

— RESEARCH BRIEF · GEOPOLITICS

Where Does China's Money Go?

Which parts of Cambodia's economy get Chinese investment, and how does China compare with other investors?

— THE SHORT ANSWER

About 7 in every 10 foreign dollars.

China sends far more than any other country: **about 7 in every 10 foreign dollars** in 2025.

Most foreign money now goes into factories. So most Chinese money very likely goes into factories too. This is **our reading of the data**, not an official figure.

— KEY NUMBERS

Four numbers that tell the story



\$5.1B

of foreign direct
investment arrived in
Cambodia (2025, NBC)



72.7%

of that foreign
investment came from
China (2025, NBC)



68.1%

of all foreign investment
went into manufacturing
(2025, NBC)



~\$10B

of projects approved, a
promise, not arrived
(2025, CDC)

01

WHAT HAPPENED

\$5.1 billion arrived in 2025

FDI means **foreign direct investment**. It is money a foreign company puts into a business here, such as a factory, a hotel or a power plant.

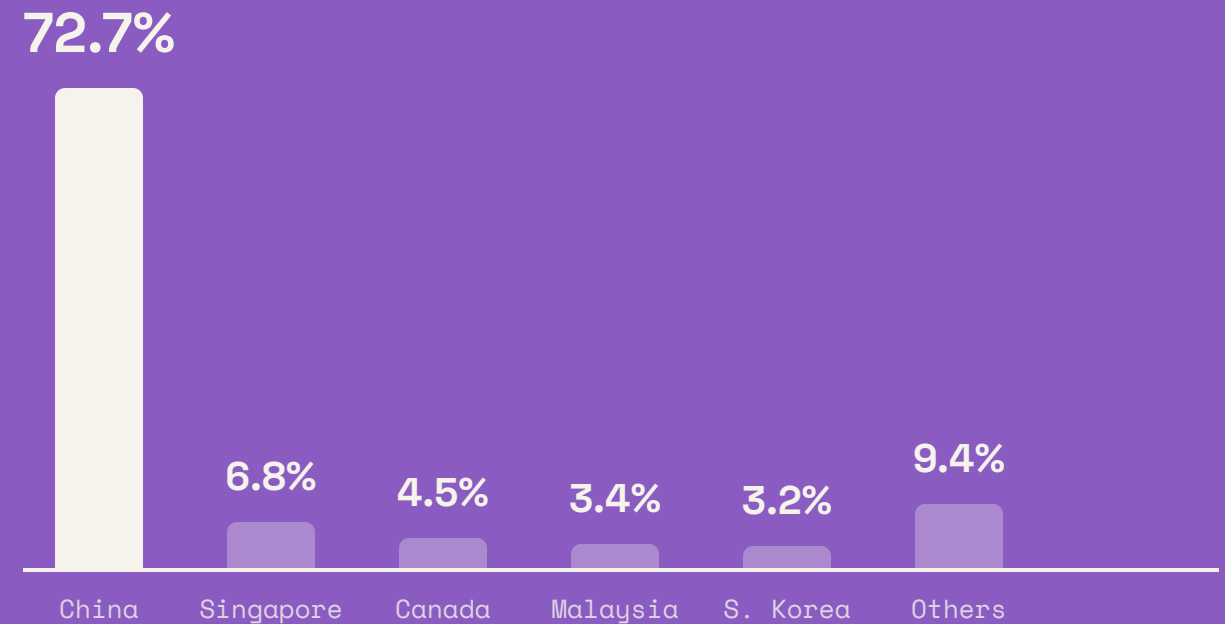
In 2025, **\$5.1 billion** of FDI arrived in Cambodia, up 16% on the year before (National Bank of Cambodia, 2025). These are the first published figures, so they could be revised.

— WHAT HAPPENED

China sent 72.7% of it

China sent **72.7%** of it, or about **\$3.7 billion** (our calculation).

Singapore was a distant second, at 6.8% (National Bank of Cambodia, 2025).



