



NESDC News

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Thailand Social's Outlook of Q2/2021

The following are the key social situations and movements in Q2/2021: (1) Dimension of Human Qualities: employment in both the agricultural and non-agricultural sectors increased. The unemployment rate declined. The ratio of household debt and non-performing loans (NPLs) to total loans rose. (2) Health dimension: the number of illnesses under surveillance decreased. (3) Social security dimension: there were an increase in the number of criminal cases and traffic accidents. While consumer complaints to the National Consumer Protection Board (NCPB) decreased, complaints to the National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission (NBTC) increased. (4) Dimension of living conditions and human behavior: consumption of alcohol and tobacco decreased. There are also other interesting social situations including improving quality of people to increase competitiveness, the education Technology: An important tool for wide open in education, the role of the media in Thai social context, and the article "Readiness for working from home in Thailand"

The labor situation slightly improved. However, it is still severely impacted when compared to the pre-pandemic levels. Although employment in both the agricultural and non-agricultural sectors had increased, the unemployment rate remained high.

In Q2/2021, the labor market improved compared to the same period last year, but it has not returned to normal. Employment increased by 2.0 percent in the second quarter of 2021 compared to the same period last year. This was resulted from a 2.4 percent increase in agricultural employment as a result of the movement of unemployed and laid-off workers, as well as attractive agricultural product prices. Employment in non-agricultural sectors increased by 1.8 percent. Construction, hotel/restaurant, and transportation/storage sectors had the greatest increases in employment among other sectors, by 5.1, 5.4, and 7.1 percent, respectively. Employment in the wholesale and retail sectors, on the other hand, fell by 2.2 and 1.4 percent, respectively. Employment in the manufacturing sector shrank primarily in the labor-intensive sector. Meanwhile, employment in the export manufacturing sector, such as computers and electronics, rubber products, and automobiles, increased steadily. **Working hours** improved from the same period last year, increasing by 8.8 percent. However, it remained

below the average of 41.6 hours per week during pre-pandemic levels. The number of overtime workers was 6.0 million, an increase of 32.2 percent. **Unemployment remained high as a result of COVID-19**, with the unemployment rate at 1.89 percent, representing 730,000 unemployed people, divided into 2.9 hundred thousand of those who have never worked before (new graduates), a 10.04 percent increase, and 4.4 hundred thousand of those who had previously worked, an 8.38 percent decrease. When considering the length of unemployment, it was found that unemployed people tend to be unemployed for a longer period of time. The number of people unemployed for more than 12 months was 1.47 hundred thousand, an increase of 1.2 times from the same period of the previous quarter. Moreover, the unemployment rate for vocational and tertiary graduates increased to 3.18 and 3.44 percent respectively, indicating that the current unemployment is in the highly skilled workforce. In terms of **unemployment in formal sector**, the number of people receiving unemployment benefits totaled 3.1 hundred thousand, representing a 2.8 percent ratio, a slight decrease from the previous quarter but still higher than the normal situation. The number of Section 33 insureds who received unemployment benefits due to force majeure increased fourfold from 7,964 in the previous quarter to 32,920.

Issues that need to follow up include:

1. **The impact of the outbreak is more severe. Furthermore, outbreak control measures have an impact on workers' ability to earn income.** The government announced measures to control the COVID-19 outbreak in April 2021 in response to the outbreak. As a result, economic activity has declined and is likely to decline further than it did in 2020, affecting employment and income, particularly among those unable to work from home. Only 5.5 percent of private sector employees, or 0.56 million out of 10.2 million, were able to work from home in the strictly controlled 29 provinces. In addition, 7.3 million self-employed people will be affected.

2. **Issuing additional assistance measures to assist workers and entrepreneurs in maintaining employment and business operations.** Workers will be more vulnerable as the COVID-19 outbreak continues. As a result, the government must implement more intensive assistance measures than in the past, such as helping to support some wages for entrepreneurs to maintain employment and providing additional subsidies to self-employed workers who are unable to work normally due to outbreak control measures or must quarantine. This is partly to prevent displacement, which would make it impossible to effectively control the outbreak.

