

IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF LABOUR EXPORT TO SOUTH KOREAN MARKET

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ABSTRACT: Labor export is a very important activity that benefits the family and the workers themselves and contributes to the country's economic growth and development. South Korea is currently the 3rd market for labor exporting of Vietnam after Japan and Taiwan. This is a developed country with a great demand for labor in difficult and dangerous occupations. Labor export to Korea will have a good opportunity to improve skills, discipline and increase income, contributing to Vietnam's socio-economic development. However, the quality and quantity of labor exported to the Korean market are unstable many fluctuations. Vietnamese labour is well-trained, hard working but lack of discipline. From 2019, Korea has re-accepted labor export from Vietnam. In the period of integration and development, the competition on labor qualifications is getting stronger. Therefore, it is necessary improve the quality of Vietnamese workers so that they can take advantage of this potential market.

Keywords: Labour export, Vietnam, South Korea.

I. POTENTIAL OF VIETNAMESE LABOUR EXPORTING TO SOUTH KOREAN MARKET

Vietnam is a country with an abundant and young labor force, which is a potential location for the investors. The population size of Vietnam in 2019 is estimated at about 97 million, accounting for 1.27 % of the world's population, ranking 14th in the world [9]. South Korea is an aging country with declining workforce and high standard of living. Korean rarely do manual dangerous jobs, especially the youth. In addition, Korea is also in need of skilled labor, experts in electronic computing, medical care, nursing, caregivers to care for the elderly. These skilled workers are more carefully recruited, through programs and are more entitled to benefits and are granted long-term visas.

Since the early 1990s, Vietnam has exported workers abroad, in order to increase the income and strengthen foreign cooperation between countries. By August 1998, Vietnam had issued license for 55 state-owned enterprises to operate in labor export. In the period from 1996-1999, this number increased to 77, of which 53 enterprises are state owned and 24 are local enterprises [7]. The government confirms: "Labor and expert export is a socio-economic activity that contributes to the development of human resources, job settlement, creating income, improving skills for workers, increasing foreign currency and strengthening cooperation between Vietnam and other countries". Since then, labor export has been implemented under a new mechanism, which open up many labor export markets for Vietnam, including the Korean market.

Since 1991, the "Industrial skills trainee program" (ISTP) has been implemented by Korea to improve the skill of foreign workers, who are working for Korean companies in foreign countries. This program has attracted many workers from participating countries. In 1992, Vietnam was one of the first countries to send workers to South Korea, with the first 56 exported labor. This is the first labor export activity of Vietnam to Korea, laying the foundation for later Vietnam-Korea labor cooperation. However, foreign-invested enterprises, small and medium-sized enterprises do not have any legal provisions to use foreign workers.

In November 1993, the Korean government launched the "Industrial Training System" (ITS) to help businesses with labor shortages. Under the program, South Korea began accepting migrant workers from 14 countries (including Vietnam) through contracts between labor export companies and the Korean Federation of Small Business (KFSB). This program addresses the shortage of workers in hazardous industries, and remote rural areas with low wages that local workers do not want to work with. The program was expanded to include fisheries in 1996 and construction jobs in 1997. However, the program recruited trainees, not workers, preventing foreign workers from enjoying legal rights of workers.

In 2003, the Korean Government launched the "Employment Permit System" (EPS) - which is directly managed by the Korean Management System and the Labor Administration Authority of the exported countries. The program officially came into effect on August 17, 2004, which marks an important step in Korea's labor import activities. Under this program, foreign workers have the legal status of "workers" rather than "trainees" should be entitled to the full basic benefits and insurance regimes like native workers.

Despite the fierce labor competition, Vietnam has built a diverse labor market, bringing in more workers abroad every year. From the first 56 Vietnamese exported workers to Korea in 1992, this number has increased to 9333 in 1996. Especially, Vietnam and South Korea signed a labor cooperation agreement under the EPS License Program in 2004, resulting in the number of Vietnamese workers exported to South Korea increased significantly. In addition to the EPS program (employees holding E-9 visas), South Korea also imports crew members from Vietnam under the nearshore fishing crew program (workers holding E-10 visas) through export companies and high skilled workers under the Gold Card Program (E-7 visa workers) through Korean-invested companies in Vietnam. With traditional markets such as

Korea and Vietnam, the number of exported workers has increased rapidly from 9333 in 1996 to 18,141 in 2008. Especially, in 2019, the number of Vietnamese exported workers to Korea under the EPS is more than 7000 people [13]. Vietnamese labor export has increased in both quantity and quality.

