



Bridging Policy and Practice: Institutional Support and Program Sustainability for Returned Migrant Workers

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ABSTRACT

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This study aims to analyze the sustainability of return migrant empowerment programs and identify the factors that hinder their long-term implementation. The research employed a qualitative descriptive approach, with data collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and document analysis. The data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, consisting of data condensation, data display, and verification of findings. The results indicate that the empowerment program has achieved partial sustainability but has not yet developed into a fully integrated and systematic reintegration mechanism. Institutional sustainability remains constrained by dependence on individual actors, limited organizational continuity, and weak cross-sector collaboration. Human resource development has improved participants' skills; however, the impact remains uneven due to limited post-training mentoring and differences in entrepreneurial capacity. Policy support is relatively strong at the regulatory level but remains limited in operational implementation, particularly regarding sustainable funding and coordinated support systems. The main barriers identified include the absence of continuous programs, weak monitoring mechanisms, unstable participant commitment, and limited private-sector involvement. The study implies that strengthening sustainable reintegration requires institutionalized post-training assistance, formal multi-stakeholder partnerships, and more stable funding mechanisms to ensure that empowerment outcomes become systemic rather than dependent on individual success.

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INTRODUCTION

International migration has become an important social and economic phenomenon that influences development processes in both sending and receiving countries. Return migration, in particular, has gained increasing

attention because returning migrants bring not only financial resources but also skills, knowledge, and international experiences that can potentially contribute to local development. However, these benefits cannot automatically be transformed into sustainable livelihoods without adequate reintegration mechanisms. Evidence from various countries shows that return migrants frequently encounter economic uncertainty, limited employment opportunities, and difficulties in converting migration experiences into productive activities after returning home (Kuschminder & Saguin, 2025; Hussain et al., 2025; Langović et al., 2024). Therefore, supporting sustainable reintegration is not merely a responsibility for migrant protection institutions but also a broader development concern. Effective empowerment programs for return migrants are essential to ensure that migration outcomes contribute positively to families, communities, and regional economic growth.

In Indonesia, migrant workers represent an important component of national and local economic development through remittances, skills transfer, and international work experiences. The Indonesian government has gradually strengthened its institutional framework for migrant worker protection, evolving from placement-oriented institutions toward broader protection and empowerment systems. This transformation demonstrates that migrant governance is no longer limited to sending workers abroad but also includes ensuring their social and economic reintegration after return. The establishment of BP2MI and its transformation into the Ministry of Migrant Worker Protection (KP2MI) reflect this expanded responsibility (Baharun, 2025; Sa'diyah, 2025). Nevertheless, institutional strengthening must be accompanied by effective implementation at the local level. Previous studies indicate that return migrant protection requires coordinated policies, institutional capacity, and sustainable support systems because reintegration outcomes depend on the interaction between government intervention and migrants' own capabilities (Farisi et al., 2022; Kuschminder et al., 2026; Manurung et al., 2024). Thus, strengthening return migrant empowerment remains a significant societal issue.

Despite increasing policy attention, many return migrants continue to experience challenges in achieving sustainable socio-economic reintegration. The transition from migrant worker status to independent livelihood after returning home is often complex because migrants may face limited business knowledge, insufficient capital, weak market access, and inadequate institutional assistance. These challenges can reduce the long-term benefits of migration and increase the possibility of economic vulnerability after return. Studies from different contexts reveal that return migrants often require continuous assistance rather than short-term interventions, particularly in entrepreneurship development and livelihood recovery (Hasan et al., 2023; Mardhotillah & Sofhani, 2024; Sa'bani et al., 2026).

In Indonesia, although empowerment programs have been developed, questions remain regarding whether these programs can create sustainable changes beyond the training period. Therefore, examining the sustainability of return migrant empowerment programs is important to understand whether existing interventions truly address the long-term needs of returnees.

In West Sumatra, particularly Padang City, the issue of return migrant reintegration becomes increasingly relevant due to the significant number of Indonesian migrant workers originating from this area. BP3MI West Sumatra recorded that Padang City represents one of the largest contributors of migrant workers in the province, with thousands of residents involved in international migration. As part of its reintegration efforts, BP3MI West Sumatra has implemented empowerment programs for Purna PMI through skills training, financial literacy improvement, and business support initiatives. However, initial observations indicate several practical challenges. Some participants experienced mismatches between training programs and their previous skills or business interests, while post-training assistance remained limited and was not provided consistently to all participants. Furthermore, business sustainability appeared to depend more on individual motivation than on systematic program support. These conditions indicate a gap between the objectives of empowerment policies and their actual implementation at the community level.

