

# A review of policy directions in women's and family issues in South Korea

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## 1. Jobs for Women

With the economic crisis in 2009 greatly aggravating employment conditions for women, the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family adopted "promotion of women's economic activities" as a top priority for its 2010 policy agenda. Since the beginning of the economic downturn, the size of South Korea's economically active female population has been on a steady decline, with female workers becoming one of the principal victims of the sluggish labor market. Their status at work and the quality of their jobs has also deteriorated; the value of women's wages versus men's wages fell from 66.4% in 2007 to 62.4% in 2008.

Some have projected that labor conditions for women's will improve as the economic rebound in 2010 creates more jobs for young women. Still, employment for women, especially for particularly vulnerable groups such as the middle-aged and seniors, could become a major social concern depending on the impact of public investment in job creation. For this reason, a growing need is evident to address the issue by creating further jobs for women through public investment in green growth and new growth engine industries.

- The Green New Deal: approximately 900,000 jobs to be created by 2012
  - Some 480,000 jobs are to be generated by 2010 in 27 core green-growth areas
  - Women are able to participate in a number of sectors, with the government's green growth policy simultaneously pursuing economic growth and environmental protection in combination with improved quality of life.

In addition, demand will increase for more diversified forms of employment, such as jobs with reduced working hours that aim to allow a balance between work and family. While the proportion of part-time employment of women in OECD countries in 2008 averaged 25.3%, the figure for South Korea was 13.2%. This indicates an apparent potential to increase flexible employment for South Korean women. In order to prevent flexibility in employment from eroding the quality of women's jobs, resolution of issues faced by female contract workers, which is at the center of other issues critical to women including employment and maternity protection, remain at the head of the government's agenda for 2010. Furthermore, there will

be an accelerated demand for public social services rather than market-oriented services provided by low-paid workers. As of 2003, employment in the social services industry in OECD countries accounts for 21.7% of all employment on average. However, South Korea's proportion of employment in social services reached a mere 13.8% in 2007.

### **Future prospects and possible responses**

In green industries, which may become a main channel of opportunity for jobs for women, active participation by women is expected in areas including the reduction of greenhouse gases and response to climate change, the energy industry, development and management of natural resources, new growth engine industries, and the business service industry (Korea Women's Development Institute, 2009). With lingering economic uncertainty, however, the issue of female irregular workers could be exacerbated as companies increase the number of yearly-contract positions. Due to the continuing low fertility rate, the creation of jobs that allow women to balance work and family, which would simultaneously elevate the country's fertility rate and encourage female participation in the labor market, is expected to place high in national priorities. Furthermore, the improvement of employment conditions for female workers in the social services sector, whose presence has been steadily rising due to the expansion of social welfare services, will also be necessary.

### **The following are suggestions to address these issues :**

First, vocational training programs should be offered to assist more-vulnerable groups, including middle-aged women and seniors who may be left behind by the job market during the economic turnaround. Governmental job creation initiatives via public investment should be sustained until uncertainty in the economy diminishes.

Second, programs to train talented female workers in emerging growth-engine sectors including green growth need to be implemented. It is imperative to reform institutions and/or business practices that may be hindering female participation in those sectors.

Third, measures to resolve issues of discrimination against and overuse of irregular workers need to be enacted. Diverse resources to facilitate conversion to regular positions, such as training programs to enhance vocational skills and opportunities to become regular workers, should be made available.

Fourth, governmental supervision of social service jobs needs to be centralized. Currently, positions for female workers in social services vary and the supervisory agencies are not clearly delineated. Furthermore, measures should be implemented to improve working conditions by job type.

