

# Going Back with Glee: A Case Study of Indonesian Migrant Workers Engaging in Circular Migration

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## Abstract

Driven by a wide range of social and cultural forces, circular migration has become a prominent phenomenon in the contemporary world, and it is especially common among Indonesian migrant workers. The research delved into what pushes Indonesian migrant workers to going back to host countries for employment after returning to their home country. A case study approach was employed by which a total of 24 semi-structured interviews were conducted with Indonesian migrant workers from Blitar, Malang, Ponorogo, and Tulungagung in East Java, Indonesia. The research reveals that non-monetary incentives such as supportive and amicable workplace environments, including the possibility of career advancements and adequate accommodations, as well as productive and family-oriented communities, act as important motivators for Indonesian migrant workers to go back to host countries. Furthermore, the research adds to the widening topography of migration studies by which it provides a broader picture in painting the “human” rationality behind circular migration in Global South.

**Keywords:** case study, circular migration, Indonesia, migrant workers, migration

## Introduction

Migration-facilitated notion has been widely explored from many different angles, with particular attention paid to issues such as how lower incomes and education levels are associated with higher migration rates (Majid et al., 2020; Meng et al., 2020; Shamsuddin, Katsaiti, & El Anshashy, 2022). With both low aspects of incomes and education levels

translating as the overriding factor for rural populations to engage in migration and seek employments abroad (Stark, Micevska, & Mycielski, 2009), the profession of migrant workers has morphed into a tenet of ensuring a better future for many of them. Whether to the host and home countries or for the migrant workers themselves, the positive implications of these migration activities are substantial, including the amelioration of social and economic conditions (Sayono, Utami, & Ayundasari, 2018), the alleviation of poverty (Harkins & Lindgren, 2018), and the acquisition of new knowledge, skills, and abilities by means of qualifying work trainings and acquiring adequate certifications. Although there are many benefits of working abroad, such as higher pay and wider job opportunities, there are also considerable drawbacks, including health-related issues, social discrimination, exploitation and abuse. The health and safety concerns, for instance, are just one of the many repercussions of working abroad (Mucci et al., 2019), mainly due to heavy workloads, long working hours, and limited resting hours that migrant workers are subjected to on the job (Moyce & Schenker, 2018). Moreover, migrant workers are susceptible to workplace bullying (Cheo, 2017) and even racial discrimination (Stevens, Hussein, & Manthorpe, 2011) due to, for example, visible social markers such as skin color and ethnicity that induced discriminatory behaviors by employers or colleagues. Importantly, the exploitation and abuse experienced by migrant worker (Sherry, 2004; Jureidini, 2010; Sonmez et al., 2011; Brennan, 2014) further lay out the pervasiveness of labor rights violations that continues to occur in many parts of the world where migration takes place.

Notwithstanding the struggles that plague this trend, a number of driving forces continue to contribute to this phenomenon of “circular migration,” or migrant workers returning back to the previous countries in which they were employed. In addition to the hopes of earning higher wages in the country of destination (Witte & Guedes Auditor, 2021), factors such as employment standing and age have a significant impact on the decisions of a former migrant worker to relocate to the country from which they perceived to have obtained better jobs (Thomas, 2019). Similarly, the earnings that migrant workers remit to their relatives in their home countries is typically used to pay off the debts that have been incurred by either (or both) the migrant workers and their families (Bylander, 2020; Guérin & Venkatasubramanian, 2020; Hoang, 2020; Lainez, 2020); and this is very likely to drive migrant workers to re-migrate as both migrant workers and their families are (in many cases) solely dependent on remittances as a means of financial support (Chowdhury & Chakraborty, 2021; Mas’udah, 2020). In a more specific case, the phenomenon of debt-induced and debt-financed labor migration has become more visible and widespread, leading to the emergence of one of the most exploitative migration industries in the world. As a result, migrant workers’ meagre earnings often become a failed investment in long-term income-generating activities, limiting their families’ potential for social mobility because of the debt that accompanied and exacerbated migrant workers’ own poverty (Hoang, 2020).

Circular migration is an occurrence for which there is extensive empirical and theoretical knowledge in its scholarships, and many have further speculated that it may just be more widespread than outward migration (Constant et al., 2013). Circular migration can be defined as the systematic and regular movement of migrants between their home countries and host countries as they look for work (Constant, 2020; Constant et al., 2013). It is a strategy

to maximize the benefits from both worlds. Circular migration has been touted as a “win-win-win” situation, in which resources are efficiently allocated. It is a win for host countries by alleviating labor shortages, it guarantees remittances for development in the home countries, and improve the lives of the migrants. GFMD (2007) characterize circular migration as “the fluid movement of people between countries, including temporary or permanent movement of which, when it occurs voluntarily and is linked to labor needs of countries of origin and destination, can be beneficial to all involved”. Through this study, we place a significant emphasis on the issue of why migrant workers continue to engage in circular migration, as well as the question of what incentives push them to return to host countries after returning to their home country. The research explores the underlying reasons behind the trends of Indonesian migrant workers returning to their host countries after coming back to Indonesia. Despite the fact that various research has been conducted on the subject of why migrant workers continue to migrate despite the risks and dwindling returns, there is surprisingly little addressing the phenomenon in the Indonesian context. Putting that in mind, we seek to fill this gap.

