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MUHAMMADIYAH'S ADVOCACY FOR THE CIVIL RIGHTS OF THE INDONESIAN MIGRANT WORKER'S CHILDREN IN MALAYSIA

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Abstract

This study aims to examine Muhammadiyah's efforts in advocating for the civil rights of children of Indonesian Migrant Workers (PMI) in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The type of research used in this study is field research with a qualitative approach. The research was conducted in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Data were obtained through indirect observation, unstructured interviews, and document analysis. Informants were interviewed using purposive sampling techniques. The data were then analyzed using the Miles and Huberman model, which includes data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The results of the study show that Muhammadiyah's efforts to advocate for the civil rights of PMI children are carried out through various initiatives, including the empowerment of PMI parents, dialogue, community-based social assistance, building networks with the PMI community, and establishing non-formal, community-based schools by developing an alternative education system. These efforts have proven effective in improving the children's access to their civil rights, particularly in the areas of education and religion.

Keywords: *Advocacy, Civil Rights of Children, Indonesian Migrant, Workers, Muhammadiyah.*

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A. Introduction

Muhammadiyah is one of the civil society organizations that plays an important role in advocating for civil rights—not only for adults but also for children. In the context of Indonesian Migrant Workers (PMI) in Malaysia, Muhammadiyah has taken on a significant role. The International Organization for Migration (IOM), citing data from the Indonesian Migrant Workers Protection Agency (BP2MI), reports that there are 2.7 million Indonesian migrant workers in Malaysia. Of that number, only 1.6 million have gone through regular (legal) channels. This means that nearly half of them migrated through irregular (undocumented) channels (IOM, 2023). The large number of irregular migrant workers presents unique challenges in Malaysia, especially for those who choose to start families and have children. Children born in Malaysia under such conditions often lack official identity documents, unlike children born in Indonesia who typically have birth certificates and are registered in the Family Card.

Many children of Indonesian Migrant Workers (PMI) face significant obstacles in accessing their basic rights. Rights such as formal education (Wijaya et al., 2024), healthcare, legal protection, and even citizenship status (Sholina, 2022), are difficult to obtain. As a result, the risk of becoming stateless children—children without citizenship—is very likely (Ghozali et al., 2023). The main cause is the lack of proper documentation from the parents, which affects the legal status of their children (Rifa, 2023). Moreover, the fact that most parents work in the informal sector contributes to weak legal protection (Shalihah et al., 2022). Limited access to public services also negatively impacts children's access to basic services (Fajriyah et al., 2024). These challenges are further compounded by the complex bureaucratic systems in both Malaysia and Indonesia. At the same time, various issues surrounding children's civil rights continue to emerge.

Muhammadiyah plays a strategic role in addressing migrant worker issues, particularly in advocating for the civil rights of PMI children. Since 2007, Muhammadiyah has had an official branch in Malaysia (Mujtaba et al., 2024). The Special Branch of Muhammadiyah (PCIM) is based in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Advocacy is a key part of Muhammadiyah's philanthropic and social service programs

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(Afandi, 2022). Muhammadiyah established a learning center called *Sanggar Bersama* (SB) in Kampung Bharu, Kuala Lumpur. This center serves as a platform to provide educational opportunities for the children of Indonesian migrant workers living there.

Muhammadiyah's efforts include the establishment of community-based schools and advocacy through policy engagement with both the Indonesian and Malaysian governments, aiming to ensure that PMI children's rights are recognized and protected. Ensuring a decent life and the fulfillment of these children's rights is a central concern for Muhammadiyah. This represents a concrete step by Muhammadiyah as a civil society organization (Hidayat et al., 2023).

There have been several previous studies related to the topic discussed by the author in this article. First, there are studies examining the fulfillment of educational rights for the children of Indonesian migrant workers in Malaysia. Thousands of children of Indonesian migrant workers in Malaysia do not possess official citizenship documents. This situation hinders their access to formal education. In response, civil society organizations and the Indonesian Embassy (KBRI) in Malaysia have sought to provide alternative educational opportunities for these children through learning centers, one of which is the Hulu Langat Learning Center located in Selangor, Malaysia (Anam et al., 2022).

Another study explores the diplomatic efforts undertaken by Muhammadiyah to protect Indonesian migrant workers in Malaysia. Various activities are involved in this diplomatic process. The first is disaster advocacy through fundraising and the distribution of logistical assistance to migrant workers during the COVID-19 pandemic. The second is providing education for children of Indonesian migrant workers who do not have official citizenship status. The third involves addressing challenges faced by migrant workers, such as employment contracts and wage payment issues.

Drawing from these previous studies, this article specifically examines the role of Muhammadiyah in advocating for the rights of the children of Indonesian migrant workers (PMI) in Malaysia. Muhammadiyah employs an advocacy strategy through educational and religious approaches for the children of Indonesian migrant workers (PMI) in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. This approach is considered effective in improving

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PMI children's access to their civil rights, particularly in the areas of education and religion. One manifestation of this advocacy is the establishment of Sanggar Bersama, which provides opportunities for PMI children to receive education and religious knowledge.