Previous studies have examined return migrant empowerment from several perspectives. Research by Hamid et al. (2022) highlighted the relationship between migrant empowerment programs and family economic resilience, while Saleh et al. (2023) emphasized the importance of community-based organizations in strengthening the sustainability of return migrant empowerment initiatives. Other studies have explored reintegration policies by examining institutional coordination, governance mechanisms, and assisted return programs (Garabiles et al., 2024; Parambengal & Kalam, 2023; Baharun et al., 2025). These studies provide valuable insights into the importance of institutional and social support in reintegration processes. However, most existing studies focus on policy frameworks, community organizations, or general migrant experiences, while limited attention has been given to how government-led empowerment programs operate sustainably at the local institutional level. Therefore, further research is needed to examine the internal and external factors influencing the sustainability of formal empowerment programs for return migrants.

Furthermore, existing literature demonstrates that successful reintegration requires more than providing training or financial assistance. Sustainable outcomes depend on institutional continuity, entrepreneurial capacity, monitoring mechanisms, and collaboration among stakeholders. Studies on return migrant entrepreneurship show that resilience, access to

resources, and supportive environments influence whether returnees can maintain productive economic activities (Wu et al., 2023; Shen & Wang, 2024). Similarly, comparative studies of reintegration policies emphasize that fragmented governance and weak coordination can limit the effectiveness of return migrant programs (Schreier, 2024; Kuschminder & Saguin, 2025; Aminullah et al., 2025). However, previous research has not sufficiently explained how these dimensions interact within government-managed empowerment programs in Indonesian local contexts. This limitation represents an important research gap because understanding program sustainability requires examining not only migrant outcomes but also institutional capacity, policy implementation, and the continuity of support systems.

This research offers a novel perspective by analyzing the sustainability of Purna PMI empowerment programs through an integrated examination of institutional capacity, human resource development, and policy support mechanisms. Unlike previous studies that primarily discuss migration experiences, economic outcomes, or community-based empowerment, this study focuses on how a formal government institution manages and sustains empowerment interventions after migrants return home. The study is important because sustainable reintegration cannot be achieved only through short-term training activities; it requires a structured ecosystem that connects government institutions, return migrants, communities, and economic actors. By investigating the implementation process at the local level, this research provides a deeper understanding of why some empowerment outcomes continue while others decline after program completion.

Based on the identified issues, this study addresses two main research problems: how sustainable is the Purna PMI empowerment program implemented by BP3MI West Sumatra in Padang City, and what factors hinder its sustainability? This research argues that the sustainability of return migrant empowerment programs depends not only on the existence of institutional authority but also on the ability to establish continuous mentoring systems, effective monitoring mechanisms, and collaborative support networks. The contribution of this study lies in providing empirical evidence regarding the challenges of transforming government empowerment programs into sustainable reintegration systems. The findings are expected to provide practical implications for improving migrant worker policies and strengthening future empowerment strategies so that Purna PMI can achieve more stable economic independence and contribute to local development.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research design with a descriptive approach to explore and analyze the sustainability of empowerment programs for returnee Indonesian migrant workers (Purna PMI) implemented by the

BP3MI West Sumatra. A qualitative approach was selected because it enables an in-depth understanding of the experiences, challenges, institutional processes, and socio-economic conditions of return migrants after participating in reintegration programs. Previous studies emphasize that sustainable reintegration requires an understanding of the complex interaction between policy support, livelihood opportunities, institutional capacity, and the personal experiences of returnees (Kuschminder & Saguin, 2025; Wijeratne & Pathmeswaran, 2026). Therefore, this approach was considered appropriate for examining how empowerment interventions contribute to the long-term sustainability of Purna PMI livelihoods and businesses.

The research was conducted at the BP3MI West Sumatra office and in the residential areas of selected Purna PMI in Padang City. The location was purposively selected because BP3MI West Sumatra is one of the government institutions responsible for protecting and empowering Indonesian migrant workers, including supporting their reintegration after returning from overseas employment. In addition, Padang City was chosen because it represents an area where return migrants have participated in empowerment initiatives and developed various post-migration economic activities. The informants were selected through purposive sampling based on their direct involvement and knowledge of the empowerment program. They consisted of BP3MI West Sumatra officials responsible for PMI protection and empowerment programs, Purna PMI whose businesses remained sustainable, Purna PMI whose businesses had discontinued, and representatives from the Padang City Manpower and Industry Office and the Cooperative and Small-Medium Enterprise Office as supporting informants for source triangulation. This multi-stakeholder perspective is important because previous research highlights that successful reintegration depends on collaboration between migrants, government institutions, and community-based support systems (Garabiles et al., 2024; Parambengal & Kalam, 2023).

