

Indonesia's Multi Track Diplomacy in Protecting the Educational Rights of Indonesian Migrant Workers' (IMW) Children in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to determine the role of Indonesia's Multi Track Diplomacy in protecting the right to education of Indonesian migrant workers' (IMWs) children in Malaysia. A qualitative-descriptive approach was used, with data collected through interviews, document-based research, and internet-based research, focusing on four tracks of Multi Track Diplomacy: government, non-government/professional, private citizens, and research, training and education. The results show that the government track produced the establishment of the Indonesian School of Kota Kinabalu (SIKK), Community Learning Centers (CLC), and the Indonesian Community Center (ICC) through the Annual Consultation forum. The non-government/professional track is carried out by Humana, Sabah Bridge, NGO PERMAI, and YPPAI, which reach children in remote plantation areas through education services, training, advocacy, and repatriation scholarships. The private-citizen track is represented by local assistant teachers who support Indonesia-assigned teachers in the classroom. The research, training and education track is carried out through international community-service programs conducted by various Indonesian universities. Overall, Indonesia's Multi Track Diplomacy has proven effective in fulfilling the right to education of Indonesian migrant workers' children in Malaysia through the collaborative involvement of both state and non-state actors.

Keywords: *Multi Track Diplomacy; Right to Education; Children of Indonesian Migrant Workers*

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INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is one of the countries in Southeast Asia that sends a large number of migrant workers abroad. Data from the Indonesian Migrant Worker Protection Agency shows that the number of Indonesian Migrant Workers (IMWs) reached 28,650 in March 2024 and continued to rise to 30,118 in May 2024 (Data Indonesia, 2025). Limited employment opportunities at home have driven many Indonesian citizens to work overseas, making the IMW sector one of the pillars of the national economy through remittances that keep increasing, positioning IMWs as the second-largest source of state foreign exchange after the oil and gas sector (Santoni, 2026). In the second quarter of 2024, IMW remittances reached their highest value of USD 387.00 million (Trading Economics, 2024).

Malaysia is the third-largest destination country for IMWs in the world and the largest within ASEAN, with the number of IMWs reaching 1,832,000 in 2023 and 1,861,000 in 2024 (BP2MI, 2024). Geographical proximity, shared language, culture, and religion, as well as the availability of jobs since the implementation of the New Economic Policy between 1971 and 1990, are the main factors driving migrants to choose Malaysia as their destination (Novia, 2023). IMWs are categorized into legal/procedural IMWs and illegal/non-procedural IMWs, and the presence of illegal IMWs has in turn raised concerns regarding the children who migrate together with them.

Children of IMWs in Malaysia often face barriers to accessing education due to inadequate educational facilities in remote plantation areas, family economic pressures, and the absence of civil registration documents, compounded by the Malaysian government's policy that prohibits the children of foreign workers from attending national public schools (*Sekolah Kebangsaan*), leaving costly private schools as the only option (Patoni & Muhammad, 2022). Yet the right to education is guaranteed under various international instruments, including Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, ratified by Indonesia through Law Number 6 of 2012, particularly Articles 29 and 30, which affirm migrant workers' children's rights to a name, birth registration, and nationality ((Indonesia, 2012); (Mahfud, 2014)).

The concept of *Multi Track Diplomacy* is used as the analytical framework for examining this issue. *Multi Track Diplomacy* is a multi-channel diplomatic approach developed by Louise Diamond and John McDonald, encompassing nine tracks: government, non-government/professional, business, private citizens, research/training/education, activism, religion, funding, and media (Diamond & McDonald, 1996). This approach emphasizes that diplomatic efforts can no longer rely solely on formal inter-governmental channels, but instead require collaboration across both state and non-state actors (Amin, Wardhana, & Khaldun, 2023). This study focuses on four of these nine tracks the government track, the non-government/professional track, the private-citizen track, and the research, training and education track as the framework for analyzing the collective role of various actors in protecting the education rights of IMWs' children in Malaysia.

