

The Indonesian Update

Monthly Review on Economic, Legal, Security, Political, and Social Affairs

Main Report

Efforts to Encourage Sustainable Economic Growth from the Villages

Laws

- Mayday 2026: Lessons from the August 2025 Demonstrations ■
- National Education Day: The State of Academic Freedom in 2026 ■

Politics

- Problem Definition* in Policy: ■
the Case of the Discourse on Standardization of Activists by Natalius Pigai

Social

- Awaiting the Presence of Safe Spaces in the Provision of Daycare Facilities in Indonesia ■
- A Breakthrough in Nutri Level Regulations to Protect Public Health? ■

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FOREWORD

The May 2026 edition of the Indonesian Update features a main report titled “Efforts to Promote Sustainable Economic Growth from Villages.” This paper examines the importance of villages as a foundation for national economic development and highlights the challenges in promoting inclusive, productive, and sustainable growth. The report also discusses how village development policies need to be directed not only at physical development but also at strengthening community capacity, local institutions, and developing economic potential based on regional needs and characteristics.

In the political realm, this edition features an analysis titled “Problem Definition in Policy: The Case of Natalius Pigai’s Activist Standardization Discourse.” This article discusses the importance of problem formulation in the public policy process and examines the extent to which the activist standardization discourse reflects an accurate understanding of the issues facing civil society groups. It also examines the policy risks that arise when solutions are formulated without an accurate and participatory problem definition.

In the legal field, the Indonesian Update highlights the dynamics of civil liberties and democratic space through two articles. The article “Mayday 2026: Lessons from the August 2025 Demonstrations” discusses reflections on handling mass demonstrations, protecting the right to express opinions, and the importance of a democratic approach in responding to public aspirations. Meanwhile, the article “National Education Day: the Situation of Academic Freedom 2026” examines the state of academic freedom in Indonesia, including the challenges faced by academics in maintaining independence of thought, expression, and contributing to the formulation of public policy.

In the social sector, this edition addresses the issues of social protection and public health. The article “Waiting for Safe Spaces in Childcare Facilities in Indonesia” discusses the urgency of providing safe, affordable, and quality childcare services as part of supporting working families and child development. Furthermore, the article “Nutritient Level Regulations: a Breakthrough to Protect Public Health?” examines the potential of nutrition labeling policies as a tool to increase consumer awareness and encourage healthier consumption patterns.

Through the monthly publication of the Indonesian Update which raises various strategic and current issues, it is hoped that this report can contribute to policy makers in government institutions, business actors, academics, researchers, think tanks, and civil society, both at home and abroad, to obtain contextual analysis of the political, legal, social, and economic dynamics in Indonesia, while enriching understanding of the challenges and direction of future public policy.

Happy reading.

Main Report

Efforts to Encourage Sustainable Economic Growth from the Villages

-Putu Rusta Adijaya-



The narrative of Indonesia's economic development always seems to be centered on cities; for example, Jakarta, Surabaya, Medan and other capital cities. With their economic magnetisms, these cities attracted many people from villages and remote areas of the country to get opportunities for better lives, such as more decent work, easier access to education, and more optimal health facilities. In theory, this phenomenon is explained in agglomeration economics in the works of economists Alfred Marshal (1890), Paul Krugman (1991), and Michael Porter (1996).

In essence, an agglomeration economy is when the process of economic activity tends to be concentrated in a certain area, such as a city, resulting in economic growth due to the proximity of the area to economic sources. For example, manufacturing industrial areas in the Bekasi to Karawang area, technology companies in Silicon Valley, as well as business centers around the Jakarta Golden Triangle area (Sudirman, Kuningan, Gatot Subroto). The gathering of economic activity in one place results in more efficient economic costs and productivity.

Thus, why do agglomeration economies occur in cities? In theory, there are several things that underlie it. First, the location of the area is close to markets or sources of input for goods/services. Because it is close to input sources, companies can more easily produce or sell goods/services and the

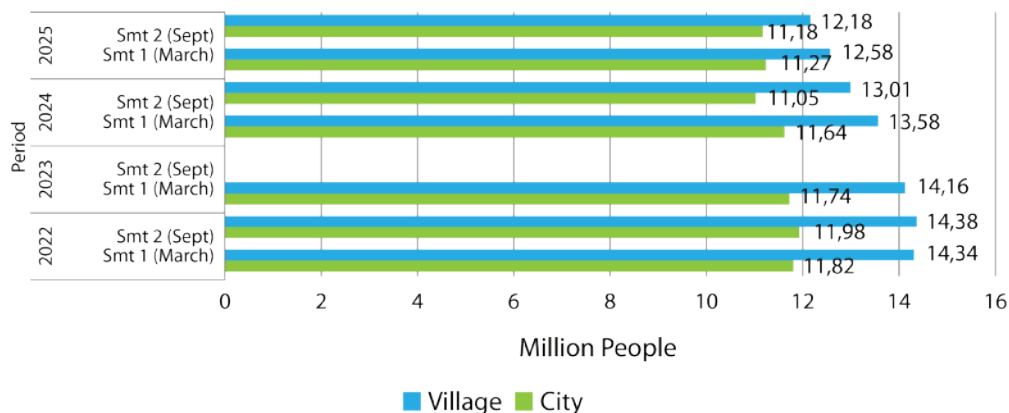
prices are cheaper. Second, the location of the area is close to the workforce so that companies can easily find skilled workers according to their needs. Third, regional locations have supporting infrastructure and share this infrastructure, such as roads, ports, electricity and internet connections. Therefore, regional locations close to suppliers, producers and consumers, as well as economic supporting infrastructure provide advantages for supply chain efficiency in an agglomeration economy.

Unfortunately, the benefits or economic processes of agglomeration do not occur in villages because of limited access, high logistics costs, and markets that are still small or underdeveloped. Apart from that, villages are also often associated with backwardness, poverty and backwardness. Therefore, this paper shall analyze efforts that can encourage sustainable economic growth in villages. In addition, this article shall provide policy recommendations for the administration of President Prabowo Subianto.