3. **Adjustment of the affected workers, both of those who have previously worked and those who have recently graduated** Workers have returned to their hometown as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic since 2020. This included both laid-off workers and new workers who have recently entered the labor market. As a result, the

number of unemployed people has increased in each region. Simultaneously, the number of unemployed people finding work has decreased due to concerns over the COVID-19 situation. Workers who return to their hometown are more likely to become self-employed. As a result, guidelines for promoting independent occupation skills that workers can easily access and practice on their own should be developed.

Household debt increased. The deteriorating credit quality must be monitored.

In Q1/2021, household debt increased by 4.6 percent from the previous quarter to 14.13 trillion-baht, accounting for 90.5 percent of GDP, partly due to the debt moratorium measures, which kept outstanding debt unchanged, and unaffected households increasingly incurred more debts. Loan quality must still be monitored. Consumer loan NPLs ratio was at 2.92 percent of total loans, up from 2.84 percent in the previous quarter, and were worsening in almost every loan category except housing loans. This indicated that households were having difficulty earning an income or that their financial situation was more precarious.

Issues that need to follow up include:

1. Results of measures designed to assist existing debtors, and potential additional assistance measures Although financial institutions have issued additional measures to assist debtors affected by the new wave of outbreak situations, the effects have been so rapid that action must be taken as soon as possible. This will require the cooperation of all financial institutions in order to support the financial situation of households during the crisis and avoid bad debt, litigation, and confiscation. However, caution must be exercised to avoid any behavior that leads to a good debtor's failure to pay debts (Moral Hazard).

2. Income, ability to repay debt, and informal debt. The new outbreak situation and outbreak control measures impacted household income and financial status, increasing the risk of default. Furthermore, if financial institutions delay lending, households having financial hardships may resort to informal debt. There should be measures in place to maintain employment, as well as debt restructuring, which could be aided by the state-specialized financial institution mechanism.

3. Surveillance of opportunistic scammers through online platforms, an illegal operation that causes victims to lose personal information, pay high interest rates, and be aggressively pursued for debt collection. Authorities and the debt collection committee must implement more stringent control measures, such as the recent announcement of a new debt collection fee. Simultaneously, before borrowing money, people should check the list of financial service providers (Non-commercial Banks) that are legally permitted.

Although overall illness has decreased, there is still a need to monitor hand, foot, and mouth disease in young children.

In Q2/2021, illnesses under surveillance diseases decreased by 32.4 percent, a decrease in almost all diseases. Dengue patients decreased by 85.4 percent, influenza patients by 54.8 percent, and pneumonia patients by 4.9 percent. On the other hand, hand, foot and mouth disease continued to increase for the third quarter. The impact on people's mental health of the COVID-19 outbreak's prolonged and more severe situation, including high stress, the risk of depression and suicide must be monitored.

Consumption of alcohol and tobacco decreased.

In the second quarter of 2021, consumption of alcohol and tobacco decreased by 2.4 percent, with alcohol consumption decreasing by 2.9 percent and tobacco consumption decreasing by 1.6 percent. Domestic violence, which frequently involves alcohol as a major contributor, must be monitored, especially during the COVID-19 period when everyone spends the majority of their time at home. The average number of cigarettes smoked per day by workers remained high, which has resulted in death. Smoking increases the likelihood of contracting and spreading germs during the COVID-19 outbreak. It also reduces the vaccine's effectiveness.

The total number of criminal cases increased due to drug cases and crimes against property. In terms of human rights situation, Thailand has been demoted to Tier 2 Watch List status

In Q2/2021, total criminal cases increased by 11.5 percent compared to the same quarter in 2020, with drug and property offense cases increasing 13.3 and 4.5 percent, respectively. Life and sexual assault crimes decreased by 8.9 percent; thus, the prevention and suppression of narcotics must be more stringently enforced. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) has released a report on the Drug Situation in Asia, which found that drug cartels in East and Southeast Asia have adapted to the COVID-19 pandemic by increasing production and smuggling of drugs from lower Mekong countries. Thailand was being used as a distribution and export hub for illegal drugs. Furthermore, Thailand has been demoted to Tier 2 Watch List status according to the United States Department of State's Trafficking in Persons Report 2021 (TIP Report 2021). It is critical to expedite the follow-up of operation results and establish guidelines for preventing and resolving human trafficking issues in accordance with the TIP report's recommendations.

