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2026 New Year address by OKA commissioner

Respected 7 million overseas compatriots and fellow citizens, the hopeful Year of the Fire Horse, 2026, has dawned.

We deeply appreciate the interest and support you have shown from all corners of the world over the past year and wish health and happiness to all your households. Now in its third year since its establishment, the Overseas Koreans Agency has begun a comprehensive overhaul of its policies to provide more effective support and strengthen the capabilities of the overseas Korean community.

President Lee Jae Myung has held nine meetings with overseas Koreans in the first six months of his administration to listen directly to the voices from the field.

The communication platform DongpoON broadcast has launched. We have taken over the “Sakhalin Compatriots Permanent Return Project” and integrated the support system, as well as expanded the scope of accompanying family members eligible for permanent return. We have improved remote identity verification for overseas citizens and enhanced access to domestic online services.

Respected overseas compatriots, the new year 2026 will be a year of fundamentally reshaping the compatriot support system and initiating a fundamental transformation of compatriot policies.

First, we will systematically assess the status of overseas compatriots and the challenges requiring resolution, which form the foundation of overseas compatriot policy, and establish a compatriot database. We will revise the Overseas National Registration Act to increase registration rates by simplifying required documents, linking overseas voter registration and introducing a predeparture registration system. We will also introduce a certification system for overseas compatriots holding foreign nationality to enhance convenience in domestic entry/exit procedures and activities within Korea.

Second, we will roll up our sleeves to resolve the long-standing grievances and persistent challenges within the overseas Korean community. To substantively guarantee the right to vote for overseas Koreans, a right that has required traveling hundreds to thousands of kilometers or else has been forfeited, we will push for reforms to the overseas voting system. We will significantly strengthen support for Hangeul schools, which are central to Korean identity education. We will raise the operational cost support rate from the current 30 percent to around 50 percent. We will establish a Korean language education support council involving the OKA, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, and others to build a whole-of-government cooperation system. This includes integrated content development and unified management of teacher training programs. We will actively pursue lowering the age limit for dual citizenship. We will also restore dedicated consular officers for overseas Koreans at diplomatic missions in areas with high concentrations of overseas

Koreans to strengthen on-the-ground support.

Third, we will expand support for overseas Korean communities and strengthen their networks. To enhance these networks, we will establish a new World Korean Congress encompassing diverse generations, professions and fields. We will invigorate overseas expansions by domestic companies and domestic investment by overseas Korean businesses while significantly expanding internship opportunities for young Koreans at overseas Korean enterprises. We will also strategically support institutional improvements to protect the rights and interests of overseas Koreans in their countries of residence, as well as their public diplomacy activities. To effectively implement this, we will establish a support system where the government and private organizations share roles.

Fourth, we will establish a support system for the domestic settlement of returning compatriots, strengthening support for the return and settlement of Koryoin, Sakhalin Koreans, adoptees, Koreans in Japan and atomic bomb victims. We will operate integrated programs linking education and employment for young compatriots wishing to return, attracting talented young compatriots. We will integrate the Overseas Korean (F-4) visa and the Visitor Employment (H-2) visa to eliminate discrimination based on residency status and promote inclusive social integration, including support for mutual exchange between compatriots at home and abroad.

Fifth, we will strengthen the control tower function of overseas compatriot policy, enhancing cooperation not only with relevant ministries within the central government but also between the OKA and local governments. We will establish an institutional foundation enabling overseas compatriots to directly participate in policymaking processes by forming an Overseas Compatriot Advisory Committee composed of compatriot experts representing diverse fields, such as economy and trade, diplomacy and peace.

Dear overseas compatriots!

In this era where the standing of our homeland directly reflects the standing of our overseas compatriots, and vice versa, the Republic of Korea and its overseas compatriots are partners and a community of shared destiny, walking together toward peace and prosperity.

Let us walk steadily together toward the day when the lives of 80 million Koreans are connected as one, relying on our tenacious vitality and the strong roots of our shared Korean identity, even amid rough waves.

In this Year of the Red Horse, symbolizing dynamic growth and leaps forward, I sincerely wish you a year where all your aspirations are fulfilled. Happy New Year! 🎉



OKA Commissioner
Kim Kyung-hyup



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Address: 34-36th Floor, Booyoung Songdo Tower, 241, Incheon Tower-daero, Yeonsu-gu, Incheon, Korea (22009)
Tel: +82-2-6747-0404, www.oka.go.kr
Instagram: @overseas_koreans_agency
Facebook: facebook.com/oka202365
YouTube: @OKAKOREA
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This magazine can also be viewed at <http://webzine.korean.net>

‘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. [\[참\]](#)

‘Showing potential’; DongpoON makes stable start

Expanding multilingual services, promotion remains challenge; compatriot community calls for ‘Russian and English subtitles’

Major overhaul planned for March, marking 100 days since launch; collaboration with compatriot media outlets, including broadcasters to be pursued

DongpoON, the 24-hour YouTube broadcasting platform connecting 7 million overseas Koreans worldwide, has entered a stabilization phase 50 days after its launch. It is now strengthening its competitiveness by expanding multilingual content.

Aiming to provide diverse and engaging 24-hour live programming, DongpoON launched Dec. 9 last year. It was established by the Overseas Koreans Agency as a “one-stop content hub” gathering Korean news, overseas Korean policies, Korean language education, K-pop, current affairs/culture, documentaries and other areas of interest to overseas Koreans.

Although there were initial concerns about insufficient preparation at launch, the overall assessment within the overseas Korean community is that it is gradually stabilizing, focusing on operating with its own produced content related to overseas Koreans.

The current subscriber count stands at 19,500. The official teaser video for DongpoON has garnered significant attention, surpassing 500,000 views.

“Although it is still in its early stages and has some shortcomings, I see its potential,” said Koh Sang-gu, president of the World Assembly of Korean Associations. “I hope DongpoON becomes a turning point for communication between the compatriot community and the homeland.”

Lack of promotion is issue; need for wider publicization through events, etc.

However, promotion remains insufficient, with most compatriots either unaware of DongpoON’s launch or, even if aware, stating they haven’t watched it. This highlights the urgent need for promotion. Efforts must be expanded through continuous events and media coverage.

DongpoON is currently running two events. The first is an event titled “Introducing our neighborhood,” offering generous gifts to participants.

Additionally, compared with its 24-hour broadcast system, the platform still lacks sufficient original content. It is noted as a shortcoming that much of the content has little direct relevance to



DongpoON promotional poster

the overseas Korean community or consists of reruns of previously aired MBC programs. Opinions also suggest that technical stability, such as occasional interruptions during broadcasts, needs improvement.

The biggest challenge cited is the “language barrier.” Currently, most content is provided only in Korean, making it inaccessible to overseas Koreans unfamiliar with the language.

DongpoON is characterized by its scheduling, which reflects time zone differences across overseas Korean communities to enable prime-time viewing. The OKA explained that it has established a stable operational foundation through measures, including a 24-hour broadcast system, deployment of monitoring personnel, backup system operations and the introduction of a weekly schedule.

'K-Pop On Air' by Ampers&One hits 1.57 million views

Currently, well-received programs include ▲ "K-Pop On Air" featuring K-pop artists and next-generation compatriots, ▲ "We'll Do It for You" sharing overseas compatriots' experiences of Korea, ▲ "Weekly Dongpo Report" covering major issues, policies and cultural news in the overseas Korean community, ▲ "K-Clip" for learning Korean easily and enjoyably, and ▲ "Dongpo Inside" spotlighting the lives of overseas Koreans.

