

**"Is Thailand on the path to an inclusive recovery":
Findings from the first round of a high frequency survey, 2022**

Summary of key findings

UNICEF's High-Frequency Surveys have been designed to assess the socio-economic effects of the COVID-19 crisis on the welfare of the households, and to track **the recovery trajectories** of various population groups across socio-economic dimensions, in such areas as employment, income, food security, coping strategies, education, and health. The survey focuses on tracking the impact of COVID-19 as well as other shocks, specifically increases in food and energy prices. High-frequency data enable 'feeling the pulse' and the capturing of trends, in order to obtain timely information for decision making.

1. EMPLOYMENT

- **The labour situation reflects the recovery from COVID-19, but significant variations remain across population groups.** 81 per cent of respondents indicated that they were working in August-September 2022. Overall, employment was higher than during the 2021 World Bank High Frequency Survey.¹ This is also in line with key national statistics indicating improvements in the general labour situation.² However, there are significant variations in current employment rate across population groups, with the lowest proportion observed in the Northeast (73 per cent), among those with less education (70 per cent), and among the poorest quintile (68 per cent).
- **In terms of the proportion of people who had lost their jobs, but then returned to work the recovery dynamics are uneven. Households with children found it MORE difficult to start working again than households without children** (68 per cent and 84 per cent respectively). More respondents from urban areas were able to find jobs after losing them (83 per cent), than respondents from rural areas (77 per cent). Across the regions, Bangkok, North and Central regions had the most employment recovery success (84 per cent, 92 per cent and 89 per cent respectively), whereas Northeast and South had the lowest proportions of respondents who were able to find jobs after losing them (63 per cent and 77 per cent respectively). Respondents in manufacturing and construction were most likely to return to work, with 98 per cent of respondents indicating that they had started working again. Employment in the agriculture sector was recovering at the slowest rate (80 per cent).
- A larger proportion of men than women indicated that they had lost their jobs or businesses as a result of COVID-19 (45 per cent and 25 per cent respectively). **However, women found it more difficult to recover** –of those who had lost their jobs 67 per cent reported that they were able to start working again, compared to 95 per cent of men. **Moreover,**

¹ World Bank, 2021, Impact of COVID-19 on Thailand's households, Insights from Rapid Phone Survey

² National Economic and Social Development Council, Thailand's Social Outlook of Q2 and Q3, 2022

the poorest were also the ones recovering more slowly: 36 per cent were unable to start working again, compared to 10 per cent of the better-off.

- **Hybrid work modality (office and home) became the MAIN mode of work for around 17 per cent of respondents.** Since the beginning of the pandemic, hybrid modality became more prevalent: (i) among the better-off (28 per cent) than among the poorest (7 per cent), (ii) among women (20 per cent) than among men (13 per cent), and (iii) for respondents with higher education (25 per cent) than those with lower educational attainment (8 per cent).

2. CARE CRISIS

- **Care (especially childcare) obligations were a critical obstacle for employment.** Of those who did not have paid jobs, the largest proportion indicated that they could not work because they had to care for children or ill relatives (24 per cent); 12 per cent were unable to work due to COVID-19 or because they were in quarantine. In the Northeast 40 per cent of households without paid work had to not work because of care obligations.
- **Of those who had to miss work for care reasons, around 70 per cent had to care for children** and around 30 per cent had to care for ill relatives.
- **The richest and poorest wealth quintiles were most likely to indicate childcare needs as a key reason for not working** (24 per cent and 17 per cent respectively), while among mid-income families a significantly lower share had to miss work due to childcare obligations (9 per cent). While the richest presumably chose not to work, but to care for children, the significant proportion of the poorest who could not work due to childcare obligations is a worrying finding. The reason may range from limited affordability or accessibility of childcare and requires further analysis. In terms of the need to care for ill relatives, the situation is different: for the poorest the share of those who did not work was 12 per cent, while for the richest it was 2 per cent. This is not surprising, as the richest can afford to hire help if relatives fall ill.
- **Women were covering most of the unpaid care obligations for young children.** When pre-school or kindergarten were closed during the COVID-19 pandemic, mothers were the main care providers in 48 per cent of cases, grandmothers in 29 per cent, and fathers in 5 per cent of cases.

3. INCOME

- **Overall recovery of household income is yet to be seen. Despite the easing of the quarantine in the first half of 2022, over 60 per cent of households reported a reduction of incomes compared to 12 months ago.** Around 35 per cent indicated that their incomes had increased or stated the same.
- **While income decline was the predominant trend over the last 12 months, the magnitude varied across groups. 70 per cent of the poorest indicated that their incomes had fallen, whereas among the better-off this proportion was 50 per cent.** Bangkok had the largest share of households with increased or stable incomes (47 per cent). No significant differences were revealed in income dynamics between households with children and households without children.

- **Both farming and non-farming businesses have been affected by income declines** over the last 12 months.

