

THAILAND



Human trafficking in the Kingdom of Thailand ('Thailand') continues to be a complex issue, with victims from diverse demographics being exploited both domestically and abroad, across various sectors. These demographics include both children and adults, Thai nationals and foreign victims (primarily from neighbouring nations),¹ trafficked domestically and around the region. Victims are often trafficked for forced labour and sexual exploitation, as well as for more newly emerging forms of trafficking, including forced marriage, online exploitation and forced scamming.

A21 Thailand ('A21') works nationally to counter human trafficking through public awareness, prevention and education efforts; intervention efforts in collaboration with law enforcement; and direct aftercare services and legal assistance to survivors. Given the nature of human trafficking in the region, A21 also provides child-centred resources specifically tailored to the unique characteristics and challenges children encounter, including through A21's Child Advocacy Centre (CAC), which employs a victim-centred approach with minor survivors. A21 continues to collaborate with government ministries, law enforcement and nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) on prevention and awareness initiatives, professional training, legal assistance, and aftercare and survivor services.

In 2022, the Thai Government continued strengthening partnerships with NGOs, increasing investigations, planning and implementing the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) with a new reflection period extension, and creating new Standard Operating Procedures for victim identification of labour trafficking.² As a result of the Thai Government's significant progress with its counter-trafficking efforts, Thailand was upgraded from Tier 2 watch list to Tier 2 on the United States, Department of State Trafficking in Persons (TIP) 2022 Report.³

The TIP report indicates that over the past five years, the demographic profile of victims of trafficking in Thailand has been diverse

in nationalities, age, gender and citizenship status.⁴ A21 has observed similar trends with male and female victims originating from Myanmar, Cambodia and within Thailand, ranging from 14 to 35 years of age. Victims often experience exploitation in the forms of debt-based coercion, false job opportunities, retention of identification documents or travel documents, reduced wage, physical violence, denied freedom of movement, and overtime work hours without compensation.

NATIONAL, REGIONAL, AND GLOBAL EVENTS - 2022 TRENDS

Thailand's upper middle income status⁵ and geographic location to neighbouring lower middle income nations make Thailand a prime destination, source and transit country for human trafficking. The desire for better working conditions and income, combined with increased urbanisation that demands cheap labour, makes forced labour the predominant form of trafficking in Thailand, in industries such as commercial fishing, agriculture, manufacturing, domestic work, and street begging.⁶ Moreover, throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, A21 observed an increase in labour trafficking victims recruited through online methods. Additionally, gender inequality and cultural values are identified as factors contributing to sex trafficking in Thailand, particularly relating to minors, and the expectations for girls to provide support to their parents and families.⁷

A21'S RESPONSE

With the lifting of COVID-19 restrictions, A21 operations in areas of prevention, intervention and restoration also increased in Thailand. A21 hosted its annual Walk For Freedom (WFF) in Bangkok and Pattaya while continuing the Tuk-Tuk Awareness Campaign. Legal assistance and professional training were conducted in person. A21 began providing in-person aftercare services, along with the continuation of remote support. Government agencies and NGOs working against human trafficking expressed interest in collaborating with A21 in prevention efforts. In 2022, A21, amongst other government agencies and NGOs, signed an MOU with the Office of Permanent Secretary for the Ministry of Tourism and Sports to launch the 'Child Safe Friendly Tourism Project' to promote a safe and child-friendly environment in the tourism industry. This project aims to develop a human trafficking and exploitation training curriculum for businesses in tourism in Thailand. Furthermore, A21 formed new working relationships with significant actors in the anti-human trafficking sphere, such

as the Ministry of Labour, other anti-trafficking NGOs, IOM, and Children and Women Protection Centres.

PREVENTION & AWARENESS

In partnership with the Thai Government, partner NGOs and law enforcement agencies, A21 continued to focus its human trafficking prevention and awareness efforts with vulnerable groups, including children (both in and out of school), and disadvantaged and rural communities. New initiatives and existing efforts were implemented by A21, while responding to the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and its challenges. These efforts include continued awareness campaigns like the Can You See Me? (CYSM) campaign, the Tuk-Tuk campaign, WFF and promotion of A21's digital safety resources in collaboration with government agencies.

