

# POLICY SUBMISSION

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# 1. Purpose

This proposal outlines policy recommendations developed in collaboration with twenty-three overseas Korean adoptee-led groups, with the aim of addressing the needs, rights, and long-term well-being of Korean adoptees worldwide. We recommend that the Overseas Koreans Agency adopt and implement the following primary priorities.

The first two funding priorities support adoptees both in their countries of adoption and in Korea. They include recommendations such as multi-year funding cycles and advance notice of funding decisions. A stable and predictable funding structure is essential for the sustainability and effectiveness of adoptee-led organizations. Primary priorities should be placed ahead of secondary priorities when considering both funding and timelines.

## Primary Priorities:

- 1. Overseas Support Services (In Adoptive Countries)**
- 2. Korea-Based Services for Overseas Korean Adoptees**

In addition, we recommend the Overseas Koreans Agency also consider the following secondary priorities. They should be considered secondary and pursued only if doing so does not reduce, redirect, or dilute funding designated for the primary priorities.

## Secondary Priorities:

- 3. Public Education and Awareness of Korean Adoption and Adoptee Experiences**
- 4. Descendants of Korean Adoptees**

All priorities are based on lived experience, community consultation, and the need for accessible, accountable, and adoptee-centered services.

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# 2. Background and Rationale (Evidence)

Korean adoptees have long faced challenges related to identity, family search, language access, citizenship, records, and reunion support. Policies affecting adoptees should be shaped by adoptee voices and grounded in transparency, accessibility, and care.

The Overseas Koreans Agency has a critical role in supporting:

- access to information and complete records
- family tracing and reunion support
- identity reconstitution
- cultural reconnection
- settlement, legal and administrative support
- long-term support services for adoptees and their families

The lives and experiences of overseas Korean adoptees are an important part of Korean history. Since the Korean War, more than 200,000 Koreans have been displaced through adoption worldwide, making Korean adoptees the largest single ethnic community of internationally adopted people globally. This community is now multi-generational, including not only adoptees themselves, but also their descendants, many of whom are now adults.

The recent findings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) have officially recognized systemic failures within Korea's intercountry adoption system. These failures include Korea's role in practices that have contributed to human rights violations, loss of identity, family separation, and lifelong, irrevocable consequences for adoptees and their families.

Together with President Lee Jae Myung's public acknowledgment of past harms in intercountry adoption, these findings have opened a new chapter in the relationship between Korean adoptees and Korea. This moment presents a significant opportunity to build a more collaborative and just foundation of trust and partnership.

These recommendations are offered in the spirit of that acknowledgment, and with the conviction that recognition without action is insufficient. What follows are actions for building sustainable funding and supporting the in-country services that adoptees have always needed. As Korea's global presence expands, a sustained commitment to truth, reconciliation, and human rights in intercountry adoption would demonstrate moral leadership consistent with Korea's role as a modern international leader.

The Overseas Koreans Agency's mandate is uniquely positioned to support overseas adoptees and their descendants not only through symbolic recognition, but through sustained programs, partnerships, and funding mechanisms. The following policy recommendations are informed by the lived experiences of adoptees across generations and regions, as well as the insights of twenty-three adoptee-led organizations that have worked for decades to build essential community infrastructure, supporting diverse post-adoption services, thereby strengthening the connective tissue among adoptee communities and Korea.

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## 3. Policy Priorities

### Priority 1: Overseas Support Services (In Adoptive Countries)

#### Problem Statement

Korean adoptees continue to face significant challenges, including the loss of identity, Korean language, cultural connection, culturally competent mental health services, and clear information about their origins and legal rights after placement abroad.

In the absence of adequate, sustained government-led services, adoptee-led organizations have filled these gaps and met these needs, often with limited or no resources. Consequently, support is inconsistent and heavily reliant on volunteers, meaning it is frequently unavailable when it is needed most. Adoption has long-lasting consequences for the wellbeing, identity development, and sense of belonging of adoptees, and the lack of services only exacerbates the problem.

For decades, these organizations have been the only source of post-adoption support for many adoptees, providing peer support, connection, cultural engagement, mentorship, advocacy, and a sense of community. Their longevity demonstrates the ongoing necessity of this work and the value of the communities they serve.

These longstanding challenges require a coordinated, sustainably funded response. Without this, Korean adoptees will continue to lack the support necessary for lifelong well-being, meaningful connections, and a sense of belonging.