II. LABOUR EXPORT TO SOUTH KOREA BY SECTORS

Vietnamese labor exported to Korea are mainly classified into four main groups of industries: manufacturing, agriculture, construction, and fishing. Over the years, the field professions tend to expand and become more diversified. From being trainees and technical intern in Korea in manufacturing, construction, electronics and textiles occupations, Vietnamese workers have participated in a number of other fields such as shipping, fishing, caring for patients and families assistant.

Manufacturing industry: including major fields such as metallurgy, metal, mechanics, machinery, electricity and electronics, textiles and food processing industry. Manufacturing is most suitable for workers with good health and technical skills, in return for high income for workers. The salary of Vietnamese labor in manufacturing ranges from VND 25-35 million, while the salary in Vietnam for this industry is quite low, only from VND 8-15 million. Because of its high income and suitability to the qualifications and health of Vietnamese workers, good remuneration from business owners, up to 85 % of Vietnamese employees choose this category when registering to work in Korea. This can be considered as the most attractive job in the Korean market during 2009-2019. Most jobs in this industry have a requirement for a healthy worker, without any illnesses or deformities, for both men and women.

Agriculture: Korea's agriculture accounts for 2.5 % of its GDP, with 1.2 million people working in agriculture, accounting for 3 % of the country's labor force. Domestic workers rarely do these jobs because of hard working conditions but low income [8]. Therefore, Korea is seriously lacking labor in agriculture. The main jobs of workers exporting to Korea in agriculture include: Growing vegetables and fruits in greenhouses; raising cattle and poultry and aquaculture. These jobs are perfectly suitable for Vietnamese workers because the majority of Vietnamese workers are familiar with this job and labor export is mainly from rural areas. The requirements of business owners to employees in this industry is quite simple. Workers need to be hard-working in good health condition without diseases or physical deformities. The income level of the agricultural sector in Korea will range from 25 to 32 million VND/month (basic income). Compared to the income of agricultural labor in Vietnam, the salary in Korea is about 2-3 times higher than that in Vietnam. Meanwhile, the working conditions in Korea are better than in Vietnam with location are mainly in greenhouses and large farms. The agricultural sector has a relatively high income and is suitable for Vietnamese workers, but the percentage of workers exporting to South Korea to choose this type of occupation is relatively small, accounting for only 5 % of Vietnam's total labor export. The reason is that the occupation in agriculture sector mainly works in rural areas, far from the city. The weather conditions are harsher than that of manufacturing workshops. The workers have to work outdoors and Vietnamese people don't adapt to the weather in Korea. Hence, the number of Vietnamese workers choose this category is less than the manufacturing sector.

Construction: Korea is a developed country, and infrastructure is the necessary foundation for all economies. Therefore, the demand for human resources in the construction industry is very high. Many Vietnamese workers want to work in South Korea in the construction industry to ensure the career development opportunities. The main fields that Vietnamese workers in Korea do such as: installation of reinforced concrete blocks, scaffolding, paint sweeping, installation and operation of construction machinery and plastering machines. This industry provides the highest income among four main professions that Vietnamese workers receive when they go to work abroad. Although the basic salary is only from 28-33 million VND, but overtime income, bonuses and allowances are quite high. However, this is also a difficult field, requiring workers with very good health and high endurance that is not suitable for female workers. The required workers must age from 24 - 35 years old, graduated from intermediate level or above with no diseases such as: HIV, tuberculosis and other infectious diseases. Candidates who have gone to work in Korea on Visa E9 just graduated from high school. The income level is much higher than other professions in Korea but the working conditions are very dangerous. Workers have to work at high altitudes in inclement weather (winter temperatures can drop to -8 °C) so the number of employees registered for this sector is quite low, at only 5 % of the total labor export of Vietnam to Korea.

Fishery: Korea is a landlocked country and has many fishing areas. However, domestic workers do not want to work in the fisheries sector due to the nature of the seafaring work is very dangerous and harsh natural conditions. In order to promote the development of the fishery sector, the Korean Government offers a lot of incentives to workers in this industry. Some jobs in the fisheries sector that Vietnamese workers often do such as: fishing and aquaculture. These occupations account for only 3 % of Vietnamese workers working in Korea. The reason why the fishery attracts few workers even though the high salary is 30-35 million VND is due to the special working conditions of this job. This is a dangerous job with high level of risk and working outdoors in the harsh weather. The requirements of employers in this area are also very strict. Labors who want to work in the field must undergo physical tests including: tests of grip, tensile strength, muscle strength; Test on necessary knowledge and skills. This is also part of the reason limiting labor to work in the fishery sector. However, due to the high income, some workers, after the expiry of the contract period, fled to South Korea in order to find new jobs or flee to work for other units, causing many negative problems for themselves and other workers.