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, direct observation, and document analysis. Interviews were conducted using semi-structured guidelines to explore participants' experiences regarding program implementation, business sustainability, institutional support, and barriers faced during reintegration. Observations were conducted to examine the actual conditions of Purna PMI businesses and their socio-economic environment, while documentation analysis included reviewing official reports, program documents, regulations, and related institutional records. Data validity was ensured through source triangulation by comparing information obtained from different categories of informants. Data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, consisting of data condensation, data display, and verification of findings. Data condensation involved selecting, simplifying, and organizing

relevant information related to program sustainability; data display was conducted through narrative descriptions and thematic categorization of institutional, economic, and empowerment aspects; while verification involved interpreting patterns and confirming findings based on empirical evidence. This analytical process aligns with previous studies that emphasize the importance of systematic assessment frameworks in evaluating return migration reintegration outcomes (Kuschminder et al., 2026; Kusumo et al., 2023).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Institutional Sustainability of the Purna PMI Empowerment Program

The sustainability of the Purna Indonesian Migrant Workers (Purna PMI) empowerment program implemented by BP3MI West Sumatra is strongly influenced by institutional capacity. The findings indicate that, from a formal perspective, BP3MI West Sumatra has a clear institutional mandate in implementing protection and empowerment programs for returnee migrant workers. This authority is supported by national regulations concerning migrant worker protection. However, the existence of formal authority has not yet been fully transformed into a sustainable institutional system because program implementation still depends heavily on limited human resources and individual commitment within the institution.

The implementation structure shows that the empowerment program is managed by a small number of officers who are responsible for various activities, ranging from identifying participants, organizing training, monitoring business development, to handling other migrant worker protection responsibilities. This condition limits the scale and continuity of the program because empowerment activities can only be implemented within a restricted number of participants each year. This finding reflects the broader challenge in return migration governance, where institutional mandates often develop faster than the operational capacity required to provide continuous reintegration support (Kuschminder & Saguin, 2025; Schreier, 2024).

Furthermore, cross-sector collaboration between BP3MI West Sumatra and other local government institutions remains situational rather than institutionalized. Several related agencies, such as offices responsible for labor, industry, cooperatives, and small-medium enterprises, have not yet become active partners in designing and implementing empowerment programs. Previous research emphasizes that sustainable reintegration requires coordinated multi-stakeholder involvement because return migrants face interconnected economic, social, and institutional challenges that cannot be addressed by a single organization alone (Garabiles et al., 2024; Parambengal & Kalam, 2023).

The weakness of institutional sustainability is also reflected in the discontinuity of Purna PMI organizational networks after changes in leadership or responsible officers. Activities that previously supported collective interaction among return migrants, such as meetings and product promotion activities, gradually stopped when institutional support decreased. This situation demonstrates that the current empowerment system has not yet created an independent community-based structure among Purna PMI. Similar findings have been reported in studies of return migrant empowerment, where sustainable outcomes are more likely when returnees are supported through strong community organizations and networks rather than short-term government projects (Saleh et al., 2023; Mardhotillah & Sofhani, 2024).

Human Resource Capacity and Empowerment Outcomes among Purna PMI

The sustainability of the empowerment program is also determined by the capacity of both program implementers and beneficiaries. The findings reveal that limitations in the capacity of program managers affect the process of identifying participants' needs and matching training programs with their previous skills and business interests. Some participants experienced a mismatch between the training provided and their existing economic activities. For example, participants who had previously developed sewing businesses received training in other fields, meaning that the training contribution to their business sustainability was relatively limited.

From the perspective of beneficiaries, business continuity after training varies significantly among Purna PMI. Participants who maintain their businesses generally demonstrate stronger internal motivation, persistence, and willingness to continue despite limited initial income. In contrast, other participants discontinue their businesses due to limited capital, household financial pressures, or the inability to separate business and personal finances. This indicates that empowerment outcomes are still strongly influenced by individual resilience rather than being fully generated by the program intervention itself.

The findings support previous studies showing that entrepreneurial resilience and personal capacity are important determinants of return migrants' ability to establish sustainable livelihoods after migration. Research on return migrants in China demonstrates that entrepreneurial intention and resilience significantly influence the ability of migrants to pursue economic reintegration after returning home (Wu et al., 2023). Similarly, studies on rural entrepreneurship among return migrants emphasize that skills training alone is insufficient without continuous support, access to resources, and an enabling entrepreneurial environment (Hasan et al., 2023).

The short duration of training, which only lasts several days, also limits the possibility of achieving significant behavioral transformation among participants. Sustainable empowerment requires continuous mentoring, market assistance, financial management training, and institutional support after training completion. Studies on return migrant entrepreneurship in Indonesia show that community-based enterprises and continuous support mechanisms play an important role in strengthening the sustainability of returnees' economic activities (Mardhotillah & Sofhani, 2024). Therefore, the current program has contributed to improving basic skills but has not yet fully developed long-term entrepreneurial capacity.

