

Cambodian Immigrants in South Korea

SEPTEMBER 2026

Summary

South Korea counted 63,681 Cambodian resident foreigners on December 31, 2024, the largest number on record. In 2024 Cambodians were the sixth-largest nationality among registered foreigners (61,006 people, 4.1 percent of the total) and the 11th-largest among all resident foreigners (2.4 percent). Their rank among registered foreigners was also sixth in 2014 and 2019, while their rank among all resident foreigners moved from 10th in 2014 to 11th in 2019 and 2024. The population grew more than seventeenfold from 3,652 in 2006 ($63,681 / 3,652 = 17.4$), fell from 47,565 in 2019 to 41,405 in 2020, and has risen every year since 2021.

Highlights

- ▶ At the end of 2024, 61,006 Cambodians were registered foreigners in South Korea, the sixth-largest nationality among registered foreigners, and the 63,681 Cambodians among all resident foreigners made them the 11th-largest nationality in that count, 33.9 percent more than the 47,565 recorded in 2019.
- ▶ In 2024, 76.9 percent of Cambodian residents (48,998 people) held the E-9 non-professional employment visa, and Cambodians made up 14.5 percent of all E-9 holders in the country.
- ▶ In 2024, 22.7 percent of registered Cambodians lived in rural counties (gun), compared with 10.6 percent of all foreign residents.

Most Cambodians came to Korea as workers under the Employment Permit System (EPS), which Korea opened to Cambodia through a labor-sending agreement signed in 2006 (Korea Times, 2025). A smaller group arrived through marriage to Korean citizens, a channel the Cambodian government suspended in 2008 and again in 2010 over trafficking concerns (ABC News, 2010). Since 2019 two newer routes have grown. Cambodian holders of the E-7 specially designated activities

visa numbered 55 in 2019 and 2,840 in 2024, and holders of the E-8 seasonal worker visa numbered 1,445 in 2024 after none in 2019.

Compared with all resident foreigners, Cambodians are younger, more often men, and far more concentrated in employment visas: 83.8 percent held an employment visa in 2024, against 19.2 percent of all resident foreigners. They are also less concentrated in the Seoul capital area and more likely to live in rural counties. This Spotlight describes the population's size, location, age and sex, visa status, migration channels, naturalization, unauthorized residence, health, community organizations, and migration from Cambodia to South Korea.

BOX 1

Definitions

Resident foreigners (체류외국인). All foreign nationals in South Korea on a valid status on December 31 of a given year, including short-term visitors and overseas Koreans who report their residence. This is the headline count used in this Spotlight unless stated otherwise.

Registered foreigners (등록외국인). Foreign nationals in South Korea for more than 90 days who register with immigration authorities, a subset of resident foreigners. Holders of the F-4 overseas Korean visa report their residence instead of registering and are therefore not in this count. Province and district figures in this Spotlight use registered foreigners (61,006 Cambodians in 2024).

Index of dissimilarity (D). A measure from 0 to 1 of how differently Cambodians and all other foreign residents are spread across districts. A value of 0.5 means half of either group would have to move to another district for the two distributions to match.

Ethnic enclave. A district where the location quotient for Cambodians (their share of the district's foreign residents divided by their share of all foreign residents nationwide) is at least 2 and Cambodians make up at least 30 percent of the district's foreign residents.

1 Size of the Population over Time

The number of Cambodian resident foreigners rose from 3,652 in 2006 to 12,192 in 2010 and 38,395 in 2014. Growth slowed after 2014, and the count was 47,565 in 2019. The count fell by 6,160 (13.0 percent) to 41,405 in 2020, changed little in 2021 (41,525), then climbed to 49,240 in 2022, 57,018 in 2023, and 63,681 in 2024.

Nearly all Cambodians in Korea are registered long-term residents. In 2024, 61,006 Cambodians were registered foreigners, 95.8 percent of the resident count. The registered

count excludes short-term visitors and holders of the F-4 overseas Korean visa, groups with few Cambodians, so Cambodians rank higher among registered foreigners. They were 20th among registered foreigners and 22nd among all resident foreigners in 2006, and sixth and 10th in 2014.

Between 2019 and 2024 the Cambodian population grew by 33.9 percent (index 133.9, with 2019 = 100). This was the 7th-fastest growth among the 20 largest foreign nationalities over that period.