A number of previous studies have examined this issue from various perspectives. Damayanti et al., studied the role of Sabah *Bridge* in education diplomacy for the children of IMWs in Sabah, Malaysia, and found that this diplomacy resulted in the establishment of the Indonesian School of Kota Kinabalu, immigration cooperation, and repatriation scholarships; however, the study focused only on a single non-government actor in a single region (Damayanti, Dewi, & Permatasari, 2023). Hartati and Andawiyah, examined the Indonesian government's application of *soft diplomacy* in addressing the education of IMWs' children in Sabah and demonstrated the effectiveness of establishing SIKK and CLC as well as processing children's legal documents, but their analysis was limited to government actors alone (Hartati & Rofi'atulAndawiyah, 2021). Fikri highlighted the general protection of IMWs' human rights abroad and found weak coordination among stakeholders, but did not specifically address children's education (Fikri, 2022). Rethanovagi

and Rusdiyanta (2018) applied the concept of *Multi Track Diplomacy* to analyze the resolution of illegal IMW problems in Malaysia during 2011-2016 and demonstrated the importance of collaboration among state actors, NGOs, and international organizations such as IOM, but did not specifically target the issue of IMWs' children's education.

Based on this literature review, previous studies tend to focus on a single actor or a single diplomatic channel, and on a limited scope of area. The novelty of this study lies in its more comprehensive use of the *Multi Track Diplomacy* framework to simultaneously analyze four diplomatic tracks in the collective effort to protect the education rights of IMWs' children in Malaysia, an integrated approach that has not been widely explored in previous studies.

Based on the above description, the research problem of this study is how Indonesia's *Multi Track Diplomacy* protects the education rights of Indonesian migrant workers' children in Malaysia. This study aims to determine the role of Indonesia's *Multi Track Diplomacy* in protecting the education rights of Indonesian migrant workers' children in Malaysia.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative-descriptive research design, an approach that produces descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words derived from observed behavior (Moleong, 2018) and seeks to describe the research object in depth, breadth, and detail (Laily, 2022). Through this approach, the author explains the role of Indonesia's *Multi Track Diplomacy* actors in protecting the education rights of IMWs' children in Malaysia, in terms of policy, implementation, and the obstacles encountered.

Data collection techniques were carried out through interview-based research, document-based research, and internet-based research. Interviews were conducted with the Principal of the Indonesian School of Kota Kinabalu (SIKK), the Community Learning Center (CLC) Liaison Coordinator for the Tawau Representative Office of the Republic of Indonesia (KRI), and a CLC assigned teacher (*Guru Bina*). The types of data used consisted of primary data obtained directly through interviews, and secondary data derived from scientific literature, official documents, online articles, and related news reports.

Data analysis was conducted qualitatively by identifying general patterns in non-numerical data, organizing and interpreting the findings from interviews, observations, and documents, and then connecting them to construct arguments that answer the research problem regarding the role of Indonesia's *Multi Track Diplomacy* in protecting the education rights of IMWs' children in Malaysia. The research was conducted from March to May 2025, with initial observational data obtained from preliminary interviews with the Principal of SIKK, the CLC Liaison Coordinator for the KRI Tawau region, and a CLC assigned teacher.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

RESEARCH RESULT

Overview of Indonesian Migrant Workers and Their Children in Malaysia

Malaysia is the primary and largest destination country for Indonesian citizens seeking overseas employment opportunities as Indonesian Migrant Workers (IMWs). Geographical proximity, cultural similarity, and high labor demand across various sectors particularly construction, plantations, and services make Malaysia the top destination choice for IMWs. East Malaysia in particular is widely chosen by IMWs due to a migration tradition that has continued across generations since the British colonial era, when employment opportunities were opened in the Sabah and Sarawak regions.

Data shows that the number of IMWs in Malaysia has generally remained around 1.8 million workers annually, although it declined between 2020 and 2022 due to the *lockdown* policies and travel restrictions imposed during the Covid-19 pandemic in both Indonesia and Malaysia (Kusnandar, 2022). The number of IMWs in 2021 was recorded as the lowest in recent years, at only 1,628,000 migrant workers. This decline also affected the value of remittances sent to Indonesia, which dropped significantly to USD 2,560 million in 2021 from USD 3,525 million in 2019. Following the pandemic, remittance values rose significantly again, reaching USD 4,592 million in 2023, and were recorded at USD 3,517 million in the third quarter of 2024, indicating a return to normal trends after the post-pandemic surge (Bank Indonesia, 2023).

