



# Economic and Social News

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## Thailand's Social Development in Q1/2016

The Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB) released the official report on Thailand's social development in the first quarter of 2016. In summary, there were a few key positive social movements captured in this quarter, including the increases in overall employment, income and average labour productivity, improvement in security of life and the “Pracharat” (public-private-community) collaboration mechanism as a more sustainable way to deal with the haze pollution problem. However, there were also a number of remaining key issues needed close monitoring designed to cushion anticipated impacts, including the declining employment in the agricultural sector due to the persistent drought, increasing patients diagnosed with dengue fever and influenza, increasing road traffic accidents especially during festive seasons, the need for supervision on commercial advertising during children's TV programs as well as the need for the urgent solutions to the drought problem affecting the agricultural sector and agriculturists. Details of the key social situations are elaborated as follows.

### Employment and income slightly increased with relatively low rate of employment

There were recorded 37,684,243 employed people in Q1 of 2016, a slight 0.2 percent increase from Q1 in 2015. However, when looking at employment in each economic sector, it was found that employment in the agricultural sector declined by 2.7 percent due to the severe drought, while that of the non-agricultural sector rose by 1.5 percent, following the recent economic expansion, especially in the manufacturing, construction, transport, and tourism sectors. The total recorded number of unemployed people stood at 369,893 individuals, resulting in the unemployment rate of 0.97 percent, a slight increase from that of 0.94 in Q1 in 2015. Wages and salaries in the private sector, excluding overtime pay and other benefits, increased by 1.14 percent, while the real wage (excluding overtime pay and other benefits) increased by 1.64 percent. Labour productivity increased on average of 3.0 percent, comprising of the

**Labor Force Survey of the First Quarter 2016**

	2015	2015				2016
	Year	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1
Total labor force (Millions)	38.5	38.3	38.4	38.7	38.7	38.3
1. Employed (Millions)	38.0	37.6	37.8	38.3	38.4	37.7
(%YoY)	-0.2	-0.5	-0.2	-0.2	0.3	0.2
1.1 Agriculture (%YoY)	-3.6	-4.4	-5.8	-3.8	-0.7	-2.7
1.2 Non-agriculture (%YoY)	1.6	1.3	2.6	1.7	0.8	1.5
2. Unemployed (Millions)	0.3	0.4	0.3	0.4	0.3	0.4
Unemployment rate (%)	0.88	0.94	0.88	0.92	0.8	0.97
3. Seasonally inactive labor force (Millions)	0.2	0.3	0.3	0.1	0.1	0.3
Share to labor force (%)	0.5	0.8	0.8	0.2	0.2	0.7

Source: National Statistical Office

2.2 percent increase in the non-agricultural sector and 1.2 percent increase in the agricultural sector

The key labour and employment related issues needed to be closely monitored include, (1) the severe drought that has persistently widely affected the agricultural sector during the past months, resulting in the need of on-going assistance from the government. Although, it has been predicted that the El Nino phenomenon will soon end sometime during May to July this year. (2) the relatively slow global economic growth and sluggish economic growth in neighboring countries and China are believed to have impacts on the country's exports, especially labour intensive industries, such as cassava, rubber and textile. Such impacts may result in working hour reduction or the plea to have the Section 75 under the Labour Protection Act (No.2) B.E. 2551 activated. (3) trade barrier resulted from the IUU and illegal labour practice problems will inevitably be burdensome for fishery and seafood processing industries. Although, despite no serious employment termination problems in these industries have been reported, all related authoritative agencies should urgently have the IUU and illegal labour practice problems addressed in par with international standards through stricter law enforcement in order to cooperate with the EU to combat IUU activities and promote sustainable fishing. (4) the related government agencies need to closely follow up the employers' compliance with the wages for standard skills in 20 branches of professions implementation in 5 industries, as recently endorsed by the Cabinet. Furthermore, related agencies need to facilitate workers who wish to have their skills tested, as well as publicize this recent policy nationwide, so that workers will have more motivation to have their skills improved, which in turn will result in a higher national productivity.

