

# **Policy Recommendations on North Korean Refugees in South Korea: Issues concerning their resettlement and what the South Korean government, NGOs and civil society could assist to ensure their resettlement (4524 words)**



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## **Executive Summary**

With 31,093 North Korean defectors registered with Ministry of Unification in South Korea, there are urgent needs to address their effective integration into the South Korean society. In this Policy Brief, four different Policy Recommendations are provided to advance their rights and voice in the international arena and to promote better assimilation in the South Korean society. The Policy Brief recommends the promotion of schooling and Education of North Korean refugees in South Korea as integral steps toward advancing and enhancing their assimilation into the South Korean society. English skill acquisition and change from socialistic to a free market society are suggested as effective policy recommendations within schooling context. Increased and consistent governmental funding to these schools and well staffed school system would give rise to competent young adults who would be able to better assimilate and perform as competent economic agents in the South Korean economy and society. Financial incentives could additionally be provided to employers to hire more North Korean employees.

## **Background Information**

With only 7% of the young Korean students agreeing to the reunification of two Koreas according to recent polls, there seems to be an increasing need to educate the Korean public especially the younger generation of the need for reunification and the situations in North Korea. Though narratives on their own have limited impact, increasing coverage of issues in North Korea in lighter ways through media coverage, TV shows, movies and articles have made an impact on South Korean's understanding of issues in North Korea. After the Saewolho ferry incident the Korean government and society has come to an awakening of their current situation and this has moved forward the society including election of President Moon and his efforts of reunification with the North. Presidents and administrations in the past have promoted policies to achieve unification yet their policies on the process or type of unification they have sought have varied a bit one from the other, yet the overarching consensus is that the reunification should be implemented under a liberal democratic system that discontinues to allow the suffering of the North Korean people by keeping Kim Jong Un in brutal grip of power.



Moreover, there should be more explicit coverage of the challenges and issues that the North Korean refugees face while adapting to the culture and life that they must adjust to while living in Korea. North Korean refugees have fled from North Korea through various routes mostly through China or Southeast Asian countries into South Korea through underground brokers. Many women have often been sexually harassed in the process of defecting and many experience horrendous experiences of trauma and violence while defecting the borders. If caught in North Korea-China borders, due to Chinese policies toward North Korean defectors that do not recognize them as political refugees who have fled from the oppressive regime but as

economic migrants who have defected seeking economic benefits, these North Korean defectors are repatriated to North Korea where they might potentially face threats of corporal or severe punishment.

Due to the severity of the situation and experiences that these refugees have experienced, it is vital that the South Korean government implement policies at the governmental level that implements advocacy and protection of these defectors and work towards education and assimilation of these populations into the South Korean society. Education will be the first step towards their assimilation into the South Korean society and a comprehensive schooling system that addresses their psychosocial, academic, practical and social and economic components of their lives would be essential to their smooth transition and assimilation into the South Korean society ultimately allowing them to integrate themselves into the South Korean economy. The Ministry of Unification of South Korea should view investment on these North Korean refugees as the very step towards investing towards the prospects of Unification as these defectors if integrated into the South Korean society successfully would fundamentally be invaluable resources who would bridge the gap between North Korean and South Korean contexts if the two Koreas were to reunify one day. In fact North Korean refugees are unification resources who will return to their hometowns and play leading roles in building a unified Korea once the Korean Peninsula becomes one state again (Nkekonwatch).

### **Policy Recommendation 1: Empowerment of NGOs and Liberty in North Korea to rescue defectors and raise awareness and promote advocacy and education of North Korean refugees**



To address unification without integration and assimilation of these North Korean refugees living in South Korea would lose the trust of the South Korean society on what the Ministry of Unification wishes to achieve. They will one day become invaluable components and resources for Reunification as they are the only ones well equipped with knowledge and experiences of both contexts if they were to successfully assimilate into the South Korean society. And their successful integration could serve as great narratives in the international arena in advocacy of North Korean refugee rights and give positive hopes toward reunification of the two countries, influencing the international perspective towards North Korean refugees and prospects of Unification and gives all the more reason for Ministry of Unification to invest in these policies of advocating education and schooling of North Korean refugees in South Korea.

