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REPORT

Blurred Placement Flows

Human Rights Risks in the Recruitment of Indonesian Migrant Fishers in Japan-Linked Seafood Supply Chains



Human Rights Now

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This report has been shaped by the honest voices and experiences of the migrant workers who participated in the interviews, as well as by the support and cooperation of the many individuals and organizations who contributed to this research. It is our hope that this report will help amplify the voices of migrant workers and contribute to dialogue and institutional improvements aimed at realizing fairer and more rights-respecting labor migration systems in both sending and receiving countries.



Human Rights Now

Human Rights Now (HRN) is an international human rights NGO based in Tokyo, Japan, with UN special consultative status. It was established in 2006 by a group of human rights professionals, including lawyers, scholars, and journalists, as the first international human rights NGO founded in Japan. With a membership comprising a wide range of human rights specialists, HRN works to address the most serious human rights violations and to protect and promote human rights across borders, with a particular focus on Asia. Since obtaining UN special consultative status in 2012, HRN has actively engaged in the United Nations decision-making process. Today, HRN has offices in Tokyo, New York, and Geneva, and carries out its activities worldwide.

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Executive Summary

Indonesian migrant fishers serve as a vital workforce supporting the fishing industries in various countries, including Taiwan, South Korea, and Japan. Meanwhile, serious human rights abuses—including excessive working hours, wage theft, debt bondage, forced labor, human trafficking, violence, and barriers to accessing remedies—continue to be reported, particularly within the distant-water fishing sector.

While previous discussions have often focused on working conditions aboard fishing vessels, this report shifts the focus to how the vulnerability of migrant workers originates from the recruitment, hiring, and deployment stages rather than solely after departure. This report examines the realities and challenges of the migrant worker deployment system in Indonesia's fisheries sector.

This study investigated the recruitment and deployment processes for Indonesian migrant fishers heading to Taiwan, South Korea, Japan, and other destinations through interviews with central government agencies, local labor offices, recruitment and deployment agencies, vocational training institutions, fisheries vocational high schools, fisheries stakeholders, and the migrant workers themselves.

The findings reveal significant disparities regarding the burden of recruitment-related costs. Depending on the deployment route, workers are often required to pay for language training, vocational training, and travel-related expenses themselves, with some cases involving loans taken out to cover these costs. Specifically regarding deployment to South Korea, cases were reported involving large security deposits and loans secured against family assets. These practices raise significant concerns from the perspective of the internationally recognized Employer Pays Principle (EPP).

Furthermore, from an institutional perspective, the research reveals that fragmented authority among multiple government agencies and systemic complexity create challenges for the protection of migrant workers. Specifically concerning Japan's Technical Intern Training Program (TITP), the program is designed primarily for skills transfer, resulting in an inadequate integration with migrant worker protection frameworks and persistent challenges in oversight and remedy mechanisms during the recruitment and deployment processes.

Additionally, the study confirmed that migration for fishing workers is not merely movement to a single destination country, but rather structured as a phased career progression involving transitions through multiple countries and regions. Some recruitment and deployment agencies strategically positioned placement on Chinese or Taiwanese fishing vessels as a form of human resource development, intended to prepare workers for subsequent deployment to Japan or South Korea, which are perceived to offer better conditions. These considerations suggest that fishing vessels bound for China and Taiwan function as entry points for gaining experience, while Japan and South Korea are recognized as subsequent destinations. This indicates that the fishing labor markets of these countries do not exist in isolation but function as an interconnected labor market through the migration of workers.

On the other hand, the study identified a practical response to these challenges in the form of an acceptance model based on cooperation between Ishinomaki City in Miyagi Prefecture and West Java Province in Indonesia. Under this model, local governments, fisheries stakeholders, educational institutions, and recruitment and deployment agencies collaborate to establish a system where migrant workers are not required to bear recruitment-related costs. Furthermore, this model includes not only pre-departure training but also post-arrival support for daily life and ongoing follow-up, which can be evaluated as a progressive initiative from the perspective of protecting the rights of migrant workers.

This report asserts that to realize the protection of human rights for migrant workers in the fisheries sector, it is necessary to focus not only on working conditions aboard vessels but on the entire migration process, including the recruitment, hiring, and

deployment stages. Moreover, when considering the protection of human rights for migrant fishers, it is necessary to look beyond individual deployment to Japan and instead consider the broader recruitment structures and realities of labor migration across the entire region, including China, Taiwan, and South Korea. Host countries must recognize that they form an interconnected labor market through the migration of workers and are called upon to strengthen cooperation with sending countries and among host countries/regions. Through ensuring the transparency of recruitment costs, strengthening oversight of recruitment agencies, and enhancing rights education for workers, this report aims to build a more transparent and rights-protected migrant worker deployment system, and it provides recommendations to ensure that companies fulfill their responsibility to respect the human rights of migrant workers in their supply chains.

1

Recruitment and Placement of Indonesian Migrant Fishers

Indonesian migrant fishers constitute an important workforce supporting fisheries supply chains in Taiwan, South Korea, Japan, and other countries. At the same time, serious human rights and labor rights violations against migrant fishers have been reported, including excessive working hours, non-payment of wages, debt bondage, forced labor, violence, abandonment at sea, and limited access to grievance mechanisms and remedies.

Although such human rights violations often become apparent during employment on fishing vessels, it has also been documented that vulnerabilities may already be created during the recruitment and placement process. The burden of recruitment-related costs, overseas employment financed through borrowing, insufficient information, opaque contractual procedures, and the involvement of multiple intermediaries can significantly affect workers' bargaining power and working conditions, as well as their ability to exercise their rights after commencing employment.

Accordingly, examining the recruitment and placement system itself is essential to understanding and addressing the structural factors contributing to labor exploitation in the fisheries sector. The recruitment and placement of Indonesian migrant fishers is carried out under a complex system involving multiple government institutions, recruitment and placement agencies, vocational training institutions, and relevant actors in destination countries. In addition, recruitment procedures, regulatory frameworks, and protection measures vary significantly depending on the destination country and the scheme through which workers are recruited and placed, resulting in differences in the risks faced by migrant fishers and the level of protection available to them.

This chapter provides an overview of the legal and institutional frameworks governing the recruitment and placement of Indonesian migrant fishers, as well as the recruitment and placement pathways to major destination countries, with a particular focus on Taiwan, South Korea, and Japan. It then examines the key governance challenges arising throughout the recruitment and placement process.

1.1 Institutional Framework for Migrant Fishers

Legal and Policy Framework

The placement and protection of Indonesian migrant fishing crew members (*Awak Kapal Perikanan*: AKP) is governed by a range of laws, regulations, and policy instruments. These frameworks consist of both general migrant worker protection legislation and sector-specific regulations applicable to fishing crew members. An overview of the principal legal and policy frameworks is provided in the table below.

Table: Principal Legal and Policy Frameworks Governing the Placement and Protection of Indonesian Migrant Fishing Crew Members

Legal and Policy Instrument	Overview	Key Regulatory Areas
Law No. 18 of 2017 on the Protection of Indonesian Migrant Workers (PPMI Law)	Primary legislation governing the placement and protection of Indonesian migrant workers	Protection before, during, and after employment; rights and obligations of migrant workers; responsibilities of central and local governments; Government-to-Government (G-to-G) placement mechanisms
Government Regulation No. 22 of 2022 on the Placement and Protection of Migrant Merchant Ship Crew Members and Migrant Fishing Crew Members	An implementing regulation under Law No. 18 of 2017 on the Protection of Indonesian Migrant Workers, establishing rules for the placement and protection of Indonesian migrant commercial vessel crews and fishing vessel crews	Recruitment, education and training, seafarers' employment agreements, legal, social, and economic protection, monitoring, and grievance mechanisms
Regulation of the Minister of Marine Affairs and Fisheries No. 4 of 2026 on the Governance of Fishing Vessel Manning, Education and Training, Examinations, and Certification of Fishing Crew Members	Regulation governing training and certification systems for fishing vessel crew members	Manning standards, education and training, examinations, certification, maritime safety, and professional competency requirements
Regulation of the Minister for the Protection of Indonesian Migrant Workers No. 2 of 2026 on Procedures for Placement by Placement Agencies	Regulation governing placement procedures for Indonesian migrant workers	G-to-G and employer-based placement mechanisms; registration, selection, medical examinations, placement agreements, social security, visa processing, pre-departure orientation, signing of Seafarers' Employment Agreements (PKL), and departure procedures
Regulation of the Minister of KP2MI No. 3 of 2025 on the Suspension and Prohibition of the Placement of Indonesian Migrant Workers	Regulation governing the suspension and prohibition of migrant worker placement	Suspension and prohibition of deployment where destination-country conditions pose risks to migrant workers; definition of migrant fishing crew members
Bilateral Agreements (Memoranda of Understanding: MoUs) between the Government of Indonesia and Destination Countries	Bilateral cooperation framework governing labor migration	Labor cooperation arrangements, worker protection measures, and roles and responsibilities of relevant authorities

Recruitment and Training Actors: P3MI and LPK

In Indonesia, the main private operators involved in the recruitment and placement of migrant workers are institutionally and clearly distinguished into the Indonesian migrant worker placement company (*Perusahaan Penempatan Pekerja Migran Indonesia*: P3MI), which is responsible for the recruitment and placement of overseas workers, and the vocational training institution (*Lembaga Pelatihan Kerja*: LPK).

P3MI is a private placement operator authorized to conduct migrant worker recruitment and selection, matching with employers, support for the conclusion of employment contracts, visa acquisition, exit procedures, and travel arrangements. To operate as a P3MI, an organization must obtain a placement business license (*Surat Izin Perusahaan Penempatan Pekerja Migran Indonesia*: SIP3MI) from the Ministry for the Protection of Indonesian Migrant Workers (KP2MI). Requirements for obtaining this license include maintaining a paid-up capital of at least 5 billion IDR and a deposit of 1.5 billion IDR. These financial requirements aim to ensure that P3MI maintains a financial foundation to properly fulfill its responsibilities associated with the recruitment and placement of migrant workers.¹

¹ The requirements regarding P3MI's paid-up capital and deposit were stipulated in Article 7 of Permenaker No. 10/2019 and have been carried over into subsequent relevant legislation. The validity of these requirements was also confirmed in Supreme Court Decision No. 15 P/HUM/2020. Furthermore, these remain positioned as licensing requirements for P3MI in the Regulation of the Minister of KP2MI No. 1/2025 on Procedures for Granting Licenses to Indonesian Migrant Worker Placement Companies.

On the other hand, LPK is a vocational training institution based on the legal framework for vocational training, providing language education, skills training, and pre-departure education. LPK itself is, in principle, not authorized to place overseas workers; it is positioned solely as an institution that provides vocational training. The relevant legal framework is governed by Law No. 13 of 2003 on Manpower, as well as government regulations and ministerial decrees concerning the establishment and operation of vocational training institutions and vocational competency development.

G-to-G and Private Recruitment Frameworks

Under the G-to-G scheme, an MoU provides the technical framework for regulating labor cooperation between the two governments, including labor quotas and workforce requirements, protection standards, dispute resolution mechanisms, and arrangements for repatriation and legal assistance.

Under the G-to-G migrant worker placement scheme, the placement and protection of Indonesian migrant fishing crew members are intended to be conducted through a legally regulated and integrated government mechanism. In practice, however, the placement of migrant fishing crew members differs significantly from that of workers in other formal employment sectors, with a substantial proportion still recruited and placed through private-to-private arrangements involving private placement companies. This creates additional risks and protection gaps, particularly in relation to recruitment practices, employment conditions, accountability, and access to remedies.

Several areas therefore require stronger safeguards within the G-to-G placement framework. These include rigorous verification of employment contracts before departure; transparent and ethical recruitment; access to insurance and social security; and effective access to legal assistance, grievance mechanisms, and complaint-handling services in destination countries. Migrant fishing crew members must also be effectively protected from trafficking in persons, forced labor, debt bondage, and other forms of exploitation. These challenges highlight the need to strengthen bilateral cooperation and ensure the effective implementation of Government Regulation No. 22 of 2022, including through stronger coordination among Indonesian authorities and their counterparts in destination countries.

