



# The Role of Welfare Laws in Supporting Thailand's Poor: An Analysis of Social Protection Systems

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**Abstract:** Teacher Professional Development (TPD) in Thailand faces numerous challenges, including limited access to continuous, high-quality training, particularly in rural areas, and an overemphasis on theoretical knowledge rather than practical skills. As the country strives to modernize its education system, there is a growing need to equip teachers with 21st-century skills such as critical thinking, digital literacy, and creativity. This paper examines the current state of TPD in Thailand, highlighting key challenges and opportunities for reform. It explores the role of digital tools, blended learning, and international collaborations in enhancing teacher training programs. The paper also provides policy recommendations for improving TPD through continuous learning, hands-on workshops, peer mentoring, and feedback systems. Long-term implications include the development of a globally competitive education system that prepares Thai students for success in the 21st-century economy.

**Keywords:** Teacher Professional Development, Thailand Education, 21st-Century Skills, Digital Literacy, Blended Learning, Educational Reform

## 1 Introduction

Thailand's welfare system has undergone significant changes since its inception, evolving from a limited framework to a more comprehensive social protection system aimed at supporting low-income populations. The primary objective of Thailand's welfare policies is to provide social safety nets for vulnerable groups, including the elderly, children, and low-income households (Tangcharoensathien et al., 2018). Historically, welfare systems in Thailand were focused on providing assistance in response to specific crises, such as natural disasters or economic shocks. However, in recent decades, there has been a shift towards more systemic and long-term social protection mechanisms (Chandoevrit & Phonboon, 2014).

A key aspect of Thailand's social protection system is the Universal Health Coverage (UHC), which was implemented in 2002 and has played a critical role in poverty alleviation (Evans et al., 2012). The UHC ensures that all citizens, regardless of income, have access to essential healthcare services. Another crucial component is the Social Security Fund, which provides pensions, unemployment benefits, and work injury compensation for formal sector workers (Chandoevrit, 2013). These systems have contributed to reducing poverty and inequality by providing a safety net for individuals and families facing economic hardships (Pannarunothai et al., 2004).

Despite these advances, the social protection system in Thailand is still characterized by gaps in coverage, particularly for informal workers, who constitute a large portion of the workforce (Saksirisampant et al., 2021). Informal workers are often excluded from social security benefits, which limits their access to essential services and leaves them vulnerable to



poverty (Warr, 2020). Additionally, inefficiencies in implementation and corruption have hindered the effectiveness of some welfare programs (Teerawichitchainan et al., 2015). Therefore, while welfare laws have made significant strides in alleviating poverty, further reforms are needed to ensure equitable access for all citizens.

The primary objective of this paper is to assess the effectiveness of Thailand's welfare laws in supporting the poor. It will analyze the current welfare system, focusing on the legal framework and its implementation, to determine whether these mechanisms are successful in addressing the needs of vulnerable populations. By examining key welfare laws such as the Universal Health Coverage, the Social Security Fund, and cash transfer programs, the paper aims to highlight areas where these policies are succeeding and where improvements are needed (Evans et al., 2012).

Another key objective is to evaluate the social protection systems that are in place and their role in reducing poverty in Thailand. The paper will assess the coverage, efficiency, and equity of these systems, particularly in relation to informal workers and other marginalized groups who are often excluded from formal welfare structures (Chandoevrit, 2013). Additionally, the paper will explore the impact of external factors, such as economic crises and globalization, on Thailand's ability to provide sustainable social protection for its poorest citizens.

This paper argues that although Thailand has made considerable progress in developing and implementing welfare laws, there are significant gaps in coverage and implementation challenges that prevent the system from fully supporting the most vulnerable populations. Specifically, the exclusion of informal workers from social security benefits and the inefficiencies in delivering welfare services are major obstacles to achieving equitable social protection (Saksirisampant et al., 2021). Furthermore, corruption and mismanagement in welfare distribution weaken the overall effectiveness of these programs, leaving many poor communities without adequate support (Teerawichitchainan et al., 2015). The paper will provide policy recommendations aimed at closing these gaps and ensuring that Thailand's welfare system can fulfill its potential in reducing poverty and inequality.

## 2. Overview of Welfare Laws in Thailand

### 2.1 Historical Development of Welfare Systems

The development of Thailand's welfare system has its roots in traditional community-based support systems and royal patronage, which offered assistance primarily during times of hardship. However, the modern welfare system began to take shape in the mid-20th century, influenced by global trends toward state-sponsored social protection. One of the earliest welfare provisions was the introduction of state-sponsored health services in the 1970s, aimed at improving public health access for low-income populations (Evans et al., 2012).

