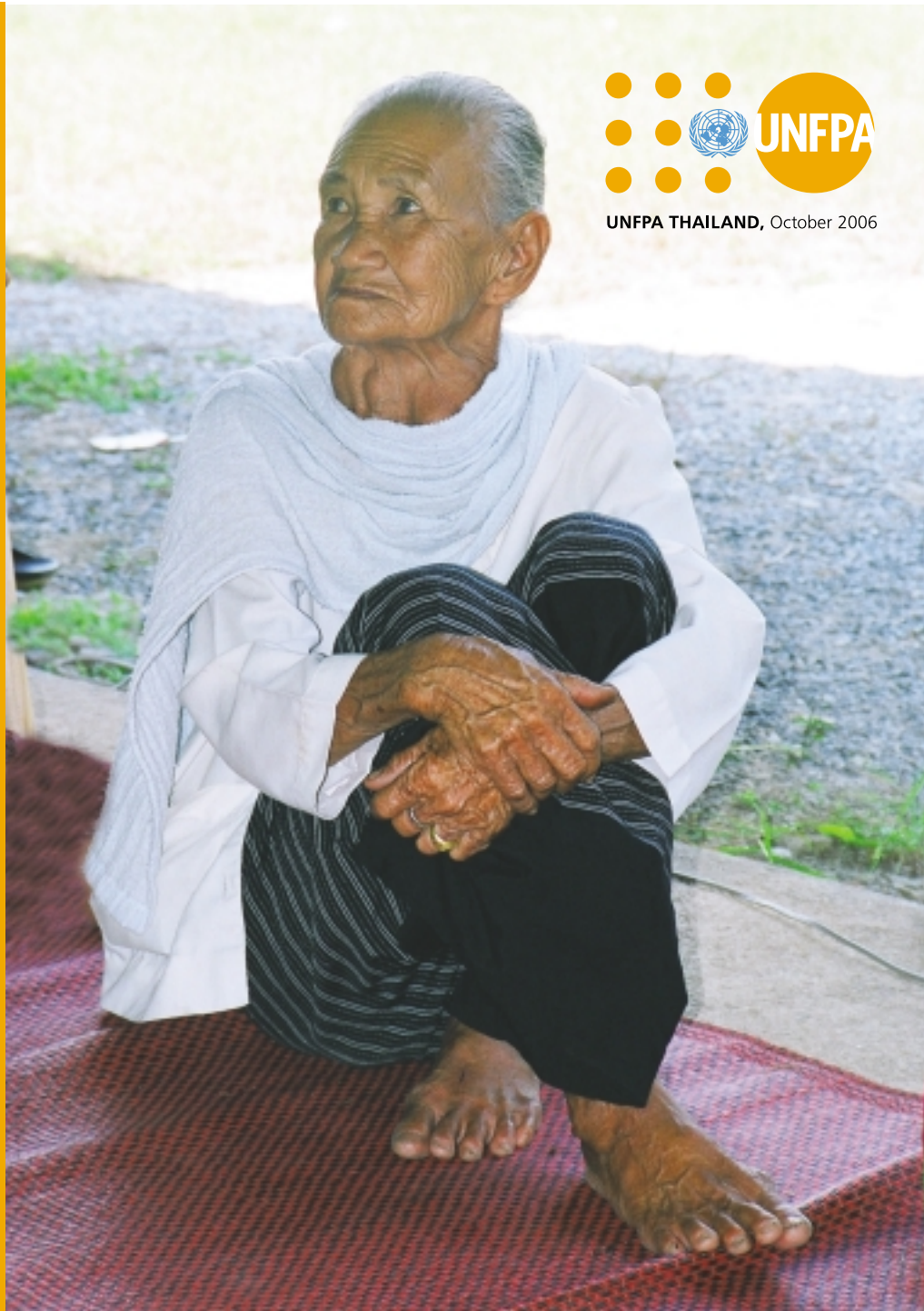


# Population Ageing in Thailand: Prognosis and Policy Response

**"The potential of older persons is a powerful basis for future development. This enables society to rely increasingly on the skills, experiences and wisdom of older persons, not only to take the lead in their own betterment but also to participate actively in that of society as a whole"**

