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FAMILY-FRIENDLY POLICIES AND PRACTICES IN THAILAND'S PRIVATE SECTOR

Summary report on in-depth research

Acknowledgements

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The summary report builds on UNICEF's ongoing work to redesign workplaces for the future and enable parents to give their children the best start in life while increasing productivity and promoting women's empowerment. Find out more at www.unicef.org/early-childhood-development/family-friendly-policies and [Family-Friendly Policies Handbook for Business](#)

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Cover photo: Early moment matters: Paternity leave, bonding time, parental consent granted by Nateetong Tantideeravit, Photographer credit Vipahwa Vongsantivanich

Contents

Acknowledgements and copyright	1
Foreword	3
Executive Summary	4
PART 1 Family-friendly policies and practices	
What do they mean in UNICEF's work with business?	6
PART 2 Elements of the study	
What were the objectives, methods, and scope for this research?	10
2.1 Objectives	10
2.2 Methods	11
2.3 Scope	11
PART 3 Key findings	
What family-friendly measures appear in Thailand's business community?	13
3.1 Corporate social responsibility	14
3.2 Parental leave	16
3.3 Flexible work arrangements	18
3.4 Protection for pregnant and nursing women	19
3.5 Support for breastfeeding	21
3.6 Childcare policy and child support	23
PART 4 Issues and potential solutions	
What are some next steps for promoting the family-friendly vision?	25
4.1 Challenges and opportunities	25
4.2 Recommendations and next steps	26
Endnotes	29

Foreword

Family-friendly policies include (but are not limited to) paid parental leave for mothers and fathers, flexible work arrangements, childcare options, and protection for pregnant and nursing women. By investing in these measures, we can help ensure that our current generation of young children reaches its full potential, foster workers' well-being, and increase companies' stability.

As an upper-middle-income economy with diverse practices across industries, it is important to understand how companies operating in Thailand perceive and implement family-friendly policies. This information will increase understanding of what measures are most effective, where gaps remain, and what additional steps might be taken to strengthen business practices and advance human capital development in Thailand.

To achieve this, UNICEF and the Sasin Sustainability & Entrepreneurship Centre have partnered to survey 100 companies in Thailand's private sector. This summary report presents findings on the policies already in place along with the attitudes of business leaders towards the benefits and remaining challenges in expanding coverage.

The momentum for family-friendly policies is growing, and an increasing number of companies are seeing the value of offering family-friendly benefits. Given the fluctuating impacts of COVID-19 and the additional stress placed on employers, workers, and families, the release of this report makes a timely contribution to understanding the contemporary business landscape.

The pandemic's course has been long and difficult, revealing an ever greater need to provide support for employees to balance work and home life, and for employers to enhance productivity and their ability to attract, motivate, and retain employees. This research will be useful to identify areas of alignment and opportunities for future policies to stimulate social recovery and sustainable economic growth.

We hope these findings encourage businesses to strengthen their support for employees and families, and that they inspire all stakeholders to explore and implement stronger family-friendly practices in Thailand.



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Executive summary

The primary goal of family-friendly policies is to promote a work-life balance that enables parents – both mothers and fathers – to have the time and resources they need to care for children, support their family's health and well-being, and give their children the best start in life. When family-friendly policies are well planned and implemented, they can yield results that are good for business, good for parents and children, and good for communities and society as demonstrated in Thailand and other countries around the world.

The research summarized in *Family-Friendly Policies and Practices in Thailand's Private Sector* assesses the state of family-friendly policies in Thailand's private sector and offers perspectives on benefits, challenges, and opportunities.

The report features four parts:

- **Part 1** outlines the evidence and the principles that underpin best practices in family-friendly policies;
- **Part 2** describes how the study was conducted;
- **Part 3** presents key findings in Thailand's private sector; and
- **Part 4** concludes the report with recommendations for next steps.

One of the strengths of this study is the array of data gathered through an online survey of 100 companies. Respondents included national, multinational, and global businesses of many sizes and sectors operating in Thailand.

As the surveys were tabulated, 10 companies were selected for in-depth interviews to explore best practices. This work took place during September 2020 – May 2021.

Among the key findings: Companies operating in Thailand's private sector are already implementing many family-friendly measures. Participating business leaders recognize the value of these policies and reported that they can help reduce staff turnover rates, enhance productivity and loyalty, and improve workplace morale. Findings in specific policy areas include:

- Corporate social responsibility – Most companies indicated that they have corporate sustainability and human rights policies in place, and over half have specific policies related to children's rights.
- Parental leave – Nearly all have adopted maternity leave policies. However, less than half have *paternity leave* policies.
- Protection for expectant and nursing mothers – three-quarters of the companies specify protection measures.
- Support for breastfeeding – Half of the companies report breastfeeding arrangements, but specific programmes vary considerably.
- Childcare – Most respondents do not fund or provide child support.

(For the purposes of this study, 'child support' includes such measures as grants for the new-born; tuition for offspring; health insurance; financial assistance for medical treatment; and paid leave in case of illness.)

In regard to the enabling environment, government policies such as the 12th National Economic and Social Development Plan (2017-21) and the Labour Protection Act (No. 7) B.E. 2562 (2019) are in place as the foundation for a coherent set of practices to promote family well-being across the country. Towards this goal, the report suggests possible steps for ensuring best practices in the private sector and indeed, for all working families in Thailand.

These recommendations focus on proposed action to:

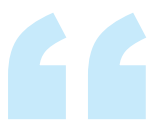
- Address gaps in parental leave structures, including adequate paid leave for fathers and mothers, encouraging uptake of these benefits among employees;
- Prioritize options for companies to engage locally available childcare services or on-site childcare centres;
- Make support for child benefits a systematic part of family-friendly policy, in partnership with government, business, civil society organizations, and non-governmental organizations;
- Strengthen mechanisms to identify the most impactful interventions and to advance the public platform for family-friendly policy development;
- Conduct further research on areas of greatest opportunity for family-friendly policies to improve worker and family well-being and human capital development. In particular, research the large proportion of workers who are self-employed or in informal work and unable to access benefits through employers.