The impact of A21's prevention and awareness efforts in 2022 was very positive, reaching 11,842 children and 28,031 adults. Additionally, 11,765 awareness and 699 prevention materials were distributed to communities. A21's CYSM campaign continues to be used as a public awareness campaign in Thailand to address sex trafficking, labour trafficking, and exploitation of children while promoting the Thai 1300 social assistance hotline number. CYSM brochures were distributed to schools, communities, government shelters, churches, businesses and universities. A21 facilitated educational sessions with 214 partners, including teachers, NGO staff and government officials from the Thailand Ministry of Social Development and Human Security (MSDHS). Feedback during these sessions, including by community members, evinced an increased understanding and ability to identify trafficking and exploitation. Community leaders also reported feeling more equipped to recognise human trafficking in their own communities.

PILOTING A NEW SERIOUS DIGITAL GAME - THE EVAC COMPUTER GAME

As online recruitment and exploitation of children continued to grow, A21 responded with an innovative approach to raising awareness amongst children through the creation of a computer game. A21, in partnership with The University of Kent, ECPAT International, PlayerThree Games and the University of Stirling, developed a Digital Game as part of the End Violence Against Children (EVAC) grant project. The EVAC Computer Game titled 'May and Bay: A serious game for a serious issue: combatting online child sexual exploitation and trafficking via a digital game' is designed for children aged 8-14, using age-appropriate tools to educate children about online safety, and is contextualised specifically for Cambodia and Thailand. In 2022, A21 piloted the game at four schools and two student camps, reaching more than 1,200 children. A21 also provided specialised facilitator training for the EVAC game for more than 180 facilitators.

A21 also collaborated with the Department of Special Investigation (DSI) to promote the EVAC computer game at the 'SX Sustainability Expo 2022', ASEAN's largest sustainability expo, hosted in

Bangkok at Queen Sirikit National Convention Centre. A21 presented at one of the sessions and hosted an interactive booth. Over 200,000 individuals were present, including children and adults, representing schools, businesses, NGOs and government ministries, many of whom engaged with A21's booth to learn more about the EVAC game and A21's work.



TUK-TUK CAMPAIGN

The Tuk-Tuk campaign began in 2021, when COVID-19 restrictions prevented public gatherings, resulting in the cancellation of WFF, A21's annual global awareness event. The campaign focused on raising awareness about human trafficking and promoting the three main anti-trafficking hotlines in Thailand: 1191 Anti-Trafficking in Persons (ATPD) Division of the Royal Thai Police (RTP) Hotline, 1202 DSI and the 1300 Social Assistance Centre Hotline under MSDHS. In 2022, key anti-human trafficking partners from both government and nonprofit sectors once again joined A21's Tuk-Tuk campaign. Notable agencies include MSDHS, the Anti-Trafficking Police Division of the RTP and DSI. A total of 32 tuk-tuks operated around central Bangkok for the entire month of September, promoting trafficking awareness messages and three national anti-trafficking hotlines.





WALK FOR FREEDOM (WFF)

In 2022 with the lifting of COVID-19 restrictions, A21 hosted WFF in two locations (Bangkok and Pattaya), with more than 470 participants, and distributed over 1,200 CYSM flyers. At the Bangkok WFF event, A21 invited both the general public and key allies in the government sectors, including MSDHS, DSI, ATPD of the RTP and representatives from U.S. Homeland Security Investigations (HSI). In Pattaya, A21 received support from Pattaya's City Hall, which provided the venue, equipment and the designated walking route. The Deputy Mayor of Pattaya City, Chonburi MSDHS, Children and Women Protection Centre and the RTP of Region 2 also supported the Pattaya WFF.

PRIMARY PREVENTION PROGRAM

As part of A21's preventative response to minors being trafficked, A21 developed the Primary Prevention Program (PPP). The PPP is a three-session program designed for children ages 6-12 that can be facilitated in community and school settings. In 2022, A21 provided online facilitator training on the PPP for 232 educators and staff working with children across Thailand, including staff at five schools, two churches and two government shelters for victims of trafficking. These facilitators were able to implement the PPP in their own schools and communities, reaching 778 children. A21 also conducted facilitator training with Nongprue and Banglamung municipalities, incorporating the CYSM campaign materials, reaching 172 children.

As part of its national prevention strategy, A21 fosters long-term relationships with local schools, partnering across all age levels and utilising multiple resources. To date, A21 has an ongoing relationship with six schools that implement the PPP annually.