However, the placement and protection of Indonesian migrant fishing crew members in Japan cannot be adequately understood through the G-to-G framework alone. Japan's migration governance operates through specific labor migration schemes, including the Technical Intern Training Program (TITP) and the Specified Skilled Worker (SSW) system, each with distinct rules governing recruitment, training, employment, residence status, and worker mobility. The interaction between Indonesia's migrant worker placement system and Japan's migration and labor governance therefore requires closer examination. In particular, it is important to assess whether existing bilateral arrangements and Japanese migration schemes provide adequate protection for Indonesian fishing crew members, including safeguards against recruitment-related exploitation, forced labor, abusive working conditions, and barriers to accessing remedies.

Recruitment Pathways for Japan: TITP and SSW

Although this report examines recruitment and placement pathways for migrant fishers across multiple destination countries, including Taiwan, South Korea, and Japan, the TITP and the SSW system are discussed in this section because they provide important institutional context for understanding both the recruitment processes examined in Chapter 2 and the recruitment and acceptance model through cooperation between Ishinomaki City and West Java Province analyzed in Chapter 3.

Indonesia's participation in the TITP is governed by Regulation of the Minister of Manpower No. 8 of 2008, which conceptualizes the program as overseas vocational training aimed at facilitating skills transfer and competency development. Administratively, all information regarding this program is shared through an online portal co-developed by International Manpower Development Organization Japan (IM Japan) and the Ministry of Manpower of Indonesia. As mentioned above, LPKs themselves are not fundamentally authorized to send overseas workers, and standard LPKs function solely as vocational training institutions. However, an exceptional system exists for the TITP bound for Japan. Specifically, organizations sending technical interns to Japan must be accredited as Sending Organizations (SOs) by the Ministry of Manpower. SO accreditation is a system through which the Ministry of Manpower accredits organizations to perform tasks such as the recruitment and selection of technical interns for Japan, the pro-

vision of necessary vocational training and Japanese language education, pre-departure training, the preparation of relevant documents, and other dispatch-related duties, in collaboration with accepting organizations or supervising organizations in Japan.²

These SO-accredited LPKs collaborate with Japanese supervising organizations to handle tasks such as candidate recruitment, Japanese language education, matching with companies, pre-departure training, and dispatch procedures. Therefore, in the context of the TITP for Japan, LPKs are able to be involved in the entire series of processes from candidate recruitment to dispatch to Japan by receiving SO accreditation, rather than acting merely as vocational training institutions. On the other hand, LPKs that have not received SO accreditation cannot directly dispatch technical interns to Japan and, in principle, remain in the position of providing services such as Japanese language education or vocational training.

This vocational training program also regulates various subsidy and allowance costs for the workers. According to the co-developed portal, the provisions of allowance consist of a training subsidy in Indonesia, a one-month training allowance at the training center in Japan, pocket money with the amount increasing or varying by year of employment, transportation from the dormitory to the company, insurance (health, occupational accidents, and pensions), a certificate issued by IM Japan, a self-employment fund (Dana Usaha Mandiri/DUM), and round-trip airfare between Indonesia and Japan. The fisheries sector is specifically categorized under “Other Sectors.” (See Annex 1 for details on this.)

Additionally, there is also regulation on cost structure for migrant workers heading for work in Japan, specifically working with the SSW scheme, that is regulated in the Decree of the Head of the Indonesian Migrant Worker Protection Agency No. 148 of 2023. The cost components include a medical check up, psychological test, passport, migrant worker employment social protection, work visa, domestic transportation, round-trip airfare between Indonesia and Japan, placement agency/P3MI service fee, and supervision service fee. This cost framework applies specifically to the Indonesian recruitment process and was introduced, among other objectives, to reduce risks associated with forced labour and human trafficking in situations where prospective or current migrant workers encounter employment-related problems. The estimated costs directly borne by the migrant worker is around Rp. 2,322,000 to Rp.3,822,000. (See Annex 2 for details on this.)

1.2 Recruitment Pathways for Migrant Fishers

Government Regulation No. 22 of 2022 on the Placement and Protection of Migrant Merchant Ship Crew Members and Migrant Fishing Crew Members remains the primary legal basis and reference for KP2MI in formulating technical policies on the placement and protection of migrant fishing crew members. This Government Regulation covers: placement requirements, *Perjanjian Kerja Laut* (PKL) or Seafarers’ Employment Agreement, protection before, during, and after employment, social security and legal assistance, and monitoring and complaint resolution.

In addition, within KP2MI, the Directorate for the Placement of Migrant Merchant Ship Crew Members and Migrant Fishing Crew Members has been established. The Directorate is responsible for formulating and implementing policies, standards, procedures, and evaluations related to the placement and protection of migrant fishing crew members.

Recruitment and Placement Schemes in Major Destination Countries

Taiwan, South Korea, and Japan are among the principal destination countries for Indonesia migrant fishers. Although regulated under the same government regulations, in practice, each country has its own placement and protection schemes and mechanisms, shaped by its respective legal and institutional frameworks.

(1) South Korea

For the placement of Indonesian migrant workers in the fishing crew sector in South Korea, there are two placement schemes G-to-G and Private-to-Private (P-to-P). G-to-G is managed by KP2MI and the Human Resources Development Service of Korea

2 The legal basis for this accreditation is established in the Regulation of the Minister of Manpower and Transmigration No. PER.08/MEN/V/2008. This regulation also stipulates administrative requirements for pre-departure training provided by training institutions (LPKs) and for overseas internships.

(HRD Korea), using the E-9 visa under the Employment Permit System (EPS). Under this scheme, a recruitment and placement system is established to ensure transparency and selectivity in the recruitment of prospective Indonesian fishing crew members. Candidates undergo the EPS-TOPIK selection process as part of the requirements for working in South Korea. Under this scheme, fishing crew members operate only in South Korea's territorial waters. The second scheme is P-to-P. This scheme involves P3MIs or Indonesian manning agencies³ and South Korean agencies or fishing companies. Under this scheme, Indonesian migrant workers use the E-10 visa. The selection process is less stringent than under the G-to-G scheme because there is no specific Korean language proficiency standard, and workers may operate in open waters. This creates higher risks and makes monitoring by the South Korean government more difficult. However, under this scheme, fishing crew members are incorporated into the seafarer employment system.

There are significant differences between the G-to-G and P-to-P schemes, particularly in terms of recruitment procedures, salary standards, costs, and selection requirements. The G-to-G scheme generally offers higher salary standards and lower placement costs compared with the P-to-P scheme. However, the P-to-P scheme has relatively easier selection requirements, particularly because its Korean language proficiency standards are lower than those under the G-to-G scheme. At the same time, the P-to-P scheme is more vulnerable to fraud and irregularities involving placement fees.

(2) Taiwan

Unlike South Korea, the placement of Indonesian migrant workers in the fishing crew sector in Taiwan is carried out under only one scheme, namely the Private-to-Private (P-to-P) scheme. However, there are differences between fishing crew members working in Taiwan's territorial waters and those working in the distant-water fishing fleets (LG).

Fishing crew members deployed to Taiwan's territorial waters are recruited through Indonesian P3MI, which are licensed by the KP2MI. Meanwhile, fishing crew members working in the open sea (LG) are recruited and placed through manning agencies, whose business licenses are issued by the Ministry of Transportation. Another difference is that fishing crew members working in territorial waters generally receive higher wages and face fewer vulnerabilities, but their placement costs are higher than those of workers employed in the open sea.

(3) Japan

However, specifically for the placement of Indonesian migrant workers through the TITP scheme in Japan, the process continues to be administered through the Ministry of Manpower.⁴ This is because the Japan Internship Program is a competency development program for prospective Indonesian workers, implemented through cooperation between the Ministry of Manpower of the Republic of Indonesia and the IM Japan. In contrast, placements under the SSW system are managed under the jurisdiction of the KP2MI, similarly to the placement of standard Indonesian migrant workers.

IM Japan is an association of small and medium-sized enterprises based in Tokyo, Japan. In the context of the internship cooperation program with Japan, IM Japan plays a role in facilitating the placement of Indonesian internship participants in Japanese companies as implementing partners of the internship program.

The following is the recruitment and placement process for Indonesian fishing crew members based on the IM Japan portal:

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- 3 Unlike P3MI, "manning agencies" refer to seafarer placement agencies regulated by the Indonesian Ministry of Transportation, which are required to hold a Seafarer Recruitment and Placement Business License (*Surat Izin Usaha Perekrutan dan Penempatan Awak Kapal: SIUPPAK*).
 - 4 The Ministry of Manpower (*Kementerian Ketenagakerjaan/Kemnaker*) retains responsibility for vocational training and labor market policies. Owing to the historical classification of Japan's Technical Intern Training Program (TITP) as an overseas internship (*pemagangan*), Kemnaker continues to play a central role in the administration of sending organizations and pre-departure training for TITP participants.

Figure 1. Recruitment Pathway of Indonesian Migrant Fishers on Government to Government Program

STEP		
1		Registration / Login At this stage, candidates register for an account or log in online via the portal at https://jepang.magangln.id and accurately fill in their personal details.
2		Application This stage explains how candidates of the migrant fishers apply for the open internship program by completing all required administrative documents.
3		This stage explains Administrative Document Screening The system will automatically verify the completeness of the prospective participants' documents; subsequently, the Regional Committee (the local committee from the candidate's home region) and the central team of IM Japan will verify the authenticity of the documents.
4		Basic Mathematics Test The Basic Mathematics Test will be conducted offline and is organized by the Central Team.
5		Physical Fitness Test The physical fitness test is conducted to assess the physical condition of prospective internship participants; this activity is organized by the Regional Committee. Physical Endurance Test: The Physical Endurance Test is conducted to measure the physical strength and endurance of prospective interns; this activity is organized by the Regional Committee.
6		Interview Interviews are conducted to directly assess various aspects such as motivation, insight, communication skills, etc. This activity will be organized by the Central Team.
7		Health Check/Medical Check-Up (MCU) Medical check-ups are conducted at hospitals or clinical laboratories designated by the Indonesian Ministry of Manpower and IM Japan. Tests include: blood, urine, eyes, stool, lungs, drug screening, uric acid, kidney function, and HIV/AIDS.
8		Japanese Language Test The Japanese language test covers hiragana, katakana, vocabulary, and grammar from Chapters 1 through 12 of the IM Japan textbook.
9		Passport Issuance This stage is carried out after the participant passes the Japanese language test and before commencing pre-departure training; specifically, a 48-page passport with a 5-year validity period is issued.
10		In-depth Subject Matter Training and Phase I Pre-departure The In-depth Subject Matter Training is conducted locally over a period of 9 days. Participants are responsible for their own accommodation and transportation costs. The Phase I Pre-departure Training is conducted locally over a period of two months. Participants are responsible for their own accommodation and transportation costs.
11		Phase II Pre-Departure Training Phase II pre-departure training is conducted at the central facility over a period of two months. Accommodation and transportation costs are covered by the central authorities (the Ministry of Manpower and IM Japan).
12		Departure Interns will be deployed and placed with companies in roles that align with their competencies or areas of expertise. They will receive a subsidy for pre-departure training.
13		Internship Period The Internship period lasts for 3 years and may be extended by 5 years if the company and the participant agree to extend the practical work period.
14		Post-Internship In the post-internship phase in Japan, participants will receive a self-employment allowance, job matching services, and entrepreneurship workshops.
15		Employment Survey This is the final step for participants who have completed the internship program. Participants are required to complete the employment survey using the form provided on this website.

1.3 Governance Challenges in the Recruitment and Placement System

The recruitment and placement of Indonesian migrant fishers is characterized by a highly fragmented governance structure involving multiple government institutions, private recruitment agencies, training institutions, and intermediaries. While the applicable legal and regulatory framework formally distinguishes the roles and responsibilities of these actors, the actual recruitment process often involves overlapping functions and complex recruitment chains that vary depending on the destination country, visa category, and employment scheme. As a result, migrant fishers may encounter different recruitment practices, cost structures, and levels of protection depending on the pathway through which they are recruited and deployed.⁵

In addition to the institutional challenges described above, previous field research conducted by Human Rights Now and Taiwan Association for Human Rights (TAHR) in Indonesia in 2025 identified a number of structural risks within the recruitment process itself.⁶ Recruitment commonly occurred through personal networks, social media advertisements, and informal brokers, while information regarding working conditions, risks, and contractual terms was often incomplete or unavailable. Interviewees reported practices including the retention of passports and identity documents by recruitment agencies, opaque recruitment-related fees, borrowing to finance migration costs, last-minute contract signing, and the signing of contracts written in languages that workers could not understand. Interviews with local and national authorities further highlighted limitations in monitoring and enforcement, as well as budget constraints affecting awareness-raising activities. In particular, the “dual licensing structure”—involving the coexistence of the Ministry of Transportation’s seafarer recruitment license (SIUPPAK) and KP2MI’s migrant worker placement license (SIP3MI)—creates jurisdictional fragmentation and causes significant confusion on the ground. These challenges are not limited to a particular destination country, but must be understood as structural issues inherent across Indonesia’s entire migrant fisher recruitment and placement system.

