



Social Reality of Employment in Bengkulu Province: Policy Analysis of Programs, Obstacles, and Challenges

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Abstrak

Employment is an activity undertaken by individuals to earn income in order to sustain a decent standard of living. Employment relationships are established through agreements between employers and workers, and such agreements should ensure decent work conditions. However, in reality, there is insufficient government supervision in ensuring the fulfillment of workers' rights in accordance with Law No. 13 of 2003. The distribution of rights for female workers is also not optimally implemented. In addition, workforce skills remain a concern, as many workers only possess primary to junior secondary education. Furthermore, freelance work has become increasingly popular due to its flexibility in time and location.

Therefore, solutions are needed to address employment issues in Bengkulu Province. Data collection in this study was conducted through interviews with the Bengkulu Provincial Manpower Office. Data analysis employed a qualitative approach. The findings indicate that many workers are engaged in seasonal sectors with unstable income. The Bengkulu Provincial Manpower Office has implemented programs such as job fairs, vocational training and education, and occupational health and safety socialization. Generation Z is perceived as less loyal and tends to frequently change jobs, showing a strong preference for freelance work due to its flexibility. Policy development is needed to provide legal protection for workers. Recommended actions include stricter enforcement against companies violating labor rights, particularly those committing violence against female workers, conducting awareness programs in collaboration with the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection and labor protection institutions, and optimizing integrated reporting systems to accelerate the resolution of such cases.

Keywords: Vocational Education, Female Workers, Freelance, Employment

INTRODUCTION

Work is something humans do for a specific purpose, such as to support their lives. This work creates a mutually agreed-upon employment relationship between the employer and the employee. The agreement between the two parties must result in decent work, ensuring the well-being of the employee while performing their work. Therefore, the state plays a key role as organizer and supervisor to ensure that the agreement is implemented in accordance with the regulations. This is stated in the Preamble to the UUD 1945, which states that the state is obligated to ensure the welfare of all citizens. Furthermore, the UUD 1945 guarantees the right of every citizen to employment. (Hermanto et al., 2024). Law Number 13 of 2003 also regulates labor rights and industrial relations systems in accordance with current conditions (Pratami et al., 2023). Protection of labor rights is divided into 3 types, including economic protection, social protection, and technical protection (Fauzi et al., 2022). However, in reality, the fulfillment of rights is based on the agreement between the employer and the employee. Cases such as the lack of social and health insurance, unilateral layoffs without severance pay, and work environments that do not meet K3 standards are common in several regions (Rafifah et al., 2025). A case study conducted at PT Indonesia Bakery Family on the workforce showed several serious violations including failure to comply with work hour regulations and occupational safety and health (K3) aspects (Haida et al., 2024). Therefore, there needs to be more extensive supervision of each company to ensure that the implementation of rights is fulfilled in accordance with applicable regulations.

Fulfilling labor rights is related to improving a region's economy. This is related to labor absorption, which results in increased production of goods and services in that region. Furthermore, this increased production of goods and services also improves worker welfare (Purba & Damanik, 2024). However, it's important to note that this economic growth isn't matched by increased job opportunities. This can occur due to skills disparities in a region's workforce, potentially increasing the potential for unemployment and poverty (Hardyati et al., 2023). This skills gap is caused by the low level of education in a region, resulting in under-absorption of the local workforce. For example, the average education level of workers in Bengkulu Province is elementary school, at 34.49%. Meanwhile, the workforce with a diploma or

university education is only 15.95% (Harianja, 2024). The low level of education among the workforce in Bengkulu Province contributes to the Open Unemployment Rate (TPT) in 2024 of 3.17% (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2024). One of the solutions that exists to solve this problem is to provide skills training through the Job Training Center (BLK). According to Eviyati & Darmi (2024) BLK has successfully provided training tailored to the skills needed in industry, as evidenced by a decrease in the TPT rate from 5.04% to 3.17% from 2023 to 2024. This figure demonstrates that the training provided to the workforce is well-targeted and successfully helps absorb the workforce according to industry needs.

Besides industrial workers, there's one type of job that's currently in high demand: freelance work. Freelancers are part-time workers who work independently and don't have to commit to a long-term company (Indriana, 2021). This type of work is currently popular among Generation Z, the current generation of young people, due to its flexible working hours and independence from a company. This is evidenced by the number of freelance non-agricultural workers in Bengkulu Province in 2023, which reached 49,386 (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2023). These figures demonstrate the significant potential for freelance work in Bengkulu Province. However, these freelancers face a fundamental problem: they lack legal protection. This is due to the lack of written regulations for freelance workers under Law Number 13 of 2003 (Dalimunthe & Fajri, 2023). And also workers in this sector do not understand their rights in the law, so this has the potential to hinder the effective implementation of the regulations (Anisah & Damayanti, 2024). Therefore, it is necessary to develop policies that legally protect freelance workers so that their rights can be properly exercised without any obstacles.

