

COUNTRY YOUTH

# CALL TO ACTION 2025

APFSD Youth Forum | Feb 19-21, 2025

Advancing sustainable, inclusive, science and evidence based solutions for the 2030 agenda and its SDGs for leaving no young person behind in Asia and the Pacific



THAILAND

## Situational Analysis

Thailand faces persistent challenges in ensuring equitable access to quality healthcare services, particularly for rural populations and vulnerable groups such as the elderly and refugees thereof. Despite the universal health coverage (UHC) system, rural communities often experience resource shortages, underfunded facilities, and limited specialized care. Refugees and asylum seekers face additional barriers as they are excluded from the UHC system, forcing them to rely on costly out-of-pocket medical expenses or limited services provided by NGOs. Immigration Detention Centers (IDCs) also lack adequate healthcare, leading to malnutrition, untreated illnesses, and deteriorating mental health among detainees. Mental health, despite increasing awareness, continues to be stigmatized, with inadequate services and limited accessibility, particularly in remote areas where awareness, professional support, and treatment options remain scarce.

Furthermore, air pollution has become a significant public health threat, with high levels of PM 2.5 contributing to respiratory diseases, cardiovascular conditions, and premature deaths, particularly in urban centers and northern provinces affected by seasonal haze. The rate of early pregnancies among Thai teenagers aged 10-14 years increased from 0.9 per 1,000 population in the past five years to 0.93 in 2024 at 1.2 births per 1,000 adolescent women, which highlights gaps in sex education and healthcare outreach. Additionally, traffic-related fatalities remain among the highest globally. Thailand ranks 9th among 175 countries in terms of road traffic deaths with a death rate of 25.4 per 100,000 population, underscoring the need for enhanced safety measures.

While Thailand has made progress in promoting gender equality, notably being the first ASEAN country to legalize same-sex marriage under the Marriage Equality Law, structural barriers persist. Women and LGBTQ+ individuals continue to face discrimination in both the public and private sectors. Gender-based violence remains a significant issue, particularly in rural areas where access to protective services is limited. Refugee women and girls are at heightened risk of gender-based violence, including domestic abuse, exploitation, and trafficking, with limited access to justice and protection services. Despite policies supporting gender inclusivity, women remain underrepresented in leadership positions and decision-making roles, especially for women in STEM. Efforts to improve workplace conditions for women, including maternity leave and fair pay, have been inconsistent, highlighting the need for stronger policy enforcement.

Thailand's economic recovery has been gradual, its GDP increasing by 2.9% from 2024 with the caveat of 90.8% GDP consisting of household debts, with disparities in employment opportunities between urban and rural areas. The rapid digital transformation has left many workers, especially in rural provinces, with skill gaps that hinder employment in emerging industries. Although the unemployment rate in Thailand is relatively low at approximately 0.97% to 1%, meaning that around 387,000 to 390,000 out of 39.63 million employed individuals were jobless, underemployment and informal labor are prevalent, particularly among youth and marginalized communities. Refugees are excluded from legal employment opportunities, pushing them into informal and often exploitative labor conditions. The lack of legal work authorization increases their vulnerability to workplace

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abuse and economic hardship, preventing them from contributing to Thailand's economy. Additionally, Thailand is rapidly becoming an aging society, with a birth rate of 1.32 births per woman, the lowest in the past 75 years, alongside an aging population that is expected to shrink the workforce, further threatening long-term economic growth. The rise of green economy initiatives presents opportunities for sustainable job creation, but access to these opportunities remains uneven and initiatives to build capacity to make use of these opportunities are lacking.

Thailand's marine ecosystems face significant threats from pollution, overfishing, and climate change. Coral bleaching events, driven by rising sea temperatures, have severely impacted biodiversity and coastal economies reliant on tourism. Thailand is the world's sixth biggest contributor of marine plastic litter, where plastic waste continues to be a major pollutant in marine environments, despite ongoing reduction efforts. Invasive species and destructive fishing practices like decimate marine life and strain aquaculture, while overtourism at popular coastal destinations exacerbates environmental degradation and highly increases endangered marine animals. Recent legislative proposals in Thailand have sparked intense debate over the use of fine mesh fishing nets where it could lead to overharvesting, particularly of juvenile fish, and could ultimately devastate marine ecosystems.