***Article 10 of the Political Declaration of the Second World Assembly on Ageing, 2002 in Madrid***



UNFPA THAILAND, October 2006

## Demographic Reality

Population ageing is defined as the increasing proportion of older persons (60 years and above) in the total population. As a consequence of sustained declines in fertility and mortality during the last three decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Thailand faces a rapidly growing population of older persons. For the first time in the history of the country, the population of older persons will exceed the population of children around 2020. This demographic change has far-reaching socio-economic implications that require an appropriate policy response.

Thailand is a signatory to the International Plan of Action on Ageing adopted at the Second World Assembly on Ageing held in Madrid in 2002. The Plan calls for a better understanding on the part of Government, civil society and the community of the ageing situation and its consequences so that older persons can be fully integrated into society and assured a life of dignity and good health.

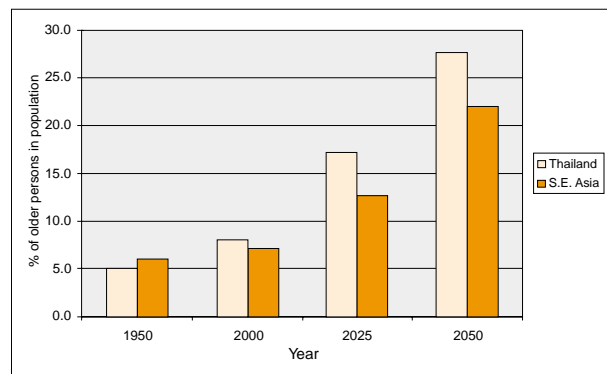
## Thailand's Population is Rapidly Ageing

In 1950, with 5 per cent of its population aged 60 years and over, Thailand ranked as the seventh most aged country among the eleven countries in South-East Asia. It has now moved up to be the second most aged country in the region (next to Singapore), with older persons constituting more than 10 per cent of the population. This is a result of a relatively higher rate of increase in older population as a consequence of decline in fertility and improvement in longevity.

The Total Fertility Rate (average number of children per women) dropped from 6.4 in 1950-55 to 1.7 in 2005 and is projected to decline marginally to 1.5 during the next 20 years. Life expectancy at birth (average number of years a new-born is expected to live) increased from 52 years in 1950-55 to nearly 71 years in 2000-2005. It is projected to increase further to 76.8 years in 2025-2030 and 79.1 years by 2050. On an average, women are expected to outlive men by about nine years.

The proportion of older persons in total population will increase to 14.0 per cent in 2015, 19.8 per cent in 2025 and nearly 30 per cent by 2050. The population of older persons will increase from the current 6.4 million to 9.0 million in 2015, 12.9 million in 2025 and exceed 20 million in 2050.

## Thailand is ageing faster than others in South-East Asia



**Sources:** Institute for Population and Social Research, Mahidol University, *Population Projections for Thailand, 2005-2025, 2006*; and United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs Division, *World Population Ageing 1950-2050*, Population Division, New York. 2002.

## More Older Persons To Support

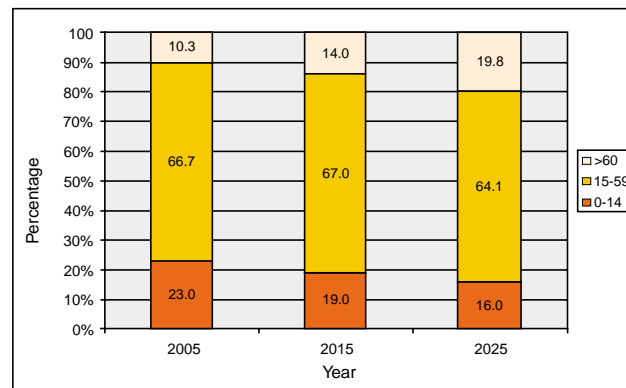
As the age structure shifts more and more towards higher age groups, there would be on average fewer and fewer persons of working age to support an increasing number of older persons.