The number of road accidents increased. More emphasis must be placed on reducing accidents involving pedestrians, who have a high risk of being involved in an accident.

In Q2/2021, road accidents increased 21.5 percent from the same quarter last year. The number of fatalities and injuries decreased by 1.3 percent and 22.1 percent, respectively. The accident was still caused by a cutting off and exceeding the speed limit, 23 percent and 21.5 percent, respectively. In addition, Pedestrians are particularly vulnerable to traffic hazards, poor road conditions, and technological advances in high-speed vehicles. During the period 2018-2020, an average of 8 pedestrian accidents were reported per day, resulting in significant losses for the country. As a result, measures such as speed management, designing and improving infrastructure to make it easier for pedestrians, vehicle safety standards and strictly following traffic rules, such as stopping to allow people to cross the crosswalk, must be implemented to make pedestrian rights a top priority.

While consumer complaints to the National Consumer Protection Board (NCPB) decreased, complaints to the National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission (NBTC) increased.

In Q2/2021, The NCPB received 20.1 percent fewer complaints about goods and services compared to the same period last year, with general goods and services receiving the most complaints, followed by condominiums. Meanwhile, the number of complaints received by the NBTC increased by 18.7 percent compared to the same period last year. The majority of them were complaints about charged SMS and incorrect charging. Furthermore, the issue of charging high electricity rates for dormitories, rental rooms, or apartments should be addressed, particularly during working from home in the period of the COVID-19 pandemic as household's electricity consumption has increased rapidly. However, these tenants were not eligible for the government's electricity reduction measures intended to mitigate the impact of COVID-19. Measures to assist tenants of dormitories, rental rooms, or apartments in order to receive equal assistance with housing groups such as houses or condominiums should be considered.

Improving quality of people to increase competitiveness

Thailand was ranked 28th out of 64 economic zones worldwide in the IMD Competitiveness Ranking 2021, up one position from 2020. Infrastructure factors are interconnected and fundamental to human development, and it was given a low rating. Education was ranked 56th, and it had an impact on the country's productivity, which is an important mechanism for increasing competitiveness. Meanwhile, the technology infrastructure that supports skill development in the modern world was ranked 37th. More work is required, particularly in terms of attitudes toward access to information and communication technology.

According to the 2020 Household Survey on the Use of Information and Communication Technology by the National Statistical Office, the most common reason for Thai households not having internet access is that they do not need it (54.4 percent), followed by a lack of knowledge/skills (28.9 percent) and a lack of access and there is no internet service in the area (6.5 percent). Therefore, if we want to increase the country competitiveness, we should put more emphasis on accelerating the development of people's quality by improving education and the labor quality. This includes developing high-performance workforce, continuous learning, and the use of technology to develop people, as well as cultivating an open-minded attitude toward learning new things and coping with change (Growth Mindset). The public sector must focus on facilitating human resource development by creating learning mechanisms as well as an environment and infrastructure that makes it easier for all groups of people to develop their skills. Furthermore, the availability of information and appropriate development direction in accordance with the aptitude and needs of the country in the future are also critical.

Education Technology: An important tool for wide open in education

Education Technology (EdTech) is the trend of today's world that brings technology to develop educational system, to increase the quality of contents and teaching techniques, and to solve the problem of inequality in education. Moreover, it helps to enhance the opportunities to access learning and solve the problem of inability to go to school during the COVID-19 pandemic as normal. These factors led to a significant growth of EdTech industrial in overall and became an important tool for wide open in education from the variety of learning styles. EdTech also helps to disseminate knowledge equally, especially schools in remote areas where there is a shortage of teachers who are proficient in their field of study or the lack of teachers to cover all classes. There are various successful models both in Thailand and abroad. In order to encourage more usage of educational technology to help manage education, internet infrastructure should be developed to be ready and equally accessible in all areas. In addition, the policy level must focus on the adoption of EdTech in education, especially to address educational disparities. There should also be a development of a content-related and technic of the supporting technology system to be consistent with each area.

