

‘The state will respond responsibly to the voices of our compatriots’

OKA announces 2026 Work Plan; realizing inclusive policies for compatriots without discrimination
5 key tasks set: building compatriot database, resolving core grievances, inclusive policies for returning compatriots, etc.

The Overseas Koreans Agency will enhance its policy foundation by establishing a compatriot database, and actively promote the substantive rights and interests of overseas Koreans through improvements to the overseas voting system and expansion of consular services for compatriots. Furthermore, it plans to shift the paradigm of compatriot policy by implementing an inclusive repatriation policy and establishing a governmentwide implementation system.

The OKA announced its 2026 Work Implementation Plan containing these initiatives, setting five key tasks: ▲ establishing a compatriot database, ▲ resolving core compatriot grievances, ▲ strengthening Korean community networks, ▲ implementing an inclusive repatriation policy and ▲ establishing a governmentwide compatriot policy framework.

1. Addressing core concerns of overseas compatriots

The OKA will improve policies for overseas compatriots, focusing on guaranteeing substantive voting rights for overseas citizens and strengthening education on Korean identity. This includes phased implementation of measures, such as institutional reforms to boost overseas voter turnout, expanded support for Hangeul schools, increased consular officers dedicated to compatriots and lowering the age limit for dual citizenship.

Overseas elections have been held eight times since the system's introduction in 2009, including presidential and National Assembly elections. However, due to complex preregistration procedures and a voting system centered on overseas diplomatic missions, participation rates remain below 10 percent of the approximately 2 million eligible overseas voters. For National Assembly elections, participation rates have been under 5 percent.

Accordingly, the government plans to comprehensively improve overseas voting infrastructure to ensure “substantive” voting rights. First, it will review relaxing the criteria for establishing overseas polling stations. The current requirement of one station per 30,000 overseas citizens, capped at three stations per diplomatic mission, will be adjusted to one station per 20,000 citizens, with a maximum



The 2025 19th World Korean Day ceremony

of four stations. During the 21st presidential election, 223 overseas polling stations were established across 118 countries.

The OKA will also pursue the introduction of mobile polling stations where designated public officials will tour specific areas to serve overseas voters residing in remote locations. Furthermore, efforts are underway to extend overseas voting hours and periods to reduce the gap with domestic voting. Additionally, plans are being reviewed to further extend the reporting period for overseas absentee voters, currently limited to between 60 and 150 days prior to election day.

Expanding voting rights for overseas Koreans

Simplifying registration and application procedures is also a key task. This includes linking the overseas Korean registration system with the overseas voting system and eliminating the overseas absentee voter registration process by utilizing a unified voter registry. Plans are in place to assign dedicated consular officers at diplomatic missions to handle overseas citizen registration, election management and outreach on an ongoing basis.

Diversification of voting methods will be pursued concurrently. Discussions are ongoing with the National Assembly and relevant

agencies regarding the introduction of mail-in and electronic voting utilizing identity verification methods, such as blockchain technology and ARS. The related amendment to the Public Official Election Act is currently under review by the National Assembly's Public Administration and Security Committee. According to the National Election Commission's analysis, if mail-in voting is introduced, the number of overseas voters is estimated to at least double, with 70 percent of them expected to use mail-in voting. The government aims to pass the amendment by the first half of 2026.

Support for overseas Hangeul schools, a core pillar of Korean identity education, will also be significantly strengthened. Until now, Hangeul schools have relied on the dedication of individual compatriots and private organizations for operation, with government operational funding covering only about 30 percent of the total. Furthermore, Korean language education support projects by bodies, such as the OKA, the Ministry of Education, and the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, have so far been operated in a fragmented manner, leading to issues of duplication and inefficiency in textbook provision, teacher training and facility support.

Strengthening Korean identity education and developing systems and structures

The government plans to raise the subsidy rate for Hangeul school operating costs to 50 percent to create a stable educational environment. The related budget will increase from 18.6 billion won in 2025 to 19.5 billion won in 2026, with a medium- to long-term goal of 25 billion won. Pretraining and post-management/supervision will also be strengthened to enhance the transparency of subsidy usage.

