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UNLOCKING POTENTIAL

**The Economic Benefits of
Legal Marriage Equality
for Cambodia**

February 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

First published in 2026 by:

Future Forum
Legacy Building
9th floor
29 Mao Tse Tong Blvd
Tuol Tumpung II
Chamkar Mon
Phnom Penh
Cambodia

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Cover image: Illustration by Jessie Suong

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GLOSSARY

This glossary explains key legal, economic, and policy terms used in this briefing. Definitions are provided for clarity and are adapted to the Cambodian context where relevant.

ADB	Asian Development Bank.
Brain drain	The loss of skilled, educated, or highly trained people from a country or sector when they migrate elsewhere for better opportunities, safety, or living conditions. It can weaken human capital and slow long-term economic development.
Cambodia's Vision 2030	Cambodia's vision to become an upper middle income country by 2030, through resilient, inclusive and sustainable growth.
Cambodia's Vision 2050	Cambodia's long-term development goal to achieve high-income country status by 2050.
Civil Code (Cambodia)	The body of Cambodian law governing private relations, including marriage and family.
DALY	Disability-Adjusted Life Year – a measure of overall disease burden, representing the total number of years lost due to ill-health, disability, or early death (World Health Organization).
Destination Wedding Tourism	A form of tourism in which couples travel to a location away from their usual place of residence to get married, often bringing guests who also spend on travel, accommodation, food, and related services.
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment – investment by a firm or individual in one country into business interests located in another.
GDP	Gross Domestic Product – the total monetary value of goods and services produced within a country over a specific period.
GDP per capita (as used in modelling)	Gross Domestic Product divided by the total population, used in this briefing as a proxy for average annual economic output or income per person. It provides an approximate measure of the value of one year of productive activity by an individual in the economy.

Human capital	The economic value of a person's skills, knowledge, experience, and health, contributing to productivity and economic growth.
IGLTA	International Gay and Lesbian Travel Association.
ILO	International Labour Organization.
Inclusive growth	Economic growth that is broadly shared across society and provides opportunities for all, particularly marginalised or excluded groups.
LGBT+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender, with the plus sign ("+") encompassing a broader range of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities.
Marriage equality	The full legal recognition of marriage between same-sex couples on the same terms as different-sex couples.
Marriage premium	The economic advantage associated with legal marriage, including higher household income, financial security, and productivity.
Minority stress	A conceptual framework describing the negative health effects that result from the social stigma, prejudice, and discrimination faced by minority groups, including LGBT+ people.
MSME	Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises – businesses that play a key role in Cambodia's economy, accounting for the majority of jobs and economic activity.
OFB	Open for Business – a coalition of global companies making the business and economic case for LGBT+ inclusion.
Pentagonal Strategy – Phase I (2023–2028)	The first implementation phase of Cambodia's five-pillar national development plan, focusing on growth, employment, equity, efficiency, and sustainability.
RGC	The Royal Government of Cambodia.

RoCK	Rainbow Community Kampuchea Organisation - a Cambodian non-governmental organisation dedicated to supporting LGBT+ rights.
Same-sex couple	In the current Cambodian legal context, the term “same-sex couples” is used for analytical purposes to refer to couples whose official identity documents list both partners with the same sex or gender marker, regardless of their lived gender identity. This includes couples where both partners identify as men (and are legally registered as “man”) or as women (and are legally registered as “woman”). Because transgender people in Cambodia cannot yet obtain legal recognition of their gender identity, the term also captures couples where, for example, one partner identifies as a woman and the other as a man, but both are legally recorded as “woman.” This language reflects current legal and administrative realities and does not seek to define or limit people’s identities, which may differ from how they are recorded in official documents.
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals – the UN’s 17 global goals to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure prosperity for all by 2030.
SOGI	Sexual orientation and gender identity – A term used to describe a person’s pattern of emotional, romantic, or sexual attraction (sexual orientation) and their deeply felt sense of gender (gender identity).
Talent retention	The ability of a country or economy to keep skilled and qualified workers, reducing outward migration and sustaining human capital for long-term growth.
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme – the UN’s global development network, supporting countries in achieving the SDGs.
UPR	Universal Periodic Review – a United Nations process reviewing each member state’s human rights record, under the Human Rights Council.
UPR Recommendation	A proposal made by UN Member States during the UPR process, which countries may accept and commit to implement.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



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

Open for Business (2018).

“ 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 (2025).

PURPOSE & APPROACH

This briefing sets out the economic benefits that legal recognition of marriage equality could bring to Cambodia. While equality and human rights arguments are well established, this analysis shows that marriage equality can also generate broad and inclusive economic gains — boosting tourism, attracting investment and talent, expanding industries, strengthening households, and improving health, productivity, and business performance.

The analysis draws on international and regional evidence, Cambodia-specific data, stakeholder interviews, and indicative scenario modelling to illustrate the potential scale and nature of these benefits. The figures presented are illustrative and denote the possible magnitude and direction of economic impact.

WHY NOW

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.

Marriage equality is a long-standing priority of Cambodia's LGBT+ communities. Since 2018, it has been the subject of ongoing dialogue between civil society actors and government stakeholders, and aligns with the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) recommendations accepted by Cambodia, including seven recommendations specific to marriage equality in 2024.

The Cambodian public supports marriage equality, and government commitments indicate openness to reform. Recognising marriage equality would complement national goals for inclusive and sustainable growth. It would align with *Cambodia's Pentagonal Strategy – Phase I (2023–2028)* — focused on growth, employment, equity, efficiency, and sustainability — and it would send a clear signal that Cambodia is open, modern, and competitive, strengthening the national brand while advancing dignity and opportunity for all Cambodians.

Global evidence shows that marriage equality generates direct spending (weddings, travel) and indirect gains as a key signal of inclusion (investment, talent, productivity, and health). By enabling all families to participate fully and equally, marriage equality contributes to stronger households, a healthier workforce, and a more competitive economy.



1. BOOSTING TOURISM

Tourism is one of Cambodia's most important economic sectors. Marriage equality would strengthen the country's image as an open and welcoming destination, attract new visitor segments — including high-value travellers — and create a new niche in LGBT+ destination weddings.

Prospective impacts in our illustrative scenarios for Cambodia within two years of marriage equality:

Additional international visitors:

+ 67,000–335,000

Additional tourism revenue:

+ USD 36–180 MILLION

Additional jobs:

+ 5,000–26,000

LGBT+ wedding tourism:

+ USD 0.7–10.8 MILLION

2. ATTRACTING INVESTMENT & TALENT

Marriage equality sends a clear signal of inclusion to global markets. Evidence from Deloitte and Open for Business shows that countries with inclusive policies attract more responsible FDI and are better able to retain and attract highly skilled talent.

Marriage equality could strengthen Cambodia's ability to attract digital, creative, and entrepreneurial talent, mitigate "brain drain", and support national policies focused on human capital and innovation.



3. GROWING THE WEDDING INDUSTRY

Cambodia's wedding sector is culturally important, economically vibrant, and dominated by Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs). Legal marriage equality would unlock significant latent demand among same-sex couples who currently celebrate only symbolically.

Illustrative additional domestic wedding spending within two years of marriage equality: **+ USD 46–139 MILLION**

This spending would flow into local services — venues, catering, decoration, photography, attire, musicians, hotels — and support thousands of jobs across both urban and rural areas.



4. STRENGTHENING HOUSEHOLDS

Marriage reduces vulnerability and improves long-term household resilience. Exclusion from legal marriage leaves LGBT+ couples without protection for property, inheritance, adoption, and family security. Legal recognition enhances financial confidence, encourages joint investment, and strengthens social protection — enhancing resilience and reducing poverty risks.

Illustrative uplift in household consumption within two years of marriage equality:

+ USD 0.3–4.5 MILLION based on modest increases in spending linked to the "marriage premium."



5. ADVANCING HEALTH, PRODUCTIVITY & BUSINESS PERFORMANCE

Exclusion and discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity harm mental health, education outcomes, and workforce participation.

Estimated annual productivity loss from depression linked to exclusion:

USD 8.2–23.6 MILLION

Estimated annual productivity loss from workplace exclusion: **USD 155 MILLION** based on wage-gap effects identified in Southeast Asia.

Marriage equality would reduce minority stress, increase psychological safety, improve worker wellbeing, and enable LGBT+ people to contribute more fully to Cambodia's social and economic life. These effects are well-documented globally and are strongly reflected in interviews with Cambodian employers and policymakers.

Marriage equality would also enhance business performance. 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.

THE POSSIBLE BENEFITS IN NUMBERS

The total possible economic gains within two years for Cambodia from the introduction of legal marriage equality (indicative): **USD 83–334 MILLION**, focusing on additional spending in tourism, weddings, and household consumption. This excludes separate annual estimates for health-related productivity losses and workplace discrimination to avoid double-counting.

INTRODUCTION & CONTEXT



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

Open for Business (2018).¹

Experience from more than 35 countries² that have recognised marriage equality — the full legal recognition of marriage between same-sex couples on the same terms as different-sex couples — shows it strengthens families, reduces discrimination against LGBT+ people, and contributes to more inclusive and harmonious societies.³

Around the world, studies also show that marriage equality delivers benefits for economies. It brings direct economic gains, while also serving as a “key signaller of LGBT+ inclusion”⁴ that generates other economic benefits. Ken Janssens, CEO of Open for Business, explains: “Open for Business has been able to evidence over ten years the economic and business benefits of LGBT+ inclusion,” adding that “marriage equality is a key signal of broader LGBT+ inclusion.”⁵

Evidence globally shows how marriage equality can stimulate spending, job creation, and GDP growth. In the U.S., legal recognition generated billions of dollars in wedding-related spending and thousands of new jobs.⁶ In Australia, research showed that legal recognition of same-sex marriage could generate substantial economic gains.⁷ In Taiwan, multinational companies highlighted the economic benefits of marriage equality — including improved workplace wellbeing, higher productivity and labour mobility — noting that inclusion makes both businesses and society stronger.⁸

Cambodia stands at a promising juncture. The government has supported LGBT+ equality and non-discrimination, and shown openness to recognising marriage equality,⁹ while pursuing an ambitious development path aimed at sustained and inclusive economic growth.¹⁰

This research briefing explores how these commitments are complementary, setting out the economic case for marriage equality in Cambodia, from boosting tourism and attracting talent, to strengthening households, health, and productivity.

Cambodia stands at a pivotal moment to position itself as a regional leader not only in economic growth and innovation, but also in inclusion and equality.

