

Strategic Management of Senior Employment Programs: Expanding Opportunities in a Super-Aged Society

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ABSTRACT

South Korea is on the path to becoming a super-aged society, with a rapidly growing elderly population. This population shift has created significant social challenges, such as high poverty rates among the elderly and increasing economic pressures on the younger generation. In 2023, the poverty rate for elderly households in South Korea was 43.4%, which is significantly higher than the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) average. Consequently, the Korean government has launched various programs to support elderly employment, focusing primarily on social service-type employment programs. However, despite their expansion, these programs face significant challenges: limited differentiation from public service roles and a lack of innovation. Using a comparative case approach, this review examines the current status of South Korea's program, benchmarks it against international models from the U.S., U.K., Japan, and Australia, and proposes a step-by-step policy roadmap for improvement.

Keywords: Senior Employment; Aging Workforce; Employment Policy; Lifelong Career Development; Retirement Transition

INTRODUCTION

Every country in the world is experiencing growth in both the size and proportion of its older adult population (1). South Korea is no exception regarding this issue. South Korea's population is aging more rapidly than that of other countries (2). As of 2020, the elderly population aged 65 or older in South Korea accounts for approximately 16.1% of the total population

(3). This figure is expected to increase to 21% by 2025, which means South Korea is becoming a super-aged society (3, 4). Additionally, by 2035, the percentage of the elderly population aged 65 or older is expected to increase to 30.9%, indicating a rapid increase in the older population.

As global populations age rapidly, the need to develop sustainable employment strategies for older adults has become more urgent than ever (5, 6). The demographic shift toward an older workforce is not only changing the job market but also creating both opportunities and challenges for employers, policymakers, and society as a whole. Ensuring the continued participation of seniors in economic activities requires proactive approaches that address age-related barriers, support lifelong

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learning, and promote flexible working models.

South Korea is a clear example of these global trends, where the effects of a rapidly aging population are especially noticeable in both the labor market and the social welfare system. As illustrated in Figure 1, the proportion of older adults in South Korea is increasing rapidly, underscoring the need for effective employment and welfare plans.

In South Korea, a significant portion of the elderly face a variety of social issues, including poverty, physical and mental health problems, social exclusion, and economic burdens. Furthermore, their poverty increases the burden on the younger generation to support them, leading to higher welfare costs for pensions and medical expenses, which, in turn, put a strain on the country's budget (2, 4). This reality is also visible in everyday life, as shown in Figure 2.

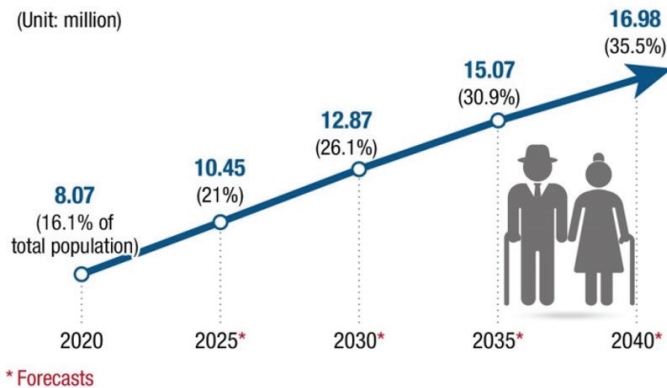


Figure 1. Predicted population aged 65 and over in the Republic of Korea (3).



Figure 2. An elderly person is pulling her cart down the street in the Republic of Korea (7).

These challenges are reflected in the concerning statistics. According to a 2023 OECD report, South Korea's elderly poverty rate was at 43.2 percent, the highest among its member countries, a position the nation has maintained for several years (3), as shown in Figure 3.

The Republic of Korea government has initiated various programs to support elderly employment and public welfare, aiming to reduce the poverty rate among elderly households and improve their quality of life. The social service-type job program is one of the main programs in elderly employment. Social service-type jobs for older individuals are defined as 'jobs that provide services in areas requiring social assistance, utilizing the experience and capabilities of the elderly' (9).

Currently, the Ministry of Health and Welfare, in collaboration with the Korea Labor Force Development Institute for the Aged (KORDI), local governments, and agencies that run the programs, is supporting social service-type employment programs for the elderly. The primary objective of these programs is to ensure financial security for the elderly. Since their introduction in 2019, the number of social service-type senior jobs has steadily increased to 85,000 (9.6%) in 2023, with plans to expand to 15% by 2027 (9).