Overall, our intention for this report is to deliver content that is relevant, clear, and useful for advancing family well-being and sustainable business practices in Thailand and elsewhere. We hope it will stimulate a commitment among companies, governments, and other partners to take family-friendly policies and practices to the next level: fulfilling their potential to benefit of parents, children, communities, and societies.

PART 1

Family-friendly policies and practices

What do they mean in UNICEF's work with business?



We need a transformative shift in how businesses and governments invest in policies and practices that not only support healthy brain development, but also strengthen the bond between parents and their children – and reap huge economic and social benefits in return.



Henrietta Fore

UNICEF Executive Director

United Nations, 'UNICEF Urges "Transformative Shift" in Family-Friendly Work Policies to Reap "Huge" Benefits', 18 July 2019

As demonstrated in Thailand and other countries around the world, well-planned and implemented family-friendly policies are, quite simply, *good for business, good for parents and children, and good for communities and society*. Fulfilling the vision of family-friendly policies requires a transformative shift towards making the well-being of workers and their families the first priority in policies and practices. The opportunity for companies to explicitly commit to child rights as part of their core business model is at the very heart of this premise.¹

As outlined in the *Family-Friendly Policies Handbook for Business*, the benefits for parents and children include children's health and well-being. The family-friendly workplace contributes to reduced child mortality, healthier birthweights, increased rates of breastfeeding and immunization, and enhanced cognitive development and achievement in school.²

Benefits for companies include improved workers' well-being and productivity, increased job satisfaction and attendance – and higher retention rates among workers, especially women. Establishing a family-friendly workplace can also help businesses strengthen regulatory compliance, mitigate risks, and increase profitability and sustainability, while promoting corporate culture, reputation, and brand value.³

Making family-friendly policies a reality in business practices will also support achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals,⁴ especially to:

- *End poverty in all its forms everywhere* (Goal 1), as business investments in family-friendly programmes can help provide financial security to new parents and improve family well-being in the long run.

- *Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages* (Goal 3), as parental leave presents caregivers the opportunity to bond with their young children, care for their health and developmental needs, and prepare them for a healthy and more prosperous adulthood.
- *Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls* (Goal 5), as family-friendly policies can help reduce the disadvantages faced by women related to employment, wages or leadership opportunities.

Moreover, strong family-focused policies and programmes related to these goals will contribute to achieving other goals such as inclusive and equitable education, youth employment, and ending violence.⁵

How employers can help children get ‘the best start in life’

Family-friendly policies can be especially beneficial to children during the first 1,000 days of life, from conception to age 3. This period has a lasting effect on a child's future, including health, brain development, happiness, ability to learn in school and earning potential as an adult.

To provide parents and caregivers with the time and support they need to bring up happy and healthy children, UNICEF calls on companies and governments to invest in family-friendly practices, including:

- At least 6 months of paid parental leave that is available for both parents
- Breastfeeding facilities and paid breastfeeding breaks for women returning to work
- Affordable, accessible and quality childcare services
- Child grants that support all families with children.

Source: United Nations Children's Fund, 'Early Moments Matter', UNICEF, n.d., available in Arabic, Chinese, English, French and Spanish at <www.unicef.org/early-moments>, accessed 12 November 2021. See also: Lake, Anthony, 'The First 1,000 Days: A singular window of opportunity', UNICEF, 18 January 2017, <<https://blogs.unicef.org/blog/first-1000-days-singular-opportunity>>.

Parental leave: Mothers and fathers need time to be with their children and to support each other in parenting, especially when they have a newborn. As a cornerstone of family-friendly policy, UNICEF and partners promote *parental leave* – paid time off for both fathers and mothers.

Maternity leave has a long history of reflecting and contributing to women's empowerment, as the International Labour Organization's (ILO) first Maternity Protection Convention was adopted on 29 November 1919.⁶ The ILO calls for a minimum of 14 weeks paid maternity leave for mothers of infants in Maternity Protection Convention 2000 (No. 183) and recommends extending maternity leave to 18 weeks.⁷ Currently, 97 per cent of the world's countries mandate paid maternity leave, and 115 countries legally guarantee at least 14 weeks paid leave for mothers. However, paid leave that is equally available to both parents is available in just 43 countries.⁸

Paternity leave is widely recognized as a measure that can reduce gender-based pay gaps, increase child-parent bonding, and motivate fathers to remain with their current employer. When a father on leave participates in caring for his baby, this can lessen the mother's risk of post-partum depression.⁹ New studies in neuroendocrinology (how hormones influence brain functions) are also finding that the benefits include greater well-being for both mothers and fathers, for example: reduced stress and fatigue among fathers who used their paid paternity leave during the prenatal to post-partum periods; and mothers reporting less depression and stress over the transition to parenthood.¹⁰

Towards promoting co-parenting¹¹ (gender-equal opportunities and responsibilities in caring for children), studies in Europe and the United States indicate that paternity leave can help foster more equal approaches to childcare and participation in the labour force – and improve satisfaction and stability in the parents' relationship.¹²

Flexible work arrangements: Flexible work arrangements allow employees to continue to fulfil their job responsibilities while giving them time to address childcare and family needs. Family-friendly measures include flexible hours, such as starting work earlier or later to cover a standard workday, more hours per day in fewer days, and flexible roles or locations, including working from home.

