



Information Pack for Social Workers
On the Korean Community in the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames



This project and its actions were made possible due to co-financing by the European Fund for the Integration of third-country nationals.

Acknowledgements

Information for the pack has been developed with help of Winny Yoon, who is the Korean Link Worker for 'Empower and Inspire', Insun Kim, a volunteer of the European Integration fund project and Nighat Taimuri, Empower and Inspire Project Manager; written by Janice Haynes (PSW) and Joanne Farrant Social Work volunteer.

Additional information has been sourced from the following two local research projects:

Kingston University of London

Towards Engaging with and Understanding three BME communities in Kingston

Identity, Interaction, Belonging and Belief

(May 2010)

Living Lives, Building Futures

Refugee, Asylum Seekers and Migrant Need Assessment

(Jan 2015)

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Introduction

This information pack has been compiled to assist social work practice with the Korean community within Kingston;

- To increase their knowledge of the Korean community.
- To identify the differences between the North and South Korean communities.
- To understand the political influences that affects the Korean community.
- To understand the cultural factors that affect authority, engagement and parenting.
- To consider the educational needs and aspirations of the Korean community.
- To understand barriers and issues faced by the Korean communities.

Demographics

Background

The last few decades have seen a steady rise in Korean immigration both in the UK in general and in the Royal Borough of Kingston. This has included an increased influx of expatriates as well as language students from South Korea and a number of political refugees from North Korea seeing asylum in the UK. The Korean population within the Borough is concentrated in and around New Malden. (Kingston University)

2011 Census Data on Ethnicity

- The population of Kingston has become more ethnically diverse, from 16% Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) groups in the 2001 Census to 26% in the 2011 Census. The school-age population is more diverse (33% BAME)
- In 2011 25.5% of Kingston's population were from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) groups, compared to 16% in 2001. This compares with 40.2% in Greater London
- The Korean population of Kingston was recorded at 3,495 in the 2011 census, representing 2.2% of the total population within the borough.

- The Korean population in New Malden is estimated to be the largest in Europe
- Due to Kingston's high Korean, Sri Lankan and Tamil populations these groups make up 50% of the Asian/Asian British Category - this is almost double the London average of 26%

South Korean Immigration

There has been a steady increase throughout the 1990s and 2000's. The overseas Korean Foundation recorded 11,330 South Korean living in the UK in 1997 compared to 40,810 in 2005. A 2009 report from the South Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade recorded 45,295 South Koreans living in the UK. It stated that the South Korean community in the UK is now one of the largest overseas Korean communities in Europe and the 12th largest overall. Whilst the status of many South Koreans in the UK is business migrants, this number also includes a significant number of students. (Kingston University)

North Korean Immigration

Although they do not make up a significant proportion of the Korean community in Kingston the number of political refugees from North Korea is also rising. However given that the Home Office refugee statistics only specify numbers for larger groupings it is difficult to give an exact estimate of North Korean immigration. (Kingston University)
It is estimated that there are approximately 800 North Korean residents in the borough.

Political Connections

Despite having a shared language and cultural heritage North and South Korea not only face quite different issues in the UK (mainly as a result of their political and historical circumstances) but also see themselves as relatively separate communities. (Kingston University)

Differences between North and South Korea

The division of Korea into the two countries occurred in 1945 at the end of World War II. Since then, the economic disparity between North and South Korea has widened. The South Korean government provided some social and financial support to North Korea such as establishing an industrial complex and giving out food supplies. Whilst around 2000, the relationship between the two countries seemed to improve North Korea's firm position on nuclear issues has strained any improvement in the relationship in more recent years.

Most asylum seekers who settle in South Korea escaped North Korea via China. The South Korean government provides financial support and vocational training for the North Korean defectors. However, due to the large differences in lifestyle and unseen discrimination, it is often difficult for them to settle.

There are many differences between the two countries. South Korea is a republic; a president is elected through a popular vote system. They also have a National Assembly, which is selected by the public, and a Supreme Court, which heads up the independent judiciary system. In contrast the government type of North Korea is a Communist state

under totalitarian dictatorship. Elections are non-competitive and have only single candidate races.

