



IS THAILAND ON THE PATH TO AN INCLUSIVE RECOVERY?

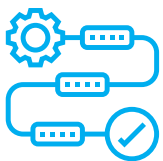
Findings from 2 rounds
of high-frequency surveys

Executive summary



Summary of key findings

In 2022-2023, the United Nations Children's Fund in Thailand conducted two rounds of High-Frequency Surveys to assess the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 and other shocks on the welfare of households, and to track recovery trajectories of different population groups across several socio-economic dimensions including employment, income, food security, education, and health.



Methodology

The multi-round surveys targeted a nationally representative sample of 2,000+ adults aged 18 years and older with access to mobile phones. Panel data have been collected through 2 rounds (see Table 1).

Table 1. Details on R1 and R2 data collection

	Round 1	Round 2
Data collection period	August 3-September 14, 2022	March 2-24, 2023
Respondents	2,720	2,007
Response rate	30% from random digit dialing	73.7% of the Round 1 respondents completed the Round 2 survey

Survey results are representative at the national level, across 5 regions, urban/rural areas, and between households with and without children. The surveys were carried out by GeoPoll using Computer Assisted Telephone Interviews (CATI). Randomized digit dialing (RDD) was employed for the first-round to reach 2,720 individuals. A sub-set of 2,007 individuals from the first round were interviewed in the second round.

The survey's content was designed to monitor the impact of COVID-19 and subsequent recovery across key social and economic dimensions affecting the welfare of households and children.

The questionnaire focused on the following thematic modules:

1. Employment
2. Childcare
3. Income
4. Issues worrying people
5. Coping Strategies
6. Food Security
7. Social Assistance
8. Education /Early Childhood Development
9. Health and Vaccination



Employment

The labor situation in March 2023 reflected an overall recovery demonstrating a continuing positive trend.

88% of respondents indicated that they were working in March 2023 compared to 81% in September 2022. When asked about their perception of the overall employment situation, a majority of households responded positively, noting that in general their situation had improved (59%).

Among the people who had lost their jobs during COVID-19 but then returned to work, the recovery dynamic was also positive with many groups that were lagging behind in Sept 2022 now 'catching up'.

Results indicated that more people returned to work between March 2023 and September 2022 (defined as those who started working again after losing their job or business as a result of COVID-19), with an increase from 79% to 90%. Of those in the second round who lost jobs and started working again, around 85% did so over the last 6 months.

Households with children in general found it MORE difficult to start working again after losing their jobs than households without children.

This trend was observed in both September 2022 and in March 2023. However, the situation in March 2023 looked more positive and the dynamics of the last 6 months indicated that households with children seemed to be 'catching up'. Households without children saw an increase of 7 percentage points (from 84% to 91%), whereas households with children saw an increase of 18 percentage points (from 69% to 87%).



Care crisis

Care (especially childcare) obligations persisted as a critical obstacle for employment. In March 2023, among those who did not have paid jobs, 20% indicated that they had to care for children with another 6% having to care for ill relatives. Care obligations remained a key hurdle to employment across both rounds, with an increase in March 2023 compared to September 2022. 57% noted that they wanted to stay home with the children, but 37% replied that childcare was too expensive. Expense was notably referenced more often for those in the Northeast (48%) and in rural areas (41%).

For some respondents, childcare became a critical issue with 5% noting that a child aged 0-6 had been left alone or under the supervision of another child younger than 10 years of age for more than 1 hour at least once in the last week. Another 10% of respondents with children aged 0-6 reported that their child had either 'often' or 'sometimes' been taken to work with an adult due to a lack of other childcare options since the beginning of COVID-19, indicating that parents are looking for ways to go back to work while providing childcare.

Women were observed to have been covering most of the unpaid care obligations for young children.

When asked which family member mainly provided childcare for households with children ages 0-6 when pre-school and kindergartens were closed during COVID-19, mothers and grandmothers shouldered the majority of the burden. Mothers were the main care providers in 46% of cases and grandmothers in 40% of cases; with male household members such as fathers and grandfathers serving as the main care providers in just 3% and 4% of cases respectively.



Income

March 2023 findings suggest a complete reversal of the previous negative income trend, with a majority of respondents indicating their income increased. 55% of respondents indicated that household income had increased over the last year, compared to 12% in September 2022. Households reported a large positive change across all demographic strata and household composition.

The increase in income was substantial, with 49% of respondents who reported an increase in household income noting that the increase was about half or more than half of their monthly income.

In terms of household farm and non-farm businesses the trend is similar, indicating overall improvement compared to September 2022.



Issues worrying people/ Inflation

When asked about the top three issues that worry people, price increase preserved its top position over the last 6 months. COVID-19 (63%) and poverty (47%) were among the top problems indicated by respondents in September 2022, though in March 2023 crime and violence (68%) and unemployment (59%) had joined to the top issues worried about.