IDENTIFICATION & INTERVENTION

A21's victim identification and intervention efforts involve participating in victim identification operations in collaboration with local and international law enforcement, utilising the CAC model in

Pattaya to provide comprehensive support to survivors in need of assistance and training frontline professionals likely to encounter victims of trafficking through their profession.

CHILD ADVOCACY CENTRE

A21 established its CAC in Pattaya in 2017 as a one-stop service centre for potential child victims of abuse, neglect, and exploitation, offering a trauma-informed, victim-centred approach specifically tailored to children's unique characteristics and challenges. Services provided at the CAC include child forensic interviews, psychosocial support and legal services. Multidisciplinary teams of social services providers, law enforcement and NGO social workers can utilise the CAC to strategise interventions and collaborate to ensure victims and family members are fully supported throughout the entire legal process.

In 2022, six victims of trafficking were identified using A21's CAC in collaboration with government agencies and other NGOs. In these cases, A21 conducted in-person and online screenings and swiftly assisted these groups of survivors with immediate legal and aftercare support. The CAC also facilitated training workshops for professionals in various sectors, including local educators, government ministries, hospitality staff, legal professionals, and other NGOs.

PROFESSIONAL TRAINING

Throughout 2022, A21 provided nine training sessions to 488 frontline professionals working in government social services, local and international law enforcement agencies such as DSI and ATPD, local NGOs, education and the hospitality industry. These trainings included identifying potential human trafficking cases/victims, supporting roles of NGOs in child exploitation investigations, facilitating forensic interviews, incentivising a victim-centred approach in the criminal justice system, and properly reporting and responding to suspected trafficking. In addition to equipping professionals with these skills, training engagements also provide opportunities for further collaboration between stakeholders, with best practices at the forefront.

A21 facilitated a training session with 43 hotel workers, with participants reporting that the prevention materials had helped them better understand how to identify potential victims of trafficking. A21 also facilitated a training session with the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Bangkok Legal Attaché Office on the 'NGO's role in child exploitation investigations and facilitation of forensic interviews' to over 70 law enforcement personnel, prosecutors, child protection officers and NGO professionals from 12 countries across Southeast and South Asia. In addition, A21 also collaborated with HSI Bangkok Office to provide a joint frontline professional training to 25 DSI Bureau of Human Trafficking Crimes officers on child development, memory and trauma, trauma-informed and victim-centred investigations, and an introduction to forensic interviews. In this training, A21 assisted HSI to contextualise the training into the Thai legal framework and highlighted the benefit of collaboration with NGOs during the victim identification and investigation process.



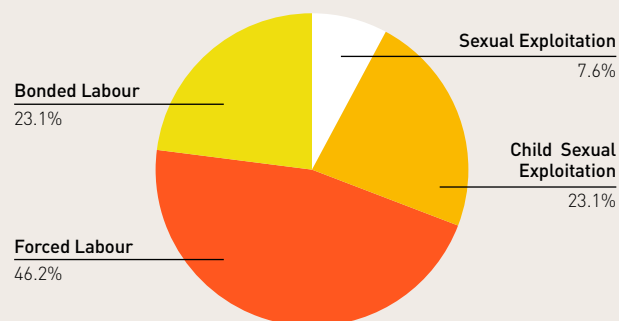
A21 both leads and assists local and international law enforcement in victim identification operations, which often leads to engagement with A21's Aftercare and Legal Assistance Programs. In 2022, A21 participated in a victim identification operation with a multidisciplinary team (MDT) consisting of law enforcement, social services and immigration, which resulted in confirmation of child labour exploitation. Utilising A21's CAC, members of the MDT convened to discuss and strategise an intervention plan that is both victim-centred and child-friendly, leading to a successful identification of a child victim. In addition, in collaboration with A21 Cambodia, A21 Thailand supported one adult and one child victim of trafficking and exploitation from Cambodia to initiate legal and judicial proceedings in Thailand against their perpetrators. In one case, A21 invited Thai and Cambodian MDT officials to meet in person and collaboratively work together, including speaking to the victim at the CAC. A21 ensured the use of a victim-centred and trauma-informed approach to ensure proper support of the potential victim throughout the entire process.

