



Asia-Pacific Regional Youth Call to Action 2024



Thailand

Reinforcing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Eradicating Poverty in Times of Multiple Crises: The Effective Delivery of Sustainable, Resilient and Innovative Solutions in Asia and the Pacific with Young People at the Forefront

SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS

Economic

After COVID-19, Thailand experienced an increase in social inequality. The impact of COVID-19 led to an escalation of social disparities, particularly affecting the vulnerable and highlighting intergenerational poverty. According to data from TPMAP (Thai People Map and Analytics Platform, a targeted development data management system), the national economic and social development scenario revealed that households trending towards intergenerational poverty, abbreviated as 'intergenerational poverty households,' numbered approximately 597,248 households, or around 15% of households with children and adolescents as members. This trend has been on the rise due to the repercussions of the COVID-19 crisis.

The economic and social development status indicated that 70% of the heads of intergenerational poverty households had only completed primary education or lower. The most crucial factors contributing to household vulnerability were financial instability due to a lack of savings (73.4%), followed by educational barriers (17.2%). Many children had to drop out of the education system because their families couldn't afford the associated expenses. The lack of opportunities to access education and essential skills necessary for future careers placed these children from intergenerational poverty households in a position where they had to enter the labor market as low-skilled or semi-skilled workers, receiving insufficient compensation to sustain their livelihoods.



Gender Equality and Sexual Reproductive Health Rights

Safe Abortion Access. As of 2024, Thailand has entered its third year since legalising on-request safe abortions up to 20 weeks, as well as safe abortions due to sexual violence or medical conditions, with no gestational age limit. The National Health Security Office (NHSO) has included safe abortion in the universal coverage package, ensuring every Thai citizen can access the service for free at registered facilities. Despite this progress, the service remains largely inaccessible in many public hospitals, leading pregnant individuals to travel to hospitals in other provinces, incur costs at private facilities, resort to unsafe abortion practices, or, unfortunately, be compelled to continue unwanted pregnancies.

The pandemic has also brought forth other issues. It is reported that since the pandemic, women and LGBTQIAN+ workers have faced more unequal payments compared with cis-men. In line with this, the pandemic has exacerbated unequal payments, especially among women and LGBTQIAN+ informal workers and migrant workers.

Gender Affirmation Therapy - Transgender and non-binary people are still struggling to access gender affirmative care. This is because gender affirmative care is still not covered under Thailand's social security fund.

Sex Workers' Rights. It is estimated that sex workers contribute around 20% of Thailand's GDP. Despite their significant economic contribution, sex workers are still criminalised in Thailand due to the Prostitution Act of 1996, which criminalises sex work. Consequently, sex workers are not protected under Thailand's labour law, leading to potential exploitation by employers and clients. They are vulnerable to police harassment and brutality due to their criminalisation. Furthermore, they are prone to exposure to HIV and STIs without proper access to healthcare facilities due to stigma and criminalisation.

Decent Work. Thailand is still one of the least unionised countries in the world. According to the Thai Department of Labour and Welfare, only around 1.5 percent of the Thai workforce are members of labour unions in 2023. Meanwhile, the World Bank suggests that Thailand had the highest level of income-based inequality in East Asia and the Pacific region in 2021 and that the richest 10% of Thais held more than half of the country's income and wealth.

In a country where over 40 million people are employed, work doesn't mean a decent living just yet. Over half of all Thai workers are informally employed, workers in the densely populated capital are overworked, and most Thais are financially insecure. Meanwhile, Thai lawmakers still uphold a trend of an unlivable minimum wage with fear of repercussions from the business sector.

The active labour relations act of B.E. 2518 worsens this issue. The law only allows unionisation of employees under a singular employer as well as collective bargaining within certain topics within a singular workplace, the law doesn't include informal workers at all, and also heavily controls organisers in the process of establishing unions. Additionally, general strikes and solidarity strikes, which are important tools for unions in collective bargaining, are entirely outlawed by section 117 of the Thai criminal code, citing internal security.

The ratification of the ILO conventions 87 and 98, to recognize both the right to freely associate and organise for collective bargaining, could provide a solution to this current issue by creating a strong foundation for decent work, higher union density rate, more frequent workplace bargaining across professions, and a fair model for future economic growth in Thailand.

Despite being a founding member of the ILO, the Thai state has been at odds with the Thai labour movement on the topic of conventions 87 and 98 since at least 1992. The most common arguments made by government officials against the ratifications have been consistently unfounded and irrational. This

includes arguments such as, “unions and strikes are a danger to the nation’s security,” and “unions are unwelcoming for investors,” etc.

Currently, a network of around 26 labour organisations and unions have been established to campaign and negotiate with the Thai government to ratify the two conventions but recently, the Ministry of Labour has also established its own committee to study the issue. The network for ratification speculates that the committee may only support the ratification of convention 98.

