

Questionnaire: Identification of possible gaps in the protection of the human rights of older persons in Thailand and how best to address them

Thailand

Possible gaps:

Violence, neglect, and abuse

According to the Situation of the Thai Older Persons Report 2022, the number and proportion of older persons in the population has been increasing continuously. It is expected that, in 20 years, Thailand will become a “super-aged society”. Older persons are of the age where they face the deterioration in many aspects – be they physical, psychological, emotional, and social. Hence, they unavoidably rely on others’ assistance in almost every aspect of their lives. Meanwhile, economic and social changes have an impact on the structure of relations as well as on the mutual support system within household and societies. Therefore, in the future, the number of older persons who are abandoned or whose rights are violated could increase. Furthermore, the 2021 report on the situation of human rights in Thailand, published by the Office of the National Human Rights Commission of Thailand (NHRCT), suggests that there should be a concrete policy or measure to protect older persons from violence and violation of their rights, which could be in forms of physical, psychological and financial abuses. The NHRCT also suggests that the government promote the elderly’s ability to access digital technology and utilise technological devices, especially for those residing in rural areas, in order to promote equal opportunities to access public services. Moreover, rapid advancement of technology could be challenging for older persons to catch up with making them unable to access its full benefit, and in turns can make them fall victim of scams, rights violation, and exploitation.

Economic security

Economic insecurity contributes to the gaps in the protection of human rights for older persons in Thailand. According to the National Economic and Social Development Council (NESDC)’s Report on the Multidimensional Poverty Index 2021, older persons account for 36.9 percent or around one-third of the total number of Thai people who were living in multidimensional poverty (8.10 million people or 11.6 percent of the population) in 2021. This percentage is likely to increase continuously in accordance with the rising proportion of Thai people over the age of 60. Their sources of income consist of income from employment, personal savings and assets, financial assistance from relatives, and public welfare including old-age allowance and state welfare cards, civil servant retirement pensions, the Social Security Fund, and the National Savings Fund (NSF). However, there are concerns regarding the current situation of economic security for older persons due to the financial unsustainability. In addition, as the number of older persons is rising, while the number of working-age Thai is decreasing,

the administration and cost management of public welfare system will also need to be regularly updated and reviewed.

Options on how best to address the gaps

Thailand also presented a progress report on the implementation of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA) for the period 2018-2022 to the Asia-Pacific Intergovernmental Meeting on the Fourth Review and Appraisal of MIPAA, organized by UNESCAP in 2022. The report includes information on Thailand's national policy on older persons and progress in MIPAA implementation in areas such as active participation, income security and social protection, as well as Thailand's endeavours to ensure enabling and supportive environments for older persons, which cover issues including housing and living environment, caregiving, integration of older migrants, neglect, abuse and violence, and information, innovation and technology.

In addition, in accordance with the all 3 cycle Action Plans on Thailand's Implementation of Recommendations and Voluntary Pledges in the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), the Department of Older Persons, Ministry of Social Development and Human Security also continues to strive to implement those accepted recommendations related to promotion and protection of the rights and welfare of older persons.

At a regional level, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) play an important role in promoting and protecting human rights including the rights of older persons. Thailand has been promoting the issue of active aging among ASEAN and its partners since 2016 which led to the adoption of the ASEAN Plus Three Statement on Active Aging. The ASEAN Centre for Active Ageing and Innovation (ACAI), which is an inter-governmental organization, was officially established in Thailand during our chairmanship in 2019. ACAI serves as a knowledge and innovation hub and collaboration platform for promoting active aging in ASEAN region. ACAI supports ASEAN Member States and development partners in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals by serving as a catalyst for the United Nations Decade of Active Aging (2021-2030), bringing together governments, civil society, international agencies, professionals, academia, the media, and the private sector to improve evidence-based guidelines and policies, as well as innovative solutions for the lives of older persons and their families.

Several activities have also been conducted at a regional level to address the gaps in the protection of the human rights of older persons such as the recent ASEAN regional seminar on "Economic Empowerment of Older Persons from the Perspective of Gender Equality via Intergenerational Strategies and Innovations for All in an Aging Society" in August 2023, which yielded in-depth conclusion that can be used to push forward constructive policies on issues related particularly to the economic empowerment of older persons including full and productive employment and social protection, rights at work and social dialogue, and effective regional planning and coordination mechanisms.

At a national level, apart from the provision of welfare for older persons according to their rights stipulated in the Act on the Elderly B.E. 2546 (2003) and its subsequent amendments, the Department of Older Persons has taken actions on the following:

1. Cooperating with the Department of Public Relations, Office of the Prime Minister, to promote older persons' rights and welfare, as well as campaigning against violation of older persons' rights, as well as physical, psychological, emotional and financial abuses via various channels such as radio and television broadcasting and other forms of media;

2. Coordinating with the National Broadcasting and Telecommunication Commission (NBTC) to distribute warnings and precautions for older persons – via SMS and radio and television broadcasting – on call-centre scams, money transfer scams, fake news, disinformation and other important risks;

3. Cooperating with the Ministry of Education, Provincial Education Offices, Provincial Cultural Offices, schools, and educational institutions, to help younger generations recognise the value of older persons and treat them as valuable parts of families and the society as a whole. In addition, Thailand also integrated the older persons-related knowledge into school activities at the local community level; and

Cooperating with the Ministry of Education to provide non-formal and informal education to older persons to equip them with knowledge and skills on the safe and correct use of technology and technological devices, as well as to help them gain greater access to their rights.

Furthermore, to address the issue of economic insecurity, both public and private sectors cooperated to enhance economic security of Thai older persons. The Department of Older Persons provided livelihood financial assistance to 4,891,158 older persons with low income, who are eligible for benefits under the state welfare registration programme from the Older Persons Fund, amounting to a sum of 4,376,221,400 baht. During the COVID-19 pandemic, special financial aid of 8,002,318,850 baht was also provided to 10,578,206 older persons to mitigate the economic impacts. Also, the Office of Social Development, Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA), provided monetary assistance, including occupational funds, medical expenses, financial aid for housing construction or repair, and daily living expenses, of 4,969,943 baht to 1,321 older persons residing in Bangkok who have experienced financial hardships.
