



ข่าว สภาพัฒนา

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สำนักงานสภาพัฒนาการเศรษฐกิจและสังคมแห่งชาติ (สศช.) 962 ถนนกรุงเกษม เขตป้อมปราบศัตรูพ่าย กรุงเทพฯ 10100

www.nesdc.go.th Tel. 0 2628 2847 Fax. 0 2628 2846 e-mail: pr@nesdc.go.th



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Thailand's Social Outlook in the First Quarter of 2026

Thailand's social outlook in the first quarter of 2026 reflected several notable developments. These include an increase in employment and a decrease of surveillance disease cases. However, the unemployment rate, household debt (in the fourth quarter of 2025), consumption of alcohol and tobacco, consumer protection complaints, and the safety of life and property worsened. In addition, three interesting social issues are highlighted (1) Challenge and Opportunity: The Future of Thailand's Labor Market in the Age of AI (2) Solar Cells: A Major Step Toward Energy Security and (3) The Silent Threat of Microplastics. The report also includes an insightful article titled "Retirement Home: A Challenge for the Later Stages of Life"

The labor situation showed signs of improvement. The number of employed persons reached 41.2 million, increasing by 4.6 percent from the first quarter of 2025. This was driven by the recovery in agricultural employment, while non-agricultural employment continued to expand. Wholesale and retail trade recorded the highest growth, followed by transportation and storage. Meanwhile, the **overall unemployment rate increased** to 0.94 percent, accounting for 0.39 million persons, mainly due to an increase among previously employed individuals, while the number of first-time job seekers declined. In addition, quasi-unemployed individuals working fewer than 24 hours per week, increased by 3.0 percent due to a rise in quasi-unemployment in the non-agricultural sector, while long-term unemployment rose by 27.0 percent. **Key issues requiring close monitoring** include: (1) **Measures to mitigate the impact of Middle East conflict on employment and labor income**, which may decrease amid high living costs. Urgent assistance measures should be prepared, especially employment matching in labor-demanding sectors; (2) **Rising disguised unemployment**, as the number of those workers exceeded 0.22 million persons in 2025, increasing by 17.8 percent from 2024. Most of them had low educational attainment and were employed in the agricultural sector. Efforts should focus on improving productivity and creating supplementary occupations to increase both working hours and income; and (3) **Employment risks in industries related to electric vehicles (EVs)**. The continued decline in the production of internal combustion engine (ICE) vehicles may force parts manufacturing workers to transition to other industries.

Household debt in the fourth quarter of 2025 increased by 0.05 percent, totaling 16.44 trillion baht. Consequently, **the household debt-to-GDP rose to 86.7 percent**, increasing from the previous quarter. According to National Credit Bureau, **non-performing personal loans (NPLs) overdue by more than 90 days** reached 1.31 trillion-baht, accounting for 9.59 percent of total loans, increasing from 9.45 percent in the previous quarter, especially

from housing loans and personal loans. **Key issues requiring attention** include: (1) **Consumption behavior among younger generations, who tend to follow online trends.** Thus, outstanding credit card debt and personal loans among individuals under 25 years old recorded the highest increase compared to other age groups in 2025. Financial literacy should be promoted among the young beginning at the primary education; (2) **The launch of virtual banks which may require close monitoring of rising indebtedness.** Experiences in China found that some borrowers entered debt cycles more easily, while the Philippines reported that digital banks had higher NPLs than traditional banks; and (3) **The influence of Finfluencers on household financial behavior in the digital era.** Some Finfluencers may disseminate incomplete or misleading information. Therefore, there should be regulation on Finfluencer content, such as registration with the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) and licensing requirements.

