

# Open for Business



## The Economic Case for LGBTQ+ Inclusion in the Philippines

Research series



# The Economic Case for LGBTQ+ Inclusion in the Philippines

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# About Open for Business

At Open for Business, we strengthen the economic case for inclusion and give leaders the evidence they need to boost business and economies and advance LGBTQ+ rights.

We are a coalition of global businesses that believe in the economic case and in a world where LGBTQ+ people are treated fairly and equally.

Our regional programmes operate in Central and Eastern Europe, East Africa and Southeast Asia. All our programmes start with us conducting research and developing an economic case for LGBTQ+ inclusion report, looking at specific geographic economies. We work with Programme Advisory Boards made up of local leaders from business, civil society, and government to contextualise our evidence and findings and make them as impactful as possible. Most importantly, our programmes convene businesses, civil society, and government, building bridges using the economic case and ensuring the data is being used and operationalised throughout the regions where we work.

Open for Business advances the economic case for LGBTQ+ inclusion through strategic engagement with influential global platforms and institutions. We present compelling evidence to decision-makers at organisations like the World Bank, World Trade Organization, European Union, World Economic Forum, and the World Business Council for Sustainable Development, demonstrating how LGBTQ+ inclusion drives economic growth and business success.

Through comprehensive research and strategic engagement programmes, we connect LGBTQ+ inclusion to fundamental economic drivers, including innovation capacity, entrepreneurial dynamism, and social mobility. Our research serves as a foundation to bring together senior leaders from business, government, and civil society, fostering meaningful dialogue and collaboration that positions inclusion as a cornerstone of economic prosperity. This research-driven approach enables us to build a robust economic case that resonates with global stakeholders and catalyses positive change.

## Coalition Partners





# About this Report

Research has shown that LGBTQ+ inclusion can be an important driver of economic activity and, conversely, that LGBTQ+ discrimination comes at both a social and financial cost to societies.

This report explores the current economic and business environment in the Philippines, expanding on previous findings from our 2024 report: “The Economic Case for LGBTQ+ Inclusion in Southeast Asia”. This report shows, through case studies, collated research, new analysis, and interviews with Free to be Me organisations,<sup>1</sup> that there remain major opportunities for growth through LGBTQ+ inclusion, as well as highlighting current inclusion efforts by city governments, business, and civil society groups.

This report shows how LGBTQ+ inclusion boosts economic outcomes, and how discrimination against LGBTQ+ communities may inhibit companies from achieving their full growth potential and hinder their ability to attract the best talent. The report’s conclusion is that greater LGBTQ+ inclusion could contribute to strengthening the Filipino economy, and the businesses and communities within it.

## Who is it for?

- › For companies operating in the Philippines, this report lays out how LGBTQ+ inclusion can be part of an effective strategy to improve competitiveness and performance.
- › For policymakers in the Philippines considering how to enhance national economic competitiveness, this report lays out the necessity of considering LGBTQ+ inclusion in national and regional policy.
- › For Filipino LGBTQ+ and human rights organisations, this report provides economics-based and other arguments that can enhance public and business engagement strategies.

## What is its methodology?

The report combines findings from a variety of quantitative and qualitative research methods:

- › A literature review of the key economic and LGBTQ+ trends in the country from sources between 2018 and 2025.
- › Data gathering and analyses of economic and other business-related data, as well as correlations with LGBTQ+ rights data in the Philippines, and in a global context.

- › Interviews with Civil Society Organisation (CSO) leaders, within Free to be Me’s economic empowerment pathway, city government representatives and business leaders who are making a difference in improving LGBTQ+ inclusion in the Philippines.

## Call for evidence

We have found there is overall limited and inconsistent data on the LGBTQ+ community in the Philippines, especially regarding economic and business inclusion issues. Open for Business plans to build its research and engagement programme in the region in the coming years. We look forward to jointly developing other research programmes with local organisations.

## Advisors

We are incredibly grateful for expert advice for this report from:

### Jeiz Robles

Director of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion, Community Business

### Marie Aubrey Villaceran

Director, UP Center for Women’s and Gender Studies



**“The Philippines has become a source of hope for neighbouring countries that criminalise same-sex relationships.”**

## Foreword

Since the creation of our Southeast Asia programme in 2024, the region has shown tremendous growth in terms of data.

The region's immense and unique diversity has made it difficult to obtain and use data. This challenge stems from several factors, including complex legal restrictions and data privacy laws, a lack of resources, and issues with collection methods and credible methodologies. Ultimately, data collection has not always been a priority. Asian values of collectivism and harmony create a societal stigma around data sharing, which complicates how people see, understand, and value data. In previous years, businesses and decision-makers in the region underutilised data. Now, we are optimistic that people's perspectives are changing and that data-driven decision-making is becoming increasingly critical in today's landscape.

The Philippines has become a source of hope for neighbouring countries that criminalise same-sex relationships. However, despite this positive perception, the country has fallen behind in protecting the LGBTQ+ community. Religious beliefs and public opinion have created barriers to passing progressive, inclusive laws. While the country waits for the results of an anti-discrimination bill – a bill that has faced delays for 25 years – Open for Business continues to produce valuable insights. This report supplements our larger report, The Economic Case for Inclusion in Southeast Asia. It provides clear evidence that greater LGBTQ+ inclusion will benefit everyone in the Philippines, while discrimination will continue to hamper economic progress for the entire country.

**Steph Galera**

Head of Southeast Asia  
Open for Business

# Executive Summary

LGBTQ+ inclusion in the Philippines is beneficial for everyone, not just LGBTQ+ people. LGBTQ+ inclusion is positively correlated with improved economic indicators, making the role of businesses, government actors, international institutions and CSOs crucial to keep this trend going.

## Key Report Findings

<b>Economically successful countries have better records on LGBTQ+ rights</b>	<p>New analyses shows moderately strong correlations between better scores in LGBTQ+ rights and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Increase in Per Capita Gross Domestic Product (GDP) from the World Bank (WB)</li> <li>› Higher scores in the Global Innovation Index (GII) from the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO)</li> <li>› Higher scores in the Travel and Tourism Development Index from the World Economic Forum (WEF)</li> <li>› Higher scores in the Corruption Perception Index (which translates to less corrupt governments) from Transparency International (TI)</li> </ul>
<b>Bias and discrimination towards the LGBTQ+ community are costing the country up to PHP 147.6 billion(USD 2.7 billion) annually per year, equivalent to 0.67% GDP</b>	LGBTQ+ bias and discrimination have significant impacts on workplace participation and LGBTQ+ community health outcomes.
<b>LGBTQ+ friendly companies outperform their rivals</b>	Data from Open for Business' global research and case studies of companies in the Philippines resulted in evidence of a diversity dividend. A focus on inclusivity at companies leads to better employee morale, performance, and ultimately to business success.
<b>LGBTQ+ Inclusive cities outperform their neighbours</b>	Manila's ranking in Open for Business' City Ratings has decreased since 2022 falling behind its regional neighbours.
<b>Civil Society Organisations are impactfully tackling discrimination</b>	Organisations within Hivos's Free to be Me Socio-Economic Empowerment programme are good examples of how organisations in the Philippines are working to rebalance the economic exclusion faced by LGBTQ+ communities.

A large, stylized sunburst graphic in shades of pink and red, centered behind the title text. The sunburst consists of a central circle with numerous rays radiating outwards, creating a dynamic and energetic background.

# **1 The Current Situation for LGBTQ+ People in the Philippines**

The Philippines typically sees a high proportion of people self-identifying as LGBTQ+, with some surveys showing 11% of the population self-identifying as part of the community compared with 7% globally.<sup>2</sup>

The country has also seen rising social acceptance of LGBTQ+ people and growing public visibility,<sup>3</sup> with Metro Manila drawing over 407,000 participants to the 2025 Pride Celebrations.<sup>4</sup> Despite this, lack of national legislation on discrimination, partnerships, gender recognition or healthcare means progress is stalled, and the community describes the environment as “tolerant, not accepting”.<sup>5</sup>

## Politics and Legislation

Progress on LGBTQ+ rights in the Philippines has been slow despite long-standing efforts. An example of this is the SOGIE (Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity or Expression) Equality Bill, which aims to provide protection against discrimination and continues to be pending in Congress since it was first filed in 2000. Marriage equality and civil unions for LGBTQ+ couples also remain unrecognised under national law. Nonetheless, the Metropolitan Community Church performs holy unions as an alternative for community members who want to confirm their commitment in front of friends and family. Additionally, trans individuals cannot legally change their name or gender marker on official documents (e.g. birth certificates, passports) unless they undergo gender-affirming surgery and obtain a court order – an expensive and

inaccessible process for many due to financial barriers, limited healthcare access, and legal complexity.

Barriers to legal and political progress include religious influence, public misinformation, and legal precedents. Strong family values and conservative social norms, bolstered by the country’s religious institutions, remain significant hurdles. Notably, the Philippines is also one of the last two countries in the world where divorce is still illegal,<sup>6</sup> with the other country being the Vatican City, reflecting broader resistance to changes in family law.

Due to the absence of a national law upholding LGBTQ+ rights, LGBTQ+ rights can vary depending on region. For example, while same-sex sexual activity is legal in most of the country, local ordinances, such as those in Marawi City under Islamic law, partially criminalise LGBTQ+ relationships. Conversely, Quezon City has introduced several pioneering initiatives,<sup>7</sup> including the Right to Care Card, which allows LGBTQ+ individuals to make medical decisions for their partners, and recently enacted a comprehensive Gender-Inclusive Health Ordinance.<sup>8</sup> The city also hosts an annual LGBTQ+ commitment ceremony and organised its first LGBTQ+ Business Summit in 2025.<sup>9</sup>

**“Tolerant, not accepting.”**

Ging Cristobal, project coordinator for Asia and the Pacific, Outright Action International







## Impact on the LGBTQ+ Community

LGBTQ+ individuals continue to face widespread discrimination, harassment, and exclusion in both public and private spheres. Bullying in schools and at home,<sup>10</sup> workplace discrimination,<sup>11</sup> and strict enforcement of gender norms (such as hair length or uniforms) remain common. According to a 2024 study,<sup>12</sup> 26% of LGBTQ+ adults in the Philippines were diagnosed with moderate to severe depression, the second highest out of Singapore, the Philippines, Thailand and Indonesia.