B. Methods

The research in this study employed a qualitative approach using a case study design to explore in depth Muhammadiyah's advocacy strategies, the forms of civil rights protection for Indonesian migrant workers' children in Malaysia, and the dynamics of their everyday lives. To collect primary data, in-depth interviews were conducted with representatives of the Muhammadiyah Special Branch Leadership (PCIM) in Kuala Lumpur, managers of learning centers, and the teachers at these centers. Secondary data were obtained from various books, journals, news articles, and reports relevant to the issues addressed in this study. The data were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman model, by using thematic analysis through the processes of transcription, coding, categorization, and thematic interpretation, while ensuring data validity through methodological triangulation, source triangulation, member checking, and discussions with research team members.

C. Results and Discussion

Results

The Problems of Indonesian Migrant Worker's Children

According to "The International Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989, Children's rights include: 1) the right of children to receive fundamental guarantees such as the right to life, the principle of non-discrimination, the right to dignity through physical and mental protection; 2) children's rights are civil and political rights, such as the right to identity and citizenship; 3) children's rights are economic, social and cultural rights such as the right to education, health, and a decent standard of living; 4) children's rights are individual rights such as the right to live with parents and receive protection; 5) children's rights include collective rights, such as refugees and groups with disabilities (Arenawati & Listyaningsih, 2017).

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Children have the same rights as adults. These rights include the right to obtain an identity, nationality, name, and family relationships. These various rights are enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), specifically in Articles 7 and 8 (Kertati, 2017). The civil rights of migrant children are fundamental rights. These rights ensure formal recognition and access to basic services for children in their destination countries (Konvensi Internasional Tentang Perlindungan Hak-Hak Seluruh Pekerja Migran Dan Anggota Keluarganya, 1990). This is especially important because children of migrant workers often face challenges in fulfilling their basic rights. They belong to vulnerable groups, similar to the elderly and persons with disabilities (Creț, 2024).

Children's civil rights can be facilitated by "listening" to them. Bantekas argues that listening to children, especially those with disabilities, can be an effective tool in shaping actions that contribute to their well-being (Bantekas, 2024). This listening means understanding the needs of children. Civil rights are not solely the responsibility of the child, but also of family members, the government, and professionals. This can be achieved by recognizing children as legal subjects (Tavares et al., 2021).

Issues surrounding children's civil rights also occur in families that are no longer intact. Children from divorced parents face specific challenges. Moreover, Indonesia's legal system has not been effective in regulating the enforcement of court decisions after a divorce. As a result, fathers' obligations to support their children post-divorce are often neglected. This is because these obligations remain voluntary and lack legal enforcement. Therefore, family law in Indonesia needs to be reconstructed through specific regulations that enforce the fulfillment of children's rights after divorce in a more binding and compulsory manner (Haris et al., 2024). This is a form of protection for children's civil rights.

The protection of children's civil rights must also extend to the digital context, not just the real world. The development of digital technology creates new avenues for digital violence against children. One example is "sharenting" — sharing children's data, such as photos or videos, without their consent. This can violate children's rights. Just like adults, children also have a right to privacy. Additionally, the issue of children's fingerprints is a serious concern. These fingerprints may become key to future data

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security. Although such issues may not be illegal, they raise ethical questions about children's rights to autonomy and protection (Bello, 2025).

Children also need protection from verbal and physical violence, including the most extreme forms like sexual abuse and life-threatening violence. Such violence does not always happen in faraway or public places—it can occur at home, in schools, and even in religious institutions. Perpetrators are not always strangers; they can be family members or people the child knows. Therefore, action must be taken to eliminate violence against children so that they can grow, play, and learn normally. Understanding the causes of violence against children can make prevention easier. Preventive efforts are essential to ensure a high-quality next generation (Tugu, 2023), and this includes granting them their civil rights.

The way to ensure children's civil rights is by securing and maintaining their identity. Identity in this sense means genuinely recognizing children as children—not treating them like adults with more abilities. Creț states that it is a child's right to obtain and maintain their identity. This is one of the pillars of a child's civil status, which includes civil rights and freedoms. Creț adds that children's rights can be effectively realized through birth registration, the right to a name, a home, a place of residence, civil status, and citizenship. All of these require joint efforts and support from all public authorities involved in implementing children's rights. This includes not only relevant ministries and local public authorities, but also parents or other legal guardians (Creț, 2024). The involvement of various stakeholders ensures that children receive the rights they are entitled to. Otherwise, there will be consequences from the lack of rights fulfillment—especially regarding identity and nationality for children of migrant workers.

The Impact of Identity and Nationality Issues on Children of Indonesian Migrant Workers (PMI) in Malaysia

The issue of identity and nationality among the children of Indonesian migrant workers (PMI) in Malaysia is a highly critical concern. In terms of quantity, there were 2.7 million Indonesian migrant workers in Malaysia in 2020, but only 1.6 million entered through official channels (IOM, 2023). Setiadi reported that in 2019, 4.7% of

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Malaysia's population—around 1.5 million people—were of Javanese descent (Setiadi et al., 2025). Meanwhile, according to Bank Indonesia, Indonesian migrant workers in Malaysia make up the largest group—1,628,000 individuals, or about 50.3% of all Indonesian migrant workers (Antara, 2025). Regardless of the data discrepancies, the number of undocumented migrant workers is very high. This has serious implications for their children born in Malaysia, who often lack identity documents and nationality.