### Major public jobs for women

- ▶ Institutionalized social service jobs, including caretakers for mothers and their newborn babies, childcare providers, caretakers for seniors living alone, caretakers for patients (Ministry of Health and Welfare, Ministry of Labor)
  - \* A total of 94,000 women participated in these jobs in 2008 (83.9%)
  
- ▶ Public jobs for the underprivileged women including unemployed women and the poor self-employed (Ministry of Public Administration and Security)
  - \* A total of 143,000 women participated in these jobs in 2009 (58.1%)
  
- ▶ Jobs for women created by nurturing women-friendly social enterprises (Ministry of Labor)
  - High-quality, sustainable jobs in the care provision, food, culture, and banking sectors
  - \* A total of 5,755 women participated in these jobs in 2008 (68.9%)

## 2. Sexual Violence, Human Rights, and Safety Issues

In 2009, a number of nefarious crimes against children and women alarmed the South Korean public. In particular, parents became intensely distressed and concerned for the safety of their children when a series of child sexual abuse cases came to light. The number of cases of sexual violence reported to the police has increased by 37.3% over the past five years, while cases of sexual abuse against children 13 years of age or younger reported to the police rose by as much as 90%. Despite a police crackdown including the forced closure of brothels and red-light districts, the prostitution industry continues to thrive through adaptation or by going underground.

In response to the increasing number of underprivileged women, including immigrant women (from cross-border marriages), migrant workers, women with disabilities, and North Korean defectors, policy approaches are called for which assuage their desire to participate in society as responsible citizens. Domestic violence in the rising number of cross-border marriages is tarnishing the national image. Last year, 16.9% of immigrant women experienced domestic violence due to cultural and language issues.

Sexuality, human rights, and safety, which entered the spotlight of public attention due to the "Cho Du-soon child sexual abuse case" in 2009, will remain major social issues in 2010. In response, a strong call for stricter regulations to curb sexual violence against women and children is expected given the lenient punishment of sexual crimes: of 1,839 convictions for sexual offenses against minors in 2007, 0.4% received a sentence of life imprisonment, 42% a fine, and 30% probation.

### **Future prospects and possible responses**

Amidst a rising number of sexual crimes against children, the high percentage of sex offenders being sentenced to probation and/or fines is sustaining the controversy surrounding court case assessment. The number of reported cases of juvenile sexual abuse has been increasing by around 10% every year: 721 cases in 2004, 738 in 2005, 980 in 2006, 1081 in 2007, and 1220 in 2008.

Despite existing governmental anti-prostitution policies, meanwhile, prostitution continues to prosper by posing as legitimate businesses and spreading through the Internet. More nations are adopting heavier punishments for buyers of sex. In addition, South Korea's Gender Gap Index, recently released by the World Economic Forum, ranked 115th among some 130 countries, indicating that the potential of South Korean women is not being fully tapped.

#### **Strategies to address these issues may include :**

First, a safer environment should be established for women and children by enacting safety systems for women and children, promoting education and public awareness of the issues related to combating violence against women and children, improving support services for efforts against violence towards women and children, and enhancing protection and support services for the victims.

Second, the effectiveness of prostitution policies to combat prostitution needs to be enhanced by improving support services offered according to class of victim, such as minors and women working in brothels, expanding anti-prostitution education and improving the quality of educational programs, compiling more accurate data on the prostitution industry, and raising public awareness.

Third, a framework for the protection of the human rights of immigrant women should be established by improving the existing 1577-1366 hotline service, increasing the number of available shelters, and raising awareness of the issues among internationally married couples as along with the public.

Finally, assistance for disabled women should be improved through a comprehensive support system catered to their specific needs by type of disability, a system to heighten their economic independence, and assistance with the educational needs of less-educated and less-mobile disabled women.

### 3. Balancing Work and Family

The government is expected to persist in its policies aimed at increasing the national fertility rate and women’s economic participation. As a nation possessing one of the lowest fertility rates in the world, efforts to increase that low fertility rate and the employment of women must include strengthening policies supporting women’s efforts to balance work and family commitments.

