



THE EFFORTS OF THE PEKANBARU MAYOR IN ADDRESSING AND MANAGING THE ISSUE OF FOREIGN REFUGEES IN PEKANBARU CITY

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Abstract

The city of Pekanbaru is one of the destinations for foreign refugees, especially from conflict countries such as Rohingya, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. The increasing number of refugees raises various problems, especially in social and security aspects, so that it requires serious attention and handling from local governments. This study aims to find out the efforts made by the Mayor of Pekanbaru in dealing with the existence of foreign refugees in his area. The method used is a descriptive qualitative approach with data collection techniques through interviews with the National and Political Unity Agency, traditional leaders, communities, as well as analysis of relevant documents and secondary data. The results of the study show that the efforts implemented include both penal and non-penal approaches. A penal approach is applied to minor offenses through placement in Immigration Detention Centers (Rudenim), while serious offenses are constrained by language barriers and the unclear citizenship status of refugees. Meanwhile, a non-penal approach is carried out by forming a Task Force for Handling Overseas Refugees (PPLN), conducting socialization and education to the community, and planning the relocation of refugees in collaboration with UNHCR and IOM. This policy reflects the city government's efforts to balance law enforcement and humanitarian protection for foreign refugees in Pekanbaru City.

Keywords: *Foreign Refugees, Criminal Policy, Mayor*



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A. Introduction

Foreign refugees have become a global issue that has received international attention, especially due to prolonged conflicts in the Middle East and Africa (Irsan, 2007:25). Complex political, ethnic, and religious conflicts prompted them to flee oppression and violence in search of temporary refuge (Parengkuan *et al.*, 2022: 5). The city of Pekanbaru is one of the destinations for refugees from Asia because of its strategic location near Dumai Port (Alini & Nidhana, 2021:360).

The growing number of foreign refugees poses problems, ranging from determining status, duration of stay, to budget allocation (Ashari *et al.*, 2024:3). The lack of comprehensive national regulations makes handling less coordinated and limits regional authority. Security management and law enforcement are a challenge, especially since Indonesia has not ratified the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol (Wagiman, 2012:42). Legal protection is still limited and relies only on administrative policies and cooperation with UNHCR (*United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees*) and IOM (*International Organization for Migration*). According to the 1951 Convention, refugees are defined as people who cannot return to their country for fear of persecution on the basis of race, religion, nationality, social group, or political views (Wagiman, 2012:99). According to the 1967 Protocol, this coverage was extended to refugees after 1951 (Adha, 2023:126).

The Indonesian government faces difficulties in dealing with refugees, although it has no legal obligation because it has not ratified the 1951 Convention. One of the prominent cases is refugees from Afghanistan who are often associated with negative impacts in transit countries such as Indonesia and Malaysia. They are considered to have the potential to cause a budget burden and are prone to involvement in criminal acts, so their presence often receives rejection from the local community (Kusnadi & Sardini, 2023:735).

Based on data from the Pekanbaru City National and Political Unity Agency as of November 29, 2024, 958 foreign refugees are scattered in official accommodation, coming from countries such as Afghanistan, Rohingya, Pakistan, Sudan, and Somalia. The existence of foreign refugees has an economic, social, and security impact. Economically, their basic needs weigh heavily on the budget (Nugraha & Yudha, 2023:24). Socially, the lack of assimilation triggers tensions with local residents (Shalihah *et al.*, 2021:101). In the security sector, lawlessness and the influx of illegal refugees threaten regional stability (Tarigan & Joshua, 2021:17).

Furthermore, the refugee crisis not only creates uncertainty for the refugees themselves, but also creates loopholes that criminal groups take advantage of to make a profit. In this situation, various crimes have the potential to emerge, such as human trafficking, sexual exploitation, illegal arms trafficking, and terrorism, all of which demand

special attention from the authorities (Thariq, 2023:48). This condition exacerbates the vulnerability of refugees, especially for women and children who are often the main targets of crime. Therefore, the handling of the refugee crisis cannot be separated from preventive efforts against the potential crimes that accompany it.

