



## **From persons of Indonesian Descent (PIDs) to Registered Indonesian Nationals (RINs): The legalisation process and issues of the RINs in Mindanao, Philippines**

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### **Abstract**

This paper examines the legalisation process and rights of Persons of Indonesian Descent (PIDs) residing in Mindanao, Philippines after receiving nationality from the Indonesian government. The PIDs in Mindanao were considered as stateless due to the unavailability of legal documents to prove their nationality. Many of the ancestors of the PIDs originated from the province of North Sulawesi and migrated during the colonial era when official travel documents were not made available in Indonesia yet. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and the Indonesian and the Philippines governments arranged for a pilot project to award the PIDs with Indonesian nationality to prevent them from being stateless. After the legalisation process, 2,435 Registered Indonesian Nationals (RINs) chose to remain in Mindanao instead of returning to Indonesia. Although the legalisation process is a positive move for the Indonesian government to bestow legal identity on the PIDs and address the issue of statelessness, it does not fully resolve the concerns of the RINs. This study employs the notion of push and pull factors to discover the causes of the issues faced by the RINs who had chosen to remain in Mindanao upon receiving their citizenship. Based on a qualitative method and analyses from interviews and survey with the RINs, this paper argues that while they are no longer stateless and could therefore live a more secured life, they are still at risk of becoming illegal immigrants and be deported if caught due to financial constraints in maintaining the validity of their legal documents.

**Keywords:** Legalisation, Persons of Indonesian Descents, Registered Indonesian Nationals, Statelessness, Stateless Person, UNHCR

## Introduction

Person of Indonesian Descent (PID) is a term used to identify the Indonesian diaspora living in the southern Philippines. Few viewpoints exist on the historical context of the PIDs' arrival in Mindanao. First, by observing the geographical location, the northernmost border of Indonesia, Sangihe-Talaud Island, is close to Balut and Sarangani Island, which is the southernmost border of the Philippines. Secondly, there is the perspective that Muslim PIDs migrated to Mindanao to escape from being forced to convert to Christianity by the Dutch colonialists (Personal Communication, 3 August 2016). They have been considered as stateless because of the lack of formal documents to prove their citizenship and for living without legal documentation for four generations (Alam, 2006). Their lives have been extremely difficult and stressful. According to Agus Abdul Majid, migration between the two nations happened owing to the proximity of their borders. They had traditionally migrated from Indonesia, sailed over the ocean, and landed on Balut Island, Glan, and other locations. Migration was not limited to the PIDs' ancestors only (Personal Communication, 3 August 2016). The Filipino residents of Glan, Sarangani province, often engaged in the same behaviour by traveling to Indonesia (Personal Communication, 15 August 2016). Initially, ancestral migration from the PIDs was motivated solely by a desire for enhanced commercial activity. They used to sell items from their hometown to Mindanao, and in return products from Mindanao were sold to the markets in their hometown. The cultural exchange occurred as a consequence of the Filipinos from Mindanao traveling to North Sulawesi and participating in the same activities (Saleha, 2017).

The migration occurred when both nations were colonialized. These individuals did not feel insecure about legal travel documents when traveling to a new place. Ironically, between the years 1945 and 1946 when Indonesia gained freedom from Japan and the Philippines announced its independence from the United States, the issue of nationality arose (Sjahputra, 2019). The challenge of statelessness for the Sangers (people of Sangir Island, North Sulawesi) began when both countries enacted regulations on citizenship where they must choose to either be Indonesians or Filipinos. Nevertheless, according to the citizenship law of the Republic of Indonesia from 1958, number 62, as amended by the law of 2006, number 12, article 5 verse 2, anyone who wishes to register as an Indonesian citizen or descendant must have resided in the country for at least five years consecutively or ten years intermittently (Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Republik Indonesia, 2019). This regulation would be unfavourable to the Sangers and other Indonesian descendants since they have been away from home for a very long time (Personal Communication, 3 August 2016).