A significant milestone in the development of Thailand's welfare laws was the implementation of Universal Health Coverage (UHC) in 2002. The UHC, under the National Health Security Act (2002), aimed to provide healthcare access to all Thai citizens, regardless of their income level. This was a transformative moment in Thailand's social protection framework, as it dramatically expanded the scope of healthcare services and reduced out-of-pocket expenses for low-income households (Pannarunothai et al., 2004).

Another critical aspect of the evolution of Thailand's welfare system is the Social Security Fund established under the Social Security Act (1990), which provides pensions, unemployment benefits, and healthcare for formal sector workers (Chandoevrit, 2013). The inclusion of formal workers in social security marked an important step toward ensuring economic security for a significant portion of the workforce. However, informal workers, who make up a large part of the Thai labor market, remain largely excluded from these benefits

(Saksirisampant et al., [2021](#)).

Throughout the past few decades, the government has also introduced cash transfer programs to provide direct financial support to low-income individuals and households. These programs have become a vital part of Thailand's social safety net, especially during economic downturns or in response to specific crises (Warr, [2020](#)). Despite these developments, gaps in welfare coverage and the exclusion of certain vulnerable groups continue to pose significant challenges.

## 2.2 Key Welfare Laws and Policies

Thailand's welfare system is supported by a set of foundational laws that provide various forms of social protection, including healthcare, pensions, unemployment benefits, and education. The key pieces of legislation include the Social Security Act, the National Health Security Act, and a series of policies aimed at addressing the needs of the poor.

The Social Security Act (1990) plays a crucial role in providing formal sector workers with financial security in the form of pensions, healthcare, unemployment benefits, and work injury compensation. However, the effectiveness of the Act is limited by its exclusion of informal workers, a major shortcoming given that over half of Thailand's labor force operates in the informal sector (Chandoevmit, [2013](#)).

The National Health Security Act (2002), which established the Universal Health Coverage (UHC) scheme, is another cornerstone of Thailand's welfare system. The UHC provides free or low-cost medical services to all citizens, making healthcare more accessible, particularly for low-income individuals (Tangcharoensathien et al., [2018](#)). The implementation of UHC has been widely recognized as one of the most successful welfare initiatives in Thailand, significantly reducing healthcare costs for the poor and contributing to improvements in overall public health (Evans et al., [2012](#)).

In addition to healthcare and social security, Thailand has also implemented several cash transfer programs designed to support low-income households. One such initiative is the State Welfare Card program, which provides financial aid to eligible low-income individuals to help cover basic living expenses (Saksirisampant et al., [2021](#)). Similarly, housing assistance programs have been introduced to provide affordable housing options for poor families, though their reach remains limited (Warr, [2020](#)).

Overall, while Thailand's welfare laws and policies provide critical support to many citizens, there are ongoing challenges related to coverage gaps, particularly for informal workers and marginalized communities. The inefficiencies in the implementation of these programs and the persistent exclusion of certain groups highlight the need for further reforms to make the welfare system more equitable and comprehensive.

## 3. Current Social Protection Systems

### 3.1 Universal Health Care and Its Impact on the Poor

Thailand's Universal Health Coverage (UHC), introduced in 2002 under the National Health Security Act, has been one of the most significant welfare reforms in the country. The UHC system provides access to a wide range of medical services, including preventative care, treatment, and rehabilitation, without financial barriers (Tangcharoensathien et al., [2018](#)). This program has played a pivotal role in reducing the financial burden on low-income populations, allowing them access to essential healthcare services they would otherwise not afford. The UHC has been widely regarded as a successful model of healthcare reform in low- and middle-income countries (Evans et al., [2012](#)).

However, despite its broad coverage, the UHC still faces challenges in reaching the poorest segments of society. Geographical barriers, such as the lack of healthcare facilities in rural areas, and social issues, like the exclusion of migrant workers and certain marginalized

communities, limit the effectiveness of the UHC (Pannarunothai et al., [2004](#)). Furthermore, disparities in the quality of healthcare between urban and rural regions mean that poorer populations in remote areas often receive lower-quality services (Saksirisampant et al., [2021](#)). These challenges indicate that while the UHC has reduced healthcare inequality in Thailand, further efforts are needed to ensure equitable access for all.