The Villages Economic Conditions

According to the data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) (accessed May 10, 2026), in 2025, Indonesia would have 84,291 villages/*kelurahan* spread from Sumatra Island to Papua Island. In general, the majority of village/district residents in Indonesia still depend on the agricultural sector. According to “Indonesian Village Potential Statistics 2025” (2025) by BPS, as many as 80.5 percent of village/sub-district residents get their main income from the agricultural sector, followed by the services sector (12.39 percent) and the industrial sector (7.11 percent). If you look at the sub-sectors in the agricultural sector, the food crops sub-sector is at the top of the list of main sources of income in villages/sub-districts (38,148 villages/sub-districts) followed by plantations (21,336 villages/sub-districts), horticulture (3,674 villages/sub-districts), and fisheries (3,646 villages/sub-districts). This sub-sector has long been the backbone of the national economy. Unfortunately, the economic agents in it; namely, farmers, planters and fishermen, are still in poverty.

Figure 1. Number of Poor Population by Region (Million People)



Source: BPS, accessed May 10, 2026. Processed by the Author. Semester 2 2023 data is not available on the official BPS website.

This is reflected in data on the number of poor people by region. Figure 1 shows that there are still very deep disparities between poverty in urban and rural areas from year to year, even though the number of poor people in urban and rural areas has decreased. For example, in September 2025, the number of poor people in villages would be 12.18 million people or one million people higher than the number of poor people in cities.

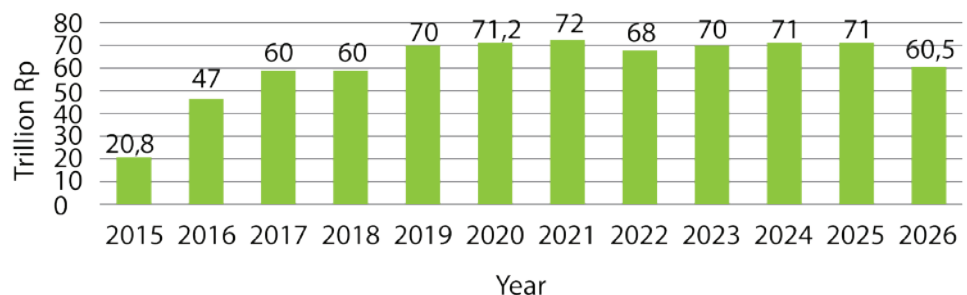
Furthermore, the Village Fund Program can also show a portrait of the economy in the village. This program, which was launched in 2015, can be said to have brought about quite significant changes, for example, improved village physical infrastructure, available clean water facilities and infrastructure, developed Village-Owned Enterprises (BUMDes), and so on. For the record, Article 20 Paragraph (1) of Minister of Finance Regulation (PMK) Number 7/2026 concerning Management of Village Funds for Fiscal Year 2026 explains the use of Village Funds to support sustainable development, such as:

- a. handling extreme poverty through direct cash assistance (BLT);
- b. strengthening climate resilient and disaster resilient villages;
- c. increasing promotion and provision of basic village-scale health services;

- d. food security programs or food storage, energy and other village economic institutions;
- e. supporting the implementation of the Red and White Village Cooperative (KDMP);
- f. infrastructure development and maintenance;
- g. development of digital and technological infrastructure;
- h. other priority sector programs including developing village potential and excellence;

The Village Fund Program provides opportunities for learning, developing, innovating and adapting.

Figure 2. Development of Village Fund Allocations for the 2015-2026 Period



Source: Ministry of Finance, processed by the Author.

However, in 2026, there will be a significant decrease in the Village Fund allocation to IDR60.5 trillion from IDR71 trillion in the previous year (Graph 2). This decline was driven by the central government’s policy of diverting APBN allocations to other priority programs, such as Free Nutritious Meals (MBG) and the development of KDMP.

As a result, there have been various reactions from several villages and their village officials who have had to think hard about how to fulfill government administration and public services amidst limited fiscal space due to reductions in village funds, such as in Krandegan Village, Bayan District, Purworejo Regency, Central Java Province (krandegan.id, December 31, 2025). Based on “Village Government Financial Statistics 2024 and 2025” by BPS (2025), villages in Central Papua Province are the villages with the highest dependency on regional transfer income (99.91 percent) followed

by villages in North Maluku Province and West Papua Province with dependency levels of 99.84 percent each in 2024.

In addition, the agglomeration economic gap between villages and cities can also be seen from the percentage of non-agricultural informal employment. BPS data (accessed May 10, 2026) shows that, in 2025, the proportion of non-agricultural informal employment in villages will be 53.09 percent or 8.82 percentage points higher than in cities (44.27 percent). Likewise with human resources between villages and cities which are proxied from the Human Development Index (HDI). In the case of Bali Province, in 2024, Denpasar City and Badung Regency will be the regions with the highest HDI values, namely 85.22 for Denpasar City and 83.87 for Badung Regency. It is no surprise that these two regions have high HDI because these two provinces have the values that form HDI, namely education, health and a decent standard of living, which are also good.

The contrast is shown by Karangasem Regency with an HDI value of only 69.74. According to the Head of the Karangasem Regional Development Planning Agency (Bappeda), I Gusti Bagus Widiantara, reported by nusabali.com (March 28, 2026), the low HDI in Karangasem Regency is due to the still lagging behind in the education sector, people's purchasing power is still low, the poverty rate is high, and access to services is unequal.

Also, many native people from Karangasem Regency who have higher education work outside Karangasem Regency or outside the region. This is a real form of agglomeration economics where areas that have been developed, with good economic activity, are more attractive to the community in seeking a more decent livelihood and income so that villages (in this case Karangasem Regency) become less competitive.

This phenomenon creates a 'vicious cycle', which can be explained as follows. A region that has or is close to economic resources will attract investment, large companies, and skilled labor. For companies, production requires a large market and skilled (sometimes very specialized) labor which is actually provided in built-up areas (in other words cities). As investment, companies and skilled workers increasingly gather in the city, suppliers and startups will also increasingly come to develop their business. The number of companies, investments, suppliers, startups will increasingly attract more skilled workers and advanced industries are needed in the city.