III. REASONS FOR LOW QUALITY WORKERS

Despite certain achievements, Vietnam's labor export to South Korea is still not commensurate with its potential. Compared to Japan and Taiwan, the two largest labor export markets of Vietnam, the quantity of Vietnamese workers in Korea is still very modest. The cause of this situation is largely derived from the quality of human resources in Vietnam, not only in terms of occupational skills but also related to employee's health, discipline and awareness.

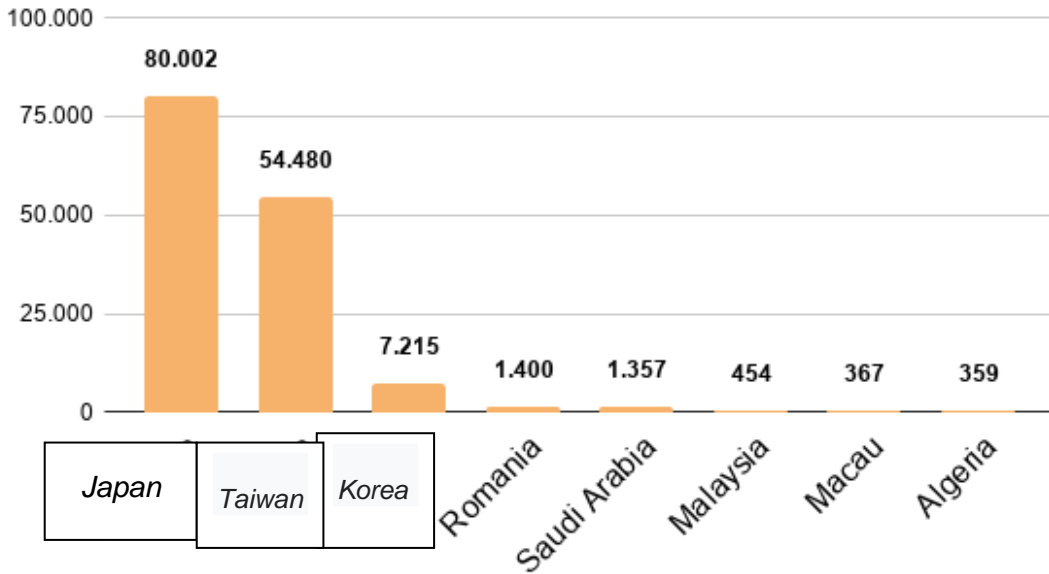


Figure 1. Vietnamese labour export by territories in 2019 [4]

Health and education: Vietnamese labor health is most suitable for housework and factory work but not seafaring and construction. Many workers could not bear the hard working conditions and had to give up their jobs. The physical strength of Vietnamese labor force is limited compared to many countries in the world, manifested in indicators such as toughness, height and weight. The demand for high quality labor in the Korean market is increasing. But Vietnam's labor supply is weak in quality and is still poor qualified. The majority of exported laborers live in rural areas with low income and poor living standards. They do not received full health care facilities, which lead to lack of completed physical development.

