

Research Article

PHILIPPINES-MALAYSIA DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS: POLICIES AND GUIDELINES ON THE DEPLOYMENT MANAGEMENT FOR FILIPINO DEPORTEES

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ABSTRACT

Philippines-Malaysia diplomatic relations are multifaceted, balancing cooperation and contention across security, economic collaboration, and migration management. This research fills a critical gap by linking high-level Philippines—Malaysia diplomacy with the practical realities of deportation and reintegration, bridging migration policy and human rights concerns. This study analyzes key policies on Filipino deportee management and their impact on Philippines-Malaysia diplomatic relations using Neoliberal Institutionalism and the Human Security Framework, and it aims to determine how both nations handle diplomatic and operational aspects of deportation management. This research employs a descriptive mixed-methods design, combining qualitative survey essays and quantitative data from primary sources to evaluate Malaysia-Philippines diplomatic relations and assess policies and guidelines for managing the deployment of Filipino deportees. The study reveals that while the Philippines and Malaysia benefit from diplomatic cooperation through ASEAN, there is no direct bilateral agreement specifically addressing deportation management. Malaysia's deportation system is technologically advanced, but deportees face significant challenges, such as poor detention conditions and limited reintegration support from the Philippines. The findings, analyzed through Neoliberal Institutionalism and the Human Security Framework, highlight a disconnect between state cooperation and the human needs of deportees, with gaps in legal, social, and psychological support during the deportation and reintegration process. Strengthening bilateral agreements on deportation, ensuring comprehensive consular support, and improving reintegration programs are essential to protect Filipino deportees. Integrating human security into diplomatic and operational practices will help both the Philippines and Malaysia establish a more humane, coordinated, and rights-based approach to managing deportation and reintegration challenges effectively.

INTRODUCTION

The diplomatic relations between the Philippines and Malaysia are characterized by a complex interplay of cooperation and contention. As founding members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), both countries have worked together to foster regional stability, economic development, and security collaboration. However, longstanding disputes—particularly over Sabah—have influenced their diplomatic strategies and policy frameworks (Wilson & Ibrahim, 2018; Kadir, 2024). Despite these tensions, bilateral relations have evolved from confrontation to collaboration, reflecting a pragmatic approach to regional diplomacy (Kadir, 2024). A significant aspect of Philippine-Malaysian diplomatic relations concerns the management of Filipino deportees from Malaysia. This issue is deeply rooted in historical territorial contestations, migration patterns, and statelessness challenges faced by populations of Filipino descent in Sabah (Cheong et al., 2025). Managing the deportation process requires policies that balance national security, human rights, and socio-economic stability. It also necessitates robust bilateral frameworks that ensure humane deportation procedures while addressing the broader implications for affected communities.

The territorial dispute over Sabah has been a longstanding point of contention, influencing both countries' diplomatic approaches (Kadir, 2024). The 2013 conflict in Lahad Datu, where an armed group from the Philippines attempted to assert territorial claims, underscored the security implications of the dispute (Wilson & Ibrahim, 2018). However, despite these challenges, the Philippines and Malaysia have engaged in cooperative security measures, particularly in maritime areas, through informal naval coordination with Indonesia (Karniol, 2005). These joint efforts have contributed to addressing security concerns such as piracy, human trafficking, and unauthorized migration.

Malaysia's deportation policies have evolved significantly, incorporating technological advancements and strategic frameworks to enhance efficiency. Key initiatives include the use of biometric technology, the National Blue Ocean Strategy, and the establishment of a National Task Force under military leadership

(Chin, 2024). Additionally, Malaysia has implemented diplomatic collaboration mechanisms, depot management strategies, and readmission clauses in Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) with labor-sending states to streamline the deportation process (Low & Mokhtar, 2017). These policies reflect a shift towards a technologically driven, militarized migration control system (Chin, 2024).

