

## COVID-19 Legal and Policy Frameworks Affecting Older Persons in Thailand

### 1. Introduction to Ageing in Thailand

Around 18% of Thailand's population are over 60 years of age, and one out of every 10 people is over 80 years of age.<sup>1</sup> In 2001, Thailand adopted the Second National Plan for Older Persons, that covers the years 2001-2021. In 2002, Thailand achieved Universal Health Coverage (UHC), and under the system, all Thai citizens access essential health services without cost. The Act on Older persons was revised in 2010, supporting community-based care and support for older persons and promoting savings among older persons. The National Strategy for 2018-2037 also addresses the ageing of Thailand's population and looks to ensure equality of social development and human resource development to address these social changes.<sup>2</sup>

At the same time, almost 2 million older people in Thailand are not in good health, and about 250,000 are in very poor condition.<sup>3</sup> However, most older persons in Thailand live independently or with family: around 65% of older persons either live with or near one of their children, and only 9% live alone.<sup>4</sup> Long-term residential care is not as popular in Thailand, with only 12 government aged care homes and less than 2,000 residents, and 13 other registered aged care homes.<sup>5</sup> The government has over 50,000 Home Care Service Volunteers for the Elderly who reach out to older persons living at home who may need extra assistance.<sup>6</sup> However, older persons in Thailand do not experience systematic ageism or health inequality, and are generally well-respected in Thai culture.<sup>7</sup> Where possible, families tend to care for their older relatives and support them economically.

Many older persons in Thailand receive economic support from their family members, or continue to work, especially in low-wage jobs or in the informal economy, to support themselves.<sup>8</sup> Retirement age in Thailand is set at 60, but this is option in the private sector, and older Thais can

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<sup>1</sup> Marcela Suazo & Wassana Im-Em, "This is not the time to neglect our older generation," Apr. 13, 2020, BANGKOK POST, <https://www.bangkokpost.com/opinion/opinion/1898465/this-is-not-the-time-to-neglect-our-older-generation>.

<sup>2</sup> Ageing population in Thailand, HelpAge, <https://ageingasia.org/ageing-population-thailand/#govpolicies> (last visited Dec. 1, 2020).

<sup>3</sup> Marcela Suazo & Wassana Im-Em, "This is not the time to neglect our older generation," Apr. 13, 2020, BANGKOK POST, <https://www.bangkokpost.com/opinion/opinion/1898465/this-is-not-the-time-to-neglect-our-older-generation>.

<sup>4</sup> The Situation of Thailand's Older Population: An Update based on the 2014 survey of Older Persons in Thailand, HelpAge International (2015), p.24, available at <https://ageingasia.org/situation-of-thailand-older-population-2015/>.

<sup>5</sup> The Situation of Thailand's Older Population: An Update based on the 2014 survey of Older Persons in Thailand, HelpAge International (2015), p.8-9, available at <https://ageingasia.org/situation-of-thailand-older-population-2015/>.

<sup>6</sup> The Situation of Thailand's Older Population: An Update based on the 2014 survey of Older Persons in Thailand, HelpAge International (2015), p.8, available at <https://ageingasia.org/situation-of-thailand-older-population-2015/>.

<sup>7</sup> Wee-Shiong Lim, et al., *COVID-19 and older people in Asia: Asian Working Group for Sarconpenia calls to action*, GERIATRICS & GERONTOLOGY INTERNATIONAL, Vol. 20(6) (2020), available at <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/ggi.13939>.

