

# **INTERACT – RESEARCHING THIRD COUNTRY NATIONALS’ INTEGRATION AS A THREE-WAY PROCESS - IMMIGRANTS, COUNTRIES OF EMIGRATION AND COUNTRIES OF IMMIGRATION AS ACTORS OF INTEGRATION**

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## ***South Korea country report***

**Ijin Hong**

INTERACT Research Report 2014/07



**INTERACT**  
**Researching Third Country Nationals' Integration as a Three-way Process -**  
**Immigrants, Countries of Emigration and Countries of Immigration as Actors of**  
**Integration**

**Research Report**  
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**South Korea country report**

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## **INTERACT - Researching Third Country Nationals' Integration as a Three-way Process - Immigrants, Countries of Emigration and Countries of Immigration as Actors of Integration**

Around 25 million persons born in a third country (TCNs) are currently living in the European Union (EU), representing 5% of its total population. Integrating immigrants, i.e. allowing them to participate in the host society at the same level as natives, is an active, not a passive, process that involves two parties, the host society and the immigrants, working together to build a cohesive society.

Policy-making on integration is commonly regarded as primarily a matter of concern for the receiving state, with general disregard for the role of the sending state. However, migrants belong to two places: first, where they come and second, where they now live. While integration takes place in the latter, migrants maintain a variety of links with the former. New means of communication facilitating contact between migrants and their homes, globalisation bringing greater cultural diversity to host countries, and nation-building in source countries seeing expatriate nationals as a strategic resource have all transformed the way migrants interact with their home country.

INTERACT project looks at the ways governments and non-governmental institutions in origin countries, including the media, make transnational bonds a reality, and have developed tools that operate economically (to boost financial transfers and investments); culturally (to maintain or revive cultural heritage); politically (to expand the constituency); legally (to support their rights).

INTERACT project explores several important questions: To what extent do policies pursued by EU member states to integrate immigrants, and policies pursued by governments and non-state actors in origin countries regarding expatriates, complement or contradict each other? What effective contribution do they make to the successful integration of migrants and what obstacles do they put in their way?

A considerable amount of high-quality research on the integration of migrants has been produced in the EU. Building on existing research to investigate the impact of origin countries on the integration of migrants in the host country remains to be done.

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## **Abstract**

Emigrants from the Korean peninsula are one of the biggest migrant communities in the world, but yet little is known internationally about their characteristics or differences by geographic area. This explorative paper attempts to shed light on overseas Koreans and their classifications, and on the ways in which the state (mainly the South Korean government)\* deals with them. Generally speaking, it is possible to distinguish overseas Koreans into Kyopos (in the Western world and in Japan), Koryos (based in the ex-Soviet Union), and Chosuns (the Korean diaspora in China). While the South Korean state tends to only address their situation with a visa policy upon those returning to their homeland, NGOs and other private organizations are more active in addressing the needs of the Korean diasporas abroad.

**Keywords:** Overseas Koreans, Kyopo, Chosun people, Koryo people, NGO

## **Acknowledgment and credits**

I would like to thank my parents, first-generation migrants to Europe, for their insights and support on this work. All mistakes and lack of precision are exclusively the responsibility of the author.

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\* The Korean peninsula has been divided in North and South along the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel in 1953. Since some migratory flows have started before that, some diasporas have originated from modern-day North Korea, although I here mostly refer to South Korea as a standard.

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## 1. Policy and institutional frameworks

### 1.1 Korean migrants: an overview

The Korean peninsula has been divided along the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel since 1953 and the end of the war in Korea into the communist dictatorial regime in the north, and the capitalistic presidential government in the south. Before that, Korea had been one political entity: accordingly, when we describe emigration and diasporas, Korean communities abroad originate both from the North and from the South, overseas Koreans are one of the biggest emigrant communities in the world.<sup>1</sup>

South Korea presents a varied emigration picture due to the spectacular economic growth that let this country develop from an extremely poor area in the 1960s to one of the wealthiest countries in the world in just a few decades. South Korean emigrants have left the country for many reasons. Some went to escape poverty and political persecution, others sought education and personal realization, especially in more recent times.

