

Indonesia's Youth Employment Landscape: The Urgent Need of Comprehensive Legal Framework to Address Current Challenges

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I. Introduction

Youth employment remains a critical challenge in Indonesia, following a broader trend across Asia-Pacific region at large. As the world's fourth most populous nation, Indonesia is currently at its demographic bonus phase, a phenomenon where the productive-age population significantly outweighs the non-productive population, and is projected to peak between 2020 and 2035. However, the persistence of high youth unemployment and labor market exclusion raises growing concerns that Indonesia is failing to translate this demographic dividend into sustainable and inclusive economic growth. In 2024, Indonesia's youth unemployment was about 13.1%, which is roughly double the national unemployment average, meaning young Indonesians (ages 15–24) are twice as likely to be jobless as the general workforce.¹ Moreover, nearly one in four Indonesian youths (23.8%) are identified as Not in Employment, Education, or Training (NEET).² In addition, the population portion affected of NEET has disproportionately largely been women.³ Employment quality has also become a concern: As over 54% of working youth are engaged in non-permanent or informal jobs, with limited job security and social protection.⁴

Sakernas⁵ 2024 data shown in Table 3 reveals that 23.78% of Indonesian youth are in a NEET condition, as previously mentioned. NEET rates are higher among females (33.10%) than males (14.98%), and slightly higher in rural areas (25.23%) compared to urban areas (22.80%). Regionally, the highest NEET rates are found in Maluku, Aceh, and North Sulawesi while the lowest are observed in Bali, Highland Papua, and Yogyakarta. These patterns underscore that gender, geographic location, and structural regional conditions play significant roles in shaping youth vulnerability to unemployment and inactivity.

These challenges are reflected not only in unemployment figures but also in patterns of labor force participation as shown in Figure 1. Data from Statistics Indonesia (BPS) indicate that the Youth Labor Force

1. "Publikasi," Badan Pusat Statistik (BPS – Statistics Indonesia), Accessed December 8, 2025, <https://www.bps.go.id/publication.html>.
2. Direktorat Statistik Kesejahteraan Rakyat, "Statistik Pemuda Indonesia 2024 [Statistics of Indonesian Youth 2024]," *Statistik Pemuda Indonesia* 22 (2024), 182, <https://www.bps.go.id/en/publication/2024/12/31/b2dba4c4542352cea8794590/statistics-of-indonesian-youth-2024.html>.
3. *Ibid.*
4. Badan Pusat Statistik, *Statistik Pemuda Indonesia 2024* (Jakarta: BPS, 2024), xii, <https://www.bps.go.id>.
5. SAKERNAS (National Labor Force Survey) is a periodic statistical survey conducted to measure the size, composition, and characteristics of the labor force, employment, and unemployment in Indonesia. Sakernas is a national survey conducted by Badan Pusat Statistik (Statistics Indonesia) to collect data on the labor force and employment conditions in Indonesia. (Badan Pusat Statistik, *Sakernas (National Labor Force Survey)*, Jakarta, Badan Pusat Statistik, 2023, <https://www.bps.go.id>.)

Table 1. Province with the highest NEET, 2024

Province	NEET Youth (%)
Maluku	34
Aceh	31,71
North Sulawesi	31,1
North Maluku	30,46
Papua	30,32

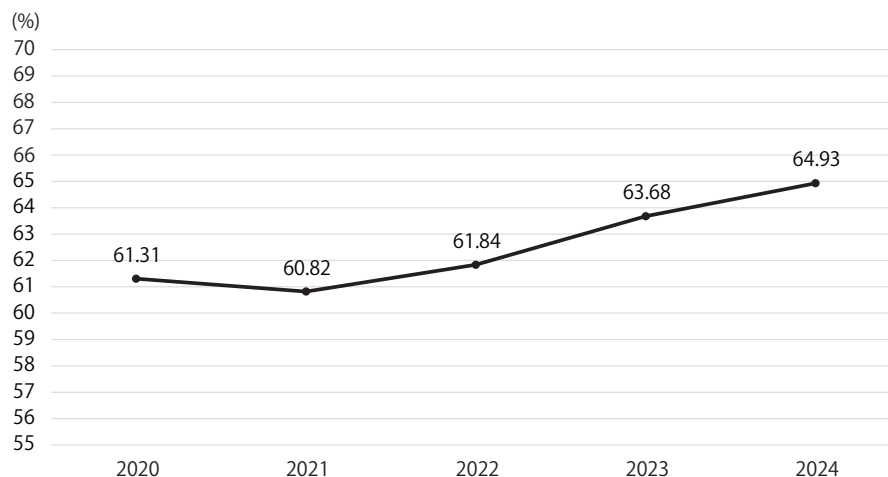
Table 2. Province with the lowest NEET, 2024