This article discusses labor issues in Bengkulu Province, programs implemented by the Bengkulu Provincial Manpower Office to address labor issues, and innovations introduced by the office to achieve Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) point 8 on Decent Work and Economic Growth. The current trend of freelance work among Generation Z is also discussed in the following article. This allows for an analysis of labor issues and helps resolve labor issues in Bengkulu Province.

METHODE

The approach used in this research is qualitative with MPKKT (Tohardi's Qualitative Policy Research Model), which is intended to make the portrayal of social and political realities in the research more directed, sharp, focused, and in-depth. Tohardi's Qualitative Policy Research Model is implemented in 3 (three) stages: 1) pre-survey stage, 2) inquiry stage (portraying social reality), and 3) policy formulation stage (Tohardi, 2020). This research focuses on digging deeper and analyzing related data and information regarding the dynamics of strengthening the economic sector from the perspective of inclusive, innovative, and sustainable economic growth as a process of pursuing decent work.



Scheme 1. Stages of implementing policy research carried out

Phase 1 of this research was a pre-survey, collecting initial data through print and electronic media regarding decent work and economic growth in Bengkulu Province. Phase 2 determined the location, time, subjects, objects, and research instruments, and obtained data collection permits. This research took place at the Bengkulu Province Manpower and Transmigration Office. Data collection focused on current employment and economic conditions, employment issues in Bengkulu Province, and the programs and solutions offered by the Manpower and Transmigration Office to address these issues. The instrument or "tool" for data collection in this MPKKT research was the researcher herself, acting as the primary instrument. Therefore, the researcher's role in data collection was as the key instrument. This research was conducted from May 2024 to February 2025, from planning, licensing, data collection, to a joint audience with the Ministry of Manpower of the Republic of Indonesia.

The data collection techniques used in this research (portraits of socio-political realities) were: 1). Participatory observation, 2) In-depth interviews with the Head of the Employment Placement and Expansion Agency to obtain data on economic sectors, inclusive, innovative, and sustainable economic growth, and decent work, as well as their linkages to Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) point 8, namely decent work and economic growth. and 3) Documentation, to obtain data on layoff index data, interview evidence, labor mobilization data, program implementation from the Manpower Office, and legal products.

The third stage of this research is policy formulation with expert judgment validation. The discussed policy drafts are then reviewed and assessed by experts. The six experts who contributed as validators: Riko Septiantoko, M.Pd.,

Nuryuana Dwi Wulandari, M.Pd., and Muhammad Harfiansyah Makarim, S.E., M.B.A., were selected based on their involvement as academics and industry players to ensure that policies are grounded in grassroots needs and reduce the gap between concept and action. After the final draft, a joint audience was held with the Ministry of Manpower of the Republic of Indonesia to communicate the recommendations.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Economic Conditions in the Employment Sector

The employment situation in Bengkulu Province presents several challenges that must be addressed to support regional economic development. The majority of Bengkulu's workforce still works in the agricultural sector, which, despite being a key sector, is often dependent on natural factors and lacks continuity throughout the year. This leaves many workers trapped in seasonal jobs with unstable incomes, and limited opportunities for advancement in other sectors.

On the other hand, the industrial and service sectors in Bengkulu are still in their infancy, resulting in insufficient diversity and quality of available jobs. While there is potential for development in the tourism and creative industries sectors, these sectors are not yet capable of absorbing a significant workforce. Many workers in Bengkulu remain in the informal sector, vulnerable to economic uncertainty and a lack of social protection. Therefore, it is crucial to encourage investment and improve infrastructure to create more inclusive and sustainable jobs.

To address these issues, the Bengkulu Provincial Government has launched various skills training and vocational education programs to improve the quality of human resources. This training aims to prepare the workforce to better meet the demands of the evolving job market, particularly in sectors requiring technical expertise. However, to achieve significant progress, collaboration between the government, the private sector, and the community is needed to create more equitable job opportunities and increase workforce competitiveness at the regional and national levels.

In addition to supervision and industrial relations, the Manpower Office is also responsible for job placement and training. For example, the Manpower Office has opened training centers for recent graduates. These centers offer training to prepare graduates for skills such as rupiah calculation and tool technician skills, sewing, and cooking. This was implemented through the Kepahiang Integrated Service Unit (UPTD) Job Training in 2024, providing opportunities for communities in Kepahiang, Rejang Lebong, and Lebong Regencies to participate in free competency-based skills training. This training consists of barista training (coffee brewing) for one class of 16 people over a period of 23 days and continued with skin care training for one class of 16 people over a period of 23 days, electrical installation training for 32 people over a period of 33 days, and batik making training for 16 people over a period of 33 days. This program is one of the ongoing programs every year as a form of commitment of the Bengkulu Province Manpower Office in supporting the needs of potential communities in Bengkulu Province.