Depending on where they reside, Korean emigrants are labeled and identified in different ways.

Overseas Koreans are generally named “**Kyopos**”, especially when they are based in the US, Europe, or Japan (they are variously named “American Kyopo”, “German Kyopo”, “Japanese Kyopo”, and the like). Emigrants in Europe have a fairly recent history, since they started to arrive as guest-workers or students only in the 1960s. The origins of American Kyopos date back to the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when Korean workers came first to the sugar plantations in the Hawaii, with inflows of Korean workers destined to continue over the twentieth century as well. Japanese Kyopos have also a long history in the country, arriving after the colonization of the Korean peninsula. Korean emigrants have kept going to Japan from the island of Jeju-do, in the southern part of the peninsula, in more recent times as well, for commercial reasons. Generally speaking, Kyopo emigrants are identified as coming from the southern part of the Korean peninsula, and they reside either in the West, or in Japan.

Diasporas in the ex-Soviet Union are known as “**Koryos**”. The history of Korean migration to the ex-Soviet Union dates back to the times of Japanese colonization at the beginning of the twentieth century, when land confiscation led to a shortage of cultivable areas. To be sure, the Korean exodus to Manchuria started at the end of the Chosun era (1392-1896), and depended on a lack of crops. This phenomenon continued through the years of Japanese colonization. Many emigrants to China came from the northern part of the peninsula.

Chinese Koreans residing in China, from North Korea are labeled “**Chosuns**”, probably because their presence in China started with the pre-Japanese occupation of the Chosun dynasty in the peninsula. Most Koreans in China, as noted, came from the northern part of the peninsula and arrived in China in search of cultivable land. This was true, at least, to the closure of the boundaries (the iron curtain) of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK), which was a consequence of the division of the peninsula at the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel in 1953.

Henceforth, a few more details on these categories of migrant Koreans are presented, by country.

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<sup>1</sup> According to a study conducted by the Overseas Korean Foundation, as of 2011 there were over 7.26 million Koreans residing in 175 countries (OKF 2011). For an English article see: <http://koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/news/article/Article.aspx?aid=2978298> [Accessed 15 November 2013].

### *Soviet Union*

Historically, migration started in the nineteenth century, with poor peasants moving to Siberia in search of arable lands. After the Russo-Japanese war, Koreans in Russia, who were believed to have worked for the Japanese government, were deported *en masse* to Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Ukraine. These Russian speaking Koreans are mostly coming from North Korea and these communities are known as Koryo people (Ki 2002).

### *United States of America*

Emigration towards Hawaii started as early as 1903, as a result of connections with American missionaries in South Korea. Korean male workers were employed in sugar factories in Hawaii and became active as political dissidents against the Japanese colonial domination (Choi 2002).

### *Japan*

The Korean peninsula was subject to Japanese colonization from 1905 to the end of WWII, and many Korean workers moved there for industry during that time. Korean migrants in Japan continue to arrive and to be active especially in the southern part of Japan, with most of them from Jeju island, in the southern part of South Korea. Japanese *Kyopos* live, *de facto*, as a ghetto community, and they retain Korean citizenship due to the Japanese government's segregationist policy.

### *China*

Korean migration to China also dates back to the nineteenth century, with poor farmers looking for arable land. At the end of World War Two and with the creation of a communist regime in the North, people fled the country as a form of political protest. The Korean community in China is vast and densely populated especially near the borderline with North Korea. Mostly it is about ghettos made of descendants of Korean emigrants, with Chinese citizenship, with their own schools and services in Korean. Nowadays North Korean defectors go to ground in China *en route* to a third country that might allow them access to the free South. These defectors started escaping the communist country especially with the famines of the mid 1990s, and reside illegally in China, often victims of human trafficking and abuse (Haggard and Noland 2011).