This can be a vital factor for women's empowerment and participation in the labour force, which in turn are crucial to building more sustainable economies.¹³ Work flexibility also contributes to better health outcomes, for example, when fathers have the option to respond to family crises, the mother's risk of post-partum health complications is reduced and her mental health after childbearing improves.¹⁴

The ILO notes that the regulation of time at work is one of the earliest concerns of labour legislation, from recognition that excessive hours are a danger to workers' and families' health in the 19th century to the ILO's Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention 1981 (No. 156).¹⁵ Step-by-step guidance for workers, employers, and governments on when and how to implement such measures is offered in the ILO's *Guide to Developing Balanced Working Time Arrangements*. The benefits for companies include:

- Increased productivity
- Reduced rates of absenteeism and staff turnover
- Improved employee attitudes and morale
- More sustainable enterprises.¹⁶

Protection and support for women during pregnancy and breastfeeding: Breastfeeding saves lives and helps children develop to their full potential. Breast milk is not only an essential source of nutritious food for infants, it also protects them from deadly sicknesses such as diarrhoea and respiratory infections. Optimal breastfeeding increases a child's cognitive capability and is associated with an average IQ increase of 3-4 points, enabling children to do better in school and earn more as adults.¹⁷ Other longer-term positive impacts include protection against overweight and diabetes in later childhood, and for nursing women, breastfeeding has been found to protect against breast cancer and to improve birth spacing.¹⁸ Mothers who choose to breastfeed require encouragement and support from their governments, health systems, workplaces, and families to make it work.¹⁹

Measures protecting women during pregnancy, breastfeeding, and postnatal care are closely linked to the mandates of maternity care, including non-discrimination, guaranteed job security, and health and safety precautions. The World Health Organization recommends six months of exclusive breastfeeding for infants, with intermittent breastfeeding for two years and beyond.²⁰ ILO Maternity Protection Convention 2000 (No.183) encourages workplaces to support breastfeeding by allowing two 30-minute breaks in every eight-hour shift. These lactation breaks require a supportive breastfeeding environment in the workplace, including comfortable facilities.

Childcare: Childcare for young children is a mainstay of family-friendly policies for business. Greater investments, by both businesses and governments, in providing accessible, affordable and quality childcare have the potential to yield a triple dividend: young children's development, women's empowerment, and economic growth.²¹

The lack of access to quality childcare is a significant barrier to women's participation in the workforce. While some governments have legislation that requires employers to provide childcare, availability is still inadequate – and even where it is available, services may be not be affordable or meet employees' needs, for example, a child's eligibility might be restricted by age limits.²²

Along with other family-friendly measures, including parental leave and flexible work arrangements, the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have brought the urgent need for childcare into the spotlight. In the face of lockdowns and school closures, for example, a study in Viet Nam found that 30 per cent of women-led micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises suspended all or some of their business activities, while only 15 per cent of the enterprises led by men did so.²³

The research that will be summarized in Part 3 aimed to find out how well the private sector in Thailand is applying family-friendly measures as an opportunity to build more sustainable businesses as well to support and promote child and human rights through the family-friendly workplace. Part 2 describes how the study was conducted.

PART 2

Elements of the study

What were the objectives, methods, and scope for this research?

UNICEF underscores the point that businesses can support parents – the people who have “the most important job in the world” – by making greater investments in family-friendly policies.²⁴ This new research on Thailand is a step in the continuum of UNICEF’s ongoing work to promote family-friendly practices in all types of workplaces. Part 2 describes the study’s core components.

2.1 Objectives

As overarching principles, the research aimed to document child rights considerations among private sector companies and the quality of family life among employees – and to raise awareness of how corporate responsibilities to uphold child rights can be fulfilled by implementing family-friendly policies. To help build understanding of child rights approaches within Thailand’s private sector, the study sought to introduce the Children’s Rights and Business Principles to the business community.²⁵

The full report and appendices present detailed examples of companies that have adopted and implemented many and various family-friendly measures. However, the concept as a systematic and coherent set of practices promoting family health and well-being is relatively new in Thailand and falls under different regulating bodies, for example:

- Parental leave: Ministry of Labour
- Childcare centres: Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security (MSDHS);
- Child Support Grant: MSDHS

Recently, initiatives on family-friendly policies in the private sector have been observed, such as a proposed tax incentive for establishing childcare in the workplace under the National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights (2019-2022) and as part of an overall aspiration to fill human capital development gaps as outlined in the latest draft of the 13th National and Economic Development Plan (October 2021 version). These elements of family-friendly policies, aside from maternity leave for formal workers, remain voluntary for non-government workers. Hence, two specific objectives of this research were to:

- Capture and assess the range of family-friendly policies as currently practised in Thailand’s private sector, highlighting both strengths and limitations.
- Develop recommendations, derived from the research findings and based on the Children’s Rights and Business Principles, on how to strengthen frameworks supporting family-friendly policies and promoting their greater adoption by companies and employees.

2.2 Methods

The data collection and analysis were informed by UNICEF's Family-Friendly Policies Handbook for Business as a framework.²⁶ The study employed a mixed methodology:

1. An online survey of family-friendly practices in Thailand among 100 companies, which began in September 2020 and concluded in January 2021
2. In-depth interviews to explore best practices, conducted during December 2020 – February 2021, with 10 companies selected based on their family-friendly profiles identified through analysis of the surveys.

During March–September 2021, the survey data were coded and analysed by descriptive analysis across different sizes, types, and sectors. Data from the interviews were analysed and synthesized by coding and transcribing to identify best practices and measures employed by each company. Chi-square tests, Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) tests and regression modelling all helped to better understand family-friendly practices in Thailand and the relationships between family-friendly policy measures and qualitative variables.²⁷

There are a few notable limitations concerning the data pool: The survey was disseminated and conducted online, so it was clearly limited to respondents with online access. The survey did not record respondents' positions or degree of involvement in family-friendly policies. And critically, the collection process was interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, which may have led to a lower response rate and somewhat constrained quantitative analysis.

2.3 Scope

The range of data gathered through the survey of 100 companies is one of the strengths of this study. Before answering questions on family-friendly policies and practices, respondents provided basic information on their company, including:

- Size – small, medium, large²⁸
- Type – national, multinational, global
- Sector – services, property and construction, agricultural and food, consumer products, manufacturing, natural resources, technology, and finance.²⁹

Proportions for the size and type of participating companies are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Percentage of surveyed companies, by size and type (n = 100)

Size	
Small-sized companies (less than 50 employees)	27%
Medium-sized companies (50–200 employees)	20%
Large-sized companies (more than 200 employees)	53%
Type	
National (Thai-owned businesses operating in the domestic market)	64%
Multinational (branches of a multinational business)	13%
Global	23%