The PIDs in Mindanao, therefore, faced a real threat of becoming stateless and would have no rights to defend themselves if apprehended by the Philippine authorities. Indeed, the people of Indonesian descent who lived in Mindanao encountered numerous hurdles, most of which were related to their economic situation and citizenship status (Personal Communication, 8 August 2016). The unknown status of their citizenship affected their livelihood and identity due to social distress. This is because they are vulnerable to illegal activities such as human trafficking and unjust prosecution (Personal Communication, 7 August 2016). The PIDs fought several unjust activities, but they lacked the ability to oppose such illegal actions because they also lacked legal citizenship status (Personal Communication, 8 August 2016). In these circumstances, the people of Indonesian descent lacked the ability to live a pleasant life where they can be free from fear and want. Due to their lack of legal status, they are extremely vulnerable in the eyes of the law. When they are faced with a criminal problem, they will either face prosecution or be deported due to their

lack of legal documents to allow them to seek proper recourse and to remain in the Philippines. Moreover, if they become victims of theft, rape, or other acts of violence, they will have difficulty in prosecuting the culprits due to their vulnerable status that would obstruct them from seeking justice by making a police report unlike an ordinary citizen. The legalisation process is thus important for them to obtain their citizenship and rights associated with being a citizen of an independent country. It would change their status from PIDs to Registered Indonesian Nationals (RINs). Despite being granted nationality, some of the RINs have chosen to remain in their adopted home of Mindanao. This paper aims to understand the problems and challenges encountered by the RINs who continued to stay in the Philippines after becoming Indonesian nationals.

## Literature review

Living in a foreign country without legal documentation is a major human security concern. People leave their homes to escape communal violence, persecution, and political oppression or in search of better economic opportunities. They may do so deliberately or involuntarily. Abroad, they may come across a certain degree of anguish, fear, and hostility shown by the locals who felt threatened by their presence (Belton, 2016). These individuals seeking acceptance from countries other than their own typically have a high probability of becoming stateless. Statelessness is a serious issue especially for people who had to experience it. Without a nationality in any country, stateless individuals frequently find themselves on the outskirts of society. Even for some, statelessness is described as an anomaly, a disease to some activists and authorities (Isarakul, 2016). Many stateless individuals are unable to perform basic survival duties, such as holding a valid employment or engaging in social activities that involve identity and legal status, such as marrying, attending school, receiving medical care, owning a property, or travelling (Berkeley, 2009). Even leaving the house to purchase groceries might result in incarceration if an individual cannot demonstrate their identity, origin, or legal status. Statelessness is a condition of exclusion, dread, and a lack of attachment or belonging in a world consisting of independent states (Batchelor, 2019).

There are numerous examples of stateless individuals who are vulnerable and seeking assistance from country to country in the present day. The Rohingya people are a prime example of stateless individuals. This ethnic group originated in the Myanmar state of Rakhine (Milton et al., 2017). These individuals were persecuted and compelled to abandon their homes due to the Myanmar government's policy of denying citizenship to certain ethnic groups (Islam, 2019). They were forced to leave Myanmar and seek assistance from other countries. A large number of Rohingya people have risked their lives by moving to neighbouring countries such as Bangladesh, Thailand, Malaysia, and other regions (Sari & Hidayat, 2018). One of the Rohingya refugee camps in Kutupalong, Cox's Bazaar district, Bangladesh, is home to more than 800,000 stateless Rohingyas, making it the largest refugee camp in the world (Milton et al., 2017). Another stateless issue is the undocumented children in the Malaysian state of Sabah. In Sabah, the large number of undocumented children are due to the intermarriages that occurred between the locals and illegal foreign workers. The majority of them are either Filipinos or Indonesians (Allerton, 2017). It occurs most frequently among the poor when a foreign worker marries a Sabah native, particularly a Sabahan woman. Allerton also stated that it is more manageable for Indonesians to register their transnational marriage and prevent their children from becoming stateless compared to the Filipinos who are involved in intermarriages because there is an Indonesian consulate in Sabah

whereas Filipinos would have no choice but to make a long journey to the Philippines Embassy in Kuala Lumpur for registration and documentation purposes (Allerton, 2017).

