

Russian Immigrants in South Korea

SEPTEMBER 2026

Summary

In 2024, 33,268 Russian nationals were resident in South Korea on 31 December, of whom 22,450 (67.5 percent) were registered foreigners. Russia was the 16th-largest nationality among registered foreigners (1.5 percent of the total) and the 18th-largest among all resident foreigners (1.3 percent). The population numbered 9,735 in 2006, 6,794 in 2010, and 8,973 in 2014, when Russia ranked 21st among registered foreigners and 22nd among all resident foreigners. It rose to 33,600 in 2019, the highest count in the series, fell to 23,702 in 2020 and 21,326 in 2021, and returned to 33,268 by 2024.

Highlights

- ▶ **South Korea had 33,268 Russian nationals in 2024. Russia was the 16th-largest nationality among registered foreigners and the 18th-largest among all resident foreigners, up from 21st and 22nd in 2014, when 8,973 Russians were resident.**
- ▶ **In 2024, 31.3 percent of Russian residents were short-term visitors and 30.4 percent held other statuses, most of them the miscellaneous G-1 status, compared with 19.7 percent and 5.2 percent of all resident foreigners.**
- ▶ **Russian nationals held 9,260 G-1 statuses in 2024, 16.4 percent of all G-1 holders in Korea, up from 3,937 in 2019 and 106 in 2014.**

Russians began arriving in number after Mikhail Gorbachev visited Jeju in 1990 and the two countries normalized relations; about 100,000 Russians, mostly sailors and shuttle traders, visited Busan in 1993 (Sisa Journal, 1994). Russia is not a sending country under the Employment Permit System (Employment Permit System, 2026). Between 2019 and 2024 the number of visa-exempt visitors (B-1) fell by about half, from 19,460 to 9,578, while holders of the miscellaneous G-1 status more than doubled, from 3,937 to 9,260.

Compared with all resident foreigners in 2024, Russian residents were more likely to be children (11.5 percent aged 0-14, against 5.7 percent), to be aged 20-39 (57.2 percent, against 49.7 percent), and to hold short-term, family, or other statuses. Few held employment visas (3.4 percent, against 19.2 percent), and none in this category held the overseas Korean statuses F-4 or H-2, because the Ministry of Justice counts ethnic Koreans of Russian nationality separately. This Spotlight describes the size, location, age and sex, visa status, and naturalization of Russian nationals in South Korea, drawing on the KIRD dataset (KIRD, 2026) and published sources.

BOX 1

Definitions

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

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 place of residence instead of registering, so they are not in registered counts. District-level figures in this Spotlight are for registered foreigners.

Russian residents and Korean-Russians. The Ministry of Justice counts ethnic Koreans of Russian nationality (Korean-Russians, part of the Koryo-saram) in a category separate from other Russian nationals. The Russian residents in this Spotlight exclude that category, so none of them hold the overseas Korean statuses F-4 or H-2.

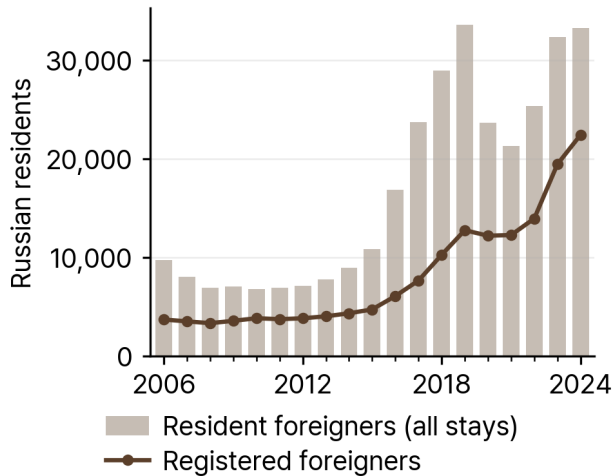
Unauthorized residents. Foreign nationals who remain in South Korea after their permitted period of residence has expired, as reported in table 6-4 of the Ministry of Justice immigration yearbook.