### *Germany*

Korean migration to Germany was encouraged after World War Two when workers for difficult jobs such as mining and nursing were needed. Bilateral agreements between South Korea and Germany, signed in 1973, let Koreans emigrate to Germany as temporary guest workers, sending remittances to their motherland. This collaboration also developed in diplomatic and economic relations between the two countries, as Germany also lent money to Korea at the time, strengthening political ties.

### *Latin and South America*

These have been popular countries for emigration since the Vietnam war ended, mainly for economic reasons.

### *Canada, Australia, New Zealand*

These countries have been destinations for since the Vietnam war and recently they have been destinations for Koreans pursuing educational objectives abroad.

Korean emigration waves have evolved. Trends from the few last decades can be described as follows.

In the 1970s, Korean emigrants escaped poverty and went to West Germany, the US, Australia, and Central Asian countries to work as menial labourers.

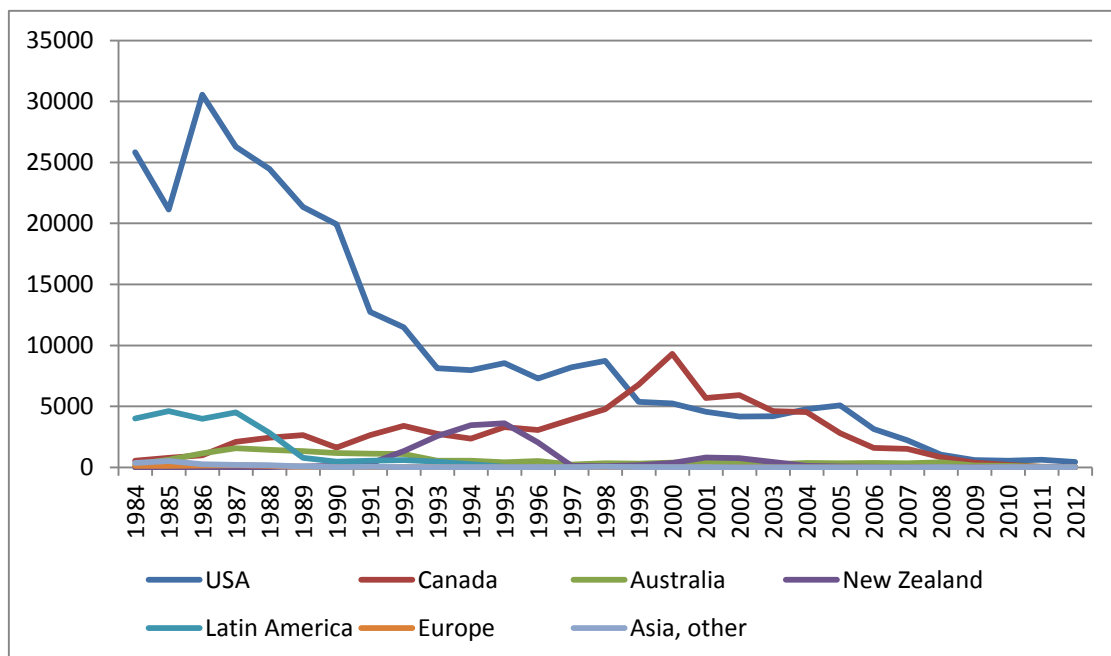
In the 1980s, Koreans performed specialized jobs abroad. This was facilitated by President Chun’s liberalization of migration movements.<sup>2</sup>

In the 1990s, emigration focused on specialized work and investment abroad.

In the 2000s, families split for educational purposes, with fathers working in the South Korea, and mothers bringing children to study in prestigious educational facilities in the US and other Anglo Saxon countries. Because the Republic of Korea is now affluent, there is return migration (especially Chosuns and Koryos).

According to available statistics, South Korean emigrants predominantly emigrated to the US, but this trend has been waning in recent years, not least due to the high standard in Korea over the last years.

**Figure 1 – Emigration trends for South Koreans in different geographical regions, 1984-2012**



Source: adapted from Ministry of Foreign Affairs

<sup>2</sup> This had previously been discouraged to keep the national currency within national boundaries, and because of the political sensitivity of the division with the North. This all changed, however, in 1981, with the new measures for issuing passports and for allowing free movement, and in particular in 1988 when the Olympic games were hosted by South Korea: this represented a benchmark for the country’s political and economic development.

