



VNU Journal of Foreign Studies

Journal homepage: <https://jfs.ulis.vnu.edu.vn/>



## SOCIAL INTEGRATION IN THE ECONOMIC SECTOR OF VIETNAMESE WOMEN MIGRATING TO SOUTH KOREA FOR MARRIAGE

Ha Thu Huong\*

*Faculty of Korean Language and Culture, VNU University of Languages and International Studies,  
No.2 Pham Van Dong, Cau Giay, Hanoi, Vietnam*

Received 20 February 2025

Revised 02 April 2025; Accepted 15 May 2025

**Abstract:** In today's era of globalization, the trend of transforming into multi-ethnic and multicultural societies is rapidly happening in many countries around the world. South Korea and the strong migration trend to South Korea in recent years are prime evidences of this trend. One of the main driving forces behind South Korea's transition to a multicultural society is women migrating through marriage and multicultural families. From the perspective of migration motivation to the factors affecting adaptation and social integration in South Korea, it can be affirmed that an important measure to promote the social integration of women migrating through marriage in South Korea is to provide them with opportunities and capacities for economic integration. This article, based on in-depth interviews with migrant brides in South Korea and survey data on their economic capacity and activities, analyzes the current state of social integration of migrant women in the economic sector. This will act as an important evidence for proposing solutions or policies to support migrant women through marriage in South Korea, enabling them to integrate into society more substantively and effectively.

**Keywords:** social integration, economic activities of migrant brides, equality of opportunity, Vietnamese brides, international marriage

---

\* Corresponding author.

Email address: [amychan712@gmail.com](mailto:amychan712@gmail.com)

<https://doi.org/10.63023/2525-2445/jfs.ulis.5457>

# HÒA NHẬP XÃ HỘI CỦA PHỤ NỮ VIỆT NAM DI TRÚ THEO ĐIỆN KẾT HÔN QUỐC TẾ TỚI HÀN QUỐC TRONG LĨNH VỰC KINH TẾ

Hà Thu Hường

*Khoa Ngôn ngữ và Văn hóa Hàn Quốc, Trường Đại học Ngoại ngữ, Đại học Quốc gia Hà Nội,  
Số 2 Phạm Văn Đồng, Cầu Giấy, Hà Nội, Việt Nam*

Nhận bài ngày 20 tháng 02 năm 2025

Chỉnh sửa ngày 02 tháng 4 năm 2025; Chấp nhận đăng ngày 15 tháng 5 năm 2025

**Tóm tắt:** Trong thời đại toàn cầu hóa hiện nay, xu thế biến đổi sang xã hội đa nhân chủng - đa văn hóa đang diễn ra tại nhiều quốc gia trên thế giới với tốc độ nhanh chóng. Hàn Quốc và xu thế di cư mạnh mẽ tới Hàn Quốc trong những năm gần đây chính là một minh chứng rõ nét cho xu thế này. Một trong những động lực chính của sự chuyển đổi sang xã hội đa văn hóa của Hàn Quốc chính là phụ nữ di trú theo diện kết hôn và các gia đình đa văn hóa. Xét từ khía cạnh động lực di trú, cho tới các yếu tố ảnh hưởng tới thích ứng và hòa nhập xã hội Hàn Quốc, có thể khẳng định một biện pháp quan trọng để thúc đẩy hòa nhập xã hội của phụ nữ di trú theo diện kết hôn tại Hàn Quốc chính là việc tạo cho họ cơ hội và năng lực để hòa nhập xã hội về mặt kinh tế. Trên cơ sở nội dung phỏng vấn sâu các cô dâu di trú tại Hàn Quốc và dữ liệu khảo sát về năng lực kinh tế cũng như hoạt động kinh tế của họ, bài viết này<sup>o</sup> phân tích thực trạng hòa nhập xã hội của phụ nữ di trú trong lĩnh vực kinh tế. Đây sẽ là căn cứ quan trọng trong việc đưa ra những giải pháp hay đề xuất chính sách nhằm hỗ trợ phụ nữ di trú theo diện kết hôn tại Hàn Quốc hòa nhập xã hội một cách thực chất và hiệu quả hơn trong các nghiên cứu về sau.

**Từ khóa:** hòa nhập xã hội, hoạt động kinh tế của cô dâu di trú, công bằng về cơ hội, cô dâu Việt, kết hôn quốc tế

## 1. Introduction

In today's era of globalization, the trend of transforming into multi-ethnic and multicultural societies is rapidly happening in many countries around the world. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) has pointed out that unequal and unfair development is the reason why people from less developed countries and territories migrate to more developed countries in pursuit of a higher quality of life (IOM, 2018). From the perspective of migrants, one of the key motivations for migration is to improve their financial conditions, escape poverty, or, in other words, migration is a means of securing livelihoods and escaping poverty (Le et al., 2008). From the perspective of host countries, accepting migrants from other nations is also a way to ensure sustainable development and maintain national competitiveness in the context of rapidly aging societies. South Korea and the strong migration trend to South Korea in recent years are notable examples of this phenomenon. According to the data released by Statistics Korea in July 2023, South Korea's population is projected to reach 40 million by the 2040s before declining to 38 million by 2070. In response to this, the South Korean government is implementing policies to enhance the roles of women

---

<sup>o</sup> This research was funded by VNU University of Languages and International Studies (VNU-ULIS) in the project No. N.24.08.

and foreigners in order to expand the economically active population. As a result, in 2022, the number of foreigners aged 15 and older in South Korea reached 1,302,000, witnessing an increase of 338,000 (35.1%) compared to 2012 (964,000). This growth includes an increase of 167,000 men and 172,000 women. The proportion of foreigners in South Korea is expected to rise from 3.2% in 2023 to 4.3% by 2040.

