



Next Generation

# Thailand

April 2026



Research  
and insight

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# Foreword

In 1855, the Kingdom of Siam and the United Kingdom signed the Bowring Treaty, laying the groundwork for lasting diplomatic, economic and cultural ties. One hundred and seventy years later, the relationship between Thailand and the UK continues to flourish: the Strategic Partnership signed in 2024 not only reinforced economic relationships but also highlighted shared values and ambitions on education, health, climate and the environment.

People-to-people connections that shape and sustain commitments and understandings like these are at the heart of the British Council's work in cultural relations. Yet a generational shift is under way in Thailand, one which often challenges established assumptions, and which makes it vital to understand how young people are perceiving and experiencing their cultural, social and political world, and how they try to act to change it. Next Generation Thailand seeks to answer some fundamental questions: What matters most to young people? How do they see their role in society? What barriers limit their potential? And what opportunities can unlock it? This Next Generation report captures the concerns, sentiments and aspirations of Thai youth, a generation that features throughout much of the British Council's cultural relations work in Thailand: building connections, understanding, trust and opportunities through education partnerships, supporting English language teaching, learning and assessment, through work in the arts, cultural development and international exchange.

Some of the economic and social conditions and trends facing young people in Thailand today, conditions which partly shape their hopes and concerns, are ones familiar to youth in neighbouring ASEAN countries, even across the globe. Young people today are navigating rapid technological change, environmental and ecological crises, dynamic labour markets and a civic terrain that constrains and enables youth voice and agency in often surprising ways. All this presents a set of circumstances that not only stands in stark contrast to the stereotypical timelessness and continuity of traditional Thailand, but which also sits awkwardly with the young adulthood experienced by the parents of today's youth: social mobility, expectations of steady income growth and embrace of modern consumer lifestyles that accompanied the rapid economic development of the 1980s and 1990s. A central theme of this report is the resonance and impact of the Thai youth voice, and the degree of youth agency and influence – and, crucially, its absence – amidst such dizzying transformation. Crucially, such agency is unevenly distributed, often depending on attributes like urban or rural location, gender, disability and language.

Thailand is also undergoing significant demographic change. Just over one fifth of the population is aged between 18 and 34, and this proportion is expected to continue to decline. This means the responsibility of shaping Thailand's development through volatile, uncertain decades ahead is increasingly concentrated on a diminishing youth population. If young people are to be better able to take informed control of their future, to envision and shape this future, then investing in young people is not optional; it is essential.

Young people themselves are in the best position to say what such investment should look like. Next Generation Thailand aims to play a part here by both amplifying youth voice and by encouraging and enabling more informed exchange and engagement between young people and policymakers. It is a research study, a platform for expression and a policy engagement tool. The findings are intended to contribute to Thailand's *20-Year National Strategy (2018–2037)*, and to policies which maximise the meaningful participation of young people in realising the Strategy's ambition of "a developed country with security, prosperity and sustainability." By grounding policy conversations in evidence and lived experience, we can better align programmes with the realities young people face.

Here at British Council Thailand, we are committed to listening and to adapting our own programmes in light of the report's findings, so they better serve to meet the needs and priorities of young people. How, for example, can our international education partnerships and teacher training work respond to persistent digital divides across regions and subgroups? How can we adapt our work in skills and employability so it is more inclusive and responsive of the needs of young people with disabilities? In this way, British Council will support informed dialogue and exchange, reinforcing the connections, trust, and mutual understanding that have underpinned relations since the Bowring Treaty.



**Danny Whitehead**  
Country Director Thailand

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## **The British Council**

Izzah Meyer, Next Generation Research Manager, Global

James Perkins, Head of Research Excellence, Global

Matthew James Sheader, Senior Justice and Youth Engagement Adviser, East Asia

Chanya Tangsuk, Head of Higher Education Programmes, East Asia

Uraiwan Samolee, Head of Education, Thailand

Jirakamon Jalanchavanapate, Programme Manager Education, Thailand

## **CineKhan Limited**

Amina Khan, Founder-Director

Fatimah Khan Hultin, Senior Researcher, Principal Investigator

## **Iconic Market Research**

Piyatida Khambunma, Co-Founder and Research Lead, Co-Investigator

Savita Langprasert, Qualitative Research Specialist

Saurabh Sardana, Analysis and Reporting Specialist

Dzaki Hakim, Quantitative Research Analyst

Darren Jeremiah, Quantitative Research Analyst

Tawanwad Kitidumrongsook, Research assistant

## **Next Generation Thailand Youth Task Force members**

Boontida Uapipatanakul, Rajamangala University of Technology Thanyaburi

Alongkot Maiduang, Institute for the Promotion of Teaching Science and Technology

Witiya Pittungnapoo, Naresuan University

Tamruja Dharmasaroja, Thammasat University

Tida Yingcharoen, The Committee on Foreign Affairs

Sirasar Boonma, Hear & Found Co., Ltd.

Taro Amornched, TakeMeTour Co., Ltd.

Weerapong Prasongchean, Chulalongkorn University

Chalee Vorakulpipat, The National Electronics and Computer Technology Centre

## **Youth Peer Researchers**

Patchareeporn Duangjai

Chamikorn Tangtieampong

Suwadee Yodjadee

Chanyapit Kamboonma

Phutita Prasopsawat

# Acronyms and abbreviations

**ADB** – Asian Development Bank

**AI** – Artificial Intelligence

**BBC** – British Broadcasting Corporation

**FGD** – Focus group discussion

**ILO** – International Labour Organisation

**GBV** – Gender-based violence

**GEDSI** – Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion

**KII** – Key informant interview

**LSE** – The London School of Economics and Political Science

**NEET** – Not in education, employment or training

**NGO** – Non-governmental organisation

**PBS** – Public Broadcasting Service

**UNDP** – United Nations Development Programme

**YPR** – Youth Peer Researcher

**YTF** – Youth Task Force

# 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 (KIs), 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.





# Introduction



# About Next Generation

The British Council's Next Generation research programme explores the needs, potential and aspirations of young people globally through three strands:

**Research:** Designing and conducting research to better understand youth attitudes and ambitions.

**Youth Voice:** Amplifying youth voice by including them in the research process as stakeholders.

**Policy Impact:** Supporting youth inclusive policymaking that addresses the challenges faced by young people.

The research aims to ensure that young people's voices are heard, regardless of background or gender, and that their interests are meaningfully represented in decisions that impact them. Each study culminates in a set of evidence-based recommendations designed to inform and support policy change.

The British Council commissioned Iconic Research and CineKhan Limited to conduct the Next Generation Thailand study to strengthen the evidence base underpinning its own work and to deepen understanding of the perspectives of young people in Thailand today. The research aims to explore young people's aspirations, priorities, challenges, and opportunities in a dynamic social, economic, and political context. By generating insights into the experiences and needs of youth, the study will help to inform the British Council's future programming and partnerships. It is intended to support the design of youth-centred initiatives and to contribute to policy dialogue by engaging stakeholders such as local and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs), youth networks, funding bodies, and relevant government institutions.

The timing of the research is also significant. 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. As this historic relationship has been commemorated, there is an opportunity to look ahead and strengthen collaboration through a deeper understanding of Thailand's younger generations. This forward-looking perspective aligns with the UK's renewed strategic engagement with the Asia-Pacific region. Thailand has become an important partner within this framework, with the establishment of the Thai-UK Bilateral Strategic Partnership in March 2024 and the launch of an Enhanced Trade Partnership in September 2024. Together, these developments reflect a growing commitment to cooperation and mutual trust, underscoring the importance of investing in the aspirations and potential of Thailand's youth as part of the ongoing relationship between the two countries.

# Research aims

This study explores the following themes and questions to inform a set of targeted recommendations to support policies that impact young people in Thailand.

## **Priorities:**

What matters most to young people in Thailand? What do their priorities reveal about their aspirations?

## **Perceptions of change:**

How do young people perceive change at a personal, community, and societal level? How do they navigate uncertainty?

## **Role in the community:**

How do young people perceive themselves? How do they view their own role in the community?

## **Drivers of change:**

How do young people perceive their role in catalysing change? What motivates or discourages youth participation in civic and political spaces?

## **Youth voice:**

What constrains youth voice? What spaces exist for young people to express themselves?

## **Education and skills, employment, and entrepreneurship:**

What hinders youth's access to education and skills, employment, and entrepreneurship opportunities? How do the barriers impact different social groups?

## Context

Thailand is an upper-middle-income country with a population of around 71 million and plays a pivotal role in mainland Southeast Asia as a founding member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. Economic growth has been driven primarily by services – especially tourism – while industry and agriculture remain important sources of employment, particularly in rural areas.

Despite significant poverty reduction over the past two decades, Thailand continues to experience high income inequality and pronounced regional disparities, with poverty rates in the Northeast and deep South nearly double the national average. Governance and political instability have also shaped the country context: cycles of popular mobilisation followed by military or judicial intervention remain a defining feature of Thailand's political landscape, constraining inclusive governance and long-term reform. At the same time, Thailand faces a rapid demographic transition toward an ageing society, which heightens the urgency of investing in human capital, productivity, and social cohesion (World Bank, 2026; Asian Development Bank (ADB), 2026).

Young people occupy a strategically important yet precarious position within this context. Thailand has approximately 15 million young people aged 15 to 29 years, a comparatively smaller cohort than previous generations, but one that carries growing economic, social, and political expectations in an ageing society. While youth literacy is near-universal, transitions from education to decent work are uneven: around 13 percent of those aged 15 to 24 years are not in employment, education or training (NEET), with young women disproportionately affected due to early pregnancy and unpaid care responsibilities (ILO-STAT, 2024). With more than 50 percent of Thailand's workforce employed in the informal sector, many young people are no doubt vulnerable to precarious work and limited social protection with long-term implications for their wellbeing.

Thai youth have emerged as influential civic and political actors, driving demands for democratic reform, social justice, and inclusion, most visibly since the 2020-21 protests and the youth-led electoral mobilisation of 2023. In early 2020, Thailand experienced a surge of youth-led protests across high schools and universities, initially triggered by the dissolution of the pro-youth Future Forward Party. After a brief pause during the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, demonstrations resumed with greater intensity, expanding into public spaces and becoming the largest youth mobilisation since the 1970s. Protesters adopted symbols such as white ribbons and the three-finger salute while advancing broader demands for democratic governance and structural reforms, including changes to the monarchy and challenges to entrenched hierarchies in politics, business, and education. Despite repeated state crackdowns, the movement evolved into smaller, decentralised groups and became more confrontational in 2021, with initiatives such as Restart Democracy leading sustained protests. Over the two-year period, more than 2,000 protesters were arrested and many leaders detained, contributing to the decline of large-scale demonstrations, although smaller networks of activists continue to sustain elements of resistance (LSE, 2023).

This period of mobilisation also underscored the growing political, social, and economic significance of Thailand's younger generation. In response, international development actors increasingly recognise youth as central to the country's future trajectory. Assessments by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and ADB emphasise youth engagement, skills development, and digital inclusion as critical priorities for strengthening Thailand's long-term competitiveness and social stability. Within this framing, young people are viewed not merely as beneficiaries of development policy but as active contributors to economic resilience, social innovation, and democratic governance (ADB, 2021; UNDP, 2022).

These dynamics are unfolding alongside important political developments. Following the national election on 8 February 2026, a new government is being formed, with the Election Commission reporting that approximately 38 million citizens – around 71 percent of eligible voters – participated in the election (Reuters, 2026). While age-disaggregated voting data has yet to be released, the results indicate a consolidation of conservative political forces. The Bhumjaithai Party, led by Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul, secured victory despite pre-election polling that had suggested strong momentum for the reform-oriented People's Party, widely associated with younger voters. Instead of achieving the landslide victory predicted by many, the orange-coded People's Party managed to secure only 118 seats with 10 million party-list votes – in comparison to the 151 seats and 14 million party-list votes it won as the Move Forward Party in 2023 (Thai PBS, 2026). The outcome not only reflects a significant setback for progressive reform and youth-led movements, but also highlights the evolving political landscape within which Thailand's young people continue to articulate their aspirations for change (BBC, 2026; The Diplomat, 2026).

## Report structure

The structure of the report is as follows. Chapter 2 presents the methodology for this study. Chapter 3 explores the outlook of Thai youth. Chapter 4 discusses the factors that constrain youth voice. Chapter 5 explores young people's civic and political engagement. Chapters 6, 7, and 8 highlight barriers to education and skills, employment, and entrepreneurship, respectively. Chapter 9 concludes with a set of recommendations.

# Methodology

The Next Generation Thailand study employed a mixed-methods approach with a Gender Equality, Disability, and Social Inclusion (GEDSI) lens applied to research design, survey instruments, training of moderators, data collection, and analysis. This approach helped to capture the perspectives of young women and men aged 18 to 30 years, while ensuring attention to groups marginalised based on gender, sexual identity, disability, and geography.

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## Youth Task Force

The research team convened a nine member Youth Task Force (YTF) to serve as strategic youth advisors throughout each stage of the research lifecycle. Members were first introduced to the study's rationale and methodological approach, enabling them to bring informed contextual insight to the research design. As the project advanced, the YTF reviewed and reflected on the qualitative findings and survey results, offering critical feedback to strengthen interpretation. In addition to their role in data validation, they contributed substantively to the development of the study's policy recommendations. They will support dissemination activities of the British Council to amplify wider stakeholder engagement with the study.

## Youth Peer Researchers

Five Youth Peer Researchers (YPRs), aged 18 to 30 years, contributed to the study as youth co-researchers across key stages of research design, data collection, and interpretation of data. One YPR was selected from each major region: North, Northeast (Isaan), Central, South, and Bangkok Metropolitan to ensure linguistic, cultural, and socio-economic diversity.

## Desk research

A targeted review of English- and Thai-language literature was undertaken to understand Thailand's existing context and the factors underpinning young people's lives. This helped map relevant stakeholders for the study and to design qualitative instruments.

## Quantitative survey

A nationally representative quantitative survey was conducted online and in-person to ensure a final set of responses from 2,000 respondents across Thailand. Fourteen hundred young people were interviewed online, and 600 respondents were approached via enumerator-led interviews. Online data collection targeted urban provinces with internet access and offline data collection took place in remote and less populated places. The Next Generation survey questionnaire was translated into Thai and was used in both modes to ensure consistency in data collection.

The sampling was based on stratified quotas organised by region, age group, and gender, with allocation based on population density statistics from Thailand's National Statistical Office, 2024. Sample sizes in each region were allocated proportional to the youth population's share in the selected area. Age and gender quotas were applied within each stratum to ensure demographic alignment with population parameters.

## Key informant interviews

Key informant interviews (KIs) were conducted to capture broader perspectives on Thailand's socio-economic and political landscape as it relates to current and emerging youth challenges and opportunities. Six interviews were conducted in Thai and seven in English, each lasting up to 60 minutes. Key informants included representatives from youth-led and youth-serving organisations, relevant government ministries and departments, local and international NGOs implementing youth-focused programmes, and stakeholders from the technology, arts, and media sectors.

## Focus group discussions

Seven focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted with young people aged 18 to 30 years. The total sample size was 42. A purposive and referral-based sampling strategy was employed across all FGDs, drawing on university networks, youth-led organisations, community groups, LGBTQ+ networks, and disabled people's organisations to ensure ethical recruitment and inclusive representation.

Each FGD comprised of six participants. Five FGDs were organised by region as follows: (1) Bangkok and Greater Bangkok, (2) Central, East, and West, (3) North, (4) Northeast, and (5) South. Two FGDs focused on LGBTQ+ youth and disabled youth. Each FGD lasted approximately 90 minutes. Except for the LGBTQ+ group, each of the six FGDs had three female and three male participants.

## Data validation workshop with students

A data validation workshop was organised with 10 university students enrolled in undergraduate and graduate programmes. Academic backgrounds included the Arts, Engineering, and Humanities.

## Stakeholder engagement

Workshops were conducted in-person with external stakeholders from the public and private sectors, academia, and civil society organisations to validate the survey findings and qualitative insights gathered from the KIs and FGDs.

# Profile of respondents

Gender:

**Male – 51 percent**

**Female – 49 percent**

Age group:

**18-24 – 50 percent**

**25-30 – 50 percent**

Urban:

**1,400 – 70 percent**

Rural:

**600 – 30 percent**

**Number of  
respondents:**

**2000**

Disabled respondents:

**181 – nine percent**

Sample distribution across regions:

**Bangkok – 89, four percent**

**Greater Bangkok – 174, nine percent**

**Central – 256, 13 percent**

**East – 275, 14 percent**

**West – 286, 14 percent**

**North – 274, 14 percent**

**Northeast – 368, 18 percent**

**South – 278, 14 percent**

# Youth outlook

This chapter examines the outlook of young people in Thailand in terms of what they value, their perceptions of equality, how they define success, and the factors that impact their aspirations and wellbeing. The chapter further discusses Thai youth's global outlook in relation to language and mobility as well as what they consider to be the most important challenges facing the world.



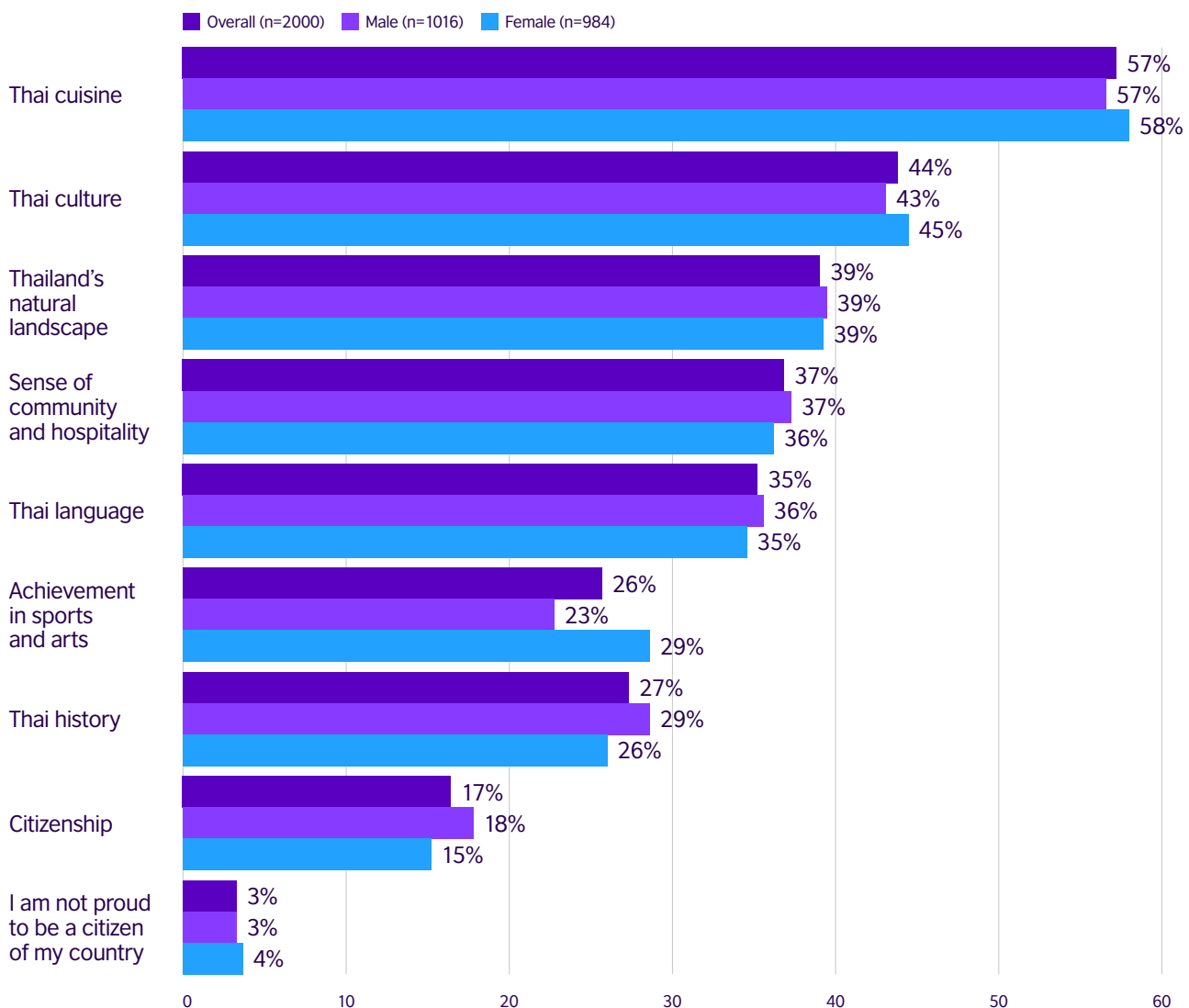


## 3.1. Values and aspirations

### Strong national pride but varying perceptions of equal treatment in society

Thai youth anchor their national pride on various aspects of cultural identity. The data shows that respondents feel most proud to be citizens of Thailand based on Thai cuisine (58 percent), culture (44 percent), natural landscape (39 percent), a sense of community and hospitality (37 percent) as well as the Thai language (35 percent). Data disaggregated by gender further reflects that female respondents (29 percent) show a stronger connection to national pride through accomplishments in sports and the arts than male respondents (23 percent).

**Figure 1: Sources of national pride**



The survey inquired about the extent to which young people agreed with various statements about equal treatment in society. Respondents by and large expressed the strongest agreement on equality based on citizenship (44 percent), age (43 percent), and race or ethnicity (40 percent), with fewer reporting equal treatment based on religion (33 percent) and gender (32 percent). However, qualitative insights from KIIs reflect a more uneven landscape of social equality. For instance, gender inequality in higher education and employment prevails, as does the selective acceptance of LGBTQ+ individuals, and that of disabled youth (KII-2, KII-11). Media also reinforces stereotypical portrayals of LGBTQ+ youth (KII-3).

A key informant working in the justice sector further noted that rehabilitated youth face stigma while female offenders encounter harsh judgment in society, and politically active young people are significantly targeted (KII-4). Additional insights from organisations working in rural and border areas emphasise that young people in remote and ethnic minority communities face multiple disadvantages arising from poverty, limited state benefits, and entrenched social hierarchies (KII-1, KII-10). FGDs with young people from different regions of Thailand substantiated these observations where several participants reflected on their lived experiences of discrimination highlighting that young people not only deal with underlying social biases regularly but have a deep understanding of how these impact them personally.

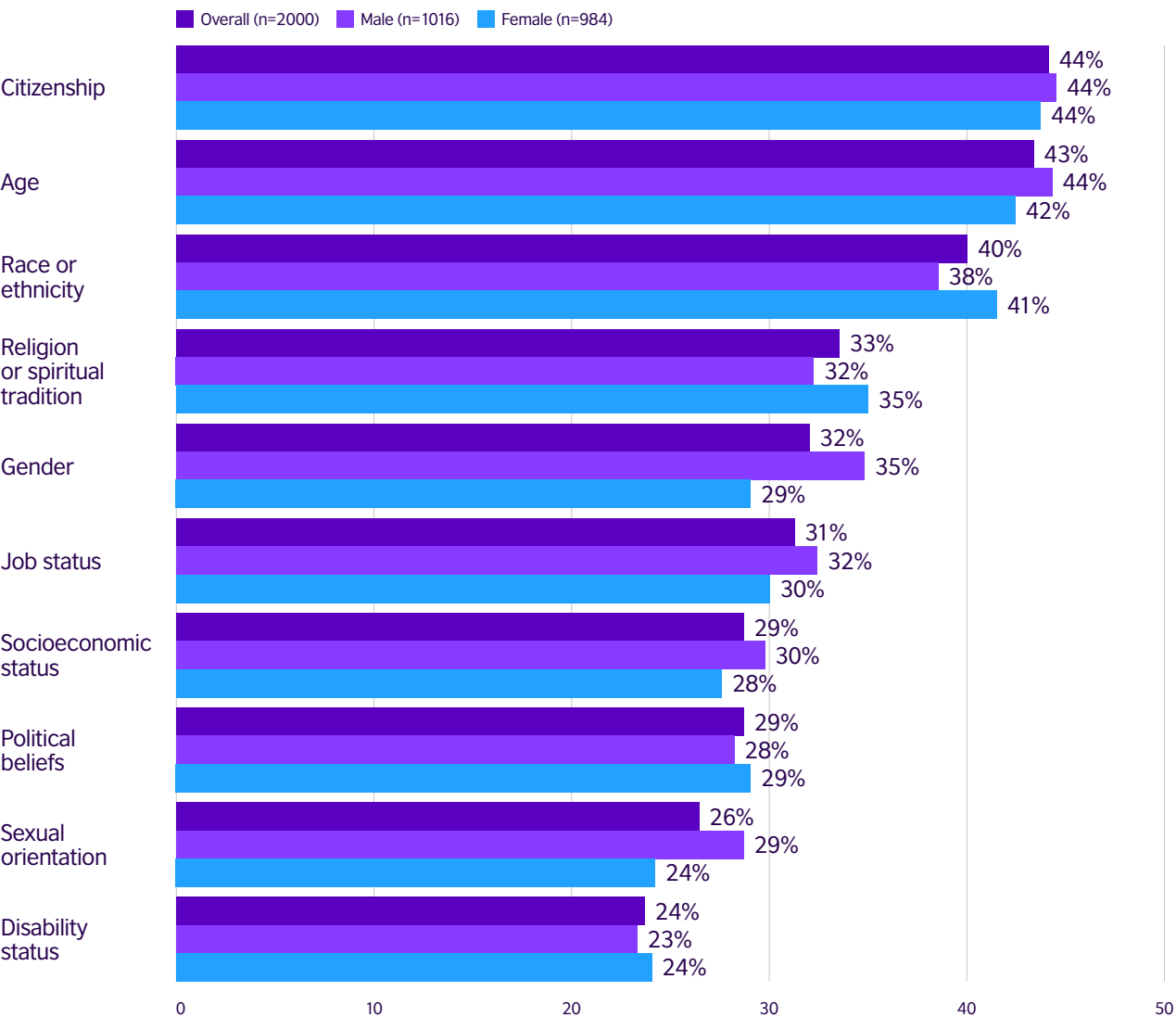
**‘In real life, people may still judge, but at least now they talk about it.’**

LGBTQ+, 26, FGD

**‘People are more aware now, but they still don’t really understand what we need.’**

Male, 29, Mobility impaired, FGD

Figure 2: Perceptions of equal treatment



## The desire for security and independence

Financial security and wellbeing constitute the most important markers of success among Thai youth. According to 62 percent of respondents, financial security is fundamental to feeling successful in life as is good health and wellbeing (43 percent). One in three respondents also stated that job satisfaction (35 percent) and living independently (33 percent) would contribute to their sense of success. Equally important to youth is having a wide array of life experiences (31 percent).

Focus group participants stated that young people not only prioritise financial stability, education, and self-improvement, but also family and personal wellbeing. Several participants indicated that stability broadly encompasses economic, moral, and emotional aspects which take precedence over individual aspirations. They emphasised the need for a stable job and enough income to live, highlighting how fundamental financial security is to young people's understanding of success. The survey found that 73 percent of rural respondents and 58 percent of urban respondents identify financial stability as a marker of achievement, which reflects that localities outside the major urban centres face stronger economic pressure amid limited educational and employment opportunities.

### **'Having a stable job will lead to good financial liquidity.'**

Female, 24, North, FGD

### **'For me, stability means not having to worry about next month's bills.'**

Male, 23, Central, FGD

Focus group participants were asked what according to them matters most to young people in Thailand. Female and male participants expressed their respective priorities somewhat differently in this regard. For example, in addition to earning a steady income, learning a new skill, and taking care of one's family is important for females, alluding to the emotional burden of caregiving and the wish to 'repay' their parents. However, family is not regarded as a constraint, but as a source of motivation to work harder and to plan for a better future.

### **'I can't give my family anything yet, but I want to.'**

Female, 22, Northeast, FGD

Female focus group participants further noted that education and self-development are integral to self-protection and to remain competitive in an unstable job market. Employment is also considered a validation of their individual abilities. While women's goals are pragmatic, self-discipline and care are equally relevant, evident in the statement of a student, **'my mental state is most important'** (Female, 18, Bangkok, FGD). The survey found that 42 percent of female respondents identified good health and wellbeing as a marker of success.

## **‘I study and I work. I’ve started to plan my life better.’**

Female, 21, North, FGD

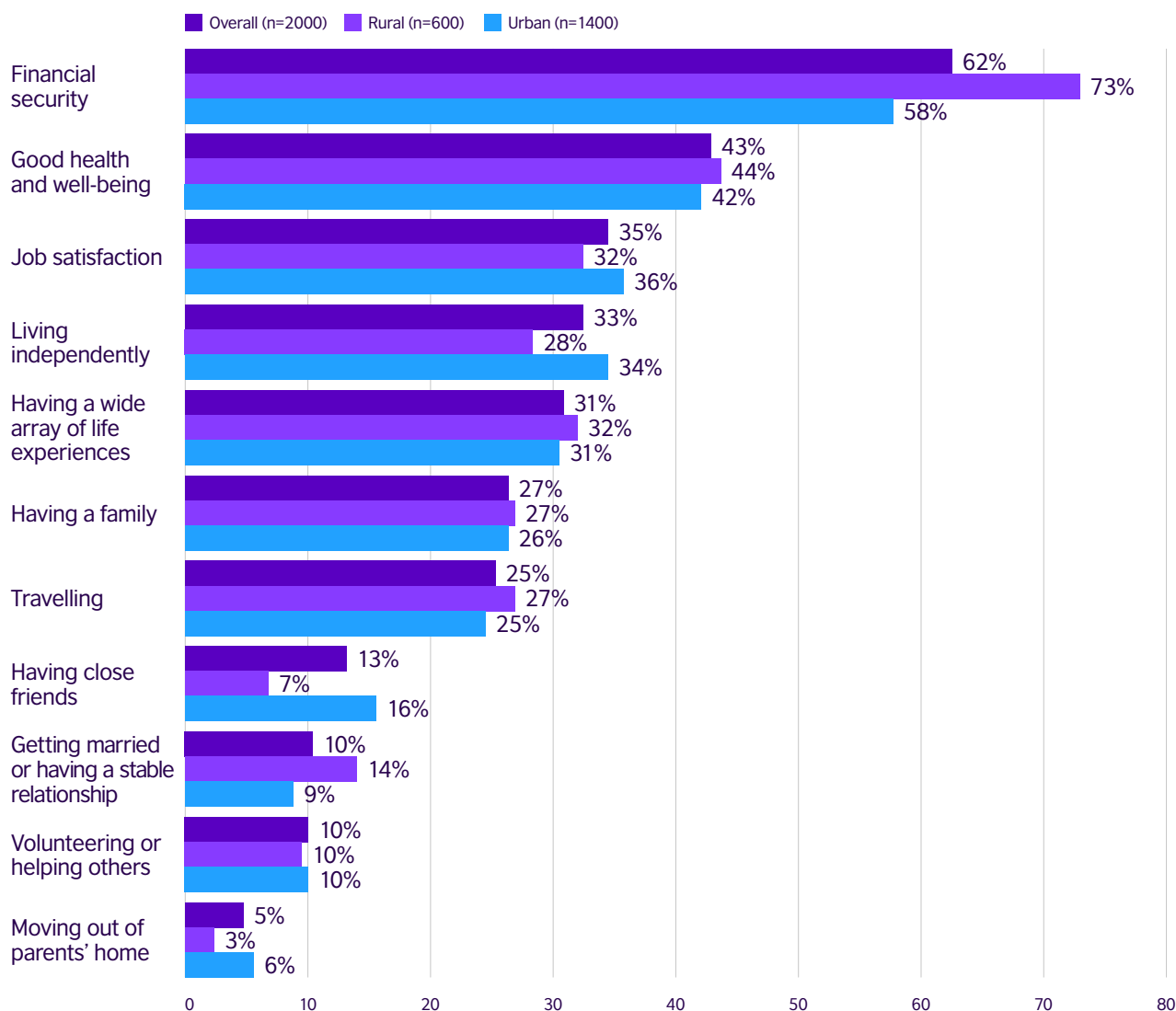
Male focus group participants, on the other hand, emphasised the need for systemic reform and expressed the desire for fairer opportunities and transparency. They view financial instability in terms of wider national issues such as political turbulence, poor governance, economic stagnation, and unequal access to education and employment opportunities. According to several male participants, financial stability is the foundation for all other aspirations.