The Conversation reported that more than 30,000 to 50,000 children in Sabah, Malaysia, live without clear citizenship. Most of them are children of Indonesian migrant workers (The Conversation, 2018). Many of these children do not possess birth certificates or official documents from either the Malaysian or Indonesian governments. As a result, they are vulnerable to statelessness (West, 2008). This is largely due to the failure to report births to the Indonesian embassy or consulate in Malaysia. One major reason is the parents' undocumented status in Malaysia, which leads to the absence of civil registration (Santoso, 2017).

Children born to undocumented migrant workers in Malaysia often end up stateless. Malaysia does not apply the jus soli principle (citizenship by birthplace), while Indonesia requires birth registration within a specific period. The issue goes beyond legality—it dominates the lives of these children, manifesting in ongoing alienation. Some families opt not to register any documents, holding out hope for eventual Malaysian citizenship—a goal that is uncertain and potentially unattainable. Although these children might be eligible for citizenship from their parents' home country, many parents consider Malaysian citizenship to be a right (Allerton, 2014).

The problem of identity and nationality leads to other issues—lack of access to education and public services, exploitation and discrimination, complex legal dilemmas, and difficulty in family reunification. The educational impact is apparent. Many children of Indonesian migrant workers are unable to access formal education. Fortunately, progress has been made. Wijaya et al. reported that around 1,200 previously excluded children are now studying in over 140 Community Learning Centers (CLCs) in Sabah and Sarawak, from elementary to junior high school levels. These CLCs follow Indonesia's national education curriculum (Wijaya et al., 2024). Unfortunately, CLCs often face resource shortages, including a lack of teachers and

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infrastructure (Supardi, 2024), as seen in Sanggar Bersama, an Indonesian community-run institution in Kuala Lumpur.

Meanwhile, Lumayag notes that Malaysia's education laws do not allow foreign children without valid documents to attend public schools. Instead, they rely on non-formal learning centers within their communities. This illustrates the marginalization of undocumented children, as their basic right to education is denied—ultimately robbing them of a chance at a decent life. In reality, children without formal education often face poverty, exposure to crime, and domestic violence (Lumayag, 2016).

In terms of public services such as healthcare, undocumented children have limited access to public health facilities, unlike those with official documents (Rifa, 2023). Their legal status is extremely vulnerable. Medical treatment costs for undocumented children can be up higher (Damayanti et al., 2023). Many undocumented families fear approaching medical services due to the risk of arrest or deportation (Veda et al., 2021).

Another consequence of undocumented status for these children is vulnerability to exploitation and discrimination. Children without official citizenship documents are at high risk of labor exploitation, as they lack clear legal protections. They are also vulnerable to human trafficking and discrimination. In 2016, 251 children from East Nusa Tenggara (NTT) were reported as trafficking victims (S. I. Pratama, 2016). By 2021, the number of human trafficking victims in Malaysia reached 90,154 (Samiyyah et al., 2024), with numbers increasing over the past five years, though accurate data remains limited.

Legal challenges are also significant for children of migrant workers. Malaysia follows a mixed citizenship system (jus sanguinis and jus soli under certain conditions), while Indonesia primarily uses jus sanguinis (citizenship by descent). Law No. 12 of 2006 on Indonesian Citizenship presents complications for children born in Malaysia to Indonesian parents. Although they may qualify for Malaysian citizenship under specific conditions, Article 6 of the law allows for dual citizenship only until age 18. Unfortunately, bureaucratic hurdles and lack of awareness among parents often hinder implementation (Agustian, 2022), resulting in administrative barriers.

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Another problem faced by children of migrant workers is the difficulty of returning to their parents' home country due to a lack of valid travel documents, compounded by strict immigration rules. This results in obstacles to reuniting with family members in Indonesia. The broad and growing impact of these identity and nationality issues is undeniable. Therefore, it is essential for various stakeholders, including civil society organizations like Muhammadiyah, to play an active role in advocating for these children.

Discussions

1. Muhammadiyah Advocacy Through the Special Branch of Muhammadiyah (PCIM) in Malaysia

Muhammadiyah's advocacy is marked by various initiatives, one of which is the presence of the Special Branch of Muhammadiyah Leadership (PCIM) in Malaysia, based in Kuala Lumpur. Apart from serving as a platform to strengthen connections among Muhammadiyah members in Malaysia, this institution also plays a role in advocating for children's civil rights. PCIM Malaysia was established in May 2007 and officially inaugurated by the Chairman of the Central Leadership of Muhammadiyah, Prof. Dr. H. Din Syamsuddin, at the Indonesian School in Kuala Lumpur on August 31, 2007. The first chairman of PCIM Malaysia was Prof. Dr. M. Akhyar Adnan (Mujtaba et al., 2024).