Surveillance disease cases declined by 36.2 percent, with most cases concentrated in respiratory infectious diseases, while **mental health problems also decreased.** **Key issues requiring attention** include: (1) **Hantavirus Disease**, which should be closely monitored, especially travelers from high-risk areas. People should avoid contact with the excretions of rats and rodents, or use protective equipment when necessary; (2) **Health risks during rainy season**, including respiratory diseases, mosquito-borne diseases, and contact-transmitted diseases. Disease prevention measures should be emphasized, such as vaccination, maintaining hygiene, eliminating mosquito breeding sites, avoiding walking barefoot in stagnant water or mud, and monitoring key symptoms; and (3) **Human Papillomavirus (HPV) infection among men**, which may occur without symptoms. Preventive measures are necessary, including safe sexual practices, HPV and related cancer screening, and vaccination for both women and men.

Consumption of alcohol and tobacco increased by 0.2 percent, as alcohol consumption rose, while tobacco consumption decreased. **Issues require close monitoring**, including: (1) **The worsening spread of illicit cigarettes**, due to the two-tier excise tax structure on tobacco products; (2) **Alcohol taxation and consumption behavior.** The specific tax structure for alcoholic beverages reduces the real value of taxes over time, thereby weakening the effectiveness of tax measures in controlling alcohol consumption; and (3) **The trial extension of alcohol sales hours and related mitigation measures.** After 90 days of implementation, the policy showed an association with an increase in alcohol-related deaths.

Safety of life and property in the first quarter of 2026 recorded a 17.9 percent increase in criminal cases compared to the same period last year. This was mainly due to a rise in drug-related offenses, while offenses against property and offenses against life, body, and sexuality declined. **The cumulative number of road-accident affected persons increased** by 4.3 percent due to increases in injuries and fatalities. **Key issues requiring close attention** include: (1) **Thai children and youth remaining engaged with narcotics.** In fiscal year 2025, narcotics offenses represented the largest share of cases involving children and

youth and continued to increase. Around 67.2 percent had a history of substance use, particularly cannabis, methamphetamine, and kratom-infused mixtures; (2) **The trading anime-card market as a new channel for scams.** Fraudulent schemes include using AI-generated images of rare card items, forging cards, and taking pre-orders without delivering the products; and (3) **Risks arising from lapses of compulsory third-party motor insurance.** In 2025, more than one in five vehicles failed to renew annual vehicle tax registration, while 40-50 percent of vehicles involved in road accidents had expired compulsory insurance coverage. An automatic renewal (opt-out) system for compulsory insurance should be considered.

Consumer protection complaints increased by 16.2 percent from the same period last year, rising across goods, services, real estate, and telecommunications sectors. **Key issues requiring attention** include: (1) **Risks and loopholes of cremation funds,** which have become increasingly vulnerable due to population aging and corruption, causing damage to numerous members. Regulatory oversight should be elevated to be more stringent and adaptive to changing contexts; (2) **Fraudulent online gold trading investment schemes,** such as fake gold trading applications and schemes persuading individuals to participate in gold price manipulation. Fraudsters often exploit fear of missing out as a tool for deception; and (3) **Prevalence of counterfeit and copyright-infringing products in both physical and online markets, which requires urgent suppression.** This trend is driven by consumers' accepting attitudes toward counterfeit products, while fake products increasingly resemble genuine items. Consequently, this poses a risk of consumers being deceived into buying substandard goods, while also undermining the country's image.

Challenge and Opportunity: The Future of Thailand's Labor Market in the Age of AI

Artificial intelligence has evolved rapidly. Moving from Generative AI (Gen AI), which generates content on its own, it is currently transitioning to Agentic AI, a system capable of planning, executing and improving tasks in place of human. An assessment of occupations affected by Gen AI reveals that, in the fourth quarter of 2025, approximately 8.7 million workers (21.8 percent of the total labor force) were affected. This figure can be categorized into (1) **The Task Replacement Group** (2.2 million workers), consisting of those in routine, structured jobs such as clerks, accountants, and programmers. This group mostly holds a bachelor's degree or higher (55.8 percent), earns an average monthly income of 27,820 baht, with an average age of 36.5, and primarily works in Bangkok and its vicinity; (2) **The Task Augmentation Group** (6.5 million workers), consisting of those that uses AI to boost efficiency while core duties still rely on human skills such as communication, negotiation, and management. This group mostly has an education below a bachelor's degree (72.7 percent), earns an average monthly income of 21,506 baht, with an average age of 42.3.

