

## Internal Migration and Inclusive Economic Growth in Sumatra: An Islamic Economics Perspective

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### ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** Persistent regional inequality in Indonesia, particularly across Sumatra Island, continues to constrain inclusive economic growth and upward social mobility. This study investigates how internal migration functions as a pathway for socioeconomic advancement and reinterprets this process through Islamic economic principles of justice (*al-'adl*) and equitable welfare within the framework of *maqāsid al-sharī'ah*.

**Design/Methodology:** This study employs a qualitative approach based on in-depth interviews with 10 purposively selected migrants, supported by relevant literature and official migration statistics. Data were analyzed by identifying recurring patterns in migrant narratives and conducting an interpretive analysis of Islamic ethical-economic sources. Analytical rigor was ensured through source and theoretical triangulation, systematically comparing interview findings with established migration theories and official statistical data.

**Findings:** The study finds that internal migration is experienced as a form of "economic hijrah," reflecting processes of human capital transformation and improved livelihoods. Domestic remittances emerge as a key mechanism for redistributing economic resources, while migration contributes to the gradual shift toward merit-based social mobility consistent with Islamic egalitarian values.

**Practical Implications:** These findings highlight the importance of inclusive migration policies and underscore the strategic role of Islamic financial institutions in optimizing domestic remittance flows to support sustainable regional development.

**Originality/Value:** This study contributes to the literature by offering an integrated analytical perspective that bridges migration theory and Islamic economics, introducing the concept of "economic hijrah" as a novel framework for understanding migration as both an economic strategy and an ethically grounded process of achieving human dignity.

**Keywords:** Internal Migration, Domestic Remittances, Islamic Economics, Maqasid al-Shari'ah, Economic Well-being

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### A. INTRODUCTION

Internal migration has long been recognized as a key mechanism for achieving vertical social mobility and improving economic well-being (Rodrigo & Mateo-Peinado, 2024). In archipelagic developing nations like Indonesia, interregional population mobility is not merely a shift in geographical coordinates but a systematic effort by individuals to break the cycle of poverty and improve their social status through access to more competitive labor markets (Frank Laczko, 2005). From a sociological perspective, internal migration also

functions as a mechanism for redistributing human resources and reducing regional disparities (Lami et al., 2022). These perspectives align with classical migration theories, which conceptualize migration as a rational response to uneven economic development and labor market inequalities.

However, persistent regional disparities continue to create structural barriers that limit upward mobility. In many developing contexts, these inequalities form rigid “social walls” that trap low-income populations in resource-constrained regions (Gilbert et al., 2025; Lu et al., 2025). In this regard, internal migration can be understood as an economic adjustment mechanism that redistributes labor toward growth centers, thereby mitigating the risk of entrenched poverty.

Despite its economic significance, mainstream migration theories, particularly the Todaro model tend to emphasize labor market imbalances while overlooking the social and ethical dimensions of migration. Although Todaro (1969) highlights the risks of urban unemployment due to mismatched expectations and job availability (Todaro, 1969), this perspective pays limited attention to non-economic factors such as social capital and moral values that may shape migration outcomes.

In the Islamic perspective, the concept of migration has profound spiritual and social dimensions (Manayangattil, 2025). Islam views population movement (*hijrah*) not only as a response to adversity but also as a purposeful effort to seek the abundant sustenance (*rizq*) provided by Allah and to realize social justice (A’la, 2025). The principle of equality in Islam emphasizes that every individual has the right to access economic opportunities without structural barriers that discriminate based on their place of origin (Nurdiana et al., 2025). Prosperity (*falah*) in the Islamic framework is not measured solely by material accumulation but also by the equitable distribution of wealth and the enhancement of human dignity (*maqasid al-shari’ah*) (Afnandito, 2025).