Environment

Fires burning in northern Thailand and neighbouring Laos and Myanmar are major contributors to air pollution in the region. This leads to unhealthy concentrations of PM_{2.5}, with Chiang Mai recording measurements as high as 161 on the U.S. AQI scale, spreading to nearby cities like Mae Hong Son and Uttaradit. PM_{2.5} and ultrafine particles, along with gaseous pollutants, exacerbate the problem. Furthermore, the economic pressure on farmers, who cannot afford to hire workers for essential tasks like cutting and gathering leaves, adds to environmental challenges. In Bangkok, biomass burning, particularly from sugarcane and rice fields, contributes significantly to PM_{2.5} levels. These environmental issues intersect with social concerns, as Thailand ranks 50th out of 163 countries for children most at risk from climate change impacts, with over 75% of children under 18 exposed to high heatwave frequency. By 2050, without serious intervention, this trend is expected to worsen significantly. Additionally, Thailand’s substantial contribution to plastic waste pollution in the ocean further underscores the need for urgent action to address environmental degradation and protect the country’s future.

Peace and Justice

According to the World Population Review, Thai citizens possess up to 10.3 million firearms, which accounts for approximately 15.41% of the population of Thailand, estimated at 66,090,000 people. However, this statistic makes Thailand the country with the highest firearm ownership in ASEAN and

ranks it 20th globally in terms of firearm ownership. The possession of firearms can be accessed by anyone and anywhere. Thailand does not have the stringent retribution to mandatory illegal weapons.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

SDG 1: No Poverty

- Localised Education and Employment
Opportunities: Distribute education and knowledge sharing initiatives, as well as job opportunities, at the local level to empower residents, enabling them to generate income and find employment within their communities.
- Universal Job Placement and Income Generation: Facilitate job placements and income generation for households on a broader scale, promoting the development of vocational skills.
- Professional Skills Training Courses: Enhance the accessibility of professional skills training courses for the general population.
- Financial Management Skills Promotion: Promote financial management skills and savings practices in households, targeting all individuals.
- Establishment of Safety Nets: Set up safety nets for individuals who are unemployed or in transition between jobs, providing support during job-seeking periods.

SDG 4: Quality Education

- Universal Access to Education: Ensure that everyone in the country has access to free education until completion of their degree.
- Prevention of Dropouts: Implement measures to prevent children and adolescents, especially those from economically disadvantaged families, from dropping out of the education system.
- Public-Private Partnerships for Outreach: Foster collaborations between the public and private sectors to conduct surveys on out-of-school children and provide assistance in reintegrating them into the education system.
- Skill-Oriented Education: Provide knowledge and skills to children and adolescents in alignment with their career interests, ensuring that there are locally relevant professions.

- Promote Self-Discovery: Encourage self-discovery in children and adolescents, teaching life skills necessary for sustaining their lives.
- Youth Advocacy Platforms: Create platforms for children and young people to voice their concerns about poverty, education, and other societal issues.
- Ensure the accessibility of education, workshops, and skills training for children and youths in every community, enabling them to find jobs that match their expertise. Emphasise the incorporation of green skills, ensuring that they are prepared for the changing future.
- The government must provide financial aid for people in vulnerable communities to facilitate climate mitigation efforts, while also prioritising the inclusion of on-ground workshops in rural communities. These workshops will ensure the dissemination of knowledge for climate adaptation among residents.
- Ensure that social security fund is accessible and inclusive to women and LGBTQIAN+.
- Informal workers should be protected under Thailand's labour law so that they are entitled to the same social security fund's coverage as formal workers. 70% of informal workers are women (and LGBTQIAN+ workers are most likely end up in the informal economy due to discrimination), hence it is a way to close the unequal payment gap.
- Gender Affirmative care should be under Thailand's social security fund's coverage. This is because gender affirmative care is also health care.
- Repeal the Prostitution Act 1996 so that sex workers will no longer be criminals in the eyes of Thailand's law.

These recommendations aim to address the goals of reducing poverty and educational inequality, fostering inclusive education, and promoting sustainable development. Implementing these strategies requires collaboration between government agencies, non-governmental organisations, and the private sector.

SDG 5: Gender Equality and Sexual Reproductive Health Rights

- Acknowledge the importance of safe and dignified abortion as a fundamental aspect of sexual and reproductive rights, affirming individuals' autonomy over their bodies and choices. Advocate for the enhancement of accessibility to safe abortion services by extending NHSO's subsidy registration to include at least one healthcare facility in every province. The Ministry of Public Health, Thai government, healthcare providers, relevant policymakers, and international institutions including the UNFPA must prioritise and commit to ensuring safe and dignified abortion access, aiming to eliminate maternal mortality rates associated with unsafe abortion practices.

SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth

- Ratify the ILO conventions 87 and 98 as soon as possible.
- Support amendments, introduction of new laws and policies that align the Thai labour laws more with ILO conventions 87 and 98, with focus on labour relations and labour union laws.
- Repeal section 117 of the Thai criminal code, regarding disruption of business or trade to change the laws of the country.
- Encourage the public to utilise the right to organise and collectively bargain.
- Facilitate and protect the right to organise, strike, and collectively bargain, especially for informal workers and public sector workers.

SDG 13: Climate Action

Agricultural Sector

- Collaborate closely with local governments and enterprises to establish programmes for the purchase of agricultural waste, incentivising farmers to properly manage their waste and reduce open burning.
- Hire consultants specialised in agricultural practices to provide guidance to farmers on sustainable waste management solutions and alternative practices.

- Subsidise air purifiers to combat the effects of air pollution on public health, making them more affordable and accessible to vulnerable populations.
- Implement the subsidy program in collaboration with local authorities and health agencies to ensure effective distribution and usage of air purifiers nationwide.

Plastic Waste Pollution

- Promote innovative solutions for compostable containers and minimise the distribution of plastic packaging and products, starting from commercial hubs like Bangkok. This initiative would involve working with businesses to transition to eco-friendly alternatives and raising awareness among consumers about the importance of reducing plastic consumption.
- Provide reusable items in school areas, including the cafeteria and nearby locations, to encourage students to adopt sustainable practices. Implement centralised refilling stations within the campus to reduce plastic consumption further. By promoting an eco-friendly lifestyle in schools, Thailand can instil environmentally conscious habits in the younger generation.
- Support local businesses by offering their homemade products, ranging from food to lifestyle items, in school cafeterias and nearby locations. This initiative not only reduces plastic usage but also boosts the local economy by promoting locally sourced and produced goods.
- Create incentives for benefits within the community, such as food and transportation discounts, to encourage participation in sustainable practices. This could be achieved through partnerships with green businesses like MUVMI, the EV tuktuk company, to provide discounts or rewards for using eco-friendly transportation options.
- Seek potential partnerships with other green businesses and organisations to expand the impact of sustainability initiatives and foster collaboration towards achieving SDG 13. By working together with like-minded entities, Thailand can amplify its efforts in promoting climate action and environmental sustainability.

Climate Education Sector

- Introduce climate education in schools by developing tailored materials for each educational level, starting from kindergarten and primary school onwards. This initiative aims to raise awareness about climate change through engaging gamification methods and integrating practical climate adaptation solutions into the curriculum. By incorporating climate education into formal schooling, Thailand can ensure that future generations are equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to address climate challenges effectively.
- Encourage class activities in art and environmental studies to provide students with hands-on experience and foster a deeper connection with their surroundings. By incorporating art and environmental studies into the curriculum, Thailand can promote creativity and environmental stewardship among students, empowering them to become agents of positive change.
- At the junior high school to high school level, specifically promote ideation and creative thinking through school-implemented projects and small grants. Provide accessible opportunities for youths to shape themselves as youth advocates and leaders in their respective institutions. By empowering young people to take on leadership roles and pursue their ideas for climate action, Thailand can harness the energy and creativity of its youth to drive meaningful change.
- At the university level, promote innovative climate solutions through hackathons, workshops on green skills, and university-level forums to gather youths from every expertise in contributing to climate action. By fostering a culture of innovation and collaboration among university students, Thailand can tap into the potential of its young talent pool to develop and implement cutting-edge solutions to climate challenges. Additionally, promote a sustainable working community by providing a space for young leaders to discuss their projects and initiatives, fostering collaboration and collective action.

SDG 16: Peace Justice and Strong Institution

- Invest in education to accelerate for youth: Implement the awareness curriculum to foster a culture of peace, tolerance, and respect for human rights among all segments of society. Students should be in a peaceful environment by educating them with a good standard from a young age. Consider the UWC school's mission model which has been nominated for the Nobel Prize award for the Peace Institute.
- Civic engagement must be improved in all groups: Empower youth involvement in local, national, and international decision-making processes. Youth, governments, organisations, and foundations must be able to communicate, interact, and work together. Hence, the data should be accessible to anyone for review and discussion. Thereby, corruption tends to decrease either.
- Implement stringent regulations and monitoring methods to control the possession and circulation of firearms, such as mandatory registration, background checks, and periodic audits of licensed gun owners or other weapons.
- Enforce strict retribution for illegal possession of weapons and trafficking, including mandatory minimum sentences for offenders, to dissuade individuals from engaging in violent activities.

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 February 15-17, 2024. The Thailand drafting team was led by Piriyaopul Prasankliew, with inputs provided by Chonthita Krairikul, Benyapa Achariyakaroon, Nathatchapong Burong, Suparat Limvanich, Evarin Rattanapariyanuch, Wanitcha Pratepa, Phonnaphat Khamphinit, and Tawanshine Lekpetsawang. Overall supervision was provided by the ARROW Call To Action team.