AN INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

“ Cambodian people live in dignity and happiness, and enjoy equal access, equal rights, and equal opportunities. ”

One of five national characteristics envisaged in the Cambodian government’s *Pentagonal Strategy – Phase I* (2023–2028).¹¹

Cambodia’s development trajectory is guided by the *Pentagonal Strategy – Phase I* (2023–2028), which sets growth, employment, equity, efficiency, and sustainability as national priorities¹² to achieve upper middle-income status by 2030 and high-income status by 2050.¹³ The Strategy envisions a vibrant society with a resilient, high-income economy; knowledgeable and skilled human resources;

and lives of dignity and happiness for all Cambodians, marked by equal access, rights, and opportunities. It also emphasises harmony and inclusivity in both the physical and natural environment, alongside economic diversification, job creation, improved productivity, trade and investment, poverty reduction, and gender equality.¹⁴

H.E. Keo Remy, Senior Minister and President of the Cambodian Human Rights Committee, describes this inclusive development approach: “Our [the Royal Government of Cambodia’s] policy is to not leave anyone behind. For society as a whole, to develop our nation, we need everyone to participate,” adding: “The LGBT+ community is a human resource who can contribute to the country.”¹⁵

Delivering on this inclusive vision requires ensuring that all Cambodians can contribute fully to the nation’s progress. As this briefing will show, advancing LGBT+ inclusion through recognising marriage equality would directly support these national objectives. By diversifying and growing Cambodia’s tourism sector, attracting investment and talent, expanding the domestic wedding industry, and strengthening households, health, and productivity, such progress would reinforce the *Pentagonal Strategy*’s focus on inclusive and sustainable growth, and help realise its vision of a prosperous and equitable society where all people live with dignity and opportunity.

LGBT+ INCLUSION IN CAMBODIA

“Without exception, the [Cambodian] State agents with whom the mandate holder interacted acknowledged at the outset that diversity in sexual orientation and gender identity was a trait inherent to humankind, and that all Cambodian citizens, including members of the LGBT community, were valued members of society who deserved freedom and equality.”

Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity (2024).¹⁶

Cambodians of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities use a range of Khmer terms to describe themselves — often transcending the more rigid categories of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender. The “+” in the English acronym LGBT+ is therefore used in the Cambodian context to acknowledge and encompass this broader diversity.¹⁷ In Khmer, the phrase “people who love someone of the same-sex” (អ្នកស្រឡាត្រំតេទដូចគ្នា) is commonly used as a respectful term for the LGBT+ community.

In this briefing, we use the term “same-sex couples” to refer to couples composed of two people of the same sex/gender, used inclusively to describe couples who would be eligible to marry under marriage equality,¹⁸ and the acronym LGBT+ — now more commonly used in Cambodia — to refer broadly to lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people, as well as other people with diverse sexual orientations, gender identities, and expressions.

Cambodia has never criminalised same-sex relations, and its Constitution guarantees equality before the law and recognises international human rights norms.¹⁹ There has

been progress in social acceptance and visibility of LGBT+ people, including government engagement through participation in dialogues with LGBT+ communities — particularly around International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia (IDAHOBIT) and Pride — along with the inclusion of LGBT+ people in some national policies, references to LGBT+ identities in education curricula, and official statements condemning discrimination.²⁰

However, there are no explicit legal protections against discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity (SOGI), leaving LGBT+ people without essential legal protections in many situations. In practice, LGBT+ Cambodians can experience family rejection, school bullying, employment discrimination, and barriers to health care, particularly for trans people.²¹ LGBT+ people have faced “practices of conversion”,²² and some have been forced by their families into different-sex marriages.²³ It is not yet possible for transgender and gender-diverse individuals in Cambodia to obtain legal recognition of their self-defined gender identity on official documents, which further exacerbates the social exclusion and discrimination they face.²⁴

SUPPORT FOR MARRIAGE EQUALITY

“ As long as I am President of the Cambodian Human Rights Committee, I will continue our mission to support LGBT+ communities. ”

H.E. Keo Remy, Senior Minister and President of the Cambodian Human Rights Committee (2025).²⁵

Marriage equality refers to the full legal recognition of marriage between two people regardless of sex, sexual orientation, or gender identity, with the same rights and responsibilities as different-sex couples. As ILGA World

explains, it simply means that “*national marriage legislation also includes same-sex couples.*”²⁶

MARRIAGE IN CAMBODIAN LAW

There are currently no explicit provisions in Cambodian law allowing legal marriage equality. While some local authorities have permitted same-sex couples to hold unofficial traditional wedding ceremonies, same-sex couples cannot register a marriage certificate or obtain legal recognition of their relationship.

The Constitution defines marriage as between “*one husband and one wife,*”²⁷ the Civil Code refers to “*husband and wife*” and “*man and woman*”,²⁸ and the 2023 Law on Civil Registration, Statistics and Identification refers to “*man and woman*.²⁹ Although the repeal of earlier prohibitions through the 2007 Civil Code and 2011 Implementation Law removed an explicit legal ban on same-sex marriage,³⁰ there remain no provisions enabling it. As a result, same-sex couples cannot be recognised as legal spouses in the Family Book or Resident Book.

Lay Pisey, a Cambodian lawyer and expert on marriage and the law, explains that one possible path toward the recognition of legal marriage equality would be the review and revision of certain articles concerning marriage in the Civil Code — including those that currently include gender-specific terms.³¹

The inability to legally marry bars same-sex couples from numerous rights and protections associated with marriage, including joint property ownership, adoption, child custody, inheritance, taxation, and protection from domestic violence.³² Moreover, as Cambodian civil society groups working on LGBT+ equality and gender equality have observed: *“the institution of marriage is exceptionally highly valued in Cambodia, and excluding LGBT and other gender-diverse people from the institution of marriage excludes them from one of the foundations of Cambodian society.”*³³

This point is worth emphasising: in interviews with Cambodian stakeholders for this briefing, the importance of marriage in Cambodian society was highlighted repeatedly. A Cambodian clinical psychologist, who asked not to be named, explained that marriage carries significant social pressure and that people can feel shame for not marrying. As they put it: *“Marriage equality would help people feel more free, more confident ... [it] would help create a sense of acceptance and completion.”*³⁴ Indeed, LGBT+ communities in Cambodia have identified marriage equality as their top priority, viewing it as the clearest and most powerful signal of genuine inclusion.³⁵ Based on this priority defined by Cambodian LGBT+ communities, RoCK, together with some civil society partners, has led the “I Accept” marriage equality campaign since 2021 to progress the recognition of legal marriage equality in Cambodia.

Cambodia’s leaders have expressed support for LGBT+ equality. In 2004, His Majesty Preah Bat Samdech Preah Norodom Sihanouk, Preahmahaviraksat, King-Father of the Cambodian National Independence, Territorial Integrity and Unity, stated: *“Cambodia should allow ‘marriage between man and man... or between woman and woman.”*³⁶ On International Human Rights Day 2012, Samdech Akka Moha Sena Padei Techo Hun Sen, former

Prime Minister and current President of the Senate of the Kingdom of Cambodia, called on the Cambodian public not to discriminate against LGBT+ people, affirming that *“they are naturally born this way.”*³⁷

More recently, senior government officials have made further public statements encouraging national and local authorities, families, the media, and the wider public not to discriminate against LGBT+ people. This includes statements by H.E. Keo Remy, Senior Minister and President of the Cambodian Human Rights Committee, on the occasions of IDAHOBIT and International Human Rights Day in 2021, and subsequent commemorations in 2022 and 2023.³⁸

The Cambodian government supported all recommendations on LGBT+ equality at Cambodia’s Universal Periodic Review (UPR) 4th cycle in 2024, including seven recommendations specifically to recognise legal marriage equality for same-sex couples,³⁹ as it had done previously in 2019.⁴⁰

Public opinion also shows clear support. Acceptance of LGBT+ people has grown among parents and families,⁴¹ communities, local authorities,⁴² civil servants, and other sectors of Cambodian society, including support for legal marriage equality as a key protection for LGBT+ families.

A 2022 Pew Research Center poll⁴³ found that 57% of Cambodians support same-sex marriage. Across Asia, younger adults are more likely than older adults to support same-sex marriage.

In interviews with Cambodian stakeholders for this briefing, many felt that society is ready to support marriage equality, with broad acceptance among the younger generation.

Legal recognition could itself play a powerful role in shaping public attitudes, fostering acceptance, and reducing discrimination.

Experience from those countries that have introduced marriage equality shows that public acceptance tends to increase — often rapidly — after implementation, even where initial support was modest.⁴⁴

INTERVIEW: WHY MARRIAGE MATTERS

“ Marriage is vital not only for expressing our commitment to each other but also for showing respect for our culture and customs. ”

Chanty Choub (2025)⁴⁵

In an interview for this research briefing, we spoke with Chanty Choub, a 50-year-old lesbian woman in a same-sex relationship. She lives in Cambodia’s capital Phnom Penh and works for a non-governmental organisation. She described marrying her wife, a teacher in Steung Treng province, in May 2023.

By marriage, she means they held a traditional ceremony, but were not able to marry legally. She explained the importance of marriage to her:

“Marriage is vital not only for expressing our commitment to each other but also for showing respect for our culture and customs. It symbolises our sacrifices, honesty, and willingness to build a life together. Additionally, marriage helps us gain acceptance for our relationship, fosters a happy family, and affirms that we can be valuable members of society contributing to its development.”

They met through friends while Chanty was on a mission in Steung Treng. Initially,

With public and government support, Cambodia stands well placed to consider the broader benefits of marriage equality, not only for equality and inclusion, but also for the economy.

her family — particularly her mother and some siblings — did not support the relationship. However, as the couple demonstrated their love for each other and their ability to care for one another and their families, they began to accept them. Her children (from a previous relationship), niece, sister, and colleagues supported her decision, but some members of her wife’s family continued to oppose the marriage and did not want the ceremony held at home. The couple therefore decided to hold the ceremony at an event venue in Steung Treng.

Chanty explained why she wants her marriage to be legally recognised: *“A marriage certificate also provides essential protections for us, such as safeguarding joint property in the event of one party’s passing. It offers legal recognition, allowing us to adopt child[ren] legally, or able to put our names on our child, obtain family and residency documents similar to those available to heterosexual couples. This recognition promotes equality under the same legal system. When both the government and citizens acknowledge and protect LGBT+ rights through the law, it creates a smoother and more equitable experience for everyone.”*



CHAPTER 1

BOOSTING TOURISM

“[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.”