However, this phenomenon is not without theoretical criticism. Michael Todaro, in his migration model, warns that uncontrolled migration flows may lead to rising urban unemployment due to mismatches between wage expectations and job availability. While this perspective is analytically robust, it primarily emphasizes economic variables and tends to overlook the role of social and moral capital in shaping migration outcomes (Todaro, 1969). This limitation reflects a broader gap in the literature, where internal migration is predominantly analyzed through economic frameworks, with limited attention to its ethical and value-based dimensions, particularly within Islamic economic perspectives.

In this regard, Islamic thought offers an alternative lens by emphasizing values such as *itqan* (professional excellence) and *ukhuwah* (social solidarity), which function as informal social safety mechanisms that may mitigate the risks highlighted in classical migration theory.

Consequently, rigid administrative boundaries (Pirandy et al., 2025) often contradict the Islamic philosophy of the ‘Earth of Allah,’ where resources are meant for collective prosperity (Manayangattil, 2025). To address this gap, this study develops an integrated analytical perspective that combines classical migration theory with Islamic economic principles. The novelty of this research lies in conceptualizing internal migration as a form of “economic *hijrah*,” offering a multidimensional understanding of migration as both an economic strategy and an ethically grounded process that advances social mobility, inclusive economic growth, and human dignity. Using a qualitative approach based on in-depth

interviews and supporting data, this study provides a more holistic interpretation of migration within the context of Sumatra.

## B. LITERATURE REVIEW

Classical migration theories conceptualize internal migration as a rational response to regional economic disparities and labor market imbalances. The Todaro model (1969), for instance, explains migration decisions based on expected income differentials between rural and urban areas. Empirical studies further highlight the role of migration in enhancing income opportunities, improving access to employment, and facilitating upward social mobility (Rodrigo & Mateo-Peinado, 2024). Additionally, migration contributes to the redistribution of human resources, thereby reducing regional inequalities (Lami et al., 2022).

However, these approaches predominantly emphasize economic rationality and tend to treat migrants as purely utility-maximizing agents, thereby overlooking the complex social, cultural, and institutional contexts that shape migration outcomes. Recent studies suggest that migrants' success is not solely determined by income differentials but is also influenced by social networks, informal institutions, and adaptive capacities, which remain underexplored in mainstream migration models (Gilbert et al., 2025).

In Islamic thought, migration (*hijrah*) is not solely an economic act but also a moral and spiritual endeavor. It reflects an effort to seek lawful sustenance (*rizq*), improve well-being, and uphold social justice (A'la, 2025; Manayangattil, 2025). The concept of *falah* (holistic prosperity) emphasizes not only material success but also equitable distribution and human dignity within the framework of *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* (Afnandito, 2025; Elvira & Izmuddin, 2025).

Nevertheless, much of the existing literature on Islamic economics remains largely normative and conceptual, with limited empirical engagement in explaining how these values operate within contemporary socio-economic phenomena (Herawati & Mukhsin, 2025) such as internal migration. As a result, the practical relevance of concepts such as *falah*, *itqan*, and *ukhuwah* in shaping migrants' economic behavior and outcomes is often insufficiently examined. This limitation indicates the need to contextualize Islamic economic principles within real-world migration dynamics to better capture their functional role beyond doctrinal interpretation.

Although extensive literature exists on internal migration and its economic impacts, there remains limited integration between migration theory and Islamic economic perspectives. Most existing studies treat migration primarily as an economic phenomenon, with insufficient attention to its ethical and normative dimensions.

This study addresses this gap by developing an integrated analytical perspective that combines classical migration theory with Islamic economic principles. By conceptualizing internal migration as a form of "economic *hijrah*," this research moves beyond conventional economic interpretations and offers a multidimensional framework that incorporates human capital transformation, social justice, and ethical agency. Accordingly, this study contributes not only to migration studies but also to the advancement of Islamic economics by providing an empirically grounded and context-sensitive interpretation of mobility and development.