The exact number of IMWs in Malaysia is difficult to determine accurately because many of them hold undocumented or illegal status. IMWs are categorized into legal IMWs, who go through official procedures and complete administrative processes so that their presence is recognized by both countries, and illegal IMWs, who enter without official channels or with incomplete or falsified documents (Sakti, Sridiani, & Dudiatman, 2024). Illegal IMWs are also generally vulnerable to becoming victims of fraud by smuggling syndicates.

Table 1. Differences Between Legal and Illegal Indonesian Migrant Workers

Aspect	Legal (Procedural) Pathway	Illegal (Non-procedural) Pathway
Documents	Complete and official (passport, work visa, work contract)	Incomplete, tourist visa, or no documents
Process	Structured: selection, health screening, orientation	Not through official processes; entering via unofficial channels or smuggled by brokers
Protection	Social security, insurance, and legal protection available	No legal protection; vulnerable to exploitation
Risk	Relatively lower and compliant with regulations	High, including violence, excessive working hours, and unilateral termination

Government Oversight	Monitored and reported to Indonesian representative offices	Not recorded by the state and difficult to trace
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Source: adapted from Kantor Imigrasi Kelas I Khusus TPI Batam (2020).

The presence of IMWs in Malaysia has also given rise to challenges, one of which concerns the children of IMWs who migrate along with their parents. Although there is no exact data on their number, several sources estimate around 200,000 IMW children are in Malaysia (Fahrudin, 2024), while other sources estimate around 58,000 IMW children are spread across three main regions, namely Sabah, Sarawak, and Johor Bahru (Aranda & Nurhilmiyah, 2024).

Children of IMWs in Malaysia frequently face concerning living conditions, including limited access to education, economic conditions that require them to work to help their parents, limited access to healthcare and other public services, discrimination due to their status as migrants, and minimal support from the Indonesian government (Prasanti, SRB, Aathirah, Mega, & Jaya, 2024). One of the main barriers requiring special attention is limited access to education, caused among other things by the distance between residences and schools, low parental awareness of the importance of education, and unclear citizenship status of the children.

This limited access to education creates a risk of IMW children becoming trapped in a cycle of poverty due to insufficient skills and knowledge to obtain better employment, and it also gives rise to further problems such as child labor and child marriage. The low level of education among IMW children is disadvantageous for Indonesia, as it has the potential to increase the number of poorly educated citizens, which hampers long-term socio-economic progress, while also posing socio-economic risks for Malaysia, including the potential boycott of plantation products produced using uneducated child labor. The phenomenon of underage child labor also risks damaging children's physical and mental development and increasing vulnerability to exploitation, which in turn contributes to the emergence of underage child marriage (Sulistya Handoyo & Triarda, 2020). In preventing child labor, access to education becomes a key factor, as school is the only path for IMW children to secure a more decent future.

Track One: Government

The issue of fulfilling the education rights of IMW children in Malaysia involves both countries and therefore requires the government's role in conducting formal diplomacy. Diplomatic relations between Indonesia and Malaysia have long been established, though they were interrupted by the Confrontation policy in 1963 and only began to recover in 1966 through the Bangkok Conference, before being fully restored in August 1967 (CNN Indonesia, 2024). Following the restoration of relations, the Indonesian Embassy in Kuala Lumpur then known as the Liaison Office of the Republic of Indonesia for Malaysia reopened, followed by the establishment of the Indonesian School of Kuala Lumpur (SIKL) on 10 July 1969 to meet the educational needs of the children of embassy

staff who relocated to Malaysia (SIKL, 2025). Educational cooperation between the two countries became more formal with the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on 10 August 1998, which regulated staff exchanges, scholarship programs, expert exchanges, and support for vocational and technical education (Anita, Darwis, & Baharuddin, 2021).