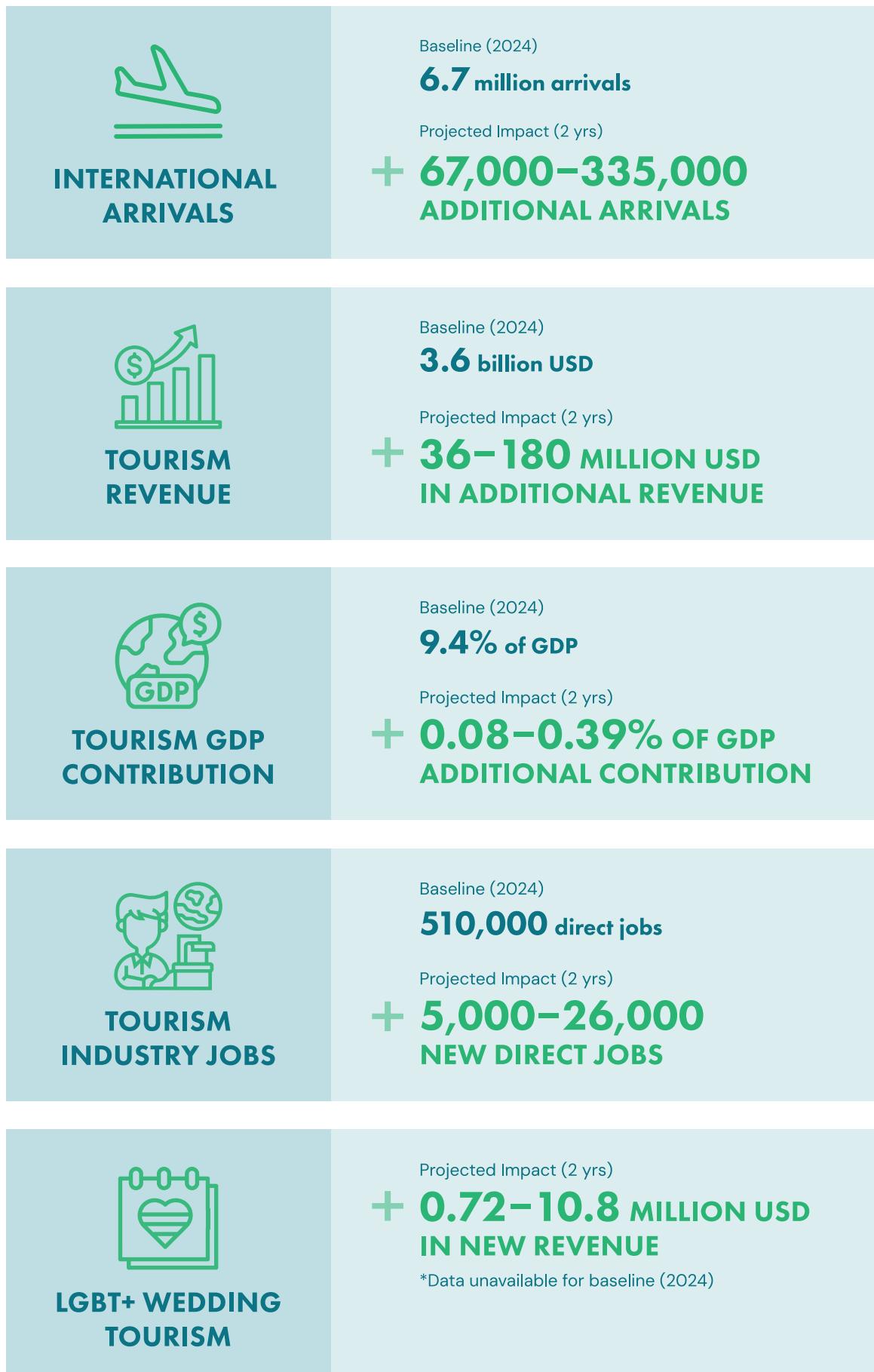
Amine Gabbouj, Program Manager,
IGLTA Foundation (2025).⁴⁶

Tourism is one of the cornerstones of Cambodia’s economy, sustaining livelihoods, generating revenue, and showcasing the country’s rich cultural heritage to the world.

Marriage equality could deliver a significant uplift, enhancing Cambodia’s reputation as an inclusive destination and attracting new

visitor segments, with increased arrivals, higher revenue, and the associated boost to jobs. At the same time, Cambodia could develop a new niche market as a destination for LGBT+ weddings.

Figure 1: Illustrative Scenarios - Indicative Impact on Tourism Within Two Years Of Marriage Equality



IMPORTANCE OF TOURISM TO CAMBODIA'S ECONOMY

“ We are fostering new tourism products with high added value...and strengthening the implementation of policies and master plans for sustainable and responsible sector development. ”

Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Manet,
World Tourism Day (2025).⁴⁷

Tourism has long been recognised as a driver of Cambodia's development. The sector is deeply woven into the national economy, contributing substantially to GDP and employment.⁴⁸

Sou Kim Prithea, Director of the Legal Department of the Ministry of Tourism, explains: *“Tourism is a very important sector for the economic development of Cambodia. The tourism sector contributed approximately 9.4% GDP. Tourism creates employment opportunities, both in direct jobs (510,000 jobs), and indirect employment.”*⁴⁹

International tourist arrivals increased from 2.5 million in 2010 to 6.6 million in 2019, with international tourism receipts accounting for an average of 26% of exports during this period. Tourism contributed about 12% to GDP directly, and significantly more indirectly.⁵⁰ Although the COVID-19 pandemic caused a sharp collapse in arrivals, the sector has rebounded strongly, showing the sector's resilience and the government's focus on tourism as a priority industry within the *Pentagonal Strategy – Phase I (2023–2028)*.⁵¹

According to Cambodia's Ministry of Tourism, tourism returned to pre-pandemic levels in 2024, with 6.7 million international visitors that year,⁵² generating USD 3.6 billion in revenue, contributing 9.4% to GDP, and creating around 510,000 direct jobs.⁵³ Cambodia welcomed over 3.36 million international visitors in the

first half of 2025, a 6.2% increase compared to the same period in 2024.⁵⁴ These figures underline the central role of tourism in sustaining livelihoods, particularly in regions such as Siem Reap, Phnom Penh, and coastal provinces, where communities depend heavily on visitor spending.

The government's *Tourism Development Master Plan for Siem Reap 2021–2035* emphasises developing new tourism products and attracting international visitors through priority and targeted markets, while also seeking to capture more high-value individual, family, and group tourists.⁵⁵ There are also reports of a new *Sacred Tourism Policy 2025–2035*, aimed at diversifying Cambodia's tourism offer and attracting high-value visitors through spiritual and cultural experiences.⁵⁶ The recent opening of new international airports in Siem Reap⁵⁷ and Phnom Penh⁵⁸ further illustrates Cambodia's ambition to expand its tourism industry, with targets to accommodate 12 million passengers by 2040 at Siem Reap International Airport and 30 million by 2030 at Techo International Airport in Phnom Penh.

A recent report by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) notes that, with Cambodia expected to graduate from least-developed-country status this decade, the country must identify new drivers of growth through economic diversification.⁵⁹ This will require not only the development of new industries but also the diversification and upgrading of existing sectors, including the tourism industry.

Legalising marriage equality would align with these ambitions by strengthening Cambodia's tourism brand and signalling that the country is open, welcoming, and globally competitive. It would complement existing policy efforts to promote high-value and diversified tourism markets, including cultural, heritage, and wellness tourism.

INTERVIEW: MARRIAGE EQUALITY & TOURISM

“ Legal recognition of marriage equality has a powerful symbolic and practical impact on how destinations are perceived. ”

Amine Gabbouj, Program Manager, IGLTA Foundation (2025).⁶⁰

As part of this research, Amine Gabbouj of the IGLTA Foundation shared insights on how LGBT+ inclusion — and marriage equality in particular — influences tourism competitiveness and destination choice.

Founded in 1983, the International LGBTQ+ Travel Association (IGLTA) is the world's leading network of LGBTQ+ welcoming tourism businesses. Its foundation supports inclusive tourism globally through research, leadership, and education.

Gabbouj emphasised that international evidence and industry experience point in the same direction: *“From the IGLTA Foundation’s perspective, the evidence consistently shows a strong correlation between LGBTQ+ inclusion and tourism competitiveness.”*

He described marriage equality as a uniquely powerful signal to global tourism markets: *“Marriage equality is not only a human rights milestone; it also functions as a highly visible signal of safety, dignity, and long-term commitment to inclusion. Research and [IGLTA] member insights indicate that destinations 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.”*

For LGBT+ travellers, legal recognition plays a decisive role in narrowing destination choices.

Gabbouj explained that marriage equality often acts as a “baseline indicator” — a first filter travellers use when shortlisting destinations. The signalling effect also extends beyond LGBT+ travellers themselves: *“For allies — friends, families, and wedding guests — it reinforces the idea that a destination aligns with shared values of equality and fairness.”*

These perceptions translate into tangible market opportunities. Gabbouj pointed to sustained growth in LGBT+ destination weddings and related celebratory travel: *“We are seeing sustained growth in LGBTQ+ destination weddings and honeymoons, particularly in destinations that combine legal recognition with strong hospitality infrastructure.”*

Such travel typically involves extended stays and higher per-trip spending with ripple effects across accommodation, food and beverage, events, transport, and cultural tourism.

Looking ahead, Gabbouj highlights Cambodia’s opportunity to translate legal reform into economic gains: *“If Cambodia were to introduce marriage equality and pair it with a clear inclusive tourism strategy, it could position itself as a regional leader in inclusive travel in Southeast Asia.”*

He stressed that legal recognition is most effective when accompanied by practical measures, including inclusive tourism strategies, staff training, engagement with the private sector, and authentic messaging. Together, these steps help ensure that legal progress is reflected in visitor experience, market confidence, and sustained tourism growth.

