



Australian Government

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade



DFAT COUNTRY INFORMATION REPORT THAILAND

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ACRONYMS

ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
AUD	Australian dollar
BRN	Barisan Revolusi Nasional (insurgent group)
DSI	Department of Special Investigation
ECT	Election Commission of Thailand
FGM/C	Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting
MFP	Move Forward Party
NCPO	National Council for Peace and Order
SBP	Southern Border Provinces (Thailand's three southernmost provinces of Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat, which have historically been affected by a separatist insurgency)
THB	Thai baht
USD	US dollar

GLOSSARY

'Attitude adjustment'	A practice whereby authorities detain political opponents and pressure them to abandon their activities, including through interrogations and lectures from military officials
<i>Hijab</i>	A head covering worn by many Muslim women
Line	A social media app popular in Japan and Thailand
<i>Kathoey</i>	Transgender women
<i>Lèse-majesté</i>	Criminal offence of defaming, insulting or threatening the monarch
<i>Sharia</i>	Islamic law

Terms used in this report

high risk	DFAT is aware of a strong pattern of incidents
moderate risk	DFAT is aware of sufficient incidents to suggest a pattern of behaviour
low risk	DFAT is aware of incidents but has insufficient evidence to conclude they form a pattern

official discrimination

1. legal or regulatory measures applying to a particular group that impede access to state protection or services that are available to other sections of the population (examples might include but are not limited to difficulties in obtaining personal registrations or identity papers, difficulties in having papers recognised, arbitrary arrest and detention)
2. behaviour by state employees towards a particular group that impedes access to state protection or services otherwise available, including by failure to implement legislative or administrative measures

societal discrimination

1. behaviour by members of society (including family members, employers or service providers) that impedes access by a particular group to goods or services normally available to other sections of society (examples could include but are not limited to refusal to rent property, refusal to sell goods or services, or employment discrimination)
2. ostracism or exclusion by members of society (including family, acquaintances, employers, colleagues or service providers)

1. PURPOSE AND SCOPE

1.1 The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) has prepared this country information report for protection status determination purposes only. It provides DFAT's best judgement and assessment at time of writing and is distinct from Australian government policy with respect to Thailand.

1.2 The report provides a general, rather than an exhaustive country overview. It has been prepared with regard to the current caseload for decision makers in Australia, without reference to individual applications for protection visas. The report does not contain policy guidance for decision makers.

1.3 Ministerial Direction Number 84 of 24 June 2019, issued under s 499 of the *Migration Act 1958*, states that:

Where the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade has prepared [a] country information assessment expressly for protection status determination processes, and that assessment is available to the decision maker, the decision maker must take into account that assessment, where relevant, in making their decision. The decision maker is not precluded from considering other relevant information about the country.

1.4 This report draws on DFAT's on-the-ground knowledge and discussions with a range of sources in Thailand. It takes into account information from government and non-government sources, including but not limited to those produced by the US Department of State, the World Bank, Transparency International, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Freedom House, Reporters Without Borders, and the Committee to Protect Journalists; various United Nations agencies; and credible news sources. Where DFAT does not refer to a specific source of a report or allegation, this may be to protect the source.

1.5 This updated Country Information Report replaces the previous DFAT report on Thailand published on 10 July 2020.

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

COUNTRY OVERVIEW

2.1 Thailand is the only Southeast Asian country to never have been colonised by a Western power. An absolute monarchy until an elite-led revolution in 1932, Thailand has since alternated between democracy and military rule. While the monarch's powers are theoretically limited by the constitution, the King exercises significant influence over politics, the military and society. The monarchy's power and legitimacy are tightly intertwined with that of the military, which has carried out over a dozen coups in the last century and maintains a central role in Thai politics.

2.2 Beginning in 1992, Thailand experienced a period of democracy that culminated in the rise of Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra during the early 2000s. Although Thaksin's Thai Rak Thai party enjoyed widespread support in Thailand's rural north and northeast, his populist policies, alleged corruption, and perceived disloyalty to the crown alienated the urban elite. Conflict between Thaksin's 'Red Shirt' supporters and his royalist 'Yellow Shirt' opponents subsequently characterised Thai politics for the following decade.

2.3 A coup removed Thaksin in 2006 and he fled to the UK. Thaksin's sister Yingluck was elected Prime Minister in 2011 before she was also removed by a coup in 2014, which installed Army chief Prayuth Chan-o-cha as head of the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO). The NCPO held a referendum to approve a new constitution in 2016, and national elections took place in 2019. While opposition parties won more seats than the military-backed party, they were unable to form government. Prayuth then became Prime Minister.

2.4 King Bhumibol Adulyadej died in October 2016 and was succeeded by his son, King Maha Vajiralongkorn (Rama X). As King, Rama X has strengthened his influence over Thai politics and the military and assumed control of the Crown Property Bureau, reportedly making him the richest monarch in the world. In early 2020, a series of protests began against the Prayuth government, which expanded to include demands for reform of the monarchy. Authorities responded by deploying riot police and arresting hundreds of protesters, many of whom faced ongoing legal action at the time of publication.

2.5 Thailand held national elections in May 2023. The progressive Move Forward Party won the most seats, ahead of the Thaksin-backed Pheu Thai party, although could not secure sufficient support from the military-appointed senate to form government. Pheu Thai eventually took government at the head of an 11-party coalition. Former businessman Srettha Thavisin became Prime Minister on 22 August 2023. On the same day, Thaksin returned from exile (see [Political system](#), [Opposition Politicians](#)).

DEMOGRAPHY

2.6 The CIA World Factbook estimates Thailand's population is approximately 70 million. Low fertility rates and increased life expectancies have led to a rapidly ageing population. By 2030 an estimated one in three Thais will be over the age of 60. Bangkok is the capital and largest city, with a population of about 11 million. There are also significant population clusters in the north, northeast and south of the country. Thailand's

population is dispersed equally across urban and rural areas. For ethnic demography, see [Race/Nationality](#). For religious demography, see [Religion](#).

ECONOMIC OVERVIEW

2.7 Thailand has experienced rapid economic and social development since the 1960s. The World Bank has classified Thailand as an upper-middle income economy since 2011. The economy contracted sharply during the COVID-19 pandemic, largely due to a halt in foreign tourism, which normally accounts for 11 per cent of GDP (the whole tourism sector accounts for approximately 20 per cent of GDP). Although tourism rebounded in 2022, 2023 GDP growth figures have been weaker than expected, mostly due to a slowdown in demand for Thailand's manufactured exports, a drop in Government spending due to election period, and longer than expected time taken to form government.

2.8 Second quarter 2023 GDP growth figures for Thailand showed a slowdown from the first three months of 2023 (2.6 per cent year-on-year to 1.8 per cent), with the Bank of Thailand predicting growth of 2.8 per cent over all (before rebounding to 4.4 per cent in 2024). Other major economic sectors include services, manufacturing, and agriculture. While agriculture contributes less than 10 per cent of GDP, it employs approximately one-third of the labour force. Poverty has reduced significantly in the past 30 years, from 58 per cent in 1990 to 6.8 per cent in 2020. Nevertheless, inequality remains very high, and rural households are generally much poorer than urban households.

2.9 Thailand's official unemployment rate is amongst the lowest in the world, at just 1.05 per cent. Analysts attribute this to a low birth rate, lack of unemployment benefits, and the practice of considering those working in Thailand's large informal sector to be employed, regardless of how few hours per week they work. In practice, there is considerable unemployment and underemployment in Thailand, including among recent university graduates. Other economic challenges include low productivity, high levels of household debt, falling real wages, and a large shadow economy (see [Security Situation](#)).

2.10 Thailand has expanded its welfare system over the past decade. Around 14.5 million Thais who are over 18 and earn less than THB 100,000 (AUD 4,200) per year are eligible for benefits under the state welfare card scheme. Benefits include a THB 300 (AUD 12) per month cash handout, THB 500 (AUD 20) credit for public transport, discounts for gas and utility bills, and additional cash handouts for the disabled and elderly.

2.11 Thailand experiences extreme weather events, including floods and occasional drought. In 2011, floods killed more than 500 people and caused almost AUD50 billion in loss and damages. Thailand is increasingly exposed to the impacts of climate change - including the 'worst April heatwave in Asian history' in 2023, with temperatures reaching a record 45.4 degrees Celsius in parts of the country.

Health

2.12 Thailand has an advanced healthcare system. Thai citizens have access to good quality, affordable public healthcare under the government-funded Universal Coverage Scheme (UCS). More than 75 per cent of the population is covered by the UCS, with the remainder covered under separate schemes for civil servants and private sector employees. The UCS offers a benefit package that includes general medical care and rehabilitation services, many (but not all) high-cost medical treatments, and emergency care. Certain types of treatment, such as in-home kidney dialysis, still incur significant out-of-pocket costs. UCS enrollees receive a gold card which entitles them to free care at health centres in their home district and contracted hospitals, as well as referrals to provincial or tertiary care hospitals.

2.13 All provinces, districts and sub-districts have provincial hospitals, district hospitals and health centres respectively. There are also many high-quality private hospitals, which are the first choice of many wealthier Thais and foreign medical tourists. Thai medical staff are generally well-trained, and the number of doctors per head of population meets global benchmarks. Nevertheless, public hospitals suffer from overcrowding, long wait times and outdated equipment.

2.14 A significant rural-urban healthcare divide persists, despite long-running government programs to improve healthcare in rural areas. Structural barriers, including distance and poverty, render people living in rural areas less likely to access healthcare and more likely to experience adverse health outcomes than people in cities. The COVID-19 pandemic strained the Thai medical system and exposed the need to train and recruit more healthcare workers, especially in light of Thailand's ageing population (see [Demography](#)).

Mental Health

2.15 Mental healthcare is covered under the UCS. There are 20 dedicated psychiatric hospitals nationwide, as well as community-based facilities and psychiatric units within general hospitals. Psychiatric medicines are included on the National List of Essential Medicines and covered under the UCS. The Mental Health Department offers a 24/7 counselling hotline, as well as chat services on social media and chat platforms Facebook and Line. Wait times for these services can be long. People living with mental illness can often face challenges when attempting to access care, particularly in rural areas. There is a nationwide shortage of qualified psychologists, especially outside Bangkok.

2.16 Stigma remains a disincentive to seeking mental healthcare for many Thais. Many Thais ascribe mental illness to supernatural causes such as ghost possession or curses, and some turn to monks or black magic practitioners for support. Prevalence of mental illness, including anxiety and depression, increased during COVID-19 lockdowns, and suicide rates rose, especially amongst the young.

Drug Abuse and Treatment

2.17 Drug abuse is a widespread problem in Thailand. Commonly abused substances include alcohol, cannabis, *ya ba* (a mixture of methamphetamine and caffeine) and *kratom* (a herbal stimulant prepared from tree leaves). Drug abuse reportedly worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic.

2.18 Thailand has historically taken a harsh approach to drug offenders, with punishments including lengthy jail terms and the death penalty. Since 2022, the government has softened its approach, decriminalising cannabis and kratom, and offering drug addicts the choice of entering rehabilitation instead of serving a prison sentence. An estimated 5,000 cannabis shops have opened since decriminalisation. Critics say this has caused social problems. Drug treatment is offered by providers including health clinics, Buddhist temples and military-style camps. Options range from free treatment under the UCS at the Princess Mother National Institute on Drug Abuse Treatment in Bangkok to THB 250,000 (AUD 10,000) a month or more for treatment in a luxury private clinic. The quality and effectiveness of treatment varies, and relapse rates are high.

HIV/AIDS

2.19 Thailand has one of the highest rates of HIV/AIDS in Asia, although new infections have dropped significantly as a result of awareness campaigns, free testing and treatment. Same-day testing is available through community-based organisations and government health providers, and on-the-spot antiretroviral treatment is available free for all HIV-positive Thai citizens. According to UNAIDS, 94 per cent of HIV-positive people are aware of their status, and 86 per cent are receiving anti-retroviral treatment.

2.20 Pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) for HIV has been widely and freely available in Thailand through community-based organisations and government health providers since 2020. Its use has been credited with

falling rates of infection among at-risk groups, including sex workers and men who have sex with men. In 2023, the government announced a rule change preventing community-based providers from dispensing PReP and requiring PReP users not covered by the UCS to pay for PReP. NGOs are concerned this will lead to a drop in take-up and an increase in HIV infections.

Education

2.21 Thailand provides universal free primary and secondary education. Attendance is compulsory for all children aged six to 15, and enrolment levels in basic education are high for both girls and boys. The quality of the Thai education system compares poorly to international standards, and standards in other Southeast Asian countries. Rural students tend to achieve poorer results than urban students, due to a lack of teachers, learning materials and physical infrastructure. Children from disadvantaged communities, migrants and children living with disabilities are the most likely to be out of school (see [Refugees and Asylum Seekers](#), [Stateless People](#), [Children](#), [People Living with Disabilities](#)). During the COVID-19 pandemic, more than 13 million children experienced learning loss due to school closures. Although the government provided some remote learning options, limited household internet access was a barrier for many students.