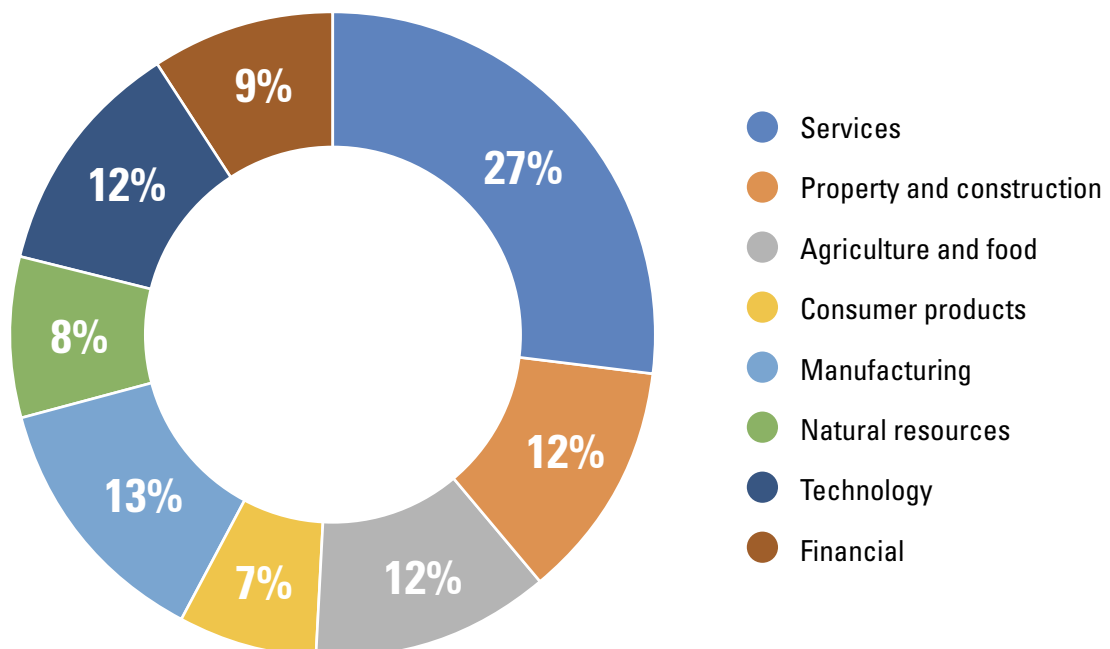
Data were also collected on foreign direct investment, employees under age 18, and the proportion of female employees. Most of the companies (64 per cent) reported that they did not have access to foreign direct investment. Nearly all companies (98 per cent) said they had no employees under age 18; one company did not have data, and another company reported that less than 5 per cent of employees were under age 18.

The reported proportions of female workers employed are shown in Table 2.

% female employees	# of companies
Less than 25%	11
25–50%	36
51–75%	39
More than 75%	11
No information available	3

Figure 1 shows how the surveyed companies spanned across all eight industry sectors.

Figure 1. Distribution of the surveyed companies, by sector



This diversity is also reflected in the general characteristics of companies that participated in the in-depth interviews. By taking this wide-ranging yet detailed and rigorous approach, the research was able to compose a valuable collection of insights on family-friendly policies in Thailand's private sector. Part 3 outlines key findings.

PART 3

Key findings

What family-friendly measures appear in Thailand's business community?



Strong and healthy family is a foundation for strong and healthy society. Sansiri will continue with its commitments and work to foster a family-friendly environment in our workplace in all possible aspects. We want to encourage other organizations to try their best to incorporate the approach into their business principles and practices. This will bring us sustainable development for both business as well as the society.



Chief of Staff, Sansiri

When it comes to family-friendly policies in Thailand's private sector, best practices among the survey participants include paid leave for both mothers and fathers, flexible work arrangements, protection for expecting and nursing women, support for breastfeeding, childcare options, and tailored child support.

The 10 follow-on interviews with selected companies revealed that all of them offer parental leave and on-site serviced lactation rooms. Many interview participants expressed their commitment to family-friendly policies and stated that they provide services above and beyond the legal requirements, including paternity leave and on-site childcare. Quotes from the interviews are used here with the participants' permission.

Thailand's economic development has elevated demand for qualified employees across many sectors, and even with the deep economic impact of COVID-19, Adecco¹ – a talent sourcing firm – and PwC Thailand² – a business consulting firm – reported that many industries, especially digital-related fields, are reporting tight labour markets for qualified candidates. During the in-depth interviews, every company mentioned that finding high-quality employees and keeping them over the long term are important elements to sustain business growth. Focusing on the well-being of employees and family members was considered essential to enhance work quality, increase motivation at the workplace, and reduce staff turnover rates.

The research indicates that there remains room for improvement in the family-friendly benefits companies provide. On the limits to applying family-friendly measures, interview respondents cited budget limitations, lack of government support and incentives, and inconsistencies in the relevant government policies and regulations.

¹ <https://www.thebangkokinsight.com/news/business/756945/>

² <https://www.pwc.com/th/en/press-room/press-release/2021/press-release-23-06-21-th.html>

Part 3 begins with the responses on corporate social responsibility in general and then proceeds to discuss findings on the family-friendly measures.

3.1 Corporate social responsibility

Two categories for measuring corporate social responsibility (CSR) were used in the study: 1) the presence of a social responsibility project, sustainable development policy and/or human rights policy or equivalent policies, and 2) a commitment on respecting children's rights related to the company's operations reflected in their policies.

Overall, 80 per cent of the companies surveyed said they have CSR measures including corporate sustainability and human rights policies, and 57 per cent declared that they have specific policies related to children's rights (see *Table 3, below*). In regard to the commitment to respect child rights in the workplace, one fifth of the responding companies indicated they refer to four business and human rights documents that mention the elimination of child labour.³⁰ Only 14 per cent of survey respondents said they refer to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and 10 per cent refer to the Children's Rights and Business Principles, which cover the full range of business responsibilities in the workplace, marketplace, community, and environment.

Interesting patterns were observed among companies when comparing sizes, types, and sectors,³¹ for example:

- Large-sized companies show the highest adoption rates of CSR and child rights policies, followed by medium-sized and then small-sized companies.
- Companies running global businesses have higher adoption rates of CSR and child rights policies than national businesses.
- Differences occur across sectors, where the property and construction sector shows the highest commitment to child rights, while the consumer products sector shows the lowest.