Labor productivity in Southeast Asia

2018

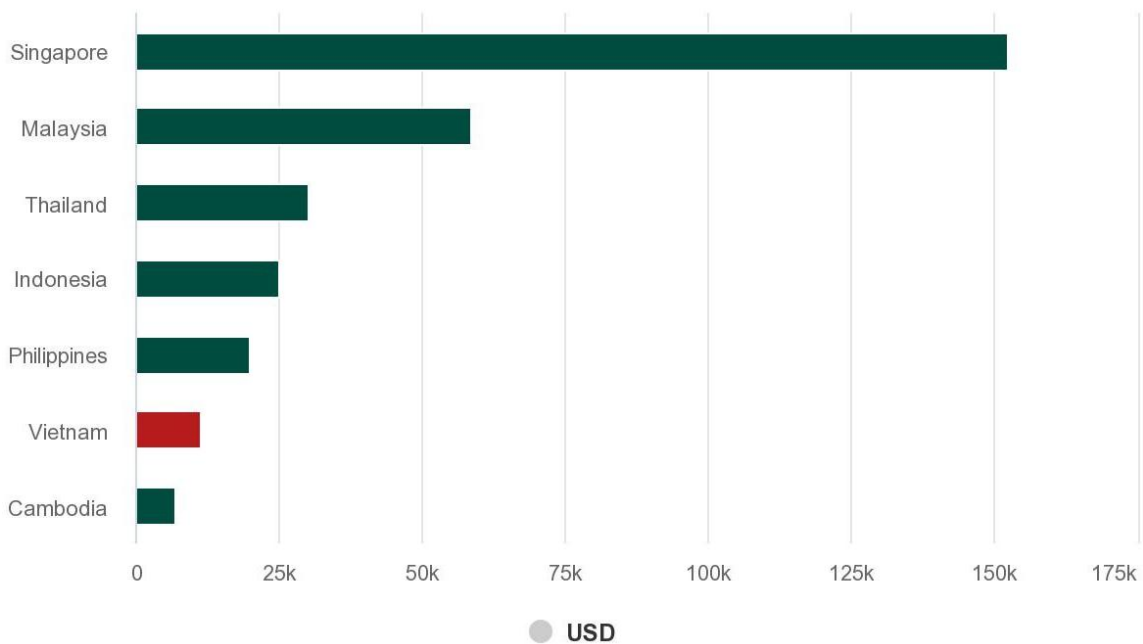


Figure 2. Comparing labour productivity in Southeast Asia in 2018 [13]

One of the the main reasons for the low quality of export labor is lacking of vocational training and foreign language, which is necessary for any exported labour. Vocational training activities in Vietnam are still small and out of date. There are very few training institutions that meet the requirements of equipment and facilities to improve the quality of export labor. Especially, specialized technical workers rarely have a chance to be well-trained when they register to work for technical sector in Korea. The curriculum for Vietnamese workers to Korea has not been standardized and unified. Many training centers have used translated Korean textbooks for teaching. This leads to inconsistencies in the content and lectures do not match the characteristics and qualifications of Vietnamese workers. These training programs are theoretical with little practice because they do not have sufficient facilities. The quality of Vietnamese labor is still low compared to the common ground in other countries in the region. Highly skilled workers still account for a very modest proportion. The number of engineers and architects reaching ASEAN standards is also lower than that of Indonesia and Myanmar. In comparison, Vietnamese labour productivity was lower than most Asean countries, which was only 7.3 % of Singapore, 19 % of Malaysia, 37 % of Thailand, 44.8 % Indonesia, and 55.9 % of the Philippines [13].

Undiscipline and lack of knowledge: Vietnamese workers still lack of discipline and understanding about local law and regulations. Vietnamese workers are often exported to Asian countries and South Korea under labor contracts and they have to return Vietnam after the expiry of the contract. However, the number of Vietnamese workers fleeing and staying abroad is very high. At the end of 2010, nearly 58 % of workers with expired contract did not return, the highest rate among the labour exported countries to Korea at that time. As a result, the labor management agency to Korea decided to terminate receiving Vietnames labour since 2011. The rate of Vietnamese illegal workers in South Korea was about 30 % in 2011 but increased significantly to 55 % in 2012. With this ratio, Vietnam is the country with the most illegal labor among the countries with labor exported to South Korea. In 2013, this rate decreased to 44.15 % but still too high compared to the expectations of the two labor management parties (30 %). Since 2013, the proportion of Vietnamese people live and work illegally in Korea decreased gradually to 12,000 people accounting for 31 % in 2019 [11;14]. Although both Vietnam and South Korea have had many propaganda methods to call workers to return home on time, this situation is still popular in many places. This worsens the image of Vietnamese people who are hard-working and disrupt the labor cooperation program. There are some groups of labor who do illegal jobs such as brewing alcohol and trading wildlife. They even form groups that cause disorganization, fighting, causing disorder, unhygienic and smoking in public places.

In addition, a part of the Vietnamese workers do not have enough information about the law, regulation and export market. They have not thoroughly studied the content and terms of the contract. The preparation of workers to work in Korea in terms of culture, customs, lifestyles and inadequacies, the observance of the law is still weak, leading to unnecessary conflicts. They just want to be abroad as soon as possible and are willing to take intermediate costs. This is also the reason why the labor export fraud increases rapidly and the workers do not strictly abide by the State's regulations, leading to arbitrarily break the contract and work illegally. For profit, many businesses have violated the State's regulations in cooperation with foreign partners, signing unfavorable terms for workers. Unfair competition to get labor supply contracts still occur between domestic and foreign enterprises. Some businesses are licensed but do not directly supply labor, but authorised all activities to the third parties without strictly managing these affiliates. Some enterprises even recruit workers and sell them to other centers to have commission. These illegal activities put workers in a bad situation due to signing labor contracts with negative terms and conditions. Since 2004, under the EPS program, the number of illegal working cases in Korea accounted for 80 % of the total illegal labor export cases.

