

IS INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION A WAY OUT OF ECONOMIC CRISIS?

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Intisari

Bagi pemerintah Indonesia, terkait dengan permasalahan ketenagakerjaan, terdapat dua permasalahan yang seakan tiada akhir yakni tingginya angka pengangguran dan rendahnya upah pekerja. Kondisi ini semakin parah sejak badai krisis ekonomi melanda Indonesia sejak tahun 1997 yang mengakibatkan menurunnya kemampuan sebagian besar anggota masyarakat untuk membiayai hidupnya. Hal ini disebabkan oleh menurunnya pendapatan riil dan meningkatnya harga berbagai kebutuhan sehari-hari. Dalam lingkup regional, kondisi krisis ekonomi yang dialami Indonesia semakin mendorong negara ini berada pada tingkat terendah perkembangan ekonomi dibandingkan dengan negara-negara di kawasan tersebut. Lambatnya proses economic recovery menyebabkan semakin langkanya kesempatan kerja di dalam negeri dan akhirnya mendorong peningkatan arus migrasi internasional tenaga kerja Indonesia ke negara-negara di kawasan Asia dan Asia Tenggara utamanya Malaysia, Singapura dan Taiwan. Dengan demikian, bagi para migran, melakukan migrasi merupakan suatu bagian dari strategi untuk kelangsungan hidup ketika pilihan-pilihan yang lain sangat terbatas.

Overblown Poverty: Questionable Impact of the Crisis

After experiencing several decades of sustained economic growth and stability, starting in the middle of 1997 when the wind of monetary crisis begin to blow over the Asian economy, Indonesia drastically turn into a deep hole of economic crisis. GDP per capita fell from US\$1,079 in 1997 to US\$380 in 1998 (*Far Eastern Economic Review*, 29 October 1998 in Hugo, 2002). The rupiah came under pressure in the latter part of 1997, falling from around Rp2,400 per US\$ to about Rp4,800 by December of that year. In January 1998, the rupiah collapsed, to Rp15,000 per US\$. For the first three quarters of 1998 the rupiah fluctuated wildly, but by the end of the year it had strengthened and stabilized between Rp6,000

and Rp7,000 per US\$. Near the beginning of the crisis up to the ousted president Abdurachman Wahid took his post, the exchange rate of the Indonesian currency, the Rupiah, was Rp6,750 against the US dollar. The Rupiah reached, again, its lowest value in 2001 when the Rupiah sank to Rp11,350, reflecting an almost 90 percent increase in the purchasing price of foreign materials (Widharto, 2002).

Since economic crisis, Indonesia is in the midst of dramatic political and economic upheaval. Few Indonesia have remained untouched by these and other events of the last couple of years. The drought of 1997, the relative price changes associated with the collapse of the rupiah and removal of subsidies and the income shocks arising from changes in demand combine to yield an extremely complex picture of substantial change throughout the society. The effects of the economic crisis on the welfare of the population are nuance and heterogeneous. They vary by region, across socio-economic groups, and across demographic groups. For some, the crisis has taken a heavy toll; these include those on fixed income and those whose livelihoods depend on sectors such as construction and services. For others, the changes have provide new opportunities—particularly those in trade able sectors such as export producers and shipping (Frankenberg, et. al., 1999).

One of the topics frequently discussed by many experts concerning the economic crisis in Indonesia is the impact of the crisis on the people's economic life. The discussions often use two indicators: poverty and unemployment.

There have been many estimates on poverty during the crisis in Indonesia. Interestingly, estimates produced in 1998 (especially in the first half of the year) were mostly very pessimistic. The crisis seemed to have been a doomsday for Indonesia. As quoted by Feridhanusetyawan (2000), ILO, for example, estimated that 98.8 million people which is almost half of Indonesian population lived under poverty line in 1998. The Central Board of Statistics produced as estimate of 39 percent in the mid 1998. These estimates are clearly much higher than the official estimate of about 11 percent in 1996. If these estimates were accurate, the condition in 1998 would have resembled the condition in the 1970s.

Yet, these figures had been quoted widely by journalists, policy makers, and even scholars, both in Indonesia and other countries.