However, as social service-type jobs for the elderly continue to expand, several challenges have emerged. These include a lack of differentiation from public service-type jobs (social activity), stagnation in the number of executing agencies, and difficulty in finding new places that need workers, such as organizations (10, 11). Therefore, it is essential to explore ways to enhance the social service-type employment program for the elderly.

This review aims to examine the current state of social service-type employment programs for the elderly in South Korea and propose ways to improve these

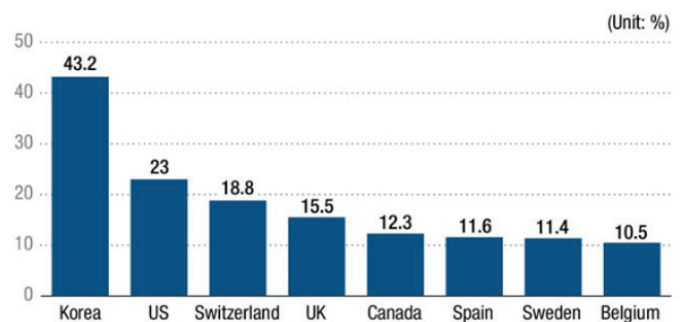


Figure 3. Elderly poverty rates among OECD countries (8).

programs. It explores elderly employment initiatives in Korea, comparing them with similar programs in other advanced countries. Additionally, this paper offers recommendations for enhancing elderly employment programs in South Korea.

The review follows the analysis processes and methods outlined below to achieve these objectives. First, it reviews various sources, including online news articles, research reports, and academic journals, related to the elderly employment programs in South Korea. Second, it identifies the key challenges and issues facing the country’s social service-type elderly employment program. Third, the paper proposes benchmarking results from senior employment programs in other advanced countries to address these challenges. Finally, based on the findings, this paper provides recommendations for the future development of South Korea’s social service-type elderly employment programs.”

THE ELDERLY EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM IN THE SOUTH KOREA

The elderly employment program in Korea is managed as a job creation initiative supported by the government. It primarily consists of public service-type, social service-type, and private sector employment opportunities, as outlined in Table 1.

The public service-type program is defined as “volunteer activities that support the ongoing social participation of low-income seniors, contributing to a healthy and active retirement life. These activities improve health, foster social relationships, and supplement income, while providing seniors with a sense of self-satisfaction and accomplishment, as well as promoting the public interest within the local community” (9). Public service-type jobs represent the largest share in terms of budget and job numbers, emphasizing social participation through service rather

Table 1. The elderly employment program in the Republic of Korea (12)

Types		Contents	Target	Characteristics (Working hours)
Public services		Social participation activities aim to promote public interest in the community, including elder-to-elder care, community environment improvement, school zone traffic assistance, and other initiatives.	Primary pension recipients are individuals aged 65 or older, with some recipients in the next lower age group between 60 and 64 years old.	Social activity (30 hours or more per month, with a maximum of 3 hours per day).
Social services		Jobs that provide services in areas of social need by utilizing the experience and capabilities of the elderly (e.g., educational facility learning assistance, public administration support, etc.).	Individuals aged 65 or older (with some exceptions for those aged 60 to 64).	60 hours or more per month, with a maximum of 3 hours per day.
Private	Marketable project group	Creating jobs for the elderly by jointly operating small stores and specialized business groups (Silver Cafe, etc.)	Age 60 or older	Job
	Employment placement	Connecting individuals with relevant work skills to organizations in need, such as those in cleaning, security, and similar fields.	Age 60 or older	Job
	Senior Internship	Providing labor cost support to encourage continued employment following a 3-month corporate internship in sectors such as industrial safety, electricity, shipbuilding, etc.	Age 60 or older	Job
	Senior friendly company	Providing support to companies and organizations that employ a significant number of elderly workers.	Age 60 or older	Job

than traditional employment. The target demographic for public service-type programs consists of individuals aged 65 or older, covering the majority of elderly employment opportunities. However, the monthly income for these roles is limited to KRW 290,000 (approximately USD 209), and many of the physically demanding and challenging jobs are often undervalued in society.

On the other hand, social service-type programs are defined as “jobs that provide services in areas requiring social assistance (such as community care, safety management support, etc.) by utilizing the careers and activity capabilities of the elderly” (9). These programs differ from public service-type programs in that they offer the necessary education and support to ensure a stable retirement, sufficient income, improved health, and stronger social relationships. Participation may be restricted for recipients of livelihood benefits under the National Basic Livelihood Security Act or employees covered by the National Health Insurance. Selection criteria are based on factors such as income level, health status, and career background. Those with prior participation experience are awarded additional points. Additionally, certain positions may require specific qualifications, such as expertise or certifications.