Various other policy recommendations could include involvement of International NGOs such as Liberty in North Korea which serves to raise awareness about the situation in North



Korea and the North Korean defectors about the process of defecting and disseminating stories of their rescue efforts and successful transportation and integration into the South Korean society. Increased advocacy and funding for these NGOs including Liberty in North Korea would be one policy option that could be recommended. LINK is one of the many NGOs that work toward rescue efforts and assimilation efforts of North Korean refugees in South Korea. Often times they work in third countries to help escape them into South Korea borderlines. Though there are many other local NGOs, LINK has been most dominantly prominent in the US setting as its works have been most primarily effective in US until the recent years where they have expanded the horizons of their work significantly in South Korea and elsewhere.



There are many NGOs that work with rescue efforts of these defectors, and others that work with resettlement of the defectors in South Korea, and Liberty in North Korea is involved with both the latter and former efforts. Many religious organizations and Christian missionaries serve as brokers who smuggle North Korean refugees out of North Korea into China and ultimately into South Korea. Increased funding and protection of these nongovernmental groups and organizations especially in their efforts to accommodate resettlement of the defectors especially surrounding the area of schooling could be one policy option that could be implemented considering cost, feasibility and effectiveness of these efforts. As potential key players if the two Koreas were to unite, the investment in education of these defectors would be effective policy recommendations to be implemented.

Funding these nongovernmental organizations would be relatively cost-effective as investment would be spent on most urgent needs of rescuing North Korean defectors and raising awareness and advocacy of these rescue efforts. The international community would be supportive of these human rights advocacy efforts and would increase South Korean reputation in the international and diplomatic arena as well. The feasibility of these programs rate high as well since having access to these underground routes and brokers are vitally restricted, yet indirect support of these nongovernmental efforts to rescue and raise awareness of these efforts would serve effective policy recommendation for the Ministry of Unification of South Korea to consider and attend to.

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### **Policy Recommendation 2: Increased financial support for schooling and education of North Korean Refugees in South Korea**

The other policy recommendation that could be made would be to implement Schooling of North Korean Refugees residing in South Korea. Schools like Hankum, Yeomyung are already being implemented in South Korea. Yeomyung, a fully accredited institution, and the most sought-after school for defectors, receives 2,000,000,000 Korean won (US\$1.75 million)

annually from the government (Lee 2018). And Haankkum receives just 100,000,000 Korean won (US\$87,600), most of which is used to cover its staffing and facilities costs. Christian organizations provide most of the rest of its funding, allowing it to guarantee free tuition plus living expenses for all its students (Lee 2018).

Other organizations include Teach for North Korean Refugees (TNKR) and these organizations help foster need for education and schooling and help foster English skills which would not only help North Korean refugees their narratives with the rest of the world but also increase their likelihood of finding a job in the competitive South Korean economy (Heifetz 2018). Especially in South Korea, fluency in English would greatly increase their chances of finding a job when they have less chances of finding a job, let alone receiving equal wages in the South Korean society. In fact they only earn about 60% of what average South Koreans would earn and receive discrimination in the South Korean society due to major cultural differences.



The other challenge that the North Korean refugees face is the transition from their minds inculcated with socialistic ideologies into the free-market economy in South Korean society. And this could in many ways be an obstacle in integration into the Korean society that the schools could help foster change and adaptation. North Korean refugees have to adjust to the free market society of South Korea and meanwhile also learn the quirks of using automated teller machines (ATMs), and credit cards (Haas 2018). Moreover, these North Korean refugees have underwent struggles and traumatic experiences in the process of defecting that hinder them from successfully assimilating into the South Korean society. Schools should accommodate the psychosocial needs of these students. These psychosocial concerns have to be addressed as



## The Guardian

*The school teaching North Korean refugees how to live in the South*

*More than 100 students attend Yeomyung school in Seoul, where they are taught the quirks of assimilating, from using credit cards to navigating*

corroborated by various research studies (Jun, Yu, Cho 2008), (Park, Lee, Jun 2018), (Kim 2013) (Lim et al 2017) (Kim 2011). Addressing their psychosocial concerns and needs as well as their economic, academic and social concerns would be vital in providing a holistic and comprehensive and practical solutions and support that address the realistic needs of North Korean refugees in South Korea experts say.