<sup>8</sup> Usa Khiewrord, *Thailand needs to do more to support older people from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic*, Jul. 7, 2020, HelpAge International, <https://www.helpage.org/newsroom/latest-news/thailand-needs-to-do-more-to-support-older-people-from-the-impact-of-the-covid19-pandemic/>.

continue working in formal employment after this age in many circumstances as well.<sup>9</sup> 85% of older Thais receive the Old Age Allowance, which is available on a graduated basis from the age of 60,<sup>10</sup> but the benefit level is at 25% of the national poverty line, lower than most other social pension programs in ASEAN countries and in the rest of the world.<sup>11</sup>

#### a. Methodology of this report

This report was developed first through an assessment of Thailand's approach to ageing and aged care in general, and also understanding Thailand's general policy and legislative response to COVID-19. After this policy background was assessed, then the specific policies and programs impacting older persons during the COVID-19 pandemic were incorporated, with a focus on access to care and services, access to healthcare, and access to economic support. While the focus of these assessments was on Parliamentary action, much of the response to COVID-19 is carried out through emergency powers delegated to the executive branch Ministers and agencies. Finally, based on these assessments, lessons learned and recommendations are provided for other Parliamentarians based on Thailand's response.

### 2. Older persons in Thailand's COVID-19 response

Thailand's Communicable Diseases Act (CDA) gives regional governors the right to issue orders for public safety, such as the temporary closure of certain venues.<sup>12</sup> COVID-19 was declared a dangerous communicable disease under the CDA, so these emergency powers are in force. Thailand's swift and comprehensive response to the public health emergency posed by COVID-19 has been praised by the international community,<sup>13</sup> and Thailand's infection rate shows the effectiveness of its approach, with less than cases 4,000 nationwide and only 60 deaths as of November 2020. However, activists and journalists have alleged that the government is using its emergency powers related to COVID-19 to combat anti-government protests and even anti-government news and information sources.<sup>14</sup> In fact, the Royal Government has come under the scrutiny of Parliament recently, with some lawmakers calling for Constitutional reforms to limit the power of the monarchy.<sup>15</sup> While these amendments are unlikely to be adopted, the process does show the Parliament's willingness to monitor the actions of government, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, when the powers of the government are even more expansive.

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<sup>9</sup> Thailand – Retirement regime for Thai private sector, Orbis, Oct. 30, 2019, <https://orbis-alliance.com/orbis-news/thailand-retirement-regime-for-thai-private-sector>.

<sup>10</sup> Thailand: Social Security Programs Throughout the World: Asia & the Pacific, 2016, [https://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/progdsc/ssptw/2016-2017/asia/thailand.html#:~:text=Old%2Dage%20pension%20\(social%20assistance\)%3A%20600%20baht%20is%20paid.if%20aged%2090%20or%20older](https://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/progdsc/ssptw/2016-2017/asia/thailand.html#:~:text=Old%2Dage%20pension%20(social%20assistance)%3A%20600%20baht%20is%20paid.if%20aged%2090%20or%20older) (last visited Dec. 1, 2020).

<sup>11</sup> Usa Khiewrord, *Thailand needs to do more to support older people from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic*, Jul. 7, 2020, HelpAge International, <https://www.helpage.org/newsroom/latest-news/thailand-needs-to-do-more-to-support-older-people-from-the-impact-of-the-covid19-pandemic/>.

<sup>12</sup> Communicable Diseases Act (2005), s. 35.

<sup>13</sup> Jidapa Khoonsinsub, *Thailand's COVID-19 response an example of resilience and solidarity: a UN Resident Coordinator blog*, Aug. 4, 2020, UN NEWS, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/08/1069191> (last visited Nov. 28, 2020).

<sup>14</sup> Interview with Sunai Phasuk, *Learning from COVID-19 in Thailand*, Sept. 1, 2020, HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/09/01/learning-covid-19-thailand> (last visited Nov. 28, 2020).

<sup>15</sup> *Thailand votes on constitutional reforms amid protests*, DW, Nov. 18, 2020, <https://www.dw.com/en/thailand-votes-on-constitutional-reforms-amid-protests/a-55643736> (last visited Nov. 28, 2020).