The impact is high economic activity, production, consumption, investment which leads to high city economic growth, higher and competitive wages, accelerated competitiveness, increased multiplier effects, making the city more advanced than others. As a result, there will be high aggregate economic

Main Report

First, the Central Government must be able to collaborate with government elements from the provincial to village levels to accelerate the development of physical, digital infrastructure and human capital to encourage product distribution, internet connections and digitalization, market and knowledge access, etc. Apart from that, the Central Government together with governments from the provincial to village level must be able to strengthen local institutions through the management of BUMDes and KDMP by professional, expert, responsible and transparent village communities. This is so that BUMDes and KDMP could be more competitive and become a sustainable economic force in the village. However, the success of this requires optimal and sustainable assistance, funding and monitoring and evaluation.”

growth on paper, but not evenly distributed. Villages are becoming less and less developed because they are losing their productive human resources (which is shown in the case of Karangasem Regency, Bali Province) as well as losing the potential for economic development. Villages that do not have or are close to economic resources (such as those in Disadvantaged, Frontier, Outermost/3T areas) will be worse off economically and socially. In economic theory, the explanation above is a form of trade-offs from urban agglomeration economics and underdeveloped rural development.

Policy Recommendations

In public and economic policy, there is no single policy or program that can solve all problems (no one-size-fits-all). Both the Central Government and regional governments must work together and collaborate to build a village economic ecosystem.

First, the Central Government, in this case the Ministry of Communication and Digital (Komdigi), together with the Ministry of State-Owned Enterprises (BUMN), the Ministry of Villages and Disadvantaged Regions Development (DPDT), the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology, the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, the Ministry of Public Works and the Ministry of Home Affairs must be able to collaborate with government elements from the provincial to village level to accelerate the development of physical, digital and human capital infrastructure to encourage product distribution, internet connections and digitalization, market and knowledge access, etc. Education and skills training must be adapted to the existing needs of the local economy and not just send village children to school in the city, but also provide relevant skills for them to manage businesses and develop the economy in their villages.

In addition, the Ministry of DPDT together with the Government from the provincial to village level must be able to strengthen local institutions through the management of BUMDes and KDMP by professional, expert, responsible and transparent village communities. This is so that BUMDes and KDMP could be more competitive and become a sustainable economic force in the village. However, the success of this requires optimal and sustainable assistance, funding and monitoring and evaluation.

Mayday 2026: Lessons from the August 2025 Demonstrations

-Christina Clarissa Intania-



Sumber Foto: setneg.go.id

May 1 is commemorated as International Workers' Day, and in Indonesia workers join in by voicing their labor rights through demonstrations and other means. On Workers' Day 2026, demonstrations took place across various regions of Indonesia, including Jakarta, Yogyakarta, Surabaya, Medan, and elsewhere. However, as the demonstrations, which should have been a peaceful means for citizens to express their views, unfolded, unrest broke out in Jakarta and a number of people were detained by police.

According to a statement by the Head of Public Relations of the Metro Jaya Regional Police, Assistant Superintendent Budi Hermanto (1/5/2026), 101 people were arrested and detained at the Metro Jaya Regional Police Headquarters on Mayday 2026. These 101 individuals were arrested on suspicion of attempting to incite unrest. However, in the latest developments, all 101 detainees have been released to their families and received legal assistance from the Jakarta Legal Aid Institute following intensive questioning (tempo.co, 2/5/2026).

Reflecting on this incident, we are reminded that last year's demonstrations also saw the arrest of up to 6,000 people. But looking back, what distinguishes the handling of those events from this round of protests? This piece seeks to examine the lessons learned, or not, from the August 2025 demonstrations, as applied to the Mayday 2026 protests.

Arrests Before the Demonstration Began

In response to the arrest of 101 people on Mayday, the Advocacy Team for Democracy (TAUD) (1/5) reported that those detained also included individuals who were not part of the demonstration, people who simply happened to be at the location. The arrests were thus made without clear grounds and based on excessive police suspicion. Searches and seizures in public spaces such as train stations were also carried out. This does not reflect the lawful use of coercive measures as required under applicable criminal procedure law.

Furthermore, it was found that police officers conducted sweeping operations before the action reached its location. In the area surrounding the demonstration, police were reported to have conducted profiling of residents, conducting searches, and arresting people based on certain physical characteristics (Press Legal Aid Institute, 1/5/2026). Sweeping operations and arrests were not only carried out moments before the demonstration began, but also days in advance. Account holders who had been actively voicing opinions were arrested before the demonstration even started (LBH Jakarta, 1/5/2026). This demonstrates that public expression of opinion, not yet even initiated, had already been curtailed by law enforcement authorities. Such actions reflect an image of law enforcement seeking to suppress public expression due to excessive suspicion.

In Jakarta, the 101 arrested individuals began being released the same day or the following day after further questioning. The questioning was also accompanied by legal assistance (tempo.co, 2/5/2026).

Compared to the August 2025 Demonstrations

Compared to the August 2025 demonstrations, the Mayday 2026 protests were smaller in scale and the number of arrests was far fewer. However, the same pattern persists in how the police handle demonstrators and carry out arrests.

The arrests did not target criminal offenders, but rather anyone present at the scene, journalists, observers, passersby, and even those standing at the edges of the crowd. Physical presence at the demonstration site was treated as evidence of involvement. This demonstrates that the arrests lacked clear rational basis. This was also the case during August 2025, according to the Fact-Finding Commission Report (2026) concerning the full series of August 2025 demonstrations.

Compared to the August 2025 demonstrations, the Mayday 2026 protests were smaller in scale and the number of arrests was far fewer. However, the same pattern persists in how the police handle demonstrators and carry out arrests.

The above issue points to a second pattern, namely, arrests that do not reflect due process of law. Criminal procedure law requires clear grounds for suspicion, a valid warrant, and notification of rights to the suspect. Yet the coercive measures carried out, whether in the form of on-site arrests or subsequent detention, did not meet the procedural standards set forth in the Criminal Procedure Code (KUHAP).

Sweeping operations and profiling reflect the authorities' suspicion as the basis for coercive measures in the field. Subjective suspicion is not a substitute for sufficient preliminary evidence. This is what led to the arrest of as many as 101 people in Jakarta alone during Mayday 2026, and 6,719 people across Indonesia during the series of August 2025 demonstrations.

This pattern then extended into the digital sphere. Vocal individuals on social media, those who actively criticized government policies, documented police violence, or simply disseminated information about the protests, were also targeted through the Electronic Information and Transactions Law (ITE Law). In August 2025, this resulted in a large wave of criminal charges faced by a number of social media users who ultimately became political prisoners. The criminalization of online expression suggests that what was being controlled was not street unrest, but dissent itself.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are proposed:

- a. The National Police must cease the practice of *sweeping* dan *profiling* based on physical appearance without sufficient preliminary evidence and must carry out coercive measures in accordance with applicable criminal procedure law;
- b. The National Human Rights Commission (Komnas HAM) must follow up on the findings of the Fact-Finding Commission (2026) and monitor ongoing legal proceedings against political prisoners; and
- c. Law enforcement authorities must use the findings of the Fact-Finding Commission to further investigate the actual perpetrators of unrest that endangered the public during demonstrations, rather than criminalizing those exercising their freedom of expression.

