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unicef 
for every child

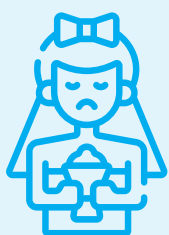
UNICEF Thailand

Child Protection

2022-2026



58% of parents in Thailand use violent discipline.¹



1 in 5 young women in Thailand marry before the age of 18.¹



Close to **1 in 4** children are not living with either of their biological parents (23.5% children).¹



In 2021, **400,000** children between 12 and 17 years were subjected to online exploitation and abuse.²

CHILD PROTECTION

The programme

Through the Child Protection Programme, UNICEF will support the Royal Thai Government to continue building a robust and proactive child protection system that incorporates prevention, surveillance and response. The Programme will address the needs of the most disadvantaged children and will respond to current issues related to online child sexual exploitation and abuse, children without parental care, the impact of COVID-19 on the protection of children and the socio-economic situation in Thailand.

UNICEF will work to strengthen laws and build regulations and policies that aim to protect children from violence, exploitation, abuse and unnecessary family separation. Supporting the design of a workforce that can deliver quality preventive and responsive social services to children and their caregivers will be a key activity while strengthening the capacity of children, young people and their families to prevent and identify risks will also be prioritised. UNICEF will support efforts to improve the quality of response of child protection and juvenile justice services, through better case management that considers the needs of the most vulnerable children such as migrants, children with disabilities and stateless children. Through support to Government planning, coordination and budgeting at national and decentralized levels, UNICEF will help to ensure that child protection issues are prioritised across all sectors, policies, plans and budgets.

UNICEF will work with Government agencies across social welfare, health, education and justice that are responsible for protecting children and with academic institutions and think tanks to generate evidence and

¹ National Statistical Office of Thailand. *Thailand Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2019, Survey Findings Report*, 2020.

² ECPAT, INTERPOL and UNICEF. *Disrupting Harm in Thailand: Evidence on online child sexual exploitation and abuse*. Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children, 2022.



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to develop models to prevent and address protection risks. NGOs, community-based organizations and Government volunteers at community level will work with UNICEF to improve the delivery of services and provide insight for the development of policy and practice while child rights networks and coalitions will collaborate with UNICEF around advocacy. The private sector will also have an important role in protecting children online and promoting child safeguarding policies in their organizations.

Background

Despite some notable progress, violence, exploitation, abuse and neglect are daily realities for far too many children in Thailand. Fifty-eight per cent of parents use violent discipline¹ and an estimated 5 per cent of Thailand's children (some 700,000) face an unacceptable risk of violence or have already suffered violence.³ Harmful gender, social norms and attitudes are the driving causes of violence against children and efforts to strengthen the capacity of children, families and communities to prevent and recognize violence have so far been ineffective.

Thailand has one of the highest prevalence of child marriages in the region with 20 per cent of women aged 20 to 24 years first married or in a union before age 18,¹ a situation that robs them of their childhood and leads to worse economic and health outcomes than their unmarried peers.

Digital learning is increasingly bringing more children into the digital environment and children are spending a considerable amount of their time online. In 2021, 9 per cent of internet users aged 12-17 in Thailand were victims of online sexual exploitation and abuse. This includes blackmailing or extorting children into sexual activities, sharing their sexual images without permission, or coercing them to engage in sexual activities through promises of money or gifts. Of great concern is the vast under-reporting, with only 1-3 per cent of children reporting their experience to the police.² The production of child abuse images and the establishment of inappropriate contact with a view to grooming and exploiting children are now common concerns for the government, law enforcement agencies, media, NGOs, the corporate sector and, to a growing extent, children themselves while their parents and caretakers may not be aware of these threats.

³ The Department of Children and Youth, Thailand Development Research Institute and UNICEF. *Child Protection Act Costing Analysis and Budgeting (internal document)*, 2020.

An estimated 55,000 children in Thailand are growing up without parental care and do not live with their parents, often living in large-scale, sometimes unregulated, institutional settings across Thailand.⁴ The COVID-19 crisis has directly resulted in the loss of parental care due to death, illness, or separation, thereby placing children at a heightened risk of violence, neglect, or exploitation while children with disabilities, as well as migrant and stateless children are at even greater protection risks.

The child protection system in Thailand has been guided by the Child Protection Act since 2003,⁵ however, child protection is not prioritized in the national strategic framework and is not seen as a political priority. The current version of the National Child Protection Strategy (2017-2022) lays out reform steps for effective and sustainable solutions for children at risk but implementation has been slow. Weak planning and budgeting have meant that child protection services for children have received insufficient funding while inadequate data has made it difficult to build a clear picture of needs and trends.

The lack of an adequate social service workforce for child protection remains a barrier to successfully preventing and responding to critical issues such as children without parental care and violence against children. There is an insufficient number of social workers⁶ and their roles and required qualifications are not clearly defined, which means children are not given the specialised services they need. Child protection agencies in particular and social services generally are not well represented at the local level. While there is a plan to gradually shift towards decentralization, it is yet to be properly realised.

Case management is conducted in an informal way across provinces and cases⁷ with many case workers having limited supervision and lacking in correct qualifications, while monitoring and accountability mechanisms are also inadequate.

The strengthening of pre-trial alternative measures has shown to be an effective way to prevent the detention of children in Thailand over the past few years, however justice professionals lack comprehensive knowledge on child protection and child rights.