## **‘We grew up in an economy that wasn’t very good, and politics isn’t stable.’**

Male, 25, South, FGD

FGDs also revealed differences between rural and urban youth where the former emphasise family and wellbeing, while the latter focus on the individual and personal agency. For instance, participants from the North and Northeast associate personal success with the ability to support one’s family whilst youth from the South emphasise the capacity to earn and time for rest. On the other hand, focus group participants from Bangkok and Greater Bangkok highlight financial independence, fairness, and autonomy to survive in a highly competitive urban environment.

**Figure 3: Markers of success in life**

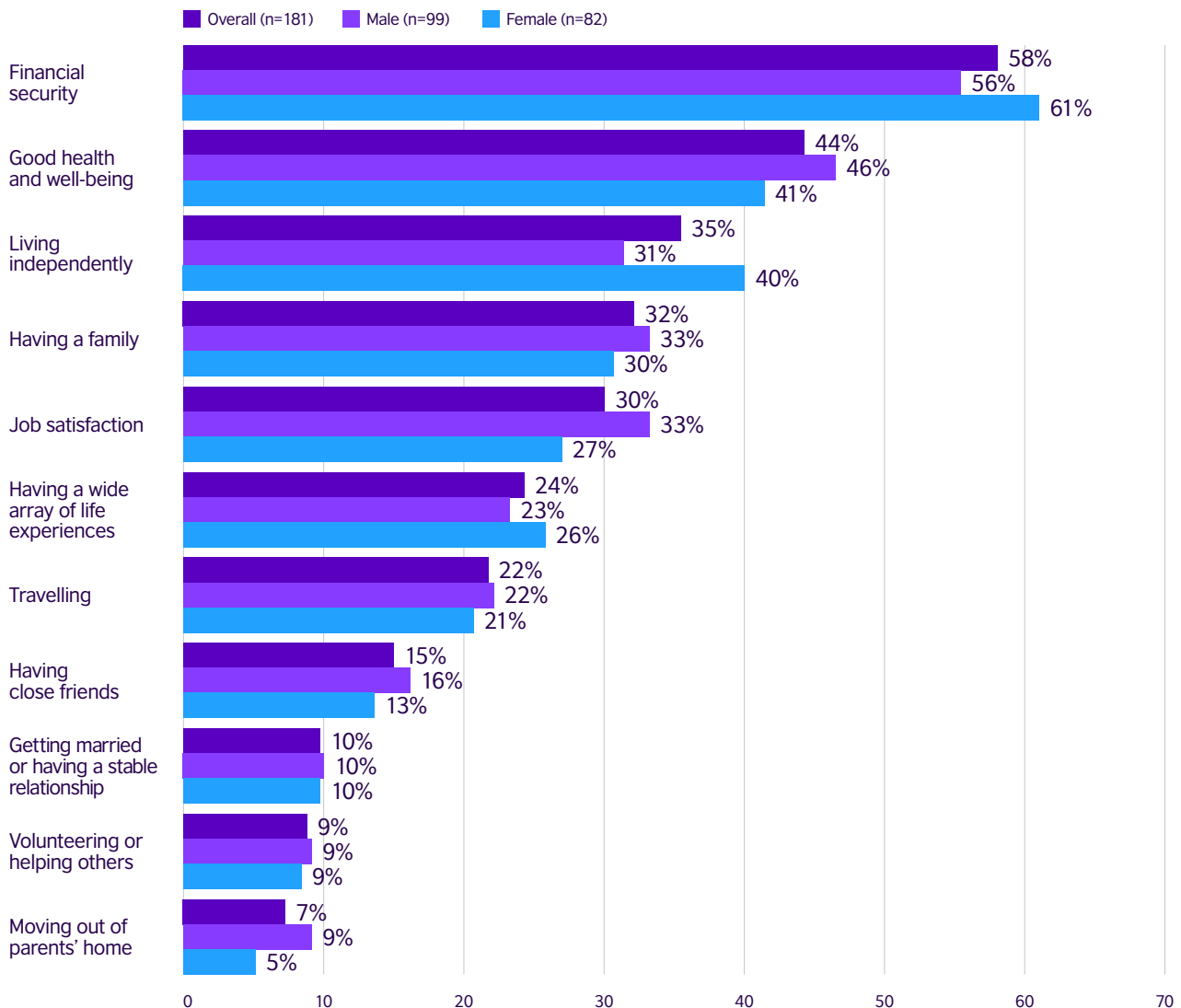


While financial security is also a common marker of success in life among disabled respondents, the data indicates that it is more important for disabled female respondents (61 percent) compared with disabled male respondents (56 percent). Disabled focus group participants view greater financial independence and equal opportunity as the gateway to dignity and respect, while education enables them to meaningfully participate in society. Several participants emphasise that their priorities are not different from others, and they too seek education, decent work, and self-reliance, but must overcome significant social barriers to achieve them.

### **‘I want to make sure my family doesn’t worry about me.’**

Male, 26, Visually Impaired, FGD

**Figure 4: Markers of success in life (disabled youth)**



FGDs with LGBTQ+ participants revealed their aspirations in relation to creating fair and sustainable opportunities for themselves. They value financial independence to gain both autonomy and respect. They highlight that in addition to education and employment, they must prove their competence in a social system that often underestimates them. In their view, economic aspirations and social validation of their contributions are equally important.

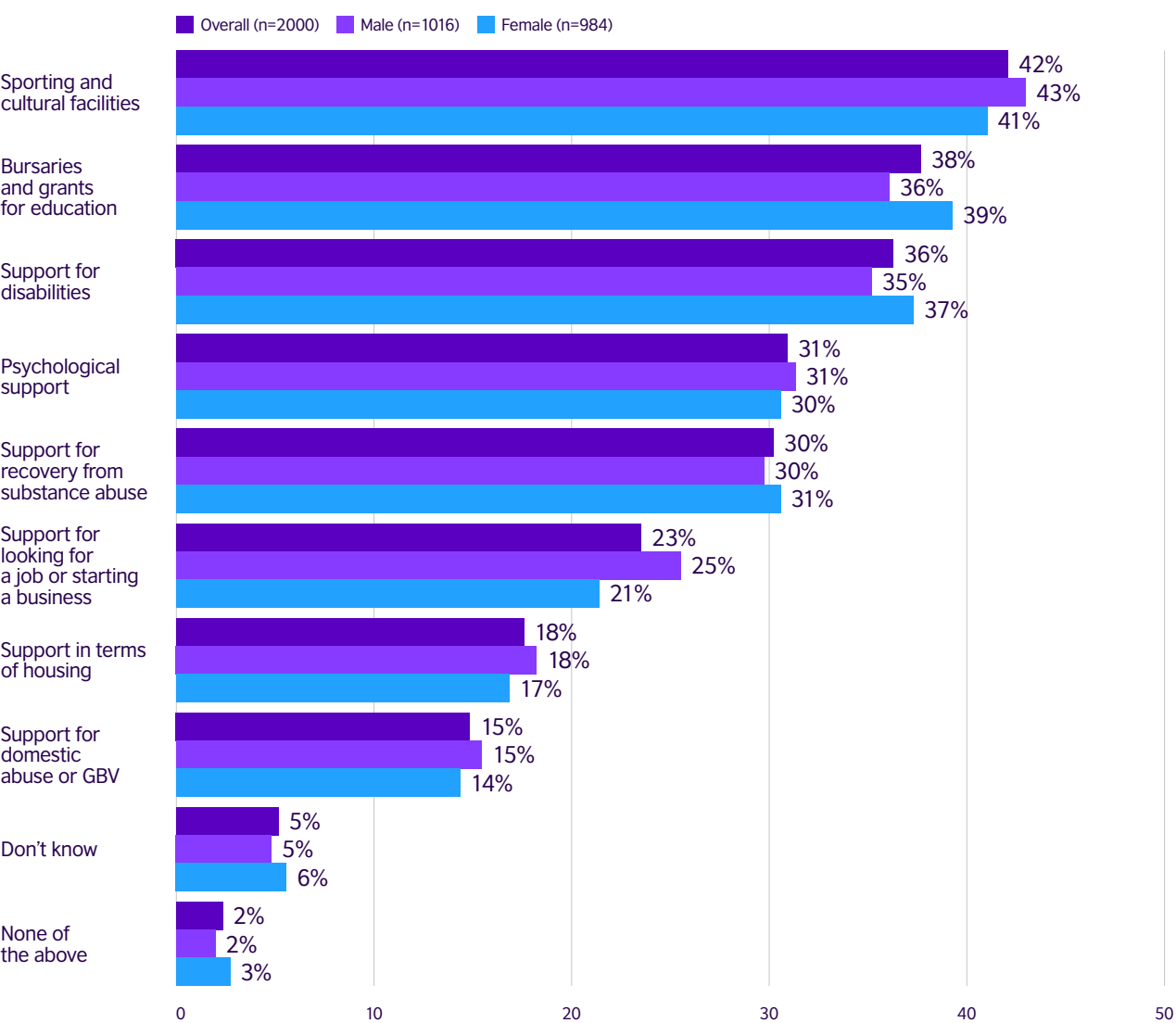
**‘I want my family not to worry about me anymore.’**

LGBTQ+, 26, FGD

# Personal optimism amid social and institutional constraints

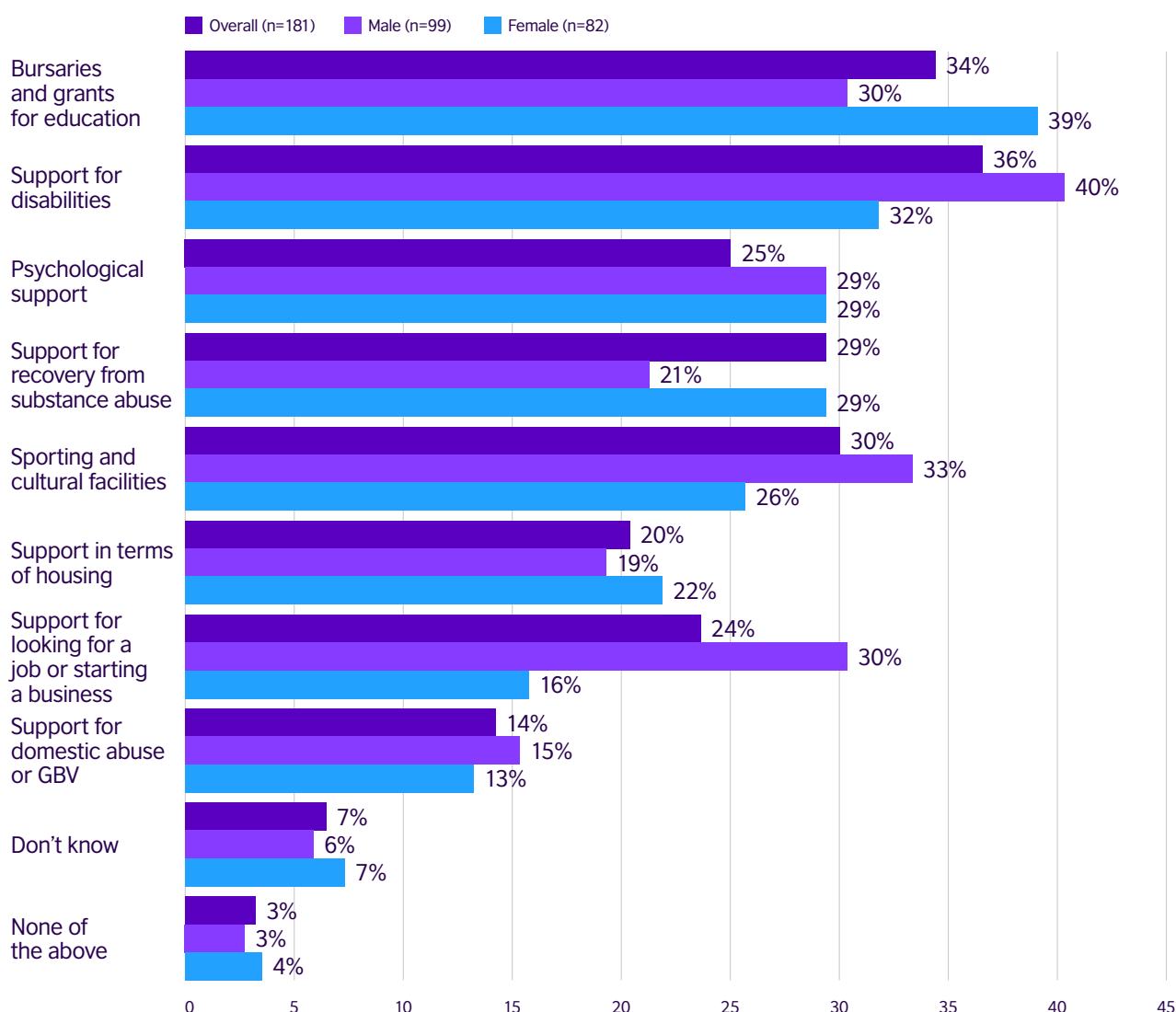
The survey data reflects that young people have limited access to community support to help them get ahead in life. Common types of support include sporting or cultural facilities reported by 42 percent of respondents or bursaries and education grants (38 percent). Gender disaggregated data shows that young women reported a higher level of education-related support compared with men (39 percent and 36 percent, respectively). Conversely, a higher proportion of young men (25 percent) than women (21 percent) receive support to search for jobs or start a business.

Figure 5: Commonly available community support



Among disabled respondents, gender disaggregated data reflects differences around access to community support. For example, support for disability was reported by 40 percent of male respondents compared with 32 percent of female respondents. Access to sporting and cultural facilities was also reported by a higher proportion of male than female respondents (33 percent and 26 percent, respectively). Twice as many male than female respondents also receive support to look for jobs or start a business, 30 percent versus 16 percent. These differences imply that existing institutional, social, or informational barriers hinder disabled women's access to fundamental services more compared with disabled men.

**Figure 6: Commonly available community support (disabled youth)**



Survey findings suggest that personal aspirations drive young people's optimism about the future. Respondents are optimistic about their career prospects (84 percent), quality of life (84 percent), and their abilities to shape their future (79 percent). Focus group participants highlighted that this hope stems from personal ambition and the desire for self improvement, evident from the statement of a participant, **'I've started to plan my life better' (Female, 21, North, FGD)**. However, both key informants and focus group participants drew attention to institutional and social barriers ranging from rigid education and employment pathways to gender norms that limit young people's ability to realise their potential. As one key informant noted, **'some young women never had the chance to finish school or even imagine another path' (KII-1)**. Institutional environments often create conditions for caution and self censorship among young people rather than empowerment (KII-2). In other words, although young people can envision a positive future and many take concrete steps toward it, they do not necessarily feel they have the agency or power to influence the systems around them.

**'If I keep improving myself, opportunities will come eventually.'**

Female, 22, Central, FGD

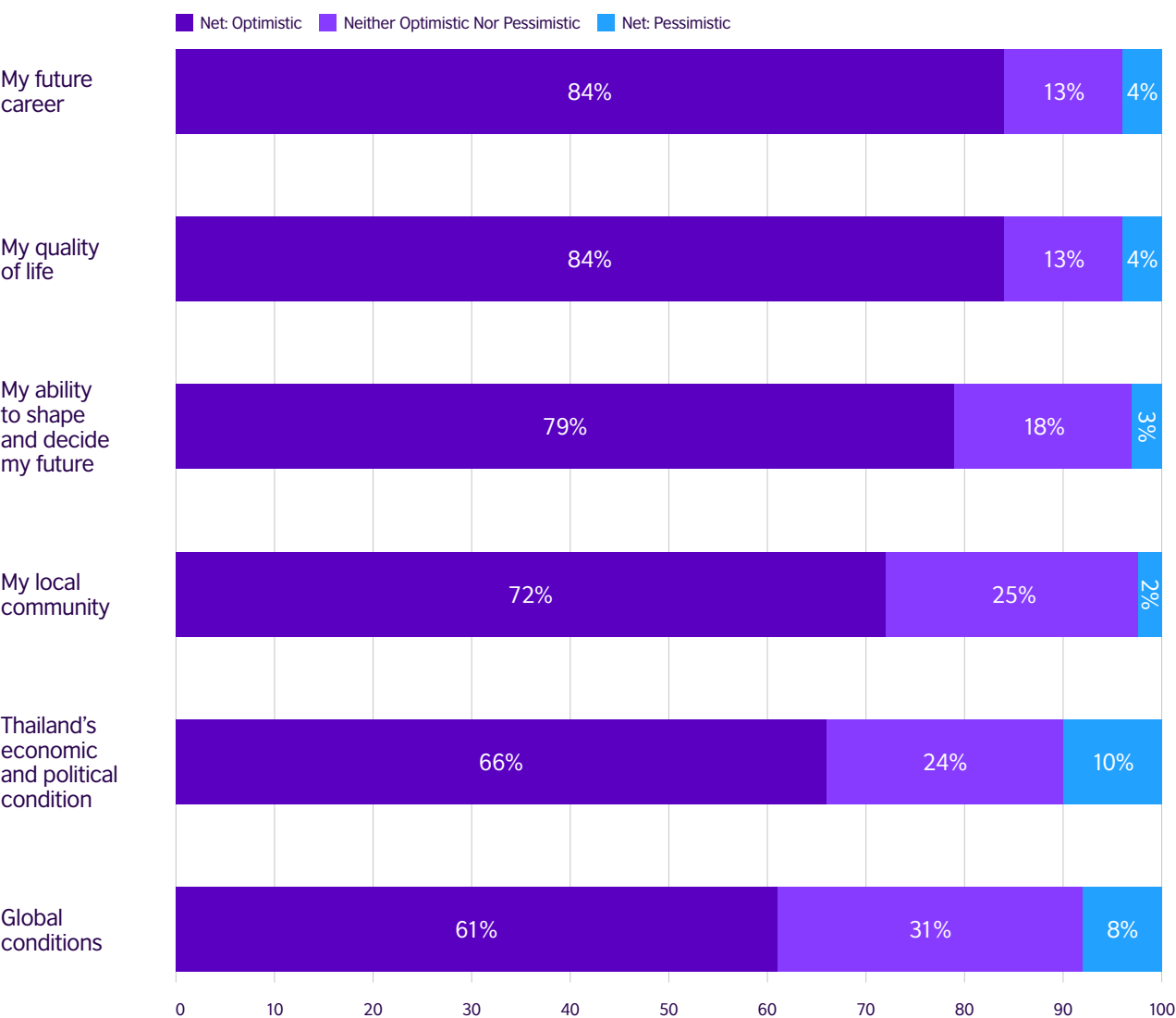
**'I'm already working, but that doesn't mean I stop learning. I might need to take more short courses.'**

Female, 24, North, FGD

**'I try to stay consistent and keep improving myself.'**

Male, 28, Bangkok, FGD

Figure 7: Youth optimism about the future (n=2000)



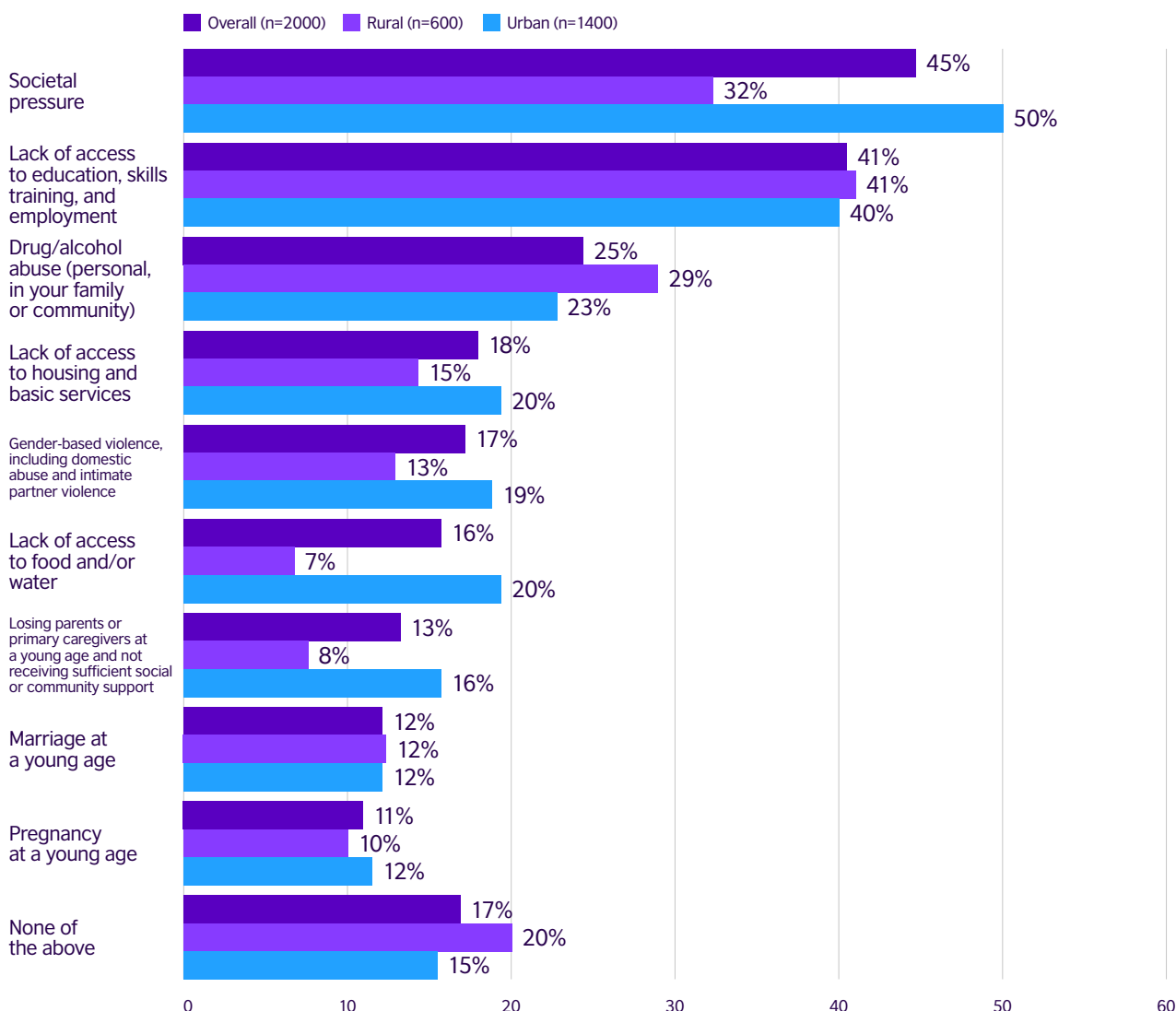
Many young people feel constrained by society and the lack of educational and employment opportunities. The survey asked respondents about the challenges they faced over the five years preceding the Next Generation study which had a negative effect on them personally. The two most pressing constraints reported by youth pertain to societal pressure (45 percent), and lack of access to education, skills training, and employment (41 percent).

The data indicates that a higher proportion of urban youth are more susceptible to social pressure compared with rural youth (50 percent versus 32 percent). The latter identify the lack of access to education, skills training, and employment as the most common challenge they faced in the past five years. More than one in two respondents in the Central (57 percent) and Southern regions (51 percent) reported societal pressure as a major challenge. The lack of access to education, skills training, and employment is acutely felt by respondents in the Northern (51 percent), Northeastern (50 percent), and Southern (46 percent) regions.

**‘People here are more modern now, but elders still hold the final say.’**

Male, 29, South, FGD

**Figure 8: Challenges faced by youth**



These challenges are intensified among disabled respondents in which case up to 58 percent of male respondents reported on the negative impact of societal pressure compared with 40 percent of female respondents. A higher proportion of disabled male respondents also reported on the lack of access to education, skills training, and employment (46 percent compared with 39 percent of females).

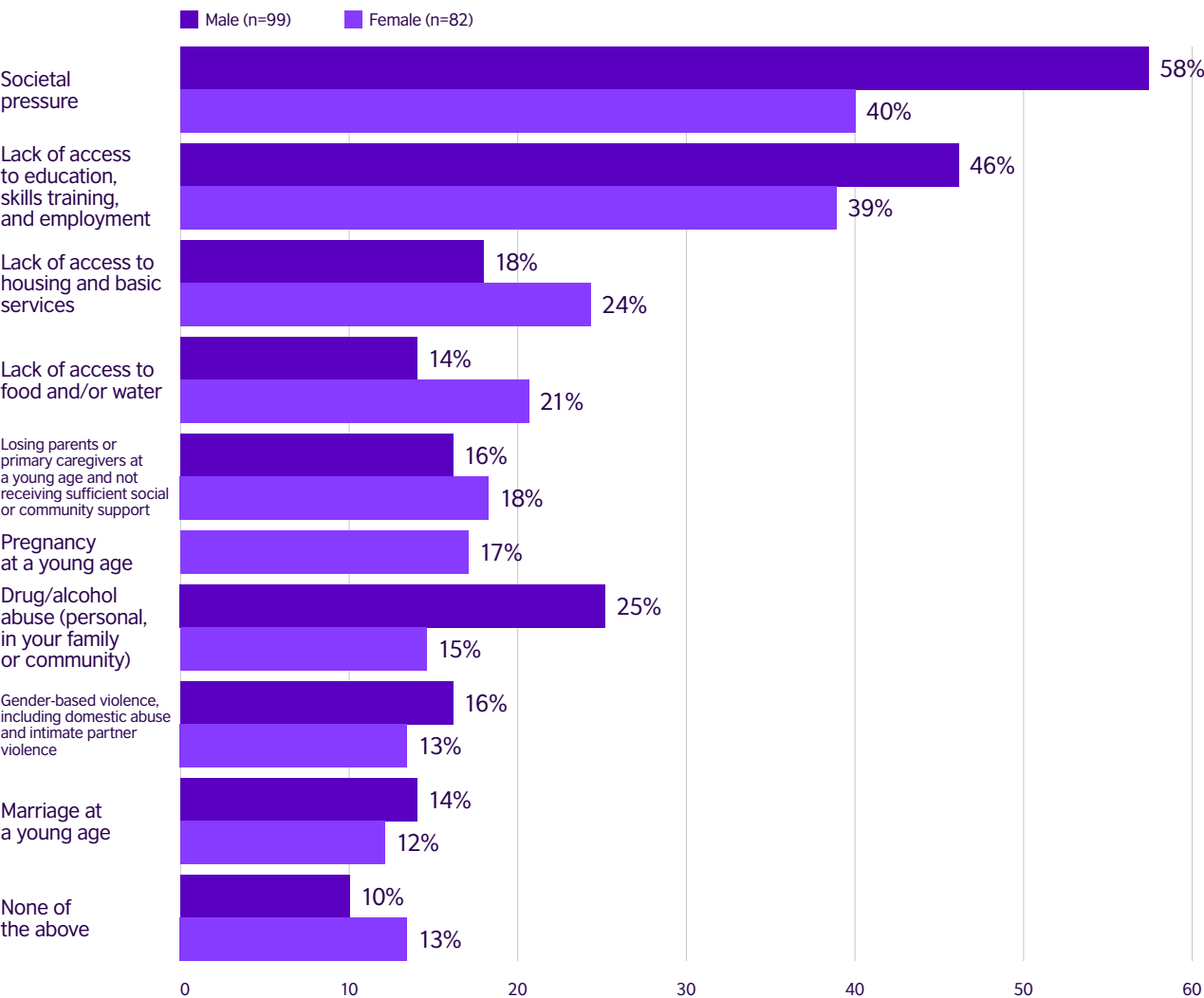
**‘I want to change my soft-heartedness, to be more decisive and not easily swayed.’**

Male, 22, Visually Impaired, FGD

**‘I want to accept myself more. I think too much and it gets in the way of everything.’**

Female, 28, Mobility Impaired, FGD

Figure 9: Challenges faced by disabled youth



## 3.2. Sources of influence

### The importance of the family in a digital world

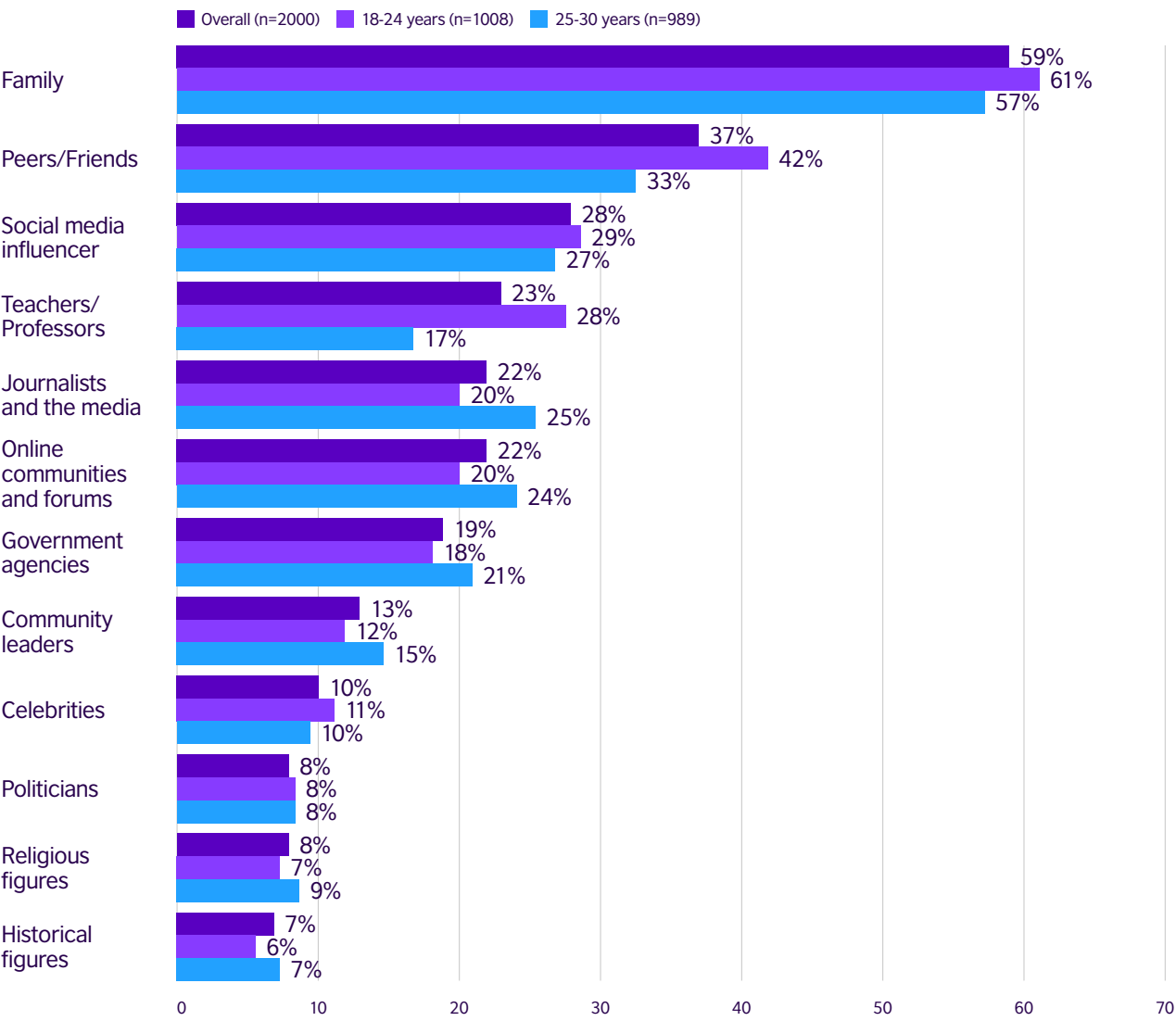
Family emerges as the strongest influence on young people's views according to 59 percent of respondents. Key informants noted that family remains powerful partly because norms are slow to change and young people feel compelled to defer to parental preferences even when these conflict with their own aspirations (KII-1, KII-4). One informant observed that **'the belief that men are the head of the family still prevails in many homes' (KII-1)**. Not surprisingly, **'many young people feel they must follow what their parents want, even if it's not what they want' (KII-4)**. Focus group participants also described family as central to how young people think and make decisions.