Policy Support and Multi-Sector Governance for Sustainable Reintegration

The policy foundation for Purna PMI empowerment is relatively strong because migrant worker protection and reintegration have become part of national policy priorities. However, the findings demonstrate a gap between regulatory commitment and operational implementation. Although BP3MI has a formal mandate, local government agencies have not yet developed integrated mechanisms to support return migrant empowerment, particularly in areas such as business development, market access, capital assistance, and continuous mentoring.

The absence of structured cooperation among institutions creates limitations in transforming empowerment programs into sustainable economic reintegration mechanisms. Local agencies responsible for cooperatives, small businesses, and employment have not fully positioned Purna PMI empowerment as part of their strategic programs. This condition reflects the challenge identified in comparative studies of reintegration policies, where policy effectiveness depends not only on formal regulations but also on institutional coordination, resource allocation, and implementation mechanisms (Kuschminder & Saguin, 2025; Kuschminder et al., 2026).

Financial support also remains an important challenge. Program funding depends on available government budgets and is not always provided continuously. Changes in national budget priorities may directly affect the continuity of empowerment activities. Although some Purna PMI have obtained business assistance, administrative requirements such as business legality, identification documents, and product certification create barriers for some returnees in accessing broader economic opportunities.

This finding is consistent with research on migrant reintegration, which highlights that sustainable outcomes require long-term institutional commitment, predictable funding, and measurable indicators of success (Wijeratne & Pathmeswaran, 2026). In Indonesia, empowerment programs for

return migrants have shown stronger impacts when economic indicators, family welfare outcomes, and institutional support mechanisms are clearly defined and continuously monitored (Hamid et al., 2022). Therefore, the current policy framework requires strengthening through integrated planning between central and local institutions.

Barriers to the Sustainability of the Purna PMI Empowerment Program

Several barriers influence the sustainability of the empowerment program, including the absence of continuous programs, weak monitoring mechanisms, limited participant commitment, and insufficient private-sector involvement. The findings indicate that post-training assistance has not yet become a permanent mechanism within the program structure. Support activities remain dependent on budget availability and internal institutional initiatives rather than being designed as a continuous reintegration pathway.

The absence of continuous mentoring reduces the ability of BP3MI to identify and respond to problems experienced by Purna PMI after training. Participants who experience difficulties in maintaining their businesses often do not receive intensive follow-up assistance. Previous research confirms that assisted return and reintegration programs require continuous evaluation and long-term support because economic recovery after migration is a gradual process rather than an immediate outcome (Kuschminder et al., 2026; Kusumo et al., 2023).

Weak monitoring is also connected with limited institutional capacity. Monitoring activities tend to focus more on participants who already demonstrate business development, while participants experiencing stagnation receive less attention. A stronger monitoring system requires regular evaluation, mentoring schedules, and collaboration with external partners such as universities, financial institutions, and business networks. Community-based approaches have been shown to strengthen return migrant empowerment because they provide continuous social support beyond government intervention (Saleh et al., 2023; Garabiles et al., 2024).

Another significant barrier is the unstable participation of beneficiaries and limited involvement of the private sector. Some participants join training because of incentives provided rather than genuine entrepreneurial motivation. Meanwhile, limited private-sector partnerships reduce opportunities for market expansion, digital marketing support, and business financing. Similar challenges have been identified in studies of return migrants, where successful reintegration depends on stronger connections between migrants, government institutions, communities, and economic actors (Adu-Okoree et al., 2023; Henderson, 2024; Aprilianto, 2026).

Overall, the sustainability of the Purna PMI empowerment program in Padang City remains partial rather than systemic. The program has provided valuable opportunities for return migrants to develop skills and initiate economic activities, but its long-term impact is constrained by weak institutionalization, limited mentoring, inconsistent monitoring, and insufficient cross-sector collaboration. Strengthening sustainable reintegration requires transforming empowerment programs from short-term training activities into integrated systems involving government institutions, community organizations, private-sector partners, and return migrants themselves.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that the sustainability of the Purna Indonesian Migrant Workers (Purna PMI) empowerment program remains partial and selective rather than fully systemic. The main lesson from this research is that formal institutional authority alone cannot ensure sustainable reintegration outcomes; it requires an integrated system involving institutional strengthening, continuous post-training mentoring, effective monitoring, multi-sector collaboration, and stable policy support. The study contributes theoretically by expanding the understanding of return migrant reintegration, showing that program sustainability should be evaluated not only through the existence of empowerment activities but also through institutional capacity, beneficiaries' entrepreneurial development, and the continuity of supporting ecosystems. Empirically, this research highlights the gap between policy commitments and implementation practices in local return migrant empowerment programs. However, this study is limited to one empowerment program context, which may restrict the generalization of findings to other regions with different socio-economic and institutional characteristics. Future research should conduct comparative regional studies, examine digital-based monitoring mechanisms, and explore collaborative reintegration models involving governments, communities, private sectors, and return migrants to develop more inclusive and sustainable empowerment strategies.

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