National Education Day: The State of Academic Freedom in 2026

-Christina Clarissa Intania-



Indonesia commemorated National Education Day (Hardiknas) on May 2nd. This year's Hardiknas invited all segments of the society to reflect on the effort to "Strengthen Universal Participation, Realize Quality Education for All." This focus was declared as part of President Prabowo Subianto's commitment in the Asta Cita to improving Indonesia's human resources through quality education that is accessible to everyone (Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education, 2026).

Through this focus, one of the things we also need to reflect on is how the current learning and teaching environment in Indonesia can provide freedom for all members of the academic community to learn and teach optimally. We need to ask: are the academic freedoms of our university community already guaranteed and protected? The author believes that the theme of universal participation and quality education for all in this year's Hardiknas should be able to highlight how all members of the academic community can actively engage and participate in sharing and acquiring knowledge, and, more than that, how our academic community can disseminate and receive quality education without hindrance.

Academic Freedom Index

Academic freedom allows everyone who pursues or delivers education to do so in a protected environment. The teaching and learning process provides

an opportunity for all participants to exchange ideas on topics that may be considered sensitive or even taboo in broader society. The existence of guaranteed and protected academic freedom for the academic community preserves this dynamic and creates space for the emergence of innovations and solutions that benefit both society and the state.

Given the importance of academic freedom to Indonesia's education ecosystem and human resource development, the quality of our academic freedom has in fact declined from the previous year. According to the institutions that publish measurements of academic quality across countries, namely the V-Dem Institute and the Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Institute of Political Science (2026), Indonesia scored 0.33 out of 1 in 2025. This represents a continued decline from 2016, when Indonesia had previously scored 0.74.

Cases and Findings

Examining recent cases from 2026, several confirm the above findings. Saiful Mujani, a Professor of Political Science at UIN Syarif Hidayatullah, was reported to police on suspicion of treason and incitement (cnnindonesia.com, 22/4/2026). Feri Amsari, a lecturer at a university's Faculty of Law, was reported on charges of spreading misinformation and suspected incitement based on statements related to food self-sufficiency (kompas.tv, 19/4/2026). Subsequently, Ubedilah Badrun, a lecturer at Jakarta State University, was also reported to police because his statements regarding the President and Vice President were deemed to constitute hate speech (cnnindonesia.com, 20/4/2026).

From the three cases above, it is evident that members of the academic community are not free to share their views in the context of academic opinion and analysis. The cases above were pursued based on statements made in podcasts or documentaries, with each figure acting in their capacity as an academic invited to offer their assessment. Charges such as hate speech, incitement, and treason discredit statements made by academics with the intent to share information as part of knowledge dissemination. If this continues, academics will become increasingly fearful of expressing their scientifically grounded views for the public good.

It is not only members of the academic community who face criminalization, many discussion events organized by university communities on campus have also been cancelled. A screening event for a documentary titled "Pesta Babi" (Pig Party), which addresses the conflict between Papuan communities and the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI), was disbanded in

several regions, one of which was at the University of Mataram in West Nusa Tenggara. The event was dispersed by Sujita, the Vice Rector III for Student Affairs at the University of Mataram, who arrived with dozens of campus security personnel. The film was claimed to be “not good to watch” according to Sujita (cnnindonesia.com, 12/5/2026).

Similar to the cases of academic criminalization described above, these acts of dispersal undermine the strength of academic forums as spaces for learning and discussing new perspectives, including perspectives considered sensitive in broader society. Topics such as the Papua issue and sexuality are frequently restricted on campuses (The Indonesian Institute, 2025). Yet universities should be the appropriate space for open-minded discussion with scientific perspectives in order to drive progress within society. This is protected as part of the very spirit of higher education itself, as also regulated under Law Number 12 of 2012 on Higher Education.

Furthermore, one university has begun participating in the Free Nutritious Meals (MBG) program; namely, Hasanuddin University. Hasanuddin University has opened an MBG kitchen, or Nutrition Fulfillment Service Unit (SPPG). The MBG program is a government priority program that has been criticized for displacing education funding priorities and is currently being challenged before the Constitutional Court regarding its regulatory basis (hukumonline.com, 18/2/2026).

The university’s participation in the MBG program as an SPPG provider is viewed by Subarsono, a Public Policy Analysis expert from Gadjah Mada University (12/5), as a deviation from the core duties and functions of higher education. A conflict of interest potentially arises because the MBG program makes significant use of state funds. The interests of the university and the interests of the state risk becoming entangled through this participation.

Referring to the above elaboration, it can be understood that academic freedom in Indonesia is not yet fully realized. There are still ongoing efforts to discredit and restrict academic statements. As a country that upholds democracy, academic freedom has become a component that accompanies the freedom to obtain education and freedom of expression (Munif, 2025). Academic freedom should therefore be guaranteed and protected by the state, not treated as something that is not considered a serious violation. With the human resource development targets sought by the current administration in the Asta Cita, the state should regard academic freedom as one of the pathways to achieving those goals, and must guarantee it.

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Recommendations

According to the above elaboration, the following recommendations are proposed:

- a. The Ministry of Human Rights, the Indonesian National Police, and the Attorney General's Office of the Republic of Indonesia must recognize that academic freedom is guaranteed and protected. Accordingly, actions that restrict it, such as dispersal and intimidation, must be addressed and must not be normalized;
- b. Universities must be able to safeguard campus autonomy and integrity by ensuring that spaces for discussion, research, seminars, film screenings, and other academic forums can proceed without excessive intervention, as long as they are conducted within a scientific framework and in accordance with the law;
- c. Security authorities and campus leadership must prioritize a dialogical approach when dealing with discussions or academic activities that address sensitive issues; and
- d. Universities must maintain independence from practical political interests and government programs to avoid potential conflicts of interest that could compromise the objectivity of higher education institutions.

