

# Thailand

For nearly 70 years, The Asia Foundation has been a partner in Thailand's development. Today, our programs are helping to strengthen Thailand's leadership in ASEAN, address critical challenges such as education reform and middle-income trap, promote digital technology, and protect the rights of women and vulnerable groups.



## THAILAND ASEAN CHAIRMANSHIP

The Foundation is supporting Thailand's continuing ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) leadership following their chair year in 2019 through research, technical assistance, facilitating regional dialogues, and policy forums. Our 2018 report ASEAN as the Architect for Regional Development Cooperation provides recommendations on how to maintain ASEAN centrality through an expanded ASEAN role on development issues. In partnership with the Rockefeller Foundation, the Foundation is supporting the ASEAN Centre for Sustainable Development Studies and Dialogue (ACSDSD) to strengthen ASEAN's role in development cooperation and pursue commitments from their Chairmanship. We also collaborate with Australia to support ASEAN efforts to address human trafficking, maritime security, cyber security, and women peace and security.

## MIDDLE INCOME CHALLENGES

Thailand is facing numerous challenges associated with middle-income trap, including declining economic competitiveness, inadequate skilled workforce, and economic reform challenges. In partnership with Australia, The Foundation is helping Thailand to address these challenges through support for Thai reform leaders in government. The Foundation conducts research on the key factors that

constrain Thailand's progress, including a major study in 2021. The Foundation is supporting the Office of the Trade and Competition Commission to improve competitiveness in the Thai economy through technical assistance and capacity building.

## COVID-19 RECOVERY

The Foundation is supporting initiatives that accelerate the economic recovery from Covid-19 in Thailand and across ASEAN. In cooperation with Google.org and ASEAN, we are implementing the Go Digital ASEAN project in all ten ASEAN member states. With a total of 200,000 participants (including 40,000 in Thailand) the project is equipping micro and small enterprises and underemployed youth, particularly those in rural and isolated areas, with digital skills. The Foundation also conducted surveys to understand the economic impact of the pandemic on the Thai workforce and small businesses to inform the Thai government's response. The findings were released in a series of reports entitled Enduring the Pandemic: Surveys of the Impact of Covid-19 on the Livelihoods of the Thai People. The Foundation also collaborated with the ASEAN Secretariat, Australia, and the Rockefeller Foundation to produce the ASEAN Rapid Assessment: The Impact of Covid-19 on Livelihoods across ASEAN with focus on labor, social welfare and



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The Foundation's research series Enduring the Pandemic provides data and recommendations to address the economic crisis from Covid-19.

We are helping 40,000 small and micro businesses to overcome the economic crisis through digital literacy training and mentoring.

The Asia Foundation is supporting the role of ASEAN in development cooperation, in partnership with ACSDSD since its establishment during 2019 Thailand's ASEAN Chairmanship.

education sectors as an input for the ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework and Implementation Plan as well as post-2020 ASEAN sectoral work plans.

## EDUCATION REFORM

The Thai educational system in recent years has consistently underperformed in international testing despite being an early leader in reaching universal primary school access in Asia. In partnership with Thai Ministry of Education, Bangkok Metropolitan Administration and Australia, the Foundation is supporting key reformers in government, and in-depth research on the obstacles to successful reform initiatives. As part of this initiative, the Foundation released a report entitled *The Challenges in Delivering Quality Education in Thailand: Rules, Resources, and Leadership*. The Foundation is also supporting online learning through the ThailandLearning.org web portal. Created during the first Covid-19 lockdowns, this portal helps Thai students to access Thai and English language learning materials and applications on the internet.

## INEQUALITY AND REGIONAL DISPARITIES

Inequality and regional disparities are major challenges in Thailand. The Northeast region, home to one-third of the population, is falling further behind the rest of the country. The Foundation released a study on this region entitled *Thailand's Inequality: Myths and Reality of Isan*. The Foundation programs in education, digital technology, and economic development help to narrow the gap in the country.

## MEKONG REGIONAL COOPERATION

The Foundation is currently supporting the Thai and Australian Government to conduct a series of Mekong-Australia Policy Dialogues. These dialogues bring together all five lower Mekong governments with international experts, to discuss development cooperation challenges in the region, including energy, infrastructure, and overlapping regional architecture. The Foundation is also implementing Mekong Safeguards, a project jointly funded by USAID and Australia, that supports policy makers, government regulators, major financiers, developers, and contractors with information and tools to foster consistent application of environmental,

social, and governance standards for energy and transportation infrastructure projects.

## THAI-U.S. RELATIONS

The Foundation works with the Thai Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and leaders from both countries, to strengthen bilateral relations between the U.S. and Thailand. In cooperation with the MFA, the Foundation organizes the annual Surin Pitsuwan Congressional Fellowship that allows Thai diplomats to spend a year in Washington to gain exposure to the U.S. Congress. We organized a bilateral dialogue (track 1.5) between leaders from both countries, held in Washington. As an output from this dialogue, the Foundation released the report *The Future of Thai-U.S. Relations*, which includes outcomes, and findings from a year-long research program. The Foundation also organizes roundtables and forums in Bangkok to deepen bilateral relations.

## GENDER AND VULNERABLE GROUPS

The Foundation is helping to reduce discrimination and stigma against women and girls and the LGBT community. In cooperation with the U.S. Department of State, the Foundation supported Thai civil society partners to increase awareness and application of Thailand's landmark Gender Equality Act by vulnerable groups. The Foundation also supports STEM education for girls in outlying regions of Thailand. We are also promoting gender-sensitive approaches in infrastructure development through USAID Mekong Safeguards.

## PEACEBUILDING AND TOLERANCE

The Asia Foundation supports policy research and dialogue to improve the prospects for peace in the southernmost provinces. The Foundation's aim is to provide opportunities for Thai officials in government and the military to have open dialogue with leaders from the Muslim community in the conflict-affected southern provinces. The Foundation provides advice and support for government and southern leaders to promote tolerance and understanding, to advance the peace process. During the Covid-19 lockdowns the Foundation also supported leaders in the Deep South to encourage the local population to abide by the government's social distancing regulations, helping to address the outbreak in the region.

*The Asia Foundation is a nonprofit international development organization committed to improving lives across a dynamic and developing Asia. Headquartered in San Francisco, The Asia Foundation works through a network of offices in 18 Asian countries and in Washington, DC. Working with public and private partners, the Foundation receives funding from a diverse group of bilateral and multilateral development agencies, foundations, corporations, and individuals.*



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