INCREASED ARRIVALS

“ If Cambodia were to introduce marriage equality and pair it with a clear inclusive tourism strategy, it could position itself as a regional leader in inclusive travel in Southeast Asia. ”

Amine Gabbouj, Program Manager,
IGLTA Foundation (2025).⁶¹

There is growing international evidence that inclusive policies, including marriage equality, can increase tourist arrivals. Tourism businesses recognise the significant spending power of LGBT+ travellers, particularly same-sex couples.⁶²

The global LGBT+ tourism market is estimated at USD 357 billion in 2025 and is projected to almost double to USD 604 billion by 2032.⁶³ A recent report by travel technology company Expedia Group found that LGBT+ travellers' identities strongly shape their choices — from destinations and accommodation to activities and transport.⁶⁴ As Dirk De Graaff, the founder and owner of Rambutan Hotels and Resorts, an inclusive hotel group in Cambodia, explains: *“The LGBT+ travel market is a huge market. LGBT+ people travel more, spend more, and they come back.”*⁶⁵

In the Cambodian government, there is recognition that LGBT+ inclusion can strengthen Cambodia's reputation and national brand, helping grow the tourism sector. H.E. Nhean Sochetha, Director General of the General Department of Social Development at the Ministry of Women's Affairs, states: *“Inclusion of women and LGBT+ people can enhance Cambodia's national image, because they have the same rights and obligations as all citizens, and they are also a workforce that contributes to promoting national and economic growth, and helping boost the tourism sector.”*⁶⁶ H.E. Keo Remy describes the importance of inclusion for Cambodia's

reputation, and, in terms of tourism, explains: *“We can bring more tourists — not just LGBT tourists, but everyone feels safe.”*⁶⁷

Hotel owner Dirk De Graaff, who remembers the impact of marriage equality on the Netherlands — the first country to legalise same-sex marriage — agrees: *“It [marriage equality] would absolutely have a positive effect on tourism — it would really make an impact.”*⁶⁸ And not just for LGBT+ tourists: *“People can go anywhere. 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.”*⁶⁹

Research and industry insights support this. One study shows that 7 in 10 consumers would choose a destination, lodging, or transportation option that is more inclusive to all types of travelers, even if it is more expensive.⁷⁰ In information provided for this research, Amine Gabbouj, Program Manager at the IGLTA Foundation, explains that evidence from IGLTA members shows destinations with inclusive legal frameworks — particularly marriage equality — are more likely to attract LGBTQ+ travellers and their allies: *“Legal recognition of marriage equality has a powerful symbolic and practical impact on how destinations are perceived. For many LGBTQ+ travellers, it represents legal certainty, social acceptance, and reduced risk. It reassures couples that their relationships will be respected by institutions, service providers, and authorities. For allies — friends, families, and wedding guests — it reinforces the idea that a destination aligns with shared values of equality.”*⁷¹

ILLUSTRATIVE SCENARIO: POTENTIAL IMPACT ON TOURISM ARRIVALS

To illustrate the potential impact of marriage equality on tourism arrivals in Cambodia, we draw on a 2024 study by Agoda and Access Partnership, which examined the effect of introducing marriage equality on international arrivals in another Southeast Asian context.⁷² The analysis was informed by an assessment of economies that enacted marriage equality between 2000 and 2018 — largely in North America and Europe — and linked observed uplifts to both LGBT+ travellers and wider

segments of visitors who value inclusivity when choosing destinations.

Based on this study's projections of increased international arrivals within two years of legal recognition of marriage equality, we apply illustrative uplifts of 1%, 3%, and 5% to model the potential impact for Cambodia.⁷³

Using recent Ministry of Tourism data and the baseline of 6.7 million international arrivals in 2024,⁷⁴ the scenarios below illustrate potential increases — from a conservative 1% uplift, acknowledging that awareness and sector adaptation take time, to a more ambitious 5% within two years.

Figure 2: Illustrative Scenarios - Additional Tourist Arrivals Within Two Years Following Marriage Equality



Even under the conservative scenario, marriage equality could attract around 67,000 additional visitors within two years. Beyond the numbers, it would position Cambodia as a progressive and inclusive society, helping to shift perceptions and strengthen long-term competitiveness in global tourism markets.

INCREASED TOURISM REVENUE

“ Marriage equality is a really important signal. It is a clear sign for all travellers that [this is] an inclusive society. ”

Ken Janssens, CEO, Open for Business (2025).⁷⁵

The impact of marriage equality on tourism is measured not only in arrivals but also in spending.

In Taiwan, marriage equality has helped expand the LGBT+ market and strengthen its tourism brand: the 2019 Taipei Pride events following legal recognition of same-sex marriage drew over 200,000 participants, and the city has promoted LGBT+ tourism through initiatives such as "#ColorTaipei," the Rainbow Bus Tour, and a Rainbow Market.⁷⁶

ILLUSTRATIVE SCENARIO: POTENTIAL IMPACT ON TOURISM REVENUE

In 2024, international visitors to Cambodia spent approximately USD 3.6 billion.⁷⁷ With 6.7 million visitors,⁷⁸ this equates to an average spend of USD 537 per visitor.

Using this average, the potential increases in arrivals under the illustrative additional visitor scenarios above translate into substantial potential revenue gains over two years. A conservative 1% uplift (around 67,000 additional visitors) would generate roughly

USD 36 million in additional spending, while a moderate 3% increase (201,000 visitors) would result in around USD 108 million.

Under the ambitious 5% scenario (335,000 visitors), additional tourism revenue could reach approximately USD 180 million over two years following marriage equality.

These figures are indicative, but they highlight how even modest increases in visitor numbers following marriage equality could yield significant economic benefits through higher tourism spending.

Figure 3: Illustrative Scenarios - Additional Tourist Revenue Within Two Years Following Marriage Equality

CONSERVATIVE SCENARIO	MODERATE SCENARIO	AMBITIOUS SCENARIO
67,000 ADDITIONAL ARRIVALS	201,000 ADDITIONAL ARRIVALS	335,000 ADDITIONAL ARRIVALS
537 USD AVERAGE SPEND PER VISITOR	537 USD AVERAGE SPEND PER VISITOR	537 USD AVERAGE SPEND PER VISITOR
+ USD 36 MILLION ADDITIONAL REVENUE	+ USD 108 MILLION ADDITIONAL REVENUE	+ USD 180 MILLION ADDITIONAL REVENUE

These gains translate into a meaningful contribution to GDP. With the World Bank measuring Cambodia's GDP at USD 46.35 billion in 2024,⁷⁹ the projected increases equate to between 0.08% and 0.39% of GDP over two years.

Beyond direct revenue, a reputation for inclusivity strengthens Cambodia's country brand, an essential asset for a nation competing for high-value tourism. Increased spending would also flow into related sectors such as transport, retail, food and beverage, and creative industries, generating a broader

economic stimulus and potentially attracting more international conferences, events, and cultural exchanges.

JOB CREATION

“ The tourism sector has been identified as contributing to socio-economic development by creating and increasing employment and employment opportunities and income. ”

H.E. Huot Hak, Minister of Tourism for Cambodia (2025).⁸⁰

Tourism is one of Cambodia’s most labour-intensive industries, with strong linkages to rural communities and small enterprises. In 2024, around 510,000 people

were employed directly in tourism,⁸¹ with many more supported indirectly through supply chains. The tourism industry is the second largest employer of women in Cambodia, who make up 60% of the tourism workforce.⁸²

H.E. Katta Orn, Secretary of State and Spokesperson, Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training, explains: “*The government considers tourism as very important for employment and job creation in Cambodia,*” both in direct jobs and indirect employment through supply chains.⁸³

ILLUSTRATIVE SCENARIO: POTENTIAL IMPACT ON TOURISM JOBS

Increased tourist spending would translate directly into job creation across Cambodia’s tourism and hospitality sectors. Using the baseline 2024 data, when Cambodia’s tourism sector generated approximately USD 3.6 billion in revenue and supported about 510,000 direct jobs,⁸⁴ we can derive an estimate of roughly 142 direct tourism jobs per USD 1 million in revenue.

Applying this ratio, additional tourism spending resulting from marriage equality could support significant job growth. Under the conservative 1% uplift in international arrivals (around USD 36 million in additional spending), this would equate to roughly 5,000 new direct tourism jobs. A moderate 3% increase (around USD 108 million) could create approximately 15,000 jobs, while the ambitious 5% scenario (around USD 180 million) could generate up to 26,000 direct jobs within two years following marriage equality.

Figure 4: Illustrative Scenarios - Additional Jobs Created Within Two Years Following Marriage Equality

CONSERVATIVE SCENARIO	MODERATE SCENARIO	AMBITIOUS SCENARIO
USD 36 MILLION ADDITIONAL REVENUE	USD 108 MILLION ADDITIONAL REVENUE	USD 180 MILLION ADDITIONAL REVENUE
142 JOBS PER USD 1 MILLION	142 JOBS PER USD 1 MILLION	142 JOBS PER USD 1 MILLION
+ 5,112 ADDITIONAL JOBS	+ 15,336 ADDITIONAL JOBS	+ 25,560 ADDITIONAL JOBS

These figures highlight the employment potential of marriage equality, with thousands of new jobs likely to be created across hospitality, transport, event management and related services. These illustrative scenarios reflect only direct employment effects within tourism and hospitality, while indirect and induced impacts through supply chains and local spending would be considerably higher, further amplifying the overall benefits for Cambodia's economy.

INTERVIEW: READY TO WELCOME SAME-SEX COUPLES

“People can go anywhere. 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 and Resorts (2025).⁸⁵

We spoke with Dirk De Graaff, founder and owner of Rambutan Hotels and Resorts, an inclusive hotel group in Cambodia. Originally from the Netherlands — which in 2001 became the first country to legally recognise marriage equality — De Graaff explained the significant impact that reform had on tourism: “It had an enormous impact, making the Netherlands

the LGBT+ destination.” He added: “*It [marriage equality] has an enormous effect on reputation — marriage equality is a very clear label of a safe and inclusive environment.*”

Rambutan highlights LGBT+ inclusion across its advertising and marketing, ensuring coverage in LGBT+ friendly magazines, websites, and blogs. De Graaff noted the strength of the market: “*The LGBT+ travel market is a huge market. LGBT+ people travel more, spend more, and they come back.*” He also emphasised the broader appeal for Cambodia: “*People can go anywhere. 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.*”

A NEW NICHE MARKET: LGBT+ DESTINATION WEDDINGS

“ [The legalisation of same-sex marriages in Illinois, U.S.] created a boom where [same-sex couples] were getting married here and then taking honeymoons. ”

Christie Kruchten, manager of Travel Leaders, a global travel agency network (2015).⁸⁶

Perhaps one of the most distinctive tourism opportunities linked to marriage equality is the development of an LGBT+ destination wedding market. This segment has proven lucrative in countries that have legalised marriage equality. In the U.S., research by the Williams Institute at UCLA School of Law estimates that weddings of same-sex couples and their out-of-state guests have boosted state and local economies by around USD 5.9 billion since nationwide marriage equality in 2015, supporting an estimated 41,300 jobs for one year.⁸⁷

Amine Gabbouj, at the IGLTA Foundation, describes the LGBT+ destination wedding and honeymoon market: “*We are seeing sustained growth in LGBTQ+ destination weddings and honeymoons, particularly in destinations that combine legal recognition with strong hospitality infrastructure. Marriage equality has enabled destinations to formally market wedding packages, work with international planners, and partner with airlines, hotels, and event providers in a credible way. This segment generates extended stays and ripple effects across accommodation, food and beverage, events, transportation, and cultural tourism.*”

Cambodia’s unique cultural heritage, world-class temples, and growing hospitality infrastructure provide strong foundations for developing a share of this market. Developing

this niche segment would also enhance Cambodia’s image as a diverse and inclusive destination in Southeast Asia, helping to attract new markets and — as one of the few countries in the region recognising marriage equality — differentiate the country in an increasingly competitive regional tourism landscape.

