

## East Java Left Behind: The Unspoken Crisis of Post-Covid Poverty

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### Abstract

The research outlines the impact of COVID-19 on poverty levels in East Java, Indonesia. Utilizing secondary information from BPS and governmental documents, the study reveals that poverty surged at the beginning of the pandemic due to increased living expenses and interruptions in economic operations. From 2022 to 2024, the poverty percentage steadily fell as a result of economic revival and social support. Poverty decreased from 10.38% in 2022 to 9.79% in 2024. Despite these improvements, issues such as inflation and digital disparities remain. The report advises enhancing social safety nets, accelerating digital development, boosting various economic sectors, and involving communities to maintain efforts in reducing poverty.

**Keywords:** *COVID-19, poverty, East Java, economic revival, social aid, digital gap, Indonesia*

### INTRODUCTION

At the close of 2019, the globe was taken aback by the rise of a novel virus that was initially discovered in Wuhan, China. In 2020, this virus was classified as the coronavirus. On January 31, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared that the coronavirus had escalated into a worldwide epidemic crisis, which subsequently became known as the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19). The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant effect on numerous sectors, particularly the economy and public health. Every facet of life has been impacted by this virus, including in Indonesia. This predicament has persisted for over a year, even though the government has introduced various measures to mitigate its transmission. These measures encompass the implementation of health protocols, restrictions on community activities at the micro-level, and widespread vaccination efforts. The obstacles encountered by the government extend beyond just managing the virus; they also involve ensuring that economic activities can proceed normally, despite the public activity restrictions that have been put in place (Silfia Yulianawati et al., 2022).

The East Java province is positioned fourth in the count of confirmed COVID-19 positive cases and also holds the highest death rate in Indonesia. The surge in COVID-19 cases in this area has substantially influenced the economic sector, especially regarding the distribution of goods and services as well as the tourism industry. Policies aimed at restricting mobility and activities have adversely

affected traders and small enterprises. Alongside facing job cuts, numerous business owners have experienced financial losses during the pandemic. Rosyadi (2021) highlighted that the open unemployment rate in East Java rose by 2.02 percentage points in 2020 compared to 2019, reaching 5.84. The COVID-19 pandemic led to significant job losses, which could potentially elevate the poverty rate and the number of impoverished individuals in the region. Given the extensive repercussions of the pandemic on the economy, it is vital to examine the shifts in the number of impoverished individuals in East Java before and after the pandemic. The aim of this analysis is to ascertain the degree of changes in the poor population and comprehend the impact of the pandemic on the economic situation of the people in East Java. Hence, conducting a study on the variations in the number of impoverished individuals in East Java following the COVID-19 pandemic is of utmost importance (Desripa et al., 2024).

## **METHOD**

This research employs a qualitative descriptive method to examine the progression of poverty rates in East Java following the COVID-19 pandemic. This method considers a range of social, economic, and policy elements that affect poverty. The information utilized is sourced from secondary materials, comprising publications from BPS and official government documents. The analysis of data is performed by evaluating poverty levels after the pandemic (2023-2024).

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**Table 1: Number of poor people in East Java, Thousand People,  
2022-2024**

Province	Number of individuals living in poverty in East Java (Thousand Individuals)				
	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Jawa Timur	4419,10	4572,73	4181,29	4188,81	3982,69

Source : BPS Jatim (2024)

The COVID-19 pandemic that began in Indonesia in March 2020 had a profound effect on the poverty levels in East Java. Information from Statistics Indonesia (BPS) indicates that the population of impoverished individuals in East Java rose to 4,419.10 thousand in 2020, up from 4,112.25 thousand in 2019. This rise was largely attributed to the implementation of social restriction measures, which resulted in reduced economic activity, business shutdowns, and job losses across multiple sectors (BPS Jawa Timur, 2021). The tourism, commerce, and production sectors experienced a significant decline, leading to job losses for numerous employees, particularly those in the informal economy.

The impoverished population in East Java rose to 4,572.73 thousand in 2021, an increase from the earlier figure of 4,419.10 thousand in 2020. This rise was linked to several key contributors, with one being the ongoing effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in recent years. The pandemic caused a reduction in economic

activities across multiple sectors, particularly in the informal sector, which employs a large segment of the workforce in East Java. Many individuals experienced job losses, reduced working hours, or lower wages, resulting in diminished purchasing power and pushing more people into poverty. Furthermore, the distribution of social assistance was neither fair nor effective, worsening the predicament. Additional factors included fluctuations in staple food prices and limited access to healthcare and education services during the pandemic, which weakened the economic stability of low-income households. The combination of these elements led to an increase in the number of impoverished individuals in East Java in 2021 compared to the previous year (BPS Jawa Timur, 2022).

In 2022, the number fell to 4,181.29 thousand individuals as a result of the relaxation of social restrictions and widespread execution of social aid initiatives. Cash Social Assistance (BST), Direct Cash Assistance from the Village Fund (BLT-DD), Staple Food Cards (Kartu Sembako), and the enhancement of the Family Hope Program (PKH) were among the initiatives that helped mitigate the effects of the pandemic on poverty rates. However, the poverty threshold became lower and more pronounced during the pandemic, indicating that the impoverished population sank even further beneath the poverty line (Sukamto & Lumintan, 2022).

