
Gig Workers and Social Protection in Indonesia: Ideality, Reality, and HRM Implications

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Abstract

The gig work sector has been rapidly growing and has transformed Indonesian labour markets, enabling millions of workers in ride-hailing, delivery, e-commerce services, and online freelancing. Although they contribute significantly to the national economy and provide flexibility, these workers often lack adequate legal labour rights and access to social security, raising urgent concerns around fairness, protection, and long-term work sustainability. While both the International Labour Organization's decent work agenda and Indonesia's labour laws emphasise the ideals of safe working conditions, fair pay, and social dialogue, the everyday reality for gig workers is shaped by ambiguous employment status, precarity, and the absence of effective protection schemes. This paper conducts a systematic literature review to identify key challenges, persistent gaps, and implications for Human Resource Management (HRM) in addressing the social protection of gig workers in Indonesia. Using a systematic literature review of current literature, the study analyses recurring themes including legal and regulatory ambiguities in worker classification, algorithmic management practices that intensify control and undermine autonomy, unstable incomes and extended working hours that compromise work-life balance, and the absence of effective mechanisms for worker representation and collective voice. By applying an HRM perspective, the study underscores the importance of embedding gig work within broader debates on sustainable HRM, fair reward systems, and participatory approaches that recognise worker voice and dignity. The findings contribute to academic knowledge by bridging legal, sociological, and HRM literatures, while also offering practical policy insights to strengthen inclusive social protection frameworks and promote decent work in Indonesia's gig economy.

Keywords: gig work, social protection, human resources management, Indonesia

1. Introduction

In recent years, digital transformation has fueled the rise and rapid expansion of gig economy. The gig economy covers the short term, task-based, and flexible work arrangements that are often mediated through digital labour platform (ILO, 2021; Tan et al., 2021). While gig work can occur through direct informal freelancing traditionally, nowadays, digital platforms have become a norm, enabling on-demand task allocation and algorithmic management (Gandini, 2019). In Indonesia, the emergence of gig work trend started in 2015, together with the rise of online ride-hailing platforms, such as Gojek

and Grab, the growing use of e-commerce platforms, such as Shopee, Tokopedia, and Bukalapak, as well as the remote work trend utilizing online platform, such as Upwork (Permana et al., 2022). Based on Badan Pusat Statistik (BPS, 2025), 57.8% of Indonesia's workforce or 84.7 million are part of informal workers. However, the labour data from BPS has no distinct classification for gig workers yet, but it is reasonable that substantial proportion of the workforce engage in gig work.

Despite its importance in Indonesia's workforce, gig economy remains in grey zone. Gig workers typically categorized as "mitra or partners" instead of employees, which creates the major legal gap and exempts the employers from their statutory obligation, such as minimum wage, working hour, BPJS Ketenagakerjaan and BPJS Kesehatan (social and health security) contributions (Hakim, 2025, Stevania & Hoesin, 2024). Wibowo & Susanto (2025) argued that current Indonesia's labour law fails to accommodate this new type of employment. Globally, the International Labour Organization (2021) observes that the gig economy across developing countries offers lack of protection, weak regulatory governance, and precarious employment conditions. In Indonesia, in the context of recent gig economy, the misalignment between technological innovation and legal adaptation impacting the vulnerability of the worker, eroding the principles of decent work.

The growing of gig economy in Indonesia exposes the gap between ideality, supported by ILO's Decent Work Agenda and the Decent Work Country Programme (DWCP) Indonesia 2020–2025, and the reality of gig workers facing the algorithmic management and labour precarity. In ideality, according DCWP (ILO, 2020), Indonesia's decent work agenda priorities include effective social dialogue that promotes sustainable business and workers' welfare, job creation and youth employment, and enhancing protection for vulnerable groups of workers, especially around social security and protection for all workers, including gig workers. However, in reality, these digital platforms utilize algorithmic management that governs the gig workers through ratings, incentives, and sanctions, offering the myth of flexibility, leading to unstable working hours, income, and health issues (Novianto, 2024; Wulansari et al., 2024).

Furthermore, the gap between ideality and reality in the Indonesian's gig economy have received scholars' attention. Most literature reviews anchored in labour law, regulatory reform, with limited Human Resources Management (HRM) perspective, such as rewards system, performance, motivation. To address this gap, this paper aims to systematically review the literature on gig workers in Indonesia through the lens of HRM, on how HRM can have a role in narrowing the gap between ideality and reality.