For the Philippines, managing the return and reintegration of deportees requires a multifaceted approach. Ensuring that deportation procedures adhere to international legal standards and human rights protections is crucial. Addressing statelessness issues through viable citizenship pathways and legal frameworks remains a pressing concern (Cheong et al., 2025). Strengthening regional cooperation within ASEAN can facilitate the exchange of best practices, joint policy development, and more structured deportation management strategies (Wilson & Ibrahim, 2018; Kadir, 2024).

The deportation of Filipino nationals from Malaysia extends beyond individual migrants, affecting families and communities in both countries. Studies highlight the socio-economic and psychological consequences of deportations, including disrupted livelihoods and social instability (Menjívar et al., 2018). Given these impacts, diplomatic engagement should prioritize socio-economic collaboration to mitigate the adverse effects of deportation. Shifting from territorial disputes to economic partnerships has already proven effective in strengthening Philippine-Malaysian relations (Kadir, 2024).

Malaysia's involvement in regional peace processes, including its role in Mindanao's conflict mediation, demonstrates its capacity for diplomatic intervention (na Thalang, 2017; Omar et al., 2020). Leveraging this experience to mediate deportation policies and ensure humane repatriation practices can further enhance bilateral cooperation. Additionally, ASEAN's multilateral diplomacy framework offers a platform for both nations to develop harmonized migration policies that address security concerns while promoting humanitarian principles (Syofyan et al., 2023).

The diplomatic relationship between the Philippines and Malaysia is multifaceted, encompassing security cooperation, economic collaboration, and

migration management. While historical territorial disputes continue to shape their interactions, both nations have demonstrated a willingness to engage in constructive diplomacy. Effective policies for the deployment management of Filipino deportees require a balance between national security, human rights, and socio-economic stability. Strengthening bilateral and multilateral cooperation can provide sustainable solutions to the challenges posed by migration, ultimately fostering regional stability and mutual prosperity within ASEAN (Kadir, 2024; Wilson & Ibrahim, 2018).

In order to fill this gap, this research study analyzes the significant and relevant literature review publications on Scopus, and limited researcher have conducted studies in evaluating the policies and guidelines for the deployment management of Filipino deportees and its impact on diplomatic relations between Philippines and Malaysia there appears to be no significant differences identified in relation to this study. This study aims to give a clear understanding by possessing a central research question: How the Philippines and Malaysia deal with diplomatic and operational aspects related to the deportation management of Filipinos deportees? The present study outlines the following objectives to address this question:

- 1) to examine the current agreements and diplomatic relations between the two countries to see how these affect and influence deportation rules;
- 2) to explores how Malaysia's specific deportation practices impact Filipinos being sent back;
- 3) to checks how well the Philippines supports deportees once they return, focusing on the procedures and help available to them; and
- 4) to determine the problems faced by deportees and areas in need of improvement by identifying significant obstacles and gaps in the deportation and reintegration process.

By pursuing these objectives, this study hopes to provide a more truthful and inclusive representation of the practical recommendations to enhance diplomatic relations and improve the management of deportees, aiming to develop more effective strategies and better support systems to strengthen the policies and

guidelines concerning the deployment of deportees' management of Filipino people from Malaysia.