Civil society organisations, such as the Philippine Financial & Inter-Industry Pride (PFIP), play a critical role in fostering workplace inclusion and supporting LGBTQ+ advocacy in the business sector. According to their 2024 Workplace Survey, increasing numbers of private companies have taken steps toward inclusion by offering same-sex partner benefits, including health coverage and family leave.<sup>13</sup> However, many LGBTQ+ individuals with the resources to do so choose to emigrate in search of greater acceptance.<sup>14</sup>

## Economic Empowerment: the Free To Be Me programme

### Tackling persistent economic exclusion faced by LGBTQ+ communities

In response to the discrimination of LGBTQ+ people in the Philippines, the Free to be Me programme was launched in the Philippines in 2020. Free to be Me is a five-year global programme led by Hivos that seeks to advance the rights, visibility, and wellbeing of LGBTQ+ people by transforming social and economic systems. It operates in the Philippines through Communities of Action (CoA),<sup>15</sup> which is a coalition of 28 LGBTQ+ organisations working towards LGBTQ+ inclusion. In the Philippines, there are four pathways within the Free to be Me programme: 1) Building Strong Foundation; 2) Generating Public Support; 3) Legal Policy Change; and 4) Socio-Economic Empowerment.

Open for Business selected five case studies to feature in this report from the Socio-Economic Empowerment pathway. These stories come from TLF Share, Wagayway Equality Inc, PANTAY, Intersex Philippines and Mindanao Pride, and they can be found on p38. The case studies show both how economic exclusion harms LGBTQ+ communities, and initiatives being implemented trying to rebalance the economic exclusion of LGBTQ+ communities.

Launched to address the persistent economic exclusion faced by LGBTQ+ communities, the Socio-Economic Empowerment Pathway aims to expand access to economic opportunities, strengthen local capacity, and influence public and private sector policies. It includes a groundbreaking 2025 study by TLF Share – the first of its kind in the Philippines – examining the ability of LGBTQ+ individuals to achieve a *magandang buhay* (“a good life”) compared to non-LGBTQ+ people.

Building on this research, CSOs held city-level workshops to help Community of Action members and local leaders draft inclusive socio economic agendas. The pathway also supported entrepreneurship programmes, providing LGBTQ+ individuals with seed funding, mentorship, and peer networks.

Pilot interventions, led by LOUD, Mindanao Pride, and Wagayway Equality Inc, included training needs assessments, SOGIESC workshops to implement best practices, and partnerships with local governments to promote anti-discrimination ordinances and inclusive workplace policies.

The pathway has strengthened community organising, raised awareness of economic advocacy, and produced locally driven plans to support livelihoods and financial inclusion – laying the foundation for replicable models of LGBTQ+ economic empowerment across the Philippines.

The case studies can be found on pages 32–39.



# **2 The Economic Opportunity for LGBTQ+ Inclusion in The Philippines**

Through assessing the current economic forecast in the Philippines and reviewing the Philippines development plan and goals, we identified key economic opportunities for the country.

### Current Forecast

The Philippine Development Plan (PDP) 2023–2028 outlines ambitious goals for inclusive and sustainable growth, targeting 8% GDP growth and a poverty rate below 9% by 2028.<sup>16</sup> While the economy benefits from a robust service sector – especially Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) leadership and a young workforce with low unemployment<sup>17</sup> – the PDP acknowledges persistent structural challenges. These challenges include the country's over-reliance on overseas remittances, an underperforming agriculture sector and infrastructure deficits that hinder competitiveness and productivity. To address these, the PDP emphasises the importance of human capital development, digitalisation, and

public-private partnerships.<sup>18</sup> in modernising sectors and expanding connectivity. It also aims to transform economic production through innovation, investment in lagging regions, and better intergovernmental coordination. With fiscal and monetary reforms, and a push to climb the global competitiveness rankings, the PDP seeks to harness the country's full potential, ensuring its young and growing population becomes an engine of long-term prosperity.

A review of the Philippines' planned budget for 2025,<sup>19</sup> as well as the World Bank and Asian Development Bank country partnership strategies,<sup>20</sup> suggest that some of the Philippines' economic challenges can become opportunities for growth. As Open for Business's research has found in other economies, many of these opportunities are strongly correlated to greater LGBTQ+ inclusion. These include:

- › Strengthening human development
- › Improving governance and institutional capacity
- › Boosting economic competitiveness
- › Fostering digital transformation through innovation

### Economic Cost

Open for Business's 2024 research estimates that the Philippines is losing up to PHP 147.6 billion annually, equivalent to 0.67% GDP, due to discrimination against its LGBTQ+ population. This is a significant opportunity to tap into unexploited gains for the Filipino economy. Explained further on page 21 and 22.



# The Evidence Base for LGBTQ+ Inclusion in the Philippines

As research shows that LGBTQ+ inclusion in a country is closely related to its economic success, the evidence provided in this report highlights where the Philippines has an opportunity to become more economically successful through greater openness and inclusion.

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## Economic Performance

### National Economic Growth

The Philippines' GDP growth continues to be surpassed by more open and inclusive economies (see page 16).

### Brain Drain

Highly-skilled Filipino workers continue to leave for more open societies (see page 17).

### National Reputation

The Philippines' record on LGBTQ+ rights is slowly changing, but it's missing key tourism opportunities (see page 18).

### Corruption

The Philippines' anticorruption efforts can be strengthened with greater LGBTQ+ inclusion (see page 20).

### Public Health

Costs to treat health issues in the LGBTQ+ community remain high, reflecting incomplete public health policies (see page 21).

### National Income Loss

Labour market inequalities are costing the Philippines PHP 49.3 billion each year (see page 22).

### Economic Competitiveness in Cities

Manila is rated "Not Open for Business", a risk to the city's reputation and investment attractiveness. (see page 23)

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## Business Performance

### Innovation

The Philippines lags its neighbours in innovation – improved innovation is associated with improved LGBTQ+ inclusion (see page 26).

### Attracting and Retaining Talent

Companies with a clear stance on LGBTQ+ inclusion benefit from attracting and retaining talent (see page 28).

### Financial Performance

Companies which have LGBTQ+ inclusive policies and programmes do better financially. (see page 29).

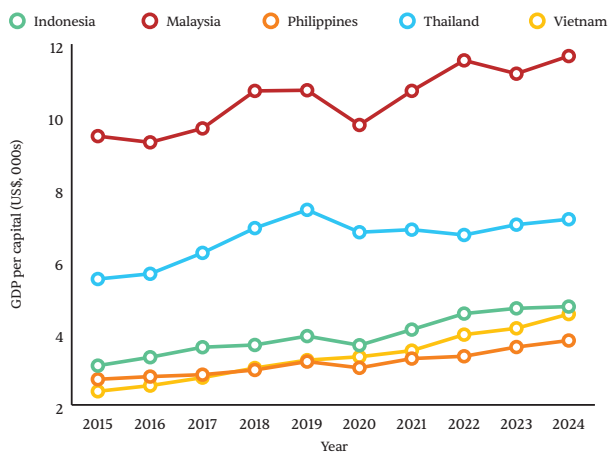


# The Economic Opportunity for LGBTQ+ Inclusion in The Philippines: Economic Performance



# National Economic Growth

Equal rights for LGBTQ+ people are associated with a better standard of living for all citizens.



GDP Per Capita 2015–2024, source: World Bank

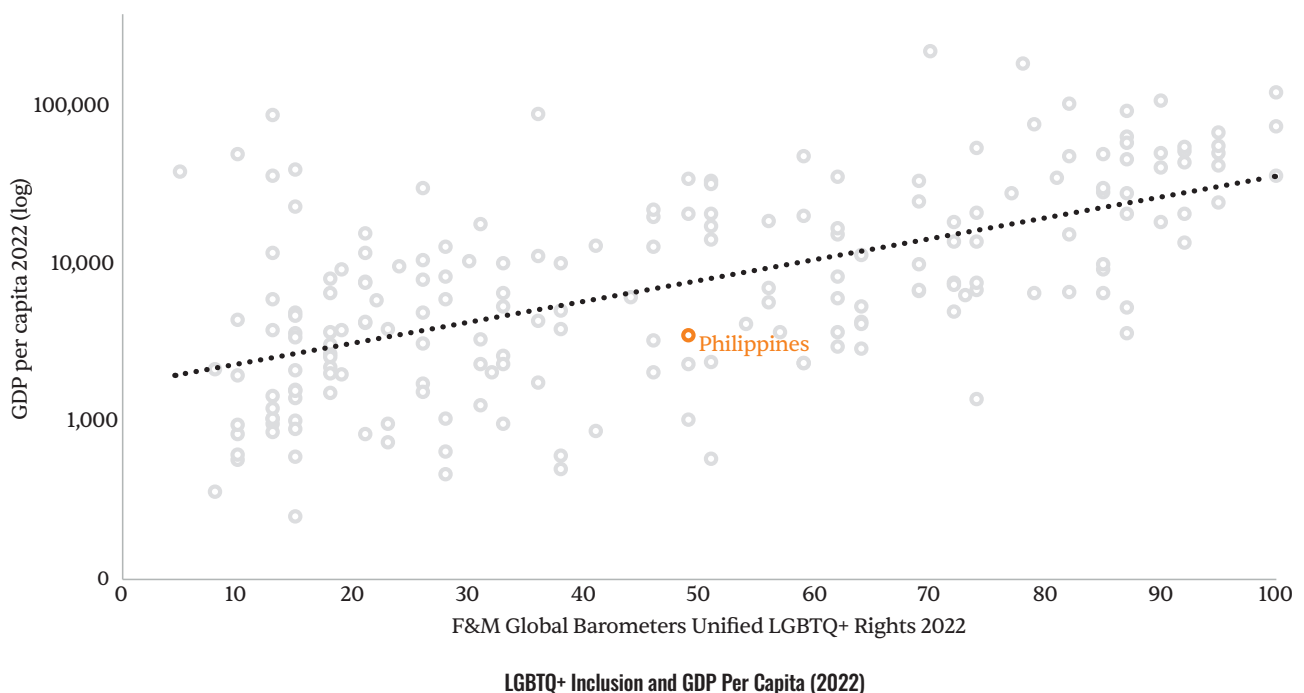
Per capita Gross Domestic Product (GDP) gives us a sense of how GDP translates into real prosperity for the populace and is an area of focus in the Philippine Development Plan. As shown in the chart below, the Philippines GDP per capita has consistently lagged behind its neighbours.

In 2021, Open for Business regression analysis of GDP data showed that a 10% gain in GBGR scores (a measure of the LGB inclusiveness of a country)<sup>21</sup> is significantly associated with a USD 3,693 gain in GDP per capita.<sup>22</sup>

In 2024, Open for Business' Southeast Asia report concluded that not only are LGBTQ+ rights and a country's per capita GDP highly correlated, but also that improvements in LGBTQ+ rights precede – and can predict – improvements in GDP growth.<sup>23</sup> This added to the evidence base that individuals in the Philippines will be better placed to grow more prosperous once the country has first become more tolerant on LGBTQ+ rights.

