UNICEF Thailand
Young People’s Resilience, Connectedness and Empowerment
2022-2026
The Young People’s Resilience, Connectedness and Empowerment programme aims to tackle challenges faced by young people in Thailand, while investing in upcoming opportunities and contributing towards more resilient, people-centred, inclusive, greener and prosperous societies.

The programme will focus specifically on the health and well-being of young people, particularly mental health and nutrition. It will also build their employability skills, with a focus on those who are marginalised, empowering them to express their voices and connect with leaders and their community. It draws on the strengths, potential and creativity of young people and their families to address challenges and support positive change.

UNICEF will work closely with key partners, including several ministries and government bodies, youth-led organizations, think tanks, private sector and academia, to expand the knowledge and skills of young people, youth workers, policy makers and society on meaningful and ethical youth participation. The programme reflects long-term national priorities and articulates UNICEF’s support to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals.

Of the 66.18 million people living in Thailand, approximately 7.8 million are adolescents aged 10-19 and approximately 8.2 million are youth aged 15-24.¹

1.4 million youth aged 15-24 years are not in education, employment or training.²

7 in 10 children and young people reported poorer mental health due to the impact of COVID-19 on their lives.³

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Background

As Thailand's shifting demographic leads towards a rapidly ageing society, one of its biggest challenges is how to empower its adolescents and young people to become thriving adults who can carry the country forward in line with its development goals.

By 2040, Thailand's ageing society will see a dependency ratio of less than two working age persons for every older person (above 65). In 2010 that figure was five workers for every older person; this is likely to bring a decline in the labour force participation rate.

While unemployment rates are currently stable, youth unemployment has risen, particularly since COVID-19 (7.5 per cent in 2020) with more young women facing unemployment than men. There is a gap in clerical support and technical occupations – shortages that translate into a deficiency of cognitive skills, such as maths, writing and reading comprehension. Looking to the future, green job opportunities also need to be more strongly considered.

The transition from school to work remains challenging for many young people in Thailand, with high numbers of them remaining outside of employment, education or training (NEET). This group is at higher risk of being socially and economically excluded, and more likely to become vulnerable in the long term. Currently, about 15 per cent of young people aged 15-24 in Thailand can be categorised as NEET; a total of 70 per cent are female. As a result of COVID-19, the NEET rate is projected to increase, while over 400,000 recent graduates are expected to be unemployed.

‘Skills mismatch’ is a major issue and despite a significant increase in educational attainment rates, college graduates are no longer concentrated in high-skill jobs and a larger share of secondary educated workers engage in low-skill jobs rather than middle-skill jobs. Furthermore, private companies continually report a shortage of the skills they need.

Gender stereotyping often leads women into fields of study linked to lower-productivity jobs – these gender dynamics often start in school with girls under-represented in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) related degree programmes. Despite significant improvements around adolescent sexual and reproductive health indicators, national averages hide deep inequalities. Adolescent pregnancy remains an issue in Thailand, with 20.2 per cent of women aged 20-24 years reported being married or in a union before the age of 18. There are high adolescent birth rates among girls living in poverty, those living in the north of the country and those living in families who do not speak Thai as their first language. Risks around sexual health are also a concern for young people.

Young people in Thailand are increasingly at risk of obesity and being overweight. The country ranks highest among 54 low and middle-income countries for adolescent fast-food intake, and more than 17 per cent of students are overweight.7

The mental health of young people in Thailand is a significant public health concern driven by physical, sexual and emotional violence, socio economic conditions, discrimination and exclusion. Thailand has the highest number of suicides among ASEAN countries, and it is likely that COVID-19 has exacerbated this problem.

Youth health services are not fully meeting the needs of young people, many of whom are referring to the internet and social media for information and support that can sometimes be unreliable and misleading.

Young people in Thailand, particularly those from marginalised groups, have limited platforms to share their opinions on issues that affect them. Since early 2020, hundreds of youth protests and movements have developed through online and offline platforms calling for political and education reform, climate action and an end to inequalities.

Participation is key to building healthy and sustainable democracies, empowering young people and fostering social cohesion and inclusion. There is a need to foster national planning processes and inclusive platforms that give young people opportunities to share their opinions and be included in decision and policy making that affects their future.

