

## Indonesia's multi-track diplomacy: efforts to address the educational rights of undocumented Indonesian migrant workers' children in East Malaysia

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### Abstract

*The right to education for undocumented children of Indonesian migrant workers (IMWs) in East Malaysia remains inadequately protected due to administrative exclusion, legal uncertainty, geographic remoteness, and fragmented cross-border governance. This study analyzes how Indonesia's multi-track diplomacy operates to protect the right to education for undocumented children of IMWs in East Malaysia. This research employs a qualitative explanatory design based on semi-structured interviews supported by document analysis. Data were analyzed through thematic coding using NVivo, with the application of triangulation and participant verification to enhance credibility. Findings indicate that educational protection functions through coordination across four main Tracks. Tracks One provides policy authority, diplomatic legitimacy, schools, documentation facilitation, and scholarships. Tracks Two translates formal commitments into operational support, particularly regarding student repatriation and placement. Tracks Four maintains access in remote plantation areas through mentor teachers who fill teaching vacancies. Tracks Five strengthens the system through temporary teaching, training, and the production of policy-relevant knowledge. This study makes a theoretical contribution by expanding multi-track diplomacy beyond conflict resolution and demonstrating its value as an analytical lens for cross-border social governance. It further demonstrates that effective coordination depends on functional complementarity, negotiated interdependence, and adaptive responses to structural constraints.*

**Keywords:** multi-track diplomacy, right to education, undocumented, Indonesian migrant workers, East Malaysia

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### Introduction

The right to education constitutes an integral part of universally guaranteed human rights. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) of 1990 affirms that every child, without exception, is entitled to access quality education as a foundation for personal development and a dignified future. This principle aligns with the objectives of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4, which emphasizes inclusive, equitable, and quality education for all children by 2030. Nevertheless, the implementation of the right to education across different regions of the world continues to face significant challenges, especially for children in vulnerable circumstances. One such group comprises children of migrant workers. High levels of

cross-border mobility are frequently not accompanied by legal certainty, resulting in many migrant children remaining administratively unregistered and marginalized from access to basic services, including education.

In the Indonesian context, this issue is particularly evident in East Malaysia, especially in Sabah and Sarawak. These regions have become major destinations for Indonesian migrant workers due to labor demand in the plantation and construction sectors. Geographical proximity, cultural and linguistic similarities, and significant differences in GDP per capita between Indonesia and Malaysia further contribute to the high demand for Indonesian migrant workers (IMWs) seeking employment in Malaysia (Prianto et al., 2023; Susilo, 2016). However, many workers migrate through nonprocedural channels, an administrative term used in Indonesia to describe migration that does not comply with official legal and procedural requirements. This corresponds to what is more widely described in international literature as undocumented or irregular migration. In this study, the term “undocumented” is used consistently to refer to migrant workers and their children who lack valid legal or administrative status in the host country.

The Indonesian Migrant Workers Protection Agency (BP2MI) reports that Malaysia remains the primary destination for irregular migrant workers (Thamrin, 2019). Publicly reported statements by the Indonesian Ambassador to Malaysia indicate that more than 50% of Indonesian migrant workers in Malaysia lack immigration documents, while only around 700,000 workers hold official documentation (Aura, 2022). Another source from the Directorate for the Protection of Indonesian Citizens and Legal Entities of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs indicates that the number of irregular Indonesian migrant workers to Malaysia increased by 146% from 2020 to 2021 (Lendong, 2021). Of approximately 2.7 million Indonesian migrant workers in Malaysia, only 1.6 million are documented, while the remainder are irregular workers often employed in precarious conditions in domestic work, construction, and agriculture sectors. A report on the palm oil sector notes that approximately 1.2 million migrant workers reside in Sabah, of whom around 840,000 are undocumented (Solidar Suisse, 2019).

The undocumented status of these workers affects their children, who also face documentation-related challenges. As a result, access to their right to education is constrained because civil registration documents, such as birth certificates and family cards are essential administrative requirements for school enrollment and certification. This condition does not merely reflect administrative irregularity; rather, it structurally produces exclusion from formal education systems, thereby transforming migration status into a key determinant of educational inequality. Due to the irregular and hidden nature of undocumented migration, precise statistics remain inherently difficult to establish. Consequently, available figures often rely on institutional estimates, administrative records, and publicly reported statements by relevant authorities.

Education is a fundamental right that must be guaranteed for every child, including those from migrant backgrounds, whether documented or undocumented. According to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, every child has the right to education without discrimination. However, undocumented migrant children often face substantial barriers in accessing adequate education due to administrative exclusions, restrictive legal frameworks, and policy limitations shaped by political and economic dynamics, which further intensify their vulnerability in realizing educational rights (Dewi, 2018). Addressing this challenge therefore requires responses that go beyond administrative measures and extend into cross-border governance mechanisms, as the issue involves overlapping state jurisdictions, legal constraints, and

the protection of citizens abroad, thereby necessitating diplomatic and institutional engagement.

Given this cross-border and multi-actor complexity, this study adopts multi-track diplomacy as an analytical framework to examine how educational protection is developed through collaborative engagement between state and non-state actors. Multi-track diplomacy conceptualizes transnational problem-solving as a “living system” consisting of interconnected networks of activities, institutions, and communities working collectively toward shared objectives. Unlike traditional state-centric diplomacy, which primarily focuses on formal interactions between governments, multi-track diplomacy emphasizes the role of diverse actors, including non-governmental organizations, private citizens, and academic institutions, in shaping transnational governance processes. In contrast to public diplomacy, which largely remains state-initiated despite targeting foreign publics, multi-track diplomacy operates through decentralized and mutually reinforcing interactions among actors with different mandates and resources. This interconnected system functions dynamically through processes of coordination, complementarity, and adaptive interaction, where each track contributes distinct capacities while simultaneously depending on other tracks to address structural limitations. Such a configuration allows diplomatic practices to extend beyond formal negotiation spaces and operate effectively in complex cross-border contexts characterized by legal ambiguity and governance fragmentation. Importantly, this dynamic interaction distinguishes multi-track diplomacy from linear and hierarchical diplomatic models, where authority and action are concentrated within state institutions. Instead, multi-track diplomacy operates through distributed agency, where outcomes emerge from continuous negotiation, feedback, and mutual adjustment among actors across different tracks.

Accordingly, the protection of educational rights for undocumented Indonesian migrant children should not be understood as the sole government responsibility; instead, it emerges from coordinated, interdependent efforts across multiple tracks. This implies that the effectiveness of diplomatic intervention in such contexts is not determined solely by formal state capacity, but by the extent to which inter-track coordination can compensate for jurisdictional and institutional limitations. This theoretical perspective is particularly relevant in the context of undocumented Indonesian migrant workers’ children, where fragmented governance and legal constraints necessitate coordinated multi-actor engagement.