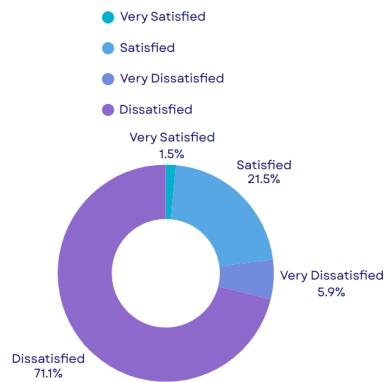
RESEARCH METHODS

This study will employ a mixed-methods research design, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches to analyze the data and provide a comprehensive understanding in evaluating the policies and guidelines for the deployment management of Filipino deportees and its impact on diplomatic relations between Philippines and Malaysia using Neoliberal Institutionalism and the Human Security Framework. This study is grounded in both primary and secondary data analysis, integrating firsthand accounts with insights from a diverse range of credible, peer-reviewed, and scholarly sources to ensure a comprehensive and evidence-based understanding of the issue. Descriptive studies, provide an overall detailed overview of diplomatic relations between Malaysia and Philippines and the deployment management of Filipino deportees. Qualitative technique uses to gather the data through essay questionnaire survey. Quantitative data collection research techniques use a numerical approach to gather broader data to examine and evaluate the diplomatic relations of Malaysia and the Philippines and the policies and guidelines for the deployment management from the Filipino deportees. This research study employs a thematic analysis approach to identify recurring patterns and themes in respondents' responses. It also uses descriptive and inferential statistical tools (RStudio statistical software) followed by Tukey's Honest Significant Difference (HSD) to analyze survey data, providing both descriptive statistics and inferential insights. Convergent design will use to utilize qualitative and quantitative data separately but then integrate the findings for a richer interpretation of diplomatic relations between Malaysia and Philippines, the policies and guidelines for the deployment management of Filipino deportees.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Primary Result and Discussion: Quantitative Data Techniques

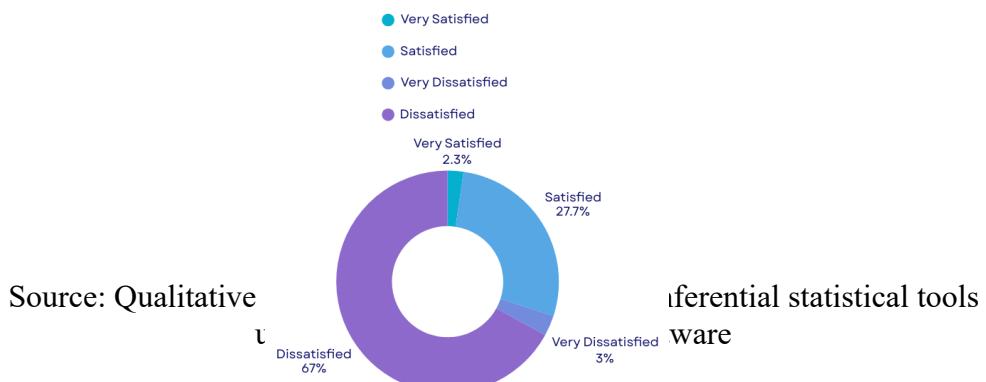
Figure 1. Diplomatic and Agreements between the Philippines and Malaysia



Source: Qualitative data survey analyzed through inferential statistical tools using the RStudio statistical software

The figure for Diplomatic Relations and Agreements between the Philippines and Malaysia shows a mix of opinions, with a significant proportion of respondents expressing dissatisfaction. The minimum and maximum values indicate a range of opinions from dissatisfaction to moderate satisfaction, while the standard deviations suggest slight variations in perspectives. This suggests that many participants perceive challenges in the clarity and transparency of agreements, as well as concerns regarding Malaysia's adherence to these agreements. Improved diplomatic communication and accountability may be necessary to enhance satisfaction.

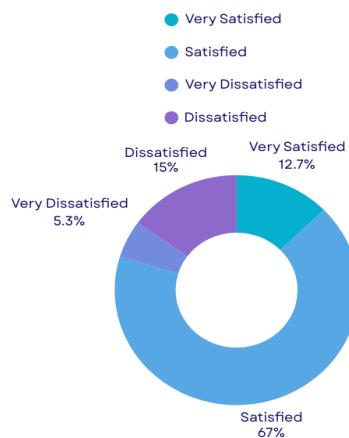
Figure 2. Malaysia's Deportation Practices and their Impact on Filipino Deportees



Source: Qualitative data survey analyzed through inferential statistical tools using the RStudio statistical software

The second figure for Malaysia's Deportation Practices and their Impact on Filipino Deportees indicates moderate satisfaction, but dissatisfaction remains prevalent. The higher standard deviations suggest varied responses, implying differing personal experiences. Concerns around the fairness and humane treatment of deportees are evident. This highlights the need for stricter oversight and advocacy for the fair treatment of Filipino deportees in Malaysia.