## 1.2 Description of state-level emigration and diaspora policies at the national level

### *State emigration policy*

State emigration policy is not particularly systematic, not least due to the size and variety of Korean migrants residing abroad. In this sense, bilateral agreements to send workers abroad still seem to be the closest match there is to what elsewhere would be termed emigration policy.

Economic agreements tend to be more centered on accepting temporary migrant workers and foreign brides from third countries (China, Vietnam, Philippines, etc.). Certainly, at the moment emigrants leaving Korea for South East Asian countries are not particularly abundant.

The incumbent South Korean President Park Keun-Hye stated in 2013, at a meeting of heads of overseas Koreans communities, that the government will provide for preschool care for overseas Koreans: though nothing has yet been done.

Bilateral agreements to guarantee the right to possess land and real estate properties do exist with a number of countries. At present, tax treaties exempting countries from paying double taxation exist with: Australia, Austria, Bangladesh, Belgium, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, China, the Czech Republic, Denmark, the European Union, Egypt, Fiji, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Malta, Mexico, Mongolia, Morocco, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Singapore, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sweden, Switzerland, Thailand, Tunisia, Turkey, the United Kingdom, the United States, Uzbekistan and Vietnam.<sup>3</sup> Similar agreements for social rights portability have been stipulated between the Republic of Korea and several countries: specifically, the portability of pension contributions for the Korean National Pension System have been signed, in chronological order, with Canada (1997), the UK (1999), the US (2000), Germany (2000), China (2012), the Netherlands (2003), Japan (2004), Italy (2000), Uzbekistan (2006), Mongolia (2006), Hungary (2006), France (2006), Australia (2006), the Czech Republic (2007), Ireland (2007), Belgium (2007), Poland (2009), the Slovak Republic (2009), Bulgaria (2008), Romania (2008), Austria (2010), Denmark (2010), India (2011) and Spain (2011).<sup>4</sup> Korean nationals living abroad do have the right to vote through the embassy for Presidential elections, but only on condition that they are legally residing in a third country.

The teaching of Korean and Korean culture abroad is promoted by the King Sejong Institutes, financed by the Korean government (Ministry of Sport and Tourism). These are akin to similar cultural institutes for promoting a country's culture, e.g. the Goethe-Institut for Germany. At present, a total of 23 Korean institutes are present in Europe: four in Russia (one in Moscow), three in Germany (Berlin, Bonn, Tübingen), two in Spain (Las Palmas in the Canary Islands and Madrid), two in London, one in Lisbon, one in Minsk, one in Venice, two in Belgium (one in Brussels), one in Sofia, one in Paris, two in Poland (Poznan, Warszawa), one in Prague, and one in Hungary.<sup>5</sup> This is, though, a general service addressing all foreign nationals interested in Korean culture. It is not for Korean communities abroad. Government policies directly addressing Korean diasporas, helping with integration and adjustment to a foreign land are not available, or, at least, they are not in any way publicized. Organization and implementation of educational facilities for Korean diasporas abroad are mainly the result of initiatives that start at community level.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.joneslanglasallesites.com/appig/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/South-Korea-Property-Investment-Guide-2013.pdf> [Accessed 15 November 2013].

<sup>4</sup> [http://english.nps.or.kr/jsppage/english/agreement/contract\\_main.jsp](http://english.nps.or.kr/jsppage/english/agreement/contract_main.jsp) [Accessed 15 November 2013].

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.sejonghagdang.org/nuri/sjc/SJC\\_Main](http://www.sejonghagdang.org/nuri/sjc/SJC_Main) [Accessed 15 November 2013].

