

Socio-Economic Reintegration of Former Migrant Workers in Indonesia: Sustainable Livelihoods and Socio-Cultural Models

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Abstract: This study aims to develop a socio-economic reintegration model for returnee migrant workers in Indonesia based on the Sustainable Livelihood framework and socio-cultural approaches. Although numerous studies have highlighted the importance of these two approaches separately, their integration within the context of migrant reintegration in Indonesia remains limited. Employing a qualitative method through a Systematic Literature Review (SLR), this research identifies, evaluates, and synthesizes relevant studies published over the past six years (2019–2025) using the Dimensions and Scopus databases. The findings reveal that reintegration is a complex process influenced by structural, socio-cultural, as well as local and global dynamics. Social capital and adaptive capacity emerge as key elements in addressing reintegration challenges, particularly during crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, an effective reintegration model must be holistic, community-based, and supported by cross-sector collaboration and institutional transformation. This study contributes both conceptually and practically to the design of inclusive and adaptive reintegration policies that are responsive to the dynamics of global labor mobility.

INTRODUCTION

The Sustainable Livelihood approach is a development framework that places communities as the primary agents in improving their well-being. This concept acknowledges that sustainable livelihoods are determined not only by economic factors but also by the interaction of social, institutional, and environmental dimensions. In this context, a sustainable livelihood refers to the ability of individuals or communities to access and manage assets (human, social, physical, financial, and natural capital), cope with risks, and seize opportunities in a way that does not compromise resources for future generations (Kumar et al., 2023).

Social and cultural capital are two crucial forms of non-material capital in the reintegration process of individuals into society (Pratama et al., 2024). Social capital refers to networks, norms, and trust that enable individuals to access socio-economic support and opportunities. Cultural capital, on the other hand, includes values, knowledge, and skills necessary to understand and navigate prevailing social structures. These two forms of capital play a significant role in enhancing the resilience and adaptive capacity of vulnerable groups, including returnee migrant workers, particularly in post-crisis or transitional contexts (Ceciliano-Navarro & Golash-Boza, 2021).

The Sustainable Livelihood approach has proven effective in strengthening community resilience and empowerment, particularly in rural areas (Pratama et al., 2025). It emphasizes the importance of involving communities in development processes based on their local experiences and capacities. A study in Vietnam showed that local knowledge plays a critical role in designing livelihood strategies that are adaptive to climate change (Mabon et al., 2021). In Indonesia, Sustainable Livelihood-based initiatives have successfully transformed local resources into sustainable economic activities, thereby enhancing community resilience and reducing dependence on external actors (Nafiah, 2020).

The socio-economic reintegration process is heavily influenced by the presence and quality of social and cultural capital possessed by individuals. A study in Colombia found that community support helps reduce stigma against ex-combatants and increases their participation in productive activities (Mouly et al., 2019). Similar findings were observed among deportees from the Dominican Republic, where social networks assisted them in securing employment and

achieving economic stability (Ceciliano-Navarro & Golash-Boza, 2021). Cultural orientation programs in destination countries also play a role in equipping individuals with social navigation skills essential for successful adaptation in new environments (Hos et al., 2019).

Community resilience is largely determined by the capacity of local systems to respond adaptively to crises. In post-deindustrialization areas, as studied by (Benito del Pozo et al., 2020), high levels of social and economic vulnerability necessitate recovery strategies that go beyond restoring previous conditions to instead create a more sustainable order. Local governments also play a crucial role in establishing resilience pathways through policy innovations, such as the use of digital technologies during the COVID-19 pandemic (Clement et al., 2023). Research in Australia highlights that co-design approaches with local communities can generate resilience strategies grounded in real community strengths and needs (Takada et al., 2023).

Despite various studies highlighting the importance of livelihood approaches and the role of socio-cultural capital in development and reintegration contexts, few have specifically integrated these two approaches in the reintegration of returnee migrant workers in Indonesia. Furthermore, there remains a lack of research on how local systems can adaptively support reintegration processes through institutional reforms and the strengthening of dynamic social relations. Therefore, this study aims to develop a socio-economic reintegration model for returnee migrant workers in Indonesia based on the Sustainable Livelihood framework and socio-cultural approaches. This research is expected to provide both conceptual and practical contributions in designing inclusive, adaptive, and context-sensitive reintegration policies and interventions.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative research design using the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach. This method is utilized to identify, evaluate, and interpret all relevant research findings related to the Socio-Economic Reintegration of Returnee Migrant Workers in Indonesia through a Sustainable Livelihood-based Model and Socio-Cultural Approach. The aim of this approach is to systematically collect and analyze data from various relevant sources in order to provide an in-depth understanding of the subject under investigation. Data for this study were sourced from the Dimensions database (<https://app.dimensions.ai>) and Scopus (<https://www.scopus.com>), covering publications from the last six years. This time frame was selected to ensure the inclusion of recent and relevant literature concerning the socio-economic reintegration of returnee migrant workers in Indonesia using the sustainable livelihood and socio-cultural approach.