The unique nature of the TITP scheme applied to the placement of Indonesian migrant workers in Japan, combined with the layered regulations governing fisheries workers, has created a complex governance issue. This complexity can be seen in the equally important involvement of two institutions: the Ministry of Manpower, which holds authority over placement, and KP2MI, which holds authority over protection. This institutional dualism creates several challenges.

First, TITP participants continue to be categorized as trainees rather than workers, placing them outside the full scope of KP2MI’s protection mandate and keeping them primarily within the placement regime. This creates institutional dualism, as placement is managed by the Ministry of Manpower while protection falls under KP2MI, with limited coordination and data sharing between the two institutions resulting in fragmented oversight.

Second, the recruitment and placement process involves a wide range of actors, including LPKs, P3MI, and various intermediaries, yet their respective roles and responsibilities are not always clearly defined. As a result, recruitment and placement procedures may become increasingly complex, creating situations in which workers proceed through contractual arrangements without having access to sufficient information. Furthermore, the involvement of multiple actors in the recruitment chain may obscure both the allocation of recruitment-related costs and the parties responsible for bearing such costs, thereby contributing to worker-paid recruitment fees and debt-financed migration. Such a structure may also present obstacles to the realization of the Employer Pays Principle (EPP), which is increasingly recognized as an international standard. In addition, limited coordination among relevant institutions and unclear divisions of authority have been identified as challenges that undermine effective oversight of, and responses to, problems arising during the recruitment stage.

These challenges have significant implications for worker protection. The classification of Indonesian migrant workers under an internship scheme places them outside the mainstream migrant worker protection framework within the migrant worker protection

5 For a detailed discussion of labor and human rights risks faced by Indonesian migrant fishers on Korean and Taiwanese distant-water fishing vessels, as well as destination-country regulatory and governance challenges, see Human Rights Now and Advocates for Public Interest Law (APIL), “Tuna in the Black Box: Human Rights Risks Hidden in the Opaque Tuna Supply Chain from Korean Fishing Vessels to the Japanese Market”, 2023, <https://hrn.or.jp/eng/news/2023/12/27/tuna-in-the-black-box-report/>; and Human Rights Now and Taiwan Association for Human Rights (TAHR), “Silenced Voices: Human Rights Risks Hidden in the Opaque Tuna Supply Chain from Taiwanese Fishing Vessels to the Japanese Market”, 2025, <https://hrn.or.jp/eng/news/2025/10/08/silenced-voices-report/>.

6 Human Rights Now and TAHR, id.

system, limiting their access to established grievance mechanisms, monitoring, and effective remedies when rights violations occur. As a result, the current governance structure risks creating a gap between the legal status of TITP participants and the protections they require as workers in practice.

Nevertheless, the existence of legal and institutional safeguards does not necessarily mean that such protections function effectively in practice. Despite being under the protection of KP2MI, the recruitment and placement process for migrant fishers continues to involve challenges that cannot be fully understood through an examination of formal regulatory frameworks alone, including the burden of recruitment-related costs, the involvement of intermediaries and brokers, insufficient access to information, and limitations in monitoring and enforcement mechanisms. The following chapters therefore examine the realities and challenges of the recruitment and placement process through interviews with relevant stakeholders and migrant fishers themselves.

2

Field Research in Indonesia

2.1 Research Overview

In June 2026, field research was conducted in Tegal Regency (Central Java Province), Cirebon Regency (West Java Province), and Indramayu Regency (West Java Province) to examine the recruitment and deployment processes of Indonesian migrant fishers.

As part of the research, interviews were conducted with representatives of SMKN 1 Mundu (State Vocational High School No. 1 Mundu), local labor offices in Tegal and Cirebon, LPKs, P3MIs, and the KP2MI, among others. Information was collected regarding the recruitment, selection, training, and deployment of migrant fishers.

In this report, P3MI, SO-accredited LPKs, and other LPKs involved in the dispatch of workers to Japan are collectively referred to as “recruitment and deployment agencies.” Furthermore, individuals who have registered with these entities and are currently subject to selection, education, training, or dispatch procedures are collectively referred to as “candidates.” This term encompasses not only those planning to travel to Japan as technical interns or specified skilled workers, but also applicants for employment opportunities in other countries.

2.2 Interview with SMKN 1 Mundu (State Vocational High School No. 1 Mundu)

SMKN 1 Mundu is a fisheries vocational high school located in Cirebon Regency, West Java Province. It was established in 1965. According to the school, it was originally established with support from Japan’s Official Development Assistance (ODA), and it has maintained close ties with Japan since its founding, including involvement in the training and placement of fishers for Japanese fishing vessels.

According to the school, among the 608 graduates with recorded post-graduation outcomes in 2025, approximately 67 percent entered overseas employment, around 6 percent joined the military or police, approximately 30 percent entered domestic employment, and less than 1 percent pursued higher education. In 2026, among 566 graduates with recorded post-graduation outcomes, approximately 70 percent entered overseas employment, around 3 percent joined the military or police, about 3 percent became entrepreneurs, and approximately 24 percent entered domestic employment. The school explained that the lower number of graduates in 2026 was due to a reduction in the number of classes.⁷

The primary overseas destinations are Japan and South Korea. Each year, more than 200 graduates are deployed to Japan, while approximately 40 to 80 graduates are deployed to South Korea. The school stated that it does not facilitate deployment to Taiwan.

According to school representatives, many students enter the school with the intention of working in Japan, and overseas employment is widely regarded as one of the principal post-graduation career pathways. The background to this situation is the school’s long-standing track record of dispatching workers to Japan, as well as the established network of alumni who have previously worked in Japan. During the visit, signage for an LPK established by an alumnus was visible on school premises; it was explained that some alumni return to Indonesia after working in Japan for approximately 5 to 10 years and subsequently launch their own placement businesses. Furthermore, the sharing of success stories by alumni with work experience in Japan is considered to be a significant influence on the career choices of current students.

Regarding the recruitment process, students undertake onboard training during their third year and are subsequently grouped according to their intended career paths. Students wishing to pursue overseas employment proceed to the selection process after obtaining parental consent and participate in interviews conducted by companies or LPKs.

⁷ Based on an interview conducted at SMKN 1 Mundu on 8 June 2026.

Each year, LPKs visit the school and organize job fairs. Approximately 10 LPKs typically participate and provide information regarding employment opportunities in Japan, working conditions, and employment benefits. Students attend these sessions and subsequently select the LPK through which they wish to apply.

Prior to the job fairs, the school requires participating LPKs to submit performance reports and reviews their past placement records and employment conditions. Students also compare the conditions offered by different LPKs before deciding where to apply. In some cases, Japanese employers visit the school directly and conduct interviews with students.

During the selection process conducted by Japanese employers, factors such as physical health, physical fitness, psychological suitability, and motivation are assessed. Employers may also inquire about applicants' family backgrounds and economic circumstances. School representatives noted that students from low-income households or those without parents are sometimes selected preferentially, suggesting that employers may perceive such students as having stronger motivation to work.

After successfully passing interviews and examinations, the school issues letters of recommendation to employers. These recommendations include not only academic performance but also evaluations of students' conduct at school and their performance during onboard training.

School representatives regularly visit regions where graduates are employed. During these visits, they meet not only with employers but also directly with graduates. A case study was introduced wherein a Japanese employer contacted the school regarding the mental health deterioration of a graduate, prompting school staff to visit the site to address the situation. In this instance, a female graduate experiencing mental instability due to anxiety and stress from living apart from her family received support from the school, which assessed her situation through direct interviews. Cases involving remittance-related family issues and temporary returns to Indonesia due to psychological stress were also reported.

Regarding recruitment-related costs regulated in Decree of the Director General of Vocational Training and Productivity Development No. 2/2944/HK.03.01/X/2024, the school explained that the total cost cannot exceed IDR 30 million to IDR 35 million under applicable regulations. A significant portion of these costs is borne by receiving companies, while students and their families primarily pay for Japanese language training. The school also stated that financial assistance is available to cover Japanese language training costs for students who have secured employment with Japanese companies.⁸

The school employs three Japanese-language teachers as civil servants. School representatives further explained that problems had previously arisen regarding inappropriate collection of scholarship funds or support payments by school personnel, but awareness-raising and preventive measures are now being implemented to prevent recurrence.

The school is also accredited by Indonesia's Ministry of Transportation, enabling students to complete procedures for obtaining seafarer-related certifications, including Seafarer's Books and Basic Safety Training (BST), on campus.

Information regarding LPKs established by alumni is also displayed on campus. According to school representatives, some graduates who have worked in Japan for approximately five to ten years return to Indonesia and establish LPKs of their own, becoming involved in the training and deployment of new candidates.

2.3 Interviews with Recruitment and Deployment Agencies

Interviews were conducted with five agencies involved in the recruitment and deployment of migrant fishers in Jakarta, Tegal, and Indramayu, comprising LPKs and P3MIs. The findings indicate that the recruitment and deployment of migrant fishers is not governed by a single uniform system; rather, significant variations exist among agencies in terms of their operational models, recruitment methods, and deployment arrangements.

⁸ In addition to school-led initiatives, the Indonesian government has launched the 'SMK Go Global' program as a strategic initiative coordinated by relevant ministries, including the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology and the KP2MI. This program aims to enhance the global competitiveness of vocational high school (SMK) graduates by providing comprehensive support—including language training and technical skills development—to facilitate employment in international markets. For further details, see: Indonesia National Police, 'Govt to Send 500,000 Vocational Graduates Abroad Under SMK Go Global Program.'

The agencies interviewed included: an LPK based in Jakarta holding SO accreditation (hereinafter “Agency A”); an agency in Tegal operating both as a P3MI and as a non-SO-accredited LPK (“Agency B”); a non-SO-accredited LPK in Tegal owned by the representative of Agency B (“Agency C”); a P3MI in Tegal (“Agency D”); and an SO-accredited LPK in Indramayu involved in the deployment of workers to Ishinomaki, a program discussed in detail in Chapter 3 (“Agency E”). Interviews were conducted with the representatives of each agency.

The following sections provide an overview of the agencies interviewed and summarize the key findings obtained through the interviews. A summary of the agencies is provided in the table below.

Abbreviation	Location	Type of Agency	SO Status
Agency A	Jakarta	LPK	SO-accredited
Agency B	Tegal	P3MI and LPK	non-SO-accredited
Agency C	Tegal	LPK	non-SO-accredited
Agency D	Tegal	P3MI	—
Agency E	Indramayu	LPK	SO-accredited

(1) Background to the Establishment of Recruitment and Deployment Agencies

The interviews first examined the professional backgrounds of the representatives prior to establishing their respective agencies. The findings suggest that recruitment and deployment agencies in Indonesia are established through a variety of pathways.

For example, the representative of Agency B had previously worked as a fisher on foreign fishing vessels before establishing an agency engaged in the recruitment and deployment of migrant fishers. Such trajectories are not uncommon in Indonesia, where former fishers often enter the recruitment industry after returning home.

At the same time, the interviews also identified cases in which recruitment and deployment agencies were established by individuals without prior experience in the fisheries sector. The representative of Agency D, for example, had no professional background in fisheries. Instead, after working in other industries and acquiring experience in international business relations and labor supply services, the representative entered the migrant fisher recruitment sector. Prior to launching the business, the representative conducted interviews with former fishers in order to gain an understanding of working conditions in the fishing industry and the recruitment and deployment process.

These findings indicate that Indonesia’s recruitment industry is not exclusively driven by former fishers. Actors from other sectors have also entered the industry, bringing different professional backgrounds and business experiences into migrant worker recruitment and placement.

(2) Recruitment Methods and Selection Criteria for Candidate Fishers

The interviews revealed notable differences among agencies with respect to recruitment methods and candidate selection criteria.

