

# **Current Policies and Development Strategies for Overseas Koreans:**

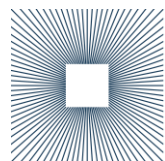
**Focusing on Koryo-saram in Central Asia**

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## **Abstract**

This paper examines the role of Koryo-saram (ethnic Koreans in Central Asia) within South Korea's K-Silk Road Initiative, highlighting their historical and cultural significance as transnational actors. It explores the socio-economic challenges faced by Koryo-saram, including disparities in overseas Korean policies, educational barriers, and limited financial support, which are exacerbated by nationalistic frameworks in policymaking. The analysis critiques South Korea's overseas Korean policies for their focus on homogeneity and identity reinforcement while neglecting the unique circumstances of diaspora communities.

Furthermore, it proposes comprehensive strategies for inclusivity, including scholarship reforms, tailored visa policies, and programs emphasizing cultural exchange and global citizenship. The paper advocates transitioning from a possessive nationalistic approach to one rooted in diversity and humanitarianism, leveraging the potential of Koryo-saram to enhance Korea's engagement with Central Asia and fulfill the K-Silk Road Initiative's objectives. By fostering inclusive policies, South Korea can strengthen its global leadership and deepen relations with Central Asia through the active participation of Koryo-saram.



## 1. Introduction: K-Silk Road Initiative and Koryo-Saram

South Korea's strategic cooperation with Central Asia has evolved in response to shifting global dynamics. Global conflicts, such as the Ukraine war and Middle East crises, have heightened Central Asia's socio-economic and strategic significance for South Korea. Consequently, Central Asia has emerged as a focal point due to its geopolitical role as a bridge connecting Europe and Asia, a strategic security hub for the Middle East and the Mediterranean, and its geoeconomic significance as a center for natural resources, energy networks, and Eurasian transportation and logistics.<sup>1</sup>

Regarding this, the K-Silk Road Initiative was issued in June 2024 by the government of the Republic of Korea. The K-Silk Road Initiative is South Korea's first diplomatic strategy specifically focused on Central Asia, developed to enhance South Korea's political and social influence within the region and to solidify partnerships with Central Asian nations amidst evolving global dynamics. Additionally, the K-Silk Road initiative upholds three core principles: "*Companionship*," "*Integration*," and "*Innovation*." This initiative prioritizes cooperation in energy and resources (oil, natural gas, minerals), mutual development assistance, and cultural exchange.

President Yoon Suk Yeol of the Republic of Korea undertook an official visit from June 10 to June 15, 2024, to Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan, aiming to lay the groundwork

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<sup>1</sup> **Park, Jae-chun.** "Future Directions for Korea-Central Asia Cooperation in a Global Transition." The Korea Foundation, December 11, 2023. Accessed [November 2, 2024]. <https://www.kf.or.kr/korcen/na/ntt/selectNttInfo.do?mi=1340&bbsId=1107&nttSn=122093>.



for enhanced cooperation with each nation's leaders.<sup>2</sup> Especially, on June 14, 2024, South Korea and Uzbekistan held a summit meeting and signed 17 agreements to usher in a "new era of cooperation in advanced technologies and innovation." These agreements encompass diverse fields such as enhancing public sector capacity, cultural exchange, transportation, and the modernization of district heating systems.

Furthermore, they include cooperation in agriculture and the training of skilled professionals. Notably, agreements were reached regarding the purchase and supply of high-speed electric trains in collaboration with the Export-Import Bank of Korea and Hyundai Rotem Company. The total investment commitments amount to \$9.6 billion.<sup>3</sup>

Consequently, tangible implementation and a detailed approach to collaboration in economic and cultural spheres are essential. Accordingly, the role of Koryo-saram, the migrants from Korean Peninsula to Central Asia, as a bridge linking South Korea and Central Asia is significantly crucial. The local networks and transnational cultural experiences of Koryo-saram can serve as valuable assets for South Korea's expansion into and adaptation within Central Asia.

By definition, Koryo-saram are ethnic Koreans primarily residing in former Soviet states,

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<sup>2</sup> **Korea Policy Briefing.** "President Yoon's Visit to Three Central Asian Countries: Advancing the K-Silk Road Initiative." June 10, 2024. Accessed [November 2, 2024]. <https://www.korea.kr/news/policyNewsView.do?newsId=148930045#policyNews>.

<sup>3</sup> **Korea Institute for International Economic Policy.** "[Monthly Political Trends] Korean President's Visit to Central Asia: Enhancing Korea-Central Asia Relations." *EMERiCS*, July 31, 2024. Accessed [November 2, 2024]. <https://www.kiep.go.kr/aif/issueDetail.es?brdctNo=369133&mid=a10200000000>.



including Russia, who predominantly speak Russian as their native language.<sup>4</sup> Koryo-Saram began migrating to Russia as early as the 1860s, and in the 1930s, they were forcibly relocated by the Soviet government to Central Asia, where they were collectively resettled in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. Accurate statistics on the population of Koryo-saram residing in Russia and the CIS region are currently unavailable. However, according to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea, approximately 300,000 ethnic Koreans live in Russia and Central Asia. Specifically, around 174,000 reside in Uzbekistan, 110,000 in Kazakhstan, 17,000 in Kyrgyzstan, 1,000 in Turkmenistan, and 700 in Tajikistan. Given that nearly 50% of the Koryo-saram residing in Central Asia live in Uzbekistan, they can play a pivotal role in the establishment of the Korea-Uzbekistan K-Silk Road Initiative.

Supporting Koryo-saram can pave the way for exploring new strategies to strengthen Korea-Uzbekistan cooperation. However, despite their potential to act as a socio-economic and cultural bridge, South Korea's current policies remain inadequate in addressing the unique challenges faced by Koryo-saram. For example, current policies in South Korea regarding Koryo-saram, including scholarship programs and cultural promotion initiatives, are insufficient in both quantitative and qualitative terms, reflecting elements of nationalism. Moreover, disparities among existing policies for overseas Koreans raise concerns about potential inequalities in their implementation.

In response, this article analyzes the social conditions of Koryo-saram and identifies shortcomings in relevant policies, offering concrete recommendations to address these issues.

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<sup>4</sup> **Academy of Korean Studies.** "Koryo-saram (高麗人)." *Encyclopedia of Korean Culture*. Accessed [November 5, 2024]. <https://encykorea.aks.ac.kr/Article/E0072273>.



Furthermore, it seeks to integrate these recommendations into the current framework of Korea's K-Silk Road Initiative and proposes strategies to position Koryo-saram as key actors in the initiative's implementation, facilitating Uzbek-Korea relations from multiple perspectives.

## 2. The Socioeconomic and Political Potential of Koryo-Saram

Koryo-Saram, ethnic Koreans residing in CIS countries and Russia, have developed a distinct identity that integrates elements of Soviet, CIS, and traditional Korean culture. For example, in the sociocultural context, Koryo-saram in Uzbekistan celebrate traditional Korean holidays such as Chuseok, Dano, and Hansik by visiting ancestral graves, maintaining Korean customs. They also actively participate in celebrating Novy God (НОВЫЙ ГОД), the largest holiday in the Eurasian region, alongside diverse ethnic communities.<sup>5</sup>

In terms of food culture, the dietary practices of Uzbek Koryo-saram exhibit a fusion of Uzbek and Russian influences, such as the combination of bread, meat, and vegetables (e.g., carrot salad), with elements of Korean cuisine. This reflects a unique blending of cultural identities. Additionally, their dining tables are consistently accompanied by tea, showcasing a transnational characteristic that bridges different culinary traditions.<sup>6</sup>

Their role as socio-political actors has become increasingly significant, particularly as they

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<sup>5</sup> **Kwon, Kyung-hwan.** "Cultural Studies of the Koryoin in Uzbekistan: Focusing on Holiday Culture." *Slavic Studies* 36, no. 4 (2020): 143–165.