Politics

Problem Definition in Policy: the Case of the Discourse on Standardization of Activists by Natalius Pigai

-Christina Clarissa Intania-



Some time ago, the media was abuzz with the discourse on “activist standardization” proposed by Natalius Pigai, Minister of Human Rights (BBC Indonesia, May 4, 2026). This sparked debate, if not opposition, among the public, as it was perceived to widen the obstacles already faced by activists and further restrict civil liberties. Although the idea to establish an assessor team for “activist standardization” was ultimately shelved on May 4, 2026, this case study is interesting to be examined further, particularly from the perspective of *problem definition* in the public policy formulation process.

This article shall attempt to see whether a policy idea has truly been designed to address the problems faced by the society, or whether it has actually created a solution that is not on target. In policy analysis, the most fundamental question is not whether the idea sounds good, but what public problem it actually aims to solve, who is affected, and whether the chosen policy instrument is relevant to the root of the problem.

Activists are Protected by Law, but Why Are They Still Vulnerable?

Referring to the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia (UUD NRI 1945), specifically Articles 28E and 28F, all Indonesian citizens are guaranteed the freedom of association, assembly, and expression of opinion. This should be interpreted as a primary instrument for activism.

In other words, the presence of activists is not a threat to the state, but rather a vital element of democratic life. Activists play a role in providing a voice for vulnerable groups, in monitoring the operation of power, and in promoting fairer and more accountable policies. Without a safe space for activism, the state risks losing its societal corrective mechanisms.

However, these normative protections on paper often do not align with other regulations, which could potentially limit civil space. In practice, activists face multiple interpretations of articles frequently used to respond to criticism. For example, the defamation provisions in the Electronic Information and Transactions Law (UU ITE), the articles on insulting the President and Vice President in the new Criminal Code (KUHP), the articles on spreading hatred or hostility, and the provisions on incitement and provocation in the criminal code.

The main problem is not simply the existence of these articles, but rather how they are used. Criticism of public officials, expressions of disappointment with policies, or satirical social media posts often fall into a gray area between freedom of expression and alleged violations of the law. When the line is not clearly defined, law enforcement officials have significant latitude for interpretation. This situation opens up the possibility of *selective enforcement*, where the law is applied harshly to critical parties but leniently to others.

In the August 2025 demonstrations, at least 6,719 demonstrators in various regions were arrested on suspicion of incitement under Article 160 of the Criminal Code (KontraS, 2025). As of February 2026, 703 people categorized as political prisoners were still undergoing legal proceedings. In another case, Laras Faizati; for example, was charged under Article 45A paragraph (2) in conjunction with the dissemination of information intended to incite hatred or hostility towards individuals and/or certain community groups based on ethnicity, religion, race, and intergroup relations due to her personal Instagram posts expressing disappointment with the police.

This series of events demonstrates that the vulnerability of activists and citizens involved in protests is not merely a normative concern, but a real, recurring problem. The mass arrests and ongoing legal proceedings signal that the state's approach to political expression remains repressive, using criminal instruments as a response to public discontent.

The vulnerability of activists was also evident in the case of Andrie Yunus, Deputy Coordinator of KontraS, on March 12, 2026 ([Tempo.com](https://www.tempo.com), 12/3/2026), who was doused with acid after vocally criticizing militarism and the role of the security forces in civil society. This incident demonstrates

that threats against activists do not always come through formal channels such as legal proceedings, but also through physical violence and terror targeting personal safety.

As a result, activists find themselves in a paradoxical situation. Constitutionally, they are protected, but operationally, they can be summoned, questioned, reported, prosecuted, and even harmed at any time for their advocacy activities. Even when cases do not go to the courts, the mere process of summons can be a form of psychological pressure, draining the movement's time, money, and energy.

This phenomenon demonstrates that the vulnerability of activists in Indonesia stems not from the absence of legal guarantees, but rather from a persistently poor legal culture. Law enforcement often fails to fully recognize freedom of expression and the right to dissent as values that must be protected. In many cases, criticism is still more easily read as a threat than a democratic contribution, while authorities tend to prioritize a public order approach over protecting citizens' rights. As a result, the law, which should be an instrument of protection, can instead become a tool of repression against critical voices.

Problematic Policy Problem Definition

This situation also highlights a more fundamental issue: how the state defines policy issues. In many cases, activism is often positioned as a source of disturbance, potential conflict, or a threat to political stability. When problems are defined this way, the solutions that emerge tend to be control-based, including surveillance, restrictions on gathering spaces, enforcement action, and even pushes for standardization of activists.

However, when viewed using *problem tree analysis*, the real problem isn't the presence of activists, but rather the state's weak protection of citizen participation. Criticism, peaceful demonstrations, policy advocacy, and community organizing should be seen as signs that democracy is working. When citizens are willing to express their aspirations, it indicates there is public energy to improve the country. However, if such expressions are perceived as threats, then the state is misreading social phenomena.

Misunderstanding the problem will result in flawed policies. The Government can be preoccupied with policing critical citizens while ignoring the root causes, such as inequality, injustice, limited channels for aspiration, or weak accountability of public institutions. As a result, the resulting policies only address superficial symptoms, not the true root of the problem.

Therefore, reforms are not sufficient through regulatory revisions alone, as the government and the House of Representatives are currently reviewing Law Number 39/1999 concerning Human Rights (HAM Law), but also require a shift in the perspective of law enforcement institutions. The apparatus needs to be built with the perspective that dissent, peaceful protest, and public advocacy are legitimate parts of democracy. Human rights education, proportional standards for handling actions, accountable oversight mechanisms, and firm sanctions against abuse of authority are crucial steps to improving this legal culture. Without cultural change, no matter how well-written regulations are, it will still be difficult to provide a sense of security for activists.

At this point, the proposed standardization needs to be tested: will certification, mandatory training, or formal state recognition address intimidation, expand freedom of expression, and strengthen legal protections? If the answer is no, then there is a risk of policy misdiagnosis. In fact, standardization could raise new questions: who sets the standards, who is considered a legitimate activist, whether informal grassroots groups will be marginalized, and whether the state will ultimately become the determinant of the legitimacy of citizen movements. Yet the essence of activism often stems from independent, spontaneous, and critical citizen initiatives.

