Gender and migration data: Korean Case Study

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Motivation

• The feminization of migration at the global level masks various migration patterns and processes

• An overview of demographic details and further breakdowns of international migration data in the combination of gender are required to
  - Understand the gendered migration patterns
  - Address gender-relevant migration issues
  - Support gender-responsive migration policies

• Collecting and analyzing the good quality and reliable gender-disaggregated data and gender statistics is important!
Background

- The Republic of Korea has been increasingly recognizing the need for international migration as central to continued economic growth (Lee, 2015)
  - there is one category of migrants that is highly feminized with more than 80 percent being female: marriage migrants (UN DESA, 2020; Statistics Korea, 2020)
  - the gender-related aspects of migration to Korea can be explored with various gender-disaggregated migration data being made available

Sex ratio of international immigrants (left) and marriage migrants (right) in Korea

Source: UN DESA, 2020; Korean Immigration Service Statistics (2020)
Methodology and Data

• Gendered ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors of international migration to Korea
• Overall migrant population and marriage migrants in Korea by gender, place of residence, country of origin, and visa category
• Impacts of COVID-19 on marriage migrants in Korea from a gender perspective
• Marriage migration policies in Korea

• The essential demographic characteristics, such as age, sex, and country of origin, are covered. Additionally, data on marital status, educational attainment, labor-related characteristics, and household size are used
  - International Migrant Stock (UN DESA, 2020)
  - Korea Immigration Service Statistics (Ministry of Justice (MoJ), 1991-2021)
  - Vital Statistics of Immigrants (Statistics Korea, 1993-2021)
  - Surveys on Immigrant Living Conditions and Labor Force (MoJ and Statistics Korea, 2018-2021)
  - National Survey of Multicultural Families (Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, 2018)
Historical trends in marriage migration to Korea

- **Explosion (1993 - 2005)**
  - Driven by the marriages between Korean men and foreign women
  - Growth of the binational marriage brokerage business

- **Decrease (2005 - 2015)**
  - More restrictions on marriage brokerage agencies
  - The saturated marriage market in rural areas.

  - Continuing decrease trends in the number of newlyweds in Korean domestic marriage
Socio-demographic characteristics of the marriage migrants

#1: Binational marriages are common between foreign brides and Korean males
- In 2020, there were approximately 138,000 women admitted as marriage migrants, or 82% of total marriage migrants, while only 31,000 marriage migrants were male
- Marriage migrants always took up a significant share (at least 25%) of female migrants in Korea

#2: The age and education gap between bride and groom is significant in binational marriages
- The average age of female marriage migrants was approximately 37.3 which is almost ten years younger than that of Korean male spouses (47.8 years old).
- Educational attainment distribution shows that nearly 90% of female marriage migrants did not complete elementary education while more than 80% of their Korean husbands finished upper secondary education

#3: Immigrant wives in Korea are over-represented in rural areas
- Female marriage migrants are more concentrated in depopulated rural areas in Korea, where unmarried male residents face a shrunk pool of marriage partners due to the “rural flight” of females
Socio-demographic characteristics of the marriage migrants

#4: There exist different characteristics of spouses in the case of males and females marrying foreigners

- Female marriage migrants come from Asian countries – China, Vietnam, Philippines and Thailand
- Korean females are, however, marrying men from a broader range of countries – mainly from Asia but also from North America

#5: There are many female naturalized Koreans who acquired citizenship through marriage

- Eight out of ten naturalized Koreans have been female, and eight out of ten female naturalized Koreans have been marriage migrants

#6: Less than 50% of marriage migrants are economically active

- Among around 168,000 female marriage migrants in 2019, 77,000 (46%) were economically active and 72,000 (43%) were employed mainly in mining & manufacturing and wholesale, retail trade, accommodation, and food sectors
- They are highly represented in elementary occupations (37.1%) and craft, machine operators, and assemblers (27.6%)
Impacts of COVID-19 on marriage migrants in Korea

Compared to 2019, the number of arrivals of female marriage migrants declined by around 116,000 persons or 91% in 2021.

The number of marriage migrants nevertheless increased in 2020 and 2021 as they were not restricted to exiting and re-entering Korea.

From 2018-2019 to 2020-2021, the unemployment rate the female marriage migrants almost doubled.

However, the labor force participation rate stayed relatively stable from 2019-2021.

### Female marriage migrants’ labor market situation, 2018-2021

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total (E + U + I)</th>
<th>Employed (E)</th>
<th>Unemployed (U)</th>
<th>Inactive (I)</th>
<th>Labor Force Participation Rate ( \frac{1}{E+U+I} )</th>
<th>Employment Rate ( \frac{E}{E+U+I} )</th>
<th>Unemployment Rate ( \frac{U}{E+U} )</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>90,414</td>
<td>44,435</td>
<td>2,073</td>
<td>43,906</td>
<td>51.4%</td>
<td>49.1%</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019</td>
<td>90,484</td>
<td>39,254</td>
<td>2,408</td>
<td>48,822</td>
<td>46.0%</td>
<td>43.4%</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020</td>
<td>99,142</td>
<td>43,848</td>
<td>3,719</td>
<td>51,575</td>
<td>48.0%</td>
<td>44.2%</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2021</td>
<td>102,173</td>
<td>43,479</td>
<td>4,319</td>
<td>54,375</td>
<td>46.8%</td>
<td>42.6%</td>
<td>9.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Respondents are aged more than 14. The economically active population includes the employed (E) and the unemployed (U). Previously marriage migrants who now are naturalized Koreans are not included.

Source: Surveys on Immigrant Living Conditions and Labor Force (2018-2021)
Conclusions

• A series of Korean data gives a unique opportunity to study how the gendered marriage migration originated from social contexts in Korea and to identify the characteristics of the main actors in marriage migration

• Understanding the patterns of marriage migration and the characteristics of marriage migrants is essential in establishing and implementing migration and social integration policies

• The trends, patterns, and policies using various quality micro-datasets will pave the way to develop a causal model in future research to better explain marriage migration decisions and marriage migrants’ successful economic and social integration

• This timely report sheds light on the importance of gender data in policy evaluation with a particular focus on marriage migrants which will lead to a successful implementation of the upcoming basic plan for the next years