His leadership was later succeeded by M. Arifin Ismail, MA, who returned to Indonesia to serve as a lecturer at Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta. Arifin Ismail was inaugurated as the second chairman of PCIM Malaysia for the 2011–2013 period by Prof. Dr. H. Din Syamsuddin on Wednesday, April 20, 2011, at the Dewan Orang Ramai Kampung Baru, Kuala Lumpur. As with Muhammadiyah in Indonesia, PCIM Malaysia also holds deliberations (*musyawarah*) to elect its leadership (Prasetyo, 2023).

Institutional Networks of PCIM Malaysia including:

1. Special Branch Leadership of Aisyiyah (PCIA) Malaysia, the women's wing of Muhammadiyah
2. PRIM Kampung Baru – mostly Indonesian workers

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3. PRIM Sungai Way – mostly Indonesian workers
4. PRIM KL Sentral – mostly Indonesian students
5. PRIM Klang Lama – mostly Indonesian workers
6. PRIA Kampung Baru (Malaysia, 2023a).

These institutional networks contribute to the organization of various Muhammadiyah activities and philanthropic efforts. PCIM Malaysia manages a range of initiatives, including:

1. Community Empowerment: Economic and entrepreneurship programs, family financial management, family health, and *muballigh* (preacher) training
2. Religious Studies: Monthly community studies, branch-level studies, Aisyiyah gatherings
3. Public Discussions: With prominent figures from Indonesia and Malaysia
4. Charity Distribution: Qurban animals and zakat fitrah
5. Social Engagement: Fellowship and social service for Indonesian workers in Malaysia
6. Youth Programs: Ramadan media for children and teens (MESRA)
7. Academic Events: Scientific discussions, conferences, seminars, book reviews
8. Family Events: Family days, sports activities (Malaysia, 2023b).

PCIM Malaysia runs many programs similar to Muhammadiyah in Indonesia. It also established a university—Universitas Muhammadiyah Malaysia (UMAM)—which was inaugurated on August 5, 2021 (Admin, 2021). Although located in Putrajaya, not Kuala Lumpur, Muhammadiyah's influence in Malaysia has been significant. UMAM is Muhammadiyah's first university abroad and its 164th overall (Berita, 2021). PCIM Malaysia works closely with local branches like Pimpinan Ranting Istimewa Muhammadiyah (PRIM). One of the most active and long-established branches is PRIM Kampung Baru. Alongside PRIA Kampung Baru, they are the oldest Muhammadiyah and Aisyiyah branches in Malaysia (A. Pratama, 2023b).

PRIM Kampung Baru held a leadership election on January 24, 2012, resulting in the selection of Muhammad Hadzim and Muhammad Sukardi as chair and secretary,

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respectively. They were officially inaugurated on April 29, 2012. For the 2023–2025 term, PRIM Kampung Baru was inaugurated on Sunday, November 26, 2023, by PCIM Malaysia vice-chairman Fauzi Fathur (A. Pratama, 2023b). Most members are Indonesian migrant workers, especially from Lamongan, East Java, working in construction and manufacturing. Some also work in Muhammadiyah-run businesses such as WasolaMu (*Warung Soto Lamongan Muhammadiyah*).

The PRIM Kampung Baru Secretariat is located on the second floor of Wisma Sabaruddin, 30-6b, Jalan Raja Alang, Chow Kit, 50300 Kuala Lumpur, Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (Admin, n.d.). Like PCIM, PRIM Kampung Baru organizes various similar programs. It frequently receives visits from Indonesian universities for fellowship and community service programs (KKN) (A. Pratama, 2023a). PCIM Malaysia established the Sanggar Bimbingan (SB), while PRIM Kampung Baru initiated a Taman Pendidikan Al-Qur'an (TPQ). Although SB is managed by PCIM, it is located in Kampung Baru. Teachers at SB include not only locals but also university students, such as those from Universitas Muhammadiyah Purwokerto (UMP) doing KKN there (Aanardianto, 2022).

PCIM Malaysia, founded in 2007 and based in Kuala Lumpur, was officially led by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Muhammad Akhyar Adnan. Since then, it has nurtured many Muhammadiyah cadres in Malaysia. The introduction of Muhammadiyah in Kuala Lumpur began through Islamic outreach efforts like religious gatherings and seminars. Now, Muhammadiyah is increasingly rooted in Malaysia, extending into social and educational fields (Mawardi, 2022). The Special Branch of Aisyiyah (PCIA) and Lazismu Malaysia also contribute by offering social assistance, especially to communities in Kuala Lumpur (Ardianto, 2022). PCIA's work also reflects Muhammadiyah's commitment to global health and humanitarian causes (Ardianto, 2022).

Muhammadiyah's growth in Malaysia is robust and well-received. Malaysian society has been open and welcoming to Muhammadiyah's mission of universal compassion (*rahmatan lil 'alamin*) and modernization on a global scale. Muhammadiyah collaborates with local Malaysian organizations in running social activities such as zakat distribution for the underprivileged. These initiatives are proof that Islam can be a blessing, even globally (Temarwut, 2023).