Figure 1. Documentation of Job Training Implementation for 80 Residents

In addition to meeting community needs during the pre-employment period through competency-based training, the Manpower Office also facilitates job fairs in collaboration with companies, and conducts coaching and inspections to ensure workers' rights are protected. Fulfillment of these community rights is also regulated in Article 9 of Law No. 13 of 2003, which states, "Every worker has the right to acquire and/or improve and/or develop work competencies in accordance with their talents, interests, and abilities through job training," thus aligning this with established government policies.

The Manpower Office also collaborates with educational and training institutions, such as the National Agency for the Placement and Protection of Indonesian Migrant Workers (BNP2TKI), which urgently needs to align with government policy, Law No. 4 of 2013 concerning procedures for the placement of Indonesian migrant workers abroad, as well as with Japanese language training and educational institutions, to improve the quality of the workforce.

Fulfillment of Workers' Rights

The Manpower Office plays a crucial role in supporting the tourism sector, including supporting companies operating in the tourism sector and the workforce employed there. However, in Bengkulu Province, workers' rights remain largely unfulfilled, particularly in relation to employment norms, social security, and the rights of female workers, especially those working night shifts. This is despite Article 81, paragraph 24 of the Job Creation Law, which stipulates that every worker has the right to a decent living.

Bengkulu Province Employment Program

In general, the policies and programs implemented by provincial manpower offices to support employment and economic growth encompass several aspects. First, there are training programs conducted through training centers, which are open to the public and do not restrict participants based on disability. This training can include courses in mechanical engineering, beauty, and so on, with durations varying from two weeks to several days, depending on the needs.



Figure 2. Entrepreneurship Training Documentation, Source: Instagram of the Bengkulu Province Manpower and Transmigration Office on November 9, 2024

The Department of Manpower also holds a week-long job fair annually, collaborating with companies offering job openings. These events are held in public places to provide the public with access to information about job openings. These job fairs aim to boost economic growth and reduce unemployment.



Figure 3. Documentation of the Job Fair Implementation, Source: Instagram of the Bengkulu Province Manpower and Transmigration Office on September 12, 2024

In addition, the Manpower Office conducts outreach programs related to occupational safety and health. This program aims to ensure workers' productivity and well-being. The Manpower Office also collaborates with Technical Implementation Units (UPT) to provide training through training centers. Professionals are sometimes involved in this training to ensure participants acquire skills relevant to the workplace.



Figure 4. Documentation of the Implementation of K3 Training, Source: Instagram of the Bengkulu Province Manpower and Transmigration Office on December 12, 2024

Freelancers are well-known, but not many are formally registered. Typically, these freelancers work in fields such as private tutoring or copywriting and are often not tied to a single company, but rather work on a project-based basis. Until now, many freelance workers have not been officially registered due to the temporary nature of their work and the lack of formal employment agreements.

Conditions of Gen-Z Workers

A common complaint from companies today concerns the Gen Z workforce, who are perceived as prone to complaining and frequently changing jobs. Companies find it difficult to register for social security for workers who have only worked for a short period, such as one month. These complaints are frequently addressed, and efforts are being made to address them by providing guidance to companies to continue registering for social security, even for short periods. The Manpower Office also attempts to facilitate and resolve issues arising between workers and companies by acting as a mediator. In addressing these complaints, companies are expected to continue registering for social security, even for short periods of employment, to ensure workers' rights are protected. The Manpower Office continues to monitor and provide guidance to ensure a smooth working relationship between workers and companies.

Regarding the provision of social security for workers, this is regulated in the BPJS Ketenagakerjaan (Employment Social Security) policy. The BPJS Ketenagakerjaan program is a government initiative aimed at providing social protection for the community, particularly workers, by providing coverage for the risks of workplace accidents and death. This program has provided benefits to the community, including unlimited funding for the medical treatment of workers who suffer workplace accidents and compensation for the heirs of deceased workers (BPJS Ketenagakerjaan, 2023). Based on Bengkulu Mayoral Regulation Number 16 of 2024 concerning the Implementation of the Employment Social Security Program, this policy aims to protect all workers in the Bengkulu City area. This program includes work accident insurance (JKK), death insurance (JKM), old-age security (JHT), pension insurance (JP), and unemployment insurance (JKP).