**Working environment is one of the key risk factors affecting workers' health.** In the year of 2015, 13 percent of employed people were reported to sustain work related injury and accident, a slight decrease from that of 13.9 percent in 2014. However, a higher proportion of informal sector's workers were reported to have work related health issues, inadequate safety and environmental hazards, compared to those in the formal sector. Moreover, the trend of working-age people with joint and bone problems was on the rise, with about 62.94 working-age people per 100,000 populations reported to have such problems in 2014, compared to that of only 28.5 people in 2010. Additionally, an Increasing number of this population group is also reported to have been diagnosed with obesity and non-Communicable diseases as a result of office syndromes, improper body movements for a long time, and insufficient physical activity engagement. They are also at higher risk of workplace suicide than other population groups due to stress and emotional distress. Working environment is one of the risk factors that can determine workers' health and well-being, thus, all related bodies have consistently been working in an integrative manner in mitigating and preventing work related health issues.

**Patients diagnosed with diseases under surveillance increased, especially dengue fever and influenza that had consistently been on the rise.** The total number of patients under disease surveillance persistently increased in Q1/2016 from Q1/2015 by 17.6 percent, comprising of 43.8 percent increases of influenza patients and 97.4 percent increases of dengue fever patients. Also, food and water borne diseases, drowning among school children during school holiday need to be placed under a close watch by related authorities as well as heat stroke related illness, especially during March-April of every year.

**Expenditure on cigarette consumption decreased, but increasing consumption of such good among youths seemed to be on the rise, of which a close monitor is needed.** In Q1/2016, the value of alcoholic consumption spending was estimated at about 39,854 million baht, a 1.8 percent increase compared to the same quarter in 2015. However, the spending on cigarette was approximately 15,706 million baht, a 2.5 percent decline compared to the same quarter last year. Nevertheless, despite the reduction in overall cigarette spending, alcohol and cigarette consumption among youths unimpressively increased, thus, requiring a special surveillance. Moreover, the average age of first time smokers among youths has alarmingly been lowered.

**Reading interest has improved, with increases in both the number of readers and time spent reading.** According to the Survey on Reading of Population conducted by the National Statistics Office (NSO) reveals that the number of readers has overall increased from 2003 to 2015, despite a decline in the number of readers aged 6 years and above of 77.7 percent in 2015 compared to that of 81.8 percent in 2013. The average time spent reading outside study/working hours increased from 37 minutes per day in 2013 to 66 minutes per day in 2015. Children aged 6-14 years and youths aged 15-24 years have the highest rate of reading of 90.7 percent and 89.6 percent respectively. Such increases could be contributed by the on-going reading promotion attempts by related agencies as well as the designation of Bangkok as the World Book Capital 2013. The number of children aged below 6 years who either were readers themselves or had adults reading for them increase consistently from 58.9 percent in 2013 to 60.2 percent in 2015, with the average reading time outside school period also increasing from 27 minutes per day in 2013 to 34 minutes per day 2015.

**Thailand's STEM workforce development is essential for the country's competitiveness enhancement.** The government needs to place more emphasis on STEM education, a learning and teaching process based on the idea of educating students in four specific disciplines - Science, Technology, Engineering and Math education, which is in an interdisciplinary and applied approach, that needs to be integrate into all education levels, starting from primary, vocational, higher education as well as lifelong learning. The focus should be on cohesive learning paradigm based on real-world applications, aiming to improve

skills and ability of the Thai people to adapt to this fast changing world. This education system is believed to be a fundamental means to produce high potential workforce, which will put Thailand on the world map, up to par with the international standards.

**Overall security of life and property improved, as both crime and narcotics cases subsided.** In the first quarter of 2016, the total number of crime cases decreased by 20.5 percent compared to the same quarter in 2015. Cases of violence against property dropped 8.7 percent while life, physical and sexual offence cases declined 8.9 percent. Narcotics and drug related cases still had the largest share of 80.3 percent of the total crime cases, a drastic 22.9 percent drop compared to the previous year. Such impressive decline is believed to be a result of the more effective law enforcement and preventative measures implementation. However, continued preventative and suppressive measures are still needed for related crime and drug related cases.

