



OKA Commissioner Lee Sang-duk (1st row, 6th from L) visits the Padok Miners' Memorial Hall in Essen, Germany, on May 17 to listen to and sympathize with padok workers.

## OKA Commissioner: 'Commitment of padok workers, cornerstone of Korea's modernization'

**Visited Padok Miners' Memorial Hall in Essen, Germany**  
**First meeting between Adoptee Association and Korean Association chaired by OKA commissioner**

Overseas Koreans Agency Commissioner Lee Sang-duk visited Essen and Berlin in Germany on May 17-18 to hold meetings with "padok" workers (workers dispatched to Germany in the 20th century) and overseas compatriots living in Germany. This is the first time the commissioner has visited Germany to communicate directly with compatriots in their locality.

On May 17, Lee visited the Padok Miners' Memorial Hall in Essen and toured the historical records and collections of padok workers on display to reflect on the meaning of their dedication. The hall is considered a space that honors the dedication of padok workers and serves as a cultural center for the Korean community in Germany.

The Padok Miners' Memorial Hall opened in December 2009 and displays various artifacts and

materials, such as the work clothes, helmets, photographs and labor contracts of Korean miners and nurses dispatched to Germany in the 1960s and 70s, bringing their lives and hard work to life for visitors. The museum is also equipped with a large auditorium that can accommodate more than 100 people and facilities for various cultural events.

### First compatriot meeting hosted by OKA commissioner in locality

Commissioner Lee then invited about 50 compatriots from the padok community and the Essen area to the memorial hall for a meeting.

"The dedication and sacrifices of the padok workers laid the foundation for Korea's modernization and economic growth," Lee said in his greetings. "And I express my deep gratitude and respect for the great role you played through your labor during the difficult times of the Korean homeland and for your significant contributions to the development of the Korean community."

"The 'Overseas Korean of the Month' program is being promoted to ensure that the contributions of compatriots, including padok workers, to their home

country are not forgotten and that their historical contributions are properly recorded and transmitted so that Koreans living in Korea can have a positive perception of their compatriots.”

“The visit of the OKA commissioner is of great significance to the Korean diaspora and shows the interest of the Korean government in our community,” said Jung Myung-kyu, president of the Federation of Korean Associations in Germany. “We hope for the government’s continued interest and support for the Korean community in Germany.”

### Commissioner Lee interacts with padok workers and others

At the meeting, compatriots used the rare opportunity of gathering all together to share their struggles and hopes. The opinions shared included “The nationality restoration process is still complicated,” “Many elderly compatriots are in need of welfare support,” and “The process of applying for subsidies and reporting the results is too difficult.”

The participants offered a variety of opinions and recommendations, including simplifying the nationality restoration process, expanding welfare for padok workers, improving the medical insurance system in Korea for compatriots, simplifying the subsidy application process and improving the process for submitting results reports.

In response, Commissioner Lee said, “I came here to listen to the voices of the field, and we will do our best to improve the systems through an internal review.”

### Meeting with officials from Korean Association of German Adoptees (KAD)

On May 18, Commissioner Lee met with the executives of the Korean Association of German Adoptees (KAD), who are preparing for the “Korean Cultural Event with Adoptees” at the same venue.

“The Korean government is making sincere efforts to resolve the difficulties faced by adoptees in finding their biological parents,” Lee said, expressing empathy for their grievances. He explained the agency’s efforts to establish a dedicated office for adoptees to provide one-stop services for adoptees and to

build a global network of adoptees.

On the same day, Lee traveled to Berlin, where he met with more than 40 compatriots at the South Korean Embassy in Germany.

The compatriots in Berlin recommended improving the application process for youth to study in their native country, expanding support for compatriot organizations overseas and simplifying the process of acquiring multiple citizenships, and also introduced current initiatives of representatives of next-generation organizations and professionals, including building a startup platform and plans to establish a network of Korean doctors in Germany.

### Commissioner Lee: ‘We will endeavor to solve difficulties’

“We will create practical policies to strengthen intergenerational connections and empower young people to become the new driving force of the overseas Korean community,” Lee said. “The OKA will be an open office that reflects ideas from the field.”

The Korean diaspora in Germany currently numbers about 45,000 people. Many of them are made up of first-generation padok workers and their families. Although they left their homeland to make a living, they have not forgotten their Korean roots. This visit to rekindle and connect with them was more than just a passing encouragement.

Even now, there are small Koreas around the world, which are quietly but deeply connected to their homeland. This trip by the OKA was the nation’s first greeting to them and the beginning of a new journey together. 🇰🇷

OKA Commissioner Lee Sang-duk (1st row, 5th from L) holds a meeting with Korean compatriots in Berlin, Germany, on May 18 to listen to and encourage the compatriot community.