This program is mandatory for all employers and workers, including wage earners, non-wage earners, construction workers, Indonesian migrant workers, and religious social workers. The Regional Government is responsible for ensuring the proper implementation of this social protection through supervision, guidance, and budget support from the Regional Budget (APBD). Employers who fail to comply with this obligation will be subject to administrative sanctions, such as written warnings, fines, or restrictions on access to certain public services, such as business permits or project tenders.

In a digital era dominated by technology and social media, Generation Z is growing up as a generation that adapts to technological developments. This is also inseparable from Gen Z's presence in the workplace. Generation Z's characteristics tend to rely on technology to increase efficiency and productivity. Generation Z prefers flexibility in work, both in terms of time and place, which allows them to work creatively according to personal preferences (Atieq, 2021).

However, loyalty to their company is often low. They tend to change jobs in search of new experiences or better opportunities. However, this poses a challenge for companies in maintaining a stable human resources within the company. According to a survey from Upwork, more than half of Gen Z workers have tried freelancing, and 53% of them make it their primary job. Interestingly, more than half of Gen Z freelancers make freelancing their primary career, working at least 40 hours per week. Most of them have even done it for more than two years (Sari & Ningsih, 2025). On the other hand, BPS data shows that the majority of the newly graduated workforce (aged 15-24) is absorbed in the informal sector. As of February 2024, there were 18.4 million workers aged 15-24 in Indonesia. Of these, 8.3 million, or 45.1 percent, worked in the informal sector (BPS, 2024).

One of the main reasons Generation Z chooses to freelance is the flexibility it offers, both in terms of working hours and location. Gen Z tends to prioritize work-life balance and prefers to work independently without formal ties to a company. Generation Z considers freelancing a career choice to address personal challenges, such as seeking financial independence. Furthermore, the development of digital platforms has made freelance work easier to access, making this

option increasingly popular among young people, especially in urban areas like Greater Jakarta (Jabodetabek) (Putri & Arifianto, 2024).

This phenomenon differs from the commonly held view that Gen Z prefers informal work to pursue flexible working hours and a work-life balance. While this isn't entirely wrong, the current situation facing Gen Z workers is more complex than that of previous generations at the same stage. Another perspective can be analyzed from the phenomenon of many Gen Z workers choosing to freelance, one of which is the lack of labor protection for freelance workers.

To address this issue, Triyono, a Labor Researcher at the Population Research Center of the National Research and Innovation Agency (BRIN), recommends that the government immediately address the increasing trend of informalization among Gen Z workers. First, by encouraging more creation of decent formal jobs for young people. Second, by preparing the capacity and skills of young workers so they can compete globally and be absorbed in the formal sector. Third, by promoting job security and welfare for young informal workers, considering that the flexible work trend will become increasingly prominent in the future. Currently, the rights of informal workers are often overlooked due to the lack of a legal framework governing them (Theodora, 2024).

CONCLUSION

The employment situation in Bengkulu Province faces several challenges that must be addressed, including the large number of seasonal workers, as the primary sector is currently agriculture. This sector still has unstable incomes. Meanwhile, the industrial and service sectors are still under development. Therefore, Bengkulu Province has launched vocational training and education programs to improve the quality of human resources. Furthermore, extensive monitoring of the fulfillment of workers' rights is necessary to ensure optimal distribution of these rights. The Bengkulu Provincial Manpower Office also holds a one-week Job Fair program annually in collaboration with job-seeking companies. This helps prospective workers obtain job information and employers find the right candidates. Furthermore, the Bengkulu Provincial Manpower Office conducts outreach on occupational health and safety to reduce the potential for workplace accidents in each company. Generation Z, as the younger generation today, is considered less loyal to a job and frequently changes jobs. This generation is attracted to freelance work because it offers flexibility in working hours and location, thus enhancing personal creativity. Therefore, it is necessary to develop policies that provide a legal framework for these freelance workers so they can work without worry.

Based on the results of this study, recommendations for the Ministry of Manpower of the Republic of Indonesia include taking firm action against companies that violate and commit acts of violence against female workers, conducting outreach to companies regarding the protection of female workers in collaboration with the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection agencies, and optimizing and expediting the resolution of acts of violence against female workers through an integrated reporting system.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The author expresses his deepest appreciation and gratitude to the Bengkulu Province Manpower and Transmigration Office for their support, cooperation, and contributions throughout this research process. He also extends his gratitude to all the informants and relevant parties who generously shared their time, provided valuable data, and information to support this research.

Furthermore, he extends his gratitude to all those who provided support, both directly and indirectly, enabling the successful completion of this research and its scientific contribution to employment studies.

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