

# Japanese Society's Perception of Legal And Social Norm Violations Committed by Indonesian Migrant Workers in Japan

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## Abstrak

Jepang menghadapi tantangan demografis berupa penurunan populasi dan penuaan masyarakat, yang mendorong terbukanya peluang pekerja migran Indonesia masuk ke dunia kerja di Jepang. Namun, dalam beberapa tahun terakhir, terdapat sejumlah kasus pelanggaran hukum dan norma sosial yang melibatkan pekerja migran Indonesia di Jepang. Persepsi masyarakat Jepang terhadap kasus-kasus tersebut menjadi faktor penting yang dapat mempengaruhi kebijakan imigrasi, integrasi sosial, dan hubungan bilateral kedua negara. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menggali persepsi masyarakat Jepang, khususnya kalangan bisnis, terhadap kasus pelanggaran hukum dan norma sosial yang dilakukan oleh pekerja migran Indonesia di Jepang. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode pengumpulan data melalui wawancara mendalam (in-depth interview) terhadap masyarakat Jepang di kalangan bisnis. Informan dipilih secara purposive sampling dengan kriteria memiliki pengalaman berinteraksi atau mengelola pekerja migran Indonesia, baik sebagai pemilik usaha, manajer, supervisor, atau pejabat di sektor swasta. Wawancara dilakukan secara semi-terstruktur untuk menggali persepsi, pengalaman, dan opini mendalam mengenai pelanggaran hukum dan norma sosial yang dilakukan pekerja migran Indonesia. Dari data yang disimpulkan oleh peneliti, sikap atau persepsi orang Jepang terhadap kasus migran Indonesia, masih bisa dianggap pelanggaran norma sosial yang bisa saja dilakukan oleh setiap migran. Namun demikian, apabila kasus pelanggaran norma sosial dan norma hukum ini berlanjut dan berlangsung dalam skala yang massif, maka tingkat kepercayaan terhadap migran Indonesia akan turun, dan efeknya berpotensi menimbulkan sikap diskriminatif yang akan merugikan kedua belah negara. Temuan penelitian ini diharapkan dapat memberikan kontribusi pada pemahaman dinamika sosial multikultural di Jepang dan menjadi masukan bagi pemerintah Indonesia dalam merancang program persiapan dan pembinaan pekerja migran. Bagi Jepang, hasil penelitian dapat membantu dalam pengembangan kebijakan integrasi yang lebih efektif dan program edukasi lintas budaya untuk mengurangi potensi konflik sosial.

***Kata Kunci: persepsi sosial, pekerja migran Indonesia, Jepang, pelanggaran hukum, norma sosial, kalangan bisnis, integrasi multikultural***

## Abstract

Japan faces demographic challenges in the form of population decline and aging society, which creates opportunities for Indonesian migrant workers to enter the Japanese workforce. However, in recent years, there have been several cases of legal and social norm violations involving Indonesian migrant workers in Japan. Japanese society's perception of these cases becomes an important factor that can influence immigration policies, social integration, and bilateral relations between both countries. This research aims to explore Japanese society's perceptions, particularly in the business sector, regarding cases of legal and social norm violations committed by Indonesian migrant workers in Japan. This study employs a qualitative

approach with data collection through in-depth interviews with Japanese business community members. Informants were selected through purposive sampling with criteria of having experience in interacting with or managing Indonesian migrant workers, either as business owners, managers, supervisors, or private sector officials. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore perceptions, experiences, and in-depth opinions regarding legal and social norm violations committed by Indonesian migrant workers. From the data concluded by researchers, Japanese attitudes or perceptions toward Indonesian migrant cases can still be considered social norm violations that could be committed by any migrant. However, if these cases of social and legal norm violations continue and occur on a massive scale, the level of trust in Indonesian migrants will decline, potentially leading to discriminatory attitudes that would harm both countries. The research findings are expected to contribute to understanding multicultural social dynamics in Japan and provide input for the Indonesian government in designing migrant worker preparation and development programs. For Japan, the research results can assist in developing more effective integration policies and cross-cultural education programs to reduce potential social conflicts.