Tourism is vital to Cambodia’s economy, and 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. Just as importantly, it would enhance Cambodia’s international image, projecting the country as a society that values dignity, inclusion, and opportunity for all.

ILLUSTRATIVE SCENARIO: LGBT+ WEDDING TOURISM

For illustrative purposes only, let us assume that between 0.1% and 0.3% of the additional international visitors projected under the illustrative tourism scenarios would be same-sex couples choosing to hold weddings in Cambodia. This allows us to outline the potential scale of LGBT+ wedding tourism following marriage equality.

Using the two-year visitor increases outlined above — 67,000 under the conservative scenario, 201,000 under the moderate scenario, and 335,000 under the ambitious scenario — this proportion would translate into approximately 67 to 201, 201 to 603, and 335 to 1,005 ceremonies respectively over a two-year period.

Assuming an average spend of USD 10,800 per wedding,⁸⁸ these ceremonies could generate between USD 0.72 million and USD 10.85 million in additional tourism revenue over two years. This spending would support a wide range of local services, including hotels, restaurants, event organisers, photographers, artisans, and cultural performers.

Additionally, each wedding guest contributes to the wider tourism economy. Using Cambodia's average spend of USD 537 per visitor calculated earlier, a 50-guest wedding could generate a further USD 26,850 in tourism revenue, in addition to the ceremony and reception spending.

Figure 5: Illustrative Scenarios - Potential LGBT+ Wedding Tourism Within Two Years Following Marriage Equality

SCENARIO	ADDITIONAL INTERNATIONAL VISITORS (2 YRS)	% OF VISITORS HOLDING SAME-SEX WEDDINGS	ESTIMATED WEDDINGS (2 YRS)	AVERAGE SPEND PER WEDDING (USD)	ADDITIONAL REVENUE (USD MILLIONS)
Conservative	67,000	0.1%	67	10,800	+ 0.7
		0.3%	201	10,800	+ 2.2
Moderate	201,000	0.1%	201	10,800	+ 2.2
		0.3%	603	10,800	+ 6.5
Ambitious	335,000	0.1%	335	10,800	+ 3.6
		0.3%	1,005	10,800	+ 10.8



CHAPTER 2

ATTRACTING INVESTMENT & TALENT

“LGBT+ inclusion is associated with higher levels of direct investment.”

Open for Business (2018).⁸⁹

As well as boosting tourism, marriage equality has the potential to enhance Cambodia’s attractiveness to global investors. By projecting the country as a society that values dignity, fairness, and opportunity for all, legal equality would signal openness and modernisation to the international business community. As Jo Scheuer, the United Nations

Resident Coordinator in Cambodia, explains: *“Marriage equality projects a society that is open, welcoming, and safer.”*⁹⁰

Evidence from global studies shows that LGBT+ inclusion helps countries attract responsible foreign direct investment (FDI).⁹¹ Marriage equality — both directly and as a

signal of inclusion — can also strengthen a country's ability to retain and attract highly skilled talent.⁹²

ATTRACTING INVESTMENT

“ LGBT+ inclusion can boost economic growth, improving a country’s ability to connect to global markets and attract investment. ”

Open for Business (2018).⁹³

FDI plays a vital role in Cambodia's economy, supporting growth, diversifying industries, and creating jobs. According to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), Cambodia attracted USD 4.4 billion in FDI inflows in 2024.⁹⁴

The Royal Government of Cambodia has made FDI attraction a strategic priority. The *Pentagonal Strategy – Phase 1* (2023–2028) emphasises promoting both domestic and foreign investment, improving the business environment, and elevating the country's international standing and openness to the world.⁹⁵

As global investors increasingly integrate social and governance factors into decision-making, inclusive policies such as marriage equality can help Cambodia meet these expectations. Marriage equality would strengthen Cambodia's investment climate by signalling inclusion and modernisation. In contrast, as Ken Janssens, CEO of Open for Business, explains: "Countries that score badly on LGBT+ rights tend to attract less investment."⁹⁶

Open for Business presents strong evidence that LGBT+ inclusion is associated with higher levels of FDI, a critical driver of growth in emerging and developing economies.⁹⁷ One of their reports cites findings from Deloitte that inclusive societies attract more investment because global businesses and high-value industries — such as finance, technology, and creative sectors — prioritise quality-of-life

factors like diversity, openness, and safety alongside infrastructure and political stability.⁹⁸

Taken together, the evidence suggests that by adopting marriage equality, Cambodia could strengthen its competitiveness as an investment destination.

ATTRACTING & RETAINING HIGHLY SKILLED TALENT

Research also shows that open and inclusive societies are better able to attract and retain highly skilled talent, reducing "brain drain."

For multinational companies, legal inclusion is a key factor in deciding where to locate operations, since employees — particularly highly skilled professionals — increasingly expect inclusive environments. The International Labour Organization (ILO) has observed that inclusive workplace policies enhance productivity, innovation, and staff retention.⁹⁹ Open for Business similarly argues that LGBT+ inclusion supports countries' ability to attract talent.¹⁰⁰

Ken Janssens explains: "This is about future-proofing. Generation Z care deeply about LGBT+ inclusion. As they become a bigger part of the population and the global workforce — and as they travel — they will be much more selective."¹⁰¹

Cambodian government policy already points in this direction: the *Digital Economy and Society Policy Framework 2021–2035*¹⁰² includes measures to attract overseas digital talent and expand the domestic skills base; the *Science, Technology and Innovation Roadmap 2030*¹⁰³ and *Skills Development Roadmap 2023–2035*¹⁰⁴ focus on human capital quality and R&D capacity. Cambodia's growing digital economy and startup ecosystem depend on talent mobility and skills.

H.E. Katta Orn, Secretary of State and Spokesperson at the Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training, emphasises the importance of human capital, particularly in the context of digital transformation and innovation. He notes that making it easier for skilled workers to come to Cambodia would help attract foreign entrepreneurs, digital nomads, and highly skilled professionals, fostering innovation. He also recognises the link between inclusion and talent: *“The government considers inclusion and equality as important in the strategy to retain and attract highly skilled workers.”*¹⁰⁵

Legal marriage equality could strengthen Cambodia’s ability to retain highly skilled professionals and attract them from abroad, including from its own diaspora. Conversely, a lack of inclusion and perceived discrimination against LGBT+ people can contribute to a “brain drain” — the emigration of talented and skilled individuals seeking safer and more welcoming environments.¹⁰⁶

Data from the World Bank–LinkedIn Partnership (2022) show that countries across Southeast Asia are losing highly skilled workers who move to destinations perceived as more open and inclusive.¹⁰⁷ This pattern is particularly pronounced among LGBT+ professionals: in India, for example, researchers identified a *“gay brain drain,”* with talented workers leaving for countries offering both greater economic opportunities and stronger social acceptance.¹⁰⁸

In several interviews for this research briefing, participants described highly skilled LGBT+ Cambodians choosing to live and work abroad simply to be themselves. The risk is not abstract — it is real and immediate, and especially damaging for a country that needs to strengthen its human capital. Interviewees stressed that Cambodia requires skilled talent across almost all industries, noting that the country’s recent tragic history has created a

“missing middle” in the workforce and that younger professionals still need time to develop.

CITIES AS DRIVERS OF ECONOMIC GROWTH

“LGBT+ inclusion sends a clear signal that a city has a tolerant, dynamic cultural life, and that it is a globally integrated place to do business.”

Open for Business (2018).¹⁰⁹

Cities are engines of economic growth, innovation, and investment. Across Southeast Asia, they account for one-third of the population but generate more than two-thirds of regional GDP.¹¹⁰ Research shows that inclusive cities attract talent, encourage entrepreneurship, and create environments where diverse individuals can thrive.¹¹¹

Recognising marriage equality would be one of the clearest signals of genuine LGBT+ inclusion in Cambodia. It would show that Phnom Penh, Siem Reap, and other urban centres are open, welcoming, and globally oriented — helping to attract and retain skilled professionals, stimulate innovation, and support creative industries.

By promoting equality and cohesion, marriage equality would strengthen the economic dynamism of Cambodia’s cities and align directly with national ambitions to modernise, attract investment, and compete for talent.



CHAPTER 3

GROWING THE WEDDING INDUSTRY

“If there is marriage equality here, we believe that there are more couples who want to get married, both legally and culturally.”

Von Darika and Then Chandavin (2025).¹¹²

Up to this point, we have examined the externally driven economic benefits of marriage equality — growing tourism, boosting investment, and attracting and retaining talent. Equally important are the domestic impacts within Cambodia, beginning with the wedding industry, one of the country’s most culturally significant and economically vibrant sectors.

WEDDINGS IN CAMBODIA

Weddings occupy a central place in Cambodian society.¹¹³ As well as being private family milestones, they are large social and cultural events, bringing together communities and sustaining a wide range of economic activities. Traditional weddings often extend over several days and involve extensive services, including venues, catering, attire, photography, decoration, entertainment, and more.¹¹⁴

Enabling all couples to marry would reflect the *Pentagonal Strategy*'s vision of Cambodian lives marked by dignity, happiness, and equal rights. It would also help strengthen local enterprises, particularly micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), in line with the Strategy's focus on inclusive growth and job creation.

The wedding sector supports a broad ecosystem of businesses,¹¹⁵ from florists and musicians to garment makers and jewellers. While comprehensive national data are limited, anecdotal evidence suggests a multi-million-dollar industry employing thousands of Cambodians across urban and rural areas.

At present, some same-sex couples in Cambodia are able to hold symbolic wedding ceremonies to celebrate their unions, despite the absence of legal recognition.¹¹⁶ While they cannot register a marriage certificate or obtain formal recognition, these ceremonies are often joyful occasions attended by parents, relatives, and friends. Many mirror the scale and cultural significance of weddings between different-sex couples, reflecting a strong latent demand that remains untapped economically.

A WHOLE NEW MARKET

Marriage equality would unlock this demand, creating a formal and growing market segment within Cambodia's wedding industry. For many LGBT+ Cambodians, legal recognition would provide the legitimacy, confidence, and security needed to invest in weddings and related celebrations at a level comparable to different-sex couples.

ILLUSTRATIVE SCENARIO: DOMESTIC LGBT+ WEDDING REVENUE

To illustrate potential domestic wedding revenue, a simple indicative calculation can be made using available demographic data and conservative assumptions.

According to the 2019 Census, Cambodia's adult population is approximately 10.14 million (aged 18 and above).¹¹⁷ While no national study has measured the number of LGBT+ people in Cambodia, international surveys provide a useful benchmark. Ipsos Global Surveys (2023 and 2025) report that an average of 9% of adults identify as LGBT+ across countries surveyed, with a lower range of around 5% in Asian countries.¹¹⁸ Applying this conservative 5% estimate to Cambodia suggests there are at least 507,000 LGBT+ adults. Assuming that around 17% are in a couple,¹¹⁹ this equates to approximately 86,000 individuals, or 43,000 same-sex couples.