## C. METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative research design with a descriptive-exploratory approach to examine the relationship between internal migration, social mobility, and economic well-being within the framework of Islamic economics. This approach is appropriate as it enables an in-depth understanding of migrants' lived experiences while allowing the integration of classical migration theories with Islamic ethical-economic principles. The study positions Islamic economics as an interpretive analytical lens to contextualize empirical findings within a value based framework.

The informants were selected using purposive sampling based on specific criteria, including migration experience (minimum five years), age range (25–50 years), and active engagement in economic activities in destination areas. The selection was not random, as this study aims to obtain in-depth, information-rich cases rather than achieve statistical representativeness. To minimize selection bias, informants were drawn from diverse geographic origins and migration pathways, ensuring variation in socioeconomic backgrounds and migration experiences.

The informants originate from diverse regions across Indonesia, including West Sumatra (Padang), North Sumatra (Medan), Jambi, South Sumatra (Palembang), Lampung, Bangka Belitung, and Java. This variation in geographic background was intended to capture a range of migration experiences rather than to achieve statistical representation. Accordingly, this study adopts an exploratory qualitative perspective, focusing on in-depth insights rather than generalizing findings to the entire population of Sumatra Island. The sample size of 10 is deemed sufficient, as it ensures data saturation, meaning that additional interviews would not yield new significant insights (Guest et al., 2006).

The data for this study consists of both primary and secondary sources. Primary data is collected through in-depth interviews with 10 informants, aiming to gather personal experiences and perspectives on internal migration, social mobility, and Islamic economic principles. Secondary data includes primary Islamic sources such as Quran verses and Hadith related to hijrah, wealth distribution, and social justice; reputable academic journals discussing migration theory (de Haas, 2021) and Islamic economics (Mutmainah Nabila Keysha, Cynthia Ananda Br Tarigan, Nurul Hidayah, 2025) and internal migration statistics from the Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS) on domestic migration trends in Indonesia.

Data analysis was conducted using an integrated qualitative approach that sequentially combined thematic analysis and qualitative content analysis. First, thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke (2017) was applied to identify recurring patterns in interview narratives related to migration experiences, economic mobility, and remittance practices.

Subsequently, qualitative content analysis was employed to interpret these empirical themes through the lens of Islamic ethical and economic principles, enabling a structured linkage between observed patterns and relevant conceptual frameworks (Clarke & Braun, 2017).

To enhance analytical rigor, the findings were validated through data and theoretical triangulation, systematically comparing interview results with established migration theories and official statistical data (Tarnoki & Puentes, 2019). For instance, findings on remittance practices were cross-validated with national statistical trends and supported by existing migration literature.

## D. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Based on the publication of the Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS), Table 1 in Population and Labor Mobility Statistics 2024, released on 31 January 2025 (Badan Pusat Statistik (BPS), 2025), it is evident that within Sumatra, West Sumatra Province ranks first, with a 16.3% share of lifetime out-migrants, compared to other provinces on the island. This indicates that West Sumatra is the largest contributor to internal migration flows to other regions. In West Sumatra, lifetime out-migration is locally known as merantau, a long-standing tradition that has persisted from earlier times to the present as a form of institutionalized local wisdom within society, shaped by adopted systems of westernization. Nasution (2023) argues that merantau is primarily driven by economic and social factors, particularly the increasing scarcity of land, which compels younger generations to migrate in search of livelihoods (Nasution et al., 2023). Accordingly, the data presented in Table 1 confirm that the practice of “Merantau” in West Sumatra remains prevalent today. The lifetime out-migrant data are defined based on individuals whose place of residence at the time of the survey differs from their place of residence at birth.

