

# NeoLiberalism and the Challenges of Managing Labour Migration in Urban Malaysia

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## ABSTRACT

Labour migration into Malaysia has increased rapidly in recent decades and this has affected Malaysia's government policy in managing migrants' movement. Interestingly, Malaysia has attracted a high degree of unskilled labour, accompanied by unabated rise of undocumented migrant workers. Mitigating undocumented migration is the main aim of Malaysia's labour migration policy and therefore the focus of Malaysian government. This has impacted on how enforcement agencies work out strategies. These agencies are the forefront of Malaysia's labour migration policy but they faced a number of challenges, such as documentation, finance and manpower capability, and political intervention, which impede their ability to optimize their capabilities in enforcing the Malaysian government labour migration policy. Resolving these challenges and moving towards a long-term labour migration policy will benefit the Malaysian state, its citizens and the labour migrants.

## INTRODUCTION

Neoliberalism and globalization has fundamentally changed the pattern of labour migration in the world (Overbeek, 2002; Shipper, 2010; Ullah, 2013), in the sense that countries that were once net exporters have also become importers of migrants, or at the least participate as transit territories in the business of sending people, or a combination of all three (Bob-Milliar and Bob-Milliar, 2013; Ullah, 2013; Lewandowska-Gwarda, 2014; Acharya et al., 2016). In line with this, a growing body of research has begun to examine the ways neoliberalism has influenced the movement of people across the world, as Frank (2014) argued that states' involvement in migration should be kept in minimum and people should be able to move freely across borders if there is demand for their labour. Some researchers defined neoliberalism as a philosophy that privileges market over government intervention (Hayek, 1971; Friedman, 2009; Poole, 2017).

Previous scholars have argued that neoliberalism and the increased economic and political interdependence across borders have resulted in more identical push and pull factors in different migration streams (Cissé, 2013; Nawyn, 2016). For instance, neoliberal policy has impacted labour migration patterns around the world (Overbeek, 2002; Otero, 2011; Tobias, 2012) from the concept of sovereignty to citizenship and governance of countries (Shipper, 2010; Nah, 2012). The effect of neoliberalism towards migration policies and citizen perception towards migrant labour has also evolved in recent decades (IOM, 2015). We see some evidence that economic prosperity coupled

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