1 Size of the Population over Time

The number of Russian resident foreigners remained below 10,000 between 2006 and 2014 (9,735 in 2006, 6,794 in 2010, and 8,973 in 2014). By 2019 it had risen to 33,600, about 3.7

times the 2014 figure. The count fell by 9,898 (29.5 percent) to 23,702 in 2020 and to 21,326 in 2021, then rose to 25,374 in 2022, 32,366 in 2023, and 33,268 in 2024.

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



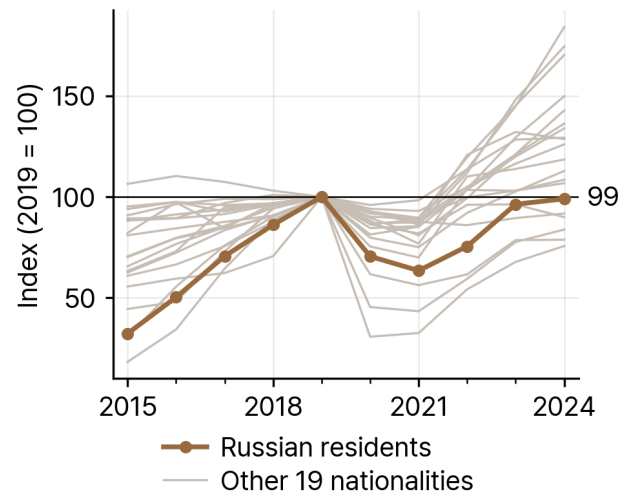
Source: KIRD dataset, from Ministry of Justice immigration yearbooks, 2006-2024.

The registered share of the population has risen. In 2006, 3,731 of 9,735 Russian residents (38.3 percent) were registered, and in 2019, 12,786 of 33,600 (38.1 percent). By

2024 the figure was 22,450 of 33,268 (67.5 percent). Those outside the registered count are mainly short-term visitors.

Measured against 2019, the Russian population stood at an index of 99.0 in 2024, about 1 percent below its 2019 level. Russia ranked 15th in growth among the 20 largest nationalities over 2019-24.

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



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

TABLE 1
Russian Residents in South Korea, Selected Years, 2006-24

Year	Resident foreigners	Registered foreigners	Rank among registered foreigners	Rank among all resident foreigners	Share of registered foreigners	Share of all resident foreigners
2006	9,735	3,731	18	16	0.6%	1.1%
2014	8,973	4,365	21	22	0.4%	0.5%
2019	33,600	12,786	18	15	1.0%	1.3%
2024	33,268	22,450	16	18	1.5%	1.3%

Note: Ranks and shares are computed among all nationalities in each count. Resident foreigners include short-term visitors and F-4 overseas Koreans who report their residence; registered foreigners are long-term residents who registered with immigration authorities. Korean-Russians are counted separately and are excluded.

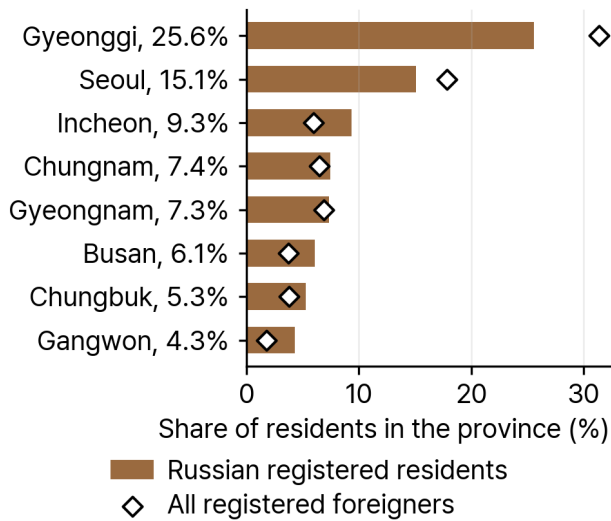
Source: KIRD dataset, from Ministry of Justice immigration yearbooks, 2006-2024.