Eligibility criteria were established to ensure that only high-quality and relevant literature was included in the analysis. These criteria are as follows: (1) peer-reviewed scientific articles published in reputable national and international journals; (2) studies that specifically discuss the socio-economic reintegration of returnee migrant workers in Indonesia using a sustainable livelihood-based model and socio-cultural approach; (3) publications issued within the past six years (2019–2025); and (4) articles available in full-text format and written in either English or Indonesian. The research procedure is illustrated in Figure 1.

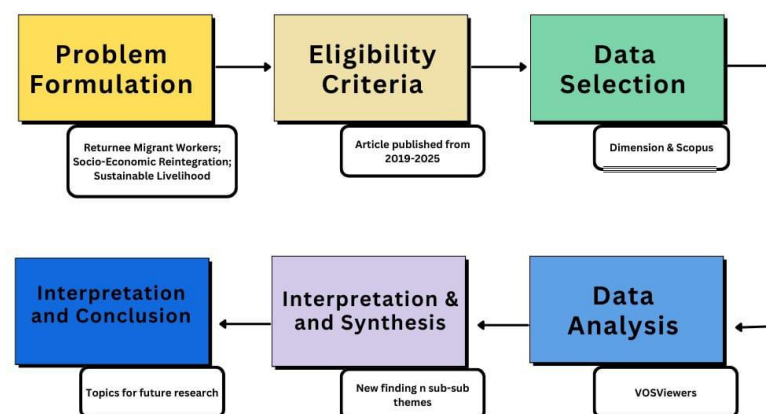


Figure 1. Research Procedure

Figure 1 illustrates that this study was conducted through several stages, namely: problem formulation, determination of eligibility criteria, data selection, data analysis, data interpretation and synthesis, and conclusion drawing. The problem formulation stage is essential to narrow down the scope of the discussion, which focuses on the Socio-Economic Reintegration of Returnee Migrant Workers in Indonesia using a Sustainable Livelihood-based Model and Socio-Cultural Approach. Eligibility criteria were established to filter data that align with the topic, using relevant keywords such as "(Returnee Migrant Workers and Socio-Economic Reintegration and Sustainable Livelihood)".

Subsequently, data were selected from the Dimensions database and filtered to include publications from the past six years (2019–2025). The collected data were then imported into VOSviewer software to generate a visualization of the relationships among keywords and themes relevant to this study. The results of the visualization and data analysis using VOSviewer were interpreted to identify and explain the key variables involved in the Socio-Economic Reintegration of Returnee Migrant Workers in Indonesia through a Sustainable Livelihood-based Model and Socio-Cultural Approach.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Data Selection Results

The initial search across the indexing databases yielded a total of 6,498 records, consisting of 1,803 open-access documents and the remainder being closed-access materials. Of the 1,803 open-access documents, 879 were journal articles and 924 were books and conference proceedings. Following the application of the eligibility criteria, a total of 522 documents were deemed suitable for further analysis. The distribution of these selected documents is illustrated in Figure 2.

