Vol. 7 No.2 pp: 236-244 Juli 2025

DOI: <a href="https://doi.org/10.29303/jgn.v7i2.563">https://doi.org/10.29303/jgn.v7i2.563</a>

# **Empowerment of the Stateless Children in Malaysia with an Integrative Education Approach**

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Article history
Received: 29-04-2025
Revised: 19-06-2025
Accepted: 25-07-2025

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Abstract: Migration is a complex global phenomenon with far-reaching impacts, particularly for undocumented migrant children, especially in Malaysia. They often find themselves in vulnerable situations due to a lack of access to formal education, healthcare, and legal protection. The absence of legal recognition makes them susceptible to exploitation, human trafficking, and various forms of abuse. Additionally, children with parents from different national backgrounds face extra challenges, which can lead to difficulties in obtaining legal recognition. Addressing these challenges requires a holistic and integrated approach. This includes legal reforms to improve access to education and healthcare services for migrant children, as well as inclusive policies that acknowledge their fundamental rights as human beings. Collaboration among various stakeholders, including the government, academic institutions such as Universiti Utara Malaysia, and civil society organizations, is crucial in providing adequate protection and opportunities for these children. Community service initiatives focused on raising national awareness and strengthening the identity of stateless children are positive steps toward empowering them. By enhancing their understanding of culture and history, as well as facilitating social integration, these initiatives can help these children feel more accepted and motivated to contribute to society.

**Keywords:** Global Migration, Indonesia, Malaysia, Undocumented Migrant Children

Abstrak: Migrasi adalah fenomena global yang kompleks dengan dampak yang luas, terutama bagi anak-anak migran yang tidak memiliki dokumen resmi, terutama di Malaysia. Mereka sering kali berada dalam situasi yang rentan karena kekurangan akses terhadap pendidikan formal, perawatan kesehatan, dan perlindungan hukum. Kurangnya pengakuan hukum membuat mereka rentan terhadap eksploitasi, perdagangan manusia, dan berbagai bentuk pelecehan. Selain itu, tantangan ekstra dihadapi oleh anak-anak dengan orang tua dari latar belakang negara yang berbeda, yang dapat mengakibatkan kesulitan dalam memperoleh pengakuan hukum. Untuk mengatasi tantangan ini, diperlukan pendekatan yang holistik dan terpadu. Ini mencakup reformasi hukum untuk memberikan akses yang lebih baik ke pendidikan dan layanan kesehatan bagi anak-anak migran, serta kebijakan inklusif yang mengakui hak-hak mereka sebagai manusia. Kolaborasi antara berbagai pihak, termasuk pemerintah, lembaga akademis seperti Universiti Utara Malaysia, dan organisasi masyarakat sipil, sangat penting untuk menyediakan perlindungan yang memadai dan peluang bagi anak-anak ini. Inisiatif pelayanan masyarakat yang difokuskan pada meningkatkan kesadaran nasional dan identitas anak-anak tanpa kewarganegaraan adalah langkah positif dalam memberdayakan mereka. Dengan meningkatkan pemahaman mereka tentang budaya dan sejarah, serta dengan memfasilitasi integrasi sosial, inisiatif tersebut dapat membantu anak-anak ini merasa lebih diterima dan termotivasi untuk berkontribusi dalam masyarakat.

Kata kunci: Anak-anak Migran Tidak Berdokumen, Indonesia, Malaysia, Migrasi Global