## Recommendations

We recommend immediate and sustained investment in international adoptee-led organizations with demonstrated expertise serving Korean adoptees. This should be accompanied by long-term funding for culturally informed post-adoption services. This support must be flexible and long-lasting; and it must provide adequate funding to meet lifelong needs such as access to language and cultural education, peer connection, support with identity issues, mental health services, and clear information about origins and legal rights. Adoptee leadership must be at the heart of designing, delivering, and evaluating these services to ensure they are grounded in lived experience and responsive to community needs.

## Actions Requested

### 1. Funding

*Organizations serving Korean adoptees globally largely rely on ad hoc grants and volunteer labor, which is not sufficient to meet the long-term needs of the Korean adoptee community. Without stable funding, these organizations will remain limited in the scope, consistency, and depth of the services they can provide. Sustainable investment is therefore essential to ensure meaningful, lasting support for the global Korean adoptee community.*

- **Establish multi-year grant cycles** that provide predictable funding beyond single-year allocations, allowing for long-term planning and organizational stability.
- **Proactively communicate funding timelines** and award decisions well in advance of the grant period so organizations can plan programming, resourcing, and operations with adequate lead time.
- **Ensure full transparency in the funding process**, including clear eligibility criteria, application requirements, and decision-making processes, with materials available in the primary languages of the communities served.
- **Direct funding to adoptee-led organizations** with governance structures led by Korean adoptees, ensuring that resources are guided by lived experience and remain focused on adoptee needs.
- **Funding must also cover operational costs**, including staff, technology needs, and communications infrastructure, recognizing that the current requirement for organizations to self-fund is a limiting factor to meet the needs of the local and regional communities. Also, volunteer resourcing alone cannot sustain essential services.
- **Provide flexible travel funding for adoptees returning to Korea**, not just limited to conference attendance or specific events, so individuals can determine how travel best supports their personal and community needs. This would include adoptees who face financial barriers with travel to Korea.

## 2. Mental Health

*Korean adoptees face distinct mental health needs arising from the loss of identity, family separation, cultural disconnection, institutional betrayal, ambiguous loss and disenfranchised grief. These needs are chronically underserved by general mental health services that are not designed for the adoptee experience. Access to affordable, culturally informed, adoptee-specific support remains one of the most urgent and consistently identified gaps across countries.*

- **Fund the development and sustainability of adoptee-specific mental health services** in countries with significant Korean adoptee populations, rather than relying on general immigrant or diaspora service models.
- **Ensure services are trauma-informed** and delivered by professionals with demonstrated competency in adoptee experiences, including identity, loss, family separation, cultural loss, ambiguous loss, and the adoptee consciousness model.
- **Provide access to services free or low-cost**, recognizing that financial barriers should not determine access to care.
- **Create and maintain a centralized directory** of adoptee-competent and trauma-informed mental health professionals across regions, reflecting local regulations and service landscapes.
- **Support group-based mental health** services as a distinct and valuable form of care, recognizing the therapeutic importance of peer connection and shared experience.

## 3. Embassy and Consular Services

*Korean embassies and consulates are often the first and most direct point of contact between the Korean government and Korean adoptees. For many adoptees, these missions serve as the primary gateway to government-administered services, processes, and information. However, not all embassies and consulates are equipped to provide accurate information. The following actions address the structural changes needed to ensure that diplomatic missions can fulfill this role consistently and effectively.*

- **Equip embassy and consulate staff** with current, accurate, and accessible information on birth family search processes, including the roles of NCRC and other relevant agencies, so adoptees receive timely and correct guidance from their first point of contact.
- **Designate a dedicated, adoptee-competent liaison** at every major embassy and consulate in countries with Korean adoptee populations to serve as a consistent point of contact between the Korean government, OKA, and local adoptee organizations.
- **Establish formal transition protocols** to ensure that the knowledge, relationships, and responsibilities of the adoptee liaison are fully transferred during staff and leadership changes, maintaining continuity of knowledge, services and processes.
- **Provide clear, consistent guidance on dual citizenship and the F-4 visa process**, with a commitment to reducing administrative barriers and improving the speed and consistency of outcomes for adoptees.
- **Embassies and consulates to provide both written and verbal translation services** in the official language of the country of residence, so adoptees can access services and information without language barriers.
- **Develop ongoing partnerships** between embassies, consulates, and local adoptee-led organizations to improve communication, outreach, and awareness of available services, programs, and opportunities for Korean adoptees.