Achieving sustainable development in Thailand requires robust partnerships across sectors. While there have been notable collaborations between the government, private sector, and civil society, coordination gaps persist. Regional cooperation through ASEAN and international partnerships presents opportunities for resource mobilization and knowledge exchange, yet mechanisms for effective implementation need strengthening. Youth engagement and partnership remain woefully underutilized, highlighting the importance of inclusive platforms for young people to contribute to decision-making processes.

## Recommendations

Our recommendations for Thailand on selected SDGs to achieve optimum target are as follows-

### SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being

- Strengthen primary healthcare services in rural areas to ensure equitable access for all, particularly vulnerable groups such as the elderly and refugees.
- Expand mental health services by integrating them into community healthcare centers and launching public awareness campaigns to combat stigma.

- Reinforce sex education in schools and communities to address early pregnancies, including parental engagement programs.
- Develop targeted interventions to reduce traffic incidents through enhanced road safety measures, improved public transport infrastructure, and employ economic measures to incentivize alternate means of transportation.
- Partner with INGOs like IOM and UNHCR to provide mobile medical units in detention centers while ensuring access to clean water and nutritious food, meeting international health standards and reducing the need for government healthcare expansion.
- Reducing greenhouse gas emissions by phasing out fossil fuels and investing in sustainable transport, food, energy, and resilience solutions will result in improved health through reduced air pollution, mitigated disaster risks, healthier and more plentiful diets, and more physical activity.
- Increase investment and funding for youth friendly, affordable, high-quality medical facilities and services, including mental health, Sexual and reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) information and services, for young people particularly in rural, and hard to reach areas.

### SDG 5: Gender Equality

- Promote gender-sensitive policies, ensuring equal opportunities in leadership, politics, and traditionally male-dominated professions.
- Facilitate vocational and leadership training for women, particularly in rural areas.
- Reform labor laws to offer comprehensive maternity and paternity benefits, supporting work-life balance and child development.
- Integrate gender-sensitive materials and examples into STEM curricula to make content more relatable and engaging for female students.
- Enhance protections for refugee women and girls by ensuring access to gender-based violence support services, including safe shelters, legal assistance, and economic empowerment programs.
- Provide educators with training to recognize and counteract gender biases, fostering an inclusive classroom environment that encourages any viable career path for students of all genders.



## SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth

- Support the digital transformation of SMEs, enhancing competitiveness through digital literacy programs.
- Promote and provide training relevant to green jobs and local employment opportunities in emerging sectors, such as renewable energy and eco-tourism.
- Expand microfinance access to marginalized communities to stimulate grassroots entrepreneurship.
- Create legal pathways for refugee employment in sectors facing labor shortages to reduce reliance on exploitative informal work by partnering with the private sector and NGOs to provide work permits, vocational training, and fair labor protections

## SDG 14: Life Below Water

- Strengthen enforcement of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) to prevent illegal fishing and habitat destruction.
- Enact and enforce laws such as Extended Producer Responsibility to phase-out single-use plastics.
- Empower coastal communities to develop and enforce sustainable fisheries management plans. Enhance coral reef restoration initiatives and implement stricter regulations on tourism activities in vulnerable marine ecosystems.
- Mobilize and empower local communities, youth, and stakeholders to actively engage in conserving marine ecosystems, preserving biodiversity, and protecting endangered species.
- Implement rigorous and transparent screening and risk assessment procedures for all aquatic species intended for import. This includes verifying the species' potential invasiveness and ensuring that imported species do not pose a threat to local ecosystems.

## SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals

- Foster multi-stakeholder, multigenerational partnerships among youth, youth organizations, government agencies, private sectors, and NGOs to co-create solutions. Enhance regional cooperation through GMS and ASEAN frameworks to address transboundary environmental and economic issues.
- Mobilize resources through blended financing models to fund sustainable development projects. Develop regional and national knowledge-sharing platforms that facilitate technology transfer and best practice dissemination across sectors
- Engage youth through leadership programs, policy consultations, and community initiatives, empowering them to co-create solutions and drive sustainable development actions at local, national, and international levels.

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*The APFSD country and sub-regional briefs were developed through collective discussions and engagements between youth advocates at the APFSD Youth Forum in Bangkok on 19-21 February, 2025. The Thailand drafting team consisted of Prim Rajasurang Wongkrasamongkol, Apithee Piyaphiphathanamongkol, Evarin Rattanapariyanuch, Jeta Jiranuntarat, Tanadech Sriwanchai, and Tanyakorn Thippayapokin. Overall supervision was provided by the ARROW Call To Action team.*

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