

# Executive summary

With a population of 71 million, Thailand – an upper-middle-income country since 2011 (OECD, 2025) – has one of the fastest ageing societies in the world. Despite poverty reduction in recent decades, limited opportunities for young people drive intergenerational inequalities (World Bank, 2023; OECD, 2025). With over half the workforce in informal jobs, young people are, without doubt, vulnerable to precarious work. This has significant implications for Thai youth who, as torchbearers of Thailand's future, are not only resilient and ambitious, but already engaged in bringing about positive change in their communities.

In 2025, Thailand and the United Kingdom marked 170 years of diplomatic relations since the signing of the Bowring Treaty in 1855, a milestone that established the foundations of engagement between the two countries. Going forward, there is an opportunity to look ahead and strengthen collaboration through a deeper understanding of Thailand's younger generations. The timing of the Next Generation Thailand study is therefore significant. It explores the aspirations, priorities and constraints of Thai youth between the ages of 18 and 30 years to inform youth centred programming and policy. This aligns with the United Kingdom's renewed strategic engagement with the Asia-Pacific region, with Thailand an important partner within this framework.

This report explores what matters most to young people in Thailand, how young people view their role in the community, what affects youth voice and civic and political engagement, and the barriers young people face in accessing education and skills, employment, and entrepreneurship opportunities. The findings of the report are based on a nationwide quantitative survey of 2,000 respondents, and qualitative insights from key informant interviews (KIIs), focus group discussions (FGDs), Youth Task Force (YTF) and wider stakeholder validation workshops with representatives from academia, civil society, media, public sector, youth-focussed international humanitarian and development organisations, and youth-led initiatives.

**A recurrent theme in this study is that youth are personally driven to succeed despite the sociocultural, economic, and political challenges they face. Young people want to be included as active stakeholders in decision-making that has long-term implications for them.**

**Values and aspirations:** Thai youth's sense of national pride is strongly tied to the country's cultural assets. Young people feel proud to be citizens of Thailand based on Thai cuisine (58 percent), culture (44 percent), and language (35 percent). Financial security (62 percent) and wellbeing (43 percent) constitute the most important markers of success in life. High personal aspirations and individual effort drive young people's forward-looking attitude in relation to career prospects (84 percent), quality of life (84 percent), and their abilities to shape their future (79 percent). Yet existing societal and gender norms as well as institutional constraints significantly impact Thai youth's potential to be effective drivers of change in society.

Qualitative insights reflect that young people are conscious of regional disparities and underlying social biases with respect to gender, sexual orientation, and disability. Thai youth also identify societal pressure (45 percent) and lack of access to education, skills training, and employment (41 percent) as key challenges. Fewer than one in two survey respondents reported receiving limited community support to get ahead in life, most commonly in the form of education grants (38 percent), disability support (31 percent), and job search and employment (23 percent).

**Sources of influence:** While 63 percent of young people depend on online platforms for news and current events, they anchor their trust in their own verification practices as well as personal networks of family and friends (59 percent). In fact, 59 percent of survey respondents reported that family emerges as the strongest influence on young people's views.

**Global outlook:** Thai youth have an open global outlook reflected in their interest in languages, international cultures, and global issues. Fewer than ten percent of young people think that globalisation is a challenge for the world. English – seen as a critical life-skill which expands opportunities for Thai youth in education and employment in Thailand and abroad – is the most popular language to learn according to 89 percent of survey respondents. At the same time, only 30 percent of respondents are willing to move abroad for education or employment. Conversations with university students suggest that low levels of interest in mobility stem from practical constraints such as the lack of financial support, and not youth disinterest. The five most attractive destinations for Thai youth to move to are Japan (33 percent), Australia (26 percent), South Korea (24 percent), the United States of America (23 percent), and China (22 percent) – primarily for education and employment.

**Global challenges:** Youth view global challenges through an environmental lens. According to 38 percent of survey respondents, climate change is the most pressing issue facing the world today. Discussions with university students reflect that young people are concerned about the far reaching impacts of climate change on Thailand's agriculture and food security. They are also concerned about Thailand's energy security in light of ongoing conflict in the Middle East – highlighting that global interconnectedness does not come without challenges.

**Climate action:** According to Thai youth, the most pressing climate-related challenges facing Thailand today are air pollution (45 percent), waste management (37 percent), and deforestation (32 percent). Four in five respondents (83 percent) are willing to or are already engaged in climate action, reflecting a strong readiness to act. Thai youth's engagement in climate action takes place through a combination of youth-led organisations, academic spaces, regional, and international platforms. Young people are increasingly active in environmental problem solving, climate literacy, and advocacy, though participation remains uneven due to insufficient institutional and financial support.

**Voice and expression:** One in two young people (51 percent) think that youth voices on national issues are rarely heard, if at all. Focus group participants express frustration at not being taken seriously or being excluded from decision-making processes that impact them the most. They further stress that restrictive social and gender norms – not indifference – silence youth voice. Youth feel shut out by those in positions of power, in a context where questioning authority in any form is considered disrespectful. LGBTQ+ youth feel they are visible but not empowered and disabled youth feel they are neither seen nor heard.

FGDs revealed that young people feel that physical spaces constrain their ability to express themselves. Public spaces tend to lean toward traditional gender identities, which makes it difficult for LGBTQ+ youth to participate – they feel the pressure to hide a part of their identity. Disabled youth underscore that physical spaces are not designed with accessibility in mind, thereby excluding them altogether. Focus group participants highlight that youth-led initiatives are few, small, and local in nature. Economic precarity and the lack of financial support limits youth participation to a small demographic which does not represent the realities of the general youth population of Thailand.