POLITICAL SYSTEM

2.22 Thailand is a constitutional monarchy, with King Maha Vajiralongkorn as its Head of State. While the King has limited formal power, he is highly influential over Thai politics and the military (see [Military](#)). The National Assembly consists of an elected 500-member House of Representatives and an appointed 250-member Senate. All current senators were appointed by the last military junta; many are closely aligned with the military (see [Recent History](#)). The House of Representatives has a four-year term; the senate has a five-year term.

2.23 At a sub-national level, Thailand is divided into 76 provinces and two special administrative areas (Bangkok and Pattaya). Provincial governors are appointed, while the governors of Bangkok and Pattaya are elected. Provinces are further subdivided into districts, led by centrally-appointed district chiefs. Local government sub-units include subdistricts, municipalities, and villages, in which citizens directly elect their leaders. The village headman or headwoman plays an important role in village life, including through organising collective action and mediating disputes.

2023 National Elections

2.24 Thailand held national elections on 14 May 2023, for the second time since the restoration of democracy in 2019. The Asian Network for Free Elections (ANFREL) described the elections as being 'well-run' and 'mostly free and fair'. Critics pointed to flaws including a constitutional framework that favoured military-backed parties, restrictions on freedom of speech, and state-sponsored disinformation campaigns. While there were some reports of vote buying, there were no reports of violence and ANFREL did not observe voter intimidation or undue influence at polling stations. Voter turnout was a record 75 per cent.

2.25 The campaign was largely a three-way contest between conservative, military-backed parties, the Thaksin-backed Pheu Thai party and the progressive Move Forward Party. The latter ran on a strongly reformist platform, including proposals to expand welfare, raise the minimum wage and abolish military conscription. Controversially, they also proposed to amend Thailand's strict lèse-majesté law (see [Critics of the Monarchy](#)).

2.26 Move Forward won the most seats, ahead of Pheu Thai, while military-backed parties performed poorly. Move Forward leader Pita Limjaroenrat immediately began negotiations to form a coalition

government, including Pheu Thai and six other parties. Move Forward's bid was strongly opposed by the military-appointed senate, particularly due to their proposed reform of the lèse-majesté law. Under the 2017 constitution, Pita needed the support of a majority of the senate to become Prime Minister and fell well short of this target. Pheu Thai formed a new coalition, including military-backed parties it had previously sworn to exclude, and in August 2022, Pheu Thai candidate Srettha Thavisin was sworn in as Prime Minister.

Corruption

2.27 Thailand is a signatory to the United Nations Convention Against Corruption (CAC) (see [Human Rights Framework](#)) and has an outwardly strong legal framework to prevent and eliminate corruption. Nevertheless, corruption thrives in Thailand, ranked 101 out of 180 countries in Transparency International's 2022 Corruption Perceptions Index. In 2020 (the most recent available figures), Transparency International found that a quarter of Thais had paid a bribe to access public services in the previous year, and 40 per cent of Thais thought the police were mostly, or all, corrupt.

2.28 It is common to pay bribes or use personal connections to obtain identity documents (see [Documentation](#)), enrol children in school and escape traffic fines. Contributing factors include low public sector wages, a culture of gift exchange when doing business, and a tendency to view corruption as the actions of 'bad individuals' rather than as a systemic social or political issue.

2.29 Local and foreign observers report that high-level corruption is common among senior officials, politicians, and the military. Despite justifying its overthrow of the Yingluck government with a promise to end corruption, the military-backed Prayuth government was involved in numerous scandals, including revelations the Deputy Prime Minister had accumulated an undeclared USD 685,000 (AUD 1 million) luxury watch collection, a lottery scam implicating a senior aide to the Prime Minister, and irregularities in the procurement of Chinese submarines by the Thai navy.

2.30 The National Anti-Corruption Commission (NACC) is empowered to investigate allegations of corruption against politicians, judges, and government officials. Critics allege the NACC is highly politicised, and that it has ignored or dismissed alleged malfeasance by military-backed governments while aggressively pursuing complaints against their political opponents.

HUMAN RIGHTS FRAMEWORK

2.31 Thailand is a party to all core international human rights instruments except the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (CED) and the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (CMW). See the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights ([OHCHR](#)) [website](#) for full details.

2.32 The constitution contains numerous human rights commitments, including freedom of expression, peaceful assembly, and association. The government does not always respect these rights in practice.

National Human Rights Institution

2.33 The National Human Rights Commission of Thailand (NHRCT) was established in 2017. It is mandated to investigate violations, promote human rights, make recommendations to the government on the protection of human rights, and prepare human rights situation assessments. OHCHR currently rates the NHRCT as an 'A' status institution, meaning it is fully compliant with the Paris Principles governing national human rights institutions. It regained this status in 2022 after having been downgraded to 'B' status for several years for

perceived shortcomings. Human rights organisations have criticised the NHRCT as lacking independence, as well as failing to hold state officials to account for human rights abuses.

SECURITY SITUATION

2.34 The security situation in Thailand is generally stable, with two notable exceptions: an ongoing [insurgency in the southern border provinces \(SBPs\)](#) and periodic [political demonstrations](#) which sometimes result in violence. Some border areas are dangerous due to armed conflict, landmines, violence associated with the drug trade and general lawlessness. Organised crime and [corruption](#) are significant problems. There is a large shadow economy, including trade in illicit drugs, human and wildlife trafficking, illegal logging, money laundering and counterfeiting.

2.35 Petty crime, scams and fraud are all common. Thailand has a high rate of gun ownership, and seemingly minor interpersonal disputes can sometimes escalate into violence. Several mass killings in recent years have prompted social debate around drugs, firearms, and military and police culture (the killings all involved soldiers or policemen). School rivalries between vocational colleges sometimes result in serious violence, particularly in Bangkok.

2.36 While large-scale attacks are rare, terrorism is an ongoing concern in Thailand. Most incidents relate to the insurgency in the SBPs. In August 2022, a wave of 17 arson and bombing attacks targeted petrol stations and convenience stores in Pattani, Narathiwat, and Yala, injuring three. In December 2022, three railway workers were killed in a bomb attack following an intentional train derailment in Songkhla. While they still occur, the incidence of terrorist attacks in the SBPs has decreased in recent years, in parallel with progress in negotiations for a political settlement.

2.37 Terrorist attacks have occasionally occurred in Bangkok and other major cities. In August 2019, a series of explosions took place in Bangkok coinciding with an ASEAN summit, injuring seven people. In 2016, a series of bombings in popular tourist destinations in southern Thailand killed four and injured 36. In 2015, a bombing at the Erawan Shrine in Bangkok killed 20 and injured 125.

2.38 Conflict in Myanmar occasionally spills over Thailand's western border, which houses large numbers of refugees from that country (see the [DFAT Country Information Report on Myanmar](#)). In June 2022, a Myanmar Air Force jet crossed into Thai territory before attacking anti-government groups on the Myanmar side of the border, and shells fired by Myanmar troops landed on the Thai side in 2021. Thailand and Cambodia have a long-running border dispute over the area surrounding the Preah Vihear Temple near Sisaket in northeastern Thailand. The area has been peaceful since the two countries signed an agreement in 2011.

People Trafficking

2.39 Thailand is a destination, source, and transit country for human trafficking of both Thai nationals and foreigners. Women, children, LGBTQIA+ people, ethnic minorities and stateless people are particularly vulnerable. Women and children are trafficked into sex work in brothels, massage parlours, bars, karaoke lounges, hotels, and private residences. Labour traffickers exploit migrant workers in commercial fishing, the poultry industry, manufacturing, construction, agriculture, domestic work and begging. An emerging trend is the trafficking of Thai nationals and others into Myanmar and Cambodia where they are forced to work in illegal call centres or participate in online scams.

2.40 Labour traffickers often exploit migrants through debt-based coercion (see [Victims of Loan Sharks](#)) and fraudulent promises of well-paid employment. Victims of trafficking are subject to serious human rights

violations, including threats, torture, and beatings. Corrupt officials are often complicit in human trafficking networks.

2.41 Thailand is listed as a Tier 2 country in the US Department of State's 2023 Trafficking in Persons Report, indicating it does not fully meet minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking, although making significant efforts to do so. Sex and labour trafficking are criminalised under the 2008 anti-trafficking law and punishable by jail terms and large fines. In 2021, the government investigated 188 trafficking cases, identified 414 victims of trafficking, and convicted 82 traffickers, including several officials. According to international observers, corruption continues to undermine anti-trafficking efforts, with some government officials and police directly complicit in trafficking crimes, including through accepting bribes or loans from brokers and smugglers that exploit victims.

2.42 Government-operated shelters provide victims of trafficking with access to counselling, legal assistance, medical care, civil compensation, financial aid, witness protection, education or vocational training, and employment. The government operates 76 short-stay shelters and nine long-term regional trafficking shelters, including four dedicated to adult male victims and families, four for female victims, and one for male child victims.

2.43 Thai law permits foreign victims of trafficking and witnesses to stay and work in Thailand for up to two years upon completion of legal proceedings against their traffickers. However, housing in a shelter is contingent on agreeing to participate in the prosecution of the alleged traffickers, which victims are often scared or reluctant to do. Victims of human trafficking are often misidentified as illegal migrants, resulting in their detention and/or deportation (see [Refugees and Asylum Seekers](#), [Stateless People](#), [Detention and Prison](#)).

3. REFUGEE CONVENTION CLAIMS

RACE/NATIONALITY

3.1 While Thai identity has traditionally emphasised the unity of the Thai nation and people, the population is ethnically and linguistically diverse. Although the 2010 national census categorises 95 per cent of the population as ethnically 'Thai', there are significant regional variations in language, culture and, to some extent, physical appearance among this group. Mahidol University's Ethnolinguistic Map of Thailand suggests the Thai population can be further broken down into Central Thais (*Thai Klang*, 39 per cent), Northerners (*Khon Meung*, 10 per cent) and Southerners (*Khon Tai*, 9 per cent). Thais can often detect which region a person comes from by their accent and appearance.

3.2 Thais from the Isaan region have historically experienced discrimination on the basis of their darker skin and rural background. In November 2021, a group of internet users were forced to apologise after making racist comments about Isaan people on the Clubhouse social media app. The comments were widely condemned, and the responsible minister indicated that people making 'inflammatory, false or discriminatory' statements could be charged under the Computer Crimes Act. Such overt discrimination is relatively rare in Thailand. DFAT is not aware of racially-motivated violence in Thailand in recent times.

3.3 Large numbers of Chinese migrated to Thailand in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Many intermarried with local Thais and eventually adopted Thai surnames and identity. Sino-Thais are highly integrated, and today 14 per cent of the population is thought to have at least some Chinese heritage. Thailand is also home to significant populations of ethnic Khmer (approximately 1.4 million) and ethnic Malay (approximately 900,000), as well as various hilltribes and other minority groups. In its 2019 report to the Committee Responsible for the Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, the Thai Government recognised 62 distinct racial groups as being present in Thailand 'from the beginning'.

3.4 Thailand hosts a large refugee population, mostly from Myanmar (see the [DFAT Country Information Report on Myanmar](#)). Many of these refugees are stateless. There is also a high rate of statelessness among indigenous ethnic minority communities in rural and border areas. For information about these groups, see [Refugees and Asylum Seekers](#), [Stateless People](#).

3.5 DFAT assesses that ethnic minorities with Thai citizenship face a low risk of official and societal discrimination on the basis of their ethnicity.

RELIGION

3.6 Thai law officially recognises five religious groups: Buddhists, Muslims, Brahmin-Hindus, Sikhs and Christians. The Buddhist population is estimated to comprise 85-95 per cent of the total population, while the Muslim population is estimated at 5-10 per cent. Other groups include animists, Christians, Confucians, Hindus, Sikhs, and Taoists.

3.7 Section 27 of the Constitution prohibits unjust discrimination on the grounds of differences in religious belief. Section 31 guarantees citizens the right to enjoy full liberty to profess a religion and exercise or practice

a form of worship in accordance with their religious principles, provided it shall not be adverse to the duties of the Thai people, and shall not endanger the safety of the State, or be contrary to public order or good morals. Religious groups from all faiths can proselytise without official interference and, with minor exceptions (see [Muslims](#)), to establish places of worship and practice their religions freely.

3.8 With the exception of [Muslims](#) (see below), DFAT assesses that religious minority groups in Thailand are generally not at risk of official or societal discrimination on the basis of their religion.

Muslims

3.9 Islam is the dominant religion in Thailand's southernmost provinces (Narathiwat, Pattani and Yala), and in Satun province. There are also small Muslim populations in Bangkok, Chiang Mai and other parts of the country. While most Muslims in the south are ethnic Malay, Thailand's Muslim population also includes ethnic Thais and descendants of immigrants from South Asia, China, Cambodia, Myanmar, and Indonesia. An estimated 99 per cent of Muslims in Thailand are Sunni.

