Study on Enhancing Employability of North Korean Refugees through Analysis on the Career Path

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1. Overview

This study analyzes career paths of North Korean refugees and extracts success and failure factors for job search and adaptation. Policy measures are suggested to support their career development and employability. The contents of this study are as follows.

First, theories on career path, career types, career development, and previous research related competencies development of North Korean refugees were analyzed. Second, employment-related laws and policies, employment situation and trends were examined. Third, career paths and career types were analyzed through life history analysis. Fourth, competency level related to employability of North Korean refugees was analyzed by questionnaire survey of employers and helpers. Finally, the strengthening measures for employment of North Korean refugees were proposed. The methods and procedures adopted for the study were literature review, questionnaire survey, qualitative life history analysis, experts consultations and seminars.

2. Related Policies Review

There are variety of resettlement support-related laws and regulations so that North Korean refugees can settle into a stable community in South Korea. South Korean society is providing general settlement needed in the early stages as well as support for a stable job training required for employment assistance: job placement, employment institutions officer, employment subsidies, education and the recognition of qualifications, entrepreneurship support, social business operations support and other related policies. In addition to legal assistance and government policy, many private groups operate a variety of programs for North Korean refugees. Private
sector is a growing trend in the program, however, support the employment of North Korean refugees and professional programs for capacity building for employment is still lacking.

3. Life History Analysis

Most of the North Korean refugees are coming to South Korea without stacking enough experience to form a career. Motives of North Korean refugees are mainly due to economic hardship, adaptation problems in North Korea, the constraints of professional freedom, and uncertainty of success.

First impression of South Korea for the North Korean refugees is frustration and disappointment in contrast to expectations. At this time they spend a lot of worry and hard times alone, and feel much emotional alienation. After completion of Hanawon, governmental settlement support institute for North Korean refugees, refugees showed a different career path. The biggest difficulty in the initial settlement phase is language discrepancy between North and South. The language problem is one of the barriers that inhibit an effort to occupational settlement. Refugees get their first job through referrals and tend to attend vocational education and training related to the job. North Korean refugees have accounted for 70% of the women. Women initially have their job as waitress, janitor, and maid in preparation for moving into better job. It is important to understand the value of money through the work in the early stage of adaptation. Many North Korean refugees show disappointment for their first job. This is due to not enough information about the job and not taking into account the experience of their aptitude, interest, working conditions and work environment of the North Korea. Major cases of career growth stage are termination of three years employment subsidies, work-family balance, continuation of study, and awareness of inequalities for work life. Occupations associated with government subsidies tend not highly relate with an individual’s career development after training. Accreditation of education and experience in the North is institutionally provided, but the progress is not easy.

4. Career Path Analysis and Typology

1) Career paths of North Korean refugees

The career types of North Korean refugees are very diverse. The first of these, who has career of the military or public sector in North Korea now has the job of government officials or works in public institutions in South
Korea. Second, they become a government official in South Korea. Third, they found jobs related to their jobs from North Korea. Fourth, most of the interviewees have their job unrelated to that of North Korea’s. Fifth, they find a same or related occupation that they were engaged in when they were in the North. The most effective policy for North Korean refugees’ career path is subsidy for settlement and employment. Recognition of education and qualifications of North Korea, job training and employment support policies, expansion of opportunity to be government officials are also important policy. Most common acquaintances affected the career movement. South Koreans who North Korean refugees meet with have very important implications during the course of the early settlers, and stage of career movement. The path of the current occupation of refugees is largely a business, bonds, employment through the recommendation or introduction by acquaintances, employment by their own will, employment by providing information of Hanawon, and career connection based on the experience of North Korea.

2) Typology of career paths

Types of career path can be classified into largely career-linked, career pioneering, and career break. Depending on the career path, career-linked type are re-classified into four such as professional type, the same type, a public institution type, and some connection type. Career pioneering type is mostly North Korean refugees have different types of jobs in the South such as employment type and business type. Career break type is almost inconsistent career path during migration of North Korea → the third countries → South Korea and job status and satisfaction gradually decline.

5. Success Factors and Barriers of Career Development

Success factors of career development are good social network formation, abandoning own position, attitudes of challenges and learning, work adjustment as social adjustment, understanding of South Korea, and stable home. Barriers are different speech style between North and South Korea, lack of opportunity according to the social structural discrimination, one-sided support system, lack of attention and love, interpersonal problems, South Korea’s impoverished affection, disconnected career, lack of information of jobs and education and training, the barriers of age, lack of systematic career support, and lacking of work experience.
6. Policy Recommendations

Based on the study, policy suggestions are as follows. First, job skills assessment tool should be developed and regularly assess the competency the refugees to boost employability and to reflect employment vocational education and training programs and policies. Second, step-by-step achievement standards need to be established for career development and to be rearranged support programs. Third, at an early stage, it is need to spend more time to understand South Korean society rather than prematurely induced employment and senior refugees to serve as a mentor to enhance the effectiveness of the support. Fourth, employment incentives and subsidies need to be linked with employment counseling, vocational education and training completion, and the individual’s career development. Fifth, the scope of waiver of national technical qualifications is also need to be expanded qualifications as well as work experience through the recognition system. Sixth, it is need to strength the follow-up measures after getting job.