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for every child



UNICEF Thailand

Education

2022-2026



95% of children of primary-school age attend primary school, however this drops to **69%** in upper secondary school.¹



Approximately **48,000** children (1%) of primary school age are out of school, the rate increases to **87,000** (3%) among lower secondary school age and **479,000** (18%) at the upper secondary school age.²



3 out of **10** children between the ages of 7 and 14 are still unable to demonstrate foundational reading skills.²



200,000 migrant children remain out of school in Thailand.²

EDUCATION

The programme

UNICEF's Education programme envisions that all girls and boys exercise their rights and benefit from a quality basic education system that equips them with 21st century skills and enables them to live and thrive in an ever-changing world.

Programme activities focus on understanding and addressing deprivations that continue to hold some children back from accessing learning opportunities, improving teaching and learning, and investing in school leadership and networks to create safe and inclusive learning environments. The programme will also address policy gaps on emerging issues like climate change and improving the use of education resources through financing that aims to achieve learning progress for all children.

The programme is informed by discussions with education policymakers and implementing partners and is based on an analysis of the country development context and ambitions. It is supported by available research, assessments and evaluations both in Thailand and globally.

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

² Equitable Education Fund. *Report on the situation of inequality in education after COVID-19, 2020* accessed at <https://www.eef.or.th/infographic-10-10-20/>



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Background

Thailand's progressive and generous education policy provides 15 years of free education for all children, and around 95 per cent of primary-school age children in the country attend school. Unfortunately, disparities in access are more pronounced at the secondary school level. About 14 per cent of secondary-school age children are not in school and the largest proportion are from disadvantaged communities.

Quality of education is a major challenge across the country with 30 per cent of students between the ages of 7 and 14 failing to demonstrate foundational reading skills which are essential for any meaningful progress in education. Programme for International Student Assessment trends for Thailand also highlight an increasingly negative trajectory in reading performance, and stagnating scores in math and science at the lower secondary level. The study and promotion of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) and the gendered nature of subject choices are also areas of concern. Despite performing better than boys in both science and maths, girls are less confident about their mathematics ability and are underrepresented in STEM-related degree programmes.

The unequal distribution of wealth and opportunity greatly affects both education access and learning among school-going children in Thailand. A student from a poor family in a rural area attending a poorly resourced school is less likely to perform well. The language gap between the home environment of students and language used in the classroom is another key source of inequality.

COVID-19 has greatly impacted education access, with school closures and the need for children to learn online impacting students with limited internet access. The pandemic's impact on household incomes has also posed severe consequences for children's educational trajectory, with an additional 300,000 children now living in poverty³ and an estimated 238,707 students dropping out in 2021.

There is a disconnect between what schools are teaching and the needs of a rapidly changing economy, leading to a skills mismatch. While more students are graduating from tertiary institutions, college graduates are no longer concentrated in high-skill jobs and a larger share of secondary educated workers are in low-skill jobs rather than middle-skill jobs.⁴

³ Equitable Education Fund. *Report on the situation of inequality in education after COVID-19, 2020* accessed at <https://www.eef.or.th/infographic-10-10-20/>

⁴ Puey Ungphakorn Institute for Economic Research. *Labour income Inequality in Thailand: The Roles of Education, Occupation and Employment History*, December 2019.

There is a growing perception that the current school curriculum is becoming irrelevant for children. In the 2021 student protests, education reform to improve the relevance of what is taught and how it is taught was at the centre of the political debate.

How children experience their school can greatly affect their learning, confidence and desire to remain in school. Recent evidence has highlighted that many schools are not safe spaces to learn – indicating increases in cases of bullying, corporal punishment and sexual violence,⁵ with violence at school ultimately leading to lower academic achievement. Violence is also increasingly moving online with children facing risks of bullying and sexual exploitation.⁶

Teachers have not been given the tools to sufficiently reflect acceptable norms and beliefs about violence or solutions for alternative discipline strategies in the classroom, and there is limited dialogue between teachers and students to develop peer support tools or student leadership. School leadership and culture in Thailand is not currently geared to address challenges

relating to inclusion, child participation, safety and the emotional well-being of learners.

