant workers.

To support these efforts, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) launched a study to better understand the response measures taken at the village level to meet the challenges of COVID-19 affecting returned migrant workers. More than 1,082 villages across 8 provinces of origin of migrant workers were involved. The results presented here show the prominent role of Indonesian villages in the pursuit of safe, orderly, and regular migration and, specifically, in maximizing the role of returning migrants as contributors to sustainable development. This study gathers best practices utilized at the village level during the Pandemic response as part of further exploring how these practices might be fortified, and integrated as part of a more permanent policy measure for the protection and empowerment of migrant workers, their households, and their communities.

This study casts a light on four things. First, while pandemic assistance at the village level has reached many, the study seeks to reveal the extent to which migrant workers specifically have been included. Second, the study highlights how village planning and regulation have yet to fully include migration. Third, despite the past efforts to socialize Law No. 18 Year 2017, there remains limited knowledge about the Law at the village level. And finally, capacities at the village level for migration governance are yet to develop. The study reveals these elements while, at the same time, reflecting how returning migrant workers bring back skills, knowledge and experience to their home villages, and the importance of leveraging this to stimulate village development.

Through this research, IOM and UNDP hope to promote the Social Innovation Platform approach as an opportunity to facilitate the integration of protection and empowerment of migrant workers into village development planning. In addition to improving the lives of returning migrant workers, the approach will help to identify locally sourced development solutions to strengthen village capacity while implementing the mandates outlined on Law No. 18 Year 2017.

Of course, this study could not have been done without the valuable contributions of many who undertook this effort under the very challenging conditions of the Pandemic. IOM and UNDP express their sincere gratitude to the lead researcher, Ms Aviyanthi Aziz and to the Indonesian Migrant Workers Union (SBMI) for their assistance in gathering recommendations for this study. And we extend our highest appreciation also to all village leaders and community members that participated in this study.

We also thank our UNDP and IOM colleagues who dedicated their time and energy to this research: Shafira Ayunindya, Karina Larasati, Lidwina Putri, Rima Prama Artha, and Usha Riyanto, without whom this research initiative would not have been such a success.

We hope that this research report will contribute to the Government of Indonesia's efforts in strengthening a safe migration framework at national and local levels. We also hope that this research report will continue to be helpful for all stakeholders and communities who work tirelessly for the betterment of migrants and their communities.

12 January 2022

Louis Hoffmann, Chief of Mission IOM Indonesia
Norimasa Shimomura, UNDP Resident Representative Indonesia

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS

BP2MI	Badan Pelindungan Pekerja Migran Indonesia National Agency for the Protection of Indonesian Migrant Workers
BUMDes	Badan Usaha Milik Desa Village-owned Enterprise
COVID-19	Novel coronavirus disease
IOM	International Organization for Migration
KKBM	Komunitas Keluarga Buruh Migran (KKBM) Community of Migrant Worker Families
Perdes	Peraturan Desa Village Regulations
SBMI	Serikat Buruh Migran Indonesia Indonesian Migrant Workers Union
TNP2K	Tim Nasional Percepatan Penanggulangan Kemiskinan National Team for the Acceleration of Poverty Reduction
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The COVID-19 pandemic is an unprecedented crisis, with implications that reach deep into the lives and livelihoods of the most vulnerable. Migrant workers are among those whose susceptibility is exposed during the pandemic as measures to control the spread of the novel coronavirus include intense movement restrictions and business closures in destination countries. As a direct result of the pandemic, Indonesia, a major sending country, has seen a large-scale return of its low-wage workers throughout 2020.

Since early March 2021, the mass repatriation has been met with a nationally coordinated response, which entails comprehensive return facilitation that involves governments at all levels. This includes village-level governments, who are required to include them in pandemic services and aid packages upon the workers' return.

As the pandemic remains yet to be under control and return is foreseen to continue in 2021, there is a crucial need to assess what gaps have remained and how the response, especially at the villages level, could be improved. The focus on villages is pertinent as in 2017, the Indonesian parliament passed Law No. 18 on the Protection of Indonesian Migrant Workers. Among others, the Law mandates villages' more significant roles and responsibilities in migration governance.

ABOUT THIS STUDY

Complementing a previous survey conducted by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and the Serikat Buruh Migran Indonesia (SBMI, or in English, Indonesian Migrant Workers' Union)¹ on 2,000 Indonesian migrant workers who returned during the pandemic. This study examines the village-level response to the large-scale repatriation, identifying best practices and areas for improvement in village migration governance under Law No. 18 (2017). Particular attention is given to the villages government's capacity to address issues relating to the protection and empowerment of migrant workers and their families.

The study employs mixed methods, with the quantitative component comprising a survey that covered 1,082 villages across eight provinces in Indonesia, namely Lampung, West Kalimantan, Banten, West Java, Central Java, East Java, West Nusa Tenggara, and East Nusa Tenggara. This presents one of the most extensive exploratory surveys on Indonesian migration governance in terms of samples collected.

KEY FINDINGS

Key finding 1: Villages' pandemic assistance reached many, but it is unclear to what extent migrant workers were included.

¹ However, SBMI is to be distinguished from the Indonesian Migrant Workers Union (IMWU), another organisation of migrant workers based in Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, China.

A central question posed in this study concerns the degree to which (returning) migrant workers and their families had been included in the village's COVID-19 response. Nearly all of the villages participating in the survey reported that they administered the village cash transfer (*Bantuan Langsung Tunai Dana Desa, BLT-DD*), and a large majority also provided assistance through other assistance schemes/forms of subsidy.

Differing interpretations of vulnerability in Indonesia contribute to the partial emergence of migrant workers as a category of aid recipients during the COVID-19 response. Less than twenty-five per cent of surveyed apparatus reported that aid disbursement in their villages targeted the group as a specific category. However, there is a likelihood that migrant worker families were included under other categories of pandemic aid beneficiaries.

Key finding 2: Migration is yet to be included in village planning and regulation.

A majority of surveyed villages have not included migration in their village medium-term development plan (*Rencana Pembangunan Jangka Menengah Desa, RPJMDes*) and village regulation (*Peraturan Desa, Perdes*). In general, villages do not consider migration to be a priority issue. This is due to the perception of migrant households' relatively higher wealth than non-migrant households and villages' predilection in aligning their developmental

priority to the national government's directives.

Key finding 3: There is limited knowledge about Law No. 18 (2017) at the village level.

Less than twenty-five per cent of the surveyed village apparatus reported that they knew about the new Law. There is a noted limited comprehension, particularly on female village apparatus and those in border areas. Village apparatus that knew about the Law tended to have participated in socialization events from the national government. One of the most interesting findings from this research is that apparatus in villages where migrant worker communities/organizations are present are more likely to be knowledgeable about the Law, pointing to the crucial role of migrant worker communities/organizations and the importance of their organizing efforts.

Key finding 4: Villages are yet to develop their capacity for migration governance as mandated by Law No. 18 (2017).

The majority of villages are yet to provide pre-departure services for prospective migrant workers. Among villages that do, none reported that they had performed one of the critical duties tasked to the village government in accordance with the Law, which is providing information about job opportunities abroad. The survey further found that fewer than one-fifth of villages had equipped villagers with

safe and orderly migration information. The findings warrant attention as informal brokers operating in rural areas continue to be the primary source of information from whom villagers learn of work/migration opportunities.

Villages need to build their capacity in registering and monitor migration flows. Less than twenty per cent of the villages surveyed kept records of villagers who migrated, both internally and internationally, and in the case of villages that do keep migration records, migration data are often still in very rudimentary form. Nevertheless, this study notes that the COVID-19 response opened momentum for better recording of migration data, as seventy per cent of the surveyed villages reported that they kept close tracks of the number of pandemic returns. This is best practice could be leveraged for future efforts toward a robust migration database.

Villages need to lend more long-term support to returned migrant workers and empower them. Unfortunately, almost half of the surveyed villages do not offer assistance to migrant workers who have returned.

This lack of measures to secure sustainable return and re-integration is inconsistent with the widespread perception of re-migration, which is viewed disapprovingly as an indication of failure to save and invest money from migration. At present, migrant workers rely more on their community initiatives and peer empowerment.

STRATEGIC POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Support villages in carrying out migration governance tasks and responsibilities

More socialization and guidance are needed to remedy the current knowledge deficit about Law No. 18 (2017) and its implementation. By taking directions from the surveyed villages in this study, the following are listed as areas where assistance is most needed: a. provision of information relating to safe migration; b. population registry and data management; c. case management/(legal) assistance. In building villages' capacity for migration governance, particular attention should be given to empowering female village apparatus and those in the border areas.

Integrate migrant worker protection and empowerment into village planning and regulation

To ensure that the protection and empowerment of migrant workers are more sustained, integrate them into villages' long-term development planning. Villages should be encouraged and assisted in building regulations to establish continued support for low-wage migrant workers and their families.

There is a salient shared concern among different stakeholders to attend to the predicament of stay-behind families, especially children of migrant workers. Affirmative actions for women are particularly needed, considering the context of feminization of migration and the gendered experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Enhance the coordination between government levels in implementing Law No. 18 (2017)

Law No. 18 (2017) mandates tasks and responsibilities for all government levels in migration governance. Coordination between them should be strengthened to form an integrated approach to migrant workers' protection and empowerment.

This is crucial, particularly for local and village governments, as their respective responsibilities are stipulated in Articles 40, 41 and 42 of Law No. 18 (2017), configuring a decentralized migration governance that emphasizes their roles.

