Press Release

สำนักงานสภาพัฒนาการเศรษฐกิจและสังคมแห่งชาติ
โทร. 0 2281 7582 อีเมล pr@nesdc.go.th
สภาพัฒน์

Thailand's Social Outlook in the Second Quarter of 2026

Thailand's social outlook in the second quarter of 2026 showed several notable developments. Employment continued to improve, while cases of diseases under surveillance declined. However, some indicators showed less favourable trends, including unemployment, household debt (in the first quarter of 2026), alcohol and tobacco consumption, safety of life and property, and consumer protection complaints. The report also highlights three emerging social issues: (1) Online Grooming: Hidden Risks in the Virtual World; (2) Vertical Drama: A New Form of Entertainment and Its Social Impact; and (3) Platform Workers: When Protection Must Keep Pace with Digital-Age Employment. In addition, the report features an article on "International Approaches to Managing Data Center Investments."

The labour situation continued to improve. The number of employed persons reached 41.5 million, increasing by 5.1 percent from the second quarter of 2025. This growth was driven by increases in both agricultural and non-agricultural employment, with the construction sector recording the highest growth. However, the **overall unemployment rate increased** to 0.95 percent, with 0.40 million people unemployed. In addition, the number of quasi-unemployed individuals, working fewer than 24 hours per week, increased by 8.0 percent, while long-term unemployment rose by 11.3 percent. **Key issues requiring attention** include: (1) **The implementation of the Employee Welfare Fund Law**, which will take effect on 1 October 2026 and cover nearly 110,000 establishments and approximately 5.7 million employees. Employees required to contribute should be made more aware of the fund, while systems should be developed to support its effective implementation; (2) **Risks to agricultural employment from El Niño**. Several areas have experienced drought, which is expected to continue through the first half of 2027. This could affect agricultural production, household income and labour demand, potentially causing some workers to move to other sectors; and (3) **The increasing number of migrant workers engaging in reserved occupations**. In fiscal year 2026, 3,217 migrant workers were found to be working illegally, with nearly one-third engaged in occupations reserved for Thai nationals, an increase of 19.3 percent from the previous year. Stricter inspections and law enforcement are therefore needed.

Household debt in the first quarter of 2026 totalled 16.41 trillion baht, **an increase of 0.5 percent** from the same period last year. Meanwhile, Thailand's economic growth accelerated, resulting in **the household debt to GDP ratio declining to 85.9 percent**. According to the National Credit Bureau, **non-performing personal loans (NPLs), overdue by more than 90 days**, reached 1.25 trillion-baht, **accounting for 9.20 percent of total loans**, down from 9.59 percent in the previous quarter, declining across all loan categories. Meanwhile, NPLs in the commercial banking system amounted to 170 billion baht, or 3.25 percent of total loans. However, **the share of loans overdue by 31-90 days (SMLs) to total loans continued to rise**, indicating a risk that they could become NPLs. **Key issues requiring close monitoring** include: (1) **Risks from housing borrowers holding more than one housing loan account.** In 2025, each housing loan borrower had an average of 1.11-1.22 newly opened housing loan accounts. Although this figure fell to 1.08 accounts in the first quarter of 2026, it still suggests that some borrowers may be taking out loans to purchase multiple properties within a short period, increasing the risk of future defaults. The credit reporting system should be made more frequent; and (2) **Borrowers participating in government debt relief measures remain unable to resume regular debt repayments.** According to SCB EIC, only 15.0 percent of borrowers participating in government debt relief measures were able to resume regular debt repayments, while 85.0 percent continued to face difficulties. Measures should therefore shift towards individualised debt rehabilitation based on borrowers' repayment capacity, as practised in South Korea.

Surveillance disease cases declined by 45.8 percent, with respiratory infections accounting for most cases. **Mental health problems also decreased.** However, **key issues requiring attention** include: (1) **Obstructive Sleep Apnea (OSA)**, which can increase the risk of serious long-term health conditions if left untreated. People should be encouraged to watch for symptoms and seek medical evaluation when at risk; (2) **Metabolic Dysfunction-Associated Steatotic Liver Disease (MASLD)**, highlighting the importance of regular health check-ups and screening; and (3) **Childhood overweight**, which calls for greater attention to healthy diet, appropriate portion sizes, and regular physical activity. Communities should be supported to provide safe spaces for children to be active, alongside regular health check-ups in schools.

