IMPACT REPORT 2023

THAILAND

The Kingdom of Thailand ('Thailand') is a Southeast Asian nation nestled between Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos and Malaysia, comprising over 71.8 million individuals living in Thailand's 77 provinces.[1] Over the last four decades, Thailand has made strides in socioeconomic growth and leveraged status from a low-income to an upper-middle-income nation, propelling many nationals from below the poverty line to a more sustainable lifestyle.[2] Due to Thailand's economic abundance and the demand for low-skilled and experienced workers, historically, many foreign workers from neighbouring and distant countries have sought employment within Thailand through official and unofficial channels.[3]



Thailand's geographic location plays a crucial role in international migration, as well as being a complex nexus in the movement of refugees, internally displaced persons, victims of human trafficking, and migrant workers.[4] In 2023, Thailand continued its recovery from the direct and indirect effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the economy and businesses, observing a 2.2% GDP growth in the first half of 2023, bolstered by increased private consumption and international tourism.[5] After re-opening its borders in July 2022, Thailand observed a continually growing number of foreign visitors and Thai nationals travelling abroad for leisure or economic opportunities.[6]

In 2023, the Thai Government continued to observe significant human trafficking crimes across its many provinces, investigating 312 human trafficking cases[7] in 2023, a 23.3% increase from 253 cases in 2022. The majority of trafficking victims identified by law enforcement in Thailand were female (75.1%), and Thai nationals (88.5%).[8] A significant number of the identified foreign victims, (70.5%), reportedly originated from two of Thailand's border neighbours, Cambodia and Laos.[9] In contrast to the trend of human trafficking victims identified by Thai law enforcement, the A21 Foundation of Thailand (A21) assisted more foreign national survivors of trafficking in the A21 Aftercare Program (73%) than Thai survivors in 2023. A21 also assisted more adult survivors (73%) of trafficking than child survivors. Similar to Thai law enforcement, A21 worked with more females, comprising 56.7% of trafficking survivors entering its Aftercare Program in 2023.

In 2023, Thailand's Ministry of Foreign Affairs reported assisting over 60,000 Thai nationals abroad; among those assisted, over 1,000 individuals were identified as victims of human trafficking,[10] with more than half comprising Thai victims trafficked for forced criminality in scam centres, as well as working in Chinese KTV in Myanmar.[11] Consistent with these reported numbers, A21 also observed a significant increase in forced criminality cases in 2023, accounting for 61% of all new survivors assisted with A21's aftercare services in that period. With the ever-evolving shift and increasingly complex nature of human trafficking trends, A21 recognises the need to work closely with frontline agencies to learn, adapt, and respond to all emergent cases that may arise in 2024 and beyond.

A21'S RESPONSE

In 2023, Thailand maintained its Tier 2 status on the United States Department of State Trafficking in Persons Report (TIP Report), citing the Government's 'significant efforts in combatting human trafficking but still not fully meeting the minimum standards.'[12] The TIP Report further cited the Thai Government's proactive efforts in human trafficking investigations, prosecutions, and convictions, as well as the nationwide implementation of the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) and its reflection period for screening, identifying, and assisting potential victims of trafficking regardless of their age, gender, nationality and other statuses.[13] In line with the Thai Government's steadfast approach to assisting victims of trafficking in Thailand and abroad, A21 worked closely with Thai and foreign law enforcement agencies, social welfare

agencies, and other governmental counterparts in 2023. A21 often served as an active member of a multidisciplinary team (MDT) to support the Thai government in successfully identifying and assisting victims of trafficking, as well as supporting survivors and families to reintegrate into their community or repatriate to their country of origin. In addition, through the implementation and launch of A21's upgraded Child Advocacy Centre (CAC) in Pattaya in late 2023, A21 is available to assist in cases of child abuse, exploitation, and trafficking through child forensic interviews.

PREVENTION & AWARENESS

Part of A21's strategy to raise awareness and prevent human trafficking, exploitation and its potential risks is to collaborate with various stakeholders and key governmental agencies within local communities in Thailand. As part of this strategy, A21 provides extensive prevention and awareness programs nationwide, specifically targeting vulnerable and marginalised groups, as well as schools, universities, community groups and businesses. In 2023, A21 reached 203,282 individuals through prevention and awareness events, resources and campaigns. These efforts include more than 33,408 people reached through prevention resources nationwide (30,343 minors and 3,065 adults), 82,908 people reached through awareness campaigns (30,014 minors and 52,894 adults) and over 7,062 materials distributed and downloaded. Through impressions of campaigns, social media, and program distribution, A21 reached a total estimate of 627,928 individuals in Thailand.