Comparative evidence shows substantial take-up when marriage becomes available. In Massachusetts, U.S., 37% of same-sex couples married in the first year after legalisation, rising to 44% within three years.¹²⁰ This indicates a strong initial surge followed by stabilisation.

Using this pattern as a guide, a two-year benchmark of around 30% would fall within this range. To remain cautious, and recognising that some same-sex couples in Cambodia have already held symbolic ceremonies, we apply an estimate that 20% of same-sex couples would marry in the two years following legal recognition. This gives an estimated 8,600 weddings over the first two years.

Weddings in Cambodia vary greatly in cost, but estimates suggest that “comfortable” families typically spend around USD 20,000 per ceremony,¹²¹ with lower averages in smaller

towns and rural areas. For consistency, we use a spend of USD 10,800 per ceremony from the chapter above¹²² – this is likely to be a very conservative estimate for a full traditional Cambodian wedding. Multiplying 8,600 weddings by USD 10,800 produces a potential USD 92.9 million in domestic wedding-related revenue within two years of marriage equality.

While this briefing uses a 20% uptake rate as its central estimate, we also present lower (10%) and higher (30%) scenarios to reflect uncertainty and provide a fuller picture of potential economic impact.

Figure 6: Illustrative Scenarios - Domestic Wedding Revenue Within Two Years Following Marriage Equality

CONSERVATIVE SCENARIO	MODERATE SCENARIO	AMBITIOUS SCENARIO
43,000 ESTIMATED SAME-SEX COUPLES	43,000 ESTIMATED SAME-SEX COUPLES	43,000 ESTIMATED SAME-SEX COUPLES
10% MARRYING IN FIRST TWO YEARS	20% MARRYING IN FIRST TWO YEARS	30% MARRYING IN FIRST TWO YEARS
4,300 ESTIMATED WEDDINGS	8,600 ESTIMATED WEDDINGS	12,900 ESTIMATED WEDDINGS
10,800 AVERAGE SPEND PER WEDDING	10,800 AVERAGE SPEND PER WEDDING	10,800 AVERAGE SPEND PER WEDDING
+ USD 46.4 MILLION ESTIMATED TOTAL SPENDING	+ USD 92.9 MILLION ESTIMATED TOTAL SPENDING	+ USD 139.3 MILLION ESTIMATED TOTAL SPENDING

Beyond direct spending, marriage equality could create wider economic spillovers: job creation across the service sector, increased demand for creative and cultural services, and greater domestic tourism as families travel for weddings and honeymoons.

By recognising marriage equality, Cambodia would not only affirm the equal right of all

couples to marry but also expand and diversify a cherished national sector. This reform represents a rare opportunity to blend tradition and inclusion, strengthening a sector that is both culturally important and economically vital.

INTERVIEW: WHY MARRIAGE MATTERS

“ If there is marriage equality here, we believe that there are more couples who want to get married, both legally and culturally. ”

Von Darika and Then Chandavin (2025).¹²³

In an interview for this research briefing, we spoke with Von Darika and Then Chandavin, both aged 29. Under current Cambodian law, both are considered women as their official identity documents indicate 'woman' based on their sex assigned at birth, even though Chandavin is a trans man. As noted above, Cambodians use a range of Khmer terms to describe diverse sexual orientations and gender identities, while it is not yet possible for transgender and gender-diverse people to have their self-defined gender legally recognised.

Darika and Chandavin began as friends before their relationship developed into dating. Their families initially rejected the relationship, but the couple worked hard to demonstrate they could build a stable life together. After becoming economically independent and purchasing a condo and a car, they approached their parents to discuss marriage.

After three years of dating and one year of engagement, they held a traditional marriage ceremony in Siem Reap, making every effort to follow Cambodian cultural traditions. They wanted to show that they respect and uphold these customs, and worked hard to gain their parents' trust and acceptance.

However, the lack of legal recognition poses significant challenges, including limited protection for joint property. They described difficulties managing assets that cannot be legally recognised, and worry that even property held in both names could be transferred to a partner's family if one of them were to pass away. While they trust each other, legal recognition would provide far greater security. They also noted that legal protections would help reduce discrimination in families, communities, workplaces, and society, improving the wellbeing of LGBT+ people and enabling them to contribute fully to economic growth.

They were clear that legal marriage equality would encourage many more same-sex couples to marry and hold ceremonies: *“Furthermore, if there is marriage equality here, we believe that there are more couples who want to get married both legally and culturally.”*



CHAPTER 4

STRENGTHENING HOUSEHOLDS

“Overall, the evidence for the economic value of marriage is strong, suggesting same-sex couples are harmed economically when not allowed to marry.”

Lee Badgett (2010).¹²⁴

Marriage equality can deliver tangible social and economic gains for Cambodian households by strengthening security, reducing poverty risks and enhancing long-term household resilience. These outcomes align closely with the *Pentagonal Strategy*’s priorities of growth, equity, and efficiency: marriage equality would further

reinforce the Strategy’s focus on strengthening families and human capital as the foundations of a resilient and inclusive society.¹²⁵

HOUSEHOLD RESILIENCE & POVERTY REDUCTION

At present, LGBT+ couples in Cambodia are excluded from the legal protections associated with marriage, including joint property rights, inheritance, and taxation.¹²⁶ This exclusion reduces household economic security by limiting families' ability to pool risk, plan for the long term, and absorb shocks such as illness, job loss, or the death of a partner.¹²⁷ In short, the benefits of marriage are not merely symbolic — they are concrete.

The couples we interviewed highlighted these challenges. Chanty Choub, a 50-year-old lesbian woman in a same-sex relationship, explained: *"A marriage certificate [would] also provide essential protections for us, such as safeguarding joint property in the event of one party's passing. It offers legal recognition, allowing us to adopt child[ren] legally."*¹²⁸ The Cambodian government recognises this gap. H.E. Nhean Sochetra, Director General of the General Department of Social Development at the Ministry of Women's Affairs, explains: *"When they cannot receive a marriage certificate, they lose the benefit of legal protections."*¹²⁹

International evidence shows that legal marriage generates a measurable "marriage premium": couples are better able to pool resources, share risks, and build wealth over time. Studies of same-sex couples in Massachusetts, U.S., found that legal recognition reduced financial anxiety and strengthened commitment, contributing to improved wellbeing and economic activity.¹³⁰ Marriage provides a legal framework that promotes interdependence, enables efficient sharing of resources, and acts as a form of social insurance — reducing vulnerability to shocks and encouraging investment in housing, education, and small businesses.¹³¹

Recent research by the Boston Consulting Group (2024) reinforces this, finding that married same-sex couples tend to have higher household income, net worth, and spending than unmarried couples.¹³² These gains stem from both the legal and financial advantages of marriage and the greater sense of stability and belonging it provides. Similar benefits could be expected in Cambodia, where marriage equality would help strengthen families and support national poverty-reduction goals.

ILLUSTRATIVE SCENARIO: THE MARRIAGE PREMIUM

To estimate the potential "marriage premium" — the economic benefits households experience after marrying — a simple indicative calculation can be made using conservative assumptions. Based on the analysis above, between 4,300 and 12,900 same-sex couples may marry in the two years following the introduction of marriage equality.

Cambodia's average annual household income is USD 6,995.¹³³ If legal recognition of marriage led to even a small increase in household income and spending — reflecting the improved financial confidence and stability associated with marriage — then a hypothetical scenario of a 1–5% rise in annual spending would represent an additional USD 70–350 per couple per year.¹³⁴

Applying this to the estimated 4,300 to 12,900 same-sex couples who may marry within the first two years after marriage equality yields a potential uplift in domestic consumption of roughly USD 0.3–4.5 million over that period. While modest, this could represent a contribution to local demand, particularly in sectors such as housing, small business investment, and education, where newly married couples tend to spend.

Figure 7: Illustrative Scenarios - Household Spending Uplift Within Two Years Following Marriage Equality

CONSERVATIVE SCENARIO	MODERATE SCENARIO	AMBITIOUS SCENARIO
4,300 ESTIMATED MARRIAGES	8,600 ESTIMATED MARRIAGES	12,900 ESTIMATED MARRIAGES
6,995 USD AVERAGE ANNUAL HOUSEHOLD SPENDING	6,996 USD AVERAGE ANNUAL HOUSEHOLD SPENDING	6,995 USD AVERAGE ANNUAL HOUSEHOLD SPENDING
1% INCREASE IN HOUSEHOLD SPENDING (% OF INCOME)	3% INCREASE IN HOUSEHOLD SPENDING (% OF INCOME)	5% INCREASE IN HOUSEHOLD SPENDING (% OF INCOME)
70 USD ADDITIONAL SPENDING PER COUPLE	210 USD ADDITIONAL SPENDING PER COUPLE	350 USD ADDITIONAL SPENDING PER COUPLE
+ USD 0.3 MILLION TOTAL ADDITIONAL HOUSEHOLD SPENDING	+ USD 1.8 MILLION TOTAL ADDITIONAL HOUSEHOLD SPENDING	+ USD 4.5 MILLION TOTAL ADDITIONAL HOUSEHOLD SPENDING

INTERVIEW: WHY MARRIAGE MATTERS

“ I manage my joint property based on our shared responsibilities. My greatest concern is ensuring that our properties go to my son or my husband in the event of any unforeseen circumstances. ”

Pov Dalin (2025).¹³⁵

In an interview for this research briefing, we spoke with Pov Dalin, a woman in a relationship with Nat, a trans man. Under Cambodian law, both are considered women, even though Nat is a trans man. As noted above, Cambodians use a range of Khmer terms to describe diverse sexual orientations and gender identities, while it is not yet possible for transgender and gender-diverse people to have their self-defined gender legally recognised.

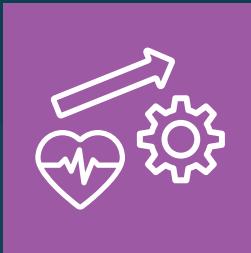
Dalin explained that she has known Nat since 2012, and their relationship deepened after she cared for him following a traffic accident. Although they faced discrimination from some relatives and neighbours, this has eased over time as they demonstrated their commitment.

Seven years ago, they held a small family ceremony with a monk blessing to affirm their partnership. They would like a legal and cultural wedding like other couples, but without marriage equality they cannot organise a ceremony recognised as a wedding, and have instead had to frame such events as birthdays or housewarmings.

