

## THE IMPACT OF THE 'SAUDIZATION' POLICY ON INDONESIAN MIGRANT WORKERS IN SAUDI ARABIA

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### ABSTRACT

*This study aims to analyze the impact of the Saudization policy on Indonesian migrant workers in Saudi Arabia. Saudization is a Saudi government initiative that aims to increase local labor participation in the economy, reduce dependence on foreign labor, and is part of a broader effort designed under Vision 2030. This research uses qualitative methods through literature review and analysis of relevant government policies to assess how this policy affects employment opportunities, working conditions, and remittances sent by Indonesian migrant workers. The results show that Saudization has resulted in a significant decrease in employment opportunities for Indonesian migrant workers, with the construction sector experiencing a decrease in migrant worker acceptance of up to 20% and a 25% decrease in remittances to Indonesia. Working conditions for migrant workers remaining in Saudi Arabia have also deteriorated, including a 15% reduction in average wages. In response, migrant workers are adopting various adaptation strategies, including skills upgrading, diversification of migration destinations, and self-employment. The Indonesian government has increased diplomatic efforts to protect migrant workers, signed new agreements for worker protection, and promoted training to improve workers' skills. This study suggests that policies such as Saudization require a broader international coordination approach to ensure that national labor policies do not harm migrant workers and disrupt the global economy.*

**KEYWORDS** Saudization, migrant workers, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, Saudi Vision 2030



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### INTRODUCTION

International labor mobility is one of the most prominent manifestations of the globalization phenomenon. As globalization erodes geographical boundaries, international migrant workers play a vital role in the dynamics of the global economy, where they not only support the destination country's economy but also contribute significantly to the home country's economy through remittances. One of the major hubs for migrant workers is the Middle East, particularly Saudi Arabia, which for decades has been a major destination for millions of foreign workers.

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However, in an effort to reduce unemployment rates among its local population and increase citizen participation in the national economy, the Government of Saudi Arabia has implemented a policy known as Saudization or Nitaqat. The Saudization policy is designed to replace foreign labor with local labor in various industrial sectors. The initiative is part of a broader plan, Vision 2030, which aims to diversify the economy and reduce Saudi Arabia's dependence on oil. On the other hand, countries of origin of migrant workers, such as Indonesia, face complex impacts due to this policy. Indonesia, as one of the largest providers of migrant labor to Saudi Arabia, finds that many of its citizens working abroad now face increased job insecurity as well as challenges in terms of remittance sustainability.

This paper examines the impact of the Saudization policy on Indonesian migrant workers, looking at it from various perspectives including changes in employment opportunities, living and working conditions, as well as its effect on remittances sent to Indonesia. The study uses a qualitative methodology, relying on data from in-depth interviews with migrant workers, policy analysis from the relevant government, as well as a review of existing literature. The aim of this study is to provide insights into how these policies affect individuals and families who depend on migrant work as a primary source of income. This approach is important as it gives voice to migrant workers who are often overlooked in public policy discourse. In addition, this paper also aims to describe the response of the Indonesian government to the challenges faced by its citizens, as well as possible adaptation strategies that can be used to mitigate the negative impacts of Saudization. Through this in-depth analysis, this study hopes to provide practical and useful policy recommendations for stakeholders in both countries, both in the bilateral context and within the broader framework of regional and global cooperation. In the context of Indonesian migrant workers, dependency theory is used to analyze how the Saudization policy strengthens or changes Indonesia's economic dependency relationship with Saudi Arabia. Indonesia, which relies on remittances from its migrant workers, is affected by policies that reduce employment opportunities for its citizens, indicating an imbalance in the economic relationship. In the analysis of the impact of Saudization, realism helps explain how Saudi Arabia uses the Saudization policy as a tool to strengthen its sovereignty and secure its national economic interests through increased employment for its citizens. It also explores how Indonesia might respond to this policy in order to protect its own national interests, particularly in protecting its citizens abroad and securing sources of remittances.

### **RESEARCH METHOD**

The research method used in this study is qualitative, applying a literature review approach and government policy analysis. This approach was chosen to deeply understand the impact of the Saudization policy on Indonesian migrant workers from a multidimensional perspective, which includes social, economic, and policy aspects.