The role of the media in Thai social context

The media plays a huge role in Thai society and also has an important role in setting up an agenda for public awareness of events. The media presents both positive and negative aspects to the audience. However, different aspects of presentations normally affect what people perceive differently, especially in today's world where media formats have evolved due to technological advancements and the behavior of media usage has changed. In particular, Social Media plays a greater role due to contents production styles

where anyone can be a reporter. The higher competition and the faster news presentation in this era resulted in the less focus on filtering news and information because there is less information verification process than traditional media. Presenting news repeatedly and providing the opinions of news reporters through major media and online media channels, especially in crime cases where investigative aspects and opinions are presented rather than facts, may affect the society. For example, human rights issues, social justice and impact on the case may be affected. It can cause a mimic criminal behavior. This is an issue that must be taken into account as to the suitability of various media roles in the context of Thai society where a large number of Thai people still lacks media literacy especially on Social Media which Fake News can be easily and rapidly spread. Encouraging media ethics and governance through media producers may not be enough. Therefore, the development guidelines of media literacy and digital media (Media Information and Digital Literacy: MIDL) for people of all age groups must be emphasized rightly.

Article “Readiness for working from home in Thailand”

Working from home is one of the measures that was applied in order to reduce the spread of COVID-19. Many companies have responded to this measure which have noticeably increased from the past. According to the survey from the Global Workplace Analytics and the Owl Labs, it is found that since 2009, the work-at-home rate rose to 159 percent, with 18 percent being full-time working from home. Meanwhile, 52 percent companies allow employees to work from home at least one day a week, and about 16 percent of companies hire a 100 percent of their work-at-home employees. For working from home styles, it often depends on the nature of the job. According to a study by McKinsey & Company about the potential of working outside the workplace by considering the proportion of time spent working effectively (Productivity), it is found that the career in finance and insurance is the occupation with the highest potential, followed by management and science/technology. While agriculture is the occupation with the lowest potential for working outside the workplace.

Working from home has both advantages and limitations. A survey by the Global Workplace Analytics and the Owl Labs found that 75 percent of employees encounter with less stress/tension. As a result, 76 percent of employees do not wish to change jobs. Moreover, working from home at least once a month causes 24 percent of employees feel productive and happy at work. However, there are limitations such as the cost of utilities at home increases, shortage of working facilities, including the lack of interaction with colleagues.

Developed countries have more work potential rate for working outside the workplace than developing countries because developed countries rely on the use of high

technology rather than focusing on labor. Therefore, it has the potential to adapt the work patterns rather than developing countries that rely primarily on the labor force in agriculture. This is reflected from the proportion of time that employees can work at full efficiency outside the workplace which accounted for about 26-30 percent of the actual working time while employees in developing countries can work efficiently outside the workplace only 12-18 percent of actual working time.

In Thailand, according to the survey of Suan Dusit Poll about “The behavior of Thai people and Work From Home” during May 2021, 43 percent of Thais work from home, and 34 percent of them work both at home and at workplace. There are several advantages, for example, it helps to reduce the spread of the disease, saves on travel expenses and to cooperate with the government measure. There are still some drawbacks such as the increase in home expenses, inconvenient tools and the delay of communication/contact. For companies, it is estimated that 20 percent of companies currently have a work-from-home policy for employees.

Guidelines for working at home to be effective in abroad cases include: (1) time management by organizing and prioritizing a work plan. Allow employees to manage/adjust working hours as needed, for instance, in Poland, companies allow couples to switch working hours in order to take turns taking care of the child. (2) Focus more about the outcome of the work than the process by clearly defining the objectives/productivity of the work. Setting a system of advice/suggestions in the work, for example, in New Zealand, there is a leaders conversations system to provide advice, help and solve problems for employees. (3) The use of technology to support work by: creating a working platform/sharing information among employee, exploring the need for technology skills, reviewing policies and regulations to facilitate the use of technology such as in Cameroon, companies invest in the installation of an internet/teleconference system and in Japan which has introduced Avatar Robots to support working at home. (4) Communication between operation teams and executives by defining a central communication platform, setting guidelines for dispatching work to executives and create a culture of open communication. For example, the US, UK, Netherlands, Denmark and China use streaming technology in teleconference/conference. Senegal, Ghana, Nigeria, Uganda, Tanzania, Ethiopia and South Africa are increasingly using teleconferencing systems and promote/develop more digital communication skills. (5) Encourage employees to work happily with rules to take care of employees both health and safety at work by keeping on both environment and well-being at work. For example, China has set up a 24-hour psychologist hotline and offers courses on emotional management during work. UN Woman has set up a working group on workers’ health and has a duty to monitor/evaluate health concerns. (6) Training to enhance employees' skills by surveying training needs that

