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Story

Why More Young Indonesians Are Choosing to Flee the Country



Youth Frustration Grows Under President Subianto's Leadership, Migration Trend Gains Momentum Online

The hashtag *#KaburAjaDulu* is an online movement centered around the idea of “just run away first” from Indonesia. It went viral across social media in Indonesia in early 2025, appearing in over 121,000 posts on TikTok and 62,300 on Instagram. Young people used the hashtag to express their desire to leave the country for better work and study opportunities, while many also shared their experiences abroad and encouraged others to follow suit.

The movement stemmed from their insecurity about the future, particularly due to Indonesia's high educational costs, limited job opportunities, and low wages. Many of the country's 64 million youth population felt overlooked by the efficiency policies of newly elected President Prabowo Subianto, which included funding cuts to key sectors such as education and climate. Young people were disappointed by government decisions and the unfulfilled promises of progress. They lost hope for a brighter future at home and increasingly chose to live abroad.

The diaspora

Jeihan Chalil, a young professional in her early 20s who has been working in Japan, shared her reasons to settle abroad during a phone interview on February 19, 2025. “I can make three to four times the minimum wage in Indonesia as an entry-level employee in Japan, which says a lot about the current economy in Indonesia,” she said.

The higher salary also allowed her to save money, something that she saw would be difficult back home. During a visit to Jakarta in 2024, she noticed that eating out there costs about the same as in Tokyo. “Of course, some foods are more expensive in Japan, but many people can still afford them,” said Chalil.

In Jakarta, a meal at the mall costs around 200,000 rupiah, which is about 4% of the **monthly** minimum wage. In Japan, a similar meal costs about 1,200 yen, which is around the **hourly** minimum wage. Two hours of work can cover the cost of a meal in Japan, while in Jakarta, it would take about 10 hours of work to afford the same meal.

But for young Indonesians working overseas, it is not without challenges. In Indonesia, there is a “reliable safety net,” Chalil said, and “once abroad, you're on your own.” Even still, she thinks it's better than facing limited prospects at home.

“If you are willing to take that risk, it might be worth it,” said Chalil, to anyone considering leaving the country.

Dita Ratri, a development practitioner and current public policy master's student at Columbia SIPA in her 30s, shared similar frustrations, calling the movement a “time bomb”—a consequence of unfulfilled hopes for progress under the current government. Many young people, disappointed with the previous government under President Joko Widodo, had hoped for change with the new administration but felt things had only gotten worse.

“Look deeper into why youth, who are typically indifferent or disengaged, are now driving this hashtag. There is a reason behind it,” she said.



A disconnect between the government and the youth

While personal stories like Chalil's show the realities that young Indonesians face, responses from those in power have been dismissive, leaving many feeling ignored and unprioritized. Deputy Minister of Manpower Immanuel Ebenezer Gerungan said, "Hashtags are fine, we don't need to pay too much attention to them." He also suggested that people who migrate should not return to Indonesia. "If they want to run away, let them," Gerungan said. "If necessary, don't come back."

This approach raised concerns among the public, as it ignored the underlying issues driving the youth's desire to leave the country. The disconnect between the government's stance and the frustration of the younger generation, if left unaddressed, could lead to bigger challenges for Indonesia's future. For example, the government set an ambitious goal to make Indonesia a high-income nation by 2045. However, the growing outflow of young, talented individuals seeking opportunities abroad threatens to disrupt this vision.

Indonesia has long viewed its "demographic bonus" – where the productive age (between 15 and 64 years old) outnumbers the non-working population – as a key engine for its economic growth. This can be a good thing for a country if the younger population is educated, skilled, and able to contribute productively to the economy.

However, the migration of skilled youth going abroad has been growing even before this movement, posing a risk to Indonesia's demographic bonus. According to an official report received by Kompas from the Directorate General of Immigration, nearly 4,000 Indonesians

became Singaporean citizens between 2019 and 2022, with most of these workers aged between 25 and 35. The trend is seen as a potential for brain drain, where Indonesia could lose its skilled labor force.

“If we’re not ready for the demographic bonus, we’ll end up with young people who have a lot of energy, but no platform to channel it,” said Ratri, who emphasized on how young people are desperately seeking better opportunities and a space to unleash their potential.

A love unreturned

For many young Indonesians, their relationship with their country feels like a one-sided affair, a sentiment that has become clearer with the rise of this online movement.

When asked to comment on the trend, ministers even questioned the sense of patriotism among the youths participating., “If there is [the hashtag] Kabur Aja Dulu, are they Indonesian citizens or not?” asked Nusron Wahid, Minister of Agrarian Affairs and Spatial Planning, after giving a [press statement](#) at the Presidential Palace in Jakarta on February 17, 2025. “If you are truly patriotic, when there is a problem, we solve it together.”

His criticism misses the deeper issue, which goes beyond a perceived lack of love for the country. It’s about wanting to be heard, to belong, and to contribute, but feeling rejected by a system that fails to value their potential. In Chalil’s words, despite the current state of the country, she still wants to return to Indonesia one day, “when everything becomes better,” she said. There is a love for the country that has not faded. But this love is not returned in the form of opportunities, safety, or a sense of belonging.

For Ratri, the solution lies in acknowledging that Indonesia’s youth, who are full of potential, are being left behind. She warned that the future of Indonesia depends on its young people, but without the necessary resources, recognition, and chances to grow, that future is at risk. “Don’t take it as a joke,” she tells the ministers. “We do love Indonesia, which is exactly why we created the hashtag.”

Politics - Youths - Social Change

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