



Diaspora engagement mapping THAILAND

Facts & figures

The terms “overseas Thai” or “Thai overseas” have been used to refer to Thai diaspora who emigrate to other countries. However, in Thai language, particularly the official term, “Thai diaspora” is also translated as “khonthay phlât thin”, which refers to a group of people of Thai origin who were displaced as a result of the 1868 border demarcation between British Burma and the Kingdom of Siam (the former official name of Thailand). Their descendants are considered to be part of ethnic minority groups and are eligible to apply for Thai citizenship.

Political rights



Dual citizenship¹



Right to vote in national elections
for citizens residing abroad²



Remittances



Remittances as a share of GDP: **1.80%**
Remittances inflow (USD million): **9,456**

Voting from abroad:³

by post
at embassies/consulates



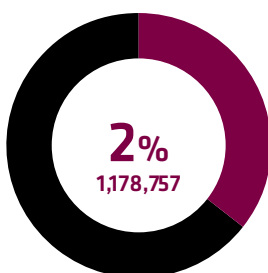
Emigration



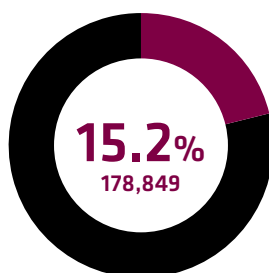
% of emigrants in
total population



% of which
in the EU



♂ 37.1%
♀ 62.9%



♂ 20.3%
♀ 79.7%

Data disclaimer

As diaspora definitions vary widely, we have chosen to use comparable data on emigration as a proxy. This does not include all who consider themselves diaspora and is not necessarily aligned with national definitions of diaspora. Emigration data comes from UNDESA (2024) and remittances from the [World Bank](#) (2024).

Top countries of destination



United States of America	307,741
Republic of Korea	199,861
Australia	109,845
China, Taiwan Province of China	80,032
Malaysia	70,718

1 <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/506c08862.pdf> (Section 13 and 14)

2 <https://www.bangkokpost.com/thailand/politics/1633350/120-000-thais-registered-to-vote-overseas>

3 However, overseas voters faced numerous problems in 2019, such as late arrival of ballot boxes, incorrect candidate information and poor voting facilities. <https://www.bangkokpost.com/opinion/opinion/1647132/poll-agency-does-fine-job-of-not-inspiring-trust>; <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/Thai-election/Thai-election-regulator-comes-under-fire-for-irregularities>

Overview of the policy and legislative framework



- 1985** ● **Recruitment and Job Seekers Protection Act⁴** established an intergovernmental committee called the 'Employment Development and Job-Seekers Protection Committee' which advises on overseas employment standards and stipulates the setting up of a 'Fund for Job-Seekers Working Abroad' in the Department of Employment to support returnees to Thailand, deployment abroad as well as skill testing and training prior to working abroad.
- 2018** ● In the **20-Year National Strategy (2018-2037)⁵**, the pillar on Human Capital Development and Strengthening involves attracting foreign experts and Thai citizens living abroad to contribute to technology and innovation required for the country's development.
- 2019** ● **Relaxation of Thai Exchange Control Act (1942)⁶** by the Ministry of Finance and the Bank of Thailand⁷ to stimulate capital outflows to support capital flow balance and lessen the pressure on the Baht. The relaxations include, among others, more freely allowing the outward remittance of foreign currency whereby most of outward remittance transactions will not require approval from the Bank of Thailand.
- 2025** ● **Tax reduction measure for returning Thai overseas (2025 - 2029)⁸**: launched by the Ministry of Finance to attract Thai skilled workers living abroad to return and work in target industries (such as agriculture and biotechnology, food processing and electronics). Any qualified Thai overseas who returns by the end of 2025 will be granted a personal income tax reduction until 2029.

Practices

Explore 520+ practices by country, SDG or sector of engagement in the [interactive database!](#)



Counselling Services @ Bangkok Bank⁹

The largest commercial bank in Thailand offers counselling services for those interested in local investment opportunities, including information on how to obtain business loans.¹⁰ The bank also helps to settle transactions with overseas business partners and provides travel advisory services¹¹ and 'AEC Connect'¹² which helps customers identify business opportunities in AEC.