3.10 Anti-Islamic sentiment exists in Thailand, although overt discrimination is relatively rare. Although Muslim identity is one of a range of factors in the [insurgency in the SBPs](#), experts generally categorise it as a primarily ethnonationalist conflict rather than a religious one. In May 2018, a primary school in Pattani banned Muslim students from wearing the hijab and reportedly punished breaches with the loss of behavioural-conduct points. The policy was later reversed by the local Administrative Court. In September 2017, security officials in Songkhla arrested Aphichat Promjan, a prominent Buddhist monk who had urged the government to burn down mosques in retaliation for attacks on Buddhist monks in the SBPs. He was later defrocked.

3.11 Buddhists in some parts of the country have opposed the construction of mosques in majority Buddhist communities. In 2021, a Buddhist group tried unsuccessfully to prevent the construction of a mosque in Nakhon Ratchasima Province. In 2017, villagers in Khon Kaen voted against the registration of a Muslim prayer house that had been set up in a private home. Also in 2017, Buddhists in Bueng Kan Province opposed the construction of a mosque in their community, citing fears of Islamic extremism. Organisations such as the Buddhism Protection Center of Thailand have reportedly circulated anti-Islamic material.

3.12 Thai law outlines the administrative structure of Muslim communities in the SBPs. The Ministry of Justice (MOJ) allows Muslim residents of the SBPs to access *sharia* as a special legal process, outside the national civil code, in relation to personal status matters such as marriage, divorce, and inheritance. Provincial courts apply this law, and a *sharia* expert advises the judge. Committee members in the SBPs act as advisers to government officials in dealing with the area's ethno-nationalist and religious tensions. See [People Associated with the Insurgency in the SBPs](#).

3.13 DFAT assesses that Muslims outside the SBPs face a low risk of societal or official discrimination on the basis of their religion. While ethnic, religious, and political issues overlap in relation to the [insurgency in the SBPs](#), DFAT assesses that in most cases religion is a contributing factor to the conflict rather than the primary driving factor.

POLITICAL OPINION (ACTUAL OR IMPUTED)

3.14 Article 34 of the Constitution guarantees the right to express opinions, make speeches, write, print, publicise and express by other means, although allows for this right to be restricted by law for the purpose of maintaining state security, public safety, public order or good morals, or for protecting the health of the people. While Article 44 guarantees the right to assemble peacefully, it allows for this right to be restricted by

law for the purpose of maintaining state security, public safety, public order or good morals, or for protecting the rights or liberties of other persons.

3.15 Despite these Constitutional guarantees, human rights activists have criticised the government for its frequent use of judicial harassment or ‘lawfare’ to silence critics, including under the following laws:

- Section 112 of the Criminal Code (Lèse-Majesté)
- Article 116 of the Criminal Code (‘the Sedition Law’)
- Sections 326 to 333 of the Criminal Code (criminal defamation)
- the *Computer-Related Crime Act* (2007; amended 2017)
- the *Public Assembly Act* (2015)
- the *Emergency Decree on Public Administration in Emergency Situation* (2005)
- National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) decrees (2014-2019)

For examples, see [Critics of the Monarchy](#), [Opposition Politicians](#), [Protesters](#), [Civil Society](#), [Human Rights Defenders and Whistleblowers](#) and [Media and Journalists](#).

3.16 Businesses, individuals, and authorities often use so-called SLAPP suits (Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation) for the same purpose, particularly under criminal defamation laws. While physical violence, enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings on the basis of political opinion are infrequent, they do occur – for examples, see [Critics of the Monarchy](#) and [Civil Society, Human Rights Defenders and Whistleblowers](#).

3.17 The space for political expression is generally wider under civilian governments than military ones. Since Thailand’s return to democracy in 2019, Thai politics has featured robust exchanges of political views, and criticism of the government has been common and accepted. Ahead of the 2023 elections, some in-country sources said that in the current environment ‘you can talk about anything except the monarchy’. In practice, exceptions apply – see [Opposition Politicians](#), [Protesters](#) and [Civil Society, Human Rights Defenders and Whistleblowers](#).

3.18 DFAT assesses that ordinary citizens are generally not at risk of official or societal discrimination or violence on the basis of political opinion, with the important exception of [critics of the monarchy](#). DFAT assesses that groups such as [opposition politicians](#), [protesters](#) and [whistleblowers](#) also face risks on the basis of political opinion – see relevant sections for specific assessments.

Critics of the Monarchy

3.19 Thailand’s strict [lèse-majesté law](#) forbids all criticism of the monarchy. Under Section 112 of the Criminal Code, anyone who ‘defames, insults, or threatens the King, the Queen, the Heir-apparent, or the Regent’ faces 3-15 years in prison. An individual can be charged with multiple cases simultaneously, and sentences are cumulative, sometimes resulting in extremely long sentences. In 2021, a 65-year old public servant was sentenced to 43 years in jail for sharing audio clips deemed to insult the monarchy, while in 2017, a man was sentenced to 35 years in jail for social media posts that were deemed to insult the monarchy.

3.20 The law does not define what constitutes an insult to the monarchy, leaving courts to interpret a wide range of actions and statements as illegal. These have included: hanging banners, printing stickers, making statements online (including in private chatrooms), and liking or sharing social media posts, as well as appearing onstage with another person who criticised the monarchy, criticising royal pets, and writing about historical or fictional monarchs. In February 2022, two women were charged with lèse-majesté for conducting public polls on whether people felt bothered by royal motorcades. In March 2023, a man was sentenced to

two years in prison for publishing a calendar featuring yellow ducks (a symbol of the 2020-21 protest movement) which authorities said mocked the King.

3.21 A total of 141 people were charged with lèse-majesté from 2006 to 2017, including Red Shirts and critics of the 2006 and 2014 coups. The youngest was aged 13 (see [Children](#)). Although prosecutions slowed after the death of King Bhumibol in 2016, they increased dramatically following the 2020-21 protests. Since then, more than 360 people have been charged with lèse-majesté, over twice the number charged during the entire period 2006-2020. In-country sources reported in 2023 that the use of the lèse-majesté law was ‘the worst it has ever been’, and that new charges were being filed weekly or even daily.

3.22 Thai law permits citizens to file lèse-majesté complaints against each other. Ultra-royalist vigilante groups collect evidence and file charges against people under Section 112 and encourage others to do so. According to local and international media reports, following the 2014 coup the “Rubbish Collection Organisation” led by retired Major-General Rienthong Nanna led a campaign to harass, vilify and file charges against hundreds of people it accused of insulting the monarchy. More recently, vigilante groups such as *Thai Phakdee* (“Loyal Thais”) and the Center of Legal Assistance for Victims of Cyberbullying (also known as the “Minion Army”) have targeted people they accused of insulting the monarchy. Their tactics include online threats, doxxing, and publishing guidelines for people to file lèse-majesté complaints. In June 2021, representatives from the Minion Army handed over about 90 lèse-majesté complaints to authorities.

3.23 People accused of lèse-majesté are usually denied bail, access to legal aid, and banned from leaving the country. While some lawyers take on Section 112 cases pro bono, there are insufficient qualified lawyers for the number of cases. When defendants are granted bail, they are often required to sign an undertaking to desist from political activities and wear an electronic monitoring device. People have complained these monitoring bracelets are bulky and require constant charging, interfering with daily activities like shopping and school. People accused of lèse-majesté are rarely acquitted, unless they can show they did not commit the actions they are accused of, for instance if they were obviously framed.

3.24 A small number of Thai anti-monarchy activists in neighbouring countries have been forcibly returned to Thailand, disappeared, or killed. In December 2018, the bodies of three Thai anti-monarchy activists who lived in Laos were found bound and mutilated in the Mekong River. The men had broadcast anti-monarchy radio programs and encouraged protests in Thailand. In June 2020, 37-year old Thai dissident Wanchalearm Satsaksit was abducted outside his home in Phnom Penh, Cambodia; he was never seen again. Some activists said his disappearance was related to his anti-monarchy activity. DFAT is aware of reports that Thai political dissidents, including anti-monarchy activists, have been forcibly returned to Thailand by authorities in Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, and Malaysia.

3.25 Under King Vajiralongkorn’s reign, royal guards, palace officials and others with links to the palace have been punished for perceived transgressions. From 2016-2020, at least 86 people were named in the Royal Gazette for misconduct including ‘abusing power’, ‘arrogance’, ‘disloyalty’ and ‘extremely evil behaviour’. Punishment included demotion, stripping of ranks and honours, imprisonment, and, in some cases, alleged mistreatment and violence.

3.26 A royal prison is reportedly maintained inside Dhareevatthana Palace in Bangkok for ‘insiders’ who displease the monarch. There are multiple credible reports of cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment in this prison, such as beatings, being forced to roll in excrement, and being forced to do excessive heavy labour. In 2015, three former palace insiders died in custody after being arrested for embezzling funds from ‘Bike for Dad’, a royal charity project. The exact circumstances of their deaths remain unclear.

3.27 According to international media reports, some royal wives and consorts have been punished for perceived misconduct. In 2020, photos emerged of Vajiralongkorn’s ex-wife, Srirasmi Suwadee, apparently living under house arrest in Ratchaburi. In October 2019, an announcement in the Royal Gazette removed

royal consort Sineenat Wongvajirapakdi from her position and stripped her titles for being “disloyal” and trying to “elevate herself to the same status as the queen”. Sineenat’s position and titles were reinstated in September 2020, but there are some reports that she has fallen out of favour again and has not been seen in public since late 2021.

3.28 DFAT assesses that people accused of criticising the monarchy are at high risk of official discrimination, in the form of unfair trials, refusal of bail, and lengthy prison sentences. They are at moderate risk of societal harassment in the form of threats and intimidation by ultra-royalist vigilante groups. High-profile critics of the monarchy who flee to neighbouring countries are at moderate risk of official discrimination in the form of forced repatriation and/or violence by royalist actors, including enforced disappearance and extrajudicial killing. Palace ‘insiders’ (including royal guards and consorts) who fall out of favour face a moderate risk of abuse and violence, including arbitrary detention and inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment, and a low risk of enforced disappearance or extrajudicial killing.

Opposition Politicians

3.29 Military-backed governments have often used legal measures to target opposition parties and politicians. Following the 2006 coup, corruption charges were brought against Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, who fled to the UK, where he lived in exile until 2023. His sister, Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra, fled to Dubai after another coup in 2014 to avoid an indictment for criminal negligence carrying a potential 10-year prison sentence. The Shinawatra’s supporters said the charges against them were politically motivated. Thaksin returned to Thailand in August 2023 and was immediately arrested; his prison sentence was subsequently reduced by royal pardon from eight years to one. Yingluck remains in exile.

3.30 Before and after the 2019 election, the NCPO repeatedly filed charges including sedition and breaches of the Computer Crimes Act against opposition politicians. While most were eventually dropped, rights groups criticised their handling and lengthy delays in their finalisation.

3.31 Since direct military rule ended in 2019, the military-backed government has frequently used criminal defamation suits and accusations of lèse-majesté to silence opposition politicians. In 2021, Future Forward Party leader Thanathorn Juangroongruangkit was charged with lèse-majesté after accusing the government of mishandling the COVID-19 vaccine rollout, and unfairly favouring a vaccine supplier owned by King Vajiralongkorn. The Criminal Court later ordered his posts removed. In February 2023, Move Forward MP Rangsiman Rome was sued for criminal defamation after he said an arrest warrant had been improperly revoked for a senator wanted on drug charges. As at the time of publication the case had yet to be finalised.

3.32 On several occasions, the Election Commission and the Constitutional Court have dissolved political parties that opposed the interests of military-backed governments. Less than a month before the 2019 election, the Constitutional Court dissolved the Thaksin-aligned Thai Raksa Chart party and banned its executives from politics for 10 years. The Election Commission had earlier found Thai Raksa Chart had violated election laws by nominating Princess Ubolratana, the elder sister of King Vajiralongkorn, as its prime ministerial candidate. Almost 300 Thai Raksa Chart candidates were disqualified from contesting the election as a result.

3.33 In February 2020, the Constitutional Court dissolved the Future Forward Party and banned its executives from politics for 10 years, after finding Thanathorn and his party had breached campaign funding rules. In March 2023, a former advisor to the military-backed government filed a petition with the Election Commission to have the Pheu Thai party dissolved, saying they had violated election law by allowing banned former politicians to canvass for them ahead of the May 2023 election. The Election Commission declined to act, and Pheu Thai was able to contest the election.

3.34 In June 2023, the Election Commission announced there were grounds to investigate Pita Limjaroenrat, whose Move Forward Party won the most seats in the [2023 national election](#), for electoral misconduct over his alleged ownership of shares in a media company. If convicted, he faces up to 10 years' jail and a 20-year ban from political office. Pita and his party have dismissed the allegations as baseless.

3.35 DFAT assesses that prominent politicians and political figures who oppose military-backed interests face a moderate risk of official discrimination in the form of fines, lawsuits and bans from political activities. DFAT assesses they are generally not at risk of violence.