Notably, "K-Pop On Air," featuring K-Pop artists and next-generation overseas Koreans, has previously featured artists, including BE BOYS, ELAST, X:IN, Ampers&One, Rescene and NOWZ. Notably, the Ampers&One episode recorded 1.57 million views, making it the most-viewed content.

'Dongpo Inside' also draws attention by spotlighting lives of compatriots settled in Korea

"Dongpo Inside," which highlights the lives of compatriots settled in Korea, is also a compelling content series. The first episode featured a day in the life of a Koryoin student at Korea University who has been in Korea for 10 years. As of Jan. 22, it has surpassed 500,000 views. The second episode followed a day in the life of Majjoodole, a mixed-race Angolan prince who moved to Seoul to succeed as a creator.

The third episode introduced Chae Ye-jin, chairwoman of the Koryoin Global Network, a Koryo-saram from Kazakhstan who has succeeded in business and raising children. Chae, now in her 17th year in Korea, shared her experience serving as an adviser for the OKA's OK Biz program on the broadcast. Dongpo Inside has aired a total of three episodes to date.

Korean language program 'K-clip' gains popularity

The Korean language education program "K-clip," which teaches through K-content, is growing in popularity, with view counts reaching a peak of 760,000 per episode. The first episode, which introduced curiosities like how Koreans greet each other upon first meeting, explained four common Korean greetings, including "Annyeonghaseyo" (안녕하세요) and "Nice to meet you" (처음 뵙겠습니다), using actual broadcast dramas in an easy-to-understand and entertaining way.

Additionally, it has aired eight episodes so far, covering neatly organized expressions related to "eyes" that catch the eye, Korean words related to "the mouth" that whet the appetite, expressions related to "hands," Korean words that reveal Korean people's emotions and Korean expressions for relationships that grow closer or drift apart.

'Weekly Dongpo Report,' spotlight on Global People Story segment

"Weekly Dongpo Report" features major domestic and international news, announcements from the OKA and interviews with prominent overseas Koreans. The episode that aired Jan. 20 (hosted by Yeom Ki-hoon and Yang Hyo-geol) focused on urgent international issues like Iran's deteriorating internal situation and debates over the independence of the U.S. Federal Reserve, alongside key concerns for the overseas Korean community, such as shifts in Korea-Japan relations and Australia's immigration policy reforms.

The "Global People Story" segment drew attention by introducing Ha Kyung-seo, chairman of the CAISA Group, a major



"K-Pop On Air" by Ampers&One, currently at 1.57 million views

figure in the Central American business community. Based in El Salvador and operating 15 companies, Ha is respected locally not only for his business success but also for his disaster relief and philanthropic activities.

“The key to business success is respecting local culture and laws while valuing people as precious assets,” Ha said.

He advised young people dreaming of overseas ventures, “Before the AI era arrives, build your software power, actively ask questions of your seniors and challenge yourselves.”

He particularly emphasized the importance of the global Korean network, reiterating, “The first person you meet at the airport can shape the next 30 years.”

The OKA also announced plans to strengthen support for vulnerable compatriots from multicultural backgrounds. Specifically, it is currently soliciting proposals for projects to assist the education and settlement of children with Korean nationality (estimated at around 20,000) born to women who returned to Vietnam.

Additionally, the broadcast covered the successful conclusion of the Next Generation Future Vision Forum held in Osaka on Jan. 13 and honored the achievements of the late taekwondo instructor Lee Jun-gu, who has been selected as the Overseas Korean of the Month. Lee taught taekwondo at the U.S. Pentagon and the Capitol building, earning a place among the “203 most successful immigrants in U.S. history.”

The broadcast also reported on the publication of a legal consultation casebook for Sakhalin compatriots, which is available on the website, continuing efforts to protect the rights and interests of overseas compatriots.

Additionally, content, such as recitations of the winning works from the 27th Overseas Koreans Literary Awards, the story of judo bronze medalist Ahn Chang-rim from the 2020 Tokyo Olympics and introductions to the lives of compatriots worldwide, including Sakhalin Koreans and descendants of Koreans in Cuba and Brazil, were also compelling enough to command attention. Exploration programs covering areas with high concentrations of Koryoin, such as Ansan’s Tteokgol Village and Incheon’s Hambak Village, were



“We’ll Make It for You”: making Lunar New Year “tteokguk” (rice cake soup)



“Weekly Dongpo Report”

evaluated as having heightened viewers’ empathy.

The OKA plans to expand its self-produced content starting in March, marking its 100th day of service. It aims to enhance content competitiveness through KTV (national affairs promotion), Arirang TV (multilingual) and building an overseas Korean broadcasting network. Additionally, it will sequentially introduce collaborations with overseas Korean influencers like Hwang Jin-i, who has millions of followers, the latest K-culture and documentaries.

Furthermore, it intends to expand multilingual content offerings in languages like English and Russian, and introduce programming blocks organized by country and time zone to make content more accessible to compatriots unfamiliar with Korean. To this end, it plans to assess the demand for overseas Korean broadcasts capable of supplying content by February.

“Utilizing online platforms is essential to strengthen communication with overseas Koreans scattered across the globe,” OKA Commissioner Kim Kyung-hyup emphasized. “We will provide 24/7 access to content that overseas Koreans are curious about and truly need. Furthermore, we will enhance two-way communication through various initiatives, allowing our compatriots to directly participate in the DongpoON channel. We hope DongpoON will establish itself as a new communication channel connecting hearts across borders.” [\[창\]](#)



“Dongpo Inside,” a day in the life of a Koryoin student at Korea University

Expanding content that considers intergenerational balance is crucial factor

Jeong Yeong-sun, president of Association of Koryo-Saram: 'We hope it will reflect the diverse voices within compatriot community'

While watching DongpoON, some programs feature foreigners residing in Korea as the main characters rather than overseas Koreans. This clearly demonstrates the openness and multicultural reality of modern Korean society.

However, if such content is repeatedly featured, viewers may find it difficult to clearly discern whether DongpoON is a channel for overseas Koreans or one covering foreigners' lives in Korea.

Diverse experimentation is possible in the channel's early stages. However, as time progresses, establishing clearer criteria regarding its primary audience and editorial direction will play a crucial role in solidifying the channel's credibility and



identity.

The greatest potential of DongpoON lies not merely in conveying information. Its essential purpose is to enable compatriots living in different countries, different linguistic environments and different generations to confront each other's realities within a single screen.

The Association of Koryo-Saram views DongpoON not as a finished product but as a platform still in the process of formation. If this

channel can lower language barriers and capture the diverse voices of the compatriot community without favoring any specific generation, DongpoON can establish itself as a space of trust connecting the nation and the compatriot community.

'To become a genuine platform that connects compatriots worldwide'

Lee Mi-ah, president of Korea-France Cultural Exchange Association: 'From a viewing platform to a participatory platform'

There are high expectations for the launch of the ambitious DongpoON initiative, which aims to connect the 7 million overseas Koreans worldwide into a single network. As a leader of an overseas Korean organization who has been actively involved in French-Korean cultural exchanges in France for over 25 years, I hope this platform will grow beyond a simple promotional channel to become a public infrastructure connecting the knowledge, experience and cultural sensibilities of the overseas Korean community. To this end, I would like to offer several suggestions.