Alcohol and tobacco consumption increased by 0.6 percent, with alcohol consumption rising by 0.9 percent and tobacco consumption by 0.1 percent. **Key issues requiring close monitoring** include: (1) **Environmental factors that may increase the likelihood of smoking among youth**, particularly the presence of cigarette retailers near residential areas, which makes cigarettes more readily accessible; and (2) **Potentially illegal online marketing of alcoholic beverages**, such as challenges offering alcoholic drinks as rewards and promoted through social media. Stricter enforcement is therefore needed, alongside measures to raise awareness among business operators.

Safety of life and property worsened, with criminal cases increasing by 18.3 percent from the same period last year, driven by increases in drug-related offenses, property offences, and offences against life, body and sexual offences. **The number of people affected by road accidents** also **increased** by 7.6 percent, reflecting increases in injuries, fatalities, and permanent disabilities. **Key issues requiring close monitoring** include: (1) **Children continued to be the primary victims of sexual abuse**. In 2025, children under 18 accounted for 78.4 per cent of the 908 reported victims; and (2) **The use of fabricated hardship stories on social media for financial gain**. Some individuals create misleading stories about personal hardship or family conflicts to gain public sympathy and generate income. In some cases, these activities are linked to commercial content-production networks, undermining public trust and potentially violating the Computer Crime Act.

Consumer protection complaints increased by 38.6 percent from the same period last year, rising across goods, services, and real estate complaints filed with the Office of the Consumer Protection Board (OCPB), and telecommunications complaints filed with the Office of the National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission (NBTC), which increased by 39.7 percent and 13.1 percent, respectively. **Key issues requiring close monitoring** include: (1) **Substandard processed meat products** containing excessive nitrates or nitrites. Cases include factories operating without renewed licences or failing to meet hygiene standards, as well as products without valid FDA registration numbers or displaying cancelled or counterfeit numbers; (2) **High-protein products with inaccurate labels**, with some containing less protein than claimed and higher levels of sugar or fat than stated. Closer monitoring and verification of label information are therefore needed.; and (3) **The hidden risks of squishy toys**. Some products lack safety certification or contain hazardous chemicals exceeding permitted limits. Others resemble food or contain sharp parts that may pose risks if swallowed or cause injury to children. Stricter controls on advertising and sales are therefore needed, while consumers should check that products carry Thai-language labels, manufacturer or importer details, and the Thai Industrial Standard (TIS) mark.

Online Grooming: Hidden Risks in the Virtual World

The growing use of online media among children and young people has created more opportunities for perpetrators to target them through online grooming. This often starts with building a relationship and gaining trust before moving conversations from public platforms to private channels. As children become more isolated from those around them and perpetrators gain greater control, conversations may turn sexual, including requests for private photos or videos, and may eventually lead to in-person meetings and sexual abuse. Concerningly, although 58.0 percent of children recognise the risks of sharing personal information with strangers online, 47.0 percent have nevertheless done so. Moreover, 10.0 percent have met in person someone they first known online, with more than half having positive feelings about the meeting.

These risks have prompted many countries to strengthen online child protection. Rather than placing the responsibility mainly on children and parents, countries such as Australia, the United Kingdom and France are now requiring **online platforms to share responsibility**. Measures include age verification, risk assessments and child-safe service design. **AI and digital technologies** are also being used to analyse online conversations, detect and prevent risky behaviour, and support investigations and law enforcement.

In Thailand, measures are also being introduced to strengthen child protection online. These include applying the **duty of care** principle, which requires platforms to take steps to prevent and reduce risks to children and youth. On 18 March 2025, the Cabinet approved in principle a draft law introducing five additional offences involving children online: grooming for sexual purposes, sexting, sextortion, cyberstalking, and cyberbullying. Strengthening **digital literacy** is also important to help children recognise perpetrators' tactics, assess the trustworthiness of people they interact with online, and know when to refuse or seek help.