People Associated with the Red Shirt Movement

3.36 Initially formed as the United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD), the Red Shirt movement rose to prominence in 2009. It opposed the military-backed governments of Surayud Chulanont and Abhisit Vejjajiva and sought the return from exile of ousted Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra. It also took up issues of economic and political inequality. At its height, the Red Shirt movement had millions of supporters. The majority were from Thailand's rural north and northeast, although it also included some progressive urbanites, academics, and left-wing activists. Most Red Shirts were non-violent, but a small number engaged in or supported violence against political opponents, civilians, and authorities.

3.37 In early 2010, mass demonstrations by Red Shirt protesters against the Abhisit government shut down central Bangkok for several weeks. Authorities dispersed the protests in a violent crackdown that killed dozens and wounded hundreds more. Security forces were widely criticised for their excessive and indiscriminate use of force against the protesters. No members of the security forces were ever held accountable for the violence. Following the crackdown, authorities questioned, arrested, and detained Red Shirt leaders and members who took part in the protests, as well as accused sympathisers.

3.38 After the 2014 coup, many Red Shirts were detained and subjected to "attitude adjustment" sessions, where security forces pressured them to end their political activities (see [Arbitrary Arrest and Detention](#)). Amnesty International recorded many human rights abuses during this period, including arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance and torture. Red Shirt leaders were jailed on charges including defamation, incitement, and lèse-majesté. Grassroots supporters were harassed, intimidated and in some cases detained. Afterwards, some Red Shirt leaders withdrew from politics, while others switched allegiance to military-backed parties.

3.39 While significant numbers of Thais still identify as Red Shirts, the movement is now much less prominent than in the past. Red Shirts played a limited role in the 2019 election, 2020-21 protests, and the 2023 election. Most in-country sources said that authorities no longer harassed or monitored Red Shirt supporters, especially if they were no longer politically active. Although DFAT is aware of isolated reports of active Red Shirt supporters being harassed or monitored by local authorities, DFAT is not aware of specific cases, and has no evidence to suggest such treatment is centrally directed or widespread.

3.40 DFAT assesses that people associated with the Red Shirt movement who are no longer politically active are not at risk of official discrimination or violence. DFAT assesses that prominent Red Shirts who remain politically active are at low risk of official discrimination, in the form of possible monitoring or harassment by local authorities.

Protesters

3.41 Large-scale street protests have been a feature of political unrest in Thailand since at least the 1970s. Most are peaceful, however some have involved deadly violence and destruction of property, as well as wide-

scale disruption of businesses and public services. Official responses have often involved excessive force. Crackdowns by security forces killed dozens or hundreds of protesters in 1973, 1976, 1992 and 2010. No one has ever been held accountable for this violence.

3.42 Beginning with the Thai political crisis of 2005-2006, Thailand experienced a decade of intense political conflict between the royalist-conservative Yellow Shirts and the pro-democracy, pro-Thaksin Red Shirts (see [People involved with the Red Shirt movement](#)). Following the 2014 coup, the NCPO severely restricted freedom of expression and assembly, including through Order 7/2557, which banned political gatherings of more than five people, and Order 3/2558, which gave authorities wide-ranging powers to detain individuals accused of ‘actions intended to undermine or destroy peace and national security’. Hundreds of protesters were arrested under these laws, including for peaceful acts such as reading George Orwell’s ‘1984’ in public and giving a three-finger salute made popular by the film ‘The Hunger Games’.

3.43 Starting in early 2020, student groups led a series of protests in response to the disqualification of progressive politician Thanathorn Juangroongruangkit and the dissolution of the Future Forward Party. The protester’s demands included reform of the constitution and education system, an end to conscription, and, most controversially, reform of the monarchy. At their height, these protests attracted tens of thousands of participants. While most were in Bangkok, protests also occurred throughout the country. The majority were non-violent, although some protesters threw Molotov cocktails, metal bars and other objects at police, and some burned vehicles and tires. Dozens of people were injured during the protests, including protesters, police, and journalists. In October 2020, a 14-year-old protester was shot dead near Din Daeng Police Station. A 28-year-old man was arrested for his killing; he reportedly had no connection to authorities.

3.44 On-and-off demonstrations persisted into 2021, with police using water cannons, tear gas, batons, and rubber bullets to disperse protesters, hundreds of whom were arrested on charges including sedition, lèse-majesté, and breaching COVID-19 restrictions. Many of these cases were ongoing at the time of publication. Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch accused police of using excessive force during the protests and in some cases of torturing protesters in custody; authorities denied these accusations. DFAT is aware of prosecutions against street vendors, businesses and others who were perceived as supporting the protests, even when they were not directly involved. In November 2021, the Constitutional Court found three protest leaders had intended to ‘overthrow the monarchy’ and ordered protest groups ‘to cease further action in these matters’. By 2022, large-scale protests had mostly ceased.

3.45 Notwithstanding the issues described above, many people who attend protests do not suffer long-term consequences for their participation. In-country sources told DFAT that young people who had participated in the 2020-2021 protests but subsequently abandoned their activism had been able to graduate university and secure jobs, including in the civil service. Two protest leaders won seats in the May 2023 national elections, despite facing ongoing legal issues related to their protest activity.

3.46 DFAT assesses that active anti-government protesters in Thailand face a moderate risk of official discrimination in the form of arbitrary detention, judicial harassment, intimidation, and surveillance. DFAT assesses they face a low risk of violence in the form of excessive security responses and possible torture or mistreatment in custody. DFAT assesses that former protesters who are no longer politically active, and are not the subject of ongoing legal action, are unlikely to face discrimination or violence for past involvement in protests.

Civil Society, Human Rights Defenders and Whistleblowers

3.47 A wide range of civil society organisations (CSOs) operate in Thailand, including labour unions, religious organisations, human rights and environmental groups, thinktanks, research institutes, and royally-sponsored development projects. Section 42 of the constitution protects the right to ‘unite and form an association, co-

operative, union, organisation, community, or any other group’ without restriction except where ‘enacted for the purpose of protecting public interest, for maintaining public order or good morals, or for preventing or eliminating barriers or monopoly.’

3.48 While many CSOs operate without interference, activists who work on ‘sensitive’ issues, including civil and political rights, [the insurgency in the SBPs](#), and the rights of stateless people, have been subjected to harassment and violence by the state and business interests. Labour, environment, and land issues are also highly sensitive, and companies frequently sue activists who campaign on these issues. For instance, Thammakaset poultry farms, which has been accused of labour abuses, has filed at least 39 civil and criminal defamation cases against 23 human rights defenders, journalists, and former employees since 2016. In-country sources told DFAT that while most such cases were eventually dismissed, they caused serious inconvenience and financial hardship, and had a chilling effect on activism.

3.49 In February 2021, the government announced a draft law to register all NGOs with the Ministry of Interior. The law would require NGOs to report their operations to the government and publicly disclose their funding sources. It would also empower the government to prohibit the work of an NGO where it affects national security, economic security, or international relations; causes ‘social disruption’; or ‘impacts the well-being of other people’. Thai and international observers criticised the draft law as onerous and prone to misuse for political purposes. At the time of publication, the law had not passed.

3.50 At least 62 community-based rights defenders and lawyers have been killed in Thailand since 2003 in relation to their work. In March 2017, soldiers shot and killed Chaiyaphum Pasae, a prominent ethnic minority activist, at a military checkpoint in Chiang Mai Province. The soldiers reported he attacked them with a grenade; eyewitnesses say he was unarmed and was shot after trying to flee a beating. In May 2023, Bounsuan Kitiyano, a Lao political activist and long-time resident of Thailand, was shot dead while riding his motorcycle in Ubon Ratchathani. Bounsuan had organised human rights workshops and protests in front of the Lao Embassy in Bangkok. No one has been arrested for his murder.

3.51 Thailand has no dedicated legal protections for whistleblowers. People who draw attention to corruption or criminal activity, including civil servants, experience threats, discrimination, and violence from the people they expose and their networks. In 2017, Police Major-General Paween Pongsirin fled Thailand after receiving threats in relation to his investigation of high-ranking military involvement in human trafficking. In 2020, Army Sergeant Narongchai Intharakawi received death threats and faced a disciplinary hearing after he filed complaints about corruption in the Army Ordnance Materiel Rebuild Center where he worked. After Narongchai fled his barracks and went public with his claims, the Army sought to court martial him for going AWOL (absent without leave).

3.52 DFAT assesses that civil society activists and human rights defenders who work on sensitive issues such as civil and political rights, the conflict in the SBPs, or labour, environment and land issues face a moderate risk of discrimination and violence at the hands of state and private actors (especially where their activities challenge powerful business, political or criminal interests) in the form of judicial harassment, threats, assault, enforced disappearance and/or extrajudicial killing. DFAT assesses that whistleblowers who challenge these interests face a high risk of harassment and violence at the hands of these same interests. DFAT assesses that state protection for civil society activists, human rights defenders and whistleblowers is generally inadequate.

Media and Journalists

3.53 Thailand has an active and diverse media, with a mix of government and privately-owned outlets. Article 35 of the Constitution states that media professionals should be free to present news or express opinions in accordance with professional ethics; that censorship before publication of news or statements made by media professionals is only permitted in wartime; that only Thai nationals may own newspapers or

other mass media; and that the state may not provide any form of subsidy to private newspapers or other mass media. Despite these guarantees, Thai journalists regularly experience interference with their reporting and practice self-censorship to avoid controversy. Thai journalists especially avoid criticism of the monarchy due to the personal and professional risks involved (see [Critics of the Monarchy](#)).

3.54 After the 2014 coup (see [Recent History](#)), the NCPO issued orders prohibiting media outlets and individuals from distributing information regarded as “malice,” “false information,” or with an “aim to discredit” the junta. According to the International Council of Jurists (ICJ), between 2014 and 2018 the NCPO summoned 35 journalists for attitude adjustment and prosecuted 14 for political crimes. It also suspended the licenses of media outlets on 52 occasions.

3.55 Thai journalists were generally able to cover the 2020-21 protests without interference, although some complained that ‘citizen-journalists’ were prevented from live-streaming events which credentialed journalists were allowed to cover. In September 2021, two journalists were arrested for allegedly violating curfew orders during the protests. Also in 2021, several journalists filed a civil case against the Royal Thai Police after they were struck by rubber bullets fired by police attempting to disperse protesters. An internal investigation cleared the police of wrongdoing, and the case was dismissed by the Civil Court.

3.56 The International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) reported that Thai journalists are often threatened with legal action when they report on topics that touch on the interests of business or political elites, including corruption, labour issues, and environmental abuses. The ICJ recorded at least 15 cases of journalists being “prosecuted merely for reporting on issues of public interest” between 2001 and 2023. Most were sued under criminal defamation laws. In 2019, Voice TV reporter Suchanee Rungmuanporn was sentenced to two years in prison after she reported on labour exploitation by a Thai chicken farming factory (the case was later dropped). In 2023, a Thai mining company sued GreenNews editor Pratch Rujivanarom for defamation after he reported on a Myanmar court verdict that found the company had contributed to a dam collapse. If convicted, he faced up to two years in prison. Where cases involve online speech, plaintiffs often intentionally file criminal defamation suits in distant, conflict-affected provinces such as Narathiwat to inconvenience and deter the person they are suing.

3.57 In February 2023, media reporting suggested the government was preparing to pass a long-mooted media bill that would establish an ethics committee, complaints mechanism and fines regime for Thai journalists. Supporters said the bill would help fight fake news and lift the standard of Thai journalism. Critics said it would broaden government powers to restrict press freedom. In-country sources familiar with the bill said that lawmakers had not been able to agree on the contents of the bill and it was unlikely to progress.

3.58 DFAT assesses that journalists in Thailand who report on sensitive topics (including corruption, criticism of the military, and environmental and labour issues) face a moderate risk of harassment by authorities, businesses, and individuals, primarily in the form of criminal defamation suits. DFAT assesses they are generally not at risk of violence.

People Associated with the Insurgency in the Southern Border Provinces

3.59 Thailand’s southern border provinces (SBPs) of Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat have been affected by an armed insurgency since the 1940s. The conflict has its origins in Siam’s 18th century invasion of the Sultanate of Patani and attempts to impose Thai identity and language on the local Malay Islamic population. Violence has included shooting attacks, arson, and bombings, as well as armed operations by security forces (see [Security situation](#)). As at the time of publication, the conflict had killed more than 6,500 people since 2004.

3.60 Peace talks between the Thai government and the main insurgent group, Barisan Revolusi Nasional (BRN), have been held periodically since 2013. In February 2023, the two parties agreed on a roadmap for peace accords, however negotiations halted pending the outcome of the May 2023 Thai election.

3.61 Insurgent attacks have targeted soldiers, police, state-sponsored militia, teachers, and monks. Security operations target insurgents and their suspected supporters. Civilians account for 70 per cent of all conflict-related deaths since January 2004. The SBPs are under martial law, and an emergency decree provides military and civilian authorities with significant powers, including to censor news and information, conduct warrantless searches, and hold detainees for 30 days without charge (see also [Arbitrary Arrest and Detention](#)). The decree also provides security forces with broad immunity from prosecution.