One of Law No. 18 (2017) key derivative regulations, the Government Regulation (*Peraturan Pemerintah*) No. 59 (2021), has recently been passed to provide a more precise framework for coordination. For villages, the regulation stipulates several mechanisms that require close coordination with the regency/town level governments, including for example, in informing migrant workers about job opportunities abroad, facilitating the access to complete administrative procedures, data collection of departing and returning migrant workers, and the empowerment of migrant workers and their families.

Establish solid and equal partnerships with migrant worker groups in migration governance

Non-government actors play an indispensable role in protecting and empowering migrant workers. In particular, migrant worker organizations' involvement in migration governance has ensured the incorporation of rights-based approaches, and much can be learned through their community examples in terms of empowerment.

At the village level, organizing by migrant workers is crucial in ensuring that development planning and regulation address the needs and vulnerabilities of the migrant workers and their families.

Stakeholders must strive to improve the existing approach to empowerment by expanding attention from an earlier narrow focus on training. Empowerment must also be understood holistically, recognizing the need for continuous efforts at all stages of migration.

Strengthening Villages Capacity in the protection and Empowerment of Migrant Workers: Best Practices and Services Inclusion during the COVID-19 Pandemic

1. CONTEXT

1.1. THE NOVEL CORONAVIRUS & MIGRATION: AN UNPRECEDENTED CRISIS

Indonesia, like many other countries around the world, was not exempt from the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak. With the emergence of international population mobility as a vector through which the novel coronavirus spread, challenges to the pandemic response also arose from Indonesia's status as a significant country of origin of migrant workers. In 2019, there were an estimated 6.5 million Indonesian workers across 142 countries globally. On average, before the COVID-19 outbreak, around 250,000 Indonesian migrant workers were deployed annually, with Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, Taiwan Province of China, Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, China and Singapore comprising the top five destinations.

The pandemic exposed the vulnerability of many Indonesian migrant workers as flexible labour. As countries of destination closed down economic activities, many of them faced job loss and were forced to return home. According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, up to December 2020, approximately 180,000 Indonesian migrant workers returned as an immediate result of the pandemic. Furthermore, BP2MI reported that there had been additional 89,000 Indonesian migrant workers returning between the period of January – May 2021. More returns are expected to continue as well throughout the rest of 2021.

Response to such mass-scale return necessitated great coordination efforts involving various stakeholders at all levels. From early on, the Indonesian government had considered village readiness in accommodating the large flows of return. In March 2020, anticipating the first deportation flows, the Coordinating Ministry for Human Development and Culture (*Kemenko Pembangunan Manusia dan Kebudayaan*) outlined the national coordination plan, which was divided into upstream (return process from abroad) and downstream facilitation (return process to the village level). These business processes displayed a general comprehension of Indonesia's low-wage labour outmigration patterns, resembling global urbanization.

The downstream trajectory outlined that facilitation of workers' return was followed up by their inclusion in villages' services during the pandemic. Aside from attending to the health crisis, village measures were geared toward safeguarding against a rise in poverty. Central to the endeavour was shifting the Village Fund from previously planned priorities to handling the COVID-19 emergency. Villages were promptly instructed to implement the acceleration

(*percepatan*) of the Village Fund (*Dana Desa*) cash transfer disbursement and revise the village budget (*Anggaran Pendapatan dan Belanja Desa*, APBDes) to accommodate villagers' needs. The cash transfer, known as *Bantuan Langsung Tunai Dana Desa* (BLT-DD), would supplement other existing aid and social security programs dedicated to poverty mitigation. This supportive budgetary framework entailed in the COVID-19 rural response preceded the eventual formulation of a similar scheme at the national level. In May 2020, the government officially launched the country's economic recovery program, known as PEN (*Pemulihan Ekonomi Nasional*), through Government Regulation No. 23 (2020).

Return, nevertheless, involves a much broader range of challenges than an emergency response could address. A survey conducted by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and *Serikat Buruh Migran Indonesia* (SBMI) in November 2020 on 2,000 Indonesian migrant workers who returned during the pandemic showed that nearly 70% of surveyed returned migrant workers were unemployed and facing challenges to secure their livelihoods. While 18% remained indebted by their previous migration, which was cut short by the pandemic, and most all migrant workers faced stigma from the community upon their return (IOM 2021).

The pandemic notably affects female migrant workers more severely. The feminization of Indonesia's labour outmigration is evident in the consistent yearly placement of more female than male migrant workers—the BP2MI reported that in 2019, nearly 70% of outgoing migrant workers were women. The IOM & SBMI study mentioned above also confirms the predominant proportion of female migrant workers as women constituted 58% of surveyed returnees. The COVID-19 heightens their vulnerability at all stages of migration—in the destination countries, they face increased risks of infection and are burdened with more work); in both destination countries and in returning to Indonesia, they are unjustly stereotyped as carriers of the virus; whereas those in the pre-departure stage are forced to remain as travel restrictions continue (Arista et al., 2020; Susilo, 2020).

1.2. VILLAGE ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES IN MIGRATION

The new Law No. 18 (2017) on the Protection of Indonesian Migrant Workers ushered in a new chapter in Indonesia's labour outmigration governance as it promises more protection efforts to remedy earlier focus on placement under Law No. 39 (2004).

In contrast to the previous legislation, the central premise of the new Law is the paradigm shift to protection orientation.

Law No. 18 (2017) devolves more migration governance to local governments, positioning them as significant duty bearers as the Law seeks to render migration closer to the workers' home communities. Chapter V of Law No. 18 (2017) enumerates in detail the tasks and responsibilities of the government at four levels in managing migration. The Law specifies mandates for local governments. Its Article 42 elucidates the village-level government's roles in

providing information to potential migrant workers, conducting data verification and ensuring proper registration for those deploying, monitoring migrant workers' departure and return, and lastly, facilitating their empowerment. The recent Government Regulation No. 59 (2021) further reiterates these stipulations, outlining close coordination with regency/town level government in carrying out the village's tasks relating to migration.

Following up on the survey conducted by the IOM and SBMI mentioned above, this study seeks to assess the extent to which COVID-19 response at the village level had met the challenges and what gaps had remained. In addition, anchoring analysis on recent reforms in Indonesia's migration governance complements the previous survey by evaluating the village government's capacity to respond to issues relating to the protection and empowerment of migrant workers and their families.

Concerning the new regulative framework, this study is particularly interested in: (i) the degree of migrant workers and their families' inclusion in existing village-level programs. Expanding on this, we are interested in identifying best practices during the pandemic response, in exploring how they can form a basis for more permanent policy measures; (ii) village-level comprehension of their mandated roles and responsibilities in governing Indonesia's labour outmigration; (iii) their capacity to carry out the tasks and duties required of them relating to the protection and empowerment of migrant workers.

1.3. STUDY METHODOLOGY

The study employs a mixed-methods sequential explanatory design, which involves two distinct stages. The first phase focuses on the collection and analysis of quantitative data sourced from a quantitative survey. While using a simple random sampling method, the survey covers 1,082 villages across eight provinces in Indonesia known to have been the source provinces of migrant workers, namely Lampung, West Kalimantan, Banten, West Java, Central Java, East Java, West Nusa Tenggara, and East Nusa Tenggara. The primary data analysis presented here relies on descriptive statistics and logistic regression.

The second qualitative phase builds on and is informed by the quantitative findings. The qualitative phase employed focused group discussions (FGDs) and in-depth interviews with policymakers, civil society organizations, migrant groups from the national to sub-national level as the main avenues for data collection (see Annex 2.).

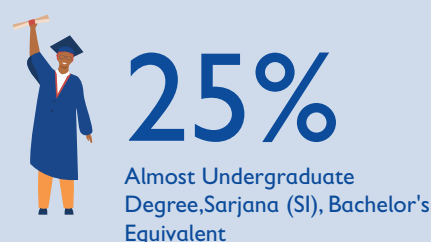
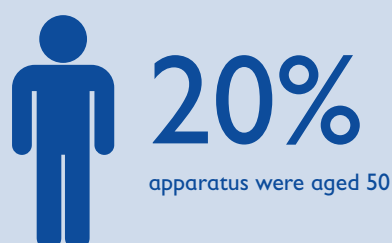
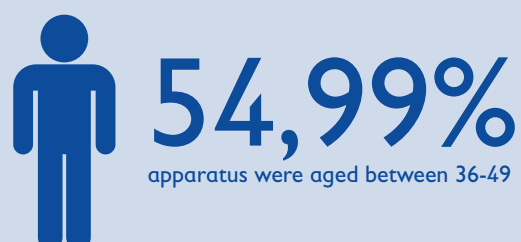
The study serves as one of the most extensive exploratory surveys on Indonesian migration in terms of samples collected to provide robust empirical evidence and indication on general findings to inform future efforts in improving village capacity in migration governance, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Box 1.

Profile of villages that participated in this study

A total of 1,082 villages participated in the survey, with 67% located in Java and 33% located outside of Java. The total population of all the surveyed villages is 6,138,725 people with an average population of 5,673 people. Only a minority of these villages were situated in the border areas (16.36%).