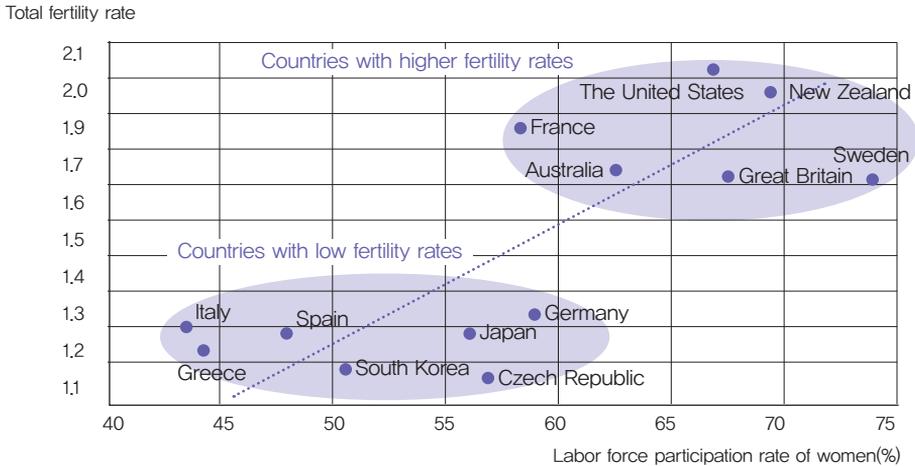


Figure 1. The relationship between women’s economic participation and total fertility rate in OECD countries

The government’s response to the low fertility rate and its family policies will be designed with double-income households as a major target. Meanwhile, generational conflicts may emerge as a pressing social issue apace with the unprecedented rate of population ageing and the retirement of baby boomers leveling a severe financial burden on working-age Koreans.

\* In 2005, eight working Koreans supported one retiree that ratio is projected to be 3:1 in 2025 and 2:1 in 2040.

Furthermore, the year 2010 is the target date for the government to establish the Second Basic Framework Responding to the Low Fertility rate and Ageing Population (the *Seromagi Plan*), in which a gender-sensitive approach is strongly called for.

#### Future prospects and possible responses

There is an increasing demand for social conditions under which workers are able to balance their work and family life. The obstacles impeding South Korea’s progress include a lack of

gender sensitivity both at work and in the home, along with a decreased caretaking function in the family resulting from family nuclearization. This issue is discussed in more detail below.

Businesses have yet to offer additional work alternatives such as permanent part-time positions and have yet to renounce discriminatory practices against married women.

- \* In 2008, a mere 42.5% of those who took a maternity leave also used a parental leave.
- \* The rate of companies complying with their obligation to provide an in-house daycare facility was 20% in 2006, 26% in 2007, and 28% in 2008.

Participation in childcare and housework by South Korean men is significantly lower than that of their counterparts in other countries, due to a lack of awareness of gender equality, the longest working hours, and frequent after-work drinking sessions perceived to be an extension of work responsibilities.

**Comparison of the time spent on housework between single-income and double-income households**

	Double-income households		Single-income households	
	woman	man	woman	man
Time spent on housework	3 hrs 28 min	32 min	6 hrs 25 min	31 min

\* Hours actually worked in 2007: 1,433 for Germans, 1,760 for British, 1,794 for Americans, and 2,316 for South Koreans

While the informal support network for the family is deteriorating due to social changes including familial nuclearization, there remain an insufficient number of high-quality childcare services designed to meet the needs of working mothers, especially for children from 0-2 years of age.

Of the policy plans for 2010 set out by the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, those related to the creation of working environments to balance work and home commitments include:

- Laying a foundation for the introduction of more flexible working options that enables the balancing of work and family obligations
- Research on policies by enterprises and individual workers to support the balancing of work and family life

- Survey of support systems offered by companies and their rate of usage
- Survey of the needs of male and female workers for support in balancing work and family life
- Development and increase of positions with flexible working hours (purple jobs)
  - Developing a diverse range of alternative work options, such as part-time positions, flex-time jobs, and home-based work
  - Developing ten model jobs for balancing work and family life by type of job and business
  - Granting commissions to develop ways to increase flextime work practices

### Purple jobs

- **Definition** : jobs that allow workers to choose when and how they work
  - **Examples**
    - Samsung SDS has put in place commuting-with-your-baby, flextime, home-based work systems. As a result, the proportion of female workers within the company has increased from 13% in 2000 to 20.5% in 2008.
    - Kyobo Life Insurance provides alternative work options including flextime, reduced working hours for intensive childcare, and family-care leaves. As a result, productivity per employee increased from 130 million won in 2003 to 170 million won in 2008 and the proportion of female workers rose from 34.3% in 2001 to 40.8% in 2009.
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- Introduction of flextime working practices in the public sector
    - Introducing pilot programs such as permanent part-time positions and “smart offices” in the public sector, identifying examples, and presenting models. The Ministry of Gender Equality and Family began operating permanent part-time positions as a pilot program in 2010.
    - Encouraging male public officials to take the lead in taking parental leave
  - Promoting the introduction of flexible working practices in private enterprises
    - Providing incentives to organizations with flexible working practices (in collaboration with other ministries such as the Ministry of Labor)
    - Developing a human resources management manual for the private sector and offering expert consultation
    - Operating a taskforce to disseminate awareness of flexible working practices (to 100 organizations including the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, local governmental bodies, and for-profit organizations)
  - Promotion of gender-sensitive working practices