Within one day of the WHO declaring COVID-19 a pandemic, Thailand created the Centre for COVID-19 Situation Administration (CCSA), an advisory group with representatives from many sectors and branches of the government.<sup>16</sup> This group is chaired by the Prime Minister and provides policy development and advice related to all aspects of the COVID-19 crisis. The CCSA determines quarantine requirements and has developed guidelines to start allowing certain categories of tourists to safely return to Thailand.<sup>17</sup>

Thailand also has a group of around 1 million village health volunteers, managed by the Ministry of Public Health, who play a critical role in public health awareness and health service delivery. These volunteers have been an essential part of Thailand's COVID-19 response, particularly in contact tracing as they keep records of their visits and can collect additional data from families and individuals.<sup>18</sup> They have also been a primary information source for many households on COVID-19 prevention, how to recognize symptoms, and have also handed out masks and hand sanitizer.<sup>19</sup> In approximately 2 weeks in March and April, they were able to visit 8 million households to screen for COVID-19 cases.<sup>20</sup> They normally receive a stipend of 1,000 Thai baht (around \$32 USD) per month for their work, and have been given an additional 500 baht per month as an incentive payment during COVID-19.<sup>21</sup>

In addition to the health sector response to COVID-19, Thailand has also made significant efforts to provide for the population economically during the pandemic. The various stimulus packages adopted in Thailand have amounted to 15% of the country's GDP, putting it on par with the U.S. and Sweden.<sup>22</sup> This amounts to the largest non-budgetary stimulus in the country's history, and

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<sup>16</sup> COVID-19 Infodemic Management: Thailand Experience, Supakit Sirilak, MD, MPH Deputy Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Public Health, 75th Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations, Sept. 23, 2020, available at [https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/risk-comms-updates/thailand-unga-presentation-infodemic-thailand-21sep2020-final.pdf?sfvrsn=d757509e\\_6](https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/risk-comms-updates/thailand-unga-presentation-infodemic-thailand-21sep2020-final.pdf?sfvrsn=d757509e_6).

<sup>17</sup> CCSA approves more quarantine packages for foreign tourists, The Nation: Thailand, Oct. 22, 2020, <https://www.nationthailand.com/news/30396610>.

<sup>18</sup> Montira Narkvichien, *Thailand's 1 million village health volunteers – “unsung heroes” – are helping guard communities nationwide from COVID-19*, Aug. 28, 2020, WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION, <https://www.who.int/thailand/news/feature-stories/detail/thailands-1-million-village-health-volunteers-unsung-heroes-are-helping-guard-communities-nationwide-from-covid-19> (last visited Nov. 28, 2020).

<sup>19</sup> Montira Narkvichien, *Thailand's 1 million village health volunteers – “unsung heroes” – are helping guard communities nationwide from COVID-19*, Aug. 28, 2020, WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION, <https://www.who.int/thailand/news/feature-stories/detail/thailands-1-million-village-health-volunteers-unsung-heroes-are-helping-guard-communities-nationwide-from-covid-19> (last visited Nov. 28, 2020).

<sup>20</sup> Montira Narkvichien, *Thailand's 1 million village health volunteers – “unsung heroes” – are helping guard communities nationwide from COVID-19*, Aug. 28, 2020, WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION, <https://www.who.int/thailand/news/feature-stories/detail/thailands-1-million-village-health-volunteers-unsung-heroes-are-helping-guard-communities-nationwide-from-covid-19> (last visited Nov. 28, 2020).

<sup>21</sup> Montira Narkvichien, *Thailand's 1 million village health volunteers – “unsung heroes” – are helping guard communities nationwide from COVID-19*, Aug. 28, 2020, WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION, <https://www.who.int/thailand/news/feature-stories/detail/thailands-1-million-village-health-volunteers-unsung-heroes-are-helping-guard-communities-nationwide-from-covid-19> (last visited Nov. 28, 2020).