<https://doi.org/10.17840/irsprs.2020.36.4.006>.

<sup>6</sup> **Kwon, Kyung-hwan.** "A Study on the Identity of Koryoin in Eurasia: Focusing on the Food Culture of Koryoin in Uzbekistan." *The Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 13, no. 3 (June 30, 2022): 615.



serve as a bridge between South Korea and the CIS region. Many Koryo-saram hold influential positions in politics, business, and social spheres, enabling them to facilitate cooperation and understanding between these regions. This unique positioning makes them valuable contributors to initiatives such as the K-Silk Road, as their local knowledge and networks enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of such transnational endeavors.

Under the former Soviet regime, Koryo-saram were more actively represented in high-ranking positions compared to today, serving as government officials (such as deputy ministers and ministers), researchers, business leaders, heads of educational institutions, and directors of scientific organizations. For instance, notable individuals such as Kim E.H., Secretary-General of Uz Auto Sano at Trans; Tyo V.I., Secretary-General of Uz Trans Gas; and Tyan V.N., Secretary-General of Uzbekistan Airways, have emerged as prominent figures. Furthermore, from the late 1940s to the 1970s, approximately 200 Koryo-saram in Uzbekistan were honored with the title "Heroes of Socialist Labor" by the state for their exceptional achievements in the agricultural sector.<sup>7</sup>

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the rise of nationalist policies in Central Asian countries reduced the Koryo-saram community's influence in the labor market and eroded their social standing. Combined with economic liberalization, these changes led to the outflow of Koryo-saram from both the national economic sphere and the private sector, prompting migration to Russia, as well as to the United States, Canada, Europe, and South Korea.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> **Khan, Valeriy.** "Koreans in Soviet and Post-Soviet Central Asia: Adaptation, Social Status, and Achievements." *Journal of Diaspora Studies* 5, no. 2 (2011): 153–171.

<sup>8</sup> **Khan, Valeriy.** "Koreans in Soviet and Post-Soviet Central Asia: Adaptation, Social Status, and Achievements." *Journal of Diaspora Studies* 5, no. 2 (2011): 153–171.



Nevertheless, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, a small number of entrepreneurs and scholars-turned-politicians who understood the dynamics of capitalism and industrial structures emerged in CIS countries, allowing the continuity of Koryo-saram representation in high-ranking positions.<sup>9</sup> Plus, Koryo-saram in Uzbekistan have played a pivotal role in fostering relationships that attract South Korean companies to the region and facilitate their successful adaptation.<sup>10</sup>

The development of energy and resource sectors in CIS countries such as Russia, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan is primarily government-led.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, South Koreans should cultivate strong relationship with Koryo-saram politicians, leveraging their extensive political and social networks as well as their deep regional expertise. South Koreans should establish close relationships with them to thoroughly understand and strategize within the internal dynamics of Central Asian projects—particularly in the areas of mineral and gas resources, in addition to cultural exchanges.

For this reason, to further activate and strengthen mineral and resource cooperation under the K-Silk Road Initiative, the South Korean government should implement academic and legislative programs, such as supportive visa policy for overseas Koreans, to support the Koryo-saram community, which has faced restricted opportunities in politics and society since

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<sup>9</sup> **Sung, Dong-ki.** "The Actual Conditions of the Entry into Politics of the Koryo Saram in the CIS and Its Correlation with Resource Diplomacy." *Studies on Overseas Koreans* 19 (February 25, 2009): 53–86.

<sup>10</sup> **Khan, Valeriy.** "Koreans in Soviet and Post-Soviet Central Asia: Adaptation, Social Status, and Achievements." *Journal of Diaspora Studies* 5, no. 2 (2011): 153–171.

<sup>11</sup> **Sung, Dong-ki.** "The Actual Conditions of the Entry into Politics of the Koryo Saram in the CIS and Its Correlation with Resource Diplomacy." *Studies on Overseas Koreans* 19 (February 25, 2009): 53–86.



the Soviet Union's collapse. This support should extend to the next generation of Koryo-saram, enabling them to advance more readily into Central Asia's political and academic spheres. However, the South Korean government's support for the next generation of Koryo-saram remains insufficient.

### **3. Overseas Korean Policy: Socio-economic Disparity**

As of 2023, the current Korean diaspora population numbers 7.08 million. When viewed in comparison to South Korea's domestic population of approximately 50 million, overseas Koreans represent around 14%, underscoring why the South Korean government aims to establish overseas Koreans as a foundation for political, economic, and cultural exchanges abroad.

By supporting overseas Koreans who are deeply integrated into various industries, businesses, and sociocultural spheres worldwide, South Korea seeks to expand its economic and political influence. Therefore, the South Korean government seeks to implement various support policies for overseas Koreans, including Koryo-saram. However, policies specifically targeting Koryo-saram remain insufficient.

In July 2024, the Overseas Koreans Agency in South Korea recruited 35 young Koryo-saram participants for the "*Understanding Korea Program*." This five-week program provided selected Koryo-saram youth with Korean language classes and cultural and historical experiences. While the program covered all educational costs, accommodation, and travel insurance, only 70% of airfare was subsidized.<sup>12</sup> However, most of the Overseas Koreans

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<sup>12</sup> **Overseas Koreans Agency.** "Recruitment Announcement for the 'Understanding Korea



Agency's policies encompass both Koryo-saram and other overseas Koreans, generally offering relatively better benefits. For instance, the "*2024 Overseas Koreans Invitation Scholarship Program*" selected 100 overseas Koreans, providing them with a monthly stipend of 950,000 KRW (Approximately 730.77 dollars, Rate: 1\$=1300 KRW) and round-trip airfare to support their studies in South Korea.<sup>13</sup> Notably, the scholarship application form requires applicants to provide details such as "academic background and grades," "thesis and publication titles," and "special skills."

However, overseas Korean students come from diverse economic backgrounds based on their country's socio-economic conditions, and educational disparities between countries can disadvantage some applicants. For example, overseas Koreans residing in advanced Western nations often have significantly higher incomes compared to Koryo-saram residing in the CIS countries and Russia, leading to notable differences in access to educational opportunities and experiences.

For instance, in 2024, Uzbekistan—the CIS country with the largest Koryo-saram population—had a Gross National Income (GNI) per capita by Atlas method of \$2,360. In contrast, the GNI of the United States, where the majority of overseas Koreans reside, was

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Program' for Young Koryo-saram Youth." May 8, 2024. Accessed [November 8, 2024].  
[https://oka.go.kr/oka/news/notice/?boardId=bbs\\_0000000000000014&mode=view&cntId=43&category=&pageIdx=](https://oka.go.kr/oka/news/notice/?boardId=bbs_0000000000000014&mode=view&cntId=43&category=&pageIdx=).