Province	NEET Youth (%)
Bali	10,01
Highland Papua	11,94
DI Yogyakarta	13,76
West Nusa Tenggara	18,31
East Nusa Tenggara	18,77

Table 3. National summary of NEET, 2024

Category	NEET (%)
Urban	22,8
Rural	25,23
Male	14,98
Female	33,1
Indonesia Total	23,78

Source: Indonesian Youth Statistic, Badan Pusat Statistik (2024).



Source: Indonesia Statistic, 2024. ⁶

Figure 1. Youth labor force participation rate 2020–2024

Participation Rate (TPAK) declined during the peak pandemic years, from 61.96% in 2019 to 60.82% in 2021, before recovering to 64.93% in 2024. While this rebound suggests renewed engagement in the labor market, the recovery has not necessarily translated into stable or quality employment, as much of the reabsorption has occurred within informal or precarious sectors.

While educational attainment among youth has improved, with increasing access to secondary and tertiary

6. Indonesia Statistic (BPS), 2024, Tingkat Partisipasi Angkatan Kerja Pemuda Indonesia. Tingkat Partisipasi Angkatan Kerja Pemuda Terus Meningkat Setelah Pandemi - GoodStats Data.

education.⁷ For instance, vocational high school graduates face an unemployment rate of around 8%, higher than any other education group, and even university graduates experience unemployment rates near 6%.⁸ Such figure reflects the mismatch between the skills possessed by the youth and the jobs available, as well as growing competition for the limited number of work opportunities. This mismatch is further compounded by post-pandemic labor market restructuring, accelerated digitalization, and shifting employer expectations, which have collectively raised entry barriers for first-time jobseekers.

A number of legal and national policy frameworks relating to supporting youth in the workplace will also be discussed. Law No. 13 of 2003 on Manpower sets the fundamental standards of working age at 15, as well as other general labor protections. Law No. 40 of 2009 on Youth outlines the definition of youth as individuals aged 16–30. The law also mandates the support of youth development, including enabling government at various levels to allocate budget for youth training programs in the context of labor development. Since youth workers are well-defined by Manpower Law, they are also covered by the national social security program (BPJS) as stipulated in Law No. 24 of 2011 on Social Security Implementing Agency. However, despite these instruments, the regulatory environment remains fragmented, with youth-related provisions dispersed across manpower, social security, skills development, and youth affairs legislation. As later chapters discuss, this dispersion contributes to gaps in coordination, uneven implementation, and the absence of a unified youth employment strategy. In regard to international law however, Indonesia has ratified ILO Conventions 138 and 182, reinforcing its commitment to international standards on minimum working age and the elimination of the worst forms of child labor.

In the subsequent sections, the report will explore Indonesia's youth employment landscape by analyzing statistical trends and institutional mechanisms while evaluating how current policies, transition programs, and regulatory instruments collectively—or sometimes insufficiently—respond to the evolving needs of Indonesia's young workforce.

II. Youth labor force participation and employment

Indonesia's youth, defined as ages 16–30 in national law,⁹ constitute a large and growing labor supply. As of 2024, there were about 64.2 million youth (roughly 1 in 5 Indonesians), among 65% of them are active in the labor force.¹⁰ This massive youth population represents the backbone of Indonesia's demographic bonus. However, the limited capacity of the formal labor market to absorb this expanding cohort indicates a structural challenge in translating demographic advantage into productive employment. Participation is highly uneven by gender. Over three-quarters of young men (76.4%) participate in the labor force, compared to only about 52.8% of young women.¹¹

These figures confirm that young women consistently face NEET rates 7–9% points higher than young men, shown in Figure 2. The gender gap is also cultural norms and caregiving roles largely account for this gap as many young women are full-time students or homemakers and thus not counted as economically