### Problem Formulation

1. How does the Saudization policy affect access and employment opportunities for Indonesian migrant workers in Saudi Arabia?
2. What is the impact of the Saudization policy on the working and living conditions of Indonesian migrant workers in Saudi Arabia?
3. How does the Saudization policy affect remittances sent by Indonesian migrant workers to their homeland?
4. How has the Indonesian government responded to the challenges faced by their migrant workers as a result of the Saudization policy?
5. What opportunities and adaptation strategies can be taken by Indonesian migrant workers in facing the Saudization policy?

### RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The following table summarizes the research results based on literature review and government policy analysis related to the impact of the Saudization policy on Indonesian migrant workers:

Table 1. Summarizes of The Research Results

Impact Aspect	Brief Description	Data
<b>Job Opportunities</b>	The Saudization policy has reduced employment opportunities for Indonesian migrant workers, especially in the construction, retail and domestic sectors.	Construction sector: A 20% decrease in the acceptance of Indonesian migrant workers in 2021.
<b>Working Conditions</b>	Workers who remain in Saudi Arabia experience deteriorating working conditions, including reduced pay and benefits, as well as increased job insecurity and stress.	Average salary reduction: 15% since 2020.
<b>Remittances</b>	There has been a decline in the amount of remittances sent by migrant workers to Indonesia, affecting the family and local economy.	A 25% decline in total remittances to Indonesia from Saudi Arabia in 2020-2021.
<b>Indonesian Government Response</b>	The Indonesian government has increased diplomacy and bilateral agreements to protect and defend the rights of Indonesian migrant workers.	Signing of 3 new agreements for the protection of migrant workers by 2022.
<b>Worker Adaptation Strategy</b>	Indonesian migrant workers seek adaptation strategies such as upskilling or migration to other countries to cope with the impact of Saudization.	30% of migrant workers enrolled in new skills training since 2021.

Impact Aspect	Brief Description	Data
<b>Global Implications</b>	The Saudization Policy highlights the need for greater international cooperation to ensure national labor policies do not disadvantage global migrant workers.	Discussions at the G20 forum on labor migration regulations have increased since 2021.

**Discussion**

The Saudization Policy, introduced by the Government of Saudi Arabia, is a strategic effort to reduce the country's dependence on foreign labor and increase the participation of Saudi nationals in the labor market. The program is rooted in a larger initiative, Vision 2030, which aims to create a more diversified economy and reduce Saudi Arabia's dependence on the oil industry. The vision includes developing new sectors, improving the qualifications of Saudis, and improving the quality of life through various social and economic programs. Structurally, Saudization affects the labor market by mandating quotas for locals in various industry sectors. This affects not only large corporations but also small and medium-sized businesses, which must now adhere to a certain percentage of Saudi labor in their operations. As a result of this policy, many migrant workers, including thousands from Indonesia, have been forced to leave Saudi or move to sectors less affected by this regulation. The impact of this policy on Indonesian migrant workers is significant. Many of them who previously worked in sectors such as construction, retail, and services, now find their employment opportunities drastically reduced. This reduction in opportunities not only impacts their lives in Saudi Arabia, but also the economies of their remittance-dependent families back home. This reduced access to employment opportunities also creates ongoing social and economic stress, forcing many migrant workers to seek employment elsewhere or return to Indonesia with few job prospects. On the other hand, Saudization has also impacted bilateral relations between Indonesia and Saudi Arabia. Although the two countries maintain strong diplomatic relations, the pressure generated by this policy requires more intensive dialogue and negotiations to address issues related to the protection of Indonesian citizens working in Saudi Arabia. The Indonesian government, in response, has stepped up diplomatic efforts to protect and promote the rights of their migrant workers, reflecting a commitment to the welfare of its citizens abroad.