Estimates that incorporate province-specific inflation rates (based on BPS price data from 44 urban areas) suggest that overall, the proportion of households below the poverty line has risen by about 25 percent, with a large increase in urban than in rural areas. Estimates that allow for higher overall inflation and higher inflation in rural and urban areas (as indicated by the price data collected in the IFLS communities), suggest that the rise in poverty is considerably larger – around 80 percent— and that rural households have experienced more change than urban households (Frankenberg, et. al., 1999).

Table 1
Trend of Poverty and Unemployment in Indonesia in 1996-1998

Years	Poor People (%)	Open Unemployment Rate (%)	Under Employment Rate (%)
1990	15.08	3.17	34.06
1993	13.67	2.76	37.35
1996	11.34	4.89	36.24
1998	24.20	5.46	36.64

Source: BPS, 1998

Fortunately, as more data and observations are available, the estimates have been much downward revised. The situation during 1998 is not as bad as was earlier estimated. In the mid-1999 Statistics Indonesia presented the official estimates on poverty in 1998, based on the National Socioeconomic Survey conducted in December 1998. The poverty rate is only 24.2 percent in Indonesia as a whole, which is an increase from 11.3 percent in 1996. The rate in urban areas is 17.6 (million) or 21.9 percent in 1998 compared to 31.9 (million) or 7.2 percent in 1996; and, in rural areas, 25.7 percent in 1998 compared to 12.3 percent in 1996. The trend from this official data suggests that urban areas had been harder hit during

the crisis. In absolute term, the number of poor increased from 22.5 million in 1996 to 49.5 million in 1998 for the whole Indonesia; from 7.2 million in 1996 to 17.6 million in 1998 for the urban areas; and from 15.3 million in 1996 to 31.9 million in 1998 for the rural areas (BPS, 1997 and 1998).

It is very unlikely that this figure (for December 1998) shows a much improvement in poverty condition in the mid-1998. Rather, the previous estimates for the mid-1998 must have been inaccurate. However, the release of the official estimate still reveals that poverty had increased from the condition in 1996, before the crisis, to the condition in 1998, during the crisis, but the increase was not as dramatic as earlier thought.

Mubyarto (2000) argues that the inaccuracy in estimating the poverty is because of both the misconception on poverty and the panic-pessimism among experts, policy makers, and people in international donor agencies. *Asahi Shimbun* (26 January, 1999) even mentions the situation is just "exaggerate poverty and unemployment level for an effort to get aid".

With more data and methods available, more estimates are also produced. Suryahadi et. al. (1999) has attempted to make a consistent estimate on what had happened during February 1996 until August 1999 based on these various, and sometimes conflicting estimates. As shown in Figure 1 and Table 1, the poverty rate was 9.75 percent in February 1996. It then declined to 6.57 percent in August-October 1997 (when the crisis just started), rose to 17.35 percent in September-December 1998, and declined to 9.79 percent in August 1999, which is already similar to the early 1996 level, but still higher than the rate at the beginning of the crisis.

Further, the increase in poverty (both in term of percentage and absolute number) seems to have occurred in all economic sectors with agricultural sector as the worst hit sector. The agricultural sector has the highest percentage and absolute number of poor people because of two reasons. First, the people in agricultural sectors are usually poorer than those working in other sectors. Second, the skill needed to work in agriculture is very minimal, and hence it can easily absorb those who lose jobs in other sectors. Therefore, the agricultural sector, which had experienced a labor surplus even before the crisis, had to share a heavier burden to accommodate "refugees" from other sectors. Worse, the

“absorption” simply means “sharing poverty” and it does not necessarily help the “refugees”; it even reduces the welfare of the “local”. In other words, the agricultural sector has experienced a severe involution.