The state of the art indicates that prior studies have extensively examined government-led initiatives in fulfilling the educational rights of Indonesian migrant children in Malaysia, particularly through diplomatic strategies and the establishment of educational institutions. These include initiatives such as the *Sekolah Indonesia Kota Kinabalu* (SIKK), the development of Community Learning Centers (CLCs), and administrative support mechanisms including civil registration documentation, National Student Identification Number (NISN) registration, teacher deployment, and legal-administrative facilitation (Agustina & Azizah, 2024; Anita et al., 2021; Dewi, 2018; Wulan et al., 2024; Yulianto et al., 2023).

At the same time, the literature highlights the growing role of non-state actors, particularly non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and community-based groups, in complementing state capacity by providing educational services, social protection, and child welfare support (Christie, 2016; Damayanti et al., 2023a; Muslihudin et al., 2023; Muyamin, 2019; Saefuddin et al., 2023; Yuvanti, 2021). Collectively, these studies suggest that the protection of educational rights for undocumented Indonesian

migrant children involves multiple actors operating across different institutional domains.

While state-centered studies primarily emphasize formal policy instruments and institutional arrangements, they often underplay the operational constraints and access barriers faced at the local level. In contrast, NGO and community-based studies highlight grassroots service delivery and rights advocacy, yet tend to overlook how these initiatives are shaped by, or interact with, formal diplomatic and policy frameworks. This divergence creates an analytical disconnect in which state-centered and non-state-focused studies operate in parallel without sufficiently explaining how their interactions are structured. As a result, the field lacks a coherent and theoretically grounded explanation of how multi-actor engagement functions as a coordinated governance system, particularly in cross-border contexts involving undocumented populations.

Furthermore, empirical studies that explicitly employ a multi-track diplomacy perspective in analyzing the protection of educational rights for undocumented Indonesian migrant children are still limited. Existing work, such as Maksum (2025) primarily emphasizes citizen-based initiatives (Track Four) and highlights constraints in resources and institutional support, yet provides limited insights into how higher-level diplomatic tracks interact with and reinforce grassroots efforts. Consequently, there remains a lack of comprehensive analysis on how different diplomatic tracks are configured and how inter-track dynamics function as a coordinated mechanism of protection in East Malaysia.

Addressing this gap, this study moves beyond descriptive accounts of actor involvement by examining how multi-track diplomatic interactions function as an integrated and relational system of governance. Unlike previous studies that primarily describe the presence or roles of individual actors, this study advances a conceptual contribution by reconceptualizing multi-track diplomacy as an interactive and relational system of governance rather than a static categorization of actors. Specifically, this research does not aim to build a formal predictive model, but instead offers a process-oriented analytical perspective that explains how interactions across tracks are structured, negotiated, and sustained in practice within a cross-border governance context.

This perspective is particularly relevant in the case of undocumented Indonesian migrant workers (IMWs), where legal ambiguity and jurisdictional constraints prevent single-actor solutions and require coordinated, adaptive and multi-level engagement. Methodologically, the study employs a qualitative approach because the dynamics of inter-track coordination such as negotiation processes, informal arrangements, and institutional adaptation, cannot be adequately captured through quantitative measurement, but require in-depth, context-sensitive analysis of actor interactions.

Based on this state of the art, the novelty of this study lies in applying a multi-track diplomacy framework to (1) identify the involved tracks, their actors, and the forms of interventions supporting educational-right protection for undocumented Indonesian migrant children in East Malaysia, and (2) analyze interconnections among these tracks as a unified system of action rather than as fragmented, actor-based interventions. This study treats cross-track coordination as the primary unit of analysis for explaining the effectiveness of educational-right protection and advances understanding of how state jurisdictional limitations can be mitigated through synergy between state and non-state actors.

In line with this novelty, the research question guiding this study is: how does Indonesia's multi-track diplomacy operate in addressing the educational challenges of undocumented Indonesian migrant children in East Malaysia? This question is operationalized to identify (a) the tracks are involved, (b) the key actors and their roles, and and (c) how inter-track relations are structured within a systematic framework for educational-rights protection. Ultimately, this article examines the dynamics and mechanisms through which Indonesia's multi-track diplomacy protects the educational rights of undocumented Indonesian migrant children in East Malaysia and contributes to the broader sustainable development agenda (UNESCO, 2020).

## Research Methods

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach to develop an in-depth understanding of the mechanisms used to protect the educational rights of the mechanisms used to protect the educational rights of undocumented children of Indonesian migrant workers in East Malaysia through the multi-track diplomacy framework. A qualitative design was selected because the study seeks to examine actor relationships, institutional coordination, policy implementation, and cross-track interactions that cannot be adequately captured through quantitative measurement alone (Neale, 2021). The approach is particularly appropriate for analysing context-specific governance processes involving multiple actors across national boundaries.

This research adopts a qualitative case study design focusing on East Malaysia, particularly Sabah and surrounding areas where Indonesian migrant workers are concentrated and where educational protection programs such as the *Sekolah Indonesia Kota Kinabalu* (SIKK) and Community Learning Centers (CLCs) are implemented. East Malaysia was selected because it represents a significant cross-border context involving undocumented Indonesian migrant families and challenges related to children's access to education. The study used both primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews with purposively selected informants who had direct experience and institutional knowledge relevant to the research topic. Six key informants participated in the study, consisting of one representative of the Indonesian government, the principal of SIKK, one CLC coordinator, two CLC supervising teachers, and one CLC student who was also a recipient of the Gema Cita repatriation scholarship. These participants represented policy, implementation, beneficiary, and diplomatic perspectives within the multi-track governance arrangement. Secondary data were obtained through document analysis, including legal regulations, government policies, official institutional reports, school administrative documents, program reports, and scholarly publications related to migration, children's rights, educational access, and diplomacy. These sources were used to enrich the analysis and provide institutional and policy context for the field findings.

Data collection was conducted through semi-structured interviews, both online and offline, depending on participant accessibility and logistical conditions, during the 2024 to 2025 research period. Each interview lasted approximately 45 to 90 minutes and, with participant consent, was audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The interview guide covered barriers to educational access, institutional responses, actor coordination, documentation issues, scholarship pathways, and implementation challenges. Document analysis was conducted in parallel to identify relevant policies, institutional arrangements, statistical trends, and program mechanisms. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis supported by NVivo 12, beginning with familiarization

with transcripts and documents, followed by open coding, categorization, theme development, and interpretation through the multi-track diplomacy framework, particularly Track One, Track Two, Track Four, and Track Five. The analysis focused on actor roles, coordination patterns, complementarity, dependency, and implementation gaps across tracks. To enhance validity and trustworthiness, the study applied source triangulation, method triangulation, and member checking with two selected informants representing key institutional perspectives. Ethical safeguards were also applied throughout the research. All participants were informed about the purpose of the study, participated voluntarily, and provided informed consent. Participant identities were anonymized where appropriate, sensitive personal information was excluded, and all audio files, transcripts, and related materials were stored securely and used solely for academic purposes.