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Muhammadiyah has established both formal and informal educational institutions to serve not only its own members but also the broader Malaysian public. The Indonesian Embassy in Kuala Lumpur, together with PCIM, has planned the establishment of the Indonesian School of Kuala Lumpur (Gunawan, 2018). Education is Muhammadiyah's primary avenue for achieving its vision of enlightening society. The establishment of the Muhammadiyah International University of Malaysia (UMAM) is a significant milestone for the organization abroad. It strengthens Muhammadiyah's vision of fostering global unity and civilization through education (Latief, 2020). Additionally, Universitas Muhammadiyah Jakarta (UMJ) has also initiated collaborations with the Malaysian government in the field of education (Redaksi, 2024).

The Field of Education Developed by Muhammadiyah: Not Only Formal but Also Political Education. The field of education developed by Muhammadiyah extends beyond schools and universities; it also encompasses political education. The establishment of universities and the implementation of student exchange programs between Muhammadiyah universities in Indonesia and Malaysian universities in Kuala Lumpur illustrate Muhammadiyah's role in political education. In this context, political education at the university level has grown significantly. The establishment of a Ph.D. program in Social Science at Universitas Muhammadiyah Malaysia (UMAM) marks a milestone in Muhammadiyah's contribution to political education (Nugroho, 2023).

Furthermore, collaboration between Malaysian universities such as Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) and Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) with several Muhammadiyah universities in Indonesia—particularly through student exchange programs in faculties like the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences (FISIP)—has further strengthened Muhammadiyah's position in political education (Nugroho, 2023).

Upon closer analysis, however, Muhammadiyah does not primarily focus on political education in Kuala Lumpur. This is because Muhammadiyah is not a political organization; rather, it prioritizes its role as a civil society organization and Islamic movement that emphasizes education. Nevertheless, as discussed previously, Muhammadiyah has established a variety of community organizations in Malaysia, particularly in Kuala Lumpur.

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Muhammadiyah also facilitates student exchanges between foreign universities, particularly those in Kuala Lumpur, and Muhammadiyah universities in Indonesia—including in the field of political education. This illustrates Muhammadiyah's political education role in Kuala Lumpur in two primary ways: The establishment of Universitas Muhammadiyah Malaysia (UMAM), which includes a Social Science program that naturally covers political education. Thus, structurally, Muhammadiyah is engaged in teaching political education at the university level; Collaborative partnerships between Muhammadiyah universities in Indonesia and universities in Kuala Lumpur—especially in faculties like FISIP, which includes political education in its curriculum.

Beyond this, Muhammadiyah's efforts in education—both nationally and internationally—pursue a common mission: to realize Islam as a blessing for all (*rahmatan lil 'alamin*) through various avenues, especially education.

2. Support for Children of Indonesian Migrant Communities in Kuala Lumpur

Muhammadiyah is also actively involved in providing educational support for children from Indonesian families living and working in Kuala Lumpur. These children are often born from unregistered marriages, not recorded by Indonesia's Office of Religious Affairs (KUA), and therefore lack essential documents such as birth certificates, family registration cards, and passports. These children receive education based on the Indonesian curriculum, which includes religious studies (such as Qur'anic recitation), local cultural content, and Indonesian national identity. PCIM (Special Branch of Muhammadiyah) educates children of Indonesian citizens who married in Malaysia without formal documentation (Fathoni, 2024).

These children study in a non-formal education institution known as Sanggar Bimbingan (SB). The sanggar is managed by Supardi and his wife under a Muhammadiyah branch. Although currently there is ongoing debate about its management—whether it should continue to be run by Supardi and his wife or be fully managed by PCIM Kuala Lumpur—its educational purpose remains clear (Supardi, 2024).

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At the Sanggar Bimbingan, learning activities are not only conducted by Supardi and his wife, but also by Indonesian university students who carry out their Kuliah Kerja Nyata (KKN – Community Service Program) there. Supardi stated that students from various universities in Indonesia, such as Universitas Muhammadiyah Sumatera Utara (UMSU), Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN) Purwokerto, and others, have participated in KKN at the Sanggar Bimbingan. The duration of the KKN varies—according to Supardi, it used to last about 1 to 2 weeks, but it is now expected to run for around 25 to 28 days. Typically, KKN participants range from 4 to 7 people. In addition, some conduct community service as part of the implementation of the tridharma (threefold mission) of higher education institutions (Supardi, 2024).

The students are taught using a curriculum that adopts 100% of the Indonesian national curriculum, including subjects like Pancasila and Civic Education. This curriculum is then supplemented with Islamic and Muhammadiyah teachings. Around 200 students are currently spread across several learning locations, including Kampung Baru, Kepong, and Selangor. These children, who study without possessing official documents in Malaysia, are monitored by the Malaysian government (Fathoni, 2024).

PCIM Kuala Lumpur emphasizes that these children must receive education—even if only through non-formal means—because leaving them uneducated for the next 5 to 10 years could lead to negative consequences, including vulnerability to criminal behavior. Muhammadiyah remains committed to serving the community, especially since many Indonesian citizens work in various sectors across Malaysia (Fathoni, 2024). Muhammadiyah in Kampung Bharu, Kuala Lumpur, also runs a charitable business called WasolaMu, short for Warung Soto Lamongan Muhammadiyah. WasolaMu offers Indonesian dishes such as Soto Lamongan, Bakso, Rawon, and more. Many Indonesian visitors come to WasolaMu, where conversations range from everyday life topics to discussions about politics (Fathoni, 2024).

