

# Unemployment Dynamics in the Indonesian Economy

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## Abstract

This study examines the dynamics of unemployment in Indonesia by addressing the paradox whereby the Open Unemployment Rate (OUR) declines while the absolute number of unemployed individuals continues to increase, and by analysing its implications for social inequality. Adopting a qualitative phenomenological design, the study explores the lived experiences of unemployed individuals to capture the multidimensional consequences of unemployment in psychological, social, and economic terms. Primary data were obtained through in-depth interviews, field observations, and documentation, while secondary data were drawn from official sources, including the National Labor Force Survey (Sakernas) published by BPS, layoff statistics from the Ministry of Manpower, and relevant scholarly literature. The findings indicate that although the OUR fell to 4.76% in February 2025, the absolute number of unemployed rose to 7.28 million, signalling persistent structural pressures within the labour market driven by layoffs and labour force expansion. Drawing on Max Weber's theory of social stratification, the study finds that unemployment constrains not only economic opportunities, but also social status and access to power. These conditions deepen inequalities in education, healthcare, and economic participation, while also reinforcing stigma, stress, and social exclusion. The study advocates the use of dual unemployment indicators and calls for more inclusive labour policies that integrate vocational training, targeted social assistance, and psychosocial support.

## INTRODUCTION

Unemployment remains a critical issue in Indonesia because its consequences extend beyond labor market performance to broader problems of inequality, vulnerability, and social exclusion. In developing economies, labor market conditions are often assessed through aggregate indicators such as the Open Unemployment Rate (OUR). However, percentage-based indicators do not always capture the full social reality of unemployment, particularly when statistical improvement coexists with persistent labor-market insecurity. Recent studies show that unemployment should be understood not merely as a macroeconomic category, but as a structural condition with enduring consequences for material well-being, subjective social status, and social integration (Li et al., 2025; Pohlan, 2024).

According to Badan Pusat Statistik (2025), Indonesia's labor force reached 153.05 million people in February 2025, an increase of 3.67 million compared to February 2024. During the same period, 145.77 million people were employed, while 7.28 million were unemployed. At the aggregate level, the Open Unemployment Rate declined to 4.76%. These figures suggest an apparent improvement in labor market performance. Nevertheless, they also reveal a paradox: although the OUR declined, the absolute number of unemployed individuals remained high. This indicates that a falling unemployment rate does not necessarily reflect a real reduction in unemployment, but may instead result from labor force growth that outpaces employment creation (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2025).

This paradox is particularly important because unemployment has multidimensional consequences. Pohlan (2024) shows that unemployment has persistent effects on social exclusion, including lower disposable income, reduced subjective social status, and weaker social integration. Likewise, Li et al. (2025) find that unemployment is closely associated with psychological distress, financial strain, and loneliness, indicating that the consequences of joblessness extend beyond income loss alone. In the Indonesian context, Ariansyah et al. (2024)

show that labor market outcomes are strongly shaped by educational pathways, suggesting that unequal school-to-work transitions may intensify labor-market vulnerability among different social groups.

From a sociological perspective, these conditions can be interpreted through a contemporary Weberian framework of social stratification. Recent interpretations of Weber emphasize that inequality is produced through the interaction of class, status, and power, making unemployment relevant not only to economic opportunity but also to social recognition and access to influence (Scott, 2024). In this sense, rising unemployment may contribute to the reproduction of social inequality by restricting access to education, healthcare, social networks, and upward mobility. Therefore, understanding unemployment in Indonesia solely through the Open Unemployment Rate is inadequate. A more comprehensive approach is needed to capture the paradox of declining open unemployment alongside persistently high absolute unemployment and its implications for inequality.

Based on this background, the present study examines the dynamics of unemployment in Indonesia by focusing on the paradox of a declining Open Unemployment Rate alongside a persistently high absolute number of unemployed individuals and by analyzing its implications for social inequality. By combining official labor-market statistics with recent empirical research on social exclusion, psychological distress, and stratification, this study seeks to provide a more comprehensive understanding of unemployment as both an economic and a social problem.

