

# Information on the Implementation of the Agreed Conclusions on ‘Women’s economic empowerment in the changing world of work’ (Republic of Korea)

## 1. Strengthening normative and legal frameworks (paragraphs 40 (a) to (j))

### • What specific actions have been taken to enact, strengthen and enforce laws and regulatory frameworks that ensure gender equality and prohibit discrimination against women in the world of work?

- The amended Enforcement Decree of the Equal Employment Opportunity and Work-Family Balance Assistance Act (May 2018) deleted Article 2(2), which stated that the provisions of Article 8 through 10 and Article 11(1) shall not apply to businesses with less than five employees. This move has expanded the scope of anti-discrimination provisions of the act.
  - \* Prohibiting discrimination of men and women in wages (Article 8), money, goods, etc. other than wages (Article 9), education, assignment and promotion (Article 10), and age limit, retirement and dismissal (Article 11)
- The same act was amended in May 2021 (to be enforced in May 2022) to lay the legal foundations for victims of gender discrimination in employment to seek redress with the labor relations commission (Article 26).

### • What specific actions have been taken to enact, strengthen and enforce laws and regulations that uphold the principle of equal pay for equal work or work of equal value in both the public and private sectors?

- The amended Enforcement Decree of the Equal Employment Opportunity and Work-Family Balance Assistance Act (May 2018) deleted Article 2(2), which stated that the provisions of Article 8 through 10 and Article 11(1) shall not apply to businesses with less than five employees. This move has expanded the scope of anti-discrimination provisions \* (including the principle of equal pay for work of equal value\*\*) of the act.
  - \* Prohibiting sex discrimination in wages (Article 8), money, goods, etc. other than wages (Article 9), education, assignment and promotion (Article 10), and age limit, retirement and dismissal (Article 11)
  - \*\* The employer shall provide equal pay for equal-value work within the identical business (Article 8(1)).
- The Equal Employment Opportunity and Work-Family Balance Assistance Act was amended in January 2019 (enforced in July 2019) to require employers subject to affirmative action measures to submit the current income status of male and female employees by job type and position in a bid to encourage employers’ voluntarily efforts to bridge the gender pay gap. (Article 17-3)
- To uphold the principle of equal pay for work of equal value, the Korean government began to release the current status of wage by business characteristics in 2020 to show the varying degree of the current status of wages and wage gaps by the size and category of businesses.
  - The government also provides diverse information on wage systems and consulting services related to wages to effectively support the overhaul of wage systems.
  - As a result, the wage gap by sex and employment type has been on a steady decline, with the wage gap between the top 20 percent and bottom 20 percent narrowing gradually. In addition, wage calculation considers seniority less important but increases the weight of the characteristics and difficulties or work itself.

**• What measures have been taken to enact, strengthen and enforce laws and policies to eliminate all forms of violence and harassment against women in the world of work and provide means of effective redress in cases of noncompliance?**

- Under Article 8 of the Labor Standards Act, an employer shall not do violence to an employee for the occurrence of accidents or for any other reason.
  - An employer who fails to comply with said provision, including no violence against women, shall face up to 5 years in prison or a fine of up to KRW 50 million. This sanction is stricter than for non-compliance of any other provision under the act while continuous guidance and supervision are in place.
- The Equal Employment Opportunity and Work-Family Balance Assistance Act was amended in November 2017 (effective from May 2018), raising a fine for businesses that do not provide prevention education on sexual harassment in the workplace from KRW 3 million to KRW 5 million (Article 39).
- The same act was amended in May 2021 (to be enforced in May 2022) to lay the legal foundations for victims of gender discrimination in employment to seek redress with the labor committee when their employers have failed to take any appropriate measures upon the request of such measures by victims (Article 26).

**2. Strengthening education, training, and skills development (paragraphs 40 (k) to (n))**

**• What measures have been taken to mainstream a gender perspective into education and training programmes in order to facilitate the effective transition from education or unemployment to work?**

- To help women experiencing career interruption due to childbirth and childcare participate in economic activities and maintain employment, the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family (MOGEF) provides comprehensive employment support, including vocational training (768 courses), via the 159 Women's Re-employment Centers across the nation. In particular, the centers provide courses on high-added-value occupations to nurture women taking career breaks into professional talent in promising sectors, such as artificial intelligence (AI), virtual reality (VR) and 3D, in an effort to brace for the 4th Industrial Revolution and changing industrial structures.
  - \* ('18) 48 centers → ('19) 49 centers → ('20) 50 centers → ('21) 59 centers
- Starting this year, the centers are running a pilot program focusing on promising sectors with high entry barriers. The pilot program offers five\* long-term (about eight months) courses on high-added value, highly skilled jobs targeting young women with high education.
  - \* 3D motion graphic designer, professional software developer, marketer utilizing big-data, big data-based java application developer, and female IT experts in the era of digital transition
- In addition, to respond to digital transition amid the COVID-19 pandemic, online content (23 items) was developed to enhance job skills at anytime, anywhere. To strengthen non-face-to-face support, an online learning management system was created in June 2021 to provide both online and offline courses (254 courses). The government also improved access to employment support services by offering online employment support, virtual services and mock interviews using AI, VR and other cutting-edge technologies.