Share of FDI that arrived in 2025, by country (NBC)

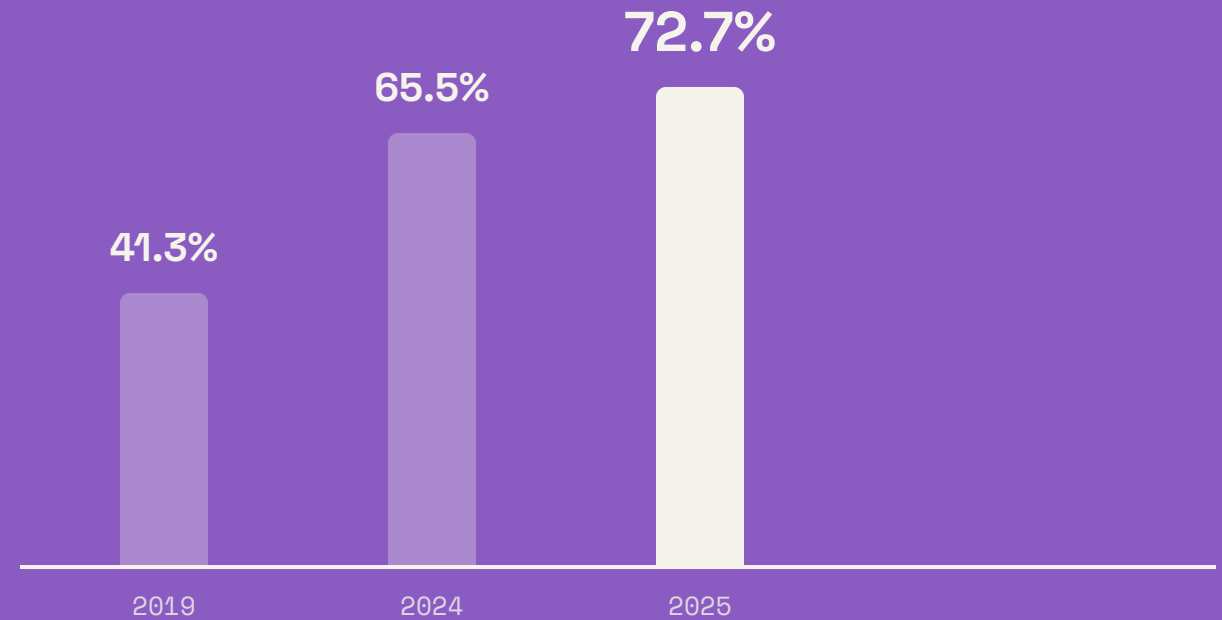
SOURCE NBC Financial Stability Review 2025, Fig. 1.8 (FDI inflows by country) · \$3.7B is our calculation

— WHAT HAPPENED

China's share rose, 2019–2025

China's share was **41.3%** in 2019 and **65.5%** in 2024 (World Bank, using National Bank of Cambodia data, 2025).

In 2025 it reached **72.7%** (National Bank of Cambodia, 2025).



China's share of FDI that arrived (2019 and 2024: World Bank, NBC data; 2025: NBC)

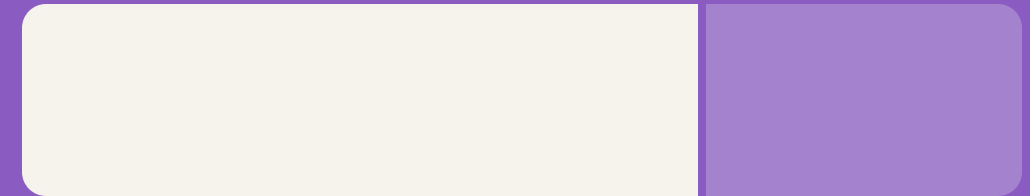
— WHAT HAPPENED

Most of it went into factories

Most of it went into manufacturing, which means making things in factories. In 2025, **\$3.5 billion** of FDI went into manufacturing. That is **68.1%** of all foreign money that arrived, and it grew 53% in one year. Money into hotels and guesthouses fell 39.6%. Construction and real estate fell 32.4% (National Bank of Cambodia, 2025).

These sector numbers cover all investors. The National Bank does not publish a sector split for each country. But China sends about 7 in 10 of the dollars, and manufacturing takes about two thirds. So most Chinese money very likely goes into factories. **This is our reading.**

FDI THAT ARRIVED IN 2025, BY SECTOR

**68.1%**

manufacturing (\$3.5 billion)

31.9%

all other sectors (our calculation)

CHANGE FROM 2024 TO 2025

Manufacturing

+53%

Hotels and guesthouses

-39.6%

Construction and real estate

-32.4%

02

WHAT CHANGED, AND WHY?

From casinos to factories, zones and roads

Before 2020, Chinese money was most visible in Sihanoukville property and casinos. In August 2019, the government banned online gambling. Reports at the time estimated about **10,000 Chinese residents** left within weeks (The Diplomat, 2019).

