



The Policy Agenda Process for the Protection of Indonesian Migrant Workers at the Regional Level: A Multi-Actor Governance Analysis

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ABSTRACT

International labor migration is a phenomenon inseparable from the dynamics of development and inequality of employment opportunities, particularly in sending regions of Indonesian Migrant Workers (PMI). Jember Regency is one of the regions with a high rate of sending PMI in East Java Province, making the issue of PMI protection a significant issue on the regional policy agenda. This study aims to analyze the policy agenda process for PMI protection in Jember Regency, by exploring how the issue is recognized, prioritized, and formulated in regional policies. This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive design. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with local government, legislative, and civil society actors, as well as analysis of policy documents, including regional development planning documents and regulations related to PMI protection. Data analysis was conducted thematically to identify patterns of policy agendas, actor roles, and structural barriers in the policy formulation process. The results show that PMI protection in Jember Regency has gained recognition as a public issue and is integrated into regional planning documents, indicating administrative and discursive legitimacy. However, the policy agenda process stagnated before producing formal and binding regional policies. The main obstacles include limited institutional capacity, overlapping authority between regional agencies, political caution, and the complexity of governance across levels of government. These findings highlight the gap between the recognition of the issue and the capacity of regional policy systems to implement substantive policies for the protection of migrant workers.

1 | Introduction

Indonesian migrant workers face complex challenges, which is why local governments are playing a role in providing protection by developing policies to safeguard migrant workers. International labor migration is a global phenomenon inseparable from the dynamics of global economic development, structural inequality between regions, and limited decent employment opportunities in countries of origin (Ness, 2023; Sari & Ningsih, 2025). This phenomenon develops along with the process of economic globalization that encourages labor mobility across countries in response to differences in wage levels, labor demand, and domestic labor market capacity (Castles et al., 2014; Malik, 2018; Benabed, 2024). In many cases, labor migration becomes a survival strategy for households in developing countries facing structural poverty, unemployment, and low-quality jobs in the informal sector (Juliana et al., 2023; Purba et al., 2024; Astuti et al., 2025; Feriyanto, 2025).

In the context of developing countries, migrant workers are often positioned as important economic actors through the significant contribution of remittances to the national and regional economies (Azam, 2015; Azmy, 2023; Rifa, 2024; Siregar, 2024). Remittances not only serve as a source of household income but also play a role in maintaining macroeconomic stability, increasing consumption, and supporting the education and health costs of migrant workers' families (Rohmatin et al., 2025; Agus, 2025). However, these economic contributions often come at a high social cost. Migrant workers face various forms of vulnerability, ranging from labor exploitation, contract violations, gender-based

violence, and human trafficking, especially those who migrate irregularly or work in high-risk work sectors (International Organization for Migration, 2021; Sativa et al., 2025; Abas & Nopianti, 2025; Mardiyati et al., 2026).

This vulnerability demonstrates that labor migration is not merely an economic issue, but also a social and humanitarian issue that demands an active state presence (Lami et al., 2022). From a human rights perspective, migrant workers are legal subjects entitled to protection, security, and dignity as citizens, both before departure, while working abroad, and after returning to their home regions (International Labour Organization, 2017). Therefore, the state's failure to provide an effective protection system can be seen as a failure of public policy to fulfill the state's fundamental obligations to its citizens.

In public policy and public administration studies, the issue of migrant worker protection is a crucial arena for assessing state capacity and the quality of governance (Azmy, 2023). Protecting migrant workers requires policies that are not merely regulatory but also collaborative, involving coordination across sectors and actors, both governmental and non-governmental. Thus, the issue of migrant workers reflects a classic public administration challenge: how the state responds to complex, cross-border, and diverse public issues while simultaneously ensuring the rights and safety of its citizens in a sustainable manner.

