

Forum: Forum on Inequalities

Thematic: How to reduce inequalities on different scales?

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Marital status: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input checked="" type="radio"/> <b>Married/in a relationship</b></li><li><input type="radio"/> Single</li><li><input checked="" type="radio"/> <b>With children, if so, how many: 2</b></li></ul>	Level of education <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="radio"/> Primary</li><li><input type="radio"/> Secondary</li><li><input checked="" type="radio"/> <b>University</b></li></ul>
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### 1. How does the theme of inequalities concern you?

I am a full-time restaurateur in the capital of Thailand, Bangkok. I both own and run a Thai restaurant along with my wife, which seems impossible in these times. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, business was thriving, however afterwards, the Thai service industry faced a problem. I am one of the affected. Born in the farmlands of Saraburi Province, I moved to Bangkok in 1994 in hopes of pursuing a restaurateur career in the newly thriving economy of Bangkok. I finished my Bachelor studies at Dusit Thani College in 1997 with a major in Business Administration in Culinary Arts and not only two years later did I successfully open my own restaurant. I can proudly say that for the last 28 years I have been living the life I dreamt of as a child.

Now, for the first time in 28 years, my restaurant among thousands of others is at risk of final closure. After the COVID-19 pandemic, the service industry experienced an extreme increase, while tourism did not. This led to an over-saturation of eateries in Bangkok. Normally, this would not have been a problem. However, since tourism did not experience a sharp kickstart as hoped, the service market was left in the dark with over 600 000 closures between 2021 and 2024 with more closing this year. Due to this, customer purchasing power has also plummeted by 40%, further slowing down our economic recovery process and causing our incomes to stagnate. The Thai restaurant industry is currently completely dependent on the domestic market, rather than both domestic and international leading to both lower demand and income.

The government has tried to help by starting a few initiatives, however so far none of them have shown any signs of improvements in the prevention of closures. These initiatives have only managed to lengthen the time for a restaurant to be open without customers, leaving workers with little to no income for months at an end. What people forget is that this does not just affect us, the restaurateur. It affects our

families. Similarly to everyone around the world, we also have families to support and dreams to experience. I have two daughters of whom both dream of a future higher education at university. Sadly, those dreams along with hundreds of thousands of others are fading as our income lowers and lowers, with only rock-bottom awaiting us.

## **2. What do you suggest at your level?**

As a representative for us, Thai restaurateurs, I have a few suggestions. The first wish we have as Thai restaurateurs, is the implementation of a funding system set by the government for small and medium business owners to ensure that we receive at least the minimum wage. This of course, could be done through an application of UBI (Universal Basic Income), which the Thai population already has a mock version of. However, the currently implemented mock UBI requires the applicant to have both a certain income and only provides the applicant with 10 000 Thai baht, which must be spend in their local district within six months. Sadly, this often does not aid the recipient as much as hoped due to it not being a recurring income.

Another problem this rises, is that to cover only our housing costs and bills, a regular Thai must spend between 15 000 to 25 000 Thai baht per month on a basic apartment at a long distance from the center. This excludes the money needed to cover food expenses as well as other necessities such as clothes and medication.

It is also believed that the Thai government could try and further promote tourism, particularly targeting wealthier, western communities who have both the time and money to spend enjoying Thailand. We are more than happy to welcome anyone, but for it to boost our incomes and aid us sufficiently, the tourists must want to spend both their time and money on local businesses. But to make sure that we would be attracting the right audience, the Thai tourism sector should try to gather some information on where and if there is a demand for Thailand's tourism sector.

At last, we also wish for the Thai government to legalize and allow Workers Unions again. Currently, the Thai labor laws set by the government restrict union formation between workers within the same employer or industry, completely lowering our chances of supporting each other and working together to keep our industry alive. I speak for us, Thai restaurateurs, but sadly not for all due to these restrictions. By allowing the formation of Workers Unions between employees of the same industry and employer, we could fairly represent all of us, when necessary, such as in cases like these.

After all, we are like everyone else all around the world. No matter where you are in the world whether it be in the Americas or Asia, Australia or Europe or even Antarctica or Africa, you have a dream. But so do we. I do not ask for your pity or sympathy, I ask for support. Support to keep our dreams alive and our families with us.