***Keywords: social perception, Indonesian migrant workers, Japan, law violations, social norms, business circles, multicultural integration***

## 1. Introduction

Two undeniable factors contributing to the large number of foreigners in Japan today are the aging population due to a declining birth rate (Fellow, 2024; Eryano, 2023; International Monetary Fund. Asia and Pacific Dept, 2024). An article published by NHK (2025) states that Japan is experiencing a very serious demographic crisis, with the number of births last year reaching 686,061 babies, down 41,227 from the previous year and falling below 700,000 for the first time since statistics began to be recorded in 1899. The total fertility rate dropped to 1.15, which is a record low in history, while the number of deaths reached 1,605,298 people, resulting in a natural population decrease of 919,237 people - the highest in history. The decline in marriages is a major factor, with only 485,063 couples marrying last year, and experts warn that without immediate intervention, the country's pension and healthcare systems will face bankruptcy due to the shrinking productive population.

The domino effect currently felt in Japan is a critical labor shortage crisis, especially in the non-manufacturing sector and small-to-medium enterprises, caused by the decline in the productive age population since 1995 and the total population since 2011. The most affected industries include construction, transportation, medical-welfare, hotel-restaurant, and information technology services. Various strategic measures have been taken by the Japanese government, one of which is opening opportunities for foreigners to work in Japan. Along with changes in demographic dynamics and global economic developments, Japan has experienced a shift in immigration policy in line with the need for foreign labor. It is undeniable that Japan is increasingly dependent on foreign labor to maintain stable economic growth.

According to an announcement from the Japan Immigration Services Agency, the number of foreign nationals working in Japan is 2,302,587 people (as of the end of October 2024). After a decline due to entry restrictions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic since 2020, the number is now increasing again. The following data was obtained from the Japan Platform for Migrant Workers, accessed on August 4, 2025, regarding the top 5 countries with the largest number of workers in Japan.

Table 1. Countries and the number of workers in Japan

	<b>Nationality</b>	<b>Number of People</b>
1	Vietnam	570.708
2	China	408.805
3	Filipina	245.565
4	Nepal	187.657
5	Indonesia	169.539

Source: Summary of the "Status of Notification of Employment of Foreign Nationals" report (as of the end of October 2024) | Japanese Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare ([https://www.mhlw.go.jp/stf/newpage\\_50256.html](https://www.mhlw.go.jp/stf/newpage_50256.html))

According to Japanese business actors, there is a tendency that workers from Indonesia have the potential to improve further and overtake the rankings of other countries within 1-3 years. Several circles in Japanese industry also see the potential that in the next 5-10 years, Indonesia could rank in the top 3 in terms of the number of foreign workers in Japan.

In December 2024, the number of Indonesian citizens living in Japan reportedly reached 199,824 people, an increase of more than 15% in the past six months. This data shows significant growth in response to immigration policies that have begun to loosen regulations in line with the declining domestic population and labor shortages in certain sectors. Up to now, there are 3 main programs most commonly used by Indonesians to work in Japan: *ginoujishuusei*, *tokutei ginou*, and *gijinkoku*.

The entry of foreign workers, especially Indonesians, does not escape problems related to violations of Japanese socio-cultural norms and violations of the law in Japan. Cases of violations of Japanese socio-cultural norms committed by some Indonesian immigrants include disturbing order and peace in public areas (speaking loudly on public transportation, littering in inappropriate places and at the wrong times, damaging public facilities). Cases of these social norm violations have lately become prominent in social media coverage, with the activities of certain communities appearing on quite a large and sporadic scale, so they are considered disruptive to order and violate decency within Japanese cultural norms.

Criminal cases committed by Indonesians have also begun to surface and spread widely on social media, ranging from theft, robbery with violence, murder, and illegal businesses. Reactions have arisen from various circles in both Japan and Indonesia. Issues such as Japan's plan to blacklist Indonesians working in Japan and various Japanese opinions lamenting the poor and unfavorable conditions for both sides (Japan and Indonesia) have come to the fore. Even the “unfavorable” situation is suspected to have become a momentum for the right-wing Sanseito party in Japan, which ultimately succeeded in gaining the most votes.

In this article, the author attempts to capture how the Japanese public perceives the increasing number of cases of violations of Japanese socio-cultural norms and Japanese law by Indonesians in Japan.

## 2. Method

This research is qualitative, aiming to view phenomena comprehensively and contextually so that the results can be used as an alternative solution that can be applied according to needs and conditions. Data collection involves informants and literature reviews so that the data obtained can describe the complete condition of a phenomenon.