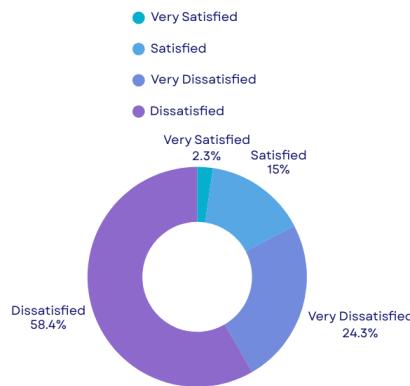
Figure 3. Philippine Government Support and Assistance upon Deportee Return



Source: Qualitative data survey analyzed through inferential statistical tools using the RStudio statistical software

Figures for Philippine Government Support and Assistance upon Deportee Return shows a relatively higher satisfaction level regarding financial support, with minimal variation as indicated by the lower standard deviation. However, legal assistance remains a concern, with a noticeable percentage of dissatisfaction and a greater range of opinions. Enhancing legal aid programs and improving reintegration services could contribute to better satisfaction.

Figure 4. Repatriation Procedures and Reintegration Support



Source: Qualitative data survey analyzed through inferential statistical tools using the RStudio statistical software

The data for Repatriation Procedures and Reintegration Support demonstrates significant dissatisfaction, particularly with legal support and the efficiency of repatriation procedures. The broad range of opinions (Min = 1, Max = 4) and the higher standard deviations suggest considerable disagreement among respondents. To improve perceptions in this area, the government could streamline its processes and expand access to livelihood programs and legal assistance.

Table 1. One-way ANOVA Result

Variable	Df	F value	Pr(>F)
Diplomatic Relations and Agreements			
Malaysia's Deportation Practices			
Philippine Government Support	3		
Repatriation Procedures and Reintegration Support	116	86.6	<2e-16

Source: Qualitative data survey analyzed through inferential statistical tools using the RStudio statistical software followed by Tukey's Honest Significant Difference (HSD)

The results of the One-Way ANOVA revealed a statistically significant difference in satisfaction levels across the four categories: Diplomatic Relations and Agreements, Malaysia's Deportation Practices and Their Impact on Filipino Deportees, Philippine Government Support and Assistance upon Deportee Return,

and Repatriation Procedures and Reintegration Support ($F(3, 116) = 86.6, p < 2e-16$). The extremely low p-value indicates that the observed differences in group means are unlikely to have occurred by chance, thus rejecting the null hypothesis. This finding suggests that the satisfaction levels regarding the different aspects of deportation management policies vary significantly among the categories.

Further analysis using Tukey's Honest Significant Difference (HSD) test confirmed the presence of significant differences between specific groups. Notably, Repatriation Procedures and Reintegration Support had significantly lower satisfaction levels compared to the other categories, with the largest mean difference observed between the Third and Fourth groups (mean difference = 1.213, $p < 0.0001$). On the other hand, Philippine Government Support and Assistance upon Deportee Return received notably higher satisfaction ratings compared to the other categories. While no significant difference was found between Diplomatic Relations and Agreements and Malaysia's Deportation Practices, the significant disparities in other areas emphasize the need for policy improvements, particularly in the repatriation and reintegration processes. These results highlight critical areas requiring intervention to enhance the effectiveness and satisfaction of deportation management policies.

3.2. Primary Result and Discussion: Qualitative Data Techniques

The lived experiences of Filipino deportees from Malaysia reveal a complex and deeply challenging process of deportation and reintegration, pointing to significant weaknesses in current bilateral frameworks and national policies. Through qualitative data collection, a series of pressing issues emerged—ranging from systemic gaps in reintegration programs to socio-emotional burdens and institutional inefficiencies. These findings are crucial in shaping evidence-based, operational, and diplomatic guidelines that align with the broader goals of humane migration management between the Philippines and Malaysia.

