



NESDC News

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Thailand's Social Outlook of Q3/2020

The significant social issues in the Thailand's Social Outlook of Q3/2020 are as follows: For the dimension of Human Qualities, there was a high number of unemployment rate and the decrease of working hour in employed people, as well as the tendency of increasing in the Non-performing debt (NPLs). For the health dimension, it was found that illness under surveillance disease decreased. In the dimension of social security, there was a decrease in criminal cases and road accidents. In the dimension of well-being and people's behavior, the consumptions of alcohol and cigarettes decreased. In addition, there were other interesting social situations including the preparedness of Thailand's public health system for the arrival of foreign tourists, the adolescent pregnancy in Thailand, and the article "The impact of COVID-19 on poverty".

The unemployment rate which remained high and the working hour of employed people which constantly decreased will affect the income and other factors of households. New graduated, young and high level of education workforces are still unemployed.

In Q3/2020, there were 7.4 hundred thousand unemployed persons. This was equal to 1.90 percent of unemployment rate that was similar to the previous quarter at 1.95 percent, which was during a severe COVID-19 pandemic. Young and high level of education workforces were the majority of unemployed persons. Considering the unemployment rate by the level of education, it was found that the undergraduate degree had been the highest among other levels, at 3.15 percent which had accounted as the highest since 2011, followed by vocational and high vocational degree at 2.79 percent and 2.73 percent respectively. Whereas the unemployment rate of workforces aged between 15-19 years old and 20-24 years old had risen to 9.4 percent and 7.9 percent respectively during this quarter as well. It indicated that young and high level of education workforce was the group that needed a continual care. There was an increase in the unemployment of workers in the formal sector. According to the Social Security Office report, it revealed that the number of beneficiaries of unemployment benefit was 4.88 hundred thousand persons, accounted for 4.4 percent of the total number of insured persons which had risen from the last quarter at 3.5 percent. Even though the unemployment for formal sector had increased, the overall unemployment remained steady. It showed that

when the workers in the formal sector became unemployed, they tended to switch to informal sector, for instance, a freelance or an agricultural worker, which affected the labor productivity. The temporary unemployment dropped. The Department of Labor Protection and Welfare reported that there were 1,387 businesses requested for the use of Section 75. It covered 3.3 hundred thousand labors, a decrease from the previous quarter of 7.9 hundred thousand.

There was a rise in the employment rate in Q3/2020. The number of employed persons had increased to 37.9 million, which accounted for the increase of 1.2 percent compared to the same quarter of 2019. It was an increase in the employment of non-agricultural sector by 1.8 percent, as more of businesses came back to normal operation. Another reason was the employment of non-agricultural sector in the same quarter of last year dropped dramatically from the effect of contraction in exports and a reduce in demand for production capacity. There was a rise in the employment in the following sectors; construction, wholesale/retail, transportation/storage by 6.6 percent, 4.6 percent, and 3.3 percent respectively. However, manufacturing sector had remained constantly decreased by 1.4 percent for six quarters. Apart from the reduction in orders, these industries were impacted by the technological disruption and the competition with foreign countries. Although it was the proper time for the agricultural sector, the employment rate in this sector reduced at 0.1 percent from the same period of last year due to many areas of the country still suffered from drought.

In spite of employment, workforces did not work efficiently. It could be clearly seen from the average working hours decreased over the same period last year from 43.5 hours per week to 41.6 hours per week. In addition, the number of overtime workers or those who worked more than 50 hours per week declined by 19.7 percent, which consequently resulted in the decrease in the productivity and income of workers. This would affect further to the purchasing power of households.

Issues to be monitored in labor sector The COVID-19 pandemic occurrence had affected labor market since the previous quarter. Despite the sign of improvement from this quarter, there are various issues that need to be followed up for the next period as follows: (1) **The potential for controlling the second wave of pandemic** Presently, the government executes the measure for economic recovery and allows the foreign tourists to travel to Thailand under the public health conditions. Even though the mentioned measure has advantages to the economic recovery, to prevent the severe effects of the second wave of pandemic to economy and employment, there must be a strict surveillance in every procedure of screening for the entry of foreign tourists. (2) **Participation in the employing measure from the government** The government has measures to promote the employment with the