**Promotion of road safety is still needed to be implemented throughout the year.** The number of both road accidents and casualties in the first quarter of 2016 increased by 11.9 and 14.9 respectively compared to the same quarter of the previous year. During the Songkran festival this year, the reported number of road accidents and casualties rose by 2.2 percent and 21.4 percent compared to the year 2015, the highest record of casualty in 10 years, despite the road safety promotion policies and measures in place. Therefore, it is important to have this problem tackled at its cause, by having local communities participating in coming up with preventative measures themselves, promoting moral behaviors among road users and responsibility for one's life as well as others'. Traffic rules and regulations can be introduced to children and youths at young age, with the help from both schools and parents as well as communities.

**More complaints on consumer goods and services and the necessity for supervision on commercials during children television programs.** Number of complaints to the Office of the Consumer Protection Board has increased by 7.1 percent while complaints on telecommunication services to Office of the National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission has increased by 80.9 percent. This was due to the switching from 2G to 3G signals. Meanwhile, food and beverage commercials during children television shows contain inappropriate contents which may adversely cause nutritional and health problems to children.

**“Pracharat” (public-private-community) collaboration as a mechanism to sustainably solve the pollution problems.** Air pollution in the North has occurred every year due to the burning in the open area of agriculture and forest fire. Number of fires and fire controls and the affected area in the North has increased from those occurred in 2015.

In addition, between January and April of every year, particulate matter smaller than 10 microns (PM10) has been found to be higher than the standard of 120 micrograms per cubic meter. As a result, in 2016 every parties involved have cooperated and supported the prevention and resolution of the air pollution issue. This was done by stressing the preventive measures, promote people's participation and intensify the law enforcement. Moreover, the "Pracharat" collaborations which include public sector, private sector, academics, community and local people in the area has effectively helped solving the problem sustainably.

### **Agriculture Workers: Adapting to the Drought**

Drought is a natural disaster that has become more severe and frequent in many parts of the country. This has adversely affected the agricultural sector of Thailand containing one-third of total labor force—most of which are in volatile to poverty. As much as 69 percent of agricultural labor age 40 years or over and more than 70 percent of them has primary education or lower. In result, they are limited by poverty and living standards to cope with the drought.

Drought in 2015 caused agricultural value-added to contract by 3.8 percent. Agricultural Production Index continued to decrease from 119.9 in March 2014 to 113.65 in March 2016. Agricultural Price Index (farm prices) fell from 147.96 to 134.07 during the same period. Accordingly, employment in agricultural sector decreased by over than 460,000 persons, accounting for a 3.6 percent decrease. Likewise, Socio-economic Survey 2015 showed that income of agricultural households (agricultural land owners, tenants, fishery and forest-related workers and agricultural workers) slightly changed by less/more than 1 percent while their expenditure and debts increased considerably compared to those of 2013. This is particularly true for agricultural workers, whose debts increased by 40.3 percent.

Measures to resolve and manage the effects from drought covers (1) *priori risk prevention* e.g. providing information on water situation, campaigning on reduction of the off-season harvesting, preparing for water reservoirs and main season rice insurance program, (2) *effects-reduction measures* such as water distribution, compensation for income loss, living- and producing cost-reduction measures and health and safety assistance programs, (3) *resolution promotion* includes trainings and supports for farmers to consider other occupation, agricultural worker employment program, loans provision to adapt to appropriate production and development, information system development to serve as resolution database. Moreover, in 2015-2016, the government has focused more on long-term resolution by promoting the technical improvement in agricultural production such that farmers are adaptive and prepared for long-term climate change.

