

# Initiative for Single Female Households

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## VISION

Seoul, a city of hope for women and families

Achieving real gender equality and taking care of each other

## HISTORY

Research was conducted on the living conditions of women in single-person households and their policy needs ('12. 3 - 4) According to the 163rd Request to Mayor (Jan. 17, 2012), the Seoul Metropolitan Government (SMG) defined that there is "demand for systematic analysis and policy restructuring concerning the rapid increase of single person households". A survey was conducted on the living conditions of women in this situation, to better understand their policy needs via a qualitative and quantitative study, along with focus group interviews.

Mayor Park Won-soon hosted an online policy forum in Jun. 5, 2012 where single women and other interested parties and organizations including Unnienetwork attended. The topic of the forum was "Happy Seoul for Single Women" and it featured the opinions of the panel and the public as it pertained to policy needs and the direction to be followed when integrating those needs to provide shape to policy-making.

Based on the opinions collected and the integration process itself, a task force team was formed and operated Jul. 30 - Sep. 11, 2012 to set up a plan of general support using primarily single female civil servants, and tried to produce policy alternatives which reflected the reality and difficulties in the daily life of single women.

Effort was made to connect with corporations which had departments related to the implementation of general support policies for women in single-person households. (Sep. 2012)

On Sept. 3, 2012, a conference to review policy-making was hosted by the Vice Mayor for Administrative Affairs, who was joined by government departments including the Housing Policy Department, the Health & Welfare Office, the Administration Bureau, and the Culture, Design & Tourism Headquarters. This helped to effectively build a cooperative network among government departments related to policy implementation.

To promote the Comprehensive Support Initiative for Women of Single-Person Households, it held a press conference on Sept. 12, 2012 and engaged in active PR through media releases, inviting different broadcasting and newspaper companies such as KBS, MBC, SBS, Chosun Ilbo, Joongang Ilbo, Dong-A Daily, etc. to attend. Coupled with the policy promotion to the public, it continued to improve policy accessibility for women of single-person households.

The press conference also reinforced the feedback process and follow-up measures.

The sub-programs of the newly-implemented policy under the control of different departments was monitored, and meetings were held among these departments. The Gender Equality Committee led the evaluation on activities related to policy implementation and based on its monitoring, prepared for follow-up schemes on projects that needed the attention of the heads of each department in charge, to reinforce the policy feedback function for effective, improved implementation of the policies. Further efforts were made to ensure the feasibility of the general support initiative and to allocate a budget to the existing programs in each department for the year 2013.

## INTRODUCTION

This helped women of single-person households, who previously had been excluded in policy content, to live better lives, by considering them as a major policy focus and objective. These women were set as major policy beneficiaries, while identifying problems they might encounter as the result of neglectful treatment in previous policy-making processes. By actively designing policy support for them, this process could enhance the lives of women in single-person households. It enabled about 2,000 women to move into a safer housing environment, which is very critical and badly needed for women. To do this, the Seoul Metropolitan Government planned by 2015 to provide 2000 small-sized public rental housing units to single women (preferentially to female workers in low-income groups), and for the first time for female college students, provided 168 rental housing units and 75 studio-type rental housing units. Further, it has provided a secure safe housing environment for women,

and has converted government office buildings into safe housing complexes and supplied rental housing around campuses. It created a 'safety zone' (Gosichon – residential areas packed with small-sized studios) around campuses with high concentrations of single women.

The SMG helped set up security devices such as security grilles & keys, emergency bells, etc., in districts which were vulnerable to crime, and introduced guidelines for crime prevention for future application in public rental housing construction. It also changed street lamps to LED in streets susceptible to crime, making them twice as bright, and broadened alleys to create a safe environment for women. In particular, it signed an MOU with the National Police Agency in September 2012 to realize a "Violence-Free Seoul for Women" and engaged in developing preventive measures, including reinforcing patrols around districts populated with single women. It also provided educational programs providing theoretical and practical information to prevent violence against women through the Violence-Free Academy for Women. Approximately 100,000 women are expected to benefit from this academy program by 2015.

It also improved women's health via a customized health-care program. For working women who have difficulty using hospital services during regular business hours, it initiated a visiting health care service, by which 700 women have benefited and been treated. Poverty issues have been addressed by creating more jobs for single women. It has held job fairs and created new jobs for these women, and plans to help another 200 women to become employed by 2013 through internship programs in conjunction with private companies, and to develop employment programs in the sector, such as a Safe-return service which will create more than 500 jobs. It will provide a business set-up support service, with 20% of its budget prioritizing women of one-person households. It helps these women address their own problems by nurturing 100 local communities.

## BACKGROUND & GOALS

The introduction of an active support program for the rapidly-increasing number of women of single-person households is urgently needed.