## **Results and Discussion**

The result and discussion section is structured based on the multi-track diplomacy framework, with separate analyses for each track to comprehensively capture the differentiation of roles, mechanisms, and contributions of both state and non-state actors in protecting the educational rights of undocumented children of Indonesian migrant workers in East Malaysia. This approach is adopted on the premise that diplomatic practices in transnational contexts do not operate in a homogeneous manner, but rather through a configuration of actors characterized by relationally, this study not only maps who does what, but also investigates how each diplomatic pathway operates, complements one another, and collectively forms a cross-border governance system. Therefore, the analytical separation by track in this section serves as a deliberate strategy to maintain the precision of empirical findings while ensuring the depth of theoretical reflection within the framework of international relations.

### **Track One (Government): State-Led Educational Protection in East Malaysia** ***The Role of the Government in Fulfilling the Educational Rights of Children of Indonesian Migrant Workers.***

The findings indicate that the Government of Indonesia, as the primary actor in track one, plays a central role in safeguarding the educational rights of children of Indonesian migrant workers, including those with non-procedural or undocumented status in East Malaysia. This role is implemented through formal state mechanisms that integrate foreign policy, national education policy, and cross-border public service delivery.

Empirically, government involvement is reflected in the establishment and management of the *Sekolah Indonesia Kota Kinabalu* (SIKK), which functions as the primary formal education institution serving children of IMWs. SIKK is one of the three Indonesian Overseas Schools in Malaysia, alongside the Indonesian School of Kuala Lumpur and the Indonesian School of Johor Bahru. As of 2024, the number of students enrolled in formal education at SIKK across various levels (primary to senior secondary/vocational) reached 1,273 students (kemendikdasmen, 2025).

However, SIKK faces constraints in terms of capacity and accessibility, particularly for children residing outside the immediate vicinity of the school. In response to these limitations, CLCs have been established and distributed across Sabah and Sarawak. In practice, the CLCs operate under the coordination of the Sekolah Indonesia Kota Kinabalu (including those located in Sarawak) as the main school, in collaboration with three Indonesian diplomatic missions in Sabah and Sarawak, namely

the Consulate General of the Republic of Indonesia in Kota Kinabalu (Sabah), the Consulate General of the Republic of Indonesia in Kuching (Sarawak), and the Consulate of the Republic of Indonesia in Tawau (Sabah).

The CLCs serve as satellite learning units that facilitate educational access for students located beyond the operational reach of the SIKK. To illustrate the distribution of students enrolled in SIKK and the CLCs, the data are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Number of Student in SIKK and CLCs Across Educational Levels

<b>Level</b>	<b>SIKK</b>	<b>239 CLC in Sabah</b>	<b>58 CLC in Sarawak</b>
Primary Level-SIKK	360	13,610	1,994
Junior Secondary Level-SIKK	194	5,263	302
Regular Senior Secondary Level-SIKK	254	-	-
TJJ Senior Secondary Program-SIKK (Distance Learning Program)	237	-	-
Vocational Secondary Level-SIKK	228	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,273</b>	<b>18,873</b>	<b>2,296</b>

*Source : Office Memorandum, No. 1254/SIKK/IX/2024; Divisi CLC SIKK, 2025*

As shown in Table 1, the number of students enrolled in CLCs, particularly in Sabah, significantly exceeds those enrolled in SIKK. This indicates that CLCs play a crucial role in expanding educational access beyond the limited capacity and geographical reach of formal institutions. The dominance of CLC enrollment reflects structural constraints in centralized schooling and highlights the importance of decentralized and community-based educational provision. This pattern also demonstrates how non-state and community-supported mechanisms complement formal diplomatic and institutional efforts, reinforcing the argument that educational protection operates through a multi-track and multi-actor system rather than a single institutional channel.

This pattern indicates that the state's formal institutional capacity alone is insufficient to ensure equitable educational access, thereby necessitating complementary mechanisms beyond centralized schooling.

In addition to formal education, the government also provides access to non-formal education, commonly referred to as equivalency education. This scheme encompasses two main components: early childhood education through Early Childhood Education (locally referred to as *Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini* or PAUD) programs and education for children or adults who have surpassed the standard school-age period through Community Learning Activity Centers (locally referred to as Pusat Kegiatan Belajar Masyarakat or PKBM) (Suarno et al., 2021).

To date, the number of PAUD institutions and enrolled learners in East Malaysia remains limited. Only four playgroup classes (*Kelompok Belajar*/KB) are available, with a total enrollment of 80 students. One of the primary constraints is the limited classroom capacity, which restricts the number of children that can be accommodated. Nevertheless, the provision of PAUD in the form of learning groups in Kinabalu (under the administration of SIKK) reflects the Indonesian government's sustained commitment to ensuring the educational rights of its citizens abroad, particularly in East Malaysia.

Despite this effort, several challenges affect the effectiveness of PAUD implementation, including inadequate infrastructure, a shortage of specialized early childhood educators, limited parental awareness regarding the importance of early childhood education, and the tendency among some parents to treat PAUD primarily as a childcare facility. This finding reflects how early childhood and non-formal education programs function not merely as service delivery mechanisms, but as adaptive policy instruments designed to accommodate legal and administrative exclusion within a cross-border governance context.

Regarding PKBM, this program serves children, adults, and IMWs who wish to resume their education after dropping out for various reasons. The program includes Package A (equivalent to primary school), Package B (equivalent to junior secondary school), and Package C (equivalent to senior secondary school) (Sucipto et al., 2021). Upon completion, participants receive certificates whose legal validity is equivalent to those obtained through regular schooling at SIKK (KJRI Kota Kinabalu, 2022), and which can be used both in Malaysia and upon return to Indonesia. As of 2024, the number of learners enrolled in PKBM under the Consulate General of Republic of Indonesia in Kota Kinabalu reached 2,405 individuals.

