

Republic of Korea (ROK): an overview

REASONS TO PARTICIPATE IN THE FAIR

- ✓ Enrolment rates at higher education institutions remained below 10% until the 1980s, but there has been a sharp rise in enrolment with a growing passion for education, eventually reaching 67.8% in 2019. The majority of higher education institutions (372 out of 430 in 2019) are private. (2020 Education in Korea, MOE - Ministry of Education).
- ✓ Challenging market (demographic numbers and local policies MOE), visibility in Korea extra important for EU institutions!
- ✓ More than student mobility: Korean government allows options for opening branches to offer international degrees in Korea.
- ✓ Chances for incoming and outgoing mobility & cooperation.



General presentation¹

- **Population:** 51,844,834 (2022 est.)
- **Official name:** Republic of Korea (ROK)
- **Capital:** Seoul
- **Political System:** presidential republic
- **Urban population:** 81.4% of total population (2022)
- **Annual population growth:** 0.24% (2022 est.)
- **Major Languages:** Korean, English (widely taught in elementary, junior high, and high school)
- **Ethnic groups:** homogeneous
- **Religion:** Protestant 19.7%, Buddhist 15.5%, Catholic 7.9%, none 56.9% (2015 est.)
Many people also carry on at least some Confucian traditions and practices.
- **Life Expectancy:** 82.97 years



¹ <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/korea-south/>

EU, Korea & Education²

The EU and the Republic of Korea both face similar challenges in terms of ageing populations and the need to compete in high-value sectors and nurture a skilled workforce to deal with these challenges. In that context, they also recognise the crucial contribution higher education makes to developing a globally competitive, knowledge-based economy and so boosting growth and jobs inter alia through the promotion of entrepreneurship.

The EU and the Republic of Korea both have much to gain by expanding academic links. The outstanding reputation of Korean education, and the country's leading role in research and technological development, make the Republic of Korea a highly valued partner for Europe's higher education institutions.

Besides bilateral cooperation, Erasmus+ , the EU's programme for education, training youth and sport is the main vehicle for this higher education cooperation. Different opportunities are open to Korean institutions through annual calls for proposals.

International credit mobility is a classic form of [student and staff exchange](#) within bilateral partnerships between European and Korean higher education institutions. Besides the benefits for the individuals, these partnerships cement links between the universities involved.

[Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters](#) are integrated degree programmes offered by a consortium of higher education institutions - these consortia can include Korean partners or coordinators. Students from all over the world study in at least two of the countries involved, and can apply for EU-funded scholarships.

[Jean Monnet Actions](#) for higher education, which deliver teaching and act as centres of competence and knowledge on topics relating to European Union integration and relations with Korea. Opportunities for doctoral education and training are provided by the [Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions](#) through Doctoral Networks, Postdoctoral Fellowships, Staff Exchanges and the co-funding of regional, national and international programmes.

² [The European Union and the Republic of Korea | EEAS Website \(europa.eu\)](#)



Korean Education System³

The Ministry of Education (MOE) is the government body responsible for the formulation and implementation of educational policies. The government provides guidance on basic policy matters as well as financial assistance.

Korean education uses a 6-3-3-4 single ladder system - six years in elementary school, three years each in middle school and high school, and four years in university. All citizens have equal access to education based on their ability regardless of their social status or position. The nine years of elementary and middle school are compulsory, but from high school and beyond, students choose an education path in line with their career choice.

Higher Education in Korea⁴

Objectives and Types of Higher Education Institutions

The objectives of universities and colleges are to develop students' personality, teach and research the profound theories of science and arts necessary for national development and human society as a whole (Article 28 of the Higher Education Act). Higher education is provided to high school graduates or individuals with equivalent academic abilities approved by relevant laws in Korea, and a bachelor's degree or a professional license is conferred to those who complete the curriculum. The years required for university graduation are two to four years for junior colleges and four years for universities, yet two years of preparatory courses and thus six years in total are required for the fields of medicine, traditional Asian medicine, dentistry, veterinary medicine, and pharmacy. Specific types and purpose of universities are described in the following table.

South Korea		
Age	Year	Schools
3-5	Kindergarten	Kindergarten
6-7	Year 1	Elementary School (6 years)
7-8	Year 2	
8-9	Year 3	
9-10	Year 4	
10-11	Year 5	
11-12	Year 6	
12-13	Year 1	Middle School (3 years)
13-14	Year 2	
14-15	Year 3	
15-16	Year 1	High School (3 years)
16-17	Year 2	
17-18	Year 3	

Higher education institutions include four-year universities and colleges, two or three-year junior and technical colleges, and graduate schools. In addition to regular four-year comprehensive universities, there are special types of universities and colleges depending on their purpose of establishment, such as universities of education where elementary school teachers are trained, industrial colleges for lifelong education, cyber universities based on information and communication technology, corporate colleges founded by companies to meet the needs of their employees, and polytechnic colleges for training job-related skills. Most universities have graduate schools, which offer master's and doctoral programmes. There are professional graduate schools in the fields of law, pharmacy and medicine (only the CHA Graduate School of Medicine will continue after 2024), and specialised graduate schools in public administration, education, and business administration, where students pursue advanced degrees.