2. Research method

This study adopts a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach to synthesise scholarly and policy-based evidence on the social protection of gig workers in Indonesia. Following the methodological principles proposed by Tranfield et al. (2003), the review process was conducted systematically and transparently to minimise researcher bias and enhance analytical rigour. As shown in Figure 1, the review process comprised three main stages: planning the review, conducting the review, and reporting and dissemination. This structured approach ensured transparency,

reproducibility, and conceptual rigour in synthesising the state of research on gig work and social protection in Indonesia.

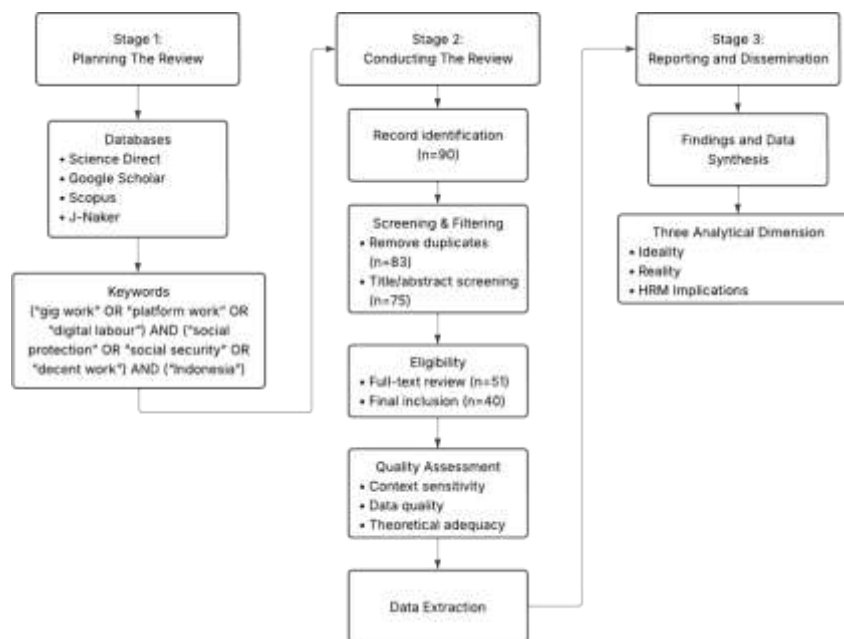


Figure 12. Research Flow Chart

In the first stage, Planning the Review, the study established its rationale and research scope by identifying fragmented evidence regarding gig work, platform labour, and social protection frameworks in Indonesia. Following the logic of Poulouse et al. (2024), who emphasized the need for a clearly articulated research question and predefined inclusion/exclusion criteria, the present study formulated its guiding question: “How has existing literature conceptualised the intersection of gig work and social protection in the Indonesian context, and what gaps remain?” A review protocol was developed based on the PRISMA guidelines (Moher et al., 2009) to ensure systematic selection and documentation. The database search strategy included ScienceDirect, Scopus, Google Scholar, and J-Naker (the Indonesian Ministry of Manpower’s open journal platform). Boolean keywords such as “gig work,” “platform work,” “digital labour,” “social protection,” “social security,” and “decent work,” combined with “Indonesia,” were used to capture studies relevant to the national context. The time frame was limited to 2014–2024, aligning with the decade during which gig economy platforms significantly expanded in Southeast Asia.

The second stage, Conducting the Review, involved systematic screening and evaluation. This review employed a multi-step filtering approach. The initial search identified $n = 90$ records, which were subjected to duplicate removal, title/abstract screening, and full-text eligibility assessment. After applying inclusion criteria related to conceptual relevance, empirical grounding, and contextual focus, $n = 40$ studies were retained for analysis. A quality assessment procedure was then undertaken, focusing on three main aspects: (1) context sensitivity, assessing whether the study appropriately situated gig work within Indonesia’s socio-economic and policy environment; (2) data quality, evaluating methodological robustness; and (3) theoretical adequacy, examining whether the study

contributed to HRM, labour policy, or social protection theory. To facilitate systematic comparison, a data extraction matrix was developed in Excel, capturing information such as author, year, methodology, findings, thematic category, and identified gaps.

