

ThaiWISE - Hela Människan i Malmö

EMPOWERING THAI WOMEN IN SWEDEN
FIVE YEAR REPORT



ThaiWISE
HELA MÄNNISKAN I MALMÖ



Hela människan
MALMÖ

Introduction

ThaiWISE aims to reduce exploitation and abuse of Thai women in Sweden, with a particular focus on women working in the Thai massage industry.

ThaiWISE is an initiative of Hela Människan i Malmö, a Christian organisation that works to address social issues faced by vulnerable groups in society.

By providing comprehensive support, education, and advocacy, ThaiWISE aims to empower Thai women, facilitate their integration into Swedish society, and promote gender equality.

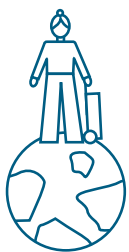
This report documents key aspects of the five-year pilot phase of ThaiWISE in Malmö, made possible through an IOP (Idéburet Offentligt Partnerskap) partnership with Malmö Municipality, as well as the initial stages of ThaiWISE's expansion to other regions of Sweden.



How we help

ThaiWISE bridges the gap between Thai women and the services they need in Sweden. Too many Thai women remain isolated and unaware of their rights and responsibilities in Sweden.

We connect them to existing support, fill service gaps with Thai-specific solutions, and provide official information in an accessible way.



Prevention

We empower Thai women with the knowledge and skills necessary to live and work safely in Sweden, mitigating risks of exploitation.

Protection

We offer advice and support to Thai women in Sweden who are experiencing domestic violence or other forms of abuse or exploitation.



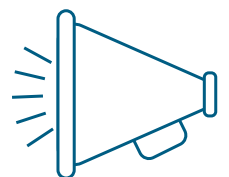
Professionalism

Our network of certified ethical salons, Nuad Thai Nordic, elevates the Thai massage industry by promoting ethical business practices and fair working conditions.



Policy and Advocacy

We conduct research to identify the challenges faced by Thai women in Sweden and we advocate for policy changes to address their needs.



Our story

2017

Noomi – Hela Människan i Malmö began outreach work to help Thai women working in massage salons.

2021

Our certification programme was established with 9 Malmö salons as founding members.

2024

June: 36 salons in Stockholm and Skåne were certified.

August: ThaiWISE began expanding to Göteborg and surrounding areas. 18 salons have initiated the certification process.

2019

The pilot of ThaiWISE – Hela Människan i Malmö was founded to address the systemic issues faced by Thai women, particularly those in the massage industry.

UNESCO recognised Nuad Thai as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

2023

March: Nuad Thai Nordic, our network of certified salons, was launched. The Nuad Thai Nordic Center was established in Malmö.

September: ThaiWISE began expanding the network to Stockholm and regional Skåne.

ThaiWISE's 2019 research revealed that many Thai women in Sweden were isolated, unaware of their rights, and exploited in both work and personal life. A shocking 80% of Malmö's massage salons were implicated in unethical practices.

Our results: highlights



19

workshops on government services



283

students of 20 hr Civic Information courses

56

students of 100 hr Civic Orientation courses



68

SFI students received study support

139

students of SFI tailored to Thai students

27

massage workers received specialised Swedish classes

33

Facebook Live events



1,068

people contacted our Call Center

82

women received counselling in Thai



15,625

people contacted via outreach activities

10,109

Facebook followers



12

students certified in Thai massage

72

expo visitors tested Thai massage

36

massage salons became members of Nuad Thai Nordic

125

participants at workshop on ethical salon management

Thai women in Sweden

45,940

Thai people live in Sweden.

78%
are women.
SCB

SOCIAL ISOLATION

Many Thai women are isolated from Swedish society, limiting their social connections and support networks.

POWER IMBALANCES

Most Thai women in Sweden marry Swedish men and many live in relationships characterised by power imbalances, control and abuse.

LIMITED KNOWLEDGE OF RIGHTS

Many Thai women are unaware of their rights and the services available to them, making them vulnerable to exploitation.

Some of the challenges that Thai women in Sweden face

LANGUAGE BARRIERS

Limited knowledge of Swedish hinders their integration into Swedish society and limits their access to services and information.

ECONOMIC VULNERABILITY

Pressure to support family in Thailand leads them to unskilled work with a high risk of exploitation and poor working conditions.

Our research, Call Center and contact with the Thai community reveals that many women experience isolation, violence and exploitation.

"He has hit me, slapped me, kicked me, and assaulted me in other ways ever since my first few months in Sweden. It's been many years now, but I keep going back to him. How can I go back to Thailand and tell my kids that I'm divorced again?"

"At the SFI class I was the only Thai student, and the teacher only paid attention to the others, the majority were asylum seekers. I was left alone most of the time. I decided to stop going to school."