Indonesia is one of the largest migrant worker-sending countries in Southeast Asia (Safitri & Wibisono, 2023). Irawan (2025)

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explains that East Java Province consistently ranks among the top destinations for Indonesian Migrant Workers (PMI). Jember Regency is even listed as one of the largest contributors of Indonesian migrant workers in the province (Febrianto, 2025). The high number of Indonesian migrant workers departures from Jember Regency is not always accompanied by adequate protection mechanisms, particularly due to the continued prevalence of non-procedural migration practices that place Indonesian migrant workers in a highly vulnerable position to exploitation, employment contract violations, and gender-based and economic violence. From a public administration perspective, the issue of migrant worker protection is not merely understood as an individual failure, but rather as a policy problem closely related to government institutional capacity, coordination between actors, and policy design that is responsive to empirical conditions on the ground (Howlett et al., 2020). Local governments, as the actors closest to the community, have a strategic role in formulating protection policies through regional legal instruments. One form of such policy intervention is the preparation of a Draft Regional Regulation (Raperda) concerning the Protection of Indonesian Migrant Workers and Their Families in Jember Regency. However, the draft regulation formulation process exhibited complex dynamics. The draft regulation on migrant worker protection, proposed in 2017, was not passed due to its perceived ineffectiveness. It was then re-proposed in 2023 with several substantive improvements. This fact indicates that the success of public policy is determined not only by the content of the regulation, but also by the policy formulation process, which involves various actors with varying interests, resources, and power relations.

Previous studies on migrant workers in Indonesia have generally focused on legal protection, the socio-economic conditions of migrant workers, and policy implementation at the national level (Leda et al., 2025). Other studies have highlighted the role of the central government and the weaknesses of the labor migration governance system (Pranoto & Arief, 2017). However, studies specifically examining the policy formulation process at the regional level, particularly by emphasizing the analysis of the roles of actors in the formulation of regional regulations, are still relatively limited. Furthermore, most public policy studies in Indonesia still place government actors at the center of analysis, while the role of non-government actors such as civil society organizations has not been thoroughly examined in the context of regional policy formulation. In fact, in contemporary policy practice, non-state actors often play significant roles as data providers, advocates for the interests of vulnerable groups, and even as policy agenda setters (Rhodes, 1997; Ansell & Gash, 2008). Thus, the research gap in this study lies in the lack of studies that integrate analysis of the roles of government and non-government actors in the process of formulating policies to protect migrant workers at the regional level. This study attempts to fill this gap by presenting an empirical analysis of the dynamics of actors in the formulation of the Draft Regional Regulation on the Protection of Indonesian Migrant Workers in Jember Regency.

This research is grounded in the perspective of public administration, specifically public policy formulation theory and elite theory. Elite theory views public policy as the product preferences and interests of actors with resources, authority, and access to the decision-making process (Dye, 2017). However, developments in contemporary policy theory indicate that the policy process is increasingly influenced by actor networks and collaborative governance, in which non-governmental actors have increasing room to influence policy (Howlett et al., 2020; Ansell & Gash, 2008). By combining elite theory and collaborative governance perspectives, this study attempts to analyze how the

distribution of roles, power relations, and the capacities of government and non-government actors shaped the policy formulation process of the Draft Regional Regulation on the Protection of Indonesian migrant workers in Jember Regency. This approach allows for a more comprehensive and contextual analysis of public policy dynamics at the local level.

Based on the description above, this study aims to analyze the process and dynamics of actors' roles in the policy formulation of the Regional Regulation Draft on the Protection of Indonesian Migrant Workers and Their Families in Jember Regency. Specifically, this study seeks to identify the actors involved, analyze the roles and power relations between actors, and assess the relevance of elite theory in explaining policy formulation practices at the regional level. This study's contributions are both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, this study enriches public administration studies by presenting an empirical analysis of the role of non-state actors in regional policy formulation. Practically, the research findings are expected to serve as a reference for local governments and other stakeholders in designing more inclusive, effective, and social justice-oriented migrant worker protection policies.