However, there are still many refugees outside the official shelters that cause unrest and social problems, including violations of the law that can be seen from news data. News data shows that the problems of foreign refugees in Pekanbaru City include illegal arrivals, lack of shelter facilities, and weak supervision. The large number of foreign refugees outside the shelter is free, causing social unrest. The case is that moral violations and behavior that are considered impolite also worsen the condition. This situation reflects the suboptimal handling from the local government.

The following is news data that describes the problem of foreign refugees in the city of Pekanbaru. located in the city of Pekanbaru.

Table 1. News Data on the Treatment of Foreign Refugees in the City of Pekanbaru

Yes	Date	Media Electronics	Title
1	March 15, 2019	Antaranews.com	Three Afghan Refugees in Pekanbaru Arrested for Adultery
2	12 December 2023	Cakaplah.com	Many Refugees in Pekanbaru Live Outside the Shelter and Some Are Free to Sell
3	14 December 2023	Fajar.co.id	Rohingya Refugees Roaming and Sleeping on the Road, Police Finally Take to Immigration
4	March 18, 2024	Liputanoke.com	Abandoned, 129 Rohingya Sleep in Plastic Tents on the Sidewalk
5	April 2, 2024	Antaranews.com	191 Rohingya refugees in Pekanbaru arrived illegally
6	17 December 2024	Cakaplah.com	Rohingya residents in Pekanbaru are worried, ask rambutan to bring their fellow villagers

Source: Author's Modification, 2025

The problem of foreign refugees in the city of Pekanbaru poses challenges in the economic, social, and security fields. This situation shows that handling refugees is not only the responsibility of the central government, but also requires an active role from local governments, especially the Mayor as the holder of policy authority. Therefore, this

research is important to provide a deeper understanding of how the steps that have been and are being taken by the Mayor of Pekanbaru in dealing with this problem. This research is also expected to make a theoretical contribution to the development of criminological studies, especially in the context of handling refugees at the local level.

B. Method

This study uses a qualitative method with a descriptive approach to describe in depth the efforts of the Mayor of Pekanbaru in overcoming and dealing with the problem of foreign refugees. The main data was obtained through in-depth interviews with key informants and informants who have involvement in handling refugees, such as the Kesbangpol Agency (National and Political Unity), traditional leaders, and local communities. In addition, the researcher also collects secondary data from official documents, articles, and other relevant written sources. The research process includes collecting data directly through interviews, observation of field situations, and then analyzing the collected data to find strategies, impacts, and challenges for the policies implemented (Wijaya et al., 2025).

C. Findings and Discussion

1. Pekanbaru Mayor's Efforts in Handling Foreign Refugees

In facing the dynamics of the existence of foreign refugees in the Pekanbaru City area, the city government through the Mayor has taken a number of efforts. One of the tangible forms of these efforts is the establishment of the Task Force for Handling Refugees from Abroad (PPLN Task Force). This task force was formed as a forum for cross-sectoral coordination to deal with various problems that arise due to the existence of refugees, ranging from education and counseling about local social norms, to supervision of refugees' compliance with the rules that apply in the community. This task force consists of various agencies, such as the National and Political Unity Agency, Rudenim (Immigration Detention Center), Police, Kodim, Prosecutor's Office, Social Service, to international organizations such as IOM (*International Organization for Migration*) and UNHCR (*United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees*).

The main basis for the implementation of these measures refers to the Presidential Regulation of the Republic of Indonesia Number 125 of 2016 concerning the Handling of Refugees from Abroad. This Presidential Regulation emphasizes that every refugee is obliged to comply with the rules of conduct at the shelter location, respect the customs of the local community, and be subject to the applicable laws and regulations in Indonesia. This provision aims to maintain public order and create harmony between refugees and local communities.

Referring to Article 30 paragraphs (1) to (4) of the Presidential Regulation, it is emphasized that refugees who violate norms or laws can be subject to action, including placement in special locations, and still be processed legally if they violate national regulations. In line with these provisions, the PPLN Task Force together with related officials handle minor violations committed by refugees by placing them in special cells at the Immigration Detention Center (Rudenim). However, for serious violations, the handling is still hampered by language barriers and the citizenship status of the refugees.