"He squeezed my throat while I was breastfeeding. I was too mentally drained to resist. Had no more energy to fight back."



Prevention

A crucial aspect of our work is preventative action. By empowering women with knowledge and resources, we aim to mitigate risks and prevent them from falling victim to exploitation and abuse.

Many Thai women who have lived in Sweden for years remain unaware of their rights, societal norms, and Swedish laws. Language barriers often contribute to their isolation and limited understanding of their new home.

Our efforts focus on:

Education and awareness: we provide information about the potential risks of immigration, and the rights of all people living in Sweden.

Cultural orientation and integration: we help Thai women understand the cultural and societal differences between Sweden and Thailand, addressing common challenges, aiding their integration and helping them learn Swedish.

OUTREACH

15,625 people reached

The ThaiWISE team and volunteers attend temple gatherings, SFI classes, schools, Thai festivals and cultural events to raise awareness of our courses and the support available at our Call Center.

WORKSHOPS

19 workshops

We conduct workshops to inform Thai people about government services that are available in Sweden, and their rights and responsibilities as a resident.

CIVIC INFORMATION

5 courses, 283 participants

This 20-hour online course was specifically designed for Thai people who are either preparing to immigrate to Sweden or have recently arrived. It introduces participants to Swedish society, laws, their responsibilities as residents, and the role of key government agencies.

CIVIC ORIENTATION

4 courses, 56 participants

This 100-hour online course offers a comprehensive overview of Swedish society, including information on rights, responsibilities, and available support services.

"If I had known about this course earlier, or 10 years ago, I would have been able to organise my life more quickly."

"I work in a restaurant. After this course, I know about employment contracts between employers and employees. This helps me protect my rights."



"My husband did not know some of the things taught in the course even though he is Swedish. It made our life together go more smoothly."

LANGUAGE SKILLS (SFI)

Learning Swedish is crucial for successful integration!

We've taken two approaches to support Thai women in their language learning journey:

Preparing for SFI course 3 course, 68 participants

This pilot initiative equipped Thai women with effective study techniques to enhance their SFI learning experience.

While the results were promising, resource constraints prevented us from continuing this program.



SFI for Thai students 139 participants

We partnered with Hyllie Park Folkhögskola in Malmö and Göteborg to deliver SFI courses specifically designed for Thai learners.



FACEBOOK AND FACEBOOK LIVE

10,109 Facebook followers, 580, 591 reached
33 Facebook Live events

Facebook is one of the most popular social media channels amongst Thai people.

We leverage the power of social media to reach and support Thai women both in Sweden and in Thailand. By delivering trust-worthy, accessible information we reduce the risks for women who are planning to immigrate, or who have recently arrived.

We post and run Facebook Live seminars on topics such as:

30%
of our
Facebook
followers live
in Thailand.

VISA AND
RESIDENCY

CULTURAL
INTEGRATION

EMPLOYMENT
RIGHTS

RELEVANT CURRENT
AFFAIRS

Protection

For Thai women who have already immigrated to Sweden and find themselves in vulnerable situations, ThaiWISE offers support and protection. Many women face challenges such as exploitative employment conditions, domestic

abuse, and isolation, which can negatively affect their physical and mental health.

We strive to create a safety net for vulnerable women, helping them to escape harmful situations and rebuild their lives.

CALL CENTER

The ThaiWISE Call Center is a vital resource for Thai people in Sweden, particularly women. In 2023 alone, we received 292 calls.

While the Call Center cannot provide direct financial or practical support, our team offers invaluable guidance and referrals to appropriate government agencies and NGOs. By connecting callers with the right resources, we enable them to navigate complex systems and access the assistance they need.

We answer enquiries via telephone, email, Line and Facebook.

A Thai woman in her late forties married a Swedish pensioner and moved to Sweden to live with him. Her husband isolated her socially and did not encourage her to learn Swedish.

He secured her a low-paying job, using her income to cover household expenses, with a small amount left for her children in Thailand.

She soon found that he was an alcoholic and gambler with severe financial problems. She was shocked when a letter arrived from a bank, revealing that her husband had forged

her signature to take out a large bank loan in her name.

She contacted ThaiWISE for help filing a divorce. When she told her husband she wanted a divorce he took his own life.

We referred her to our colleagues from Noomi - Hela Människan i Malmö who helped her find a lawyer, supported her throughout the legal process that was necessary to solve her problems with the bank, helped her apply for housing support and assisted her enrolment in SFI.

Why do people contact the Call Center?



