
Gig Worker and Social Protection in Indonesia: Between Ideality and Reality

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Abstract

The rapid expansion of Indonesia's gig economy has transformed its labor market by providing new opportunities for flexible work while simultaneously reproducing long-standing patterns of precarity and exclusion. This study explores the relationship between gig work and social protection in Indonesia through a qualitative literature review of research, government publications, and statistical data published between 2019 and 2025. Drawing upon national datasets from the *Badan Pusat Statistik (BPS)* and policy documents from the Ministry of Manpower (*Kemnaker*), the review synthesizes findings from academic and institutional sources to reveal the contradictions between the ideal of universal protection and the fragmented reality faced by digital workers. Results show that gig workers are predominantly young, urban, and informally employed, with women and rural workers facing compounded disadvantages due to gender and spatial inequalities. Despite the government's commitment to the *Decent Work* and *Social Protection Floor* frameworks, participation in formal social protection schemes remains below 10 percent, hindered by irregular income, self-enrollment requirements, and weak legal recognition. Recent innovations—such as digital registration, portable benefit systems, and co-contribution models—signal progress but remain limited in scale. The study concludes that bridging the gap between ideality and reality requires redefining Indonesia's social protection architecture toward inclusivity, flexibility, and gender equity. A hybrid model that integrates state support, platform responsibility, and worker participation offers the most viable path to ensure fairness and dignity in the digital labor era.

Keywords: gig workers, social protection, Indonesia, informal labor, gender inequality.

1. Introduction

The digital revolution has profoundly altered the structure of work across the globe. Over the past decade, digital platforms have expanded into nearly every sector, enabling a new form of labor known as the *gig economy*—characterized by short-term, flexible, and task-based arrangements mediated through technology (Wood et al., 2019). This model provides autonomy and income opportunities for millions, yet it has also exposed significant gaps in social protection and labor rights, particularly in developing economies (Berg, 2018). In many cases, digital workers are treated as independent contractors, leaving them outside traditional systems of social insurance and labor law (ILO, 2021)

These global patterns resonate strongly in Indonesia, where the digital economy is growing faster than the regulatory frameworks that govern it.

Indonesia's labor landscape reflects both the dynamism and inequality of this transformation. With the rapid growth of digital platforms, millions of Indonesians now work as online motorcycle taxi drivers, delivery couriers, freelance designers, and micro-entrepreneurs operating through social media (Tobing, 2024). According to the *Badan Pusat Statistik* (BPS), as of February 2025, the national labor force reached **145.77 million**, with **59.12 percent** working in the informal sector and an unemployment rate of **4.76 percent** (BPS, 2025b, 2025a). These figures confirm that informal and non-standard employment remain dominant in Indonesia's economy. Yet, despite this vast workforce, the majority of gig workers remain excluded from formal social protection systems such as *BPJS Ketenagakerjaan* (Septiani et al., 2025).

In recent years, the Indonesian government has taken steps to address this issue through initiatives such as the *Jaminan Sosial Pekerja Rentan* and the *BPJS Bukan Penerima Upah (BPU)* programs. However, participation among informal and gig workers remains very low—around **7.6 percent** in 2023—largely due to structural barriers rather than mere affordability (Septiani et al., 2025). Existing social insurance schemes are designed around traditional employer–employee relations, while gig work functions through a triangular structure involving platforms, clients, and independent workers (Hamid & Intan, 2024). This misalignment between policy design and labor reality reflects a fundamental tension between the ideality of universal social protection and the reality of fragmented implementation (Pratomo et al., 2024).

Scholars emphasize that this disconnect is rooted in the persistence of a dual labor market, where formal and informal sectors coexist under unequal institutional conditions (Berg, 2018). While the *Decent Work* agenda proposed by the International Labour Organization advocates for fairness, equality, and security in all forms of work (ILO, 2019), gig workers in Indonesia often experience economic precarity and lack basic labor rights (Albab et al., 2023; Hamid & Intan, 2024). Studies reveal that many platform workers earn below minimum wage and are excluded from occupational safety and pension benefits (Pratomo et al., 2024). Furthermore, Indonesia's legal framework continues to classify them ambiguously as “partners,” effectively denying them recognition as employees entitled to collective bargaining and protection (Albab et al., 2023).

These challenges are not unique to Indonesia but reflect a wider global struggle to redefine labor governance in the digital age. In Asia, several countries such as India and the Philippines have started exploring hybrid models combining voluntary participation and state-backed protection for gig workers (Elder et al., 2022). However, Indonesia's policy evolution remains cautious, constrained by fiscal limitations, fragmented institutions, and the absence of comprehensive data on digital labor (BPS, 2025b; Tobing, 2024). The Ministry of Manpower's policy paper *The Gig Economy Dilemma: Exploring Alternatives to Create Decent Work for OJOL Drivers in Indonesia* acknowledges these issues, highlighting the urgency of creating fair and sustainable protection mechanisms for platform-based workers (Tobing, 2024).