3.2.1. Challenges Upon Return: Cultural, Economic, and Emotional Displacement

One of the most prominent challenges faced by deportees—particularly those born or raised in Malaysia—is cultural disorientation. These individuals

often lack linguistic fluency in Filipino languages and feel socially alienated in their supposed country of origin. This sense of estrangement is compounded by poor infrastructure in return areas, with some deportees lacking access to basic utilities such as clean water and electricity, further intensifying their psychological and emotional displacement. Economic hardship was a recurring concern. Most returnees arrived in the Philippines with no financial resources, leaving them unable to access food, housing, or transportation. These material deprivations triggered elevated mental health risks, including anxiety and despair. Emotional impacts were especially pronounced among previously educated or employed individuals who now faced shame and societal stigma. Moreover, reports of physical punishment, such as the use of rotan by Malaysian authorities, raise critical human rights issues requiring immediate diplomatic attention. These findings highlight the need for protective mechanisms under bilateral agreements to address mistreatment and uphold due process.

3.2.2. Reintegration Program Effectiveness: Material and Psychosocial Support

Despite these hardships, reintegration programs—when available and adequately implemented—were reported to have a transformative impact. Government-led initiatives, such as the ayuda system offering financial aid and basic necessities, provided essential short-term relief. More importantly, psychosocial support helped many deportees reframe their experience, viewing deportation not as an end but as a new beginning. Several female respondents appreciated gender-sensitive approaches, reporting feelings of empowerment, dignity, and renewed confidence. This emotional recovery was facilitated through counseling, peer support, and structured community-building activities. Additionally, reintegration initiatives that emphasized restoring community ties enhanced social belonging and reduced feelings of exclusion. Public perception campaigns also helped deportees reclaim their narratives. Instead of being seen as failures, they were encouraged to recognize their strength and resilience—an approach that contributed to broader community cohesion and individual psychological healing.

3.2.3. Difficulties in Accessing Social Services: Inequity, Corruption, and

Institutional Insensitivity

Despite the positive aspects, several systemic flaws were identified in the delivery of reintegration services. Many participants criticized the unequal and opaque distribution of aid. Some returnees received more support than others without any transparent rationale, leading to perceptions of favoritism and mistrust in government programs. Furthermore, disrespectful behavior from some local officials—ranging from mockery to outright neglect—caused additional emotional distress. Instances of sick individuals being forced to wait in long lines for food and medicine indicate a severe lack of prioritization for vulnerable groups, such as the elderly, sick, women, and children. Healthcare services were also found lacking. In some cases, deportees received only a single dose of medication for serious ailments, reflecting insufficient and inconsistent access to medical care. Those unfamiliar with bureaucratic processes or lacking personal networks struggled even more, as access often depended on social capital rather than institutional fairness. These gaps emphasize the urgent need for standardized, dignified, and rights-based reintegration systems.

3.2.4. Treatment by Immigration Officials: Variability, Corruption, and Lack of Protocol

Deportees shared divergent experiences with immigration officials. Malaysian authorities were frequently described as harsh, with some deportees alleging corruption, such as being asked for bribes. These exploitative practices heightened the deportees' vulnerability and led to emotional trauma. In contrast, Philippine immigration officials were generally perceived as more lenient, but inconsistencies in treatment persisted. While some officers offered genuine assistance, others displayed apathy or disrespect. The absence of a consistent, ethical standard of behavior across agencies on both sides of the border underscores the need for standardized, human-rights-based deportation protocols. These should include mandatory training, performance monitoring, and accountability mechanisms to reduce arbitrary conduct and corruption.