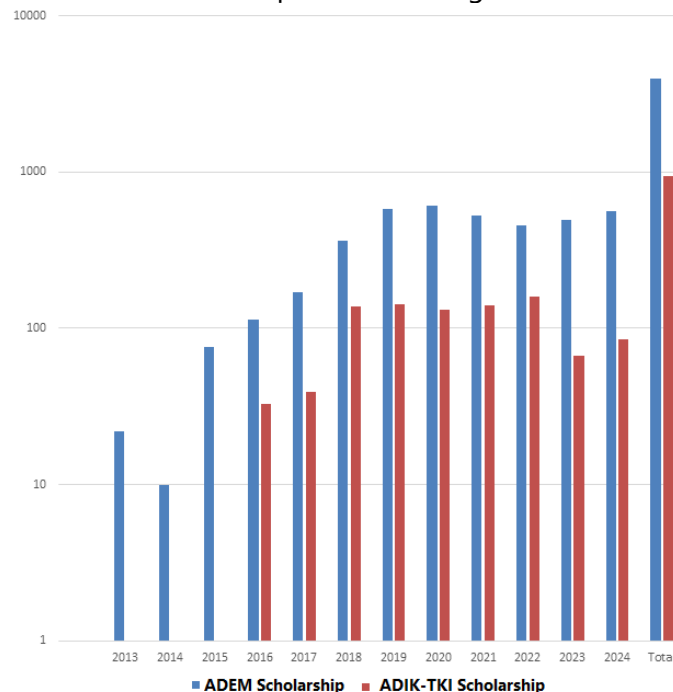
Another significant finding concerns the policy of granting a grace period for documentation completion for children of undocumented IMWs. In practice, children without birth certificates or other civil registration documents are still admitted to SIKK and CLCs while being assisted in obtaining the required documentation through Indonesian diplomatic missions. This policy enables the integration of student data into the national education database (Dapodik) and the issuance of National Student Identification Number (NISN), which is essential for ensuring educational continuity. The same policy is also implemented in PKBM programs, where children of undocumented IMWs are permitted to enroll and are granted a grace period to complete the civil documentation process (Saefuddin et al., 2023). From a multi-track diplomacy perspective, scholarship programs represent a strategic mechanism through which the state extends its protective function beyond territorial boundaries, particularly for populations constrained by legal and administrative barriers.

In addition, the government implements a repatriation scholarship program known as the *Generasi Maju Cinta Tanah Air* (Gema Cita) Program. This program facilitates educational access for children of IMWs in Sabah and Sarawak to continue their upper secondary education (senior high school, vocational high school, or Islamic senior secondary school) in Indonesia. It is an annual initiative resulting from collaboration between the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology of Indonesia, Indonesia Diplomatic Missions (Consulate in Tawau and Consulate General in Kota Kinabalu), SIKK, and the Sabah Bridge Foundation. Initially introduced as the "Repatriation Scholarship for Children of IMWs in Malaysia", the program was later renamed "*Gema Cita*". Beneficiaries are primarily children born in Malaysia (Sabah and Sarawak) whose parents work in palm oil plantations and who have completed their primary and junior secondary education at SIKK or in CLCs across these regions.

Three educational pathways are facilitated within this program. First, the ADEM pathway provides full scholarships from the Ministry of Primary and secondary Education for students who pass the selection process, enabling them to complete their education at designated schools in Indonesia. Second, the Foundation pathway involves Indonesian partner foundations or educational institutions affiliated with the Sabah Bridge-SIKK network, which fully (Type A) or partially (Type B) cover educational costs.

Third, the independent pathway facilitates travel documentation and school placement without providing financial assistance (kemendikdasmen, 2025).

Another scholarship scheme is the ADIK-TKI scholarship, which is specifically intended for students pursuing higher education. This scholarship prioritizes applicants from economically disadvantaged families, particularly children of Indonesian migrant workers who have graduated from senior secondary school or have graduated within the past year but have not yet continued their studies. The scheme provides tuition fee waivers and monthly living allowances to support students' educational needs. Destination universities for ADIK Affirmation recipients include leading institutions such as Institut Teknologi Bandung (ITB), Universitas Indonesia (UI), Universitas Diponegoro (UNDIP), Universitas Padjajaran (UNPAD), Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia (UPI), and other reputable universities in Indonesia. To illustrate the trend and distribution of scholarship beneficiaries, the data are presented in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** Data on the number of ADEM and ADIK-TKI scholarship recipients, 2013-2024  
*Source : Annual Report of the CLC Division, 2024*

As shown in Figure 1, the number of ADEM and ADIK-TKI scholarship recipients demonstrates a gradual increase over time, indicating the expanding commitment of the Indonesian government and its partners in supporting the educational continuity of migrant children. The presence of both secondary and higher education pathways reflects a comprehensive approach to educational protection that extends beyond basic access. This trend also highlights the role of coordinated multi-actor engagement, involving government institutions, diplomatic missions, and partner organizations, in facilitating cross-border educational mobility. Thus, the scholarship programs not only function as educational support mechanisms but also represent an integral component of Indonesia's multi-track diplomacy in addressing structural barriers faced by undocumented migrant children.

This indicates that scholarship programs function not only as educational support mechanisms, but also as instruments of cross-border governance that connect policy with transnational protection strategies.

Taken together, these data reveal three major patterns. First, educational access is predominantly sustained through decentralized community-based institutions, as CLC enrollment substantially exceeds formal school enrollment at SIKK. Second, non-formal pathways such as PKBM and documentation grace-period policies function as adaptive mechanisms for children excluded from conventional schooling requirements. Third, scholarship programs demonstrate that state protection extends beyond basic access toward long-term educational mobility. These patterns indicate that educational diplomacy in East Malaysia operates through layered and flexible governance arrangements rather than through a single institutional channel.

### ***Theoretical Significance and Government Implications***

The findings indicate that the role of government within Track One extends beyond routine administration and involves the formal organization of policies, institutions and resources to protect educational access for citizens abroad. Its centrality derives not only from the government's longstanding position as a primary actor in diplomacy but also from its authority as the formal policy-maker and resource holder capable of enabling the achievement of diplomatic objectives (Asma Amin; Danar Hafidz Adi Wardhana; Riady Ibnu Khaldun, 2023). From a multi-track diplomacy perspective, the government provides regulatory authority, diplomatic legitimacy, and material resources that enable other actors to operate effectively (Mukhtar-Landgren & Smith, 2019; Witteveen et al., 2023).

In contrast to conventional diplomatic approaches that emphasize interstate negotiations, the practice of track one in this context reveals a shift toward cross-border public service-oriented diplomacy. Education is not positioned as a secondary issue; rather, it is treated as a strategic instrument of soft power that directly addresses the fundamental needs of citizens abroad, including vulnerable groups whose legal status may be ambiguous.

The policy of granting a grace period for documentation and the acceptance of undocumented children in SIKK, CLC, and PKBM demonstrate the state's flexibility in interpreting its constitutional obligations. This practice broadens the meaning of citizens protection, moving from a formal legalistic approach toward substantive protection of human rights, particularly the right to education. Within a governance framework, this reflects policy adaptation to social realities encountered in the field.

Furthermore, the findings reinforce the argument that the effectiveness of track one does not stand alone. The government's role becomes meaningful precisely through its interconnection with actors. Thus, track one functions as a central node within the multi-track system rather than as a dominant hierarchical actor. Nevertheless, it remains structurally dominant by controlling agenda setting, resource allocation, and diplomatic legitimacy. Excessive dependence on state coordination and funding may limit the autonomy, innovation, and long-term sustainability of non-state initiatives.