## Literature Review

The phenomenon of migration has been in existence for centuries and, among others, is driven mostly by economic and social-political factors, natural disasters, conflicts, urbanization, as well as population issues (Urbański, 2022). To better understand the phenomenon, it is important to look into relevant theories. Zanabazar, Kho, and Jigjiddorj (2021) elaborate that there are various pull and push factors that influence migration around the globe. The pull factors to migration involve various aspects that attract people to certain destinations. Migration-classified pull factors can be categorized into economic, social, and political. Economic factors that pull migrants include indices such as hope for better employment, better shelter, more income and food, and higher living standards. Similarly, various social and political factors contribute to the pulling of migrants to other countries. Social factors such as religious tolerance and better career and educational opportunities in some countries contribute to the pull of migrants. The push factors on the other hand are the factors influencing migration based on the conditions that force individuals to leave their homes. Similar with pull factors, the push factors influencing migration can also be categorized into economic, social, and political factors. The economic factors influencing migration include lack of employment. Ibrahim et al. (2021) claim that few jobs and overpopulation of many developing countries including Indonesia contribute to push migration. Low living standards are another factor that drives migration. The other economic factors contributing to migration include natural disasters such as floods that devastate the means of income. The pull and push migration factor theory are inevitable to underpin the study.

Most occurrences of international labor migration take place when the rate of population growth outpaces the rate at which there is an increase in work opportunities. Therefore, migrating abroad can be a viable option for (especially rural) populations from

less-developed regions to support their families financially. Because of the significant wage differential between and across nations, a section of the working-age population migrates or relocates overseas, particularly to Asian countries, owing to the disparity between domestic and foreign incomes (Jain & Oommen, 2016; Piper & Roces, 2004; Shah, 2013). In example, it is often stated that the availability and offering of a broader and wider range of work possibilities that are in low or no demand among local employees also act as reasons for migrating abroad (Boustan et al., 2010). Further, in addition to securing employment, another motivation for labour migration abroad is the accumulation of financial capital (or cushion) that can be invested in the establishment of a business in the country of origin upon the migrant workers' return home (Piracha & Vadean, 2010). According to Martyn (2018), because migrant workers earn more earnings outside of their home country than they do in their home country, they are able to save money for investments in their home country's economy as well as for day-to-day necessities in their home country. In this, Wickramasekara (2008) asserts that former migrant workers possess a greater propensity to stimulate economic growth in their home countries, leading to the creation of new employment opportunities; nevertheless, the ideal conditions are not always reached in practice. In many real-world situations, former Indonesian migrant workers who are expected to produce at least one job for themselves are frequently compelled to migrate again when their businesses run out of funds and unable to develop. Therefore, those who are shut out of the economy typically seek employment prospects in other countries when they are unable to find work in their home country.

Moreover, while it is normative that migrant workers would return home upon completion of their employment contract in the destination nation; also, this is not always the situation today. Uhlendorff and Zimmermann (2014) found that some former migrant workers who had returned to their home countries in search of employment subsequently re-migrated again. As the study found, there are a number of dominant causes for this phenomenon, including the fact that the income earned while working abroad is insufficient to meet daily necessities; the difficulty of finding a job in the country of origin and the fact that even if you do, the income earned is lower than abroad; and the existence of social networks that facilitate re-migration. As per Triandafyllidou and Marchetti (2013), money and employment status are factors that act as motivations for frequent migration. Supported by Konstantinou (2019), the decision to return overseas is highly influenced by five factors: age, employment status, remittances, length of education, and type of provider. As Zewdu (2018) also observes, the primary motivations for migrant workers' migration are income, profits, length of employment, investment, and location of the host country. In this, it is becoming increasingly common for migrant workers to opt to remain in their countries of employment for a lengthy period of time. In the event that they do return home, it will most likely be for the sole purpose of completing paperwork-related administrative tasks or making a short visit with family. Indeed, migration is a strategy adopted by many populations in an effort to better their economic conditions due to the immense economic benefits it can afford. Indeed, there are a variety of fundamental variables that encourages and pushes migrant workers to return to work abroad. In this, the objective of our study is to delve deeper into the factors that push migrant workers to re-migrate and engage in frequent international mobility in the particular context of Indonesia.

## Methodology

A typical perspective of qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Maxwell, 2008; Neuman & Robson, 2014; Creswell & Poth, 2016) is that it is most beneficial at the “case” (e.g., a program, a policy, a project; see, for example, Yin, 2006; Stake, 2010) level, where themes and linkages can be identified using a variety of interpretative techniques (Oun & Bach, 2014). Case study focuses on the subject of what can be learned precisely about a case (Stake, 2005), and it is most effective “when research aims to produce a firsthand understanding of a case” (Yin, 2006). Theoretically, much of case study rests on the belief that social phenomena, human challenges, and the characters of instances are context-dependent (Guba and Lincoln, 2005; Stake, 2005). The research uses a case study methodology to inquire into the push factors that act as incentives for Indonesian migrant workers to going back to employment overseas after returning to Indonesia.