## METHODS

**Research design and data sources.** This study employed a qualitative phenomenological design to examine how unemployment is experienced and interpreted by affected individuals in Indonesia. A phenomenological approach was selected because the study seeks to understand unemployment not only as a statistical category but also as a lived social condition shaped by psychological, economic, and social meanings. In line with the abstract, the study combined primary data from unemployed individuals with secondary data from official and scholarly sources. The secondary materials included the February 2025 National Labour Force Survey (Sakernas) published by Statistics Indonesia and official layoff statistics issued through the Ministry of Manpower's data portal, as well as relevant recent academic literature on unemployment, social exclusion, and lived experience (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2025; de Boer & Zeiler, 2024; Kementerian Ketenagakerjaan Republik Indonesia, 2025; Robinson & Williams, 2024).

**Data collection.** Primary data were collected through in-depth interviews, field observation, and documentation, consistent with the procedures outlined in the abstract. Participants were selected purposively to capture variation in age, educational background, residential context, and unemployment experience, including those affected by layoffs and limited access to work opportunities. In-depth interviews served as the main technique for eliciting participants' subjective accounts of economic pressure, social stigma, psychological strain, and coping strategies. Field observations were conducted to situate these experiences in their everyday social contexts, while documentation was used to compile supporting evidence from official reports, training-related materials, and labor-market records. This combination enabled the study to connect personal narratives with broader structural labor-market dynamics (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2025; Robinson & Williams, 2024).

**Data analysis and trustworthiness.** The data were analyzed iteratively through coding, thematic condensation, and interpretive comparison across interviews, observations, and documents to identify recurring meanings and patterns related to unemployment and inequality. The analysis remained grounded in a phenomenological logic by prioritizing participants' lived

experiences while interpreting those experiences within their broader social context. To enhance trustworthiness, the study applied source and technique triangulation, comparing evidence from interviews, observations, documentation, and secondary datasets. Credibility was further strengthened through careful documentation of analytic decisions and transparent alignment between empirical material and interpretation, which are widely recognized as key strategies for qualitative rigor (Ahmed, 2024; de Boer & Zeiler, 2024)

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Results

#### Unveiling the Absolute Impact of Unemployment on Social Inequality

The increase in the absolute number of unemployed individuals, despite the declining proportion of the Open Unemployment Rate (OUR), has serious implications for the dynamics of social inequality in Indonesia. The rising number of jobless individuals particularly from vulnerable groups has led to a more unequal distribution of income. Without a stable source of income, households that were once near the poverty line may fall further below it, while those with access to stable employment improve their socio-economic position. This growing disparity is reflected not only in income differences but also in access to basic necessities such as food, housing, and public services (Sagala et al., 2022).

An increase in absolute unemployment means more individuals and families are trapped in a cycle of limited access to education and healthcare. Children from low-income families are more likely to reduce study hours or drop out of school to support household income. Similarly, access to healthcare services such as immunizations, regular check-ups, or chronic disease treatment becomes restricted. These factors reinforce the cycle of poverty and elevate the risk of intergenerational inequality, where children from unemployed households experience lower health and social outcomes than previous generations.

Moreover, absolute unemployment has the potential to induce widespread psychological and social pressure. Individuals who lose their jobs often experience stress, anxiety, and a sense of helplessness, which, if unaddressed, can result in social stigma and internalized inferiority. These mental burdens affect not only the unemployed themselves but also their families and social environments, weakening their social networks and limiting participation in local social and economic activities. This, in turn, widens the divide between those with access to opportunity and those without.

Another key dimension is the inequality of economic opportunity. When job opportunities are unevenly distributed, marginalized groups such as those in underdeveloped areas, women, and individuals with low education levels are most severely affected. A rise in absolute unemployment exacerbates the gap between urban areas with better access to labor markets and rural areas with limited economic investment. Likewise, women and individuals with limited skills are less likely to compete for the remaining employment opportunities, resulting in an entrenched pattern of unemployment segmented by gender, location, and competencies.

Measuring the absolute number of unemployed individuals becomes crucial as a socio-economic indicator. Absolute data enables policymakers to identify regions and groups most in need of targeted intervention. For instance, social assistance programs and vocational training can be focused on areas experiencing the highest increase in unemployment. Similarly, educational interventions such as scholarships for poor children can help break the cycle of poverty. Understanding the absolute impact of unemployment thus forms a legitimate foundation for inclusive policymaking that integrates economic, educational, health, and psychosocial dimensions in addressing real-world social inequality (BPS Central Java Province, 2022).