The majority of IMWs are located in East Malaysia, particularly Sabah and Sarawak, due to geographical proximity and the high demand for labor in the palm oil plantation, construction, and domestic work sectors. The relatively open entry points and minimal oversight have also contributed to high levels of undocumented migration into the region. This condition prompted the Indonesian and Malaysian governments to hold the *Annual Consultation* as an annual cooperation forum that has taken place since 2004 under President Megawati and continues to the present (Husain, Puryanti, & Setijowati, 2021). The 2006 meeting produced an agreement to establish the Indonesian School of Kota Kinabalu (SIKK) between President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, and SIKK began operating on 1 December 2008 after obtaining official permission from the Malaysian Ministry of Education (Mufida, 2018).

SIKK was built using Multi-Year Social Assistance Funds from the Ministry of Education and Culture starting in 2011, with the building officially inaugurated by Minister of National Education M. Nuh on 23 December 2014 (Dian, 2019). SIKK is located in the capital of Sabah, but has not yet reached IMW children living near palm oil plantations located 90–100 km away, requiring travel times of up to two hours.

This limited reach prompted the Indonesian Consulate General (KJRI) in Kota Kinabalu to pursue further diplomatic efforts, culminating in an agreement at the 1 January 2009 *Annual Consultation* between President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi to sign a *Joint Statement* establishing *Community Learning Centers* (CLC) as an effort to equalize access to education for IMW children in the plantation regions of Sabah and Sarawak. The name CLC was officially launched by Minister of National Education M. Nuh on 22 October 2010, and the Malaysian government formalized its legal status at the 2011 *Annual Consultation* in Lombok.

Table 2. Development of Indonesia-Malaysia Educational Cooperation for IMW Children

No	Year	Key Event
1	1967	Reopening of the Indonesian Embassy in Kuala Lumpur
2	1969	Establishment and inauguration of the Indonesian School of Kuala Lumpur (SIKL)
3	1998	Signing of the Indonesia-Malaysia Education MoU
4	2004	First Annual Consultation meeting and signing of the children's education cooperation MoU
5	2006	Establishment of the Indonesian School of Kota Kinabalu (SIKK)
6	2006	Deployment of assigned teachers (Guru Bina) to teach at SIKK and CLC
7	2008	SIKK began operating after obtaining official permission from the Malaysian Ministry of Education

8	2009	Diplomatic effort to establish Community Learning Centers (CLC) and signing of the Joint Statement
9	2010	The name CLC officially launched by Minister of National Education M. Nuh
10	2011	Malaysian government formalized the legal status of CLC through the Annual Consultation in Lombok
11	2011– 2014	Construction of the permanent SIKK building with support from the Ministry of Education and Culture's Multi-Year Social Assistance Fund
12	2017	Establishment of the Indonesian Community Center (ICC) in Johor Bahru

Source: compiled from various sources.

CLC is a learning unit under SIKK established to reach IMW children who cannot access SIKK directly, divided into plantation-based CLCs and non-plantation-based CLCs. There are currently 111 CLCs at the elementary level and 42 CLCs at the junior secondary level, with a total of 1,315 students enrolled at SIKK across all levels, 16,270 students at elementary-level CLCs, and 4,888 students at junior-secondary-level CLCs in 2024. CLCs have obtained a National School Identification Number (NPSN), entitling them to receive School Operational Assistance Funds (BOS), which are channeled through KJRI Kota Kinabalu, forwarded to SIKK as the parent school, and distributed to each CLC (Community Learning Center (CLC), 2022).

IMW children who complete their junior secondary education at a CLC are sent back to Indonesia to continue to senior secondary school, and are entitled to receive an official diploma because of CLC's status as a formal school under SIKK, provided they have birth documentation. For children who do not yet have birth documentation, CLC assists with the documentation process as long as the parents hold an Indonesian identity card (*KTP*), even without a passport.

Teaching staff at SIKK and CLC consist of *Guru Bina*, certified professional teachers rigorously selected by the Ministry of Education and Culture under two-year contracts, and *Guru Pamong*, local teachers recruited and paid by the surrounding plantations or companies to assist the *Guru Bina* (SIKK, 2025). The presence of *Guru Pamong* provides direct support and continuity for daily learning amid the limited number of professional teachers sent from Indonesia, and is also a result of the legal and operational space opened through Indonesia-Malaysia diplomatic relations.