#### INTRODUCTION

Security issues related to international borders are often features of discussions on migration because migration itself is a complicated phenomenon with security-related implications, especially in relation to undocumented migrant children, for Malaysia, which has a sizeable population of stateless children with Indonesian mothers and non-Indonesian fathers. However, their legal identity and entitlements are often ignored. This is more about fortified borders and militarized migration than the actual threats to security (Makhroja & Anam, 2022). Undocumented and irregular migrants challenge the traditional understanding of border security, as well as state sovereignty. The family unit of stateless children tend to use the open nature of borders as a means of circumventing the immigration system. This poses a significant challenge to Malaysia's attempts at border security and integrity (Rizki et al., 2021). The combination of socio-economic marginalization and cultural invisibility generates multidimensional violence. The exploitation and abuse that stem from societal neglect harm personal security while simultaneously destabilizing society. The inadequacy of their protective legal framework, risks presenting unaccompanied children and the stateless family form as a new vulnerable category whose individual security is already at risk. Furthermore, the lack of legal recognition and documentation for stateless children complicates efforts to track and monitor their movements, which can raise concerns for law enforcement and public safety. The inability to identify and register these children renders them invisible to authorities, hampering efforts to ensure their protection and well-being (ElDidi et al., 2023).

Stateless people and undocumented migrant children in Malaysia are part of larger issues related to the unresolved the right to have access to a basic education, such as primary or secondary level schooling. Education is one of the most important and basic human rights which is included in many international agreements and covenants like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Rizki et al., 2021). However, the reality for many stateless and undocumented migrant children is a lack of access to formal education, which perpetuates a cycle of poverty, exclusion, and marginalization. In the Malaysian cases, where public education is mostly government sponsored, undocumented migrant children faced most striking inequities toward access and enrollment in public schooling. Caring for children in educational settings is governed by law. Lacking legal documentation of any kind such as residence or birth certificates these children often don't qualified to legal equalities or access but are subjected to arbitrary and classist norms by educational systems. In turn, these children are unable to develop, integrate socially, and gain skills that are vital for economic self-sufficiency later (Block et al., 2024).

Moreover, the lack of access to formal schooling for stateless children will affect national productivity and integration in the long run. Education is vital for fostering understanding and respect for differences, qualities that are critical for a bounded and unified society. By not offering education to stateless children, Malaysia endangers social harmony by sweeping vulnerable groups below the developmental curtain, diametrically opposing peace, stability, and sustainable development efforts (Sopyan, 2021). This concern requires combined legal action and community based policy solutions responsive to the denial of educational rights. The government should enact inclusive policies that ensure equal access to education for all children, regardless of their legal status or nationality. In addition, efforts should be made to raise awareness among educators, policymakers and the general public about the importance of inclusive education and the rights of migrants and stateless children. This international community service initiative will focus on the Baitul Rohmah Rohingnya Learning Center, in Alor Setar, Malaysia. Which is a learning center that handles Rohingya children and mixed-descent (statelesss children), including many Indonesian children. The total number of students is around 60 people. The activities planned for these children are centered on improving their national insight and fostering a sense of nationalism. Given their stateless status, these children face many challenges, including limited access to education, health care, and legal recognition. Strengthening their national insight is crucial because it

can give them a sense of identity and belonging, despite their uncertain legal status. By instilling a spirit of nationalism, this initiative aims to empower these children to navigate their circumstances with resilience and pride in their heritage. The activities planned at the Baitul Rohmah Rohingnya Learning Center will include a variety of educational and cultural programs designed to deepen the children's understanding of Indonesian history, culture, and values. Through workshops, discussions, and creative projects, the children will have the opportunity to explore their roots, celebrate their cultural heritage, and develop a strong sense of solidarity as members of the Indonesian community in Malaysia. By nurturing their national consciousness, the initiative seeks to inspire these children to become active participants in shaping their communities and advocating for their rights. By equipping them with knowledge and pride in their national identity, the initiative aims to empower them to overcome obstacles and strive for a brighter future, despite the challenges they face as stateless individuals in Malaysia.

This international service project will collaborate with Universiti Utara Malaysia, which shares this concern, particularly under the Indonesia, Thailand and Singapore Institute. Universiti Utara Malaysia, as a partner, is located in the border region between Malaysia and Thailand. This area serves as the center of oil palm plantations in Malaysia, attracting a large number of undocumented migrant workers from Indonesia. The collaboration with Universiti Utara Malaysia is crucial due to its strategic location and expertise in addressing migration-related challenges, particularly those affecting undocumented migrant workers and their families. The Indonesia, Thailand and Singapore Institutes are likely to have valuable insights and experience on migration patterns, labor rights, and socio-economic dynamics in the region.

