



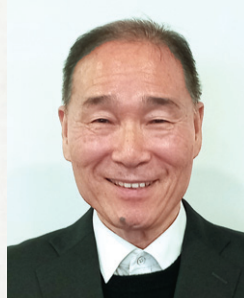
Now is time to empower fledgling OKA

Currently in February 2025, there are more than 7 million overseas Koreans living in 181 countries around the world. This is 10 percent of the 70 million Koreans in North and South Korea. That's more than the combined population of Busan and Daegu. This is more than just demographics. Who are our overseas compatriots? Asking who they are is an awakening to our recent and modern history. At the same time, it provides insights into the present and future of global Korea.

Despite this, our society's understanding of overseas compatriots is low. Even among our leaders, in every section, there is a shallow perception, and in the media, it is difficult to find in-depth coverage. In many cases, they are simply understood as people who left Korea in the past. This is a regressive perception formed during a time of struggling national fortunes, but Korea is now a country that is forging its own era across the globe. The Korean diaspora is an invaluable asset that will contribute to our country's continued development, whether it's in the face of a declining population, the globalization of the next generation or the enhancement of our economic and cultural strength. In short, now is the time for a national strategy to share and realize the future value of overseas Koreans.

The Overseas Koreans Agency is a government agency that was created in response to this need of the hour. It was born in June 2023; it is only 20 months old and still a newborn OKA. The OKA has a big mission. First, it must mobilize the capabilities of the 7 million overseas Koreans to continue to develop the strength and capabilities of the Korean global community. This, of course, must be accompanied by the realization of future values that will enable the Korean diaspora and Korea to grow together. If we translate these goals into concrete tasks, there is a lot of work to be done. It also requires the elaboration of policies and strategies to wisely pursue them.

The work of the OKA is multilayered and complex. The issues and measures are closely linked to the various problems of the overseas Korean community, and cooperation with multiple ministries is essential. Just counting the main ministries involved, we have the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Employment



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and Labor, the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy, the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, the Ministry of Health and Welfare, and the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family. Without smooth collaboration with these ministries, it is difficult to expect substantial results.

In last year's national audit, the National Assembly also emphasized the need to centralize overseas Korean affairs under the OKA. In reality, however, it is questionable whether other departments are listening to what the OKA has to say. For policies to be effective, they must go

beyond nominal cooperation and be accompanied by actual policy coordination and active support.

For example, one of the current initiatives that the OKA is focusing on is supporting Korean language education for returning overseas compatriots to help them integrate into society. However, this requires close policy consultation with the Ministry of Education. It also requires close communication with the Ministry of the Interior and Safety, which will ultimately implement the policy. In addition, the operational issues relating to more than 1,500 Korean language schools scattered around the world cannot be resolved smoothly without close coordination with the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism.

Currently, the OKA has a weak institutional foundation. It is fundamentally understaffed and underfunded. This is because it is a young organization. Just as a newborn baby needs the care and support of their family, the newborn OKA needs the mutual cooperation and good governance of related ministries. Of course, the support of overseas Koreans and the Korean public is essential.

For this to happen, the right perception of overseas Koreans must be prioritized. We need a warmer view of them, not just as migrants, but as partners who can grow with Korea. And there must be responsible policy development to support this. We look forward to seeing the new OKA grow strongly with the understanding of the public and the cooperation of relevant ministries, as well as the new future for the Korean community in Korea and around the world. [\[창\]](#)

