

Thailand

Capital: Bangkok

Area: 513,100 sq km

Languages: Thai

Ethnic groups: Thai 89%, other 11%

Administrative divisions: 76 provinces

System of government: Constitutional monarchy

Currency: Baht

THAILAND IN FIGURES	
Human Development Index (2003)	0.778 ⁸⁰
Demography	
Population (2005)	64.2 million ⁸¹
Population under 15 (as % of total) (2003)	24.5% ⁸²
Economy	
GDP (2004)	US\$ 161.7 billion ⁸³
GNI (per capita) (2004)	US\$ 2,490 ⁸⁴
Unemployment (as % of total labour force) (2004)	2% ⁸⁵
Inflation rate (2004)	3.3% ⁸⁶
Population living below the national poverty line (1990-2002)	13.1% ⁸⁷
Health and education	
Life expectancy at birth (2004)	70.5 years ⁸⁸
Adult literacy rate (15 years and above) (2003)	92.6% ⁸⁹
Gross primary enrolment ratio (2004)	98.5% ⁹⁰
Survival rate to Grade 5	-
Gross secondary enrolment ratio (2004)	77.3% ⁹¹
Public expenditure on education (2000-02)	5.2% ⁹²
Public expenditure on health (2002)	3.1% ⁹³

⁸⁰ UNDP, Human Development Report 2005.

⁸¹ UNFPA, State of World Population 2005.

⁸² UNDP, Human Development Report 2005.

⁸³ World Bank, World Development Indicators database, April 2006.

⁸⁴ World Bank, World Development Indicators database, April 2006.

⁸⁵ US Department of State, Background Note Thailand.

⁸⁶ World Bank, World Development Indicators database, April 2006.

⁸⁷ UNDP, Human Development Report 2005.

⁸⁸ World Bank, World Development Indicators database, April 2006.

⁸⁹ World Bank, World Development Indicators database, April 2006.

⁹⁰ World Bank, World Development Indicators database, April 2006.

⁹¹ World Bank, World Development Indicators database, April 2006.

⁹² UNDP, Human Development Report 2005.

⁹³ UNDP, Human Development Report 2005.

Background

Thailand is located in the centre of peninsular South-East Asia. Myanmar is to the west, Lao PDR to the north and east, Cambodia to the south-east and Malaysia to the south.

The population is mostly rural, concentrated in the rice-growing areas of the central, north-eastern and northern regions. However, as Thailand continues to industrialize, its urban population – 31.6 per cent of total population, principally in the Bangkok area – is growing.

Economy and development

Thailand is undergoing a transition from an agricultural to an industrial economy. Large disparities in socio-economic welfare remain, caused by uneven distribution of wealth, environmental degradation and the effects of urbanization.

Thailand's developing free-enterprise economy has recovered from the Asian financial crisis triggered by speculation against the Thai baht in 1997–98. By 2002, Thailand's standard of living had returned to the level prevailing before the financial crisis.

During 2001–04, the economy grew at a moderate rate, but the rate of growth was slower than in the booming 1980s and the first half of the 1990s. A long-term shift from agriculture to manufacturing and services continues, but about 49 per cent of the workforce is still employed in agriculture, forestry and fishing, although this sector is responsible for only 10 per cent of GDP. The economy is heavily dependent on exports, such as textiles and computer components, which account for 60 per cent of GDP. Between 2002 and mid-2004, the number of poor declined by about 2 million. According to the World Bank, the poverty rate declined from 15.6 per cent to 12 per cent during this period.

Following the 1997 economic crisis, the country's political structure underwent a series of changes. In late 1997, a new Constitution came

into force which emphasizes participatory democracy and decentralization to local-level administration, rights-based development and greater transparency in the State system. Furthermore, the new constitution decrees that the State must protect children and youth from violence and unfair treatment and that all children are entitled to free basic education of not less than 12 years.

Education

The basic education system has been improved, including raising the duration of compulsory schooling from 6 to 9 years, providing free education for up to 12 years, expanding access to education, improving educational facilities and providing education in local or minority languages.

In 2004, an estimated 96 per cent of students completed grade six, and 48 per cent completed grade 12. In the same year, more than 8.8 million students were enrolled in 32,413 primary, middle and high schools; 631,000 students were enrolled in 612 vocational education institutions.

Child labour situation

The decline in poverty along with the government-promoted education continuation programme and a low birth rate have been key factors in reducing the number of children in child labour in Thailand. In 1988, 40 per cent of children aged 13 to 14 were reported to be working and not in school. By 1999, this had fallen to less than 10 per cent.

However, some underserved areas and vulnerable groups have lagged behind in sharing the benefits of economic growth, and disparities are widening within the country. The child labour problem persists. A nationwide survey by the Department of Labour Protection and Welfare found that of the approximately 300,000 children aged 15 to 17 (60 per cent male and 40 per cent female) who are legally employed in

registered establishments, 50 per cent received lower wages than the legal daily minimum wage and more than 70 per cent worked more than 40 hours a week.

In addition, Thailand continues to face challenges in combating some of the worst forms of child labour. Child labour can still be found in Thailand's large unregulated sectors, such as in small-scale factories, fishing, construction, agriculture, the service sector including domestic work, forced begging and commercial sexual exploitation. Vulnerable groups of children at risk of the worst forms of child labour have been identified, comprising children of ethnic minorities, migrant children, children in poverty, runaways, school drop-outs, children from broken homes and children without birth certificates or other official identification papers.

Significantly, there are indications that the continuous demand for child labour in informal sectors has led to an influx of children from neighbouring countries. Thailand represents by far the biggest destination country for labour migrants (both regular and irregular) in the Mekong sub-region, who are drawn by the country's social and economic progress. Some are trafficked and work in slavery like conditions. There are no official government statistics on the number of children trafficked into and out of Thailand. However, what is known of recruitment conditions and exploitation indicates that a significant number of underage migrant children are victims of trafficking. They are mostly from hill tribes in Thailand and from Cambodia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Myanmar, but cases of trafficked children from some South Asian countries have also been reported.

Various studies indicate that most child trafficking victims in Thailand originally sought migration for employment willingly and may have been misled in their home villages or at a border crossing point by unscrupulous job brokers operating to fill a demand or a perceived interest in child labour. The victims experienced a range of problems from receiving wages much lower than the national minimum wage to

sexual and physical assaults and deprivation of the basic workers' rights guaranteed by Thai law.

In addition to the demand from employers seeking to maximize profits with cheap pliant labour, child labour and the trafficking of children in and into Thailand prevails due to several enabling factors, including:

- uneven social, political and economic development between Thailand and neighbouring countries that prompts migration, both regular and irregular;
- transnational organized criminal groups;
- lack of consistent and effective migration management;
- poor labour inspection, particularly in sectors with the many migrant workers;
- corruption and failure to enforce existing laws by some individual authorities;
- lack of citizenship for the hill tribe population;
- lack of legal status among foreign migrant children and youth as a result of illegal migration.

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While, overall, Thailand has significantly improved its legal framework to combat child labour and child trafficking, it continues to be a source, transit and destination country for trafficked children, and great challenges remain. Thailand has not ratified the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (2000). Furthermore, weak law enforcement and implementation of anti-trafficking measures are still areas of concern.