TABLE 1
Cambodian Resident and Registered Foreigners in South Korea, Selected Years

Year	Resident foreigners	Registered foreigners	Rank among resident foreigners	Rank among registered foreigners	Share of all resident foreigners (%)	Share of all registered foreigners (%)
2006	3,652	3,331	22	20	0.4	0.5
2014	38,395	37,299	10	6	2.1	3.4
2019	47,565	45,016	11	6	1.9	3.5
2024	63,681	61,006	11	6	2.4	4.1

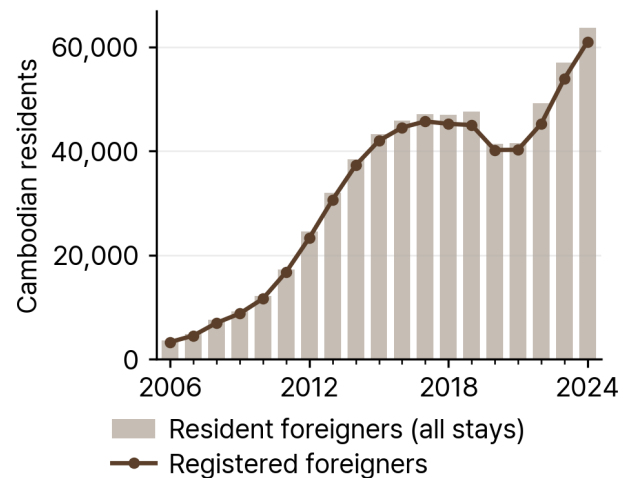
Note: Resident foreigners (체류외국인) include short-term visitors and F-4 residence reporters; registered foreigners (등록외국인) are long-term residents who register with immigration authorities. Ranks and shares compare Cambodians with all nationalities in the same count.

Source: KIRD dataset, from Ministry of Justice immigration yearbooks, 2006-2024.

2 Distribution by Province and District

In 2024, 39.1 percent of registered Cambodians lived in the Seoul capital area (Seoul, Incheon, and Gyeonggi), compared with 55.2 percent of all foreign residents. Almost all of that share was outside Seoul itself: 22,753 Cambodians (37.3 percent) lived in Incheon and Gyeonggi, and 1,109 (1.8 percent) in Seoul. The Yeongnam region held 24.8 percent (15,121), Chungcheong 18.4 percent (11,224), Honam 14.8 percent (9,034), and Gangwon and Jeju 2.9 percent (1,765).

FIGURE 1
Cambodian Resident and Registered Foreigners in South Korea, 2006-24



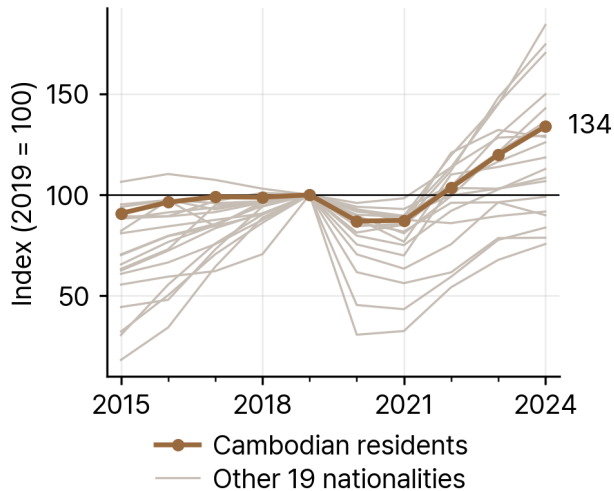
Source: KIRD dataset, from Ministry of Justice immigration yearbooks, 2006-2024.

In 2024, 22.7 percent of registered Cambodians lived in a rural county (gun), compared with 10.6 percent of all foreign residents. The rural county share was 44.5 percent in Honam, 35.3 percent in Chungcheong, and 31.0 percent in Yeongnam.

The population is spread across many places. In 2024, 121 districts had at least 100 registered Cambodians, and the ten largest districts together held 29.4 percent of the total.