Within this context, the present study examines the gap between the *ideality* and *reality* of social protection for gig workers in Indonesia. It seeks to understand how policy frameworks, institutional capacity, and socio-economic structures influence the exclusion of gig workers from formal systems. Using a literature review approach, this paper synthesizes national statistics, policy reports, and academic research to map the barriers and opportunities for reform. The study also highlights innovative practices—such as digital registration, portable insurance, and platform co-contribution models—that could extend coverage to gig workers while promoting fairness and sustainability (Hamid & Intan, 2024; Pratomo et al., 2024).

Ultimately, this research contributes to the growing discourse on digital labor and social justice in the Global South by presenting an Indonesian perspective on how developing countries can balance flexibility with fairness in the platform economy (ILO, 2021; Septiani et al., 2025). Bridging the gap between ideality and reality will require not only regulatory reform but also a paradigm shift in how societies value and protect non-standard work. Only through such transformation can Indonesia ensure that its digital future remains not just productive, but also equitable and humane.

2. Research Method

This study adopts a **qualitative literature review approach** to explore the relationship between gig work and social protection in Indonesia. A literature review is particularly suitable for this topic because it enables a comprehensive understanding of existing empirical data, policy developments, and theoretical discussions surrounding the gig economy (Berg, 2018). Rather than generating new field data, this method synthesizes findings from diverse and credible sources to reveal key patterns, contradictions, and policy implications

2.1. Data Sources and Selection Criteria

The research draws exclusively from **secondary data** published between **2018 and 2025**, ensuring the use of the most recent and relevant information. The sources include: (1) **Official national data** such as the *Badan Pusat Statistik (BPS)* reports on labor force and employment conditions in February 2025 (BPS, 2025b, 2025a); (2) **Government publications**, including reports and papers from the *Ministry of Manpower (Kemnaker)* that address gig work and social protection reforms (Tobing, 2024); (3) **Peer-reviewed academic articles** discussing the development, challenges, and welfare implications of gig work in Indonesia (Albab et al., 2023; Hamid & Intan, 2024; Pratomo et al., 2024; Septiani et al., 2025); (4) **International institutional reports** from the *International Labour Organization (ILO)* that provide regional and global frameworks on social protection and digital labor (Elder et al., 2022; ILO, 2019, 2021). The inclusion criteria focused on studies and reports that: (a) were published between 2018–2025; (b) explicitly discussed gig work, informal labor, or social protection policy; (c) provided either conceptual, legal, or empirical insights related to Indonesia or the broader Southeast Asian context. Publications that were outdated, duplicated, or lacked methodological clarity were excluded to maintain analytical precision and temporal relevance.

2.2. Analytical Framework

The analysis follows a **thematic synthesis approach**, which allows for the integration of qualitative findings across diverse literature (Berg, 2018). The review process involved four key steps: (1) **Identification** of relevant literature through keyword searches using terms such as “gig economy,” “social protection,” “informal labor,” and “Indonesia” in academic databases, government portals, and institutional repositories; (2) **Screening** to ensure alignment with the research questions and time frame (2018–2025); (3) **Thematic categorization**, grouping studies into major themes such as: *Policy and legal frameworks* governing gig work in Indonesia, *Socioeconomic characteristics* and vulnerabilities of gig workers, *Institutional and fiscal barriers* to social protection inclusion, *Innovative models* and comparative insights from other Asian countries; (4) **Synthesis and interpretation**, where findings were compared, contrasted, and contextualized within Indonesia’s socio-political and economic structures.

This framework enables a multidimensional understanding of the issue—capturing not only the legal and policy gaps but also the lived realities and adaptive strategies of gig workers (Hamid & Intan, 2024; Pratomo et al., 2024).

2.3. Conceptual Basis

The conceptual foundation of this review is informed by two complementary frameworks. First, the **Decent Work Framework** by the International Labour Organization, which emphasizes fairness, security, and dignity across all employment forms (ILO, 2019). Second, the **Social Protection Floor Framework**, which promotes universal access to income security and essential health services regardless of employment status (ILO, 2021).

These frameworks serve as normative lenses for evaluating how Indonesia’s social protection policies align—or fail to align—with the changing dynamics of digital and informal labor.