Though, to a lesser extent, at least one in three respondents selected friends and peers (37 percent), one in four chose social media influencers (28 percent) and one in five respondents noted online communities (22 percent) as sources of influence on young people. Reflecting on their experiences, focus group participants think that peers and digital platforms broaden young people's exposure to new ideas. However, as one focus group participant stated, **'online, we learn fast, but sometimes parents don't understand that world' (Female, 25, Northeast, FGD)**. Another highlighted the limitations of connecting digitally which can feel superficial since **'everyone seems connected, but it's not real closeness' (Female, 18, Bangkok, FGD)**.

Age disaggregated data reflects external influence on young people as they transition into adulthood. A higher proportion of respondents aged 18 to 24 years rely on close social networks, that is, peers (42 percent) and teachers (28 percent). On the other hand, respondents aged 25 to 30 years reflect greater reliance on journalists and media (25 percent) as well as online communities and forums (24 percent) as sources of influence compared with younger respondents.

Regional differences are prominent and Bangkok stands out in terms of peers and friends being the major source of influence (64 percent) followed by social media influencers (52 percent) and family (48 percent). On the other hand, up to 92 percent of respondents in the Central region cite family as the most influential factor. The findings indicate that although peers and online communities are increasingly relevant for young people, family prevails as the most authoritative source of influence on their views.

Figure 10: Sources of influence on young people



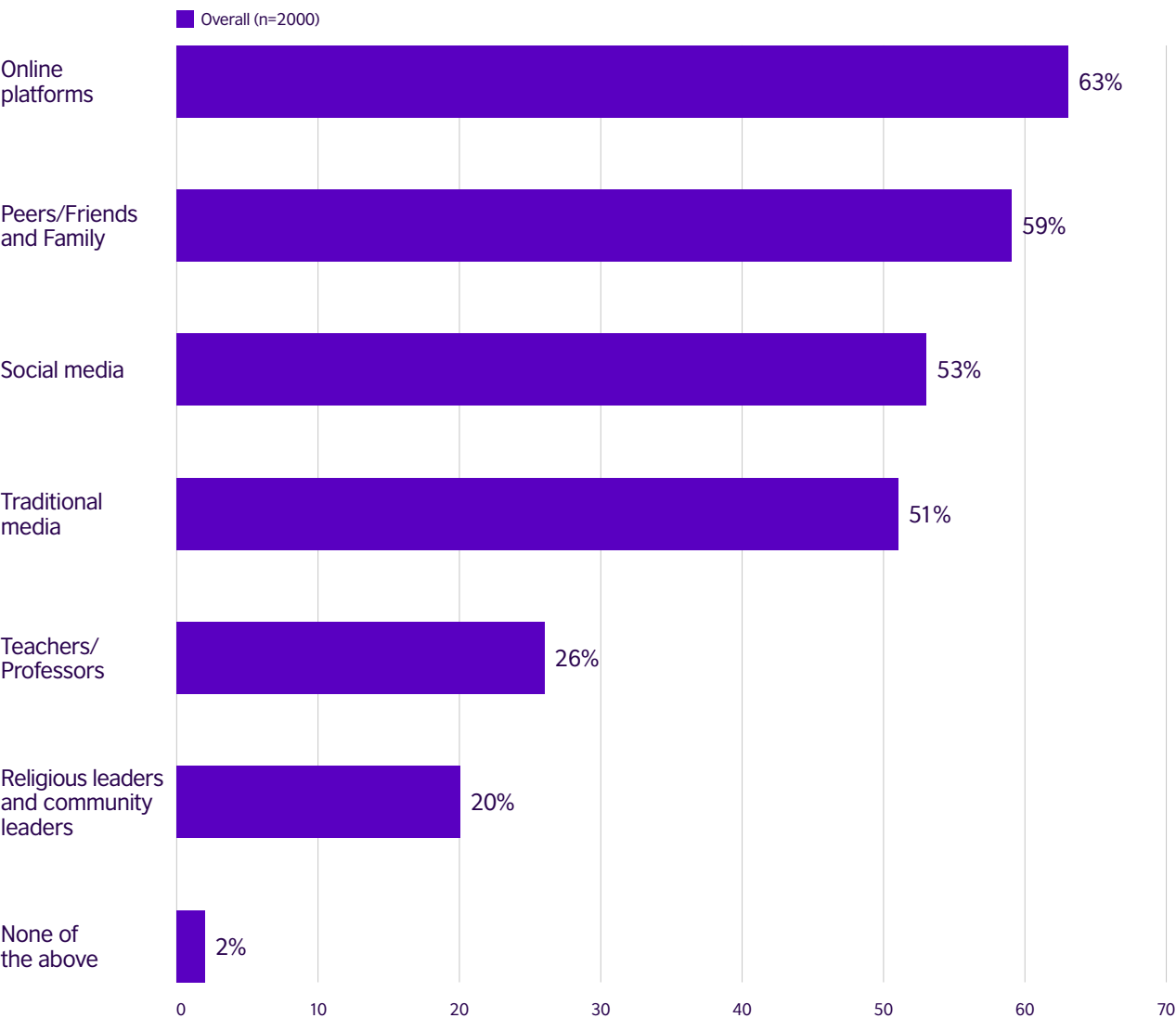
## Balancing digital sources of news with trusted networks

The survey found that 63 percent of young people consider online platforms as the most important sources of information for news and current affairs. This is not surprising in view of the findings of the Digital News Report survey, according to which as many as 88 percent of Thais access news online every week (Kheokao, 2025). In the data validation workshop with university students, most participants stated that online platforms are easily accessible thus making digital sources more influential compared with other sources of news and current events.

However, students highlighted that they verify information from multiple sources including credentials and affiliations. For instance, in relation to election news, students explained that they follow candidates' and parties' social media channels to familiarise themselves with different types of campaign content which they refer to as advertisements that require validation, weighing the feasibility of policy proposals against past promises and other sources to determine whether claims are exaggerated. In this respect, students reflect a strong awareness of underlying biases and the need to decide for themselves what source they consider trustworthy. In other words, young people's reliance on online platforms does not equate to passive consumption of news. Instead, it reflects a self directed verification of information.

While young people depend on online platforms for news and current events, they anchor their trust in their own verification practices and personal networks. The survey data reflects that social networks (family, friends, and peers) constitute credible sources of information for many young people (59 percent) as do social media (53 percent) and traditional media (51 percent). The immediate network of family, friends and peers is the most trustworthy source of information for news and current affairs for at least two out of three respondents in the East (73 percent), the West (70 percent), and in Bangkok (70 percent). On the other hand, three out of four respondents in the East (76 percent) and 61 percent of respondents in the South trust traditional media.

Figure 11: Most trustworthy sources of information for news and current events



**Table 1: Most trustworthy sources of information for news and current events**

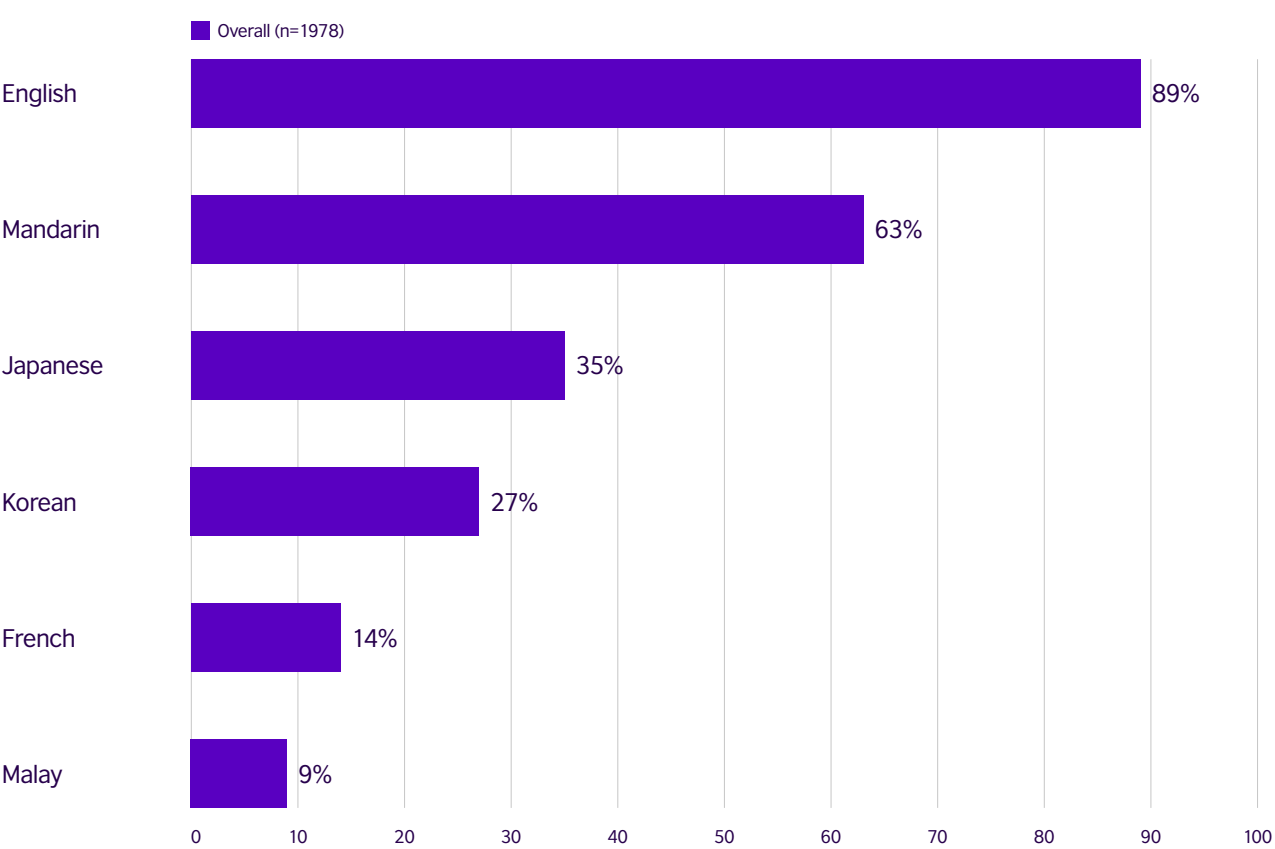
|                               | Bangkok | Greater Bangkok | Central | East | West | North | Northeast | South |
|-------------------------------|---------|-----------------|---------|------|------|-------|-----------|-------|
| Online platforms              | 69%     | 77%             | 72%     | 76%  | 63%  | 55%   | 55%       | 49%   |
| Peers / Friends and family    | 70%     | 63%             | 59%     | 73%  | 70%  | 55%   | 56%       | 39%   |
| Social media                  | 58%     | 31%             | 60%     | 19%  | 44%  | 69%   | 73%       | 59%   |
| Traditional media             | 51%     | 34%             | 47%     | 76%  | 48%  | 42%   | 45%       | 61%   |
| Teachers / Professors         | 29%     | 20%             | 22%     | 18%  | 37%  | 27%   | 33%       | 20%   |
| Religious / community leaders | 12%     | 11%             | 14%     | 10%  | 26%  | 27%   | 21%       | 31%   |
| None of the above             | 0%      | 1%              | 1%      | 1%   | 2%   | 5%    | 1%        | 2%    |

### 3.3. Global outlook

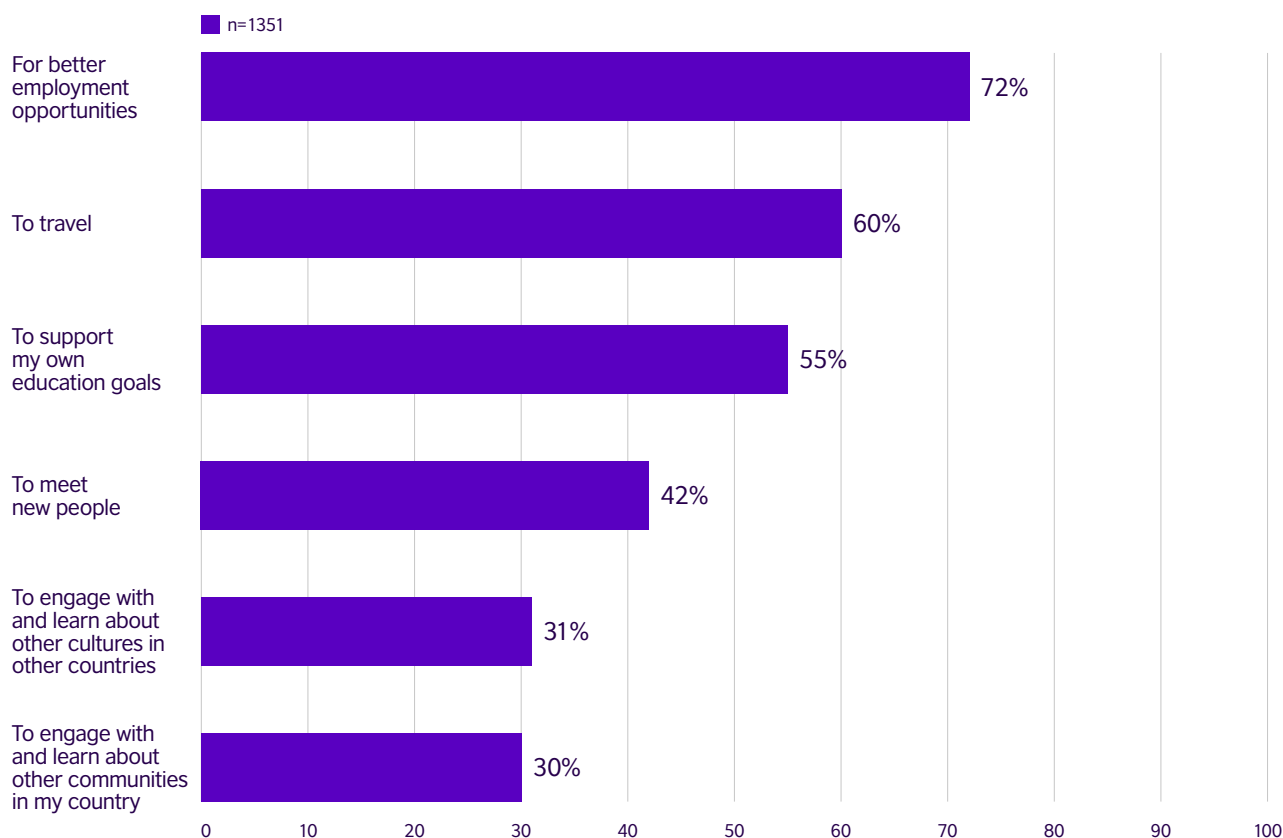
#### English: a lingua franca for Thai youth

Eight out of ten respondents (89 percent) consider English to be the most important language to learn over regional languages such as Mandarin (63 percent) or Japanese (35 percent). The survey found that young people want to learn English to secure better employment opportunities (72 percent), for travel (60 percent) and to pursue educational goals (55 percent). At the validation workshop, university students also stated that English is necessary because most textbooks are in English when it comes to technical subjects, for example engineering, and it would be difficult to perform well with insufficient proficiency. Additionally, students highlighted that with the use of AI on the rise, English language skills are critical since it is the dominant language in this sector. Students also view English as necessary to be able to communicate better in different situations. This suggests that Thai youth consider English to be more of a ‘lingua franca’ or ‘life skill’ rather than associating it with a particular country.

Figure 12: Most important languages to learn (n=1978)



**Figure 13: Reasons for learning English (n=1351)**



## Practical limitations to youth mobility

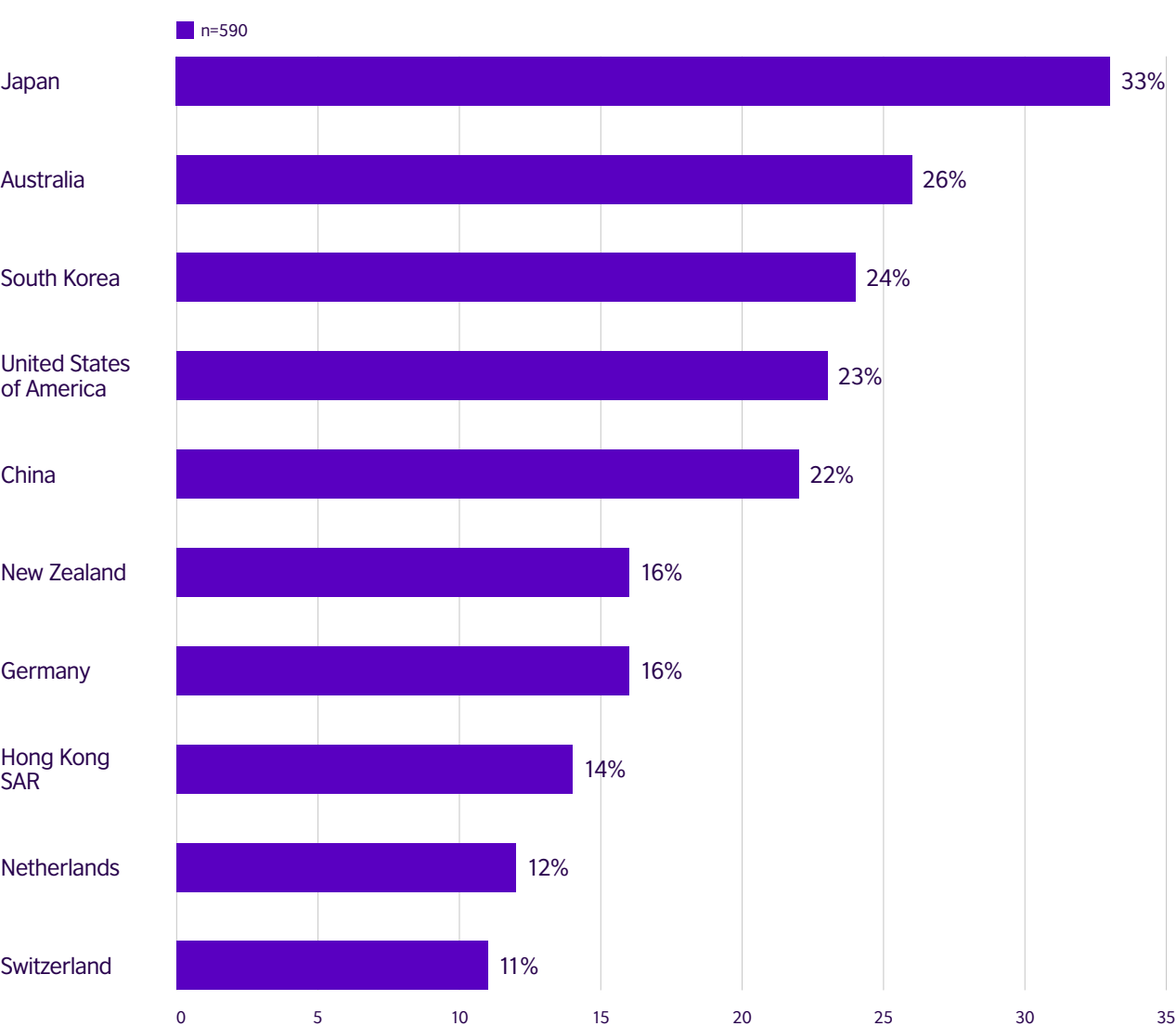
Fewer than one in three survey respondents (30 percent) stated that they would be willing to move to another country. When asked to reflect on this finding, university students thought that the survey data should not be interpreted as a sign of Thai youth's low willingness to move elsewhere but as a reflection of practical constraints. They stressed that moving to another country requires significant preparation including money, decent accommodation, and visas, all of which makes it hard for most young Thai people to consider moving. According to them, the lack of financial support remains the most important barrier for young people as well as visa-related challenges. Students also think that moving abroad is risky and full of uncertainties which can range from not being able to secure employment after graduation or the sudden loss of employment as well as culture shock.

<sup>1</sup> The United Kingdom ranks 16 out of 25 countries considered most attractive to move to.

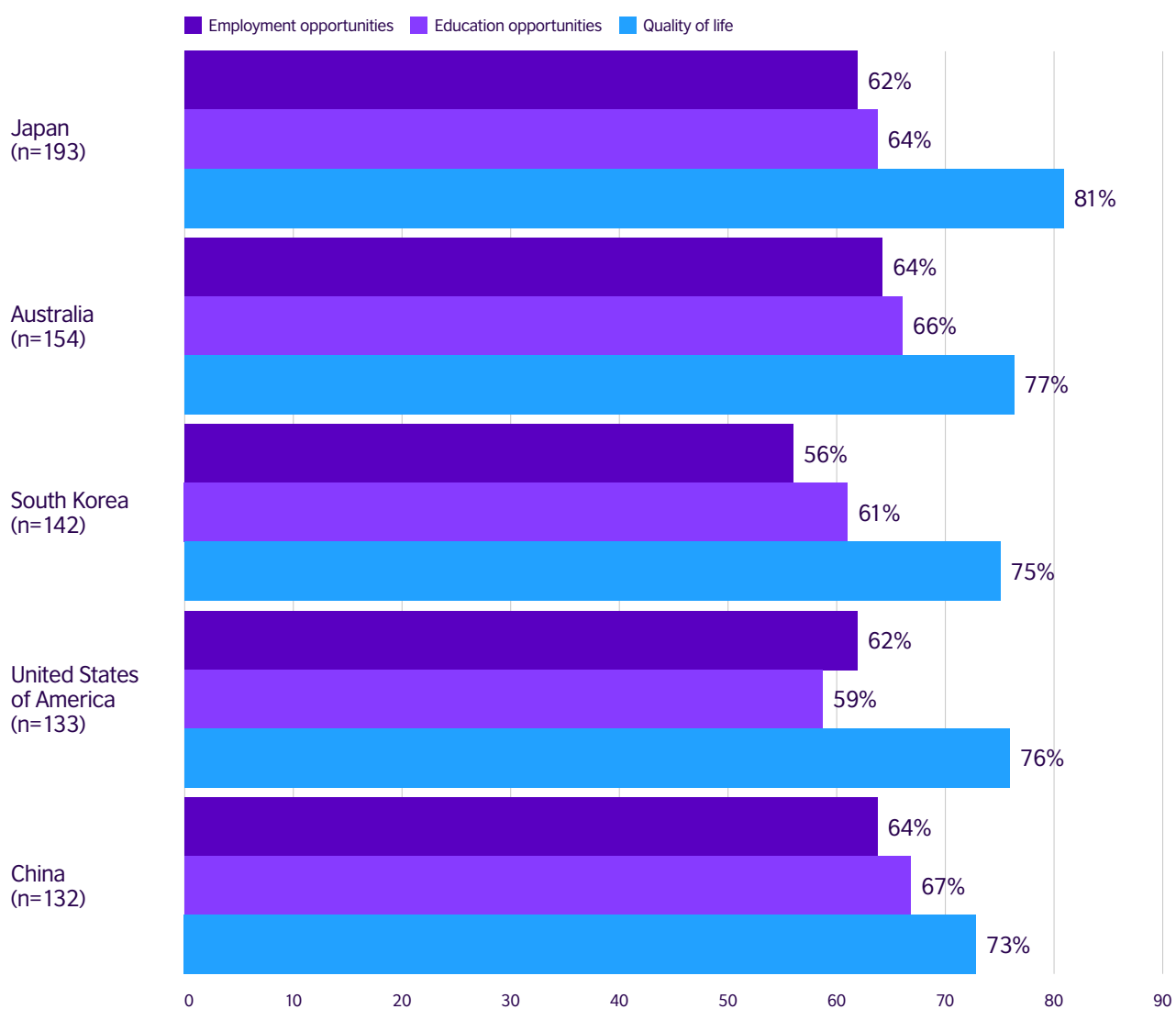
## Preferred destinations driven by culture and opportunity

The top five destinations that young people find attractive 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). The desire to migrate to these countries is largely motivated by the quality of life as well as education and employment opportunities. Fewer than ten percent of respondents who stated that they are willing to move abroad consider the United Kingdom to be an attractive destination.<sup>1</sup> According to university students from the data validation workshop, Japan’s culture is similar to that of Thailand which is why it would be appealing to move there. Moreover, engineering students find Japanese technology an interesting field to explore. Among English-speaking countries, students find Australia to be the most attractive since it is not too far from Thailand and it has many Asian communities.

Figure 14: Ten most attractive countries to move to (n=590)



**Figure 15: Reasons for moving**



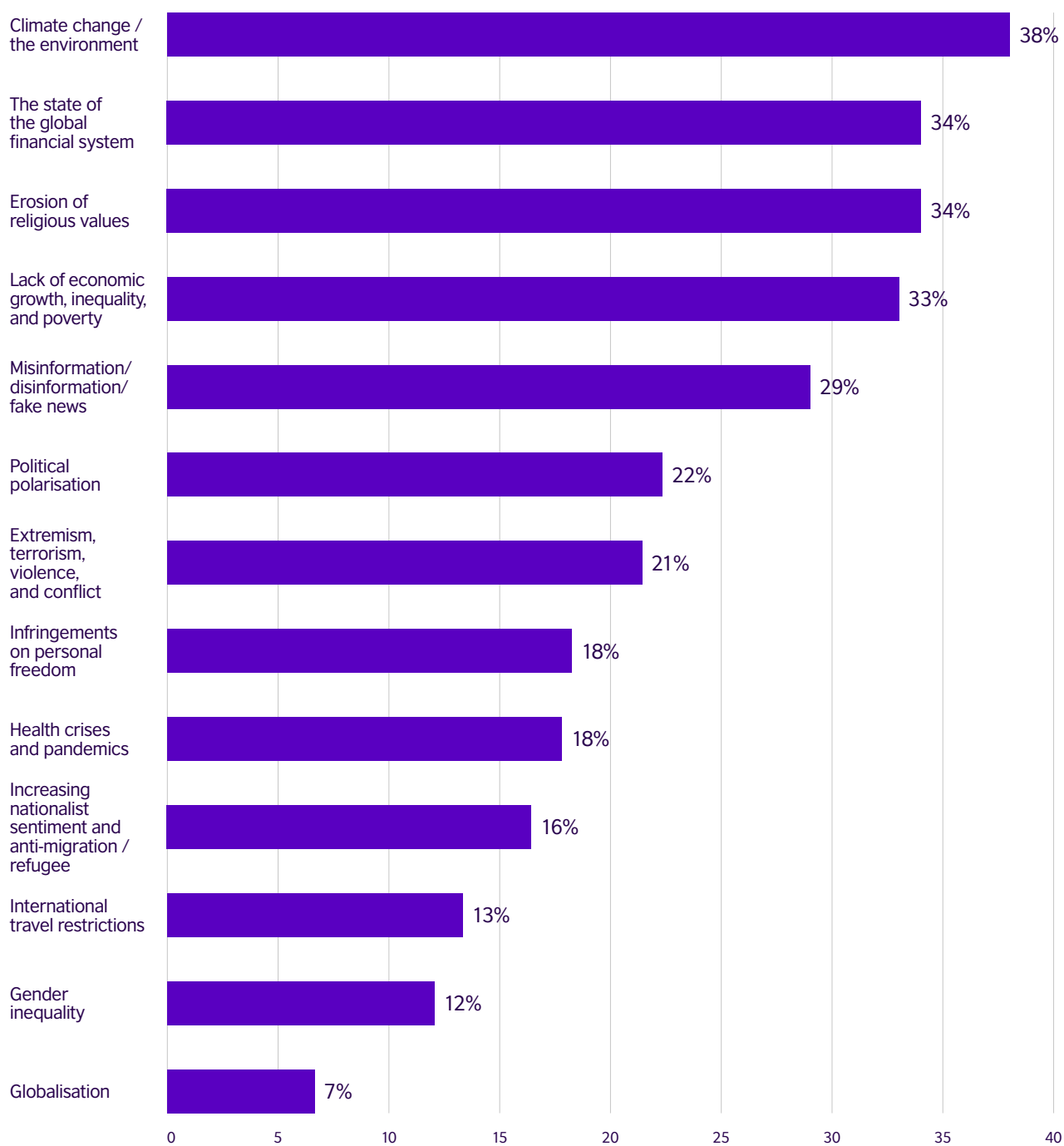
## Perceptions of global challenges

Thai youth view global challenges through an environmental lens, with climate change emerging as the dominant concern. The survey data shows that climate change (38 percent) is considered to be the most pressing issue facing the world today. During the validation workshop, university students emphasised the far reaching impacts of climate change on agriculture and food security, arguing that Thailand's agricultural competitiveness has declined compared with other countries in the region.

A third of respondents identified the erosion of religious values (34 percent) as a pressing global issue. However, according to university students, all of whom identified as Buddhists, concerns about declining religious values may not necessarily reflect a global issue but underlying tensions between traditional institutions in Thailand and young people's perspectives on religion. In this respect, Buddhism's decline stems from its use as a tool for control by the state, something young people increasingly reject.

In the case of globalisation, only seven percent of respondents view it as a global challenge, suggesting that Thai youth are broadly open to international interconnectedness. At the same time, 34 percent identify the state of the global financial system as a pressing issue. During the workshop discussions, university students emphasised that global interconnectedness also brings vulnerabilities. They pointed to the impact of the ongoing conflict in the Middle East on global energy prices and highlighted how such disruptions contribute to Thailand's energy insecurity.

**Figure 16: Most important issues facing the world (n=2000)**

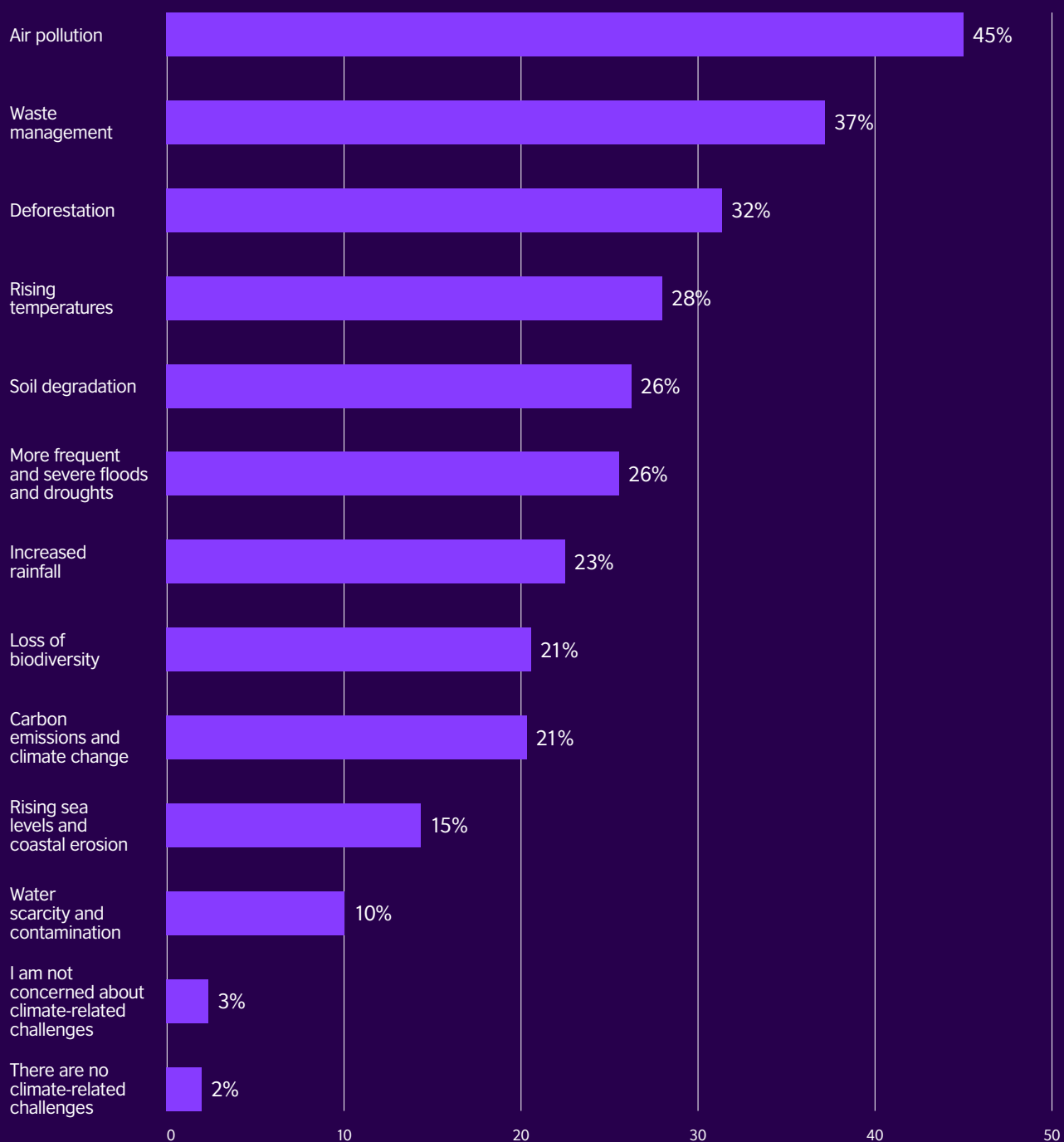


# Evolving landscape of youth in climate action

Thai youth demonstrate both a high awareness of environmental threats in Thailand and a strong readiness to act. According to survey respondents, 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. Among those who stated that they are not involved in addressing climate-related challenges, a lack of expertise and knowledge constitute key constraints for one out of two respondents (53 percent).