The company provides welfare and health benefits for full-time employees that cover the spouses including de facto couples and same gender partners. While the latter coverage has yet to be covered by law, we decided to act ahead of the curve to be at the forefront of advocating for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in the community, with the key objective of bettering our society.



**Head of Human Resources,
Johnson & Johnson (Thailand)**

Table 3 presents details on the analysis of survey results.

Table 3. Percentage of companies with CSR and child rights policies, across sizes, types, and sectors		
Size	CSR policies	Child rights policies
Small (less than 50 employees)	52%	28%
Medium (50–200 employees)	70%	45%
Large (more than 200 employees)	96%	74%
Type	CSR policies	Child rights policies
National	80%	55%
Multinational	69%	54%
Global	87%	65%
Sector	CSR policies	Child rights policies
Services	67%	52%
Property and construction	92%	75%
Agriculture and food	100%	67%
Consumer products	71%	43%
Industrial	69%	62%
Natural resources	100%	50%
Technology	67%	50%
Financial	100%	56%
Overall (n = 100)	80%	57%

3.2 Parental leave

Thailand's Constitution B.E. 2560 (2017) makes a broad statement on protecting a mother's rights before and after giving birth,³² and the Labour Protection Act of 2019 states that female employees in formal employment are entitled to maternity leave of up to 98 days for each pregnancy, with 'normal' daily wages paid for up to 45 days by their employer (chapter 59).³ Mothers who participated in the Social Security funds in article 33 and 39 categories⁴ can also claim 50 per cent of their daily wage for 90 days (maximum 7,500 baht per month). However, time off for prenatal care also count as part of the maternity leave days.³³ This limitation has been cited as an issue that does not fully address the protection of mothers' health.³⁴

Paternity leave (15 paid workdays) is currently limited to government officers and permanent government employees – fathers employed in the private sector are not eligible for paternity leave.³⁵

The analysis of parental leave policies in Thailand found that 96 per cent of the companies surveyed adopt maternity leave policies. Exceptions were found among small sized-companies, national and multinational businesses, and in the services and technology sectors. Overall, only 37 per cent of responding companies have a policy for paternity leave, rising up to 78 per cent in the financial sector, 61 per cent among international businesses, and 45 per cent among large-sized companies (see Table 4, below).

A majority of the companies (77 per cent) pay full salaries during maternity leave, while 14 per cent have opted for a compulsory payment of 45 days, leaving the rest to be covered by Social Security or taking unpaid maternity leave. Based on statistical analysis conducted by the researchers, the industrial sector has a significant relationship with the length and amount of salary offered for maternity leave; the companies in consumer products and natural resource sectors also tend to have higher salary coverage for maternity leave.



Employees are the organization's own people. If we take care of them and ensure that their lives are fulfilling, their happiness will reflect on the quality of their work and the productivity of the organization. This enriching effect will pass on even to our customers and not only improve our business prospects, but the community life that we are a part of as well.



Senior Vice President, Employee Engagement and Communication, Siam Commercial Bank (SCB)

3 <http://protection.labour.go.th/attachments/article/64/%E0%B8%9E.%E0%B8%A3.%E0%B8%9A.%20%E0%B8%84%E0%B8%B8%E0%B9%89%E0%B8%A1%E0%B8%84%E0%B8%A3%E0%B8%AD%E0%B8%87%E0%B9%81%E0%B8%A3%E0%B8%87%E0%B8%87%E0%B8%B2%E0%B8%99%20%E0%B8%89%E0%B8%9A%E0%B8%B1%E0%B8%9A%E0%B8%97%E0%B8%B5%E0%B9%88%207%202562%20%E0%B8%89%E0%B8%9A%E0%B8%B1%E0%B8%9A%E0%B8%A0%E0%B8%B2%E0%B8%A9%E0%B8%B2%E0%B8%AD%E0%B8%B1%E0%B8%87%E0%B8%81%E0%B8%A4%E0%B8%A9.pdf>

4 https://www.sso.go.th/wpr/main/privilege/%E0%B8%81%E0%B8%AD%E0%B8%87%E0%B8%97%E0%B8%B8%E0%B8%99%E0%B8%9B%E0%B8%A3%E0%B8%B0%E0%B8%81%E0%B8%B1%E0%B8%99%E0%B8%AA%E0%B8%B1%E0%B8%87%E0%B8%84%E0%B8%A1_detail_detail_1_125_691/233_233

Table 4 lists the research findings on parental leave policies among the surveyed companies.

Table 4. Percentage of companies offering maternity leave and paternity leave, across sizes, types, and sectors		
Size	Maternity leave	Paternity leave
Small (less than 50 employees)	83%	36%
Medium (50–200 employees)	100%	20%
Large (more than 200 employees)	100%	45%
Type	Maternity leave	Paternity leave
National	95%	33%
Multinational	92%	15%
Global	100%	61%
Sector	Maternity leave	Paternity leave
Services	88%	41%
Property and construction	100%	25%
Agriculture and food	100%	17%
Consumer products	100%	29%
Industrial	100%	23%
Natural resources	100%	50%
Technology	92%	42%
Financial	100%	78%
Overall (n = 100)	96%	37%

3.3 Flexible work arrangements

While there are presently no applicable Thai legal requirements in place, many companies have initiated flexible work arrangements, allowing employees adaptable hours (e.g., varied shifts, part-time) or a choice of location for performing their work (e.g., offsite, from home).

Over half (51 per cent) of the responding companies offer flexible working hours, and 42 per cent offer options for the location. Companies in the technology sector represent the highest proportion implementing flexible hours (75 per cent), followed by smaller companies (72 per cent). Regarding flexible locations, the services sector far outpaces all other categories, at 70 per cent (*see Table 5, below*). Flexible work arrangement dynamics may have shifted during and after the 2021 'third wave' of COVID-19 in Thailand, calling for further analysis of enduring changes to flexible work arrangements stimulated by COVID-19 adaptation.

Table 5 shows the proportions of surveyed companies with flexible hours and arrangements.