COVID-19 has lost its importance; the share of people who highlighted this problem as one of their top issues decreased from 63% to 28% over the six months. Unemployment and crime and violence increased in relevance, with crime and violence seeing the steepest rise from 26% to 68%.

Inflation, while remaining a problem, seems to have become less critical in March 2023 compared to September 2022. When asked “how much of a threat the price increase is to your household’s finances” in March 2023, 26% indicated it as ‘substantial threat’ - 21 percentage points lower than during round one in September 2022 (47%).



Coping strategies

Households used a large variety of coping techniques to survive and mitigate the shocks brought about by the COVID-19 outbreak. While reduction of food consumption or shift to cheaper food items was a predominant strategy in September 2022 (51%), it became less utilized by households in March 2023 (27%). This is generally considered a positive sign as its decline is aligned with the improved employment and income findings of the survey. Reduction of non-food consumption remained the top coping strategy however, with a slight decline observed in March 2023 (50%) compared to September 2022 (52%).

The government was an important source of support across population groups for both rounds. The percentage of those who relied on government assistance as a way to cope with shocks was 37% in March 2023, up from 29% in September 2022.

Savings remained one of the main coping strategies, however the percentage of respondents who relied on savings has declined slightly over the 6 months (from 39% to 34%). The findings from a follow-up question asking “Has the amount of your households’ savings changed compared to 6 months ago” also confirmed the challenges household face in relying on savings as a coping strategy. 35% of respondents reported that their savings decreased compared to 6 months ago, with 21% reporting no change and just 6% indicating that their household’s savings had increased. An additional 35% of respondents indicated that the question was not applicable as their household did not have any savings at all. In total, about 70% of all households across regions, household composition, gender, and urban/rural areas reported that their savings had either decreased over the last 6 months or were nonexistent – which is a worrisome statistic.

Borrowing from banks and from friends has increased in 2023. Respondents in March 2023 were more likely to indicate that they took out a loan from a financial institution, rising from 21% in round 1 to 40% in round 2. Borrowing from friends and family also increased while selling assets decreased, which may suggest that household assets have been used up to some extent and going into debt is becoming one of the only available strategies for some households.

Another significant finding that highlights the problem of debt is the percentage of households resorting to delaying payment obligations, which has increased from 24% to 36% over the 6 months. Households with children were even more affected – in March 2023 40% of households with children reported delaying payment obligations.

An increase of households relying both on taking out loans and then delaying payment obligations represents a troubling trend for household finances across the country.



Food security

Food security improved between March 2023 and September 2022 across all indicators. A majority of respondents in March 2023 (88%) indicated that they had not worried about not having enough food to eat because of lack of money or other resources over the last 30 days, an improvement since September 2022 (74%).

In March 2023, 10% of respondents reported that they were unable to eat healthy and nutritious/preferred foods because of a lack of money or other resources, a decrease from the 21% observed back in September 2022. In terms of extreme food insecurity, the situation has improved as well. When asked “During the last 30 days, was there a time when you or another member of your household had to skip a meal because there was not enough money or other resources to get food?,” 6% answered ‘often’ or ‘sometimes’, whereas in September 2022 this indicator was 11%.



Social Assistance

Around 70% of households in March 2023 reported receiving social assistance from the government, which was an increase from 60% compared to September 2022. A larger share of households with no children reported receiving government assistance in round 2 (70%) than in round 1 (55%).

When asked about difficulties obtaining social assistance payments, only 2% mentioned experiencing challenges. This is an improvement compared to September 2022, when 14% reported problems.



Health/Vaccination

In March 2023 almost 100% of respondents reported that all adult members of their household received at least two shots of the COVID-19 vaccine at the time of the survey, slightly up from the 98% reported in round 1, indicating that vaccination uptake is very high. **These results are similar across all demographic strata, regions, and gender.**

The survey results indicated good overall access to medical services over the last 12 months (including regular check-up services and vaccination), both for adults (98%) and children (99%). These results are relatively homogenous for both poorer and better well-off (98% and 99% respectively reporting that they were able to access medical services for their 0-6 year old when needed).



Education/ECD

During the first round in September 2022, 94% per cent of households indicated that their children returned to school when the school reopened. However, in the Northeast only 84% returned. Among the poorest the proportion was even lower with 81% returning to school. All of the households where none of the children returned to school when the school reopened were from Northeast and from the two lowest income quintiles.

During the second round in March 2023 these areas had caught up with nearly 100% of respondents across all strata reporting that children had returned to school.

A majority (94%) of the round 2 respondents who had children ages 7-17 also reported that their children had no difficulties catching up on learning after returning to school. When asked how the students felt about returning to school, round 2 also encouragingly recorded that 81% of students were happy to see teachers and friends, and 49% were 'excited and eager to get back to face-to-face learning'.



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