2 | Metode

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive design. The qualitative approach was chosen because the study aims to deeply understand the process of the Indonesian migrant workers protection policy agenda at the regional level, particularly regarding actor dynamics, power relations, and the mechanisms of interaction between government and non-government actors within a multi-actor governance framework. This approach is relevant for examining public policy phenomena that are complex, contextual, and fraught with socio-political meaning, thus cannot be adequately explained through a quantitative approach alone (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

This study focuses on the policy agenda stage, a crucial phase in the public policy cycle. The policy agenda is understood as the process by which a public issue receives serious attention from policy actors and is recognized as a problem requiring government intervention (Kingdon, 2011; Howlett et al., 2020). Therefore, the unit of analysis in this study is the process by which the issue of Indonesian migrant workers protection emerges, is debated, and is prioritized on the policy agenda at the local government level. The research location was determined to be the Jember Regency Regional Government. This location was chosen based on empirical considerations that the region faces complex Indonesian migrant workers issues, from a social, economic, and institutional perspective. Therefore, this study will provide a broader understanding of the Indonesian migrant workers protection policy agenda process at the local level.

The research subjects were determined purposively, taking into account the direct involvement of actors in the policy agenda process. Research informants included local government officials with authority in the field of employment and migrant worker protection, members of the Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD) involved in policy discussions related to migrant workers, and representatives of civil society organizations or non-governmental organizations working on migration and migrant worker protection issues. In addition, supporting informants such as academics and community leaders were interviewed to enrich the analytical perspective. Purposive sampling technique was used to ensure that the data obtained was relevant, in-depth, and aligned with the research focus (Patton, 2015).

Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews, documentation studies, and limited observations. The interviews were conducted semi-structured to explore the perspectives, experiences, and roles of each actor in the Indonesian migrant workers protection policy agenda process. The documentation study included a review of policy documents, laws and regulations, official government reports, meeting minutes, and media coverage relevant to Indonesian migrant workers issues. Meanwhile, limited observations were conducted to gain a contextual understanding of policy forums or activities related to Indonesian migrant workers protection issues, where possible. This combination of data collection techniques was used to strengthen the depth and comprehensiveness of the research information (Kvale, 2009).

Data analysis was conducted qualitatively using an interactive analysis model that includes data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing (Miles et al., 2014). Interview data and documentation were analyzed thematically by linking empirical findings to the theoretical framework of policy agendas and multi-actor governance. The analysis process was carried out iteratively and reflectively to ensure a strong connection between the data, theoretical concepts, and the researcher's interpretations. Data validity was maintained through triangulation of sources and methods, confirmation of findings with key informants (member checks), and peer discussions. This strategy was implemented to increase the credibility, dependability, and confirmability of the research results (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Furthermore, this study upholds the ethical principles of social research by ensuring informed consent from informants, maintaining confidentiality, and using research data solely for academic purposes.

3 | Result

3.1 | Recognition of the Issue of Migrant Worker Protection as a Regional Public Problem

The research findings indicate that the protection of migrant workers in Jember Regency has been recognized as a significant public issue at the regional level. This recognition is reflected in the increasing frequency with which Indonesian migrant workers issues emerge in regional policy discourse, including development planning forums, regional coordination meetings, and official statements from government actors. Indonesian migrant workers issues are no longer viewed solely as a matter for individual or family migrant workers, but are understood as structural issues that require the presence of the state through adequate policies and institutions. From a public administration perspective, this condition marks a crucial initial stage in the policy agenda process, namely when an issue is successfully defined as a legitimate public problem (Dye, 2017; Kingdon, 2011).

The recognition of the issue of migrant worker protection in Jember Regency is inextricably linked to the region's characteristics as one of the largest migrant worker-sending regions in East Java Province. The high rate of migrant worker migration abroad, both through procedural and non-procedural means, increases the potential for various vulnerability issues, such as labor rights violations, exploitation, violence, and socioeconomic issues after the migrant workers return. This empirical situation has increased the sensitivity of local government actors to the urgency of migrant worker protection, not only during the placement phase, but also during the pre-placement and post-placement phases. This finding reinforces the view that the magnitude of the problem is a key factor in driving an issue's attention on the regional policy agenda (Howlett et al., 2020).