<sup>13</sup> **Overseas Koreans Agency.** "Invitation of Overseas Korean Scholarship Students, 2024." March 11, 2024. Accessed [December 1, 2024].  
[https://oka.go.kr/oka/news/notice/?boardId=bbs\\_0000000000000014&mode=view&cntId=33&category=&pageIdx=](https://oka.go.kr/oka/news/notice/?boardId=bbs_0000000000000014&mode=view&cntId=33&category=&pageIdx=).

\$80,300 in 2023,<sup>14</sup> more than 34 times higher. This economic disparity is able to affect education investments both on a national scale and within individual households. A student from a well-resourced family with access to quality educational environments (such as scholarship programs) who gains admission to an Ivy League school is more likely to be selected as a scholarship recipient compared to a student from a low- or middle-income household attending an average institution.

Additionally, since Uzbekistan's independence, the rise of Uzbek nationalism and the discontinuation of free education have further strained the economic situation of Koryo-saram families. Consequently, university enrollment rates among Koryo-saram have declined, and securing well-paying jobs has become more challenging.<sup>15</sup> This indicates that there are qualitative educational disparities among overseas Korean students.

Consequently, it is essential to consider the diverse economic conditions and educational environments of overseas Koreans and introduce a special quota system for Koryo-saram, along with a dedicated scholarship invitation program. Such measures would help bridge the economic and educational opportunity gaps resulting from their unique national and social backgrounds. Additionally, these programs would strengthen relations between Koryo-saram, South Korea, and their resident countries, fostering a sense of belonging among Koryo-saram as part of a shared historical community with Korea.

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<sup>14</sup> **World Bank.** "GNI Per Capita, Atlas Method (Current US\$)." Accessed [December 1, 2024]. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GNP.PCAP.CD>.

<sup>15</sup> **Sung, Dong-ki.** "Analysis and Prospect of Educational Status of Uzbek-Korean High School Students in Uzbekistan." *Studies on Overseas Koreans* 42 (June 30, 2017): 95–134.



#### 4. Lack of Financial Supports for Koryo-saram Community

In 2023, the South Korean National Assembly allocated a government subsidy of 500 million KRW (385,000 USD) to commemorate the 160th anniversary of Koryo-saram migration, with 200 million KRW (154,000 USD) designated for domestic projects and 300 million KRW (231,000 USD) for projects in the Primorsky Krai (Yeonhaeju). Subsequently, on February 13, the organizing committee submitted a project proposal to the Overseas Koreans Agency.

However, on July 3, the Overseas Koreans Agency finalized the domestic project budget at 68.2 million KRW (50 million for the commemoration project, 13.2 million for the forum, and 5 million for a diaspora photo exhibition) that is 52.5 thousand dollars USD, which was less than half of the initial request. For international projects, budget allocation from the Korean Ministry of Economy and Finance was delayed due to shifts in the international situation, particularly in Russia-Ukraine War, and the inability to use the "e-Naradom" system abroad.<sup>16</sup> Consequently, the scale of domestic and international commemorative projects has been reduced, with some projects even canceled.

Considering this, it is crucial to establish a process to clearly set and announce support amounts for publicly funded projects related to Koryo-saram support, as well as to provide advance notice of the full budget utilization plan. Furthermore, active collaboration between government ministries, NGOs, and civic organizations is essential to successfully implement these projects.

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<sup>16</sup> **eKoreaWorld**. "Emergency Countermeasures Meeting Held for the Halved Budget of the 160th Anniversary of Koryo-saram Migration." July 10, 2024; updated July 11, 2024. Accessed [December 1, 2024]. <https://www.ekw.co.kr/news/articleView.html?idxno=11723>.



## 5. Nationalism in Overseas Korean Policy

Meanwhile, the nationalist orientation of South Korea's overseas Korean policies also reveals certain limitations. Current policies primarily focus on strengthening Korean ethnic identity. For example, the Overseas Koreans Agency's announcement for the 26th Overseas Koreans Literature Award in 2024 states that the award aims to reinforce the Korean identity among overseas Koreans and to enhance mutual understanding between overseas Koreans and Korean nationals. Notably, in the essay and memoir categories, one of the designated topics is *“experiences of feeling a sense of identity and pride as a Korean within the local society of the host country.”*<sup>17</sup>

Overseas Koreans have particularly adapted their identities according to the societal, political, and cultural factors of each country. Consequently, although the first generation of overseas Koreans maintains a Korean identity, that identity among future generations of overseas Koreans is naturally bound to dilute as they integrate into their local societies. This means that their language, culture, mindset, and national identity are inevitably shaped by their country of birth and residence. Especially, as the generations of Koryo-Saram progress from the first generation to later ones, there has been a noticeable loss in their proficiency in the Korean language.

Thus, linguistic homogeneity within society is connected to the spiritual culture of the host society. The spiritual culture that influences Koryo-Saram, including music, films, and

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<sup>17</sup> **Overseas Koreans Agency.** "26th Overseas Korean Literature Award Contest." May 27, 2024. Accessed [December 5, 2024]. [https://oka.go.kr/oka/news/notice/?boardId=bbs\\_0000000000000014&mode=view&cntId=47&category=&pageIdx=](https://oka.go.kr/oka/news/notice/?boardId=bbs_0000000000000014&mode=view&cntId=47&category=&pageIdx=).

literature, is closely tied to that of Russia and CIS countries. Additionally, their names follow the naming conventions commonly used in CIS countries.<sup>18</sup> Accordingly, it is clear that they have the identity of their country of birth and residence. Similar to this, identity is fluid, and an individual's values and identity can fluctuate significantly depending on their place of residence within a country, social environment, and affiliated groups.

However, an overseas Koreans policy in the Republic of Korea mainly focuses on enforcing an ideology of “*Hanminjok*”, a word calling Korean ethnicity sharing homogeneous blood, identity, culture and thoughts. For instance, in the overview of overseas Korean policy, among the part of a basic direction for overseas Koreans policy from Overseas Korean Agency under South Korean Government, they indicate “*enforcing a bond with South Korea, cultivating an identity as Korean.*” And they make a lot of events regarding supporting future generation overseas Koreans, always stressing the event’s purpose is to enforce “The Pride of Korean”<sup>19</sup>

### Overseas Koreans Budget Allocation (2024)

Project Name	Details	Cost (Exchange rate: 1 USD = 1,300 KRW)	Total Cost (Exchange rate: 1 USD = 1,300 KRW)
Fostering Korean Identity among Overseas Koreans	Strengthening the Capacity of Korean Language Schools	17.7 billion KRW (13.6 million dollars)	33 billion KRW (Approximately 25.4 million dollars)
	Training of Korean Language School Teachers	2.7 billion KRW (2.1 million dollars)	
	OKFriends Homecoming Teens &	7.7 billion	

<sup>18</sup> **Khan, Valeriy.** *Koryo-saram: Who Are We? In Russian Regional Overseas Korean Studies IV: Identity and Relationship with the Homeland.* Seoul: Sunin Publishing, 2019.

<sup>19</sup> **Overseas Korean Agency.** "Policy and Dedication Information." Accessed [December 5, 2024]. <https://oka.go.kr/oka/information/policy/dedication/>.