Table 2
“Consistent” estimates of poverty rate, February 1996 – February 1999

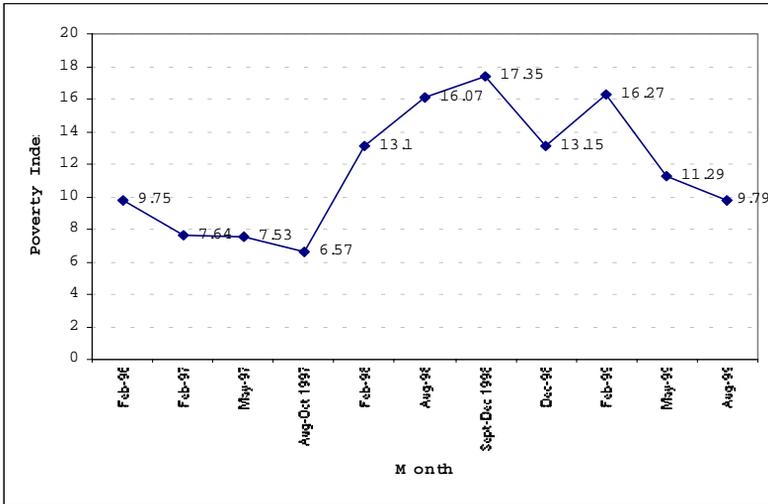
Date	Data sources/ Reported by	Actual reported estimates	Adjusted estimates
February 1996	Susenas Core/ Gardiner	11.47	9.75
February 1997	Susenas Core/ Gardiner	9.36	7.64
May 1997	100 Villages/ SMERU	7.53	7.53
Aug-Oct 1997	IFLS 2+/ RAND & LDUI	11.0	6.57
February 1998	Susenas Core/ Gardiner	14.82	13.10
August 1998	100 Villages/ SMERU	16.07	16.07
Sept-Dec 1998	IFLS 2+/ RAND & LDUI	19.9	17.35
December 1998	100 Villages/ SMERU	16.79	13.15
February 1999	Susenas/ SMERU	16.27	16.27
May 1999	100 Villages/ SMERU	11.29	11.29
August 1999	Susenas/ SMERU	9.79	9.79
Percentage Change from lowest point to highest			10.78 (164%)

Source: Suryahadi et. al. (2000)

As it is shown by Strauss, et. al. (2002) poverty was not really increasing in the period of 1997-2000. Even there is tendency of declining poverty in urban areas in 7 out of 13 provinces, and in rural areas in 7 out of 13. However we can observe that in certain provinces such as rural West Nusa Tenggara, the increase in poverty is very large, while in other such as rural South Sumatra, the decline is large, although from very high levels. This paper has also presented an interesting result that over half

of those in poverty in 1997 left poverty by 2000. On the other hand, almost 55 percent of the poor in 2000 were not poor in 1997.

Figure 1
"Consistent" Estimates of Poverty Rate, Feb 1996 - August 1999



In short, the above discussions have shown that the impact of the economic crisis has penetrated all economic sectors, though the impact varies according to the sector and not as dramatic as thought in the 1998. Concerning with the economic impact from the crisis, the thesis often express that the crisis have reduce the people's purchasing power caused by two factors working simultaneously, that is the decreasing of the people's real income and the drastic increase of the daily necessity cost. Both factors cause the economic condition of people in general is buried. Basically, it is most likely that only a limited people who get advantages from crisis. In general, they are the people "forgotten" during the economic glory, that is partly in the agricultural sector, especially hard crop and both small and middle industries. This is, all at once, proving that, in fact, those infected the crisis is the government not the people. We must also bear in mind that the impact of the crisis does not single direction and

but varies across regions and sometimes in micro perspective it is surprising and contradictory.¹

Unemployment and Wage of Labour: Unending Problem

Disregarding with the problem of amount, that the important undeniable fact is that the economic crisis has caused some of the people losing jobs. According to Swasono (1998), it is estimated that the labor amount being fired of works were about 1.5 millions - 3.6 millions people deriving from many sectors due to economic crisis. The other people having difficulties for fulfilling their daily needs and that of no less importance is that they are the people who directly participate in the formal economic activities and exist on the middle level.

