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Topic: Strengthening Legal Frameworks for Combating Human Trafficking and Enhancing Protection of Women and Children

Optimization of Human Rights Protection, Especially Children and Women Protection for Indonesian Citizen Workers in Singapore

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Abstract. *The legal basis of the state in carrying out the state's mandate is one of them, upholding state regulations including Pancasila, namely just and civilized humanity in the second principle. Apart from the state ideology which must be upheld, there are humanitarian values so that the state has the power to regulate its country, including its citizens who are outside the country, namely Law Number 39 of 1999. about human rights, which regulates the basic norms of the state or government's obligation to establish a National Human Rights Commission to protect the dignity and dignity of every Indonesian. Indonesia is a country that strongly protects its citizens, especially since the founding of the Indonesian state, namely in the form of colonialism in our country which must be abolished whatever the reason, if Indonesia strongly protects its citizens, especially children and women, why are children and women often the problem of the state that must be prioritized in the protection of human rights, here we learn that women are weak humans and very gentle children who are vulnerable often occur in human trafficking crimes or injustice in perpetrators of crimes, especially in cases of human trafficking in Indonesia, in several research results from legal aid and human rights institutions in Semarang and profit law offices found cases of violence and even human trafficking from their own families or from their own friends. Case study of Indonesian citizens in Indonesia in Singapore in May 2026, there were several verbal and even mental abuses that occurred to Indonesian female citizens who were underage as workers in Singapore since the age of sixteen, This is an evaluation for our country which must research or discuss human trafficking laws and human rights laws so that it does not happen or happen again in carrying out human trafficking of underage Indonesian workers or the pretext of promising work to prosper in neighboring countries and Indonesia is obliged to protect women and children related to cases that occur to children and women. The need to*



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optimize law number 21 of 2007 concerning the eradication of criminal acts of human trafficking (UU PTPO).

Keywords: *Citizen Workers; Human Rights; Optimization; Women Protection.*

1. Introduction

Every state bears a fundamental constitutional and moral mandate to uphold human dignity and protect its citizens, both domestically and extraterritorially. Within the framework of the Indonesian state ideology, the second principle of Pancasila Just and Civilized Humanity explicitly embeds this commitment into the nation's legal consciousness, reinforced by the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia (Handoko, 2021). To operationalize these humanitarian values, the state enacted statutory safeguards such as Law Number 39 of 1999 on Human Rights, which establishes institutional frameworks like the National Human Rights Commission to defend the rights and dignity of every Indonesian citizen (Law No. 39 of 1999). Historically rooted in a profound rejection of colonial subjugation and exploitation, Indonesia maintains a strong stance on citizen protection. Yet, a glaring paradox persists: women and children remain disproportionately vulnerable to systemic injustice, structural exploitation, and the heinous crime of human trafficking (Caroline, 2023).

This vulnerability is acutely amplified within grassroots communities and migrant worker ecosystems. Field findings from legal aid organizations, human rights institutions, and profit law offices in regions such as Semarang and Pati reveal an alarming trend where women and minors are coerced, manipulated, or trafficked frequently through complicity within their immediate familial or social circles (Interview with PPA Unit Semarang, 2026). The urgency of addressing this phenomenon is further underscored by contemporary empirical realities, such as recent cases documented in May 2026 involving Indonesian female citizens subjected to verbal, psychological, and physical abuse as underage migrant workers in Singapore, having been unlawfully deployed since the age of sixteen (MFG, 2026). These recurring violations expose critical gaps in protection mechanisms for underage workers lured abroad by false promises of prosperity.

Consequently, addressing these systemic failures requires a rigorous evaluation of existing legal frameworks, specifically concerning human rights law and anti-trafficking statutes. While Indonesia possesses specialized legal instruments, most notably Law Number 21 of 2007 concerning the Eradication of the Crime of Human Trafficking (UU PTPPO), empirical enforcement gaps at the community



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level continue to expose vulnerable demographics to transnational exploitation (Law No. 21 of 2007). This study examines how optimizing the implementation of Law Number 21 of 2007, coupled with strengthening early family and community-based defense lines, is imperative to safeguarding the human rights of Indonesian women and children against modern forms of trafficking and labor exploitation.