Using an interview protocol consisting of five open-ended questions (see Appendix 1), the research draws on a collection of 24 semi-structured, one-on-one interviews with self-identified Indonesian migrant workers (14 male and 10 female participants) in East Java. The Province of East Java, one of the most major departure ports in Indonesia, is responsible for transporting the biggest number of migrant workers to countries outside of Indonesia. According to the Indonesian Migrant Workers Protection Agency (BP2MI or Badan Perlindungan Pekerja Migran Indonesia), East Java is one of the provinces in Indonesia with the highest number of migrant workers in 2021, with a total of approximately 360 thousand workers leaving the country between 2015 and 2021. During the same time frame, more than 185 thousand migrant workers from East Java chose to return to Indonesia; nonetheless, it is possible for these migrant workers to go back to their countries of destination and so engaging in circular migration. In this, the Province of East Java was selected because it sets out as a setting at which the population of migrant workers are reputed as much prevalent than in any other regions in Indonesia.

The recruitment was done through the use of purposive sampling (non-probabilistic identification of participants) and convenience or snowballing sampling techniques (Parker, Scott, & Geddes, 2019), with important community actors, such as the district village apparatus, as well as personal contacts and familial ties between participants, played a significant connecting role in the initial recruitment process. It is important to note, however, that the district village apparatus only supplied information of a list on their villages’ migrant workers for the purpose of our initial recruitment procedure. Therefore, with the entire participant recruitment being autonomously conducted by us, we were able to minimize potential selection biases (such as village heads’ vested interests with informal, non-registered recruiters or agents) as participants were recruited on the basis of their interests in participating in the study. That is, without any interference from the village officials, we were able to derive our study’s findings strictly from the answers given by informants. Furthermore, the informants were aware that the information obtained from them would be used solely for research purposes prior to providing their consents to participate in the research. It is assumed that the informants have established at least some level of trust towards

us as the researcher, thereby reducing the likelihood that they would conceal or withhold real stories from us.

Our interviews were performed through WhatsApp given our informants' unwillingness to speak over the phone, their hectic work schedules, and the time difference between Indonesia and the countries where they are currently employed. That being the case, the personal information of the informants is kept confidential through which each of them was given a pseudonym and other identifying characteristics were fictionalized. With a total of 24 informants (Table 1), 70% of them had returned to work overseas once, while 30% had returned to work abroad twice or more. The informants were locals of the East Java cities of Blitar, Malang, Ponorogo, and Tulungagung, and they are currently employed in Greece, Hong Kong, Malaysia, New Zealand, Saudi Arabia, South Korea, and Taiwan. The ages of the informants ranged from 24 to 65, 13% had completed junior high school and 87% had completed senior high school, 75% had been married, 21% had been single, and 4% had been divorced, and their monthly income ranged from Rp 7 million (\$463.20) to Rp 35 million (\$2,316.02). Indeed, it is worth noting that our informants' earnings are far higher than the average wage of migrant workers, which was at least Rp 3,7 million in 2017 numbers. Irrespective of the overarching assumptions that inform our sample's representation, we consider it is important to acknowledge the sociodemographic factors that contribute to explaining this, such as the fact that our informants are returning migrant workers with an extensive experience who have returned to their countries of destination multiple times.

Secondary data collection, including non-participant observation and documentation of relevant literature sources, as well as information from relevant village offices, were incorporated to corroborate the findings from the interviews. In accordance with the suggestions made by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2018), data are processed by selecting, simplifying, and separating data that encompasses the full textual section in the form of interview transcripts with resource individuals, relevant documents, and other empirical materials. Following this process, the research conducts data presentation steps, during which we condensed and refined the collected data in order to arrive at a conclusion. This stage entails evaluating data from the beginning of data collection to data presentation, as well as identifying patterns and providing explanations. The act of drawing a conclusion is evidence that study was carried out, and within this study, data triangulation approach was used to ensure the validity of its data by checking data from a variety of sources and at a variety of times in order to assess the reliability of the data in this method.