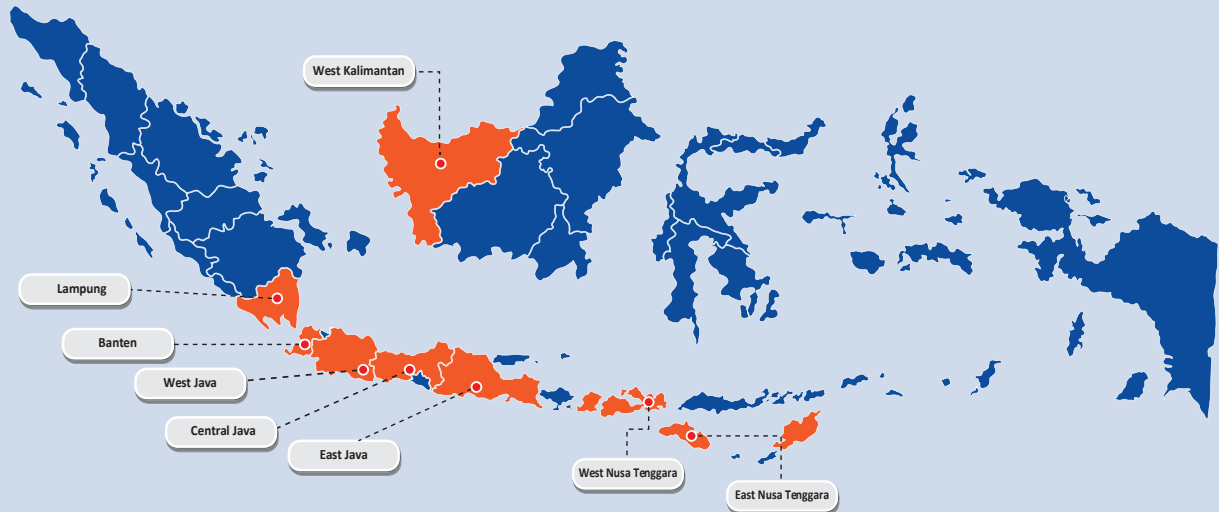
The survey was administered by SBMI enumerators to the villages apparatus. Village secretary made up 36.78% of the respondents, while village technical implementers (*pelaksana teknis*), either head of affairs (*kepala urusan*, KAUR) or head of section (*kepala seksi*, KASI) represented 38.17% of the surveyed apparatus. Only 18.11% of the participating apparatus were village heads, hinting at how they might not hold the most authoritative knowledge of the village as an administrative unit. In general, it is the village secretary (*sekretaris desa*, or in Javanese, *carik*), who manages the village secretariat, who is the forefront figure in the village development and financial planning.



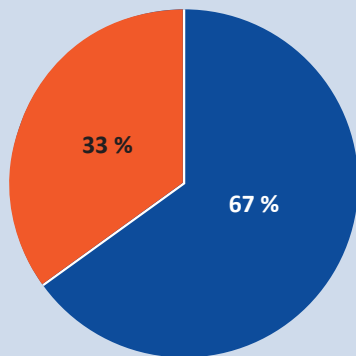
Over half of these apparatus were aged between 36-49 (54.99%), while about 20% were above 50 years of age. The majority were high-school graduates (65.99%), and almost 25% held an undergraduate degree (*sarjana* (S1), bachelor's equivalent).

A large majority of the village apparatus were men (85.86%), indicating a continued challenge with increasing the participation of women in village governance. A little over half of the villages apparatus reported that their villages had collected gender-disaggregated data, 30.5% had not, while 18.48% did not understand what gender-disaggregated data meant.

Provinces surveyed in this study

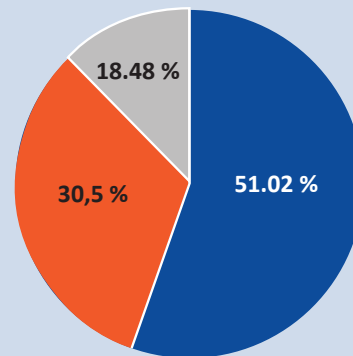


Village Location



■ Java ■ Outside of Java

Availability of gender-based data



■ Collect gender-based data
■ Do not collect gender-based data
■ Do not know what gender-based data mean

Strengthening Villages Capacity in the protection and Empowerment of Migrant Workers: Best Practices and Services Inclusion during the COVID-19 Pandemic

2. KEY FINDINGS ON VILLAGE CAPACITY

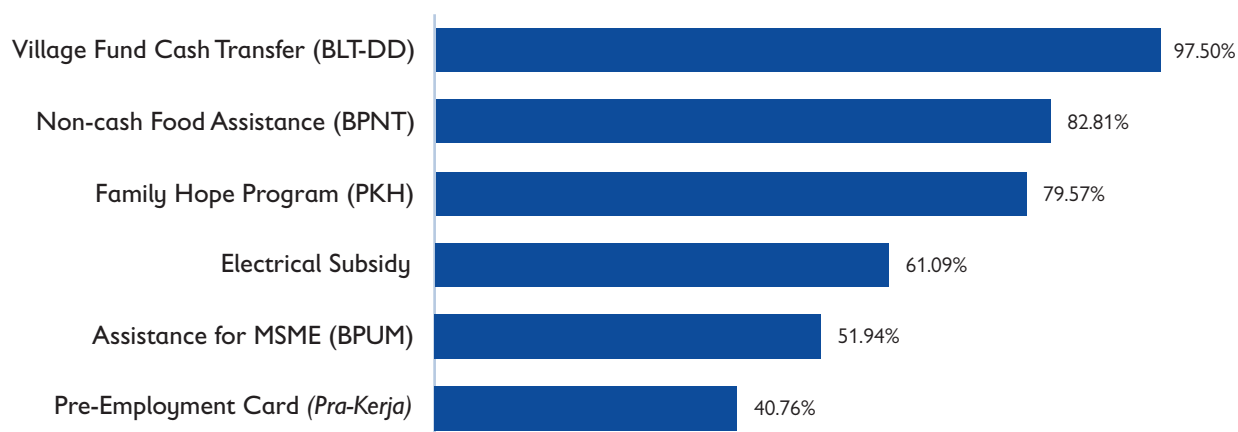
2.1. Villages' pandemic assistance reached many, but it is unclear to what extent migrant workers were included

One of the central questions posed in this study concerns the degree to which (returning) migrant workers and their families had been included in the village's COVID-19 response. Since the onset of the pandemic, the government at the national level has strived vehemently to expand the reach of various aid/assistance and social protection programmes launched by different ministries. The Ministry of Social Affairs' flagship programme, the Family Hope Program (*Program Keluarga Harapan*, PKH), is allotted to protect the poorest households, especially during economic downturns. Launched in 2007, the PKH's main objective is to improve their access to health and education. Another major programme is the pre-work card (*Kartu Prakerja*), administered by the Ministry of Manpower.

Most relevant for the villages, however, is the BLT-DD, which derives from the Village Fund. The landmark Village Fund was introduced through Law No. 6 (2014) on Villages (*Undang-undang tentang Desa*). A direct annual fiscal transfer from the central government to be utilized to finance the village's own development efforts aims to revitalize rural development, improve village governance, and encourage more democratic representation of Indonesia's 74,957 villages (Antlöv et al., 2016). Devolving fiscal autonomy to the village level, the use of the Village Fund is subject to the villagers' own discretion. As part of the pandemic response, villages are required by Law to use up to 35% of the Village Fund for direct cash assistance through the BLT-DD. The BLT-DD presents the only scheme for which the village's deliberation is crucial for determining eligible recipients.

Complying with nationwide instruction, nearly all (97.5%) of villages participating in the survey reported that they administered the BLT-DD. In addition, 82.81% of them channelled the non-cash food assistance (*bantuan pangan nontunai*, BPNT), while 79.57% distributed the PKH. Other assistance programs provided by the surveyed villages included electrical subsidy (61.09%), assistance for micro, small and medium enterprises (51.94%) and the *Kartu Prakerja* at 40.76%.

Figure 1. Types of assistance administered in the villages



In line with the focus on BLT-DD, the village deliberative meeting (*musyawarah desa*) was the primary mechanism (87.15%) for determining aid beneficiaries, while the existing unified database (*Data Terpadu Kesejahteraan Sosial*, DTKS) most likely guided the distribution of the PKH. Other mechanisms included a discussion between the village apparatus and the village-level COVID-19 task force (51.22%) and assessment based on the village's data (43.99%). In addition, 24.31% of surveyed villages reported that they involved women representatives in the deliberation process.

Further qualitative interviews with surveyed villages revealed the diversity of disbursement practices. Most villages cited limited funds as the most pressing problem in delivering the pandemic response, so they came up with their initiatives. Some villages slashed the number of aid packages to cover more households. Other villages resources to alternating beneficiaries' turns, as stated by one of the village secretaries from West Nusa Tenggara Province.



"If we provide assistance to Family A this month, we'll skip the next month so we can cover Family B" (Village secretary, male, West Nusa Tenggara)

There are diverse interpretations of vulnerable groups in Indonesia. However, within the COVID-19 context, according to the National Team for the Acceleration of Poverty Reduction (*Tim Nasional Percepatan Penanggulangan Kemiskinan*, TNP2K), the main vulnerable groups are women, people with disabilities, the elderly, and informal workers (TNP2K, 2020). The survey results show how the top four answers on the types of households that receive COVID-19 aid packages correspond to the TNP2K categorization.

Migrant workers' families are broadly not mentioned as recipients of COVID-19 aid packages. Only 24.21% of respondents stated that the aid disbursement in their villages targeted the group as a specific category. While 43.81% of the villages participating in the survey reported that they assisted migrant workers, who returned during the pandemic or their family members (if the workers themselves did not return), there is a likelihood that migrant workers or their families were included under other categories of pandemic aid beneficiaries. In this case, most likely the low-income families impacted by job loss or female-headed households. Surveyed apparatus stated that they could not provide exact data on the distribution of the aid packages. Thus, a more accurate assessment of migrant worker families' inclusion in the pandemic assistance would involve further qualitative surveys at the household level.



