



The Republic of Korea should help women enter and stay in the workforce

The Republic of Korea could improve its citizens' overall well-being by tackling inequality in the workforce that has left women falling behind their male counterparts.

A report by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development points out that on many measures the country remains well behind other OECD countries when it comes to the treatment of women in the workforce. Randall Jones, head of the Japan and Korea desk at the OECD, spoke on the issue at the Asian Development Bank Institute.

Discrimination and labor market dualism lead to a very high gender wage gap—37%. In 2000, the gap was 40%, so we made a small improvement, but it's still very large. When women start off, the wage gap is only 10% relative to men, but once women leave the workforce to care for children, or their parents, they get off the seniority-based wage system, and then come back as nonregular at a low wage. The wage system is not conducive. And, finally, women are not very prominent in management—only 6% in the central government. The OECD average is 32%. So, again, women don't have very many career opportunities.

One of the main issues is the treatment of women having children:

For women, we need to raise employment. That means allowing women to take maternity leave. In Korea, there is great social pressure that in a company, if a woman is expecting, that she either quit or not take maternity leave, because the people who are left have to do double-time. There is great social pressure, and many firms really discourage women from taking maternity leave. We really have to make maternity leave more acceptable and enforce

the rules for parental leave in which the women take some of it. The men, not so much, but it's going up. But we need better work-life balance so that women have more of a chance to work.

Making it easier for women to enter and stay in the workforce would improve the economy. But it is also an issue of fairness, Jones said.

They start off with the same education basically. If you look at young, nonregular workers and young regular workers, the gap in skills is very small. From an outside perspective, it seems very unfair that two people who are basically equivalent, one makes 40% less because they are nonregular. This, in my view, is key in trying to promote equality.

That was Randall Jones, head of the Japan and Korea desk for the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, speaking at the Asian Development Bank Institute in Tokyo.

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