Recommendations

Referring to the analysis above, here are some suggestions that could be made:

- a. The Government, along with the House of Representatives (DPR), needs to prioritize revising and harmonizing various regulations that have the potential to restrict freedom of expression, including articles open to multiple interpretations in the ITE Law, the Criminal Code, and their derivative regulations. At the same time, revisions to the Human Rights Law must be directed at strengthening protection for human rights defenders, activists, journalists, and citizens who express criticism peacefully. The focus of policy should not be standardizing activists, but ensuring that every citizen can safely exercise their constitutional rights.
- b. The Indonesian National Police, the Prosecutor's Office, and other law enforcement institutions need to establish operational standards that recognize peaceful protest, advocacy, and dissent as legitimate components of democracy. The use of criminal laws against criticism should be a last resort, not the primary response. Furthermore, regular

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Given these various issues, the primary policy need now is not to increase controls on activism but rather to strengthen protection of civic space and citizen participation. The state needs to ensure that every policy response truly targets the root of the problem, not just the superficial symptoms. Therefore, there are several strategic steps stakeholders can take.

human rights-based training, independent oversight mechanisms, and strict sanctions against officers who intimidate, abuse, or abuse their authority against activists and demonstrators are essential.

- c. The Ministry of Human Rights of the Republic of Indonesia must promote the protection of activists. Concrete measures could include a rapid complaint channel for threats against human rights defenders, emergency legal aid, psychological recovery services, and regular dialogue forums with civil society organizations. Meanwhile, civil society can strengthen cross-issue solidarity, document cases, and educate the public so that attacks on activists are not seen as individual issues but as threats to democracy.

Social

Awaiting the Presence of Safe Spaces in the Provision of Daycare Facilities in Indonesia

-Made Natasya Restu Dewi Pratiwi-



At the end of April 2026, Indonesia was shocked by the revelation of a violence case involving 53 children at the “Little Aresha” daycare center in Yogyakarta, where children were reportedly abused and frequently tied up by caregivers entrusted with their care (CNN Indonesia, April 28, 2026). This case serves as a stark reminder that child protection in Indonesia is still far from the “safe” standards mandated under Law Number 35 of 2014 on Child Protection.

Following the discovery of violence at the Little Aresha daycare center, it has become imperative for the government to conduct a comprehensive evaluation and transformation to ensure that all daycare centers in Indonesia obtain official permits, employ certified caregivers, and do not operate childcare services without competent human resources.

These mechanisms are essential to ensure the availability of daycare facilities that are not only accessible, but also accountable in implementing childcare practices oriented toward child protection. Therefore, daycare management should not merely prioritize business profit, but must also guarantee dignified child protection. In response to the persistent cases of violence in daycare centers across Indonesia, this article examines the development of Indonesia’s commitment to providing a legal framework and ecosystem that supports the establishment of high-quality and equitable daycare facilities throughout the country.

Current Policy Situation in Ensuring the Presence of Standardized Daycare Facilities

Before the violence case at Little Aresha daycare emerged, Indonesia unfortunately did not yet have specific regulations governing the licensing mechanism for establishing daycare businesses. In terms of data management, Indonesia also lacks an integrated system that parents can use to access information on the distribution of daycare centers around their residence that meet child-friendly standards and have obtained permits from the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education.

According to the Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI) in 2026, the governance and licensing system for daycare or childcare services in Indonesia remains confusing due to differing licensing pathways across sectors. For example, Childcare Centers are supervised by the Social Services Department, while Early Childhood Education institutions are overseen by the Education Department.

However, the reality is that 95% of daycare facilities in Indonesia are community-managed (KPAI, 2026). This means that most existing daycare centers have not been adequately monitored under a standardized government licensing system, because establishing a daycare facility currently only requires a Business Identification Number, which is unrelated to guarantees of competency standardization. Although this mechanism allows broader community participation in managing daycare services, it also creates significant risks, as it makes it difficult to monitor the quality of services and compliance with child protection regulations.

Furthermore, daycare institutions that do not ensure their caregivers possess appropriate competency certification are highly vulnerable to engaging in unethical childcare practices, failing to meet human rights standards, and neglecting child health protection. Therefore, the government must firmly commit to reforming daycare governance, which remains insufficiently regulated through specific policies and is prone to overlapping authority due to the lack of clear supervisory divisions among ministries and government institutions.

Positively, the discovery of violence at Little Aresha daycare prompted the government to respond by immediately initiating an integrated daycare licensing system to ensure standardized licensing, establishing a task force to improve daycare governance, and preventing manipulated licensing

practices in the field (Kompas, April 30, 2026). However, this response also demonstrates that the government's approach to improving daycare governance still tends to be reactive, as mitigation efforts are only designed after cases have already become severe and caused victims.

In the context of violence in daycare centers, the government has failed to implement a preventive paradigm because it only improved the regulatory system after cases of violence had already occurred and harmed children. Ideally, the government should have conducted prior assessments to ensure the existence of a specific legal framework that guarantees the implementation of child protection principles in daycare settings. This is particularly important in the current era, where daycare facilities have become increasingly essential for parents with demanding work schedules or for families living in migrant environments. Without clear regulations and transparent quality monitoring, parents as the primary users of daycare services ultimately become victims of inadequate governance that fails to uphold the principles of good governance.

The Need for Safe and Accessible Daycare Facilities

Access to daycare or childcare/daycare centers must be expanded to create equitable access to childcare services for parents who do not have relatives or caregivers available to look after their children while they work. However, access should not only increase in quantity, but also in quality. Daycare facilities must provide environments that support children's growth and development through opportunities for play, learning, and access to nutritious food. Expanding access is essential to reduce parents' uncertainty regarding childcare arrangements, which may otherwise affect their productivity at work.

Beyond access, ensuring children's safety from the risk of violence while in daycare or childcare facilities remains a critical priority. The legality of service providers must also be clearly established from the outset. This issue is particularly urgent because children, as a vulnerable group experiencing violence, are often unable to clearly explain the traumatic events they have endured. Addressing this issue requires stronger regulatory oversight to ensure standardized childcare quality and safety in daycare facilities, educating parents to make informed decisions when choosing daycare centers, equipping parents with communication skills to help children recognize signs of violence, and ensuring transparency regarding the legality of childcare institutions.

The involvement of the Indonesian Child Protection Commission and civil society organizations in monitoring reports and handling cases of child abuse must also be strengthened. The government should collaborate with health professionals, including child psychologists, to educate parents on how to identify signs of violence and sexual abuse. This would enable children to better understand inappropriate experiences they may face, communicate them to parents, and receive prompt follow-up support and protection.