In addition to SIKK and CLC, which serve as the educational solution in East Malaysia, the Indonesian government through KJRI Johor Bahru established and inaugurated the *Indonesian Community Centre* (ICC) in 2017 as an effort to fulfill education for IMW children in West Malaysia. ICC is a community that supports the social, cultural, and educational needs of Indonesian citizens abroad (Utami, 2021). Through ICC, Indonesian children abroad are introduced to Indonesian culture, language, and history, while it also serves as a hub for socio-cultural activities such as national holiday celebrations that strengthen a sense of togetherness and national identity, bridge education and culture for IMW children, and support the social and administrative adaptation of Indonesian citizens in the host country (Shanisse, 2023).

Track Two: Non-Government/Professional

Government efforts to fulfill the education rights of IMW children in Malaysia are limited because they fall outside the jurisdiction of the Indonesian government, thus requiring the role of other diplomatic channels and actors, one of which is non-governmental organizations (NGOs). A number of NGOs have been recorded as contributing to the fulfillment of these education rights.

First, *Humana Child Aid Society*, a non-governmental organization established in 1991 at the request of local plantation workers, focusing on the children of foreign nationals who face difficulties accessing education in Malaysian government schools in East Malaysia (Alfatoun, 2024). In its early years, Humana was supported by a *Corporate Foundation*, but its main support now comes from palm oil plantation companies in East Malaysia (Muyamin, 2019). Cooperation between Humana and plantation companies has secured permission from the Malaysian Ministry of Education to provide education for children from kindergarten to the sixth grade of elementary school, and Humana currently operates approximately 98-134 learning centers spread across plantations and remote areas.

Humana applies the principle of "*Education for All*," which holds that every child has the right to education regardless of background, nationality, or legal status, with a mission to reduce child labor in the plantation sector, provide holistic education from kindergarten to sixth grade, develop supplementary education programs such as sports and arts, and support the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. Through this mission, Humana has provided education to more than 12,000 children of plantation workers in Sabah. In addition to education services, Humana also trains teachers and managers as child labor prevention advocates through training programs such as the "*MY Voice Child Labour Case Manager Training*" (The Centre for Child Rights and Business, 2024), and collaborates with the Indonesian government and community, including Indonesian teachers and CLC, to expand the reach of education and enable children who have completed basic education in Sabah to continue their education in Indonesia (Retno Wulan, Muslihudin, & Wijayanti, 2024). Humana also utilizes media as a means of disseminating information about education services to the IMW community in Sabah and developing non-formal education in sports and arts to support the holistic development of IMW children (Muyamin, 2019).

Second, Sabah *Bridge*, a foundation established in 2014 and formally incorporated as the Sabah Bridge Education Foundation in 2020. This foundation was founded by Indonesian teachers who had previously taught in Sabah and focuses on the education rights of IMW children around Sabah's palm oil plantations. Sabah *Bridge* collaborates with the Ministry of Education and Culture, BP2MI, CLC, and schools in Indonesia to facilitate continuity of education for IMW children. One form of support from the Indonesian government is designating schools in Indonesia as partner institutions to receive repatriated IMW children, as well as providing education funding through the Secondary Education Affirmation (ADEM) scholarship for senior secondary level and the Higher Education Affirmation (ADIK) scholarship for tertiary level, which in 2024 reached 471 and 85 recipients respectively (Kemendikbud, 2024).

For its dedication, Sabah *Bridge* received "*The Hassan Wirajuda Awards*" from the Indonesian government in 2017 in recognition of its contribution to helping the government provide educational facilities extending to Indonesia and negotiating with Malaysian immigration authorities to facilitate travel documents for IMW children continuing their education in Indonesia (Habibah, 2023). Sabah *Bridge* also utilizes media and communication to conduct education diplomacy with the Indonesian government, the Malaysian government, and partner schools in Indonesia, while facilitating interaction among parents, IMW children, and educational institutions to support learning coordination, educational supervision, and effective educational administration (Basrowi, 2019).

Table 3. Differences Between Humana Child Aid Society and Sabah Bridge

Aspect	HUMANA	Sabah Bridge
Working Area	Focused in the Sabah region, particularly palm oil plantation and remote areas in Sabah, Malaysia	Operates in Sabah, but with a broader scope covering education diplomacy and document processing for IMW children continuing their education in Indonesia
Core Activities	Provides non-formal basic education for children in plantations and remote areas in Sabah	Facilitates education for IMW children in Malaysia by helping process legal documents, supervising repatriated students, educating parents and teachers, and bridging access to further education in Indonesia
Main Target	All children in Sabah plantations regardless of nationality	Specifically targets IMW children in Sabah who wish to continue formal education in Indonesia

Source: compiled from various sources.