ILO (1997) estimated that in 1998 open unemployment was 13.7 million people coming from 5.8 million unemployed people in previous year, 2.7 million additional new labour force and 5.2 million of those who lose their job because of the crisis. In 2001, open unemployment was eight million people with unemployment rate reached 8.1 percent increasing from 6.1 percent in previous year. This figure is almost doubled compared to that before the crisis which was 4.7 percent (Kompas, 28 May, 2002). Another estimation (Swasono and Anung Anindita, 2002) by using estimated GDP for 1998, which was minus 15 percent, open unemployment will increase to 17.0 million or 18 percent of the labour force, and under employment will increase doubled than that in 1996. In total open unemployment and under employment will reach 35 million or 37.9 percent of the labour force. Even though there is no a single agreement about the figure, but all people seems to agree that the crisis has a serious impact on declining employment opportunity bringing about a more serious problem of unemployment.

The other critical problem on Indonesia economic development is wages of labour. Historically, the Indonesian government announces minimum wages for all the regions. However, in 1992 it was found that

¹ Many scholars has argued that one should be careful in interpreting the impact of the economic crisis on people welfare (see for instance Husken, 1999; de Jong, 1999 and Breman 1999).

the levels of these minimum wages in many regions were below the levels of these requirements for physical survival. Later the wage levels raised, but even in 1995 there six provinces in which the official minimum wages were below those needed for basic physical needs (Nachrowie and Wangkeraren, 1996).

These policies, combined the policies of banning all strikes, have kept the wages of unskilled labourers among the lowest in developing countries in Asia. In the early 1990s the unskilled urban wage was Rupiah 1,176 with the value of the rupiah ranging from 1,842.8 to 2,252 to the US dollar between 1990 and 1995, this would render the wage comparable to or even lower than that obtaining in the cities of the much poorer economies of Bangladesh, India and Pakistan. Indonesia has one of the lowest average wage rate in Asia, and the lowest in the Asean countries (ILO, 1997).

By 1998 slightly higher fractions of man and considerably higher fractions of women are working than in 1997. The changes are similar in urban and rural areas. However, changes in the proportion working reflect largely an entrance of unpaid family workers. Generally, the employment opportunities seem to be stronger in Sumatra (North and South) and Kalimantan than on Java or in West Nusa Tenggara.

International Migration in the Economic Crisis Era

Actually, it is difficult to find the exact number of Indonesian migrant worker abroad since a lot of migrants are illegal one and there is no valid registration on that. However, there is no doubt that the number of Indonesian worker abroad is increasing. As it can be seen in Table 3, in the period of 1998-1999 there was a significant increase on Indonesian worker abroad. The newest data shows that in the last two years (1999-2001), the amount of Indonesian overseas worker (TKI) were 968.260, with average of placement 387.304 workers in a years. From the total, 47,52 percent of the worker are working in ASEAN countries, 34,5 percent at Midle East, 17,52 percent at Asian Pacific, 0,7 percent at Europe and United State and 0,06 percent in other countries. The crisis has increased the pressure to seek working overseas among Indonesian (Romdiati, Handayani and Rahayu, 1998). Looking at sex differentials it is interesting

to find out that a lot of overseas worker are women migrant (TKW) that is 71,39 percent and the rest (28,61 percent) are men.

Table 3 has also shown that there is a significant increase of Indonesia workers involving in manufacturing sector but it is also clear that community, social and personal services, in which house maid is included, is still prevalence. One of the reason is that those working abroad are mostly low educated people. Some studies on Indonesian international migration indicate that Indonesian workers are mostly characterized by low education, limited knowledge and skills, and are between the ages of 15 and 40. A study in four provinces (West Nusa Tenggara, East Java, Yogyakarta, and Central Java) organized by Ministry of Labor shows that more than 50 percent respondents was elementary school and not completed of elementary school. Raharto (1999) who interviewed 133 migrant in Cianjur and Indramayu district found similar finding. Ninety three percent of respondents were not completed elementary school and

Table 3
The Indonesian Migrant Workers by Main Industry, 1998 and 1999

Main Industry	Period			
	1998		1999	
	Number	%	Number	%
Agriculture/Forestry	24,144	6.35	63,434	14.83
Manufacturing	44,977	11.82	91,828	21.47
Construction	1,470	0,39	1,355	0.32
Restaurant/hotel	47	0,01	56	0.01
Transportation/sailor	25,966	6.82	26,628	6.23
Nurse	445	0.12	1,860	0.43
Community, Social, personal services	222,682	58.53	184,630	43.18
Others	60,472	15.89	57,828	13.52
Total	380,472	100.0	427,619	100.0