**AGEING INDEX** is used to show the changing proportion of older population relative to the population of younger persons (aged less than 15 years). In Thailand, this Index, approximately 45 at present will cross the 100 mark around 2020 rising to 140 by 2050. For the first time in Thailand's history, the population of older persons will exceed the population of children (aged below 15 years) around 2020.

Such changes will imply a reduction in income per capita, savings and investments, as well as increase in public expenditures on social security, health care and welfare of older persons. At the social level, the changing family structures will also imply a decline in family support to the elderly. Poverty among older persons stood at a high rate of 20.7 per cent as per the 2002 Survey of the Elderly, compared to the national average of 9.8 per cent.

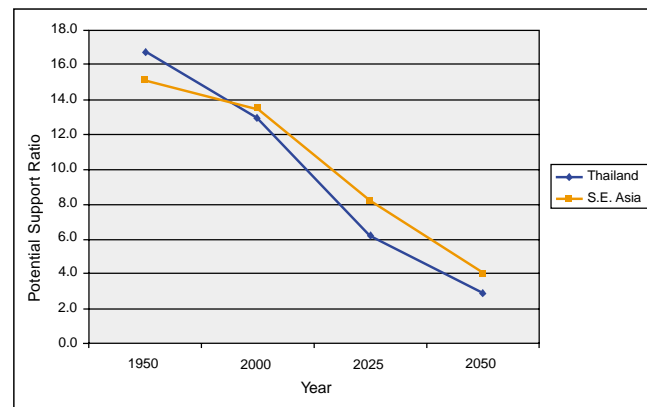
**POTENTIAL SUPPORT RATIO** in Thailand, currently estimated at 10.0 is projected to decline to 7.8 by 2015 and further to 5.2 by 2025. This means that the number of working age adults potentially available to contribute to the support of the population aged 65 years or more will be reduced by half. This will pose a challenge to sustain the success achieved in reducing poverty as per MDG-1 which aims at halving poverty levels. Further, the decline in the potential support ratio will be larger in Thailand compared to South-East Asia.

## Older dependents outnumber younger workers



**Source:** Institute for Population and Social Research, Mahidol University, *Population Projections for Thailand, 2005-2025, 2006.*

## Potential Support Ratio declines faster in Thailand



**Source:** United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs Division, *World Population Ageing 1950-2050*, Population Division, New York, 2002.

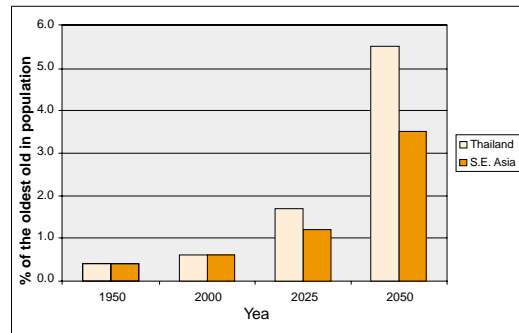
## TWO IMPORTANT FEATURES OF POPULATION AGEING:

### (A) Increasing proportion of the oldest old

Population aged 80 years or more is referred to as the “oldest old”. Increasing survival rate to age 80 years means that among the older persons, more and more will live up to 80 years. Currently, this is 36 per cent and will increase to 56 per cent by 2050. Similarly, life expectancy at age 80 years (that is the number of years an oldest old person can on average be expected to live beyond 80 years) is projected to increase. With an increasing proportion of Thais expected to reach age 80 years and on average live for more years beyond that, the proportion of the oldest old in the population is expected to register exponential growth.