For this report, we have updated the chart from 2024, showing the correlation between higher GDP per capita and higher LGBTQ+ inclusion scores, highlighting the position of the Philippines within the sample.

<sup>1</sup> Results from Open for Business granger causality tests on 2018 and 2019 data



# Brain Drain

More open and tolerant countries are attracting highly-skilled workers.

Brain drain is the emigration of professionals to other countries in search of better opportunities. This is a common phenomenon in Southeast Asia and one which governments aim to limit.<sup>24</sup>

When skilled workers move abroad, governments lose investments made into their education, which can stall economic progress. Additionally, brain drain creates shortages of key workers which impacts a country's ability to innovate, conduct research, and develop new technologies. In turn, this increases reliance on foreign services.<sup>25</sup>

The Philippines has built a comprehensive migration management system and benefits from foreign job opportunities bringing remittance to the Filipino economy.<sup>26</sup> However, it is facing shortages of key workers. For example, 50% of licensed Filipino nurses now work abroad, which is projected to create a shortage of up to 250,000 nurses by 2030.<sup>27</sup>

The Filipino government has tried addressing brain drain. For example, President Marcos Jr. endorsed plans to train more healthcare and IT professionals locally in exchange for mandatory service of 2-3 years before they can migrate.<sup>28</sup> This is intended to build workforce capacity while delaying talent loss. Another example is the Balik Scientist Program, highlighted in earlier Philippine Development Plans, which invites Filipino experts abroad to return for knowledge-sharing, mentoring, entrepreneurship and R&D.<sup>29</sup>

Research shows that more open and tolerant societies are better able to both attract highly-skilled talent and reduce the number of highly-skilled talent leaving the country, thus reducing brain drain. For example, Open for Business' Southeast Asia research used aggregated global data from LinkedIn users to find that, in 2022, skilled workers were moving to the US and Australia at a higher rate than skilled workers are moving from the US and Australia to the Philippines. Whilst this could be explained by various factors, observations across all brain drain analysis in Southeast Asia showed that net gain of talent always went to countries that score higher on LGBTQ+ inclusion. Additionally, whilst there is limited aggregate data on LGBTQ+ brain drain, qualitative studies have documented LGBTQ+ rights being a decision-factor for LGBTQ+ people choosing to leave their home country. For example, a 2022 UN survey on migrant workers documented:<sup>30</sup>

**“The Philippines is a strongly Christian country, so the family is not extremely open in terms of sexual diversity and relations. I need to go to a place where I can be the woman that I am and where I can further my visions and my goals in life.”**

Trans woman, the Philippines



The Philippines lost highly-skilled workers to more open countries in 2022.  
Source: World Bank-LinkedIn Data Partnership

# National Reputation

## With a weaker LGBTQ+ reputation, the Philippines is losing economic opportunities to Thailand

LGBTQ+ discrimination can shape perceptions on a world stage leading to a negative impact on tourism, talent attraction and export markets for consumer goods. The international reputation of a country has become a significant factor in the global competitiveness of its economy and this report looks at media and tourism as key considerations.

### 1. Media

The Philippines' reputation on LGBTQ+ rights receives mixed media reporting on an international stage, but needs to make progress to be seen as a fully inclusive society.

The graph on page 19 represents 2024 analysis by Open for Business using Nexis Newsdesk media monitoring tool. This tool analysed the sentiment on LGBTQ+ issues of at least 4,000 international news articles over a 5 year period. Whilst the Philippines

has consistently achieved net positive sentiment, it is important to note the growing difference between the Philippines and Thailand since 2022. Thailand out-performs the Philippines significantly, likely associated with the introduction of the Marriage Equality Bill into Thailand's parliament in 2022. This introduction opened up the debate on equality, fostering a positive environment to socialise same-sex marriage, and correlating with improved positive sentiment of international reporting about Thailand.<sup>31</sup> Importantly, this out-performance provides an opportunity for Thailand to position itself on the international stage as a desirable country for tourism, talent, and business.

### 2. Tourism

Increasing tourism is a stated goal in the Philippines' national economic plans. National reputation plays a key role in attracting tourists, with research showing 43% of LGBTQ+ respondents have canceled a trip after seeing a destination be unsupportive of LGBTQ+ people.<sup>32</sup> It is estimated that the LGBTQ+ tourism industry will grow to USD 604bn by 2032,<sup>33</sup> therefore, the tourism industry in the Philippines will continue to feel the effects of LGBTQ+ inclusion or discrimination.

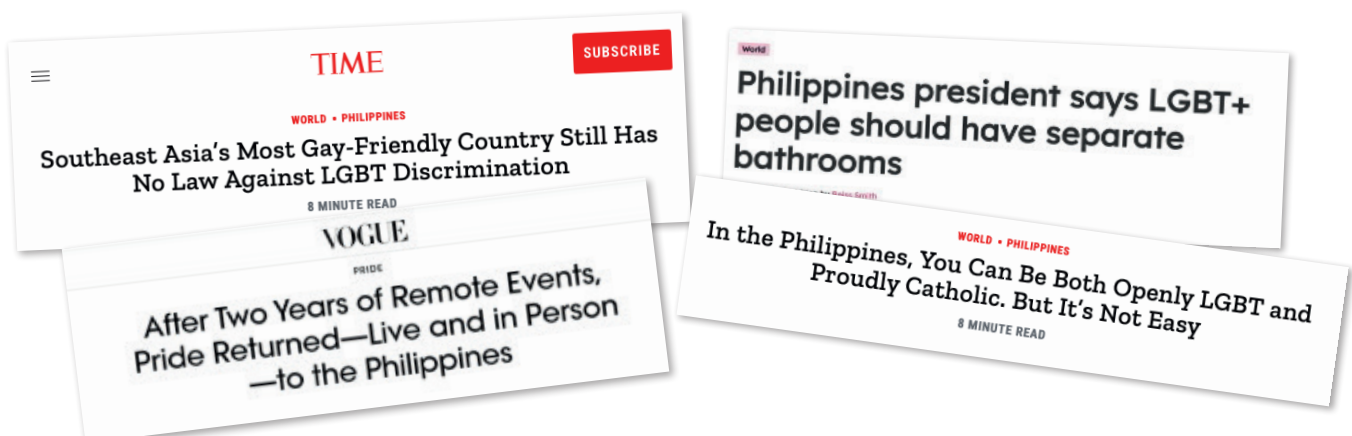
New correlation analysis shows that countries with higher levels of LGBTQ+ inclusion and rights are associated with a higher score in the Travel and Tourism Development Index. This suggests a positive association between a country's LGBTQ+ inclusion and the development of its travel and tourism sector.

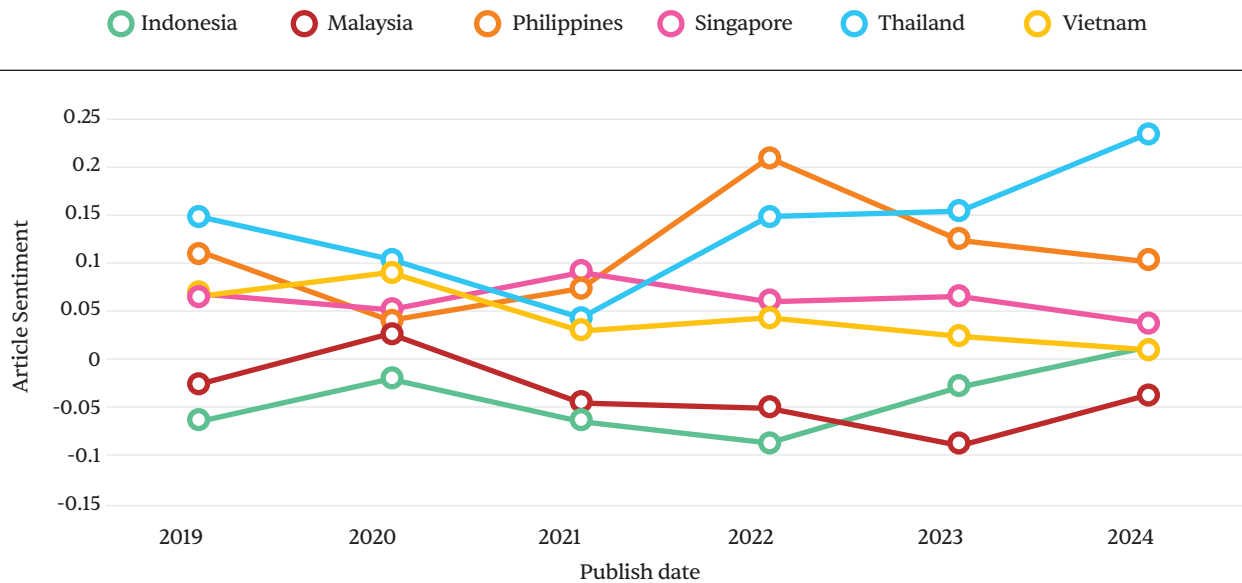
Whilst the Philippines' Department of Tourism is actively promoting the country as one of Asia's most LGBTQ+ friendly destinations through press coverage, public events and partnerships,<sup>34</sup> stalled legislation is capping the potential benefits.

