

# Women candidates support migrant worker protection

**Dian Septiari**  
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Female legislative candidates from the Jakarta II electoral district, which covers Central Jakarta, South Jakarta and overseas voters, pledged support for the protection of female migrant workers abroad as they realize politics continues to overlook gender-related issues.

Seven female candidates from the Jakarta II electoral district gathered in a public discussion on Sunday held by rights groups Migrant Care, the Indonesian Women's Coalition and KAPAL Perempuan to hear their commitment to female rights protection as the April elections draw near.

In male-dominated politics, politicians were still reluctant to talk seriously about women's issues, especially when it did not directly benefit them, legislative candidate from the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle, Nuraini, said at the event held to also celebrate International Women's Day.

Forty-nine female candidates from Jakarta II, along with 56 male candidates, are contesting seven House seats.

Compared to around 800,000 registered voters in Central Jakarta and 1.6 million registered voters in South Jakarta, the 2.05 million registered overseas voters could be a determining factor in winning the Jakarta II electoral district.

The Overseas Election Committee recorded that the largest overseas voter rolls came from countries with large populations of migrant workers, with 558,873

voters registered at the Indonesian Embassy in Kuala Lumpur, followed by the Indonesian Economic and Trade Office in Taiwan with 277,065 and the Indonesian Consulate General in Hong Kong with 180,232.

Data from Agency for the Placement and Protection of Indonesian Migrant Workers (BNP2TKI), meanwhile, shows that around 60 percent of Indonesian migrant workers are women who work in the domestic sector.

Nuraini said there were many reports of abuse and violations abroad that tended to drag on or were ignored.

"That is why the implementation of a 2017 law on the protection of migrant workers must be supervised and controlled, including its implementing regulations," she said in the discussion, which was broadcast online on Facebook.

The law mandated that a set of implementing government regulations on legal, social and economic protection for migrant workers be issued two years after the enactment of the law in November 2017 to amend the 2004 law.

Yet, until now, the government has yet to set up the implementing regulations to transition from the pro-business 2004 law to the protection-first 2017 law.

"The law mandates dozens of implementing regulations, but what we have so far is only Ministerial Regulation No. 18/2018 on social security," Nuraini said.

She was referring to a ministerial regulation regulating social security for migrant workers — which is provided by the Workers

Social Security Agency (BPJS Ketenagakerjaan).

"The majority of female migrant workers who work as domestic workers are very vulnerable to discrimination and violence. Some even face the threat of capital punishment. Regulations derived from the 2017 law should be the answers to these problems," Migrant Care executive director Wahyu Susilo said.

In October last year, Indonesian migrant worker Tuti Turzilawati was executed in Saudi Arabia after she was found guilty of murdering her employer's father. Following her arrest in 2010, she had reportedly pleaded self-defense amid frequent sexual harassment.

Legislative candidate Christina Aryani from the Golkar Party said the House's supervisory role meant that lawmakers should push the government to finalize the implementing regulations.

"They [the government] have been very secretive with the draft, so until now we have not seen it, let alone learned of its details and which institution will have the lead role in implementing it — is it the BNP2TKI? And what will be the role of Manpower Ministry in it?" she said.

Christina blamed migrant worker exploitation on profit-oriented recruitment agencies that controlled the recruitment process, placement and education.

In addition, Christina said, Indonesia should renegotiate its bilateral agreements on migrant workers with destination countries, such as its agreement with Malaysia, which had expired in 2016.