In terms of fulfilling workers' rights and implementing the mandate of the Maternal and Child Welfare Law, access to safe daycare services should be equally accessible to all. The implementation of these regulations must be strengthened so that working women, particularly female breadwinners, do not experience barriers to employment due to childcare challenges. Indirectly, accessible daycare or childcare facilities within workplaces can contribute to improved productivity while also reflecting a company's obligation to support the welfare and needs of its workforce.

To achieve this, harmonization of standard operating procedures related to daycare services is crucial to ensure clarity regarding the division of authority among sectors, as well as the rights and responsibilities of all involved parties. Oversight mechanisms are equally important. Harmonization can facilitate integrated case reporting systems, strengthen coordination in prevention efforts, improve service provision according to standards, and map daycare or childcare facilities that meet regulatory requirements. This data integration is expected to encourage evidence-based policymaking through representative data analysis. The provision of daycare or childcare services must also take into account the resources and institutional capacities of related organizations so that implementation remains rational, realistic, and targeted, rather than being driven solely by business interests.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are proposed to improve governance in ensuring the availability of safe, equitable, and high-quality childcare facilities:

- a. The Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection, the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Ministry of Population and Family Development, the Ministry of Home Affairs, the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, the Ministry of Religious Affairs, and the Indonesian Child Protection Commission, which have agreed to establish a task force on improving daycare governance, must ensure inclusive and meaningful participation from the public, parents,

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Ultimately, the case of violence at Little Aresha daycare should serve as a catalyst for a comprehensive evaluation by the state to build a more preventive, integrated, and rights-oriented child protection ecosystem. The state should not merely be present when cases of violence go viral in the public sphere, but should instead establish a protection system that works even before violence occurs.

- children, young people, industry associations, health professionals, and academics in providing input. This is essential to ensure that improvements in daycare governance are responsive to field realities, integrated with workers' rights, and not designed hastily without addressing root causes. Therefore, the Ministry of Manpower should also be involved in the task force as a demonstration of the government's commitment to guaranteeing workers' rights to access safe childcare facilities.
- b. The Witness and Victim Protection Agency, under the coordination of the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection, must ensure comprehensive assistance for victims' families to prevent the risk of intimidation during the legal process.
 - c. Regional governments, under the coordination of the Ministry of Home Affairs, should be encouraged not only to focus on fulfilling administrative requirements for establishing daycare facilities, but also to actively develop systems for regular monitoring of childcare service quality in their regions. This monitoring should include verification of operational legality, caregiver competency, facility capacity, and mechanisms for handling public complaints.
 - d. KPAI, together with civil society organizations, must strengthen oversight of transparency in daycare governance and establish complaint channels that are easily accessible to the public. Beyond handling cases, these institutions should also expand public education efforts to help parents understand indicators of safe daycare environments, recognize early signs of child abuse, and understand reporting procedures for violations. Strengthening public literacy is crucial to ensure that child protection is not solely the responsibility of the state, but also becomes a collective movement empowering communities.

Social

A Breakthrough in Nutri Level Regulations to Protect Public Health?

-Made Natasya Restu Dewi Pratiwi-



As of April 14, 2026, the Ministry of Health (Kemenkes) issued Ministerial Decree (KMK) Number HK.01.07/MENKES/301/2026 concerning the Inclusion of Nutrition Labels and Health Messages on Ready-to-Eat Foods (Ministry of Health, 2026). This policy was adopted as an educational effort to prevent excessive consumption of sugar, salt, and fat (GGL), which can increase the risk of various non-communicable diseases, including obesity, hypertension, cardiovascular disease, stroke, and type 2 diabetes.

The urgency of this policy cannot be underestimated, given its strong relevance to the growing prevalence of non-communicable diseases in Indonesia (Pratiwi, 2025). Data shows that the four diseases imposing the greatest financial burden on BPJS Kesehatan are closely associated with excessive GGL consumption. For instance, the cost of kidney failure treatment alone increased by more than 400%, reaching IDR 13.38 trillion in 2025 compared to only IDR 2.32 trillion in 2019 (BPJS Kesehatan, 2025). This figure reflects the significant negative impact of uncontrolled GGL consumption on both state finances and the quality of life of the Indonesian population.

Although Indonesia has finally ratified the Nutri Level regulation, further measures are needed to ensure that nutrition labeling policies do not stop at the regulatory stage alone. Therefore, this article critiques strategies

needed to ensure the effective implementation of the Nutri Level regulation in addressing Indonesia's high burden of non-communicable diseases, which is closely linked to unhealthy levels of GGL consumption.

A Glance at the Nutri Level Regulation for Ready-to-Eat Foods

In its initial implementation phase, the KMK does not target micro, small, and medium-scale food businesses such as Tegal food stalls, street vendors, and small restaurants. At present, the regulation focuses primarily on nutrition labeling for ready-to-drink sweetened beverages produced by large-scale businesses, including boba drinks, *teh tarik*, palm sugar coffee, and juice-based beverages.

Large-scale businesses are required to include nutrition labels and health messages in the form of Nutri Levels across various information media as part of a public education effort to reduce excessive consumption of sweetened beverages. These information media include menus, retail packaging, brochures, banners, flyers, menus on commercial electronic applications, leaflets, and other forms of promotional material.

The Nutri Level system consists of four categories:

- a. Level A (letter A in dark green)
- b. Level B (letter B in light green)
- c. Level C (letter C in yellow)
- d. Level D (letter D in red)

Level A indicates lower GGL content than Level B, Level B lower than Level C, and so forth. The determination of Nutri Levels is based on self-declaration by business actors regarding the GGL content of their products, supported by testing results from government laboratories or other accredited laboratories. However, the inclusion of a "self-declaration" mechanism in this regulation requires careful oversight, as it creates the risk of unverified nutritional claims being made for commercial gain.

Therefore, the GGL labeling policy introduced through this KMK represents a positive step toward reducing the prevalence of non-communicable diseases in Indonesia. Nevertheless, the regulation must be supported by clear implementation guidelines to ensure that these good intentions do not remain merely symbolic. This includes preventing the trivialization of

nutritional verification processes and ensuring that self-declared nutritional claims are validated by qualified experts.

