

# Beyond static inequality

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# *Synopsis*

Upward economic mobility, a movement to a higher socioeconomic status, is a policy objective in its own right. It indicates the extent to which opportunity exists in society. In the presence of mobility, inequality is less problematic as individuals, through their own ability and effort, can rise into higher socioeconomic classes regardless of their backgrounds. However, research on economic mobility, in comparison to studies on mainstream static inequality indices, remains limited in developing countries due to the lack of longitudinal data. So far an abundance of literature on mobility has revealed that the opportunities for people, especially the ones at the bottom of the income spectrum, to move upward have become increasingly sparse. This phenomenon goes not only against the moral principles but may also lead to long-term economic inefficiency, persistence of inequality and disruption of social harmony. Hence, the impediment to mobility must be tackled in order to ensure that the equal opportunity to succeed remains achievable for all walks of life.

The purpose of this thesis is to understand economic mobility in the context of a developing economy and the role that social protection programs have played in promoting economic mobility. It does so by examining the extent and pattern of intragenerational income mobility, and by identifying factors driving mobility based on longitudinal data from Thailand. The study establishes causality linking participation in certain social protection programs which, in theory, have the potential to overcome mobility constraints including vocational training, microcredit and social pension, and changes in mobility outcomes by means of various impact evaluation methods using both absolute and relative mobility indicators.

Results gathered in this thesis suggest that Thailand still needs to overcome several challenges to transform the country into an inclusive and open society where everyone has an equal opportunity to prosper. In theory, social protection programs appear to be an obvious mobility-enhancing intervention to address the socioeconomic immobility. However, in practice, only the social pension program is found to impact beneficiaries along the outcome dimensions considered. The vocational training and the microcredit program do not play a role in fostering mobility. The thesis concludes that the implementation of social protection programs alone does not necessarily remove binding constraints to upward mobility. Program design and implementation matter. The effectiveness of the programs needs to be improved. Moreover, social protection should be regarded as an integral part of the wider system of social and economic support aiming to enhance productive capacity and promote upward mobility