A multicultural society is an inevitable and irreversible trend in contemporary South Korean society. One of the main driving forces of this transformation is women migrating through marriage and multicultural families. Among foreign residents in South Korea, about 60% of women migrating through marriage belong to the long-term resident population, having lived in the country for more than ten years (Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, 2019). Therefore, the South Korean government has continuously made efforts to establish a system of policies specifically targeting migrant women through marriage as primary beneficiaries, aiming to create a healthy, open, and inclusive multicultural society. From the perspective of migration motivations to the factors influencing adaptation and social integration, it can be stated that an important measure to promote the social integration of women migrating through marriage in South Korea is to provide them with opportunities and capacities for economic integration. This article, based on in-depth interviews with Vietnamese migrant brides in South Korea and survey data on their economic capacity and activities, analyzes the current state of social integration of migrant women in the economic sector. This will act as an important evidence for proposing solutions or policies to support migrant women through marriage in South Korea, enabling them to integrate into society more substantively and effectively in future studies.

## **2. Content**

### **2.1. Theoretical Framework**

“Hoà nhập” is translated into “Integration” in English and “통합” in Korean. This word can also be found in Latin language. The Latin word “Integratio” is derived from “Integer”, which means restoring completeness. The concept of social integration began to be seriously considered with the emergence of early modern countries, the differentiation of social functions, and the expansion of the concept of citizenship (Park, 2019). At the World Summit for Social Development held by the United Nations in 1994 in Copenhagen, Sweden, “social integration” was defined with two meanings. The first meaning is “inclusion”, which contrasts with “exclusion”, referring to the process of providing benefits such as justice, material well-being, and political freedom to the majority of the population. The second meaning is “harmony”, which contrasts with “disintegration”. In this sense, social integration refers to “harmony and solidarity”, aiming to prevent the breakdown of families and communities or the disruption of social order due to social crimes and corruption (Lee et al., 2014). Based on this definition, it can be seen that there is no significant distinction between the two concepts “social inclusion” and “social integration”. Both aim at recognizing differences, reducing levels of inequality and social exclusion, and strengthening social relationships and interactions.

Based on this definition, social integration in the economic sector means that all social groups, especially vulnerable groups (such as the poor, the disabled, ethnic minorities, and women...), can fully and fairly participate in the economic activities of society. Social integration highlights the recognition of diverse individuals as equal members of society, aiming to reduce inequality and social exclusion. Therefore, the principle of “equity” is a crucial

factor in assessing the level of integration of groups commonly referred to as “minorities” within society.

Peragine and Biagi (2019) assert that, according to the Equality of Opportunity (EOp) approach, the primary goal of public policies is to ensure that individuals develop their lives within a fair contextual framework. The implementation of the Equality of Opportunity principle extends beyond the mere application of non-discrimination policies, which mandate that individuals with different characteristics be treated equally and provided with equal opportunities (e.g., race and gender should not affect access to education, healthcare, or the labor market). This approach is both fair and morally right, as explained by Fleurbaey (1994), who based his argument on two fundamental ethical principles concerning equal distribution and the recognition of personal responsibility. The first is the principle of compensation, which requires society to compensate individuals for disparities in outcomes caused by factors beyond their control (such as race, gender, religion, or family background). The second principle relates to the allocation of outcomes based on individual effort (or, more broadly, the fulfillment of personal responsibility) (Fleurbaey, 1994; cited in Ferreira & Peragine, 2015). Building on the foundation of the Equality of Opportunity theory, this study examines social integration in economic sector through two specific aspects:

*1. Are migrants provided with fair opportunities to participate in economic activities? (reflected in equal access to job search channels, vocational training, and opportunities to engage in various sectors and industries)*

*2. Are migrants allocated resources fairly in the way that accurately reflects their personal responsibility, effort, and labor outcomes (as reflected in income levels)?*

This theoretical framework serves as the foundation for the author's data analysis in the research findings. Besides, to clarify the impact of economic activities on migrants' social integration, the author also assesses how economic activities influence social integration in other sectors, such as culture, politics, or society.

## **2.2. Research Methods**

### **2.2.1. Data Analysis Method**

In the study, the author has applied the following data analysis method: research, investigation, and synthesis of documents to understand and model concepts and theories related to social integration, as well as the different dimensions of social integration; data synthesis and statistical analysis method to utilize data sources from the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family and Statistics Korea.

### **2.2.2. In-depth Interview Method**

The author conducted in-depth interviews with 37 Vietnamese migrant brides in South Korea. Most of these migrant brides have lived in South Korea for at least five years, ensuring a sufficient period of settlement to contribute to their level of social integration in different dimensions.