The population of the oldest old, currently estimated at 590 thousand, will increase to 1.3 million in 2025 and exceed 3.5 million by 2050. This means extended duration of social security and welfare payments and increasing need for care of old age morbidity and disability.

### Oldest old will increase faster in Thailand



**Source:** United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs Division, *World Population Ageing 1950-2050*, Population Division, New York, 2002

### (B) Feminization of the older population

Among the old, women outnumber men as they constitute a majority of Thailand’s older population. At birth there is an approximate balance in sex ratio with 103 males to 100 females. Due to higher female life expectancy, the ratio of males to females declines with age, and women outnumber men in older age groups. In 2005, women constituted 50.6 per cent of Thailand’s older population and 66.9 per cent of the oldest old population. Projections show that women will continue to be more than 60 per cent of the oldest old population in 2025.

A much higher proportion of older women than older men live without a spouse. The National Survey on the Elderly in Thailand in 2002 reported that 45 per cent of older women, as against 15 per cent of older men, did not have a spouse. Older Thai women face other disadvantages relative to men: (a) lower level of literacy, (b) longer periods of widowhood, (c) living alone with significantly lower household income, (d) higher levels of morbidity and disability and (e) lower likelihood of receiving formal retirement benefits or social security support. As such older women more than older men are exposed to poverty, neglect and abuse.

	M	F
% population 65+ in the labour force	37.5	17.3
% older persons who are illiterate	10.0	21.3
% older persons who are single	20.0	53.0
% older persons living alone	2.3	4.9

**Sources:** United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs Division, *World Population Ageing 1950-2050, 2002* ; *Population Ageing Chart 2002*; and *Living Arrangements of Older Persons, 2005*. Population Division, New York.

## Limited Sources of Financial Support

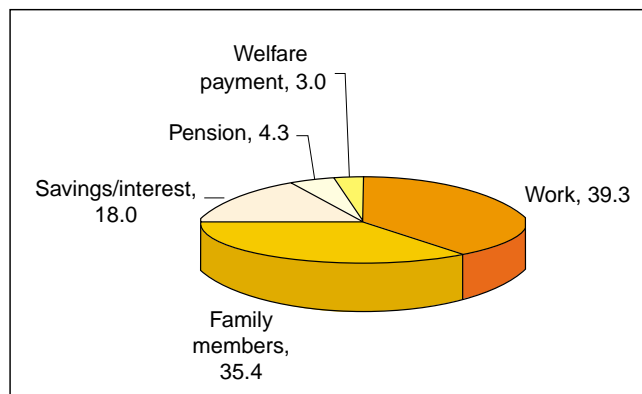
Nearly 75 percent of financial support for older persons in Thailand comes from just two sources: gainful employment and transfer payments from family members. According to the 2002 Survey of the Elderly, only a third of older persons reported their financial resources to be adequate to make both ends meet. The Survey also showed that in 2001, only 4.3 per cent of older persons were receiving a pension and another 3 per cent, welfare payments from the State. Therefore, there is a significant gap between the actual need and current provisions of social security.

## Regional Variations in Population Ageing

Population ageing has neither been nor is projected to proceed at a uniform rate throughout the country. The population in some regions is more “aged” than in others. It is important to take note of these regional variations when formulating policies and allocating resources for addressing the issues related to population ageing.

The higher incidence of population ageing in the North and Northeast is largely due to out-migration of younger adults seeking better opportunities for employment or education. This also results in higher proportion of older persons in rural areas than in urban areas.