	Youth Camp (Homeland Study Program for Overseas Korean Youth)	KRW (5.9 million dollars)	
	Scholarship Program for Overseas Koreans	4.6 billion KRW (3.5 million dollars)	
	Promotion of Overseas Korean Identity and Status Enhancement	300 million KRW (0.2 million dollars)	
Establishing a Global Korean Network for the Mutual Growth of Overseas Koreans and the Homeland	Hosting of World Korean Business Convention	1.7 billion KRW (1.3 million dollars)	3 billion KRW (Approximately 2.3 million dollars)
	World Korean Leaders Convention	1 billion KRW (0.8 million dollars)	
	Overseas Korean Youth Internship Program	300 million KRW (0.2 million dollars)	
Embracing Overseas Koreans and Supporting Vulnerable Korean Communities	Support for Overseas Koreans	800 million KRW (0.6 million dollars)	840 million KRW (Approximately 0.7 million dollars)
	Support for Vulnerable Overseas Koreans in Overseas Crises and Accidents	40 million KRW (30 thousand dollars)	
Establishing a Digital Consular Service System and Expanding Consular Services	Establishment and Operation of the Overseas Koreans Certification Center (Digitalization)	4.3 billion KRW (3.3 million dollars)	12.4 billion KRW (Approximately 9.5 million dollars)
	Operation of Consular Information System at Overseas Missions (Digitalization)	4.7 billion KRW (3.6 million dollars)	
	Establishment of Apostille Platform (Digitalization)	1.2 billion KRW (0.9 million dollars)	
	Operation of Overseas Koreans Service Support Center	2.2 billion KRW (1.7 million dollars)	

**Note:** Data retrieved from Overseas Koreans Agency, 2024.

([https://oka.go.kr/board/file/bbs\\_0000000000000008/51/FILE\\_00000000000533/2023122717053145624](https://oka.go.kr/board/file/bbs_0000000000000008/51/FILE_00000000000533/2023122717053145624))

The 2024 budget allocation of the Overseas Koreans Agency reveals a significant disparity



in funding priorities. The largest allocation of 33 billion KRW (approximately 25.4 million dollars) was dedicated to the “Fostering Korean Identity among Overseas Koreans” program. This is followed by allocations of 12.4 billion KRW (approximately 9.5 million dollars) for “Establishing a Digital Consular Service System and Expanding Consular Services,” 3 billion KRW (approximately 2.3 million dollars) for “Establishing a Global Korean Network for the Mutual Growth of Overseas Koreans and the Homeland,” and only 840 million KRW (approximately 0.7 million dollars) for “Embracing Overseas Koreans and Supporting Vulnerable Korean Communities.” This distribution indicates that the Overseas Koreans Agency allocates 39.3 times more funding to identity programs than to vulnerable overseas Koreans.

This emphasis on strengthening Korean identity reflects a nationalistic orientation in policy, potentially overlooking the individual and diverse identities of overseas Koreans. The approach tends to categorize all overseas Koreans under the homogeneous label of "Korean ethnicity," which can be seen as a form of ideological control rather than inclusive policymaking. Overseas Koreans, particularly those residing in the CIS, Russia, the United States, Latin America, and China, have, over several generations, assimilated into their host societies and developed cultural identities that align more closely with their resident countries. Thus, a policy that focuses solely on reinforcing ethnic Korean identity could be perceived as a narrow, ethnocentric perspective driven by nationalistic goals.

According to a survey conducted among Koryo-saram residing in Gyeonggi Province, many identify themselves as foreigners despite being part of the local community. The survey revealed that Koryo-saram’s housing situations are largely unstable, with the majority living in “monthly rentals with a deposit” (84.7%), followed by “monthly rentals without a deposit”



(7.8%), “rent-free accommodations” (4.0%), “long-term rental” (2.3%), and “home ownership” (1.3%) (Gyeonggi Family & Women Research Institute, 2019).<sup>20</sup>

These findings suggest that current policies focusing on cultural experiences and the reinforcement of Korean identity may not adequately address the real needs of Koryo-saram and other overseas Koreans. Instead, there is a remarkable need to understand their lived realities, cultural identities, and socio-economic conditions. Rather than prioritizing cultural assimilation, it would be more effective to implement policies that consider the diverse identities and circumstances of overseas Koreans, ensuring more comprehensive support that aligns with their actual needs.

Accordingly, there is a pressing need to significantly expand support for vulnerable overseas Koreans, including the Koryo-saram community. This support should shift towards a more humanitarian approach, grounded in the recognition of a shared historical memory. It is essential to move beyond viewing Koryo-saram merely as “ethnic Koreans abroad.” Instead, policies should incorporate a deeper understanding of their historical background, social conditions, and the identities formed by subsequent generations based on their unique circumstances. Rather than adopting a narrow, Korea-centric perspective, it is crucial to embrace a global citizenship education approach that acknowledges the diverse realities of Koryo-saram.

On this foundation, efforts should be made to broaden social awareness and address the linguistic challenges faced by Koryo-saram. This includes providing free Korean language

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<sup>20</sup> **Gyeongido Family and Women Research Institute.** "Settlement and Living Conditions of Koryo-saram Residing in Gyeonggi Province." Policy Report 2019-21.

education tailored to different economic levels, enabling their fuller integration into both Korean society and the broader international community.

## 6. Discrimination on a Visa Categories amongst Overseas Koreans

The South Korean government restricts the issuance of F-4 visas to overseas Koreans (Koryo-saram) under the age of 60 from 11 Central Asian countries, including Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, excluding Russia. This policy stems from concerns over a high number of undocumented immigrants originating from certain countries, such as Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. Consequently, overseas Koreans from Central Asia must present either a bachelor's degree or a technical qualification officially recognized by the South Korean government to obtain an F-4 visa.<sup>21</sup>

The F-4 visa allows foreign nationals of Korean descent to engage in professional occupations in Korea. However, it prohibits employment in unskilled labor positions, such as construction work, mining, food delivery, or cleaning.<sup>22</sup> The visa can be renewed every three years without restrictions on residency in South Korea. Nevertheless, Central Asian overseas Koreans, particularly those from Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, are required to meet higher eligibility criteria, such as holding a bachelor's degree or a certified technical qualification, to

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<sup>21</sup> **The Korea Economic Daily.** "24 Years Since the Enactment of the Overseas Koreans Act: Still Restricting Visas for Koryo-saram." September 4, 2023. Accessed [December 5, 2024]. <https://www.hankyung.com/article/202309040809Y>.

<sup>22</sup> **Ministry of Legislation, Republic of Korea.** "Eligibility Criteria for F-4 Visas for Overseas Koreans." October 15, 2024. Accessed [December 5, 2024]. [https://easylaw.go.kr/CSP/CnpClsMain.laf?popMenu=ov&csmSeq=1136&ccfNo=3&cciNo=2&cnpClsNo=2&menuType=cnpcls&search\\_put=](https://easylaw.go.kr/CSP/CnpClsMain.laf?popMenu=ov&csmSeq=1136&ccfNo=3&cciNo=2&cnpClsNo=2&menuType=cnpcls&search_put=).



be granted an F-4 visa.<sup>23</sup>

As a result, a significant number of Koryo-saram opt for the H-2 (Working Visit) visa to enter South Korea.<sup>24</sup> Unlike the F-4 visa, H-2 visa holders are permitted to work only in specific sectors designated by immigration law, such as manufacturing, agriculture, fisheries, and certain service industries, provided they are employed by special employers authorized under the program. Eligible manufacturing firms are limited to businesses with fewer than 300 regular employees or a capital base of 8 billion KRW or less.<sup>25</sup> Employment opportunities available to H-2 visa holders are thus confined to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which are characterized by low wages and short-term employment contracts, thereby limiting income generation.