Although the people of North and South Korea speak the same language, they have many fundamental differences - different ideas and cultures that developed after the separation of the two countries. The market economy of South Korea has done a lot to improve the overall economy of the country, and the gross national product has been on the rise. The economy of North Korea has had many challenges, largely due to the self-reliant and closed economic system that they use. Overall, the government and economy of South Korea has been more prosperous and successful than North Korea. South Korea has made significant investments in the education and welfare of its people and has a high standard of education, with many educational institutions. This has created a work force that can compete successfully in the world economy. North Korea also has a mandatory educational system, although it is more focused on educating the public so that it can maintain its current political structure. It is more difficult for children who come from poor families in North Korea to get a higher-level education than it is in South Korea.

The way of thinking between the two countries remains very different with the two communities being quite fragmented, with continued suspicion between the two countries its leaders and its people.

The research from Kingston University highlighted the 'perceived tension' between the North and South Korean communities and the relatively vulnerable status of North Koreans in Kingston. The research highlighted an influx of North Koreans in the last 2 years (2008-10), who represent a very vulnerable group. Whilst the sensitivity of these issues made it difficult for these concerns to be further explored the research included accounts of asylum seekers or refugees who arrive in this country without any English and no support networks. It cited that for a refugee community to come and not have any English and no links with anyone who is English is quite unusual and concluded that this vulnerable unsupported status leaves them open to being exploited in many areas such as business, housing and employment.

The report however highlighted that in spite of ongoing tensions, particularly economic, community organisations were in the process of building relationships between the two communities. Participants in the research felt that tensions amongst North and South Korean communities in Kingston were slowly being resolved.

South Korea and the UK

The South Korean community in the UK is the largest in Europe. Most of the members were originally students and resident employees from Korean companies.

Historically, South Korea has a closer relationship with the USA. Many social systems in Korea follow that of the US, such as the education and political systems. Therefore, South Koreans have immigrated to the US for many more years and formed larger communities there.

The South Korean government prohibits dual citizenship. Therefore, immigrants living in the UK either give up their Korean citizenship or remain as a permanent resident. Many South Koreans have not applied for British passports as this is seen as an additional expense and instead prefer to remain on a Korean passport as a permanent resident

South Koreans maintain very good contact with their families in South Korea using a social app called 'Kakao Talk' or by phone and are of course free to visit and return to their country of origin.

In terms of future expected trends the number of immigrants from South Korea to England is expected to fall with the current UK visa requirements. Since 2012 very few South Koreans are coming to the UK unless they are highly skilled or are able to offer a lot of financial investment. However the working holiday system that started in 2012 is continuing to attract many young Koreans.

North Korea and the UK

The majority of North Koreans arrive in this country as illegal migrants and have to prove asylum seeker status. Whilst their status is assessed by the government they remain under government protection and have access to education and other services. However, many remain in the UK as illegal immigrants, increasing their risk of exploitation, facing housing, health and financial difficulties. Since 2012 the UK government has restricted entry into the UK which has affected those from South Korea seeking employment and residency.

In the past, North Korean defectors escaped individually, however a more recent trend is for them to leave with their families. The UK is viewed as somewhere that will provide education and a good living environment for their families and is seen as a positive place to settle.

However, for those who do leave their families behind, travelling on their own to areas of safety, they often find themselves isolated from their families, as it is almost impossible for them to contact them once they have fled. Often the journey out of North Korea has been as a result of traumatic circumstances compounded by the fact that they know that they will not be able to return.

Some North Koreans living in the UK have family members living in South Korea who they are able to maintain contact without any difficulties

During World War II, Japan occupied Korea and this resulted in large numbers of Koreans fleeing to live in China. These Koreans mainly settled down in a place called 'Yeonbyeon', where it is geographically close to North Korea. The Koreans from 'Yeonbyeon' are also key members of the Korean community in the UK.

There is a free newspaper available in New Malden, the Free NK, which reports world news to the North Korean citizens.

Cultural factors

Authority

Korean attitudes towards authority and intervention by children's services in Kingston can be best understood by considering certain cultural factors. Korean parents are not generally familiar with the services that are offered by children's services within the UK. Whilst various types of children's services are available in Korea the tendency is for Korean parents to care for their children on their own, without any outside intervention.

