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UNICEF Thailand

2021 Annual Report





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Update on the context and situation of children

In 2021, the Royal Government of Thailand announced its 13th five-year National Economic and Social Development Plan (NESDP) 2023-2027 with five ambitious goals: adapting to an innovation-based economy, developing human capital, creating a society of opportunity and fairness, creating sustainability through green economy, and greater regional connectivity and infrastructure (approval expected in March 2022). The plan has been widely consulted, including with young people, and is built on the achievements and lessons learned from its predecessor and contains provisions to address the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 in the country.

Thailand was heavily affected by the global pandemic, experiencing multiple waves of COVID-19 outbreaks in 2021, with subsequent containment measures and major social and economic challenges with impact on children and their families. A rapid phone survey on the impact of COVID-19 on households conducted by the World Bank (April – June) showed that 50 per cent of respondents were affected by job losses and over 70 per cent experienced a decline in their income (80 per cent in households in rural areas, the southern region, and low-income groups).

Over 12 million learners and 680,000 teachers were affected by school closures (3-week full closure and 36-week partial closure) between September 2020 and October 2021 (UNESCO-UIS data). A rapid phone survey conducted by the World Bank (April – June 2021) showed that 90 per cent of households had school-aged children who attended school the previous semester, with half of them attending in hybrid mode and a quarter attending in-person. These numbers were lower in rural and lower-income households, and those in the South. More than half of the households reported that children have encountered learning difficulties during these times due to inability to focus without adult supervision and lack of access to learning devices.

An online survey led by the Department of Mental Health with 183,974 adolescents during the first 18 months of the pandemic showed that 28 per cent of respondents experience high levels of stress, 32 per cent are at risk of depression, and 22 per cent are at risk of committing suicide. The financial hardships imposed by prolonged containment measures, coupled with mental stress, led to a 265 per cent increase in the number of calls to the helpline run by Childline Thailand Foundation who provides direct assistance to children in need.

Despite challenges, the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) report of the 17 most disadvantaged provinces, conducted prior to the pandemic and launched in March 2021, showed significant progress on children's wellbeing: fewer adolescent birth rates, fewer children (1-15 years of age) experiencing violent discipline, an increase in iodized salt consumption (90 per cent compared to 85 per cent national average), and more children living with their parents compared with other regions in Thailand (15 per cent vs. 24 per cent).

On the other hand, the provincial level MICS data also revealed stark regional disparities particularly in the southern most provinces which still experience disproportionate challenges with regard to the development of children - most likely made worse by the pandemic. Stunting rates in Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat provinces (23 per cent) are almost double the national average of 13 per cent. About 16 per cent of children under 5 in those provinces are wasted (8 per cent national average). In Narathiwat, Songkhla,

Pattani and Yala provinces, only 36 to 18 per cent of children (7-8 years of age) are able to successfully complete three foundational reading tasks (52 per cent national average). Furthermore, 5 to 8 per cent lower-secondary-school age children in Narathiwat, Songkhla, Pattani and Satun provinces are out of school (compared to the 3 per cent national average). This gap further widens for upper-secondary-school age children in Pattani, Songkhla and Narathiwat provinces: 19 to 36 per cent compared to 18 per cent national average.

Demographic trends also show how Thailand is expected to become a complete aged society by 2023, with the aging population reaching 20.1 per cent of the total population. At the same time, with shrinking birth rates, the working age population is expected to decrease to 11 per cent as a share of the total population between now and 2040. Enhancing Thailand's human capital is at the core of the draft 13th NESDP which makes a strong case to invest in children and the quality of services offered to them and their families. The change of demographics also highlights the need to invest in education reform and quality inclusive education to ensure that young people acquire the necessary skills to enter and contribute to the labour market.

Student and youth led-political protests continued in 2021 and were driven, inter alia, by the economic and health impact of the pandemic. The multiple lockdown measures in 2021 affected young workers in the informal labour sector who saw a reduction of working hours, salary cuts, and eventual layoffs. Being under the age of 18, they were the last group to access vaccines, which further decreased their opportunities to get back into work. Thailand is home to 1.4 million young people aged 15-24 not in education, employment, or training.