³ [Ministry of Education > Education System > Overview \(moe.go.kr\)](https://moe.go.kr)

⁴ [Ministry of Education > Education System > Higher Education \(moe.go.kr\)](https://moe.go.kr)

History of Higher Education Institutions

The first university in Korea was Tae-hak founded in Goguryeo Dynasty (372 AC), where children of noble and/or elites learned scriptures, martial arts, and so forth. Since then, Kuk-hak in Tongil Shilla Dynasty (682 AC), Guk-ja-gam in Gyoryeo Dynasty (992 AC), Sung-gyun-gwan in Joseon Dynasty were established as an institution that cultivates Confucianism. In the time of enlightenment, various professional schools were established to educate technocrats, however, they did not advance into university-level schools in the Japanese Colonial era due to suppressions and higher education control policies. In this context, higher education institutions in Korea included one university named Gyung-sung Jaeguk University and about twenty public and private professional schools in 1945. Since Korea became independent, National Seoul University which was an integrated school of Gyung-sung Jaeguk University and government professional schools was established. Private schools known as professional schools also received government authorisation; the number of authorised universities increased to twenty universities by 1947. It included eight national public universities and twelve private universities. Since then, university education in Korea expanded dramatically; seventy universities in 1965 increased to 426 universities, almost by six times in 2021, which include 190 universities, 134 junior colleges, 45 graduate schools. The Higher education system is implemented based on nearly forty-five relevant laws including the Framework Act on Education and Higher Education Act. In principle, management methods and contents of universities are autonomously decided by the university, and the government provides various financial support for the university to operate in a socially desirable way.

Restructuring Higher Education institutions

Because of a dramatic decline in school-age population, the number of college freshmen in 2023 is predicted to drop by 160,000, compared to 2013. Colleges will soon face complex problems beyond their reach. Without government intervention, the imbalance between colleges in metropolitan areas and provinces is expected to be aggravated. Having fierce competition for a limited pool of prospective students, colleges may not be able to carry out their function properly in education and research. Hence, the Korean Ministry of Education initiated school restructuring to avoid deterioration in the quality of tertiary education.

Spurring innovation with autonomy and accountability and structural improvement in line with social change, on May 20, 2021, the Ministry of Education released the Support Strategy for Systematic College Management and Innovation and suggested the following three policy directions:

1. Actively support colleges to voluntarily adjust to optimal sizes to pursue self-sustaining innovation.
2. Induce financially and educationally unstable colleges to undergo drastic transformation, whereas those not showing improvement are closed.
3. Create a more collaborative higher education ecosystem between colleges in the metropolitan area and elsewhere, universities and junior colleges, as well as colleges in the same locality.
4. Higher education institutions include four-year universities and colleges, two or three-year junior and technical colleges, and graduate schools. In addition to regular four-year comprehensive universities, there are special types of universities depending on their purpose of establishment, such as universities of education where elementary school teachers are educated, industrial universities for lifelong education, cyber universities based on intra-company universities founded by companies to meet the needs of their employees, and polytechnic universities for training job-related skills. Most universities have graduate schools, which offer master's and doctoral programmes. There are professional graduate schools in the areas of law, pharmacy and medicine, and specialised graduate schools in public administration, education, and business administration, where students pursue advanced degrees.



Building Education and Research Capacities of Higher Education Institutions

The era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution has dawned by the integration of ICT in our modern way of life. In other words, virtual and real worlds are connected by the networks of IoT (Internet of Things) and AI (artificial intelligence), ushering in a knowledge- and intelligence-intensive society. In this context, people equipped with both ideas and practical knowledge are the key infrastructure of this new society, and universities should nurture intelligent learners equipped with profound knowledge by improving their own educational and research capacities. With this in mind, the Korean Ministry of Education 1) established K-MOOC (Korea-Massive Open Online Course) to allow everyone to benefit from online tertiary education courses anywhere, free of charge; 2) fully supported universities' foundational/liberal arts education, non-academic courses, and quality of teaching and learning to identify and proliferate exemplary cases of undergraduate studies; and 3) supported universities to promote master's and doctoral degree programmes to create new knowledge and skills, and bring innovation based on creativity.

Efforts for internationalization of Korean universities

The Korean government is putting efforts to globalise universities so that Korean students can enjoy a variety of opportunities without going to study abroad. The Songdo commercial district is designated to attract universities from other countries. They have opened several branches for those looking for an international degree in Korea. Higher education institutions have gradually signed contracts with foreign partners for credit exchanges, degree programmes, research projects, and instructor exchanges. Local undergraduate students can now easily take courses in English, as well as interact with foreign professors and students from culturally diverse backgrounds. The number of foreign students in higher education institutions in South Korea has increased during a past decade.

Interesting reads

- ✓ [Ministry of Education > Education System > Higher Education \(moe.go.kr\)](https://moe.go.kr)
- ✓ [2020EducationinKorea.pdf \(koreaneducentreinuk.org\)](https://koreaneducentreinuk.org)
- ✓ [South Korea - Education Services \(trade.gov\)](https://trade.gov)
- ✓ [Factors influencing Korean students' choice of study abroad destination short-term and long-term by destination country | SpringerLink](#)