**Figure 17: Most pressing climate related challenges facing Thailand (n=2000)**



Thai youth's engagement in climate action in Thailand takes place through a combination of youth-led organisations, academic spaces, and regional/international platforms. Young people are increasingly active in environmental problem solving, climate literacy, and advocacy, though participation remains uneven.

- **Environmental innovation spaces:** Youth-led hackathons mobilise young people to co create solutions on air pollution, water issues, and coastal protection.
- **Regional platforms:** International development organisations provide avenues for youth to share climate solutions and participate in policy discussions.
- **Climate content creation:** Youth-led organisations create youth-focused content to contribute to climate literacy and awareness.
- **Advocacy networks:** Youth-led organisations engage in climate policy dialogues and participate in regional climate events, linking activism with environmental governance.
- **Marginalised groups:** Youth focussed organisations support climate affected migrant and conflict area youth.

However, several constraints limit meaningful youth engagement in climate action:

- **Educational gaps:** Climate change is not integrated into school curricula, and rural, migrant, and refugee youth face limited access to quality education.
- **Geographic inequality:** Climate opportunities are concentrated in Bangkok, leaving rural and border area youth with limited options to engage.
- **Economic pressures:** Low income youth struggle to participate due to travel costs, unpaid engagement, and competing livelihood needs.
- **Social norms:** Gender norms and community expectations restrict girls' and marginalised youths' participation.
- **Digital divides:** Lack of digital connectivity and low digital literacy hinder climate learning in rural areas.

## Policy recommendations

Policy recommendations to effectively engage Thai youth in climate action:

- **Integrate climate education** into the national curriculum.
- **Expand green skills training** through schools, vocational centres, and community programmes, with a focus on green jobs and digital literacy.
- **Decentralise climate opportunities** by supporting climate programmes, events, and youth networks in rural and border provinces.
- **Provide financial support** such as travel stipends and microgrants to enable participation by low income, rural and marginalised youth.
- **Create formal youth-government climate dialogue platforms** in different regions of Thailand for youth to participate in policy processes.
- **Strengthen mentorship networks** linking youth with climate experts, NGOs, universities, and policymakers.
- **Support community level climate action** through local innovation labs, hackathons, and school community partnerships.
- **Ensure inclusion of marginalised groups** through accessible and multilingual climate programmes.

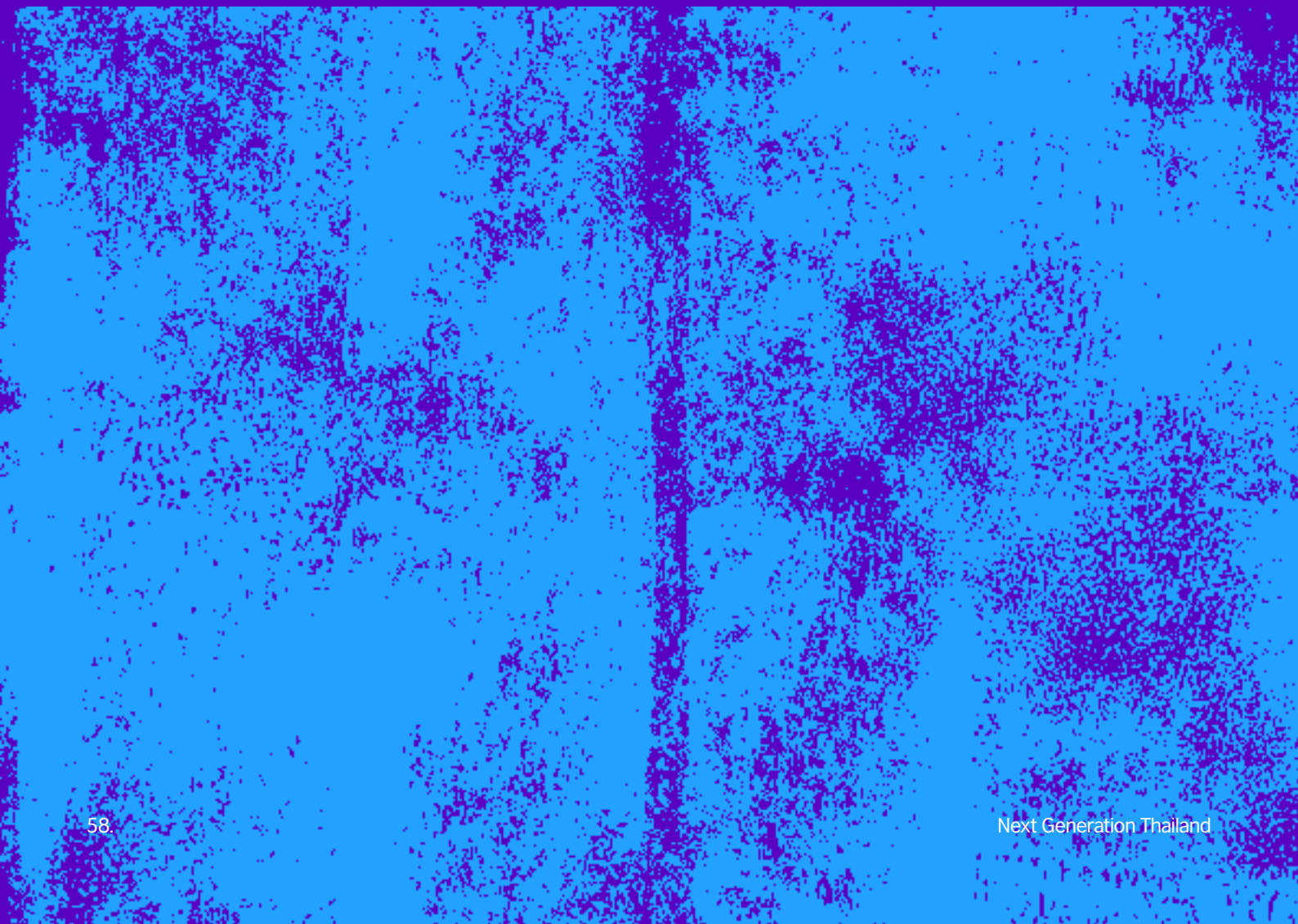
## Key insights

- Young people's sense of national pride is strongly tied to Thailand's cultural assets, particularly cuisine. These soft power assets suggest that cultural diplomacy and creative economy initiatives may resonate strongly with younger generations and offer pathways for youth participation in promoting Thailand globally.
- Youth's lived experiences of discrimination, particularly among women, LGBTQ+ youth, and disabled youth, reflects that social cohesion is not evenly felt. Greater investments in social inclusion would resonate strongly with young people.
- Youth define success through financial security, wellbeing, and independence which reflects the impact of economic uncertainty underpinning young people's priorities. Policies that strengthen income security would align closely with youth priorities.
- Young people's optimism about the future arises from a sense of personal aspiration and individual effort rather than external support. Policies that focus on improved access to basic services for young people to excel would strengthen their confidence in the country's institutions.
- Family constitutes the main source of influence on young people's views. Youth-focused programmes that engage families and community networks alongside young people are therefore likely to be more effective in steering intergenerational dialogue.
- Although online platforms dominate news consumption, young people rely on peers and family to verify information. Digital literacy efforts that build on existing verification habits rather than assume passive consumption would resonate strongly with young people.
- Young people identify societal pressure as the most important challenge they faced over the past five years which affected them personally. Youth policy and programming need to prioritise support systems that address social dimensions of youth wellbeing.
- Youth regard English as an essential skill for employment, education, and global engagement. This signals strong demand for accessible, high quality language learning pathways that connect Thai youth directly to local and international opportunities.
- Youth's low interest in mobility is influenced by practical constraints such as lack of financial support, not disinterest. Expanding equitable mobility pathways could unlock latent demand among youth.



# Youth voice and expression

A key finding of the Next Generation survey is that many young people in Thailand do not feel heard when it comes to national issues. Youth have limited representation in policymaking or youth-led consultation mechanisms to channelise their voices meaningfully. Against this backdrop, this chapter explores the barriers to youth voice.





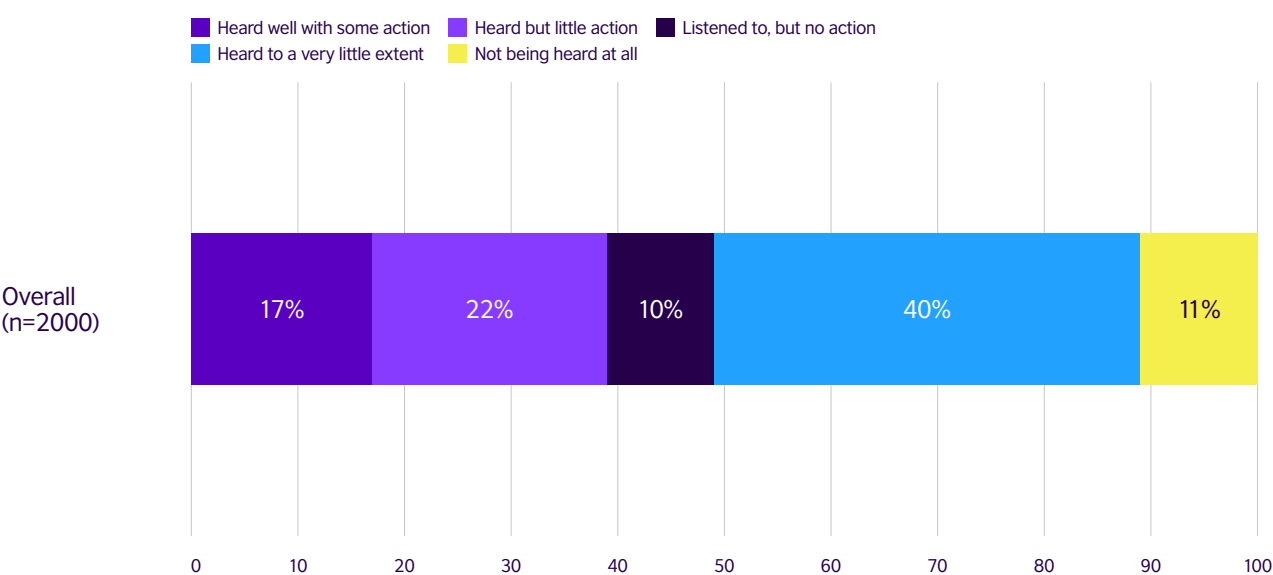
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# 4.1. Barriers to youth voice

## Consulted but not considered

One in two respondents (51 percent) think that youth voices on national issues are not at all heard or heard to a little extent while one in ten respondents (10 percent) thinks that even if youth are heard, action does not follow through. Focus group participants expressed a lot of frustration for not being taken seriously or being included in decision-making processes that impact them the most. As one participant highlighted, **‘they ask for our opinions, but they already have the answers’ (Male, 25, Bangkok, FGD)**. According to focus group participants, genuine youth participation would be possible only when families, communities, and institutions view young people as stakeholders and not passive bystanders.

Figure 18: Are youth voices on national issues heard?



Constraints to youth voice manifest differently across social identities. Male focus group participants highlighted that young men feel shut out of institutional spaces where those in positions of authority, such as local officials, teachers, and community leaders treat young people as good for ideas but not decisions. In this respect, they also feel that their opinions are heard only for appearance’s sake since the decisions are already made. The survey data shows that one in two male respondents (51 percent) think that youth are barely heard.

**‘They let us talk, but they’ve already decided everything.’**

Male, 25, Bangkok, FGD

**‘Everything in this country is decided from the top, and we’re just told to accept it.’**

Male, 25, Bangkok, FGD

Focus group participants further highlighted that prevailing social hierarchies and gender norms reinforce the notion that young people are inexperienced, uninformed, or immature, thus ensuring that anyone in a position of authority can dismiss young people’s opinions. Female participants stressed that social expectations on women are such that girls are raised to be polite and agreeable rather than outspoken. Questioning authority, even mildly, is considered disrespectful. In the absence of strong female role models, a participant stated that **‘you learn to keep your ideas to yourself because no one listens anyway’ (Female, 25, Northeast, FGD)**. According to the survey, one in two female respondents (50 percent) think that their voices are heard to a very little extent or not at all heard.

**‘We’re taught to be polite, not to argue.’**

Female, 24, North, FGD

**‘If you speak up, people think you’re being rude or emotional.’**

Female, 21, North, FGD

In the South, where 37 percent of respondents stated that their voices are heard to a very little extent, topics of gender and sexual orientation remain taboo and efforts to promote the rights of LGBTQ+ youth are met with significant challenges (KII-10). Discussions with LGBTQ+ focus group participants further revealed that they are visible but not empowered. In this respect, they spoke about being invited to panels, events, or discussions whilst being aware that these roles rarely come with real influence. According to them, LGBTQ+ youth are not necessarily steering conversations related to matters concerning them as they are not part of policymaking and **‘you are invited to represent diversity, not to shape it’ (LGBTQ+, 26, FGD)**.

**‘We’re seen as examples, not equals, and our voice gets used to make others look inclusive.’**

LGBTQ+, 29, FGD

**‘They talk about inclusion but never include us in decision-making.’**

LGBTQ+, 22, FGD

The survey data shows that 58 percent of disabled male respondents think that youth voices are not at all heard or heard to a very little extent. Even fewer disabled female respondents (43 percent) think the same. Reflecting on their lived experiences, disabled focus group participants stressed that they are neither seen nor heard and discussions on youth empowerment or policy rarely include the voices of disabled youth. They also said that their opinions are often filtered through caregivers or NGOs and **‘we’re not even in the conversation, people speak for us’ (Male, 29, Mobility Impaired, FGD)**. Reflecting on their daily experiences, focus group participants further emphasised that disabled youth are capable advocates, but lack access to platforms where they can be heard.

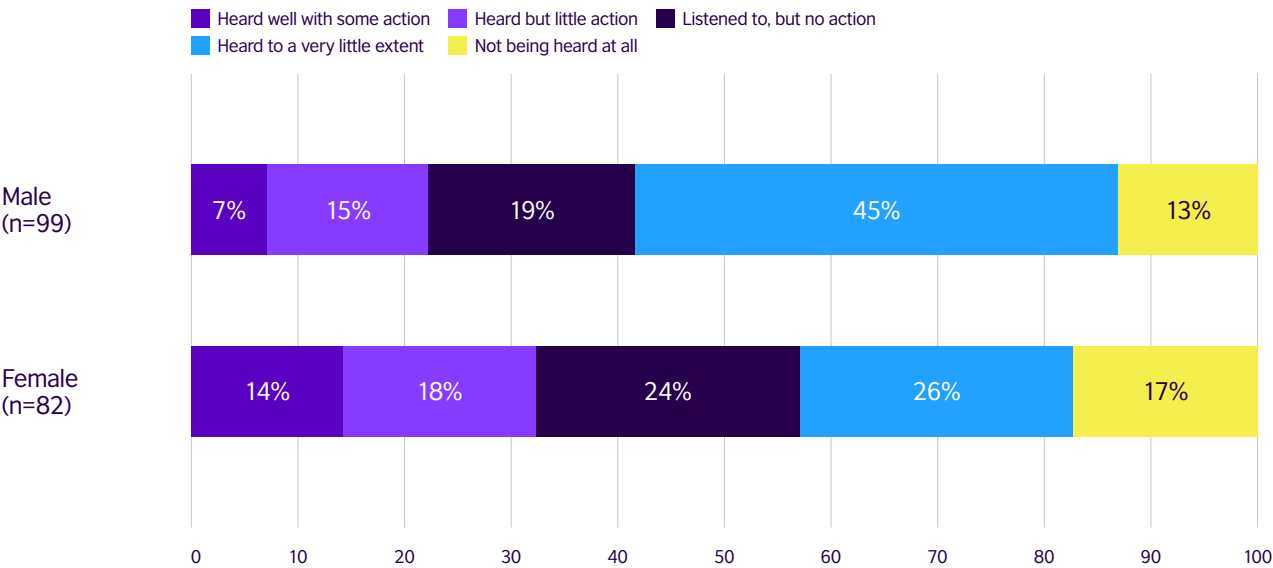
### ‘We’re invited for the picture, not for the plan.’

Male, 22, Visually Impaired, FGD

### ‘Even in youth projects, disability isn’t on the agenda.’

LGBTQ+, 22, FGD

Figure 19: Are youth voices on national issues heard (disabled youth)?



## Silence driven by social pressure, not indifference of young people

Reflecting on the various constraints to youth voice, focus group participants expressed that Thai youth are not silent because of apathy. Instead, they want to participate and contribute positively to their communities. However, they reiterate that they are **‘tired of being asked for opinions just to fill a form’ (Male, 25, South, FGD)**. The impact of barriers to youth voice ranges from a loss of motivation among young people to feeling disconnected and ambivalent since **‘people listen when it’s trendy, not when it matters’ (LGBTQ+, 22, FGD)**. Not surprisingly, focus group participants think that it is better to remain silent to protect oneself in a system that rewards obedience over initiative. As one participant said, **‘we grow up being told not to talk back’ (Male, 29, South, FGD)**.

### **‘Even when you’re invited to meetings, you just sit and listen.’**

Female, 22, Northeast, FGD

### **‘It’s not that we don’t want to speak, it’s that no one really listens.’**

Male, 25, South, FGD

According to key informants, existing social contexts determine where and how young people express themselves. In this respect, higher educational institutions in large cities are generally considered safe and progressive spaces that enable youth voice to flourish (KII-2). Women and LGBTQ+ youth are also regarded as emerging voices across educational spaces and social initiatives (KII-5, KII-6). As women transition out of secondary education, there is a noticeable increase in their willingness to participate in club activities, youth movements, and organisational roles (KII-9). Yet, as key informants noted, the prevalence of underlying patriarchal values continue to reinforce gender inequality in both private and public spaces such that young people find it difficult to share their perspectives without fear of judgment or repercussions, particularly when expressing opinions about politics, gender, or social change (KII-2). Moreover, young women remain underrepresented in positions of leadership owing to stereotypes of vocal women as ‘too emotional’ (KII-6). The reaction to such entrenched gender biases is best captured in the statement of a focus group participant according to whom, **‘it’s easier to stay quiet than to be judged’ (Female, 25, Central, FGD)**.

### **‘After a while, you start believing that your voice doesn’t matter.’**

Female, 25, Northeast, FGD

### **‘After a while, you stop trying to be heard.’**

Female, 24, North, FGD

## Physical spaces reinforce hierarchy and exclusion

A recurring concern among focus group participants is that young people find physical spaces restrictive due to existing social hierarchies which set the tone for conversations. Youth-led initiatives where young people can participate are few, small, and local in nature. As noted earlier, while male focus group participants underscore that adults dominate community events, female participants find public expression risky.

### **‘It doesn’t feel like our space, we’re just guests.’**

Male, 25, Bangkok, FGD

### **‘Physical spaces don’t feel safe for honest opinions.’**

Female, 25, Central, FGD

### **‘Community events feel formal, not a place to share ideas.’**

Female, 21, North, FGD

According to LGBTQ+ focus group participants, physical gatherings reinforce traditional views and biases that most often leave them feeling judged and **‘it’s lonely being ignored, even when you’re right there’ (LGBTQ+, 26, FGD)**. They further note that conventional public spaces such as temples, schools, or community organisations tend to lean towards traditional gender identities which makes it difficult for them to participate. In this respect, LGBTQ+ focus group participants shared that they would rather avoid some public events because they feel the pressure to hide a part of their identity. These feelings of exclusion can be understood in the context of the survey finding discussed earlier where societal pressure emerges as the challenge having the most negative impact personally on respondents. Although LGBTQ+ youth feel safe and comfortable in smaller youth-led creative or volunteer groups, focus group participants stressed that such spaces are limited. Disabled focus group participants shared that physical spaces remain inaccessible to them since most are not designed with accessibility in mind. This stops them from going to places or participating in events altogether.

## **‘You are judged before you speak.’**

LGBTQ+, 22, FGD

## **‘Most places aren’t accessible, so we can’t even join.’**

Male, 29, Mobility Impaired, FGD

Compared to young people in rural areas, youth in urban areas have access to different kinds of information, viewpoints, and exposure to ongoing debates. As one key informant (originally from the Northeast who moved to Bangkok some years ago to study and now runs a volunteer youth network) put it, **‘the proximity to decision-making venues in Bangkok proved invaluable ... and made it easier to attend events, interact with others and engage in meaningful conversations’ (KII-11)**. However, another key informant from the international development sector drew attention to the limitations of in-person engagements even in Bangkok, where **‘financial capacity and the ability to self-fund determines youth participation among a specific demographic that is not fully representative of the general youth population in Thailand’ (KII-7)**.

## 4.2. Online spaces: where youth feel heard

Young people are increasingly turning to digital spaces to communicate and express themselves. According to a focus group participant, **‘online spaces give us power’ (Male, 25, Bangkok, FGD)**, thus enabling young people to speak openly compared with the limitations that dominate physical spaces. In this respect, digital platforms allow young people to explore ideas and connect with others who understand them. As one LGBTQ+ participant explained, **‘sometimes it’s the only place you feel understood’ (LGBTQ+, 22, FGD)**. Key informants similarly observed that youth are steadily transitioning online since it offers greater opportunities to gather, share ideas, and conduct campaigns virtually (KII-10).

### **‘Posting online is liberating.’**

Female, 25, Central, FGD

### **‘Online, things move fast, but in real life, people still think the same.’**

Male, 25, South, FGD

The survey found that one in five respondents (21 percent) engages with the local community via online platforms. However, regional differences persist in how young people use them. For instance, higher levels of online engagement are reported in Bangkok (37 percent) where youth use multiple platforms for activism, learning, and visibility. Focus group participants from the North and Northeast also rely on online platforms for learning and connecting. Those from the South use social media to follow news and social trends, while respondents from the Central, Eastern, and Western regions engage online to acquire skills, seek entertainment, and connect with others.

### **‘It’s the loudest place to speak, but not always the safest.’**

Male, 26, Bangkok, FGD

### **‘We use Facebook to talk about local problems, but people argue easily.’**

Female, 25, Northeast, FGD

Online behaviour also varies across social groups. Male focus group participants tend to rely on online platforms for news, sharing opinions, and learning. They rely on YouTube, Facebook, and TikTok to search for information while they rely on X and Reddit to participate in discussions. According to one participant, the latter platforms are **‘the only places we can talk about real issues, even if it’s risky’ (Male, 25, Bangkok, FGD)**. On the other hand, female focus group participants rely on social media for inspiration and informal learning on TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube to access creative and skills-based content.

## **‘TikTok and YouTube teach more practical things than school.’**

Female, 21, North, FGD

LGBTQ+ youth associate online platforms with safety, belonging and identity where X, TikTok, and Facebook groups allow them to share experiences and connect with others who understand them. These spaces provide emotional support and a sense of community. In the case of disabled focus group participants, the internet removes the physical barriers they face otherwise, allowing them to learn, advocate, and connect through Facebook groups and YouTube channels focused on disability awareness. These platforms offer visibility and a sense of independence that in-person gatherings rarely provide.

## **‘Sometimes it’s the only place you feel understood.’**

LGBTQ+, 22, FGD

Despite the appeal of digital spaces, young people are increasingly aware of the challenges that accompany online participation. The survey found that 20 percent of female and 30 percent of male respondents identified misinformation, disinformation, and fake news to be pressing issues facing the world reflecting young people’s awareness of cyber threats. Focus group participants shared their concerns about how fast misinformation spreads and how easily discussions turn hostile. Both male and female participants find that the internet amplifies voice and vulnerability at the same time. LGBTQ+ focus group participants regard online spaces as essential for community, belonging, and identity but underscore the stress of harassment the internet exposes them to.

Disabled focus group participants found online spaces liberating yet limiting. They note that digital platforms offer them visibility and a sense of independence that offline environments rarely provide. However, accessibility challenges remain even in online platforms and online discussions about disability often lack accuracy or empathy, reinforcing stereotypes.

**‘You can share opinions, but if people disagree, it becomes a fight.’**

Male, 25, South, FGD

**‘You must be careful. People use hate speech without consequences.’**

LGBTQ+, 29, FGD

**‘Online platforms make us visible, but they’re not always accessible.’**

Male, 29, Mobility Impaired, FGD

## **Enabling conditions for youth expression**

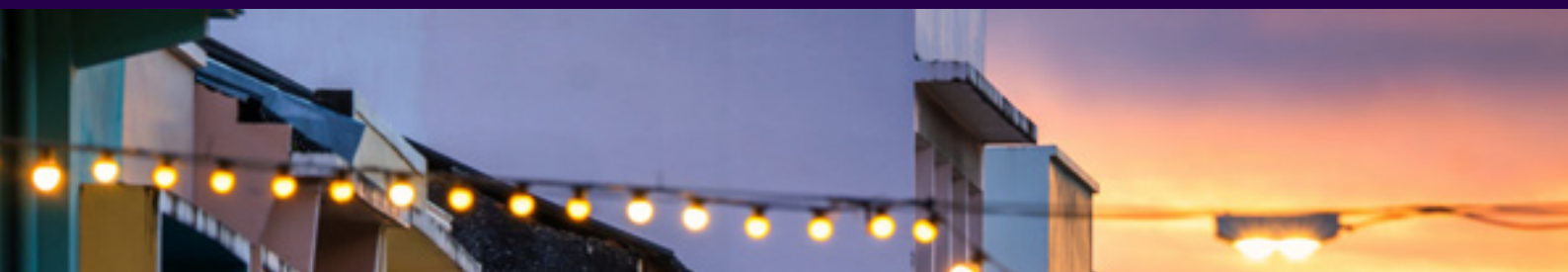
Focus group participants stressed the need for stronger support with respect to communication skills, media literacy, and civic learning to help them engage effectively in public conversations. According to them, Thai youth are active online but often lack knowledge and guidance regarding how to fact-check or engage in social debates in a safe way. Focus group participants said they had little awareness of existing programmes in this regard.

Male and female focus group participants alike agreed that youth need training in critical thinking, safe dialogue, and identifying misinformation. While male focus group participants lean toward political and digital literacy **‘to learn how to check news, not just share it’ (Male, 23, Central, FGD)**, female participants emphasise safety and emotional wellbeing with respect to online spaces. They want media literacy to be able to recognise manipulative content and to better judge information that circulates quickly on social media. According to one participant, **‘programmes should teach us how to protect ourselves from harassment’ (Female, 25, North, FGD)**. LGBTQ+ participants emphasise inclusion where **‘media literacy understands our experiences’ (LGBTQ+, 22, FGD)**.

## Key insights

- Social hierarchies in physical spaces stifle youth voice and agency. Creating inclusive, youth led community spaces would foster youth expression and strengthen social cohesion.
- Gender norms continue to suppress young women's voice, with many taught to be polite and non confrontational. Targeted leadership initiatives would resonate strongly with young women.
- LGBTQ+ youth's experiences reveal that symbolic inclusion rarely translates into influence. Ensuring LGBTQ+ youth have meaningful roles in decision making processes would strengthen the authenticity of inclusion efforts.
- Disabled youth's accounts of being spoken for, excluded, or unable to access physical and digital spaces highlight persistent barriers to effective youth engagement. Enforcing accessibility standards and supporting disabled led platforms would enhance their participation.
- Young people's preference for digital spaces reflects that physical environments feel hierarchical, exclusionary, and unsafe for open expression. Ensuring youth friendly safe spaces would help young people feel genuinely heard.
- Young people are vulnerable to hostile debates online. Investments in media literacy, critical thinking, and safe dialogue skills would help youth navigate online spaces safely.
- Limited awareness of existing civic learning or online safety programmes suggests a gap between youth needs and available support. Increasing visibility and youth friendly design of such programmes would improve uptake and impact.

# Youth civic and political engagement



This chapter explores young people's civic and political participation amid the limitations they face.



5



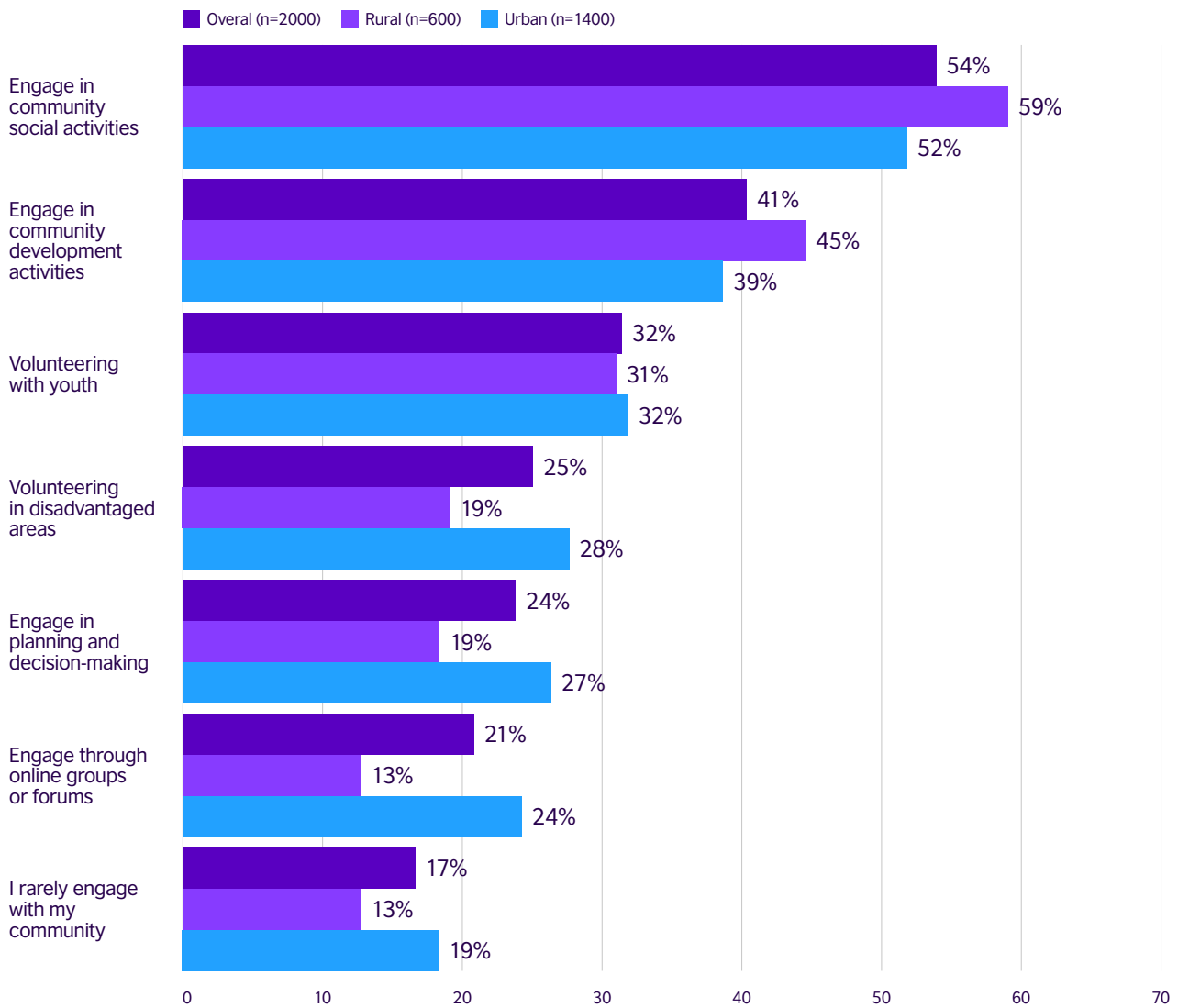
## 5.1. Civic engagement

The survey inquired about how respondents engage with their local community. One in two respondents (54 percent) engages in social activities and 41 percent contribute towards development activities. A third (32 percent) volunteer with youth and one in four respondents (25 percent) volunteers in disadvantaged areas. Key informants noted that young people participate in several ways through practical, community driven activities such as environmental hackathons, climate camps, and local problem solving events that allow them to co-design solutions with peers (KII-6, KII-12). Youth also volunteer through activities organised by their schools such as inter-school collaborations, tutoring initiatives, and sustainability projects such as urban gardens and plastic reduction campaigns (KII-5).