Agency A has maintained partnerships with fisheries vocational high schools since its establishment in 2005 and currently deploys approximately 30 workers annually to small-scale purse seine fishing vessels in Japan. In an effort to maintain the quality of recruits, the agency primarily targets graduates of fisheries vocational high schools. Although it previously collaborated with fisheries schools throughout Indonesia, most applicants are now recruited through referrals from former trainees and former fishers who have returned from overseas employment. Candidates are assessed by a professional skills certification body (LSP), which evaluates factors such as participation in safety training, net-mending skills, and knowledge of fishing operations. Representatives of Japanese supervisory organizations and fisheries cooperatives may also participate in interviews. After passing the LSP assessment, candidates undertake 360 hours of Japanese-language training. While formal Japanese-language certification, such as the Japanese Language Proficiency Test (JLPT), is not required under the TITP, a certain level of Japanese-language ability is nevertheless expected during interviews with Japanese counterparts, and applicants’ résumés and qualifications are reviewed.

Agency E similarly recruits candidates from fisheries vocational high schools. Selection criteria include basic fisheries knowledge, general knowledge, and basic numeracy skills. The number of workers deployed depends on labor demand from Japan. Agency E primarily supports placements in Ishinomaki and handles very few requests from other regions.

Agency B has deployed migrant fishers to Taiwan, China, France, South Korea, and Spain since 2020. While the agency expressed an interest in sending workers to Japan, it reported that it had not yet secured suitable job orders. Approximately half of its placements are to China, primarily on squid fishing vessels and tuna longliners. Around 30 percent are to Taiwan, mainly in distant-water fisheries. Placements to France are concentrated in bottom-fishing operations, while placements to South Korea are mainly in coastal and territorial fisheries.

According to Agency B, educational attainment is generally considered less important than prior fishing experience for placements outside Japan. Candidates are recruited through the agency's website, advertisements, and, most commonly, referrals through personal networks. The agency also maintains relationships with labor brokers known locally as *calo*.

Agency D also recruits and deploys Indonesian fishers to Japan. However, these placements are primarily for distant-water tuna vessels and do not take place under Japan's TITP or SSW system. For Japanese placements, Agency D receives job orders from designated intermediary agencies in Japan and recruits candidates based on the requirements set out in those job descriptions. The recruitment process involves candidate outreach, document screening, selection, and matching with Japanese employers. According to Agency D, all recruitment-related costs associated with placements in Japan are borne by the Japanese intermediary organization. Similar intermediary arrangements reportedly exist for placements to other destination countries.

When asked how relationships with foreign agencies were established, the representative explained that connections were initially developed through information provided by vessel crew members and subsequently formalized through site visits, reciprocal exchanges, and the negotiation of memoranda of understanding.

Agency D recruits candidates primarily through social media and labor brokers. Brokers with long-standing relationships with the agency identify potential candidates within local communities and refer them to the agency. Former fishers who were previously deployed through the agency also play an important role in recruitment by referring new candidates, for which they receive referral fees. As a result, networks of former migrant fishers and labor brokers function as key recruitment channels.

Candidate screening focuses heavily on previous fishing experience. Information reviewed during the selection process includes the names of vessels on which candidates have served, years of fishing experience, fishing methods, and target species. According to the representative of Agency D, practical fishing experience is regarded as considerably more important than educational qualifications. Individuals with work experience in agriculture or other land-based sectors are generally considered unsuitable for direct placement on fishing vessels due to the significant differences in working and living conditions. The representative noted that workers transitioning directly from land-based occupations to fishing frequently leave their positions before completing their contracts. Consequently, detailed verification of prior fishing experience, fishing methods, and target fisheries forms a central component of the selection process.

Overall, the interviews suggest that, particularly for placements outside Japan, recruitment and deployment agencies place greater emphasis on practical fishing experience than on formal educational attainment. Candidate screening processes commonly involve detailed assessments of previous vessel service, fishing methods, and fisheries experience.

(3) Destination Countries and Stepwise Labor Mobility

Interviews with recruitment and placement agencies revealed that some agencies intentionally promote a stepwise migration pathway in which migrant fishers first acquire experience on Chinese or Taiwanese fishing vessels before moving to destinations perceived as offering more favourable employment conditions, such as Japan or South Korea.

According to Agency B, working conditions on Chinese and Taiwanese vessels are generally viewed less favourably than those offered elsewhere. The representative stated that the agency aims to place workers in better positions after they have accumulated

approximately two years of experience, noting that “more capable fishers should be sent to destinations with better wage conditions.” Similarly, Agency D described a hierarchy among destination countries, explaining that Japan offers the most favourable conditions, followed by Korea and then Europe, while China and Taiwan are perceived as less desirable destinations. Agency D further explained that workers are often first deployed to China or Taiwan to gain experience before being considered for placement in Japan or other higher-paying markets.

These accounts suggest the existence of a stepwise labor migration model in which Chinese and Taiwanese fishing vessels function as an entry point for younger or less experienced fishers, who subsequently seek employment opportunities in Japan, Korea, or other destinations. In this sense, the international mobility of Indonesian migrant fishers does not necessarily consist of a single movement from origin to destination, but may instead involve a sequential process through which workers accumulate skills, experience, and credentials across multiple labor markets.

Of particular significance is the fact that recruitment and deployment agencies themselves characterized employment conditions in China and Taiwan as comparatively less favourable while simultaneously presenting these destinations as important pathways for gaining experience. This suggests that employment on Chinese and Taiwanese vessels may function as a preparatory stage for access to destinations perceived as offering better wages and working conditions.

If such patterns are widespread, labor markets in countries such as Japan and Korea may be partially dependent on workers who have previously acquired fishing experience in China or Taiwan. Rather than operating as isolated national labor markets, fisheries labor markets across the region may therefore be interconnected through the circulation of migrant fishers and the accumulation of experience across multiple jurisdictions.

Therefore, when examining human rights protections for migrant workers, it is imperative to view the recruitment structure and labor migration realities not solely in the context of placement to Japan, but across the entire region, including China, Taiwan, and South Korea. In particular, when assessing human rights risks within the seafood supply chain circulating in the Japanese market, it is essential to consider work experience and recruitment processes prior to the workers’ arrival in Japan to fully understand the structural human rights risks inherent in this industry. Furthermore, it is important to note that for workers transitioning to Japan after working in countries such as China or Taiwan, even if Japanese working conditions are perceived as relatively favorable, there is a risk that this perception could lead to the invisibilization of human rights challenges within Japan.

(4) Deployment Structures and Inter-Agency Coordination

The interviews also revealed significant variation in the institutional arrangements through which migrant fishers are recruited, trained, and deployed overseas. As discussed in Chapter 1, under Japan’s TITP, workers are generally required to be recruited and dispatched through an LPK that has obtained authorization as a SO. However, the present research identified cases in which non-SO LPKs undertook recruitment and training functions before transferring candidates to another SO-certified LPK or a P3MI responsible for the formal deployment process.

One example is Agency C, which operates primarily as a training institution rather than a fisheries-specific recruitment and deployment agency. Agency C provides Japanese language instruction and training on Japanese workplace culture for prospective technical intern trainees and specified skilled workers. According to the agency, the majority of its placements currently involve technical intern trainees, with approximately 100 individuals deployed annually.

As Agency C does not possess SO authorization, technical intern trainees are dispatched through separate agreements with SO-certified LPKs located in Jakarta, Bekasi, Central Java, and other regions. For SSW placements, by contrast, deployment is conducted through a P3MI operated by the same owner.

According to Agency C, such arrangements are common within the Indonesian recruitment industry. The agency explained that LPKs tend to specialize in candidate recruitment and training, whereas SO-certified institutions focus on administrative and deployment functions. From this perspective, the division of responsibilities among multiple agencies is regarded as a more efficient

operational model. Agency C further noted that obtaining SO authorization requires compliance with various regulatory requirements, including changes to corporate structure and organizational registration. Moreover, SO-certified institutions may face restrictions regarding the sectors and destinations for which they are authorized to deploy workers. As a result, some agencies deliberately continue operating as non-SO LPKs and collaborate with SO-certified institutions when overseas deployment is required.

These findings indicate that recruitment for employment in Japan is not always undertaken by a single agency. Rather, recruitment, training, and deployment functions may be distributed across multiple actors, creating a multi-layered recruitment structure involving different types of institutions with distinct responsibilities. Such institutional arrangements have important implications for oversight, accountability, and the protection of migrant workers' rights throughout the recruitment process.

(5) Recruitment Costs

The involvement of multiple agencies in the recruitment and deployment process also affects how recruitment-related costs are allocated among different actors.

As mentioned above, the Indonesian government has legally established an upper limit of IDR 30 million to 35 million for recruitment costs bound for Japan. However, the interviews revealed that recruitment-related expenses are often incurred through multiple channels, including training fees, deployment fees, and language education costs, making the actual cost structure more complex than the legal framework alone might suggest.

At Agency C, education and training costs amounted to approximately IDR 8.5 million per candidate. These costs included Japanese language instruction, training expenses incurred during the preparation period, and final examination fees. Trainees traveling from distant regions were permitted to stay free of charge in accommodation facilities operated by the LPK, while those living nearby commuted from their homes. In addition to these expenses, candidates were reportedly required to pay approximately IDR 28 million to the SO-certified institution responsible for their formal deployment to Japan.

A 2019 study conducted by Human Rights Working Group (HRWG)⁹ documented cases in which brokers charged migrant workers excessive and unauthorized fees amounting to tens of millions of rupiah. When asked about this issue, Agency C stated that, if a planned deployment became impossible, the agency would seek alternative placement opportunities to ensure that candidates were still able to migrate rather than losing the funds they had already invested.

These findings suggest that, although government regulations impose ceilings on recruitment costs, migrant workers may nevertheless be required to bear multiple categories of expenses, including training fees and payments to SO-certified institutions. The total financial burden borne by workers, as well as the transparency of those costs, therefore warrants further examination. Moreover, given that non-SO LPKs may collaborate with SO-certified LPKs as part of the deployment process, effective oversight from a migrant worker protection perspective should extend beyond formally authorized recruitment agencies to include institutions responsible for recruitment and pre-departure training.

Different patterns were observed among SO-certified LPKs.

At Agency A, candidates were required to pay approximately IDR 6.5 million for Japanese language training. This amount included accommodation costs, meals, and instructor fees. According to the agency, candidates were not charged for passport acquisition.

Similarly, Agency E, an SO-certified LPK involved in the Ishinomaki recruitment program, operates under a model in which vessel owners in the Ishinomaki region provide financial support for workforce development in cooperation with fisheries vocational high schools and LPKs in West Java. Under this arrangement, Japanese language education and vocational training costs are borne by Japanese stakeholders, and candidates are not required to pay recruitment or training fees themselves. Furthermore, according

⁹ Human Rights Working Group (HRWG), "Shifting the Paradigm of Indonesia-Japan Labor Migration Cooperation, Voices of Returned Migrant Workers on Pre-Departure Processes under EPA and TITP", 2019.

to Agency E, the core of their recruitment and placement operations relies on the collaborative framework established between the LPK and relevant organizations in Ishinomaki City; they do not conduct recruitment through other SOs. The Ishinomaki City and West Java Province collaboration model will be discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

These examples demonstrate that workers' financial burdens vary considerably even within recruitment pathways to Japan. In particular, the model adopted by Agency E illustrates how employer- or buyer-funded recruitment systems can substantially reduce the economic burden placed on migrant workers.

The interviews also examined recruitment costs associated with deployments arranged through P3MIs.

Agency B reported that the average cost incurred prior to departure was approximately IDR 35 million. However, detailed information regarding the breakdown of costs or variations among destination countries was not provided.

Conversely, hearings with Agency D indicated that the financial burden varies significantly depending on the destination; in particular, cases involving placement to South Korea can entail extremely high costs. Regarding placement to Japan, while the financial burden on the candidate is relatively smaller compared to cases destined for South Korea, the specific amounts and cost components differ by case. While instances were identified where the receiving side covers Japanese language training and travel-related expenses—as seen in the Ishinomaki model where candidates bear no financial burden—other instances exist where candidates are required to cover a certain portion of the costs. Agency D estimated that sending a fisher to Korea costs approximately IDR 155 million per worker, including departure processing fees, agent commissions, administrative expenses, and security deposits. Of this amount, approximately IDR 70 million is collected as a “runaway prevention deposit.” Although this deposit is reportedly refunded upon completion of the employment contract, workers cannot access the funds during the contract period. As a result, many workers reportedly secure bank loans using land or housing assets as collateral. Agency D stated that the agency does not actively promote Korean placements because it considers it undesirable for workers to assume such substantial levels of debt.