Third, NGO PERMAI (Indonesian Community Growth Organization in Penang, Malaysia), a non-governmental organization in the social, educational, and cultural fields operating in West Malaysia with members from various segments of the Indonesian community, ranging from migrant workers, students, lecturers, and teachers to professionals (Kurniasih & Heliantono, 2024). NGO PERMAI actively provides social and educational services, one of which is the establishment of the PERMAI Learning Center (*Sanggar Bimbingan*) as a place of learning for undocumented migrant children, supported by teaching staff from Indonesian students, volunteers, and cooperation with educational institutions in Indonesia. NGO PERMAI also receives support from the Indonesian Embassy and KJRI Kuala Lumpur in the form of facilities and supervision, and plays a role in fostering harmony and welfare between the Indonesian community and the local Malaysian community through social interaction, tolerance, adaptation, and socio-cultural contribution (Sahureka, 2023).

Fourth, the Indonesian Children's Education Care Foundation (YPPAI), a community organization in the education field established in 2008 within the Felmaa plantation environment as an expression of concern for the future of IMW children in the plantation. YPPAI receives education funding from the plantation and the Indonesian government through the Ministry of Education and Culture, and manages 8 Community Learning Activity Centers (PKBM) called Al Firdaus with approximately 2,000 students aged 6-16. In addition to YPPAI, there is also the Mutiara Serat Bangsa Empowerment Foundation (YPMSB, or Serat Bangsa), which runs two programs: the Mutiara Borneo Center in Kalabakan, Sabah, and a program at the Tuan Fuad/Tun Razak Palm Oil Plantation in Kunak, Sabah. Both foundations receive full support from the government through the Ministry of Education and Culture as well as from the companies, which provide facility assistance in the form of chairs, tables, teacher housing, and transportation for children to their places of learning .

Track Four: Private Citizens

Private citizens represent one of the *Multi Track Diplomacy* channels involved in fulfilling the education rights of IMW children in Malaysia. One individual diplomatic actor who plays an important role and is directly present within the migrant community is the *Guru Pamong*, a local teacher recruited to assist the *Guru Bina* at CLCs spread across Malaysia's palm oil plantation regions. As an individual diplomatic actor, the *Guru Pamong* holds a strategic role while also serving as a bridge between the Indonesian community and the local Malaysian community around the CLC.

Guru Pamong come from the local community, whether Indonesian or Malaysian nationals, and are appointed and paid by the surrounding companies or the local CLC management. Based on SIKK data, the number of *Guru Pamong* at CLCs in the Sabah and Sarawak regions reached 628 individuals in 2024 (SIKK, 2025). In addition to serving as teaching staff, *Guru Pamong* also function as social and cultural agents who frequently face limited facilities, unclear legal status of IMW children, and a discriminatory social environment. Through a community-based approach, *Guru Pamong* are able to build cross-cultural relationships, ease tensions with the local community, and advocate for migrant children's education rights through informal channels.

The presence of *Guru Pamong* has a significant impact in increasing the trust and legitimacy of CLC within the local community, ensuring the continuity of non-formal education in remote areas, promoting the social inclusion of IMW children, and strengthening the cultural bridge and nationalism among IMW children. The presence of *Guru Pamong* therefore represents a concrete manifestation of individual diplomacy's contribution to supporting and advocating for the education rights of IMW children in Malaysia.

Track Five: Research, Training and Education

This track encompasses all research, community service, and education activities that play a strategic role in fulfilling the education rights of IMW children in Malaysia, in

collaboration with the Indonesian government, the Malaysian government, NGOs, and higher education institutions. One form of collaboration with the government is the establishment of *Sanggar Bimbingan* (Learning Centers), non-formal institutions that provide access to education for IMW children who face barriers related to documentation and citizenship status that prevent them from accessing formal education.