*Institutions in charge*

The main institution in charge of migrant Koreans is the Division for Overseas Koreans at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This refers to all overseas Koreans who are regularly documented on the Ministry's official listing of Koreans residing abroad. Activities of the Ministry to benefit overseas Koreans include visa management, bilateral agreements for recognition of driving license, passport issues, and the like.<sup>6</sup>

The Korean state does not really establish a policy framework for Korean diasporas abroad. However, it does apply specific regulations and help for overseas Koreans who wish to return to their homeland. For example, the state does not provide incentives for overseas Koreans in the ex-Soviet Union or China to return to Korea, but it facilitates their employment there with the provision of the temporary works visa system targeting overseas Koreans (H2 visa) (Seol 2012). As for what concerns emigration policy, departures from the peninsula included different motives and historical periods. Yoon (2012) argues that there were two main waves of migration from the peninsula, each presenting its own *raison d'être*: a first wave to Russia, China, the US, and Japan in the nineteenth and twentieth century, motivated by the need to escape poverty; and a second wave of migrants to the US, Europe and Latin America, looking for better opportunities.. The Office for Immigration of the Republic of Korea is the main institution responsible for the creation and implementation of these regulations.

Bilateral or multilateral agreements on readmission (or forced returns) of emigrants are not especially contemplated, although the situation with North Korea begs to differ. One such accord exists between China and the Democratic Republic of Korea, whereas North Koreans fleeing their own country, when caught in China, are repatriated by the Chinese authorities. The Chinese police system and government, the North Korean government and its military concentration camp staff are the main institutions in charge here.

**1.3 Engagement of non-state actors**

Cultural identity, a sense of Korean history, and the teaching of Korean among the diaspora abroad is kept alive through self-organization at the community level. In particular, schools for compulsory education are often put together, financed, and administered by the migrant communities themselves, especially in China and Japan, where the ghettoization of minorities is stronger. Emigration flows to European countries mostly started in the 1960s, motivated by the search of better opportunities; due to the more independent nature of this second wave of migrants, it has been argued that the sense of community and the will to preserve collective identities has been less strong there (Yoon 2012).

Migrant platforms for exchanging information are available in internet websites of *ad hoc* associations and foundations. One example can be given by the Overseas Korean Foundation network: established in 1997 from the Overseas Koreans' Committee under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This organization based in Seoul South Korea, aims to build a platform of support, exchange and cooperation between overseas Koreans and their home country. To this end, it favors visits of overseas Koreans to their homeland, promotion of research and the construction of a network of talented Kyopos, and the promotion of Korean language and culture for overseas Koreans and their descendants.

As for NGOs, private actors (e.g. businesses), associations, trade unions, churches, and other non-governmental actors, there seems to be considerable activity, though generally on a small scale. According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, there are, at the moment (2012), almost three thousand economic, political, social, cultural Korean associations abroad operating in various countries. The most numerous and active can be found in the United States (mostly culture and welfare related residential and religious associations), Japan (predominantly associations that are based on the district

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<sup>6</sup> [http://www.mofa.go.kr/travel/moving/index.jsp?menu=m\\_30\\_190](http://www.mofa.go.kr/travel/moving/index.jsp?menu=m_30_190) [Accessed 15 November 2013].

of residence), and China (basically concerned with educational facilities for teaching Korean language and culture) (Ministry of Foreign Affairs). The services they offer tend to be related to learning Korean and cultural and religious events, though there is a considerable diversity depending on the size of the community, and its geographic collocation. It can be said that the existence of these activities from below makes up for a lack of government help from their country of origin.

#### 1.4 A short list of relevant agreements

Single bilateral agreements exist and are continuously renewed, though they tend to concentrate on the economic aspect of the bilateral collaboration. For example, in the case of Germany, bilateral trade and investment agreements, and high-level exchanges have taken place through the 1990s and the 2000s.