Within the broader field of international relations, these findings demonstrate that citizen protection abroad increasingly depends not only on formal diplomacy, but also on the state's capacity to coordinate multiple actors across borders. In this respect, Track One functions not merely as a policy implementer, but as the central coordinating actor within a wider multi-track governance system.

## **Track Two (Non Government/professional): Non Government functions in Cross-Border Educational Protection**

In contemporary international relations studies, diplomacy is no longer monopolized by the state as the sole actor. Instead, it is conducted through a configuration of both state and non-state actors operating across jurisdictions. The concept of multi-track diplomacy positions non-governmental actors as part of the non-formal diplomatic ecosystem that transcends the limitations of states, particularly in issues of humanitarianism and the protection of fundamental rights of citizens outside their territorial boundaries. Therefore, the analysis of Track Two in this study is not viewed merely as an exploration of social or educational organizations, but rather as a practice of non-state diplomacy that serves to bridge foreign policy with the reality of cross-border implementation, particularly in the context of protecting the educational rights of undocumented migrant children in East Malaysia.

### ***Sabah Bridge as a Key Actor in Track Two***

The study reveals that, in the context of safeguarding the educational rights of undocumented children of IMWs in East Malaysia, the non-governmental organization (NGO) Sabah Bridge plays a pivotal role as a track two actor. Established in 2014 and legally recognized in 2020 under the name *Yayasan Pendidikan Sabah Bridge*, this organization was founded by Indonesian teachers with prior teaching experience in Sabah. Its primary focus is to support the educational continuity of children of IMWs living in plantation areas of Sabah.

Sabah Bridge's mission is to facilitate sustainable education for these children. Its vision is to "Facilitate the continued education of Indonesian migrant workers' children in Malaysia so they can pursue their education in Indonesia, preparing them to become an educated and independent generation." Its mission includes: (a) assisting Indonesian migrant workers' children in Malaysia to continue their education in Indonesia; (b) supervising and mentoring repatriated students, especially those attending partner schools, during their stay in Indonesia; (c) collaborating with relevant parties to expand access to educational facilitation for migrant children in Malaysia; and (d) educating accompanying teachers and parents about the repatriation program (Damayanti et al., 2023).

Sabah Bridge plays a significant role in facilitating educational repatriation, particularly for migrant children who have completed primary and secondary education at SIKK and CLCs. The facilitation includes mapping potential schools in Indonesia, assisting with travel and citizenship document processing, and coordinating with Indonesian government institutions for scholarship schemes for repatriation. Additionally, Sabah Bridge oversees and mentors students post-repatriation to ensure the sustainability of their education and their social adaptation once back in Indonesia.

The findings also demonstrate that Sabah Bridge actively builds collaborative networks with state actors, such as relevant ministries, the Indonesian embassy, and partner schools in Indonesia. Through this network, Sabah Bridge becomes a crucial link between state policy and the real needs of migrant children on the ground, especially those who are undocumented and in a legally and socially vulnerable position.

### ***Track Two as an Operational Bridge within the Multi-Track System***

The findings indicate that Track Two plays an important intermediary role within the multi-track diplomacy framework. Rather than replacing the state, organizations such as Sabah Bridge help translate policy commitments into practical interventions

that can reach vulnerable communities more effectively. Their comparative advantage lies in organizational flexibility, closer community access, and the ability to respond quickly to administrative and social obstacles faced by migrant families.

This case also demonstrates that the presence of multiple actors alone does not automatically constitute multi-track diplomacy. What makes Track Two significant is its functional coordination with other tracks. Sabah Bridge's repatriation assistance depends on state-issued documentation, scholarship access, and diplomatic facilitation from Track One, while its effectiveness is strengthened by cooperation with schools, communities, and educational partners. This indicates a pattern of interdependence rather than parallel actor involvement.

At the same time, the relationship is not fully symmetrical. Although NGOs may possess greater operational flexibility, their long-term effectiveness remains structurally dependent on government legitimacy, administrative access, and policy support. This creates a power imbalance in which non-state actors often carry substantial implementation responsibilities while having more limited influence over agenda-setting and resource allocation.

From a broader international relations perspective, these findings suggest that the protection of citizens' rights abroad increasingly depends on collaborative governance arrangements involving both state and non-state actors. In this respect, Track Two functions as a strategic operational bridge that enables Indonesia's broader protection efforts to reach areas and populations that formal state mechanisms cannot fully serve on their own.

#### **Track Four (Private Citizens): Community Actors in Grassroots Educational Protection**

In the development of international relations scholarship, individuals and community actors are increasingly recognized as contributors to cross-border governance processes, particularly in contexts where formal institutions face implementation limits. Within the multi-track diplomacy framework, Track Four refers to private citizens and community-based actor whose everyday practices help connect policy commitments with realities on the ground. Their role becomes especially important in socially and geographically marginal settings where state presence is limited. Accordingly, the analysis of Track Four in this study focuses on how individual and community actors contribute to protecting the educational rights of undocumented children of Indonesian migrant workers in East Malaysia.

##### ***Mentor Teachers as Key Grassroots Actors***

The research reveals that mentor teachers play a central role in sustaining educational access for children of IMWs in East Malaysia, particularly in remote and plantation areas. Mentor teachers are locally recruited educators, including Indonesian and non-Indonesian nationals, who support the operation of Community Learning Centers (CLCs) alongside government-appointed teachers from Indonesia.

Empirically, their presence is vital because the Malaysian education system does not fully accommodate migrant children, while the Indonesian government also faces limitations in supplying sufficient teaching personnel for all CLCs (Widiawati et al., 2023). According to the data from the SIKK, the number of mentor teachers in Sabah and Sarawak in 2024 reached 628. Field findings indicate that their number significantly exceeds that of government-appointed teachers, making them the actors who interact most frequently with students and migrant communities on a daily basis.

This research shows that mentor teachers play a key role in maintaining educational services at CLCs, especially when logistical support or teacher replacements from Indonesia are limited. They ensure that learning activities continue even in unstable legal and social situations (Mustaffa et al., 2022), particularly for children of undocumented IMWs at risk of exclusion from the formal education system.

Mentor teachers are not only educators but also social and cultural agents. They become essential community connectors, addressing barriers to informal educational access (Widiawati et al., 2023). Through a community-based approach, mentor teachers serve as bridge between Indonesian cultural identity and local Malaysian society, mediating potential tensions and advocating for the educational rights of migrant children through informal channels (Udhwalalita & Hakim, 2023). The presence of mentor teachers significantly impacts the trust and legitimacy of CLCs within local communities, ensuring the sustainability of non-formal education in remote areas, promoting social inclusion for children of IMWs, and reinforcing cultural ties and nationalism among children of IMWs. Thus, mentor teachers represent a tangible contribution of citizen diplomacy in supporting and advocating for educational rights for children of IMWs in Malaysia, filling the gaps left by formal institutions (Yun, 2012).