Korean parents expect to support their children both financially and emotionally over an extended period of their lives. They support their children throughout their education including paying for university tuition fees and beyond whilst their children try to find jobs, with support often extending until after they are married. Similarly because of the difficulty of getting on the property ladder many young Koreans are reported to remain living with their parents until they have found employment or until they are able to afford their own homes.

In Korea, this pattern of parental involvement in their children's lives is seen as natural and not questioned in any way. Whilst it may result in many parent-dependent young people it ensures longevity of close ties between extended family members.

This dependency has the potential to lead Korean parents to regard their children as "dependent" rather than developing into "independent individuals." This way of viewing their children is a mind-set which governs parents' entire attitude towards their children, regardless of their age.

This attitude to ownership of their children may help to explain why some Korean parents, when they commit suicide, have been known to take their own lives together with their children's. One theory is that the parent cannot bear the idea of leaving their child behind to live without them; so critical is the role of the parent in the ongoing welfare of their children.

The general belief of Korean parents is that any problems they face with their children, unless it is severe, should be solved within their family circle. For this reason they feel uncomfortable and embarrassed when there is any form of comment or intervention by others.

The following helps to highlight the aspirations of Korean parents for their children;

Koreans tend to judge social status in the following order.

- Which university does she/he come from
- What jobs does he/she have? (Government, Senior Officers, reputable companies, doctors, dentists, lawyers and professors)
- The degree of wealth.

Koreans regard their children's success as the highest value in their life. Their children's success is judged in the following order:

- Which University does he/she go to (Ox/cam in UK, Ivy League US, Seoul National University, Korea University,)
- What subject does she/he studies
- The social class of who they marry

Only a small number of parents would regard their child's personality as being more important than their social and academic achievements. It is common for the majority of Korean students in primary, middle and high schools to spend their time after school receiving extra tutoring until late evening, to enable their children to gain entry to the top universities and medical schools.

Engagement

Better understanding of how Korean families deal with government agencies and services would also assist organizations in their endeavor to work more effectively with this community

Koreans are generally reluctant to be open and transparent when they are approached by UK authorities. They view themselves as an ethnic minority, many do not have good verbal or written English skills, and as a result feel they would be disadvantaged if these factors were exposed to the UK authorities. Koreans do not wish to share problems they may be facing such as not having valid visas, social benefits, and tax or bank issues, with others.

The Kingston University research project highlighted that as well as the language barrier; engagement is hampered by quite different cultural frameworks, beliefs and habits. Participants spoke of the difficulty of understanding taken for granted cultural norms and ways of doing things in the UK, which were perceived as being very different from what Koreans are used to and often very challenging to deal with.

The project highlights several areas that impacted on effective engagement;

- The more democratic layered structures that exist in the UK were difficult to understand by the Korean community. This difficulty in understanding was found not just to exist with those who were new to the UK but amongst Koreans who had been settled for many years and still reported confusion about how the system works. This lack of understanding was found to impact on the community's ability to engage and in some cases led them to unwittingly breaking the law. Participants spoke of not understanding the voting system, the citizenship application process and tax system.
- It highlighted difficulties the Korean community experienced in communication and building relationships- that interaction, communication and relationships simply worked differently in the UK. This was particularly noted with regard to building relationship with public service providers such as the police .The ability to form personal relationships was felt to be very important when using public services and

engaging in the local community. They cited the importance of taking time and building trust as being key to facilitating official or functional relations, and this was felt to be lacking by participants.

- One of the prominent issues of discussion from the participants in the project was the fact that Koreans tended to feel reluctant to seek help from outside their community. This stemmed from both a sense of pride and also a feeling that they did not want to bother anyone 'from outside 'with their problems.
- Two specific areas identified with regards to difficulties in the engagement process and taking up of local services were health and the police. The participants felt that the bureaucratic process surrounding health care was confusing and they missed a more personal approach to health care that they were used to. With regard to the Police in Kingston there was an even greater reluctance to call the police and they would only do this in very serious cases.
- There seemed to be a general belief that the police would not take their problems seriously or be able to deal with them in a satisfactory way. Some reported having been victims of crime when they felt the police had been unable to help. The Korean community were found to have a very different expectation of what police can and cannot do when dealing with crime as a result of different policing systems in Korea. They seemed to expect more rights as a victim of crime as well as expecting suspects to be more severely dealt with. The number of forms and lack of understanding about who to contact also contributed to their reluctance to report crime other than with regard to serious cases.
- The limited discussion held with the North Korean community as part of the project highlighted that their experience of engagement with the police is very much shaped by their dealing with the police in North Korea, as well as their often uncertain legal status as political refugee or asylum seeker

