

Lessons from Israel's policy on diasporic youth

Today, more than 3.6 percent of the world's population resides abroad as part of a "diaspora." Advances in transportation have accelerated this trend, and the success or failure of a nation's development now hinges on how effectively it absorbs and utilizes the assets of the dispersed diaspora. From this perspective, Israel is a prime example of successfully leveraging the diaspora as a key national driver.

Israel's diaspora policy is implemented through the organic collaboration of four ministries and agencies: the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Migration and Absorption, the Jewish Agency and the World Zionist Organization (WZO). Each agency, according to its role, shares responsibilities, such as educational planning, program operation, diplomatic liaison and settlement support, creating an efficient system.

Israel is implementing various policies to strengthen the identity of diaspora youth and encourage their return. The WZO designs the ideology and curriculum for Zionist education and teaches Jewish identity to youth worldwide. The Jewish Agency runs practical programs, offering free 10-day visits to Israel for Jewish youth aged 18-26 from around the world, as well as long-term stays of five months or a year, and providing on-site education.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs maintains official diplomatic channels with diaspora communities and is responsible for promoting programs and providing government support. Finally, the Ministry of Migration and Absorption provides practical support for young people who decide to return ("aliyah"), including language training and job placement, completing the chain of "identity cultivation → return → settlement."



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In addition, the Maccabiah Games, held every four years and often referred to as the "Jewish Olympics," play a crucial role in strengthening Jewish solidarity and communal identity, with Jewish athletes from around the world participating.

Thus, Israel utilizes the diaspora as a vital national asset through close collaboration among various institutions.

Israel's diaspora policy offers five important implications for Korea.

First, it strategizes identity as a national strategy. Israel designs its programs to maintain Jewish identity through a combination of Zionist education, visits and return (aliyah). Korea should

also develop its overseas Korean youth programs into a strategic flow of "maintaining identity → participation → contribution → return."

Second, organic interministerial collaboration is essential. A system is needed where relevant ministries, such as education, foreign affairs and returnee settlement, collaborate organically. The current interministerial disconnect must be resolved, and a virtuous cycle must be established.

Third, the formation of a global youth network is crucial. Like Israel, communities and networks should be maintained even after the visit, and connections with domestic youth should be expanded to include internships and entrepreneurship.

Fourth, the reverse dispatch of leaders is crucial. Like Israel's "Shlichim," Korea could dispatch youth leaders to overseas Korean language schools and Korean organizations to directly implement local identity education.

Fifth, policies linking returnees and settlement are crucial. Israel supports the actual return and settlement of returnees after the visit. Korea, too, should develop long-term settlement policies, including language education, scholarships and support for entrepreneurship.

The Israeli case demonstrates that the diaspora is not simply a migrant population but a key driving force for national development. Diaspora youth policies are a crucial factor in determining a nation's future competitiveness. Korea, too, should closely analyze and apply Israel's success story to strengthen ties with overseas Korean youth and explore ways to contribute to national development. 

