

Dedication of 7.5 million compatriots, ‘national asset’ dimmed by next year’s OKA budget cuts

The overseas Korean community is in an uproar. The 7.5 million compatriots who had anticipated a major shift in overseas Korean policy with the new administration’s inauguration have fallen into a deep disappointment and concern upon learning that the 2026 Overseas Koreans Agency budget proposal has been effectively cut by 5.7 billion won.

While the budget appears to have increased by 2.1 percent to 109.2 billion won, the “hidden reduction” caused by the transfer of support projects for Sakhalin and adopted compatriots (7.8 billion won) has been exposed, raising doubts about the government’s commitment to recognizing overseas compatriots as a “national asset.”

This is not merely a matter of numbers. The budget cut is deeply disappointing as it shows a lack of even the most basic respect for honoring the blood and sweat of our compatriots who preserved the flame of the independence movement and supported the nation during the IMF foreign exchange crisis.

Looking closely at the reality of this budget proposal, the problems become clearer. Despite the expansion of the OKA’s scope of work since its launch in 2023, core national projects, such as strengthening Hangeul schools, supporting the settlement of repatriated compatriots, building an overseas Koreans database and establishing communication platforms, are not being adequately supported.

Specifically, essential projects like establishing education and culture centers (7.2 billion won), supporting historically special compatriots (1 billion won) and the World Korean Business Convention (900 million won) have been drastically reduced. Meanwhile, the budget for repatriated compatriots, now exceeding 860,000 in population, remains a mere 1 billion won. That the budget for the agency overseeing 7.5 million compatriots falls far below that of local governments serving 50,000 people (800 billion won) or 100,000 people (1 trillion won) is tantamount to turning a blind eye to the survival and prosperity of the overseas Korean community.

Why is this budget increase so crucial? Overseas compatriots



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are not mere “immigrants.” As President Lee Jae Myung emphasized in his Liberation Day message, the dedication of Korean residents in Japan to the independence movement made today’s Republic of Korea possible, and their donation of nine diplomatic compounds stands as an eternal testament. Even today, compatriots lead economic and cultural exchanges through global networks, contributing to national development.

However, budget constraints hold back this potential. Without support for Hangeul schools, the next generation’s identity weakens, inadequate settlement support for returning compatriots increases social costs, and the absence of communication platforms creates gaps in public diplomacy. Ultimately,

increasing funding is the government’s practice of “people’s sovereignty” and the key to resolving the inconveniences faced by the compatriot community and strengthening national competitiveness.

“The OKA was hastily launched without sufficient preparation, resulting in a half-baked agency due to budget and organizational shortcomings,” OKA Commissioner Kim Kyung-hyup said in an interview with Yonhap News Agency on his 50th day in office. “The systematic securing of resources for implementing national policy tasks is urgently needed.”

Therefore, the overseas Korean community strongly requests that the issue of cutting next year’s budget for the OKA be given significant consideration during the National Assembly’s budget deliberation process. A substantial budget increase is imperative for the OKA to properly fulfill its role as the governmentwide control tower for overseas Korean affairs, meet the needs of the 7.5 million-strong overseas Korean community and lead shared growth with the homeland. It is the state’s rightful duty to support its overseas citizens.

For the OKA to transform into a “working agency,” a budget increase is essential. To ensure the dedication of 7.5 million compatriots is never in vain, the overseas Korean community must unite in crying out, “The time is now for the minimum investment in our 7.5 million compatriots!” 