**Table 1. Absolute Unemployment Impact on Social Inequality**

Aspect	Problem Description	Indicators/Consequences	Policy Recommendations
Income Distribution	Rising absolute unemployment	Income gap increases; vulnerable families struggle to	Data-based direct cash assistance (BLT);

Aspect	Problem Description	Indicators/Consequences	Policy Recommendations
	intensifies income inequality between vulnerable and established households.	meet basic needs (food, housing, utilities).	targeted subsidies for at-risk groups.
<b>Access to Education &amp; Health</b>	High unemployment leads to school dropouts and reduced healthcare access for children of unemployed families.	Declining school attendance, higher stunting rates, lower routine immunization and chronic care access.	Scholarships and educational support for poor families; mobile health services in vulnerable areas.
<b>Psychological &amp; Social Pressure</b>	Unemployed individuals experience stress, anxiety, stigma, and community isolation.	Rising reports of mental health issues; declining participation in community/economic activities.	Psychosocial support services; community-based support groups; reintegration programs.
<b>Economic Opportunity Inequality</b>	Marginalized groups (e.g., women, rural residents, low-educated individuals) face unequal labor market competition.	High unemployment among women, secondary school graduates, and rural populations; employment access gap.	Localized vocational training; investment incentives for underdeveloped areas; inclusive entrepreneurship programs.
<b>Socio-Economic Indicators</b>	Absolute unemployment figures are crucial for identifying the most affected areas and populations.	District-level unemployment spikes; vulnerable groups needing health, education, and training interventions.	Budget prioritization for affected regions; data-driven policy; responsive and regular evaluation.
<b>Inclusive Policy Consistency</b>	Interventions must be holistic, integrating economic, education, health, and psychosocial sectors.	Fragmented program outcomes; lack of intersectoral coordination reducing policy effectiveness.	Cross-sector coordination forums; indicator-based monitoring; integrated program impact evaluations.

Source: Researcher's Field Observation (2025)

The rise in absolute unemployment has deepened income disparities between well-off and vulnerable families. Without stable income, vulnerable households struggle to meet essential daily needs, such as food, housing, and utilities. Therefore, interventions like data-driven cash transfers

and targeted subsidies are essential, but only effective when implemented with precision to reduce income inequality efficiently.

Unemployment directly affects access to education and healthcare, especially for children from disadvantaged families. School dropouts become more frequent when children are compelled to support household income, and access to immunizations and treatment for chronic illnesses declines significantly. This exacerbates intergenerational poverty cycles. Solutions such as scholarship programs and mobile healthcare services in high-risk areas are vital to safeguarding the quality of human capital (Susanto et al., 2018).

Beyond economic and educational effects, unemployment causes significant psychological and social stress. Feelings of stress, anxiety, social stigma, and isolation are common among the unemployed. These experiences affect not only individuals but their broader social networks, leading to reduced community participation. Psychosocial support services, community support groups, and social reintegration programs are essential to facilitate re-engagement in local social and economic activities.

The inequality of economic opportunity highlights how certain groups particularly women, residents of underdeveloped areas, and individuals with lower education suffer disproportionately from unemployment. The high incidence of joblessness among these groups points to systemic segmentation in labor market access. Localized vocational training and targeted investment incentives can help bridge this divide and promote inclusive job creation (Purba et al., 2022).

Absolute unemployment figures are critical for developing responsive and targeted socio-economic policies. These data help identify the most affected regions and populations, enabling the prioritization of budgets and interventions. However, their effectiveness depends on real-time intersectoral coordination, periodic monitoring, and evaluation. Consistency in data-driven policy and cross-sectoral synergy is key to designing a holistic and sustainable strategy to reduce social ineq.

### **The Paradox of Declining Open Unemployment Rate (OUR) vs. Increasing Absolute Unemployment**

The phenomenon in which the Open Unemployment Rate (OUR) decreases while the absolute number of unemployed individuals increases presents a crucial paradox in labor market analysis. Statistically, the OUR declines because it is calculated as the ratio of unemployed individuals to the total labor force. When the labor force grows substantially by millions, for example the unemployment ratio may decrease even if the number of unemployed individuals rises. As such, the OUR becomes an insufficiently sensitive indicator of the increasing oligonomic burden in society (Pasuria & Triwahyuningtyas, 2022).