This data reflects that AI is impacting and posing risks to Thailand's labor market structure, marked by a decline in employment and job opportunities for recent graduates, especially in repetitive roles; a labor downshifting from high-skilled to low-skilled jobs that

remain less affected by AI; potential displacements in logic-based and practical skill-based jobs as Agentive and Physical AI become widely used. Therefore, Thailand must prepare by (1) **Accelerating the comprehensive AI adoption** while developing data infrastructure and processing systems to adequately support future demands; (2) **Shifting the role of high-skilled workers toward “AI Managers”**; and (3) **Developing a digital and AI governance legal framework** covering both labor protection and accountability for AI-inflicted damage.

Solar Cells: A Major Step Toward Energy Security

Thailand has high potential for solar power generation, prompting the government to set a target of 90,000 household solar installations by 2028. Currently, only 20,282 households have installed solar cells. This is partly due to different electricity consumption patterns across household groups, combined with other constraints such as (1) complicated application processes for on-grid and hybrid systems; (2) high upfront installation costs ranging from 120,000 to 400,000 baht; and (3) unappealing policy incentives, such as tax deductions capped at 200,000 baht, which primarily benefit only those with taxable income.

A review of international practices reveals a combination of measures. **Germany** has promoted low-cost, easy-to-install plug-in solar devices, with short payback periods and long lifespans. This is supported by regulatory reforms that allow apartment residents and tenants to install these devices while streamlining the installation process. Meanwhile, **United Kingdom** emphasized economic incentives such as VAT exemptions, allowing households to sell excess electricity back to the grid, and providing installation subsidies for low-income households.

Currently, the Thai government is accelerating support for household solar cell installations through various initiatives, including: (1) low-interest loans offered by the Government Housing Bank, Government Savings Bank, and KTC; (2) excess electricity buyback schemes; and (3) the development of a one-stop service system by the Metropolitan Electricity Authority (MEA) and the Provincial Electricity Authority (PEA). However, low-income households still face constraints in terms of initial investment. Measures such as installation subsidies, will expand opportunities for all groups to access clean energy. Moving forward, **research and development in related technologies should be promoted**, especially core components like inverters, to lower costs and establish a strong foundation for the domestic solar manufacturing industry. Also, fostering **collaboration among the public, private, and academic sectors** is crucial to developing household energy management technologies, and **updating regulations**, ensuring that access to solar energy is better tailored to localized contexts.

The Silent Threat of Microplastics

Microplastics are plastic particles smaller than 5 millimeters. They originate either from intentional small-scale manufacturing (primary microplastics) or from the breakdown of larger plastic items (secondary microplastics) like food packaging, water bottles, bags, and fishing nets. Easily dispersing into water, soil, and the air, microplastics pose a significant threat to the

environment, the economy, and public well-being. Factors that exacerbate the microplastic problem include (1) the rapid growth of the fast fashion industry; (2) the expansion of food delivery services; (3) excessive heating of food in plastic packaging; and (4) improper waste disposal. This leads to **economic consequences**, especially the fishing, agriculture and tourism sectors, as well as **health risks**. Microplastics have been found accumulating in numerous human organs, such as the brain, blood vessels, liver, kidneys, bone marrow, placenta, and breast milk. This may pose long-term health effects, including hormonal disruptions, developmental delays in children, an increased risk of cancer, heart disease, and stroke, while also acting as a vehicle for toxins into the body.

Therefore, a systematic approach is essential to mitigate these risks through (1) **Developing legal and regulatory measures** such as extended producer responsibility (EPR) principle to ensure producers manage the entire lifecycle of their packaging; accelerating the Roadmap on Plastic Waste Management (2018-2030); establishing standardized methods for measuring microplastics in food and water sources, and utilizing tax incentives to encourage the private sector to design eco-friendly products and packaging; (2) **Advancing research and development for alternative materials**, especially bioplastics from agricultural raw materials; and (3) **Implementing proactive health surveillance** by developing continuous data collection and proactive health monitoring systems to track microplastic exposure and study their correlation with non-communicable diseases (NCDs), ultimately enabling the timely formulation of appropriate preventive and public health interventions.