### 3.2 Social Security for Informal Workers

Thailand's Social Security Fund (SSF), established under the Social Security Act (1990), provides benefits such as pensions, healthcare, and unemployment compensation to workers in the formal sector (Chandoevrit, [2013](#)). However, a significant portion of Thailand's workforce—over 50%—is employed in the informal sector, which is largely excluded from these benefits (ILO, [2021](#)). Informal workers, including agricultural laborers, street vendors, and home-based workers, are not covered by the SSF, leaving them vulnerable to economic shocks and healthcare costs.

Several initiatives have been introduced to extend social security to informal workers, such as the Section 40 of the Social Security Act, which allows voluntary enrollment. However, enrollment rates remain low, and the benefits provided are limited compared to those available to formal sector workers (Saksirisampant et al., [2021](#)). The exclusion of informal workers from comprehensive welfare benefits continues to exacerbate income inequality and poverty in Thailand (Warr, [2020](#)).

### 3.3 Cash Transfer Programs and Basic Income Support

Thailand has implemented several cash transfer programs aimed at alleviating poverty, with the State Welfare Card program being one of the most prominent. This program provides conditional cash transfers to low-income individuals, helping them cover essential living expenses such as food, utilities, and healthcare. In addition to conditional transfers, there are also unconditional cash transfer programs targeted at vulnerable populations, such as the elderly and disabled (Evans et al., [2012](#)).

These programs have had a positive impact on poverty reduction by improving the livelihoods of the poorest households. However, challenges remain in ensuring that these transfers reach the most vulnerable populations, particularly those in remote rural areas (Chandoevrit & Phonboon, [2014](#)). Furthermore, the amount provided by these transfers is often insufficient to lift families out of poverty in the long term, highlighting the need for increased financial support and better-targeted interventions (Warr, 2020).

### 3.4 Housing and Education Support

Housing and education are key components of Thailand's welfare system, especially in efforts to address long-term poverty. The government has implemented various housing assistance programs, including the provision of affordable housing for low-income families. Programs such as the National Housing Authority's Affordable Housing Initiative aim to provide low-cost homes for the poor. However, access to these programs is limited, and the demand for affordable housing far outstrips supply, leaving many low-income families without adequate shelter (Teerawichitchainan et al., [2015](#)).

In the realm of education, welfare programs aim to break the cycle of poverty by providing scholarships and financial aid to children from low-income families. These programs are designed to increase access to primary and secondary education, particularly in rural areas where educational opportunities are limited (Evans et al., [2012](#)). While education support programs have made strides in improving literacy and school attendance, gaps remain in ensuring that children from poor families receive equal opportunities for higher education and skills development (Saksirisampant et al., [2021](#)).

## 4. Challenges in Welfare Implementation

### 4.1 Gaps in Coverage

Thailand's welfare system faces significant structural issues that prevent complete coverage for the country's poorest populations. A major gap is the exclusion of informal workers and migrant laborers from many of the social security programs. Despite the Social Security Act providing a safety net for formal sector workers, over 50% of Thailand's workforce operates in the informal sector, where access to benefits such as healthcare, pensions, and unemployment support is limited or non-existent (ILO, [2021](#)). Migrant workers, who constitute a substantial portion of Thailand's labor force, are often excluded from comprehensive welfare programs, leading to significant disparities in access to social services (Saksirisampant et al., [2021](#)).

Structural barriers also prevent coverage expansion. Many informal workers are unaware of voluntary social security schemes, or they face administrative obstacles when trying to enroll. Additionally, social security contributions may be seen as burdensome for low-income workers, who prioritize immediate financial needs over long-term benefits (Chandoevmit, [2013](#)). These coverage gaps exacerbate poverty and inequality, as large portions of the workforce remain vulnerable to economic shocks, health crises, and aging without adequate support (Evans et al., [2012](#)).

### 4.2 Inequality in Access to Benefits

Geographical disparities play a crucial role in access to welfare benefits. Urban residents, particularly in cities like Bangkok, often have better access to social services, including healthcare and education, than those in rural areas. Rural populations, particularly in remote provinces, experience challenges related to infrastructure, a lack of healthcare facilities, and reduced access to social programs. This disparity results in significant inequality in access to welfare benefits, despite the formal existence of universal programs such as Universal Health Coverage (UHC) (Pannarunothai et al., [2004](#)).