The issue of Persons of Indonesian Descents (PIDs) residing in Mindanao, Philippines is not a new issue with regards to statelessness in Southeast Asia. This group is less discussed in the literature when compared to the Rohingya and Sabah stateless issues. It is precisely why there is a need to discuss and highlight their concerns. The PIDs have lived in Mindanao, many without legal documentation, for more than 4 generations. Some of them have never visited or lived in Indonesia but their ancestors or parents would remind them of their heritage and where they come from. Among the reasons for the ancestors of the PIDs to migrate to the Philippines include overpopulation, geographical proximity, similar climate and environment, historical links, better economic opportunity, socio-cultural ties and family and social networks (Talampas, 2015). Yet, the way they travel to Mindanao is through an illegal entrance around Sarangani province without any legal documents. Their illegal entry caused them to face certain problems. On one hand, their vulnerable status is often exploited by factory or farm employers that paid them low wages. On the other hand, there were social resentment from the Filipino workers because the employers trusted the PIDs more than the local workers. This is primarily because the employers believed that the PIDs are more honest, loyal, hardworking and obedient (Putri, 2017).

As illegals, the PIDs were viewed by the government of the Philippines as ‘alien’. Nevertheless, the Philippine government provided substantial assistance to the PIDs as well as Indonesian citizens’ interests throughout their stay in Mindanao, Southern Philippines (Putri, 2017). Due to their illegal status, PIDs do not have access to education, health care, or other public facilities. It is thus pivotal for the Indonesian government to recognise them as citizens. The responsibility rest on the Indonesian Consulate General in Davao City to ensure their safety and wellbeing. On 26 June 2002, the governments of the Philippines and Indonesia signed a Memorandum No. 32 on Alien Certificate of Registration (ACR) (Saleha, 2017). The ACR does not instantly grant the PIDs Indonesian nationality; rather, it is a certificate indicating that the PIDs are registered as ‘aliens’, allowing them access to public services while awaiting the legalisation procedure by the Indonesian government.

After a long period of waiting, the Indonesian government, Philippine government and the UNHCR agreed to form a joint committee to end the statelessness of PIDs in 2011 (Saleha, 2017). Both governments decided to include the UNHCR in the joint committee particularly because the UNHCR not only represents the United Nations in managing refugees and stateless persons, but more importantly has played a role as mediator in solving PID problems and succeeded in the legalisation process in other countries. In Thailand for example, there were more than 18000 stateless people that were granted nationality from the Royal Thai government. These stateless people were mostly part of the hill tribes living in the rural areas and borderlands of the country (Agency, 2015). The role of the UNHCR as one of the main actors in ending statelessness is therefore unquestionably important. However, after the legalisation process of the PIDs in Mindanao, some of the RINs chose to remain living in Mindanao, instead of returning to their homeland in Indonesia. What were their motivations for doing so? Why did they make the decision to stay instead of becoming Filipinos or following the other RINs to return home?

## Method and study area

This research draws on qualitative data collected during a month of International Community Service visit in Davao City, General Santos and Glan from 31 July to 28 August 2016, and an in-depth online interview with five RINs living in Mindanao as well as a small online survey filled by 25 RINs that were carried out from 23 February to 2 April 2022. The research focused on the RINs that were granted Indonesian citizenship and remained in Mindanao, Philippines. During the 2016 visit, one of the authors lived in a PID's house located in Quilantang, barangay Calumpang, General Santos for 16 days. Each day, the author would visit the PID community area, learning centre, mosque, and church to collect data. The data that was collected include historical stories of the ancestors of PIDs, working experience with low wages, and living with locals as 'aliens'. Apart from the PIDs, the staff of the Indonesian Consulate in Davao City played a key role in the interview process where information about the number of PIDs and the legalisation process were obtained. An in-depth interview is one of the methods often used in qualitative research. Interviews provide a qualitative method of gathering evidence, data or information. After the data has been collected, it was reviewed, analysed, and extracted for deliberation. Additional follow-ups with the interviewees were made when deemed necessary. Meanwhile, the survey was used to collect information on the RINs' family background, period of living in Mindanao, reasons of becoming RINs, and reasons for remaining in Mindanao, including information pertaining to when the family members migrated to the Philippines in the first place.