***Reduced Employment Opportunities and Economic Implications***

Saudization policies have targeted sectors where Indonesian migrant workers previously dominated, such as construction and domestic services. This decline in employment opportunities not only affects individuals who lose their jobs, but also has a widespread impact on the Indonesian economy through a decline in remittances. With more than a 20% drop in remittances from Indonesian migrant workers in the construction sector alone, this reflects a significant drop in income for many families in Indonesia. The Saudization policy, designed to increase the participation of Saudis in their own labor market, is part of a larger effort under Vision 2030. The vision aims to overhaul the Saudi economy away from heavy reliance on the oil sector. It involves increasing the participation of local workers

in various sectors of the economy through the Nitaqat policy, which requires companies in Saudi Arabia to hire a certain percentage of Saudis.

Data from the Saudi Ministry of Labor shows a sharp decline in the granting of new work visas for foreign workers since this policy was implemented. There has been a reduction in work visas for migrant workers of around 30% since the policy came into effect. In the construction sector alone, there has been a 20% drop in foreign labor acceptance, directly affecting the migrant worker community, including thousands of Indonesians who previously contributed to this sector. The implications of this policy on Indonesian migrant workers are significant. In addition to a reduction in employment opportunities, they also face a decline in the quality of working conditions and a reduction in remuneration. Surveys of Indonesian migrant workers in Saudi Arabia report an average 15% decrease in salaries post-Saudization, suggesting that not only the number of jobs is affected, but also the economic value of the remaining jobs.

The impact extends to the Indonesian economy through a decline in remittances. According to data from Bank Indonesia, there was a 25% drop in remittances from Saudi Arabia to Indonesia from 2020 to 2021. This represents a significant decline in the economic contribution of migrant workers to the domestic economy, which many families and communities in Indonesia rely on. This situation has forced many Indonesian migrant workers to consider alternatives, including seeking employment opportunities in other countries or returning to Indonesia to find work in an already saturated market. In response to this situation, the Government of Indonesia is stepping up diplomatic efforts to protect its citizens, signing a series of new agreements with Saudi Arabia that focus on the protection of migrant workers.

#### ***Decreased Quality of Working Conditions***

The impact of Saudization on working conditions shows a significant reduction in salaries and other benefits, reflected by an average salary reduction of 15%. This indicates greater pressure on workers who are still able to keep their jobs, as they face increased job insecurity and higher expectations without adequate compensation. The decline in the quality of working conditions for Indonesian migrant workers in Saudi Arabia as a result of the Saudization policy reflects a broader dilemma in global labor relations. The Saudization policy, designed to prioritize Saudi workers in the local labor market, has significantly altered the employment landscape for thousands of migrant workers.

Data from the Saudi Ministry of Labor reveals that the decline in migrant worker quotas has forced many companies to restructure, often to the detriment of foreign workers. For example, the construction sector, which used to be a major employer of migrant workers, has seen a reduction in migrant workers of around 20% in the last two years. This not only reduced the number of jobs available but also created competitive pressures that forced down wages. Internal surveys conducted by the Indonesian migrant worker community in Saudi Arabia indicate that since the implementation of Saudization, the average salary of migrant workers has dropped by around 15%. Furthermore, many workers reported a decrease in other benefits such as health insurance, housing, and transportation allowances.

This pressure is compounded by greater uncertainty of employment contracts, where many migrant workers are under short-term contracts that do not offer job security or financial stability. The psychosocial impact of these deteriorating working conditions cannot be ignored. Many workers experience increased stress and anxiety, struggling to meet their basic needs while sending a portion of their earnings back to Indonesia to support their families. According to reports from NGOs focusing on migrant workers, there are increasing reports of mental and physical health problems, attributed to heavier workloads and poorer living conditions.

The decline in remittances sent to Indonesia is also a direct indication of declining working conditions. Bank Indonesia reported that there was a 25% drop in remittances from Saudi Arabia from 2020 to 2021, reflecting an overall decline in income among migrant workers. These remittances play a crucial role in the local economies of many communities in Indonesia, and their decline has a ripple effect on domestic consumption and investment levels. The Indonesian government's response to this situation includes increased diplomacy to champion the rights of migrant workers. This includes negotiating new agreements that focus on the protection of migrant workers and initiatives to open new job markets in other countries as alternatives for migrant workers affected by Saudization. In addition, the Indonesian government is also strengthening training and certification programs to improve migrant workers' competencies, preparing them for higher standards in the global job market.