Furthermore, issues of bureaucracy and inefficiency in the distribution of welfare benefits hinder the effectiveness of these programs. Lengthy administrative processes, a lack of transparency, and inadequate digital infrastructure for tracking and delivering benefits contribute to delays and errors in distributing aid. As a result, many eligible individuals, particularly in rural areas, fail to receive timely support (Warr, [2020](#)). This inefficiency undermines the objective of poverty alleviation and widens the socio-economic gap between regions (Saksirisampant et al., [2021](#)).

### 4.3 Corruption and Mismanagement

Corruption and mismanagement are major obstacles to the effective implementation of welfare programs in Thailand. Instances of embezzlement, misallocation of funds, and favoritism in the distribution of welfare benefits have been reported, particularly in local administrations (Teerawichitchainan et al., [2015](#)). Corruption weakens trust in government institutions and disproportionately affects low-income populations, who rely most on social welfare programs.

One notable case of mismanagement involved the misappropriation of funds intended for welfare programs for disabled individuals. Investigations revealed that local officials siphoned off funds, leaving disabled recipients without critical financial aid (Chandoevmit & Phonboon, [2014](#)). Such cases highlight the need for stronger oversight and transparency in the management of welfare resources. Moreover, the lack of effective legal frameworks for holding corrupt officials accountable further undermines the goal of providing equitable social



protection.

To address these challenges, the Thai government must implement anti-corruption measures and improve the accountability of officials involved in the distribution of welfare benefits. Increased transparency, the use of digital platforms for monitoring, and community involvement in oversight processes could help reduce corruption and ensure that benefits reach their intended recipients (Evans et al., [2012](#)).

## 5. Reforms and Policy Recommendations

### 5.1 Expanding Coverage to Informal Workers

A major challenge for Thailand's social protection system is the limited coverage of informal workers, who make up more than half of the country's labor force (ILO, [2021](#)). To address this issue, it is essential to reform the Social Security Fund (SSF) to include more informal sector workers in its safety net. Currently, informal workers can voluntarily enroll in social security schemes (e.g., Section 40 of the Social Security Act), but participation rates remain low due to a lack of awareness and the limited benefits offered (Saksirisampant et al., [2021](#)).

Policy recommendations include:

(1) Raising awareness about social security options for informal workers through targeted outreach campaigns and partnerships with local organizations (Chandoevrit, [2013](#)).

(2) Offering incentives such as tax breaks or government subsidies to encourage informal workers to formalize their employment, thereby gaining access to social security benefits.

(3) Increasing contribution flexibility by allowing informal workers to make smaller, more manageable payments toward social security, while gradually expanding the benefits they can receive (ILO, [2021](#)).

(4) The formalization of informal employment can also be encouraged by creating policies that make it easier for small businesses to register formally, thereby extending social protection to a greater number of workers. The formalization process could include simplifying bureaucratic procedures and reducing the cost of registration, making formal employment more accessible to small enterprises and informal workers (Teerawichitchainan et al., [2015](#)).

### 5.2 Improving Efficiency and Reducing Corruption

To improve the overall efficiency of welfare benefit distribution, streamlining administrative processes is necessary. The current system is often plagued by bureaucratic delays and inefficiencies that prevent timely disbursement of benefits, particularly in rural and marginalized communities (Warr, [2020](#)). This can be addressed by enhancing the use of digital technologies to track and distribute benefits more efficiently. For example, mobile payment systems and biometric verification can help ensure that beneficiaries receive their payments on time and without interference from local bureaucracies.

In addition to improving efficiency, anti-corruption measures are crucial for ensuring that welfare benefits reach their intended recipients. Corruption within the welfare system, including embezzlement and misallocation of funds, continues to undermine the effectiveness of social protection programs (Chandoevrit & Phonboon, [2014](#)). Proposed anti-corruption measures include:

(1) Improved transparency through public reporting of welfare fund allocations and expenditures.

(2) Establishing independent oversight bodies tasked with monitoring welfare fund distribution and investigating instances of corruption (Evans et al., [2012](#)).

(3) Community-based monitoring programs that empower local communities to report

instances of corruption and hold government officials accountable.

### 5.3 Enhancing Cash Transfer Programs

Cash transfer programs have been widely used in Thailand to alleviate poverty by providing direct financial assistance to low-income households. However, targeting mechanisms remain a challenge, as many of the most vulnerable populations, particularly in rural areas, are often excluded from these programs (Saksirisampant et al., [2021](#)). Improving these mechanisms is critical to ensure that the poorest households are reached and that funds are distributed effectively.

