

## Thailand Moves to Legalize Same-Sex Unions, a Rare Step in Asia

By Hannah Beech, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/09/world/asia/thailand-same-sex-unions.html>

The bill avoids the term “marriage,” but allows for couples to adopt children and jointly own property. Though approved by the country’s cabinet, the plan has to get through Parliament to become law.

BANGKOK — In a country that has long been a rare bastion in Asia for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people, Thailand said on Wednesday that it had approved a draft bill that would give same-sex unions many of the same benefits as those of heterosexual marriages.

The bill, approved by the cabinet, avoids the term “marriage” but allows for the legal registration of same-sex partnerships. Accompanying amendments to the civil code would give couples the right to jointly own property, adopt children and pass on inheritances. Civil partnerships must occur between individuals who are at least 17 years old. At least one of the pair must be a Thai citizen.

“The Civil Partnership Bill is a milestone for Thai society in promoting equality among people of all genders,” said Ratchada Dhnadirek, a deputy government spokeswoman. “This strengthens the families of people with sexual diversity and is appropriate for the present social circumstances.”

While the bill still needs to be passed by Parliament to become law, social activists say that the biggest hurdle was approval by Thailand’s cabinet, which is a stronghold of retired military generals and tradition-bound political elders.

Although some elements of the Buddhist-dominated culture in Thailand are socially conservative, the country is also one of the most open places in the world for L.G.B.T.Q. people.

Thai surgeons have been pioneers in gender-reassignment surgery, and schools in rural Thailand have provided separate bathrooms for transgender students. Hit soap operas chronicle gay relationships. And four transgender people were elected to Parliament last year.

Yet discrimination persists, with gay and transgender individuals often encouraged to enter certain fields like entertainment or fashion. Rights activists say that the welcoming attitude toward gay tourists may not be as pervasive toward Thais themselves.

If the civil partnership bill is approved by Parliament, Thailand will join Taiwan as the only places in Asia that provide elements of legal equality for same-sex couples. Taiwan’s legislature passed a [same-sex marriage law](#) last year.

The Thai bill is not as expansive as that of Taiwan. Same-sex couples in Thailand will not be able to enjoy certain tax breaks. And critics of the bill say that calling such unions civil partnerships, rather than marriage, is a cop out.

“The foundation of the same-sex union law draft isn’t based on equality,” said Pauline Ngarmpring, who is transgender and who [ran for prime minister last year](#). “But it’s better than nothing,” she added. “This is not a fight that can be finished in our generation.”

Ms. Pauline, a former sports promoter, noted that she was still identified as male on her Thai identity card and must use male facilities at public hospitals.

In Malaysia, Singapore and other Asian nations, gay sex is a criminal offense. Brunei last year [enacted laws calling for death by stoning](#) for gay sex and adultery, but after an international outcry, the nation’s sultan said that capital punishment had not been carried out for decades and that [the moratorium on the death penalty would continue](#).

This year, a judge in [Singapore rejected efforts](#) to overturn rarely enforced colonial-era legislation that could lead to up to two years’ imprisonment for consensual sexual relations between two men. India [repealed a similar section of its penal code in 2018](#).