Normatively, the recognition of the issue of migrant worker protection as a regional public issue is reflected in the adoption

and internalization of the national policy framework. Law Number 18 of 2017 concerning the Protection of Indonesian Migrant Workers serves as the primary foundation defining the authority and responsibility of regional governments in implementing migrant worker protection. This national legal framework was then cascaded down to the provincial level through East Java Provincial Regulation Number 2 of 2022 concerning the Implementation of Migrant Worker Protection. The research findings indicate that the existence of provincial-level regulations serves as both a normative reference and policy pressure for district/city governments, including Jember Regency, to recognize migrant worker issues as part of the regional policy agenda.

The research findings also show that provincial-level regulations serve as the primary reference point in formulating the policy agenda for protecting Indonesian migrant workers in Jember Regency. Local government actors tend to be cautious about raising the issue of Indonesian migrant workers on the formal agenda without a clear legal framework from higher levels of government. This reflects the strong influence of vertical policy relations within the Indonesian governance system, where recognition of an issue at the regional level is heavily influenced by the direction and stability of national and provincial policies. This phenomenon aligns with findings from public policy research in Indonesia, which indicates that regional policy agendas are often responsive to higher-level regulatory frameworks (Arifin, 2024).

The recognition of the issue of migrant worker protection as a regional public issue is also reinforced by empirical findings from previous research. Hartiningsih Astuti et al., (2025) showed that regions with high levels of migrant worker deployment tend to face greater policy pressure to provide comprehensive protection instruments. This pressure originates not only from the central and provincial governments, but also from civil society, the media, and the families of migrant workers directly affected. In the context of Jember Regency, this condition contributed to the formation of a collective awareness among policy actors that migrant worker protection is a strategic public issue that cannot be ignored, even though the implementation of formal policies still faces various structural obstacles.

3.2 | Position of Indonesian Migrant Worker Protection in Regional Planning Documents

The protection of Indonesian Migrant Workers has been explicitly integrated into the Jember Regency regional development planning documents. The inclusion of Indonesian migrant workers issues in the Regional Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMD) reflects the local government's formal recognition of the importance of Indonesian migrant workers protection as part of the regional development agenda. In the document, Indonesian migrant workers protection is positioned as a performance indicator for regional heads, indicating that this issue is not merely sectoral but also directly linked to the overall performance of regional government. In the context of public administration, the integration of issues into planning documents is a crucial mechanism for legitimizing policies and providing strategic direction for development (Dunn, 2018). Performance indicators for migrant worker protection in the Jember Regency Medium-Term Development Plan include the establishment of the One-Stop Integrated Service (LTSA) and the commitment to formulate regional regulations related to migrant workers. The LTSA is viewed as an institutional instrument that facilitates access to services for prospective and retired migrant workers, while also enhancing coordination between regional agencies. Research findings indicate that the LTSA symbolizes the regional government's commitment to addressing migrant worker issues administratively, although its effectiveness still relies heavily on regulatory support, human resources, and adequate budget.

Furthermore, the research findings confirm that, administratively and discursively, the issue of protecting Indonesian migrant workers has gained formal legitimacy within the regional planning system. This legitimacy is evident in the explicit mention of Indonesian migrant workers issues in official planning documents and in local government performance targets. However, this legitimacy in planning documents has not been fully followed by the existence of binding policy instruments, particularly in the form of regional regulations. This situation indicates a gap between planning commitment and policy implementation capacity, a common phenomenon in public policy governance at the regional level (Howlett et al., 2020).

The gap between the planning and implementation of migrant worker protection policies in Jember Regency has also been found in various empirical studies in other regions in Indonesia. Hidayat (2021) showed that the integration of migrant worker issues into regional planning documents is often not accompanied by adequate regulatory and institutional strengthening. Similar findings were expressed by Pomeo & Winarti (2024), who emphasized that many local governments have incorporated migrant worker issues into their Regional Medium-Term Development Plan but have not been able to translate these issues into sustainable operational policies. This indicates that planning documents often serve as a forum for articulating political commitments, without being balanced by robust implementation mechanisms.