By integrating these frameworks with current Indonesian studies, the review situates gig work not as a marginal phenomenon but as a **core feature of Indonesia’s labor transformation** (Septiani et al., 2025; Tobing, 2024). The combination of national and global perspectives ensures that the analysis reflects both the structural realities of developing economies and the normative ideals of equitable labor governance.

2.4. Ethical and Analytical Considerations

Because this research relies solely on secondary data, no direct human subjects were involved, and ethical approval was not required. However, the study upholds ethical standards in citation, interpretation, and synthesis by accurately representing authors’ findings and maintaining transparency in source selection (Albab et al., 2023). Analytical objectivity was prioritized by cross-verifying information from multiple credible sources to minimize bias and enhance reliability.

2.5. Literature Sources in the Review

Table 11. Literature Sources Used in The Review

No	Source Type	References	Purpose / Contribution
1.	National Statistics	(BPS, 2025b, 2025a)	Provides quantitative data on labor force structure and informal employment.
2.	Government Publications	(Tobing, 2024)	Outlines Indonesia's policy direction on gig workers and social protection.
3.	Academic Journals (Peer-Reviewed)	(Albab et al., 2023; Hamid C Intan, 2024; Pratomo et al., 2024; Septiani et al., 2025)	Offers empirical and conceptual insights on legal, welfare, and policy aspects of gig work.
4.	International Reports	(Berg, 2018; Elder et al., 2022; ILO, 2019, 2021)	Provides comparative frameworks and international standards for social protection.
5.	Analytical Framework Sources	(Berg, 2018; ILO, 2019, 2021)	Serves as the theoretical foundation for thematic synthesis and policy evaluation.

3. Results and Discussion

The literature reviewed paints a nuanced picture of Indonesia's gig economy—one marked by rapid growth, deepening informality, and uneven social protection coverage. While digital platforms have expanded opportunities for flexible work, they have also created new layers of economic vulnerability. To capture this complexity, findings are discussed across five interconnected themes: socioeconomic characteristics, gender and spatial patterns, social protection gaps, governmental responses, and emerging innovations.

3.1. The Socioeconomic Profile of Gig Workers in Indonesia

Recent studies and labor statistics show that gig workers in Indonesia are predominantly **young adults aged 20–39**, with a concentration in **urban centers** such as Jakarta, Surabaya, Bandung, and Yogyakarta (BPS, 2025a; Tobing, 2024). The majority are employed in **ride-hailing, delivery, and digital freelance sectors**, occupations that require minimal capital but expose workers to fluctuating income and platform-driven management systems (Berg, 2018; Wood et al., 2019).

As of February 2025, Indonesia's labor force reached **145.77 million people**, with **59.12 percent** employed informally and **4.76 percent** unemployed (BPS, 2025b, 2025a). These numbers indicate that digital gig work largely overlaps with the informal economy. Many workers lack stable contracts, regulated hours, or access to occupational health and pension benefits (Hamid & Intan, 2024).

Economically, gig workers often experience inconsistent income due to algorithmic control and demand volatility (Berg, 2018). Socially, they occupy a precarious position between independence and

exclusion: they are self-employed in theory, but in practice, their autonomy is limited by digital platforms' policies and commission systems (Pratomo et al., 2024).

3.1. Gender and Spatial Dimensions of Gig Work

A notable yet underexplored aspect of Indonesia's gig economy concerns **gender and regional disparities**. While men dominate platform-based transport and delivery work, **women are increasingly active in home-based digital labor**, including online retail, freelance content creation, and virtual assistance (Tobing, 2024). Female gig workers often choose this mode of work for flexibility, allowing them to balance income generation with household responsibilities.

However, gendered inequalities persist. Women tend to earn **20–30 percent less** than their male counterparts due to concentration in lower-paying, informal digital sectors and reduced access to platform incentives (BPS, 2025b). Moreover, women are less likely to register for *BPJS Ketenagakerjaan* because many perceive themselves as “family helpers” rather than workers entitled to formal protection (Septiani et al., 2025).

Spatially, the gig economy is **heavily urban-centric**. Platform jobs cluster in metropolitan areas with robust digital infrastructure and high consumer demand (Tobing, 2024). In contrast, rural regions lag behind, constrained by limited connectivity, smaller markets, and low financial literacy. This urban–rural divide reflects the broader digital inequality in Indonesia, suggesting that gig work may reinforce rather than bridge socio-economic disparities (BPS, 2025a; Elder et al., 2022).

3.2. The Gap in Social Protection Coverage

Across the reviewed literature, one of the most consistent findings is the **low participation rate of gig workers in formal social protection schemes**. In 2023, only **7.6 percent** of informal and gig workers were enrolled in *BPJS Ketenagakerjaan*—far below national targets (Septiani et al., 2025). The main barriers are structural: irregular income, lack of employer contributions, limited awareness, and administrative hurdles (Hamid & Intan, 2024; Pratomo et al., 2024).