This discrepancy demonstrates that a declining OUR does not necessarily reflect improvements in labor market conditions. It is possible that individuals who were previously outside the labor force now enter it, only to fall into the category of underemployed or partially unemployed. This explains why, despite optimistic percentages, ground realities often reveal heightened socio-economic burdens. Therefore, it is essential to interpret both indicators contextually, rather than treating them as interchangeable.

This paradox has significant implications for public policy planning and resource allocation. If policymakers rely solely on a declining OUR, it could result in reduced investment in employment-related programs, leaving vulnerable groups underprotected especially in regions experiencing high absolute unemployment. This situation underscores the need for incorporating absolute unemployment data alongside percentage indicators, ensuring that programs such as job training, economic support, or local stimulus are accurately targeted (Berliana Feby Yanti et al., 2023).

Labor market experts advocate for the use of composite indicators monitoring the OUR alongside absolute unemployment figures and underemployment rates. This dual-indicator approach provides a more nuanced depiction of labor market dynamics, covering both the quantity and quality of labor absorption. Employment policies should therefore move beyond celebrating declining percentages and instead respond to the actual scale of joblessness.

This paradox reinforces the necessity of a deep, critical understanding of employment statistics as the foundation for equitable and inclusive socio-economic strategies. Policymakers must utilize data holistically to design interventions that not only reduce statistical percentages but also address the lived realities of those affected. In this way, employment development can truly serve all sectors of society, leaving no one behind (Setyastanto et al., 2024).

**Table 2. The Paradox of Declining OUR vs. Rising Absolute Unemployment**

<b>Declining OUR</b>	<b>Increasing Absolute Unemployment</b>	<b>Policy Implications</b>
Percentage ratio to total labor force	Absolute number of unemployed individuals	Composite indicators are needed for more accurate targeting
May decline even as labor force grows rapidly	May rise even as percentage decreases	Policy must consider absolute figures, not just percentages
Offers a general overview but may obscure spikes in unemployment	Reveals real socio-economic burdens	Intervention planning should be based on affected populations, not misleading percentages
Declining OUR may lead to reduced social program allocations	Unaddressed if policy focuses solely on ratios	A multi-indicator approach OUR absolute figures underemployment is essential for holistic interventions
Use dual indicators OUR and absolute unemployment	Consider underemployment and household burden	Employment policy must be inclusive, data-driven, and responsive to prevent premature withdrawal of support

The use of percentage-based indicators such as OUR often presents an oversimplified picture of labor market conditions. Since the OUR is calculated as a ratio between unemployed individuals and the total labor force, it may decrease even when the actual number of unemployed persons increases especially when the labor force expands rapidly. This demonstrates that percentage-based metrics alone are insufficient to understand the true economic burden experienced by society.

The table above further illustrates how absolute unemployment figures provide a more concrete and human-centered perspective. These figures directly reflect individuals who have lost jobs and now face the consequences of income loss, including difficulties in meeting basic needs. Overreliance on the OUR can obscure these realities, as families of the unemployed continue to suffer economically despite seemingly improved percentages.

This insight becomes especially important in the formulation of public policy. The table emphasizes that government intervention strategies must prioritize absolute unemployment data. If policies are driven solely by a declining OUR, crucial social programs such as job training, direct cash transfers, and subsidies might be scaled back, even as the number of affected families remains high. From a planning perspective, absolute figures offer a more accurate foundation for identifying priority regions and vulnerable groups (Setyorini et al., 2019).

There is a tangible risk when policy relies on a single metric. As the table shows, dependence on the OUR alone can lead to misallocation of resources and failure to address actual social burdens. Conversely, a rise in absolute unemployment, if ignored due to a falling OUR, may leave many individuals without protection or economic recovery opportunities. Therefore, a multi-indicator approach is essential to ensure broad-based and inclusive intervention strategies.

Labor experts recommend concrete steps, including the development of composite indicators. By using absolute unemployment data, OUR, and underemployment rates together, policymakers

can gain a more comprehensive picture of labor market absorption quality. This integrated view is vital to ensure that interventions move beyond statistical satisfaction and address real-life challenges such as family burdens, hidden underemployment, and psychological stress. Future employment policy must be inclusive, responsive, and based on comprehensive data. A policymaking approach that integrates multiple indicators will help prevent premature or inadequate interventions. By designing strategies that balance statistical indicators with absolute realities, economic interventions can more effectively reduce social burdens and steer labor market diversity toward greater equity. uality driven by unemployment.

### Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that unemployment in Indonesia cannot be adequately interpreted through the Open Unemployment Rate (OUR) alone. Although the OUR declined to 4.76% in February 2025, the absolute number of unemployed individuals increased to 7.28 million, indicating that labor force growth outpaced employment absorption (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2025). This finding is significant because it challenges the conventional assumption that a declining unemployment rate necessarily reflects an improving labor-market condition. Instead, the evidence suggests that percentage-based indicators may conceal structural pressures in the labor market, particularly when employment creation is insufficient to accommodate a rapidly expanding labor force. In this sense, the study confirms that labor-market assessment based solely on aggregate rates risks producing an incomplete reading of employment realities and their broader social implications.

This paradox becomes more substantive when examined through the lived experiences of unemployed individuals. The qualitative findings reveal that unemployment is experienced not merely as a temporary loss of income, but as a multidimensional condition involving economic insecurity, social stigma, psychological distress, and weakening social attachment. These findings are consistent with Pohlan (2024), who argues that unemployment produces long-term effects on social exclusion through declining income, reduced social status, and weakened integration. They also resonate with Li et al. (2025), who show that unemployment is closely associated with financial strain, loneliness, and psychological distress. In the Indonesian context, therefore, rising absolute unemployment should not be interpreted as a neutral statistical outcome, but rather as a mechanism through which inequality is reproduced in everyday life. The burden of unemployment extends beyond labor-market exclusion to the erosion of dignity, confidence, and social participation, particularly among vulnerable groups with limited educational and economic resources.

From a Weberian perspective, these findings can be interpreted through the interconnected dimensions of class, status, and party. As recent Weberian scholarship suggests, stratification operates not only through differential access to economic resources, but also through social honour and access to influence (Møen, 2025). In this study, unemployment weakens class position by narrowing life chances and reducing access to stable income; it undermines status by exposing individuals to stigma, shame, and declining recognition within their communities; and it diminishes party by limiting voice, representation, and effective participation in institutional processes. This interpretation extends prior Indonesian studies that have largely focused on macroeconomic determinants or policy instruments. For instance, Agustina et al. (2023) emphasize structural economic determinants of unemployment, while Yoana et al. (2024) highlight the role of vocational education in reducing unemployment risk. Although valuable, these studies do not fully explain how rising absolute unemployment reshapes social hierarchy and deepens multidimensional inequality. The present study therefore contributes to the literature by integrating official labor-market indicators with a Weberian stratification framework to show that unemployment is simultaneously an economic, social, and political condition.

The contribution of this study lies in moving beyond descriptive labor statistics and macroeconomic correlation by demonstrating that the rise in absolute unemployment has broader consequences for inequality and social cohesion. This perspective has important policy

implications. First, employment policy should not rely solely on the OUR as a headline indicator, but should also incorporate absolute unemployment figures to capture the real scale of labor-market exclusion. Second, policy interventions should extend beyond job creation to include measures that address the social and psychological consequences of unemployment, such as targeted vocational training, data-driven cash assistance, and psychosocial support for displaced workers. Third, because unemployment is also linked to weakened participation and representation, labor policy should be designed within a broader inclusion framework that strengthens access to education, skills, and institutional support. Accordingly, this study argues that a socially responsive employment policy must address not only labor absorption, but also the restoration of life chances, social recognition, and agency among unemployed individuals.

## CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the supply chain of PT. Mushiro Jaya Group operates through an integrated system linking baglog production, partner-based cultivation, harvest collection, sorting, packaging, and distribution to business consumers. The transaction mechanism is differentiated by actor: partnerships with cultivators apply a cash on delivery system, while transactions with business consumers are conducted through a pre-order scheme with weekly payment arrangements. The supply chain is further supported by the exchange of key information regarding market demand, product availability, and price agreements, which facilitates coordination among supply chain actors. The findings indicate that the overall supply chain performance of PT. Mushiro Jaya Group has reached an excellent category in serving both producers and business consumers. Nevertheless, the analysis also reveals that order fulfillment in Channel 2 has not yet achieved a superior level. This suggests that, despite strong overall performance, the company still faces operational constraints in meeting business consumer orders consistently and efficiently. Therefore, improving order fulfillment should become a strategic priority to strengthen responsiveness, enhance reliability, and support the long-term competitiveness of the company's oyster mushroom supply chain.

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