Source: Tara bakti. H. Soeprobo and Nur Hadi Wiyono (2002)

even have no schooling education. It is most likely the reason that male laborers are mainly employed in unskilled jobs such as plantation and lumber industry work, while female laborers are mainly employed as housemaid and cooks (Bandiyono and Alihar, 2000). Tirtosudarmo, (2002) mentions that most of the workers (56,45 percent) are working in formal sector and 43,55 percent in informal sector.

Table 4 shows the number of migrant workers working abroad annually during 1996-2000 period. Among these four destination countries, only Taiwan which show a consistent increase of Indonesian worker. Taiwan started with a limited number of Indonesian worker in 1996 and passed Singapore in the year of 2000. On the other hand, Singapore, Malaysia and Arab Saudi experienced a fluctuation in the period of 1998-2000. In the period of 1996-1997 for instance, the number of Indonesian worker in Malaysia increase significantly. A year later the number of worker was decreasing. Even though the number of Indonesian worker in 1999 and 2000 was still much lower than that in 1997 but it is clear that there is a dramatic increase in the period of 1998-2000. On the other hand the number of Indonesian worker in Singapore tends to decrease consistently in the period of 1996-2000. This is an indication that Singapore is no longer becoming preference for Indonesian worker to work. In Arab Saudi, before the economic crisis, the number of migrants who were working in the country was 115,209, increasing up to 1116,844 in 1997 and 177,404 in 1998. But it then decreased in the period of 1998-2000. It is interested that there were a shifting pattern of destination countries of Indonesian

Table 4
Number of the Indonesian Migrant Workers in Selected Countries (1996-2000)

Countries	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Malaysia	38,652	317,685	95,033	169,177	170,067
Singapore	29,065	31,928	42,031	34,829	20,456
Taiwan	8,888	9,445	14,109	29,372	41,620
Saudi Arabia	115,209	116,844	177,404	131,157	108,734

Source: Tara Bakti H. Soeprbo and Nur Hadi Wiyono, 2002

migrant workers, from Saudi Arabia to Asian Pacific countries such as Malaysia and Taiwan. Malaysia is still becoming the main destination for Indonesian worker, at least indicated by the highest number of Indonesian worker in 2000.

Based on neoclassical economics in macro perspective, international migration occurs because of existing geographic differences in the supply and demand for labor in origin and destination countries which also act as the major driving factors for individual migration decisions. The imbalance of labour market causing an increase of unemployment in Indonesia in one hand and an increasing demand of labour, at least for certain type of work, in neighboring countries on the other hand might explain how this theory work for Indonesian case.

Table 5
Indonesia: Estimated Stocks of Overseas Contract Worker Around 2000

Destination	Estimated Stocks	Source
Saudi Arabia	425,000	Indonesian Embassy, Riyadh
U A Emirates	35,000	Asian Migration News, 30 April 1999
Malaysia	1,900,000	Kassim, 1997
Hongkong	32,000	DEPNAKER
Singapore	70,000	Asian Migration News, 15 May 1999
Taiwan	46,762	Kyodo, 24 may 2000
South Korea	11,700	Asian Migration Yearbook, 1999:182
Japan	3,245	Asian Migration Yearbook, 1999:128
Philippines	26,000	South China Morning Post, 10 December 1998
Brunei	2,426	Asian Migration Yearbook, 1999:125
Other	20,000	DEPNAKER
Total	2,572,133	

Sources: Hugo, 2002: 19

From micro perspective, neoclassical approach explain that a cost-benefit calculation is the main reason for individual rational actors who make decisions to migrate. Differences in earnings are the important factor. Several cases shows that this also work for Indonesian migrants working abroad (see Mantra, 1999; Sukamdi, et. al., 2001).

One of the important issues taken into account on economic impact of migration discussion is remittances. Even the issue of remittances has becoming main concern of policy makers in Indonesia. The word "labour export" implicitly referring to the expectation that Indonesian migrants will generate income not only for the migrants and their family but also for the country. Critics on this policy is that government tends to obey the interest of migrants to have security assurance in destination area and after coming home.