Table 1 Participants' Sociodemographic Characteristics

No	Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Education Level	Marital Status	Monthly Income (IDR; Million)	Occupation	Country of Destination
1	Sukar	Male	40	Senior High School	Married	10	Factory Worker	Taiwan
2	Rohmah	Female	35	Senior High School	Married	9	Migrant Domestic Worker	Taiwan
3	Marzuki	Male	35	Senior High School	Married	10	Factory Worker	Taiwan
4	Heri	Male	37	Senior High School	Married	8	Gardener	Taiwan
5	Basuki	Male	65	Senior High School	Married	10	Gardener	Malaysia
6	Ismail	Male	40	Senior High School	Married	10	Contractor Worker	Malaysia
7	Diah	Female	40	Senior High School	Married	12	Migrant Domestic Worker	Greece
8	Nisa	Female	30	Senior High School	Married	10	Migrant Domestic Worker	Taiwan
9	Anam	Male	35	Senior High School	Married	10	Factory Workers	Taiwan
10	Ghoni	Male	45	Senior High School	Married	12	Gardener	New Zealand
11	Amelia	Female	45	Senior High School	Married	9	Migrant Domestic Worker	Saudi Arabia
12	Indra	Male	32	Senior High School	Not Married Yet	12	Janitor	New Zealand
13	Endar	Male	35	Senior High School	Married	10	Factory Worker	Taiwan
14	Anton	Male	30	Senior High School	Not Married Yet	5	Miner	Malaysia
15	Isna	Female	40	Junior High School	Married	8	Migrant Domestic Worker	Hong Kong
16	Nana	Female	37	Senior High School	Married	8	Migrant Domestic Worker	Hong Kong
17	Rudi	Male	29	Junior High School	Married	35	Manufacturing Worker	South Korea
18	Luluk	Female	41	Senior High School	Married	7	Migrant Domestic Worker	Hong Kong
19	Fahrul	Male	47	Senior High School	Married	7	Plantation Worker	Malaysia
20	Lusy	Female	30	Senior High School	Not Married Yet	10	Babysitter	Taiwan
21	Rika	Female	24	Senior High School	Not Married Yet	7	Migrant Domestic Worker	Hong Kong
22	Melati	Female	44	Junior High School	Married	8	Migrant Domestic Worker	Hong Kong
23	Budi	Male	39	Senior High School	Not Married Yet	7,2	Construction Worker	Malaysia
24	Dani	Male	51	Senior High School	Divorced	12	Factory Worker	Taiwan

Source: Authors' own processed data

## Analysis

One of the countries that is responsible for sending a large number of migrant workers to other countries is Indonesia. According to the World Bank Group (2017) report entitled "Migrating to Opportunity", Indonesia was ranked second as the country with the largest number of migrant workers in Southeast Asia, with an estimated 18% (or over 1.2 out of a total of 6.5 million workers) and around Rp 125.2 trillion in remittances in 2015. As per the data collected by Indonesian Migrant Workers Protection Agency (BP2MI or Badan Perlindungan Pekerja Migran Indonesia) for the period 2015-2021, there are a total of approximately 1.5 million Indonesian migrant workers, with 75% of these migrant workers exited the country through unofficial or illegal methods, while only 25% of them exited the country through official or legal means. However, the figures offered do not even begin to account for the full magnitude of Indonesian migrant workers currently employed abroad. The research findings is presented by focusing on the motivating rationalities influencing Indonesian migrant workers' decisions to going back to their countries of employment and thereby engaging in circular migration.

"I Feel at Home Here": Work Environment, Career Development, and Accommodation.

There are also two distinct types of working environments that migrant workers may encounter when working in a foreign country: unpleasant and pleasant. Regarding the lack of comfort (and/or unpleasantness) of working environments, Sterud et al. (2018) conclude that migrant workers in many host countries are more likely to be exposed to dangerous working circumstances and to develop health problems, especially those relating to their mental health. Indeed, many migrant workers are more likely to have been involved in some sort of mishaps or suffered an injury while working in a foreign country, and this is particularly true for migrant workers who are employed in the fields of agriculture, industry, and construction (Fitzgerald et al., 2013; Hargreaves et al., 2019; Moyce & Schenker, 2018). Moreover, the lack of access to adequate medical care and other crucial public services that migrant workers can secure in their country of destination can further contribute to an uncomfortable working environment (Caxaj & Cohen, 2019). Similarly, many migrant workers face a variety of challenges in the workplace, such as racial discrimination, harassment, and threats (Akay & Ahmadi, 2022), workplace intimidation (Weine et al., 2013), unsupportive human resources and a lack of control over the environment (Harvey et al., 2020), and poor relationships with co-workers (Lowe et al., 2020); for which these issues are exacerbated by barriers of cultural and linguistic differences (Luksyte, Spitzmueller, & Rivera-Minaya, 2014). On the other hand, migrant workers can also be offered the opportunities to have the experiences of working in a setting that is both comfortable and supportive (Janta et al., 2011), which for Ravasi, Salamin, and Davoine (2015), one of the requirements necessitates them in having a reliable employer for the migrant workers. The research finds that migrant workers who return to their countries of employment are supported by a positive and encouraging work environment characterized by a number of variables, such as a strong sense of kinship between co-workers and employers, promising career developments, and having adequate accommodations.