#### ***Track Four as a Community-Based Support Mechanism in the Multi-Track System.***

The findings indicate that Track Four operates primarily through sustained social presence and direct community engagement. Unlike Track One, which relies on policy authority, or Track Two which functions through organized institutions, Track Four works through interpersonal trust, routine interaction, and practical problem-solving at the local level. This suggests that the effectiveness of cross-border educational protection depends not only on formal policy design, but also on actors who can translate policy into daily practice.

From a governance perspective, mentor teachers fill implementation gaps that neither state institutions nor formal organizations can fully reach. They ensure that educational services continue in remote locations where administrative access, staffing, and infrastructure remain limited. Their contribution demonstrates that multi-track diplomacy should be understood not merely as the presence of multiple actors, but as a coordinated system in which different actors perform distinct but complementary functions.

At the same time, the position of Track Four is structurally vulnerable. Despite carrying substantial frontline responsibilities, mentor teachers often operate with limited formal authority, uncertain career pathways, and insufficient institutional protection. This creates an imbalance in which community actors bear operational burdens without equivalent decision-making power or long-term security. The sustainability of Track Four therefore depends not only on personal commitment, but also on stronger institutional recognition, training support, and clearer protection mechanisms.

The findings also show a close interdependence between Track Four and Track One. The reliance on mentor teachers to address shortages of government-appointed teachers indicates that the state informally depends on community actors to extend policy reach. Conversely, mentor teachers require institutional connection with SIKK and CLC structures to maintain legitimacy and operational continuity. This relationship illustrates that Track Four is neither autonomous nor secondary, but an essential component of the wider multi-track system.

From an international relations perspective, these findings broaden understanding of how diplomacy and citizen protection increasingly operate through community-level actors in cross-border social spaces. In this case, the protection of educational rights for undocumented children of IMWs in East Malaysia emerges not only from formal institutions, but also from sustained grassroots participation embedded within a broader governance network.

### **Track Five (Research, Training, and Education): Academic Contributions to Cross-Border Educational Protection.**

In contemporary international relations studies, knowledge, education, and the production of academic discourse are recognized as critical instruments in diplomacy and national soft power (Belarbi et al., 2023). Track Five within the framework of multi-track diplomacy represents a path of diplomacy based on learning (peacemaking through learning), where academic institutions, researchers, and educators play a role as non-state actors who contribute epistemic legitimacy, human resource capacity, and cross-border value transfer. Their contribution is particularly relevant in contexts where institutional capacity is limited and additional human resources, expertise, and learning networks are required. Accordingly, this study examines how academic actors contribute to protecting the educational rights of undocumented children of Indonesian migrant workers in East Malaysia.

#### ***Universities and Academic Actors as Track Five Contributors.***

The findings of this study indicate that Track Five operates predominantly through the involvement of higher education institutions, lecturers, and students in international education programs and community service initiatives, particularly through schemes such as International Community Service Program (Kuliah Kerja Nyata/KKN) and temporary teaching programs at SIKK, as well as various CLCs in Sabah and Sarawak.

Empirically, the presence of Indonesian academics and students in East Malaysia is facilitated through a coordination mechanism involving the Indonesian Embassy, Consulates, the Education Attaché, as well as SIKK and CLC partners (Udhwalalita & Hakim, 2023; Widiawati et al., 2023). Field findings show that universities in Indonesia actively collaborate with the Indonesian representative offices to send students and lecturers as temporary teachers, learning facilitators, and capacity-building program facilitators in CLCs. The Indonesian Embassy in Kuala Lumpur has reportedly established partnerships with more than 100 Indonesian universities, with more than 50 additional universities committed to supporting access to education for migrant workers' children. This commitment highlights the recognition of Track Five's significant role in addressing the educational rights challenges of migrant workers' contributions in ensuring the fulfillment of basic educational rights, even amidst formal limitations and bureaucratic constraints.

Track Five's main contribution is evident in addressing the shortage of educators in the field, particularly in CLCs in the region. Students and lecturers serve as instructors for basic subjects, literacy and numeracy development, as well as facilitators for non-academic activities such as entrepreneurship, culture, and the reinforcement of national identity. In some cases, academic involvement also includes training for local teachers and support in developing educational materials tailored to the socio-cultural conditions of migrant workers' children.

In addition to its direct role in education, Track Five also contributes through the production of knowledge and the documentation of practices. The community

service and research activities conducted by academics generate empirical data, activity reports, and scholarly publications that enrich the understanding of the dynamics surrounding the protection of migrant children's educational rights in East Malaysia. This knowledge subsequently becomes an essential reference for governments and other non-state actors in formulating subsequent policies and strategies. Taken together, the findings suggest three core patterns: supplementary staffing support, local capacity development, and policy-relevant knowledge generation.

***Track Five as a Supporting Knowledge Resource within the Multi-track system.***

The findings indicate that Track Five strengthens the multi-track system by providing expertise, temporary human resources, and institutional learning capacity. Unlike Track One, which operates through authority and policy instruments, or Track Two and Track Four, which focus more directly on field implementation, Track Five contributes through teaching assistance, training and analytical reflection. This demonstrates that governance effectiveness can depend not only on regulation and service delivery, but also on the circulation of knowledge and skills across institutions.

At the same time, the presence of academic actors alone does not automatically create systemic coordination. Their contribution becomes meaningful when linked with other tracks. Community service programs can function effectively only when facilitated by government institutions, coordinated with organizations such as Sabah Bridge, and socially accepted by local educator and communities. This indicates that Track Five is best understood as an enabling and reinforcing component within a broader interdependent system rather than as an autonomous actor.

However, Track Five also faces limitations. Academic engagement is often temporary, program-based, and dependent on institutional schedules, funding cycles, or university commitments. As a result, continuity and long-term impact may be uneven across locations. This creates a structural constraint in which academic actors can provide valuable short-term support but may not always sustain continuous service delivery without stronger institutional integration.

From an international relations perspective, these findings broaden understanding of how educational cooperation and citizen protection can involve universities and knowledge institutions in cross-border settings. Academic actors function as intermediaries connecting field experience with policy learning, thereby helping transform short-term interventions into longer-term governance improvement.

Overall, Track Five complements the wider multi-track diplomacy system by contributing knowledge resources, training support, and institutional learning. Its significance lies not in replacing other actors, but in strengthening the adaptive capacity of the overall governance network protecting the educational rights of undocumented children of Indonesian migrant workers in East Malaysia.

Theoretically, these findings confirm that Track Five functions as a form of soft power within the multi-track diplomacy system. Through education, research, and community service, academics do not merely transfer knowledge; they also disseminate values, norms, and national identity that strengthen a state's position in the broader context of international relations.