Given the prevalence of undocumented migrant workers in the palm oil industry, there are many cases of limited access to education for stateless children of Indonesian female migrant workers in Malaysia. In line with targets 8.8 and 10.7 in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), it is explained that every country needs to protect the rights of migrant workers, especially female migrant workers, and facilitate safe migration mobility (Sholina, 2022). Through collaboration with Universiti Utara Malaysia, it presents an opportunity to engage with local communities, civil society organizations, and policymakers to address the specific needs and vulnerabilities of migrant children and their families. By leveraging the university's research capabilities, community networks, and advocacy platforms, the international service project can develop targeted interventions and advocacy strategies aimed at promoting the rights, well-being, and socio-economic inclusion of migrant children in Malaysia.

By fostering partnerships between academics, government agencies, and non-governmental organizations in Malaysia and Indonesia, the international service project can promote holistic and sustainable solutions that address the root causes of statelessness, exploitation, and marginalization among migrant children and their families. Engaging in community service is a fundamental responsibility of educators, aiming to foster community development and promote inclusive practices. The proposed community service effort in Malaysia focuses on raising national awareness through targeted educational interventions for stateless children. This narrative explains the overarching objective and significance of the initiative in academic discourse. The primary objective of the community service initiative is to address the various challenges faced by stateless children in Malaysia, particularly those related to their lack of access to education and legal recognition. Stateless children, often marginalized and excluded from formal institutions, represent a vulnerable demographic that requires urgent attention and support. Through targeted educational interventions, the initiative seeks to empower stateless children with knowledge, skills, and a sense of national identity, thereby fostering social inclusion and resilience. In essence, the initiative seeks to strengthen national awareness among stateless children, instilling in them a deep understanding of Malaysian culture, history, and civic values. By providing knowledge about the nation's heritage and diverse cultural tapestry, the initiative aims to foster a sense of belonging and solidarity among stateless children, transcending legal and social barriers.

The initiative aspires to promote the principles of human rights and social justice by advocating for the rights of stateless children to education, legal recognition, and dignified livelihoods. Through collaborative efforts with local stakeholders, government agencies, and civil society organizations, the initiative seeks to raise awareness about the plight of stateless children and mobilize collective action towards systemic reforms and policy interventions. In addition, the initiative underscores the role of educators as agents of change and advocates for social equity and inclusion. By utilizing pedagogical strategies, experiential learning approaches, and community engagement frameworks, educators seek to create transformative learning experiences that empower stateless children to navigate social challenges and realize their full potential as engaged citizens. The community service initiative represents a concerted effort to advance the principles of social justice, human rights, and inclusive education in Malaysia. Through collaborative partnerships, educational interventions, and advocacy efforts, the initiative aims to raise national awareness, promote social cohesion, and empower stateless children as agents of positive change in their communities and beyond. By embracing diversity and upholding the rights of all individuals, Malaysia can aspire towards a more just, inclusive and resilient society that reflects its rich cultural heritage and national aspirations.

The issues underlying community service initiatives focused on stateless children in Malaysia encapsulate a complex web of challenges stemming from legal, social, and educational gaps. At its core, the central issue revolves around the plight of stateless children who lack legal recognition and access to basic rights, including education, health care, and protection under the law. Stateless children often find themselves marginalized and excluded from formal institutions due to their ambiguous legal status, denying them the opportunity to fully participate in society and realize their potential. The lack of legal documentation exacerbates vulnerabilities and perpetuates cycles of poverty, exploitation, and social exclusion among stateless children. Without legal identity and documentation, they face significant barriers to accessing essential services, such as education and health care, further exacerbating their marginalization and hampering their prospects for socio-economic advancement. The issue of statelessness intersects with broader socio-economic and political dynamics, including migration patterns, citizenship laws, and intergovernmental relations. Stateless children, especially those from migrant backgrounds, often fall through the cracks of existing legal frameworks and bureaucratic processes, leaving them trapped in limbo with limited avenues for assistance or support. Furthermore, a lack of awareness and understanding around statelessness perpetuates misunderstanding and stigmatization, further marginalizing affected children and undermining efforts to effectively address their needs.