The Kampung Baru Learning Center, managed by the Special Branch Leadership of Muhammadiyah (PCIM) Malaysia and inaugurated by the Education Attaché of the Indonesian Embassy in Kuala Lumpur on 10 April 2021, applies non-formal learning based on the Indonesian education curriculum standards (Aanardianto, 2021). This center collaborates with Universitas Djuanda (UNIDA) through the International Community Service Program (*KKN*), which focuses on the education of IMW children. Through this program, UNIDA students conduct observations and identify the problems faced by IMW children and are directly involved in teaching and learning activities, teaching Indonesian language, mathematics, Islamic religious education, English, arts and culture, social studies, civic education, natural sciences, as well as religious activities such as congregational prayers and Quran recitation (Humas UNIDA, 2024).

This International Community Service Program provides mutual benefits: cultural exchange and the strengthening of national values for the children of the Kampung Baru Learning Center so that they maintain a strong national identity despite living abroad, while also encouraging the learning motivation of IMW children and improving the quality of teaching at the learning centers, while the participating students gain teaching experience and direct adaptation to the learning center environment.

In addition to UNIDA, a number of other higher education institutions in Indonesia have also conducted International Community Service Programs and contributed directly to the education of IMW children in Malaysia, including the Ahmad Dahlan Institute of Technology and Business Lamongan in 2023, which focused on community service and education at the PERMAI Learning Center (Lamongan, 2023); UPN Veteran Jakarta, which conducted an international community service program in cooperation with SIKL and learning centers in 2023 (Humas UPNVJ, 2023); UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, which conducted an international community service program in 2024 focusing on the education of IMW children and learning assistance at learning centers (feb.uinjkt, 2024); Universitas Sulawesi Barat, which conducted an International Community Service Program in Malaysia in 2024; and Universitas Jenderal Soedirman, which conducted an International Community Service Program in Malaysia in 2024 (KSM, 2024). Although these higher education institutions have been identified as contributing to the fulfillment of IMW children's education rights through the fifth track, it is possible that other institutions have also contributed but remain unidentified due to limited official documentation and minimal public reporting of such involvement.

In addition to collaboration with the government, the fifth track also works together with NGO PERMAI through the operation of the PERMAI Learning Center (SB PERMAI), established on 2 May 2021 (Permai Penang, n.d.). NGO PERMAI has formed a partnership with the Association of Indonesian Students (PPI) in Malaysia, particularly PPI

at Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), in managing and teaching at the learning center. Since 2022, teaching activities at the PERMAI Learning Center have become part of the work program of the Social Community Department of PPI USM, with its members voluntarily serving as teachers, particularly on weekends (Sahureka, 2023), while the Indonesian Embassy and KJRI Penang provide learning facilities in the form of tables, chairs, computers, stationery, and books (Setiawan, 2022).

DISCUSSION

The success and effectiveness of Indonesia's *Multi Track Diplomacy* in protecting the education rights of IMW children in Malaysia positions Indonesia as one of the most proactive countries in advocating for its citizens' basic rights abroad, particularly when compared to other migrant worker-sending countries such as the Philippines and Bangladesh. Novia's study on the diplomatic efforts of the Indonesian Embassy in Kuala Lumpur through the *Community Learning Center* (CLC) in providing access to education for IMW children shows the success of the Indonesian government's diplomacy in addressing the education of IMW children in Malaysia, as reflected in the establishment of SIKK and the development of CLC, which have concretely provided access to education for IMW children in the Sabah region of Malaysia (Novia, 2020).

Through the *Multi Track Diplomacy* approach, Indonesia does not rely solely on formal inter-governmental diplomatic channels but also actively involves non-government actors. The results of this approach are evident in the establishment of SIKK, more than 300 *Community Learning Centers* (CLC) in the Sabah and Sarawak regions, the presence of various learning centers providing non-formal education access for undocumented IMW children in several regions of Malaysia, the involvement of NGOs such as *Humana Child Aid Society* and *Sabah Bridge*, and the presence of *Guru Pamong* as individual actors. Compared to other migrant worker-sending countries, most of which still focus primarily on protecting adult workers, Indonesia has taken a step further by making migrant workers' children's education part of a systematic diplomatic and humanitarian agenda.