**3. Implementing economic and social policies for women's economic empowerment (paragraphs 40 (o) to (mm))**

**• What steps have been taken to promote decent paid care and domestic work in the public and private sectors?**

- To ease the childbirth and childcare burden on employees and promote work-life balance, the government adopted measures, including parental leave, leave before and after childbirth, and paternity leave, and provides diverse support.
  - First, the subsidy cap on the leave before and after childbirth was raised to provide stronger support for pregnant workers.
    - \* KRW 1.6 million in 2018 → KRW 1.8 million in 2019 → KRW 2 million in 2020
  - Second, starting in October 2019, paternity leave was expanded from five days (three paid days) to ten days (all days paid) and was newly available to employees working for employers entitled to high priority public support.
  - Third, the government raised childcare leave allowance\* and the cap on the daddy childcare leave bonus scheme\*\* in an effort to encourage working parents to take parental leave and promote a dual-parenting culture.
    - \* The amount of the first three-month allowance was raised from 40 percent of the ordinary salary to 80 percent (Sept. 2017), and the amount for the following nine months was raised from 40% of the ordinary salary to 50% (Jan. 2019).
    - \*\* The bonus applies to parents with a second (or more) baby, and the cap was raised from KRW 1.5 million to KRW 2 million in July 2017, before the bonus was expanded to a first baby in July 2018. The cap was once again raised to KRW 2.5 million in January 2019.
  - Fourth, the shorter working hour allowance for childcare was raised\*. From October 2019, in addition to parental leave, new parents can work shorter hours for another year. If they don't use the full term of parental leave, they can shorten their working hours for up to two years.
    - \* The allowance amount was raised from 60 percent of the ordinary wage to 80 percent in January 2018, and 100 percent of the ordinary wage was supported for the first five hours reduced per week from October 2019.
  - Finally, starting in January 2020, employees can take 10 days off for family care (unpaid family care leave) so that they can take urgent care of their family members for old age, accidents or illness or for childcare.
  - In particular, the urgent family care expenses support has been in place for working parents who need to take some time off to look after children aged 8 or younger (18 years old or younger for children with disabilities) due to family members infected with the coronavirus, day-care center or school closures, and remote teaching, among others (An employee is given KRW 50,000 for up to 10 days).
    - \* This urgent family care expenses support was intended to be temporarily implemented in 2020 only, but due to the prolonged COVID-19 pandemic, it is still in place by allocating the funds through a supplementary budget in 2021.
  
- In addition, the public childcare service called *idolbom* service has been put in place to ease the childcare burden for working parents experiencing childcare vacuum. The government is expanding service hours and the scope of eligibility every year, so they rose from 480 hours for families who earn no more than 120% of the median income in 2017 to 840 hours for families who earn no more than 150% of the median income in 2021. In addition, the maximum government subsidy rate on the service fees stood at 75 percent in 2017 to be raised to 90 percent in 2021. The subsidized hours for parents with severe disabilities also went up to 960 hours a year in 2019 from 720 hours.
  - To provide a reliable public childcare service, the government devised the plan to provide the safer *idombol* service in 2019, which introduced the installation of CCTVs with prior consent. In 2020, a customized personality and aptitude test for babysitters was developed while strengthening the qualifications for babysitters by amending the *idolbom* service support act. To prevent child abuse, the service case management personnel have been placed.
  - To enhance the convenience of the service, the real-time application and waiting

management system was developed in 2020, while launching a service for families with emergency childcare support at night and on weekends. In 2021, a chatbot automatic counseling service and a simple payment service were introduced to immediately respond to customers, improving customer convenience significantly.

- **What actions and investments have been made to support gender-responsive social protection and care infrastructure and services?**

- To complement the limitations of facility-based public childcare services and provide flexible childcare support tailored for local needs, community-based childcare centers have been in operation that serve as a space for childcare and encourage the sharing of childcare burden with neighbors. In addition, consulting and education services are offered to communities with residents' active leadership to give childcare help customized to local needs.

- **What specific measures have been implemented to promote women's entry, reentry and advancement in the labour market?**

- The government is assisting women in entering the labor market by laying the foundation for a gender-equal employment culture by distributing the guidelines on gender-equal pay and employment and case-based educational videos (from 2019) and providing HR personnel with education on gender-equal HR management (from April 2021).
- The 159 Women's Re-employment centers across the nation provide one-stop support, such as employment counseling, vocational training, work experience opportunities, and job placement support, to women taking career breaks in a bid to help them return to work as quickly as possible. In response to the changing world of work, including the 4th Industrial Revolution and accelerated digital transition, the centers are expanding customized vocational training in highly-skilled, high-added-value occupations in the areas such as IT and content, taking into account the needs of businesses and the preference of women.
- The centers have also upgraded their internship programs to provide women experiencing career interruption with opportunities for work experience of interest and full-time employment opportunities so that they can sustain economic activities.
  - \* The new employment incentive was launched to expand the scope of eligibility for the internship program and to encourage long-term employment.
- The Inter-Ministerial Integrated Employment Support for Women with Career Interruption links each ministry's training programs for women's talent with MOGEF's employment support services, creating a virtuous cycle for quality support for jobs.