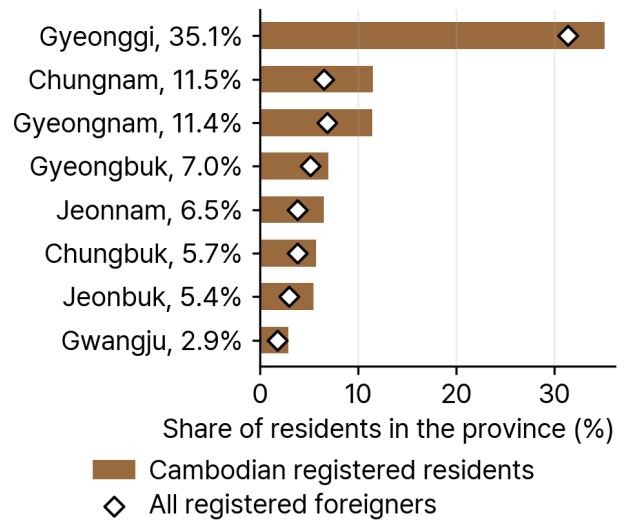
Hwaseong-si in Gyeonggi-do had the most (3,588). In Icheon-si, Nonsan-si, and Miryang-si, Cambodians made up more than one in five foreign residents.

FIGURE 2
Growth of Cambodian Residents Compared with the 19 Other Largest Nationalities in South Korea, 2019-24 (2019 = 100)



Source: KIRD dataset, from Ministry of Justice immigration yearbooks, 2006-2024.

FIGURE 3
Registered Cambodians in South Korea by Province, 2024



Source: KIRD dataset, from Ministry of Justice immigration yearbooks, 2006-2024.

The index of dissimilarity between Cambodians and all other foreign residents across districts was 0.494 in 2014 and 0.507 in 2024, a change of 0.013 over the decade.

TABLE 2
Ten Districts with the Most Registered Cambodians, 2024

District	Province	Registered Cambodians	Share of district's registered foreigners (%)
Hwaseong-si	Gyeonggi-do	3,588	7.0
Icheon-si	Gyeonggi-do	2,202	21.1
Gimpo-si	Gyeonggi-do	1,813	7.1
Pocheon-si	Gyeonggi-do	1,739	10.7
Gwangju-si	Gyeonggi-do	1,670	11.2
Nonsan-si	Chungcheongnam-do	1,522	23.7
Miryang-si	Gyeongsangnam-do	1,449	29.5
Gimhae-si	Gyeongsangnam-do	1,432	5.8
Eumseong-gun	Chungcheongbuk-do	1,284	9.3
Paju-si	Gyeonggi-do	1,255	8.1

Note: Gwangju-si is the city in Gyeonggi-do, distinct from Gwangju Metropolitan City. Together these ten districts held 29.4 percent of registered Cambodians.

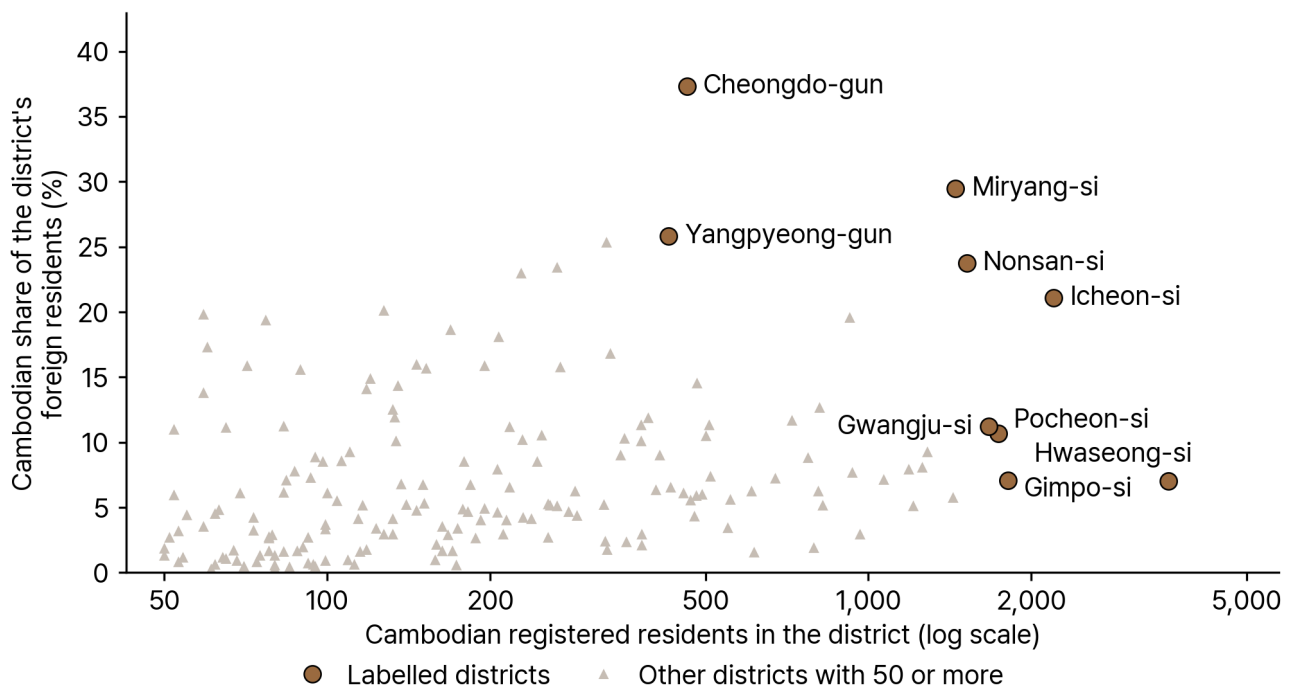
Source: KIRD dataset, from Ministry of Justice immigration yearbooks, 2006-2024.