To adequately engage with local communities, A21 translates and contextualises all prevention programs and materials for local distribution. To ensure a wider reach across the nation, A21 has also focused on organising a dedicated group of volunteers to implement prevention programs across Thailand. A21 also conducts general human trafficking awareness and supports volunteers in training local communities across Thailand as part of A21's Train the Trainer program for programs like the Primary Prevention Program (PPP), Early Childhood Prevention Program (ECPP), EVAC computer game and general awareness training. In 2023, A21 facilitated 219 events and conducted facilitator training with 1,132 professionals working with children, youth, and vulnerable groups in Thailand.

EDUCATING CHILDREN THROUGH THE PRIMARY PREVENTION PROGRAM & EVAC GAME

One of A21's core programs is the Primary Prevention Program (PPP). The PPP is an age and developmentally-appropriate prevention program designed for children aged 6-12 in community and school settings. Originally piloted in Thailand, the PPP provides critical knowledge to children about human trafficking, online exploitation, human rights, and safe migration to assist children in making informed decisions that protect themselves. Through A21's PPP Train the Trainer program, in 2023, A21 trained 1,132 professionals and engaged 2,272 children.



In 2022, A21, in partnership with the University of Kent, non-governmental organisation (NGO) ECPAT International, PlayerThree Games, and the University of Stirling, designed an interactive digital game called 'May and Bay' to create awareness of online child exploitation and trafficking as part of the End Violence Against Children (EVAC) project. The game was designed for Thai and Cambodian children aged 8–14. The game uses age-appropriate content in various modules focused on the risks of online exploitation and trafficking in Southeast Asia. The successful pilot in 2022 led to the expansion and implementation of the EVAC game in 2023. A21 partnered with the Department of Special Investigation (DSI), the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security (MSDHS), and selected NGOs and schools in Thailand to conduct the May and Bay game training for over 1,200 children.

A21 AWARDED OUTSTANDING AGENCY IN THAILAND'S NATIONAL ANTI-TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS DAY

On June 7, 2023, A21 was awarded the 'Outstanding Agency in the Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Award' by the Prime Minister's Office in honour of Thailand's National Anti-Trafficking in Persons Day, an accolade given to only select government departments and NGOs for their achievement in prevention and awareness of human trafficking in Thailand. This award was made possible through A21's close collaboration with the MSDHS and other partners, reflecting A21's achievement in continuous advocacy and outreach to thousands of people across Thailand on human trafficking and exploitation.



WALK FOR FREEDOM

In 2023, A21 and its partners jointly organised Walk for Freedom (WFF)[14] events in four cities across Thailand: Bangkok, Pattaya, Chiang Mai and Su-ngai Kolok. Over 800 people participated in the WFF events, including members of the general public, governmental agencies, law enforcement, social welfare ministries, businesses and NGOs. These four WFF events raised awareness for an estimated 28,200 people.

A21'S TUKTUK PUBLIC AWARENESS CAMPAIGN

A21 launched the TukTuk Public Awareness Campaign in response to the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions in Thailand in 2021 and 2022, which prohibited large gatherings of people in Bangkok and other cities, resulting in the cancellation of A21's annual WFF. The campaign aimed to increase public awareness of human trafficking and exploitation through the use of infographics and banners about human trafficking and promoting three government hotlines on TukTuks. In light of the campaign's popularity, A21 joined forces with the MSDHS in 2023 to host the 'KICK OFF' National Anti-Human Trafficking Day event, which included A21's TukTuk campaign. Presided by the Permanent Secretary of MSDHS, the event brought together over 20 organisations and agencies working to combat trafficking and exploitation and had an estimated reach of over 1,000 individuals in a single day.



EMPOWERING LOCAL PATTAYA STUDENTS

In 2023, A21 partnered with the Department of Trafficking in Persons Litigation, the Office of Attorney General (OAG), DSI, the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Division (ATPD) of the Royal Thai Police, MSDHS and Pattaya City Hall to facilitate human trafficking prevention training for students in Pattaya City. Facilitators invited selected student leaders from 11 schools in Pattaya to participate and learn about human trafficking and exploitation, empowering them to advocate for greater awareness of this issue amongst their peers. After the training, the student leaders created various innovative awareness-raising projects on trafficking and exploitation. They presented them to the organisational committee, which judged the projects based on creativity, innovation, and impact. A21, OAG, DSI, ATPD, MSDHS and Pattaya City Hall organised an award ceremony in December and invited students from all 11 schools to participate.

