

## Social Inequality and Inequal Access to Jobs (A Case Study of Street Buskers and Clowns in Hulu Sungai Utara Regency)

Erfan Maulana<sup>1\*</sup>, Akhmad Berkatillah<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Universitas Sapta Mandiri, Indonesia

<sup>2</sup> Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Administrasi Amuntai, Indonesia

\*Corresponding Author: [erfanmaulana@univsm.ac.id](mailto:erfanmaulana@univsm.ac.id)

**Abstract:** The phenomenon of street workers such as buskers and clowns in Hulu Sungai Utara Regency reflects social inequality and limited access to employment that still persists in Indonesia, particularly in regions with uneven economic development. This group is often marginalized from access to education, skills training, and formal employment. This study aims to analyze the factors that drive individuals to work in the informal sector and to identify the role of the government and social organizations in their empowerment. The research applies a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study method, using document analysis from the Central Bureau of Statistics, the Department of Social Affairs, the Department of Manpower, and publications from NGOs working on labor issues. The findings indicate that low education levels, limited skills, lack of employment information, and minimal social protection are the main causes. In addition, negative social stigma and the suboptimal implementation of government policies worsen their condition. The creative economy is seen as an alternative for empowerment through culturally based training and facilitated market access. Therefore, this study recommends cross-sector collaboration to design sustainable and inclusive empowerment programs for street workers.

**Keywords:** Social Inequality; Inequality Of Access To Jobs.

**Abstrak:** Fenomena pekerja jalanan seperti pengamen jalanan dan badut di Kabupaten Hulu Sungai Utara mencerminkan ketimpangan sosial dan terbatasnya akses pekerjaan yang masih terjadi di Indonesia, terutama di daerah dengan pembangunan ekonomi yang belum merata. Kelompok ini seringkali terpinggirkan dari akses pendidikan, pelatihan keterampilan, dan pekerjaan formal. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis faktor-faktor yang mendorong individu bekerja di sektor informal dan mengidentifikasi peran pemerintah dan organisasi sosial dalam pemberdayaan mereka. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif dengan metode studi kasus, dengan menggunakan analisis dokumen dari Badan Pusat Statistik, Departemen Sosial, Departemen Tenaga Kerja, dan publikasi dari LSM yang bergerak di bidang ketenagakerjaan. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa tingkat pendidikan yang rendah, keterbatasan keterampilan, kurangnya informasi ketenagakerjaan, dan minimnya perlindungan sosial menjadi penyebab utama. Selain itu, stigma sosial yang negatif dan implementasi kebijakan pemerintah yang belum optimal memperburuk kondisi mereka. Ekonomi kreatif dipandang sebagai alternatif pemberdayaan melalui pelatihan berbasis budaya dan akses pasar yang difasilitasi. Oleh karena itu, penelitian ini merekomendasikan kolaborasi lintas sektor untuk merancang program pemberdayaan yang berkelanjutan dan inklusif bagi pekerja jalanan.

**Kata Kunci:** Ketimpangan Sosial; Ketimpangan Akses Pekerjaan.

## Introduction

Street workers are individuals who work in public spaces or specific areas such as streets, sidewalks, or other public places to earn a living. They often work in the informal sector, meaning they do not have formal employment relationships or contracts with employers. Their occupations can vary widely, ranging from beggars, buskers, street vendors, to service workers offering activities like cleaning car windows or collecting trash.

Street workers frequently face various challenges, such as income instability, lack of social protection, and limited access to health or education services. Furthermore, they are vulnerable to being disciplined or evicted by authorities who may perceive their presence as disruptive to public order.

According to research conducted by Matamanda et al. (2023), street workers play a crucial role in the urban informal economy, especially in developing countries. They serve as one of the main sources of livelihood for urban poor communities who are often marginalized from the formal labor market. In this context, street workers can be regarded as an essential part of the local economy, even though they operate outside the legal system and without adequate legal protection. As further explained by an expert in ScienceDirect (2023), "Street vending plays a critical role in the informal urban economy of cities in the Global South, serving as a key source of livelihood for the urban poor."

However, the existence of street workers also poses specific challenges. Most of them operate illegally, which can potentially hinder the growth of the formal economy. According to a study published on ResearchGate (2023), "Street vendors contribute to the socio-economic development of society. However, most street vendors operate illegally, so the growth of the informal sector can hamper economic growth in general."

This phenomenon is also often linked to broader social issues such as poverty, urbanization, and unequal access to economic opportunities. Therefore, the presence and role of street workers should be seen as part of a complex socio-economic dynamic.

Social disparity and unequal access to employment remain among the fundamental issues within Indonesia's labor system. Although various employment programs have been launched, many communities especially those in the informal sector still struggle to obtain decent and secure employment opportunities. Based on data from Statistics Indonesia (2025), the national open unemployment rate (TPT) was recorded at 4.76%. This figure reflects a decrease compared to the previous year, but it still does not represent the full condition across all social groups.