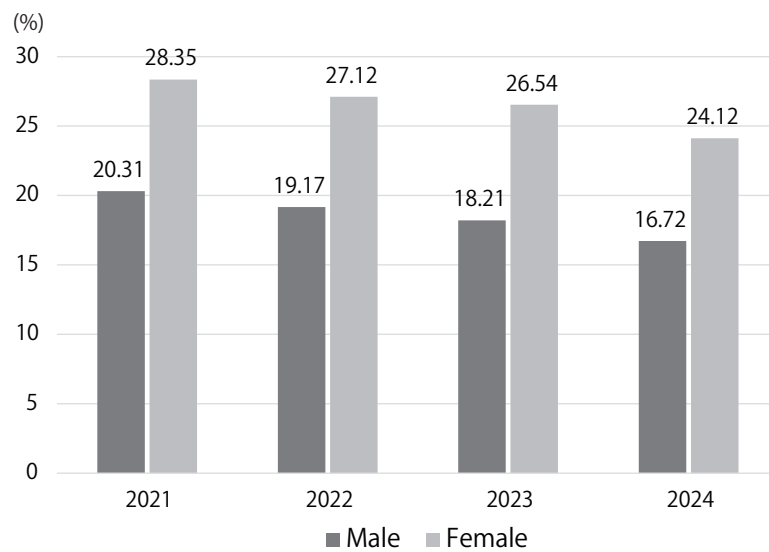
7. *Ibid.*

8. Badan Pusat Statistik (BPS – Statistics Indonesia), “Tingkat Pengangguran Terbuka Berdasarkan Tingkat Pendidikan [Open Unemployment Rate Based on Education Level],” *Sakernas Februari 2025* 8, No. 1 (2025), 17, <https://www.bps.go.id/id/publication/2025/07/14/90a6b20c25c63176d23ab46c/booklet-sakernas-februari-2025.html>.

9. Republic of Indonesia, Central Government, Pasal 1 Undang-Undang No. 40 Tahun 2009 tentang Kepemudaan [Article 1 of Law No. 40 of 2009 on Youth], 2009, <https://peraturan.bpk.go.id/Details/38784/uu-no-40-tahun-2009> [in Indonesian].

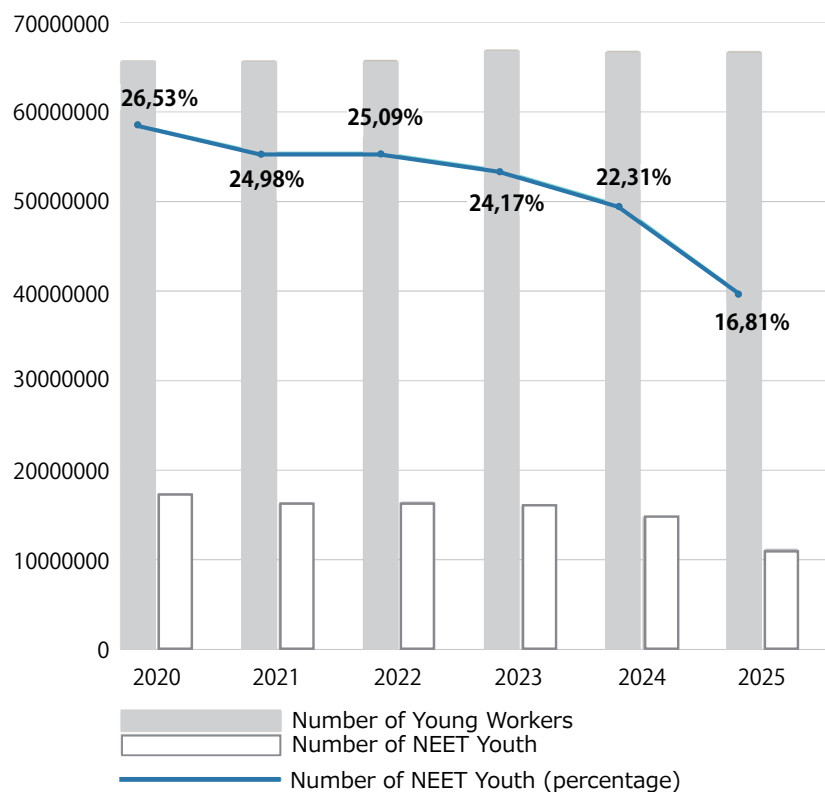
10. Direktorat Statistik Kesejahteraan Rakyat, *loc. cit.*, 11, <https://www.bps.go.id/en/publication/2024/12/31/b2dbaac4542352cea8794590/statistics-of-indonesian-youth-2024.html>.