2 Distribution by Province and District

District-level data cover the 22,450 Russian registered foreigners in 2024. The Incheon and Gyeonggi area accounted for 34.9 percent of them and Seoul for 15.1 percent, so 50.0 percent lived in the capital region, compared with 55.2 percent of all foreign residents. The Yeongnam region accounted for 22.2 percent, the Chungcheong provinces 15.0 percent, Honam 8.2 percent, and Gangwon and Jeju 4.7 percent. Some 7.1 percent lived in rural counties (gun), compared with 10.6 percent of all foreign residents.

The population is spread across many districts. The ten largest districts accounted for 32.7 percent of Russian registered foreigners in 2024, and 62 districts had at least 100. Incheon Yeonsu-gu had the most (1,484), followed by Ansan-si Danwon-gu (948), Hwaseong-si (772), Asan-si (733), and Gimhae-si (700). In Seoul, Jung-gu had 652 and Gwanak-gu 354.

FIGURE 3

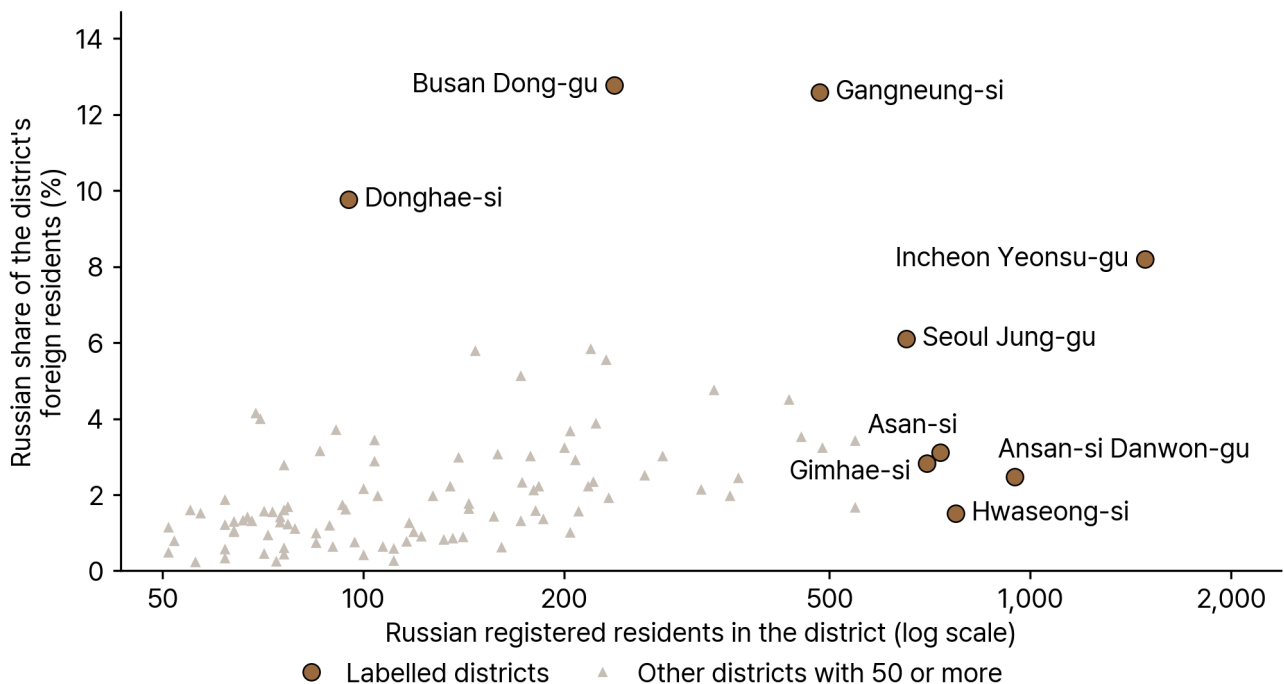
Russian Registered Foreigners by Region of South Korea, 2024

Source: KIRD dataset, from Ministry of Justice district statistics on registered foreigners, 2024.

Russian nationals made up the largest shares of registered foreigners in Busan Dong-gu (12.8 percent, 238 people), Gangneung-si (12.6 percent, 483), Incheon Yeonsu-gu (8.2 percent), and Seoul Jung-gu (6.1 percent). Busan Dong-gu contains the Choryang-dong area near Busan Station, which became a Russian-oriented commercial district in the early 1990s (Sisa Journal, 1994).