Recommendations for improvement include:

(1) Refining the eligibility criteria for cash transfers to better identify and include the most impoverished households, particularly those in remote or marginalized areas.

(2) Incorporating technology-based tools for better data collection and targeting, such as using geographic information systems (GIS) to map out areas with the highest concentration of poverty (Warr, [2020](#)).

(3) Implementing regular assessments to evaluate the effectiveness of cash transfer programs and adjust them based on the changing needs of the population.

There is also a growing discussion around transitioning toward universal basic income (UBI) as a more sustainable and inclusive model for social welfare. While UBI programs provide a fixed amount of income to all citizens, regardless of their income level, they ensure that the most vulnerable populations are automatically included without having to navigate complex eligibility criteria (Evans et al., [2012](#)). Although implementing UBI in Thailand would require significant financial investment, it could serve as a long-term solution to poverty alleviation and welfare distribution inefficiencies.

## 6. Conclusion

### 6.1 Summary of Findings

Thailand's welfare laws have played a crucial role in supporting low-income populations and addressing key areas of social protection, such as healthcare and social security. The Universal Health Coverage (UHC) and Social Security Fund (SSF) have provided essential services to millions, especially in terms of health access and retirement benefits (Tangcharoensathien et al., [2018](#)). However, significant gaps in coverage remain, particularly for informal workers and migrant populations, who are often excluded from comprehensive social security benefits (ILO, [2021](#)). Additionally, bureaucratic inefficiencies, corruption, and geographical disparities in service delivery continue to undermine the overall effectiveness of welfare programs (Warr, [2020](#)). While the existing welfare laws have made progress in alleviating poverty, these persistent challenges limit their full impact.

### 6.2 Final Thoughts on the Role of Welfare Laws

Welfare laws in Thailand are vital in addressing poverty and inequality, particularly as the country faces economic changes and increasing social demands. Social protection systems, such as cash transfer programs and UHC, are essential tools for reducing poverty and ensuring that vulnerable populations have access to necessary services. However, to fully realize the potential of these systems, legal reforms must be undertaken. Expanding coverage to include informal workers, improving the efficiency of benefit distribution, and addressing corruption are key areas for policy focus (Chandoevrit & Phonboon, [2014](#)). By strengthening the legal frameworks governing social protection, Thailand can ensure that its welfare systems genuinely benefit the most vulnerable members of society.

### 6.3 Future Directions for Research

Future research should explore the long-term effects of Thailand's welfare programs on poverty reduction. Studies could focus on the sustainability of Universal Health Coverage and cash transfer programs, particularly in light of changing economic conditions and demographic shifts (Teerawichitchainan et al., 2015). Additionally, there is a need to investigate the potential for expanding welfare laws to cover informal workers more comprehensively and examine the feasibility of transitioning to more universal income support models such as universal basic income (Evans et al., 2012). Lastly, further research should assess the impact of anti-corruption measures on improving the distribution and effectiveness of welfare benefits in Thailand.

### Originality & Body of Knowledge

*Originality:* This paper provides an in-depth analysis of Thailand's welfare laws and their role in supporting vulnerable populations, particularly low-income and marginalized groups. Its originality lies in the comprehensive evaluation of the country's welfare systems, including Universal Health Coverage (UHC), the Social Security Fund (SSF), and cash transfer programs, within the specific socio-economic context of Thailand. Unlike previous studies that often focus on individual components of the welfare system, this research adopts a holistic approach to assess the effectiveness, challenges, and opportunities for reform. By addressing critical issues such as the exclusion of informal workers, geographical disparities, and the impact of corruption, the paper contributes novel insights into improving social protection systems in Thailand.

*Body of Knowledge:* This study significantly enhances the understanding of welfare laws and social protection mechanisms in Thailand by analyzing their historical development, implementation challenges, and policy gaps. It advances the academic discourse by highlighting the systemic inequities faced by informal workers, rural populations, and marginalized groups in accessing welfare benefits. Furthermore, the paper emphasizes the role of digital tools, targeted outreach, and anti-corruption measures in addressing inefficiencies and expanding coverage. By providing actionable policy recommendations, such as improving cash transfer targeting mechanisms and exploring universal basic income models, this research offers valuable frameworks for policymakers, scholars, and practitioners aiming to create a more equitable and sustainable welfare system in Thailand.

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### Declarations

**Conflict of interest:** The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

**Ethical treatment of experimental subjects (animals & human):** -

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