IMR Institute for Migrant Rights

Annual Report 2026

Migration Jurisprudence from the South: making the law that governs migrant workers findable, readable and usable.

> *"Law that cannot be found cannot be used."*

Cianjur, West Java, Indonesia · theimr.org

FOREWORD

Making promises legible

Southeast Asia is, among other things, one of the world's great labour markets. Few regions depend so heavily on people who cross borders to work, and few have said so much, on paper, about protecting them.

Workers from Myanmar, Cambodia and Laos keep Thailand's farms, boats and building sites running. Indonesians and Filipinos care for households in Singapore and Malaysia. ASEAN adopted the Cebu Declaration on migrant workers in 2007 and a Consensus to give it flesh in 2017. Yet ask a simple question at any regional meeting and no one can answer it with confidence: what do the laws of the member states actually say about recruitment fees, contracts, wages, or a worker's right to change employers? The Consensus pegs protection to "national laws, regulations and policies". A commitment pegged to national law, without a clear record of that law, is very hard to hold anyone to.

Nor can the region simply borrow the tools that already exist. Most international databases and indexes on migration law are designed and funded in the richest countries, and they ask those countries' questions about asylum, integration and irregular entry. They pay far less attention to what shapes migration in the South: memorandums of understanding between neighbours, work permits tied to one employer, seasonal and informal flows, and the central role of sending states.

This report describes how IMR began, in 2026, to fill that gap, for Southeast Asia and for the Global South more broadly. With the help of many volunteers, most of them law students from many countries, IMR now publishes 1,540 court decisions on migrants from 92 countries, an atlas of 97 global, regional and national norms with ratification data for 187 countries, a comparison of twelve countries of origin on nine questions, and a directory of free legal help in 37 countries. Courts in the region, from the Philippine Supreme Court to Malaysian and Thai tribunals, have already built a body of reasoning on wages, documents, detention and recruiters' liability that few judges outside each country ever see. We want it to be seen. So far, all of this has been done without a single grant.

We should be plain about one thing. This is a first draft, not a finished register. Coverage is uneven, many entries still await checking against official texts, and some of our coding choices will rightly be questioned. We published early precisely so that officials, law faculties, labour inspectors, unions and migrant workers' organisations could improve it. Every contribution is credited and every change is recorded in the open.

None of this needs a new treaty or a new institution. It needs the region to write down, in one place, what its laws already say. After nearly two decades of promises to migrant workers, making those promises legible is the least we can do next, and it may turn out to be the most useful.

Pranoto Iskandar
Founding Director, Institute for Migrant Rights

Beth Lyon
Chair, IMR Advisory Board

WHO WE ARE

An Indonesian institute for people who cross borders to work

People who migrate for work are governed by law they cannot easily find or understand: the treaties of the international community, the rules of regional bodies, and the statutes and courts of both the country they leave and the country they work in.

The Institute for Migrant Rights (IMR), based in Cianjur, West Java, addresses this problem in two ways. It gives free legal information and help to workers and their families, and it publishes open, coded data on migration law for researchers, lawyers and policymakers. Its databases are gathered under the title *Migration Jurisprudence from the South* (in Indonesian, *Pandangan Hukum Migrasi dari Dunia Berkembang*), because most of the law that shapes migrants' lives is made and applied outside Europe and North America.

2026 AT A GLANCE

1,540
court decisions on migrants from 92 countries

97
global, regional and national norms in the Migration Law Atlas

187
countries with treaty ratification data

115
instruments on migrant domestic workers in 44 jurisdictions

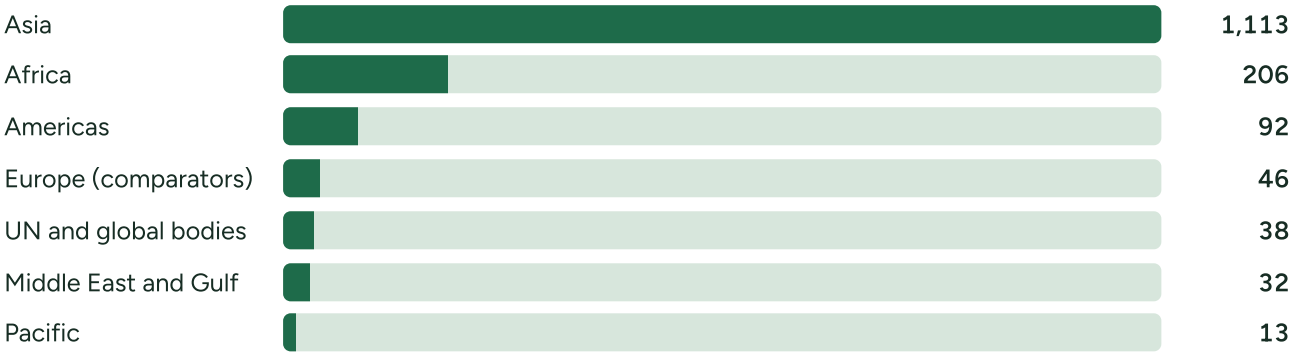
91
free legal help organisations in 37 countries

8
languages in the Legal Clinic

Open by default. Every database can be downloaded with its codebook under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 licence (CC BY 4.0). Every decision has a plain-language summary in English and Indonesian.