First, I hope it evolves beyond a mere "policy news delivery channel" into a two-way communication space where compatriots actively participate. If it gathers issues faced by Korean communities abroad in education, culture and administration, and connects them to policy feedback, compatriots will tangibly feel the trust and sense of belonging that comes from knowing "the nation is listening to my voice."

Furthermore, introducing multilingual services (local



language, Korean, English) in dedicated sections for culture/arts and youth, and regularizing interviews, performance/exhibition introductions and collaborative contests would be a significant boost for overseas Korean artists active abroad. If DongpoON becomes a "hub" accompanying cultural programs, public diplomacy and youth initiatives, the tangible impact will be amplified. Furthermore, accumulating the experiences of the overseas Korean community into a "public

knowledge" archive and systematizing it to cover Korean language education, next-generation identity and K-culture collaboration cases will create synergy with the Overseas Koreans Agency's digital database and enhance the quality of long-term policies.

Finally, if it activates diverse content and participation channels as an inclusive platform spanning generations and professions, from first-generation immigrants to youth, businesspeople and artists, Koreans worldwide, including those in France, will actively engage not only in content production collaboration but also in direct participation. 장

‘7 million overseas Koreans are not recipients of charity but valued partners of ROK’

Strengthening 24-hour communication through DongpoON; launching data-driven, tailored policies

‘We are overhauling our entire policy framework with aim to realize inclusive overseas Korean policies without discrimination by country of origin’



OKA Commissioner Kim Kyung-hyup emphasizes, “We will fundamentally overhaul our entire overseas compatriot policy to ensure the state responsibly responds to the voices of our compatriots, aiming to realize an inclusive compatriot policy free from discrimination based on country of origin.”

Overseas Koreans Agency Commissioner Kim Kyung-hyup expressed high expectations for the 24-hour YouTube platform DongpoON, which connects 7 million overseas Koreans worldwide, during a New Year interview with Yonhap News Agency at the main office in Songdo, Incheon, on Jan. 9. Marking its first month since launch, DongpoON is establishing itself as a “one-stop content hub” encompassing overseas Korean policies, Korean language education and K-culture. Kim announced plans to “overhaul the platform in March, marking its 100th day of service, incorporating feedback from all sectors,” signaling the development of a more sophisticated communication channel.

The core task the OKA is most focused on this year is “establishing a sophisticated, data-driven policy system.”

“Until now, limitations in policy formulation stemmed from a lack of foundational data,” Kim diagnosed. “By building a reliable foundational database for overseas Koreans, we will design and implement tailored policies based on the lives of overseas Koreans, not just administrative convenience centered on providers.”

He particularly emphasized, “We will fundamentally reorganize the entire overseas Koreans policy framework to ensure the state responsibly responds to the voices of our compatriots, aiming to realize inclusive policies without discrimination based on country of origin.”

Additionally, there are plans to significantly increase registration rates by simplifying the overseas citizen registration process. Alongside this will be introduced a new Overseas Korean Certification System for compatriots holding foreign nationality.

“We will actively work with relevant ministries to resolve long-standing aspirations of the overseas Korean community, such as guaranteeing voting rights for overseas citizens, strengthening Korean identity and lowering the age for allowing dual citizenship,” Kim said. “We will concentrate all our capabilities on enhancing the Republic of Korea’s national competitiveness by unifying domestic and international networks.”

Another challenge in compatriot policy is efficiently consolidating tasks currently dispersed across multiple ministries.

To deal with these problems, Kim said, “We will swiftly organize pending issues spanning multiple ministries, such as nationality, military service and welfare, through a consultative body with relevant ministries.”

Kim highlighted the transfer of approximately 8 billion won from the Ministry of Health and Welfare’s “Support Budget for Sakhalin Compatriots’ Permanent Return” to the OKA this year as a major achievement. This marks the first instance of centralizing compatriot affairs previously scattered across ministries and is expected to serve as a milestone in establishing the agency as a true “policy control tower.”

This reflects the changed policy status since the launch of the OKA. With overseas Korean policies now officially included in recent presidential briefings and key national agenda items, analysis suggests these policies are beginning to establish themselves as a pillar of national strategy.

Inclusion policies for the 860,000 repatriated compatriots residing domestically will also be strengthened. Domestic compatriots constitute a significant proportion, accounting for 32 percent of all foreigners (approximately 2.65 million). In an era of population decline and regional depopulation, their stable settlement is emerging as a national challenge.

The newly established Department for Settlement Support of Returning Compatriots will provide comprehensive support for employment and education. Particularly for groups with historical specificity, such as Sakhalin Koreans and Koryoin, the plan is to implement “warm settlement support” that goes beyond simple residency management. A blueprint was also presented to create a virtuous cycle structure, connecting education to regional settlement through the “Project to Attract Young Compatriot Talent.”

The current budget for the OKA is insufficient when measured against the scale and expectations of the 7 million-strong overseas Korean community.

“During next year’s budget formulation process, we will strive to faithfully plan and operationalize the contents of the presidential briefing from the initial stages to ensure they are reflected in the government budget,” Kim pledged.

A notable aspect of Kim’s administrative philosophy is the “restoration of the overseas Korean community’s autonomy.”

“We must move beyond the model where compatriots merely attend events prepared by the government,” he asserted.

The declaration by Korean association presidents at last year’s World Korean Association Conference to host the event themselves marks the starting point.

Kim emphasized, “Such changes will lay the foundation for respecting the autonomy of the compatriot community and strengthening its cohesion.”

Alongside this, the OKA will establish the inaugural World Korean Congress this year, integrating events previously held separately by the Korean business associations, Korean Associations, professional organizations and next-generation groups. The plan is



OKA Commissioner Kim Kyung-hyup speaks during an interview with Yonhap News Agency.

to hold the World Korean Association Conference, the World Korean Next Generation Conference and the World Korean Business Association Conference simultaneously, creating a massive platform for exchange that transcends generations, professions and regions.

Kim emphasized that overseas Korean policies are not benefits for a specific group but are directly linked to the nation’s future competitiveness.

“Even to address the issue of a shrinking working-age population, a shift in public perception toward overseas Koreans is urgently needed,” he said.

“Overseas Koreans are pioneers of South Korea’s export markets and private diplomats. We will pursue policies from a partnership standpoint so that our compatriots can build bridges first in places where the government finds it difficult to reach,” he said.

To realize this vision, the OKA plans to clearly define the division of roles with the private sector. The government will establish policies and infrastructure, while a road map enabling the private sector to take charge of suitable areas is scheduled for completion within the year.

Regarding the need to integrate Overseas Koreans Cooperation Centers, he said, “We are comprehensively reviewing legislative amendments, the effectiveness of policy implementation and budget efficiency.

“We will establish transparent governance where compatriots directly participate in policymaking processes, creating an OKA that resonates with both citizens and compatriots alike.” 장

Master Rhee Jhoon-goo, 'pioneer of taekwondo wave'

'Made significant contributions to globalization of taekwondo and U.S.-Korea sports diplomacy'

Selected as one of '203 most successful and famous immigrants in U.S. history' in Washington, D.C.