unemployed persons and those who go back to their hometown, as well as the group of new graduates with high unemployed problems. However, there were only a few numbers of entrepreneurs and labors participated in the measure, in particular, the project that provide subsidy to the entrepreneurs to hire new graduates. There were 88,564 positions posted from the entrepreneurs, but only 57,096 workers registered, which 4,114 of them were in the process of preparing for the project agreements (reported on November 11, 2020) (3) **Impact of natural disasters on the agricultural employment** The flooding situation has continuously damaged the households and the agricultural areas since the beginning of the fourth quarter. Presently, there are 35 provinces affected by the flooding situation, particularly Southern and Northeast which more than 1.99 Rai of agricultural areas were devastated. (4) **The quality of life of labor** The gradual increase in unemployment and reduction in working hours caused the workers to receive lower incomes and may affect the quality of life of workers, the ability to pay for debt and the poverty.

From the above situations and issues, There are measures that can promote a more flexible labor market may help mitigate the consequences and help to increase workers' resilience in order to mitigate the impact as follows: (1) **Encouraging self-employed people to have capital and marketplaces**, for example, promoting a local market or street food in each area and community may increase the ways to make a living and generate more income for labors, especially those in the informal sector. (2) **Accelerating the implementation of projects under the Emergency Decree authorising the Ministry of Finance to Raise Loans to Solve Problems, to Remedy And Restore the Economy And Society as Affected by the Coronavirus Disease Pandemic**, that has been approved for 202 projects in order to create more jobs, employment, and income according to the guidelines. This will help create more employment for a period of 3-12 months for 3.4 hundred thousand positions. (3) **Promotion of skills development for both new graduates to be ready to work and those who have already worked or have a job to have more skills or to have new skills that will enable job adjustments** The group of new graduates entering the labor market but are still unable to find a job should be developed to have the necessary skills to work, such as language skills, technology skills, and negotiation skills. For those who have previously worked or who are currently working must develop skills continuously. In 2020, the World Economic Forum stated that there were several of essential skills for working, such as using technology in critical thinking, complicated problem-solving skills, servicing skills or having a good service mind, financial and resource management skills, as well as leadership and social influence skills to enhance the work efficiency.

Household debt rose at a slow rate while the quality of credit must still be monitored closely.

The household debt situation in Q2/2020 was worth 13.59 trillion baht, expanding by 3.8 percent, decelerated from 4.1 percent in the previous quarter. It was accounted for 83.8 percent of GDP, which steadily increased from the previous quarter. The main reason was the severe contraction of economy, included of continuous increase of the household debt value. It reflected the growing financial vulnerability of households, especially those who were affected or were at risk of income and employment from the economic crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic occurrence. The overall credit quality was still at risk and required close monitoring. Based on the outstanding balance of non-performing loans (NPLs) of commercial banks at the end of the second quarter of 2020, the value was 152,501 million baht. It grew by 19.7 percent and accounted for 3.12 percent to total loans, which decreased from 3.23 percent in the previous quarter. It was a result of measures to aid debtors and the alleviation of debtor classification criteria that improved overall debt quality situation.

Tendency of household debt in Q3/2020 is predicted that the demand in loan will increase due to the lessen measures of pandemic control, the surge in consumer confidence. The trend is also expected to rise in the household debt to GDP ratio, as well as the outstanding NPLs due to the economic contraction and unclear signs of recovery.

The impact of COVID-19 pandemic occurrence on the Thai's household debt was a crisis that demonstrated and emphasized on the financial vulnerability and structural problems of the Thai households. It showed that they lacked of assurance and immunity to cope with economic uncertainty. In the past, the government and financial institutes implemented measures to alleviate the affected debtors in both minor groups and business groups. In the next phase, if the time frame of measures has ended, but the economic situation has not yet recovered, there will be a risk of an increase in bad debt numerously. The household might create more informal debt, specially incurring debt for consumption goods. Therefore, this is a challenge for both government and financial institutes to establish policies for solving the household debt in a state of uncertainty.

The overall illness decreased, but a tendency of diseases that are likely to be more common in winter needed to be monitored.