Private sector jobs are employment programs in which local governments provide subsidies to private companies that hire participants from the program. The wages for these positions range from KRW 365,000 to KRW 1,961,000 (USD 283 to USD 1,521), depending on working hours and the type of job (9). Among these positions, the Marketable Project Group is a program designed to create jobs for the elderly. Employment placement is determined through a job linkage program that matches older adults with varying levels of education and experience to private companies and other sources of demand. The Senior Internship program supports companies by covering labor costs, encouraging the hiring of older adults aged 60 or older, and promoting both new and continued employment opportunities. Lastly, the Senior-friendly Company program targets businesses that employ a significant number of older adults in positions where they can remain competitive and effective.

All of the elderly employment programs outlined above are financially supported job programs. These programs aim to promote rapid employment and employment stability for low-income individuals, long-term unemployed individuals, and other groups facing employment difficulties, through government financial

support (13). Specifically, direct job programs within financially supported job programs offer temporary and transitional employment opportunities to vulnerable groups, helping them escape long-term unemployment and transition into the private sector (13).

Suppose the definition of a financially supported job program is applied. In that case, senior participants in social service-type employment programs should be able to transition into purely private sector jobs through temporary and transitional roles within these programs. The primary responsibility of the social service-type elderly employment program is for the execution agency to identify demand sources (organizations) and place participants accordingly. The execution agencies conduct a demand survey to assess the use of senior human resources, targeting government entities, local governments, public institutions, and non-profit organizations. They are responsible for selecting, placing, and managing the participants (9).

The overall framework of the elderly employment program is outlined in Figure 4.

The Ministry of Health and Welfare of the Republic of Korea supervises the operation of senior job creation programs, including the formulation of senior job creation policies and allocation of the national budget. In contrast, local governments manage local programs and allocate local budgets for these initiatives. KORDI plays a critical role in supporting the senior job creation program. This includes identifying job opportunities for seniors through public-private partnerships, job development and placement, as well as providing education and training to program participants and seniors. Additionally, KORDI is responsible for evaluating and investigating senior job creation

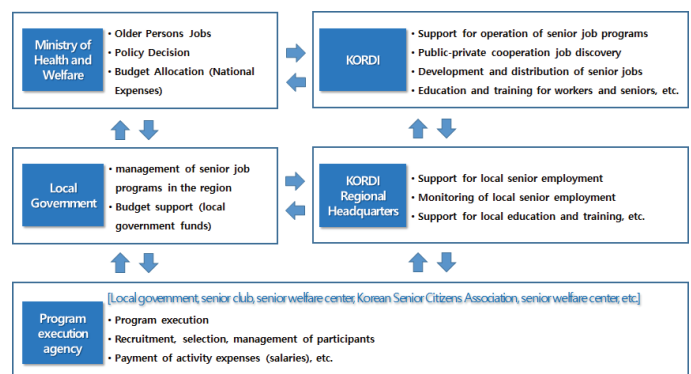


Figure 4. Overall Framework of the Elderly Employment Program. (Author’s own illustration (4)).

programs and promoting these initiatives. KORDI's regional headquarters monitor senior job opportunities, support education and training, facilitate the connection of regional resources, organize and operate regional councils, develop and expand regional senior job creation programs, and provide operational support.

PROBLEMS AND ISSUES OF KOREA'S ELDERLY EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM

Addressing the significant challenges associated with Korea's current social service-type elderly employment program is essential for improving the quality of life of the elderly population. These issues, identified through various newspaper articles, research reports, and academic journals, are outlined below:

Structural Challenges in Social Service-Type Jobs for the Elderly

The absence of a clear definition for social service-type jobs remains a fundamental issue (11, 14). These roles include public service-type activities for vulnerable elderly populations and general social service-type jobs. Establishing a clear and comprehensive definition is critical to forming a robust foundation for social service-type employment programs.

Social service-type jobs lack sufficient segmentation (11). To address this, it is essential to analyze existing social service-type employment and develop new tasks and functions, creating segmented roles explicitly tailored for the elderly.