Godfather of American taekwondo who taught Bruce Lee and Muhammad Ali

The Overseas Koreans Agency (Commissioner Kim Kyung-hyup) has selected the late taekwondo master Rhee Jhoon-goo (1932-2018) as its Overseas Korean of the Month for January, in recognition of his significant contributions to the globalization of taekwondo and Korea-U.S. sports diplomacy.

Rhee is recognized as the figure who first established taekwondo in American society, playing a decisive role in developing it beyond a mere martial art into a medium for cultural, diplomatic and sports exchange. Dubbed the "Father of American Taekwondo," he garnered attention from the early days of taekwondo's spread through his innovative approach.

Master Rhee Jhoon-goo was born in Asan, South Chungcheong Province, in 1932 and first encountered taekwondo at the age of 16 at Cheongdogwan. Later, while majoring in civil engineering at Texas State University in 1957, he founded a taekwondo club and began teaching the art to American students, taking the first step in spreading taekwondo within the United States.

A life dedicated to popularizing taekwondo

In 1962, at the request of the U.S. Department of Defense, he relocated to Washington, D.C., and opened the Jhoon Rhee Taekwondo Institute. Later, after reading about Congressman James Cleveland's robbery victim story, he introduced taekwondo to U.S. lawmakers by teaching them, which led to the opening of a taekwondo dojang within the U.S. Capitol, spreading taekwondo throughout American political circles and society at large. Beginning in 1965, he established the U.S. Congressional Taekwondo Club, teaching lawmakers free of charge and contributing to taekwondo's presence on the political and diplomatic stage.

Rhee opened over 60 taekwondo schools across the United States, significantly contributing to establishing taekwondo as a popular sport. His schools were so influential that by the 1980s, 11 were operating in the Washington, D.C., area alone.

Taekwondo pioneer with designated Jhoon Rhee Day on June 28

Rhee Jhoon-goo's activities extended beyond the United States



May 23, 2023: Fifth Anniversary Memorial for Master Rhee Joon-goo -- Jhoon Rhee Memorial Project Launch Ceremony held at the National Assembly Library

to the entire world. He sent letters to embassies of various countries within the U.S., recommending taekwondo to the children of diplomats. At the request of diplomats returning home after completing their terms, he paved the way for dispatching taekwondo masters overseas. This became a crucial turning point in the globalization of taekwondo. Notably, starting in 1991, he entered the former Soviet Union (now the Commonwealth of Independent States). He persuaded high-ranking officials at a time when martial arts were illegal, leading to their legalization. He also gathered karate instructors to hold seminars, contributing to the legalization and spread of taekwondo within the former Soviet Union. As a result, over 65 Jhoon Rhee Taekwondo Schools were established in regions, including Russia.

Rhee taught taekwondo to world-renowned figures like Bruce Lee and Muhammad Ali, elevating taekwondo's global stature. He imparted kicking techniques to Lee and learned hand techniques from him, even co-starring in the 1973 film "When Taekwondo Strikes." He also taught taekwondo techniques to Muhammad Ali, helping facilitate Ali's visit to Korea, thereby playing a significant role in expanding international exchange through sports. Furthermore, he created a martial arts form called "Martial Ballet," choreographed to music, and incorporated it into the dojang curriculum.

Developing safety-enhancing protective gear

After a student suffered serious injury during a match, this instructor, concerned about enhancing taekwondo's safety, personally developed protective gear for the head, chest, shins and elbows. This became the prototype for the protective equipment used in today's world taekwondo competitions, contributing to the simultaneous advancement of both safety and competitiveness in the sport. This invention is regarded as a paradigm-shifting innovation in martial arts training, as protective gear was virtually nonexistent in martial arts at the time.

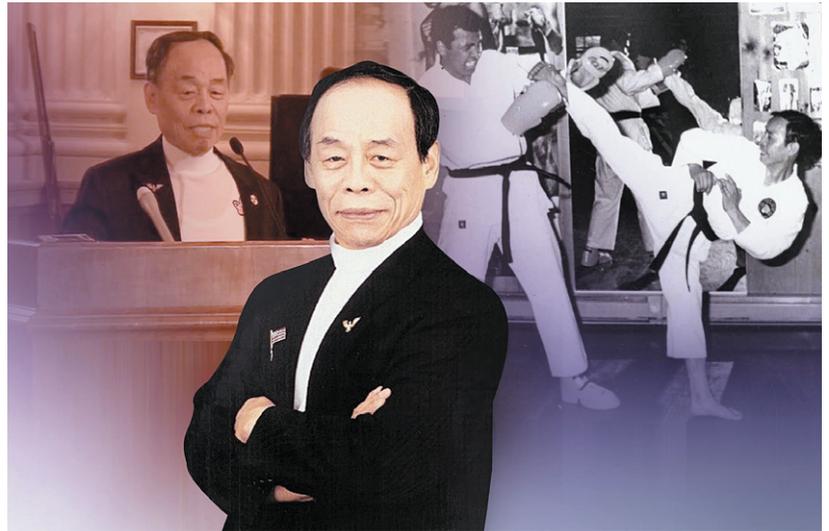
Master Rhee visited South Korea with over 30 U.S. taekwondo officials to attend the Korea-U.S. Taekwondo Friendship Training Tournament. During this visit, he met with former President Kim Dae-jung, alongside four U.S. Congressmen. He later served as an adviser to the "Congressional Taekwondo Federation," laying the groundwork for enhancing Korea-U.S. friendship and sports diplomacy through taekwondo.

In recognition of his achievements, Washington, D.C., designated June 28 as Jhoon Rhee Day in 2003. In 2000, he was selected as the sole Korean American among the "203 most successful and famous immigrants in U.S. history." In 1992, he was recognized by President George H.W. Bush with the "Daily Points of Light" award, and in 2009, he received the South Korean Order of Civil Merit, Magnolia Medal.

2009 recipient of Mugunghwa Medal of Order of Civil Merit

"Master Rhee Joon-goo is the godfather of taekwondo and the originator of the Korean Wave, having devoted his entire life to taekwondo and promoting its value throughout the United States and around the world," OKA Commissioner Kim Kyung-hyup said. "We selected him as the Overseas Korean of the Month for January so that his passion and dedication may be widely known and remembered for generations to come."

Meanwhile, the OKA identifies compatriots who have contributed to the development of the Republic of Korea or enhanced the status of Koreans in their countries of residence, selecting and announcing them monthly as the Overseas Korean of the Month. Previous recipients since March last year include Kim Pyeong-jin (former president of the Jeju Development Association in Japan), Hong Myeong-gi (former chairman of the M&L Hong Foundation), Im Cheon-taek (independence activist), Park Byeong-heon (former head of the Korean Residents Union in Japan), Park No-hak (former president of the Return of Detained Sakhalin Koreans Association), Lee Ui-gyeong (independence activist), Dr. Seo Se-mo, Chairman Seo Gab-ho, professor Lim Deok-sang in the United States and Oh Gi-mun (former president of the Korean Women's Association in Japan). 



Master Rhee Joon-goo, selected as Overseas Korean of the Month in January



Master Rhee Joon-goo demonstrates a wooden board break with a water cup balanced on his head during his 80th birthday celebration at the Cannon Building of the U.S. Congress on Sept. 30, 2010.



Master Rhee Joon-goo demonstrates a kick to Muhammad Ali (L), the 1976 World Heavyweight Boxing Champion.