Access Partnership's 2024 research on the impact of marriage equality in Thailand predicts that in 2 years the Thai economy will benefit from:<sup>35</sup>

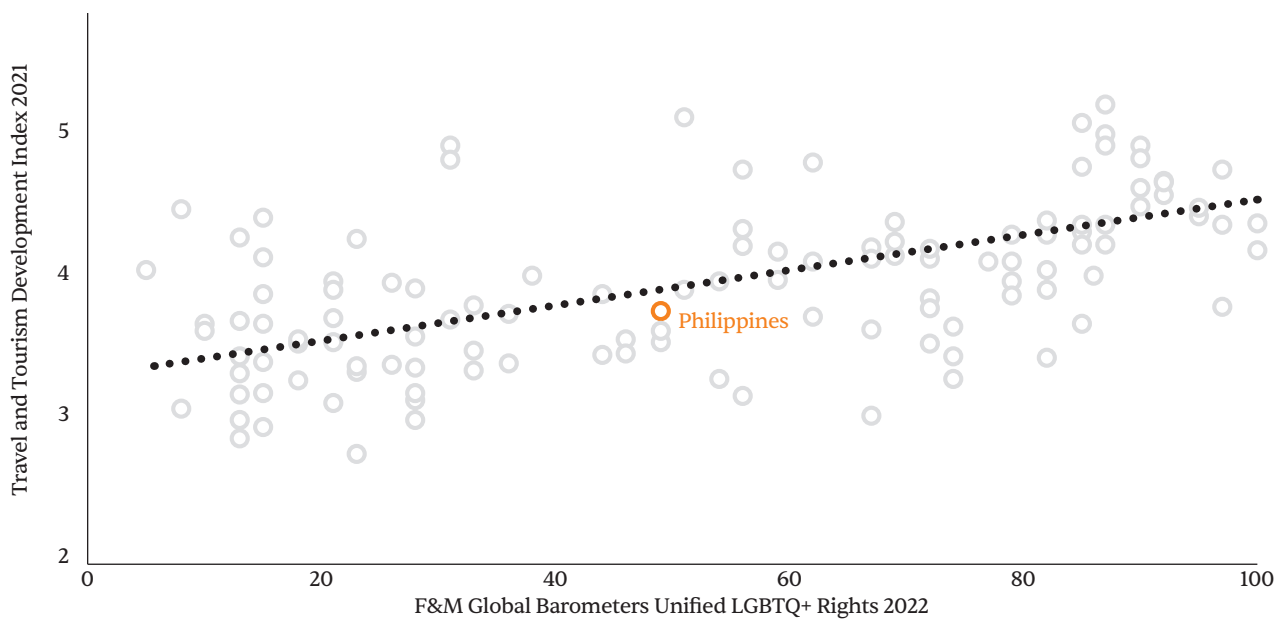
- › Increased tourism receipts by 2 billion USD per year
- › Add an additional 152,000 FTE jobs
- › Lift Thailand's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by 0.3%

This is currently untapped potential for the Philippine economy.





Analysis of new article sentiment on LGBTQ+ issues, source: Lexis Newsdesk





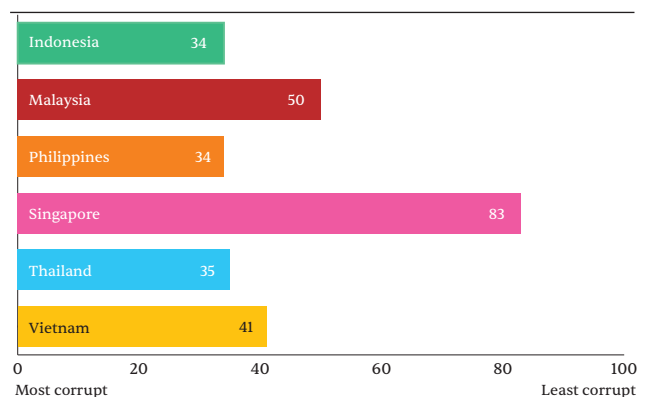
# Corruption

Higher levels of corruption are associated with greater levels of discrimination against LGBTQ+ people.

As seen on the graph below, corruption perception is highest in the Philippines compared with its five neighbours. The Philippines is vocal on its efforts to decrease corruption, with President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. signing in the New Government Procurement Act (NGPA) in July 2024, which has been hailed as “the biggest anti-corruption measure in the country’s recent history”.<sup>36</sup> Whilst this focuses on procurement and digitalisation, corruption can also be reduced through societal inclusiveness which fosters a fair environment.<sup>37</sup>

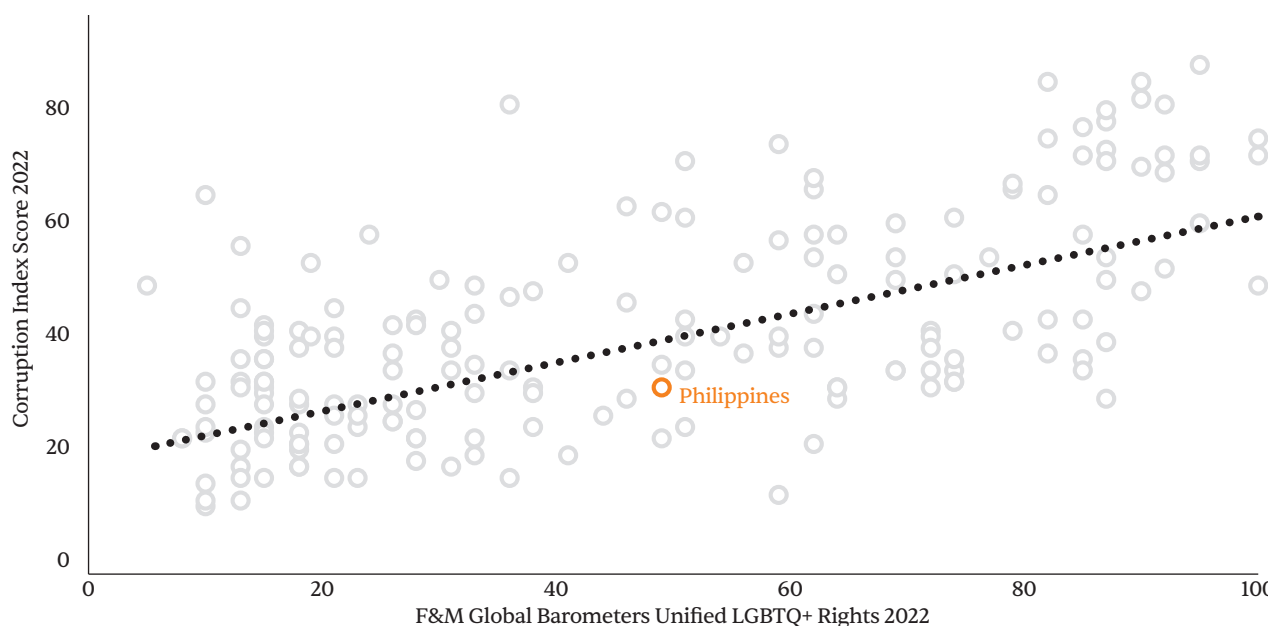
In 2024, Open for Business’ Southeast Asia report concluded that not only are LGBTQ+ rights and a country’s corruption perception highly correlated, but also that improvements in LGBTQ+ rights precede – and can predict – improvements in corruption perception.<sup>38</sup> This added to the evidence base that work done by government, CSOs and businesses to improve LGBTQ+ rights could contribute to a lower corruption perception in the Philippines.

For this report, we have updated the chart from 2024, showing the correlation between Corruption Perception and LGBTQ+ inclusion scores, highlighting the position of the Philippines within the sample.



Corruption Perception Index Scores 2023, source: Transparency International

<sup>1</sup> Results from Open for Business granger causality tests on 2018 and 2019 data



# Public Health

## Poor health outcomes due to LGBTQ+ discrimination cost the Philippines up to PHP 98.3 billion per annum.

As stated on page 13, the Philippines economy is losing up to PHP 147.6 billion per annum through LGBTQ+ discrimination. PHP 98.3 billion of this is tied to poor health outcomes, due to discriminatory-driven costs associated with HIV/AIDS and depression among LGBTQ+ people in the Philippines.

### HIV / AIDS

The Philippines has one of the fastest-growing HIV epidemics globally, with new infections rising by ~543% between 2010 and 2023,<sup>39</sup> and high rates of incident HIV infection among Filipino men who have sex with men (MSM).<sup>40</sup> These high rates have a cost to society in disability and lost wages.

A statement from UNAIDS explains that knowledge of HIV status among gay men and other men who have sex with men who are living with HIV was three times higher in countries with the least repressive LGBTQ+ laws than in countries with the most repressive LGBTQ+ laws.<sup>41</sup> Therefore an improvement in legal rights for LGBTQ+ people, and government response to LGBTQ+ discrimination in healthcare, can help bring these costs down for Philippines society.

High estimate	Low estimate
PHP 73.0 billion (USD 1.3 billion)	PHP 24.0 billion (USD 446.5 million)

Source: EMIS 2017, ECDC

### Depression

Depression due to stigma, exclusion and stress affect the LGBTQ+ community at significantly higher rates than non-LGBTQ+ people.<sup>42</sup> In APCOM's 2024 report on LGBTQ+ people in the Philippines, they documented that 57% of the sampled LGBTQ+ community identified a need for mental health services.<sup>43</sup> A paper by De La Salle University in Manila concludes that, in response to rising mental health disorders among LGBTQ+ people, society should focus on "advocating for the rights and freedoms of these marginalized individuals".<sup>44</sup> Decreasing the wage gap for under-represented groups brings economic benefits from contributions to GDP, reducing strain on the working population, and reduced poverty and inequity.<sup>45</sup> In 2022, the World Bank reported that in the Philippines "an increase of women's labor supply by a mere 0.5 percentage points per year would increase gross domestic product (GDP) per capita by about 6% by 2040 and almost 10% by 2050".<sup>46</sup>

Similar to HIV/AIDs, the high depression rates have a cost to society in disability and lost wages and Open for Business calculated that the economy in the Philippines is losing up to PHP 25.3 billion annually from depression in the LGBTQ+ community.

High estimate	Low estimate
PHP 25.3 billion (USD 463.6 million)	PHP 24.3 billion (USD 154.5 million)

Source: Institute For Health Metrics and Evaluation 2021, Open for Business estimations

# Wage Gap and National Income Loss

The wage gap among LGBTQ+ workers lowers national productivity and costs the economy up to PHP 49.3 billion each year.

Research shows that LGBTQ+ workers – particularly transgender, non-binary, and LGBTQ+ people of color – consistently earn less than their heterosexual, cisgender counterparts due to systemic discrimination.<sup>47</sup> This wage gap results in an inefficient use of talent, suppressing workforce productivity and limiting innovation across industries.<sup>48</sup> Moreover, reduced earnings for LGBTQ+ individuals diminish consumer spending and overall economic demand, which slows growth and weakens market dynamism.<sup>49</sup>

Open for Business estimates the wage gap among LGBTQ+ workers in the Philippines lowers national productivity and costs the economy up to PHP 49.3 billion each year.<sup>50</sup>

High estimate	Low estimate
PHP 49.3 Billion (USD 904.7 Million)	PHP 32.9 Billion (USD 603.1 Million)

Estimated annual cost of the LGBTQ+ wage gap

With research showing that anti-discrimination laws can be an effective policy tool for reducing labour market inequalities across sexual orientation,<sup>51</sup> the current economic and political landscape could be a key opportunity for the Philippines.



# Economic Competitiveness in Cities

Manila is rated “Not Open for Business”, a risk to the city’s reputation and investment attractiveness.