A strong kinship between co-workers and employers. Reports from several interview sources indicate that there is a rather strong sense of kinship present in respondents' respective locations of employment. This holds true not only between co-workers but also with employers, through which the interview results with several migrant workers provide credence to this claim. For example, according to Rohmah, a migrant domestic worker in a Taiwanese family, shared that "my work atmosphere is quite comfortable, because my employer treats me like I am a family, and I have been invited out with my employer's family on multiple occasions." Even Marzuki, another migrant worker in Taiwan, attributes his decision to stay and re-migrate back to Taiwan to the warmth and acceptance he found at his workplace, noting, "We have a sense that we are far away from home, which contributes to our heightened sense of unity." Two other migrant workers in Taiwan, Ahmad and Anam, indicated that their "pleasant" and "very good in comparison to Indonesia" work environment drives them to return to Taiwan instead of remaining in Indonesia. Due to his employer's kindness and personal connections with him, Ahmad underlined the feeling of being at home ("I feel at home here") since "I am considered a member of the family here" and "I do not feel as though I am in a foreign country, but at home." Anam felt similarly, linking to Ahmad's example with his co-workers that he also fostered a sense of belonging and made him "especially at ease working in Taiwan." Amelia, a Saudi Arabian migrant worker, could also identify to the feeling of belonging to a family, as she described her experiences as follows:

The place where I work is wonderful, and my employer genuinely cares about me, since I am frequently given the option to take time off each year. The fact that the employer's family considers me a member of their family is a major factor in my decision to continue working here. (Amelia, Saudi Arabia)

In addition to the strong sense of kinship amongst migrant workers themselves, informants see decent and compassionate supervisors or employers as a significant element that pushes them to return to work abroad. Excerpts below are a few examples that offer presentations on the generosity of their employers:

The workplace is pretty accommodating. The employer is courteous, not impolite and bossy. There are occasionally employers that enjoy giving orders and exercising control. But my employer is really kind, as they do not ask me to work while I am on vacation. They recognize that I am on vacation, so they allow me to relax or meet up with friends. (Luluk, Hong Kong)

My work atmosphere is excellent, my employer is very attentive, my pay is never late, and I am permitted time off. The job here meets all of my needs. (Nana, Hong Kong)

The workplace has friendly and enjoyable environment. And thank God, I have never had a negative or unpleasant experience while working. Also, my employer is kind. Consequently, I feel content and comfortable working there. (Melati, Hong Kong)

As seen by those excerpts, several informants experienced a sense of comfort at their place of employment as a direct result of the strong sense of kinships that existed between their employers as well as among the co-workers themselves. Moreover, and especially in the case of migrant domestic workers, where their employers treat them as if they were members of the family, it is also consistent with prior research (Farashah & Blomquist, 2019; MacKenzie & Forde, 2009), which suggests that the familial-like bond between migrant workers and their employers can have a significant impact on their level of motivation. Indeed, every migrant worker expects the expectation that their prospective employer will be kind, given their belief that it is critical to develop positive relationships with the employer's family. In this, pleasant and mutually beneficial interactions between migrant workers and their employers can foster a strong sense of obligation on the part of migrant workers towards their employers. In addition to having a healthy relationship with the employers, the presence of a work environment that encourages migrant workers to feel as though they have close friends who live nearby also adds to the development of a strong sense of proximity to their homes (Tabuga, 2018; Timonen & Doyle, 2010; Wanninayake, 2016).

A promising career development and opportunities for self-growth. The extensive career developments and employment opportunities offered to migrant workers contribute to the creation of a working environment that is more accommodating to their needs. Several sources claim that it is easier to locate employment opportunities and advance one's career outside of rather than within Indonesia. According to Sukar, a migrant worker in Taiwan, "Not only do I get to interact with a great number of people, but my company also fosters my professional development." In point of fact, for many of the informants, having a job profession does not only translate as, as Ismail in Malaysia exactly put it, "already being in a profitable position," but being "given a lot of responsibility by my supervisor made me feel important because in Indonesia, I am only a seller of bamboo pottery" contributes more significantly to a sense of self-improvement, self-esteem, and self-growth. Basuki, another migrant worker in Malaysia, mentioned that his relatively pleasant work environment as a gardener in his employer's home was not only a significant factor in his decision to stay and return, but that his employer's request that he to help take care of the plantation the employer owns has made him feel useful and important, and he believes that his current position is sufficient to realise his potential. Nisa in Taiwan also remarked, "The working climate in Taiwan is undeniably superior to that in Indonesia, especially in terms of standards and finances." She added that, despite her inability to find job in Indonesia, she was delighted to have been offered a position as a migrant domestic worker in Taiwan, for which she would receive a monthly salary.

Thus far, we have been able to deduce the following: A large number of migrant workers leave their home countries in search of better employment opportunities and higher earnings. These workers often prosper in their new environments, increasing the likelihood of returning to work abroad in the future. Furthermore, many sources also revealed that they had worked at the same location for an extended period of time and that their employers had placed a high level of trust in them, which prompted informants to compare their experiences working in Indonesia and abroad, with the latter implying a higher quality of work and environment. According to earlier research (Forde & MacKenzie, 2009; Lan, 2001; Wanninayake, 2016),

migrant workers' access to career developments is strongly influenced by the companies or employers for which they work. If a more open-minded and inclusive attitudes prevails at the workplace, migrant workers will have a better chance of advancing in their (Rajendran et al., 2020). Employers' trust in their migrant workers serves as not only a kind of psychological capital but also as a source of inspiration and hope, empowering them to face and triumph over the hardships of their new home and workplace. That is, migrant workers are likely to remain with their existing employers if they are given opportunities to take charge of their careers and improve personally and professionally (Le, Jiang, & Nielsen, 2018). It is inevitable, however, that migrant workers will choose to work abroad and engage in circular migration due to the inaccessibility of labour market and the difficulty of finding work in rural areas of Indonesia (Martyn, 2018), as well as the possibility of salaries abroad that are higher than in Indonesia (Zid et al., 2020).