<sup>22</sup> Jidapa Khoonsinsub, *Thailand's COVID-19 response an example of resilience and solidarity: a UN Resident Coordinator blog*, Aug. 4, 2020, UN NEWS, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/08/1069191> (last visited Nov. 28, 2020); COVID-19 AND A POSSIBLE POLITICAL RECKONING IN THAILAND, INTERNATIONAL CRISIS GROUP, Aug. 4, 2020, available at <https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-east-asia/thailand/309-covid-19-and-possible-political-reckoning-thailand>.

includes a series of direct economic stimulus payments to various groups and the availability of small and medium-sized loans for business and individuals.<sup>23</sup> In addition to national efforts, the government also contributed to the UN's COVID-19 Fund.<sup>24</sup>

a. Access to services

Many older people in Thailand live with family members rather than in long-term care institutions. While older people have special needs and special requirements to follow during the COVID-19 pandemic to avoid infection and maintain their health, it is important for families living with older persons to be informed about how best to protect them. As the incidence of gender-based violence has risen since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, elder abuse must also be monitored as families are increasingly locked down together and more dependent on one another for social and economic support.<sup>25</sup> While informal care for older persons within the family may be easier during COVID-19 in some ways because more family members are home more often due to lost work and remote work, the financial impact of significant loss of income on families who are also caring for older persons can cause added stress.<sup>26</sup> At the same time, changes to service delivery and care in the long-term care system have been limited as the outbreak in Thailand was so well-contained and because so few Thais live in residential long-term care.<sup>27</sup>

The Thai Society of Gerontology and Geriatric Medicine has issued guidelines for caring for older people, tailored to older persons living at home as most older persons in Thailand live with family members outside of residential aged care.<sup>28</sup> Although older people may be unable to use online resources, the posters and public awareness campaigns are being disseminated in many different forms of media. The guidance identifies categories of people at high risk for COVID-19, including older persons over 70, and persons with underlying health conditions such as diabetes, hypertension, coronary diseases, respiratory diseases, or other NCDs, which often impact older persons. While the guidelines require people in these groups to stay home, they also allow for exceptions when a person needs to receive medical treatment or perform duties as a doctor or other medical worker, or serve in another essential profession.<sup>29</sup> The guidance also calls on older persons to limit all visits with persons outside of their home and use the telephone, Internet, and social

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<sup>23</sup> COVID-19 AND A POSSIBLE POLITICAL RECKONING IN THAILAND, INTERNATIONAL CRISIS GROUP, Aug. 4, 2020, available at <https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-east-asia/thailand/309-covid-19-and-possible-political-reckoning-thailand>.

<sup>24</sup> UN COVID-19 Response & Recovery Fund, Multi-Partner Trust Fund Office, <http://mptf.undp.org/factsheet/fund/COV00> (last visited Nov. 27, 2020).

<sup>25</sup> Marcela Suazo & Wassana Im-Em, "This is not the time to neglect our older generation," Apr. 13, 2020, BANGKOK POST, <https://www.bangkokpost.com/opinion/opinion/1898465/this-is-not-the-time-to-neglect-our-older-generation>.

<sup>26</sup> Wee-Shiong Lim, et al., *COVID-19 and older people in Asia: Asian Working Group for Sarconpenia calls to action*, GERIATRICS & GERONTOLOGY INTERNATIONAL, Vol. 20(6) (2020), available at <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/ggi.13939>.

<sup>27</sup> Wee-Shiong Lim, et al., *COVID-19 and older people in Asia: Asian Working Group for Sarconpenia calls to action*, GERIATRICS & GERONTOLOGY INTERNATIONAL, Vol. 20(6) (2020), available at <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/ggi.13939>.

<sup>28</sup> Wee-Shiong Lim, et al., *COVID-19 and older people in Asia: Asian Working Group for Sarconpenia calls to action*, GERIATRICS & GERONTOLOGY INTERNATIONAL, Vol. 20(6) (2020), available at <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/ggi.13939> (referring to <http://www.thaigeron.or.th/>, providing the guidelines and infographics in Thai language).

<sup>29</sup> Regulation Issued under Section 9 of the Emergency Decree on Public Administration in Emergency Situations B.E. 2548 (2005) (No. 1)

media for social contact. The guidelines detail the need to wear a mask and keep at least a 2-meter distance from any other person from outside one's own household.<sup>30</sup> The guidelines encourage older persons living at home to have one primary carer in order to limit their exposure to multiple people, and to essentially quarantine together.<sup>31</sup> The guidelines strongly discourage sharing plates of food or sharing a room or personal belongings.