emphasizes on communication and leadership skills, and on how to take care of physical and mental health, for example, Portugal provides courses to develop essential skills for managers and staffs. (7) Setting clear rules, agreements and working conditions by reviewing the relevant regulations to consider the benefits that have recently been obtained from working from home and (8) Maintaining a work-life balance by supporting the management of working time and personal life and by clearly defining the achievement and duration of work. For example, Portugal sets guidelines for working that do not affect the health and personal life of employees.

According to Puey Ungphakorn Institute for Economic Research in 2019, the research about the readiness to work at home in Thailand report considering the difficulty index to change to work at home found that Thailand was not yet ready for working from home due to the nature of most of the work rely on machines/tools and need work onsite. Moreover, there is still not much use of information technology. In addition, it was also found that (1) males have the ability to change their work patterns more difficult than females because males have to deal with works that requires more machines/tools. (2) People aged 46 years and over are not ready to work from home at the highest rate due to the lack of digital skills that are needed to facilitate the use of information technology. (3) People with a bachelor's degree or higher are the most adjustable groups who ready to adapt the working style because the nature of the work does not require a lot of machines/tools and they have good digital skills. (4) It is more difficult for low-income people to change their workplaces than high-income people. (5) Occupations that relevant to machinery operators in factories and agriculture or fisheries are the least adjustable groups to change their working style.

Guidelines to prepare Thailand for working at home (1) Preparation of the organization for a new way of working by studying and analyzing the nature of the work, staff skills, as well as the working system to determine the proper working style (2) Upgrading of technology readiness for the organization by developing/improving technology systems for working to be more efficient and stable. This includes tracking the progress of the work and evaluation of employees' performance in a timely and fair manner. In addition, companies should provide a development of digital skills for employees to be efficient and agile at work. (3) Consideration of working outside the workplace as an organization's policy. The executives must realize the importance of working outside the premises. Methods and guidelines should be clearly defined as well as creating an online working culture that focuses on job achievement. (4) Considering working from home method as part of the digital economy driving policy by supporting investment/development of digital infrastructure to be stable and comprehensive.