The Ministry of Unification should be funding these schooling systems which promote education, English skills, education of free-market values and understanding needed to assimilate into South Korean society, and address of psychosocial needs and concerns of these refugees. The cost of funding these efforts could be high compared to other policies but they are cost-effective when considering the potential impacts these efforts would have on education of North Korean refugees and equip them with skills including English to thrive in the globalized economy and open society in South Korea.

The effectiveness of the policy would be high in bringing about successful assimilation and integration of these North Korean refugees in the South Korean society. Feasibility of these programs would be also relatively easy as funding in other policy recommendations would be invested and concentrated in this area and there are many existing religious organizations and social workers and staff who are working towards North Korean refugee education in schools including but not limited to Yeomyung, Hankum, and Teach for North Korean Refugees. their academic but emotional and social well-being and success. Teachers serve the role as active mediators if any conflicts arise amongst students, or any problems that they face in the community as they try to assimilate into the South Korean culture.

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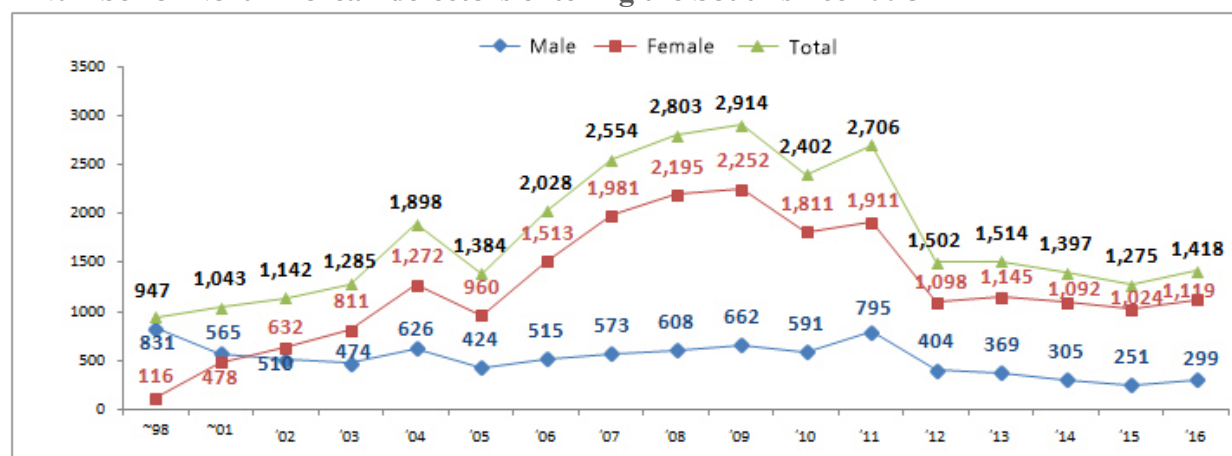
### **Policy Recommendation 3: Strengthen efforts by Hanawon Program to promote assimilation of North Korean refugees in South Korean society**

Another policy recommendation would be to further advance the efforts provided through the Hanawon program already being implemented by the Hanawon program. Korea Hana Foundation offers various forms of support in cooperation with the central and local governments, and the private sector, designating and running 23 regional adaptation centers (Hana Center) across the nation, settlement assistants (500 persons) work with volunteers, and professional counselors (100 persons) provide comprehensive counseling, protection officers include 230 persons in residence, 60 persons in the workplace and 800 persons for personal protection. (Ministry of Unification).