The index of dissimilarity (D) between Russian registered foreigners and all other registered foreigners across districts was 0.419 in 2014 and 0.44 in 2024, a slight increase in residential separation. No district met the definition of an ethnic enclave used in this series (a location quotient of at least 2 and the group making up at least 30 percent of the district's foreign residents).

FIGURE 4

Districts with the Most Russian Registered Foreigners in South Korea, 2024

Source: KIRD dataset, from Ministry of Justice district statistics on registered foreigners, 2024.

3 Age and Sex

Women made up 47.0 percent of Russian residents in 2024 (15,625 of 33,268), up from 45.2 percent in 2019 and slightly above the 45.1 percent among all resident foreigners. The largest five-year age group in 2024 was 25-29, and the median fell in the 30-34 group.

In 2024, 3,837 Russian residents (11.5 percent) were aged 0-14, twice the 5.7 percent share among all resident foreigners; in 2019 the figure was 3,972. Children under 5 numbered 1,161 in 2024, down from 1,295 in 2019. Adults aged 20-39 made up 57.2 percent of Russian residents (49.7 percent of all resident foreigners), and people aged 60 and older 2.9 percent (12.9 percent of all resident foreigners). Those aged 50 and older numbered 3,260.

4 Visa Status

In 2024, 31.3 percent of Russian residents were short-term visitors, compared with 19.7 percent of all resident foreigners. Another 30.4 percent held other statuses (5.2 percent overall) and 25.3 percent held marriage or family statuses (13.6

percent overall). Only 3.4 percent held employment visas, against 19.2 percent of all resident foreigners; 7.4 percent were in study and training (10.2 percent overall), and 2.2 percent held permanent residence (F-5), against 7.7 percent. None held an overseas Korean status (F-4 or H-2), compared with 24.5 percent of all resident foreigners.

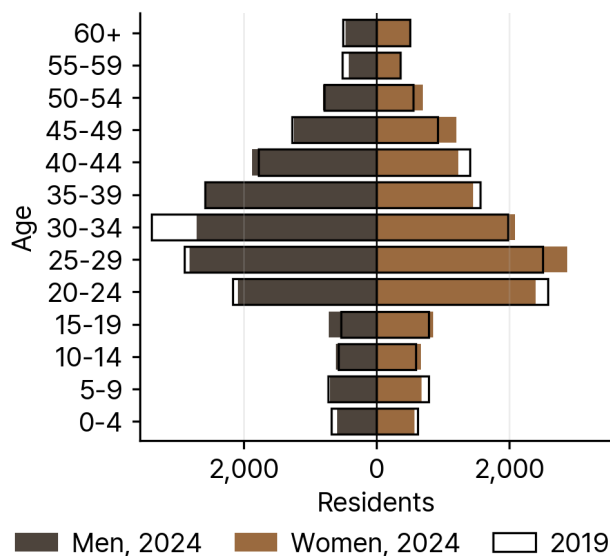
TABLE 2
Ten Districts with the Most Russian Registered Foreigners, 2024

District	Province	Russian residents	Share of district's foreign residents (%)
Incheon Yeonsu-gu	Incheon	1,484	8.2
Ansan-si Danwon-gu	Gyeonggi-do	948	2.5
Hwaseong-si	Gyeonggi-do	772	1.5
Asan-si	Chungcheongnam-do	733	3.1
Gimhae-si	Gyeongsangnam-do	700	2.8
Seoul Jung-gu	Seoul	652	6.1
Ansan-si Sangnok-gu	Gyeonggi-do	546	3.4
Pyeongtaek-si	Gyeonggi-do	546	1.7
Gwangju Gwangsan-gu	Gwangju	487	3.3
Gangneung-si	Gangwon-do	483	12.6

Note: Registered foreigners only. Share is the Russian count divided by all registered foreigners in the district.