The final stage, Reporting and Dissemination, focused on synthesising and organising the extracted data into coherent analytical categories. Consistent with the SLR process, this stage served as a bridge to the subsequent Findings and Discussion section, where results are presented through three analytical dimensions reflecting the structural, institutional, and HRM perspectives of social protection in Indonesia's gig economy.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Ideality: The Normative Vision of Social Protection

In the Indonesian context, the concept of “ideality” in social protection for workers must be understood through the lens of the International Labour Organization (ILO) Decent Work agenda, which defines decent work as productive employment that provides fair income, security in the workplace, social protection for workers and their families, and freedom of voice and representation (ILO, 2013; ILO, 2021; ILO, 2024). The ILO's framework situates social protection as one of four interdependent pillars: employment creation, rights at work, social protection, and social dialogue, that together constitute the foundation of equitable and inclusive labour markets (ILO, 2013). Within this normative vision, all forms of work, including platform-based labour, should be covered by comprehensive protection systems guaranteeing equality of treatment and fair conditions regardless of contractual form.

Indonesia's legal and policy architecture broadly reflects these ideals. The Manpower Law (Undang-Undang No. 13 Tahun 2003) enshrines every citizen's right to work and earn a decent living (Republic of Indonesia, 2003), while the BPJS Law (Undang-Undang No. 24 Tahun 2011) establishes universal social-insurance coverage across health, occupational, and pension schemes (Republic of Indonesia, 2011). More recently, labour-market reforms through the Job Creation Law (Undang-Undang No. 11 Tahun 2020), later amended by Undang-Undang No. 6 Tahun 2023, aim to streamline regulations and promote formalisation across employment sectors. Complementary initiatives such as the Social Protection Transformation Roadmap 2025, coordinated by Bappenas and Kemnaker, outline Indonesia's strategic vision for achieving universal and integrated protection, including for non-standard and digital workers, by the mid-decade (Ministry of National Development Planning [Bappenas], 2023). Collectively, these frameworks define the “ideality” of protection as an inclusive, portable, and adaptive system capable of responding to structural labour-market shifts.

At the policy level, the Decent Work Country Programme (DWCP) 2020–2025 reinforces this vision by identifying three national priorities: (1) inclusive employment opportunities, (2) enhanced labour governance and compliance, and (3) expanded social-protection coverage for vulnerable groups, including informal and platform-based workers (ILO, 2020). Meanwhile, the ILO's World Employment and Social Outlook (WESO) 2021 report stresses that digital labour platforms can positively contribute to employment only when accompanied by universal protection, fair pay, and

rights-based governance (ILO, 2021). It advocates for adaptive policies that ensure benefits are transferable and that platforms uphold decent-work standards through transparent algorithms and equitable remuneration systems.

From a theoretical standpoint, this ideal framework resonates with sustainable human resources management (SHRM) principles, which emphasise the integration of economic performance, social equity, and employee wellbeing (Ehnert et al., 2016). Governments, platform firms, and HR professionals thus share ethical stewardship in ensuring that technological innovation enhances, rather than erodes, decent-work principles. By articulating this normative “ideality,” the paper establishes a benchmark for analysing the subsequent Reality and HRM Implications sections, which explore how Indonesia’s current labour conditions diverge from and can move closer to these ideals.

3.2. Reality: Gaps, Precarity, and Institutional Barriers

In the Indonesian context, the concept of “ideality” in social protection for workers must be understood through the lens of the International Labour Organization (ILO) Decent Work agenda, which defines decent work as productive employment that provides fair income, security in the workplace, social protection for workers and their families, and freedom of voice and representation (ILO, 2013; ILO, 2021; ILO, 2024). The ILO’s framework situates social protection as one of four interdependent pillars: employment creation, rights at work, social protection, and social dialogue, that together constitute the foundation of equitable and inclusive labour markets (ILO, 2013). Within this normative vision, all forms of work, including platform-based labour, should be covered by comprehensive protection systems guaranteeing equality of treatment and fair conditions regardless of contractual form.