In rural and marginalised areas, young people participate in community service, environmental monitoring, and small scale advocacy arising from their direct exposure to flooding, coastal erosion or pollution (KII-6, KII-12). Youth also contribute ideas to the local authorities, support participatory processes or assist with outreach at the provincial and sub-district levels (KII-9). Youth-led digital platforms further aim to expand young people's access to civic spaces, where such initiatives produce climate education content, organise social media and peer to peer awareness campaigns for wider outreach (KII-12). These exemplify the ways in which youth engage in civic spaces through collaborative community action.

Insights from FGDs indicate some differences in the nature of young people's engagement. For example, male focus group participants shared that they are inclined to lead by example emphasising their interest in positions of responsibility and leadership while female focus group participants lean towards supporting others to shift attitudes gradually. Both LGBTQ+ and disabled focus group participants underscore youth agency through representation and self-advocacy to demonstrate their belief that sustained visibility can challenge prevailing biases against sexual orientation and disability in society.

**Figure 20: Youth engagement in the local community**



## Committed yet constrained

Key informants highlighted that regional inequality and economic vulnerability inhibit young people especially in rural areas from engaging meaningfully with their communities (KII-1, KII-2, K-13). In many instances, rural youth are left with no choice but to **‘prioritise survival over activism or creativity’ (KII-2)**. This resonates strongly with focus group participants according to whom, **‘it’s hard to join activities when you work and take care of your family’ (Female, 25, Northeast, FGD)**. Moreover, with limited transport facilities or finances, youth in rural areas also find it difficult to travel long distances to participate in activities. Key informants drew attention to youth from ethnic minorities and border areas who face linguistic and citizenship challenges which severely restrict their engagement with broader Thai society (KII-2, KII-10).

### **‘Meetings are far and we don’t have time or transport.’**

Female, 25, Northeast, FGD

### **‘We’re too busy with work to join community activities.’**

Male, 23, Central, FGD

As discussed earlier in Chapter 4, to varying degrees, existing social norms and hierarchies, conservative mindsets, and narrow information channels silence young people and hinder youth engagement in the process (KII-2, KII-3). Although more acute in rural and traditional communities, the emphasis on conformity is central to how young people are raised in Thailand (KII-2). Both social hierarchy and age-based authority are powerful barriers to youth’s meaningful engagement (KII-4).

### **‘You stop speaking when you realise nothing will change.’**

Male, 25, Bangkok, FGD

### **‘Nothing changes, so people just stop showing up.’**

Female, 25, Central, FGD

Opportunities to engage in civic initiatives are also scarce and localised in most regions of Thailand (KII-5). Outside of urban areas, most young people lack safe spaces and role models to encourage or enable effective youth engagement (ibid.). Most young people outside of metropolitan areas also do not have access to national conversations and information (KII-3). Key informants stressed that the combination of existing hierarchies and financial dependence further stifles youth agency (KII-4, KII-9).

Although young people are engaged and attentive to community and public issues, this participation does not necessarily translate into a sustained sense of agency or influence. Key informants emphasised that youth engagement is influenced by notions of permission while social norms normalise compliance over leadership (KII-3, KII-4). Although civic energy among youth is present, there is a major gap between youth participation and power such that young people can be active in their communities, but lack the pathways and recognition needed to feel as agents of change (KII-2, KII-4, KII-5).

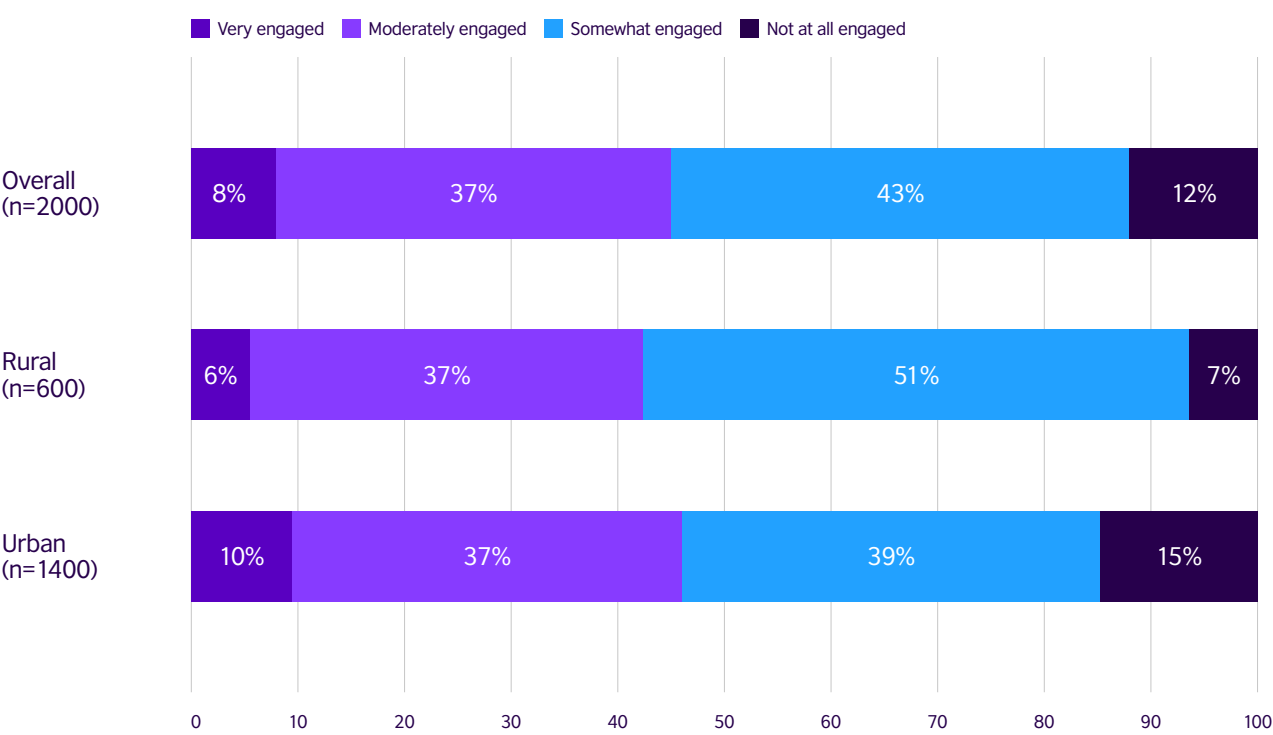
**‘People stop trying because every initiative costs money which young people don’t have.’**

Female, 25, Northeast, FGD

## 5.2. Political engagement

Thai youth today are both ‘**socially aware and politically articulate when it comes to interrogating authority**’ (KII-2). Youth activism in political spaces is increasingly visible especially around issues that resonate with their interests (KII-9). For example, when petitions require signatures, youth groups are often the most responsive and take initiatives to mobilise wider groups of people (ibid.). Against this backdrop, the survey asked respondents how engaged they are personally with politics in Thailand. The data shows that eight in ten respondents (88 percent) are engaged to quite an extent. When asked what young people understand political engagement to be, university students at the validation workshop shared examples such as performing duties as citizens to participating in micro contexts like informing university policies.

Figure 21: Youth engagement with politics



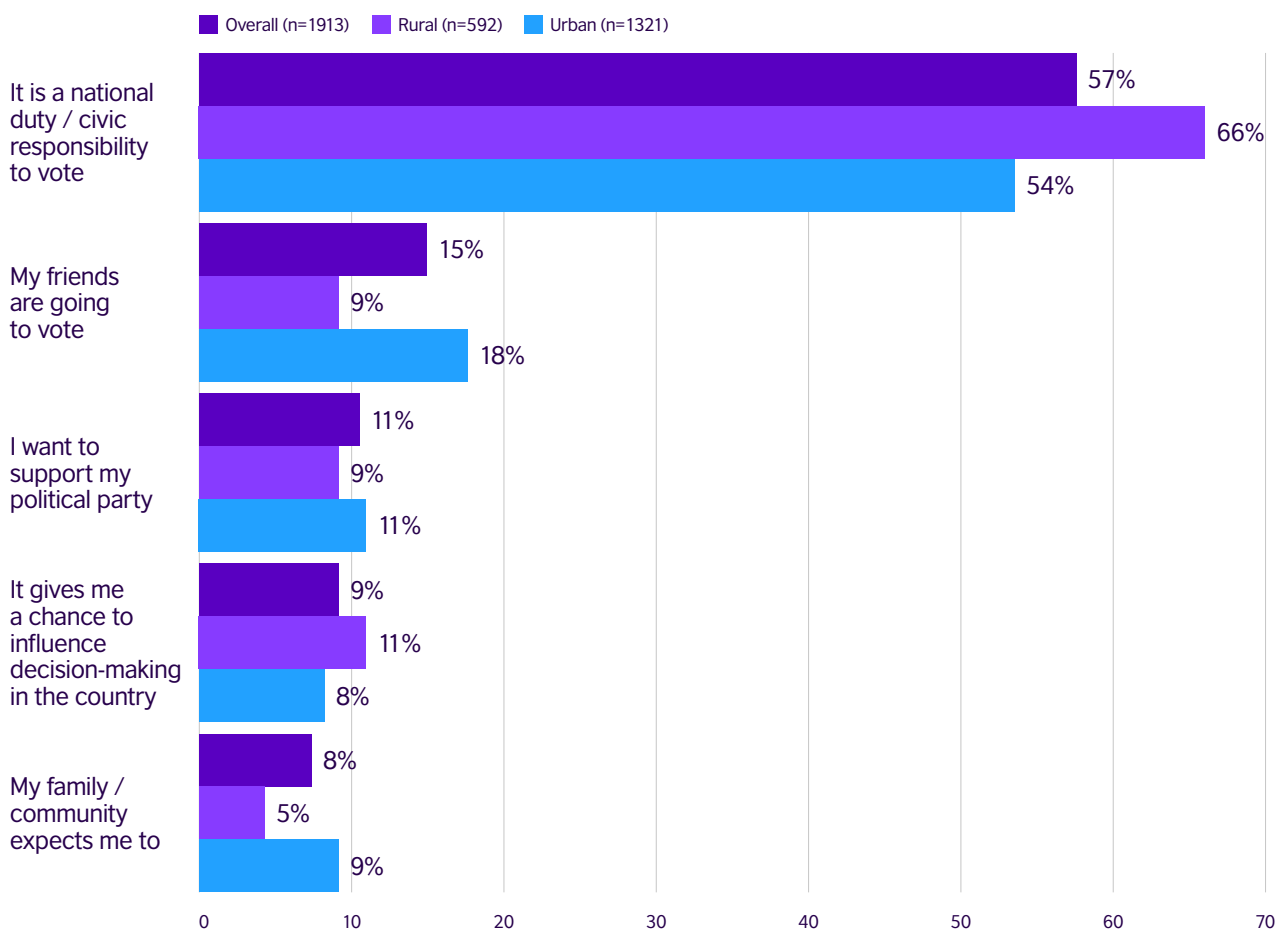
At the time of data collection in 2025, an overwhelming majority of respondents (96 percent) expressed their intention to vote in the next election.<sup>2</sup> Since data on the election held in February 2026 was not available at the time of writing, university students were asked to share their views on this finding. Most students do not think that such a high proportion of respondents voted in the recent election and suggested lower estimates, between 70 and 85 percent, based on their understanding of the lead up to the election.

The survey found at least one in two respondents (57 percent) is driven by a sense of national duty or civic responsibility when it comes to voting. Few respondents (11 percent) reported that they would vote based on their affiliation with a political party and even fewer (nine percent) would vote to influence decision-making in the country. Location disaggregated data reflects that a higher proportion of youth from rural areas (66 percent) is motivated to vote based on a sense of national duty compared with urban youth (54 percent). On the other hand, higher proportions of urban respondents appear to be influenced by their social network when it comes to voting where 18 percent would vote if their friends voted, and nine percent would be influenced by their family or community.

This seeming lack of youth engagement with political parties or policymaking may be understood in the context of the political environment in 2020 when, as key informants highlighted, students played a pivotal role. They participated in demonstrations to amplify youth demands for democratic processes and transparency in governance (KII-10). However, the student protests were suppressed at times through violent means (ibid.). In other words, both legal and social pressures limit youth engagement in political spaces whereby a general fear of reprisal among young people results in a **‘climate of caution where youth internalise self-censorship as a survival strategy’ (KII-4).**

<sup>2</sup> The survey was conducted in autumn 2025 and the general election took place on 8th February 2026.

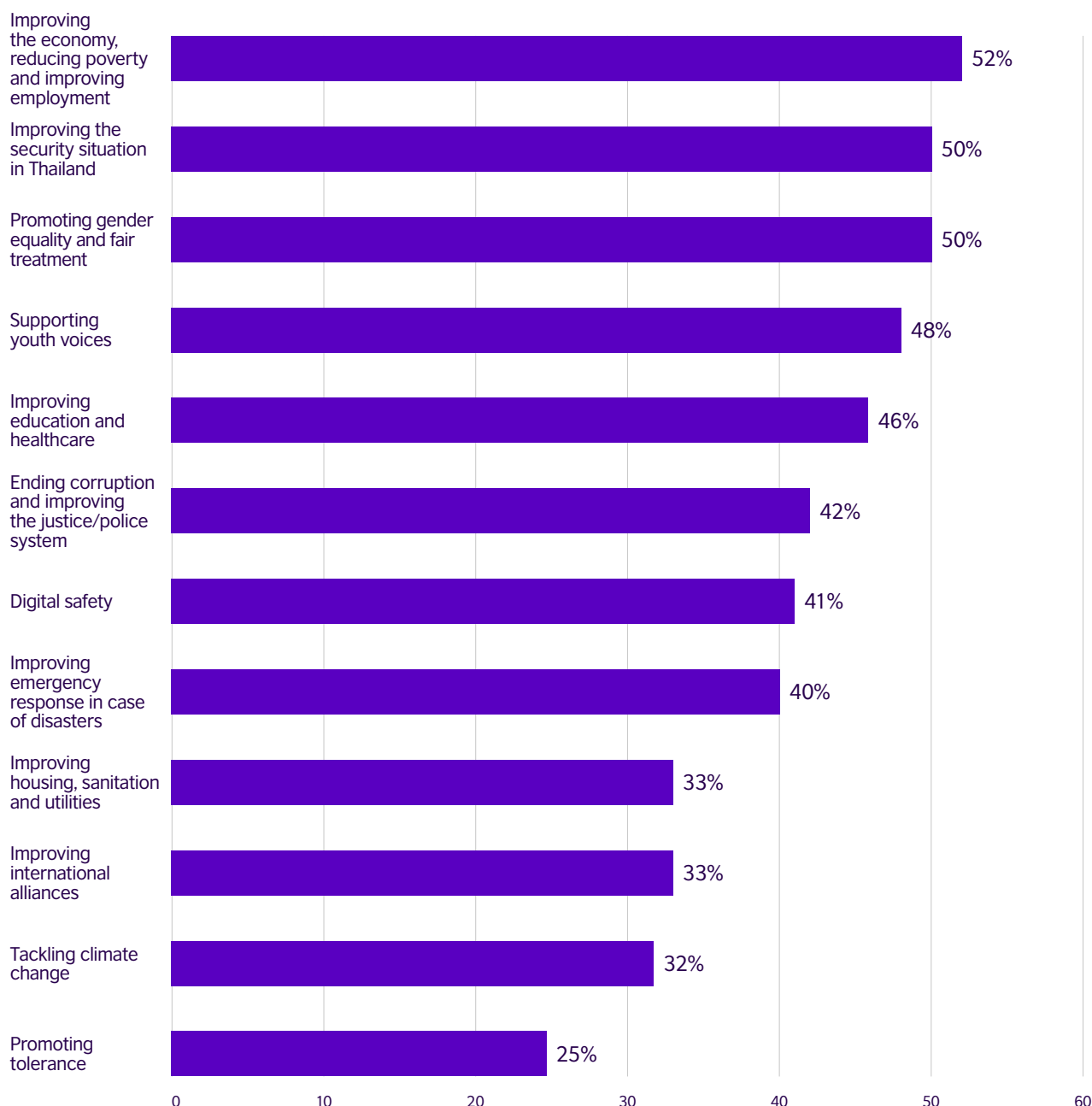
**Figure 22: Most important reasons for voting**



One in two respondents consider economic improvement, employment opportunities, and poverty reduction (52 percent), gender equality and fair treatment (50 percent) as well as improvements in security (50 percent) to be extremely critical issues that influence who young people decide to vote for. Supporting youth voices (48 percent) is also of high relevance. These findings are supported by key informants' views on Thai youth's political engagement as moving beyond **'matters of personal autonomy to questions around citizenship, democracy, justice, and equality over the past twenty years'** (KII-2).

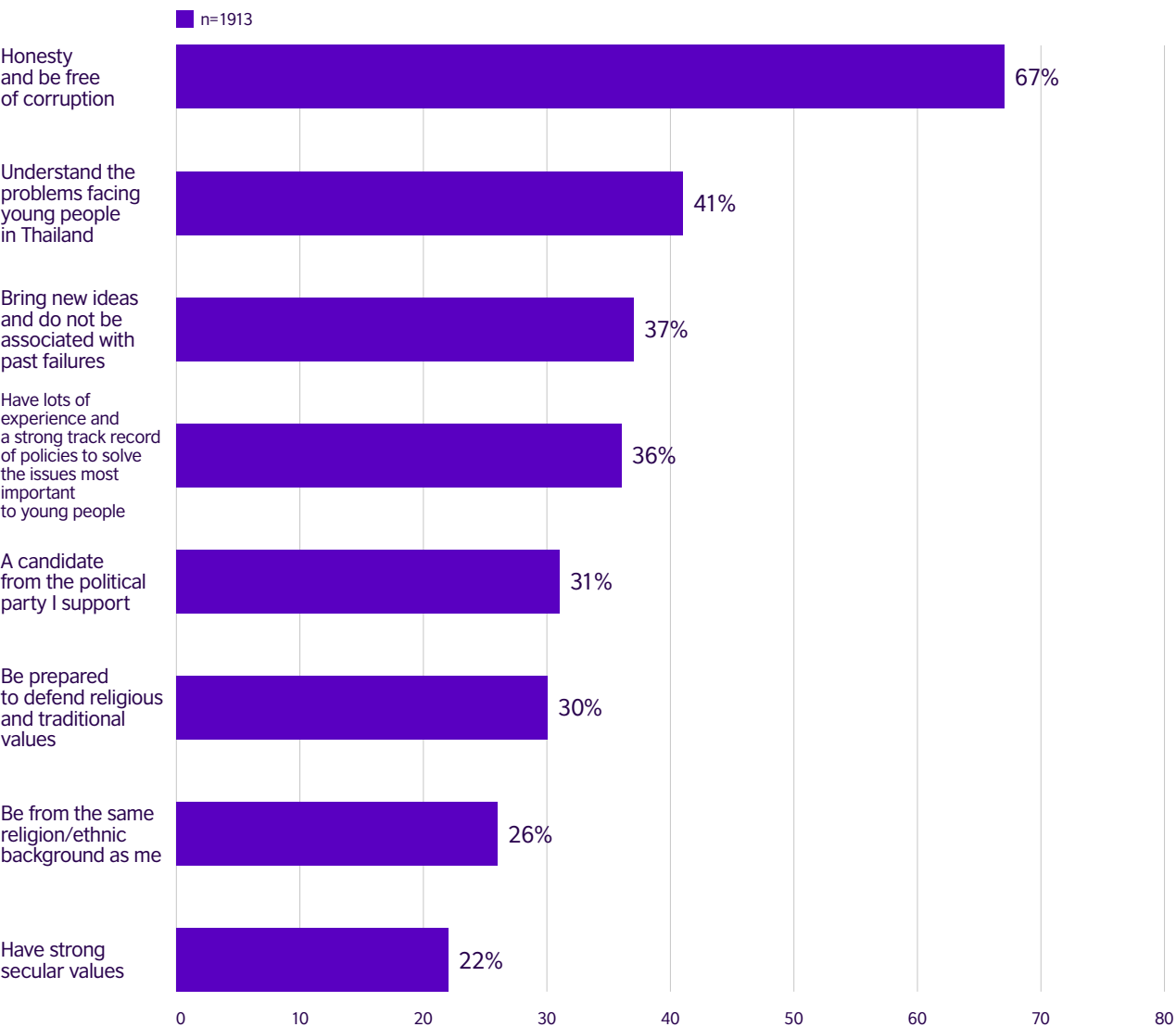
Young people's reasons for voting as an act of political engagement can be seen as emerging from the challenges they face as well as the widening of spaces for critical reflection. Key informants from academia highlighted that youth began by questioning everyday hierarchies from school rules to uniform regulations which gradually evolved into interrogating broader power structures (KII-2). Frontline organisations working with vulnerable youth similarly observe that persistent inequality, restrictive gender expectations, and weak state protection systems make young people increasingly aware that their personal hardships reflect deeper institutional failures (KII-1). Civil society actors add that exposure to social issues through school projects, community initiatives, and digital platforms strengthens young people's sense of injustice and motivates them to speak out (KII-1, KII-9). Access to digital media further accelerates this shift by enabling youth to seek information, organise, share experiences, and mobilise across regions in ways previous generations could not (KII-2).

**Figure 23: Issues considered extremely important when voting (n=1913)**



Young people do not view political participation as distant or abstract, but as a response to the conditions they face. The survey found that two out of three respondents (67 percent) would vote for a candidate who is honest and free from corruption. Moreover, 41 percent of respondents seek political candidates who understand the problems facing young people in Thailand.

Figure 24: Most important qualities in a political candidate (n=1913)



# Key insights

- Thai youth demonstrate strong levels of civic participation through volunteering, community activities, and local initiatives. This indicates an opportunity to strengthen existing efforts to enable youth leadership and community engagement in a sustained manner.
- Concerns about repercussions and social judgment create an environment where youth often self-censor their political views, highlighting the need for safer spaces for youth dialogue and debate.
- Hierarchical social norms and deference to authority constrain youth engagement with political and public institutions. Promoting youth-inclusive governance mechanisms and intergenerational dialogue would enable youth participation in decision-making processes.
- Digital platforms have become important spaces for youth to discuss and engage in social and political issues compared with traditional spaces which feel restrictive. Strengthening digital literacy and responsible civic engagement online can help young people to participate more confidently in public discourse.
- Opportunities for civic and political engagement remain uneven across regions, with urban youth generally having greater access to networks, platforms, and programmes. Expanding decentralised engagement initiatives and youth platforms in rural areas would help ensure broader participation.
- Women, LGBTQ+ youth, and young people from marginalised communities often face additional barriers to engaging publicly due to social expectations and discrimination. Youth engagement strategies could therefore prioritise inclusive approaches that actively enable the participation of underrepresented groups in civic and political spaces.
- The findings highlight that Thai youth are interested in engaging with their communities and in contributing to the country's future but often lack safe and meaningful channels to do so. Creating institutionalised platforms for youth consultation and participation in governance would enable youth engagement in public discourses.

# Dynamics of change

Understanding the dynamics of change from the perspective of Thai youth is important because it sheds light on how they adapt and respond to the challenges and opportunities they face as young adults. The focus group discussions indicate a deep understanding among youth of the nature and pace of change at three levels: **the personal, the community, and the society**, which to varying extents influence how they view their role as catalysts for social change.



## Personal

At the personal level, youth regard change as gradual and inward, a process of becoming steady and better equipped to manage uncertainty. Growth entails strengthening one's mindset and emotional balance. Patience, confidence, and self-control constitute key characteristics as young people become adults. Personal development, however, is a response to instability with an emphasis on managing money, balancing study and work, and meeting family expectations. Whereas young male participants equate growth with maturity and self-control under pressure, young women lean toward adaptability, managing competing demands while also caring for themselves. LGBTQ+ youth emphasise empowerment and finding strength in defining themselves despite the biases they face. Both self-determination and redefining limitations are central to disabled youth's notion of change.

### **'I try to keep improving myself even when life feels stuck.'**

Male, 26, Bangkok, FGD

### **'I've learned to be stronger, not to let others' opinions define me.'**

LGBTQ+, 22, FGD

## Community

At the level of the community, young people notice changes with respect to the ways in which people relate, speak, and connect with each other. Focus group participants attribute a general sense of increasing openness in their surroundings within families as well as wider social circles. Parents listen more while peer networks are becoming diverse. However, gaps between generations are also widening with traditional views on career and lifestyle prevalent among parents. The community is fragmented with comparison and competition common among peers. Digital spaces impact how communities interact with social media – viewed as a tool for expression and awareness. LGBTQ+ youth experience greater visibility and cautious acceptance on online platforms, and disabled youth attribute their empowerment to education and technology. At the same time, young people understand that social media is a contested space where divisions can deepen.

**‘My parents have started listening more, even if they still think differently.’**

Male, 23, Central, FGD

**‘We all know what’s happening online, but not much about what’s happening next door.’**

Female, 25, Central, FGD

**‘Social media helps because people can see our lives directly, not through pity.’**

Male, 22, Visually Impaired, FGD

## **Society**

At a societal level, young people are of the view that society is stuck between pursuing modern ideals whilst old structures prevail and retain considerable control. Although access to technology and social awareness is improving, patriarchy, social hierarchy, and the glacial pace of institutional reform reinforces inequality. In this respect, young people demand fairness, meritocracy, and respect across class and gender in a context where wealth and privilege determine access to opportunities. At the same time, youth feel disillusioned with the existing political institutions which fail to address the realities and needs of young people.

**‘People talk more about women’s rights now, but many still expect women to do everything.’**

Female, 21, North, FGD

**‘Equality still feels like a word, not something we experience.’**

Male, 22, Visually Impaired, FGD

## Drivers of change

Young people express a measured view of their role in driving social and political change. Many believe that meaningful change begins at the level of the individual, through conduct and not confrontation with systems that are resistant to reform.

**‘We can’t change the system,  
but we can change how we act in it.’**

Male, 25, South, FGD

**‘If we show them that we’re responsible,  
adults start to listen and trust us more.’**

Female, 21, North, FGD

# Education and skills



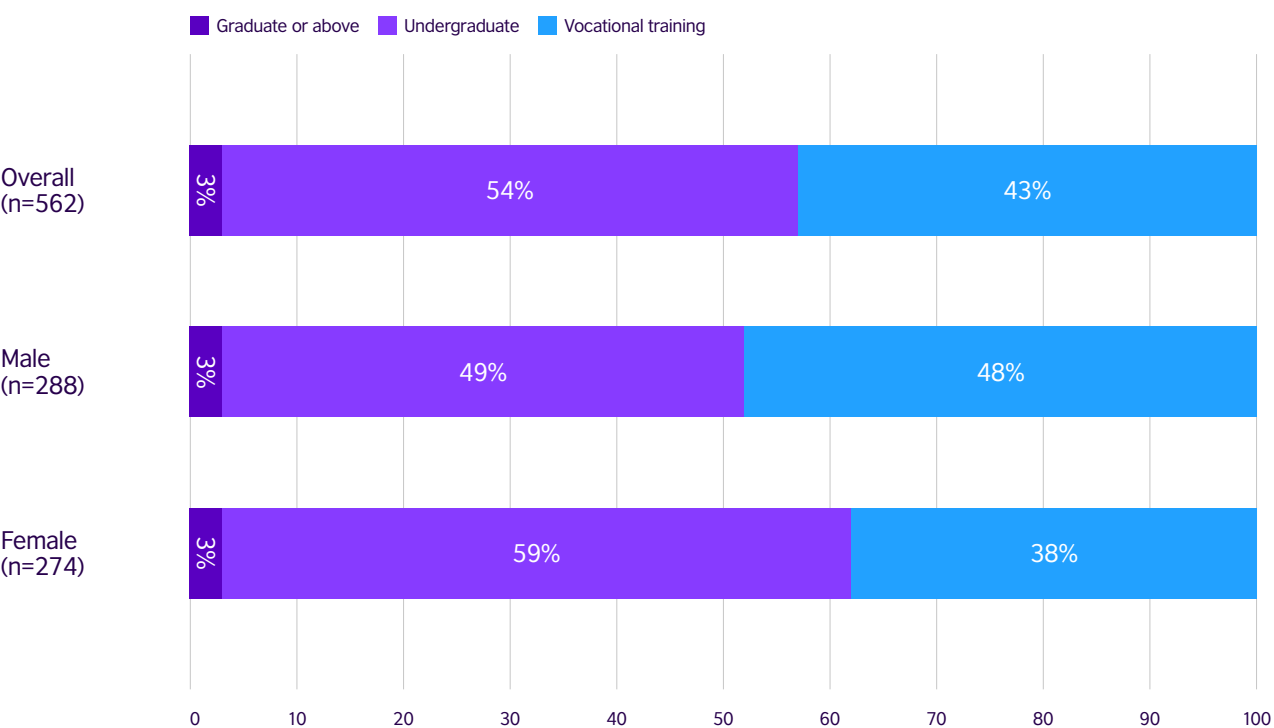
This chapter explores young people's perceptions of and barriers to education and skills alongside their impacts on different social groups.



# 6.1. Enrolment

One in four respondents (28 percent) are students. Of these, 54 percent are enrolled in undergraduate programmes at university while 43 percent are engaged in vocational training. Fewer than five percent are enrolled in graduate degrees at university. Educational choices reflect a gender split with females concentrated in higher education (59 percent) compared with 38 percent who are enrolled in vocational education. Male students are equally likely to enrol in academic and vocational tracks, at 49 percent and 48 percent, respectively.

Figure 25: Student enrolment in vocational and higher education



## 6.2. Perceptions of education

### Education has greater intrinsic significance for rural youth

The survey inquired about young people's perceptions of the value of education. Larger shares of rural students believe in the transformative power of education than urban students. Half of rural students (53 percent) compared with 32 percent of urban students strongly agree that education is a catalyst for positive change in society and instils confidence in young people to face adversities. Just as many rural students (53 percent) also strongly agree that education can improve knowledge and understanding of the world as opposed to fewer urban students (28 percent).