Table 5. Percentage of companies offering flexible hours and locations/roles, across sizes, types, and sectors		
Size	Flexible hours	Flexible locations
Small (less than 50 employees)	72%	41%
Medium (50–200 employees)	50%	25%
Large (more than 200 employees)	40%	30%
Type	Flexible hours	Flexible locations
National	53%	38%
Multinational	31%	38%
Global	57%	57%
Sector	Flexible hours	Flexible locations
Services	59%	70%
Property and construction	33%	42%
Agriculture and food	42%	25%
Consumer products	57%	43%
Industrial	38%	8%
Natural resources	38%	13%
Technology	75%	58%
Financial	53%	33%
Overall (n = 100)	51%	42%

3.4 Protection for pregnant and nursing women

Maternity-focused measures include non-discrimination for pregnant women, protection from contract termination during pregnancy, and ensuring health and safety during pregnancy and breastfeeding.³⁶ The Thailand Labour Protection Act (No. 7) prohibits termination of employment on the grounds of pregnancy (Section 43) and allows female employees to request temporary duty changes before or after delivery if their normal assignments are not practical for health considerations (Section 42).

Overall, 74 per cent of companies surveyed specify measures protecting pregnant and nursing women, though adoption rates of these measures are much lower among companies in the financial and services sectors (*see Table 6, below*). A company's rules governing the equal treatment of expectant mothers vary significantly depending on the size and sector. Results from logit regression models show that:

1. Companies running global and national businesses, and technology companies, are more prone to adopt anti-discrimination measures, while companies in the financial sector are less likely to do so.
2. Large-sized companies tend to have higher adoption rates of the policy on no termination of employment during pregnancy.
3. National businesses, large-sized companies, and companies with 25–50 per cent female employees are more likely to delineate safety measures during pregnancy and breastfeeding, while negative association with safety measures is the norm for companies in the financial sector.



At Pranda, product quality is not the only thing we tend to, but adding quality to the lives of our employees as well. This is especially true for our family-friendly ideals. We take care of our employees as a part of our family.



**Chief of Central Administration,
Management and Public Relations
Section, Pranda Jewelry**

Table 6 shows the proportions of companies that offer protection for employees who are pregnant and when they are breastfeeding.

Table 6. Percentage of companies with protection for pregnant and nursing employees, across sizes, types, and sectors			
Size	Non-discrimination	No termination of employment	Safety during pregnancy and breastfeeding
Small (less than 50 employees)	58%	56%	52%
Medium (50–200 employees)	75%	70%	65%
Large (more than 200 employees)	79%	91%	83%
Type	Non-discrimination	No termination of employment	Safety during pregnancy and breastfeeding
National	76%	78%	73%
Multinational	38%	85%	62%
Global	87%	74%	74%
Sector	Non-discrimination	No termination of employment	Safety during pregnancy and breastfeeding
Services	63%	60%	56%
Property and construction	83%	92%	56%
Agriculture and food	75%	92%	75%
Consumer products	85%	100%	100%
Industrial	77%	85%	85%
Natural resources	88%	100%	75%
Technology	91%	75%	100%
Financial	44%	56%	56%
Overall (n = 100)	74%	78%	72%

3.5 Support for breastfeeding

Nearly half (49 per cent) of the surveyed companies report that they support breastfeeding, but less than 30 per cent maintain a dedicated lactating space, and less than 10 per cent offer reduced working hours or paid breastfeeding breaks. Further investigation on policy and the actual support reveals that companies in consumer products, agriculture and food, and the property and construction sectors, as well as companies with large-sized or global businesses perform better in terms of consistency in actual practice on breastfeeding measures.³⁷

To capture the prevalence of breastfeeding policies, a *breastfeeding index*³⁸ was constructed as part of this analysis, using five variables based on company responses to the survey questions:

1. Space for breastfeeding within the company
2. Paid breastfeeding breaks
3. Dedicated space for breastfeeding or expressing breast milk
4. A clean place for storing expressed breast milk
5. Breastfeeding information and counselling.

Company responses were valued (1 = yes, 0 = no) and scaled to a maximum of 100 to reflect the number of breastfeeding support measures in place. The higher the index number, the more comprehensive the breastfeeding support provided by the company category.

The breastfeeding policy adoption and index scores indicate that while almost half of companies have a breastfeeding policy, the policies are supported by an average of only one active breastfeeding support measure. Breastfeeding support also varies by type of company; companies in consumer products, agriculture and food, and the property and construction sectors, as well as companies with large-sized or global businesses perform relatively well on breastfeeding measures.³⁹

Table 7 shows more detailed results on the proportion of companies with a policy on breastfeeding, along with the associated index score.

Table 7. Percentage of companies adopting a breastfeeding policy – and the breastfeeding index score – across sizes, types, and sectors		
Size	Breastfeeding policy	Breastfeeding index score
Small (less than 50 employees)	32%	11
Medium (50–200 employees)	35%	9
Large (more than 200 employees)	62%	28
Type	Breastfeeding policy	Breastfeeding index score
National	45%	18
Multinational	38%	12
Global	65%	26
Sector	Breastfeeding policy	Breastfeeding index score
Services	41%	15
Property and construction	67%	25
Agriculture and food	67%	28
Consumer products	57%	40
Industrial	46%	17
Natural resources	50%	13
Technology	42%	10
Financial	33%	18
Overall (n = 100)	49%	19

3.6 Childcare policy and child support

Among all the companies surveyed, 85 per cent do not have a policy to directly support childcare services for employees. Among the remaining companies, seven offer a nursery care centre in the workplace, four provide funds to help individual employees cover nursery or kindergarten costs, three provide support through the supplier of off-site childcare, and one company offers travel support.

Regarding employees' access to company childcare services, when they were available, there were limitations regarding the age of eligible children. Eleven companies provided childcare for children from birth through age 3, children aged 3–5 were eligible in one company, and none of the companies offered services for children over 5 years old.

A *child support index*⁴⁰ has been developed to reflect the overall extent that relevant measures were reported by companies in surveys and interviews. This index encompasses five variables:

1. Grant for the birth of a child
2. Tuition for offspring
3. Private health insurance for children and members of the immediate family
4. Financial assistance towards the costs of a child's medical treatment
5. Paid leave in case of illness of a child.