3.62 There are longstanding, credible reports of human rights abuses committed by security forces in the SBPs against suspected insurgents and ordinary civilians, including [Arbitrary Arrest and Detention](#), [Torture](#) and [Extra-Judicial Killings](#). People affected by state-perpetrated violence have limited recourse to justice, and human rights observers report that no member of the security forces has been successfully prosecuted for abuses committed in the SBPs. Insurgent groups have also been accused of human rights abuses against security forces and civilians.

3.63 In-country sources reported that the situation in the SBPs had improved significantly in recent years, and that abuses by security forces were much less common than in the past. They also reported that people involved in, or impacted by, the insurgency in the SBPs who needed to flee Thailand would most likely go to Malaysia rather than seek refuge in a third country.

3.64 DFAT assesses that actual or perceived insurgents face a high risk of official violence during security operations, and a low risk of extrajudicial violence by security forces, including torture and extrajudicial killings. DFAT assesses that individuals and families perceived as supporting the insurgency face a moderate risk of official discrimination in the form of warrantless searches and arbitrary arrest and detention. DFAT assesses that civilians from both Malay Muslim and Thai Buddhist communities face a low risk of violence from both state authorities and insurgent forces.

GROUPS OF INTEREST

Women

3.65 Section 27 of the Constitution guarantees equal rights for men and women, and prohibits discrimination against a person on the grounds of sex. Other articles commit the State to protecting and promoting women's rights. The *Gender Equality Act* (2015) mandates non-discrimination based on sex and gender identity in policy, rule, regulation, notification, project and procedures by government, private organisations, and any individual, but makes exceptions in the cases of religious principles and national security. Some 27 cases were brought under this act between 2016 and 2019, mostly concerning alleged discrimination against transgender people (see [Sexual orientation and gender identity](#)).

3.66 Thai women are well-represented in education, business, and the arts. There is gender parity in primary school enrolments, and female students outnumber males in secondary and tertiary education. Women are involved in all sectors of the economy and account for up to 40 per cent of Chief Executive Officers and 34 per cent of Chief Financial Officers. Nevertheless, women lag behind men in terms of overall labour participation. Gender discrimination is common in some workplaces, such as exclusion from certain roles and opportunities. Employers sometimes specify gender in recruiting material. Women are significantly underrepresented in politics, the security forces and at senior levels of the judiciary.

3.67 Gender-based violence (GBV) is a significant problem in Thailand. According to UN Women, one in four Thai women will experience physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner in her lifetime. Stigma and lack of financial independence are barriers to leaving abusive relationships. Family and community attitudes often promote reconciliation at the expense of women's safety. Domestic violence reportedly worsened during COVID-19 lockdowns, in line with global trends. Political opinion and gender intersect, and female journalists, activists, politicians and protesters are frequently subjected to sexual threats and doxxing online (see [Political opinion, actual or imputed](#)).

3.68 There is a dedicated national 24/7 domestic violence hotline and government-run shelters in all provinces. One Stop Crisis Centres (OSCC) are available in all public hospitals under the Ministry of Public Health. These centres provide survivors with healthcare (including doctors, nurses, and psychologists) and referral to other services, such as social workers, shelters, police, lawyers, and NGO services. More than 13,000 women and girls accessed these services in 2018. In-country sources reported that women could theoretically relocate to other towns or provinces to escape abusive relationships, although in practice this often depended on their financial resources, support networks and whether or not they had dependent children.

3.69 Protection orders can be issued by courts or the police. Few women seek protection orders and in-country sources reported that they were not always effective. The *Family Institute Protection Act* (2019) makes family violence a crime and mandates prosecution. It allows third parties to report suspected abuse and allows officials of the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security to impose a 48-hour protection order, even without a court order. Under the Act, abusers can be barred from entering the family home, forced to undergo counselling, and banned from alcohol. Despite these protections, police and judges do not always take reports of GBV seriously and often emphasise reconciliation over protection of victims.

3.70 Rape is significantly underreported: research suggests as few as 10 per cent of victims disclose their experience of rape. Rape and sexual assault are criminalised under Article 27 of the Criminal Code, with penalties ranging from four years' imprisonment to the death penalty. Victims are eligible for financial support under the Criminal Injuries Compensation Act (2001). Spousal rape is criminalised.

3.71 An in-depth UN report on official responses to rape in Thailand found 'women reporting cases of rape in Thailand ... encounter significant societal, legal, and institutional policies and practices that act as barriers to justice'. These include gender-insensitive policing and legal structures, a preference by police and families for conciliation over accountability, and a strong culture of victim-blaming. Perpetrators who are powerful or well-connected sometimes escape accountability through corruption or influence.

3.72 Either men or women can file for divorce. Grounds include: 'adultery; misconduct that caused the survivors to be seriously ashamed, insulted or hated; serious harm against survivor or the ascendants'. Assets are generally divided equally, and there is provision for child support, although it is not always enforced. Custody decisions tend to favour mothers and shared custody arrangements are available. Many Thai couples live in de facto relationships, and there are very high numbers of single mothers. In-country sources reported that single mothers were generally not stigmatised, although family breakups were frowned upon. A THB 600 (AUD 25) a month government welfare payment is available for all single parents earning less than THB 100,000 (AUD 4,500) a year.

3.73 Women in some ethnic minority communities are significantly less empowered and more likely to suffer GBV than other women in Thailand, especially when they are [stateless](#). They often struggle to access support services, including due to a lack of interpreters. In-country sources reported that among the Hmong ethnic group, married women were usually considered property of their husband's family, meaning if they divorce, they are not allowed to return to their own families. Forced marriages reportedly occur among some ethnic minorities, including the Hmong, Akha and Lisu (see [Race/Nationality](#)).

3.74 Female genital mutilation (FGM) – reportedly of Type IV, ‘pricking’ – occurs in some Muslim communities in southern Thailand. FGM is not criminalised and DFAT is not aware of government efforts to eradicate it.

3.75 Thailand is one of the world’s major sex tourism destinations. Women and *kathoeys* (see [Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity](#)) make up the majority of sex workers. Although sex work is illegal under the *Prevention and Suppression of Prostitution Act* (1996), the law is only sporadically enforced, and sex workers operate openly throughout Thailand. Because of their legal status, sex workers are vulnerable to exploitation and harassment. While sex work remains stigmatised, its visibility and economic importance make it a tolerated, if not necessarily accepted, part of Thai society. The Move Forward Party proposed a draft bill to legalise sex work ahead of the 2023 election.

3.76 DFAT assesses that women in Thailand face a moderate risk of GBV, including, but not limited to, domestic violence and sexual assault. Although state protection mechanisms exist, DFAT assesses women face societal, legal, and institutional barriers to accessing them. The ability to relocate to escape a perpetrator depends on individual circumstances, including financial resources and support networks. It may be difficult or impossible for a woman to gain protection from a high-ranking or powerful perpetrator. DFAT assesses that women from ethnic minority communities are at higher risk of GBV and have less access to state protection (see [Race/Nationality](#)).

Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

3.77 Thailand has a long-held reputation for tolerance towards lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and/or intersex (LGBTQIA+) people. The law does not prohibit consensual same-sex relations, and issues facing LGBTQIA+ communities are discussed in public. The *Gender Equality Act* (2015) prohibits discrimination ‘due to the fact that the person is male or female or of a different appearance than his or her own sex by birth’. LGBTQIA+ people have successfully filed claims under this Act, although critics claim it is not always effective and offenders generally avoid punishment.

3.78 In-country sources reported that overt homophobic statements or actions were generally considered unacceptable by Thai society. DFAT is not aware of any pattern of societal violence against the LGBTQIA+ community or individuals in recent times. LGBTQIA+ people are not excluded from the civil service or the military, and gay men can ordain as Buddhist monks (provided they observe the vow of celibacy required of all monks). There are prominent LGBTQIA+ people in business, academia and media, and several openly gay MPs. Thailand elected its first transgender MP in 2019 and another in 2023. LGBTQIA+ advocacy groups exist and operate nationwide, providing support services to LGBTQIA+ people and advocating for the LGBTQIA+ community and its needs.

3.79 Despite the prominence of LGBTQIA+ issues in Thailand, many Thais have a limited understanding of gay and lesbian relationships. Older Thais especially often understand LGBTQIA+ as referring predominantly to *kathoeys* (trans women). Some LGBTQIA+ people remain uncomfortable disclosing their identity due to concerns of social stigma or rejection. Until recently, lesbians and trans men were much less visible in Thai society than gay men or trans women, although in-country sources reported this was rapidly changing.

3.80 Some LGBTQIA+ people experience family violence and rejection on the basis of their sexual orientation or gender identity. Some are pressured by parents to enter heterosexual marriages. Muslim families especially often hold conservative attitudes towards LGBTQIA+ people. In-country sources reported that while some LGBTQIA+ people lived openly in the Muslim-majority SBPs, others chose to relocate to Bangkok or other more tolerant areas. There are some reports of bullying against LGBTQIA+ people in schools, although in-country sources reported this was consistent with broader patterns of bullying of all students and rarely extended to physical violence.

3.81 LGBTQIA+ people were prominent in the 2020-21 protest movement. Some LGBTQIA+ protesters who were detained complained that authorities asked questions about their LGBTQIA+ status in interviews. They were otherwise apparently treated the same as other protesters (see [Political Opinion, Actual or Perceived](#)).

3.82 There is no provision for same-sex marriage or civil unions in Thai law, and same-sex couples cannot legally adopt. Due to lack of legal recognition, same-sex partners are disadvantaged in inheritance rights, welfare benefits and the right to make medical decisions for their partner. Thai lawmakers have been considering a bill to legalise same-sex civil unions since 2012, and Pheu Thai and the Move Forward Party included support for same-sex marriage in their policy platforms ahead of the 2023 election.

3.83 Transgender people are unable to change their sex on official documents, even when they have had sex reassignment surgery (SRS). This can lead to difficulties in travel (if the sex on an individual's passport does not match their appearance) and employment. The Ministry of Education requires all students to wear sex-specific uniforms consistent with their biological sex, although increasing numbers of schools and universities allow transgender students (and in some cases staff) to wear uniforms according to their individual gender expression. Trans women prisoners are kept in separate blocks in prisons.

3.84 Trans women in particular experience employment discrimination outside of stereotypical occupations such as sex work and beauty therapy. Although some find employment outside these industries, a 2019 study by the Asia Pacific Transgender Network found trans women were consistently much less likely to receive a positive response to a job application than other, similarly qualified applicants.

3.85 While trans women who have undergone SRS are exempt from the military draft (see [Military](#)) they are provided documents that outline the grounds for their exemption as being 'gender identity disorder', widely interpreted as a form of mental illness. This can impact employment opportunities, as conscription documents are regularly presented in employment situations.

3.86 Local media reports often link trans women with crime, and there are reports of trans sex workers being physically and verbally abused by police. In 2021, a policeman was forced to publicly apologise after video of him kicking and shouting at a trans sex worker in Chonburi was made public. In-country sources reported that such incidents had become much rarer due to changing social attitudes, civil society advocacy and improved training for police. According to the US State Department's 2022 human rights report for Thailand, police treat LGBTQIA+ victims of crime the same as others 'except in the case of sexual crimes, where there was a tendency to downplay sexual abuse or not to take harassment seriously'.

3.87 Little information is available on the treatment or recognition of intersex people. Intersex people can change the sex marker on their birth certificates to either male or female if they were diagnosed as intersex at birth and have subsequently undergone genital surgery.

3.88 DFAT assesses that LGBTQIA+ people face a low risk of official discrimination through denial of inheritance, adoption, and medical rights. DFAT assesses LGBTQIA+ people face a low risk of societal violence and discrimination, although this varies between families and communities. DFAT assesses that trans women face a moderate risk of official discrimination due to their inability to legally change their sex, and a low risk of official violence if they are in contact with the police. DFAT assesses that trans women face a moderate risk of societal discrimination in employment. Although state protection mechanisms exist for these groups, they are not always accessible or effective.

Children

3.89 Despite strong legal protections, child labour and exploitation occur in Thailand. Children are put to work in industries including agriculture, fisheries, and professional kickboxing, and exploited for commercial sex and online pornography. Children from migrant populations, ethnic minorities and poor families are

particularly vulnerable. According to the US Department of Labor, in 2021 the Thai government made ‘moderate advancement’ in eliminating the worst forms of child labour. For information on child trafficking, including sex trafficking, see [People Trafficking](#).

3.90 The minimum legal age for marriage for both sexes is 17, although anyone younger than 20 requires parental consent. A court may grant permission for children aged between 15 and 16 years to marry. Despite these laws, child marriage occurs in Thailand. According to UNICEF, 20 per cent of Thai women marry before the age of 18 and 3 per cent marry before 15. Many early marriages reportedly occur in the Muslim-majority SBPs, as well as some hill tribe communities. *Sharia* law allows the marriage of young girls after their first menstrual cycle with parental approval, and a Muslim younger than 17 may marry with a written court order or written parental consent.