Young people are turning to digital spaces to communicate and express themselves – the internet removes the barriers that in-person gatherings reinforce, namely judgement and social exclusion, especially in the case of LGBTQ+ and disabled youth. Youth rely on digital platforms to access news (63 percent), learning materials, and connect with others, and one in four (21 percent) use online platforms to engage with their communities. At the same time, young people are acutely aware of the risks of misinformation, disinformation, and fake news, with 29 percent of survey respondents highlighting these as a global challenge. Youth express the need for digital and media literacy support to engage effectively in public discussions and to protect them from online harassment.

**Civic and political engagement:** Young people reflect a strong interest in civic participation through social activities (54 percent) and community development activities (41 percent). A third (32 percent) volunteer with youth and one in four respondents (25 percent) volunteers in disadvantaged areas. Eight in ten young people (88 percent) also stated that they are politically engaged to varying degrees. At the time of data collection in 2025, nine out of ten young people (96 percent) expressed their interest to vote in the next general election. Key factors that influence young people's decision to vote include a sense of national duty or civic responsibility (57 percent). Few respondents (11 percent) would vote based on their affiliation with a political party and even fewer (nine percent) would vote to influence decision-making in the country. This seeming lack of youth engagement with political parties or policymaking may be understood in the context of the political environment in 2020, when students played a pivotal role in demonstrations to amplify youth demands for democratic processes and transparency in governance.

**Education:** Young people see education as central to their mobility and agency, yet they feel that the current system falls short – within the subgroup of survey respondents who are students, 35 percent strongly think that society does not reward educational attainment. While 40 percent of students think that paying more for quality education is justified, it is not something many young people can afford. Youth are critical of an education system that relies on rote learning, outdated curriculum and approaches to teaching, leaving them unprepared for life after graduation. Young people draw attention to the following areas in Thailand's education system which need significant improvements: support for career guidance (41 percent), curriculum (39 percent), fee structure (37 percent), quality of teaching in public institutions (33 percent), and teacher shortage (31 percent) as well as access to improved infrastructure and facilities (30 percent). Insights from the KIIs and FGDs suggest that an overhaul of the education system is required. Reforms should be directed toward modernising the curriculum, increasing access to education services, reducing regional disparities, and improving access to marginalised communities.

**Employment:** Survey respondents who are employed face significant challenges in a largely informal and gender segregated labour market. Women are more represented in low wage jobs, primarily services and care sectors, while men are more represented in technical skills and trades. Higher shares of disabled youth (43 percent) are also vulnerable to less secure forms of employment such as part-time work, self-employment, and seasonal employment. Commonly cited issues relate to low wages (37 percent), job insecurity (34 percent), long working hours (28 percent), and lack of career growth (27 percent). A persistent mismatch between education outcomes and labour market needs reinforces underemployment, while regional disparities push youth to migrate to cities for work. Marginalised groups also face discrimination and inaccessible workplaces. Insights from FGDs underscore the need for labour reforms to improve youth's access to formal employment. The priorities of young people would be prioritising fair wages, stronger worker protections, transparent recruitment, and closer alignment between education and employer needs, combined with regional development strategies. Policies grounded in gender and social inclusion are essential to expand equitable access to decent work for all youth.

**Entrepreneurship:** Entrepreneurial ambition is widespread among Thai youth – 68 percent of respondents are interested in starting their own business within five years. Women and men reflect similar levels of interest. However, aspiring entrepreneurs face several barriers, most notably limited information on business opportunities (53 percent), lack of financing (50 percent), lack of entrepreneurial skills (46 percent), digital skills (40 percent), and technological skills (33 percent). Qualitative insights reflect that women and marginalised groups experience additional exclusion through financial gatekeeping and weak institutional support, including for LGBTQ+ and disabled youth. Policies that recognise youth as economic actors, expand skills development, improve access to finance, and build locally grounded support ecosystems are essential. Integrated pathways that link training, networks and capital would help young people develop viable enterprises, including social ventures. Embedding entrepreneurship support within broader education and labour reforms would address youth's concerns around access, fairness, and mobility, while enabling them to contribute to Thailand's economic future.

## **The study makes the following recommendations to support young people:**

**Address social exclusion:** Strengthen anti discrimination efforts through awareness campaigns, inclusive education, and accessible services. Schools, media, and civil society can promote inclusion and create safe spaces for youth dialogue nationwide.

**Institutionalise youth participation in policymaking:** Reinforce youth councils, consultations and policy labs so young people can influence provincial and national planning. Civil society and universities can help ensure rural and marginalised youth are represented.

**Reform education for equitable access and future ready skills:** There is an urgent need for ministries responsible for secondary and higher education to modernise the national curriculum to foster critical thinking, digital literacy, and problem-solving skills.

**Promote gender responsive employment and leadership:** Strengthen policies which support women's participation in high growth sectors and expand leadership pathways through employer-education partnerships.

**Expand provincial youth opportunity ecosystems:** Prioritise local strategies that improve education access, digital infrastructure, entrepreneurship support, and job creation, supported by universities, community groups, and the private sector.

**Strengthen safe spaces for youth expression:** Invest in safer physical environments and promote digital literacy through collaboration between technology companies, educators, and youth organisations.

**Integrate youth into soft power and cultural economy strategies:** Expand youth roles in cultural programmes, creative industries, and international exchanges through coordinated partnerships across cultural and educational sectors.