Dalin also described the challenges arising from the current legal system, which does not enable same-sex couples to access full adoption rights — protections that are essential to safeguarding the best interests, development, and rights of their children. Dalin and her partner have adopted a son and live together as a happy family, yet they remain concerned about their child's future due to the absence of these legal protections.

Legal recognition is central to their family's security. Dalin noted that marriage equality would reduce discrimination, allow them to marry in both legal and cultural terms, and provide essential protections. Managing shared assets is a particular worry, as she wants to ensure their property is safeguarded for her son or her husband if anything were to happen. Although they have registered a Declaration of Family Relationship (DoFR) as a non-legal binding private contract,¹³⁶ it does not provide the legal protections they need.

Without legal recognition, Dalin feels her family cannot live on equal terms with others, and the uncertainty continues to heighten her concerns for her child. She hopes that Cambodia will one day recognise their marriage, giving her family the dignity and security they deserve.



CHAPTER 5

ADVANCING HEALTH, PRODUCTIVITY & BUSINESS PERFORMANCE

“The economic costs of exclusion ... are costs that can be reduced through effective efforts toward full social, economic, and political inclusion of LGBT people. Inclusion is likely to lead to increases in productivity of existing workers, greater investment in human capital, and better health.”

M.V. Lee Badgett (2014).¹³⁷

When people are free to live, work, and contribute without fear or discrimination, societies benefit through better health outcomes, stronger human capital, and higher productivity.¹³⁸ For Cambodia, advancing LGBT+ inclusion through legal marriage equality would help unlock these gains over time.

HEALTH & WELLBEING

“ Stigma and exclusion of LGBT people are likely to generate economic costs, particularly from lost productivity as a result of workplace discrimination, and health disparities (in HIV, depression, and suicidal ideation). ”

M.V. Lee Badgett (2014).¹³⁹

Discrimination and social exclusion place LGBT+ people at significantly higher risk of poor mental health. International studies show disproportionately high rates of depression, anxiety, and related conditions among LGBT+ populations — with depressive disorders among gay men, for example, estimated at around three times higher than in the general population.¹⁴⁰ Research in Cambodia similarly points to widespread depression, low self-esteem, and other mental-health challenges among LGBT+ youth.¹⁴¹ In a recent study on the mental health of the LGBT+ community in Cambodia, 32% of respondents said they had experienced suicidal thoughts, while 21% had attempted suicide.¹⁴² These figures indicate a severe and preventable public-health disparity with clear economic implications.

Crucially, these elevated risks are not inherent to LGBT+ identity; they arise from stigma, discrimination, and the stress of having to conceal one's life. In an interview for this research briefing, a Cambodian clinical psychologist shared: *“In my experience, 9 out of 10 LGBT+ people have mental health problems,”* explaining that many *“have to live a double life... face shame... and not being able to be themselves.”* These stressors, combined with discrimination and social exclusion, directly affect mental health and *“impact their education and work.”* The psychologist shared examples of patients whose wellbeing had deteriorated due to exclusion — including one

who felt pushed out of a job they loved because colleagues treated them as *“worthless for being LGBT+,”* and another who suffered depression after feeling compelled to marry a man due to family pressure.¹⁴³

Mental-health conditions such as depression and anxiety reduce productivity by restricting people's ability to study, work, and participate fully in society, creating both human and economic costs.¹⁴⁴ A 39-country study of emerging economies found that greater legal and social inclusion of LGBT+ people is linked to stronger economic development, as exclusion reduces productivity, limits labour supply, and weakens human capital formation.¹⁴⁵

Government officials in Cambodia recognise these links. H.E. Katta Orn at the Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training highlights the role of *“psychological safety”*, noting that inclusion supports *“increased productivity,”* and that *“workers with a stable family life tend to experience fewer psychological burdens. They can focus better and maintain motivation at work.”*¹⁴⁶

Cambodia has never criminalised same-sex relationships and is generally more tolerant than many countries in the region. However, LGBT+ people still face stigma and cannot have their relationships legally recognised. These barriers limit wellbeing and reduce participation in the formal economy. As the psychologist explains, *“marriage equality would help people feel more free, more confident,”* and would *“create a sense of acceptance, of completion”* in a context where marriage is closely tied to social belonging and respect.¹⁴⁷

Marriage equality would therefore 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.

ILLUSTRATIVE ESTIMATE: MENTAL-HEALTH IMPACTS OF EXCLUSION

To estimate the potential cost of depression linked to LGBT+ exclusion, the Open for Business methodology for Southeast Asia¹⁴⁸ can be adapted for Cambodia. This approach uses disability-adjusted life years (DALYs) — a standard World Health Organization metric — to measure the burden of ill health. One DALY represents a year of healthy life lost due to illness or early death; the higher the number, the greater the health and productivity loss for a population.

Using recent regional data from the Global Burden of Disease 2021 study for ASEAN countries, Cambodia recorded an age-standardised rate of 1,717 DALYs per 100,000 people for all mental disorders.¹⁴⁹ Applying this rate to Cambodia's 2024 population of 17,638,801¹⁵⁰ gives an estimated 302,858 DALYs for mental disorders overall. Within the ASEAN region, depressive disorders account for approximately 29.6% of total mental health DALYs,¹⁵¹ suggesting that around 89,646 DALYs in Cambodia are attributable to depressive disorders — this regional percentage is used as a proxy in the absence of Cambodia-specific data.

As noted above, rates of depression among LGBT+ people are several times higher than among the general population, largely due to stigma, discrimination, and lack of legal protection. Following the Open for Business approach,¹⁵² this “excess” mental-health burden is expressed as a percentage of total depressive-disorder DALYs — referred to as the attribution share.

For illustrative purposes only, and under conservative assumptions, it is estimated that 3.5% of Cambodia's total depressive-disorder DALYs are attributable to LGBT+ exclusion, producing an “excess” of 3,138 DALYs. For illustrative purposes, using a 7% attribution share increases this to 6,275 DALYs, while a 10% share gives 8,965 DALYs.

To convert these annual health impacts into an illustrative estimate of lost economic output, each DALY is valued at Cambodia's GDP per capita (USD 2,628),¹⁵³ used here as a simple proxy for average annual economic output per person, rather than as a measure of productivity per hour worked. This proxy-based approach is used for illustrative purposes only, reflecting the fact that mental-health impacts affect not only hours worked, but also labour-force participation, educational attainment, and non-market or unpaid work, which are not captured by hourly productivity measures.¹⁵⁴ On this basis, the estimated annual productivity loss is USD 8.2 million under the conservative scenario, rising to USD 16.5 million and USD 23.6 million under the moderate and higher scenarios, respectively.

A brief note on interpretation: valuing DALYs using GDP per capita provides an indicative estimate of the economic output Cambodia loses each year as a result of poor mental health — the productivity that could have been realised if those affected had been able to participate fully in the economy.

Figure 8: Illustrative Scenarios - Estimated Economic Cost of Depression Linked to LGBT+ Exclusion

CONSERVATIVE SCENARIO	MODERATE SCENARIO	AMBITIOUS SCENARIO
3.5% SHARE OF DALYS ATTRIBUTABLE TO LGBT+ EXCLUSION	7.0% SHARE OF DALYS ATTRIBUTABLE TO LGBT+ EXCLUSION	10.0% SHARE OF DALYS ATTRIBUTABLE TO LGBT+ EXCLUSION
3,138 EXCESS DALYS (OF 89,646)	6,275 EXCESS DALYS (OF 89,646)	8,965 EXCESS DALYS (OF 89,646)
2,628 GDP PER CAPITA	2,628 GDP PER CAPITA	2,628 GDP PER CAPITA
USD 8.2 MILLION ESTIMATED ECONOMIC COST (ANNUAL)	USD 16.5 MILLION ESTIMATED ECONOMIC COST (ANNUAL)	USD 23.6 MILLION ESTIMATED ECONOMIC COST (ANNUAL)

Even under cautious assumptions, depression associated with exclusion could cost Cambodia USD 8–24 million per year in lost productivity. These figures highlight how social exclusion carries tangible economic costs alongside human ones, and how inclusion — including through legal recognition of marriage equality — can strengthen both wellbeing and economic performance at the national level.

PRODUCTIVITY & STRONGER BUSINESS PERFORMANCE

“ Anyone whose rights are curtailed cannot be fully productive, fully participate as a member of society. ”

Jo Scheuer, UN Resident Coordinator in Cambodia (2025).¹⁵⁵

Exclusion in education, employment, and legal protection does not only harm individuals – it constrains overall productivity and Cambodia’s long-term growth. When LGBT+ employees experience stigma or feel compelled to hide their identities, workplaces lose creativity, innovation, communication, and efficiency. As Eng Chandy, Executive Director of Gender and Development for Cambodia, explains: *“Discrimination is a loss for the country... They [LGBT+ people] cannot unleash their potential.”*¹⁵⁶

By contrast, when employees feel safe and respected, they contribute more effectively. 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.**¹⁵⁷ When companies operate in inclusive environments – including in countries that have recognised legal marriage equality – they are better positioned to realise these advantages.

Many Cambodian businesses already recognise this. In recent years, both local and international firms have hosted or supported Pride events, signalling their commitment to equality and inclusion. These include, among others, AEON Mall Sen Sok City, Courtyard by Marriott, Factory Phnom Penh and Urban Village, Manulife, Rosewood Hotel, and Cambodian fashion retail company ZANDO Group.¹⁵⁸ Puthika Cheab, who leads a co-working space and

social impact hub in Siem Reap, observes: *“To not hide, to not be restricted, to not be ashamed and to be yourself means people can think clearly, communicate clearly and contribute better.”* He added that inclusion directly strengthens business performance: *“Most definitely a business benefits when the weight is lifted off – the ideas, the contribution is better and bigger.”*¹⁵⁹

Legal recognition of same-sex couples would reinforce these gains by signalling that Cambodia values diversity, talent, and modernisation. As H.E. Katta Orn notes: *“Inclusion and equality are not only a moral principle. They are a key economic driver.”* He added: *“The economy grows when everyone is able to participate and succeed at work.”*¹⁶⁰

For the wider economy, marriage equality also enhances competitiveness and innovation. As Dr Ben Li, the Founder and Chairman of Urban Village and Factory, which has hosted and supported Pride events in Phnom Penh, highlights, 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.”*¹⁶¹

Together, these perspectives highlight a clear economic logic: when discrimination is reduced, productivity rises; when people feel recognised, they perform better; and when society signals acceptance, businesses and the broader economy thrive.

ILLUSTRATIVE ESTIMATE: LOST PRODUCTIVITY FROM WORKPLACE EXCLUSION

To complement the health-related estimates above, an additional calculation illustrates the potential cost of lost productivity and earnings resulting from workplace discrimination against LGBT+ people. This follows the methodology used in the Open for Business Southeast Asia Report (2024).¹⁶²

The approach involves three steps:

- (1) estimate total labour income in the economy by applying the labour income share of GDP;
- (2) estimate the share of that labour income attributable to LGBT+ workers, based on their assumed share of the workforce; and
- (3) apply an estimated percentage loss in productivity or earnings due to discrimination.