The Koreans attitude to the police highlights well their attitude to authority in general. Koreans are fearful of the UK police force as they view them as having a very strict adherence to the law. Their relationship with the police in Korea is felt to be much more friendly. For example a drunken local resident may enter a police station shouting and being abusive but would be given a relatively lenient punishment on the grounds that they only behaved in this way because of their drunken state. Whilst in Korea this minor anti-social behaviour is common, Koreans would not behave in this way in the UK as they know the police have a zero-tolerance policy. Their preference to keep their distance from the police, to not be known or make contact means they have little understanding or experience of how this authority may be able to be help and support them.

There is an account of a Korean volunteer joining the local neighbourhood watch. This experience helped her to gain a better understanding and knowledge of the way both councillors and police worked. The metropolitan police have recently appointed a Korean

community engagement officer to help improve relationships and understanding of the police by the Korean community.

Parenting

Some parenting issues arise out of a lack of understanding and knowledge of child care legislation within the UK.

Many Korean parents are not aware there is a statutory requirement that children under a certain age, should not be left alone without appropriate child-care. As a result of this some parents tend to leave their children at home alone. For example, a 9 year old daughter may be expected to look after a 4 year-old son, while their parents are absent from the home.

Some parents are not used to their children using child seats whilst driving and may be unaware that this is compulsory in the UK.

In both these examples parents may have no knowledge that their actions will be viewed as unsafe and illegal. Improved education would clearly help to address such issues.

Korean parents are also not familiar with UK 'systems'. For example education rules and expectation with regard to reporting of absences to schools. Often schools do not appreciate how difficult and challenging it is for Korean parents to speak and voice their confusion about these expectations.

Common day events held in school, such as non-uniform day (mufti day), book character day or red nose day, would not necessarily be celebration events that parents from the Korean community were familiar with. Although schools send a letter and some parents may have a good understanding of English, they may have difficulties understanding the letter. This could then create tensions between the child, who is much more familiar with these cultural events and the parent who is not; this could highlight to the child a lack of understanding of key issues by their parent

The table below gives some examples of the acceptability of certain child care practices for Korean parents

Acceptable to Korean parents	Not acceptable in Korean culture
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Leave a child under 12 year old home for about 30 minutes whilst parent goes shopping ▪ Hitting the child's leg and hands, with a stick, after seeking the child's understanding of their wrongdoing – this is seen as commonly acceptable behaviour but is rare. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Leave a child under the age of 12 years at home whilst the parents worked without provision of an appropriate carer. ▪ Leave a 6 year old alone for about 30 minutes whilst parent goes shopping. ▪ Young people having sexual intercourse before adulthood. Parents expectation is that they do not have sex before marriage ▪ Smoking: Girls' smoking is particularly not well received by parents as well as the general public. Even an adult woman smoking is not well received by the public. ▪ Drinking: similar to smoking but less strict.

Attitudes towards Children Social Care

Korean parents believe that any problems they experience with their children should be solved within their family circle and are unlikely to approach outside support. Hence it is unlikely that they will actively seek out any support by approaching social services or any social care organisation.

One of the issues highlighted in the Kingston University project was the difficulty that public service providers found when trying to engage with the Korean community. This was often

compounded by the impact of hierarchical and formal social structures within the Korean community. In practical terms this meant that communication had to be filtered through more formal channels and it was not easy to deal directly with particular sections within the Korean community. This was particularly relevant to young people and to women with caring responsibilities, who were not working but were often isolated within the community, experiencing difficulty finding support.

In terms of parenting and child protection issues these findings have implications on how childcare services can access families to identify need and offer appropriate support.

When language is a barrier the use of interpreters does not seem to be a problem. It is often the case that parents will use their children to act as interpreters.