Since then, the mix has moved toward factories, special economic zones (areas built for factories, with special benefits) and big transport projects.

— WHAT CHANGED, AND WHY?

Examples include

Why did the money move? Trade deals, costs and trade routes are often named. We will test those reasons in a later episode.



The Phnom Penh to Sihanoukville Expressway

Opened in 2022, it is **187 km** long and cost about **\$2 billion**, as reported (National Development and Reform Commission of China, 2022).



The Sihanoukville Special Economic Zone

Chinese and Cambodian companies developed it, led by China's Hodo Group. As of May 2025, it had **202** companies and institutions and **32,000** jobs (Wuxi Municipal Government, 2025).



The Funan Techo Canal

In September 2026, China Exim Bank signed a loan of **nearly \$1 billion** for it (Cambodianess, 2026). It is a loan, not investment.

— 03 · WHO IS INVOLVED

Who is involved



On the Chinese side

There are private manufacturers, state-owned builders like China Road and Bridge Corporation, and state banks like China Exim Bank, which lend money.



On the Cambodian side

The Council for the Development of Cambodia, or CDC, approves new projects. The National Bank of Cambodia counts the money that arrives. The Ministry of Economy and Finance is also involved.



Approved is not arrived

Approved money is a promise that has not arrived yet. It includes Cambodian investors.

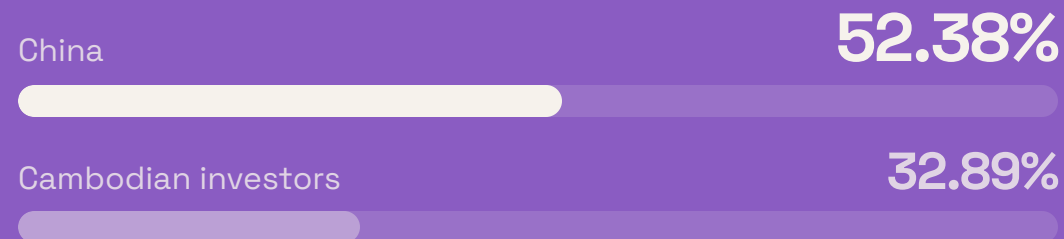
— WHO IS INVOLVED

Approvals: a promise, not money

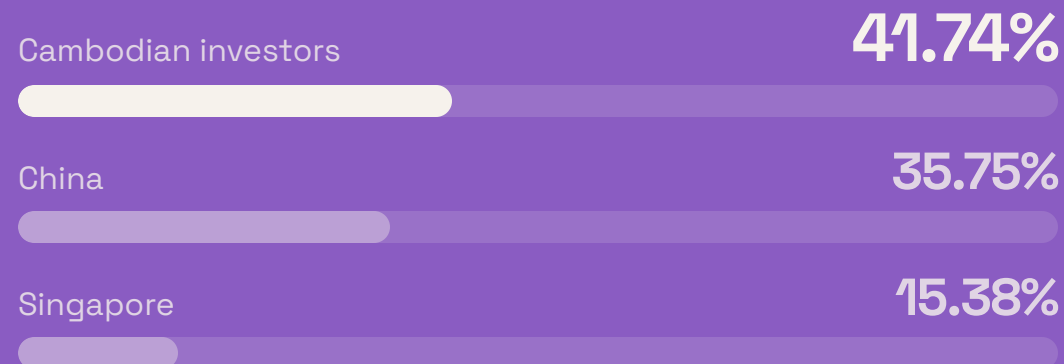
In 2025, the CDC approved about 630 projects worth around **\$10 billion**, up 45% on 2024 (CDC, 2026). In the first 10 months of 2025, China was the largest source of approvals, at **52.38%**, about 1 dollar in every 2. Cambodian investors came second, at 32.89%, about 1 in 3 (CDC, 2025).

In the first half of 2026, the CDC approved \$4.7 billion. Cambodian investors led, at **41.74%**. China was second, at 35.75%, and Singapore third, at 15.38% (CDC, 2026).

SHARE OF APPROVALS, JAN-OCT 2025



SHARE OF APPROVALS, JAN-JUN 2026



— 04 · RISKS AND OPEN QUESTIONS

Risks and open questions



Concentration

If one country sends 7 in 10 foreign dollars, a slowdown there hits Cambodia harder.