### Preferences for education pathways differ between rural and urban youth

Rural respondents express a stronger preference for vocational education whereas urban respondents view higher education as more valuable for their career. A higher proportion of rural students (35 percent) view vocational education as more the need of the hour than formal education compared with 28 percent of urban youth – reflecting the need for practical and skills-based education in rural areas which have limited educational opportunities.

### Shared concerns about the cost and payoff of education

The views of rural and urban respondents converge when it comes to paying more for quality education where 40 percent of each strongly agree that it is justified. However, in practical terms, quality education is not something all young people can afford. Up to 37 percent of students reported that the fee structure needs to be improved. As one focus group participant reflected, **‘education in Thailand still depends on money, not everyone can afford it’ (Female, 24, North, Focus Group)**. One in four rural (25 percent) and urban respondents (25 percent) also think that it is more important to pursue a career than to complete one's education. This points to young people's concerns about underlying economic pressures that result in a trade-off between the immediate need to work and the perceived long-term benefits of education.

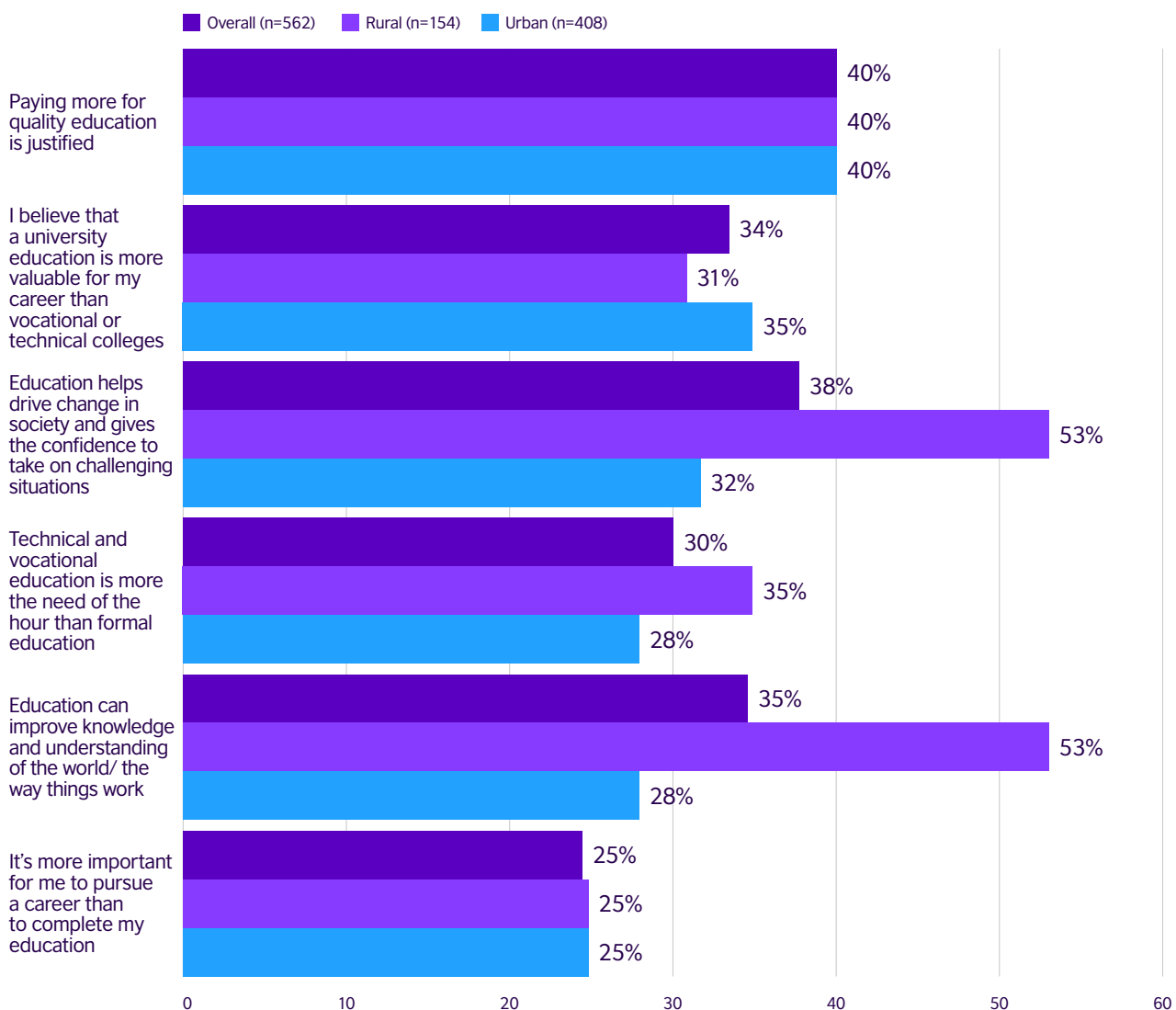
### **‘Having a degree doesn't guarantee a job, sometimes it just gives you debt.’**

Female, 25, Central, FGD

### **‘Education is like musical chairs, only a few get accepted.’**

Male, Bangkok, FGD

**Figure 26: Students' views about the value of education**



## 6.3. Barriers to education and skills

The findings from the KIIs, FGDs, and survey data indicate that young people face several barriers to education and skills, some of which are reflected in their views about the education system in Thailand.

### Preparing for life and work after education

While one in three respondents (35 percent) strongly agree that the quality of education in Thailand is good or improving, even fewer (25 percent) think that their education has prepared them well for general life and work. In this respect, a key informant who works in the public education sector noted that **‘Thailand does not lack talented youth, but we lack an education system that helps them see the value of what they learn’ (KII-13)**. Both rural and urban students (41 percent each) reported that support for career guidance needs to be improved. This finding resonated strongly with several focus group participants who think that the education system does not prepare them for life after graduation.

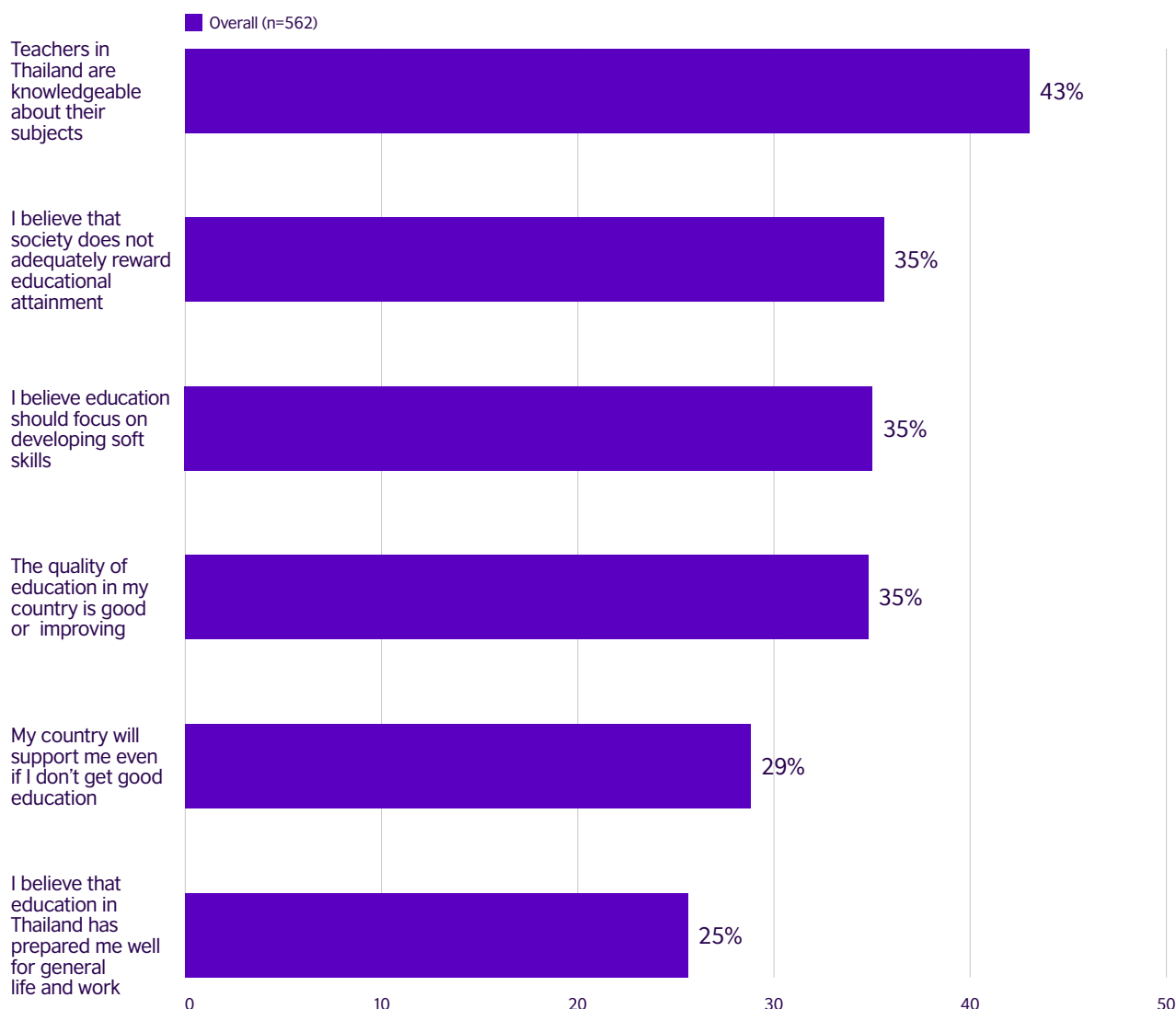
### ‘Education doesn’t match work, and it doesn’t teach you how to think.’

Male, 28, Bangkok, FGD

### Social limits to education

One in three (35 percent) students think that society does not adequately reward educational attainment. In fact, FGDs revealed that young people largely feel that socioeconomic status and privilege pave the way for most rather than educational accomplishments. As one female focus group participant said, **‘if you don’t have money or status, talent doesn’t help much’ (Female, 25, Northeast, FGD)**.

**Figure 27: Students' views about education and teaching in Thailand (n=562)**



## Curriculum

Thirty nine percent of students identified curriculum as one of the key areas in the education system that needs improvement. A key informant from academia highlighted that **‘Thai curriculum emphasises memorisation, leaving little room for creative or critical skills development’ (KII-2)**. This finding resonated with focus group participants from the South who questioned the relevance of what they learned at school. They stressed that young people did not need more exams, but knowledge that connected them with the opportunities around them. As many as 50 percent of students in the South think that the curriculum should be improved.

**‘The curriculum never changes, even though the world moves on.’**

Male, 25, South, FGD

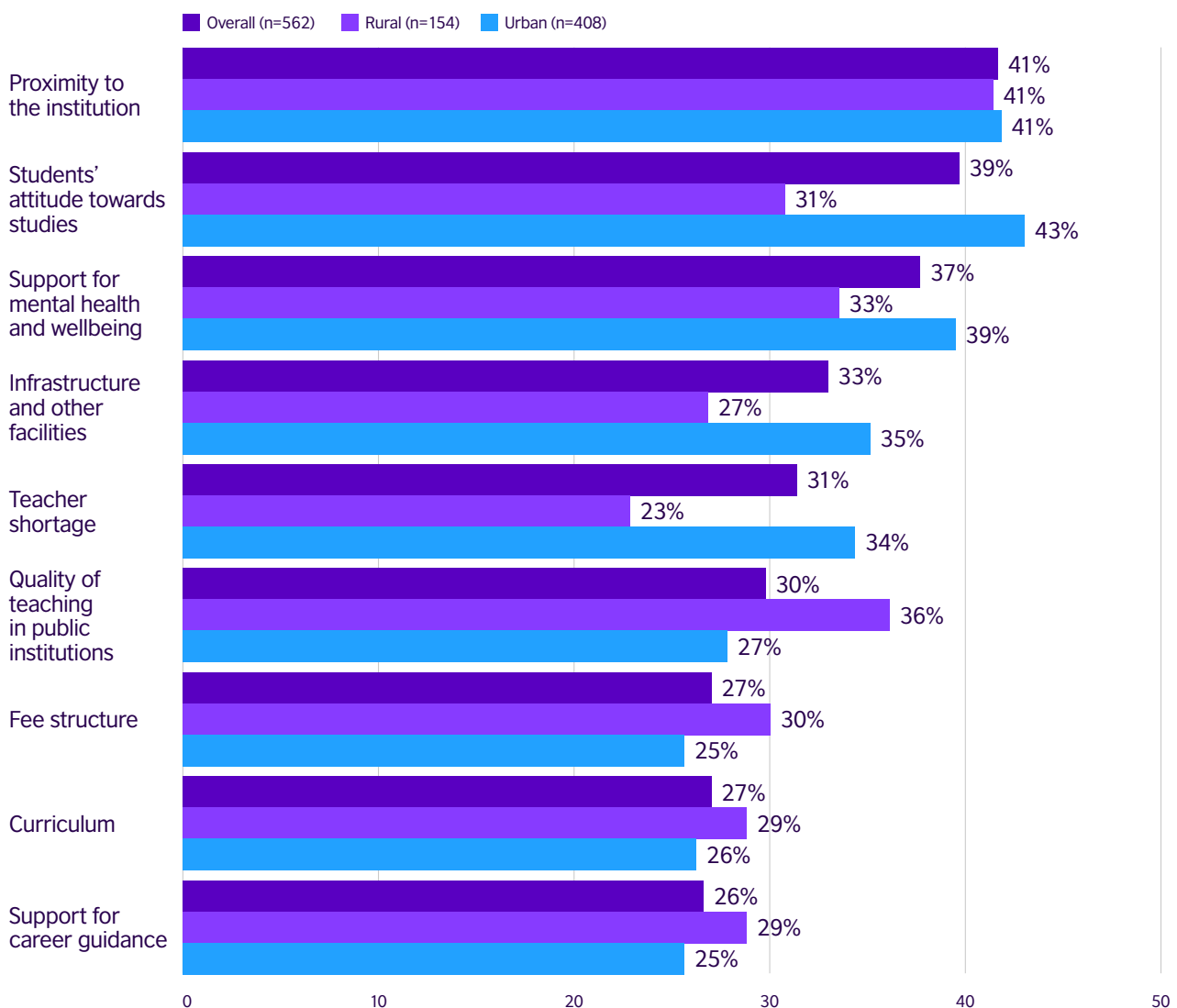
**‘Thailand still teaches for exams, not for life.’**

Female, 21, North, FGD

**‘The curriculum was never designed with us in mind. They don’t even teach how to read graphs to someone who can’t see them.’**

Female, 30, Visually Impaired, FGD

**Figure 28: Greatest improvements required in the education system**



## Institutional disparity

Overall, one in three students (33 percent) think that the quality of teaching in public institutions needs to be improved. Key informants highlighted stark contrasts between public and private educational institutions when it comes to resource allocation and access to technology among other things. Whereas public institutions deal with slow budget approvals, outdated and ill-equipped facilities, private schools are quick to adopt new curricula and technologies almost immediately (KII-2, KII-5). Students who are enrolled in private schools or well-known public schools have a clear advantage with **‘access to opportunities more readily available’ (KII-10)**. A focus group participant shared a similar sentiment stating that, **‘if your school is famous, you get chances automatically’ (Male, 26, Bangkok, FGD)**. Institutional disparities are further reinforced through rigid policy frameworks and centralised education governance which hinders regional adaptation (KII-5).

**‘People care more about which university you’re from than what you can actually do.’**

Male, 28, Bangkok, FGD

**‘If you’re not from a famous school, people treat you like you’re less capable.’**

Male, 23, Central, FGD

## Quality of teaching

The survey findings indicate a disconnect between teachers’ subject knowledge and the effectiveness of their teaching practices in the classroom. While 43 percent of students strongly agree that teachers in Thailand are knowledgeable about their subjects, a key informant from the education sector noted that the quality of teaching in public schools can vary and reinforce rigid approaches to teaching where **‘teachers’ mindsets still reflect a top-down culture and mistakes are penalised rather than treated as part of learning’ (KII-5)**. Many focus group participants also stressed that existing methods of teaching are skewed towards rote learning instead of fostering critical thinking, soft skills, or applied learning. In this respect, at least one in three (33 percent) students stated that education should focus on developing soft skills and **‘teachers should teach for understanding, not just to cover the book’ (Male, 29, Mobility Impaired, FGD)**.

**‘We’re taught to listen, not to question.’**

Male, 29, South, FGD

**‘Learning here means memorising, not understanding.’**

Female, 21, North, FGD

## Teacher shortage

Teacher shortage is a growing concern in Thailand (KII-5). Teachers in public schools are especially overwhelmed with administrative tasks that limit their meaningful engagement with students (ibid.). One in three respondents (31 percent) indicated that teacher shortage needs to be addressed. Moreover, 42 percent of respondents in the Central region and 38 percent in the North are most affected by teacher shortage.

### **‘Schools here don’t get enough support, everything depends on the community.’**

Female, 25, Northeast, FGD

### **‘Teachers still teach the same way they did when I was little.’**

Female, 24, North, FGD

## Uneven access to institutions and facilities

Physical access to educational institutions remains a key concern. One in four students (26 percent) cited proximity to the institution and 30 percent cited infrastructure and other facilities as areas that require improvements in the education system. Reflecting on one’s personal experience growing up in a farming household in northeast Thailand (where 28 percent of respondents in the survey stated that proximity to the institution was a challenge), a key informant highlighted that rural youth are compelled to discontinue their studies beyond elementary school largely due to issues of access (KII-11). For example, pursuing high school education requires travelling far from the village which has significant cost implications for low-income households. Such constraints compound existing economic pressures on rural families where young women and men must support their households through work from an early age.

While rural-urban disparity persists with respect to education, the divide is more prominent between those who live in Bangkok and those who live elsewhere. As one key informant explained, **‘opportunities are not the same. In Bangkok, young people have everything, but in rural areas, basic access can be a problem’ (KII-6)**. The underlying frustration among young people who reside further away from the metropolitan areas is encapsulated in the statement of a young male focus group participant from the Central region according to whom, **‘schools in big cities get better support, but here everything feels left behind’ (Male, 23, Central, FGD)**.

### **‘We finish school and still end up in the same place.’**

Female, 25, Northeast, FGD

## Digital divides

Educational disparities across geographies, institutions, and teaching are further reinforced through digital inequalities. Up to 89 percent of students are willing to upskill themselves through vocational training, digital bootcamps, artificial intelligence (AI), and creative or leadership development courses. However, key informants noted that the lack of digital infrastructure in rural areas significantly impacts students' education outcomes. Limited funding in schools that are already under resourced hinders access to digital learning resources (KII-5). At the same time, even in schools that have the requisite facilities, the uptake of digital skills tends to be slow owing largely to a lack of knowledge among teachers in using the technology effectively (KII-8). In this case, key informants highlighted that the issue is not just about the disparity between urban and rural schools but also a systemic barrier that impedes digital uptake as is the case in many schools in Bangkok. In many instances, teachers are not trained sufficiently to guide students in digital upskilling (KII-11). Focus group discussions revealed that when young people have access to the internet, it can serve as an important learning tool.

### **'I learned more from YouTube than from school.'**

Female, 24, North, FGD

### **'TikTok and YouTube teach more practical things than school.'**

Female, 21, North, FGD

**Table 2: Barriers to education and skills**

| Barriers                                   | Bangkok | Greater Bangkok | Central | East | West | North | Northeast | South |
|--------------------------------------------|---------|-----------------|---------|------|------|-------|-----------|-------|
| Lack of support for career guidance        | 53%     | 27%             | 38%     | 40%  | 45%  | 43%   | 48%       | 33%   |
| Infrastructure and other facilities        | 47%     | 65%             | 24%     | 50%  | 31%  | 20%   | 19%       | 33%   |
| Fee structure                              | 40%     | 31%             | 42%     | 48%  | 52%  | 22%   | 39%       | 26%   |
| Curriculum                                 | 33%     | 35%             | 39%     | 23%  | 25%  | 31%   | 52%       | 50%   |
| Students' attitude towards studies         | 33%     | 27%             | 24%     | 34%  | 33%  | 25%   | 23%       | 26%   |
| Support for mental health and wellbeing    | 27%     | 35%             | 31%     | 27%  | 22%  | 26%   | 28%       | 22%   |
| Quality of teaching in public institutions | 27%     | 23%             | 28%     | 21%  | 31%  | 57%   | 29%       | 38%   |
| Teacher shortage                           | 20%     | 8%              | 42%     | 10%  | 31%  | 38%   | 33%       | 34%   |
| Proximity of the institution               | 20%     | 8%              | 20%     | 37%  | 25%  | 31%   | 28%       | 26%   |

## 6.4. Impacts of barriers on social groups

FGDs drew attention to the ways in which the barriers to education and skills discussed thus far impact different social groups. Male focus group participants expressed their frustration with an education system that left them unprepared to deal with life beyond school. They also highlight how the system reinforces unfairness in the absence of meritocracy resulting in them feeling disappointed and unmotivated. Female focus group participants, on the other hand, reflected on the pressure the education system poses on them in the form of expectations of families and teachers to perform better, and competition from their peers. Most often young female students feel anxious and burnt out. Poverty also impacts young girls from low-income households who are forced to drop out by the time they reach middle school. As a result, they are **‘vulnerable and susceptible to labour exploitation, trafficking and early marriage’** (KII-1).

### **‘Studying hard doesn’t mean you’ll succeed if the system is unfair’**

Male, 26, Bangkok, FGD

### **‘I study and work hard, but sometimes it just feels like I am running in circles.’**

Female, 24, North, FGD

The survey data shows that close to one in two disabled students (46 percent) reported on infrastructure and facilities as constraining factors. Several key informants noted that most educational institutions fail to accommodate or facilitate disabled youth (KII-2, KII-3, KII-4, KII-13). Disabled youth in rural areas are also likely to discontinue education after secondary school primarily due to logistical and financial reasons (KII-2). Disabled focus group participants reflected on the emotional costs of exclusion, feeling invisible at school and underestimated by teachers and classmates alike resulting in low levels of confidence.

### **‘Regular students are not taught to understand us, and we’re not taught how to live alongside them. The system keeps us apart.’**

Female, 27, Visual Impaired, FGD

### **‘You get used to being left out, but it still hurts.’**

Male, 22, Visually Impaired, FGD

### **‘When people treat you like you can’t learn, it’s hard to stay confident.’**

Male, 29, Mobility Impaired, FGD

In the case of LGBTQ+ youth, inclusion and self-expression are not guaranteed across all educational institutions and **‘acceptance is still selective’ (KII-2)**. LGBTQ+ youth also face bias and exclusion due to negative stereotypes reinforced by the media (KII-3, KII-4). Focus group participants underscored the emotional toll of being seen as ‘different’ which impacts how they behave socially and academically.

## **‘You study among people who don’t accept you, so you stop trying.’**

LGBTQ+, 26, FGD

## **‘School doesn’t feel safe to be yourself, it feels like performance.’**

LGBTQ+, 22, FGD

Ethnic minority youth in Thailand face several challenges. A key informant who works in a civil society organisation gave the example of Hmong and other hill tribe communities, where early and forced marriage remains a major cause of school dropout, with girls often removed from school during holidays to marry (KII-1). This practice **‘cuts short education and isolates girls from state protection’** (ibid.). Remoteness further compounds challenges where border communities experience limited access to schools. For many, the absence of Thai citizenship further restricts educational pathways, as **‘Hmong and cross border youth who are not registered as Thai citizens struggle to access scholarships’ (KII-1)**.

Whereas students in the deep south of Thailand are integrated into the Thai education system, the situation is markedly different for cross-border and displaced youth. The lack of documentation and citizenship among cross-border youth inhibit them from accessing the Thai education system. As one key informant stated, **‘they are Thai in every sense, but on paper, leaving them invisible to many government schemes’ (KII-1)**. This is especially the case for youth residing in temporary shelters along the Thailand-Myanmar border. According to a key informant from an international development organisation, movement outside the shelters is prohibited and schools inside the camps do not follow the Thai curriculum or teach Thai (KII-10).

Although education services are predominantly delivered by international humanitarian organisations and local partners, funding cuts in international humanitarian assistance in recent years further exacerbates challenges related to service delivery, for instance, not being able to pay teachers, buying books or carrying out repairs (Save the Children, 2024). Such restrictions mean displaced and refugee youth cannot be integrated into the Thai education system with long term consequences on their ability to obtain higher education or secure employment. Due to restrictions on employment opportunities outside the camps, many young people have had little choice but to become teachers within their communities. While some undertake these roles reluctantly and out of necessity, young people seek ways to build a life within the confines of the camp (KII-10).

## Key insights

- Young people believe that education is integral to their mobility and agency. However, they feel that the existing education system fails them in this respect. Policies that strengthen access to education and skills including teaching quality and practical learning would better enable youth to pursue their goals.
- Young people in rural areas strongly believe in education's transformative value. This underscores the need to improve access to educational institutions in underserved areas with targeted support for rural youth including ethnic minorities and cross border youth.
- Young people report that the education system emphasises rote learning. Expanding skills-based learning, problem-solving, digital literacy, and critical thinking would better prepare youth to adapt to different circumstances and labour markets.
- Financial barriers and unequal access to educational resources continue to shape educational outcomes for many young people. Expanding bursaries, scholarships, and flexible learning pathways would ensure that economic background alone does not determine access to higher education and skills development.
- Digital divides across regions and socioeconomic groups limit young people's ability to access modern learning opportunities and professional development. Strengthening digital infrastructure, connectivity, and access to online learning technologies will support young people's education in underserved areas.
- Disabled youth and those from ethnic minorities and displaced communities face significant barriers to education. Policies must therefore prioritise inclusive infrastructure, accessible learning environments, and language-sensitive approaches to ensure better integration with the national education system.
- Improving education outcomes will require more than institutional reform. Closer collaboration between education providers, employers, and local communities would help align learning with real-world opportunities and ensure that education translates into meaningful social and economic mobility for Thai youth.





# Employment

More than 50 percent of Thailand's workforce is informally employed (OECD, 2025). This chapter provides an overview of the profile of employed youth who participated in the survey to better understand the challenges young people face in their workplaces and in accessing better employment opportunities. It also explores the differential impact of barriers to employment on social groups.



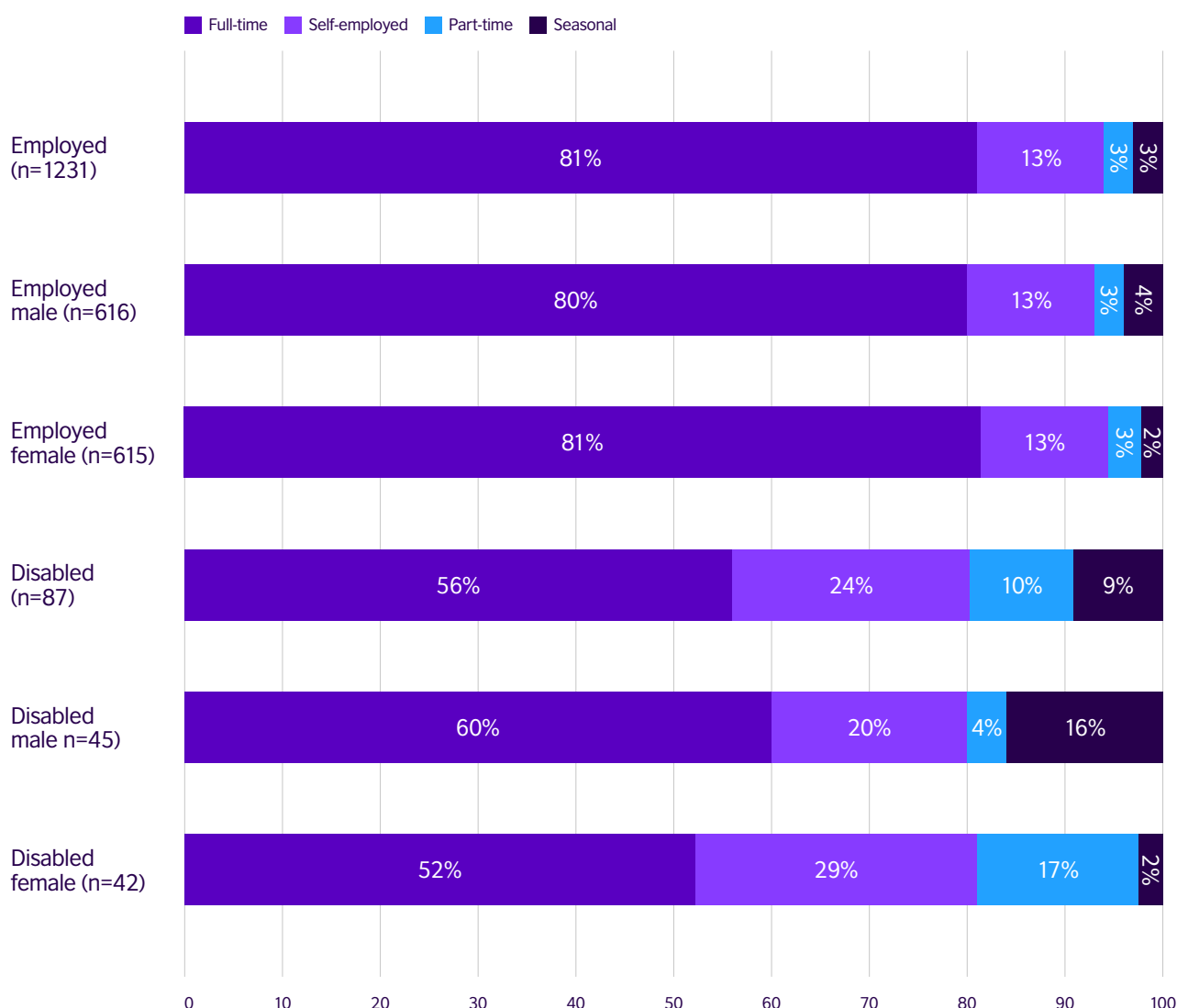
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# 7.1. Profile of employed youth

## Uneven employment pathways

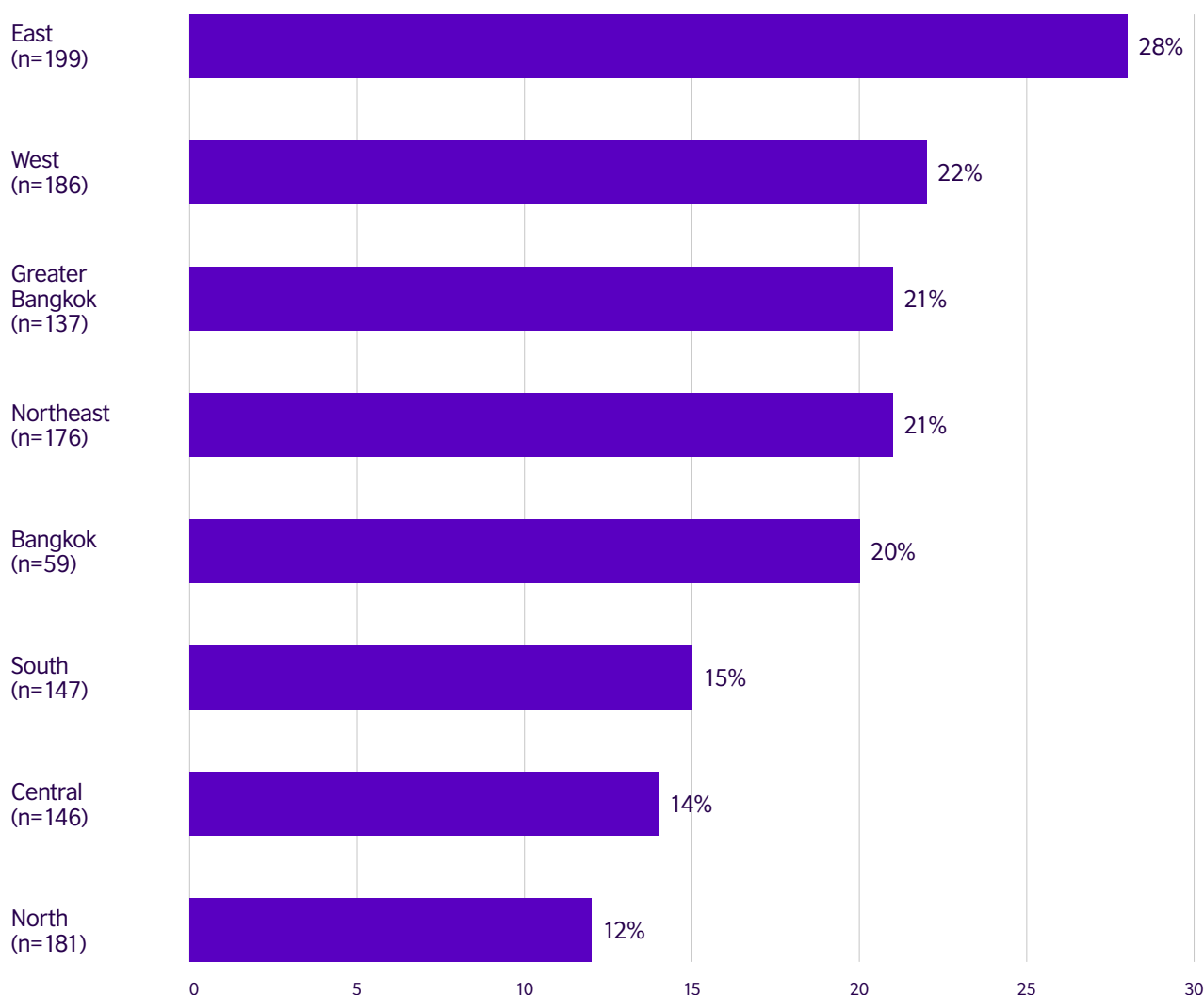
Overall, 62 percent of survey respondents are employed and five percent are unemployed. Among the employed individuals, four out of five respondents (81 percent) are employed full-time. However, the data reveals that higher shares of disabled employed youth (44 percent) are vulnerable to less secure forms of employment. One in three disabled men (36 percent) rely on self-employment or seasonal jobs and 46 percent of disabled women engage in self-employment or part time work.