According to Professor Lee Jin-young of Inha University, the H-2 visa is valid for a maximum of 4 years and 10 months, after which visa holders must return to their home country. Failure to secure a subsequent visa can lead to family separations or, in some cases, undocumented status in South Korea.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, employment data for H-2 visa holders in

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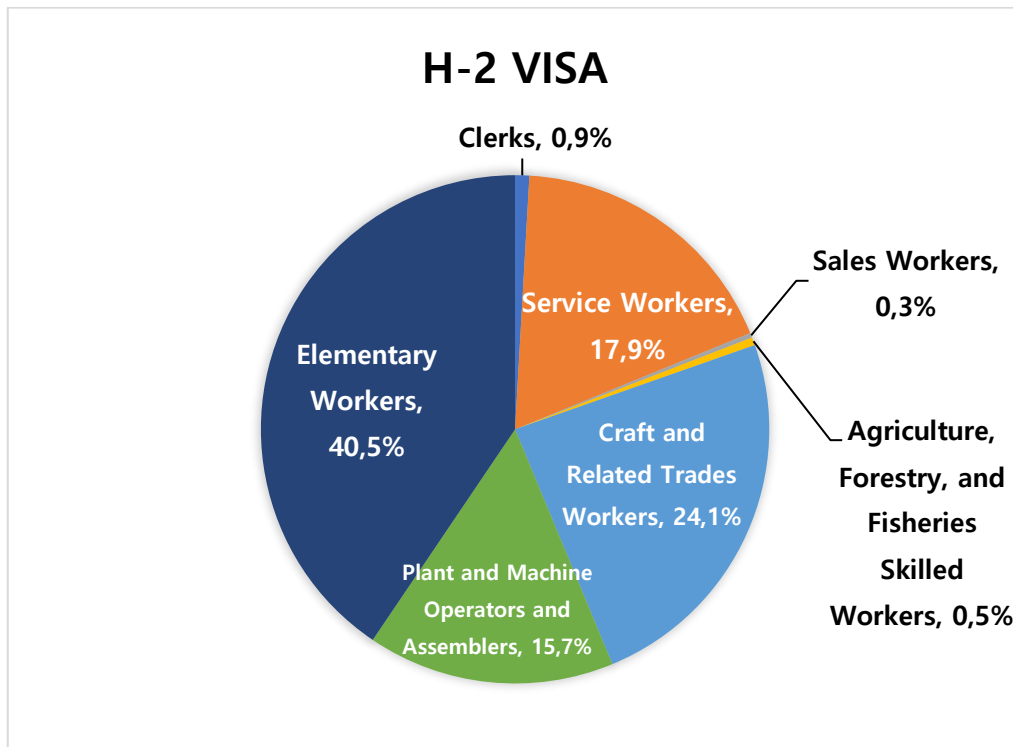
<sup>23</sup> **The Korea Economic Daily.** "24 Years Since the Enactment of the Overseas Koreans Act: Still Restricting Visas for Koryo-saram." September 4, 2023. Accessed [December 5, 2024]. <https://www.hankyung.com/article/202309040809Y>.

<sup>24</sup> **Kim, Sang-wook.** "'40% of Koryo-saram on Visit and Employment Visas... Unification under Overseas Korean Visa Needed.'" *Kore Ilbo*, October 22, 2024. Accessed [December 5, 2024]. <https://koreilbo.com/korean-news/-40-kore-saram/>.

<sup>25</sup> **Lee, Eun-jung.** "F4 and H2 Visa System for Overseas Koreans in Light of the Aricel Tragedy." *The Asia Business Daily*, June 26, 2024. Accessed [December 5, 2024]. <https://www.asiae.co.kr/article/2024062616174178792>.

<sup>26</sup> **The Korea Economic Daily.** "24 Years Since the Enactment of the Overseas Koreans Act:

South Korea reveals that 40.5% are engaged in unskilled labor, 24.1% work as skilled or related workers (e.g., in metal or construction), 15.7% operate machinery or assembly lines, 17.9% are employed in service occupations, and only 0.9% work in administrative roles.<sup>27</sup>



Data Retrieved from the Statistics Korea

As such, it can be inferred that over 80% of H-2 visa holders (elementary workers, craft workers, plant operators) are engaged in blue-collar jobs, highlighting that the majority of these individuals are employed in precarious labor environments. Consequently, it is reasonable to

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Still Restricting Visas for Koryo-saram." September 4, 2023. Accessed [December 5, 2024]. <https://www.hankyung.com/article/202309040809Y>.

<sup>27</sup> **Statistics Korea.** *2023 Immigrant Residence Status and Employment Survey Results: Living Conditions of Foreigners by Residence Status.* April 17, 2024, p. 8.

deduce that a significant portion of Koryo-saram holding H-2 visas is also working in blue-collar occupations.

As of October 2024, there are a total of 36,616 Uzbekistan-born Koryo-saram residing in South Korea (excluding permanent residents with F-5 visas), comprising both F-4 and H-2 visa holders. Among them, 7,856 individuals, or 21.5% of the total, hold H-2 visas.<sup>28</sup> This indicates that approximately one in five Uzbekistan-born Koryo-saram in South Korea are exposed to unstable working conditions.

According to a 2018 study by The Seoul Institute, a survey of 200 Koryo-saram residing in South Korea found that 70% reported a monthly income ranging from 1 million to 2 million KRW (Kim, 2018). In comparison, the average real monthly wage in South Korea in 2018 was 3,407,000 KRW,<sup>29</sup> meaning the average income of Koryo-saram was 1.7 times lower than the national average. This underscores the fact that Koryo-saram in South Korea are disproportionately exposed to low wages.

Since 2022, minor children of F-4 and H-2 visa holders are eligible to obtain F-4 visas upon entering South Korea, allowing visa holders to invite their children from Uzbekistan. Considering that F-4 visas are typically granted to individuals aged 60 and older in Central Asia, it can be inferred that F-4 visa holders among Koryo-saram in South Korea are

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<sup>28</sup> **Ministry of Justice, Republic of Korea.** "October 2024 Data on Foreigners Residing in Korea." November 20, 2024. Accessed [December 6, 2024].

<https://www.immigration.go.kr/immigration/1569/subview.do?enc=Zm5jdDF8QEB8>.

<sup>29</sup> **Statistics Korea.** "Monthly Average Wage (Real), Indicators of Quality of Life." Accessed [December 6, 2024]. <https://www.index.go.kr/unify/idx-info.do?idxCd=8085>.



predominantly elderly individuals or the minor children of Koryo-saram parents. According to the Migration & Training Centre (2023), among F-4 visa holders in South Korea, the proportion of individuals of working age (15–64 years) decreased from 86.7% in 2010 to 74.5% in 2023, while the proportion of those aged 65 and older increased from 11.2% to 23.3% over the same period.<sup>30</sup> This trend suggests an aging demographic among F-4 visa holders, leaving young Koryo-saram in their 20s and 30s outside the benefits of the F-4 visa system. As a result, these younger individuals are compelled to rely on H-2 visas, often leading them to work in blue-collar occupations.