The key information about the interviewed participants can be summarized as follows:

- Place of residence in South Korea: 8 brides live in Daegu, 2 in Busan, and 26 in Seoul and its surrounding areas.
- Age distribution: 1 bride is under 30 years old; 23 brides are between 30 and under 40; 9 brides are between 40 and under 50; and 4 brides are over 50.

- Length of residence in South Korea: 5 brides have lived in South Korea for less than 5 years; 8 for 5 to under 10 years; 16 for 10 to under 20 years; and 8 for 20 years or more.

These in-depth interview participants represent a diverse range of locations, age groups, and living experiences in South Korea, providing a reliable source of information on the social integration of migrant women in South Korea.

The in-depth interview content is structured into three main sections:

1. Collecting personal information (includes identity, hometown in Vietnam, place of residence in South Korea, and family background).
2. Investigating the social integration process of these brides in South Korea (education and training, challenges faced upon arrival, strategies for overcoming these challenges, and current living conditions).
3. Assessing their social integration levels in South Korea (participants provide self-assessments of their satisfaction with life in South Korea, factors contributing to their success/difficulties in integration, and their future aspirations).

Within the scope of this study, the author focused on analyzing interviews related to economic activities and social integration in the economic sector of Vietnamese women who migrated to South Korea through marriage.

### **2.3. Research Objectives**

The objective of this study is to provide a systematic understanding of the process and status of social integration among Vietnamese women who migrate to South Korea through international marriage. Based on this foundation, the study aims to clarify the reciprocal relationship between economic, cultural, political, and social factors, highlighting the necessary stages of adaptation and integration that migrant women must navigate to effectively and rapidly integrate into Korean society. By analyzing the research findings, the study proposes recommendations to facilitate the social integration process and enhance the social status of Vietnamese migrant women in South Korea, not only within their families but also across various sectors of social participation.

### **2.4. Research Findings**

#### **2.4.1. The Right to Participate in Economic Institutions of Migrant Women in South Korea**

##### **2.4.1.1. Job Searching**

According to the report from Statistics Korea, the number of employed migrants in 2024, ranked by nationality, is listed as follows: Ethnic Chinese Koreans (341,000 people) and Vietnamese (123,000 people). According to survey results from in-depth interviews, there are two common job-searching channels for migrant brides in South Korea: 1) the Vietnamese community in South Korea 2) the internet. For the first channel, access methods and referral formats vary. Job opportunities may come from relatives or acquaintances from Vietnam or from Vietnamese women who know each other through a shared community in the same living area (through informal social groups or meetings at organizations such as the Multicultural Family Support Center or religious institutions like churches and temples...). Being introduced to jobs through acquaintances allows migrant brides to quickly find a job that matches their language proficiency while also meeting their economic needs. However,

most of these jobs are manual work or temporary positions that do not require high intellect (such as working in restaurants or performing manual labor in manufacturing sites...).

“After arriving in South Korea, I discovered that I had been deceived into marriage, so I ran away. While wandering on the streets, I met two Vietnamese people. They stopped their car and asked me if I was Vietnamese. After realizing we were fellow countrymen from Thái Bình, they let me get in their car and took me to their place. Later, they helped me get a job at a family-run business. I worked at that company for a year before moving to another area. At my first job, I only received a salary of 1.1 million won (around 20 million VND). Later, as the work was too demanding and I had to take on additional tasks left by an elderly employee who had retired, my salary increased to 1.2 million won (around 22 million VND). Each month, I could only save 200,000 to 300,000 won, and I could only send money back to my parents once every six months.”

(Ms. T\*\*\*, 39 years old, Gwangju - Now returned to Vietnam)

For finding jobs on the Internet, except for job opportunities posted in some groups of Vietnamese community groups in South Korea (via Kakaotalk groups or Facebook pages), there are also many different channels by Korean government (job seeking websites, Employment Support Center under the Ministry of Employment and Labor, recruitment channels of welfare centers...). The characteristic of jobs found through these channels is that only those who have reached a certain level of Korean language proficiency can access and obtain them. In particular, the process of preparing application documents according to job requirements or interviewing via phone is all conducted in Korean. Therefore, it can be assessed that these jobs are more diverse in terms of sectors, and most of them offer better salaries and benefits.

“I have done many jobs (I only worked at the Multicultural Family Support Center for one year). I usually find jobs on my own, mainly through newspapers and websites... After my Korean was better, I reached out to employment centers for support. These agencies are usually very enthusiastic and provide thorough explanations. Thanks to that, I was able to work in some occupations which are similar to Koreans or in positions prioritized for foreigners (discussed during the interview), such as tour guides.”

(Ms. N\*\*\*, 41 years old, Daegu)

Another job introduction channel frequently mentioned by migrant women in interviews is referrals from Koreans. These Koreans could be neighbors or acquaintances they interact with in daily life. More commonly, they are teachers or staff members at Multicultural Family Support Centers who, after interacting with the migrant women and recognizing their diligence and abilities, recommend them for jobs. Most of these recommended jobs are somewhat related to the Vietnamese language or require foreign support (for example, developing educational products for foreign children, teaching cultural classes at schools, or working at other support centers).

“I started working when my child was three years old after moving to Bucheon to learn Korean. I joined a multicultural instructor class. The teachers at the school referred me to teach multicultural education at kindergartens, then gradually moved on to elementary, secondary, and high schools. Sometimes, welfare centers and police departments also invited me to teach.”