AFTERCARE

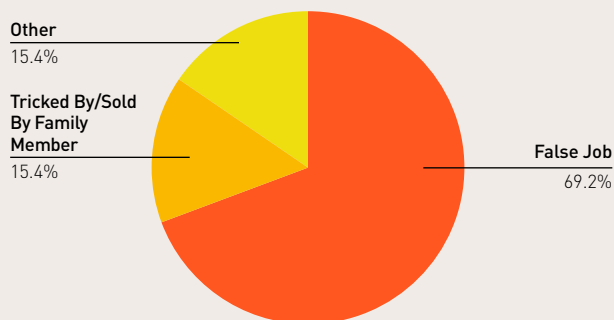
A21 provides comprehensive trauma-informed aftercare services for survivors of trafficking, according to each individual's needs, to assist them at each stage of their progression from crisis intervention to restoration and independence. In total, A21 assisted 41 survivors in its Aftercare Program in 2022, with 13 survivors entering the program, nearly doubling the number of new survivors from 2021 (seven). In previous years, A21 has primarily supported Thai female survivors of sexual exploitation aged between 18-25 and 14-17 (minors), many recruited through false job opportunities with others deceived by friends and family, as well as supporting minor survivors as young as infants from neighbouring nations trafficked for forced begging. In 2022 however, A21 observed a shift in the main demographic of survivors assisted due to the increase in labour trafficking cases attributed to the emergence of scamming crime in the region, with the majority of the survivors in A21 Thailand's Aftercare Program being men aged between 18-25 (46.2%). All the male survivors assessed shared one common factor - the lack of formal education. This demographic shift from previous years is likely a result of the increase in referrals of victims of scamming in the region, rather than a decrease in the other forms of trafficking.

Survivors in A21's Aftercare Program were primarily trafficked through forced labour (46.2%), with false job opportunities continuing as the primary recruitment method (69.2%). The forms of exploitation experienced by the remaining survivors who entered the program in 2022 included sexual exploitation (7.6%), child sexual exploitation (23.1%) and bonded labour (23.1%). Survivors in A21's Aftercare Program expressed that some of the control tactics used included debt bondage, restricted freedom of movement, and the withholding of identification documents. Many survivors also experienced some form of physical abuse and threat of physical harm as a method of control.

FORMS OF TRAFFICKING 2022



RECRUITMENT METHODS 2022



AFTERCARE SERVICES ENSURE COMPREHENSIVE SUPPORT FOR SURVIVORS' REINTEGRATION

In 2022, A21 increased its efforts to assist survivors in their successful reintegration into communities by focusing on attaining non-exploitative and sustainable employment, appropriate housing and continued psychological support. As part of its reintegration efforts, A21 utilised its Survivor Relocation Services (A21 SRS) to provide safe domestic relocation and international repatriation for survivors. As border restrictions lifted in 2022, A21 supported international repatriations for two survivors back to Cambodia and Myanmar, as well as one to Thailand from the United Kingdom. A21 provided three domestic relocations, two with the assistance of partner organisations.

In addition to A21 SRS, A21 also offers long-term accommodation support through rent assistance to allow survivors the time to establish stability while minimising the financial stress of paying for accommodation. Nine survivors received rent assistance in 2022, with five survivors successfully transitioning into independent living. Non-exploitative and sustainable employment is crucial to successful reintegration. Thirteen survivors found employment in 2022 and seven survivors completed job readiness training. Through various group and individual Life Programs, staff observed many survivors benefiting from developing practical life skills, building self-esteem and confidence, strengthening relationships with other survivors and being equipped with strategies to manage the impact of trauma. In 2022, 11 A21 Life Programs were completed by survivors. Psychological support was also provided to survivors to assist in their reintegration.

Caseworkers provide comprehensive aftercare support in the communities in which survivors are located throughout Thailand. To address the needs of survivors, A21 caseworkers provide remote services as well as travelling to meet survivors locally when available. When meeting locally, caseworkers assist in coordinating resources available in their communities. Because some locations

lack local resources, caseworkers may face challenges in delivering regular services. To navigate these challenges, online platforms such as video calls and online group meetings have assisted in providing more comprehensive remote support. In 2022, A21 facilitated the first online peer support Life Program, Freedom to Flourish, which aims to assist survivors in flourishing, connecting, and supporting each other in their restoration and journey towards independence. Through an online group, four survivors met virtually for the duration of the 10-session program to build an online community across different regions of Thailand.

