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UNLOCKING POTENTIAL

The Economic Benefits of Legal Marriage Equality for Cambodia

February 2026

Summary Factsheet

BACKGROUND

"Open, inclusive and diverse societies are better for business and better for economic growth."

— Open for Business.

Marriage equality is an essential affirmation of equal rights and protection for families. International experience from the more than 35 countries that have already recognised marriage equality shows that it can also be a catalyst for economic opportunity. Countries that have recognised marriage equality can see stronger tourism performance, an improved investment climate, more resilient households, and healthier, more productive workforces. These gains flow not only to LGBT+ communities but to the wider economy.

Marriage equality refers to the legal recognition of marriage between two people of the same sex, with the same rights, responsibilities, and legal status as different-sex couples.

In Cambodia, it is not currently possible for same-sex couples to register for a legal marriage certificate. Obtaining marriage equality has been identified as a key priority by Cambodian LGBT+ communities to ensure equal legal recognition and protections for their families, as well as contributing to social inclusion.

Cambodia stands at an important moment. The Royal Government of Cambodia has supported LGBT+ equality and non-discrimination. In particular, Cambodia has accepted all recommendations on advancing LGBT+ equality – including seven recommendations on marriage equality – in the 2024 Universal Periodic Review. The Cambodian public increasingly supports marriage equality.

At the same time, Cambodia is driving towards the ambitions of Vision 2030 and Vision 2050, supported by the *Pentagonal Strategy – Phase I (2023–2028)*, which emphasises growth, equity, efficiency, inclusion, sustainability and resilience.

"Our policy is to not leave anyone behind. For society as a whole, to develop our nation, we need everyone to participate. The LGBT+ community is a human resource who can contribute to the country." — H.E. Keo Remy, Senior Minister and President of the Cambodian Human Rights Committee.

Legal recognition of marriage equality would align directly with Cambodia's *Pentagonal Strategy – Phase I (2023–2028)*. It would support household stability, strengthen human capital, and send a clear signal that Cambodia is an open, modern, competitive, and welcoming future-ready country for tourists, investors, and global talent – strengthening the national brand while advancing dignity and opportunity for all Cambodians.

The research highlights how **legal recognition of marriage equality would not only affirm the dignity and equal rights of all families – it would also contribute to a more dynamic, inclusive, innovative, and resilient Cambodian economy.**

Methodology: Based on the full research briefing, this factsheet highlights the potential economic benefits of marriage equality, drawing on evidence from global studies, Cambodian data, stakeholder interviews, and scenario modelling adapted from internationally recognised methodologies. The figures presented are illustrative and denote the possible magnitude and direction of economic impact.

The potential economic benefits of marriage equality span 5 key areas:





1. BOOSTING TOURISM

Tourism is one of Cambodia's most important economic sectors, generating revenue and sustaining livelihoods. Marriage equality offers an opportunity to strengthen this sector. By **attracting more visitors, stimulating greater spending, creating thousands of jobs, and opening a valuable new market in destination weddings**, marriage equality could deliver tangible economic benefits.

Marriage equality would strengthen Cambodia's reputation as an open, safe, and welcoming destination — a factor that increasingly shapes where people choose to travel.

"It had an enormous effect on [the Netherlands'] reputation — marriage equality is a very clear label of a safe and inclusive environment. If a country has a label as a safe and welcoming country, it will have a

positive effect on LGBT+ visitors and other visitors too — women, solo travellers, family travellers." — Dirk De Graaff, Founder, Rambutan Hotels.

International experience shows that inclusive reforms, such as marriage equality, can lead to increases in arrivals, stimulating higher visitor spending, creating more jobs in the tourism industry, and stronger destination branding.

"[D]estinations with inclusive legal frameworks — particularly marriage equality — are more likely to attract LGBTQ+ travellers and their allies, benefit from positive destination perception, and build trust with international markets." — Amine Gabbouj, Program Manager, International Gay and Lesbian Travel Association (IGLTA) Foundation.

Marriage equality would also enable Cambodia to enter the global LGBT+ destination wedding market — a segment proven to generate high-value tourism.

Prospective impacts in our illustrative scenarios for Cambodia within two years after the recognition of legal marriage equality:

ADDITIONAL INTERNATIONAL VISITORS	ADDITIONAL TOURISM REVENUE	NEW JOBS SUPPORTED	LGBT+ WEDDING TOURISM
+ 67,000–335,000	+ USD 36–180 MILLION	+ 5,000–26,000	+ USD 0.7–10.8 MILLION



2. ATTRACTING INVESTMENT & TALENT

Global firms and investors increasingly assess social inclusion, openness, and quality of life when choosing where to invest and operate. Evidence from global studies shows that LGBT+ inclusion helps countries attract responsible foreign direct investment (FDI). Marriage equality — both directly and as a signal of inclusion — can also strengthen a country's ability to retain and attract highly skilled talent.

"LGBT+ inclusion can boost economic growth, improving a country's ability to connect to global markets and attract investment." — Open for Business.

Cambodia is actively working to expand its digital economy, strengthen innovation, and develop human capital. Marriage equality could reinforce these objectives by sending a clear signal to global markets that Cambodia

welcomes diverse talent and is aligned with modern business expectations. Taken together, the evidence suggests that by adopting marriage equality, Cambodia could strengthen its competitiveness as an investment destination.