- Promotion of a working environment that balances work and family life through the signing of MOUs with businesses: currently, MOUs have been inked with seven companies including Korean Airline, Hyundai Heavy Industries, and the KT Corporation.

Evolution of companies after signing an MOU

- SK Telecom: established a work performance evaluation program which preempt potential disadvantages suffered by employees who take a parental and/or maternity leave (October 2009)
- CJ Cheiljedang: created major business strategies increasing the number of female managers and female human resources (October 2009)
- KB Bank: introduced a "short working hours during intensive childcare" initiative for the first time ever in the banking sector (July 2009) increased the length of maternity leave from five to six months, and introduced an infertility leave (August 2009)
- STX Offshore and Shipbuilding: installed special convenience facilities for female employees including an exclusive resting place and a nursing room (May 2009)

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- Increasing the number of companies, especially smaller enterprises, that pledge themselves to the Women-friendly Business Agreement with the Ministry's Job Center for Women. As of 2009, 500 companies have signed the agreement.

- Encouraging the use of a flextime option at work
  - Identifying and supporting companies that adopt flextime options

※ According to the OECD, those countries with a higher proportion of part-time work for women enjoy an elevated labor force participation rate by women, with a one percentage point increase in the ratio of part-time work triggering a 0.5 percentage point rise in women's labor participation.

In order to support workers' juggling of work and life, a worker's right to return to work after maternity and/or parental leave should be protected by law. In addition, a substitute employee program needs to be put in place in order to assist companies in hiring supplementary workers and eventually to secure workers' rights to maternity and parental leaves.

Regarding governmental childcare policy, another pillar allowing a balance of work and family life, childcare support for working mothers needs to be enhanced. Along with the continued expansion of public daycare facilities, the quality of private daycare centers should

be developed and further incentives should be provided to support operation of in-house daycare facilities in workplaces. Expansion of childcare benefits for working mothers and introduction of a child tax credit needs to be considered. Lastly, one further pressing matter is the reduction of the number of hours actually worked and the promotion of a more gender-sensitive family culture by encouraging male participation in childcare.

#### 4. Gender Mainstreaming Policies

2010, the second year in the government's gender budgeting initiative, is the date the gender budgeting initiative and the gender impact assessment come up for evaluation. With opinions and evaluations being returned regarding the gender budgets put forth in the initial year of the initiative, an ongoing discussion surrounds the directions for budgetary planning for 2011. The focus of the gender impact assessment of policies will shift from quantitative increases to quality improvement, with heightened interest shown in the impact of the assessment. In terms of women's representation, which serves as a vehicle as well as a goal for enhanced gender mainstreaming, the local elections slated for June 2010 will be perceived as a defining moment in the improvement of the status of South Korean women. Raising awareness of gender equality and the increased participation of women in decision-making positions are deemed vital to narrow the gender gap in South Korea.

#### Future prospects and possible responses

The gender impact assessment of policies, which is being adopted by the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family as a major vehicle for gender mainstreaming, will continue to expand in scope. Although this assessment and gender budgeting differ in the sense that the former is related to policies and the latter to budgets, a strong call for linking the two systems exists due to their sharing of a mutual goal to seek policy improvement through the integration of a gender perspective into policies. In particular, it is expected that introduction of gender mainstreaming initiatives by local governments as part of their policy agenda for female constituents will develop as a central issue in upcoming local elections. With South Korea chairing the G20 summit and joining the Development Assistance Committee of the OECD (OECD/DAC) in 2010, the manifestations of gender mainstreaming in the nation will be under scrutiny.

#### The following are suggested responses to these issues :

First, the practical improvement of the gender mainstreaming system, not simply tasks undertaken for the sake of formality, needs to be pursued by reflecting public expectations of and interest in gender budgeting.