Vertical Drama: A New Form of Entertainment and Its Social Impact

Smartphones have changed how people consume media, shifting from scheduled television programmes and hour-long series to shorter content that can be watched anytime and anywhere. Vertical dramas, designed for mobile screens and built around fast-paced storytelling, are becoming increasingly popular. Thailand is an emerging market, ranking sixth globally for app downloads and third outside China for in-app purchases. With its internationally experienced media and entertainment talent and rich cultural resources, Thailand is well placed to develop its vertical drama industry in three key areas: (1) Opening up opportunities for new producers and talent to enter the industry and create jobs; (2) Developing new business models, including coin purchases, subscriptions, platform advertising, and product placement; and (3) Promoting Thai culture to global audiences, particularly by building on content areas in which Thailand is already a leading producer, with potential for related businesses and further economic value.

However, these opportunities also come with **significant challenges** including: (1) **Repetitive storylines** that rely on intense and emotional plots. If this continues, it may reduce content diversity and distort perceptions of right and wrong and how problems should be solved, particularly among children and youth; (2) **Risks for vulnerable group**, as watching content alone on mobile devices may reduce opportunities to exchange views and increase exposure to hidden advertising, propaganda, and misleading information; and (3) **Online scams**, where criminals use fake advertisements or phishing links to trick users into sharing personal information or downloading malware, potentially leading to identity theft and stolen funds.

As the vertical drama industry continues to grow, countries are taking different approaches to regulation. *China*, for example, requires vertical dramas to be approved before release, while the *United States* focuses on protecting consumers from unintended coin purchases and unwanted subscriptions. In Thailand, the focus should be on **protecting people's rights and safety**, particularly in areas such as child exploitation and fraud, while avoiding overly strict content controls that could limit creativity. **Media literacy** is also important, helping viewers recognise misleading content, hidden advertising, and online scams. Creating spaces for viewers to discuss and share different perspectives can broaden their views and help them understand how media shapes their thoughts and behaviour.

Platform Workers: When Protection Must Keep Pace with Digital-Age Employment

Platform businesses have become an important part of the digital economy, providing flexible work opportunities for many people. Thailand's digital services market is expected to grow from 310 billion baht in 2023 to 520 billion baht by 2027, supporting nearly 460,000 workers in 2025. However, this flexibility comes with **a protection gap**, as platform workers are not formally recognised as employees and therefore face: (1) **insecure income and benefits**, due to unpredictable earnings and work-related costs borne by themselves; (2) **health and safety risks**, as many face pressure to work 10-12 hours a day; and (3) **limited bargaining power**, as platforms can set or change working conditions unilaterally. The algorithms governing job allocation, performance assessment, and account suspension are often unclear. Customer ratings affect job allocation, while riders' complaint and appeal processes can be difficult and time-consuming.

The public sector has begun taking steps to strengthen protection, including advancing the draft Independent Workers Promotion and Protection Act B.E. .... and establishing a subcommittee to consider minimum pay and benefits for platform workers. International experience shows two main approaches to protecting platform workers: (1) **Applying existing labour laws**, with courts **determining employment status based on actual working conditions**, as in *the United Kingdom*, where Uber drivers have been recognised as workers entitled to basic rights despite being classified as self-employed under their contracts; and (2) **Introducing specific legislation for platform workers**, providing rights and protections suited to their work without requiring them to be employees. In 2026, the ILO adopted the Decent Work in the Platform Economy Convention, emphasising employment status based on actual working conditions and rights relating to pay, safety, social security, unionisation, collective bargaining, and algorithmic transparency. Thailand should apply the principles of the Convention by speeding up the review and enactment of the draft Act, requiring platforms to be transparent about how they operate, and enabling workers to negotiate collectively.

International Approaches to Managing Data Center Investments

Data centers are critical infrastructure that enables digital services to operate smoothly and efficiently. They are also becoming an increasingly important sector in attracting investment. In *the United States*, the expansion of data centers has been associated with increases of 3.5 percent in employment, 5.0 percent in wages, and 4.7 percent in the number of business establishments, while unemployment rates have fallen. The case of Loudoun County, Virginia, also shows how Data Centers can generate significant revenue to support community development.