The number of single-person households in Seoul has rapidly grown over the last two decades, from 9.1% to 24.4% of all households, with the number of female single-person households (450,000) accounting for 53% of the total. Despite this sharp increase, the previous major policies in taxation, housing, social safety nets, etc. were designed primarily for multi-person households, with single-person households being marginalized in government policy preparation. The Comprehensive Support Initiative for Women of Single-Person

Households is a public policy, introduced for the first time in Korea, to help previously-marginalized women in the public sector, and is an outcome of the enthusiasm to achieve a gender-equal, welfare city.

Many women in single-person households have had trouble in major sectors of their daily lives: labor, housing, poverty, etc.

Seoul Metropolitan Government introduced the Support Initiative for Single-Female Households to address the increase in women in this type of household, most of whom suffer difficulties in areas such as labor and housing. Most single person households are susceptible to unemployment and 43.7% are in fact unemployed, a rate which is three times higher than that for multi-person households. Even those who have jobs are often in volatile employment situations as the larger proportion is engaged in part-time or temporary job positions. Many women of this family type reside in *jeonse* (lump-sum deposit payment) or monthly rental housing such as cell-type housing or shared room rentals in poor districts. According to a 2012 survey on women of single-person households, 8 out of 10 women stated that they felt anxious about their volatile housing conditions. In particular, considering that many women living in a large city feel vulnerable to crime, (twice as much as men do), it is critical for these women, who live alone, to have stable housing. This is particularly problematic in that the number of sexual violence incidents reported has increased every year, from 3,621 in 2005 to 4,515 in 2010 (a 24.6 % increase) as these women become an easy and primary target for sexual violence crimes.

There exist other issues threatening women's living standards, such as mental and physical health problems caused by irregular meals or social isolation.

Policies are urgently needed for responding to social changes where the one-person household is no longer unique. The rapid increase of single-person households (i.e., that the social trend of living alone is becoming prevalent), requires a shift of paradigm in public policies, from emphasis on multi-person households to single-person households. In this sense, the Comprehensive Support Initiative for Women of Single-Person Households is very meaningful in that Seoul has tried for the first time to actively respond to these social policy needs.

## Objectives

- Expand the supply of small-sized rental housing units for single women.

- Create safe living conditions.
- Customize health care.
- Increase jobs for single women.
- Build a community for single women where they can live comfortably together.
- Provide general services to reduce inconveniences.

## IMPLEMENTATION

### **Trial Strategy**

The project mainly pursues comprehensive support for women in single-person households.

Responding to the surging number of female single-person households and their living situations, its purpose is to support these women, who have been marginalized in society, through new policies designed differently from previous policies which targeted multi-person households, in order to ease their anxiety and difficulties in a comprehensive manner.

The strategy is to provide support to 6 sectors, including housing, safety, health, employment and community, along with a lessening of anxiety and inconvenience.

The project categorizes the needs of single women into these six sectors to establish separate initiatives corresponding to each major need. For each policy sector, it has created and implemented sub-projects: supply of housing to women of single-person households through the expansion of small-sized rental housing units, creation of an environment free from violence and crime, provision of customized health care services, creation of more specialized jobs, promotion of local community activities, rendering of general services to relieve inconveniences, etc.

Strategies and goals are driven from the bottom up by policy.

The objective and strategies for comprehensive support policies for women of single-person households have been established with a bottom-up approach. First, a survey was conducted which targeted 570 women in single-person households in Seoul, to understand their living conditions and policy needs. An e-policy forum was also opened, to hear policy proposals and embody the

purpose and goals of policy, and formed a Task Force Team to establish Comprehensive Support Initiatives for Women of Single-Person Households, led by single female civil servants who would prioritize policy strategies. The forum was completely a consumer-oriented opinion-gathering process for building policy prioritization and strategies.

## Obstacles and Solutions

1. One main obstacle was identified in the policy-developing process, in terms of a pioneer project (first attempt to develop a policy to support women of single-person households).

There has been little discussion regarding policy-making for single-woman households, as policy needs have been emphasized in academic circles that paid attention to demographic changes. There are few examples found in foreign countries where women of single-person households were seen as a main focus of a universal policy. Because this is the first effort ever made to shift the paradigm of policies for women, it is not an easy task to change policy direction for women which embodies the policy in a project.

**>>Solution:** Thorough research on current situations and policy demands, with policy development through policy forums. In order to develop a practical support plan to improve the quality of life in these households, the first step was a close study of policy demand. For this, Seoul conducted quantitative research on real-life situations targeting 550 women aged 25 to 49 and then narrowed this down to 20 women for in-depth interviews, to identify policy demand by sector and by specific case. It has also tried to understand the policy requirements of these women through greater use of SNS research. Based on the results, experts participated in a policy-making process to generate policy alternatives, and the Mayor of Seoul hosted an e-forum under the topic "Happy Seoul for Single Women" so the policy could be examined by the public and integrate their opinions. The purpose of this was to foster a policy which would be successful in supporting female single-person households by actively promoting their participation, making them a key agent in the policy-making process.