*The tenth anniversary commemoration ceremony at the Settlement Support Center for North Korean Refugees, or Hanawon, in Anseong, Gyeonggi Province*

< Number of North Korean defectors entering the South since 1998 >



The increased efforts would include education provided at Hanawon on emotional stability, health care, better understanding of South Korean, career counseling and basic vocational training, and initial resettlement support (Ministry of Unification Manual). Topics would include understanding of community, educational guidance, health promotion, employment, economic education. Resettlement subsidies are distributed among the refugees for effective assimilation and about KRW 7 million for a single person household. Housing arrangements are made, and housing subsidies are provided, about 13 million for a single person household. Vocational training is also provided free of charge and monthly training allowances of



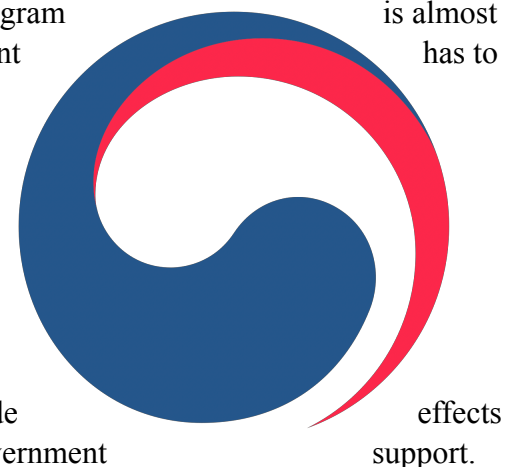
KRW 200,000 are provided during the training period. Vocational training, certification, and employment incentives are provided to incentivize training and attainment of certificate. Employer subsidies are provided to the employers for about KRW 500,000 is subsidized up to four years to incentivize South Korean owners to employ nondiscriminatory policies toward North Koreans and incentivize employment of North Korean refugee workers. Livelihoods security benefits are provided about KRW 600,000 per month.

Health care plans, special pension plans are provided. And nursing mother assistance, medical assistance, medical expenses, and emergency livelihood and daily necessary kits are provided. In terms of education, special admission policies and school transfer policies are implemented, and special admission and transfer to colleges are carried out; support for school fees are provided and tuition for middle and high schools and national and public universities are exempted. Counseling is provided through follow-up services through Hana Center, professional counselors and resettlement assistants are available to provide success stories of previous refugees who have integrated well into the South Korean culture and society. (Ministry of Unification Manual).

These programs and projects being implemented by the Ministry of Unification could be continued as though costly as it assists North Korean refugees in helping them with their early stages of integration, these are fundamental basic necessities only Ministry of Unification can provide at such a systematic and extensive level. Effective integration and assimilation would be virtually impossible without these subsidies provided by the government to help them adjust to the free market economy of South Korea. Initial investment has to be implemented for them to become economic agents in the South Korean economy who could sustain themselves in the job market. The effectiveness of the program is almost vital that it is inevitable investment the Korean government has to make in order to ensure successful integration and assimilation of the North Korean refugees into the Korean society.

Feasibility is made possible through the investments that the Ministry of Unification makes toward these policies. But one of the oft-repeated major concerns about these financial investments are that they are insufficient and increased funding could be enacted; these financial hand-outs often bring about unintended side effects such as North Korean defectors' dependency on these government support. There have been studies that exemplify how most defectors do not save or invest and use all the money they are given on luxuries when they leave Hanawon. Hence, the recommendation could be to give out financial support in installments and to monitor their expenditures.

Financial management training is also needed. What has been freely handed out could be used extravagantly and hence perhaps better policy recommendation would be career counseling and training to secure them jobs that would ensure



## Ministry of Unification

them sustainable income in the long run. Financial installments to assist initial stages of resettlement supplemented by job training and career advising could be implemented simultaneously as long term policy recommendations.

#### **Policy Recommendation 4: Promote narratives of North Korean refugees in international community to promote public activism**

Last but not least the policy recommendation to further enhance the narratives of North Korean refugees in the international community would be a potential recommendation that could be overlooked yet require further scrutiny. These narratives through media and public activism could be powerful empowering tool through which these North Korean refugees could enhance their voice, status and power in the international community. Investment of funds and efforts to promote more international exposure and attention of North Korean refugee crisis would further increase chances of public awareness and increased understanding and funding of relevant policies on North Korean refugee. These narratives are already being presented in international platforms such as but not limited to Bush Institute, Tedtalks (Joseph Kim), UN platforms (Yeon Mi Park), US Congress (by Song Hwa Han and JinHye Cho) (U.S Government Publishing Office 2012) as they already are doing in many ways.