11. *Ibid* 186.



Source: Indonesia Statistic (BPS), 2021–2024.¹²

Figure 2. The gender gap in NEET statistics: Estimated population aged 15–19 years (2020–2025)



Source: Statistics Indonesia (BPS), 2025.

Figure 3. Estimated number and percentage of NEET youth (2020–2025)

12. Statistic Indonesia (BPS), 2024, Indikator Pekerjaan Layak di Indonesia, 23.

active.¹³ In fact, out of all non-working youth, the majority are female, often engaged in unpaid domestic work as national data shows 39 million women of working age are outside the labor force due to household responsibilities.¹⁴ This gender disparity in participation is one of the issues of Indonesia's youth employment landscape, indicating untapped economic potential if more young women could be empowered to work.

As previously mentioned, unemployment is significantly higher for youth aged 15–24 than for older adults. Over the years, there is a persistent pattern that young workers are likely to be jobless than younger adults as shown in Figure 3. However, it is important to note that Indonesia is steering into the right direction as it has improved its youth employment prospect compared to two decades ago. The struggle for youth workers seems also to indicate a broader regional issue, as ILO also shows the Asia-Pacific region is facing an average of 13.9% youth unemployment rate.¹⁵

III. COVID-19 pandemic effect on youth employment

The COVID-19 pandemic, in particular has a profound impact on youth labor market trajectories. Lockdowns, school closures, and economic contractions disproportionately affected young workers, many of whom were employed in sectors most vulnerable to disruption, such as retail, hospitality, and informal services¹⁶ exacerbating NEET rates and creating what some scholars refer to as a “lost cohort” of youth whose early career pathways were derailed.¹⁷

During the pandemic, digitalization in workplaces was accelerated as well, which also affect the trajectories of Indonesia's labor landscape. This has widened the gap between digitally literate youth and those without access to technology or training. This digital divide is particularly pronounced in rural areas and among low-income youth, which has resulted in inequitable access to emerging labor markets. A report conducted by UNICEF Indonesia explores the current situation of digital divide in Indonesia, from which there are five areas of divide (table 4).¹⁸ The table summarizes five gaps (internet connectivity, device access, internet usage and infrastructure, digital skills, and education disruption) that together shape unequal entry points into post-pandemic labor markets. Limited and costly connectivity in low-income and remote regions restricts access to online job portals, digital apprenticeships, and remote work. Low computer ownership (despite high smartphone uptake) constrains the development of productivity and coding skills commonly required for formal employment. Weaker infrastructure and affordability further depress usage quality, while foundational and advanced digital skill deficits, especially among young women, translate into lower

13. Faizah, Fida Y., Isbah, M. Falikul, and Azca, Muhammad N., “Understanding Young People Not in Employment, Education or Training in Indonesia: Gendered Transition in the Changing Cultural Context.” *YOUNG*, 2025. Accessed December 15, 2025. <https://doi.org/10.1177/11033088251345645>.

14. Republic of Indonesia, Ministry of Manpower, Peraturan Menteri Ketenagakerjaan No. 9 Tahun 2025 tentang Rencana Strategis Kementerian Ketenagakerjaan Tahun 2025–2029 [Ministry of Manpower Regulation No. 9 of 2025 on the Strategic Plan of the Ministry of Manpower for 2025–2029].

15. Ministry of Manpower for 2025–2029, 6, October 10, 2025, https://jdih.kemnaker.go.id/asset/data_puu/2025pnmaker009.pdf [in Indonesian].

16. Pratomo, D. S. *et al.*, 2025, “The Fragile Workforce: Indonesian Youth Workers Vulnerability during the COVID-19 Pandemic.” *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth* 30 (1): 1–25. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02673843.2025.2526467>.