(Ms. N\*\*, 44 years old, Bucheon)

#### ***2.4.1.2. Participate in Vocational Training Activities***

Among the various aspects of economic participation rights, vocational training plays a crucial role in helping migrant brides secure stable jobs with decent wages, even if these are

manual labor jobs in factories. However, in reality, very few migrant women have access to workplace training or skill development programs. While the rate of vocational training among male migrant workers in public institutions or corporate training centers is relatively high, migrant women are often trained at welfare centers or private institutions... (Park Min Jeong, 2020). Additionally, the percentage of female migrants working for employment purposes is low, and many of them choose temporary or seasonal jobs. This is both the cause and result of their limited access to formal vocational education services. Many organizations that are not directly related to vocational training or lack official recognition in this field only offer short-term courses or training that do not fully align with women's needs and career aspirations.

“The South Korean authorities have conducted surveys on vocational training needs among migrant brides. The results indicated that most women want to pursue office jobs such as working as translators and interpreters in the medical and legal fields. Therefore, there is a high demand for advanced vocational training programs. However, due to labor shortages in Korea, vocational training programs still primarily focus on some sectors that Koreans are unwilling to work in (cleaning and domestic help...).”

(Ms. O\*\*\*, 47 years old, Gyeonggido)

Nevertheless, participating in vocational training classes has provided many women with stable job opportunities in specialized fields suited to married migrant women.

“While studying cultural courses, I also joined a cooking class with the goal of becoming a cooking instructor after graduation. In Seoul, there is a program for training foreign cooking instructors”. In addition to teaching Korean cuisine, they also prepare us to teach Vietnamese dishes such as making “banh xeo” (crispy Vietnamese pancakes). During the course, they also train us on how to create recipes. Currently, the wage for teaching cooking classes is 120,000 KRW per hour (approximately 2 million VND). If I can teach in Korean, the salary would be very good.”

(Ms. H\*\*\*, 36 years old, Seoul)

#### ***2.4.1.3. Participate in Various Occupational Fields***

When investigating the employment sectors of migrant brides, the author found that the type of work is directly related to their Korean language proficiency and educational background. In the case of brides such as Kim Anh (Busan), Thuy Tien (Seoul), and Kim Dung (Daegu), who married with advanced Korean language proficiency (or held a university degree in Korean studies), they were able to enter the labor market and secure office jobs or high-income positions immediately. These include roles such as staff members at Multicultural Centers, the International Exchange Foundation, or student managers at universities. In contrast, those with lower Korean proficiency upon arrival often had to start with manual labor jobs, such as factory work or assisting in restaurants. They could only have better-paying positions after attaining a certain level of Korean language proficiency.

When examining employment status by country of origin, the percentage of women engaged in regular employment is lower than that of men, with disparities between Vietnam, China, and other Asian countries. Additionally, there are significant differences in employment status based on gender and education levels. While 70.8% of men with a college degree or higher are in regular employment, only 55% of women are full-time workers. Statistics from the Korean Women's Development Institute in 2021 indicate that marriage-based immigrants predominantly work in the service sector, whereas their participation in managerial and professional roles is lower than that of the general South Korean workforce. 25.1% of these workers are engaged in short-term jobs (less than 36 hours per week),

accounting for approximately 26.4% of Korea's total short-term workforce.

According to in-depth interviews, migrant brides mainly concentrate on four primary job sectors:

Manual labor jobs that do not require Korean language skills, education, or specific qualifications. These jobs mainly include working in factories, serving in restaurants, or taking on temporary work that can be done from home. The advantages of these jobs are that they are easy to obtain, require no Korean proficiency, and offer flexible working hours (which is essential for women who need to balance work with household responsibilities, such as taking care of children - a role traditionally assigned to women in Korean families). However, these jobs are physically demanding and often come with low wages and potential employer exploitation. According to the Korean Ministry of Employment and Labor, as of August 2023, the minimum wage in Korea was set at 9,860 KRW per hour (approximately 180,000 VND per hour) and 2,060,740 KRW per month (around 40 million VND per month, based on a 40-hour workweek, 209 hours per month). However, most migrant brides hardly receive this standard wage when working in this kind of job.

“When I first arrived, I only worked part-time in restaurants, construction sites, or small jobs that my friends invited me to do on a daily basis, earning around 50,000 to 80,000 KRW per day (approximately 1 to 1.5 million VND).”

(Ms. D\*\*\*, 36 years old, Daegu)

“When I wanted to start working, I knew very little Korean, so my friends helped me find a job at a restaurant where I could work and learn the language at the same time. After 7 to 8 months, I started working, but my salary was low. Even though I sent money back to Vietnam, it was not much (over 30 million VND per month). Most of my earnings were used for covering my living expenses in Korea, including rent and personal needs.”

(Ms. H\*\*\*, 32 years old, Incheon - Currently returned to Vietnam)

“I once worked in a garment factory for a month, and it was very exhausting - the working environment was unclean, with lots of fabric dust. Skilled workers received better wages, but those doing simple tasks like thread-cutting were low-paid.”