Findings from many researches on the use of remittances show that mostly remittances are to fulfill the basic need such as consumption. It is rarely found that remittances are spent for productive purposes. So that it might be true that the impact of remittances on poverty alleviation is arguable. However it can not be denied that the migrants get economic benefit from international migration. At least they receive income much higher in destination than that in the origin area.

We must bear in mind that the "negative" impact of international migration can not be neglected. Research on return women migrants from Arab Saudi (Sukamdi, et. al., 2001) in Yogyakarta reveals that the returning migrants have faced several social and psychological problem. In destination area some of them experience sexual abuse. In the way home they have to combat with robbery and after their arrival they must deal with social and psychological adaptation problems. That is why their economic benefits could not compensate social cost that they have to pay.

The finding of several researches such as done by Harris (1997) and Mantra, et. al. (1999) show that migration is the main factors for villages economic progress and family economy as well. Wage gap between the origin and destination area is the main driving force for migrants to leave the origin area. Daily payment in Lombok ranging from Rp500 - Rp1,000 is much lower than that in Malaysia which provide payment as high as Rp7,000 to Rp8,000 (Raharto, 1999).

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The remittance is substantial in supporting households economy and the improvement of migrant household conditions (see Mantra, 1999). Migrants from Central Lombok, use most of their remittances to pay off their debts, to cover their daily needs, and to provide their children education expenditures. The similar findings have also been found in Yogyakarta showing that 60.5 percent of the migrant's family use the remittances in similar way. Only a limited number is using the remittance to be invested in productive activities (Sukamdi, et. al. 2001). The same research has also found out that most of the migrants is capable to buy house facilities such as TV because of remittances. About 59 percent of migrants state that they bought it by some money that they obtained from working abroad. Study in West Nusa Tenggara and Nusa Tenggara has also revealed that the family had used remittance for various purposes and the important one is to build houses. In Yogyakarta 38,3 percent of the migrants admitted that they could build their house with the money they receive by being a migrant woman abroad. In addition, most of the migrants (63.8 percent) point out that they use some of the remittances to finance their children education (Keban, 1999).

Table 6
Sex Ratio of Indonesian Migrant Workers
in Four Destination Countries, 1995-2000

Destination Countries	Sex Ratio				
	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Malaysia	15.2	157.3	50.4	90.0	138.3
Singapore	21.4	17.4	11.2	10.1	12.9
Taiwan	349	257.0	257.0	24.7	13.7
Saudi Arabia	3.5	7.3	8.5	8.7	10.3

Source: Tara Bakti H. Soeproboto and Nur Hadi Wiyono, 2002

Since most of the research was done in rural areas then land is becoming important production factor. Many family spent money to be invested in land. It is interesting to find out that 31,7 percent of the

migrants stated that they had their land from migrant's salary transfer, and only 28,0 percents owned some rice field by the heritage distribution from their parents. It means remittances is the most important source to have land as part of family investment (Sukamdi, 2001).

From the gender perspective, there is a changing pattern before and after the economic crisis (1995-2000). In general the Indonesian migrant workers were dominated by the women, which was shown by the sex ratio that less than 100. However there is an exception such as Taiwan during the period of 1995-1998, and Malaysia for the 1997 and 2000 that male is dominating the Indonesian worker abroad.

There are characteristics of legal Indonesian labor migration. Historically, the labor migration to Malaysia has been male-dominated but women are increasingly significant, and in recent times, there has been a relative balance (Hugo, 2002). Data shows the increasing of men and women movement as overseas contract worker, especially following the onset of the Asian economic crisis in mid-1997.

What conclusion can we draw from the discussion above? First, it might be true that international migration provides economic benefit for the migrants. But, it is still arguable to say that the benefit is substantial for releasing the migrants from poverty. The reason is that the use of money they have mostly is for consumption purposes and not for productive one. So that the impact on household economy is not significant. International migration, then, is only part of strategies to survive. For some instance, the remittances are still helpful in supporting people to make the best out of crisis.

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