“The registration process was further devolved to the RT levels—they drew up the lists of beneficiaries.” (Village secretary, male, Lampung)

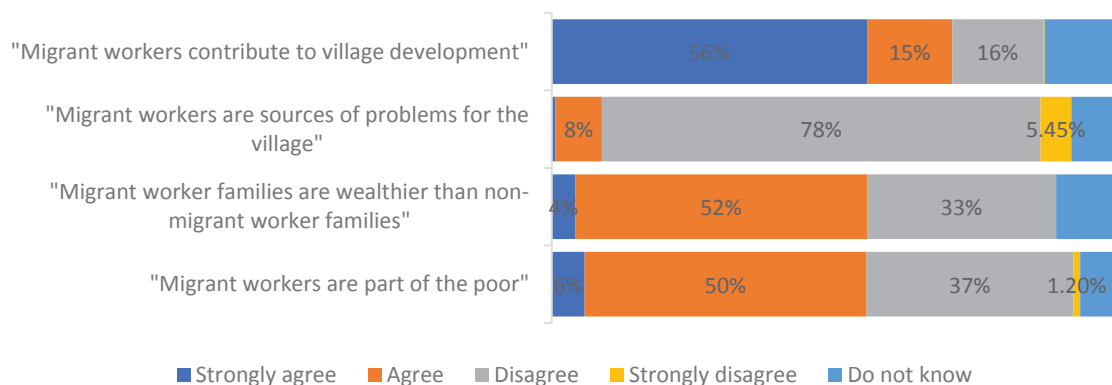
Nevertheless, the current study can predict the villages that included migrant worker families in its COVID-19 services. **A key finding of the quantitative survey is that existing villages program(s) for migrant workers has a significant positive correlation with the provision of COVID-19 aid to migrant workers households compared to other variables** (see **Table 1**). Villages that already have pre-departure programs catering to the needs of prospective migrant workers are likely to include migrant worker households in their pandemic response.

Table 1. Correlation between delivery of COVID-19 aid/assistance with villages' regulative framework and existing measures

VARIABLES	COVID-19 aid to migrant worker households
Perdes on migrant workers	0.484 (-0.32)
Inclusion of migrants in village development planning	0.0985 (-0.221)
Existing village program(s) for migrant workers	0.962*** (-0.334)
Availability of village's migration records	0.204 (-0.185)
Village's provision of information on safe migration	0.304 (-0.191)
Constant	-1.349*** (-0.089)
Observation	1,082
Pseudo R-squared	0.0271
Robust standard errors in parentheses	*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

The absence of migrant worker families in most villages' aid recipient categorization can be attributed to the prevailing perception that they are relatively better off than non-migrant households. 55.82% of surveyed villages agreed or strongly agreed with the assertion that migrant workers households are better off than households with no migrating members. However, 56% of the surveyed villages also agreed to the statement that migrant workers are part of the poor and needed greater attention from the government, particularly at the village level. This figure relates to the depth of poverty—while relatively they earn more than non-migrant households, it does not mean they are not vulnerable. A UNICEF-UNDP joint study showcased that COVID-19 impacts on household finances had been severe, with almost 75% of households earning less than they did just shortly before the pandemic outbreak (UNICEF 2021). The previous SBMI-IOM study on returning migrant workers also showed that, similar to other households, they faced intense economic difficulties. As they grappled with the pandemic's impacts, some of the critical challenges included generating alternative livelihood support and securing access to food. A vast majority (89%) reported that they would have liked to receive cash assistance from the government.

Figure 2. Village apparatus' perception of migrant workers



The following quotes from follow-up interviews with village apparatus shows the ambiguity in how village governments perceive migrant workers:



"They are better off than their neighbours. Just have a look at their houses; they are nicer... If anything, we are hoping that with their earnings from abroad, it is the migrant workers that could contribute to the village." (Village secretary, male, East Java).

"But I also feel sorry for them. They make many sacrifices. I mean, they are never at home, always working abroad. When they return, it is often only for a while—before long, they'll head overseas again." (Technical implementer, male, Banten).

The majority of village apparatus correctly perceived economic reasons to be the main driver for migration. This finding corresponds with the previous IOM-SBMI study, which

recorded the majority (95%) of returning migrant workers self-report that they migrated primarily for economic reasons, 58% of whom stated dissatisfaction with Indonesia's wages. In general, government stakeholders expressed that migration should be temporary, emphasizing re-migration as a key concern. They would not like to see the permanence of migration—however, as one provincial government representative from Lampung delineated, re-migration often occurs as workers are often unable to save from their earnings.



“The root of the problem is debt-induced migration. They have to pay back the recruiters through wage cuts. They cannot save enough money from just one contract period; that’s why they go overseas for three, four terms.”
(Lampung government official, male)

According to the previous survey on returning migrant workers, 36% of the respondents planned to re-migrate, either internally or internationally. Those who want to work overseas plan to do so as soon as the pandemic is over.

While they had a more ambiguous attitude to migration, the village apparatus participating in the quantitative survey reported positive opinions about migrant workers. Over 80% of the surveyed apparatus stated that they disagreed that migrant workers were troublemakers and a nuisance to the village government. This fact presents an encouraging finding as it counters the prevailing perception of “migration as a problem”—in the context of Indonesian labour outmigration, official and public discourses often employ the term “*pekerja migran bermasalah*” (problematic migrant workers) instead of referring to them as “*pekerja migran yang menghadapi masalah*” (migrant workers who are facing problems).

On the other hand, opinions are more divided on the responsibility to protect migrant workers. 63.59% of surveyed apparatus agreed that protection should begin at the village, but 66.17% also posited that the protection’s responsibility lay more with governments at the national, provincial, and regency/town levels. While Law No. 18 (2017) enumerates the roles and responsibilities of each government level, a considerable gap exists in how it does not provide reference on the coordination mechanism between the government levels. The recently-issued Government Regulation No. 59 (2021) on the Protection of Indonesian Migrant Workers seeks to clarify, especially regarding the close coordination between the village and regency/town level, in which the local Manpower’s office would play a crucial role. Surveyed village apparatus identified the regency/town as the level of government from whom they seek to support the most.

In line with the optimistic view of migrant workers, 71% of surveyed apparatus also agreed (15%) or strongly agreed (56%) that migrant workers contribute positively to village development. Village governments and the Ministry of Village, Disadvantaged Regions and Transmigration expressed the hope that through their remittances and experiences abroad, migrant workers could generate a multiplier effect in the village’s economy. However, qualitative

interviews indicated that rather than exploring the developmental benefits of migration, villages appeared more concerned with attending to its social costs, defined as “intentional and unintentional outcomes, which arise from the migration of parents (father/mother/both) within the country (internal) or outside the country (international), with undesirable impacts on individuals and society” (IOM & Save the Children, 2017). To illustrate, efforts to develop a specific village regulation on migration in Sumbergede, a village in the Sekampung Sub-district, East Lampung District, stemmed from concerns about the predicament of stay-behind families of migrant workers. Their village regulation, among other things, has a special section dedicated to the issue of family resilience.

2.2. Migration has not been included in village planning and regulation

Discussions conducted throughout this study indicated how stakeholders are more inclined toward integrating migration to the existing framework rather than pushing for migration-specific programs at the village level. Foremost to consider is that there are already too many village-specific programs—ranging widely from the issue of digitalization to tourism—which potentially burdens village governments in implementation. Civil society actors also learn more about the integration approach, especially as they are worried that migration-specific programs may lead to the instrumentalization of migration, i.e. exploiting migrant workers for their remittances potentials.

It is of note that at present, there are two migration-specific programs at the village level—one is the Productive Migrant Villages or *Desa Migran Produktif (Desmigratif)*, developed by the Ministry of Manpower; the other is the Community of Migrant Worker Families or *Komunitas Keluarga Buruh Migran (KKBM)*, piloted by BP2MI. Aside from the apparent overlap between these programs, a central problem is that they are dependent on the ministry/institution’s budgeting and are limited in scope.

Between 2016 - 2019, Manpower’s Ministry had initiated *Desmigratif* in 402 villages. While between 2017 - 2018, the BP2MI had implemented the KKBM in 49 villages across 7 provinces. The coverage of these two programs is far below that of the Village-owned Enterprise or the *Badan Usaha Milik Desa (BUMDes)*, which is the priority village-level program endorsed by the national government. This report will expand on the potentials of optimizing BUMDes for migrant workers in Section 2.5.

At present, migration has yet to appear in village planning and regulations. Most surveyed villages have not included migration in their medium-term development plan (*Rencana Pembangunan Jangka Menengah Desa, RPJMDes*). As discussed earlier, this is most probably due to the perception of migrant households’ relatively higher wealth than non-migrant households. However, it also reflects how villages’ developmental priority closely follows national and local governments’ directives.