Student absenteeism is another concern in Thailand, and the low engagement of parents with teachers and school governance is a challenge in addressing this problem.

Inequity in access to education is primarily experienced by migrant children, those with disabilities, as well as those from poor and disadvantaged backgrounds, especially at the secondary level. More than 164,000 migrant children are enrolled in school within Thailand; but there are still an estimated 200,000 migrant children remaining out of school,⁷ while upper-secondary school-age children, especially boys, make up nearly 85 per cent of the national out-of-school population.

Students who drop out of school are more likely to join the ranks of those who are not in education, employment and training, lacking transferrable skills and the ability to adapt to changes in labour market demands.⁸

Partners

- Ministry of Education
- Office of the Basic Education Commission
- Office of Vocational Education Commission
- Ministry of Labour
- Civil society organizations
- School principal networks
- School collaboration networks
- International organizations and non-governmental organizations
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
- UN agencies
- ILO
- Industry partners
- Private sector
- Academia
- Think tanks

⁵ Thitiratsakul, T. 'Teachers need to learn child rights', Bangkok Post, 9 December 2020.

⁶ ECPAT, INTERPOL and UNICEF. *Disrupting Harm in Thailand: Evidence on online child sexual exploitation and abuse*, Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children, 2022.

⁷ United Nations Thematic Working Group on Migration in Thailand, *Thailand Migration Report 2019*, 2019 accessed at <https://thailand.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-06/Thailand-Migration-Report-2019.pdf>

⁸ Thailand Development Research Institute. *Youth Employability Scoping Study*, May 2020.

Priority Areas

1

Improving children's learning

Low learning outcomes in Thailand indicate that many learners are not being adequately equipped with the foundational, digital and transferable skills they need to successfully transition to work or higher education. UNICEF will work with the Government and other partners to equip learners of all ages and capacities to develop these essential skills to enable their successful participation in a changing world.

Building on the previous programme cycle, UNICEF's partnership with the OECD around the curriculum, skills development and assessment will continue. The curriculum will aim to strengthen children's competencies in self-management, critical thinking, problem-solving, collaboration and team work as well as STEM and early grade reading. It will also aim to reach learners of all levels inside the classroom.

UNICEF will work with partners to address the impact of COVID-19 on children's learning, helping students in primary grades catch up on early grade reading and numeracy. The programme will strengthen school leadership and train teachers in STEM subjects and support usage of technology as a teaching tool. UNICEF will prioritize the use of evidence for decision-making and strengthen the Government's capacity to collect and analyse disaggregated data and information to monitor progress.

UNICEF will also work towards ushering in a 'step-change' around the use of technology in teaching, learning and assessment at all levels of the education and training system. An education system that embraces current online technologies can only be achieved through reliable and fast internet. UNICEF will therefore advocate for investment in high-speed broadband internet for schools.



What we do

- Support the development and national roll-out of a basic education curriculum and assessment framework that is inclusive and considers the needs of all children including those with disabilities.
- Strengthen teacher training and mentoring for improved STEM and digital competencies within all schools, including supporting distance learning that blends digital technology and traditional face-to-face teaching.
- Improve reading skills of children through innovative approaches such as the "Every Child Can Read" initiative, provision of mobile libraries in remote areas, and building capacity for data collection to monitor learning. Monitoring is also part of a broader acceleration strategy for foundational learning and education recovery.
- Support the Government to provide secondary school students with guidance and opportunities to increase their employability and experience that will prepare them for the workforce and higher education.



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Schoolchildren enter the UNICEF Mobile Library to select their favourite books to borrow to take home and read. Supported by Tops, the Mobile Library reaches migrant and ethnic minority children living in remote areas and equips them with the reading skills they need to reach their full potential.