Retirement Home: A Challenge for the Later Stages of Life

As Thailand transitions into a super-aged society, providing adequate elderly housing has emerged as a critical challenge. The government has attempted to promote the concept of “Aging in Place,” which enables older adults to continue living in their own homes or original communities with various support measures. However, changing social contexts have diminished the capacity of families to care for the elderly, leaving a growing number of older people to live alone. Therefore, this approach may no longer serve as a one-size-fits-all solution. According to a survey by the Institute for Population and Social Research, Mahidol University, although the majority of people prefer to age in place upon retirement, a growing number of younger people are choosing not to have children. This shift has driven up the demand and interest in senior complex and assisted living. According to 2025 data from the Real Estate Information Center (REIC), Thailand has 96 retirement homes accommodating nearly 16,000 individuals, reflecting a high demand for these services. However, access remains limited for low-income groups, as highlighted by the case of Ban Bang Khae, where over 6,000 seniors are on the waiting list for a facility that can accommodate only 250 residents. Furthermore, Thailand’s senior housing system faces key limitations, including (1) **Accessibility constraints**. Facilities are heavily concentrated in major hub provinces while some provinces with a high proportion of non-working elderly population face a shortage of facilities; and (2) **Psychosocial constraints** exist as certain groups of seniors may struggle to build new relationships in an

unfamiliar environment, leading to isolation. Moreover, residing exclusively in senior-centric housing can limit intergenerational interactions, ultimately affecting long-term mental health and quality of life. An overemphasis on physical safety may also make the living environment feel more like a hospital than a home, undermining the seniors' independence and dignity.

In response, several countries have developed more diverse elderly care models. For example, **France** has implemented a foster family system (Famille d'accueil), which allows seniors to live with caregiver families as if they were members of the same household; **the Netherlands** offers college students to co-live with seniors in exchange for engaging in shared activities (Humanitas Deventer); and **Germany** has established multi-generational community houses (Mehrgenerationenhäuser) that provide spaces for people of all ages to interact, engage in activities, and learn together. Meanwhile, Thailand has the "Lam Sonthi Model" in Lopburi, which develops community-based elderly care through multi-sectoral collaboration. Moreover, social enterprises have played an active role in elderly care, such as "Joy Ride," providing transportation and companionship for seniors, and "Yuan Yen," which provides home-based palliative care. These initiatives reflect that retirement home should not be confined to a single model of expanding facilities or senior complex; rather, it can be developed in conjunction with care systems linked to the community and aging-in-place initiatives. Key approaches include (1) **Diversifying senior housing options** through incentive measures for the private sector and communities, such as tax benefits, low-interest loans, or the allocation of state-owned land. These incentives should be paired with specific conditions, such as allocating a proportion of affordable units for low-income seniors, as well as repurposing abandoned buildings or underutilized spaces; (2) **Developing community-based elderly care networks** to cover both health and social dimensions, such as organizing intergenerational activities and fostering assistance among neighbors; and (3) **Supporting social enterprises (SE) to develop intergenerational housing systems**, such as establishing home-sharing platforms managed by SE as intermediaries, which allow seniors to remain in their own homes, while also reducing social isolation.