In February, the Myanmar military seized power from the civilian government in the country leading to widespread civil unrest. The Thai Government prepared for a possible cross-border influx of migrants, and UNICEF raised the level of preparedness for a possible humanitarian situation. Thailand is home to over 200,000 stateless children without their fundamental right nationality and legal identity.



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Major contributions and drivers of results

The organisation's strategy for an upper middle-income country, such as Thailand, continues to focus on strengthening the capacities of key state institutions to deliver and scale quality social services to all

children, fulfil the rights of every child, and address persistent inequalities. This approach remained even more relevant in 2021 amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

A progressively positive enabling environment

Through concerted advocacy, policy dialogue, adolescent engagement, and technical support, in 2021, UNICEF contributed to a positive enabling environment for children in several significant fronts.

Children's priorities were reflected in the draft 13th National Economic and Social Development Plan and the National Economic and Social Development Council now independently generates child multidimensional poverty rates. The Child Support Grant was further expanded to reach over half of all children below the age of 6 (2.3 million children) and the Early Childhood Development (ECD) National

Strategic Plan (2021-2027) was approved by the Cabinet.

The Skills and Competency-based curriculum was revised and launched in October with support from the OECD and UNICEF through a highly consultative process. The draft ECD Caregiver's Curriculum for children (0-3 years) was also developed and piloted, with the Thailand Professional Qualification Institute (TPQI). The Education Equity Fund embarked on a review of the equitability of the education budget and allocation formula, laying an important milestone to address public finance gaps.

The Department of Children and Youth (DCY) shifted priorities towards a preventive approach, focused on family strengthening, following a Child Protection System Visioning Exercise and Mapping coordinated by UNICEF, which will be used in the development of National Child Protection Strategy 2023-2027. DCY also developed COVID-19 Child Protection guidelines for the prevention of family separation, and guidelines and tools for Child Protection in Emergencies for frontline service providers in 77 provinces.

UNICEF's support to law reform led to the development of a proposal to increase the Minimum Age of Criminal Responsibility from 10 to 12 years. This will be part of the draft amendments prepared for the Child Protection Act currently under review. It also helped the Sub-Committee on Law Reform develop legislative

provisions for the prevention and response to different child online protection issues, including online child sexual exploitation and abuse. Furthermore, the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security developed a new strategy for the provision of a comprehensive welfare support for adolescent mothers (for adoption in 2022), following a review of progress made under the 2016 Prevention and Response to Adolescent Pregnancy Act.

Under the umbrella of the UN Technical Working Group on Non-Communicable Diseases, UNICEF led the support to the Ministry of Public Health on the Marketing of unhealthy food and drink to children, with a draft legislation, expected to be adopted in 2022. It will be the first in the region.

Greater resilience to the 'new normal'

During closures of ECD centres, 650,000 children continued to benefit from home delivered-school lunches following UNICEF's successful 2020 advocacy. Building on a 2020 analysis of the minimum nutrition standard for school lunch programme, UNICEF, in collaboration with the Parliament Budget Office and the Budget Scrutinization Committee, recommended an increase in allocation for the school lunch programme. Strategic partnerships and advocacy efforts played a critical role in having the Cabinet approving the proposal by Ministry of Education to increase the budget for school lunch programme by 5 per cent in 2021.

To mitigate the impact of ECD centre disruptions, UNICEF engaged 43,716 parents and caregivers through the Early Moment Matters on Mobile (EMMM), and 10,655 children under five years of age from extremely poor households, urban slums, and migrant families with play-based learning materials (Magic Box). In addition, nearly 10,000 linguistic minority and migrant children benefitted from direct learning support during school disruptions. Almost 75,000 children interacted through creative online foundational reading activities. With the Equitable Education Fund, UNICEF prioritised education recovery and launched a pilot project to better understand and mitigate learning loss through accelerated and remedial learning in affected provinces. Advocacy for school safety and prioritisation of vaccination of teachers was instrumental



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in the re-opening of 95 per cent of schools nationwide.