Moreover, gig workers also encounter institutional fragmentation where their protection responsibility dispersed among several government body, such as Ministry of Manpower (Kemnaker), BPJS agencies, and company platforms, without any alignment and coordination mechanism (Wibowo & Susanto, 2025; Permana et al., 2023). Employers use the partnership label to the gig workers to avoid employer statutory obligation, while only limited voluntary and selective benefit, such as optional insurance, rewards, financial assistance, only to showcase the image of social responsibility to the public but causing inconsistent protection for long-term security (Stevania & Hoesin, 2024). Furthermore, weak labour policy and the absence of workers dialogue further making workers unable to exercise their voices institutionally (Muhyiddin et al., 2024).

In addition, algorithmic control reinforces workers’ vulnerability. Companies’ platforms govern the system to distribute tasks, evaluate performance, and enforce compliance based on customer-rating metrics (Naibaho, 2025; Woodcock & Graham, 2020). The system acts as digital Taylorism into productivity control (Tan et al., 2021; Novianto, 2024). Technology functions to enhance efficiency and autonomy, but in reality, the platforms shift managerial power to algorithms which reduce workers’ agency over time. For instance, they need to have continuous connectivity, gamified incentives mechanism, and deactivation rules, push the workers to work long hours to sustain the income.

The lived consequences are evident: unstable earnings, chronic fatigue, excessive working hours, physical exhaustion, road-safety risk exposures (Stevania & Hoesin, 2024; Novianto, 2024). For example, many workers work more than 12 hours to meet targets for incentive with no access to rest facilities, health

or accident insurance (Muhyiddin et al., 2024; Novianto, 2024; Stevania & Hoesin, 2024; Wulansari et al., 2024). Some drivers mentioned that one of the daily risk factors is physical exhaustion (Novianto et al., 2023). These realities can be seen as Decent Work deficit, where access to the decent work agendas are limited and protection gaps shaped by legal ambiguity, fragmented institutional, and algorithmic management. To bridge the gap, requires the institutional and policy reform, as well as HRM strategies to reinforce fairness and social protection for the Indonesia's gig worker.

3.3. HRM Implications: Bridging the Social Protection Gap

HRM is central to translating Indonesia's legal-policy commitments on social protection into platform practices that reliably deliver coverage, fairness, and continuity for gig workers. Policy frameworks and platform regulation alone are insufficient to guarantee inclusion unless HRM processes institutionalise enrolment in social insurance, transparent reward systems, and participatory governance (Behrendt et al., 2019; Graham et al., 2020; Rahman & Ghorpade, 2021; Kusuma, 2022). Across Indonesian and regional studies show that where algorithmic management dominates without a human governance layer, workers experience wage volatility, long working hours, and minimal access to health or injury insurance (De Ruyter & Rachmawati, 2020; Heeks et al., 2021). Conversely, platforms that embed HRM-led welfare systems demonstrate improved income stability, lower turnover, and stronger worker trust (Atkinson & Sedacca, 2025; Graham et al., 2020; ILO, 2021). Aligning platform management with the ILO's Decent Work pillars thus requires HRM to function as a protection enabler rather than a purely administrative unit (ILO, 2020; ILO, 2021).

The literature highlights that integrating BPJS Ketenagakerjaan registration and contribution mechanisms into HR information systems directly expands gig workers' participation in national insurance. Studies indicate that HRM coordination with state agencies reduces administrative complexity, increases voluntary enrolment, and enhances continuity of coverage for work-injury and health benefits (Kusuma, 2022; Rahman & Ghorpade, 2021; Wibowo & Santoso, 2025). Similar partnerships in Indonesia's courier and ride-hailing sectors show that HR-managed data sharing between platforms and the social-security authority leads to more accurate contribution tracking and claim processing (Novianto et al., 2023; Putri et al., 2023). These initiatives reflect the Social Protection Transformation Roadmap 2025 and the Decent Work Country Programme 2020–2025, which advocate digital integration and shared responsibility for extending coverage to non-standard workers (Bappenas, 2023; ILO, 2020).

Equally important, HRM contributes to the portability and continuity of protection benefits across platforms. Empirical findings reveal that Indonesian gig workers often lose insurance eligibility when changing apps or pausing work, illustrating the absence of portable benefit identifiers (Tobing, 2024). Researchers propose HR-driven interoperable databases and unified worker IDs that allow contributions to “follow the worker,” aligning with decent-work principles of equal protection regardless of employment form (Graham et al., 2020; Heeks et al., 2021; Ravizki & Purnami, 2023; ILO, 2021). Portability not only ensures coverage continuity but also supports fairness perceptions central to Equity Theory (Adams, 1965): when workers perceive balanced contributions and benefits, their sense of organisational justice and engagement rises.