The Republic of Korea signed a Free Trade Agreement with the EU 6 October 2010, which came into effect on 1 July 2011. This FTA between the ROK and EU, encompassed areas such as intellectual property, procurement, competition policy, trade and sustainable development. A revised form of this FTA was signed in May 2010.<sup>7</sup>

Agreements at the regional level, with a list of relevant websites, include:

- ACD (Asia Cooperation Dialogue)  
[http://www.mofa.go.kr/ENG/countries/regional/acd/overview/index.jsp?menu=m\\_30\\_60\\_10](http://www.mofa.go.kr/ENG/countries/regional/acd/overview/index.jsp?menu=m_30_60_10)
- APEC (Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation)  
[http://www.mofa.go.kr/ENG/countries/regional/apec/overview/index.jsp?menu=m\\_30\\_60\\_20](http://www.mofa.go.kr/ENG/countries/regional/apec/overview/index.jsp?menu=m_30_60_20)
- ARF (Asean Regional Forum)  
[http://www.mofa.go.kr/ENG/countries/regional/arf/overview/index.jsp?menu=m\\_30\\_60\\_30](http://www.mofa.go.kr/ENG/countries/regional/arf/overview/index.jsp?menu=m_30_60_30)
- ASEAN (Association of south East Asian Nations)  
[http://www.mofa.go.kr/ENG/countries/regional/asean/overview/index.jsp?menu=m\\_30\\_60\\_40](http://www.mofa.go.kr/ENG/countries/regional/asean/overview/index.jsp?menu=m_30_60_40)
- ASEM (Asia-Europe Meeting)  
[http://www.mofa.go.kr/ENG/countries/regional/asem/overview/index.jsp?menu=m\\_30\\_60\\_50](http://www.mofa.go.kr/ENG/countries/regional/asem/overview/index.jsp?menu=m_30_60_50)
- EAS (East Asia Summit)  
[http://www.mofa.go.kr/ENG/countries/regional/eas/overview/index.jsp?menu=m\\_30\\_60\\_60](http://www.mofa.go.kr/ENG/countries/regional/eas/overview/index.jsp?menu=m_30_60_60)
- ROK-EU relations  
[http://www.mofa.go.kr/ENG/countries/regional/eu/index.jsp?menu=m\\_30\\_60\\_70](http://www.mofa.go.kr/ENG/countries/regional/eu/index.jsp?menu=m_30_60_70)
- FEALAC (Forum for East Asia-Latin America Cooperation)  
[http://www.mofa.go.kr/ENG/countries/regional/fealac/index.jsp?menu=m\\_30\\_60\\_80](http://www.mofa.go.kr/ENG/countries/regional/fealac/index.jsp?menu=m_30_60_80)
- G20 Seoul Summit 2010  
[http://www.mofa.go.kr/ENG/countries/regional/g20/overview/index.jsp?menu=m\\_30\\_60\\_90](http://www.mofa.go.kr/ENG/countries/regional/g20/overview/index.jsp?menu=m_30_60_90)

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<sup>7</sup> [http://www.mofa.go.kr/ENG/countries/europe/local/index.jsp?menu=m\\_30\\_40\\_20](http://www.mofa.go.kr/ENG/countries/europe/local/index.jsp?menu=m_30_40_20) [Accessed 15 November 2013].

## 2. Legal documents

Activities and services for Koreans residing abroad are mostly self-organized and administered. The government takes charge of broad bilateral agreements (e.g. right to property, social rights' portability). However no separate special legislation on Korean emigrants and the Korean diaspora is to be found. Rather, Koreans and their descendants residing abroad are expected to abide to the national laws of the country in which they are residing.

Emigration has become more common since 1981 when the passport system was opened up and less politically determined than it had been in the past. Since this is still a relatively new topic, greater efforts are needed to understand the nature of migrant Koreans overseas and the integration there.

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## Websites

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Korean National Pension System: [http://english.nps.or.kr/jsppage/english/agreement/contract\\_main.jsp](http://english.nps.or.kr/jsppage/english/agreement/contract_main.jsp)

Ministry of Foreign Affairs: [www.mofa.go.kr](http://www.mofa.go.kr)

Overseas Koreans Foundation (OKF) (재외동포재단): [www.korean.net](http://www.korean.net)

## Interviews

Interviews with two Kyopos residing in Italy (21 hours; 22-30 August 2013).

Interview with a Kyopo from Uzbekistan (12 hours; 13-25 August 2013).

Interview with a Kyopo from Japan (19 hours; 20-24 July 2013).