#### 4. Events and Global Connectivity

*Korean adoptees are separated across many countries and regions and often lack regular access to others who share their experiences or the financial means to travel to Korea. It is essential to provide funding opportunities to adoptee-led organizations to hold gatherings, as well as to connect regionally and in Korea in order to build community, shared identity, and belonging. Access to these opportunities should not depend on geography or economic circumstances.*

- **Establish a travel support program** that enables every Korean adoptee to visit Korea at least once in their lifetime, with both individual and group travel eligible for support.
- **Provide travel funding for homeland visits** and community events to be used flexibly, so recipients can determine how best to meet their needs.
- **Support recurring regional gatherings in adoptive countries**, with needs-based travel stipends to ensure financial barriers do not prevent participation.
- **Support ongoing collaboration among adoptee-led organizations** across countries and regions to strengthen global networks, share resources and best practices, and foster a more connected and sustainable worldwide Korean adoptee community.
- **Provide opportunities for adoptee leaders** of these organizations to convene, enhance collaboration, mobilize community engagement, and advance shared policy priorities and initiatives.

#### 5. Korean Language and Cultural Reconnection

*For many Korean adoptees, reconnecting with Korean language and culture is an important part of identity development throughout their life. However, structured, affordable, adoptee-specific programming remains inconsistent and often unavailable. Existing programs are typically designed for the general public or adoptive families and do not meet the distinct needs of adoptees.*

##### **Language Learning**

- Provide free or low-cost Korean language education for adoptees, including beginner, intermediate, and advanced levels.
- Offer adoptee-centered classes in both in-person and online formats to increase accessibility and support functional language development.

##### **Cultural Education and Connection**

- Fund cultural programming designed specifically for adoptees, including learning about traditions, holidays, history, and everyday cultural practices.
- Include practical cultural activities such as cooking classes featuring national dishes.
- Create early cultural connection opportunities for young adoptees to support reconnection from an early age.
- Partner with existing Korean cultural centers where appropriate to deliver adoptee-specific programming.

#### 6. Centralized Online Portal

*Establish and maintain a dedicated centralized online portal for Korean adoptees. The portal should serve as a single point of access for information, services, and resources across countries of adoption and in Korea, and should be separate from general-purpose websites.*

- Portal to be available in the primary languages of global Korean adoptee communities, designed for

accessibility and usability, and updated regularly to ensure information remains current and accurate.

- Portal is the same unified system referenced in Priority 2 (Korea-Based Support Services), managed by the same governing body, and designed to serve Korean adoptees seamlessly whether they are living in their country of adoption or in Korea.
- Portal should also integrate information on adoptee-related services in both countries of adoption and Korea to ensure continuity of access regardless of geographic location.

## Proposed Timeline

### By the end of 2026

- Establish multi-year funding commitments for adoptee-led organizations, with transparent criteria, accessible materials, and advance notice of timelines.
- Designate adoptee-competent liaisons at major Korean embassies and consulates in countries with significant Korean adoptee populations.
- Equip embassy and consulate staff with accurate, up-to-date information on birth family search processes and adoptee services.
- Launch an initial directory of adoptee-competent, trauma-informed mental health professionals across key regions.
- Release the first phase of the centralized online portal in primary adoptee community languages, with core navigation and service links.

### By the end of 2027

- Expand funding to cover operational costs for adoptee-led organizations, including staffing, technology, and communications infrastructure.
- Implement formal transition protocols at Korean embassies and consulates to ensure continuity of service.
- Launch adoptee-specific mental health services at free or low-cost rates in countries with significant Korean adoptee populations, including group-based supports.
- Begin adoptee-specific Korean language and cultural programming in partnership with existing Korean cultural centers, with both in-person and online options.
- Expand the online portal to include resources on birth family search, citizenship, F-4 visas, and cultural reconnection.

### By the end of 2028

- Move toward full operational sustainability for adoptee-led organizations through stable multi-year funding and coverage of core operational costs.
- Improve consistency and accessibility of dual citizenship and F-4 visa processes across major embassy and consulate locations.
- Strengthen and sustain adoptee mental health services as a long-term, accessible resource.
- Deliver adoptee-centered Korean language curriculum across beginner, intermediate, and advanced levels, alongside age-appropriate cultural programming for all stages of life.
- Launch the full centralized portal as a scalable, globally accessible resource supporting Korean adoptees in both adoptive countries and Korea.

## Implementation Notes

Implementation of these recommendations should prioritize scalable, accessible, and consistent support for Korean adoptees across the globe, including those living in their countries of adoption and those in Korea. Services should meet adoptees at every stage of their journey, including first-time visits to Korea, birth family search, citizenship processes, relocation, and ongoing connection through multiple visits.

It is important to recognize that not all adoptees will travel to Korea. These recommendations are designed to support adoptees wherever they reside, ensuring access to guidance, resources, and community at every stage of their journey.