## Primary sources of financial support for older persons, 2002



**Source:** National Statistical Office, *Report on the 2002 Survey of Elderly in Thailand, 2003*.

## The proportion of older persons is highest in the North and Northeast Regions

Region	Percentage of older persons in total population		
	2005	2015	2025
THAILAND	10.3	14.0	19.8
Bangkok Metropolitan	8.6	11.9	18.6
Central (excl. Bangkok)	10.8	13.1	17.9
North	12.1	16.0	23.9
Northeast	9.6	14.7	21.4
South	10.4	13.2	17.8

**Source:** Institute for Population and Social Research, Mahidol University, *Population Projections for Thailand, 2005-2025, 2006*

## Policy Response

The Royal Thai Government has been aware of the challenges arising out of population ageing and has given increasing priority to the issues relating to older persons. Following the World Assembly on Ageing held in Vienna in 1982, Thailand formulated the National Long-term Plan of Action for the Elderly (1986-2001). The Plan covered health, education, income and employment, and social and cultural aspects. Later, a Working Committee on Policy and Action for the Elderly was set up to formulate the Essence of the Long-term Policies and Measures for the Elderly (1992-2011) to help accelerate welfare actions.

In 1997, constitutional provisions were made to give older persons with insufficient income the right to receive aid from the State. In 1999, the Government established the National Commission on the Elderly which formulated the currently operational Second National Plan for Older Persons (2002-2021). This Plan focuses on the preparation for quality ageing, the well being of older persons, social security for older persons and research to support policies and programmes. The Bureau of Empowerment for Older Persons was also created as the focal point on population ageing in Thailand.

These policy instruments, together with the Act on Older Persons 2003 provide the policy framework for welfare promotion, protection and empowerment of older persons throughout the country.

The Government provides social welfare assistance of 300 baht per month to older persons having an annual income of less than 10,000 baht. It is planned to increase the coverage of this assistance to 76 per cent of all eligible poor older persons in Thailand. The Government has also created an Older Persons' Fund with an initial outlay of 60 million baht. Adults who take care of their old parents have been given entitlement to tax exemptions up to a specified maximum based on their income.

The 30 baht Universal Health Care Scheme helps reduce the burden of the families in supporting the health care needs of their elderly parents and relatives. The Ministry of Public Health is encouraging community hospitals to run elderly clinics periodically and to provide home health services by visiting older persons at their place of residence. Older people are entitled for free health care services at all state-run health stations/hospitals. Emphasis is also laid on health promotion for the elderly through temples and older people's clubs.

In addition, the Government has taken other initiatives, such as support to strengthen income security at old age, life-long education, day centres for health care and promotion, family assistance, counseling, and other social activities for the elderly, promotion of healthy behaviours from younger ages and creating awareness among the community by organizing social activities for older persons. The Government seeks to inculcate a positive attitude in the society towards ageing.

## UNFPA Cooperation

UNFPA's collaboration with the Government in the area of population ageing has increased in recent years. As part of South-South Cooperation, UNFPA works with the Thailand International Development Cooperation Agency (TICA) to conduct workshops for policy makers and programme managers. Under the Eighth Cycle of cooperation (2002-2006), UNFPA is collaborating with the Faculty of Nursing, Chiang Mai University to support older persons affected by HIV/AIDS in Northern Thailand. The project aims to mitigate the physical, emotional, psychological, social and economic impact of the pandemic on the elderly.