Within the diplomatic framework, the involvement of universities and scholars expands the meaning of diplomacy beyond state-to-state interaction toward engagement among cross-border epistemic communities. This practice demonstrates that educational diplomacy is not only carried out through formal state policies (Track One), but also through the legitimacy of knowledge produced and disseminated by academic institutions.

The findings further indicate that the effectiveness of Track Five is highly dependent on its interconnection with other diplomatic tracks. International community service programs, such as Community Service Program, can operate effectively only when supported and facilitated by government actors (Track One), coordinated with professional non-governmental organizations such as Sabah Bridge (Track Two), and accepted by local actors such as mentor teachers (Track Four). This dynamic confirms that academics should not be understood as independent actors, but rather as integral components of an interdependent multi-track diplomacy system.

From the perspective of International relations, Track Five enriches the understanding of how knowledge-based diplomacy contributes to inclusive cross-border governance. Academics function as intermediaries linking field practice with theoretical reflection, ensuring that the protection of the educational rights of undocumented children of IMWs in East Malaysia does not merely represent a short-term response. Instead, it contributes to broader processes of policy learning and the long-term strengthening of institutional capacity.

Consequently, Track Five completes the cycle of multi-track diplomacy system identified in this study. The state provides policy frameworks and diplomatic legitimacy (Track One); professional NGOs manage cross-border implementation (Track Two); civil society actors ensure sustainability at the community level (Track Four); and academics reinforce the system through knowledge production, capacity development, and value-based diplomacy. The interaction among these actors demonstrates that the protection of educational rights of Indonesian migrant workers' children in East Malaysia emerges from a multi-track diplomatic process operating as an integrated system, rather than from isolated sectoral initiatives.

### **A System-Based Analysis of Multi-Track Diplomacy in Protecting the Educational Rights of Undocumented Children of IMWs.**

The system-based analysis using the multi-track diplomacy framework in this study demonstrates that the protection of the educational rights of undocumented children of IMWs in East Malaysia cannot be understood as the outcome of a single actor or a single diplomatic track alone. Rather, the empirical findings reveal that the effectiveness of such protection depends on the dynamic integration among multiple tracks, which together constitute a living system, as conceptualized in the multi-track diplomacy framework.

As illustrated in Figure 2, the project map depicts the respective roles of each track in protecting the educational rights of non-procedural children of IMWs. Each track possesses its own distinct roles and resources; however, they must operate collaboratively in order to achieve the broader objective of safeguarding the educational rights of undocumented migrant children.



**Table 2. Synergy Among Tracks**

Track	Key Actors	Roles & Efforts	Synergy with Other Tracks
Track one : Government	Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia (KBRI), Education Attaché, Consulate General of the Republic of Indonesia, Consulate of the Republic of Indonesia, Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, <i>Sekolah Indonesia Kota Kinabalu</i> - Community Learning Centers (SIKK-CLC).	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Establishing formal and non- formal education institutions               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Establishing the <i>Sekolah Indonesia Kota Kinabalu</i> (SIKK)</li> <li>b. Establishing Community Learning Centers (CLCs)</li> <li>c. Establishing Learning Activity Centers.</li> <li>d. Providing school facilities and infrastructure</li> <li>e. Assigning supervising teachers.</li> <li>f. Granting a grace period for the completion of required administrative documents.</li> <li>g. Assisting in the completion of administrative documents through Indonesian representative offices.</li> <li>h. Establishing Early Childhood Education (PAUD-Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini) institutions.</li> <li>i. Establishing Community Learning Activity Centers (PKBM-Pusat Kegiatan Belajar Masyarakat).</li> </ol> </li> <li>2. Providing repatriation scholarship programs (Gema Cita)               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. ADEM Repatriation Scholarship for the senior secondary level (SMA/SMK)</li> <li>b. ADIK-TKI Scholarship for the higher education level.</li> <li>c. Managing travel documentation for scholarship recipients.</li> <li>d. Establishing partnerships with destination schools for repatriated students.</li> </ol> </li> <li>3. Conducting formal educational diplomacy with the Malaysian government.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Supporting civil society, NGOs, and academics by providing institutional frameworks, legitimacy, and resources for their initiatives.</li> <li>2. Collaborating with the Sabah Bridge initiative to provide repatriation scholarship programs (Gema Cita).</li> <li>3. Facilitating universities that conduct community service programs in Malaysia.</li> </ol>
Track two : Non government/ Professional	Sabah Bridge	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Facilitating repatriation scholarship programs.</li> <li>2. Managing administrative documentation for repatriated students.</li> <li>3. Establishing partnerships with destination schools for repatriated students.</li> <li>4. Conducting educational diplomacy with the Malaysian government.</li> <li>5. Coordinating learning and instructional activities.</li> <li>6. Supervising the education of repatriated children</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Collaborating with Track One actors to implement repatriation scholarship programs, covering processes from document administration to monitoring scholarship recipients.</li> <li>2. Collaborating with the government to address the shortage of teachers</li> </ol>

		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>7. Managing educational administration effectively.</li> <li>8. Providing educational guidance for parents and teachers.</li> </ol>	<p>in various Community Learning Centers (CLCs), particularly those located in remote areas.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. Strengthening connections between Indonesia and Malaysian communities in areas surrounding the CLCs.</li> </ol>
Track Four : Private Citizens	Mentor Teachers ( <i>guru pamong</i> )	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Serving as educators in various Community Learning Centers (CLCs)</li> <li>2. Acting as social and cultural agents within the learning environment and surrounding communities.</li> <li>3. Bridging Indonesian communities and local Malaysian communities in areas surrounding the CLCs</li> <li>4. Advocating for the educational rights of migrant children through informal channels.</li> <li>5. Ensuring the sustainability of non-formal education in remote areas.</li> <li>6. Strengthening the trust and legitimacy of CLCs within local communities.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Collaborating with the government to address the shortage of teachers in various Community Learning Centers (CLCs), particularly those located in remote areas</li> <li>2. Facilitating connections between Indonesia and Malaysian communities in areas surrounding the CLCs.</li> </ol>
Track Five : Research, Training and Education	Universities (lecturers and students)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Community service programs and broader community engagement initiatives.</li> <li>2. Serving as temporary teaching personnel at the <i>Sekolah Indonesia Kota Kinabalu</i> (SIKK) and various Community Learning Centers (CLCs).</li> <li>3. Collaborating with the governments of Indonesia and Malaysia as well as non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in implementing educational initiatives.</li> </ol>	<p>Collaborating with the government, NGOs, and mentor teachers in implementing community service programs (KKN-Kuliah Kerja Nyata) across various Community Learning Centers (CLCs) in East Malaysia.</p>

*Source: processed by author*

The interaction among tracks operates through functional complementarity rather than parallel coexistence. Track One provides policy authority, diplomatic legitimacy, and institutional resources, while Track Two translates these frameworks into operational mechanisms such as scholarship facilitation, documentation support, and field coordination. Track Four fills implementation gaps where formal state institutions face geographic, social, and personnel limitations, particularly in remote plantation areas through the daily work of mentor teachers. Meanwhile, Track Five reinforces the system by contributing temporary educators, capacity-building programs, and evidence-based knowledge that supports policy adaptation and long-term institutional learning. Through these reciprocal functions, the protection system becomes operational across multiple governance levels.