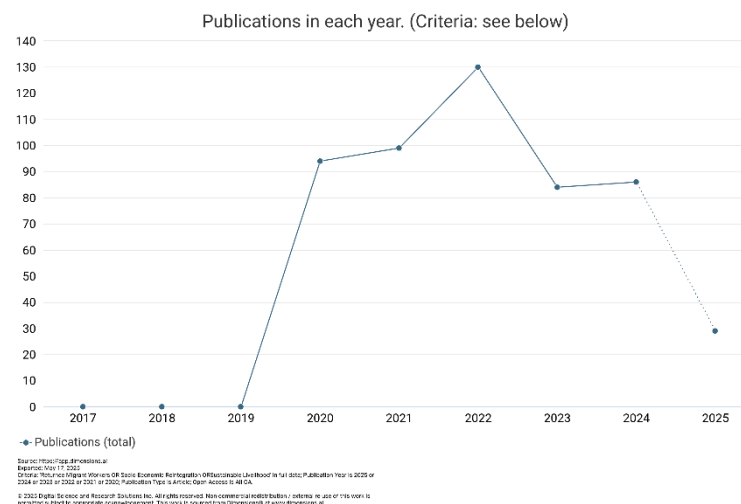


Figure 2. Distribution of Data Over the Last Decade

Figure 2 illustrates that starting in 2019, the number of publications experienced a sharp increase from zero to nearly 100 publications. This surge likely marks the beginning of growing academic attention to specific topics such as "Socio-Economic Reintegration" or "Returnee Migrant Worker Models", in alignment with the thematic focus of this study. In 2020, there was a slight increase compared to 2019, reaching nearly 110 publications, indicating sustained interest in the subject matter.

The year 2021 saw a peak in publication volume, with more than 130 publications, representing the height of academic engagement. This peak can be associated with the prolonged impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which spurred numerous studies on socio-economic resilience, social policy development, and the reintegration of vulnerable groups.

However, in 2022 and 2023, a significant decline occurred, with the number of publications dropping to around 85, followed by a plateau. This trend may reflect thematic

saturation, a shift in research focus to emerging post-pandemic issues, or waning attention due to declining funding and policy urgency on the topic.

The number remained relatively steady in 2024, but projections for 2025 show a dramatic decrease to below 30 publications. Similar to the pattern observed in the first graph, this sharp drop is most likely not indicative of an actual trend but rather reflects incomplete data for the current year or delays in the indexing process.

Network Visualization of Data

The data that had undergone the selection process were then visualized using VOSviewer to identify key research variables and explore the interrelationships among them. The network visualization enables a clearer understanding of the conceptual landscape and thematic clusters relevant to the study. The result of this visualization is presented in Figure 3.

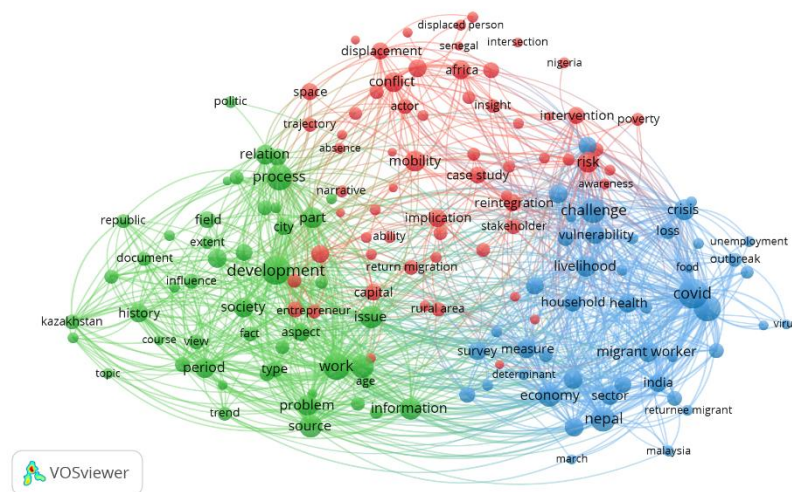


Figure 3. Network Visualization of the Research Variables

Figure 3 is a network visualization of all the variables studied over the past 6 years and depicts four different color groups: green, red, and blue. The interpretation of each variable is as follows.

a. Green Cluster (Social Dynamics, Development, and Structural Transformation)

The green cluster highlights a focus on social aspects, institutional relations, and development within the context of migration and reintegration. Keywords such as *development*, *society*, *relation*, *process*, and *work* emphasize the structural factors underlying human mobility and reintegration efforts.

The presence of terms like *history*, *field*, *influence*, *document*, and *extent* indicates that studies within this cluster are longitudinal, reflective, and interdisciplinary exploring how various forms of development and policy affect migrant communities in the long term. This also includes the involvement of *entrepreneurs*, *issues*, and *information* in the empowerment process of returnee migrants.

b. Blue Cluster (Crisis, Livelihood, and Global Socio-Economic Response)

The blue cluster focuses on livelihood challenges in the context of global crises, particularly the COVID-19 pandemic. Terms such as *COVID*, *crisis*, *unemployment*, *loss*, and *health* reflect the significant pressures faced by migrant workers during and after the pandemic. Countries like Nepal, India, and Malaysia are key focal points in studies that highlight the relationship between macroeconomic conditions and the microeconomic realities of migrants' livelihoods.