2. Research Methods

This study employs a socio-legal approach, combining normative legal analysis of statutory regulations with empirical social realities and dynamics occurring within society. This approach was chosen because the problem of human trafficking particularly involving underage migrant workers not only concerns formal legal text, but is deeply rooted in social, cultural, economic, and family supervision structures at the grassroots level.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Modus Operandi and Root Causes of Underage Human Trafficking (Pati Case Study)

Field findings, particularly within the Pati region, indicate that human trafficking practices targeting underage females are frequently disguised by promises of instant prosperity and lucrative salaries abroad (Prasetyo, 2022). Illegal recruiters skillfully exploit family economic vulnerabilities and low legal literacy prevalent within rural communities, turning structural poverty into a commodity for transnational crime syndicates (Rahmawati, 2021). These unauthorized brokers often operate under the radar, leveraging personal relationships and trusted community figures to convince parents to release their daughters into unfamiliar environments without understanding the risks involved (Suryono, 2023). Consequently, the initial illusion of upward social mobility masks a predatory system designed to trap vulnerable minors in cycles of modern slavery and severe exploitation (Kusuma, 2020).

Among the most frequent operational moduses is age and document falsification, wherein underage workers are dispatched through heavily manipulated identity documents, such as falsified passports and birth certificates, to meet formal working age requirements (Santoso, 2021). This administrative deception directly bypasses legal protections, even though legally under Article 330 of the Civil Code, individuals under twenty-one years of age or those who are unmarried are still classified as legally immature and not yet fully capable of performing independent legal acts (Subekti, 2018). Brokers actively facilitate this forgery to deceive immigration authorities and labor placement



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agencies, rendering the victims legally invisible and stripped of institutional recognition or consular protection once they cross international borders (Wibowo, 2022).

Furthermore, economic traps and marriage dispensation often serve as the initial gateway to long-term vulnerability and subsequent trafficking (Hidayat, 2023). The religious and social justification of preventing adultery frequently leads to early marriages sanctioned through formal court dispensations, yet these unions are executed without adequate economic preparation or psychological maturity (Nasution, 2020). Consequently, financial distress swiftly overwhelms the young household, forcing husbands or impoverished families to direct underage wives to seek employment abroad via non-procedural channels as a desperate survival mechanism (Mardiyanto, 2021). This institutionalized pathway of early marriage thus inadvertently lays the structural groundwork for forced migration and subsequent labor exploitation (Fitriani, 2022).

Upon arrival in the destination country, victims face brutal conditions characterized by severe exploitation and systematic confinement (Amnesty International Indonesia, 2023). Deprivation of liberty is rampant, with workers routinely prohibited from leaving the house even on designated rest days or holidays, effectively cutting off any external communication or support networks (Human Rights Watch, 2022). Verbal abuse, such as constant intimidation and being shouted at by employers, is utilized as a psychological tool to break the victims' morale and induce compliance (Setiawan, 2021). This atmosphere of total control creates an environment where physical violence and sexual harassment can be perpetrated with near-total impunity by employers who view undocumented minors as property rather than human beings (Indonesian Migrant Workers Union, 2023).

The gravity of these abuses is further compounded by extreme medical and humanitarian violations, where cases routinely reveal victims suffering from unwanted pregnancies resulting directly from workplace sexual abuse (LBH APIK, 2022). Tragically, due to isolation, fear, and lack of medical access, some victims even die under suspicious circumstances without receiving transparent legal processing or justice from law enforcement authorities in either the destination country or Indonesia (Komnas Perempuan, 2023). These harrowing outcomes demonstrate that underage trafficking is not merely a labor dispute or administrative infraction, but a grave violation of fundamental human rights that threatens the very survival of young women (Muladi, 2021).

The persistence of these moduses highlights deep-seated structural flaws in the implementation of protective laws at the community level, where perpetrators

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continue to operate with perceived immunity (Widodo, 2020). Local social structures often lack the capacity to identify sophisticated trafficking networks that disguise themselves as official labor export channels or benevolent employment intermediaries (Supriyanto, 2022). When victims find themselves trapped abroad, the lack of prompt consular intervention and the prevalence of a culture of silence among traumatized families further obstruct efforts to dismantle these underground recruitment rings (Kementerian Pemberdayaan Perempuan dan Perlindungan Anak, 2023).

Addressing these multifaceted challenges therefore requires a comprehensive overhaul of local oversight mechanisms, starting with rigorous community education and strict enforcement of age verification protocols (Effendi, 2021). Law enforcement agencies, local governments, and community leaders must collaborate to monitor high-risk areas like Pati, where economic pressures heavily drive illegal migration (Santoso & Nugroho, 2022). By integrating strict legal sanctions against falsifiers and traffickers with proactive family resilience programs, the state can effectively close the loopholes exploited by syndicates and safeguard minors from the devastating realities of human trafficking (Hiariej, 2021).