Addressing the root causes and consequences of statelessness among children requires a multidimensional approach that addresses legal, social, and educational barriers while fostering empathy, awareness, and inclusive practices within the community. The problem statement underscores the urgent need to address the systemic challenges and injustices faced by stateless children in Malaysia, including legal ambiguity, social exclusion, and limited access to essential services. By recognizing and addressing the root causes of statelessness, Malaysia can work towards creating a more inclusive, equitable, and rights-based society that upholds the dignity and well-being of all its members. In doing so, the project applies a comprehensive problem-solving approach that encompasses a range of critical aspects. The initial step begins with an in-depth Needs Assessment aimed at identifying the specific barriers and needs of children of undocumented migrant workers in Malaysia, thereby enabling the project to tailor its actions more effectively. In addition, the approach focuses on leveraging local potential by recognizing and leveraging the resources, talents and competencies of the Malaysian community to enhance the sustainability and relevance of the programme to its primary target audience. The framework also encourages partnerships with stakeholders such as government agencies, organisations, educational institutions and community leaders who play a vital role in mobilizing the necessary resources and support. The project links local issues to global issues and considers the broader social, economic and educational factors of migrant workers.

#### **METHOD**

The community service activities on Education and Identity Strengthening for the Children of Undocumented Indonesian Migrant Workers (PMI) in Malaysia is a collaborative effort between the University of Mataram and Universiti Utara Malaysia. The primary focus of this program is on the children of Undocumented Indonesian Migrant Workers in Malaysia who are products of mixed marriages and subsequently left without formal education. This program suggests a target area in Kedah, Malaysia with an estimated around 45 children of elementary school age. This activity is designed to foster national insight, adaptation, and motivational skills among PMI children at the Rohingya Learning Center in Kedah, Malaysia. This program is carried out in three phases, the preparation phase, program implementation phase, and community awareness strengthening phase.

The preparation phase has been carried out post-October 2023 after Mataram Universiti's community service team brought on board Universiti Utara Malaysia. A series of online meetings were conducted in order to settle on the meeting point and the activity objective. There were initially two proposed location options which included Baitul Rohmah Rohingya Learning Center and Sanggar Belajar Permai. After considering factors of accessibility, permits, and the number of target participants, it was decided that the activity would be focused on the Rohingya Learning Center, Kedah, Malaysia. This decision was based on ease of access, coordination with partners, and wider target coverage.

In the program implementation stage, there are three main activities carried out, such as:

## 1. National Identity Awareness Workshop

This activity uses a narrative approach to help undocumented PMI children understand Indonesian culture, history, and national values. Through captivating narratives, young people will reconnect with their roots and enhance their national identity. Their existence as foreign-born children makes them less familiar with Indonesian national values (Samad et al., 2023).

#### 2. Self Adaption Introduction Workshop

This training aims to equip PMI children with the skills needed to adapt to life in Malaysia. The materials provided include language skills, understanding cultural standards, and strategies for surviving in a new environment. It is hoped that through this training, PMI children can be more confident in living their daily lives in the country where they live.

### 3. Motivation Session

This session is designed to provide encouragement to undocumented PMI children so that they continue to have hopes and dreams. By presenting inspiring presentations, goal-setting activities, and mentoring sessions, PMI children are encouraged to have a brighter vision for the future and the confidence to achieve their dreams.

Through interactive sessions, workshops, and mentoring activities, participating children will be empowered to envision a path to personal growth and academic achievement. The culmination of this service activity is designed to last for three days, where intensive engagement and interaction with the children will take place. This timeframe allows for the delivery of comprehensive educational modules, interactive sessions, and meaningful exchanges aimed at instilling confidence, resilience, and a sense of purpose among participants.