Illness under surveillance dropped by 68.1 percent, which was the reduction in almost all diseases. There were illnesses under surveillance during rainy season, such as influenza patients decreased by 93.4 percent, patients with pneumonia decreased by 44.9 percent and

patients with dengue fever decreased 34.4 percent. The pandemic occurrence of COVID-19 stimulated people to watch out and look after themselves carefully, together with self-quarantine at home and social distancing practice. Nonetheless, there are still monitoring and surveillance issues for health and disease that are likely to increase in the next phase of the beginning of winter, such as pneumonia, influenza, and also the threats in health, such as deaths from cold weather, PM 2.5 dust problems, as well as an increase in disease cases, such as RSV and tuberculosis.

Consumption of alcohol and cigarettes decreased

In Q3/2020, the consumption of alcohol and cigarettes dropped by 5.5 percent. Alcohol consumption decreased by 7.5 percent and cigarettes consumption dropped by 2.5 percent. Most of the recent alcohol and cigarettes control operations focused on measures at national level, campaigns and public relations to educate people, the restriction of buying, the market control, and tax and price measures. However, there is still a lack of emphasis on the development of mechanisms to address local community-wide problems that may directly make a change since it could work closely to the people and consumers in the area, and also, could understand the socio-cultural and economic context of the local areas through the cooperation from all sectors including the government, private sector, civil society, Village Health Volunteers and local communities, which altogether could learn to solve the problems of the area until it becomes an agreement among the people in the community.

Overall criminal cases decreased, but still needed to watch out for the groups of children and young people which may enter the gambling cycle easily through various advertising channels. Thailand's human trafficking situation remained unchanged at the "Tier 2" level for the third consecutive year.

In Q3/2020, overall criminal cases fell by 25.3 percent compared to the same period of last year. Narcotic cases decreased by 27.4 percent, crimes against life, body and sexual assaults decreased by 10.1 percent and crimes against property also decreased by 13.6 percent. However, it is still needed to watch out for the groups of children and young people which may enter the gambling cycle easily, particularly the online gambling which is three times more severe than other types of gambling. Nowadays, there are many online gambling websites that offer various gambling services throughout the day by accessing via the internet on the smartphone or computer. The teenagers are the most likely to enter the gambling cycle due to persuasive advertisement. In terms of the situation of human trafficking in Thailand in 2020, the US TIP Report of 2020 yet ranked Thailand in the “Tier 2” category for the third consecutive

year, stating that Thailand continues to increase its efforts to prevent overall human trafficking. Furthermore, they also provided important suggestions to the operations of Thailand.

The number of accidents and deaths decreased but monitoring motorcycle accidents remained top priority.

Road traffic accidents and deaths in Q3/2020 decreased by 2.7 percent and 12.4 percent, respectively, as compared to the same period last year. The main contributing factors to road accidents include cutting in front of other vehicles that made up 36 percent of road casualties, followed by exceeding speed limits which accounted for 35.6 percent. Road accidents caused by motorcycle collisions were still the highest in this quarter, with big motorbikes mostly involved in accidents. Therefore, relevant agencies considered the need for stricter rules and requirements for big motorbikes in order to strengthen road safety, reduce injuries, and loss of life and property.

The number of complaints to the National Consumer Protection Board (NCPB) and the National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission (NBTC) increased.

According to the NCPB, the number of consumer complaints on goods and services in Q3/2020 increased by 7.5 percent as compared to the same period last year. Complaints on direct selling and direct marketing rose by 35.2 percent due to direct selling firms taking advantage of the COVID-19 to lure people to invest. The complaints to the NBTC also increased by 3.1 percent from the same period last year, which were predominantly about standard and quality of services. Moreover, the government should pay attention to the impact of Cross-Border E-Commerce (CBEC) in the country. Given that the growth of CBEC has been followed by the development of innovation, market adaptation and lifestyles, this complexity of the supply chain may open up opportunities for some sellers to exploit consumers. The quality of imported products through CBEC may not be as expected because it had neither obtained approval from the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) nor had it been inspected by the Thai Industrial Standards Institute (TISI). Because of these factors, some sellers used marketing strategies to attract people into buying counterfeit or low-quality products. Consumers might find taking legal action challenging due to language barriers, distance or other limitations. Therefore, additional measures or legislation are needed to protect consumers.

