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**Women and Family Policy Strategies in Preparation for  
Unification and Prospects for Social Integration in Unified  
Korea (Ⅱ)**

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Studies on Korea's unification have continued on a steady basis in various areas including education, healthcare, culture and arts, early childhood education and childcare, and military affairs. However, few highlighted issues concerning gender and families. An important task ahead of us is to take a gender-sensitive approach to lay the groundwork for social integration in unified Korea across the sectors of politics, economy, society, family and culture and advance the issue of gender equality.

Unification does not simply mean integration of the two Koreas at the institutional level. It is also about reducing differences in perceptions, values, culture and ways of living, which promise to be considerably more challenging.

There exist considerable gaps between South and North Koreans in their perceptions of each other, values, ways of living and attitudes. Similar differences are expected in their perceptions and values on gender, family and family lifestyle.

The purpose of this study is to shed light on major issues on gender and families in an in-depth manner and explore ways of promoting them in preparation for unification. Korean Women's Development Institute (KWDI) conducted survey on gender and family issues in preparation for unification, which consist of 4 types of survey: public survey on South Koreans and North Korean defectors residing in South Korea, and expert survey (1); a quantitative study and expert survey (2); and a qualitative study.

#### 1) Public Survey

Both South Korean residents and North Korean defectors were highly positive about the need for unification. In particular, North Korean defectors (91.6%) showed a higher level of agreement than South Korean residents (72.2%). As for obstacles to post-unification social integration, most respondents (more than 90%) cited income disparity and different political systems. Some also pointed to historical perceptions, living customs (such as family ceremonies), and communication issues. If the social polarization currently afflicting South Korea worsens after unification, conflicts may arise between different classes. Such concerns call for employment support and social security policies designed to provide income support in different phases of unification: pre-unification, immediate post-unification and unified Korea.

In the survey on family lifestyle, North and South Koreans revealed significant differences in issues pertaining to gender and families. North Korean defectors were found to have more traditional and conservative perceptions than South Koreans. To address the perceptual and cultural gap in family life, efforts to change perceptions and culture and to promote mutual exchange need to be

undertaken in pre-unification period, to be reinforced and intensified after unification.

In terms of division of labor between partners in family, both groups of respondents showed a high level of agreement on women taking up more household duties. This tendency was more pronounced among North Korean defectors. It was also the case for childcare responsibilities.

With regard to gender perceptions, the two groups of respondents again showed considerable differences. Conservative gender perceptions prevailed among North Korean defectors, revealing the attitude of gender inequality with the tendency to impose more strict norms on women.

As discussed above, it has been demonstrated that the two Koreas have large differences not only in institutions but also in their people's perceptions, especially on gender and family issues, such as family life and culture, gender equality, gender roles and perceptions. What is thus essentially required is the process of seeking to understand the cultural and value differences and endeavoring to make necessary changes. The necessary organizations and infrastructure must be made available, as well as the opportunities for mutual exchange, education programs and face-to-face interactions.

## 2) Expert Survey

In the expert survey (1), respondents were asked about the most pressing challenges for the Korean society to ensure post-unification social integration. The tasks were grouped into 8 categories and respondents were asked to set the priority. "Jobs" came out on top, followed by "class conflict," "ideological conflict," "South-North regional conflict," "difference in political systems," "cultural conflict," and "generational conflict."

Another issue, not listed above, which will be of paramount importance in unified Korea is caregiving. Experts preferred universal service over selective service as the post-unification means of providing childcare and elderly care.

They also focused on caregiving “service” as opposed to childcare allowance or cash benefits. It is also noteworthy that experts expressed the need to provide differentiated support for North Korean facilities and caregivers, and to achieve inter-Korea integration of childcare services.

In the expert study (2), a qualitative research was performed in the areas of gender, family and unification. The major findings of the study are as follows. First, experts believe that a control tower needs to be established to implement policies for the mid- to long-term, provisionally titled “Committee on Gender and Family in Unified Korea.” Second, experts agreed on the need to consolidate the two Korea’s gender legislations into one law, provisionally titled “Act on Gender Equality in Unified Korea.” Third, experts pointed out the need to strengthen administrative capability in gender and family policies. Last, they reiterated the need to focus not only on institutional integration but also on psychological integration between the residents of the two Koreas.

Based on the findings above, this research presents the following policy recommendations.

First, when setting the policy direction on gender and family affairs in unified Korea, a gender-sensitive approach based on women and family perspective must play an important role. It is important to identify the realities of life facing men and women and create the space and conditions that help South and North Koreans, and their men and women, live together.

Second, what is more important than institutional integration is the integration of culture and values, or harmony thereof. Surveys on South Korean residents and North Korean defectors revealed large perception gaps on issues of gender and family, and in particular, clearly showed North Korea’s patriarchal and male-centric culture and system.

Third, to help maintain stable family lives will be an important task in the unification process. It is necessary to identify where and how the two Koreas

differ in their perceptions and cultural practices in family values and family life and define the types of efforts that need to be undertaken to facilitate the social integration process.

Fourth, plans for vocational training and job creation need to be designed and implemented in a systematic manner to prevent large-scale unemployment among North Korean women after unification. At the same time, active gender equality policies need to be run together with labor market security policies to reduce women's concentration in jobs with low wage and/or long working hours.

Fifth, there must be active plans to address the issue of low fertility in unified Korea. The shift to unified Korea is accompanied by the ongoing phenomenon of low fertility, an important future risk factor, and thus it will remain a challenge to be addressed. Moreover, policies on population, education and welfare need to be explored concurrently to manage the future population on the Korean Peninsula.

Sixth, the infrastructure, necessary to implement gender and family policies needs to be established in preparation for unification. More specifically, preparation is needed in diverse areas such as human resource allocation, infrastructure installation, information and data collection, budget allocation, and organization building.