However, these investments also come with **challenges**, including: (1) **Heavy resource use and environmental impacts**, such as in *Ireland*, where data centers accounted for 21 percent of the country's electricity consumption in 2023, and in the *United States*, where there have been environmental concerns over gas turbines installed to power xAI's data center in Mississippi; (2) **Limited local economic benefits**, as most employment occurs during the construction phase, while core technology and operations remain under the control of foreign companies, as seen in *Sweden* with Meta's facility in Luleå; and (3) **The need for effective regulation to ensure sustainable growth and greater local benefits**. Rather than simply promoting data center investment, many countries are updating their laws and regulations to manage environmental and resource impacts while ensuring that more of the economic benefits stay in the country. For example, the *European Union* requires data centers to report their energy and water consumption. *Singapore* has introduced the Green Data Center Roadmap, requiring new projects to use at least 50 percent clean energy and show clear benefits to the local economy. Meanwhile, *Malaysia*'s Selangor state requires new data centers to source at least 30 percent of their goods and services locally.

Promoting data center investment in Thailand involves several considerations, including: (1) **Participation of Thai businesses**, as Thailand still relies on imported key IT equipment, such as processing chips, while the local businesses benefiting from these projects are mainly concentrated in construction, land development, and utilities; and (2) **Regulatory framework for data centers**, as Thailand currently lacks a lead agency to oversee data center projects as a whole and has yet to establish specific environmental standards or legislation that take into account the particular nature of data centers. Although the public sector has begun taking steps, including setting up a subcommittee on energy management to screen data center projects and launching a pilot Direct Power Purchase Agreement scheme for renewable electricity, the detailed criteria, assessment methods, and enforcement mechanisms are still under development.

Therefore, to ensure that data center expansion creates greater value for the country, Thailand should: (1) **Accelerate the development of a regulatory framework for data centers**, including establishment of lead agency to coordinate and monitor projects, implementation of Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), and updating of relevant laws and regulations to reflect the specific nature of data centers; (2) **Create opportunities for Thai businesses to enter the data center value chain** by setting requirements for the use of local content, supporting business matching, upgrading product and service standards, and equipping workers with the skills the industry needs; (3) **Involve stakeholders in project planning and assessment**, with measures to monitor impacts and provide remedies; and (4) **Promote efficient use of energy and resources** by encouraging data center operators to increase their use of renewable energy, adopt technologies that reduce electricity and water consumption, and set clear targets for energy and water use.