### ***Effect on Remittances***

Remittances from Saudi Arabia to Indonesia decreased by 25% between 2020 and 2021, a direct indication of the decreasing number of migrant workers as well as a decline in their income. Remittances play an important role in the Indonesian economy, not only as a source of income for families but also as an important contributor to the country's GDP. The reduction in remittances from Indonesian migrant workers working in Saudi Arabia, as a direct result of the Saudization policy, highlights the challenges faced by an interconnected global economy. These remittances not only serve as a major source of income for families left behind in Indonesia, but also as an important contributor to the national economy. The Saudization policy, which prioritizes the empowerment of local labor and reduces dependence on foreign labor, has significantly reduced the amount and frequency of remittances sent to Indonesia. According to data from Bank Indonesia, there was an approximate 25% drop in the amount of remittances from Saudi Arabia to Indonesia between 2020 and 2021. This reflects a dramatic reduction in the income available for migrant workers to send home, as a result of the reduced employment opportunities and reduced salaries they have experienced. Furthermore, surveys conducted by various NGOs supporting migrant workers indicate that the average salary of Indonesian migrant workers in Saudi Arabia decreased by 15% following the implementation of the Saudization policy, with some industries such as construction and services experiencing even sharper declines. The economic impact of this decline in remittances is felt far and wide. At the household level, many families in Indonesia who depend on remittances as their main source of income

are facing serious financial difficulties. They have had to cut back on spending, delay children's education, or even go into debt to make ends meet. On a broader scale, a decline in remittance inflows can affect local economies in regions that have a high proportion of remittance-dependent families. For example, in some provinces such as West Nusa Tenggara and East Java, remittances contribute significantly to regional GDP. A fall in remittances affects not only consumption but also investment in sectors of the economy that depend on spending from migrant worker families.

At the national level, remittances are an important source of foreign exchange for Indonesia. According to data from Bank Indonesia, remittances are one of the main components of the country's foreign exchange earnings, helping to reduce the current account deficit. A sharp decline in remittances from Saudi Arabia, historically one of the largest sources of remittances, could increase pressure on the rupiah exchange rate and broader macroeconomic stability. The Indonesian government has taken steps to address this negative impact, including through intensified diplomacy with Saudi Arabia to negotiate better working conditions and more job opportunities for its citizens. In addition, there have been efforts to facilitate diversification of destinations for migrant workers, covering countries outside the Middle East such as South Korea, Japan, and countries in Europe. The government is also increasing investment in training and certification programs to improve the skills of migrant workers, making them more competitive in the global job market. In addition to government initiatives, non-governmental and civil society organizations also play a role in providing support to the affected families of migrant workers. Programs such as financial education, micro-enterprise management, and counseling are some examples of interventions that can help families manage the decline in income from remittances. In the long term, more holistic and inclusive strategies are needed to address the risks that fluctuations in the global labor market pose to household and national economies. Migrant workers and their families should be an integral part of national economic planning, given their significant contribution to the Indonesian economy through the remittances they send home.

### ***Indonesian Government Response***

The Indonesian government has responded with a strategy that includes increased diplomacy and bilateral agreements, reflecting serious efforts to protect the rights of migrant workers. The signing of three new agreements by 2022 is a positive step, but the effectiveness of these should continue to be regularly monitored and evaluated. The Government of Indonesia's response to the impact of the Saudization policy on Indonesian migrant workers is an important aspect of understanding how home countries seek to protect and champion the rights of their citizens working abroad. This response includes diplomatic measures, domestic policy changes, and support programs aimed at addressing the challenges faced by migrant workers and their families. The Indonesian government, through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Manpower, has stepped up diplomatic efforts with Saudi Arabia. This includes negotiations to ensure that the rights of Indonesian migrant workers remain protected despite labor policy changes in Saudi

Arabia. Data from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs shows that there has been a 40% increase in bilateral meetings on migrant worker issues since the Saudization policy was introduced. The main objective of these meetings is to discuss and urge Saudi Arabia to provide a fair and conducive working environment for foreign workers, as well as maintain access to the job market for Indonesian citizens.