The Open for Business City Ratings benchmarks 149 cities based on their performance across two key dimensions: LGBTQ+ inclusion and economic competitiveness. This unique index evaluates urban centres worldwide to identify which cities successfully combine inclusive policies with economic strength, reflecting the growing evidence that LGBTQ+ inclusion is a driver of economic prosperity and business success.

Economic Competitiveness	LGBTQ+ Inclusiveness
Economic Competitiveness	Social attitudes
Innovation	
Business Environment	
Human Capital	Legal situation
Entrepreneurship	

Open for Business City Ratings, Economic Competitiveness, LGBTQ+ Inclusiveness

The table on the next page shows where Manila stands in regard to other Asian cities in the 2025 City Ratings Report. As shown in the table, Manila’s rating has declined since 2022, while both Bangkok and Singapore have seen steady improvements – widening the existing gap. This divergence underscores an urgent need for Manila to reassess and strengthen its competitiveness on the global stage.

Singapore’s continued rise is driven by robust economic performance, strong support for entrepreneurship, and progressive social reforms, including a higher LGBTQ+ score following the decriminalisation of same-sex relations. Thailand’s upward trajectory is similarly supported by increased entrepreneurial activity, but more notably, by the landmark legislation legalising same-sex marriage – demonstrating a firm commitment to inclusivity and modern governance.

In contrast, Manila has shown no measurable progress in LGBTQ+ inclusivity and suffering economic conditions in innovation, business environment and human capital. As a result, its rating has deteriorated from “Partially Open for Business” to “Not Open for Business”. This signals not only a missed opportunity for growth but also a potential risk to the city’s reputation and investment attractiveness. In fact, the report also finds compelling global correlations which indicate that inclusive cities attract diverse talent and foster environments where innovation flourishes:

- Cities ranking in the top quartile for LGBTQ+ inclusion showed human capital performance 4.0 times stronger than the bottom quartile across key metrics including quality of living, inflow of university students, years of schooling, and number of top universities per capita. This pattern holds consistent across North America, Europe, and Asia-Pacific markets, with particularly strong effects in knowledge economy hubs.
- LGBTQ+ inclusion can be a driver of innovation and entrepreneurship in urban hubs. Cities ranking in the top quartile for LGBTQ+ inclusion had innovation scores that are 2.0 as high as their less inclusive counterparts, while their entrepreneurship scores soar even higher at 2.5 times the baseline.

## Asia Pacific

City is fully open for business				
<b>AA</b>	Brisbane ↑	Melbourne	Sydney	Perth
<b>A</b>	Adelaide	Auckland ↓	Singapore ↑	Wellington ↓
City is partially open for business				
<b>BBB</b>	Hong Kong	Taipei ↓		
<b>BB</b>	Osaka	Tokyo ↓		
<b>B</b>	Bangkok ↑	Nagoya	Seoul ↓	Yokohama
<b>CCC</b>	Busan			
<b>C</b>	Bangalore	Chennai	Delhi	Hyderabad ↑
	Kuala Lumpur ↓	Mumbai	Shanghai	
City is not open for business				
<b>DDD</b>	Beijing ↓	Guangzhou	Manila ↓	
<b>DD</b>	Almaty	Chongqing ↓	Hanoi ↓	Ho Chi Minh City ↓
	Jakarta	Phnom Penh		
<b>D</b>	Colombo ↓			
<b>E</b>	Dhaka ↓			

Manila's declining rating in this year's ratings should serve as a wake-up call for local leaders. As businesses increasingly factor LGBTQ+ inclusion into their location decisions for new offices and operations,<sup>52</sup> and as top talent considers these factors when choosing where to live and work,<sup>53</sup> Manila risks falling behind

in the competition for investment and human capital. The global data showing strong correlations between inclusive policies and economic performance underscores the urgency for Manila to strengthen its inclusivity framework. Without decisive action, the city may find itself at a disadvantage in attracting

the companies, skilled professionals, and investors essential for sustained economic growth in an increasingly competitive global marketplace.<sup>54</sup>

Cities in the Philippines such as Quezon City and Iloilo are seeing the benefits of LGBTQ+ inclusion (see pages 34 and 35).



# The Economic Opportunity for LGBTQ+ Inclusion in The Philippines: Business Performance



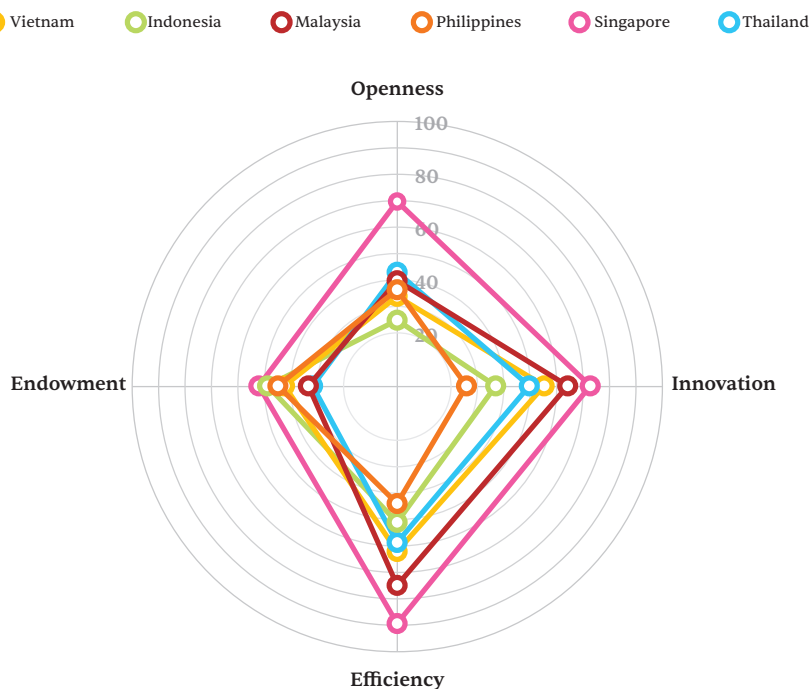
# Innovation

The Philippines is not rated as an innovator within the region, but could improve through greater diversity and openness.

Innovation is a key driver of business growth. As seen in the graph below, the Philippines' innovation score is low within the Southeast Asia region, and the National Innovation Council in the Philippines is spearheading a comprehensive National Innovation Agenda and Strategy Document (2023-2032) to boost economic competitiveness.<sup>55</sup>

Despite the country lagging behind in the regional scenario, they are a leader in their income bracket. According to the 2024 scores of the Global Innovation Index, the Philippines is one of the leaders for the lower middle-income group. Within that group of economies, it has been one of the countries with the fastest growth in the ranking since 2013.<sup>56</sup>

Whilst a range of factors can contribute to national and business innovation levels, workplace culture plays an important role. We see this in Accenture's "Getting to Equal 2019" research,<sup>57</sup> a workforce survey of over 18,000 professionals in 27 countries. The study found that for every 10 percent improvement in the culture of equality, businesses gain a 10.6 percent innovation mindset among their workers. At the time of publishing, Accenture Diversity and Inclusion lead for the Philippines confirmed the relevance of the results for Filipino businesses, quoting "Accelerating equality in the workplace has never been more critical for driving innovation".<sup>58</sup>

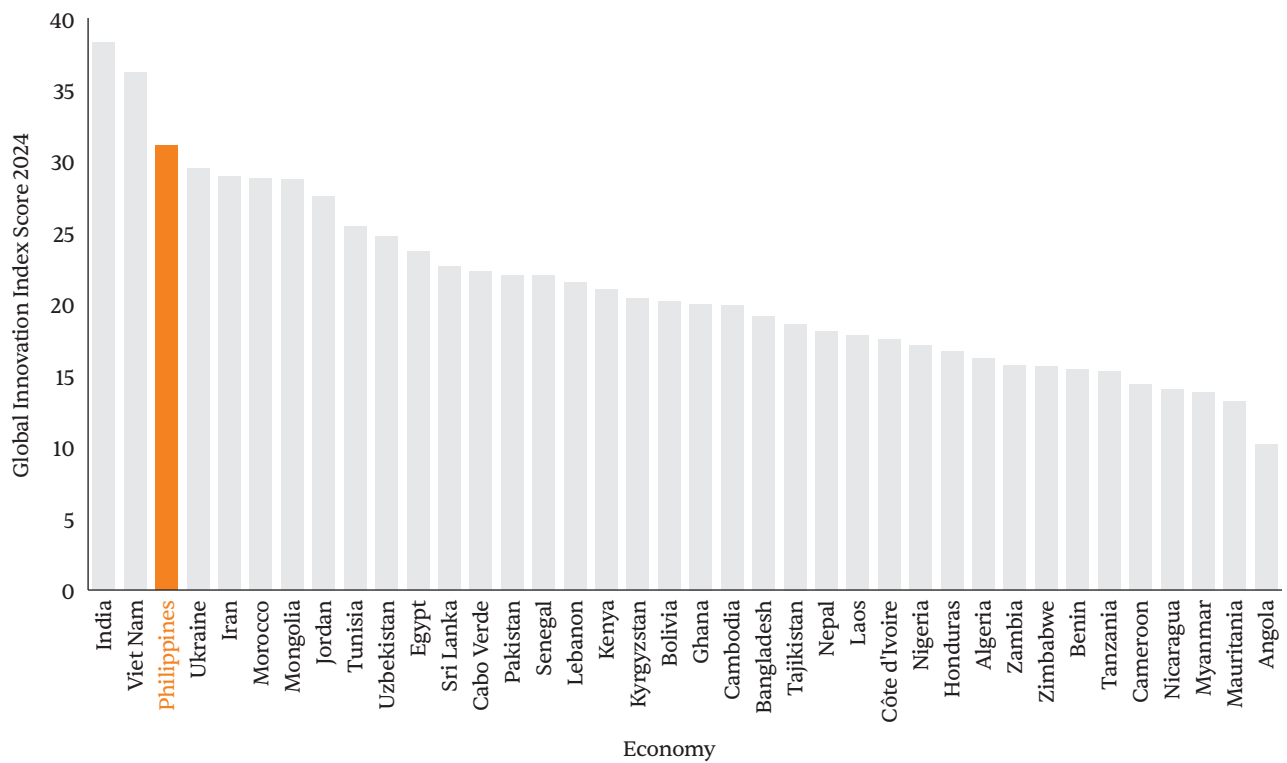


Global Attractiveness Index score for each dimension (1 = min, 100 = max),  
source: The European House – Ambrosetti elaboration on GAI Index