Overseas Koreans: Japan increases; China decreases

OKA releases Status of Overseas Koreans; 7 million reside in 181 countries worldwide
 Decrease in Northeast Asia and North America, increase in South Asia-Pacific and Europe;
 clear trend of ‘large-scale settlement areas shrinking, emerging regions expanding’

The number of overseas Koreans residing in 181 countries worldwide is estimated at approximately 7 million, showing a slight decrease compared with two years ago. Statistics also reveal a structural shift where decreases and increases are concentrated in specific regions. While traditional large-scale residential areas continue to see declines, some emerging regions show a distinct upward trend, indicating a gradual shift in the distribution of overseas Koreans.

The Overseas Koreans Agency announced in its “2025 Status of Overseas Koreans Report,” released Dec. 31, 2025, that the global overseas Korean population was recorded at 7,006,703. This represents a 1.06 percent decrease (74,807 people) compared with the 7,081,510 recorded at the end of 2022. While the decrease is not large, the regional patterns of increase and decrease showed a clear contrast.

These statistics, based on data from Dec. 31, 2024, were calculated by overseas diplomatic missions by synthesizing official statistics from host countries, along with data from civil affairs processing records, overseas citizen registries, overseas voter rolls and overseas Korean community organization records.

If data as of Dec. 31, 2024, cannot be obtained, the most recent

available statistics shall be used, provided that the reference date of the relevant statistical agency is clearly indicated.

First formation of Status of Overseas Koreans Statistics Committee

To enhance statistical reliability, the Overseas Koreans Agency conducted relevant research and established the Overseas Koreans Statistics Committee for the first time, involving overseas Koreans and statistical experts, to undergo a verification process.

By residency status, overseas nationals totaled 2,402,026, while foreign nationals of Korean descent numbered 4,604,677. This represents a decrease of 2.67 percent (65,943 people) and 0.19 percent (8,864 people), respectively, compared with the previous survey. The relatively larger decrease in overseas nationals maintaining Korean citizenship suggests that changes in the structure of overseas stays are intertwined with short-term movements or return flows.

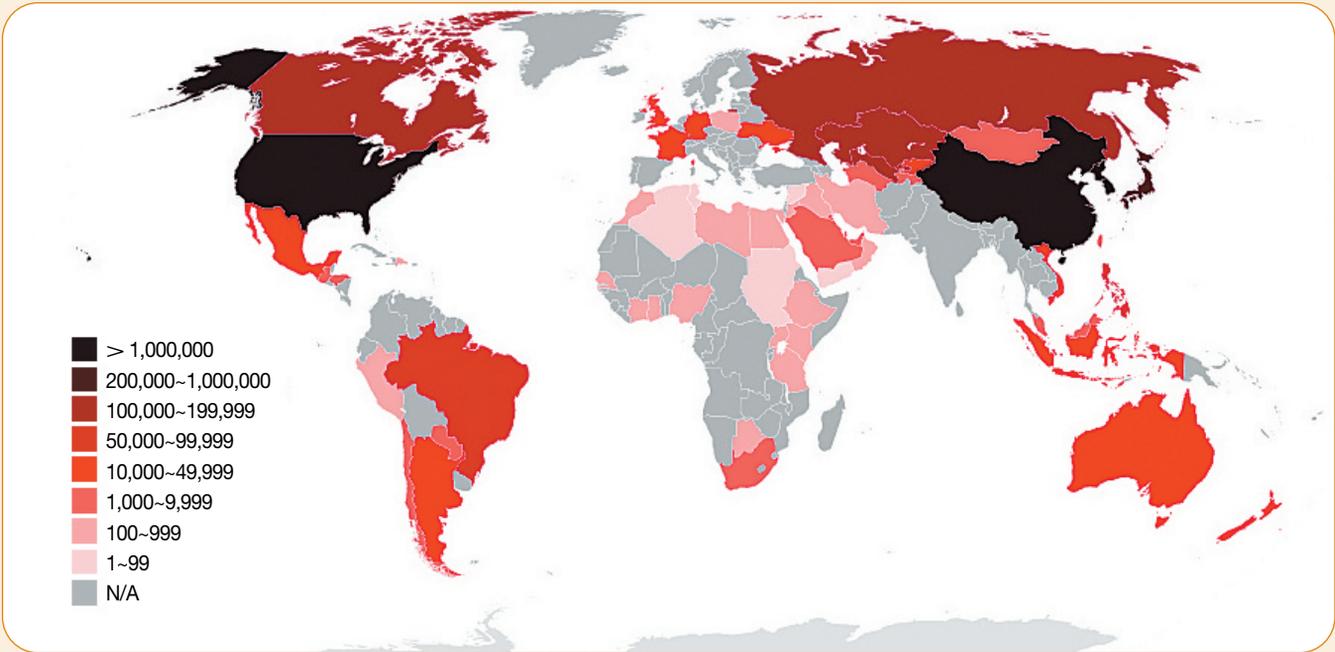
Conversely, the South Asia-Pacific region and Europe showed contrasting trends, increasing by 12.5 percent (64,171 people) and 7.6 percent (15,065 people), respectively. Although their share of the total population is relatively small, these regions are assessed

Status by residency type

Category	Overseas Koreans				Foreign Nationals of Korean Descent (Citizens)
	Permanent Residents	Ordinary Residents	International Students	Total	
Total (people)	1,037,047	1,208,884	156,095	2,402,026	4,604,677
Change (people)	14,036	-84,958	4,979	-65,943	-8,864
Change Rate (percent)	1.37	-6.57	3.29	-2.67	-0.19

Regional Status

Category	Northeast Asia	South Asia/Pacific	North America	Central/South America	Europe	Russia & CIS	Middle East & Africa
Total (people)	2,816,295	577,483	2,820,200	106,348	213,161	444,971	28,245
Change (people)	-102,728	64,171	-42,581	3,597	15,065	-11,182	-1,149
Change Rate (percent)	-3.52	12.50	-1.49	3.50	7.60	-2.45	-3.91



as showing the most dynamic changes in terms of growth rate alone.

The total number of overseas Koreans decreased overall, with declines observed in Northeast Asia, North America, Russia and the CIS region, where 87 percent of all overseas Koreans reside. Northeast Asia decreased by 3.52 percent (102,728 people), North America by 1.49 percent (42,581 people) and Russia/CIS by 2.45 percent (11,182 people). The scale of reduction in these regions led to the overall decrease in the number of overseas Koreans.

Striking contrast between Japan and China

By country, the contrast between Japan and China was particularly striking. Japan saw a 19.8 percent increase (158,852 people) in its overseas compatriots population, as children from international marriages were reflected in the statistics for the first time. Conversely, China experienced a 12.39 percent decrease (261,486 people), the largest decline among individual countries, due to increased repatriation and migration to third countries driven by economic factors.

The number of overseas Koreans in the United States decreased slightly as the non-response rate in the U.S. Census survey was adjusted from 26 percent to 15 percent. The decrease in the Russia/CIS region was analyzed as being influenced by the Russia-Ukraine war. The recovery of the tourism industry and increased corporate expansion were cited as key factors in the South Pacific region, while increased employment and inflow of international students were major factors in Europe.

The country with the largest overseas Korean population is the United States (2,557,047), followed by China (1,848,241), Japan (960,970), Canada (263,153), Vietnam (192,683), Uzbekistan (175,338), Australia (172,155), Kazakhstan (122,554), Russia (113,042) and the Philippines (52,695).