Promises are not money

Some approved projects arrive late, shrink or never start.



Quality

Some analysts ask if factory jobs bring new skills, or stay low-skill (Mom Mit, East Asia Forum, 2025).



Rising or falling?

It depends on the measure. China's share of money that arrived kept rising until 2025. In new promises, Cambodians led in early 2026. But half a year is short, and one big project can swing the numbers. Full-year figures for money that arrived in 2026 are not out yet.

 RISKS AND OPEN QUESTIONS

Trade rules

A **tariff** is a tax on imported goods. In July 2025, the United States set a 19% tariff on Cambodian goods. It also set a 40% rate, instead of 19%, on goods it judged “transshipped”, meaning passed through Cambodia to avoid US tariffs (White House, 2025).

In October 2025, Cambodia and the US signed a trade agreement (Office of the US Trade Representative, 2025). But US tariff rules changed again in 2026.

US TARIFF RATES AS ANNOUNCED, JULY 2025

19%

on Cambodian goods

40%

instead of 19%, on
goods judged
“transshipped”

As announced in 2025, not today’s rates.

— 05 · WHAT IT MEANS FOR YOU

Jobs it creates: likely factory jobs

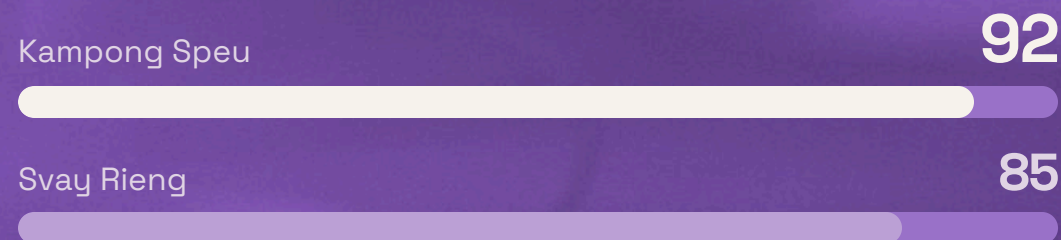
Most new foreign money builds factories. So most jobs it creates are likely factory jobs. The CDC expects 2025 approvals to bring about **438,000 jobs** (CDC, 2026). That is an estimate, not a count.

In the first half of 2025, Kampong Speu (92 projects) and Svay Rieng (85 projects) had the most approved projects (CDC, 2025). Wages, skills and whether factories stay can depend on trade decisions far from Cambodia.

438,000

jobs expected from 2025 approvals (CDC estimate, not a count)

APPROVED PROJECTS, FIRST HALF OF 2025



— 06 · DIFFERENT VIEWS

Two ways to read the numbers



Investment is bringing jobs and new industries.

Some point to record approvals (CDC) and fast growth in factory investment, with manufacturing FDI up **53%** (National Bank of Cambodia). The Asian Development Bank says industry was the main driver of growth in 2025.



Cambodia needs a wider mix of investors.

Others point to China's rising share, from **41.3%** in 2019 to **65.5%** in 2024 (World Bank, using National Bank of Cambodia data). Researcher Mom Mit, writing in East Asia Forum, argues that high FDI numbers hide low-skill jobs and weak technology transfer.

ABOUT THE DATA

Read these numbers carefully

- **Two measures, kept apart.** "Arrived" figures are actual FDI counted by the National Bank of Cambodia. "Approved" figures are CDC promises and include Cambodian investors. They cannot be compared directly.
- **Data age.** The latest full-year figures are for 2025. They are the first published ones, so they could be revised. The newest approval figures cover January to June 2026.
- **Different periods.** The 2025 country split for approvals covers January to October only.
- **Our calculations and reading.** The \$3.7 billion from China is our calculation. "Most Chinese money goes into factories" is our reading, as no official China-only sector split exists.
- **Estimates and labels.** The 438,000 jobs and the 10,000 residents are estimates. The canal money is a loan, not FDI. The 2025 US tariff rates are as announced, not today's rates.
- **Chart notes.** The Canada (4.5%), Malaysia (3.4%), South Korea (3.2%) and "Others" (9.4%) shares come from the same NBC chart of 2025 FDI by country (NBC Financial Stability Review 2025, Fig. 1.8). The 31.9% for "all other sectors" is our calculation: 100% minus 68.1%.