While the Ministry of Health and Welfare collects performance data to oversee social service-type job programs, the focus has primarily been on budget details, job quantity, and achieving numerical targets (11). However, this quantitative approach overlooks the quality of employment. Research by Kim *et al.* (4) highlights inadequate management in areas such as wage levels, working hours, employment types, and sustainability.

Lack of systematic education and training

The education and training system for social service-type job participants to achieve the core job competencies required is insufficient (15). Currently, education for senior job program participants is primarily divided into online education led by the head office of KORDI and regional specialized education led by regional headquarters (11). The online education provided by the head office is a training course

designed to strengthen participants' capabilities. The primary education contents are 'Human Resources and Labor,' 'Finance and Accounting,' 'Understanding the Elderly,' and 'Major Disaster Punishment Act,' which are provided online at all times.

Differences in the capabilities of execution agencies

Execution agencies exhibit significant disparities in their capabilities, mainly due to differences in location. Agencies in Seoul demonstrate higher resource availability and greater capacity to develop diversified programs than those in rural areas (11). This disparity underscores the need to equalize resources and support across regions.

Insufficient transition to private sector jobs

The transition from social service-type senior jobs to private sector employment is minimal, with little performance data available to track outcomes. As part of the financial support job project, social service-type jobs aim to provide temporary and transitional roles for vulnerable groups, helping them re-enter the private labor market (13). However, this goal is often unmet, and mechanisms for facilitating these transitions require significant improvement.

By addressing these issues systematically, Korea's social service-type employment programs can be improved to better meet the needs of its aging population.

SENIOR EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS IN ADVANCED COUNTRIES

This chapter examines senior employment programs in leading advanced countries to identify solutions for the challenges facing Korea's elderly employment programs, particularly the social service-type jobs discussed earlier.

Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP) in USA

The SCSEP is a community service and work-based job training program designed to help older Americans re-enter or remain active in the workforce (16). Established under the Older Americans Act of 1965, SCSEP currently operates with an annual budget of approximately \$400 million (17). Participants must meet specific eligibility criteria: they must be 55 years or older, have a household income below 125% of the federal poverty level, and be unemployed. SCSEP

participants receive wages equivalent to the United States minimum wage, or the highest prevailing wage, for an average of 20 hours per week while acquiring on-the-job skills and training (16). SCSEP services are provided through local nonprofit organizations and, occasionally, state agencies. These services include job training, job search assistance, and tailored support for older workers. The following features of SCSEP provide valuable insights for improving Korea's social service-type employment programs:

Focus on self-sufficiency

SCSEP's primary objective is to enhance employment, promote self-sufficiency, and improve the quality of life for participants. The program emphasizes transitioning participants into unsubsidized employment within the public or private sector (18).

Diverse education programs

SCSEP offers targeted job skill training and support, focusing on preparing participants for specific roles with partner companies or organizations. Educational opportunities are categorized by academic level, specialization, and required qualifications. Additionally, SCSEP collaborates with CareerOneStop (<https://www.careeronestop.org>) to help participants easily access training programs and customized job opportunities through consultations.

Job training support for older workers

SCSEP addresses specific challenges faced by low-income older workers, such as age discrimination, physical limitations, and issues with sight or hearing. The program provides specialized services to help participants overcome these challenges and identify customized career pathways, ensuring their successful reentry into the labor market (18).

Strong networks

SCSEP benefits from a robust network of professionals who understand the specific challenges faced by unemployed older adults. For instance, partnerships with vision and hearing aid providers offer practical solutions to address sensory impairments. These strategies can serve as valuable benchmarks for improving Korea's execution agencies, which often struggle to secure demand sources and establish external partnerships (11, 19).

By learning from SCSEP's comprehensive approach, Korea's elderly employment programs can adopt

effective strategies to improve outcomes for older workers and address existing challenges in the social service-type job sector.

The Leading Specialist 50+ Age & Employment Charity In London (Wise Age) in UK

The UK has developed various senior employment programs aimed at improving opportunities and outcomes for adults aged 50 and above. These programs focus on eliminating age discrimination, promoting education, raising awareness of equality and diversity, and encouraging flexible work arrangements (20, 21, 22). Among these, Wise Age stands out as a leading initiative. Wise Age promotes age diversity in the workplace, supports older adults seeking employment, provides training for organizations aiming to develop age-friendly employment practices, and advocates for the active participation of older adults in creating age-friendly cities. The program also promotes intergenerational communication and understanding. Here are some key features and benefits of Wise Age (22):

Diverse support for companies

Wise Age offers free resources to organizations aiming to become age-friendly employers. This includes statistics, resources addressing stereotypes about older workers, and insights into the benefits of a silver economy. Additionally, Wise Age provides a comprehensive toolkit outlining the attributes of an age-friendly company, helping businesses evaluate and enhance their age-friendly practices.