IDENTIFICATION & INTERVENTION

A21's intervention program works proactively with law enforcement, prosecutors, attorneys, social welfare officers and other frontline responders to assist potential victims in escaping their trafficking situation and providing adequate protection and care. A21 conducts this intervention through meaningful collaboration with the MDT members and working closely alongside survivors and their families throughout their legal and judicial process. In some instances, law enforcement and MSDHS or provincial Social Development and Human Security officers invited A21 to form an MDT to screen and conduct victim identification interviews of potential victims. In these situations, A21 staff often serve as interpreters and social workers. Through 11 of these victim identification operations, A21 participated in the identification of 35 victims of trafficking. Over the course of 2023, A21 conducted 17 child forensic interviews. Additionally, A21 receives referrals for services on behalf of victims of human trafficking from partner organisations and law enforcement or government entities.

CHILD ADVOCACY CENTRE AWARDED AS OUTSTANDING CHILD PARTICIPATION ORGANISATION

Since 2017, A21 has worked closely with the Thai Government and law enforcement to support victims of human trafficking and child exploitation through the Child Advocacy Centre (CAC) in Pattaya, located in Chonburi Province. The CAC consistently served as a child-friendly, victim-centred space that allows for child and adult victims to be interviewed in a safe environment and receive holistic aftercare support. The CAC also serves as a space for local and national MDT members to meet and conduct case conference meetings. In light of A21's continuous effort to support child victims of exploitation and trafficking in Chonburi, A21 received an award from the Chonburi Government as an outstanding organisation for child participation and protection. This award was made possible by A21's close partnership with the Chonburi Shelter for Family and Children, operated under the Department of Child and Youth (DCY), and strong collaboration on child exploitation cases and other initiatives in the Chonburi Province.



The CAC 'counselling room' provides a safe space for survivors to meet with their caseworker and discuss specific needs.

THE CAC EXPANSION

The CAC model increases the efficiency of victim identification and significantly reduces the risk of re-traumatisation of children by minimising repetitive interviews and examinations, through the use of recorded child forensic interviews. Child forensic interviews are interviews conducted in a manner to elicit reliable information from children thereby improving the likelihood of use in legal proceedings. CACs also provide crucial immediate support services and fill a vital gap in access to justice, therapy and social services.

Due to increasing demand and the need for a larger, more technologically advanced space, A21 expanded the CAC in Pattaya in December 2023. The newly expanded CAC includes a fully functional forensic interview room and observation room with state-of-the-art forensic interviewing technology, a workspace for MDT members, and a counselling room for survivors to meet with their case managers. The CAC expansion resulted in increased case referrals, enhanced partner networks, multiple stakeholder visits to the facility, and a greater opportunity to support law enforcement in the identification and investigation of child exploitation cases. In one such law enforcement operation, A21, along with other NGOs, assisted in the identification of a total of 24 child victims of trafficking in 2023. Importantly, A21 ensured that engagement with the child victims occurred in both a child and victim-centred manner and subsequently worked with the children, their families, the government and other stakeholders to provide follow-up services to the victims and their families.



The CAC child-friendly forensic interview room is equipped with audio-visual recording equipment. Minors can disclose abuse in the presence of the forensic interviewer while members of the MDT observe from the next room.



The CAC 'observation room' allows members of the MDT to watch and listen to live forensic interviews from within the same building while ensuring only one person interviews the child.

PROFESSIONAL TRAINING

A21 works proactively with the Thai government, civil societies, businesses, and other sectors to provide tailored training on human trafficking identification and response. In 2023, A21 led 12 trainings in partnership with various agencies, resulting in over 643 officials and individuals trained. Training topics ranged from general awareness of human trafficking, victim identification and response, to more specialised topics such as victim assistance support, working within an MDT, forensic interviewing techniques and child online safety and protection.

In 2023, A21 and the Human Trafficking Litigation Department of the OAG, under the sponsorship of the nonprofit organisation The Asia Foundation, conducted training for 113 public prosecutors from over 32 provinces in Thailand as part of OAG's training on human trafficking and child exploitation case prosecution. A21 also conducted its first ever three-day international training in partnership with Homeland Security Investigations (HSI), travelling to Luang Prabang, Laos, with HSI and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) to train 34 attendees, including 14 prosecutors, seven judges, and 13 law enforcement officials on child forensic interviewing and working with the MDT to support victims of trafficking and exploitation.