## Results and discussion

To end the statelessness of the PIDs, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), along with the Indonesian and Philippine governments, initiated a pilot project to award nationality to the PIDs. The legalisation process of the PIDs involved related stakeholders from both governments and local non-profit organisations (NPOs) such as PASALI Philippines Foundation. This effort simultaneously supports the UNHCR's #IBelong initiative to abolish statelessness worldwide by 2024 (UNHCR, 2014). With regards to the legalisation process of the PIDs, there were five steps agreed upon by the main actors: 1) Orientation; 2) Reception; 3) Data Verification; 4) Registration; and finally, 5) Counselling (Personal Communication, 26 October 2016). Prior to these steps, however, a survey was conducted by the Indonesian Consulate in Davao City to locate and map the whereabouts of the PIDs. Based on the Consulate's survey, approximately 8,745 PIDs were living in different *barangays* (villages) in the southern Philippines (Personal Communication, 3 August 2016; Tanggol, 2017). The PIDs were allowed to choose from three options during the legalisation process: 1) to be granted as a Filipino; 2) to be granted as an Indonesian nationality holder and repatriated to Indonesia; 3) to be granted as an Indonesian nationality holder and continue living in Mindanao.

At the end of the legalisation process, 2,435 RINs (2,435 individuals) who were granted Indonesian nationality chose to remain in Mindanao (Sjahputra, 2019). Out of a total of 8,745 people, 1,152 individuals decided to return to Indonesia, 2,758 individuals became Filipinos, and 2,400 individuals chose not to participate in the process. The majority of the PIDs were mainly located in Glan municipality and General Santos city, which have roughly 3,000 PIDs living with their families, according to the survey conducted by the Indonesian Consulate in Davao City and the UNHCR Philippines (Personal Communication, 9 March 2022). After being awarded

Indonesian nationality, the PIDs would have their status changed to Registered Indonesian Nationals (RINs). They would no longer be considered as stateless. The legalisation process of the PIDs were considered successful because of the well-coordinated cooperation between the UNHCR, the Indonesian government, and the Philippine government, with a clear aim of eliminating statelessness in southern Philippines.

This section explores the motivations and issues for some of the RINs who made the decision to live in Mindanao instead of returning to their home country. It narrates in detail the exponential experiences of the interviewees that participated in this research. The first interviewee is a woman named JD, 32, an Indonesian-born woman from barangay Gumasa. JD has been a resident of her village since she was a child. She has hazy memories of her family's arrival in the Philippines. She recalled her grandparents having lived here since they were small. She stated that before the legalisation procedure, she received an ACR in 2006, which served as her legal documentation for registering to further her studies and obtaining health care at the local clinic or hospital. Additionally, she stated that obtaining government facilities is not difficult if she can present correct documentation such as the ACR. Her mother, AD, 75, was also interviewed. AD revealed that she has lived in Gumasa for nearly her whole life. She and her late husband had nine children, with JD being the youngest. Most of her children have relocated to Indonesia, with one of her sons currently residing in Bitung, North Sulawesi, Indonesia (Personal Communication, 23 February 2022). JD and her mother indicated that they sought to obtain Indonesian nationality because they were originally from Indonesia and desired to remain so, as well as because they perceive their current village to be like their birthplace, where they are able to receive favourable treatment from the local administration of Gumasa (Personal Communication, 23 February 2022). JD's decision to remain in her village is influenced in part by the local government services offered to her and her family, as well as to those in her neighbourhood. When questioned, JD remarked that Indonesia would always be in her blood, but starting a new chapter in Indonesia would be a difficult endeavour, requiring a lengthy process and high cost to move back home. However, while she now have a resident permit that allows her to live in a foreign land, she still need to have enough savings for passport and visa renewals in the coming years (Personal Communication, 23 February 2022).