Free matching services for older adults

Wise Age offers a complimentary personality test to help older adults discover careers that align with their interests and skills. This personalized approach streamlines the job search process for seniors who may be uncertain about their career goals, resulting in increased job satisfaction and improved placement outcomes.

Practical guidance for managers

Wise Age offers webinar-based training for managers on how to support and value older volunteers. These sessions highlight the contributions of senior employees and help organizations create an inclusive and supportive work environment, particularly for employers uncertain about embracing age-friendly practices.

Comprehensive online support for seniors

Wise Age provides easy-to-navigate online resources for seniors, including guides, access to 70 recruitment and job sites, and links to age-friendly employers. Seniors can also upload their CVs for visibility to potential employers. This accessible and user-friendly platform encourages older adults to take proactive steps in their job search, boosting their confidence and sense of qualification.

Wise Age exemplifies an innovative and effective approach to senior employment, offering practical solutions that can be adapted to enhance similar programs in other countries, including Korea.

Japan Organization for Employment of the Elderly, Persons with Disabilities and Job Seekers (JEED) in Japan

JEED is a national organization dedicated to providing comprehensive support to individuals seeking employment, including youth, women, the elderly, and persons with disabilities, ensuring they can achieve their full potential (23, 24). JEED's primary mission is to create a society with lifelong employment opportunities. To this end, the organization supports employers in promoting the employment of older workers by offering counseling, technical assistance related to grants, and guidance on employing older workers. JEED also conducts research, surveys, and promotional activities under the Law Concerning Stabilization of Employment of the Elderly, developing practical methods to enhance opportunities for older workers. These initiatives enable companies to create workplaces where individuals can thrive regardless of age. The advantages of JEED identified through benchmarking include the following (24, 25).

Consultation and advice for employers

JEED offers advisory services to help companies create employment environments that support the continued employment of older workers. Planners and advisors help organizations raise the retirement age and develop continuous employment opportunities for workers up to age 70. Upon request, JEED also provides tailored training for corporate managers and employees aged 40 and above to foster motivation and engagement.

Practical methods for workplace improvement

JEED develops practical strategies to promote lifelong employment. These include expanding job

categories, revisiting wage structures, and improving personnel management systems and training programs. By thoroughly understanding the challenges faced by companies, JEED identifies solutions and areas for improvement. These practical methods are compiled into reports and shared online as references for corporations, employment planners, and advisors focused on elderly employment.

Publicizing success stories and building awareness

JEED collects and disseminates case studies of companies successfully integrating seniors into their workforce. The organization regularly hosts symposiums to discuss extending retirement age and expanding continued employment opportunities. These efforts aim to increase awareness of the importance of senior employment both within organizations and in the broader community.

Skills Checkpoint for Older Workers (SCOW) Program in Australia

Australia has implemented several government programs to support senior employment, helping older Australians find and retain jobs, develop new skills, and transition smoothly into retirement. One notable initiative is the SCOW Program. SCOW is a national program designed for workers aged 40 and older who wish to keep working. It provides advice and guidance on career transitions, reskilling, and career planning through personalized assessments to identify skills and training needs. Delivered by BUSY At Work (26), the program is accessible to both employers and individuals seeking career assessments and one-on-one support through career guidance officers. SCOW is free to access, and participants can also apply for a co-funding grant of up to \$2,200 to pursue eligible training courses aimed at career upskilling or transitioning to a new job (27). Key features and benefits of SCOW are as follows.

Personalized skills and career assessment

SCOW offers tailored assessments that help participants identify their existing skills, strengths, and areas for improvement. This customized approach enables mature-age workers to understand their career options better and make informed decisions about future employment or training opportunities.

Access to training and Reskilling opportunities

The program provides participants with guidance on relevant training programs and educational

opportunities to help them upskill or reskill. This access is critical for maintaining competitiveness in the job market and meeting the changing demands of various industries.

Enhanced employability and confidence

SCOW offers comprehensive support, including career planning, job search assistance, and interview preparation. This assistance not only boosts participants’ job prospects but also enhances their confidence and readiness to re-enter or advance in the workforce.

The comparative case analysis revealed key similarities and differences between Korea’s social service-type employment program and international models, as shown in Table 2.