In March 2023, A21 collaborated with the Australian Federal Police (AFP) to host a training session in Vientiane, Laos. This event aimed to enhance collaboration between police and reputable NGOs from Thailand, Cambodia, and Laos. Participants identified gaps, highlighted unique strengths, and built partnerships to support cross-border human trafficking cases.

In another first training of its kind, A21 collaborated with HSI and OAG Human Trafficking Litigation Department to conduct a five-day forensic interview training in Pattaya, targeting 26 local and national Thai law enforcement, prosecutors, government social welfare officers, psychologists and social workers already engaged in child protection in Pattaya. The training, led by HSI's forensic interview specialists from the United States, provided foundational skills on interviewing child victims of abuse, exploitation, and trafficking through a trauma-informed lens, as well as how to utilise the CAC to conduct child forensic interviews. This event also featured training by specialised prosecutors from Thailand's OAG and the U.S. Department of Justice on using child forensic interviews in the prosecution process. By expanding the training to include the use of forensic interviews in investigation and prosecution, this training provided a holistic understanding of the benefits of the proper use of forensic interviews. Notably, the number of child forensic interviewers registered with the Chonburi Provincial SDHS Office between October and December 2023 increased after this forensic interview training.

AFTERCARE

A21's Aftercare Program offers comprehensive support to survivors of human trafficking of any age or gender, providing them with access to psychological and social support, medical care, safe housing, financial aid, life skills development, relocation and repatriation support, and

assistance with finding employment. This holistic approach provides survivors stability and sustainability, significantly decreasing the risk of re-victimisation. As part of A21's Aftercare Program, A21 staff works closely with residential shelters, Thai government shelters for trafficking victims and NGOs to provide services to survivors in the community. A21 utilises a strong referral network for survivors of trafficking to receive aftercare, whether from A21 or through one of A21's trusted partners.

In 2023, A21 welcomed 30 new survivors from varying demographic and socioeconomic backgrounds into its Aftercare Program. Many new survivors were female (56.7%) and adults (73%) aged 18 to 41. Although adult survivors comprised the majority of new survivors in 2023, child survivors entering A21's Aftercare Program also increased, doubling in 2023 from the previous year. The growth of adult survivors in A21's Aftercare Program merely reflects the significant increase in the identification and assistance of survivors of forced criminality in scam centres, accounting for 50% of all new survivors. Twenty percent of A21's survivors were child victims of forced begging, followed by bonded labour (13.3%). Survivors reported false job opportunities as the most common recruitment method (70%), followed by deception by friends or family members (26.7%). For the first time, the number of foreign nationals exceeded that of Thai nationals who entered A21's Aftercare Program in 2023 (73%), a significant shift from previous years where more survivors were Thai nationals (19.4% in 2022). This shift is largely due to the rise of trafficking in scamming cases which involves more foreign nationals.

A21 observed an increase in survivors of forced criminality in online scam centres, a form of trafficking that coerces its victims to commit illicit and unlawful acts of online scams.[15] In cases of forced criminality, many victims were recruited through social media and reported financial concern as the motivating factor in seeking a job abroad, leading them to Thailand and its neighbouring countries. The survivors reported undergoing a fraudulent yet intricate recruitment process that appeared legitimate at first before becoming trapped in an online scamming scheme. The survivors received threats, abuse or torture if they failed to comply and meet their daily quotas of the number of people they needed to lure into making fraudulent investments. In partnership with Thai law enforcement, A21 assisted 19 victims of forced criminality from Thailand and several other countries within the region. A21's aftercare services supported these survivors with emergency short-term accommodation, basic needs care packages, victim identification support and coordination with Thai authorities involved in the NRM process. In 2023, A21 coordinated and provided support for two domestic relocations within Thailand and the repatriation of 19 individuals from Thailand to Ethiopia, Zimbabwe, the Philippines, Uzbekistan and Nepal. A21 also assisted in the repatriation of one Thai national back to Thailand.

FREEDOM RETREAT EMPOWERS SURVIVORS THROUGH SURVIVOR-LED PEER SUPPORT APPROACH

In 2023, A21 hosted a two-day Freedom Retreat for survivors enrolled in A21's Aftercare Program for the first time. Participants at the retreat included female survivors consistently engaged in A21's Aftercare Program, remotely and in person. This retreat allowed survivors to connect with A21 social workers in a safe and inclusive space, meet with others who had similar experiences, and participate in various life-enhancing programs and activities. These programs were designed to empower survivors through a trauma-informed, survivor-centred approach, teaching crucial skills such as setting boundaries, safe communication, and fostering healthy relationships.