For greater resilience against the impact of the COVID-19 outbreaks, UNICEF swiftly distributed 550 oxygen concentrators to the Ministry of Public Health, and critical hygiene materials among 305,767 vulnerable people (164,016 children and 141,751 adults which includes 4,608 migrants and 533 children with disabilities) in affected communities.

UNICEF also supported the provision of Psychosocial First Aid to 3,927 children and helped introduce the Child Protection and Health Case Management for 1,690 vulnerable children. Children left without parental care due to COVID-19 were supported with an interim grant for kinship care and foster families and COVID-19



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self-testing kits thanks to UNICEF’s advocacy and technical support to DCY to develop COVID-19 child protection guidelines for the prevention of family separation and guidelines and tools for Child Protection in Emergencies for frontline workers. UNICEF also worked with the Department of Juvenile Observation (DJOP) of the Ministry of Justice on the development of guidelines on the care and protection of children

in DJOP institutions in the context of COVID-19, focusing on the organisation’s contingency plan and protocol in dealing with newly infection cases and in coordinating with health services, as well as the development of COVID-19 related Risk Communication and Community Engagement materials for children and care takers in the institutions.

Leaving no one behind

With support from UNICEF, Government authorities drafted a three-year roadmap to withdraw the Thai reservation on Article 22 (refugee children) of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). An assessment of the Child Protection services for migrant children took place, including cross-border dimensions and the development of the DCY Migrant Child Protection Guidance.

Greater understanding of the bottlenecks faced by children with disabilities in accessing social protection benefits was possible. Thanks to the preliminary findings of various studies (available in the first quarter of 2021), including a review of the Disability Grant eligibility criteria (shedding light on the limitations of the existing medical approach in defining disabilities); a study to assess the feasibility of a tier-system for disability benefits; and an assessment of availability of and linkages among social services for children with disabilities.

Furthermore, with UNICEF support, the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities and the Department of Children and Youth developed and adopted communication strategies and technical upgrades for the Disability Grant, including the development of the chatbot application to address overload of complaints on online platforms and the production of communication materials to increase understanding on social services for people with disabilities and minimizing workload of staff. In 2022, these communication materials are expected to serve 2 million people with disabilities, including children with disabilities and their families.

Thanks to successful advocacy with the Royal Society, the Cabinet approved the inclusion and the importance of mother-tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE) in the National Language Policy Action Plan (2021-22).

Amplifying digitization efforts

In Udonthani Province the Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) adopted *Primero*, the case management information system, to be integrated into *Child-Shield*, an innovative surveillance and information system that employs predictive analytics to screen and track children and families at risk of violence, exploitation, abuse, and neglect to organize preventative action; and *Parenting for Lifelong Health (PLH)*, an evidence-based parenting intervention to reduce the risk of violence against children and improve child wellbeing. UNICEF and MoPH will undertake an evaluation of the *Primero* pilot to assess the feasibility and relevance of scaling it up at national level.

Through UNICEF's advocacy, THB 13 million was mobilised from the Government to finance the development of the enhanced Child Support Grant

Management Information System (CSG MIS) to improve accountabilities, work processes, and the vertical integration of the Child Support Grant. With UNICEF's support, the enhanced CSG MIS is in place and the handover of the system from the vendor and capacity building of the staff of the Department of Children and Youth will be completed in 2022.

In collaboration with UNESCO and ITU, UNICEF completed an analysis on digital infrastructural gaps in education, including an initial mapping of school connectivity, which was uploaded to the Project Connect global database. The Ministry of Education and UNICEF initiated a comparative assessment of available learning platforms and a digital content curation exercise to streamline the available education technology for users.