3.91 An unusually large proportion of those involved in the 2020-21 protests were children. In February 2018, Amnesty International released a report called “We are Reclaiming Our Future” detailing surveillance and intimidation of child protesters. Alleged harassment included monitoring of social media, visits by authorities to schools and homes, and being followed or photographed outside schools and on public transport. In-country sources reported that protesters including children were sometimes followed by men they called ‘minions’ who wore plainclothes and appeared to be members of the security forces. Some protesters have reportedly suffered mental health issues as a result. See [Political Opinion, Actual or Perceived](#).

3.92 DFAT assesses that children in Thailand generally face a low risk of abuse and exploitation. DFAT assesses that children from migrant populations, ethnic minorities or very poor families are more vulnerable and face a moderate risk of abuse and exploitation, including child labour and sexual exploitation. State protection mechanisms exist but are not always effective. DFAT assesses that child protesters face similar risks to other political protesters; if detained they are treated similarly to other children in contact with the justice system (see [Detention and Prison](#)).

People living with disabilities

3.93 Section 27 of the Constitution prohibits discrimination on the grounds of disability, or physical or health condition. The *Persons with Disabilities Empowerment Act* (2007) provides for rehabilitation services, disability-appropriate education, and assistance to access public services. It also requires businesses to employ people with disabilities ‘in proper proportions of the entire number of their workforce’. The *Persons with Disabilities Education Act* (2008) ‘promotes fairness of access to education and vocational training for all disadvantaged groups’.

3.94 Numerous NGOs and civil society organisations provide services to people living with disabilities (PLWD) and promote their interests nationwide. Mainstream schools are required by law to accept students with disabilities, and there are dozens of specialist schools and education centres for students with disabilities. Some students with disabilities attend university and access support to do so. PLWD who register with the government are entitled to free medical examinations, wheelchairs, and crutches. Some PLWD have successfully sued businesses such as airlines or banks that failed to provide disability-accessible services.

3.95 Despite government support and legal protections, in-country sources reported that PLWD in Thailand still encountered discrimination and barriers to full enjoyment of their rights. Government support for inclusive education is inadequate, and disabled students often drop out of school or attend informal education centres that do not provide pathways to higher skilled work. Access to appropriate education and support is particularly challenging for disabled students from poor, rural, migrant, or ethnic minority communities (see [Race/Nationality](#)).

3.96 In-country sources reported that although societal attitudes towards PLWD were positive, they were often ‘paternalistic rather than empowering’. Families occasionally hid disabled children from view out of perceived stigma. There are isolated reports of individuals with neurodevelopmental disorders such as Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and other PLWD being shackled, although in-country sources said this was rare and usually occurred as a last resort by very poor families. Sexual exploitation and abuse of deaf people and people with intellectual disabilities is reportedly common. Due to communication difficulties and a lack of support services such as sign language translators and instructors, these groups sometimes struggle to access appropriate healthcare and protection.

3.97 DFAT assesses that although PLWD face some restrictions and barriers, they are generally able to access support to participate in society. DFAT assesses that people with physical and intellectual disabilities, as well as people with neurodevelopmental disorders, can also face a moderate risk of sexual exploitation and abuse.

Refugees and asylum seekers

3.98 Thailand hosts a large refugee population, mostly from Myanmar. Approximately 90,000 Myanmar refugees live in nine camps along the Thai-Myanmar border, managed by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Some have been in the camps for decades.

3.99 Conditions in the camps are basic. The refugees cannot build permanent housing, have no legal right to work and must obtain permission to leave the camps, including for medical treatment. Humanitarian needs including food, healthcare and education are provided by the Committee for Coordination of Services to Displaced Persons in Thailand (CCSDPT), a consortium of NGOs. Since 2015, about 100,000 refugees from these camps have been resettled to third countries (including Australia).

3.100 From 2014 to 2022, UNHCR facilitated the voluntary return of almost 2,000 people from the camps under an agreement with Thailand and Myanmar. Voluntary returns ceased after the February 2022 Myanmar coup. Since then, large numbers of people have fled from Myanmar to Thailand to escape violence. They are generally allowed to stay for a few days or weeks before being encouraged to return by Thai authorities. There are credible reports of forced returns by Thai security forces. One group of refugees was reportedly attacked by Myanmar security forces after being moved back across the border by Thai authorities (see the [DFAT Country Information Report on Myanmar](#)).

3.101 DFAT is aware of credible reports of serious mistreatment and exploitation of some refugees and asylum seekers in Thailand, including by Thai officials and security forces. [Women](#) and [LGBTQIA+ individuals](#) are particularly vulnerable, especially along the Thai-Myanmar border. Some undocumented people from Myanmar are reported to have been subjected to pressure for sexual favours or bribes of up to THB 20,000 (AUD 900) in exchange for not being detained or deported as illegal migrants (see the [DFAT Country Information Report on Myanmar](#)).

3.102 Approximately 5,600 UNHCR-registered refugees from various countries live in Bangkok. Hundreds of refugees are held in Immigration Detention Centres (IDCs), including about 600 Rohingya and more than 50 Uyghurs. Conditions in the IDCs are harsh (see [Detention and Prison](#)). Thailand reportedly comes under pressure from some countries to return or indefinitely detain their nationals. In 2015, the Thai government forcibly returned 109 Uyghur men and boys to China (see the [DFAT Country Information Report on China](#)). Outside the IDCs, refugees are vulnerable to sexual and labour exploitation and human trafficking (see [Security Situation](#)).

3.103 Thailand is not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention and does not have specific asylum legislation. Consequently, refugees and asylum seekers who do not otherwise have a legal right to stay in

Thailand are treated as illegal migrants. In 2019, the Thai Government announced a National Screening Mechanism (NSM) to distinguish between people who need international protection and economic migrants. Refugees from Myanmar are not included under the NSM. Criteria for the NSM were approved by Cabinet in 2022 and a committee has been developed to oversee its implementation. Progress has been slow and, as at the time of publication, the mechanism was not yet in operation.

3.104 DFAT is aware of reports Thailand was considering offering 10-year migrant worker visas to UNHCR-registered refugees in exchange for giving up their refugee status. DFAT understands this arrangement never proceeded past initial discussions and is not in operation. Under a 2016 MoU, UNHCR-registered refugees from Myanmar have the option of giving up their refugee status, leaving Thailand and returning to live and work in Thailand for up to four years. In-country sources reported that Myanmar refugees were highly unlikely to take up this option following Myanmar's return to military rule in February 2021.

3.105 DFAT assesses that refugees in established camps in Thailand face a high risk of official discrimination in the form of restricted movement, inability to own land and barriers to education, healthcare, and other essential services. DFAT assesses that outside of established camps, refugees also face a moderate risk of official discrimination in the form of misidentification and detention as illegal migrants and forcible return to their country of origin. DFAT assesses refugees also face a moderate risk of sexual and labour exploitation and human trafficking.

Stateless People

3.106 Around 570,000 stateless people are registered with the government in Thailand, one of the largest populations of stateless people in the world. Many are members of hill tribes living in and around Chiang Mai, as well as ethnic minorities along the Thai-Myanmar border. This group includes people from Myanmar who lack evidence of citizenship, ethnic minorities registered with civil authorities, and previously undocumented minorities (see also [Race/Nationality](#) and [Birth Certificates](#)).

3.107 Although the law stipulates every child born in Thailand should receive a birth certificate regardless of their parents' status, many parents do not obtain them, particularly ethnic minorities living in remote areas. Barriers include administrative complexities, language and geographical barriers, travel restrictions, misinformed or unscrupulous local officials and a lack of recognition of the importance of the document (see [Birth Certificates](#)).

3.108 By law, stateless people may not vote, or own land, and their travel is restricted (see [Internal Relocation](#)). They can legally work in any occupation, although licenses for certain occupations are restricted to citizens. Many work in low-skilled jobs in agriculture and construction. Stateless people in Thailand are vulnerable to sexual and labour exploitation and human trafficking (see [Security Situation](#)).

3.109 In general, stateless people experience worse health and education outcomes than Thai citizens. While they can attend Thai schools, access is uneven. Although they can enrol in Thai universities, they cannot access government loans. They are ineligible for free healthcare under the Universal Coverage Scheme. While some are covered by the National Healthcare Fund for Persons with Legal Status Problems, many rely on services provided by NGOs. Some lack access to healthcare altogether.

3.110 As part of a pledge to attain zero statelessness by 2024, the Thai government has gradually reformed its nationality and civil registration laws to make it easier for people to claim citizenship. As a result, over 100,000 stateless people have acquired Thai citizenship since 2008. Nevertheless, procedures to obtain citizenship remain difficult to access, overly bureaucratic and complex. Those who succeed often do so only with the help of NGOs. Estimates suggest it would take the government decades to provide nationality for the current caseload.

3.111 DFAT assesses that stateless people in Thailand face a high risk of official discrimination in the form of restricted movement, inability to own land and barriers to education, healthcare, and other essential services. Pathways to citizenship exist but are often inaccessible due to structural barriers. DFAT assesses that stateless people are at moderate risk of sexual and labour exploitation and human trafficking.

Victims of loan sharks

3.112 Loan sharking is a serious and widespread problem in Thailand, where it accounts for an estimated 20 per cent of total lending. At least half of those who owe money to loan sharks also have debts with formal lenders. In many cases, victims owe money to multiple lenders and borrow from one lender to pay off another. Victims range from factory workers and day labourers to small-scale farmers, economic migrants, and operators of SMEs. Loans range from as little as THB 3,000 (AUD 120) to THB 1 million (AUD 40,000) or more.

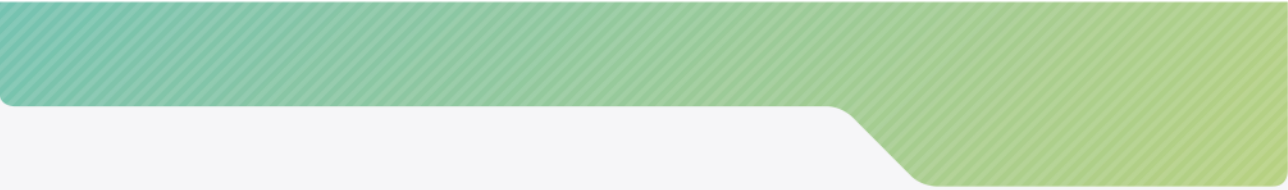
3.113 Loan sharks typically charge extremely high interest, often calculated daily. For instance, a victim may take out a THB 5,000 (AUD 200) loan on which they must pay THB 125 (AUD 5) interest per day for 25 days, at which point they must repay the principal in full, an interest rate of more than 60 per cent. Borrowers often receive considerably less than the nominal amount borrowed: a victim may borrow THB 10,000 (AUD 400) and only receive THB 7,200 (AUD 300) due to 'deductions' charged by the loan shark.

3.114 Small borrowers often hand over bank cards or identity documents as collateral. Farmers tend to secure their loans against land deeds. Many loans are not secured against assets, however, are guaranteed by a relative or village headman. Loans which are secured against assets, such as farm machinery, are typically easier to settle if the borrower defaults, since the lender can repossess the asset to pay off the debt. Military personnel sometimes fall victim to loansharking by senior officers, who lend them money to assist with the corrupt purchase of ranks; they are reportedly expected to repay their debts through further corruption.

3.115 Loan sharking operators include criminal gangs, wealthy individuals, and corrupt officials. Some employ former police officers – known as 'black helmets' – as enforcers. Enforcers use a variety of methods to coerce borrowers into repaying their debts, including verbal harassment and threats of legal action, as well as vandalism, such as supergluing the locks on a property so the victim can't access it. They may also use doxxing or post notices around a person's workplace or home that they are a 'bad person' who doesn't pay their debts. At the higher end, enforcers seize assets such as TVs and rice cookers, burn down victims' homes or businesses, make violent threats (including sexual threats) against victims, family members and guarantors, and carry out physical attacks. DFAT is aware of cases where victims were severely beaten or forced into drug trafficking or sex work to repay their debts. Suicide rates among victims are high.

3.116 Thailand criminalises loansharking under Civil Code 156, which limits the maximum interest chargeable on loans to 15 per cent, and Civil Code 2560, which makes loansharking a criminal offence, punishable by two years in prison. Loansharking victims can access support through agencies including the police, the Ministry of Interior and the Prime Minister's Office. Victims can also contact the Center for Countering Abuse by Loan Sharks on a 24/7 hotline. Police investigate loansharking claims and loan sharks are regularly arrested and imprisoned: for instance, more than 100 people were arrested on suspicion of loansharking in the first half of 2022.

3.117 Despite these protections, in-country sources reported that victims were often unaware of how to seek help, authorities were under-resourced to combat loansharking, and their efforts were often poorly coordinated. Corruption is a serious obstacle and local officials are often involved in loan sharking or turn a blind eye to it. It can be difficult or impossible for victims to access state protection where the alleged loan shark is a high-ranking official, military or police officer, or local powerbroker.