Adequate accommodations that fulfil basic living needs. Having a sense of familial-like relationships and promising career developments are important, but so is providing adequate accommodations for migrant workers to do their jobs. Such comfort can be accomplished in a variety of ways, for example, such as reassuring migrant workers that the company or employer cares about them by meeting basic necessities like providing them with a safe place to live and nutritious food to eat. Rohmah in Taiwan, for example, went on to remark, "If all goes well, my employer will provide for both my physical and spiritual needs." Ghoni, who is currently located in New Zealand, commented, "When compared to Indonesia, the facilities at work here in New Zealand are, of course, superior." Luluk in Hong Kong has described her work environment as "incredibly nice" because she is provided meals three times per day and the cost of these meals are not deducted from her salary. A large number of sources also receives paid vacation time during which they can relax and refuel. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, many also reported receiving lodging, registration, and transportation to clinics in order to obtain the COVID-19 vaccine. In fact, hospitable conditions are among the incentives that encourage informants to remain and work in migrant workers' host countries (Dewen, Fang, & Guoqing, 2010; Koh, 2020; Loganathan et al., 2019). Basuki, who resides to work in Malaysia, noted similarly, "Here, the employer's family has placed their trust in me, and as a result, I have been provided with a separate room with a variety of suitable and better facilities.

Indeed, many informants reported feeling comfortable and secure, with their rights being respected and appreciated, and their incomes and general quality of life being greatly enhanced compared to their experiences in Indonesia. Furthermore, the fact that both the company and the employer offer genuine compassion and care for migrant workers and fulfil their responsibilities to provide them with the essential working conditions they need to perform their jobs, such as the right to food and shelter and the ability to receive vaccinations, demonstrates how the availability of adequate accommodations at the place of employment encourages informants' sense of comfort to remain.

"... Like a Family": A Welcoming Community

While there are many elements at play, Blumenstock, Chi, and Tan (2019) argue that a solid social network is a major motivator for migrant workers to remain in their host country. Kiranantika (2021) lists that trust, social engagement, and reciprocity are the three pillars of survival strategies in countries that host migrant workers. Informants in this study were found to congregate in local groups and communities; these connections are important to informants as they offer a space where they are able to trust one another and lean on one another for emotional support while they are far from home and their families for work. Informants further reported that being a part of these groups enabled them to feel safe since it allows them an opportunity to unwind and socialize with others who understood them and their experiences as minorities, as well as provides opportunities for networking and mutual support.

Networking to foster relationships and connections. According to the responses of the majority of the informants, the opportunity to make new connections is a major draw to participating in online communities and a key factor in their decision to do so. Rudi, a migrant worker in South Korea, spoke about his experiences in this subject as follows.

I am a member of a variety of communities, including soccer communities, religious communities, regional communities, and many others. There are other communities, but owing to time and energy constraints, I only follow these. Joining a community is one way, in my opinion, to meet new people who come from all over the world and come from a variety of different backgrounds. (Rudi, South Korea)

The presence of these communities has a number of positive effects on the network, including the production of new knowledge that might not have been acquired had informants focused just on seeking employment. Sukar in Taiwan has talked about how he wants to become more involved in the local community because of the positive effects it has on his life and provides him with opportunities he would not otherwise have, such as unique experiences that would be hard to come by in the profession. He explained that the people in his circle are from all walks of life and work in places all over the world, so he can learn about new things from them, such as how to do certain occupations or what it is like to live in places he has not seen before. In the same vein, Anam in Taiwan shared his insights gained through being an active member of his local community.

I am a member of a group of professionals who assist migrant workers with their concerns. For instance, if there is an issue with the factory where I work, this community will guide and direct me on how to address it and the process that must be followed. Herein I get new information particularly regarding better understanding of the employment agreements (contracts). (Anam, Taiwan)

The benefits of engaging with local communities, such as receiving new knowledge from a vast network, are sufficient to make informants feel secure and drive them to return to work abroad; hence, it is one of the most essential considerations for many informants to remain in host countries. According to Garip and Asad (2016), migrant networks facilitate

migration because they provide access to migrant social capital. The term “migrant social capital” refers to the knowledge and support migrants provide one another to minimize migration's expenses and maximize its benefits. In fact, as Dolfin and Genicot (2010) highlight, the size of a person’s network has a direct correlation with the likelihood that they will migrate and engage in yet another instance of circular migration.