According to Statistics Indonesia (BPS) as of August 2024, the number of employed people in Indonesia reached 144.64 million. Of this number, approximately 83.83 million people, or 57.95%, worked in the informal sector. Informal workers include self-employed individuals, those assisted by unpaid labor, casual workers, and

unpaid family workers. This high proportion of informal employment indicates that a majority of Indonesia's workforce remains in sectors vulnerable to both social and economic insecurity.

**Table 1. Indonesia's Labor Statistics (August 2024)**

Category	Number (million)	Percentage (%)
<b>Working-age population</b>	216.79	100
<b>Labor force</b>	153.05	70.6
<b>Employed</b>	144.64	66.7
<b>Unemployed</b>	7.28	3.4
<b>Informal workers</b>	83.83	57.95
<b>Formal workers</b>	60.81	42.05

**Source: Statistics Indonesia (BPS), 2024**

The Province of South Kalimantan recorded an Open Unemployment Rate (OUR) of 4.20% in August 2024. Meanwhile, in Hulu Sungai Utara (HSU) Regency, the OUR was lower, at 3.73%. Although these figures indicate improvement, the reality on the ground shows that certain groups in society remain unaccommodated within the formal employment system, one of which is street workers.

Street workers—including buskers, street clowns, scavengers, hawkers, and beggars are part of the informal sector, unregistered in the formal employment system and lacking social security coverage. According to a report by the Ministry of Social Affairs (2022), there are over 3.1 million displaced individuals in urban areas, most of whom rely on street work to survive. In Jakarta alone, the Social Affairs Office recorded around 10,000 active street workers daily, with job types ranging from busking and begging to street entertainment such as clowns and human statues. This number does not include similar workers in other cities or regencies across Indonesia, including in remote and peripheral areas such as Hulu Sungai Utara.

Street workers generally come from low-educated households with limited income. They lack access to skills training and formal employment opportunities. Additionally, the participation rate of informal workers in social security programs remains low—only around 9 million out of more than 50 million informal workers in Indonesia are registered with BPJS Employment (2024). This highlights the fragility of social protection for this group.

This population is also vulnerable to social stigma and repressive actions, as their presence is often perceived as a disturbance to public order even though they are merely trying to survive. It is this structural injustice that motivates the current study to explore in-depth the determinants of unequal access to employment among street workers in Hulu Sungai Utara, as well as the potential of creative economy-based empowerment as an inclusive and locally grounded approach.

## Method

This research employs a qualitative descriptive approach using a case study method. Data were collected through documentary study techniques from secondary sources such as reports from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS), documents from the Social Affairs Office, the Manpower Office, as well as publications from NGOs focusing on labor and poverty issues.

The research location is Hulu Sungai Utara Regency, South Kalimantan Province, specifically in urban areas of Amuntai places where street workers such as buskers, street clowns, street vendors, and others are frequently encountered, particularly at traffic lights or working around food stalls, shops, and roadside residential areas.

The data analysis was conducted using content analysis techniques, by identifying, categorizing, and interpreting patterns found in the documents to understand issues of social inequality and the empowerment of street workers through the creative economy, supported by statements from key informants, namely the street workers themselves.

## Results and Discussion

### 1. Driving Factors Behind Street Workers (Buskers and Street Clowns)

#### a. Buskers

Buskers often come from low educational backgrounds and low-income households. They are forced to work on the streets due to difficulties in finding decent jobs and limited skills.

Silver (2020) explains that social exclusion occurs when individuals or groups are isolated from access to the formal employment system, thereby being pushed into the informal sector. Buskers fall into this category, where lack of skills and education causes them to be marginalized from the formal labor market.

Kembuan, Matheosz & Pratiknjo (2021) state that street buskers generally emerge out of necessity, driven by the need to meet daily living expenses and save money for education. This economic pressure becomes the main reason why they choose to perform on the streets as a source of income.

Busker testimony: *"Sometimes I play music on the street, sometimes I dress as a clown for photos. If someone gives me money, I accept it. But it's tough many people look down on us."*

#### b. Street Clowns

Street clowns also often face limitations in accessing formal jobs suited to their skills, leaving street performance as their only option.

According to Silver (2020), groups marginalized from the formal labor market are forced to seek alternatives in informal employment. Street clowns are a clear example of this social exclusion.

Zahra (2023) notes that many street clowns shift to this profession due to lack of formal education and limited job opportunities. The study reveals how social and economic inequality influences this group to choose street work.

Street clown testimony: *"I sometimes wear a clown costume for photo sessions on the street. If someone gives me money, I accept it. But I often feel anxious because there's no stable income."*

## 2. Lack of Social Protection and Stigma

### a. Buskers

Buskers work without adequate social protection and are often subject to enforcement actions and social stigma.

Irawan (2021) argues that structural inequality leads to injustice, where certain groups—such as buskers—lack equal access to social and legal protection. They are often seen as public disturbances without being guaranteed their proper rights.