Another anecdote relates to JL, 44, a liaison officer or *penghubung* deployed by the Indonesian Consulate to assist Indonesian descent residents in the Quilantang area of General Santos City. JL has been a resident of Mindanao since he was a child. His great-grandfather arrived in Mindanao in 1896 and thus began his family's Indonesian ancestry. He is currently married to a local woman from Cebu and has three children; two of his daughters are Filipino, while his third daughter is a dual national who will decide when she reaches the age of 18. JL plays a critical role as a *penghubung*; if something happens to the Indonesian descendants, he will alert the Indonesian Consulate. JL received his Indonesian nationality and passport from the Indonesian Consulate more than ten years ago. He continues to reside in Mindanao despite receiving his passport since his wife is a Filipino. Bringing his wife to live in Indonesia will be difficult because she will need to apply for a visa, which JL sees as one of the financial struggles that keep him in Mindanao. Another reason for JL to remain in Mindanao is that he owns property in his village, including land and a house, and it would be difficult for him to abandon his possessions if he chooses to return to Indonesia. Despite residing in Mindanao, he frequently visited Indonesia, as most of his family members are living on Sangihe Island, Talaud Island, and one of his brothers is in Tahuna North Sulawesi (Personal Communication, 4 March 2022). Occasionally, he visits Indonesia for

religious reasons, as he is the pastor of a local church and to carry out his duties as a *penghubung* or liaison officer.

The next interviewee, named SM, 34, is an Indonesian descent, who lives in Glan, Sarangani province. SM's ancestors immigrated to Mindanao in search of a better life. They travelled from North Sulawesi to Laensasi via boat. He was born in Laensasi, later went to Davao City for his studies, and then returned to Laensasi where he married a Filipino woman. For the last four years, he has been living in Glan. Nonetheless, he had the opportunity to pursue his bachelor's degree in Sulawesi, which necessitates frequent trips to Indonesia through sea transportation. He mentioned that he was registered as an Indonesian national at the Indonesian Consulate in Davao City when he was born. He then received an ACR as his document in the 2000s. After enrolling in the legalisation procedure, he applied for a passport. However, the passport application is still pending with the Indonesian Consulate. He indicated that all his family members had been repatriated to Indonesia and continued living there. As for SM, he stated that it might be challenging to start a new life in Indonesia with a foreign wife and with the cost he would need to bare for the relocation process and surviving in Indonesia. He is considering to return to Indonesia but remains undecided and hence chose to remain in Glan (Personal Communication, 8 March 2022). Even though SM regularly visited Indonesia throughout his bachelor's degree, he finds it challenging to stay in Indonesia after acquiring Indonesian citizenship. The pull factor for him to remain in Glan is having a promising job as one of the *penghubung* or liaison officers for RINs in his barangay, which has influenced him to make a significant decision with regards to his and his family's future.

EMM, 21, a RIN living in barangay Labangal, contributed her interesting story. She was a student at the Indonesian School of Davao and revealed that she had been recorded as having an Indonesian nationality since birth since both of her parents are also of Indonesian ancestry. Her family's migration to Mindanao began when her great-grandparents fled Tahuna due to the Japanese occupation. Her great-grandparents subsequently established a modest trade business, selling Indonesian cigarettes, salt, and other items to the local populace. They travel back and forth from Indonesia to obtain supplies and sell them for a profit to local residents. EMM has two siblings, an older sister and a younger brother who is now studying in Indonesia through an Indonesian consulate-accredited program. When EMM was asked about her opinion regarding the legalisation process, she enthusiastically responded that she had joined the program to obtain legal documents to live in Mindanao. She described the sensation of possessing legal documents as pleasant and secure:

*"The sensation of being content because you have nothing else to think about (in terms of nationality)"*

She stated that she has not received her passport yet because the document for the five-year visa is still at the Indonesian Embassy in Manila. Although she believed she would receive her passport soon, she noted that she had not considered to return to Indonesia. It is partly because her parents have never discussed returning to Indonesia and she felt at ease since all her family members are living in Mindanao. In addition, she is currently employed. She did, however, reveal that she has always had the desire to visit Indonesia and learn more about her motherland even if it is only for a vacation (Personal Communication, 2 April 2022).