Project RETURN, 2014 - present

An initiative of the Association of Thai Professionals in Europe (ATPER) in Denmark, the project aims to create a forum for Thai people with knowledge, skills and experience accumulated abroad to apply and share it back home. It also seeks to inspire all Thai people through cooperation and communication as well as to give them an opportunity to gain knowledge and experience from abroad. Target areas are science and technology, law, agriculture, forestry and environment, energy, transportation and health.

4 http://thailaws.com/law/t_laws/tlaw0071_3.pdf

5 Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board (2018), National Strategy 2018-2037 (Summary), https://bic.moe.go.th/images/stories/pdf/National_Strategy_Summary.pdf.

6 <https://www.bot.or.th/English/FinancialMarkets/ForeignExchangeRegulations/FXRegulation/Pages/default.aspx>

7 See the difference between previous regulations and current regulations: <https://www.bakermckenzie.com/en/insight/publications/2019/11/thai-exchange-control-law-relaxed>

8 Tax reduction measure for returning Thai overseas (2025 - 2029): launched by the Ministry of Finance to attract Thai skilled workers living abroad to return and work in target industries (such as agriculture and biotechnology, food processing and electronics). Any qualified Thai overseas who returns by the end of 2025 will be granted a personal income tax reduction until 2029.

9 Bangkok Bank, Business Banking, <https://www.bangkokbank.com/en/Business-Banking> <https://www.bangkokbank.com/en/Business-Banking/My-International-Trade>

10 'Developing a Road Map for Engaging Diasporas in Development', IOM and Migration Policy Institute (MPI), 2012, https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/diaspora_handbook_en_for_web_28may2013.pdf

11 <https://www.bangkokbank.com/en/Business-Banking/My-International-Trade/Trade-Advisory-Services>

12 <https://www.bangkokbank.com/en/International-Banking/AEC-Connect>

Reverse Brain Drain Project, 1997-2015¹³

The project was established within the National Science and Technology Development Agency to use the knowledge and connections of Thai professionals overseas to help in Thailand's development, particularly in the science and technology sectors. Around 35 projects were initiated before RBD began to shift its emphasis to short-term visits, involving knowledge sharing and technology transfer workshops. Through e-newsletters, RBD also disseminates information about Thailand's science and technology needs among overseas Thai professionals, government agencies, academic communities and the industrial sector.

Expansion of remote healthcare services for overseas Thai nationals 2023

Starting in January 2023, the National Health Security Office (NHSO) launched telemedicine consulting services through mobile applications for overseas Thai nationals who are eligible under the Universal Coverage Scheme.

>> Observations

The "Observations" and "Obstacles" sections contain additional information on the context of diaspora engagement that does not fit directly into the other sections. They are based on a combination of literature review and comments from the authors. New information is incorporated during the annual updates. Readers are invited to verify the relevance of the information at the time of reading, as the context may have evolved.

Thailand has not yet fully recognised the importance of offering attractive benefits, such as building better diaspora networks and encouraging network membership, to lure back its diaspora. The Thai government has tried to address the issue by initiating programmes, such as the Reverse Brain Drain, in order to recruit the talents that the country needs.¹⁴ The Thai embassies abroad have also assisted in the formation of diaspora organisations.

Following a drop in exporting labour during the Covid-19 pandemic, Thailand has reinvigorated its work to increase the number of migrant workers leaving the country with the Ministry of Labour aiming to send 100,000 in 2022, some of whom will be on jobs secured by the Department of Education in collaboration with partner countries such as South Korea, Japan, Israel and Taiwan.

The government of Thailand requires receiving countries to provide Thai migrants with proper rights in terms of wages, social welfare and other basic human rights. To do this, and to ensure support to Thai nationals living abroad, the Thai government has established several departments in different ministries, embassies and divisions.