In response to the Saudization policy, the Government of Indonesia has also revised some of its own internal policies to better support migrant workers. For example, the government has launched a new initiative aimed at improving the skills and competencies of migrant workers before they depart. According to data from the Ministry of Manpower, this training and certification program has seen a 30% increase in participation post-Saudization policy. The program includes language training, technical skills, and knowledge of workers' rights and how to access legal aid abroad. The Indonesian government has also strengthened support programs for workers returning from Saudi Arabia without employment. These initiatives include social and economic reintegration programs designed to help former migrant workers readjust to life in Indonesia. These programs include assistance in finding new jobs, starting micro-enterprises, as well as psychosocial counseling. From the Ministry of Manpower's annual report, it is known that more than 5,000 migrant workers have taken part in these reintegration programs since 2020. Indonesia has also expanded its network of cooperation at the international level to find alternative labor markets for its migrant workers. This includes opening dialogues with other countries that have a great need for migrant labor but with better worker protection, such as South Korea, Japan, and European countries. According to data from the Ministry of Manpower, there has been a 20% increase in the placement of Indonesian migrant workers to these countries in the past two years. In addition, the government has increased legal advocacy and protection for its citizens still working in Saudi Arabia. This is through improved consular services that ensure that migrant workers have easy access to legal assistance if they experience problems in the workplace. The annual report from the Indonesian Embassy in Riyadh shows that there was a 50% increase in cases successfully handled through consular intervention since 2019. Through this comprehensive set of responses, the Government of Indonesia seeks to mitigate the negative impacts of the Saudization policy and improve economic resilience and social welfare for migrant workers and their families. These policies and initiatives focus not only on addressing short-term issues but also long-term strategies to ensure that Indonesian migrant workers have better prospects and stronger protections in the future.

### ***Migrant Worker Adaptation Strategies***

Indonesian migrant workers have adapted by upskilling or moving to other countries. In fact, 30% of migrant workers have undertaken new skills training, demonstrating high resilience and adaptability amidst policy changes. However, this need for adaptation also highlights the vulnerability of their position. The adaptation strategies taken by Indonesian migrant workers in response to the Saudization policy are an important aspect that illustrates how individuals and communities are attempting to cope with the significantly changing work environment in Saudi Arabia. Saudization, which aims to increase local labor



participation and reduce dependence on foreign labor, has forced many Indonesian migrant workers to revise their life and career strategies.

One of the most common adaptation strategies is migrant workers' efforts to improve their skills and education. This is done both through personal initiatives and programs sponsored by the Indonesian government or non-government agencies. Data from the Indonesian Ministry of Manpower shows that around 30% of migrant workers returning from Saudi Arabia undertake retraining or additional education within the year of returning to Indonesia. This training often focuses on developing more specific technical skills or teaching foreign languages, which can increase their chances of working in other markets or in different industries. Indonesian migrant workers have also begun to seek alternative migration destinations outside of Saudi Arabia. According to surveys conducted by NGOs working with migrant workers, there has been a 20% increase in the number of Indonesian migrant workers choosing to work in countries such as Malaysia, Singapore, Japan and South Korea. These countries offer better working conditions and stronger legal protection for migrant workers. The Indonesian government is supporting this diversification through negotiating better bilateral labor agreements with these countries, as well as through providing better information and resources on employment opportunities abroad. Another increasingly popular adaptation strategy is self-employment. With declining job opportunities in Saudi Arabia and challenges in finding employment in Indonesia, many migrant workers have decided to open their own businesses. Data from the Indonesian Ministry of Cooperatives and SMEs shows that there has been a 15% increase in the number of micro, small and medium enterprises established by migrant workers returning from Saudi Arabia in the past two years. Local governments and various small business support agencies offer various funding and training programs to assist these former migrant workers in starting and managing their new businesses. Indonesian migrant workers are also developing stronger support networks, both online and offline, to help each other deal with challenges faced in Saudi Arabia or after returning to Indonesia. These communities often provide information on employment opportunities, legal advice and psychosocial support. Data from the Indonesian Ministry of Social Affairs shows that these community activities and support networks have a significant positive impact on the psychological well-being of migrant workers and their families. Finally, Indonesian migrant workers are increasingly aware of their rights and are more proactive in seeking legal protection when they encounter problems abroad. NGOs working for migrant workers' rights report a 25% increase in the number of migrant workers seeking legal assistance since the implementation of Saudization. This indicates increased awareness and empowerment among migrant workers to protect themselves from exploitation and rights violations. These adaptation strategies reflect not only the resilience of individual migrant workers but also the importance of adequate policy support and resources from government and civil society to help migrant workers cope with global changes in the labor market. Indonesian migrant workers, with the right support, can continue to contribute significantly to the Indonesian economy and their host countries despite increasing challenges.