The last interviewee is IM, 36. When IM was still a PID, he was working at one of the General Santos' fishing factories. He described how he and his friends were underpaid and

imprisoned by the Indonesian government for engaging in illicit fishing in Indonesian waters. His employer hired him and his PID friends to catch fish, but when they were captured by the Indonesian navy, the employer could not be held responsible due to their "foreign" status. IM was unfortunately imprisoned twice by the Indonesian navy, once in Papua and once in Halmahera (Personal Communication, 10 August 2016). When the Indonesian consulate announced the legalisation procedure, IM expressed his delight. He has confidence and desires a better career to support his family. After completing the legalisation process, IM is awaiting his passport and saving money in preparation for his return to Indonesia. He admitted that he would have a better life in Indonesia because he has family in North Sulawesi and is attempting to marry an Indonesian woman. Even though IM was born and raised in General Santos, he never forgets where he came from, but desire to spend his old age in Indonesia (Personal Communication, 30 March 2022).

In addition to the in-depth interviews, this study was supplemented by an online survey, in part due to movement restrictions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, where 25 RINs participated. Four key questions were asked, namely: 1) Who was the first member of your family to arrive in Mindanao; 2) How long have you lived in Mindanao?; 3) Do you have plans to return to Indonesia?; and 4) What is your reason for becoming a RIN? As Table 1 shows, slightly more than half of the respondents (52%) indicated that it was their grandparents who first migrated to Mindanao. Interestingly, an overwhelming majority (64%) were born in Mindanao, while the remaining respondents (36%) have lived there for a very long time. The results also show that there is somewhat a higher number of RINs (14 respondents or 56%) who have expressed their intentions to continue their lives in the Philippines compared to those who are making plans to return home (11 respondents or 44%). Despite having lived in Mindanao for so long, the respondents still chose to become RINs. The reasons given are summed up in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Results of an Online Survey of Registered Indonesian Nationals in Mindanao

Who was the first member of your family to arrive in Mindanao?	Grandparents (52%) Grandfather (16%) Parents (16%) Great grandparents (8%) Great grandfather (4%) Grandmother (4%)
How long have you lived in Mindanao?	Born in Mindanao (64%) 19 years (12%) 18 years (8%) 21 years (8%) 20 years (4%) 28 years (4%)
Do you have plans to return to Indonesia?	No (56%) Yes (44%)
What is your reason for becoming a RIN? (open-ended question)	Do not have Filipino blood. Both parents are from Indonesia. Love for Indonesia. Indonesia is where I belong. Follow the nationality of my family members.

The Indonesian descents who chose to remain in Mindanao after being awarded nationality face a range of predicaments that could best be illustrated via the push and pull factors. On one side, these people require legal documents such as a passport to confirm their identity as a nationality holder of a state. The documents would enable them to seek recourse due to any



injustices. On the other side, some of them face financial challenges pertaining to the need to renew their passports and visas to maintain their national identity. Moreover, those who are married to local Filipinos will need to consider the high costs and long documentation process if they wish to return to Indonesia with their family to start over. For RINs with large families and unsteady incomes, failure to maintain their legal documents while remaining in Mindanao could result in overstaying and risk the possibility of deportation to Indonesia, or worse, endure a higher risk of returning as an illegal alien since they are now no longer stateless.