One district met the enclave definition in 2024. In Cheongdo-gun (Gyeongsangbuk-do), 462 registered Cambodians made up 37.3 percent of foreign residents, a location quotient of 9.6. Other districts with high Cambodian shares in 2024 were Miryang-si (29.5 percent), Yangpyeong-gun (25.8 percent), Damyang-gun (25.4 percent), and Nonsan-si (23.7 percent).

3 Age and Sex

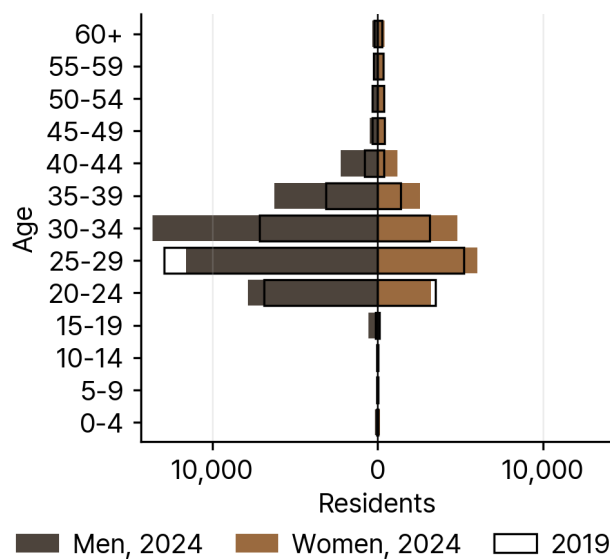
Cambodian residents are concentrated in young working ages. In 2024, 87.8 percent (55,922 people) were ages 20 to 39, compared with 49.7 percent of all resident foreigners. The largest five-year age group was 30 to 34, and the median age also fell in that group.

FIGURE 4
Districts with the Largest Numbers of Registered Cambodians, 2024



Source: KIRD dataset, from Ministry of Justice immigration yearbooks, 2006-2024.

FIGURE 5
Cambodian Residents in South Korea by Age and Sex, 2024



Source: KIRD dataset, from Ministry of Justice immigration yearbooks, 2006-2024.

Few Cambodian residents are children or older adults. In 2024, 0.9 percent (583) were under age 15, against 5.7 percent of all resident foreigners, and 1.2 percent were 60 or older, against 12.9 percent. The number of Cambodian children under 15 rose from 245 in 2019 to 583 in 2024, and children under 5 from 83 to 309.