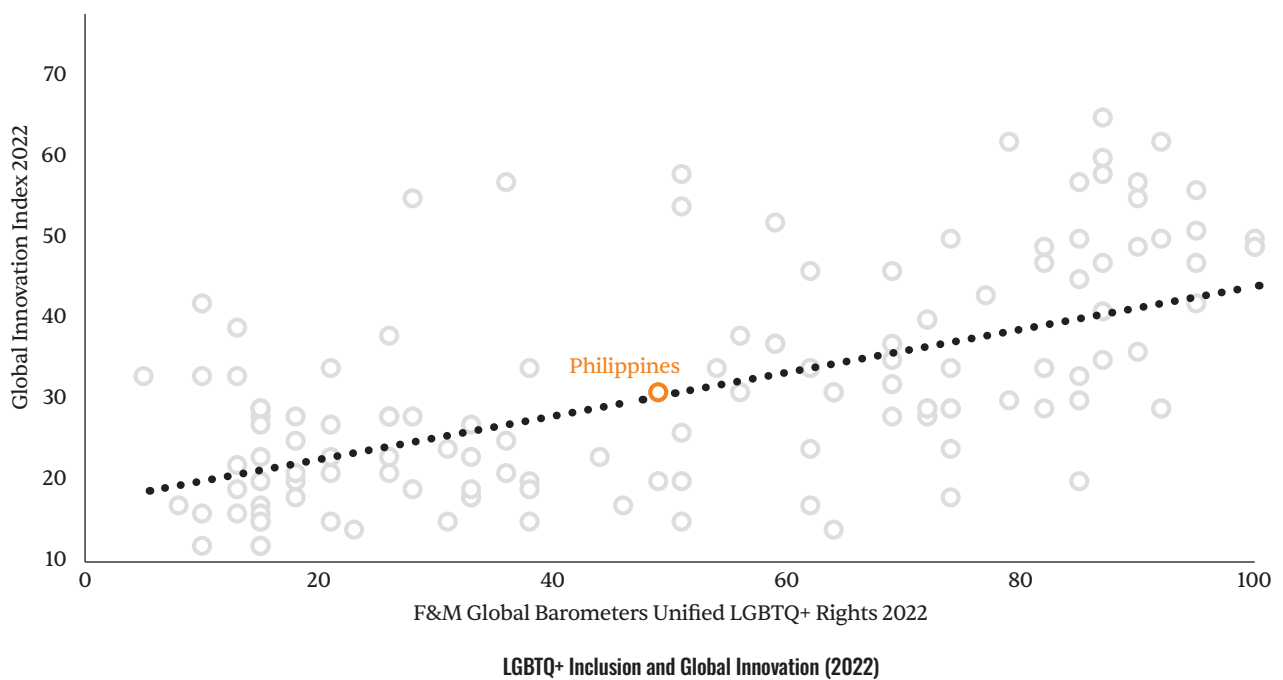
Open for Business' Southeast Asia report draws similar conclusions. Findings show that not only are LGBTQ+ rights and a country's innovation highly correlated, but also that improvements in LGBTQ+ rights precede - and predict - improvements in innovation.<sup>59</sup> This added to the evidence base that individuals in the Philippines would become more innovative once the country has first become more tolerant on LGBTQ+ rights.

For this report, we have updated the chart from 2024, showing the correlation between innovation and LGBTQ+ inclusion, highlighting the position of the Philippines within the sample. The data reveals there is still significant opportunity for the country to boost its levels of innovation by fostering a more open and inclusive culture.


<sup>59</sup> Results from Open for Business granger causality tests on 2018 and 2019 data



Global Innovation Index Scores (2024) among lower middle-income countries



# Attracting and Retaining Talent



**67%**

of companies in the Philippines now offer LGBTQ+ benefits

**Inclusive policies throughout a company help draw in top talent and keep them engaged.**

Hiring and retaining skilled workers is key to business prosperity, and success in these areas has globally been linked to a company's DEI policies, both internally and externally. In Southeast Asia, a 2024 study from BCG, including the Philippines, found that 61% of employees in the survey said they would consider leaving their current company for another that had a more inclusive culture. In addition, the research found having a senior leadership team committed to DEI raised employees' levels of happiness and motivation significantly.<sup>60</sup>

Businesses in the Philippines are signaling their commitment to LGBTQ+ inclusion to prospective and current employees through awards and recognition, like PFIPs Bahaghari awards and Iloilo Office of LGBTQ+ Affairs' LGBTQ+ inclusion badge.<sup>61</sup> IBM was the winner of PFIP's 2024 Pride Network of the Year and stated that their LGBTQ+ initiatives "have led to an 8% increase in headcount and a 40% rise in network membership".<sup>62</sup>

With 67% of companies in the Philippines now offering LGBTQ+ benefits,<sup>63</sup> businesses who do not keep up with rising inclusion standards risk losing out on key talent.

# Financial Performance

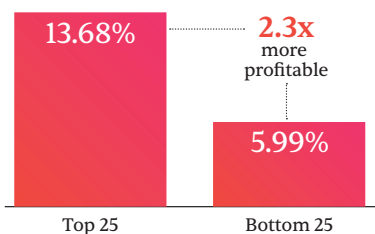
## LGBTQ+ inclusive companies outperform their rivals.

Open for Business' report, "Investor Guide to LGBTQ+ Inclusion: Enhancing business performance through LGBTQ+ Inclusive ESG Strategies",<sup>64</sup> concludes that companies that are transparent on LGBTQ+ inclusion have superior financial performance, improved brand reputation, and enhanced talent attraction.

The report analysed 290 companies in Australia, Germany, the United Kingdom, and the United States – four key investor countries for the Philippines.

### LGBTQ+ inclusive companies have stronger financial performance.

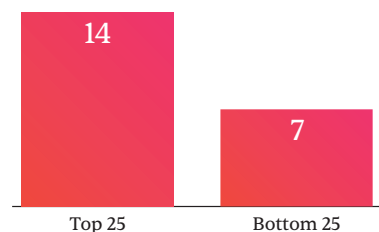
The report analysis includes an LGBTQ+ transparency score, based on 15 data points relating to corporate LGBTQ+ inclusion policies. Our analysis found that the 25 companies with the highest LGBTQ+ transparency scores have an average Profit as a Percentage of Revenue more than double that of the 25 companies with the lowest scores.



Companies with top 25 LGBTQ+ Transparency Scores are more profitable, source: Open for Business

### LGBTQ+ inclusive companies have stronger reputation and brand preference

The report used the Fortune World's Most Admired Companies list as a proxy for reputation. From this, they found 14 of the 25 companies with the highest LGBTQ+ transparency score feature in Fortune's list of the world's Most Admired Companies, compared to just seven of the 25 with the lowest score.



Companies with high LGBTQ+ transparency scores are more likely to appear in Fortune World's Most Admired Companies list, source: Open for Business

The top 25 companies for transparency are

**2.3x**

more profitable than the bottom 25



# **3 Case Studies: Advancing LGBTQ+ Inclusion**



The previous section of this report sets out the evidence base on why being LGBTQ+ inclusive is critically important for the Filipino economy. In this section, we lay out examples of how CSOs, city-level government units and businesses are already putting the economic case into action by creating inclusive societies and producing meaningful impact.

The first three sections, “Shaping National Policy”, “Creating More Inclusive Cities” and “Creating More Inclusive Companies” focus on how these champions for inclusion are removing systemic barriers and obstacles for LGBTQ+ people. The case studies are with CSOs (PANTAY and TLF Share), city governments (Quezon City and Iloilo LGBTQ+ Office) and business (Teleperformance and GCash).

The final section, “Enabling Inclusion by Building Capabilities”, focuses on giving LGBTQ+ people the capabilities to overcome any remaining barriers and obstacles themselves. The case studies are with CSOs (Mindanao Pride, Intersex Asia and Wagayway Equality Inc).

Together, these case studies show that inclusion is not just a principle – it’s a practical pathway to economic resilience and shared prosperity.



# Shaping National Policy

Progressive national policy is an essential driver for LGBTQ+ inclusion and LGBTQ+ organisations have clearly identified key policy areas in need of reform in the Philippines.<sup>65</sup>

Through utilising arguments of economic discrimination facing the LGBTQ+ community, and producing new research, CSOs in Free to be Me's Socio-Economic Empowerment pathway are impactfully working with

civil society, multilateral organisations, government and business to positively influence policies that affect the LGBTQ+ community.

## PANTAY

Established in 2016 and registered in 2022, PANTAY is a duly-recognised multi-awarded young LGBTQ+ and allies network advocating for gender equality, human rights, and inclusive democracy in the Philippines.

Since June 2024, PANTAY has served as the host of the Free to Be Me (F2BM) programme in the Philippines, an innovative program that brings together a movement of vibrant and diverse LGBTQ+ organisations who advocate for their human and socio-economic rights. One of their focuses under its economic empowerment arm is working with multinational institutions to embed LGBTQ+ inclusion within operations, internal systems, programs, and official development assistance (ODA), such as loans and grants that shape national policies. These institutions include the World Bank, International Finance Corporation (IFC), and Asian Development Bank (ADB).

PANTAY strategically engages with government stakeholders such as the Department of Economy Planning and Development (DEPDev), the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) and the Department of Education (DepEd) to align national economic



frameworks with inclusive goals. Their advocacy positions LGBTQ+ inclusion as essential to national productivity, human capital investment, and social protection reform. With encouragement from the global F2BM team, PANTAY started a dialogue with multilateral organisations to identify entry points in gender strategies where LGBTQ+ people are often overlooked.

In June 2025, PANTAY held a learning session on SOGIESC and LGBTQ+ rights with the World Bank and Asian Development Bank staff in the Philippines, and held a leadership training in June to build capacities among LGBTQ+ leaders for governance and economic advocacy ahead of the 2025 elections.

PANTAY sees their main impact as creating discourse for the intentional inclusion of LGBTQ+ people in policy and using economic arguments to facilitate these conversations. Before joining the Free to Be Me Communities of Action, PANTAY wasn't using economic empowerment or justice arguments in their work. However they now use key messages on social economic development as a way to push forward the legislative agenda. Their reflections on the programme are that the community members now understand that discrimination is an economic issue, and they need to continue to work out practical methods of how to integrate the economic case in their ways of working.