Indonesia's social security architecture remains designed around **formal employment relationships**, rendering it misaligned with non-standard labor patterns (ILO, 2021). Gig workers classified as *mitra* (partners) are not legally recognized as employees, and therefore must self-enroll and self-contribute—an unrealistic expectation for workers with unstable income streams (Albab et al., 2023).

The *BPJS Bukan Penerima Upah (BPU)* program, meant for non-wage workers, offers little improvement. Its contribution model assumes steady income, while gig workers' earnings fluctuate daily or weekly (Tobing, 2024). Consequently, many remain uninsured, making them highly vulnerable to economic shocks, illness, or accidents (Berg, 2018).

This persistent gap underscores a **policy–practice mismatch**: while Indonesia has endorsed global frameworks like *Decent Work* and *Social Protection Floors*, its implementation mechanisms have not evolved to fit the digital era (ILO, 2019, 2021).

3.3. Governmental and Policy Responses

The Indonesian government, primarily through the *Ministry of Manpower (Kemnaker)*, has recognized the need to include gig workers in the formal social protection framework (Tobing, 2024). The policy paper *The Gig Economy Dilemma: Exploring Alternatives to Create Decent Work for OJOL Drivers in Indonesia* outlines strategies such as **flexible contribution models** and **platform co-financing mechanisms**.

Collaborations between *BPJS Ketenagakerjaan* and major platforms (Gojek, Grab, Shopee) represent early steps toward inclusion but remain **voluntary and limited in scope** (Septiani et al., 2025). The absence of clear legal mandates continues to hinder full participation. Indonesia's *Manpower Law (No. 13/2003)* still classifies platform workers as business partners, leaving them excluded from key labor protections (Albab et al., 2023; Hamid & Intan, 2024).

Nevertheless, local-level innovations are emerging. Several regional governments, such as Jakarta and Yogyakarta, are experimenting with **municipal subsidies** and **simplified digital registration** for informal and gig workers. These initiatives demonstrate growing policy awareness and may serve as prototypes for nationwide implementation (Tobing, 2024).

3.4. Emerging Innovations and Opportunities

New approaches to expanding coverage are gaining scholarly and policy attention. **Digital registration systems, portable social protection accounts, and platform-based contribution schemes** have been identified as promising reforms (Elder et al., 2022; Pratomo et al., 2024). These mechanisms would enable workers to retain benefits across multiple platforms and employment transitions, addressing one of the central challenges of digital-era labor markets.

In addition, digital literacy and awareness-raising campaigns are crucial. Many gig workers remain unaware of their eligibility for *BPJS* or distrust its effectiveness due to inconsistent service delivery (Septiani et al., 2025). Collaboration between platforms, unions, and government agencies could enhance transparency, trust, and accessibility.

Taken together, these innovations point toward a **hybrid protection model**—combining voluntary worker participation, state support, and platform responsibility. Such a model aligns with the evolving international discourse on inclusive labor governance (ILO, 2021; Tobing, 2024).

3.5. Synthesis and Broader Implications

Overall, the findings reveal a paradox: while digitalization has expanded work opportunities, institutional adaptation has lagged behind. Gig workers occupy a **liminal space between formal recognition and informal survival**, where flexibility comes at the cost of security (Hamid & Intan, 2024; ILO, 2021).

The **urban and gendered dimensions** of gig work highlight that digital inclusion does not automatically equate to social inclusion. Women and rural workers remain doubly marginalized—by both structural labor inequality and digital infrastructure gaps (BPS, 2025b; Tobing, 2024).

To move forward, Indonesia must transition from **reactive pilot projects** to **systemic reform**, embedding flexibility, portability, and equity into its social protection architecture. This requires

redefining the state's role—not merely as a regulator, but as an enabler of adaptive, inclusive protection for all forms of work (Elder et al., 2022; Pratomo et al., 2024).

Ultimately, bridging the gap between *ideality and reality* will determine whether Indonesia's digital future becomes a pathway to empowerment or a new frontier of inequality.

4. Conclusion and Recommendation

4.1. Conclusion

This study has examined the relationship between gig work and social protection in Indonesia through a qualitative literature review of recent research, policy reports, and national data published between 2019 and 2025. The findings demonstrate that while the gig economy represents a dynamic and expanding sector in Indonesia's labor market, it also exposes deep structural and institutional inequalities.