This case illustrates that the financial burdens borne by migrant workers are shaped not only by regulations in the country of origin but also by destination-country policies and recruitment practices. In the Korean cases described by Agency D, workers reportedly incurred substantial debt as a consequence of recruitment-related costs, particularly the requirement to provide a large security deposit.

From an international labor rights perspective, worker-incurred debt associated with obtaining employment is widely recognized as a significant risk factor for forced labor. The ILO's Indicators of Forced Labor identify debt bondage as an important indicator that may be associated with situations of forced labor. Furthermore, the ILO has emphasized that assessments of forced labor risks in the fishing sector should examine not only wage payment practices but also whether workers are required to provide deposits or guarantees and whether recruitment practices comply with the Employer Pays Principle (EPP).¹⁰

Viewed from this perspective, recruitment systems that require workers to bear substantial recruitment-related costs or provide large security deposits may create more than a financial burden. Such arrangements can increase workers' economic dependence and potentially make it more difficult for them to leave abusive working conditions, terminate employment, or return home when their rights are violated. Consequently, efforts to protect migrant workers' rights should include scrutiny not only of recruitment costs themselves but also of the operation of deposit schemes and their compatibility with the Employer Pays Principle.

Agency D also reported that, despite being a P3MI, it operates its own language training program. Because there is often a period between contract conclusion and departure, former migrant fishers with overseas fishing experience provide language instruction and practical guidance to new recruits. Candidates themselves bear the costs associated with this training. According to Agency D, Korean-bound workers receive approximately two and a half months of Korean language instruction, reflecting the perception that stronger language skills improve access to better treatment and working conditions after arrival.

10 International Labour Organization (ILO), “Towards Freedom at Sea: Handbook for the Detection of Forced labour in Commercial Fishing”, 20 December 2023, <https://www.ilo.org/publications/towards-freedom-sea-handbook-detection-forced-labour-commercial-fishing>.

International standards increasingly recognize that migrant workers should not bear recruitment fees or related costs. The ILO has stated that migrant fishers should not be charged recruitment fees or related expenses, including language testing fees, skills assessment fees, training costs, orientation expenses, passport and visa fees, transportation costs, and accommodation expenses.¹¹

However, the present research found significant variation in who bears such costs. While Agency E operates a model in which training and education expenses are financed by receiving-side stakeholders, candidates recruited through Agency A, C, and D were required to pay at least some recruitment- or training-related expenses themselves.

These findings suggest a potential gap between international standards, particularly the Employer Pays Principle, and current recruitment practices. Differences in the scope of costs charged to workers and the allocation of financial responsibility among recruitment and deployment agencies may also reduce transparency and predictability for migrant workers. From a rights protection perspective, greater clarity is needed regarding both the composition of recruitment-related costs and the parties responsible for paying them, as well as their consistency with international labor standards.

Overall, the interviews demonstrate that the financial burdens faced by migrant workers vary significantly depending on the type of recruitment institution involved, the destination country, and the nature of relationships between sending and receiving actors. Even within recruitment pathways to Japan, some workers incurred training and deployment-related expenses, while others benefited from arrangements in which receiving-side stakeholders assumed those costs. In addition, certain destinations, such as Korea, involved substantial security deposits and associated indebtedness.

These findings suggest that assessments of fair recruitment should consider not only the overall amount paid by workers but also the composition of those costs, the allocation of payment responsibilities, and whether workers are required to incur debt in order to access employment opportunities abroad. Additionally, companies involved in seafood supply chains are required to understand the costs borne by workers during the recruitment and hiring process to ensure that excessive financial burdens or debt are not incurred. In particular, from the perspective of the internationally recognized ‘Employer Pays Principle,’ it is critical to minimize recruitment-related costs borne by workers and to advance efforts toward preventing the risk of forced labor.

(6) Challenges in System Implementation and Protection of Migrant Workers’ Rights

Interviewees also identified the complexity of Indonesia’s migrant worker deployment system as an important factor shaping recruitment practices and workers’ experiences.

According to several recruitment and deployment agencies, oversight and regulation of recruitment institutions involve both the KP2MI and the Ministry of Manpower, resulting in a regulatory framework that is often perceived as complicated. Because different categories of recruitment institutions are subject to different legal requirements and supervisory authorities, recruitment and deployment agencies themselves reported difficulties in fully understanding and navigating the system.

The present research likewise found that multiple actors—including SO-certified LPKs, non-SO LPKs, and P3MIs—participate in the recruitment process while performing distinct functions. Furthermore, recruitment pathways differ depending on the migration channel involved, including placements on distant-water fishing vessels, Japan’s TITP, and the SSW system. As a result, recruitment processes experienced by migrant workers are highly heterogeneous and often difficult to understand from the workers’ perspective.

Interviewees also identified challenges relating to candidates’ understanding of their legal status under Japan’s TITP. According to recruitment and deployment agencies, many prospective migrants do not clearly understand the distinction between being a “trainee” and being a “worker.” Although LPKs reportedly provide pre-departure explanations, interviewees indicated that candidates do not always fully comprehend the implications of these different legal classifications.

11 International labour Organization (ILO), “Guidelines for Fair labor Market Services for Migrant Fishers”, 14 November 2025, <https://www.ilo.org/resource/other/guidelines-fair-labour-market-services-migrant-fishers>.

This issue reflects a broader tension within the TITP itself. While the program is formally framed as a mechanism for international cooperation through skills transfer, participants nevertheless perform paid labor under employment relationships. As a result, candidates may struggle to understand their precise legal status and the rights to which they are entitled.

Where migrant workers depart without a sufficient understanding of their legal rights and obligations, they may face difficulties in assessing employment contracts and working conditions. It is therefore important that workers fully understand, prior to departure, matters such as contract terms, wages, working hours, conditions governing job changes and repatriation, and available complaint and remedy mechanisms.

This issue is particularly significant in the fisheries sector. Depending on the type of fishery involved, workers may spend extended periods at sea, limiting their ability to access external support services or seek assistance when problems arise. Ensuring that workers understand their rights and available grievance and remedy mechanisms before departure is therefore an important component of preventing human rights abuses and facilitating timely responses when violations occur.

In Japan, the introduction of a new Employment for Skill Development Program (*Ikusei Shuro*) is scheduled for April 2027. This reform aims to address, to some extent, issues identified under the current TITP, such as easing requirements for changing employers and strengthening supervisory mechanisms. However, ensuring that migrant workers receive sufficient information prior to departure and begin their employment with a full understanding of their rights and contract details remains a significant challenge. Furthermore, since the issue of financial burdens and debt at the dispatch stage cannot be resolved solely through institutional reforms in the receiving country, continuous efforts are required from both recruitment/dispatch-related agencies and receiving entities.

2.4 Interviews with Local Manpower offices

2.4.1 Tegal Local Manpower Office

Most regulatory authority over the deployment of overseas migrant workers rests with the central government. Accordingly, the local labor office does not possess the authority to revoke licenses or impose sanctions on recruitment and deployment agencies.

At the same time, the local labor office may provide assistance in cases involving occupational accidents, deaths, or problems arising after workers return to Indonesia.

The local labor office maintains a certain level of oversight regarding the activities of LPKs and P3MIs. However, effective supervision is limited in practice because prospective migrant workers frequently use recruitment and deployment agencies located outside the region, and many recruitment companies are headquartered in other provinces.

The office also identified the promotion of socialization activities for prospective migrant workers as an important function. However, budget constraints were cited as a major obstacle to conducting such activities on a sufficient scale.

In addition, officials noted that the governance of migrant worker protection has become complex because both KP2MI and the Ministry of Manpower are involved in the administration of the system.

2.4.2 Cirebon Local Manpower Office

The local labor office plays an active role in resolving disputes involving migrant workers.

When complaints are submitted by migrant workers or their family members, the local labor office summons the relevant P3MI and facilitates discussions between the worker and the agency. Where a dispute is resolved, the P3MI is required to submit a written report documenting the resolution.

Where a P3MI fails to cooperate in resolving a dispute, the local labor office may request the suspension of the agency's operations and subsequently report the matter to KP2MI, which is responsible for determining whether the agency's license should ultimately be revoked.

mately be revoked.

Cases involving brokers present particular challenges. Because brokers are not subject to a formal licensing system, it is difficult to identify, supervise, or sanction them.

With respect to problems occurring after workers have departed overseas, the usual process is for family members to contact the local labor office, which then communicates with the relevant P3MI. If the issue remains unresolved, the matter may be referred to KP2MI, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Indonesian diplomatic missions abroad.

Issues relating to recruitment fees, loans, and collateral arrangements are regarded as matters arising from contractual relationships between workers and recruitment agencies or financial institutions. While the local labor office does not possess authority to intervene directly in such contractual matters, it may provide assistance to prospective migrant workers in accessing available financial support.

For migrant fishers deployed to Taiwan, different regulatory frameworks and competent authorities apply to coastal fisheries and distant-water fisheries. As a result, deployments conducted through manning agencies holding a SIUPPAK license issued by the Ministry of Transportation fall outside the jurisdiction of the local labor office.

The local labor office also regards socialization activities for migrant workers as an important component of its mandate. However, officials reported that the budget allocated for these activities had been suspended as a result of government financial efficiency measures, significantly constraining the office's capacity to conduct outreach and awareness-raising programs. Cirebon Regency contains more than 420 villages and over 40 sub-district-level administrative units, and conducting adequate outreach activities therefore requires substantial financial and human resources.

2.5 Interviews with KP2MI

As part of this research, an interview was conducted with the KP2MI to better understand the current framework governing the protection of Indonesian migrant workers and the overseas labor deployment system.

As noted above, Indonesia's migrant worker deployment system is governed by Law No. 18 of 2017 concerning the Protection of Indonesian Migrant Workers. The law was enacted to shift the focus of the system from labor deployment toward the protection of migrant workers' rights and provides for comprehensive protection before departure, during employment abroad, and upon return.

According to KP2MI, overseas employment schemes can broadly be divided into two categories. The first is the G-to-G scheme, exemplified by the Employment Permit System (EPS) for employment in South Korea. The second consists of deployment through P3MI. Most overseas employment opportunities, including Japan's TITP and SSW program, fall within the latter category.

To operate as a P3MI, a company must first register as a legal entity with the Indonesia Investment Coordinating Board (BKPM) and subsequently obtain a license to engage in migrant worker placement services. Licensing requirements include a minimum paid-up capital of IDR 5 billion and a security deposit of IDR 1.5 billion. This deposit system is intended to provide a source of protection for migrant workers in cases where a P3MI fails to fulfill its responsibilities. However, KP2MI noted that there have been cases involving P3MI whose licenses were revoked in which the deposit alone was insufficient to provide adequate compensation to affected workers.

KP2MI also operates the SSKO PMI (*Sistem Komputerisasi Perlindungan Pekerja Migran Indonesia*), an integrated information system for migrant worker protection. Prospective migrant workers are required to register in the system prior to departure and, upon completion of registration, are issued an E-PMI (electronic migrant worker card). The E-PMI serves as proof that the individual has been officially registered as a migrant worker through the prescribed legal procedures.

As discussed in Chapter 3, this research also included interviews with Indonesian specified skilled workers currently employed in Ishinomaki City, Miyagi Prefecture, Japan. These interviews identified an operational challenge whereby workers transitioning from the TITP to the SSW status encounter difficulties renewing their E-PMI while remaining outside Indonesia and may be required to return to Indonesia in order to complete the process. In response, KP2MI officials stated that, under the current system, it is preferable for workers to re-register during a temporary return to Indonesia before departing again. Taking into account the impact of long-term overseas employment on family relationships, KP2MI noted that issues such as divorce and deterioration of parent-child relationships have been observed among migrant workers who spend extended periods abroad. Encouraging periodic returns to Indonesia is therefore regarded as part of migrant worker protection efforts.

KP2MI also expressed a critical view of Japan's TITP. In recent years, according to the interviewee, cases have been identified in which certain LPKs recruit candidates under the guise of "capacity building programs" and charge inappropriate fees. The interviewee explained that law enforcement authorities have already taken action against such cases in several regions, and that KP2MI has strengthened its awareness-raising and outreach activities (dissemination) for prospective migrant workers.

Given that recruitment activities by LPKs continue to take place, KP2MI has also produced some dissemination materials for prospective migrant workers and provides information on overseas employment schemes and workers' rights.