In the Republic of Korea, social service-type jobs are not clearly defined and often overlap with public service roles. This makes it hard to know exactly what seniors are supposed to do. In the United States, the SCSEP program provides clearer pathways, combining community service with opportunities for regular employment. The U.K.’s Wise Age program promotes age-friendly workplaces and supports both seniors and employers. In Japan, JEED has set rules that extend the retirement age to 70 and organizes clear job categories. Australia’s SCOW program focuses on each person by giving personalized career and skills assessments. Training is another area where significant differences are evident. Korea primarily offers basic online training with a limited variety, which is insufficient for many seniors to develop strong skills. The U.S. SCSEP

provides customized training through CareerOneStop, while Wise Age offers toolkits and webinars to help job seekers and employers. In Japan, JEED provides structured training for both workers and managers. Australia’s SCOW program even offers seniors reskilling grants of up to \$2,200 to help them acquire new skills and remain employable.

Finally, the Republic of Korea has weak connections with the private sector, which limits job opportunities outside public roles. On the other hand, the U.S. program focuses strongly on transitioning seniors into regular private-sector jobs. Wise Age in the U.K. partners with employers to reduce age discrimination, while Japan gives incentives and subsidies to companies that hire seniors. Australia supports career transitions with both guidance and funding. When it comes to employer engagement, Korea relies mainly on public agencies, but the U.S., U.K., Japan, and Australia all involve employers and businesses much more actively in supporting senior employment.

These comparison results highlight that Korea’s challenges—unclear job definitions, insufficient training, reliance on public-sector roles, and weak private-sector transition—are directly addressed in various ways by international programs.

DISCUSSION

This review explored how South Korea designs and manages its social service-type job programs for seniors, and compared them with similar programs in the United States, the United Kingdom, Japan, and

Table 2. Comparison of Senior Employment Programs

Dimension	Korea (Social Service-type)	SCSEP (U.S.)	Wise Age (U.K.)	JEED (Japan)	SCOW (Australia)
Job Definition	Ambiguous, overlaps with public service	Clear, community service + transition	Age-friendly work advocacy	Legal retirement age extension to 70, structured job categories	Personalized career/skills assessment
Training	Basic online, limited specialization	Tailored, CareerOneStop training	Employer toolkits, webinars	Structured training for managers/employees	Reskilling grants up to \$2,200
Transition	Weak link to the private sector	Strong unsubsidized employment focus	Employer partnerships	Incentives and grants to employers	Career transition guidance + funding
Employer Engagement	Limited, mainly public	NGO and employer partnerships	Advocacy + consultancy for companies	Corporate counseling and subsidies	Joint planning with businesses

Australia. The findings indicate that South Korea has made significant progress in expanding opportunities for older adults, but several structural challenges continue to limit the programs' long-term success.

Strengths and Weaknesses of the Republic of Korea Model

Despite recent progress in expanding senior job opportunities, particularly in public-sector and community-based roles, several challenges remain as suggested above. Job definitions are often unclear, blurring the roles and responsibilities of participants. The range of available jobs is also not diverse enough, making it hard to match opportunities with seniors' varied skills and goals. Training programs tend to be basic and too general, and are not sufficient to give participants the specific skills required for their jobs. Furthermore, the paths to help them move into the private sector are weak, leaving many seniors stuck in temporary, low-wage, part-time positions. Finally, the lack of a system for evaluating performance hinders continuous improvement and limits the expansion of successful methods.

Together, these weaknesses underscore the need to shift from a welfare-based approach to jobs to a system that empowers older adults as skilled contributors to the labor market.

Lessons from International Models

A side-by-side comparison of international programs (Table 2) reveals practical strategies that could inform Korea's approach to senior employment.

The Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP) in the United States prioritizes helping seniors transition from subsidized community service jobs into long-term, unsubsidized employment through tailored training and employer partnerships. Korea's reliance on short-term public jobs could be reduced by adopting structured transition programs supported by placement services and stronger private-sector engagement.

The Wise Age initiative in the United Kingdom demonstrates how direct employer engagement can combat age discrimination. Through age-friendly recruitment toolkits, reskilling support, and awareness campaigns, Wise Age encourages more inclusive hiring practices. Similar initiatives in Korea—such as employer education programs and certification for “age-friendly companies”—could reduce stigma and open more private-sector opportunities for seniors.