Generating evidence for action

Evidence generated through UNICEF technical support and partnerships provided greater understanding about the situation of children, especially the most vulnerable.

In 2021, the MICS 6 Report drew further national attention and was used in several policy discussions, namely, the joint campaign to stop HIV stigma and discrimination; the UN Common Country Assessment; the Child Protection Visioning Exercise; and in-depth analysis of education (MICS EAGLE).

To shed light on the impact of COVID-19 on the performance and outcomes of education system in Thailand, UNICEF supported the development of a Thailand Education Situation Analysis and led a research symposium on global lessons learned and an international virtual conference on role of teachers (40,000 national and 1,500 international participants).

The social protection system, benefited from a series of analyses (e.g., vulnerability mapping and diagnostic review with focus on children, active age, migrants, old age and gender). A review of the benefit adequacy of the Child Support Grant (CSG) was also conducted, in addition to a feasibility study on the expansion of CSG to pregnant women, and an assessment of targeting strategy and practice.

In partnership with the Department of Health (DoH), UNICEF supported a feasibility study of online counselling on breast feeding to develop a policy proposal for an appropriate online model planned for 2022. UNICEF also supported a study to understand the views and demands of children in rehabilitation programmes and the development of community models to support reintegration of children, which helped inform service improvement and engagement of communities.

The report, *'Ending Child Statelessness in Thailand: Developing an Accelerated Nationality Review Model Through Research and Empowerment of Stakeholders,'* is being used as evidence to advocate for the development of an effective healthcare policy for stateless children with the National Health Commission Office. The study on Cambodian migrant children and their access to services was also completed and will be used for initial discussions between the Governments of Thailand and Cambodia on child protection cross-border collaboration in 2022.

As a result of proactive engagement in policy discussions around evaluation and the completion of two evaluations (e.g., First 1,000-day Programme; and Formative evaluation of the Welfare Card programme), UNICEF was appointed by the Prime

Minister as expert member to the Monitoring and Evaluation Committee of the One Trillion THB Borrowing Act (COVID-19), a loan decree for stimulus package to tackle the socio-economic impact of COVID-19

In cooperation with multiple government agencies (Ministry of Public Health, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Social Development and Human Security, Department of Justice Department of Juvenile Observation) and civil society UNICEF also embarked on a research initiative to define how mental health and psycho-social support services (MHPSS) can most effectively be delivered for children and adolescents in the country. Recommendations will help to define what is required across key sectors (social welfare, health, education) to ensure MHPSS

for children and adolescents, and how this model can be implemented in the country, as mental health was identified as a key priority area of the new UNICEF Country Programme 2022- 2026.

UNICEF as the UN agency mandated to protect the rights of every child, including children's right to grow up in a safe environment, initiated a research on the impacts of climate change and environmental degradation on children in Thailand, as part of its contribution to national climate and environmental efforts, with a focus on children's unique vulnerabilities, needs and perspectives in Thailand. Findings will pave the way for greater advocacy and programmes targeting the impact of climate change on children.

Scaling up efforts

UNICEF delivered a technical programme for 36 local government officials in developing real case budget proposals for Early Childhood Development services. Around 70 per cent of the drafted budget proposals are going to be part of the local budget plan for the upcoming fiscal year. To ensure sustainability, national ownership, and scale-up of the initiative, the Local Government Human Resource Training Institute will adopt the curriculum on budget proposal writing and results-based planning and budgeting.

Coverage of child protection systems at sub-national level increased 142 per cent (from 850 to 2,059 sub-districts) with better defined child protection roles for the Local Administration Organisation of the Ministry of Interior.

Over 75,000 school children (51 per cent girls) nationwide engaged in the "Every Child Can Read" initiative through reading corners in pre-primary classrooms, mobile libraries in remote areas, and online campaign to foster the love of reading in 2021. Based on the MICS-EAGLE analysis and reading campaign review, UNICEF advocated and engaged partners to prioritize foundational literacy and numeracy, especially for disadvantaged children. The 10 mobile libraries completed their digital upgrade and are connected and equipped with laptops and pre-loaded tablets ready to reach children with digital literacy in remote areas.