The interviewee further expressed a critical view of Japan's TITP. While the program was originally intended to facilitate skills transfer and training, the interviewee noted that, in practice, it has come to function in part as a labor supply mechanism. The interviewee also identified the lengthy waiting period before candidates are able to take the skills assessment examination as a challenge.

Concerns were also raised regarding recruitment-related costs. According to the interviewee, cases continue to exist in which prospective workers participating in Japan's TITP are required to pay substantial fees. In some cases, candidates have reportedly been asked to bear costs of between IDR 80 million and IDR 100 million prior to departure.

The interviewee further noted that, in certain cases, when problems arise, LPKs reportedly deduct fees directly from allowances or other payments that should otherwise be provided to workers. According to the interviewee, there have been cases in which approximately JPY 10,000 per month was deducted from such payments.

The above interview findings demonstrate that, in considering the protection of migrant workers' rights, it is necessary to examine not only working conditions after placement but the entire recruitment and placement process, including recruitment, selection, education and training, and the costs incurred in connection with placement. In light of the significant differences among recruitment agencies in terms of the costs borne by workers and the content of education and training provided, further examination is also needed to ensure transparency regarding the costs borne by migrant workers and to assess the extent to which these practices are consistent with the internationally recognized Employer Pays Principle.

At the same time, this study identified a case in which, based on agreements and memoranda of understanding concluded between Ishinomaki City, Miyagi Prefecture, and West Java Province, Indonesia, Ishinomaki City, the Ishinomaki Fisheries Training Council, host vessel owners, fisheries-related vocational high schools, LPKs, and the West Java provincial government collaborate to provide comprehensive support from human resource development through post-arrival assistance without requiring migrant workers themselves to bear the costs associated with their placement. Under this initiative, in addition to Japanese-language education and human resource development at the pre-departure stage, various forms of support are provided after arrival in Japan, including assistance with daily life, coordination with host vessel owners, and continued exchanges with the workers' communities of origin.

The following chapter therefore examines the case of Indonesian technical intern trainees and specified skilled workers in Ishinomaki City, Miyagi Prefecture. Based on interviews with relevant stakeholders, it outlines the history and development of the collaboration, the mechanisms for recruitment, placement, and reception, and the support system provided to migrant workers.

3

The Ishinomaki – West Java Recruitment and Reception Model

3.1 Overview of the Study

Fishing communities across Japan have been facing a severe shortage of labor, leading many regions to accept Indonesian technical intern trainees to support the fisheries sector. Ishinomaki City has continuously accepted technical intern trainees from West Java Province, since fiscal year 2007. However, the Great East Japan Earthquake of 2011 caused devastating damage to Ishinomaki's fisheries industry, which constitutes one of the city's core economic sectors. Of the 29 technical intern trainees residing in Ishinomaki at the time of the disaster, 28 returned to Indonesia, while one chose to remain in Japan. In the following year, however, 13 former trainees returned to Ishinomaki and worked alongside local fishers to support the recovery of the fisheries industry. Since then, new trainees have continued to arrive annually and remain an important part of the local fisheries workforce.

The technical intern trainee program established under the agreements and MoUs between West Java Province and Ishinomaki City can broadly be divided into two categories. The first consists of trainees who came to Japan under the agreement and MoU concluded in 2007. The second consists of trainees who came to Japan after graduating from fisheries vocational high schools under a scholarship program established pursuant to an MoU signed in 2013 between West Java Province and the Ishinomaki Fisheries Training Council. Under this scholarship scheme, vessel owners in Ishinomaki provided financial support for the children of fishing households.

This study focuses on the recruitment and acceptance mechanisms established under the agreement and MoU on training programs concluded in 2007 between the government of West Java Province and Ishinomaki City. Interviews were conducted with the Fisheries Division of Ishinomaki City, the Ishinomaki Fisheries Training Council, and vessel owners who currently accept technical intern trainees.

It should be noted that some fisheries companies in Ishinomaki City accept technical intern trainees through channels outside the Ishinomaki Fisheries Training Council. In such cases, trainees themselves bear various costs associated with departure and placement; however, the specific amounts of these costs could not be confirmed during the study.

The following sections examine the development of cooperation between Ishinomaki City and West Java Province, the support systems established during the recruitment and acceptance stages, and the mechanisms through which the two regions have maintained their long-term relationship.

3.2 History of Cooperation between Ishinomaki City and West Java Province

(1) Establishment of the Cooperative Framework

Ishinomaki City is located adjacent to the Kinkasan fishing grounds, one of the world's three major fishing grounds, and is one of Japan's leading fisheries cities, with more than 200 species of fish landed annually. At the same time, despite fisheries being a key local industry, labor shortages had become a serious challenge across the fishing, aquaculture, and seafood processing sectors.

Following the establishment of the institutional framework for Japan's foreign trainee system in 1989, interest in accepting foreign workers increased in Ishinomaki City. Labor shortages were particularly acute in the small-scale bottom trawl fisheries sector, which was primarily operated by family-owned businesses. However, under the system at that time, the acceptance of foreign trainees was only permitted through pilot projects led by local governments. Concerns regarding potential difficulties arising from language and cultural differences, as well as challenges in securing budgetary resources to assign personnel responsible for man-

aging the program, prevented implementation. Meanwhile, some fishing vessels were unable to operate due to labor shortages, making workforce recruitment an urgent issue for the local fisheries sector.

Against this backdrop, Mr. O, who was engaged in seafood trading in Sukabumi Regency, West Java Province, facilitated communication between the two regions. Through his mediation, the Governor of West Java sent a letter to the Mayor of Ishinomaki requesting fisheries skills training opportunities for young people from the province.

Subsequently, in April 2007, Ishinomaki City and the government of West Java Province signed an agreement on training programs and an MoU on broader cooperation in the fisheries sector. Ishinomaki City also established the Ishinomaki Fisheries Trainee Acceptance Council and dispatched municipal officials to West Java Province in preparation for the program. As a result, the first cohort of 11 trainees arrived in November 2007.

The first cohort was selected from graduating students of a fisheries vocational high school in Sukabumi Regency, West Java Province. At that time, the government of West Java required that trainees bear no recruitment or training-related costs as a condition of participation. Accordingly, utility expenses for pre-departure Japanese-language training facilities were covered by the government of West Java, while Japanese-language instructors' salaries and trainees' meal expenses were covered by the vessel owners in Ishinomaki who accepted the trainees.

From the second cohort onward, the selection process shifted to recruiting high-performing students from fisheries vocational high schools throughout West Java Province. In recent years, at the request of the government of West Java, the majority of trainees have come from fisheries vocational high schools in Cirebon and Indramayu Regencies.

Following amendments to Japan's Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act in July 2010, responsibility for supervising the program was transferred to the Miyagi Prefecture Fisheries Cooperative Association, the Watanoha Fishing Vessel Fisheries Cooperative Association, and the Oshika Fisheries Cooperative Association. Although the West Java side considered whether the program should continue following this institutional change, it ultimately decided to maintain the trainee dispatch program on the understanding that the MoU with Ishinomaki City remained valid and that Ishinomaki City would continue to be actively involved.

(2) Continuation of the Program and Institutional Reorganization after the Great East Japan Earthquake

The Great East Japan Earthquake of 2011 caused extensive damage to Ishinomaki's fisheries industry, destroying numerous fishing vessels and port facilities.¹² At the time of the disaster, 29 Indonesian trainees were residing in Ishinomaki City. Of these, 28 returned to Indonesia, while one chose to remain in Japan.

Following the disaster, the West Java Fisheries Department reviewed whether the trainee dispatch program should continue. After consultations with the Fisheries Division of Ishinomaki City, however, an exchange program was established under which officials from West Java Province were invited to Ishinomaki annually at the expense of local vessel owners.

In 2014, Ishinomaki City and West Java Province signed a new Memorandum of Understanding on Friendship Exchange and Fisheries Cooperation. As the trainee program originated as an intergovernmental cooperation initiative between local authorities, a system was adopted under which trainees were not required to bear costs associated with pre-departure training, intermediary services, or other recruitment-related expenses.

12 The tsunami damaged all 44 fishing ports in Ishinomaki City. Of the 3,230 fishing vessels registered in the city, 2,762 were lost. Breakwaters, set-net fisheries, and aquaculture facilities were also almost completely destroyed. The Ishinomaki Municipal Wholesale Fish Market was severely affected, with both the Ishinomaki and Oshika markets rendered unusable due to extensive damage. In the year preceding the disaster, the three fish markets in Ishinomaki recorded landings of 129,000 metric tons, with a total value of JPY 18.2 billion. In the year following the disaster, however, landings fell to 54,000 metric tons and the total value declined to JPY 9.5 billion. Recovery efforts subsequently progressed, and by 2015 landings had reached 100,000 metric tons with a value of JPY 18.1 billion, effectively returning to pre-disaster levels.

(3) Establishment and Role of the Ishinomaki Fisheries Training Council

Although many vessel owners lost their fishing vessels immediately after the Great East Japan Earthquake, the trainee acceptance program was resumed through the use of government-funded reconstruction assistance programs. As part of its post-disaster recovery efforts, Ishinomaki City also assigned two municipal officials to oversee the acceptance of foreign workers.

At the same time, the Miyagi Prefecture Fisheries Cooperative Association, which had served as the supervising organization at the time, withdrew from the trainee acceptance program, and the Ishinomaki Fisheries Trainee Acceptance Council ceased its activities. Consequently, in April 2012, the Ishinomaki Fisheries Training Council was established by local fishers with the objective of supporting technical intern trainees and promoting international exchange. The Council is funded by contributions from vessel owners affiliated with the Watanoha Fishing Vessel Fisheries Cooperative Association and the Oshika Fisheries Cooperative Association. While 16 vessel owners participated at the time of its establishment, membership had increased to 35 by 2024.

Municipal officials from Ishinomaki also visited West Java Province and held consultations with provincial authorities. As a result, in July 2012, thirteen former trainees who had returned to Indonesia after the earthquake came back to Ishinomaki, allowing the trainee acceptance program to resume. The costs associated with their return were borne by the receiving vessel owners. Furthermore, following the expiration of the MoU between Ishinomaki City and West Java Province in 2013, a new MoU was concluded between West Java Province and the Ishinomaki Fisheries Training Council.

The Council aims to contribute both to human resource development in the trainees' home country and to the sustainability and development of Japan's coastal fisheries through support for technical intern trainees and specified skilled workers. Its activities encompass a wide range of services, including support as a registered support organization, assistance with daily life and administrative procedures, transportation to and from airports, Japanese-language education and fisheries training, welfare programs, support for receiving vessel owners, coordination with West Java Province, communication with trainees' families, and home visits to trainees' households.

Japan's TITP has often been criticized for functioning more as a labor supply mechanism than as a system for technology transfer, which is its stated objective. In contrast, under the MoU, the acceptance of trainees was conceived not merely as a means of securing labor but as a comprehensive support initiative extending from the pre-departure stage through trainees' return to Indonesia. The objective was to establish a framework that would benefit both the trainees and the vessel owners who received them.

This approach reflected a broader vision of the program as a form of interregional cooperation through human resource development rather than a simple labor recruitment scheme. According to stakeholders, while fisheries constitute a major industry in the coastal areas of West Java Province, many children from fishing households have historically been unable to continue their education due to financial constraints. The Council therefore sought to provide scholarships to children of fishing families, enabling them to attend fisheries vocational high schools and subsequently undertake technical training in Japan. It was hoped that, upon returning home, these individuals would apply the knowledge and skills acquired in Japan to support the development of local fisheries. Although the scholarship program itself is no longer in operation, its underlying philosophy of supporting human resource development in the sending communities has been maintained through initiatives such as Japanese-language education support for technical intern trainees.

(4) Human Resource Development Support through the Scholarship Program

In 2013, following the first case of a trainee absconding from the fifth cohort, the Ishinomaki Fisheries Training Council launched a scholarship program targeting children of fishing households who intended to continue working in the fisheries sector after returning to Indonesia.

Prior to this initiative, many trainees and technical intern trainees who came to Japan were not necessarily from fishing families and did not always enter the fisheries sector upon their return. As a result, the skills and knowledge acquired in Japan were not always effectively utilized in local fisheries activities.

To address this issue, the Council established a scholarship program for children of economically disadvantaged fishing households. Under the program, 20 students per year received scholarships of JPY 60,000 per person annually (approximately IDR 7 million at the exchange rate at that time) for three years, covering the duration of their high school education. At the time, this amount was generally sufficient to cover tuition fees at fisheries vocational high schools. The program aimed to provide educational opportunities for children from fishing households who might otherwise have been unable to continue their studies due to financial constraints. The scholarships were funded by vessel owners participating in the Council.