Overall, the research findings indicate that the position of migrant worker protection in Jember Regency's regional planning documents reflects the local government's formal recognition and normative commitment to the issue. However, this position remains administrative and symbolic in nature and has not yet been fully translated into legally binding substantive policy. These findings reinforce the argument that the successful integration of the issue into regional planning documents is determined not only by its presence in the Regional Medium-Term Development Plan, but also by the local government's ability to translate this planning commitment into operational and sustainable policy instruments.

3.3 | Dynamics of the Formation of Regional Regulations for the Protection of Indonesian Migrant Workers

Interviews with local government and civil society actors indicate that Jember Regency initiated the drafting of a Regional Regulation (Perda) on the protection of Indonesian migrant workers in 2017. This initiative emerged in response to the increasing number of Indonesian migrant workers from Jember and the various cases of vulnerability experienced by Indonesian migrant workers, both during their placement and after returning to their home areas. In this context, the Perda is seen as a strategic policy instrument to provide legal certainty and clarify the roles and responsibilities of local governments in implementing comprehensive Indonesian migrant workers protection. However, research results indicate that the initiative to draft the Regional Regulation did not result in its ratification. The proposed Regional Regulation Draft (Raperda) was deemed inconsistent with the national policy framework, which was undergoing significant changes at the time, particularly regarding the regulatory transition from Law Number 39 of 2004 to Law Number 18 of 2017 concerning the Protection of Indonesian Migrant Workers. These policy changes at the national level created regulatory uncertainty that directly impacted the legislative process at the regional level, leading local governments to postpone the

ratification of the Regional Regulation to avoid potential policy disharmony.

These findings indicate that vertical policy dynamics between the central, provincial, and district governments are a crucial factor in the policy agenda process at the regional level. Local government actors demonstrate caution in formulating binding regulations without certainty and clarity of policy direction from higher levels of government. This reflects the character of the Indonesian government system, which places cross-level regulatory synchronization as a primary prerequisite for regional policymaking, particularly on strategic issues such as the protection of migrant workers (PMI). Furthermore, the failure to enact regional regulations during this period was perceived by research informants as a form of institutional learning for local governments. This experience fostered increased awareness of the importance of policy harmonization and more intensive coordination with provincial and central governments before proposing regional legislative initiatives. In other words, the failure was not entirely viewed as a policy failure, but rather as an institutional learning process in navigating the complexities of labor migration policy governance.

The findings of this study are consistent with empirical research in other regions in Indonesia, which confirm that the regulatory capacity of local governments is significantly influenced by the clarity, stability, and consistency of national policies. Nuradhawati (2019) demonstrated that regulatory changes at the central level often create uncertainty for local governments in formulating derivative policies, resulting in delays in the formation of regional regulations. In the context of Jember Regency, this situation demonstrates that the dynamics of the formation of the Regional Regulation on the Protection of Indonesian migrant workers are influenced not only by local political commitment but also by the configuration of policies across levels of government that define the scope of local government activity.

3.4 | The Role of Actors and Interactions in the Policy Agenda

The policy agenda process for Indonesian migrant workers in Jember Regency involves the interaction of various actors with different roles and interests. These actors come from the local government, legislative bodies, and civil society, who collectively shape policy dynamics at the local level. The involvement of these many actors reflects the complex and cross-sectoral nature of the Indonesian migrant worker issue, making it impossible for a single actor to address it. In this context, the policy agenda is formed through a process of interaction, negotiation, and exchange of interests between actors. Local governments occupy a central position as key actors in promoting the inclusion of migrant worker protection issues on the formal policy agenda. This role is reflected in the initiatives of regional apparatuses in raising migrant worker issues in planning documents, coordination forums, and internal government discussions. Local governments also function as policy brokers, bridging the interests of various actors, including the central government, provincial governments, and non-state actors. However, research findings indicate that the role of local governments remains heavily influenced by limited authority and institutional capacity, which results in caution in promoting regulatory policies.