¹³ ILO Good practices database, https://www.ilo.org/dyn/migpractice/migmain.showPractice?p_lang=en&p_practice_id=43 (please see the ppt file under the documents section of the page for further details by the Ministry of Science and Technology)

¹⁴ 'Developing a Road Map for Engaging Diasporas in Development', IOM and Migration Policy Institute (MPI), 2012, https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/diaspora_handbook_en_for_web_28may2013.pdf

Obstacles



- **Inadequate policy framework:** For Thais living abroad, there are few official government programmes or initiatives encouraging emigrants' involvement in the economy of their home country.
- **Data and coordination:** While the government wishes to develop a more robust policy on diaspora engagement, there are inter-ministerial disagreements regarding the drafting of ministry regulations, and no practical guidelines for government officers regarding the diaspora. This is due to the result of the limited number of studies relating to diaspora issues and a lack of data.¹⁵ Research on the returning Thai diaspora is also relatively limited.
- **Legal restrictions:** Although the returning Thai diaspora identify themselves as Thai, speak and write the Thai language and maintain Thai cultural practices, they face discrimination upon return in terms of legal rights to own land and housing, for example. The children of returning diaspora also have difficulty finding places in higher education institutions.¹⁶

¹⁵ 'Thai Diaspora: What happens when they return 'home'?', Monchai Phongsiri and Maniema Thongyou, 2012, Journal of Population and Social Studies, file:///Users/Vani/Downloads/84513-Article%20Text-204729-1-10-20170425.pdf

¹⁶ 'Transnational Livelihoods of the Returning Thai Diaspora in Thai Society', Monchai Phongsiri and Maniema Thongyou, 2011, <http://www.ipedr.com/vol20/18-ICHSC2011-M00041.pdf>

Annex:

List of Actors

Explore the institutionalisation of diaspora engagement worldwide via the [typology of 520+ institutions](#)

Diaspora related institutions

- **At regional level**

International Organisation for Migration (IOM)

IOM began its operations in Thailand in 1975 and joined IOM as a member state in 1986. IOM's cooperation with the Royal Thai Government has expanded to cover all aspects of migration affecting the Kingdom and its neighbours, including labour migration, migration health, counter trafficking, emergency and post crisis, institution building, border management, security and law enforcement. IOM has a strong presence in Thailand and is home to the IOM Mission in Thailand and the IOM Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific. It has over 400 staff working on more than 35 active projects in 10 locations across the country.

ASEAN Forum on Migrant Labour

The annual forum, formed in 2008, is an open platform for review, discussion and exchange of good practices and ideas between governments, workers' and employers' organizations, and civil society stakeholders on key issues facing women and men migrant workers in South-East Asia, and develop recommendations to advance the implementation of the principles of the ASEAN Declaration on Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers.

TRIANGLE in ASEAN

The TRIANGLE in ASEAN programme, which was established in 2015, is a part of the International Labour Organisation's global efforts to promote fair migration. Through delivery of technical assistance and support to governments, social partners, civil society and regional bodies, TRIANGLE in ASEAN aims to create a set of policies, tools and services that enhance the contribution of labour migration to stable and inclusive growth and development. It involves six countries, including Thailand, and is funded by Australia and Canada.

- **At national level**

- At ministerial level

Ministry of Labour

Since 2002, The ministry's functions are to provide services pursuant to Article 86 of the constitution which requires the government to promote the employment of people of working age, protect workers, organise labour relations system, provide social security and ensure fair payment, and to render services in labour administration and solve labour problems. The ministry has authority in labour administration and protection, skill development, and promotion of employment of people.

- At sub-ministerial level

Department of Skill Development

This department functions under the Ministry of Labour and its duties include coordinating linkages and to establish and develop networking for the development of labour potential in the country and abroad.

Department of Employment

The department is under the Ministry of Labour and promotes - among other things - overseas employment for Thai workers. It monitors the procedure of sending them abroad and ensures that the procedures comply with Thai laws and regulations. It also protects the rights and benefits of job seekers and Thai workers who are working or training overseas.

Thailand Overseas Employment Administration (TOEA)

Since 1993, the TOEA has been in charge of supervising and facilitating the process for Thai workers wishing to work overseas. The administration monitors recruitment and job seeker's protection, it also helps to improve administrative procedures, coordinate with host countries (with regard to facilitating, sending and protecting the permitted workers) and to develop bilateral cooperation with the main destination countries. TOEA also protects overseas workers through several labour affairs offices in Thai embassies overseas from which it provides necessary information and assistance to Thai workers.

