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Joining the "Good Men's Club": Reform Begins at Home in Thailand's Journey to OECD's Membership and Good Governance¹

Krongkwan Traitongyoo²

The quest for OECD membership has often been portrayed as a pursuit of international status, a desire for Thailand to shift herself from being a developing country to a developed one and to be able to join the so-called "Rich Men's Club." However, the narrative has shifted recently. To borrow the sentiment echoed by Mr. František Ruzicka, Deputy Secretary-General of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the OECD is now better understood as the "Good Men's Club." Thus, for Thailand to join this club is not merely a trophy to be won, but a transformative vehicle for deep-rooted structural reform and crucially, this transformation "has to begin at home."

¹ The following analysis is a reflection on the insights shared during the official visit of **Mr. František Ruzicka**, Deputy Secretary-General of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), on 8 December 2025.

² Senior Analyst, International Studies Center (ISC)

Thailand's path to the OECD is the culmination of a partnership spanning over two decades, originating in 1999. Since then, Thailand has steadily been trying to align itself with international standards, such as by becoming the first Southeast Asian nation to establish an OECD Country Programme. This history of engagement has already yielded tangible results. By 2023, informality in the Thai economy, a long-standing barrier to inclusive growth, dropped from 70% to 57.8%. Simultaneously, GDP per person employed rose by 26%. The current accession process is the final "technical phase" that will lock in these gains through a rigorous review across 25 technical committees.

Currently, the most critical path of Thailand's journey is the strengthening of public integrity and good governance. While Thailand has made strides in legislative frameworks, such as the 2025 amendments to the **Act on Anti-Corruption**, the primary challenge remains the "enforcement gap." As Mr. Ruzicka noted during his special lecture, signing a convention is merely the beginning; the true test lies in domestic implementation.

Thailand's intent to join the OECD Anti-Bribery Convention focuses on the "supply side" of corruption. However, for this to be effective, the reform **must begin at home** through a clear three-step progression namely, 1) **Adopting the laws** to criminalise foreign bribery 2) **Creating independent institutions** to oversee these laws 3) **Empowerment**, ensuring these bodies have the actual power to enforce rules without political interference.

Beyond anti-corruption, OECD membership acts as a catalyst for economic modernisation. The 2025 Economic Survey of Thailand,³ launched during the Deputy Secretary-General's visit, highlights a significant convergence: Thai income levels rose from 30% of the OECD average in

³ https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/oecd-economic-surveys-thailand-2025_426b9bc0-en.html

2000 to 40% in 2024. To continue this trajectory, the OECD provides a roadmap for four essential domestic reforms:

- **Competition and Regulatory Reform:** Breaking down monopolies and ensuring that state-owned, public, and private enterprises all play by the same rules - the "Level Playing Field."
- **Climate Resilience:** Investing in climate-resilient infrastructure to mitigate risks like the devastating floods in Southern Thailand.
- **Education and Upskilling:** Modernising school curricula to ensure the Thai workforce is prepared for the digital and green transitions.
- **Fiscal Discipline:** Managing public finances to decrease deficits and ensure long-term stability.

However, the "Good Men's Club" philosophy suggests that the impact of these reforms must penetrate deeper than the institutional level; it **has to begin at home**, reaching down to the **community level**. Every citizen needs to understand that this is a collective process. Whether it is a small business owner in a rural province benefiting from fairer competition rules, or a local community leader engaging with "Open Data" to track municipal spending, the journey belongs to everyone.

For reforms to be sustainable, they must be "baked into" the legislative fabric of the country. This requires the active participation of:

- **Parliamentarians** who must prioritise national interest over short-term political gains.
- **Civil Society** to act as a watchdog for "Open Data" and "Open Government" initiatives.
- **The Private Sector** to embrace higher standards of responsible business conduct.

Ultimately, Thailand's accession to the OECD should not be viewed through the narrow lens of international relations or foreign policy. While it certainly elevates Thailand's standing on the world stage, the process is very domestic at heart. It is an internal "upgrade" of the country's social and economic operating system.

Indeed, the journey to 2030 is not going to be a bed of roses. Political complexities are a reality for any nation. However, the presentation of the Initial Memorandum marks a concrete step toward elevating Thailand's economic standards and improving the quality of life for its people. Ultimately, joining the "Good Men's Club" is about building a sustainable, transparent environment. But as the 2025 visit made clear, the OECD can provide the map, but the engine of reform must start within Thailand's own borders.