Japan's Japan Organization for Employment of the Elderly, Persons with Disabilities and Job Seekers (JEED) highlights the value of a robust legal and institutional framework. By requiring companies to provide continuous employment up to age 65, with incentives to extend opportunities to 70, and by offering vocational training and subsidies, JEED ensures clearer occupational standards and stronger labor market integration. Korea could address its own issues of unclear job definitions and weak private-sector participation by adopting comparable policies.

Finally, Australia's Skills Checkpoint for Older Workers (SCOW) underscores the importance of individualized support. Through personalized career counseling and reskilling grants, SCOW enables older workers to adapt to labor market shifts. Korea's current reliance on generic training could be strengthened by adopting targeted pathways, especially in growth areas such as digital skills, social services, and care sectors.

Together, these international models suggest that Korea can strengthen its senior employment programs by combining structured private-sector transitions, employer engagement, standardized job frameworks, and personalized reskilling.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

From a theoretical perspective, the findings underscore the importance of lifelong career development and active aging, aligning with the concept of “productive aging.” Programs that recognize seniors as assets, not burdens, can enhance both individual well-being and the nation's economic strength.

Practically, this paper suggests that Korea should transition from a welfare-based employment model to an empowerment-based system by drawing lessons from international programs to clarify and diversify job categories (drawing from JEED's frameworks), provide role-specific and personalized training (inspired by SCOW), reduce reliance on public jobs through private-sector linkages (as in SCSEP), and address age discrimination via employer engagement and awareness campaigns (as in Wise Age).

These international programs all demonstrate that combining education, targeted job matching, and collaboration with employers can help older adults stay active, confident, and productive in their careers.

Policy Lessons and Recommendations

South Korea's social service-type employment programs have expanded in size and scope, involving

more people, but they still face challenges. These include unclear job roles, inadequate training, a lack of variety in job types, and weak connections to private-sector employment opportunities. By examining and comparing international programs—such as SCSEP (U.S.), Wise Age (U.K.), JEED (Japan), and SCOW (Australia)—we can find valuable lessons for Korea.

Based on this comparison, the seven policy recommendations were rearranged in order of implementation: starting with tasks that can be carried out immediately, moving to improvements that can be incorporated in the medium term, and finally reaching long-term structural reforms, as shown in Table 3.

Short-term (1–2 years, immediately actionable)

Clarify and Standardize Job Definitions. Just as Japan’s JEED provides clear occupational frameworks and legal standards, a central weakness in Korea’s current model is the unclear nature of job definitions, which often overlap with public service jobs for vulnerable groups (11, 15). This undermines program consistency and reduces their value as labor market pathways. To address this, social service-type jobs should be clearly defined as “jobs providing services in areas requiring social support by utilizing the career and activity capabilities of older adults”. Standardizing categories and criteria would ensure clearer role expectations, reduce redundancy, and improve program management.

Provide Standardized Manual Support and Case Sharing. Drawing inspiration from Japan’s JEED, which publishes detailed program manuals and shares success stories, it is clear that the Republic of Korea agencies often lack consistent guidance for program implementation, leading to administrative burdens and uneven practices. Therefore, it is important to create and regularly update a standard operations manual

for program execution agencies. This manual should include detailed procedures, success stories, and tools to improve efficiency. Furthermore, activating case-sharing networks, both online and offline, would help agencies across the nation learn from each other and adopt best practices.

Medium-term (3–5 years, institutional and infrastructure strengthening):

Establish a Systematic Education and Training Framework. Inspired by Australia’s SCOW program, which offers personalized career counseling and reskilling grants, it is evident that systematic education and training are critical for equipping participants with the necessary skills for various social service-type jobs. Training in Korea is often too general and ineffective, limiting seniors’ ability to build long-term employability. To overcome this, tailored training pathways should be introduced that are linked to specific job categories. Each program must define clear educational goals, targeted competencies, and measurable outcomes, while using evaluation tools to track whether participants achieve these competencies, ensuring continuous skill development.

Build a Comprehensive Database and Matching System. As seen in the case of the U.S. SCSEP’s systematic participant data management, building a robust database (DB) for participants is essential. Korea currently collects only basic demographic data, lacking an integrated system that tracks participant skills, health, and outcomes. It is therefore recommended that Korea develop a national integrated database that includes participants’ health, education, competencies, and job performance. Real-time data sharing among agencies would enhance coordination, minimize mismatches, and facilitate more effective job placement.

Implement Continuous Performance Management.