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**Partners**

- Ministry of Public Health
- Ministry of Social Development and Human Security
- Ministry of Youth and Tourism
- Ministry of Labour
- Ministry of Interior (Department of Local Administration)
- Ministry of Education
- National Economic and Social Development Commission
- National Child and Youth Council of Thailand
- National Council for Child and Youth Development
- Thailand Professional Qualifications Institute
- Thai Health Promotion Foundation
- UNFPA
- UNDP
- ILO
- WHO
- Private sector
- Academic institutions
- Youth-led and youth-serving organizations
- Sports organizations
- Media

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7 WHO. Global School-Based Student Health Survey (Thailand), 2015.
Health and well-being for all young people

The health component of the Young People’s Resilience, Connectedness and Empowerment programme will focus on strengthening the health system to holistically address young people’s sexual and reproductive health, mental health, nutrition and their risk of non-communicable disease.

UNICEF will support integrated health and well-being services for young people, particularly the most marginalised, including girls, young people living with HIV and chronic health conditions, young people with disabilities and young migrants.

Digital platforms and technology will be used to reach young people with health messages and counselling that empowers them to develop healthy lifestyles, make better and more informed health and well-being decisions, and improve personal health management.

There is currently limited data on the prevalence and patterns of some of the emerging health issues for young people. UNICEF will therefore generate and consolidate evidence disaggregated by gender and age in support of advocacy for further integration of these issues into national health reforms.

Ensuring that adolescents participate actively in the development, implementation and monitoring of policies and services will be a priority.

What we do

- Work with UN agencies and academia to generate data and evidence on young people’s mental health and the services available to them as well as nutrition to support advocacy for improved integration of these issues into national health reforms and policies.

- Support integrated mental health and psychosocial support services for young people and implement public campaigns to normalize mental health and reduce stigma around the issue.

- Support the Government to develop policies to support healthy food and lifestyle choices including enhancing nutritional quality of foods, fiscal measures and regulating food marketing.

- Support the development of innovative digital health platforms for young people and communication strategies that target all young people with messages on well-being and healthy lifestyles.

"Being sad and depressed doesn’t mean there is something wrong with you,” said 15-year-old mental health activist Prachaya (fourth from the left) in a special episode of UNICEF’s The Sound of Happiness podcast on breaking the silence on statelessness, disability, sexual orientation and seeking mental health help.
UNICEF will work with partners to develop a package of policies and services that targets young people who are not in employment, education or training that builds skills and knowledge through training and learning opportunities.

The programme will provide marginalised young people with foundational and transferable skills, along with technical, entrepreneurship and vocational skills, through more flexible pathways from school to work. These include accelerated and flexible learning, catch-up and second chance programmes, internships, apprenticeships, mentorship and career guidance.

UNICEF will also strengthen public-private partnerships for skills development and employability to address existing mismatches between labour supply and demand.

What we do

- Work with partners to generate evidence on why youth remain outside of employment, education or training to inform policies and programmes that will develop their competencies and support their smooth transition to decent and sustainable employment or entrepreneurship.
- Support the Government to develop a package of measures to address the needs of youth who are not in employment, education or training.
- Provide technical support and advice to the Government to improve the content and functionalities of digital employment platforms for young people.
- Convene and support meaningful partnerships with the private sector to improve learning opportunities for young people, particularly those who are marginalised, through internships, apprenticeships and career guidance.
Young people’s empowerment and participation

UNICEF will work closely with key partners to expand the knowledge, skills and competencies of young people, youth workers and policy makers on meaningful and constructive youth participation.

Organizations that serve youth and that are led by youth will be supported to create a national digital resource centre for young people’s participation and youth work. The platform will make available information on legislation, formal and informal training opportunities, and ways to engage young people on issues such as education, employment, health and climate change. It will provide non-formal learning resources for youth workers and youth leaders and offer opportunities to build networks.

Online engagement will also be developed to harness the voices of young people to shape policy and inform youth programme design, including through the use of UNICEF’s globally recognised U-Report and Global Voices of Youth platform.

To address the generational gap and strengthen participation within families, UNICEF will work with partners on parenting support programmes and initiatives. These programmes will aim to help parents and caregivers communicate effectively with adolescents and support their well-being and participation in society.

What we do

- Support research to understand and guide youth participation and leadership in schools and communities that will enable young people to engage with policy makers on issues such as health, employment, budgeting, climate change, and environmental sustainability.
- Collaborate with the Thailand Professional Qualifications Institute and civil society organizations on the development of professional standards for those who work with young people, including educators and social workers.
- Support the development of a national online resource centre for youth work and youth participation.
- Work with youth organizations and policy makers to enable the participation of young people in governance mechanisms at the national and local level.
- Develop positive parenting programmes that address gender issues aimed at improving parent-adolescent relationships and dialogue.
- Use two-way digital communication channels (such as U-Report) to gather the voices of young people to inform policy making, and to raise public awareness of issues concerning young people today.
- Work with the Young People Advisory Board within UNICEF to inform our work and make UNICEF more participatory and relevant for young people, particularly the most marginalised.