In keeping with the current administration's development orientation, infrastructure is a primary concern for village governments. Between 2012 and 2016, village spending on infrastructure increased more than ten-fold (*Kompak*, 2019), and within the 2015-2020 period, funds distributed to village governments have been used to build 261,877 kilometres of village roads, 1,494,804 kilometres of bridges, and 11,944 village markets (Ministry of Finance 2020 data). Second to infrastructure-building, also high on the village agenda, is health issues, the importance of which is likely to become more amplified in the post-COVID-19 world. In particular, there is an emphasis on child stunting reduction, especially as: a. it is a crucial indicator in the second Sustainable Development Goal of Zero Hunger; b. it aligns with the national vision of building the country's human capital. The prevalence of child stunting in Indonesia has remained high over the past decade (Beal et al., 2018), and in 2018, Indonesia had a 37% stunting rate for children under 5 years of age. Before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, stunting was the priority health focus, as it aligned with the national vision in building the country's human capital.

This study asserts that alignment with national planning presents opportunities for integrating migration issues into the village's broader development framework. Firstly, concerning infrastructure, while national-level government and activists have encouraged villages to move beyond infrastructure indicators to measure their developmental milestones, scholars have pointed out how remittances are better facilitated when (physical) infrastructures and supporting facilities are already in place in the migrant-sending regions (de Haas, 2010). Secondly, considering villages' concerns about the potentially adverse impact of migration to stay-behind families, attention to children and their health can also be an effective way to mainstream migration issues in village development.

In the pandemic context, for 2021, the government has pledged further IDR 699.43 trillion for PEN. Regarding villages, the national outline for COVID-19 response, governed through the Ministry of Finance-disbursed Village Fund for 2021, was confirmed through Law No. 9 (2020) on National Budget. In addition to adopting new habits (*adaptasi kebiasaan baru*), the Law lists two focus areas for the Village Fund disbursement: economic recovery and developing the village's priority sector. Furthermore, the Minister of Villages, Disadvantaged Regions and Transmigration's Regulation No. 13 (2020) on Priority for 2021 Village Fund Spending provides further guidance for these two areas, as detailed below (Article 6, points 1 & 2):

- a. Economic recovery is to be accomplished through: (i) the founding, development and revitalization of the BUMDes; and (ii) development of productive, economic units managed by BUMDes;
- b. Priority areas include: (i) improving village database, mapping of village potentials, and use of information & communication technology (ICT); (ii) development of the Touristic Village program (*Desa Wisata*); (iii) prevention of stunting; (iv) promoting Inclusive Villages (*Desa Inklusif*), which involves facilitating the participation of women

and fostering village's social justice orientation. In addition, there are potentials to integrate the protection and empowerment of migrant workers to the pandemic priority areas, which will be elaborated in Section 2.4.

In addition to integration to planning, more sustained village attention to issues relating to the protection and empowerment of migrants can be achieved through the issuance of village regulation. According to the survey, only 5% of the villages have a regulation (*Peraturan Desa or Perdes*) on migrant workers. The village regulation is essential as it presents a legal umbrella to formalize required measures to address a particular issue. Besides ensuring policy implementation, *Perdes*'s value lies in its participatory nature as its process mechanisms mandate villagers' active involvement. Article 69 point (9) of Law No. 6 (2014) on Villages governs that the draft *Perdes* must be consulted with the village community. However, there is still a vast area for improvement in ensuring inclusiveness in village development deliberation forums. According to studies, the community is often only represented by village leaders. Moreover, participatory planning does not involve villagers continuously, leading to a gap between the rural development process and actual needs (Damayanti & Syarifuddin, 2020) and the marginalization of women (Alimah, 2017). This study also found that less than 10% of surveyed villages still have not involved female migrant workers in village policy-making of migration issues, indicating ample room for improvement.

2.3. There is limited knowledge about Law No. 18 (2017) at the village level

A fundamental challenge to current migration governance lies with the village's low comprehension of the framework outlined by the new Law. The survey indicated that most of the village apparatus are unaware of the latest development in migration governance and the tasks and responsibilities mandated by Law No. 18 (2017) to the village government. Only around 24% of the total surveyed village apparatus reported that they knew about the new Law. Furthermore, respondents' different responses to the survey affirmed villages' unfamiliarity with current mechanisms and process flows relating to labour outmigration as outlined by Law No. 18 (2017). For example, most villages (80.22%) were not aware of the One-stop Integrated Service (*Layanan Terpadu Satu Atap, LTSA*), an innovative facility that the Law has introduced, particularly to curb rampant brokerage practices in rural areas.

A central finding from this study is that comprehension regarding Law No. 18 (2017) of female village apparatus and those located in border areas can be further improved. This point is based on the significant negative correlation between comprehension and gender and location variables (see Table 1 below). Gender-wise, of the 153 female village apparatus that participated in the survey, only 15.03% stated they knew about the Law, indicating less familiarity with the legal framework compared to their male counterparts (25% of the 929 male village apparatus involved in the study claimed they knew about the Law). Meanwhile, in terms of geographical

location, of the 96 surveyed villages located in the border areas, only 13 or 13.54% reported that they knew about the Law. There is a lower comprehension of the Law than villages in non-border areas, where 24.54% (242 of 986) reported that they were knowledgeable.

Several factors contribute to the village apparatus' lack of knowledge about the current legal framework for governing migration. **Firstly, it indicates the low degree of socialization about Law No. 18 (2017)—especially from the national and provincial levels.** Villages that did know about the Law tended to have participated in socialization events, especially those held by the BP2MI. In a focused group discussion held during this study, some of the attending provincial government representatives made particular remarks.



“We (at the provincial level) ourselves are still struggling with understanding this new law—if we cannot yet understand it, how could we socialize it further to the local levels?” (Central Java government representative, female)

Indeed, to date, most provinces, as well as regencies/towns, are yet to issue their respective local regulations (*peraturan daerah, Perda*) to support the implementation of the Law. Some local governments assert that they still await the derivative regulations (*aturan turunan*) that provide more concrete guidance for implementation; however, a more substantial reason as to why local governments have been circumspect with developing their regulations relates to the heavy emphasis on local government's roles and responsibilities under the new Law. In particular, this relates to the goal of abolishing recruitment fees. Law No. 18 (2017) explicitly states its Article 30 that, Migrant workers cannot bear placement fees.” While supporting this goal, local governments are wary of the responsibility to finance the training of migrant workers, a significant cost component, which now falls on them. The recently issued Government Regulations No. 59 (2021) on the Protection of Indonesian Migrant Workers has now provided more specific directions, including concerning the financing of training, which is expected to resolve the issue.

Secondly, it is of note that the government is not the villages' only source of information about the new Law. Interestingly, the survey also finds a statistically significant correlation with a positive coefficient between the existence of migrant workers community/organization with the familiarity of village apparatus with Law No. 18 (2017) (see Table 2. below). Apparatus in villages where migrant worker communities/organizations are present are more likely to be knowledgeable about the Law, at 38.79% (45 of 166 villages compared to those where such organizations are not present. **This data points to the crucial role of migrant worker communities/organizations and the importance of their organizing efforts, which will be elaborated in Sub-section 2.4.c.**

Table 2. Correlation between familiarity with Law No. 18 (2017) with demographic and developmental factors

VARIABLES	Familiarity with Law No. 18 (2017)
Existence of migrant organization	0.757*** (-0.233)
Outside of Java	0.00976 (-0.207)
Female	0.737*** (-0.282)
Border area	0.854** (-0.357)
Village apparatus' level of education	0.119 (-0.0864)
Total population	1.97E-05 (-1.81E-05)
Lesser electric capacity	3.58E-05 (-3.67E-05)
Total educational facility	0.00516 (-0.0106)
Farmland	-1.39E-06 (-241E-06)
Village area (hectares)	-1.81E-07 (-2.15E-07)
Constant	-1.855*** (0.397)
Observation	907
Pseudo R-squared	0.0385
Robust standard errors in parentheses	*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

2.4. Villages are yet to develop their capacity for migration governance as mandated by Law No. 18 (2017)

As village apparatus are not aware of the tasks and responsibilities mandated by the Law, existing practices (or lack thereof) indicate the need for villages to develop their capacity to administer migration governance as stipulated by Law No. 18 (2017).

a. The majority of villages are yet to provide pre-departure services for prospective migrant workers.

More than 90% of surveyed villages have not developed dedicated services/programs for prospective migrant workers. Among villages that do, none reported that they had performed one of the critical duties tasked to the village government, providing information about job opportunities abroad. The survey further found that only 18.85% of villages had equipped

villagers with information on safe migration and educated them about the risks of trafficking. This is alarming as 67.1% of the surveyed villages also cited that informal brokers are the primary source of learning abroad work opportunities. Existing studies have pointed to how brokers' intermediation has often involved conflated fees, unscrupulous practices, and increased risk of trafficking. Nevertheless, research has also shown how Indonesian villagers place more "trust" on informal brokers than the government, noting their ability to "navigate the bureaucratic process while embodying the ethical qualities that convince Indonesian villagers to become migrants" (Lindquist 2012).

Despite the obvious problem presented by brokers, 38.08% of surveyed villages do not consider administering pre-departure measures necessary. As has been discussed earlier, they do not see migration as a priority issue. Others attributed the absence of these essential programs to a limited budget (29.02%) and resources (25.08%). These latter factors are significant to address, considering that in contrast to the village apparatus' limitations, brokers operate in a very mobile manner in rural areas, covering vast areas across villages to recruit workers. In addition, one village apparatus related that he had great difficulty curbing the activities of inter-local brokerage as he felt he only had jurisdiction in his village.



