

## Thailand Country Report 2023

### **I. Introduction**

The geopolitics of Thailand which is near the Golden Triangle area, the largest drug production site in Asia, and the constant transportation infrastructure development made Thailand become market and transit routes for drug trafficking to the third countries. In the past few years, during the outbreak of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19), the governments of all countries including Thailand enforced various measures, such as social distancing, prohibition of group activities, border shutdowns, and restriction of traveling between countries, to prevent and control the COVID-19 pandemic. People had to adapt themselves to the situation which caused substantial growth and expansion of online social networks and parcel/cargo services. Drug syndicates took the advantage of these changes to reduce the risks of revealing their identities. The online social media also allowed drug traders to improve their marketing by posting images, videos, and texts to attract more customers, making drug trafficking rapidly spread out and difficult for authorities to detect. In 2022, the COVID-19 situation began to subside, so the restrictions and measures for COVID-19 prevention were eased. Drug syndicates quickly resumed their businesses at the level before the pandemic. The economic and social conditions as well as people's way of life which has been changed after the COVID-19 pandemic, made the trafficking and prevalence of drugs are likely to increase continuously.

### **II. Drug and Trafficking Situation**

Thailand has been facing the problem of being the illicit drug markets and trafficking routes from the Golden Triangle area. A large amount of Methamphetamine tablets (Yaba), crystal methamphetamine (Ice), heroin, ketamine, and cannabis are found being imported to Thailand, mostly into the upper north border provinces and has been increasing every year. Drugs from other regions such as ecstasy from Europe and cocaine from South America are also found being trafficked to Thailand. Drug syndicates use various routes and methods for trafficking, for example, seaports, airports, parcel posts including border checkpoints and natural border paths.

Yaba, Ice, and heroin are the main drug prevalent in Thailand. However, designer drugs such as Happy Water, coffee sachets containing ecstasy, ketamine, and LSD were frequently found over the past year. The users were mostly teenagers who misunderstood that those illicit drugs were unarmful and increased enjoyment. In addition, the price of illicit drugs produced in the region, such as Yaba, Ice, heroin, and ketamine, was continuously declined since drug syndicates have upgraded their technology in drug production which could multiply their productivity, replaced the primary precursors and chemicals with uncontrolled substances, exploited online channels for drug trades and converted the forms of transportation to parcel posts. These factors made the cost of drug production reduced, then the selling price also dropped. The areas that confronted the drug epidemic were the major cities/provinces with a high density of population.

### **III. Legislation/National Policy**

In late 2021, Thailand developed new laws and regulations relating to narcotic drugs. The Narcotics Code B.E.2564 (2021), which merged all relevant narcotic drug laws and regulations, was effective and entered into force on December 9, 2021. The key ideas of the Narcotics Code were; modifying punishment guidelines to be more reasonable, adjusting the penalties in consistent with the offence, focusing on drug syndicates crackdown, recognizing drug users as patients, encouraging drug users to undergo voluntary treatment instead of compulsory and providing them with social rehabilitation, and paving the way to use narcotic crops for medical, researching and economic purposes. In addition, the Narcotics Code 2021 focuses on hindering drug prevalence, especially among children and youth. The Narcotics Code 2021 became a framework for systematic drug control implementation in Thailand.

Thailand is one of the top countries that faced prison overcrowding problem due to the inefficiency in classifying serious and minor offenders. Around 80 percent of total prisoners are drug offenders. The Narcotics Code 2021 was designed to cope with this problem by allowing the abolishment of irrefutable presumptions and court's reconsideration for appropriate penalties, as well as reducing the penalties to the offenders instead of imprisonment for minor offences which also reduced their social stigmatization after the completion of sentence. In 2022, 61,348 offenders were reconsidered their penalties. In this regard, 2,018 offenders (3.29 percent) were dismissed, 20,272 offenders (33.04 percent) were reduced their penalties, and 39,058 offenders (63.67 percent) were retained the original penalties.

