

Abstract

Policy Measures for the Social Inclusion of Marriage-based Migrant Women: Focusing on Expanding Social Participation

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Social participation of immigrants is not only a fundamental factor for a stable life of immigrants themselves and their family members, but also a core agenda for multicultural society: social integration and intergroup relationships. It is also an important issue that should be considered in terms of social inclusion, which is the “process of improving the terms of participation in society for

people who are disadvantaged on the basis of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, and economic and migration status.” (UN 2016: 1)

Among diverse types of immigrants, marriage-based migrant women are a regular member of the Korean society and are expected to participate in the society in earnest. Bearing this in mind, this study identified their interest, state, and obstacles in the Korean society by analyzing raw data and conducting interviews with those migrant women. By doing so, this investigation shed light on the possibility and limitations of expanding social participation. Adding to that, this study sought policy measures for social inclusion to clarify the agenda that the Korean society should pay attention to and expand the participation of marriage immigrants’ communities.

The study found that 29.7 percent of women who immigrated to Korea for marriage do not participate in any social gatherings or activities. Moreover, 44.9 percent of those immigrants are not willing to participate in such occasions in the future either. This can be said that the lack or the absence of those social acts would lead to social exclusion. When there is a limited social participation among low-income, old-aged and divorced migrant women, chances are that divorced and bereaved migrant women will be excluded from society.

The social participation area of marriage immigrants can be divided into two: the inside and the outside of immigrant groups. The social participation of marriage-based migrant women usually centers on the country which they are originally from. With this country-based practice being a centerpiece of their social activities, migrant women largely find it a starting point of their life in Korea and a sole path that connects them to people other than their family members. This is particularly true for those in the early stages of Korean life when they have difficulty in communication with others.

Through their country-based communities, immigrants often find a way to interact with, comfort, and give help to each other.

Another pillar of marriage-based migrant women's participation in society, along with their taking part in groups, including the aforementioned one, is the participation in the outside group activities, especially those related to the mainstream society. For those migrant women, building a relationship with the society is a barometer that can tell their settlement in Korea and an important factor for the formation of social resources that cannot be mobilized within their homeland-based groups. In particular, unlike in a familial relationship which shares ethnic backgrounds within a family, participating in the mainstream group is more meaningful for marriage-based migrant women who act as wives and mothers of mainstream group members. Indeed, social inclusion, as a whole in a society, can be realized only when participation that is accompanied by group-to-group relations is actively carried out.

However, it is limited for migrant women to form relationships outside of immigrant communities, especially mainstream society. The longer they live in Korea, the more interest they have in participating in activities of the outside group than in the former homeland group. Only a limited number of migrant women take part in meetings and activities with Koreans. Although they are living among Koreans, the formation of relationships with Koreans on a personal level has not been done well. On a public level as well, it is difficult to find meetings and activities with intergroup relationships. As they adapt to Korean life, interest in the meetings joined by those who came from a same country gradually decreases, and migrant women who have not found opportunities for activities in intergroup relationship settings may withdraw their interest in

social participation after all.

With the possibility of social participation accompanied by group-to-group relationships being limited, converting Multicultural Family Support Centers into integrated centers and making programs designed to put migrant women and Koreans together are expected to provide new opportunities for gatherings and activities. However, programs carried out by those integration centers do not take into account the between-group relationship at all, so there is a high possibility that those plans will lead to the classification or the hierarchy between Koreans and migrants rather than the promotion or the improvement of the relationship. In fact, cases of such problems have been reported as migrants and Koreans spend time together at the integrated centers or during community activities.

On the other hand, it is also noteworthy that migrant women's group activists try to participate in areas other than "multicultural" ones with regard to the expansion of participation area. Yet, this participation does not bring only positive sides. Those who have attempted to participate in such outside sectors may find themselves lack of competence and thus face "intergroup wall," which they cannot jump over and identify themselves as a "permanent member with multicultural background."

Not only personal interest and active personality but also family support are important factors for migrant women's participation in society. In this regard, the study also found that the degree of spousal support has a consistent and positive impact on social participation. Family support for social participation requires more than emotional support; it involves housework sharing and family member caring. Marriage migrant women who are relatively active in social activities are still faced with burdens that they should not neglect housework and child care. For migrant women who have no

experience in social participation, negative attitudes on outdoor activities of family members and burdens of house chores are likely to serve as bigger obstacles. This is why greater supports among family and the reformation of their roles and responsibilities should be considered as important factors in approaches to expand social participation of migrant women.

As seen above, the participation of the migrant women in society depends on individual interest and competence, family member's support, and participation opportunity. Some migrant women face the risk of social exclusion due to low interest in social participation, difficulty in finding opportunities, and poor conditions. The area in which those who are shy of those risks participate is the type of group where those who are from a same country gather. Migrant women, especially those who have lived in Korea for a long time after marriage, are more interested in gatherings and activities that involve Korean relations than in their homeland-based gatherings, but such opportunities are hard to find. Even when they do participate, it is highly likely that they will be frustrated in the face of discrimination and distinction during those activities.

For social inclusion, migrant women facing the risk of social exclusion should be able to regain interest in social participation and must be given participation opportunity, and more migrant women should participate in various activities with other immigrants as well as Koreans in order to form positive relationships. To that end, the government should seek the following measures to expand migrant women's social participation.

- Establish policy goals and specify agenda for the expansion of migrant women's participation in society
 - Place the issue of migrant women's social participation on

agenda through the revision of the Multicultural Families Support Act and suggest approach directions.

- Put diverse policies into Basic Plan for Multicultural Family Policy, such as actions for marriage-based migrant women groups that are faced with the risk of social exclusion, ideas for expanding social participation that is accompanied with intergroup relationship, stronger family supports for greater social participation, and ways of building social environment, in addition to existing steps for wider social participation among the migrant women.

② Provide support for basic participation for migrant women in the face of social exclusion

- Prioritize help for those migrants who are at the risk of social exclusion, including the low-income, the elderly, the divorced or bereaved, through autonomous gatherings at multicultural family support centers and others.

③ Review and improve existing projects regarding migrant women's participation in society

- Check the effects and limitations of the meetings and activities run by the government, local governments, multicultural family support centers, integrated centers, and immigration and public offices for foreigners on migrant women's participation in society, and draw up tasks for their improvement from the perspective of participants.

④ Recognize migrant women's organizations as policy partners

- Acknowledge migrant women's organizations as public policy partners so that participants can identify themselves as active

members of society and act on the true meaning of social participation.

- Develop support projects to promote the activities of migrant women's groups.

⑤ Come up with measures to foster migrant women's ability to participate in society and create a better family environment

- Develop educational and training programs for migrant women who are interested in social participation to have the necessary capabilities of partaking in group-to-group relationships.
- Approach systematically and continuously for migrant women to enhance their ability to participate in society from the initial stage of adaptation.
- Draft measures that can fortify family support for social participation and reorganize domestic roles.

⑥ Access to the quality level of intergroup relationships among co-participating organizations

- Need to take cautious approach so that public institutions that operate groups and activities that are accompanied by intergroup relationships do not classify and discriminate groups or marginalize certain groups in the course of their activities.
- Improve the activity process so that participants can shape horizontal and positive relationships.

⑦ Support inter-group cooperation for the improvement of relationships between groups

- Provide opportunities actively for residents and groups from different backgrounds, to collectively plan, promote and collaborate on projects.

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