

## Korea

Long-term migration into Korea amounted to approximately 318 000 persons in 2007, virtually unchanged from the previous year. “Long-term” for Korea means the entry of persons who stay for more than 90 days and can thus include some relatively short-term movements. There has been a notable drop in industrial trainees (from 44 000 to 6 000), a category which had been used in the past to bring in lower-skilled workers. These trainees are now entering Korea under the Employment Permit System (EPS) as “non-professional employees” (E9 visa, approximately 31 000 in 2007) or through “working visits” (H2 visa, 94 000), a category reserved to workers of Korean ethnic origin from China, Russia and neighbouring countries. The latter formerly entered as visiting family members, a category which saw an ostensible drop from about 84 000 in 2006 to 20 000 in 2007. All of these immigrants are, in principle, temporary. Only about 30 000 of “long-term” immigration is permanent in character, most of it being marriage migration. Migration of highly skilled persons is limited. International students, however, have almost quadrupled from 2003 to 2007, with over 15 000 persons having entered for study in 2007.

Asylum seeking in Korea is very limited, a little more than 700 persons in 2007 having lodged a request, almost 40 percent of them Nepalese. Few are accorded refugee status.

The foreign population reached a level of approximately 1.07 million in 2007, accounting for 2.2 % of the total population. Forty-seven percent of the foreign population is Chinese; an additional 11 % consists of citizens of the United States. Visa overstayers represent about 21 % of the foreign population but their number appears to be stabilising, increasing at a much slower rate (5%) than the foreign population (17%). Almost 480 000 persons in the foreign population were low-skilled workers, accounting for almost 3 % of wage-and-salary employment.

Despite its limited foreign population, international marriages have become a significant phenomenon in Korea in recent years. Since 2004 more than 11 % of marriages have involved a foreign spouse; in rural areas the percentage is 41 %. About 38 000 such marriages occurred in 2007, three quarters of these involved a foreign woman. Children from such marriages will constitute a significant portion of the youth population in coming decades.

2007 saw a major transition away from the industrial trainee scheme as a way of bringing in low-skilled migrant workers. Most workers are now entering under the employment permit scheme and benefit from the same rights and treatment as Korean nationals. The employment period of foreign workers under the EPS was three years, with no possibility of long-term stay. However, a returning worker could come back to Korea and be re-employed one month after departure. Workers could change jobs three times in the three-year stay period. The maximum period of stay has since been extended to five years, without the need to go back for one month after three years.

Domestic firms can now (2008) also sign multi-year contracts with foreign workers, instead of the one-year contracts (and permits) which needed to be renewed every year.

In contrast to the employment permit scheme, the work visit visa (H2), restricted to persons of Korean origin, and is far more flexible. Proof of Korean ancestry is sufficient to obtain a visa; there is no need to have a job prior to entry. There is, however, a requirement to register with the Korean authorities after a residence is found.

After steadily rising for several years to reach 72 000 in 2008, the numerical limit for employment permits was set at 17 000 in 2009. For the first time, as well, a limit of 17 000 was also set on the number of entries of ethnic Koreans.

The First Basic Plan for Immigration Policy covering the period 2008-2012 was released in 2008. It is intended to lay the foundation for implementing a long-term and consistent immigration policy. The plan consists of four parts: active openness to enhance Korea’s competitiveness; establishing quality social integration for foreigners; implementing an orderly immigration policy; and ensuring protection of foreigners’ human rights.