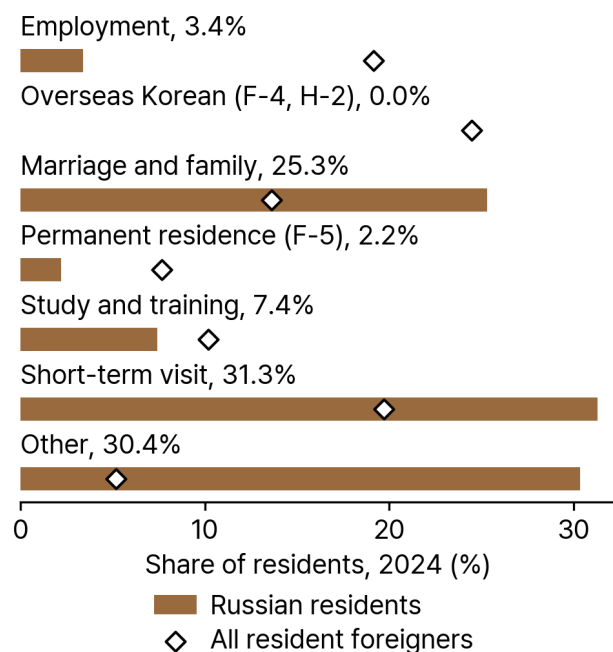
Source: KIRD dataset, from Ministry of Justice district statistics on registered foreigners, 2024.

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



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

FIGURE 6
Russian Residents and All Resident Foreigners in South Korea by Visa Group, 2024

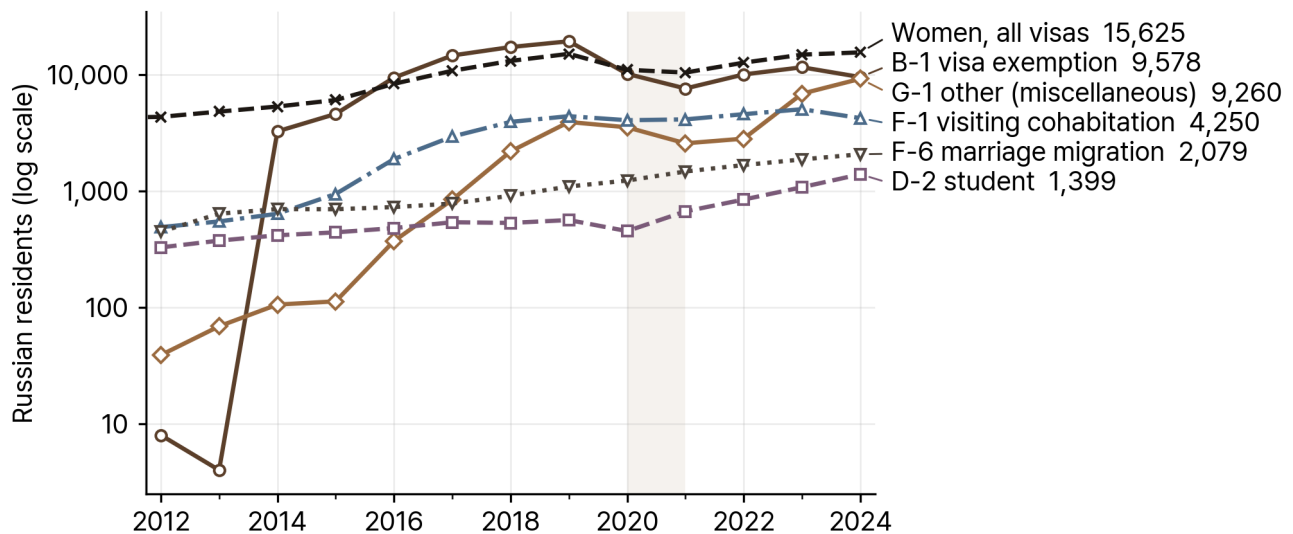


Source: KIRD dataset, from Ministry of Justice immigration yearbooks, 2006-2024.

Visa exemption (B-1) was the most common single status in 2024, held by 9,578 Russian nationals (28.8 percent). The number was 3,270 in 2014 and 19,460 in 2019. Russia had the third-largest number of B-1 holders of any nationality in 2024.