3.2.5. Policy Recommendations from Deportees: Jobs, Infrastructure, and Bureaucratic Reform

When asked what improvements they would recommend, deportees stressed the importance of long-term economic reintegration. Access to sustainable employment, vocational training, and livelihood opportunities was seen as more critical than temporary aid. Infrastructure weaknesses—including inadequate government facilities, poor sanitation, and inconsistent utilities—also emerged as systemic barriers, highlighting the need for reintegration strategies to be embedded in broader community development frameworks. Respondents in areas like Tawi-Tawi also called for environmental awareness campaigns, particularly around waste management, reflecting a desire for community empowerment alongside personal recovery. Documentation and repatriation procedures were widely criticized for being slow and overly bureaucratic. Many deportees reported unclear processes, excessive paperwork, and delays that added stress to an already traumatic experience. Calls for streamlining administrative procedures and improving clarity in official communication were strong and consistent. Finally, the issue of corruption was a central concern. Reports of discriminatory treatment and extortion—especially targeting women and religious minorities—demand immediate institutional reforms. For deportation and reintegration management to be effective, dignity, transparency, and equity must be non-negotiable principles.

3.2.6. Emotional and Social Impact: Stigma, Resilience, and Identity Crisis

The emotional toll of deportation is undeniable. Many deportees described feelings of humiliation, fear, and loss—especially in cases where they had been primary breadwinners. These psychological burdens were compounded for individuals with weak familial or cultural ties to the Philippines, leading to isolation and identity crises. Socially, reintegration varied. Some managed to adapt by respecting local customs and forming new relationships. Others, however, were labeled derogatorily—referred to as "HALAW"—in certain regions, a stigma that perpetuated their marginalization. This points to the need for public awareness campaigns that challenge stereotypes and foster inclusion. Traumatic incidents during deportation—such as mistreatment by officials—left lasting emotional scars. While a few reported positive encounters, the inconsistency in treatment highlights the lack of a uniform, compassionate approach. Young women and

family caregivers were especially vulnerable. One story recounted a young woman responsible for her sibling during the journey, illustrating the compounded burdens faced by some returnees. These narratives emphasize the importance of trauma-informed, gender-sensitive interventions that provide specialized care.

3.2.7 Strategic Implications for Diplomatic and Policy Action

These insights offer valuable direction for strengthening the Philippines–Malaysia migration framework. First, bilateral agreements must include clear standards for humane treatment during deportation. Second, reintegration must move beyond short-term relief and address economic, social, and psychological dimensions. Third, anti-corruption mechanisms and standardized procedures should be institutionalized to ensure accountability and fairness. Ultimately, Filipino deportees must not be seen as liabilities, but as citizens with potential to contribute to national development. Ensuring their dignified treatment, equitable access to services, and sustainable reintegration is not just a humanitarian obligation—it is a strategic imperative for both national security and regional diplomacy.

3.3. Secondary Result and Discussion: Content Analysis from Published Article

3.3.1. The Philippines–Malaysia Diplomatic Cooperation and Relations Influencing Deportation Policies

Malaysia has played a significant role in facilitating peace in the Philippines, particularly through its involvement in the peace process in Mindanao. The Malaysian-led International Monitoring Team has been effective in fostering peace at the local level, which indirectly strengthens diplomatic relations between the two countries (Franco, 2013; na Thalang, 2017). Both nations are active members of ASEAN, which serves as a platform for regional cooperation and the addressing of mutual concerns, including immigration and security issues (Wilson & Ibrahim, 2018; Aquino et al., 2023).

Since the 2010s, Malaysia has significantly reformed its deportation practices under the goal of achieving “zero illegal immigrants.” These efforts have

involved diplomatic collaboration, improved depot management, and fiscal efficiency. Malaysia has also signed Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) with labor-sending countries—likely including the Philippines—that contain readmission clauses designed to streamline deportation processes (Low & Mokhtar, 2017; Chin, 2024). In addition, Malaysia has adopted biometric technology and established a National Task Force under military leadership to enhance the efficiency and control of its deportation operations. These initiatives reflect a shift toward a technologically advanced, integrated, and militarized deportation regime (Chin, 2024).

