

OKA must take action against population decline

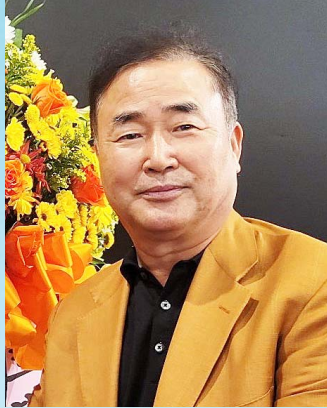
South Korea's declining birthrate is having a number of serious impacts on South Korean society. It will lead to a shrinking labor force, which could hinder economic growth, and poses a major challenge to the sustainability of Korean society in the long run.

The government has implemented various policies to address population decline, including support for births and attracting foreign labor. In particular, the policy of expanding the influx of foreigners has led to a significant increase in the number of foreigners who have acquired Korean citizenship. According to the Ministry of the Interior and Safety, the number of foreign residents came to around 200,000 in 2022, including 90,000 Korean Chinese, but this is far from enough to cope with the declining population.

For South Korea to address its demographic challenges in an age of declining birth rates, aging populations and multiculturalism, the country needs to attract the talented workforce of its 7.5 million overseas Koreans, and the Overseas Koreans Agency, a dedicated organization for overseas Koreans, must step up to the plate.

The Koryo migration policy is a good example. The OKA has been promoting various policies to help overseas Koreans, including the Koryo people, adapt to Korean society. In particular, as a result of the provision of visas for migration to Korea, information on residence and employment, Korean language training and cultural adaptation programs, the number of Koryo people living in Korea surpassed 100,000 for the first time last year, up from 2,392 in 2007. What is encouraging is that there has been a recent trend of younger Koryo people moving to Korea.

The Ministry of Justice is currently conducting a public opinion survey on "Multiple Citizenship and Renunciation/Loss of Nationality." The poll is intended to gauge public sentiment on the nationality system as a whole, but it also includes the government's



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proposal to lower the age for multiple citizenship to 55.

In parliament, former National Assembly Speaker Kim Jin-pyo has proposed to the policy committee that the age for multiple citizenship be lowered to 40, and People Power Party National Assembly member Kim Seok-ki introduced a bill to lower the age to 55 in 2022. However, the proposal has been slow to gain traction due to fear of public opposition.

There is another area where the OKA should take action. It is to grant Korean citizenship to more than 40,000 Korean adoptees in the United States who are "stateless" because they were unable to obtain citizenship there. The government has a responsibility to grant citizenship to these children, who became

"international orphans" due to the weaknesses of the Korean system at the time of their adoption.

South Korea has long been the world's largest exporter of orphans. On June 30, 2023, the "bill to enact a law on international adoption," which proposes guaranteeing the rights and interests of adopted children and strengthening state responsibility, passed a plenary session of the National Assembly. It amounts to the government's intention to directly intervene in international adoption. Due to the declining birth rate, the number of adopted children has dropped from 1,000 to fewer than 500 a decade ago, but about 40 percent of these children are still adopted overseas.

I propose that we enact an international adoption ban. There are already a growing number of countries around the world that have enacted adoption bans in their national laws. This is proof that they too are struggling with the problem of population decline.

Now, more than ever, every child and every citizen is precious, and it's time for more attention and more active policy intervention from the OKA. 차장

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