The preparedness of Thailand's public health system for the arrival of foreign tourists

Special Tourist Visa (STV) is an economic measure by the Thai government to restore the local tourism industry that has been greatly affected by COVID-19. Currently, public health

measures and guidelines have been put in place to strictly handle the arrival of foreign visitors. Medical supplies such as Favipiravir (medication used to treat COVID-19), N95 masks and personal protective equipment (PPE) were provided. More than 1,000 quarantine facilities across the country have been divided into State Quarantine (SQ), Alternative State Quarantine (ASQ), Local Quarantine (LQ) and Organization Quarantine (OQ), which can accommodate more than 46,000 people. In addition, 6,700 beds from isolation rooms and Airborne infection isolation rooms (AIIR-ICU) were also provided to accommodate patients (as of July 13, 2020). Although public health resources were prepared, raising awareness for Thais to protect themselves and infection prevention and control training for relevant staff continued. This included correcting people's understanding to avoid panic and not stick to having '0' COVID-19 cases in the country. Lastly, priorities should be given to the screening, isolation, quarantine or Testing-Tracing-Isolation (TTI) which can be used as an effective response and control leverage in the case of an outbreak.

Adolescent pregnancy in Thailand

Overall, the adolescent birth rates for mothers aged 15-19 years old, fell from 51 per 1,000 women aged 15-19 in 2015 to 23 per 1,000 women aged 15-19 in 2019. However, the birth rates remained high in Northern and Southern regions where the proportion of births to adolescents aged 15-19 were 42 per 1,000 women aged 15-19 and 35 per 1,000 women aged 15-19, respectively. Moreover, the adolescent birth rates for mothers aged less than 15 years were 0.8 percent. Most adolescent mothers have lower levels of education, with 130 per 1,000 women aged 15-19 completing elementary school, and this trend continues to decline as their level of education increases. It reflects that maintaining teenagers not to drop out from school is critical in preventing adolescent pregnancy. In addition, high adolescent birth rates tend to come from low-income households. Adolescence mothers also tend to be at higher risk of having anemia, high blood pressure and experiencing postpartum depression. For babies, they will have high risk of dying from pre-eclampsia and having low birth weight. In terms of socio-economic impacts, many adolescent mothers dropped out of school. The fact that education is related to future earnings, having a lower level of education means having insufficient money to raise children. This can increase risk of stress and family violence in the household. These factors will interrupt opportunities for children to receive higher education attainment, and a cycle of young maternity and poverty will continue from generation to generation.

In order to prevent teenage pregnancy, the government should strengthen the monitoring of children and youth in vulnerable households and high-risk groups of children. This can be done by collaborating with families and schools, establishing value of sexual and

reproductive healthy to prevent unplanned pregnancy, as well as educating skills of life and consequences of unplanned pregnancy. Lastly, efforts are needed to increase access to education and encourage children to remain in school, as evidence suggests that education is crucial to resolving adolescent pregnancy.

The article “The impact of COVID-19 on poverty”

Poverty trend in Thailand from 1988-2019 before the outbreak of COVID-19 was on a path of successful reduction. The poverty rate fell from 65.17 percent in 1988 to 6.24 percent in 2019, or equivalent to 4.3 million people. At the household level, 1.31 million households or 5.04 percent of total households were living in poverty in 2019, which decreased from 1.85 million households or 5.04 percent of total households that were living in poverty in 2018. Data on the demographic and economic characteristics of the poor has shown that (1) dependency ratio (number of children below 15 years old and elderly population relative to the working age population) of poor households is obviously higher than rich households (2) children and youth are experiencing poverty more than elderly persons and working-age persons and (3) Larger households, skipped generation family households, and households that were not economically active are more vulnerable to extreme poverty.

The effect of COVID-19 since the beginning of 2020 has led to a rapid downturn in Thailand's economy, adversely affecting people's incomes and living conditions. The survey conducted during the coronavirus outbreak found that 54 percent of respondents have experienced lower incomes, increased debt to formal and informal institutions. Moreover, the unemployment rate also increased. Consequences of socio-economic impacts due to the outbreak not only affected poor households but also households that were vulnerable to shocks and were at increased risk to poverty. These households include:

1. **Poor households which will be severely affected**, especially the urban poor who bore high living costs and costs to avoid being infected with COVID-19.