Furthermore, a governmentwide cooperative system for overseas Korean language education will be established to jointly develop and distribute standardized textbooks and educational content. Efficiency will be enhanced through integrated management of teacher training programs and shared use of facilities.

To strengthen the support functions for overseas compatriots at diplomatic missions, the expansion of consular officers dedicated to compatriot affairs will be pursued. Since the launch of the OKA, all seven consular officers dedicated to compatriot affairs, who had been dispatched during the previous Overseas Koreans Foundation era, have been withdrawn. This has led to criticism that the expertise and continuity of compatriot support services within diplomatic missions have weakened. Currently, diplomatic personnel are overburdened with incident response, visa processing, passport services and other duties.



OKA Commissioner Kim Kyung-hyup delivers a briefing on the 2026 Work Plan.

Expanding consular staff dedicated to compatriots; lowering age limit for dual citizenship

The government plans to establish a governance structure linking the OKA, overseas missions and compatriot organizations. It will expand consular staff at all overseas missions while gradually dispatching dedicated consular officers from the OKA to 18 key missions, including those in areas with high compatriot populations. This aims to strengthen a field-oriented support system, enhancing participation in overseas elections, managing compatriot human resources, improving disaster and incident response, and mediating conflicts among compatriot organizations.

Lowering the age limit for dual citizenship will also be pursued in stages. Currently, dual citizenship is only permitted for compatriots aged 65 and older, but there has been persistent demand from the compatriot community to lower this age threshold. The government is considering lowering the age limit to 50 for those who have completed or been exempted from military service. It plans to evaluate the implementation effects before deciding on further reductions.

The government expects these policies to substantially guarantee the rights and interests of overseas compatriots, strengthen ties with the overseas community and simultaneously bring positive ripple effects to the domestic society.

2. Overseas compatriot database construction

To enhance the effectiveness of the statistical and registration systems that form the foundation of overseas compatriot policies, the OKA will supplement the survey system used to assess the status of overseas compatriots and implement phased improvements to the overseas citizen registration system, as well as the construction of a database (DB) for compatriots holding foreign nationality.

The OKA currently conducts a status survey every odd year to

determine the number of overseas Koreans by country of residence. According to the “2025 Status of Overseas Koreans,” the total number of overseas Koreans worldwide was recorded as 7,006,703. However, the current survey has been criticized for being limited to simple statistics, such as country of residence, gender and residency status. It has also faced limitations in ensuring accuracy and reliability due to differing statistical environments by country and the high mobility of overseas compatriots. Accordingly, the government plans to operate an Overseas Compatriot Statistics Committee involving overseas compatriots and statistical experts to explore ways to enhance the credibility of the statistics.

Enhancing the effectiveness of the Overseas Citizen Registration System was also identified as a key task. While overseas citizen registration is a legal obligation requiring registration at the relevant embassy or consulate for stays exceeding 90 days in specific overseas regions, the lack of sanctions for non-registration and insufficient practical benefits for registration have resulted in low registration rates. Indeed, as of 2024, out of 2,402,026 overseas Koreans by residency status, only 940,000 were actually registered as of October 2025.

Advancing policy enhancement through overseas compatriot database development

The government plans to revise the Overseas Nationals Registration Act, focusing on streamlining required documents, linking with overseas voter registration, introducing a predeparture registration system through immigration information linkage, implementing a renewal system and strengthening publicity through text message notifications upon departure.

To establish a systematic database for overseas compatriots holding foreign nationality, the introduction of an Overseas Compatriot Certification System is under review. For overseas compatriots without foreign nationality, who are not subject to mandatory registration, the accumulation and management of basic data, such as residence address, contact information, occupation and expertise, has been inadequate. Information related to Korean associations and Korean business organizations has also relied on voluntary provision.

