



FAMILY FRONTIERS

Persatuan Kebajikan Sokongan Keluarga Selangor & KL (PPM-011-10-24072020)

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Press Statement
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Marrying for Business? Malaysian Binational Families Refute Misleading Claims

Family Frontiers refers to the Domestic Trade and Cost of Living (KPDN) Deputy Minister Datuk Dr Fuziah Salleh's statement in Dewan Negara claiming that non-citizens' main modus operandi to run businesses in Malaysia is by marrying Malaysians.

The recent statement by the Deputy Minister risks creating misconceptions about Malaysian binational families and the realities they face. Such narratives can unintentionally diminish the recognition of Malaysians' right to choose their spouses regardless of nationality and their families' ability to earn a dignified living.

Non-citizen spouses could feel compelled to run businesses under their Malaysian spouse's name or find informal work due to limited access to legal employment. The visas of non-citizen spouses come with the statement of prohibition from employment, though they may be the main provider and only income earner for their Malaysian spouse and Malaysian children. While the Registration of Businesses Act 1956 limits sole proprietorships and partnerships to Malaysian citizens and permanent residents, similarly many policies in Malaysia fail to account for the real-life challenges faced by non-citizen spouses and their Malaysian families.

In 2024, 158,708 non-citizen spouses were given a Long-Term Social Visit Pass (LTSVP). This group represents a vast, untapped human resource at a time when Malaysia is struggling with brain drain. However, a significant barrier remains: **The statement "Any Form of Employment is Strictly Prohibited"** on the visas of non-citizen spouses.



Image credits: Penang Insider

This restriction creates uncertainty and hesitation among potential employers, many of whom are reluctant to hire someone whose visa explicitly states they cannot work — even though the Immigration Department allows employment with an endorsement, which can be cumbersome and time-consuming to secure, causing some employers to rescind job offers. For spouses with strong professional qualifications, the short validity and precarious nature of the LTSVP — often just one to three years — makes it a risky hire for companies, discouraging employers from offering stable, long-term employment opportunities.

“In our current reality, the struggle to earn a living as a spouse is significant due to restrictive regulations. Without the necessary work endorsements in our passports, we are treated similarly to any other foreigner, severely limiting our ability to work and earn an income,” says Aaron* (pseudonym to protect his identity), a non-citizen spouse who runs a family business with his Malaysian wife.

A 2021 survey by Family Frontiers showed that this problem is widespread. **Of the respondents, over 70% held a bachelor's degree or higher, yet 77.2% reported difficulty finding a job, and 34.2% stated that companies were "very unwilling" to hire them after seeing the employment prohibition on their visa.** Furthermore, licensed professions such as engineering, law, and medicine are often inaccessible without Permanent Resident status, which is notoriously difficult to obtain in Malaysia.

The public's suggestion to restrict business registration for non-citizen spouses until five years after marriage is another deeply misguided proposal. Such a policy would unfairly punish legitimate binational families and deny them the ability to earn a dignified living during the critical early years of their marriage.

“Both then and today, non-citizen spouses have yearned to make Malaysia their home, so as to not uproot their Malaysian families. Yet, as perpetual outsiders, they face challenges in almost every aspect of everyday life — from employment to education to healthcare to financial services and transport. Precarious immigration statuses set the basis for systemic discrimination,” said Gulzhan, an impacted non-citizen wife of a Malaysian.

If non-citizen spouses are barred from legitimate employment and now face crackdowns on their family businesses, how are they supposed to support their Malaysian families and children who are dependent on them? This policy simply shifts the entire financial burden onto the Malaysian spouse, especially a Malaysian wife who will become the sole provider for the family during her child bearing years adding unnecessary and immense stress on binational families.

While we understand that KPDN is working to address the issues faced by local businesses, they miss the bigger picture. The earnings of these families are not siphoned out of the country; they are spent on Malaysian goods and services, paying Malaysian taxes, and supporting the Malaysian economy. By crippling their ability to earn, Malaysia is not just hurting families, it is hurting the country's economy as these businesses also pay taxes. Instead of penalising hardworking spouses who merely want to support their Malaysian spouses and children, ultimately, these barriers to employment do not just impact businesses — they infringe on the right to family life and the dignity of Malaysian binational

families. When non-citizen spouses are denied the ability to work or run a business, it creates economic hardship and emotional strain for Malaysian spouses and their children.

Family Frontiers stands ready to work with the government to ensure that policies concerning non-citizen spouses protect and advance the wellbeing of Malaysian binational families. Removing the statement of prohibition on employment from the LTSVP and eliminating barriers to employment is in the best interest of the child and the wellbeing of the family. Every Malaysian binational family deserves the chance to thrive together, free from policies that trap them in dependency and vulnerability. Empowering non-citizen spouses with the right to work safeguards family unity, secures children's futures, and allows families to contribute fully to the nation's growth.

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