Despite the negative effects from drought, it has obviously stimulated further adaptation and development which will upgrade the production capacity toward sustainability. So far, communities and farmers have adapted the followings: (1) water management consistence with community/local, (2) delaying the harvest, changing to crops that require lower water and changing the production technique, (3) processing of products to increase income and (4) soil improvement, forest- and environment preservation to reduce the effects from natural disasters. Nonetheless, there remain farmers who need more supports from related agencies. Most requested supports are forming cooperative group for supplementary occupation in the community, marketing supports and information provision on production and processing of agricultural product as additional income.

**Important social issues that set to be implemented include:**

**1. Preparation and capacity-enhancement for farmers** includes the followings: short-term (1) immediate problem-solving by setting aid programs that are flexible with time, area and accessible by target groups such that they receive the fullest benefits, providing knowledge on farmers as well as supporting planning for adaptation and their finance, (2) enhance by all related parties on water management by raising awareness of drought and other disasters, promoting private sector to follow 3R (Reduce, Reuse, Recycle) and motivating business sector to help use water efficiently as well as promoting environmental preservation and development.

Medium- and long-term (1) capacity-building for farmers to be able to adjust to the long-term climate change by promoting knowledge exchange on production techniques across farmer groups, increasing R&D and production technology for repeating drought areas and restructuring agricultural production to accommodate risk, support smart farmers and build networks with small farmers to create local employment and enhance competitiveness, and (2) sustainable water management by integrating and setting management system to prevent drought, preparing a system to cope with climate change through basic infrastructure, change in patterns of living and doing businesses such that they are less volatile to climate change.

**2. Promptly develop and support the government's STEM education** which is set to be implemented both in the formal and informal education e.g. (1) set up National STEM Center and 13 regional centers, (2) set target for STEM education for academic year 2016 for 2,250 primary and secondary schools and 17,220 STEM teachers, (3) provide guidance to teachers in connecting analytical knowledge and skills to students and enhance STEM educational personnel with target of 4,000 persons, and (4) proceed the pilot science-based vocational education in 5 vocational colleges as well as adjusting the curriculum and evaluation of regular vocational education to accommodate STEM. As for the informal

education, assign institutions to provide STEM education to labor entering the job market and those already in the market. Also, produce human resource with STEM skills in 10 occupations of the future as well as upgrading R&D for development of STEM resources.

**3. Reduction of alcohol- and tobacco consumption among youths** by intensifying the law enforcement relating to alcoholic beverage and tobacco, campaigning awareness of the alcoholic beverages and tobacco continuously to reduce the new consumers. This can be implemented along with other measures such as area-based campaigning through media in a way consistence with geo-social settings, applying all regulations and taxes imposed on factory tobacco to home-produced tobacco, monitoring the smuggled tobacco and nicotine-containing products and considering tobacco plain packaging legislation as a control measure such that the health warnings can be seen clearly due to the fact that cigarette brand names are in a prescribed color and size

**4. Monitoring commercial advertising during children's TV programs** with related agencies putting on a close monitor and collaboratively set regulations for appropriate commercial advertisements during children's TV programs. The regulations aim at solving the over-nutrition and chronic sickness from high cholesterol in children, which is on the rise. Moreover, awareness should be raised among food and beverage producers on the importance of child development such that they are motivated to produce healthy products.

**5. Building reading habits to enhance early-childhood development.** By promoting reading habits in the family, parents raise awareness on importance of reading to children since pregnancy and after birth or children to read by themselves, at least 15-30 minutes a day with parents selecting reading materials appropriate to children's ages. In addition, environment within household and community should be developed to promote reading, particularly for children aged 0-3 years. This will enhance their capability and development which are good foundation for future study, work and live prospects.

Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board.