ACCESS TO JUSTICE

A21 consistently serves as a bridge between law enforcement, prosecutors, social services, and survivors in providing comprehensive legal support services. In 2022, A21 assisted with 22 criminal prosecution and defence cases involving 35 survivors with its Legal Assistance Program. The majority of cases involved sex trafficking, labour trafficking or child sexual exploitation offences. Eight perpetrators were convicted, sentenced to a combined total of 27 years, and ordered to pay compensation totalling 1.2 million Thai Baht (approximately \$34,000 USD) to survivors. A21 Legal Assistance Program includes coordination with law enforcement, prosecutors and contracting attorneys to represent survivors in major legal proceedings; trial preparation; accompanying survivors and family members to testify before law enforcement and in court; pursuing civil restitution for survivors; as well as providing necessary aftercare services when required to ensure that survivors receive holistic support and full access to justice.

In 2022, A21 observed an increase in survivors prosecuted for crimes they were forced to commit while trafficked or exploited, as well as an increasing number of defamation cases against survivors for pursuing a legal case against their alleged traffickers. In response, A21 continued to tirelessly advocate for these survivors by contracting attorneys for legal representation, working actively with the survivors and their families to provide legal guidance and support, and providing robust aftercare services to all survivors while pursuing legal defences.

A21 also observed that the traffickers of survivors in our Aftercare Program were mainly Thai nationals (both men and women), with the exception of online scamming cases where traffickers' nationalities are unconfirmed but likely East Asian or South East Asian (not Thai). In A21's observation, many of the traffickers involved across all cases in Thailand had not completed higher education or formal schooling. Some traffickers had families to support. Typically, traffickers operated in groups with divided responsibilities, such as recruiters, handlers, establishment managers, distributors and security guards. These traffickers also used online platforms for recruitment. Social media remains the primary platform for advertising false job opportunities with high salaries, in which Facebook was the most frequently cited channel for recruitment.



APINYA'S JOURNEY: FROM CRISIS TO INDEPENDENCE

Apinya* grew up in central Thailand with her family. Like many other young teenagers, Apinya spent her time on social media. It was during this time that she caught the attention of an older man. After being groomed with false promises, the older man ultimately enticed Apinya to have sex with him. Unbeknownst to Apinya, the older man recorded, uploaded and distributed sexually explicit footage of her across various social media sites. Apinya's classmates discovered the online video clips, causing her considerable distress and leading her to relocate to a different school.

As Apinya relocated, the RTP received a tip regarding a social media page with child sexual abuse material (CSAM). Following this discovery, a multidisciplinary team was formed, including law enforcement task forces, social services and representatives from A21. An investigation by law enforcement resulted in successfully identifying the minors featured in the CSAM, including Apinya. As a result of this

investigation, Apinya was provided government protection and safe accommodation and later referred to A21 for ongoing legal support and aftercare services.

With the assistance of A21, Apinya received holistic aftercare support, including the provision of basic needs, education assistance, and life skills training. Additionally, Apinya was provided extensive legal support throughout the entire process, including support as she gave her testimony to law enforcement and coordination with prosecutors. Apinya steadily improved her social support, reconnecting with family and friends, and enrolled in a program to continue her education. Throughout this journey, Apinya demonstrated remarkable resilience and growth, which allowed her to testify against her perpetrator. The court ultimately convicted her perpetrator and sentenced him to 13 years imprisonment. In 2022, Apinya transitioned out of A21's Aftercare Program and received a scholarship to enrol in university.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ UNODC, *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2022*, 123 https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/glotip/2022/GLOTiP_2022_web.pdf
- ² Davy, Deanna and ECPAT International. "The Sexual Exploitation of Children in Southeast Asia." www.ecpat.org, ECPAT International, Sept. 2017, ecpat.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Regional-Overview_Southeast-Asia.pdf.
- ³ U.S Department of State (US DOS), *Trafficking in Persons Report*, 22nd Ed., 2022, 537 <https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-trafficking-in-persons-report/>.
- ⁴ Ibid.
- ⁵ "World Bank Open Data." *World Bank Open Data*, <https://data.worldbank.org/country/TH>.
- ⁶ 2022 Trafficking in Persons Report, United States Department of State Publication, July 2022, <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/20221020-2022-TIP-Report.pdf>; see also McGeough, Sara and Anti-Human Trafficking Cell of Mercyhurst University. "Human Trafficking in Thailand." *The Exodus Road*, 2 Feb. 2022, theexodusroad.com/human-trafficking-in-Thailand/.
- ⁷ Davy, Deanna and ECPAT International. "The Sexual Exploitation of Children in Southeast Asia", ECPAT International, Sept. 2017, ecpat.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Regional-Overview_Southeast-Asia.pdf.