Using Cambodia's total population of 17.6 million (2024)¹⁶³ and GDP per capita of USD 2,628 (2024),¹⁶⁴ total GDP is approximately USD 46.4 billion. Applying the labour income share of GDP of 44.5% (2025),¹⁶⁵ yields an estimated total annual labour income of approximately USD 20.6 billion.

We assume, for illustrative purposes and consistent with international surveys referenced above, that 5% of workers are LGBT+ — though the real number may be lower due to the barriers outlined throughout this report. This implies that LGBT+ workers account for approximately USD 1.03 billion of total annual labour income.

If discrimination reduces LGBT+ productivity or earnings by 15%, as estimated in the Open for Business Southeast Asia Report,¹⁶⁶ this suggests an indicative annual loss of approximately USD 155 million in wages and productivity linked to LGBT+ exclusion.

Figure 9: Illustrative Scenarios - Estimated Lost Productivity Linked to LGBT+ Exclusion

STEP	INDICATOR	FORMULA / ASSUMPTION	RESULT
Step 1	Total labour income	$\text{Total population} \times \text{GDP per capita} \times \text{labour income share}$ $17.6 \text{ million} \times 2,628 \times 44.5\%$	= USD 20.6 BILLION
Step 2	LGBT+ workers' share of labour income	$\text{Total labour income} \times 5\%$	= USD 1.03 BILLION
Step 3	Productivity/ wage loss due to discrimination	$1.03 \text{ billion} \times 15\%$	USD 155 MILLION <small>INDICATIVE ANNUAL LOSS</small>

These figures are indicative but align with international research showing that inclusive economies are more productive. By creating a legal environment in which LGBT+ people can live and work openly — through reforms such as marriage equality — Cambodia could begin to recover this “inclusion dividend,” strengthening both equality and economic performance.

In summary, health and productivity are mutually reinforcing. The evidence suggests

that inclusion — anchored in legal recognition and protection — improves health, boosts workforce participation and improves business outcomes. Marriage equality would therefore contribute not only to the dignity and equal rights of Cambodian citizens but also to a healthier, more productive and competitive economy.

INTERVIEW: LGBT+ INCLUSION AND PRODUCTIVITY

“ Gains in individual productivity translate to business results. ”

Ken Janssens, CEO, Open for Business (2025).

In an interview for this research briefing, Ken Janssens discussed the relationship between marriage equality, LGBT+ inclusion and productivity. He explained that marriage equality is a key signal of broader inclusion, and that inclusion is vital for productivity.

Poor health outcomes among LGBT+ people — including higher rates of depression and anxiety — reduce productivity and place

unnecessary strain on public health systems. Greater inclusion, by contrast, improves health outcomes, enabling LGBT+ workers to experience better mental health, be themselves at work and contribute more fully to their organisations.

Janssens described two dimensions to productivity gains: first, LGBT+ inclusion makes employees more productive; and second, this enhanced individual productivity drives overall business performance. He also highlighted the link to talent, noting that inclusive societies and workplaces attract and retain LGBT+ talent and avoid the “*LGBT+ brain drain*.”

CONCLUSION

“ We urge everyone to embrace their true selves and strive for a better future. ”

– H.E. Khieu Kanharith, Member of the Supreme Privy Council to His Majesty the King, and a parliament member (2024).¹⁶⁷

This briefing has illustrated that recognising marriage equality could bring broad and inclusive economic benefits to Cambodia, while advancing values already central to the nation’s vision of growth, dignity, and harmony.

Marriage equality is not only a matter of equal rights, but also a strategic economic opportunity. It would strengthen a range of sectors that the Royal Government has prioritised in the *Pentagonal Strategy – Phase I* (2023–2028): tourism, investment, and human capital. By equally recognising same-sex couples, Cambodia would signal to the world that it is open, modern, and confident, a country that welcomes diversity and harnesses it for national progress.

The evidence shows that marriage equality could:

Attract **67,000–335,000 ADDITIONAL VISITORS** over two years, generating **USD 36–180 MILLION** in new tourism revenue, and supporting **5,000–26,000 NEW JOBS**.

Create **USD 0.7–10.8 MILLION** in new LGBT+ wedding tourism over two years.

Generate **USD 46–139 MILLION** in domestic wedding spending over two years.

Increase household consumption by **USD 0.3–4.5 MILLION** over two years.

Reduce annual productivity losses from depression linked to exclusion by **USD 8–24 MILLION**.

Address workplace discrimination that currently costs an estimated **USD 155 MILLION** per year.

Taken together, these two-year impacts suggest that marriage equality could deliver USD 83–334 million in economic benefits within the first two years — while the annual gains from reduced discrimination and improved mental health would continue to strengthen Cambodia’s long-term growth, innovation, and human capital.

Marriage equality would also reinforce Cambodia’s international credibility, supporting its aspirations under Vision 2030 and Vision 2050, and enhancing the country’s reputation as an open, modern, and confident nation.

Ultimately, recognising marriage equality is about both prosperity and dignity. It affirms that all families deserve equal recognition and protection under the law. It strengthens wellbeing, enables people to contribute fully to society, and supports Cambodia’s ambition to leave no one behind.

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

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¹⁵⁷ Open for Business. (2024). *The economic case for LGBTQ+ inclusion in Southeast Asia*. Open for Business. Available at: <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/68556a4967988c67bc81dd79/t/692ebdfda7d9fe3ff4411736/1764670973543/Southeast+Asia+Report.pdf>

¹⁵⁸ Taking the example of the year 2025, businesses that hosted or supported Pride-related events in Cambodia included, among others:

- Factory Phnom Penh and Urban Village, Pride events, 21–22 June 2025. Available at: <https://www.khmetimeskh.com/501701256/urban-village-factory-phnom-penh-keep-pride-tradition-alive-with-marching-for-love/>
- AEON Mall Sen Sok City, Pride Fiesta public event, 21–22 June 2025. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/aeonmall.sensokcity/posts/1042743934732484>
- Courtyard by Marriott Phnom Penh, Pride Night, 20 June 2025. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/courtyardphnompenh/posts/1384525623225003>
- Pride Fest organised by Pride Cambodia, supported by Rosewood Hotel and Manulife, 24 May 2025. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/share/p/lFmXDXh6ZA/>
- ZANDO Group, Pride Month staff engagement activities, 2024. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=298994296537133>

¹⁵⁹ Interview with Puthika Cheab, Director, Siem Reap House, 21 November 2025.

¹⁶⁰ Interview with H.E. Katta Orn, Secretary of State and Spokesperson, Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training, 27 November 2025.

¹⁶¹ Interview with Dr Ben Li, Founder and Chairman, Urban Village and Factory, 25 November 2025.

¹⁶² Open for Business. (2024). *The economic case for LGBTQ+ inclusion in Southeast Asia*. Open for Business. Available at: <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/68556a4967988c67bc81dd79/t/692ebdfda7d9fe3ff4411736/1764670973543/Southeast+Asia+Report.pdf>

¹⁶³ World Bank. (2024). Total population – Cambodia. Washington, D.C.: World Bank. Available at: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL>

¹⁶⁴ World Bank. (2025). Data: Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, and Viet Nam. World Bank Open Data. Available at: <https://data.worldbank.org/>

¹⁶⁵ International Labour Organization (ILOSTAT). (n.d.). Country profile: Cambodia. Selected decent work and labour market indicators. Available at: <https://ilo.org/ilostat/data/country-profiles/khm/>

¹⁶⁶ Open for Business. (2024). *The economic case for LGBTQ+ inclusion in Southeast Asia*. Open for Business. Available at: <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/68556a4967988c67bc81dd79/t/692ebdfda7d9fe3ff4411736/1764670973543/Southeast+Asia+Report.pdf>

¹⁶⁷ Cambodianess. (2024). *A testament to love: Cambodian LGBT elders' stories of survival and triumph*. Phnom Penh: Cambodianess. Available at: <https://cambodianess.com/article/a-testament-to-love-cambodian-lgbt-elders-stories-of-survival-and-triumph>

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank all those who took part in interviews and generously shared their time, insights, and expertise for this research, including Cambodian and international stakeholders from government, business, and civil society. Their perspectives, experiences, and reflections were invaluable in shaping the analysis and grounding it in both local context and global evidence.

The inclusion of quotes, perspectives, or information in this briefing does not imply that the research team, Future Forum, or Rainbow Community Kampuchea Organisation (RoCK) endorse or share the views expressed, or endorse those providing them, nor that we independently verify or vouch for the accuracy of information provided by interviewees.

OPEN FOR BUSINESS

We would also like to thank Open for Business for serving as an expert advisor on this report. Open for Business is a leading organisation and coalition of global businesses that has advanced the economic case for LGBT+ inclusion internationally through a methodology that is rigorous, well-established, and proven. We extend our sincere thanks to Miguel Fuentes Carreño, Head of Research, Impact, and Evaluation; Ken Janssens, CEO; Liz Jacobs, Director of Global Programmes; and Emma Appleby, Programme Manager, for their valuable guidance and support throughout the development of this research.

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METHODOLOGY

The findings in this briefing are based on a mixed-methods approach, combining three main sources of evidence:

- Desk research and literature review of global, regional, and national studies on the economic impact of marriage equality and LGBT+ inclusion.
- Interviews with Cambodian officials, business leaders, civil society representatives, and international experts.
- Scenario modelling — borrowing primarily from Open for Business methodologies — to illustrate potential economic benefits for Cambodia across tourism, investment, domestic industry, household resilience, health and productivity.

The research was conducted between August and December 2025. While the analysis draws on the best available data, it is subject to certain limitations, including gaps in Cambodia-specific economic and demographic data on LGBT+ populations. Where national data were unavailable, estimates were developed using comparative international evidence and reasonable assumptions adapted to the Cambodian context.

Where financial figures are converted between currencies, exchange rates are based on the Bank of England daily spot exchange rates as of 1 December 2025, to ensure consistency across estimates. Actual values may vary depending on exchange rate movements over time.

The scenarios presented in this briefing are illustrative rather than predictive. They are intended to denote the possible scale and direction of economic impacts based on experiences from other countries and recognised international methodologies. The figures therefore represent indicative estimates, not forecasts.

This briefing focuses on key areas where the economic effects of marriage equality are most visible — tourism, investment and talent, domestic industry, household spending, and health and productivity. It does not capture all possible effects or interactions, and future research could build on this initial analysis to explore additional areas or develop more comprehensive modelling.



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