All these activities are carried out by involving a team of experts and students from the University of Utara Malaysia and the Baitul Rohmah Rohingya Learning Center which is a learning center for undocumented children. After the implementation stage of the program is carried out, there is also a stage of strengthening community awareness. The continuation of this program is to raise awareness of migrant

worker issues through social media campaigns and outreach programs. By involving the larger community, the program hopes to create empathy, understanding, and support for undocumented migrant worker children and their families. In addition, the goal of this program is to make Indonesian migrant workers in Malaysia more inclusive and supportive by promoting education and advocacy.

Overall, this problem-solving strategy combines specific interventions for undocumented migrant children with broader community education initiatives to address institutional issues and social stigma associated with migrant worker issues in Malaysia. Through this program, it is hoped to empower undocumented migrant children and promote positive social change at the individual and community levels by combining local observations with global ideas.

#### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Based on the collaborative international service activities between the University of Mataram and Universiti Utara Malaysia at the Baitul Rohmah Rohingya Learning Center, a number of important findings have been provided that can be the basis for further efforts to provide access to education and welfare for children of undocumented Indonesian Migrant Workers in Malaysia.

First, it was found that the high number of children of undocumented Indonesian Migrant Workers in Malaysia indicates a complex phenomenon of undocumented migration. Some of these children are the result of marriages between mothers with legal citizenship. Their existence shows the urgent need for a more comprehensive strategy in addressing the issue of documentation and child protection. In addition to administrative issues, these children also face the risk of exploitation, violence, and human trafficking, which further worsens their lives.

The citizenship status of children in Malaysia is highly dependent on the marital status and citizenship of their parents, in accordance with the principle of jus sanguinis stipulated in Article 14 (1b) and Part II of the Federal Constitution of Malaysia (Sopyan, 2021). To acquire Malaysian citizenship, a child must be born in the country to a legally married couple, where one parent is a citizen or permanent resident of Malaysia. However, in reality, this system leaves many children at risk of statelessness even though they were born in Malaysia and have direct ties to the country. Children born to stateless parents are categorized as "genuinely stateless" (Sanghvi et al., 2022).

Children born in Malaysia may be vulnerable to statelessness due to various legal and administrative constraints, such as unregistered marriages of parents, unregistered births, and the lack of clear administrative procedures for granting citizenship to adopted children and children found abandoned. If the parents' marriage is unregistered, children born from the relationship may be considered illegitimate and risk losing their citizenship rights. Several legal cases in Malaysia have shown that children born to unregistered couples have been denied citizenship because they are considered to follow the citizenship of their mother (Sanghvi et al., 2022).

Second, children with illegal status are not recognized in the formal education system in Malaysia, resulting in them losing their basic right to education. In fact, children under the age of 18 should have the right to education. As explained in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in articles 28 and 29, which emphasize that every child has the right to basic, secondary, and higher education to develop their abilities and talents to the maximum. In addition, it is also in line with point 4 in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which focuses on inclusive, equitable, and quality education for every child in the world (Shazana et al., 2025). Although there are difficulties for those with stateless children in obtaining formal education, there is a temporary solution in the form of non-formal education. They study in studios or non-formal learning centers in the form of Community Learning Centers (CLC) (Lee & Hoque, 2024), such as the Rohingya Learning Center, which provides basic non-formal education. However, this non-formal education often does not meet the standards required for

further academic recognition, making the future of these children very uncertain. This condition requires an inclusive education policy that can bridge the gap between formal and non-formal education for undocumented children. Third, related to the distribution of age and level of education, where the majority of these children are between 7 and 18 years old, the age group that should be in compulsory education. The division of classes into four levels based on ability shows that there is an effort to adapt education to the individual needs of children. However, limitations in the use of the national curriculum that is not always in line with the national education system can make it difficult for students to advance to higher levels of education (Thuraisingam et al., 2022). In addition, the lack of adequate teacher training is still a challenge for the quality of education. The implementation of an adaptive curriculum and training for educators can be an important step to improve the quality of learning in these centers.