From the social and cultural side, another step taken by the government is to involve traditional leaders and communities in the handling process. Traditional leaders assessed the importance of a local wisdom-based approach to shape the refugees' understanding of applicable norms and customs. The local community also expressed concern over the attitude and behavior of some refugees who were considered not in line with local social values. This concern is further reinforced by the emergence of visual documentation on social media, which shows residents voicing complaints about the lack of firm action against the behavior of refugees that are considered troubling.

In response to this situation and the increasing number of refugees, especially from the Rohingya ethnicity, the Mayor of Pekanbaru together with the Deputy Mayor also took diplomatic steps by establishing more intensive communication with international organizations such as IOM (*International Organization for Migration*) and UNHCR (*United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees*). One of the concrete steps proposed is the relocation of refugees to Rental Simple Flats (Rusunawa) to provide a more decent and humane place to live. The city government also encourages funding for the resettlement to be assisted by donor countries such as the United States and the European Union through the IOM (*International Organization for Migration*) (*Pekanbaru.go.id, accessed May 9, 2025*).

However, in its implementation, the Pekanbaru City government faces various challenges. One of the main challenges is the absence of technical regulations at the regional level that limit the Task Force's authority to act, especially when refugees commit violations. Various forms of violations committed by refugees, such as curfew violations, petty theft, and destruction of residents' facilities, often cannot be followed up decisively because the legal status of refugees is not the same as that of citizens. The actions that can be taken are usually only limited to warnings or temporary placement in the Immigration Detention House. This creates the impression that there is no deterrent effect and makes people question the government's firmness.

In addition, the limitation of shelter facilities is also a fairly urgent problem. The growing number of refugees is not commensurate with the current available housing capacity. The Pekanbaru City Government has not yet had adequate permanent shelters. The plan to move refugees to rented flats (rusunawa) has only emerged as an initiative

of the new Deputy Mayor of Pekanbaru, but the plan is still in its early stages and has not been realized due to various obstacles, such as budget limitations and the lack of effective technical coordination between related institutions. Communication barriers are also a challenge in itself, especially because of the limited number of translators that make it difficult to convey information as well as the mediation or coaching process for refugees. This condition is exacerbated by the potential for social conflict, where some residents complain about the attitude of refugees who are considered not to respect local norms. This tension is feared to trigger horizontal conflicts if not dealt with seriously.

Overall, the efforts of the Mayor of Pekanbaru in dealing with the problem of foreign refugees include the establishment of the PPLN Task Force as a coordinating forum, the implementation of the rule of law in accordance with Presidential Decree 125 of 2016, handling violations through Rudenim, the need for the involvement of indigenous leaders and communities in cultural approaches, and increasing cooperation with international organizations to respond to the basic needs of refugees in a more humane and organized manner. All of these steps are taken so that the existence of foreign refugees does not cause social tension in the future. These measures are not only aimed at maintaining order and security in the city, but also reflect the commitment of local governments in upholding human values, even though they are limited by authorities that have not fully supported them. The government is trying to carry out its role to the fullest even though policies related to refugees are under the authority of the central government. The existence of the PPLN Task Force is proof that cross-agency coordination is the key to creating more effective and equitable refugee governance.

2. Analysis of the Mayor's Efforts Based on Criminal Policy Theory

The term "Policy" comes from the word *policy* (English) or *politiek* (Dutch), so "Criminal Policy" is also known as "Criminal Politics". In foreign literature, this term is called *Penal Policy, Criminal Law Policy, or Strafrechtspolitiek* (Rifai, 2012: 1). According to Muladi, criminal policy is a form of rational and structured effort by the community to overcome crime. The main goal is to prevent crime from occurring (Zaidan, 2016:262).