The Protection of Thai Nationals Abroad Division

In 1998, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs established the Department of Consular Affairs, which includes the Protection of Thai Nationals Abroad Division. The Division was opened officially in 1999. The division provides assistance to Thai nationals in distress, promotes and protects Thai workers abroad, assists Thai fishing or commercial vessels as well as their crews outside of Thailand, supports Thai women who are victims of illegal trafficking, provides assistance in the case of a major natural disaster, political turmoil or war, and assists Thai nationals who are arrested.

The Office of International Peoples' Rights Protection (OIPP)

The office was established in 2006 by the Order of the Office of the Attorney General (OAG). It gives legal advice to Thai nationals who marry foreigners, to foreigners who visit, work or reside across the country, and to Thai nationals living abroad. To do this it has law clinics in foreign countries where a large number of Thai nationals work or have residency. It answers legal questions sent via the internet from Thai persons who reside abroad as well as from foreigners residing in Thailand. It cooperates with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Labour to provide legal assistance to Thai nationals being prosecuted in foreign jurisdictions.

Diaspora organisations in Europe

Association of Thai Professionals in Europe (ATPER)

1993 Europe

✔ Development activities

The Association was born from the integration of Thai professionals living in Europe and Thai students currently studying at graduate level in Europe. The association, formally established in 1993 and officially registered in 1997 in Paris, has been supported by the Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment and the Office of Higher Education Strategy, Ministry of Education of Thailand. The association promotes the transfer of knowledge in science and technology from Europe to Thailand through activities such as training in various fields such as IT, biotechnology, environment and education, research collaboration and teaching at tertiary level, provision of news and information exchange services in various fields that are beneficial to the development of Thailand such as education, science, medicine, human rights, law and patents in Europe, and facilitation to contact and coordinate between agencies in Thailand and various agencies in Europe.

Read more about diaspora organisations
in "[Starting guide: What is a diaspora
organisation](#)"





Puer Thai e.V. 2005 Germany

Puer Thai e.V. was founded in Berlin jointly by Thais and Germans to bridge cultural differences in Berlin. It teaches German with Thai interpreters and helps Thais with integration.

Thai Asa eV. 2000 Germany

Thai Asa eV is a non-profit association in Germany for the promotion of German-Thai relations. As the official integration agency of the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, it offers German courses to help people from abroad with integration. At the same time, anyone interested in the Thai language and culture can attend Thai language courses.

Thai Freundschaft Gruppe Erlangen 2007 Germany

A group formed by Thai women in Erlangen, Germany, committed to protecting the interests of Thai women living in Germany. It aims to provide the German population with a better understanding of Thailand and its culture as well as to educate them on the situation of Thai women in Germany.

Thai Women for Thai Women Association 1998 Switzerland

A group of Thai women in Switzerland met in 1998 with the idea of creating a support group whose objective was to try to find solutions to various problems. The Royal Thai Embassy in Bern provided support for the association by allowing subsequent meetings to take place at the embassy and by providing the initial funds to help the association start its activities and projects.

THARA Association (Thai Women Articulate Their Rights Abroad) 1991 German

The THARA Association was founded in 1991 by a group of Thai women in Germany who have helped and advised compatriots with problems. Officially registered as THARA eV since 1997, the association supports Thai women in Germany and helps them know and exercise their rights.

Finnish-Thai Association ry 2002

Integration activities

Disseminates Thai culture in Finland and provides integration assistance to Thai communities in the country.

Ban Ying e.V. 1990 Germany

Ban Ying e.V. is a coordination and specialist advisory centre against human trafficking. The word “Ban Ying” means “house of women” in Thai. As one of the oldest women’s projects in Berlin in this field, it advocates for the rights of migrant women, particularly those coming from the Southeast Asian region, who have experienced violence, exploitation, or human trafficking. It also works with the wider public to improve social and living conditions for migrant women as well as transgender people.

un.thai.tled Germany

Un.thai.tled is a collective of Thai creatives in Germany established to provide a platform for creative talents, focusing on those who come from Thailand or with a Thai socio-cultural background to counter misconceptions and stereotypical narratives against Thai and other cultures through arts, performances, and any form of media. With that mission, they organise events, such as film festivals and art exhibitions, and also engage with organisations and people from Germany and other diaspora groups to foster inter-group collaboration and intercultural exchange.

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