Accordingly, a plan is being considered to collect personal information through a certification process for participants in projects and events hosted by the OKA, and assign a unique identification number to each individual compatriot. Target events include the World Korean Association Conference, the Korean Business Leaders’ Conference, the Next Generation Conference, the Korean Adoptees Conference, training programs for Hangeul school teachers, political forums, homeland training programs for the next generation, and various support projects and scholarship



The 2025 Invitational Training Program for Hangeul School Teachers

programs for compatriot organizations.

To ensure the certification system takes root, incentive measures are also being pursued. This involves encouraging organizations applying for OKA support projects to submit membership rosters based on certified overseas Koreans and giving preferential treatment to these applications during the review process.

Furthermore, linking the assigned unique personal identification numbers to the Overseas Korean Identity Verification Service is being considered. This service would allow certified overseas Koreans to use their numbers when accessing digital services, such as e-government, financial services and public institutions.

3. Strengthening Korean diaspora networks

A comprehensive restructuring of overseas Korean policies is underway. The government plans to realign the roles of government and private entities while considering diplomatic sensitivities in host countries, integrate diaspora networks, and systematically support public and economic diplomacy by leveraging the capabilities of overseas Koreans.

First, the government will review the legal status and role of the Overseas Koreans Cooperation Center to reduce potential diplomatic friction that may arise during the implementation of overseas Korean policies. This review takes into account that direct government involvement or support for certain sensitive projects could raise concerns about diplomatic conflicts or interference in the internal affairs of host countries.

Division of roles between government and private sector: restructuring Overseas Koreans Cooperation Center

Furthermore, as criticism has persisted regarding the unclear division of responsibilities between the OKA and its subordinate organization, the Overseas Koreans Cooperation Center, the need for structural improvements to eliminate overlapping duties and confusion while enhancing budget execution efficiency has been raised.

Strengthening the overseas Korean community network was also

presented as a key task. Current issues include the lack of a comprehensive platform encompassing the entire Korean community, as events organized by the OKA are fragmented by generation, profession and field. Furthermore, many overseas Korean organizations were noted to have weak representativeness and internal cohesion. Structures that lack membership rosters or involve electing presidents through limited methods are also targets for improvement.

Accordingly, the OKA plans to establish and regularly hold an integrated World Korean Congress that transcends existing frameworks. This congress will encompass not only existing Korean association leaders but also business associations, professional groups, youth and next-generation leaders, opening its doors to any overseas Korean wishing to participate. The vision is to utilize this as an official channel to reflect diverse opinions from the overseas Korean community in the formulation of external policy.

A plan to separate the Overseas Korean Games, previously held within the National Sports Festival, and establish a new World Korean Games is also under consideration. This aims to expand participation opportunities for the diaspora and strengthen the identity of diaspora sports events.

The reorganization of the Korean Association structure will proceed concurrently. The role of the chair of the World Korean Association Conference and the World Korean Business Convention, currently held by the OKA commissioner, will be transferred to the private sector. This aims to transform these bodies into substantive forums where the overseas Korean community itself discusses and decides on its current issues. Furthermore, support will be provided for Korean Associations to establish and manage standardized membership database systems. This will be linked to the government's overseas Korean policy formulation and support criteria to enhance accountability.

The government will also encourage the formation of regional branches and the consolidation of community capabilities by holding regional conferences for Korean associations and business conferences across continents like the Americas and Asia. Alongside this, measures to promote the management of

association membership lists and the holding of association chairperson elections, linked to the Overseas Korean Certification System, are under review.

Support for public and economic diplomacy activities leveraging overseas Korean capabilities

Support for public and economic diplomacy leveraging overseas Korean capabilities will also be strengthened. The government recognizes the need to strategically support overseas Koreans as private diplomats and market pioneers, given the rising political influence and status of overseas Korean communities in their host countries, alongside the spread of K-culture.

To this end, it will identify overseas Korean experts active in mainstream fields, such as politics, economics, science and technology, and culture and arts, and support their activities contributing to national interests. Examples include activities promoting shared prosperity with host countries, advancing peace on the Korean Peninsula and establishing Korean Day, Hangeul Day and Kimchi Day.