"I can handle those who come from our own village, talk to them and reprimand their behaviour, but how do I manage brokers who come from other areas?"
(Village Secretary, Male)

At the regency/town level, innovative initiatives to aid safe migration passages have emerged. For instance, in the Sambas regency, local officials have come up with SILVI (*Sistem Layanan Virtual*), a virtual information booth dedicated to providing services to migrant workers, including job opportunities, data verification and case complaint mechanisms. The example of SILVI can inform future efforts in utilizing digital technology to socialize and promote safe migration practices to prospective workers.

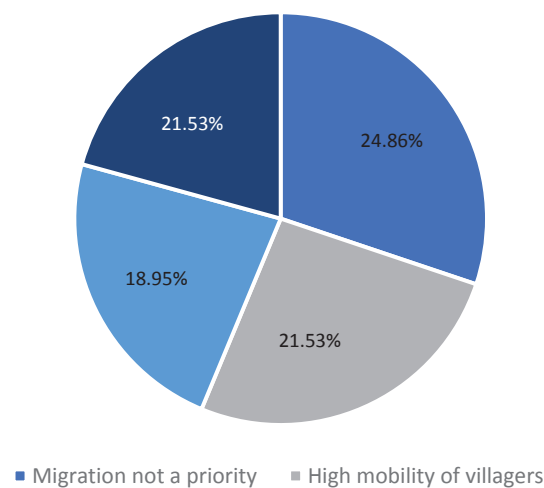
b. Villages need to build their capacity in registering and monitoring migration flows.

Only 19.13% of the villages surveyed kept records of villagers who migrated, both internally and internationally. Villages' lack of initiative in monitoring migration flows worrisome, as 65.9% of surveyed villages reported that they were aware that villagers went to work abroad without being correctly recorded in the village's registry. This indicates the high probability of undocumented migration, which remains a problem in Indonesia's labour outmigration.

Of the village apparatus that did not keep track of their villagers' movement, 28.56% said they were not given directives. A follow-up interview with a village technical officer in Serang

substantiated this finding when he made a similar comment, “There is no instruction from above,” referring to the regency level government in particular. Such statements opened up questions about the extent to which current village governance arrangements under Law No. 6 (2014) has succeeded in encouraging more bottom-up initiatives. In one of the FGDs conducted during the study, CSOs working on village-focused issues have also pointed out how most Indonesian villages have not reached the “mandiri” (independent/empowered) status and still require much assistance to implement their responsibilities. In line with the previous point pointing to challenges relating to the provision of migration information, other apparatus (24.86%) stated that they did not keep such records as migration did not constitute a village priority. In addition, others conveyed that tracking villagers’ movements presented a daunting task as there was high mobility (21.53%) and that they had limited resources (18.95%) and budget (17.1%).

Figure 3. Challenges preventing village’s maintenance of migration record



Further, in villages that keep migration records, migration data can still be in very rudimentary form. In some villages, the existing practice is as simple as recording the name of the migrant worker and the destination country. Much assistance is still needed in terms of building the village’s migration database. In addition, there is a potential to integrate the village’s migration profile into a broader database, i.e. the village information system (*Sistem Informasi Desa*, SID), the template platform initiated nationwide. Villages still need support, particularly from the regency/town level governments, in building their SID.

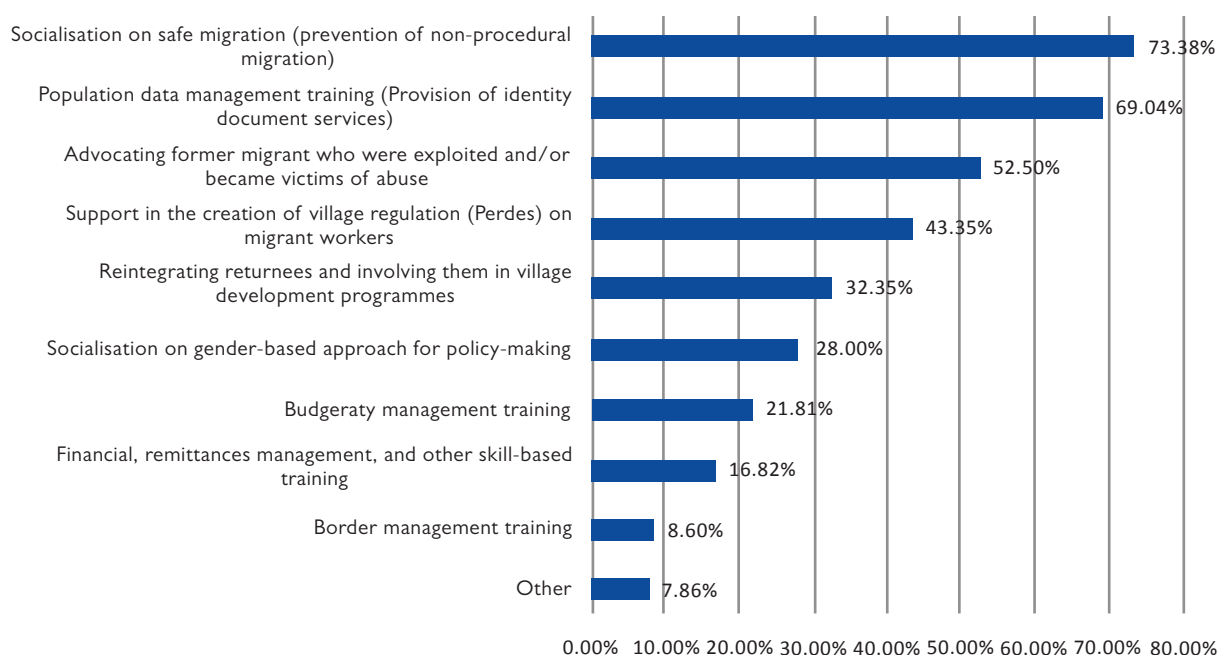
Interestingly, villages appear keener in collecting data about the stay-behind family members of migrant workers than the migrant workers themselves. According to the survey, more villages kept records of the family member of migrant workers than those that regularly maintained data about migrant workers.

This study notes that Indonesia's COVID-19 response opened momentum for better recording of migration data. A best practice emerged from the downstream pandemic response as COVID-19 return necessitated villages' watchful measures to track and register returnees. Almost 70% of the surveyed villages reported that they kept close track of the number of pandemic returnees, reflecting compliance to the nationwide instruction during the early days of the pandemic response. The figure is much higher than the number of villages that routinely collect data on departures and arrivals of migrant workers. This pandemic returnee registration can form an initial basis for routine practice upon every worker's return to the village in the future.

The study explores the follow-up activities/assistance that villages consider most beneficial in increasing their capacity in migration governance.

The types of assistance requested vary greatly depending on the village context (for example, border management is highly pertinent to those in the border areas). However, overall, socializing information on safe and fair migration tops the list at almost 75%, followed closely by population data management training at nearly 70%.

Figure 4. Follow-up activities requested by village apparatus



C. Villages need to lend more long-term support to returned migrant workers and empower them

As in the pre-departure stage, a limited number of villages already have good practices in place relating to migrant workers' return and re-integration. However, almost half of the surveyed villages do not offer any assistance to migrant workers who have returned. Of those

that do, support is primarily provided for immediate case management, most notably enlisting social services support for workers who experienced abuse or violence abroad (25.23%), providing access to health (17.84%), and legal assistance (6.38%). The lack of measures to ensure sustainable return and re-integration is at odds with the general inclination among stakeholders in Indonesia, who view re-migration in an unfavourable light.

At present, empowerment, which is more long-term oriented, still largely falls short of village governments' priority. **Migrant workers' empowerment is currently contingent on peer support.**

Most former migrant workers reported they were mentored by other former migrant workers when they decided to start their own businesses. This is the case with Ibu Mimin, who formerly worked in Saudi Arabia. Upon returning to Sukabumi, West Java, in 2003, she found support in Ibu Jejen Nurjanah, a senior member of SBMI, who encouraged her to form a co-operative, which was eventually founded in 2004. Their co-operative was officiated into a legal body in 2010 and has since been involved in various government programs. Similarly, in Lampung, Ibu Elly—who referred to herself as a failed migrant because she did not have any savings when she returned from Malaysia in 2015—also benefited from the counsel of Pak Sukendar. He encouraged her to join local organizing efforts and initiate a small-scale business in mushroom farming and cultivation (*budidaya jamur*), with jamur crispy now featuring her main product.

SBMI members believe that the first step of empowerment is to assemble and form a collective and build their networks, especially with government stakeholders from there. From their perspective, there is a particular need to organize former migrant workers at the village level.



“Usually, the village government administers empowerment (programs) to those who have already self-organized, such as farmers, or traditional/folk art groups (kelompok kesenian). They are commonly found in villages; meanwhile, we (migrant workers) have not emerged as an established group” (Moch. Ernawan, SBMI organizer in Malang)

There is currently a lack of empowerment programs from village governments; former migrant workers usually turn to local governments, usually at the regency/town level. However, those who have participated in government-administered empowerment programs reported that such programs tended to be conducted on an ad hoc basis and, therefore, not sustainable.

² Ibu is a common reverential term for addressing (usually older) women, while Bapak (often shortened to Pak) are the male equivalent. It is common and expected to call people by these pronouns and first names.



“When a program implementation is taking place, they do involve us in activities. But when there is none, we do not see any engagement from them; we only receive a little touch.” (Hanya disentuh sedikit).