**Table 1. Percentage of Inter-provincial Lifetime Migrants by Province, 2023**

Province	Lifetime-in Migrants	Lifetime-out Migrants
Aceh	3,7	4,5
Sumatera Utara	3,5	12,8
Sumatera Barat	6,9	<b>16,3</b>
Riau	26,3	8,1
Jambi	18,2	6,8
Sumatera Selatan	10,0	9,4
Bengkulu	16,5	6,2
Lampung	14,5	8,9
Kep. Bangk Belitung	15,0	7,4
Kepulauan Riau	40,6	8,9

*Source: BPS, 31 December 2025*

Table 2 presents data on the percentage of recent inter-island out-migrants based on their island of residence five years prior and their island of residence in 2023. The data show that 79.3% of migrants from Sumatra relocated to Java, indicating that Java remains the primary and most dominant destination for Sumatra-origin migrants. Compared with other destination islands, such as Bali–Nusa Tenggara, Kalimantan, Sulawesi, Maluku, and Papua. Java attracts a substantially higher share of migrants from Sumatra.

**Table 2. Percentage of Inter-Island Recent Out-Migrants by Island of Residence 5 Years Ago and Island of Current Residence, 2023**

Island of Residence 5 Years Ago	Island of Current Residence						Total
	Sumatera	Jawa	Bali-Nusa Tenggara	Kalimantan	Sulawesi	Maluku & Papua	
Sumatera	-	<b>79,3</b>	5,3	7,7	5,1	2,7	100,0
Jawa	55,9	-	13,6	17,5	7,5	5,4	100,0

Bali-Nusa Tenggara	9,9	66,0	-	16,2	5,8	2,1	100,0
Kalimantan	9,6	51,9	17	-	20,2	1,3	100,0
Sulawesi	9,7	32,2	13,9	20,4	-	23,9	100,0
Maluku&Papu a	8,6	34,4	11,8	0,6	44,7	-	100,0

*Source: BPS, 31 December 2025*

Based on in-depth interviews with 10 informants, this study finds that economic considerations and employment demands are the primary drivers of internal migration. Seven informants reported migrating in search of better job opportunities and improved economic conditions, while two cited marital reasons, primarily following a spouse and one indicated educational purposes. Notably, all male informants identified employment that related motives, underscoring a strong link between migration and labor-oriented aspirations.

These findings are reinforced by participants' narratives, which consistently highlight increased income, skill development, and enhanced economic resilience following migration. As one informant explained, "I moved because it was difficult to find stable work in my hometown, but here I have better opportunities and can support my family more consistently." Another participant similarly noted, "After migrating, I not only earn more, but I also learned new skills that improved my confidence and financial stability." Overall, the results suggest that the pursuit of improved livelihoods and economic stability remains the dominant factor shaping internal migration decisions among the informants.

These empirical findings provide an important foundation for understanding internal migration beyond a purely economic phenomenon. The predominance of employment-related motives among the informants suggests that internal migration represents not only a strategy for income generation but also a broader process of self-improvement and social transformation. Within this context, internal migration can be interpreted as a form of economic hijrah, in which individuals relocate in pursuit of better livelihood opportunities, enhanced human capital, and improved living conditions, while simultaneously navigating moral and ethical considerations shaped by Islamic economic principles. Accordingly, the following discussion examines internal migration as a process of economic hijrah, human capital transformation, and moral imperatives embedded within migrants' decisions and experiences.

### **1. Internal migration as Economic Hijrah, Human Capital Transformation and Moral Imperatives**

In this study, the phenomenon of migration is not viewed merely as passive geographical mobility, but as a manifestation of "Economic Hijrah". This argument positions physical relocation as a moral imperative to break the cycle of intergenerational poverty. From this perspective, migration is a proactive action that combines personal capacity building (human capital) with the religious obligation to seek a better life.

Sociologically, migration serves as a mechanism for enhancing Human Capital. According to the theory developed by Gary Becker, individuals migrate as an investment in themselves (Popoola & Bolaji Gabriel, 2025). Migrants are willing to bear the psychological and financial costs in the present in exchange for acquiring skills, work experience, and social networks in the destination areas.