Given that blue-collar jobs frequently involve construction and industrial work, young Koryo-saram with H-2 visas are at heightened risk of workplace accidents and industrial injuries. Additionally, the declining proportion of working-age individuals among F-4 visa holders implies a reduction in the number of Koryo-saram engaged in professional occupations. This underscores the need to relax the eligibility criteria for F-4 visas, expanding access not only to individuals aged 60 and older or minor children but also to young Koryo-saram in their 20s and 30s. Providing educational support and facilitating their entry into diverse professional fields would enable them to contribute meaningfully to the South Korean economy. Such policy improvements would help address the structural challenges faced by Koryo-saram and maximize their potential within South Korean society.

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<sup>30</sup> **Park, M., and Choi, S.** *Residence Status, Age, and Regional Distribution of Korean Diaspora Residing in Korea (2010–2023)*. Migration Research & Training Centre, April 2024. Accessed [December 6, 2024].  
[https://www.mrtc.re.kr/data/04.php?admin\\_mode=read&no=894&page=&make=&search=](https://www.mrtc.re.kr/data/04.php?admin_mode=read&no=894&page=&make=&search=).



## 7. Conclusion

This paper has examined the history and identity of Koryo-saram, their role in the K-Silk Road Initiative, their potential marginalization within the context of current overseas Korean policies, and the implications of nationalism.

Koryo-saram, who migrated to Russia and Central Asia between the mid-19th century and the 1930s, have developed a unique cultural identity that blends Russian, Central Asian, and Korean influences. They are well-positioned to serve as critical bridges in the K-Silk Road Initiative, which was announced in June 2024. However, current overseas Korean policies remain broadly defined and tend to treat the diaspora as a homogeneous group in perspective of nationalism, but even among this so-called homogeneous group, there are discriminant phenomenon from the program and visa for Overseas Korean. This overarching approach risks marginalizing Koryo-saram, who face economic and educational disadvantages due to their specific regional and national circumstances.

As discussed in Chapter 4, the “Overseas Koreans Invitation Scholarship Program” primarily targets overseas Korean students enrolled in, or planning to enroll in, South Korean universities. Most South Korean universities, especially prestigious ones in Seoul (such as Yonsei University, Korea University, and Sungkyunkwan University), operate special admission tracks for overseas Koreans.<sup>31</sup> However, these programs often favor applicants from affluent backgrounds, particularly those from English-speaking or high-income countries, who can

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<sup>31</sup> **Overseas Korean Education Portal.** "Recruitment Guidelines by University." Accessed [December 6, 2024]. [https://okep.moe.go.kr/board/list.do?board\\_manager\\_seq=16&menu\\_seq=22](https://okep.moe.go.kr/board/list.do?board_manager_seq=16&menu_seq=22).



afford the higher tuition costs. For instance, at Yonsei University's Underwood International College, the tuition for the first semester is 6,043,000 KRW (4656 USD), with subsequent semesters costing 5,848,000 KRW (4498 USD).<sup>32</sup> In contrast, as of the first half of 2024, the average monthly wage in Uzbekistan was 401 USD,<sup>33</sup> while the average monthly wage in Tashkent between June and September 2024 was approximately 673.27 USD.<sup>34</sup>

Given such economic disparities, overseas Koreans from developing countries face significant barriers in accessing prestigious private universities in South Korea. This economic divide perpetuates disparities in educational opportunities among overseas Korean students, with those from lower-income countries experiencing greater challenges in securing admission and scholarships.

On the other hands, nationalistic approach for Overseas Korean policy has a limitation, not realizing Overseas Korean's identity meticulously including Koryo-saram, provoking the gap between Korean society's perception to Koryo-saram and adaptation of Koryo saram when they come to Korea.

Additionally, the discrimination about visa policy consisting of H-2 and F-4 can worsen an

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<sup>32</sup> **Yonsei University.** *Tuition Fee Table for 2024 Academic Year.* Accessed [December 6, 2024].

[http://www.yonsei.kr/\\_common/jsp/download.jsp?path=/\\_res/sc/etc/&file=2024\\_fee1.pdf](http://www.yonsei.kr/_common/jsp/download.jsp?path=/_res/sc/etc/&file=2024_fee1.pdf).

<sup>33</sup> **Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Korea.** "[Economic Trends] [Uzbekistan] Economic and Industrial Trends (July 2024)." Accessed [December 6, 2024].  
[https://tls.mofa.go.kr/www/brd/m\\_4049/view.do?seq=369915&srchFr=&srchTo=&srchWord=&srchTp=&multi\\_itm\\_seq=0&itm\\_seq\\_1=0&itm\\_seq\\_2=0&mp;company\\_cd=&company\\_nm=](https://tls.mofa.go.kr/www/brd/m_4049/view.do?seq=369915&srchFr=&srchTo=&srchWord=&srchTp=&multi_itm_seq=0&itm_seq_1=0&itm_seq_2=0&mp;company_cd=&company_nm=).

<sup>34</sup> **Spot.** "Monthly Salary Report." October 25, 2024. Accessed [December 6, 2024].  
<https://www.spot.uz/ru/2024/10/25/monthly-salary/>.





economic gap between Koryo-saram in Cenral Asia and other countries' overseas Korean due to accessibility to Blue Collar job and white-collar job. And it deters social integration as a sincere meaning, polarizing each other's social and economic status.

Meanwhile, to successfully implement the K-Silk Road Initiative, fostering young and adolescent Koryo-saram (ethnic Koreans) is of paramount importance. Currently, the aging population among F-4 visa holders indicates a decline in the working-age population eligible for this visa category. Additionally, a significant proportion of young individuals entering Korea on H-2 visas are employed in unskilled labor positions. This highlights the need to secure a specialized talent pool for the K-Silk Road Initiative, particularly in areas such as cultural exchange and local resource and mineral industry research. Given the Koryo-saram community's close social and linguistic ties to Central Asia, providing targeted support for this group is essential to establishing a foundation for the initiative's success.

Accordingly, I suggest the recommendations regarding current policies to advance Koryo-saram policy including overseas Korean one holistically.



## **Policy Recommendations:**

### **1) Comprehensive Strategies for Supporting Koryo-saram and Overseas Koreans**

To accurately assess the actual and specific living standards of Koryo-saram (ethnic Koreans abroad) and establish policies that enable their access to substantive equality by addressing economic and social barriers, it is essential to conduct a comprehensive study on the income levels, occupational distribution, and educational attainment of Koryo-saram residing in South Korea and abroad, as well as other overseas Koreans by continent. This endeavor necessitates collaboration between governmental and non-governmental entities, such as the Association of Koryo-saram and agencies like the Overseas Koreans Agency and the Korean Statistical Information Service (KOSIS).

Non-governmental organizations and the Korea Koryo-saram Association, leveraging the human resources of associations, should focus on qualitative surveys, including in-depth studies of the challenges faced by Koryo-saram in choosing and maintaining occupations. Meanwhile, government institutions like the Overseas Koreans Agency and KOSIS should undertake quantitative surveys, such as income analyses of individuals holding H-2 or F-4 visas.

Additionally, a uniform approach to selecting beneficiaries for support programs and policies under the broad category of "overseas Koreans" may inadvertently foster discrimination against marginalized groups, deviating from the principle of true inclusivity for compatriots. To address this, selection processes should consider the circumstances of individuals' countries of origin, thereby lowering the barriers to accessing cultural and scholarship programs. Based on income level surveys and statistical analysis, quotas for program participation should be allocated by country and continent to ensure equity and achieve substantive equality.