2. **An estimated 1.14 million vulnerable households were at risk of falling into poverty.** These households included (1) Approximately 6.37 hundred thousand households were dependent on public and private assistance transfers. Among these households were elderly households, skipped generation family households, and households that were not economically active. (2) There were approximately 4.67 hundred thousand households that experienced lower incomes. These households worked in sectors that were more prone to job loss such as the tourism industry or self-employed. (3) There were approximately 0.49 hundred

thousand agricultural households that didn't own lands or own little lands. Although they weren't directly affected by COVID-19, productivity and incomes were likely to decrease.

Government relief measures to help people who were affected are as follows:

(1) **Short-term measures** included cash support of THB5,000 over a period of 3 months for freelancers and farmers, cash support of THB1,000 over a period of 3 months for disadvantaged groups, and support for households, such as, the reduction of utility bills and the price of basic necessities. (2) **Medium-term** measures included the Emergency Decree authorising the Ministry of Finance to Raise Loans to Solve Problems, to Remedy and Restore the Economy and Society as Affected by the Coronavirus Disease Pandemic, B.E. 2563 (2020). The royal decree allowed the government to borrow 1 trillion baht to address the impacts of the pandemic, aimed at creating jobs and incomes for workers returning to their communities, as well as developing a learning system that helps citizens to adapt skills to meet the needs of the labor market in the future.

Recommendations for solving poverty problems Due to uncertainties of the pandemic that might affect the economy again, policy recommendations to tackle poverty are (1) **Use local mechanisms to help identify targeted/vulnerable groups who were affected by COVID-19.** Local authorities (provincial administrative organizations (PAOs), municipalities, tambon administrative organizations (TAOs)) should participate in the verification and screening of potential beneficiaries because they have been working closely with local people. (2) **Speed up the implementation of programs to rebuild the economy and society hit by the outbreak.** This will allow households to gain more income and maintain their level of consumption and living conditions. And (3) **Facilitate job creation** by providing vacancies, training, financial access for low-income people and markets for people who need to sell products. At the same time, the government must place importance on addressing structural poverty to achieve sustainable outcomes. This can be achieved by (1) **revamping the whole agricultural system**, in particular capital funding, marketing knowledge and water sources for agricultural and consumption. And (2) **strengthening social security to tackle poverty in the long-run.** Initiatives include expanding the coverage of Article 40, encouraging savings and risk management to mitigate unexpected circumstances, as well as strengthening the poverty targeting system to reach more poor people and vulnerable groups.