2

Ensuring equitable, safe and inclusive learning environments for all children

A safe and inclusive learning environment is one that embraces all students and welcomes and supports them to learn, whoever they are and whatever their abilities or requirements. This means making sure that the 'whole school' – teaching, curriculum, school buildings, classrooms, play areas, transport and toilets – is appropriate for all children at all levels. UNICEF will support schools to promote safe and inclusive learning environments and equity in basic education, targeting the poorest and most disadvantaged children. This will include additional and targeted support for children with disabilities, migrant children and those who are at risk of dropping out in secondary school.

UNICEF will generate research on how schools address violence, discrimination and well-being to inform a school safety and student well-being framework that will feed into online trainings and communication materials for students and teachers. UNICEF will also continue working with the Ministry of Education (MoE) to strengthen the reporting and management of incidents of violence.

Innovative and customised education models for disadvantaged children to remain in school will be scaled up. In collaboration with the MoE and the Equitable Education Fund, UNICEF will generate research to understand who these children are and why they are dropping out. This will inform a pilot of interventions in select schools that will help them remain in school.



What we do

- Generate research on why vulnerable children are dropping out at the secondary level and work with selected provinces to implement early warning interventions that will help them stay in school.
- Advocate to decision-makers in the Government and school principal networks on safe, healthy, gender-responsive and inclusive learning environments free of violence and discrimination.
- Develop a "school safety and student well-being" framework with supporting communication materials on gender, inclusion and school safety as well as tools and guidance around codes of conduct, self-evaluation and standards.
- Develop manuals and online trainings for children, schools and parents that give them the knowledge to create safe and inclusive school environments by detecting and addressing violence (including online), strengthening school leadership and bringing communities together to support schools and the well-being of its students.
- Address stigma and discrimination within the education system and learn about the barriers children with disabilities face when accessing education. Use research to work with teachers to help reach these children and maximise the potential of assistive technology to support children in class and make learning more accessible.
- Strengthen the foundational reading skills of migrant and non-Thai speaking children from minority backgrounds through additional support from teachers and tailored resources to help them remain in school.

3

Strengthening policies, data and budgets to leave no child behind

UNICEF will include initiatives to address knowledge and research, data and policy gaps, which can help to strengthen a comprehensive education system that reaches all children for generations to come. UNICEF will work with the Government to collect and analyse data that examines the barriers to education for Thailand's most vulnerable children and adolescents. This will inform an improved policy framework that addresses current learning needs, bridges educational inequalities and promotes inclusion.

UNICEF will work with Government agencies at the provincial and local levels responsible for the planning, budgeting, monitoring and quality assurance of education services to ensure that the delivery of quality education is equitable and consistent throughout the country. It will focus on ensuring that education budgets are allocated more equitably and advocate to ensure resources reach the most disadvantaged and marginalised.

Building on the previous programme cycle, UNICEF will expand existing partnerships with the Equitable Education Fund and UNESCO on the "All for Education" campaign. This will serve as an advocacy springboard for advancing equity and learning with a focus on equitable financing, addressing the digital divide and recovering learning loss due to COVID-19.



What we do

- Work with the Government to improve policy that supports learners and creates a resilient education system for the future that considers emerging issues such as COVID-19, changing technology and climate change adaptation. This will involve convening key education partners to commission relevant research that addresses gaps in the sector that will inform policy and planning to improve equity, learning and resilience.
- Support knowledge and innovation exchange platforms to share good practices and evidence-based solutions at national, regional and global levels among education practitioners and policy makers to feed into policy dialogue, planning and implementation.
- Support the streamlining of routine collection and sharing of national administrative education data such as the school census, public exams, school inspections and teacher payroll to inform strategy and decision-making.
- Support the Government to improve the use of resources in the education sector by conducting public expenditure reviews and developing an investment case for expanding free and compulsory education and budgeting models that address issues around equity.



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