Anticipated utilization for future overseas Korean policy development

The OKA plans to publish the 2025 Status of Overseas Koreans as a booklet and distribute it to major government agencies, universities, research institutions, public libraries and media organizations. Furthermore, it anticipates that these statistics will be widely utilized as foundational data for future overseas Korean policy development, academic research and corporate overseas expansion.

Meanwhile, to ensure transparency in calculation bases, the OKA stipulated that whenever official statistics from the host country government are unavailable and estimates must be used, the calculation basis must be explicitly stated. Furthermore, if any survey subjects are excluded or not reflected in the statistical data, the reasons must be clearly explained.

Additionally, for the use of system data, the number of registered overseas nationals was compiled based on figures registered in the G4K system (Overseas Koreans Civil Services Portal). Additionally, for regions or countries showing a change of 3 percent or more compared with the previous statistics (published in 2023, based on the end of 2022), the specific reasons for the change must be explicitly stated to verify sudden data fluctuations.

‘Gwangju is my grandfather’s hometown and my final resting place’

‘Viktor Moon Art Museum’ to open next month; expected to serve as cultural bridge connecting identity

Currently preparing portraits of key figures from May 18th Democratization Movement and Gwangju-born independence activists

“We have no homeland of our own. Though we ride trains across the land, we are actually flying towards the sky from beneath the earth. We Koryoin, forced to wander without knowing when, where or how far we must go, were like people flying like birds.”

In the eyes of artist Viktor Moon (74), who we met on Jan. 12 at the Koryoin Village in Wolgok-dong, Gwangsan Ward, Gwangju, both the harsh winds of Kazakhstan and the bitter history of the Koryoin lingered simultaneously. A third-generation Koryoin from Kazakhstan and a leading Korean art master, he has now ended his life of wandering and settled in Korea, his grandfather’s homeland, specifically in Gwangju, where his roots lie.

Sorrow of Koryoin people imprinted on canvas

In the studio and living space provided for him by the Koryoin Village, countless dots gathered on the canvas to form a world of their own: from the train symbolizing the tragedy of forced migration to the faces of the Koryoin striving to hold onto their identity. In conversation with Moon, the world of art he dedicated his life to painting and the trajectory of his life as a Koryoin came through.

The most significant symbol in Moon’s work is the installation piece “The Migrant Train Flying Through the Sky,” displayed on the outer wall of the second floor of the Koryoin Comprehensive Support Center. It embodies the Koryoin community’s hope to soar freely through the sky, escaping the suffering of being loaded onto freight trains in 1937 and forcibly driven into the desolate wastelands of Central Asia without understanding why.

“I painted windows on the train in the work because this wasn’t merely a means of transportation. Though we were settled in Russia from the time of our great-grandfathers, we were always forced to leave. Even those born and raised in Kazakhstan became strangers again after independence due to intensified nationalist policies. In a reality where even outstanding doctors and scientists were excluded for being of a different ethnicity, I projected the fate of the Koryoin onto the train.”



Artist Moon Viktor is interviewed by Yonhap News Agency in his studio within the Goryeo Village in Gwangju on Jan. 12.

Portrait of Hong Beom-do with 14 medals emblazoned on chest

His artistic awakening began while watching the 1988 Seoul Olympics on TV. His first visit to Seoul in 1989 was a shock in itself. “Staying for a month opened my eyes wide. To us, who had only encountered negative information about North Korea, South Korea’s development seemed miraculous.” This experience became the catalyst for him to seriously tackle the heavy theme of forced migration on canvas.

Ironically, the unique pointillism technique that symbolizes Moon’s style was perfected during a life-or-death crisis. After heart surgery, confined to bed for a long time, he endured his painful recovery by dotting tiny pieces of paper with a small brush, unable to move his body.

“When lying down, there was nothing I could do. As I applied



Artist Moon Viktor poses in front of a portrait of Gen. Hong Beom-do in his studio on the second floor of the Koryoin Comprehensive Support Center within the Koryoin Village in Gwangju on Jan. 12. This work is listed for auction on the Koryoin Village website with a starting bid of 20 billion won.

each dot with a small brush, time passed. Though a technique originating in France, to me, each dot represents the life of an individual Koryoin and embodies tenacious vitality.”

His brush also turned toward portraying historical figures. His portrait of Gen. Hong Beom-do, who died in solitude in Kazakhstan, carries Moon’s profound regret.

“I depicted the general’s anger -- he fought for independence during the Japanese occupation, yet after forced relocation, he received no compensation due to the Russian government’s administrative failures. It was a tribute to our hero who never received the respect he deserved.”

Museum will showcase refined artistry of Koryo people

In this work, listed for auction at 20 billion won on the Koryoin Village website, he depicted 14 medals on the chest to honor Gen. Hong’s achievements.

His settling in Gwangju felt like destiny. In 1994, he arrived in Korea with about 20 paintings, and by chance, he held an exhibition at the Gwangju Kumho Cultural Foundation. It was a huge success, with all works sold out. During this process, he discovered something even more astonishing.

“I found ‘Moonbawi’ in Gwangju. Seeing the ancestral burial site of my family name, Moon, and the characters engraved on the stele, I became certain my roots were here in Gwangju. This was the hometown my grandfather, who emigrated to Ussuriysk, Russia, in 1886, must have longed for so deeply.”

Three years ago, suffering from complications after a botched knee surgery in Kazakhstan, he underwent corrective surgery and regained his health thanks to Korean medical professionals and the

support of compatriots, including Lee Cheon-young, chairman of the Gwangju Koryoin Village. Now, he is preparing for a new tomorrow to repay the Koryoin Village in Gwangju that embraced him.

This February, the official Moon Viktor Art Museum will open in the Koryoin Village, featuring a permanent exhibition of Moon’s works. The first floor will be a gallery, while the upper floor will serve as a studio, creating a space where visitors can experience Koryoin history through art.

‘Deeper the work, the older I get’

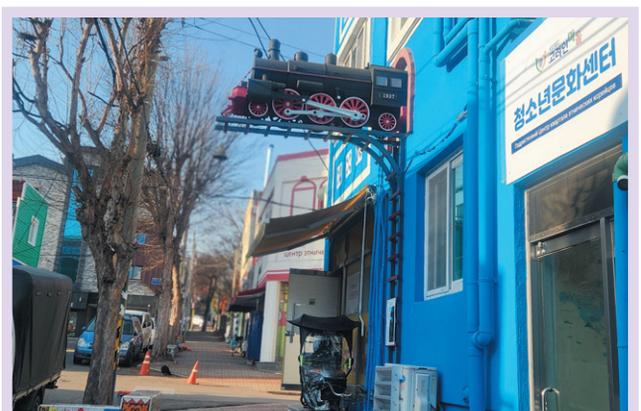
“If my paintings remain in Kazakhstan, no one will value them. But in my homeland, they become the history of the Koryo people. I am preparing portraits of key figures related to the

May 18 Democratization Movement and independence activists from Gwangju. I want to transform the image of the Koryoin, often seen merely as laborers, into dignified art.”

He didn’t forget to offer harsh words for young descendants of Koryoin. He expressed regret over their attitude of coming to Korea only to earn money, without trying to learn Korean or its history.

“If you study just a word or two every day, you can speak well in a year. You must know the language to preserve your roots.”