The workers lack of knowledge results in the unawareness of their rights and obligations, facing a number of human rights-related issues. The most serious problems faced by export workers in Korea are working in an unsafe, hazardous environment, discrimination, mistreatment and moving restrictions. The EPS program has always been revised in the direction of receiving comments from foreign workers, Korean employers and other stakeholders. However, some of the provisions of the EPS are still controversial and internationally condemned for violating the human rights of foreign workers such as the regulations of restricting transfer. According to the EPS program regulations, workers are only allowed to transfer among factory up to 3 times during their working period in Korea. They are only allowed to transfer with objective reasons from employers, health issues or working conditions. In fact, workers are always passive in the matter of factory transfer and if there are cases of abusive employers, it is also difficult for employees to prove it. For this reason, many workers are afraid and do not want to sue their employers. If the employer wants to terminate the labor contract, there is no need to give a suitable reason but if the employee wants to terminate the labor contract, there must be a permit signed by the employer. In many cases, the unlicensed worker has been forced to leave the labor market illegally and is arrested by the employer and the Immigration Agency.

There is the labor discrimination in the agricultural sector. According to the International Amnesty organization, about 20,000 foreign workers in South Korea working in agriculture (including Vietnamese workers) are trafficked, and exploited. They are forced to work in harsh environmental conditions and threatened and beaten. Agriculture sector is one of the hardest fields, because the workers have to work outdoors under the harsh weather and get an average salary, even lower than in other industries. In addition, the number of days off in the agricultural sector is much lower than other fields, which is only take 2-4 days/ month. Hence, many workers break the contract and become illegal labor due to human rights violations.

IV. SOLUTIONS TO IMPROVE THE LABOUR QUALITY

Invest in education and training

It is necessary to have a long term solution for labour quality. The Government should invest in building more vocational and training centers, especially in remote, rural and mountainous areas. These centers need to be upgraded and equipped with technical facilities and equipment for vocational training for workers in accordance with the market demand of the imported countries. The labors must be trained both in theory and practice before going abroad so that they can quickly adapt to the new working environment. This will improve the quality and competitiveness of Vietnamese labour in the market in the long term and help them find suitable jobs. The methods of training also needs to be innovated and creative, which encouraging workers to study and enjoy the education. The technical and vocational education and training system should promote and focus on key vocational training such as construction, mechanics, electronics, sewing, textile, agriculture, healthcare, seafarers and seafood processing to meet the needs of the Korean market. When the workers have basic foundation, they will be highly adaptable to the changing needs of employers; have sufficient qualifications to absorb and quickly apply new technologies and facilities. Focusing on training skilled and high qualified labor force, Vietnam can increase technical human resources, who can undertake complex tasks and fit with the modern technological environment.

Besides working skills, workers should be trained with discipline languages, customs and laws of South Korea in order to understand and harmonise with the living condition. They need to understand the basic information about Korea such to become a high-yielding and disciplined workforce. Labor export enterprises need additional short-term training applicable to workers who have been vocationally trained and recruited from factories, enterprises, economic and social organizations. This is a process of vocational training, foreign language training and orientation education with contents such as laws, cultural history, customs, and working conditions of Korea. In summary, improving labor quality by developing advanced labor training programs before dispatching needs to be done in a synchronized and quality manner so that Vietnamese workers can prove their quality with the Korean employers.

Upgrading and completing legal documents

Vietnam has lacked of a synchronous legal system to regulate the behaviors of entities participating in labor export activities. Sanctions for handling violations of the current law on labor export are not strict enough to create a sense of discipline and responsibility for labor export activities. Consequently, many enterprises do not follow the operation mechanism and violate the law. At the same time, the law has many loopholes creating an environment for illegal activities to exist. Therefore, the Government needs to improve regulations and legal documents on labor export activities in order to create a unified legal system, creating a basis for entities to participate in this activity more strongly. The implementation solutions are:

Urgently develop and promulgate labor export laws to agree on regulations regulating labor export activities. The provisions of the Law must ensure the strictness of the law, be sufficient to deter and educate subjects violating the law on labor export activities. At the same time, it must ensure the rights of the participants, encourage businesses and workers to participate in labor export activities.