HRM's role also extends to rewards and performance management that reinforce participation in social protection. According to Expectancy Theory (Vroom, 1964), workers' motivation depends on believing that effort leads to valued outcomes. Platforms that link safe-driving behaviour, reliability, or customer-service scores with tangible benefits such as subsidised insurance or savings incentives, strengthen the behavioural link between performance and protection (Rachmawati et al., 2022; Rahman & Ghorpade, 2021). Complementarily, Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory (Herzberg et al., 1959) distinguishes hygiene factors such as pay and security from motivators like recognition and autonomy. Social protection thus serves as a foundational hygiene factor preventing dissatisfaction, while transparent feedback and fair-reward systems become motivators sustaining commitment. When designed through the Total Rewards lens (Milkovich & Newman, 2020; Manus & Graham, 2003), HRM integrates benefits, wellbeing, and development alongside pay, enabling gig workers to perceive protection not merely as compliance but as part of a holistic employment experience.

Evidence further underscores HRM's contribution to capability and literacy building, which enhances workers' ability to exercise their protection rights. Studies find that many Indonesian gig workers lack understanding of eligibility and claim procedures, leading to under-utilisation of BPJS benefits (Kusuma, 2022; Putri et al., 2023). HR-led micro-learning modules and safety trainings increase awareness of rights and strengthen the conversion of entitlements into realised security (Behrendt et al., 2019; De Ruyter & Rachmawati, 2020). These findings resonate with Sen's (1999) Capability Approach, which links wellbeing to individuals' freedom to access and use protective mechanisms. By embedding education and communication within HRM routines, platforms enhance both compliance and empowerment, creating a virtuous cycle between knowledge, protection, and productivity.

Research also highlights HRM's influence in shaping equitable risk-sharing models that distribute contributions among workers, platforms, and the state. Partial employer subsidies for BPJS premiums have been shown to increase satisfaction and retention, particularly among low-income drivers (Novianto et al., 2023). Comparative analyses show that tripartite co-funding models improve coverage and sustainability while reinforcing fairness perceptions (Behrendt et al., 2019). These mechanisms exemplify sustainable HRM in practice, balancing efficiency with long-term social equity (Ehnert et al., 2016; Kramar, 2014).

Finally, HRM's governance role extends into institutional collaboration and worker representation. Indonesian studies observe that fragmented oversight between ministries, BPJS, and platforms perpetuates enforcement gaps, while HR leaders engaging in tripartite forums or partnerships with unions enhance accountability and representation (Ford & Honan, 2019; Rachmawati et al., 2022). Embedding participation and transparency into HR policies aligns with Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), which posits that autonomy and relatedness strengthen intrinsic motivation. When workers perceive agency and belonging, they are more willing to comply with safety protocols and contribution schemes. In this sense, HRM becomes both the moral and operational steward that integrates social protection into the psychological and institutional fabric of Indonesia's platform economy.

Collectively, the reviewed studies demonstrate that HRM constitutes the bridge between Indonesia's policy ideals and workers' lived access to social protection. By embedding insurance enrolment, portability, equitable rewards, capability building, and participatory governance within HR systems, organisations transform compliance into empowerment. As the platform economy expands, HRM's evolution from administrative function to ethical stewardship ensures that innovation and flexibility advance alongside fairness, security, and human dignity.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

The trajectory of gig economy in Indonesia underscores a systemic gap between the ideality and lived realities, reflecting the government's commitment to the decent work and the precarious work faced by the gig workers. While the Indonesia's Decent Work Country Programme (2020–2025) highlighting fairness and inclusion, the realities reveal workers' vulnerability caused by regulation ambiguity of gig worker employment status, algorithmic control and weak workers' protection. In addressing this, Human Resource Management (HRM) has an important role in bridging the gap through rethinking rewards system, fair and transparent performance management, capability and literacy building for the workers, and institutional collaboration and worker representation. Lastly, this study provides systematic literature review that connects HRM and gig economy conditions in Indonesia, offering insights for researchers, policymakers, and HR practitioners.

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