(Ms. H\*\*\*, 36 years old, Seoul)

After becoming proficient in Korean, many migrant brides have access to some jobs that make use of their ability to speak two languages, such as translation, interpretation, or assisting the Vietnamese community in Korea. Consequently, a significant number of migrant brides work as consultants at foreigner support centers (such as the Danuri Call Center or welfare centers for foreigners) or provide support to multicultural families and international students.

“I came to Korea in 1994 as an industrial trainee but became undocumented after 11 months. Back then, I moved to Busan to work in a garment factory and then relocated to Seoul, continuing to work in clothing and travel bag manufacturing. In 2006, I remarried a Korean man and returned to Vietnam for paperwork before coming back to Korea on an F6 (spouse of Korean National) visa. In 2009, the Danuri Call Center was hiring, and although my Korean was not so fluent, my husband encouraged me and even helped me prepare and mail my application. I got the job, and now I have been working there for 15 years.”

(Ms. N\*\*\*\*\*, 59 years old, Anyang)

“Every day from 9 AM to 4 PM, I work at Dongnam Health University, assisting international students. This university is one of the top three institutions in the area with the highest number of Vietnamese students.”

(Ms. H\*\*, 30 years old, Suwon)



Migrant brides with higher education degrees from Vietnam or who have obtained university degrees and professional certifications in Korea often seek jobs in the teaching sector. These include various roles such as teaching foreign languages (Vietnamese for Koreans or Korean for Vietnamese) and cultural education (teaching Vietnamese culture to students or professionals working in multicultural fields)... Informal tutoring jobs only require fluency in two languages, while official teaching positions (at language centers or schools) require qualifications. Entering the education sector marks an important milestone in the social integration of migrant brides, as their academic achievements are recognized and their work is highly valued in Korean society.

“I currently work as a multicultural education instructor, mainly teaching about Vietnamese culture, people, and traditions. I teach elementary and secondary school students (by session) and also at kindergartens (one session per school). Additionally, I also organize cultural experience activities, such as Vietnamese cuisine and traditional clothing demonstrations. Since I only teach 1–2 sessions per week, the income is low, and the work is unstable. However, this job requires strong Korean language skills and good communication abilities, and it is intellectually rewarding.”

(Ms. N\*\*, 44 years old, Bucheon)

“I teach cooking classes for Koreans. This is a job I got after attending a cooking class sponsored by the Seoul Metropolitan Government. Additionally, I teach Vietnamese language classes for children from multicultural families. This is freelance work, which I will apply whenever the Multicultural Family Support Center hires.”

(Ms. H\*\*\*, 36 years old, Seoul)

Social integration allows migrant brides to confidently pursue diverse job opportunities in Korea, beyond traditional fields that are mainly associated with immigrant workers. Hence, for migrant brides who have lived in Korea for many years, possess higher education, and have successfully adapted, their career choices expand significantly, with jobs facilitating personal development goals (as in the case of the brides cited below). Some return to their majors from Vietnam, while others explore new professions based on personal interests and experiences.

“Previously, I worked at the Multicultural Family Support Center, specializing in assisting newly arrived brides. Currently, I have transitioned to working for an American insurance company, where I am the first foreign employee. Additionally, I volunteer as an interpreter for the Northern Gyeonggi Provincial Police Agency and provide translation services for the Tax Office in Incheon.”

(Ms. L\*\*\*, 46 years old, Seoul)

“My company develops educational programs under contract, creating bilingual teaching materials and organizing year-end events. Since my major in Vietnam was marketing, I am currently responsible for planning and online marketing (sales management, ordering, and project planning). The company does not offer overtime pay (regular working hours are from 10 AM to 5 PM), so I am not completely satisfied with the salary. However, I enjoy the working environment, and my mother-in-law supports my decision to continue working.”

(Ms. D\*\*\*, 36 years old, Daegu)

“My goal by the age of 45 is to become a Vietnamese language lecturer and interpreter (to ensure my livelihood) while also studying and obtaining certifications to become a coach. I am gradually transitioning into the field of professional financial training. Although I am still in the process of building a solid knowledge background, my financial training activities are currently community-based. In the future, I aim to expand my financial consulting services beyond the Vietnamese community in South Korea to more diverse customers.”

(Ms. T\*\*\*, 38 years old, Seoul)

Especially, as South Korea enters a hyper-aging society, certifications in newborn care, elderly care, and disability assistance, as well as domestic work training, are attracting significant attention. These programs enable migrant women, who typically have limited economic participation while their children are in school, to enter the highly demanded caregiving labor market in Korea.

“My in-laws suffer from dementia and have mobility issues. To assist them, I researched elderly welfare programs and discovered that government support was available. Hence, I took a two-month elderly care course to better understand elderly needs and caregiving methods, and I even completed an internship. Currently, my father-in-law receives three hours of daily government-funded care. Meanwhile, I have registered as my mother-in-law’s caregiver, also providing three hours of care per day. This arrangement gives me flexibility and allows me to earn an income as well.”