In its development, Muhammadiyah is currently making administrative efforts to be officially recognized as an organization by the Malaysian government. This step is being taken so that Muhammadiyah can provide greater benefits to the community. With official legal status from the Malaysian government, Muhammadiyah will, in the

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future, be able to establish formal schools—either by acquiring schools that have closed, building new ones, or through other means.

3. Analysis of Muhammadiyah's Advocacy Efforts for the Children of Indonesian Migrant Workers (PMI) in Malaysia

Advocacy should prioritize challenging the core principles of policies rather than just modifying administrative rules or procedures. We clearly defining the issue and shaping the agenda are essential for attracting new supporters. Effective tactics include framing the issue strategically, rallying allies, and using media to influence public opinion (Stachowiak, 2023). The objective of advocacy can be understood through the theory of change as figure below:

Muhammadiyah plays a strategic role in advocating for the children of Indonesian migrant workers (PMI) in Malaysia. As a component of civil society, Muhammadiyah's role is widely recognized in the context of Indonesian socio-religious studies. Setiadi stated that Muhammadiyah has demonstrated its independence from the state, a characteristic of civil society (Setiadi, 2021). It has successfully strengthened the public sphere and shown a strong commitment to democratic values. Muhammadiyah engages in transnational advocacy, particularly for PMIs in Malaysia. Its principles of independence, voluntarism, and self-reliance enable Muhammadiyah to respond quickly and effectively to issues concerning PMI children.

Muhammadiyah approaches advocacy as an implementation of *amar ma'ruf nahi munkar* (enjoining good and forbidding evil). This concept is interpreted broadly, not limited to religious worship but extending to social dimensions, including advocacy for the children of PMIs. In this context, amar ma'ruf nahi munkar is realized through the prevention and resolution of violations against the civil rights of PMI children in Malaysia. Muhammadiyah has transformed the understanding of this principle from a normative-textual approach to a transformative-contextual one.

Muhammadiyah adopts principles of justice (‘adalah), equality (musawah), and liberation (taharrur) in its advocacy work—core values rooted in Islam. Justice forms the foundation for fulfilling children’s civil rights. Equality ensures every child has

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equal access to these rights regardless of whether they are the children of migrant workers. Liberation seeks to free children from structural oppression that hinders access to their rights. These three principles are interlinked and shape Muhammadiyah's comprehensive advocacy framework (Zakiyuddin Baidhawy, 2015).

The philosophical foundation for Muhammadiyah's advocacy lies in Islam rahmatan lil 'alamin (Islam as a mercy to all creation), which emphasizes openness, humanity, and universality. In protecting children's civil rights, Muhammadiyah's advocacy transcends national, ethnic, and citizenship boundaries, demonstrating that it does not succumb to narrow nationalism or religious sectarianism.

The Special Branch of Muhammadiyah (Cabang Istimewa Muhammadiyah or CIM) in Malaysia plays a significant role in advocating for PMI children's civil rights. This advocacy involves Muhammadiyah's institutional networks, such as the Pimpinan Cabang Istimewa Aisyiyah (PCIA) Malaysia, and various PRIM branches in Kampung Baru, Sungai Way, KL Sentral, Klang Lama, and PRIA Kampung Baru (Malaysia, 2023a).

Muhammadiyah's advocacy goes beyond handling cases; it also focuses on education. This includes community empowerment through economic and entrepreneurial activities, financial and family health training, religious study circles (pengajian), academic discussions, and family gatherings. These efforts highlight Muhammadiyah's distinctive approach to advocacy. Through such activities, community needs and potentials can be mapped, and violations of children's civil rights can be identified.

Mapping and gathering information through community-based activities is evidence of Muhammadiyah's bargaining power in dialogues with both the Indonesian and Malaysian governments (Fathoni, 2024). This community-based approach helps ensure that advocacy is effective and well-targeted. Muhammadiyah also utilizes its broader networks, such as PCI Aisyiyah and Lazismu Malaysia, to carry out social and humanitarian programs, particularly in Kuala Lumpur (Ardianto, 2022). These social aid efforts act as indirect advocacy for PMI communities, including children.

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Another form of advocacy involves dialogue—not just casual conversation, but also academic forums such as scientific discussions, conferences, seminars, and book reviews (Malaysia, 2023b). These forums often discuss the civil rights of PMI children. Many consider this a gentle religious approach that maintains religious identity while promoting advocacy both in Indonesia and Malaysia. Through PCIM Malaysia, Muhammadiyah builds networks with PMI communities, identifies issues faced by PMI children, collaborates with local Malaysian entities (Fathoni, 2024), and facilitates communication between PMIs and the Indonesian government.

A concrete form of advocacy is the establishment of schools for PMI children to access education. These schools include both formal and community-based non-formal schools with alternative education systems. Non-formal education is provided to about 200 students across learning centers in Kampung Baru, Kepong, and Selangor. These children lack legal documentation in Malaysia, yet are still monitored by Malaysian authorities (Fathoni, 2024). They are also taught life skills and religious education.