A sense of togetherness for mutual support. The creation of a strong and deep sense of support and mutual solidarity is another advantage of informants being members of certain communities. Because of this, our informants feel as if they have a safe place to call home and are aware of whom to contact if they encounter any issues when working abroad. Melati, who works in Hong Kong, said that “people in the Indonesian migrant worker community that I follow are like family” because they look out for one another and plan get-togethers, which brings her joy and makes her feel at peace. She went on to explain that if one of the members of the community is having a difficult time or has a problem, the rest of the community will rally around them and do anything they can to help, no matter how small. Indra, a New Zealand-based worker, reiterated this sentiment, stating that the Indonesian migrant worker community he has come to know and respect in New Zealand is more concerned with supporting its own members in times of need. In his word, “If someone is in need of assistance, they are able to post their request straight on social media groups, where their other friends can then respond and offer their help.” One more perk was revealed by Rudi in South Korea, who elaborated on the benefits of his community by saying, “We discuss with one another what it is like to live in a foreign country, and based on our various life experiences, the members of the group are able to assist one another and offer one appropriate help.” Comparing his personal perspective to that of Rudi, Anam in Taiwan made the following attempts at communication:

The worker community that I am a part of here provides assistance to Indonesian migrant workers who are employed in this manufacturing facility. When there is an issue with the plant, the community will step in, particularly in things connected to the contracts that are being negotiated. In the event that there is a violation of the contract, the community will work together to find a solution to the issue. (Anam, Taiwan)

Sukar in Taiwan agrees, stating that another advantage of belonging to a community is having friends who are like siblings because migrant workers work so far away, so “they do not feel alone, and we can back each other up” in times of hardship. Due to the community’s closeness and mutual support, informants can retain a higher level of living while working abroad. Having close friends and family is a big motivator for informants to return to their host countries. Hombrados-Mendieta et al. (2019) also noted that among migrant workers, family and native friend networks, as well as community integration, have significant influencers on immigrants’ ability to attain life contentment. Similar points are offered by Munshi (2014), who also contends that such ties might provide social and emotional support.

A community as a means of relaxation. Almost all informants also noted the demanding schedule, tough time management, and complex responsibilities associated with their work

abroad. As a result, one way they believe that they can relieve stress on the weekends and holidays is by being active in a community. Although the informants did email us with some documentations while traveling or celebrating holidays with their community, we decided against including it in this study to protect the informants' identities. Some informants have shared their thoughts on the topic in the following ways:

Following communities abroad is pretty helpful to prevent us from being stressed out by the demands of work. For instance, if we spend our vacation time to do anything other than rest in the dormitory, we occasionally go for a stroll with our community buddies. (Rudi, South Korea)

On occasion, while we are on vacation, our community friends visit tourist spots with us, however not usually on holidays or weekends because we also need to spend more money. But it was quite useful in enhancing my own enjoyment after a long day of work. (Luluk, Hong Kong)

It is simple; in this neighbourhood, we frequently come together to relax by going to simple restaurants or dining at our residences. It is a good way to alleviate weariness as a result of my co-workers' [friends of the community] presence. (Anam, Taiwan)

In short, the interviews infer that informants consider they have a place to recuperate from exhaustion in a country with a different work culture than Indonesia. As a result, when informants choose to return to their host countries, they are less likely to be concerned about the taxing demands of their work because they have a very supportive community.

Strengthening religious fervour (faiths) through communities. Because of the nature of their jobs, some informants must learn to adapt to the traditions and customs of countries other than their own. As a result, those who were once in the majority in Indonesia will now be in the minority at their places of employment, especially when it comes to religious practices. In this, by participating in local communities, those who must work away from their families can gain a sense of belonging and renewed drive to complete their tasks, where they feel like they have a second family among other members of the community who share their Indonesian heritage and religious beliefs. Occasionally, these communities conduct events with the express intention of reminding migrant workers of customs that are ubiquitous in Indonesia but are less so in other parts of the world. One example is described by Luluk, a Hong Kong-based worker, who related her community's experience of arranging a monthly Islamic congregational prayer (known as a yasinan).

Even though we live in a region where the vast majority of people do not practice Islam, we are able to maintain our identity as Muslims with the help of this program. That is to say, we are able to continue to worship in accordance with the tenets of our religion and the traditions that we followed while we were in Indonesia. (Luluk, Hong Kong)

Melati went on to say that through her Muslim Indonesian migrant community, she is able to draw closer to God and cure her familial longings in accordance with her religious

beliefs. She explained, "Every week, we gather to pray together. It is comforting to live here, even though it is distant from home, because it feels near and has a family-like atmosphere. In addition to making a living, one of the reasons for returning to work here is that I am quite comfortable with the community." Sukar shared his thoughts with the people in his humanitarian communities, stating that his faith not only supports him spiritually but also provides him with the steadiness he needs to maintain his beliefs and see them through, even if others do not. He sought to illustrate by saying, "During the month of Ramadan, we also share iftar and sahoor with others." Ghoni in New Zealand felt particularly linked to this subject since he lived and worked in a country where the majority of people did not share his religion and values.