Keywords like *survey*, *migrant worker*, *returnee migrant*, *sector*, and *household* suggest a quantitative and microeconomic approach to evaluating the impact of the crisis on livelihoods. The terms *vulnerability* and *challenge* also reflect the structural and social vulnerabilities encountered by former migrant workers.

c. Red Cluster (Mobility, Conflict, and Post-Displacement Reintegration)

The red cluster represents the dynamics of human mobility, especially those driven by conflict, displacement, and return migration. Keywords such as *displacement*, *conflict*, *actor*, *reintegration*, and *implication* emphasize the main focus on the process of individuals returning to their communities after being affected by conflict (for example, in Africa, Nigeria, and Senegal).

This cluster also shows strong associations with *risk*, *intervention*, and *capital*, indicating the need for cross-sectoral approaches to support socio-economic reintegration. Issues such as *absence*, *stakeholder*, and *space* reflect the spatial and institutional complexities that affect the reintegration of returnee migrants or displaced persons.

Based on the cluster division, researchers can make a more in-depth study of several topics as follows.

a. Post-Conflict Reintegration Dynamics and Return Mobility

The reintegration of former displaced persons is heavily influenced by the role of local actors and stakeholders, which varies depending on geographic contexts and community dynamics. International organizations such as the United Nations (UN) play a strategic role in supporting the reintegration process through programs tailored to local security conditions and community characteristics. For example, the UN's political verification mission in Colombia facilitated the social reintegration of former FARC-EP combatants. At the local level, the involvement of civil society and community members has proven crucial in shaping perceptions and acceptance of returnees. However, as seen in Kenya, social stigma and low levels of trust from communities toward former Al-Shabaab members have become major barriers in the reintegration process, highlighting the importance of inclusive and participatory approaches (Juma & Githigaro, 2021). Structural constraints such as the lack of language training and employment support experienced, for instance, by Syrian refugees in Portugal—as well as misalignments between local and national policies, also pose significant challenges to reintegration effectiveness (Meer et al., 2021).

Conflict significantly impacts the social networks of returnees, ultimately reshaping their post-conflict social capacities. A study in Northern Uganda revealed that armed conflicts like the LRA insurgency have dismantled traditional social structures and given rise to new forms of social capital, such as kinship-based support networks and informal groups that play a critical role in refugee livelihood strategies (Ejang & Sarah Okite, 2020). Meanwhile, in Mali, transit migration dynamics during conflict were exploited by rebel groups to enhance their capacity through recruitment and exploitation of migrants, demonstrating how mobility can be ambivalent in conflict contexts (Nydal, 2024). Social capital also plays a key role in migration patterns; strong social networks tend to facilitate increased migration flows between communities, whereas communities with weak social capital tend to experience a decline in social cohesion (Lórinicz & Németh, 2022; Łukaszewska-Bezulska, 2021).

Interpretation of these various research findings indicates that the dynamics of post-conflict reintegration and return mobility are highly complex and cannot be understood in a linear fashion. The roles of both local and international actors, along with structural and socio-cultural factors, interact in shaping the success or failure of reintegration. Conflict not only disrupts social networks but also creates space for the emergence of new forms of solidarity and community resilience. In this context, social capital becomes a crucial component that determines how returnees navigate the reintegration process and access livelihood resources. Therefore, a sustainable livelihood-based approach that is sensitive to local dynamics and the social capacities of returnees is essential for designing responsive policies and interventions within a sustainable socio-economic reintegration framework.

b. Development, Social Relations, and Institutional Transformation

Local social and political structures have a significant influence on employment opportunities for returnees, encompassing aspects of regional governance, institutional policies, and community dynamics. The quality of local governance plays a key role in facilitating the integration of returnees into the labor market, as demonstrated by medium-sized cities like Guelph in Canada, where collaboration among local stakeholders has improved migrants' access to employment services (Crea-Arsenio et al., 2023). However, institutional barriers remain, such as labor policies restricting refugee participation in Switzerland and limited access to education and training for migrant youth in Catalonia, both of which negatively affect long-term employment prospects and economic integration (Ahrens et al., 2023). On the other hand, community networks

and informal social support such as community-based referrals and emotional assistance have been proven to facilitate the transition of returnees into the local labor market while strengthening their social resilience (Crea-Arsenio et al., 2023).