When the scholarship program was introduced, representatives from Ishinomaki City, the Ishinomaki Fisheries Training Council, and the supervising organization, the Oshika Fisheries Cooperative Association, visited West Java Province and held discussions with the Governor of West Java regarding the scholarship scheme, technology transfer, and the selection of scholarship recipients. As a result, twenty students enrolled in fisheries vocational high schools in 2014, and another twenty students were admitted the following year while the first cohort advanced to the next grade level. The scholarship program was implemented over two cycles spanning six years.

Although the program was suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic, sixteen graduates of fisheries vocational high schools who had participated in the scholarship program were dispatched to Ishinomaki as technical intern trainees in April 2018.

Subsequently, the scholarship program for high school education was replaced by support measures aimed at trainees wishing to transition from technical intern status to SSW status. Under the new arrangement, preparatory training courses for relevant examinations are provided free of charge through local LPKs. In addition, the government of West Java provides each participant with JPY 50,000 to cover food expenses during the training period. All remaining costs are borne by the Council, meaning that trainees themselves incur no financial burden.

Most of the trainees are graduates of fisheries vocational high schools in West Java Province, particularly SMKN 1 Mundu in Cirebon Regency and SMKN 2 Indramayu in Indramayu Regency. In recent years, the proportion of trainees from the Indramayu Regency has increased significantly.

As a result, technical intern trainees accepted through the Ishinomaki Fisheries Training Council are not required to bear the costs of Japanese-language training or dispatch procedures following graduation from high school. Japanese-language education and dispatch procedures are carried out by an LPK located in Indramayu Regency that is affiliated with Mr. O. After the scholarship program ended, the funds previously contributed by vessel owners to finance scholarships were redirected to support Japanese-language training for prospective trainees.

3.3 Institutional Characteristics of the Recruitment Process

(1) Recruitment without Worker-Borne Fees

One of the defining features of the trainee acceptance scheme established under the agreement and MoU between West Java Province and Ishinomaki City is that trainees are not required to bear the costs associated with pre-departure education, Japanese-language training, passport acquisition, travel, or other expenses necessary for coming to Japan as technical intern trainees.

This arrangement emerged in response to concerns that many trainees, including graduates of fisheries vocational high schools, were arriving in Japan burdened by debts incurred to pay recruitment and deployment agencies and other intermediaries.

According to interviewees, trainees participating in this scheme are not required to secure large sums of money before departure and are able to receive various forms of support after arriving in Japan. Many trainees come from the same communities or graduated from the same fisheries vocational high schools as individuals already working in Ishinomaki. As a result, they are able to obtain assistance with clothing, housing, and practical information about daily life. In addition, the Ishinomaki Fisheries Training Council provides support related to both daily life and employment, helping to reduce the financial and psychological burdens associated with the initial settlement period in Japan.

(2) Limitation of Sending Areas and Educational Institutions

The scheme is implemented pursuant to the agreement concluded between West Java Province and Ishinomaki City and is open to students and graduates of public fisheries vocational high schools within West Java Province.

Although multiple fisheries vocational high schools in West Java Province participated during the initial stages of the program, most trainees now come from schools located in Cirebon and Indramayu Regencies. One reason for this concentration is that the LPK working closely with the Ishinomaki Fisheries Training Council is located in Indramayu Regency.

According to stakeholders, limiting recruitment to specific regions helps maintain social connections among trainees and their families, thereby contributing to the prevention of problems such as absconding.

(3) Limiting the Role of Informal Intermediaries

As noted above, the scheme is implemented under the agreement and MoU between Ishinomaki City and West Java Province and operates on the basis that trainees should not bear recruitment-related costs, in accordance with requests made by the West Java side.

Because Japanese-language training expenses, tuition fees, travel costs, and related expenditures are borne by the receiving vessel owners, there is limited scope for intermediaries of the type commonly found in conventional recruitment processes to become involved. Trainees are also informed in advance that they are not required to make any payments if school personnel or third parties request fees from them.

Experiences of Indonesian Technical Intern Trainees Working in Ishinomaki City: From Arrival in Japan to Employment in Ishinomaki

As part of this study, interviews were conducted with Indonesian technical intern trainees currently working in Ishinomaki City. The following sections present the experiences of trainees who came to Japan through different pathways and are now employed in Ishinomaki.

Technical Intern Trainees Who Came to Japan through the Scholarship Program

This study interviewed two technical intern trainees who came to Japan in 2018 as members of the first cohort of the scholarship program. Both were from Gebang District, Cirebon Regency, West Java Province, and both had fathers who worked in the fisheries sector. They had accompanied their fathers on fishing trips from an early age and described fisheries as a familiar occupation.

Both trainees attended fisheries vocational high schools in Cirebon and Indramayu Regencies while receiving scholarships under the program. They first learned about the opportunity when teachers from fisheries vocational high schools visited fishing villages to recruit prospective students. Tuition fees, uniforms, textbooks, and other educational expenses were fully covered by the scholarship program.

After graduating from high school, they obtained a graduation certificate, a fisheries training completion certificate, a maritime safety training certificate, and a seafarer's book. They subsequently participated in Japanese-language and cultural training at a facility operated by the Cirebon Regency Fisheries Office before traveling to Japan. According to the interviewees, the training period generally lasts approximately one year, although its duration may vary depending on circumstances.

Upon arriving in Japan, they spent approximately one month at the office of the Ishinomaki Fisheries Training Council, where they received additional instruction in Japanese language and basic knowledge necessary for daily life in Japan. The training covered practical topics such as how to use bicycles and how to separate household waste.

According to the interviewees, they initially found it difficult to adjust to the differences between the Japanese they had learned in Indonesia and the expressions commonly used in everyday life in Ishinomaki. However, through interactions with local residents and support from Indonesian trainees already working in the city, they gradually acquired the language skills and daily-life practices necessary for living and working in Japan.

Technical Intern Trainees Who Entered Ishinomaki through Other Schemes

This study also interviewed technical intern trainees who came to Japan without participating in the scholarship program established through the cooperation between Ishinomaki City and West Java Province.

Mr. I was born in an inland area of Indramayu Regency, and neither of his parents worked in the fisheries sector. Motivated by an interest in marine-related occupations, he enrolled in a fisheries vocational high school, studied in the fisheries department, and graduated in 2012.

After graduation, he was introduced to an opportunity by a Japanese-language instructor and worked for approximately eleven months on a Japanese tuna longline vessel based in Kochi Prefecture. At the time, he was employed through the maruship system.

According to Mr. I, he arranged his travel through an agent in Jakarta and paid IDR 7 million to the Japanese-language instructor. After returning to Indonesia, he was required to make an additional payment of IDR 3 million. He also noted that many prospective migrant workers take out loans in order to finance travel-related expenses.

After returning to Indonesia, Mr. I learned about the trainee dispatch program to Ishinomaki City and applied. The program provides Japanese-language and cultural training to graduates of fisheries vocational high schools in West Java Province before dispatching them to Ishinomaki. Because Mr. I already had prior work experience in Japan, he was selected and came to Japan as a member of the eleventh cohort of trainees.

3.4 Post-Arrival Support and Monitoring

(1) Support for Daily Life and Employment after Arrival in Japan

The Ishinomaki Fisheries Training Council provides both daily-life and employment-related support to technical intern trainees who have graduated from fisheries vocational high schools and completed pre-departure Japanese-language training before arriving in Japan.

According to interviewees, during the initial years of the program, municipal officials from Ishinomaki City assisted Council staff in conducting an approximately one-month orientation program for newly arrived trainees. The program covered topics such as waste separation, rules regarding smoking and alcohol consumption, daily life in Japan, communication with Japanese people, Japanese-language education, and adaptation to local dialects. These sessions were intended to supplement areas that could not be adequately addressed through pre-departure language training alone.

In addition, support from Indonesian trainees who had already been working in Ishinomaki played an important role in assisting newly arrived trainees. Since many trainees originate from the same communities or graduated from the same fisheries vocational high schools, they are able to receive practical assistance regarding both daily life and work through existing social networks.

Furthermore, when problems arise in either their personal lives or workplaces, trainees are able to consult the Ishinomaki Fisheries Training Council, which has established mechanisms to provide necessary assistance and support.

(2) Engagement with Receiving Fishers and Improvement of Working Conditions

One of the key roles of the Ishinomaki Fisheries Training Council is to provide support to, and engage with, vessel owners who accept technical intern trainees.

According to interviewees, inappropriate behavior by some vessel owners became an issue during the acceptance of the first cohort of trainees. Such behavior reportedly included lecturing trainees while intoxicated and making discriminatory remarks. As a result, some trainees expressed a desire to return home, and several sought assistance from fisheries cooperatives.

In response, measures were introduced, including separating the accommodation of vessel owners and trainees. Furthermore, when the first case of absconding occurred among the fifth cohort, improving working conditions and strengthening relationships between vessel owners and trainees came to be recognized as important challenges.

Following the establishment of the Council, oversight and guidance for receiving vessel owners were strengthened. Where disputes with trainees occurred repeatedly, or where adequate rest periods were deemed not to be provided, vessel owners were requested to make improvements. According to stakeholders, if such improvements were not made, the Council could suspend the acceptance of trainees by the vessel owner concerned.

The Council also requires receiving vessel owners to provide trainees with one day off per week. Previously, trainees generally received only around two days off per month. The increase in rest days is reported to have improved working conditions not only for trainees but also for vessel owners and Japanese crew members.

In this way, the Council contributes not only to supporting trainees themselves but also to improving labor conditions through engagement with receiving employers.

As part of this study, an interview was also conducted with a vessel owner engaged in 19-ton bottom-trawl fishing operations. According to the vessel owner, Indonesian crew members work diligently and have become indispensable to the operation of the business. At the same time, communication problems had occurred in the past between trainees and older vessel owners or Japanese crew members, and some trainees reportedly returned to Indonesia due to verbal abuse and other interpersonal issues.

However, in recent years, communication in the workplace has improved as younger generations of vessel owners and crew members have become more common. In some cases, Indonesian and Japanese crew members now spend their days off together.

At the same time, interviews with vessel owners repeatedly highlighted the continuing severity of labor shortages in the fisheries sector and emphasized that Indonesian crew members have become essential to sustaining fisheries operations. Expectations are also high for workers who transition from technical intern status to the SSW program and continue working in the industry. According to interviewees, a considerable number of workers are aiming to obtain SSW (ii) status.

Going forward, a key challenge will be how to create an environment in which such workers can establish themselves in local communities and continue working in the fisheries sector over the long term.

3.5 Ongoing Exchange and the Development of Trust-Based Relationships

(1) Home Visits Conducted by Receiving Fishers

Mutual visits between stakeholders in Ishinomaki City and West Java Province have been conducted continuously on an annual basis. As part of these exchanges, vessel owners from Ishinomaki have visited the families of Indonesian crew members working under their supervision. This initiative began in 2015 following the introduction of the scholarship program for children of fishing households.

The vessel owners explained that visiting trainees' families enables them to better understand the environments in which the trainees grew up and lived, thereby deepening their understanding of the individuals they employ. To facilitate this process, vessel owners registered with the Council take turns visiting Indonesia each year. These visits contribute not only to building trust with the trainees themselves but also with their families.

(2) Continued Exchange through Reciprocal Visits

Since the conclusion of the agreement and MoU concerning the training program between Ishinomaki City and West Java Province in 2006, reciprocal visits by stakeholders from both regions have continued on a regular basis.

Delegations from West Java Province visit Ishinomaki to observe the city, inspect the trainee program, and encourage technical intern trainees working there. Meanwhile, representatives from Ishinomaki visit West Java to hold discussions with the governor and other stakeholders regarding the acceptance of trainees.

These visits also include tours of fisheries vocational high schools and participation in scholarship award ceremonies. Such exchanges have continued through close cooperation among supervising organizations, the Ishinomaki Fisheries Training Council, and other relevant stakeholders.

(3) Building the Trust Relationships that Sustain the Program

The agreement and MoU concerning the training program between West Java Province and Ishinomaki City were made possible in large part through the efforts of Mr. O, a native of Ishinomaki with extensive knowledge of Indonesia's fisheries sector and strong personal relationships with stakeholders in West Java Province.

