

MARRIAGE MIGRATION: THE CASE OF FEMALE MIGRANTS IN KOREA

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Abstract

This article examines the exact number of migrants who have visited the Republic of Korea from many countries between 1990 and 2020. It also examines the immigration policies and demographic changes in the society implemented by the Republic of Korea, as well as the number of female and male immigrants coming to the Republic of Korea through the F-6 marriage visa and the E-9 unskilled worker visa. It scientifically analyzes the increasing demand for female migrants in society due to the changing role of women in Korean society.

Keywords: F-6, E-9, Republic of Korea, demographics, feminization, migrant, gender, DESA.

Introduction

As a result of the observations of modern researchers studying the process of migration at the international level over the past decade, it has been found that the number of female migrants is increasing. This situation further strengthens the need to analyze migration issues from a gender perspective. They discuss the phenomenon called "feminization of international migration" (an increase in the share of women in the total number of migrants). The current available data show that over time, the process of gender-based international migration is deepening. In his research conducted by the American researcher Buettner in 2022, he expressed his support for addressing gender-related issues of international migration and supporting and widely promoting gender-sensitive migration policies. In his opinion, it is important to have data that adequately reflects the differences between men and women, as well as to understand how temporary social factors determine and shape the type of international migration. Based on the results of modern research in the case of Korea, demographic changes



have been observed in the Republic of Korea over the past decade, such as rapid population aging, low marriage and birth rates, and a constantly increasing need for international migration¹. In the Republic of Korea, the number of male immigrants is higher than that of female immigrants. However, among one category of migrants, namely marriage migrants, the ratio of female migrants is higher than that of male migrants, to be precise, more than 80 percent of migrants are women². There is a variety of migration data disaggregated by gender in the Republic of Korea, and research shows that the largest number of migrants visiting the Republic of Korea are from China, Vietnam, Thailand, the Philippines, and the United States³. The rapid urbanization of Korean society has led to an increase in the number of female migrant marriages in rural areas in recent years (Estévez-Abe and Caponio, 2022; Chang, 2021; Belanger et al., 2010; Cho, 2014; Briselli, 2022). It is no exaggeration to say that Korean women have begun to leave rural areas and move to urban areas for education and work, in short, to live a modern life. As a result, the number of marriage partners for men who want to start a family in rural areas has sharply decreased. At a time when Korea's demographics are expected to suffer greatly, the Republic of Korea is pursuing a wise policy, namely, the deregulation (relaxation of control) of bi-national marriage agencies since 1999 and the introduction of a marriage visa (F-6 visa category) with a Korean citizen in accordance with the 2007 Immigration Treatment Act, which allows local governments and rural areas to conclude marriage agreements between single Korean men and female migrants from all over the world, especially from Southeast Asia, China, and the Russian Federation, thereby solving the so-called "bride shortage" problem to some extent⁴. Since the start of the Korean government's large-scale immigration policy in 2000, the number of E-9 (unskilled worker visa) and F-6 visas allocated to migrants has increased significantly. The countries participating in the Korean EPS (Employment Permit System) program are: Vietnam, the Philippines, Thailand, Indonesia, Cambodia, China, Mongolia, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Nepal, Uzbekistan, Bangladesh, Kyrgyzstan, Myanmar, and East Timor. The E-9 Unskilled Worker Visa is intended for foreign workers who come to work in unskilled jobs. The F-6 visa is a marriage contract between immigrants and Korean citizens. The purpose of introducing this visa was to increase Korea's demographics. Since 1990, the Korean government has been encouraging (and even subsidizing) bi-national marriages through marriage brokers. A study conducted by the Korean Immigration Service to determine the number of migrants who obtained E-9 and F-6 visas from the Republic of Korea between 2009

1 Lee, H. (2015). An Overview of International Migration to South Korea. In: Social Transformation and Migration (Castles S., D. Ozkul and M.A. Cubas, eds.). Migration, Diasporas and Citizenship Series. Palgrave Macmillan, London.

2 United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division. (2020). International Migrant Stock 2020. (United Nations database, POP/DB/MIG/Stock/Rev.2020).