The recent talk during CSIS (Center for Strategic & International Studies) hosted talk on experts and North Korean defectors to raise public awareness about the pertinent issues of North Korean market and the role of North Korean women in those markets. The North Korean defectors were able to provide insights as to the role that North Korean women could play in these markets that sell smuggled goods from China which provide North Korean citizens of the information about the outside world prohibited by the regime as many officials are willing to take bribes to allow transactions to happen despite state regulations, and Victor Cha, a senior advisor of CSIS made a remark on how these North Korean women would serve key roles if North Korea were to one day open up and receive international businesses and corporations, then these women who are most familiar with these free market concepts and values would be essential key players in the new job market of the emerging economy once North Korea enacts open policies toward the international community (Center for Strategic & International Studies 2019).



*Advocacy fellows with the non-profit Liberty in North Korea (LiNK) speak to CSUF students about their experience escaping North Korea in Fullerton on Tuesday, October 16, 2018. Pictured, from left, are Ill Yong, Noel, Geum Hyok and Jessie. The event was sponsored by the CSF UN Association. (Photo by Leonard Ortiz, Orange County Register/SCNG)*

During the North Korea Freedom Week that happened in Washington as a yearly tradition this year, along with the Center for Strategic & International Studies, the Heritage Foundation also invited North Korean defectors, Huh Kwang il Head of the Committee for Democratization of North Korea, Kim Heung Kwang, Head of the North Korea Intellectuals Solidarity, and Kim Seongmin Founder and Director, Free North Korea Radio moderated by Suzanne Scholte, President of Defense Forum Foundation. These North Korean defector representative have voiced their opinion that increased infiltration of outside information through the USBs and bottles filled with outside information and goods will disempower North Korean regime from the inside out. And they stress the importance of tackling issues of Human Rights as an effective strategy to address the denuclearization issues in North Korea.

And the defectors voice their opinion that the international community including United States must continue with their economic sanctions despite the contentions that these sanctions might cause increased suffering on the ordinary people, yet the ordinary people are rarely influenced by these sanctions or find ways to accommodate to these changes, yet the officials are those who are unable to adjust to these changes and incur all burdens from these sanctions. The global community should make best use of their expertise and insiders' knowledge of the situation in North Korea to address political issues and develop policy recommendations (2019 Heritage Foundation). Moreover, the North Korean refugees are unification resources who will return to their hometowns and play leading roles in building a unified Korea once the Korean Peninsula becomes one state again (Nkekonwatch).

The South Korean government could also learn from how the US government is supportive of North Korean defectors and do more to raise awareness about them and provide greater support to North Korean Human Rights Organizations run by North Korean defectors as the US government tends to do. Also consistency of these support for defectors could be implemented by the South Korean government, as policies often change every time the government changes. Also, the progressive Moon government pursues radical rapprochement with NK regime and hence have withdrawn much support to North Korean defector organizations because of their vocal criticism of the North Korean regime. South Korean government could learn from how the US government is supportive of North Korean defectors and defector organizations to precipitate and ensure their resettlement.

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### **Successful Case Story: Joseph Kim, an assistant on the Human Freedom Initiative at the George W. Bush Institute.**

**I** am a North Korean Dissident; Human Rights

Matter in My Home  
FEBRUARY 25, 2019  
5 MINUTE READ

by **Joseph Kim**

North Korean dissident Joseph Kim shares why it's critical that human rights abuses are addressed at the upcoming U.S.-North Korea Summit.



North Korea is the place where I was born and lived until I was 15. It is the place, where at the age of 12, I saw my father wither away and die of starvation; it is also the place where I said my last goodbye to my older sister, not knowing she would never return because she would be forcibly sold to a man in China. I was an orphan, homeless, and survived for three years during the great famine by begging in the informal North Korean markets, before I escaped to China in 2006. A year later, I came to the United States as the first minor North Korean refugee, thanks to the **North Korean Human Rights Act**, signed into law by President George W. Bush in 2004. I am forever grateful to this nation for giving me the opportunity to experience freedom.