3.118 DFAT assesses that victims of loan sharks are at high risk from criminal gangs of verbal, social and online harassment, and at moderate risk of violence, including assault, arson, and vandalism. While avenues exist to seek state protection, these are sometimes ineffective, especially where the loan shark is a high-ranking or powerful individual.

4. COMPLEMENTARY PROTECTION CLAIMS

ARBITRARY DEPRIVATION OF LIFE

Extra-judicial killings

4.1 Thailand has a history of state-sponsored violence, including extra-judicial killings. Perpetrators have included soldiers, police, paramilitaries, and civilian militias. Victims have included [protesters](#), [civil society activists](#), [critics of the monarchy](#) and [suspected insurgents in the SBPs](#). State-sponsored actors generally enjoy impunity from prosecution, and perpetrators are almost never brought to justice. A 'war on drugs' waged by the Thaksin government in the mid-2000s led to thousands of extra-judicial killings of accused drug dealers. Many were later found to have no links to the drug trade.

4.2 Some in-country sources reported that the Thai state had changed tactics in recent years, preferring to use 'lawfare' or judicial harassment to silence opponents rather than killing or disappearing them (see [Political Opinion, Actual or Imputed](#)). The US Department of State 2022 Human Rights Report did not record any extrajudicial killings in Thailand in 2022.

Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances

4.3 Enforced disappearances occur in Thailand, although the US State Department did not record any cases in 2022. In August 2022, the parliament passed the *Prevention and Suppression of Torture and Enforced Disappearances Act*, which criminalises enforced disappearance, punishable by jail sentences of 5-15 years and fines of THB 100,000-300,000 (AUD 4,000-12,000). The law also establishes a committee chaired by the Minister of Justice which provides a mechanism for investigating alleged cases and preventing future cases.

4.4 In the most recent United Nations Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances report, released in August 2015, the UN noted that it had recorded 82 cases of enforced disappearance in Thailand since 1980. Human rights groups believe the actual number is higher, as some families of victims and witnesses have remained silent due to fear of reprisal. None of the 82 cases have been formally resolved, and no perpetrators have been brought to justice.

Deaths in Custody

4.5 Deaths in custody sometimes occur in Thailand, including at the hands of state officials. Thailand does not release official figures on the numbers of deaths in custody. In August 2021, a video emerged showing police officers in Nakhon Sawan torturing and suffocating to death a suspected drug dealer. The police were reportedly attempting to extort a USD 61,000 bribe (AUD 100,000) from the suspect. Six of the police officers received life sentences for murder, including the ringleader, nicknamed 'Joe Ferrari' for his multi-million-dollar collection of illicitly gained luxury cars. See also [Torture](#).

4.6 A suspected insurgent died in August 2019 after being interrogated in military custody in Pattani. A lawyer assisting the man's family said the man might have been tortured to death. A military commission found he died of natural causes. The NHRC also investigated the incident, but found 'no clear medical evidence to show what had caused his death'. There have been several deaths in immigration detention centres in recent years, which some human rights observers attribute to neglect (see [Detention and prison](#)).

DEATH PENALTY

4.7 The Criminal Code permits the death penalty for a range of offences, including murder, rape, arson, terrorism, demanding or accepting a bribe, treason, espionage, and drug trafficking or possession. People excluded from the death penalty include individuals aged below 18 at the time of the crime; pregnant women; the mentally ill; and the intellectually disabled. The method of execution is lethal injection.

4.8 There were 195 prisoners on death row at the end of 2022, most for drug trafficking. Executions are rare: only three people have been executed since 2003, the most recent for murder in June 2018. The monarch has broad powers to authorise executions, or to pardon or commute death sentences.

TORTURE

4.9 Thailand is a State Party to CAT (see [Human Rights Framework](#)) and Section 28 of the Constitution prohibits torture, brutal acts, or punishment by cruel or inhumane means. The *Prevention and Suppression of Torture and Enforced Disappearances Act*, which criminalises torture by state officials, was passed in 2022. The law establishes an investigation complaints mechanism and prescribes jail sentences of 5-15 years and fines of THB 100,000-300,000 (AUD 4,000-12,000) for offenders. See also [Enforced or involuntary disappearances](#).

4.10 Despite legal protections, there have been credible reports of torture in Thailand, including by military and police. Victims include protesters, suspected criminals, and suspected insurgents. Methods include beatings, burns, electric shocks and suffocation. Police are reported to abuse and torture suspects in custody, including to extract confessions. The widely-reported 'Joe Ferrari' case in 2021 involved police torturing a suspect by suffocating him with plastic bags to extort money (see [Deaths in custody](#)).

4.11 Security forces have been known to use torture to extract intelligence from people associated with the insurgency in the SBPs, although in-country sources reported this was much less common than in the past. Amnesty International's 2016 report 'Make Him Speak by Tomorrow' detailed multiple cases of torture against protesters and other detainees by security forces following the 2014 coup. There are credible reports that some protesters who were detained during the 2020-21 protests were tortured in custody by police, including beatings, death threats and burning with cigarettes.

4.12 Torturers are rarely held to account, and there are numerous examples of investigations lasting years without resolution. In-country sources reported they were hopeful the *Prevention and Suppression of Torture and Enforced Disappearances Act* (2022) would be a deterrent and mechanism for accountability in the future.

4.13 For assessments of the risk of torture to specific groups, see relevant sections such as [Critics of the Monarchy](#), [Protesters](#) and [People Associated with the Insurgency in the Southern Border Provinces](#).

CRUEL, INHUMAN OR DEGRADING TREATMENT OR PUNISHMENT

4.14 There have been numerous reports of cases of hazing and physical abuse of low-ranking soldiers, some of which have led to fatalities. In January 2021, two army recruits filed a complaint with authorities after they were allegedly beaten and tortured by a drill sergeant for possession of marijuana. In 2018, a 22-year-old conscript died after he was beaten by three senior soldiers at Lopburi army camp three weeks earlier. In December 2022, a policewoman was charged with crimes including human trafficking and assault after she detained and physically abused a female soldier who was assigned to her as a maid.

4.15 For information about alleged cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment of palace guards and other people who fall out of favour with the monarchy, see [Critics of the Monarchy](#).

Arbitrary Arrest and Detention

4.16 Article 28 of the Constitution states that arrest and detention of a person shall only be permitted through a court-issued order or warrant, or on other grounds as provided by law. Persons arrested or detained by police are entitled to judicial review of their detention within 48 hours in most cases, and are entitled to compensation should a court find that they have been held unlawfully. DFAT understands this requirement is generally observed, except where provisions such as the Emergency Decree apply (see [Protesters](#), [People Associated with the Insurgency in the Southern Border Provinces](#)).

4.17 Following the 2014 coup (see [Recent History](#)), the NCPO summoned, arrested and detained approximately 2,000 people under HNCPO order 3/2015 (see [Political opinion, actual or perceived](#)). Those detained included politicians, activists, journalists, and others accused of supporting the deposed government, offending the monarchy, or being involved in anti-coup activities. Prior to releasing detainees, military authorities often required them to sign documents affirming they were treated well, would refrain from political activity, and would seek authorisation prior to travel outside the local area.

4.18 After the 2014 coup, authorities summoned at least 929 people to participate in ‘attitude adjustment’ sessions. Those subjected to such sessions were detained incommunicado in military camps, with some held longer than the allowable seven-day limit. Although attitude adjustment generally did not involve physical mistreatment, authorities subjected detainees to psychological pressure, including being blindfolded and driven to undisclosed locations, subjected to lengthy interrogations and intimidatory talks from military officials, held in solitary confinement, and denied access to family members or legal counsel. DFAT is not aware of cases of people being subjected to attitude adjustment after 2019.

4.19 Where in force, the *Emergency Decree on Public Administration in the State of Emergency* (2005; ‘the Emergency Decree’) gives the government authority to detain persons without charge for up to 30 days in unofficial places of detention, including military camps or police stations. The Emergency Decree is in force in the SBPs and was invoked nationwide during COVID-19 lockdowns in 2020-21. During this period the Emergency Decree was frequently used to arrest anti-government [protestors](#).

5. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

STATE PROTECTION

5.1 The effectiveness of state protection mechanisms in Thailand varies, and institutions including the military, police and judiciary are often politicised. Corruption is common, especially among police. At various times all branches of the security forces have been implicated in human rights abuses. A culture of impunity prevails, including in the SBPs (see [People Associated with the Insurgency in the Southern Border Provinces](#)).

Military

5.2 The Thai military consists of five branches – the Royal Thai Army, Royal Thai Navy, Royal Thai Air Force, Royal Thai Armed Forces (joint headquarters), and the Ministry of Defence. The King is the official head of the armed forces. Thailand has an estimated 350,000 active-duty personnel and about 100,000 reservists.

5.3 The Ministry of Defence requires service members to receive human rights training, including officers, NCOs, enlisted personnel, and recruits. Military officers in the SBPs receive specific human rights training, including detailed, situation-specific contingencies. Nevertheless, there are credible, well-documented reports of human rights abuses by Thai military personnel, including [torture](#) and [mistreatment](#), [arbitrary detention](#) and [extra-judicial killings](#). Perpetrators are rarely, if ever, held to account.

5.4 Under the *Military Service Act* (1954), men over the age of 21 are eligible for compulsory military service. Conscripts are selected through a lottery system. There is no provision for conscientious objection. Approximately 100,000 personnel are recruited each year through the system. The period of service varies. Those with university degrees normally serve for six months if they volunteer for service, or one year if drafted via lottery. Those who have completed secondary education will serve one year if they volunteer, or two years if drafted. People sometimes bribe officials to avoid the draft or leave the military early, although doing so carries a potential punishment of up to three years' imprisonment. Despite some resistance, growing social and political pressure means the armed forces are likely to gradually transition to a mostly volunteer force over the next decade.

Police

5.5 The Royal Thai Police (RTP) is the national police force of Thailand. It is governed by a Director-General who reports to the Office of the Prime Minister. The RTP employs an estimated 220,000 officers.

5.6 The Metropolitan Police Bureau is responsible for policing in Bangkok, while the Provincial Police Division is responsible for policing in the remaining 76 provinces. The Border Patrol Police, a 40,000-strong paramilitary force, has special responsibility for policing in border areas, including combating insurgencies and suppressing transnational crime. Other RTP bodies include the Central Investigation Bureau (CIB); Narcotics Suppression Bureau; Police Education Bureau; Tourist Police Bureau; and Immigration Bureau.

5.7 In October 2018, a new 1,600-strong police unit was created called the Ratchawallop Police Retainers, King's Guards 904. This unit provides security to the royal family, carries out the king's 'royal wishes', and collects information on 'individuals and groups whose behaviours pose a threat to national security and the monarchy'. See [Critics of the monarchy](#).

5.8 The effectiveness of Thai police at responding to criminal incidents varies. In-country sources reported that parts of the RTP were highly effective, including those involved in investigating drug trafficking and human trafficking and undertaking 'kill or capture' missions against dangerous criminals. Police at junior levels are low-paid and provide much of their own equipment, including their own guns. It is reportedly common for police to extract confessions under intimidation or torture to secure convictions. Some police supplement their income by moonlighting as security guards, while others are involved in illegal activities such as trafficking.

5.9 Despite pledges by successive governments to tackle police [corruption](#), it remains a serious, widespread problem. Efforts to reduce corruption among police have generally focused on encouraging "honest" behaviour by individual officers rather than addressing systemic issues. It can be difficult or impossible for a victim of crime to seek justice and protection from police when the perpetrator is a high-ranking or powerful individual. In September 2023, the RTP was widely criticised in Thai media following 25 officers' failure to prevent (and possible collusion in) the murder of another officer who had reportedly refused to improperly transfer the relative of a local powerbroker.

5.10 There are credible, well-documented reports of human rights abuses by Thai police, including [torture](#) and [mistreatment](#), [arbitrary detention](#) and [extra-judicial killings](#). People can file complaints of police abuse with the superior of the accused police officer, with the Office of the Inspector General, or with the Police Commissioner General. The NHRCT, the Lawyers' Council of Thailand, the Office of the National Anticorruption Commission, the Supreme Court of Justice, the MOJ, the Office of the Prime Minister, and the Office of the Ombudsman also accept complaints of police abuse and corruption. Complaints about police abuse rarely result in punishment. Investigations are often superficial, and complainants are sometimes countersued for defamation by police (see [Political Opinion, Actual or Imputed](#)).

Department of Special Investigation (DSI)

5.11 Formed in 2002, the Department of Special Investigation (DSI) is a 1,600-strong investigative unit that sits within the Ministry of Justice and operates independently of the RTP. The DSI has a statutory remit to investigate serious crimes in the public interest, including complex criminal cases, those affecting national security, those involving organised crime, and those potentially implicating high-ranking government officials or police officers. It is empowered to instigate its own enquiries.