The plan also includes operating a Korea-Host Country Friendship Week during presidential visits to host countries. The vision is to encourage participation from diverse groups of overseas Koreans in public diplomacy projects. This includes organizing exchange and cultural events before and after visits, leveraging the capabilities of overseas Koreans and local influential figures, as well as promoting volunteer activities with local citizens, cultural exchanges and Korean language classes.

In the economic sector, the OKA will pursue measures to contribute to the domestic livelihood economy by leveraging the international Korean business network. We will host the World Korean Business Convention, regional Korean business conventions and the World Korean Business Forum in collaboration with local governments. Through the operation of the Overseas Korean Business Advisory Group, we will promote the overseas expansion of domestic companies and stimulate domestic investment from overseas Korean businesses. We also plan to gradually expand internship programs for domestic youth at



The 23rd World Korean Business Convention

overseas Korean companies.

Furthermore, discussions will be held to unify the support system for Korean business organizations, currently managed separately by the OKA and the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy. This measure aims to reduce duplication and confusion arising from projects involving overseas expansion and investment expansion by utilizing global Korean business networks.

4. Inclusive policy for returning compatriots

Amid deepening crises of declining working-age populations due to the low birth rate and aging, and the disappearance of rural communities, the government is fully implementing a policy to systematically support the domestic settlement of young overseas compatriots and historically special compatriots.

The OKA will first implement the “Attracting and Settling Young Overseas Korean Talent” project to contribute to national development and revitalize regional economies. This initiative stems from the assessment that the rapid decline in the working-age population due to low birth rates and aging, coupled with a shortage of talent to drive regional economic growth, is weakening the self-sustaining capacity of local areas.

To this end, it will operate an integrated program for young compatriots wishing to settle in Korea, offering a package of scholarships, education, employment and settlement support. This initiative will be pursued alongside the enactment of a relevant special act and is scheduled to begin in earnest in March 2026, based on a new budget of 3.09 billion won for that year. Previously, the OKA announced a support program for young overseas compatriots on Dec. 12, 2025. The enactment of the “Special Act on Attracting and Cultivating Overseas Korean Youth Talent” (working title) is being pursued for the first half of 2026.

Support for attracting and settling overseas Korean youth talent

Alongside this, tailored support will be strengthened for historically distinct overseas Koreans, including Koryoin, Sakhalin Koreans, adopted Koreans, Korean Japanese and atomic bomb victims. Consideration was given to the fact that these communities often face difficulties during their settlement process in Korea due to identity confusion and linguistic/cultural barriers stemming from complex historical backgrounds.

The OKA will continue supporting Sakhalin Koreans and Koryoin in permanent repatriation and settlement. It plans to enhance tailored Korean language education, medical care and welfare support alongside operating community centers for adopted Koreans. Furthermore, to eliminate discrimination based on residency status, it will push to integrate the currently separate Overseas Korean (F-4) visa and Visitor Employment (H-2) visa.



The 27th Overseas Koreans Literary Awards ceremony

Policies to encourage repatriated compatriots to settle in regions facing depopulation will be implemented concurrently. The “region-specific visa” will be redesigned to meet the industrial needs of local governments requiring compatriot talent, and customized settlement projects will be promoted in each compatriot residential area through national subsidies to local governments. Furthermore, support will be provided for private sector projects to assist repatriated compatriots in stable community integration. Support and healing for the scars of the past will continue for Koreans in Japan, atomic bomb victims and adoptees.

New dedicated organization for supporting settlement of returning compatriots

A new organization dedicated to supporting the settlement of returning compatriots will also be established. Concerns have been raised that functions essential for returning compatriots’ settlement in Korea, such as residency status, employment, education and multicultural support, are currently scattered across multiple ministries, lacking comprehensive governmentwide coordination and integration. This has led to administrative blind spots and repeated settlement failures.

Accordingly, the Dedicated Organization for the Domestic Settlement of Returning Compatriots will be established within the OKA to serve as a control tower overseeing settlement support. This organization will also leverage domestic and international compatriot networks to comprehensively strengthen compatriot capabilities and roles.