Key Social Indicators

Key Components	Year 2024	Year 2025	2024				2025				2026	
			Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2
1. Employment[1/]												
Workforce (Thousands)	40,356.6	40,130.82	40,226.4	40,178.1	40,484.1	40,537.7	40,085.09	40,114.4	40,196.3	40,127.5	41,912.3	42,160.1
% YOY	-0.22	-0.56	-0.14	-0.31	-0.12	-0.34	-0.35	-0.16	-0.71	-1.01	4.56	5.10
Employed Person (Thousands)	39,806.4	39,624.6	39,579.0	39,500.7	40,039.5	40,106.2	39,383.3	39,510.0	39,852.1	39,752.8	41,194.5	41,510.7
% YOY	-0.26	-0.46	-0.13	-0.45	-0.13	-0.36	-0.49	0.02	-0.47	-0.88	4.60	5.06
Unemployed Person (Thousands)	402.2	327.8	407.7	429.1	413.9	358.2	357.7	365.5	307.5	280.5	393.1	400.9
Unemployed Rate (%)	1.00	0.81	1.01	1.07	1.02	0.88	0.88	0.91	0.76	0.70	0.94	0.95
Quasi-Unemployed Person (Thousands)	192.3	155.4	191.5	162.4	191.9	223.6	176.3	155.9	142.6	146.6	185.9	185.7
2. Household Debt[2/]												
Household debt value (Trillion baht)	16.43	16.44	16.37	16.36	16.36	16.43	16.31	16.31	16.33	16.44	16.41	N/A
% YOY	0.21	0.04	2.40	1.55	0.82	0.21	-0.35	-0.31	-0.19	0.04	0.50	N/A
Ratio to GDP (percent)	87.9	86.7	90.4	89.4	88.5	87.9	86.7	86.3	86.4	86.7	85.9	N/A
NPL[3/] (Trillion Baht)	1.22	1.31	1.09	1.16	1.20	1.22	1.19	1.24	1.29	1.31	1.25	N/A
% YOY	16.4	7.6	14.9	12.2	14.1	16.4	8.7	6.9	7.6	7.6	5.2	N/A
% NPL to Total Loan	8.94	9.59	8.01	8.48	8.78	8.94	8.78	9.11	9.45	9.59	9.20	N/A
3. Health and Illness												
3.1 Number of patients under disease surveillance[4/] (persons)												
Measles	1,868	1,137	543	136	504	685	389	352	212	184	153	123
Meningococcal fever	11	21	2	2	3	4	2	0	6	13	6	6
Encephalitis	967	1,572	316	216	242	193	312	435	413	412	369	399
Cholera	4	7	2	0	0	2	1	0	4	2	3	7
Hands, feet and mouth	89,794	112,474	15,957	7,847	49,610	16,380	10,684	13,004	68,510	20,276	8,534	9,626
Dysentery	1,823	2,072	485	373	533	432	506	598	556	412	456	488
Pneumonia	398,201	459,138	96,395	75,975	115,246	110,585	138,418	97,040	103,517	120,163	97,084	77,596
Leptospirosis	4,187	5,115	767	732	1,348	1,340	782	955	1,287	2,091	855	1,026
Dengue fever	103,601	57,653	24,131	17,702	42,328	19,440	7,236	15,036	24,918	10,463	4,635	7,147
Influenza	650,931	1,174,455	121,074	99,895	220,228	209,734	267,952	130,683	217,452	558,368	159,855	43,448
Rabies	3	7	0	1	2	0	4	2	1	0	2	3
3.2 Rate per 100,000 population of death with major chronic non-communicable diseases[5/]												
High blood pressure	13.2	N/A	Quarterly data are not available									
Ischaemicheart disease	33.3	N/A										
Cerebrovascular disease	59.5	N/A										
Diabetes	21.2	N/A										
Cancer and tumors	133.2	N/A										
4. Safety of life and property[6/]												
Against life, body, and sexuality crimes (cases)	19,233	19,345	4,553	4,471	5,237	4,972	5,102	4,906	4,903	4,434	4,836	5,151
Property crimes (cases)	70,595	78,238	15,491	15,515	20,776	18,813	19,894	18,523	21,501	18,320	17,157	20,102
Narcotics (cases)	357,096	418,558	81,203	84,142	95,511	96,240	92,638	97,783	112,279	115,858	118,161	118,140
Cumulative reported disaster victims (persons)[7/]	869,232	874,026	224,121	203,848	212,637	228,626	225,919	204,797	215,580	227,730	235,726	220,333
Road traffic accident fatalities (persons)	14,173	12,428	3,748	3,450	3,131	3,844	3,408	3,080	2,716	3,224	3,488	3,133
5. Consumer Protection												
5.1 Number of Complaints filed to OCPB[8/] (Cases)												
Advertising	2,594	2,748	807	397	742	648	788	674	530	756	697	489
Labelling	2,860	3,288	584	533	886	857	911	850	664	863	788	874
Contracts	2,172	2,542	467	420	686	599	625	666	469	782	560	501
Direct Selling and Direct Marketing	2,793	4,293	609	600	711	873	1,418	744	1,258	873	1,247	1,669
Others	14,989	22,834	3,319	3,567	3,869	4,234	4,310	5,603	6,315	6,606	6,094	8,394
5.2 Consumer Complaints filed to NBTC[9/] (Cases)	1,460	1,540	414	340	311	395	394	367	449	330	425	415

Source: [1/] Labor force survey report, National Statistical Office, Ministry of Digital Economy and Society

[2/] Bank of Thailand

[3/] National Credit Bureau

[4/] Bureau of Epidemiology, Department of Disease Control, Ministry of Public Health

[5/] Public Health statistics, Strategy and Planning Division, Office of the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Public Health; and the Thai Health Promotion Foundation (ThaiHealth) website

[6/] Criminal Record and Information Management Enterprise System (CRIMES), Royal Thai Police

[7/] Claims filed under Protection for Motor Vehicle Victims Act., Road Accidents Data Center for Road Safety Culture (ThaiRSC)

[8/] Office of the Consumer Protection Board, Office of the Prime Minister

[9/] Office of The National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission (NBTC)