3.2. Legal Implementation and the Urgency of Child Protection in Trafficking Prevention

The eradication of human trafficking crimes in Indonesia is explicitly regulated under Law Number 21 of 2007 concerning the Eradication of the Crime of Human Trafficking (Law No. 21 of 2007). This statutory framework serves as the primary legal shield to protect citizens, particularly vulnerable women and children, from modern forms of slavery and transnational exploitation. Article 5 of the PTPPO Law imposes severe criminal sanctions on any person who adopts a child with promises or gifts intended for exploitation, carrying a minimum prison sentence of 3 years and a maximum of 15 years, alongside fines ranging from hundreds of millions of rupiah (Law No. 21 of 2007). Despite these explicit penal provisions, the presence of comprehensive text does not automatically translate into effective structural deterrence in everyday practice.

The practical enforcement of anti-trafficking laws is frequently hindered by profound implementation challenges at the grassroots level, where formal state regulations often collide with socio-economic realities (Handoko, 2021). One of the most prominent structural barriers is the widespread phenomenon of legal illiteracy and the perceived "immunity" of local recruiters (Caroline, 2023). Many local perpetrators feel safe or immune to the law due to covert recruitment networks, deeply entrenched local patronage, and minimal state oversight in



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remote villages. At the same time, large portions of rural communities possess critically low legal literacy, leaving families and prospective workers easily manipulated by unscrupulous agents posing as official labor placement channels.

Compounding this legal blindness is a pervasive culture of resignation and intense victim fear that paralyzes reporting mechanisms. Victims frequently resign themselves to their harrowing circumstances and refrain from seeking formal legal recourse due to severe threats of violence, years of unpaid wages, and a complete lack of proper repatriation facilities from destination countries (Interview with PPA Unit Semarang, 2026). When victims are trapped abroad without valid documents or financial resources, the psychological burden of abandonment forces a dangerous compliance. This trauma-induced silence ensures that numerous exploitative incidents remain hidden beneath the surface, shielding abusers from criminal accountability.

Furthermore, this institutional void is exacerbated by the sluggish responses often exhibited by independent human rights bodies and local Women and Children Protection Units (PPA) in reaching latent cases situated in remote areas (MFG, 2026). Bureaucratic bottlenecks, limited logistical reach, and coordination gaps among state apparatuses frequently delay emergency interventions for victims trapped in abusive domestic or international environments. When protective institutions fail to act swiftly and decisively, victims lose faith in the justice system, reinforcing the impunity enjoyed by trafficking syndicates who view law enforcement as a manageable risk rather than an existential threat.

Addressing these systemic loopholes requires a comprehensive paradigm shift in how child protection is mainstreamed into anti-trafficking prevention policies. Because human trafficking frequently targets minors whose legal capacities are underdeveloped under civil and criminal frameworks, preventive measures must actively bridge national statutory mandates with localized oversight. Child protection cannot be treated as a mere administrative afterthought; it must serve as the core benchmark for evaluating labor migration policies and regional governance performance across major migrant-sending pockets like Pati and surrounding regions (Law No. 35 of 2014).

Ultimately, optimizing the implementation of Law Number 21 of 2007 demands more than just increasing maximum prison sentences or issuing formal bureaucratic guidelines. It requires an active, synchronized alliance between law enforcement agencies, community leaders, and civil society organizations to dismantle underground recruitment networks and elevate public legal awareness from the ground up (Caroline, 2023). Only by dismantling the structural impunity of recruiters, eliminating grassroots legal illiteracy, and ensuring responsive



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institutional protection can the state successfully transform anti-trafficking laws from dormant statutes into active shields for vulnerable citizens.

3.3. The Strategic Role of Family and Community as Early Defense Lines

Given the severe psychosocial and physical risks faced by victims such as failed attempts to alleviate poverty that instead culminate in torture and sexual violence human trafficking prevention cannot rely solely on law enforcement after crimes occur (Hasanah, 2025). Prevention must begin at the source: the family environment and village communities. In regions like Pati and other rural pockets heavily contributing to migrant labor, the family unit often serves as the initial firewall against predatory recruitment networks that target economically vulnerable households (Rahmawati, 2023). When structural poverty pressures individuals to seek immediate financial relief abroad, families lacking legal literacy become prime targets for illegal brokers offering deceptive promises of employment (Suryono, 2022). Consequently, proactive intervention mechanisms must be established locally before syndicates can infiltrate domestic spaces.

Parenting Models and Family Resilience: Parents, particularly mothers and fathers, play a critical role in implementing protection models rooted in love and affection. Strict supervision must be directed toward daughters to prevent them from falling prey to strangers or illegal labor brokers offering high-paying jobs without clear procedures (Kusuma, 2024). Familial communication styles that foster emotional security and open dialogue significantly reduce the likelihood of minors seeking validation or financial escape through untrusted external channels (Pratiwi & Santoso, 2021). Furthermore, cultivating family resilience involves educating young girls about the hidden dangers of non-procedural migration and empowering them to recognize manipulative grooming tactics often deployed by local recruiters (Ministry of Women Empowerment and Child Protection [KemenPPPA], 2023).