Company responses were valued (1 = yes, 0 = no) and scaled to a maximum of 100 to reflect the number of child support measures in place. The higher the index number, the more comprehensive the child support provided by the company category.

The majority of companies (64 per cent) reported offering support such as scholarships or child health insurance – rising up to 89 per cent among companies in the financial sector. The child support index score of large-sized companies was significantly higher than small-sized companies. Unexpectedly, companies with foreign direct investment were found to be negatively associated with active child support policies, while companies in the property and construction sector are more likely to provide child support.



Most employees are from the upcountry region, so their children will have to be left in the care of nursery centres or others outside their family. This means parents can never be confident of the level of attentiveness or affection given to their own children, not to mention the attached expenses. Therefore, we plan on opening an internal daycare centre so that our employees can be closer to their own children.



**Chairman of the Executive Board,
Bangkok Rubber**

Table 8 lists the results related to companies' practices in childcare and other types of child support, along with the child support index score.

Table 8. Companies' childcare and child support practices, by percentage – and the child support index score – across sizes, types, and sectors			
Size	Childcare	Child support	Child support index score
Small (less than 50 employees)	16%	72%	12
Medium (50–200 employees)	25%	65%	15
Large (more than 200 employees)	50%	62%	27
Type	Childcare	Child support	Child support index score
National	20%	69%	19
Multinational	15%	38%	15
Global	13%	65%	27
Sector	Childcare	Child support	Child support index score
Services	15%	59%	12
Property and construction	17%	75%	20
Agriculture and food	17%	67%	32
Consumer products	14%	71%	29
Industrial	23%	61%	22
Natural resources	25%	50%	28
Technology	17%	50%	17
Financial	22%	89%	20
Overall (n = 100)	18%	64%	20

Overall, it is clear that private companies in Thailand are showing a strong interest in taking steps to make their workplaces family-friendly in both policy and practice – and many are already applying relevant measures.

Part 4 builds on the study's findings to outline recommendations for stronger and more systematic family-friendly policies in Thailand.

PART 4

Issues and potential solutions

What are some next steps for promoting the family-friendly vision?

During the in-depth interviews, participants cited several issues that are holding companies back from implementing or expanding family-friendly policies. They also mentioned points where employees are reluctant to use some of the options that are currently available.

Part 4 opens with a summary of the challenges and opportunities business leaders identified. This is followed by ideas for building stronger family-friendly practices and improving their uptake among companies and employees, based on the study analysis and UNICEF guidance on child rights and family-friendly principles.

4.1 Challenges and opportunities

Though there was positive feedback during the interviews on applying family-friendly policies, common issues mentioned were budgeting, management, emergencies, and a lack of external support from government and relevant organizations.

For many companies, family-friendly measures that go beyond legal requirement, such as 45 days of paid maternity leave, is considered as part of employee benefits, and there is generally a fixed budget with very limited flexibility, which can be a barrier to the decision-making process for establishing such policies. When revenue streams are unexpectedly disrupted, such as during the COVID-19 pandemic and economic downturns, there are substantial impacts on extending family-friendly practices.

The budget issue was prominently noted in regard to investments required to establish, operate, and staff workplace nurseries, including finding well-trained professional teachers and nannies. Interview participants mentioned that the average cost of a childcare centre can be more than 1 million baht per year. In addition, they noted that operating a well-designed childcare centre needs support from government, non-governmental organizations and international organizations – for example, to provide financial support, consultation on regulations, and guidelines for implementation. Further research is required on childcare centre operating costs, and costs and benefits of potential approaches to expand needed childcare support to companies and working families.

When establishing policies, companies that have both production line and office staff found it difficult to analyse the specific impacts and define a single family-friendly policy applicable and fair to all. Changes in government regulations were also cited as a challenge to policy stability. When new regulations are issued, the private sector may need to make quick adjustments, which can create miscommunication between companies and their employees.

Workplace breastfeeding facilities or lactation rooms are available in several workplaces, but interviewees reported that they were not commonly used by employees. The reasons they cited are linked to convenience, as they perceived that powdered milk is preferred over breastfeeding during working hours.

Regarding paternity leave, employees are not always aware that it is available. This is mainly due to poor internal employee-company communication, as some company regulations or policies may change without adequate notice to staff. In addition, when companies offer paid paternity leave that is lower than the employee's current salary, interview participants indicated that it was rarely taken and that most employees prefer to work for full pay or even make extra income from overtime.

Two opportunities for companies to expand policies were suggested by the research: 1) Private companies in Thailand currently exclude same-gender partners from family-friendly policies, but a few national companies are considering coverage in this direction as long as it is compatible with other policies and regulations; and 2) Health insurance in many companies does not cover mental health, which presents an opening for employers willing to address this in the future.

4.2 Recommendations and next steps

Building on the research findings and UNICEF guidance, particularly the *Family-Friendly Policies Handbook for Business*,⁴¹ the following are recommendations for key stakeholders to advance family-friendly policies both in their organizations and for all working families across Thailand.

Companies

- **Understand utilization of existing policies, and gaps to address:** companies can strengthen their family-friendly policies by engaging employees with surveys, mappings, and consultations to improve utilization of existing policies, identify gaps and establish plans to address priorities identified by management and employees.
- **Build upon successes to expand parental leave:** many companies in Thailand already meet and exceed national standards on maternity leave. They can build upon this success by offering and promoting paid paternity leave. Paternity leave can have positive effects on maternal well-being and early child development, as well as increase worker retention and motivation. Those companies already offering a level of paid paternity leave can showcase the benefits of paternity leave through mechanisms suggested in Next Steps.
- **Extend protections for pregnant and nursing women.** While many companies do provide protections – non-discrimination, no termination of employment, safety during pregnancy and breastfeeding – this is not universal, particularly among small and medium-sized enterprises. This may increase the vulnerability of pregnant women and young mothers during the COVID-19 economic crisis. All enterprises should put in place protections for pregnant and nursing women, and ensure equal treatment for all employees regardless of parental status.
- **Improve breastfeeding support.** Exclusive breastfeeding is critical to healthy child development, however nearly half of companies do not report having breastfeeding support policies in place. Companies should include these in their benefits, including a mix of flexible working arrangements for breastfeeding mothers to take lactation breaks, access to lactation facilities including breast milk storage, and provision of information on the importance of exclusive breastfeeding. Beyond establishing breastfeeding policies, companies should monitor their utilization, and work with employees to understand and address any barriers to utilization.