Beyond socio-political structures, access to information and documentation is a crucial factor in empowering returnees, particularly in supporting labor mobility and economic reintegration. In the Mexico–Guatemala border case, documentation status greatly influences the cross-border migration experience, while in the Philippines, regulatory frameworks play a vital role in providing repatriation infrastructure that enables returnees to come back with adequate administrative support (Velasco Ortiz, 2022; Liao, 2023). In Cameroon, community expectations regarding the economic contribution of returnees are highly shaped by their ability to access information and resolve documentation issues effectively (Wanki et al., 2022). Participatory programs in Indonesia provide a concrete example of how the provision of information, training, and entrepreneurial support can reduce unemployment while improving the socio-economic well-being of communities (Sembiring & Agustin, 2023). Nevertheless, challenges remain, such as bureaucratic hurdles and socio-economic disparities that limit the empowerment process.

Evaluative findings from the studies above indicate that inclusive development and successful reintegration of returnees highly depend on the capacity of local systems to create supportive social relations and responsive institutions that address migrant needs. Institutional transformation is needed to strengthen coordination among local governments, educational institutions, civil society organizations, and the private sector, in order to overcome structural barriers such as discriminatory labor policies or inaccessible information systems. Strong social relations both formal and informal serve as a critical foundation for building trust, increasing economic participation, and supporting the identity transition of returnees from dependency to independence. Therefore, reintegration strategies must be holistic, integrating the dimensions of local development, dynamic social relations, and adaptive institutional reform in addressing the complexity of return migration.

c. Global Crises and Livelihood Vulnerability of Former Migrant Workers

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the economic vulnerability of migrant households by significantly reducing income and remittance flows. In India, the decline in remittances impacted household consumption and food security, forcing families to adopt various survival strategies to cope with economic pressures (Narjis et al., 2022). In China, approximately 70% of migrant workers experienced wage reductions, resulting in a 45% decrease in remittance income and pushing many households into poverty (Zhang et al., 2021). In Ukraine, shifting household spending patterns reflected a heavy reliance on remittances as a key driver of welfare, with projected increases in expenditures across all categories in response to remittance fluctuations. Similar conditions were observed in Portugal and the United States, where migrants faced financial and social stress due to job loss and housing insecurity (Gama et al., 2022; Solheim et al., 2022).

Amid crisis pressures, adaptive strategies and survival responses have become essential elements in building both individual and institutional resilience. University students developed various coping strategies to deal with the stress of sudden shifts to online learning, while others applied resilience principles such as feedback and learning to strengthen personal coping mechanisms (Portable & Format, 2021). At the organizational level, responses to the crisis exhibited diverse adaptation pathways, ranging from operational adjustments to the redesign of healthcare services to maintain service continuity (Gogalniceanu et al., 2020). At a systemic level, the crisis has also driven transformations in higher education, characterized by tensions between adaptation and resistance to change (SABZALIÉVA, 2022).

Based on these findings, it can be concluded that global crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic not only worsen the economic vulnerability of former migrant workers but also test their adaptive capacities in maintaining their livelihoods. The heavy dependence on remittances reveals the fragility of migrant household economic foundations, especially when access to global labor markets is disrupted. However, the emergence of coping strategies at the individual, community, and institutional levels demonstrates the potential for building more sustainable resilience. In the context of former migrant workers, the crisis presents an opportunity for reforming social protection systems and strengthening local institutions to provide safety nets and expand access to information, training, and domestic employment opportunities. Therefore, post-

crisis recovery agendas must be designed with a holistic, livelihood-based approach that is sensitive to migrant vulnerabilities and responsive to the evolving dynamics of the global economy.

CONCLUSION

Various study findings indicate that the socio-economic reintegration of former migrant workers is complex and multidimensional, shaped by the interplay of structural and socio-cultural factors, as well as the roles of local and international actors. Social capital and adaptive capacity are key to navigating reintegration challenges, particularly in the context of global crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, which has exacerbated livelihood vulnerabilities. Therefore, effective reintegration strategies require a holistic, inclusive, and adaptive sustainable livelihood approach, supported by institutional transformation and the strengthening of local social relations.

The urgency of future research lies in the development of community-based reintegration models that can enhance the socio-economic resilience of former migrants through cross-actor collaboration and the mobilization of local social capital. Further studies are also needed to evaluate the effectiveness of post-crisis institutional interventions in providing access to decent work, vocational training, and social protection systems that are responsive to the dynamics of global mobility.

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