Moreover, it is imperative to expand and diversify support programs for Koryo-saram. Currently, the Overseas Koreans Agency offers a "Korean Culture Understanding Program" for Koryo-saram, which is limited to programs held on university campuses in Korea.<sup>35</sup> To supplement these efforts, additional initiatives should include education on Korean culture, global citizenship, and regional cultural experiences. For example, subsidizing visits to cultural heritage sites such as Jeju Island, Bukchon Hanok Village in Seoul, and the Korean Folk Village could foster a deeper understanding and familiarity with Korean culture.

Regarding scholarship programs, extending beyond government-funded initiatives to include partnerships with private scholarship foundations, such as the Woori Multicultural Scholarship Foundation by Woori Bank and the Lotte Scholarship Foundation by Lotte Group, as well as large-scale Korean NGOs like World Vision and Good Neighbors, could significantly raise awareness of Koryo-saram issues among corporations, government, media, and the public while securing more resources.

To facilitate these efforts, the government should host joint seminars and academic forums in collaboration with corporations, the Koryo-saram Association, and the Overseas Koreans Agency. These events could provide platforms for academic presentations and discussions on social issues faced by Koryo-saram and other overseas Koreans, such as cultural adaptation difficulties and economic insecurity in South Korea. Such initiatives could raise awareness among professionals across various fields about the challenges facing overseas Koreans,

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<sup>35</sup> **Overseas Koreans Agency.** "Recruitment Announcement for the 'Understanding Korea Program' for Young Koryo-saram Youth." May 8, 2024. Accessed [December 6, 2024]. [https://oka.go.kr/oka/news/notice/?boardId=bbs\\_0000000000000014&mode=view&cntId=43&category=&pageIdx=](https://oka.go.kr/oka/news/notice/?boardId=bbs_0000000000000014&mode=view&cntId=43&category=&pageIdx=).



ultimately expanding the scale of educational support for Koryo-saram and other overseas Korean students, thus contributing to their access to educational equity.

## 2) Humanitarianism Support Measures

Current policies for overseas Koreans are predominantly rooted in nationalism, reflecting a lack of consideration for the diversity among these communities. This approach demonstrates a nationalistic tendency to homogenize identities without accounting for the unique characteristics of various overseas Korean groups, thereby limiting the potential for the development of policies targeting Koryo-saram specifically.

To overcome such nationalism and embrace identity diversity across different countries, it is imperative to adopt a transnational perspective grounded in the framework of Official Development Assistance (ODA). This approach should align with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs),<sup>36</sup> aiming to achieve global consciousness and foster the prosperity of the global human community. Policies for overseas Koreans, including Koryo-saram, should operate in a way that contributes to these goals while addressing broader issues of global cooperation and inclusivity.

Focusing on SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) can transform South Korea's policies for overseas Koreans from a narrow focus on supporting Koryo-saram as part of a historical ethnic collective to a broader emphasis on inclusivity within Korean society. This

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<sup>36</sup> **United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs.** "The 17 Sustainable Development Goals." Accessed [December 6, 2024]. <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>.



shift would expand the potential for ODA initiatives and contribute to the prosperity of the global community. Furthermore, it could serve as a foundation for South Korea's future K-Silk Road Initiative, promoting the inclusive support of Koryo-saram by embracing their cultural, ideological, and identity-based diversity. Through these efforts, South Korea could deepen its understanding of Central Asian cultures via Koryo-saram and lay the groundwork for enhanced Korea-Central Asia exchanges.

Collaboration among government agencies such as the Overseas Korean Agency, KOICA, and the Korea Foundation, alongside NGOs and domestic organizations like the Association of Koryo-Saram, is essential to diversify support measures for Koryo-saram. These measures should encompass cultural exchange, development cooperation through ODA, and broader support for overseas Koreans.

To achieve this, it is essential to establish and implement support projects for overseas Koreans and Koryo-saram based on a framework of leading indicators aligned with the SDGs. For instance, in targeting Koryo-saram with the aim of achieving SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), sub-target 10.3 (Ensure equal opportunity and reduce inequalities of outcome, including by eliminating discriminatory laws, policies, and practices and promoting appropriate legislation, policies, and actions in this regard) can be leveraged to address the inequalities they face. Additionally, sub-target 10.6 (Ensure enhanced representation and voice for developing countries in decision-making in global international economic and financial institutions) can serve as a basis for amplifying the voices of Koryo-saram in policy-making processes. By integrating these elements, it becomes possible to design policy programs and allocate budgets that enhance the specificity of humanitarian policies for Koryo-saram and reinforce the necessity of related legislative measures.



By implementing these strategies, South Korea can move beyond a nationalistic framework and create policies that support Koryo-saram as part of a broader global and regional context, enhancing inclusivity, cooperation, and cultural understanding.

Moreover, the budget allocation for the “Embracing Overseas Koreans and Supporting Vulnerable Korean Communities” section under the Overseas Koreans Agency must be increased, with additional subcategories introduced. Currently, this section is allocated approximately \$0.7 million, accounting for only 1.85% of the total 2024 budget for overseas Koreans’ support, which amounts to approximately \$37.9 million. This disparity highlights the relatively low proportion of support directed toward overseas Koreans residing in economically underprivileged developing countries compared to those in developed nations.

To achieve substantive economic and social equality among overseas Koreans, humanitarian support must be integrated into policy initiatives to align with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Specifically, targeting SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 4 (Quality Education), and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) can address educational and social inequalities through economic and educational support measures. For instance, providing free Korean language and cultural education (e.g., Korean cultural and global citizenship education), expanding access to textbooks, learning materials, and scholarships, would help to reduce disparities within overseas Korean communities. These measures would not only foster self-reliance among individuals in Koryo-saram and other overseas Korean communities but also mitigate inequalities within these groups, ultimately enhancing inclusivity for Koryo-saram within South Korean society.

Furthermore, showcasing South Korea’s commitment to humanitarian support on the global

stage would bolster the country's international reputation. Such efforts could position South Korea as a trusted and peace-oriented nation with a strong humanitarian focus in the global community.

Many studies have identified linguistic communication as a critical yet challenging factor for Koryo-saram in adapting to life in South Korea. (Seol, 2019; Kang, 2023; Hwang, 2024; Kang, 2024) To address this issue and transcend nationalistic narratives, Korean language education for Koryo-saram should not be framed as a necessity tied to shared bloodlines or residence in Korea. Instead, Korean should be promoted as an international foreign language of growing global significance.

According to the Korea Foundation, as of 2023, the number of members in Hallyu (Korean Wave) fan clubs worldwide reached 225 million. Additionally, as of June 2024, 17.7 million English-speaking users on the global language-learning app Duolingo were studying Korean, ranking it as the fourth most popular language after Spanish, French, and Japanese (Hankook Ilbo, 2024). Furthermore, the global popularity of Korean-language content, such as the Netflix series *Squid Game* and K-pop artists like BLACKPINK and BTS, underscores the rising significance of Korean as a transnational tool for cultural exchange and global communication.