Office of National Economic and Social Development Council

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Key Social Indicators

Components	2019	2020	2019				2020				2021	
	Year	Year	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2
1. Employment 1/												
- Workforce (Thousands)	38,178	38,544	38,365	38,420	37,959	37,968	38,193	38,173	38,726	39,086	38,750	38,778
%YOY	-0.7	1.0	0.6	-0.2	-2.0	-1.1	-0.4	-0.6	2.0	2.9	1.5	1.6
- Employed Person (Thousands)	37,613	37,680	37,703	37,782	37,482	37,483	37,424	37,081	37,927	38,289	37,581	37,822
%YOY	-0.7	0.2	0.9	-0.3	-2.1	-1.1	-0.7	-1.9	1.2	2.2	0.4	2.0
- Unemployed Person (Thousands)	373	651	351	377	394	372	395	745	738	727	758	732
- Unemployment Rate (%)	0.98	1.69	0.92	0.98	1.04	0.98	1.03	1.95	1.90	1.86	1.96	1.89
- Underemployed Person (Thousands)	250	485	336	239	193	231	284	704	442	510	651	225
2. Household debt ^{2/}												
- household debt value (Trillion baht)	13.49	14.04	12.97	13.09	13.25	13.49	13.50	13.59	13.78	14.04	14.13	N.A.
% YOY	5.1	4.1	6.3	5.8	5.6	5.1	4.1	3.9	4.0	4.1	4.6	N.A.
Ratio to GDP (percent)	79.8	89.4	78.4	78.4	78.8	79.8	80.2	83.8	86.6	89.4	90.5	N.A.
- NPL (Billion baht)	140.6	144.4	126.4	127.4	133.3	140.6	156.2	152.5	144.3	144.4	148.7	N.A.
% YOY	16.7	2.7	9.0	10.0	12.2	16.7	23.6	19.7	8.3	2.7	-4.8	N.A.
% NPL to Total loan	2.90	2.84	2.75	2.74	2.81	2.90	3.23	3.12	2.91	2.84	2.92	N.A.
3. Health and Illness												
Number of patients under disease surveillance ^{3/}												
- Measles	6,614 (19.0)	1,212 (-81.7)	2,068	1,585	1,533	1,428	746	146	194	126	104	59
- Meningococcal fever	25 (25)	12 (-52)	6	6	6	7	5	3	2	2	2	3
- Encephalitis	894 (20.0)	908 (1.6)	258	207	211	218	275	190	266	177	244	144
- Cholera	12 (140)	5 (-58.3)	6	4	1	1	0	1	2	2	0	1
- Hands, feet and mouth	67,355 (-3.8)	33,310 (-50.5)	9,260	12,954	35,839	9,302	5,512	1,153	5,003	21,642	12,440	3,540
- Dysentery	2,556 (-24.8)	2,234 (-12.6)	649	736	647	524	679	573	586	396	422	295
- Pneumonia	256,555 (-9.5)	196,403 (-23.4)	73,429	51,189	63,635	68,302	77,549	29,430	35,389	54,035	45,417	27,980
- Leptospirosis	2,170 (-14.6)	1,641 (-24.4)	463	493	722	492	269	334	526	512	227	241
- Dengue fever	131,157 (50.9)	72,130 (-45.0)	16,150	31,978	54,989	28,040	9,183	18,159	36,187	8,601	2,392	2,657
- Influenza	396,363 (116.2)	123,602 (-68.8)	133,975	61,464	108,786	92,138	99,365	4,957	8,293	10,987	5,687	2,242
- Rabies	3 (-80.0)	3 (-0.0)	0	2	0	1	0	2	1	0	0	2
Rate per 100,000 population of death with major chronic non-communicable diseases												
- High blood pressure	14.2 (8.4)	N.A.	No quarterly data available									
- Ischaemic heart disease	31.4 (-1.2)	N.A.										
- Cerebrovascular disease	53.0 (12.6)	N.A.										
- Diabetes	25.3 (15.9)	N.A.										
- Cancer and tumors	128.2 (4.2)	N.A.										
4. Safety of life and property ^{4/}												
- Deaths from road accidents (cases)	8,685	7,303	2,422	2,177	1,899	2,187	2,054	1,456	1,784	2,009	2,053	1,437
- Crimes against person (cases)	16,640	14,604	4,353	4,498	3,989	3,800	3,882	3,592	3,616	3,514	3,832	3,274
- Property crimes (cases)	46,549	43,312	11,684	10,757	12,341	11,767	11,104	10,380	10,764	11,064	10,997	10,848
- Narcotics (cases)	369,237	311,816	86,291	94,196	97,520	91,230	91,899	81,522	70,901	67,494	96,802	92,354
5. Consumer Protection ^{5/}												
5.1 Number of complaints (cases)												
- Contract/Property	4,017	3,188	1,170	1,050	1,018	779	528	776	1,091	865	983	1,090
- Goods and service	2,105	2,138	459	706	545	395	547	429	537	625	585	622
- Advertisement	7,191	6,810	726	3,452	1,705	1,328	949	2,525	1,758	1,578	1,811	1,455
- Law	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
- Direct sales & marketing	2,252	3,828	377	651	721	503	534	1,189	975	1,130	731	762
5.2 Hot line 1166 (cases)	47,996	55,551	11,759	11,579	13,127	11,531	15,258	13,737	13,278	13,278	10,749	8,578

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/ Criminal Record Information, Royal Thai Police

5/ Office of the Consumer Protection Board, Office of the Prime Minister