It is important to recognize that without serious commitment, Indonesia's alarming non-communicable disease situation will remain difficult to address. Even with the adoption of the GGL labeling policy, Indonesia still faces major challenges in reducing unhealthy consumption habits. According to the 2023 Indonesian Health Survey (SKI), 28.7% of Indonesians continue to consume sugar, salt, and fat above recommended limits. More specifically, the national average shows that 5.5% of the population consumes more than four tablespoons of sugar per day, 53.5% consume more than one teaspoon of salt daily, and 24% consume more than five tablespoons of fat per day.

These consumption patterns directly contribute to the increasing prevalence of obesity in Indonesia. By 2023, obesity among adults over 18 years old had reached 23.4%, representing a 7.3% increase compared to the 2018 prevalence rate of 21.8% (Ministry of Health, 2023). Even more concerning, obesity rates among children have nearly doubled over the past decade, with childhood obesity reaching 7.8% in 2023 (Ministry of Health, 2023).

These figures confirm that Nutri Level should not function merely as a regulatory instrument. A detailed GGL labeling mechanism should include clear guidance for selecting healthier products through warning labels and a traffic-light system based on GGL content, enabling consumers to immediately understand whether a product falls within or exceeds recommended daily consumption thresholds.

The implementation of the Nutri Level regulation must also be monitored with transparency and accountability, including ensuring that no loopholes allow businesses to manipulate GGL content data. Through the ratification of this KMK, Indonesia aims to improve public access to information regarding daily GGL consumption limits, empower consumers to make healthier food and beverage choices, encourage healthier product reformulation, and establish a reference standard for GGL label design across industries.

Notes for Future Effectiveness

Beyond nutrition labeling, Indonesia needs to develop broader supporting policies to create an environment that enables healthy living. One important approach that Indonesia has yet to implement is the introduction of excise taxes on sweetened foods and beverages. International evidence has shown that such taxes are effective in reducing the consumption of sugar-sweetened products, encouraging product reformulation to lower GGL levels, and

reducing obesity prevalence in countries such as Mexico, South Africa, Portugal, and the United Kingdom (obesityevidencehub.org, 11/05/2025).

Efforts to promote physical activity and public education campaigns must also be supported by government investment in adequate mobility infrastructure so that public transportation users, pedestrians, and cyclists feel safe and comfortable while traveling. Furthermore, UNICEF research (2023) found that many Indonesians feel unsafe engaging in outdoor physical activity due to air pollution, which represents a structural barrier that cannot be ignored in healthy lifestyle policymaking. This means that the success of the Nutri Level regulation will be difficult to achieve if it is not integrated with policies from other sectors responsible for creating environments that support healthy living and outdoor physical activity.

The Free Health Check-Up Program (*Pemeriksaan Kesehatan Gratis/PKG*), currently prioritized by the government, can also serve as an instrument for the early detection of obesity and other non-communicable diseases associated with excessive GGL consumption. Data collected through the PKG should be used as an evaluation tool to assess whether the implementation of the Nutri Level regulation contributes to changes in GGL consumption patterns and reductions in non-communicable disease prevalence. Therefore, the Nutri Level regulation should not be implemented merely as a formality, but should instead be accompanied by a clear evaluation framework to ensure its impact is measurable and meaningful for the public.

Following the PKG, individuals identified as being at risk of non-communicable diseases should receive counseling to support lifestyle modification and reduce the risk of complications. In the long term, the Nutri Level policy has strong potential to reduce the economic burden of non-communicable diseases if its implementation is accompanied by investment in cross-sector collaboration that supports changes in GGL consumption patterns through public education that is empowering and accessible at the grassroots level.

Impact evaluations should also be synchronized with PKG data collection and the Indonesian Health Survey to assess the extent to which the Nutri Level regulation contributes to reducing non-communicable diseases caused by unhealthy GGL consumption patterns.

In conclusion, to optimize the implementation of the KMK, the government must intensify comprehensive health promotion strategies so that the public understands how to read GGL labels and can make informed decisions when choosing healthier products. Detailed technical guidelines for the KMK must also be disseminated across all relevant sectors to ensure clarity of implementation and prevent overlapping authority.

Monitoring and reporting on the impact of the implementation of GGL labeling on food and beverage packaging should be quantified and integrated into non-communicable disease surveillance systems, including future Indonesian Health Surveys and PKG evaluations. This would allow policies to be continuously improved based on representative and evidence-based data.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are proposed to strengthen the implementation of the Nutri Level policy so that it can produce a tangible impact on reducing non-communicable diseases in Indonesia:

- e. The Ministry of Health must immediately issue detailed technical guidelines for the implementation of the KMK and disseminate them comprehensively to all targeted large-scale business actors. This should be accompanied by a transparent and accountable compliance monitoring mechanism, including proportional sanctions for businesses that fail to include Nutri Level labels or manipulate GGL content data.
- f. The Food and Drug Monitoring Agency, together with the Ministry of Health, must establish a cross-verification system for GGL content claims independently reported by businesses. This is necessary to ensure that the current self-declaration mechanism does not become a loophole for manipulation that misleads consumers and undermines the educational objectives of the Nutri Level policy.
- g. The Ministry of Health, in collaboration with the Ministry of Finance, should accelerate the implementation of excise taxes on packaged sweetened beverages as a fiscal instrument that complements the Nutri Level labeling policy. International evidence demonstrates that the combination of excise taxes and labeling policies is significantly more effective in reducing GGL consumption than labeling policies alone.
- h. The Ministry of Health should integrate monitoring of the Nutri Level KMK's implementation impact into future Indonesian Health Surveys to ensure the availability of longitudinal data for policy evaluation. Such data would help assess whether the regulation contributes to reducing the prevalence of non-communicable diseases and lowering the country's economic burden associated with these diseases.

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The implementation of the Nutri Level policy must become a concrete step toward guaranteeing the public's right to clear, transparent, and easily understandable nutritional information. This policy should not merely function as a labeling formality, but must encourage healthier consumption behavior through massive public education, consistent monitoring, and strong legal certainty. Ultimately, GGL labeling regulations must continue to respect consumers' freedom to make conscious food choices while simultaneously creating a healthier, fairer, and more public health-oriented food environment.

- i. The Ministry of Health, together with the Ministry of Communication and Digital Affairs, should involve local governments, civil society organizations, and educational institutions in promoting healthy consumption behavior through health promotion and behavior change strategies.

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