The miscellaneous G-1 status grew from 106 holders in 2014 to 3,937 in 2019 and 9,260 in 2024; Russians made up 16.4 percent of all G-1 holders in Korea in 2024.

FIGURE 7

Russian Residents in South Korea by Visa Type, 2006-24

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

Visiting cohabitation (F-1) holders numbered 4,250 in 2024, close to the 4,418 of 2019. Between 2019 and 2024, marriage migrants (F-6) rose from 1,098 to 2,079, students (D-2) from 565 to 1,399, dependent family members (F-3) from 485 to 1,291, and general trainees (D-4) from 433 to 1,058.

1993 about 100,000 Russians visited Busan, the second-largest group of visitors after Japanese. Most were sailors and shuttle traders, and the Texas Street area of Choryang-dong near Busan Station became a Russian-oriented commercial district (Sisa Journal, 1994).

5 Migration Channels and Policy

Russian arrivals in South Korea grew after diplomatic normalization in the early 1990s. Russians began coming to Busan right after Mikhail Gorbachev's 1990 visit to Jeju, and in

Russia is not among the sending countries listed in the Employment Permit System program guide, so the E-9 low-skilled work visa is not a route for Russian nationals (Employment Permit System, 2026). Few Russian residents held employment visas in 2024 (3.4 percent).

TABLE 3

Most Common Visa Types among Russian Residents in South Korea, 2019 and 2024

Visa	Meaning	2019	2024	Share of Russian residents, 2024 (%)	Share of all holders of this visa in Korea, 2024 (%)
B-1	Visa exemption	19,460	9,578	28.8	4.6
G-1	Other (miscellaneous)	3,937	9,260	27.8	16.4
F-1	Visiting cohabitation	4,418	4,250	12.8	4.3
F-6	Marriage migration	1,098	2,079	6.2	1.4
D-2	Student	565	1,399	4.2	0.8
F-3	Dependent family	485	1,291	3.9	2.5
D-4	General trainee	433	1,058	3.2	1.2

Note: Share of Russian residents is out of 33,268 Russian resident foreigners in 2024.

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

Ethnic Koreans who hold Russian nationality have a separate route. The F-4 overseas Korean status is available to people who held Korean nationality and to their direct descendants who can document the relationship (Ministry of Government Legislation, 2026). The Ministry of Justice counts these Korean-Russians in their own category, so they are not part of the figures in this Spotlight. Korea also operates a permanent return and resettlement program for elderly Sakhalin Koreans, ethnic Koreans who were moved to Sakhalin under Japanese colonial rule. The government selected 270 people in 2023, down from 350 in 2021, and about 3,900 Sakhalin Koreans and family members were estimated to be waiting (Incheon Ilbo, 2026).

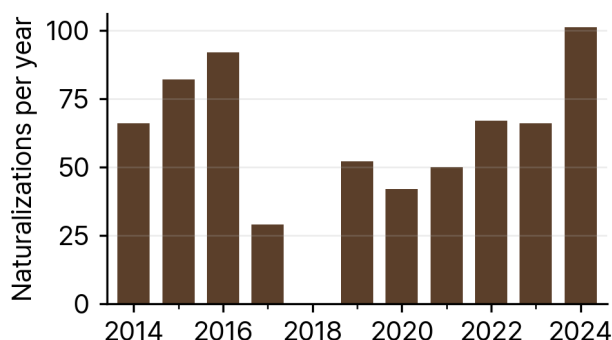
In February 2026, Korea merged the H-2 (visiting employment) status into F-4, ending the practice of giving overseas Koreans different visa routes depending on country or region of origin. Within about six months, more than 54 percent of H-2 holders had converted to F-4 (Dongpo World News, 2026). Because the Russian category in the KIRD data contains no F-4 or H-2 holders, this change mainly concerns Korean-Russians and other overseas Koreans. The KIRD data end in 2024 and so predate it.

6 Naturalization

The KIRD dataset records 647 naturalizations of Russian nationals from 2014 to 2024, drawn from the yearbook's by-country tables for 2014-2017 and 2019-2024; the 2018 yearbook reports China and Korean-Chinese together and is excluded. Annual counts ranged from 29 in 2017 to 101 in 2024, the highest year in the period.