- **Support access to childcare facilities, onsite or in the community.** While circumstances determining the optimal approach vary, companies should ensure employee families have access to quality childcare in the vicinity. This can consist of establishing and operating a childcare facility on-site, or supporting access to locally available childcare through measures such as subsidies for transport of children to childcare, flexible working hours for parents to transport children, and supporting local childcare facilities used by employees.

Government

- **Address gaps in maternity leave to ensure benefits to the mandated 98 days.** While many companies provide fully paid maternity leave benefits, it is not a universal mandate or practice. There is also a statutory gap of eight days uncovered by required employer benefits or Social Security. This can be addressed by, at minimum, an extension of Social Security benefits to 53 days.
- **Research and pilot paternity leave incentives.** Companies interviewed have expressed support for expanding their family-friendly policy related benefits, noting a need for greater government incentivization and support. Paternity leave is one area where further research and piloting could be conducted on the impact and cost of incentives, for example tax breaks for companies offering two weeks' paternity leave at 90 per cent of the employee's salary (in alignment with policy in the United Kingdom).
- **Expand and promote incentives for childcare facilities and childcare access.** While some incentives are in place for operation of childcare facilities, these are not widely understood or accessed. Employers and working families can benefit from greater support for companies choosing to operate childcare facilities, support access to childcare services in the community, or both. Support can include a mix of tax deductions for childcare facility establishment and operation and private community childcare facility tuition, establishment of care standards for private childcare facilities, and public-private partnerships to facilitate expansion of community childcare, particularly for children of ages 0-3.
- **Make support for child benefits a systematic part of family-friendly policies, in partnership with the private sector.** Child benefits, including regular cash transfers as part of a government-sponsored system of social protection and social services, are a proven way to support families in caring for their children. Thailand has already shown leadership in this area through the Child Support Grant for vulnerable families through the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security, and a contributory child allowance through the Social Security system.⁴² The government can further involve small and medium-sized companies to promote and augment these schemes, for example by introducing a multi-tiered benefit system as well as additional grants for child education.

Multi-Stakeholder

- **Enhance monitoring, feedback, and research mechanisms.** Regular monitoring of private sector practices, worker perceptions, and the impact of adjustments to government policies can give business leaders and policymakers stronger evidence to guide future decision-making. This could take the form of a regularly published index, with business feedback mechanisms in place to further understand trends and challenges. This in turn could guide further research to identify impactful, feasible policy actions to advance family-friendly policies in ways that benefit working families, businesses, and society.
- **Promote best practice by recognizing leaders.** Many companies in Thailand are exceeding national standards and serving as regional leaders in implementing family-friendly practices. Establishing a recognition platform, engaging government, corporate, and civil society stakeholders, to celebrate leaders and influencers can build awareness of family-friendly policies across industries, promote family-friendly practices to the public, and stimulate discussion on appropriate actions to advance Thailand's leadership in this space.

- **Conduct further research on areas of greatest opportunity for family-friendly policies to improve worker and family well-being and human capital development.** This study focuses on companies and their employees, finding a range of good practices and opportunities for further development. Yet as more than 52 per cent of Thailand's workforce is self-employed or informal as of December 2021,⁵ and therefore not able to access family-friendly policy related benefits through employers, more research is needed to understand their needs and what measures could effectively meet them. Areas of concern include ensuring exclusive breastfeeding, access to quality childcare, and ensuring access to income support such as the Child Support Grant, for consistent coverage of family-friendly policies for all working families in Thailand.

Many of the recommendations developed through this study in Thailand can be applied across East Asia and the Pacific, and beyond. We hope this summary has piqued the interest of businesses, governments, and other partners in taking family-friendly policies and practices to the next level – truly realizing its full potential to the benefit of business, parents and children, communities, and societies.

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- 38 **The breastfeeding index** was constructed by the sum of five breastfeeding related variables divided by the number of variables (i.e., five), and then rescaled to 0–100. The variables are: 1) space for breastfeeding within the company, 2) paid breastfeeding breaks, 3) dedicated space for breastfeeding or expressing breast milk, 4) a clean place for storing expressed breast milk, and 5) breastfeeding information and counselling.
- 39 Results from regression models confirm that **large-sized companies are more likely to adopt breastfeeding support policies and other relevant measures, especially companies engaged in global business** (see Table 104 in Appendix C for details). Similarly, the results from chi-squared tests and one-way ANOVA with Bonferroni tests are also accorded with the regression model (see Table 79 and Table 80 in Appendix C).
- 40 **The child support index** was constructed by the sum of five child support related variables divided by the number of variables (i.e., five), and then rescaled to 0–100. The variables are: 1) grant for the birth of a child, 2) tuition for offspring, 3) private health insurance for children and members of the immediate family, 4) financial assistance towards the costs of the child's medical treatment, and 5) paid leave in case of illness of the child.
- 41 UNICEF East Asia and Pacific Regional Office, 'Family Friendly Policies Handbook for Business', June 2020, <www.unicef.org/eap/media/5901/file/Family-Friendly%20Policies:%20Handbook%20for%20Business.pdf>.
- 42 The Government of Thailand, working closely with UNICEF, has established a Child Support Grant as part of its commitment to end child poverty and address inequality, in line with the National Strategy 2018–2037. More than 1 million Thai children have received monthly support under the grant. See: UNICEF Thailand, 'The 1st Three: Thailand's progressive road toward universal child grant coverage', February 2020, <www.unicef.org/thailand/reports/1st-three>, accessed 15 November 2021. See also: 'Thailand's Child Support Grant Helps Vulnerable Families', 26 March 2019. <www.unicef.org/thailand/stories/thailands-child-support-grant-helps-vulnerable-families>.