(Ms. H\*\*, 30 years old, Suwon)

Through the shared experiences of migrant women who moved to Korea through marriage, there are some conclusions about their right to participate in economic institutions. In general, these women do not face significant barriers in accessing economic opportunities, as evidenced by the diversity of job search channels and career fields they engage in. However, their access to specific job markets and industries is closely linked to their personal abilities and social networks. The better a migrant bride’s Korean language skills and the deeper her connections with Koreans (both within her in-laws and other Korean acquaintances), the greater her access to effective job search channels and diverse vocational training programs. These factors also increase their chances of having skilled and socially-respected jobs. This is a key strategy for improving the economic integration of migrant women through marriage.

## **2.4.2. The Right to Fair Distribution**

### **2.4.2.1. Income Equality**

According to the theory of Equality of Opportunity, economic integration also involves the right to fair distribution, primarily reflected in income and asset distribution. This ensures that vulnerable groups benefit from social security and equality. According to the Korean Ministry of Employment and Labor, the minimum wage as of August 2023 was 9,860 won per hour (approximately 180,000 VND/hour) and 2,060,740 won per month (around 40 million VND/month) based on a 40-hour workweek (209 hours per month). This means that migrant brides should be entitled to at least this minimum wage.

However, survey results indicate that migrant brides still face wage discrimination. According to a 2020 survey by the Migrant Research and Training Center, 8.5% of ethnic Koreans from China reported earning less than 1 million won per month, while 38.0% earned between 1 million and 2 million won. Meanwhile, 49.4% earned between 2 million and 3 million won, despite only 40.4% working full-time. In contrast, Vietnamese and other Asian migrant women had a higher full-time employment rate (48.8% and 53.7%, respectively); however, less than 30% earned over 2 million won per month. Similar findings were reported in the 2021 survey conducted by the Korean Women’s Development Institute on multicultural families. In other words, even though employment rates among ethnic Koreans from China are lower, they receive relatively higher wages compared to migrant women from other countries. For migrant women from other countries, even those with stable, full-time jobs still receive significantly lower wages. Vietnamese migrant women, including migrant brides, often earn far less than their Korean counterparts and even other migrant workers, such as those from China.

Income disparity reveals a broader issue: workplace discrimination against migrant women in Korea.

“Based on my own experience in consulting, wage discrimination against foreigners is a prominent issue. Even the luckiest among us only receive the basic salary; regardless of how long or well we work, our salary remains the same as that of Korean employees. Some workplaces do not even pay the legal minimum wage or provide tax deductions. Personally, I only receive the lowest salary at my center.”

(Ms. O\*\*\*, 47 years old, Seoul)

“I once worked in a factory where foreign workers were exploited (wages were stagnant despite working longer hours). Some companies even withheld salaries. That’s why we always advise each other to thoroughly research companies before accepting a job. In my case, in 2018, before returning to Vietnam, I worked at a supermarket. When I resigned, I was supposed to receive severance pay, but the supermarket refused to pay. I had to ask a friend in South Korea to look into the labor laws and fought for months just to receive a few hundred thousand won (equivalent to one month’s salary).”

(Ms. T\*\*\*\*, 35 years old, Mokpo - now returned to Vietnam)

Discrimination can also be seen in the multicultural awareness of colleagues in the workplace.

“Even though South Korea considers itself a multicultural society—meaning mutual understanding is essential. However, in fact, foreigners are often expected to assimilate entirely into Korean culture, while Koreans rarely make an effort to learn about other cultures. You can see this in how cultural programs primarily target children, while adults have limited opportunities to learn. Even some employees at multicultural centers have little awareness of foreign cultures and see no need to educate themselves.”

(Ms. O\*\*\*, 47 years old, Seoul)

#### **2.4.2.2 Career Mobility**

According to Statistics Korea, 327,000 foreign workers have stayed at a single office for over three years, 241,000 people stayed for one to two years, and 176,000 people for less than six months. 48.6% of foreign workers stay in a job for one to two years, reflecting a high turnover rate and showing a trend of career mobility of foreigners living in South Korea.

Key factors driving job changes include seasonal work, unfair wages, and economic pressures... Migrant brides, in particular, report that besides some external factors (Covid 19, the policies of the Korean government: closing support centers for foreign workers), their dissatisfaction with the jobs (workplace discrimination, difficult working conditions, and bad relationships with employers...) are the reasons for frequently changing jobs. However, the most common reason is their desire to find better opportunities with better working environments as well as higher salaries and benefits.

Thus, changing jobs is also a way for migrant brides to choose suitable jobs, helping them achieve stability both financially and mentally. This serves as a crucial condition for deeper and more sustainable social integration. Moreover, the opportunity to change jobs, much like the opportunity to participate in economic institutions, is closely related to the individual migrant bride’s level of education, skills, and social network. Migrant brides’ sharing clearly shows that the better their Korean language proficiency and the more specialized qualifications they obtain (in South Korea), the greater their chances of accessing a diverse range of job opportunities that match their career aspirations and personal goals.

“For the first five years, I didn’t know Korean, so I helped my mother-in-law run her food

stall (delivering orders by bicycle). She paid me 600,000 won (about 12 million VND) and gave me extra money for my child's milk. I saved this to support my family and buy a house in Vietnam. Later on, after obtaining a two-year Korean language certificate, a Korean acquaintance introduced me to an office job at a travel agency. That was between 2005 and 2006 when many Koreans wanted to visit Vietnam. Hence, I earned under 1 million won per month. Later, I became a tour guide in Vietnam, making up to \$1,200 per month.