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## Key Social Indicators

Components	2014	2015	2014				2015				2016
	Year	Year	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1
1. Employment <sup>1/</sup>											
Workforce (Thousands)	38,576	38,548	38,454	38,442	38,811	38,598	38,279	38,404	38,767	38,744	38,312
%YOY	-0.2	- 0.07	-0.12	-0.89	0.35	-0.20	-0.45	-0.10	-0.1	0.4	0.1
Employed person (Thousands)	38,077	38,016	37,812	37,815	38,421	38,262	37,612	37,752	38,330	38,371	37,684
%YOY	-0.4	-0.16	-0.40	-1.18	0.27	-0.14	-0.53	-0.17	-0.2	0.3	0.2
Unemployed person (Thousands)	322.7	340.6	341.1	385.7	326.6	237.3	361.3	336.1	356.0	308.8	369.9
Unemployment rate (%)	0.80	0.88	0.89	1.00	0.84	0.61	0.94	0.88	0.92	0.8	0.97
Underemployed person (Thousands)	256.3	272.5	277.9	258.1	245.1	244.1	281.2	277.2	250.9	280.8	292.9
2. Health and illness											
Number of patients under disease surveillance (cases) <sup>2/</sup>											
- Measles	1,184 (-55.3)	1,015 (-14.3)	340	321	313	210	224	236	276	279	316
- Meningococcal Meningitis	14 -	25 (78.6)	4	3	2	5	4	6	9	6	5
- Japanese encephalitis	594 (-17.8)	632 (6.4)	140	143	153	158	164	144	178	146	182
- Cholera	12 (50.0)	108 (800.0)	2	2	6	2	2	2	4	100	41
- Hand, food and mouth	65,835 (42.7)	41,392 (-37.1)	9,662	19,732	27,792	8,649	9,217	7,771	14,594	9,810	8,906
- Dysentery	8,106 (-15.4)	7,042 -13.1	2,326	2,261	2,050	1,469	1,804	1,956	1,774	1,508	1,694
- Pneumonia	200,710 (8.2)	216,959 (8.0)	60,599	38,215	56,775	45,121	56,556	42,176	57,754	60,473	56,376
- Leptospirosis	2,263 (-27.1)	2,151 (-49.4)	393	462	774	634	283	393	723	752	391
- Dengue fever	40,999 (-73.5)	144,952 (53.6)	4,953	8,222	16,554	11,270	7,538	24,409	60,768	52,237	14,885
- Influenza	74,065 (68.6)	77,926 (52.1)	30,899	11,178	16,146	15,842	24,206	10,840	18,397	24,483	34,817
- Rabies	6 (20.0)	5 (-16.6)	2	1	2	1	1	1	2	1	3
Rate per 100,000 population of death with major chronic non-communicable diseases											
- High blood pressure	11.0 (37.5)	n.a.	No quarterly data available								
- Ischaemic heart disease	27.8 (3.3)	n.a.									
- Cerebrovascular disease	38.7 (7.2)	n.a.									
- Diabetes	17.5 (17.4)	n.a.									
- Cancer and tumors	107.9 (3.0)	n.a.									
3. Social security											
- Patients from road accidents (cases)	5,998	6,271	1,884	1,577	1,285	1,625	1,623	1,533	1,322	1,793	1,871
- Crime against person (cases)	23,916	25,602	5,884	6,024	5,904	6,313	6,210	6,724	5,947	6,721	5,659
- Property crimes (cases)	46,722	48,770	11,706	11,853	11,845	11,690	11,214	12,850	12,926	11,780	10,236
- Narcotics (cases)	384,644	279,266	95,095	102,728	98,838	91,711	83,963	67,015	64,375	63,913	64,753
4. Consumer protection <sup>3/</sup>											
4.1 Number of complaints (cases)											
- Advertisement	2,571	2,875	287	843	805	636	632	753	742	748	727
- Label	2,352	2,552	254	682	752	664	572	726	614	640	704
- Contract	1,515	2,552	131	621	519	244	260	272	253	334	457
- Law	69	6	10	15	39	5	4	1	1	0	25
- Direct sales and direct marketing	131	566	0	0	0	131	54	159	177	176	120
4.2 Hot line 1166 (cases)	38,701	49,708	3,410	10,804	12,703	11,784	12,293	12,300	12,865	12,250	11,666

Source: 1/ Labor force survey report, National Statistical Office, Ministry of Information and Communication Technology

2/ Bureau of Epidemiology, Department of Disease Control, Ministry of Health

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