Generally, former migrant workers have to rely on their efforts to engage the government and look for opportunities. Ibu Elly said that she immersed herself in the community by joining many groups and attending as many events held in her vicinity as possible, especially to gather information relating to available government assistance for SMEs. Many former migrant workers recounted the sadness of having to go knocking door-to-door, offering products to whichever local government offices they could access. Answering this, regency-level governments said that they faced budgetary limitations in supporting empowerment. A BP2MI representative from one of the districts in West Java Province recounted how his unit received no budget allocation at all for two consecutive years, 2019 and 2020 (the latter notably due to the pandemic), noting that,



“This is why for empowerment; we have to recourse to available funds at the village level.” (district-level BP2MI representative, male, West Java)

It is observed here that budget constraints could present less of a hindrance when there is an integrated strategy to empowerment. To remedy the current technical, silo approach to empowerment, the regional development planning agency (*Badan Perencanaan Pembangunan Daerah*, Bappeda) could play an immense role in determining how responses toward migrant workers could be incorporated into the larger local-level framework for community empowerment.

This study asserts that the understanding of empowerment needs to be expanded from the currently dominant entrepreneurship training programs. Former migrant workers also need capacity building in other aspects such as gathering market information, securing access to capital, and marketing and distribution. An alarming development now concerns informal lenders (*“rentenir”*) operating at the local levels. In West Java, there is a growing presence of “Bank Emok”. The phenomenon of Bank Emok is fascinating as these lenders are women who specifically target homemakers in rural areas (Merdeka, 2020). Unscrupulous lending practices seem to be pervasive across Indonesia. In East Nusa Tenggara, lenders thrive because of alleged discriminatory practices by government actors, who do not provide much assistance to marginalized populations in accessing capital. In East Flores, lenders could charge 20% of interest rate, and there is little that locals—many of whom aspire to migrate considering local culture’s emphasis on sojourn (*merantau*)—can do so because they do not have many financing options.

It is of note that as most of them are home-based businesses (“home industry”) focusing on food products, they can also benefit from help in legal licensing, halal certification, and product packaging. For home-based products, *Sertifikat Produksi Pangan Industri Rumah Tangga* (SPP-PIRT), a guaranteed certification for food products sanctioned by the Regent/Mayor through the local health office (*Dinas Kesehatan Kabupaten*), is clearly important. Packaging is also an issue, as it entails a relatively high-cost component. Regarding marketing and distribution, former migrant workers expressed great interest in improving digital technology capacity to boost the creative economy that they advance through their business activities (*menggabungkan ekonomi kreatif dengan teknologi tepat guna*). E-commerce has become more critical after the pandemic occurred. Before 2020, Ibu Mimin had relied on schools and public bazaars as the main avenues to sell her community’s products, but now she needed help in digital marketing, which requires a particular online presence and promotional savviness.



“We need to market our products through the internet more than ever now, but I don’t know how to be an admin (of an online shop)” (Ibu Mimin, former migrant worker, female, West Java)

It is essential to highlight that even before return, migrant workers’ organizations have initiated empowerment programs. This is the case with the *Jaringan Buruh Migran Indonesia* (JBMI) network based in Hong Kong SAR, China, which has administered empowerment programs in the form of skilling training since the deployment stage. Among the activities that the JBMI has held include hairdressing courses, cooking lessons, or provision of classes relating to family financial planning. In addition, they also assist migrant workers through psychological counselling.

It should also be noted here that empowerment goes beyond economic activities. The experiences of SBMI community organizers exemplify how they have emerged as important development actors and agents of social change in the village context. Many of them are active members of their community, advocating on issues not limited to migration and other issues. Examples are abounding among SBMI organizers, who involve themselves in early education and women empowerment. For example, Pak Usman Sakti, in East Lombok, Nusa Tenggara, also actively leads local efforts relating to early education (*Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini, PAUD*), particularly through the association for early education-level teachers and educational personnel (*Himpunan Pendidik dan Tenaga Kerja Kependidikan Anak Usia Dini Indonesia, Himpaudi*).

Ibu Mimin in Sukabumi, leverages her organizing efforts through women co-operatives (*koperasi wanita*), and participation in special forums for women, including during discussions about the Village Fund. Similarly, Ibu Klemensia in East Flores emphasizes female empowerment in the group she formed to participate in BP2MI’s village-level KKBM program. It is particularly worth noting that SBMI organizers in East Flores, like Pak Polseno, are active members in

Asosiasi Desa Wisata, an association devoted to advancing the Touristic Village program, which the Ministry of Villages, Disadvantaged Regions and Transmigration has identified as one of the prioritized programs.

It is worth mentioning that CSOs also play a role in initiating programs to support migrant worker families. A much-cited example is the efforts of Tanoker, in organizing community activities in the village of Ledokombo, in Jember, East Java. Tanoker has for decades now, including programs dedicated to educating and empowering stay-behind children of migrant workers. In particular, they engage these children and optimize their potentials through the use of traditional games such as the egrang (stilts) and other learning activities as a form of community parenting that caters to the specific needs of these children.

Box 2. SBMI MART



A best practice that deserves a special mention here is the SBMI Mart, which has recently opened in two locations, namely Ngantang in the Malang Regency and Jakarta. SBMI Mart combines the concepts of co-operative and semi-groceries and dedicates attention to promoting migrant workers' products. According to SBMI Jakarta store manager, Riyanti, the idea for SBMI Mart came from the observation that many (former) migrant workers and their families were not able to scale up, and like many home-based businesses, face challenges with accessing buyers and selling their products to nationwide retailers/chain-stores (SBMI,

2021). SBMI Mart seeks to fill in the current gap by providing peer access to their outlets. While SBMI Mart also sells everyday items available in other chain stores, they designate a special display section that showcases migrant workers' products. "We want to provide them with an etalase (storefront) to feature their items and promote them to a wider audience." SBMI also plans on marketing these products through online platforms to boost sales further.

2.5. BUMDes has potentials for migrant workers' protection and empowerment, but there are challenges in its implementation

This study mentioned how stakeholders preferred integrating migration into existing village planning and priorities instead of developing migration-specific programs. Concerning coverage, the survey results showed that BUMDes had a more far-reaching reach compared to other village-focused programs. More than 75% of apparatus reported BUMDes as the most favoured program

in their villages compared to 24% that mentioned the Desmigratif. The BUMDes is mandated by Law No.6 (2014) on Villages to drive the village economy.

The enterprise aims to create employment opportunities and market networks that support community needs; increase community welfare through improved public services, growth and equitable distribution, and boost the village's community and original income. While BUMDes is cited as the supported program, in practice, its implementation has yet to live up to its promised potentials. Many villages have not managed to develop their BUMDes. Unfortunately, this is not simply a matter of (technical) capacity. Putting it more straightforwardly, one SBMI community organizer in Karawang commented that, "Often, it is a matter of who is close to the village head (*Kades*)."

Migrant workers are well-positioned to influence the democratization of BUMDes, mainly through remittances. Of course, its nature as a private flow prevents remittances from being directly listed in the inventory of village income (*pendapatan asli desa*). However, it can be channelled to village income under the "self-help, participatory and mutual assistance" (*swadaya, partisipasi dan gotong-royong*) designation listed as one of the sources of village income. Alternatively, it can be routed to co-operatives (*koperasi*), an economic unit identified by migrant worker community organizers as the most suitable entity for their purposes. The Ministry of Villages, Disadvantaged Regions, and Transmigration has stated that BUMDes is open to collaborating with migrant-initiated co-operatives. Therefore, this initiative should be seriously considered as a plausible mechanism to engage village governments.

Villages need to invite greater involvement from community groups, including migrant workers and their families, to ensure that BUMDes remain true to its empowerment ideals and the social justice orientation of the village. This is crucial in the issue of labour migration, where other sectors, including private actors, have access to the village.

For example, a recent SBMI experience Among the mechanisms they explore to support the LPK is by engaging the BUMDes as a possible financial source for training.

In addition to BUMDes, (former) migrant workers also have potential leverage in identifying prospective products in their areas of origin. Villages are keen to develop their Featured Rural Product (*Produk Unggulan Kawasan Pedesaan, Prukades*). With their experiences abroad, migrant workers can have better information about market needs beyond their local/national spatiality. For example, in West Nusa Tenggara, locals have recently discovered the market potentials of porang (*Amorphophallus muelleri*), which fetch high prices in China and Japan as the main ingredient for *konnyaku* and *shirataki* noodles. As a result, the government has recently begun to promote *porang* as a prime export commodity (Detik, 2021).

Strengthening Villages Capacity

in the protection and Empowerment of Migrant Workers:

Best Practices and Services Inclusion during the COVID-19 Pandemic

3. STRATEGIC POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The COVID-19 pandemic has severely adverse impacts on labour migration and exposed the vulnerability of migrant workers and their families. As workers lose their jobs, forcing them to return and face unemployment, there is real insecurity for migrant households that previously depended on remittances. Indonesia's COVID-19 response does highlight an emerging best practice, in which the Village Fund was swiftly re-directed to aid disadvantaged villagers. However, migrant workers and their family members have primarily occupied an indeterminate position in terms of their (relative) vulnerability, which renders their inclusion in assistance programmes tentative and arbitrary. Based on empirical findings from both quantitative and qualitative components of the research, this study concludes with the following recommendations to improve villages' preparedness in meeting the challenges relating to migrant workers' protection and empowerment.