Office of National Economic and Social Development Council

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Key Social Indicators

Components	2018	2019	2018				2019				2020		
	Year	Year	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3
1. Employment 1/													
Workforce (Thousands)	38,434	38,178	38,145	38,482	38,725	38,382	38,365	38,420	37,959	37,968	38,193	38,173	38,726
%YOY	0.9	-0.7	-0.2	0.6	1.5	1.7	0.6	-0.2	-2.0	-1.1	-0.4	-0.6	2.0
Employed Person (Thousands)	37,865	37,613	37,361	37,885	38,301	37,911	37,703	37,782	37,482	37,483	37,424	37,081	37,927
%YOY	1.1	-0.7	0.2	0.9	1.7	1.9	0.9	-0.3	-2.1	-1.1	-0.7	-1.9	1.2
Unemployed Person (Thousands)	404	373	474	411	373	359	351	377	394	372	395	745	738
Unemployment Rate (%)	1.1	0.99	1.24	1.07	0.96	0.93	0.92	0.98	1.04	1.04	1.03	1.95	1.90
Underemployed Person (Thousands)	293	250	336	283	319	232	336	239	193	231	284	704	442
2. Household debt 2/													
household debt value (Trillion baht)	12.83	13.48	12.20	12.37	12.55	12.83	12.97	13.09	13.25	13.48	13.50	13.59	N.A.
% YOY	6.0	5.1	5.2	5.7	5.8	6.0	6.3	5.8	5.6	5.1	4.1	3.8	N.A.
Ratio to GDP (percent)	78.4	79.9	77.7	77.5	77.6	78.4	78.4	78.4	78.9	79.9	80.2	83.8	N.A.
NPL (Billion baht)	120.5	140.6	115.9	115.8	118.8	120.5	126.4	124.4	133.3	140.6	156.2	152.5	N.A.
% YOY	9.1	16.7	5.5	10.3	7.8	9.1	9.0	10.0	12.2	16.7	23.6	19.7	N.A.
% NPL to Total loan	2.67	2.90	2.78	2.72	2.73	2.67	2.75	2.74	2.81	2.90	3.23	3.12	N.A.
3. Health and Illness													
Number of patients under disease surveillance 3/													
Pneumonia	5,556 (74.4)	6,562 (18.1)	630	632	1,186	3,108	2,065	1,582	1,520	1,395	730	140	191
Dengue Fever	20 (-28.5)	22 (10)	1	9	3	7	6	5	6	6	5	3	2
Hand, Foot, Mouth	745 (-8.5)	891 (19.5)	182	251	200	132	258	199	212	222	250	191	251
Influenza	5 (-37.5)	12 (140)	0	2	2	1	6	4	1	1	0	2	2
Dysentery	70,008 (-0.3)	67,203 (-4.1)	10,079	14,626	32,718	12,585	9,254	12,916	35,866	9,167	5,303	1,107	4,946
Measles	3,399 (-29.8)	2,518 (-25.9)	1,132	956	741	561	646	731	642	499	654	537	589
Leptospirosis	283,601 (5.9)	256,194 (-9.6)	74,881	58,699	90,160	59,861	73,553	51,353	63,816	67,472	75,221	29,032	35,094
Japanese encephalitis	2,540 (-26.8)	2,165 (-14.7)	402	637	932	569	466	495	710	494	259	330	516
Cholera	86,922 (63.4)	129,906 (49.4)	6,830	24,029	35,564	20,499	15,548	31,766	54,906	27,686	9,012	17,797	36,063
Meningococcal Meningitis	183,363 (6.7)	392,518 (105.3)	40,995	25,698	73,042	43,628	133,369	61,229	108,345	89,575	97,934	4,781	7,191
Rabies	15 (87.5)	3 (-80)	7	3	3	2	0	2	0	1	0	2	1
Rate per 100,000 population of death with major chronic non-communicable diseases													
- High blood pressure	13.1 (6.6)	14.2 (8.4)	No quarterly data available										
- Ischaemic heart disease	31.8 (3.2)	31.4 (-12)											
- Cerebrovascular disease	47.2 (6.9)	53.0 (126)											
- Diabetes	21.9 (12.1)	25.3 (159)											
- Cancer and tumors	123.3 (2.4)	128.2 (4.2)											
4. Safety of life and property													
- Patients from road accidents (cases)	8,361	8,667	2,310	2,003	1,799	2,249	2,422	2,177	1,899	2,187	2,046	1,416	1,669
- Crimes against person (cases)	17,704	16,640	4,447	4,619	4,133	4,505	4,353	4,493	3,988	3,800	3,877	3,588	3,586
- Property crimes (cases)	45,701	47,726	11,267	11,258	11,597	11,579	11,684	10,757	12,341	11,767	11,068	10,355	10,663
- Narcotics (cases)	289,666	385,971	64,704	77,157	72,784	75,021	86,291	94,196	97,520	91,230	91,895	81,430	70,791
5. Consumer Protection 4/													
5.1 Number of complaints (cases)													
- Contract/Property	3,191	4,017	660	795	1,072	664	1,170	1,050	1,018	779	528	776	1,091
- Goods and service	1871	2,105	522	433	482	434	459	706	545	395	547	429	1,758
- Advertisement	1,434	7,191	330	253	417	439	726	3,452	1,705	1,328	949	2,525	537
- Law	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
- Direct sales and marketing	940	2,252	254	180	220	286	377	651	721	503	534	1,189	975
5.2 Hot line 1166 (cases)	52,504	47,996	11,082	14,879	13,684	12,859	11,759	11,579	13,127	11,531	15,258	13,737	13,278

Source: 1/ Labor force survey report, National Statistical Office, Ministry of Digital Economy and Society
2/ Bank of Thailand
3/ Bureau of Epidemiology, Department of Disease Control, Ministry of Health
4/ Office of the Consumer Protection Board, Office of the Prime Minister