Partners

- Ministry of Social Development and Human Security
- Prime Minister's Office
- National Economic and Social Development Council
- Office of the Civil Service Commission
- Office of the Public Sector Development Commission
- Ministry of Interior
- Ministry of Public Health
- Ministry of Education
- Department of Children and Youth
- Justice sectors
- Civil society
- Sub-district administration organizations and health services
- Faith-based organizations
- Private sector
- Immigration Bureau
- IOM

4 The Department of Children and Youth and UNICEF. *Review of Alternative Care in Thailand: Policy to Implementation with Special Focus on Children Affected by HIV/AIDS*, 2015.

5 The Child Protection Act was reviewed in 2014, but the new draft Act did not pass Cabinet review in 2019, signalling a lack of prioritization, and the conceptualization and editing process was interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

6 The ratio of professional social workers per 100,000 population is 4.36.

7 Case management is a way of organizing and carrying out child protection response to ensure that the individual needs of a child and their family are met in an appropriate, systematic and timely manner. Core principles of effective case management include: (i) the child protection response is individualized and tailored; (ii) in accordance with established procedures; (iii) coordinated through an interlinked system of referrals; and (iv) managed by a responsible case worker.

Priority Areas

1

Building a system that protects children

With the goal of ending violence against children, UNICEF will seek to further elevate child protection in the national agenda, focusing particularly on the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children. UNICEF will advocate with the Government to include child protection in public sector reform approaches and provide technical support in the development of laws and strategies.

There is a shortage of child protection workers in Thailand, and UNICEF will support the government to plan and cost new options for an improved workforce model that can deliver quality preventive and responsive services to children and their caregivers.

UNICEF will also support the government to scale up the national data system to ensure there is better information for planning, case management and performance monitoring. Strengthening the digital data system to manage children in the justice system will also be a priority.



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What we do

- Advocate to prioritize child protection in national policy and strategies alongside a coalition of partners.
- Support law and policy makers on child protection reforms in line with recommendations from the Committee on the Rights of the Child.
- Generate evidence for advocacy and to guide public finance management to strengthen the resources for child protection systems, including a professional and adequate social service workforce for child protection.
- Advocate for clear allocations to strengthen child protection systems and the social service workforce in the national budget.
- Support the strengthening of cross-sector information, data and case management and allow information to be shared across systems.

2

Protecting children against violence

Removing violence from any situation requires a complex system that includes prevention, detection, referral and multidimensional care responses, including rehabilitation. UNICEF will work towards reinforcing these responses for children in need by building the capacity and knowledge of the people around them to prevent violence, detect risks and refer cases.

UNICEF will leverage existing data and evidence and implement prevention measures targeting at-risk families that promote positive parenting practices to keep children safe from domestic violence.

Working with the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security, the Ministry of Public Health, the Ministry of Education and the private sector, UNICEF will support the development of child protection safeguarding policies in institutions that accommodate children, including within the education system.

An online child protection model will be piloted, and UNICEF will engage with the private sector to promote the prevention of violence, digital literacy and resilience. In collaboration with district authorities, UNICEF will strengthen the skills and resources of caregivers, children and communities to prevent, detect and refer cases of violence. UNICEF will also collaborate with other United Nations entities, faith-based organizations and the private sector to implement social and behaviour change strategies to address harmful gender and social norms and practices that promote or tolerate violence.



What we do

- Strengthen the skills of children, caregivers and communities to recognize risks, prevent abuse and neglect, and protect children and develop family support services.
- Strengthen and scale up the system of detection and case referral.
- Support the Government and private sector to implement child safeguarding policies in child-oriented settings.
- Work with other UN agencies, faith-based organizations and the private sector to support the change of harmful gender and social norms such as corporal punishment.

3

Improving access to justice and family-based care

UNICEF will support efforts to improve the quality of response of child protection and juvenile justice services, especially as they relate to case management and equitable service delivery, particularly for migrant and stateless children.

An information system across all sectors will be linked to improve information management around case management while competent, well trained case management officers will serve as the backbone of the process working within a newly defined set of standards.

UNICEF will support the strengthening of response services, as well as secondary and tertiary prevention services to stop the recurrence of abuse of children. Rehabilitation and reintegration services for survivors of abuse and juvenile offenders will also be developed. UNICEF will advocate for family-based care to try and reduce the number of children who live in institutions and support the expansion of protection support to migrant children. UNICEF will also work with justice agencies and NGOs to improve child-friendly services in the justice system, and to develop alternatives to detention and increase access to both.



What we do

- Advocate and support the Government on the integration of an effective monitoring and evaluation system with a rights-based approach.
- Provide support to legal services for children including alternatives to detention and child-friendly gender-responsive justice, including within the immigration enforcement system.
- Develop family-based alternative care and help children remain outside of institutions.
- Advocate to scale up foster care programmes and support to families providing kinship care.
- Support migrant children by developing protective services that are alternatives to detention, and by developing cross-border agreements with Myanmar, Cambodia and Laos on protecting migrant children.
- Advocate for an end to statelessness and help simplify and accelerate the process of legal status review.



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Santiphong Moonfong coordinates one of the Mobile Civil Registration Units run in schools by UNICEF, the European Union and partners to help stateless children apply for legal status. “Coordinating among teachers, district officers and civil society organizations has accelerated this process for the benefit of children. They will get better protection and better access to their fundamental rights.”



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