The author used in-depth interviews with several Japanese individuals who have the capacity to observe and analyze the world of foreign workers in Japan. Three Japanese

individuals were interviewed in-depth, focusing on questions related to 1) Japan's current conditions from a socio-cultural and economic (business) perspective; 2) legal loopholes in Japan that could potentially be misused; 3) policies implemented by the Japanese government to mitigate violations of socio-cultural and legal norms in Japan; and 4) general views prevalent in Japanese society towards foreign workers, especially Indonesians. In addition, the author also used literature reviews to find references related to current news about violations of social and legal norms in Japan committed by Indonesian workers. The use of these two methods is considered the most comprehensive in gathering data related to issues arising in the world of foreign workers in Japan, especially Indonesian workers.

### 3. Result

Based on in-depth interviews with Japanese sources and Indonesian workers who are Japanese nationals, the researcher created two categories regarding Japanese perceptions of Indonesian workers today, especially given the phenomenon of increased media coverage on social media about violations of socio-cultural norms and legal infractions. The first is negative perception:

1. Uncomfortable with the presence of foreigners: disrupts order and tranquility
2. Potential for cultural clashes that can cause minor to major friction
3. In the business world: disrupts business productivity

This negative perspective has the potential to give rise to social and political issues. These social issues appear in Japanese society in the form of discrimination and racism. According to Indonesian workers in Japan, this attitude can be felt in daily life, such as the difficulty in finding a place to live. Although subjective, negative sentiments are also felt by Indonesian workers, such as Japanese people who then become reluctant to interact with Indonesians. These negative sentiments are also experienced by workers in the workplace. Some Indonesian workers feel that working hours are unfairly distributed and that their rights to leave and overtime do not match what is appropriate.

The second perception is positive, which consists of favorable views of Indonesian citizens, especially Indonesian workers. The following are some Japanese perceptions of Indonesian workers:

1. Polite manners are still considered the best compared to other foreigners, even those who also come from Asian countries. The concept of respecting elders and understanding social hierarchy, which is also applied in Japan through the *senpai-kohai* concept, as well as the culture of small talk that resembles the Japanese *tatemaie*, all contribute to Indonesians' adaptability in Japan.
2. Better communication skills (easier to listen to and understand for Japanese people). Being accustomed to living in multicultural environments has a positive effect on the mastery of regional or ethnic languages by Indonesians. This also positively affects their foreign language communication skills, especially Japanese, which is considered easier for Japanese people to understand.
3. An open attitude that facilitates problem mitigation and handling. This open attitude plays an important role in communication between Indonesian workers and the Japanese side (agencies, Japanese companies, and fellow Indonesian workers). This potential can be considered one of the keys to mitigating issues that arise during work activities in Japan.

4. Support from family in Indonesia. The support factor from family in Indonesia also plays an important role in the good behavior of Indonesian workers in Japan. Many Indonesian workers in Japan aim to improve the financial condition of their families in Indonesia, which leads to greater effort in behaving well in Japanese society.

#### 4. Discussion

There is no definitive data on socio-cultural and legal violations committed by Indonesian workers in Japan. However, researchers found information from social media about several cases that occurred in Japan, including:

Table 2. Examples of cases of violations of the law in Japan by Indonesian citizens

<b>Kasus</b>	<b>Keterangan</b>	<b>Tahun</b>	<b>Lokasi</b>
Murder	Three Indonesian citizens were arrested after the body of another Indonesian citizen was found inside a suitcase in the Ono mountains.	April 2023	Fukushima
Street Robbery	An Indonesian man attacked a Japanese woman and stole her wallet.	July 2024	Fukuoka
Mugging and Motorcycle Gangs	committing a holdup	July 2024	Fukuoka
Sexual Violence and Robbery with Aggravating Circumstances	Detained for alleged sexual harassment of a fellow Indonesian citizen during a house burglary.	September 2024	Kagawa
Murder and Robbery	attempted to rob and murder an elderly Japanese national due to online gambling debt	November 2024	Kakegawa
Stabbing of Elderly Victim	Indonesian citizen stabbed elderly Japanese couple during home robbery.	November 2024	Shizuoka
Murder and Robbery	Robbery that resulted in the death of a fellow Indonesian citizen. They also reportedly overstayed their visa.	January 2025	Gunma
Community activities	Raising the PSHT community flag at a public facility and activity	Event in 2022 but appeared on social media in June 2025	

Data taken from Timerilis (July 11, 2025) Indonesians in Japan Under Scrutiny: Robbery, Murder Cases Spark Public Concern (Timerilis, July 11, 2025) regarding attempted robbery and murder by Indonesian citizens in the Kakegawa, Shizuoka area.