Integrated, tailored support encompassing both domestic and international compatriots will be implemented, centered around the dedicated organization. Considering the historical and cultural particularities of returning compatriots, tailored housing information will be provided, and support for initial settlement and stable residence will be offered. Employment assistance will be provided through linking to vocational training programs and hosting specialized job fairs for compatriots. Korean language and



The policy dialogue for supporting the settlement of overseas compatriots in Korea

cultural understanding education, along with social adaptation programs, will also be operated. Furthermore, plans are in place to support exchanges between compatriots at home and abroad by utilizing the kinship networks of returning compatriots, and to promote inclusive social integration by linking with local volunteer activities.

5. Streamlining governmentwide policy framework for overseas Koreans

Criticism has been raised that the government’s overseas compatriot policies, scattered across multiple ministries, reveal limitations in ensuring policy consistency and identity. Accordingly, proposals have been made to unify the planning, coordination and execution functions of overseas compatriot policies, institutionalize their participation in policymaking and concurrently improve public awareness.

Despite the establishment of the OKA two years ago, current overseas Korean policies remain fragmented across various ministries. This has led to assessments that there are limitations in establishing a distinct policy identity that reflects the unique characteristics of overseas Koreans. Particularly, it has been pointed out that in some ministries other than the OKA, overseas Korean policies are being handled as part of foreigner or immigrant policies.

Accordingly, a proposal has been put forward to clearly designate the OKA as the central driving force for overseas Korean policy and to unify the overall policy framework. This involves consolidating the planning, coordination and execution functions of overseas Korean policy within the OKA, enabling it to serve as a true control tower.

Specifically, a plan is being discussed to conduct a comprehensive survey of all overseas Korean-related laws and programs scattered across various ministries, then systematically integrate them under the leadership of the OKA to ensure policy consistency. Key areas under consideration for integration include

settlement support for repatriated compatriots (Ministry of Justice), operation of overseas Korean language education institutions (Ministry of Education, Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, etc.) and transfer of the National Memorial Park for Overseas Koreans (Ministry of Health and Welfare), streamlining domestic economic support activities for Koreans around the world (Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy) and unifying support services for children of multicultural families returning to Korea (Ministry of Gender Equality and Family).

Strengthening cooperation between the central government and local governments was also presented as a key task. The plan is to establish regular consultation channels between the OKA and local governments to promote tailored overseas Korean policies reflecting regional characteristics.

To institutionally guarantee overseas Koreans’ participation in policymaking, the operation of an Overseas Koreans Advisory Committee was proposed. This advisory group would serve as an institutional foundation enabling overseas Koreans to participate in policy discovery, consultation, evaluation and implementation. It would be composed of representative overseas Korean experts selected by field, such as economy/trade and diplomacy/peace, considering professional expertise, generation and region. The advisory group would evaluate major policies and make recommendations through regular and ad hoc consultations.

Additionally, the need to improve public perception of overseas compatriots was raised. It was pointed out that negative perceptions toward overseas compatriots are forming due to the spread of some distorted information and that discriminatory views toward Chinese compatriots (ethnic Koreans from China) are intensifying, particularly intertwined with anti-China sentiment.

As a countermeasure, launching a public awareness campaign was proposed. The plan involves supporting the production and dissemination of content that introduces the success stories, heartwarming tales and national contributions of overseas compatriots through the overseas compatriot communication platform DongpoON, and cooperation with media and broadcasting companies. However, it was also pointed out that the 2026 budget of 330 million won for the communication platform is insufficient even for minimal operations.

Measures to invigorate exchanges between domestic citizens and overseas compatriots were also included. Plans under review include working with local communities to expand support for social service activities, cultural events, and sports exchanges involving both compatriots and local residents. Alongside this, implementing education programs on understanding overseas compatriots for elementary, middle, high school and university students, as well as expanding this to the general public, was presented as a task to pursue. [\[참\]](#)