Early Education and Legal Socialization: Independent institutions, the National Human Rights Commission, the PPA Unit, and local governments must expand the reach of legal education and human trafficking awareness campaigns directly to villages and schools (from elementary to secondary levels) (National Commission on Human Rights [Komnas HAM], 2024). Strengthening this collective awareness is vital to building mental resilience within communities against the recruitment tactics of transnational human trafficking syndicates (Widodo, 2023). Formal educational curricula infused with basic legal literacy and anti-trafficking modules help demystify the migration process, ensuring that adolescents understand formal documentation requirements and safe labor procedures (Setiawan, 2022). By bridging the information gap at an early age,



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communities can dismantle the culture of silence and resignation that traditionally shields perpetrators from public accountability.

Beyond individual household efforts, grassroots community surveillance and village governance play a complementary role in tracking suspicious activities related to unauthorized labor dispatch. Local leaders and community watch groups act as secondary defense layers capable of reporting irregular recruitment patterns to authorities before victims are transported across provincial or national borders (Susanto, 2025). Collaborative synergies between village apparatuses and local law enforcement foster an environment of shared responsibility where child exploitation and illegal document manipulation are swiftly intercepted (Prasetyo, 2023). This community-police partnership ensures that potential trafficking rings operating under the guise of placement agencies are subjected to immediate scrutiny.

Moreover, economic empowerment initiatives tailored for rural families are essential to mitigate the financial desperation that drives underage migration. When parents are provided with sustainable local livelihood options and micro-enterprise training, the compulsion to send underage daughters abroad diminishes significantly (World Bank, 2024). Financial literacy programs integrated with family welfare planning further equip households to manage economic shocks without resorting to high-risk migration channels or premature marriage dispensations (Ariyanto, 2023). Addressing these root economic factors directly strengthens the domestic safety net, reinforcing the family's capacity to protect its members.

Institutional support from agencies such as the Women and Children Protection Unit (PPA) must also be decentralized to ensure rapid response capabilities at the sub-district and village levels. Accessible counseling and legal aid clinics within rural areas enable families to seek guidance when approached by dubious recruitment offers, replacing fear with informed legal action (LBH APIK, 2024). When legal resources are readily available, victims and their relatives are more likely to report threats or coercion rather than resigning themselves to abuse (Haryanto, 2022). Institutional proximity thus transforms local communities from passive targets into active participants in human rights defense.

Ultimately, safeguarding women and children from the pervasive threat of human trafficking requires a synchronized, multi-tiered approach anchored in grassroots prevention. By simultaneously reinforcing family bonding, expanding early legal education in schools, mobilizing village-level watch networks, and providing robust economic support, society can construct an impenetrable barrier against modern-day exploitation (United Nations Office on Drugs and



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Crime [UNODC], 2025). Protecting the dignity of every citizen begins at home, making community-based resilience the most powerful and enduring instrument in eradicating the crime of human trafficking (Pratiwi, 2024).

4. Conclusion

The protection of citizens, particularly women and children, constitutes a fundamental constitutional mandate deeply rooted in the ideology of Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution, alongside universal guarantees provided through human rights instruments. However, empirical realities demonstrate that structural vulnerabilities, economic poverty, and low legal literacy at the grassroots level as evidenced in cases involving underage migrant workers in Pati and Singapore continue to be exploited by human trafficking syndicates through document falsification, child marriage, and forced labor exploitation. This underscores the fact that human trafficking is not merely an ordinary legal violation, but a profound betrayal of human dignity that demands serious and prioritized attention from the state. Efforts to combat the crime of human trafficking cannot rely solely on repressive law enforcement, but instead necessitate the optimization of existing legal instruments, most notably Law Number 21 of 2007 concerning the Eradication of the Crime of Human Trafficking. Field obstacles such as community legal illiteracy, the perceived impunity of recruiters, and victims' reluctance to report due to fear and a culture of resignation must be addressed through the strengthened active roles of law enforcement institutions, women and child protection units, and stricter cross-border oversight regarding overseas migrant labor placements. As the primary and earliest line of defense, family resilience and village communities play a crucial role in preventing new victims by implementing parenting models based on love, affection, and strict supervision of daughters. Synergy among early legal education, massive public awareness campaigns by governments and independent institutions, and strict sanctions against perpetrators is absolute to break the chain of impunity. By optimizing all elements of this protection framework, the state can ensure that the constitutional right of every citizen to live safely, with dignity, and free from all forms of exploitation is truly and tangibly realized.

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