Issue additional decrees or ordinances on labor export including strict sanctions such as fines, confiscation of property or imprisonment and local public labor for violations in labor export activities. Especially for the acts of cheating, illegal organizing and sending people abroad, recruiting workers, collecting money in contravention of regulations. Penalizing Vietnamese laborers who are abroad in an attempt to entice or seduce other people to flee or abuse their positions and powers to export labours. Severe Vietnamese workers violating laws in the host countries so that they can not affect to the political-diplomatic relations between the two countries.

Strengthening cooperation activities with South Korea Government to resolve the issue of Vietnamese illegal working labours. Coordinating with the Korean authorities to implement measures to prevent, promptly and thoroughly handle acts of abusing labor export activities of some individuals and organizations in other countries. Especially those against the guidelines and policies of the State and entice Vietnamese laborers to flee and violate laws in the host countries. Negotiating with other labor-exporting countries to the Korean market to agree on policies to protect the rights and interests of the workers. Vietnam can cooperate with ASEAN countries to establish a regional labor export association to promote Vietnamese labor export and limit the unfair competition activities from other labor exporting countries. This will help protect and enhance labor export activities in the country and ensure national benefits in labor export to the Korean market.

Improving the capability of labor export enterprises

Labour export enterprises play an important role in this activity because they are the intermediate agency and directly work with the labour. Many illegal working labor in Korea are the consequences of irresponsible activities by labor export enterprises. Businesses did not understand the labor needs in Korea leading to the transfer of labor to undesired job or location. As a result, many workers arbitrarily cancel contracts to find other jobs. Therefore, labor export enterprises need to research, analyze and forecast the evolution of the labor export market to clearly identify South

Korea's labor recruitment needs in terms of number, sectors and quality. Since then, they must develop a suitable labor export plans with the capacity of domestic labor supply of Vietnam. They can implement some of the following suggestions:

Increasing financial and human resources investment to set up representative offices in Korea to manage labor and work in the labor export market. Training a representative staff with sufficient ethical qualities, working capacity, fluency in foreign languages and Korean law to coordinate with Vietnamese diplomatic missions in this country to manage and resolve issues related to the interests of Vietnam Labor Federation.

Cooperating with international and social research agencies in the country and abroad to assess and forecast the factors that can change labor trends and policies in Korea. Develop appropriate labor export plans with the actual situation and diversify the relations with many partners to avoid risks of loss in labor export in case there is a change in market dynamics, political situation, and government's policy.

Organizing forums and seminars in Vietnam and abroad about the potential of Vietnamese workers, the activities of Vietnamese enterprises as well as the needs of foreign workers of Korean business owners in order to find partners and sign labor export contracts. Strengthen the market survey and practical inspection of Vietnam's export labor in Korea.

Negotiating with Korean employers to set the minimum wage for Vietnamese labor. Based on the qualifications and skills of each type of labor, determine different salaries for labor of Vietnam to ensure the legitimate interests of the Vietnam Export Federation, reduce the difference in wages between Vietnamese export workers and workers from other countries and local workers.

Innovating the recruiting of export labor. In order to carried out the selection carefully, the successful candidate must match the work needs of the overseas aspirations, the employee's qualifications and the salary must be commensurate with the job. Recruiting workers who have already exported to reduce training costs. They may encourage college graduates to go to Korea for labor export to meet the needs of high-quality labor, such as supporting deposits, vocational training costs by lending at low interest rates, advance payment and pay by salary when working abroad.

Supporting for exported workers after returning home

One of the reasons that Vietnamese workers want to stay after the expiry of the contract and become illegal labor is because when they return to Vietnam, they do not have jobs with high income. Therefore, in order to minimize the unemployment of workers when returning home, the State needs to support them in terms of finding the suitable jobs. Exported workers to Korea have accumulated knowledge, experience and skills, which are attached to production and business. In order to promote this advantage, the Government needs to have policies to support them to invest and develop through project programs such as startup programs, production and business development programs. The State shall provide loans, reduce taxes, land lease and production environment to encourage workers to invest according to their needs, abilities and interests. A Website of export labor information with accurate statistics on the number, structure, skill level and individual ability of each employee will be very useful to concerned people. They can find out partners and supporter to cooperate and do business. The labor support centers can also serve as a focal point to support workers to find suitable jobs after returning home.

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