17. This study, based on Indonesia's 2022 National Labour Force Survey (SAKERNAS), finds that young workers were significantly more likely to lose jobs during the pandemic, especially those in informal employment and sectors such as retail, hospitality, and food services. It highlights how school closures and economic contractions exacerbated youth vulnerability, with many transitioning to informal work lacking stability and protection.

18. UNICEF Indonesia, “Situation Analysis on Digital Learning in Indonesia,” (Jakarta: UNICEF Indonesia, 2022), <https://www.unicef.org/indonesia/media/9956/file/Situation%20Analysis%20on%20Digital%20Learning%20in%20Indonesia.pdf>.

employability and wage prospects. Finally, pandemic-era schooling interruptions in places like Maluku and Papua risk long-term scarring, reducing the pipeline of digitally ready graduates. Addressing these five areas in tandem is therefore critical to an equitable post-Covid youth employment recovery, particularly for rural and low-income cohorts.¹⁹

Although Indonesia has shown signs of recovery, the effects of the pandemic remain visible. First, youth unemployment in Indonesia remains elevated at approximately 13% as of 2024,²⁰ although it has declined from its pandemic-era peak of 16% in 2021. Similarly, the NEET rate for youth aged 15–24, although is showing a downward trend from 24.3% in 2020, it still is above 20%, indicating that a substantial portion of young Indonesians remain disengaged from both education and the labor market.²¹ Second, youths who especially were laid off during the pandemic also find weaker re-employment prospects and prolonged detachment. Among those who lost jobs, only 25.1% transitioned back to the formal sector and 42.0% to the informal sector, while 32.8% remained unemployed.²² Further, even when regaining employment, some young workers have been found to experience an average wage reduction and a higher likelihood of earning below the stipulated minimum-wage as many transitions into informal sectors. All in all, the pandemic has pushed job trends towards informality, which has resulted in lower protection and lower quality re-employment opportunities. Moreover, inequal development has also exacerbated the technological gap between developed areas and rural and underdeveloped areas.

Table 4. Digital area and digital gap in Indonesia, 2024

Digital area	Digital gap
Internet connectivity	Only 21% of people in low-income areas have internet access compared to 93% in high-income areas such as Java. Rural and remote regions (e.g., Papua) experience weak or non-existent connectivity, limiting remote learning.
Device access	Less than 15% of children in rural areas and 25% in urban areas own computers suitable for home-based learning. Although smartphone ownership is high, it does not guarantee access to computers or stable internet required for digital learning.
Internet usage and infrastructure	Indonesia ranks 63rd in the <i>Inclusive Internet Index 2020</i> : Availability (55th), Affordability (61st), Relevance (62nd), and Readiness (40th). These low rankings reflect disparities in internet quality, cost, relevant content, and digital literacy readiness.
Digital skills and gender gap	78% of non-internet users cite lack of skills as a barrier. Women face even greater disadvantages in digital access and skill development.
Education disruption	During the pandemic, 68 million students moved to digital learning. Many faced barriers such as limited devices, internet, electricity, and infrastructure heightening dropout risks.

IV. Intergenerational divide

In parallel, a subtle but increasingly relevant issue is the emergence of intergenerational tension in the workplace, which can be observed from a cultural and labor market perspective. According to the report

19. UNICEF Indonesia, “Situation Analysis on Digital Learning in Indonesia,” (Jakarta: UNICEF Indonesia, 2022), <https://www.unicef.org/indonesia/media/9956/file/Situation%20Analysis%20on%20Digital%20Learning%20in%20Indonesia.pdf>.

20. Direktorat Statistik Kesejahteraan Rakyat, *loc. cit.*, 23, <https://www.bps.go.id/en/publication/2024/12/31/b2dbaac4542352cea8794590/statistics-of-indonesian-youth-2024.html>.

21. *Ibid.*

22. Pratomo, D. S. *et al.*, *loc cit.*: 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02673843.2025.2526467>.

by IDN Institute, some employers express concerns that Gen Z's workstyle differs from established norms, including perceptions of lower adherence to conventional routines, greater need for flexibility, and greater emphasis on mental-health boundaries, which are sometimes misunderstood as lack of commitment.²³ A study documenting prior studies on Gen Z traits in the workplace has also underscore the dimensions that show contrast to their older cohort. These dimensions include work values; communication and feedback norms; technology preference; hierarchical level; leadership styles; and retention drivers.²⁴ These cultural dimensions are often referenced in discussions about challenges faced by younger workers in navigating multi-generational workplaces.