Emphasizing the global utility of the Korean language can shift its perception from being the exclusive domain of ethnic Koreans to a medium for fostering cross-cultural exchange and global connectivity. Beyond mere linguistic communication, learning Korean offers opportunities for personal growth, broadening life perspectives, and creating career prospects. It also facilitates interconnected learning of other East Asian languages, such as Japanese and Chinese, which share linguistic similarities in their use of Sino-Korean vocabulary.



Highlighting these aspects underscores Korean as both a resource for individual development and a bridge to greater global engagement.

Introducing a TOPIK certification system and hosting Korean language competitions specifically for Koryo-saram could significantly enhance Korean language learning rates. In addition to the standard topics typically featured in Korean speaking competitions for foreigners, such as Korean culture, introducing themes related to international affairs and global cultural content (e.g., films, dramas, music) would simultaneously promote global citizenship and encourage Korean language learning.

Furthermore, efforts should be made to encourage Koryo-saram in Uzbekistan to prepare for the TOPIK exam and improve their access to Korean language education. For instance, adjusting tuition fees based on income levels or providing discounts for low-income individuals at Sejong Institutes and Korean Education Centers in Tashkent could greatly enhance the accessibility of Korean language education for economically disadvantaged Koryo-saram. These measures would not only foster greater participation in language learning but also contribute to broader educational and social inclusion within this community.

### **3) Strategies for Visa Integration**

In South Korea, there has been a growing call to integrate the F-4 and H-2 visas to reduce



discrimination among overseas Koreans.<sup>373839</sup> The Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Korea announced a new initiative titled the “New Immigration and Entry Policy Initiative” on September 26, 2024. This initiative aims to prepare for the era of over three million foreign residents in Korea by enhancing immigrant integration through the attraction of skilled talent, increased participation of local governments and the private sector, strengthened social integration, and the implementation of scientifically-based immigration management.<sup>40</sup>

In particular, the initiative seeks to address discrimination based on nationality by integrating visa categories and expanding employment eligibility. While the Ministry has yet to propose specific measures for integrating the F-4 and H-2 visa categories, the formal acknowledgment of the need to address visa-related disparities represents a significant step forward. Developing concrete plans for the integration of these visa categories remains a critical task moving forward.

The F-4 visa offers the advantage of allowing lifetime residency in Korea through renewal

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<sup>37</sup> **Kang, Seong-ho.** "When Integrating the F-4 Visa for Overseas Koreans, Employment Restrictions Must Be Completely Lifted." *Yonhap News Agency*. Accessed [December 6, 2024]. <https://www.yna.co.kr/view/AKR20241129127900371>.

<sup>38</sup> **Park, No-ja.** "[No-ja Park's Korea: Inside and Outside] Visit Family Visa: Another Form of Discrimination." *Hankyoreh*, December 13, 2023. Accessed [December 6, 2024]. <https://www.hani.co.kr/arti/opinion/column/1120160.html>.

<sup>39</sup> **eKoreaWorld.** "Ministry of Justice, Stop Discrimination Against Overseas Koreans!" August 27, 2021. Accessed [December 6, 2024]. <https://www.ekw.co.kr/news/articleView.html?idxno=10607>.

<sup>40</sup> **Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Korea.** “New Immigration and Entry Policy Initiative.” Last modified September 26, 2024. Accessed December 7, 2024. <https://www.moj.go.kr/moj/221/subview.do?enc=Zm5jdDF8QEB8JTJGYmJzJTJGbw9qJTJGMTgyJTJGNTg3OTE1JTJGYXJ0Y2xWaWV3LmRvJTNGcGFzc3dvcmQlM0QIMjZyZ3NCZ25kZVN0ciUzRCUyNmJic0NsU2VxJTNEJTI2cmdzRW5kZGVtdHllM0QIMjZpc1ZpZXdNaW5lJTNEZmFsc2UIMjZwYWdlJTNEZmFsc2UyNmJic09wZW5XcmRTZXEIM0QIMjZzcmNoQ29sdW1uJTNEJTI2c3JjaFdyZCUzRCUyNg%3D%3D>.



every three years. However, it has limitations, as holders are restricted from engaging in blue-collar or manual labor jobs. These shortcomings point to the necessity of integrating the F-4 and H-2 visas to enable Koryo-saram and other overseas Koreans to access diverse employment opportunities across multiple sectors.

To facilitate this integration, comprehensive statistical surveys and public disclosure of visa-related data for Koryo-saram are urgently required. While the KOSIS (Korean Statistical Information Service) provides general statistics on the number of overseas Koreans holding F-4 and H-2 visas, more granular data—such as the distribution of visa holders by nationality, age group, and occupational category—are not available. A full-scale survey, including data on visa holders from CIS countries, is essential for a detailed analysis of the visa system, which can provide the evidence needed to strengthen the case for policy reform.

Furthermore, academia, government organizations, and associations related to Koryo-saram should collaborate to organize public hearings and forums. These events would serve as platforms to present evidence and arguments for visa integration to policymakers and persuade legislators of its necessity. Strengthening cooperation among relevant institutions, including the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Overseas Koreans Agency, is also crucial to secure multi-faceted legislative support for overseas Koreans, including Koryo-saram.

By implementing these strategies, South Korea can address the challenges posed by the current visa system, promote equality among overseas Koreans, and pave the way for more inclusive policies that reflect the diverse needs of this community.



## Final Reflections

Erich Fromm's philosophical work "To Have or To Be? (1974)" offers a valuable framework for understanding human behavior and societal structures. By distinguishing between the modes of having and being, Fromm critiques materialistic and possessive approaches to life, which prioritize ownership over genuine relationships and self-realization. These possessive tendencies lead to existential anxiety and alienation, whereas adopting a mode of being fosters inner growth, meaningful relationships, and a deeper sense of inclusion and understanding.<sup>41</sup>

The current policies for overseas Koreans, including Koryo-saram, align more closely with the mode of having, as they often categorize these individuals under a homogenous identity of Hanminjok (the Korean people). This approach reduces overseas Koreans to ideological possessions of the nation, overlooking their unique cultural and historical contexts. Such a framework perpetuates a narrow, nationalistic perspective that fails to address their individuality and global potential.

Transitioning to a mode of being in policies for overseas Koreans would entail recognizing their unique characteristics and fostering mutual understanding through tailored policy measures. This approach would enhance multicultural inclusivity within Korean society and deepen Korea's understanding of its diaspora, thereby strengthening its role as a global pivotal state. Such a shift would align with the broader goals of the K-Silk Road Initiative, leveraging the potential of Koryo-saram to enhance Korea's cultural, economic, and diplomatic engagement with Central Asia.

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<sup>41</sup> **Fromm, Erich.** *To Have or To Be?* New York: Harper & Row, 1976.



For example, in the cultural exchange sector, policies could support education and employment opportunities for Koryo-saram, cultivating experts in culture, tourism, and interpretation. In resource-related sectors, initiatives could focus on training Koryo-saram professionals to bridge communication and technical expertise. These efforts would not only realize the untapped potential of Koryo-saram but also provide tangible contributions to the K-Silk Road Initiative's objectives.

Ultimately, adopting policies grounded in the mode of being would foster a more inclusive and understanding society, enhancing Korea's global standing and capacity to lead in a rapidly interconnected world. By recognizing overseas Koreans and Koryo-saram as individuals with diverse and valuable contributions, Korea can move beyond a possessive framework to embody the values of cooperation, inclusion, and shared growth.