#### b. Access to healthcare

Thailand's healthcare system is generally a strong example of UHC, accessible to all and leaving no one behind. However, due to the strict lockdown measures instituted in Thailand to prevent the spread of COVID-19 early on, older persons have experienced a drop in their medical care during the pandemic. Before the outbreak of COVID-19, Thailand did not have an existing list of essential services that would remain open during an emergency, so other services that are critical for older persons, such as NCD screening and elective but necessary procedures, have been limited as well.<sup>32</sup> Some health workers who would have been available to facilitate these tests and services were reassigned to manage COVID-related issues and cases.<sup>33</sup> While the health volunteers have been essential in reaching older persons with simple care and advice, diagnostic testing, and other health information, older persons did report not being able to refill their regular medications due to hospital or pharmacy closures, and having important surgical procedures postponed.<sup>34</sup> Older persons were also hesitant to go to the hospital or attend appointments with doctors due to fear of contracting the virus or even violating stay-home orders.<sup>35</sup> Some hospitals were able to adapt to the changed conditions with the use of telemedicine technology and arranging for the delivery of prescription drug refills to the homes of older persons.<sup>36</sup> The government has also offered an income tax break for medical personnel in the 2020 tax year as a way to compensate them for the risk associated with their jobs during the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Thai Society of Gerontology and Geriatric Medicine, Institute of Geriatric Medicine, et al., A Guideline to Care for Older Persons during the COVID19- Pandemics, *J Gerontol Geriatr Med.* 2020, 19(1-4), p.2.

<sup>31</sup> Thai Society of Gerontology and Geriatric Medicine, Institute of Geriatric Medicine, et al., A Guideline to Care for Older Persons during the COVID19- Pandemics, *J Gerontol Geriatr Med.* 2020, 19(1-4), p.2.

<sup>32</sup> JOINT INTRA-ACTION REVIEW OF THE PUBLIC HEALTH RESPONSE TO COVID-19 IN THAILAND, WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION, July 2020, available at <https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/searo/thailand/iar-covid19-en.pdf> (last visited Nov. 28, 2020), p.36.

<sup>33</sup> JOINT INTRA-ACTION REVIEW OF THE PUBLIC HEALTH RESPONSE TO COVID-19 IN THAILAND, WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION, July 2020, available at <https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/searo/thailand/iar-covid19-en.pdf> (last visited Nov. 28, 2020), p.36.

<sup>34</sup> Wee-Shiong Lim, et al., *COVID-19 and older people in Asia: Asian Working Group for Sarconpenia calls to action*, GERIATRICS & GERONTOLOGY INTERNATIONAL, Vol. 20(6) (2020), available at <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/ggi.13939>.

<sup>35</sup> JOINT INTRA-ACTION REVIEW OF THE PUBLIC HEALTH RESPONSE TO COVID-19 IN THAILAND, WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION, July 2020, available at <https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/searo/thailand/iar-covid19-en.pdf> (last visited Nov. 28, 2020), p.36.

<sup>36</sup> Wee-Shiong Lim, et al., *COVID-19 and older people in Asia: Asian Working Group for Sarconpenia calls to action*, GERIATRICS & GERONTOLOGY INTERNATIONAL, Vol. 20(6) (2020), available at <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/ggi.13939>.

<sup>37</sup> Thailand: Tax developments in response to COVID-19, KPMG, <https://home.kpmg/xx/en/home/insights/2020/04/thailand-tax-developments-in-response-to-covid-19.html> (last visited Nov. 28, 2020).