Mr. O played a critical role in connecting vessel owners facing severe crew shortages in Ishinomaki, the Industrial Promotion Division of Ishinomaki City, the government of West Java Province, fisheries vocational high schools, and other relevant institutions.

Although trainee and technical intern programs already existed at the time, various concerns had been raised regarding their operation. One particularly significant issue was that many trainees and technical intern trainees arrived in Japan carrying substantial debts.

Graduates of fisheries vocational high schools typically receive Japanese-language training through LPKs authorized to dispatch technical intern trainees before traveling to Japan. However, as revealed through the interview with Mr. I in this study, they are often required to bear various expenses, including Japanese-language training fees, passport acquisition costs, and other administrative fees. As a result, some workers continue repaying debts even after they begin working in Japan.

Against this backdrop, the framework established between West Java Province and Ishinomaki City is distinctive in that it does not impose financial burdens on the trainees themselves, making it a pioneering initiative in this regard.

The findings of this study indicate that the significance of this initiative lies not only in reducing financial burdens but also in establishing a system of continuous engagement from the recruitment stage through post-arrival support in Japan.

At the same time, sustaining such a system requires ongoing efforts to understand local conditions and maintain close cooperation with government agencies, fisheries vocational high schools, recruitment institutions, and other stakeholders.

Ensuring that Indonesian technical intern trainees and specified skilled workers can work in Japan's fisheries sector with confidence, acquire the technical knowledge and fisheries-management skills necessary for their professional development, and utilize those skills upon returning home requires the continued commitment of all stakeholders involved in the program.

The relationships that have been built among Ishinomaki City, West Java Province, the Ishinomaki Fisheries Training Council, and receiving vessel owners can be regarded as a practical example of an integrated approach to the recruitment, dispatch, and reception of migrant workers.

As Japan prepares for the introduction of the new Employment for Skill Development Program (*Ikusei Shuro*), consideration should be given to how this model may be adapted and applied in other regions.

4

Recommendations

1. Recommendations for Governments and Relevant Public Authorities

(1) Strengthen the Implementation and Enforcement of Indonesia's Migrant Worker Protection Framework

- Strengthen monitoring mechanisms and law enforcement capacity to ensure the effective implementation of Law No. 18 of 2017 on the Protection of Indonesian Migrant Workers (UU 18/2017), and to address the gap between legal protections and actual practices.
- Enhance oversight of recruitment activities and fee collection practices by P3MIs, LPKs, brokers, and other intermediaries, and ensure effective enforcement and corrective measures in cases of non-compliance.
- Expand the human and financial resources available to provincial and local labor offices and other relevant authorities so that they can effectively carry out monitoring, grievance handling, and migrant worker protection functions, thereby ensuring the effective implementation of the protection framework at all levels.

(2) Improve Governance of Recruitment Systems in Indonesia's Fisheries Sector and Strengthen Inter-Agency Coordination

- Clarify overlapping responsibilities between the Ministry of Manpower and KP2MI and establish coherent and consistent administrative procedures. Develop platforms that facilitate timely and accurate information-sharing among relevant institutions and stakeholders, enabling all actors to understand and comply with applicable regulations.
- Establish systems ensuring that migrant workers receive accurate information throughout the entire migration process—from recruitment to departure and employment—regarding their rights, working conditions, recruitment-related costs, and available grievance mechanisms. Such efforts should go beyond information provision and empower workers to assess risks and access appropriate remedies.

(3) Build Comprehensive Cross-Border Protection Frameworks Through Cooperation Among Receiving Countries and Territories

- Recognize that receiving countries and territories such as Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan do not operate as isolated labor markets, but are interconnected through the movement of migrant workers. Receiving countries and territories should strengthen cooperation with one another and with sending countries to establish comprehensive protection systems covering the entire migration pathway.
- Acknowledge that recruitment and placement agencies often adopt stepwise migration strategies whereby workers first gain employment experience in destinations such as China or Taiwan before moving to countries offering more favourable employment conditions, including Japan and South Korea. Receiving countries and territories should share information regarding these migration trajectories and explore cross-border monitoring and remediation mechanisms to ensure that labor rights abuses occurring at earlier stages do not create structural vulnerabilities at later stages of migration.
- Harmonize standards concerning transparency of recruitment fees and contractual conditions across receiving countries and territories. Promote the Employer Pays Principle as a common regional standard and cooperate to prevent migrant workers

from being subjected to excessive recruitment fees, debt burdens, and related forms of exploitation regardless of their migration pathway.

- Strengthen information-sharing networks among receiving countries and territories regarding labor protection practices and violations, including information on abusive recruitment and deployment agencies, placement agencies, and brokers, to prevent actors excluded from one jurisdiction from relocating their activities to another.
- In accordance with the state duty to protect human rights under the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, governments should adopt effective measures to ensure that businesses fulfill their responsibility to respect human rights, including by introducing mandatory human rights due diligence requirements covering their entire supply chains.
- In particular, the government of Japan, which currently lacks an independent National Human Rights Institution, should establish such an institution without delay. An NHRI would play a critical role in addressing transnational human rights abuses such as those documented in this report and in facilitating cooperation with counterpart institutions in other countries.

(4) Promote Responsible Recruitment and Reception Through Local Government Engagement with Communities

- Work with receiving employers and relevant organizations to establish and expand systems under which receiving-side actors bear the costs of language training, travel, visa processing, and other migration-related expenses. Eliminate the transfer of such costs to migrant workers and prevent exploitation and forced labor risks arising from excessive indebtedness.
- In cooperation with supervising organizations and registered support organizations, establish comprehensive support systems, including orientation programs, language assistance, administrative support, and accessible consultation services, to ensure that migrant workers can live and work safely within local communities.
- Strengthen ongoing monitoring mechanisms relating to both working and living conditions in collaboration with supervising organizations, registered support organizations, and receiving employers. Regularly assess issues such as excessive working hours, leave entitlements, and harassment, and establish systems capable of responding promptly when problems are identified.
- Go beyond post-arrival management by maintaining regular exchanges, mutual visits, and information-sharing with sending communities. Such engagement can contribute to building trust, identifying problems at an early stage, and improving migrant worker protection.
- In anticipation of the transition to the Employment for Skill Development Program (*Ikusei Shuro*), establish community-based reception models that prioritize migrant workers' rights protection and social inclusion rather than focusing solely on labor supply. Draw upon existing good practices, accumulate and share implementation know-how, and develop sustainable reception systems.

2. Recommendations for Seafood Companies and Companies Employing Migrant Workers

(1) Conduct Human Rights Due Diligence Covering Recruitment and Hiring Stages

- Expand the scope of human rights due diligence concerning migrant workers beyond post-arrival working conditions to include the recruitment and hiring stages, including recruitment-related fees, indebtedness, and the practices of recruitment and deployment agencies, educational institutions, and intermediaries.
- Identify human rights risks by assessing recruitment pathways, cost-sharing arrangements, and contractual relationships between migrant workers and recruitment and deployment agencies, and implement effective measures to prevent and miti-

gate identified risks.

- In particular, where migrant workers are found to be carrying significant recruitment-related debt, promptly provide appropriate remediation and corrective measures.

(2) Conduct Ongoing Monitoring After Recruitment

- Conduct regular interviews not only on wages, working hours, and leave entitlements, but also on living conditions, interpersonal relationships, and experiences of harassment, in order to identify concerns at an early stage through continuous engagement.
- Ensure that migrant workers have access to grievance mechanisms that are independent from the employing company and aligned with the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, so that they can raise concerns without fear of retaliation.

(3) Engage Suppliers Through Dialogue-Based Approaches

- Rather than relying solely on one-way compliance audits, identify the capacity constraints and structural challenges suppliers face in complying with human rights standards, and promote constructive dialogue and the development of improvement plans between companies and suppliers.
- Implement responsible sourcing practices and encourage suppliers to adopt employment practices that recognize migrant workers not merely as labour inputs, but as essential contributors to business operations and local communities.
- Support suppliers in establishing regular dialogue and consultation processes with migrant workers to identify and address issues relating to working and living conditions.
- Move beyond an audit-centred compliance approach and build partnerships with suppliers, NGOs, trade unions, and other stakeholders to address systemic labour risks and promote continuous improvement.

(4) Strengthen Internal Capacity

- In line with the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, provide training based on human rights due diligence guidance in order to strengthen the knowledge and capacity of personnel responsible for human rights due diligence, including the identification, prevention, mitigation, and remediation of labour rights abuses in the fisheries sector.

3. Recommendations for Receiving Organizations, Supervising Organizations, Registered Support Organizations, and Related Actors

(1) Reduce and Increase Transparency of Recruitment-Related Costs

- Recognizing that debt-financed migration can contribute to human rights abuses, review cost structures that rely on recruitment and deployment agencies and other intermediaries, assess and disclose the allocation of costs such as education, language training, and travel expenses, and take measures to prevent migrant workers from bearing excessive recruitment-related costs.

(2) Establish Comprehensive Post-Arrival Support Systems

- When conducting orientation programs after migrant workers arrive, provide comprehensive support covering daily life, local culture, available support services, and responses to discrimination and harassment.

- Establish systems through which migrant workers can seek assistance in their native languages and ensure the availability of support providers capable of offering ongoing assistance with both employment-related and daily-life concerns.

(3) Ensure Access to Independent Support Providers

- Establish organizations or designate personnel who can provide mediation and support from an independent and neutral position when disputes arise between migrant workers and employing companies.

4. Recommendations for Multi-Stakeholder Initiatives

(1) Promote Regional Cooperation Models

- Collect and analyse good practices that successfully reduce migrant workers' recruitment-related costs and provide comprehensive post-arrival support, and promote their replication across other regions and sectors.
- Facilitate sustained cooperation among local governments, educational institutions, employers, and support organizations in sending communities, and support the development of responsible labour migration systems that reduce excessive reliance on intermediaries.

(2) Incorporate Migrant Workers' Voices into System Design

- Continuously collect and incorporate the experiences of migrant workers and returnees into the design and improvement of recruitment systems, reception frameworks, and support mechanisms.

Cost Provisions Applicable to Indonesian TITP Participants

Under the TITP scheme, participants are entitled to the following allowances, insurance coverage, and support measures:

- Training subsidy in Indonesia: ¥100,000
- One-month training allowance at the training center in Japan: ¥80,000
- Transportation between dormitory and workplace
- Health insurance, occupational accident insurance, and pension coverage
- Certificate issued by IM Japan
- Self-Employment Fund (Dana Usaha Mandiri / DUM): ¥500,000–¥900,000
- Round-trip airfare between Indonesia and Japan

Minimum Monthly Allowance by Year and Sector

The minimum monthly allowance payable to participants varies by year of placement and sector, as shown in the table below.

Year	Construction and Caregiver Sectors	Manufacturing and Other Sectors
Year 1	¥105,000	¥100,000
Year 2	¥110,000	¥105,000
Year 3	¥120,000	¥110,000

Source: International Manpower Development Organization Japan (IM Japan) and Ministry of Manpower of the Republic of Indonesia, “Program Magang ke Jepang”, https://jepang.magangln.id/index.php/home/program_magang.

Cost Structure for Indonesian Migrant Workers under the SSW Scheme

Cost Component		Amount	Borne by Migrant Workers	Borne by Employer
Medical Check Up		Rp902.000	Rp902.000	–
Psychological Test		Rp550.000	Rp550.000	–
Passport		Rp0 untuk paspor baru pertama kali	–	–
Migrant Worker Employment Social Protection	Before Departing	Rp37.500	Rp370.000	–
	During and after working period	Rp332.500		
Work Visa		Rp400.000	Rp0	Rp400.000
Domestic Transportation	Pulau Jawa	Rp500.000	Rp500.000	–
	Luar Pulau Jawa	Rp2.000.000	Rp2.000.000	–
Indonesia–Japan Departure airfare		Rp10.000.000	Rp0	Rp10.000.000
Indonesia–Japan Return airfare		Rp0	Rp0	Rp0
P3MI service fee		Maximum ¥180,000 or equivalent to one month's salary	Rp0	¥180,000
Supervision service fee		Maximum ¥10,000/worker/month	Rp0	¥10,000

Source: Badan Pelindungan Pekerja Migran Indonesia (BP2MI), “Decree of the Head of the Indonesian Migrant Worker Protection Agency No. 148 of 2023 on Component Amounts for the Placement Costs of Indonesian Migrant Workers to Japan through the Government-to-Government Placement Scheme”.