On the other hand, the Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD) holds a strategic position in the policy agenda process, particularly regarding its legislative and oversight functions. The research findings indicate that DPRD support is a crucial factor in determining whether the issue of migrant worker protection can

progress to the formal policy formulation stage. Interactions between the executive and legislative branches occur within a dynamic local political framework, where policy issue priorities are often influenced by political considerations, time constraints, and other legislative agendas. This situation demonstrates that the policy agenda process is not only technocratic but also fraught with political dimensions. In addition to government and legislative actors, civil society organizations and Indonesian migrant worker support institutions play a crucial role as advocates. The research findings show that these non-state actors consistently raise the issue of Indonesian migrant worker vulnerability in the public sphere through case support, policy advocacy, and media utilization. This advocacy role contributes to increasing the visibility of Indonesian migrant worker issues and strengthening policy pressure on local governments. These findings confirm that non-state actors play a strategic role in maintaining the sustainability of Indonesian migrant worker issues on the local policy agenda.

The interaction between government, legislative, and civil society actors forms a pattern of relationships that mutually influence the policy agenda for protecting Indonesian migrant workers. While there is room for dialogue and coordination between actors, this interaction has not yet been fully institutionalized formally. This situation makes the policy agenda process highly dependent on individual initiative and specific momentum. This finding aligns with research by [Wahyudi & Nurmandi \(2020\)](#), which states that the success of labor migration issues on the policy agenda is largely determined by the ability of non-state actors to build public narratives and sustain policy pressure.

3.5 | Structural Barriers in Regional Policy Formulation

Although the issue of migrant worker protection has received discursive attention and legitimacy at the regional level, research findings indicate various structural barriers hampering policy formulation in Jember Regency. These barriers are not isolated but arise from a combination of interrelated institutional, administrative, and political factors. This situation has caused the policy agenda for migrant worker protection to stagnate at the recognition and planning stages, unable to transform into legally binding regional policies. One of the main obstacles identified is the limited institutional capacity of local governments. Regional agencies addressing migrant worker issues still face limitations in human resources, budgets, and a lack of clarity regarding the division of tasks. These limitations impact the low capacity of regional institutions to design comprehensive and sustainable policies. In the context of public administration, institutional capacity is a crucial prerequisite for effective policy formulation, particularly on cross-sectoral issues such as migrant worker protection ([Howlett et al., 2020](#)). In addition to limited institutional capacity, the research also revealed overlapping authority among regional government agencies in addressing migrant worker issues. The protection of migrant workers involves various sectors, from employment and social affairs to community empowerment, each of which falls under the authority of a different regional agency. This lack of clarity in coordination and division of roles has resulted in a suboptimal and fragmented policy formulation process. This situation reinforces previous research findings that institutional fragmentation is often a major obstacle to public policy formulation at the regional level.

Another structural barrier relates to political caution in formulating new regulations. Research shows that local government and legislative actors tend to be cautious in pushing for the formation of Regional Regulations on the protection of Indonesian migrant workers, especially in situations of policy uncertainty at the national and provincial levels. This caution is influenced by concerns about potential regulatory disharmony, budgetary implications, and the political risks that may arise from

the ratification of new policies. This phenomenon suggests that the policy formulation process is influenced not only by technocratic considerations, but also by political calculations inherent in the dynamics of local governance ([Dye, 2017](#)).

Overall, the research findings confirm a gap between the recognition of migrant worker protection as a public issue and the ability of regional policy systems to promote it on the formal policy agenda, resulting in binding regulations. This pattern is also found in various studies of migrant worker policies in other regions in Indonesia, which show that the policy agenda for migrant worker protection often stops at the level of normative commitments without being supported by strong policy instruments ([Pomeo & Winarti, 2024](#)). These findings indicate that the complexity of governance across levels of government and limited institutional capacity are key structural factors that need to be addressed to ensure more substantive implementation of migrant worker protection at the regional level.