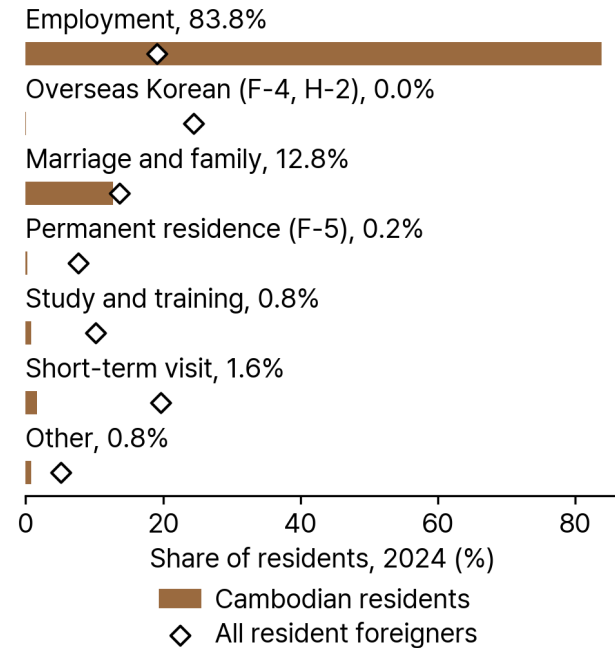
Women made up 31.4 percent of Cambodian residents in 2024 (19,988 people), down from 32.4 percent (15,406) in 2019. Among all resident foreigners, 45.1 percent were women in 2024.

4 Visa Status

In 2024, 83.8 percent of Cambodian residents held an employment visa, compared with 19.2 percent of all resident foreigners. Marriage and family visas accounted for 12.8 percent (13.6 percent among all resident foreigners). Short-term visits (1.6 percent), study and training (0.8 percent), and permanent residence (0.2 percent) were each much smaller than among all resident foreigners (19.7, 10.2, and 7.7 percent). No Cambodians held overseas Korean visas, the category that covers 24.5 percent of all resident foreigners.

The E-9 non-professional employment visa is the main status. Cambodian E-9 holders grew from 31,056 in 2014 to 37,980 in 2019 and 48,998 in 2024. In the KIRD data for 2024, Cambodians were the largest nationality among E-9 holders, at 14.5 percent of the total. The Korea Times described Cambodia in 2025 as the second-largest source of E-9 workers after Nepal (Korea Times, 2025).

FIGURE 6

Visa Groups of Cambodian Residents and All Resident Foreigners in South Korea, 2024

Source: KIRD dataset, from Ministry of Justice immigration yearbooks, 2006-2024.

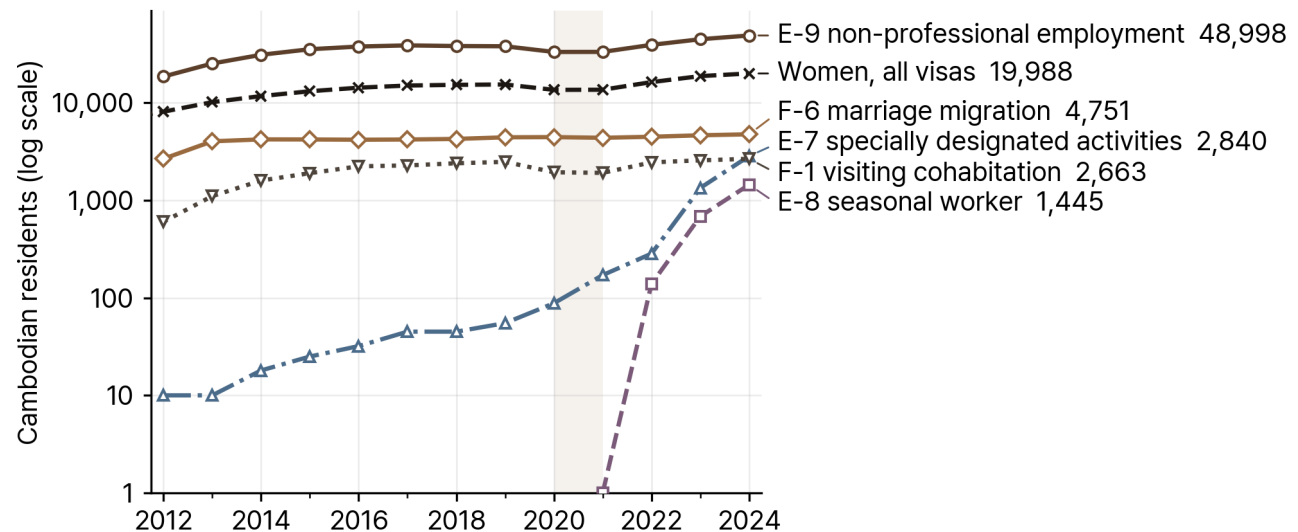
Two smaller statuses grew fast after 2019. E-7 holders increased from 55 in 2019 to 2,840 in 2024, and E-8 seasonal workers from zero to 1,445. Marriage migrants on the F-6 visa numbered 4,751 in 2024, up from 4,428 in 2019, and F-3 dependent family holders rose from 51 to 409.