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## Priority 2: Korea-Based Services for Overseas Korean Adoptees

### Problem Statement

Overseas Korean adoptees have distinct needs for Korea-based services when visiting or residing in Korea. However, existing services are limited in scope, fragmented across providers, and often difficult to access or navigate. This creates a need for a broader, more coordinated, and accessible system of support. Effective service provision must be grounded in an accurate understanding of adoptees' lived experiences, informed by expert recommendations, and responsive to actual demand. Services should be accessible to all overseas Korean adoptees during their time in Korea, regardless of background or circumstance.

At present, support is delivered by a mix of government agencies and NGOs, but the lack of coordination limits efficiency, continuity, and consistency. A more integrated, user-friendly system is needed to ensure adoptees receive timely, consistent, and comprehensive assistance.

### Recommendation

We recommend establishing a dedicated, accessible physical space in Korea to serve as a central point of support for overseas Korean adoptees and their descendants. This space should be complemented by a digital platform to improve accessibility, coordination, and scalability. Together, these services would support reconnection, wellbeing, and community belonging for adoptees visiting or residing in Korea.

### Actions Requested

#### *1. General Support Services*

- Provide assistance with housing and daily living needs for overseas Korean adoptees during their stay in Korea.
- Offer guidance on navigating Korean society, public systems, and relevant regulations.
- Facilitate access to birth family search services, including support with documents, translation, and interpretation.
- Serve as a liaison to connect adoptees with relevant organizations, authorities, and service providers.
- Make DNA testing accessible to adoptees and birth families through trusted, locally available channels.

## *2. Reunion Services*

- Provide pre-reunion and ongoing counselling tailored to the emotional and psychological needs of adoptees and their Korean families.
- Ensure interpretation and translation services are available throughout the reunion process.
- Offer trauma-informed support for adoptees and Korean (birth) families.
- Provide safe, private, and comfortable spaces for reunions.

## *3. Information and Infrastructure*

- Maintain a centralized directory of services, resources, and contacts relevant to adoptees.
- Establish a dedicated community space for informal connection, peer support, and private meetings.
- Create an environment that supports safety, belonging, and ease of access for adoptees in Korea.

## *4. Cultural and Language Reconnection*

- Provide guidance and programs to support Korean language learning and cultural reconnection.
- Facilitate access to cultural events, workshops, and educational opportunities related to heritage and identity.

## *5. Health and Wellbeing Support*

- Secure sustainable funding for culturally competent mental health counselling in key languages spoken by adoptees.
- Develop an emergency response plan for mental health crises.
- Provide clear guidance on accessing Korea's healthcare system, including hospitals and general health services.

## **Proposed Timeline**

### **By the end of 2026**

- Establish a single point of contact as the foundation for future support services.
- Strengthen existing services for Korean adoptees and improve accessibility and inclusion.
- Increase access to essential services, including translation and counselling.
- Implement other priority services that can be delivered quickly and with minimal setup.
- Establish first phase of single online entry point for Korean adoptee information and services aligned to in-country services.

### **By the end of 2027**

- Open a small-scale support centre and office serving as a central point of contact.
- Launch a shared webpage with current procedures, resources, and information for adoptees.
- Expand additional priority services as capacity allows.

### **By the end of 2028**

- Develop a comprehensive knowledge base aligned with adoptees' information and contact needs.
- Open a full-scale Korean adoptee centre in Seoul as a physical space for services, meetings, and support.
- Launch a full digital platform for accessing processes, contacts, networks, shared learning, and organizational resources.

- Extend services to other cities in Korea.

## Implementation Notes

Implementation should prioritize ease of use for Korean adoptees, alongside the standardization and scalability of core services. This will allow resources to be focused on individualized support where needed and help create a sustainable model for service delivery in Korea.

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## Priority 3: Public Education and Awareness of Korean Adoption and Adoptee Experiences

### Problem Statement

Korean adoptees are a minoritized community in both their adoptive countries and Korea, and public understanding of adoption history and lived experiences of adoptees remains limited. As a result, Korean adoptees are often misunderstood, discriminated against, or overlooked in both adoptive countries and Korea, including within government-sponsored associations and cultural centers. Their experiences are frequently treated as marginal rather than as a legitimate part of the broader Korean diaspora.

The limited visibility contributes to ongoing cultural misunderstanding and makes it more difficult for adoptees and birth families to advocate for their needs. While Korean adoptees are often represented in popular culture, our experiences are far less visible in policy, institutional materials, and public information. As a result, misconceptions continue to shape how adoptees are perceived and how our needs are addressed.