After removing Kratom from the list of prohibited substances in 2021, Thailand published the Kratom Plant Act B.E. 2565 (2022) which came into force on August 27, 2022. Its key concepts were to impose measures for people's prevention and protection of health, especially in the risk group who are likely to misuse Kratom leaves, measures for import and export of Kratom leaves, and measures for promoting and supporting Kratom as industrial crop. After the Act entered into force, Thailand took actions to control the use of Kratom according to the intent of the Act as follows:

1. Develop Kratom import and export information system.
2. Conduct projects to research Kratom for medical use and economic benefits in accordance with knowledge and context of each area. In this way, the farmers will earn progressive income and have a better quality of life.
3. Educate and encourage the farmers to grow Kratom with standards for food and medical use.
4. Promote the establishment of model communities with Kratom growing standards in cultivation, harvest, transportation, and marketing. Currently, there were 195 registered entrepreneurs and 2,158 Kratom plots in 104,183.20 square meters with the certification of Good Agricultural Practice (GAP).

#### **IV. Law Enforcement**

There are two important measures for drug suppression in Thailand as follows;

1. Drug interdiction: to block illicit drugs from the production site to the inner area of the country, impede precursors and chemicals to enter the Golden Triangle area, and guard the land, sea, and air routes for not being exploited as drug trafficking routes to the third countries. Moreover, the modern technologies are being applied to drug investigations.

2. Drug syndicate suppression: to eradicate domestic and international drug syndicates and their networks by using property and conspiracy measures, expanding investigations, and applying modern tools and technologies to the investigations. In 2022, there were 258,629 drug cases, 266,726 drug offenders, and seizures of 504.61 million tablets of Yaba, 12,561.41 kilograms of Ice, 604.15 kilograms of heroin, 1,206.77 kilograms of ketamine and 52,324.81 kilograms of cannabis.

Fiscal Year	Methamphetamine (Million tablet)	Heroin (Kilogram)	Ice (Kilogram)	Cannabis (Kilogram)	Ketamine (Kilogram)
2018	339.69	940.63	19,347.92	16,401.94	551.44
2019	518.90	941.85	16,284.52	14,342.71	734.82
2020	319.11	597.33	23,872.25	9,227.60	1,342.43
2021	554.74	4,520.56	26,622.67	41,573.65	1,350.45
2022	504.61	640.15	12,561.41	52,324.81	1,206.77

*Table: The statistics on the seized drugs during the fiscal year 2018 – 2022*

For dealing with drug trafficking networks, property-based confiscation and value-based confiscation were implemented by relevant agencies under the related laws, such as Narcotics Code 2021, Anti - Money Laundering Act, and tax measure under Revenue Code. Moreover, Thailand has enhanced the capacity building for officers responsible for property seizures by providing them with knowledge of law enforcement, measures of property seizures under Narcotics Code 2021, and innovative technologies. With such competencies, property seizures related to drug cases were skyrocketed. In 2022, the value of seized properties in drug cases was more than 11 billion Baht.

Fiscal Year	The value of the asset (Million Baht)
2018	1,228.66
2019	949.59
2020	790.57
2021	7,346.82
2022	11,003.02

*Table: The statistics on the asset seizure and confiscation during the fiscal year 2018 – 2022*

## V. Regional/International Cooperation

Thailand gives priority to international cooperation both inside and outside the region, especially the countries in the Greater Mekong Sub-Region, to control and intercept precursors and chemicals from entering the drug production site, eradicate drug kingpins and their networks, and joint patrol along the borders by operating Safe Mekong Coordination Center (SMCC), which is

one of the essential cooperation mechanisms in the region among Cambodia, China, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam. In 2022, with such cooperation mechanism, there were seizures of 666,303.96 kilograms of precursors and chemicals.

Thailand also recognizes the importance of the capacity building for frontline drug enforcement officers. The International Narcotics Control College (INCC) was established in Chiang Rai Province. With the aim of being an international training center, the college has developed curriculums for drug prevention and suppression, law enforcement, and modern tools and technologies. Thailand is willing to train drug law enforcement officers from other countries including the countries in the Greater Mekong Sub-Region and ASEAN.

For ASEAN cooperation, Thailand has committed to implement and closely work with ASEAN Member States for addressing and solving drug problems under the ASEAN Work Plan on Securing Communities against Illicit Drugs 2016-2025. In addition, Thailand and ASEAN Member States have monitored over drug situations in each ASEAN country through ASEAN Drug Monitoring Network (ADMN) and ASEAN-NARCO website, and have cooperated on drug interdiction through ASEAN Airport Interdiction Task Force (AAITF) and ASEAN Seaport Interdiction Task Force (ASITF). Furthermore, Thailand also focuses on the cooperation with other dialogue partners such as China, Korea, Japan, United States, Australia, and United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes (UNODC). Those countries and organizations have provided technical support for drug control such as training courses, budget, equipment, and operational guidelines.

