

The truth behind the unemployment statistics

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Of all the social mores held dear by Indonesians, "I think it's the government's duty to support those who can't find work", is the pre-eminent belief.

The social services minister probably knows this, but we wonder if he knows that 89 percent of the people are looking to him to support the unemployed.

Nobody would suggest that people in poverty can live off democracy alone. About 75 percent of both the educated (junior high and above), and the less educated groups equally believe that the

"gap between rich and poor is growing".

On the other hand, over 70 percent of both groups are equally "optimistic about the future", and over a third of the country believes that "the Indonesian economy appears to be improving".

Though the heartache caused by the recent oil price hikes has dampened enthusiasm, optimism remains buoyant in the main.

This article focuses on unemployment and the workforce. The information is based on Roy Morgan Single Source, a national survey with 25,000 respondents annually, covering 90 percent of Indonesia's population over the age of 14,

working but actively looking for either full-time or part-time work. On this basis, there are 73.5 million people in the Indonesia workforce.

In addition, there is the 5.9 percent who "don't work", but they are primarily under-20's and over-50's who aren't sure whether they want to work at this point in time or not.

That does not put them in the same basket as the unemployed.

But the real pressure on the Manpower Ministry comes from the 14-24 age group, of whom almost 12 percent cannot find jobs even though they are actively looking.

Unemployed, disgruntled youth are damaging both to

the collective conscience as well as the national economy. With over 18 million students at any point in time, there are no quick fixes.

What is also disappointing is that almost 3 percent of males and 6 percent of females looking for jobs, but currently unemployed, have a diploma or degree from a university. Politicians, the business community, educators and sociologists would do well to focus on these demographic groups.

At over 8.2 million, SMEs employ a substantial and growing segment of Indonesia's workforce, followed by 4.26 million office workers and another 382,000 professionals and managers.

The fact that more than half of all adult women do not participate in the workforce is culturally understandable across Indonesia. They are housewives, raising families and reinforcing family values. As time goes by, this will gradually change but, for now, it is a reality that eases pressure on employment. Above all, people want security in their lives, their homes, as well as in their jobs.

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