Religion

The main religions are Christian and Buddhist. The Kingston University research engaged with church ministers and highlighted a tight informal network, which exists around Korean churches. Ministers were seen not to just give spiritual support but gave more general advice to its parishioners relating to life in the UK. They appeared to act as a bridge between the two cultures. Several churches have Korean ministers (Chessington Methodist Church and Kingston's United Reformed Church) with Chessington conducting dual language services.

Education

The 2011 school census showed 642 Korean children attended Kingston schools. Access to good education for their children was cited as being one of the prime reasons for families choosing to live in Kingston.

The drive to ensure that children of Korean families receive a good education is well established and a priority within most family networks. South Korea is seen as a highly competitive country and as such one of the key objectives for parents living in the UK is for their child to strive towards attending one of the top schools and universities.

The importance of education makes Korean society extremely competitive. Korean parents believe their children can enjoy a better life if they have achieved well and continued their studies through to higher education. They are willing to make considerable sacrifices to enable their children to receive the best education.

Within the Korean community there are a large number of private tutors working for Korean students offering after school tutoring. There are also a few privately owned after-school institutions.

A recent study in Korea revealed that whilst 30% of secondary school leavers in France, Switzerland and Germany go onto university, more than 80% of students in South Korea attend university following completion of their school years.

Korean families are ambitious for their children to attend university as this is seen as a key achievement.

Barriers and issues faced by Korean Community

The Living Lives, Building Futures Refugee, Asylum Seekers and Migrant Need Assessment research was commissioned by Refugee Action Kingston to assess the needs of refugee, asylum seeking and vulnerable migrant population within the Borough. The North Korean population in Kingston were included as part of this research and the findings taken from the shared experiences of this larger group of refugee and asylum seekers is extremely helpful in understanding the needs and issues faced by the North Korean community.

Whilst the findings found that Kingston was viewed as a safe place to live and was reported to have a friendly population and good environment, the report identified key themes of concern, some of which are as follows:

Communication

Whilst there are inherent difficulties in comparing the characteristics of community groups and their differing national backgrounds, language structure and ability to communicate appears to be a key issue. The biggest challenge to Koreans living in the UK is the difficulty they find with the English language. Europeans in general are culturally represented as being 'open' and 'communicative'; they also share a language with similar language roots. The Chinese population has a language which is similar in structure to the Latin based language of Europeans. Chinese people are often represented as being less 'shy' and more 'open' than other nationals. In contrast, Korean language has language structures completely different to English. Characteristically, Koreans are often described as 'shy', less 'open' and afraid of foreigners and fearful of speaking openly a language that they find very difficult.

- Among the **25,176** Kingston residents that do not speak English as a main language (**16.4%** of the population), the two most common main languages were Tamil and Korean.
- Assuming that the vast majority of Korean speakers are Korean, it is likely that around three quarters of Korean residents in Kingston speak Korean as their main language as opposed English.

- The table below gives some indication of the first language of those over 3 years of age. The majority of residents state that Korean is their main language. Although the table does not reflect the level of proficiency it does present an overall picture of language preference.

	Kingston	Merton	Richmond	Sutton
Number of Korean residents	3,495	1,280	155	717
Number of residents born in Eastern Asia (excluding China and Hong Kong)	3,078	1,671	799	788
Number of residents aged 3 and above that speak Korean as a main language	2,613	918	90	511

(Source: ONS Census 2011)

The Kingston University research project also highlighted that one of the key problems faced by the Korean community was the language barrier. Korean and English are very different languages, grammatically, syntactically and phonetically and this means that learning conversation in English is a big challenge for many Korean even when they may have some prior knowledge of the language. Even with the existence of English language courses Koreans expressed difficulty conversing in a foreign language even when a level of proficiency has been achieved. Reading and writing was felt to be easier than conversation. The research noted requests to include Korean language instructions on official forms such as secondary school application forms.

The Living Lives research highlighted that poor language skills were felt to have a detrimental impact on the person's mental and physical wellbeing, giving them a sense of isolation preventing them from being able to find employment and communicate with services. Particularly communication between Local Authority departments such as housing and council tax offices was felt to be very difficult.

Housing and financial issues

There is a significant gap in economic circumstances between the North and South Korean communities. The majority of South Korean families are able to afford to fund privately rented accommodation or purchase their own homes; many having access to well-paid executive jobs.

