

Promise and peril of rapid rural-urban migration

Since colonial times, migration policy in Indonesia has sought to respond to Java's overpopulation and Jakarta's struggle to manage waves of rural migrants descending on the city in search of a better life. The transmigration program continued long after the Dutch left the Indonesian archipelago, and successive administrations in Jakarta have pursued restrictive migration policies seeking to discourage new migrants from coming. In 2016, Jakarta's government even revived its *Gerakan Kembali ke Desa* (Return to Village Movement).

But recent migration data show that Jakarta's leaders need a new scapegoat for the problems of poorly managed urban growth. Small cities — not Jakarta — are now on the front lines of the country's migration, urbanization and employment challenges.

Today, a young person is more likely to be leaving than coming to a big city. Taken together, Indonesia's nine largest metropolitan areas saw more youth out-migration than in-migration between 2010 and 2015. Meanwhile, the country's small cities are swelling with young migrants. During the same period, in-migration increased the youth population (ages 15 to 29) of non-metropolitan cities by about 3 percent. In some small cities, such as Padang Panjang, West Sumatra and Bli-



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tar, East Java, population increase due to in-migration was greater than 15 percent.

Greater Jakarta's youth population is growing by less than 0.2 percent annually due to in-migration. South, Central and East Jakarta all lost far more young people to migration than they received. And while peri-urban areas like Bekasi saw high numbers of in-migrants, most were urbanites from Jakarta seeking more space in the suburbs — not rural migrants fleeing villages in search of big city life.

These figures show that young Indonesians today are still leaving home in search of better opportunities, but the "hotspots" of migration are no longer concentrated in and around Jakarta. In fact, they are no longer clustered in Java. Out of the 50 cities and regencies that saw the highest rates of net youth in-migration between 2010 and 2015, only 10 are in Java and none are part of Greater Jakarta (Jabodetabek).

What kinds of opportunities do smaller towns and cities in Indonesia offer migrants? Are these vibrant economic cen-

ters, or are they places of last resort for migrants rebuffed by the hurdles of living and working in bigger cities? The data point to a mixed story.

About half of the young rural migrants coming to small cities are in search of educational opportunities — suggesting an aspirational quality to this increasingly important migration pattern. Small cities are also enterprising: youth are more likely to be entrepreneurs — business owners employing at least one other person — than their big-city counterparts.

Beyond this, small cities feature prominently in a new report published this month by the JustJobs Network and the Center for Policy Research, which highlights places acting simultaneously as origins and destinations for migrants. These "migration junctions" are hosting many circular migrants, who use small cities as an employment hub to diversify household income beyond farm work.

On the other hand, a young worker in small-city Indonesia is about 50 percent more likely to wind up in a precarious job — as an own-account, unpaid or casual worker — as compared to one in metropolitan Indonesia. The data also suggest that skill-intensive jobs are still more likely to be found in big cities.

The story in Indonesia's small cities is one of both potential and

peril. If young people in these burgeoning places are afforded the chance, they can carve pathways toward productive employment and prosperity. Indonesia may even transition from a country of deep spatial inequality — with opportunity concentrated in Jakarta and a few other large cities — to one with more balanced economic development. This aim is certainly at the heart of President Joko "Jokowi" Widodo's promise to "build from the peripheries".

Meanwhile if small cities continue growing, absorbing migrants in search of economic opportunity but failing to deliver those opportunities, they may become new centers of urban poverty and even social unrest.

Jakarta politicians can no longer blame rural migrants for urban governance problems; Jakarta is not the center of Indonesia's rural-urban migration story anymore. National politicians must join forces with leaders in places like Kupang, East Nusa Tenggara, Kendari in Southeast Sulawesi and Bima, West Nusa Tenggara, to forge a prosperous future for small cities — one that affords aspiring young Indonesians high-quality jobs and economic mobility.

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