3 Oh, J.-E., D.K. Kang, J.J. Shin, S. Lee, S.B. Lee and K. Chung (2011). Migration Profile of the Republic of Korea. IOM MRTC Research Report Series, No. 2011-01.

4 Lee, H. (2008). International marriage and the state in South Korea: Focusing on governmental policy. *Citizenship studies*, 12(1):107-123.



and 2019 shows that the number of women who entered Korea on E-9 visas in 2009 was 7,571. The number of men was 10 times higher than the number of women, namely 78,083. No figures are available at this time due to the lack of an F-6 visa. The F-6 visa has been introduced by the Government of the Republic of Korea since 2011, and in the same year alone, 3,965 migrants were granted an F-6 visa. Of this figure, 699 were men and 3,266 were women. These figures bring the total number of E-9 visas granted by 2019 to 151,116. Of this figure, 140,469 were men, while 10,647 were women. From these figures, it can be seen that the majority of migrants who came to Korea on the E-9 visa between 2009 and 2019 were men. The latest figures show that the number of male migrants visiting Korea has increased by about 1.7 percent compared to 2009. The number of women has not changed much, increasing by about 1.4 percent. This figure is significantly higher for women who have obtained F-6 visas compared to men. Based on statistics from 2019, this figure is 127,602, which is a 39 percent increase compared to 2011. According to this indicator, the number of men aged 31,897 is increasing. Although this indicator has increased by 45 percent since 2011, the number of men who have married Korean citizens through F-6 visas is significantly lower than the number of women. There are several reasons why these indicators have increased significantly every year. One of them is that some educated and wealthy women in the Republic of Korea are looking for men who are financially equal to or higher than them, which reduces the number of women who can marry middle-class men in rural areas. As a result, the need for Korean men to marry foreign migrant women is increasing. One reason is the increasing need for care in the Republic of Korea. According to Korean tradition, caring for children is an important task that should be done by Korean women. However, today, most Korean women are avoiding taking on such a responsible task. As a result, many Korean men are starting families with migrant women. They have been providing adequate care for their spouse's parents. DESA (Department of Economic and Social Affairs)⁵ According to a 2020 study by the Korea Migration Agency, the number of international migrants in the Republic of Korea rose from 43,000 in 1990 to 1,730,000 in 2020, a nearly 40-fold increase in the number of migrants in Korea over the past 30 years. Gyeonggi Province is the region with the highest number of migrants in the Republic of Korea, with 227,000 male migrants and 153,000 female migrants. According to DESA, there are 15 top countries sending migrants to the Republic of Korea, with 3 of them sending the most migrants, with China in first place, with about 800,000 migrants visiting the Republic of Korea. Of these, approximately 450,000 are male and 350,000 are female migrants. Vietnam is in second place. From this country, 177 male and female migrants visited the Republic of Korea in 2020. Thailand is in third place. In 2020, 159,000 migrants from Thailand visited the Republic of Korea. 82 percent of female migrants who visited the Republic of Korea from 1990 to 2020 were married to Korean citizens with F-6, i.e., a marriage contract.

⁵ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division. (2020). International Migrant Stock 2020. (United Nations database, POP/DB/MIG/Stock/Rev.2020).



Conclusion

The article examines the situation of female and male migrants in the Republic of Korea. Using accurate statistical data and the results of modern research, it provides an in-depth analysis of the sharp increase in marriages with migrant women and men in the Republic of Korea against the backdrop of demographic changes, urbanization, and the liberalization of marriage agencies. The number of migrants visiting the Republic of Korea on F-6 and E-9 visas, their gender composition, countries of origin, and socio-economic status are also examined. In addition, the article examines the important role of the specific gender roles and demographic needs of Korean society in shaping international marriage migration policies.

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11. Lee, H. (2008). International marriage and the state in South Korea: Focusing on governmental policy. *Citizenship studies*, 12(1):107-123.
12. F-1-3 (Visiting or Joining Family) and F-2-1, F-5-2 visa holders before 2011. F-6 visa has been replacing F-2-1 visa since its introduction in 2011 as part of efforts to guarantee their stable stay and better deal with their growing numbers.
13. United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division. (2020). *International Migrant Stock 2020*. (United Nations database, POP/DB/MIG/Stock/Rev.2020).