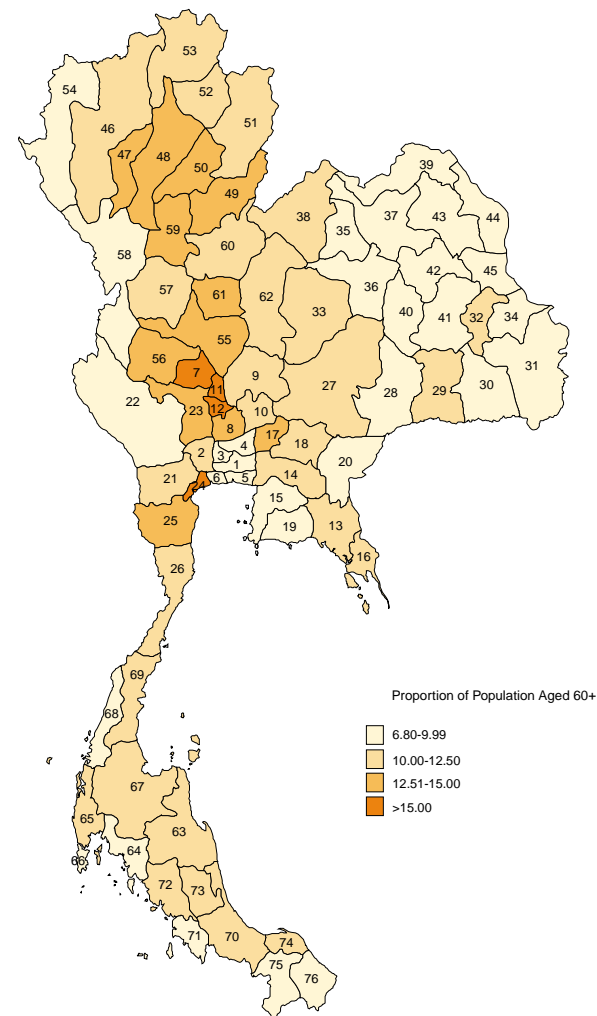
The United Nations Partnership Framework (UNPAF), 2007-2011 has included older persons as one of the vulnerable groups. Under this Framework, UNFPA proposes to increase its involvement in the following ageing issues :

- Older persons and development focusing on income security, social protection and poverty prevention;
- Advancing health and well-being into old age focusing on health promotion and training providers of health care;
- Developing an enabling and supportive environment focusing on support for care givers and developing a positive image of ageing.

UNFPA would also seek to address several measures contained in the Second National Plan for Older Persons in Thailand. These would include: preparation for quality ageing, promoting well-being in older persons and their social security. These will be implemented through partnerships with national and provincial governments, civil society and community based organizations.

## Older Population in Thailand, 2005

1. Bangkok
2. Nakhon Pathom
3. Nonthaburi
4. Pathum Thani
5. Samut Prakan
6. Samut Sakhon
7. Chai Nat
8. Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya
9. Lop Buri
10. Saraburi
11. Sing Buri
12. Ang Thong
13. Chanthaburi
14. Chachoengsao
15. Chon Buri
16. Trat
17. Nakhon Nayok
18. Prachin Buri
19. Rayong
20. Sa Kaeo
21. Ratchaburi
22. Kanchanaburi
23. Suphan Buri
24. Samut Songkhram
25. Phetchaburi
26. Prachuap Khiri Khan
27. Nakhon Ratchasima
28. Buri Ram
29. Surin
30. Si Sa Ket
31. Ubon Ratchathani
32. Yasothon
33. Chaiyaphum
34. Annat Charoen
35. Nong Bua Lam Phu
36. Khon Kaen
37. Udon Thani
38. Loei
39. Nong Khai
40. Maha Sarakham
41. Roi Et
42. Kalasin
43. Sakon Nakhon
44. Nakhon Phanom
45. Mukdahan
46. Chiang Mai
47. Lamphun
48. Lampang
49. Uttaradit
50. Phrae
51. Nan
52. Phayao
53. Chiang Rai
54. Mae Hong Son
55. Nakhon Sawan
56. Uthai Thani
57. Kamphaeng Phet
58. Tak
59. Sukhothai
60. Phitsanulok
61. Phichit
62. Phetchabun
63. Nakhon Si Thammarat
64. Krabi
65. Phangnga
66. Phuket
67. Surat Thani
68. Ranong
69. Chumphon
70. Songkhla
71. Satun
72. Trang
73. Phatthalung
74. Pattani
75. Yala
76. Narathiwat



Source: Institute for Population and Social Research, Mahidol University, *Population Projections for Thailand, 2005-2025, 2006.*

UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund, is an international development agency that promotes the right of every woman, man and child to enjoy a life of health and equal opportunity. UNFPA supports countries in using population data for policies and programmes to reduce poverty and to ensure that every pregnancy is wanted, every birth is safe, every young person is free of HIV/AIDS, and every girl and woman is treated with dignity and respect.



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