On the labor market side, the generational gap manifests in the form of skill mismatches and formal qualification. As *entry-level* postings routinely require 1–2 years of experience, prior internships, and advanced technical credentials, employers' preference shifts to hire more experienced, thus older candidates. In a survey of new graduates, all respondents reported encountering such expectations and 89.7% felt deterred of applying without experience.²⁵ Meanwhile, 40% of employers reported that new graduates are lacking the essential competencies, with only 53% of graduates in jobs aligned to their training or educational background.²⁶ Thus, job-readiness screening may tilt hiring toward experienced candidates and disadvantages of first-time entrants. It might also be connected to the drive towards job informality, such as freelancing among youths as skill mismatch has been found as a driver for young workers to informal sectors.²⁷

The certification system in Indonesia is also still developing, albeit the presence of a national certification body known as BNSP. In addition to formal qualification (such as university degree), technical qualification certificate is found to also reduce the chance of job mismatch, acting as a 'competency signal' in a particular field.²⁸ However, Indonesia's competency-based certification ecosystem has not yet reached the level of integration seen in countries with mature qualification frameworks. Research on the adoption of the *Standar Kompetensi Kerja Nasional Indonesia* (SKKNI) shows that certification uptake remains uneven across sectors, partly due to variation in provider quality, industry recognition, and the limited embedding of competency assessment within vocational and higher-education pathways.²⁹

V. Youth employment in current regulatory framework

Indonesia does not have any "Youth Employment Act." Rather, youth employment is stipulated in and affected by different regulatory acts (such as law and government regulation). These instruments address

23. IDN Research Institute, "Indonesia Gen Z Report 2024: Understanding and Uncovering the Behavior, Challenges, and Opportunities," (Jakarta: IDN Media, 2024), 21, <https://cdn.idntimes.com/content-documents/indonesia-gen-z-report-2024.pdf>.
24. Yunita Zahra, Seger Handoyo, and Fajrianthi Fajrianthi, "A Comprehensive Overview of Generation Z in the Workplace: Insights from a Scoping Review," *Journal of Management Development* 42, No. 6 (2023): 411–425, 4–9, <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajip.v51i0.2263>.
25. Praudia, F. W., and Lestari Ambarini, "The Double Barrier of Age Requirements and High Qualifications in Entry-Level Employment Opportunities in Indonesia," *Jurnal Magisma* 13, No. 2 (2025): 111–120, 114, <https://jurnal.stiebankbpdjateng.ac.id/jurnal/index.php/magisma/article/view/539/369>.
26. Adelia Azzahra *et al*, "The Impact of High Job Qualification Standards on Unemployment Rates Among Fresh Graduates in Indonesia," *Journal Transnational Universal Studies* 2, No. 4 (2024): 244–255, <https://doi.org/10.58631/jtus.v2i4.109>.
27. Mahmoud Arayssi *et al*, "Skill Mismatch, Nepotism, Job Satisfaction, and Young Females in the MENA Region" *Econometrics* 11, No. 2 (2023): 16, <https://doi.org/10.3390/econometrics11020016>.
28. ^[1] Statistics Indonesia (BPS), "Education–Occupation Mismatch of Indonesian Youth: Implications for the Demographic Bonus," *Statistical Data Stories for Indonesia Vol. 2, no. 10 (Mismatch Pendidikan-Pekerjaan Pemuda Indonesia: Implikasi Bagi Bonus Demografi, Cerita Data Statistik untuk Indonesia Vol. 2 No. 10)*, 2025.
29. World Bank, *Competency Standards as a Tool for Human Capital Development: Assesment of Their Development and Introduction into TVET and Certification in Indonesia* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2020), <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/6451b1e4-775f-5f1c-9149-8a6df33d6698/content>.

different dimensions of youth employment, ranging from minimum-age standards to skills development and school-to-work transition programs. Indonesia's regulatory milestones include the ratification of ILO Conventions 138 and 182, which set the foundation for minimum-age requirements and the elimination of the worst forms of child labor. These commitments were subsequently embedded into domestic legislation through the Manpower Law of 2003, which formalized minimum-age requirements, prohibited the worst forms of child labor, and set basic protections for young workers.