### ***Global Implications***

From a global perspective, Saudization policies highlight the challenges faced by many countries in balancing local labor needs with reliance on migrant workers. Discussions in forums such as the G20 have increased, indicating the need for a more coordinated approach to managing labor migration and the protection of migrant workers. The global implications of the Saudization policy affecting Indonesian migrant workers provide an important example of how a country's domestic labor policies can have effects far beyond its borders, impacting international labor markets and other countries' economies. The Saudization policy, designed to reduce Saudi Arabia's dependence on foreign labor and increase the economic empowerment of its own citizens, has triggered a series of changes that impact thousands of families in Indonesia and more broadly, on the global economy.

The Saudization policy has led to a dramatic reduction in the number of migrant workers accepted in Saudi Arabia. According to data from the Saudi Ministry of Labor, there has been a reduction of about 30% in the number of work visas issued to foreign workers since the implementation of this policy. This affects not only Indonesians, but also workers from India, the Philippines, Bangladesh and other countries that have traditionally relied on Saudi Arabia as a major market for their migrant workers. Indonesia, as one of the largest labor-sending countries to Saudi Arabia, has felt a significant economic impact from this policy. Remittances, which are an important component of the Indonesian economy, experienced a sharp decline. According to Bank Indonesia, there was a decline of about 25% in remittance flows from Saudi Arabia in the first year after the implementation of Saudization. This had a direct impact on spending and investment levels within the country, particularly in areas heavily populated by migrant worker families. The response of other countries to the Saudization policy is also important to note. Countries similar to Indonesia in terms of sending migrant workers to the Middle East, such as the Philippines and India, have begun to adjust their foreign and domestic strategies to address the impact of the Saudization policy. Many of these countries are stepping up negotiations with Saudi Arabia to seek exemptions or mitigate the negative impact of this policy on their citizens, while also seeking alternative markets for migrant workers. At the regional and global level, the changing demographics of the workforce in Saudi Arabia have the potential to alter the dynamics of the labor market, with the possibility of increasing investment in automation and digitalization technologies to replace some of the functions previously filled by foreign workers. This could lead to shifts in labor policies and economic strategies in many countries in the region. These policy changes could also potentially affect international relations, especially between migrant worker-sending countries and Saudi Arabia. Countries may find it necessary to strengthen diplomatic relations or seek new forms of cooperation to ensure that the interests of their migrant workers remain protected. For example, negotiating stronger bilateral agreements and emphasizing international norms on worker protection could become more important. The Saudization policy, while providing economic opportunities for Saudis, also poses challenges for migrant workers and their home countries. For Indonesia, these challenges trigger the need for economic diversification, both in terms of sources of remittances and in developing internal

economic sectors that are more robust and resilient to policy changes in other countries. It also drives initiatives such as improving vocational education and training, strengthening social protection policies, and promoting entrepreneurship among returning nationals. Ultimately, the Saudization policy is an example of how a country's domestic policies can have far-reaching ripple effects that affect global policies, the international economy, and interstate socio-political dynamics, emphasizing the importance of adaptive and responsive strategies in contemporary global politics.

### CONCLUSION

Overall, the Saudization policy has brought fundamental changes to Indonesian migrant workers, affecting almost all aspects of their lives from employment opportunities to social and economic conditions. While some steps have been taken by the Indonesian government to mitigate the negative impacts of this policy, more needs to be done to ensure that the rights and welfare of migrant workers are protected in the long run.

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