To increase my income, I continued to learn Korean and transitioned to work in marriage services especially in 2009 when there were many migrant brides to Korea. At that time, my official salary was \$1,200, and I also received commission bonuses every time I brought a groom to meet the bride. So, my total income reached around \$1,800 to \$1,900 (approximately 40 million VND). Thanks to that, I was able to buy a house in Vietnam (District 3, Saigon) and another in Gangnam (of course, out of the 900 million KRW for the house purchase, I took a 150 million KRW bank loan). As competition in the tourism industry increased, I switched to marriage services in 2009 and then transitioned into labor recruitment and study abroad consulting. In 2014, my husband was in an accident, and I became the sole provider. After he passed away in 2019, COVID-19 boomed, and I faced financial hardship. Now, my life is fairly stable and I continue working in visa and labor recruitment services."

(Ms. T\*\*, 60 years old, Seoul)

#### ***2.4.2.3 Opportunities for Self-Development in the Workplace***

Besides improving the financial situation of their families, economic activities also hold significant meaning for the mental and social lives of migrant brides. When they first arrive in Korea, most women feel unfamiliar with their new lives in a completely different country. In the beginning, when their Korean language skills are still limited, most of them stay at home, focusing on learning the language and taking care of their families (many newly arrived brides already have children and spend around one to two years at home fulfilling childcare duties). This is also the period when they feel the most uncomfortable, stressed, and vulnerable. Only when they have the chance to go out and work do these brides get the opportunity to change themselves, interact with the outside world, and truly integrate into society.

First and foremost, to find stability and balance, migrant brides continuously strive to adapt and improve themselves to fit into the working environment.

"The first time I worked at the Danuri Call Center and answered calls, I was extremely nervous. I still remember my first call. It was for interpreting for a married couple. During my first year, I constantly thought about quitting because the job was extremely stressful and overwhelming. At that time, the call center had consultants from six different countries, and I was the oldest among them, with limited Korean language skills.

The people I assisted were usually Korean men married to Vietnamese women. Most of them were poor, often the eldest sons in their families, had health issues, or lacked higher education. Some even told me straight over the phone that my salary was paid with their taxes, so I had to endure their scolding. While the job was not physically demanding, it was mentally exhausting. It took me five to seven years to get used to it and learn how to control my emotions. Working at the call center did not provide as much financial stability as working in a factory, but with my husband's encouragement, I decided to commit to it until retirement."

(Ms. N\*\*\*\*\*, 59 years old, Anyang)

Survey results also show that compared to manual, simple, and temporary jobs, office jobs or positions that require frequent interaction with Koreans serve as a goal and a motivation for migrant brides to develop themselves to meet South Korean employment requirements.

“I graduated with a degree in Korean language in Vietnam and worked at a Korean company before moving here. So, I had no issues with language or cultural adaptation. However, what shocked me the most was the tough requirements when applying for jobs. When I first came to Korea, I wasn’t eligible for official employment (having lived in South Korea for two years) and had no recognized South Korean qualifications (my university degree and work experience from Vietnam were not accepted in South Korean job applications). I ended up working at a golf course because it was a manual labor job that didn’t require any certifications, and I stopped preparing for other opportunities.

By 2023, I had the chance to apply for an online teaching job (teaching Vietnamese), but the employer required a valid TOPIK certificate, and mine had expired a long time ago. I had to retake the test but failed to register in time, missing two job opportunities. Luckily, an online TOPIK testing program was recently launched, and I passed with Level 5, which was sufficient.

Later, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs organized a two-week teacher training program for foreigners teaching Korean. Initially, I planned to take unpaid leave to attend, but since my company didn’t allow it, I decided to quit the job. After completing the training, I applied for a position at the Multicultural Family Support Center. However, once again, without Korean-recognized qualifications, computer certification, or translation/interpreting certifications, I was ineligible for any position at the center. Even administrative jobs at the center required a social welfare degree. This made me realize that in South Korea, everything requires official certifications and qualifications. Although I had taken various courses in the past, I had never considered obtaining qualifications. Initially, I wondered why so many people kept studying. Was it because they genuinely didn’t know things, or was it necessary? During my job interview, the director of the Multicultural Family Support Center pointed out that I did not make careful preparations for job applications.”

(Ms. L\*, 36 years old, Incheon)

Beyond learning Korean and working in such familiar fields as translation and language teaching, job opportunities have also encouraged women to explore new career paths with diverse professional goals.

“I am currently training to become a yoga instructor, aiming to teach full-time via the Internet. I believe that everyone has a job that suits them. So, last year, I decided to pursue this path and enrolled in an online course from Vietnam to gain foundational knowledge.”

(Ms. D\*\*\*, 37 years old, Seoul)

“I am still in university (studying online at a cyber university, attending classes whenever I have free time). I plan to study social welfare to open a nursing home in Vietnam. My husband also insists that I become proficient in Korean and computers, so he has encouraged me to obtain a medical tourism guide certification as well.”

(Ms. H\*\*, 30 years old, Suwon)

Thus, economic activities have provided an environment and opportunities for migrant brides to engage with society, naturally improving their Korean language skills. At the same time, striving for career achievements and progress also acts as a driving force, stimulating their desire for learning and self-development.