4. INFLATION

- When asked about their perception of price increase over the last 12 months, 99 per cent of households indicated that prices had gone up, with around 80 per cent reported that prices had gone ‘up a lot’.
- **The majority of households were struggling because of inflation.** Around 90 per cent indicated that this price increase is a threat to their household finances. While inflation affects many households, 54 per cent of the poorest reported that the price increase is a SUBSTANTIAL threat to their household finances (compared to 34 per cent for the better-off group).
- **While the COVID-19 pandemic continues to worry people in Thailand, it is being overshadowed by inflation.** When asked about the most worrying issues, households indicated price increases and COVID-19 as the two leading issues that worried them, with price increase being a problem for an even higher percentage of respondents. ‘Poverty’ and ‘unemployment’ occupied third and fourth places.
- Concerns about price increase varied across regions. In Bangkok rising prices was an issue to a higher proportion of households than COVID-19. However, in Northern and Southern provinces COVID-19 still ranks first. **Also, for poor people inflation has overshadowed COVID-19, while COVID-19 remains the main concern for the better-off.**

5. COPING STRATEGIES

- **Households were relying primarily on adverse coping strategies to cope with the shocks brought about by the coronavirus outbreak and the higher cost of living. Reductions in food and non-food consumption** were the predominant strategies over the last 12 months (53 per cent and 54 per cent respectively).
- **In terms of positive coping strategies**, around 40 per cent of households relied on savings, which was the second most common coping strategy. Fewer households relied on savings than during the World Bank survey in 2021 (64 per cent).³ The government remained an important source of support (29 per cent) as well as direct support from friends (23 per cent and borrowing from friends (24 per cent).
- **Household debt was an issue, especially for families with children.** Households with children were more likely to delay payment obligations (a third of households with children said they had to delay debt payments). Households with children were more actively borrowing (both from banks and friends) than households without children. Households with children were also more likely to be pawning assets and property.

6. FOOD SECURITY

- **Over 20 per cent of households indicated not being able to eat healthy and nutritious/preferred foods.** The issue was more pronounced among poorer (40 per cent) households.

³ World Bank, 2021, Impact of COVID-19 on Thailand’s households, Insights from Rapid Phone Survey

- **Around 4 per cent** of all households reported going without eating for a whole day, with a higher proportion among poor households (12 per cent).

7. SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

- **Over 60 per cent of households reported receiving social assistance from the government.** A larger proportion of households with children indicated receiving assistance over the last 12 months (68 per cent), compared to households without children (56 per cent).
- **Top-ups for major social assistance programmes played a significant role for many households.** Of those who received social assistance, over 70 per cent reported receiving top-ups during the last 12 months. A larger proportion of households with children than households without children received top-ups (86 per cent and 61 per cent respectively).
- Around 80 per cent of households received their transfers via the ‘Pao Tung’ mobile application and 40 per cent received them through bank transfers.
- **Most people have not experienced difficulties obtaining social assistance payments; however 13 per cent indicated problems.** The main issues that households were facing were: (i) problems with the internet/power; (ii) issues verifying identity; and (iii) difficulties navigating the application. The proportion reporting difficulties was higher for households with children (22 per cent) than for households without children (5 per cent).

8. EDUCATION AND EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

- **Ninety-four per cent of households indicated that their children returned to school when the school reopened. However, in the Northeast only 83 per cent returned. Among the poorest the proportion is even lower, at 81 per cent.** Of those who did not return to school when the school reopened, over 90 per cent are from Northeast, and predominantly from lower income quintiles.
- **Fear of being infected with COVID-19 was stated as the main reason for children not to be enrolled at school at the time of the survey** (44 per cent). Other reasons included: (i) the school does not appear ready to resume classes [for example no guidelines / revised curriculum in place yet] (7 per cent); (ii) lack of devices and internet (6 per cent each); and (iii) children are not interested in studies (5 per cent).
- **Perceived effectiveness of remote learning:** around 79 per cent stated that distance learning was LESS or NOT effective compared to face-to-face learning. Over 25 per cent of the poorest indicate that distance learning was NOT effective at all.
- **Learning challenges:** Besides limited access to the internet and devices (24 per cent and 11 per cent); the second key challenge was that parent were either too busy to support learning (20 per cent) or did not have enough skills to support the children (12 per cent). In addition, limited preparedness of teachers to deliver classes during online learning, was considered an issue.
- **Enrolment in early childhood development (ECD) institutions/kindergartens increased significantly recently in comparison to the COVID-19 period.** Data suggests LESS fear of COVID-19 among parents was likely to be the primary reason for

increased recent enrolment. There were significant variations in ECD enrolment between income groups, with higher rates for better-off families.

9. HEALTH AND VACCINATION

- **98% of respondents reported that all adult members of their households received at least two shots of vaccine against COVID-19.** Of the 2 per cent not fully vaccinated, 71 per cent stated ‘worries about side effects’ as the primary reason.
- **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** (96 per cent) **and children** (97 per cent). These results are relatively homogenous for poorer and better well-off.
- **Mental health remains a concern.** Around 43 per cent of respondents indicated that they had felt very anxious, nervous or worried a few times over the past month; 22 per cent weekly; and 7 per cent daily. Among the poorest, 14 per cent indicated that they felt very anxious, nervous or worried ‘every day’, compared to 4 per cent among the richest.
- **When asked about a child**, a smaller proportion reported children aged 7-17 feeling very anxious, nervous or worried than the figure for adults. However, a significant share of adults (23%) indicated that they ‘do not know’ if the child was feeling very anxious, nervous, or worried over the past month.