Figure 29: Type of employment



Regional differences are also prominent. Higher shares of youth are engaged in less secure forms of employment in the following regions: East (28 percent), West (22 percent), Greater Bangkok (21 percent), Northeast (21 percent), and Bangkok (20 percent).

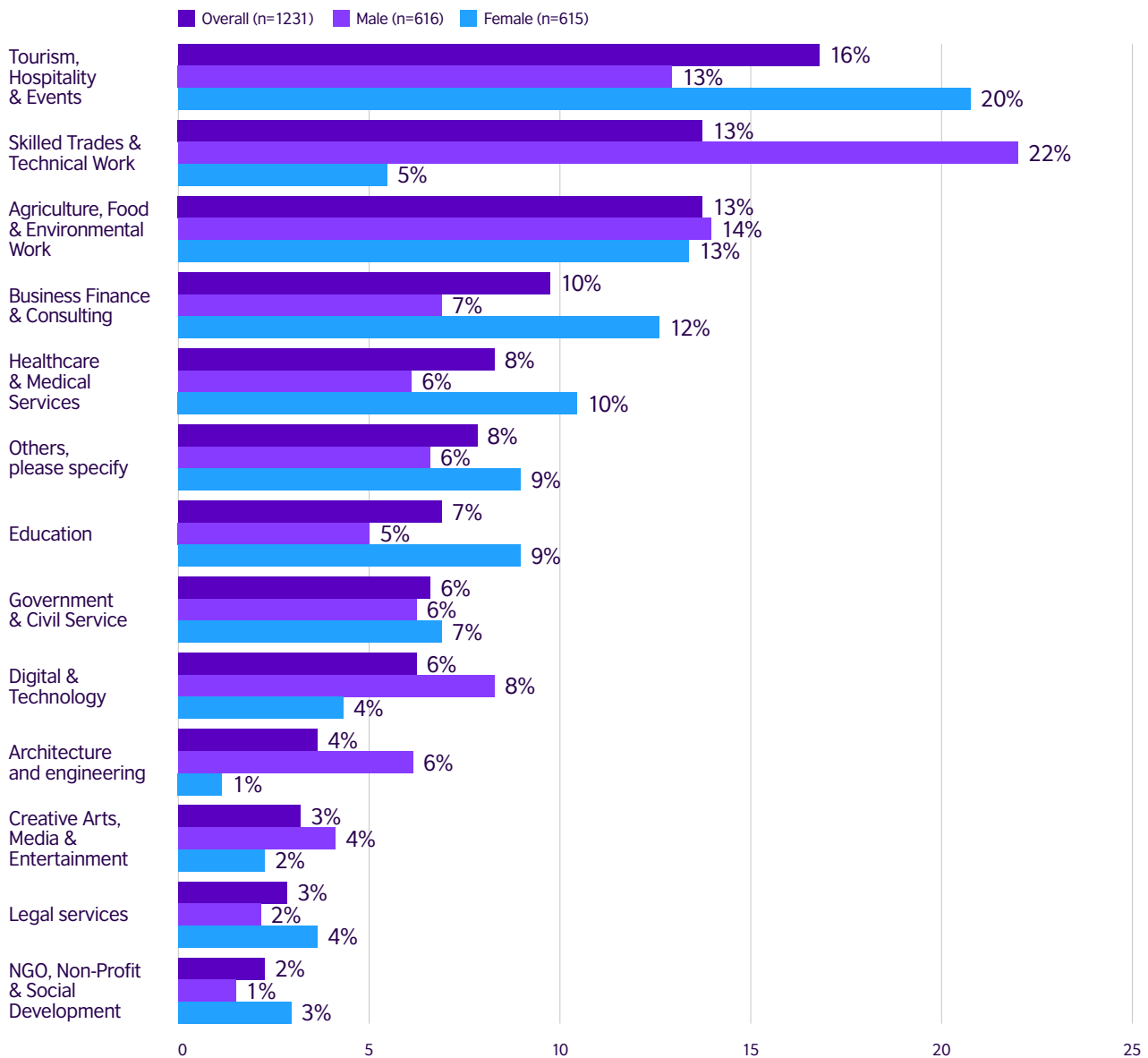
**Figure 30: Share of employed youth in less secure employment**



## Gender segregated labour market

The data indicates that gender segregation manifests across employment sectors where female respondents work primarily in the service and care sectors while male respondents are represented in technical skills and trades. This has implications for gender wage gaps since women are concentrated in low wage jobs compared with men. Higher proportions of women are engaged in tourism and hospitality (20 percent), business and consulting (12 percent), healthcare and medical services (10 percent), education (nine percent), government and civil service (seven percent), legal services (four percent), and non-profit organisations (three percent). On the other hand, higher proportions of men are represented in skilled trades and technical work (22 percent), technology (eight percent), media and entertainment (four percent) as well as architecture and engineering (six percent). Equal proportions of male (14 percent) and females (13 percent) are employed in agriculture.

**Figure 31: Job sectors**



## Precarious employment landscape

The survey found that low wages are a key concern according to one in three respondents (37 percent) as well as lack of job security (34 percent). Compared with men, higher proportions of women are affected by long working hours (30 percent), lack of skills training (24 percent) and bullying or verbal abuse (18 percent). On the other hand, male respondents are impacted by the lack of career growth (28 percent), unfavourable work environments (27 percent) and corruption in the workplace (23 percent). Insights from FGDs reinforce these findings where participants broadly described the job market as unequal. In the prevailing context of wages failing to keep pace with rising living costs and limits to career progression, most focus group participants are frustrated since stable employment feels out of reach to them without the right connections. As one participant noted, **‘even when you do your best, someone with status will still get ahead’** (Male, 25, Bangkok, FGD).

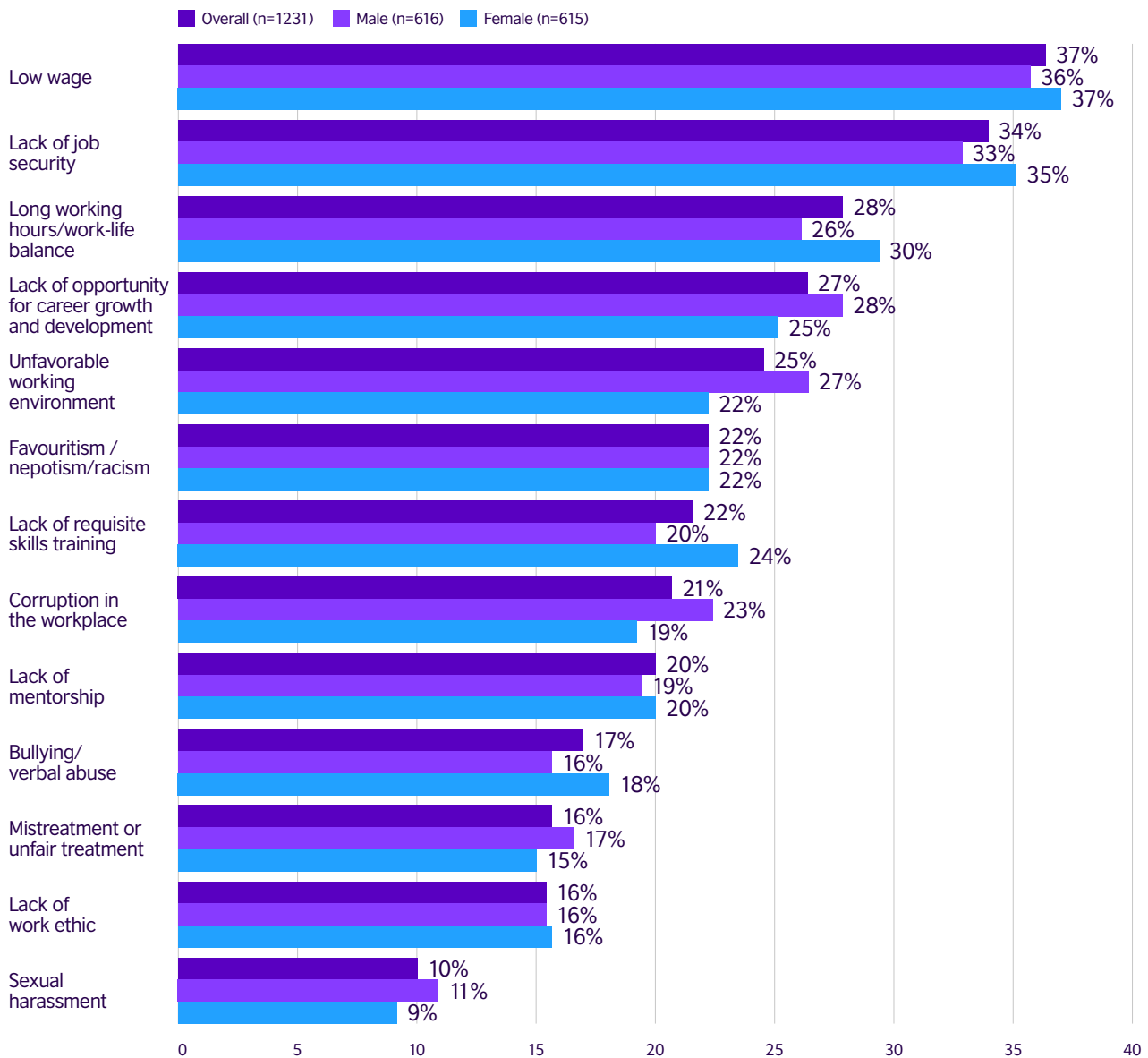
### **‘The economy keeps changing, but salaries stay the same.’**

Male, 23, Central, FGD

### **‘If you don’t have connections, no one looks at your application.’**

Male, 25, South, FGD

**Figure 32: Challenges faced by youth in employment**



**Table 3: Challenges faced by youth in employment**

| Key issues                             | Bangkok | Greater Bangkok | Central | East | West | North | Northeast | South |
|----------------------------------------|---------|-----------------|---------|------|------|-------|-----------|-------|
| Low wage                               | 42%     | 58%             | 32%     | 35%  | 27%  | 29%   | 34%       | 47%   |
| Lack of job security                   | 27%     | 20%             | 43%     | 28%  | 35%  | 36%   | 50%       | 28%   |
| Lack of career growth                  | 42%     | 23%             | 23%     | 27%  | 23%  | 27%   | 31%       | 26%   |
| Corruption in the workplace            | 10%     | 12%             | 20%     | 15%  | 27%  | 25%   | 25%       | 26%   |
| Lack of work ethic                     | 8%      | 6%              | 10%     | 12%  | 15%  | 23%   | 22%       | 22%   |
| Lack of mentorship                     | 22%     | 15%             | 11%     | 29%  | 20%  | 19%   | 18%       | 22%   |
| Bullying / Verbal abuse                | 20%     | 15%             | 16%     | 18%  | 22%  | 17%   | 10%       | 20%   |
| Lack of requisite skills training      | 15%     | 11%             | 21%     | 26%  | 25%  | 24%   | 26%       | 19%   |
| Long working hours / work-life balance | 8%      | 30%             | 53%     | 27%  | 33%  | 22%   | 24%       | 18%   |
| Sexual harrassment                     | 10%     | 8%              | 4%      | 5%   | 9%   | 22%   | 6%        | 18%   |
| Unfavourable working environment       | 20%     | 21%             | 30%     | 27%  | 26%  | 23%   | 31%       | 16%   |
| Favouritism / Nepotism                 | 49%     | 36%             | 19%     | 27%  | 19%  | 22%   | 11%       | 14%   |
| Mistreatment or unfair treatment       | 17%     | 26%             | 12%     | 21%  | 20%  | 11%   | 10%       | 12%   |

## 7.2. Barriers to accessing employment opportunities

KIIs and FGDs revealed several barriers to employment, ranging from skills mismatch, geographic disparity, limited vocational and non-formal training, and discriminatory practices and inadequate protections for workers.

### Skills mismatch

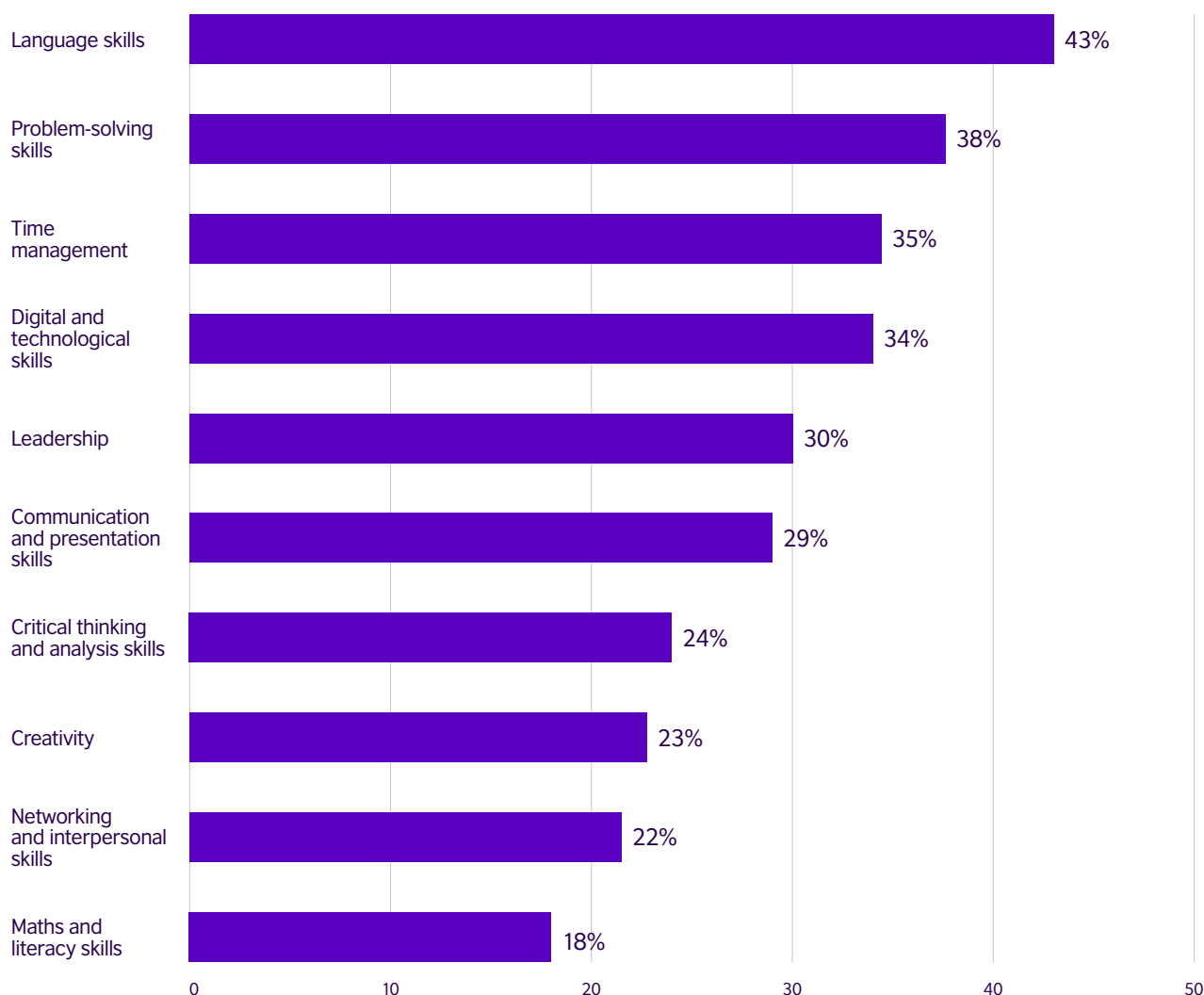
Weak educational foundations contribute to a misalignment between graduates' credentials and the demands of the Thai labour market which hinders young people from transitioning into secure or better paid employment (KII-6, KII-11). A critical gap in this regard is that graduates are not equipped with the necessary communication, problem-solving or project-management skills that employers seek (ibid.). At least one in three employed respondents consider language (43 percent), problem-solving (38 percent), time management (35 percent), digital and technological skills (34 percent), and leadership (30 percent) to be important for job purposes. Key informants noted that career counselling is an area where students receive fragmented support and are not sufficiently encouraged to explore potential career paths (KII-9). As noted earlier in Chapter 6, up to 41 percent of respondents stated that career guidance was an area that needed the greatest improvement in the education system.

Several focus group participants emphasised the disparity between educational trajectories and labour market demands across regions, noting that young individuals often feel inadequately prepared when they enter the workforce in relation to the practical or technological skills that employers demand. For instance, problem-solving skills are top of the list among respondents in Bangkok (61 percent), Greater Bangkok (56 percent), and in the East (45 percent). Digital competency is also a case in point where young people feel ill-equipped to adjust to an employment landscape that increasingly relies on digital tools requiring specific knowledge (KII-6). Among respondents in the Northeast, 55 percent deem digital and technological skills to be highly relevant.

**‘They hire us just to comply with the law.  
They don’t care about what we can do.’**

Female, 28, Mobility Impaired, FGD

**Figure 33: Most important skills required for employment (n=1231)**



Focus group participants further noted that the mismatch contributes to underemployment where graduates accept positions which do not necessarily match the degree they obtained at university, thus perpetuating the notion that educational attainment alone does not guarantee secure employment. A key informant in the public sector echoed similar concerns where graduates who possess the required skills face difficulties in securing employment largely due to the prevailing economic situation (KII-8). In this case, even students who put significant effort into their job search struggle to find work that corresponds with their qualifications or abilities (ibid.).

**‘Even with a degree, jobs are hard to find and the pay isn’t enough.’**

Female, 24, North, FGD

**‘Education feels disconnected from real jobs here.’**

Male, 23, Central, FGD

## Geographic disparity

There are marked differences between youth who live in Bangkok and those who live elsewhere. The concentration of opportunities both in educational and employment terms exposes young people in the city to various career pathways. As one key informant highlighted, provisions such as peer mentoring and counselling remain concentrated in private or well-funded urban institutions (KII-5). Outside Bangkok, however, job opportunities in the private sector remain limited, and young people seek employment in the public sector (KII-9). Approximately one in ten respondents in the Northern (nine percent), Western (nine percent), and Southern (eight percent) regions are employed in government and civil service jobs.

According to key informants, young people's interest in government jobs reflects a mix of economic insecurity, cultural expectations, and the need for stability. Young people in marginalised communities gravitate toward public sector roles because they offer predictable income, long term security, and formal benefits that are often unavailable in the private or informal sectors. In the deep South, for example, young people seek stable employment in a context where local economies are weak and mobility is restricted (KII-10). Cultural norms also exert a strong influence on young people to seek public sector employment, which is widely viewed as respectable, safe, and a socially approved career path (KII-9).

### **'You have to move to Bangkok if you want to be taken seriously.'**

Female, 24, North, FGD

Key informants stated that although gender-based disparities have narrowed in classrooms, economic background and geography continue to determine who gets access to employment opportunities (KII-5). Whilst youth in urban contexts face competitive environments, youth in rural areas still face basic limitations such as language proficiency including in English, access to digital tools, and exposure to national and international perspectives. For example, one in two respondents in the Northeast (54 percent) and in the North (52 percent) selected language as a top skill required for employment purposes. Focus group discussions further revealed that students in rural areas have limited opportunities in the local labour markets or access to labour market information and networks that could support their career aspirations.

### **'Everything is about Bangkok; here we just take what's left.'**

Female, 25, Northeast, FGD

In the North, 12 percent of employed respondents are engaged in agriculture and 14 percent in tourism. Focus group participants from the North stated that available work in both these sectors pay little and offer no long-term financial security. One in three employed respondents (36 percent) in the North also cited the lack of job security as a key concern. Focus group participants further stated that applicants from the North are often overlooked when they apply for jobs in Bangkok or other large cities. This is echoed in the words of one participant who said that **'most people have to move out if they want better pay'** (Female, 24, North, FGD).

## **‘Most people earn just enough to get by, not to move ahead.’**

Female, 25, Central, FGD

Among respondents from the Northeast, job insecurity affects one in two employed youth (50 percent). Up to one in three employed individuals are impacted by low wages (34 percent), lack of career growth (31 percent), and unfavourable work environment (31 percent). Focus group participants from the Northeast underscored underemployment and migration as prevailing norms in the region where they stressed that seasonal work and low pay are characteristic of the local economy. Young people with degrees end up leaving home to find work in the cities since **‘most jobs don’t match what people study’ (Female, 22, Northeast, FGD).**

Focus group participants from the Southern region (where 47 percent cited low wages as a major challenge) voiced similar concerns about ad-hoc and seasonal employment. While tourism provides some opportunities, these are rarely long-term making it hard for young people to plan for their future. In the Central, Eastern and Western regions where factories and services dominate the local economies, participants draw attention to long working hours. Moreover, graduates are often underemployed possessing degrees that are not relevant to the labour market.

## **‘Jobs come and go depending on the season, nothing lasts.’**

Male, 29, South, FGD

## **‘Our education doesn’t fit the jobs we actually have here.’**

Male, 23, Central, FGD

As with educational opportunities, metropolitan areas and Bangkok serve as major hubs for high-quality training, internships, and access to better employment prospects. However, focus group participants from Bangkok shared their concerns about the emotional cost of keeping up in a competitive environment. According to them, urban youth feel that the labour market is crowded, with stagnant wages, and social bias deeply ingrained. Additionally, half of the employed respondents in Bangkok (49 percent) and 36 percent in Greater Bangkok reported that nepotism and favouritism are key challenges. According to one participant, **‘you can work hard, but promotions depend on who you know’ (Male, 25, Bangkok, FGD).**

## Limited vocational and non-formal training

The lack of vocational training reinforces inequality among rural youth especially for those with low educational attainment. Key informants highlighted that youth from low-income households are likely to drop out of the education system by the time they reach grade nine (KII-1). Poverty and caregiving responsibilities especially in the case of young mothers and urgent household needs push young people into informal labour with low pay and no protection. In this case, insufficient access to local and non-formal educational and training pathways for school-leavers or caregivers constrains their transition into safe employment. Even if vocational training options exist outside major cities, they are unevenly distributed and poorly aligned to local labour markets. This gap frequently compels young people to migrate to the metropolitan centres.

## Discriminatory practices and inadequate protections

Focus group participants highlighted hiring practices that perpetuate inequality where appearance, social background, and personal networks influence recruitment. According to a participant, **‘it’s not about skills, it’s about how you look or what they expect you to be’ (LGBTQ+, 26, FGD)**. Moreover, focus group participants emphasise that inconsistent implementation of labour protections makes young employees susceptible to discrimination and precarious employment conditions.

## ‘Connections and looks matter more than ability’

Male, 26, Bangkok, FGD

## 7.3. Impacts of barriers on social groups

For many young people, especially those without strong networks or the ability to move to larger cities, the prospect of building stable careers remains uncertain. According to a focus group participant from the Northeast, **‘people cease to dream because nothing changes’ (Female, 22, Northeast, FGD)**. Similar sentiments were echoed by a focus group participant from the Central region who asserted that **‘you do everything right and still do not advance’ (Male, 23, Central, FGD)**.

Even in Bangkok which has a higher concentration of employment opportunities compared with other provinces, focus group participants stressed that young people face significant challenges. A participant articulated the cumulative impact of persistent setbacks where **‘you start to feel tired, not from work, but from unfairness’ (Male, 25, Bangkok, FGD)**.

In the deep South of Thailand, conservative social norms among the Malay Muslim communities pose significant challenges for young women to pursue employment including convincing parents to recognise the importance of improved job opportunities (KII-1, KII-10). Cultural sensitivities also pose significant challenges for women in terms of integrating with others when pursuing work beyond their communities. For instance, a key informant gave the example of a young Muslim girl from the deep South who secured an internship at an international hotel chain but faced challenges with respect to her choice to wear the hijab at work (KII-10).

A key informant noted that young women are particularly overwhelmed by prevailing social norms and expectations around caregiving where **‘a woman’s success is often seen as temporary until she gets married or has children’ (KII-2)**. The lack of workplace policies related to maternity leave or the provision of childcare services create further obstacles in women’s career pathways (KII-1). In the case of LGBTQ+ youth, a key informant stated that the barrier is often social acceptance where discrimination in workplaces persists in subtle forms, influencing employment opportunities and representation in leadership (KII-4).

**‘Some jobs don’t even consider you if your gender doesn’t fit the form.’**

LGBTQ+, 22, FGD

**‘We have to create our own work because companies won’t hire us fairly.’**

LGBTQ+, 29, FGD

Key informants also drew attention to the experiences of young disabled people as **‘the most structurally excluded’** and **‘underrepresented in workplaces’** (KII-2, KII-12). Young people experience several challenges depending on the nature of their disability. For instance, a key informant who works with deaf people stated that they tend to face significant barriers with respect to recruitment (KII-9). In certain instances, organisations have hesitated to hire deaf candidates on the premise that their existing staff may experience awkwardness or discomfort in interacting with deaf employees (ibid.). Reflecting on their job seeking experiences, focus group participants felt that policies aimed at disabled people are largely symbolic. According to them, most workplaces remain inaccessible, not only with respect to physical access but also in relation to attitudes. In the latter case, companies comply with equality policies in name only, hiring a few disabled people to appear inclusive and without offering them meaningful roles. As one participant stated, **‘people think hiring us is about charity, not about ability’** (Male, 29, Mobility Impaired, FGD).

**‘Companies give us small jobs to tick the quota, not real opportunities.’**

Male, 22, Visually Impaired, FGD

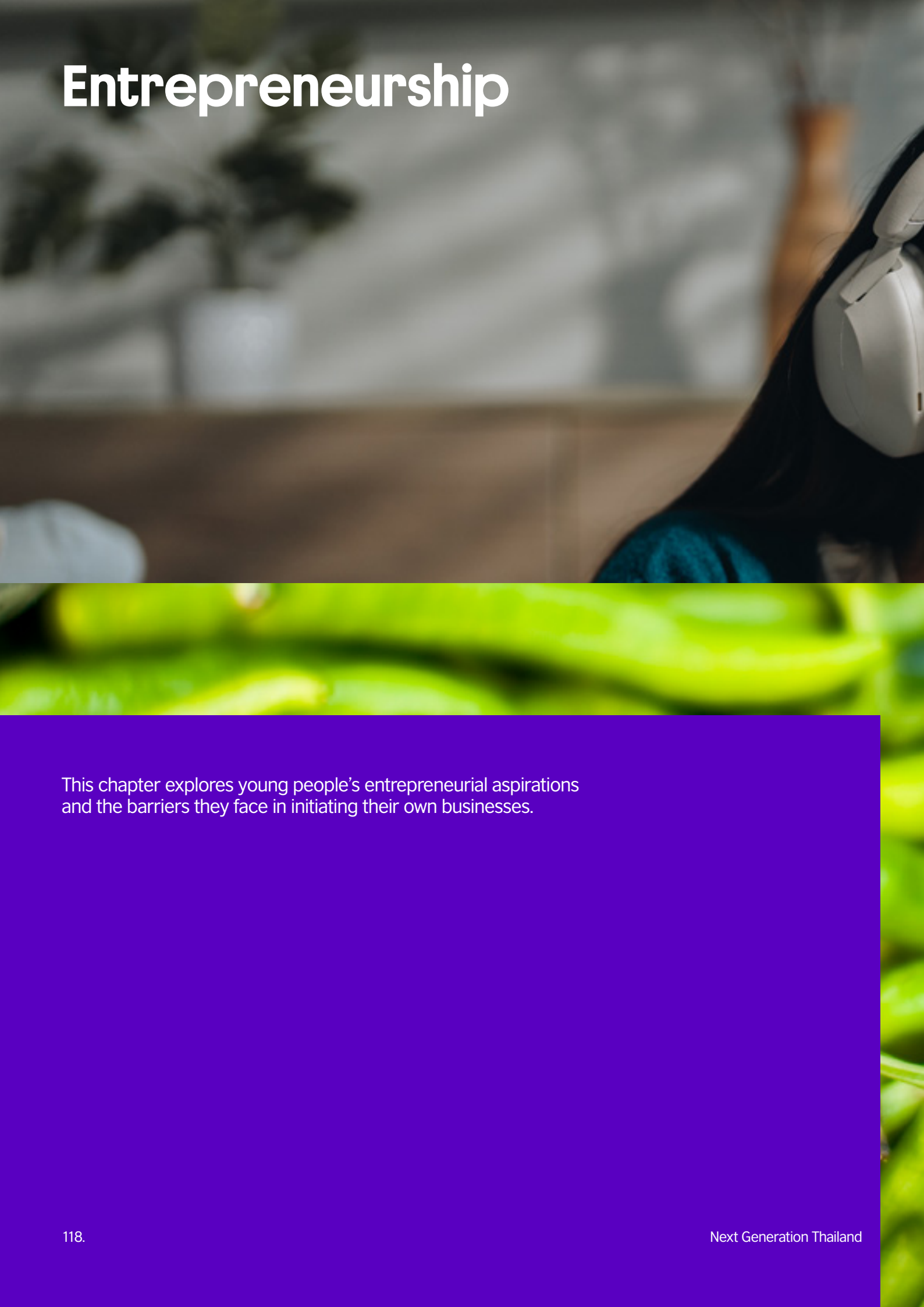
**‘We just want to be treated like everyone else, not as an exception.’**

LGBTQ+, 26, FGD

## Key insights

- More than half of Thailand's workforce is employed informally. Thai youth are significantly affected by low wages, job insecurity, and limited career progression. Young people also underscore the influence of privilege on employment opportunities. Labour reform policies need to prioritise fair wages, stronger labour protections and transparent recruitment practices.
- A mismatch between education outcomes and labour market demand reinforces underemployment and limits young people's ability to secure well-paid jobs. Policies that emphasise closer alignment between the education sector and employers' needs would improve young people's transition into the labour market.
- Employment opportunities remain uneven across regions and limited opportunities in local labour markets compel young people to migrate elsewhere in search of better prospects. Policies aimed at regional economic development strategies can improve employment prospects.
- Despite similar labour force participation rates between women and men, the labour market is characterised by gender segmentation, with women concentrated in service and care sectors and men in technical and skilled trades. Gender inclusive labour market policies would enable women's access to better paid job sectors.
- Marginalised members of society face additional barriers such as discrimination in hiring practices and inaccessible workplaces. Policies which integrate a strong GEDSI lens would improve access for women, LGBTQ+, and disabled youth to better employment opportunities.