4 | Discussion

4.1 | Recognition of the Issue of Indonesian Migrant Worker Protection from the Perspective of the Public Policy Agenda

The recognition of the issue of migrant worker protection as a public issue in Jember Regency demonstrates the initial stages of the policy agenda, as outlined in agenda-setting theory. According to [Kingdon \(2011\)](#), an issue can enter the policy agenda when it is perceived as a pressing public problem and receives the attention of policy actors. The findings of this study demonstrate that the high number of migrant workers from Jember and the various cases of vulnerability that accompany it have functioned as problem indicators that have encouraged the issue of migrant workers to gain visibility at the regional level. In the context of public administration, the recognition of an issue as a public problem does not occur neutrally, but rather through a social and political process involving the construction of meaning by policy actors. The issue of migrant workers in Jember Regency is understood not only as a labor issue but also as an issue of citizen protection and state responsibility. This aligns with [Dunn \(2018\)](#) view that policy issues are the result of actors' interpretations of social reality, not merely objective facts.

The findings of this study also support empirical studies in other regions in Indonesia, which show that regions with high levels of migrant worker deployment tend to more quickly recognize migrant worker protection as a public issue. Research by [Astuti et al. \(2025\)](#) found that high exposure to migrant worker risk encourages local governments to pay greater attention to protection issues, although this is not always followed by comprehensive policies. A study by [Hidayat \(2021\)](#) also shows that recognition of migrant worker issues is often driven by pressure from cases and public scrutiny. However, recognition of an issue as a public issue does not necessarily guarantee its continued presence on the formal policy agenda. [Kingdon \(2011\)](#) emphasized that many issues stall at the problem recognition stage without successfully advancing to the decision agenda. In the context of Jember Regency, the research findings indicate that although the issue of migrant workers has been widely recognized, this recognition remains discursive and normative, not yet fully translated into binding policy commitments. Therefore, recognition of migrant worker protection in Jember Regency can be understood as an important initial step, but not yet sufficient in the policy agenda process. This finding confirms that the success of a policy agenda is not only determined by the level of urgency of the problem, but also by the ability of the policy system to transform issue recognition into concrete policy decisions.

4.2 | Integration of Indonesian Migrant Workers Issues in Planning Documents: Between Administrative Legitimacy and Policy Substance

The integration of the issue of migrant worker protection into regional planning documents, particularly the Jember Regency Medium-Term Development Plan, reflects a form of administrative legitimacy for the issue. In public policy theory, planning documents are viewed as strategic instruments reflecting development priorities and the policy direction of local governments (Howlett et al., 2020). By including the issue of migrant workers as a performance indicator for regional heads, the Jember Regency government has formally affirmed the importance of migrant worker protection in the regional development agenda. However, research shows that the integration of the issue into planning documents does not fully reflect the strengthening of substantive policies. Dunn (2018) emphasized that policy planning often serves as a symbolic arena for demonstrating political commitment, without always being accompanied by strong implementation instruments. This phenomenon is evident in the context of migrant worker protection in Jember Regency, where planning commitments have not been accompanied by binding regional regulations. These findings align with empirical research in various migrant worker-sending regions in Indonesia. Pomeo & Winarti (2024), found that many local governments have incorporated migrant worker issues into their RPJMD (Regional Medium-Term Development Plan), but still face difficulties in translating these issues into operational policies. Hidayat (2021) also noted a gap between planning documents and the implementation of migrant worker protection policies, caused by limited capacity and unclear authority.

From a public administration perspective, this situation indicates an implementation gap between planning and substantive policy. Howlett et al., (2020) explain that the success of policy planning depends heavily on the alignment of objectives, instruments, and institutional capacity. When any of these elements are lacking, planning risks becoming merely an administrative document. Therefore, the integration of Indonesian migrant workers' issues into the Jember Regency Medium-Term Development Plan can be understood as an important step in building policy legitimacy, but it is not sufficient to guarantee effective Indonesian migrant workers protection. This finding emphasizes that policy planning needs to be accompanied by strengthening regulatory instruments, so that it does not remain merely symbolic.