VISA, PASSPORT & RESIDENCY ADVICE



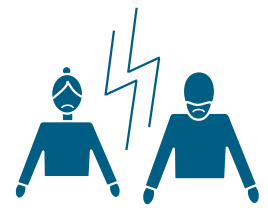
ENQUIRIES FROM THAILAND



UNDERSTANDING SWEDEN



EMPLOYMENT QUESTIONS



DOMESTIC ISSUES

COUNSELLING

Unfortunately, there are no government-funded counselling services specifically tailored to the needs of Thai people in Sweden. While translators are available, they cannot fully replicate the nuances and understanding of a native Thai counsellor.

We fill this crucial gap by providing counselling services delivered by a Thai counsellor residing in Sweden. This service is essential to those in urgent need of mental health support.

"Effective counselling requires a deep understanding of the clients language and culture. Many of my clients have been suffering severe mental health challenges in silence for too long, unaware that they can get help in their own language."

Jularat Ngakhotchasan,
Certified Counsellor



Professionalism

A key aspect of ThaiWISE's work is to promote professionalism and ethical standards within the Thai massage industry. We aim to:

Uphold ethical practices: Ensure that Thai women working in the industry are treated with dignity and respect.

Enhance Nuad Thai's reputation: Elevate the perception of Thai massage as a valuable and legitimate profession.

Empower women: Create opportunities for Thai women to earn a dignified living.

Change attitudes: Shift societal attitudes and create a more equitable and respectful environment for Thai women in Sweden.



MESSAGE TRAINING

3 courses, 12 students

Many Thai women working in Swedish massage salons lack the mandatory training and certification required by the Thai government to be a qualified Thai masseuse.

ThaiWISE is the sole provider of these official courses in Sweden, offering women a cost-effective opportunity to upgrade their skills and become certified masseuses.

These 150 hour massage courses took place at the Nuad Thai Nordic center in Malmö.

SFI FOR WOMEN IN MASSAGE

27 students

Many women in the massage industry work six days a week. Leaving their job to study Swedish would be detrimental for their business and their income, a compromise most are not willing to make.

To address their specific needs, we collaborated with Hyllie Park Folkhögskola in Malmö to create a Swedish course to suit to women working in massage salons.

Classes are co-taught by a Thai teacher, and are held on Sundays when most salons are shut, allowing them to progress their Swedish skills without sacrificing their professional commitments or income.

Ethical business training

125 participants

This training, run in 2020, was a pre-cursor to our certification training programme.

We trained women from over 100 massage salons in essential business skills, such as employee rights, tax regulations, and health and safety standards.

This online initiative allowed us to engage with the Thai community, gain valuable insights into the challenges faced by women in the massage industry, and generate interest in our certification program.

Health and Wellness Expo

72 recipients

Nuad Thai Nordic participated in two Health and Wellness Expos in Eslöv. Masseuses from our member salons offered Thai massages to attendees, providing a first-hand experience of this traditional healing practice and raising awareness of its benefits.

NUAD THAI NORDIC: A NETWORK OF CERTIFIED ETHICAL SALONS



36 certified members
18 applicants in training

After months of recruitment, screening, background checks and training, the first members of the Nuad Thai Nordic network were certified in 2021.

These nine salon owners from Malmö became pioneers of our certification system, and the foundation for our expansion to Stockholm and Göteborg and surrounding areas.



Certification process



Salon inspection & background checks

We collaborate with the Environmental Administration in Malmö, and use their procedures and checklists in other cities.



Civic information course

This 20 hour course was designed by ThaiWISE specifically for Thai massage workers, based on existing government resources.



Business management training

This 3-day business training is run by experts at Nyföretagare Centrum, LEVEL and Rao Redovisning.



Certification from ThaiWISE

Lesson learned: building trust takes time

Initially, gaining the trust of Thai women was challenging. They were hesitant to participate in our pilot program in Malmö.

However, as the program's success became evident and we expanded to other locations, salon owners began pro-actively seeking certification.

The involvement of local municipalities and the Royal Thai Embassy in Stockholm have been crucial in giving our certification programme credibility and building trust with our target audience.

Challenges and risks: resources and relationships

While we're proud of our progress and aspire to certify salons nationwide, our current resources limit our ability to expand. To achieve this goal and maintain the quality of our certification, we require additional funding and a larger team.

Strong relationships with local municipalities, and other relevant stakeholders are needed for the ThaiWISE project to succeed in additional locations in Sweden.