The yearbooks also record 89 restorations of Korean nationality by Russian nationals from 2011 to 2024 (also excluding 2018), a procedure open to people who previously held Korean nationality. Only 26 restorations were recorded in 2024. Against a resident population of 33,268 in 2024, these totals are small, and 2.2 percent of Russian residents held permanent residence that year.

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



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

7 Unauthorized Residents

Russia is not among the ten nationalities listed separately in table 6-4 of the Ministry of Justice yearbook for 2024, so the yearbook gives no count of unauthorized Russian residents for that year. The yearbook counted 397,522 unauthorized residents of all nationalities in 2024. Global Voices reported in 2024 that 9,108 Russian nationals were overstaying their visas in 2022, the tenth-largest number of any nationality (Global Voices, 2024). The report does not say whether this count includes Korean-Russians.

8 Health and Well-being

To our knowledge, no published study reports health outcomes for Russian nationals in South Korea separately.

News reports describe occupational deaths and injuries among Russian sailors on ships docked in Busan, who may not be counted as resident foreigners. On 29 August 2025, a Russian sailor in his 40s died of heat-related cardiac arrest in the engine room of a Russian-flagged refrigerated cargo ship at Gamcheon Port in Saha District (Nocut News, 2025). On 15 September 2026, a Freon gas leak during maintenance of the freezer compartment of a 769-ton Russian fishing vessel in Saha District injured 5 of the 15 Russian sailors aboard, 2 of whom were found in cardiac arrest (Hankook Ilbo, 2026).

9 Migration from Russia to South Korea

We know of no published source that reports what share of Russian emigrants live in South Korea or Korea's rank among their destinations. On the Korean side, Ministry of Justice statistics for March 2025 counted 71,464 residents linked to Russia, comprising 35,952 Koryo-saram (Korean-Russians) and 35,512 other Russian nationals (Ministry of Justice, 2025). The ethnic Korean population of Russia, the group from which Korean-Russian migration draws, fell from 153,156 in the 2010 census (Rosstat, 2011) to 87,819 in the 2021 census (Federal State Statistics Service of Russia, 2022).

Russia has no government labor-sending agreement with South Korea. The e-나라지표 government indicator portal lists 17 Employment Permit System sending countries in 2026, and Russia is not among them (e-나라지표, 2026). No EPS Korean-language test (EPS-TOPIK) is held for Russian nationals, so no count of applicants against quota places exists for this corridor.

Russians have come to Korea by other routes. Through the 1990s and early 2000s, the E-6 entertainer visa brought Russian women to work as dancers in clubs. In February 2003, after more than 20 Russian women on this visa petitioned that they had been made to serve customers in bars and in some cases forced into sexual liaisons, the Ministry of Justice ceased issuing E-6 visas for dancers at cabarets and night spots (Korea Herald via YaleGlobal, 2003). In 2024, Global

Voices reported that many Russians enter on short-term permits and look for jobs in Telegram and KakaoTalk chat groups (Global Voices, 2024).

Russia has been the largest source of asylum applications in South Korea since 2023. Applications from Russian nationals rose from 1,038 in 2022 to 5,750 in 2023 (Korea Herald, 2024), then numbered 4,546 in 2024 and 2,026 in 2025, 13.8 percent of the 14,626 applications that year (Anadolu Agency, 2026). Officials linked the applications to the war in Ukraine and to military conscription, and no Russian applicant was granted refugee status in 2025 (Anadolu Agency, 2026).

Remittances are a very small part of Russia's economy. Personal remittances received equaled 0.083 percent of GDP in 2024, down from 0.128 percent in 2023, 0.142 percent in 2022, 0.527 percent in 2021, and 0.664 percent in 2020 (World Bank, 2025). The World Bank's bilateral remittance estimates, last produced for 2021, put remittances sent from South Korea to Russia at about US\$5.0 million that year (World

Bank, 2021). In a case reported in 2026, Korea Customs Service investigators alleged that an underground broker used the Tether (USDT) stablecoin to move about US\$42 million between South Korea and Russia in more than 6,000 transactions between January 2023 and July 2024 (Bitget News, 2026).