As the interview concluded, Moon began dotting the canvas again. True to his words that “deeper works emerge with age,” the countless dots he applied were now stitching together the scattered history of the Koryoin onto the canvas of Gwangju. 🇰🇷



Artist Moon Viktor’s representative work “Migrant Train Flying Through the Sky” is seen on the exterior wall of the second floor of the Koryoin Comprehensive Support Center within Gwangju’s Koryoin Village on Jan. 12. This piece embodies the aspirations of the Koryo-in people soaring freely through the sky after passing through the deep historical tunnel of forced relocation in 1937.

‘A night united through music’; overseas Korean artists take stage in their homeland

‘2026 Korean Festival’ held free of charge at Seoul’s Sky Art Hall on Jan. 13

The Overseas Koreans Agency hosted the “2026 Korean Festival, Tonghyang (同響) - Shared Resonance,” a stage where overseas Korean artists unite through music in their homeland.

The stage, held at 7 p.m. on Jan. 13 at the Sky Art Hall in Yeowon Culture Center, Gangseo Ward, Seoul, was prepared to foster mutual understanding and shared bonds between overseas Koreans and domestic citizens through the medium of culture and arts. The performance served as a cultural exchange venue where overseas Korean artists, active in different corners of the world, connected on one stage under the theme “Same Resonance.”

Performers included Edwin Kim, a Korean American pianist and music director; Chloe Kim, a Korean Australian drummer; and Grace Kelly, a Korean American jazz saxophonist. Joining them on stage was the Gwangju Koryoin Village Children’s Choir, composed of repatriated compatriot children, creating a moving performance that bridged generations.

Children of different nationalities and backgrounds filled the concert hall with a shared resonance that day. The Koryoin Village Children’s Choir took the stage in traditional Central Asian attire, performing a medley of children’s songs, “Our Language Education” and “Beautiful World” (lyrics and music by Park Hak-gi) from the Koryoin Village’s representative original musical, “I Am Koryo-in.”

The children’s voices, resonating in harmony with the conductor’s gestures, transcended the journey of migration and settlement, blending into a single chord. As the performance concluded, the audience erupted in a wave of heartfelt applause.

Founded in 2017, the children’s choir comprises descendants of Koryoin independence fighters, including children aged 4 and 5, as well as children of Koryoin from diverse backgrounds, such as Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Ukraine and Russia. Differences in language and culture became natural learning experiences during



A performance by the Gwangju Koryoin Village Children’s Choir

rehearsals. In the practice room where Korean and Russian languages mingled, the children became each other’s bridges, and music became the fastest common language to connect hearts.

“Though the children have different nationalities and backgrounds, they share the identity and pride of being ‘Koryoin’ through music,” said professor Cho Jeong-hee of Honam University, the choir’s director and conductor. “The moment they sing, the children’s expressions and voices change, and that transformation is the greatest reward of this activity.”

Alongside their performance activities, the Gwangju Koryoin Village Children’s Choir also serves as cultural ambassadors, promoting awareness of Koryoin Village and the history of the diaspora. In 2022, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs produced an online promotional video featuring the choir’s performance, introducing Korean culture and the story of the Koryoin community to the world.

OKA Commissioner Kim Kyung-hyup said, “This festival was organized to create an opportunity for the overseas Korean community and the motherland to grow closer through culture and the arts.” 

Koryoin youths build employment skills through hotel service training

40 Koryoin youths from Russia and CIS regions participate in one-month domestic vocational training in Jan.



The opening ceremony for the Overseas Koreans Agency's vocational training program is held Jan. 5 at the Korea Hotel Tourism Foundation in Ansan, Gyeonggi Province.

Young Koryoin residing in Russia and the CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States) regions participated in training to enhance their professional skills in their homeland, the Republic of Korea.

The Overseas Koreans Agency (Commissioner Kim Kyung-hyup) conducted a vocational training program from Jan. 5 to 30 for 40 young Koryoin (27 from overseas, 13 from Korea). This training was conducted for participants selected through an open recruitment process. The training institution was the Korea Hotel Tourism Education Foundation.

Participants were selected from countries that include Russia, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. They completed over 120 hours of practical training in various fields, such as Korean cuisine and baking, alongside approximately 80 hours of online and offline Korean language instruction.

Additionally, during the training period, participants receive hands-on hotel service education, including food and beverage service practice, at a hotel operated by the Education Foundation, and participate in traditional food culture programs, such as distilled liquor making and tea ceremony experiences. The program also includes historical and cultural experiences, such as visits to Gyeongbok Palace and Bulguk Temple.

This initiative aims to enhance the economic self-reliance capabilities of young Koryoin of Russian descent and strengthen their sense of solidarity with their homeland. It is the second customized program for this group, following an industrial training program in coding and industrial design conducted in June 2025.

The training program's opening ceremony was held Jan. 5 at the Korea Hotel & Tourism Education Foundation. Attendees included Chairman Yuk Kwang-sim, Dean Lee Won-young and OKA's Director of Russian Compatriots Lee Kyu-hyun.

"Food is a vessel that carries culture, possessing the power to connect people across borders and serving as an asset to introduce Korea to the host country," Dean Lee Won-young said. "I hope this one-month intensive training program will help trainees gain confidence and become a valuable, lifelong experience."

Meanwhile, the training institution, the Korea Hotel Tourism Education Foundation, is a specialized education organization in the hotel and tourism sector established in 1989. It operates the Korea Hotel Tourism College, the Korea Culture and Arts College, and the Embleton Hotel, providing practical training for professionals in the food, tourism and leisure industries. 

Supporting settlement preparations before return; full-scale pre-entry education under way

OKA discusses cooperation with IOM to support compatriots wishing to return to Korea

Overseas Koreans Agency Commissioner Kim Kyung-hyup met with International Organization for Migration (IOM) Deputy Director-General Lee Sung-ah on Jan. 8 to discuss pre-entry education and support measures for compatriots wishing to settle in Korea.

The IOM is a U.N.-mandated international organization in the field of migration, headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland, with offices in over 171 countries worldwide.

It carries out activities including: ▲ advising and consulting on government migration policies, ▲ identifying and supporting victims of human trafficking, ▲ supporting refugee resettlement, ▲ strengthening disaster response capabilities and ▲ improving awareness in the field of migration.



OKA Commissioner Kim Kyung-hyup (L) meets with IOM Deputy Director-General Lee Sung-ah.

This meeting coincided with Deputy Director Lee Sung-ah's tour of Asia and visit to Korea, marking the first time a Korean national has been appointed to a senior position at IOM.

Deputy Director Lee stated during the meeting, "Since 2005, IOM has worked closely with government ministries and public institutions through its Korea office," and proposed a pre-entry education program for repatriated compatriots, including Koryoin,

prior to their arrival in Korea.

In response, Commissioner Kim said, "Since 2025, the OKA has recognized the issue of insufficient information and the preparation needed in the pre-return stage of supporting the settlement of compatriots with foreign nationality in Korea," expressing his intention to actively accept the proposal.

'Specialized department to assist 860,000 returning compatriots settling in Korea'

OKA establishes Returning Compatriots Settlement Support Division; promoting education, talent attraction, rights enhancement

The Overseas Koreans Agency has established a new Returning Compatriots Settlement Support Division to help compatriots who have lived overseas and returned to Korea settle stably into our society.