In line with these findings, the study by Amin et al., further reveals that undocumented IMW children in East Malaysia often experience confusion and identity negotiation when switching between Indonesian, Malay, and their mother tongue, and that educators, including *Guru Pamong* respond to this condition through a cultural rather than purely linguistic approach, involving bilingual scaffolding strategies, culturally familiar learning materials, emotional support, and flexible teaching methods, thereby strengthening IMW children's confidence, communication skills, and sense of belonging within their learning environment (Amin, Antuli, et al., 2026).

These findings are further reinforced by Amin et al., who emphasize that the fifth track strengthens the education system for IMW children through temporary teaching, training, and the production of policy-relevant knowledge. Their study offers a theoretical contribution by extending the application of *Multi Track Diplomacy* beyond the context of conflict resolution to serve as an analytical lens for cross-border social governance, and demonstrates that the effectiveness of inter-track coordination depends on functional

complementarity, negotiated interdependence, and adaptive responses to the structural limitations encountered in the field (Amin, Antuli, et al., 2026).

In line with this, Amin et al.'s study on Indonesia's *soft power* diplomacy shows that the various education diplomacy channels for non-procedural IMW children, ranging from formal state engagement, plantation-sector cooperation, community- and NGO-based schooling, to teacher training reinforce one another, with formal diplomacy opening policy space while grassroots and educational tracks carry out direct teaching down to remote plantation communities (Amin, Abbas, et al., 2026). This educational support also functions as a form of *soft power* that preserves IMW children's Indonesian identity while shaping how Indonesia is perceived internationally, meaning that closing the remaining gaps in fulfilling education rights depends on tighter coordination among tracks rather than reliance on any single channel (Amin, Abbas, et al., 2026).

This study has several limitations. The analysis focuses on four of the nine *Multi Track Diplomacy* channels government, non-government/professional, private citizens, and research/training/education so the roles of the remaining tracks, such as business, activism, religion, funding, and media, were not examined in depth. Primary data were also obtained from a limited number of key informants at SIKK and CLC in the Tawau region, which may not fully represent the diversity of conditions across all CLC locations in Sabah and Sarawak.

These findings have practical implications for policymakers and diplomatic actors involved in protecting the education rights of IMW children. Strengthening coordination among the four tracks examined particularly between formal government channels and grassroots/NGO-based initiatives could help close the remaining gaps in education access, especially for undocumented children in remote plantation areas. Future research is encouraged to examine the remaining *Multi Track Diplomacy* channels not covered in this study, as well as to explore the perspectives of IMW children and parents themselves regarding the education services they receive.

CONCLUSION

Multi Track Diplomacy makes a significant contribution to protecting and expanding access to education for IMW children in Malaysia, particularly in remote areas that are difficult for formal diplomacy to reach. Through the first track (government), the Indonesian government has established cooperation with the Malaysian government through the *Annual Consultation* forum, resulting in the establishment of the Indonesian School of Kota Kinabalu (SIKK), *Community Learning Centers* (CLC), and the *Indonesian Community Center* (ICC), as well as the deployment of *Guru Bina* and the distribution of BOS funds to support educational operations. In the second track (non-government/professional), non-governmental organizations such as Humana, Sabah Bridge, NGO PERMAI, and YPPAI actively provide non-formal education services, learning facilities, training, advocacy, and repatriation scholarships for IMW children in palm oil plantation areas. In the fourth track (private citizens), *Guru Pamong* serve as both teaching staff and social/cultural agents who strengthen the continuity of education amid existing limitations. In the fifth track (research, training and education), the contributions of

Indonesian universities through International Community Service Programs and community service at learning centers strengthen non-formal education capacity while preserving the national identity of IMW children.

Overall, *Multi Track Diplomacy* makes Indonesia's diplomacy more inclusive and collaborative, no longer relying solely on inter-state relations but also involving various non-state actors. This approach has proven effective in advocating for the education rights of IMW children while also demonstrating that protecting Indonesian citizens abroad requires synergy across multiple diplomatic channels. Future research is recommended to further explore other *Multi Track Diplomacy* channels not examined in depth in this study, as well as to encourage the strengthening of the legal status of non-formal education institutions such as learning centers so that they receive official recognition from the Malaysian government.

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