#### **4. Addressing the growing informality of work and mobility of women workers (paragraphs 40 (nn) to (qq))**

- **What measures have been implemented to promote the transition from informal to formal paid employment for women?**

- To increase the job security of non-regular workers, the government provides subsidies that cover the increased labor costs for companies that convert non-permanent workers to permanent workers.
  - In 2020, of all recipients of the subsidy, 1,756 were female workers, accounting for 40.6 percent.
- In addition, the guidelines on the protection of fixed-term and contract-based employees were revised in 2020, advising businesses to hire existing non-regular employees first when recruiting staff for new regular positions, in a move to promote job stability of female workers in non-

regular employment.

- Domestic work, held predominantly by women, remains to be informal employment with low job security and poor working conditions. To improve the treatment, the law to improve the working conditions of domestic workers\* was legislated in 2021. In addition, the government is planning to develop and promote a model where social economic organizations serve as service providers to ensure the rights of domestic workers. (Budget for 2022 was secured.)

\* Under this law, the government certifies service providers which directly hire domestic workers (enacted in June 2021; to be enforced in June 2022; Ministry of Employment and Labor)

## **5. Managing technological and digital change for women's economic empowerment (paragraphs 40 (rr) to (ss))**

### **• What specific actions have been taken to support women's access to skills development and decent work in emerging fields, including science, technology, engineering, and mathematics?**

- The Korean government is operating various programs and systems to nurture female STEM talent.

- In particular, to expand the number of female talent entering the STEM sectors, the Korean government has introduced a quota system that mandates a certain portion of recruitment and promotion to be women. As a result of the continuous implementation of this system, the percentage of new female employees in public research institutes in science and technology increased by more than 10% between 2015 and 2019.

※ Percentage of new female employees: (2015) 22.1% → (2019) 32.2%

- In addition, the government is supporting women's capacity building in STEM through professional training for emerging technologies and industries, including AI, climate change, data, software, and AR and VR.

- MOGEF began the inter-ministerial integrated employment support service in 2021. Under this program, Women's Re-employment Centers provide their employment support to women who have been experiencing career breaks and completed other professional training programs\* in science and engineering run by other ministries.\*\*

\* Professional training programs (each ministry) → job counseling, internship opportunities and job placement support (MOGEF) → post-management (MOGEF)

\*\* There are eight ministries, including the Ministry of Science and ICT; Ministry of Trade, Industry, and Energy; Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism; Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs; Ministry of Environment; Ministry of Employment and Labor, MOGEF; and Korean Intellectual Property Office (About 1,600 trainees)

## **6. Strengthening women's collective voice, leadership, and decision-making (paragraphs 40 (tt) to (aaa))**

### **• What specific efforts have been implemented to support women's participation and leadership in trade unions, workers' organizations and employers' organizations?**

- The Korean government honors businesses and people with merit (including labor unions) for their efforts in promoting employment equality and work-life balance by awarding prizes to the best companies and people with merit.

- The government is also working to encourage female employees to participate in labor-management negotiations by honoring people with merit, including labor unions, for contributing to the reasonable operation of labor unions by promoting women's participation and improving gender-discriminatory practices.

**7. Strengthening the role of the private sector in women's economic empowerment (paragraphs 40 (bbb) to (eee))**

**• What efforts have been undertaken to encourage private firms and institutions to mainstream gender equality considerations in policies and practices?**

- While respecting the voluntary participation of private companies, the Korean government releases the number of male and female executives of listed companies to increase diversity in the corporate decision-making process. In addition, it provides consulting services to businesses in an effort to raise awareness among businesses and society.
- In addition, the Capital Market Act was amended to introduce a special provision on the composition of corporate board members by sex (enforced on August 5, 2020; transitional measure of two years). This requires businesses of a certain size and above to include women executives on their corporate boards, and to some extent, this requirement serves as an institutional mechanism to increase gender balance on corporate boards.

**• What action has been taken to increase investment and support for women entrepreneurs?**

- The Ministry of SMEs and Startups operates the Women's Startup Incubation Centre (BI) to promote women's entrepreneurship. The purpose of this program is to invigorate women's entrepreneurship and strengthen the competitiveness of women's businesses by providing comprehensive support for women such as incubation space for start-up, information, and other measures to help women to start and grow their business. The main target of support is preliminary female entrepreneurs and female entrepreneurs within 3 years of starting a business, and the applicants are able to stay in BI for up to 3 years from the date of move-in. Currently, there are 18 centers in metropolitan cities nationwide and 238 rooms are being in operation.
- MSS is supporting for promising women entrepreneurs with women business dedicated venture investment fund where they can scale up. The venture investment fund has raised about KRW 136 billion (USD 1.14 billion) by 2020, and an additional 20 billion won is being created (USD 16.8 million) in 2021. In addition, when women's companies apply for government support programs, they are given a preferential treatment.

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