Fourth, while trying dealing with the problem of stateless children of migrant workers, it was revealed that higher education institutions, particularly in Indonesia, such as University of Mataram, and in Malaysia is Universiti Utara Malaysia that have pertinent responsibilities. Through the Tri Dharma of higher education, it is explained how universities synchronize in fostering the integration of education through service, teaching, and research to enable contribution to development beyond Indonesia. Also, in this case, the University of Mataram's community service unit participation is a commendable development for out-of-class activities in terms of enhancing student engagement towards issues of migration and global development (Universitas Mataram, 2023). Besides the existing MoU adding Universiti Utara Malaysia's involvement serves as another important purpose to guarantee the complete execution of the proposed activities. The purpose of the involvement of Universiti Utara Malaysia was to improve the project by providing educational and psychological counseling to the stateless children in Malaysia. By leveraging their expertise and resources, Universiti Utara Malaysia intends to inspire these children to persevere in pursuing education and foster aspirations for the future. The collaboration between the University of Mataram and Universiti Utara Malaysia signifies a joint effort to address the challenges faced by stateless children, especially in accessing quality education and envisioning brighter prospects. The collaboration between Universiti Mataram and Universiti Utara Malaysia underlines the commitment to fostering the educational aspirations and holistic development of stateless children, thereby contributing to the broader goals of social inclusion, human rights and sustainable development in Malaysia and beyond.

Fifth, in the implementation of this program, it was found that the non-governmental organization, the Rohingya Learning Center, played a vital role in filling the educational gap. This institution provides learning opportunities for stateless children, who would most likely not have received an education if not for the intervention of such an institution. The center also serves as a safe place for children to learn and interact, creating an environment that supports their social and emotional development. In addition, through non-formal learning facilities that can be accessed by stateless migrant workers in Malaysia, it can reduce the level of crime against minors, such as exploitation, human trafficking, and forced labor of minors (Jannati et al., 2023). The existence of institutions such as the Rohingya Learning Center must be supported continuously, both by the government and international organizations, to ensure the sustainability of their programs.

Lastly, considering the socio-economic background of disadvantaged migrant workers, efforts to introduce culture and provide motivation to learn are very important. The workshop activities held within the framework of this program serve as a means to foster self-confidence and enthusiasm for learning in children. Positive responses from teachers and students indicate that more personal and contextual interactions can increase children's interest in learning. Strengthening an approach that focuses on children's psychosocial needs, in addition to academic aspects, is key to improving the quality of education provided.

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#### CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

From the perspective of community service implementation for undocumented Indonesian children overseas, it is apparent that undocumented Indonesian children in Malaysia encounter numerous challenges that impede their access to education and quality living standards. A more multifaceted approach that addresses all elements pertaining to the child, such as education and social welfare, is highly recommended involving all relevant parties. Apart from that, it is also important to promote the partnership of private and public educational institutions with governmental and nongovernmental bodies to construct an all-embracing system for accommodating migrants and undocumented children of school age that is proactive. These measures will help improve the welfare of these children, thus aiding in the evolution of a just and more equitable society in the years to come. Based on some of the crucial issues concerning undocumented migrant children in Malaysia, the Rohingya Learning Center identified a number of undeveloped areas which are most important and relevant to this activity.

The findings from this activity underline the critical need of providing long-term aid for educational programs aimed at undocumented children. Support can come in different forms such as financial resources but also includes many other constituents like governments, international organization, or even local citizens in the form of active participation. It becomes essential in the formation of an educational framework to cater to all children without considering their status or position. This is necessary to create an inclusive education system that is accessible to all children, regardless of their legal status. These ongoing programs should be designed to not only meet basic educational needs, but also to provide relevant life skills, which can help these children adapt and thrive in the future.

#### **Acknowledgments**

Our research team would like to thank LPPM University of Mataram as a funding program, Universiti Utara Malaysia, and Baitul Rohmah Learning Center as international collaboration partners. We hope that this project will bring a positive impact on education and development between Indonesia and Malaysia.

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