# Entrepreneurship



This chapter explores young people's entrepreneurial aspirations and the barriers they face in initiating their own businesses.

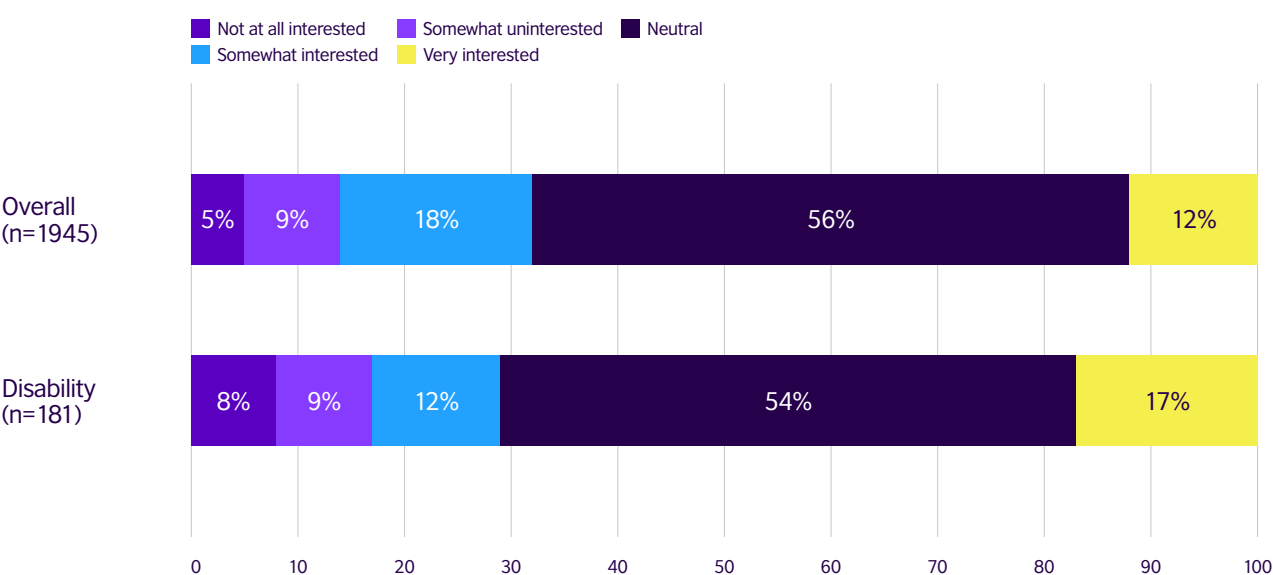


# 8.1. Interest in entrepreneurial activities

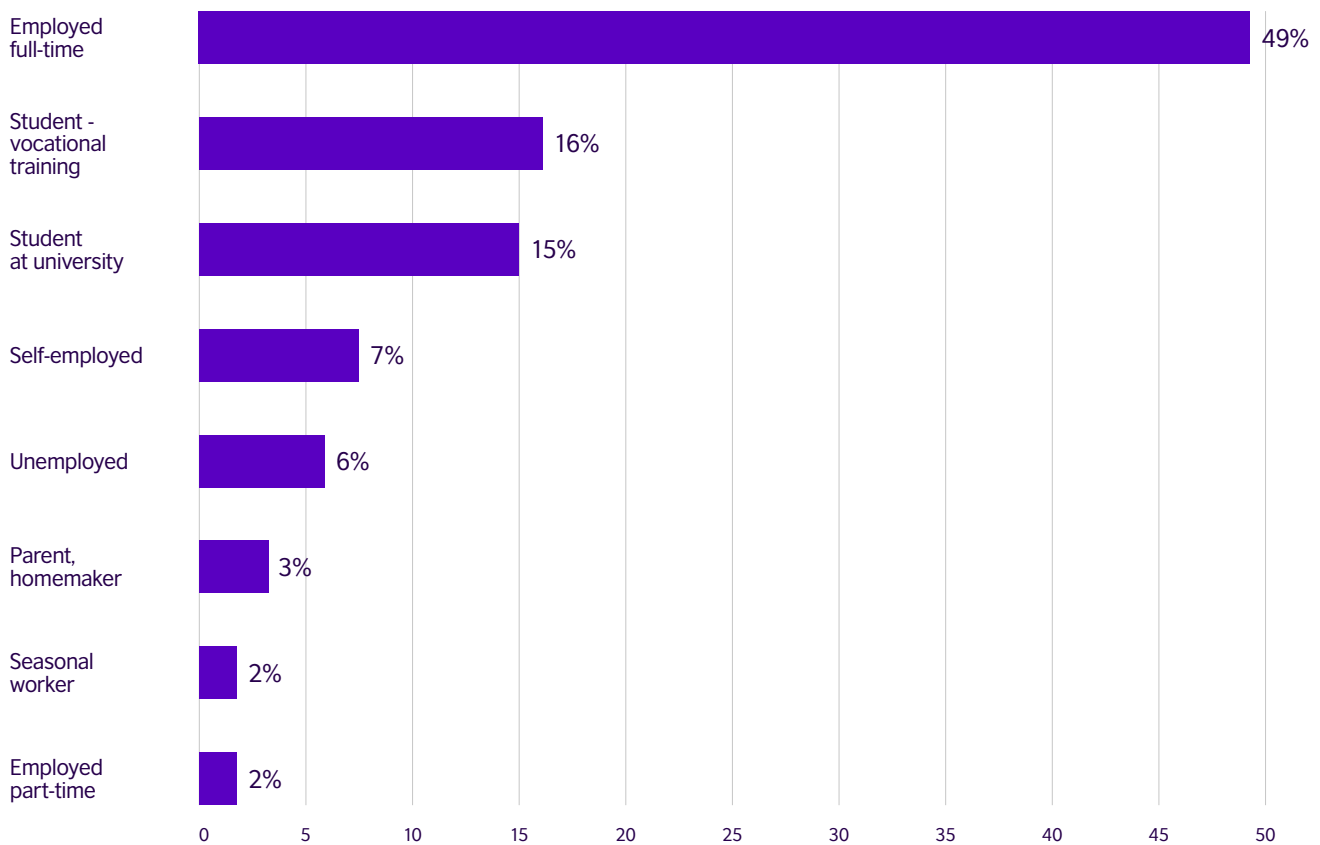
The survey data shows that entrepreneurial ambition among Thai youth is widespread and consistent across gender and disability status. Two out of three respondents (68 percent) are interested in starting their own business within five years, with women and men reflecting similar levels of interest. Among disabled youth, 71 percent are interested in initiating their own business venture. The notably high interest among young people indicates that the notion of entrepreneurship offers greater agency compared with existing employment opportunities.

Key informants noted a generational shift over the past two decades with Thai youth reflecting increasingly entrepreneurial aspirations (KII-13, KII-6). The survey data shows that 49 percent of aspiring entrepreneurs are already in full-time employment, and another 31 percent are enrolled in vocational or university programmes. For many young people, entrepreneurship appears to be a parallel aspiration to their current endeavours.

Figure 34: Interest in starting a business within five years

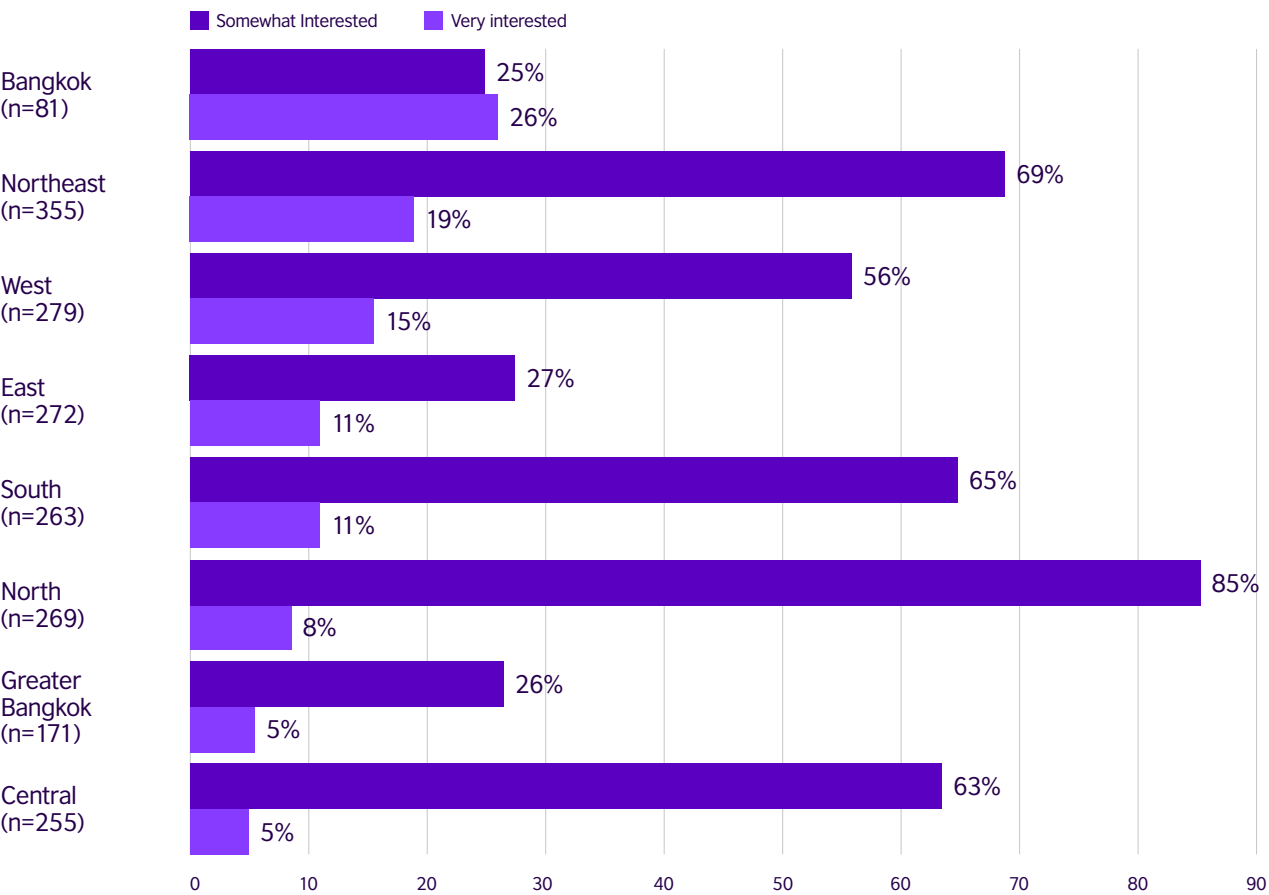


**Figure 35: Current occupations of those interested in starting a business (n=1326)**



While many respondents indicate an underlying interest in launching a business within the next five years, the level of entrepreneurial drive varies across regions. One in four respondents in Bangkok (25 percent) and one in five respondents (19 percent) in the Northeast are very keen to undertake an entrepreneurial venture.

Figure 36: Interest in starting a business within five years



## 8.2. Barriers to entrepreneurship

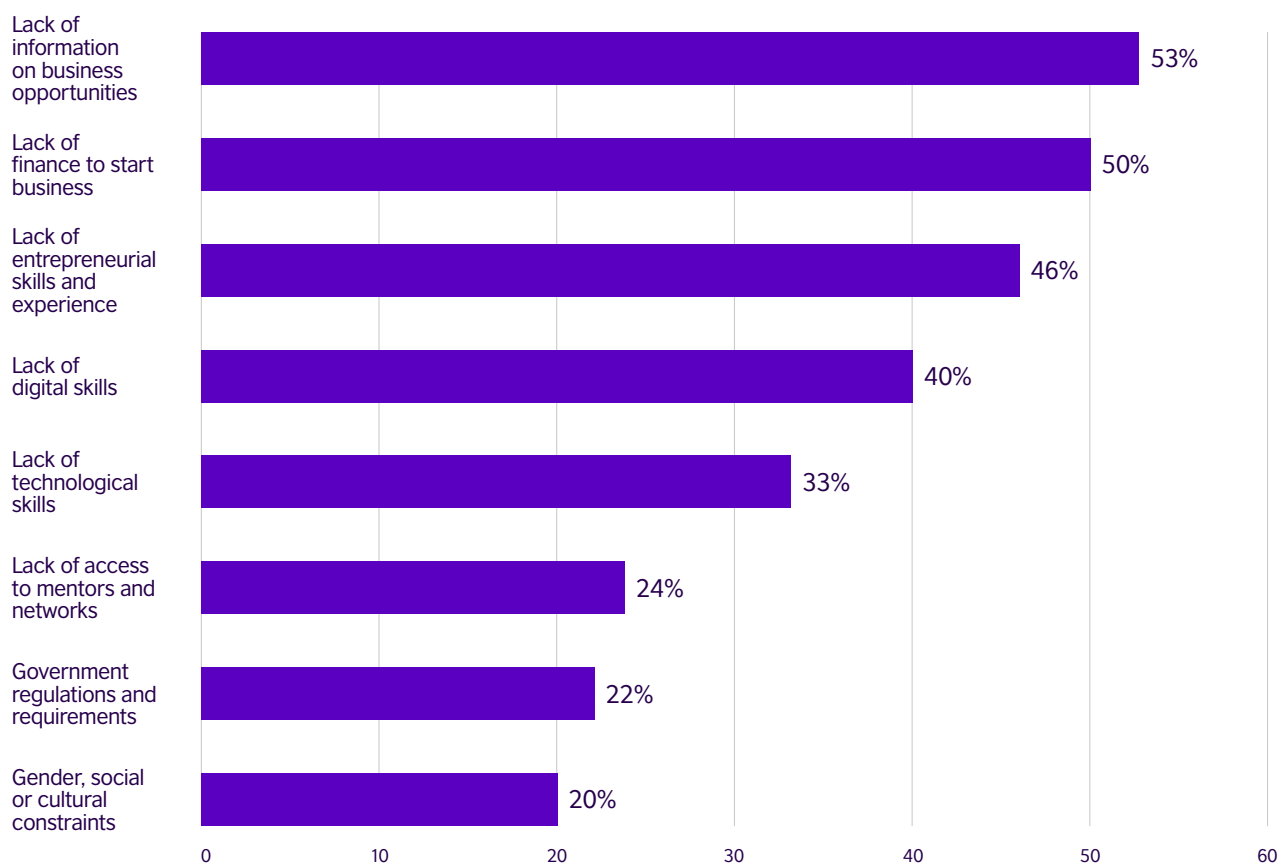
### Limited financial support – a key barrier

Despite young people's interest in entrepreneurship, they face several barriers. The lack of information (53 percent) and limited access to finance (50 percent) constitute key constraints for one in two aspiring entrepreneurs. Other challenges range from misconceptions about what entrepreneurship entails, a lack of encouragement for small-scale initiatives and a lack of emphasis on critical thinking and research skills. Reflecting on one's experience as a young person running a social enterprise, a key informant shared that there is a general tendency to associate starting a business with high profile ventures, technology or online content creation as opposed to developing grassroots initiatives that contribute to local communities (KII-6).

Funding for entrepreneurial ventures are also likely to favour technology-based products or services which makes it difficult for young people to receive support for small-scale or non-technical projects (KII-7, KII-8). Consequently, not all students can access or benefit from entrepreneurship programmes due to a lack of 'readiness, awareness, and institutional limitations' (ibid.). All these factors combined make it especially challenging for young people to not only start but sustain their businesses.

In addition to limited financial support, a key informant highlighted that young people exhibit significant gaps in digital competence (KII-13). In this respect, the survey found that a lack of entrepreneurial (46 percent), digital (40 percent), and technological (33 percent) skills further hinders aspiring entrepreneurs.

**Figure 37: Barriers to entrepreneurship**



## Pronounced regional disparities

As with education and employment, regional disparities remain pronounced with regard to accessing entrepreneurship opportunities (KII-2). Among youth in the provinces and rural areas, barriers to information, access to finance and affordability constitute critical limiting factors when it comes to considering entrepreneurship (ibid.) Few young people have the requisite access to ecosystems that provide capital, training, mentorship or digital infrastructure (KII-1, KII-2, KII-13). Smaller universities in the provinces and their students often remain out of reach even when larger corporations organise events (KII-6, KII-8). Additionally, limited resources inhibit participation especially when faculty members or teachers are not involved in a sustained manner (KII-6).

Key informants noted that access to entrepreneurship ecosystems remain largely limited to urban areas and private institutions (KII-5). Even in universities that focus on enabling entrepreneurship, opportunities do not necessarily reach everyone. In many cases, information is disseminated only to those who are already interested in start-ups or business ventures as opposed to the wider student population (KII-6, KII-11).

The experiences of young people in the Northeast are somewhat different. With few formal job opportunities in the region, focus group participants said that young people are inclined to undertake small business ventures such as selling goods online or joining the family's line of work. However, small markets, limited cash flow, and inadequate digital infrastructure create constant challenges.

## **‘People want to start something, but there’s no support or information.’**

Female, 25, Northeast, FGD

## **‘Even if you have an idea, you can’t get the funds.’**

Female, 22, Northeast, FGD

In the South, young people highlight that unstable local economies and fluctuations in the tourism sector make it difficult to sustain small businesses, especially in the off-season. Additionally, getting official approval takes time and connections, and rules and permits are complicated. According to a focus group participant, **‘starting a business feels like paperwork, not an opportunity’** (Male, 29, South, FGD).

## **‘It’s hard to plan a business when customers come and go.’**

Male, 25, South, Focus Group

In the Central, Eastern and Western regions, young people highlight that they recognise potential in the local industries but lack the guidance and financial support to start, scale, or sustain businesses in the presence of large chains that make survival difficult for small shop owners. As one focus group participant stated, **‘we see opportunities, but we don’t know where or how to start’** (Male, 23, Central, FGD). Focus group participants from Bangkok highlighted that competition in urban areas can be overwhelming. With high rents and limited access to investors or viable networks, most young people find it difficult to start ventures however small.

## **‘Without knowledge and support, small initiatives can’t grow.’**

Female, 25, Central, FGD

## **‘Everyone wants to sell something here, but only a few succeed.’**

Male, 26, Bangkok, FGD

## 'Business in Bangkok is about who you know, not what you sell.'

Male, 25, Bangkok, FGD

For most young people, entrepreneurship does not offer a sustainable career path due to the lack of necessary support and networks. Both economic stability and family support are integral to young people undertaking entrepreneurial risks (KII-4).

## 'If you fail once, people will say you should have stayed employed.'

Female, 21, North, FGD

**Table 4: Barriers to entrepreneurship**

| Barriers                                             | Bangkok | Greater Bangkok | Central | East | West | North | Northeast | South |
|------------------------------------------------------|---------|-----------------|---------|------|------|-------|-----------|-------|
| Lack of entrepreneurial skills and experience        | 54%     | 61%             | 46%     | 60%  | 45%  | 43%   | 46%       | 40%   |
| Lack of access to finance to start a new business    | 51%     | 52%             | 42%     | 72%  | 43%  | 52%   | 49%       | 54%   |
| Lack of information on business opportunities        | 49%     | 39%             | 58%     | 67%  | 46%  | 56%   | 56%       | 43%   |
| Lack of digital skills                               | 34%     | 20%             | 44%     | 21%  | 42%  | 37%   | 46%       | 46%   |
| Limited access to mentors, connections, and networks | 27%     | 37%             | 25%     | 14%  | 26%  | 25%   | 20%       | 27%   |
| Lack of technological skills                         | 24%     | 20%             | 42%     | 12%  | 38%  | 31%   | 38%       | 34%   |
| Government regulations and requirements              | 20%     | 22%             | 21%     | 19%  | 25%  | 24%   | 22%       | 19%   |
| Gender, social, or cultural constraints              | 7%      | 13%             | 21%     | 9%   | 23%  | 28%   | 16%       | 23%   |

## Social norms and hierarchies and family expectations

While many focus group participants view entrepreneurship favourably, in practical terms it is a venture few can afford to consider. While the main barriers centre around the lack of financial support and limited knowledge including access to mentorship or practical skills training, focus group participants highlight social norms and hierarchies, bureaucracy, and family expectations as key limiting factors. In the prevailing context, entrepreneurship is perceived as **‘risky – in traditional Thai culture, families are inclined to direct young people toward stable careers in government or corporate sectors’ (KII-5)**. For instance, focus group participants from the North feel uncertain about starting a business with little access to credit or relevant information. Not surprisingly, their families often discourage risk-taking and compel them to look for government jobs which are considered safe.

**‘No one teaches us how to start; you just have to guess.’**

Female, 24, North, FGD

**‘People around here say business is too risky, better get a government job.’**

Female, 21, North, FGD

## 8.3. Impacts of barriers on social groups

FGDs drew attention to the gendered implications arising from barriers to entrepreneurship. Despite an interest in starting businesses, male focus group participants highlighted that limited access to capital and loans amid strong market competition discourages them. According to one focus group participant, **‘I want to start a business, but banks don’t trust young people’ (Male, 25, South, FGD)**. Male focus group participants also highlighted the underlying pressures they face from their families especially with respect to the fear of failure where parents often warn sons against ‘losing face’.

### **‘Family pressure makes you feel tired before you even begin.’**

Male, 28, Bangkok, FGD

### **‘Even when you have a plan, no one gives you a chance.’**

Male, 25, South, FGD

Female focus group participants, on the other hand, highlighted that self-doubt arising from family expectations stifles their entrepreneurial ambitions. In their view, both emotional and practical barriers inhibit many young women from undertaking entrepreneurial ventures even though they personally regard entrepreneurship as a pathway to independence and flexibility. According to several female focus group participants, low levels of confidence stem from existing social norms that compel young women to prioritise family and caregiving roles since **‘we are not taught how to start or manage anything, only how to work for others’ (Female, 21, North, FGD)**.

At the same time, the lack of mentorship and training related to financial literacy and entrepreneurial skills and limited institutional support further constrain young women from starting a business. According to female focus group participants, financial institutions perceive young women as less reliable borrowers compared with young men. Even within families, financial decisions often rest with fathers or brothers making it harder for young women to take the initiative since **‘families still think that business is for men, not women’ (Female, 24, North, FGD)**.

### **‘Sometimes you stop dreaming because it’s too burdensome to continue on your own.’**

Female, 25, Central, FGD

### **‘It’s discouraging when your family doesn’t believe in you.’**

Female, 24, North, FGD

Although LGBTQ+ focus group participants viewed entrepreneurship as both an opportunity and a necessity to avoid workplace discrimination, the lack of financial and institutional support renders it unviable for most. They pointed out systemic biases that still assume traditional gender norms. For example, applying for a business registration or loans can be complicated if legal documents do not match their identity. They also tend to be left out of traditional networks or the informal circles of trust that drive business in Thailand. Since credibility often depends on conformity, LGBTQ+ entrepreneurs struggle to gain acceptance or investment and **‘people still don’t trust you if you don’t fit their image of an entrepreneur’** (LGBTQ+, 22, FGD).

**‘You carry everything yourself, because no one takes you seriously.’**

LGBTQ+, 29, FGD

**‘Even government programmes assume everyone is straight and the same.’**

LGBTQ+, 26, FGD

Disabled focus group participants noted that financial exclusion is the main barrier to pursuing entrepreneurship since banks and funding programmes often overlook disabled applicants. They further highlighted that business related training and support networks rarely accommodate the accessibility needs of disabled people, thereby limiting participation.

**‘Getting a loan is harder when they see disability, not ability.’**

Male, 22, Visually Impaired, FGD

**‘It’s not failure that hurts, it’s being ignored.’**

Male, 29, Mobility Impaired, FGD

## Key insights

- Entrepreneurial ambition is widespread. Young people are actively seeking to create their own opportunities, even when systems including families are slow to adapt. This underscores the importance of policies that not only recognise Thai youth as economic actors but also facilitate long-term investments in cross-sectoral programmes to enable youth entrepreneurship.
- In a labour market characterised by low wages and job insecurity, young people's strong interest in starting a business reflects a desire for greater agency and innovation. Policies which support youth through skills development, accessible financing, and supportive ecosystems that are sensitive to the local context will resonate with aspiring entrepreneurs in different regions.
- Key barriers to entrepreneurship range from a lack of relevant information, mentorship, finance, and skills development including digital literacy. Holistic and youth-centred entrepreneurship pathways which connect training, mentorship, networking, and capital would address some of the concerns of young people willing to initiate businesses including social enterprises.
- Women and marginalised groups face additional layers of exclusion such as financial gatekeeping and limited access to institutional support. Policies with an inclusion lens would ensure that young peoples' ambitions translate into opportunities regardless of gender, disability, sexual orientation, or ethnicity.
- Many young people view entrepreneurship as a potential alternative to precarious and low-paid work. Integrating entrepreneurship support within broader education and labour market reforms would address youth concerns around access, fairness, and mobility.



# Conclusion and recommendations

This report draws attention to the aspirations and lived realities of young people between the ages of 18 and 30 in Thailand. The study finds that young people are proud to be Thai, have strong aspirations, are motivated to improve their lives and contribute to their communities. However, they face several barriers – from not being heard on national issues to difficulties accessing education and skills, secure employment, and entrepreneurship opportunities – which limit their potential to be effective change agents in society.

A summary of the main findings is included here. A set of recommendations for each theme has been compiled from consultations with the British Council, the YTF, wider stakeholders, key informants, focus group participants, and university students.

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# Conclusion

## Youth outlook

Young people in Thailand are very proud of their cultural and natural heritage. Many respondents agree that people are treated equally based on citizenship. However, perceptions vary with respect to disability and sexual orientation which reflects that young people are sensitive to underlying biases in society. Stability and autonomy are central to their notion of success derived primarily through financial security, wellbeing, and independence. Thai youth are confident about what they can achieve themselves which is reflected in their optimism about the future. However, they are sceptical about the wider society due to prevailing social and gender norms. They are aware of global challenges and consider climate change to be the most pressing issue facing the world along with economic uncertainty.

## Youth voice and expression

Young people feel their voices are unheard. Cultural expectations, social and gender norms, and the lack of safe spaces constrain how they express themselves. While young women are expected to be polite and restrained, young men feel excluded from decision-making. LGBTQ+ youth stress that they are symbolically included and disabled youth highlight that they are spoken for rather than consulted. Digital platforms offer alternative avenues for expression but also expose youth to online harassment. Youth emphasise the need for safe, inclusive, and well-facilitated spaces for dialogue.

## Youth civic and political engagement

While young people participate in different community initiatives, their ability to engage meaningfully is narrowed due to economic precarity, limited mobility, and deeply embedded social hierarchies. Politically, young people are aware and articulate, motivated less by party loyalty and more by civic responsibility as well as concerns around the need for economic improvement, gender equality, security, and integrity in public life. Yet legal and social pressures reinforce self censorship and limit young people's meaningful participation in political spaces.

## Education and skills

Youth view education as a pathway to mobility, yet access and quality vary by geography, socioeconomic status, and disability. Rural students express stronger belief in the value of education but face greater barriers related to distance, infrastructure, and cost. Young people emphasise the need for curriculum reform, improvements in teaching, better learning environments, and skills development, particularly in public institutions. Minority communities and displaced youth also face linguistic and legal barriers that hinder integration into the Thai education system.

## Employment

Employed youth face significant challenges related to low wages, job insecurity, skills mismatch, and lack of career progression. Gaps in language skills, digital skills, and problem-solving limit young people's access to better employment opportunities. Disabled youth face significant barriers, including employer bias and inaccessible workplaces.

## Entrepreneurship

Young people across demographic groups are strongly interested in entrepreneurship, but the lack of information, negligible financial support, and gaps in digital and basic entrepreneurial skills constrain their ambitions. Opportunities are concentrated in urban areas and social norms discourage risk-taking. Addressing these barriers to enable youth entrepreneurship will support young people in exercising greater agency over their economic aspirations.

## In summary...

A recurrent theme in this study is that Thai 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. As the study documents, Thai youth are resilient, ambitious, and already engaged in bringing about positive change in their communities. They desire to be heard on equal terms as torchbearers of Thailand's future.

# Recommendations

## This report makes the following recommendations to support young people:

- **Address perceived inequalities affecting women, disabled and LGBTQ+ youth.**  
Youth perceptions of equal treatment in society reflect that social inclusion remains uneven. Ministries responsible for social development, justice, and education can strengthen existing efforts to reduce discrimination through targeted public awareness initiatives, inclusive education policies, and improved accessibility in public services. Educational institutions and media organisations could consider collaborating with civil society and youth-led initiatives to promote inclusive narratives and ensure safe spaces that enable meaningful learning and dialogue among young people in urban and rural areas.
- **Institutionalise youth participation in policymaking and public decision-making.**  
Public institutions could consider improving existing mechanisms to enable effective youth participation in policy discussions and national development planning. Existing youth advisory councils, participatory consultations at national and provincial levels, and youth policy labs can be strengthened to provide practical channels for youth perspectives to inform public policy. Civil society organisations, universities, and youth networks can support inclusive dialogue and ensure representation from rural and marginalised youth.
- **Reform education systems to prioritise future-ready skills and equitable access.**  
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. Expanding on work-based learning, community engagement, and industry placements within formal and vocational study pathways would bridge the gap between education and employment. Universities, vocational institutions, and private sector partners can support young people by co-designing programmes aligned with labour market needs and local economic contexts.
- **Promote gender-responsive employment and leadership opportunities.**  
Ministries responsible for labour and gender equality can strengthen policies to improve women's workforce participation in higher-growth sectors. Employers and professional associations could work with higher education institutions to expand leadership development programmes for women and introduce inclusive workplace policies to ensure that they are better represented in leadership positions.

- **Expand youth opportunity ecosystems in provinces.**  
Provincial and local government administrations need to prioritise local youth development strategies to strengthen education access, digital infrastructure, entrepreneurship support, and job creation in underserved areas. Universities, community organisations, and private sector partners can collaborate to improve regional innovation hubs, mentorship networks, and local training programmes to enable young people to build careers within their communities.
- **Broaden safe and constructive pathways for youth political engagement.**  
The government can strengthen non-partisan platforms for civic education and democratic participation. Youth forums, deliberative assemblies, and structured civic engagement programmes can support informed participation while respecting Thailand’s social and political context. Universities, civil society organisations, and youth networks need to be able to facilitate dialogue and public debate.
- **Strengthen safe digital spaces for youth dialogue and civic expression.**  
As digital platforms increasingly serve as spaces for youth discussion and engagement, it is necessary to invest in safer online platforms that promote constructive dialogue while reducing risks of harassment and misinformation. Technology companies can collaborate with educators and youth organisations to promote digital literacy and moderated youth forums that support respectful exchange of ideas.
- **Integrate youth into Thailand’s soft power and cultural economy strategies.**  
Thai youth’s strong sense of national pride associated with the country’s cultural heritage highlights the potential for relevant ministries (culture, foreign affairs, and tourism) to expand youth participation in national soft power initiatives through youth-led cultural programmes, creative industry internships, and international cultural exchanges. Creative industry associations, culinary institutes, universities, and private sector partners need to collaborate to offer training, mentorship, and pathways for young people to engage with global cultural markets.

The Next Generation Thailand study highlights both the potential and the urgency of investing in young people. Thai youth are ambitious and motivated to contribute to the country’s future. Yet, as the report shows, their ability to do so is constrained by the lack of access to quality education and decent work. Addressing these challenges will require coordinated action across the government, the private sector, educational institutions, civil society, and youth organisations to create systems that are more inclusive, transparent, and responsive to the needs of young people. Recognising Thai youth as decision-makers offers a powerful opportunity to pave Thailand’s future.

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