Education for PMI children adopts the Indonesian curriculum, including Pancasila and Citizenship Education, and is enriched with Islamic and Muhammadiyah teachings. They also learn Quran recitation, local content, and Indonesian cultural values (Fathoni, 2024). These lessons are delivered in non-formal education centers called *Sanggar Bimbingan* (SB), managed by Supardi and his wife under a local Muhammadiyah branch. Higher education institutions also support these non-formal education efforts through community service programs, as part of the university's tri-dharma (three core missions) (Supardi, 2024). This advocacy is essential—even if informal—since neglect over five to ten years could lead to severe social issues or even criminal behavior (Fathoni, 2024).

Muhammadiyah's advocacy also includes supporting PMI parents. For instance, they established Warung Soto Lamongan Muhammadiyah (WasolaMu), a community empowerment initiative. This approach does not only support children directly but also builds the capacity of parents to protect their children's rights. Muhammadiyah's empowerment strategy successfully shifts the PMI role from passive recipients to active agents in child rights protection.

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Children born to undocumented Indonesian migrant workers in Malaysia exist within conditions of structural and multidimensional vulnerability. The absence of civil documentation, such as birth certificates, passports, and population identity records, is not merely an administrative issue but reflects systemic failures in cross border protection mechanisms to guarantee children's fundamental rights. The undocumented status of parents, whether due to irregular employment or unregistered marriages, leads the host state to deny legal recognition of the family unit, resulting in the loss of state recognition for children from birth. This condition has direct implications for the fulfillment of children's civil and social rights, particularly access to formal education, healthcare services, and legal protection. Without official legal identity, children of PMIs face the risk of prolonged social exclusion and potential statelessness. These circumstances not only constrain their future mobility and life opportunities but also heighten their vulnerability to exploitation, discrimination, and violence.

Furthermore, this issue reveals policy overlaps and gaps between the country of origin and the destination country. On the one hand, Malaysia's strict immigration regulations toward undocumented workers significantly narrow the scope of protection available to their children. On the other hand, limitations in data collection mechanisms, public outreach, and service provision by the sending state further exacerbate the situation, particularly for migrant workers whose working in the informal sector who remain difficult to reach through official channels. Accordingly, the challenges faced by undocumented children in Malaysia cannot be understood solely as the result of individual parental choices. Rather, they are the consequences of structural inequalities, weak migration governance, and the absence of a child rights-based approach. This context underscores the need for the involvement of non-state actors, including civil society and religious organizations, to fill institutional gaps left by the state while simultaneously advocating for more inclusive and child centered policy frameworks.

Within this context, Muhammadiyah occupies a strategic position as a transnational civil society actor operating in the space between state institutions and migrant communities. Muhammadiyah does not function as a state institution or

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political actor, but rather as a modernist Islamic organization with strong social legitimacy, extensive institutional networks, and advocacy capacity grounded in Islamic and humanitarian values. In relation to undocumented children in Malaysia, Muhammadiyah positions itself as a protector of the civil rights of vulnerable groups that are largely neglected by the legal systems and migration policies of both the sending and receiving states. Muhammadiyah's approach is rooted in the Islamic principle of rahmatan lil alamin (a blessing for all humankind) and the doctrine of amar maruf nahi munkar (enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong), which are translated into concrete social and humanitarian practices. From this perspective, the issue of Indonesian migrant workers' children is not viewed merely as a matter of citizenship legality, but rather as an issue of social justice, human dignity, and universal child rights. This positioning enables Muhammadiyah to transcend national and citizenship boundaries in its advocacy efforts.

Muhammadiyah possesses considerable potential to advocate for the rights of Indonesian migrant workers' children in Malaysia due to its social, cultural, and institutional capital. As a religious organization with strong moral legitimacy among Indonesian migrant workers communities, Muhammadiyah is relatively well accepted by migrant families, including those in undocumented situations who tend to avoid formal state institutions. Its transnational networks, including PCIM, PRIM, Aisyiyah, Lazismu, and Muhammadiyah affiliated universities, facilitate the sustained mobilization of human resources, philanthropic funding, and knowledge. Moreover, Muhammadiyah's emphasis on non-formal education and religious humanitarian approaches provides a strategic and relatively safe entry point for advocacy within Malaysia's political and legal environment. These efforts also align with global child protection agendas, thereby opening opportunities for collaboration with states, international organizations, and other civil society actors.

Nevertheless, these opportunities are accompanied by significant structural challenges. The absence or limited legal recognition of Muhammadiyah as an official organization in Malaysia constrains its institutional capacity, particularly in establishing formal educational institutions and conducting open policy advocacy. At the same time, the vulnerability of the target population, namely undocumented PMIs

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and their children, complicates data collection, accompaniment, and civil rights empowerment due to persistent fears of immigration raids and deportation. Muhammadiyah's initiatives also rely heavily on volunteer engagement and philanthropic funding, placing program sustainability at risk in the absence of more stable policy support and financial resources. In addition, the complexity of citizenship and immigration regulations between Indonesia and Malaysia means that Muhammadiyah's advocacy tends to focus on short term fulfillment of basic rights, such as education and social support, while its impact on structural policy change at the state level remains limited. This condition indicates that although Muhammadiyah holds a strategic position as a transnational civil society actor, the effectiveness of its advocacy is highly dependent on cross actor collaboration and more inclusive state policies.