### 3. Conclusions

From the analysis above, several conclusions can be drawn regarding the social integration of Vietnamese migrant women for international marriage in South Korea’s economic sector:

First, in terms of the right to participate in economic institutions, Vietnamese migrant brides in South Korea do not face significant difficulties in accessing opportunities for economic participation. This is evident in the diversity of job-seeking channels and the range of industries they engage in. However, the extent of their access to support channels or job sectors depends directly on their qualifications and capabilities. Among these factors, Korean language proficiency is the most important, followed by educational qualifications, work experience, and the ability to expand social networks.

Second, regarding the right to fair distribution, migrant brides still face many injustices and discrimination in economic activities, as reflected in their significantly lower income levels compared to native workers. However, this discrimination applies broadly to all foreign migrant workers rather than being a specific issue applied to marriage migrants. The form and degree of discrimination depend on the working environment, the level of awareness of people around them, their qualifications, as well as the women's ability to advocate for themselves.

Third, these migrant brides continuously strive to bridge the gap, overcome discrimination, and assert themselves in the South Korean labor market. This is reflected in their willingness to step out of their "comfort zones" to seek more diverse job opportunities that better match their skills and personal identities, thereby securing stable income and contributing to their family's overall economic well-being. This level of engagement represents a higher degree of social integration in the economic sector among long-term migrants in South Korea.

From the surveys on the economic integration of marriage migrant women, it can be concluded that, in addition to external factors (such as South Korean perceptions of multiculturalism and corporate hiring policies), internal factors (such as individual competence, qualifications, and social networks...) play a decisive role in ensuring fair distribution of both resources and opportunities in economic activities for migrant brides. This is also a motivation for these women to continuously enhance their skills and showcase their individual identities in the integration process in Korean society. At the same time, it also presents a policy challenge, in which both the Vietnamese and South Korean governments need to develop appropriate support measures to ensure the comprehensive and practical social integration of individuals in this group.

### References

- Ferreira, F., & Vito, P. (2015). *Equality of opportunity: Theory and evidence*. Oxford University.
- Fleurbaey, M. (1994). On fair compensation. *Theory and Decision*, 36, 277–307.
- Ho, Q. H. (2018). Social justice in the socialist-oriented market economy in Vietnam. *Economics & Development*, 248, 2–11.
- Kim, Y. S. (2016). Settlement of Vietnamese migrants and key considerations in Korea-Vietnam women's cooperation. In *Proceedings of the Korea Women's Policy Institute Conference* (pp. 53–68).
- Le, B. D., & Khuat, T. H. (2008). *Migration and social protection in Vietnam during the transition to a market economy*. The Gioi Publishers.
- Le, T. M. (2015). Vietnamese diaspora: Social integration and cultural identity. *Journal of Social Sciences*, 2(198), 32–47.
- Lee, J.-Y., Cho, B.-H., Jang, D.-J., Yoo, M.-S., Woo, M.-S., & Seo, H.-J. (2014). Social integration: Concept, measurement, and international comparison. *Korean Social Policy Review*, 21(2), 113–149.
- McAuliffe, M., & Ruhs, M. (Eds.). (2017). *World migration report 2018*. International Organization for Migration (IOM). <https://publications.iom.int/books/world-migration-report-2018>

- Ministry of Women and Gender Equality of South Korea. (2022). *Survey on the status of multicultural families nationwide in 2022*.
- Park, J.-S. (2019). *A study on immigration law system for social integration* (Doctoral dissertation). Graduate School, Keimyung University.
- Peragine, V., & Biagi, F. (2019). *Equality of opportunity: theory, measurement and policy implications*. Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg. Doi: 10.2760/640390.
- Pham, V. Q. (2016). Social networks and social integration of poor migrant labor in Vietnam's urban areas. *Political Theory Online Journal*. [http://luluanhinhtri.vn/home/index.php/thuc-tien/item/1788-mang-luoi-xa-hoi-va-hoa-nhap-xa-hoi-cua-lao-dong-nhap-cu-ngheo-tai-cac-do-thi-viet-nam.html?fbclid=IwAR0ynz11BKya0ZGGbIt2GmwFA\\_L7g72pK2LSy\\_pPB1nA5DZ7zk4BUgVEI](http://luluanhinhtri.vn/home/index.php/thuc-tien/item/1788-mang-luoi-xa-hoi-va-hoa-nhap-xa-hoi-cua-lao-dong-nhap-cu-ngheo-tai-cac-do-thi-viet-nam.html?fbclid=IwAR0ynz11BKya0ZGGbIt2GmwFA_L7g72pK2LSy_pPB1nA5DZ7zk4BUgVEI)
- Pham, V. Q., & Tran, V. K. (2015). Social integration: Some perspectives and the implementation of research and measurement. *Journal of Psychology*, 10(199), 71–81.
- Standing Committee of the National Assembly. (2003). *Ordinance No. 06/2003/PL-UBTVQH11 dated November 9, 2003, on population*. Hanoi, Vietnam.
- Tran, T. H. M. (2021). *Study on gender issues in domestic migration and economic reorganization in Vietnam*. Australia's Program Supporting Vietnam's Economic Reform 2021.