The 'Living Lives' research project highlighted benefits and housing as two key areas of concern. Many refugee and asylum seekers were found to live on very low incomes and struggled to meet basic needs for food, fuel, transport and accommodation. Recent changes in welfare benefits and reduced wages have combined to create additional

pressures. Many identified that they were unable to provide regular meals and were dependent on support from food banks. For many changes to the welfare reforms and other legislative changes have left them struggling to remain in their homes and similar to other groups have found landlords reluctant to rent to people on housing benefits. Single migrants were found to be particularly vulnerable to homelessness with few options other than temporary hostel accommodation.

Mental health

Suicide in Korea remains an important social issue with there being a high number of reported suicides – the highest rate recorded in OECD countries.

The 'Living Lives' research reported high levels of stress, depression and anxiety amongst the asylum seeking migrant community. The trauma of the journey from the country of origin and traumatic past experiences combined with feeling of isolation, loss of family and friends the day to day experience of poverty and hardship all impacted on an individual's physical and mental health. The report identified the lack of specialist mental health services capable of responding to the complex needs of this group and also the stigma associated with mental health in some refugee/migrant communities.

Health

Local health care providers spoken to as part of the Kingston University research project highlighted that the Korean community seemed reluctant to use local health care services.

One service provider stated that Koreans don't access health and mental health services and when they do they appear reluctant to receive the appropriate help. This combined with parent's reluctance to seek help outside the family for their children has implications for them seeking appropriate health care support for their children when this is needed.

According to the WHO 2012 Global Tuberculosis report there are 345 TB infections per 100,000 people in North Korea. Reluctance to engage with health services in this country may result in TB remaining undetected and untreated.

The 'Living Lives' project showed that whilst the majority of migrants were registered with GPs there was a lack of knowledge of what health services were available and the health care system was considered complex and difficult to understand.

It identified the high level of violence and sexual violence experienced by refugee and asylum seeking women who were highly vulnerable to sexual exploitation as a result of their financial destitution. Pregnant women were considered to be a particularly vulnerable group who were often malnourished and in poor health and who did not access support or present for maternity care until late into their pregnancy.

Employment

The majority of South Koreans move to live in the UK and settle in Kingston as a result of employment opportunities. Samsung established its first headquarters in New Malden before its 2005 move to Chertsey in Surrey and the existence of Korean companies such as Kia and LG provide many employment opportunities for the South Korean population as well as running their own private businesses and commuting to jobs in London. Locally in New Malden there are 20 Korean cafes a karaoke bar and supermarket which offers local employment opportunities for the Korean community.

Generally the North Korean community are often unable to work for British businesses and do not enjoy the employment opportunities of the South Korean community. If able to find employment they are mostly employed in menial jobs for South Korean business such as waiters, chefs and shelf stackers.

The 'Living Lives' project identified significant barriers to getting employment with little support being available for those who wanted to get a job. Job centres were felt to focus purely on low paid, low skilled work irrespective of the person's previous experience and qualifications. Having to work illegally with low pay and poor working conditions is for some the only option available.

Feedback from members of Korean Community

Winnie Yoon, the Korean Link Worker has been running "Empower and Inspire" sessions funded by the EU for members of the Korean community based on living in the UK. She carried out a number of evaluations completed by parents and found the following:

- Most participants attending these sessions often had high levels of education, university undergraduate degrees or post graduate degrees. However, despite being high academic achievers the participants on the course found learning to speak English one of their biggest challenges
- They found the challenges of trying to understand the slow procedure of visiting their GP both frustrating and confusing. The course focused upon trying to get them to understanding the importance of accessing their local GP's rather than going straight to A&E.
- The parents attending the course reported that they wanted to understand and learn about the UK education system but struggled with UK parenting expectations. There was an example of one participant reporting that she was seen as being harsh and loud with her children when she was in fact talking in a normally acceptable Korean way.

This information pack is not intended to be a definitive account – it requires further development so that services working with the Korean community develop a more detailed

knowledge and understanding of the history of the community and some of the challenges that they face.

Date created	20 March 2015
Signed by:	Janice Haynes, Principle Social Worker, Achieving for Children
Equality Analysis completed (yes/no):	No