The cases in table 2 are ones that have received extensive coverage on social media. This has caused concern among both Japanese and Indonesian communities. The growing Indonesian community in Japan faces serious challenges due to a series of criminal cases involving Indonesian Citizens (WNI), ranging from murder and robbery to assaults on local residents, which have tarnished the image of Indonesia in the Land of the Rising Sun.

Influencer Neo Japan (Dian Kusuma) issued a stern warning to WNI not to bring negative habits from Indonesia and to uphold the country's reputation abroad, as even minor violations can lead to deportation. Although the majority of WNI in Japan live law-abiding lives, the actions of a few individuals can have a broad impact on the whole Indonesian community, making it essential to strengthen community discipline and cultural awareness.

Japanese society's view divides violations of social and cultural norms and legal infractions into two types based on who is the victim or the disadvantaged party. The first type is when the violation is committed by a foreigner and the impact is felt or the disadvantaged party is also Indonesian; in such cases, Japanese people tend to have a neutral perception (neither negative nor positive).

The second type is when the violation causes physical and non-physical harm to members of Japanese society, which has the potential to generate a negative perception. Examples include the cases presented in table 2. Minor violations that fall into the category of breaches of social and cultural norms in Japan include: throwing trash outside of designated places and times, causing disturbances in inappropriate locations, neglecting cleanliness, smoking in undesignated areas, and not being punctual. Meanwhile, serious offenses or those classified as breaches of Japanese law include: theft, robbery, murder, operating illegal businesses, overstaying, drugs, and fighting.

On the other hand, the presence and rapid growth of Indonesian migrant workers in Japan has two main implications:

1. Social Implications:

- a) Increased intercultural interactions bring benefits by facilitating the exchange of values and openness to cross-cultural understanding, but can also cause friction if not supported by a deep understanding of local norms.
- b) The emergence of negative stigma due to violation incidents affects the image of the Indonesian community, as well as the decline in local residents' trust toward the existence of foreign workers.

2. Economic Implications:

- a) Significant contributions to the Japanese economy by meeting employment needs in sectors experiencing labor shortages, such as manufacturing, construction, and agriculture.
- b) The potential for disruptions in the labor system if working conditions are not promptly improved, which could decrease productivity and increase the rate of labor exploitation.

## 5. Conclusion

Based on an analysis of Japanese public perceptions regarding violations of laws and social norms committed by Indonesian migrant workers, this study has yielded several significant findings that provide a comprehensive understanding of the complex dynamics of cross-cultural relationships in the context of labor migration. There are two sides that need attention according to this research. On the one hand, there is positive appreciation for the characteristics of Indonesian workers, such as politeness, good communication skills, openness, and strong family support. However, on the other hand, concerns about violations of laws and social norms create negative perceptions that have the potential to cause discrimination and racism, and in the worst-case scenario, could lead to strict restrictions on prospective workers as well as Indonesians in general who wish to engage in activities in Japan (school, business, tourism). These findings reinforce international migration theories that

emphasize the importance of social perception factors in determining the success of migrant integration. In practical terms, this research identifies the need for a holistic approach in addressing labor migration issues that does not focus solely on economic aspects but also includes socio-cultural dimensions.

This study has limitations in terms of the number of informants and a narrow geographic focus. Future research is recommended to broaden its scope by involving more sectors and regions in Japan, as well as by using quantitative approaches to measure the level of perception more broadly.

In addition, longitudinal studies are needed to understand changes in perception alongside the development of bilateral relations and Japan's demographic dynamics. Comparative studies with other labor-sending countries will also provide richer perspectives on the factors that influence Japanese public perception.

This study affirms that the issue of labor migration cannot be viewed merely as an economic transaction, but rather involves complex social, cultural, and political dimensions. The success of the Indonesia-Japan labor migration program is determined not only by economic factors, but also by the ability of both countries to manage socio-cultural aspects and build mutually beneficial positive perceptions.

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去年の出生数 初めて 70 万人下回る 出生率も過去最低の 1.15 (Last year's births fell below 700,000 for the first time, with the fertility rate also hitting a record low of 1.15.)

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