4.3 | Interaction of Actors and Political Agendas in the Indonesian Migrant Worker Protection Policy

The policy agenda for Indonesian migrant workers protection in Jember Regency is shaped through complex interactions between local government actors, the Regional People's Representative Council, and civil society. In policy network theory, public policy is viewed as the result of the interaction of various interdependent actors with varying resources (Dye, 2017). The findings of this study confirm that no single actor fully controls the Indonesian migrant workers policy agenda process. The role of the local government as an agenda setter is evident in its initiatives to incorporate Indonesian migrant workers issues into planning documents and policy forums. However, the local government is not fully autonomous in promoting these policies, as it relies heavily on legislative and policy support at higher levels. This reinforces Kingdon (2011) view that the policy agenda is formed through the convergence of various actors' interests within a limited policy window.

Civil society actors in this study act as policy entrepreneurs who consistently raise the issue of migrant workers through advocacy and case management. This role aligns with the findings of Wahyudi & Nurmandi (2020), which show that non-state actors have a significant influence in pushing the issue of labor migration onto the policy agenda. Ansell & Gash (2008) also emphasize the importance of non-state actors in collaborative public policy governance. However, the research findings indicate that interactions between actors in Jember Regency have not been fully institutionalized in formal collaborative mechanisms. Interactions remain ad hoc and dependent on specific momentum. This condition makes the aspirations of the migrant worker policy agenda highly vulnerable to changes in actors and local political dynamics. Thus, the interaction of actors in the migrant worker protection policy agenda in Jember Regency indicates that policy success is strongly influenced by the quality of relationships between actors, not solely by normative commitments. This finding underscores the importance of strengthening collaborative mechanisms in migrant worker policy governance.

4.4 | Structural Barriers and Stagnation of the Regional Policy Agenda

The structural barriers identified in this study are key factors explaining the stagnation of the Indonesian migrant worker protection policy agenda in Jember Regency. From a multi-level governance perspective, regional policies are heavily influenced by the configuration of authority and regulations across levels of government (Howlett et al., 2020). The research findings indicate that uncertainty surrounding national and provincial policies directly impacts local governments' caution in formulating new regulations. Limited institutional capacity and overlapping authority between regional agencies also weaken the ability of local governments to formulate policies to protect migrant workers. Nuradhawati (2019), demonstrated that institutional fragmentation is a classic problem in regional policy formulation in Indonesia. Findings by Pomeo & Winarti (2024), also confirm that structural barriers are a major factor in the failure of migrant worker policies in various regions.

In addition to institutional factors, political dimensions contribute to the stagnation of the policy agenda. Dye (2017) emphasized that public policy is always the result of political compromise, so actors' caution in formulating regulations is a rational response to political and administrative risks. In the context of Jember Regency, this caution contributed to the delay in the formation of the Regional Regulation on the Protection of Indonesian migrant workers. Thus, the stagnation of the Indonesian migrant workers protection policy agenda cannot be understood solely as a failure of actors, but rather as a result of the complex interaction between institutional structures, political dynamics, and governance across levels of government. These findings provide an important contribution to the study of public administration by demonstrating that issue recognition and normative commitment do not automatically result in formal policy.

5 | Conclusion

This research shows that the protection of Indonesian migrant workers in Jember Regency has been recognized as a crucial public policy issue and has gained discursive legitimacy within the regional policy agenda. This recognition is reflected in the integration of Indonesian migrant workers protection issues into regional development planning documents and the increasing attention of government and civil society actors to the vulnerability of Indonesian migrant workers. However, this recognition and normative commitment have not been fully followed by formal and binding regional policies. The Indonesian

migrant workers protection policy agenda process still faces structural obstacles, such as limited institutional capacity, overlapping authority, and political caution in formulating regulations. These findings highlight the gap between the recognition of the issue and the capacity of the regional policy system to produce substantive and sustainable Indonesian migrant workers protection policies.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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