5 Migration Channels and Policy

Labor migration from Cambodia rests on a 2006 labor-sending agreement between the two governments under the Employment Permit System (Korea Times, 2025). The same report described Cambodia in October 2025 as the second-largest source of E-9 workers after Nepal.

Seasonal farm work is a second channel arranged between governments. In August 2026, Hamyang County in South Gyeongsang Province signed an agreement with Cambodia's Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training in Phnom Penh to bring in seasonal workers (Newspim, 2026).

FIGURE 7

Cambodian Residents in South Korea by Visa Type, 2012-24

Source: KIRD dataset, from Ministry of Justice immigration yearbooks, 2006-2024.

In October 2025, after kidnappings and killings of Korean citizens by Cambodia-based crime groups led to public calls to cut Cambodia's E-9 quota, Labor Minister Kim Young-hoon

said the government had no plans to adjust Cambodia's allocation and warned that a cut would unfairly stigmatize Cambodian workers (Korea Times, 2025).

TABLE 3
Main Visa Types Held by Cambodian Residents in South Korea, 2019 and 2024

Visa	Meaning	2019	2024	Share of Cambodian residents, 2024 (%)	Cambodians' share of all holders of this visa, 2024 (%)
E-9	Non-professional employment	37,980	48,998	76.9	14.5
F-6	Marriage migration	4,428	4,751	7.5	3.2
E-7	Specially designated activities	55	2,840	4.5	4.5
F-1	Visiting and cohabitation	2,480	2,663	4.2	2.7
E-8	Seasonal worker	0	1,445	2.3	5.9
C-3	Short-term visit	1,130	907	1.4	0.6
F-3	Dependent family	51	409	0.6	0.8

Note: Shares use the 2024 Cambodian resident total of 63,681.

Source: KIRD dataset, from Ministry of Justice immigration yearbooks, 2006-2024.

In January 2026, after the Supreme Court ruling on the death of Cambodian worker Nuon Sokkheng (see Health and Well-being), the Ministry of Employment and Labor said it would seek to revise the law so that employers cannot house foreign workers in illegal temporary structures, and would step up inspections of foreign workers' housing (Korea Times, 2026).

6 Naturalization

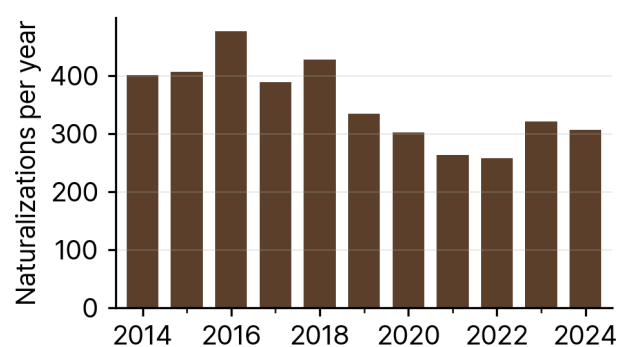
The KIRD dataset records 3,885 naturalizations of Cambodian nationals from 2014 to 2024. The Ministry of Justice yearbook's naturalization table by country of origin is used from the 2011 edition onward, because the 2009 and 2010 editions print cumulative totals dating back to 1991; Cambodia's row covering all naturalization routes in that table begins in 2014. Annual naturalizations peaked at 476 in 2016, fell to 258 in 2022, and stood at 307 in 2024.

A further 83 restorations of Korean nationality were recorded for Cambodian nationals from 2011 to 2024, one of them in 2024. Restoration applies to former Korean nationals and is mainly relevant for ethnic Korean groups.

7 Unauthorized Residents

Cambodia is among the ten nationalities that the Ministry of Justice yearbook reports separately in its table of unauthorized residents (table 6-4). The count of Cambodians without valid status was 6,099 in 2019, 8,751 in 2021, 10,920 in 2023, and 10,709 in 2024.