When examined through the lens of the Theory of Change, Muhammadiyah's role in advocating for the rights of Indonesian migrant workers' children in Malaysia can be understood as a gradual, contextual, and community-based process of social transformation rather than as a direct and immediate policy intervention. Muhammadiyah operates at the grassroots level based on the fundamental assumption that the realization of children's rights cannot be achieved solely through regulatory change, but must begin with strengthening community capacity, transforming awareness, and creating safe spaces for children living under legally precarious conditions. Within the Theory of Change framework, Muhammadiyah's primary inputs consist of socio religious capital, transnational institutional networks, volunteers, and philanthropic resources. These inputs are subsequently converted into activities such as non-formal education through community learning centers, religious instruction, family accompaniment, community dialogue, and the strengthening of networks with Indonesian diplomatic missions and local authorities. These activities generate concrete outputs, including increased access to education for migrant worker' children, the establishment of safe learning spaces, improved parental literacy regarding child rights, and the development of community based social data previously beyond the reach of the state.

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At the intermediate outcome level, Muhammadiyah seeks to enhance the capacity and resilience of Indonesian migrant workers communities. Children who were previously marginalized gain basic knowledge, cultural identity, and religious values, while parents gradually transform from passive subjects into more informed and proactive actors in protecting their children's rights. At this stage, the changes observed are social and cultural rather than legal, yet they constitute critical prerequisites for more structural forms of advocacy. In the long term, Muhammadiyah aims to achieve impacts such as reduced social exclusion among Indonesian migrant workers' children, increased opportunities for their integration into more formal education systems, and the opening of policy dialogue spaces between the state and civil society. Although Muhammadiyah does not directly alter citizenship or immigration policies, its interventions contribute to reshaping the child protection ecosystem through the demonstration of best practices at the community level. These practices may serve as reference points for the state in formulating more inclusive policies.

Critically, Muhammadiyah's Theory of Change illustrates that the organization functions as a catalyst of change and a bridging actor rather than a policy maker. The strength of this approach lies in its capacity to generate bottom-up change based on the assumption that social justice and the fulfillment of children's rights can only be achieved when communities possess sufficient capacity, awareness, and bargaining power. However, the principal limitation of this approach lies in its dependence on resource sustainability and the willingness of the state to respond to changes emerging at the community level. Consequently, the effectiveness of Muhammadiyah's role within the Theory of Change framework is ultimately determined by the extent to which local level outputs and outcomes can be translated into drivers of structural policy change.

D. Conclusion

This study highlights that behind legal categories and migration policies lie the everyday lives of children of Indonesian migrant workers whose access to basic civil rights remains uncertain. Through the Special Branch of Muhammadiyah (PCIM) in

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Kuala Lumpur, Muhammadiyah has emerged as a crucial actor in responding to this vulnerability by providing practical, community-based forms of advocacy that reach families often excluded from state protection. In a context marked by legal invisibility and social marginalization, Muhammadiyah's initiatives offer not only services but also recognition, dignity, and a sense of belonging for migrant children.

The findings indicate that Muhammadiyah's advocacy extends beyond formal legal interventions. By empowering parents through small-scale economic initiatives such as WasolaMu, facilitating dialogue through religious gatherings and public discussions, delivering community-based social assistance, strengthening migrant networks, and establishing non-formal educational spaces, Muhammadiyah addresses the immediate needs of children while nurturing longer-term social resilience. These efforts ensure that children who live without official documentation are not deprived of education, moral guidance, and opportunities for personal development. From an analytical standpoint, Muhammadiyah's approach demonstrates how faith-based civil society organizations can translate moral values into concrete social action. Rooted in the principles of justice, equality, and liberation, Muhammadiyah interprets amar ma'ruf nahi munkar as a commitment to protect human dignity rather than merely to enforce normative rules. This perspective allows advocacy to move beyond legal status and to focus on children as rights-bearing individuals whose well-being must be safeguarded regardless of their parents' migration status.

Viewed through the lens of the Theory of Change, Muhammadiyah's advocacy represents a gradual and relational process of transformation. Change begins at the community level, where parents gain awareness, children find safe spaces to learn and grow, and trust is built between migrant communities and supportive institutions. While these interventions do not immediately reshape immigration or citizenship policies, they generate meaningful social outcomes by reducing exclusion and strengthening community capacity, thereby creating conditions in which broader policy dialogue becomes possible. Nevertheless, this study also recognizes its limitations. Conducted within a specific temporal and geographical context, the findings reflect only part of the broader experiences of Indonesian migrant workers'

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children in Malaysia. Future research should therefore explore longitudinal and comparative approaches to better capture the evolving realities of migrant families and to assess how community-based advocacy can influence structural policy change over time.

In conclusion, this study underscores that protecting the civil rights of children of Indonesian migrant workers cannot rely solely on legal frameworks and state institutions. It requires sustained engagement from civil society actors capable of working closely with vulnerable communities. Muhammadiyah's experience illustrates how Islamic community organizations can humanize advocacy by placing the life of children at the center of rights protection, thereby contributing to more inclusive and compassionate responses to migration-related challenges in transnational settings.

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