Thailand has also been working to develop a COVID-19 vaccine that can serve Thai citizens and even be shared with other countries in need. Due to the low rates of transmission of the virus in Thailand, the population is extremely susceptible to outbreaks in the future. Public health officials estimate that the country will need to vaccinate at least 30 million Thais to protect against a future outbreak, and relying on wealthier nations to share the vaccine proved inadequate in previous outbreaks of other diseases.<sup>38</sup> The Thai government also recently concluded a contract with one of the leading international vaccine developers for about 13 million courses of the vaccine.<sup>39</sup> While the government has not yet determined a priority order for those groups who will receive the first rounds of the vaccine, it has indicated that healthcare workers are likely to be among the first.<sup>40</sup>

### c. Access to economic support

Thailand has adopted several stimulus measures to assist individuals whose incomes have dropped significantly due to COVID-19 and the declining economy. People aged 60 and over make up about one-third of the workforce in Thailand, and around 60% of them run their own micro-businesses.<sup>41</sup> These older persons often depend on the income they earn from this employment. However, older workers were among the first to be laid off when COVID-19 began impacting businesses, yet older workers find it more difficult to shift into professions or roles that require new skills or skills in information technology that could be required for remote work.<sup>42</sup> However, for those individuals covered by Social Security Fund payments, the stimulus packages ensure they will receive 50% of their prior salary (up to 15,000 baht per month) if they are temporarily laid off.<sup>43</sup> Loans were also made available for individuals and businesses at ultra-low interest rates.<sup>44</sup> A special tax deduction for health insurance payments was also adopted,<sup>45</sup> as was a deduction for small and medium enterprises who were able to keep employees on the payroll.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Zsombor Peter, *Thailand Readies Human Trials of Homegrown Coronavirus Vaccine*, July 23, 2020, VOICE OF AMERICA, <https://www.voanews.com/covid-19-pandemic/thailand-readies-human-trials-homegrown-coronavirus-vaccine>.

<sup>39</sup> Chalida Ekvitthayavechnukul, *Thailand, Philippines sign for AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine*, Nov. 27, 2020, DAILY HERALD, <https://www.dailyherald.com/article/20201127/news/311279979/>.

<sup>40</sup> Chalida Ekvitthayavechnukul, *Thailand, Philippines sign for AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine*, Nov. 27, 2020, DAILY HERALD, <https://www.dailyherald.com/article/20201127/news/311279979/>.

<sup>41</sup> Penchan Charoensuthipan, *COVID-19 crisis hits hard for the elderly*, Aug. 23, 2020, BANGKOK POST, <https://www.bangkokpost.com/thailand/general/1972839/covid-19-crisis-hits-hard-for-the-elderly>.

<sup>42</sup> Penchan Charoensuthipan, *COVID-19 crisis hits hard for the elderly*, Aug. 23, 2020, BANGKOK POST, <https://www.bangkokpost.com/thailand/general/1972839/covid-19-crisis-hits-hard-for-the-elderly>.

<sup>43</sup> Thailand: Government and institution measures in response to COVID-19, KPMG, <https://home.kpmg/xx/en/home/insights/2020/04/thailand-government-and-institution-measures-in-response-to-covid.html> (last visited Nov. 28, 2020).

<sup>44</sup> Thailand: Government and institution measures in response to COVID-19, KPMG, <https://home.kpmg/xx/en/home/insights/2020/04/thailand-government-and-institution-measures-in-response-to-covid.html> (last visited Nov. 28, 2020).

<sup>45</sup> Thailand: Tax developments in response to COVID-19, KPMG, <https://home.kpmg/xx/en/home/insights/2020/04/thailand-tax-developments-in-response-to-covid-19.html> (last visited Nov. 28, 2020).

<sup>46</sup> Kiatipong Ariyapruchya, et al., *The Thai economy: COVID-19, poverty, and social protection*, Apr. 28, 2020, EAST ASIA & PACIFIC ON THE RISE, available at <https://blogs.worldbank.org/eastasiapacific/thai-economy-covid-19-poverty-and-social-protection>.