## **VI. Treatment and Rehabilitation**

“Drug users are patients” is the significant concept of the Narcotics Code 2021. Currently, Thailand put the importance on the voluntary system than the correctional system. Either the offenders can voluntarily opt in the treatment and rehabilitation system until the end of the process without being prosecuted and criminal record, or enter the process by court’s order. Therefore, last year, drug treatment and rehabilitation measures in Thailand focused on providing drug addicts with access to treatment and social rehabilitation to reduce the negative consequences associated with drug use. The measures emphasized on screening processes which appropriate to each drug patient’s level of addiction, treatment and rehabilitation for drug users, drug abusers, and drug addicts according to the standards of the Ministry of Health, and social rehabilitation by supporting drug addicts who have undergone treatment to improve their quality

of life in terms of residence, education, and occupation and monitoring them until they can live a normal life in society. In 2022, there were 130,560 patients admitted to the drug treatment, 85.06 percent of the target. Most of them were abusers of Yaba (78.10 percent). The next below were abusers of heroin at 5.52 percent, cannabis at 5.20 percent, and Ice at 4.60 percent. 77.04 percent of all drug patients were the patients who underwent the voluntary system. The majority of the drug patients were over 25 years of age (73.28 percent).

Apart from rehabilitation by medical measure, Thailand has implemented Community-Based Treatment (CBTx) to involve the community in taking care of drug users sustainably and psychosocial therapy counselling clinics in court system to prevent recidivism. Besides, Thailand has enhanced cooperation between relevant agencies to work out on people with psychotic disorders from drug use to minimize social problems from these people.

For drug prevention, Thailand has added drug prevention curriculum for students in all grades and took properly actions against drugs in each target groups. The targets were encouraged and enhanced drug resistance skills to prevent them from involving with dangerous drugs, especially children and youth. In 2022, the major projects/activities were as follows:

1. Publishing 56,790 tale books to develop brain skills and drug immunity of early childhood children with Executive Function (EF) approach.

2. Organizing Youth Network on Drug Prevention Program (YNDPP) two times to strengthen drug prevention network among youth from six countries in the Greater Mekong Sub-Region (Cambodia, China, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam).

3. To be Number One Project which is a project established by Princess Ubolratana Rajakanya. The project focuses on drug prevention among youth under the slogan “Be Number One without Drugs”. There are media campaigns and various creative activities for youth and teenagers to participate. To Be Number One Centers are installed for members to take care and give advice to each other in order to stay drug-free. In 2022, there were 29,668,213 members of the project and 11,045 To be Number One Centers.

Moreover, Thailand has initiated Alternative Development (AD) for strengthening the villages/communities along borders and promoting drug prevention. In the past year, there were many projects implemented across the northern part of Thailand to solve problems in holistic view and improve the quality of life such as developing basic factors of life, solving social, economic, education, and health inequality, and raising economic opportunities by providing

knowledge, skill, budget, and market. As a result, people along the borders have a better life and not involve with drugs as traders or users.

## VII. Conclusion

In the past few years, COVID-19 pandemic situation had a great impact on Thailand and countries around the world in many dimensions such as economy, society, politics, as well as people's way of life. The most severe and obvious impact was economy, which was resulted by the strict measures for pandemic control. Economic activities had been halted and many companies had been closed down, causing numerous people to lose their jobs. The situation made people lack of income while debts increased. However, drug syndicates adapted themselves to the COVID-19 pandemic situation by using new technology for drug production, transportation and distribution. They also took the advantage of the situation to induce people to the cycle of illicit drugs; to earn a living as traders and traffickers, and to relieve the stress from economic issues as addicts. Therefore, the trend of drug problems in Thailand and many other countries showed no signs of abating.

To solve these problems, the related laws must be updated to keep up with the changes of new forms of crimes. Every country must urgently deal with economic issues, provide necessary welfare for people, implement alternative development and enhance people's quality of life, especially people living near drug production sites. Moreover, employment providing and career opportunities should be raised for the vulnerable groups, so they can earn an honest income and not involve with drugs. In the post-COVID-19 pandemic, accelerating inclusive economic growth should be the priority for all countries to reduce economic, social, education, and health inequalities, including various forms of crimes, especially illicit drugs. Eventually, it will be the crucial factor in driving ASEAN to become drug-free.

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