2. Obstacles in the policy implementation process: Social consent and understanding regarding new policies

It is conventional understanding that the existing women's policies target women in economically-marginalized groups, or working moms seeking a dual income while raising their children. In this sense, the Comprehensive Support Initiative for Women of Single-Person Households is an extremely innovative and leading policy that shifts the paradigm of previous women's policies. This

change might be an unfamiliar notion for the ordinary citizen, and difficult to understand.

☞ **Solution:** Drawing public attention and consent via media publicity. To guarantee a successful launch, social consent and understanding should be attained first. Effort has been made to acquaint the public with the increasing number of single female households and the difficulties they might encounter, and to present it as a critical social issue. A press conference was held on September 12, 2012 and released through the major domestic press concerning the increase in female single-person households and the need for new policies, in an effort to promote social understanding on the policy needs of single women.

## Resources

A group of experts, called “the Gender Equality Committee” was formed to improve the professionalism of the policies.

Comprehensive policy-making activity support has been embraced by the Gender Equality Committee panel group and other civil groups during the entire process, encompassing establishment, implementation, and monitoring. The policy proposal was submitted in the planning stage, led by the Policy Planning Divisional Committee in the Gender Equality Committee, with continuous consultation in the implementation stage. In addition, each process has been monitored to enable improvement by encouraging the participation of experts throughout the entire policy-making and implementation process.

Effective use of available resources was made through connection with various private institutions.

A collaborative network with various private agencies promoted the effective use of resources in the private sector. For example, programs were operated in partnership with private organizations having specialties such as education on preventive measures against violence or avoiding crime, such as the Violence-Free Academy for Women and the Korea Taekwondo Association, which utilized resources effectively by launching a joint program with hospitals in Seoul during the implementation process for health support programs, such as visiting health care services for working women.

An active collaboration system was established with public service agencies

Most important, an MOU (‘Violence-Free Seoul for Women’) was signed with agencies that play a critical role in preparing safety measures for women, such as the Seoul Metropolitan Police Agency, to frame a basis for seamless service

provision, from prevention of violence to support for victims. A network for cooperation was built with local community centers and Seoul Metropolitan Rapid Transit Corporation concerning the 'unmanned delivery system' project in subway stations or areas with a high concentration of single-person households, to promote the use of public service space in an effective manner.

Financial resources were secured through creative ideas.

It was a housing support project that, despite the high demand for these households, encountered obstacles in project implementation due to the massive budget required. To solve the financial issue, it introduced the idea of renovating old government buildings, integrating a safe rental housing program for women into aging public office building reconstruction projects in which the lower floors were designed for public office use because of their higher accessibility, while the higher floors were renovated as rental housing for women. By minimizing the financial burden while providing rental housing, the approach made it possible to effectively secure financial resources. Currently, one pilot program has received positive evaluation and further expansion of the reconstruction approach is in the planning stage.

## TRANSFERABILITY

This is a leading policy developed for the first time, in Korea or other countries, providing a benchmark for comprehensive support for women of single-person households.

The rapid increase of female single-person households is seen, not only in Seoul, but in major cities around the world as well. This global demographic change has to be considered as a major focus when establishing future-oriented urban policy.

However, in the past, female single-person households were not understood as a key policy agent, resulting in a lack of policy alternatives being established concerning the issue. In this context, the Comprehensive Support Initiative for Women of Single-Person Households could play a critical part by being adopted as a benchmark case for women's policy for large cities in Korea and other countries.

Major cities in Korea have been learning from this initiative and have set it as a key agenda among research institute networks for women's policy in 16 municipal and provincial governments.

There is growing focus on the general support initiative for female single-person households among large cities, including Busan, and Daegu, where there has been recognition of the rapid increase in single female households and the policy demands thereof. In particular, after major media press releases in Korea, there has been a constant stream of inquiries about the initiative via e-mail and phone. The Korean Women's Policy Network, a network in partnership with women's policy research institutes in 16 municipal and provincial governments in Korea, set 'support for women of single-person households' as the agenda for a workshop to seek feasible methods of application to local governments. During the workshop, Seoul's project was introduced as a prime model, with discussion about methods for expansion on a national level.

The SMG sought policy expansion and international distribution.

The Seoul Metropolitan Government has successfully implemented women's policy in the past under its 'Women-Friendly City Project', which was closely connected to the real-life situation that was developed independently for the first time by a local government, resulting in global success. Now that the increasing number of female single-person households has been observed everywhere beyond Seoul, it seeks a way to introduce, promote and distribute its comprehensive support policy internationally. Specifically, hosting of an international conference is being considered in order to network with policy experts around the world.

## INTERNATIONAL RECOGNITION

Second winner of the 2013 United Nations Public Service Award

## CONTACT

DO YOU WANT TO GET MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THIS POLICY?

DO NOT HESITATE E-MAIL US!! POLICYSHARE@SEOUL.GO.KR

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