Diplomatic collaboration between Malaysia and the Philippines—particularly through ASEAN—has likely influenced deportation rules and practices. The inclusion of readmission clauses in MOUs with labor-exporting countries such as the Philippines facilitates smoother deportation processes and ensures bilateral cooperation (Low & Mokhtar, 2017). Malaysia's involvement in the Mindanao peace process and broader regional security efforts under ASEAN also play a role in shaping diplomatic relations, which in turn affect deportation-related policies (na Thalang, 2017; Capie, 2004).

Although there are no public agreements explicitly and solely dedicated to deportation rules between the Philippines and Malaysia, their diplomatic relations—characterized by peace facilitation, mutual cooperation, and ASEAN frameworks—substantially influence immigration and deportation practices. The presence of readmission clauses in MOUs, along with Malaysia's technological and military reforms in its deportation regime, are critical components shaping these practices (na Thalang, 2017; Low & Mokhtar, 2017; Chin, 2024).

. CONCLUSIONS

This study evaluates the diplomatic relations between the Philippines and Malaysia concerning deportation management, using Neoliberal Institutionalism and the Human Security Framework as its guiding theoretical lenses. The findings, drawn from quantitative and qualitative data as well as secondary content analysis, reveal a complex interplay of diplomatic cooperation, operational practices, and

human security concerns.

Neoliberal Institutionalism emphasizes the importance of institutions, shared norms, and sustained dialogue between states. The study finds that diplomatic relations, particularly through ASEAN and informal bilateral mechanisms, significantly influence the deportation policies and procedures of both countries. While no explicit, public agreements focus solely on deportation, existing frameworks—such as Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) with readmission clauses—help streamline deportation operations. Malaysia's involvement in regional peace efforts, including its role in the Mindanao peace process, further strengthens diplomatic relations that indirectly impact deportation practices. From the perspective of the Human Security

Framework, which prioritizes individual well-being over state interests, the findings highlight critical gaps in addressing the needs of deportees. Malaysia's technologically advanced, militarized deportation system, while enhancing state control, often disregards the human cost of deportation. Deportees face significant challenges, including mistreatment, lack of access to legal assistance, and inadequate reintegration support. Interviews with deportees reveal the absence of comprehensive assistance upon return to the Philippines, underscoring the shortcomings of existing reintegration programs.

The analysis further reveals operational inefficiencies that exacerbate the difficulties faced by deportees. Despite Malaysia's operational advancements in deportation management—characterized by biometric systems and military-led enforcement—there is a stark contrast between Malaysia's deportation efficiency and the Philippines' fragmented reintegration support. While the Philippines has some support systems in place, they are under-resourced and fail to address the broader social, legal, and psychological needs of deportees. The study draws three major conclusions: (1) Diplomatic cooperation through ASEAN and peace initiatives has laid a foundation for deportation management but lacks specificity and formalized protocols addressing deportation processes; (2) Malaysia has made significant strides in deportation efficiency, yet the Philippines' reintegration programs remain weak, exposing systemic vulnerabilities in supporting deportees

post-return: and (3)Deportees continue to face severe challenges, from detention conditions to reintegration difficulties, signaling a need for urgent policy reforms.

To address these issues, it is recommended that both nations formalize bilateral agreements specifically targeting deportation management, enhancing diplomatic cooperation to create more structured, human-centered protocols. These agreements should include clear guidelines for deportation procedures, consular support, and comprehensive reintegration services, ensuring that deportees' rights and well-being are safeguarded. Integrating the principles of human security into these diplomatic and operational frameworks will contribute to a more balanced, rights-based approach to deportation governance, ultimately fostering better bilateral cooperation and promoting sustainable, humane migration management in the region.

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