Thai Union is one of the world’s leading seafood providers with a strong Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) profile. Thai Union’s main focus within children’s rights is to increase access to education and limit child labour.

ADDRESSING CHILDREN’S RIGHTS

How it started

The fishing industry in the Southeast Asian region is largely an informal sector that is gradually becoming formalized and as a result the industry is being more closely examined. There are two factors that tend to lead to infringements on children’s rights within the fishing industry: many businesses are family owned and run and the work force is composed of migrant labour.

Within family businesses, young family members may assist with work tasks, while school is de-prioritized in favour of ensuring that the family and its business survive.

There is a high movement of workers from neighbouring countries, migrating for economic reasons. Migrant workers often do not have the opportunity to access the education system in their host country.

Child care centres in Samut Sakhon

Thai Union initiated a program to build child care centres in local schools for the children of migrant workers to help them transition to the Thai school system.

The program for establishing schools sprung from an audit of the area outside Bangkok where some Thai Union factories are located. The audit showed children of migrant workers in the areas were not attending school during the daytime.

Several main reasons for this were identified - parents were not aware of how to enrol their children in local schools; children spoke languages other than Thai and therefore would not be able to speak at school; and parents were not always aware of the importance of education for their children. Thai Union has also run English classes for children at the schools.
**Code of Conduct**

Thai Union works to educate their suppliers on their Business Ethics and Labour Code of Conduct, which specifically prohibits child labour. Suppliers are provided with support to follow the Code and encouraged to share it with their suppliers. The aim is to influence all layers of suppliers so that the Code of Conduct is followed throughout the supply chain.

**Collaborations with Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO) in Thailand**

Thai Union collaborates mainly with three NGOs in Thailand. Project Issara who offer a hotline that can be called by migrant workers to raise concerns, act as a grievance mechanism and get information about labour rights. Any issues that are revealed, both Thai Union specific and general in the community or industry, are raised and taken action on.

Migrant Workers Rights Network (MWRN) are invited to Thai’s factories to check conditions both in factories and surrounding communities, and strengthen mechanisms for worker voice.

Labour Rights Promotion Network (LPN) focuses on talking to Thai Union’s migrant workers and educating them in the importance of education for their children, and avoiding child labour or child trafficking. LPN helped establish the Thai Union Child Care Centres.

**Going forward**

Thai Union is looking to expand their current projects. For example, they will be launching a new project on the importance of education in “danger zones” where there is high risk of child exploitation in the form of for example child labour or trafficking.

The project to increase education among their shrimp suppliers is getting attention from the industry and more parties are getting involved. Going forward Thai Union will continue to broaden the initiative and drive it to become industry-wide. They also have identified that more work can be done around human trafficking which will be given more focus.

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**DECREASING CHILD LABOUR ON SHRIMP FARMS**

Thai Union is initiating a program to ensure that shrimp farms in their supply chain do not have child labour. Since the farms can be family operated and may depend on the help of the whole family the problem is difficult to solve. By making education easily accessible, limiting the hours of work and seeing to that there is shelter and water available lives for the children and their families can be improved, as well as increasing opportunities for education.