I am a member of the Indonesian migrant worker community in New Zealand. The purpose of this community is to provide migrant workers with a sense of belonging so that they feel comfortable working here. In addition, our community frequently engages in charitable endeavours, such as the distribution of meals to the needy. In remembrance of Indonesian traditions throughout the last month of Ramadan, we prepared an iftar and sahur menu featuring Indonesian foods such as ketupat, chicken opor, and many others. (Ghoni, New Zealand)

Indra, who is also in New Zealand, has an almost same experience.

My neighbourhood frequently hosts charitable events such as food drives and fundraisers for the homeless. In addition to this, people regularly assemble to worship or do kajian (Islamic discussions). (Indra, New Zealand)

As can be seen from the findings of the interviews, Indonesian migrant workers abroad are able to fulfill their religious commitments despite being a religious minority in their place of employment. They are able to feel less isolated and more accepted as individuals when they are with this community of people who have similar experiences and perspectives. As a result, informants are more likely to go back to work abroad, even if it means moving away from their families and the country of their origin or becoming a minority in the country where they are employed.

## Conclusions

As reported by The World Bank (2017), Indonesia is one of the largest contributors of migrant workers in Southeast Asia, with some of its migrant workers migrating abroad on multiple occasions for a variety of different, multifaceted reasons. This research seeks to identify what push factors encourage Indonesian migrant workers to return to their country of designation after returning to Indonesia, and so engaging in circular migration.

Previous research has demonstrated that migrant workers are frequently subjected to exploitation and abuse (Digidiki & Bhabha, 2018; Gallagher, 2015; Miller et al., 2015), lending credence to the assumption that they will not re-migrate as migrant workers. However, as

Ollus (2016) argues, migrant workers are positioned in “forced flexibility” where “they have limited options other than to agree to working on poor and exploitative terms”. As Acharya (2020) also highlights, migrant workers are rendered with no bargaining power due to the “chronic underemployment at their place of origin, persistent precariousness, and informality of migrant workers in the unorganized sectors”. Even further, as many migrant workers often fund their (debt-financed) migration by taking out loans at exorbitant interest rates, selling off valuable land for quick cash, mortgaging productive assets, and spending down limited reserves (Moniruzzaman & Walton-Roberts, 2018), it is hardly surprising that migration-related activities is overburdened with debt and tragically, can take the whole migration episode to service the debt itself. That is, many migrant workers consider that irrespective of the negative aspects of migration and the risks they must face, many continue to migrate and even re-migrate due to both internal and external factors beyond their control.

This research, however, points out a different line of story. While also acknowledging that migrant workers are (often unavoidably and unfortunately) subjected to the negative features of migration and are strongly compelled to re-migrate as workers in their pursuit of economic factors (“money”), as Sorauren (2000) notes, “There are (and must be) more reasons to work than just to earn money. And these other reasons can be promoted to motivate people to work hard as well as to mitigate the conflict of interests”. Relative to the research findings, supportive and amicable workplace environments (including the possibility of career advancements and adequate accommodations) as well as productive and family-oriented communities are two non-monetary incentives in enticing Indonesian migrant workers to going back to countries of destination after returning to Indonesia. By contrast to previous studies that concluded economic factors to be the primary driving force for migrant workers returning to work overseas (Borras et al., 2022; Spitzer & Piper, 2014; Sricharoen, 2020; Zid et al., 2020), our study sheds light on the “human” side of the reasons migrant workers return to employment overseas.

From exploring the perspectives and experiences of Indonesian migrant workers, our study looks at the incentives that influenced their decisions to going back to host countries for employment after returning to home countries. While many previous research has shown that migrant workers are frequently exploited and subjected to cases of abuse, and that many migrants continue to re-migrate despite the terrible conditions they are subjected to in their quest for better jobs, income, and means of subsistence; our study offers a different side of the story by elucidating that migrant workers are driven to return to work abroad for not only “monetary” reasons but also for “human” (non-monetary) reasons. While it is irrational within our argument to assert that migrant workers will return to employment overseas solely for these non-monetary incentives, especially considering their personal circumstances back in Indonesia such as (for example) debt-financed migration or their workplace-related situations in host countries (including abuses and exploitations), it is still considered that these “human”, non-monetary incentives to be fundamental relative to the key causes that push migrant workers to going back to countries of destination. That is, by prescribing the normative changes of migrant workers re-migrating with pleasure, or in other words, “going back with glee”, and positioning their rights and welfares as well-protected and well-accommodated, as opposed to being in instances of exploitation, abuse, and debt-facilitated



migration, the research contributes as a key point of departure for future studies to explore the non-monetary incentives for migrant workers to re-migrate and engage in circular migration.

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## Appendix 1.

1. How many times have you returned to your countries of destination, and for what reason?
2. You returned to [insert example] for the following reason: [insert example]. How is your work environment as a [insert occupation] (for example, workloads, relationships with employers, relationships with co-workers)?
3. Why did you decide to work as a migrant worker abroad?
4. How are the accommodations at your place of employment as a [insert occupation]?
5. What other reasons led you to return to work as a migrant worker abroad?

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