The framework then expanded with the Youth Law (2009), which legally defines youth (aged 16–30) and mandates government support for youth development across education, workforce preparation, and participation domains. With the addition of the Social Security Organizing Agency (BPJS) Law of 2011, young workers are also entitled to a national framework for worker social protection, including those in non-standard and early-career employment relationships.

In the mid-2010s, Indonesia began strengthening instruments targeting school-to-work transition. The Domestic Internship Regulation (2016, amended in 2020) standardized the rights, obligations, and protections of interns, thereby safeguarding young people participating in structured work-based learning. This shift was followed by expanded competency-development policies, notably the 2020 regulation establishing the *Kartu Prakerja* program, which provides training vouchers and incentives to build work competencies. Initially launched as part of Indonesia's COVID-19 response, Prakerja evolved into one of the country's largest upskilling initiatives and was further normalized through 2022 amendments that integrated it into routine workforce development policy.

In parallel, reforms to employment arrangements emerged through the 2021 Law on Employment Agreement for a Specified Period of Time, which introduced stricter caps and conditions for fixed-term contracts, outsourcing, and working-time arrangements. These provisions are salient for young workers who disproportionately enter the labor market through temporary or contingent forms of employment.

Table 5. Labor regulatory instruments that has impacted Indonesian youths historically

No	Years	Regulatory instruments affecting youth
1	1999	International Labor Organization C138–Min. Age - Ratifies minimum-age standards for employment
2	2000	ILO C182–Worst Forms - Obliges prohibition and elimination of the worst forms, including hazardous work
3	2003	Law on Manpower - Incorporates min. age and child protection provision into national labor law.
4	2009	Law on Youth Affairs - Defines “youth” (e.g., 16–30); but statistical monitoring commonly uses 15–24.
5	2011	Law on the Social Security Organizing Agency - Establishes the framework for worker social security, including youth participants
6	2016	Law on Implementation of Domestic Apprenticeships. - Standardizes internship rights and protections during school-to-work transition.
7	2020	Law on the Development of Work Competencies through the Pre-Working Card Program. - Provides training and incentives; scales during the COVID-19 response.
8	2021	Law on Employment Agreement for a Specified Period of Time, Outsourcing, Working Time and Rest Time, and Termination of Employment. - Sets limits on consecutive fixed-term contracts (cap ~5 years; verify exact clause). Aiming to help entry-level workers from indefinite temporary arrangement.
9	2022	Amendment on Law on the Development of Work Competencies through the Pre-Working Card Program. - Normalizes the program from a pandemic response to an ongoing upskilling program.

Collectively, these regulatory instruments constitute the core legal framework shaping youth employment in Indonesia. They not only set boundaries for protection and minimum standards but also outline the state's strategies for supporting youth employability, skills formation, and smoother transitions into decent work.

VI. Conclusion

In conclusion, Indonesia's youth employment landscape reflects a set of structural and emerging challenges that continue to shape young people's transition from school to work. While progress has been made in expanding education access, strengthening skills programs, and improving labor market resilience after the pandemic, several issues remain noteworthy.

- a. **Labor market pressures persist**, including relatively high youth unemployment, elevated NEET rates in several provinces, and the continued prevalence of nonpermanent or informal work arrangements among young workers.
- b. **Uneven access to skills and opportunities**, such as education–occupation mismatch, digital disparities, and rising employer expectations, continues to influence job readiness and shape who is able to enter quality employment, particularly among first time jobseekers.
- c. **Post pandemic adjustments and shifting workplace norms** have introduced new complexities in youth labor market participation. Lingering scarring effects and intergenerational differences in work-style preferences illustrate how the youth labor market is evolving alongside broader social and technological change.
- d. **Youth related regulations and programs exist across multiple policy domains**, but their dispersion means that responsibility for supporting youth employability spans several institutions. Rather than indicating a need for immediate structural reform, this highlights the importance of continued coordination and monitoring to ensure that existing instruments effectively address young people's needs.

Taken together, these findings suggest that while Indonesia has important foundations in place, strengthening youth employability will depend on sustained attention to emerging skill demands, equitable access to opportunities, and the ability of current policies and programs to adapt to a rapidly changing labor market environment.

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