The growing number of individuals below the poverty line in East Java in 2023, rising from 4,181.29 thousand people in 2022 to 4,188.81 thousand people, stemmed from a variety of interconnected factors. A primary factor was the increase in the poverty threshold by 3.97%, escalating from IDR 487,908 per capita per month in September 2022 to IDR 507,286 in March 2023. (BPS Jawa Timur, 2024) This led to numerous individuals who were not initially categorized as poor now being recognized as poor since their earnings could no longer sustain essential expenses. Moreover, inflation in food commodities was a key contributor to the increase in poverty rates. Food items accounted for roughly 75.78% of the poverty threshold in East Java, and consequently, the escalation in prices of essential foods like rice, eggs, and cooking oil directly diminished the buying power of low-income households (Bayu et al., 2024).

In 2024, East Java attained 3,982.69 thousand impoverished individuals in 2024, nearing the figures observed prior to the pandemic. Elements contributing to the decline in poverty levels include robust economic growth, restoration of significant sectors of the economy including production, commerce, and travel, and continuing comprehensive social support for impoverished individuals (BPS Jawa Timur, 2024). However, the nature of poverty in the aftermath of the pandemic has changed, featuring an increase in urban poverty and greater vulnerability among specific demographics such as informal laborers, women, and children. Emerging obstacles to alleviating poverty in the post-pandemic period include escalating living expenses caused by inflation and an expanding digital gap between the affluent and the impoverished (Rahmawati & Dharmawan, 2023).

**Table 2: Poverty level in East Java, Percentage,  
2022-2024**

Province	Poverty level in East Java (Percentage)				
	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Jawa Timur	11,09	11,40	10,38	10,35	9,79

Source : BPS Jatim (2024)

The rise in the poverty rate in East Java in 2020 to 11.09% from 10.37% in 2019 occurred due to several key factors. The most significant of these was the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic, which started spreading in early 2020, leading to an extensive pause in the economy.c activities. Several sectors including trade, tourism, services, and small to medium enterprises experienced a decrease in production alongside revenues, leading to layoffs and rising unemployment. Social initiatives implemented to mitigate potential spread further restricted chances for individuals, especially in the informal sector, to make a living (Khotimah et al., 2022).

The poverty level in East Java also kept increasing in 2021 to 11.40%, surpassing the 2020 rate of 11.09%. This rise was primarily influenced by the persistent effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, which aggravated the economic situation for the community. Most business sectors, particularly SMEs and the informal economy, faced a significant downturn in their activities, resulting in reduced incomes for individuals and higher unemployment rates. (Ayong et al., 2024). Additionally, the containment strategies that hindered movement and economic operations throughout the pandemic impeded the growth of the regional economy, delayed the provision of social assistance, and deteriorated people's purchasing capacity. Furthermore, issues arose, including unequal access to healthcare services and educational opportunities, as well as the general population's struggle to adapt to technological progress during the course of the pandemic (Khotimah et al., 2022).

In 2022, East Java successfully lowered its poverty rate by 10.38%, dropping from 11.40% in 2021, marking a significant success in the battle against poverty. This decrease was driven by a strategic blend of post-COVID-19 economic recovery efforts and comprehensive implementation of government initiatives. The East Java provincial government systematically engaged in various economic empowerment programs, which included direct cash assistance and MSME capital support (Richardson Bunawan & Yuningsih, n.d. 2022).

In 2023, poverty in East Java is expected to fall by 10.35% from 2022 to 10.38%, reflecting the success of consolidating improvements in the socio-economic circumstances of the community in the area. Additionally, a significant factor contributing to this reduction is the recovery of activities following the COVID-19 pandemic, influenced by the rise in job opportunities and community earnings. Moreover, various government social assistance initiatives, including

direct cash assistance (BLT), the family hope program (PKH), and food and energy subsidies, further aid in preserving the purchasing power of disadvantaged groups. Local authorities also actively engage in enhancing local economic empowerment through entrepreneurship training, supporting MSMEs, and improving access to education and healthcare services. The synergy of economic growth and focused social protection measures is a key element in combating poverty, even though the decrease is relatively minor. This illustrates that efforts to alleviate poverty need to be continuously strengthened in a sustainable manner to ensure a more significant impact in the future (Khoirudin & Haerusman, 2023)

The poverty rate in East Java fell from 10.38% in 2023 to 9.79% in 2024, driven by multiple factors, including ongoing economic growth, managed inflation, and a reduction in the unemployment rate. Economic empowerment initiatives, like support for SMEs, along with the coordinated actions of both central and local governments to alleviate extreme poverty, also significantly contributed to this reduction (Jurnal et al., 2025)

## **CONCLUSION**

According to the study, the COVID-19 pandemic initially increased poverty in East Java, Indonesia, but subsequent economic recovery and social support initiatives contributed to a reduction in poverty from 2022 to 2024. Despite these positive developments, ongoing challenges such as inflation and disparities in digital access continue to hinder comprehensive poverty alleviation. Ongoing and targeted actions are essential to maintain durable advancement and resilience against future economic downturns.

### **Recommendations:**

1. Maintain and enhance social safety programs to protect disadvantaged populations, particularly in times of economic recession.
2. Enhance digital frameworks and knowledge to facilitate access to online job and educational opportunities.
3. Foster diverse economic sectors to lessen vulnerability to underperforming sectors and encourage sustainable growth.
4. Consistently assess anti-poverty initiatives to adjust and optimize strategies effectively.
5. Engage local communities in the development and execution of poverty alleviation initiatives to ensure they are pertinent and enduring.

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