5.12 Although the DSI is reportedly a well-funded and highly capable organisation, DSI officers are occasionally accused of corruption and misconduct. In January 2023, the head of the DSI was removed from his post, after reportedly failing to act against five DSI officers accused of accepting THB 9.5 million (AUD 400,000) in bribes to release 11 suspected Chinese gangsters operating from the former Nauru Consul General's residence.

Judiciary

5.13 The Constitution provides for the right to a fair and public trial and for the presumption of innocence. While most trials are public, courts may order closed trials in cases involving national security, the royal family, children, or sexual abuse. Defendants in ordinary criminal courts enjoy a broad range of legal rights, including

access to a lawyer of their choosing, prompt detailed information on the charges against them, free assistance of an interpreter as necessary, the right to be present at trial, and the right to adequate time and facilities to prepare a defence. They also have the rights to not be compelled to testify or confess guilt, to confront witnesses, and to appeal. While these rights are generally respected, sometimes authorities reportedly do not afford all of them to defendants, particularly in small or remote provinces.

5.14 Section 10 of the Criminal Code prohibits double jeopardy. The Section reads: ‘Whoever commits an offence outside the Kingdom shall not be punished again in the Kingdom for the doing of such an act if there has been a final judgement of a foreign court acquitting such person; or there has been a judgement of a foreign court convicting such person, and such person has already passed over the punishment’. This law is respected in practice.

5.15 From 2014 to 2019, the ruling National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) redirected prosecutions for offences against the monarchy, insurrection, sedition, weapons offences, and violation of its orders from civilian criminal courts to military courts, which did not provide the same legal protections for civilian defendants as civilian courts. Some 2,408 individual were prosecuted in these courts. Those already convicted have no right of appeal.

5.16 Public trust in the judiciary has been undermined by notorious cases where wealthy or well-connected individuals have escaped justice through corruption. Critics often contrast this with prosecutor’s aggressive pursuit of cases against opponents of the government and monarchy (see [Critics of the Monarchy](#)). Courts including the Constitutional Court have repeatedly found against opposition politicians and parties, adding to the perception they lack independence (see [Opposition politicians](#)). Calls to reform the justice system were included in the demands of the 2020-2021 protest movement (see [Protesters](#)).

Detention and Prison

5.17 In its 2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices, the US State Department described conditions in Thai prisons as ‘poor’. In-country sources reported they were nevertheless significantly better than they were in the past. Overcrowding is a major problem and toilet facilities are basic. Food and water are reportedly sufficient in quantity and quality. Prisoners have access to free medical care, medication, vaccination, and dental care. Conditions in Bangkok prisons are generally better than provincial prisons. In-country sources reported that violence within prisons was uncommon and guard-on-prisoner violence extremely rare. However, violence against detainees in police custody is reportedly common (see [Police, Torture, Cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment](#)).

5.18 Male, female, and transgender prisoners are held separately. There are separate facilities for juveniles under 15 years of age. Political prisoners are held with the general prison population. Prisoners are typically housed in the yard from 8 AM to 3 PM and can exercise. Solitary confinement of up to one month is used as a punishment, during which prisoners are denied visitors and privileges.

5.19 Avenues exist for prisoners to complain, and in-country sources said that reports of mistreatment were taken seriously. The National Human Rights Commission monitors prisons, including interviewing prisoners. International organisations have been unable to monitor prisons since the COVID-19 pandemic began, although foreign embassies have been able to visit their own nationals.

5.20 Authorities detain undocumented migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers (who are all categorised as ‘illegal migrants’) in immigration detention centres (IDCs), which are located across the country (see [Refugees and asylum seekers](#)). IDCs are administered by the Immigration Police Bureau and are reportedly poorly regulated.

5.21 In-country sources reported that conditions in IDCs were much worse than in the regular prison system. IDCs are severely overcrowded, with inadequate access to food, clean water, and toilets. Medical care is inadequate. Some detainees have died in recent years, including from COVID-19. DFAT is aware of reports of prisoner-on-prisoner violence in IDCs, as well as violence and extortion by guards. Detainees cannot receive visitors and international organisations have limited opportunity to monitor conditions in IDCs. See also [Refugees and asylum seekers](#).

INTERNAL RELOCATION

5.22 Although Section 38 of the Constitution provides for freedom of internal movement, it also allows for the restriction of this right by law in cases of national security, public order, public welfare, town, or country planning, maintaining family status or for welfare of a minor. Thai citizens from all backgrounds frequently relocate internally for a variety of reasons.

5.23 The government restricts the free internal movement of [stateless people](#) who are not citizens but who hold government-issued identity cards. Authorities prohibit holders of these cards from travelling outside their home districts without prior permission from the district office, or outside their home provinces without permission from the governor. Offenders are subject to fines or a jail term of 45 to 60 days. People without identity cards may not travel at all.

5.24 According to human rights organisations, police at inland checkpoints often ask for bribes in exchange for allowing stateless people to move from one district to another. In addition, two groups – former Chinese civil war belligerents and their descendants living in the country for several decades, and children of Vietnamese immigrants residing in 13 north eastern provinces – live under laws and regulations restricting their movement, residence, education, and access to employment. The Chinese group is restricted to residence in the northern provinces of Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, and Mae Hong Son.

5.25 As noted in [Women](#), DFAT assesses that internal relocation may be more difficult for single women seeking to relocate with children, especially where they lack financial independence and the support of family and friends. DFAT assesses that people wanted by the authorities, particularly in politically sensitive cases, are unlikely to be able to escape through internal relocation.

TREATMENT OF RETURNEES

Exit and Entry Procedures

5.26 Sections 38 and 39 of the Constitution guarantee citizens freedom of travel, emigration and repatriation, and immunity from deportation. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs oversees immigration, which is governed by the *Immigration Act* (1979). The Act requires persons entering or departing Thailand to enter and leave at designated immigration checkpoints only. Persons entering or leaving are required to show their passport and boarding pass (where appropriate). Since July 2022, arrival and departure cards are no longer required to cross Thailand's air borders, but they remain a requirement for crossing land borders.

5.27 Most entry and exit into and out of Thailand is by air, although it is also possible by sea or over land. Thailand currently has ten airports offering regular international services. Entry and exit is also possible at Bangkok and Songkhla Harbours. There are at least 20 international land border crossing points between Malaysia, Myanmar, Laos, and Cambodia, although some of these are not always open or restrict their services to locals living on either side of the border. There are also many informal border crossing points, especially

along Thailand's 2,400 km border with Myanmar. This border features long, unpatrolled sections of jungle where people cross regularly without detection by authorities.

Conditions for Returnees

5.28 Conditions for returnees are likely to depend on the profile of the individual. In-country sources report that low-profile returnees would likely only come to official attention on return if they had committed an immigration offence while departing. Authorities would likely be unaware of the nature of their asylum claims abroad. Most recent returns from Australia have been voluntary and uncontroversial.

5.29 The past few years have seen a considerable rise in the numbers of those claiming asylum overseas, particularly on political grounds. In-country sources said that authorities have compiled a list of political dissidents who have fled the country, although the numbers and names on it are unclear. The list has reportedly been provided to immigration staff at airports, although not to staff at land borders. DFAT is unable to verify the existence of this list, although considers its existence plausible. In recent years authorities have taken an aggressive approach to repatriating anti-monarchy activists from neighbouring countries (see [Critics of the Monarchy](#)). Authorities have sometimes refouled asylum seekers, including recognised refugees (see [Refugees and asylum seekers](#)).

DOCUMENTATION

5.30 The Bureau of Registration Administration has responsibility for civil registration and national identity documents. District offices located nationwide provide a one-stop service for major forms of identification, much of which is now computerised. Documentation can generally be verified without significant difficulty.

Thai National Identity (ID) Card

5.31 The Thai national identity (ID) card is the primary form of identification. It is issued to Thai nationals aged between seven and 70 years. In addition to proving the bearer's identity and eligibility for government services, it is also necessary to obtain private services such as applying for a mobile phone contract or opening a bank account. It is compulsory to carry the ID card, and failure to produce it without good reason is punishable with a fine of up to THB 200 (AUD 10). The ID card is biometric and carries basic information about the bearer, including: their photograph; 13-digit identification number; title; given and family names; date of birth; address; date of issue; and date of expiry (six years after the issue date). All entries except the address are provided in both Thai and English. The initial ID card must be applied for in Thailand, but it can be renewed at Thai diplomatic missions abroad. A digital version of the national ID card is also available.

House Registration Book

5.32 The house registration book is the official document proving a person's legal place of residence. It includes the personal information of a person or persons having an official domicile in Thailand. It is used where proof of address is required, including car ownership or land office registration, opening a bank account, connecting utilities, or voting. The book is blue for Thai nationals and yellow for foreigners.

Birth Certificates

5.33 A person born to a Thai parent (mother or legal father) acquires Thai nationality by birth. Thai law states that any child born in Thailand has the right to be registered and to obtain a birth certificate, including those born to non-Thai parents or parent who have no legal status. Birth certificates are normally filed within 15 days in the local civil registry office by the hospital where the birth takes place. If the birth takes place outside a hospital, the village chief has responsibility for filing birth certificates.

5.34 Birth within Thailand does not automatically confer citizenship. The law bases citizenship on birth to at least one citizen parent, marriage to a male citizen, or naturalisation. Individuals may also acquire citizenship by means of special government-designated criteria implemented by the MOI with approval from the Cabinet or in accordance with nationality law. Many members of ethnic minority groups lack official recognition of citizenship. Recent amendments to the law allow ethnic Thai stateless people and their children, who meet the added definition of 'displaced Thai', to apply for the status of 'Thai nationality by birth' (see [Stateless people](#)).

Marriage Certificates

5.35 To marry legally in Thailand, both parties must be at least 17 years of age or have a court order allowing them to marry (see also [Children](#)). In the case of both parties being Thai nationals, they must both present their ID cards and House Registration cards and be accompanied by at least two witnesses. In the case of previous marriages, proof of divorce or spousal death is also required. Foreigners marrying Thai nationals must present a copy of their passport and arrival card, an affidavit from their embassy regarding their marital status, and a translation of the affidavit certified by an approved MFA translator. Both parties are issued with marriage certificates.

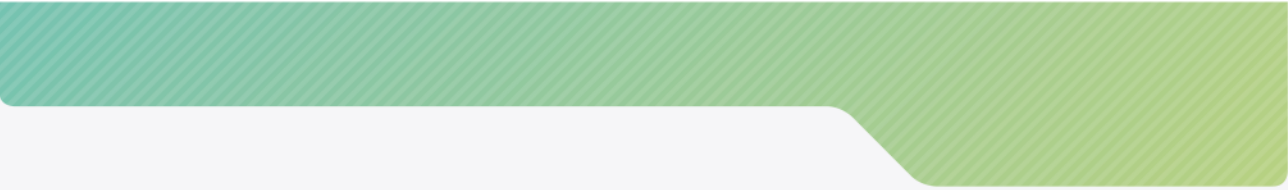
Passports

5.36 Thailand issues ordinary (dark red), official (blue), diplomatic (red) and temporary/emergency (green) passports, as well as *haji* passports (provided to Muslims to enable them to conduct religious pilgrimages to Saudi Arabia). All types have the words 'Passport' and 'Thailand' written in Thai above the national emblem and THAILAND – PASSPORT written below. Thailand has issued biometric passports since 2005, and the biometric symbol is at the bottom of e-passports. Passports are 66 pages long and are valid for five years (the *haji* passport is valid for two years). An ordinary passport costs THB 1,000 (AUD 50).

5.37 Passports contain the following information: Digital photograph of the holder; Type ('P' for ordinary/ 'O' for official/ 'D' for diplomatic); country code (THA); Passport number; Surname; Title name (Mr/Ms/Mrs/Master holder's name); Full name in Thai; Nationality (THAI); Personal number (same as Thai National Identification Card); Province of birth; Date of birth; Sex; Date of issue; Date of expiry; Issuing Authority; Height (metric); Signature of bearer; and Machine Readable Zone. All information is printed in both Thai and English.

PREVALENCE OF FRAUD

5.38 Thailand has long been regarded as one of the world's leading centres for stolen, doctored and/or forged documents. A wide range of high-quality false documents is readily available for purchase on the street, including staff identification passes from multiple airlines, citizenship and driving licences from numerous countries, and diplomas and certificates from prestigious western universities, including Australian ones. There



is a well-established trade in passport theft, and gangs reportedly steal Western passports to order. International observers report that forged passports from Thailand are regarded as the highest quality of any in the world. Thai authorities have done little to combat the trade, and observers allege that there is widespread complicity among officials at all levels.

5.39 In-country sources report that the Thai National Identity (ID) Card is the most trusted form of identification, as the 13-digit identification number on it cannot be changed. Documents with biometric information are generally less vulnerable to fraud than those without.

5.40 Reporting on document fraud indicates that it tends to focus on identity documents from Western countries, particularly in relation to passports. The well-established and high-quality nature of the trade, however, means that fraud in relation to Thai identity documents cannot be discounted.