## TLF Share

TLF Sexuality, Health and Rights Educators Collective (TLF Share) is a membership-based non-profit organisation of peer educators, trainers, and advocates dedicated to advancing the rights and well-being of LGBTQ+ individuals, with a specific focus on gay men, bisexual men, transgender women, and men who have sex with men. They are supported by esteemed development partners in their mission to foster meaningful change within their communities and contribute to the Philippine government's drive for a progressive country.<sup>66</sup>

Over the past two years, TLF Share has advanced economic empowerment efforts for the Philippine LGBTQ+ community by conducting and utilising research that fills a critical data gap on queer Filipinos' socio-economic conditions. By comparing LGBTQ+ individuals with their non-LGBTQ+ siblings, the study revealed that LGBTQ+ Filipinos continue to experience insecure employment, discrimination, and lower levels of economic confidence. While income levels were not conclusively lower, the research shows that systemic discrimination continues to limit income potential and access to *magandang buhay* (good life).

Following the report's launch in March 2025, TLF Share has supported thirteen community-led LGBTQ+ organisations to use these findings in local advocacy, such

as supporting these organisations in conducting dialogues with their relevant local government institutions and the business sector. In addition, TLF Share also utilised the benefits of cross-movement collaboration by integrating LGBTQ+ concerns within labour rights, advocating to maximise existing protections in the absence of a national anti-discrimination law.

They also recently had a multi-stakeholder engagement, including a roundtable discussion with key socioeconomic actors from the national government, such as the Department of Economy, Planning, and Development (DepDev), the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), the Department of Health (DOH), the Commission on Population and Development (CPD), the National Anti-Poverty Commission, the Philippine Statistics Authority (NAPC).

TLF Share highlighted its recent success in engaging government agencies, with participating agencies expressing a shared recognition of the value of including LGBTQ+ identities in statistical data collection. Additionally, as a key outcome, the Department of Social Welfare and Development committed to organising a policy dialogue on diversity, equity, and inclusion to operationalise and mainstream the Executive

Order 51 otherwise known as the "Reinforcing The Diversity And Inclusion Program, Reconstituting The Inter-Agency Committee On Diversity And Inclusion, And Creating The Special Committee On Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, And Asexual Affair".

TLF Share have faced challenges as some MNCs scale back Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion efforts, but remain optimistic about sustaining momentum by showing tangible economic advantages of LGBTQ+ inclusion.

**The research shows that systemic discrimination continues to limit income potential and access to *magandang buhay* (good life)**

## Creating More Inclusive Cities

As Open for Business' City Ratings report concludes,<sup>67</sup> cities that are more LGBTQ+ inclusive can experience higher levels of competitiveness, innovation, and human capital. Two cities whose ongoing work demonstrates this are Quezon City and Iloilo City.

### Quezon City

In 2023, Quezon City introduced a “Right to Care” card which enables sex same couples to make medical decisions for their partners.<sup>68</sup> In 2025, Quezon City enacted its Gender-Inclusive Health Ordinance, the first local government unit in the country to do so, with the aim to provide “accessible, respectful, and affirming healthcare services for all – regardless of gender identity or expression”.<sup>69</sup> Quezon City also hosted the first LGBTQ+ Business Summit to champion inclusive economic growth, seeking to position Quezon City as a leader in inclusive urban governance by celebrating the vital role of queer entrepreneurs and workers in driving economic growth.<sup>70</sup>

Reflecting its public reputation as an inclusive city,<sup>71</sup> Pride in Quezon City has grown from 25,000 attendees in 2022 to 200,000 in 2024.<sup>72</sup>



## Iloilo Office of LGBTQ+ Affairs

Iloilo City has emerged as a national leader in LGBTQ+ inclusion, linking advocacy to systemic change and economic opportunity in local government. From a 30-person Pride march in 2016 to over 7,000 in 2025, local efforts led by the Office of LGBT Affairs – established in 2019 and the first in the country – have institutionalised protection, participation, and presence.

Iloilo passed an anti-discrimination ordinance in 2017 which signalled clear commitment from the local government to protect its LGBTQ+ citizens.<sup>73</sup> From there, the Office of LGBT Affairs has grown the programme to cover safe spaces, gender justice programmes, HIV/AIDS awareness, SOGIE education, and community outreach.<sup>74</sup> Some of their success includes:

- › Changing the Gender and Development Code in the city government to mean LGBTQ+ persons can access budget previously constrained to gender.
- › Offering free beauty treatments to citizens who learn about SOGIE at the same time.
- › Creating an inclusive replica of the national government financial assistance programme during the COVID-19 pandemic which did not cover same-sex couples.
- › Employing 100 LGBTQ+ sewers to make masks during the years of the COVID-19 pandemic, saving public money, and providing job opportunities.
- › Creating a “Pink Badge” system for employers in the city so prospective candidates know whether an employer is LGBTQ+ inclusive in their recruitment.

This work has produced results including: increased workforce participation for the LGBTQ+ community, reduced violence against the community and increased talent availability for companies who are LGBTQ+ inclusive. The city shows how rights-based approaches can spark both human rights and economic benefits.

## From a 30-person Pride march in 2016 to over 7,000 in 2025





# Creating More Inclusive Companies

With lacking national legislation, companies play a key role in building inclusive environments for LGBTQ+ people.

PFIP's 2024 workplace survey shows an improvement in the number of companies that grant benefits to LGBTQ+ employees since their 2021 survey, such as an increase in equivalent medical benefits for same-sex domestic partners (+8.7%) and an increase in equivalent life insurance benefits (+13.0%).<sup>75</sup>

These benefits, along with other internal and external support for the LGBTQ+ community, are key to achieving equality for Filipino employees. The case studies below show companies in the Philippines that are leading the way for LGBTQ+ inclusion.

## BPOs, such as Teleperformance Philippines

In the Philippines, Business Process Outsourcing (BPOs) are major employers and, according to a report by the IT and Business Process Association of the Philippines (IBPAP), the Information Technology and Business Process Management (IT-BPM) sector contributed 12.6% to the country's GDP and employed over 1.57 million Filipinos in 2022.<sup>76</sup> These BPO partnerships attract multinational companies, such as Microsoft, Amazon and IBM,<sup>77</sup> seeking efficient and reliable outsourcing solutions, and they often require vendors to align with their diversity and inclusion (D&I) standards, pushing BPOs in the Global South to adopt similar practices. The scale of employment means that even small shifts in inclusion policies have large ripple effects on workforce participation. They also often employ younger generations who are more likely to be supportive of LGBTQ+ inclusion and expect progressive employers.<sup>78</sup> A research paper on transgender women in BPOs in the Philippines found they were accepted and

encouraged to be "themselves" in BPOs and that building a gender-neutral washroom, allowing for a relaxed dress code, and forming support groups were ways BPOs support transgender women.<sup>79</sup> This creates a large opportunity in the Philippines for BPOs to lead the way in LGBTQ+ inclusion.

One of the largest BPOs in the country, Teleperformance Philippines, has been recognised for its inclusive and safe environment for LGBTQ+ employees in the Philippines.<sup>80</sup> The company

has implemented explicit non-discrimination policies that cover sexual orientation and gender identity as well as a "Use of Chosen Name" policy that has been used by 181 employees since 2022 – both filling a gap left by lacking national legislation.<sup>81</sup> Their internal group TP Pride also organises events, training, and mentorship programmes to promote awareness and inclusion.<sup>82</sup> This has helped foster belonging and boosted employee engagement in an industry known for high turnover.





## GCash

GCash, a leading fintech company in the Philippines, champions LGBTQ+ inclusion through both its inclusive workplace and financial services. The company's Great Place to Work certification reflects its supportive culture, where 95% of employees feel fairly treated regardless of sexual orientation.<sup>83</sup> Hamill, a manager at GCash and a transwoman, shares that being able to express her identity freely has boosted her confidence and productivity.<sup>84</sup>

In its products, GCash also fills critical gaps left by national legislation by allowing policyholders to designate same-sex partners as beneficiaries in its insurance products,<sup>85</sup> offering protection where legal recognition is absent. The company also provides inclusive loans and supports LGBTQ+-owned micro,

## In its products, GCash fills critical gaps left by national legislation

small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs),<sup>86</sup> expanding economic opportunities for marginalised groups. Through these initiatives, GCash not only enhances employee engagement and retention but also promotes financial inclusion and economic growth. This showcases how LGBTQ+ inclusion benefits both firms and the broader Filipino economy.

## PFIP Workplace Guide

For business leaders compelled to improve their LGBTQ+ inclusion, PFIP's 2024 "LGBTQ+ Inclusion in the Workplace: A Comprehensive Guide for Future-Forward Organizations in the Philippines" is a key tool. It contains clear guidelines for organisations according to the level of maturity of their LGBTQ+ inclusion strategies. Specifically tailored to the Philippines, it also spotlights best practices and contains a reflection guide and workbook for organisations to review their current strategies.<sup>87</sup>



# Enabling Inclusion by Building Capabilities

Whilst the previous three sections have shown how institutions can remove systemic barriers for LGBTQ+ individuals, this final section shifts the focus to empowering LGBTQ+ people with the tools and opportunities needed to navigate and overcome the remaining challenges themselves.

When LGBTQ+ individuals are economically empowered through access to education, training, entrepreneurship, and fair employment, they are better equipped to enter and thrive in the labour market. Economic empowerment

also encourages entrepreneurship and the growth of small enterprises in the country bringing national competitiveness gains. The CSOs highlighted below are building capabilities in the Filipino LGBTQ+ community to bring economic

benefits such as reduced poverty and reliance on social welfare, decreased costs associated with poor mental health or underemployment, and ultimately are building more resilient, inclusive economic systems.

## Mindanao Pride

Mindanao Pride is a registered non-profit, non-governmental organisation established in 2017, composed of Mindanaoans with diverse SOGIESC identities who are advancing the rights and welfare of sexual and gender minorities in Mindanao. Their Queer Workforce Advancement and Resource Training Alliance (QWARTA) fosters economic empowerment and professional development for LGBTQ+ Mindanaoans by supporting LGBTQ+ micro and small enterprises and providing career training, mentorship, and growth opportunities across Cagayan de Oro City, Butuan City, and Zamboanga City.

Launched in December 2023 with support from the Free to Be Me programme and building on a 2021 US Embassy-recognised initiative, QWARTA addresses the lack of inclusive economic opportunities in a region marked by conflict but growing peace. Despite local anti-discrimination ordinances, LGBTQ+ people still face employment and workplace exclusion, worsened by the pandemic. QWARTA has reached 118 participants through two tracks: entrepreneurship and career development.