FIGURE 8
Naturalizations of Cambodian Nationals in South Korea, 2014-24



Source: KIRD dataset, from Ministry of Justice immigration yearbooks, 2006-2024.

Relative to the resident count, these figures equal 12.8 percent in 2019 (6,099 of 47,565), 21.1 percent in 2021 (8,751 of 41,525), 19.2 percent in 2023 (10,920 of 57,018), and 16.8 percent in 2024 (10,709 of 63,681). Cambodians ranked 8th among nationalities in 2024 and accounted for 2.7 percent of the 397,522 unauthorized residents counted that year.

8 Health and Well-being

To our knowledge, no published study reports health outcomes for Cambodian residents of Korea separately. News reports describe deaths at work and in worker housing.

Nuon Sokkheng, a 30-year-old Cambodian farm worker, died on December 20, 2020 in an unheated vinyl greenhouse structure used as her dormitory near a vegetable farm in Pocheon, Gyeonggi Province. On January 29, 2026, the Supreme Court upheld a ruling that the government was liable

for failing to oversee workplace accommodation and ordered it to pay 10 million won to each of her parents (Korea Times, 2026).

On February 28, 2026, a 35-year-old Cambodian worker died of cardiac arrest after a 1-ton ship block fell on him at a shipyard in Samho-eup, Yeongam, South Jeolla Province (Asia Economy, 2026).

9 Migration from Cambodia to South Korea

South Korea receives a small part of Cambodia's labor migration. Of about 183,000 returned migrant workers counted in Cambodia's 2019 Labour Force Survey, 95.3 percent had last worked in Thailand and 1.7 percent in South Korea, the second most common country after Thailand (IOM 2024). In January 2024 a spokesperson for Cambodia's Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training said the ministry had documented more than 1.3 million Cambodians working abroad (Phnom Penh Post 2024).

According to a January 2024 ministry report, 9,778 Cambodians, including 2,719 women, were employed in South Korea in 2023 (The Better Cambodia 2024). In April 2023 Labour Minister Ith Samheng said more than 60,000 Cambodians were working in South Korea, more than 40,000 of them on fixed-term migrant worker contracts, and that the Korean government had promised to raise the number of workers by 10,000 or more (Phnom Penh Post 2023). The KIRD data counted 57,018 Cambodian resident foreigners at the end of 2023. In 2024, 35,341 Cambodians took the EPS Korean-language test (EPS-TOPIK) and 11,498 passed (HRD Korea 2025), and Korea admitted 10,445 Cambodian workers on E-9 visas (Ministry of Employment and Labor 2026).

Personal remittances received by Cambodia from all countries totaled about USD 2.83 billion in 2024, or 6.10 percent of GDP, down from 6.57 percent (USD 2.78 billion) in 2023 and 7.43 percent in 2020 (World Bank 2026). For 2021, World Bank bilateral estimates cited by IOM put remittances from South Korea to Cambodia at USD 65 million, the fourth-largest source after Thailand (USD 637 million), the United States (USD 213 million), and France (USD 89 million) (IOM 2024). Cambodian officials report much higher figures. Minister Ith Samheng said in April 2023 that Cambodians in South Korea send home USD 500 million to 600 million a year (Phnom Penh Post 2023).

As far as we know, no published source reports the provinces of origin of Korea-bound workers in aggregate. A 2020 case study of Korea-migrant households was set in Reap and Roka communes of Pea Reang District, Prey Veng Province (Chan & Lak 2020), and workers and families interviewed by the Phnom Penh Post in January 2024 came from Kampong Cham and Kampong Chhnang provinces (Phnom Penh Post 2024).

Cambodian policy has restricted marriage migration to Korea twice. Cambodia banned foreign marriages in March 2008 to prevent trafficking and lifted the ban about eight months later. In March 2010 it suspended marriages between its citizens and South Koreans, after a matchmaker was sentenced to 10 years in prison for bringing 25 women from the countryside to broker marriages with South Korean men. The number of Cambodian women marrying Korean men had risen from 551 in 2008 to 1,372 in 2009, according to Yonhap as reported by ABC News (ABC News 2010). On the labor side, the total cost of the EPS route for Cambodian applicants, including the language test, health check, passport, visa, orientation, and airfare tax, was USD 991 in 2013, according to Ministry of Labour data submitted to the National Assembly for its 2014 audit (Migrant Forum in Asia 2017).