The 'Every Day is Mind Day' campaign to promote youth mental health reached adolescents, parents, teachers and caregivers, over 21 million times through social media content which included useful resources, Facebook Live events and infographics; 1,304,423 users gained access to sexual and reproductive health and mental health information through the LoveCareStation; and 10,232 youth received online counselling. 1,541 vulnerable youth gained skills to become lifelong learners, secure productive work, make informed decisions about their health and positively engage in their communities. 163,074 young people engaged to support UNICEF advocacy priorities through digital approaches. Online and offline opportunities to increase awareness of the right to participation, engage in principles of digital citizenship, and acquire skills to participate in decisions concerning their lives reached over 75,516 young people.

Programme effectiveness

With an annual programme budget of US\$11.3 million, UNICEF Thailand managed a total of 49 strategic partnerships with 10 government departments and 27 civil society groups including partnering with 25 civil society organisations (CSOs) to implement humanitarian activities. To ensure a sustained

improvement in Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse, and reduction of risks in programme implementation 27 partners were trained and assessed. The office also drafted a new country programme document (CPD) for 2022-2026 for approval during the February 2022 Executive Board session.

Greater strategic positioning and brand trust

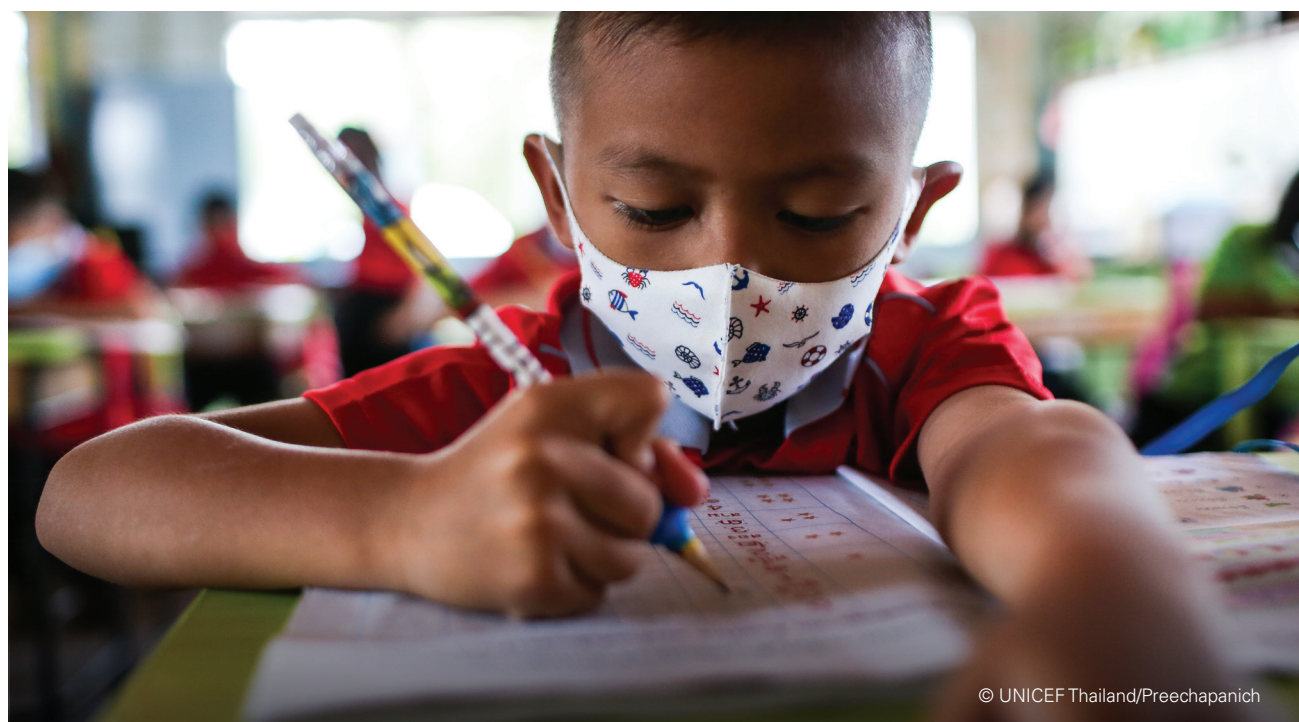
UNICEF led two nation-wide public advocacy campaigns on sensitive topics leading to great awareness and triggering significant policy discussions: youth mental