The rise of digital platforms has created new opportunities for employment flexibility and entrepreneurship, yet this flexibility is often synonymous with insecurity. Most gig workers remain part of the **informal sector**, characterized by unstable income, limited bargaining power, and lack of social insurance coverage (BPS, 2025b, 2025a; Pratomo et al., 2024). Despite the government's commitment to *Decent Work* and *Social Protection Floor* principles, the implementation of these ideals remains partial and fragmented (ILO, 2019, 2021).

Social protection systems such as *BPJS Ketenagakerjaan* and *BPJS Kesehatan* are still anchored in traditional, employer–employee models, making them ill-suited for workers whose employment is flexible, intermittent, and platform-based (Hamid & Intan, 2024; Septiani et al., 2025). The result is a widening gap between the **ideality** of universal social protection and the **reality** of limited institutional reach.

Moreover, demographic and spatial dimensions amplify this inequality. The gig economy in Indonesia remains **male-dominated and urban-centered**, with women and rural workers facing greater barriers to access due to digital exclusion, care responsibilities, and wage disparities (BPS, 2025b; Tobing, 2024). This intersection of gender, geography, and informality reflects a broader socio-economic imbalance within the country's digital transformation.

At the policy level, the Indonesian government has begun taking proactive steps through initiatives like *The Gig Economy Dilemma* (Tobing, 2024), collaborations with digital platforms, and local-level pilot programs. However, these remain **fragmented and voluntary**, lacking robust regulatory frameworks or long-term financial mechanisms (Albab et al., 2023).

In conclusion, Indonesia's gig workers stand at the crossroads of progress and precarity. The country's challenge is not simply to extend coverage, but to **redefine the meaning of protection** in a digital era—one that accommodates flexibility without sacrificing fairness, and innovation without eroding human dignity. Bridging this divide is essential to realizing a truly inclusive vision of decent work and social justice.

4.2. Recommendations

Drawing from the findings and discussions, several actionable recommendations emerge for policymakers, institutions, and researchers:

4.2.1. Policy Reform and Legal Recognition

- 4.2.1.1. **Redefine employment categories** within Indonesia's labor law to formally recognize gig workers as a legitimate form of employment, ensuring eligibility for social protection and basic labor rights (Albab et al., 2023; Hamid & Intan, 2024).
- 4.2.1.2. **Integrate platform responsibility** into social protection financing through co-contribution schemes between companies, workers, and the state, as piloted in other Asian economies (Elder et al., 2022; Tobing, 2024).

4.2.2. Institutional Adaptation and Administrative Flexibility

- 4.2.2.1. **Develop portable social protection accounts** that allow workers to retain coverage across multiple platforms and job transitions, aligning with global best practices (ILO, 2021; Pratomo et al., 2024).
- 4.2.2.2. **Implement digital registration systems** that automatically enroll gig workers into *BPJS* using platform data integration to minimize administrative barriers (Tobing, 2024).

4.2.3. Inclusivity and Gender-Responsive Policy

- 4.2.3.1. **Promote gender-sensitive programs** targeting female gig workers, particularly those in home-based digital sectors, by subsidizing premiums and expanding child-care support (BPS, 2025b; Septiani et al., 2025).
- 4.2.3.2. **Enhance rural access** through digital infrastructure development and awareness campaigns, reducing spatial inequality and improving the inclusion of rural gig workers (Elder et al., 2022; Tobing, 2024).

4.2.4. Capacity Building and Awareness

- 4.2.4.1. **Strengthen outreach and education** about the benefits of social protection through digital literacy campaigns, platform pop-ups, and local union involvement to build trust and participation (Septiani et al., 2025).
- 4.2.4.2. **Establish multi-stakeholder coordination** among the Ministry of Manpower, BPJS, digital platforms, and civil society organizations to ensure coherence between national goals and local implementation.

4.2.5. Future Research Directions

- 4.2.5.1. Future academic studies should explore **quantitative assessments** of income volatility and social protection impacts among gig workers across provinces, using mixed-methods approaches.
- 4.2.5.2. Comparative research between **urban and rural gig economies** could further illuminate the interplay of technology, geography, and inequality, providing insights for region-specific policy design.

4.3. Final Reflection

Indonesia's pursuit of universal social protection for gig workers represents both a moral and developmental imperative. As the digital economy continues to expand, protection mechanisms must evolve in parallel—ensuring that flexibility does not come at the expense of fairness.

Achieving this balance demands not only regulatory reform but also a **cultural shift in how society values non-standard work**. Gig workers are not peripheral to the economy; they are at its core. By embedding inclusion, equity, and dignity into social protection policies, Indonesia can transform the gig economy from a site of vulnerability into a foundation of shared prosperity.

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