Khoerunnisa (2023) states that society tends to perceive busking as a low or unstable profession. Formal jobs usually offer social security and welfare benefits such as health insurance, sick leave, and pensions. Buskers typically have no access to these benefits. Moreover, formal employment often provides opportunities for personal and skill development, which may be limited in street busking.

Busker testimony: *"Sometimes we are seen as city nuisances, but we're just trying to make a living in any way we can. We're not protected if problems arise with others or the authorities."*

### b. Street Clowns

Street clowns also face stigma and discriminatory treatment, often being perceived as contributors to public disorder and denied legal or social protection.

Structural inequality, as described by Irawan (2021), occurs when street workers, including clowns, are treated as marginalized groups without access to basic rights such as adequate legal and social protection.

Sulastris's (2023) research finds that street clowns are frequently targets of enforcement without clear solutions. The study highlights how stigma and inequality hinder their chances of transitioning to more structured and protected employment.

Street clown testimony: *"I'm often moved away by officers, sometimes even arrested just for wearing my clown costume. We're seen as a nuisance. There's no protection for us who work on the streets."* – Informant B (Street Clown)

### 3. The Role of Government and Social Institutions

#### a. Buskers

Government programs for empowering buskers remain limited and lack integration to address their challenges in informal work.

Zimmerman (2022) states that social empowerment should enable individuals to access resources that improve their quality of life. In the case of buskers, such empowerment is often unsustainable or poorly integrated.

Sari (2023) reveals that while there are programs from NGOs and local governments aiming to empower buskers, these efforts are often temporary and lack depth.

Busker testimony: *"I once joined a training organized by an NGO, but after that, there was no follow-up. I don't know where to start to improve my life."*

#### b. Street Clowns

Empowerment efforts for street clowns are also limited, with few effective programs that can create real change in their lives.

Zimmerman (2022) emphasizes the need for more systemic and sustainable interventions in social empowerment for marginalized groups like street clowns. Poorly integrated programs often fail to deliver significant impact.

Maya (2023) research shows that although some organizations offer training, there is insufficient support to help street clowns improve their welfare through more structured work.

Street clown testimony: *"I joined training held by some organizations, but there was no follow-up. I'm confused about how to find a better job."*

### 4. The Potential of the Creative Economy in Empowering Buskers and Street Clowns

#### a. Buskers

The creative economy can serve as a potential pathway for empowering buskers, particularly in performing arts like music. With proper training, they can enhance their skills to earn income in a more structured way.

According to Howkins (2023), the creative economy offers opportunities for individuals with artistic talents to turn their creativity into structured and profitable sources of income.

Zahra (2023) finds that musically talented buskers can develop careers in the arts and entertainment sector, which could provide better earnings compared to street performances.

Busker testimony: *"I enjoy playing guitar and singing, but I'd like to perform in more organized places, not just on the streets. I also want to learn more about performing arts."*

#### b. Street Clowns

Street clowns can also be empowered through the creative economy, particularly in the performing arts and entertainment sectors, allowing them to earn income through their creativity.

Howkins (2023) explains that the creative economy provides space for artistic workers, including street clowns, to develop their potential into more professional and structured forms of employment.

Sulastri (2023) research shows that street clowns empowered through creative economy sectors such as performing arts and entertainment can gain more stable and structured income.

Street clown testimony: *"I want to learn more about performance and art. If there's an opportunity, I'd like to work in a better place—not just on the street."*

## Conclusions

Based on the discussion presented earlier, the following conclusions can be drawn:

**Driving Factors Behind Street Workers (Buskers and Street Clowns).** Street workers, both buskers and street clowns, are driven by limited education and skills, which hinder their access to formal employment. Most of them come from low-income families and are isolated from the formal employment system, leading them to choose street work. This social exclusion distances them from decent job opportunities, making the informal sector their only livelihood alternative.

**Lack of Social Protection and Stigma.** Street workers, particularly buskers and street clowns, face not only economic inequality but also discriminatory treatment and societal stigma. They are often perceived as public nuisances without adequate legal protection, exacerbating existing social inequalities. Such discrimination prevents them from accessing basic rights, rendering them a marginalized group in society.

**Role of Government and Social Institutions.** Although some empowerment programs have been implemented by the government and NGOs, these programs are often poorly integrated or unsustainable. Street workers feel they lack long-term support, which hinders their ability to improve their social and economic conditions. Therefore, more structured and sustainable empowerment efforts are urgently needed to effectively address their issues.

**The Potential of the Creative Economy in Empowering Buskers and Street Clowns.** The creative economy offers significant opportunities for buskers and street clowns to develop their skills and earn a more structured income. Training programs in performing arts such as music for buskers and entertainment arts for street clowns can provide better empowerment pathways, offering them the chance to build careers in more professional and organized fields. Through the utilization of the creative economy sector, they can achieve more stable income and improved well-being.

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