Table 3. Step-Based Policy Recommendations

Step	Focus	Policy Recommendations
Step 1 (Short-term, 1–2 years)	Establishing foundational clarity and guidance	1. Clarify and Standardize Job Definitions 2. Provide Standardized Manual Support and Case Sharing
Step 2 (Medium-term, 3–5 years)	Building systematic training, data, and evaluation mechanisms	3. Establish a Systematic Education and Training Framework 4. Build a Comprehensive Database and Matching System 5. Implement Continuous Performance Management
Step 3 (Long-term, over 5 years)	Diversifying roles and strengthening private-sector integration	6. Expand and Diversify Job Opportunities 7. Strengthen Transition Pathways into the Private Sector

Following the model of the U.K.'s Wise Age and the U.S.'s SCSEP, which evaluate programs based on participant satisfaction and employment outcomes, systematic performance evaluation and monitoring are required to ensure program effectiveness. Program performance in Korea is not monitored consistently, limiting opportunities for feedback and improvement. To resolve this, a performance management system should be developed to evaluate both quantitative measures (like hiring and retention rates) and qualitative ones (like satisfaction and social impact). Furthermore, tracking participants' successful transitions into the private sector should be established as a key performance indicator (KPI).

Long-term (over 5 years, structural reform stage)

Expand and Diversify Job Opportunities. Just as the U.K.'s Wise Age links senior employment to broader societal needs, Korea's programs are currently focused on a small range of public-service roles, limiting their ability to match the diverse skills of seniors. The expansion of these jobs must be qualitative as well as quantitative, moving into different job fields. New roles must address emerging social challenges and leverage the capabilities of highly educated and economically independent older generations (11, 28). Therefore, it is recommended that Korea diversify job opportunities into emerging areas such as housing, culture, environmental services, and digital support. By using the skills of highly educated and economically active seniors, Korea can create higher-quality, more meaningful roles that also address new social challenges.

Strengthen Transition Pathways into the Private Sector. Just as the U.S. SCSEP explicitly aims to move participants into unsubsidized private-sector jobs, many Korean seniors remain stuck in low-wage, temporary jobs without clear pathways to stable employment. To address this, Korea should create structured private-sector transition programs supported by tax incentives and employer partnerships. As a crucial step, tracking the rate of successful transitions into unsubsidized jobs must be established as a core performance indicator for these programs.

If these changes are made, Korea's programs can become more effective, fair, and meaningful. They can support the elderly in contributing to society, improving their quality of life, and staying connected with people of all ages.

CONCLUSION

South Korea has become a "super-aged" society, meaning that over 20% of its population is 65 years old or older. This population shift highlights a growing crisis with various social problems, including poverty among the elderly, health issues, feeling isolated from society, and greater financial pressure on the younger generation (29). These problems require immediate and well-planned solutions to support the aging population and ensure the stable future growth of society.

The Republic of Korea government has introduced several job programs for older adults to help solve these growing problems. These programs mainly aim to reduce poverty among senior citizens and lessen the financial and social burden on younger generations. Among these efforts, social service-type job programs stand out as a creative and meaningful solution. These programs enable older adults to use their experience and skills to contribute in areas where social support is needed, such as education, care, or public services. Unlike traditional public service roles, these jobs are designed to offer seniors more valuable and meaningful opportunities, helping them feel more connected and useful in their communities (9).

However, despite the progress and expansion of these programs, significant challenges remain. Issues such as unclear job definitions, insufficient role segmentation, inadequate quality management, and limited transition pathways to private sector jobs remain barriers to the full realization of the program's potential. These challenges show the need for a more structured and organized approach to improve the effectiveness of social service-type employment programs.

To address these issues, this review examined the current state of Korea's social service-type senior employment program, identifying its strengths and limitations. Furthermore, the paper highlighted valuable insights and best practices that could be adapted to the Korean context through benchmarking senior employment programs in advanced countries.

The analysis results and policy recommendations presented in this review study are not only relevant to Korea but also hold significance for other countries facing similar demographic and social challenges. By taking a planned approach to senior employment, societies can foster a stable economy, promote unity between generations, and enhance the quality of life for older adults.

Looking ahead, future research should look more

deeply into the effectiveness of senior employment programs by using primary data sources such as surveys, statistical analyses, and participant interviews. This will enable us to understand the program's results better and develop solutions tailored to the specific needs of older adults. Through ongoing research and improvement, Korea and other nations can find a more inclusive and lasting way to manage the challenges of an aging society.

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CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

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