This analysis finds that migration changes the cognitive and technical structure of individuals. In migration, there is an organic process of up skilling through a more competitive labor market compared to the origin area. As a result, the economic value of the individual increases, which in turn drives vertical social mobility from the working class to the functional middle class.

The Islamic lens provides a deeper theological dimension to this phenomenon. Islam forbids a static (passive) attitude toward poverty if the opportunity for improvement is still wide open. QS. An-Nisa: 97 serves as a sharp critique against those who feel oppressed (mustad'afin) but are reluctant to act, with the assertion that "Isn't the Earth of Allah vast, so you can migrate within it?"

In this context, migration is defined as a Proactive Effort. Epistemologically, poverty caused by laziness or reluctance to explore opportunities is considered reprehensible. Migration transforms into an act of worship because it aims to preserve one's dignity (hifz al-muru'ah) and prevent becoming a burden to others. Economic success in the migrant's destination is viewed as a means to achieve Falah, an integral success, where financial independence in this world serves as a bridge to spiritual tranquility and well-being in the Hereafter.

## **2. Wealth Redistribution through Remittances (Spatial Justice)**

While the previous section focused on individual transformation (human capital), this section analyzes the macroeconomic impact of migration on economic equity. The main argument is that remittances serve as a decentralized wealth redistribution instrument, effectively correcting interregional disparities without solely relying on government bureaucratic intervention.

Sociologically, remittances are a manifestation of the New Economics of Labor Migration (NELM) theory. Unlike classical theories that view migrants as atomistic actors, NELM sees migrants as part of a family unit. Migration is viewed as a risk diversification strategy: when the agricultural sector in rural areas faces failure (e.g., due to climate conditions), money sent by family members in urban areas becomes the primary safety net.

Remittances create a multiplier effect in rural areas. The money is not only used for consumption but also invested in housing improvements, access to healthcare, and most importantly, the education of the next generation. Gradually, this process dismantles the "Intergenerational Poverty Wall," where the children of migrants have higher social mobility prospects than their parents.

From the Islamic perspective, remittances are a tangible application of the principle of wealth distribution so that it does not circulate solely among the rich (Q.S. Al-Hashr: 7). Development that is concentrated only in large cities leads to the geographical accumulation of wealth, which is theologically viewed as undesirable.

Migration facilitates the flow of wealth from growth centers (cities) back to marginal regions (villages). The researcher argues that remittances can be seen as a form of Zakat, Infak, and Sadaqah (ZIS) practiced organically within families and communities. This creates Spatial Justice, where prosperity harvested in cities is "dropped" back to rural areas through bonds of brotherhood (ukhuwah) and family responsibility (mas'uliyah), ultimately contributing to the broader welfare of the community.

A study by Ratha (2013) from the World Bank shows that remittances are significantly more stable than foreign capital flows (Foreign Direct Investment) in reducing

poverty rates in developing countries (Weeraratne, 2024). In Indonesia, the research by Adelman & Taylor (1990) supports the idea that one dollar of remittance can generate much larger local income growth through economic activities in villages (such as home construction, which absorbs local labor) (Batubara et al., 2023; Hugo, 2003).

However, there is criticism regarding the Dependency Syndrome. A study by De Haas (2009) warns that if not well managed, remittances can create families in rural areas that are reluctant to work and instead wait for remittances from abroad or urban areas (de Haas, 2021; De Haas, 2009). Additionally, large remittance flows can trigger local inflation, such as increases in land prices and construction materials in villages, which in turn makes it difficult for local residents who do not have migrant family members (inequality within villages).

It can be analyzed that, despite the risks of dependency, remittances remain the most effective catalyst for prosperity within the framework of Islamic economics. Remittances are not merely money transfers, but transfers of hope and dignity. By channeling wealth from the cities to the villages, migrants act as agents of redistribution, fulfilling a prophetic mission to create economic balance on Allah's Earth, ensuring that progress in one region brings positive impacts to others.