"The government considers inclusion and equality as important in the strategy to retain and attract highly skilled workers." — H.E. Katta Orn, Secretary of State and Spokesperson, Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training.

Some highly skilled LGBT+ Cambodians already live and work abroad in order to be themselves and enjoy equality. Marriage equality would help reverse brain drain and support Cambodia's ambition to build a dynamic, innovative workforce ready for the future.



3. GROWING THE WEDDING INDUSTRY

Weddings are a vital part of Cambodian culture and an important source of income for micro, small and medium enterprises. Legal recognition of marriage equality would unlock significant latent demand among same-sex couples who wish to marry both legally and culturally.

Illustrative scenarios – **domestic wedding revenue uplift** for Cambodia within two years following marriage equality:

+ USD 46–139 MILLION

This spending would flow to venues, caterers, musicians, florists, tailors, photographers, event organisers and local accommodation – creating jobs and strengthening community economies.

Couples interviewed for this research described the deep cultural importance of marriage. *“Marriage is vital not only for expressing our commitment to each other but also for showing respect for our culture and customs.”* — Chanty Choub, 50-year-old Cambodian lesbian woman in a same-sex relationship.



4. STRENGTHENING HOUSEHOLDS

Marriage provides a legal framework that protects families, enables joint financial planning, and reduces vulnerability to shocks. Exclusion from legal marriage leaves LGBT+ couples without basic legal protections – including those relating to joint property, inheritance, adoption, and social benefits.

“When they cannot receive a marriage certificate, they lose the benefit of legal protections.” — H.E. Nhean Sochetha, Director General of the General Department of Social Development, Ministry of Women’s Affairs.

Legal recognition enhances financial confidence, encourages joint investment, and strengthens social protection. Marriage equality can deliver tangible social and economic gains for Cambodian households by strengthening security, reducing poverty risks and enhancing long-term household resilience.

International evidence shows that legal marriage strengthens financial security and increases spending – known as the “marriage premium.”

Illustrative scenarios – **uplift in household spending** within two years following marriage equality in Cambodia:

+ USD 0.3–4.5 MILLION





5. ADVANCING HEALTH, PRODUCTIVITY & BUSINESS PERFORMANCE

"Inclusion is likely to lead to increases in productivity of existing workers, greater investment in human capital, and better health." — M.V. Lee Badgett, international economist.

Exclusion imposes measurable economic costs. Marriage equality would reduce minority stress, increase psychological safety, improve worker wellbeing, and enhance business performance. These effects are well-documented globally and are strongly reflected in interviews with Cambodian employers and policymakers.

Exclusion and discrimination harm mental health, education outcomes, and workforce participation. Cambodian research shows that LGBT+ people currently experience significant mental health challenges – in large part due to lived experiences of discrimination and stigma based on their sexual orientation and gender identity. ***"Marriage equality would help people feel more free, more confident... it would create a sense of acceptance, of completion."*** — Cambodian clinical psychologist.

Using internationally recognised methodologies applied to Cambodia:

Illustrative scenarios – annual productivity loss due to depression linked to LGBT+ exclusion:

USD 8-24 MILLION

Illustrative scenarios – annual productivity loss due to workplace discrimination:

USD 155 MILLION

Marriage equality would reinforce social inclusion by affirming LGBT+ families as equal under the law. It has the potential to improve mental health, strengthen household stability, and remove a significant source of psychological stress – enabling LGBT+ people to contribute more fully to Cambodia's social and economic life.

For the wider economy, marriage equality also enhances competitiveness and innovation. As Dr Ben Li, the Founder and Chairman of Urban Village and Factory Phnom Penh, which has hosted and supported Pride events in Phnom Penh, highlighted, LGBT+ people are active contributors in emerging sectors, creative industries and start-up ecosystems: ***"Accepting the LGBT+ community can bring more creativity, innovation, and it helps Cambodia's reputation."***

There is strong global evidence that LGBT+ inclusive companies outperform their peers. Studies summarised by Open for Business show that firms with inclusive policies achieve higher profitability, productivity and innovation, as well as improved talent attraction and lower staff turnover. When companies operate in inclusive environments – including in countries that have recognised legal marriage equality – they are better positioned to realise these advantages.

"Most definitely a business benefits when the weight is lifted off – the ideas, the contribution is better and bigger." — Puthika Cheab, Director, Siem Reap House.

By embracing inclusion, Cambodia can unlock the potential of all its people – and move confidently toward a more equitable and prosperous future.

THE BENEFITS - IN NUMBERS

The total estimated possible economic gains within two years of recognising marriage for Cambodia (indicative) would be **USD 83-334**

MILLION, focusing on additional spending in tourism, on weddings, and household consumption.*

*This excludes separate annual estimates for productivity losses due to depression and discrimination.



Please find more details in the **full** research briefing by RoCK and Future Forum, *Unlocking Potential – The Economic Benefits of Legal Marriage Equality for Cambodia* (2026).



Future Forum (FF) is an independent think tank that focuses on nurturing new thinkers and thinking for Cambodia. www.futureforum.asia



Rainbow Community Kampuchea Organisation (RoCK) is a Cambodian non-government organisation dedicated to supporting LGBT+ equal rights in Cambodia. Together with some civil society partners, RoCK has led the **"I Accept" campaign** to progress the recognition of legal marriage equality in Cambodia. www.rockcambodia.org

