

Overview of Child Labour in Thailand

Thailand has been successful in reducing child labour over the past 15 years due to positive measures on social and economic development and a reduction in population growth. However, some forms of child labour still persist. Ministry of Labour analysis suggests that there were 300,000 children aged 15-17 years legally employed in registered establishments in 2005 (60 percent male and 40 percent female). In reality, this official figure is compounded by illegal work by children under 15, and especially by non-registered or falsely registered migrant children. Thailand also continues to face challenges in combating some of the worst forms of child labour: victims of trafficking, working children under 15 years old, children used in begging, and children in domestic labour. Other sectors include child labour in some manufacturing and fishery industries, services such as karaoke bars and restaurants, and in the agricultural sector. Vulnerable groups include children of minority groups, migrant children, and children in poverty.

Summary of the synthesis report: "Assessing the Worst Forms of Child Labour in Selected Provinces of Thailand: Chiang Rai, Tak, Udon Thani, Samut Sakhon, Songkla and Pattani" 2006

Comprehensive research on child labour was conducted in six selected provinces of Thailand, from October 2005 to June 2006. The main objective was to assess the situation of children in worst forms of child labour (WFCL) and to investigate the characteristics of children in WFCL. The following table shows the specific provinces included in the study, sectors covered and the sample size.

Province	Selected sectors	Sample size
<i>Chiang Rai</i> (North)	Domestic labour, service/entertainment, begging	603 Thai & migrant children (Myanmar / Laotian/ethnic groups)
<i>Tak</i> (North)	Agriculture	598 Thai & migrant children (mainly Myanmar)
<i>Udon Thani</i> (North East)	Agriculture, service/entertainment	600 Thai children
<i>Samut Sakhon</i> (Central)	Fishing, food processing, domestic labour, agriculture	643 Thai & migrant children (mainly Myanmar)
<i>Songkhla & Pattani</i> (South)	Fishing, food processing	300 Thai & migrant children (mainly Myanmar)
Total		2744 children

The research revealed that although there has been significant progress in combating child labour in Thailand, the problem is still persistent. Of the more than 2200 child labourers surveyed, 35% were below the legal minimum age of 15 years. The majority of all the children (63%) worked more than 8 hours per day - in most cases during the day from 0800-1700 while a significant group (41%) had to do evening or night work or had unspecified working hours. (Not including Samut Sakhon).

A very high proportion of all the child labourers were exposed to hazardous working conditions such as: dust and smoke (40%), noise (26%), chemical substances (26%) and 'moral harms' (15%). Furthermore, many children faced various forms of abuse by employers such as: physical confinement (15%), physical punishment (8%), general harassment (20%), sexual harassment (7%), rape (1%) and verbal humiliation (15%). In general, child labourers were paid less than adults even if they carried out the same tasks. Half of the child labourers surveyed were paid less than 2000 Baht per month. This is roughly half of the daily legal minimum wage in Thailand.

Based on criteria such as: age, working hours, hazardous working environment and various forms of abuse and exploitation, as many as 44% of the child labourers could be categorised as being in WFCL. The highest percentage of children in the WFCL was found in the following sectors; begging (100% of children in this sector), domestic labourers (72%), service sector e.g. karaoke bars etc. (49%) and agriculture (40%).

Vulnerability to WFCL is closely related to gender, nationality/ethnicity and migrant status. The majority of children in WFCL were non-Thai or migrant children from neighbouring countries, mainly Myanmar (67%). Only 16% of the Thai children interviewed were found in this category. Furthermore, only 34% of the children in WFCL were in possession of identity documents as compared to 69% of the children in non-WFCL. In terms of gender, 46% of all girls surveyed, and 40% of all boys, were in WFCL.

Lack of education is another important vulnerability factor. Children in WFCL had lower level of education than other child labourers (non WFCL). Out of the total number of children with no education, 72% or 426 children were engaged in WFCL.