### **3. Social Mobility and the Dismantling of Class Barriers (Equality)**

Sociologically, traditional rural societies often have an inscriptive social structure, where an individual's status is determined by lineage, ancestral land ownership, or customary position (Britannica, 2025). This frequently hinders social mobility for individuals from lower classes.

Migration offers individuals the opportunity to undergo a "re-identification of self." In urban, anonymous, and cosmopolitan environments, a person's status is no longer determined by their parentage in the village, but by what they do and produce (achieved status). Pitirim Sorokin's theory of social mobility emphasizes that vertical mobility channels (such as the military, schools, or economic organizations) are more open in urban areas. Through migration, individuals "leap" out of a static social stratification into a more dynamic structure, enabling them to ascend to higher social layers based on competence.

From the Islamic perspective, this concept aligns with the principle of egalitarianism (absolute equality) before Allah. Islam rejects social stratification based on lineage or caste. The principle "Inna akramakum 'indallahi atqakum" (Indeed, the most honorable among you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous) provides theological legitimacy, affirming that human dignity is determined by one's efforts and integrity, not by geographical origin or ethnicity.

Migration embodies the value of Al-Musawah (Equality). When a migrant successfully changes their economic status, they not only improve their living standards but also restore their human dignity (karamah al-insan). In Islam, working hard to improve one's condition is a form of obedience. Therefore, the dismantling of class barriers through migration is a manifestation of social justice (adl), which is the core of the Islamic message.

A study by Zhou & Logan (1989) in the *American Sociological Review* shows that in immigrant communities, social capital and hard work can overcome traditional class barriers (Zhou & Logan, 1989). In their research on migrants in Indonesia, Sriyana (2024) found that migration provides "new strength" for migrants, enabling them to break free from the feudal structures in their origin areas once they achieve economic independence (Sriyana, 2024).

Pierre Bourdieu's Theory of Social Reproduction (1986): Bourdieu argued that the upper class often "reproduces" class through cultural capital. Even though a migrant may succeed economically, they may still face barriers to entering the elite urban class due to differences in speech, taste, and social networks. Status may rise, but class barriers persist in a more subtle (symbolic) form (Bourdieu, 1986).

Portes & Zhou (1993) caution about downward assimilation (Portes & Zhou, 1993), where migrants who are not well-integrated become trapped in the harsher urban lower class compared to their rural origins (Cavone et al., 2017). While cultural capital and the risk of downward assimilation remain challenges, this study concludes that migration remains the most rational and ethical path to breaking class barriers. Through the spirit of Islamic equality, migrants are positioned as sovereign subjects of their own fate. Migration is not merely about becoming wealthy, but about becoming "equal" in access to prosperity and dignity on the vast Earth of Allah.

## E. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that internal migration extends beyond a mere demographic shift, functioning as a strategic pathway through which individuals navigate and potentially alleviate the social and economic constraints associated with persistent inequality. While the risk of urban unemployment, as highlighted in Todaro's model, remains a structural challenge, the findings suggest that the integration of Islamic values—particularly the work ethic of *itqan* (diligence) and the principle of *ukhuwah* (social solidarity)—plays a meaningful role in supporting migrants' economic adaptation and resilience. From an Islamic economic perspective, these dynamics reflect a broader interpretation of human mobility aligned with the ethical principle of shared access to resources, where opportunities for prosperity are not confined by rigid administrative boundaries.

Ultimately, the observed patterns of social mobility may be understood as contributing to the realization of *maqasid al-shari'ah*, particularly in advancing economic well-being (*al-falah*) and equitable opportunity (*al-'adl*) within a framework of social justice. These findings underscore the importance of developing more inclusive and responsive migration policies, as well as strengthening the role of Islamic financial institutions in facilitating productive domestic remittance flows to support sustainable and equitable regional development. By integrating migration theory with Islamic economic principles, this study offers an alternative ethical-analytical lens for understanding migration as both an economic strategy and a pathway to human dignity.

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