Research on this corridor centers on remittances and return. Sok and Yang (2021), comparing Cambodian workers in Malaysia and South Korea through interviews, found that most workers in Korea sent their salaries home, while those in Malaysia sent limited amounts, and linked the difference to the government-to-government recruitment used for Korea and the government-agency scheme used for Malaysia. Chan and Lak (2020) found an average annual remittance of USD 7,000 among 69 Prey Veng households with a member in Korea, spent mainly on food, health care, home renovation, education, and property, and described remittances as an insecure income source unless invested in longer-term livelihoods. Lay, Lee, and Kim (2025) interviewed five EPS workers preparing to return, who described building a livelihood at home, restoring relationships strained by years abroad, readjusting to hometown life amid concern about Korean cultural influence, and planning an uncertain future. A 2017 policy brief reported that Cambodian workers had been dispatched unlawfully to farms through labor brokers, despite the government-to-government design of the EPS (Migrant Forum in Asia 2017).

10 Community Organizations

The Cambodian embassy opened a shelter in Sangnok-gu, Ansan, on May 28, 2018, with space for about 20 people, to support Cambodian workers who lacked jobs or housing. The press report at the time put the number of Cambodians in Korea at about 60,000 and in Ansan at more than 600 (Kyeonggi Ilbo, 2018).

Of the 1,717 migrant-serving organizations in the KIRD census, 6 name Cambodians in their name or target group. They include the Gwangju-Jeonnang Cambodian Community (Gwangsan-gu, Gwangju), the Gunpo Cambodian Buddhist Center (Gunpo-si, Gyeonggi-do), the Cambodian Cultural Center (Sangnok-gu, Ansan), and Osankam (Miryang-si, Gyeongsangnam-do). Most general-purpose organizations, such as foreign worker support centers and multicultural family centers, also serve Cambodians.

TABLE 4
Migration indicators, Cambodia and South Korea

Indicator	Value	Source
Returned migrant workers whose last country of work was South Korea, 2019	1.7% (Thailand 95.3%)	IOM 2024
Cambodians documented working abroad, all destinations, January 2024	more than 1.3 million	Phnom Penh Post 2024
Cambodians employed in South Korea, 2023 (ministry report)	9,778 (2,719 women)	The Better Cambodia 2024
Cambodians working in South Korea, April 2023 (minister's statement)	more than 60,000	Phnom Penh Post 2023
EPS-TOPIK test takers in Cambodia, 2024	35,341 (11,498 passed)	HRD Korea 2025
E-9 workers admitted from Cambodia, 2024	10,445	Ministry of Employment and Labor 2026
Total EPS cost per Cambodian applicant, 2013	USD 991	Migrant Forum in Asia 2017
Remittances from South Korea, 2021 (World Bank estimate)	USD 65 million (fourth-largest source)	IOM 2024
Remittances from South Korea per year, 2023 (minister's statement)	USD 500-600 million	Phnom Penh Post 2023
Personal remittances received, all countries, 2024	USD 2.83 billion (6.10% of GDP)	World Bank 2026
Cambodian women marrying Korean men, 2008 and 2009	551 and 1,372	ABC News 2010

Source: Sources as listed in each row.

About these profiles. The KIRD data profiles describe the twenty nationalities with more than 20,000 resident foreigners in South Korea in 2024 and answer the questions asked most often about foreign residents. Figures come from the Korea Immigration Regional Dashboard (KIRD) dataset, built from the Ministry of Justice immigration yearbooks and the Ministry of the Interior and Safety foreign-resident statistics for 2006 to 2024 (<https://doi.org/10.3886/E249944V1>); context comes from the sources listed. Interactive maps and tables: <https://immigrantsinkorea.today>.

Suggested citation: Korea Immigration Regional Dashboard (KIRD). 2026. "Cambodian Immigrants in South Korea." Foreign Residents in South Korea series, September 2026. Data: Korea Immigration Regional Dashboard (KIRD) dataset, <https://doi.org/10.3886/E249944V1>. Interactive maps and tables: <https://immigrantsinkorea.today>.

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