Track One therefore functions as the coordinating center of the broader multi-track system. Through the establishment of SIKK, the expansion of CLC and Learning Activity Centers, the document grace period policy, and the repatriation scholarship scheme, the state creates structural conditions for educational access for the children of IMWs, including those who are undocumented. However, research findings also reveal

that the capacity of the state, in a cross-jurisdictional context, has its limits, particularly when it comes to direct implementation at the community and individual levels.

This is where Track Two (Non-Governmental/Professional) plays its role as the operational bridge and accelerates implementation. Organizations such as Sabah Bridge bridge the gap between state policies and field realities through flexible and adaptive informal diplomacy. Track Two manages the administrative, social, and institutional complexities that cannot be fully addressed by formal state mechanisms, while ensuring that repatriation education policies and scholarships are accessible to the most vulnerable groups. This relationship forms a reinforcing feedback loop, where state support strengthens the capacity of NGOs, and the success of NGOs, in turn, reinforces the legitimacy of state policies.

For example, in the implementation of the Gema Cita repatriation scholarship program, Track One actors provide policy frameworks, funding schemes, and diplomatic facilitation, while Track Two actors such as Sabah Bridge manage field-level coordination, including student identification, document processing, and school placement in Indonesia. This collaboration demonstrates how formal state policies are translated into operational mechanisms through non-state actors, enabling access for undocumented migrant children who would otherwise face administrative exclusion.

However, this inter-track coordination is not without challenges. Field findings indicate difficulties in aligning administrative procedures across institutions, particularly in cases involving undocumented families who lack formal identification documents. These constraints often delay access to education and complicate the implementation of scholarship programs. To address these challenges, adaptive mechanisms have been developed, including the provision of documentation grace periods, continuous coordination between diplomatic missions and NGOs, and flexible administrative arrangements at the institutional level.

Meanwhile, Track Four (Private Citizens) operates at the micro level, supporting the sustainability of the system. Mentor teachers, as citizen diplomacy actors, ensure that educational access remains available in the most vulnerable social spaces, such as palm oil plantations and remote areas. Their role demonstrates that the success of diplomacy is not only determined by policy design and organization but also by everyday social practices that build trust, local acceptance, and stability in educational services. Track Four fills gaps that cannot be reached by the state or NGOs, making multi-track diplomacy truly present at the community level.

Track Five (Research, Training, and Education) complements the system by providing capacity support and policy learning. Through the involvement of academics and universities in international community service, temporary teaching, and knowledge production, Track Five contributes to strengthening human resource capacity and the legitimacy of knowledge in the diplomatic system. The knowledge generated not only supports field practices but also serves as the basis for policy reflection and future governance innovations. Thus, Track Five ensures that the protection of educational rights for children of IMWs is not limited to short-term responses but contributes to long-term institutional learning.

These examples illustrate that inter-track dynamics operate not only as a conceptual framework but also a practical mechanism through which coordination, negotiation, and adaptation occur in response to real-world constraints. Overall, the findings of this study reaffirm that multi-track diplomacy works effectively when understood and implemented as an integrated system, rather than as a collection of sectoral initiatives. The mutual dependence between tracks shows that the failure or

weakening of one track has the potential to disrupt the entire system. From the perspective of international relations, this analysis strengthens the argument that contemporary diplomacy, particularly in issues of protecting the rights of citizens abroad, requires a systematic approach that integrates the state, non-state actors, individuals, and knowledge within a single cross-border governance architecture.

Nevertheless, interdependence does not automatically eliminate tension. Differences in institutional mandates, uneven resource capacities, and bureaucratic procedures may slow coordination processes. In practice, actors with stronger formal authority, particularly state institutions, retain greater agenda setting power, while grassroots actors often bear implementation burdens with more limited influence over decision making.

## **Conclusion**

The fulfillment of educational rights for the children of IMWs, particularly those who are non-procedural or undocumented in East Malaysia, represents a complex issue that cannot be addressed by a single actor alone. The findings of this study suggest that a multi-track diplomacy approach plays a significant role in addressing administrative, political, social, and geographical barriers that impede educational access for migrant children, rather than constituting a universally “most effective” strategy. Educational protection in this context emerges through coordinated interactions among governmental, professional, citizen-based, and academic actors rather than through isolated institutional efforts. This study therefore highlights the importance of collaborative multi-actor governance as a key mechanism for addressing educational exclusion among undocumented migrant children.

From a theoretical perspective, this study makes three contributions. First, it expands multi-track diplomacy beyond its conventional association with conflict resolution by applying it to cross-border educational rights governance. Second, it operationalizes the framework by demonstrating how differentiated actor roles interact to sustain cross-border educational governance. Third, it refines the theory by showing that cooperation occurs alongside unequal power relations and institutional dependency.

This research also emphasizes that Indonesia has made significant efforts to promote the educational rights of its citizens abroad. The establishment of SIKK, the expansion of the CLC network, and the sustainability of repatriation scholarship programs demonstrate that educational diplomacy can address not only political interests but also humanitarian needs. Therefore, the multi-track diplomacy approach offers a context-specific model that may inform similar governance challenges, while remaining sensitive to variations in institutional capacity and policy environments.

The findings of this study suggest several important policy implications. First, the multi-track diplomacy approach needs to be further institutionalized through formal coordination platforms involving government agencies, diplomatic missions, non-governmental organizations, and educational institutions to ensure sustained collaboration and policy continuity. Second, scaling up this approach requires the development of standardized operational frameworks adaptable to different regional contexts, alongside strengthening local-level capacity, particularly within community-based learning centers and grassroots networks. Third, this study highlights that the protection of migrant children’s educational rights requires not only state intervention but also sustained collaboration with non-state actors, especially in cross-border settings where legal and administrative constraints limit direct government action.

This study also acknowledges several limitations. As a qualitative descriptive study, the findings are context-specific and do not aim for statistical generalization. The analysis is limited to selected actors and institutional settings in East Malaysia, which may not fully capture the diversity of experiences across other regions. In addition, while the study examines inter-track interactions, the depth of analysis is constrained by the availability of empirical data on long-term coordination outcomes.

Future research is therefore recommended to expand comparative analysis across different countries or regions, to quantitatively assess the effectiveness of multi-track coordination, and to further explore how institutionalization mechanisms can enhance the sustainability of cross-border educational governance. Overall, this study suggests that protecting migrant children's educational rights in fragmented cross-border settings requires diplomacy to operate not only through state authority, but through coordinated governance across multiple societal actors.

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