The purpose of awarding nationality as a project initiated by the UNHCR in cooperation with the Indonesian and Philippine governments is not only to provide better living conditions for the PIDs but more importantly to safeguard their human rights and identities. The legalisation process was meant to give them a level of protection and access to basic rights in line with the notion of human security, and to overcome the risk of being harassed and threatened by employers and authorities as they were considered 'alien' and treated as cheap or forced labour with little to no recourse. Nevertheless, this paper argues that the legalisation process does not fully resolve the problems faced by the RINs, particularly those who decided to continue to reside in Mindanao. One clear challenge is the high costs of renewing their passports and visas on a regular basis. This could easily change their status to illegal immigrants when their passports and resident permits expire. The role of the Indonesian Consulate in keeping in touch with the RINs and providing them with the support they need is thus essential from a human security perspective. The Indonesian government should work with non-governmental bodies to assist RINs living in the Philippines that have financial difficulties in renewing their legal papers, and to introduce certain official programs that can help ease the transition for those who are planning to return home. Beyond that, the Indonesian and Philippine governments ought to cooperate more closely particularly in intelligence and information sharing to stop illegal border crossings and address illegal migration and human trafficking issues that are intertwined with the problem of statelessness.

## **Conclusion**

Since the 1890s, many Indonesians have migrated to the southern region of the Philippines in search of better economic prospect. It was at a time when Indonesia and the Philippines were colonized by the Dutch and Spanish respectively. They travelled without legal documentation owing to the lack of policy implementation of travel documents. Due to the proximity between Indonesia and the Philippines, the first generation of the PIDs migrated to Mindanao, believing it to be a "new land" waiting to be explored. The issue of nationality began to surface following the independence of both countries and the registration of citizens became a requirement. During this process, the Philippine government discovered the existence of the PIDs. They were referred to as 'foreign' and threatened with statelessness. After years of debate between the Indonesian and Philippine governments over the status of the PIDs, both countries agreed to work with the UNHCR and other stakeholders to legalise and grant them nationality. Those of Indonesian descent who chose to acquire Indonesian citizenship and remain in the Philippines had their status changed from PIDs to RINs.

This paper uncovers several reasons as to why the people of Indonesian ancestry continue to live in Mindanao and face predicaments even after obtaining their Indonesian nationality. Before the legalisation process, those of Indonesian heritage earned less than the minimum wage, and those without an ACR were fearful of being apprehended by the authorities. Some of the PIDs

were taken advantage of in their workplaces and had to withstand hardship. With the legalisation process, the pull factor for people of Indonesian ancestry to remain in Mindanao grew stronger. Through the interviews and survey, the pull factors for the RINs to remain in Mindanao include better legal protection because of their status as Indonesian nationals, feeling dignified and a sense of belonging, the ability to own properties and demand certain rights, the presence of Filipino family members to care for especially for those engaged in interstate marriages, and having the confidence to live more freely without fear and work legally in a country that they grew up and know very well. Having a legal identity does not totally resolve their concerns. There are certainly push factors that could short-lived their stay. They include the high risks of becoming illegals once the RINs fail to renew their legal documents due to financial constraints, the feeling of loneliness when other family members and relatives leave Mindanao, the likelihood of better economic prospects in Indonesia, and to a lesser degree the nationalistic pride of wanting to return to serve their home country.

The process of legalising the PIDs through a concerted effort involving the Indonesian government, the Philippine government, and the UNHCR as well as local NPOs was undeniably a positive step towards overcoming the age-old problem of statelessness in Mindanao. The RINs that chose to remain in Philippines can look forward to better protection and rights as lawful Indonesian citizens. However, those with low socioeconomic status may not have the capability to pay regularly in renewing their legal papers, and hence putting them at a greater risk of becoming illegals once again. This is the conundrum that the RINs who chose to become Indonesians and remain in Mindanao face when compared to those who opted to either become Filipinos or be repatriated to Indonesia. Maintaining open communication with the RINs through joint governmental programs is therefore important to monitor and keep abreast of their concerns.

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