Russian migrants to Korea have come mainly from Buryatia, Zabaykalsky Krai (Transbaikalia), Primorsky Krai, Khabarovsk Krai, and Amur Oblast, the eastern regions of Russia closest to Korea. Global Voices reported in 2024 that people now come from all parts of Russia (Global Voices, 2024).

The main policy governing travel between the two countries is a visa waiver agreement signed on 13 November 2013 and in force since 1 January 2014. Holders of ordinary passports of either country may remain up to 60 days without a visa, provided the visit is not for employment, residence, or study (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2013). The agreement does not permit employment.

TABLE 4
Migration Indicators, Russia and South Korea

Indicator	Value	Source
Share of Russian emigrants living in South Korea	n.a.	No published source known to us
Russian nationals among resident foreigners in South Korea, March 2025	71,464 total; 35,952 Korean-Russians and 35,512 other Russian nationals	Ministry of Justice, 2025
Employment Permit System sending country, 2026	No	e-나라지표, 2026
Asylum applications by Russian nationals, 2022	1,038	Korea Herald, 2024
Asylum applications by Russian nationals, 2023	5,750	Korea Herald, 2024
Asylum applications by Russian nationals, 2024	4,546	Anadolu Agency, 2026
Asylum applications by Russian nationals, 2025	2,026 (13.8% of 14,626)	Anadolu Agency, 2026
Russian nationals overstaying visas, 2022	9,108 (10th)	Global Voices, 2024
Remittances as a share of Russia's GDP, 2024	0.083%	World Bank, 2025
Remittances from South Korea to Russia, 2021 (World Bank estimate)	US\$5.0 million	World Bank, 2021
Alleged USDT transfers between South Korea and Russia, January 2023 to July 2024	About US\$42 million	Bitget News, 2026

Note: Figures from news and reference sources are as reported there. n.a. = not available.

Source: Sources as listed in each row.

Research on Russian nationals in South Korea, apart from Korean-Russians, is limited and centers on commerce and travel. Kim and Yang (2017) dated the origins of the Central Asia Street in Gwanghui-dong, Seoul, to Russian merchants who came in the 1990s, after the 1990 normalization of relations, to buy Dongdaemun clothing for resale in the former Soviet Union; when most of these traders moved their business to China in the 2000s, Mongolian and Central Asian merchants took over the cargo companies, restaurants, and

Cyrillic signage they left. Park (2014) used bilateral panel data for 1995–2010 to estimate that visa waiver agreements raise inbound visitors from partner countries by about 60 percent and outbound travel by about 14 percent, and applied these estimates to the 2014 Korea–Russia waiver. Fedorova and Nam (2023) photographed more than 800 public signs between 2018 and 2020 in four urban districts, three in Seoul and Wongok-dong in Ansan, and found that new migrant communities, including the Mongolian, Central Asian, and

Russian district near Dongdaemun, create "multilingual islands" in the streetscape. Harmon-Donovan (2015) asked why Russian speakers chose South Korea, Cambodia, and the Netherlands over North America and Western Europe between 1989 and 2015. We are not aware of any study of brokers, debt, work, marriage, or return migration among Russian nationals in Korea.

10 Community Organizations

Two of the 1,717 migrant-serving organizations in the KIRD census name Russians or Russian speakers in their name or target group. The Svoboda Russian-Speaking Support Center (Seubaboda Reosiaegwon Jiwon Senteo) is a community

organization in Yeonsu-gu, Incheon, the district with the most Russian registered foreigners. Cheonan Moise is a nongovernmental organization in Dongnam-gu, Cheonan. Both are self-operated and privately funded. Most general-purpose organizations, such as multicultural family support centers and foreign worker support centers, also serve Russian residents.

In Busan's Choryang-dong, the Choryang TCK House, a nongovernmental organization, supports Russian-speaking migrant families. In 2023, about 100 Russian-speaking students attended Choryang Elementary School, and volunteer teachers at the center provided after-school instruction in Korean and Russian, along with music and other activities (The AsiaN, 2023). The source describes these families as Russian-speaking and does not break them down by nationality.

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. "Russian 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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