I cannot begin to imagine the challenges President Donald Trump must face at the upcoming Vietnam Summit when he meets with North Korea's Leader Kim Jong-Un. Achieving the objectives of Complete, Verified, and Irreversible Disarmament (CVID) and holding the Kim regime accountable for its human rights abuses are indeed difficult tasks.

The nature of the negotiations requires both parties to compromise on certain interests in order to accomplish shared objectives, otherwise we would not call it a negotiation. It would simply be called extortion. But why would North Korea's human rights abuses be part of that compromise?

**Forty-one percent** of the North Korean population is undernourished, and 28 percent of children under five have stunted growth. Furthermore, Kim Jong-Un's nuclear program is partially funded by sending North Koreans to places like China and Russia to perform slave labor in exchange for currency. I recognize North Korea is not the easiest country to negotiate with. By focusing on less sensitive issues, like **aiding people with disabilities**, President Trump can take a small step toward addressing human rights abuses.

If human rights is not addressed, it will weaken the power of the United States. I say this for two reasons: one practical and one theoretical that could have grave consequences in the long-term.

The inspiring stories of North Korean refugees are an asset and not a political tool, something I hope the White House agrees with since President Trump invited Ji Seong-Ho and seven other North Korean defectors to the 2018 State of the Union Address. Employing stories of North Korean defectors only for political gain can seriously damage this nation's reputation.

I urge President Trump to empower North Korean defectors and not exploit them. Otherwise, the international community could start questioning our motivations and intentions, even if the U.S. genuinely advocates for North Korean human rights in the future.

Moreover, I believe what makes America a great nation is not merely having the best military and economic powers. Rather, what makes the United States a great country is its commitment to the nation's principles and identity. That is to **promote and protect** universally that all people are equal and entitled to freedom, to be treated fairly with dignity, and the understanding that this is not a privilege reserved for Americans, but all citizens of the world.

As an example, there is no denying that China is rapidly advancing its economic power. But we would not necessarily call China a great nation, unless it treats its people with dignity and respect.

While it is difficult to suggest a new pathway to make the Kim regime give up its nuclear ambitions while pressing human rights issues at the summit, what can be assured is that abandoning U.S. national principles and identity will make America weak. Even if the Vietnam Summit achieves a concrete and comprehensive agreement on denuclearization, failing to address the gulags, slave labor, and other human rights abuses is neither an investment nor a gamble. It is simply a lose - lose game.

In the fall of 2013, as I was traveling through South Africa, at the Johannesburg airport I saw a message on the wall, "They call it Africa, but we call it home." It resonated with me. There is no doubt that North Korea is one of the darkest places in the world, but it is still a home for me and 24 million North Korean people.

For the sake of this nation and for my friends who are still suffering under the North Korean dictatorship, I cannot wish for anything else but a successful outcome of the Vietnam Summit between President Donald Trump and North Korean Leader Kim Jong-Un.



## **Conclusion**

The policy recommendation made by this policy brief would be the increased funding and efforts to staff schools that support education of North Korean refugees in South Korea. The Hanawon programs are already being implemented by Ministry of Unification already and further efforts would be redundant and enhanced efforts would not be as compulsory and urgent as to the efforts to staff and equip existing schools there exist in educating North Korean refugees in South Korea. Equipping them with various skills especially English would enable them to be competent in the job market. Also, college degrees would enhance their chances of employment. Moreover, they should acquire knowledge and skills to navigate the free market society in South Korea and schools should provide them with practical knowledge and skills to navigate this free market society. Moreover, schools should be providing psychosocial support for those who have experienced traumatic experiences in the process of defecting from the North. Also, schools should provide assistance to these students in teaching them how to ride the metro to using credit cards and ATM machines. Even those things that seem mundane and part of everyday life should not be taken for granted and they should visit City Halls, medical services and other resources available in the area along with the students to teach them access and use of these various resources and services made available to them.

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