The presence of foreign refugees in the city of Pekanbaru has given rise to various dynamics, especially in social and legal aspects. Based on the results of the research, the handling of violations of the law involving refugees is carried out through several steps and coordination between institutions, which is part of the efforts of the city government under the leadership of the Mayor of Pekanbaru. One concrete form of this effort is the establishment of the Task Force for Handling Refugees from Abroad (PPLN Task Force), which shows the initiative of local governments in dealing with this problem collaboratively across sectors. In this case, the findings of the research can be analyzed using Criminal Policy Theory, which consists of two main approaches, namely penal and non-penal.

a. Penal Approach

The Penal approach is to focus on repressive measures taken after a criminal act has occurred, such as the prosecution or eradication of crime (Sopiah, 2024:18-19). This repressive action aims to provide appropriate punishment to the perpetrator, create a deterrent effect, and prevent the recurrence of crimes by both perpetrators and others (Faisal, 2017: 251).

The following efforts reflect the penal approach, including:

- 1) Refugees who commit minor offenses are placed in Immigration Detention Centers (RUDENIM) as administrative sanctions, which are part of the law enforcement mechanism against foreign refugees.
- 2) The government still adheres to Presidential Regulation No. 125 of 2016, specifically Article 30, which stipulates that foreign refugees who commit violations can be subject to special placement or legal proceedings in accordance with the provisions of applicable laws and regulations
- 3) Although violations of the law committed by refugees are minor, they are still recorded and acted upon within the framework of law enforcement, despite the challenges of unclear citizenship status and language barriers that hinder the process.

b. Non-Penal Approach

The non-penal approach emphasizes preventive measures, such as control, deterrence, and anticipation before crimes occur. This approach does not use criminal sanctions, but aims to influence people's views on crime. Efforts to combat crime through this approach are carried out by addressing the root causes of crime, so that it can be prevented before it occurs (Sopiah, 2024:19).

The following efforts reflect a non-penal approach, including:

- 1) The establishment of the PPLN Task Force (Task Force for Handling Refugees from Abroad) as a forum for cross-agency cooperation, involving parties such as the Kesbangpol Agency, the Police, UNHCR, IOM, and traditional leaders in handling refugee issues.
- 2) There is routine coordination between institutions that are members of the PPLN Task Force through monthly meetings and active communication in WhatsApp groups, including UNHCR, IOM, Kesbangpol, police officers, and other related parties.
- 3) Coaching and counseling activities for foreign refugees are carried out on a regular basis, both weekly and daily, aimed at improving their understanding of the rules in force in the area and conveying other important information. This program is carried out at shelter locations or through internal activities regulated by the PPLN Task Force.

- 4) The plan to relocate Rohingya refugees to Rusunawa (Simple Rental Flats) by the City Government as a form of humanitarian-oriented solution to prevent potential social conflicts in the community.

Based on the results of the analysis using the theory of Criminal Policy which includes penal and non-penal approaches, it can be concluded that the handling of foreign refugees in the city of Pekanbaru has applied both approaches. The penal approach can be seen in the handling of minor offenses committed by placement in the Immigration Detention Center (Rudenim) in accordance with Presidential Regulation Number 125 of 2016, although the handling of serious offenses is still limited due to language constraints and the citizenship status of refugees. Meanwhile, a non-penal approach is applied through the establishment of the PPLN Task Force, coordination between related institutions, educational activities, and refugee relocation as a preventive measure. Both approaches illustrate that the Government seeks to carry out a firm handling of foreign refugees, but still considers the humanitarian aspect, by enforcing the rules through enforcement and taking preventive measures through coordination and coaching.

D. Conclusion

Based on the results of the research, it can be concluded that the efforts of the Mayor of Pekanbaru in dealing with foreign refugees are carried out through penal and non-penal approaches as part of a responsive and collaborative criminal policy. These efforts are realized through the establishment of the Task Force for Handling Refugees from Abroad (PPLN Task Force) as a coordinating forum between agencies, enforcement of rules based on Presidential Regulation No. 125 of 2016, placement of offenders in Immigration Detention Centers (Rudenim) for minor offenses, and cooperation with international institutions in humanitarian values. However, the limitations of regional regulations, shelter facilities, language barriers, and the lack of optimal technical coordination between agencies are serious challenges that need to be overcome immediately so that refugee management can run more effectively and fairly, as well as prevent potential social conflicts in the community.

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