3.1. Support villages in carrying out migration governance tasks and responsibilities

From the pandemic experience, the study gathers that villages that have a prior understanding of migration, notably those which have implemented migration-related programmes, are more responsive to the needs and vulnerabilities of migrant worker households. There is thus a clear need to support village governments in strengthening their capacity to implement their tasks and responsibilities concerning migrant workers' protection and empowerment under Law No. 18 (2017). Furthermore, more socialization is required to remedy the current knowledge deficit about the Law, as when taking direction from the surveyed villages in this study, the following are listed as areas where they need assistance the most:

a. provision of information relating to safe migration; **b.** population registry and data management; **c.** case management/(legal) assistance. The pandemic context has, in particular, seen the emergence of a best practice, in which villages have begun to record returnees' movements. These results could inform future efforts as villages build their migration database. Pertinent to consider are the following: **a.** improving data on return and re-migration; **b.** linking the village's migration database to the village's SID and a nationally integrated migration database; **c.** involving the BPS to contextualize migration data in the broader national database to better understand how migration relates to development issues in general.

As the survey findings have indicated, particular attention should be given to empowering female village apparatus and border areas. Concerning the first, villages could benefit from further assistance in integrating gender responsiveness, as the Presidential Instruction No. 9 on Gender Mainstreaming (Inpres No. 9 Tahun 2000 tentang Pengarusutamaan Gender) mandates, in their developmental framework and governance of migration. As for the latter, border-specific context presents particular challenges, which require a more defined response. Further capacity-building measures targeting these villages are crucial, primarily as Law No. 18 (2017) mainly addresses villages in their position as the origin and not transit areas.

3.2. Integrate migrant worker protection and empowerment into village planning

Indonesia's pandemic response at the village level, especially as exemplified in the inclusive disbursement of the BLT-DD, illustrates a best practice as to how migrant workers can be accommodated in more comprehensive aid measures and assistance programmes. Beyond the emergency context, to ensure that the protection and empowerment of migrant workers are more sustained, they need to be integrated into villages' long-term development planning. Villages should be encouraged and assisted in building regulations to establish continued support for low-wage migrant workers and their families.

Aside from the poverty reduction framework, which the COVID-19 response has substantiated, two further, more nuanced points of departure linking migration to development can be considered.

Firstly, there should be explorations about how migration features into the Ministry of Villages, Disadvantaged Regions and Transmigration's neo-endogenous development paradigm, and the related concepts of village-initiated development (*Desa Membangun*) and rural development (*pembangunan pedesaan*).

Secondly, there needs to be more investigation into how migration could be incorporated into the national planning agency's (*Badan Perencanaan Pembangunan Nasional, Bappenas*) configuration of livelihoods (on-farm, off-farm, and non-farm activities) and a broader understanding of migration in the context of agrarian transition.

For many villages, interests from different stakeholders may converge on the issue of stay-behind families, especially children of migrant workers. Village programs catering to this issue should be given more priority. Affirmative actions for women are particularly needed, considering the context of feminization migration and the gendered experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic.

3.3. Enhance coordination between government levels in implementing Law No. 18 (2017)

This short study showcases how a coordinated national response and supportive budgetary framework form a COVID-19 best practice. The government was able to shoulder the daunting task of facilitating the mass-scale return of migrant workers and ensuring their inclusion in the village's policy measures during the pandemic. The experience highlights the importance of multi-level coordination in governing migration. At the same time, Law No. 18 (2017) specifies migration governance that rests on increasing roles and capacities of local and village governments (*tata kelola migrasi berbasis kedaerahan*). This should not mean a diminished role of the national government. Beyond ad hoc response necessitated by the pandemic, ministries/agencies should coordinate and integrate national support to villages in improving their capacity to respond to issues of protection and empowerment of migrant workers. In linking migration to development, there is a potential strategic role for the Bappenas in integrating protection and empowerment of migrant workers in developmental planning.

As re-migration is a key concern resulting from prevailing indebted migration practices, all government levels should contribute to BP2MI-led efforts to abolish recruitment fees. Furthermore, to complement endeavours at the national and sub-national levels, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Manpower should lead joint efforts to negotiate bilateral and multilateral agreements to socialize the "employers pay" norm. It can be done with the support of the International Labour Office (ILO) and IOM, which have consistently promoted fair and ethical recruitment practices.

Meanwhile, local governments should discuss, in concrete terms, how concurrent government applies to the issues of migrant workers' protection and empowerment and come up with coordination mechanisms to implement individual level's responsibilities as stipulated in Articles 40, 41 and 42 of Law No. 18 (2017). Furthermore, they should decide on appropriate bureaucratic nomenclature so that labour migration issues can be effectively included in local government budgets. For instance, local governments' obligatory, essential services (*Urusan Wajib Pelayanan Dasar*) include protection and accommodating migrant workers.

In line with this study's recommendation to include migration in national and village planning, there is also an urgency to enhance the role of the regional development agency (*Badan Perencanaan Pembangunan Daerah*, Bappeda) in integrating migration in local-level development planning. While the technical expertise of specific government services (*Dinas*) at the local levels is essential, there is a need for a more strategic perspective of migration in development planning. The Bappeda also has a ready capacity in aiding efforts to improve the migration database.

One of the Law No. 18 (2017) key derivative regulations, the Government Regulation (*Peraturan Pemerintah*) No. 59 (2021), has now been issued to provide a more precise

framework stipulating coordination between the different levels of government in protecting and empowering migrant workers. Village apparatus could refer to this regulation, especially in close coordination with the regency/town level governments. In particular, effective coordination should be established and maintained between villagers and the Manpower Offices at the regency/town level, where this information would be made available.

It is noted here that future research should account for sub-districts (*kecamatan*) potentials in facilitating the levels of migration governance.

3.4. Engage migrant workers groups as essential partners in migration governance

The COVID-19 outbreak has deprived many migrant workers of their employment abroad, and crucial concerns are raised about prospects for alternative livelihoods. This relates directly to the question of migrant workers' empowerment, and this study has extensively explored the potential roles of non-government actors, especially migrant workers' communities, in this regard.

The role of CSOs and migrant workers' communities in shaping and reforming Indonesia's governance of labour outmigration is well-documented. Community-initiated practices have often informed government policies and even get adopted as official programs.

To cite an example, the Ministry of Manpower modelled their Productive Migrant Villages (*Desa Migran Produktif, Desmigratif*) on Desbumi (*Desa Peduli Buruh Migran*), a pilot project championed by Migrant Care. The participation of community-led organizations at all levels is invaluable as they have relentlessly pushed for incorporating a more rights-based approach in the governance of migration.

Stakeholders must strive to improve the existing approach to empowerment by providing (former) migrant workers with assistance activities beyond training. End-to-end protection needs to be complemented with holistic empowerment. Empowerment should be regarded as an overall effort that should be gradually cultivated starting from their pre-departure, in destination countries, and upon return – with continuous, follow-up monitoring.

At the village level, ensure inclusiveness and community participation in migration governance by supporting village-level community-organizing by (former) migrant workers and family members, and encourage greater economic involvement and investment in the community, mainly through co-operatives. Their participation is crucial to make sure that village processes recognize and address the needs and vulnerabilities of migrant workers.

ANNEX 1.

List of Targets Districts

- | | |
|--------------------|------------------|
| 1. Lampung Timur | 15. Jember |
| 2. Lampung Selatan | 16. Lumajang |
| 3. Pesawaran | 17. Tulungagung |
| 4. Serang | 18. Banyuwangi |
| 5. Pandeglang | 19. Bondowoso |
| 6. Karawang | 20. Probolinggo |
| 7. Indramayu | 21. Bojonegoro |
| 8. Sukabumi | 22. Lombok timur |
| 9. Cianjur | 23. Makassar |
| 10. Cirebon | 24. Kubu Raya |
| 11. Wonosobo | 25. Pontianak |
| 12. Kendal | 26. Sambas |
| 13. Semarang | 27. Flores Timur |
| 14. Malang | |

ANNEX 2.

List of FGDs conducted during the study

FGD with Government Stakeholders

List of topics	Date of FGD	Participants
(1) National-level support to village governments in migrant workers' protection & empowerment;	February 22, 2021	BP2MI, Ministry of Manpower, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Home Affairs, Ministry of Finance
(2) Inclusion of migrant workers and their families in government's development programs/services;	February 24, 2021	BP2MI; Coordinating Ministry for Human Development and Culture; Ministry of Social Affairs
(3) COVID-19: best practices and challenges in policy responses	February 26, 2021	BP2MI; Ministry of Village, Ministry for Villages, Disadvantaged Regions and Transmigration; Bappenas, Ministry of Social Affairs; Coordinating Ministry for Economic Affairs; Ministry of Women Empowerment and Child Protection
Roles and responsibilities of local governments (province-level) in migration governance	March 10, 2021	Regency-level government representatives from Banten, West Java, Central Java and East Java (Provinces in Java)
	March 12, 2021	Regency-level government representatives from Lampung, West Kalimantan, West Nusa Tenggara, East Nusa Tenggara (Provinces outside of Java)
Roles and responsibilities of local governments (regency/town level)	March 24, 2021	Regency-level government representatives from East Lampung, Sambas, Indramayu, Cirebon, Malang, East Lombok, East Flores

FGDs with Non-government Stakeholders

List of topics	Date of FGD	Participants
Gaps in protection and services, role and participation	February 16, 2021	SBMI, Migrant Care, Jaringan Buruh Migran (JBM), Sakti, Kabar Bumi, IMWU Hong Kong
Challenges in re-integration, migrant entrepreneurship, the efficacy of empowerment programs and government support	March 18, 2021	Former migrant workers currently running small-scale businesses

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