Key Social Indicators

Key Components	Year 2024	Year 2025	2024				2025				2026
			Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1
1. Employment^{1/}											
Workforce (1,000 Persons)	40,356.6	40,130.8	40,226.4	40,178.1	40,484.1	40,537.7	40,085.1	40,114.4	40,196.3	40,127.5	41,912.3
% YOY	-0.20	-0.56	-0.10	-0.30	-0.10	-0.30	-0.35	-0.20	-0.70	-1.00	4.60
Employed Persons (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
% YOY	-0.30	-0.50	-0.13	-0.45	-0.13	-0.36	-0.49	0.02	-0.47	-0.88	4.60
Unemployed Persons (Thousands)	402.2	327.8	407.7	429.1	413.9	358.2	357.7	365.5	307.5	280.5	393.1
Unemployed Rate (%)	1.00	0.81	1.01	1.07	1.02	0.88	0.88	0.91	0.76	0.70	0.94
Quasi-Unemployed Persons (Thousands)	192.3	155.4	191.5	162.4	191.9	223.6	176.3	155.9	142.6	146.6	185.9
2. Household Debt^{2/}											
Household Debt Value (Trillion Baht)	16.44	16.44	16.37	16.36	16.36	16.44	16.33	16.32	16.33	16.44	N/A
% YOY	0.27	0.05	2.40	1.55	0.82	0.21	-0.35	-0.31	-0.19	0.05	N/A
Ratio to GDP (%)	88.0	86.7	90.4	89.4	88.5	88.0	86.7	86.4	86.4	86.7	N/A
NPLs ^{3/} (Trillion Baht)	1.22	1.31	1.09	1.16	1.20	1.22	1.19	1.24	1.29	1.31	N/A
% YOY	16.40	7.60	14.89	12.18	14.09	16.40	8.67	6.90	7.55	7.60	N/A
% NPLs to Total Loan	8.94	9.59	8.01	8.48	8.78	8.94	8.78	9.11	9.45	9.59	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
Meningococcal Fever	11	21	2	2	3	4	2	0	6	13	6
Encephalitis	967	1,572	316	216	242	193	312	435	413	412	369
Cholera	4	7	2	0	0	2	1	0	4	2	3
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
Dysentery	1,823	2,072	485	373	533	432	506	598	556	412	456
Pneumonia	398,201	459,138	96,395	75,975	115,246	110,585	138,418	97,040	103,517	120,163	97,084
Leptospirosis	4,187	5,115	767	732	1,348	1,340	782	955	1,287	2,091	855
Dengue Fever	103,601	57,653	24,131	17,702	42,328	19,440	7,236	15,036	24,918	10,463	4,635
Influenza	650,931	1,174,455	121,074	99,895	220,228	209,734	267,952	130,683	217,452	558,368	159,855
Rabies	3	7	0	1	2	0	4	2	1	0	2
3.2 Death with Major Chronic Non-Communicable Diseases^{5/} (per 100,000 Population)											
High Blood Pressure	13.2	N/A	Quarterly data are not available								
Ischaemic heart 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/}											
Offenses Against Life, Body, and Sexuality (Cases)	19,233	19,345	4,553	4,471	5,237	4,972	5,102	4,906	4,903	4,434	4,744
Offenses Against Property (Cases)	70,595	78,238	15,491	15,515	20,776	18,813	19,894	18,523	21,501	18,320	16,854
Narcotics Offenses (Cases)	357,096	418,558	81,203	84,142	95,511	96,240	92,638	97,783	112,279	115,858	117,130
Receiving Notification of Cumulative Victims ^{7/} (Cases)	869,232	874,026	224,121	203,848	212,637	228,626	225,919	204,797	215,580	227,730	235,726
Road Traffic Fatalities	14,173	12,428	3,748	3,450	3,131	3,844	3,408	3,080	2,716	3,224	3,488
5. Consumer Protection											
5.1 Number of Complaints Filed to OCPB^{8/} (Cases)											
Contracts	2,594	2,748	807	397	742	648	788	674	530	756	697
Labelling	2,860	3,288	584	533	886	857	911	850	664	863	788
Advertising	2,172	2,542	467	420	686	599	625	666	469	782	560
Direct Selling and Direct Marketing	2,793	4,293	609	600	711	873	1,418	744	1,258	873	1,247
Others	14,989	22,834	3,319	3,567	3,869	4,234	4,310	5,603	6,315	6,606	6,094
5.2 Consumer Complaints Filed to NBTC^{9/} (Cases)	1,460	1,540	414	340	311	395	394	367	449	330	425

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 website of the Thai Health Promotion Foundation (ThaiHealth)

^{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 (THAI RSC)

^{8/} Office of the Consumer Protection Board, Office of the Prime Minister

^{9/} Office of The National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission (NBTC)