The entrepreneurship track included a 5-day training for 15 LGBTQ+ entrepreneurs across the three cities, a field visit to LGBTQ+ owned businesses like Butterboy in Metro Manila, and mentorship with business leaders - many of them LGBTQ+ - starting August 2024. These monthly mentoring sessions, alongside regular realignment meetings with the QWARTA team, provided technical guidance, reflection space, and peer affirmation. Fourteen of the 15 entrepreneurs achieved their medium-term goals and secured seed grants, with their progress showcased at the “QWARTA MERKADO Bazaar” at Araneta City, the “Love Wins, Lokal Wins Bazaar” in Quezon City, and the Quezon City LGBTQ+ Business Summit. At the “MERKADO Plenary Discussion”, representatives from each city shared lessons learned and best practices, helping build visibility and networks across sectors.

The career development track ran workshops from September 2024



to May 2025 and hosted exclusive job fairs in collaboration with local governments, resulting in 10 direct hires into office management and customer service roles. Participants also took part in an E-Commerce Entrepreneurship Training focused on branding, online selling, and financial literacy - key skills for thriving in the digital economy.

Mindanao Pride has upskilled over 90 individuals, helped secure employment, and strengthened the visibility and viability of queer-led enterprises. They reflect that key to the success was tailored mentoring and affirming support structures, which continues to grow a resilient and inclusive entrepreneurial and professional network in Mindanao.

## Intersex Asia

Intersex Philippines is an organisation dedicated to empowering intersex individuals and their families in the Philippines. In 2024, they launched a year-long national entrepreneurship programme to provide sustainable income options for intersex individuals facing employment discrimination. Through financial literacy training and a tailored Academy for Intersex Entrepreneurship delivered in partnership with the Philippine LGBT Chamber of Commerce, participants learned how to start and sustain small businesses. Ten individuals received seed funding,

mentoring, and milestone-based grants, creating ventures like printing shops, car washing vending machines and perfume businesses.

During the programme, the entrepreneurs faced hurdles of finding reliable suppliers, fluctuating market prices and fear of making mistakes. Many participants were also balancing personal responsibilities, particularly within their households, which can impact their availability and consistency in attending sessions. To address this, the Academy created a repository of session recordings, allowing participants to catch up on the mentor's advice and learn from their

peers' experiences, even if they are unable to attend live.<sup>88</sup>

Beyond the impact of building businesses, the initiative fostered connection, confidence, and visibility within the community. One example is that members of the initiative have felt empowered to be active in their community, a contributor to positive mental health. Personal accounts also told Open for Business that entrepreneurship opportunities have helped them combat barriers to entry of the job market, for example discrimination in interviews when the gender marker on their ID is different to how they present.<sup>89</sup>

## Wagayway Equality Inc

Wagayway Equality Inc – a community of volunteers – is an organisation established in 2007 to champion sexuality, health, rights, and inclusive progress for the LGBTQIA+ community, the youth, and key-affected populations in Batangas City and other parts of Calabarzon such as Laguna and Quezon. Wagayway Equality Inc launched Empower Queer in 2024 to promote economic inclusion and financial resilience for LGBTQ+ individuals across several provinces of the Philippines. The programme offered over 25 Financial Empowerment Trainings, career development, and entrepreneurship, including the “Kasali Ka” module, which translates to “You are included”. Participants learned how to manage finances, invest safely, and build sustainable livelihoods. Ten recipients also received seed grants

and mentoring through the Soon-to-be Queer Entrepreneurs track, with business ideas ranging from online shops to local mini-groceries.

The team reflected that the programme was particularly successful as it was inclusive of both young and ageing populations. For example, in a visioning exercise on attendees' financial position in the future, Wagayway Equality Inc tailored the content to show the differing strategies attendees could use depending on their age. Wagayway Equality Inc also convened a Building Opportunities Summit, a job-matching and networking event connecting queer job seekers with employers.

Empower Queer fosters a mindset of empowerment, encouraging LGBTQ+ individuals to take charge of their own economic



future, supported by an enabling environment of mentors, partners, and trained volunteers advocating for inclusive growth. With over 50 stakeholder engagements and growing interest from universities and government offices, Empower Queer hopes to have laid the foundation for a lasting, community-led support system for LGBTQ+ economic empowerment.

## Conclusion

The case studies presented in this report highlight that meaningful progress toward LGBTQ+ inclusion in the Philippines is both achievable and underway.

Through coordinated efforts across civil society, local government, and the private sector, these initiatives highlight the tangible social and economic benefits of

inclusive practices. They underscore the importance of empowering LGBTQ+ individuals while also addressing systemic barriers through policy and institutional reform. It is now incumbent upon policymakers and business leaders to build on these efforts and play an active role in advancing a more inclusive and equitable society.



# 4 Legal Summary Fact Sheet

<b>Same-sex Intimacy</b>	<b>Legal</b>
<b>Marriage Equality</b>	<b>No</b>
<b>Legal Partnership</b>	<b>No</b>
<b>LGBTQ+ Hate Crimes Law</b>	<b>Legally recognised:</b> Section 216 on “Violence Against a Member of the Community” of the Criminal Code (2013) explicitly lists "sexual orientation" and “gender identity” and criminalises the display of apparently antisocial behavior as well as assault.
<b>Transgender Legal Recognition</b>	<b>No</b>
<b>LGBTQ+ Adoption</b>	<b>Single only</b>
<b>LGBTQ+ Workplace Anti-discrimination</b>	<b>No</b>
<b>Conversion Therapy</b>	<b>Not banned</b>
<b>The F&amp;M 2022 Global Barometer of Gay Rights® score</b>	<b>63% / Grade D - Intolerant</b>
<b>The F&amp;M 2022 Global Barometer of Transgender Rights™ score</b>	<b>41% / Grade F - Persecuting</b>

# Appendices and Methodology

## I. F&M Global Barometers

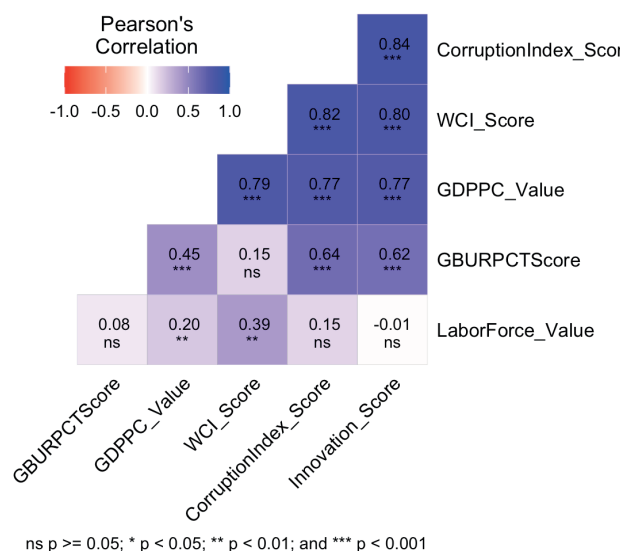
Open for Business utilises the F&M Global Barometers Unified LGBT Rights for 2020 and 2021 as its exclusive data source for LGBT+ rights worldwide. The data is available upon request for 2011-2022.<sup>90</sup>

## II. Correlation Graphs

Open for Business ran Pearson's correlations between the F&M Global Barometers Unified LGBT Rights for 2022 and the following datasets:

- › International Institute for Management Development's (IMD) World Competitiveness Index (WCI) 2022.<sup>91</sup>
- › Transparency International's 2022 Corruption Perception Index (CPI).<sup>92</sup>
- › The World Bank's GDP per capita data for 2022 (to current US\$).<sup>93</sup>
- › International Labour Organization's 2022 data on labor force: "ILO Modelled Estimates and Projections database (ILOEST)".<sup>94</sup>
- › The World Intellectual Property Organization's (WIPO) Global Innovation Index (GII) 2022.<sup>95</sup>
- › Open for Business ran Pearson's correlations between the F&M Global Barometers Unified LGBT Rights for 2021 and the following dataset:
- › The World Economic Forum's Travel and Tourism Development Index (TTDI) data for 2021.<sup>96</sup>

In all cases, we cleaned the databases to match by country name, and to have long formats, as a way to match the F&M Global Barometer structure. To run the correlations, we used the metan library in R, and the command `corr_coef` for data on 2022 for the first set of indices, and for 2021 for the second set. We created a Pearson's correlation heat map to understand the variables's significance and level of correlation for the 2022 correlations using the command `plot(corr1)`. For the 2021 Travel and Tourism Development Index we only ran the command `corr_coef` to obtain the coefficient and level of significance. It resulted in a coefficient of 0.59, with a  $p < 0.05$ .



After visualising which correlations had statistical significance (the CPI, the GDPPC, the GII, and the TTDI), we used the ggplot2 library in R to graph scatter plots for all the correlations, using the command `ggplot`. In all cases, we added the command `geom_point` to highlight the Philippines.



### III. Case Studies

The case studies were informed by a list of LGBTQ+ organisations provided by Hivos through the Free to be Me programme. Using insights from Free to be Me (economic empowerment plans, annual reports, initial proposal, studies that came out from the project, and secondary literature reflecting the results from the program), we reached out to five organisations based on their relevance to this report's focus. We contacted each organisation with a set of 13 interview questions about: 1) project description; 2) its impact; 3) lessons learned from its implementation; 4) how these projects provide evidence for economic and LGBTQ+ inclusion in the Philippines; and 5) final reflections. We conducted semi-structured interviews for one hour, with one to four representatives per organisation, through June 2025. Open for Business had one or two staff members running the interviews and taking notes (none of them were recorded). All interviews were online and in English.

The notes, the primary sources (from the Free to be Me programme), and secondary literature, guided the writing of the case studies. Each case study was structured in a narrative way to highlight each initiative's context, goals, and impact. We shared a draft of each case study with the respective organisation to verify the accuracy of the information before publication.

Among the limitations, we found that the internet connection hindered the fluidity of the interview, along with language barriers between the interviewers and the interviewees. This report includes case studies from organisations which were able to participate in the interview process through June 2025, as there were time constraints to run them. Time differences also posed constraints to running more interviews. A broader limitation with economic inclusion projects was addressed in the report: there exist difficulties in recording and reporting quantitative data that evidence the positive results from LGBTQ+ inclusion through economic inclusion projects. Thus, the organisations were not always able to provide detailed quantitative data to add to the report.

### IV. Advisory Board

This research was guided by Open for Business Research Advisory Board consisting of representatives from:

- › Academic experts
- › Investment professionals
- › Corporate sustainability leaders
- › Data analysts
- › LGBTQ+ civil society organisations
- › LGBTQ+ community representatives

Their expertise helped shape the methodology, interpretation of findings, and development of recommendations.

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