### Recommendation

We recommend that the Korean government lead efforts to provide accurate, adoptee-informed information about Korean adoptee experiences, grounded in lived experience. This should improve public understanding and help correct persistent misconceptions that affect policy, advocacy, and service provision.

### Actions Requested

#### *1. Improve government and public information on Korean adoptee issues and support services*

- Develop and update government materials on adoption, adoptees, and Korean (birth) families to reflect Korean adoptees as a recognized and equal part of the Korean diaspora.
- Produce clear, factual educational materials for adoptees, their Korean (birth) families and the general public.
- Deliver training for medical, mental health, and education professionals who work with adoptees and Korean (birth) families.

#### *2. Strengthen accurate public representation of Korean adoptees and their lived experience*

- Include adoptees as valued participants in Korean cultural events and public initiatives.

- Use official social media and public communications to present accurate depictions of adoptee experiences.
- Support adoptee-created public symbols and initiatives that recognize Korean adoptee loss, identity, and contribution, including through collaboration with Korean cultural and popular media representatives.

## Proposed Timeline

### By the end of 2026

- Compile relevant government documents and records to inform the development of public information sheets and datasets on adoptees and their birth families.
- Develop a public communications strategy to improve accurate representation of Korean adoptees in media and public discourse.

### By the end of 2027

- Undertake consultation with adoptees, researchers, and subject matter experts to develop fact sheets, curriculum materials, and cultural resources addressing misinformation and gaps in public understanding.

### By the end of 2028

- Complete and disseminate the resulting documents, cultural products, and educational materials through appropriate public channels.

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## Priority 4: Support for DoKADs (Descendants of Korean Adoptees)

### Problem Statement

Descendants of Korean Adoptees often have identity and family needs that are distinct from those of adopted individuals. However, current Korean adoptee programming and community structures do not consistently provide DoKAD-specific support, spaces, or access to heritage resources. As a result, DoKADs may lack dedicated community connection, defined rights for accessing birth family related information, culturally relevant learning opportunities, and homeland programming designed for their unique experiences. Crucially, DoKADs have not yet been formally consulted as a stakeholder group. Their voices and needs must be heard directly before any programming is designed for them.

### Recommendation

We recommend the Korean government, adoptee-serving organizations, and affiliated heritage institutions formally recognize descendants of Korean adoptees as a distinct stakeholder group and ensure their inclusion in relevant programming, services, and community spaces. Any programming developed for DoKADs should be co-designed with DoKADs directly, through dedicated and accessible consultation processes. Programming should also accommodate adoptees who wish to participate in heritage experiences together with their children, recognizing that family-based engagement is a meaningful and distinct pathway for many.

## Actions Requested

### 1. Establish Direct DoKAD Consultation

- As a first step, initiate a dedicated consultation process with DoKAD representatives prior to designing or expanding any programming. Korean adoptee organizations may be able to assist with initial outreach.
- Use this process to identify DoKADs' needs, priorities and preferred forms of engagement, and inform all subsequent actions with these findings.

### 2. Create DoKAD-specific support and community spaces

- Establish dedicated spaces where DoKADs can connect, share experiences, and build community.
- Ensure DoKADs are included in Korean adoptee community spaces and programming where appropriate.

### 3. Develop inclusive homeland and heritage programming

- Design homeland-based programming specifically for DoKADs to support heritage exploration in age-appropriate and accessible ways.
- Offer DoKAD-specific tours and programming that do not require parent participation.
- DoKAD programming should accommodate adoptees who want to travel with their DoKAD children (i.e. family-inclusive options alongside the independent DoKAD programming).
- Provide opportunities for DoKADs to travel to Korea and engage with their heritage independently (outside of organized tours), with appropriate support.

## Proposed Timeline

### By the end of 2026

- Establish a consultation process directly with DoKAD representatives
- Identify DoKAD needs

### By the end of 2027

- Pilot one or two programs
- Measure success and outcomes

## Implementation Notes

For effective implementation, DoKAD consultation must precede program design, rather than run alongside it. The consultation process should be accessible and inclusive of DoKADs of all ages and from all geographical areas. While Korean adoptee organizations may assist with initial outreach and facilitation, the process should allow DoKADs to speak independently. The findings from the consultation should be documented and shared with the participants, and the program design should demonstrably reflect them.

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## 4. Conclusion

Korean adoptees have the expertise and lived experience necessary to shape policies that affect their lives. We urge the Overseas Koreans Agency to adopt these recommendations and work in partnership with adoptee communities to ensure meaningful, accountable, and lasting change.

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## 5. Signatories

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