Currently, approximately 860,000 returning compatriots reside in Korea. While they share language, culture and ethnic identity with our citizens, they have faced difficulties in their daily lives and settlement process due to the lack of a dedicated department to support them.

The OKA began supporting returning compatriots last April through the temporary Domestic Compatriot Support Task Force. However, as the number of returning compatriots continues to grow and support demands increase, it was determined that a dedicated



Overseas Koreans Agency Commissioner Kim Kyung-hyup (R) pushes a permanently returning Sakhalin compatriot in a wheelchair.

department was necessary.

The newly established Returning Compatriots Settlement Support Division will pursue the following tasks: ▲ supporting projects by local governments and private sector organizations, ▲ developing and operating settlement education programs tailored to the age and circumstances of compatriots, ▲ attracting and supporting the settlement of outstanding compatriot talent in Korea, ▲ conducting surveys and research related to repatriated compatriots in Korea,

and ▲ collaborating with relevant ministries and related agencies. Through this the OKA will carry out its national policy task and key priority of "strengthening support for repatriated compatriots in Korea."





Hangeul schools: the roots of our community

‘Student reporters’ report from the field and open the future

Hangeul schools transcend being mere institutions for teaching the mother tongue. They serve as an “emotional cradle” and “birthplace of identity,” providing an embrace amid the alienation and identity confusion children experience in immigrant communities while fostering pride in being Korean. This is precisely why improving the quality of Hangeul schools has been highlighted as a core task in overseas Korean policies since the launch of the Overseas Koreans Agency. Hangeul schools anchor our children’s identity and become the sails propelling them toward the future.

Over the past 123 years of Korean immigration history in the U.S., our overseas community has grown remarkably. Yet behind the dazzling statistics, a lingering challenge remains in the corner of our hearts: the issue of establishing the next generation’s identity. Having spent 28 years as a public school teacher on weekdays and a Hangeul school principal on weekends, I have witnessed firsthand that Hangeul schools must never remain mere “language education institutions.”

Amid these pressing demands of our times, expectations for the launch of the OKA are higher than ever. I firmly believe the core of this policy must lie in achieving a qualitative leap for Hangeul schools. It is now time to expand the concept beyond mere language acquisition to encompass Korean history, culture and spirit, transforming them into Korean schools.

I hope the launch of the OKA transcends the passive concept of merely “supporting second-generation education” and transforms into a “future investment” aimed at building the nation’s capabilities. The fact that children speak Korean fluently and cherish their homeland is thanks to the heartfelt dedication of teachers who have worked tirelessly behind the scenes. However, we must now move beyond relying solely on individual dedication and instead contemplate innovative educational models that align with the trends of our times.

As a first step we are focusing on the Global Hangeul School Student Reporter Corps project. Recently, Hangeul schools from over 10 regions worldwide, including New York, New Jersey, Washington, D.C., the U.S. West Coast, China, Germany, France and Johannesburg in South Africa, came together for their first video



Hwang Hyun-joo,
principal of the Korean School
of New Jersey, U.S.

conference. The process of high school student reporters directly covering local news and producing newspapers in multiple languages (Korean, English, French, etc.) will be a valuable experience for the children to find their own voice. We are confident this newspaper will become a powerful network connecting the next generation of compatriots worldwide.

Structural educational innovation is also urgent. For instance, the proposal to operate a “joint campus” combining the New York, Long Island and New Jersey campuses could be a practical alternative to efficiently

allocate educational resources and strengthen specialized research capabilities. Securing expertise in second-generation education must be concretely achieved. However, for such innovation to materialize, the OKA must provide unstinting support from a purely educational perspective, free from partisan interests.

Furthermore, if the networks of overseas Korean businesspeople, women leaders and elected Korean American politicians managed by various government ministries are focused on next-generation education, the nation’s capabilities can naturally be passed on to the second and third generations. This is not only crucial as a long-term core initiative for the OKA but will also significantly aid Hangeul schools in achieving financial self-sufficiency.

Finally, I wish to emphasize unity in the overseas Korean community. Rather than creating new organizations due to individual differences in opinion, we should strengthen existing structures like the 40-year-old National Association of Korean Schools (NAKS) to adapt to the changed AI era. Division is not the right educational model to show our children.

Hangeul schools are the roots of the overseas Korean community. Only with deep roots can the tree stand firm, and only then can the flowers blooming from that tree spread their fragrance across the world. We hope the OKA, now in its third year, will deeply understand the changed environment and implement effective policies for the next generation.

The author will also dedicate their utmost effort to ensure the inaugural issue of the student reporter team’s newspaper, which shares children’s experiences and opens the future, is successfully published. 📖

* The contributor’s claims or opinions may differ from the position of the Overseas Koreans Agency.

Jan 5: Enrollment ceremony for domestic and overseas Koryoin youth vocational training

8: Meeting with IOM Deputy Director-General Lee Sung-ah

13: 'Korean Festival - Resonance: Same Sound' held

15: 'The origin of Taekwondo Hallyu' Master Lee Jun-gu selected as January Overseas Korean of the Month

26: OKA-Korea Economic Association forum on revitalizing the Korean economic sphere

OKA Announcements

'All your questions answered at a glance'; legal casebook for Sakhalin compatriots published

Practical Q&A focused on real-world cases ranging from permanent return to citizenship acquisition

The Overseas Koreans Agency has published the Sakhalin Compatriots Legal Consultation Q&A Casebook in both Korean and Russian to address various legal questions faced by Sakhalin compatriots returning to Korea permanently during their settlement process.

This casebook was compiled based on major cases actually received while operating a dedicated legal consultation window for Sakhalin Koreans. It provides easy-to-understand Q&A solutions for practical issues compatriots face during life in Korea, ranging from permanent return application methods to nationality acquisition, health insurance and housing support.

Key contents include clarifying that, regarding permanent return eligibility, if all children of first-generation compatriots have passed away, one grandchild (direct descendant) and their spouse may accompany them for return. It specifically guides that even a maternal grandchild can be eligible if documentation proving the child's death is provided.

It also provides detailed guidance on the document preparation process, which compatriots find the most challenging. For cases where discrepancies in birth dates between Russian and Korean records make identity verification difficult, it suggests solutions, such as obtaining an identity verification certificate or correcting the family register. It also emphasizes practical considerations, such as the fact that documents proving relationships, like a son's birth certificate, do not need to be reissued when reapplying for permanent return, but the spouse's marriage certificate must be a recent copy issued within the last three months.

Regarding nationality acquisition, it clearly states that while first- and second-generation Sakhalin Koreans can maintain dual nationality through nationality determination, third-generation



Cover of the Sakhalin Compatriots Legal Consultation Q&A Casebook

individuals must undergo naturalization procedures. It also gives significant weight to questions frequently asked during actual consultations, such as the fact that freedom of departure is allowed even during the nationality determination review period (approximately four to seven months).

Information on domestic living support systems was also significantly expanded. For health insurance, eligibility is maintained for stays abroad within one month but is lost if the stay exceeds one month, requiring re-enrollment upon re-entry. Regarding housing issues, the OKA introduced the relief measures currently under discussion with relevant agencies for compatriots facing difficulties renewing rental housing contracts due to delayed nationality acquisition.

The OKA plans to make this casebook available for anyone to view through its website and other channels.

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From Idea to Economy

모두의 아이디어

2024.7 ~ 2026.12

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