ACCESS TO JUSTICE

A21 works collaboratively with local and international law enforcement, prosecutors and social services to provide survivors with comprehensive legal assistance and support. As part of A21's Legal Assistance Program, A21 and its partners work to support and represent survivors in legal proceedings and ensure that survivors are fully informed and included in every stage of their legal process. In addition, A21 works closely with survivors and family members to support their testimony before law enforcement and in judicial settings, assists survivors in pursuing restitution and provides necessary aftercare services to survivors throughout their legal process to meet their needs.

In 2023, A21 assisted with 22 criminal prosecution and defence cases involving 39 survivors through its Legal Assistance Program. Many cases involved sex trafficking, labour trafficking, child sexual exploitation offences and forced criminality. The cases involving criminal prosecutions resulted in the convictions of six perpetrators, a combined sentence of 95 years imprisonment, and compensation totalling 1.65 million Thai Baht (approximately $45,644 USD) to survivors.

A SURVIVOR'S COURAGEOUS ACT RESULTS IN SUCCESSFUL ESCAPE FROM A SCAM CENTRE COMPOUND

Yui,* who grew up in a middle-income family in Thailand, used her strong language skills and opportunities to study abroad. Returning home after graduation, she worked as an assistant teacher while looking for a full-time role. She discovered a promising job opportunity in the Philippines through social media, which offered to cover all travel expenses for a role in an online trading platform's human resources department. After a seemingly legitimate hiring process, Yui was hired and travelled to the Philippines, only to find herself in a dire situation.

Upon arrival, she and other recruits from neighbouring countries were taken to a remote, guarded compound. Their documents were confiscated, and they were coerced into participating in the company's illegal activities, including fraudulent online scams. Yui was tasked with recruiting others into the scam centre and was under constant surveillance and threat of fines and torture if she failed to meet impossible quotas.

After months of captivity, Yui and another victim managed to contact their families, leading to an operation by Thai law enforcement in collaboration with NGOs and the Philippine Government. Repatriated and referred to A21 for aftercare services, Yui received comprehensive support, including legal assistance, counselling, employment help, and medical care. Engaging in A21's Life Programs, she learned new skills and was even certified in nail art while teaching foreign languages. Now on a path to recovery, Yui is rebuilding her life, focusing on healthy relationships, and reclaiming her independence.



ENDNOTES

[1] *World Bank Open Data.* (n.d.). World Bank Open Data. https://data.worldbank.org/country/TH

[2] The World Bank in Thailand. (2023). World Bank. https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/thailand/overview

[3] *Thailand Migration Report 2019.* (2019). United Nations Thematic Working Group on Migration in Thailand. https://thailand.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-06/Thailand-Migration-Report-2019.pdf

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[5] "Thailand's economy faces headwinds from manufacturing sector downturn." *S&P Global Market Intelligence*, 2023 https://www.spglobal.com/marketintelligence/en/mi/research-analysis/thailands-economy-faces-headwinds-from-manufacturing-sector-downturn-sep23.html

[6] Vigil, S. and D. Kim (2023). *International Labour Migration in a Changing Climate: Insights from Malaysia and Thailand*. International Organization for Migration (IOM) and Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI), Bangkok, Thailand.

[7] These Government cases may involve more than one victim of trafficking, sometimes between one to 100 victims of trafficking.

[8] Royal Thai Government. (2024). *Royal Thai Government Country Report on Anti-Human Trafficking Efforts 1 January - 31 December 2023.*

[9] Ibid.

[10] *Ministry of Foreign Affairs Aids 60,000 Thai nationals abroad, leverages technology for support in 2024.* https://www.thaianti-humantraffickingaction.org/Home/2024/01/12/ministry-of-foreign-affairs-aids-60000-thai-nationals-abroad-leverages-technology-for-support-in-2024/

[11] Ibid.

[12] United States Department of State. (2023). Trafficking in Persons Report: *Thailand - United States Department of State.* https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-trafficking-in-persons-report/thailand

[13] See: United States Department of State. (2023). Trafficking in Persons Report: Thailand - United States Department of State. https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-trafficking-in-persons-report/thailand ; And *Royal Thai Government's Country Report on Anti-Human Trafficking Efforts.* (2024).

[14] Walk for Freedom is a day of 'global awareness and local action' in the fight against human trafficking, where individuals engage their community through local walk events to raise awareness about human trafficking in their cities and collectively result in a ripple effect around the world.

[15] United States Department of State, Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons (2014) *The Use of Forced Criminality: Victims Hidden Behind the Crime* https://2009-2017.state.gov/documents/organization/233938.pdf

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