Where the decisions come from

The Court Decisions database collects judgments on migrants from national courts, regional human rights bodies and United Nations treaty bodies. Courts in Asia, Africa, the Middle East and Latin America come first; decisions of European and North American courts are kept only as marked comparators.



Decisions by region, 20 November 2026 (n = 1,540). Source: IMR Court Decisions database, decisions.csv.

By level of court

National courts	1,394
Regional bodies	98
International courts and UN treaty bodies	48

Among national courts, 820 decisions come from countries of destination and 569 from countries of origin.

How far each entry is checked

Fully coded from secondary sources and summaries	225
Candidates listed for checking	1,315
Checked line by line against the judgment	under way

Each decision page shows its status. The method is explained at theimr.org/data-quality.

Five things we set out to do

1 Opened the law to researchers

IMR published a connected set of open databases, from treaties and regional instruments down to national statutes and court decisions: the Migration Law Atlas and its farmworker view, Court Decisions, Migrant Domestic Workers, Countries of Origin, comparisons of migration and labour law in the Gulf States, East Asia and Southeast Asia, and Government Hate Speech. Every entry links to its source and every database has a codebook. In November the whole site and all its data moved to a public GitHub repository, so every change is recorded in public and other projects can contribute data.

2 Brought the law within reach of workers

The Legal Clinic helps workers and families prepare a rights communication in plain language, in eight languages: English, Indonesian, Arabic, Dari/Farsi, Bengali, Nepali, Tagalog and Vietnamese. A trafficking self-check, a guide to the arguments that have worked in court, and a directory of free legal help in 37 countries give practical next steps. One-page country sheets for eight countries of origin are available in English and Indonesian. IMR runs no live hotline, so its help does not depend on staff being online.

3 Kept it honest

Every database shows how far each entry has been checked, and secondary sources are marked as such. IMR published a statement on how it uses AI and a public page on how its data are checked. A blind second coding of a sample of entries, with agreement measured by Cohen's kappa, is planned.

4 Trained student researchers

Law students from partner faculties, including Universitas Tarumanagara in Jakarta and Khorfakkan University in the United Arab Emirates, learned to find, code and verify legal sources using a written checking guide and worksheet.

5 Published

IMR Press opened at press.theimr.org with nine titles in Indonesian and English (listed on page 6). The *Indonesian Journal of International & Comparative Law* (ijicl.org), peer-reviewed since 2014, continued to publish.

THE DATABASES

Ten database pages, one method

DATABASE	WHAT IT HOLDS
Migration Law Atlas	97 norms across three tiers (31 global, 37 regional, 25 national, plus 4 key reports), with ratifications in 187 countries
Farmworker law view	106 farmworker norms (82 international or regional, 24 national)
Court Decisions	1,540 decisions from 92 countries, with summaries in English and Indonesian
Migrant Domestic Workers	115 instruments in 44 jurisdictions, coded against ILO Convention No. 189
Countries of Origin	12 countries of origin compared on 9 questions
Gulf States, East Asia, Southeast Asia	Neutral comparisons of migration and labour law in destination states
Government Hate Speech	34 democracies, with a companion comparison of elections and non-citizens
Find free legal help	91 organisations in 37 countries; phone numbers listed only after they are checked

> **How we check.** Every entry starts from an official source wherever one exists: the court's own website, the official gazette, the responsible ministry, the ILO or the United Nations. Secondary sources are used only when no official text can be found, and are marked. New material waits in a separate folder until an editor has reviewed it.

Figures counted from the published data files on 20 November 2026.

HOW IMR IS FUNDED

> **Self-funded so far.** IMR has received no grants or other outside funding to date. All of the work described in this report was self-funded and carried out by IMR's team and volunteers. Any future funding will be reported here and on theimr.org.

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IMR PRESS

Hukum HAM Internasional: Sebuah Pengantar Kontekstual
Pranoto Iskandar

Membela Globalisasi (In Defense of Globalization)
Jagdish Bhagwati

Satu Bumi (One World: The Ethics of Globalization)
Peter Singer

Relasi Negara & Agama: Redefinisi Diskursus Konstitusionalisme di Indonesia
Yudi Junadi

Using World Trade Law to Promote the Interests of Global South
Nandang Sutrisno

Standar Internasional Migrasi Ketenagakerjaan Berbasis HAM
Pranoto Iskandar

Muslim dan Keadilan Global (Muslims and Global Justice)
Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im

Tradisi Hukum Indonesia
Ratno Lukito

Pemajuan Kepentingan Negara-Negara Berkembang dalam Sistem WTO
Nandang Sutrisno

LOOKING AHEAD

Plans for 2027

1 Check the decisions

Move decisions from “coded” to “checked against the judgment”, starting with the most-used entries, and publish the first inter-coder reliability results.

2 Take the law to villages

Legal literacy sessions and student paralegal training in migrant-sending districts of Java, subject to funding.

3 Grow coverage where it is thin

More decisions from Africa, Latin America and the Pacific, and from courts in countries of origin.

4 Publish the data papers

The first versioned release is now archived on Zenodo with a permanent identifier (DOI). Next comes publishing two papers that describe the collection.

5 Widen the circle

Welcome new members to the Advisory Board and new partner law faculties.

HOW TO CITE OUR DATA

Institute for Migrant Rights (2026). *Migration Jurisprudence from the South: databases of migration and labor law* (Version 2026.11) [Data set]. Zenodo. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.24389324

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