The stimulus packages also included 6 months of 5,000 baht (\$153) payments to informal workers who lost their work due to COVID-19, but who would not be covered by the Social Security Fund payments.<sup>47</sup> Thailand is estimated to have over 21 million people working in the informal economy, which amounts to over 50% of its workforce.<sup>48</sup> Many older persons in Thailand depend on their income from work, with up to 50% of those aged 60-69 and up to 19% of those aged 70-79 still working.<sup>49</sup> Accordingly, these cash payments authorized through the stimulus package could significantly benefit older persons, many of whom work in the informal economy. However, many older people could have difficulty with the online application process,<sup>50</sup> and qualification for the payment uses information in the existing government databases, which are often out-of-date, resulting in exclusions from the program for otherwise qualified individuals.<sup>51</sup> Farmers impacted by COVID-19 were designated to receive special payments like those made to out-of-work informal workers as well.<sup>52</sup>

### 3. Conclusion: Lessons Learned for Parliamentarians

Thailand's approach to protecting older persons during the COVID-19 pandemic was to address the specific needs of older persons who are living at home with family members, while fewer were in long-term care and appeared to be less at risk of an outbreak. Through the health volunteer network, the government was able to reach millions of Thais, including older persons, with essential information about the COVID-19 virus, and conduct contact tracing where cases were discovered to stop the spread of the virus in each case. Thailand also provided some tax deductions and benefits that could help healthcare workers and carers of older persons.

While many countries have provided cash stimulus payments to citizens to limit the economic impact of COVID-19, many of these programs were administered through existing social security or unemployment schemes. Thailand developed a program to provide these payments to informal workers and farmers as well, which benefited many older persons who had still been working in the informal economy before the COVID-19 pandemic. Additional support in the form of loans for individuals and small businesses could also help older persons who had been self-employed before the COVID-19 pandemic.

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<sup>47</sup> Kiatipong Ariyapruchya, et al., *The Thai economy: COVID-19, poverty, and social protection*, Apr. 28, 2020, EAST ASIA & PACIFIC ON THE RISE, available at <https://blogs.worldbank.org/eastasiapacific/thai-economy-covid-19-poverty-and-social-protection>.

<sup>48</sup> COVID-19 AND A POSSIBLE POLITICAL RECKONING IN THAILAND, INTERNATIONAL CRISIS GROUP, Aug. 4, 2020, available at <https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-east-asia/thailand/309-covid-19-and-possible-political-reckoning-thailand>.

<sup>49</sup> National statistical office of Thailand

<sup>50</sup> Usa Khiewrord, *Thailand needs to do more to support older people from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic*, Jul. 7, 2020, HelpAge International, <https://www.helpage.org/newsroom/latest-news/thailand-needs-to-do-more-to-support-older-people-from-the-impact-of-the-covid19-pandemic/>.

<sup>51</sup> Usa Khiewrord, *Thailand needs to do more to support older people from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic*, Jul. 7, 2020, HelpAge International, <https://www.helpage.org/newsroom/latest-news/thailand-needs-to-do-more-to-support-older-people-from-the-impact-of-the-covid19-pandemic/>.

<sup>52</sup> Thailand: Government and institution measures in response to COVID-19, KPMG, <https://home.kpmg/xx/en/home/insights/2020/04/thailand-government-and-institution-measures-in-response-to-covid.html> (last visited Nov. 28, 2020).

## **Recommendations:**

### **Recommendation 1:**

**Target advice to older persons to the country-context, whether more older persons live with their families or live in residential aged care.**

### **Recommendation 2:**

**Utilize public health approaches tailored to the living conditions of older persons—for example, looking to community health workers to deliver important information, education, and supplies to older persons living in more rural areas, living with family members, or with less access to health information.**

### **Recommendation 3:**

**Consider adopting a tax deduction as compensation for the additional risk healthcare workers have taken on during the COVID-19 pandemic.**

### **Recommendation 4:**

**Consider classes of persons—especially older persons—who may be left out of stimulus payment programs, such as informal workers and farmers, and develop programs to provide these groups with cash assistance as well.**

### **Recommendation 5:**

**Short-term and low-interest loans from the government to individuals and businesses can be an alternative to direct cash payments where government budgets do not allow for large cash payment programs.**