

GMS Flash Alert

Immigration

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South Korea – Immigration Reforms Expand Top-Tier Visa Access and Streamline Employment Visas

The Ministry of Justice of South Korea announced a new immigration policy strategy designed to attract outstanding foreign talent in innovative industries. The initiative expands eligibility for the Top-Tier Visa and introduces new visa types and system reforms to address labor shortages and support economic growth, as detailed in an official ministry briefing.^{1,2}

WHY THIS MATTERS

This development is significant for global mobility programs, HR leaders, and globally mobile employees considering assignments in South Korea. The broadened access to the Top-Tier Visa for professors and researchers in science and technology, alongside corporate personnel in eight advanced sectors, could facilitate the entry and settlement of highly skilled professionals. The creation of new visa categories and the simplification of existing employment visas may streamline compliance and reduce administrative hurdles for organizations. For foreign workers and international graduates of Korean technical colleges, these changes may open new pathways to long-term employment and residency.

Key Highlights

South Korea's Ministry of Justice has announced a comprehensive immigration policy update to strengthen talent recruitment and address demographic shifts:

- **Expanded Top-Tier Visa eligibility:** Professors and researchers in science and technology are now eligible, in addition to corporate personnel in eight high-tech industries, such as semiconductors and artificial intelligence.
- **New E-7-M Visa (also known as “K-CORE (Korea College-to-Regional Employment)” visa) for middle-skilled technical workers:** Targets foreign graduates of domestic technical colleges in manufacturing, aiming to retain talent educated and socialized in South Korea.
- **Support for small business and regional labor needs:** Special provisions are expected to allow small businesses in provinces with declining populations to hire foreign staff, addressing acute labor shortages.

- **Agriculture and fisheries skilled worker visa:** Introduces a new pathway to encourage long-term employment in these sectors.
- **Simplified employment visa structure:** The existing 39 employment visa types are expected to be streamlined into three skill levels (high, medium, low), centralizing management around professional employment.
- **Wage advisory committee:** Establishment of an advisory body under the minister to set minimum wages by industry and foreign worker category.
- **Implementation of online filing system:** Aims to reduce the need for in-person immigration office visits and shorten waiting times by developing an integrated online immigration services platform.

KPMG INSIGHTS

The reforms reflect South Korea’s proactive approach to counteract demographic challenges – such as a low birth rate and an aging population – by making the country more attractive to global talent. The simplification of visa categories and tailored support for regional employers may lower administrative barriers, while the new wage-setting mechanism aims to adhere to fair labor standards.

In light of the changes, organizations, entities, and individuals might wish to consider the following:

- Organizations could review their mobility policies and assess opportunities to leverage the expected new visa options, particularly for talent acquisition in science, technology, and manufacturing.
- HR teams could update onboarding and compliance processes in line with the new visa structure and wage rules.
- International graduates of Korean domestic technical colleges could consult with immigration advisers regarding the new E-7-M Visa pathway.

Questions or concerns about the process and/or who qualifies for use of the automated immigration counters should be directed to qualified travel professionals and/or immigration advisers or a member of the immigration team with KPMG in South Korea (see the Contacts section).

ENDNOTES:

- 1 KOREA.net, Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, [“New immigration strategy offers visa benefits for top talent.”](#) published on March 4, 2026.
- 2 Ministry of Justice (in Korean), [“2030 immigration policy strategy,”](#) published on March 3, 2026.

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Contacts

For additional information or assistance, please contact your local GMS or People Services professional* or one of the following professionals with the KPMG International member firm in South Korea:



So-Hyeon Jung
Partner
Tax
Tel. + 82 (2) 2112 7657
sohyeonjung@kr.kpmg.com



Han Moi (Matt) Park
Director
Tax
Tel. + 82 (2) 2112 0604
hpark11@kr.kpmg.com



Henna Puumala
Supervisor
Tax
Tel. + 82 (2) 2112 6702
hpuumala1@kr.kpmg.com

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