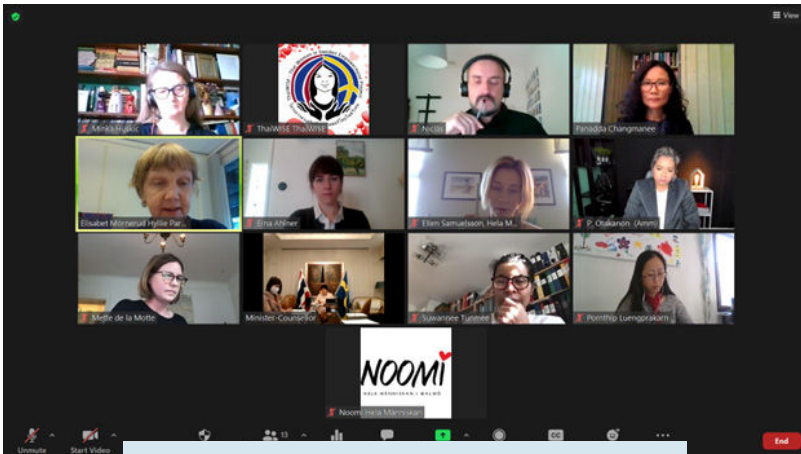


Policy and advocacy

ThaiWISE is actively engaged in policy and advocacy work to address the systemic issues affecting Thai women in Sweden.

By amplifying the voices of Thai women and serving as a bridge between them and relevant authorities, ThaiWISE has been able to advocate

for policy changes and challenge discriminatory practices. Through in-depth research, constructive dialogue, and media campaigns the project aims to create a more supportive and inclusive environment for Thai women in Sweden.



ThaiWISE hosted an online workshop on domestic violence with authorities and community organisations to amplify the voice of Thai women in this context.



Embassies on board

ThaiWISE collaborates with the Swedish Embassy in Bangkok to reduce the risks of migration for Thai women planning to immigrate.

Since 2020, ThaiWISE's information on migration to Sweden has been available to people applying for a Swedish visa at the embassy. This pro-active approach prepares them for the most common risks of immigration and advises them on how to avoid dangerous situations.

RESEARCH

2019: A Female Perspective on the Conditions of Women Working in the Thai Massage Industry in Malmö

2020: Domestic Violence against Thai Women in Sweden: Victim's Perspectives and Experiences

2022: Thai Women's Experiences of Immigration to and within Nordic Countries, in partnership with the University of Lund

Domestic violence: bridging the cultural gap

In 2020 ThaiWISE collaborated with the police to subtitle a short film about domestic violence. We shared this film on our Facebook page and website to raise awareness about the signs of abuse and provide information on available support services.

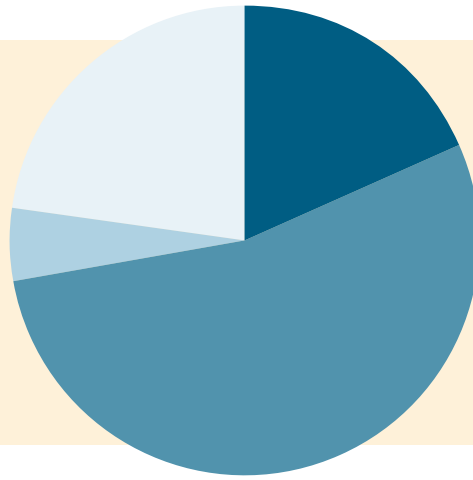
Media and social media

Changing public perception in Sweden is crucial to improving the lives of Thai women. We need to challenge stereotypes surrounding Thai massage and Thai people, especially women.

ThaiWISE has established itself as a trusted source of expertise. Our team has been sought out by many media outlets, including TV4, DN and Sydsvenskan, to provide informed commentary on sexual exploitation in Thai massage salons. We offer a balanced perspective, highlighting the many legitimate businesses while addressing the complex factors contributing to illicit activities.

Financial support

ThaiWISE would like to express our heartfelt thanks to our principal supporters. Their invaluable support is crucial to the success of our mission to improve the lives of Thai women in Sweden.



- National Board of Health and Welfare (Socialstyrelsen)
- Royal Thai Embassy in Stockholm
- Malmö Municipality (Malmö Stad)
- Swedish Gender Equality Agency (Jämställdhetsmyndigheten)

Looking forward

The successful five year pilot of ThaiWISE has laid a strong foundation for our future. We have tested, evaluated and refined our concept and are ready to expand our reach and impact.

Many of ThaiWISE's services, such as our Call Center and our online training, are already available nationally.

We aim to expand the Nuad Thai Nordic network nation-wide. By certifying professionally-run salons, we are not only recognising the many talented Thai women working in massage, we are

raising the reputation of Thai massage and giving women a chance to be proud of their occupation.

This initiative will also allow us to connect with Thai communities in more locations, including women who are isolated and vulnerable, helping us to reach those who need our support most.

We envision a future where Thai women in Sweden are empowered, integrated, and thriving.





We thank our supporters!



Malmö stad



Royal Thai Embassy
STOCKHOLM



Socialstyrelsen



JÄMSTÄLLDHETS
MYNDIGHETEN



contact@thaiwise.se



+46 76 035 32 78 (Mon - Wed)



NuadThaiNordic, ThaiWISE Malmö



ThaiWISE



www.thaiwise.se



www.nuadthai.se