health (21 million reach) and ending childhood statelessness (12 million reach/7 million engagement).

Enhanced emergency preparedness

In cooperation with UNHCR, UNICEF monitored the situation of displaced population crossing the border from Myanmar in the provinces of Mae Hong Son, Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Kanchanaburi, Ranong, Chumporn and Prachuabkirikhan. Coordinating efforts with the Protection/WASH/Education/Nutrition Working Groups, UNICEF supported the capacity building of

partners; the establishment of referral pathways; as well as the development of key advocacy messages and response guidelines for temporary safety areas. In the district of Mae Sot in Tak province, UNICEF supported the distribution of hygiene supplies for 1,673 children, 3,057 adults and books/toys for 149 children.



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Partnerships and UN collaboration

The Department of Local Administrative (DLA) emerged as a strategic partner for children's agenda in the country given their full ownership on the budgeting and planning capacity building. Working with them, along with civil society partner (Raks Thai) and academia (SDID, Thammasat University) was instrumental for the trialling of "greater investment for ECD." UNICEF also worked with the Local Government Human Resource Training Institute to adopt the programme. Collaboration with DLA on the Magic Boxes also led to their recognition of the importance of parental engagement in ECD centres.

The TPQI was another important ally in 2021. The partnership with TPQI, the Kasetsart University and Foundation for Slum Child Care (FSCC) on the

caregiver's curriculum for children (0-3 years) provided an opportunity to build both ownership and credibility before presenting it to the ECD National Policy Committee. Under the leadership of TPQI, UNICEF started to support the development of the E-Workforce Ecosystem Platform, Thailand's first lifelong learning platform. A partnership with the Ministry of Labour (MoL) was established to generate evidence on youth who are Not in Education, Employment, or Training (NEET) and the drivers of exclusion. UNICEF also collaborated with TPQI to strengthen the capacities of youth organisations working in non-formal and informal education, leading to national occupational standards for youth work which will be developed in 2022.

A Technical Advisory Group composed of several ministries (Public Health, Social Development, Education, Justice), civil society organisations, WHO, UNESCO and youth was established to develop a study on systems strengthening for mental health and support and to advocate for the development of integrated health and wellbeing services for young people.

In partnership with the National Council for Child and Youth Development, a landscape analysis of youth participation was undertaken. While a partnership with DLA, Child and Youth Council of Thailand, and Thai Health Promotion Foundation helped strengthen mechanisms for quality participation and representation of young people at all levels of governance and SDG localization with UNDP.

UNICEF cooperated with the MoL to support children and families locked down in construction camps during the third wave of COVID-19 and a draft public-facing report explaining how existing tax incentive measures can be applied to promote pro-child rights practice was developed.

The formative evaluation of the First 1,000-day programme was another example of successful partnership between the government (Health; Public Health), academia (Mahidol University) and UNICEF.

Partnering with Thailand Development Research Institute (TDRI) and CSG NGO Network was critical for advancing social protection goals, with TDRI regarded as an important player in policy discussions being members to some of the most important committees and advisory boards in the country.

Under the UN Joint Programme on Social Protection, a Vulnerability Mapping and a Diagnostic Review of Social Protection in Thailand was conducted with dedicated reports on children, active age, migrants, gender and older people informing policy dialogue and consultations with experts from government agencies, academia and non-government stakeholders.







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