Second, obstacles that remain to be cleared include: a lack of commitment and participation by public officials in the implementation of the system, lack of discretionary power granted to the official in charge of gender sensitivity issues in drawing up improvement measures related to budgeting and programs, a lack of sustainable inter-organizational collaboration, and a lack of public awareness of the benefits of the system.

Third, the quantitative expansion of the gender impact assessment in local governmental policies should be extended to the policies of the central government. The implications of the gender impact assessment need to be actualized by improving the process of target project selection, assessment indices, and implementation.

Fourth, through collecting research results in gender impact assessment, gender budgeting and gender-sensitive statistical analyses, models should be identified and promoted through receptive media to heighten public awareness.

Fifth, while enhancing the national image by adopting South Korea's gender mainstreaming cases into the agenda in the G20 summit and OECD/DAC activities, the resulting feedback should be reflected upon as a means to further improve the system.

Finally, policy measures to boost women's representation, including quotas for women, need to be actively sought out as part of the process of women's participation in the upcoming local elections.

- The ratio of female legislators in the 18th National Assembly: 13.7%
- The ratio of female members in the fourth elected local councils: 14.5%

## 5. Family Policies

There will be a continued need in 2010 for policies supporting vulnerable families, including single-parent families and disadvantaged households. Another pressing issue is enhancing the social embrace of diverse types of families, such as multicultural families, single-mother families, and families with divorced parents.

### **Future prospects and possible responses**

The evolved structure of households, such as single-person households, single-parent households, working poor households, double-income households, and senior-only households, necessitates family policies that are able to accommodate contemporary family values and the varying needs of diverse family types. The declining rate of marriage will increase the num-

ber of delayed marriages, those who postpone their weddings, and single-person households. As it is expected to be as a key component of the country's low fertility rate, policies need to be drawn up which target unmarried women. Furthermore, comprehensive measures are called for which encompass a number of aspects including employment, social security, education, housing, and health in order to alleviate the deepening poverty of vulnerable families, including female seniors living alone, single-mother households, and working poor households.

- \* Unmarried-mother households account for 7-8% of all households.
- \* The number of working-poor households is estimated to have surpassed two million as of 2009.

As for multicultural families, the government has focused its efforts on crafting policies according to target group and increasing the number of multicultural family support centers as well as diversifying the programs designed with them in mind. In the future, however, family policies need to become more focused on the social integration of multicultural families, to view them not as beneficiaries but as responsible members of society.

**Possible strategies to address these issues include :**

First, policy efforts need to be made to ensure familial and societal values for gender equality infrastructure to encourage male participation in housework and childcare -for example, introduction of quotas for men's parental leave, childcare reflected in pay step increases, and reduced overtime work- should be established.

Second, a comprehensive support system for caretaking services should be established. Family care leave should be institutionalized as statutory paid leave to enable workers who need to care for family members to balance work and care provision. An integrative support center is required to link community-based care service providers to the demand side for those services.

Third, assistance to needy households, including single-parent families, should be increased. Starting in 2010, the Ministry of Health and Welfare is planning to raise the age limit for childcare benefits to poor single-parent households with no children over the age of 17 from ten to twelve. This will benefit 9,000 additional children annually.

Fourth, policies should be crafted to assist multicultural families. Detailed information on human rights and cross-border marriages need to be provided to women considering immigration before they enter the country. This could be enabled through a multi-lingual web-site that provides assistance to multicultural families as well as information on life in South Ko-

rea. An increase the number of multicultural family support center across the country from the current 100 to 140 is also recommended. Service accessibility needs to be improved in tandem with the standardization of education programs.

Last, a national embracing of diverse forms of family as well as protection of South Korean nationals should be engendered through a strengthening the rights of single mothers and the promotion of domestic adoption. Prior to ratifying the 1993 Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption, relevant regulations need to be revised to enable the introduction of an adoption permit system and the establishment of centers that exclusively assist adoption. Starting in 2010, the Ministry of Health and Welfare is planning to increase the brokering costs and childcare benefits for families adopting children with severe disabilities and raise the age limit for the benefits from the present 13 to 18.