— SOURCES

Every number, and where it comes from

1. **Financial Stability Review 2025**
National Bank of Cambodia
https://www.nbc.gov.kh/download_files/publication/fsr_eng/FSR2025_En.pdf
2. **Cambodia Economic Update, June 2025**
World Bank · Jun 2025
<https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/099060925065018354/pdf/P506814-501fedcb-5a78-4603-a512-479686a9338a.pdf>
3. **CDC Approves 630 Investment Projects Worth Nearly US\$10 Billion in 2025**
Agence Kampuchea Presse (AKP) · Jan 2026
<https://www.akp.gov.kh/post/detail/358194>
4. **Chinese, Cambodian Investments Top Development Chart**
Cambodianess · Nov 2025
<https://cambodianess.com/article/chinese-cambodian-investments-top-development-chart>
5. **Cambodia approves 4.7 bln USD in fixed-asset investments for H1 2026**
Xinhua · Jul 2026
<https://english.news.cn/20260714/47ee8b2f9d294a2da6dde4db5c4b4779/c.html>
6. **Cambodia Approves USD 4.7 Billion in New Investments for H1 2026**
Acclime Cambodia · Jul 2026
<https://cambodia.acclime.com/news/new-investments-approvals-h1-2026/>
7. **CDC Approves US\$5.8 Billion in Investment Projects in H1, up 81%**
Agence Kampuchea Presse (AKP) · Jul 2025
<https://www.akp.gov.kh/post/detail/341497>
8. **Executive Order 14326: Further Modifying the Reciprocal Tariff Rates**
The White House · Jul 2025
<https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/07/further-modifying-the-reciprocal-tariff-rates/>
9. **Fact Sheet: The United States and Cambodia Reach an Agreement on Reciprocal Trade**
Office of the US Trade Representative · Oct 2025
<https://ustr.gov/about/policy-offices/press-office/fact-sheets/2025/october/fact-sheet-united-states-and-cambodia-reach-agreement-reciprocal-trade>
10. **Cambodia's rising FDI numbers don't add up to quality growth**
East Asia Forum · Nov 2025
<https://eastasiaforum.org/2025/11/28/cambodias-rising-fdi-numbers-dont-add-up-to-quality-growth/>
11. **Asian Development Outlook April 2026: Cambodia**
Asian Development Bank · Apr 2026
<https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/1135881/cam-ado-april-2026.pdf>
12. **1st Chinese-invested expressway injects new vitality into Cambodia's economic growth**
National Development and Reform Commission (China) · Nov 2022
https://en.ndrc.gov.cn/news/mediar/sources/202211/t20221109_1341042.html
13. **Cambodia's Sihanoukville Special Economic Zone introduces over 200 firms**
Wuxi Municipal Government · May 2025
https://en.wuxi.gov.cn/2025-05/23/c_1097519.htm
14. **Nearly \$1 Billion Loan Secured for Funan Techo Canal**
Cambodianess · Sept 2026
<https://cambodianess.com/article/nearly-1-billion-loan-secured-for-funan-techo-canal>
15. **Did Cambodia Just Make a U-Turn on Gambling?**
The Diplomat · Sept 2019
<https://thediplomat.com/2019/09/did-cambodia-just-make-a-u-turn-on-gambling/>

— DISCLAIMER

Before you use this brief



Sources and accuracy

Figures in this brief are compiled from public sources believed to be reliable at the time of writing (October 2026). Data can differ between sources and may be revised later. Always check the original source before you rely on a number.



For education only

This brief is for educational purposes only and is not financial, investment, legal or medical advice. Get professional advice before making decisions.



Independent

The Camdex Lab is independent and is not affiliated with, or endorsed by, any organization cited. Naming an organization does not mean it reviewed or approved this brief.



Photos

Photos are illustrative, used under the Unsplash licence and credited on each slide. They do not show the people, places or events described in the data unless stated.



Sharing and quoting

You may share this brief and quote short parts or single charts with credit to "The Camdex Lab" and a link to thecamdexlab.com. Please do not sell it or remove our credits.



Found an error?

Email info@thecamdexlab.com. We correct mistakes and list every change publicly. Full terms: thecamdexlab.com/terms.

THE CAMDEX LAB

Is one large investor a strength for Cambodia, or a risk?



Read online



Watch the series



thecamdexlab.com

For education only. Not financial, investment, legal or medical advice. Independent, not affiliated with any organization cited.

© 2026 The Camdex Lab Organisation · Cambodia · Corrections: info@thecamdexlab.com

Photo: Roth Chanvirak / Unsplash